CHAPTER-V

SUMMATION

I feel there is something unexplored about woman that only a woman can explore.

Georgia O’Keeffe.

The thesis is sought to trace and analyze Zora Neale Hurston’s representation of sexuality in four of her works, emphasizing Hurston’s representation of black women as proud sexual beings, striving to lay claim to their bodies, to find their voices, and to oppose repression. It is argued that Hurston reworks stereotypical portrayals of black oversexed women into empowering tales of liberation and of coming to terms with one’s sexuality. It is suggested that Hurston depicts some of her characters in terms of the landscape of the South, thus underscoring their claiming of the history-burdened space. Through using the metaphor of a mule, Hurston transforms her characters from submissive into confident, sexually conscious, and powerful women. Finally, all these features of Hurston’s narratives combine to show the black women’s gradual development from voiceless, fearful, and self-conscious into expressive, experienced, mature and sexually liberated. This progression is particularly emphasized in Hurston’s works to find their identity and autonomy. Hurston’s works demonstrate the biggest challenges of Black women and are still chained to traditional ideals of wifehood and motherhood.

The research knits with African American race, colour, gender- bias, slavery, oppression, cultural roots and roots to seek out female identity and autonomy in the male dominated society. The writers of African - American in turn eviscerate the protagonists’ gossipy female critics, whose contempt and judgements fracture the African American female community instead of unifying it. Her novel Their Eyes Were watching God shows the tragedy that women like Janie, is brave enough to choose self over a lifetime’s worth of sacrifice, and endure attacks from the very population of their actions which originates to liberate. The women around the world have improved their status in terms of educational attainment, political freedom,
employment accessibility, decision making status etc., compared to the status of men, they are still far behind, and in that sense no society in the world exhibits gender equality. A close reading of the novels of African American women writers shows a tremendous awareness of the problems of the women, and it is revealed in their novels depending on the theme.

The contribution of women writers in general is immense, and they are in fact playing a positive role in highlighting the dilemmas, the quest for identity, and the challenges confronting women today. In the words of Anuradha Roy in Patterns of feminist Consciousness in Indian women Writers, “through their fictional creations, women writers participate in, reject, and redefine in different ways the traditional images” (44). Hurston is equally an observer and an experimentalist. This is quite true as she has dealt with the problems of middle class educated women in African American society, with an eye for the literary qualities of her work. It is essential that women need not accept everything as part of their fate. There are instances wherein the family is responsible for the suffering. In such cases, they should learn to find a solution. In this regard, to awaken women to their rights, powers, and potential is the foremost need of the hour, because injustice against them will continue as long as they remain reconciled to the myth of feminists.

Morrison, Williams, and Walker have all publicly noted Hurston’s influence on their writing, and each of the three has, in turn, exerted her own influence on a newly-emerging crop of Black women writers, here and abroad. African women writers such as Buchi Emecheta and Bessie Head, dissatisfied by Black male writers’ romantic depictions of African motherhood, have also followed suit, making Hurston’s and her disciples’ influences global. They have proven to be the Black superwoman’s kryptonite that they have not destroyed her, but their efforts have emboldened many other Black women writers who are increasingly banishing her to the outskirts of African American literature. This is an important development for African American women, both writers and readers. While many of the Black community have considered the Black superwoman role liberating, the tide has
turned, as twenty-first century Black women increasingly reject it as exhausting and burdensome, thus shaking the heavy load from their collective back.

A time has come when they could no longer bear the undeserved social injustice and sufferings meted out to them. They have felt that they must relentlessly fight their way out of slavery, sexism, gender bias, alienation, marginality, racial discrimination, political exclusion and economic exploitation. They have sought racial recognition, equality and dignity. They begin to explore and record in their literary works their long-cherished dream of achieving total freedom in every respect and establishing their identity in a hostile environment. They aspire to become respectable American citizens just like the whites. Black American feminist writers have got connected to their rich cultural past and have explored the African-American culture and tradition. They have reconnected themselves with their folk-roots, rural past and oral tradition and became aware of their rich culture and tradition. Many critics have expressed about the slave culture, the bitter memories of slavery and colonization, myth, the pain and the pathos of the African American people in America are the vital parts of African-American literary tradition. Art is a way to voice. Their art has vividly expressed the robust aspirations of the African American women. They are keen observers of the African American women's determined struggle against abject slavery, race violence, oppression, marginalization, gender bias, sexism and social exclusion and dealt with these critical issues in their literary works.

The black literary works are about the diligent quest for black American identity and liberty. The African American women, in particular, are always mere objects in the American history. The struggle of black American writers is to make black women respectable subjects. Hence, scholars thought that black women were interested in their anti-racist struggle. But the fact is that black female reform organizations were primarily concerned with the women’s movement. It is because of the racism of white women and the social apartheid blatantly exercised in America that African American women choose to focus on their deplorable, pathetic plight rather than all women, both black and white. Despite the fact that black women are
excluded from the organizations of white women, they have believed in the necessity of a unity of black and white women.

The images of the black female character in African-American literature have been an important focus of this research. Until the 1940s, the images of black women had been stereotyped. During the periods of slavery and reconstruction of black women in the Southern part of America, white literary texts are assigned a role that further nourished submission and loss of selfhood. Here, one talks about the pattern of “mammy” who is portrayed as fat, enduring, strong, kind, and nurturing black women, employed in white families in Southern United States. The roles of “mammy” are mainly physical. She is just a laborer and she is not afraid of showing the sensuousness that white women feared to show. Therefore, the African American woman is used as a surrogate of all the physical functions that the white woman does not have the courage to perform. The second most prominent image of the black woman is the image of the “mulatta”.

Here, the African – American novelist, Hurston has wanted to portray the whole society in her writings. But somehow, as the characters have taken shape, all the protagonists turned out to be a woman. Perhaps, as a woman, she is more sensitive to women’s issues, and family relationships. The inner working of the female psyche holds a great fascination for Hurston, and the reader is made to perceive things through a woman’s point of view. Hurston’s women, though on the brink of revolt, do not revolt openly. Their traditional roles gain primacy over their newly acquired, modernize and professional roles. Hurston in her novels foregrounds the silence of women, the passive acceptance of the roles assigned to them. Her focus begins with the house. As a family settlement the house not only provides shelter but is ranked amongst the most immediate space within which African American women can hope to situate themselves. It provides the basic framework within which women can compose, and recollect themselves. It ensures them with a destiny. The novelist does not focus on the décor, or the distribution of objects in the house, she stresses the interiors of the mind. Marriage, the promised end in the traditional society, becomes
only another enclosure that restricts the movement towards autonomy, and self-realization.

Hurston has realistically expressed the misery, and the pain experienced by women in a male dominated society. Her vision of life is optimistic. All her protagonists are passive rebels. They all try to adapt themselves to the society as it is, and in that process they are discovering themselves, new ways of living, and new ways of functioning. Hurston approaches literature differently. Women’s struggle in the context of contemporary African American society, to find, and preserve her identity as wife, mother, and most important of all, as a human being is Hurston’s major concern in her novels.

Novels like *Clottel* (1850) and *Lola Leroy* or *Shadows Uplifted* (1892), the first published novel by an African American woman, creates this heroine who becomes an enduring image for African American women in African-American literature for decades. She has unveiled the dilemma of values that black people faced and represented the forbidden crossing of cultures. The representation of the African American woman as a mulatta in the black literary tradition peaked in early twentieth century in Jean Toomer’s first book *Cane* (1923), and Nella Larsen’s *Passing* (1929). But as time passed, the stereotypical images of mammy and the mulatta are no longer representative of the black women in modern African-American literature. They are replaced with new women for the new age. During the period of the Harlem Renaissance, African American people from the South migrated in great numbers to the urban North in pursuit of prosperity. Black women have migrated too, but their social status does not improve as they have hoped. Instead of working in fields, picking cotton or cleaning the houses of the white masters, the black women have worked as domestics, factory laborers, or prostitutes. In other words, black women are at the lowest bottom of the society’s working scale. The African American literature has given up the old stereotypes and deal with the new realities in books like Zora Neale Hurston’s *Dust Tracks on the Road* (1942), Ann Petry’s *The Street* (1946), and Richard Wright’s *Native Son* (1941).
Hurston has explored black women’s identity and autonomy in her works. While the majority of her literary peers during the Harlem Renaissance are concerned with upward social mobility and the outward appearance of African-American culture, Hurston is motivated and consumed by her own goals. Influenced by her study of anthropology and folklore, she is determined to establish the black female identity in her own way. The African American intellectuals have criticized Hurston for seemingly conforming to the stereotypes that they have tried to overcome. These same critics have branded her literary works as counter-productive to the goal of African-Americans integrating into American society as equals. However, Hurston has created awareness among the African American women about their identity and has continued her crusade undeterred, highlighting the desperate struggle of the black people to survive and secure the most basic rights and freedom.

Hurston’s complete identity and autonomy in her works has been highlighted with folk values, her ear for languages and her lively imagination contribute to the vivid impressions and dramatic appeal of the narrative but distort its structure, character, imagery, symbolism and mood. She uses her womanizing father as a model for anti-heroic protagonist and the Bible to give symbolic significance to the plot. She subordinates plot and character to the vivid illustration of black folklore. The title of the book and its theme are an imaginative rewriting of John 4:1-11. The biblical parable stresses God’s mercy for the repentant sinners of Nineveh, whereas Hurston’s narrative emphasizes God’s judgment on Reverend Pearson for his unregenerate lechery. Though the novel reveals the character of the male protagonist, the most vital part of the novel revolves around a strong female character Lucy Potts. Though she is submissive throughout the novel, she assertively proclaims her identity through her death, set in Alabama and all-black Eatonville. Andrew Burris observes in The Crisis that:

Now Miss Hurston has written a book, and despite the enthusiastic praise on the jacket by such eminent literary connoisseurs as Carl Van Vechten, Fannie Hurst, and Blanche Colton Williams, all sponsors for the New Negro, this
reviewer is compelled to report that *Jonah’s Gourd Vine* is quite disappointing and a failure as a novel . . . (166–67)

In all the novels of Hurston, each character has a story to tell. She portrays life in the middle class society as she sees it in reality. She does not add colour to reality through her imagination but presents it as it is. The characters are fictional but the situations are real. She looks at society in a neutral way. She knows that the society has its good and bad aspects. She expresses her feelings towards society through her characters. She presents both the positive, and the negative aspects of the society, and how it affects different individuals through her heroines. Institutions in the society—gender, race, slavery etc., reinforce, and sustain subordination of women. They do not question patriarchal values, and structures which maintain an unequal position of women in the family. Empowerment of women is the solution to end subordination. Through empowerment women would acquire economic, social, political power, and take part in the decision making. The process of empowerment to achieve gender equality can begin with a positive attitudinal change towards women as a whole. Hurston appears to believe that by not protesting, and offering resistance, the women have to blame themselves for their own victimization. She therefore, put forward that they themselves have to break the shackles that have kept them in the state of captivity for several centuries. Finding themselves trapped in the roles assigned to them by society, women attempt to assert their individuality, and confront their struggles in search of freedom. They try to redefine human relationships. Without rejecting outright the cultural and social background, they realize the need to live in the family but reject the roles prescribed to them by the society. They try to achieve self-identity and autonomy within the confines of their oppression. Thus they manage to extricate themselves from male dominance. At the same time, they are not willing to forgo the security marriage offers them.

A close reading of the novels of Hurston clearly indicates their preoccupation with the different problems women face. Hurston has tried to project strong women capable of surviving all the ordeals as far as possible. The women in Indian fiction are emerging out of darkness, throwing off their legacy of humiliation, dependence, and
resignation, and reaching out for an equitable share of man’s worldly and spiritual goods. Hurston’s fiction deals essentially with the empowerment of women and her fictions offer a convenient theoretical framework to expound her viewpoint. One can see the process of self-identity and empowerment of her women through different stages. The first stage of self identity and autonomy is visible when they can distance themselves from a given situation, and recognize the structures of power. The protagonists learn to analyze the situation in which they are the next stage of this process is when these women characters experience the change of not only being able to understand the dominace but resist it, Hence their courage to protest is experienced. In the third stage realization emerges.

Hurston stresses the need to harmonize the man-women relationship as equal partners. The relationship of man and woman is very similar to that between the master, and his slave. However, the empowered woman has come to know her place, and position in the family and the society. She is conscious of her individuality, and believes that women, as a companion of man, and gifted with equal mental capacities, has the right to participate in the minute details of the activities of man, and she has the same right to freedom, and liberation as man. The empowered woman has come to signify the awakening of woman into a new realization. There is no victory in the subjugation, and destruction of the male. The need is to see each other’s need for space, freedom of expression, identity and autonomy. The female protagonists in Hurston’s novels stand apart from that of their counterparts in the writings of many contemporary women writers. Sandwiched between tradition and modernity, illusion and reality, and the mask and the face, they lead life of restlessness. Progressing along the axis of delimiting restrictions, self-analysis, protest, and self discovery, they try to create both physical as well as psychological space for themselves to grow on their own.

It is clear that like the model new-women, they rebel against the dictates of their domestic duties, and social sanctions, challenge male-devised orthodoxies about women’s nature, capacities, roles and existential insecurity. Transgressing the socially
conditioned boundaries of the body, they frankly and frequently enter into a dialogic relationship with their bodies, both within, and without being the representatives of represent values, beliefs and ideas which are modern, and stand in opposition to the traditional ones. Being the representatives of the new generation of self-actualizing women, they seek to figure out new ways of dealing with their problems, instead of running away from them, and realizing that the solutions lie within themselves. These new women have a balanced, practical approach to their problems. They realize that victory does not lie in the subjugation, and destruction of the male, rather it lies in bringing him to see the indispensability of each other’s space. The new women start up as rebellious, and discontented, but end up renewed, and rejuvenated. It reveals the presence of a definite quest for a true self-identity. Hurston explores, and exposes the feminine consciousness imprisoned within the four walls of domesticity. She thinks that problems of women in African American society is further compromised by their being made to believe that they are custodians of culture, and traditions, thus making them feel personally responsible for any break downs in traditional social structures.

Hurston talks about the problems of women and also gives the solutions for these problems. The solutions do not come from outside but from within. The protagonists undergo a transition, and accept the unchanged situation with self realization that they cannot change the situation but have to change their outlook, and attitude to make their life durable. In all her novels Hurston demonstrates successfully, and convincingly the sources of traps, and violence awaiting women at various stages of their existence, and also suggests some ways, and means of how they can possibly overcome the same through courage, and confidence. It can be observed that most of her women built harmonious relationship in a spirit of give- and –take, and in a mood of compromise, and understanding. They undergo the process of transformation, and change their perspective to cope with life that remains the same. They do not change the situation but change their outlook. This is the common thread found in many of her novels.
In order to explore the plurality, and complexity of female experiences, and to point the possible area of improvement, and development for women, Hurston has convincingly created wonderful portraits of the contemporary realities of womanhood in her respective social contexts, but also make ardent advocacy for a social change to alleviate the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual burdens of women. Hurston stands for black identity and she expresses infinite compassion for the women. Hurston by making her heroines undergo stages of self-introspection and self-reflection, makes them evolve themselves into more liberated individuals than what their biological nature or culture have sanctioned. Freud’s psycho analytic tool, intrapersonal psychotherapy is made use to interpret the protagonist’s self-realization. The protagonists do not feel at peace within. They introspect philosophically, and reach to the conclusion that one has to shape as well as face the events of one’s life. They attain peace of mind by their own efforts.

Hurston also lays emphasis on female bonding, which seems to provide relief to suffering women. The readers come across the role of sisters, mothers and friends coming to rescue of the victim or the harassed and hapless one seeking out some female relative or friend to mitigate her suffering. Women’s problem is so deep rooted that it urges the readers to overcome fear, and anxiety and to take a brave decision to grow, and succeed. The socially constructed ideals of maleness and femaleness obstruct free thinking and freedom of choice and action. External barriers such as social restriction and patriarchal expectations become negligible for women who overcome self-imposed restrictions, and inner barriers of limiting thoughts and beliefs regarding themselves. Through her women characters she conveys female identity and autonomy. She prompts her women readers to make an inward journey to realize the depth of the dehumanizing process which they have been undergoing due to excessive male demands. She does not leave the readers at this juncture of self-pity and frustration but lead them to a regenerative process by providing them ideological weapons, and the ideal of self help. Hurston earnestly endeavours to analyse the questions once raised by Betty Friedan in The Feminine Mystique in order to enable their readers think about the productive possibilities of women’s liberation in an
egalitarian social context: “Who knows what woman can be when they are finally free to become themselves? Who knows what women’s intelligence will contribute when it can be nourished without denying love?” (33).

In the novel Their Eyes Were Watching God, Hurston writes about her tenacious quest for selfhood and invincible spirit by chronicling the life of her beautiful and aspiring female protagonist, Janie Crawford. In this novel Hurston writes basically about the theme of women’s emancipation. She revolts against sexist misinterpretation of women, oppression of the black women, patriarchy, and racism. She lays emphasis on the dreams and desires of the black women. She portrays in her novels how Nature significantly contributes to her heroines’ emotional and spiritual development. In Janie’s case, Hurston employs her power of language to depict her protagonist’s determined quest. As the first African-American female to write with such eloquence and insight into the human spirit, her works formed the foundation and inspiration for future black writers like Alice Walker. In the character of Janie, she has created someone who represented the African-American female of Hurston’s era. Janie, in fact, is a timeless heroine within whose story the modern day female can discover herself and find her own voice. Janie’s quest for identity and self-recognition takes her through three marriages and into a journey back to her roots.

Janie comes back to Eatonville and inspires her female listener, Phoeby, by recounting the ordeal that she has confronted in her life’s journey. This helps her female readers to embark on a study of her quest for self-realization and how she gains her ‘identity’ and ‘autonomy’ in the course of the novel. This character undoubtedly represents a landmark in American literature, ‘Defying previous stereotypical representations of black women as "mammies", 'Jezebels", and "tragic mulattos.” The story of a young girl, whose heart is filled with many dreams and most of them are related to love and marriage. Her beliefs regarding marriage and love, starts going wrong from her first unhappy marriage, which also turns her into a woman from a young girl.
The novel is full of rich African American culture that allows the reader to experience it through different forms of interaction, especially the different forms of storytelling: “First of all there is the lying game mostly have played on the porch in Eatonville, which is an old tradition in the black community. Secondly, storytelling in the novel is also done through gossip. The gossip starts very early in the novel when the town members are curious to find out what transpired between Janie and her third husband and what tragedy made her return to the town she had once happily left. Through the sharing of information the gossip creates community (Lester 26)”. The speech which is used in the novel is often lyrical. Citing the poetical language Joe Starks uses in the early stage of their courtship, Lester notes that, “other characters go beyond talking but instead rap as they communicate with one another (37)”. The language used by the characters also includes metaphors. For example there is the reoccurring metaphor of the pear blossom, which “signifies awakening and possibility (King 60)”.

The language not only presents the various rich lyrical speech forms but also helps to define African American culture. The most striking irony in Their Eyes Were Watching God is that Janie’s marriage to Tea Cake is her key to freedom from men’s bondage and Nanny’s safety-first doctrine. Hurston chooses to end Janie’s quest with the tragic illness of her beloved Tea Cake. Her vitality manifests itself again when she decides to kill the man she loves the most in self-defense. The sun has to kill the night to survive another day, although day and night have been forever inseparable. In her quest for life, she has to take a life. Janie ends love and life to create a vaster possibility for more life.

This imagery combining nature and eroticism sets the framework for the rest of the novel. Janie judges her lovers and husbands through unsuitability to or compliance with the pear tree image and the blossom that is her sexuality. All of her future husbands are described in terms of plants and flowers, and this natural imagery is filled with underlying, yet rather overt, sexual meaning, which always refers back to the pear tree scene. In this manner, Janie’s quest for voice and dignity is sexualized.
by Hurston. Hurston seeks nature to prove her identity and autonomy for heroine Janie. The paths Hurston does want black women to take are represented in detail in her novels, wherein the acclaimed TE deals with a black woman’s sexuality and *Seraph on the Swannee* with what Hurston terms a “cracker” woman. In her longer, more mature works, Hurston extends the natural imagery used in “Sweat” as well as the mule metaphor: Janie in TE envisions her marriage as a blossoming pear tree and then experiences three marriages, all of which repress her voice, her identity and her sexuality, as well as desecrate the pear tree image. In the end, Janie decides to stay alone. Arvay from *Seraph on the Swannee* gets raped by her suitor, marries him, and then has to struggle with his possessiveness, abuse, as well as his overbearing love of her and her own feelings of inferiority, to find an equal role in her marriage to Jim. The two novels end with their female characters’ respective conscious decisions about their future. Their fate is finally in their hands, their identity and independence is liberated after many trials and struggles.

In *Seraph on the Suwannee*, her heroine Arvay Henson copes with a dominant white world and ultimately achieves her social identity through marriage and motherhood. Janie’s three marriages constitute an eventful journey of personal growth from vulnerable young girl to a self-contained adult woman who does not require either a husband or a child to feel complete. While Hurston charts a journey for both Janie and Arvay that culminates in feelings of self-worth and connection to their respective communities, the trajectory of each woman’s journey and the end results are very different. Janie, black, single, and childless or child-free achieves a state that allows her to exercise her strong “womanly voice” as she rejoins the black community which she left years ago (Haurykiewicz 45). From this point on, Janie is the author of her life story. Arvay, white, wife and mother, leaves behind the flawed society of her youth to reconnect with her husband in a newly established community that revolves around his occupation. While Arvay heads off to a new horizon satisfied to conform to someone else’s idea of who and what she should be, Janie, having “done been tuh de horizon and back” (TE 183), is now a fulfilled woman who can stand alone with her uniqueness and freedom.
Through this empowering imagery connecting characters with landscape and specific trees, as well as through her usage of the mule metaphor which exemplifies the transformation from repression to managing one’s fate, Hurston provides a distinct portrayal of black women, focusing on their bodies, the expression of their desires, and their search for the self. A similar process of pain and suffering in attaining equality in a relationship unravels in *Seraph* as Arvay goes through hell, as Hurston depicts her quest, to finally claim power over her husband and find an adequate role in the marriage with the ambiguous Jim. Originally a “cracker,” Arvay is haunted with feelings of inferiority and inadequacy because of her roots – this leads to her almost unchallenged submission to Jim once he rapes her under the mulberry tree. It takes Arvay more than twenty years to find a way of banishing her cracker past and accepting her middle-class role as well as her deeply sexual body to which Jim succumbs more than he lets on to Arvay. Like Janie, Arvay also returns to her tree to find a source of power and make a crucial decision to return to Jim. Though their decisions differ, both female characters make a conscious act of deciding about their future – one does not see that in either *Sweat* or *Color Struck*, where the female heroines remain indecisive or desperately lonely, respectively. The association with the trees thus symbolizes the strength of Hurston’s characters as well as their budding and blossoming sexuality – in order to claim it properly, they have to go through good and bad experiences and then reclaim their identities from men.

Each woman experiences a trial of sorts: Janie, a literal trial for the murder of Tea Cake in self-defense; Arvay, a trial of conscience during which she comes to terms with her past and formulates a plan for her future. Although Janie never actually speaks in the court room, she is acquitted and returns to Eatonville. Arvay, maneuvering through the emotional detritus of her past, experiences the kindness of people after her mother’s death and comes to understand that she has “changed inside” (TE 298). She decides to join Jim in a new community by the ocean where he now makes a living, harvesting shrimp. St. Clair claims that “Arvay affirms her separate identity by choosing her own direction….” and that she “submits to the power of love” (55); in other words, Arvay’s decision could be considered as an act
of female agency. Arvay exhibits a degree of self-determination. She has made choices and reconnected with the community. Bell Hooks says about Janie, “Ultimately her triumph in womanhood is that she acquires the ability to name and define her reality” (19-20). One could say the same for Arvay. Arvay’s reality, however, remains within the confines of a social tradition rooted in domination. While Arvay’s social connections derive from her relationship with her husband, Janie returns to her community as a separate entity, complete within herself, with her own story to share with her friend, phoeby, who will pass it on to the communal “Mouth-Almighty” (5).

Their Eyes Were Watching God concludes with Janie pulling in “her horizon like a fish-net. Pulled it from around the waist of the world and draped it over the shoulder (TE 184)”, and, as Kathleen Davies points out, she drapes it over “her own shoulders, rather than over a man’s” (157). Michael Awkward believes this representation as “an act of consolidation whereby Janie, insisting on the right to define herself on her own terms, resolves “a double consciousness into a unified, black sensibility (156)” In contrast, at the end of Seraph on the Suwannee, Arvay talks herself into believing that her happiness lies in submitting to a socially constructed identity that positions her as wife and mother. While Janie’s fish net is a symbol of her subjectivity and independence, the fish net imagery used in Seraph on the Suwannee, represents a tool of patriarchal entrapment. Both Janie and Arvay establish their female identity and autonomy and, demonstrating their feeling of self-worth, achieve a sense of place in their communities. They undergo significant changes in terms of self-realization and empowerment. Arvay is regenerated into an energetic wife and mother through whom she establishes her identity and liberation while Janie eventually reaches her horizon, surmounting formidable obstacles.

Hurston’s autobiographical elements also prove in the same vein; she lets her desire to dictate her journey just like her permitting the dust roads to guide her feet. Hurston’s Dust Tracks on a Road disappoints or even confuses any reader who attempts to regard it as a footnote to Hurston’s life since she writes her autobiography
without intending to let the reader know the minute details of her life. But she wants the reader to “interpret the incidents and directions of [her] life” (DT 3). As an autobiographer, Hurston is less concerned with telling the “truth “on the basis of prior self-knowledge than with demonstrating how truths are constructed and reconstructed. For Hurston, “truths” are always proven on the basis of the self’s misrecognition of what the self is and what it wants, rather than on its recognition. As a novelist who perceives “lying” as likely “truth” (Gilmore 106), Hurston further shows the reader how the so-called truth could be reinvented not by established rules but by her own mind, and at the same time could be re-told in her own way. “By admitting her lies, Hurston comes closest to the truth (Krasner 116)”.

Autobiographies, in this sense, are no more “real” than fictions. Both autobiographies and fictions are “all narrative-based, and are all “verbal fictions” in that they are all (not “found” but) structured, selected, invented and shot through with kind of literariness, such as metaphor, allusion and Juxtaposition” (Childs 151). The language Hurston makes use of in her autobiography is distinctly oral. She often makes use of the pronoun “you” as if she were directly addressing a speaker. Often in describing an event it is as if Hurston were actually speaking to the reader, responding as if the reader asked her to affirm what she had just said. “Then in the midst of other difficulties, I had to get sick. Not a sensible sickness for poor folks to have. No, I must get down with appendicitis and have to have an operation right away” (DT106). This line stands out and also seems more oral because of the shift in tenses: the previous lines and subsequent lines are in the simple past, while here she uses the present tense. She pauses in the story she is telling in order to complain to her addressee as if he or she were standing right in front of her. “Of course Hurston grew up in the oral tradition of Southern culture, which had its roots in African culture. Africans traditionally focused more on the spoken than on the written word and had a highly developed oral art (Reith 2)”. Wideman observes that Hurston made an effort to make her texts livelier, to make them speak like the best storytellers by animating her text “page by page, line by line and word for word” (xi).
**Dust Tracks on a Road** could be regarded as a fictionalized autobiography since the more it reveals, the more it covers Hurston’s life. Janie, the heroine of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, has been to the far horizon and now comes back to her community and rejoins her people. In telling another black woman, her best friend Pheoby, what she has seen, heard and experienced in her life-journey, she does “return to Eatonville with her hard-won knowledge (Kubitschek 109)”. Janie’s autobiography- her very act of recounting to Pheoby her childhood, her three marriages, her female quest not for economic security and social status but for self-discovery and self-fulfillment- is actually Hurston’s efforts to register and express black women’s desire for love and life in white America.

Hurston clearly shows the reader how she tells her story to the reader by bringing the reader’s attention to the very process through which the self is formed and reformed, by retelling her heroine’s life stories. James Krasner has carefully observed: “the most interesting operation in the book is not Janie’s telling of her own success story, but the narrator’s retelling Janie’s telling in order to demonstrate the way in which autobiographical fiction is constructed (Krasner 118)”. Neither Janie’s life-stories nor Hurston’s life-writing should be regarded as an absolute expression of or the only truth about black women’s joy and sorrow, love and hatred, but, instead it should be taken as the beginning, not the end, of the black women writers’ exploration into the possibilities of black womanhood. Robert E. Hemenway assures that “Zora had an affair with a man of West Indian parentage whom she had first met in New York in 1931 and then found again during her short-lived attempt at graduate school (Hemenway 231)”. According to Hemenway, Hurston expresses her deep emotion toward this love affair when it eventually came to an end. “As she admitted,’ [t]he plot was far from the circumstances, but I tried to embalm all the tenderness of passion for him in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (Hemenway 231). In this sense, one can identify the “author Hurston”, “the writer self” with the “fictional-Janie”, “the speaker self”, since the two voices seem to resonate with each other throughout the novel. Hurston lets her heroine Janie, who is very much like Hurston herself, talk
and, walk in her own way, make her own decisions without hesitations or regrets and pursue her female quest for love and respect, female identity and autonomy.

Hurston, in fact, by weaving and placing together the broken fabrics that make up the quilt of a black woman’s life, represents her collective experience by putting words in Janie’s tongue. Hurston’s love story, in this sense, could be retold or even recreated by any black woman who is ready to embark on a female quest for self-fulfillment and self-empowerment. Hurston reveals that Janie represents the experiences of African American women. Janie is a typical African-American woman and Hurston depicts how Janie’s journey is taken on behalf of her black sisters, in the sense that Janie opens up a horizon for them, to speak up the desire that lies latent within them.

Hurston begins *Seraph on the Suwannee* with a reference to minstrel portrayals of southern culture, asking the reader to consider how uncovering minstrel history can better illuminate Arvay’s story—a poor white woman’s search for identity within the gendered paternalist residuals of plantation culture in the modern South. As Baker argues, “Hurston uses Arvay’s story to express her own resolution of the American identity crisis. Indeed, in the title and the first lines of the book, Hurston invokes one of America’s most beloved minstrel songs and its writer: “Sawley, the town, is in west Florida, on the famous Suwannee River. It is flanked on the south by the curving course of the river which Stephen Foster made famous without ever having looked upon its waters” (SS 1). Hurston’s portrayal of Arvay as similar to the black folk causes the white Sawley community to further discriminate against Arvay. Hurston again forges bonds between white women and African-American culture when she describes Arvay’s zealous religiosity: “Arvay had turned from the world. Such religious fervor was not unknown among white people, but it certainly was uncommon…Excessive ceremonies were things that Negroes went in for. White folks just didn’t go on like that” [SS 4]. Even while the church pretends to be moved by Arvay’s pledge to missionary service, Hurston tells how the “community soon put Arvay Henson down as queer, if not a little ‘fetched’”(SS 6).
Cynthia Ward argues that “Arvay’s identity, insignificant as it is, is located and fixed within a rigid structure of the white working-class community’s values. Jim’s challenge to her to play with and redefine that structure in effect threatens her tiny self” (Cynthia 81). Arvay’s firm disbelief that she is meant to play the part emerges, when, time and again, she fails to act like the southern woman and disappoints Jim; in repeated moments when Jim expresses anger and frustration with Arvay, Hurston exposes Arvay’s wifehood as a clearly constructed role that must be performed correctly in order to, as Jones argues, “justify the perpetuation of the hegemony of the male sex, the upper and middle classes, and the white race” (10). Jim uses religion to build his idea of how their marriage should be conducted when, echoing a particularly Pauline philosophy, he says “A woman who knows her master is all right, and she answers to his commands” (SS 33). Jim also invokes a religious hymn to describe Arvay’s role: “I told you, like that old hymn says, marriage with me never was designed to make your pleasures less. Rest easy…” (SS 74).

**Seraph on the Suwanee** is a highly symbolic novel. Hurston has used many complex symbols in the novel. One another symbol present in the novel is that of the burning of the house. Arvay goes back to Sawley, for her mother’s funeral and later puts fire to the old house of her family. This burning of house has a great symbolic meaning for Arvay. She is immensely happy at her act. Hurston writes:

Looking at the conflagration, exultation swept over her, followed by a peaceful calm. It was the first time in her life that she was conscious of feeling that way. She had always felt like an imperfect ball restlessly bumping and rolling and bumping. Now she felt that she had come to a dead and absolute rest. The dry old house dead and absolute rest. The dry old house burned furiously, and as Arvay watched the roaring and ascending flames, she picked herself over inside and recognized why she felt as she did now. She was no longer divided in her mind. The tearing and ripping and useless rending was furnished and done.

(SS 879)

Hurston constructs her novel on this conventional structure. Like any romance where hero and heroine function as the center of the story, so Jim and Arvay. The whole
story revolves around them, with Arvay being the protagonist of the story like Cinderella. There are also other minor characters present but they only serve as a foil to the hero and heroine. Larraine, elder sister of Arvay acts as a foil to Arvay, while Carl Middleton, brother-in-law of Arvay, functions as a foil to Jim, for in the beginning of the novel, he too, serves as a potential lover for Arvay. Hurston portrays Arvay as a very beautiful girl who enchants Jim so much that he eventually rapes her in order to possess her. Interestingly, Hurston portrays the rape of Arvay by Jim in a romantic fashion. —Jim penetrates her violently and forcibly, and Arvay like Sleeping Beauty in the fairy tale, seems to be awakened by his probing of her body (Campbell 144). Jim marries Arvay. They have ups and downs in their married life, but they both overcome their problems to reunite in the end and live happily ever after. To quote John Lowe:

In Hurston’s conceit, Arvay, like Cinderella, finds her handsome prince, who whisks her away from her unhappy home (replete with a wicked sister) and installs her in what eventually is described as a veritable central Florida —Castle. (SS 278)

Just as the symbol of dog is associated with males so is the horse imagery associated with females. When Jim tells his friend Joe about his feelings about Arvay, Joe advises Jim to dominate Arvay just as humans do with horse. Joe advises Jim:

Most women folks will love you plenty if you take and see to it that they do. Make ‘em knuckle under. From the very first jump, get the bridle in the mouth and ride ‘em hard and stop ‘em short. They’s all alike, Boss. Take ‘em and break ‘ems. (SS 640)

When Arvay returns to Sawley after Larraine and Carl have picked over her mother’s possessions, only the organ remains: “There was nothing in there except that relic of an organ, which had been nothing for years but a rat’s nest” (SS 301). This image reminds us directly of Arvay’s talent as a musician—a talent deep inside her that was never nurtured, but instead, gnawed away by her years of service to Jim. As Arvay burns the organ along with the house, she burns a symbol of the one trait that connected her to Joe Kelsey and his blues, as well as provided her independence and
difference from Jim. Hurston reveals to readers the complicated version of southern music history derived from the exploitation and celebration of white women and the African-American population.

Hurston’s diagnostic approach posits Arvay, the wife and mother, as a symptom of what is wrong with Anglo-Saxon culture: she may be complicit but does not possess enough power to be the root cause. As O’Reilly points out, in a patriarchal society “[M]others do not make the rules . . . they simply enforce them” (44). Jim is the means through which Arvay can understand herself as worthwhile. Because he is so highly valued by society, she, as his wife, shares and benefits from his privileged social position. But they do not share that privileged social space as equals. Hurston’s diagnosis centers on a close analysis of the stormy relationship that exists between Arvay and Jim. To reiterate, the works analyzed in the thesis display Hurston’s profound knowledge of the discourse surrounding the black woman’s body and the imagery of oversexed black females this discourse propagated.

The rebellious and activist author transforms the fears about nonwhite women’s overt sexuality, which were at the centre of the discourse, into empowering metaphors and portrayals of female bodies. The mule metaphor, wherein the toiling black female is treated as a working and breeding machine, is turned into a metaphor of resistance in terms of sexual power. The animal is transformed into a confident woman in control of her sexuality and her body. As Janie returns to Eatonville, she displays her beautiful body in front of everyone to see. Arvay seduces Jim and lures him into her now powerful embrace. These two women come a long way from what Delia and Emma have to deal with. While Delia struggles to get rid of her husband Sykes and Emma succumbs to her color-consciousness, the female characters from Hurston’s novels proudly claim their bodies and make decisions about their future. There is a clear progression and development in Hurston’s portrayal of female sexuality in her works, yet what remains constant throughout the four works is that “the beginning of this was a woman” (TE 1), and that sexuality can be viewed as one of the most prominent themes in Hurston’s fiction.
Full of the richness of the blacks’ vernaculars and humor, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is a novel teeming with bodily passion and with the deep desire on the part of a black woman, to love and to be loved as a “nigger” woman, rather than painting her heroine as an asexual woman who abandons her first husband, verbally castrates her second one and eventually kills her third and the most beloved husband. Nevertheless, most of Hurston’s “prominent and leading” black male contemporaries do not appreciate Hurston’s great efforts. Richard Wright, on the contrary, bitterly criticized Hurston for her failure to “move in the right direction of serious fiction” (16). Wright dismisses Hurston’s novel as a piece which only satisfies the white’s fantasy for funny Negros. Otis Ferguson feels quite uncomfortable about Hurston’s preference for black dialects and the vernacular, for “although the spoken is remembered, it is not passed on” (23). Sterling Brown, furthermore, seriously doubts whether Hurston still bears the racial issues in mind as a black writer is always supposed to do, since “living in an all-colored town, these people escape the worst pressures of class and caste”(20). Alain Locke greatly admires Hurston’s “cradle gift” for “telling a story convincingly”. However, her failure to “grip with motive fiction and social document fiction” displeases him much (18).

All these charges, indeed, are indicative of the vulnerable position in which Hurston is put as a black female writer. Like her heroine Janie, Hurston also has to face “the trial” for transgressing the established boundaries set for black female writers: her tendency to show the beauty of black dialects, her boldness to express black female’s pleasures, sufferings and sexuality, and above all, her insistence to demonstrate how the key issues of race, gender and class are closely intertwined and assert the blacks’ legitimate female identity and autonomy in her “all-black” town. “The challenge of Hurston’s character”, as Mae Gwendolyn Henderson strongly argues , “is that of a black woman writer- to speak at once to diverse audience about her experience in a racist and sexist community where to be black and female is to be , so to speak, “on trial” [21],to voice her desires, and to (re)define her identity.

Janie finds out that marriage without love might ensure social status and material success but it fails to provide her with the freedom to explore the world
around her, to develop her potential and most crucially, to be herself. Janie’s journey, in fact, is a journey from self-doubt to self-fulfillment, from silence to speech, from limitations to possibilities. In addition, Janie, after having gone to “the far horizon,” decides to come back to Eatonville, her own people, which is a symbolically significant act. Her return is as important as her departure. As Barbara Christian argues, “Janie does not see her life as tragic; she sees it as full and rich. Indisputably, she brings back to her community a significant message that self-fulfillment rather than security and status, is the gift of life” (Black 59). In returning to share with her own people what she has experienced in her self-discovery, Janie sets herself up as, in the words of Lee Edwars, “a compelling model of possibility for anyone who hears her tale” (Washington 107). In this sense, Janie’s journey would never come to an end but instead, would be continued by anyone who passionately responds to Janie’s call.

Hurston’s women characters aspire for and achieve control over their lives. They break away from their loveless marriages and attain autonomy, identity, self-realization, self-fulfillment and independence. They dream, grow, love, search for a new world, attain freedom, and assert their individuality. They evolve and ultimately emerge as liberated, confident women. Friedan speaks about the Strike for Equality, All kinds of women’s groups all over the country will be using this week on August 26 particularly, to point out those areas in women’s life which are still not addressed. For example, a question of equality before the law; we are interested in the equal rights amendment. The question of child care centers which are totally inadequate in the society, and which women require, if they are going to assume their rightful position in terms of helping in decisions of the society. The question of a women’s right to control her own reproductive processes, that is, laws prohibiting abortion in the state or putting them into criminal statutes; He thinks that would be a statute that we would [be] addressing ourselves to.

African American women are suppressed in the past which is evidently proved by many female writers through their pen. Hurston presents her female characters in her works, oppressed and alienated and urge for freedom and liberation.
After many trials and tribulations through race, colour, sexism, gender bias, marginalization, have emerged as empowered women like Janie, Lucy, Delia, Arvay and so on. African American though have some frustrations, may be liberated in the future who will not be dependent on male as seen through the dreams of Female authors. Zora Neale Hurston is such a great personality who portrays her female protagonists liberated after many struggles to find their identity and autonomy. Hurston is the role model for all the African American writers who give voice for women liberation through their literary works.

The scope of further study of Hurston’s works may be still analyzed and carried out for research work in the terms of cultural roots and tradition of African Americans, Marginalization, Gender bias of the African American society, Man–women relationships, Hurston as a Folklorist, Hurston as eco-writer, African American slavery, Marriage as means of liberation, Black and white system of living, African American Diaspora: an analysis, Imagery and Myth in the works of Hurston, Style and diction in the fictions of Hurston, Language and Style in the novels of Hurston, Women Characters of Hurston’s novels and so on. Thus, Hurston, a paragon of African American literature is a boon and a legend in the hearts of all the African American writers.

The study practically points to Indian women, who over the centuries in all civilization and cultures, are suppressed, oppressed and marginalized in the matter of sharing the available opportunities for the fulfillment of their lives. Despite that every woman works for the development of her family, her husband, and children. They are bounded with their own superstitions, yet struggles to come out of the shells. The inception of the women’s movement can be traced not to a radical awakening but to a gradual enlightenment about the role to be played by women both in home, and in the nation. Their “heroic role” is defined by reference to the part, mythic women and to contemporary freedom fighters like Sarojini Naidu, kamaladas Chattapadhaya, Aruna Asif Ali, and Raj Kumara Amrit kaur. Each highlighted an aspect of the idealized Indian Women. Women’s issues in Post-independent India were complex, and more complicated, and encompass a range of issues relating to work, wages, civil rights,
sex, violence, representation, caste, class, and health. The self definition of the woman is further problematical. She lives in a society where tradition is an integral part of the daily life, and enjoins codes of cultural behaviour. The actualization of a self and identity is counter pointed against the established norms of a patriarchal society. Throughout the ages women in India has faced gruesome atrocities. Many Indian English fiction writers like Sarojini Naidu, kamala Markandaya and Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal, Shashi Deshpande highlighted the plight of women, their increasing problems, physical and emotional exploitation, and their mental anguish in the male dominated society in every sphere of life. They have been echoing the feeling of marginality and expressing their revolt against the purely masculine world. The Indian women writers stressed their need for women to break free from the shackles of their traditional position. Yet somewhere in the society women is silenced. Hurston is the greatest example who is bold, revolutionary to raise voice for the women community.

To sum up, the sensible and logical presentations of the feminist concerns of Hurston through the ideological apparatus of fiction energize, aesthetise, and illuminate the minds of the readers, and empower them for an effective encounter with the stark realities of the competitive world which they inhabit. Being a radical writer, who upholds the value of co-operation, and companionship between men, and women, Hurston envisions a world of freedom, knowledge, equality and hope for both men, and women, and emphasize on what a man, and a woman have to give each other, on the mystery of completion, and not on the discussion of separate superiorities. Change will come only if women themselves acknowledge, and articulate the desire, and need for change. Hurston also suggests that active and independent participation in a consumer society is the road to female identity and autonomy. Thus in this study the researcher establishes that in all the novels of Hurston knits in many dimensions of female identity and autonomy, like economic, socio-cultural, interpersonal, sexual, academic, psychological etc is portrayed through various women characters and their urge to emancipate to find their identity and autonomy in the modern world.