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RICHARD MILLER FLANAGAN'S SELECT NOVELS: A CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract:

Portrayal of selfish, shrewd, foolish, helpless and unpredictable sacrificing women is a favourite wish in writing in general and in dramas and novels in particular. The Indian epics Ramayana and the Mahabharata and a Series of ideal, tragic and ambitions women are example of such projection. Helen of Troy, Cleopatra were the most beautiful women but they Caused wars. This 'feminine mystique' has been the main theme in the Victorian writers such as Charles Dickens and Thomas Hardy. Shakespeare's dark tragedies show the cruelties, wickedness and hidden selfish motives destroying the world of the protagonists. In fact nearly half of the population of the world is of womankind, but since the ancient times, they have been responsible on the one hand, to inspire, to instigate for great achievements, but they are also responsible for the destruction of great men.

Keywords: *Women, Wanting, The Sound of One Hand Clapping, Weaker Sex, etc.*

In the present paper, some exemplary women from Richard Flanagan's novels *Wanting* (2008), *The Sound of One Hand Clapping* (1997) are of major concerned. There are three generations of women, grandmother Maria, mother Sonja and her daughter, facing helpless tragic fate during life and death in *The Sound of One Hand Clapping*, whereas in *Wanting*, there are Lady Jane, Mathinna, Catherine, Ternan with their plan that are at time exceptionally successful but most of the times as tragic failures. Like earth woman has to suffer in silence but at time she turns 'into a revengeful tigress to kill, torture all with their claws and teeth, their sinister plans, and deceptive temperaments. They use their feminine charm, tonal grace and cruel deceptive similes to confuse, to puzzle and at time to madden their men. An Indian writer, who settled abroad, painted out that Man tries to the sky to Catch the Stars but falls down in the wiles of a woman'. Woman is a long unseen rope that at last hangs the brave man.

The other side, the men they treat women as properties, tools, puppets, playthings and objects for exploitation. They are insulted as 'a weaker sex' or honoured as 'a fair sex'. The Woman marries a man, one who woos a man but she is responsible for both the birth and death of men. She has five fold functions mother, wife (or beloved), sister, daughter and caretaker. "Michael Levenson has noted that the characteristic movement of the novel (as a form) is not the breathless succession of punctualities (but) a rhythm of containment: events incorporated within one another" (2009:514).

In the present novels in *The Sound of One Hand Clapping* there is unfortunate Maria whose mystery of death and life is revealed in the end. There is Sonja who suffers a lot due to her drunkard father Bojan and has to turn into a prostitute with a baby whose fatherhood cannot be decided. In

Wanting there are two Simultaneous stories of the Victorian period consisting of a couple of triangles. It includes Charles Dickens his wife Catherine and his beloved and heroine of dramas, Ellen Ternan. The next triangle is of John Franklin, his wife Lady Jane and their adopted daughter Mathinna. The world of the former is fine art drama and aesthetic relationships in comparison with the family affairs. However, the other triangle has Franklin who had been lost in his adventure but his wife Lady Jane has decided to civilize the girl Mathinna and teach her the ways of the modern educated Culture but she fails in her mission for Mathinna eats moths, bites the guests and reverts to her native savagery. The Dickens story celebrates the success of culture and civilization whereas Mathinna's story is an example of the failure of the civilization. *The Sound of One hand Clapping*(1997) is Richard Flanagan's Second novel after his *Death of A River Guide* (1994), but it has three generations of women Maria, Sonja and her daughter and their tragedies. The novel begins with these lines : "All this you will come to understand but can never know, and all of it took place long, long ago in a world that has since perished into peat, in a forgotten winter on an island of which few have ever heard. It began in that time before snow Completely and irrevocably, Covers foot prints" (Flanagan, 1).

This very first paragraph of the novel creates a sense of mystery as well as invites reader's curiosity. The story fluctuates and oscillates between nearly a span of fifty years (1954 to 1990 with two chapters without mention of year (86 Chapters in 425 pages). The first paragraph is repeated on the last page (P. 425) with an addition of only two sentences. "As black Clouds shroud the star and moonlit heavens, as an unshadowabl darkness comes upon the whispering land. At that precise moment, around which time was to cusp" (Flanagan, 425).

The story ends on a sad note as on the penultimate page, Sonja Shouts in pain the name of her mother 'Maria' used for her daughter 'Maria'. The entire narration has aesthetic values and poetic style where Sonja's tragic dying situation is explained as:

"Her body burning like fire, Her hands
running over the ground. Her face being
feathered by the wet grass. Bowring
button grass threading water droplets. Pearls
of dew spreading across her checks. Necklace
of grace. And as she lay down
her daughter's name. Her beautiful name.
'Maria'... my Maria" (Flanagan, 424).

The beauty and tragedy needs no explanation as it is a picturesque narration in itself. Flanagan's '*Wanting*' (2008) is another novel based on women, the setting is one hundred years' past and weaves to simultaneous stories in alternate narration. It starts as:

"They were called wild black though wild they
most certainly were not, but rather scabby,
Miserable and often compulsive. They were...
the once feared Van Diemonian tribes that for so
long had waged relentless and terrible war" (Flanagan, 1).

The novel in the beginning itself, provides a picture of the Black people, their qualities and limitation Van Diemonian's Land is the earlier name of Tasmania. The pivotal character is Mathinna, a black girl, who in spite of the efforts of lady Jane, reverts to her original ways.

The novel ends as:

"In writing this novel, I have on occasion
made Free use of Sentences and phrases
from Dickens' own work. The Stories of
Mathinna and Dickens with their odd but
undeniable connection In human affairs.
That and not history, is the true subject
of '*Wanting*'" (Flanagan, 256).

Flanagan's interest is in felling and not in history. The two triangles John Franklin, Lady Jane, Mathinna and Dickens, Catherine and Ellen Ternan compel reader to compare and evaluate the Crisis as well as the motives the achievements as well as the failures in either of the stories.

Mrs. Gottliebsen and Two Penny Sal (from Gould's Book of Fish), Emma and Mrs. Keith (*The Narrow Road to Deep North*) Black pearl and Jemma in *The Death of a River Guide* are also unique

creation of selfishness, nymphomania and opportunism. The females have both qualities of head and heart, but at times they use it for fulfillment of desires and activities related to their selfish motives.

Maria's (*The Sound of One Hand Clapping*) death is mysterious, she is thought to have been either gang raped, killed or hanged. It is not clear whether she was killed or had committed Suicide. On the contrary, her unlucky daughter suffers in childhood the cruelties of her father, nextly she had been sexually assaulted by him remains a mystery. She had been sent to one family when once again her problems increased. She bears a child but does not know who the father of the child might be.

Lady Jane *Wanting* spent her complete life even after death of her husband Franklin in show, he had gone on an expedition towards North Pole but never returned. Whether he was killed or direct in snow or cost his path has not been clearly explained but only suggested. Similarly, the sufferings of Ella Ternan who loved Charles Dickens but the relationship is again mysterious for while dying she wants him to call her as 'Dear Sister'. They act in drama as hero and heroine Dickens wife named Catherine is aware of their relationship but never understands the depth, fascination and devotion of their relationship. It is said that Charles Dickens' first novel '*David Copper field*' has his two wives Dora and Agnes based on Catherine and Ella Ternan respectively. It is mysterious to know whether reality is in dramatic style of a drama in his real life. *Wanting* presents two great women, Lady Jane and Ella Ternan, but two other women Catherine and Mathinna are far beyond any improvement in their lives. In spite of being white and Black, they suddenly turn to their instincts and impulses, and express themselves despite the anticipations or results. "Flanagan's novel presents a poetic that must be completed by the reader" (Keene in Visenor, 58).

Flanagan presents the true atmosphere in his fiction, whether the background is hilly-area, and the man Bojan as a carpenter. *The Sound of one hand Clapping* or Civilized 20th Century Pre-war, war, post-war world of the present (*Narrow Road to Deep North*) or a Century back Victorian period *Wanting* and an aesthetic world of art – drama, his painting of women is both realistic and mysterious. Like the writings of Jane Austen, Thomas Hardy, Emile Bronte and Virginia Woolf, his novels (except Sea-novels) have woman as the central character.

Though Aljaz Cosini (*The Death of River Guide*), Dorrigo Evans (*The Narrow Road Road To Deep North*) Mr. Gould (*The Gould's Book of Fish*) are great heroes, Lady Jane, Mathinna, Ellen Ternan and Catherine in *Wanting* and Maria, Sonja and baby (3 generations) (in *The Sound of One Hand Clapping*) and the Doll (Gina Davies) in *The Unknown Terrorist* are Female centered novels, baby jemma death (*River Guide*) aunt Mrs. Keith's last letter before death (*Narrow Road to Deep North*). Ternan's Tragic plight and predicament (*Wanting*) and Maria's tragic hanging (*Sound ... Clapping*) are the best and the greatest events in the lives of the women.

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