Preface

Zora Neale Hurston is a literary giant in African American literature. Though discovered recently, she is already considered as the literary foremother of all African American women writers. Her life and literature has become a paradigm to understand African American culture and African American women’s life. Hurston being a folklorist and an avid lover of her culture imbues all her works in African American folklores which are a signature mark of her works. Hurston’s novels, *Jonah’s Gourd Vine, Their Eyes Were Watching God, Moses, Man of the Mountain* and *Seraph on the Suwanee* point each and every aspect of a human being and his surroundings. Through her works Hurston manifests the thriving African American life and culture.

The thesis is divided into seven chapters. Chapter I is African American Women Writers of the Twentieth Century. The chapter deals with the African American writers of the twentieth century, their history, themes and on-going trends. Major writers and their works have been covered. Effort has been made to explore into the psyche of these writers and probe into their minds. The chapter not only encompass them chronologically, but also delves deep into the various factors which have shaped their creative mind.

Chapter II deals with Zora Neale Hurston’s life and works. The chapter is divided into three parts. The first section deals with the early life of Zora Neale Hurston, her childhood and teenager years. Effort has been made to delve deep into the early influences which shaped her personality and her literary trends. The second section is about Hurston’s career and her literary endeavours. Various literary influences on Hurston, and her intriguing personal life have also been looked at. The third and the last section deals with the resurrection of Zora Neale Hurston. The
section extensively deals with how she was brought back from obscurity and her influence on other African American women writers and African American literature as a whole.

Chapter III is on Zora Neale Hurston’s first novel *Jonah’s Gourd Vine*. This is a story inspired by her parent’s lives. Hurston explores the vices and virtues of a simple common man. The primary setting of the novel is rural Florida. It is a story steeped in rich African American culture and folklores. Hurston explores various themes such as religion, marriage, jealousy, sin and salvation, slavery and racism in the novel. The most redeeming quality of the novel is the use of the African American dialect which was so unusual for any African American writer of Hurston’s time.

Chapter IV is on Hurston’s magnificent novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. It is perhaps the first feminist novel in African American literature. It is a story about an African American woman and her struggle to live a life for her own happiness. Hurston brilliantly develops the story in the background of African American culture. She uses folkloric traditions as an intrinsic part of the story. The main themes dealt with are marriage, gender, love, search of identity and blues. Various symbols and imagery have been studied. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is also known for a pioneering use of narrative which has been studied in the chapter.

Chapter V is on Hurston’s third novel, *Moses, Man of the Mountain*. It is a unique novel since Hurston deals with the serious biblical theme of exodus, using a literary sleight of hand. She also uses the story as an allegory to comment on African American slavery and oppression. Themes such as race and racism, nature, gender, class, liberation and freedom have been extensively studied. Various narrative techniques have also been also been analysed in detail.
Chapter VI is on Hurston’s last novel *Seraph on the Suwanee*. It is a novel about whites. Hurston explores the white culture and their personal lives in the novel. The novel is highly symbolic and complex, and explores the psyche of the neurotic protagonist. The novel is once again set in rural Florida. The themes in the novel are class, marriage, nature, religion, gender and motherhood. Though African American characters are minor, but they are integral to the plot. Narrative techniques have also been dealt with in the study. The novel is replete with complex symbols and imagery.

Chapter VII is conclusion. This chapter is the culmination of all the chapters. Hurston’s *Jonah’s Gourd Vine, Their Eyes Were Watching God, Moses, Man of the Mountain* and *Seraph on the Suwanee* have been taken for the study. This chapter is an assessment of all the themes and narrative techniques used in the above works. All the four novels are different in their own sense, yet are connected with each other. A final conclusion has been made in this chapter.