

Voice and Space: A Comparative Feminist study of Pratibha Ray's Yajnaseni and Virginia Woolf's A Room of One's Own

Tapas Kumar Das¹, Manisa Mohanty²

¹Faulty, P. G. Department of English Shailabala Women's (Auto) College, Cuttack

²Final Year P. G. Student, P. G. Department of English Shailabala Women's (Auto) College, Cuttack

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ABSTRACT

Pratibha Ray's "Yajnaseni" (1984) and Virginia Woolf's "A Room of One's Own" (1929) are both powerful feminist texts. Although they emerge from different cultural and historical backgrounds, they share strong concerns related to women's voice, freedom, and space. This paper compares how Ray and Woolf present feminist ideas through the central female figures of Draupadi in "Yajnaseni" and the woman writer in Woolf's essay.

Few studies have compared these texts to examine feminist themes of voice and space across cultures. This study highlights how an Indian mythological narrative and a modern feminist essay both explore women's search for identity and autonomy.

The research uses a qualitative comparative literary method and feminist theoretical approaches. It analyses Ray's use of myth, memory, and interior monologue alongside Woolf's argumentative and analytical style. Ray employs myth, memory, and interior monologue, while Woolf uses argument, social critique, and analytical prose.

Key themes explored include gender inequality, the silencing of women's voices and the desire for autonomy. Both texts show how social expectations restrict women while they strive for dignity and freedom. Despite differences in style and contexts, both authors emphasise that the struggle for voice and space is central to women's lives.

Keywords: Voice, Space, Patriarchy, Feminist, Comparative study, Autonomy, Freedom.

INTRODUCTION

Pratibha Ray and Virginia Woolf are considered two of the most influential writers of their respective periods according to their genres of writing. Ray is a leading writer in Odia literature, while Woolf is a central figure in British modernism. Both writers focus on women's perspective and their struggles in patriarchal societies. Voice and space are central in feminist literary criticism, as women have historically been denied freedom to express themselves and occupy spaces necessary for independent identity and self-expression. Literature reflects these restrictions but also enables women writers to challenge patriarchy and reclaim silenced voices.

Pratibha Ray's "Yajnaseni" and Virginia Woolf's "A Room of One's Own" are two such texts that address the problem of women's marginalization from different cultural and literary traditions. Yajnaseni retells the Mahabharata from Draupadi's perspective, giving her a voice absent in the original epic. A Room of One's Own is a feminist essay advocating women's intellectual freedom and material independence as essential for creativity.

Although differing in genre, style, and culture, both works share the concern that women need voice and space. This study explores how both texts depict women's struggle against patriarchy and their pursuit of

autonomy, identity, and freedom. By comparing an Indian mythological narrative with a modernist essay, this study shows that the struggle for women’s voice and space in universal, transcending culture and history. Table Diagram

Yajnaseni (Pratibha Ray) Draupadi	Virginia Woolf (A Room of One’s Own)
Mythological Contexts	Modern Contexts
Physical and Bodily Denial	Economic Dependence
Social Humiliation	Institutional Exclusion
Emotional Voice	Intellectual Voice
Personal Resistance	Argumentative Resistance

LITERATURE REVIEW

Pratibha Ray’s *Yajnaseni* and Virginia Woolf’s *A Room Of One’s Own* have been widely recognised as important feminist texts though most critical scholars treats them separately within their respective cultural backgrounds both two topics creates a changes in the form of feminist writing some writers share there opinion about these books.

Mandakranta Bose (2001) considers *Yajnaseni* a retelling of Mahabharata in this novel Ray gives a voice to Draupadi instead of showing her as a silent and suffering woman and also shows her inner thoughts about the patriarchal society and grants her psychological and narrative space to articulate her lived experience.

Meenakshi Mukherjee (2005) emphasizes that *Yajnaseni* is part of a broader tradition of Indian feminist rewriting of myth Ray uses Draupadi voice to question social norms, destiny and male authority and also argues that ray transforms her from a symbolic figure into a self- conscious individual and creates a space for female subjectivity.

Gayatri Chakravorty (1980) spivak although she does not write directly on *Yajnaseni* her famous question “can the subaltern speak?” is relevant to feminist readings of Draupadi scholars use to spivak’s ideas to argue that Draupadi’s voice allow to silenced women speak against men in the patriarchal society and also discusses about the narrative space created by Pratibha Ray.

Elaine Showalter (1977) Through theoretical relevance showalter’s concept of gynocriticism helps explain *Yajnaseni* as a female centred novel and focusing on women’s experience and inner conflicts and also creates a literary voice towards women.

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar (1979) They view *A Room Of One’s Own* as exposing patriarchal systems that suppress women’s creative voice they supports Woolf’s work in *Mad woman in attic* and their work strengthens Woolf’s argument about voice and space.

Toril Moi (1985) she focuses on Woolf’s blend of personal narrative and feminist theory she argues that Woolf’s idea about “A Room” it goes beyond physical space to include intellectual and ideological freedom and also highlights Woolf’s challenge to male dominated society with the form of voice and space.

Jane Marcus (1981) she argues that Woolf’s criticizes the University and library that exclude women, and also share that space is linked to power and access in society. Without institutional space women’s voices remain marginalized.

Michele Barret (1980) emphasizes the importance of economic Independence in women’s liberation. She supports Woolf’s view that financial security is essential for women’s freedom and she argues that women’s voices cannot fully develop without economic and personal space.

In addition to these foundational scholars, contemporary feminist theorists provide further insights into voice and space.

Bell Hooks (2000) Highlights the intersections of gender, race, and class, demonstrating how social structures restrict women’s self- expression.

Sara Ahmed (2010) Explores how norms and emotions influence women’s psychological and intellectual space.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003) Critiques the universal application of western feminist theory, advocating for culturally specific approaches.

Judith Butler (2004) examines how socially constructed gender identities limit women’s intellectual and bodily space.

Helene Cixous (2005) Promotes *écriture féminine* as a means for reclaiming narrative voice.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2013) illustrates how structural barriers in both personal and public spaces affect women’s freedom and creativity.

Integrating these modern perspective alongside the works of Ray and Woolf strengthens the comparative understanding of voice and space across cultures and historical periods.

Research Gap

Despite substantial feminist criticism on Pratibha Ray’s “Yajnaseni” and Virginia Woolf’s “A Room of One’s Own” a significant research gap remains in comparative feminist studies and cross cultural analysis few scholars discuss these texts independently within their cultural and historical contexts, but they often fail to critically explore the intersection of women’s voice and space across traditions.

Specifically, there is a limited exploration of:

- I. How much have critics compared women’s voice and space in both Yajnaseni and A Room of One’s Own together or have they mostly studied each work separately.
- II. How have critics failed to compare Draupadi’s personal voice in Yajnaseni with Woolf’s intellectual voice in A Room of One’s Own, even though both are different feminist ways of fighting against patriarchy.
- III. Why do critics talk about Yajnaseni only in Indian feminism and A Room of One’s Own only in western feminism, and do not compare how men control women’s lives and creative spaces in both texts.
- IV. Why do scholars not show that when women do not have space or freedom, their voice and creativity also suffer in both texts
- V. Why have critics not compared women’s voice and space in Yajnaseni and A Room of One’s Own together from a cross cultural feminist perspective.

Objectives

- To examine the concept of voice.
- To analyse the idea of space.

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- To study the relationship between voice and space
 - To compare Indian and western feminist perspectives.
 - To highlights the feminist significant of the patriarchal structure.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative comparative literary approach to examine the concept of voice and space in Pratibha Ray's *Yajnaseni* and Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*. It uses feminist theoretical frameworks, including gynocriticism and cross-cultural feminist perspectives, to guide the analysis. The primary texts are studied for narrative voice, character perspective, and representation of physical, social, emotional, intellectual and economic spaces. Secondary sources such as scholarly articles and contemporary feminist research, are used to support and contextualize the discussion. This methodology allows a systematic comparison between Indian mythological narrative and a western modernist feminist essay, highlighting how women's voice and spaces are shaped, restricted, and reclaimed across cultures.

DISCUSSION

The core of this study is the concept of voice and space, analyzed through a comparison of Pratibha Ray's *Yajnaseni* and Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*. These texts come from different cultural and literary contexts, *Yajnaseni* from Indian mythology, and *A Room of One's Own* from western modernist feminism, but both focus on women's struggle for self-expression., Both works explore how women's voices are influenced by the spaces they occupy in patriarchal societies.

In *Yajnaseni*, Draupadi speaks in a first person narrative, emphasizing the importance of women's voice. Through her narrative, Draupadi challenges patriarchal authority and highlights the injustices she faces in the Mahabharata. Draupadi expresses her feelings to Krishna, revealing her emotional and moral struggles. Ray gives her a voice that reflects a fully lived experience. In contrast, Woolf presents an intellectual voice in *A Room of One's Own*, critically analysing societal restrictions on women due to lack of money, education, and personal space. Her voice is calm and analytical, she introduces Judith Shakespeare, an imaginary sister of William Shakespeare, equally talented but constrained by lack of resources and patriarchal control.

Comparatively, Draupadi's voice emerges from personal suffering, while Woolf's voice is based on social observation and reasoning.

Space is crucial in both texts. Draupadi lacks physical, social, emotional, intellectual, bodily, and narrative space. She is controlled by male authority, her father, husbands, and society. Even as a queen, she has no private space and must live by palace rules, sharing her life with five husbands.

Draupadi is denied social space, valued only as a daughter, wife or queen. The dice game highlights this denial, as she is dragged into the court without respect. Elders' silence shows societal support for male power. Her emotional space is also restricted; she must suppress pain,

Despite her intelligence, Draupadi's intellectual space is denied; her questions in court are dismissed. Her body is treated as property, showing extreme patriarchal control. Yet Ray allows her to reclaim narrative and mental space through first-person narration, transforming her struggle into self-identity.

Woolf emphasizes physical, economic, social, educational, intellectual, and psychological spaces. She argues that women need a private room to think and write. Patriarchal society, with constant family and household duties, denies women this privacy, preventing focused creativity.

Economic space is vital; Woolf notes that a woman needs £500 per year to be independent. Dependence on men limits, creativity, and confidence. Money provides security, freedom, and choice.

Educational space played a vital role to write this essay. Woolf compares Men's colleges and Women's colleges. Men's colleges were rich, well-built and full of educational resources while women's colleges were poor and underdeveloped. Women were denied higher education, libraries, and lack of opportunities. This lack of educational space kept people away from knowledge and literary growth.

Education is also critical. Woolf compares men's and women's colleges: men's colleges were resource-rich while women's were underdeveloped, lacking libraries and opportunities. This denied women access to knowledge and literary growth.

Intellectual space allows women to express ideas, but male-dominated society often criticized or ignored their writing. Woolf uses Judith Shakespeare as an example: equally talented as her brother, she is denied the opportunity to write due to patriarchy.

Social space is limited; women are confined to domestic duties while men dominate public spaces. Woolf herself restricts on campus, illustrating societies control over women's nobility and actions. Psychological space is crucial for mental freedom and self-confidence. Long-term oppression diminishes women's belief in their abilities.

This discussion addresses the research gap by comparing an Indian mythological feminist narrative with a western feminist essay. Draupadi's personal voice is contrasted with Woolf's intellectual voice, showing that women's marginalization and denial of space are universal in patriarchal societies.

CONCLUSION

This comparative study of Pratibha Ray's *Yajnaseni* and Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* demonstrates that the issues of women's voice and space are central to the feminist discourse across cultures and historical periods:-

Although these texts emerge from different literary traditions. *Yajnaseni* rooted in mythological retelling and *A Room of One's Own* in western feminist thoughts both exposes how patriarchal societies restrict women's freedom, autonomy, creativity, and self-expression.

The study shows that women's voice is deeply connected to the availability of space. In *Yajnaseni*, Draupadi's voice emerges from lived suffering, emotional pain, and moral questioning within a rigid patriarchal structure that denies her physical, social, bodily, and intellectual space. Despite her royal status, she remains controlled by male authority and treated as property, especially during the dice game episode. However Pratibha Ray reclaims Draupadi's silenced voice by granting her narrative and psychological space through first-person narration, allowing her to speak against the patriarchy.

In *A Room of One's Own*. Woolf presents a rational feminist voice, showing that women need economic independence, education, privacy, and intellectual freedom to create. Through the example of Judith Shakespeare and women's exclusion from universities and libraries, she illustrates how lack of space, silences women's voices in literary history.

The cross-cultural comparison shows that despite cultural differences, patriarchy similarly controls women's bodies, mind, education, and creative spaces. When women were denied space, their voices remain suppressed; when they gain it, their voices and identity grow.

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