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FEMALE VOICE IN MARGERET ATWOOD'S NOVEL 'THE BLIND ASSASSIN'

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the paper on the novel 'The Blind Assassin' is to demonstrate, the social position of women of Canada in 20th century, a century which was gloomy and pessimistic. Iris, the female character suffers extreme violence at the hands of her husband Richard Griffin, raises her voice against that torture and through a memoir unfolds all the mysteries of her life.

The novel 'The Blind Assassin' revolves around the character of Protagonist, Iris Chase and her sister Laura Chase. Both the sisters were raised well off but motherless in a small town Southern Ontario. Eighty seven years old Iris recalls the events of her life under the name of her deceased sister Laura who committed suicide at the age of twenty five. She gives a detailed account of her grand parents and parents, her childhood memories, her unhappy married life with Richard Griffin and her extra-marital love affair with a culprit Alex Thomas.

The novel is multilayered having three parallel embedded storie. In her old age between 1998 and 1999, Iris Chase Griffin reflects on her family history living in a small Ontario town of port Tichonderoga. Her sister Laura Chase, her husband Richard Griffin and her daughter Aimee – all have died earlier. Now she only has a grand daughter Sabrina but she bears ill feelings for her. Iris, even at her old age runs a small business taking help from Myra, a local ship-owner and daughter of old house helper of chase family. The narration shifts alternately between Iris present and memoirs of her childhood of early life. Laura, her younger sister , died in a car accident or some said it was a suicide. After her death, Iris found, in her belongings the manuscript of a novel 'The Blind Assassin' which was published posthumously. The novel describes many meeting episodes of two unknown lovers. The lovers tells the beloved a strange story about a distant planet called Zycron. Along with this novel within novel we read reports from newspaper clippings about the major events of the city.

According to Karen F. Stein The Blind Assassin is "constructed like a Russian wooden doll, i.e. nested series of stories; and like the nested dolls, one story hides another until it is opened to reveal another one surprisingly similar to it." (P.N.. 35)*. Here is another science fiction narrated by the male protagonist about Sakiel- Norn), fantasy of virgin sacrifices by the blind assassin. This romance fiction is the creation of Iris herself under the disguise of Laura. It is about the secret meeting of two unnamed lovers who are none other than Iris Chase and Alex Thomas. In the novel, " there is a continual blurring of borders not only in fiction and Iris' real life memoir but also between the Sakiel-Norn fantasy and the lives of two lovers in Toranto.* (P.N.165)

In the novel, all the events of Iris and Laura's childhood are remembered and recollected by the author. She also narrates the incident of incident of Laura 's death in the blooming years of her life. She tries to investigate her untimely death and in this venture comes across all those factors which were responsible to make a woman passive, marginalized and merely a puppet in the hands of male. Iris "Appropriates her voice and writes her untold story thus becoming a subject that shapes instead of remaining an object that has been shaped by patriarchal assumptions"*

Atwood, in the novel, tries to deconstruct the binary of subject/object that assigns a woman secondary position in society and gains the power to fight the oppressors. In the words of Fiona Tolan, " Novel is profoundly connected with representation of female body, female victimization and female power."* The novel shows how girls are treated as sexual commodity, only a toy to play with. Iris as well as her sister Laura are sexually molested by Richard who is presented as embodiment of masculinity. Iris says, " when he married me, he figured he'd got a bargain, two for the price of one"(BA617) Richard, after the marriage uses her as toy, teases her for amusement and treats her merely as sexual object without making any emotional bondage. In the words of Greer "Woman has been dictated and made to believe that her identity exists in her body, she is exploited and oppressed on account of her sexuality, she is the sexual object sought by all men and all by all women (67)

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Iris experiences her marriage as violence behind a beautiful veil where everyday she gets bruises purple, blue and yellow. He finds pleasure inflicting pain, Thighs were his special place where it wouldn't show. Iris' position was no better than that of animal, to obey Richard's command and gratify his sexual needs. Her "job was to open her legs and shut my mouth." (BA407) She was there merely as sexual object meant to satisfy Richard's lust. So "the method that is used to subjugate women as the objectification of women in sexual terms; the male perspective on society is dominant one ….. the relationship is found on gender hierarchy in which men are dominant and women are subordinate, socially economically, politically and sexually." *(121)

Iris in writing the novel proves Helen Cixous' concept of 'Ecriture Feminine'. However 'Ecriture Feminine' is defined as female writing but in true sense of words it is a unique style of writing marked by new images. Helen Cixous introduced new feminine language that would subvert "these patriarchal binary schemes where logo centricism colludes with phallocentrism in an effort to oppress and silence women." Cixous argues that women can make patriarchal oppression passive by using feminine writing which "the passage towards more than self towards another than the self, towards the towards the other."*(112)

Atwood's female characters are often recognized as 'coded bodies' that suffers torments, torture and subjugation on account of their sex. Iris on seeing the bruises over her body by Richard's sexual act as a "kind of code which bloosomed , then faded like invisible ink held to a candle, but if they were a code , who held the key to it," (BA455)

Iris leads a passive life after her marriage, having no control over her body and life. Her body is like a site where, Richard carve, construct and mould. She tries to liberate herself from that enslaved position, Cixous writes, "Women must write herself, must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies…… Women must put herself into the text … as into the world and into history….. by her own movement."* (Medusa 245)

Cixous wants women to "break out of the snare of silence"*(Medusa 251), Women can only liberated themselves from the boundaries of patriarchal society only by giving voice to their silence. For centuries women had been deprived from her identity as a human being , the power to speak against her own exploitation, suppression is snatched from her. Iris writes the story not only to make her conscience free before death, but also to make her grand daughter but also to make her granddaughter Sabrina realize her own identity. She reveals in the memoir for Sabrina "your real grandfather was Alex Thomas and as to who his father was, well sky is the limit…your legacy from him is the reality of infinite speculation. You are free to reinvent yourself at will." (BA513)

All the mysteries and hidden facts about Iris and Laura are exposed at the end of the novel. Iris by recounting and rewriting the memoir unfolds all the layers and factors responsible for gender identity of the sisters. She breaks the lifelong silence and unfolds the truth before the readers.

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