

Virginia Woolf's A Room of One's Own

Abstract

A Room of One's Own Speaks of the discrimination of gender bias that existed in the patriarchal Victorian Society. Virginia Woolf in her A Room of One's Own advocates that if women are given equal opportunities –a room of her own where women can read and write, and earn her own living. Through this women can get the chance to write and become writers. Virginia uses the symbol of room as freedom, liberation, liberty where she is the master and can express her thoughts clearly to the world.

Keywords: Protest, Discrimination, Oppression, Victimization, Feminine, Masculine, Earning, Patriarchal.

Introduction

A Room of one's own (1929) treats issues that had long been of vital interest to woolf. It deals with the difficulties of women in general – and women writers in particular in a male dominated world. It lays bare most of the intellectual assumptions of the society in which she was brought up. Woolf passionately deplored the various obstacles society places in the path of all creative places in the path of all creative women, she manages to protest them with a grace and wryness. Her argument is the insistence that a writer who is 'harassed and distracted with hates and grievances' cannot produce anything of enduring value, appropriately enough. A Room is in itself luminous proof of a mind which has been able to synthesize its anger and frustrations into a compelling, balanced work of art. Transcending special pleadings of any sort, the book is an immensely civilized document speaking to the common humanity shared by everyone.

A Room of one's own was Virginia's first concerted attempt to create a counter- theory to Victorian sex. The essay has gained its reputation as the most single important work of feminist literary criticism. It laid out general ideas and issues through which the lives and works of women writers might profitably be read. Virginia woolf has portrayed herself.

**“as a guerrilla fighter in a Victorian skirt’,
leading women against patriarchy and a victim of patriarchy,
excluded from patriarchy’s privileges and undermined as a
confident, independent adult.”**

Aim of the Study

Aim of this paper is to study Virginia Woolf's A Room of one's own as feminist treatise. In which she protest the gender bias of the victorian society by citing many examples of discrimination.

This essay is a sort of primer of feminist concepts, the experience of oppression of victimization, the importance of exclusion and marginality the existence of a distinctive female voice and subject matter. Even her passing assertion that

**“We think back through our mothers if we are women.
It is useless to go back to the great men writers for help
however much one may go to them pleasure.”**

has taken its place at the centre of an important thread of feminist thought among studies of mothers and daughters in literature, psychoanalytic theories of female identity that stressed the mother-daughter relationships, and the philosophical investigation of the material thinking as a paradigm for ethical human behavior. Virginia Woolf had the intuition that the mother – daughter – relationship is a powerful trope for female experience.

Virginia wolf in October 1928 travelled to Cambridge University to deliver two talks. She was invited there by the arts society at Newnham College and the odtaa at Girton College, than the only women's college at Cambridge. Unable to enroll in the university as a student because her father believed that university education was not for girl, Virginia wolf entered in the University as a adult, and on her own terms. This same invitation in 1913 was declined by her to deliver the prestigious clark lectures in English literature which had been inaugurated by her own father. Virginia saw her visit as a part of a continuing struggle for women's



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empowerment. In one of her letters to her friend she wrote that she visited the University because

“I wanted to encourage young women as they seem to get fearfully depressed.”

These talks grew into the book known as **A Room of one's own**. As Virginia was denied University education she thought of having a college for women where women would be given equal chance to study like men. During her visit to the University she had meals at both men's and women's colleges. Virginia contrasted the vast difference in the sitting, building and meals of both the colleges Oxford and Cambridge which were then a bastion of male privileges. She has reflected on equality in male – dominated culture which she has analyzed in this book. The first women's college was founded by Emily Davis and later by Anne Jemima Clough in Griton and Newnham were to take place alongside the male colleges at Cambridge dated from the Middle Ages. The Women's dormitories were situated at a safe distance from the existing university to minimize the distraction to male students. Women were allowed to attend lectures, where seating was segregated by sex but not to take degrees.

In writing **A Room of one's own** Virginia Woolf was fully aware of the dangers that beset the controversialist and had made every effort to avoid them. Though she was careful to exclude the strident tones, still she was committed to the cause of women's rights.

In **A Room of one's own** the broader outlines of Virginia's feminist doctrine begins to appear. It is described as a feminist fantasy. It begins with the story of a visit to two colleges, one for men, the other for women. In men's college, Virginia dined on sole, partridges and

“A Confection which rose all Sugar from the waves.”

The same evening, in the dining hall of the women's college, Virginia had been served a supper of beef, custard and prunes. Two scenes had evoked in her mind, the first of **'Kings and Nobles'** bringing **'treasure in huge sacks'** and the second of **'lean cows and a muddy market and withered green.'** Virginia points about the difference in the treatment of boys and girls living standard. Virginia Woolf's main contention in this book was that in order to write **a woman must have money and a room of her own.'** That is she must have the same opportunities as men to pursue her interests to be free of material cares. Trying to answer the question, 'why are women so poor?' Virginia discussed the trouble they had in earning a living. She commented indignantly on the position of English women at various times in history and glanced at the books written about them mainly by men. On the whole women had failed to create great works of art, she said, because they had been denied on opportunity to develop their faculties. The one field in which they had made substantial contributions is literature and for very good reasons. It was possible to keep them out of academies and institutes, but no one could bar them from the writing desk or forbid the use of pen and paper.

A Room of one's own is a feminine tract which speaks of why women are poor, why can't women write fiction, compares the history of women

writers from the 16th C to the 19th C, and talks about the discrimination between men and women and lastly says that there is a balance between the feminine and masculine self.

Virginia compared the girl's and Boy's colleges, boy's college were good because men would donate generously and the donated money would be used for the buildings, dining halls, library, gardens and chapels. Men would do so that after their death their names should be engraved in the University premises and not only had this will their monuments be made in their memory. Moreover men could do so because men were the only earning support in the families. Whereas women could not donate as they were denied education and jobs. The meals at Boys college were rich and of variety whereas the meals at Girl's college were ordinary and simple. Girl's were not allowed to visit the library at the college which made Virginia Woolf very angry as she was denied entry in it. Women are poor according to Virginia, because they are uneducated and have no jobs hence they leave no inheritance for their daughters.

Virginia Woolf asked why women did not write poetry in the Elizabethan age? The obvious reason was that women were not educated. If Shakespeare had a sister called Judith Shakespeare equally wonderfully gifted, would she have written like her brother? Yes, she would have written, Virginia Woolf suggested, had she got the chance to express her thought like her brother. She had always remained at home. She was as adventurous as imaginative as Agamemnon to see the world as he was. But was not sent to school. She had no chance of learning grammar and logic, let alone of reading Horace and Virgil. She would pick up a book now and then, one of her brother's perhaps and would read a few pages. But then her parents would come in and tell her to mend the stocking or mind the stew and not moon about with books and papers. This was a typical behavior of a patriarchal father who would speak sharply but kindly to his daughter teaching her right place in the family. Father would love his daughter but would emotionally blackmail his daughter. Same was the case with imaginary sister of Shakespeare. She had scribbled some pages up in an apple loft on the sky, but would be careful to hide them or set fire to them. Before she was out of her teens she was betrothed to the son of a neighbouring wool stapler. She was given the treatment just like all girls were treated.

“He begged her instead not to hurt him, not to shame him in this matter of her marriage. He would give her a chain of beads or a fine petticoat, he said, and there were tears in his eyes. How could she disobey him? How could she break his heart?”

This was the behaviour of a patriarchal father and his daughter was supposed to obey him. It was taken for granted that she will readily except her father's decision. But in the case of Judith, it turned out opposite. It had an adverse effect on her. Judith in **A Room of one's own** ran away from home because she did not want to marry a person of her father's choice. She made a small parcel of her belongings

one summer night and took off to London. She was too young to be away from home, she was just seventeen she had a gift like her brother, for the tune of words, had a taste for the words, had a taste for the theatre. She wanted to act, hence in London she went to the theatre where men laughed in her face. The manager of that theatre, a fat loose-lipped man guffawed and said, something about poodles dancing and women acting, no women he said could possible be an actress'. She could get no training in her craft. This adventure of being alone was too much for Judith in those days, she would roam alone in the streets at midnight have dinners in a tavern. But her dream of writing fiction, as she had the genius for it, and that of acting were shattered. Men are after all men, their behavior never change, one men named Nick Green who was the actor manager took advantage of her and made her pregnant. She was ditched by him hence had to commit Suicide and now is lying buried at some cross roads of London unknown. This was the condition of women in those days, women could not survive alone on their own, Such social patterns greatly influenced the feministic ideas of Virginia woolf.

According to Virginia woolf, men of that Society did not let women write fiction, though they had genius because men tried to suppress their genius due to their own selfish reason. Men thought women's writing would surpass theirs own and they will have no readers left for themselves hence men tried to suppress the genius of women writers Genius among women had then also existed as it must have existed among the working classes too.

In **Jane Eyre**, a novel by Charlotte Bronte published in 1847, a Room or an attic is used to hide mad Creole, wife Bertha confined to the upper region

of the Hall for years. Rochester the hero of the novel does so, because he thinks that she, Bertha is a shame for him and the family. So he keeps her confined away from the society.

The Dark Room, a novel by R.K. Narayan is a dark novel, full of gloom & and social criticism. Women's inferior status is partly due to women themselves as she (Savitri the heroine of the novel) acknowledges – "we are responsible for our position. We accepted, food, shelter and comforts that you give & are what we are." Here R.K. Narayan uses the room as a symbol of isolation, where the women hide their emotions & suffering away from the world.

Earlier writers have used the symbol of room as bondage and suppression. Virginia woolf uses the symbol of room as freedom, liberation, liberty where she is the master and can express her thoughts clearly to the world. It is like an open window where everyone can have a view.

Conclusion

To conclude, the protest in the writings of Virginia woolf comes out through her manifestation of gender bias in the Victorian society. She protest against women at home and by the society at large. Virginia portrays her protest by demanding equal status in general & A Room of one's own in particular for women to be able to express themselves creatively. Indeed Virginia woolf 'was a Guerilla fighter in a Victorian skirt.'

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