

MARY ROWLANDSON'S THE SOVEREIGNTY AND GOODNESS OF GOD – "A PURITAN WOMAN'S PERSPECTIVE OF PROVIDENCE"

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Abstract: *The history of American literature had its origin with the arrival of English-speaking Europeans to the United States. The Europeans preserved their history through the first written sources of the conflict such as writing Captivity Narratives and other literary works. Therefore Captivity narrative is stories about the Indigenous people of North America. This paper tries to analyze one such Narrative of the Captivity and the Restoration of a Puritan woman Mrs. Mary Rowlandson who was taken as a war prisoner by the Narragansett Indians for ransom money, her strong faith in God in all trials, and her intention to prove herself as a worthy woman in her society through her captivity narrative after her restoration.*

Key Words: *Native Americans, European explorers, Patriarchal society, Removes, Faith in God, Predestination of Providence, and Restoration.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Native Americans are the aboriginal or the indigenous people of the United States. People lived in North America before the arrival of Europeans from the late 15th century is called the Indigenous people of the Americas. Archaeologists believe that the first people came to America at least 15,000 years ago in several groups or tribes. They were the first people whom the European explorers met when their ships landed in America.

The political, cultural, and agricultural transfer and adjustment took place between the Old and the New World societies after the migration of Europeans to the Americas and the process was known as the Columbian exchange. It is related to European colonization and trade after Christopher Columbus's 1492 voyage. Invasive species, including communicable diseases, were the by-product of this exchange. The changes in agriculture significantly altered global populations. The cultural exchanges and the transfer of people happened between the continents as a result of the Columbian Exchange. The wide variety of crops and livestock increased the population in both the hemispheres. Traders returned to Europe with maize, potatoes, and tomatoes from the Americas, which became the most significant crops in Europe by the 18th century.

The European colonization and outsiders' invasions, the introduction of new societies and cultures greatly affected the natives of America. Various armed conflicts like the American Indian Wars or Indian Wars were conducted against the native peoples of North America by the European colonists, and the new American settlers to suppress them. The wars were the result of competition for the resources and land ownership on the territories traditionally owned by the Native Americans by the Europeans and the Canadian settlers. European powers and the new American explorers encouraged Native American tribes to conduct warfare against each other and their neighboring groups to divide and rule them. Their population declined gradually due to the new diseases, warfare, and slavery which were introduced to them after the arrival of the invaders and explorers. After the establishment of the United States, many Native American peoples were subjected to warfare and removals.

King Philip's War was such a kind of war which had a great connection with the captivity of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson. It was initiated by the Wampanoag chief Metacom known by New Englanders as King Philip. And it was conducted in 1675 to resist the spreading power of New Englanders through the countryside. Along with the support of the Nipmucs and the Narragansetts, the Wampanoag attacked the settlers and destroyed several towns. Mrs. Rowlandson along with her children was captured during this particular war.

Captivity narrative is a literary genre in American literature. They are the stories of people captured as captives by enemies whom they consider uncultured and uncivilized, or whose beliefs, customs, and manners they oppose. These narratives have a permanent place in American literature, ethnography, history, and the study of the Native peoples of America. It emerged with the settlement of North America at the end of the nineteenth century. Even though the captivity narratives written by the Native Americans who were captured by the early Spanish explorers were the primary narratives, the genre commonly refers to the accounts written by European settlers who

were kidnapped by the Native Americans. The classic US captivity narratives encounter the relationship between the European explorers, foreign invaders and the native people throughout the Americas.

The most basic narrative formula of Captivity Narratives is relating the torments experienced by a captive in the society whom they consider inferior. Such narratives were often used as propaganda to tell their sufferings in the captor's camp. The racial system was not popular during the 15th century; instead superiority lay in the belief of superior in civilization, culture, and political organization. *A True History of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson* was also known as *Sovereignty and Goodness of God (1682)*. It is perhaps called as the most famous captivity narrative. It describes the American woman who has been taken a captive mercilessly by the voracious Indian savages assailing the reputable family. The main themes of this captivity narrative are trials of captivity, escape or rescue, and assimilation into a Native community. This narrative received an outstanding popularity in its time and inspired many subsequent writers. Her account has the conservative plot structure and talks about the stereotypical beliefs of savagery, civilization, and feminine purity.

Rowlandson's captivity narrative was not the first captivity narrative. European adventurers from different places like England, France, Portugal, and Spain had also published more influential accounts throughout the New World before her account. Many writers added literary devices and enhanced their captive experiences, to attract and seek the sympathy of the audiences. They used the captivity narrative to condemn, and criticize the opposite groups of people through the works. For example, British colonial writers debased the French during mid 18th century, American writers degraded the British during the Revolutionary era, US writers used it to condemn US policies of Indian removal in the 19th century, and the Native American writers used the themes and styles of captivity narration to scorn the US imperialism.

Similar to the African American Slave Narratives, the American Captivity narrative patterns also echoed about the plots and dramatic accounts of transatlantic slavery. It also included the stories of Bible, Greek mythology, and the genres of autobiography like slave narratives, travel writings, and the novels. These genres had been shaped and reshaped into a literary legacy by many cross-references and mutual influences. During times of war between the French and the Native Americans, the popularity of captivity narratives increased, many works were reprinted several times. These narratives have an everlasting place in literature, history, and the study of Native peoples and their cultures. Captivity narratives were significant in the study of modern spiritual and religious movements, not because they provided the historical fact about Native American practices, but because they provided the readers with a scope of assimilating the changes in the popular mass culture. Even the present day authors and filmmakers use the themes of the captivity narratives of centuries past by reviving and revising the familiar narratives and stereotypes to special cinematic effects.

Some other most important and often read captivity narratives were Captain John Smith's *Generall Historie of Virginia, New-England, and the Summer Isles (1624)*, John Williams's *The Redeemed Captive, and Returning to Zion (1707)*. The genre had a great impact of the Puritan society. Captivity narratives not only served as a form of entertainment, it also served as a tool of promoting the Puritan theology. Early Puritan captivity narratives written by the authors like Mary Rowlandson, John William, and Cotton Mather made use of their narratives to urge social conformity. All these authors described the attack, abduction, forced immigration, agonies, tortures, adaptation among the Native American society, and return to the Puritan society. They framed their narratives around the beliefs of the Puritan society that God would punish the unruly people who were disobedient through capture, and would save them through His ultimate forgiveness and mercy to the person one who is faithful through rescue and return to their own society.

Mary Rowlandson wrote her story to reveal the fact what actually happened to her in the captivity camp to others especially to those who were around her. She wrote it with the intention of making the readers feel her pain and difficulties she had undergone. Rowlandson belonged to a reputable family within the Puritan society with all the customary qualities of a fine Christian. Her intention can be seen in the preface to the reader which was written by an anonymous Puritan minister Increase Mather. The Preface's author composes Mrs. Rowlandson's narrative of her time in captivity as an example of divine providence worthy of religious study. He writes "Tis no new thing for Gods precious ones to drink as deep as others, of the Cup of common Calamity: take just Lot (yet captivated) for instance, beside others" (Increase Mather). He says it is strange that the Lord who oppressed the Rowlandsons during the captivity, and had ultimately restored their spirits and their surviving children.

"It was as strange, if not more, that he should so bear up the spirits of his Servant under such bereavements, and of his Hand-maid under such Captivity, travels, and hardships (much too hard for flesh and blood) as he did, and at length deliver and restore. But he was their Saviour, who hath said, when thou passest through the Waters, I will be with thee, and through the Rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the Fire, thou shalt not be burnt, nor shall the flame kindle upon thee, (Isai. 43).

He compares Rowlandson's experience with that of biblical depictions which were delivered by the divine providence. The author adds that Mrs. Rowlandson wrote the narrative herself to protect herself from the criticism. He

also emphasizes that her narrative's publication is an appropriate act of self-righteousness and her attitude to praise the Lord. The author of the preface Increase Mather emphasizes that Mrs. Rowlandson wrote this narrative herself for some friends who had believed that its trustworthiness would benefit the readers and the public. He also stresses that, being the wife of a reverend, Mrs. Rowlandson is a modest woman and that she had published this narrative to make others understand her situation in the foreign camp. He restates that this work as an evidence of predetermination of God proves that God has power over human events, and he grants mercy to "his People," and that the hardships Mrs. Rowlandson underwent were in fact for her good.

Critics like Teresa A. Toulouse in her "*My Own Credit': Strategies of (E) Valuation in Mary Rowlandson's Captivity Narrative,*" in *American Literature*, says that Rowlandson would have struggled for her status in the new social setting as a result of the war. One of the motivations for publishing her account would have been to promote the Puritan belief about God and to prevent letting any prohibited ideas from finding its way into the public eyes to doubt and judge her for it. As she belonged to a restricted patriarchal society, she would have written her narrative close to the religious context, such as God is the active agent who would definitely punish the sinners and save the Christian believers. Hence, her voice and her own opinion for freedom were greatly restricted by both the social expectations and the good of Christianity. Continual references seen in her narrative depict God's will or predestination allowing for her capture; "it was easy for me to see how righteous it was with God to cut off the thread of my life and cast me out of His presence forever. Yet the Lord still showed mercy to me" (Rowson, 5). Rowlandson viewed the incidents like her capture and that the Americans could not cross the river to follow them even though they were very close behind the Natives whom she was with, as the intention of God. Thus even in the harsh conditions of capture, a Puritan woman could not doubt about the God's compassionate will. She convinced herself as "God did not give them Courage or Activity to go over after us; we were not ready for so great a Mercy as Victory and Deliverance" (Rowson, 9).

Captivity narratives had its origin from the 17th century in the American literature, and the earliest and popular was "*A True History of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*" (1682). It went through four editions in the year when it was published and became 15 when it was republished in America and England. It was considered to be the first American bestseller. It was the story of a woman called Rowlandson. She was the wife of a Puritan minister. As the English hanged Metacom's allies on trial for Sassamon's murder, Metacom prepared for a war against the English as revenge. Metacom's War, was also called King Philip's War. It began in June of 1675 when Narragansett Indians attacked the Plymouth colony Swansea, and it ended three years later in April 1678. The Narragansett Indian tribe were an Algonquian American Indian tribe from Rhode Island. For a long time, the tribe was nearly landless, and so they worked to regain the federal recognition, which they achieved in 1983. One of the many towns attacked by the Indians during King Philip's War was Lancaster, Massachusetts. During the first attack on this town, the Indians killed several colonists and inhabitants (Rowson, 3).

Mary Rowlandson and her children were among the people captured at Lancaster. While they were captured the six-year-old Sarah was wounded fatally and died nine days later in her mother's arms. The other two children were sold to different tribes, and she was made to travel with her captors, for about 150 miles north from her hometown. Mrs. Rowlandson was held captive for eleven weeks until she was finally ransomed by her husband. After six years, she wrote her captivity narrative *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God* in 1682. This narrative was the first English-American women's captivity narratives, which detailed the experiences of non-Indian women who were held captive by Native Americans but eventually returned to their families.

"*A True History of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*" was the first book written by Rowlandson. She had never written anything before she had been kidnapped. Her captivity experience made her write a book like the professional writers with the clear pictures of the abduction experience from the violent and disorienting raid. As the culture and the lifestyle of the Native Americans were new to Rowlandson, she compared their singing, dancing, and cooking of plundered animals like horses, cattle, sheep, swine, calves, lambs, roasting-pigs, and fowls to hell. Rowlandson denotes the physical appearance of the Natives and her hatred towards them as "when they came near, there was a vast difference between the lovely Faces of Christians, and the foul looks of those Heathens which much damped my spirits again" (Rowson, 21). Rowlandson remarks the Native American people and their culture as inferior to their race. According to her, anything non-Christian was of lesser value and also complains the absence of any Christian faces near her as distress and points it as "no Christian soul near me" (Rowson, 10). Though some Natives helped her and all the kindness shown to her is greatly appreciated by her, it is described briefly, but it can be seen in many places that Rowlandson tries to criticize them and their behavior. It shows Rowlandson's unstable condition and her situation to please her society after her release. Rowlandson insulted the savageness and brutishness of the Native Americans. She often remarked the association of Indians as "heathen" and "hellish" and compared their behaviors to the Christian ideals and accused those who had left the Native Americans free declaring them as innocents, and blamed the "Praying Indians" those who had converted to Christianity.

Rowlandson had been removed more than 20 times from each camp by the Indian captors. She named it as "removes". From each painful step in her life as a pious Puritan matron entering into the harsh world of the Narragansett, she found that her will to survive was stronger than her fear or grief. She helped herself with her

endurance and ability to adapt by eating food which previously disgusted her, like raw horse liver and bear meat to survive in the new Indian Savages. She also learned to admit their humanity and to barter and bargain with them. Even after being ransomed, Rowlandson could not relive from her sufferings for several months in dreams and flashbacks. It took many days for her to recover and adjust herself in her own society. Slowly she began to realize how much her emotional expression and religious grace had changed, from the public acceptance through writing her story. Thus by writing about her suffering and redemption, she re-entered the Puritan society in a new role.

Chelsea Hansard in her *Criticisms of Patriarchy in Mary Rowlandson's 'The Sovereignty and Goodness of God' (1682)* quote the views of the scholars like Teresa A. Toulouse and Laurel Thatcher Ulrich. "Ministers from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries often edited and promoted women's captivity narratives like *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God* and they have portrayed the women captives as passive, helpless victims, who are incapable of achieving their own political, religious, and social ends"(Chelsea). However, the women whom the ministers criticized as passive and helpless for the society in turn used their narratives to achieve their own goals of criticizing the English patriarchal social structure.

Chelsea Hansard adds the views of the historian Laurel Thatcher Ulrich's *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England 1650-1750* to explain the gender roles of European-Americans in New England during 17th century. According to Ulrich, women in New England play different roles such as the positions of housewives, deputy husbands, mothers, and deputy fathers. He says that, they have all the rights to bring up their family through their economic skills like service, manufacturing, agriculture, etc. And they could also trade the goods they produced like men to obtain food or goods from other women in the community. He points out Mary Rowlandson's captivity narrative *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God*, which gives the insight of how a Puritan woman of colonial New England used her manufacturing skills of knitting clothes, and bargaining with the captors within the captivity society to survive and protect her. Ulrich also points out that Mrs. Rowlandson after returning from her captivity made use of all those roles to criticize her own patriarchal society through her narrative.

Though Mrs. Rowlandson's hostage experience was worst, she has grown and changed profoundly into a challenging woman in her society. According to her, writing a captivity narrative after her return was a restorative ritual of conclusion, a way of mourning for her lost children and her happy days, and way of raising voice for her future. Mrs. Rowlandson wrote her memoir herself without any ghostwriter, enraged by the curiosity of the neighbors and the insidious sympathy of the public. She described her story as a way to tidy those pieces away in her own memory bank but in a form which she hopes it would prove herself as a worthy woman.

2. CONCLUSION:

Rowlandson's account reflects the predominantly Puritan, European, female point of view on the Native Americans. It is clear that, as a captor with prominent prejudice, it is impossible for her to understand the goodness in the captor's society. Yet, this narrative has led to a greater evaluation of the cultural differences and expectations on the other group, particularly whom they considered inferior and uncultured. Being written after the event and her release and for others to read Rowlandson would have altered the events in her favor to maintain her status in her society. The narrative still remains useful as Rowlandson often recounts where she and her captors were staying. This has helped the historians to attain a better knowledge about the Native American tactics during the war. With all this Rowlandson's narrative gives a better perception of her society at her time, and their social relations and their prejudice of the Native Americans.

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