

# A Reading of Feminist Aspect in Angela Carter's *Shadow Dance* and *The Magic Toyshop*

<sup>1</sup>Dr. Geeta M. Patil & <sup>2</sup>Mr. Ramesh Kachrual Lahoti

<sup>1</sup>Professor, Dept. of English, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University, Aunrangabad <sup>2</sup>Asst. Professor, Dept. of English, Kalikadevi College, Shirur (Ka) Beed.

## Abstract:

Feminism is a complex ideology that encompasses many different subcategories that are all uniquely different from one another. One of the renowned stylish fiction authors of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Angela Carter, expresses the views of feminism through her novels, fairy tales, and re-writes of fairy tales. The English novelist Angela Carter is best known for her 1979 book *The Bloody Chamber*, which is a kind European fairy tales. She is one of the prominent and prestigious writers of her times. She began her career as a writer very early, when she was in her twenties. She has received many awards; they are James Tait Black Memorial Prize (for fiction), Kurt Maschler Award, The Cheltenham Prize, Somerset Maugham Award, and Mail on Sunday/John Llewellyn Rhys Prize.

**Keywords:** Patriarchy, women and Feminism.

## Introduction:

Feminism is a complex ideology that encompasses many different subcategories that are all uniquely different from one another. One of the renowned stylish fiction authors of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Angela Carter, expresses the views of feminism through her novels, fairy tales, and re-writes of fairy tales. The English novelist Angela Carter is best known for her 1979 book *The Bloody Chamber*, which is a kind European fairy tales. She is one of the prominent and prestigious writers of her times. She began her career as a writer very early, when she was in her twenties. On the widened scope of her writing Warner says,

The novels showed her baroque powers of invention and her fearless confrontation of erotic violence, of female as well as male sexuality. She marked out her territory early and men and women clash on it, often bloodily and the humor is mostly of the gallows variety. From the beginning, her prose was magnificently rich, intoxicated with words- a vivid and sensual lexicon of bodily attributes of minerals of flora and fauna and she dealt in strangeness. (Warner, p. 11)

The novels written by Carter gave her fame and name. She has received many awards; they are James Tait Black Memorial Prize (for fiction), Kurt Maschler Award, The Cheltenham Prize, Somerset Maugham Award, and Mail on Sunday/John Llewellyn Rhys Prize. Her stay in Japan has great impact of surrealism on her. During her stay in Japan, she has written two novels *Nights at the Circus* and *Wise Children*. From her childhood, Carter loved music, cinema, songs and circus. Along with the novels, she has an experience of short story writing. *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* (1980) and *The Black Venus* (1981) are her short stories. For children the short stories are *Miss Z*, *The Dark Young Lady* and *The Donkey Prince*. Carter's work in verse

is *Unicorn*. She has edited a work *Wayward Girls and Wicked women*. Carter's last published work is *Expletives Deleted: Selected Writings* (1992).

The term 'feminism' is used to describe a political, cultural and economic movement which aimed at establishing equivalent rights for women. It involves many theories and philosophies concerned with issues of gender difference, and a movement that advocates gender equality for women and campaigns for women's rights and interests. According to Maggie Humm and Rebecca Walker,

The history of feminism can be divided into three waves. The first feminist wave was in the nineteenth and early twentieth century's, the second was in the 1960s and 1970s, and the third extends from the 1990s to the present. Feminist theory emerged from these feminist movements. It is manifest in a variety of disciplines such as feminist geography, feminist history and feminist literary criticism. (<http://www.gender.cawater-info.net/>)

There are many criteria of feminism, among them liberal feminists were of the opinion of equal job and wages to women whereas radical feminists study deals with sexual politics, pornography, the oppressed position of women, male gaze etc. All these works are minutely discussed in the works of Angela Carter. *Shadow Dance* (1966) is the debut novel of Angela Carter. The characters in the novel, Morris, Oscar Honey prove unfaithful against women. In *The Magic Toyshop* (1967), the orphaned Melanie, in the very young age is forced to work under her tyrannical Uncle Philip, who is the representative of patriarchy. In *Several perceptions* (1968) Joseph, the protagonist watches and experiences the miseries of women and thinks that he is persecutor of women. *Heroes and Villains* (1969) focuses light on the social differences between men and women. The novel describes rape as a mean to subjugate women. In *Love* (1971), the women are shown unhappy. *Infernal Desire* *Machine of Doctor Hoffman* (1972) has a theme of science fiction and fantasy. Desidireo fought against Dr. Hoffman who wants to liberate man from reality. Carter's *Passion of New Eve* is the story in which with the advanced technique, Mother changes men into women, just for knowing the brutal experience of rape, unwanted pregnancy. *Nights at the Circus* is the story of a girl Fevvers, a girl with wings. She is shown the example of a liberated woman. *Wise Children* (1991), it is the story of twin girls Dora and Nora, the illegitimate daughters of Melchoir Hazard. He is a Shakespearean actor and acknowledges these two daughters on his hundredth birthday.

### **Feminist Approach:**

The present research paper is going to focus on the elements of feminism in her *Shadow Dance* and *The Magic Toyshop*. Carter has elaborately described the theme of feminism through her writings. She always gives encouragement to women in the novel and assures the results against fighting with patriarchy. Even Carter's fairy tales serves the purpose of feminism. Carter's *The Bloody Chamber* becomes famous and caught attention of the many writers at the same time her novels *Wise Children* and *Shadow Dance* do not come into much limelight. Carter is a radical feminist and seeks for equality of women. The reflection of radical feminism is lucid in *The Bloody Chamber* and her early works. In *The Bloody Chamber*, mother saves her daughter from Blue Beard. In true sense, Carter is the strong advocate of women empowerment. Even though Carter's writing

span is not much lengthy, she dealt with various subjects in her works. In all the issues the gender issue was at height. She has unrevealed the truths which other writers never spoke about. Throughout the work, Carter made a women centered world. Her female characters are powerful and destructive. It is noteworthy to mention that Carter with the financial help of earlier success went to Japan and she experiences the things, which she later on depicted in her novels.

Patriarchy is nothing but the domination of male .Patriarchy proves to be a kind of hindrance in the progress of women. Even patriarchy is responsible for the subordinate position of women. It gives full freedom to men and very less to female. In short patriarchy is kind of male dominated society. Violence in other way is used as a weapon to control the power of women. Carter's first novel, *Shadow Dance* deals with the story of love triangle with two men and a woman. It is the story of violence. Honeybuzzard is shown ruthless who plays with the emotion of beautiful Ghislaine. In the course of time, the scar on the face of Ghislaine haunts Morris. The novel ends with the murder of Ghislaine by Honey. In *Shadow Dance* Ghislaine is presented an unsatisfied young woman, who is scarred after a violent sexual attack. Both Morris and Honey are shown the equal partners in crime. Violence reaches to such a peak that all the characters fall prey to the violence for which they are responsible. Ghislaine is shown a woman who obeys the rules and the values of a male dominated society. Both the women in the novel, Ghislaine and Emily are unmarried. In the early novels of Carter, marriage is not the thing of happiness, on the contrary, it is harmful and a curse. In other words marriage proves to be the means through which the women can be trapped and controlled. The women in the novel have given inferior position. Edna, the wife of Morris, without raising a question, accepts the authority of Morris. According to her, 'Husbands were a force of nature or an act of God, like an earthquake or the dreaded consumption, to be borne with to be meekly acquiesced to be impregnated by as frequently as nature would allow.' (SD, 45) Morris is presented as an innocent and able to suffer silently even though she is the sole breadwinner of the family. Edna stands for everyone to help. She does not like to see the misery of others. She even stands by the side of Ghislaine. Though she is a good hearted woman, there is no place to her in such patriarchal world. On the other hand Ghislaine with the scar wanders everywhere and rejected. When she comes to Honey, she says to him, 'I've learned my lesson, I can't live without you, you are my master, do what you like with me. (SD, 166) Ghislaine gets unfortunately murdered by the hands of Honey.

Apart from Edna and Ghislaine, Emily is one female character in the novel. She is sexually active yet unmarried. Woman tries to be equal with men. She is catholic but thinks religion as 'a lot of old rubbish' (SD, 106) she is presented as a practical and a strong girl. She serves in the junk shop to the customers. She is rather very much different from the above two female characters. Emily is,

Hard, cool, (and) impersonal, and just as she had cheerfully thrown away the enormous wardrobe of her father, her first hero...in order to clear a space for Honeybuzzard, so she might, one day, throw away Honeybuzzard when she came upon something that seemed to her more pleasing, where she loved, she loved entirely, but not necessarily, for long. (SD, 99)

In the end only, Emily comes to know that Honey has gone off with Ghislaine.

*The Magic Toyshop* is a very popular novel of Angela Carter. It was written in 1967. It comprises the story of Melannie and her two siblings and their shelter in her tyrannical uncle Philip's house as their parents were killed in an accident. Uncle Philip has no emotions and behaves with everyone just like puppets. In the house, the supreme power was of Uncle. He is shown as the representative of male domination. Aunt Margaret, wife of Uncle Philip too suffers a lot under Philip's supremacy. Philip has a puppet shop. In the novel these women are treated as subordinates and given inferior positions

Being a student of English Literature; Carter has great influence of English writers such as Shakespeare, Milton and also of John Milton on her writing. According to Edmund Gordon, biographer of Angela carter,

In Angela Carter's fiction – as in fairy tales – the heroine often makes a dramatic gesture, forsaking everything, giving up her oppressive past for an uncertain future. *The Magic Toyshop* – the novel that most powerfully evokes her childhood – ends with Melanie and Finn looking at each other 'in a wild surmise' as the family home is destroyed by fire. (Gordon, 47)

Like the puppets, all the characters in the novel are under the control of Uncle Philip. Margaret is completely under the power of Uncle Philip. It is strengthened by the necklace which is given to her by Philip. This necklace was allowed to wear only on Sunday. This choking and uncomfortable necklace is the act of suppression of Margaret's thoughts. As a result of all the cruelty on her by Philip made her voiceless throughout the novel. Thus Margaret becomes the victim of cruel husband Philip.

Uncle Philip dominates Melanie in each respect even sexually. It is clear in the puppet performance of Leda and the Swan. Melanie was performing the role of Leda. In the performance Uncle Philip carried out the act of rape indirectly by means of swan. On the other hand, the dumbness of Margaret is the indication of no leaving any option to Philip. She is aware of the cruelty in the nature of her husband, that's why she herself accepts dumbness. Philip doesn't give any money to these women. These poor women were living completely under the mercy of Philip. From this, it is clear that Philip must have fear, that if they would be given financial freedom, they can stand against him. For any kind of purchase the consent of male authority was important. Philip never gives time to his family nor he understands them, on the contrary, he always escaped with his puppets.

Like necklace, Philip made restrictions on Margaret's dress. Margaret has to wear a particular dress on Sunday. This dress never makes her happy. The dress was very dull and made of cheap material. The dress expresses her lack of happiness. All the women in the novel are depended on male. When Melanie was growing, she was thinking and dreaming of her marriage but due the tragic death of her parents, the things change and she has to admit the realities of life, the life under the supervision of tyrannical Uncle Philip.

Even the women in the novel have no freedom to wear the dress they like. Once Melanie wore a pair of trousers, here, Finn warns Melanie that she can't wear the dresses like that because Uncle Philip 'Can't abide a woman in trousers. He won't have a woman in the shop if she's got trousers on and he sees her. He shouts her

into the street for a harlot (MTS, 62). In this way' the theme of women exploitation is incorporated in the novel. With the weapons like magic realism, gothic fiction and fantasy Carter developed a postmodern approach and focuses on the gender issue and femininity of her times. In such a suffocated condition, the women like Margaret finds freedom with Francie and Melanie with Finn.

To sum up, Angela Carter will be remembered for her feminist writings and incorporation of different themes like magic realism, fantasy, hybridity, science fiction, gothic fiction etc. These all efforts made her a radical feminist for which she is known for.

**Works Cited:**

Warner, Mariana. (1994) *Managing Monsters: Six Myths of Our Time: The 1994 Reith Lectures* Wintage, p. 11

[http://www.gender.cawater-info.net/knowledge\\_base/rubricator/feminism\\_e.htm](http://www.gender.cawater-info.net/knowledge_base/rubricator/feminism_e.htm)

Carter. Angela, *Shadow Dance*, Virago, 1966

Gordon, Edmund. *The Invention of Angela Carter: A Biography*, Random House Publication, 2016. p. 47. Print

Carter. Angela. *The Magic Toyshop*, Heinemann 1967 (Virago 1981)

