

Lack of Human Dignity in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*

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Abstract

Lack of self-respect is the serious tension faced by human beings in this modern era. Though they achieved a lot in the field of science and technology they fail to respect each other. They don't even want to accept certain group of people as human beings. Discrimination is a significant infirmity which originates in our past, continues in the present and trying to attain its peak in the future. Racial tensions, gender and caste discriminations are the set of favouritisms that represses the power of heart which is packed with love and respect. This study is an effort made to analyze the lack of human dignity with reference to Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*. Zadie Smith is a British writer whose portrayal of social tensions helps to explore the leading problems in London and also to find a solace for the problem.

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Our globalised world fails in the field of humanism and prospers in the areas of crime and terrorism. They give priority to skin colour, money, location and gender. They even kill people for their skin colour which is known as racism. Racism is the systematic discrimination and other forms of oppression directed at members of other races. Racism is popular in America, Europe and African countries. They consider people as not human beings but as blacks and whites. White people acts as the masters while the blacks are treated as slaves to their masters. Even brown people consider black as their inferior whereas they are inferior to whites. Racism also plays a leading role in administration, education and environment. This notion persists in modern day America. Recently in America, an Indian Engineer Srinivas Kuchibotla is killed by the members of racism. He is an immigrant who lives there for the welfare of his family. This incident explains the existing cruel nature of racists in America. Portrait of this murder depicts the state of mankind in a civilised country which leads the modern world.

“Loss of Human Dignity in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*” clearly depicts the endangered nature of mankind and gives a solution to safeguard their respect, values and portray their importance of being a human. “Humanism is the special virtue of a revolutionary” is the famous words of Surya Sen. Unity pave a great way to a revolution or a change. While one searches for the identity which is forgotten under the prejudice of man power, it would work as an obstacle in human revolution. Racial discrimination is the serious problem which evaporates the identity of a human and projects them as blacks and whites. Zadie Smith describes the field of racism and its effect in Britain. In the novel *White Teeth*, she explains the sufferings of natives and immigrants due to the discrimination. Zadie Smith paints denature of humanity in her novel *White Teeth* through the characters of Clara, Alsana, Samad, Archie Jones and Neena.

A civilized man is one who loves others for their dignity and not for their imperial power. Nowadays people like to live as a leader not as a human. “The saddest thing in the world is not poverty, it is the loss of human dignity” (Glennie).

Zadie Smith creates a beautiful character to explain this statement. Clara, as a black Jamaican struggles a lot in Britain because she is inferior to both white and brown people. She herself considers blacks as a deficient race: “Clara Bowden was beautiful in all senses except maybe, by virtue of being black, the classical” (29). She believes that black is a colour of slavery and it will make one always depend on others. Like most of the teenagers she too considers that white is the colour of supreme and it provides freedom. So she marries an Englishman to express her pride. She tries to find out her identity through a sacred vow called marriage. The idea of power, superiority and identity which are constrained by human beings leads to lose one’s morality, values and dignity which is a part of the world. Smith portrays the true world where the so called civilized man destroys everything for his superiority and this kind of bitterness makes a man worse than an animal.

The society believes that God will consider her fellow beings as humans and approaches them with a dignity. Modern world not only lacks in dignity but it also loses hope in spirituality. This spiritual degenerated world fails to understand the meaning of humanity, “dignity means, capabilities that are vital to the maintenance of a good human life, such as practical, reasoning, imaging sense and moving about in space” (Winkler). Zadie Smith explains the experience of Archie, as a native in racist society. Though he feels Clara as his comfort, woman society treats him differently. Everyone criticises him for his black Jamaican wife. He excitedly expresses his happiness to turn in to a father as Maureen asks: “Did you says blue eyes, Archie, love... I’m not bein’ funny... but in’t your wife, well, coloured?”(69).The cruel nature of whites hurt Archie even though he belongs to the same race. Through this line one can understand the modern world, where the dignity fights a lot to sustain its pride. Racists can’t even bear the happiness of a parent who is ready to welcome their child. Instead of taking part in their happiness they are ready to criticise them. They forget that God created them on his own image and he treats all of them as equal.

In *White Teeth*, Smith states that Archie as a white man faces least amount of adversity in comparing to the other apparently polarizing characters. Archie’s only taste of racism occurs when his boss, Mr. Hero revokes his invitation from company’s party. The reason is that people feel uncomfortable when they meet Clara in the party. Kelvin Hero says that: “you see the wives don’t like it because, let’s face it, she’s a sort, a real beauty- incredible legs, Archie, I’d like to congratulate you on them legs... when they’re sitting down to a company dinner with their lady wives, especially when she’s... they don’t know what to make of that at all” (72). They judge a human being with his appearance and they are not ready to consider them as the same human race. Though they attain peak in all areas they are ignorant to accept everyone as unique which is explained as: “of racism we never will be free/ They judge you by where you come from and the colour of your skin/ For many equality and respect seems impossible to win” (Duggen).Through the portrayal of Archie, Smith indirectly states the pathetic condition of people who faces lot of struggles under the name of discrimination.

Education is an art which mould a man into an awakening soul. It teaches them their unique qualities, values and dignity of being a part of this world. It builds humanity among human beings. In *White Teeth*, Smith satirically expounds the condition of an educated society which is longing for authority over everything. It makes one to forget their values and identity as a human being. Magid likes the culture of English and likes to live in England. He believes that England is a nation which provides good education. The society which gives confidence to overcome the obstacles destroys his fellow beings for their skin colour. The author deliberately

depicts the nation which provides good education. It lacks all its values and dignities. People lose their humanity which can't be evoked by education. Globalized world, though succeed in developments loses in moral education. The condition of illiterate nations is much worse than the educated society. They too loose their humanity in traditions and superstitious beliefs.

Racism plays an important role in the concept of beauty. Irie believes that she is not fair and so she goes to beauty parlour. She wants to straighten her hair and colour it with red. She believes that straight hair improves her beauty because white people have straight hair. This shows the curiosity of black over whites. Through this character author illustrates the mind of second generation people, who thinks that white is the suitable colour to live in this world which provides beauty and pride. African poet, Bernard Dadie ironically thanks God for creating him as black. In the poem the author express that: "white is a colour for special occasions / black the colour for everyday" (Dadie 8). They are ready to sacrifice their time for beauty. The scientific inventions like plastic surgery are the prime example of apartheid existing today.

Zadie Smith depicts the real developments of the globalised society. Everyone is interested in power and superiority, no one bothers about their fellow beings. They are not willing to spend their precious time for others. They invest their valuable time in money. Smith neatly portraits the struggles of people who undergoes various atrocities in the name of racism. Racism is highly related to the caste system in India. Caste system is created by people for the development of their status. Later, high class people take it as a weapon and suppress low class people like whites suppressing blacks. Brown people acts superior to blacks. They treat them differently like parayar treats pallar in Indian community. Brown people are marginalised by the whites whereas blacks are doubly marginalized by whites. Through this the author states that human beings lose their identity for different causes. The modern world uses humans as a machine to operate the digital world. Today's technologies control the mind of humans which vanishes the identity of being a human. So the author asks the readers to be in connect with humans and respect each other's feelings and provide them freedom. Everyone have to understand that each individual has the right to live in this world with his dignity and he has the right to profess and practice the things which are good to human race. They have to understand that God created them as one human race who has to love and cherish among them and they have the supreme power to show their dignity for others. Discriminations build boundaries among nations whereas humanity breaks the rules and boundaries and creates a new society with dignity.

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