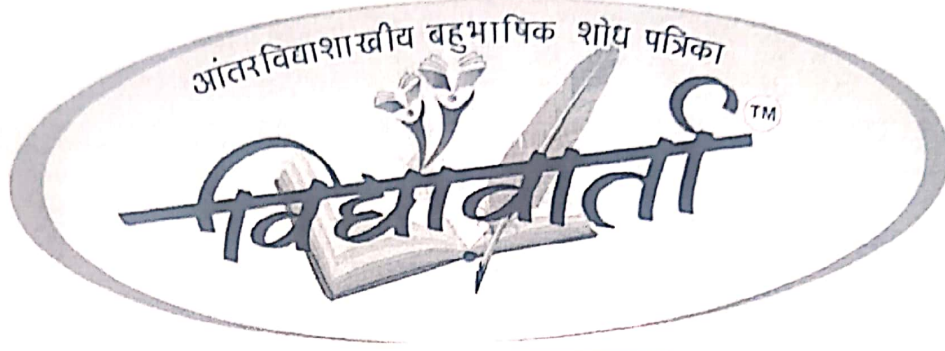


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विद्येविना मति गेली, मतीविना नीति गेली
नीतिविना गति गेली, गतिविना वित्त गेले
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-महात्मा ज्योतीराव फुले

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INDEX

- 01) An Evaluation of Financial Performance of State Bank of India In Bihar
Arbind Kumar & Dr.Harendra Prasad Singh, Saran ||10
- 02) Challenges of e-Learning during the COVID-19 Pandemic
Dr. Y. P. Gaur, Aligarh ||13
- 03) Study Of Some Medicinal Plants For Curing Dental Problems In Balaghat ...
Dr.B.J.Hirve, Dist.Beed M.S. ||17
- 04) A STUDY OF INFLUENCING FACTORS ON BUYING BEHAVIOUR OF WOMEN ...
Mrs. Megha J. Khairnar, Nashik Road ||19
- 05) E-Commerce and its Scope
Prof. Sayali P. Mishra, Achalpur ||25
- 06) GANDHIAN THEORY OF SARVODAYA
MOHAMMAD AKIF TAUFIQUE, Aurai Bhadohi ||27
- 07) 21st CENTURY APPLICATION OF MOBILE TECHNOLOGY: PROVIDING ACADEMIC ...
Dr.Rajeev R. Paithankar, Sengaoon ||36
- 08) NANOPARTICLES AS PLATFORMS FOR CANCER THERAPY
YOGESHWAR R RAMASANE & SANJEEV M. REDDY, Dist. Nanded (M.S.) India ||40
- 09) Reflection of Self Identity in past memories in Elizabeth Bowen's 'The Little ...
Smt. S.S. Sarmagum, Gadhinglaj ||51
- 10) Position of LGBT at the Moment of Celebrating the 75th Independence ...
Dr.Kiran Dagadu Shinde, Dist- Pune, Maharashtra, India ||53
- 11) Feminist Reconfigurations of the idea of Objectivity
Arpana Singh, Madhepura ||57
- 12) Docile Body in Gileadean Society in The Handmaid's Tale by Margaret ...
Mrs. Ujwala Pramod Solase, Dist: Kolhapur ||64
- 13) डॉ. बाबासाहेब आंबेडकरांची कृषी राज्य समाजवाद संकल्पना आणि भारतीय ...
डॉ. अविनाश भीमराव अंकुशराव, औरंगाबाद ||67

Reflection of Self Identity inpast memories in Elizabeth Bowen's 'The Little Girls'

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Abstract

Introductory section of this research pa-

per is about Elizabeth Bowen as the novelist of

outstanding creativity and influence of Henry

James, Jane Austen and Virginia Woolf. The

novel 'The Little Girls' is one of her mature nov-

els dealing with memory, childhood and search

of identity in the past. The search for self iden-

tity of Elizabeth Bowen is under the surface of

this novel. This novel has a close relevance to

Bowen's early memories. This paper throws light

on the life of three aging ladies which reflects

their search of identities by going back to the

past mentally and remaining in the present

physically. Dinah, Clare and Sheila are these

three women but Dinah is more interested than

other two women as far as returning to the past

and remaining in the present. Dinah is self in-

volved and likes to live in her own world. In this

novel, Bowen describes many incidents of past

and present life of three women to reflect their

mental condition.

Key Words: Search, identity, past, memory, child-

hood, emotional, present, funeral, ceremony

Introduction:

Elizabeth Bowen is a novelist of out-

standing creativity who began writing in 1930s

and continued till 1970s. She is greatly influ-

enced by Henry James, Jane Austen and Virginia

Woolf in the treatment of themes and style of

writing. Her novels express unique views on the

quality of life during the century both in England

and Ireland. Being an Anglo Irish by birth, Bowen

maintains a sense of unique detachment in her

views and analysis of English life in her writ-

ings. The novel 'The Little Girls' is one of her

mature novel writing at the age of 60 published

in 1964. It is one of Bowen's and qualities text

dealing about memory childhood and search of

identity for the past living in the present. In this

novel 'The Past' is ever present and where fate

can act very easily upon its inhabitants.

Search of identity and its relevance in the

novel

Every person has his own personality.

One possesses one's own identity which is not-

ing but self identity. It is natural trait of every

human being to search one's identity in one way

or other. In the same way, Elizabeth Bowen

searches in her novels. 'The Little Girls' is one

of them. As Bowen grew older her sense of iso-

lation increase and the complexity is seen in

her works like 'The Little Girls' and 'Eva Trout'. In

her life, she experienced unusual mixture of aris-

tocratic privilege and emotional deprivation; she

was deprived of a natural privilege like mother's

funeral and so could not mourn naturally. Her

subsequent moves from Ireland to Kent (England)

raised the question of her own nation and her

identity also. Her early life taught her to love

places and things more than people and pre-

serve memories of her past childhood which are

evoked at the age of sixty and create a sense of

isolation. All this made Elizabeth Bowen to

search her identity in the novel 'The Little Girls'.

Reflection of search of identity in 'The Little

Girls'

This research paper throws light on the

life of three aging English ladies especially Dinah

who try to search for identity in the past but all

in vain. Clare and Sheila are forced by a chance

call of dinner to evocate the past but they are

happy to live in the present and satisfied too.

Sheila Artworth is a well settled, middle-class

woman at Somerset. Clare is a self-made

businesswoman. She has excelled in handling her Mopsie Pye shops. They are the product of their times and perfectly represent middle class society in England. Dinah the protagonist of the novel is sixty year old woman which extraordinary beauty. Her youthful appearance shows that life has not much affected her. She is a widow living a lonely life at Applegate. Being a women, very recently she has been engaged in a task of burying objects in the cave. So that the future generation will be able to reconstruct her race from those remnants. Dinah and Frank are burying some objects at the outset of the novel which appears to be an archeological enterprise. This suggests that Dinah has some purpose in this task. She has her own view of history. Dinah deliberate burying of 'time capsules' is purely personal and purposeful. In this context John Coates remarks:

'To bury evidence is necessary to filter and select one is choosing what one considered important about oneself or one's time and obviously, the choice may be entirely wrong. If there is an intention to dig up the buried object later, then the burying becomes the making of an appointment to meet oneself, raising acutely the question of self knowledge.' (15)

When Dinah's friend Mrs. Coral puts the question who's going to seal it up? She suddenly realized that she is repeating the past experience. She becomes obsessed with the desire to find her long-lost friends of St. Agatha's School. Dinah spends money worth £100 for newspaper advertisement. This shows Dinah keen interest in her friends and her task of burial. Dinah burying of expressive objects reveals that they are means for the times to come to comprehend personalities. As a child, Bowen could not participate in her mother's funeral ceremony. So she buried a biscuit tin can containing some crypting writing. This suppression of not watching the funeral ceremony is found in this novel too. The little girls bury the coffer with object and his Bowen in computer for the exclusive in past. Dinah tries to identify herself with past

activity of burying coffer and wants her friends to be a part of this interesting enterprise to reopen the coffer.

Dinah represents the contemporary middle class society. The Impercipient cave symbolized Dinah's personality as loving, exuberant and Confused. Being very close to her mother in her childhood Dinah retains the memories of her mother. Mrs. Piggott love china which is recollected by Dinah. Mrs. Piggott dwells on the emotional value of objects and helps to maintain a sense of continuity and almost a thing of identity. Dinah fails to understand that her friends Clare and Sheila have a life of their own. They are purely practical in nature. Both of them are not interested in Dinah's enterprise. Her constant ringing forces them to participate in this task. Clare's disturbance is expressed:

"To have met again has been very nice. But we cannot keep ining and outing every two days. We have lives to live." (15)

Dinah is always in her own world and is not a product of her time like friends. Time affects Sheila and Clare. Dinah is always protected from the beginning of her childhood till present. When Dinah and Clare go to Frank's Cottage, in his absence Dinah feels a sense of security. This feeling of safety represents in the other side of her nature and has a feeling of insecurity in her own home. When Dinah and her friends find out the coffer empty which shocks Dinah where as her friends are normal. She feels completely defeated when Clare accuses Dinah for her selfish nature and call her enchantress child. She goes in a trauma. Her friends nurse her and show the due affection when needed. Clare goes back to her childhood days when Frank reinforces in her mind. She understands the depth and truth of childhood friendship. Looking at sleeping Dinah she remarked:

"We were entrusted to one another in the days which mattered. Clare thought. Entrusted to one another by chance, not choice. Chance, and its agents time and place. Chance is better than choice". (236)

This also means that trust between them is violated by Dinah purposefully to unite her

friends for only one task to reopen the coffer. Friendship is to be based on love and understanding. The empty coffer also symbolizes that Dinah fails to understand her friends. At the end, Clare realize that Dinah fear failure of her task to preserve the past. This also means that past is airrevocable but Dinah's way of handling and preserving the past is completely wrong.

On the other hand Dinah's friend Sheila and Clare are perfectly worldly woman. They live in the present and faced all oddities of life. So they identify their life with present situation. When Dinah wants to get in touch with them it appears to them eccentric and also seems to threaten their personality and reputation affecting their identities. They do not cling to past and are happy to live in the present. The call of Dinah's voice is knock and blow to their own status and identity. Sheila and Clare artificiality is symbolize that two women are frightened and are conscious of the world around them, without confidence they defend themselves by costly dresses and purchases. They hide their identity. The success of 'Mopise Pye Shop' also suggests the rootlessness and the restlessness of modern man.

Conclusion

Elizabethan Bowen has tried to reflect the lives of three friends; Dinah plays a major role and is the cause of many incidents in the past and the present life of three friends. Dinah searched for identity in past which tortured her. One should live in the present rather than go back to past. Dinah tries to struggle against the sense of loss in an unconventional way of life review in which Bowen participated by proxy. Bowen herself experienced a cathartic effect from completing the novel.

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