



The Inner Voice: A Study of the Fiction of Alice Munro

Mala Sharma

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Alice Munro has been awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature (2013) for her short-story collections. The greatest short-story writer of Canada, she has been hailed as “master of the contemporary short story”. Munro, by her innovative ideas and concepts, has expanded the parameters of the genre of short story to new heights. Since writing her first story “The Dimensions of a Shadow” in 1950, she has gone a long way, with numerous publications, all of which have won her accolades, both within the country and outside. Ranging across the breadth of Canada—from Ontario to British Columbia—her fictional world has a strong regional focus, delving into the lives of common people. The stories are mainly women-centric, with an in-depth study of their living conditions under the traditional social conventions. Munro's fiction has drawn the attention of readers and critics of literature, and her work has been translated into a number of languages.

The book studies Munro's works anew. It also attempts to seek out the message that she wants to put forward to her readers. What makes this work challenging and stimulating is that, although Munro is constantly drawing attention to the universal problems of women, she does not seem to put up strong resistance against male domination, as Atwood and Laurence do. Rather, she unfurls the miseries and sufferings in the lives of women, and their social victimization. Thus, she seems to open up new ways of looking at women's problems in society.

The area of study focuses on three decades of Munro's works, beginning from 1968, to 1998, though Munro has been publishing till date. The subject matter has been divided into six chapters, including Introduction. In all the chapters, an attempt has been made to search the ‘inner voice’, underlying the fiction of Munro. The patterns and paradigms of the genre have been discussed. Besides, the development of the short story in Canada from its early settlement to twentieth century has been studied. Munro's narrative art has been examined, keeping in mind the modern theories of narratology.

The book also explores the autobiographical elements present in the author's works. Questions such as whether Munro's art can be considered as autobiographical narrative, or is it a fictionalization of reality, have been taken up for discussion. It describes the women's cry of protest against oppression and social injustice that Canadian women have had to endure for decades. Fear, subjugation, servility and defiance of set rules of social conduct—all find a voice in the fiction of Munro, and this has been looked into, in details, in an exclusive chapter.

It is hoped that the book will open new vistas of thought for researchers, scholars and academics interested and engaged in Canadian studies.

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