

Timelessness in a Room of One's Own by Virginia Woolf

Poushali Biswas

Spoken English Trainer, Fastinfo, Rabindra Bharati University, Directorate Of Distance Education

Abstract:

In her seminal work *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf portrays the destitution of women within the four walls of their drawing room. How their existence and emotional intelligence had been sabotaged. They have been diminished to mere homemakers behind male history makers, but they don't have a history of their own. The world thinks that they are devoid of brain, which thought has to be changed. Their male counterparts deprive them of their right in every aspect of life- home and workplace. They were deprived of formal education, but she wants university education. She alludes to different literary works. She says that women has the agility of earning their own livelihood and create the history of their own. She emphasizes on Women and Fiction, and reveals, through Stream of Consciousness technique how women are capable of earn their bread and butter by writing, and they are not poor by any way. She has heralded women empowerment through her work.

Keywords: emotional intelligence, feminine plot, male dominated society

The world was never a déjà vu for women. Virginia Woolf was a true pioneer devised among modern women. The question arises who and how become a modern women? According to the sources that modern literature in English took its first steps during the 19th century which has as it brace the socio-political and economic activities going around in Britain more prominently the whole world and its interrelations. Then, usually the question arises what was the socio-political affairs going on round the world. Amidst these there were a section named 'women' was there, whose inclusion was nowhere in the worlds daily drama of geopolitics per say. There was no freedom. What does freedom actually mean? Freedom from all boundaries and barriers exerting one's inner spirit without any hesitation or fear of a doom. But that does define overall freedom of a person irrespective of caste, class religion, race and gender in this vast world. Freedom of the mind is at the ground level to every expression of freedom were women really free, seems not, as there was nowhere any trait of that nobody included them in politics or in any aspects of the modern world. How would there be any picture of women—they were chained from the roots of their existence—they were not allowed to step out of their house or take any decision of their family or even themselves or their children. How could they dare to take decisions they were not allowed to leave their bedroom or kitchen, maximum they were allowed to step out to the drawing room where they sat and observed people. They were caged in their own house and hence in their own relationship and in own room of existence. The modernization in the political world or literature did not render any modernization in the women lives. How could a caged bird see the whole world flying was out of the question. She can only reminiscence her daily life and mind "and roll up the crumbled skin of the day". They had no formal education, only escaped from unlettered.

Virginia Woolf came out as a pioneer and storyteller of every women mind. She begins by an attempt to bridge the gap between women and fiction and does so throughout her lecture at Cambridge University titled *Women and Fiction* and in doing so he alludes to Fanny Burney, Jane Austen, Bronte Sisters, Hawthorne Parsonage, witticisms of Miss Mitford, and George Eliot, she resonates the beauty and her admiration for Oxbridge university, reminisced Charles Lamb's admission there some hundred years ago and then Milton's *Lycidas*, and Thackeray's *Esmond*. She notably mentions in chapter 1, the sorrows of Christianity which connotes to women's body rights in the first wave of feminism. Her attempt full of verve to merge daily life of an wounded bird with the suffrage of women throughout the world in that contemporary era when hardly feminism rose its head—she was the embodiment of true feminism and its pathfinder. She has an informative and glorifying conversation with Mary Seton, who is a bit more privileged but in the same boat, she works in a university but is underpaid.

In her 1929 work *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf is blessed with a five hundred pounds annually, she is soundly anxious regarding domestic and healthy living of other women, she is worried about their survival in a patriarchal society and hence she wants to start public life of women in her country, making a living by writing fiction. She candidly talks to Mary Beton /Mary Seton about the then present condition of women how their normal flow of emotional intelligence was sabotaged in every aspects of rule of life in the world.

She mentions one quote from Samuel Butler "Wise men never say what they think of women". She puts her opinion that "what is so unfortunate is that wise men never think the same thing about women". She further says accounting her research that Napoleon thought women incapable just like Pope: "most women have no character at all". But Samuel Johnson thought the opposite. "have they souls or have they not souls"? "Others on the contrary maintain that women are half divine and worship them on that account". Goethe honours them, Mussolini despises them and Napoleon thinks logically that had they not been inferior they would have ceased to enlarge. Hence it is taken for granted that they are unable to conduct any intellectual activity and Rebecca West is called "the arrant feminist". She says that "men are snobs". But no one look down on that women have been considered the 'other sex', and that they have 'served all these centuries as looking glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size. Without that power probably the earth would still be swamp and jungle. The glories of all would be unknown, she says if they were not inferior, they would cease to enlarge. If she begins to tell the truth the figure in the looking-glass shrinks; his fitness for life is diminished. The looking glass vision is of supreme importance because it charges vitality it stimulates the nervous system.' So Woolf clears to the readers there is a question of force induced suppression against women in every aspects starting at home. Here comes a ground question that nobody said about their practice or any basic opportunity which enhance their agility. Here begins Virginia Woolf's timelessness. We today in the 21st century are holding offices but unforgettable is that from where we emerged today.

Now the question arises have we been believably modernized in a respect of entirety? Have we been able to evacuate our mind from the discriminatory propensity on the basis of gender? The stretch comes back to its own position every time the chapter opens and closes as we close our eyes. Everyday the newspaper floods by the incidents of domestic violence, violence against women in their workspace, in a massive sense rape. In Woolf's time women sat in the drawing room and observed what others were practising and wrote, still they were not forgetful of their responsibility towards society which was rather pathbreaking. In case of Virginia Woolf it was not only feminism, it was an aura, an era. What a tremendous work William James has done by coining the term 'Stream of Consciousness'; joy knows no bound within the

flow of consciousness, cognition. William James engraved Virginia Woolf's feminine thoughts in the pillar of the then male society. It was truly an era of reawakening. On the one hand, Woolf in England and on the other there were a group of people, not only writers who were supporting women to come out of the veil enwrapping them in the discrimination of societal, political and economic dilemma. Mention may be made of Rabindranath Tagore's *Home and the World*, published in 1916, that centred round two men, Nikhil, born of blue blood, his wife Bimala, and his friend Sandip. While Nikhil wants Bimala to come out of curtain and join the rally (outside world) she tastes all pervading womanhood; she meets corrupt Sandip and in the end he finds she is capable of making Sandip realize his sins and establish her superiority in many ways. The main cause of this instance is that, it was totally 'a feminine plot' i.e. totally a plot that was designed to carve a woman life to its entirety, (at the beginning Bimala's husband is keen to introduce her to the outer world and at the end she finds herself capable enough to clash with a man which was next to impossible in every household then. Same thing as William James did by coining the term 'stream of consciousness' (along with other proponents of this narrative technique). This is a famous example of reawakening happening in the east and west simultaneously.

What does all the waves of feminism utter?

Each of the waves has their own shades- the first wave (late 19th/ early 20th century) focussed on suffrage and legal rights. Main activists were Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Lucretia Mott and Sojourner Truth.

The second wave (1960s-80s) on the other hand challenging systemic patriarchy, reproductive rights, and workplace equality. Betty Frieden, Gloris Steinem, Bella Abzug, Shirley Chisholm and bell hooks.

The Third wave (1990s-2000s) introduced intersectionality and individuality. Main activists were Kimberle Crenshaw (intersectionality), Rebecca Walker (coined 'third wave'), Judith Butler (gender theory).

The Fourth wave started around 2012- present uses digital tools for activism #Me Too, sexual violence, body positivity, and intersectionality. Important figures being Tarana Burke, Alyssa Milano, Christine Blasey Ford.

In totality it was to severe ties that bound women, which did start within society, by religion, the Christianity rendered rules for women, which they had to obey about marriage, rearing children, and domestic life. As a women of 21st century I feel a childlike yearning to tell her how she paved the way for all-inclusive benefit of women. Apart from the west, in the east it was the heinous practice of Sati, (burning alive of women on their husbands funeral pyre) rampantly practised; Virginia Woolf opened the eyes of the women all over the world. But women didn't forget their commitment

towards society. Virginia Woolf voiced all women. She said about writing, but actually she meant all women should perform their duties they wished or were capable to. Language as it is basic requirement for a baby after birth, to convey its needs, likewise Virginia Woolf incited among women the needs to address one's own needs and further of a bigger whole.

Virginia Woolf is said to be very much loving for language, it was as if a newborn child's utmost craving for utterance to communicate with her mother, and depicts how university education flourishes people's life and how women are kept aloof from that.

She alludes to life of women during the time of Queen Elizabeth which points clearly the policy of ruling in a religious manner (by the Queen). The timelessness lies in the sensibility through ages, from the era of Henry vii during the dissolving of monasteries, the male counterparts survived by transfer of jobs, but the women monks were delved into despair, which is evident from chapter 3. She also says 'had Tolstoi lived

at the priory in seclusion with a married lady 'cut off from what is called the world', however edifying the moral lesson, he could scarcely, I thought, have written War and Peace'. She also tells that women were genuinely and casually considered as poor, and she writes under the heading WOMEN AND POVERTY: 'conditions in Middle Ages, habits in the Fiji islands of, worshipped as goddesses by, weaker in moral sense than, Idealism of, Greater conscientiousness of, South Sea Islanders, age of puberty among, Attractiveness of, offered as sacrifice to, Small size of brain of, Profounder sub-consciousness of, Less hair on the body of, Mental, moral and physical inferiority of, love of children of, Greater length of life of, weaker muscles of, strength of affections of, vanity of, higher education of Shakespeare's opinion of, Mr. Browning's opinion of...' and is what lying under the deep recesses of her mind.

She also inducts that a student unsuccessful in university will acquaint himself as not being a woman and tries to find position in society. Same thing went on repeating throughout the globe at that juncture. In the east Raja Rammohan Roy was fighting for abolishing the Sati system, Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar and Babu Rajchandra Das for women education, in the west Mary Wollstonecraft, Emma Willard, Catherine Beecher, Maria Montessori, in this very situation Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* served the 'feminine plot', which is important and valid.

Stream of Consciousness for Woolf was not only a medium but a mode of mutiny. At times she reminisces the bonding of freedom in regular life, momentarily she is chronicling the importance of university education for women. She describes the moral degradation among youth, having failed in university but I am superior in that I am not a woman.

It was the inception of nature for women. It was the disapproval of concealment in any phases of whole of woman's journey in life, no woman should hide her feelings and think herself inferior, this is what Virginia Woolf wants to say- that your life is not only yours but the whole world. She states that women lack a history of their own, they should be aware of their existence out of the four walls of their drawing room.

'Even the names of the book gave me food for thought' - she wants to say that women have their own brain and has the potential for creating a literary product or in any discipline. She is cancelling the sense of nothingness built in the mind of women by the patriarchal society and through her work gives a milestone of inspiration for making history. She vociferously describes that it was the subsidising of emotional intelligence of women and vividly portrays the Stream of Consciousness technique- she says about painting the picture of Professor Von X and thinks how would be his wife like? He is said to be writing the work *The Mental, Moral and Physical Inferiority of the Female Sex*. She says he was 'was labouring under some emotion that made him jab his pen on the paper as if he were killing a noxious insect... he must go on killing it' showed actually the proneness of men to dominate women.

She also mentions the relation between Cleopatra and Octavia is that of jealousy, in 'Antony and Ceopatra'. She says 'all these relation between women is rapidly recalling the splendid gallery of fictitious women are too simple and unattempted'. It is portrays by the eyes of the other sex. She also notes Proust that a man is terribly hampered and partial in his knowledge of women, as a women in her knowledge of men.

At the end she surmounts to the unity in equality between the two sexes- 'and I went amateurishly to sketch a plan of the soul so that 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 woman's brain the woman predominates over the man'. She finds timelessness in the equal consent of both sexes, full of positivity, and fruitful contribution to the society.

She quotes ‘Coleridge perhaps meant this when he said that a great mind is androgynous’.
As students of 21st century like us we should admit that nothing would have changed if not Woolf raised her voice. Through her technique of Stream of Consciousness she mirrors the hidden potentialities within women. She has such an aura of freedom that embodiment of feminism is not sufficient for her.

Bibliography

1. For successfully completing my research paper I have taken help from the following website links:
Links-
2. Woolf, Virginia. “A Room of One’s Own”. *Arcturus Holdings Limited*. 2022