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“Kashmiri Women’s Room of one’s own”**Or****Jhelum drowns Shakespeare’s sister****By*****Aamir Qayoom***

Given the fact that earlier we used to be encyclopaedic but now we are wikipediac, earlier we used to read books but now we read e-books, e-magazines, e-journals etc. This boom in information technology has given rise to the globalisation of world affairs. Gone are the days of those calm and peaceful days. The hustle and bustle of days drains one’s creative energy. Each day one lives with multiple identities. Facebook updates and tweets continue to dominate and influence our existence. But Today I am agog to tell you my story because some confused signal from my mind urges me to tell it to you today but wait. Oh. I feel tired, my body resists, so do my eyes, they disobey my orders today. Perhaps next time you hear my story. As I put my light off I sense like melting and mingling with the gloomy blanket of the night.

Presently I find myself in a Kashmir university classroom. One of the backbencher students introducing himself as Imaan Dar raises his hand to ask a question, I nod my head to give him impression that he is permitted. His loud and bold words demand to know “what is the relevance of Virginia Woolf’s essay ‘*A Room of One’s Own*’ for a Kashmiri woman”. I fill my lungs with air; I hear the echoes of words within me. Backbencher has for sure pricked my emotional safety valve and thus tsunami of emotions will come out as I will answer his question. Thank God for not having been born in Kashmir. A paradise on earth turned into mini philistine. While being lost in a reverie, one of the girls in the middle calls out ‘sir’ and I begin to answer his question.

The remarkable aspect of Woolf’s text is that it stands as a clarion call for women to act and assert their identity. The text as a whole deals with the creative energy of women which remains unexplored in patriarchal arena. Suddenly while teaching I hear the echoes of protests outside class (Hum kya Chate Aazadi, we want freedom). One of the university guards knocks the door and breaks the news of stone pelting, followed by public demonstrations around Maisuma area of Srinagar. Interestingly enough the same news is confirmed by a tall funky boy who gave me the impression that he was busy with checking facebook updates in class; while I was answering Imaan Dar’s Question. So within a jiffy chaos marks every bustle and I find myself thinking of leaving university, as soon as possible.

I took a taxi to reach Lal Chowk. Strangely enough I felt myself to be poisoned by Imaan’s question. Guarded by the sense of passion I resolve to explore a real space Lal Chowk: instead of imaginary space Oxbridge which Virginia Woolf explored in her essay. Determined to reach museum crossing Foot Bridge connecting Lal Chowk with Cultural Academy and museum. As I walk I can feel small drops of rain falling on me, the environment turns pale, and every object around me reflects pain and separation. Besides I could see few lads waiting for their turns in Residency roll point. Somehow with hook or crook I managed to strike a conversation with one of the lads wearing *pheran* (a gown to protect from cold during winter) which gave me impression of his lazy and lousy nature. After discussing some Kashmir politics with him; as Kashmiri Dhabas and stairs of shops are famously known for. I somehow wanted

him to get engaged in Imaan's Dar's question. Weirdly he accuses me of knowing nothing about Kashmir. Branding me as an outsider who shows guts by talking feminism in Kashmir. Engulfed with fear I stood lip locked, my stereotype of seeing him as lousy and lazy lad in *pharan* melts. Lost in the Silences and shadows of my discontented world, he took me some yards away and said.

How will you explain feminism to half widows of Kashmir? Raped women of kununposhpura? How would you explain feminism to those women who live in a political laboratory? How do you explain Woolf's ideas to those who live in an uncertain peace? How would you explain same to the half widows of Dardpura for whom sudden disappearance of their husbands haunts their existence? Imagine the mental geography of the mother who is uncertain whether her son will return at night or not? For them my dear chum it is difficult to associate themselves with these derivative discourses, which have impregnated your thinking as they had mine, when I was studying English literature in Delhi couple of years back. For these women your ideas mean nothing more than wild imaginations.

Coming to the cursory examination of Kashmiri women and their personal spaces i.e. their rooms which haven't so far existed. But still in their rest rooms one finds the creativity reflected from the way they manage the household affairs. The way they govern themselves in such an oppressive ambiance. However a critical and careful scrutiny of their rooms reflects pain, numbness, separation, misery, etc. Their rooms are filled with imaginary graffiti's which haunts their existence. The women in Kashmir find it difficult to find their own rooms after they have become victims of structural oppression more than patriarchy. This is a simpleton thinking to expect them to have their rooms in this situation. It is equally idiocy to blame Kashmiri women of not having their own rooms.

The Foucaultian understanding of text brings out the dichotomy between complex matrix of patriarchy and power. The power forms the base of how women are controlled. However women in Kashmir are the victims of double power (patriarchal power and structural power). It has also affected the way they perceive about themselves making them not to uphold and celebrate the X chromosome (female) but rather feeling ashamed of being born with wrong chromosome. For the production of art peace is necessary but oddly enough this word does not exist in dictionaries of Kashmiri women. What would women of kununposhpura write when the air she breathes smells of blood of innocents killed on the streets, chowk's and crossings of Kashmir? How would these women write when there mornings are mourning's? Suppose they somehow get there rooms what would they write about? Of course they will give outlet to their pain, sense of dislocation and psychological fragmentation. Isn't it time that we consider rethinking violence on women? As he leaves I touch my cell phone, Googling till I find that dashing Ishaq wants to be friends with me. Touching the accept icon and smiling on my Maggie intellectualism; I started my journey towards the museum.

While moving on I avoid the Residency road to reach the museum, because of the threat of security forces that had cordoned the whole area by now. Pavilions were packed with police men fully loaded with pellet and pepper guns, bamboo sticks, and with heavy boots as I walk on the back road of Residency Road, leading me straight towards the museum. A strange sense of fear has taken the possession of my body now. I decide to postpone my visit to museum yet a strange sense encourages me, leaving my body wretched and making it a microcosm of Kashmir conflict. As I take some rest before passing the bridge I decide to eat pea nuts from a hawker

surrounded by couple of local police men, usually to guard the bridge and watch the moment of people around.

While munching nuts I hear the wailing cries from the women from the banks of the river Jhelum. I quickly rush to the spot, only to find that Shakespeare's sister has drowned herself. I try to enter the curiosity circle made by some of the men around. Lost in thinking how can Shakespeare's sister drown in Kashmir. Unwittingly I find these voices leaking from my mouth. Bringing the uneasiness to some men, I find myself someone pulling me out of the curiosity circle. Some minutes later I find myself in the lap of Jhelum View Park amidst the scene of floating shikaras. While watching this gloomy scene from the distance I could see a tall, skinny guy coming in the direction of the park. As he sat sharing the same bench, I asked him about Shakespeare's sister. Clearing his throat to get my attention he said. A tourist by the name Edward Peterson some years back finding her poetry collections unpublished called her Shakespeare's sister as a token to her creativity. But why did she do suicide I wonder. Wait there is some news around. A suicide note from Shakespeare's sister. One of elders comes forward to read the letter "I am Shakespeare's sister on the paradise of earth, I was not something visible personification of absolute perfection, I had no room of my own; I suffered the stings of patriarchal and political oppression, so in vain did I not kill myself? I lost myself in Jhelum, but I found meaning, In vain I did not give myself away". Touched by the letter I move slowly as I can walk with the feeling that every atom of the air smells of rottenness. As I find myself alone in the banks of Jhelum River while the fisher men pack up their things. I find myself not wanting to enter museum, I rush to my home some yards away, I decide to think about Imaan's Dar's question. While handling pea nuts in one hand, I move in the direction of my home. Walking towards my home, munching nuts I find myself in home, with a copy and pen in my hands, filled with strange sense of craziness to prepare the unanswered question of Imam Dar. Suddenly I hear the knock at the door. Oh my mom knocks the door and I wake up to find myself at crossroads. Was it a Dream or Reality or just a Product of one sleepless night?

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