



## VICTIMIZATION BY TRADITION IN ALICE WALKER'S POSSESSING THE SECRET OF JOY

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### Abstract:

Literature is a bridge for the people to walk to and fro to the history of our world. People can apprehend the various facts, traditions, rituals, life styles that society is subjected to now and then. The applause for this medium of expressions has to be rendered to the inventor and to his or her invention. When we scour our literature, one can know the happiness and haplessness that mankind has withstand. There were rites by which human beings became the part of a ghetto and at the same time they were shattered. Writers, especially women writers, have much more to share what they and their fellow beings put up with. Women writers wrote mainly on the issues that a woman goes through in every stage of life in the name of rites or rituals. African women were the worst victims. Tanritanir says, "To be a black woman is more difficult than to be a woman" (438). Alice Walker is the one of the writers who lifted the difficulties to the society that women undergo in Africa. In spite of race, sex, inequality that black women had undergone, they were traumatized in the name of tradition. This article examines the protagonist, Tashi, of *Possessing the Secret of Joy* by Alice Walker. Tashi was adherent in her tradition but later became a victim.

### Introduction:

Alice Malsenior Tallulah Kate Walker is a prolific writer of several novels, essays, poems and children's books. She was born on 9 February 1944 in Eatonton in Georgia. She was the youngest one of seven children to her parents, Willie Lee Walker and Minnie Tallulah Grant Walker. Her family lived in poverty. Her mother was a good narrator. So she grew up listening to stories of ghosts, dreams and real stories. She was taught about the tradition and culture by her mother from her childhood itself.

Alice Walker sees writing as a way to correct wrongs that she observes in the world. Walker in *Possessing the Secret of Joy* examines the practices of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). The novel focuses on Tashi who willingly requests the rituals, in part because she unaware of what the rituals involves. She was completely ignorant of her barbaric ritual and its profound effect throughout her life.

### Review of Literature:

In commenting on *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, Alyson. R. Buckman states that "Walker's text acts as a revolutionary manifesto for dismantling systems of domination". This article has taken aid from the other writers whose sentiment echoed in their works. Awa Thiam's *Black Sisters Speak out: Feminism and Oppression in Black Africa* was chosen as the primary aid to support Alice Walker.

The epigraph of the novel, "When the axe came into the forest, the trees said the handle is one of us" (i/ii) shows a silent submission of women to the macho society. *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, is about an African woman, circumcised protagonist, Tashi. She was a minor character in Walker's *The Colour Purple*. She moved to America from Olinka, a fictional African nation. She married Adam, Olivia's brother. They left Olinka due to war. Olinka was a place where genital mutilation for female is practiced. Tashi moved back to Africa to undergo mutilation. She felt that she is sandwiched between the two cultures: traditional and western. She did the mutilation and struggled to pass the physical and psychological trauma. Later, she killed the 'tsunga' who killed her sister, Dura, and become a strong opponent of the circumcision. Tashi gets executed thereafter. Through this novel Walker informs the women about the ill effects of circumcision. She wanted the women to fight for their rights. Walker conveyed the message that "Torture is not culture".

Tashi was suffocating because of her dual identity as an African and as an American. This made her to rethink on her Olinkan village and its rituals. She forgot the physical and psychological disabilities that she has to bear. She has considered herself as a fighter for her tribe. "I sat astride the donkey in the pose of a chief, a warrior" (Walker, 20-21). She was not ready to give up even after Adam and Olivia compelled her. Circumcision not only affected her but also her child. She used her mouth to regain the shape of her son, Benny's, head. She does the scarification and once she returns back to America, her husband, Adam, too does that in order to save her from society's embarrassment.

Awa Thiam in her book *Black Sisters Speak out: Feminism and Oppression in Black Africa* shares a firsthand experience of a 26 year old young woman. When she was questioned what she feels about the problems of excision or does she wants it to consider as a mutilation, her answer was really shocking. She says:

I was excised as a child. I am talking about my own personal experience. Today, I am glad I had the excision operation. The reason why I maintain this point of view is that it has fulfilled its function as far as I am concerned. I have been divorced for four years and I have never been for one moment felt the desire running after a man, or felt the absence of sexual relations to be a lack, a vital lack (66).

There are people who consider this practice as a form of preserving their virginity. Even parents support this practice and take their child for this initiation ceremony. It's a form of making them to get ready for marriage. They are afraid of being ostracized from their society. In some community, if the child is not circumcised, she is considered to be illegitimate. Still people believe it is a way to escape from rape.

The macho society subjugates the voiceless women in one or the other way. Walker in an interview acknowledges that "a culture in which men will not marry you unless you have been mutilated and there is no other works you can do and you are . . . considered to be a prostitute if you are not mutilated, you face a very big problem. Women mutilate their daughters because they are looking down the road to a time when the daughter will . . . marry and at least have a roof . . . and food."

**Conclusion:**

The novel is against the traditional evil practice of Africa. Walker speaks for African women, who are still doomed in the darkness. She strongly opposes FGM and asks women to rise against it. She wants the practice to be abolished. Even though this novel brought a lot of criticism to Walker, she stood firm in her writing. She was accused of mistreating men in the name of patriarchy, racism, and sexism. Any how she succeeds in educating the society through her writing. She wishes to revolutionize the society through her pen. She decided to give a part of her royalty of her book to the people who were worst affected because of FGM.

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