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## LIBERATION AND SELF-FULFILLMENT WITHIN ZORA NEALE HURSTON'S "THEIR EYES WERE WATCHING GOD"

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### ABSTRACT

The Paper explains the impact of the colonial forces with their different shapes on the writings of many writers whom they belong to cultures suffered from the exploitation of colonialism. Hurston's novel *Their Eyes were watching God* which concerns the south African-American black women is an attempt to reflect the struggle of the black women to get liberation physically and psychologically .

**Key words:** Emancipation, oppression, racism, injustice, native cultures, liberation, identity, psychological health, self fulfilment and autonomy

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Postcolonial literature can be used to refer to the most modern literature as many areas including Europe and Asia were under the control of the Roman or Ottoman empires. Although most of the countries had a period which can be called colonial and post colonial but critically the contemporary term for postcolonial period is used to refer to countries which were under the former European empires .The term postcolonial is a methodology and approach as it include writings through the colonial and anti-colonial period that preceded the political independence.

The word colony originally derived from Latin and then to be used in the fourteenth century to refer to the Roman settlement in the newly conquered country. The term colony has been used later to the British colonies or to the time when the United States had been thirteen British colonies. The colonizers whom they were known as the European settlers carried with them violence to destroy the native populations.

Recently colonialism refers to the exploitation of native or weak people by colonial rulers and it doesn't refer only to the political destruction but also to the destruction or alteration of the native cultures and knowledge by European powers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Eventually the postcolonial literature within all the circumstances of exploitation of colonialism is engaged with writings that discourse the history of colonialism ,oppression ,racism and injustice.

The term postcolonial has been extended to include not only the colonized cultures in Asia, Africa and south America but also the African-American ,the Caribbean ,the ethnic studies ,and the minority studies and to explore the writings of people who were under the control of white Euro-American culturally and politically. Following the new perspective of the postcolonial literature we conclude that the American postcolonial literature had taken up many shapes and the Harlem Renaissances was one of these shapes .

At that time the united states witnessed great migration which draw its shape into two types ;there was the migration of African –Americans who migrated from south to the north to settle in America's urban centres and the migration from so many nationalities who migrated to the united states to settle and establish what is called American multiculturalism. According to Eric Rauchway this multiculturalism had its positive impact as he mentioned "we have needed the new people –the order of German, the turbulence of the Stav and Hun- to save us from our own stagnation. (Rauchway, 2006:67)

The great migration of African –American and their exclaim for their civil rights raised a real problem for white Americans which was known as the Negro problem. The black image of the Negro as a rapist and social terrorist ,the suffering and ill-treatment of the African –American led them to struggle for citizenship and social justice and their efforts were translated to shape what is known as Harlem Renaissance which was the beginning of the black culture with its literature

The Harlem Renaissance was not a school of literature but a reflection started by a group of people shared the black experience and had the dialectical development of social and political thought .It was a reaction to the Age of Washington which rejected the social and political equality with whites and depended on self –help and race pride.

The African –American who suffered the slavery in the nineteenth century and lived in the south sought with their great migration to the middle and north for better life and trying to get rid of racism in the south. The African American adopted new culture, social and artistic expressions within what Alaine Locke called New Negro Movement. The movement took place In Harlem ,New York from nearly 1918 to 1930 and to be also an extension to the slavery era.

Many writers accompanied the Harlem Renaissance and they reflected in their Works the musical and aesthetic aspects of this culture as well as the social and psychological aspects. For instance

,there was Claude Mckay (1889-1948) who was one of the earliest and most central figures of the Harlem Renaissance and he got great reputation with his book *Harlem Shadow* (1922) and his first novel *Home to Harlem* (1928).

African American writers of the Harlem Renaissance such as Arna Bontemps, Jesse Fausset ,Langston Hughes ,and Zora Neale Hurston reflected the experiences of African Americans with the forms and technique of modernism and their works had a continuing influence on American literature. With the novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) by significant female novelist Zora Neale Huston (1891-1960) ,the experiences of African Americans were addressed perfectly.

Zora Neale Hurston (1891-1960) was born in Notasulga ,Alabama and to move with her family at the age of three to Eatonville ,Florida which was one of the first incorporated black towns in the United States and a place where African –Americans lived independently . Hurston described her childhood in Eatonville in her essay *How It Feels to Be colored Me*.

After the death of Huston's mother in 1904,her father and her stepmother ,Matte Moge, sent her away to care for her brother's children and they stopped paying her tuitions. Hurston realized that it was the moment to depend on herself and she started working as a maid in a travelling Gilbert and Sullivan theatrical company and then she attended the high school of Morgan State university. She attended Howard University and to graduate with only two-years Associates degree regarding to the time she spent at Howard writing. With a scholarship offered by Annie Nathan Meyer to Barnard College, Hurston received her B.A in anthropology.

Before becoming one of the writers of The Harlem Renaissance Hurston was selected for The New Negro by her short story *Spunk* .Zora Neale Hurston with her four novels and too many published essays and short stories as well as plays and two books on black mythology has been considered on of the most famous black woman writers in the United States and the preminent figure to reflect the African-Americans rigorously.

Hurston 's second novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* had been written in a frame form and it concerns a southern black woman Janie Crawford covering forty years of her life. Janie was seeking love through her life firstly from her grandmother who raised her and secondly from her three marriages experiences of three different men. Janie's grandmother, Nany, was a slave and was raped by her owner which resulted in giving birth to her mixed- race daughter Leaf. Leaf was also raped by her school teacher that gave birth to Janie and leaf ran away leaving Janie with Nany and to leave a disappointment for Nany's dream to change the customary fate of black woman and to be followed also by double-disaster marriages of her granddaughter, Janie.

Janie could touch and experience the true love with her third husband Tea cake who introduced her to new world of happiness and comfort. Tea Cake who became jealous and unpredictable person after a disease he got from a rabid dog in his attempt to save Janie from the dog and drowning through a powerful hurricane tries to shoot Janie by his pistol but he gets a shoot from with a rifle in self-defense and as it usual to all happy dreams ,Janie was forced to confront the misery of her new husband's murder at her hand .

*Their Eyes Were Watching God* is autobiographical one that narrates the growth and development of black woman against the oppression of race and gender through the oral and written voice of Zora Neale Hurston and Janie Crawford . The novel is an autobiographical expression and understanding of the self that create a new cultural understanding and exploring the self of the black people struggling against the oppression of time, place, race , class, gender.

*Their Eyes Were Watching God* emerges as an attempt to shape and empower the black woman's self and identity within the racial community .It emphasizes the importance of black folk and the right of black woman to achieve self fulfilment and autonomy out of the circle of men.

Janie's fictional character which was Hurston's writerly self is an attempt to liberate black people in general and black women in particular and

the efforts to settle the psychological health that was touched and told by the slave narratives of the nineteenth century. Hurston's effort to establish authenticity of the folk culture was vivid through her using of popular forms.

Janie with her relation with her third husband Tea Cake is looking for her liberation. Janie's first two marriages with Logan and Joe are characterized by the domination of both husbands and both of them have invested her in a way which is somewhat different from another. The way that both husbands treat Janie asserts the ideology of capitalism.

Logan invested her to do the work of the field and the kitchen which is surrounded by the demand of her obedience. Janie's submission is in contrast with her ideal image of love and marriage and she can realize with him that her first attempt of marriage to get her dream is dead. She leaves Logan with a new feeling and change inside her which may be called the ecstasy of liberation to fall into another kind of domination with Joe Starks who tries to make her one of his possessions. Joe who is a man of position tries to turn Janie to thing not a person .He dominates her behaviours and brings to her another feeling of loss. Janie's relation with Joes till his death is another step to realize the real meaning of domination and liberation.

The moment that Janie kills her third husband Tea Cake is a must in the novel. Although Tea Cake liberated Janie from two different kinds of domination for a period of time but he turns to practice another kind of domination through his physical abuse and his jealousy; so his murder is a momentary freedom for Janie. Janie in her development and growth contends to replace the old culture concept that places women's wishes on material and economic demands by love and affection.

#### **Conclusion**

*Their Eyes Were Watching God* is Hurston's document to explain the impact of the history which is represented by the legacy of slavery on the present dilemma of her female protagonist Janie. As Janie's grandmother was abused physically and exploited sexually and her mother was also raped ,Janie

develops her past history within the era of post-Emancipation and attempt to find the real concept of her identity and self-fulfilment. Janie tries to put an end to the African –American women’s thoughts which are influenced by the white culture.

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