



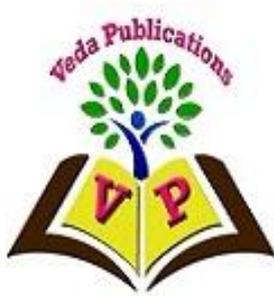
JANE AUSTEN: AN ANDROGYNOUS MIND IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF VIRGINIA WOOLF'S 'A ROOM OF ONE'S OWN'

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ABSTRACT

"Miss Austen's works may safely be recommended, not only as among the most unexceptionable of their class, but as combining in an eminent degree, instruction with amusement, though without the direct effort at the former....."



In these lines Richard Whately describes the superior quality of Jane Austen, the writer. In 'A Room Of One's Own' Woolf emphasis that William Shakespeare and Jane Austen are the best dramatist and novelist respectively because of the element of androgyny. The mind of Austen and Shakespeare had consumed all impediments. 'They had complete mind'. Their minds were never dominated by either masculine or feminine qualities, but by a combination of the two. To prove this point, Woolf compares Jane Austen with George Eliot and Charlotte Bronte. The paper deals with a comparative study of Jane Austen's "Emma"; Charlotte Bronte's "Jane Eyre" and George Eliot's "The Mill on The Floss". The above three mentioned works have been studied under the same perspective of androgyny as expressed by Virginia Woolf in her work "A Room Of One's Own".

Keywords: *Androgynous Mind, Feminine Qualities, Impediment, Resentment*

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Virginia Woolf's 'A Room of One's Own' is claimed to be one of the earliest texts on feminism. It deals with the financial independence, freedom of mind and the obstacles which a woman writer experiences during writing. 'A Room of One's Own' gives the idea that a female writer needs uninterrupted time to think and privacy, which are the fundamental aspects of an artist. It deals with the relation between gender and writing. She provides a series of anecdotes. Furthermore, she highlights some more facts which do not correlate the personal privileges but the professional behaviour of writer. She includes androgynous mind, fearless work and a factful fiction as the main facts for writers to achieve success in their work. She states,

"Fiction must stick to facts and the truer the facts the better the fiction."

Woolf argues that a great literary mind should be androgynous, that is, a combination of masculine and feminine qualities. One must be woman manly or man womanly. Then Woolf emphasis on the free flow of thoughts.

Woolf mentions Jane Austen as a writer with an androgynous mind. In the novel, "Emma", the protagonist is the victim of her own illusions. She creates her own world which is not real. Emma, the protagonist, shows continual errors of judgement, errors which do less harm to other people. Austen depicts her as:

"Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever and rich with a comfortable home and happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence; and had lived nearly twenty one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her."

Mr. Knightley was one of the few people who could see faults in Emma Woodhouse and the only one who ever told her of them. Austen has freed her mind from hate fear and not heaped it with bitterness and resentment. While portraying her characters, Jane wrote without boasting or giving pain to the opposite sex. Jane wrote as women write not as men write. Austen's nature makes her work successful because of the lack of anger and bitterness towards men. Woolf states,

"Here was a woman about the year 1800, writing without hate, without bitterness, without fear, without protest, without preaching."

Another feature of Austen is that she makes her characters real. They live with us like normal human beings. We have personal disliking for Mrs. Elton and anger on Frank. Instead of telling us what her characters are, what they feel, she presents the people realistically and they reveal themselves. She shows an acute grasp of the human mind and human motives and reveals it with great skill. She does not interrupt her stories with her personal comments as George Eliot does. To prove Austen a novelist with androgynous mind, Woolf compares her with George Eliot and Charlotte Bronte.

Charlotte Bronte treats the emotions, passions and feelings of women very minutely as in her novel "Jane Eyre". The novel presents the image of a woman who is intelligent, independent, kind hearted and above all, brave enough to say 'no' to the social conventions. Jane has an independent spirit which makes her declare:

"I desired liberty; for liberty I gasped; for liberty I uttered a prayer....."

But Charlotte Bronte fails to demonstrate the concept of androgynous mind. In the relationship between Jane and Mr. Rochester, Jane was a relatively stronger character. At the first time they met, Jane helped the injured Mr. Rochester and at the end, Jane helped him because of his disability and blindness. 'Charlotte Bronte portrays Mr. Rochester in the dark.' 'Jane Eyre' is written 'in the red light of emotions, not in the white light of truth'. Jane tells Edward Rochester,

"I love you better now, when I can really be useful to you, than I did in you state of proud independence, when you disdained every part but that of the giver and protector."

Bronte's mind was not free from hate and fear. Feminine qualities are so strong in her mind that she tries to depict her female characters more stronger than her male characters. Bronte portrays Mr. Rochester with the emotion of bitterness and resentment. 'Jane Eyre' serves as the pioneer in the cause of women's liberation though it fails to convey the concept of androgyny due to its failure to balance the equality between men and women.

George Eliot is the victim of inner strife as her writings prove, 'sought ineffectively to veil herself by using the name of a man'. Eliot acquaints



the readers with the inner thoughts and ideas of her characters as in the novel 'The Mill on The Floss'. This novel is a partly autobiographical involving Maggie Tulliver and Tom Tulliver. In this novel, she represents the inner struggle of soul and reveals the impulses and motives which govern the human action. The characters like Maggie, Tom, Philip, Lucy and Stephen are essentially realistic. Eliot tries hard to give equal importance to her female and male characters in the novel.

The portrayal of Maggie, Lucy is superior and upto the mark but it does not mean that her male characters like Tom, Philip is defective. But she lacks complete mind i.e. androgynous. Unlike Austen, Eliot's mind is not free from fear and bitterness. She is conscious and fearful of public criticism. Her fear can be seen in the inner conflict or mental struggle of her characters. She interrupts her story with her personal comments. Tulliver's story aptly justifies this very thought of her.

Austen finds it no need to express her feelings through her personal words. She sets up the novel on a rigid ground modifying the reader's interest through her characters while Charlotte is found filled with feministic behavior. Her female character Jane represents herself as an emblem of feminism covered with fear and bitterness of the writer. Jane Austen justifies what Virginia Woolf has remarked about a writer's high spirits and proves Austen a great novelist with androgynous mind.

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