

Supernatural Beliefs in African Diaspora

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Abstract: This study is an attempt to determine the supernatural beliefs which prevails or dominates in African diaspora in the light of materialistic world. This novel is imbued with supernatural incidents and occurrences. This novel is fraught with tragedy and pain. Every character of this novel has his/her own painful story. Each and every character is contributing his/ their best to change his/their condition and plight. At some part of this novel, the tragedy is not an individual experience, but is rather like a collective consciousness. In the parameters of materialistic worlds, these incidents would not look like a real incidents. The mind of anybody would raise so many questions. Which might be reasonable and logic based. How can a person control the power of nature? How can a person talk with dead people? Such type of things prevails in every society. What are the reasons and causes of dominating such type of superstitious things in these societies. In this study we would try to analyse and measure such type of things in the parameters of materialistic world.

Keywords: African, Beliefs, Diaspora, Supernatural.

1. PREVIEW

In today world, Every language has its own literature. Literary field of a language may be very vast and comprehensive. Any work cannot be confined within the boundaries of any country. Every individual has liberty to study any work from any part of the world. Anyone has no restrictions. In spite of the fact, one does not know every writer. We don't read every writer. And It is not possible to study every writer. Whenever we hear the name of any writer, a curiosity arises in our mind. Who is this writer? What is the contribution of this writer in the field of literary world? What profession has been adopted by this literary man for spending the life? During his life, Which type of obstacles has been confronted by this writer? What is the family background of this writer? What is the educational qualification of the writer? These are the bit of some questions, which would arise/strike in the mind of reader. Before going on the text of topic, so there is a requirement or need to narrate about the writer.

2. INTRODUCTION

Gloria Naylor (January 25, 1950- September 28, 2016) was born in New York city, where she grew up and later became American Novelist. She became a world known figure, after writing the debut novel 'The Women of Brewster Place' (1982). She was the oldest child of "Roosevelt Naylor" and "Alberta Mcalpin". The Ancestors of Naylor's family had been sharecroppers in "Robinsonville" and "Mississippi". The forefathers migrated to "Harlem" to escape life in segregated South. Her father was a transit worker. Her mother was a telephone operator. She received a support of parents for her education. She was an outstanding and intelligent student. She studied everything in voraciously manner. In 1981, she gained a Bachelor degree in English from "Brooklyn College". In 1983, she earned a Master Degree in "Afro-American" studies from "Yale University". The debut novel won the 'National Book Award' in 1983 in the category of First novel.

Following are the important works to her credit-

1. The Women of Brewster Place(1982)
2. Linden Hills(1985)
3. The Meaning of a Word(1986)
4. Mama Day(1988)
5. Bailey's Cafe(1992) 3
6. Children of the Night: The Best Short Stories by Black Writers, 1967 to Present(1995)
7. The Men of Brewster Place(1999)

These works played very important and significant role and contribution in order to establish the fame Professor. She has taught writing and literature at "George Washington University", "New York University", "Boston University" and "Cornell University". While she was visit on 'St. Croix, United States Virgin Islands', She died from cardiac arrest on September 28, 2016. During the period of her studies at Brooklyn College, she engrossed in the works and writings of "African- American" Female authors. She got inspiration from Zora Neale Hurston, Alice Walker and Toni Morrison. During her life time, She won many awards. and reputation of Gloria Naylor between the intellectuals of 'Western Culture'. In 1989, 'The Women of Brewster Place' was adapted as a film by Oprah Winfrey's 'Harpo Productions'. She started her career as a

3. AWARDS

1. National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship, 1985
2. Candace Award, National Coalition of 100 Black Women, 1986
3. Guggenheim Fellowship,1988
4. Lillian Smith Award,1989

In Literary World, Gloria Naylor has given great contribution by providing creative and fruitful works about "Afro-American" societies. Every work of Gloria Naylor is fabulous, fantastic and prodigious. At this time, I opted 'Mama Day' for discussion. I would like to discuss about supernatural things, orthodoxies and traditions which prevail in expatriate or diaspora "Afro-American" societies. This novel is fraught with such type of things. The writer is a highly qualified individual. The writer does not like these things. So, she has emerged these concepts and aspects through her work. She explains every concept in a unique way.

4. SUPERNATURAL BELIEFS IN AFRICAN DIASPORA

'Mama Day' is the third novel by Gloria Naylor. It is published in 1988. The story of this novel which makes many allusions. The main focus of this novel is centered towards the tragic love affair between George Andrews and Cocoa Day. In this novel, 'Willow Springs' is the place where all the important and significant actions have been performed. The story of this novel revolves around the two main characters between George Andrews and Cocoa Day. Cocoa Day is the grandniece of Mama Day. At the later stage of this novel, she will marry with George Andrews. And she will become the wife of George Andrews. In this novel, She acts as a bridge between their two worlds. One world represents "African-American" mysticism. And other world represents Western rationalism. George Andrews was the resident of New York. In one year, she visits "Willow Springs" for two weeks every August. She becomes more and more part of George's World than "Willow Springs". George's world represents main land and materialistic world. George Andrews familiarizes her to the real New York. She gains a degree in history from this mainland. Cocoa Day is deeply connected with her family and ancestry. The history of her family is fraught with tragedy and pain. While George Andrews is an orphan boy. George was abandoned by his mother who was a prostitute. He took a shelter in orphanage. He was raised by whites. In the mainland, he learned that "only the present has potential and only "facts" are relevant. He had no place for emotions, beliefs, myths or superstitions in his life. Once he was on his own, he said, "I may have knocked my head against the walls, figuring out how to buy food, supplies and books, but I never knocked on wood. No rabbit's foot, no crucifixes- not

even a lottery ticket.” The condition of George’s heart was bad. He controls his condition by taking a pill twice a day with strict regularity and great punctuality. He has a great passion for football. He was fascinated by this game. The reason and cause of attraction towards this game is only mathematical possibilities. When George meets with Cocoa Day, his world is turned upside down. She introduces to him a world of emotions, superstitions and mysteries. He is intrigued by Cocoa Day’s family and her past in Willow springs. After four years of marriage, he visits to “Willow Spring” Island with Cocoa Day. In this novel, George represents Contemporary urban “American-Africans”. He has adopted white customs, traditions and beliefs. He earned a Bachelor degree in engineering from “Columbia Engineering school”. He runs his own engineering company in New York city. Cocoa Day wants to get a job. So she went to his company for acquiring a job. At the interview place, she met with George Andrews. George Andrews is unable to hire Cocoa Day for Job, because job starts immediately and she is obligated to visit “Willow Springs” Islands every august to spend time with Mama Day and her family. Mama Day is a witty old lady. She is the matriarch of Willow Springs. Mama Day is the great Aunt of Cocoa Day. During her life, she never married with any man. She had no children of her own. She is the sister of Abigail Day. She believes in heritage and family. According to the inhabitants of this Island, She has deep and intense understanding in the power of nature. Mama Day intervenes or meddles in every activity of Cocoa Day’s life. She wants to see her happy. Mama Day (Miranda) utilizes magic, nature, wit, and wisdom to help the residents of “Willow Springs” Island. She serves as a community doctor on the “Willow Springs” Island. She has a vast knowledge of herbal remedies. She Knows how to treat most ill individual. She gains utmost respect from the inhabitants of “Willow Springs” Island. She was the descendant of Sapphira Wade. Her inheritor or foremother Sapphira Wade was the owner of conjuring powers. For pregnancy of Bernice, she performs a mysterious ritual with the help of her chicken. She protects Cocoa Day from Ruby’s murderous jealousy. She sprinkles a metallic powder around the house of Ruby. Consequently, on this house, there was the twice strike of lightning to kill Ruby. Abigail Day is the grandmother of Cocoa Day. She is the sister of Mama Day. She is a respectful lady. She is a doting grandmother who cares Cocoa Day. She lives with her grandmother Abigail Day. She is a central nurturing figure.. she has no knowledge of natural and supernatural worlds. The name of Cocoa Day’s mother is a Grace Day. She is not alive. Her husband was not faithful to her. She died from this grief. And Cocoa Day became motherless. John-Paul day was the father of Mama Day (Miranda) and Abigail Day. He was a wise and talented artist who could carve lifelike images of flowers, he taught Mama Day to be at home in the woods. Ophelia Day was the mother of Abigail Day and Mama Day (Miranda). She became insane after the death of her baby, Peace. She drowned herself in the sound between the island and mainland. In this novel, People of materialistic world are considered individuals of mainland. Peace Day was the daughter of John-Paul Day and Ophelia Day. She was the younger sister of Mama Day and Abigail Day. She drown/sank in the well when she was at the infantile stage. Abigail Day also named her first daughter Peace, and that child didn’t live past infancy. Ambush Duvall is the inhabitant of Willow springs. He is married to Bernice. Bernice is the wife of Ambush Duvall. Bernice is in a mood of desperation. Because, they (Ambush and Bernice) want to have a baby. She acquires a Mama Day’s aid. She undergoes a fertility ritual. With the help of this fertility ritual, she became pregnant. For her baby, she became overprotective and overindulgent mother. In “Willow Springs”, Bernice is a best friend of Cocoa Day. Charles Duvall is the son of Bernice Duvall and Ambush Duvall. He is known as a little Caesar. His mother treats him like a king. He dies in a hurricane. Mrs. Jackson was the teacher of George Andrews. At the “Wallace P. Andrews” Shelter She teaches the boys. She taught him that “ only the present has potential, sir.” Junior Lee is not a good person. He is a lazy fool. He is the one who cheats his wife, Ruby. He married to Ruby. He likes to drink and Party. He is a shiftless individual. Reema’s boy belong to the “Willow Springs”. For education, he went to the mainland. He earns advanced degree from the mainland. The inhabitants of this islands takes Reema’s boy as an outsider and stranger. He tries to collect research on the Island’s inhabitants. But his efforts were thwarted by the residents of this island. He misunderstands them. Dr. Brian Smithfield is the medical doctor from the mainland. He has a grudging respect for Mama Day. Despite the lack of sophisticated implements or training, Mama Day performed a caesarean section birth with great expertise. Bascombe Wade was a Norwegian slave owner. In future, the family of this person became the owner of the Island of “Willow Springs”. He fell in love with Sapphira Wade. Sapphira Wade was the great – grandmother of Mama Day. On the “Willow Spring” Island, Sapphira Wade is known as a mystical and enigmatic figure by the inhabitants of this Island. The legend of her life is murky. Her identity was as a slave women and a powerful conjurer who married with Bascombe Wade. According to the inhabitants of “Willow spring” Island, she can walk through a lightning storm without being touched. She can grab a bolt of lightning in the palm of her hand. She can use the

heat of lightning to start the kindling (Combustion Process) going under the medicine pot. She has ability to turn the moon into slave. She can swaddle the stars into the cloth. She has ability to heal up the wound of every creature on this earth. There is a suspicion to be witchcraft of Sapphira Wade. She bore seven sons. She gained the deed to the island of “Willow Springs” from her husband before he died in 1823. Then she flew back to Africa, the legend goes. “God rested on seventh day so would she.” Hence, this family uses the last name, Day. During the pre- Civil War era, this Island became a community of free “African- American”. Dr. Buzzard is a charlatan and a hoodoo/ medicine man of Willow Springs. His powers are trickery. For ailments, he brews moonshine. His remedies and medicines are made from alcohol. He distributes these medicines to the individuals of “Willow Springs” for money. He considers himself to be the rival of Mama Day. Mama Day is not agree with this point of view. According to Mama Day, Dr. Buzzard has no real power. And They do not hold same and similar powers. There are so many differences between the power of Dr. Buzzard and Mama Day. She believes in this point of view. He incurs Mama Day’s disrespect for his deception. Cocoa Day writes a letter to George Andrews by saying that she wants a job. Mama Day intervenes in this process and puts a mysterious substance on the envelope. According to Mama Day, this mysterious substance would be helpful in order to remember the image of Cocoa Day in the mind of George Andrews. She gets a confirmation letter from George Andrews. In future, very soon, she will be recommended for another job. Cocoa Day and George Andrews begin to date and marry suddenly. George Andrews does not visit Willow Springs for four years. During this time, Cocoa day were present at the “Willow Springs”. Many incidents and accidents happened or occurred, at the “Willow Springs”. When George Andrews visited Willow Springs, Cocoa Day never shares unusual and supernatural aspects of “Willow Springs”. George Andrews is a practical minded engineer. He spends his life in practical way. He does not believe in supernatural aspects, orthodoxies, corroded traditions and conventions. He believes in work. He is not a orthodox or superstitious people. When a hurricane comes on “Willow Springs” Islands, he thinks from the scientific point of view. His views and opinions do not coalite with the people of “Willow Springs”. His opinions differ in every aspect of the inhabitants of “Willow Springs” Island. At the “Willow Spring” Island when Cocoa Day falls ill, he wants to go to the city and bring a doctor for the treatment of his wife. But at that time, he has been encircled by the crowd of Orthodox and Superstitious people. George takes Mama Day as a “ crazy old woman” rather than a powerful conjurer who can save Cocoa Day from her mysterious illness. At that time, he feels helpless. He wants to do anything, for saving the life of his wife. The bridge has been destroyed by hurricane. So anybody cannot visit to mainland. He half-heartedly helps Mama Day. He was in rage. He became furious and angry. When he went into the Kitchen, he died from cardiac arrest. That was the reason and cause of his death. Ruby was a voodoo and witchcraft women. Ruby is overweight, insecure and jealous. She uses her power to marry with Junior Lee. According to this novel, Ruby possesses great powers. She spends these powers to hurt other Women. Junior Lee is attracted by some women. She uses these powers to harm those women. She puts a hex on Junior Lee’s long-time girl-friend. After this magic, She became insane and maniac. For teasing to George Andrews, Cocoa Day takes a support of Junior Lee. It became harmful for Cocoa Day. She was envious and jealous towards Cocoa Day. She lures and invites Cocoa Day to come to her house. She braids her hair. She puts a poison on the comb of Cocoa Day. Poison entered into the body of Cocoa Day through scalp. Poison became harmful for the body of Cocoa Day. Cocoa Day became ill. That was the reason of Cocoa Day’s illness. During her illness, she became a victim of horrific hallucinations. She pushes George away from her body. She realizes that worms and insects have invaded her body. They were eating her alive from the inside out. She was in this belief, only the soothing stoke of her grandmother’s hands, can save her body from the devourment of parasites. According to the Mama Day, The death of George Andrews rescues Cocoa from death’s door. He is buried on the “Willow Springs” Island. In this novel George’s death is shown in Cocoa Day’s ancestral home. Mama Day uses her superior powers to kill Ruby with Lightening. She retreats to the other place, which she visits often, to learn from her Day ancestors how she can save Cocoa. She finds a ledger with the bill of sale for slave women, her great-great grandmother, whose name she has never known. In this ledger, Mama Day could only read the letter Sa. Because, time has washed away the most of the words of the ledger. In dream, she knows the name Sapphira. She should listen the past and pain of her mothers. According to Mama Day, Cocoa Day was the part of the life of George Andrews. Cocoa Day has placed and put herself in the hands of George Andrews. So she must acquire the help of George. She tells George to go to chicken house and bring back whatever he finds there. George does not realize that Mama Day means his own two hands. George does not trust her. That is why he could not bring back the symbol of life from the chicken’s nests. He attacks the chicken and destroys them and himself. He saves Cocoa Day in his own way by sacrificing himself.

In this novel, at the age of 104 years, Mama Day is still alive. She would see next century, before her death. She is in a mood of anticipation. In this novel, Miranda is known as a Mama Day. She nurses cocoa Day back to her health. After recovery from her illness, Cocoa Day leaves her life in 'New York' and settles in 'Charleston', a southern city that keeps her near her home but not fully a part of it. She remarries with another man. But Cocoa Day comes to the grave of George Andrews, on the 'Willow Springs' Island. At this place, she talks with the grave of George Andrews about what happened. Near the end of the novel reader knows that George has died and that he speaks from beyond the grave. She has two sons. In the remembrance of her first husband, Cocoa Day named George to her second son. This is the tragic end of this play.

Opinions and dogmas on Supernatural beliefs:

First many of us may have different opinion in respect of the term supernatural. What actual the supernaturalism is? Some people are in agreement with this opinion, that things prevail. But these may or may not be a part of the faith of an individual. So we cannot prove whether these things are real. Some people are not with scientific background are not in agreement with this opinion. While some people are agree with this opinion that we can prove supernatural things in some way. So, there is existence of such type of things. In supernatural things, we may include the magic, miracles, souls, spirits, ghosts,, angels, devils, asuras,, demons, UFOs (Unidentified flying object), legendary creatures, god, and parapsychology.

The opinions of someone may differ on supernatural things. One part of the society may be in favour and another one may be in disfavour. The wise writer would say everything on the issues or topic, whichever he/she wants to say. The writer would explain his/ her views through the circumstances of characters without creating controversy, in elaborately manner. This is an identity of diligent writer and the fabulous work. He/She would not put himself/herself in controversial situation. The writer would say everything in smoothest manner. He/she will be considered unbiased. He would not narrate who is in a right position. Those people who are in a favour of supernaturalism or those individual who are in disfavour of supernaturalism. Some people of the society would narrate fairy tale. These tales would seem imaginary and fanciful. Such type of things would seem baseless, illogical and irrelevant. While on the other side, the individuals of materialistic world would not believe anything without any logic and reason. They would measure everything on the basis of scientific parameters and standards. If anything is not scientifically proved, they would consider it absurd, haphazard and obsolete. "Mama Day" novel is imbued with supernatural occurrences. In this novel, there are so many incidents which would not fit in the standards and parameters of science. On the one part of the novel, one thing is narrated. Sapphira Wade was a powerful conjure women. She can walk through a lightening storm, without being touched. She can grab a bolt of lightning in the palm of her hand. She can use the heat of lightning to start the kindling under the medicine pot. She can treat moon as a slave. She can swaddle the stars into the cloth. She can heal up the wounds of every creature in a few seconds. How is it possible. In scientific terms, these are the impossible things. Lightning is a sudden electrostatic discharge that occurs during a thunderstorm. This discharge occurs between electrically charged regions of a cloud (called intra-cloud lightning or IC) between two clouds (CC lightning), or between a cloud and the ground(CG lightning). Anybody cannot walk through lightning storm. Nobody cannot take the bolt of lightning in the palm of hand. Because we cannot bear the shock of lightning. In this process of lightning, there is a involvement of high voltage current. Nobody has capacity to use the heat of lightning for domestic purpose. Nobody cannot treat moon as a slave. Nobody cannot swaddles the stars into the clothes. Nobody cannot heal up the wounds and injuries of any creature within a few seconds. These things are scientifically proved. If anybody can do such type of things. Then, such type of things would come in the circle of miracles. These are impossible things. On the one part of the novel, Mama Day sprinkles the metallic powder around Ruby's house. Lightning strikes this house twice. Mama Day's metallic powder and magic was the cause of lightning to strike twice in Ruby's house. It is merely an illusion. Such things are not possible. Anybody cannot control the power of nature. When George has been dead, Cocoa speaks to him regularly. Such type of things is not possible. Any man who has got the state of death cannot speak anybody. She was in a mood of grief, there may be possibility, she will have talked with herself. In one part of the novel, one thing is narrated, Bernice got the state pregnancy with the help of mysterious ritual. Such type of things is not possible. In one part of the novel, such type of things is narrated, they received signs and indications about Cocoa Day's ensuing illness and hurricane. Science does not consider such type of things. In one incident, Cocoa Day realizes that worms have invaded her body and are eating her alive from the inside out. It was merely the impact of poison on the body of Cocoa Day. In this novel, Ruby is considered as a witchcraft. She uses

magic and hex. And she has ability to control the power of nature. Such types of things is not possible. She takes a support of dangerous and harmful things for performing the process of her magic. She uses poison on Cocoa Day. The reasons of cocoa Day's illness was only a poison. On the basis of realization, Mama Day wants to take the hands of George. According to her, such type of activities would be helpful for saving the life of Cocoa Day. It was merely an illusion of Miranda. This activity of Mama Day became the cause of George Andrews death. Such type of things in this novel are hazardous and absurd.

5. CONCLUSION

"Mama Day" is filled with supernatural happenings and incidents. Supernatural beliefs take a support from fairy tales. In reality, these things cannot happen. These things represent only the mindset of the people. Supernatural things prevail only in tales. It is only the creation of mind. These things prevail or dominate in every society. In some societies, the existence of these things can be in huge number. While in some other societies, these things prevail in a very little manner. The reason behind that things is a literacy rate of societies. In some societies, the literacy rate is very high. While in some societies, the literacy rate is very dim. Generally, educated people will not believe anything without any reason and logic. He will think everything from scientific point of view. Generally, people of materialistic world take high qualification. The awareness can be seen in modern and post- modern societies. In this modern world, Infrastructures have been developed for new researches and inventions. People of materialistic world have constructed Laboratories, hospitals and industrial organisations. According to the scientific theory, any person can not meet those persons who have got the state of death. Any living being can not see supernatural things. According to the scientists, supernatural things do not exist. There is a question on the existence of these things. So it is always a matter or subject of research. These things are baseless or illogical. The relevance of these things lies under the suspicion. People of materialistic world do not pay attention towards these things. They have become materialistic. The economic conditions, political conditions and social conditions play very important role in order to decide the mindset of the people. These things mould the mindsets of the people. On the Willow Springs Island, there is a drought of scientific views and opinions. If any person of modern world would try to narrate reasonable things among the crowd of such individuals. He would put himself in trouble. The writer has proved this thing through the character of George Andrews. There is abundance of illusions. There is a dominance of fairy tales. In this Island, Illiteracy rate is very high. Education is only a medium which can bring awareness in such type of societies. For performing magic and hex, the characters of this novel take support of harmful techniques and products. In reality, there are no supernatural entities, objects and powers. The writer is not in ambiguous mood . Gloria Naylor has said everthing on the topic whichever she wants to say. She has got success in order to depict the corroborated and dilapidated traditions and conventions which prevail in African Diaspora.

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It would be the inspirational strength to appreciate the work of Gloria Naylor as an appreciation for the power of writing and expressing a cultural society which has migrated from its African origin. A vivid description of living style in a society which has been shown to be flourishing on an island somehow separated from the mainland. Obsolete traditions, superstitions and supernatural beliefs are still dominating in these people. I have honour to acknowledge this work of renowned author to highlight the living pattern of such ethnic groups who have their own world and heritage. It would be a tribute to the author to appreciate her fabulous and fruitful works which have provided the opportunity for doing research work. I am grateful to my guide (Dr. Umed Yadav)who has inspired me to do research in this field. I also beholden of Chaudhary Devi Lal University, Sirsa, in which I am pursuing M.Phil (English) degree.

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