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A STUDY OF FEMININE PERSPECTIVE IN THE NOVEL BUTTERFLY BURNING

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ABSTRACT

The paper makes an attempt to study the feminine perspective in the novel *Butterfly Burning* published in the year 1998 written by Zimbabwean writer Yvonne Vera (1964-2005). Set in the late 1940s, it is about the voice of the people under colonialism in Zimbabwe. Yvonne Vera has been one of the esteemed voices in the African literature who brought her characters to speak for themselves and for righteousness. She has earned laurels for her characters not only in her novels but also in her short stories. Her creative works have earned her recognition and awards. Being a woman herself, women are the foundation of Vera's writing. Her works are read from the feminist perspective and are part of African studies known across the literary circles of the globe. The paper explores how Yvonne Vera focuses on the feminine issues in the novel? How does she connect her readers with her characters in order to provide a new vision to the society?

Keywords: Colonial, Feminist, women empowerment, Independence, Identity.

Yvonne Vera (1964-2005) is an award winning writer from Zimbabwe. Women are the foundation of Vera's writing. All her novels deal with women and problems related to them. She basically deals with African women. Her novels talk about difficult subject matters. Through her writing she gives voice to these African women. *Butterfly Burning* is the story of a girl named Phephelaphi. She is an ambitious woman who wants to pursue her career in nursing. The novel talks about her journey of her dreams. Woman has always been an important part of Vera's work. Her perspective behind her writing is to empower the women. So, all her works deal with the aspect of feminine perspective. There are many grounds on the basis of which an individual's perspective is formed. His upbringing, education, family and society etc. forms the basis of their perception. Vera had always been a strong girl. She was brought up in a family which provided her full freedom and support. Thus Vera expected the same from all the women. Through her writing she aims at giving a voice to these women.

In *Butterfly Burning* Vera bring these women at the center. Since ages, it is seen that women were always marginalized. Vera being an independent woman had a different perspective towards these African women. Like her, she wanted these women to be strong and independent. The same is expressed in the novel. At various stages, the novel deals with the feminine perspective. The first issue which is raised by Vera

is being independent. In the novel we find various women characters who aim to be independent. Phephelaphi, the protagonist, always aimed to have a career. To achieve this desire, she moves to the city. There she fell in love with a man. She could have lived with him happily sacrificing her career. But she preferred to be independent.

The desire to be independent was so strong in them that they were ready to sacrifice anything for this. Phephelaphi was deprived of her mother's love due to this desire. And in future she herself opted for self-abortion, as the desire to be free was more important for her. In African culture motherhood is cherished. This is the second issue raised by Vera. The women characters in her novels are so ambitious that they are ready to sacrifice the beautiful feeling of motherhood. Motherhood, a feeling which makes a woman complete, but these African women are ready to sacrifice this beautiful desire just to be free and independent. It is not that these women characters don't value it, but they are forced to take such a hard decision in life. Life has given them so many complexities that they are left with no choice. If Phephelaphi would have accepted her pregnancy, she had to sacrifice her career. And it was not just about career, but throughout her life she had to depend on others for her living. For a single woman this situation is very complicated. She is compelled to opt for a career. Secondly Africa has no place for a single mother. So these women opt for career rather than motherhood.

The next important issue which Vera talks about is identity crises. African women have always been active participants but they were never appreciated for this. So in the novel we find that these women characters struggle hard for creating an individual identity for themselves. It is one of the important perspectives. These African women were not fighting for equality but they were focusing on creating their own identity. Nowhere it is seen that these women characters compare their position with that of men but yes they do struggle to create their own identity. But this struggle was not easy for them. They lacked all sorts of support. They were all alone in this struggle. In fact they even lacked support of their fellow women. It is seen that in the novel the protagonist is not only ditched by her lover but her friend also ditched her. Even their desire to be free and independent was never appreciated or supported by these men. Fumbatha never supported her dreams. His love was always conditional. Thus all this added to their hardships.

Being a woman is not easy. She is being judged on different parameters. One such parameter is related to beauty. Beauty is one of the important aspects of feminine perspective on the basis of which a woman is judged. It is important for a woman to look good. And this beauty is connected with the external beauty, especially the skin. White skin was preferred. When these women moved to towns, this was another challenge they had to face. To be presentable and to stand in the competitive world, these women had to go through a painful process in order to lighten their skin tone. Ambi culture was very common in town. So being women, these women were forced to be a part of this Ambi culture.

Another major issue with these African women was that they were considered as an object. They were just used and not valued for what they are or what they wanted to be. Men always considered these women as an object to be used. If it was of no use they were rejected. Phephelaphi lost her life due to this. She failed to accept the rejection. These women lacked support in their life. Men's support was always conditional for them. This added to their miseries in life. Phephelaphi's mother also lost her life due to this.

It is sad that a woman is mostly judged through her skin and body. Her external self is given more importance than her inner self. Same issue is raised by Vera in the novel. Phephelaphi rejected being like her mother. Her mother was a prostitute. She was compelled to be a part of this world for her survival. But Phephelaphi was strong enough to reject this profession and wanted to have a career in nursing. But her external self-defeated the inner self. Phephelaphi was expecting which forced her to take a hard decision of self-abortion. This decision affected her relationship with her lover which led to her death. Thus her body defeated her dreams and desires.

Thus throughout the novel it is seen that being a woman these characters had to face continuous hardships. Vera has talked about different feminine issues to show the true picture of African society. When Africans had lost everything, survival itself was a tough task. These women had dreams of flying high and

being independent. They knew their journey would be tough but they had the courage to opt this path. Phephelaphi's dream of being a nurse was shattered with her pregnancy. But she was bold enough to choose her career instead of her child. She had a strong desire for freedom. In order to be free she burnt herself. Thus the society needs to observe a woman from a different perspective. Vera aims at telling her readers that with the changing world a shift in vision towards women is needed. A new perspective needs to be framed which provides a new hope, a new life to the women of society.

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