



# A Freedom of Her Own: Revisiting Woolf in Sara Joseph's World

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**Abstract:** This paper explores Sara Joseph's short story "Inside Every Woman Writer" through a postcolonial and feminist lens. In contrast to Virginia Woolf's idea in "A Room of One's Own", Joseph states the problem faced by Indian women, especially in Kerala, through colonialism and patriarchy, and the resistance of women under male domination, as well as societal and colonial rule. Woolf argued that women require a private room and financial independence to free themselves. Joseph reshapes this idea within the Indian context, stating that without wealth or privacy, Indian women can express themselves if they have inner strength and courage. Referring to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's global feminist ideas in "We should all be feminists", the paper shows how feminism connects across the world but differs with culture and local experiences. Overall, Joseph does not repeat Woolf's ideas but redefines them for Indian women, proving that creativity and independence can exist even in restrictive environments. Her story celebrates women's resilience and power to write, dream, and resist, even within everyday life.

**Keywords:** Resistance, Feminism, Postcolonialism, Creativity, Empowerment

## Introduction:

Women in many societies have been expected to remain silent or limit their dreams due to family obligations and social norms. In *Inside Every Woman Writer*, Sara Joseph demonstrates how a woman still discovers her voice within these constraints. For her, writing is about finding power within life rather than escaping it. Joseph reinterprets Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* for Indian women, demonstrating that freedom does not automatically imply an actual space or money. Instead, it entails having confidence, imagination, and belief in oneself.

Women writing in general is considered powerful and resistant as they are shaped by the world both outside and inside their homes. From Virginia Woolf to Sara Joseph and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, the three different writers at three different times portray patriarchy and their resistance through writing. The experience differs with each of the writers, depending on their lifestyle and the problems they went through. Through this study, the idea of Virginia Woolf's economic independence is affected when compared with Indian women. Virginia Woolf's famous idea that "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction" implies that women want independence and seclusion. However, in Indian society, particularly in Kerala, most women do not have this level of personal space. They are surrounded by obligations like family, religion, and social expectations. This study takes Woolf's concept and reinvents it. In Sara Joseph's story, the "room" is not a physical space, but a mental and emotional one. It is a location within the woman's mind and heart where she can still think and create even though her environment is limited. Writing in this short story is a form of resistance where she reclaims her identity and voice. The study depends on feminist and postcolonial theories to understand how gender, culture, and history impact women writers' experiences. The analysis will be interpretative, focusing on how language, imagery, and character development reflect women's battles for creative and personal independence. The study uses close reading and theoretical reflection to uncover deeper layers of meaning from Sara Joseph's *Inside Every Woman Writer* and its feminist background.

**Literature Review:**

For nearly a century, feminist literary studies have focused on the relationship between women's work and liberation. Beginning with Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929), critics and writers have investigated how material, emotional, and intellectual freedom influences women's creativity. Woolf's famous remark that "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction" laid the groundwork for feminist literary criticism by associating economic independence with creative expression. She claimed that women's innovation had been stifled not by a lack of skill, but by social and structural constraints. Her article continues to have an impact on feminist thought around the world, and it provides an important framework for viewing women's writing as both a personal and political act. However, other critics and writers have noted that Woolf's ideas, while revolutionary, were based on a Western and upper-class perspective. Elaine Showalter, in *A Literature of Their Own*, proposed the concept of Gynocriticism, which seeks to analyse women's literature from their own cultural experiences rather than via male or Western views. Showalter's framework encourages readers to research the feminine literary legacy, which covers topics such as parenting, identity, and the body. Gynocriticism thus created a new avenue for writers like Sara Joseph to convey the intricacies of women's existence in non-Western countries.

In the Indian context, feminist writers and critics have expanded on these ideas by demonstrating how gender intersects with colonial and postcolonial history. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* demonstrated how colonial and patriarchal structures frequently mute women, denying them the opportunity to express themselves. In *Under Western Eyes*, Chandra Talpade Mohanty criticized Western feminism for treating all women equally while ignoring the cultural and economic realities of women in underdeveloped countries. These postcolonial feminist philosophers contend that women's freedom must be understood within their particular cultural, linguistic, and historical contexts, where it is aligned with Sara Joseph's Malayalam writings.

This redefinition resonates with Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *We Should All Be Feminists*, which broadens the feminist conversation to include diverse global experiences. Adichie insists that feminism is not confined to Western ideals but adapts to each culture's specific needs. Joseph's story echoes this global vision while staying grounded in Indian life. By connecting the writers like Woolf, Showalter, Spivak, and Adichie, this paper situates *Inside Every Woman Writer* within a continuum of feminist thought that moves from Western to postcolonial spaces.

**Research Gap:**

While many studies on feminist writing in India concentrate on the impact of Western feminism, there is little research into how Indian women writers reinterpret and localize these concepts within their own social and cultural contexts. Previous interpretations of Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* have frequently been limited to Western or urban feminist frameworks, failing to consider how its primary ideas, mainly economic independence and creative freedom, translate into the actual experiences of postcolonial Indian women. Similarly, most scholarship on Sara Joseph has focused on her as a Malayalam feminist voice, with few studies comparing her reinterpretation of Woolf's ideas or connecting her work to global feminist thinkers such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. This research bridges that gap by connecting Woolf's modernist feminism with Joseph's postcolonial and spiritual feminism, demonstrating how women authors can achieve liberation beyond material independence via inner strength and creative resilience in an Indian environment.

**Analysis:**

In *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf stated that a woman requires money and her own private place to freely write. A "room" for Woolf represented freedom, privacy, and the capacity to express oneself, all of which were frequently denied to women at the time. However, in Sara Joseph's *Inside Every Woman Writer*, set in postcolonial India, the concept becomes more emotive and intimate. The "room" is not a real location, but rather a mental and spiritual space in which a woman finds calm and fortitude to create, even while her exterior existence is filled with constraints. The woman in Joseph's story lives in a typical Kerala household, surrounded by noise, responsibilities, and expectations. She lacks Woolf's financial comfort and privacy, but she still manages to write. Her imagination transforms into her "room," a secluded region within her thoughts where she may think and dream freely. By demonstrating this, Joseph adapts Woolf's notion to the Indian setting, which is civilized and influenced by patriarchy, religion,

and colonial power. She contends that true independence for Indian female writers stems not from money or solitude, but from inner power, faith, and self-belief.

Postcolonial feminism studies how colonialism and patriarchy together affect women's lives. During British rule, Indian women were often seen as helpless victims needing rescue. Sara Joseph challenges this by showing a woman who saves herself through writing. In Kerala, where modern education meets traditional rules, Joseph's protagonist struggles between freedom and duty. She cannot completely escape her social world, so she learns to resist quietly within it. The strength of even leaving her child portrays the suffocation experienced, which became unbearable to her due to the societal environment.

Every pot she scrubbed, every meal she cooked, carried within it the rhythm of a story waiting to be told. This shows how a woman's everyday life can become the very source of her writing. Joseph bridges domestic labour and artistic creation. The protagonist does not reject her domestic role; instead, she transforms it into inspiration. Each repetitive household act like scrubbing, cooking, and cleaning that becomes a form of unspoken storytelling. This statement reinterprets what "a writer's life" means in a patriarchal culture. Unlike the male writer, who frequently works alone, Joseph's female writer creates her art amidst noise, chores, and interruptions. The "rhythm of a story" hidden in housework represents how female creativity endures despite its invisibility. By transforming her domestic experience into writing, she reclaims narrative control.

Joseph thus contends that women's creativity does not have to replicate men's forms of freedom; it can emerge naturally from the very settings where women are expected to remain silent.

Although Woolf, Adichie, and Joseph are from distinct civilizations, their books share the same goal, which is women's intellectual and creative freedom. Adichie's *We Should All Be Feminists* portrays feminism as universal, whereas Joseph tailors it to Indian reality. Her feminism is peaceful and contemplative, influenced by everyday life and culture. She does not reject society, but instead reshapes it from the inside. This demonstrates how feminist ideas may spread across borders and change meaning in different circumstances. The conversation between Woolf's England, Adichie's Nigeria, and Joseph's Kerala demonstrates how global feminism develops through cultural exchange and reinterpretation.

The sentence that is reframed from the short story perfectly expresses the idea of reclaiming the female voice. Waking up when the house sleeps. The line explains how the female writer's creativity emerges in secret, inside the confines of household life. Her voice cannot speak freely during the day because she must fulfil her domestic tasks as wife, mother, and caregiver. However, at night, in silence, her suppressed thoughts rise "like waves," representing emotional strength and resistance. This demonstrates that one cannot stop women from writing if they decide to do so; her rebellion goes to any extent. Sara writes not because the system lets her, but because it doesn't. Her act of writing is a quiet rebellion, not proof that the system is fair or conquerable, but rather of her inner strength.

Joseph is not arguing that all women can or should perform under oppression. Instead, she reveals how patriarchy instils such awful resilience in women in the first place.

### **Theoretical Framework:**

This study is based on three theoretical perspectives, which are feminist literary criticism, Elaine Showalter's Gynocriticism, and postcolonial feminism. These frameworks provide a detailed examination of Joseph's story, allowing for a comparison with Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* by positioning Joseph in a postcolonial Indian setting.

Feminist literary criticism examines how literature portrays women and how women express themselves. It examines how social and cultural systems restrict or limit women's voices. Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* was one of the first and most significant works in this genre. Woolf emphasizes the importance of money and space for women writers, demonstrating how society frequently prevents women from obtaining an education, financial independence, and personal freedom. Feminist criticism focuses on women's inner lives, including their ideas and emotions. This is abundantly evident in Joseph's story, in how the protagonist fights with family responsibilities and social expectations while attempting to live a creative life.

Elaine Showalter's Gynocriticism goes one step further. Instead of examining how males depict women, it focuses on women as writers and makers. Showalter categorizes women's literary growth into periods. During the "feminine phase," women adopt male literary patterns. In the "female phase," women write about their own experiences, developing a particular voice that represents their lives, feelings, and views.

Applying gynocriticism to Joseph's story reveals how she develops a female literary identity. The protagonist's difficulties and insights are important to the novel, demonstrating how women write literature from their own experiences. Joseph's work emphasizes both the emotional and cultural dimensions of female creation, making her story representative of the "female phase" of literature.

Postcolonial feminism investigates women's experiences in colonially influenced societies. Scholars such as Gayatri Spivak and Chandra Talpade Mohanty say that Western feminism cannot be applied universally since women in colonial countries confront unique social, cultural, and economic problems. They are oppressed not only by patriarchy but also by colonial legacies and cultural norms. In Joseph's story, she must deal with both patriarchal and postcolonial pressures. Her creative freedom is constrained by domestic responsibilities, cultural expectations, and Kerala's historical setting. By emphasizing local conflicts, Joseph adapts feminist ideas to the postcolonial Indian context. Writing becomes a means of resistance, a way to assert agency while adhering to gender and historical norms.

This study, which also references Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, demonstrates how Joseph's story fits into a global feminist discussion. Feminist ideas spread throughout cultures, but they are moulded by local histories and realities. Joseph's tale indicates that women everywhere crave creative independence, but how they attain it varies according to their social, cultural, and historical environment.

### Insights:

Sara Joseph's *Inside Every Woman Writer* redefines what freedom means for women in postcolonial India. Joseph's protagonist demonstrates that creative liberty does not always require physical seclusion or riches, as Virginia Woolf indicated, but can come from inside – through courage, self-awareness, and creativity. The lady writer in Joseph's novel turns her domestic environment into a source of inspiration, demonstrating that quiet may become language. By combining feminist, postcolonial, and spiritual themes, Joseph develops a uniquely Indian vision of empowerment based on resilience and introspection.

“A woman writes not when she is free from her duties, but when she learns to carry her words along with them.”

This is exactly in line with the paper's claim that true freedom is internal and self-created, mirroring Woolf's concept of creative independence while translating it into an Indian, lived experience of resilience and self-expression.

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