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**A Journey to Liberation: *The Saga of the Salve Girl* by Harriet Jacobs**

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**Abstract**

The Incident of the Slave Girl" is a part of the larger work known as "Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl" written by Harriet Jacobs. It's a powerful autobiography recounting the life of Jacobs as a slave and her struggles for freedom. The incident of the slave girl refers to the protagonist, Linda Brent (pseudonym for Jacobs), and her traumatic experiences as a slave, including her fight against exploitation, pursuit of freedom, and the challenges she faced along the way. It highlights the harsh realities of slavery and the resilience of the human spirit in the face of oppression.

**Keywords:** slavery, escape, adversity, resilience, oppression, freedom, womanhood, family, and survival.

Psychoanalytic theory mainly deals with the human behaviour memories play a major role in one's behavioural change. These memories can be induced by author or the person experience by themselves in their life. Mostly the psychoanalytic theory states that one's behaviour is mainly influenced by their childhood memories or by their desire. Because of the people takes up a huge action which lands them in guilt. This then pushes the person towards trauma. The novel Incident in the Life of a Slave Girl which is an autobiographical work written by Harriet Jacobs. Psychoanalysis has with three functions: id, the super ego and the ego, which controls the human behaviour and their mind. The novel Incident in the life of a slave girl is an autobiographical work, written by Afro-American writer. This novel can be viewed under the lens of psychoanalytic theory, which helps the researcher to critically analyse the character, Linda. Linda is the protagonist of the novel who suffers a lot under slavery. Because of these sufferings, she had some change of thoughts in her mind. Here memories play a major role. The memories during her slavery time changes Linda's behaviour and mind- set at the end of the novel.

### **Linda's Childhood**

Psychoanalysis mainly deals with memories. In this novel Incident in the Life of a Slave Girl, which deals with When Linda was young she used to live her life with freedom she was like her grandmother. Her grandmother wants her grandchildren to be free from slavery. She was strong and has power to be free Linda's grandmother was running a bakery in which she earns nearly \$300 per month. Because of her grandmother Linda also wants to be free from slavery. Her

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grandmother is Aunt Martha who is molly horn blow. The real character in the life of the author Harriet Ann Jacobs. As Linda's grandmother is a free woman, who used to lead money to her mistress. This shows that Linda's grandmother is living an independent life. But she also known that her family is still under the slavery. Grandmother wished to see her family is free from enslavement. This character resembles in Linda's character where she wants to be free from slavery and sexual harassment by the white masters.

### **Linda's Nostalgia**

In the beginning of the novel Incident in the life of a slave girl, Linda who was very happy under her 4parent's guidance. Linda claims that. "I was born a slave; but I never knew it till six years of happy childhood had passed away" (Jacobs 8). Because of this she had a dream of independence. She had a strong feeling about self-worth for the first six years. After the death of her parents, she realised the real life of slave. According to Merriam Webster nostalgic is defined as longing for or thinking fondly of a past time or condition (Merriam-Webster) she was longing to go back to her past life which keeps her happy. Because the incident that happened in her childhood keeps her in a strong desire of self-respect. This nostalgia plays a major role in the beginning of Linda's slavery. "A wistful or excessively sentimental yearning for return to or of some past period or irrecoverable condition" (Merriam Webster). Even though Linda has a strong feeling for independence or returning to her past life she was unable to do that because Linda doesn't have power or even rights in her side. Linda status that, "My master had power and law on his side; I had a determined will. There a might in each"

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(Jacobs 73). Linda explains their tradition of slavery by stating “My grandmother remained in her service as a slave; but her children were divided among her master’s children” (Jacobs 9). This shows family members were continued to be slave for their life time. Even though, Linda knows about her slavery life. She was more comfortable in her childhood. Which caused her psychological defence. She has developed a strong hope for her future with falsehood and minister petition in view of the fact that happened in her childhood. This the main reason for Linda’s nostalgic during that period. The slave people don’t have any rights on their side and the master were treated them as a animal.

“Moreover, they thoughts them he had spoiled his children, by teaching them to feel that they were human beings. This was blasphemous doctrine for a slave to teach; presumptuous in him, and dangerous to the masters” (Jacobs 12) This quote shows the mind-set of white people, where they thought that Linda’s father treated Linda as a human being which made her to forget that she is a slave. Linda’s father does not want his children to be slave. At his funeral he was considered as a property and not as a human being. Nostalgic memories generally involve memories with family or close friends. This leads Linda to have complex emotion. These nostalgic memories simply do not give the memory of the people who is socially connected. This ontology places an important role in reconnecting the memories of past with the present. In this novel Incident in the Life of a Slave Girl, the character Linda is closely attached to nostalgic memories. Because, she was grown up in the different situation which made her to forget her slave doctrine’s that she has to follow

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in future. This is the reason it took time for Linda to accept the reality.

### **Memories and Guilt**

Memory is a process that help the people to store the incident which can help them in future. But this process will make the suppress more in their life the incident that in the life of Linda makes her to suffer in the future in cause psychological defence. She had a better childhood which stop Linda from accepting the present life as slave. Linda has a change of behaviour because of her memories which is associated with slavery where he mentally and physically affected. Linda claims that, "God judge's men by their hearts, not by the colour of their skins" (Jacobs 63). This show that they were slaves because of their colour which was a cruel thing that was faced by Linda because of their colour they were treated badly by their masters.

When the black people were dominated by their colour, they will develop an inferior complex which can affect their future life. Sigmund Freud states that the memories can affect the person at any stage of their life. In this novel the character Linda is affected by her slave memories, which makes a huge difference in her life. At first, she was unable to accept the real life of slavery. Linda states that, "He tried his utmost to corrupt the pure principles my grandmother had instilled...but he was my mother. I was completed to live under the same roof with him". (Jacobs 26) when Linda started her slavery life, she was uncomfortable with her master but Linda has no other option she has to stay with her master Dr. Flint who sexually abuse her.

Even though Linda suffered by her master, she was unable to leave him. She felt that because of this slavery white also had some behaviour changes in them. They all become cruel and their attitudes have changed a lot towards the black. Linda claims that, "I can testify from my own experience and observation that slavery is a curse to the white as well as to the black". (Jacobs 46) Once the white is practiced to some behaviour. It is impossible to change that behaviour from them. They are used to suppress the black people. Which is difficult to change.

As like this the black people is used to slavery, but Linda was just opposite to this. Because she was used to happy and has self-respect when she was young. This is the main reason for her it took time to accept the reality of her life with self-respect. "He told me I was his property; that I must be subject to his will in all things" which was claimed by Linda Brent that she was his property that Dr. Flint has rights over Linda in every way. These memories of Linda affected her mentally which made her to go back to childhood days where she was happy and independent.

#### Motherhood of Linda

When Linda has started the stage of motherhood, she had guilt that her children will also suffer the same things that she had faced in her life. At first, she had a mind-set that she wants to live an independent life but after she got a child her mind-set was completely changed. She thought that she wants freedom from slavery. Linda has come across the experience of slave mothers who that was happy with the death of their child. The girl's mother said, "The body is dead, thank god; and I hope

my poor child will soon be in heaven too". (Jacobs 15) this shows that slavery is very cruel activity then death. The mind-set of slave mothers was psychological affected by their memories and the incident that happened in their life. But this is the different in Linda's situation where she fought for her children and she want her children to be freed from slavery. She believed everyone that who gave her hope about her children's future. "God alone knows how much I know I have suffered; and he, I trust will forgive me. If I am permitted to have my children. I intend to be a good mother and to live in such a manner that people cannot treat me with contempt". (Jacobs 133).

This quote was said by Linda to Mr. Durham which shows that for Linda the important thing in her life is to save her children from slavery. When she escaped from her master without her children, she was longing to get back them. Because she is psychological affected by the incidents that happened to her in her childhood days. Then Linda also has a guilt about her children who was suffering under the slavery.

### **Transformation of Linda**

In the beginning of the novel Linda is considered as a strong and stubborn girl who wants to live her in life of independence. But her fate is to be slave which was not accepted by Linda because of her memories that she had in her past life, Linda was affected by her childhood memories. This was one of the reasons for her behaviour change. When Linda was affected sexually her mental health was damaged. Because of this her behaviour was completely changed. Her suppression by the white people. Linda has suppression memory, pushing unwanted thoughts, emotion, and fantasies

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and more out of conscious awareness, when Linda escaped from slavery; she has the memories of her slavery life. This is known as suppressed memory which affect Linda's mental health this suppressed memories brings fear to Linda which breaks her confidence which she had in her childhood days. She fears the worst about her children who is next slave to Linda's masters' house. She remembers her slavery days there she says that,

I spent the day gathering flowers and weaving them into freestone while the dead body of my father was lying within a mile of me; incident shows that how Linda's father was considered as a property. After Linda escaped from slavery, she was in confidence about getting her children. She states that "Whatever slavery might do to me it could not shackle my children. (Jacobs 12).

This confusion is because of her mental health issue like nostalgic, suppression and guilt which plays a major role in one's life and it can change their behaviour and mind- set they had before. In this novel Incident in the Life of a Slave Girl the character Linda who was first considered as a strong girl with more confidence but after the slavery her confidence level was broken and pushed her to a confused state of mind-set. This psychological defence is because of her memories which she had during her slavery time.

#### Fear and Confusion

Through the end of the novel the mind-set of Linda is in confused state. Where she fights for freedom and also, she had fear about her children. This novel is about the psychology abuse of the character Linda. She experienced her first psychological abuse is when she was taken as a slave for



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the first time Linda mentioned that, “She was a piece of merchandise because she lived as free as a white born slave”. (Jacobs 8). Linda as shocked to see that the society takes slavery as a normal thing. When she run away from her slavery she was in dilemma. Dr.Flint used Linda’s to children to punish and control her. Which make her to fear about her children. Dr.Flint was Linda’s weakness and tries to make her his mistress. Even after the end of slavery the black people faced humiliation and discrimination. Linda as given freedom by Mrs. Bruce and she reunited with her family. Linda will remember about the grandmother who supported her during slavery time. Linda states that “When my grandmother applied for him for payment, he said the estate was insolvent and the law prohibit payment. It did not, however, prohibit him from retaining the silver candelabra which had been purchased with the money”. (Jacobs 13). Linda helped by her grandmother who mentally and physically supported her. Linda’s grandmother stood as a pillar for Linda, when she was betrayed by many people. She finds hard to believe people. This is also a psychological effect when she experienced many betrayals from the people, who were believed by Linda. After this incident she was unable to trust other people. She was closely related the characters like her grandmother brother and uncle and Linda’s close friend Fanny. Her grandmother was bold women. Linda was take care by her grandmother from the childhood days

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