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PORTRAYAL OF NATIVE AMERICAN WOMEN IN DIANE GLANCY'S PLAY *WAR CRIES*

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ABSTRACT

Diane Glancy, a Native American dramatist, essayist and novelist. She portrays the Native women in her dramas and novels. She has written two collections of plays: *War Cries* (1997) and *American Gypsy: Six Native American Plays* (2002). *War Cries* is a collection of nine plays which include- "Weebjob", "Sick Horse", "The Truth Teller", "Mother of Mosquitos", "The Best Dancer the Pushmataha Pow Wow's Ever Seen" and "One Horse". In this collection Glancy discusses the social status of Native women and reveals their inner psyche, feelings, emotions and experiences of Native women. Her women characters are insulted and dominated by their father, brother, husband and other closest male relatives in her drama. Sereh in the play "Segwohi", is insulted by her brother Segwohi, Virgene in the play "Stick Horse", is dominated by her beloved, Eli and Coyote Girl in the play "Halfact" is mentally and emotionally tortured by her father and brother. Glancy does not represent her women characters as oppressed character, but also gives them the voice to speak for their rights. They have the power to speak against the patriarchal society and make their own identity in the society.

**Keywords:** Natives, identity, patriarchy, psyche.

Native Americans are pre-Columbian inhabitants of North America and South America. The native people of Canada are commonly known as First Nation people while the native people of United States are known as Native Americans. Women played a very important role in Native American society. Before the European colonization, the situations of Native Americans were good. They were the creator and preserver of culture and tradition. They were not only the housekeepers or caretakers of children but they also helped the men in agriculture and hunting. They were equal to native men. But after the colonization, the situation of Native women became worst. They were forced to depend economically on the men. They were expected to do only the household works and raised the children. In this way "their status declined, and

they became more vulnerable to the interests and machinations of men" (Medicine and Jacobs 130).

Literature plays an important role to show the image of women in the society. Native American literature represents the native women, their voices and their experiences. Native American writers "focuses on or foreground gender and sexuality in their work contribute a space that brings us full force to questions of Native women consciousness, power and vision in relation to both academia and our communities at large" (Avila 1). Diane Glancy as a Native American dramatist, essayist and novelist, portrays the native women in her dramas and novels. She has written two collections of plays: *War Cries* (1997) and *American Gypsy* (2002). *War Cries* is a collection of nine plays which include- "Weebjob", "Sick Horse", "The Truth Teller", "Mother of

Mosquitos", "The Best Dancer the Pusp mataha Pow Wow's Ever Seen" and "One Horse". In this collection, she discusses the social status of Native women and reveals the inner psyche, feeling and experience of Native women.

Native women had lost the power and respect after the colonization. Native men believed that women's role is to fulfil the expectation of their fathers, husbands, brothers and other closest male relatives. The main duty of the native women is to cook and serve food for them. In the play "Weebjob", Weebjob as a husband remembers his wife, when she had gone to his sister's house, only when he feels hungry. He said to his daughter "Your mother is at her sister, not to return for a few days I'm hungry. See what is in the kitchen and I will break my fast" ("Weebjob" 20). He remembers Sweet Grass as a cook, not as a wife. Thus the Native American women are only expected to do the household works.

Glancy's women characters in the play are insulted by the closest male relatives. Her heroines give love and respect to the male relatives, but they do not respect their love and good behaviour towards them. As Virgene from the play "Stick Horse" is dominated by the male character Eli. She is not appreciated by him but she loves him. She says to him "I still care you Eli. No matter how it hurts" ("Stick Horse" 102). On the other side, Eli does not understand her love and replies to her "I'm not going to marry you. . . Can't you get a man anywhere?" ("Stick Horse" 97). Eli disrespects the love of Virgene.

Another woman character, Sereh from the play "Segwohi", insults by her brother Segwohi. Sereh had two husbands but both her marriage had broken up. Then she decided to live with her brother, Segwohi. But he does not respect her and appreciate her for her work. Everyday Sereh is insulted by Segwohi. He says, "You do nothing make warped cellars at your potter wheel." ("Segwohi" 214) In this way Sereh feels that she is not a good and successful woman, that's why she had been abandoned by her husband and by her children. She always accepts what her brother said to her. She never protests against him. Thus Sweet Grass from "Weebjob", Virgene from "Stick Horse" and Sereh

from "Segwohi" shows the social status of the Native American women.

Native women suffer from the domestic violence and sexual assault. The U.S. department of Justice defines Domestic Violence is a "pattern of abusive behaviour in any relationship that is used by one partner to gain or maintain power and control over another intimate partner. Domestic violence can be physical, sexual, emotional, economic, or psychological actions or threats of actions that influence another person" (qtd. in Herring ). Glancy women character, Sweet Potato in "Weebjob" and Coyote Girl in "Halfact" deal with the problems of domestic violence. In the mid of the play Sweet Potato shares her experience to her father's friend, Pick Up, whom she marries at the end of the play. She tells her experience that when she went to Gallup, she was physically abused by the white people and the natives. Sweet Potato suffered from the physical harassment. The other woman character, Coyote Girl, tortures mentally and emotionally by her father and brother, after the death of her mother. She wants to live an independent life. She asks her brother "I wish we could play in the cemetery again without knowing As children. Unaware" ("Halfact" 194). But her brother does not allow her to go outside and replies her that "You'll get the grow-ups and never be the same. You want to be carried into the kitchen like wood for the stove?" ("Halfact" 194). Her brother and her father believe that native woman has no right to go outside and live an independent life. At the end of the play Coyote girl feels sad and she says:

Take away my pine cone doll and laughter

Take my memory and voice.

Let me be a spiny skeleton, a bonny ladder.

A scaffolding which is nothing but structure  
for the content of others. ("Halfact" 199)

Thus Coyote Girl is growing up "with incest, isolation and a longing for escape" ("Halfact" 190). Glancy through the character, Sweet Potato and Coyote Girl expresses the situation and the struggle of the native women to survive in the society.

Glancy does not only show the typical image of the Native American women in a patriarchal society but also show another image of the women in which they are rebellious and strong.

Kimberly Blaeser points out in the introduction of *War Cries* that: "Glancy's intentions in this collection are literary to be sure, but like those of many other Native Women writers, they are also supra-literary. She shares these stories as "voices speaking against the darkness" as "war cries." Each drama contains a spark of healing, an aide to survival" (vi).

Glancy represents her women characters not only as oppressed character but give them the power to speak for their rights. In the play "Weebjob", Sweet Grass's life is fully depended on her husband Weebjob. But she wishes to speak for herself. She comes in the middle of the play, from her sister's house. When she lived without Weebjob in her sister's house, she realized that she has the power to live without her husband's opinion. She said that she missed Weebjob, but on the other side she feels confident to speak to her husband. When she came in her house, she accepts the relation of her daughter with Weebjob's friend, PickUp, but Weebjob does not accept it. She speaks for her daughter relation with PickUp. At that time Weebjob says to her, "You never used to contradict me, Sweet Grass" ("Weebjob" 69). At that time Sweet Grass confidently replies to Weebjob, "Because I express my opinion, you call it contradiction? Haven't I always been free to say what I think ("Weebjob" 69). Sweet Grass realizes Weebjob that women have also power to speak against the patriarchal society.

As Sweet Grass, Sereh in the play "Segwohi" reminds the importance of her in the house to her brother, Segwohi. She realizes what she had done for him.

I've cooked for you ten years since your wife's death. I earn enough from my pottery that I could live by myself. You took care of me in the past, but now I make the money that pays the taxes on your land and buys the food. . . . The woman come from Sante Fe and pays me a lot for my pottery. I buy a firebrick kiln. I give some of the money to the orphans- to Peyto . . . . I give some to You, Segwohi. So now I have spent it all - I can say I'm poor again and have to live with you. It's better than living with myself- letting the men come around again- though I'm getting too old for that anymore. At least you spare me some of my troubles. ("Segwohi" 227)

At the end of the play Segwohi is thankful to her sister and says, "I do love you, Sereh. You're my sister who has always been with me- longer than my wife and daughter. You are with me even more than Peyto. I think he would not even come out here but for you" ("Segwohi" 229). By the help of Sweet Grass and Sereh, Glancy proves that Native American women are not fully dependent on the men. They have the power to speak for their identity and they make their own place in the society.

Native American Women, according to Bataille and Sands are "characterized by responsibility for the steadfastness of tribal ideas and values" (18). Native women give more importance to their culture and traditions. Paul Gunn Allen opines that a native woman is "defined by her tribal identity. In her eyes, her destiny is necessarily that of her people and her sense of herself as a woman is first and foremost prescribed by tribe" (qtd. in Cotera 152).

Glancy's women character show respect for their culture and traditions. As in the play "Truth Teller", the main character, Indian Woman fights for their culture and tradition. She criticized the white people who did wrong with Native Americans. Her husband, Indian Man is eager to help the white people, but on the other side, Indian Woman does not like her husband to help them. She observes with great distress that how Europeans act, "they kill the game we hunt for food. They say they buy our land. But the land was given to us" ( "Truth Teller" 265). Indian woman as a tradition keeper, remind her husband about the traditional tasks: "I would rather you chop fire-wood. Kill a deer. Make me another deer antle rake. Find some chockecherry. Dream a name for the child. Draw a birtchbark scroll for his life's path. Paddle the boat while I gather rice with my cedar beaters" ("Truth Teller" 257). The words of Indian Woman reveal that Native Americans should do all the traditional tasks, because through that tradition they come to know about their culture. In this manner a Native woman give more importance to their tradition and culture and connects the present to the past.

Thus the dramatic work of Daine Glancy reveals that after colonization native women were entrapped in a miserable world. They lost their

power, respect and identity in a male dominated society. They became the victim of domestic violence. But Glancy does not only show the miserable situation of native women in the patriarchal world, she also shows another image of Native women, in which they fight for their identity, culture and tradition.

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