Multiculturalism in Canada And Feminine Identity Issues

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Abstract

Canadian Literature, especially in English is very susceptible to the concern of multiculturalism which fundamentally has originated from the cultural miscellany typifying also the writers themselves, predominantly in the recent decades. Canadian literature at times defines a clear amalgam of Diaspora that divulges strength and exuberance. This paper objectifies to scan a number of Canadian ethnic literatures, with an analysis to unearth and discuss issues that have cropped up during the past 50 years in Canada. The issues that need a governing platform to be discussed are postmodern aesthetics, ethnicity, race, search for identity, isolation, colonialism, nature of modernism, Quebec literature and gender equality. Whilst talking of multiculturalism my concern shall also rest upon the feminine identity issues raised by the Canadian native and non-native women writers that have been left astray while too much grappled in the question of multiculturalism. The women writers namely Margaret Lawrence, Margaret Atwood, Adele Dorothy Livesay and Carol Shields have very proficiently utilized the common theme pertaining to the identity of women, who are browbeaten, demoralized, subjugated and exploited. They fight back and rebel against the civilization and culture. Laurence and Atwood deal with a course of liberating. They never compel on to the reader their views but just recommend open possibilities. But the face of Canlit has greatly been transformed due to the influence of Carol Shields – the Man-Booker Prize Winner for ‘Unless’. Carol has highly written on the nonattendance of women’s voices and experiences in contemporary literature. A Fairly Conventional Woman, The Stone Diaries and Unless, as her feminine characters use work, conjugal as well as imaginative to surpass helplessness and subjection.
Introduction

The focus of Canadian literature has always subsisted upon the nationalistic and provincial themes. Frank Davey and other reviewers, against such focal denigration in Canadian literature, have remarked that a focus on theme compresses the approval of intricacy of the literature shaped in the country, and generates the thought that Canadian literature is sociologically-oriented.

Literature of every nation is subjective to its socio-political contexts and Canadian literature too, under the same sway, has produced a variety of genres. Influences on Canadian writers are extensive, both geographically and traditionally.

Canada's overriding cultures were formerly British and French, as well as indigenous. After Prime Minister Trudeau's "Announcement of Implementation of Policy of Multiculturalism within Bilingual Framework," in 1971, Canada gradually became abode to a more wide-ranging population of readers and writers. The country's literature has been dynamically influenced by international immigration, predominantly in contemporary decade.

Canadian literature, being a home to a number of writers, is cosmic and often divided into categories mainly as per prefecture and regions, secondly by author and then by literary period. Categorization by author includes the literature by Acadians, Aboriginals, Irish and Canadian women writers. Tagging by literary periods, anthologized as bodies of work, means the literature named as "Canadian Post Moderns" or "Canadian Poets between the Wars."

Governing Multicultural Approaches:

Universal works of Canadian literature personifies Multiculturalism, Quebec literature and Gender Equality, Failure, Humour, Mild Anti-Americanism, Nature, Satire and irony, Self-deprecation, Ethnicity and various general and special issues. Detailing the
themes dealt in the Canlit, the first and foremost issue discussed distinctly is Multiculturalism. Contemporarily and after the First World War, multiculturalism has been an imperative subject. Writers whose pen has idolized the theme embrace Mordecai Richler, author of The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz, Margaret Laurence, author of The Stone Angel, Michael Ondaatje, author of The English Patient and Chinese Canadian Writer Wayson Choy.

Canadian Literature is not associated with any particular theoretical approach; rather, it is interested in investigating articles on all issues concerning various writers and writing in Canada. Every concern includes both English and French matter from a broad choice of contributors.

The structuralist approach disproved thematic and linked questions of nationalism and identity to focus on the more recognized aspects of literary works in the late 1970s. The next decade saw poststructuralism, deconstruction, the surfacing of postmodernist and postcolonial speculations and practices. It unbolted the entry to transformed interest in the question of national identities in these two literatures. Linda Hutcheon pointed out that the "entire question of Canadian identity has become a kind of playground—or battlefield—for the postmodern as well as the post-colonial defining of 'difference' and value"("Circling the Downspout of Empire," 166).

The effects of colonialism on the original native population found reflections in the Canadian writings during the 1970’s and even later. The ethnicity of the aboriginals the folklore used, mores and the way of life was for an extended time on the brink of being stamped out, as the imposed language of the colonizer turned out to be the customary practice. As many contemporary authors believe that they have been marginalized, they argue that they are similar to the tribal inhabitants, becoming “…spectators, not elements in what goes on” (Weibe, Rudy. “Where Is the Voice Coming From?” Canadian Short Fiction, 274).

There was umbrage among the writers to embrace an identity of their own, to be recognized and thus authors such as Rudy Weibe and Dennis Lee specify the troubles faced by the like of theirs who wish to put across their experiences, but have been denied a right to be heard. In “Cadence, Country, Silence: Writing in Colonial Space”, Dennis Lee
verbalizes the problems encountered by writers who are both colonizer and colonized. In Where Is the Voice Coming From? , Weibe ascertains about the place of the Cree inhabitants, whose verbal language was silenced by the hostile, yet influential voice of the colonizer. “The colonial writer does not have words of his own...The words I knew said Britain and they said America, but they did not say my home”, said Lee. Many a writers experienced a block, and to overcome this dilemma, they believed that they would have to own the “foreign” language. The question of owning a language led to pinpointing of the national identity. For native Canadians the issue of identity remains a central discussion within Canadian fiction, both native and national. Many a Canadian novels spin around the subject of the exploration for one's identity and the necessity to substantiate one's existence. An excellent example is Robertson Davies’s Fifth Business, in which the main character Dunstan Ramsay searches for a new identity by leaving his old town of Deptford.

The rise of French-Canadian fiction took place sometimes in 1837. Quebec literature is small. Until 1930s the kind of Quebec literature which were popular were the rural novel and the historical novel with an inclination in Catholic morality but the mid of the 20th century brought into light new group of authors who had a penchant in writing novels with psychological and sociological foundations. The Second World War consequences and industrialization gave a further direction to the literature and French-Canadian literature also began to attract a great deal of notice globally. Writers like Nicole Brossard utilized a formalist manner of writing novels paving a way to an experimental branch of Québécois literature. Cultural and social tensions rose between the English and the French speaking states of Canada moreover the mayhem in addition to the colonization scenario found expression in Roch Carrier’s ‘The Hockey Sweater’.

**Feminine Identity Questions and Women Writers:**

A feminine concern in Canada, as in other parts of the world, questions the essentialities of gender and aims to identify with gender disparity. The studies and the theories imperatively discuss the encouragement of women’s rights and explore the locales of prejudice, stereotyping, objectification, subjugation and patriarchy. The feminist writers have volubly talked about and depicted women’s pain; in education; in equanimity with men’s salary and wages; in gender impartiality; in right to initiate divorce proceedings;
even reproductive rights of women to take individual decisions in matters associated to pregnancy and right to enter into contracts and personal assets. The matters related to the protection of women and girls, domestic violence, sexual harassment, sexual assault and various such struggles and oppressions of day to day life have been brought forth by feminist writers like Margaret Lawrence, Margaret Atwood, Adele Dorothy Livesay, Carol Shields and others. The question of identity, self respect and encounters of the browbeaten, demoralized, subjugated and exploited women have been very proficiently utilized by them. They fight back and rebel against the civilization and culture. They never compel their views on to the reader but just advocate open possibilities.

Coral Ann Howells in ‘Refiguring Identities: Contemporary Canadian Women’s Fiction’ considers that in this way they contribute to the "process of transforming the discourse of Canadian national identity in order to accommodate the heterogeneous identities of the nation's inhabitants. Not that Canadian women's writing is to be expected to provide solutions to the question of Canadianness, but they do present a more honest recognition of the differences and multiple affiliations within individual identities that need to be negotiated by politicians and social policymakers as well as by individual citizens".

Dorothy Livesay was one of the foremost Canadian poets of her generation and has remained at the primary rim of intellectual discovery and literary novelty in Canada. Her poems represent the way that women are observed by society and the struggles they face being a part of it. She pictures how women have made significant growth in their role from an entity of beauty and virginity to a liberated and free young adult entering the human race without gender constrictions.

In her collective poetry of the 1930's Dorothy Livesay is alarmed principally with society and the poems speak distinctly for independence from capitalist dictatorship. Her unease at the complex life of women, predominantly, incited the growth of the strappingly feminist prominence that became a unique attribute of her work. Her poems have shown a better interest in woman’s freedom, her need for individuality and her right to free existence and identity.

The early works of Livesay present a buoyant hesitance about sexuality: represented by solitude in nature and craving for heterosexual experience. Livesay’s poetry in middle
age tackles with the troubles and possibilities of heterosexuality especially when it’s found that a heterosexual union was created in terms of male superiority and authority versus female imperceptibility and quietness. Livesay writes, "The woman I am / is not what you see," this is hardly "non-threatening simplicity".

In 1967 when The Unquiet Bed was published Livesay was very much in the skin of a woman and she listed the concerns to which she had dedicated her life and work "the destruction of the environment, the danger of nuclear war, the plight of women politically and socially, the mistreatment of children, and also the need for improved health and dietary standards."

Livesay, in her old age works, redefined aspirations and included contrasting behaviours acquired by her own self as love for her grandchildren and sexual closeness with women. Livesay's poetry and she herself became vital to the women's movement in the late 1960's and 70's. Her representations of female sexual desire were also central to her quest for poetic identity. The incredible series of ups and downs in her course of life demonstrated her own pronouncement that, "Every decade we become a different person".

Margaret Atwood is an important representative of the feminist movement. She dominated the time, in both poetic technique and nationalist and feminist observations whether poetry, fiction or criticism. Margaret Atwood scrutinizes and reflects on the shattering of the male and female relationships. The complex nature of style is because she’s always tried to dissect the rational and the irrational extremities in the lives of men. She visualizes the contemporary men as being a victim to incessant uncertainties and obsessions that arise from the unfounded and hostile surroundings. The typical feature of Atwood's writing is symbolism and myth.

She’s written much about women who fight with their individual apprehensions, diffidence, who undergo an agonizing course of self-assessment with the aim of establishing a significant example in their lives.

In her novels and poems, she has written about the emptiness and wastelands of the Canada. It actually reflects the ‘wilderness of identity’. She examines the intricacy of being a Canadian. Her novels are about the feminine self that is becoming liberated. In her novel
The Edible Woman, the main protagonist goes through a process of self-discovery. In Lady Oracle and Life Before Men, Atwood’s resentment is aimed at men. She sees the society as chauvinist, male-dominated where a woman revolts to her man to facilitate her survival and sustenance. The situation of physical suffering brought into light in Bodily Harm is all about novel circumstances in an unnamed hostile Caribbean island. The heroine is a refugee and to her the island is politically alien and dangerous. She experiences that she has to discard her native culture and accept the new life so as to free herself. Surfacing is very representative novel where the narrator physical voyage to the north represents a retreat into her past and psyche. She explores not only her own self but also tries to reinvent and recreate herself in relation to her past and in relation to her relationship with nature. She drowns in order to be born again. She is critical of Canadians who always put the blame on Americans. She claims that in many cases, Canadians are the ones to be blamed. The novel has been described as a kind of mystical initiation of the heroine to finally become a shaman (somebody who has visions and can predict things).

The Handmaid’s Tale brought Atwood immense identification. Offred, a female protagonist existing in a futuristic American society rebels against the society dictated by men when she finds that women are treated as sexual servants and are only there to bear children. She tries to rediscover herself as a special woman.

Margaret Atwood’s Survival thematized the questions of nationalism and identity to concentrate on the more formal aspects of literary works. As Linda Hutcheon notes, the "entire question of Canadian identity has become a kind of playground—or battlefield—for the postmodern as well as the post-colonial defining of ‘difference’ and value."

After the Second World War a name emerged in the Canadian Literary History that brought to the forefront a different Canadian mentality, which was of Margaret Laurence. Laurence’s might lies in producing imaginary characters especially the representations of women who go through a progression of self-innovation and self-assessment.

In The Stone Angel Hagar, the protagonist, is a biblical allusion as of a woman and is portrayed as a toy in the hands of some greater power. The novel symbolizes the autocracy and the subjugation of the older generation over the younger generation in Canadian context. It also presents an emotional dilemma where establishing relationship
outside one’s circle is in a mess. Similarly in A Jest of God Rachel, the heroine faces the dominance and dilemma of living in a family, is oppressed and is on the verge of breakdown but as the life slowly paces ahead she discovers herself – essentially to the decisive self-knowledge and self-acceptance.

Morag, an outcast orphan in The Diviners, is brought up by Metis family. Here Laurence depicts the then face of Canada where all the discrimination (cultural, communal) and injustices prevailed. The failure of Morgan’s marriage and other such crunches lead her to self-discovery, which she achieves by becoming a writer. For The Diviners Laurence received the Governor-General Award.

Carol Shields, Redeeming Lives of Women

Pulitzer Prize winning novelist Carol Shields is a prolific writer for who every new day in the domesticity is an invariable spring of splendor and illumination. To a conventional argument of modern women writers Carol Shields adds an incredible involvedness of discussing the gender gap. She explores this area with her unique knack, buoyancy and proverbial chic humor. The core of her novels is largely about the life of women, the philosophy of gender bias, postmodernism, the compelling era, harmony and entwined relationships. Shields's arguments characterize contemporary fiction: familial symbiosis and marital apprehensions. Her ordinary characters extraordinarily portray pretentiousness, jealousy and annoyance and are frustrated with the loneliness in their lives and encounter everyday happenings, good or bad, with a distinct novelty.

The feminist theories brought forth by Simon de Beauvoir and Betty Friedan has created an evident impact in Shields’ approach towards feminist philosophy. In A Fairly Conventional Woman, The Stone Diaries, and Unless, Shields has employed De Beauvoir’s thoughts on transcendence and immanence as her female characters exercise on household and creative efforts to outrival powerlessness.

Eleanor Wachtel, the writer/broadcaster who hosts CBC Radio’s Writers & Company, said “I love the way Carol Shields’s mind works. Her particular kind of humanity just dazzles me. It’s the foundation of her commitment to writing as a form of redemption. It is
redeeming the lives of lost or vanished women.” Shields' herself defined feminism as 'Simply an acknowledgement that women are human'.

In The Stone Diaries, published in 1993, the protagonist, Daisy Goodwill Flett, gives an account of a stretched, perturbed life, from 1905 to the 1990s. A kid of the century, Daisy wakes up in mid-life to a world of overlooked opportunities before age compels her to weigh up her own transience. Here Carol Shields dealt with the inner life of a woman living through an apparently ordinary daily routine, but the book's profundity of emotional sensitivity, and its delicate meticulousness of language, mesmerized readers on both sides of the border and both shores of the Atlantic.

Shields' focus was on exploring through women's lives and inner feelings. One of her most admired books Larry's Party scrutinized the life of a jumbling Winnipeg letdown who achieves distinction in building mazes. Shields began wrote books which scrutinized women's companionships and women's inner lives. All of her novels trace out the magnitude of the quotidian, the exigency of relationships and the connections between individuals and their communities.

In the novel Unless, nineteen-year-old Nora leaves home and sits voiceless on a street corner begging for money. Around her neck is suspended a symbol “Goodness”. Nora’s family is distressed, as they look for explanations why Norah would thrust aside her university studies, her boyfriend and her family. And, they question themselves, Why goodness? Unless is Carol Shields’ most blatantly feminist novel. Once again, there's a prickly talk in the novel Unless on the ignorance and apathy of men towards women. She’d believed that it’s all about the flesh that men want to be around women. They do not pay a heed to women's sensitivity and remain indifferent about the domestic turmoil that she faces singlehandedly or how the synapses of a woman's mind function.

Shields creates female characters who hope and grow to both magnitude and excellence over the trivial everyday issues that are crucially significant in the life of a woman. In A Fairly Conventional Woman Brenda is a woman who though, in the hands of time lost herself but regains her lost identity by recognizing her own potentials in the form of art.
Conclusion

Canadian literature defines a clear amalgam of Diaspora that divulges strength and exuberance. Canadian outlook on nature, frontier life and Canada’s status at the global stage is time and again echoed in the Canada’s literature, whether written in English or French. Canadian literature speaks aloud the cultural and artistic miscellany, with many of its most high-flying writers focusing on ethnic life.

Women Writers have brought a sweeping revolution in the entire literary belief by identifying and discussing time-honored and conventional feminine issues that have been very faintly portrayed by male authors. They’ve been successful in their struggle to transfigure the woman as a liberated and self-sufficient person shedding off their role from an object of splendor and virginity.
References


