



Women Oppression in the Select Short Fiction of Alice Munro: A Critical Study

Parthasarathi. K. S

PhD Research Scholar

School of English and Foreign Languages

The Gandhigram Rural Institute

Abstract

The present research reveals how women are oppressed in Alice Munro's selected short fiction. The works selected for analysis are *Baptizing* and *Queenie*. In these stories, gender oppression is addressed clearly. Women are considered to be the inferior human in family as well as in society. Alice Munro's women characters were abused and exploited in all causes. This research paper will discuss the oppression of women by violence and in other subtle ways.

Key Words: Oppression, Violence, Abuse, Exploitation.

Introduction

This paper is a research on the selected writings of Alice Munro's short fictions. She talks about the lives of women who struggle to live under the oppressive system. The protagonists in *Baptizing* and *Queenie* long to lead their lives filled with love for their loved ones. That was well depicted through the characters of Del and Queenie. Domestic control, corporal abuse, sexual harassment and lack of personal freedom were explicitly seen in these works. Through her short fiction, she proficiently brought the women's psychological oppression and physical suppression faced inside and outside their home.

Alice Munro is a Canadian short fiction writer. She got Nobel Prize for literature in 2003. Munro's fiction is mostly set in southwestern Ontario, her native place. There is autobiographical touch in most of her short fiction. Her stories highlight human intricacies in an uncomplicated prose style. She is also referred as "the Canadian Chekhov". In most of the short fictions the central character are all women. The

major themes of her short fictions are love, marriage, secrets, betrayal and about life ordinary people in and around Ontario.

In the story *Baptizing*, Del and Jerry were school friends. Jerry was a clown personality and made everybody laughed at him but, had good IQ power. Del and Jerry participated in many quiz programs and won many prizes. Del and Jerry together had gone to parties, dances and cinemas. One day Jerry's mother went out, Jerry called Del to his home and asked to remove her dress, wanted to see a naked woman. Del hesitated but he was forced to remove her dress. He heard the sound of her mother had entered into the home. Jerry pulled her into a small room with no dress. After the arrival of his mother, Jerry throws out Del into the cellar. It is a dark and cold night. Jerry wants to protect himself and not Del. She struggled a lot to return home. Jerry doesn't think of Del.

In the story *Queenie*, Queenie and Stan were husband and wife, were planned to celebrate Christmas, and invited her friend to their home. Queenie made sausage rolls and gingerbread. Queenie wrapped up the cake in a cool place. A day after Stan asked Queenie to give a piece of a cake to him. She went searching in the cupboard, refrigerator and the cake was found anywhere. Stan said to Queenie that she might give it to Andrew. She was shocked to hear this. Stan thought that she was lying. She asked him to forgive her. But he didn't react to the apology. But, he laid down beside her and hugged her and hold her and pretty soon he fulfilled his lust without saying anything to her. A few days later, she found the cake. She never told the discovery of the cake Stan. She didn't want to start the problem again.

Women Oppression in *Baptizing*

Del and Jerry participate in quiz programs conducted by the school. They have won so many prizes. Del was physically good looking than Jerry, yet both had good IQ power. They always fight with each other built they were good buddies. One evening, Jerry asked Del to take off all her clothes. He said that he had never seen a real live naked woman. She feels pleasure and joy and lay down on the bed. Del feels extremely silly, foolish and exciting. He stands beside the bed looking down at her and feels surprised; she showed her body to him. She lay down on the bed. They both laughed at each other. He hears his mother's voice outside, saying good night to somebody. His mother has come from the meeting earlier than usual.

"Jerry pulled me off the bed and out of the room while I was still trying to grab my clothes. 'Closet,' I hissed at him. 'I can hide – closet – get dressed!'... 'Shut up, shut up.' His face was white; he was shaky...still trying to convince him that I had to get my clothes, – and he pushed me inside and bolted the door."(LGW,258)

Jerry pulls her off the bed and out of the room while she is still trying to grab her clothes. The room is very small. So Del can't hide in that room. She has to wear her dresses. Jerry begged her to get out of the room. She tries to convince him, how she can go out without dress. Jerry doesn't lend his ears to Del's

words. He pulled Del down the back stairs. He opens the cellar and pushed her inside and locked the door. Del is the only person inside the cellar naked. After a few seconds, Jerry switched on the lights of the cellar to handover her dress to her and switched off the light. Now the cellar is too dark than before. She is sitting in the cellar without dress in that snowfall.

Del finds the cellar window and tries to open it. But, she can't open it. She searches for an old ragged curtain or piece of shelf oilcloth to cover her. She thinks that how could she get into her house in that dress. She thinks that it will be possible if Jerry would come and let her out after his mother went to sleep. Del hears that Jerry and her mother talking in the front room, and kitchen. She is waiting for Jerry to open the cellar door. She feels very cold in the cellar. Del feels unhappy and ashamed of her activities why I have done it, she asked herself. She moves towards the chute in that room. She sees that her clothes were there. She picks up her clothes and wears them. She climbs up on the washtub and unhooked it and crawled out through the snow.

"I ran home barelegged through the cold streets. I was furious now, to think of myself naked on the bed. Nobody to look at me but Jerry, giggling and scared and talking dialect. That was whom I had to take my offerings. I would never get a real lover." (LGM,260)

Del runs to her home with great disappointment. She thinks of herself about the situation in Jerry's house. Nobody looked Del in naked, except Jerry. As she felt, he cheated her. She thinks that she will not get a real lover. The next day Jerry came to school carrying the garter belt she left.

Del was in process of falling into the prey of the male-dominated web. And therefore, she became the victim of it. For Del, Jerry was at the central stage. So she accepted his wish. But for Jerry, Del occupied the edge position so he left once he filled his wish. Unknowingly, Del was oppressed by Jerry as she doesn't have control over her desire and life. And to add insult to injury, Jerry pretended that nothing had happened last night. The stance authority over the female by the male became a stereotype even at a small age. In the name of love, Del satisfies Jerry. But Jerry as a male threw Del's feelings and never mined her emotions.

Del with her free spirit, she curbed. Therefore she wished to adjust compromise and adapt to life. So as to live the life day after day. After life has to move on. Del as women was not ought to love and to be loved. This was the situation of women in society. She has no right to question her rights and feelings. She was not supposed to protest against the existing beliefs and situations. Del has to merely exist submitting and subordinating the male world.

Women Oppression in *Queenie*

Queenie arranged a Christmas party. She invited her friends and her husband Stan's friends. Queenie made sausage rolls and gingerbread. Everything went in a good manner. The party was gone perfectly.

Andrew was a Chinese boy. He brought a record. The song on the record was very nice. Queenie loved the songs. So she danced with the Chinese boy. Stan noticed that Queenie was dancing with the Chinese boy. The Chinese boy was doing his dental surgery. Andrew wanted to learn to play the "Moonlight sonata". So that he approached Stan to teach him. Stan said that it would take a long time to learn. So, Andrew had to have the patience to learn the music. They played musical chairs too. The cake baked by Queenie was not consumed by guests at the party. Queenie wrapped up the cake in a cool place. She was either planned of doing that or she has actually done it. The next morning the cake was not on the table. So, she thought that she has done it. A day after Stan asked Queenie to give a piece of a cake to him. She said to him that the cake was not ready to eat. But, he demanded to bring the cake to him.

Queenie went searching in the cupboard, refrigerator and the cake was found anywhere. The cake was not there. She felt nostalgic that she took a clean cloth and soaked it in wine and wrapped the cake carefully. And she can't remember where she kept it. Queenie had confused also, whether she has done it or whether she has done it in the dream. She can't remember where she kept the cake after finished wrapping. She tried to recall it but her mind went black. She looked all through the cupboard, oven and in her dresser drawers and under the bed and on the closet shelf. But, the cake was not found.

That was the beginning of Queenie's long, miserable struggle. All she could say was no. No, no, I did not give the cake to anybody. I did not give the cake to Andrew. I am not lying. No.no." (HFCLM,260-61)

Stan asked Queenie whether she did give it away. She was sure she hadn't given it away. After sometimes Stan said to Queenie that she might give it to Andrew. She was shocked to hear this. She said she did not give the cake to anybody and Andrew also. But Stan didn't accept it.

"Everybody lies, Stan said. And the more she cried and begged him to believe her, the more cool and sarcastic he became...Then he came close to her again in such a calm, half-smiling way that she thought for a moment he was going to kiss her. Instead, he closed his hands around her throat and just for a second cut off her breath. He didn't even leave any marks." (HFCLM,259)

Stan thought that she was lying. She began to cry. She kept crying while was arguing with him. Queenie cried and begged him to believe her. He came closer to her, thought that he is going to kiss her. Instead, he closed his handhold her throat and first for a second cut off her breath. He was angry and left the house. He

stopped speaking to her. He wrote a letter to her. In that letter, he wrote he would speak if she tells the truth. She was crying all over Christmas.

“When Stan came home that night and pretended she didn’t exist... She thought that if she had to go on in this way she would die. Just as if he really had choked off her breath, she would die. So she said, Forgive me. Forgive me. I did what you said. I’m sorry. Please. Please. I’m sorry....And she began to howl and hang on to him and beg him to forgive her”
(HFCLM,262)

Queenie asked sorry to Stan. She asked him to forgive her. But he didn’t react to the apology. Stan didn’t say that he had forgiven her. Insisted he got a try washcloth and wiped her face. He laid down beside her and hugged her and hold her and pretty soon he fulfilled his lust without saying anything to her.

A few days later, she found the cake. The cake was wrapped up in a dish towel and they wrapped in waxed paper and put the cake into a shopping bag and hang it from a hook on the back porch. The sun-porch was the best place to ripen the cake in the winter. On that particular day, she had drunk. So she forgot it. She found it and threw it out. She never told the discovery of the cake Stan. She didn't want to start the problem again. She knew that she didn't give the cake to Andrew. But her husband said that she has given the cake to Andrew. By showing the cake to Stan, she can clear the doubts on her. But she didn't do it. Queenie said to Christy, her friend that men are not normal and they were so jealous.

Queenie as a wife was expected to be obedient, quiet, submissive and passive. Her miserable action of forgetting cake became the pitiable plight in due course. She was helpless before the acquisition of a lie on her. Queenie was always treated as an object by her husband to satisfy his lust and service. Meantime, to maintain the cultch, he continuously tortures her. Though she never expected a separate identity, she was physically abused to keep her under the control of him. For her the physical intimacy was love but for him it was lust.

The submissive silence of the Queenie was the powerful weapon she handed to her husband to rule her. Though women wish to step out and wipe the negative image of themselves. They were comforted one or in another way by the male world so that they lose once again and under them forever. Oppression became the normal way of leading life in the male-headed family. Women are living in pain for ages as victims of verbal abuse and physical violence. Domestic sexual violence makes women week physically and psychologically. The complex emotions the woman holds were always hidden in their heart. They were entangled in the situation and suffer hopelessly to live. They were born to live with pain.

Conclusion

The portrayal of enduring women was well sketched by the author. Self-sacrificing women were expected to be part of the family and society. Within the power structure, the inequality among the human results in exclusion. The domination of men and the submission of women became the part and parcel of the society. Even after many harping over women's rights, a free woman from sexual and social subordination was found hardly. This was portrayed beautifully in the works of Alice Munro.

Works Cited

Munro, Alice. *Lives of Girls and Women*. 1971

Munro, Alice. *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage*. 2001

Kamble, Sushen.D and Jadhav, Ganesh.V. —Marginalization of Women in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*.|| *Research Front* 1.4(2013):1.Print

