

# Kopbhavan – A Room of One’s Own

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**Abstract:** *Women have played a significant role in the famous epics of India. Yet the portrayal of their character often comes with layers or shades of colors, where the brighter ones are subdued under the vile ones. The women characters are stripped off their authority and their right to exercise power in their lives. The idea of bringing Kopbhavan lies in the association of it with the women’s right over their own decisions in their lives, their independence and their authority over themselves. The idea of Kopbhavan is taken from the celebrated Indian epic, ‘Ramayan’, wherein Kaikeyi, one of the 3 wives of King Dashrath, uses it at her own disposal. The notion of Kopbhavan is brought into parallel with Virginia Woolf’s, A Room of One’s Own, as Woolf also tries to put women’s agency into question.*

*This research paper therefore tries to attempt a comparative study of the two characters, i.e. Kaikeyi and the women from Woolf’s A Room of One’s Own. The paper would follow qualitative analysis of the works, Kaikeyi by Vaishnavi Patel and A Room of One’s Own by Virginia Woolf. The research paper also looks at various scholarly articles that help build the topic in the same direction. The paper aims to bring out parallels between the two texts by looking at underlying themes around women, their agency, independence and traditional gender roles..*

**Keywords:** Social & Cultural repression, traditional gender roles, independence, autonomy.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Indian epics have given us myriad of characters. These characters spin their stories in such a crafty way that the entire epic seems to come together. The men and women in the epics like Ramayan and Mahabharat seem to go shoulder-to-shoulder around various instances. The women characters in the epics seem to go a long way in and around these texts. Some of them come out to be way stronger than the male protagonists. Their placement in the epics make them peculiar characters and their choices to course their decisions are the reasons that they are still celebrated to this date. Kaikeyi, from the epic, Ramayan, stands apart as she continues to challenge the male authority throughout her storyline. Her stance as a queen stands different than her fellow queens who are mostly portrayed as giving into the patriarchal set-up. Kaikeyi comes from a warrior background from the lands of Kaikey. She is the warrior princess who is wedded to Dashrath, the King of Ayodhya. She participates in wars along with her husband and also saves him from losing his life, which in turn gets her 3 boons from her husband. She politely accepts those boon and suggests to use them when the right time arrives. The episode of her using those 3 boons is where the epic takes its decisive transition. The setting of this episode is executed in Kaikeyi’s Kopbhavan, or what is generally called as The Sulking Room. The Sulking Room portrays Kaikeyi’s own space to exercise her rights as the Queen by power and not just by being the King’s wife. Woolf in her book, A Room of One’s Own, tries to draw out a similar space for women. She puts it very clear that women need to have their own private spaces, where they can practice power, their freedom as well as their independence. These spaces act as a promoter to help them build their creative selves where they are free to think and express themselves without a prejudice. (Woolf, 1929)

In *Kaikeyi*, the titular character seeks to carve out her own identity in a patriarchal world. Born in a royal family, she is trained as a warrior and has ambitions that go beyond the typical expectations of women in her society. However, her agency is limited by the roles women are expected to play in her time—wife, mother, and queen. She is often forced to navigate power dynamics in a world dominated by men, like her husband, King Dasharatha. Her decisions, such as demanding the exile of Rama, stem from her desire to assert control over her destiny and the future of her son, Bharata. (Patel, 2022)

Woolf argues that women cannot fully express their creative and intellectual abilities without independence—both financially and physically. She suggests that women need a "room of their own" to escape societal restrictions, as well

as the financial freedom to pursue their creative endeavors. Woolf critiques the way women have been historically excluded from intellectual spaces, reinforcing that without autonomy, women's potential remains stifled.

Kaikeyi's life is shaped by the expectations placed on her as a woman—she must be a devoted wife and mother, while also adhering to the royal expectations of obedience and loyalty. Despite her intelligence and strength, Kaikeyi is limited by her role in the palace. Her decision to send Rama into exile is, in part, a response to feeling trapped by these limitations, and it's an attempt to shift power in her favor, not only for herself but for her son's future as well.

Woolf discusses how women have been oppressed and excluded from intellectual, creative, and public spheres due to the patriarchal structures of society. Women, according to Woolf, have historically been denied access to education, financial resources, and spaces where they could be creative. This social and cultural repression of women leads to an underrepresentation of their voices in literature and the arts.

Kaikeyi's ambition to ensure the kingship for her son, Bharata, leads her to make drastic decisions, including the exile of Rama. She is motivated by love for her son but also by her desire to secure power and influence in the royal court. While her ambition is often seen as negative, the novel presents her as a woman who understands the political landscape and is trying to navigate it in a way that ensures her son's future.

Woolf's essay also delves into the theme of ambition, particularly in the context of women's access to creative spaces. Woolf argues that women, like men, should be allowed to express their ambitions and creative desires. She notes that societal barriers, such as the lack of a private space to think and the financial independence required to support one's artistic goals, often suppresses women's potential.

In *Kaikeyi*, the protagonist often feels isolated in her struggle for power and independence. While she is surrounded by other women in the palace, these women are typically portrayed as either rivals or passive figures. Kaikeyi's journey reflects a lack of solidarity among women, who are often pitted against each other due to the constraints of a patriarchal system.

Woolf also emphasizes the importance of women supporting each other in their quest for autonomy and creativity. She speaks about the need for women to have their own spaces—literally and metaphorically—where they can thrive without fear of competition or judgment. Woolf advocates for a kind of sisterhood where women help each other gain the resources and opportunities to succeed.

Both Kaikeyi and Woolf's argument highlight the importance of independence for women. Kaikeyi's struggle for autonomy within the royal court mirrors Woolf's argument that women need a space to thrive outside the control of patriarchal structures. Kaikeyi's actions and Woolf's argument stem from a desire to break free from the constraints imposed by patriarchy. Kaikeyi challenges the traditional gender roles through her bold decisions, while Woolf argues that women need the freedom to express themselves and be recognized in intellectual circles.

They highlight the theme of ambition, with Kaikeyi striving to secure power for her son and herself, while Woolf stresses that women should have the freedom and resources to pursue their own ambitions in creative and intellectual pursuits. Both works focus on how women who challenge societal norms often face harsh judgment and misrepresentation. Kaikeyi's legacy is rewritten in a more sympathetic light in Patel's retelling, while Woolf calls for women to redefine their roles in history and to be given the opportunity to tell their own stories. Both Kaikeyi and Woolf touch on the challenges of achieving empowerment without a supportive network of women. While Kaikeyi often faces competition and isolation, Woolf envisions a world where women can collaborate and support one another to achieve their creative and intellectual goals.

In short, both *A Room of One's Own* and *Kaikeyi* explore themes of independence, agency, ambition, and the ways in which women challenge societal limitations. Woolf advocates for women's space and autonomy in intellectual pursuits, while Kaikeyi's story reflects a woman who, despite being constrained by her environment, takes bold actions to secure power for herself and her family. Both works encourage a reevaluation of traditional narratives and offer a richer, more nuanced view of women's struggles for freedom and recognition.

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