Feminism and anti-feminism in the caterbury tales literature review examples

Sociology, Feminism

Introduction

Feminism is a social and political movement aimed at establishing equality for women in the society (Klein 12). From the feminist perspective, the Canterbury Tales expresses some critics of Ruth Evans and Lesley Johnson who argued that it is hard to ignore the difference between how people viewed women in the past and today. In addition, males who mostly advocate for anti-feminism composed most stories found in the Caterbury Tales. This essay has deeply touches on the bad and good attributes assigned to women in the Canterbury Tales. Some of the bad attributed discussed included denial of rights to enter some areas, acting as slaves, and denial of life opportunities. On the other hand, some of the good attributes given to women included the right to lead events, leading prayers, and giving advices to the society. In addition, the essay gives an analysis of some of the differences between men and women in the Canterbury Tales (Cooper 23-30).

Thesis statement: The Canterbury Tales portray both positive and negative attributes towards women. Due to the equality of women in the society, the following discussion draws a conclusion on feminism and anti-feminism in the Caterbury Tales.

What attributes or prejudices are specially assigned to women, both good and bad in the Canterbury tales?

An opinionated view of attributes and manners in the Canterbury Tales portrays different behaviors of feminist and anti-feminist women. The two main women characters used in the Chaucer's takes are Prioress and the

Wife of Bath. Wife of Bath represents all liberal women in the Canterbury Tales and showed extreme bad behaviors thus given bad attributes in the Tales. On the other hand, Prioress represented a good example of women who had self respect and that of their husbands. These two characters were used by Chaucer to represent how women in the society should portray both good and bad characters.

Starting with bad attributes represented by the Wife of Bath, Chaucer described her as charm woman who could drive any man to her trap. She had five husbands and took control over them. Her only dream was to have her sexual desires accomplished. Women inferiority to men was visible from the Wife of Bath's character because she always fought for antifeminism campaigns conducted by men in the society. In the narration about the place of women in the society, Saunder had the following view:

" In a morality play, a personified vice such as Gluttony or Lust " confesses" his or her sins to the audience in a life story."

She could stand amongst men and fight for equal rights between men and women in the society. On the other hand, the Wife of Bath represented a tough woman who was distinctive, aggressive self-promoting, and could not spare anyone daring to interrupt her during her speech. She was a representation of female voices because she performed an act of twenty-four women. Moreover, she was against men who wrote antifeminist literature (Saunders 11-13). The battle between sexes was also presented in the Canterbury Tales. A woman was defined by her family, social position and wealth. Knight could not appreciate his wife and always complained. At one instance when Knight was asked why he was sad he replied, " I hardly bear

the shame of having such an ugly, lowborn wife". The law prohibited a woman from entering certain places depending on the contributions made on her name. For example, a woman could not step inside the monastery depending on the amount of dowry paid towards her. The following restriction presented a high level of anti-loyalty to women because most factors worked against them. In addition, the society ensured that women received no powers and had less opportunity to advance in their lives. This showed a high level of antifeminism that shows bad women attributes in the society (Saunders 15-23).

Another bad attribute of women portrayed in the Canterbury Tales concerned passing of laws discriminating against women. Men in the Canterbury Tales denied women opportunities to gain their independence because forcing them to depend on their husbands for everything. However, women in the Canterbury Tales are represented as ignorance as portrayed in the Wife of Bath's character. Generally, women are expected to obey their husbands' ruling without questioning. The women character portrayed in the Wife of Bath shows how women must decline some of the laws and fight for their rights in the society. She claimed that marriage should be treated with respect for one another hence one party must bow down for the other. However, she was a hypocrite because she could not allow her husband to rule her. She treated each of her five husbands' differently depending on their capabilities to satisfy her sexually (Saunders 1-8).

On the other hand, the Canterbury Talesa portrayed some good attributes towards women. Chaucer represented Prioress's character as that of a respected woman in the society. Prioress was a woman from a wealthy

family who dressed decently and respected others. One of the attributes portrayed in connection to this character is the ability of women to show good behaviors in the society. Chaucer argued that " Purity in body and heart may please some--as for me, I make no boast.. " Moreover, she behaved in respect to culture and norms. The society respected her and always gave her an opportunity to make decisions that favored her. These aspects showed a concerned society that gave women a chance to prove their capabilities instead of denying them opportunities. (Saunders 7-9) Women also received good attributes in the Canterbury Tales because some communities allowed them to hold positions in the monastery. Prioress's manners gave her an opportunity to stand for the women rights in the monastery. In addition, she never followed every rule introduced by men especially those that were against women holding powerful positions in the society. Women were given an opportunity to lead in several occasions such in churches and other cultural ceremonies. This shows some of the good prejudices given to women because of their good behaviors in the society. Moreover, some tasks required the presence of a woman like during payment of dowry and weddings (Cranny 15-18).

The Second Nun is also one of characters in the Canterbury Tales who represented good attributes of women. Following her character, women were given an opportunity to serve prominent people in the society during special occasions. The character of a nun was used because nuns are believed to be holy hence are much respected in the society. On this context, women in the society are given certain priorities such as praying for the sick and performing sacrifices to scare away devil. These attributes were given to

women because of their dedications and belief in God. In addition, the Second Nun had the responsibility of counseling people in marriages and preached against men who sleep with women before marrying them. Through the above, she fought for the women's rights in marriage (Cranny 15-18). As Second Nun explained:

" Experience--and no matter what they say in books--is good enough authority for me to speak of trouble in marriage. For ever since I was twelve years of age, thanks are to God, I've had no less than five husbands at church door--if one may believe I could be wed so often legally!" (P. 220)

The differences between men and women at this period

In the Canterbury Tales, men and women held different responsibilities and roles as discussed below. Firstly, women were expected to be holy and submissive to men irrespective of the situation. " The knights Tale" portrayed women's characters by moral behaviors however, some women portrays evil nature. According to Chaucer,

" only women are termed as evil because they assumed the characters of withes and prostitutes".

In addition, the Tales portrayed women as innocent beings as opposed to men who were always suspected of breaking the laws. It was hard to find women on the wrong side of the law because they lacked a chance of moving out of the homestead. All the household chores were directed to women as men went out to look for food. On this context, if anything bad happened in the society, like theft, only men were to blame Cooper 22-25). Another difference between roles played by men and women in the

Canterbury Tales is that women were not allowed to take superior positions in the society. Chaucer speaks of the Wife of Bath who ignored some of the rules restricting women from heading certain events.

" Only men had the power to head different activities and make rulings during criminal cases" (223).

This factor denied women their rights because some judgments were made in men's favor. On the other hand, women were denied luxurious living in the Canterbury Tales. Only men were allowed to live an expensive life while women lived like slaves. The rules only allowed women who came from wealthy families' access to some luxury things but in a restricted manner (Cooper 33-35).

Conclusion

Feminism and anti-feminism is an issue that is widely discussed in Canterbury Tales. Chaucer provided a current look on how women were treated in the society where only men dominated. Many of Canterbury Tales revolve along the characters portrayed by men and women providing an idea of priorities and bad things attributed to women. The Canterbury Tales by Geoffrey Chaucer presents the Wife of Bath who was a strong woman and actively involved in antifeminists campaign. However, her arguments were disregarded as baseless and compromised. The tales speaks of certain attributes assigned to women, both good and bad. The Wife of Bath represented by Chaucer in the Canterbury Tales was used as the case study.

References

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