



Theme of Marriage and Motherhood in Zora Neale Hurston's Novels : An Overview

Zora Neale Hurston is the most influential writer in African American Literature. She revolted against conventional norms of black writer writing only about race and racism. The theme of marriage has been delved in deep by Hurston. She explores the theme of marriage in all her works, but marriage is not a celebrated thing. In all her novels, marriage is depicted as a deadly proposition. Hurston herself had gone through two failed marriages. Perhaps, for this reason marriages in Hurston's novels are full of problems and unhappy discords. Hurston depicts that a marriage can survive only when there is happiness in it, and it should be the primary motive of any marriage. Man or woman, happiness is required by all. Motherhood has never been a primary concern for Hurston in her works, and has never been dealt by Hurston in a magnanimous way in her novels. Mother characters are not a powerful characters in her novels, and motherhood is a theme which is often ignored by Hurston. Key Words : African American, Marriage, Happiness, Motherhood.

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Zora Neale Hurston is the most influential writer in African American Literature. She revolted against conventional norms of black writer writing only about race and racism. Her works scintillate with happiness and lively spirit. She died in obscurity again to be discovered by seminal writer Alice Walker in 1973. Today her works are celebrated and have become canons of African American literature. Alice Walker writes about Hurston, "We love Zora Neale Hurston for her work, first, and then again (as she and all Eatonville would say), we love her for herself. For the humour and courage with which she encountered a life she infrequently designed, for her absolute disinterest in becoming either white or bourgeoisie, and for her devoted appreciation of her own culture, which is an inspiration to us all" (1-2)

Hurston's first novel *Jonah's Gourd Vine* was inspired by her parent's lives. Hurston depicts how an African American man is consumed by his own lechery. Not only the protagonist but also other characters suffer from their own follies. It is through these entrapments that they search their own identity and try to survive. Hurston's second novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is a classic work. Hurston depicts the life of an African American woman who dreams of happiness. Surviving through all odds and adversities, finally she triumphs and finds happiness. She does not dream big but she nurtures a simple dream of happiness which she

finds in herself. *Moses, Man of the Mountain* is Hurston's third novel. Hurston beautifully transform the age old biblical story of Moses into an African lore and draws parallel with African American lives. She conveys a message of hope and well as warns her people that they should handle freedom with responsibility. Hurston's last novel *Seraph on the Suwanee* is often misunderstood and misread. In reality, this novel is a critique on white culture. She juxtaposes discoloured white life with that of lively African American people and culture.

The theme of marriage has been delved in deep by Hurston. She explores the theme of marriage in all her works, but marriage is not a celebrated thing. In all her novels, marriage is depicted as a deadly proposition. Hurston herself had gone through two failed marriages. Perhaps, for this reason marriages in Hurston's novels are full of problems and unhappy discords. In *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, John Pearson marries thrice but all the three marriage are not a harmonious, and John Pearson feels trapped in them. Similarly in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Janie's first two marriage end in failure till she meets Tea Cake. In *Moses Man of the Mountain*, Moses' first marriage with an Ethiopian Princess proves to be a failure. His second marriage with Zipporah is not as he intends it to be. Hurston especially, warns women of impending dangers in marriage. Her women characters be it Lucy, Hattie, Janie, Zipporah, or Arvey all have a

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subjugated position in marital relationship. It is the women in her novels, who bore the brunt of the unharmonious relationship. Hurston also depicts domestic violence where women are beaten and abused by their husbands. There exists a fine line between success and failure in a marriage. Hurston shows that characters who fail to understand their own faults are destroyed just like John in *Jonah's Gourd Vine* or Jody in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. The characters that recognize their problem are able to overcome them like Arvey and Jim in *Seraph on the Suwanee*. As humans, all make mistakes at some point of life, but one should make a new start with the same vigour. Hurston presents readers with new role models. Especially for women, Hurston shows how to break the old stereotype roles they have to play in marital relationships. Hurston depicts that a marriage can survive only when there is happiness in it, and it should be the primary motive of any marriage. Man or woman, happiness is required by all.

Motherhood has never been a primary concern for Hurston in her works, and has never been dealt by Hurston in a magnanimous way in her novels. Mother characters are not a powerful characters in her novels, and motherhood is a theme which is often ignored by Hurston. Hurston herself was not a mother and never had any children. Hurston's women characters are independent and feisty like Janie in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Part of Janie's independence is because she had no children to tie her down. All other independent women characters such as Hattie, and Miriam too, have no children. Other characters such as Lucy in *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, Zipporah in *Moses*, Man of the Mountain and Arvey in *Seraph on the Suwanee* who are also mothers remain in a subjugated position and seems to lose their independence. Thus, for Hurston not only marriage but motherhood too, seemed a deadly proposition and she manifests in her novels without any hesitation.

Thus, we see that how Hurston in our own impeccable style treats the theme of marriage and motherhood. For her female characters marriage is not the end of the world nor it is a path to happiness. In doing so, firstly, Hurston has manifested the drawbacks and negative aspects of patriarchal marriage; secondly, she also demonstrates that to some extent women are also responsible for their own inferior status in the marriage, and thirdly she has broken negative stereo type image of African American women as promiscuous. Similarly, motherhood is also not an empowerment proposition for the females. Sometimes, it seems that her characters are way better without marriage and motherhood. Its obvious she wrote what she had firsthand experience in her life. To Conclude it would be apt to Sharon L. Jones, "A master of self-representation, Hurston fashioned the narrative of her own history to present herself as the product of a rich African American cultural heritage. The story of her life, marked by a determination to succeed as a writer despite the wide spread racial and gender discrimination of the era, continues to serve as an inspiring example."(xii-xiii)

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(1) Walker, Alice, "In Search of Zora Neale Hurston." Ms. March 1975. Print.

(2) Jones, Sharon L. *Critical Companion to Zora Neale Hurston : A Literary Reference to Her Life and Work*. New York: Facts on File, 2009. Print.



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'रिसर्च लिंक' की सदस्यता का शुल्क भुगतान राष्ट्रीयकृत बैंकों द्वारा सीधे ट्रांसफर या जमा किया जा सकता है। बैंक का विवरण निम्नानुसार है-

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भुगतान की मूल रसीद, शोध-पत्र एवं सीडी के साथ कार्यालयीन पते पर भेजना अनिवार्य है।



Different Facets of Feminism in Indian English Literature

This paper is an attempt to understand the trajectory which Feminism has travelled in India. It explores various facets of Feminism in context of the Indian subcontinent. Having elaborated the age old gender discriminatory malpractices of Sati and Jauhar, the article enumerates the Indian authors living in India and abroad writing on the causes of women. As feminism includes not just female authors but also the male ones, it also reflects on the contribution of male writers writing whichosculates psychological exploration of women's psyche for the causes of women.

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Literature makes a water image of society through certain issues of the time-space in which they are produced. This paper discusses the facets of feminism in Indian English literature by penetrating deep into the mind of the Feminism in India is a set of movements with the bourne of elucidating, establishing and interceding the political and the socio-economic rights and the equal opportunities for Indian women.

The paper discusses that feminism is a diverse collection of social theories, political movements and moral philosophies, largely motivated by or concerning to the experiences of women, especially socially, politically and economically. As a social movement, feminism largely focuses on limiting or eradicating gender inequality; promoting women's rights, interests, and other related issues of women in society.

In the Indian context, the women have to fight against the patriarchal society as they are not given inheritance in the ancestral property. This too goes without saying that they have had to suffer Sati the widow immolation and Jauharsel self immolation.

The history of Indian feminism can be divided into three parts. The first phase of feminism is the beginning in the mid-19th century when the Europeans male speak out openly against the social evil of sati. The second phase is from 1915 onwards till 1947 when Mahatma Gandhi incorporated feminist movement with Quit India movement. The third and the last phase is believed to have continued from the times of post-independence till now. It has fairly focused on equality and rights on the political front too.

Despite this progress women in India have been facing

many issues of discrimination. There has emerged a disturbing trend of female foeticide or sex selective abortion a modern form of killing a "Dudh Piti". This comes close to, if not squarely, at least at an angular distance, "Sati Pratha." It is ironic to note that Indian feminism focuses only on already privileged women or well settled women. Unfortunately, it neglects representation of the poor women of the lower caste. As a result of it we find caste specific feminist organizations and movements.

The most important thing about Indian feminist movement is that they have been initiated or started by men later on joined by women. Their main purpose was to abolish the custom of sati, child marriage, disfiguring of widow, remarriage of upper caste Hindu widows, promoting women's education, legal rights for women to own property. The 19th century is a period when most of the issues of women were taken up.

In the first phase of feminism we must remember Maharani Jind Kaur, the youngest wife of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. She was a sheer beauty, full of energy and strength of purpose. The British described her as "Messalina of the Punjab" too rebellious to be controlled. Other names to be mentioned are the Queen of Jhansi Rani Laxmibai, Kittur or Rani Chennama, Qudsiya Begum of Bhopal and Jind Kaur of Punjab as mentioned earlier.

In the second phase, the struggle against the British-rule-boasted-Nationalism was at its highest peak. Gandhi played a vital role by legitimizing and expanding Indian women's public activities. The women played an important role in the movements known as Satyagrah of Borsad and Satyagrah of Bardoli. All Indian women's conference (AIWC)

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and the National federation of Indian Women (NFIW) emerged as strong feminist organization by the efforts of Gandhian followers. They became supporting organizations of political movements initiated by congress against the colonialism.

The third and the last phase of feminism is said to have commenced after independence. The democratic and the Republic Setup of India gave constitutional equality to all irrespective of race, religion, caste and gender. The Indian state of Kerala is often viewed as leading and ideal progressive state in the women's rights movement. In 1966 Indira Gandhi became the first female prime minister of India. She served as prime minister of India for three consecutive terms from (1966 to 1977).

Feminism in Indian literature as well as the broader perspective of feminism in India, is not a singular theoretical point of reference, it has alchemized with time preserving balance, with historical and cultural subsistence, echelon of advertence, discernments and actions of individual woman and women in mass. Feminist writers in India today proudly uphold their causes of 'womanhood', through their write-ups.

Indian women novelists have given new dimension to the Indian English literature. When we refer to the term Indian English writer, it suggests the one who writes in English language and whose native or co-native language could be one of the numerous languages of India. Names of authors like Virginia Woolf and Toni Morrison come very spontaneously. Names of Indian authors rarely come up in the list of feminist writers. The truth is that Indian writers were a little slow in catching up with the feminist movement that raged worldwide. India was still under British rule and too rooted in the age old traditions. The concept of feminist writing was started by men in India as we have discussed earlier. So the first Indian feminist writers were actually men Rabindranath Tagore is one of them.

Indian English writings commenced with authors like Sarojini Naidu. She magnetized the readers with her penmanship as the Nayantara Sehgal and Rama Mehta kept on using feminist contents in their writings. The multifaceted writing panaches of each writer imparts us distinct viewpoint of feminism. While Kamala Das navigates women exploration in India and the world, writers like Shashi Deshpande make characters who can censure their own egotism for their bemoan condition. Arundathi Roy has her persuasion on the society, begins her story without a beginning and does not real end it. Jumpa Lahiri on the contrary meticulously formulates her story and moves at a perfect pace.

Authors like Kamala Markandaya, Shashi Deshpande and Anita Desai have chosen the problem and issues faced by the women in today's male dominated world as the main theme of their books e.g., some of the novels of Shashi Deshpande like *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1980) and *That Long Silence* (1990). She has depicted the complexities between man and woman relationship and endeavored to

explore the psychological facets of the lead protagonists. The women novelists try to create awareness that this is the time to proclaim with definite precision.

Indian English writings started with authors like Sarojini Naidu. She charmed the readers with her writings as the great poetess. Nayantara Sehgal and Rama Mehta used feminist themes in their writings. Nayantara was born on 10th May, 1927. Nehru was her uncle but she never came under his political influence. She openly opposed Nehru government policies and recently she was a part of "Award Wapsi Movement" against atrocities and intolerance of Hindu right wing party rule in India.

Her first book *Prison and Chocolate Cake* was published in 1954. She penned political writings like *Indira Gandhi: Her Road to Power* (1982) and *A situation in New Delhi* (1989). Her two novels *Mistaken Identity* and *Rich like us* were published in the US in 1985. Kamala Das also known as Kamala Suraiya (reverted to Islam) was born on 31st March, 1934. She contributed in Malayalam her native language too. She is believed as one of the exceptional Indian poets writing in English. She is also known as Madhvi Kutty among her Malayali readers. Her contribution is mainly for short stories and poems.

Bharati Mukherjee was successful in highlighting the cultural clashes and other social and political dilemmas in North America. Bharati Mukherjee could not ignore her Indian origin though seems herself as an American writer. She expresses the agony of women in one of her novels *Wife* (1975), "All her life she had been trained to please. He expected her, like Sita, "to jump in to fire if necessary."

Mukherjee is an Indian born American writer, born in Kolkata on 27th July, 1940. She graduated from Calcutta University in 1959 and post graduated from M.S. University Baroda in 1961. She wrote in collaboration with her husband two books *Days and Nights in Calcutta* (1977) and *Sorrow and the Terror* (1987). She received the Nation Book Critics Circle Award in 1988 for her famous fiction "The middle-man and Other Stories". She also won the "National Magazine award" for her essay "An invisible woman".

Veena Paintal wrote about rebellious women. In *An Autumn Leaf* (1976), she portrays a character named Charisma, who is an independent girl with her own views on love and marriage. She writes:

'I do not believe in arranged marriages. In today's world they have little chance of survival. I have my own down like a slave to some rich man I do not even and be treated like a piece of furniture.'

Gayatri Spivak is a feminist literary critic and theorist. She is best known for the article, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" which is considered a founding text of post-colonialism. She is also known for her translation of Jacques Derrida's 'Of Grammatology'. She is best known as a postcolonial theorist, Gayatri Spivak describes herself as a "Para-disciplinary, ethical philosopher".

"My position is generally a reactive one. I am versed

by Marxists as too codec, by feminists as too male-identified, by indigenous theorists as too committed to Western Theory. I am uneasily pleased about this” (1990:67).

Dina Mehta is Parsi community Indian writer. Her works reflect history of Indian communities. The parsi writers including Dina Mehta have the clear notion of the fact that the community of the Parsis is disappearing rapidly. Through their works they try to preserve their ethnicity.

Jhumpa Lahiri is indeed the storyteller who weaves the lace of love, identity, crisis, lies and faults in a mature way. She is Bengali American author born in 1967 in London. Right from childhood she loved her homeland India. A sense of homelessness and inability to feel accepted took hold of her as she grew up. In 2003 Namesake was her first novel. In 2000, she wrote Indian Holy song. In 1998 she wrote Sexy. Her famous works are Interpreter of Maladies (1999) Unaccustomed Earth (2008), The Lowland (2013).

Some more names to be mentioned are Anita Nair, Sudha Viswanathan, Nergis Dalal, Krishna Sobti, Indira Goswami, Malti Chendur, Gauri Deshpande, Namita Gokhale, Shobha De and Arundhati Roy.

Majority of Indian readers comprising both male and female read the novels of the Indian women authors with certain expectations. They look for some “Indian-ness” in their writings. Only the women novelists of India are capable for conveying the message of feminism in an Indian way. Yet other authors reflecting on women's cause are as follows:

(1) **Varsha Bhosle**, “On Kamala Das's Conversion to Islam.”

(2) **Partha Chatterjee**, “The Nationalist Resolution of Women's Question.”

(3) **Suchitra Sinha**, “Women Empowerment and Gender Bias in Birth and Survival of Girls in Urban India.”

(4) **Amarty Sen**, “The Many Faces of Gender inequality.”

(5) **Tibile. R**, “Gayatri Chakravorty- Syivak: An Indian Literary Theorist”, October 2012 Vol. I. Issue. www.galaxyimrj.com.



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(7) गुजराती माध्यम के शोधपत्र हरेकृष्णा (Harekrishna), टेराफॉन्ट वरुण (Terfont Varun), टेराफॉन्ट आकाश (Terfont Aaksah) में टाईप करवाकर 'पेजमेकर 6.5' में भेजे जा सकते हैं।

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