

Portrayal of Free Spirit in Adrienne Rich's *Aunt Jennifer's Tiger* and Alice Walker's *Meridian*

- Dr.Sharda Singh

Abstract

The works of women writers of USA have become increasingly visible in the academy especially since 1970s because of their active involvement in contemporary women's movement. Writers like Toni Morrison and Alice Walker and poets like Maya Angelou and Adrienne Rich and others have been strongly greeted for their ideologies. Undoubtedly, their works echo strong resistance against racism, patriarchy and militarism. The present paper highlights the remedy of the various maladies like male dominance, subordinated identity and submissive life. It is said that 'every action has reaction' and these writers believe that "'FORTUNE FAVOURS THE BRAVE". So they have depicted the undaunted spirits among their female protagonists who fought bravely against the odds and eventually emerged victorious.

Key Words----- **Racism, Slavery, Suspended, Self-consciousness, Self-analysis, Independence**

Introduction at a glance

Alice walker is a versatile black feminine author. She prefers to be called "womanist" on the American fictional scene for more than two decades because womanism is better than feminism; "womanism" appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility and women's strength" (Walker 1983:xi). Walker redefines the past of slavery into the 'individual search for freedom. She explores many aspects of interrelationships of sexism and racism in the American society. Mary Helen Washington (1977:22) analyzes Walker's personal construct of the history of black women and how "suspended" black women characters in literature emerge as "The Emergent Women". Though the race oriented black cultural nationalist reviewers and critics attempted to sideline the black writers yet Alice Walker established herself as a staunch black feminist. *Meridian*, the protagonist who is a black girl, creates her own individual image of universal acclaim with her grit and determination for education. Adrienne Rich is widely known as a staunch feminist. As a poet and theorist, she actively involved herself in women's movement. The protagonist Aunt Jennifer of Adrienne Rich represents women all over the world whose tiger is prancing across a screen to get expression..

THEMATIC ANALYSIS-----

Aunt Jennifer's Tiger, the text reveals the sad truth. The poet has grimly painted the constraints of marriage life. She depicts the traumatic and oppressive life of Aunt Jennifer as a wife through a number of images, like

"the massive weight of Uncle's wedding bands
Sits heavily upon Aunt Jennifer's hands".

Tying in a nuptial knot seems mere a signature to her. She feels burdened by the weight of her marital responsibilities. She is so subjugated that when she sits for

embroidery in a free time, her fingers tremble. The poet has deliberately highlighted the embroidery work which is enough to confine the female within the threshold like Alice Walker's Celie of her novel *The Color Purple* who spends her free time in quilting. It is apt to reflect patriarchy where male controls the female coercively. Aunt Jennifer, who is a victim of unhappy marriage, who passes her free time in embroidery, uses sharp and contrasting colours which ironically represents the missing colours of her personal life. Besides 'Ring' is another symbol in the text which refers to 'enslaved' or 'bondage'.

“Aunt Jennifer's tigers prance across a screen
Bright topaz denizens of a world of green.”

The protagonist draws the pictures of 'denizens' and 'chivalric' tigers. They are majestic animals, a symbol of power, strength and freedom enjoyed by men at large. The symbols of tigers of her knitting are flamboyant men of the society who prance upon the weaker animals of the jungle. They do not fear rather terrify the others. Actually the poet has referred the qualities of tigers intentionally which is lacking in Aunt Jennifer who represent the women in general. The poet wants to suggest them to possess these qualities to fight against their oppressors. The poet wants to establish a sense of triumph in her women characters like free tigers.

Meridian is Walker's second novel. In this novel she enters into a broader arena and portrays a dynamic protagonist Meridian Hill, who rises from her state of oppression to become a leader of the people. She is Walker's first woman character to survive by her own efforts. *Meridian* is also a political novel, as its theme is based on Civil Rights and Black Nationalistic movement. Walker herself has been active civil right activist. Meridian, who represents Walker, has to undergo a difficult situation in the start. In the words of Deborah E. McDowell:

Hers is a formidable struggle, for she lives in a society that domesticates conformity that censures individual expression, especially for women; but she flourishes notwithstanding and evolves into a prototype for psychic wholeness and individual autonomy”. (168)

Meridian is a “Looney” woman, physically and psychologically abused in the outset, the pregnant and married to a high school dropout she finds herself trapped like as usual black woman of the past. So, she wants to get rid of her own baby Eddie Jr. whom she has given birth as the age thirteen only. This makes her think: “so this is what slavery is like.” (*Meridian*69). Even before marriage, she is raped by a mulatto called George Dexter's assistant who thinks her a fair game to play because she is black. However becoming Eddie's mother has made her understand what it is to be a woman specially to be a poor black woman, and a mother. Unlike Sula, of Toni Morrison's *Sula* Meridian never declares “I don't want to make somebody else (babies) but I want to make myself”(Sula 85). Meridian struggles with thoughts of suicide or killing her child, but eventually decides to give the child up and attend college. She experiences motherhood in the initial stage of her life and then decides to find out her own path and identity. She completes her graduation and enters an organization of black militants in Mississippi.

Meridian and other like-minded students feel that the Saxon authority want to suppress their natural instinct under their goal of conferring “lady hood” upon them .The experience with black male like Truman and Mr. .Raymond opens Meridian's mind against the hypocrisy of sexism. Consequently, she imposes self –discipline to heal her wounded psyche and the pain of her people .She is clinged to her something in past, which is full of music of her own culture rooted in love. She empowers herself after her graduation and decides to serve her own people who are needy and sufferer.

Conclusion-----

The novel depicts a woman whose chief aim in life is not only marriage and motherhood, but also, a woman who has a conscious moral choice to be an individual. Meridian Hill fights with her emotions, rejects the stereotypical roles imposed on society, commits whole heartedly to serve her community. She braves all impediments and the people honour her for her devotion and dedication Thus *Meridian*, occupies a special place in the oeuvre of Alice walker in the sense that it presents predominantly the women's world. It is a world where women outshine men in terms of their clear perception of things around them, their courage to cope with their surrounding and come to terms with their losses, their ability to forge an alliance among themselves and learn to live. In an interview to Alice Walker, John O'Brien gives statement that: “central to any consideration of Alice Walker's fiction is her preoccupation with black womanhood and its myriad shading.”(192) In the end it must be said that every life must be purposeful and meaningful. And the poet Adrienne Rich too has symbolized women to be brave like tigers to break the shackles of oppression. They will be 'proud and afraid'. Thus both women have succeeded in their goal through emergent character.

Works- Cited

- Adrienne, Rich. *The Aunt Jennifer's Tiger*
 Christian, Barbara-- . Novels for Everyday Use in *Alice Walker Critical Perspective Past and Present*. New York: Amistad.1993p.73-99
 ---, *Alice Walker: The Black Woman Artist as Wayward: In Black Women Writers*, New York: 1950-1980 P. 457 -477.
 ---, *The Black Women Novelists: the Development of a Tradition*.
 Cleaver, Eldridge. *Soul on Ice* .New York: McGraw Hills.1968.p.159
 Collins, P.H. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* .Boston: Unwin Hayman.1990.
 DuBois, W.E.B. *Souls of Black Folk* Greenwich, Conn: Fawcett Premier Book.1961. pg,23
 McDowell, Deborah E. The Self in Bloom: Alice Walker's *Meridian* CLA Journal 24.3. 1-1981 P.262-2

(Dept.of English)
 Govt. Nirbhay singh Patel Sc.College,
 A.B. Road, Indore.