

Exploration of Racial And Cultural Memory for Socio-Discursive Empowerment of Self in Shange's "Sassafras, Cypress and Indigo"

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ABSTRACT

Ntozake Shange is an eminent African American playwright and poet, who gives the autobiographical touch in all her writings. She addressed all the feminist problems through racism and sexism in her works. She was awarded for National Coalition of 100 Black Women. Her works are mostly based in the form of letters, recipes and music. Shange's *Sassafras, Cypress and Indigo* reveals the Gullah Geechee culture. Here, the Black arts connects the three sisters and also reveals their talents through the culture. Hilda Effania and her youngest Indigo are the constant personalities who exposed their culture in a strong way. Cartographies, weaving, cooking, letters and dance are the major components in the novel. Shange has made use of these elements to forward the culture of the novel. Shange brings out the Gullah Geechee Culture, by black arts and self-realisation. Moreover, Gullah culture reveals the role of women much.

Keywords: Geechee, Culture, Cartographies, Recipes, Letters.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Gullah Geechee Culture covers all over the coastal region of United States, it includes North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia and Florida. The main motto of the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor which is one the National Heritage Area, is to safeguard, measure and make sense of the history, heritage sites, and traditional cultural practices. Mostly,

the National Heritage Areas are authorized by Congress as area where natural, historic and cultural resources merge to form a coherence, nationally important countryside.

Shange was a renowned American poet, dramatist, novelist, and essayist. Even though she wrote many works in different genres, her dramatic directions were unique and outstanding among other works. Her famous and awarded work was *For Colored Girls who have Considered Suicide/When the rainbow is enuf*(1975). Shange's plays are referred as choreopoem, or staged poetry because of her poetry, music, drama, and dance. Shange wrote all her plays and novels in unusual style with all her experiences in America as a black woman. This leads her writings innovatively, about the subject of race, politics and other feminist issues like racism and sexism, the deeper level of study also reveals her culture.

Shange's plays representing the strong African American Women, who shows her powerful opposition to any chauvinism, whether it may be the racial, sexual and social issues, in American society. She was criticized by mixed reactions, for her characterizations of the correspondence between the black men and women. She was not only expressed her experiences of pain through writings but also she expressed the friendly relationships between human beings, and her black female characters were mentally strengthened among abusive male. All her talents gathered from her experiences, because Shange travelled with her family to many foreign places such as Cuba, Haiti, Mexico and Europe. Shange's mother shared the story of major African American works on her young age and her father was a music player, she took enough sources from parents itself. As she was an intellectual person, she made her works in the form of recipes, letters, music, and sometimes in magical mappings. Shange was the author of the novel, *Sassafras, Cypress, and Indigo*(1982).

Even though Shange was well versed in writing the plays, she also experimented to write novel, her first complete novel was *Sassafras, Cypress, and Indigo* which took nearly eight years to complete. It was published by St Martin's Press. This novel adapted from her own previous work *Sassafras*(1976), and it was written in a pastiche style which means in the form of letters, recipes, poetry and magic spells, and the common text.

The novel *Sassafras, Cypress and Indigo* is about the three black sister, their name has been given as its title. It was dedicated by Shange to all women in struggle. *Sassafras*, the eldest sister who have an interest in weaving like her mother Hilda Effania and her father's spirit guided her mamain all hard situations. The middle sister, *Cypress* who is a dancer and she earns money for Civil Rights Movement, as a contribution from her dance company. The youngest sister, *Indigo* who rarely spoke, spending most of her time with the dolls and she also have a moon in her mouth. The novel contains various themes including racial and cultural issues facing by Black Americans, mother daughter relationship, woman love on nature, Self-Realization, food and religion. Cartographies, music, cooking recipes, weaving and dance are the major components in the novel. Shange brings out the Gullah Geechee culture, which is mostly based on women's crafts work, farming and cultivation. The novel borrows the African traditions uniquely from the African Americans of South Carolina, the geechee culture was not directly came from Africa, it was created by West Africans who worked for cultivating rice, indigo, cotton and they also settled in the U.S coastal areas such as South Carolina, Florida and Georgia.

The novel begins with the presence of *Indigo* sitting among her hand made dolls who was living in the street of Charleston, South Carolina. She was immature, her mama got worried about her because of too much south in her and *Indigo* used to say that she got earth's blood in

her. Mama, who was narrated as the strongest woman taking care of her three daughters alone in male dominated society, without any others support and she loved Indigo the most among other sisters. Indigo loved the another lady who cares her the most in next to her mom, is Aunt Haydee. Indigo and Aunt Haydee are similar in nature and thoughts, that is why they travelled to moon by some magical thinking, because not all the black people thought to go to the moon. Indigo is mentally strong about her believes, she only use the colored dolls to play and talk, then she visits only the home of color ladies. She isolate herself from others and spends more time with her gullah dolls. She shares her thoughts through her cartographies like moon journey and other moments in a child life. Indigo soon got her periods, her mama sent her to buy kotex from the pharmacy located near her street, in between she met Uncle John and he gifted her a fiddle. At first, she is not happy with her gift, but Uncle John explains the role played by fiddle in their ancestors life, they were used to communicate their feelings and pains through playing the fiddle. Then, she reaches the pharmacy and asked kotex when Mr.Lucas closing the shop, he enquired her that what is the purpose for her urge in the late evening. Then she opened her secret that she got her first periods but she understands that Lucas was so evil and the very first time she felt uncomfortable to answer a man's question about her menstruation, Indigo was so little in her age but she found the evilness in Lucas' mind. Suddenly, the changes occur in Indigo's mind and she requested her mama to taught to play a fiddle, her mama was so happy that her daughter came out of her dolls and she got new interest in her life, there were so many differences found in her behaviour by her mama and finally, Indigo compose various music by her own and she can't keep quite with her fiddle. Her music made herself to become a socio-responsible person, and initiated her to join in the club named Junior Geechee Captains. The three sisters united in their home to celebrate their Christmas, they were surprised by her mother's gifts and favourite recipes of their father, Albert. Later on the two sisters were separated to do some works and expose their talents, so Sassafrass moves to Los Angeles and settled with her artists. There she was fell in love with her prolonged abusive boyfriend Mitch. He abused her, so she can't feel the comfortableness with his company in a same home. She later planned on to spend her upcoming time with her sister Cypress in San Francisco. Sassafrass was the one who took long in this novel, even to an end. There, she tried to forget her memories with Mitch, then mingled with her sister's dance group by dancing, and concentrated in writing the poetry.

Cypress faces the hardness in dancing due to the low earnings in San Francisco, then she travelled to New York and joined in a dance company to earn money for Civil Rights Movement. In between she was in alternative love relationship with her lesbian dancer Idrina and Leroy McCullough, a musician. Mama was planned to make her daughters' marriage life with the persons who will take care of them next to her in a comfort zone like to be rich in manner. But it was collapsed, Sassafrass again goes back to Mitch and joined in a spiritual based group, named the New World Found Collective. There she accepts to choose the saint like path for getting rid of Mitch's shoddy energy, and practised the rituals with hope to vanish his demons. Later, she decides to spend the upcoming life at her home in Charleston.

The novel ends up with the transpersonal communication by Hilda Effinia standing infront of Albert's portrait that their children too expecting the same what they have expected in their past and she also stands confidentially that Albert's soul guided her to brought up their children. Finally, Sassafrass got her labour pain, along with the caring of her sisters and Mama, she delivered a free child to their world.

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Here, the culture revealed through the mother-daughter relationship, all the three sisters were shown their identity through expressing their music, poetry, weaving, and dancing. All these exposed in gullah geechee style to the world. At last, Sassafra's baby called to be a free child, which mean they wish the child to be from all the race in their world.

II. REFERENCES:

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