

## SHIFTING GENDER ROLES: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE VICTORIAN VERSUS THE CONTEMPORARY TIMES

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Gender role theory postulates how males and females perform their biologically assigned gender through certain specific attitudes and behaviours. The focus is laid on how the process of socialization, the transfer of norms, values and beliefs influences the behaviour of both the genders*

**KEYWORDS:** *Shifting Gender Roles*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Gender role theory postulates how males and females perform their biologically assigned gender through certain specific attitudes and behaviours. The focus is laid on how the process of socialization, the transfer of norms, values and beliefs influences the behaviour of both the genders. Social role theory proposes that the social structure is the underlying force in distinguishing genders and that sex-differentiated behaviour is driven by the division of labour between two sexes within a society. The division of labour creates gender roles, which in turn, lead to gendered social behaviour. (Gender and Socialization)

Gender roles influence how a person portrays oneself. The assignment of roles according to a particular gender impacts the gender dynamics. The strict adherence to the traditional role seems unimportant in the present context. Many European societies subscribed to "Victorian" ideas of gender roles, named after the long reign of the British Queen Victoria. Women were to stay in the home, and if they went out, they usually only went to spaces separate from men. While Queen Victoria didn't exactly fit into this traditional gender role—she did rule all of Britain and its empire—she still conveyed these ideals to her subjects. Because of the global reach of the British Empire, these ideas spread all over the world, often through force. Victorian age seems very well to exemplify how a woman was seen as belonging to first her father and then her husband with no sense of independence of her own. She is the caregiver, the nurturer, the kind and meek person who is confined to looking after the proper functioning of the household chores. The woman does not have any say, most of the time her opinions are dissuaded, she is seen as someone childish and silly. The women had to fit into the 'Victorian feminine ideal'. Unable to pursue anything outside the domestic sphere the women were restricted to the patriarchal societal standards. Various roles were assigned as to how males and females should function in Victorian society. Following these set rules, both males and females were expected to behave. The strict norms that society dictates and how it limits her to finding an agency to fight for her were studied upon.

The Victorian age has been brought to the forefront to examine how someone's gender strongly determined the behavioral as well as physical aspects in which they presented themselves in the eyes of society. In the middle-class

Victorian household, a new kind of education was required for the girls to fit into the kind of lifestyle they were leading. The household chores were managed by the servants and the girls did not have to assist their mothers. The sole purpose of Victorian women was to get married to a man. For the women to be worthy, they took classes to enhance their skills in dancing or learned how to play the piano. The acceptable traits were learned, the correct way to maintain the posture, how much distance to maintain when standing next to another person and how to ask to be excused when she needs to go to the bathroom. The fashion was quite unsuitable for moving around freely. The crinoline was popular in the 1940s, with a bell-shaped skirt, it fell across to the floor covering several feet, acting as a constraint. Carrying out trivial activities like traveling by train or carriage, cleaning the floors was restricted while wearing a crinoline. Similarly, a corset entrapped a woman both in the literal and figurative sense. Corsets were worn underneath the dresses to give a feminine appeal to the figure. Also, the women had to function under the restrictions imposed by the society, trying their best to achieve these ideals and set standards. The fashion was designed in a way to control women's movements. The restrictions imposed upon the Victorian women made them feel suffocated resulting in bouts of hysteria. This brings up the example of one of the greatest female poets of Victorian times, Elizabeth Barret. Having to attend to the household chores of managing the servants and caring for her widowed father, she did not find time to focus on her poetry. She becomes unwell and a professional invalid. However, after developing a friendship with Robert Browning, one of the best Victorian poets, she is persuaded to escape with him. Leaving behind her house, she escapes with Robert Browning to Italy and gets married.

Talcott Parsons, a social theorist, viewed gender roles to be biologically based. (It was part of his three essays in the volume *Family, Socialization and Interaction Process*.) The process of modernization brought about a rationalization in role allocation. By rationalization, Parsons meant redefining the roles of gender concerning the economic and sexual function. Central to Parson's thinking was the assumptions about the normative nature of pair bonding in modern society. In his picture of the modern world, marriage and the family created by marriage functioned on mutually supportive economic and affectional bonds in which male's capacity for instrumental work was complimented by female's ability to manage the expressive aspect of family life and the rearing of children.

Education paves the ground for women to have a chance at being at par with men and not be limited to only the domestic sphere. One of the earliest documented women feminists was Mary Wollstonecraft. She argues the unfairness of the fact that the only education that women were receiving was knowledge on how to fulfil the two roles of wives and mothers. Beyond the domestic sphere, there was no formal education received by women before the nineteenth century. Even in the nineteenth century, it wasn't without challenges that education for women grew. There prevailed essentialist ideas about the nature of women- considered weaker of the two sexes, being materialistic, and so on. Mary disputed the conduct manuals which dictated how women should be conducted. These manuals were oppressive to women and hence she said that people should stop using them. Women, being physically weaker gave rise to the belief that they were mentally weak in comparison as well. At the core, it was believed that women were inherently lustful, giving in to temptation easily; something known as the Madonna/whore complex. That was one of the reasons why society thought that women should not receive an education – they would dive deeper into such vices. A woman should never be allowed in a position of authority. They should never be allowed to teach specifically or given a position over a man. The original sin was committed by Eve, her temptation accounts for women's inferiority and sinfulness.

There should not be a downside to educating women as they are the ones raising the children. Hence, better children would mean more educated members of the society. Wollstonecraft drew attention to the infantilizing of women.

It is not a compliment for women when men call them gentle, delicate creatures. The reason behind women behaving lustfully is for keeping them as slaves for so long. The minute they got a taste of freedom, they act extravagantly. Men calling out women for being shallow is a consequence of being forced to be as such they were prevented from participating in matters of any kind of importance. They had no choice but to be obsessed with superficial things like external beauty, dresses, jewellery. Right from infancy, they were taught that beauty is a woman's sceptre. Mind shapes itself to the body and roaming around its guilt cage seeks to adorn its prison. As a result of finding themselves in such a prison, the only thing they can do to stay sane is to embody it decorate themselves. They are shallow as men did not give any other alternative. Educating women would deliver as good a result when you educate men. Improvement must be mutually taking them free as they would quickly become free. The injustice for which one one-half of the human race are obliged to submit to retorting on their oppressors, the virtue of men will be worm-eaten by the insect which he keeps under his feet. Women won't be a hindrance but they will be a benefit.

In Contemporary times, we have seen how women have become increasingly conscious about their rights. For centuries past, women have been trying their best to establish an identity of their own and break free from the clutches of their gender identity that withhold them. Virginia Woolf in her book "A Room of One's Own" has put forth the fact that women are regarded as unequal to men. Society has always been partial to women. Here, Woolf brings forth the example of Judith, a fictional sister of Shakespeare. Judith's fictional work did not receive the same recognition as Shakespeare's works. Her talent remained underappreciated as in those times a woman with par in terms of intelligence with men could never be successful. Woolf points out that if Judith received recognition in society, she might have even produced better literature than Shakespeare himself. Instead, Judith was underestimated and treated as the second sex. Literature has produced some popular female characters. The Shakespearean heroines play a pivotal and dominant role. However, the irony lies in the fact that in the real world, women were being treated as secondary. It is because of the men and their domination, she laments, that women are treated as the second sex.

Women were not permitted to educate themselves and since a ages back, did not have personal rights and the free time to spend time to do some creative writing. In Woolf's essay "A Room of One's Own" she says that she can be addressed by any name as preferred, it could be Mary Beton or Mary Seton or even Mary Carmichael. The name does not hold any importance. (Woolf) These lines from the first chapter talk about the author's search for identity which is maintained till the end of the essay.

### **THE ROLE THE GENDER OF CHARACTERS IN THE SELECTED TEXTS PLAYED IN DETERMINING HOW THEY ARE TREATED**

There exists a duality concerning the male and female identity in society. The men are deemed to be the 'neutral' force and the women being the 'other' is just an object to men as Simone de Beauvoir puts forth in her book "The Second Sex". However, since it is men who have imposed this distinction on women, it is the responsibility of women to not give in to this submission. The classification of men and women must not simply be limited to sexuality and it cannot give a conclusion on its nature. Women can never fully be free from the clutches of society. They can either choose between personal freedom and integration of the society. In the past, a woman could be married and gain respect from society. But she did not enjoy any personal freedom. On the other hand, prostitutes had a sense of personal freedom but got no respect and were marginalized by society.

The French Lieutenant's Woman with the same title is referred to not by her name which is Sarah Woodruff but as 'the French lieutenant's woman' by the residents of Lyme Regis. This reduces her individuality to someone who belongs to a person. As an independent character, she does not have any credibility. Mrs. Poultney while describing the kind of woman she wants to provide a home for mentions how she must be of irreproachable moral character. (Fowles) Ernestina is described as possessing the 'right face' for her age. Features such as a small chin, oval and delicate as violet are what make a woman more appealing. She would act coyly, casting down her eyes prettily, as if she might faint should any gentleman dare address her. She is the perfect example of the idealistic Victorian woman who possesses both the physical characteristics as well the mannerisms that were expected from them. The vicar while describing the French Lieutenant's woman begins by telling her name which is Sarah Woodruff. She is deserving of Mrs. Poultney's charity on account of being a really distressing case. (Fowles)

Sarah suffers from 'grave attacks' melancholia, partly attributable to remorse. She has fixated on the delusion that a lieutenant is an honourable man who will return to her. As a reason to which she is seen on many occasions standing by the sea, haunting it.

Sarah Woodruff used to be a governess to Captain John Talboth's family at Charmouth. There was a French vessel that was driven ashore by a dreadful gale. The Lieutenant of the vessel whose leg was crushed at the impact was provided shelter by Captain Talboth's family. Since he spoke in French, Sarah was called upon to help translate what he spoke and attend to his needs as well.

Sarah Woodruff is said to be a woman who wasn't a fine moral judge of people. She had not lodged with a female cousin in Weymouth- which makes her person not capable of making sound judgment. "This instinctual profundity of insight was the first curse of her life".(Fowles)The second curse is her education. It is not the best education, not enough, at least, to teach beyond third-rate young ladies' seminary in Exeter. Her students look down upon her. Sarah finds solace reading poetry and fiction- two sanctuaries for the lonely. She is a victim of caste society. She was forced by her father to drop out of classes. "To the young men of the one she had left she had become too select to marry; to those of the one she aspired to, she remained too banal. (Fowles)

The interesting thing to note here is the fact how Sarah is a character formed based on the assumptions of society. Fingers are pointed at her for being abandoned by the French lieutenant and losing her purity at his hands. While later it is revealed that she had been chaste. The ostracization she faces in the eyes of the society in Lyme and her settlement in Chelsea as an assistant to the famous painter Dante Gabriel Rossetti completely shows her character in a different light. She asserts herself and refuses to marry Charles when he meets her at the end.

The publication of Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre created quite a commotion in the nineteenth century. The character of Jane defied the gender roles of her time. Unlike the demure Victorian women, Jane's refused to be restricted by the conformity in the society. The readers at that time did not receive well a woman character lacking feminine traits. Jane Eyre represents grey in a society that is strictly black and white considering the role of gender. (Leibbrandt) Her character personifies that of a spirit that refuses to repent or be disciplined. (Turner) The expression of anger in Jane Eyre alarmed the readers at that time. The blatant portrayal of sexual desires in the repressed form was what caused disarray in the Victorian ideals. The readers viewed her as being rude and vulgar. (Turner)

The relationship between the master, Mr. Rochester, and the governess, Jane Eyre was an unconventional love story. Not only did they belong to different, but it was also an illicit relation. Jane portrays a character who takes pride in herself, is passionate, witty, and determined; she is conventionally not good-looking. She is a daring Victorian woman who refuses to be controlled.

In Malala Yousafzai's biography, we follow the journey of a teenager as she navigates through life in Swat Valley, in northern Pakistan. Amidst the rigid society which adheres to fixated gender roles, we see how her father establishes his school "Khushal School" to make education accessible to everyone. Beating against all odds be it economical, or facing opposition from Ghllamullah who called himself the Mufti lamented how it is against Muslim ideologies to be educating males and females under the same roof; he faced many challenges. She finds liberation in the premises of her school; the doorway is described as a magical entrance to the girls 'special world'. As they skipped through, they cast off their headscarves. Here, the usage of a headscarf as a means of covering the head can be constricting.

Gender bias is blatantly something one can observe in Malala's society. The gap between both genders seems to be further widening. Born in a society that rejoices at the birth of sons, her parents showed no bias towards her. Malala mentions that her father urged his friends to throw sweets, coins and dried fruits in her crib, a practice which was usually only done for boys. She points out how girls are expected to stay indoors after a certain age, cook, and feed the male members but she decided at an early age, she won't do that. Her father emphasized that his daughter would be 'free as a bird' (indicates their family was liberated than others in the society) In a way she is lucky to have been born in a family that allows her to pursue her ambitions. In a society where wife-beating was not unheard of, Malala ironically comments how her father never lays a hand on his wife. He shares his problems with his wife, something which is seen as a sign of weakness by the other men. The fragile masculinity comes to the forefront. Kindness, sensitiveness, etc. are some traits that are mocked when portrayed by men. It is only commendable when men display their toughness and are macho. The difference does not end here. There is a constant need to supervise or protect women. In their society, though males could roam around freely, females always had a male member to accompany them- a practice which annoyed Malala. Narrating about her father when he was a student who moves to SpalBandi with her aunt and her husband to pursue his college education, he observes how the women in that place had great freedom, unlike her village. The simple act of meeting outside the home for women to chat was something very unusual. The Purdah System was not unheard of. In the village of her maternal family's side, the women had to hide their faces whenever they left their purdah quarters and could not meet or speak to men who were not their close relatives. The Pashtun code of conduct did not treat women favorably. There were instances of women being sold off to older men with wives. A society where if a girl flirts with a man disgraces the family and in certain cases, women were even poisoned. A custom called 'Swara' was practiced in which a girl could be given to another tribe to resolve a feud. Even though it was banned officially, it continues. Windows cannot marry without the permission of her family.

In one of the wedding rituals, the bride and groom have to look in a mirror to see each other's faces. In the instances of arranged marriages, most of the time, it is the first time that the couple sees each other. A small boy is made to sit on their laps to encourage the birth of a son in the future. This shows how much society favours a male child over a female child.

While reading *The Yellow Wallpaper* where the female protagonist is suffering from depression, she is gaslighted into believing she is anything but unwell. There is a constant denial which the lines “You see he does not believe I am sick!” “My brother is also a physician....and says the same thing”, (Gilman) lucidly states. She is forbidden to do any sort of work until she is ‘well’ again. She believes that change and excitement along with congenial work would be good for her. She used to write in secrecy, putting away her work if anyone comes over. She is not encouraged to dwell on her condition. This shows that there is a complete disregard for her thoughts. She is bound to hide her journal when someone comes up to check on her. “He hardly lets me stir without special direction” (Gilman)- indicates her being supervised closely. John would speak to his wife as though he were speaking to an infant who is incapable of making a decision. He would take her in his arms, calling her a blessed little goose, saying he would go down to the cellar if she wished and get it whitewashed into the bargain”. (Gilman) She is confined to a nursery being asked to simply rest and not even allowed to be near her child. The extent to which she suffers because of her depression is not known to her husband, she laments. According to him, there is no reason whatsoever for her to suffer, and in that he finds satisfaction. Her husband, John’s sister Jennie steps up to help in housekeeping. She is a perfect and enthusiastic housekeeper. And yet the protagonist cannot let her find her writing. Jennie believes it is the writing which made her sick.

In the play “*The Glass Menagerie*” by Tennessee Williams, what the future holds for each character is largely dictated by their gender. The male protagonist Tom should take business classes because he is a man while Laura, his sister must get married because she is a girl. It is from tradition that gender roles seem to stem from, being that Amanda, their mother talk about what women should do and what men should do according to her Southern upbringing. A person’s gender determines the values upon which they are judged. For instance, Amanda stresses upon her daughter on Laura’s staying ‘fresh and pretty,’ and on the other hand, emphasizes the importance of ‘character’ that a man should have.

Anita Nair makes a clear distinction that exists in terms of gender roles in her novel “*Fasting Feasting*”. The women characters become victims of the Indian middle-class patriarchal society. Set at the backdrop of the late 1970s, Uma, Aruna and Arun are three siblings brought up in a family who rejoice in the birth of their son. The parents teach conventional domestic roles which are essentially feminine. Uma is forced to give up her education to take care of her baby brother, Arun. Uma tries to seek help from Mother Agnes from her convent school, to make her parents understand how much she wants to pursue her education. Mother Agnes is powerless and Uma has no choice but to resign to her fate. Uma becomes a burden to her family after three failed marriage attempts. On the contrary, her younger sister Aruna has marriage proposals lined up for her. She marries a wealthy family and settles in Bombay; whenever she visits her own family she acts in a superior manner in front of Uma.

Another interesting character is Anamika, their cousin. A brilliant student who had to give up her opportunity to study at Oxford University to get married off to an eligible person of her parent's choice. She is trapped in a marriage where she is ill-treated by her in-laws. Unable to find a way out of it, it is later discovered that she is dead. Whether it is a case of murder or suicide remains unclear. Her life is sacrificed to the patriarchy that exists in society.

### **DO PEOPLE ALWAYS GET A CHANCE TO COME OUT OF THE CLUTCHES OF GENDER INEQUALITIES?**

The instances in which certain characters spoke against the injustices faced by themselves or others were largely determined by the situations in which they found themselves in. They needed to break the pattern of injustice faced. However, not everyone had the courage or the way to come out of the gender inequalities that they were subjugated to.

It is seen in certain cases, how a character was moulded since their childhood to be independent. Taking the example of Charlotte Bronte's female protagonist, Jane Eyre, we see the use of symbolism of the Red Room. Locked up inside the red room as a punishment to a young Jane remained a bitter memory throughout her life. She becomes aware of the prison from whose shackles she must break free. In Lowood institute, when she was humiliated, she connects it with the punishment she had to suffer in the Red room in the Gateshead household. There is a constant need for Jane to prove her worth. Her social status makes her aware that she must be worthy if she must marry her master, Mr. Rochester, in the Thornfield Mansion. Her character learns how to assert herself and makes herself liberated.

Sarah Woodruff does not seem bothered to be an outcast and when being referred to as The French Lieutenant's Woman. She seeks freedom from a society that views her as an outcast; as such she never bothers to clear the assumptions made about her by the people around her. Sarah's character finds the liberation that she seeks and establishes herself as an independent woman who does not need a marriage alliance to be supported or to fend for herself and her child.

The fact that she leads the Lyme society to ostracize her by making them believe that she is not chaste was a ploy devised by her to break free from the shackles of the Victorian rules and regulations. Her ambiguity gives her a mysterious persona; she becomes a victim of the notions of gender in society. John Fowles who is the author cites E. Royston Pike's "Human Documents of the Victorian Golden Age" at the start of Chapter 2 which makes a commentary on how the population of women is much more than the men. The statistics stated how in the British population in the year 1851, for every 8,155,000 females from the age of ten onwards, there were 7,600,000 males. This hinted at the fact how Victorian women whose sole purpose is to fulfill the roles as a wife and a mother remain unaccomplished.

This becomes an ironic statement in the context of the French Lieutenant's Woman because she does not feel the need to fit into the typical role as assigned by society. Her bad reputation makes her a dishonourable person unfit for Victorian society. (Pike)

Dog-woman in Jeanette Winterson's "Sexing the Cherry" defies the stereotypical woman role. She declares that her appearance is hideous and accepts it as a given. She does not adhere to the behavioural patterns that the patriarchal society expects the women to follow. Her body becomes a weapon against men, it is described as being huge, and in certain situations, her large breasts tried to choke men, her vagina being large enough for no penis to fit, and her clitoris representing that of an orange.

In a society where a woman is usually recognized by her marital status, the female protagonist here was known to people as dog-woman. She is self-sustained and does not require a husband to provide for her. Her life centres around two things -her being a woman and feeding dogs.

It is observed while describing the characters of Dog-Woman and the female environmentalist how they traditionally do not fit into any of the archetypal categories traditionally used for women: the virgin, the lover, the mother, and the sister. Instead, she opens a new category: the monster. The authors Susan Gubar and Sandra Gilbert stated how the monster woman was in reality a woman seeking the power of self-articulation. (Bartholmess) Women who tried to articulate were proclaimed as being abnormal and they were cut out from society. Hence women were intimidated due to fear of being ostracized. It was a ploy devised by the patriarchal society to keep patriarchy intact.

The chance to prove their self-worth is something not everyone gets; to show their wilfulness to others that showcase how there is more to them than their crippled condition and extremely shy nature. Laura Wingfield becomes a source of worry for her mother, Amanda in “The Glass Menagerie”. She worries how her daughter has no gentleman-callers and goes on to boast about the number of gentleman callers she used to get back in her day. Laura does not find an agency of her own, the reason being partly due to her shy nature and partly because of being viewed by everyone being someone different. This significantly influences her character.

Female characters highlighted in “Fasting Feasting” by Anita Desai fail to come out from the clutches of the patriarchal society. Uma’s family stops her from pursuing her career and solely offers to finance their son’s education. She is asked to stay inside the four walls of her house learning to do household chores until she reaches the age of marriage. Then again, she is looked down on by society for remaining a spinster.

The plight of cousin Anamika shows the sad reality of women who has to face atrocities after being married. Neither the parents allow them to come back nor they can find a way out, which often results in their death. Uma’s sister, Aruna, obeys her parents since her childhood and believes that she has achieved a better life than her sister for having married an affluent family in Bombay. She is not aware of the extent to which patriarchy is ingrained in her.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman in “The Yellow Wallpaper” observes the patriarchal setup of the nineteenth century. The unnamed narrator starts losing touch with the outer world as a reason for being confined to a room. Controlled by her husband John, she is wrongly diagnosed with hysteria, when in reality she is suffering from post-partum depression.

Her husband prevents her from doing any task that requires thinking, which takes a further toll on her depression. She almost believes her husband when he tells her that she is not having any sort of illness. The woman is not allowed to exercise her creativity; she even has to resort to writing her journal in secrecy. She becomes prey to the set gender rules of the society; a society that favors the males and assigned them the dominant role while women had to abide by their male counterparts without raising any questions. The nineteenth-century medical health facility had no fair knowledge about female mental health issues and thereby diagnosed many disorders as hysteria. (Carey) Recommending bed rest was a sort of a cure given by doctors due to a lack of understanding of the condition.

There is a stark contrast in the way John and his wife are portrayed. While everything John says is deemed to be practical, his wife on the other hand is not taken seriously and is thought to be overly emotional.

Ultimately, she slowly descends into madness. If she had not blindly followed everything her husband said and if John was not so authoritative as a husband and a doctor, maybe she would be better. But her inability to question her husband’s actions to the point of even believing she was wrong costed her of her sanity.

Sometimes, in trying times, all that is required is some courage to speak out against what is wrong. Ziauddin Yousafzai fought against all odds to establish the “Khushal School” in Swat Valley, be it economical or in the form of threatening from powerful people like that of Muftis. He campaigned for women’s right to education and spoke out against the terrorist organization of the Taliban. Malala, his daughter was inspired and participated alongside her father in the campaigns. It wasn’t without a grave consequence in which Malala was almost killed and had to fight for her life. The Taliban shot her head in point-blank range. Her recovery was a miracle and she was even more unstoppable after that. She became renowned globally and to date, she continues inspiring millions. It proves how all someone needs are a voice to

speak against the injustices that are happening all around.

More than fashion it was designed in a way to keep women under control. Similarly, headscarves made women like Malala feel controlled. She rebelled by not covering her head or face while out in the public space, even when her mother asked her to cover as people were staring at her. The school premises were a space that made her feel free and she flung her headscarf as if in triumph over her restriction.

## **OVERCOMING GENDER DISPARITY**

The roles as dictated by the society since yesteryears concerning a particular gender have loosened up. The thought processes, attitudes, and ideologies of people have changed gradually. The movement of the women folk from the domestic sphere to the public domain helped in bringing change in the strict gender roles. The Industrial Revolution gave women the opportunity to work along with men. Women found inclusion in the workforce which previously consisted of men. The Feminist Movement played an important role in overcoming the watertight compartment of gender roles that have been assigned since times immemorial. The campaigns were undertaken to ensure women got their share of rights be it legal rights, protection from domestic violence, rights over their bodies, and so on, elevated them. The first wave of feminism began in the 1830s till the 1900s which was a fight for claiming voting rights in particular. The second wave which followed was concerned with the social rights of women and this movement was at its peak in the 1960s and 1970s. The third wave of feminism was a response to the failure of the second wave of feminism; it began in the 1990s. As put forward by Virginia Woolf in her essay "A Room of one's own", to write fiction, a woman must have money and a room of her own. This statement throws light on a minor point while exploring other shortcomings in the patriarchal system which limits women from discovering the creative potential they might have. These areas range from the educational sphere to cultural as well as economic spheres. The education system was deemed responsible for centring around the male viewpoint and thus promoting literary values which were reflected in the works of the male writers. The gendered language gave rise to the debate on how a woman author has no choice but to resort to making usage of the masculine language.

Woolf incorporated the psychological theories of Carl Jung to present the concept of the androgynous creative mind. She fictionalized this concept to show a 'woman manly or 'man womanly combination of men and women. In her essay, she conjures up the imaginary twin sister of William Shakespeare named Judith to show how women in her society were treated differently than men. Judith's talent of writing receives no limelight whilst Shakespeare receives recognition and is applauded by society for his writing skills. All Judith receives is an underestimation. While refusing to get married, their father beats her up. She dies a tragic death by suicide. The imaginary character of Judith is illustrated to lay emphasis on the fact that women's talents seldom receive much recognition and their voices are silenced.

The *Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir describes how distinguishing women on every level as the 'other' is oppressive for them. The men hold the position of self or subject while the women become the object or the 'other'. This distinction places women in opposition to men. The subordinate position occupied by women is further examined by de Beauvoir but her research finds no justification for women being treated as the inferior lot. The disciplines of biology, psychoanalysis, and historical materialism disclose no specific reason for women's inferiority, it is simply assumed.

The requirements of a woman to have a stance of her own and the shortcomings that she faces in the process are inspected by Virginia Woolf and Simone de Beauvoir.

The ideas and beliefs of gender roles have to be unlearned. There have to be a conscious effort as well as awareness about it. These are unwritten roles which have been passed on. The culture of heteronormativity is influenced by gender roles; there is the exclusion of anyone who is not a heterosexual. Stereotypical roles are associated to cooking which is often considered as a woman's work while the man is called the 'breadwinner' of the family. The fixated gender roles become redundant in between gay couples. (Pallapothu)

## CONCLUSION

The research undertaken has come to the understanding that to overcome the conformity of gender roles, both men and women have to be treated equally. The women have to be uplifted to assume a role of responsibility. For that to happen, the opportunities have to be accessible to her. The Victorian and Contemporary times have been scrutinized which revealed how society has undergone a slow and gradual change in its attitude towards women. In the instances where the characters of the selected texts did not adhere to roles dictated by the society, they have not seen a positive light.

As it was seen in the Victorian era, the females were given secondary status. They behaved in the feminine manner as expected from them. Women were assigned roles by society with regard as to how they should function in a particular manner with strict adherence to those "roles". A male, on the other hand, exercised the liberty of having no such restrictions laid upon him. It has been analyzed and found that when women started gaining awareness about their rights, they stopped accepting the way they were treated. Women who obeyed and were dependent on the men, lacking any sexual desires, were submissive, meek, soft-spoken, and were dependent fit into the 'Victorian feminine ideal' in the eyes of the men. On the other hand, if women were self-sufficient, confident, expressive of their sexual desires, they were given the tag of 'improper feminine'. (The Victorian Feminine Ideal) A woman was perceived as a frail being who had the virtues of being nurturing yet reserved qualities and was strictly limited to the household establishment. In contrast, a man could be free in the public reigning their power. A woman was deemed as a desirable person only if she were married. More often than not it was a marriage of convenience.

In the first chapter, it has been noted how the gender of a person influences the way they are treated by society. The male characters were given the option to pursue their careers while their sisters did not get that opportunity; this was reflected in the selected texts, namely "Fasting Feasting" and "A Glass Menagerie". A male had this added advantage along with their liberty. The female characters who lacked feminine traits were not well received by the readers. The examples include Charlotte Bronte's "Jane Eyre" whose overt expression of rage and passions caused an uproar in the Victorian society where any respectable woman would repress such emotions. It raised a question about Victorian morals. The female protagonist of "Sexing the cherry" is gigantic and cares little about her looks. Then there is the character of Sarah Woodruff in "The French Lieutenant's Woman" who is not accepted by society for having an affair with a French sailor in the past. To sum up, the dichotomy that exists in the male-female anatomy begins in childhood when society imposes the feminine destiny on a girl child and she starts seeing the men as being superior to her. (Beauvoir)

The second chapter reflects on the limitations that prevented the characters of the selected texts from taking a stance against the injustices faced by them. On the occasions when they rose above the suppression induced by the society, they had to bear the consequences. Ziauddin Yousafzai, Malala's father while speaking against the injustices, made one thing clear as to how the fact that he was a male made it possible for him to make his voice heard both within his community and outside.

The third chapter examines the viewpoints of the writers Virginia Woolf and Simone de Beauvoir on the requirements of women to explore their talents and the disadvantages they face in the process; how putting women as the 'other' places her in opposition to men which oppresses her. Society has to unlearn the notion they hold about gender roles. The stereotypical gender roles is non-existent between a gay couple which proves how gender roles are not fixed.

It was surprising to see that society still has a long way to go. Years and years of deeply rooted misogyny and the belief that males are superior to females are ingrained in society. Rules and a code of conduct were set out and they were little or no favorable at all for women. Women did not have an agency of their own. Women became increasingly aware of their rights and slowly and gradually they tried to break free from the patriarchal norms of the society. At the present times, after years of women fighting for their rights and being relentless has paved the way for them to find an agency of their own, stepping out from the four walls of their house, pursuing a career of their choice, and thus be liberated.

The gendered roles changed at the end of the nineteenth century. The mingling of men and women in both the private and public sphere brought a change in the rigidity of the societal norms. The transformation in the attitudes was brought in by the advent of socialism nationalism, and women's rights. The people resisted colonialism and formed transnational networks to fight for women's rights. Ideas about how to define gender, femininity, and even masculinity were transforming everywhere. The labour-intensive Industrial Revolution brought many women out of the home to work in factories. The phrase 'New Woman' was applied to women in America and Europe who sought liberation and access to education. This term was not meant to be a compliment.

This work has been completed within certain limitations. The area of study is a vast one with scope for further research. The third gender has not been extensively studied except a few observations made, which was not possible to cover within the short period of completing this research work. The advancement of gender studies has made it plausible to conduct more on this topic. The characteristics of race, sexual orientation, ethnicity etc with relation to gender are further areas to be explored. New theories have come forward which have highlighted the continuity of this gender disparity.

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