

Acknowledgements

I express my gratitude to **Smt. R. Nandini**, Chairperson, P.S.G.R. Krishnammal College for Women for providing me the opportunity to do my research in this prestigious institution. I am greatly obliged to **Dr. (Mrs.) N. Yesodha Devi**, M.Com.,Ph.D., the Secretary and **Dr.(Mrs.) S.Nirmala**, M.B.A., M.Phil., Ph.D., the Principal, for providing me with all the necessary facilities. I place on record my indebtedness to **Dr.(Mrs.) R. Padmavathi**, M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D., Dean, Academic Support and Alumni Relations, for her invaluable suggestions and good motivation. It has been an immense help in my work.

My heartfelt thanks to **Dr. Sushil Mary Mathews, M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D.,** Associate Professor and the Head of the Department of English for her constant encouragement. I wholeheartedly thank my guide **Dr. (Mrs.) Sumathy K Swamy**, M.A., B.Ed., M.Phil., Ph.D., MBA, Associate Professor of English for her constant encouragement and supervision. I am grateful to her for the interest and concern she had shown in my work. I thank all the members of staff of the Department of English for their support and encouragement. I sincerely thank **Mrs. B. Mynavathi**, M.A., M.Phil., B.Ed., Associate Professor for her kind support and encouragement.

My thanks are due to **Dr. R. Radhika**, M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D., LLB., Advocate, for her valuable suggestions, support and timely guidance.

I extend my love and affection as token of gratitude to my beloved parents **Mr.K.M.Venugopal** and **Mrs. Devayani**, my siblings **Mr. Ramesh K.V**, **Ms. Jayalakshmi K.V** and my brother-in-law **Mr. Sathish kumar** for being the guiding spirit whose prayers and love have been an unceasing moral support to me.

I am bound to my husband **Mr. N. Gokul Kumar** for his love, care and support through out the completion of my research. I am proud of my three children

Sree vishwanath. G , Sridevi. G and Sumedha. G, who sacrificed their happiness and supported me through out the completion of my work.

My thanks to **Mrs. Damayanthi Narayanan**, my mother-in-law for her encouragement and support.

I express my sincere thanks to my aunts **Mrs. Mallika Mohan** and **Mrs. Ambika Narayanan** whose inspiring words had given me strength to complete this work. I extremely thank **Mr. Saravanan** and family for their extensive support during the tough times of my research. I bow to all my other family members, friends and relatives who stood by me all times.

I would also like to express my sincere thanks to the Libraiains of PSGR Krishnammal College for Women, Coimbatore, Bharathiyar University, Coimbatore, Madras University, Chennai and American Counsulate Library for providing necessary books and materials relevant to the topic. Above all, I thank God for showering his blessings for the successful completion of my thesis.

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A Note on the Text

The investigator has made an extensive use of the following texts and taken passages from the five major novels of Margaret Laurence with reference to the chapters II, III, IV and V respectively.

The Stone Angel

By

Margaret Laurance

Laurence, Margaret. *The Stone Angel*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart. 1964. Print.

A Jest of God

By

Magaret Laurence

Laurence, Margaret. *A Jest of God*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart. 1966. Print.

The Fire - Dwellers

By

Margaret Laurence

Laurence, Margaret. *The Fire-Dwellers*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart. 1969. Print.

The Diviners

By

Margaret Laurence

Laurence, Margaret. *The Diviners*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart. 1972. Print.

❖ For research methodology the scholar has used only *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* 7th edition.

Modern Language Association. *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. 7 ed.

New Delhi : East-West Press, 2009. Print.

Abstract

Canadian Literature enjoys an international prestige today with its history that started with the inhabitation of aboriginal people for thousands of years, evolving from a group of French and British Colonies into bilingual, multicultural federation. Canadian Literature written in Canada began as a continuation of what was being produced in Great Britain had to define itself against the American tradition. It developed in the United States and eventually evolved as a distinctive literature. Literature in Canada grows from the social attitudes held in common, as well as from historical antecedents and explanation models. Canadian novel, however, began to take off in the 1950s with Robertson Davies, Mordecai Richler, Maris Gallant and Sheila Watson. By the late 19th Century, Canada became a state. Many educated persons regarded nationalism as a natural and necessary aspect of human life. Fiction of Canadian writers characterized their nation as a northern land whose northern climate gave the nation, and its people, a unique national identity, and showed it as a place of ice and snow which indicates the moral aspect of Canada's northern character. English Canadian fiction reflected the world view of a particular group of Canadians which is dominant in the construction of Canadian political and cultural life in the late 19th century. The authors were from the educated social classes who provided Canada with religious leaders, politicians, newspaper publishers, educators, lawyers and influential merchants. English Canadian writing has taken its roots as a localized response to space, distance, local forms of speech and intonation.

The study entitled "Rhythm of Despair: Demystification in the Select Novels of Margaret Laurence" attempts to examine how Margaret Laurence presents the despair in the life of the protagonists and their struggle to understand the self-reality.

The study primarily focuses on the presentation of the writer-characters in the selected novels of the writer. Margaret Laurence, a much-loved Canadian author, was one of the great novelists of the twentieth century. Her stories feature strong women and their struggles for self-understanding and acceptance. She was known for her outspoken support of peace, women's rights, and other progressive causes

The objective of this thesis is to highlight the main aspects of the survival of women in the novels of Margaret Laurence and to establish the thesis that Laurence's women are varied and that they decline to be victims and thus their dilemma. An interpretation of the strategies adopted by the protagonists to survive has been made. The study confines itself to the four major novels.

This thesis is divided into six chapters. Chapter - I begins with an introduction to the ambience of Margaret Laurence's age. It gives a brief sketch of her life and achievements. The rhythm of despair is defined and the treatment of the same theme by novelists other than Laurence is dealt upon. It also brings into focus how women voice their sufferings.

Chapter - II deals with '*The Stone Angel*' which is considered as the best of the Manawaka novels. Hagar Shipley, the character steps out of her past to the passage of growth and development. Hagar's life is about resolution and revolution. In order to achieve emancipation in life and to have contentment, Hagar has to let go her pleasures and her apprehensions. The novel begins with the acceptance of the truth that the narrator of the story is the wilful ghost of Hagar Shipley. The circumstance faced by Hagar is a universal one - one which sooner or later everyone will come across. The novel is about a woman who is so strong, so rigid, so arrogant that her own life, that of her father, her husband and her youngest son are all

destroyed. The elder son, Marvin, only survives because he goes away. She is unable to let anyone into her personal being, to permit her internal solitude to be attacked, to tell people how she feels, to actually say anything loving or kind which might suggest flaw. This chapter portrays various facets of her sufferings and how she attained self-realisation.

Chapter –III ‘ A Jest of God’, is about passing judgments and making false assumptions based on prejudice. This novel dramatizes the life of a neurotic, spinster school teacher named Rachel Cameron. At thirty-four years of age, she is trapped in a life of personal seclusion and isolation, caring for her compulsively dependent, hypochondriac mother. This chapter depicts how the protagonist Rachel Cameron meets the challenges and how she gains control over her life and how she achieves self-understanding. It also proposes to show how the growth of her personality follows the pattern of the isolated heroine’s progress to self-knowledge recognized earlier in this conversation. Rachel’s essential loneliness is reflected back at her by others, and the ultimate impossibility of communication with anyone else is repeatedly emphasized. Rachel is approaching the realization that she must take responsibility for her own life, but as yet is unable to face or accept it, and continues to retreat to the security, albeit false, of conventionality. Rachel Cameron life is analysed in this chapter and a path of self-actualisation is given priority.

Chapter – IV entitled ‘The Fire Dwellers,’ wherein Margaret Laurence deals with the state of despair in the problems of isolation of the protagonist Stacey Cameron, Rachel’s older sister. The difference in character between the extroverted Stacey and the neurotic introvert Rachel does not prevent Stacey from emerging, in her adult life, as just as isolated as Rachel. Stacey, like her sister Rachel, is the

product of a Manawakan upbringing, so she bears the same blemish as they, mark that have been inflicted by the early influence of a widespread puritanical environment which still values the pioneer and protestant ethic. She experiences a feeling of guilt which in turn leads to a sense of inadequacy and failure. Stacey is unable to realize the changes in herself brought on by the passing of time, her dual role as wife and mother continues to seem strange to her, even after all this time, since she attempts to derive her identity from her previous experience.

Chapter - V deals with Laurence's last novel 'The Diviners'. Morag Gunn is a role model who teaches her readers to fight for their rights. It is easy to see that more and more of her life had buried her identity for a long portion of her life. Morag's identity relates to her efforts to shape that identity by reshaping her own memory and perception of the past. Morag's stories are underlined with a sense of regret that she has never been able to find the right words to tell people how she feels about them. Her self exploration in the present grasps for the right language to express what her past relationships with people have meant to her, and how they have created who she is as a person. Morag is always questioning who she is as a person as well as whom the influential people in her life have been that have helped shape her identity. For the longest time the only answer that she could come up with is that she is a product of her parents and they have shaped her identity. She realizes later in the novel that she is more a product of Christie and Prin. *The Diviners* is a story which is threaded through uncertainty, loss of memory, trying to segment strings of the past together into a single mould. Yet memories are fabricated, stories are elaborations, and no matter how precise one may be certain facts always escape the mind.

Chapter- VI titled 'summation' sums up the previous chapters and it attempts to focus on the protagonists of the select novels who are considered as emerging new woman. They are self-realised women. Margaret Laurence's female protagonists in all these four novels are identical in fighting to be victims and survive their predicament. Endurance for them means that there is self-actualisation, and that all individuals are free to determine their own lives as equals. This chapter sums up the journey of despair in all the selected protagonists and their self-realisation. It sums up with a research that the selected characters really suffered the rhythm of despair and are later self-independent in their life. They emerge as independent new women.