

A PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN THROUGH THE SELECTED SHORT STORIES BY O'HENRY

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Abstract

Sustainable development is primarily about people, their well-being, and equity in their interpersonal relationships all around the world where nature-society imbalances threaten the economic and social stability. Feminism is a recognition and identification of all forms of Discrimination, Exploitation and Oppression (DEO) of women and a commitment to work against it. Feminism focuses on larger structures that oppress women. To understand how patriarchy and socio-economic systems perpetuate DEO, the feminist perspective is required to be understood. The present paper discusses the Feminist Perspective on Sustainable Development Goal 5, one of the 17 SDGs adopted by UN in 2015, to formulate futuristic inclusive policies and strategies for women to increase their involvement in social development process. The broader framework will relate to women as an agent of social change. The paper postulates that less DEO means more gender equality and women empowerment.

Keywords

Feminist Perspective, SDG 5, Gender Equality, Sustainable Development, Social Change.

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William Sydney Porter, better known by his pen name O' Henry, was an American writer known primarily for his short stories, though he also wrote poetry and non-fiction. His work includes "The Gift of the Magi", "The Duplicity of Hargraves", and "The Ransome of Red-Chief", as well as the novel *Cabbages and Kings*. (Wikipedia) His short stories are known for, wit, wordplay and clever twist ending. He wrote nearly 60 Stories about life in America. He was a prolific American author who developed a reputation as a short story writer who focused on the lives of the people in New York City. Many of his stories have become famous for their use of irony and unexpected plot twists. Towards the end of his life, however, O' Henry suffered both health & financial issues before his death in 1910 in New York City.

As Porter, he only attended school for a short time before entering the workforce. He was raised by his relatives after his mother's death when he was three years old. Porter gained an interest in writing and literature from his Aunt Lina Porter, who also taught him privately. When Porter was giving the shape of his experience as a short stories, the other American scholars such as Mark Twain, Kate Chopin, Annie Dillart, Ambrose Bierce, Rex Stout, and Frank R. Stockton were enriching the American literature. They also were presenting the reality of the American society. Readers find the real state of the Contemporary society through the literary mirror.

A literary theme is the main idea or underlying meaning. A writer explores in a novel, short story, or other literary work. The theme of a short story can be conveyed using Characters, setting, dialogue, plot, or a combination of all these elements. The short stories of O'Henry are full of love and sacrifice, repetition, appreciation, remorse, guilt, change, selfishness and dependency. Some common themes of O'Henry are deception, mistaken identity and the effects of coincidence, the unchangeable nature of the fate, and the resolution of seemingly unsolvable difficulties separating two lovers.

The main goal of present research paper is to point out the female characters through some selected short stories of O' Henry as- 'The Gift of the Magi', "An unfinished story", 'A Service of Love', "Springtime A La Carte", 'The Romance of Busy Broker'. The women characters of these short stories are young and struggle for their livelihood as well as for their true love. Della Young & James, the protagonists of "The Gift of the Magi" struggle to live on a small salary. Della is a devotee wife, who loved very much her husband Jim. By Christmas Eve, Dellas's thrift has gained her only \$1.87 for her husband's gift, which she had hoped would be "something fine and rare and sterling." She decides to sell one of the family

“treasures” - her long, beautiful chestnut hair to buy a platinum chain for her husband's prized possession. To describe the beauty of her hair O'Henry writes –

“So now Della's beautiful hair fell about her, rippling and shining like a cascade of brown waters. It reached below her knee and made itself almost a garment for her.” (5 AM-3).

Her hair was most valuable for her and Jim but she is ready to sacrifice it for her husband because of intense love. She searched out the shop to sell her hair. The conversation between Della & Madamae

“Will you buy, my hair? Asked Della

“I buy hair, said Madame. ‘Take yer hat off and let's have a sight at the looks of it.’

Down rippled the brown cascade.

‘Twenty dollars,’ said Madame, lifting the mass with a practical hand.

‘Give it to me quick’, said Della.

Oh, and the next two hours tripped by on rosy wings. Forget the hashed metaphor. She was ransacking the stores for Jim's present.”. (5 AM-3)

The story presents the DNA of contemporary society. The women maintain the morality about love & marital relations. Della who is youthful, Caring and sensitive. Much of the story follows her perspective and highlights her devotion and love for her husband, Jim. She demonstrates this sensitive and caring nature when she throws herself down on the couch to cry she realizes. She hasn't saved enough money to buy Jim a Christmas present. O' Henry presented Della as a dynamic & Kind-hearted but impulsive young, affectionate, selfless, and somewhat hysterical.

Sarah is a character in “Springtime A La Carte: This Story presents the desire for love& struggle for livelihood Like Della –’ A Gift of Magi.’ Sarah the beloved of a young farmer, is a young girl living in New York. “With her rudimentary typing skill. She struggles to make a living in New York. A decent well-paying job in New York has eluded her. She does some freelance typing jobs here & there to take out a living. She lives in a red brick low-rent dormitory, there is tSchulenburg's restaurant!” (<https://www.englishcharity.com>>sp....

Sarah eats in Schulenburg restaurant regularly, The deal, typing of the menu daily, twenty times, done with the offer to provide three meals every day to Sarah as compensation for the menu typing she would do for the restaurant. She is loyal to her lover Walter Her state is love for Walter like Radha for Govinda as Sarojini Naidu writes in “Song of Radha, the Milkmaid.”-

I carried my curds to the Mathura fair

How softly the heifers were lowing
I wanted to very. "who will by
These cards that are white as the clouds in the sky
When the breezes of 'Shrawar' are blowing?"
But my heart was so full of your beauty Beloved
They taught at as I cried without knowing.
'Govinda!' 'Govinda!' 'Govinda!' 'Govinda?'
How softly the river was blowing. (KKD-38)

"Love may as Shakespeare said, feed on itself: but Sarah could not bring herself to eat the dandelions that had graced, as ornaments, the first spiritual banquet of her heart's true affection". (5 AM, 43)

Sarah was so lost in her love memory that instead of typing the name of the dish on the menu between the red cabbage and the stuffed green peppers was the item she typed "DEAREST WALTER, WITH-HARD-BOILED EGG!" (5 AM-45)

In "A Service of Love" Delia & Joe loved each other very much. Because of deep & true love, they are each willing to do something like Jim & Della. But they do not really into their respective types of art. "The characters of O' Henry are always determined to solve problematic situations through their wits and creativity. O' Henry is often categorized as a realist writer by many critics. Realism is an artistic and literary movement developed during the 19th century. It is unfolded everyday concerns in contemporary settings. The aim was to present the real image of social classes in a true manner inclusive of all unpleasant aspects of life."

(<https://litpriest.com/short-stories>)

The story 'A Service of Love' has the theme of love, art desperation, connection & honesty. Delia wants to be a pianist & Joe wants to be an artist. They live with good understanding As O' Henry exposed the feeling of Delia –

'Joe, dear,' she said gleefully, I've a pupil. And, oh, the Loveliest people! General-General A. B. Pinkney's daughter-on Seventy-first Street. Such a splendid house, Joe-you ought to see the front door! Byzantine I think you would call it. And inside! Oh, Joe, I never saw anything like it before" (5 AM-25).

Delia told him (Joe) about her pupil on Clementina and about the supper. Joe also told her about his painting at the preparing the dish for supper. "All right," said Joe reaching for the blue scalloped vegetable dish. 'But I hate for you to be giving lessons. It is not art. But you're a Trump and a dear to do it (5 AM-26)

As a woman, Delia maintains the relationship between husband & wife. She did not want to hurt, Joe. She, silently worked in a laundry did not tell to Joe.

When Joe again asked Delia about the reason for her hand getting burnt and along with that asked about where did she exactly worked, Delia could not hide both the truth and her tears and said that she ironed her shirt, in the big 24 Street laundry and along with that she confessed that general Pinkney and the and Clementine were imagery character. She is so innocent that could not hide the truth. As O' Henry wrote –

“I could not get any pupils,” She confessed. ‘And I couldn’t bear to have you give up your lessons; and I got a place ironing Shirts in that big twenty-fourth street laundry. And I think I did very well to make up both General Pinkney and Clementina, don’t you Joe? And when a girl in the boundary set down a hot iron on my hand this afternoon. I was all the way home making up that story about the Welsh rabbit. You’re not angry are you, Joe? And if I hadn’t got the work you mightn’t have sold your Sketches to that man from Peoria.’ (5 AM-29)

Dulcie an underpaid shop girl, who is the heroin of ‘An Unfinished Story’, eventually goes out with Piggy. Piggy lurks around shops looking for desperate shop girls. Dulcie might go out with him just for a good meal. She was fond of decorating & set up her room. The photographs of General Kitchener, William Muldoon, and the Duchess of Marlborough are proof of her fondness for stylish life. Like other stories, O' Henry presents the account of \$ & cents in this story. As the writer accounts-

“For the room, Dulcie Paid two dollars a week. On weekdays her breakfast cost ten cents; she made coffee and cooked an egg over the gaslight while she was dressing.” (5 AM-49)

And other also - “She had her lunches in the department-store restaurant at a cost of sixty cents for the week, dinners were \$1.05. The evening papers - show me a New Yorker going without his daily paper.! - came to six cents; and two Sunday papers - One for the personal column and another to read were ten cents the total amounts to \$4.76. Now one has to buy Clothes.....” (5 AM 49)

The story presents amatured Woman Dulcie. She plans to go out on the first dinner date with Piggy. But She is excited to go out until she sees her picture of General Kitchener giving him a Judgemental look. Dulcie wants to be with someone like General Kitchener. Suddenly insecure Dulcie cancels her plans with Piggy & goes to her bed hungry. With the theme of the poverty & exploitation O' Henry exposes the state of Dulcie-

“Dulcie worked in a department store. She sold Hamburg edging, or stuffed peppers, or automobiles, or other little trinkets such as they kept in department

stores. Of what she earned, Dulcie received six dollars per week. The remainder was credited to her and debited to somebody else's account in the ledger kept by G-Oh, primal energy, you say, Reverend Doctor-Well then, in the ledger of Primal Energy." (5 AM-47)

Every woman considers herself- as a fairy. Dulcie also considers herself the most beautiful woman, as O'Henry exposed Dulcie's feelings about herself.

"Dulcie turned to the dresser to get her handkerchief; then she stopped still, and bit underlip hard. While looking in her mirror she had seen fairyland and herself, a prince, just awakening from a long slumber. She had forgotten one that was watching her with sad, beautiful stern eyes – The only one there was to approve or condemn what she did straight and slender and tall, with a look of sorrowful reproach on his handsome, melancholy face, General Kitchener fixed his wonderful eyes on his out of his guilt photograph frame on the dresser." (5 AM- 51)

"The Romance of Busy Brooker story tells of a stockbroker, who appears to want to replace his secretary, but ends up proposing to her only to get an answer he was not expecting. The protagonist-miss Leslie-Stenographer worked for Harvey Maxwell. Like other women protagonists, Miss Leslie is beautiful in an unadorned and even plain way. The story comments on the relationship between men's working lives and their love lives. Miss Leslie accepted the proposal of Maxwell and was ready to get married to Maxwell. He proposed to her-

"Mrs.Leslie, he began hurriedly, 'I have but a moment to spare. I want to say something at that moment. Will you be my wife? I haven't had time to make love to you in an ordinary way, but I really do love you. Talk quick, please - those fellows are clubbing the stuffing, out of Union Pacific!' (5 AM-58) Leslie is loyal to her marital relation to her husband Maxwell. She pours her feelings –

"The stenographer acted very queerly. At first, she seemed overcome with amazement; then tears flowed from her wondering eyes; and then she smiled sunnily through them, and one of her arms slid tenderly about the broker's neck.

'I know now, she said softly. 'It's this old business that has driven everything else out of your head for the time. I was frightened at first. Don't you Remember, Harvey? We were married last evening at eight O'clock in the little church around the corner! (5 AM-58)

The Last Leaf's both women Characters Johnsy & Sue had the different views towards the life. As Johnsy was hopeless and pessimistic while Sue, the roomie of the Johnsy was optimistic. She was her true friend. She went to Behrman and the doctor for the save of Johnny's life. She had only hope from Behrman. She requested to the Behrman to paint the same leaf. As O' Henry writes –

“She is very sick and weak”, said Sue “The sickness has put these strange idea into her mind. Mr. Behrman, if you won’t come, you won’t. But I don’t think you’re nice!” (ATBEPW-51)

O’ Henry exposed the affection and feelings of Sue for Johnsy-

“After the doctor had gone, Sue went into the workroom to cry. Then she walked into Johnny’s room. She carried some of her paintings materials, and she was singing”(ATBEPWS - 49)

On one side Sue is optimistic and had a hope for the life of Johnsy while other side Johnsy had no hope

for her life. As O’ Henry exposed the pessimistic thought of Johnsy -”It is the last one,” said Johnsy. I thought it would surely fall during the night. I heard the wind. It will fall today, and I shall die at the same time” (ATBEPWS-51)

Johnsy had no any hope of her life. She had considered that with the fall of the last leaf, she would die. She expressed her grief to sue – “You do not have to buy things for me” said Johnsy. She still looks - out the window. “There goes another. No, I don’t want anything to eat. Now are four. I want to see the last one fall before night. Then I’ll go, too”. (ATBEPWS —50)

Johnsy also told Sue–

“Tell me as soon as you have finished.” Said Johnsy. She closed her eyes and lay white and still. “Because I want to see the last leaf fall. I have done enough waiting. I have done enough thinking. I want to go sailing down, down, like one of those leaves”. (ATBEPWS - 50)

The present research paper has pointed out the work, poverty exploitation, true love, loyalty, sacrifice & understanding of marital relations of women. All the women characters had mostly the same qualities and face the same situation & problems. The woman characters of O’Henry’s Short Stories. “A Gift of Magi-Della, “Spring Time A. La Carte - Sarah, “A Service of Love - Delia, ‘An Unfinished Story - Dulcie, “The Romance of Busy Broker - Leslie, all were working women. They love their husbands & maintained their marital relations, which are necessary for a healthy & happy society. All the women protagonists, faced the financial problems & belonged to the low class. As Della, Sarah, Delia, Dulcie, and Leslie struggled for money. But all of them want to enjoy the life. They loved & sacrificed for their lovers & husbands. O’ Henry described wistfully about the women characters.

In this way, O’ Henry presented & advocated, the powerful love caring and witty women characters who have played a significant role in his short stories.

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