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Review

Speciality of Ruskin Bond’s Writings

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Ruskin Bond is considered to be an icon among Indian writers and children’s authors. He was awarded the Padma Shri in 1999 for contributions to children’s literature. Ruskin Bond was born towards the end of the British Raj. A somewhat lonely childhood, marked by his parents’ divorce and his mother’s remarriage. India gets an exquisite reflection in his stores. This paper intends to look at him more closely. His works are highly approved by society at large. His stories are very famous and he writes in an extremely enjoyable language and style which even holds a child throughout the entire narrative. This is not the sole point to entertain. His approach to his child characters, their activities, desire, feeling, and he like win our favour. Most of his novellas and short stories hide a fervent quest for identity, the concerns of which are historically and culturally inflected. Ruskin Bond is thus, in no way inferior to any of his contemporaries. His works are neither ambiguous nor theoretical.

Key words: Indian writer, narrative, entertain.

INTRODUCTION

Stories are something that almost every child likes, and books are something most children today detest. In India, a child is very often introduced to the world of stories by his/her immediate relatives. They often narrate fairy tales and popular stories from the Panchatantra and the Jatakatales, especially at bed time. Such stories not only send children to a world full of fantasy and magic, but also often have a moral to teach in the end. When children grow older, they reach out for more stories, and in many cases, the relatives run out of them. At this point, come to the rescue, a group of writers, who cater to the needs and expectations of the children. Since most children do not like sitting in a corner, reading a book and since many of them do not have the attention span to read an exhaustingly long book, fiction written specifically for children often comprises short narratives, depending upon the age group of the intended readers. Also, the language of such books tends to be very interesting and humorous, but not necessarily ‘simple’.

In India, many middle class urban children start out reading fairy tales and go on to read books like Charlie And The Chocolate Factory, Nancy Drew, Hardy Boys, Series Of Unfortunate Events, Goosebumps, The Famous Five, Harry Potter, Artemis Fowl and so on. Many of the books that such children in India read are written by authors from the west. A probable reason for this could be the fact that very few authors in India who write exclusively for children are well marketed. A lot of children and their parents are not even aware of these authors and of their books’ existence. The focus of the media and most schools in India is on literature for children coming from the west. A lot of parents also insist
that their children should read books written by Britons because they feel the language and grammar will be correct, as they follow the so-called ‘Queen’s English’. A lot of children prefer too American and British fiction series like Nancy Drew and Harry Potter either because they are popular among their friends and as a result play an important role in maintaining their levels of social acceptance in their peer group or because through these books, they learn something about a different culture. Among the very few Indian authors in English who are marketed well by the media, are encouraged by schools and parents and any layman is aware of Ruskin Bond. His stories are very famous and he writes in an extremely enjoyable language and style which even holds a child throughout the entire narrative.

Bond claims that India is his home. He states that he is drawn to India because of the atmosphere—the diversity that has mingled to produce a unique place. He was born in India, his mother’s family has been in India for two generations, and his father was born, lived, and worked in India. According to Bond, his mother’s family are descendants of Timur the Lame. In an article, Bond writes: “Race did not make me an Indian. But history did. And in the long run it is history that counts.”

Bond has always been interested in books of all types. Some of his favorite authors include Rumer Godden, Emily Bronte, T. E. Lawrence, Rudyard Kipling, and Tagore. His love of books was inspired by his father and cemented by loneliness when his father died.

According to Bond, books were the great escape. Books became like friends and provided the comfort that he needed during the most difficult times of his young life. Bond started his writing career at a young age by keeping journals that would eventually form the basis of his first novel Room on the Roof published in 1956 and went on to win the John Llewellyn Rhys Memorial Prize. The book was written during his time in London while he was experiencing strong feelings of longing and homesickness for his familiar surrounding and friends in India and is based largely on real life characters and incidents from his journals. This makes his early efforts unique, the works of an adolescent living and growing up in India during the colonial and post colonial era.

Bond has written over 100 short stories and two autobiographies. The first, Scenes from a Writer’s Life, covers roughly the first twenty-one years of his life and the second book, The Lamp is Lit, picks up when Bond returned to India after a two-year stay in England.

Although Ruskin Bond was basically from England and his forefathers were British, he always missed India and the friends at Dehra. In his autobiography, Scenes from a Writer’s Life, reveal his longing for the atmosphere of India:

“...even though my forefathers were British, Britain was not really my place.
I did not belong to the bright lights of Piccadilly and
Leicester Square; or, for that matter, to the apple orchards of Kent or the strawberry fields of Berkshire. I belonged, very firmly, to peepal trees and mango groves; to sleepy little towns all over India; to hot sunshine, muddy canals, the pungent smell of marigolds; the hills of home: spicy odours, wet earth after summer rain, neem pods bursting; laughing brown faces; and the intimacy of human contact”. (Bond, 1997, pp. 154-155)

Ruskin Bond writes that his autobiographical work The Lamp Is Lit: Leaves from a Journal, a collection of essays, episodes, and journal entries, is a celebration of his survival as a freelance—this survival being as much the result of his stubbornness. He explains:

“At twenty I was a published author, although not many people had heard of me! And although I wasn’t making much money then, and probably never would, it was the general consensus among my friends that I was an impractical sort of fellow and that I would be wise to stick to the only thing that I could do fairly well—putting pen to paper”. (Bond, 1998, p. 13).

A few mentions are also made in his work about modernization. In his autobiography,

The Lamp is Lit, Bond discusses how in the 1940s most of the traffic going to Mussoorie consisted of bullock carts carrying sugar cane. Now, the sugar cane is carried in trucks. He states that we should not grumble too much because it helps the economy.

Ruskin Bond wrote in the light of his own experience of life and he found impressions about thing and peoples which had an ordinary effect on him and it was reflected in his work. He was sober by temperament that has an impractical sort of fellow and that I would be wise to stick to the only thing that I could do fairly well—putting pen to paper. He also writes that his survival as a freelance—this survival being as much the result of his stubbornness. He explains:

“The school library, The Anderson Library was fairly well stocked and it was something of a heaven for me over the next three years. There were always writers past or present, to discover and I still have a tendency to ferret out writers, who have been ignored or forgotten.”

Ruskin’s love for his maid is also retold in the short story “My First Love,” where a maid is the mother figure who takes care of his physical needs, and comforts him when he is afraid at night, entertains him with fairy tales of princes, gardens, and palaces. His parents’ marital
troubles and his father’s pain and loneliness had a lasting effect on the shy and sensitive Ruskin Bond, an effect that has influenced his attitude toward life and his writing. He takes up serious themes for his stories but they are not dull, because he makes them interesting to attract the common reader. His focus of attention is the poor middle class men and women who follow their own way of life. He writes about baggers, villagers and yet they have their point of honour which authors have generally reveals through his works. Ruskin Bond thinks that even a rogue has his point of honour as a virtuous person has his point of dishonour. He therefore loves mankind. He wrote about every part of life. From childhood to old-age, he wrote about his experience and incidents that he was involved in various times. Ruskin fictionalizes his childhood experiences in the novella Once upon a Monsoon Time and the short story “The Room of Many Colours,” which is actually the first half of the novella, covering the protagonist’s life in Jamnagar. The story reveals an innocent and a charmed view of childhood in which the protagonist is brought by his father, maid, and by a gardener, in the same way as Ruskin Bond was brought up by his father in Jamnagar.

Bond, an apparent idealist, tries to see the best in everything and everyone. A reviewer of his work, Soma Banerjee, states that Bond’s works are “internationally acclaimed due to his deep insight into human nature. They reveal his tolerant attitude and warm sympathy for people.”

Tales about everyday life are the focus of Bond’s work, not social issues. The only social issue he writes about is nature.

Recurring themes in Bonds work include his mother’s abandonment, his relationship with his father, crossing boundaries set by society, love of nature, unrequited love, and, to a lesser extent, changes that are occurring in India.

Another common theme in Bond’s work is unrequited love. Bond’s first real experience with love occurred when he was in England for two years. He fell in love with a Vietnamese girl, Vu Phuong. He describes her as a pretty and soft-spoken girl. They walked hand in hand, and she made tea for him, but unfortunately, she thought of him as a brother and when she returned to Vietnam to visit her family, he never heard from her again. In “Time Stops at Shamli,” Bond writes of a young man who meets a girl from his past. He wants to take her away from her dreary life and unhappy marriage. The two lovers talk, kiss, and embrace until he becomes overcome with emotion and tries to convince her to run away with him. He is predictably unsuccessful. She is married and remains “as unattainable as ever.”

Other themes that appear less frequently in Bond’s work include partition, changes in society, and Hindu traditional life. In his first autobiography, Bond writes about partition.

Bond reflexively uses Hindi words in his writing. In Time Stops in Shamli, he uses the term shikar (hunter), gulab (rose), hisaab (days accounts), maidan (grounds), and dhobi (washer man). His casual use of these words indicates his proficiency with Hindi and ease with Indian culture.

As a writer, Bond does not have a sense of superiority over Indians nor does he apologize to Europeans in his stories. He seems comfortable with both cultures. There is no sense of tension between the two.

Bond’s stories are simple ones about everyday life. They are light hearted and humorous. Most of his stories tell how the narrator met a certain character, what they did and speak about and how they parted.

Bond particularly likes to write children’s stories. Eminent Indian novelist, Mulk Raj Anand, suggests that Bond is seeking to recapture through his writing what he missed in life – a happy childhood.

He has always emphasized on the friendly relationship between man and nature and has brought before us our need for each other. That is why we notice his pity for the unsympathetic and cruel actions of human beings towards nature.

Having grown up in the hills, in the lap of nature... in once idyllic Mussourie, Kasaulli, Shimla, Dehradun and Jamnagar... no one understands nature like Ruskin Bond and it takes his ability to put this wonder into words. He is indeed nature’s favourite child.

He is a painter of words. Bond uses his pen as a brush to paint captivating images of his observations on and his experiences with nature and beckons his readers into his imagination... like the sweet fragrance of a flower in full bloom during spring. A book that relaxes the eyes rests the mind. It is very, very soothing... almost like a lullaby on a hot summer afternoon. While the fragrance of his words... lingers on and on and on.

Ruskin Bond has his modest home miles from the madding crowds in picture-postcard pretty Landour, a quaint little ‘town’ above Mussoorie. His tiny living room is filled with books, pictures and ‘trophies’. The writer’s familiar chubby face is now framed by hair that was ‘more-salt-less-pepper’ and combed neatly, like a schoolboy’s. His eyes are sparkling blue, his complexion a healthy pink, and his smile ever so engaging. While, his voice is deep and resonant. Bond has written in almost every genre - short story, novel, poem, travelogue, essay etc... and counts essays and short stories as his favourite forms. Prolific and popular, witty and wise, charming and cherubic, Ruskin Bond commands adulation across regions, age groups and gender. Here is a writer who has defied genres, challenged conventions and remained enduring and endearing down the years... and he believes that in order to become a good writer one has to be confident and perseverant. He says, “At times, when the chips are down and you are disappointed, you have to stick to this. I have seen young people who entered this field, but quit after some time and joined other
creative streams like advertising or journalism. I stick to writing, since I had no other alternative.”

In 1992, he received the Sahitya Akademi award for English writing, for his short stories collection, Our Trees Still Grow in Dehra, by the Sahitya Akademi (India's National Academy of Letters). He was awarded the Padma Shri in 1999, for his life time contribution to Indian literature.

Bond currently lives in Landour, Mussoorie's well-known Ivy Cottage, with his adopted family – Prem and Chandra, their kids Rakesh and Mukesh and their five kids. He visits his brother William in Canada and his sister Ellen who lives with his step-sister Premila in Ludhiana from time to time.

Some of his stories made into movie

Recently, his short story "Susannah's Seven Husbands" is made into movie "Saat Khoon Maaf", directed by Vishal Bharadwaj, which stars Priyanka Chopra. Ruskin Bond is also there in the movie (Cameo).

The other stories which were turned into movies are "Junoon" in 1978 and "Blue Umbrella" in 2007.

Ruskin Bond mesmerizes his readers yet again through his straight from the heart collection of prose and poems. This is his way of expressing his feelings for his beloved adopted country with all her animate and inanimate beings, their uniqueness, their character and how all these combine to create a unique flavour of Indian-ness. In fact Ruskin Bond is living legend who has been portraying life and experiences through various genres of literature. Ruskin Bond has contributed in making three generations of Indian school children into readers. His short- stories, poem and essays- even those written forty or fifty years back- are widely authorized in school texts, and his books are recommended for reading in many schools throughout the country where English is the medium of communication.

Conflict of Interests

The author have not declared any conflict of interests

REFERENCES

Review

Which change, what change? Glamourising social misfits in selected Nigerian home movies

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Nigeria is Africa’s most populous nation with a vibrant emerging theatre culture; the home movies. Currently, Nigeria is ranked the second largest producer of films in the world. Nollywood, as the home movies industry is called, has produced films in their thousands reflecting various aspects of the Nigerian culture and tradition. Prominent amongst such pre-occupations of directors and producers of Nollywood is the presentation of a class of wealthy citizens in the society who determines what happens to people in their environment. Because of this get-rich quick mania, characters are portrayed in a number of Nollywood movies that tend to encourage even the lazy to do odd jobs, including most often, ritual sacrifices to get to the socio-economic class of people in the society. This paper attempts to look at three of such movies, their effects on, not only the Nigerian viewer (Nollywood’s immediate target audience), but the globe where Nollywood currently ravages.

Key words: Change, glamourising, social misfits, Nigerian home movies.

INTRODUCTION

Of all the forms of art, that which is most long lasting in the minds of its consumers are the audio-visuals. When we read works of art, we can only visualise the characters in action; but when we are exposed to stage performances of the same literary texts, because of the practical excitement that we do not just imagine but see, its effect on the viewing audience is by far deeper than the reading audience. For stage productions, such effects can only be remembered after the productions. This is quite different when such a production is recorded, or when it is via the medium of film. Unlike the stage productions, in film or movies, the viewer has the advantage of multiple viewing and the opportunity to analyse, critique and digest the contents of the film. In addition to this is the comfort of the place of viewing movies. While you must be in the theatre for a stage production, for movies, you have a choice of going to the cinema halls or view such in the absolute comfort of your home, devoid of distractions that other viewers in open theatres may experience. When one therefore, assesses movies within the confinement of the said comfort, most likely, one’s attention is more focused, directional and...
critical. Because of societal norms, weather challenges and the like, in some countries of the world, children can hardly go for either stage productions or cinema. Such children find solace in the homes where those same movies can be viewed. This way, because of the high patronage at home and public centres, its effect on the adults and the adolescence in the society is great.

Of all the forms of entertainment, the screen has but one language; the language of images. That is why in film, thought and image exist; but image is primary. On the screen, one extracts the thought from the image, in literature, the image from the thought. The task which the motion picture tries to achieve is, by the power of the moving image, to make the audience hear, see and feel. It is above all, to make the audience understand. This total experience of the audio – visual medium is based primarily on the image, and the ability to match image to sound (Ekwuazi, 1991:7). We are so concerned with the dynamic power of this medium and its influence on the audience from of old till date. It was in such assessment that Baburo Petal documents The Influence of Hollywood on Indian Consumers. According to Petal, in Miller (2005:78) Hollywood undertook this cultural insemination of millions of people, their most powerful weapon in the world – the movies.

Pictures after pictures were sent to India during the two World Wars- pictures that taught us to dance rhumbas and sandas; pictures that thought us to coo and woo; pictures that thought us to utter “Hi” and “Gee”, pictures (of) devilry and divorce and pictures that took us to jinks and drinks. Hollywood has vitiated our food, water, air, arts, music, culture, costumes, philosophy, life and human relations. Whatever Hollywood touched was contaminated. A thousand American sins became as many Indian fashions. That is how Hollywood thought us the American way of life through entertainment.

Petal’s observation here is not limited to Hollywood’s global onslaught. Even the Indian populace he defends here later exported their culture to other parts of the world through their films. Same for the Chinese films as one can argue for any film that transcends the immediate geographical configuration of its viewership. It is because of this potent influence that the movie industry can wield and is capable of sustaining that producers of movies need to be cautious of what messages they pass across in their works.

THE NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE

Following the exposure of Nigeria to the Western life via colonial administration and post-colonial experience, we were introduced to foreign media and means of entertainment. Hollywood, Bollywood and the Chinese films for instance, flooded the open and ready market of Nigeria. As people got excited with their contact with these alien cultures, little did they know that they were rather unknowingly getting influenced by these foreign cultures forgetting or neglecting their indigenous cultures and forms of entertainment for an almost unending time. As this influx mounted day by day, the major television outfit of the government, the Nigerian Television Authority took over by screening foreign soaps. Asigbe, cited by Nwogu (2007:8) states that at this particular point, most of the television programmes were foreign soaps, especially, the Mexican soaps because we did not have our own indigenous programmes. This got some Nigerians edgy to create alternative local forms of entertainment. As a result of this zeal “Mirror in the Sun”, came up which, according to Igwe (2007:10) was the first soap opera produced by an independent producer on the television. This gingered other private individuals to write and submit proposals to the Nigerian Television Authority. Consequently, they came up with “Behind the Clouds”, and then Zeb Ejio and Amaka Igwe came up with “Ripples” and “Checkmate” respectively. These made huge successes and encouraged others who came with a lot of ideas but they could not make serious headway, because the Nigerian Television Authority had a problem with sponsorship of play productions. Subsequently, then came the economic austerity measures, (the Structural Adjustment Programme, SAP) that made sponsorship of such productions impossible. Quite a lot of the television houses’ technical staff, film units of the Ministry of Information and audio – visual sections of similar parastatals were laid off (Idegu, 2004: 169). Because these technical staff needed to put food on the table for their families, they began to use video cameras for the home movies.

It should be noted that because of the way these trained technical staff were relieved of their jobs with the Nigerian Television stations, their plunge into home movie making may after all, have some protest aestheti- cs. The preponderance of ritual sacrifices, witchcraft and the like as the only selling stories as always claimed by the producers leaves much to be desired. Their protest was to get means of livelihood, at all cost, the content of the movies notwithstanding, so far as they could lay their hands on indigenous materials which they rarely used in context. Okome and Haynes (1997:92) document that:

…the structural pattern of popular indigenous films must be seen and discussed in the framework of the society where its practice is situated, as well as in its unique relationship to its audience. The social framework includes the social and ritual roots of the theatre practice which produced the movies. Indigenous films making is a very pragmatic enterprise. Themes may be universal in appeal, but the social landscape is usually situated in recognizable cultural history - the history of traditional society of art cinema, formulated for an authentic frame of an indigenous theatre practice and forged by a crude zeal to satisfy the audience’s glamour for its own face and cultural avatars, filmmakers in this cinema explore
the culture of its audience.

We do not have any contrasting view about movies evolving from the culture of the people that produce it. We are however, appalled with rather the nonchalance and obvious misrepresentation of the people's culture(s). At the early commencement of the Nigerian home movies, the producers gave an impression that they were "rebelling" against foreign films with our alien cultures. ZebEjiro, an unmistakable experienced producer of the Nigerian movies, and in fact one of those who birthed it once confessed in an interview with Nwogu (February 14th 2007) that:

Before home video movies we watched foreign movies in our homes. Because of the vacuum created by the non-existence of an indigenous entertainment, the foreign movies took over the market- 90% of what Nigerians watched were foreign movies. But when Nigerian home videos came, we fought the battle and the reverse is the case. Now more than 90% of Nigerians watch Nigerian home movies, while only less than 10% are foreign movies. Even people in Hollywood are looking up to Nigerians for stories. There was a conference held some time ago on Nigeria home movies. They cannot understand how we make our movies. There was a full page write up in the New York Times on the Nigerian home movies. This is a plus. We are using our indigenous materials to battle the global entertainment upsurge (emphasis mine)".

The impression here has some nationalistic motif, sounding as if the entertainment industry of Nigeria that was over dominated by foreign film dealing deadly blows to our indigenous culture was being countered by local movies. It looked like the Nigerian home movies were out to change that ugly incursion of foreign cultures. But over the years, it has remained a puzzle as to what change and which change they are really after. Questioning their direction, Haynes (2000:208) submits that if Nigerian film production was supposed to take up the challenge posed by the influx of foreign cultures through foreign films, then films have responded poorly. Art without cultural base is meaningless. But it must be art in the first place, aesthetically fulfilling. It is only then that art can effectively promote and propagate cultures. Anything short of this will be counter-productive and debasing.

The focus of most Nigerian home movie producers is far from laudering the battered image of Nigeria at home and abroad. It is far from cultural promotion. It is never close to finding commensurate alternative to counter the deleterious effects of foreign films on our indigenous cultures. Simply put, it is a change geared towards advancing their means of livelihood and they give no consideration to the negative effects of their misapplication of Nigerian tradition, falling guilty of the same offence, they all along, accused foreign films of doing. Because their major motivational force is money making, it brings to the forefront the fact that commercial films do not serve culture or go out to decisively encourage morality. If anything, they break norms and show a culture that is more of their own creation, and after their own likeness; a culture that the supposed owners themselves frown at and reject. This point is advanced by the way a number of the actors go into obvious anti Nigerian cultural antics just because they want to make money. David Ajiboye's comment in The Nigerian Tribune newspaper of June 15th, 2005 about Bisi, one of Nigerian female actors is a great pointer. According to the report "Bisi doesn't see anything wrong in facing the camera nude so far as the pay is justifiable and the message it is intended will be of immense value to the society". How can such an act be said to be Nigerian? No doubt, within the confines of a ritual/festival performance, you can have a glimpse of such exposure, sometimes during the initiation into womanhood rites. But to pose in front of a camera and show the whole world the contours of one's nudity, not for any sacred/ritual benefit, but for money, exemplifies the obvious disadvantages inherent in quite a number of the Nigerian home movies. What other message can be intended in such an act but a complete rehearsal for blue film that the typical Nigerian culture does not permit. If foreign films have such unholy elements of pornography that the Nigerian government frowns at, then Bisi, and quite a number of the Bisis in the Nigerian home movies should be cut to size in their penchant to ape Western filmic style.

This alien cultural behaviours in the home movies may after all have arisen from even the name, Nollywood, which we dare say came out of Hollywood. There is no originality in that AT ALL. So from that perspective, virtually everything that has to do with the Nigerianisation of foreign films will definitely and expectedly be as problematic as their name. The choice of Nollywood as a name is, without doubt a reflection of their uncritical, uncreative inverted ingenuity which breeds the likes of Bisi in our movie industry. Are they in search of global acceptance? Does such acceptance lie with a copied name or the originality of our narratives? With that almost plagiarized name, what has the name given to us positively that a typical indigenous name would not have given us?

Because of the way former technical staff with the Nigerian Television Authority (the Federal Television houses) were hounded out of job because of the Structural Adjustment Programme of the Federal Government, they granted to themselves the leverage as it were, to launch what can be assessed as the culture of protest aesthetics. The content, style, and focus of the home movies, most often than not confirm this. John Kani of the Market Theatre, South Africa, talking about the South African experience during the inglorious apartheid regime observes thus:
Our great artists created images in wood, stone, caves and on canvas that reflected our culture with great pride. The songs and dances were about who we are, where we come from and where we are going. But once the intentions of the colonials became clear the culture of resistance was born. Poems and songs and stories spoke of our suffering and the evil of the oppressor. Sculptures and paintings bore the pain and indignity of our people. The voice of defiance grew from a whisper to a deafening roar in the ears of the oppressor. It was then that the artist had to find, ingeniously, other means of expressing the anger, the joys, the frustrations, the hopes and the aspirations of our people (emphasis mine). http://www.africanchorus.org/literary%20papers/JK1.htm

How else can one explain the almost total abuse of professional ethics and disregard for cultural aesthetics and sensibilities of Nigerians by quiet a number of the Nigerian home movie producers except that they are protesting against the vestiges of colonialism and Western civilization.

Because of the way these home movie producers began to churn out Nigerian culture-based films, they were easily accepted by the immediate audience long starved of a form of entertainment that they can call their own. Again because of the protest aesthetics, the use of the people’s culture and traditional practices was used as baits on the gullible audience by the producers to make quick money that the Nigerian Television Authority denied them by their sack. So much of rituals permeated every fabric of the movies that, to some Nigerians, as one may argue for the audience outside of Nigeria, Nigeria was a country of ritual killings and voodooism. No doubt, in our Nigerian societies, the supernatural appears in virtually every aspect of our lives. Some Nigerians even patronise indigenous magic when under stress and confrontations to which these melodramatic films routinely subject some of their characters. We also agree that witchcraft is a common weapon in a number of domestic or neighbourly antagonisms. So invariably, we are not saying that these acts do not take place, but our concern is that they are blown out of proportion. Ake (2002:61) agrees that it is true that we have violence with us and various armed robberies and assassinations. But our goal as the mirror of the society is not to encourage these negative aspects by reflecting them too much on screen without redress.

There is no country in the world that does not practice witchcraft, rituals, vodooos and the like. How much of such do we see its overdose in Hollywood, Bollywood and all the other Woods of the globe? How much of this past, and sometimes harmful past, do the other film producers in the world emphasis on, just because they want to make money by playing on the seeming ability of the audience to take in anything? But because Nigerians advertise their hunger at alarming and exaggerated rates, producers do this to catch in some cash, and this they are doing very well at the detriment of the essence of our national being and cultural sacredness and relevance. The venture into film products has, however, brought more dreadful consequences than cultural pollution. It is difficult to say whether the poor showering of Nigerian films on creative works of art is the result of an overemphasis on the call to use the medium as a tool for the promotion and propagation of culture or the result simply of the inability of the directors, who are fascinated in the medium but do not have the discipline to grapple first with its forms and technicalities. Both means are to be blamed for the poor artistic quality of Nigerian films. Cultural didacticism and cultural confusion account for much of the problem (Haynes, 2000:202).

CASE STUDIES

Today, Nigeria is the second largest producer of movies in the world, second to India. This puts every message portrayed in our movies under global watch and criticism. Nigeria is therefore, exporting her rich culture to other parts of the world, even as Hollywood and Bollywood forefronted. However, as the agitation to curb the excesses of these foreign films can be said to have contributed to the birth of the Nigerian home movies, a look at the movies show that we are already more guilty of cultural misadventures than our professional forebears.

Open Secret

The author prefers Open Secret in his analysis of voodoo-based Nigerian movies because of the abounding evidence that in this movie is encapsulated all similar Nigerian movies with this kind of focus and thematic preoccupation. At the beginning of the movie, we see Olisemeka as a poor man, incapable of feeding his wife. So poor that he eventually returns his wife to the village, declaring the union over. He comes back to town and consults a shrine, “Ogugu” on how to break even. He is told what to do, what to abstain from, what sacrifices to make. He obliges and suddenly becomes rich. With his leap from poverty to wealth, he marries another woman, donates millions of naira (Nigerian currency) to his church and community. In fact, in recognition of his contributions, the king of his village and the council of chiefs, appreciate Olisemeka with a chieftaincy title. Chief Olisemeka regularly makes ritual and human sacrifices to “Ogugu” and by this, his wealth, affluence and popularity grow astronomically. He introduces Uwakwe, his business friend whose business is collapsing to “Ogugu”. Uwakwe is ordered to exchange the senses of his two children, sleep with his daughter often and never call his children by their names. His wife notices the great breakthrough of her husband’s wealth, but she is sad that the health of her children deteriorates as her husband’s wealth increases. She visits a spiritualist who uncovers the deal.
She returns home to her husband who feigns ignorance, but she challenges him to call his children by their names. Chief Olisemeka refuses. Later in the evening, she stumbles into the room to see her husband making love with their daughter, Amuche. Unable to endure this, she runs to the village to report. By the time they return to the town, chief Uwakwe is dead on the bed, bloated with money all over the place. He dies because the secret of his wealth is discovered by his wife. As for chief Olisemeka, his son Ronald returns from abroad at the age of twenty. His father talks him into initiation to “Ogugu” in accordance with chief Olisemeka’s oath with “Ogugu”. Ronald refuses. His father eventually bundles him into the “Ogugu” shrine, ready to be sacrificed when the youths of the village get wind of it, storm the shrine, free Ronald and give chief Olisemeka a cut on his head. He is dragged to the village as the villagers are alarmed at the turn of events. Then the movie ends.

This is first and foremost, a product of a bad script, which according to Derek Musa, in Omatsola (1998:73) is regarded as padding. According to him, it is like a fake pregnancy – all clothes and no baby. In his opinion the flaw of “padding” is easily committed when worthless scripts are paraded for production. Unlike the way this movie and several others present the issue of ritual murder, it is a grievous offence in Nigeria. In this movie, businessman Uwakwe who inverts the senses of his children and sleeps with his daughter (incest by all Nigerian cultural values) for money ends up dying rather cheaply without any form of reprimand AT ALL. He dies just because the secret of his wealth is known by his wife. So what becomes of the brutalised abused daughter? What becomes of the inverted senses of his innocent children? What lesson(s) is the movie passing to those who want to make money by such dirty means? That they can make money this way, “enjoy” themselves for as long as they keep to the rules of the rituals and be ready one day to die, quietly without any form of punishment? As for chief Olisemeka, in spite of all the atrocities he commits, he ends up only with a cut on the head and a public disgrace. That is all. Is there no possibility that chief Olisemeka will use his same ill-gotten wealth to eventually buy back his fame, respect and regard since the movie ends rather open ended without any punishment meted on chief Olisemeka?

Dons in Abuja

In this movie are a group of friends, Chief Okaomee, Nwoko, Onwa and a few others who are members of a dreaded cult, the Venerable Circle. Members here are the people that matter in the economic and political affairs of the city. They are portrayed as the envy of those in search of fulfiment and accomplishment to the point of societal acclamation, acceptance and adoration. Whatever they say is law and there is hardly any law of the land that does not bow where they are involved. The news of their affluence is in every nook and cranny of the town so much that it spreads to all surrounding towns and villages. David who works in town and pursues the legitimate and civil way to feed himself and send whatever he can afford to his parents, visits his parents one day to the almost uncontrollable fury of his father. His father is so angry with David for working in town and not being able to make money like others do. Adequately humiliated, David returns to town and with the aid of a friend, he is introduced to the Venerable Circle and he is eventually initiated. To become like the other members and burst forth with wealth, David is told to sacrifice his mother, and he agrees. Then he becomes rich overnight. Onwa, one of the members of the cult goes home often to pick young boys to the city, promising to send them abroad. Gullible parents, who are also made to believe that there is plenty of money abroad, release their children to Onwa with gratitude. Onwa, however, uses them for ritual sacrifice in the Venerable Circle to fortify his membership and bloat his wealth. Later in the movie, Nwoko intercepts a parcel belonging to his friend and cult mate, chief Okaomee. To hit him back, chief Okaomee kidnaps Nwoko’s only daughter. Onwa sells four boys to Nwoko for sacrifice but one of the boys is rejected by the cult spirits and he escapes to break the secret in the village. Unknown to Onwa, he comes to the village to pick more boys with his usual pretence of sending them abroad for greener pastures. The village clamps down on him and he is arrested by the law enforcement agents, the police.

Like Open Secret, this is yet another instance of glamourising social miscreants in Nigerian movies. The only slight difference here is that the police apprehend Onwa at the end of the film. Then a lot of questions. What becomes of all other members of the Venerable Circle who are not caught? Will they continue in their ritual escapades and “enjoy” themselves full blast without remorse? Will they fly out of the country, like most of their likes do, long before the arms of the law attempts to grab them? Will Onwa in the police net break the secret that he took an oath never to disclose? Will Onwa himself not go to court, use his money to fight the case for prove of his membership of any secret cult, win the case and even claim damages? As laudable as handing him over to the police is, the film should have advanced its plot to show how decisively Onwa and the entire Venerable Circle are dealt with to the deterrent of others. Most often, like in Dons in Abuja, punishments, when they are meted out at all, are far from commensurate with the crimes committed. When this happens, the movies do not only promote these misfits and bad examples, but they encourage others to be like them and stock enough money to fight their way if they are ever caught.

Super Hero

Super Hero is set in an imaginary town called Amalu. It is
a typical Nigerian Igbo village with regard for traditional worship in their god, Okrika. At the beginning of the movie, the village is ruled by a powerful, people-oriented and dynamic king, Igwe, but whose first "son," prince Obika is nothing but a tyrant and a bully. He goes about committing all sorts of oppression, disregarding the office of his father, the Igwe. In spite of the observation of the council of chiefs, the Igwe does not seem to understand. Obina, the "second" son of the Igwe is the complete opposite of Obika. He is humble, well behaved, respectful and loved by the people. One day, Obika arrests a man into the bush and assaults him with the help of his assistants. Obika demands the man's farm, a case that the Igwe earlier settled in the villager's favour, but which Obika will not let go. As he arrests the man from his farm in the most humiliating way into a jungle for assault, the man's son runs to the Igwe for his intervention. The Igwe, in the company of his chiefs locates the bush where Obika is brutalising the villager. Enraged, the Igwe openly denounces Obika's behaviour warning him that he was heading for destruction. He announces that based on his records of misbehaviour and continued refusal to change, when he the Igwe eventually joins his ancestors, Obika will not ascend the throne, but a more befitting son, which is obviously Obina. The Igwe orders the villager free and returns to the palace very disappointed with Obika. As the Igwe goes back to the palace, Obika grumbles loud and clear, rather rudely that unlike his father's disapproval of his behaviours, he Obika was heading for greatness. Chief Udemba, all the while angry with the Igwe for reprimanding him over taking a fellow chief's wife, meets Obika to plead loyalty and remind him of the weight of the Igwe's declaration that after his death, Obika was not qualified to be the Igwe. Later, Obika stabs his father, the Igwe to death in his sleep. He remains undiscovered and therefore, against the laid down traditional due process, Obika mounts the throne and takes over as the Igwe. Neither his own mother, the chief priest nor the chiefs, except chief Udemba recognise him as Igwe. Obika terrorises the entire village with arrests, killings and tyranny. Dissatisfied with her son's tyranny, the Queen reveals to Obika his true father. On her marriage to the Igwe, she experienced delayed child birth. Igwe threatened to take another wife. She visited diviner who recommends that she sleeps with a nonentity in the village after which her womb will be opened by the gods. Not happy about this, but deter-mined to secure her place as the Queen, she agrees and that union resulted to Obika. By this, he is not qualified for the throne as stated by the late Igwe who dies unaware of this secret. Obika slaughters his mother there and then. He proceeds to arrest all the chiefs, takes them to the bush, ties them at stake and kills all of them. Obina his brother runs away to take refuge in Mbiaka, his mother's village. Ukadike, the chief wrestler and head warrior of Amalu, backed up by the slain chiefs, organises the warriors for a battle against Obika. From Mbiaka, Obina is supported with warriors to fight Obika by his mother's kinsmen that Obika wants to invade if they do not release him. In the battle, Obika dies a very simple death while Ukadike is only injured. Obina is crowned Igwe by the chief priest and peace returns to the land which Obina renames Ukadike in honour of his friend and chief warrior. The movie ends.

Who then is the super hero in the movie? The Igwe who rules according to the dictates and mores of the people? Ukadike who fights and kills the notorious Obika? Obina who eventually takes over his father's throne or the tyrant himself, Obika? For any movie interested in sending a straight message on socially accepted behaviours, there should be no ambiguity in its hero. Come to think of it, why should such a terrible haughty Obika be allowed to rule for such a period of time, causing untold hardships to the people and land and die, again without any form of punishment as deterrent to his likes? Why will the Queen keep the secret of Obika's fatherhood to herself until Obika kills every real or imagined enemy including herself? Are we saying that the society should accommodate the likes of Obika for such a long period of time of avoidable calamities, just waiting for the day he will die almost without pains? Is there no way such Obikas can be cut to size long before they destroy the fabrics of the society that will take longer time to rehabilitate? Such a movie may be quietly encouraging tyranny, oppression and terrorism for as long as the illegitimate person in power has access to the apparatus of government.

On a political scene, the film captures, to an extent, the political misbehaviour of the ruling classes in a number of African countries where elections hardly take place, yet with staggering results of voters that the powers that be and they alone can fathom. Countries where political leaders, who themselves know they never won elections, nevertheless, occupy offices for several years. But the point is, there should be a difference between these socio-political realities and the presentation of these realities in movies. As the voice of the people, theatre should be seen to go beyond the realities by offering solutions to the problems that bedevil the people. Anything short of this, the movies will be condoning and giving a stamp of approval to these social misdeeds.

Conclusion

The three selected movies used in this paper are just reflections of some aspects of the totality of Nigerian movies. We want to agree with Ekwuazi (1991:51) that all art is traditional; is cultural: the discrete units of every art from like the entire art for itself derive from specific cultural and traditional realities. But the case is that such traditional realities should be presented in such a way that they drive home lessons to move the society forward than far back to the ancient times with all the shortcomings. Citing Uzoukwu, Linda (2007:52) agrees that the bulk of the Nigerian movie makers:

... have failed woefully in the sense that they are not
reproducing art as art should be. Life is art and art is life. If you are going to tell me a story of my town, tell it to me the way it was so that if I didn’t exist in that period or era, I could learn something and say yes, this was how my people used to be, dress and did their things. But they have managed to scratch it on the surface because they are too much in a hurry to make money.

It is amazing how, in the twenty first century; a group of people will take the entire Nigerian nation and her cultural sensibilities for a ride this long. There is virtually no aspect of these excesses that is welcome and applauded in Nigeria, as most producers will want us to believe. Okome and Haynes (1997:108) laments about this unchecked misbehaviour when he opines that unlike European and American film cultures, it is not the studio which controls this ordering of structure. It is the movie maker, who is himself part of the audience, very rooted in the audience’s cultural and social behaviour. He/she is part of the making of a new urban culture. For this reasons, this film making practice does not only remain popular, it also narrates a vibrant part of a new social meaning. A social meaning that is, to say the least, personal money-making motivated and very misleading.

To be modest, in nearly all the movies, the central attraction is how to make speedy financial returns and break even. The analysis of Merton’s theory of anomie founded on the extreme egoism and materialisms of the American culture is relevant here. Ends and means are harmoniously joined in a well-integrated culture. The culture provides goals and sufficient means for attaining such goals. Both the goals and the means are available to the majority of the people and are generally accepted to them. A state of anomie results when there is a conflict between the ends and the means-when the means of attaining the culturally set goals are either not generally available or are not acceptable. The disproportionate emphasis on wealth (in the movies), on monetary success, is characteristic of this state of anomie. Money becomes the definitive status symbol; it guarantees the possession of other status symbols, and the whole situation encourages conspicuous consumption. The movies present us with a motley collection of characters while adopting the goals of success as defined by their society, react against the unavailability of the means by allowing such goals by devising means of their own (Haynes, 2000: 137).

Part of the craze for money at all cost is said to be rooted in the misapplication of some cultures, and cultural values. Some of the characters embrace the permisiveness of urban life because something in them, something inherent in their culture, predisposes them to such permissions. Let us consider one of the three major cultures in Nigeria for example:

The Igbo culture, for instance, reveres achievement as much as it reveres age. An Igbo proverb encapsulates this very well that if a child washed his hand clean, he can eat with elders. In the pre-colonial days, the nature of this achievement could be valour in war or some such feat that would ultimately redound to the credit or benefit of the entire community. But in a culture that privileges the individual over the community, this achievement becomes purely for individual aggrandizement. Consequently, the urge for achievement, irrespective of the particular manner in which it is manifested, becomes in these films, the ultimate expression of individuality. Such urges are socially defined; they are not rooted in human nature. If they become excessive, it is merely because they have not come under adequate social control. Haynes (2000: 137).

In Nigeria, untrained individuals and groups of people can wake up and begin to produce movies with little or no respite. The Nigerian film industry can boast of no production code- except, perhaps, as is contained in the Censorship Act, or the National Films and Videos Censors Board. In the operation of this Censorship, hardly, if ever, is the overall quality of films or their thematic horizons censored (Ekwuazi, 1991:12). There is of course a federal government legally backed regulatory organ set up to handle to the barest minimum, all these issues that give the nation and its people bad image. Section 373 subsection 1 item ii of Decree No 85 of 1993 establishing the Board stipulates that movies should not expose the people of Africa and their heritage to ridicule or condemnation. The same section 373, sub-section 2, paragraph a-c state that the film committee shall not approve a film which, in its opinion, and by its sane judgment, depicts amongst other vices, (a) indecent, obscene or likely to be injurious to morality or (b), likely to incite or encourage public disorder or crime or (c) undesirable in the public interest. The record of the National Film and Video Censors Board Report, as documented by Idegu (2004:185) states that any movie production that;

...undermines national security, encourages or glorifies the use of violence, exposes the people of African heritage to ridicule or contempt, indecent, obscene or likely to be injurious to morality, promotes cultism/cults, witchcraft, voodooism, glamourises sex, rape, bloody scenes, gun violence...will not be approved by the Censors Board. It is rather unimaginable, that with such an enabling law in existence since 1993, the producers of the horrible Nigerian home movies have been left to fragrantly disobey the rules of the game, rather repulsively and more so, without adequate sanctions. This tells a lot of volume on the sincerity of the Nigerian government and other stakeholders to repositioning Nigeria for global relevance in this century.

Our position include, but not limited to the fact that we ought to have transcended the obvious setbacks in some of our inherited heritages, that to conceptualise movies
around ritual and ritual aesthetics to the negative, may most likely be a way of perpetuating a tradition that is antithetical to development and a way of recognizing and adoring obvious social vices that can misinform, mislead and encourage the perpetuation of such vices not only on the Nigerian viewers but on the global consumers. Those who have not learned that cultural identities are fluid composites will perpetuate for us all the sad, gruesome and detestable glamourisation of archaic, obsolete and barbaric inheritance in this globalised 21st century. Cultural identities are not fixed and rigid; so also cultural inheritances that make up those identities are equally not fixed. Every culture is never rigid but dynamic hence our members should rather use the non-rigidity of those cultural abnormalities to the advantage of the present rather than lure us into some depth of harmful inherited practices.

In an interview granted on February 14th 2007 cited by Nwogu (2007:91) Rotimi Vonn, Chairman Lagos state office of the National Film and Videos Censors Board laments;

*I cannot comprehend why most producers have chosen to represent Nigeria the way they do. Nigerians are loving people, they are kind and they are benevolent. Nigerians are very helpful and can also pray. They believe in God so much and He changes their situations. Nigerians are peaceful and tolerant; if not, we would not have been together as a nation up till today. These are good values that can uplift a nation. I advise our film and movie makers to venture in this direction and the results will be pleasing at all levels*.

At a point in our immediate past, the Nigerian government launched a campaign spear-headed by the Information Minister tagged “Rebranding Nigeria”. The greatest culprit of the exportation of our cultures and values massively negatively is the Nigerian home movie industry. A country that has rules that are openly violated by the people with little or no reprimand, a country that has little or no respect for the role of the entertainment industry in the exportation of our cultures negatively cannot be serious about rebranding anything. Rebranding what; rebranding who? How do you rebrand the Nigerian home movies when for over a decade, the government, at all levels, left the industry in the hands of those who are either untrained, or though trained, are financial gains propelled at the expense of national image. That the Nigerian home movie industry, currently ranking second largest in the world, yet never winning global awards in film/movie production as due summarises the quality of what we produce. There is the need for a change and an overhaul of the entire system. Then and only then, we can begin to talk about a change that is positive, focused and sustainable development-driven. Thereafter, the exportation of the Nigerian rich cultures relevant to our immediate and universal contemporary realities can start on a clean and positively rewarding slate.

**Conflict of Interests**

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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"Grief for what is human, grief for what is not": An Ecofeminist Insight into the Poetry of Lucille Clifton

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This paper seeks to present an understanding of Lucille Clifton’s poetry through the theory of ecofeminism that finds a connection between the exploitation of nature and the oppression of women. According to ecofeminists, among all the human groups threatened by the devastation of the environment, women in particular are exposed to the greatest dangers. This can be seen in the births of deformed babies, miscarriages due to radioactive waste, and serious health problems affecting the woman, the family, and society in general. Some ecofeminists have even gone further asserting that women have a greater appreciation of the connection between nature and humanity. Accordingly, this keen awareness which makes women more attentive than others to ecological problems nominates them to speak for the environment and defend it against abuse and mistreatment. As a woman whose roots go back to Africa, Clifton depicts nature in her poetry as being oppressed in the same sense that both women and African people have been subjugated. Thus, she connects nature to history showing how the environment, women, blacks, the colonized, the poor, and children are exploited and dominated. What Clifton yearns for in her poetry is a community born out of love rather than of oppression. Therefore, she calls on all voices of the community to be recognized and heard. Through an ecofeminist lens, this paper finds that Clifton weaves into her poetry an insight that acknowledges the interconnection of all living entities on earth and emphasizes that each being, whether human or nonhuman, has a purpose to fulfill in the world.

Key words: Clifton, ecofeminist, grief, human, insight, poetry.

INTRODUCTION

Begin with the pain of the grass 

and pause for the girl with twelve fingers who never learned to cry enough for anything that mattered, not enough for the fear, not enough for the loss, not enough for the history, not enough for the disregarded planet.

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A widely respected African-American poet, Lucille Clifton (1936-2010) fosters an ecofeminist aesthetic through which she can reimage the world and suggest new insights into caring for our ‘disregarded planet’ whose mistreatment by human hands provokes ‘grief’ and brings to mind other forms of oppression such as the exploitation of women, people of colour, and other subjugated groups. In her work, Clifton adopts a poetic vision that includes the whole universe, human and nonhuman, "making room for everyone's sorrow, every survivor's noble blight" (Holladay, 2004b, p. 4). This paper seeks to present an understanding of Clifton's poetry through the theory of ecofeminism that combines ecology and feminism into a single philosophy in which women writers play a key role in defending the environment, voicing the pain endured by the oppressed, and calling for a kind of dignity for all beings.

Black experience, family life, and the female body are the main concerns of Clifton's poetry. Proud of her African roots, the poet praises her ancestors' capacity to resist oppression and survive economic and political racism. Furthermore, Clifton (1987a) claims that she was named after her great grandmother, Caroline Donald, who—according to the poet—was the first black woman to be brought at the age of seven from West Africa to America as a slave (p. 276). It is worth noting that Clifton was born with an extra finger on each hand. Lupton (2006) points out that the poet associates “this congenital difference with European witchcraft and with Egyptian royalty” (p.10). Clifton (1987a) writes:

I was born with twelve fingers  
like my mother and my daughter  
each of us  
born wearing strange black gloves. (p. 166).

Remarkably, Clifton's poetry raises ecological concerns presenting a keen awareness of the threatened status of the planet. In her poetry, Clifton calls for interconnection not only with nature, but also with her African heritage and her femaleness. As Hooks (1993) points out, "Black self-recovery takes place when we begin to renew our relationship to the earth" (p.182).

Ecofeminism: An Overview

The term "ecofeminism" was first introduced in 1974 by French feminist philosopher Françoise d'Eaubonne in her work Le Feminisme Ou La Mort (Feminism or Death) in which d'Eaubonne called upon women to lead an ecological revolution to save the planet (Kaur, 2012, p. 385). However, ecofeminism as a movement "first developed in the 1980s in the United States" where feminists injected a new insight into the new theory by arguing that both women and nature could be liberated together (Buell, 2005, 139). Prominent among scholars and critics who have provided a solid framework for ecofeminism and contributed to its development are Judith Plant, Susan Griffin, Ynestra King, Rosemary Ruether, Carolyn Merchant, Janis Birkeland, Karen J. Warren, Maria Mies, Mary Daly, and Lori Gruen.

The common thread among ecofeminists is that the patriarchal power in society oppresses both nature and women. This interconnection between the mistreatment of nature and the degradation of women is the core of ecofeminism. In this sense, "the rape of the earth, in all its forms," to quote Plant (1989), "becomes a metaphor for the rape of woman, in all its many guises" (p. 5). In Women and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her, (1978), Griffin discusses the close connection between women and nature, revealing how the female speaker feels proud of having her roots in the earth:

I know I am made from this earth, as my mother’s hands were made from this earth, as her dreams came from this earth and all that I know, I know in this earth, the body of the bird, this pen, this paper, these hands, this tongue speaking, all that I know speaks to me through this earth and I long to tell you, you who are earth too, and listen as we speak to each other of what we know: the light is in us (p.227).

Obviously, the ongoing degradation of the planet, the unprecedented rate of pollution, the extinction of species, the hazards associated with releasing genetically engineered organisms into the environment, the escalating rise of atmospheric greenhouse gases, global warming as well as the problems associated with exponential human population growth are only some in a long list of environmental crises that threaten the whole world (Fox, 1995, pp. 3-4). These disasters have resulted in what Schiffman (2013) calls "environmental grief," grief for the plight of our environment and the ecosystems around us (p. 8). However, it is not enough for us to feel sorry for the natural world. Rather, an action must be taken; otherwise we will destroy the planet, "our own terrestrial nest," to quote Schiffman (2013) who wonders, posing two different options:

What will emerge from the environmental crisis? Will it galvanize the humanity to find a way to live in harmony with the natural system of the air, the water, the soil, and the biosphere which support us? Or will we continue down our present suicidal path, laying waste to the earth’s limited resources and ultimately destroying our
own terrestrial nest? (p. 9)

It seems that 'humanity' has chosen the first option and decided 'to find a way' out of this ecological problem. Therefore, there have been public outcry and organized protests against the abuse of the environment all over the world where women in particular have played a vital role, simply because they are the most concerned ones, the ones who are more likely than other members of society to 'bear the consequences' and pay the price. This can be seen in the births of deformed babies, miscarriages due to radioactive waste, and serious health problems affecting the woman, the family, and society in general. As Mellor (1997) puts it,

Ecological impacts and consequences are experienced through human bodies, in ill health, early death, congenital damage and impeded childhood development. Women disproportionately bear the consequences of those impacts within their own bodies (dioxin residues in breast milk, failed pregnancies) and in their work as nurturers and carers. Some ecofeminists have gone further and argued that women have a greater appreciation of humanity's relationship to the natural world, its embeddedness and embodiedness, through their own embodiment as female (p. 2).

This is also the viewpoint of Warren (2000) a famous ecofeminist who sees that among all the human groups threatened by the devastation of the environment—the blacks, the colonized, the poor, the elderly, children—there are "those who belong to the female sex, who face the greatest risks and suffer immeasurably greater damage compared with those who belong to the male sex" (p. 2). Accordingly, this keen awareness which makes women more attentive than others to ecological problems logically nominates them not only "as the vanguard speakers of environmental malaise," Sandilands (1999) points out, but also "as the vanguard of the forthcoming ecological revolution to clean up the earth" (p. xi). Put another way, women's concern for nature is rooted in their concern for the health and well-being of their families in particular and of their society in general. This is what the women writers who advocate ecofeminist thought determinedly assert:

Because we have traditionally been mother, nurse, and guardian for the home and community, women have been quick to perceive the threat to the health and lives of our families and neighbours that is posed by nuclear power proliferation, polluted waters, and toxic chemicals (as cited in Sandilands, 1999, p. xi).

If women are particularly affected by environmental degradation, society in general—including men—also bears the consequences of this ecological disaster. For example, pollution, nuclear war, unclean water, toxic chemicals, greenhouse gases and the disappearance of green areas certainly have bad effects on all members of society who, regardless of their gender, may fall prey to bad health, dangerous diseases and early deaths. However, due to the fact that women traditionally perform the role of mother and home-maker, they are often more conscious of threats to the environment; consequently, they assume a more protective role in regards to preserving the environment for their children. Diamond and Orenstein (1990) argue stating that "because of women's unique role in the biological regeneration of the species, our bodies are important markers, the sites upon which local, regional, or even planetary stress is often played out" (p. x). Thus, the process of nurturing and caring for children becomes an essential mechanism that enables women to express the current ecological crisis and speak for a humiliated environment. In this sense, the 'biological' role achieved by women supports their environmental struggle and justifies their lead in defending nature.

Fully convinced that the abuse of nature and the oppression of women "often stem from the same root" (Stein, 2000, p. 201), ecofeminists maintain that if a culture is inclined to mistreat its human counterparts, it is highly likely it will mistreat and degrade its natural environment as well. Addressing the same issue, King (1983a), one of the leading figures whose theoretical works have placed a foundation for the ecofeminist philosophy, argues that the struggle for women's liberation must be a struggle for nature as well, adding that the degradation of nature should not be viewed as separate from the humiliation of women, basically because both are subjugated by the same oppressor, namely, patriarchal culture:

We believe that a culture against nature is a culture against women. We know we must get out from under the feet of men as they go about their projects of violence. In pursuing these projects men deny and dominate both women and nature. It is time to reconstitute our culture in the name of that nature, and peace and freedom, and it is women who can show the way. We have to be the voice of the invisible, of nature who cannot speak for herself in the political arenas of our society (p. 11).

Ruether (1975) also thinks that time has come for women to change the scene by creating new insights into saving both the oppressed women and the mistreated planet. In New Woman, New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation, she encourages women to take the first step and start the process of change. First, the writer makes it clear that there can be no liberation for women and no protection from the current environmental disaster within "a society whose fundamental model of relationships continues to be one of domination" (p. 204). Then, she comes to clarify that under all these ruins of patriarchy always lie a hope. Like King, Ruether is
completely sure that 'it is women who can show the way' and solve this crisis. According to Ruether, this can be achieved by uniting "the demands of the women's movement with those of the ecological movement" in order to "envision a radical reshaping of the basic socioeconomic relations and the underlying values of ... society (1975, p. 204).

Merchant, an influential ecofeminist, published a significant book that was regarded in the 1980s as a decisive turning point for ecofeminist thought. In The Death of Nature. Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution (1989), the writer reveals the historical links between women and nature. Furthermore, the author draws attention to the idea of 'nature as female,' bringing to mind the ancient identity of nature, especially the earth, as 'a nurturing mother' depicted as

a kindly beneficent female who provided for the needs of mankind in an ordered, planned universe. But another opposing image of nature as female was also prevalent: wild and uncontrollable nature that could render violence, storms, droughts, and general chaos. Both were identified with the female sex and were projections of human perceptions onto the external world. The metaphor of the earth as a nurturing mother was gradually to vanish as a dominant image as the Scientific Revolution proceeded to mechanize and to rationalize the world view. The second image, nature as disorder, called forth an important modern idea, that of power over nature. (p. 2).

One of the most important issues often handled within an ecofeminist context is the idea of dualisms upon which the present worldview is based. According to ecofeminists, the dualisms that exist within the patriarchal structure such as "masculine and feminine, yin and yang, male and female, dark and light, nature and culture, primitive and civilized" are completely false, Cuomo (1998) argues concluding that:

Feminists, and ecofeminists in particular, have identified hierarchical dualistic thinking as endemic to systems of dominance and subordination typified by Western power discourses. These discourses define women, people of color, nature, and anything that comes to be associated with these as subordinate and less valuable (p. 136).

As the above extract reveals, ecofeminists believe that viewing the world in hierarchical dualisms leads to an automatic assumption of subordination, and the consideration of one concept as positive and the other as negative. That is to say, while one term is regarded as good, it follows that the other--its opposite--must be bad. Therefore, these dualisms have resulted in what Mellor (1992) describes as "a one-dimensional public world devised by men in their image embodying culture, mind, science, reason, and materialism, eclipsing and suppressing women in a private world associated negatively with nature, body, folk knowledge, emotion and spirituality" (p. 54). Sharing the same perspective, Birkeland (1993), a well-known ecofeminist, affirms that the dualistic conceptual framework of patriarchy "supports the ethic of dominance and divides us against each other, our 'selves,' and nonhuman nature" (p. 20). As a result, ecofeminist thought comes to address the needs of both human and nonhuman subjects, revealing their suffering and giving them a voice. In this way, ecofeminism, rather than highlighting nature as the most important agenda, grasps all forms of life viewing the universe as an interconnected whole.

The conclusion that can be drawn from the discussion adopted above is that ecofeminism provides us with a new insight into "being human on this planet with a sense of the sacred, informed by all ways of knowing -- intuitive and scientific, mystical and rational," King (1990) states promoting an ecofeminist way of thinking that calls for "a dynamic, developmental theory of the person -- male and female -- who emerges out of nonhuman nature, where difference is neither reified nor ignored and the [reciprocal] relationship between human and nonhuman nature is understood" (p. 117).

**Clifton's Poetry: An Ecofeminist Insight**

King's assertion that ecofeminism can open a new possibility for us to be 'human on this planet' echoes the ecofeminist message implied in the poetry of Lucille Clifton who, adopting a similar vision to King’s, states in an interview with Michael Glaser, "I would like to be seen as a woman whose roots go back to Africa, who tried to honor being human" (Glaser, 2000, p. 328). In this sense, Clifton keenly yearns for the coming of that moment when we become 'human,' able to feel for all the oppressed on earth. Outstandingly, her poetry highlights the interconnection of the world; drawing attention to what she calls "the bond of live things everywhere" (1987a, p. 49).

"The environment...seems to me in danger;" so replied Clifton when asked about the reason behind devoting much of her poetic energy to environmental issues (Holladay 2004a, p. 195). As a woman with African roots, Clifton depicts nature in her poetry as being oppressed in the same sense that both women and African people have been subjugated. This meaning is embodied in a short untitled poem from her collection Good News about the Earth (1972). The poem reads as follows:

being property once myself
I have a feeling for it.
that's why I can talk
about environment,
what wants to be a tree,
ought to be he can be it.
same thing for other things
same thing for men. (p. 2)
Describing herself as ‘property,’ Clifton refers to the fact that she is both a descendant of African slaves who have endured racial oppression, and a woman who has undergone male domination. According to her, these attributes endow her with the ability to feel and speak not only for her fellow women and black sufferers, but also and more importantly for the nonhuman nature that is mistreated and humiliated by the same patriarchy. Being a black woman, or rather ‘being property,’ the poet sees herself as a fitting spokesperson for what Sandilands (1999) calls “environmental malaise” (p. xi). Significantly, Clifton's comparison between female oppression or human enslavement on one hand and environmental exploitation on the other invites the human race in general and women in particular to save nature from its subjugated position. In the above quoted poem, Clifton thinks of nature itself as ‘property,’ as enslaved by humankind. That is why she asserts that she can express its pains and defend its rights, simply because both are victims of oppression. In lines five and sex, the poet maintains that the nonhuman others have their rights to exist side by side with human beings. This idea is also extended in the last two lines of the poem, 'same thing for other things / same thing for men,' which reflect the comprehensive scope of Clifton's poetic vision that recognizes the right to life not only for the natural world as seen in 'what wants to be a tree, / ought to be he can be it,' but also for 'other things' and even for 'men' themselves, the symbol of masculinist domination and authority. This is indeed an integrated vision that grasps the whole universe and highlights the harmony of all living things.

Responding to the ethics of ecofeminism, Clifton becomes aware of her responsibility as a woman writer in facing environmental degradation. In an untitled poem from Mercy, a book of poetry published in 2004, she addresses the human oppressors who mistreat nature telling them that they will bear the consequences:

\[
\text{the air} \\
\text{you have polluted} \\
\text{you will breathe} \\
\text{the waters} \\
\text{you have poisoned} \\
\text{you will drink} \\
\text{when you come again} \\
\text{and you will come again}
\]

This time, Clifton warns humans to stop abusing nature otherwise the universe, a type of higher power, will abandon humankind, and 'slowly / walk away.' The humans' maltreatment of nature is undoubtedly responsible for this abandonment. The final stanza of the poem intensifies the dilemma of humanity in case the universe turns 'its back' and decides to 'leave.' In this case, the future generations of humanity will be 'alone / in the world,' without the "kindly beneficent" universe and its support "for the needs of mankind," to quote Merchant (1989, p. 2).

Protest against cutting down trees in southern Maryland is the theme of 'the killing of the trees,' a long poem in which Clifton (1991) attempts to defend 'what is left of life / and whales and continents and children and ozone and trees'--all things endangered by science and progress:

\[
\text{the third went down} \\
\text{with a sound almost like flaking,} \\
\text{a soft swish as the left leaves} \\
\text{fluttered themselves and died.} \\
\text{three of them, four, then five} \\
\text{stiffening in the snow} \\
\text{as if this hill were Wounded Knee (p. 39)}
\]

Expressively, the lines portray the ripping of the trees that are strongly rooted to the ground in a dramatic scene in which the reader feels as if he is listening to the trees
going down, one by one: 'three of them, four, then five.' While falling down, the trees produce a sad sound that resembles cracking and split as if they are moaning for being disconnected from their mother land. In addition, a soft, hissing sound accompanies the trembling leaves as they fall down receiving death. In the last line of the above stanza, 'as if this hill were Wounded Knee,' Clifton compares the bulldozing, or let us say 'the killing,' of the trees to the famous Wounded Knee Massacre that took place in 1890 when U.S. military troops attacked the North American Indians. According to Robertson (2014), the attack was so horrible that:

many women and children...were cut down by deadly shrapnel from the Hatchkiss guns. The rest fled under withering fire from all sides. Pursuing soldiers shot most of them down in flight, some with babes on their backs. One survivor recalled that she was wounded but was so scared she did not feel it. She lost her husband, her little girl, and a baby boy. One shot passed through the baby's body before it broke her elbow, causing her to drop his body. Two more shots ripped through the muscles of her back before she fell. (para. 2)

In this way, Clifton connects nature to history showing how the environment, women, children, and the colonized are exploited and oppressed.

According to Clifton's ecofeminist vision, what further connects women and nature is the fact that both are victims of male domination. This is what the poet indicates in the last section of 'the killing of the trees':

so i have come to live
among men who kill the trees,
a subdivision, new,
in southern Maryland. (1991, p. 40)

Clifton herself is a witness of the abuse of nature. It is worth noting that the poem is based on her personal experience. Interviewing Thiers, she points out:

I wrote that poem when I first moved to St. Mary's County. I lived in a new development and had just come from California, where cutting down trees for no reason is just not done. But men were cutting down trees as if it were something wonderful; there seemed to be no feeling for preserving the landscape. (Thiers, 1998, p. 20)

Clifton writes in the poem, "I have brought my witness eye with me," implying that she has recorded the details of that tragic story in which

what is left of life
and whales and continents and children and ozone
and trees huddle in a camp weeping
outside my window and i can see it all
with that one good eye. (1999, p. 40)

The poem ends sadly depicting nature and its human and nonhuman entities gathering in their defeated 'camp,' 'weeping' and feeling conquered by masculinist oppression and exploitation. As the poem reveals, Clifton's sense of grief at seeing the deliberate destruction of nature implies an ecofeminist insight that is concerned not only for the earth at large, but also for all creatures in this universe.

From an ecofeminist standpoint, Clifton's poetry emphasizes that all beings are worthy of life. The final section of Mercy (2004), 'the message from the Ones,' opens with an untitled poem reading as follows:

the universe requires the worlds
to be
each leaf is veined from the mother/ father
each heart is veined from the mother/ father
each leaf each heart has a place
irreplaceable
each is required to be (p. 69)

Clearly, the first line summarizes the whole poem as it confirms that the universe allows all forms of life to exist and live in harmony. But, what disturbs this harmonious atmosphere is man who always tries to dominate and exploit other lives. The lines emphasize the interconnection of all living entities on earth and reveal that each being has a place and a purpose to fulfill in the world. Clifton's deep ecological assertion that 'each leaf each heart has a place / irreplaceable,' points to the integration of all creatures. Remarkably, the connection between 'leaf' and 'heart' as both of them are 'veined' suggests the strong bond between what is human (heart) and what is nonhuman (leaf). It is noted that each of the two words consists of three sounds: two consonants and a vowel (/hɑːt/, /lɪ:f/) as if the poet implies that both the human and the nonhuman are equal in many, if not in all, things. The last line of the poem, 'each is required to be' refers to the interdependency of biotic systems and life-forms. In this poem, Clifton develops a voice calling for 'future wholeness with ethical responsibility for the other' (Kriner, 2005, p. 187). From an ecofeminist point of view, what Clifton achieves in this poem is a quest for a kind of knowing that extends beyond knowing the self to understanding "the complexity of any self and the need for more connection and communion among humans, and between humans and nonhumans, across differences in the world at large" (McCormick, 2012, p. 88).

In this sense, Clifton adopts an ecofeminist perspective that goes in harmony with Birkeland's call for resisting a dualistic way of thinking which splits us against each other. Thus, in her rejection of dualistic attitudes, Clifton tries in her poetry to reweave new stories that recognize and value the biological and cultural variety which maintains all life. Ostriker (1996) refers to this ecofeminist position arguing that Clifton "assumes connection where the dualisms of our culture assume separation – between self and other, human and nature, male and female, public and private, pleasure and pain" (p. 308).
Instead of the 'either/or' philosophy, Clifton adopts the 'both/and' thinking and consequently resists dualistic split and fosters interconnection. The ecofeminist insight into her poetry not only promotes human relations with the environment and the broader world but also "emphasizes connections," argues McCormick (2012), "and dissolves differences between people...ask[ing] us to see with collective eyes, to see beyond singular notions of the self" (pp. 86-8).

A careful reading of Clifton's poetry shows that she does not confine her poetic scope to a one-sided view of the world based on only gender, race, culture, or any other issue. Rather, she adopts an inclusive ecofeminist stance comprised all levels of agency, intertwined and interacting with one another. Accordingly, she calls on all voices of the community to be recognized and heard. Related to this issue is the idea that many of Clifton's poems are untitled; this may denote something; it seems that the poet does not want to confine herself to a narrow title that may hinder her wide-ranging vision and restrict her voice within the limits of a specific topic. Rather, she wants her poetic voice to be a communal one, addressing everyone and attending to everything.

In an untitled poem in the last section of Mercy (2004), Clifton draws attention to the human relationship that connects people together, urging everyone to come back to the nest of human intimacy:

```
you are not
your brother's keeper
you are
your brother
....
you are not
your sister's keeper
you are
your sister  yes ( p. 68)
```

As shown above, the lines underline the rejection of the 'either/or' ways of thinking and promote the 'both/and' approach implied in the speaker's affirmation of the importance of living in connection with others. When the poet says 'you are / your brother,' she suggests that you are not yourself or you are not a single self. Put another way, she wants to say that both you and your brother are connected in one integrated self. This stage of interconnection is preceded by another stage in which differences dissolve between the two selves in order to reach the stage of integration. Likewise, the final stanza of the poem also affirms the interconnection between the addressee's self and his sister's. That Clifton devotes another stanza to 'the sister' is indeed evocative; this may stand as a reminder for the male addressee that he is not 'his sister's keeper,' but he himself is his own sister whose self has been dissolved in his, forming one incorporated self instead of two separate ones. Accordingly, he should neither think of the idea of dominating his sister nor perceive his relationship with her in a dualistic view that separates them as male and female. Significantly, the stanza about the sister, unlike that about the brother, ends with the adverb 'yes.' This adds more assertion to what the poet is actually posing throughout the stanza, specially drawing the addressee's attention that his relation with his sister is based on integration and respect rather than disparity and exploitation. In brief, what Clifton yearns for in her poetry is a community born out of love rather than of oppression.

It is noted that Clifton often employs unusual techniques in her poetry. For instance, she is fond of using small letters in positions that require the use of capital letters. This can be seen in the following lines:

```
we have dropped daughters,
african and chinese.
we think they will be beautiful. we think
they will become themselves. (2004, p.15)
```

Likewise, the first person singular pronoun is repeatedly used as a lowercase letter 'i', as in "won't you celebrate with me / what i have shaped into a kind of life? i had no model. / born in Babylon / nonwhite and woman / what did i see to be except myself?" (1991, p. 25). Also, rules of punctuation are scarcely followed in Clifton's poems. These lines present an example:

```
only to keep
his little fear
he kills his cities
and his trees
even his children oh
people
white ways are
the way of death
come into the black
and live. (1987a, p. 57)
```

In addition, Clifton mostly uses few strong stresses per line. To consider this poem:

```
x x / x
in this garden
/ x
growing
/ x x x / / x
following the strict orders
/ x x x /
following the light
/ x x / x x
see the sensational
/ x x / x
two-headed woman
/ / / / / x
one face turned outward
/ /
```

As the above example indicates, the maximum number of strong stresses per line is four as shown in line seven. Some lines, like the first and the second, have one strong stress only whereas the rest of lines contain just two or three.

The use of such technical devices--the lowercase instead of capital letters, the small letter 'i', the few strong stresses per line, and the scarce use of punctuation marks--encloses Clifton's poems with a sort of humbleness, one suggests, and hence makes them appear suitable and fitting to address those who are oppressed and dominated. As Bryson (2002) argues, we should adopt a sense of "humility in relationships with both human and nonhuman nature" (p. 6). Thus, once we feel modest towards the natural and human world, we become aware of the present environmental catastrophe that threatens all forms of life on the planet. However, some critics see that the abandonment of regular techniques and the use of irregular ones may be seen as an expression of objection and dissatisfaction. For example, Holladay (2004b) states that "black activist poets were reacting against the political and literary establishment, and one way to do that was to reject the conventions of standard English" (p. 19).

In Next, a collection of poems published in 1987, Clifton expands her ecofeminist awareness to deal with the destructive impacts of war on both nature and man. Her two poems, 'I. at nagasaki,' and 'I. at gettysburg,' stand as a strong opposition to war and the chaos it causes. Obviously, Clifton starts each of the two titles with the subject pronoun 'I' that seems to stand for the poet who places herself in each scene as if she is giving an eyewitness account of the two historical events. The first poem, 'I. at nagasaki,' refers to the bombing of the Japanese city Nagasaki during World War II, bringing the threat of nuclear war into a sharp focus. Imagining herself as a survivor of the bombing, Clifton (1987b) narrates:

in their own order
the things of my world
glisten into ash. i
have done nothing
to deserve this,
only been to the silver birds
what they have made me.
nothing (p. 24)

The speaker recounts how her world has completely been ruined and turned into 'ash.' Indeed, the destruction has been dehumanizing for all involved. Abusively, the bomber planes, recognized by the narrator as 'the silver birds,' have reduced her and her surroundings to 'nothing' though she has committed no crime and has 'done nothing' to meet such an end together with the innocent inhabitants of her defeated city. The U.S. leaders have given 'their own' murderous 'order' and thousands of human and nonhuman creatures have been killed. Statistics about the impact of the bombing on people and the environment are indeed horrible. The atomic bomb dropped on Nagasaki killed about "39,000" people, and injured an estimated "25,000," stated the report of the Manhattan Engineer District of the United States Army describing the effects of the bombing of Nagasaki in August 1945 as follows:

Total destruction spread over an area of about 3 square miles. Over a third of the 50,000 buildings in the target area of Nagasaki were destroyed or seriously damaged. The complete destruction of the huge steel works and the torpedo plant was especially impressive. The steel frames of all buildings within a mile of the explosion were pushed away, as by a giant hand, from the point of detonation. The badly burned area extended for 3 miles in length. The hillsides up to a radius of 8,000 feet were scorched, giving them an autumnal appearance....Houses and other structures were completely destroyed while fires broke out everywhere. Trees were uprooted and withered by the heat. (The Avalon Project, 1946)

In the second poem, 'I. at gettysburg,' Clifton alludes to the American Civil War (1861-1865) that was waged due to many causes the most important of which was slavery that was prohibited in 'free' states whereas it was allowed in 'slave' states. The uncompromising differences between "the free and slave states over the power of the national government to prohibit slavery in the territories that had not yet become states" was the main reason behind that war (McPherson, 2014, para. 3). Remarkably, the human and nonhuman cost of the Civil War was beyond all expectations. Often described as "America's bloodiest conflict," the war resulted in the horrible death of more than "620,000" persons, "roughly 2% of the population" of America at that time in additions to "hundreds of thousands" more who were left injured or "died of disease" (Civil War Causalties). Moreover, the war caused massive environmental destruction at Gettysburg:

With massive amounts of dead bodies, humans, and animals, battlegrounds became a major transmitter of disease...Much farmland was destroyed by many things during the civil war. Houses, barns, outhouses, were blown to pieces by canons and other means of weaponry...if the houses and fences were not totally destroyed by a battle itself, they were ripped down and used for firewood on both sides of the war....Also, due to the destruction of a lot of land in the south, it led to many changes in the Post Civil War Era. The landscape was drastically effected due to deforestation and spreading of
crops that countered the destruction of the war. (Zinno, 2009, paras. 11-12)

'I. at gettysburg' refers to Clifton's imagined experience at a 'farmland' where the 1863 battle of Gettysburg, one of the darkest days of the American Civil War, took place. Clifton (1987b) writes:

if, as they say, this is somehow about myself, this clash of kin across good farmland, then why are the ghosts of the brothers and cousins rising and wailing toward me in their bloody voices, who are you, nigger woman, who are you? (p. 23).

As the narrator explains, it was said that this conflict was related to her, 'this clash of kin across good farmland.' However, she discovered that the matter was more complicated than she had first imagined: it was a serious fighting, a civil war, between soldiers belonging to the slave states and others fighting for the free states. Fighters on both camps were compelled to fight against each other, and the result was a tearing civil war. In a horrifying scene, 'the ghosts of the brothers and cousins,' who seemingly were black fighters and therefore of the same 'kin' to which the speaker belongs, suddenly went up and in a moaning voice asked her a significant question, 'who are you, nigger woman, who are you?' As defined in dictionary, the word 'nigger' though "sometimes used by black people as a mildly disparaging way of referring to other black people" is "one of the most racially offensive words in the language" (Definition of nigger in English). The speaker was shocked and disappointed because her identity as a black descendant has been overlooked by the very people who were supposed to share her the same origin. She did not expect that the black soldiers would not be able to recognize her. This is the message of the poem: people of the same clan are no longer connected or related together but are so divided and so separated that they do not know each other.

If this is the case among people of the same 'kin,' then the split among members of society in general is of course sharper. For Clifton, white patriarchy is responsible for this separation among American people. Her view is in agreement with ecofeminist thought that identifies "patriarchy, particularly western patriarchy, [not only] as the main source of global ecological destruction," but also as the main reason behind the sharp "division of society" (Mellor, 1997b, p. 5). Despite the pain undergone by the blacks whose 'bloody voices' were heard in each Civil War battlefield, the poet is greatly disappointed to face the depressing truth that "many white men still have little understanding of the people whose enslavement precipitated the Civil War" (Holladay, 2004b, p. 44). Obviously, racism stands as one of the central issues Clifton poses in 'I. at gettysburg.' It was the main cause of the bitter Civil War that shattered the balance of the American community and divided its people into two separate poles. As Feagin (2001) puts it:

In the United States racism is structured into the rhythms of everyday life. It is lived, concrete, advantageous for whites, and painful for those who are not white. Each major part of a black or white person's life is shaped by racism....One of the great tragedies today is the inability or unwillingness of most white Americans to see and understand this racist reality. Among whites, including white elites, there is a commonplace denial of personal, family, and group histories of racism. Most do not see themselves or their families as seriously implicated in white-on-black oppression, either in the distant past or in the present. Referring to themselves, most whites will say fervently, "I am not a racist." (p. 2)

Carr (2000) argues that ecofeminism "brings new insights to bear in the ongoing...struggle against...violence, to secure the...dignity and security of all human beings" (p. 15). Addressing this ecofeminist insight, Clifton's poem titled 'jasper texas 1998' depicts the violence and racial intolerance that people inflict on one another without any consideration for the victim's dignity. The poem tells the tragic story of James Byrd, a black man who was chained to the back of a pickup truck, dragged to his death by three white men, and left in front of an African-American cemetery in Jasper, Texas. During the ordeal, Byrd's head and right arm were severed from his body. As the poem opens, the reader observes how Clifton cleverly gives voice to the dead, imagining that Byrd's head 'was chosen to speak' for the rest of his body:

i am a man's head hunched in the road. i was chosen to speak by the members of my body. the arm as it pulled away pointed toward me, the hand opened once and was gone. (2000, p. 20)

The lines vividly draw a real picture of Byrd's death taking the reader to an actual scene in which the dying man was giving his last breath. The reader feels as if he is really watching Byrd's head being separated from his body, his arm 'pulled away' and his hand 'opened once' and then closed forever. That the head and the arm in particular were the cut off organs is very suggestive. It seems that the poet tries to convey the idea that the white killers not only want to wipe out the intellectual power of the blacks, symbolized by the head, but also wish to ruin their physical capabilities represented by the arm, especially the right arm. Additionally, the poet specifically chooses the head to speak for the other organs of the body as if Clifton likes to say that the blacks' cause and quest for social justice are so clear in the 'head' of each black person that he can fluently express what his fellow blacks need and yearn for. Also, 'the arm' that was severed and victimized by the white murderers seems to stand for all
the oppressed blacks. More suggestively, the arm 'pointed toward' the head as if asking it to tell the arm's tragic story and get back its right from those who dominate the blacks and exploit them.

Undoubtedly, the horrible way in which James Byrd was killed stirred the anger of the poet who came to ask furiously:

why and why and why
should i call a white man brother?
who is the human in this place,
the thing that is dragged or the dragger? (2000, p. 20)

It is clear that the voice is Clifton's. As the lines indicate, she deals with the issue of racism in an explicit way. For her, the racial oppression practiced by the white Americans against the blacks went beyond all limits. The oppressors have left no space for any settlement. That is why the speaker finds it difficult, if not impossible, to 'call a white man brother.' Then, she poses a second question saying who is acting humanely: the murderer or the murdered, the subjugator or the subjugated, 'the dragger' or 'the thing that is dragged'? Of course, these questions need no answers because it is known that the oppressed in general adopt a more civilized behaviour than their oppressors who in most cases lack the minimum of the appropriate conduct. As usual, Clifton surprises us with her careful choice of words. When she refers to 'the dragger,' she only uses one word which means that the doer is a human being. However, she does not use the single word 'dragged' or even the phrase 'the person who is dragged' in order to refer to the victim; instead, she uses the phrase 'the thing that is dragged' to indicate that the action of dragging and oppression practiced against the helpless black man has nullified his humanity and turned him into a powerless being, a thing that can do nothing. This of course signifies the huge impact of the crime committed against James Byrd. The poem ends with a note of sadness as the poet mournfully states, "i am done with this dust. i am done" (Blessing the Boats 20). Here, Clifton points out that it is a shame for the American society to permit such savage practices of violence and attitudes of racial intolerance. From an ecofeminist perspective, the poem stands as a reminder for the American people in particular and the human race in general that Byrd's death has reflected a narrow-minded outlook unable to accept the other or acknowledge the sacred bond that connects all humans together. Commenting on the poem,' Lupton (2006) refers to the great effect the poem has had on the hearts and minds of the Americans:

Although people may have forgotten the newspaper or television accounts of the execution of James Byrd...these atrocities live on in the words of poets...As long as it's taught, the horror cannot be diminished. The story is told, is taught again and again and again. 'jasper texas 1998' is now part of the American literary history and will reach its audience for generations (p. 89).

Ecofeminism, as previously argued, provides women with a particular stake to speak not only for the exploited environment but also of for the other victimized groups in society including children. In 'alabama 9/15/63,' a poem from the Blessing Boats collection (2000), Clifton, moved by her ecofeminist 'stake', reacts to the tragic death of four young girls who were killed in the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama on September 15, 1963. The poet ironically asks:

Have you heard the one about
the shivering lives,
the never to be borne daughters and sons,
the one about Cynthia and Carole and Denise and Addie Mae?

Have you heard the one about
The four little birds
shattered into skylarks in the white
light of Birmingham?

Have you heard how the skylarks,
known for their music,
swooped into heaven, how the Sunday
morning strains shook the piano…? (p. 21)

The poem starts with the ironical question, 'Have you heard the one about / the shivering lives, / the never to be borne daughters and sons ...,', as if the poet is going to tell a joke, while she in fact speaks about one of the most tragic events, the death of four little innocent creatures who lost their lives without any sin committed by them. In the second stanza, the poet clarifies that 'Cynthia,' 'Carole,' 'Denise,' and 'Addie Mae' are the names of the tragic heroines of her heartbreaking tale. The ironical question posed by the poet at the beginning of the first stanza is also repeated at the start of the third and fourth stanzas, forming a refrain that not only adds music to the lines, but also characterizes the satirical, sad tone of the poem and emphasizes its atmosphere of grief and disappointment. In a very clever use of the language, Clifton compares the pure young creatures to 'four little birds' devastated by the huge power of the explosion which, metaphorically pushing the children up, made them look like 'skylarks' singing in 'the white light' produced by the detonation. More importantly, the blast of the bomb blew their pure souls as well as the music of the piano they used to play on Sundays into heaven. It is known that skylarks are famous for singing while flying. So, the comparison between the blown up girls and the flying skylarks is very suggestive. In addition, the poet's description of the four young girls as 'four little birds,' creates a connection between those victimized children and nature, another site on which man inflicts his domination and abuse.
It is noteworthy that the four young victims were African-Americans who went to attend a Sunday school in the Church when a racist placed a dynamite bomb in the basement of the place. The attack was carried out by the Ku Klux Klan, "a terrorist group whose members were responsible for atrocities that are difficult for most people to even imagine" (Bond, 1998, p. 4). The death of the four children in such a horrible way makes the poet unable to turn a blind eye to white patriarchy that oppresses the black Americans and even kills their innocent children. In fact forgetting such painful events is not an easy matter. This is what McKinstry (2011), a survivor of Birmingham Church Bombing, maintains in the introduction to a book she devotes to the incident:

Almost half a century has passed since the Klan bombed Sixteenth Street Baptist Church at 10:22 on Sunday morning, September 15, 1963, and my four young friends died agonizing deaths….I tried hard to forget the senseless deaths, the inhumane injustices…For almost five decades, I had not been able to muster the courage, nor the composure, to publicly record the stories that have become such a dark part of our nation's past. I had struggled to forget these stories, to rid them from my head and heart. They proved too horrible, too painful, to dredge up to memory (pp.ix-x).

In his well-known poem, ‘To a Skylark’, Shelley (1993) writes, ‘Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought’ (p. 60). This meaning truly applies to Clifton's 'alabama 9/15/63.' Recording the details of a highly agonizing tale, Clifton's poem stands as one of the 'sweetest songs whose writer has really succeeded in making us feel for the suffering of the four young girls, the sorrow accompanying their unbearable death, and the desire inside everyone that the world can hopefully close the gloomy page of racism which terrifies people and deprives them even of their offspring. This is Clifton's ecofeminist note in 'alabama 9/15/63,' a powerful purification of our feelings and a realistic reminder that we should commit ourselves to lead a life based on love and understanding and not on hatred and exploitation of those who share this world with us whoever they are, mainly because

all life is life.
all clay is kin and kin. (Clifton, 1987b, p. 22)

CONCLUSION

To sum up, Clifton skillfully weaves into her poetry an ecofeminist insight that articulates the grief which plagues us all and at the same time speaks for an environment so stressed, so endangered by human hands” (Scigaj 1999, p. 2). The diverse topics handled in her poetry including nature, women, blacks, children, and other victimized groups point to an ecofeminism that calls attention to the importance of ethics in our treatment not only with human beings but also with the natural world with its various species. From an ecofeminist point of view, the main theme in Clifton's poetry is the connection between the exploitation of nature and the domination of women. Another significant topic is women as guards of nature and leaders of an ecological revolt. Other issues that are frequently raised in her poetry and often discussed within an ecofeminist scope are pollution, deforestation, nuclear war, racism, and violence against children.

A key ecofeminist message in Clifton's poetry is that all entities in this world are worth living, simply because the universe grasps all creatures and allows space for everyone and everything to exist and lead a life. Outstandingly, Clifton's poetry resists dualistic attitudes, challenges male patriarchy, reimagines the world, and creates new metaphors and insights into recognizing our world in a more conscious, interactive way. If ecofeminism stresses the idea that we must acknowledge that all subject positions have power and voice in society, then Clifton undoubtedly aligns with this philosophy in her poetry which constantly gives the chance for all marginalized or unnoticed groups to be recognized and heard. Aware of her ecofeminist position as a spokesperson of our ill-treated environment, Clifton defends nature against human abuse illuminating the need for adopting a relationship with the nonhuman other based on respect and appreciation.

Generously, Clifton's poetry grants humanity a second chance to redeem itself and learn how to accept the other. It is true that we--humans--have abused nature, dominated women, promoted racism, subjugated the poor, and killed children; even so, all is not lost and the future is still possible. If we learn to communicate with each other and acknowledge the value of being interconnected with both the human and the other-than-human on this planet, we can then unmake the current world and start anew. These are Clifton's last words to us:

what has been made
can be unmade
....
it is perhaps
a final chance (2004, p. 74)

Conflict of Interests

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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Full Length Research Paper

“Representing the African culture in Buchi Emecheta’s The Bride Price- A Study.”

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The social institution of marriage and the culture of paying bride price are interlinked and form an important part in the lives of African men and women. Like other communities, the African society has its own series of events that take place before and after marriage such as the hunting of bride by going to the prospective bride’s hut before marriage and the inheritance of a widow and her family by the brother-in-law after the death of the husband. The traditional society of Africa strictly follows the culture of paying “bride price” by the groom’s family failing to which consequently lead to the death of the bride in her first childbirth. The African men and women strongly hold this belief no matter how modern the society has become in order to avoid death. In the light of these social practices and taboos prevalent in the African society, the paper is an attempt to analyze the reflection of the African system of marriage and the very culture of paying bride price in Buchi Emecheta’s novel The Bride Price.

Key words: African women, bride price, marriage, traditional and patriarchal society.

INTRODUCTION

The union of man and woman is universally and socially acknowledged by the institution of marriage. It is one of the oldest rituals to be practiced even today in every parts of the world. Marriage is an important part of the traditional African society and is one of the largely reflected issues in African literature. According to Ngcobo (1986), in her essay entitled “African Motherhood-Myth and Reality” which appeared in Criticism and Ideology: Second African Writers’ Conference, Stockholm edited by Kirsten H. Petersen, the concept of marriage in African context is similar with any other community:

As elsewhere, marriage amongst Africans is mainly an institution for the control of procreation. Every woman is encouraged to marry and get children in order to express womanhood to the full. The basis of marriage among Africans implies transfer of a woman’s fertility to the husband’s family group. (1986: 141)

Chukwuma (1989) claims in her article, Positivism and

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Authors agree that this article remain permanently open access under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License 4.0 International License.
The Female Crisis: Novels of Buchi Emecheta, that in Emecheta’s novels:

*The true test of woman continues to be the marriage institution ( . . . ) Through it a woman attains a status acclaimed by the society and fulfils the biological need of procreation and companionship.* (1989: 5)

In one of her novels, *The Slave Girl* (1977), Emecheta has also emphasized the need and compulsion for marriage in the context of an African slave girl, Ojebeta Ogbanje:

*Every woman, whether slave or free, must marry* (Emecheta, 1977: 113).

Marriage in the traditional patriarchal society of Africa is performed with great importance and dignity. The bride and the groom marry for further lineage of the groom's family. The duties of the newlywed wife and husband are to procreate and provide for the family. But with this social practice of marriage comes with other traditional customs which are very much indispensable in the African society without which the marriage is incomplete. Bridge price is one of the widely practiced social customs of Africa within the marriage institution wherein the prospective groom has to pay in terms of money or properties to the bride's family. Bridge price is paid mostly in the form of money, however, other items such as “palm wines”, “cowries”, “yams”, “farmlands”; animals like “cows”, “goats” etc. are also given. There is a belief in African society that if the bridge price is not paid then, the bride dies in childbirth. The African men and women strongly hold this belief no matter how modern the society has become in order to avoid death. Male writers from Africa glorify women and present them with dignity and honour in their writings. As for instance, Chinua Achebe’s protagonist Okonkwo, in the novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958), seeks solace and spends the seven years exile in his mother's native village Mbanta. The novel also describes the rituals to appease the Earth Goddess (in African society, the Earth is considered a “mother”) by making sacrifices. Such glorification of women as Goddesses and Mothers are reflected in the writings of African male writers. Breaking away from such type of writing in which traditional African women are glorified, Buchi Emecheta writes of the predicament of African women in the male dominated society. Without any hesitation, Emecheta outrightly exposes the malpractices and inhuman treatments done by African men on women. Emecheta is one of the literary artists whose works aim at changing the stereotypical image of African women in society.

The novel *The Bride Price* (1976), one of the three historical novels written by Buchi Emecheta, is a record of the fictional character Aku-nna and her journey from childhood to her short-lived motherhood set at the backdrop of traditional African society of Lagos and Ibuza in the late 1950s. After the death of her father, Ezekiel Odia, Aku-nna along with her mother and brother are inherited by dead father’s elder brother Okonkwo Odia in Ibuza. Aku-nna’s education is allowed to continue by her new father thinking that it will fetch a good “bridge price”. However, Aku-nna elopes with her teacher, Chike Ofulue whose forefathers were Osu (slaves). Aku-nna’s act shatters her step-father’s dream of becoming an Obi (the Chief) with the help of her bridge price. Okonkwo dismisses Aku-nna and refuses to receive the bridge price from Chike. The ultimate outcome of it is Aku-nna’s death in her first childbirth. Emecheta presents a biting attack on the traditional culture of Africa which paralyzes the women mentally, emotionally and psychologically.

As feminism was a liberation movement of women for equal socio-political rights as men by the “white” women in the west in late 19th century, however it failed to consider the plights and issues of “black”, “coloured” or Third World women. In this context, the novel *The Bride Price* can be best studied and analyzed from the womanist perspective as expounded by Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi and Alice Walker. Just as feminism is against the discrimination of women based on gender, womanism is against the discrimination of women based on both gender and race. The term “womanist” is generally considered to have first been introduced by the famous Afro-American novelist Alice Walker in her 1983 book *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens: Womanist Prose*. As Walker skillfully contrasts the difference between the terms “feminism” and “womanism” in terms of colour:

*Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender* (1983: xii). In the words of Patricia Hill Collins:

*Black women are “womanist” while white women remain merely “feminist”* (1996: 10).

Buchi Emecheta, as a womanist writer, writes about the socio-cultural practices experienced by the black women in Africa. But what makes Emecheta a balanced writer is that she maintains a perfect equilibrium between her emotions and intellectualism; never idealizes her African traditional customs and beliefs which put enormous pressure upon the woman relegating her to the margin. Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi (1985), in this regard, states that Emecheta deals mainly with the black woman as the victim of black patriarchy. She captures every detail of the traditional customs that makes womankind-a victim. As for instance, the practice of polygamy in which African man like Okonkwo appears as symbolic representation of male hegemony which leaves the African women like Ma Blackie and Aku-nna with no voice of their own as well as the malpractices of cutting of lock of hair of the women and declaring them as wives by the traditional African men. Women have been represented as the “weaker sex” or the “second sex” and
stereotyped with negative qualities such as sensitive, emotional, fragile, indecisive, submissive etc. To quote Simone de Beauvoir in this context: “To be feminine is to appear weak, futile, docile” (de Beauvoir, 1956: 334).

Such stereotyping of women exists in Africa within the institution of marriage. The African husband overpowers and leads his family while the wife is restricted within the domestic walls of household chores and the rearing and nurturing of children. This has led to the notion of “Father is Supreme” or “Father is the shelter” (Emecheta, 1976: 12) in every patriarchal society. One of the institutions through which traditional African men enjoy this authority and supremeness is “marriage”. With marriage comes the power of African men to suppress their women. Every important decisions of society are taken by men only while the women remain either as audience or follower. As for instance, the inheritance of a widow by the next male member of the dead husband is decided by society which is patriarchal through and through. The use of the word “inherited” (p. 23) by the writer shows that African men consider women as “properties” or “commodities” that can be transferred or owned.

The purpose of marriage in traditional African society is to help the husband’s family grow. The most celebrated possession of an African woman is to give birth to a male child. The impact of the preoccupation of the African society with the bearing of children is strongly negative as it is evident in Ma Blackie’s effort to even walk a “two-hundred mile journey to her home town of Ibuza. There she asked the river goddess to send her a baby” (p.2). An African woman is ready to take all kinds of pain just to save her marriage. Ironically, the birth of a female child is less wanted and celebrated. She is socially and culturally looked down upon with contempt if she fails to give birth to a son. This very gender bias in preferring the birth of a male child is reflected in the text. Aku-nda’s father expects more sons from Ma Blackie for he has paid double bride price:

I paid double the normal bride price for you; he told her. ‘And we were married in church. But what have you given me—just one son?’

He did not speak of Aku-nda. She was only a girl. (p.2)

The life of an African widow passes through several events which are portrayed by the writer through the character of Ma Blackie, as a man in a traditional African society is considered the head of a family. Emecheta explains:

It has always been like that in Nigeria. When you have lost your father, you have lost everything. Your mother is only a woman; she cannot do anything for you. A fatherless family is a family without a head, a family without a home (p.12).

After a husband’s death, a typical and traditional widow is expected to live a life in a deplorable condition. Such as staying in a separate “mourning hut” for nine complete months without changing clothes or taking a bath in which she is forced to mourn for her death husband. Also the inheritance of a widow and her family (children) by the next brother-in-law adds more dilemmas for the fact that she alone cannot survive with her children but to be owned and ruled by another man. This way, a widow is socially accepted in a traditional society of Africa and it is only womenfolk who suffer in the name of culture and tradition.

As the African society practices other form of marriage such as polygamy in which a man marries more than one woman, the chance of creating jealousy and insecurity among the wives is high. Polygamy, the very tradition that installs man to male chauvinism and male hegemony is resented by Emecheta. The jealousy among the wives is highlighted by Emecheta when Okonkwo Odia, elder brother of late Ezekiel Odia, marries Ma Blackie as his fourth wife. Ngbeke, the first wife of Okonkwo, shows her hatred and jealousy against Ma Blackie and Aku-nda. She wants Aku-nda to be an Ogbanje, a Nigerian word meaning “living dead”:

Yes, I’m sure Aku-nda is an ogbanje’, she said. ‘She’s too quiet (…) An ogbanje doesn’t belong in this world. They all die young, usually at the birth of their first child. They have to die young, because their friends in the other world call them back. I’m glad that none of my daughters is an ogbanje. (p.33)

It can be understood that Emecheta dislikes the ‘scoring off’ at the birth of female child. So, she exposes the greediness of African men in expecting huge bride price from their daughters. Bride price is widely accepted and practiced culture of African society. The Oxford Dictionaries give the definition of “bride price” as a sum of money or quantity of goods given to a bride’s family by that of groom in some tribal societies. To quote Sircar (1995) on the main reasons for the culture of paying bride price in African marriage:

High bride wealth in the form of money and cattle was given to the bride’s people, in exchange the woman’s sexual and reproductive powers were surrendered to the man and his lineage (Pp. 26-27).

The marriageable age of an African woman begins from the moment she attains her puberty. The younger the age of the African woman the more chances to get her married off early with higher bride price. The novel depicts that there is no joy on the fact of becoming a woman with the onset of menstrual cycle. Rather, it creates a psychosis in African women for they are vulnerable to unwanted suitors who can cut a lock of hair and announce the woman (the victim) as his wife without even paying the bride price. Emecheta writes:

(…) in Ibuza, an innocent young girl was not always safe.
A man with no money to pay a bride price could hide behind the trees. He could jump out and cut a piece of hair from a girl’s head. If he did that, she belonged to him for life and no other man could have her (p.48).

As a ritual of African marriage, the society allows young men to visit young women who have attained puberty. The young men get a chance to become the suitor for these women. When Aku-nna becomes a woman, she is thronged in by many suitors including Chike, the slave and Okoboshi, the proud and rude man. Okoboshi insults Chike for being a descendant of a slave and also tries to exploit Aku-nna physically. There is a stiff competition among the African men when it comes to marriage. They compete for the youngest woman who can be very productive. The fight between Chike and Okoboshi is a clear evidence of the competition. The only difference is that Chike fights for his love of Aku-nna while Okoboshi more for his sexual satisfaction.

Another means of making a marriage happen when the woman does not agree is the adoption of kidnapping and marrying the woman forcefully. Such tactics are adopted by the African men to exploit the weak women. Emecheta shows how a woman is victimized and exploited in a traditional African society. And to worsen the scenario, instead of raising a voice against it, the African women easily submit to the exploitative men without a fight because of the notion that whatever a man does is always right in a patriarchal society. Emecheta exposes the submissive nature of such women through Aku-nna:

‘This is the end of all my dreams’, she thought. ‘They are kidnapping me’ (p.56).

The height of African men’s atrocity towards the women is too severe to be even considered. If she denies the marriage, she is very likely to be sexually exploited not only by the unwanted groom but also could be helped by the groom’s male friends:

(…) He could force her to sleep with him, and if she was unwilling his friends could hold her down. Perhaps that had happened to Aku-nna (p.60).

The novel reflects the emphasis on the virginity or purity of African woman at the time of marriage which is not only made for higher bride price but for the fact that every African woman should be a virgin till she gets married. An African woman going against this traditional law of the society is consequently forbidden and considered to have committed a heinous crime. Emecheta shows the inhuman and beastly act of Okoboshi towards Aku-nna when she announced that she was not a virgin. He even hit her thrice:

Okoboshi hit her across the face with all his strength. ‘You dirty animal!’ he shouted. ‘Do you think I want to touch you now? Slave-girl!’ He hit her again (…) Soon I shall marry the girl of my choice, and you will fetch and carry for her! Now get out of my bed!

He hit her once more. She fell onto the floor and lost consciousness (p.64).

A very important impact on the traditional African culture brought by colonization is the Christian marriage. The progressive acceptance of western culture and lifestyle can be seen in the novel. Aku-nna’s father in the beginning of the novel emphasized that he deserved to get more sons since he had married Aku-nna’s mother not only in the traditional way but also in the Church.

Even Aku-nna dreamt of getting married in the same two ways- ‘one for the beautiful goddess of Ibuza and one for the white man’s god in church’ (p.3).

Also, the christening of Aku-nna and Chike’s English bed by Chike’s friend Ben Adegor as “Joy” clearly indicates the acceptance of western culture which is more liberating to African men and women from their own inescapable culture and taboos.

What Emecheta tries to project is that people like Aku-nna and Chike, victims of sexism and casteism, find solace in the new culture brought by colonization. In spite of their self individuality and western education, both Aku-nna and Chike become victim of the male dominated African society.

The myth behind unpaid bride price is something which the African men and women cannot ignore. As stated earlier, the culture of bride price is very much prevalent and practiced in Africa. The title of the novel The Bride Price holds significance within the context of the story. The bride price is mandatory in African marriage without which the husband cannot claim the children born by his wife as his own. The protagonist of the novel is named as “Aku-nna” by her father which literally means “Father’s wealth”. Emecheta feels that various forms of male oppression which have been sanctioned by the patriarchal society need to be scrutinized and readressed. The birth of a female child is viewed as a means to fetch a good bride price.

Aku-nna’s stepfather Okonkwo also expected huge bride price out of Aku-nna’s marriage for his own good i.e., to use the money in his becoming of an Obi (the Chief). In fact, her education was allowed to continue as an educated girl was more desirable for marriage for they fetch higher bride price. Education acts as a liberating force in Emecheta’s novels. It is through education that allowed Chike to dream about their new lives where Aku-nna could teach in a school as a teacher while Chike in oil company so that they could earn independently. However, his plan got shattered when Aku-nna eloped with Chike Ofulue, a descendant of slave. Even though Chike offered the bride price, Okonkwo refused to accept it. A very shocking yet often true fact is that if a groom’s family fails to give the bride price to the bride’s family at
the time of marriage, the bride dies in childbirth. Consequently, due to malnutrition and young age, Akunna died in childbirth fulfilling the prophecy. As a socialist writer, Emecheta tries to bring home the message that breaking the law of the society is always tragic:

Afterwards every girl in Ibuza was told the sad story of Akunna and Chike. 'If you want to live a long time,' they were told, 'you must accept the husband that your people choose for you, and your bride price must be paid. If it is not paid, you will never survive the birth of your first child. (p.85).

Conclusion

A detailed image of African marriage and the culture of bride price are reflected in Buchi Emecheta’s novel The Bride Price. Emecheta adopts the art of writing to expose the strict customs of marriage and bride price where only the male members decide and settle everything from preparing a mourning hut of a widow to educating girl child for higher bride price hence making the benefit of male members. The novel portrays the linking social events i.e., “marriage” and “bride price” without which each of the social events remains incomplete in the African society. In the novel, the writer emphasizes the need to educate oneself and to overcome the orthodoxical customs and rituals that neither elevate the women’s status nor provide solution to all miseries faced by the traditional African women. In doing so, an urge of the writer is also apparent to preserve the age old custom since defying of such customs and cultures often leads to death no matter the reason is scientific or ritualistic. African woman has no identity of her own. Her life has to be constantly controlled and governed by the whims and caprices of her father or even her husband for that matter. She becomes totally non-existent, non entity; a complete annihilation of self and her self-identity. This is the most painful thing that can ever happen to a woman. As a woman writer, Emecheta feels a desperate need to champion the grievances of the woman of her society.

Conflict of Interests

The author(s) have not declared any conflict of interests.

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The exuberance of immigration: The immigrant woman in Bharati Mukherjee’s

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South Asian women and in this context Indian women have always suffered subjugation and rejection in a chauvinistic society restricting them to a life of domesticity. However, by migrating to a foreign country as spouses and participating in the labour market to get education and to live for their children, women migrants experienced social and emotional emancipation and financial independence for the first time. This paper aims to explore the concepts of assimilation and the melting pot theory through the experience of empowerment and liberation from conventional strictures that the Indian woman undergoes through the character of Jasmine in Mukherjee’s novel. The research further examines Mukherjee’s theory of the homeland that constantly exists in a dialogic and supplementary relationship with the new homeland, thereby opening up new ways of thinking about national-cultural formations.

By situating her protagonist in a new American culture with her allegiance to her new home thereby rejecting the hyphenated status of an Indian-American, Mukherjee through the character Jasmine rejects Bill Ashcroft’s theory that diaspora disrupts the theory of national unity.

Key words: Immigration, transition, journey, assimilation, melting-pot, conventional, society.

INTRODUCTION

“We immigrants have fascinating tales to relate...we have experienced rapid changes in the history of the nations in which we lived. When we uproot ourselves and come here either by choice or out of necessity, we must absorb 200 years of American history and learn to adapt to American society. Our lives are remarkably often heroic,” (1989) claims Mukherjee while narrating the tale of her transition and transformation from an expatriate Indian to that of an immigrant American in an interview with Alison B. Carb, 1989. The experience of migration writes critic, Vijayasree is often projected via the “topos” of the journey. Physical sojourn across sea or land becomes an extended metaphor for a woman’s struggle “to come to terms with herself” (Crane, 2000: 127).

Rejecting fixed identities which is at once an “other,” and yet entirely “knowable and visible,” (Roberson, 1998:137), Mukherjee in nearly all her narratives, disrupts the biological notions of identity by challenging the static notions of ‘Otherness’. The protagonist of the novel, Jasmine too, in a Mukherjee-ian vein embraces America as a nation space in the process of articulation in order to escape the comparative “fixity,” offered by her original homeland; the stereotypical, male-oriented hegemonic India that she must quit for the sake of
individualism, of emancipation and empowerment. Jasmine, like Mukherjee, masters the game of survival, of existence in a foreign territory, a fact testified by her unyielding will when she states later in the novel, “Adventure, risk, transformation, the frontier is pushing indoors through uncaulked windows. Watch me reposition the stars I whisper to the astrologer who floats cross-legged above my kitchen stove” (Mukherjee, 1989:240).

For ages in India, while men have been associated with mobility and the notion of progress, women have been fixated to home as a timeless space due to the cult of domesticity embedded deep within the Indian culture and tradition. In case of migration and diaspora as critic Ponzanesi notes, women as a preserver of “traditions, heritage, continuity,” (McLeod, 2000:245) are inevitably required to restore a traditional home in a new country. Mukherjee in her path breaking novel, Jasmine for the first time deconstructs this given notion of home, enabling free mobility and progress of women in a foreign soil. She is, as critic John K. Hoppe notes, “plainly disinterested in the preservation of cultures, the hallowing of traditions, obligations to the past...not interested in such nostalgic aspects of preservation” (1999).

In an interview with Shefali Desai, Mukherjee claims, “As [the characters] change citizenship, they are reborn,” and Mukherjee’s Jasmine in her third novel, Jasmine is no exception. From Jyoti the village girl of Hasnapur, to Jasmine the city woman, to Jazzy the undocumented immigrant who learns to talk and walk American, to Jase the sophisticated Manhattan nanny who falls in love with Taylor, to Jane the lowan woman who marries the banker Bud Ripplemeyer, the “J” as critic Ketu Katrak observes “represents the element of continuity within transformation” (Sarkar, 2002: 241). The “J” in Jasmine signifies the journey undertaken by a muted subaltern woman. As Elizabeth Bronfen writes, “Jasmine’s dislocated Other speaks out of a self-conscious and self-induced effacement in the voice of a resilient and incessantly self-refashioning hibridity” (Ponzanesi 2004:41). Opposing rebirth to comfort, the characters in almost all of Mukherjee’s literary works embrace violence that accompanies cross-cultural revision and personal change. As Jasmine says: “There are no harmless, compassionate ways to remake ourselves. We murder who we were so we can rebirth ourselves in the image of dreams” (Mukherjee, 1989: 25). It is the willingness of characters like Jasmine, Dimple and Tara to murder their past selves that enables them to actively advance into unknown but promising futures. The futures in which they propel themselves toward and even help to shape are not guaranteed to be successful, but do have the potential for personal, material and spiritual success.

Narrating a traumatic yet fulfilling journey from an expatriate in Canada to an immigrant in the U.S, in her 1997 essay “American Dreamer,” Mukherjee’s sojourn from a non-entity to an individualized, liberated being, a transition that she experienced for the first time in the University of Iowa classroom is reflected in Jasmine’s journey from a village woman dominated by caste, religion and patrimony to an emancipated, self-made individual who is in full control of her life and destiny. Rejecting “cultural memory” and “biological identity,” Mukherjee uses the word “jasmine,” in her novel to evoke the flowering of possibilities. In a famous article that appeared in The New York Times Book Review, “Immigrant Writing: Give us our Maximalists,” Mukherjee professes her new philosophy on migration. Fight against the “static ghetto of little India,” she says, “don’t play the victim, you are a part of America and America is made out of you” (Ponzanesi, 2000:35). Assimilating herself within the melting pot model of America that obliterates the “us vs. them,” (Mukherjee, 1997) mentality, rejecting hyphenation that heightens the sense of nostalgia and alienation in an individual thus categorizing the “cultural landscape “into a center and its peripheries,”(1997) Mukherjee calls for a “total adoption of citizenship,” of going “the full nine yards of transformation”(Gabriel 2004:86); in other words, the model of immigration. Drawn to the narrative of assimilation her “immigrant” is prepared to discard the nostalgia for the past, as Mukherjee’s ‘immigrant’ heroine, Jasmine asserts, “I changed because I wanted to. To bunker oneself inside nostalgia, to sheathe the heart in a bullet-proof vest, was to be a coward” (Mukherjee: 1997).

Unlike women of her generation trapped in the categories of mother, daughter and wife, upholding conventions and traditions, constrained by patriarchal strictures, Mukherjee’s Jasmine is portrayed as the New Woman questioning the accepted norms of society, passing through processes that symbolise transformations from weakness to strength and from restriction to freedom. A rebel from the very beginning, Jasmine rejects the ideal images of Hindu goddesses Sita and Savitri, the powerful cultural images of women in India. Instead she dons the image of goddess Kali of Hindu mythology, ready to avenge murder on those who exploit and taint her femininity. Mukherjee conjured the character of Jasmine in keeping with the lives of first generation divorced and widowed women, who in spite of “feelings of pain, anger, loneliness and alienation” struggled to rebuild and redefine their entire lives (Gupta, 1999:211)

Born in the feudal village of Punjab, eighteen years after the partition riots, Jasmine, the protagonist of Mukherjee’s novel, is presented as an unlucky child: female, intelligent and born too late down the line of daughters (fifth daughter and seventh of nine children of her parents) to use her beauty to her advantage. At the age of seven, Jyoti is the star pupil of her class and for Masterji, “the oldest and sourest teacher in [her] school” (Mukherjee, 1989:50). Through constant flashbacks to the past, Jasmine narrates to his readers, the academic progress of her early life, something that set her apart from the girls of her age who dedicated their lives to...
domestic chores and catering to the needs of the breadwinner, the patriarch of the family. Jasmine, as she recollects was a “whiz in Punjabi and Urdu, the first likely female candidate for English instruction [Masterji] ever had. He had a pile of English books, some from the British Council Library...The British books were thick with more words per page.” “I remember,” Jasmine remembers, “Jane Eyre which I was forced to abandon because [it] was too difficult” (53).

It is interesting to note that Jasmine’s rejection of Victorian novels like Jane Eyre and Great Expectations with a voice of an “ostensibly progressive cultural authority, addressing issues of gender and class formation,” is symbolic of Mukherjee’s promotion of multiculturalism, in the novel, Jasmine. In her search for an American selfhood, Jasmine in a similar vein as Mukherjee, discards the postcolonial expatriate identity in lieu of a life of an American immigrant, a life of a liberated self-made individual in the U.S. By favouring “immigrant” over “postcolonial,” as a leitmotif of her novels, Mukherjee, as critic Ketu Katrak observes, “goes beyond the conventional periodizations presupposed by the term “postcolonial,” which scholars like Ella Shohat have critiqued for its relatively binaristic, “fixed and stable mapping,” of power relations between colonizer/colonised and centre/periphery (Sarkar.De:236) Thus, to resist the workings of this binary, Mukherjee conceptualises the melting pot assimilation as something genetic rather than hyphenated, something that is constructed through constant reformation, transmogrification of both the migrant and the nation state.

Mukherjee, it seems has taken great care in creating Jyoti or Jasmine as a stereotypical village girl who scavenges firewood in the forest, who perceives her role model in Vimla who widowed at the age of twenty-two, douses herself with kerosene thus imposing upon herself the traditional ritual of sati (an ancient Indian ritual that required women to burn themselves alive in the funeral pyre of their husbands). Unlike in her previous two novels, wherein Mukherjee depicts the aristocratic and middle-class values and practices in the characters of Tara and Dimple respectively, in Jasmine, the author explores and acquaints her readers to the reality of a woman’s life belonging to the low class agrarian community in a village in Punjab (McLeod, 2000:212). Jasmine’s mother proves herself a “feminist hero,” preventing the thirteen year old Jyoti from being married off to a widower with three sons. Instead, she ensures the education of her daughter despite being tormented and tortured by her mother-in-law who as Jasmine recollects “made a fuss about my staying in school” (Mukherjee, 1989: 47) and secretly hoped that her daughter-in-law would be beaten by her husband for her violating the strictures of patriarchy.

Despite attempts of educating her, Jyoti like the girls in her village is married off at the age of fourteen to Prakash Vijh who insisted on a “no dowry, no guests Registry Office wedding.” With marriage to Prakash, the first phase of Jyoti’s journey begins, from feudal Hasnapur to urban Jullunder (Faymonville, 1997). A “modern man, a city man” Prakash trashed traditions right from the beginning. A progressive Prakash shared his vision of studying and opening an electronic business in the U.S., with his wife Jasmine when he says, “I want for us to go away and have a real life” (Mukherjee, 1989).

After marriage, even though the city of Jullender, with its modicum of Westernization brings home the amalgamation of the Indian and the Western, Jyoti, renamed Jasmine by her husband to “break off the past” (77) remains the traditional obedient and dutiful wife willing to dedicate her entire life to domestic chores and in service to her husband. At this point, it can be said that the rebellious sparks that we had seen now and then in Jasmine’s disposition is further aggravated when Prakash instils within her the values of modernity. Rejecting the conventional modes of wifey behaviour Prakash thwarts her traditional cultural desire to have children when he says, “We aren’t going to spawn! We aren’t ignorant peasants...you are still very young and foolish...you are confusing social and religious duty with instinct” (Mukherjee, 1989: 78). Instead he teaches her to read VCR manuals, repair all kinds of electric goods and with him dream of a liberated and individuated life in U.S.

Set in the backdrop of a war torn Punjab, at the heart of Mukherjee’s novel, Jasmine lies the Khalistani Movement of the 1970s that took its toll over Canadians of South Asian ancestry in the terrorist attack in 1985 on the Air India plane which killed all 300 of its passengers. In Jasmine, Mukherjee depicts the Sikh war for Khalistan in Punjab, wherein a bomb kills Prakash because he happens to be with Jasmine, his Hindu wife. Violence, a leitmotif of Mukherjee’s novels, be it in the form of political strife, the Naxalite Movement of the 1970s in Calcutta as portrayed in The Tiger’s Daughter, or Dimple’s schizophrenia which culminates in the murder of her husband at the end of the novel, Wife; while it manifests the inner turmoil of Mukherjee’s protagonists, in Jasmine, it prepares the protagonist for risk taking in order to progress in America, “the risk necessary to make a leap into a truly new future, a leap [which] Mukherjee figures as specifically and quintessentially American” (Hoppe, 1999).

Widowed at the age of seventeen as foretold by the village astrologer, a confused Jasmine reverts to the conventional Hindu value system of wifey dutifulness and subservience when she decides to go to America to commit Sati, burning herself along with her husband’s suit at the site of the university where Prakash was to study. Although Jasmine’s sojourn to the U.S is induced by socio-religious duties that require her to terminate her life with her husband’s death, deep down in her subconscious, the ambition and the dreams of a new life in America that Prakash had seeded in her begins to bloom. Soon after her husband’s death, Jyoti is haunted
and reminded of Prakash's words, "Think Vijh and wife! Prakash exhorted me from every corner of our grief-darkened room. There is no dying. There is only an ascending or descending, a moving on to other planes. Don't crawl back to Hasnapur and feudalism" (96). Even though Prakash works as a catalyst, initiating her journey into selfhood and self discovery, the fact that, the war "between [her] fate and [her] will,"(of which she remains unaware in the beginning ) begins once she undertakes the journey of travelling to the west, to the U.S, a land of opportunities.

Arriving at the Amsterdam airport with forged immigration papers, Jasmine begins to acknowledge her uprooted identity and her minority status in the big airport lounges when she reflects, "we are the outcasts and deportees, strange pilgrims visiting outlawland shrines...we are roughly handled and taken to waiting rooms where...custom guards await their bribe. We are dressed in shreds of national costumes, out of season... We ask only one thing: to be allowed to pass through; to continue" (Mukherjee, 1997). Intimidated by her foreign surroundings, Jasmine's predicament is reminiscent of Mukherjee's own situation, who, soon after she arrives the city of Iowa on a "summer evening of 1961," to pursue a study in Creative Writing, is "cut off forever from the rules and ways of upper-middle-class life in Bengal, and hurled into a New World life of scary improvisations and heedless explorations" (Mukherjee, 1997). For Jasmine, nothing is rootless; her life is in constant motion as we see her moving from the swamps of South Florida to an Indian enclave in Queens, from Columbia University in upper Manhattan to an Iowa farming town. Like the eponymous narrator of the novel, Jasmine, Mukherjee too has changed citizenship and culture with disorienting rapidity transforming from an expatriate in Canada to a committed immigrant in the U.S

Immigration, as opposed to expatriation as Mukherjee explains is a process of gain, contrary to conventional perspectives that construe immigration and displacement as a condition of terminal loss and dispossession. However assimilation or cultural fusion as Mukherjee puts it deconstructs the centre/periphery binary that occurs not without the "preponderance of violence" (Crane, 129) for assimilation is a cultural looting, a cultural exchange, a costly negotiation that the immigrant has to pay for the sake of self-transformation. Mukherjee's Jasmine, an alien in an uncharted territory confronts violence in the form of 'rape,' soon after she arrives in the U.S. The captain of the ship, known as Half Face who had "lost an eye and ear and most of his cheek in a paddy field in Vietnam" (Mukherjee: 104) remorselessly rapes Jasmine despite her requests and pleas. Donning the garb of a vengeful Goddess Kali, Jasmine who had been cast in the mould of the "Sita Savitri stereotype," (Fludernik: 263) to devote herself to her husband through loyalty and self-sacrifice," is out to defy and destroy the devil who violates her chastity. With blood oozing from her sliced tongue, the rebellious Jasmine asserts her individuality and freedom by murdering Half Face as she narrates the incident, "The room looked like a slaughter house. Blood congealed on my hands, my chin, my breasts... I was in a room with a slain man, my body blooded. I was walking death, Death incarnate" (119). In killing Half Face, observes critic Deepika Bahri, [Jasmine] experiences an epistemically violence that is also a life affirming transformation (Roberson:140). Paradoxically, this act of revenge frees her from the desire of death: "My body was merely a shell soon to be discarded. Then I could be reborn, debts and sins all paid for" (119). The process of Jasmine's reboirth or rehousement in the West begins.

Despite the initial horror, the land is not without saints. After her encounter with violence and evil within the American society, a starving and shattered Jasmine is rescued by the saintly Lilian Gordon, a Quaker lady who acts as a saviour of the undocumented. Discarding the self that belonged to the village of Hasnapur, Jasmine learns to talk, walk and dress like an American, thanks to her mentor, Mrs. Gordon who identifies her as a "special case " (Mukherjee, 1989:134) way apart from the expatriates who sentimentally attached to the distant land, their home, unable to 'rehouse,' themselves in a new country. With a new name and her first American identity, Jasmine moves away from the past against all odds, for the sake of self-empowerment, for a stable identity, "I checked myself in the mirror, shocked at the transformation; jazzy in a T-shirt, tight cords and running shoes. I couldn't tell if with the Hasnapuri side I'd also be abandoned by Hasnapuri modesty"(133). At this point, Lilian's advice to Jasmine, "...do not let the past deform you..."(131) is in line with Mukherjee's belief that "there is no sense in holding on to the past that does not qualify one's reality with meaning" (Kumar, 2001:140). Like the protagonist of her novel, who instead of migrating back to her country decides to move further on in life and make her fortune in America, Mukherjee as critic Sandhya Shukla puts it, decided that India is a place she could not live in, for in India to be a woman "was to be a powerless victim whose only escape was through self-inflicted wounds" (Shukla 2003:163).

The second phase of Jasmine's transformation begins in the Hayes household. As a caregiver to the adopted daughter of University professors, Taylor and Wylie, Jasmine felt liberated from her past and the role of a widow. With a new name Jase, Jasmine becomes Americanized, confident of her proficiency in English. America, a synonym for modernisation, overwhelms Jasmine as she finds herself a part of the Hayes family instead of being treated as a subordinate as done in Indian societies to domestic employees and caregivers, a fact testified by Taylor's treatment of Jasmine as an equal when she comes to their house for the first time for the job of a caregiver, "I fell in love with what he represented..." (Mukherjee, 1989:122) Donning the robe of a Quaker lady who leaves behind her foreign surroundings, Jasmine's predicament is reminiscent of Mukherjee's own situation, who, soon after she arrives the city of Iowa on a "summer evening of 1961," to pursue a study in Creative Writing, is "cut off forever from the rules and ways of upper-middle-class life in Bengal, and hurled into a New World life of scary improvisations and heedless explorations" (Mukherjee, 1997). For Jasmine, nothing is rootless; her life is in constant motion as we see her moving from the swamps of South Florida to an Indian enclave in Queens, from Columbia University in upper Manhattan to an Iowa farming town. Like the eponymous narrator of the novel, Jasmine, Mukherjee too has changed citizenship and culture with disorienting rapidity transforming from an expatriate in Canada to a committed immigrant in the U.S
his joking” (Mukherjee: 167). She appreciates the Americans for their liberal views and their sense of respect for even those doing menial jobs when she compares her present situation with that of the Mazbi woman who worked in her house in Hasnapur, “In Hasnapur the Mazbi woman who’d stoke our hearth or spread our flaking, dried out adobe walls with watered cow dung had been a maid servant. Wylie made me feel like her younger sister. I was family, I was professional.” (Mukherjee: 175).

On the other hand, Jasmine comes to realise the fluidity and transience of human relationships in America when Wylie decides to leave her husband Taylor for the economist Stuart Eschelman in search of “real happiness” (Mukherjee: 180). She later contemplates, “In America nothing lasts... We arrive so eager to learn, to adjust, to participate, only to find monuments are plastic, agreements are annulled.” Nothing is forever; nothing is so terrible or wonderful that it won’t disintegrate (Mukherjee: 181). The fleeting nature of relationships portrayed in the novel Jasmine is symbolic of the lives of Third World migrants and of Jasmine in particular, fleeing poverty and socio-economic oppressions, moving in America from coast to coast from small towns to big cities in search of an identity, an individuality that seems to elude them (Fludernik, 2003:325). In Mukherjee’s imagination, America is a place in flux, a metaphor that represents freedom from Indian values and practices. Like Wylie who barters her husband and child for true happiness, Jasmine too needs to give up a certain kind of home, home-as-comfort, home-as-talisman for regenerating herself into an American immigrant (Drake, 1999).

With Jasmine being absorbed within the Hayes family as Duff’s “day mummy” (174) and Taylor’s love interest, the process of re-housement finally begins.

While Jasmine tries to re-root herself within the American melting pot, absorbing the American culture and lifestyle, her harrowing past begins to haunt her in the form of the assassin who had murdered her husband in Jullundur whom she spots in the Central Park in Manhattan. However, her escape from Manhattan to Iowa from her past as critic Nagendra Kumar puts it is not an act of cowardice but life affirming. “She is running away for life not escaping from life which is a positive step” (Kumar 2001:114). Jasmine’s life in Iowa begins with her chance meeting with Mother Ripplemayer, the Iowan counterpart of Lilian Gordon who helps her to get a job in Bud’s rural bank as a teller girl and within a span of six months Jasmine succeeds to become the live-in companion of Bud, a man twice her age. In this novel, a new name and a new image operate as clearly demarcated milestones in the process of one’s identity formation. With each new name, from Jyoti to Jasmine to Jase and now Jane as Bud prefers calling her, the protagonist of Mukherjee’s novel is reborn several times, transforming herself in every phase of life.

In reconfiguring the American political and cultural fabric as the site of ongoing contestation and definition, Mukherjee implies that while America transforms all those who make their home in it, America itself is being transformed (Sharmani, 2005). In an interview with Alison Carb Mukherjee reveals, “I’m saying we haven’t come to accommodate or to mimic; we have changed ourselves, but we have also come to change you”(1988). In other words, just as America’s melting pot transforms non-traditional immigrant communities, Mukherjee maintains that mainstream culture and values, too, are shaped and moulded, “unavoidably and ongoingly”, by the presence of these new immigrants (Tandon 2004: 152). Mukherjee’s theory of cultural assimilation and fusion is well depicted in the symbiotic relationship shared by Bud and Jane. To Bud who is twice her age, Jasmine is warm and supportive. Even when Bud becomes a cripple, she patiently serves him while bearing his child in her womb. While absorbing the ways of American living, Jasmine brings home the flavour of India in the food she cooks for Bud and their adopted son Du, a victim of the Vietnamese war, “I took the gobi aloo to the Lutheran Relief Fund last week. I am subverting the taste buds of Elsa County. I took out some of last night’s matar panir in the microwave. It goes well with pork, believe me” (Mukherjee: 19). For Mukherjee who has often been criticized by critics for her “unapologetic embrace of American citizenship, in spite of professing allegiance to an ‘American,’ identity has however never promoted the dominant definition of national identity. For Mukherjee, the Indian homeland always exists in a dialogic and supplementary relationship with the new homeland of America, opening up new ways of thinking about national-cultural formations (Gabriel, 2004:92).

In Mukherjee’s novel, Jasmine too adopts a similar process wherein the newly arrived illegal immigrant from India draws upon the Indian concepts of Satī and reincarnation, linking them with the co-ordinates of self-will and resilience, thus recasting herself as Kali, to avenge her husband after being raped in a cheap motel in Florida or adopting the categories of wife, mother and daughter self-sacrificing and loyal yet assertive and individuated bringing home the virtues of Indian culture while discarding traditional social values and strictures that have chained Indian women to a life of domesticity and child bearing (Hussain, 2005:53).

While the minor cultures in America is represented as the other, objectified with violence, exploitation and commodification, as exotic and interesting, the central character of Mukherjee’s novel, Jasmine as an immigrant from the Third World considered as “special,” by Lilian Gordon and later “exotic,” by Bud, guarantees her upward mobility by making strategic use of her difference as an Asian in order to acquire maximum visibility and privileges. Mukherjee and consequently Jasmine, as critic Sandra Ponzanesi observes practices Left-liberal Multiculturalism, a theory that resists the idea of erasing cultural differences. Instead it enables one to establish
individual identities within the host country. Although Jasmine is haunted by the past which confronts her in the form of the Sikh terrorist, Sukhwinder in Central Park or in the shape of traditional Indian values embedded deep within herself, both Mukherjee and Jasmine "makes of [their] mother country an India of the mind" (Shukla, 2003:235). They barter their Indian 'fate, immobility and oppression," with the American "destiny, change and empowerment,” in order to establish themselves as individual emancipated beings in the west. Mukherjee who has always rejected the centre/periphery binary as earlier discussed in this chapter, subverts Bud's American dominance when his innate racism, that had led him to acquire an Asian wife and to adopt a Vietnamese refugee as a son, to be deserted by them both. The undermining of his American dominance and values are symbolised by his becoming crippled and having to live in a wheelchair for the rest of his life.

In the essay “American Dreamer,” Mukherjee writes, “I choose to describe myself on my own terms, as an American, rather than as an Asian-American. Rejecting hyphenation is my refusal to categorize the cultural landscape into a centre and its peripheries; it is to demand that the American nation delivers the promises of its dream and its Constitution to all its citizens equally” (Mukherjee, 1997). In the novel, Jasmine, it is Du, the Vietnamean refugee who embraces a hyphenated identity while Jasmine discards her past completely for the sake of her future. Towards the end of the novel while the hybrid Du departs for the frontier in search of his family, his community, Jasmine heads for the future with her lover Taylor to California pursuing adventure, risk and transformation leaving behind her crippled husband Bud. Critic Andrienne Rich observes that in deserting Bud and choosing Taylor, Jasmine does not exchange between men but transforms her world. Like Wylie, like a true American, Jasmine goes out in search for true happiness, for individualism and selfhood as she confides, "I am not choosing between men. I am caught between the promise of America and old-world dutifulness" (Mukherjee: 240).

Conclusion

Thus, Mukherjee in Jasmine has carved out the assimilation of Third World immigrants into the American melting pot which is itself enriched by those she describes as “new pioneers.” Jasmine, as critic Deepika Bahri, 1998, perceives is one of those pioneers, a survivor with courage, wryness and a hopeful streak, at odds with her fatalism (Roberson:140). Jasmine’s attempt to reshape her destiny and to establish it as the foundation of her development of her potential is realised by the force of her indomitable will which surfaces in adverse moments and helps her reconstruct her mission with determination and zeal. In each of her metamorphoses, Jasmine thus rewrites new ways of being and knowing: she engages in “new recognitions of roles, identities and enactments of migrant behaviour,” which she can choose to replay or discard. Throughout the novel, Jasmine chooses to discard old selves in order to make choices that enable agency thus enabling her to “phantom [her] way through... continents” (101).

In all her novels, Mukherjee’s migrants seem to struggle indeterminately with questions crucial to diaspora and exile, be it preserving or rejecting identities, to create a new self by discarding the old, for, as Mukherjee perceives, “in this age of diasporas, one’s biological identity may not be one’s only identity. Erosions and accretions come with the act of emigration” (Mukherjee, 1997).

Conflict of Interests

The author have not declared any conflict of interests

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