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LANDSCAPE OF MIND IN THE FIRE DWELLERS BY MARGARET LAURENCE

Parisa Talebi

Research Scholar, English Department of Mysore University, India.

Abstract:-“Landscape of Mind” discusses the psychological barriers the protagonist faces and about the impact of landscape on *The Fire Dwellers* (1969) by Margaret Laurence. This novel is about ordinary housewife and depicts the struggle she endures in her way of life. Laurence is aware of the situation of women in the male dominated society. Laurence is the greatest regionalist who depicts her land's identity through her novels. Her imagined landscape is different from that of mundane world. In *The Fire Dwellers*, Laurence depicts the protagonist's dissatisfaction with social life as outer landscape. Laurence explores the idiosyncracies of her protagonists in outer landscape. Stacey, protagonist of *The Fire Dwellers*, has the ability to overcome her psychological problem. The protagonist of Laurence in this novel is trapped within the web of societal expectations.

Keywords:Fire Dwellers , Landscape of Mind , psychological , protagonist faces .

INTRODUCTION

The protagonist of Laurence wants to be active in their social life. For Laurence, social life and real world collaborate with her protagonists' circumstance, and shapes their identity. Laurence reveals the ambiguous inner landscape of women who wish to emerge from the restrictions of society. The protagonist suffers from her inner segregation with the outer world. Her protagonists want to play active roles in the society.

The Fire Dwellers is the story of Stacey MacAindra, a woman and mother trying to discover new paths and new places in real life. Stacey encounters many problems in her mind's landscape; she has to conform to the social expectation of the 'good mother' image. In spite of being a mother and a woman, Stacey has a fragmented personality which comes from psychological problems; Stacey shows her inability as a woman. She explains the norms of her culture to the readers. Psychological problem is meant to teach the reader to cope with unsatisfied desires.

For Laurence, psychoanalytic theory is essentially related to the feminist project, and must, like other theoretical traditions, be adapted by women to free it from vestiges of sexism. Freud's views are still being questioned by people concerned about women's equality. Laurence as the other feminist writers finds potential use of Freud's theories in the feminist movement. For Laurence the word “power” is more important than the other word in the patriarchal society.

Stacey must come to terms with her isolation in her inner landscape, or find a new path or a different role for herself. Women must struggle to participate in society. In describing woman in her novel, Laurence believes that, man is effectively denying women's authority as well. Laurence premises her understanding of women's inferior status and marginalized existence on the ontological view that humans are ineluctably trapped in their bodies. Laurence is the follower of Simone de Beauvoir.

Beauvoir believes that women's inferiority in society is a result of not natural differences but of differences in the upbringing of man and woman. Her famous statement, that one is not born but rather becomes a woman, can be read in this way as arguing that there is no ontological subjectivity which is the exclusive domain of men or women. In “The Second Sex”, she utters, “man represents both the positive and the neutral, as is indicated by the common use of man to designate human beings in general; whereas woman represents only the negative, defined by limiting criteria”

The Fire Dwellers deals with the problems women face in provincial Canada. Stacey suffered an emotional crisis. She finds herself alone and frightened and imagines the world as a virtual hell in which she finds many problems to survive. Stacey is a Scots-Canadian, but born in Manitoba. After marriage, she was living in Vancouver. Being a prairie woman she is confused

in the big city. In her mind's landscape she suffers from psychological isolation, she imagines she is alone in the house with her husband and children.

Her psychological problem relates to her inability to communicate with others. This awareness of the inadequacy of communication to allow one's voice to speak for herself that makes Laurence to feel the need for evolving a language that is completely feminine. Yet the mere development of a characteristically feminine language cannot ensure that women's mode of thought is not infiltrated with patriarchal thoughts. This compels women writers to know the need for feminine aesthetics. Stacey's partner is a salesman who "he spends so much time out of his home. The lack of communication is a major problem of Stacey she talks with her neighbors but it is superficial, sometime she thinks about suicide". (167,262) She reveals her hidden despair to the reader.

Through internal and external landscapes, Laurence portrays Stacey's problem with her role in her home. She imagines the house as a place for peace and rejoices. But this novel shows the situation of Stacey as a housewife and a mother, she wants to escape from the boundaries of the home. Stacey is seen at first with a wish to be "more free". (2) Stacey believes that the future can bring change for her: "Everything will be all right when the kids are older. I will be more free" (8).

First chapter of the novel shows the contradiction between Stacey's inner and outer landscape. "Ladybird, Ladybird, Fly away home; Your house is on fire, Your children are gone". (7) The beginning rhyme of the first chapter shows the unstable psyche of Stacey. In her problematic moment, she talks to God and complains about her problem. She imagines she is unable to raise her sons Ian and Duncan. This problem brings a crisis of identity for her.

She talks to God: "Sometimes I wonder if I even exist and she retorts, I know what you mean, Lord. I have the same trouble with myself" (7) and also says "Listen God, I know it's a worthwhile job to bring up four kids. You don't need to propagandize me. I'm converted. But how is it I can feel as well that I'm spending my life in one unbroken series of trivialities?" (89) She is connected to her family and does not know who she is "I can't go anywhere as myself. Only as Mac's wife or the kid's mother" (81) Stacey criticizes the mundane world in this novel. She goes through the experience of a new person and experiences different feeling "Then I know who I'm supposed to be". (81)

Margaret Laurence in her article "Ten Years Sentences" comments for Stacey the world seems: "violent and indeed lunatic". (15) Stacey imagined her home as a safe place but finds horror in her life. Home should be a safe place for the housekeeper but she accepts finally that her home is not a safe place. In her dreams, a house is a place of hope. She compares the innocent lakes in central Manitoba with her unsafe home. "It's all I can do to cope with what goes on inside these four walls. This fortress which I'd like to believe strong". (15)

In Manawaka, prairie land, Stacey imagines her house as a hell full of fire. This fact shows the importance of the title, *The Fire Dwellers*. Stacey suffers because of home town acquaintances. They are unfamiliar to her, and she says "I live in a house full of people" (169). But it relates to the problematic condition of her mind, Stacey also thinks she is alone in her home. In her middle age she copes herself with an unsatisfactory world: "why did I ever once feel that to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth would be a relief? It would be dynamite that's all. It would be. It would set the house on fire". (282) The house on the fire shows her unstable landscape of his mind.

In landscape of Stacey's imagination, the city and home bring joy and happiness for her. When she runs away from home, her leaving is an escape from herself, from her children and her husband. One night before her escape she says "he makes hate with her" her husband's hands clenched around her collarbones and on her throat until she is unable to bring herself to speak the release. It doesn't hurt, you can hurt me. But afterwards neither of them can sleep. Finally, separately, they each rise and take a sleeping pill". (150)

The reason of her scope is the psychological problem. Her husband wants her to leave him alone; Stacey at this moment is like a wounded land. Laurence compares her protagonist's inner landscape as wild, wound nature. Stacey goes to the bathroom and releasing the water, cries. The water brings her satisfaction. She escapes not only from her home but also from all houses. Now, for Stacey, home is the symbol of isolation. In modern society of Toronto, house separate people from each other Stacy leaves the boundaries of her home and goes to the water. Water is a symbol of freedom for Laurence's protagonists. In the wasteland of her mind Stacey suffers from boundaries of her own house. David Stains in *Margaret Laurence: Critical Reflection* writes "*The Fire Dwellers* presents itself as a novel of minding: we enter the mind field of Stacey Cameron MacAindra, and we attend to the phonic play and interplay... Like the river in *The Diviners*, the narrative of *The Fire Dwellers* moves both ways in time and Laurence uses a mixed third-person and first-person narration to present Stacey MacAindra both from without and within". (80)

The Fire Dwellers combines the imaginary maternal world and social reality. When Stacey leaves home to the beach, in her world of imagination, the beach is symbol of freedom for her. Sometimes Stacey in her imaginations identifies herself on the margin of society. She dresses as fool, she imagines herself in an unreal world. She likes music and dancing, she dances in the house, and dance brings her hope and joy in her real world. In joyous moments she finds herself in imaginary landscape without the label of mother and wife.

Once it seemed almost violent, this music. Now it seems incredibly gentle. Sentimental, self-indulgent? Yeh, probably but I love it. It's my beat. I can still do it I can still move without knowing where, beforehand. Yes. Yes. Yes. Like this. Like this. I can. My hips may not be so hot but my ankles are pretty good, and my legs. Damn good in fact. My feet still know what to do without being told I love to dance (125).

Stacey, like her sister in *A Jest of God*, needs to transform herself. For Rachel transformation happens through her fantasies and imagination. Stacey's transformation occurs in her memory and beside the water, out of her home when she

escapes home to be free from the boundaries of her real landscape. She hates her husband. Stacey's wounds are not visible. The landscape of her mind is wounded.

The title also refers to the inner and outer chaos of Stacey's landscape. Her horror causes her to think about suicide, the real landscape for Stacey portrays “the buildings at the heart of the city are brash, flashing with colors, solid and self confident.”(8) She suffers from the dangers she sees in the wild city. She is a “spiritually isolated housewife and mother threatened by domestic and social chaos which she fears, both, as personal hell fire and nuclear holocaust”(Vevaina 122)

In *The Fire Dwellers*, Laurence expresses the ups and downs of a mother named Stacey's life. She is a hard working woman. Laurence describes a common mother's life with four children, that the feeling of nothingness and purposelessness annoys her psyche and mind. She is seeking her lost years at the age of forty. Stacey is tired of and detests her family because they want her for their own purposes. She wants to get rid of the responsibilities of being a mother and a wife, and different factors such as the individual and the community contrast, psychological and mental statuses, and the inner and outer perspectives are effective to do this. Laurence has depicted these factors artistically.

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