

The Conventional Route of Femininity: An Analysis of Gender Roles in Little Women By Louisa May Alcott and Fasting By Anita Desai.

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of
Bachelor of Arts degree in English Literature

by

JERIYA. J (40010009)



DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

SATHYABAMA

INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

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This is to certify that this Project Report is the bonafide work of **JERIYA.J (40010009)** who carried out the project entitled **"The Conventional Route of Femininity: An Analysis of Gender Roles in Little Women By Louisa May Alcott and Fasting By Anita Desai"** under my supervision from January 2023 to May 2023.

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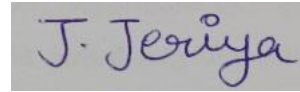
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DECLARATION

I am **Jeriya. J**, hereby declare that the project report entitled “**The Conventional Route of Femininity: An Analysis of Gender Roles in Little Women By Louisa May Alcott and Fasting By Anita Desai**” done by me, under the guidance of **Dr. Sowmiya L. M. M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D.** at **SATHYABAMA INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY** is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the award of **Master of Arts degree in English Literature**.

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DATE: 05.05.2023

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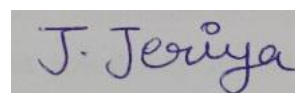
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Jeriya.J

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Study

The world is around 4.543 billion years old, during a dramatic climate change that occurred 3,00,000 years ago the first modern humans evolved from homo sapiens in Africa. Like the other early humans, they were hunter-gatherers surviving alongside nature, as the system they were living in has never been decided based on their comfort, it was always decided to co-op with nature itself. Within the past 12,000 years, our species began to produce food and change our surroundings. A bit away from nature's terms, humans eventually found they could control the growth and the breeding of certain plants and animals. That was the first sense of control over nature for any species on Earth, this discovery led to farming and herding animals, the activities that transformed Earth's natural landscapes.

Lewis Henry Morgan, the author of *Ancient Society* summarizes this transformation into three main stages, 1. *Savagery* – the period in which man's appropriation of products in their natural state predominates; the products of human art are chiefly instruments that assist this appropriation. In simple terms, humans were eating the natural food resources of the forest along with hunting, the only unnatural thing they had was weapons they used for hunting or any sort of instruments they used to acquire food. 2. *Barbarism* – the period during which man learns to breed domestic animals and to practice agriculture and acquires methods of increasing the supply of natural products through human activity. 3. *Civilization* – the period in which man learns a more advanced application of work to the products of nature, the period of industry and art. In the eyes of both *Lewis Henry Morgan* and *Friedrich Engels*, "savagery" and "barbarism" were respectful and honorific, not negative as the power and control were over material resources rather than people.

Barbarism then later civilization first occurred locally, then it spread globally, as humans invested more time in producing food, they settled down into places as opposed to the old times when our species moved from place to place depending on the seasons, food, and water resources in the forest. It all began as a small community, a group of humans like clans, they settled in a place and decided to live there, later came villages which became towns, and the towns became the now- called cities. As opposed to less food supply in old times, with more food production, the human population began to increase dramatically. Our species had been so successful that it outran every other species and has created a turning point in the history of life on Earth. But nature has a balance to it, any modern changes that begin can only come with furthermore chain of changes and things will eventually get more complicated over time which will impact the management of the community.

Every species that ever lived had a system of life, a system that is aligned and controlled predominantly by the events of nature rather than by any species itself. But the evolution of modern humans has opened the opportunity to control the system and that resulted in a lot of changes in the system over different times. The birth of diversity, culture, practices, virtues, spirituality, and gender roles came into play across our globe and many new systems came into action, multiplied into a variety of new systems in society.

1.2 Matriarchy

Matriarchy is a social system where society is governed and controlled by women. Matriarchy centers on the principle of mother rule, where mothers or females stand right up in the power structure. A school of thought believes human society was originally matriarchal. In relation to the matriarchal system co- existed Matrilineality. Matrilineality is the tracing of kinship through the female line. The social system in which each person is identified with their mother's lineage and involves the inheritance of property and titles. A matriline is a line of descent from a female ancestor to a descendant who are mothers, and can be termed as, a "mother line". *Lewis Henry Morgan* in his book *Ancient Society*, describes the major stages of human development in which he agrees with the work that the first domestic

institution in human history was the matrilineal clan. This ancient matrilineal descent pattern contrasts with the currently more popular pattern of patrilineal descent in which a family name and property are usually tracked through the father's lineage. It is completely unrelatable to believe that the surname system was once based on the mother's lineage as supposed to the father's, that is how long in time we have traveled with a sense of normality towards the patrilineal system. Primitive communism, according to both *Lewis Henry Morgan* and *Friedrich Engels*, matrilineal clan system had women living with their sisters, with an unwritten principle that "my sister's child is my child". In the household, the sisters evenly cared for each other's child, and even had a practice of breastfeeding each other child without any differences. As they lived and worked together, women in these households felt strong bonds of solidarity with one another, empowering them to act against uncooperative males, the husbands of any sister found to be trouble, without any hesitation, upon the order of chief would be asked to pack up his things and retreat to his clan and start a new matrimonial alliance in some other as monogamy was not part of the original system.

1.3 Downfall of Matriarchy

According to *Morgan*, the rise of alienable property disempowered women by triggering a switch to the patrilocal residence and patrilineal descent: It thus reversed the position of the wife and mother in the household, under monogamy she was isolated from her native clans, living in the separate and exclusive house of her husband under his rules. Engels added political impact to all this, describing the "overthrow of mother right" as "the world-historic defeat of the female sex." *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* by *Friedrich Engels*, assigns the origin of patriarchy to the emergence of private property, which has traditionally been controlled by men. In this view, men directed household production and sought to control women to ensure the passing of family property to their own (male) offspring, while women were limited to household labor and producing children. The role reversal came with dominance and strict rules across cultures that enslaved women in various forms, through social norms, political actions, and religious codes. Women have been ripped off of their individuality and were

expected to follow a certain norm to prove themselves as good woman in the society. As a result of these events, women ended up being an object that men own, forced to be in monogamy or else considered ruined. A woman without a man is considered unsafe and women across the globe are stripped of their rights to voice out their opinion. Over time, this phenomenon developed an ideology that getting a man and marrying a man is the true meaning of the life goal of a woman. This in turn has created a devious chain of limitations to true womanhood, Patriarchal romance, the domesticity of women, and patriarchal dependency are terms that describe the downfall of women because of the patriarchal system.

1.4 Patriarchy

Patriarchy, in its wider definition, means the manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in society in general. It implies that “men hold power in all the important institutions of society” and that “women are deprived of access to such power”. However, it does not imply that “women are either totally powerless or totally deprived of rights, influence, and resources” (Lerner 1989:239). Patriarchy is a system of relationships, beliefs, and values embedded in political, social, and economic systems that structure gender inequality between men and women. Attributes that are seen as feminine or womanly are undervalued and considered weak, while attributes that are regarded as masculine or manly are privileged and considered as strong. Patriarchy literally means “the rule of the father”, the first pre-historic evidence of patriarchal structures is pointed to, by some researchers, to be placed deep in the human evolutionary past at the first signs of the sexual division of labor which happened, about 2 million years ago, evidence suggests that most prehistoric societies were relatively egalitarian before that division. Social constructionists argue that gender roles and gender inequity are instruments of power and have become social norms to maintain control over women. Sociologist *Sylvia Walby* has composed six overlapping structures that define patriarchy and that take different forms in different cultures and at different times: 1. *The household: women are more likely to have their labour expropriated by their husbands*

such as through housework and raising children. 2. Paid work: women are likely to be paid less and face exclusion from paid work. 3. The state: women are unlikely to have formal power and representation. 4. Violence: women are more prone to being abused. 5. Sexuality: women's sexuality is more likely to be treated negatively. 6. Culture: representation of women in media, and popular culture is "within a patriarchal or Male gaze". Women became co-dependent as men has all the decision-making power and the money; the domesticity of women has made them unfit for the world to survive outside their homes. As stated by many feminists we do live in a male dominated society, where women are trapped as modest slaves by many deceiving elements implemented in the name of culture, society, and the virtues of true femininity. Over time the true meaning and ideology of a perfect woman turn into the one who marries and lives her life in monogamy fulfilling her socially demanded virtues. Getting a man to live has become the accomplishment that any normal women desire or dream, thus defining the meaning of patriarchal romance. In *Little Women*, Louisa May Alcott writes a guide to middle-class feminine ideology in which she explores how women who lack money empower themselves without violating feminine codes of purity. In *Fasting, feasting*, Anita Desai showcases the typical sufferers of culture and silently accepted patriarchy which is represented through the characters of Uma and Anamika. With this extensive background study, the writer would like to move further with the analysis of the novel to conclude with the result of this study. Patriarchy, in its wider definition, means the manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in society in general. It implies that "men hold power in all the important institutions of society" and that "women are deprived of access to such power". However, it does not imply that "women are either totally powerless or totally deprived of rights, influence, and resources" (Lerner 1989:239). Regarding the existence and origin of patriarchy, traditionalists do believe that men are born to dominate and women to be subordinate. They believe that this hierarchy has always existed and will continue, and like other rules of nature this one too cannot be changed. There are others who challenge these beliefs and say that patriarchy is not natural it is man-made and, therefore, it can be changed. In

this regard, Aristotle propounded similar “theories” and called males active, females passive. For him female was “mutilated male”, someone who does not have a soul. In his view, the biological inferiority of woman makes her inferior also in her capacities, her ability to reason and, therefore, her ability to make decisions. Because man is superior and woman inferior, he is born to rule and she to be ruled. He said “the courage of man is shown in commanding of a woman in obeying” (Learner 1989:8-11). But these theories of male supremacy have been challenged and it has been proved that there is no historical or scientific evidence for such explanations. There are indeed biological differences between men and women but these distinctions do not have to become the basis of a sexual hierarchy in which men are dominant. The analysis of many of these theories enables us to recognise that patriarchy is man-made; historical processes have created it. No single explanation of the origin of patriarchy is accepted by all. Here, I will present only some of the principal theories put forward, and that too, very briefly.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE SURVEY

2.1 Review of literature

In the thesis, *Does "little women" belittle women: Female influence in Louisa May Alcott's "little women"*, Anjali prasad, explores how women without money empower themselves in society and how they gain class status without violating traditional expectations of women. The thesis discusses Louisa May Alcott's representation of class and gender in nineteenth-century America. It asks whether the daughters' expectations for themselves are obtainable given the restrictions society places on them. The study examines the discrepancy between the characters' voices and the author's voice regarding the role of women in society. It elaborates that these voices often contradict one another. The characters are willing to subscribe to a traditional gender role, while the author resists such conformity. Ultimately, however, the author acknowledges that conforming to societal expectations represents the only way women may achieve power in society. The thesis concludes that power may be achieved by women in nineteenth-century America, but only at the expense of personal desire. For women to achieve power during Alcott's era, they were required to conform to norms and make sacrifices that served husband and family more than individual needs. Though the influence achieved by each daughter may appear slight by twentieth century standards, it represents a necessary first step in the march of womanhood.

In the thesis, *The struggle for "family existence" an analysis of little women: a novel by Louisa May Alcott*, Miftahul Jannah, the author, after analyzing the personality of the characters as shown in chapter four, concludes that the main characters' personality of Little Women that are Josephine March, Margaret March, Elizabeth March, Amy March, and Mrs. March indicates some sorts of The Big Five Personality theory, more specifically, two traits of The Big Five that are Conscientiousness and Agreeableness concerning to their struggle for family existence. Related to The Big Five Personality traits, all characters represent their personalities of Agreeableness and

Conscientiousness in particular sides. The Agreeableness mostly categorized by modest, patient, altruistic, considerate, unselfish, helpful, humble, loyal, and cheerful. Likewise, the Conscientiousness mostly categorized by hardworking, ambitious, and persistent. Lastly, in this characters' personality analysis, Josephine and Elizabeth have a close personality in particular side, for example, Jo and Beth quiet unconcern with their appearance the way they dress up and any luxuries. In contrast, Margaret and Amy have the same interest in particular side, whereas they assemble themselves to imagine living in the rich sphere. Compared to their willingness to dream high, Jo and Amy, in contrast to both of their sisters Meg and Beth, have set their goals for themselves that lay outside their domestic sphere. Nevertheless, the fourth sisters take their own responsibilities to help maintaining their family. Jo and Meg choose to work for earning money, while Amy and Beth do their duty in keeping their house and creating happy circumstances. On the other hand, Mrs. March is described as a guidance for the sisters, she is a noble-looking woman, a strong mother, a hard worker, as well as religious woman.

Kaviya. K in her article, *Fasting, feasting as a channel on women as the sufferers and Preservers of culture*, concludes that, the typical sufferers of culture and silently accepted patriarchy are represented through the characters of Uma and Anamika. If Uma shall be excused for her inability to learn and dusky unattractive looks, Anamika was a brilliantly learnt woman with warm and attractive looks and skills. While Uma remained to suffer as a spinster throughout her life just to preserve the custom of obedience to parents, Anamika remained to silently suffer under her in-laws to preserve the culture that would taunt a married woman who left her in-laws' house and for the respect of her family. Altogether, throughout the novel, Mama, Mrs. Patton, Aruna, Mira Masi, Uma, and Anamika are all both the sufferers and preservers of culture, except that they remain to be silent. Anita Desai's novel is a shout-out of all the women who in some point of their life or throughout their life has undergone any of those that the novel spoke about. Through this novel, light is thrown upon these domestic sufferings of women in a light yet loud way.

Dr. Ousephachan. K.V, in his article, *Anita Desai's fasting, feasting in feminist perspective*, states that the novel *Fasting, Feasting* focuses on a sense of deep- rooted pathos over the plight of mankind and particularly women. The novel deals with an overly sensitive story depicting the human values through her characters, namely, Uma, Aruna, Arun, and the Patton family. Anita Desai presents woman as an embodiment of sacrifice, silent suffering, humility, faith, and knowledge in *Fasting, Feasting* from a feminist perspective. She concentrates on the unequal treatment given to women seeking education and alternatives to marriage and motherhood and successfully portrays the predicament of women in the patriarchal society.

2.2 Theoretical framework

2.2.1 Patriarchal theories

According to standard sociological theory, patriarchy is the result of sociological constructions that are passed down from generation to generation. These constructions are most pronounced in societies with traditional cultures and less economic development. Marxist feminists use the terms *patriarchal capitalism* or *capitalist patriarchy* to describe the interactive relationship of capitalism and patriarchy in producing and reproducing the oppression of women. *Shulamite Firestone*, a radical-libertarian feminist, defines patriarchy as a system of oppression of women. Firestone believes that patriarchy is caused by the biological inequalities between women and men. *Freud's* description of the normally neurotic family using the analogy of the story of Oedipus. Those who fall outside the Oedipal triad of mother/father/child are less subject to male authority.

2.2.2 Matriarchal theories

Matriarchy, a social system in which the mother or a female elder has absolute authority over the family group; by extension, one or more women (as in a council) exert a similar level of authority over the community. The theory known as unilineal cultural evolution, now discredited, suggested that human social organization “evolved” through a series of stages: animalistic sexual promiscuity was followed by matriarchy, which was in turn

followed by patriarchy.

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, matriarchy is a "form of social organization in which the mother or oldest female is the head of the family, and descent and relationship are reckoned through the female line; government or rule by a woman or women."

In their works, Johann Jakob Bachofen and Lewis Morgan used such terms and expressions as *mother-right*, *female rule*, *gynecocracy*, and *female authority*. All these terms meant the same: the rule by females.

CHAPTER III

AIM AND SCOPE OF THE PRESENT INVESTIGATION

3.1 Objectives

The aim of the study is to analyze and extract the finding from the novels that are selected – *Little Women* and *Fasting, Feasting*. Through the course of the analysis, the main point of approach to this study should be maintained exclusively to patriarchal theories, as the writer tries to attain information from the subtext of the novel and understand its relevance to the time and interpret the cultural codes. Through the study, the writer explores each character in the narrative of the story, decoding the character's role based on gender, journey, characteristics, and shades exhibited by them. As far as Anita Desai's *Fasting, feasting* is concerned, the novel does not need a magnifying glass to analyze as the novel is quite forward and the writing of the novel is right on point with its story and does not discreet a deep hidden meanings waiting to be discovered behind those writing. But on the other hand, *Little Women* is a prominent novel written by Louis May Alcott and is often considered a novel that is empowering, especially to women, just as the story suggests. But despite all the inspiring tales of how a bunch of little girls survived a time in life all by themselves, the study comes into play to help the writer understand why it was tough for these little women to survive without their father, why the family at first struggled even when having the mother. In short, finding the answer to the above-mentioned thought is the objective of this study.

3.2 Scope

The scope of the study is limited to focusing the entire analysis predominantly from different perspectives of patriarchy theories and since comprises two big novels is a long process; the writer limits the explaining and citation part only to the important key points from both novels. The selected two novels are unsimilar in their outlook, but the patriarchal point of view provides a way to interpret the underlying subtext in both novels concerning femininity in society.

CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Design

To do this analysis, the Qualitative descriptive method is ideal as found in the literature review based on a similar thesis. Qualitative descriptive research generates data that describe the 'who, what, and where of events or experiences' from a subjective perspective. From a philosophical perspective, this approach to research is best aligned with constructionism and critical theories that use interpretative and naturalistic methods. In this study, this method helps the researcher understand the text and subtext in relativity to the characters portrayed in the novel.

4.2 Material of Analysis

As samples for this research, two novels have been selected - Little Women written by Louisa May Alcott, and Fasting, feasting by Anita Desai. Little Women's novel consists of two parts with 47 chapters overall and Fasting, feasting is written into two parts. The character roles, traits, and the narrative that is aligned with the culture and limitations of the time are analyzed to identify connotations and denotations behind these stories in particular relation to patriarchy.

4.3 Data Collection and Analysis Procedure

In this study, the writer uses the novel as the primary resource. To collect the data, the writer conducts this study through several steps, that are:

1. Reading and understanding the story of both the novel with the right context and collecting data from the chapters that exhibit patriarchal codes.
2. Collect relevant data on how each character behaves in a different situation and gather data on patriarchal codes exhibited by the characters.

3. Collect the data that has moments of inspiration and empowerment towards women and by whom & how the empowerment takes part in the story.
4. Various other points of discrimination or oppression seen in the novels are to be recorded for interpretation.
5. Overall, the above-gathered data is analyzed and interpreted using patriarchal theories and codes.

CHAPTER V

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Result

Alcott's *Little Women* and Desai's *Fasting, feasting* is both giant novels and has the potential to be read and interpreted into a large extensive study. But in this thesis due to the limitations, the writer would cite and interpret only the important lines from both novels.

5.1.1 Analysis of *Little Women*

Alcott's story begins with the four March girls - Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy sitting in their living room, ranting about their poverty. Initially, the girls discuss about what they will each buy themselves to brighten their Christmas. Soon, however, they change their minds and instead of buying presents for themselves, they decide to buy presents for their mother, Marmee. Marmee comes home with a letter from Mr. March, the girls' father, who is serving as a Union chaplain in the Civil War. The letter inspires the girls to bear their burdens more cheerfully and not to complain about their poverty.

On Christmas morning, the girls wake up to find books, probable copies of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, under their pillows. Later that day, Marmee encourages them to give away their breakfast to a poor family. In turn, their elderly neighbor, Mr. Laurence, whom the girls have never met, rewards their charitable activities by sending over a feast. Soon, Meg and Jo are invited to attend a New Year's Party at the home of Meg's wealthy friend, Sally Gardiner. At the party, Jo meets Laurie, the boy who lives with Mr. Laurence. While dancing, Meg sprains her ankle and Laurie escorts the two sisters' home. The Marches regret having to return to their daily routine after the holiday festivities. Jo visits Laurie when he is sick, and meets his grandfather, Mr. Laurence. She bluntly insults a painting of Mr. Laurence in front of the man himself. Luckily, Laurie's grandfather admires Jo's spunk, and they become friends.

Soon, Mr. Laurence meets all the sisters, and Beth becomes his special favourite. Mr. Laurence gives her his deceased granddaughter's piano. During the chapters further, the girls have various adventures. Amy is caught trading limes at school, and the teacher hits her as punishment. As a result, Mrs. March withdraws her daughter from school. Jo refuses to let Amy go with her to the theatre. In retaliation, Amy burns Jo's manuscript, and Jo nearly lets Amy drown while ice-skating. Pretty Meg attends her friend Annie Moffatt's party and after allowing the other girls to dress her up in high style, learns that appearances are not everything. While at the party, she hears that people think she intends to marry Laurie for his money.

That year, the Marches form the Pickwick Club, in which they write a family newspaper. In the spring, Jo smuggles Laurie into one of the club meetings, and he becomes a member, presenting his new circle with a post-box. At the beginning of June, the Marches decide to neglect their housework. At the end of a lazy week, Marmee takes a day off too. The girls spoil a dinner, but everyone ends up laughing over it. One day, Laurie has English friends over, and the Marches go on a picnic with them. Later in the story, Jo gets a story published for the first time.

One dark day, the family receives a telegram saying that Mr. March is sick in the hospital in Washington, D.C. Marmee goes to tend to him, and Jo sells her hair to help finance the trip. Chaos ensues in Marmee's wake, for the girls neglect their chores again. Only Beth goes to visit the Hummels, and after one of her visits, she contracts scarlet fever from the Hummel baby. Beth tries to hold on to life until Marmee returns. Meanwhile, Amy spends time at Aunt March's house to escape the disease. Beth recovers, though not completely, and Mr. Brooke, Laurie's tutor, falls in love with Meg. Mr. Brooke and Meg are engaged by the end of Part One.

Three years pass before Part Two begins. Mr. March is home from the war, and Laurie is nearly done with school. Soon, Meg marries and moves into a new home with Mr. Brooke. One day, Amy decides to make lunch for her art school classmates, but poor weather ruins the festivities. Jo gets a novel

published, but she must cut it down to please her publishers. Meanwhile, Meg struggles with the duties of keeping house, and she soon gives birth to twins, Demi, and Daisy. Amy gets to go to Paris instead of Jo, who counted on the trip because their Aunt Carroll prefers Amy's ladylike behaviour as a companion.

Jo begins to think that Beth loves Laurie. To escape Laurie's affection for her, Jo moves to New York to give Beth a chance to win his affection. There Jo meets Professor Bhaer, a poor German language instructor. Professor Bhaer discourages Jo from writing sensationalist stories, and she takes his advice and finds a simpler writing style. When Jo returns home, Laurie proposes to her, but she turns him down. Beth soon dies.

Amy and Laurie reunite in France, and they fall in love. They marry and return home. Jo begins to hope that Professor Bhaer will come for her. He does, and they marry a year later. Amy and Laurie have a daughter named Beth, who is sickly. Jo inherits Plumfield, Aunt March's house, and decides to turn it into a boarding school for boys. The novel ends with the family happily gathered, each sister thankful for her blessings and for each other.

In the analysis of all the chapters, one of the key factors that are found in relativity to patriarchy is the attributes of a true woman, the traces are found here and there in bits and pieces. Some of the traces that showcases that those ideologies existed both in Alcott's time and the times of little women are Jo being considered rather tomboyish than woman, there are lines where even her little sister Amy advises her to mind tone.

"...If you mean libel, I'd say so, and not talk about labels, as if Papa was a pickle bottle," advised Jo, laughing... I know what I mean, and you need not be satirical about it. It is proper to use good words, and improve your vocabulary," returned Amy, with dignity..."

In another instance, where Jo is been longing to go on a trip to Paris, her aunt Carol prefers Amy as a companion stating Amy is more ladylike. Further into the story it is seen that Marmee endorses domestic ideology as a primary

means of empowerment. This ideology defines a woman's function as making the home a comfortable place for family. Ironically, Meg gets tired of household work in the second part of the novel after her marriage to the professor. According to Marmee, if a woman makes her private sphere pleasant, she may enjoy subtle influence over her male counterpart. Marmee teaches her daughters attributes of ideal womanhood within this domestic ideology attributes which she purports are tactics for empowerment in a male-dominated world. Although Marmee was not fully empowered and a feminist, she did exhibit her experience that is not all tainted by patriarchy. In a most important life lesson to her daughter, Marmee empowers them not to hold patriarchal romance, getting a good man with good money and settling down should not be an ideal thing for a women's life and it should not be the purpose of life or even a sense of achievement in life.

She admits to Meg and Jo that marriage represents the ideal goal of all women. "To be loved and chosen by a good man is the best and sweetest thing which can happen to a woman" (Alcott 92). But Marmee cautions her daughters not to marry only for financial security.

"Money is a needful and precious thing and when well used, a noble thing but I never want you to think it is the first or only prize to strive for. I would rather see you poor men's wives, if you were happy, beloved, and contented than queens on thrones, without self-respect and peace. Better be happy old maids than unhappy wives, or unmaidenly girls, running about to find husbands."

This is probably the sign of the first empowerment that these little women got, and all these little women went on to live their individual life, gathering power from within, and explored their lives to their best, which was not quite common in Alcott's era. Together, these women showcase an inspiring story. Although, in the absence of patriarchal romance, on the downfall the other virtues of femininity were still the same with the little women even though the rest of the women got married to their wishful men irrespective of their money, Jo was altogether different, right from the beginning of the story. But

Jo was the real empowered woman in the novel, where he shows lots of radical signs as supposed to the time's ideologies, be it wanting a career as a writer and becoming one, being outspoken in contradiction to other women who were not opinionated nor loud, the other such signs of her outspoken behaviors is shown when she bluntly dislikes the painting of Mr. Laurence. She turns down Laurie's proposal for her individuality. And it would not be fair to not mention how she marries a man who was not the ideal man any woman would wish to marry at the time as he was poor. The perk of inspiring journey is that when she inherited aunt march's house, she decides to turn it into a boarding school for boys, Jo on a whole exhibited, Individuality, passion, Compassion, and the right new attributes to define womanhood.

5.1.2 Analysis on *Fasting and Feasting*

Fasting, Feasting, like the name suggests, is a novel of two halves. The first is the history of a small middle-class family in India. The father of the family was, before he retired, a successful private practice lawyer. The mother a traditional housewife from a merchant family. The couple are inseparable. Not only do they spend all of their free time together, but they are one in all of their opinions and values, presenting such a formidable, united front that their children call them by the collective name 'Mama papa'. The only thing they might disagree on is what to have for dinner.

The couple had two daughters: Uma, the eldest and Aruna the younger. But when Aruna was entering puberty and Uma practically a grown woman, an unexpected pregnancy delivered the much-desired son who they named Arun. Uma, a sweet, enthusiastic young woman, though clumsy and a poor student is pulled out of high school to help in the house and with the baby. Her protests are no use against her traditionalist parents who do not see the point in continuing education for a girl who is failing, especially when there is a son to put their efforts towards.

Mama, papa, have little desire for socialising and their children's experience with friends and family outside of their house is marriage. There is Mira-Masi, a distant relative who has turned to religion since the death of her husband.

Constantly travelling and on pilgrimage, her visits bring news and gossip about family and fill Uma with dreams of escape. Ramu, a cousin of Uma, is considered a wastrel. His vices are not known but are suspected to include alcohol and drugs. His visits promise outrageous fun but usually deliver indulgency spoiled with his unreliability.

Then there is Anamika, Ramu's sister. Anamika is beautiful, with lady-like manners and is a high-achieving student. If she knows how others long for her attention, how mothers hate that their daughters cannot compete with her, she shows no sign of it but remains cool, graceful, accepting. Anamika wins a scholarship to Oxford but her parents, also very traditional, give no thought to her attending. Instead, her scholarship is just another qualification towards finding her the most eligible husband.

As they grow up, the contrast of Uma, Aruna and Anamika's experiences with suitors and marriage become a focus of the story. But Uma, thirsting for freedom and fulfilment against the very unfair hand she has been dealt is the centre.

“... A career. Leaving home. Living alone. These troubling, secret possibilities now entered Uma's mind – as Mama would have pointed out had she known – whenever Uma was idle. They were like seeds dropped on the stony arid land that Uma inhabited. Sometimes, miraculously, they sprouted forth the idea, run away, escape. But Uma could not visualise escape in the form of a career. What was a career? She had no idea...”

The second half of *Fasting, Feasting* occurs years later when Arun is a university student in America. The 'privileges' Arun has been showered with at the expense of his sisters have not delivered happiness. As a boy he was made to focus on his studies at his private school. After school, he spends hours with private tutors. Though his father occasionally encourages him to have some fun as well, something he never did with his daughters, Arun is exhausted by the end of the day and prefers to go to his room and read comics alone.

Travelling to America as a student bursts Arun's bubble of isolation and exposes his crippling shyness and awkwardness. Having to live with a roommate, being approached for comradery by other Indian students, is too much for Arun to handle. Just when he feels he has found the minimum solutions to survive by, he realises he has nowhere to live over the summer break. To his horror, a letter from his father arrives telling him he has arranged, by very loose connections, for Arun to stay with an American family, the Patton's.

To say the young man has been thrown into the culture clash deep-end would be an understatement. His vegetarianism is incomprehensible to the Patton's and, though Mrs Patton tries to be understanding and accommodating, her idea of vegetarianism is to eat raw lettuce, tomatoes, and carrots. But even if Arun could overcome his paralysing shyness, he has no knowledge of cooking any Indian food, to improve his situation or the Patton's ignorance. A part of him experiences a need for inclusion for the first time, especially when he sees father and son watching sport together on TV. But as he learns more of this microcosm of American family life, it only increases his confusion.

As the title suggests, the novel is into two halves, with food being a key difference. The first half, the story of the family in India, is over two-thirds of the novel and food does not seem to feature heavily. The second half of the immigrant Arun in America is much smaller, and his observances of food is a strong part. As well as his difficulty in finding suitable food for himself, both on campus and within the Patton home, Arun witnesses how access to an abundance of food changes the family and hence society.

The novel *Fasting, Feasting* found be an unfoolish present to its reader, where the author explains a core of problem in the simplest way possible. The novel depicts how women in society are either following or being forced to follow the ideal and true attributes of women. The novel shows how the mother character does not voice out against her husband, in any event, whether is right or wrong, the mother characters just stand and gets all the

scolding from her husband. Through the eyes of Uma, Desai showcases how values of empowerment vary from gender. Although, Uma wanted to pursue her studies, she rejected those chances to study further right after the birth of her baby brother Arun. Desai here depicts the true situation of the Indian society, where patrilineal is evident. After the convergence of patrilineal ideas into society, women were traditionally treated equal to an object despite how much ever love the parents show because they raise the women with the saying, “anyhow she is going to go somewhere else after marriage” this literally states that women usually get married and settle elsewhere and only the boys were considered true descendents to all the riches. This results in women being treated like an occasional being that is one day going to be gone and boys are the one who will stay and take care of the parents when they are old.

In another instance, even when Anamika gets a scholar, she was not encouraged or allowed to pursue her studies. Instead, she was married to a well-off man, which horrifically resulted in her being burned alive by her husband. Despite being a good woman following all the virtues of womanhood, she ended up dead. This shows the sheer dominance of man over women in the marriage under the patriarchal system. This part of the story is Desai’s way of saying to the society, “look what have you done”, due to the lack of empowerment of women, uplifting and supporting male dominance this is what you have achieved.

In the other portrayal, Desai narrates from the perspective of Arun in America, where he notices the similarity between two nations by one core system called patriarchy. When he witnessed the Mr. Pattons yelling at Mrs. Pattons he feels a flash of similarity between his parents and the Pattons.

5.2 Discussion

5.2.1 *Little women*

Little women and Fasting, feasting are two novels that have both similarity and contradictions to its theme and narratives. Little women on the prime portrays an inspiring story of how a bunch of young girls survive through a lot of struggles, empowering themselves from within during a tough time in the past. Based on Marmee's advice, all the girls embark on individual journey and succeeds on the own paths, these women were in indeed empowered especially for that time in history but there were still lots to be concerned in the empowering part, although Jo breaks all the barrier and truly has an inspiring journey, on the downside as a whole it actually reveals how patriarchy as system held all these women for ages, left to struggle if they were to live without a man. On the sub text, the novel exhibits the lack of freedom and options to women as the time's normality was against surviving without a man and if taken it was considered as tough life for a woman or even impossible.

5.2.2 *Fasting and Feasting*

The second novel in the analysis, Fasting, feasting is a story narrated by the protagonist Uma, who find it ridicules on how gender roles vary drastically with no equality and how dominance on women is quite common and normal in action. Women were forced or demanded to follow the virtues of femininity or else considered ruined. This novel is direct and simple which portrays the impact of patriarchy system on the society and how women are being dominated by men as a cause to this whole social construct.

Overall, this analysis of two novels exhibits how patriarchy as a system left the women characters struggling for their family existence, maintaining their life on the tip trying to contribute to their femininity. Dependency in various aspects and lack of decision-making power to streamline their own lives are seen in both denotated and connotated ways through the course of both the stories.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

6.1 Summary

6.1.1 *Little women*

The novel *little women* were not intended to portray patriarchy as the main subject, instead it is a simple story about few inspiring women surviving during a hard time and their rose to self-empowerment, written in the backdrop of a zeitgeist or a time in culture. The novel portrays how the women characters in the novel during Alcott's era rose to their individual brilliance all on their own. The key character that sparked the fire for this brilliance is Marmee aka Josephine March, the mother of *little women*, Alcott did not portray her to be a modern-day feminist who independent and rebellious instead she was a woman in her empirical understanding of the world moved a little away from a traditional woman and tried to educate her daughters a bit of practical solution and perspective life. She might have not tried them on how to make a career for them, but she taught them what to seek in a man and be a kind fine woman. She tried them to do house works, she encouraged them to help the poor, she gave them courage and opportunity to lead their life on their own term with their individuality as a strong female in the world. The daughters too were not short on their achievement, they all rose up to be fine women doing what they want in life, although not all of them were serious feminist but they lived by a term which was a little equal for women than the rest of the world during that part of time in history. On special mention, Jo was a phenomenal daughter of Josephine, she was a woman that was inspiring, strong and talent, she lived her life has the change that was ought to come in the male dominated world, she was a woman who did not bend her moral to fit to the world, rather in a way, she made the world to adapt to her. Overall, *little women* is definitely an inspiring, sentimental, heartfelt novel. The only downside to this novel, is not the novel itself but the social system that surrounds it, in simple word, Patriarchy.

6.1.2 Fasting and Feasting

Anita Desai was born on 24 June 1937 in Mussoorie, India. She got educated at Delhi University. Anita Desai belongs to the post-independence era. She was one of the prominent figures in Indian literature. Desai was mostly influenced by her German mother. Whom she describes as “a European core in her which protested against certain Indian things, which always maintained its independence and its separateness’ Most of her fiction is concerned with the theme of oppression of women, alienation, affect in marriage, family relationships and contradiction, a quest for women identity(identity crisis), some of her notable works . The clear light of day 1980 deals with the role of the mother in modern society. Fire on the mountain 1978 this novel portrays a materialistic women’s perspective of life which leads to miscommunication. Some of her achievements are the 2014 Padma Bhushan 2007 sahitya academic 2003 Benson Medal of Royal Society of Literature 2000Alberto Moravia Prize for Literature (Italy) 1999 Booker Prize for Fiction (shortlist) 1993Neil Gunn Prize 1984 Booker Prize for Fiction (shortlist) 1983 Guardian Children's Fiction Prize 1980 Booker Prize for Fiction (shortlist) 1978 National Academy of Letters Award 1978 Winifred Holtby Memorial Prize. Anita Desai’s Fasting, Feasting is a novel that tells the tale of a traditional middle-class Indian family and the varying fates of their children. The book is written in two parts. In the first part we see Uma, the eldest daughter and the circumstances that leads to her current imprisoned state while the second half focuses on Arun, the youngest son, who later emigrate to the west, which now feels more terrible than his own family. Anita Desai does an incredible job at portraying the misery and problems of women in an inherently patriarchal Indian family. The women of the family are forced into domestic responsibilities at a young age and are soon reduced into a mere instrument of marriage, which contrasts with how the sons are treated as the herald of the family and their upbringing becomes the sole aim of the parents. Uma's story felt more captivating to me, and it took me some time to develop empathy for Arun. The ending of the book also felt underwhelming. Anita Desai is outright with her criticism on how women are still considered as an object to a man, which they can trade or sell to another man. She comments on the state of unmarried women and

how the society rejects their own existence. This story is essentially the author's declaration on how a woman is also a being, very much capable of finding her own salvation.

6.2 Conclusion

6.2.1 *Little women*

The main idea, or message, of *Little Women* is that family is important in life and that we can handle any problem or tragedy with the support of family. There is also a message portrayed through the character of Jo, that women can be competent, successful, and still be feminine and have a family. Generations of readers young and old, male, and female, have fallen in love with the March sisters, the talented author-to-be and tomboy Jo, tragically frail Beth, pretty Meg, and romantically spoiled Amy, empowered by their mother Josephine March, united by their love to each other and their struggles to survive in New England during the Civil War when their father was away.

If looked up from a different perspective on why did these women struggle when there was no man in the house despite women mastering various life skills, why weren't they ready to face the world outside home all on their own like men do, why earning for family was mastered only by men, where doing household chores and being domesticated inside home was for women, this questions puts a perspective on how in a devious way patriarchy has always existed, in the name of culture and morale over different times.

On the contrary to *little women*, *Fasting, feasting* is a tox screen that is plain to its truth, tried to state how patriarchy existed, through the narration of Uma, on how ridicules she felt about different incidents and with the way many patriarchal traits and gender discriminations co-existing as part of normality in our social system. Uma and Arun symbolize reflection of family's enforcements. They both was not able to live the life they wanted. Having an unspoken mother and self-centered father made them unhappy. Many characters in the novel becomes victim of judgements and perspectives. We clearly can see characters like Arun or Uma who lives with burden of family traditions and with ordinance of family ends up unhappy. On the other hand,

characters like Mari-Masi who lives without boundaries despite being marked as black sheep lives comfortably and has the freedom of choice.

6.2.2 *Fasting and Feasting*

The portrayal of how Anamika has a perfect women based on social standards do face sufferings as a woman, Desai's show on two sides to the women standards with Uma and Anamika and how both the women face pain no matter what. This brings up a question if women will ever be enough for the man's world? How more should you expect from a woman, for them to simply protect their virtues of a true women they are expected to live under a box for the most of their life.

We today live in a time beyond little women and Fasting, Feasting, if looked around do we see equality, yes, to a certain extent, but marginally still weak. Patriarchy is the way of things even today in many rural, suburban, and urban places, The present generation has somewhat knowledge on feminism and equality although its like an unbaked bun. The truth is radical feminist exist in the world more than real good feminist, in the times of influence anybody with an opinion and good communication skills could streamline many people's mind in both good and bad ways. If we ought to talk about the good and bad levels of influence around, that alone could require a new thesis, but as for as the women empowerment is concerned, specially to lots of uneducated women and vast number of women in rural who are under the influence patriarchy and believe them to be the right way needs to know that they could all do more than just household things. Although its vague, the simple remedy to this chronic condition created by patriarchy, is to show the bird that there is a wide blue sky beyond this man-made cage and that is where you originally belong. The empowerment of women is already in process, thanks to the good part of social media, but as told, it is a process, and it will continuous, and we are to hope that someday some sense of equality among the men and women is achieved if not for perfection at least to a better threshold than every past and see the world become a better place for all of us.

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