



A Reading of the Female Psyche and Identity Spaces in Yashica Dutt's *Coming Out as a Dalit* and Ntozake Shange and Ifa Bayeza's *Some Sing, Some Cry*

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Abstract

*African American Literature has come into being from the writers of American descent living in the United States of America. On the other hand, Dalit literature has emerged from the caste differences in the Indian society. These two types of women across nations try to defy the generic conventions that have arisen from executed sets of characteristics that insist on regimenting women's body politics in specific. This paper focuses on the power struggle of two different nations and explores the connection that is bound together due to racial segregation of spaces due to caste and cultural differences. Dalit women are imperilled to manifold subjugations grounded based on caste, gender, and class. This paper will compare two different literatures through the novels of Ntozake Shange and Ifa Bayeza's *Some Sing, Some Cry* and Yashica Dutt's *Coming Out as a Dalit*. The focus of these two writers is to portray the man-made calamities and adversities that both these African American women and Dalit women faces to survive in their respective societies to succeed in their life by enchanting themselves with the various tassels of life. Women from both of these novels have learned to accept life wholeheartedly even in the midst of desperation and horror. This paper will try to focus on how women engender their chronicles of pain and belongingness in order to weave tales of women's authorization for the need of realization for their progenies.*

Keywords: gender, caste, women, psyche

This paper will compare two different writings from two different nations from the works of Yashica Dutt, Ntozake Shange, and Ifa Bayeza. These two writers through their novels *Coming Out As A Dalit* and *Some Sing, Some Cry* portray the man-made calamities and adversities that both these two types of women across nations face in order to make an existence of their own in their respective societies to succeed in their life by enchanting themselves with the various tassels of life. These women across nations have curved themselves in such a way that they can survive and exist in all uneven circumstances and harsh realities of life. This paper will try to focus

on how women engender their chronicles of pain and belongingness in order to weave tales of women's authorization for the need of realization for their progenies.

Dalit literature is considered to be an important genre of Indian literature from the time of independence or at the latter half of the twentieth century. Dalit literature has emerged from the caste differences in the Indian society. This literature mainly concentrates on the caste-based oppression and subjugation faced by the people of the Dalit communities specially in places like Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan, Gujrat and Orissa to be specific.



The enlightening of the Dalit community aroused after independence with the awareness created by our freedom fighters like Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Mahatma Gandhi, and Mulk Raj Anand which are worth mentioning. Coming to the women writers of this particular literature Dalit women literature have expressed and emerged from the caste differences and their experiences of bitter casteism on the basis of methodical acumen due to the class division in the community and these acrimonious experiences of life in the Indian society which have been shared to the reader community in the form of memoirs and autobiographies. Women writers to be worth mentioning are Meena Kandaswamy, Urmila Pawar, Namdeo Dhasal, Babytai Kamble and Yashica Dutt. The chronicles expressed by these writers concentrates mainly on the relationships that are bonded by the social construct of caste, community, class division, sex, and gender. These women writers portray the brawls and scuffles of their individual lives which has been a resultant of discrimination under the aegis of caste and gender to the foremost. The social and cultural identities that have been created by the patriarch of the Indian societies have jeopardised and weakened the women community in specific in the Indian society. But Indian women have been capable of shattering the walls of gender prejudices in order to create a new identity for themselves. The cultural and social revolt that started in the 1970's brought in a change in the patriarchal society of Dalit community but the matriarchal society of the Dalit community failed to receive any type of independence and freedom. Therefore, the Dalit females are still now victimised by the caste identities on one side and on the other side by the gendered identities and pigeon-holes of the society. These barriers of the society have forced women to create a subjugated alternative space for themselves. But with the change of time in the contemporary period these women have negotiated their own space of identity through the process of narratives and tales.

Yashica Dutt is one such writer who has been born out of the tragic tales of Dalit experiences in the pink city of Rajasthan. Most of her growing period was spent in Delhi trying to flee from her Dalit identity and pretend to be a girl from the upper caste

following the footsteps of her mother. But with the tragic incident of Rohit Vemula Yashica Dutt was shaken in order to expose her identity as a Dalit without any shame. She beautifully defines about the protest done in Hyderabad University thus:

Banned from entering the hostel and with nowhere else to go, the suspended students (Rohith and four others) decided to create 'Velivadas' (a Telugu word that refers to Dalit ghettos) on campus to drive home the casteist discrimination they were facing. With grimy rolled up mattresses, plastic tarps and white sheets with 'Velivada' scrawled across them, they squatted in the middle of the campus forcing people to pay attention to their pain. It was an elegant, modern and charged form of protest similar to that of Emma Sulkowicz's – the Columbia University student who carried the mattress on which she had been raped on her back throughout campus in 2014 (130).

After the suicide of Rohit Vemula, Dutt started to realize the necessity to express her identity and to write for the welfare of the society. Thus, Yashica Dutt after this realization acknowledges herself as a Dalit by caste in the year 2016 and continues her journey by starting to collect stories from other Dalits on caste acumen under the title *Document of Dalit Discrimination*. This paper will focus on her work *Coming Out as A Dalit* which shares her draining psychological burden of pretension in her childhood period and the consequent life experiences of being a Dalit. Her mother Shashi was highly ambitious and in spite of their poverty and her husband being an alcoholic she was strong enough to give a high-class education to her three children in spite of the various hurdles of her life. Shashi, Dutt's mother worked every moment of her life to prove herself and her family as an upper caste and this created a guilt in the mind of Yashica Dutt. She is described by Dutt as: "I understood that Mum's stubborn emphasis on looking stylish was so that we would look upper caste" (98). She carried this guilt of pretending as an upper caste and compared herself to the people of African-American origin. She felt a pain in her heart when she herself experienced that all the people indifferent of their colour and creed participated in the communal crusades of racial, ethnic, and cultural acumen but with the suicide of Rohit Vemula or in



the class struggle of the Dalits it becomes their own individual class struggle for search of identity and indiscrimination. Yashica Dutt in the newspaper *Guardian* very beautifully writes:

On the contrary there isn't even the same kind of open discourse here of the kind you have in the US about racism, white supremacy, which is all mainstream. Instead of acknowledging discrimination, upper caste Indians, instead of taking responsibility, have deluded themselves into thinking they are already living in a 'post-caste' society.

This Yashica Dutt very beautifully describes as the blamelessness of the Indians unable to understand the problems of the Dalits on one hand and on the other the blamelessness of the Americans to understand the racial difficulties of the African-Americans. She also very conceitedly describes that she was amazed unlike in India where there is always a continuous effort to hide their caste but in Columbia, she experienced that black, hispanic and gay classmates acquiescently speak about their experiences of racism, casteism, and gender differences bringing in an emotion of empathy and friendship from their classmates. During her stay in Columbia, she very well describes about her racially and culturally discriminated contemporaries and their dark individual narratives, personal stories, and exploitation that they had faced on a regular basis. But in spite of their bitter realistic experiences, they had the courage to share and express about their bitter involvements of life which made a lasting dumbstruck impression in the minds of the contemporaries. These stories of the blacks, Latins, and others were heard and accepted with a pain in their hearts and how they had the courage and audacity to express made Dutt realize about her own self and to express about her caste differences without hesitation.

Dalit women are imperilled to manifold subjugations grounded on caste, gender, and class. African American Literature has come into being from the writers of American descent living in the United States of America. Black female novelists, playwrights, and journalists worth mentioning are Phillis Wheatley, Zora Neale Hurston, Rosa Guy, Audre Lorde, Ntozake Shange, Ifa Bayeza, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and many more

focuses on the issues arising out of racism, sexism, apartheidism by arousing emotive experiences amongst the writers of feminist criticism and also black liberation movements. These black women writers focus on their varied experiences of apartheidism and racial discrimination experienced by the Black woman in the hands of white man. African American women literature projects the authoritative and dominating structure of the American culture oppressing the black people by creating bitter stories of slavery and their exclusive life experiences of women harassment, rape, and forced sexual relationships which have given rise to various social and cultural movements through the forms of various writings. Ntozake Shange born as Paulette Lindia Williams and Ifa Bayeza born as Wanda Williams are both biological sisters belonging to an upper middle-class family who encountered racial segregations and racist attacks during their childhood similar to Yashica Dutt strongly influenced their work on literary narratives. *Some Sing and Some Cry* is a work created by the two sisters challenges the tradition of racism and sexism through the power of narrating and bringing in subtle nuances of African-American history and an interconnection with seven legacies of African-American women who are able to survive in spite of their tragic experiences of even mothering a child through the power of culture and music. This literary work portrays the bitter experiences of Betty Mayfield first as a daughter, then as a wife and later in her life as a mother and a grandmother. She becomes an existing testimony and representative of African-American women's experiences of possession, maltreatment, and even sometimes loved due to the existing sexual relationships in the hands of white patriarchy. Eudora Mayfield is an audacious woman who wants to hide her Mayfield identity and strives hard to prove herself as a seamstress in Charleston. Like any other African American woman and also her own Aunt Blanche she forcefully wants to forget her bitter and ruthless past to make an identity for herself. From her childhood itself Dora has seen dark and bitter experiences of ownership and abusive behaviour for her grandmother Mah Bette by her so-called "Pa-lover" whom she holds on until she moves to Charleston and even later in her life.



Even though Mah Bettte is abused and harassed by her white father, lover and owner she still lingers a longing for him because of the identity of being a part of the Mayfield family that he has provided her and her three daughters. *Some Sing, Some Cry* portrays a powerful musical saga to literature portraying four generations of African-American women and their experiences at Sweet Tamarind an estate on an island in South Carolina. It portrays how each and every woman in Mayfield struggles to survive in order to create a world of identity, happiness, and possibilities for themselves. For these black women the racial discrimination and slavery that they face in the hands of the white master and so-called father makes them stronger and firmer at every point of their life. Ntozake Shange and Ifa Bayeza beautifully describes the legacies of African-American women whose motives of achievement is to disdain, malice, and beleaguer the white patriarchal society. Through the reading of Jacques Derrida Sharon Holland very beautifully portrays the dark experiences of sexism as:

Both physical and psychic, touch is an act that can embody multiple, conflicting agendas. It can be both a troubled and troublesome component in the relationship between intimates, as in the case of Derrida; or, alternatively, the touch can alter the very idea as well as the actuality of relationships, morphing friends into enemies and strangers into intimates. For touch can encompass empathy as well as violation, passivity as well as active aggression. It can be safely dangerous, or dangerously safe. It also carries a message about the immediate present, the possible future, and the problematic past. Finally, touch crosses boundaries, in fact and imagination (100).

Some Sing, Some Cry very beautifully shares the liberated feeling of Betty Mayfield as she gathers the courage to go away from the plantation island named Sweet Tamarind located in South Carolina. Shange and Bayeza describes Sweet Tamarind as:

“Why, on Swet Tamarind everybody understood everybody else. The melange of Yoruba, Wolof, Portuguese, French, Spanish, and a hint of English left the words of men, free or slave, soothing the air from mouth to mouth, left history in place, content with the comings and goings of her children” (2).

The novel very generously describes the lives of African-American slave women of many generations how they struggle in order to survive. They go through different power and gender struggles and try to overpower these gender games in order to have a new beginning in life. The novel moves around the time span of 200 years portraying histories of seven generations of women who have been emancipated and is able to create an identity of their own in spite of their hardships and dark histories. On one hand when we see Mah Bette liberated from her dark truths though eagerly accepts her heritage and on the other hand, we experience how Eudora does not have any sense of belongingness or longings for the relationships and colour cyphers that she belongs to. Therefore, in order to make Eudora happy Betty with Eudora move out of their Sweet Tamarind cocoon to Charleston where she is gang raped by some white people and she carries on the albatross by giving birth to a white baby Elma whom she biologically accepts giving a new way to her life. At this point of time, it happens as if when she is fully down with her life her grandmother Betty is always there to support her and she in this context explains Eudora that their new life was a life free of malevolence, nastiness and that they can have peace in life. But again, to Eudora’s ill-fate she gives birth to Lizzie with her unloved so-called husband who is again raped as her mother again giving birth to a daughter. But these mothers and daughters have never been defeated by prejudice, racism, and loneliness while they continuously attempt to survive for a liberated life. Unlike Elizabeth or Eudora Lizzie has the courage to break out of the cocoon that Elizabeth always protects and abandons her daughter Cinnamon to become a floor stopper during the time of Harlem Renaissance. Cinnamon through the profession transfers the legacies of their untold narrative in a musical note. But to her ill fate we see that in the later part of the novel Cinnamon loses her voice in an ailment named laryngeal dystonia which is proved to be caused by mental and physical anxiety and traumas experienced from earlier life. Cinnamon also gives birth to a daughter Tokyo Mayfield Walker who was ‘nominated for the best R&B album of the year and she was sober (547). She also later receives the prestigious Grammy award for her outstanding performance and this is how the novel



ends by Shange and Bayeza explaining slavery and its consequent emancipation thus: "Slavery leaves telling marks lasting generations, still every word out of our mouths is a song". (552). The novel closes in a very emancipated note that Shange and Bayeza describes about emancipated slavery as that the legacies of generations have experienced and now that they are liberated and boundless thus: "Her Grammys, her fans, memories. No man, No children. She had never imagined that. Here she was fifty, schlepping up a mountain in half a buckboard. She removed her tour logo baseball cap and held her face to the white noonday sun. The music has fed me. No cause to feel sorry for myself" (557). Through her the reader becomes aware of the differences of race, colour, culture, love, and the ties of familial relationships that black women face and falls a prey in the hands of white patriarchy.

The above-mentioned texts are considered to be an exclusive text in itself which is written in the structure of autobiographies representing an assortment of stories from their own experiences which fight for the pursuance of women's identity and their individual rights against the White men in one text and in the another against the prevailing patriarchal, social, and cultural customs. If we also consider the case of movies worldwide, we can perceive that in Hollywood movies black women are generally portrayed as domestic workers, servants to white children, nannies and other oppressed roles. The same is the case in Hollywood movies also. In the films like *Masaan*, *India Untouched*, *Bandit Queen* and many more the Dalits are portrayed as sweepers, immobilized, and oppressed who are forced to accept any kind of humiliation.

Both the autobiographical texts portray the suppression, oppression, denigration, and abnegation met upon women and their physiques in the name of colour, caste, and racial differences by the so-called male-dominated society. This has been beautifully stated by Dutt as:

Historically, mainstream white feminism has disappointed black women and other women of colour pretty much the way that upper-caste feminism has often, unwittingly, let down Dalit women in India. Just like upper-caste feminists, white feminists too assumed that their experiences represented the lives of all women. With better access to education, black women activists in particular have been able to push back against this assumption...since then, black women activists, like Dalit women activists, have been building spaces to address their own issues (154).

Women in general worldwide till the twentieth century were placed in a cocoon where they were fostered by their grandmothers, protected by their mothers and tamed and trained by their mothers-in-law exercising to the necessities and demands of the specific community and nation. These two types of women across nations try to defy the generic conventions that have arisen from executed sets of characteristics that insist on regimenting women's body politics in specific. This paper thus focuses on the power struggle of two different nations and explores the connection that is bound together due to racial segregation of spaces due to caste and cultural differences.

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