

Exploring Female Agency and Hybrid Selfhood Postcolonial Insights from Possessing the Secret of Joy and Breath , Eyes and Memory

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**إستكشاف الوكالة النسائية والذات الهجينة : رؤى ما بعد
الإستعمار من امتلاك سر الفرح والنفس ، العيون والذاكرة**

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Abstract:-

This paper discusses precocity for female agency and hybrid selfhood in the works of Alice Walker, specifically in *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, and that of Edwidge Danticat in her work *Breath, Eyes, Memory* within a postcolonial framework. It discusses how Tashi and Sophie negotiate cultural and historical strictures for the purpose of appropriation of agency and identity amidst the intersecting oppressions of patriarchy and colonialism. This is a fragmented yet powerful way that hybrid identities are described through acts of resistance, with a play of memory, tradition, and trauma. The findings reveal that Walker and Danticat depict agency as an enabling process of reclaiming the self, whereas hybrid selfhood is portrayed as an enabling space in which one's resilience and strength may be asserted. The paper contributes to the existing literature on postcolonial feminism, done with nuanced insight into the culturally specific and globally resonant contexts of identity formation and resistance. Further research might be comparative studies with other postcolonial feminist texts and interdisciplinary approaches regarding trauma theory and an intersectionality approach.

Key words: Female agency, hybrid selfhood, postcolonial literature, feminist critique, identity formation.

المخلص:-

تتناول هذه الدراسة موضوعات الوكالة النسائية والذات الهجينة في رواية امتلاك سر الفرح لأليس ووكر ورواية النفس، العيون، الذاكرة لإدويدج دانتكات ضمن أطر ما بعد الاستعمار. تبحث الدراسة في كيفية مواجهة الشخصيتين الرئيسيتين، تاشي وصوفي، للقيود الثقافية والتاريخية، واستعادة استقلاليتهما، وإعادة تعريف هوياتهما وسط تقاطعات الاضطهاد الناتج عن النظام الأبوي والاستعمار. من خلال تحليل أفعال المقاومة وتداخل الذاكرة والتقاليد والصدمات، تسلط الدراسة الضوء على الطبيعة المجزأة ولكن التحويلية للهوية الهجينة. تكشف النتائج أن ووكر ودانتكات تصوران الوكالة كعملية ديناميكية لاستعادة الذات، والهوية الهجينة كمساحة للصمود والتمكين. تساهم هذه الدراسة في أدب النسوية ما بعد الاستعمار من خلال تقديم رؤى دقيقة حول تشكيل الهوية والمقاومة في سياقات ثقافية محددة ولكنها ذات صدى عالمي. تشمل الاقتراحات للبحوث المستقبلية دراسات مقارنة لنصوص نسوية أخرى ما بعد الاستعمار، ونهجاً متعدد التخصصات يدمج نظرية الصدمة والتقاطع.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الوكالة النسائية، الهوية الهجينة، الأدب ما بعد الاستعمار، النقد النسوي، تشكيل الهوية.

INTRODUCTION

The story of the marginalized voice, particularly women, has been a staple conduit through which questions of identity, agency, and resistance have been posed in postcolonial literature. Similarly, female characters in such literature are often positioned at the juncture of personal and collective struggles that are considered oppressive to their autonomous selves. This paper critically examines how cultural, historical, and social dynamics are interrogated through the optic of female agency and hybrid selfhood in postcolonial literature.

Hybrid identities in the global postcolonial setting have taken shape and form from the collision between cultural traditions and colonial legacies [19]. Female agency in such frameworks is representative of their resistance to patriarchal and colonial dictates and offers new ways of unraveling autonomy and identity. Two such emblematic texts that deal with such themes are Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992), and Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, 1994; both bear richly multi-layered narratives. It is against this backdrop that the present study undertakes an investigation into how such works of fiction articulate the women struggle in the pursuit of agency to redefine selfhood within postcolonial spaces.

Postcolonial literature engages with legacies of imperialism through which fragmentation and reconstitution are signaled by much of the identity discourses [20]. By no means do female characters in this genre confront only the after-effects of colonial exploitation but also systemic gender oppression. Hybrid selfhood, as theorized by Homi K. Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* (1994), corresponds to the notion of a self-identity emerging from negotiating multiple cultural influences. From the point of view of postcolonial feminism, hybridity is cast into space wherein women assert their agencies and resist oppression to gain back autonomy.

Works by Walker and Danticat strike a balance between identity and agency. Their protagonists press through patriarchal and cultural expectations to linger at the scars of colonialism. By centering these narratives, this paper will try to undertake a critical observation of

how postcolonial feminist texts identify roles of empowerment and counter hegemonic narratives of power.

In *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, Alice Walker enhanced her novel with a story that approaches one of the most shocking practices: female genital mutilation [7]. This is told through the story of Tashi, an African woman who struggles with the physical and psychological after-effects of this ritual. It does not wish to avoid either the critique of a cultural tradition that manifests itself in gender-based violence nor an analysis of how colonial and patriarchal systems continue the practice of such customs. Through self-discovery and resistance engaged by Tashi's journey, Walker addresses broader implications of agency and identity.

Similarly, Edwidge Danticat's novel *Breath, Eyes, Memory* deals with trauma, migration, and cultural identity through the life of Sophie Caco, a Haitian woman whose experiences reflect tensions between tradition and autonomy. Danticat magnificently re-creates how generational trauma shapes Sophie's sense of self and agency, above all in the face of societal expectations and legacies of her mother's experiences. Both novels are illustrative of the complexities of female agency and hybrid identity in postcolonial contexts.

This paper examines the thematic analysis of *Possessing the Secret of Joy* and *Breath, Eyes, Memory* within the frameworks of postcolonial theory and feminist critique. Such novels are replete with myriad themes; however, this research has prioritized female agency and hybrid selfhood, given that wider socio-political implications might necessitate a scope beyond the immediate. Secondly, this research has focused on textual analysis itself and has engaged less directly with reader-response interpretation or comparison studies outside of the two selected texts.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Postcolonial theory is a critical method that researches the legacies of colonialism and imperialism in the light of culture, politics, and society. Anchored by foundational thinkers such as Edward Said, Frantz Fanon, and Homi K. Bhabha, it questions the dynamics of power, representation, and identity in postcolonial societies. For instance, Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), evinces just how voluminous the colonial discourse is in creating the "Other" as a

means of control and domination, a constituting of identities through oppositional binaries, such as colonizer/colonized and civilized/savage [18]. These are rigid categories of identity that give no agency to the colonized.

Regarding the context of this paper, post-colonial theory indicts the explanation of how colonial histories and cultural hegemonies both constrain female agency. The struggle existed and functioned in the female protagonists of Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy* and Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory* as they function within the patriarchal and the colonial structures that seek to define their identities and limit their existence. In this respect, post-colonial theory offers a degree of critical mechanisms through which these concerns are able to resist such constraints in their efforts towards asserting agency.

Further intervening in this discussion are the psychological legacies of colonialism on identity development-those posited by Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952). Fanon postulates that through assimilation, the colonized internalize their oppressors' values and perceptions; thereafter, a split psyche or self is induced [6]. This splitting has been manifested in the protagonists of both Walker's and Danticat's novels as they wrestle with cultural expectations, traumas, and quests for self-autonomy.

Hybridity, theorized by Homi K. Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* (1994), becomes an imperative to understand the formation of identity within postcolonial contexts. Hybridity results in a "Third Space" where cultures meet, bargain, and change, thus providing identities that move beyond staunch binaries [2]. This process problematizes the notion of an identity as an essential entity but a fluid and constructed one. Bhabha insists, hybridity is a space of resistance wherein the subaltern voice is able to contest dominant articulation and assert an agency.

In *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, Tashi personifies hybridity in a state of struggle between brought-up cultural heritage and the introduction to Western ideologies [14]. Her character represents a journey of tension in respect to maintaining certain cultural traditions and critiquing practices such as female genital mutilation, which she will later reject. Similarly, Sophie from *Breath, Eyes, Memory* faces hybridity

as a Haitian immigrant to the United States, negotiating her complex double cultural identity amidst the backdrop of generational trauma.

The aspect most relevant to Sophie's story is the "Third Space" concept, forwarded by Bhabha. Her identity is neither fully Haitian nor fully American but one that results from a hybrid construction through her lived experiences. This hybridity provides her with the insurance of condemnation and resistance against the patriarchal and cultural expectations that have dealing cruelly with her and her mother all these years, thereby showing what hybrid selfhood could accomplish.

The other fruitful crossing is formed by feminist postcolonial theory, which connects gender and colonialism and underscores certain problems that women have in postcolonial societies. There are influential thinkers, among whom one could mention Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, who have themselves sharply criticized Western feminist metanarratives for universalizing women's experiences and eliding the particularities of race, culture, and colonial history. Mohanty, in her essay titled "Under Western Eyes", criticizes that Third World women have been represented as victims in a monolithic manner. She articulates an integral contextualization of their struggles in local and historical perspectives [13].

In her seminal work, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", Spivak engages with the subaltern woman's silencing within colonial and post-colonial discourses. She infers that such women are also denied agency and representation within movements that claim to speak for them [22]. This insight proves significant in analyzing how Walker and Danticat give voice to their female protagonists so that they articulate their agency in culturally specific ways.

In Possessing the Secret of Joy, the stand that Tashi takes against FGM and her subsequent activism for its abolition is illustrative of the intersection of the feminist and the postcolonial concern [17]. Walker criticizes patriarchal oppression and attacks the complicity of colonial legacies in continuing such practices. On the other hand, Danticat also engages with Sophie's narrative in Breath, Eyes, Memory regarding how sexual violence gets tangled up with cultural expectations of female agency and reflects how women resist and redefine their roles under oppressive structures.

Intersectionality is a critical framework that was first theorized by Kimberlé Crenshaw, and it critically looks at the intersecting systems of oppression defining the experiences of individuals. For Crenshaw, identities cannot be singular; they are constituted as sites of conjunction for race, gender, class, and other aspects [4]. This framework is very useful in understanding how the protagonists in both Walker's and Danticat's novels navigate the axes of opposition along various dimensions.

Tashi's identity in *Possessing the Secret of Joy* is critically informed by her gender, ethnicity, and the cultural practice that brings such personal trauma, yet simultaneously also speaks to a broader societal notion [24]. In the same way, Sophie's experiences in *Breath, Eyes, Memory* are completed by her race, immigrant status, and the trauma passed down generations from her mother. Intersectionality thus helps concede a more critical representation of such characters in the way their agency is both enabled and constrained by these interacting elements.

This analysis is further informed through the theorization on frameworks of cultural identity developed by Stuart. According to Hall [8], identity is a "production" rather than an essence and, therefore, fluid and dynamic in nature (p. 222). It also aligns with such an explanation befitting a notion of hybridity, wherein identity is constructively built by historical, cultural, and social processes. These journeys reflect this fluidity as Tashi and Sophie negotiate their identity within the contexts of diaspora, tradition, and resistance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholarship regarding Alice Walker's work, *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992), and Edwidge Danticat's work, *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994), has always fashioned these novels as thematically rich in handling trauma, identity, and resistance. Walker's work is often discussed and researched with perspectives aligned with feminist and postcolonial critique. For instance, Alexander [1] considers how Walker critiques FGM not only as a gendered practice but also as a culturally and historically situated form of oppression across borders (p. 184). Alexander's work points out that these so-called cultural practices, like FGM, need to be placed within the wider framework of global feminist struggles.

Similarly, *Breath, Eyes, Memory* has been highly discussed by scholars working on diaspora and generational trauma. Chancy [3] looks upon Danticat's novel as a seminal text of Haitian women's literature, emphasizing the axes of silence, memory, and resilience (p. 92). Chancy frames the novel within a deeply rooted tradition of revolutionary storytelling with reclaiming the voices of Haitian women within postcolonial and patriarchal contexts.

Mardorossian [12] contextualizes *Breath, Eyes, Memory* as part of the migrant literature genre, claiming that the novel's investigation of diasporic identity's prevalent difficulties offers a new dimension to the genre (p. 16). In line with this idea, Mardorossian asserts that Danticat depicts Sophie's migration from Haiti to the United States as "symptomatic of the multiplicity of experiences women endure in transnational sites". Each of these studies has factored at least some of the thematic concerns of each novel, but are less about drawing comparative connections and more about interrogating each text in isolation.

Indeed, postcolonial feminist literature has received critical deliberation on many occasions, with scholars underlining the ability of this literature to depict the linked oppressions of race, gender, and colonialism. For instance, Mohanty [13], in her widely read essay titled "Under Western Eyes", launches an attack on Western feminist discourse for the homogenization of Third World women. She insists to the contrary that such homogenization shall be understood in variations, considering the diversity women's experiences undergo across cultural and historical contexts (p. 63). This critique by Mohanty is foundational to any understanding of how postcolonial feminist literature, such as the works of Walker and Danticat, rebuffs these essentialist narratives.

One of the contributions of Spivak [22] herself is found in an essay entitled "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in which marginalization of subaltern voices is called into question under both colonial and postcolonial structures. Spivak's argument that subaltern women are often silenced even within emancipatory movements begets a fundamentally critical perspective for examining female protagonists' agency in Walker and Danticat's novels (p. 27). These theoretical premises have aided in shaping leading scholarship into postcolonial feminist literature, including the works in consideration.

In fact, both Walker and Danticat have made invaluable contributions to the field of postcolonial literature which has widely highlighted issues of female agency and cultural critique. Lauret [10] terms Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy* a "profoundly political novel" that invites readers "to ponder painful questions about cultural practices and woman's rights" (p. 98). Thus, Walker places Tashi's story in the context of worldwide feminism, connecting the local with the universal, which allows him to present a critique that may be understood across cultural lines.

N'Zengou [15] poses Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory* as a moment of rupture in female Caribbean literature; he writes that, "within the novel, there is development concerning two central themes: cultural memory and storytelling practices as modes of resistance" (p. 130). N'Zengou stresses how Danticat's narrative works out not only the personal traumas of her protagonist but also weighs these traumas within the larger history and diasporic movement of Haitians.

Although there is considerable scholarship on both *Possessing the Secret of Joy* and *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, most such research explores only a single novel. Very few studies conduct an informed comparison between both novels-especially regarding subject matters like those of female agency and hybrid selfhood. This constitutes an even more serious omission in how discussions of such themes interact with postcolonial feminist theory.

However, much of this scholarship by itself represents either a cultural critique or diasporic identity apart from any consideration of how these elements may interact in order to influence the protagonists' journeys. Addressing these gaps, the present study undertakes a comprehensive analysis of Walker's and Danticat's contributions toward postcolonial feminist discourse, especially through their attempt to locate female agency and identity within culturally specific yet globally resonant contexts.

ANALYSIS OF FEMALE AGENCY AND HYBRID SELFHOOD IN BOTH NOVELS

Agency for female protagonists in postcolonial literature most often arises as a result of the urge to respond to cultural and social constraints that enforce patriarchal and colonial hierarchies.

Protagonists in both Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy* and Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory* have to fight against enormous odds to recover their agency from such a trend of crossing oppressions resting essentially upon the props of cultural traditions, personal trauma, and historical legacies.

In *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, Walker attacks the very foundation of the cultural practice of FGM as it has been used to oppress women's bodies and psyches [25]. The protagonist, Tashi, is circumcised out of cultural loyalty but afterwards seeks, literally, to fight her way through the crippling consequences. Recalling her decision, Tashi says, "The pain is so intense it becomes a reality of its own" [23]. This quote epitomizes the physical and emotional burden of a practice symbolic of patriarchal domination masquerading as cultural tradition. Walker dramatizes Tashi's suffering to expose how societal constraints exploit women in the guise of preserving cultural identity.

Along similar lines, in *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, the social demands for female sexual purity serve as the catalyst for repressive strictures [16]. Martine, Sophie's mother, extends the practice of "testing" the virginity of her daughter, which is part of the patriarchal tradition and extremely invasive and traumatic to Sophie. Sophie says, ".it was up to a mother to keep her daughter pure. My mother had done it to me, and I had failed her" [5]. This internalization of blame also reveals the cyclic nature of oppression, whereby women are compelled by the influence of societal expectations to assume roles that demean their autonomy and self-esteem.

The protagonists in both novels are made to struggle through societal constraints that economically exploit their bodies and identities as tools for maintaining patriarchal and cultural control. These constraints were deeply set within their respective cultural contexts, those very instances of the greater challenges faced by women in postcolonial societies.

Resistance to these strictures forms, then, the backdrop for both Tashi's and Sophie's journeys. In *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, Tashi ultimately experiences, through activism, the cultural and personal results of FGM. She exclaims, "Resistance is the secret of joy!" [23]. In this way, the announcement forms a pivotal moment in

her redemption of agency, in which she transformed her suffering into a source of strength.

Tashi's resistance goes beyond her personal story to mirror larger struggles against gendered violence in postcolonial societies. Equally profound, Sophie resists in *Breath, Eyes, Memory*. She refuses to continue condoning the practice of virginity testing on her own daughter: "I have decided to stop all this testing. It stops with me" [5]. In this moment, Sophie is defiantly rebelling against a lifetime of patriarchal conditioning that has controlled and commanded every aspect of her life—a critical moment toward self-determination.

The resistant acts of the protagonists reflect a potentiality of agency in postcolonial contexts. It is here that Tashi and Sophie begin to fight against the oppressing systems by taking control back into their own hands and making choices about their bodies, and thus provide narratives of resilience and, subsequently, empowerment. Walker and Danticat make abundant use of rich symbolism and narrative techniques while depicting the agency of their protagonists. Within the larger context of cultural violence, the scars from FGM in *Possessing the Secret of Joy* manifest both the physiological and psychic pain of cultural violence. Tashi's scar serves her private reminder of a struggle but is also—will be—a symbol of her resilience.

Walker uses fragmented, nonlinear narration to create a parallel with the fractured identity of Tashi, extending that process of journeying toward empowerment is not easily channeled. Above all, in *Eyes, Breath, Memory*, Danticat shows her interest in storytelling and memory as important narrative devices [9]. Stories of Haitian folkloric myth permeate Sophie's relationship with her mother, serving as means both of connecting with the heritage and exorcising trauma. For example, Sophie recalls, "My grandmother said the stars were brighter in the hills, as if they were much closer to us. She called them her lanterns" [5]. This serves as an indication of the struggle of Sophie herself in trying to reconcile her cultural roots with her claiming of autonomy.

Both authors employ their protagonists' voices as tools of reclaiming agency. Fragmented thoughts from Tashi and reflective narratives by Sophie create insight for readers into their inner worlds, underlining personal and collective dimensions of their resistance.

Through these methods, Walker and Danticat raise their protagonists' stories into important critiques of societal and cultural constraints.

HYBRID SELFHOOD AND IDENTITY FORMATION

One of the most important concepts developed within postcolonial theory is hybrid selfhood; that is, those fluid identities formed at the juncture of multiple cultural, historical, and social influences. Hybrid identities in both *Possessing the Secret of Joy* and *Breath, Eyes, Memory* form the very core of the protagonists' journey in meandering their ways through cultural expectations, personal trauma, and the search for belonging.

In *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, Tashi's character is largely shaped by her conciliation of her African heritage with that of Western culture. Following the performance of FGM as an act of devotion to her culture, Tashi later has to reconcile the physical and psychological consequences of such a choice when transplanted into a Western society. She states, "I wanted to be accepted. I wanted to belong. "I wanted to be one of them" [23]. The above desire further establishes the inner turmoil she has lived with for being a hybrid individual—being torn between one's cultural identities and those one is exposed to via Western ideologies.

In a related manner, Sophie in *Breath, Eyes, Memory* becomes the embodiment of tension regarding hybrid identity as an immigrant from Haiti now in America. "I felt like two halves of a split pea," she says, "One part of me was at home in Haiti, the other lost in the foreign soil of America" [5]. The personal struggle of Sophie to balance her Haitian heritage with the American environment brings to light the issue of dual pressure on cultural fidelity and assimilation, which defines hybrid identities.

Both novels track, with varied emphases, the ways in which hybrid identities provoke feelings of fragmentation and alienation, whereby protagonists fight for a feeling of belonging within worlds that demand conflicting cultural expectations from them. This struggle is central to their journeys of identity formation, as they strive to define themselves on their own terms.

Memory and tradition hence constitute Tashi's and Sophie's selfhood in some aspects that are hardly removable from trauma. In *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, it is Tashi's recollections of her

initiation ceremony and the following mutilation that most vitally haunt her throughout her existence. She reminisces, "The old woman said it would make me clean. It would make me whole. But I have never felt so broken" [23]. These memories, in keeping with the parental dictate of cultural lore, bind Tashi to her past, a source of unending anguish. Walker dramatizes traumatic recall for Tashi in order to comment on how, at times, cultural practice can shatter as often as it shores up identity.

In *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, too, memory works as a double-edged sword for Sophie (Mackay, 1994). Her mother's tales of her experiences in Haiti are fully packed with the generational trauma within storytelling. Martine could remember the rape during political turmoils, which made an enormous difference in Sophie's perception of her identity. She says, "Her nightmares were passed down to me. I carried them in my blood"[5]. This trauma, passed down through Sophie, provides a continuum within which her sense of self is shaped vis-à-vis her mother's suffering and the historical struggles of Haitian women.

Both authors insist that memory and tradition are dynamic rather than static forces in the molding of the protagonists' selves in evolution. In these characters, Tashi and Sophie, some sort of confrontation with these elements of the past is essentially an intrinsic part of forging integral essences or a hybrid self which integrates, without repudiating their experiences.

Though Tashi's and Sophie's stories originate from different cultural and historical backgrounds, their experiences emphasize some significant convergences that detail the ways in which hybrid identities are inextricably linked to personal and collective histories. Ultimately, both characters attempt to fit into the expectations of their cultures: Tashi by being circumcised and Sophie by aligning with her mother's standards of purity. Moments when they finally all resist such expectations become critical points in their journeys toward self-definition.

Tashi's eventual epiphany-"I am no longer who they made me to be. I am who I choose to become" [23], marks her renunciation of cultural and extrinsic forces having defined her life. Similarly, Sophie's resolve to break the cycle of virginity testing stands as a recuperation of free will and a redefinition of self-outside of Haitian tradition: "I am

not my mother.". I am myself" [5]. These instants of affirmations underline their agencies in influencing their hybrid identities.

Another comparative point is represented by the narrative technique Walker and Danticat seem to utilize with similar character uses, which turns to fragmented storytelling, changing between times of past and present in an attempt to represent the fractured identities that Walker's and Danticat's protagonists do inherently possess. In *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, Tashi's fragmented memories mirror her inner struggle for reconciliation between her cultural past and her present self. Through the course of *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, Sophie's story consistently performs centrifugal and centripetal bounces back and forth between her life in America and her mother's past in Haiti to express fluidity and hybridity of her identity.

DISCUSSION

Alice Walker and Edwidge Danticat inscribe female agency as an act of resistance and self-recovery within postcolonial frameworks. Both *Possessing the Secret of Joy* and *Breath, Eyes, Memory* incorporate their main characters, who have to negotiate the restrictions brought about by culture and patriarchy in claiming their autonomy. On one level, Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy* can be read as a representation of Tashi's agency in the form of a transformative journey: from her internalization of cultural expectations through her decision to undergo female genital mutilation to her eventual rejection of FGM and her advocacy for abolition. As she says, "Resistance is the secret of joy! As Walker herself puts it" [23], woven into the narrative of her struggle to regain possession of her body and her voice.

Walker situates Tashi's agency within a global feminist and postcolonial frame, exposing the intersection of cultural critique and personal empowerment. Similarly, in Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, Sophie breaking patriarchal traditions passed down within her family is an act of agency. The virginity testing that Sophie's mother continues as a cultural practice signifies the controlling practice of women's bodies and female sexuality. Thus, Sophie's refusal of this tradition—"It stops with me"[5] —represents her rebellion against the cultural as well as family expectations. Agency in Danticat's mind is a deeply personal, profoundly political act that emanates from the inside of the protagonist's selfhood.

Walker and Danticat thereby represent female agency in a dynamic process, which is shaped by the struggle against cultural and patriarchal enclosure. Their respective protagonists' defiant acts challenge the systemic subjugation that has been enforced on them while putting into force an autonomous self to illustrate wider implications of agency within postcolonial contexts. This construction of hybrid selfhood is deeply intertwined, in both these novels, with cultural and historical contexts through the negotiation found in the protagonists of legacies of colonialism, tradition, and trauma. As in *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, Tashi's hybrid identity is manifest on the basis of a balance between African heritage and the influences of Western culture.

The decision to go through with FGM is deeply interwoven within the cultural pressures from her Olinka community, while later experiences in a Western context would bring into light the dissonance between the two worlds. Indeed, Tashi reflects, "I wanted to belong, but I lost myself in the process" [23], which speaks to the fragmented nature in which her identity has come to be. Walker uses Tashi's story as a critique of how the legacies of culture and history fracture selfhood, yet she also uses it to signal an opportunity for healing and integration.

In *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, the hybridity of Sophie's identity is molded through her experience of being a Haitian immigrant in the United States. This struggle to reconcile her Haitian heritage with her American environment reflects greater tensions in diasporic identity. This duality is captured by the reflection of Sophie: "I carried Haiti in my blood, but America in my habits" –[5]. The fact that her mother's past is rife with historical trauma, in addition to the cultural pressure of Haitian traditions, even more problematizes Sophie's selfhood. Danticat portrays hybrid identity in both debilitating and enabling lights, consonant with the play of memory, tradition, and the immigrant experience.

Both writers place their protagonists' hybrid identities within particular cultural and historical contexts, emphasizing the role of context in the constitution of selfhood. Tashi and Sophie's hybridity is emblematic of the fragmentation, negotiation, and reconciliation that often characterize postcolonial identity.

As a result, it proves that female agency and hybrid selfhood are the cores of the postcolonial feminist narratives of Walker and

Danticat. Authors do point out the binding features of cultural traditions and historical legacies constraining women; at the same time, they present resistance as an effective means for reclaiming the autonomy and identity. One insightful revelation within the novels is that female agency significantly emanates from acts of resistance against patriarchal and cultural norms. The activism of Tashi against FGM, and the refusal by Sophie to be virginity-tested, illustrate how postcolonial literature can belittle certain repressive practices while at the same time allowing its female protagonists to express their autonomy. Therefore, narratives espouse feminist postcolonial theories by underlining the centrality of agency in challenging systemic oppression.

Another exciting observation from the research is that the hybrid self in these novels symbolizes the tensions and difficulties that are experienced while constructing identities in the postcolonial context. Both Tashi and Sophie work through fragile selves created through cultural dualities and historic traumas. The research outlines the transformative gene of hybridity, as ultimately-given the spiraling cycles of experience which the protagonist undergoes-strong resilient self-identities are found carved and empowered at the same time.

CONCLUSION:-

This paper has indicated how female agency is negotiated through processes of resistance and self-reclamation within postcolonial frameworks in both Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy* and Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory*. Such negotiate how cultural and historical contingencies construct hybrid selfhood. As such, identity is fragmented but transformational. Tashi and Sophie resist oppressive tradition and identity reconstructions as ways to assert their independence from the core of powerful life stories of survival and accommodation.

In fact, Walker and Danticat are two influential writers who have prolifically contributed to the realm of postcolonial feminist writings by addressing the intersection enabled through cultural critique, gendered oppression, and identity formation. Their sensitive narratives of hybrid self and agency point out how complicated it is to carve out a path between personal and collective struggles in the postcolonial world. These novels, therefore, act as witnesses against

rigid notions of culture and identity, pressing for more dynamic and inclusive ways of framing autonomy and self.

Other areas of future research may be the comparison of other postcolonial feminist authors in explorations of the recurring themes of agency and hybridity within different cultural contexts. Interdisciplinary approaches shall further allow a greater depth in exploring issues of identity formation within postcolonial narratives through the use of trauma theory or intersectionality. Finally, reader-response studies on Walker's and Danticat's works may allow insights into how such powerful narratives were received and what their impact has been.

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