



Literatures of the Marginalised:
Dreams, Voices and Challenges of the Subaltern

A Collection of Critical Essays

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Domestic Violence in Zora Neale Hurston's *Sweat*

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This paper tries to analyse the theme and ideas of Black feminist criticism which is revealed in the short story "Sweat" written by Zora Neale Hurston. It is clear that the male - dominated nature found in all the society. It can be understood by the origin of feminism. The origin of feminism could be traced to France when in 1837, Charles Fourier, a French philosopher coined the word and by 1910, feminism has appeared in most of the countries in Europe and in the U.S., although feminist movements were triggered by different causes and were aimed at different goals in many of these countries. At the early stage in the U.S and the UK, feminism movements started with a focus on the campaign for the rights of women to enter contractual agreements, agitation for equality within marriage union, parenting rights, and the rights to own property. The next stage centred on the campaign for the rights of women to gain political power. Feminism is theory that men and women should be equal politically, economically, and socially. In order to overcome domestic violence and male domination, the women started to raise their voice against men through their writings. In this short story, Zora Neale reveals how a woman struggles to lead her life.

Black Feminism means the specific feminism advocated by African American women in the USA. It deals in particular

with issues addressing women from ethnic minorities; the black feminism of African American women naturally caters especially to their history, experiences, traditions, culture and needs. In the modern era, McKay (1987, 163) has stated that one important task of Black feminism is to confront always White racism as well as black male patriarchy. It became their duty to empower women. Empowering women is to make them independent in all aspects from mind, thought, rights, decisions, etc by leaving all the social and family limitations.

Sweat tells the story of Delia Jones, a humble, timid woman trapped in a marriage with an abusive man who takes pride in mistreating her. The story opens up on a spring night in Florida, with Delia busy going about her job as a washwoman. She is a busy woman doing all her household chores. In spite of that she attends the church service. Usually she collects the soiled clothes on Saturday when she returns the clean things. Sunday night after church, she sorts them and puts the white things to soak. There is a number of bundles lying around. Even though she has lot of works, she is happy when her husband goes out. She squats in the kitchen floor beside the great pile of clothes, sorting them into small heaps according to color, and humming a song.

The story gives a feeling of a woman who is always afraid of her husband. Some men will be interested in giving torture by doing something always. They will be a sadist. In this story, the facet of the facet of Sykes, her husband, is of such character. He is a man at the woman's expense. If he goes out, Delia finds happiness. If he enters, she feels irritated. Psychologically she suffers a lot through his action.

Sykes has come back home with her horse and buck board. She feels something falls on her shoulders and slithers to the floor. She got afraid. He finds joy in making her afraid. She thought that it is the big bull whip, but it is a real snake. "Just then something long, round, limp and black fell on her shouldersA great terror took hold of her. It softened her knees and dried her mouth." The above lines picture the pain of a mind. Psychologically it affects her when he does something like this. She gets irritated and says that one day she will be dead by his foolishness. Without listening to her, he steps into the room. She resumes her work. Immediately after entering, he shouts at her stating that how many times it can be said to keep the white clothes outside. "Ah done tole you time and again to keep them white folks' clothes outa dis house"

It shows the dominance behavioural system (DBS) which is related to psychopathy. The people who have the tendency to dominate cannot live quietly. They want to kindle the mind of others to quarrel with them. (Zuroff, Fournier, Patall, & Leybman, 2010). Without minding his voice she continues her work. But he is not allowing her to do by his actions. He kicks all of the clothes together again and stands in her way truculently. His whole manner hopes and waits for an argument. But she walks calmly around him and commences to re-sort the things. But he does not ready to leave her. He threatens her to kick them out of the room. "Next time, Ah'm gointer kick 'em outdoors"

Delia never looks up from her work. She tells him that she has taken sacrament at the church house and for that also he snorts scornfully by stating her a hypocrite. Then he steps roughly upon the whitest pile of things. He wants to make her

angry. The writer vividly points out the behavioural psychology of a dominant man. She also portrays the life of a married couple for fifteen years. Even though it has been for fifteen years, still they do not have understanding. She does not get concern and care from her husband. She is fed up with her life but politely utters that Sykes has done too much, married for fifteen years and she has been washing for fifteen years and sweats a lot. "Looka heah, Sykes, you done gone too fur. Ah been married to you fur fifteen years, and Ah been takin' in washin' for fifteen years. Sweat, sweat, sweat! Work and Sweat, cry and sweat, pray and sweat!" She recalls her first brutal beating in two months after the wedding. She has the memory of his numerous trips to Orlando with all his wages and returns to her penniless. Women usually have faith in God when trouble comes her way. She is also humiliated by her husband. In her inner spirit, she curses him that one day he will reap what he sows. That is the extreme level of patience.

Her husband has brought a snake and kept that in a box. It scares her often She understands that the creature is her torment. She broaches him that to take away the snake from their room. She starts to tell that she was patient when he beat her, but she could not tolerate bringing snake to torture her. He is not ready to listen to. She angrily yells at him that she hates him because of this and warns him that she is not going to leave him. She makes her mind to take a different step. She wants to look for her own individuality. She wants to get rid of this troublesome house. She wants to be independent.

Sykes agrees with her by saying that he too hates her. He is glad to know that she also hates him. She also threatens him that if you lay hands on me, she will give him back. She boldly

says with no signs of fear. After hearing this Sykes departs from the house. It shows that she discovers her potentialities in her world. Delia demands her own back to assert her independence, setting him free from all cruelties to her. Finally, as she has cursed, her husband dies of snake bite. She hears a cry on a day which might have come from a maddened chimpanzee. All the terror, all the horror and all the rage that man possibly could express without a recognizable human sound.

The writer tries to emphasize the fact the fall of a dominant husband. The story holds a three dimensional perspective. A simple hard working wife struggles a lot psychologically which is a subject of Psychology, strives hard to identify herself which applies to feminism, and overcomes from the male dominant patriarchy which falls under anthropology. Her wisdom on these three subjects is revealed in a short story. The character Delia refuses to be a victim of the male - dominated society and she has been taken for granted all along. She decides not to live the female stereotype any longer and asserts her independence and individuality when she is tortured by her husband with a snake. In doing so, she pioneers the cause of black feminism in the late nineteenth century. In doing so, she pioneers the cause of black feminism in the late nineteenth century.

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