

## **A Study on Postcolonial Feminism with Reference to Mariama Ba's , *So Long A Letter***

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### **Abstract**

The term Feminism is always a cynosure in the literary discussions. The conceptions and views on Feminism sustain controversial label where it suffocates to come to a conclusion on women's issue. The discussion and colloquies on Feminism lead to dissension in accepting that feminism is for women. The skepticism towards feminism leads to take sides to understand it clearly. Western Feminism and Tri-continental feminism disserve as dichotomies with its own features. This paper is a study on Postcolonial Feminism which highlights the need of differences within feminism. This paper utilized Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter* an epistolary fiction as a catalyst to have detailed views on postcolonial feminism. It also serves as a spokesperson for Third world feminism. The two main characters Ramatoulaye and Aissatou represent third world women. The notable feature of this fiction is the issue of religion and the discussion leads to the SIS which stands as great wall of the rights of Islamic Women. Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter* though it is published in 1980s its contemporary context elucidates the need to change the state of third world women.

**KEYWORDS:** Feminism; Western Feminism; Tri-continental Feminism; Epistolary Fiction; Religion; Islamic women; SIS.

### **Introduction:**

The arrival of Postcolonial Feminism in 1980 resonate the need for subjugation of colonial women. It was a period where Western Feminism narrowed down its view on women in general. The then feminism which spoke on the suppression of women had failed to place its foot on colonized women. Delphic appearance of feminism was not a promising sign for colonized women. Therefore as a part of third wave feminism, postcolonial feminism brought down the life of women and their experience. Writers contributed their views, insights and personal experience through their essays. Audre Lorde's "The Master's tools will never Dismantle the Master's House", Chandra Talpade Mohanty's "Under Western Eyes", "Third World Feminism", Homi K. Bhabha's "The subaltern can speak", Alice Walker's "In search of mother's garden". These writers have broken the chain of commonality in Feminism. They do not find any difference in the sense of Postcolonialism and Feminism. Both the theories talk on suppression in the context of colonial people and in the context of women. The issues of subaltern, marginalization are similar to colonized countries and women. One distinct quality which exists in postcolonial feminism is they oppose that western feminism cannot be generalized. The tri-continental feminism and postcolonial feminism being with a lot of similarities, they speak on historical and cultural suppression of countries and women. Once colonized and under developed countries are named as Third World Nations. It includes Africa, Asia and Latin-America. The women in these region faced problems where they cannot claim their own national contexts. The issues they faced are within their nation.

One of the features of postcolonial feminism is indigenous cultural criticism. It came out as a result of misinterpretation in the views of first wave and second wave feminism. The complete discussions on these two waves can be generalized on the mode of western feminism and but not on the non-west. It cannot be because of cultural conflicts placed on non-west women. They are portrayed to be indulged in the powerless state and supposed to be slaves. The next feature of postcolonial feminism is doubly colonized women in terms of culture and history. Alice Walker in "In search of our mothers garden" discussed black women are doubly colonized. It was an essay published in 1983. As Lynn Munro says, "She captured the voice of unsung heroines". She begins the essay by quoting Jean Toomer's poem, which tells black women are merely treated as sex objects and known for hopelessness. They were not given an opportunity to pursue their dream and proven their talents:

He was talking to a woman, how she has to handle her life: I talked, beautifully I thought, about an art that would be born, an art that would open the way for women the likes of her. I asked her to hope, and build up an inner life against the coming of that day. (401)

Toomer noted that Black women are intensive and talented. Their uniqueness lies on being spiritual, though their bodies are ruined away beyond their wishes. Black women are named as saints because of the quality of bearing physical and mental ability to accept the suppression of their talents. Alice Walker throws up a personal light on quoting the struggle of black women. She took examples from the life of her grandmother and mother. She confesses that in the history, it would not have been difficult to lead life as mothers and grandmothers but as black women. She avows that the life of black women is full of burden and willingness to unshed the burden. Walker has used a distinct comparison for black women "Mule of the world". She quoted two parallel examples Phillis Wheatley a slave in 1700, her poetries and Virginia's A Room of one's own. Through poetry of Philis Walker reemphasis the term "contrary instincts" of Virginia Woolf's which delineates the struggle of black women and how they survive to write poetries even after that:

We know that you were not an idiot or a traitor, only a sickly little black girl, snatched from your home and country and made a slave; a woman who still struggled to sing the song that was your gift, although in a land of barbarians who praised you for your bewildered tongue. (405)

Woolf brought to light about the state of women in 16<sup>th</sup> century who could not express their thoughts through any forms of writing. For, she wondered at Philis Wheatley that with all her struggle she wrote poetry. Woolf's usage of contrary instincts denotes the state of mind when female writes desired to write and at the same time find themselves in the midst of confusion whether they could accomplish as their instinct says. Walker by comparing these two writers brought down the difference in the notion of experiencing feminism as white and black feminism. Therefore the two features indigenous cultural criticism and double colonization of black women tell the world that postcolonial feminism survives in major part of third world women and reflects in women writings.

### **Mariama Ba's So Long a Letter an exemplar:**

Senegalese writer Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter* is an epistolary fiction. It was written in French. It is based on portraying the condition of women in western Post-African society. It is published in 1980. The fiction exhibit the cultural history of Senegal. It was a country of mixed religion of Islam and Christianity. Senegal was a place of aboriginals during pre-colonial times. During that period for the purpose of trade Islamic religion spread throughout the region. It was the predominant religion of Senegal and then came Christianity. Most of the laws of Senegal are translated one which found in Quran. But Senegal was satiated with mixed religion and that made incongruity when French colonization came. Meanwhile Quran played the role of law of Senegal's practice of marriage, family life, and gender role which gave importance to male domination. The fiction portrayed themes where Ramatoulaye, the protagonist, and her friend Aissatou encountered in their married life. The two characters represent the postcolonial feministic view. The plot begins with a letter Ramatoulaye a Senegalese woman residing in Dakar. She was writing a letter to her long-lasting friend Aissatou who lives in America. The letter was written on the occasion of the death of Madow, Ramatoulaye's husband. "Yesterday you were divorced. Today I am a widow" (1). She has to undergo the Islamic of practice of a two day morning and isolation. She wrote the about her selfish husband as a journal eventually to be sent to her friend. At the same time she has to host for all who came to attend the funeral:

This is the moment dreaded by every Senegalese woman, the moment when she sacrifices her possessions as fits to her family-in-law; and wore sill, beyond her passions she gives up her personality. Her dignity, becoming a thing in the service of the man who has married her, his grandfather, his grandmother, his father, his mother, his brother, his sister, his uncle his aunt, his male and female cousins, his friends. Her behaviour is conditioned; no sister in law will touch the head of any wife who has been stingy, unfaithful or inhospitable. (4)

She felt that injustice was happening to her that, Modou had left her after 30 years of married life any giving 12 children to her. She could not trace the reason for the break-up in her life after 30 years. She came to know about Binetou the second wife of Modou. Binetou was a young girl. She had been a scapegoat to separate the life of Ramatoulaye and Modou and to fulfil the desire of her greedy mother, who planned to earn from Modou, According to Binetou modou bias introduced as sugar daddy. Daba, daughter of Ramatoulaye was talking about marriage of Binetou her friend Daba shared a good friendship with Binetou and she had often been to her Daba home that made Daba to share acout the marriage of Binetou with her sugar daddy . She often praise and felt proud about him that he would settle her economic needs. Therefore the marriage between Modou and Binetou was conditional. Ramatoulaye, meanwhile in her letter talked about the successful married life with Modou at the beginning of their marriage. Theirs marriage was an usual story of demurrall on the status of Modou with whom Ramatoulaye's life would ended up even for a mere things. She confessed that she was not married to Daouda Dieng who wished to marry her then. Parallel the married life of Aissatou was recounted. Aissatou's marriage with Mawdo was a dream come true moment. Mawdo a medical student and belong to noble family for her he was in resolute to marry Aissatou who was the daughter of ordinary goldsmith. Nabou aunt of Mawdo dislike their union and tried

dissociate them and she won in that she decoupled them by compelled marriage between Mawdo and young Nabou her daughter. Though it was a sort of trepidation to Mawdo he accepted to marry young Nabou because of his own mother's illness. On the other side he convinced Aissatou that it was a deceptive marriage, and it appeared non deceptive marriage when they got children. She decided to lead an independent life by divorcing him. She bounced back with a great merit thorough her education and joined in Senegalese Embassy:

Books knit generations together in the same continuing effort that leads to progress. They enabled you to better yourself. What society refused you, they granted; examinations sat and passed took you also to France. The school of interpreters from which you graduated lead to your appointment into Senegalese Embassy in the United State. (32)

Through Mawdo, Modous brother Tamsir, she came to know that Binetou was going to be her co-wife. She broke down and tolerates to accept their marriage, where her children deny. When there was a sudden death of Modou she was all alone to take care of her family. She was approached by Tamsir and Daouda for re-marriage, but she strongly denied. She determined to be for her children throughout her life time. She could find her children were growing up in a matured way. When her children needed at the stage of adolescence, Ramatoulaye, felt more responsible about their safety and protection. She faces a lot of challenging situations which taught her news lessons. She encountered life with all vigour strength and determination. The fiction ended where Ramatoulaye was waiting for her friend's arrival from America to meet her. She named one of her daughter as Aissatou on the moral dependency she has on her friend.

### **Discussion:**

Postcolonial feminism has its base gender discrimination. Western and non-western feminism itself is a primal discrimination. It claims different perspective in the life of women of once colonized nations, significantly black women. It talks about black women's life, work identity, rights, religion and sexuality. So long a letter portrays these contexts in the life of Ramatoulaye and Aissatou. Both the women have faced the unhealthy and betrayed marriage life. Ramatoulaye led a happy married life with Modou for 30 years and begot children. She came to know that it was not a life for her though her daughter Dada. It was her friend was the co-wife of Ramatoulaye. She faced the restriction and hurdle from every side in terms of husband his relatives, religion & culture. Her religion Islam embrace polygamy Senegale followed Quran as law. She was bounded to the rules. The sudden death of Modou was breath taking hour to stand for her children firmly. Similarly Aissatou led a happy married life until young Nabou came into her life. To the societal norms she accepted her husband to share his life with other women. For, she realized that she was treated mean by her husband. Aissatou took firm decision of getting divorce and excel in her life. She achieved her dream by educating her and went for work in embassy. To put it in right words Roy and Schwarz says:

When "Third World Women" speak in the voices of these feminists, it is to repudiate otherness, tokenism, stereotyping, exceptionalism, and the role of "native informant". They seek to resignify the attributes of

Third world women- silence, the veil, absence and negativity, for instance. (Roy and Schwarz)

Mariama Ba has brought to light about two strong women. Postcolonial feminism is the veracious theory which depict the status of black women

**Conclusion:**

Women and their problems are approached in the context of feminism in life and applied as theory in literature. The study of this paper is to unriddle questions of feminism. It elucidates to understand feminism by approaching Black Literature fiction with postcolonial feminism.

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