

## **A FEMINIST STUDY IN NOVEL OF KATHERINE MANSFIELD**

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However, Modern Short Story was born in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and it was founded by Edgar Allan Poe<sup>1</sup> who was at once a successful poet and pioneer of detective stories. He was also the first critic who provided a workable definition of the modern short-story. For him, A Short story was a prose narrative "Requiring from half an hour to one or two hours in it perusal".<sup>2</sup> Thus, Brevity is regarded as a very important feature of modern short-story. This aspect sets it apart from novel or drama. However, modern short-stories are also noted for elements of surprise, probability, suspense and credibility.<sup>3</sup> Following Poe, a good number of American writers took up the short-story in earnest and produced many remarkable and convincing stories. As a knowledgeable critic has observed, "It was born in America. sometime during the Middle of 19<sup>th</sup> Century, nurtured by Poe, Hawthorne, Bret Harte, Amboise Bierce, in America and Balzac, and Maupassant across the Atlantic, and naturalized in England in the 1819 by authors like Stevenson. Kipling, Hardy and Wells. It was not till the first quarter of this century that it attained full stature and became a citizen of the world."<sup>4</sup> (A Thakur, Bharati Bhawan, Patna, Introduction, 1985) though Irving, Hawthorne, Poe, Bierce, Brete Harte, pioneers of short stories across the Atlantic. The American Short-story reached its peak in the hands of William Sidney– Porter (Commonly known as O'Henry) William Saroyan, Sherwood Anderson, and Earnest Hemingway.<sup>5</sup> But as already told, exactly at the sometime the short story developed and matured gradually in France in the hand of famous novelists like Balzac and Flaubert but the man who did a great service to the development of short-story is none other than Guy Maupassant.<sup>6</sup> His stories dealt with the lives of ordinary men and women and their struggles, and triumphs. Maupassant's stories also have historical importance because they dealt with the moral decline and the political eclipse of France in political affairs. As already stated, the third important influence on the modern short-story was exerted by nineteenth century Russian writers and early twentieth century practitioners such as Leo Tolstoy, Maxim Gorky, Nikola, Gogol, Ivan Turgnev and of course Dostoevsky and Anton Chekhov:<sup>7</sup> Of them, Tolstoy followed the method of parables or fables, and wrote stories which had deep moral appeal or teaching. His stories are too well-known and they do not require special mention in this survey. Similarly, Gorky was a committed writer and was involved in the struggle of peasants and supported revolution. Naturally his stories were of topical interest but they are also full of human interest and compassion.

Katherine Mansfield lived from 1888 to 1923 and was an exact Contemporary of D.H. Lawrence, James Joyce, and Virginia Woolf, P.G. Wodehouse, and J.B. Priestley, all very important writers of her generation. She is usually regarded as one of the most successful writers of Modern Short Stories, both in the terms of choice of themes and treatment of female characters who suffer from various mental conflicts and problems of insecurity and fragile emotions. Her stories are flawless<sup>8</sup> in terms of depicting the little world of dormant passions and emotion of the characters. At the same time, they are miracles of concentration and craft. As a story writer, she belongs to the group of

experimental writers of fiction who loved to move away from the dominance of plot and character to the exploration of the feminine Psyche. Three collections of her stories appeared during her life time and they are named "In A German Pension" (1911). "*Bliss and Other Short Stories*" (1920), and "*The Garden Party and Other Short Stories*" (1922). Two other collections entitled "*The Dove's Nest and other Short Stories*" (1923) and "*Something Childish*" appeared after her death (1924). The first was hailed but the latter received mixed reception but critical readers have acknowledged her contribution to the art of short stories without reservation. Her early death revived the memories of Keats and Dylan Thomas. Moreover, her Uninhibited life also contributed to a romantic myth of the artist as the enemy of the established social and moral norms. However, all sensitive and discerning readers have concurred that she was original both in her technique and the way of life. In other words, she has been regarded as a modernist as an innovator, and also as an experimenter. Her stories are often cited as examples of stories of impression, something which was quite fashionable in the early 20s and 30s of the last century. She has been regarded as the English disciple of Anton Chekov and a worthy follower of Virginia Woolf. Even a causal analysis of her stories viz "The Tiredness of Rosabel",<sup>9</sup> "The Little Governess", "The Swing of Pendulum", "Bliss" and of course, "A cup of Tea" suggest that her stories are replete with variety of women's experiences and their handicaps and hesitations in a world; dominated by asserting brutal, insensitive menfolk. What particularly strikes in her treatment of her female characters is the various weaknesses and faults in women's character and their various mood swings and turn about. In the final analysis, however, it is her competence and skill in dealing with various female characters and unfolding of situations with a delicate and sure touch which arrests attention and haunts readers for a long time. In recent years some standard biographies, Private Journals & letters of the writer have come out. Though a few studies have appeared, yet there has been no serious attempt at a balanced estimate of her exceptional gifts as a modern short story writer. Feministic theories in literature were propagated by a number of female writers such as Betty Friedon (*The Feminine Mystique*), Toril Mox (*Sexual/ Textual Politics*), Elaine Showalter, (*The New Feminist Criticism*) and Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Guber (*Mad Woman in The Attic*). These writers were sharply critical of the treatment of female characters by male writers and they found them inadequate and false. Although a beginning was made by Virginia Woolf in the early 20s, the first major statement was made by Simone de Beavoir and, later on was repeated by Germaine Greer in books like "*The Second Sex*" and "*The Female Eunuch*" respectively. During 60s, 70s and even early 80s feminist theories and interpretations were the rage both in England and France and, of course, in America, Katherine Mansfield's stories can be very well interpreted in terms of feminism. The present attempt is a modest venture in that direction from the feminist perspective.<sup>10</sup>

In the light of observations made in preceding pages, it becomes quite obvious that the important consequence of Katherine Mansfield's story and work lies in the fact that she was both woman and an authoress and, because of an early death, she could not give a finishing touch to her vision and aspiration but in, her fictional characters, one finds a true picture of women's suffering, their circumstances, their struggles, resilience and occasional moments of triumphs. Thus the themes which are tried in her stories are, of course, the typical problems of modern living but in her stories, the clash and general struggles are presented in such a way that they seem to be synonyms of her own

adulthood, on the one hand and symptoms of emancipation of language and literature from the dominance of male writing on the other.<sup>21</sup> From her Newzealand roots in Wellington to a life of emotional upheavals in places like London, Germany, and France, She provides an instance of a very volatile unpredictable woman who was trying to live on her own terms.

**References:**

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- 5 Beach Croft :- The Modest; art, A Survey of the Short-Story in English, London (1968)
6. Ibid
7. Ibid
- 7 Allen, Walter :- The Short-Story in English Oxford (1982)
9. Ibid
- 10 Mansfield, Katherine's Collected Stories, London (1945)

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