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## CONCEPT OF MARRIAGE IN H.G.DELISSER'S JANE'S CAREER

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**Abstract:** West Indian Literature emerged on world literature in early 19<sup>th</sup> century. H.G. DeLisser is the precursor West Indian novelist. His *Jane's Career* (1913) is one of the first West Indian novels in which the central character is Black. Caribbean society is a plural society. Its heterogeneity accentuates racial, ethnical, lingual and religious assimilation. People from Africa, Europe and Asia continents assimilate for various reasons in Caribbean basin and lost originality. They lack roots. Their personality is idiosyncratic. Racial discrimination affects progress of Caribbean society. Three centuries amalgamations of colours have produced shades of colours. Caribbean people suffer racial, economical and psychological discrimination. *Jane's Career* is a novel of lower class peasant origin Jane's strives for survival and her attempts to establish social identity through marriage. It also explores black Jamaican women's power and racial and class hierarchy

**Keywords:** Mulatto- racial intermixture, School girl- an apprentice domestic servant.

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**Introduction:** 'Marriage is union of true minds' writes Shakespeare in his famous sonnet, *True Love*. But for Jamaicans Marriage is a ladder of ascending social status. Colonial and Post-colonial experiences, long lasted brutal suffering of plantation slavery, hybridity of colours, racial, ethnical, lingual, and religious assimilation accentuate economic and social discrimination. It affects Caribbean society's economy. Racial dominancy divided Caribbean society into lower, middle, and upper class. Emancipation Act at surface declares liberty to plantation slaves but all legal rights were reserved by whites. Black people could not marry without consent of their masters. Plight of black remained the same. Unskilled, uneducated poor lower class people face economic deprivation and social degradation. Assimilation of African, Asian, and European races produced Creole society. They lost their originality. They want social status. Sugar plantation dictates Caribbean economy. White imperialists always remained as ruler and present an elite class and blacks belong to lower peasant and labourer class. Lower peasant and worker class was illiterate and poor. They struggle to gain economical security and stability.

H.G. deLisser (1878- 1914) is one of the precursors of West Indian novelists, explores social status and living of Jamaican lower class people during 19<sup>th</sup> century. *Jane's Career* is his first novel, published as *Jane* in the *Annual Journal* in 1913 and later published in a book form as *Jane's Career in England* in 1914. It is the first West Indian novel in which the protagonist is the black. The novel depicts lower class Jamaican women's struggle for settlement and social status. Ramchand says, "*Jane's Career* is about the quest for identity, both in the personal and in the socio-cultural sense is often clarified by popular art forms that create recognizable images of identity conflict." (Ramchand, 57 )

Jane Burrell, the protagonist of the novel is a Jamaican Negress of peasant origin, due to poverty leaves her native place delightedly to become a school girl along with the middle class woman Mrs. Mason at the age of fifteen. On the occasion of her migration to Kingston her parents and elders extend moral lessons to her. They ask her to abstain from pre marital sex. Her father warns her, "Keep yourself up when y'u is in Kingston, an' don't allow any of those Kingston buoy to fool you up." (3) Jane's mother imbibes importance of marriage on an adolescent girl. Jane's mother is proud of her upbringing. She remarks, "We bring her up decent an' respectable; she know dat her fader an' me married long before she born..." (2) Jane is so excited to go to town. Her enthusiasm and eagerness to enter to the new world keep her away from upcoming problems. Life in village is slow. Like other villagers she too wants to go away from the village. "There was the unrest in the village. The men would not remain, even the women wanted to go elsewhere." (9), Natural calamities, poverty, and dullness force Jane like others to move on to cities. De Lisser reveals the Jamaican country yard is economically and socially deprived.

Jane's career begins as a 'school girl' in Mrs. Mason's home. Mrs. Mason has been supervising Jane. Under her vigilance Jane's innocence has been declined. Jamaican women treat domestic service as slaves. Jane experiences the same. Mrs. Mason and her nephew and nieces sexually and physically torture Jane. She has to work for long hours. She has been abused and beaten for petty mistakes. Jane shares her experiences with her friend,

"Icaan't tell y'u me child' replied Jane piteously. If you ever see how I work morning to night you would sorry for me." (74) Cecil, Mrs. Mason's nephew like previous schoolgirls, tries to seduce her. He sexually assaults her. Jane is very much disturbed for Cecil's misbehaviour. For the sake of job she sustains his

sexual assault. Jane is very strong. She does not want to return to her native. She knows that her dreams will be fulfilled in Kingston. Jane expresses her determination of her staying in Kingston, "I could not come back home, I get too used too" (to friendships with few. Satyara, a slum dweller, advises Jane to run away from Mrs. Mason's house. Gaining, opportunity, Jane elopes from Mrs. Mason's home and her career jumps from domestic servant to factory worker. Though her new job is simple and does not need skill, it was hectic. Jane could earn six shillings a week from which she has to fulfil all her basic requirements. Her wages were meagre yet she is very satisfied for her newly gained liberty. She is free to talk and walk. On the first night only, after leaving Mrs. Mason's home she goes on long walk at night, dancing parties and clubs: 'Jane feels satisfied with her newly won freedom and independence. (105)

In the factory, Jane is friendly and social with her co-workers. Her factory co-workers address her as Ms. Burrell. Jane is delighted to be addressed respectfully. Jane becomes more practical. Her friends and co-workers suggest her to maintain illegitimate relations. Factory workers wages are low. Lower class women don't want to work as domestic servant. Factory women aspire for financial stability. To lead life comfortably they don't hesitate to keep ex marital relations. Concubine practice was common in Caribbean society. Lower class women treat sexual relation as 'back force' and mode of financial transaction. They suggest Jane to get rid of tedious work and financial crunches. Mr. Curden, newly appointed supervisor in factory tries to take disadvantage of Jane's poverty. He is an adult married man of forty.

Jane is a girl of virtue. She has not forgotten her parents' advice. She believes in Marriage. She wants comfort and social status through marriage. Her friend's advice of getting a friend is rejected by Jane. Her friend Celestina suggests, "Yes; dat meck a difference. But ef yu get a friend like mine, yu needn't boder to work. What y'ugoin' to meck you'self a slave for? "But here Jane shook her head resolutely. 'No', she said, ' I promise me fader to keep meself-up, an' I gwine to do it. Perhaps I may married one of dese days; who is to tell?" Jane is optimistic for her marriage. Her friends snob at her. They laugh at on her marriage plan. Jane is a dreamy girl. Her volition for self-identity perhaps is genetic. Heterogeneity is the outcome of three hundred years amalgamation of various races. Various shades of colours are found in Caribbean society. Jane may have inherited genetic intermixture. 'Jane was a trifle darker, strongly built and robust, but her features, the nose especially, hinted some white ancestor.' (12) Jane maintains her dignity and belief in values. She doesn't easily

surrender to circumstances. Cecil, Mrs. Mason's nephew tries to tempt her by giving money and support. Yet Jane elopes from there.

Jane stays in slum but her behaviour and thoughts are uplifted. Jane wants to stick up to morality. She does not want to embrace immorality of lower peasant class of having pre-marital sexual relations. She has English ideas like a married life, having social status, economic stability, and love for children. Jane always firmly retaliates on the discussion of marriage. While Satyara Jane's short time roommate rejects plan of marriage as marriage, for her is losing liberty. She explains that sex and marriage are two different things. Use men only for economical support: Who gotten married now? De best t'ing a gurl can do, when a young man want to be friendly with her, is to 'eat him out' as much as she can? (144). But Jane is decent. She inherits superior morality. Jane favours marriage as it provides social status. Jane's fascination of marrying white man explores her dream. Jane replies to Satyara, "It must be nice to be a white lady,' 'an' to have white gentleman to take care of an' give you whatever y'u want. Then you doant have to work an' you can put on a new dress every day, an' eat what you like. An' when you go to church, you doant have to walk, but can drive in a car or buggy.' (108) Jane's expectations are very basic. She has spent her childhood in poverty. She has been deprived from comfortable life. Her desire is like Pecola in Tony Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. Pecola expects the bluest eye for her because she too is the victim of racism. She wants to be white. Like Jane believes that due to her race she is poor. ' Everyt'ing belong to white people,' said Jane, 'and brown people. We only have de leaving.' (15) In Caribbean society, white people represent an elite class. Black people remain poor. Jane opines, " I wonder why black people so poor?" Jim's mother replies, "P'rhaps it's because when slavery them have all de land an' all de house, while poor we have noten, an' have to work hard for a bread." (138). Post effects of plantation slavery have disturbed social hierarchy of Caribbean society. Jane believes that she may achieve everything after marriage. ' But if you are married you can be in society.' (109)

Jane's fantasy about marriage is flexible. In her fantasy she addresses herself as Ms. Burrell. Illegitimate children are brought up by mother in Caribbean society. De Lisser provides statistical data of illegitimate children in Jamaica. He writes, "Sixty-two per cent of the children born annually in Jamaica are illegitimate." Jane has children without marriage. Jane has to remould her opinions about marriage. She does not want to accept factory supervisor Mr. Curden's proposal of being mistress. She asks for a month's duration to make up her mind. During this

period, she tries to persuade her young coloured neighbour Mr. Vincent Broglie to support her in denying Curden's proposal. She skilfully handles the situation. Mr. Broglie is busy in strike of trade union. Jane makes him aware of the futility of strike. He changes his plan. He knows that without job he will suffer financial crunches. As a matter of fact, Vincent is flibbertigibbet. He decides to support Jane. He remarks, "You are a good girl Jane; You not only looking for what you get from a man. You are the kind of girl a man can depend on." (188)

Though Jane wants to marry him, Jane and her lover postponed their marriage. Lower peasant class and working class do not have sufficient money for marriage. Understanding the practical hurdles and financial crunches, and most importantly to get rid of isolation and to avoid illegitimate proposals by men like Curden, Cecil and others, Jane decides to live with Vincent. Jane has adjusted with her commitment to marriage but has a strong urge of middle class status and children. Mr. Vincent provides her financial support and social status. Jane lives with Vincent without marriage enjoying all the comforts and financial stability.

On first birth day of her child, Vincent arranges a grand party and declares his plan of marriage with Jane. It surprises all including Jane. Probably Jane succeeds in influencing Vincent about her principles about marriage. Jane's parents attend her wedding with pride. Jane marries in Coke Church pompously. It is a big wedding. Jane performs all rituals. 'Down the aisle on the arm of her husband she marched, her

veil thrown off her face, the organ sounds triumphantly.' At last Jane achieves everything which she desires for. But her happiness crosses all the limits when Emms, Mrs. Mason's niece attends and congratulates her. 'Let us congratulate you, Ja—Mrs. Broglie,' Emma said, hastily correcting herself. 'We came to see your wedding.'

Then she and sister put out their hands, and Jane's cup of Joy was full.(207)

Jane's belief in marriage proves right. Jane who has arrived in Kingston as a school girl now has appointed a school girl for self. Jane lived in slum and worked in bottle factory. Now she represents an elite class. Jane has transformed., ' In her white muslin dress, with her hair done up with ribbons, wearing high heeled shoes and looking as though she had been born to entertaining guests'. (196) Jane's mortality gets its result. In Jane's Career De Lisser explores intermixture of colour. Jane marries a lighter skinned man and ascends towards social hierarchy.

**Conclusion:** De Lisser believes that Jamaican needs proper education, job opportunities, higher wages, more access to land, agricultural education and the social influence of elite class. Marriage is one of the tools of social reformation. Marriage may reduce illegitimacy in Jamaican society. In Jamaican society, inter racial and inter colour marriages gives social status. Jane's marriage with light colour man pours her social recognition. She gets respect and title in society. Jane's faith in marriage gets its positive results.

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