

QUEST FOR ACHIEVEMENT IN FEMALE
PROTAGONISTS:
STUDY OF SELECTED AMERICAN
WOMEN NOVELISTS

by

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CERTIFICATE

I am satisfied that the thesis presented by Mrs. Mitali Biswas is worthy of consideration for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy and is a record of the original bonafide research work carried out by her under my guidance and supervision and that the results contained in it have not been submitted in part or full to any other University or Institute for award of any degree/diploma. I certify that she has pursued the prescribed course of research.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a study of five American women novelists, namely, Kate Chopin, Edith Wharton, Ellen Glasgow, Willa Cather and Margaret Mitchell, primarily of some of their major works (1899-1936) in which their female protagonists strive towards self-actualization. The term self-actualization has been borrowed from the works of Abraham Maslow.

In this respect the dissertation is a major departure from the conventional view that writers have tended to cast the female protagonists as types. Only recently have some critics, primarily scholars of feminist literature, begun to realize women authors' contribution to the understanding of the female experience. Although they raise significant issues ranging from feminist to historical consideration of their work, they do not delve into the psychological development of women who are in search of self-fulfilment and achievement.

The dissertation has been divided into five chapters. Chapter I contains a brief survey of the studies conducted on the images of women in American fiction. It also contains a brief discussion of the theoretical framework, taken from the field of depth psychology, which has been used to analyse the process of self-actualization in the female

protagonists of about twenty novels.

Chapter II is devoted to those protagonists in whom self-actualization is in a nascent stage. Chapter III deals with those protagonists who move towards self-actualization but do not achieve it. Chapter IV is a study of those protagonists who achieve self-actualization. This division of chapters has been made with a view to highlighting the progressive development of these various female protagonists on their road to self-actualization.

The last chapter, in addition to being a summing up, attempts to establish a correlation between the lives of Wharton, Glasgow and Cather and their fiction. The underlying idea in establishing this relationship is that a novelist cannot conceive of a fully self-actualized character unless he or she has gone through this process. The path to self-actualization has not been easy either for these novelists or their protagonists.

CLARIFICATIONS

I have used British spelling in this dissertation and retained the original spelling in the quotes.

I have followed the conventions given in The MLA Style Sheet (2nd edition).

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