

Resurgence and Reflections: A Feministic Reading of Elena Ferrate's The Days of Abandonment, The Lost Daughter and the Story of the Lost Child.

Swathy Krishna CB, Meghana AK, Varsha K

Abstract: Elena Ferrante, the Italian novelist has written a fair number of novels which emphasises her treatment of feminism. Ferrante belongs to an age where her generation had experienced feminism. The paper speaks about her governance of feminism through Ferrante's various characters such as Olga, from *The Days of Abandonment*, Leda from *The Lost Daughter*, Elena and Lila from *The Story of the Lost Child* etc. Elena's women are the ones who look forward for more clarity at the cost of other values considered fundamental to friendship in traditional terms and feminist norms. In most of her novels, we can find the writer herself becoming the central figure, who partially manifests the knitting of Ferrante's sisterhood with her successful reception of tetralogy: Neapolitan novels which include her four major novels; *The Brilliant Friend*, *The Story of a New Name*, *Those Who Leave and Those Who Stay* and *The Story of the Lost Child*.

Keywords: Feminism, Neapolitan novels, Women, Male chauvinism, Identity Crisis.

I. INTRODUCTION

Elena Ferrante one of the major Italian novelists has taken up her life along with the process of finding new norms to her carrier. Ferrante's childhood experiences and her method of thinking has influenced her novels so far. The enigma the author consults in her works is the reflections of her own life. The author in most of her works has pivoted the mental and physical distress of women in all stages of her life. The Neapolitan novels introduced by Elena Ferrante have gazed at the lights of mental trauma in being alienated, abandoned or dominated by male. The tone of feminism that contemplates in Ferrante's works can be considered as a reflection of author's life itself. The psychological frailty that recur throughout her life has become the ground for her Neapolitan novel series. Ferrante's has always been private about her carrier as well as her life. She never attempts face to face interviews whereas promotes letters. Anonymity is Ferrante's token of success as she believes. Her works are bold which chronicles the inner conflicts of intelligent women, who confront themselves the memory of crude violence and misogyny of their youth. Her novels fledged by much surprising events, but lacks the grip of reality. Ferrante introduces them with a lapse of Neapolitan dialects and induce obscenities, dragging into a hallucinatory quest which heals the bitter emotions of the past.

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Swathy Krishna C B, X Semester, Integrated MA English Student
Department of English and Languages Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham
Kochi Campus, India

Meghana A K, X Semester, Integrated MA English Student
Department of English and Languages Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham
Kochi Campus, India

Varsha K, Assistant Professor Department of English and Languages
Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham Kochi Campus, India

She says no character can escape her past, as her tagline denotes "No self can be left behind." Her writings have a powerful intimacy that points sharp on to the readers, making them reflect through their own minds. Ferrante's works has now become sensational, degrading the male chauvinistic novels. The forte of her works marks its uniqueness in juxtaposition between portraying matter of facts and metaphor, between hyper realism and hallucinatory distortion. Ferrante not only lime lights female abandonment but also emphasises the techniques of how abandonment might disconcert a woman who has categorised herself to be strong and looks down on vulnerability. Ferrante's works are super authentic that the reader gets confused by her character representation, which seem to us as Ferrante herself, but what the reader know are just her sentences, her line of imagination and the pattern of her mind. In a way Ferrante herself is a character who puts herself out of sight and reveals her through her novels. Ferrante's novels seem weary in reading as it contains no humour but carries intensity. As we read Ferrante's novels, we may find them more self-protective, intense and violently personal. She has consulted to model her novels to be excitingly unique that they seem like a roller coaster of incidents, they include case histories, full of flaming rage, lapse, failure and tenuous psychic success. Each of Ferrante's novels represents women as a major character either as a narrator or a protagonist. All of Ferrante's women are self-empowered and are the victims of struggles and tolerances from their childhood to youth, later they are portrayed as the monuments of self-defence and empowerment.

II. OBJECTIVES

The prime objective of the research is to study and understand the treatment of feminism in Ferrante's novels and to analyse the state of women in the twentieth century Italy. It also looks into identifying Ferrante's techniques use in portraying her female characters and also in understanding the other major and minor characters in the novels chosen. The paper also tries to unravel the imposed alimationation of women who suffocates to push her life in a male dominated patriarchal society. The study also intends to prove how the author, along with her other characters manage to regain her own psychological balance as well as to identify herself with the mental and physical restrains of her fellow beings.

III. HYPOTHESIS

Elena Ferrante's treatment of feminism is strictly



evident in the opted novels; *The Days of Abandonment*, *The Lost Daughter* and *The Story of a Lost Child*. The study of feminism and the balancing of mental illness parallels in three of these novels. All her works are partly autobiographical in nature.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Ferrante's novels can be doubtlessly analysed on the basis of feminine psycho analytic perspective where the author herself brings in the references of both feminism and psycho analysis through the vague representation of herself. The novelist introduces a partly autobiographical tone to her novels which fruitfully throws light on the post-modern feminine psycho analytic criteria.

V. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The Days of Abandonment is one of Ferrante's most noticed feminist novels which dwell with a woman's headlong descent into her lack of sense after the immediate after-shock of marital betrayal, and the psychic fury it unleashes. In her *The Days of Abandonment*, Olga, the protagonist breaks down after the departure of her husband, whom she relied fully which results in a total crisis of self which manifests as physical disease and disorder. Olga thinks, "now at thirty-eight, I was reduced to nothing. I couldn't act as I thought I should. No work, no husband, numbed blunted" (56TDA). Elena Ferrante has portrayed Olga as an ordinary woman who may experience the same kind of dispute in being abandoned by her only dearest and trusted someone. Olga has two young children, Ilaria and Gianni. Olga gets a psychic breakdown after her husband suddenly planned to disappear from life that she couldn't handle the two young children all by her. Ferrante introduces an incident where Olga collapses completely to bring about a comeback in her thought process. Olga happens to fall apart when her son Gianni gets sick, she gets trapped inside a room with her sick son, and her dog foaming at the mouth. This situation pulls her emotionally down and physically unstable. She gets a new glimpse of light where she gets out of the mental infection. Ferrante's treatment of psychology has backboneed the story into a realistic and emotional one. The introduction of Neapolitan dialects not only confuses the reader but also the character. This clearly directs the reader to introduce Elena Ferrante as a feminist who not only finds interest in female abandonment but also shows interest in the way abandonment might disconcert a woman who has categorised herself as strong and looks down on vulnerability. Olga finds herself as intrepid as she discovers the characters in a novel that she reads as "sentimental fools". Olga wanted to be a different woman, she wanted to write different stories about women, a woman with invincible words where she denies to promote the manuals of abandoned women. The inner conflicts that a woman experience while studying about another woman is portrayed so well that Ferrante's undivided attention to attain the goal of a successful woman gazes through this idea. But when Olga happens to witness the relationship Mario and Carla, her sexual jealousy almost unravels her. In such a situation Olga loses her state of mind and slightly travels away from her coherent sense of self, whereas she

still remains recognisable to the readers. In the midst of her hysterical thinking, she arrives at the bitter truths of violence in life, the messiness of domesticity, the proximity of sexuality or sexual jealousy and the duplicity of female identity, civilised into responsible motherhood or daughterhood but still wild at heart. This shows the socialised self in Ferrante's world which is dragged into traumas and messy desire to become vulgar reality. Sometimes this makes her works mythical in nature also reminiscent. Olga being revengeful to Mario, thinks herself as the "Queen of spades, the wasp that stings, the dark serpent", the invulnerable animal" (98TDA). She again feels disturbed when her children irritate her. Here in this novel we can visualise Olga as rationally feeble and physically unrestrained. Leda, the narrator of *The Lost Daughter* is also an astonishing character like Olga that Ferrante has created. Leda is forty-seven-year-old academic who has to manage both motherhood and professional advancement. Like Olga, Leda also leads the life of a single and courageous woman who was no longer married to her husband in Toronto with whom both her daughters Bianca and Marta have gone to live. Leda as a mother is fully engaged with the thoughts of her daughters which are often ambivalent and sharply hostile. Leda finds it difficult to experience the detachment of her family and is conducting a terrible thought process. Here Leda's emotions ride like a roller coaster where she happens to think about Bianca's birth and the struggles she had during the time. Ferrante represents Leda as a disappointed mother who mourns about the birth of her child. Bianca who was an unexpected baby seems to be a burden to Leda during her birth. "I had wanted Bianca; one wants a child with an animal opacity reinforced by popular beliefs. She had arrived immediately, I was twenty-three, her father and I were right in the midst of difficult struggle to keep jobs at university. He made it, I didn't. A woman's body does a thousand different things, toils, runs, studies, fantasizes, invents, wearies, and meanwhile the breast enlarge, the lips of the sex swell, the flesh throbs with a round life that is yours, your life, and yet pushes elsewhere, draws away from you although it inhabits your belly, joyful and weighty, felt as a greedy impulse and yet repellent, like an insect's poison injected into a vein." (34TLD) Ferrante's characters dwell with the pain of detachment and attachment. Leda here is being experimented with aching realities of fictitious relationships. Leda has a feeling that her daughters are of her own flesh but stays emotionally alien to her. This makes her to have a complicated alteration of sympathy and antipathy for her daughters. Leda develops a feeling of break down when she attempts to think about her stressful youth. She lost the beauty of all her youthful ages, that she had to welcome motherhood during her early twenties. Here goes the life of a woman chained to maternity, grandmother, daughter, which is a product of single flesh. Leda wanted to pull her daughter aside but they made sure to gaze her at once. Bianca and Marta became more adhesive to the outside colours which seemed new to them; new bodies new intelligence etc. Everything made them pull out of the domestic inconveniences where they forget to balance the real stabilities of life. Leda



alienated from everything finds her own techniques to love the time that she had for herself. Leda finally creates her own space to build up a healthier and strong language which is true to herself. Ferrante's treatment of a woman finding her own self rather than struggling for the family becomes a new standard of womanhood. But as evident in the novel that the overlapping of responsibilities breaks the character to find a new wisdom moulds her into a better woman. Ferrante brings an idea of flying over the inabilities where a woman completes herself by finding methods to fix her drawbacks rising up from a stage of nothingness to a state of completion. Ferrante's women are those who are totally thrown away into darkness and depression, who brings back themselves all the powers gained from alienation and detachment. The rage that women create from her breakdown is completely revengeful and is out of psychic disabilities. It is a woman's mental trauma that brings her back into stable and peaceful life. Ferrante frequently points out the chauvinist behaviours of a man which pulls down the emotional quotient of a woman. Ferrante presents her principal women characters in her tetralogy: The Neapolitan novels. The four-volume series is set in Naples where Elena Ferrante herself belongs to. Lila and Lenu the two major characters of the Neapolitan series provide a very different face to the feminine characters of Elena Ferrante. The story takes off from their childhood leading to the adulthood. Lila and Lenu seem to be Ferrante's powerful women characters that the reader witnesses the continuous physical and psychological growth of both these characters. Lila is represented as a more outrageous and rebellious woman were as Lenu as we see is fond of clinging to Lila. The backbone of the novel thematically concludes the lost childhood of the innocent friends who later came to develop a filthy jealousy among them. Ferrante has given a more powerful and intelligent characteristic to Lila who seems to be more courageous and braver. Lenu is the direct presentation of the author herself who is mentally inclined to Lila. The more feminist perspectives of the novel open when Ferrante dig deep into the life of married girls who are being tortured by their men, who once they become husbands, take to beating them. The picture of Naples is something that shows young girls watching their mothers becoming desexualised, which in turn happens to them. Ferrante in the novel marks a note of an empowered woman in Lila but when it comes to Lenu, she totally inclined upon her friend with an unexpected amount of jealousy and selfishness. The very unique character of Lila makes Elena more envious. Elena faces difficulties in stabilising motherhood with her writing career. Lila, on the other hand, albeit being studious and brilliant, was soon sent to be married and thus represents yet another character loss of all her dreams and wishes. Ferrante points out the difficulties of being a woman through both Lila and Lenu. Though she portrays her characters as slaved by the stupid stereotypes of the society, she is not willing to throw them into a total state of abandonment. Elena Ferrante uses a single tone of colours for her women characters from their childhood till death. This four-volume series include every single thing that take place in a woman's life. Ferrante somehow portrays herself through this series, which provides more personal information about her life and career. "Elena Ferrante's

female characters are genuine works of art. It is clear that her novels are the child of Italian neorealism and an abiding fascination with scene", says *El Pais*. As we can see her characters show a unique element of feminism which treats the reader to continue with the character's thought which later becomes a realistic that the reader herself becomes the character. Elena Ferrante through this novel series is trying to speak about her own life and life experiences. The reader invents the very realistic image of Elena the character in the novel as Elena Ferrante herself.

VI. MAJOR FINDINGS

The detailed study of Elena Ferrante's *The Lost Child*, *The Days of Abandonment*, and *The Lost Daughter* with reference to the recurring images of her bygone childhood days, as experienced by a girl of that age, has helped in proving the vibrant methodology the writer has chosen to portraying her women characters, presenting them as the central figures. These lady protagonists are deeply and intrinsically tied up with the writer's own life and hence the books are autobiographical in tone. All the lead characters tend to experience and live through the sufferings and hardships Ferrante herself had gone through once. Being so, Ferrante's male characters are shown in a darker shade, more of villainous appearances that simultaneously contributes to a more clear and vivid feministic reading of these texts. Her female characters, namely, Olga, Leda, Elena and Lila are all on the same strings that these four women represent the same visions, thought, emotions and communicate in a much similar manner with the readers. At times, we also find the writer herself making an appearance in the texts, thus illustrating a concrete identification of the character and the tale she wants to convey.

VII. CONCLUSION

Elena Ferrante the voice of the Neapolitan women had created a great sketch of the women of her times through her novels. As we see in all these three novels Ferrante's feministic vision has questioned the existence of women in a family, in her work place or in the society. Ferrante had this method of portraying her women as weak as the novel begins but she drifts them up as they fly over success from all their tolerances and struggles. The Ferrante fever had struck the arena of Neapolitan feminism through her works. Though the novels contain satisfying plots or storyline, the title remains a mystery in the first look. *The Days of Abandonment*, *The Lost Daughter* and *The Story of the Lost Child* gives a not so very positive interest to the readers, but as we begin reading the novel it cannot stop us. Ferrante is a bit confusing and creates a tone of boredom in the reader but it becomes more interesting as it leads to the climax. the very naturalistic and realistic treatment of language and narration defines Elena's struggles to convey her life story. These books and some of her letters are the only evidence that Elena Ferrante had left behind as her personal life.

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