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Gynocentric Perspective of Morag Gunn in Margaret Laurence's *The Diviners*

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Most folks sense today that feminism has gained more significance. It recognizes men and women as equal in all matters. Feminism tries to end all oppression, pertaining to women alone. Feminism is about women redefining their roles in the society. It is women centered and focuses on women's perspectives, interests, rights, and victimization. In other words, it is *Gynocentric*. '*The Diviners*' is Laurence's last work in the Manawaka series. It is celebrated as an epic novel where she exhibits a mature and profound understanding of human nature and density. The core of the novel is the life-history of Morag Gunn, her individual point of view and her journey towards autonomy. In this paper an attempt is made to highlight how Margaret Laurence tries to deconstruct the male female polarity by empowering her artistic- heroine Morag Gunn to go in for sexual neutrality.

Literature is a cultural construct and provides us with valuable insights into the development of Societies. It helps psychological understanding and reformations of epistemological constructs. Literature in itself is a rich source material for interpreting the past. Women's writings focus attention on the manifestation of female sensibility, feminine reality and on its significance as a means of bringing about an awareness of this reality. Feminism being an important movement in the modern world, a woman's place, position and especially the quest for her identity and importance, are not duly recognized. Gynocentricism provides the platform to delve deep into the obstacles faced by women.

Gynocentrism is derived from the Greek word *gyno*, meaning "woman," and *kentron*, meaning "center", is a radical feminist discourse that champions woman-centered beliefs, identities, and social organization. It also challenges the androcentric promotion of masculine standards as normative, and the presentation of those standards as neutral. Gynocentric feminism is concerned to revalue sexual difference and femininity positively. The literature about women portrays the realities of their mental and physical sufferings and desperate struggle for a meaning in life and living. A woman's experience includes a different perception. Women do not say things in the same way as men and have different ideas and feelings about what is important and what is not.

Explaining the importance of examining women's experience Greda Lerner says:

Women have been left out of history not because of the evil conspiracies of men in general or male historians in particular, but because we have considered history

only in male-centered terms. We have missed women and their activities, because we have asked questions of history which are inappropriate to women. To rectify this, and to light up areas of historical darkness we must, for a time focus on women-centered enquiry, considering the possibility of existence of a female culture within the general culture shared by men and women. History must include an account of the female experience over time and should the development of women's past. This is the primary task of women's history. The central question it raises is: What would history be like if it would be seen through the eyes of women and ordered by values they define? [15]

This question is suitably and duly answered by the feminist novelist Margaret Laurence in her novel *The Diviners*. Margaret Laurence's *The Diviners* is a feminist text which critiques the patriarchal orthodoxy. In the literary history the women is seen as inferior and the gynocentricism is suppressed and oppressed by men.

The Diviners is a powerful story of female protagonist by name Morag Gunn through which the author espouses a broadly feminist position. The novel proves a tool for Laurence to communicate Morag's pain and to convey her passionate belief that sexism lies in at the heart of women's oppression. Morag is a strong character in the novel. This is evident even at a very early age, when a boy teases her, she fights with him. She says,

The best way is to knee them in balls. They double over, scream, and chicken out. Hardly any boys ever tease her these days. [70]

Morag Gunn never allowed any male to dominate her at any time of her life, including her stepfather Christie Logan, her boy friend Skinner, her husband Dr. Brooke Skeleton, and a couple of her occasional friends like Chas, Daniel, and Herald. She shares mostly her creator's viewpoint:

Boys are generally mean. Those girls, who have a hope of pleasing them try. Those who haven't a hope, either stay out of their way or else act very tough and try to make fun of them first.[78]

Though Morag Gunn has to undergo a lot of struggles in her life, mostly due to culturally conditioned frigidity, she has never even once gone through the phenomena of inferiorization. She has never recognized the superiority of phallogocentric patriarchy and has rejected her domestic role and thus renegotiates the current social positioning of women. She believed that for a man 'woman is just a commodity to be possessed and used at the man's will and pleasure. As a feminist has to be so, Morag is neither romantic nor sentimental. But unfortunately she falls into the pit by marrying Dr. Brooke who postpones child birth and treats her as his possession. When Brooke denies her motherhood, she grows into a feminist and seeks the help of Jules Skinner to fulfill her reasonable desire. Morag believed that living with a man of her choice would be a thrilling experience in "those halls of Sion",

All jubilant with song
And bright with many an angel
The prince is ever in them,

The pasture of the blessed

Are decked in glorious sheen. [273]

But the reality is truly bitter. Her existence with Brooke Skeleton terrifies her. She cries,

Help me, God; I'm frightened of myself [274]

Morag doesn't want anyone, especially a male to influence her creativity. For she feels, as Virginia Woolf puts it,

A woman's writing is always feminine: it cannot help being feminine; at its best it is most feminine; the only difficulty lies in defining what we mean by feminine [cited in Schowalter, 311]

Morag protests daringly and instinctively and informs her husband that he can no longer treat her like a doormat. As she doesn't want a tag of her husband's name with her name, she publishes the novel under the name of Morag Gunn and not of Morag Skeleton. Once her marriage vows ends, she loses all the meaning for the married life and realizes her mistake of allowing herself to be carried away by the male charm. As she understood that fatherhood and husband are masks of phallogocentrism, she forcibly throws away from her life.

Morag has to be appreciated for keeping the male in the background throughout her life. She has never allowed the phallogocentric male, her step father Christie Logan, her lover Jules Skinner, her male –publisher, her friends and her husband Brooke to dominate or suppress her in anyway. The moment she feels their first step towards suppressing her, she walks out. She has the unshakable conviction that male and female are equal and if there is a situation, she could even manage her affairs malelessly. She never yields to sentiments. Thus Laurence has portrayed Morag as a loving mother and a nurturer and a hard worker and a true gynocentric woman who retires quietly in a farm house after the death of Pique's (her daughter) father .

Margaret Laurence has created her heroine as a practising feminist. Though the female writer is displaced, disinherited and excluded, Laurence heroine overcomes all these and comes out successfully by not accepting the phallus as a privileged signification. Feminist like Morag Gunn identifies patriarchy as a power packed, phallogocentric institution where woman have been made secondary, and dismantles the rules to carve a niche for her. She also proves that gynocentrism can break over patriarchal norms and to equate woman with men. The oft-quoted Shakespearean adage-“Frailty, thy name is woman” is proved false in the case of Morag Gunn. She emerges as a successful, independent, maleless person unruffled by the threats of patriarchy.

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