

Issues of Gender Bias in Virginia Woolf's A Room of One's Own

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Abstract

The present paper tries to analyse issue of gender Bias in Virginia woolf's A Room of one's own (1929). It is a classic document of the Feminist critical movement. Women of her time were denied access to libraries and ideas. All the ideas about women were propagated by men. From the example of Judith Shakespeare, William Shakespeare's imaginary sister, Woolf tries to present the situation of women in our society with restricted gender roles.

Keywords: Gender, Feminism, Gender Bias, Women.

Introduction

Gender bias is reality of the world. It is part of our collective consciousness. Kate Millet's sexual politics makes a distinction between 'sex' and 'gender'; Sex refers to biological identity as male or female whereas 'gender' is culturally/ socially /psychologically constructed through sex role stereotyping and historical conditioning. The patriarchal system of society teaches women to internalize the concept of male domination in the process of their socialization. A man understands this world in his own specific way according to his own experiences, but a woman understands herself and this world in relation to man.

Objective of the Study

This paper tries to establish issue and gender in women's emancipation. Virginia woolf's essay 'A room of one's own'(1929) is a cry for the woman's requirement of some space of money so that they can write about themselves. Very beautifully problems of gender issue is also incorporated to make us understand that more than sex, gender role is responsible for pitiable condition of women.

Main Text of the Study

Kate Millet considers women to be equally responsible as men in perpetuating the sex role images. Mary woolstonecraft also in her 'A Vindication of the Rights of Women' (1792) contends that the great majority of women are intellectually and ethically inferior to men not because of lack of potential or ability, but owing to their inferior education and insidious social conditioning. Virginia Woolf in her essay "Professions for Women" complained that woman's social obligations hindered a writing career, although women are not fundamentally different from men in their psychological need and outlook.

Woolf's book 'A Room of One's Own' (1929) became a classic document of the feminist critical movement. In this essay, she examines the obstacles and prejudices that have hindered woman righteous claim for their own history and literature. Women had to face many obstacles in the academic circuit, which symbolizes the effect of an educational culture and radically restricts the scope of women's intellectual exposure.

"A woman must have money and room of her own, if she is to write fiction."

Money symbolizes power and freedom and a room of her own is to have contemplative thinking. Women were not/are not allowed to think freely. They were not even allowed to enter libraries without male company.

"Ladies are only admitted to the library if accompanied by a fellow of the college or furnished with a letter of introduction".

Women were not recognized as individuals or autonomous beings. They were denied access to buildings and ideas. This exclusion disturbed not only a single thought or review but the lifelong development of an individual and the historical development of an intellectual tradition. Virginia Woolf was surprised to see a lot of books in the British Library



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written on women by men but she could not find any book on men by men or women. She found that male author highlight the strength and weakness of women, glorify them when in fact, they are "Locked up, beaten" and degraded Virginia woolf wants women to fullfill the gaps on the shelves of library by writing about themselves. She says,"

"Have you any notion how many books are written about women in the course of one year? Have you any notion how many are written by men? Are you aware that you are perhaps, the most discussed animal in the universe."

This essay vividly indicates gender bias in English Society.Woolf refers to an old male professor at the university who tells that no women could have written the plays of Shakespeare since these are the products of a masculine mind, which is always superior. In reaction to this statement, Woolf invents a fiction character Judith, "Shakespeare's Sister" to illustrate that a woman with Shakespeare's Gift was not given the same opportunity to flourish her talent. She was not sent to school, nor given time to read at home. Nor was she allowed any access to the outside world. She was trapped in the home.

"She was as adventures, as imaginative, as agog to see the world as he was. But she was not sent to school".

Judith was engaged and when she refused to marry, she was beaten. Threatened with a forced marriage, she ran away to London and forced by circumstances, killed herself. While her brother William Shakespeare established himself. Through most famous images, Woolf has tried to suggest that women's genius often goes unrecognized in a male centered society. Judith perished because she was denied access to equal opportunities. She neither had money nor space to pursue her talent and that has been the fate of women through the ages. They only need opportunities to shine and to pursue their talent.

"A room of one's Own" portrays Virginia Woolf as one of the first true feminist, who has presented the extremely servile lot of women in the

contemporary society. Wives were beaten without remorse, daughters were sold and males openly claimed women to be inferior and incapable of education. The light that lies within the women was allowed to be dimmed by the male domination. Woolf is disgusted at the poor way history and literature have represented women in past. No better position than the lover of a greater man has ever been given to her. Woolf is surprised at the kind of stuff men write about women in the books. Men are not sure whether women have souls or not. Some call them savages other "Maintain that women are half divine".

Virginia Woolf does not want women to emulate men when working as heads of schools or colleges, because women have a better rule of their own. She tells them to live their own feminine life to full. She presents a beautifully balanced image of both the sexes, when she writes:

"In each of us two powers preside, one male, one female; and in the man's brain, the man predominates over the woman and in the women's brain, the woman predominates over the man".

Conclusion

The normal and comfortable state of being is when the two live in harmony, together, spiritually cooperating.

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