

# AUNT JENNIFER'S TIGERS

(BY- ADRIENNE RICH)

**About poet: Adrienne Cecile Rich** (1929 – 2012)

She was an American poet, essayist and feminist. She was one of the most widely read and influenced poets of the second half of the 20th century. In her poems she talks about a woman's experiences in her married life. She has tried to explore the inner feelings of a woman who is living under the dominance of men. Adrienne Rich was born in Baltimore, Maryland, USA. She is widely known for her active involvement in the women's movement. She has published 19 volumes of poetry, three collections of essays and other writings. She was strongly against racism and inequality prevalent in human society. In the poem Aunt Jennifer's Tigers the poet describes the oppressed condition of women by males and their dominance in society.

## EXPLANATION OF THE POEM:

**Stanza -1.** Aunt Jennifer's tigers prance across a screen,

Bright topaz denizens of world of green.

They do not fear the men beneath the tree;

They pace in sleek chivalric certainty.

**Explanation:** Aunt Jennifer's tigers prance and move across a screen or wall.. They are bright coloured like the golden yellow jewel (topaz). They are the denizens (dwellers) of green forests. They are not afraid of the men standing under the tree. They are well groomed (shining) and running fast on the panel with confidence.

( Here Aunt Jennifer has knitted images of tigers on the panel. They are not real or living tigers. The images of tigers are created by aunt on the panel with her own hands. The tigers represent her dreams. Her desire is to be free from fear and oppression that control her life and wants to become brave like tigers.)

**Stanza- 2.** Aunt Jennifer's fingers fluttering through her wool

Find even the ivory needle hard pull.

The massive weight of Uncle's wedding band;

Sits heavily upon Aunt Jennifer's hand.

**Questions:** (i) Why do aunt Jennifer's fingers flutter?

(ii) Why does she find it hard to pull the ivory needle?

(iii) Why is uncle's wedding band described as being heavy?

**Answer:** (i) Aunt's fingers were not healthy and strong. She was afraid of her husband.

(ii) she finds it hard to pull the ivory needle because she was very weak and worried.

(iii) Her married life with uncle had been severe. The uncle treated her with heavy hand and cruelty.

**Explanation:** Aunt Jennifer's hands are moving about her wool to create beautiful images of tigers. But the movement is not easy and smooth. Aunt finds the ivory needle very hard to pull through wool. The Uncle's wedding band seems very heavy on her hand. She feels burdened with her marital (wedding) responsibilities.

(Aunt always fears from her husband. Her marital life is burdened for her. Through this stanza the poet wants to carry the fact that a women does not feel ease to carry he martial life. Her humour does not matter before her husband. She feels so much subjected that the martial bond is a burden on her. This is also with aunt Jennifer.)

### Stanza- 3. When Aunt is dead, her terrified hand will lie

Still ringed with ordeals she was mastered by.

The tigers in the panel that she maid

Will go on prancing proud and unafraid.

**Explanation:** The final stage reveals aunt Jennifer will remain terrified always in her life as well as after her death. She will be confident with unpleasant painful experiences after her death because she is mastered by her husband. The tiger in the panel that she made will go on jumping. They will be proud and unafraid.

## Question and Answers

**Qs. How do 'denizens' and 'chivalric' add to understanding of the tiger's attitude?**

Ans. The Tigers are the 'denizens' of the forest. They are very brave and fearless. They are 'chivalric'. They occupy honorable and majestic positions in the world of Animals. So the use of 'denizens' and 'chivalric' adds to our understanding of the tigers attitude.

**Qs. Why do you think Aunt Jennifer's hands are fluttering through her wool in the second stanza? Why is she finding the needle so hard to pull?**

Ans. Ant Jennifer is creating Tiger on the screen. Her hands are fluttering through her wool. She had bitter and unpleasant experiences of her married life. The memory of her married life is still fresh in her mind. So she finds the needle so hard to pull.

**Qs. What is suggested by the image 'massive weight of Uncle's wedding band'?**

Ans. The poet uses many images and symbols to describe the unpleasant experience of Aunt Jennifer's married life. Massive weight of 'Uncles wedding band' is a symbol of harsh and bitter experiences of married life of Aunt Jennifer. The Wedding band also stands for unbreakable bond of marriage between the husband and wife.

**Qs. Of what or whom is Aunt Jennifer terrified with the third stanza?**

Ans. Aunt Jennifer's is creating Tiger on the screen. She is terrified. She had gone through with bitter and harsh experiences in her married life. The memory of her married life is still fresh in her mind. She is still in rip of the unpleasant experiences of her married life. So she is frightened.

**Qs. What are the 'ordeals' Aunt Jennifer is surrounded by, why is it significant that the poet uses the word 'ringed'? What are the meaning of the word 'ringed' in the poem.**

Ans. Aunt Jennifer had a bitter and unpleasant married life. 'Ordeals' stands for bitter and unpleasant experiences of her married life. The poet uses the word 'ringed' which suggests that Aunt Jennifer is still surrounded by the bitter experiences of her past life. The another meaning of the word 'ringed' is encircled.

**Qs. Why do you think Aunt Jennifer created animals that are so different from her own character? What might the poet be suggesting through this difference.**

Ans. Aunt Jennifer creates Tiger on the screen. These Tigers are brave and fearless. They are different from Aunt Jennifer character. The poet wants to suggest that Aunt Jennifer wants to express her desire to be confident and brave through her creation. So the Tigers are different from her own character.

**Qs. Interpret the symbol found in this poem.**

Ans. The poet uses symbols in the poem. The Tigers are the symbol of courage, honor, bravery and confidence. The massive weight of 'Uncle's wedding band' is symbol of harsh and bitter experiences of Aunt Jennifer's married life. 'Ordeals' and 'Ringed' also stands for bitter and harsh experiences.

**Qs. Do you Sympathize with Aunt Jennifer. What is the attitude of the speaker towards Aunt Jennifer?**

Ans. Yes, we are sympathized with Aunt Jennifer. The poet has also a sympathetic attitude towards the Aunt Jennifer. She uses many symbols to describe the harsh and unpleasant married life of Aunt Jennifer.

#### IMPORTANT MEANINGS

Prance - jump or move in a spirited manner

Screen - here, the wall or the surface of the tapestry

Topaz - a bright yellow precious stone

Denizens - inhabitants

Chivalric - brave and honourable

Certainty - confidence

Fluttering - moving with a light irregular or trembling motion

Massive - heavy

Wedding band - wedding pact, signifying martial duties

Ringed - confident of tied up

Ordeals - unpleasant or painful experiences

Mastered - controlled

Panel - flat board

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