

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN HILLARY JORDAN'S *WHEN SHE WOKE*

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Abstract: *When She Woke* presents many competing views of a woman's proper role in a society. The author reveals the female characters' views of themselves to the reader and how do these self-images shape their interactions with others. Women pay a higher price than men for breaking society's rules. Hannah's character from sheltered, obedient Evangelical Christian to frightened fugitive to independent woman with her own notions of faith and sexuality is enormous which are shown through the different ways of religion and abortion depicted in the book. Jordan's novel explores a lot of big, thorny issues: abortion, faith, governmental control, sexuality, discrimination, etc. It is more a coming-of-age story about one young woman's personal journey towards emancipation. Women are considered as a part of nature because of their reproductivity. Women reproduce lives instead of producing material goods, but men are considered as a part of the culture because they participate in the production of the material goods. As a result, women are marginalized in the decisions regarding the 'ordering' of society.

Key Words: Abortion, Faith, Marginalized, Sexuality.

Introduction: Women have been marginalized throughout the centuries. Not all women get a 'second' position in the family and society but a majority of women undergo sexual, mental and physical harassment. Gradually as women got access to education facility, the feelings of self-realization have come to the minds of women. Women could not express their feelings, emotions and thoughts to anybody in the past. It was the society which restricted women from their rights. Women were merely puppets in the hands of male dominating society. Women were living silently in unfavorable social conditions where the husbands were considered as Gods where women must pray to the husbands for their mercy. Women were confined to the four walls of a home and had to play the roles of wife, mother, daughter and sister. Sometimes they had to accept these roles not because of their own free will but because of social demands. The patriarchal society has been snatching the bread and butter of women from their mouth. They have been sacrificing everything for the well-being of their family. Whenever a woman got an opportunity to show her talent in a society, she grabbed it and converted it into the golden opportunity. But patriarchal society did not digest it and started providing fewer opportunities to women. When women stepped out into a society to get access to education, to get job opportunities, to take responsibilities on their shoulders, to know the world as it is, they realized and experienced several dark faces of patriarchal society. They realized their stereotypes, their social status which was buried by men and their future.

In the twenty-first century, women have become the leaders in the families as well as in the society. They have access to their rights and they have been performing their duties accordingly. But the question

remains do all the women enjoy their fundamental rights? Which are the factors responsible for their restricted conditions? Are they independent? Do they have decision making authority? Obviously, the answers to above questions are 'no'. But the condition of some women in a society has begun to change. Education has strengthened them, they have proved themselves as the creators of creativity, they have started expressing them boldly with compassion and passion but it is the society which restricts them to progress. We have entered in an era where it is a time of awakening, lightening, learning and technological advancements as female perceptions begin to take their right turn, and it is an era where the masculine empire has been declining. The female psychology has become emboldened. Men witness their crumbling empire, their dyeing world. Women, now, do not suffer abuse in silent shame. Masculinity has begun to be cracked. Women are taking practical steps like a baby steps and practicing tolerance rather than a cold war with their counterparts. The concepts like independence, self-esteem, autonomy, self-realization and empowerment are now much common with females as they try to practice it. They have realized that they must protect themselves, their homes and children. They know that nobody will take care of them but themselves. The woman takes care of the baby and home and the man takes care of both is a past; she goes to work, he goes to work and ideally both should take care of their children.

Hillary Jordan's *When She Woke* is a story about America that has lost its way. It is story about self-discovery and reclamation in the wake of enormous shame. Women pay a higher price than men for breaking society's rules. Hannah's character from sheltered, obedient Evangelical Christian to frightened fugitive to independent woman with her own notions of faith and sexuality is enormous which

are shown through the different ways of religion and abortion depicted in the book. Jordan's novel explores a lot of big, thorny issues: abortion, faith, governmental control, sexuality, discrimination, etc. Hannah Payne is trapped in a net of relationships where she cannot escape in the beginning but manage to break the net at the end. This is a proactive novel where the line between Church, state and an individual has been eradicated. Hannah, the protagonist of the novel, is no longer imprisoned and rehabilitated but she is chromed. Her skin color is altered by the judicial system of America through viruses to match the class of their crime. Hannah becomes red because she commits a crime of abortion, a murder. Throughout the novel, the readers meet with people having white skin, red skin, yellow skin and green skin. Except white skin colored people, rest of the colors stand for crime and punishment. The story of Hannah just reminds us Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* and provides us a sharp look at the future of reproductive rights. The writer focuses more on religious and political controversy. She weaves the story from more controversial abortion, theocracy and political extremism. Hannah's fight for freedom is a sober warning to American hypocritical society where a 'right to life' is a law and abortion is an offense. The novel begins with Hannah, who wakes up in a prison cell as a criminal. She comes to understand that her body color is changed to red from head to toe. In America, the criminals are 'chromed', a color to match their crime where other people can see the criminals are coming and stay the hell away from them. The concept of 'chroming' is radical and the writer has portrayed the female protagonist as a strong human being to defy the cultural expectations which bind her.

The incidents in the novel bring out Hannah's acceptance of the challenges to fight against the circumstances. She takes over a masculine role and controls the situations to modest them. Hannah transgresses the space provided to her, both physically and psychologically, and interrogates social and sexual boundaries. The author has tried to focus on the stark reality of the lives of 'chromed' people whose hopes, aspirations, dreams, feelings, emotions, and attitudes are shattered by the antagonistic circumstances created for them by the society in which they live and partly by themselves. Women put limits upon themselves is evident everywhere. The parents become the obstacle in the academic development of Hannah. Hannah wants to enjoy college days but the parents do not like it, they just tell her the importance of marriage and husband. As Hannah says-

"College wasn't an option for me," Hannah said. There'd been no money for it, but even if she'd been

able to get a scholarship, her parents would have opposed her going. They'd taught her that her highest purpose as a woman, the purpose for which she'd been created, was to get married, be a helpmeet to her husband and raise a family. (p. 96)

Hannah's parents restrict her to the traditional stereotypes of women. Ideally, four walls of the home and raising and upbringing of children is not the only world for her to live in. The parents most often indirectly teach Hannah not to dream high. Hannah is kept down directly, but she is also counted upon not to ask for enough in the first place. And that is the problem for Hannah who fail to ask for 'more'. If Hannah cannot have access to education, she cannot even think about the economical independence of herself. Her relationship to money is often distorted in the same way as are her relationships to food and sexual pleasure. Disorder relating to money is symptom of Hannah's early power deprivation and indirectly the deprivation of her appetite. Men are not the only who control women's money, appetite and sexuality but the parents, theocracy and judicial system also control it. These forms of social oppression are innately exploitative. Here, Hillary Jordan attacks the narrow mindedness of the parents, religion and the judicial system. For Hannah, religion and judicial system are hypocrites in the development of society. The author wants to convey the fact that financial literacy is to be understood and it is a basic to women's empowerment as reproductive literacy, and financially dependent women are paralyzed in the sense they lose their right of decision. Hannah's poverty, racial discrimination, her lack of access to higher education, religion's interventions, all conspired to keep Hannah away from her own identity. Many people agree that women do not wish to transform the environment or master their surroundings, but it is not the case with Hannah, who struggles hard to take control over her surroundings. Hannah keeps a secret with her, a secret which she never discloses to anybody- a secret of her love.

Parents are more responsible for shaping the life of their children. A child's physical and psychological developments depend on the mentoring of her by the parents. If the parents teach children false notions about the world and things, the children automatically derive false notions about the world.

She showered and put on the clothes Kayla had left for her: jeans, a cotton sweater, underwear, socks and sneakers. Hannah had never worn pants before, and the snug feel of them was discomfiting. She'd been taught that pants were inappropriate for girls because they were immodest, an explanation that had never made sense to her, given that pants, unlike all but floor-length skirts, covered a hundred percent of a woman's legs. Once, just after she turns sixteen, she pressed her mother as to exactly why they were

immodest. "Because they remind men of your legs and what's between them," her mother replied. "Is that what you want to do?" (p. 180)

Putting pants on the body doesn't mean that the girls try to seduce men. A woman must wear whatever she wants in which she feels comfortable. Conventionally, privilege is given to men to think women as a fruit, to pass comments on the clothing style of women and gaze towards women's body so intensely that women should feel themselves as a forbidden thing. If a woman's dressing style arouses man's sexual wickedness, it is the fault of that man and not of a woman. Men must change their attitude and behavior towards women and must tell themselves that women are not like a fruit which they can pick up it any time and taste it. Also, it is duty of parents not to tell their children the false notions rather they should cultivate the rational things into their children.

Abortion is against the norms and rules of new American society. In attempting it, Hannah is showing objections towards the social norms. Society considers this type of crime to be an eternal disgrace. To support the social norms, the judicial system punishes Hannah by making her 'chromed' so that every member of the society will recognize her as a murderer. By chroming as red, yellow and green, the society challenges the very essence of human beings. If a criminal is convicted for a crime, keep her/him in a prison instead pressurizing them to live in society. Living in a society is not the way of redemption and salvation for the criminals. These convicted criminals become prey of people. Hannah is attacked several times by a group of people called 'Fist' who are anti-abortionist. They do not go deep into the problems of convicted people. Cole, Hannah's brother in law, is a member of Fist, but he attempts to kill Hannah. He knows the reality about Hannah that she is unmarried, she is deceived by someone, she is dependent on her parents to live and she has an emotional personality, still he wants to kill her. He forgets all the relations and calls her as 'bitch'. If an

unmarried woman becomes pregnant, is it she solely responsible for it? The concept of pregnancy requires the union of male and female and it is not one way process. In Hannah's case, she is deceived by Reverend Dale, an agent of God, who is supposed to preach the people about Christianity. He is highly respected, welcomed by people. He is married to a woman named as Alyssa. The readers come to know that he has affairs with other women also. The writer attacks the American society which respects the 'son of bitch' like Reverend Dale who is a stigma to the society and the religion. This is the point in the novel where Dale enjoys all the freedoms, he is satisfied with his life and Hannah suffers agonies as she was slept with her once. The contradiction comes when Hannah doesn't get food to calm her appetite and Dale fulfills his sexual appetite by sleeping in bed with other women.

Towards the end of novel, Hannah just gets rid of all the nonsenses happened with her. She leaves the Straight Path Center run by Mr. and Mrs. Henley for the redemption and salvation of 'chromed' women. Hannah cannot suffer the tortures in the path center. Nobody has permission to raise questions towards the enlightener, but Hannah confidently asks questions to the enlightener and abuses him for his misbehavior.

"What kind of monster are you, to treat her like that?" she cried. "Do you honestly think God would approve of what you just did, do you think he's up in Heaven right now saying 'Good job, way to torture that poor woman?'" (p. 142)

Hannah feels free at the end and she says,

'Trust not anyone but yourself.' (p. 315)

'You must set foot upon the path with nothing but yourself.' (p.339)

Hannah violates all the restrictions and burdens. She feels powerful to erode the bitterness of past life. Now she is safe and she doesn't have any kind of fear of religion or hypocritical society.

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