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MARGARET LAURENCE'S "A BIRD IN THE HOUSE": A REVIEW ON INDIAN SOCIETY

C.THENMOZHI¹, Dr.SRINIVASAN²

¹Research Scholar, ²Associate Professor

Department of English, National College, Trichirapalli-1

thenmozhiashok@yahoo.co.in; ksriisin2011@yahoo.com



ABSTRACT

Margaret Laurence a well-known Canadian writer known for her famous novel *The Stone Angel*. Laurence's contribution to Canadian feminist modernism is highly commentable. An ideal feminist who studied and projected the psyche of women through her fictional female characters. She stands unique in creating women of boldness who have realized their powers and liberate themselves. One among the Manawaka series is a collection of short stories.

A Bird in the House is found similar with the society of India and taken for discussion to see it in different feminist perception. Vaneesa MacLeod is a narrator of the story and she has recorded her observation on the treatment of women from her childhood. She could understand the patriarchal domination of her grandfather, and how it has stolen the freedom of women of her family finally she escapes from the clutches through her education. This paper aims to spell out the similar situation prevails in Indian families, its causes and solution through the writing of Margaret Laurence.

Key Words: Feminism, patriarchal society, freedom, power, education.

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INTRODUCTION

Feminism has been a topic of discussion on many literary works, dissertations and seminars as women of our society have been enduring the problem. There is no answer to the question how long they have to endure? But there is an answer for the question how long they have been enduring? The knowledge of feminism enters when an individual gets affected by the problem or observed the problem. Indian women have been a victim of patriarchal society nearly 3000 years. The problems have been changing from age to age but women remains as victim. Female authors come out with varied perceptions. But overall contributions made by women writers are less and so they have been invisible and their voice become unheard. Thus the empowerment of women becomes the recurring subject in order to create an identity for them in this patriarchal society. The modern women though educated or employed are divided between domestic duties or professional forays and inevitably most of the women undergo a psychological tension and that has become a part of their life. Helene Cixous in "Sorties: Out and Out: Attacked Ways Out/ Forays" writes of the dilemma for women who look for, but do not recognize themselves in the world: "What is my place if I am a woman? I look

for myself throughout the centuries and don't see myself anywhere" (574). Being a nation of multicultural Canada and its literature are similar to India in some aspects. A women writer of Canadians literature projects the plights of women. It was found Canadian modernism paves the way for writers to project themselves and being recognized and they have become the voice of the voiceless.

Laurence and Feminism

Among the women writers of 20th century Canada, Margaret Laurence is discovered as a literary fore mother known for her projection of female characters with different perspectives. Her works are blaring the feminist modernism which has been omitted during the emergence of modernism. Her novels aim to make women to realize and manipulate the techniques of individual and communal enablement. A woman has been taken as a powerful tool to represent her nation and women in general. The part contributed by Laurence in empowering women, nation and literature through her highly crafted universal personalities are commendable. Thus she is considered a suitable example to represent feminism.

Vaneesa and her family

A Bird in the House is a collection of short stories comes under Manawaka series and published in the year 1970. It was narrated by the female character Vaneesa Mac Leod started from her childhood to the present age of forty. She narrates what she has observed from her surrounding, listen to others' words and sometimes eavesdrops. Who considered herself as a bird in the cage maintained by her grandfather Timothy Connor. Vaneesa sometimes called her grandfather the great bear who used to wear a thick fur coat. His exposition of disapproval of things can be seen even in the way he walks. He is very punctual, strict, and conservative and short-tempered. No one could tolerate his words and especially Vaneesa but everyone didn't want to reveal as it may hurt Grandmother Agnes. During the course of the stories she slowly learns about all the tragedies concerning the people surrounding her and she ventures out more and learns about what goes on outside the safety of her home and people related to her. After few years there came a situation Vaneesa has to stay with her grandfather Connor as she has lost her father who passed away by pneumonia. Similar to her mother and aunt felt she is also liked to escape from Manawaka and from the brick house. Women of the first brick house of Manawaka called it as 'Confounding dungeon' and want to get out it and search their identity Aunt Edna did so as she has decided to marry Wes Grigg who is also insulted by Timothy Connor decided to leave the house but Beth in another hand wishes to vanish herself from the place but unable to do as she is a widow depended her father but having a hope of sending their children's out of this cage. Finally Vaneesa was sent to the University of Winnipeg.

A Great Bear

Timothy Connor is a grandfather of the protagonist and early settlers of Manawaka is referred as 'A great bear' because "The name had many association other than his coat and surliness. It was the way he would stalk around the Brick House as though it were a cage." (63) He has earned by shoeing horses after some years become a blacksmith later saved enough money and set a hardware store for him and always talk to her about his past which made her to feel bore. Timothy Connor played a vital role in the collection of stories. He is very punctual, strict, conservative and short-tempered and can be called an example of patriarchal society. Terence stated "He could never show any of his own. All he could ever come out with in was anger. Well everybody to his own shield in this family" (85) Grandmother Agnes is known for her manners and she never pushes her belief over others not even hurt others through her words though she didn't like one's activities. She was praised as angel by Timothy after her death but never during her life time once. The character of grandmother resembles more to the woman of Indian society. Beth, mother of Vanessa, a widow would like to free herself from clutches of the society but couldn't do even from her father. She wishes to fulfill her dream through her daughter. Beth said "Your grandfather didn't believe in education for women" (187) He has not allowed her for her higher studies. She likes to send her daughter for higher education. Vanessa ultimately liberates herself through her education. Aunt Edna's friend Jimmy Lorimer wished to marry her. Edna had fear to inform it to her father so her mother asked his permission and further she requested him to be nice to the guest for her sake but as they have feared grandfather talked ill of his profession and made him left the place

immediately. Edna who said unable to endure his father like her mother and comes to know later her boyfriend got married with some other girl. When Aunt Edna gets a second chance she no more wants to be submissive. She has decided to marry Wes Grigg who is also insulted by Timothy Connor decided to marry him and left the house. Vaneesa who was exceptionally intolerable to her grandfather and started to hate him never before and had a frantic state to get away from Manawaka.

Conclusion

Grandmother and mother Beth are similar in their attitude of submissiveness and considered that as their fate. This is the attitude most of the Indian women used to have. They have considered it as fate and become ignored and invisible inside their family. They have inherited this quality from their mothers as Beth did so from her mother. But Aunt Edna and Vaneesa liberates themselves from the clutches by their boldness, there was an urge in them to create an identity for themselves. Freedom takes place when they realize their power and by changing their attitude. Thus Laurence offers a hint to the society of women that change must take place within the women not on the outsiders. Timothy lived and died as same who never changed himself for others.

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