

## Realization of Self in Anne Tyler's *A Slipping-Down Life*

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*A Slipping- Down Life* presents a teenage girl's agony as she is incapable of making own identity and actualize her own self. Though it is common in teenagers, Evie's suffering is more painstaking as she lacks the support of a traditional family and the absence of motherly care. She is all alone. She finds herself helpless to separate her from Casey's image, a rock singer and strongly believes that he only can help to actualize her own self. Teenagers are more worried about their identification in the world, acceptance from others, and even name and fame in the society as does Evie Decker. She does not dare enough to carve 'Casey' on her forehead for that, nevertheless thinking that how horrible it would be on a girl's face. It is evidently shows that more than beauty she needs his name on forehead as a means of identification. Her perception on feminine role or womanhood is built on stereotypic images on soap operas and in magazines that she is able to achieve by becoming Drum's wife. In order to define herself she chooses the role of womanhood by marrying Drum against her father's wish.

Evie suffers due to the lack of self-sufficiency and deficient in channelizing energy, thoughts and knowledge appropriately in the earlier stages of life. John Updike in his

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review of Searching for Caleb entitled “Family Ways”, he argues that Tyler has a “fascination with families” (75). Her female protagonist undertakes a mission and makes a journey to self-actualization. Evie keenly watches soap operas and these happen to be a model of reality, especially in her romantic life. The motherless, fat, unattractive girl tries to find her true identity. She spares her major portion of day to day life for listening to radio broadcast instead of sharing time with fellow friends. In fact she has no friends except Violet. Literally there is no one exist to pave her way. Absence of a loving mother or a caring hand is something dangerous for teenagers, so does in Evie’s life.

Evie suffers due to loneliness at home and at school. At school nobody notices her because she is over weighted and has few friends. To make her identity the bashful, lonely, silent teenager without the support of parental care and traditional family endures in the world. She is addicted to radio, spends mornings and evenings as a pill. The search for self ends up in her inability to separate herself from Casey, a rock singer whom she encounters first in a radio program. There is nothing else existed for her, except marrying Casey for her identity and self-actualization. To attain her motto the short, wide and heavy footed girl Evie finds no other better way to catch the attention of Casey than carving his name on her forehead. She has never felt remorse on spoiling her face for someone whom she has least knowledge about. Whatever, her purpose is, to be noticed by others especially Casey. Eventually she succeeds and does not mind how silly others feel when they face her, beyond that she wants to be recognized and get identity. She believes all her dreams will be accomplished with the help of Casey. Though she is not at all attractive to Casey, he ultimately requests her to marry him in his adversity because he is quite sure that Evie

would not leave him. No one else but it is Evie defaces her pretty face by carving his name on her forehead and works hard for his popularity. It is difficult for her to forget and forgive the insult made by him earlier. Though she first denies and laughs at his proposal, later she agrees to him. It is contradictory to say even Casey is not ready to propose her directly instead asks her to reduce weight for him. "Have you ever thought of losing some weight?"(111).

A woman is brought up in family and the society as an alien. She is neglected and kept outside of the social arena in the name of protection. She always grows up and leads life tied and hidden by parents, brothers, and husband and by society. So the improper exposure she gets makes her an inappropriate being to live in the world. So out of fear she gets a faulty notion about world which clouds her vision. This is apparent in Tyler's works. Gilbert says:

failure of vision have impelled all of Tyler's characters on the flights, the inability to see the beauty of the present, its outlines obscured in layers of the past, and the inability to see themselves at all, the fear that they are invisible as individuals in the webs of others' lives.(263-264)

Evie tries to overcome the loneliness and longs to recover her lost self. Women in general, in their journey to restore self and to find own self they force to detach themselves with family for a short time in order to have a good vision and to escape from oppression. Susan Gilbert says in her chapter "Anne Tyler", "in detachment, they see" (274). Since mirror has a special place for defining or identifying self, Tyler uses this device brilliantly in portrayal of Evie. She does never get a complete or a clear image of herself. She sees her daily in the mirror though in order



to complete her image she needs Casey's image on it, "she pasted the picture in the middle of her mirror. Drumstrings Casey's penciled head took the place of her own every time she combed her hair" (17). To refer to Evie, using an *Alice in Wonderland* analogy, Bail argues, "the beginning and end of the circular movement are framed by mirror" (34). Evie can see her image in the mirror but she is unable to identify herself in her mirror image but with portrayal of Casey on the mirror.

Mr. Decker, Evie's father is physically present though he is devoid of parental skills. The wise, good old man is just an onlooker in Evie's life. He is unable to handle the needs and psyche of a teenaged girl child. Gilbert contends, "Evie's father is colorless, kind and communicative" (256). It is not completely expected from him that he should understand all the needs of a teenaged girl. Even father finds it difficult either to understand or to see her physical and mental issues. At hospital bed she asks him, "Do you want to see?" (35). Even in such a pathetic situation of Evie, father is not ready to look at her. Mr. Decker glances up and "dropped his eyes" quickly (35). Her disillusionment and lack of identity become worse due to her father's failure to understand clearly about her. Irrespective of gender and age every human longs for acceptance, love and belongingness, the basic driving force of an individual. When he lacks any the problem starts. To get an identity and attention Evie carves the name on forehead that no one could neglect or leave without noticing.

Not only father but also friends have never considered Evie's presence. In the high school, "When classmates met up with her they passed in a hurry, barely noticing her. Evie never spoke to them" (6). In fact Evie's invisibility at home and among friends at school and their contempt makes her to think seriously about visibility and identity of her own. She falls off the rock to

get her an identity that resulted in Evie's self-destructive behavior. Her inability to identify herself as Evie Decker ends up with defining her as Mrs. Bertram Drumsting Casey and feels proud of having his name on her forehead and walk around. In this trial she gets not only attention and identification from friends but also from Casey. Her sacrifice extends to work for Casey to make him famous in his carrier. To acquire it Evie herself put her in a situation to be looked and gazed by others in Unicorn, where he works. She takes a seat in front of stage near to Casey so that audience will be able to see his carved name on her forehead. She longs to be a part of Casey always. Mulvey contends, "Thus the woman as icon displayed for the gaze and enjoyment of men, the active controllers of the look, always threatens to evoke the anxiety it originally signified" (591).

Evie succeeds in getting attention but for a quiet short time. Later her recognition vanishes as people used to her scar. "She noticed that people in the Unicorn had stopped staring at her. No one whispered about her; no one stood up to get a better look. They craned their necks around her in order to see the musicians" (87). She is no longer needed in that place and gets dismissal soon. When she has got realization that her decision goes wrong in Casey's matter, she cut bangs to hide the scar. On the road to recover her own self she feels insecure in the scar. "She cut herself a set of bangs, long enough to cover her eyebrows. Her eyes without eyebrows looked worried and surprised" (93). Earlier what she did for getting an identity later she hides, because she is on the mend to discover and realize her own self. Though her vision is not so clear yet she starts to realize the distorted image of herself and others.

Evie's vision is blurred that is the core reason of all her problems. Drum informs Evie that he loses his job for "getting on good with the manager's daughter", and "Evie blinked, cutting

off the daughter forever with a single moment” (96). She does not really want to see the reality that is the reason she blinks when she comes to know the reality of Casey. Though Casey explicitly revealing the fact that he keeps relation with manager’s daughter Evie is not reacting to it or try to correct him. It shows that she is not bothered to find the real identity of Casey and has no clear image on how her life would be. In fact her marriage and being a wife, she learns to care and see clearly her own identity. Bail Urgues, “More and more, Evie Becomes the decision maker” (27). Even though Casey discourages her to go for work due to the fact that “it wouldn’t look good” (141) she decides to go for a job and support Casey.

Evie’s trial for getting an identity is undoubtedly unusual before her marriage, later she realizes her fault and tries to discover identity by separating herself from Casey and takes up a job at the library. There after she realizes herself and her identity in the world. She finds her as a self-sufficient independent individual, “She pictured herself in a blue smock, clam and competent” (141). Through many obstacle and worries Evie finds her real identity and comes to know that there is no need of identity in the name of husband or father. As an evident of her faulty vision she decides to take the name of Casey as her own, that she carved “I’ll tell them it them it is my name.... It is my name” (184). Further she does no longer wish to get sympathy on her and wants to be a wife or daughter to get identity. Now she carries no titles, becomes an independent and a full-fledged member in society. Day by day she realizes that she is alone in the world with an unborn child in her womb. However she is more confident enough to lead a better life for her own. She finds her twin-tower love is wrong. He is not trustworthy as he sleeps with another woman in her absence. She accepts the reality of her father’s death. She thinks over her own ignorance



about her husband and she is nearly out of sorts after seeing the condition of the house where Casey takes her to live together. She is literally scared about the ambiance and expresses her feels frankly, "Have you ever *looked* at this place? It's a mess. And I'm freezing to death, it's much too cold" (181). Ever since marries to Drum and starts to stay with him she gets realization on her life, surrounding and her own identity. Now she views clearly. Voelker asserts, "Evie found her way to an identity as an adult and a mother, heir to the family house... through the consequences of an event that was not her choice but accidental"(47).

Evie's transformation is drastic and sudden. She does not dare enough to gain power to tackle situation. It is she insists Drum to make choice with her and the child in her womb in the changing situation. But he does not find much difference and he says, "I don't see how that changes anything" (183). On the contrary, for Evie the new situation with a baby in makes her to think about protection and a safe place to live. Her decision shows that Evie has got a better vision and identity than Drum and now she knows how to lead a life. While packing things in her bags to go back to his father's house, she reminds herself as a character in a movie she is familiar in many movie and now Evie is in that situation without rehearsal she does things perfectly. "Then she began folding the blouses that hung in her closet. Hundreds of times, in movies and on television, she had watched this scene being rehearsed for her" (183). Meanwhile Drum is just an onlooker, "Drum came to be her audience" (184). This incident clearly shows that Evie has gained her life, identity and realizes her image. Now she is capable of leading her life as a woman, and a future mother. This novel gives a new image of woman who is sure of herself and her future. Petry says that:

The ending of *A Slipping Down Life* is thus an affirmative one. Essentially a parable of the evolution of one woman's strong, healthy sense of identity [...] If it is not a flawless vision[...] it is nonetheless meant to be a positive one. From this point on, strong women able to raise their families alone and to deal with crisis and impediments of daily life will be a salient feature of Anne Tyler's novels. (68-69)

Anne Tyler makes symbolic ending to the novel by revealing that Evie has got identity and realization as, "She rolled the window down" (185). This is very significant while she leaves because it indicates that she does no longer need to look through the window to get realization. It also tells her look at Drum after rolling down the window indicates her independence from Casey and trumpet of getting her own identity.

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