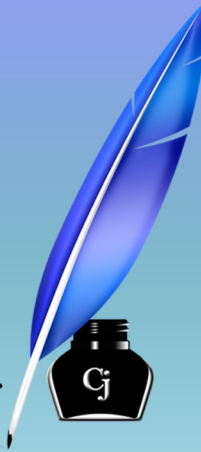


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Feminine Consciousness in Zakes Mda's *Ways of Dying*

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Abstract:

Feminine consciousness means woman is aware of revolting and demanding justice. Females are inferior in patriarchal society. The present paper attempts to study of feminine consciousness in Zakes Mda's novel *Ways of Dying* (1995). Zakes Mda is the most acclaimed South African Black novelist in post-apartheid era. *Ways of Dying* is his first and most popular novel. The novel reveals the closet of small-town rural South Africa to expose magical realism, feminism, silence, protest, suicide, corruption, violence, jealousies, and reconciliations. Females are inferior in patriarchal society. Mda focuses on feminine consciousness through the black female protagonists such as Noria, That Mountain Woman and Mother of Toloki who are the central characters in the novel. Feminine consciousness explores identity crisis, injustice, racial exploitation and struggle for survival in South African Society. The novel mostly discusses about the strong black women's social reform.

Keywords: Zakes Mda, South Africa, *Ways of Dying*, Noria, injustice, feminine consciousness.

Introduction:

The term 'Feminism' refers to aim the establishment and defense for equal political, economic, and social rights and equal opportunities for women in patriarchal society. Feminism is controversial for challenging traditions in many fields like social justice and especially for supporting shifting the political balance toward women. Feminine consciousness is the concept of patriarchy, sex, class and these are the key ideas in relation to the understanding of women's position and experience in all societies'. An *Oxford English Dictionary* defines feminism as 'the advocacy of women's rights on the ground of the equality of the sexes' (Soanes 635).

Feminists are of the view that women's position in society is not equal to men. They are marginalized by patriarchal ideologies in such a way that they do not get equal status with men in all walks of human life. The society is structured in such way that it is partial to men in the political, social and economic spheres of life.

Feminine refers to the stereotyped gender assumptions about women which are linked with the words 'soft', 'gentle', 'passive' nurturing, instinctive rather than 'rational', simplest level feminism frees woman to choose whatever roles they wish without being hampered by artificial gender linked assumption of what is or is not appropriate. Females are inferior in patriarchal society. Feminine consciousness means woman is capable of revolting and

demanding justice. According to K. K. Ruthven, “simplest level feminism frees woman to choose whatever roles they wish without being hampered by artificial gender linked assumption of what is or is not appropriate” (Ruthven 29). According to Sushila: “Feminism should aim at providing us with an altogether new awareness of woman’s role in the modern complex world” (Sushila 11).

Feminism means different thing to different people ranging from a wish to change and challenge, who existing order of things to a desire to bring about a more balanced and saner equality between the sexes and achieve a respected individual liberty for women with their natural instincts and characteristic in act. Simeon de Beauvoir rightly observes, “The women of today are in a fair way to dethrone to affirm their independence succeeding in living completely the life of a human being” (Beauvoir 30).

Traditionally, women were stereotyped as passive and dependent, while men were regarded as active and independent. The traditional roles of women as housewives and men as breadwinners led to marriage and family patterns that were basic in perpetuating inferior treatment of women. It is only now, in our current times are being encouraged to engages in work outside the home, where as men are being urged to participate equally in childcare and housework. ‘Consciousness raising groups, informal discussion groups, which attempt to increase awareness of sexist attitudes and behavior which are an important features of the movement’ (*The New Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1974:732)

The present paper aims to study the feminine consciousness in Mda’s novel, *Ways of Dying* (1995). Zakes Mda is the most acclaimed South African Black novelist of independence era. He has received every major South African Prize for his work. *Ways of Dying* is his first novel, won M-Net the Book Prize, shortlisted for the CNA and Noma Awards. His reveals the closet of small-town rural South Africa to expose feminism, miscegenation, rape, protest, suicide, corruption, violence, jealousies, and reconciliations. Mda focuses on feminine consciousness through the black female protagonists such as Noria, That Mountain Woman and Mother of Toloki who are the central characters in his novel.

In the novel, *Ways of Dying*, Noria is black female protagonist. Noria’s life with Napu, her husband echoes description of the multiple system oppression that black women are burdened with. Noria reduces chances of having access to economic resources. Her chances are further reduced by Napu, who oppresses her, and forbids her to work. Noria is also the victim of the patriarchal society. One midnight, drunken Napu come into shack with another woman. He ordered her pack belonging and leave the shack. She takes refuge in neighbour’s house. She takes refuge in neighbour’s house. After the initial breakdown of her marriage with Napu, she returns to her parents’ home. She is forced into prostitution because she has no money to look after herself and her son. Noria becomes determined to give Vutha a good education despite of her poverty. She resorts to sex work to finance his expensive private school education. After some months of staying at her parents’ home, Noria has a conflict with her father and she returns back to Napu’s shack. Noria went back to her husband’s home and says to woman: “Woman, I am back in my house. You collect you rags and go!” (p.91). As well as she says to Napu, “You, Napu, if you value your life, you will shut up!” (p.91). She behaves like lunatic. So, no one say signal word against her. From that day, there was no direct communication between them. They speaks to each other indirectly, use medium for communication is Vutha, their son. She not gives respect to Napu. She was insulted him. She earns money from illegal way also. She becomes more headstrong when dealing with Napu’s escalating abuse. Noria was hardened by now and

she fought back every time with Napu tried to be rude or cruel to her. Noria's father, Xesibe also oppresses his daughter's oppression by forcing her to stay in an abusive marriage. So, she lives with Napu and she loses Vutha, son's life due to patriarchal law. In Xesibe's world women are property by men and women have no freedom to decide about her and even against their husbands' opinion. So, she lives with Napu and she lost Vutha, son's life due to patriarchal law.

Noria is against patriarchal society choosing the partner, Toloki. She challenges to begin a change in the society. Mervis comments in her book about novel: 'with this novel Mda explores creative ways of resolving race, class and gender induced oppression in the post apartheid environment of black community' (Mervis 55). Noria's life with Napu echoes. Molaria Ogundipe Leslie's description of the multiple systems of oppression that is black women are burdened with oppression. Noria's life is limited by the burden of apartheid whereby black women could only exist and work in certain places. This greatly reduces her chances of having access to economic resources. Napu's grandmother sees nothing wrong with the disrespect with which she treats Noria, she shouts at her constantly, and attempts to bewitch her. Napu's grandmother is also supporter of patriarchal society. So she also disrespect treats her badly. Noria's father also adds to his daughter's oppression by forcing her to stay in an abusive marriage. In Xesibe's world, women are owned by men, and under no circumstance is a woman to decide for herself that she no longer wishes to be with her husband. Lastly, for many years, Noria is burdened by her own decision to stay with Napu. Noria stubbornly remains with Napu until Napu carries out his threat to desert her and kidnap Vutha. Noria's decision to stay with Napu has tragic consequences for her son; perhaps if she had never gone back to Napu, she could have saved her child.

That Mountain Woman is also against the gender discrimination. She does not show respect the society's people. That Mountain Woman views against that patriarchal law. So the writer narrates: "It was not only the razor blades that mode people wary of That Mountain Woman"(p. 34). That Mountain Woman who also supports to her daughter, Noria is against patriarchal society. She always oppose to tradition as well as she does not give respects to people. So, people also say that: "That Mountain Woman had no respect for our ways and talked with men any how she liked" (p. 34).

Toloki's mother always show her anger towards her husband, Jwara who neglects his family and spends lot of time in workshop. She was not happy with self absorbed husband. She makes objection against husband and says: "You spend all your time with that stuck up bitch Noria and you do not care of your family" (p. 29). Always Jwara has no provide attention towards family. So the narrator narrators, "Toloki's mother on the other hand was furious. There was no more food in the house, and no one could get Jwara to respond to their pleas...her stout matronly body shaking with Toloki's mother anger uttered the immortal words"(p.30). She was angry with Noria because of spending all day in workshop of Jwara.

The journey of women like Noria, That Mountain Woman and Toloki's mother, who have had to cross boundaries carrying the mountains of racism and patriarchy on their backs make pertinent emphasis for a need to end the politics of domination. So, hooks rightly explains about society in his book, *Outlook Culture: Resisting Representations*: "In this society, there is no powerful discourse on love emerging either from political progressive radicals or from left" (hooks 242).

Thus, Zakes Mda shows the change of woman from a puppet in man's hands to that of an independent woman who asserts her equal rights with man and demand recognition. It constitutes woman's awareness about patriarchal norms practiced in every field of society. It is an attempt to make society aware about injustice and oppression; women have to undergo their secondary status, perception of processes of gender construction and woman's subordination in the family and the society. But in the novel, black women are strong enough too aware about exploitation and struggle against society.

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