

International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

Golden Research Thoughts

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CONSCIOUSNESS OF WOMEN IN ALICE MUNRO'S THE LOVE OF A GOOD WOMAN

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ABSTRACT:

The aim of the paper is to portray the perception of women in Alice Munro's novel *The Love of a Good Woman*. The voice of women in Canada is against to the marginalization. They quest for their space and rights. The Canadian writer, Munro expresses her feel through her protagonists in her contemporary writing. She depicts the women's situation and conditions of their life in society. She talks about the women's personal and professional life in the story. She examines how the women bury their desire and living for the family. The protagonists adjust their life for their family sake. Their individuality is crunched by the male domination. However they are supreme in certain context, they have superior above them. The narrator explains women's survival of life in the male chauvinistic world. She presents the daughter- mother relationship through her protagonists. She shows the changes of a woman in different ages, such as a girl, lover, wife and mother. One can understand how she gives importance for women and talks their inner feel. Thus, the author's conscious about women is clearly

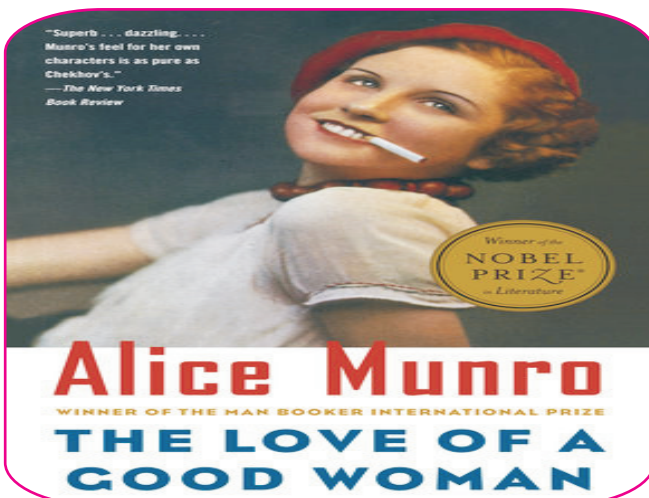
revealed in this novel.

KEYWORDS: Alice Munro's novel , women's personal and professional life.

INTRODUCTION :

Alice Munro is well known to the world by her short story. Later she brought collections of short stories as novel. She depicts about women and their lives in all her stories. There is another writer, Katherine Mansfield who is familiar for short story. She brings women's situation in her works like Munro. Her story, *The Doll's House* is an example of women's portrayal in her works. The voice of women in Canada is to protest against social structures, marginalization and oppression. The Canadian women's conditions are not better than other countries. The quest for their space organized them to demand the political rights through their voice and movement in 1929. The second phase of the Canadian feminist movement from 1960 onwards created a literary canon for women. The objective of women is to express their inner in their writings. Uma Parameswaran says the second phase of the Canadian movements, "...set out to formulate theories that linked political action with scholarly analysis, and feminism became a serious pursuit in academia" (54).

The title of the story, "The Love of Good Woman" is the story of dying woman and youthful nurse. A young nurse sacrifices her life for her parents. The woman confesses her dying moment as she commits a murder. She disposes the body with help of her husband. It shows that how the woman is problematized in her life. Munro always depicts human life, especially women in her fictions. In this story, she talks about human being how they are bonded with love. She brings the people's weakness and silence in her writing. She concentrates the feelings which constitute the human life. She gives



the daily life of women for the universal experiences. Her writing is about human lives and she conveys:

I feel that all life becomes even more mysterious and difficult. And the whole act of writing is more an attempt at recognition than of understanding, because I don't understand many things. I feel a kind of satisfaction in just approaching something that is mysterious and important. Then writing is the art of approaches and recognition. I believe that we don't solve these things in facts our explanations take us further away. (Thacker 54)

The Quest of Identity in the Society

Munro explores various situations of life in her works, such as social inequalities, male domination and injustices. She aims the quest of self-identity through her writings. Her protagonists face the reality of life in her novels. The issues of women are the central point of the author's view in *The Love of a Good Woman*. In this fiction, she figures out the love, sex and abortion in different portions. Her feminism is portrayed in the form of sadness and sort of power. She shows her characters weakness, silence and denial in this work. She reveals male exploitation and social restriction on women in "Before the Change". Her protagonist is forced to abort her child as being pregnant before marriage would damage her lover's respect. The heroine's father also asked her to do abortion when he knew her. The narrator conveys through her protagonist, "Change the law, and change the person. Yet we don't want everything—not the whole story—to be dictated from outside. We don't want what we are, all we are to be concocted that way" (LGW 285). She talks about abortion and getting married. It might not be a matter to do it but they have to think about the age factor. In "Jakarta", the protagonist wonders to getting delay to the next baby, "...the progression got dimmer and it was hard to sure just when you had arrived at where ever it was you were going" (LGW 83).

The narrator knitted the reality of women's life in society. Men used to go for a job and women used to be in home all time. This kind of customs was followed by the people in society. But some women worked in bar, stores and offices who had "dead husbands, sick husbands and never any husband" (LGW 12). Some women were the head of the family to take care of it and they earned money to run their family. It shows that women can be independent, at the same time they can do men's jobs. Whatever the reason made them to work; they did it equally to men. They proved that women can do any kind of jobs in society. However the society has wrong notion about women like they are physically and mentally weak. It is broken and they are ready to do all the jobs.

Women's Survival in the Dominated World

The author depicts a woman's survival and doing job. She gives description about Jimmy's mother's appearance and how she used to get ready for her job. She examines how woman makes herself to go for a job, "...she was putting the hat straight on a female dummy, adjusting the veil, then fiddling with the shoulders of the dress...She had taken off her shoes to walk on the window carpet" (LGW 25). Jimmy's mother dressed up everyday like the same but never cared the public world of town. She did not give importance to the stranger and simply she dismissed them. She is capable to handle them and manage their comments but she is in her way to home without noticing them. She does not give much importance for them. One can see the woman's quality and how she runs her day to day life in this world, "She was capable, if she did that, of rapping on the glass and mouthing hello. At work she lost the hushed discretion, the studied gentleness, of home" (LGW 26).

When the girls are seen by men, they teased by them. Two girls wheel their bicycles and they are teased and shouted by the boys. Women do not have their rights and individual freedom in the male-dominated society. As men have physical strength, they might have the wrong notion that they can show their power to the women. But women are empowered and they are equal to men. The writer talks about men and how they treat and consider women in the world. She narrates the situation of the girls and how they can be shouted by the boys. In the novel *The Love of Good Woman*, she says about how the women are treated in the male chauvinistic world.

Domination against Female Gender's Profession

Enid is in the service of nursing even though she does not like the profession. She hates to meet sick people when she is in training. Later she changes to be kind with people. She finds there are some pregnant

women. She serves them and she helps them to be in home childbirth. She says how those women have confidence and boldness. She remembers about their determination to face everything. Munro describes the power of women through the character of Enid's experience. They do not feel to face anything even in the pregnancy time. They have a willpower and self-confidence on them.

The protagonist's father asks her to stop working as nurse. He asks her to promise when he is admitted in the hospital. She does not know how to react because he asks the promise in his final stage of death. She hesitates to promise and wants to know the reason. But he forced her to promise and leave the nurse job. One can find there without saying the reason, he asks her to promise for leaving the job. Here, woman is suppressed and they do not have rights to ask questions or know something. The narrator shows men's domination towards women through Enid's father. Even in father and daughter relationship, there is a male power from the father's side, "Her father thought - he had decided that such familiarity would change a girl, and furthermore that it would change the way men thought about that girl. It would spoil her good chances and give her a lot of other chances that were not so good" (LGW 40). He is in a wrong assumption about girl and nursing job. He conveys her that this job is not a right one for a girl. He tries to say about men; sometimes changes make them to be not good. All men are not same and some of them in wrong thought. She would be in trouble when touches men's bodies. Some people have wrong thought about nursing, but really they are in servicing to the people. The author explains clearly about men's mind and thought. She describes how women face the problem in society. She explains the male domination, superiority and power towards women. She picturizes how the women lose their individuality, denied and not permitted to work in own interest. People have negative thought about nursing women and belittle them in the world.

Munro exposes the poor and rich women in society. At the same time, she speaks the profession of nursing. She depicts women's sufferings and how they are portrayed in society. However Enid's parents do not allow her to nursing, she withdraws it and stays in home itself. Most of the women are not permitted to go for job and their freedom is controlled by their parents. Her mother says only poor girls do nursing because their parents cannot send them to college as economically weak. The people have wrong opinion about nursing. They think that poor girls only can go for nursing. The nursing is precious, servicing to the people and sacrificing their life. But it slowly changes due to the economical status of the society. Here women get trouble through their differentiation. Women are dominated by men, even in women there is a partiality and discrimination like poor and rich. This is the way the people used to be in society and women's situations in the world, "...her mother had not wanted Enid to go into nursing in the first place, claiming that it was something poor girls did, it was a way out for girls whose parents couldn't keep them or send them to college" (LGW 40).

Enid was the class secretary in high school. She was in administrative position and led the class. She handled the boys and made them to obey her. In this context, the author shows a girl's talent and potential. She was very much capable to manage the team. She mingled with boys in her school days, "She had friends who were boys but never a boyfriend" (LGW 41). She liked to be high-spirited, well dressed and good looking in personality wise. Even the girls are good in the matter of appearance and personality. But she had ambition in her life to succeed it. Women are aware of their career and focus for it in single mind. They want to shine in the male chauvinistic world. They run their life according to their plan, "She had been preoccupied with her ambition—to be a missionary, at one embarrassing stage, and then to be a nurse" (LGW 41). She never thought of nursing is just a job and can do it till get married. She wanted to be good in her life and do the good thing. She does not like to be "orderly, customary, wifely way" (LGW 41). Once, the doctor asked her willingness to help the people according to her performance and talent observed by him. She did not accept his offer, "The doctor who had looked after Enid's father, and had observed her competence around the hospital, asked her if she would be willing to help out for a while, nursing people at home. She said that she would think about it" (LGW 42). The writer portrays the women's expectations and interests in their life. They do not like anything in someone's order. At the same time, they do not want to follow the customs which have formed in the dominated world.

Gender Bias and Married Life of Women

Little bride struggles to be a wife and the domestic one. She does not like the way of living, such as care for dependent and joining with neighboring wives. She never cares about other's expectations. She ignores the

neighbor when they have a conversation. Mrs. Gorrie points out her that not care for her man and washing the dress properly. In this context, Little bride states, "Chess doesn't mind," I said, not realizing how this would become less and less true in the years ahead and how all these jobs that seemed incidental and almost playful, on the borders of my real life, were going to move front and center" (LGW 130).

The protagonist was halfway into her first pregnancy. She is not able to spend the time for reading. The changes of her life are described and the narrator shows a woman's situations after marriage. She sacrifices her life according to the domestic environment. This environment makes her to be controlled and oppressed. She says:

I had less time for reading now, and sometimes I would hold a book in my hand for a moment, in my work at the desk - I would hold a book in my hand as an object, not as a vessel I had to drain immediately and I would have a flick of fear, as in a dream when you find yourself in the wrong building or have forgotten the time for the exam and understand that this is only the tip of some shadowy cataclysm or lifelong mistake. (LGW 138)

The woman, little bride works in the library when she is pregnant. The narrator picturizes the protagonist's survival of life in this story. She considers her character in two ways. She destroys the wrong notion and conceptions of men are the head and lead of the family. As she belongs to female gender, she goes to the job and earns money like men. Of course, women are in the equal share in all the parts. The equality has proved in many contexts in this novel. Many Canadian women writers brought gender equations in their writing like, Munro, Van Herk and Maracle. It is difficult to work in the period of pregnancy. But Munro's character proves women can work in all the situations and circumstances.

Strength of Women and Kindness

There are lots of restrictions for women even in a family. Whatever the women want to do, men have to instruct them. It happens even today in some places. Munro brings the male chauvinism in this novel. Her heroine DEAR R is introduced in "Before the Change" story. She discusses the female character's personal life in her house. She explains how the woman faces the problem with opposite gender of man. She shows the male power even in father-daughter relations. The heroine is permitted to attend the phone call. At the same time, she has to speak according to her father's words and his instructions. Her father treats her daughter as submissive. She does not have any rights to imply and speak in the house. The writer exposes the father's domination to daughter. She conveys through her writing women's problem in house and society.

The author speaks the strength of women in her story "My Mother's Dream". She talks about women and their potential. She introduces mother and her daughters in this story and she describes them through their characters. Mrs. Kirkham says bravely how she longs for son but she has daughters. It is a grateful to have them as big supporters in life. Ailsa is one of the characters and she is efficient and reliable, and Iona is the soul of kindness. The author conveys how the women are in society. Women are kind hearted and they are talented and trustworthy. Here she portrays the women's quality and the women have same characteristics as men have. The author proves that women are not a submissive or secondary. They have equal rights and power of men. They can do everything what men do. The narrator's feminist constructiveness is proved strongly through her writing. Women sacrifice their life for family in society. Someone has to be with Mrs. Kirkham as she is ill to take care of her. Iona takes care of her in a day time and she goes to work at night. One has to appreciate how Iona does dual job. She should be in the house and she should go for a job. This is the way women are in the dominated society. Working in night shift is hard for women and generally men would go for it. She works in the bakery at night. She breaks the boundaries like working in night shifts and bakery. The narrator expresses the women's power and how they manage everything in society. Women are equal to men because they do all the jobs and other than handling the family also. The wrong notion has broken as women are to stay in a house, being an object and subordinate to men.

One of the critics, Malcolm Jones Jr. explains how Munro's feminism is examined in writing through her protagonists, "The main characters in Alice Munro's mesmerizing stories, mostly women, are an unprepossessing lot: librarians, eccentric spinsters, seamstresses, all of them denizens of small, drab, Canadian towns. But invariably, Munro pulls a switch, something like that old movie cliché where the mousy heroine removes her glasses, undoes her hair and reveals herself a beauty" (63). The characters of Munro set place in

society. She focuses the change of women and feministic views in her works. She discusses the women and their difficulties, like marriage and independence. The themes of the discussion are explored in the fiction of *The Love of a Good Woman*. She explains lives of women and their desire for liberation. Her attention is to bring her protagonists to achieve in their life. And the feministic search is seemed in her writing.

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