

A Postcolonial Study of Flannery O'Connor's *Everything That Rises*

Mustconverge

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Abstract:

In about two centuries since independence, the history of America is filled with the battle for liberation by Blacks, for almost a century. It's been a long battle for African Americans and other minorities in America, particularly in the south, to acquire and secure their civil, social and economic equality. It all started in early 1860's with American Civil War which abolished slavery constitutionally. But not until the Civil Rights Movement in 1950's, Blacks acquired true liberation and complete freedom to exercise their civil, social and economic rights. It was hegemonic supremacy consciousness of Whites which made it a century late for Blacks to get their real freedom. Even after complete liberation through Civil Rights Movement, the majority of the white community couldn't renounce their supremacy consciousness and were never ready to accept Blacks equal to them. Racial prejudices and tensions persisted post-civil rights movement. Flannery O'Connor provides a glimpse of that society and a look at section of those Whites through her story "Everything that rises must converge".

Keywords: African-Americans, Blacks, Post-civil rights movement, White Supremacy, Gender, Racial discrimination.

Even though the Civil Rights Act of 1964 in America “outlawed discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin ... It did not end discrimination” (Civil Rights Act of 1964). Leaving a little percent of the Whites, the most couldn't bring themselves down or assume the Blacks' position rose, to see Blacks as equals to them. This has been portrayed in the story *Everything that Rises Must Converge* by Flannery O'Connor. The story *Everything that Rises Must Converge* is published in 1965, just at the end of the decade after the Civil Rights Movement in America. However the still prevalent superior and condescending nature of Whites, even after a decade of movement is depicted in the story. The story consists of a main character Julian, a young White boy and his mother and Black woman who travels in the same bus with her son. There are other small characters who are all Whites.

Julian is a young boy who completed his college just a year ago and aspiring to become a writer. He lives with his single mother. He is born and grown up during the time when slavery was abolished and conditions of Blacks was improving and Blacks being accepted into mainstream society, even though discrimination prevailed. He could accept and consider the Blacks as equal as the Whites and with no prejudices and discrimination. His mind had already got accustomed to the new evolving society. But Julian's mother, a quinquagenarian, couldn't accept this and get accustomed to it. She always remembers that her family lineage has members who were Governors, plantation owners, slave owners and who had high reputation from the people in their time. In their respective times, they all lived a venerating life from African Americans and other minorities, for their bureaucratic, aristocratic and affluent position and along with these reasons, the foremost one, prevalent institution of slavery and slave

ownership. But coming to Julian's mother at present, even though they don't have that wealth, position or veneration from people, she still insists to carry that status and attitude, and continues to believe and bear the white supremacy consciousness. She wants her son too, to live upholding their class. But when he tries to explain her that that view of self doesn't have place in the changing society and asks her to stop it, she reverts reproachfully - "I most certainly do know who I am...and if you don't know who you are, I'm ashamed of you" (O'Connor 6).

Public transport system was segregated on racial basis in American south until 1956. It was integrated then. Till that time, the Whites would have their quota of seats which the Blacks should not sit on. And Blacks would have their own quota. Whites didn't want Blacks to sit beside them. But after scrapping this law, Blacks were free to sit anywhere in any seat in public transport. But the Whites loathed it. In the story, Julian's mother, a white and supremacy conscious one, didn't want to travel alone in the bus to avoid any situation of tension when any black tried to occupy seat beside her if it is empty - "She would not ride the buses by herself at night since they had been integrated" (O'Connor 3). When she gets into the integrated bus accompanied by her son, as soon as she settles in her seat, she scans the whole bus to check if any black is present in it. When she found no black, she feels elated. Another white passenger joins Julian's mother in her pleasure for having bus for themselves. This ultimately shows their abhorrence to share their seats with Blacks. This is again proved when the white woman expresses her feeling of disgust describing her bus journey the other day fully filled with Blacks - "thick as fleas - up front and all through" (O'Connor 10).

During their travel, a negro in suit and with a suitcase climbs in and tries to occupy seat beside the white woman. As soon as he sits, she shifts to another seat. Julian's mother observes this and "cast(s) her an approving look" (O'Connor 13). This approving act of Julian's mother to

the white woman symbolises the reassertion of notion that Blacks will never be treated equal by them. Then Julian deliberately shifts from seat beside his mother to seat beside that negro. This immediately draws attention from his mother and the other white woman as well. His mother's eyes are "fixed reproachfully on his face" and "The woman with the protruding teeth was looking at him avidly as if he were a type of monster"(O'Connor 13). The other woman's so far pleasant treatment of Julian changed into a detesting one as he joined the negro. This reproachful act from the both White members portray that the Whites expect all their fellow Whites and their next generation too to never accept the Blacks as equals to them. This act of trying to nurture their off-springs in this manner is an act of perpetuating the discriminatory and derogatory ideology against those Blacks of the future generations.

Flannery O'Connor, through Julian's mother, exemplifies the Southern Whites' crafty mind who tried to hinder Blacks' raise through alternate schemes, when they couldn't succeed in stopping constitutional abolition of slavery in 1950's. In conversation with his son on progressing Blacks and evolving world, she claims that the Blacks "should rise, yes, but on their own side of the fence" (O'Connor 7). This statement by Julian's mother echoes the southern Whites' scheme which led to the introduction of segregation laws. They demanded equal but separate society. The Whites deliberately led to creation of this segregated society because " 'Separate but equal' is 'inherently unequal' " and through these laws Whites can always curtail Blacks from emerging (Farrell).

Julian's mother represents a hypocritical White woman who expresses condescending nature towards Blacks and call it "being gracious". When the Blacks are already emerging in all domains, the notion of being gracious to them and assuming the need of grace for the Blacks is belittling and condescending them. In the bus journey Julian's mother encounters a negro child

and smiles at him as a benevolent gesture. But “It was the smile she used when she was being particularly gracious to an inferior” (O’Connor 18). The negro boy’s mother wears the clothes and the hat exactly similar to Julian’s mother. She carries the same elegance in her appearance which Julian’s mother carries. This symbolises the enhanced position of the Blacks equal to the Whites. But Julian’s mother doesn’t accept the empowerment of the Blacks and their development in terms of education and in other ways of social living. Julian’s mother still assumes herself to be a superior woman being the White and feels the need to patronize the Blacks. When Julian’s mother deboards the bus along with the negros, she offers a penny to the negro child, attempting to patronize him. But to her surprise the penny is reverted back harshly from the negro mother.

Further we see the character of Julian’s mother as the one who disagrees with the abolition of slavery, emerging of the Blacks equal to the Whites and integration of the Blacks’s lives with that of Whites. She feels it all as a mayhem – “The world is in a mess everywhere...I don't know how we’ve let it get in this fix” (O’Connor 10). She assumes this transformation of world is nothing but a deviation from an ideal order. Regardless to the great transformation of the living style of the Blacks, Julian’s mother confidently bears the notion that “They [the Blacks] were better off when they were” still slaves (O’Connor 6).

Through the story *Everything that Rises Must Converge*, Flannery O’Connor tried to portray the supremacy of the Whites was the root cause for the racial discrimination in America which was prevailing even after a decade of Integration by law. The content of the short story is still applicable and vividly seen in the contemporary society. Even “In the 21st century, race relations remain a contentious issue in many sections of [American]society” - says an article in news timeline of Ferris State University, Michigan (Plessy). Though the concepts of slavery and

discrimination are legally obliterated, the consciousness of the White supremacy is still prevailing and leading to frequent hate crimes, propaganda wars, women oppression and mass incarcerations in America. Through the characters of Julian mother and other White woman in *Everything that Rises Must Converge* Flannery O'Connor implies the presence of white supremacy consciousness and there by perpetuation of tensions from it which are inharmonious for a society looking forward to be equal in sharing its rights to all the citizens.

Flannery O'Connor's *Everything that Rises Must Converge* deliberately addresses the key issues of race and gender that lead to have the formulations of the neocolonial identities prevailing in America.

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