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TRAGEDY AND WOMEN : PERSPECTIVES ON AMERICAN FEMINIST THEATER.

1.0 Theater since the beginning of civilization has been an all male activity, as the woman was not whole-heartedly accepted into its arena. Even when accepted, woman had to play roles demanded by the male aesthetic patterns. Their tragic situation was shifted to their male counterparts. Even the revised view of Aristotelian tragedy excluded woman from the center of the stage. Tragedy seemed to be the birthright of the male, from the point of view of theater historians/directors. The female's tragic experience was ignored in traditional theater. But with the advent of the women's Theater project and Feminist playwrights entering the male bastion of theater, the necessity to define the aesthetics of Feminist Theater has risen.

1.1 For this purpose, I propose to examine whether there exists a separate aesthetics for tragedy in Feminist Theater. The nature of the Feminist tragedy and the woman's tragic experience are to be analyzed. But the dramatic theories from Aristotle to Miller are found inadequate for such an analysis. For, Aristotle's contention that, a female character being manly is inappropriate, banishes the women from tragedy. The French philosopher Saint-Evremond maintained that the actress 'shall put on grief all along' as she pleases best with her art of weeping. Elder Olson's interpretation of Clytemnestra sounds more of the voice of the man rather than the woman. A reading of the essays on tragedy by Schiller, Schlegel and Nietzsche reveal the exclusion of woman from tragedy by the very non-mention of woman in these treatises. The tragic heroines in Ibsen and Strindberg are only the extension of the man's idea of how a woman 'should be' (and not a woman 'is'). Even the modern theories of Miller/ Tennessee Williams see the tragic woman only through the male consciousness. The serious and typically woman's issues of these feminist playwrights, make it indispensable to evolve separate tools of dramaturgy for Feminist Theater.

2.0 Tragedy is still relevant as a genre in the modern era, though Joseph Woodkrutch claimed it otherwise. Woodkrutch in his essay "Tragic Fallacy" argues that we have moved to the anthropocentric Universe, where God is not the subject and man is the centre. Hence god-like men or heroic men, protagonists of tragedy are non-existent. Heroic suffering, a fundamental characteristic of tragedy is not possible for ordinary men. However Miller, Hegel and other modern dramaturgists focus on Man— his conflicts with his self, or with his society. Therefore, as long as the personal is political, as long as there is an awareness of the dignity and seriousness of life, tragedy will live. But why there has been no great tragedy on woman? If Othello's tragic flaw is jealousy, is not jealousy a flaw of the female too? The only answer to this query could be that tragedy involved great power and authority of the hero, and power/authority never involved women. With the shifting of this power structure gradually from men to women, the woman too is accepted as capable of tragic intensity.

