

**FEMINISTIC PERSPECTIVES IN THOMAS KENEALLY'S NEW-  
HISTORICISM: AN AUSTRALIAN WRITING****Dr. N. Vineela**

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**ABSTRACT:**

*The writer, historical novelist who has taken the Australian literature far beyond the country is Thomas Keneally. All though modern in their psychology and style, many of his novels are reflections of historical material. He is the writer of Historical Fiction and an exponent of ideological production of emerging Australian national characters. Thomas Keneally admitted the realities of the World War I & World War II in his fictional novels The Daughters of Mars and Schindler's Ark. Feminism' is a concept which came into light in 1960's. It is civilization as a whole that produces the creature which is described as 'feminine'. In the novel Schindler Ark, the female characters played an important role. One of the main characters is Emilie Schindler. Being neglected by her husband, she managed to manage herself to support him especially in his needs and deeds that to in his absence. She was mostly called as Oskar's abandoned wife by the readers. This reveals the insecurity of women. There was no protection either for men or women under the dictatorship of Hitler. Not for equal rights but they were tortured, punished, worked and killed. Schindler, in those hard times, he has extended his level best to the women.*

*An Australian living treasure, Thomas Keneally's 29<sup>th</sup> novel is Daughters of Mars which revisits the World War I from the perspective of two sisters who are like the modern women, the durance sisters are courageous enough. They are good at taking the self- decisions. The nurses see the blood of this conflict on hospital ships and operating theatres. The other aspect of the novel was that women were placed on the battlefields. They were called the female soldiers. Daughters of Mars for the first time placed the women on the battlefields. War is not always about the men. It is also about the women. 'Daughters of Mars' is a historical novel which reconstructs its past. The history of Australia and its participation in the Gallipoli Campaign includes the future of Australia. Historical writer Keneally has drawn an inspiration from the actual wartime's dairies, historical hospital and the real hospital ships. Like the soldiers of every war, Naomi heroism was noticed during the disastrous events in the Aegean Sea. New Historicism shifts the focus away from the factual content of historical account. The text is interpreted by different cultures to fit the ideological needs of power structures. Thus Daughters of Mars is an effort of author to assimilate the literary text into history is supported by the feminism, post structuralism doctrines of totality and reality. New Historicism has distinct affinities with resonances; the author is interested in issues of history. He has interpreted the term history in a much broader sense. He emphasised literature and history as inseparable. As New Historicism believes that there are different interpretations of facts. Keneally took his readers back to history to the facts. He has given life to the past through his writings.*

**KEYWORDS:**New- Historicism, WWI, Feminism, History, Sisterhood, Culture, War.....

**INTRODUCTION:**

Born in Sydney in 1935, Thomas Keneally became a famous prolific writer, novelist, playwright, author of fiction. The writer is a historical novelist who has taken the Australian literature far beyond the country is Thomas Keneally. All though modern in their psychology and style, many of his novels are reflections of historical material. He is the writer of Historical Fiction and an exponent of ideological production of emerging Australian national



characters. Thomas Keneally admitted the realities of the World War I & World War II in his fictional novels *The Daughters of Mars* and *Schindler's Ark*.

It was during this Age of Revolution (1774-1848), there were many revolutionary moments occurred in Europe and America. The writings of history too had started in this age. The genre 'history' was taking its new shape. New ideas began to grow, the thoughts of making a history as a proof reading, a meaningful verse, a good progression and the historicists began to opine that the present is sufficiently different from the past. According to Philosopher Emmanuel Kant (1724-1804), "History is preceded as a series of breaks with a past in a movement towards the emancipation and enlightenment." New-Historicism came out helping in reconstructing the historicism and its grand dominant and oppressive narratives. According to Foucault, "History is no longer an inevitable and explanatory horizon, a way of revealing the inherent truth or meaning of an event." Foucault's *Critique of Historicism* begins with the explanation that Historicism has emerged at a certain point of History. He identified Historicism as a modern achievement. History is used in the process of colonial expansion. New Historicism came into existence marking as a 'return' to the history. This heart-rending new novel *The Daughters of Mars* by Keneally is a narration of two characters Naomi Durance and Sally Durance who were the daughters of South Wales dairy farmer Mr. Durance. Keneally is truly a war novelist. The title of the novel, *Daughters of Mars* aptly suits the novel. Mars is the Roman God of War. Together a reader can take a very close view of the history, the myths and its legacy. Mars was considered as the God of War and the agricultural guardian by the Romans. He was upturned in sacrifice, art and also in festivals. He was born to Jupiter and Juno by impregnating the flora aligned with the appetite of Juno. In the Roman mythology, the role of Mars was very unique. He was titled as the War of God because he liked to fight whether he wins or lost. He liked to trouble and enjoys the havoc of the bloodshed on the Battlefields. He was commonly considered not only as War spreader but also a peaceful protector, tribal God and a healer. He was called the heroic warrior of God. Armilustrium festival was celebrated by the people to honour him.

And in this festival, the weapons of the soldiers were supposed to purify and store on his foot. They often offer the sacrifices to Mars before and after the war as a customary practice. It was believed that Romulus and Remus were the twin sons born to Mars and the Human Priestess. According to the Roman Mythology, Mars had no daughters. But Keneally titled this novel as 'Daughters of Mars' after the name of the Roman God of War Mars. Hence, it was titled so because, the whole novel is about a major point i.e., War. Even though the Roman god was not blessed with daughters, the author titled it as 'Daughters of Mars' because the Durance Daughters enacted as a brave soldiers on the battle fields of World War I. They neither participated in War nor a Campaign but was affected by the consequences of the war. They suffered being a part of a World War I even it was Offstage. At Archimedes their experience of World War I had started. This was a hospital ship which was two miles off from the Gallipoli. All the wards were quickly filled with the wounded and the dying diggers. A huge metal shrieks and thumps could be heard within the ship and unearthly lament went on. All the doctors and the nurses had necessarily had to engage themselves to the operations and treatments. Human bodies savaged by Shells, bullets, shrapnel, trench foot, mustard gas and shell shock were seen. Missing limbs, amputations,



infections and diseases were highly observed. The writer writes, "Lay a man whose wound once was not bandaged showed a face that was half steak and no eyes. The lack of features made his age impossible to guess."

They have confronted first on a hospital ship near Gallipoli, then on the Western Front... The sisters were never been good friends at home. But War has made them to expose themselves to the world and find themselves courageous in the face of extreme danger. In the words of Jake Kerridge, "Australian novelist Keneally is much given to quoting Stalin's chilling Aphorism: one death is a tragedy. A million deaths is a statistic." Hidden wounds were at the heart of this old-fashioned tale of the two nurses who faced the horrors of Gallipoli and Somme Battle. The strong women caught in the great mill of history. The first part of the novel is taken up with the horrors of Gallipoli. Gallipoli campaign was the battle of Gallipoli and was a campaign of World War I. Those have taken place on the Gallipoli Peninsula in Modern Turkey in the Ottoman Empire between 1915 and 1916. This campaign was one of the greater victories during the World War I. It was also defined as the moment in the national history of Turkey. It was a naval campaign. This campaign is often considered as the birth of national consciousness in Australia and New Zealand and the date of the landing April 25 is known as the ANZAC day. Sisters were supposed to treat the Australian soldiers who have been wounded in the Gallipoli battle in Turkey. Australia lost 8700 men at Gallipoli. Australian imperial Force which was comprised of 5 divisions and more than 120,000 soldiers held off a major German offensive in early 1918 and contributed to the allied victory. Later they gain the experience of inhumanity of war through the gas. April 25 is a day of remembrance both in Australia and New Zealand army corps in Gallipoli as the anniversary of the landing. There were hellish and brutal conditions. The dead bodies and some living bodies were arriving to the hospital like waves. There happened millions of flu deaths during the war. The war has wounded many lives. The women were gaining courage. Gallipoli has an almost mystic place in our minds Keneally says with utmost amusement.

The writer made the young sisters to reside in painful and distressed circumstances. War itself is a great art. It covers all the aspects the modern life including society, business, politics and human behaviour. A kingdom that has once destroyed can never take back its original shape. History can be horrible. Wars in the 20<sup>th</sup> century were the most horrible of all. First World War is the war that ends all wars. One evening everyone could sense the thunder sound made by the Turkish guns. Gallipoli was near. The next day morning the battle was arrived. For the first time Sally has experienced the wounded soldier whose elbow has been shot off. They started treating the waves of tattered and butchered men. They have nursed those injured in WWI and had suffered their own emotional wounds. In fact they found their bonds while facing the atrocities of war. They have discovered the world beyond their imaginations. They may not be a part of war but their doings and needful tasks towards the soldiers made them the daughters of Mars.

"No Australian author has more eloquently or extensively of war than Thomas Keneally."  
(Peter pierces Panorama)



“The horrific butcher’s bill of WWI trench fighting is at the heart of this moving epic novel from the author of Schindler’s List.” (Publishers Weekly)

Keneally made the Durance’s as the real daughters of Mars. On Archimedes they have witnessed Mars in all his ferocity. Keneally had written much about WWI and about the Australian history. For the first time, he has tackled Gallipoli, his own country’s great founding myth. With a great cheerfulness he says, “Gallipoli has an almost mystic place in our minds”. ‘Daughters of Mars’ is a historical novel which reconstructs its past. The history of Australia and its participation in the Gallipoli Campaign includes the future of Australia. Historical writer Keneally has drawn an inspiration from the actual wartime’s dairies, historical hospital and the real hospital ships. Like the soldiers of every war, Naomi heroism was noticed during the disastrous events in the Aegean Sea. Historicism is being tempted as New in the literary theory. It deals about the first principles of truths in the history and discusses how people are obliged to organize themselves socially and politically. *Daughters of Mars* speaks about the truths of the World War I and speaks about the sufferings of the victims who were affected by the war. The author described the events of the war through the characters. There was a psychological impact on every character in the novel. The writing about the war contextualizes the development of the writers thought. He laments not only the human casualties of the war but also the loss of the common, civilized standards. His New Historicism has problematical in the modernity. He claimed to achieve the tradition of modernity to post modernity. The modernism can itself be defined as the break from the past. New Historicism tends helpfully to isolate the problems from which take off and when it goes further, itself mutates into one or the other. Criticism simply gets the better with the history adding to the original story by bringing it up to date. *Daughters of Mars* for the first time placed the women on the battlefields. War is not always about the men. It is also about the women. The author has shared this belief in short in his novel *Daughters of Mars*.

The incomprehensible horrors and terrors of the war filled many souls with pain. The vastness of the war was captured in the writings of Keneally. The ending of the novel was disappointing because it moves back to the post War. *Daughters of Mars* is a novel about suffering and transcendence, despair and triumph and simple acts of decency that make us human even in a world gone mad. Everything is in some way involved in or affected by the struggles and negotiations for power. New Historicism began by examining some piece of evidence that seems, at first to have very little to do with literature but is nevertheless relevant to the complex cultural system from which a given work of literature emerged. A notable achievement of the writer Thomas Keneally is *Schindler Ark*, a winner of Booker Prize in 1982. This masterpiece was made into the internationally acclaimed film “Schindler’s List” by Steven Spielberg, which has gone to win the seven Academy awards including Best Director and Best Film. “Keneally’s portrait of Schindler is inspiring...he keeps clear of the pitfalls of sensationalism, handling the almost unbearable with the tough delicacy which it demands.” ‘Feminism’ is a concept which came into light in 1960’s. During ancient times Greek poetess Sappho (1560) had challenged the literature dominated by man. Catherine the Great (1470), the queen of Joan of Arc in France was ordered by the divine to liberate France. She was only woman warrior who was burnt alive. Later on Virginia Woolf, Jane Austen, George Eliot, Bronte Sisters and other feminist writers have created a new



dimension in literature. Simon De Beauvoir says, "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman. It is civilization as a whole that produces the creature which is described as 'feminine'. In the novel *Schindler Ark*, The female characters played an important role. One of the main characters is Emilie Schindler. Being neglected by her husband, she managed to manage herself to support him especially in his needs and deeds that to in his absence. She was mostly called as Oskar's abandoned wife by the readers. She believed him than any other. In Emilie's words "My dear Oskar" was always growling, "I never needed the damn money". (*Schindler Ark* -79).She was a boon in his life. The other character is Ingrid. He was killed by Amon for no fault. This reveals the insecurity of women. There was no protection either to men or women under the dictatorship of Hitler. Not for equal rights but they were tortured, punished, worked and killed. Schindler, in those hard times, he has extended his level best to the women. He bought them again when the train was missed. On the other hand in his dark life, there were many women. Another character is Helen. Helen looked across the room and saw Amon lolling on the sofa and smiling, "Stop shaking, you stupid girl," he told her, "or I won't be able to save you from the hound". Then he said, why don't you be my magical substance? (*Schindler Ark* -251).

### **CONCLUSION:**

Thomas Keneally has created an authentic picture of contemporary scenario through his writings. Considered as one of the most revered authors of Australia, he has created a niche for himself as a writer of various genres with astounding success at the world arena. He's seen history as a country of diversified rich cultures and great traditions, which are the persistent themes, explored in his novels. His conception about history, reflected in his works is the product of his real experiences of the country. Keneally's works are diverse and widely acclaimed. His fiction represents the national identity. National identity is the central theme of all his works. It brings in to light the cultural and critical environment in which the works are being authored. Keneally is a chief figure in the literary heritage of Australia as his works are an amalgamation of literary craft and history. Modern Australian literary and even historical works have been ignored sometimes as a source material for a study of recent developments in social complexion. Attention to historical work is admittedly of the greatest importance, but concentration in this direction must be permitted to blind one to the fact that there is now emerging a new Australia, to some extent based on the colloquial, which is already of the greatest literary and social value. With the growing importance of the literary world on the international scene, these modern Australian novels will be welcomed by every reader across the world.

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