

PORTRAYAL OF BLACK CONSANGUINEOUS FAMILY UNIT THROUGH PENITENT PROTAGONIST BENJIE - NEW-FANGLED OUTLOOK

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ABSTRACT:

This paper aims to focus on young protagonist Benjie who is a common teenager who struggles to understand the difference between good and bad in the inner and outer world and also he fails to recognise the true affection expressed by the stepfather who is an uncommon man in the common world. Alice Childress introduced a new theme of expressing the affection and unity of the Black people in her novel "A Hero Ain't Nothin' but a Sandwich. He makes the reader figure out the problem of temporary pleasure which is given by drug, Heroin that could see widely among American society of Harlem and it is recompensed for permanent love of family. My study behind this novel using Attachment theory stressed on relationships and bonds between people, particularly long-term relationships, including those between a parent and child. Once Benjie over comes those addictions he finds permanent solace in the family which was the real harmony in life. The Author portrays the daily life of a teen and his miserable love for his mother in a separated family unit who is unable to accept the realism that prevails among the African life.

KEYWORDS: Consanguineous Family Unit, Affection, Real Harmony, Attachment theory, Family bond.

INTRODUCTION

A Hero Ain't Nothin' but a Sandwich by Alice Childress was about the lifestyle of thirteen-year-old boy Benjie in African American families, his wants, needs, demands, discontent, and the gradual change in his mindset was explored in this paper.

During the period of the Harlem Renaissance, most of the writers focused on themes of slavery, emphasizing the cruelty, indignity, and the ultimate dehumanization of slaves. They were mostly written by slaves who would like to get freedom. Slavery and slave narratives are recurring themes in African-American literature adopted in modern times by writers like Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, etc. Besides, they comprehend the importance of black cultural identity subsequently Americans expressed that in all forms of genres spoke to their history and culture. The African American literature enlightened about the breakup of the traditional Black nuclear family has its roots in the forced separation of families during slave days. Whereas, Alice Childress introduced a new theme of expressing the affection and unity of the Black people in her novel "A Hero Ain't Nothin' but a Sandwich". It is quite different from the regular novels and it is one of the best novels which expressed about the affection, love, care, etc in the family of Black People. It is proved that affectionate communication can change any wrong person into a good-natured person who promotes the human relational experience across cultures. The expression of affection contributes to the good harmony among the close personal relationships.

DISCUSSION

The novel expresses that how wrongly young boy Benjie likes to liberate himself from the entire clutches that stand as hurdles in front of him by using heroin as because of he was in the adolescent period. Usually, young boys are smarter in identifying their wants. When their needs are denied they become annoyed and raised their voice to reach their vice destination or sometimes it becomes vice versa. A troubled boy becomes addicted to heroin, his mother and foster father Butler help him to fight against it and recover through Attachment theory.

Attachment theory is focused on the relationships and bonds between people, especially long-term relationships, including those between a parent and a child. Attachment is emotional bonds between two people who are of different age group. The earliest bonds formed by children with their caregivers have a remarkable impact that persists throughout life. The attachment also serves to keep the children close to the family, thus improving the child's chances of survival. Throughout history, children who sustained with proximity to an attachment figure we're more likely to receive comfort and protection, and therefore more likely to survive to adulthood. As it is the process of natural selection, a motivational method designed to regulate attachment emerged.

A Hero Ain't Nothin' but a Sandwich suggests that, while a person's problems may indeed be the result of poverty or injustice, it is up to each individual to take responsibility for his or her own life. The title of the novel reflects Benjie's cynicism and his belief that, in the modern world, heroism is no longer possible. Benjie learns, however, that real heroes are not those who are perfect. The heroes of the modern world like Butler Craig may be flawed and have troubles of their own. Real heroes are those who are keen to help others even when they have nothing to gain. Indeed, it shows the attachment of the stepfather to the child.

In the novel each time Butler tries to reach out to Benjie, but the young man recoils. Benjie is especially annoyed that Butler may confiscate his pleasure towards the drugs. When Butler tells Benjie that he can make something of his life if he tries, Benjie ridicules Butler for calling himself a "maintenance man" and reminds him that he is merely a janitor (caretaker). Benjie tells Butler not to offer him advice because he does not see where opportunity has come for Butler. It shows how far Benjie's inner mind fervour on the drug Heroin in order to recompense his personal grief. It is evident of 19th-century American society which was affected by highly drug abuse.

The depiction of the neighbourhood and school environment especially among the teens shows the real image of the emergence of the drugs in the happy livelihood. Insecure environment, poverty, cultural deviations are the main factors that spoil the young mind to experience evil. As Benjie moves from marijuana to heroin, his resentment grows towards his family. Benjie becomes more and more alienated from his friends and family. When Butler tries to lend Benjie mental support, Benjie tells him to stop trying to be a hero. As a young boy, he couldn't understand the difference between good and bad as well as the true affection expressed by the stepfather. But, the stepfather behaves like a father and tries to change him from the bad habit. At last Butler's (stepfather) love, affection, care wins the title through attachment theory.

Benjie's feelings for Butler are compounded by his relationship with his mother. The close relationship between his mother and Butler sprung up, Benjie seeks drugs to dump his feelings. He feels as if his mother has abandoned him, too. Childress links Benjie to Oedipus complex in her characterization of him as an adolescent perhaps too attached to his mother and too resentful of her relationship with his stepfather.

He is exceptionally sensitive about his mother's pain when she and Butler begin to argue over his drug addiction. He is angry that his mother loves Butler, but he aches when he sees her crying after Butler moves out of the house. Through this, the author clearly expresses the consanguineous family unit of the black people.

Alice Childress portrayed the lifestyle in particularly consanguineous family unit of the Black People through her characters is the uniqueness of this novel. The young boy Benjie though his real father left him, his stepfather in the place of real father image shows the true sign of fatherhood though at first Benjie was adamant and attacks Butler in words and actions but it did not stop him to show his support. Here, Alice Childress make to remember William Shakespeare's quote in Hamlet *There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so.* (Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet*, Act 2.2.11)

As per this quote, at last, Benjie learns the art of thinking for sustaining and maintaining a harmonious consanguineous family unit. Besides, he recognizes his Stepfather's love towards him and that love makes him overcome his drug addiction and reconciled among the family with a true heart. The author's unrivalled timbre of voice revealed the unity of the family that prevailed in this

novel. It is aptly enlightened by the author that the family unit is strengthened by the optimistic and constructive approach from the elder as well as younger generations.

CONCLUSION

Alice Childress is a master in portraying different characters that are very close to African American consanguineous family unit. Every character in the novel has some addictions. Addiction was different from one another. A temptation towards addiction varies. Benjie though like a common individual is tempted by the evil addictions which gave him temporary pleasure and peace. Once he overcomes those addictions he finds permanent solace in the family which was the real harmony in life. Though every character presented their voices in a monologue they were unknowingly connected to Benjie. Benjie's individualism was presented by the author in a real way other than a criminal.

Works Cited

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