



IN THE “SHADOW” OF VIRGINIA WOOLF: A  
COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SELECTED NOVELS BY  
20TH CENTURY BRITISH WOMEN WRITERS

BY

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## ABSTRACT

Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1928) and *Three Guineas* (1938) are considered by many critics as pioneer works which are instrumental in formulating feminist literary criticism. Being discontented with gender inequality imposed on women by patriarchy, her female-centric views on emancipation of women are pertinent in those two works. This thesis recognises Woolf for raising the issues of women's empowerment and presenting provoking thoughts on the need for the emancipation of women. Woolf envisages a future society in which women are able to function as equals of men. This research attempts to examine the influence of Virginia Woolf's feminist thoughts in selected works by three contemporary British women writers: Beryl Bainbridge, A.S. Byatt, and Margaret Drabble. This research uses Woolf's two texts as the analytical framework to examine the extent to which the selected writers echo the concerns, complaints and complexities of feminist issues raised by Woolf decades ago. This research exposes the obstructions, constraints, and challenges women have to face to be in the public front. It also charts the gradual changes in the traditional values upheld by women for more than half a century after Woolf's advocacy of female-centric issues on both the domestic and public front. The voices of the three selected writers echo Woolf's feminist thoughts which emphasize that the success of women's struggle against patriarchy is only possible if the confinement of women in domesticity, and marginalisation of women in the public front can be eliminated by giving women equal opportunities in every field.

## خلاصة البحث

يعتبر العديد من النقاد مقالة فرجينيا وولف "غرفة مالكة واحد" (1928)، وكتابتها ثلاثة جنيهاً (1938) من الأعمال الرائدة التي لها دور هام في انبثاق النقد الأدبي النسائي. كما أن استيائها من عدم المساواة بين الجنسين المفروضة على النساء من قبل الوالدين، ووجهات نظرها الأنثوية التي تركز على تحرير المرأة تعد وثيقة الصلة في هذين العاملين. ويقر هذا البحث وولف على إثارة قضايا تقوية المرأة، وتقديم الأفكار الثورية باعتبارها ضرورة لتحرير المرأة. تتطلع وولف لمجتمع المستقبل الذي تكون فيه المرأة قادرة على الوقوف على قدم المساواة من الرجال. يحاول هذا البحث دراسة تأثير أفكار فرجينيا وولف النسائية على ثلاثة أعمال مختارة لثلاث روائيات بريطانيات معاصرات هن: بربيل بينبريدج، و A.S. بيات، ومارغريت درابل. يستخدم هذا البحث نصي وولف باعتبارها إطاراً تحليلياً لدراسة مدى صدق الروائيات المختارات للاهتمامات، والشكاوى وتعقيدات القضايا النسوية التي أثارها وولف منذ عدة عقود مضت. هذه الدراسة تكشف العراقيل، والمعوقات والتحديات التي على المرأة أن تواجهها لتكون في الجبهة الأمامية الجماهيرية. كما يعرض للتغيرات التدريجية في القيم التقليدية التي أقرتها النساء لأكثر من نصف قرن بعد مناصرة وولف لقضايا المرأة التي تركز على كلا الجبهتين الداخلية والعامية. أصوات الروائيات الثلاث المختارات بمثابة الصدى لأفكار وولف النسائية التي تؤكد أن نجاح نضال المرأة ضد نظام الوالدين ممكن فقط إذا كان حبس المرأة في الحياة المنزلية، وتهميش المرأة في الحياة العامة يمكن القضاء عليه من خلال إعطاء فرص متساوية للمرأة في كل الميادين.

## **APPROVAL PAGE**

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## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degree in IIUM or other institutions.

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*This dissertation is dedicated to my late brother, Mr. A. Subramaniam, my pillar of strength, who had significantly shaped my life, having full confidence that I can succeed in every field I venture into. May God bless his soul and may he attain Moksha.*

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Virginia Woolf was one of the feminists known for her pro-women thoughts which shaped the ideology of feminism in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Before the Second World War and long before the first wave feminism, Woolf argued that women's experience, particularly their involvement in women's rights movements, could be the basis for women's liberation from the stereotyped roles they had been assigned to. Much of her pro-feminist thoughts concerned issues of inequality, and emancipation of women who had been under the oppression of patriarchy for centuries.

According to Woolf's biographer, Hermione Lee (1997, p. 51), Woolf was a member of a privileged social class and "descended from a great many people, some famous and others obscure; born into a large connection, born not of rich parents and into a very communicative, literate, and articulate, late nineteenth-century world." However, she was an outsider to that class in more ways than one. Despite the literary background of her family, she herself did not attend any school, belonged to no public institution and rarely appeared in front of an audience.

Woolf, an icon in Western feminist studies recognized for her implausible thoughts on feminist issues which prefigures other concerns of later feminism, was also an essayist, novelist, publisher, and critique very much ahead of her time, with themes consisting of major feminist issues in her empirically researched non-fictional works—*A Room of One's Own* (1928) and *Three Guineas* (1938)—depicting the socio-historical underpinnings of women's emancipation.

Aajiz (2013, p. 3) in his article, "Feminism and Virginia Woolf" also agrees and claims that, Woolf's pro-feminist thoughts evidently foreshadow the feminist-centric issues of today which transcends time and boundary.

She is the pioneer of the literature reflecting the women's troubles, inequalities, gender and identity differences, femininity and masculinity with true pen... She was a touch-stone for contemporaries and predecessors.

Bechtold (2000, p. 1), in her article "More Than A Room and Three Guineas: Understanding Virginia Woolf's Social Thought," claims that:

To feminist social thinkers and activists, Virginia Woolf's writings offer early and rich insight into the socioeconomic processes of occupational segregation, wage discrimination, imposition of separate spheres, social exclusion and trickle-down patriarchy. Her implied views on distributive justice permeate her novels and diaries, and show remarkable insight into recent work by feminists on female tasks related to provisioning, and also to a long tradition of work specifically dealing with considerations of social welfare and a critique of utilitarianism.

Black (2004, p. 23), a Professor of Political Science and Women's Studies in New York University, claims in her book, *Virginia Woolf as Feminist*, that Woolf's vehement arguments and her pro-women thoughts which underlie the concept of feminism for women's emancipation and self-achievement are more than just equality or equal treatment. According to her, Woolf belongs to the class of "social feminists because of her valorisation of women's civilization" that provided a basis for social and political transformation.

Grounding Woolf's feminist beliefs in the everyday world, Black emphasizes that *Three Guineas'* goal is twofold. It intends to elucidate, firstly, Woolf's brand of feminism which was explicitly set out and, secondly, the extent to which her thoughts are relevant in today's world. Woolf carefully and deliberately put together documented accounts of women's life in order to contend for a restructuring that would transform society. Black (2004) also argues:

By contrast, Woolf presents a deeply radical sort of feminism. Her feminism was original, yet firmly rooted in the feminist movements of her time. Incorporating a vision of completely changed society, *Three Guineas* is more radical than most of us yet recognise (p. 7).

DiBattista (2006, p. 49), on analysing Black's *Virginia Woolf as Feminist*, agrees that

[from] Naomi Black's learned, tireless argument in favour of this deliberately obdurate work, readers may come to appreciate this most uncompromising of Woolf's feminist pronouncement....These details, coupled with accurate paraphrase and citation of Woolf's arguments, give Black's study its quiet and insistent authority. *Virginia Woolf as Feminist*...has some new-fashioned, and urgent, literary and historical work to perform, as Black makes clear in the fervid argument she makes for *Three Guineas*' continuing relevance for feminism in the third millennium.

Laura Marcus (2010, p. 144), in the *Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf*,

claims that:

If the feminisms of the second half of the twentieth century have found in Woolf one of their most significant forerunners, it is at least in part because her writing and thinking were so intertwined with the feminisms of the first half of the century.

Michael H. Whitworth (2010, p. 118), in *The Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf*, claims that "some of the most significant recent re-evaluations of Woolf positioned her as an heir to enlightenment values: a democratic intellectual." He also quoted in Melba Cuddy-Keane's study that Woolf is a "democratic highbrow; concerned to make high cultural forms available to all, and produce active, self-reflective readers."

The above are evidence of Woolf's feminist thoughts that foreshadow the feminist-centric issues of today which transcends time and space. In light of Woolf's stature as a feminist for her thoughts in the early 1920s, and a feminist in the modern context, this research will place Woolf in the first wave feminism. The research also intends to gauge how Woolf's feminist ideas of the 1930s are reflected in the selected

works of three 20<sup>th</sup> century British women writers: Beryl Bainbridge, A.S. Byatt, and Margaret Drabble.

This research intends to highlight that the selected writers' novels and their portrayals of female characters still reflect similar concerns raised by Woolf in her two non-fiction works—*A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas*. Kathmann (2012, p. 47), who analyses Woolf's both non-fictional works above argues that:

Woolf's extensive ideologies on women's issues and nature of her trains of thoughts prove that Virginia Woolf was a progressive thinker who was ahead of her time concerning feminist issues.

Hermione Lee (2001, p. 7), in her essay "Virginia Woolf: A Room of One's Own," claims that "it is probably the most influential feminist essay of the twentieth century." Woolf, in both her non-fictional works, exemplifies the numerous hindrances in societal background which regarded women as second-class citizens and argues for women's financial independence, access to formal education, acknowledgment of intellectual ability, intellectual liberty, and equal rights in the professional sphere.

The British women writers selected for this research include and emphasize the issues and ideology expounded by Woolf in their novels. This research attempts to establish a confluence of feminist thoughts between that of the selected writers and Woolf's. In the title of the thesis, the word 'shadow' connotes that the contemporary British women writers are still concerned and confronted with almost similar key feminist issues raised by Woolf in the 1930s. They are thematically inclined to the main essence of Woolf's brand of feminism as expounded in *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas*.

This research is comparative in nature because inter-textual analysis is used to examine the female characters in the selected novels who struggle to overcome the

similar feminist-centric issues of Woolf's ideology of feminism in *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas*.

Woolf was born in London in 1882 to Julia Jackson Duckworth, a member of the Duckworth publishing family, and Sir Leslie Stephen, a literary critic. Woolf was homeschooled by her father and grew up in their family home at Hyde Park Gate. Following the death of her father in 1904, Woolf moved in with her sister and two brothers to their house in Bloomsbury. Woolf's economic situation improved when she inherited £2500 from an aunt. Their house became central to activities of the Bloomsbury Group, of which Virginia Woolf and her political theorist husband, Leonard Woolf, were early members. This group consisted of writers, intellectuals, philosophers, and artists who had informal gatherings to discuss literature, aesthetics, criticisms, economics, and modern attitudes towards feminism as well as sexuality in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Some of Bloomsbury's imminent members were Clive Bell, E.M. Forster, Lytton Strachey, and Duncan Grant. The consolidation of Bloomsbury's beliefs in unifying aesthetic concerns occurred under the influence of the philosopher G.E. Moore.

In 1917, the Woolfs bought Hogarth Press and managed it successfully, publishing all of Virginia Woolf's and other Bloomsbury members' works. By the early 1930s, Bloomsbury ceased to exist in its original form. However, Woolf was not affected by this cessation. She was seriously involved in the literary movement of modernism and developed innovative literary techniques, such as realism, in her writings to relate human experiences in her novels. She utilised the stream-of-consciousness technique to convey a character's interior monologue, and to capture the irregularities and meanderings of thought, allowing her characters to accept facts or truths of life and reject sentiments and illusions.

Woolf, in her essay, “The Modern Fiction” (1921), defines this technique as one that “examines for a moment an ordinary mind of an ordinary day—the mind receives a myriad of impressions—trivial, fantastic, evanescent, and engraved with the sharpness of steel” (p. 89). In this technique, the Woolf introduces readers to the interior life of a character, without his/her intervention.

Woolf employed these new techniques in her novels in order to reveal women’s experience and find an alternative to the male-dominated views of reality in her fiction entitled *The Voyage Out* (1915), *Night and Day* (1919), *Jacob’s Room* (1922), and *To the Light House* (1927). She also established herself as one of the leading writers of the modernist period by incorporating her innovative literary techniques into the works above. After the publication of her two non-fictional works, *A Room of One’s Own* and *Three Guineas*, Woolf became an easily noticeable personality for her pro-women thoughts for women’s emancipation.

## **1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

Patriarchy was at its height during the early 1900s in Britain. Woolf witnessed excessive gender oppression demonstrated in her contemporary social setting. She noticed that society was divided by gender-based issues. She observed inequality in the domestic front, work place and public field. Patriarchal hegemony controls women’s movement and is responsible for patterning women’s role in society. Kathmann (2012, p. 33) claims that “the patriarchal structures serve as a weapon of oppression for women.” Men approved activities, mannerisms, finances, education, and sexuality for women, controlling all the social forces and effectively placing women in the shadow of acceptance while men progressed in almost every field. In a nutshell, the whole sphere of women’s life was in the clutch of patriarchy.

Woolf was fortunate to have studied at the Ladies' Department at King's College of London where she was introduced to a handful of radical pro-feminists at the helm of educational reforms. She keenly and meticulously observed discrimination, inequality, and inequity imposed on women by society. She was furious to see the restrictions, violations, destructions, and marginalization of female intelligence due to patriarchy. She intended to demonstrate her discontentment on the treatment of women. Hence, the output of her frustrations was translated into her pro-women ideology of which the outcomes were her two non-fictional works, *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas*, from which the analytical framework for this research is drawn. Therefore, this research will delineate the striking features of Woolf's pro-women thoughts in these two works to support the arguments in relation to the selected novels of the three British women writers.

Women have been defined by the roles of wife and mother in many countries across the world for centuries. The presumption is that a husband is responsible for income earning while a wife is responsible for caring. Britain was not an exception for the above presumption until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Marriage was a necessary protection for women and it was the only option opened to them in a world where patriarchy was dominant. They had no other options indeed, as Woolf explains in *Three Guineas*:

Marriage, the one great profession, open to our class since the dawn of time until the year 1919, marriage and the art of choosing the human being with whom to live life successfully... (p. 12).

For centuries, British women were barred from entering the fields of education, economy, and politics. Women were discriminated and marginalised in many aspects and denied opportunities to prove their intellectual abilities and capabilities. They were considered second-class citizens and given only sub-standard recognition where no dynamic changes in women's achievements could possibly occur. Women practically

played their pre-arranged domestic roles as wives, mothers, and caretakers. In other words, a significant transformation in the lives of women to highlight their intellectual abilities in other fields or doctrines was hindered by the patriarchal structure.

Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (2000), was drawn from her two lectures at Cambridge in October 1928. She had developed them from her thoughts considered timely by many people, especially women, to bring about changes to the socially constituted, stereotypical traditional roles of women. In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf claims that women have been oppressed by men because of their economic disadvantages: of the inaccessibility of money and privacy to write deprived women because they lacked the social and economic amenities men have.

Her argument claims that “intellectual freedom depends upon material things” (p. 28) and women are deprived of this solely because patriarchy controls them. Men intentionally put women into domestic responsibilities and make them dependent on them for financial assistance. Woolf claims that for self-development and financial achievement, women should break these barriers.

As a continuity of her theory and arguments in *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf wrote another work entitled *Three Guineas* in 1938. According to its arguments, women need to be employed in professional settings to achieve a strong financial background. Therefore, education would be the main focus in achieving this status, allowing for women to expand out of their traditional roles of housewives and mothers. The bondage of marriage and obligation to the institution of marriage should not be considered as the only option for women. The intellectual ability of women had been hindered by the bondage of matrimony for centuries and it was time for women to have free access to higher education. For that, Woolf suggested that the government should show serious commitment in providing higher education for women and engage them in professional

activities. In *Three Guineas*, Woolf directly pointed out the government's lack of commitment in this area:

At any rate that method is not open to us; both the Army and the Navy are closed to our sex. We are not allowed to fight. Nor again we are allowed to be members of the Stock Exchange. Thus we can use neither the pressure of the force nor the pressure of money. The less direct but still effective weapons which our brothers, as educated men, possess in the diplomatic service, in the Church, are also denied to us. We cannot preach sermons or negotiate treaties. Then again, although it is true that we can write letters or send articles to the Press, the control of the Press - the decision what to print, what not to print - is entirely in the hands of your sex. It is true that for the past twenty years we have been admitted to the Civil Service and to the Bar; but our position there is still very precarious and our authority of the slightest (p. 21).

Woolf's concerns and arguments on the discrimination against women's higher education and professional works in the public front are clear in *Three Guineas*. There are no equal opportunities in gaining knowledge, intellectual skills, and higher working position for women in the world of patriarchy. As a consequence, women are economically backward and forced to depend on their fathers, brothers, and husbands for financial and material support. Woolf examined women, their position in history, and their struggles throughout centuries to depict the reality and quandary they were forced into.

Woolf is regarded as an innovative and influential early 20<sup>th</sup> century writer who addresses themes of class hierarchy and gender inequality, considered to be bold and radical in her time. Her pro-women thoughts have influenced many women writers of her time as well as many contemporary British women writers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This research will analyse three British women writers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century who are thought to be substantially influenced by Woolf's thoughts of feminism.

The first selected 20<sup>th</sup> century British women writer is Beryl Bainbridge (21<sup>st</sup> November 1932- 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2010) from Liverpool, England. She is the daughter of Richard

Bainbridge, a salesman who was not established in his career, and her mother, Winifred Baines, a housewife who was always discontented with her married life. Bainbridge's stories are famous among working-class women of middle- and lower-middle class families because she was from Liverpool and many characters in her novels comprise of English middle and lower working classes. She wrote 19 novels before her death. Her novel, *The Bottle Factory Outing* (1974), won the 1974 Guardian Fiction Prize. She is also very well known for another novel, *An Awfully Big Adventure* (1989), which was adapted into a film in 1995. In the 1990s, she turned to historical fiction, one of which, entitled *Master Georgie* (1998) and is set in the Crimean War, won her the 1998 James Tait Black Memorial Prize for her fiction. She was working on her 20<sup>th</sup> and final novel, *The Girl in the Polka Dot Dress*, at the time of her death and it was posthumously published in May 2011.

The second selected writer is A.S. Byatt (24<sup>th</sup> August 1936—) from Sheffield, England. She is the daughter of an aristocrat and novelist, John Frederick Drabble. She is also a poet, essayist, biographer, and editor. She has written 11 novels and six collections of short stories. Her first novel, *The Shadow of the Sun* (1964), is about a young girl growing up in the shadow of a dominant father. *The Virgin in the Garden* (1978) is the first book in a quartet series about the members of a Yorkshire family. Her novel, *Still Life* (1985), won the 1986 Macmillan Silver Pen Award. Many of her stories incorporate realism and naturalism with fantasy. She won the 1990 Booker Prize for her novel *Possession: A Romance*, the same year it was published.

The third selected British woman writer is Margaret Drabble (5<sup>th</sup> June 1939—), the second daughter of John Frederick Drabble who was born in Sheffield, England. Just like Bainbridge and Byatt, Drabble is also a well-known contemporary writer in Britain, having written 18 novels and edited two editions of *The Oxford Companion to English*

*Literature*. She is also a critic, playwright, and biographer with a wide range of readership across the world. Her first novel, *A Summer Bird Cage*, was published in 1963. Her third novel, *The Millstone* (1965), brought her the 1966 John Llewellyn Phys Memorial Prize. Known as an ambitious writer with broad social concerns, many of her novels depict the correlation between contemporary English society in England and its individual members. In her early novels, her characters' faults reflect the political and economic situations and the restrictiveness of their conservative surroundings. *A Summer Bird Cage* depicts this. She portrays the conflicts between intellectual challenges and motherhood in the 1960s and 1970s in her novel *The Millstone*. In *A Natural Curiosity* (1989), Drabble deals with the conflicts between the intellectual ability and domesticity of women, and in *The Writer of Exmoor* (1996), she illuminates the withdrawn existence of an old female author.

The researcher chose Bainbridge, Byatt, and Drabble for the intended research based on the following reasons. The three writers have been involved in literary writings for more than half a century and, in terms of publication, they are ahead of their contemporaries such as Muriel Sparks, Angela Carter, Anita Brookner, and Penelope Fitzgerald. They started writing in the early 1950s and produced the most number of novels and other literary works in their careers as writers. In addition to their numerous works, they have also received many honours and awards for their remarkable contributions to literary circles. Many reputable and renowned Western universities include these writers' works in their Women and Gender Studies courses. In 2008, *The Times* newspaper named Bainbridge, Byatt, and Drabble among "the 50 greatest writers since 1945."

Besides being an author, Bainbridge served as a theatre critic for the monthly magazine, *The Oldie*. Bainbridge won the 1977 Whitbread Awards Prize, one of United

Kingdom's most prestigious literary awards, for her novel, *Injury Time*, and 1996 for *Everyman For Himself*. Her novels continue to be popular with critics and also commercially successful. She consistently received critical praise and has been nominated for the prestigious Booker Prize five times though she has never won any. She was described by Higgins Charlotte as "a national treasure" in *The Guardian* (May 2007). Her contributions to English literature and her establishment as a great writer earned her the honour of Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire in 2000. Also, in 2005, the British Library acquired many of Bainbridge's private letters and diaries.

Byatt has also written for the media, including the British intellectual journal *Prospect*, *The Guardian*, *The Times*, and *Times Literary Supplement*. Besides the acclaimed awards she has won, she is also recognised for her literary works and accorded with an Honorary Doctor of Philosophy from seven international universities. In 1990, the British government granted her the Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire for her distinguished contributions in literature.

Considering her extensive and multi-faceted roles, Lynn Veach Sadler, an American poet, writer, and playwright, says of Drabble:

Who else is a novelist, a critic, a lecturer and a contributor to the woman's page and the high contributor to high-brow journal simultaneously and yet so accessible to writers? ... Articles about her (Drabble) appear in Italy, Russia and Japan; and her novels have been translated into many languages including French, Dutch, Swedish, Russian, Spanish, Japanese and Hungarian. American doctoral dissertations are increasing, and we are hearing of a school of "Drabblers" (p. 11).

Over the course of her established and notable 50 years of literary career and contributions to contemporary English literature, Drabble was honoured the Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire in 2008. She was also bestowed the Golden PEN Award for 'Lifetime Distinguished Service to Literature' in 2011.

Throughout the 1950s to the 1980s, these writers' complex and physiological dealings with women's resilience towards patriarchy include themes such as love, hate, marriage, pregnancy, motherhood, intellectual awakening, and recognition for self-identity.

## **1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

This research analyses whether patriarchy is still responsible for designing women's role in society. Have aspirations of the feminist thoughts paved by Woolf changed the position of women over time? Through the depictions of the female protagonists in the novels of the three selected writers mentioned above, the researcher will focus, explore, and analyse how the feminist ideology of Woolf is interwoven. This research will also argue that the works of Bainbridge, Byatt, and Drabble run parallel to much of what was put forth in Woolf's theory of feminism expounded in *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas*.

Woolf's feminist ideology is a system that imposes to dismantle the binary concept of masculinity and femininity. It presents one of the most important issues of the feminist theory, that is, a belief in the principle that women should have the same rights and opportunities as men to re-install and affirm their positions and roles in public domains. She encourages women to enter into professions, so that they may break away from their historically and conventionally assigned roles and gain economic independence (*Three Guineas*, 74). This thesis will contribute a significant perspective in looking into the issues of Woolf's pro-feminist thoughts adopted by Bainbridge, Byatt, and Drabble.

### **1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

The objectives of this research are to examine the novels of three selected contemporary British women writers—Beryl Bainbridge, A.S. Byatt, and Margaret Drabble—and to analyse to what extent Woolf’s pro-feminist thoughts are reflected in their fiction. In order to achieve this, the researcher will first analyse if patriarchy still holds a superior hand in designing the roles of women in domesticity and social lives. The researcher will also delineate changes in the traditional values of women over the last 30 to 50 years, if there are such changes.

The selected writers depict the cultural, socio-economic, and political constraints forced on women, and their struggles to break away from the conventional settings of society to achieve self-autonomy. For that, this research proposes that these writers are thematically inclined towards the feminist ideology expounded by Woolf in *A Room of One’s Own* and *Three Guineas*. The research will also investigate the transformation of women’s position and status in 20<sup>th</sup> century Britain by analysing the portrayal of female protagonists in the selected novels of these three writers.

#### **1.3.1 Research Questions**

1. Does patriarchy still have the superiority in designing the roles of women in domesticity and social lives?
2. Are there any changes in the traditional values expected of women over the last 30 to 50 years?
3. What are the main impediments for women’s growth, especially in the public domain?
4. What are the positive effects of early feminist thoughts on the chosen 20<sup>th</sup> century British fiction?

In this research, the gap between the first and second novels of each chosen writer is approximately 20 to 30 years. This is done on purpose to examine the positive impact of Woolf's pro-women thoughts (if there are any) with the passage of time in the selected works of contemporary British women writers.

#### **1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

Many researchers have examined details of Virginia Woolf's fictional and non-fictional works, focusing on her styles and writings. They review her ability as an artist and a modern writer, as well as her modernist approaches in her fiction. Also highlighted are the ideas of "material things" and "androgyny" in Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, and the ideas of "fascism" and "pacifism" in *Three Guineas*. None of the critics have taken the approach as what this research does, which is to examine the impact of Woolf's pro-feminist thoughts on the works of the three chosen contemporary British women writers. As such, this research will fill the gap in the existing body of knowledge on Woolf's feminist ideas and her influence on contemporary British women writers. The findings of this research will help inform scholars and researchers working on feminism, of the influence of Woolf's ideology on British women writers and chart changes in not only their works, but also in the British society of the 20<sup>th</sup> century where women's emancipation is concerned.

#### **1.5 SCOPE OF THE STUDY**

This research will explore and examine if indeed the evolution of women's rights really did take place in the writings of the three British writers from the 1950s to 1990s using Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas* as a basis of comparative study. Six novels of three 20<sup>th</sup> century British women writers are chosen on the basis of their