



## Feminist Writers' Impact on English Literature

B. Suresh Babu<sup>1</sup>, R. Deepa<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Lecturer in English, S.G. Government Degree College, Piler, Annamayya District

<sup>2</sup>Lecturer in English, Government Junior College, Piler, Annamayya District

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### Abstract

This paper explores the intertwined themes of belonging, unbelonging, and cultural identity in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* through the lens of food literature. In the novel, food functions as more than sustenance; it becomes a symbolic marker of memory, identity, and displacement. Characters such as the judge Jemubhai Patel, Sai, Biju, and the migrant workers express their emotional and cultural fractures through their relationship with food – what they eat, reject, long for, or are denied. The judge's rejection of traditional Indian foods reflects his internalized colonial shame, while Biju's longing for home-cooked meals in foreign kitchens reveals how immigrant labourers endure alienation through food deprivation. Sai's experiences with Western and Indian dishes illustrate her struggle to situate herself between cultures. Through these culinary moments, Desai reveals how food encapsulates the conflict between rootedness and rootlessness, anchoring cultural memory even as global forces displace individuals. By reading the novel as a text of food literature, this study argues that the politics of taste, hunger, and culinary nostalgia offer a powerful lens to understand immigrant trauma and cultural fragmentation. Ultimately, the paper shows that the search for belonging in *The Inheritance of Loss* is often articulated not through grand political statements but through the intimate, everyday language of food.

**Key words:** Food Literature, Cultural Identity, Belonging and Unbelonging, Migration.

### Introduction

**Jane Austen:** (1775–1817) was an English novelist celebrated for her six novels, including *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility*, which masterfully used wit and

social commentary to portray the lives, marriages, and economic dependencies of the English landed gentry in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, establishing the novel of manners and influencing literary realism. Born

in Hampshire, she received most of her education at home. Born in Hampshire, she received most of her education at home, fostered by her clergyman father's library, and lived a quiet life, never marrying, though her works offered keen insights into societal pressures on women.

**Virginia Woolf:** (1882-1941) was a seminal English modernist writer, essayist, and feminist, famous for pioneering the stream-of-consciousness technique in novel like *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*, and for influential feminist works like *A Room of one's own*. Born into an intellectual London family, she co-founded the influential Bloomsbury Group and the Hogarth Press with her husband Leonard Woolf, but battled lifelong mental health struggles, ultimately dying by suicide in 1941.

**Margaret Atwood:** (born 1939) is a prolific Canadian author of novels, poetry, and essays, famous for dystopian works like *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments*, exploring themes of gender, identity, and climate change, with a career spanning decades and earning numerous awards, including the Booker Prize. Her upbringing in the Canadian wilderness influenced her writing, leading to a distinctive voice and global recognition, with her books adapted into popular TV shows and films.

#### Themes

**Jane Austen: *Pride and Prejudice* :** Social standing and wealth are not necessarily advantages in her works, and a further theme common to Austen's work is ineffectual parents.

**Virginia Woolf: *A Room of One's Own: Women & Society/Literature:*** Woolf examines how societal roles and patriarchal values have shaped women's experiences and dictated how their literature is perceived, often devaluing work focused on female lives.

**Margaret Atwood's: *The Edible Woman* :** Critiques patriarchy, explores female identity, reproductive rights, and women's experiences within restrictive societies, using characters who find mental strength to cope.

#### Methodology

**Jane Austen - *Pride and Prejudice*:** In the early 19th century, during the Napoleonic Wars, the Bennet family lives at their Longbourn estate, situated near the small town of Meryton in Hertfordshire, England. Mrs. Bennet's greatest desire is to marry off her five daughters to secure their futures. A regiment of militia is encamped outside the town, and the younger Bennet daughters flirt with the officers.

When Elizabeth meets with Lady Catherine de Bourgh when the Lady visits Elizabeth's home, Lady de Bourgh confronts Elizabeth about her relationship with Mr. Darcy during which Elizabeth says to Lady de Bourgh "he is a gentleman; I am a gentleman's daughter; so far we are equal." This is the first time in the novel that Elizabeth can truly be portrayed as a feminist character. Feminism is a doctrine that equates women and men equal, and this moment when Elizabeth declares herself equal to Mr. Darcy is when Elizabeth emerges as the feminist subtly hinted in the previous chapters. From the beginning of the book Elizabeth was merely an outspoken woman with many opinions to express and unafraid of being suppressed by those around her. She never truly equated herself with men or her oppressors, she never truly paved a true road for herself with her own virtues and ideas for success for her future, unlike Charlotte Lucas did by marrying Mr. Collins with only intentions of living a comfortable life. Feminism during that time is much different from how it has evolved to present time and a perfect example of a feminist during the era would be Charlotte Lucas. Charlotte can be seen as a feminist instead of Elizabeth during the first chapters of *Pride and Prejudice* because of her ability to make firm decisions for herself not based on wanting solely

to live for her husband's every want and need. Charlotte states "I ask only a comfortable home; and considering Mr. Collins character, connections and situation in life, I am convinced that my chance of happiness with him is as fair as most people can boast on entering a marriage state." Elizabeth, during these first many chapters, was much like a carefree and witty young lady, however by making such a strong statement against Lady de Bourgh, she has truly rose above that rank to a feminist woman. Equating herself with a man and that too of a much higher status than herself shows that she has not only grown as a feminist but also in the way that she has become comfortable with herself as who she is that she will not take criticism from anyone.

There is also a lack of horizontal hostility that is observed on the part of Elizabeth. Horizontal hostility is when members of an oppressed group fight amongst each other because they cannot vent their anger out on those in power. During the late eighteenth century and nineteenth century, the oppressed would be women and the oppressors would be the men and those of higher class. Women were treated as commodities and less valued therefore causing this horizontal hostility among their own kind. Women would normally pent out anger on each other by mocking, taunting, belittling and backstabbing each other. Elizabeth goes through various situations in which she can show this horizontal hostility against her fellow women. For example, Miss Bingley who seems to have a keen interest in Mr. Darcy however when she notices his apparent curiosity of Elizabeth, she begins to dislike Elizabeth bent on proving her flaws to him. Through this hate shown towards Elizabeth, she can easily put her anger on another woman or back on Ms. Bingley. However, she chooses not to and instead hits her oppressors directly. For example, her outburst at Lady Catherine de Bourgh; instead of walking away from that situation with her head bent in defeat and expressing her anger out on her sisters or friends

Elizabeth promptly retaliates to Lady de Bourgh's comments. This type of standing up for oneself shows the movement away from the conventional woman of that time to a more modern and self concerned woman.

**2. Virginia Woolf A Room of One's Own:** begins in the voice of a narrator, who stands in for Woolf herself, as a woman visiting the campus of Cambridge University. The narrator finds herself at odds with the male-dominated culture that pervades the academic institution. After being told to keep off the grass intended only for students and scholars, and barred admittance to the library, the narrator returns to the women's college, Newnham, for dinner, finding it woefully underfunded and uninspiring.

She tells Mary Seton, daughter of the college's founder, that their dinner, which included poor cuts of beef, was a strong contrast to the rich and delicious fare the men were eating in other parts of the university. She learns from Seton that budgets and means are slim for the women's college, resulting in bare-bones accommodations in both scholarly resources and the college environment. The two then have a conversation that refers to Seton's mother founding the college and the difficulty in raising funds for the institution. Woolf contrasts this to the founding of Cambridge itself, which was endowed with wealth from the beginning, drawing a contrast between the investment in men's and **women's education**. The narrator suggests that Seton's mother, and all women, would have been better able to fund the endeavor had they had their own money and independence.

**3. Margret At wood -The Edible Woman:** is the first published novel by Canadian writer Margaret Atwood, published in 1969. It is the story of a young woman, Marian, whose sane, structured, consumer-oriented world starts to slip out of focus. Following her engagement, Marian feels her body and herself are becoming separated.

Atwood explores gender stereotypes through characters who strictly adhere to them (such as Peter or Lucy) and those who defy their constraints (such as Ainsley or Duncan). The narrative point of view shifts from first to third person, accentuating Marian's slow detachment from reality. At the conclusion, first person narration returns, consistent with the character's willingness to take control of her life again. Food and clothing are major symbols used by the author to explore themes and grant the reader insight on each of the characters' personalities, moods, and motivations.

Setting is used to identify differences between the characters; for example, Duncan is encountered in a mundane laundromat, gloomy theatre or sleazy hotel. In comparison, Peter inhabits genteel bars and a sparkling new apartment. However, these changing environments are also used to explore different angles of existence, contrasting a freer, wilder glimpse of life, with a civilised, gilded cage. This highlights the difficulties presented to women in the era, where freedom was synonymous with uncertainty but marriage presented problems of its own.

This novel's publication coincided with the rise of the women's movement in North America. The Edible Woman is described by Atwood as "protofeminist" because it was written in thus; it anticipated second-wave feminism.

### Conclusion

The conclusion of feminism isn't a final endpoint but an ongoing journey towards full gender equality, challenging systemic oppression for everyone, not just women, by dismantling patriarchal norms, ensuring equal opportunities in education/work, securing bodily autonomy (like reproductive rights), and redefining gender roles to create a truly just world free from discrimination and objectification, extending its impact across all aspects of life and culture.

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