

**QUEST FOR SELFHOOD IN NTOZAKE SHANGE'S *FOR COLORED GIRLS*  
WHO HAVE CONSIDERED SUICIDE/ WHEN THE RAINBOW IS ENUF**

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**Abstract**

Most of the African – American writers have consistently been distracted with racial topics and social inheritances. Racial prejudice has persisted in the black Americans life due to their oppression and colonization. Though the subjection was legitimately annulled, the blacks kept on being treated with disdain by the whites and were regularly made fatalities of shamefulness and abuse by them. The black has started to acknowledge their obscurity as an image of their ethnic character only after the origin of ‘Black Renaissance’. The ‘Black Power Movement’ focused on black pride and gradually the blacks started to acknowledge their obscurity, as a part of their character and they feel proud of their African past about which they were embarrassed. This configuration of black cognizance delivers itself to the development of an identity.

Most of the black female playwrights present the struggles and sufferings of the black people through art. The authors used their writings as a medium to delineate the more profound issues of blacks particularly their identity crisis. They especially pushed their black females to feel proud of their black identity. Among those black writers Ntozake Shange’s works are of great implication. The present paper aims at the theme of search of one’s identity in Ntozake Shange’s *for colored girls...* in African American culture.

**Key Words:** Identity, African American, rainbow, sufferings

Shange , as a black writer, expresses the cultural, racial and black feminist issues in her writings. She infused poetry, dance, music, dialogues and skit in her works and created a new genre called ‘choreopoem’ or ‘choreodrama’. This choreodrama recollects the significant traits of African theatre. Her choreopoem or so-called choreodrama *for Colored Girls who have considered suicide/ when the rainbow is enuf* is a lively and greatly artistic work. In this work, she explores the struggles, sufferings and joys of seven black women and celebrates their capability and conquers their distress. The seven characters are dressed in the colour of the rainbow with addition of brown. The characters share their suppression of being black and of being female. This *for colored girls...*, is a collection of poems mingled with dance and music.

The choreopoems search a new identity and encounter the characteristics of nothingness. In Shange’s *for colored girls...*, the practice of nothingness is born out of the twofold encumber of being woman and being a black. African American writers devote their accomplishments to advance a feeling of belongingness and profound- rootedness of the black identity. Identity is worried about self-definition, and the self is conceptualized as a genuinely steady, inner substance that is seldom altered to fit the specific circumstance.

The famous and notable writer Elizabeth Brown Guillory coins the artistic skills of Shange’s work in Hine’s work as, “The major theme in Shange’s works is the abuse of women and children. Her female characters survive in the face of loneliness, rejection and rape.” (191) She further elucidates Shange’s remark of sexuality in her choreodramas as handling of the sexuality problems in her play *for colored girls who have considered suicide/ when the rainbow is enuf*. The sexual sufferings of women is narrated by the writer in her *for colored girls...*, the women in the oppressed society were assaulted by their own friends and the men in highest

position but they are anxious of collecting money from them. These women are fallen as the victims in the hands of society and villains. Shange gives importance to the exposure of female identity and the gender discrimination.

The writer points out the conventional beliefs of people whose minds were occupied with myths and the fright of ethnic beliefs. She asserts, “We are lost in the confusion of myths and fears of race and sex. To be a good, to be respectable and worthy citizens, we’ve had to combat absurd phantasmagoric stereotypes about our sexuality, our lusts and loves, to the extent that we disavow our own sensuality to each other. (Lockett 196) Shange proclaims that sexuality is the final remedy for all their riddles. Through these characteristics many characters try to show their identity to the society.

The African American females explore themselves to the society and they realize that they are dreadfully entwined with it. Through this concept the writer declares how the African women are dominated and marginalized by the male society. The suppressed women expect their self independence. Stream of consciousness technique is aptly applied by the writer in this choreodramas. The technique is a dramatic vehicle used by the writer to present her vision about feminine individuality. Carrie J. Boden confers Shange’s application of stream of consciousness technique as, “... uses stream of consciousness in her theater pieces, and she urges black playwrights to abandon European theater models and move toward African American traditions that include storytelling, rhythms, and dance.”(Nelson 391)

Similar to Shange many writers give their voices for the female’s search of self identity. In this way the Indian writer Bharathi Mukerjee present the theme of quest for identity in her novel *Jasmine*. The protagonist Jasmine is never disappointed by her worries and she is always

in search of her identity. Chris Weedon, in his book *Identity and Culture: Narratives of Difference and Belonging*, considers identity as an important element:

The desire to be from somewhere, to have a sense of roots and a feeling of belonging are key features of the quest for positive identity in postmodern, post-colonial societies. The current popularity of genealogy and family history point to this need, as does the marketing of family names, crests and the like. It is also manifest in the popularity of tourism concerned with roots and heritage. (85)

She converted the blind and false beliefs of the society into a positive note. Like African women Jasmine raises up her individuality by breaking up the false notions of the living community. "Fate is Fate, When Beulah's bridegroom was fated to die to snakebite on their wedding night; did building as still fortress prevent his death? A magic snake will penetrate solid walls when necessary."(4) The works of the female writers delivers the struggles and dilemmas of female in the present environment. These writing push the real suffers to come out from their obstacles.

Shange ennobles the painful inner minds of females and informs that they have the responsibility of loving and caring of female society. They battle for survivals in the society and have the dilemma of facing the world as a female character and especially as a black. These women are oppressed by the society in double aspects as being a woman and a black. They struggle to come out from their riddles and search their own identity. In Shange's *for colored girls...*, the writer has chosen the names of the character from the lowered- cased. These names refer their poor and abused status of the black female in the white society. This example itself reflects the writer's desire of bringing her black community towards the liberation of the society. Shange's dramas assert the physical and mental agonies of the black women in the white world.

In the choreodrama *for colored girls*... the character lady in brown conveys the significance of names through her songs as:

sing a black girl's song  
bring her out  
to know herself  
to know you  
but sing her rhythms  
carin/ struggle/ hard times  
sing her song of life  
she's been dead so long  
closed in silence so long  
she doesn't know the sound  
of her own voice  
her infinite beauty. (4)

Shange's dramas convey that black conversation reveals the closeness of music with human life. It further informs that dance, music and speech are intertwined with each other and as well as it related to the human existence. The writer pin points the female struggles of race and abortions which are faced mostly by the black female society. Their individuality is suppressed in these countenances. According to white culture the black women's sensual pleasures and sexual practices are estimated in a negative way.

Toni Cade Bambara in her essay "For Colored Girls- And White Girls Too" pictures Shange's point of women's sufferings as

What is curious about the work is that though men appear exclusively as instruments of pain, there is no venom, no resorting to a Queen of Hearts Solution off with his head! No god- like revenge, no god- like forgiving. Hell, some things are unforgivable. The women of the various pieces suck their teeth, storm, sass and get on with the miracle of living. (38)

The final part of Shange's choreodrama narrates the attainment of females search for identity which is powered by the upper class white society. The writer has given the image of god in oneself; it is a credit to her accomplishment. These attitudes give the women to view the world in a different angle. She prepares herself to look forward the world as a black woman. The lines narrate the self realization of woman as, "I found god in myself// and I loved her/ I loved her fiercely". The black woman fulfills her identity through this apprehension and there is no necessity for her to depend upon the white women and the male society.

Shange's choreo dramas celebrate the identity of black females in the white society. She never encourages women to depend upon men and to tolerate the social practices. Her communication places the importance of male- female relationship which results in an interchangeable understanding.

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