

## Feminist Study of Brian Moore's *The Luck of Ginger Coffey*

Ramnath Singh Rathore<sup>1</sup> & Dr. Laxman Singh Gorasya<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Research Scholar, School of Studies in English, Vikram University, Ujjain (MP)

<sup>2</sup> Associate Prof., Govt. Madhav Arts and Commerce College, Vikram University, Ujjain (MP)

Received: January 29, 2019

Accepted: March 07, 2019

**ABSTRACT:** *The present research paper discovers feministic approach of Brian Moore in his novel, The Luck of Ginger Coffey. He has been awarded by many awards for his contribution in the field of literature. He has been considered well known Irish-Canadian novelist of 20<sup>th</sup> century. The paper throws light on how female characters: Veronica and her daughter Paulie struggles in a foreign land to gain individual freedom and financial security. It is found that they have greater impact on each and every actions of main male protagonist, Ginger Coffey. It is explored that Brian Moore has beautifully raised 'female voice' against the male dominance society through depiction of Veronica and her daughter in the novel and thus it is proved that Moore has sowed the seeds of feminism in 1950's, which gave birth to a movement called Feminist movement in the coming time.*

**Key Words:** *Rebellious, Catholicism, Feminist, Submissive, Emigration.*

### INTRODUCTION

Brian Moore was considered the most extraordinary and professional Canadian writer in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He had been bestowed with a Governor General's Award for his novel, *The Luck of Ginger Coffey* which was published in 1960. The Canadian government awarded him for a noble piece of work in the field of literature. Moore had put in most of his novels Irish background where he was born and the United States where he lived till the end of his life. Emigration had been the main theme of most of his novels. The characters of this novel: Ginger Coffey, his wife Veronica and their daughter, Pauline emigrated from Dublin in Ireland to Montreal in Canada for betterment of their life. The main concern of the present research paper is to dig up Brian Moore's feministic approach which is the main concern of the theme of the present paper's title.

It is also analyzed how women characters who are responsible for each and every action of the main male protagonist, Ginger Coffey. It is explored how women protagonists face social injustice, cultural diversity, and struggle for financial stability as well as mental crisis in a new country. In literary scene it seems that Brian Moore has beautifully depicted female characters in this novel: Mrs. Veronica and her daughter Pauline. They hope that they may have individual freedom and religious freedom in new world, i. e., Canada. They do not believe in any religion. In Ireland Mrs. Veronica and her husband find no progress and no hope for economic growth. Therefore they immigrate to Canada where they think that they will be free from strict principles of Catholicism and social constraints like other people who also think that Catholicism and established patriarchal system is a great hurdle for their progress in Northern Ireland. They witness conflicts between the dogmas of Catholicism and those of Protestantism in Ireland.

There are some matters in Ireland like- question of justification, autonomy of political expression, identity crisis and spiritual and cultural dissimilarities among the Irish people. Therefore these subjects have become the themes for writers of Ireland in 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is also correct in case of the novel *The Luck of Ginger Coffey*. This is Brian Moore's Canadian novel that is set in Canadian ambience. As Liam Gearon well describes, "In emigration for aesthetic freedom might be the province of a cultural elite, economic necessity might be said to be amongst the more common and most basic of incentives" (Gearon 59). It is found that this novel has cultural diversity in Canada where Ginger Coffey and his wife and their daughter strive for individual freedom as well as for economic security in life.

In reality both Veronica and her husband Ginger Coffey face challenges in personal and professional life in Canada. She is worried for her husband's job insecurity. He tells her lie that he has got a job. She quarrels with him when she finds that he has spent all the money he has for the return ticket to Ireland. It is she who inspires him to earn wealth and public status in the New World. It is found that in this novel Veronica plays vital role to influence the deeds of her husband.

Further it is examined that Veronica and her daughter suffer a lot due to failure of Ginger Coffey in getting a

good job to sustain in a foreign country. Though he gets a work but cannot carry on it for a long time. Gerald Grosvenor is Ginger Coffey's friend who helps him to settle down there but he also has bad intention for Veronica. But she is aware of her dignity and maintains distance between Grosvenor and herself.

The present research paper also examines in *The Luck of Ginger Coffey* that there is a woman behind the success or failure of a man. Ginger Coffey is the main male protagonist of the novel but it is his wife Veronica and his daughter Pauline who direct his life. In this novel Veronica and her daughter Paulie have emerged as most significant women protagonists. Paulie is nick name of Pauline.

In the beginning of the story both Veronica and his husband Ginger Coffey have discourse about the differences between both the atmospheres of Ireland and that of Canada. Both of them agree that social and spiritual background of Ireland is ruled by social restraints and Canada is free from such burdens as Ginger spoke to her:

In fact one of his secret reasons for wanting to get away to the New World was that, in Ireland, church attendance was not a matter of choice. Bloody well go, or else, tinker, tailor, soldier, sailor, rich man, poor man, you were made to suffer in a worldly sense. Here he was free . . . (*The Luck of Ginger Coffey* 21)

Veronica also agrees with him about the individual and spiritual freedom in Canada and she hopes for betterment of their life. This shows that she is hopeful towards life. In the New World she cooperates and supports her husband. She shows courage and patience in adverse time when her husband searches for a job and after failure of many times he gets a job of proofreader in a newspaper with the aid of his friend Grosvenor. In such a tough time, Veronica has to face the charges of disloyalty towards her husband as Ginger Coffey misunderstood her, "Bloody females! Sobbing out her private affairs to some outsider, had she no dignity, the woman?" (28)

In course of time her husband has lost his job and she has no hope for stability in Canada and she asks him for returning to their home country, "Tomorrow you're going to get those tickets." (33), but he tries to convince her that he will get a good job very soon. She becomes very confused about his success and insults him in spite of motivating him, "Beggars can't be choosers," Vera's voice" (37). It shows her rudeness towards him. She also shows her interest to do a job with the help of her husband's friend Grosvenor. Her husband thinks that she is attracted towards a stranger and he does not want her to do a job due to his traditional thinking. Here it seems that she is disloyal and submissive but reality is revealed at the end of the novel.

Ginger Coffey blames Veronica that she has an illicit relationship with his friend Grosvenor. She tries her best to prove her faithfulness to her husband and asks Grosvenor to speak the truth. Grosvenor admits the fact that he loves Veronica but he also speaks the reality to Ginger Coffey about Vera, "Veronica is a wonderful girl and she's been terribly loyal to you" (89). He means that she has been very loyal to him.

There has been dispute between Veronica and her husband when she realizes that he has used the word 'whore' for her in front of their daughter. As she reacts:

What do you mean, tell her? It's pretty hard to tell a child that her mother is some class of whore. What are you talking about? she said. How dare you? (96)

Veronica becomes angry with him and leaves him and stays along with her daughter in the apartment of her husband's friend. She also joins a job to earn her own bread and butter. She does not permit her husband to meet her daughter. This shows that as a mother she is very hard hearted and does not care of a child's emotions for her father. She revolts against old system of the patriarchal society of Ireland in Canada as she says to her husband Ginger Coffey:

"You say you love me," she said. Just, because you miss me. Well, you'd miss a servant if she'd been looking after you for fifteen years. That's not love. (123)

Veronica is such a woman character who is seen primarily as a home maker and mother. As she has been seen dealing with matters of kitchen and looking after her daughter Paulie. But now she wants to become economically an independent woman. This shows her ability to fight against the adverse conditions.

In course of time, she does not only support Ginger economically but also aids him materialistically, i.e., sexually. Many times against her will, her husband imposes his desire upon her as it is obvious, "Looked at her, and, obedient, she went to the bathroom . . . Then forgetting her years of complaints about his roughness, he took her, tumbling her baked beneath him" (44). It shows her thinking of a traditional woman who wants to keep her husband happy in the beginning of her married life. But her husband does not care of her feelings. He has exploited her physically many times.

Ginger Coffey is hard and self-centered person. He is conservative and therefore he does not like her wife to do a job as he thought, "No need for her to get a job either, was there? He could take care of his own" (43). It shows the dominance of male dominant society over him in which he has been brought up in Ireland. He thinks that she should look after her family like a house wife. Veronica disobeys her husband and decides to

do a job. At the end of the story it is revealed that she has a secret plan for the betterment of her family and wants to help her husband. Veronica being a mother understands Paulie better than her father. She tells her husband that their daughter is no more a child. She performs her duty honestly as a good mother towards her daughter even at the time of economic crisis.

Further Veronica appears as an individually and professionally independent woman who has transformed her hair style and appearance also. As the author described, “She had changed her hair style, and her dark hair, now cut short, fitted her face like a helmet. She wore more make-up and a dress he[Ginger] had never seen” (142). At the same time the reality surprised her husband as well as the reader at the end of the novel when it was seen that she did not accept the offer of Grosvenor to stay with him. As she spoke to her husband, “I never slept with Gerry. On my word of honor. I wouldn’t do it until you and I were legally separated” (240). This showed her loyalty towards her husband. Thus the image of an ideal woman has been restored according to the Christianity at last.

She has convinced her husband to let her to do a job. Thus it is explored that Brian Moore has depicted Veronica’s character as a bold woman who strives to improve her economic and personal image in a new culture in Canada. As it is clear that Veronica who did not have any freedom in Ireland of the fifties. The principles of Catholicism used to interfere strictly in the lives of Irish people, especially in women’s lives. Now in the New World, i. e., Canada she felt free from social and religious bondage. Here she could take her own decision to live a happy life. It was the time when there was an increment in divorce cases due to clashes between husband and wife. As Jonathan Dollimore was right to describe the middle of the twentieth century scenario of Canada in his *The Challenges of Sexuality*, “Divorce increased and in the process lost some of its stigma. Correspondingly, the Christian ideal of the permanence of the marriage bond was displaced, as was, to some extent, the authoritarian and patriarchal conception of family structure. More and more women were entering paid work” (Dollimore60).

Another female protagonist in the novel is Paulie, daughter of Veronica and Ginger Coffey. Though she plays very minor role but she leaves a greater impact on the lives of her parents. It is she who saves their marriage life. She likes both her father as well as her mother. She is very friendly with her mother as Ginger Coffey noticed in the text, “They were like sisters, those two, always gossiping away about wee things he knew nothing about” (*The Luck of Ginger Coffey*35). Though she was very close to her mother but she also loved her father and therefore she decided to stay with her father in a small room when there was problem between her parents. Veronica also loved her daughter to much and could not live without her. She met her daily. It was found that Paulie worked as a link between her parents for communication.

Though she is a very minor female protagonist in the novel but she makes her parents to come together at the end of the story in Canada. She is flexible and adjusts herself in new land and makes new friends. The most important act of Paulie is that she behaves like a matured woman when her father informs her that her mother is about to divorce him and how she replies her father, “But Catholic’s aren’t allowed to get a divorce, Daddy” (160). This act of Paulie obliges her parents’ to change the decision of separation. This shows Brian Moore’s ability of portraying the minor woman protagonist who influences the life path of major characters through the depiction of Paulie’s character. She plays a vital role to bring the happiness of her family at the end.

*The Luck of Ginger Coffey* provides an opportunity to explore the women characters who struggle in a foreign land for their rights to have self-dependence socially, economically and mentally. It helps the reader to ponder how women like Veronica and Paulie raise their voice against the social dogmas. At last, they prove that they are right and they should be given the equal rights in compare to men. At the same time it is also found that a woman like Veronica also wants to follow some social tradition which helps to make a happy family by giving up the idea of divorce on the condition of being a working lady.

It is seen that there is a negotiation between husband and wife for living together as a family and here it seems that husband allows her wife to go for a job outside. There is a victory of women over a male character as it true in case of Veronica and Paulie over Ginger Coffey. As Patricia Lane Gondcales da Cruz is apt to conclude, “In conclusion, a renegotiation among the members of the family is essential to the survival of the Coffeys” (Gondcales da Cruz 100).

## CONCLUSION

Finally it can be concluded that Brian Moore through the character of Veronica presents lives of such women who want to gain individual independence as well as financial stability. Therefore, it is obvious that the seed of feminism was sown by Moore in the fifties that further gave birth to a movement called feminist movement in the twentieth century. Thus it could be said that Moore also has been a feminist

writer who noticed the exploitations of women in the fifties in Ireland and other parts of the world he visited in his own life time. He also brought it into notice that women should have certain autonomy for taking their own decisions against the so called dogmas of the patriarchy system.

### References

1. Craig, Patricia. Brian Moore: A Biography. London: Bloomsbury. 2002.
2. Cruz da, Patricia Lane Gondcales. Brian Moore's The Luck of Ginger Coffey: An Experience of Immigration from Ireland to Canada in the Fifties. Universidade Federal De Minas Gerais. 2008.
3. Dollimore, Jonathan. The Challenges of Sexuality. Sinfield 51-86.
4. Gearon, Liam. Landscapes of Encounter: The Portrayal of Catholicism in the Novels of Brian Moore. Canada: University of Calgary Press. 2002.
5. Moore, Brian. The Luck of Ginger Coffey. US and UK: Andre Deutsch(US) and Atlantic Monthly(UK). 1960. Print.
6. Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia.