

A Room of Her Own and a Room with a View

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Abstract: The paper goes from *A Room of One's Own* back to *A Room of a View* to probe ways, not by way of statistic analysis, but by way of story-telling, to women's liberation and independence. A room of her own is difficulty enough to obtain, but how come a phenomenon of "marry into the purple", of getting into someone else's room, is quite a sensation by now? If self-actualization and happiness instead of material comfort constitute the ultimate of one's life, "a view" is more important than a room itself.

Keywords: Room, A view, Identity, Self-actualization

1 Introduction

Women writers George Elliot, George Sand, Virginia Woolf, and even some male writers like D. H. Lawrence in Europe turned on people's nerves, or consciousness, yet they did not launch a Women's Liberation Movement as in America. Nevertheless, women whose consciousness was aroused, like Nora in *A Doll House*, bolted out of the house, tried almost everything that men had been doing, and rented or even bought their own rooms or even houses, at last. But did they arrive at self-actualization and happiness?

2 History, or Herstory

She had her own room, the girl of a well-to-do family. The room was called "maiden chamber," and, there was often a chambermaid to her. She stayed there day and night, year in and year out, except there was a festival like lantern festival or miaohui. She sewed or embroidered, or even read some books. Meals and daily necessities were brought in by the chambermaid; no one could enter the chamber and no glimpse of her should be caught by a male. She would be so carefully guarded and protected until her wedding day, with her chastity safe and sound.

But in a poor house, a girl might sleep with her parents in a common bed, called kang in the north, together with other brothers and sisters, until she is old enough, usually fourteen or so, but that would not be very far from being married away. Down in the south, a poor household may have a one-room house, with every member sleeping in, and the teenage girl might have a bed in a corner with some curtains to keep private.

That was when they were girls, not women yet. They became women when they got married. Then they would live with her husband in a room attached to a compound house, along with her parents-in-law and brother- sister-in-laws, to wait on others or to be waited on, depending on her position. A room to herself? What do you mean? Definitely no way. Even their bedroom door should not be closed most of time.

3 Status Quo

100years later, in the 21st century, how is the situation women are in? Do they have rooms to their own? If so, do their rooms have a view? Or views?

As is stated in *Program for the Development of Chinese Women (2001-2010)*, "In order to better protect women's rights and interests, enhance women's overall competence, speed up the process of equality between men and women, and to bring into full play the role of women in China's socialist modernization drive, the Chinese Government has formulated and promulgated the Program for the

Development of Chinese Women (2001-2010) (hereinafter referred to as PDCW). In PDCW, general and major objectives have been set forth for women's development in 2001-2010, based on women's current situation, periodic and long-term goals of women's development, and China's basic conditions, and in line with the general requirements of the Tenth Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development of the People's Republic of China. And in consideration of the 12 critical areas of concern covered by the Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women and approaches taken by other countries in drawing up their programs for women's development, on the basis of the implementation of PDCW'95, in view of the problems that need to be addressed with urgency in the development of Chinese women, and for purpose of sustainable development in 2001-2010, six areas are defined in PDCW as priorities for development, namely: women and the economy, women in decision-making and management, education of women, women and health, women and law, and women and the environment, with the promotion of women's development as the main theme throughout the document."

PDCW is aimed to strengthen the relevant functions of the government, mobilize all social forces, create a better social environment for women's advancement and development, and at the same time, to encourage women to work harder and strive for their advancement and development through participation in economic and social development processes, to implement the basic state policy of equality between men and women, and promote women's full participation in economic and social development, to promote the realization of equality between men and women in political, economic, cultural, social and family life, to ensure the equal access of women to employment and economic resources, to enhance women's economic status, to ensure women's political rights, to enhance women's participation in the administration and management of and decision-making on state and social affairs; ensure women's equal access to education, to promote the educational level of women in general and the level of life-long education of women, to ensure women's access to primary health care services, to enhance women's health status and their life expectancy; ensure women's equal access to legal protection, to safeguard women's lawful rights and interests; and improve the ecological and social environment for women's development, to improve the quality of life of women and promote the sustainable development of the cause of women's advancement.

And the revised Marriage Law, promulgated in 2001, reiterated the basic principle of equality between men and women, stressed the equal status of husband and wife and their equal rights and responsibilities in marriage and the family, and, in consideration of actual situation, added articles forbidding domestic violence and bigamy with the clear aim of protecting women's rights. Today, women have a lot more say in decision-making concerning their own marriage and play a bigger role in family decisions, and their personal and property rights are better protected, as reported by *guoqing.chian.com.cn*.

Statistics from *Report on Work of Government 2012* shows that the average living area per capita was 32.9 square meters in rural area and 37.1 square meters in towns and cities. According to *Chinese People's Livelihood Development Report 2013*, 84.7% of houses are privately owned by households, thanks to the development of estate in China in recent years. Things could be better in 2014. It is believed that the situation of Chinese women will be improved considerably in the 21st century.

That means everyone has a room of one's own. Really?

Not necessarily. Young girls and boys have their rooms, at last; at least those born after 1990's have been brought up in their own rooms. Single men and women have rooms or houses to themselves except those who cohabit. But for married people, if not a writer or a painter whose work requires a studio, who wants a room of one's own? You will be suspected of wanting to separate with your partner.

So women still do not have their own rooms. (Men do not either.)

4 Views

When Virginia Woolf talked about room of one's own, she was not only talking about the material room, of course. Actually she was talking about room for women's genius to be developed and brought into

play, about women's voices to be made and heard, women's identity, independence, self-actualization and women's welfare and well being.

For a genius like Virginia Woolf, to write fictions, a room of her own is a must, and better with \$500 added to it. But what if she had not a view, or views? It would be a stale and desolate room. What she turned out would not be *A Voyage Out* or *Orlando* or *To the Lighthouse*, but some work of woe, or needle work, of which nothing would be said because she did not go out to gossip with other women about the latest fashion, the latest fair and affair.

Take another instance. If Lucy did not take a room with a view, she would stay in that stale room in Florence for 7 days, go for the arranged tour of Italy, and go back to Britain for an arranged marriage, raise some children as good as her and her brother, and spend a life safe and sound. But what about love, the soul-racking love? She would know nothing of it, none of the bliss and happiness.

If women do not have a view or views on what happiness is, they would believe "do well" is no better than "marry well," "It is happier to cry in a BMW with a lover than to laugh at the backseat of a bicycle with your love," and "the happiest thing is to marry into the purple."

If women do not have a view as to what is love, they would believe "love is to be loved". They would starve to get that slim figure or go for a plastic surgery to get a perfect feature, to win love over. They wait to be better housed, to be well clothed, to be tenderly tended and lovingly loved, without thinking what to love, being the weaker. Maybe the only love for them would be shopping and gossiping. Sports? No, it is ungraceful to run and sweat. Poetry or music? Can well get away without. Creation of any kind? Yes, children.

If women do not have a view on beauty, they would go on investing in pots of expensive yet worthless cosmetics, high-heels, handbags, and fashion clothes. Economy will soar, with beauty industry taking the lead, but what about women's identity and self-consciousness? If taken away of their luxuries, those vain wretch can not found their body, not to say their worth or identity.

If women do not have a view, they would not desire a room of their own whatsoever. Young, they were daughters. Grown up, they were wives, and then mothers, mother-in-laws. They would never be themselves. They would resort to their mother-wit, or even grandmother-wit, and live their mothers' or even their grandmothers' life once again. What life did to them will be passed to the children, and so on and so forth.

Here is the story of my mother. She lived for 50 years with my father, quarreling, fighting both hot wars and cold wars with him, all their lives until she died, of hatred. She never experienced that love and happiness in a loving relationship. What a life for her! Yet she never set her mind at a divorce. First, it was for the sake of us, three small children. She could not possibly raise us all by herself. Second, it was the greatest shame to divorce or to be divorced. Third, there was not a room for a divorced woman with two or three kids at heel at that time. We did not have our own house until 1990's. Then by the end of 1990's, every one of us had our own houses, and my brother gave my parent two houses. House was out of question but divorce out of the question; it was too troublesome, to inconvenient. Just to think of people sticking together for the sake of convenience in a relationship without love, a life of mutual hatred! What a life!

That was an old generation, gone to the wind. But is the next generation faring any better? 20 years ago a friend of mine got married away from our dormitory to a man with a house. Later when the relationship had gone from bad to worse, she just could not get herself out of it because she had neither house nor job. At that time rooms or houses are allotted to married couple by the government to the name of the male. Women had no right to a house or even a room. That was the painful facts of life. She managed, through many toil and tow, to stay, with neither love nor hope for a new love or a new life.

I have more luck than she. I have a house, because, all of a sudden, in 1998, women were endowed with the right to have a house! For me divorce came much easier, just a matter of signing a divorce agreement and of him moving out. I would not live my mother's or my friend's life once again. I have a room to stay in and to start a new life with. I still have dreams of love, because I have a view.

Fortunately, nowadays one can always rent a room of one's own if one can not afford a house. There

will always be a way out if you have a view.

5 Conclusion

Substance like a room of one's own is important at times for women, but a view, the sense of being, identity, and self-actualization, is more important, and for women, harder to come by. Lucy was fortunate enough to obtain a room with a view; more importantly, she had George and his father to help shape her views as to love and life. But for women at large who only travel for fad, surf for bargains or download slim programs, how can a world view dawn on them? Here it seems sociology, women studies, research and statistics of the kind can do little but contributing to the academics. Who read those thesis and research papers but the academicians? Some magazines like *Friend, Love*, website with columnist like Maoli contributing her views, or even a movie like *A Room with a View* might do a better job, if we can not get women to read Virginia Woolf.

What a view if only women read!

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