

HEALING THROUGH TRAUMAS – A STUDY ON GAYL JONES’ LITERARY WORKS

Riya Kumari

Department of English,

Ph.D. Research Scholar,

Lalit Narayan Mithila University, Darbhanga

ABSTRACT

The best part of African American literature is that it allows readers to heal from their pains and scars because it is all about healing, compassion, and humanity. The beauty of any literature lies in the fact that it owes an extraordinary power of connecting with the readers and the characters. Even if the characters are depicted as a non-living thing they dare to touch the souls and minds of readers. This article is about informing readers how the literary works of Gayl Jones helped in healing. In this modern and scientific world, I personally feel that people have become so materialistic that somewhere they have started losing their humanness which lies inside them. “A man without a soul and a heart is nothing but a robot.” The reason why I have chosen Gayl Jones for my study because as per my research, I think she owns the quality of touching the souls and hearts of readers respectively. If read carefully and seriously her works have the power to make a thumbprint in the lives of readers. To be a great writer one must be a great reader one must devote them completely to the given piece of the story. Gayl Jones is one of them because she is explicitly well in reading and writing. This article explores Gayl Jones’ engagement of a healthy dose of skepticism and self-critique around the language she crafts in her literary works.

KEYWORDS: *Gayl Jones, Healing, Traumas, African Americans, Humanity*

INTRODUCTION -

For African Americans, storytelling was in their bones and blood and thus, as a result, it came out in their literature. In this article, I will focus on the untouched side of oral traditions and its consequences. Apart from giving moral lessons and entertaining people it also healed people and helped them in the process of introspection. For any individual, self-realization is the ultimate key to enlighten their soul which can be seen as an evolutionary process. As, Toni Morrison remarks, “it’s what remains unsaid that often speaks the loudest”. For this, I have a focus on the two important fields and had tried to correlate them with African American folktales and they are given below:

1. Humanistic side
2. Psychological side.

African American Literature is known for its breathtaking and unique style creativities. As per my research, most of the African American literature was developed from African American oral traditions. To attain a place in the literary world was not that easy for these folks. It is clear from the historical backgrounds of African Americans that their past life was very painful and unhappy. They were not allowed to live their life on their own and their life was orchestrated by the white Americans. Thus, the only door that was opened for them was through folktales. African American folktales allowed them to get connected with their cultural backgrounds. White people tried their best to force them to copy their cultures and traditions but they were a failure in their deeds. Ultimately, with the help of African American literature, they proved that they are not going to accept their rules and regulations. It was only possible with the help of several courageous, revolutionary figures and great authors who were adamant about writing about their culture, their community, their homes, their peoples, their souls, and their hearts.

However, the journey was full of thorns and stones for African Americans but the outcome was very beautiful and fruitful. Today, African American literature represents humanity, love, and hope. It is an example of diversified literature that includes various facets of cultural and historical groups, gender, class, and races. It helps in promoting respect and empathy among different communities. They teach us the value of diversity and helps people building a stronger sense of identity and wellbeing so that they can self-realize their strength, ability, interest, and support each other. What is new about the modern ways of researching African American folktales and its aftermath? To answer this, it is necessary to study African American folktales in two broad contexts and they are as follows:

1. The oral traditions of storytelling African American society and
2. The written form of African American folktales.

The first and most important is the history of folktales, its colloquial style and themes, vernacular language, and moral lessons it gave to the listeners. The second one is the written form in which African American intellectuals and activists fought against the barbarity and chauvinistic act of white people who were against their race and culture. The written forms of folktales were used as a medium to make their voices heard which was once taken by white chauvinists. It was the revolution within the "Black community" that brought changes in their lives that included how humans are equally born, what is meant by culture, and why each language and identity are important? Thus, Chinua Achebe says in his book *No Longer at Ease* :

"The impatient idealist says: 'Give me a place to stand and I shall move the earth.' But such a place does not exist. We all have to stand on the earth itself and go with her at her pace."

The specific objectives of this paper are given below:

1. Discovering elements that helped in healing both at a personal, social, and psychological level.
2. Specific motifs in the literary works of Gayl Jones.
3. Understanding the traditional means of African American oral traditions by comparing it with the modern way of African American folktales.
4. Focusing on how African American folktales helps readers and researchers to broaden their horizon.
5. Learning the significance of African American culture and its history through the literary eyes of Gayl Jones.

GAYL JONES AS A HEALER -

Gayl Jones is one of the most influential literary voices in the canon of African American literature. She develops her creative and realistic ideas into her novels by portraying strong and psychotic characters. The way she portrays her characters in her novels seem as if it is Gayl Jones who wants to achieve and fulfill her own dreams and desires with the help of her characters. Jones has the power of intimidating people who dominate others, especially the chauvinistic men who will treat the women of her society by her own way of storytelling. She thinks that if oral storytelling can entertain people then it can also help in improving this world. Her literary works are all about that. Rather than entertaining people she gives a shock to the readers by weaving and constructing the reality about life and sometimes more than that which most of the people are unable to speak about. Thus, I can say that what is more difficult in speaking becomes more convenient in writing and articulating their emotions and feelings to this world. The reason why it is important focuses on both the aspects, how it is produced, and how it is received. So, we can say that it is the wisdom of Jones that she knows how to produce stimuli on the reader's psyche. The excellence of her novels increases the impact of the sensibilities of readers. Through her works, she tells them not to suffer at our misery but to work on it. Hence it goes like this:

"Misery won't touch you gently. It always leaves its thumbprints on you; sometimes it leaves them for others to see, sometimes for nobody but you to know of." (Edwidge Danticat, *The Farming of Bones*).

According to me, to live a balanced and happy life one must know the importance of being a human and their major roles as a human being which is only possible when we can study people from their situation, their activities, and most importantly from their psyche. In this article, I will analyze how Gayl Jones uses racism, slavery, and gender issues as a medium to create a utopian world. In her literary works, she uses interesting themes, imagery, and characters to surprise her readers and make them aware of the real side of this world. She often depicts a world that stretches didactic and humanistic perspectives. Jones elaborates through her novels that the main purpose of writing a story is to enrich one's own experience which is also one of the important points in healing people. In a sense, her works are the form of transportation of experiences that puts the readers and authors under the same circumstances and relate with each other from on an evolutionary point of view,

Gayl Jones' works are the highest form of power and empowerment. Thus, in her first novel she puts in like this to empower her character, Ursa:

"She was closed up like a fist. In her very own memory, not theirs, her very own real and terrible and lonely and dark memory." (Corregidora, Jones)

Her novels are like the glue that binds readers throughout the story because it is bestowed with multiple meanings. Jones' novels often deal with trans-cultural experiences because she is interested in culture and traditions and thus transfers them to different parts of the world. She negotiates about the individuality of oneself when they are lost because of some external forces and fears. About her novels, she tells stories to have the power to make people think and feel. Gayl Jones's love for writing fiction stories makes her a true storyteller. She is captivated by African American literature and is praised for her talent in the canon of African American literature. In 1975 Jones published her first novel *Corregidora* which was surprisingly an upbeat success. It was highly appreciated by Toni Morrison who told *The New York Times Magazine* in a 2015 interview that, "...no novel about any black woman could ever be the same after this." Jones, next novel was *Eva's Man* (1976), followed by *The Healing* (1998), *Mosquito* (1999), *White Rat* (1977), the short story "Almeyda" (1977). In year 1975 Jones wrote a play *Chile Woman*. Her literary works tell a painful truth of the past, present, and hopefully, not the future says Delia Mercado. She was influenced by the writings of Toni Morrison, Ernest Hemingway, and James Joyce. Her creative use of language especially the oral traditions in her writing styles had made readers compare her with Henry James and Mark Twain. In her poem, *Deep Song* She sings:

The Blues calling my name.
 She is singing a deep song.
 She is singing a deep song.
 I am human.
 He calls me crazy.

In assessing the manner and degree to which the literary and African American vernacular voices in her literary works are liberating, it is appropriate to apply Jones's literary standards for excellence. In her assessment of the dialect and folklore in the literary texts of Dunbar and Hurston, Jones asks: "How does one employ the language to return it to the elasticity, viability, and complexity of the language." For her language is not a sign of communication but for establishing relationships, sharing emotions, and understanding others. In her literary works, we find the reflection of oral traditions that have a modern touch. In Gayl Jones' novels race, culture, and gender issues play an important where it marked social, economic, and religious hierarchies. Her literary works are known for its subtle humor that jibes upon American society. Through this context, she examines how racial issues, gender issues, and slavery affected African Americans. In her literary works, she articulates the African American's concern. African Americans demanded a society that has peace, balance, and can form its own rules and regulations. They present literary and critical pieces that confront the racism, sexism, and classism that had historically oppressed African Americans.

Like Fanon's theory of the oppressed, Gayl Jones explores the idea of self-knowledge and racial unity in her literary works. She illuminates the psychology of oppression by putting them in her literary pieces so that it affects the oppressors and the oppressed. To have an impact on the reader's mind she uses psychotic characters in her literary works. For example, in her novel *Eva's Man* she demonstrates a psychotic character Eva Medina Canada who brutally murders her lover because of the torture he gave to her. Her fear and insecurities about her identity are counted in a stream-of-consciousness manner. The memories of her past always remind her that this world is full of nasty people. Every time she is jolted away by the memory which has specific words and images. *Eva's Man* is a statement about the life of women. The body of a woman is treated as an object. Like *Corregidora*, *Eva's Man* is a blues story focusing on the tension between pain and pleasure in human relationships. It explores the internal psychic pain of a woman's mind. Eva confronts her personal history and articulates her blues in the novel. Jones describes the tragic life of a woman by the repetition of blood, milk, and semen. Even these fluids become confused, as Eva Medina's mind does:

"The sweet milk in the queen bee's breasts has turned to blood."

GAYL JONES AS A STORYTELLER -

Oral tradition is concerned with the psychological and cognitive perspective which focuses on the internal mental processes that are different from the outer world. It also focuses on the unconscious processes that occur within a person's mind. This perspective also tries to incorporate humanistic and personal understanding. The modern research on African American oral tradition is all about understanding and evaluating people's psyche. Human beings are the creators of stories and thus they are the best storytellers. The beauty of folktales is that it enhances the quality of storytelling in both the readers and the writers. Today, oral tradition is concerned with the academic discipline that is full of deep understanding of other cultures and people's psyche. The modern study on oral traditions is a real pedagogy. It argues the fact that traditional society is different from modern society.

The oral traditions always have a didactic range. African American folktales tell us:

1. A good understanding of the society in which they are supposed to share their knowledge of nature, morals, and social behavior.
2. The dignity of African Americans which was lost during the slavery era.

As a true litterateur, Gayl Jones interprets that oral traditions are an important part of literature because it explains the total way of life of society psychologically and emotionally. This totality also includes mundane activities and teaches about different cultural perspectives and certain tough situations so that readers should learn something from this. She says that there is no such thing as an uncultured person or society. No matter how big and small a society is, the fact is all human beings are bounded by a unique culture, inherit it, and are well cultured. In the words of Herskovits, "a society is composed of people; the way they behave is their culture". Like culture, oral tradition also includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, and customs that a man acquires from its society. Gayl Jones' novels are the works of psychoanalysis that cure disturbed and depressed minds. Her psychoanalysis can be referred to as psychotherapy. Thus, her ways of writings are like direct communicating with the patients who need support and a helping hand. This act of talking about what we have in unconscious minds is the Free Association. Olayinka defines Free Association as,

"A method by which psychoanalysts allow patients suffering from anxiety disorders to talk freely about threatening, unresolved, and unpleasant conflicts they experience in life, be it in their childhood or adulthood. If for any reason an individual is unable to express repressed unpleasant negative experience or ungratified libido, Freud claims that this results in anxiety disorders, and by reliving these repressed feelings during psychotherapy sessions, the patient can gradually lead a normal life again." (pp-55)

The best part about a great storyteller is that they never make a gap between "Me and "You" but fills the gap by making "We" make "Us". They understand that storytelling is a spiritual and healing process that has a heart to heart and soul to soul conversation. A good storyteller keeps in mind that storytelling is a conversation between two minds. The storyteller is a conscious mind and the listener is an unconscious mind. It is not like a lecture which is didactic but it is something which is shared among the same who have experienced the same pain and sees life in the same direction. A storyteller and a listener are like someone who shows the exact direction to the person who needs it and reaches a definite conclusion where they can cherish the moments and inspire the world. Anyone can be a good storyteller but it takes a lot to leave a footprint in someone's life. She possesses a powerful sense of understanding people and heals them through her powerful words. She tells a tale of how we suffer and also gives the idea of winning over them by sharing their stories and thus helps in healing.

CONCLUSION- Gayl Jones's novel generally deals with the dark, violent, and gothic situations of human life with the help of her characters. The excellence of Jones' writing style lies in creating an impact on the reader's mind and their soul. Her works are a rich source of using one's pain into strength and power as personal growth. Jones with the help of her writing style teaches us that how we use our pain reveals how strong we are and we are fit for any problems. Her novels satisfy the dictum which says "hold my attention." With an apt remark, we can say that her novels are true healers that motivate us to fight under any circumstances.

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