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RESEARCH ARTICLE

MARGINAL VOICES IN ALICE WALKER'S STRONG HORSE TEA

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Abstract

The dominant forces, the torchbearers of civilizations in America, have always silenced marginal voices. The religious books have always been the instrumental foundations for the whites to retain dominance across the world. Ruthless whites like the Aryans defeated the natives and enslaved them in their trap. They enforced slavery and imbibed the superstitious notions and outdated religious rituals that never allowed the oppressed to question its authority on the base of reason and science. In the twentieth century, the emergence of revolutions and the movements for the human rights of the African Americans forced the imperialists to accept democratic values, implement, and administer them in the countries. Under the influence of the dominant oppressive forces, the whites kept the downtrodden and oppressed people ignorant about it. The pains and problems of the people did not end with the abolition of slavery and untouchability in both the countries but continued horribly in racist, classist, and sexist society. The vintages of slavery resulted from the race and caste are still on display in the slums. The humble dwellers in the slums struggle never ending problems caused by the elite dominated industrialism and capitalism in the metropolitan cities where there is hardly any room and scope for their growth and emancipation. Alice Walker's "Strong Horse Tea" voices the margins who were rejected and dejected for ages. This paper is an attempt to throw light on the margins within the margins and voice the miserable lives of the oppressed, those who struggle against the oppression and are silenced meticulously by the hypocritical ruthless masters.

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Introduction:-

Alice Walker a renowned writer deals with the women's issues in racist and sexist America where the literary giants of her time in white literary circle miserably failed in their presentation of the African Americans in America and even if they projected the people of color, they were presented from the whites' point of views and not the humanists' worldview. Walker deals with the several issues that concern black women's identity, voice, human rights and their exploitation in racist and sexist society. The entire race of the black raised their voice against their discrimination and remained silent towards the pains and problems faced by the black women in patriarchal construct of race and sex. In her exploration of the African American society, Walker finds black males and the whites more responsible for the status quo in society in regard to women's pains, problems and identity issues that they failed to identify, recognize and address in the whites' race and gender-based society.

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Black women's voices are not only silenced meticulously by the whites but they are also dominated forcibly by the black men who regarded them sexual beings and imposed single parenthood forcibly on them without any sense of duty and responsibility on their part towards their women and children, they fathered. Rannie Toomer represents such women. The way, the whites administered racism to administer their sovereignty; the same way mendevised patriarchy to control women in their reign and quiet their voice by marginalizing their position in society. In *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens Womanist Prose*, Alice Walker highlights black women's plight in the racist and sexist conformist order that has regarded women the "mule of the world" and handed them the burdens that "everyone else-everyone else-refused to carry." (237) Rannie Toomer, the protagonist of *Strong Horse Tea* is a representative of black women who are in love and trouble of various predicaments. She is imposed motherhood without marriage and the man who is responsible to bring the child in the world is nowhere seen shouldering father's responsibilities and his complete absence marks the deterioration in the entire black community and the lack of solidarity between men and women to work towards the emancipation of entire African American society.

In *Strong Horse Tea*, Walker projects the marginal world of African American mother, Rannie Toomer who is trapped in racial imperialism and not granted freedom in any form to exercise her abilities and faith in science. She is condemned to live in slum as the black women's world is ruled and dominated by the racial and imperial authority of the whites and the irresponsible behaviour of the black men who imposed motherhood on black women and left them. Rannie Toomer, the protagonist raises her voice against the injustice done to her by the racist white community and the black male ideology those who do not regard black women as human beings and victimize them in the name of God and religion. The story begins with a description of her son's critical health condition and details her plight. Her plight is due to racism and sexism perpetuated in the imperial world in which black women are trapped in ugly relations and burdened with motherhood. The narrator recalls, "Rannie Toomer's little baby boy Snooks was dying from double pneumonia and whooping cough. She sat away from him, gazing into the low fire, her long crusty bottom lip hanging. She was not married. Was not pretty. Was not anybody much. And he was all she had." (Walker, *The Complete...*, 80) The narrator's description of Rannie Toomer's plight displays the deprived world of the black community in which the mothers and children suffered due to the incapacity of the black men to understand their responsibility towards women and also the children, they fathered.

Rannie Toomer raises her voice strongly against the dominant forces with her faith in science and medicine but she is innocent enough not to understand that it is ruled by the whites who do not care for the blacks and their children. She voices strong rejection of the swamp magic in her remark, "I don't believe in none of that swamp magic." The white mailman shatters her faith in science and medicine when he should assist her in calling doctor, he directs her to the "swamp magic" in a mocking tone, "Magic that if it didn't work on whites probably would on blacks." (Walker, *The Complete...*, 83-84) His attitude towards her appeal is a manifestation of the white race mentality towards the entire black community. Her voice is silenced and she is condemned to poverty, ignorance and the set norms of imperialism that the sexist male dominated patriarchy rules through the conformist religious authoritarian dogma that has been imbibed and instilled methodically in society.

In *An Essay on Alice Walker* Mary H. Washington's comments, "...struggling to get a doctor for her dying child, is handicapped by poverty and ignorance as well as by the racism of the southern rural area she lives in." (Christian:93) Rannie Toomer fails to understand the entrenched pattern of discrimination. Unable to realize her marginalized position as a black and a black woman, she puts her faith in a white doctor and appeals the white mailman to send one to treat her only child Snooks. Her failure to understand her racial positions displays her limited understanding of colonialism and imperialism. In *Racism and Feminism: The Issue of Accountability*, Hell Books rightly comments, "...the American woman's understanding of racism as a political tool of colonialism and imperialism is severely limited." (119) Rannie Toomer's voice is muffled and the black women like her are rejected their right to life and relegated to a worse level than animals. She is denied the basic needs in life she requires to live with dignity and respect in society. She receives the advertising circulars often, the ones, the white mailman delivers. Her ignorance about the advertisement law that sends circulars makes her to consider the issue seriously, and question the mailman, if "She couldn't ever buy any of the things in the pictures- so why did the stores keep sending them to her?" (Walker, *The Complete...*, 82) It is a mockery to the humanity, that the white capitalists mock the poor by sending their advertising circulars even when the blacks are not in position to buy any one item from the list of the circulars and are in the dire need of basic demands of food, cloth and shelter in their life. The medical facilities remained a distance reality in their life which they could not afford for centuries and remained deprived of everything, they deserved as human beings. African Americans were deprived of education that critically affected their lives and controlled their beings through the literature they provided through the advertising circulars. In

Reanimating the Trope of the Talking Book Deborah Anne Hooker's observation in this regard throws light on the pathetic conditions to which the blacks were conditioned, "... the appearance of printed texts to illiterate auditors whose amazement reveals both a simple lack of literacy and a profound unfamiliarity with the dominant forces shaping and controlling their world." (Bloom, 189) Although Rannie puts her trust in science and a doctor, she fails to recognize the dynamic forces behind her oppression in the world of science and technology that is controlled by the whites to exploit and gain more profit. Deborah further rightly points, "Despite failing to grasp why she repeatedly receives the pictures of all the objects she 'couldn't buy,' Rannie paradoxically invests her trust in the world from which these texts emerge." (Bloom, 192)

The white imperialist world denied the blacks education and threw them permanently in the dark wholes of ignorance and superstition. Rannie, left with no alternative is forced to seek Sarah's advice to save her only child Snooks who is dying of phenominaia and cough. The white mailman's advice to seek the help of black root maker and the swamp magic throws light on the mentality of the white people and the conspiracy of nigger magic and the white racist society that deny the blacks the basic needs of food, health and education. Snooks' death symbolizes the irresponsible behaviour and racist entrenched pattern of discrimination to maintain the blacks under the threshold of the white hegemony. In *An Essay on Alice Walker*, Mary Helen Washington comments on Snook's death, a great tragedy that struck Rannie, "In his death, all the elements seem to have conspired- the earth, the 'nigger' magic of Aunt Sarah, the public and private racism of the south. One wonders what desperate hysteria allowed Rannie Toomer to stomach the taste and smell of horse urine." (Christian, 93)

Rannie Toomer's critical condition is presented through the use of circulars she makes in protecting herself and her child from utter cold. The narrator states, "Cold wind was shooting all around her from the cracks in the window framing, faded circulars blew inward from the walls." (Walker, *The Complete...*, 85) She plastered the circulars as use value futilely to protest from the wild cold Georgia weather. Rannie's is forced to fetch strong horse tea, the only remedy to save her dying child in a shoe that leaks and has to put her tongue against it to offer warm strong horse tea to her son, highlights her tragedy caused by the lack of the fundamental opportunities, education provides. Rannie Toomer's plight and Snooks death is not incidental, it is caused by the entrenched pattern of racism and sexism, and she is victim of. In *Strong Horse Tea by Alice Walker: A Review* Taskeen, Samiya and Abida Taskeen rightly comment on the root cause of the blacks' suppression and oppression that has resulted in denying the equal rights to them. In their opinion, Rannie's plight and her son's death are the results of the whites' cruelty, brutality and savagery and the ignorance of their own equal rights in racist orthodox society. (59)

To conclude, racial prejudice instilled in the white class not only relegated the blacks to poverty and deprived them of basic needs in life but it also critically affected black women. Denial of the basic needs was a great disaster that left the blacks at the mercy of conventions and rituals, left them with no other alternative except the swamp magic to save their dear ones. Racism and classism compelled men to reject their duty as fathers and burdened women with a single parenthood. Rannie is a representative of the black women who carried the burden of children with paramount feelings of love and affection for them. Snooks' tragic death in racist and sexist America is the ultimate end of humanity. Racism not only destroyed the blacks but critically affected women's relations with the black men who became irresponsible, unaccountable toward their duties as a companion, husband and father, and overall a human being. Race, Sex and Class prejudice and inequity suppress Rannie's voice and strong faith in science and reason, cause a disaster in her life, and leave her with no alternative except to catch a *strong horse tea* in stormy rain to save her dying child, Snooks. Walker's *Strong Horse Tea* demands the human beings to raise their strong voice against all the kinds of discriminations, oppressions and subjugations wherever they are and force the governments to act according the law and democracy to sustain humanity in materialistic imperialistic world that adheres race, class and sex distinctions in the age of science and technology.

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