**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

UGC MINOR RESEARCH PROJECT (14th July 2017- 13th July, 2019)

TITLE

**ECOCRITICAL APPROACH TO LITERATURE WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO VIRGINIA WOOLF’S MAJOR NOVELS**

The ecocritical study of Virginia Woolf’s (1882-1941) major novels has been undertaken with the conviction that Woolf, despite being a modernist writer in the formal and thematic aspects of her novels, was deeply concerned about ecological imbalance in the modern materialistic world. Very few scholars have explored this aspect in one or two of her novels, which they have published as journal articles or chapters in books. However, there is an evolving pattern in her civilizational concerns hinging upon the organic unity between the human and the natural world across her novels which needed to be explored. The present study addresses this issue, and hence, its significance, as it undertakes a full length study of her five major novels- *The Voyage Out* (1915), *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), *To The Lighthouse* (1927), *The Waves* (1931) and *Between The Acts* (1941).

The study is interdisciplinary in nature since it applies the concerns of ecology to the study of literary works, albeit in broad outlines. It is to be noted that the novel form, which deals with human life, is considered less eco-conscious than poetry. Woolf, as a novelist, walks this less trodden path, from her first novel to the last, by making her novels as poetic in style. Her grappling with the fluid form of stream of consciousness is in consonance with her struggle to convince the world about the essentialist unity between man and nature and the existentialist disunity between the same- leading to her apocalyptic view of the universe in her last novel, *Between the Acts,* where, under the bombshells of World War II, she envisions total destruction of mankind and its rebirth all over again from the cave-man.

The research methodology used in the ecocritical analysis of Woolf’s novels involves a consideration of formal aspects - structure, characterization, point of view, setting, symbolism and style- as revealing the cosmic unity between man and nature. The study reveals the unusual level of artistic integrity between the form and the content of her novels. The Laws of Nature are shown to rupture the course of human life as in *The Voyage Out,* where the heroine dies by heat of the tropical sun rather than by heartbreak.

The study reveals that the central vision of Woolf’s novelistic art is informed by her sense of cosmic unity which takes the form of a duality between man and nature, matter and spirit, art and life and so on. Modern way of life, with its egalitarian emphasis on cultivation of mind and intellectual pursuits, lacking in love of the universe, is shown to be ignorant about its self-destructive course. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, the second protagonist, Septimus Warren Smith, commits suicide by jumping out of his hospital window, because, the world for him is ‘too much to bear’. The heroine, Mrs. Dalloway, understands the meaning of his death as rejection of the corrupt modern life, and death, as it were, coming as a welcome release. *To the Lighthouse* portrays the meaningless passage of Time as the protagonist and other ‘human’ characters die and lay deeply buried in the sands of time. *The Waves* emphatically embodies the rhythmic view of life like the waves in the sea when the six characters- three male and three male- live and die and keep wondering about the meaning and essence of their lives. *Between the Acts* presents imminent destruction of the universe on the eve of World War II.

Woolf’s protagonists are identified with elemental forces of nature- Rachael with the waves, Mrs. Dalloway with the sky, Mrs. Ramsay with Mother Earth, spreading human love and affection in contrast to her husband’s egotism and Bernard with the sea. Moreover, in the use of symbolism and style, she employs natural phenomena. In all the selected novels for the study, the sea and waves are used as symbols which, in the diverse contexts of their use, mean different things to different people. Woolf, thus, weaves ecological concerns into the formal aspects of her novels.

Woolf combines issues of subjugation of Nature in the modern materialistic world with the issues of women in male-dominated societies in her novels. Thus, she provides ecofeministic insights into her novels by highlighting the similarity in the plight of Nature and women’s lives- both being victims of male ego.

One of the major conclusions arrived at in this study is that Woolf is a Neo-Romantic novelist who loves Nature and advocates its supremacy and power over living beings. For her, Nature has independent existence and it represents cosmos-spirit of the universe- for her. Her novels are a warning to mankind that if it does not accept this sublime truth and persists in materialistic pursuits, it is doomed to become extinct as she reveals in *Between the Acts.*

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