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A VERIDICAL EXPOSITION OF AFRICA IN NOEMIA DE SOUSA'S "IF YOU WANT TO KNOW ME"

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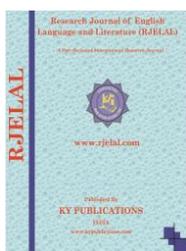
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ABSTRACT

Literature is considered as the mirror of the society in which it is written. Hence society and literature remain inextricable to each other. This concept is proved factual while recalling the renowned poet, Noemia De Sousa. Through the select poem, "If You Want to Know Me", she encourages the determined new reader to know of Africa in a better way. She also introduces the reader to hidden world of slavery and persecutions endured by an African under the colonial regime. The present study highlights the veristic portrayal of the sufferings encountered by the Africans and the different ways adopted by the poet to account it accurately.

Keywords: colonial, factual, inextricable, persecution, veristic

Noemia De Sousa hailed from Mozambique, the Southeast of Africa. She wrote poems in Portuguese language and her poetry exposed a large part of the anti-colonial literary movement of Mozambique. In 1950's, Noemia became involved in the Mocambicanidade movement.

Mocambicanidade was a new and revolutionary literature at which all citizens of Mozambique shared their issues concerning race, class and politics. It was an open platform for all to make open dialogues. As an active member of Mocambicanidade, Noemia expressed her resistance by writing poems in newspapers. Her literary works in newspapers played a vital role in spreading cultural identity and awareness of the revolutionary movement.

According to Hilary Owen, "Noemia's literary works focused the importance of African

identity, black pride and indigenous feminism" (22 – 23). Her vibrant and stimulating poetry accounts intensely the unsettling world of mistrust, injustice and oppression. It also rings with examples of human strength, dignity and pride.

Noemia's "If You Want to Know Me" was a revolutionary poem which exposes the sign of long years of slavery and torture endured by the Africans. Though the world turned a blind eye towards the problems faced by Africans, Noemia tries to give voice for her people through the poem. Hence, the title of the poem, "If You Want to Know Me" opens a choice of willingness before the readers whether to understand and experience Africa or not. Noemia was particular that only those who want to know of Africa should experience the same pain and emotions underwent by an African. Thus she exposed the truth that the painful experiences of an African was not a flowery tale but a living experience.

To Noemia De Sousa, if the reader's answer to her title is yes, then she wholeheartedly wills to help him or her to understand Africa by presenting it before them using different methods. In the first two lines of the poem she conveys, "If you want to know me / examine with careful eyes" (1-2). This serves as a respite to the long title of the poem. Hence, Noemia has adopted two methods in her poem to explain about Africa to the reader. The first and the foremost method adopted is observation. As the first step of observation, she instructs the readers to open their eyes and watch carefully. Then she asks them to look at "this bit of black wood" (3). By black wood, she meant the sculptors made by Makeonde tribe of Africa. The statues and sculptors made by Makeonde tribal people had a strong influence on their painful experience under the colonial regime. These sculptors and statues help a new reader to understand the physical feature of Africa and its people. Hence with the aid of the sculptors made by the Makeonde people of Northern Africa, Noemia makes the new reader to understand the physical nature of her country.

Secondly, the poet takes on the method of demonstration. Noemia doesn't want to leave her reader with just showing off something but at the same time, she tries to portray it in a practical way. Hence she demonstrates the painful condition of Africa and its people physically and emotionally. Noemia displays the real situation of Africa through pointing the external nature of the sculptors. She asks the reader to look at the eyes which are "empty sockets despairing of possessing life" (9). She also presents the wide open mouth of the sculptors which resulted out of the painful cry and the outstretched hands which was tired of pain and suffering. The outspread hands also sign as, "raised in imprecation and in threat" (12). She also exhibits the decorated body the African with "wound from the harsh whipstrokes of slavery"(14). Though tortured, Noemia exposes the pride and mysterious nature of Africa and an African and defines proudly it as, "That is what I am" (18).

Noemia displays how the reader can emotionally experience Africa by portraying the soul of Africa. She requests the new readers to share their deep feeling with the groans of black dockworkers

and to indulge himself or herself in the cultural practices like the frenzied dance of the Chope tribe and the rebellion undertook by the Changana class. She also requests them to listen to the songs of the African writers which embodies the sad thoughts and pangs of the Africans. According to Noemia, the external reader can examine the soul of Africa only through sharing the same painful experience and feelings of loss and agony.

In the concluding lines of the poem, Noemia gives a deep analysis of her account on Africa. She conveys, "I'm nothing but a shell of flesh / where Africa's revolt congealed / it's cry pregnant with hope" (28 -30). These lines convey a deepest truth and share the optimistic belief in an African. She conveys that even though an African is considered nothing by their colonizer, they still have a body, which is alive. This body is the living emblem of all their pangs, sufferings and endurance. These pains changed the body to a frozen state and made it no more painful. This state shows the ability of an African to endure the sufferings and exhibit their protest and resistance with the ray of hope of liberation and independence in the years to come. Thus the poet ends her poem by portraying the prophecy of future years of Africa with development and freedom. This hope had made the Africans to endure all the pains and oppressions in the past years. Thus the poet had presented the real portraiture of Africa to the new readers with the methods of observation and perfect demonstration.

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