

POSTCOLONIAL REPRESENTATION AND RESISTANCE IN LITERATURE

Editors

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Ethnic Elements in Tayari Jones' *Silver Sparrow*

D. R. Mane and Chhaya M. Gore

Ethnicity is an identity of American social structure. America is the country of different cultures, heritage and traditions. American literature is combination of various ethnic groups and their works. American literature is ethnic representation of various literatures such as: Native American-Sherman Alexi, Chinese American-Li Young Lee, and African American-Tayari Jones etc.

As the *Oxford Advance Learners Dictionary* defines "ethnicity is a category of people or group who identify with each other based on similarities such as common ancestry, common language, common history, common society, culture and nation."

Tayari Jones' works are identified as a new voice from African American ethnic group. In her novels she not only describes her experience as a black in white society but also focuses on ethnic elements in her writing. *Silver Sparrow* is the story of black African American girl. She narrates about her life and her father. She narrates her father as:

"My father, James Witherspoon is a bigamist..." (Jones 01)

Through this novel Tayari Jones highlights the issue that is one part of African American ethnic group and their activities as bigamist. Tayari Jones not only focuses on the issue of bigamist but she also represents it through her work. *Silver Sparrow* is the representation of this custom which is part of black women's life. It allows men to have many wives whereas woman have no choice and must accept them without any objection. Even Baptist also allows it. In male dominated society man made his own rights for him. The novelist focuses this problem with the contemporary touch.

The structure of family in a social condition is changed as per the time, in previous period there were joint families, with many members but now the separate family trend came in the society. In the house, there are three or four members in one family. But Dana's painting of family, which is not discussed in the society. Dana, an innocent girl, draws the picture of her family in the school, in which the social set up of the family lives are drawn in the house and Dana and her mother are outsiders in the house. This picture of Dana shows the reality of society, and quotes and unquotes family. In society there is no place of family like a Gwen. Her teacher, father and mother and everyone is shocked by this drawing. Gwen

prohibits drawing such picture of the family for hiding their real identity.

Gwen and Dana, African American women, try to search their identity in their whole life. In the case of marriage, Dana's innocent words present many elements of ethnicity. The first wife gets the first position, which is legal, so Dana thinks that then why not her first coming as a baby of James does not give her first position. She thinks that it is more complex to understand this. Dana wants her position in the society like a Chaurisse which she never gets. She always observes to Laverne and Chaurisse, and also wants to imitate for the higher position but she fails. Her mother also searches her identity, after pregnancy she wants to marry James for the identity of Dana but she fails. In hospital Raleigh signed the discharge paper as a father of Dana.

Absolutely race and ethnicity cannot be one term but race is a part of ethnicity. In race, physical appearance or biological structure and genes are important. Bone structure, colour, hair, nose, eyes, teeth, lips etc pass genetically from one generation to other generation. So some characteristics remain same in the look of a particular group. Such as Gwen, Dana, Laverne, Chaurisse, James, Ronalda and Miss Bunny are African American people so they have black skin, curly hair, thick lips, white teeth and big height. There are some minor differences between their appearances like dark black or light black colour, thin or fat, heavy hair or less hair etc. But they have different physical appearances than other group of people. Like white boy, Mike has white skin and blue eyes. She puts the existence of mix-racial Raleigh who has combine features of black and white.

As an African-American man, Ronalda's father Mr. Harris keeps his culture alive in his house. He loves his African descent very much. He feels proud of his culture. He has all pictures of African black beauty. His picture gallery keeps alive his African culture and history in his house. He has the images of Malcolm X, W. E. B. Du Bois and Kwame Nkrumah (an African president). He lives in his own world of ancestry. He named his son Kwame Nkrumah to show respect or love to his motherland.

Tayari Jones shows the racial discrimination by using the mouthpiece of Ronalda, who suggests to Dana to take admission in Southern University in Baton Rouge. Dana wants to go to Mount Holyoke but she advises her that it is not appropriate for black

people. She says that white people never adjust with black people. If she takes the admission there, she will suffer from many things. If James' painting to mix up black and white colour suggests

so many things. His mixing only creates gray or something distinct but he tries to sort out the problem of race. He has a wish in his childhood that one white man must drive for him, to show the humiliating feeling of coloured people because of their treatment. He remembers his past where in hotel there was a prohibition to black people to come in. He describes the incident of a white woman, how she feared because of his appearance.

As an African American woman writer Tayari Jones gives voice to the feminist approach in certain examples. As a part of them after disclose identity as a legal marriage. Ronald's parents never like her because of her gender. They want only boy. Ronald being dark black coloured so no classmate is friendly with her. Ronald tease her as a 'Bama'. Mary an African American woman throws a hot grits on the face of Al Green for the revenge of white man. The novelist describes the dressing style of people on the basis of contemporary time; James uses navy Chauffeur's uniform and hat, a driver's professional dress. All characters generally use jeans, shirts, jacket etc; on festival they wear Easter dress.

She describes cuisine style of African American people in contemporary America. Now they use dining table, napkins, fork and spoons in the house. They use coke, cold sandwiches, pea, egg, ham, oysters, chicken, crab cakes, a roast-beef and bar pizza, pig, fish, potatoes and cauliflower, in drinks orange juice, drinks-gin and-tonic, peppermint schnapps, cocktail, potato soup, Vienna sausages, strawberry wine, raspberry syrup, beer etc. Place is a very important element for ethnic identity and novel because it was a centre place of Civil Right Movement. She thinks that it is an urban south changing from time to time, so reflects the history. Alabama has unique importance in African American history. Auckland, Virginia, Chicago, North Carolina, Mississippi, Georgia, Hampton, Birmingham, Chapel Hill, Virginia Highland etc have their importance in African American history. There are names of colleges with ethnical thinking like Mount Holyoke College in Georgia prefer white and Southern university¹⁰ black.

Tayari Jones uses simple language and narrative, half narrative given by Dana and half by Chaurisse. Both sisters very clearly give the account of life of their parents in a simple manner. She keeps the oral traditional technique of Africa by the story telling of Dana and Chaurisse. By the style of speaking of Ronald, she represents the specific quality and repetition of words. She uses many metaphors like 'James' painting', 'Dana's family picture', 'Brooch and earrings of Miss Bunny,' etc.

The novelist focuses the political atmosphere in the contemporary period by discussing the members of election, like Ronald Reagan, Carter, Alexis and Bill Cosby. Social condition many times shows that both white and black fear to each other. Miss Bunny gives the account of Raleigh's mother, which indirectly gives the hint of Raleigh's birth history and his mother's grief as a woman. When Dana and Chaurisse go to Georgia that time they feel insecure because they are in the area of white people. Mike, a white boy is not ready to come to Atlanta because of the fear of black people. James also gives the account of humiliation in childhood. Friends of Miss Bunny also discuss how black women suffer in the plantation period. James is not economically so strong, at primary stage. He wants to do new business and his own car but because of his insufficient money he can't built like white man.

Christianity is main religion of the both black and white people. There are references of Bible, Christ, Baptism etc in the novel. Kinship is a prominent feature of ethnicity handled by Tayari Jones in the psychological way. Dana lastly realizes that only blood is not important in the relations but the trust and love is valuable for the relation. Dana has a blood of James but at the ending she realizes that her father once loved her, now doesn't want to speak her. He blames to her for her fatherless condition. He doesn't think it as his mistake but he asserts all happened because of Dana. He wants to live life on his own law, so he doesn't tolerate the disturbance of anyone, which is unknowingly created by Dana. Thus there are ample references in Tayari Jones' *Silver Sparrow* that exhibit different facets of ethnicities in African American background.

Works Cited

Jones, Tayari. *Silver Sparrow*. New York: Algonquin, 2011. Print.