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A REDEFINITION OF FEMINISM THROUGH THE CHARACTER LESLIE MOORE IN L. M. MONTGOMERY'S ANNE'S HOUSE OF DREAMS

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Abstract:

This paper explores the novel *Anne's House of Dreams* (1917) by L. M. Montgomery, with specific focus on the character, Leslie Moore, who is a devoted wife to her debilitated husband, Dick Moore. Leslie's story challenges the traditional notion of women's independence and self-fulfilment. Her story redefines feminism as a celebration of a woman's choice to submit and be a dutiful wife to her ailing husband. Rather than portraying her as an insignificant submissive women, she is depicted as a woman honouring her femininity within which she wilfully embraces loyalty, devotion and duty. The paper further examines how Leslie Moore's story serves as an honorarium to the traditional feminine virtues where strength, loyalty, compassion and nurturing are essential aspects that are forgotten in today's depiction of feminism. This paper demonstrates feminism as an individual female's personal choice, where the choice can also encompass surrender, fidelity, selflessness and marital duty.

Key Words: feminism, marriage, loyalty, devotion, tradition, modern

Introduction:

Lucy Maud Montgomery (1874 – 1942), is a prominent Canadian author. One of her famous works is Anne of Green Gables and its sequential series. L. M. Montgomery was born in Clifton, Prince Edward Island. Her works are mostly rooted in the captivating landscapes of Prince Edward Island. Her literary journey began as early as 15 years of age and then she went on to teach as a school teacher while carrying on with her writing. Montgomery's fame rose up, when she published Anne of Green Gables in 1908. She became an instant best selling author. Her major works are Anne of Green Gables series, Emily of New Moon series, The Story Girl series and The Blue Castle. She published 20 novels, countless poems and over 500 short stories but her private life is apparently full of struggles including her husband's mental illness. Leslie Moore's story is possibly an autobiographical reflection of the author's life.

Feminism in general focuses on social and political equality. The first wave of feminism in-between the late 19th century & 20th century riveted on voting rights, freedom to own properties and an equal access to education. The second wave of feminism which spread across 1960-1980s was a fight for social equality rather than a legal sphere. This era focused on women empowerment where women questioned the traditional roles they play in marriages and in their workplace. It also expanded the fight for women's reproductive rights and it addressed workplace discrimination and sexual harassment.

The perspective of feminism is achieving equality both legally and socially between male and female counterparts. The 21st century modern feminism examines intersectionality, gender and identity arguing that modern feminism has diverted from the fundamental idea of gender equalities to promote misandry. Some traditional feminists feel that modern feminism is destroying the traditional roles of women by devaluing motherhood and home making. So, traditional feminists argue that being a devoted wife and a mother is a respected life path and it should not be considered as an oppression.

The aim of this research paper is to redefine feminism through the character of Leslie Moore in Anne's House of Dreams by L. M. Montgomery. Feminism has evolved into modernistic narratives over the years with different perspectives than their traditional counterparts. Montgomery presents her intricate perspectives on female strength and grace through devotion and faithfulness in the traditional roles of women.

Redefining Feminism with Leslie Moore's Journey:

Anne's House of Dreams by L. M. Montgomery portrays the blissful life of Anne Shirley Blythe. It is set against the distressing tragedy of her neighbour, Leslie Moore. Leslie's marriage to Dick Moore is dysfunctional. Her life is constrained in a difficult marriage to a man who is mentally disabled after a tragic accident. While Anne's perspective of Leslie's life is sorrowful and as self-sacrificial, L. M. Montgomery presents her life as female strength rather than adhering to modern feminism that breaks the traditional values.

Leslie's story proposes a redefinition of woman's power that can also be found in her devotion and commitment to her marriage even though the marriage is dysfunctional.

Leslie Moore is a significant character in the novel, *Anne's House of Dreams*. She is introduced to Anne in the place called Four Winds after Gilbert and Anne moved into their new home, their house of dreams in Four Winds. The moment Anne laid eyes on her, she knew Leslie Moore was a kindred spirit and yet had a mysterious beautiful soul. She was a woman who had a melancholic expression. Anne knew that Leslie Moore will be her best friend the moment she saw her. Anne's curiosity spiked when she saw Leslie, who had long golden hair, which she described as living golden hair. She had a tall erect posture and blue hue eyes and lips like crimson. Anne had never seen anyone as beautiful as Leslie.

It seemed to Anne, for a fleeting moment, that there was even a veiled hint of hostility in it. But it was the girl's beauty which made Anne give a little gasp ——a beauty so marked that it must have attracted attention anywhere (26,27).

Leslie's life was a tragic story. Before marriage, Leslie West was a strong brilliant and beautiful girl, full of life. She grew up very close to her father. However, her tragic life began when her beloved brother, Kenneth died a gruesome death. After the heartbreak of his son's death, Mr. West committed suicide. In the midst of the distressing deaths of her father and brother, her mother lost their farm which was mortgaged. Miss Cornelia rightly exclaimed "Poor Leslie! You wouldn't be much surprised if you knew what her life has been. It's been a tragedy ——a tragedy!" (77).

In their desperate situation, Leslie was forced to marry Dick Moore due to her mother's manipulation and their financial instability. A few years into their marriage, Dick Moore had a severe head injury while he was sailing to Havana in the ship named *The Four Sisters*, which left him retarded. "Dick Moore it was ——his body at least. His mind wasn't there ——as for his soul, in my opinion he never had one!" (83). He completely lost his memory and had the mental capacity of a small child. He was totally dependent on Leslie and thus, she became the sole care-giver of Dick Moore with no-one else to care for him. "She's taken care of Dick and she's never been away from him for eleven years" (84).

Leslie's narrative is an exploration of womanly duty and what it means to be a committed, sincere wife. Leslie chose to stay in the marriage to care for Dick Moore. She had the opportunity to leave him, yet she showed great level of endurance, loyalty and faithfulness in her marriage life. "He's apt to run away if he isn't watched. That's the burden Leslie has had to carry for eleven years ——and all alone" (83). Leslie's constant care was exclusively required by Dick Moore both mentally and physically. Since taking care of him needed immense physical and emotional effort, she stayed home all day. This left her lonely but still remained faithful to Dick Moore. Her whole life was consumed by a sense of duty. Leslie Moore was not a victim, she is but a fortitude of immense moral values. Her tragic story argues that there is a different perspective of feminism that emphasizes on freedom from narrow modernistic views. The perspective portrays her duty as an act of strength

and grace. Leslie desires for a loving and caring relationship. Nevertheless, she finds enjoyment in choosing to be loyal and devoted wife to her husband—a choice made consciously and willingly.

Conclusion:

Feminism can be interpreted in significant virtues like self-respect and self-discovery, urging women to pave their own path by breaking free from traditional restraints whereas, Leslie's story challenges the constrained rules of feminism. Her narrative changes the dynamics of modernistic views. She willingly surrenders to her husband as a devoted and dutiful wife even though he is mentally disabled. This act is seen as a selfless and conscious choice made by Leslie. Leslie's devotion can be compared to a mother's unconditional love for her ill- child. The relationship between a mother and her ill child is also a selfless and devoted relationship as she willingly tends to her child's every need. She sacrifices her time and energy to take care of that child. This shows that, kind, devoted and selfless relationship is possible even in marriage life. L. M. Montgomery suggests that this kind of surrendering is not born of lack of will but an unwavering strength. Leslie's narrative redefines the powerful realization of self not as a victim of traditional roles.

In Anne's House of Dreams, Leslie Moore's story challenges the modern notion of feminism. It demonstrates a dynamic redefinition of the idea. The author L. M. Montgomery, through the character Leslie Moore argues that a woman's strength is not limited to modern aspects of feminism and it cannot just be in breaking away from traditional roles. Leslie embraces her devotion with compassion and integrity. The novel highlights the fact that the true power of feminism can also be found in compassion, kindness, devotion, loyalty and faithfulness rather than in limiting the aspects of feminism to independence and to reject the traditional duties of womanhood. Usually, the women who are devoted to their husbands are portrayed as submissive but the characterization of Leslie proves them otherwise. Her character serves as a constant reminder that female strength in feminism can be an overarching concept, one that exalts a female resilience whether in moulding a new path or finding grace within a life of devotion.

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