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DEPICTION OF FIGHT AGAINST PATRIARCHY IN THE NOVEL OF ZORA NEALE
HURSTON

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses on the novel Zora Neale Hurston in the light of Patriarchy. The protagonist of the novel, Janie is taken for analysis. This paper also involves in delineating characteristics traits of the male characters in the novels. Further, the paper studies the treatment that is meted out to the protagonist at the hands of men in the selected novel. The paper studies the novel in terms of the violence, subjugation and oppression that the male characters pose to the protagonist in the novel. The paper discusses on the various levels of suppression that Janie undergoes at the hands of the people who are highly patriarchal in mind set. Further, this paper details on how the protagonist stands as a model to shun suppression at the hands of patriarchy.

KEY WORDS: Feminism, Patriarchy, Zora Neale Hurston, Their Eyes Were Watching God, Janie, Tea Cake.

INTRODUCTION

Members in a patriarchal society have tendency to take solace on the sexist beliefs that are handed over to them by their highly patriarchal ancestors. They have the sexist and patriarchal notions, which suppress women in many ways. For many years women have been struggling to eradicate the sexist treatments that suppress women. Feminist writers aim at destroying this through their writings. They try to depict the struggles and the sufferings of women in the patriarchal society. Here the novel selected for the paper involves in depicting the protagonist, who fights against oppression. The theme of Patriarchy is seen throughout the selected novel. Patriarchy is a very intricate structure. So, to break it women have to undergo so many changes and hardships in their life. In this novel also, the protagonist faces many problems in her exertion to overcome the suppression laid by patriarchy. This novel is essentially an illustration of patriarchy and its treatment towards women. Janie represents women in this world, who strive hard to come out of patriarchal suppression at any cost.

ANALYSIS

The so called highly institutionalised system of Patriarchy has always been a threat to women. Patriarchy enables men reach the power-position. Through this men get the privilege to make use of their autonomy over women. Patriarchy suppresses women in family, work place and also in society. Even after many years of struggle, women are still suppressed by patriarchy. Though women have attained equality

economically, still their spouse or father is stated to be their owners. Male members of a family have the authority over the financial independence of women, even if they are working professionals. It is still believed that women are not fit for the so called jobs which only men can do. Patriarchy compartmentalises the role of women. Not only these, but also in Patriarchal society women are deprived of their rights to speak, think and act. Women are not allowed to express or even think of their life. Women have many limitations. These limitations are physical as well as psychological. Women are often suppressed or warned of when they exhibit any great thinking propensities. It is against the basic right to speak, express and think. Patriarchal society has always expected women to dwell in ignorance. They are considered as members of the weaker sex. They are thought to be not unfit for works apart from the domestic chores. Women were expected to have a puppet-like existence. The patriarchal system compartmentalises the thoughts and expressions of women.

The novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is written by Zora Neal Hurston. The novel was published in the year 1937. It is a depiction of a woman, whose life itself is an endeavour to oppose patriarchy. The protagonist shows great characteristic traits of representing the spirit of change. She breaks the norms that are posed by the male chauvinistic people around her. As the novel begins it is evident that Janie is suppressed by her own grandmother. This is the first level of suppression she undergoes. Here, a woman is suppressed by another woman of her own family, who has a mind that is glutted with the notions of patriarchy. The grandmother in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* though understands the sufferings of Janie, believes that it is her duty to get Janie married to the much older rich man. She believes that only a male support can make her life secured and happy. Here the grandmother represents the familial violence that is meted out to young women by people with patriarchal ideologies. According to her, a man is superior to a woman. She believes that only a man can give life and protection to a woman. The grandmother sticks to the old beliefs about marriage. This is one of the notorious notions that the patriarchal society hold on to. She fails to understand that women can live a secured life without even getting married. However, Janie is suppressed here. Janie is unable to protest against her much beloved grandmother. She becomes Logan's wife.

Secondly, Janie is suppressed by her male counterparts also. Here, this symbolises women's oppression under the highly male chauvinistic men in and around her life. A woman is left powerless, when she is suppressed by her own male counterpart. During such circumstances, she has to suffer a lot and challenge so many things to come out of the oppression. A woman is even forced to ignore the relationship itself. Here, Janie also does the same. Patriarchy believes that marriage can give women all the happiness. However, it is not so, as portrayed through the life of Janie.

It is evident from the novel that women have to attain power to shun all the injustices done to them. When women are in power they can fight against sexist exploitation and oppression. To attain power women must concentrate on the elimination of the archetypal roles that are imposed on them by the society as well as by their male counterparts. They must come out of the vicious circle of patriarchy. Logan is a typical male chauvinistic husband. According to Logan a wife should do whatever her husband expects of her. He wants Janie to do all the works in the farm. Here tries to affirm his power over Janie. In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Logan says that she cannot eat dinner, if she does not chop wood. Logan is the only person she has to rely upon. This makes him superior to her. Janie's youth and her lively spirit are suppressed by her male chauvinistic husband, who makes it a point that he has married her just to fulfill his expectations. Janie is made like a malefactor. Here, the life Janie lives marks the second level of women getting subjugated at the hands of male members of her patriarchal society, just because she relies upon men for her livelihood.

Thirdly, Janie's rights to think, speak, express and live are suppressed, when she lives with Joe. Janie runs away with Joe. With Joe, Janie cannot stand the Patriarchal suppression. Joe does not allow Janie to speak or act as she likes. Joe, in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, believes that he is superior to Janie. He humiliates Janie in front of others. As he is her husband, he can do anything to her. He orders her to cover her hair with a head rag. This marks his patriarchal ideology about a wife. He believes that Janie's beauty must be under his control. He does not want Janie to be admired by other men. He suppresses Janie's right to act. When Janie is requested by the people to deliver a speech, Joe simply prevents Janie from doing so. Joe, in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* says that his wife does not know anything. He states that she deserves to sit in the porch, not to

deliver a speech in public. Here, he controls Janie's right to speak, think and express. Janie is treated just like a puppet. He thinks that women are only capable of porch-sitting. They do not fit to be part of any social or political activities. She is even deprived of her rights to get along with the neighbours. Janie is not even allowed to get along with the porch sitters. This marks women's suppression in the social level at the hands of patriarchy. She is crippled emotionally and socially by her male counterparts.

Janie's search for true love helps her fight against patriarchy. She arrives with a conclusion that true love will not suppress her physically, emotionally as well as in the social level. She elopes away from Logan, breaking the suppression laid by him in the name of marriage and economical support. She hopes for a better life with Joe. Janie's dream to get true love is the author's dream to make women attain freedom from patriarchal suppression. Zora means to emphasise that to fight against patriarchy, women have to fight against the suppression meted out to them at the hands of men. Janie understands that she cannot receive true love from Joe, as he cripples her emotionally as well as socially. When Joe dies, it marks Janie's freedom from the patriarchal suppression. She does not cry much. Janie has got her right to speak, think, express and act. Thereby, she chooses Tea Cake as her partner. She even breaks the basic norm of patriarchy. She breaks the concept of marriage, when she starts living with Janie without getting married or divorce from her previous marriages. Janie leaps out of the vicious circle of patriarchy.

Tea Cake in the novel is also a representative figure of destroying the norms of patriarchy. He treats Janie with equality. He loves her for originality. Janie goes to job. Tea and Janie work together. She enjoys equality in her social relationships when she is with Tea Cake. Janie's attainment of equality in work place depicts that she is economically independent. Here, Zora Neale Hurston seems to emphasise that men has to stand up for helping women. Men have to shun the patriarchal beliefs in the society, so as to make women their equals. Here, Tea Cake helps Janie to attain power through economical independence. . This helps her in acquiring the masculine rights as well as privileges. Janie, the Protagonist, is aiming at attaining equality to men, especially to become equal to her male partners. She aims at arriving at the stage of Power. She attains power through her arrival at finding true love. With Tea cake she can speak, work and decide like men. Janie's attainment of power is based on her role as an independent as well as working woman. She breaks the norms of patriarchy, which poses women next to men. Janie is however, ahead of all the men in the novel.

Janie breaks the patriarchal norm which gives the 'rights to choose their life' only to men. She breaks it when she runs away with Joe and when she chooses to live with Tea Cake. She chooses the life which is not forced upon her by anyone. Janie chooses to walk away from luxury, when she leaves Logan. She chooses to express her individuality, when she fights for her right to speak. She becomes an independent thinker, when she arrives at her identity. She even expresses that one has to choose her own life, nobody else can do it for a woman. Here she means that women have to fight against patriarchy on their own. This epiphany that Janie arrives at is the depiction of her success in the fight against patriarchy and the patriarchal suppression on her thought on speech. The novel *There Eyes Were Watching God* essentially depicts the aspects of patriarchy. Janie is a representative figure of women's battle against the patriarchal society and so the novel is.

CONCLUSION

Women attaining power after fighting against patriarchy is a way to lift the pall from their life. Once the pall of suppression at the hands of patriarchy is lifted, women can face their life without any inhibitions. To lift this cloud, women have to come forward and stand against the suppression. They must get liberated from the suppression by arriving at their original identity and epiphany. As Janie does, women have to find their identity, the voice for their thought and right to choose. If a woman achieves this, it would mark her great stride towards her fight against patriarchy.

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