



A Depiction of "New Age African Women" in Tsitsi Dangarembga's Literary Work *Nervous Condition*

Neha (Ph.D. Research Scholar, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi JNU)

Abstract

This paper investigates the literary representations of women. In order to empower African women in a culture where men predominated, Tsitsi Dangarembga developed a variety of female characters that are represented in her work. Tsitsi Dangarembga created a variety of female characters throughout her literary output. This paper discusses how women are portrayed in literary works by analyzing the novel "Nervous Condition" to observe how society and the issues of the female characters are depicted. With the aid of literature, this paper explores Tsitsi's unwavering belief that development occurs gradually, as demonstrated in the novel "Nervous Condition," the subject of the study, and highlights the injustices women experience, such as polygamy, wife-beating, childbirth, and the exclusion of women from education. Literature is the primary source for learning about global civilization, both past and present objective of this research is to call attention to the issue raised by the author and to explore the condition of women through the lens of literature. Outstanding writer Tsitsi Dangarembga has worked hard to enhance women's rights and writes extensively on female topics.

Keyword – Women Identity, Patriarchy, Literary representation

INTRODUCTION

In both oral and written forms, literature has long been one of the most significant vehicles for reflecting reality and society. Additionally, it is still a trustworthy medium for depicting, comprehending, and interpreting various facets of human endeavors, such as religion, class conflict, politics, interpersonal interactions, and gender relations (Kwatsha, 2009). Literature has a demonstrated ability to develop our civilization or society because of its broad appeal. Its authenticity is essential for promoting others' empathy and sparking the desire for social action. The reader is taken into a parallel realm full of wonder, love, peace, pain, and strife with the aid of literature (Kwatsha, 2009). This paper also likes to discuss the value of literature and how it may be used to convey the harsh realities of life. Literature offered suggestions for a better future and what adjustments society needed to advance. People can use it as a mirror to examine themselves or the outside environment. Although it sometimes seems to be losing significance over time, literature always plays a significant role in contemporary culture. Even after literature is ignored, it is still impossible to overlook the

contributions it makes. through influencing our civilization, fostering the adoption of our social behaviors, and raising everyone's tolerance.

Scott in Zinsser claims (Kwatsha, 2009) "Gender" has been used to refer to the social, cultural, and psychological aspects of masculinity and femininity. Gender is also the term used to describe an individual's level of masculinity or femininity. Due to societal differences between them, women and men are not able to engage equally in social, political, economic, and cultural life. It is only inevitable that literary works have been influenced by gender relations, particularly feminism, and have become a veritable tool for gender activism (Englund, 2004) Gender discrimination has become widespread in the modern world, especially when it comes to women. Women now are significantly more independent, aware of their rights, and supportive of equality than they were in earlier times. Reflections on women's hardships and gender inequality can be found throughout the literary work. Prejudices, stereotypes, and superstitious views about the feminine gender were mostly developed by the author using critique. Men were obsessed with surpassing women in every element of life for millennia, which caused women to struggle under this load. There have been a few occasions, nevertheless, where women from illustrious royal, military, economic, and religious backgrounds have, on their initiative and in their particular cultures and eras, elevated their status (Andrade, 1990). Feminism's underlying tenet is that to achieve racial and economic equality, society must be inclusive of all people. Feminism is an ideology that outlines the principles that people should uphold and follow. Feminism is portrayed in Coetzee's essay (Englund, 2004) as a criticism of gender-related social connections that emphasizes injustice and fights for women's issues, rights, and concerns, among other things (Andrade, 1990).

This paper analyses how literary works about women's difficulties depict them and pinpoints the main issues that still need to be fixed. Since literature, as already established, is a true reflection of society and literary characters provide us insight into society, changes are required for the growth of women. This research focuses especially on African literature; Africa is the second-largest continent in the globe and is home to a sizeable portion of the world's population. Due to the issue of gender inequality on this continent, African countries must continue to develop and their societies must become more self-sufficient. A deeper, more passionate grasp of Africa's past and present can be found in African literature. to post-colonial battles for freedom and democracy from anti-colonial struggles (for independence 2000). Subjectivity, experience, and gender issues are all addressed in African literature in ways that are still largely unexplored. In view of the racial, ethnic, and sexist tendencies that have been allowed to grow in African societies, there has been much discussion about how chaotic and violent the African continent is. African women are frequently ignored in the social, political, and economic realms of their countries (Counihan, 2007) Today, there is a lot of discussion about gender issues in African literature. This discussion examines the methods certain African fiction characters utilize to challenge and disrupt intertwined Western discourses on gender, employment, sexuality, and health. Here, the new favorite tenet of the male supremacist ideology, the conflict between tradition and modernity, is used to argue for both sides, revealing how women have "unlearned" these false notions to forge a powerful feminist movement and relearn the value of sisterhood (Counihan, 2007)

Application of the trauma theory and witness literature to investigate the traumatization of female characters and its impact on civil society is a significant addition to these gender studies in African literature.

ABOUT AUTHOR – ‘NERVOUS CONDITION’

Tsitsi Dangarembga spent some of her formative years in England. She began her education there, but she completed her A-levels at a missionary school in her birthplace of Mutare, Zimbabwe. She later went to Cambridge University to study medicine, but she soon got homesick and returned to Zimbabwe just as the 1980s-era black majority government there took power. She joined the Zambuko theatre group as well as the drama club at the University of Zimbabwe. She was required to participate in the plays *Katsha* and *Mavambo*. Dangarembga released a short story titled "The Letter" in 1985 in Sweden. In 1987, she also published the drama titled "She Does Not Weep in Harare." When she was twenty-five, her book "Nervous Conditions" helped her gain notoriety. It was the first novel ever written by a black woman from Zimbabwe, and it won the African category of the 1989 Commonwealth Writers Prize. When asked why she hadn't written any prose since *Nervous Conditions*, she responded, "I haven't written any prose for two main reasons: first, the book wasn't published until after "I switched to using film as a medium; and second, Virginia Woolf's astute observation that a woman needs £500 and a room of her own in order to write is entirely true. I'm moving nevertheless, and I'm hoping to receive my first private room since 'Nervous Conditions'. I'll try to ignore the £500 components (Rebecca,2017). In *Nervous Conditions*, Tsitsi Dangarembga writes, "I composed it as a getaway from what my life had become." The self-referential autobiographical mode that Tsitsi Dangarembga has selected as her literary tack distinguishes her literary achievement in Zimbabwe's male-dominated literary scene (Rebecca, 2017). Her novel *Nervous condition* is about a black girl in Zimbabwe who yearns for better for herself and her loved ones. It is liberating, and cathartic, and defines oneself to speak up. It affirms that a person is a conscious being capable of independent thought and action. We must understand the narrator's interpretive perspective in order to comprehend the new insights she develops about what it means to be a woman in a patriarchal and colonial culture (Rebecca, 2017).

WOMEN IN AFRICAN LITERATURE

The experiences of women throughout history and in modern literature are explored by various writers, The lesson it conveys by every woman must stand up for their rights in a civilized society. Numerous feminist works depict the experiences of women and gave the message to women that they should be independent. For instance, African feminists were expected to be militant and combative in works like Sembene Ousmane's *Les bouts de Bois de Dieu*, Guelwaar, Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*, and Aminata Sow Fall's *L'ex pere de la nation*, all these work in African literature document both the good and bad experiences that African women have had in patriarchal society both inside and outside of Africa to emancipate them. Womanism in African literature and criticism draws attention to and records the experience (Murray, 2018) of women. In African ancient society, women played a special and important role as queens, warriors, priestesses, mothers, wives, artisans, herbalists, and sorceresses. Her entire and complete development has been impacted by a variety of factors, including ancient and contemporary polygamy, child and forced

marriage, levirate, widowhood, female genital mutilation, injustices, and violence from her mother-in-law (Sadek, 2014). The African female writer also includes devastating experiences such as male economic, psychological, political, and social aggression against women. All of the issues in the literature were documented and called for emancipatory action (Kwatsha, 2009). African feminists aimed to promote the literary criticism and fiction of wholly or predominantly African female authors. Writing in a genre that had only previously been dominated by masculinists was required of feminists. The African feminist places attention on and promotes the work and experiences of women in order to counteract all types of masculine biases and assumptions that have historically been directed toward women. Having achieved admission into innovative literary and critical thought in Africa, African feminism addresses a variety of issues, including the injustices and oppression experienced by women in patriarchal societies as well as the stigma and insults of the past and present. One of her most important responsibilities is to investigate and evaluate all parts of human endeavor as well as to thoroughly evaluate herself and engage in existential soul-searching in order to sustain vitality and relevance in the realm of literal and critical thinking (Cohen, 1992).

ISSUES IN THE NOVEL 'NERVOUS CONDITION'

The self-referential autobiographical method of this novel makes it Dangarembga's literary success in Zimbabwe's male-dominated literary scene. According to the source (Shaw, 2007) the author uses in this piece *Speaking up* is liberating, cathartic, and identifies oneself. It affirms that a person is a conscious being capable of independent thought and action. We must understand the narrator's interpretive perspective in order to comprehend the new insights she develops about what it means to be a woman in a patriarchal and colonial culture (Shaw, 2007). In "Nervous Condition," two generations of women are depicted, including Tambu, a poor village cousin who moves in with her well-known, learned, and wealthy uncle "Babamukuru." There, she learns about the problems with his autocratic reign and comes to respect his disobedient daughter Nyasha. Nyasha, the play's central figure, is the "bad daughter" whose parents perceive her behavior as a slight against conventional norms as well as a blow to their honor and social standing (Uwakweh, 1995). This situation is comparable to Nyasha's in *Nervous Conditions*, the recalcitrant daughter of a headmistress. Conflicts in the protagonist's family and the book are directly tied to his sexual behavior. Nyasha and Tambu have extremely distinct character representations, and while they both desire freedom, Tambu is forced to keep up the discord of society because she lacks resources. As a result of her actions, Nyasha was perceived as a "bad daughter," despite the fact that she had the resources and a libertarian mindset. In the Tambu's world, colonial dominance can be seen in every facet of daily life, including deciding when African children should start school, upholding anti-Indigenous prejudice in places like Sacred Heart, and using the selective nature of the educational system to limit the educated indigenous population (Shaw, 2007). Colonialism perpetuates the "poverty of blackness" by allowing a small number of natives to obtain an education. Be informed that due to his educational background, Babamukuru has the potential to become the supreme patriarch. Another illustration of colonial cultural influence is "the Englishness" fatal allure in people's lives. The deeds of Nhamo and his eventual demise, Nyasha's "anorexia," and Tambu's mother's pathological fear of losing her daughter to foreign mania all serve to draw attention to this issue.

WOMEN IN NERVOUS CONDITION

The primary goal of this paper is to draw attention to how women are portrayed in the modern literary masterpiece "Nervous Conditions." The issue of sexuality, feminism and the role of women characters in postcolonial political writing are also discussed in this paper. We also attempt to determine whether these themes are more organically related to society than dissimilar. The author of "Nervous Condition" concentrates heavily on the experiences of women in society and includes numerous female characters, each of whom has a unique viewpoint. The struggle of one daughter to uphold feminist ideals of adulthood independent of her father and confined cultural beliefs is an example of the larger efforts made by women in society (Uwakweh, 1995). Independent Zimbabwe committed to emancipating women with the enactment of the Legal Age of Majority Act (Uwakweh, 1995) which gives women the freedom to form their marriages, represent themselves in court, pursue their education, and be the guardians of their children. Despite these regulations, many of a woman's legal rights were violated. Even if more and more women started to reject the ideal of the good daughter, devoted wife, and selfless mother in favor of a new kind of sexual politics, they were in no way hailed as cultural trailblazers. However, she also realizes the dreadful responsibility, frailty, and loneliness that can come with being in charge of one's own life. Dangarembga supports women as sexual, autonomous, independent in thought, and adult creatures in her writings (Saliba, 1995). In contrast to the impacts of black American feminists, Dangarembga's work explores what it means to be a woman in general and in the violent postcolonial setting.

The book "Nervous Conditions," which follows the lives of four women of various ages and social classes, challenges the very line from which it writes. The book shows that the boundary is neither solid nor uniform, but rather "a great expanse of physical, psychological and intellectual space with its own dynamics and conflicts the so-called frontier is an immense diversified location" with its own dynamics and tensions (Uwakweh, 1995). By using this female character author represent the three levels of entrapment that the narrator names—the trapping of poverty, the burden of gender, and "the Englishness" that Tambu's mother warns against—are felt by all the characters in a variety of ways and to varying degrees, according to the author's analysis of the social component. Male dominance serves as a common theme throughout the novel special in the case of Tambu's and Nyasa's female characters. This claim is supported by the narrator's classifications, which include the "escaped" women, the "entrapped" women, and the disobedient girls. She describes herself as an escapee since she was able to break the earlier in life socially mandated quiet because she is a woman. Through her narrative, the author exposes patriarchy and the implications of female enslavement. Babamukuru is a representation of the patriarch in the life of the ladies and his extended family. Being the educated family member who Tambu's family depends on for financial support, he has undeniable control over the other family members. He manages the family's business and decides what is best for everyone in the family, including Nhamo, Tambu, Lucia, Nyasa, and Maiguru (his wife). Even when Babamukuru forces him into a Western marriage as a cultural compromise, his brother (Tambu's father) is unable to react or challenge his decisions. Tambu's interactions with her brother Nhamo show how even as a small child, she was aware of the subordinate position that women held in her family. She claims that in her

family, women's desires and sensibilities were not prioritized or even acknowledged as real. Tambu's loss of the chance to start school early is the main source of tension between the two brothers since Tambu's sibling, the male child, is given preference. The combination of these with Nhamo's hostile display of male power and authority causes them to clash. Tambu's earlier efforts to establish a maize patch to raise money for her elementary schooling show her desire to overcome her disadvantage. In a world dominated by men, it also symbolizes a struggle for self-definition. Tambu doesn't shed a tear when her sibling dies. She instead takes advantage of his passing to advance in her academic career. Ironically, after "acquiring" her position at Babamukuru's mission house, Nhamo loses her prior resolution and independence of thought in the presence of her uncle's generosity and power. Maiguru lacks the independence that her education demands because she is Babamukuru's bride. Although she plays the character of the pleasant, upbeat wife, she nevertheless feels resentment at her dependence on her husband and passively enables him to manage her finances in order to maintain his enormous family. She later negotiates her status under patriarchy by momentarily quitting her marriage, but finally comes to a bargain that grants her some kind of independence from her husband. She is so confined because she is unable to seek an equal marriage partnership. She doesn't try to get out of her place or fight against her daughter's quest for individuality. It indicates that both moms have a greater impact on their offspring as a result. They would prefer that their daughters adopt the character of the all-sacrificing, quiet woman rather than being loud and rebellious.

All of the female characters suffer from anxiety, a psychological disease brought on by their peculiar circumstances. Tambu remains silent out of concern for upsetting her benefactor. Her mother's fear of "the Englishness" causes her to develop aberrant traits. Then there is the enlightened Nyasa, whose anorexia Dangarembga uses as a sign of resistance to masculine dominance. Her refusal to be anyone's "underdog" and her real act of retaliation against her father for calling her a whore to provide the greatest symbolic threat to male authority. She demystifies and is an iconoclast of patriarchal dominance. She attempts to bridge the gap between the two cultures, while having grown up in Western culture, to liberate women from the burden of being a woman. Because her concept of female independence contradicts Babamukuru's idea of traditional femininity, it is not a surprise that the argument between the father and daughter degenerates into physical violence. She uses anorexia, which is the loss of appetite, as a weapon against her environment's customs and her father's authority. Dangarembga may or may not have been the first African (woman) novelist to explore the subject of anorexia in African fiction. Some feminist scholars, like Sheila MacLeod, Kim Chernin, and Hilde Bruch, have studied the anorexia problem and its impact on European women (Shaw, 2007).

Women in "Nervous Conditions" find it challenging to overcome the societal presumption that men are superior to women because it is a strong force. The reader can comprehend how badly sexism affects Tambu's life by looking at her education as an example of the impact of patriarchy. The family decides not to send Nhamo to school because they only have enough money to send one child. Tambu must follow Babamukuru's strict instructions regarding gender customs if she intends to continue attending the mission school. When she is admitted to the convent school, she must convince her father and uncle to let her leave. Throughout the entire book, Tambu can navigate the patriarchy with ease, while other female characters have it harder.

Mother, for example, toils tirelessly in the fields while experiencing extreme poverty. Mother, a naive woman, is compelled to accept the standard of living that her lazy husband gives. Tambu, who was nurtured in this environment, shares Maiguru's desire to get a degree. However, even Maiguru is affected negatively by patriarchy, forced to forego her income, perform menial labor in the home of her husband's extended family, and denied respect or a say in family decisions. Nyasha is the character who is most negatively impacted by patriarchy because she was reared in England and has first-hand knowledge of gender equality. Nyasha and Tambu frequently disagree once they return to Rhodesia because Tambu values Nyasha's father more than Nyasha does. Nyasha chooses to use her unique perspective in defiance of social norms because she recognizes its value.

GAP IN THE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN'S CHARACTER

Dangarembga saw how crucial it was to consider gender inequality in light of other forms of social and political injustice. Her passion for feminism-related social change seems to have waned in light of Zimbabwe's postcolonial failures in the areas of gender and ethnic relations.

Although the narrative contains numerous examples of patriarchal oppression, there are still many unanswered questions. Women are frequently portrayed as victims, yet I have never come across a woman who is speaking up against men or for their interests. If I consider Tambu's character, she is allowed to get an education because her brother passed away before she was permitted to enroll in school. Additionally becoming pregnant, her mother puts her life in danger for her husband's wish. According to this interpretation, if a person deviates from the rules, they would either suffer in life or fail to follow what society tells them. This is how Nyasha is portrayed throughout the entire work, being painted by the author as a "bad daughter" or in a negative female role.

The four women's experiences are used by the author to provide the book with a diversity of voices as she examines the various ways that African women's stories have been silenced through colonial and patriarchal meta-narrativity. It also becomes clear that there are few opportunities for women's experiences in post-independent Africa. Numerous female characters who suffered at the hands of the patriarchy and were forbidden from leading autonomous lives are depicted by the author in this work. In "Nervous Conditions," the author questions commonly held beliefs about hysteria by using a variety of distinct "screens" of hysteria to illustrate this illness. Hysteria, according to this essay, is not a silent place. In the novel, the female body—which is denigrated and inscribed by patriarchal and colonial action—becomes a potent center of resistance. Although the book's two protagonists, a man, and a woman, are implied to be both hysterical, the author also examines hysteria in black women and colonial people. I discovered that the full feminine hysteria was missing somewhere, and women should have greater freedom instead of being oppressed. If people fight for what they believe is right, they ought to succeed and go on to live regular lives rather than portraying themselves negatively.

CONCLUSION

As a conclusion to this paper, I would want to say that the author portrays women's characters in a very significant way that exemplifies every facet of women's representation in society. Since I mentioned at the outset that writing is a means of escaping reality and fostering a better future, it stands to reason that this story had some gaps in it. Because the author's future goals should inspire the reader and convey a sense of optimism, From the beginning to the very conclusion of the book, the author represents several women of various ages and shows how each woman's life is extremely different from the others. For instance, Tambu reaches a point where she begins to back up the validity of her warning regarding the threat posed by "the Englishness." Her means of emancipation come from her understanding of her narrator's function. By allowing Tambu to transcend the boundaries imposed by society on women, Dangarembga makes controversial statements about gender and its institutions. Tambu feels liberated by sharing "my narrative of four ladies that I adored, and our husbands." She uses her strategy to show how the hypothetical female's options should be fluid and how activities shouldn't finish with the text. This gives all women a chance at reality. By tackling patriarchal ties within the African family unit, which frequently encompasses the extended family, Dangarembga effectively portrays the kinship structure. The patriarchal inclinations that prevail over the entire continent of Africa can certainly be seen in her work as a microcosm. Racial and colonial issues are explored alongside patriarchal supremacy since they are both unquestionably related to the control of a lesser social group. In reality, Dangarembga has shown a deep comprehension of both the particular and general problems that her society faces. Her literary philosophy places a strong emphasis on the knowledge and fortitude needed to face society's dilemmas.

Bibliography

- Andrade, Susan Z. *Rewriting History, Motherhood, and Rebellion: Naming an African Women's Literary Tradition*. no. 1, 1990, <https://about.jstor.org/terms>.
- Counihan, Clare. *Reading the Figure of Woman in African Literature: Psychoanalysis, Difference, and Desire*. no. 2, 2007, <https://about.jstor.org/terms>.
- Englund, Harri. "Gender Relations in African-Language Literature: Interpretative Politics and Possibilities." *Source*, vol. 8, no. 1, African Sociological Review / Revue Africaine de Sociologie, 2004, <https://about.jstor.org/terms>.
- Kwatsha, L. L. "Some Aspects of Gender Inequality in Selected African Literary Texts." *Literator*, vol. 30, no. 2, 2009, pp. 127–56.
- Murray, Jessica. "Disciplining Women: South African Literary Representations of Gendered Surveillance and Violence." *English Academy Review*, vol. 35, no. 2, July 2018, pp. 71–82, doi:10.1080/10131752.2018.1519922.
- Sadek, Sayed. "The Struggle of African Women in Selected Works by Ngugi Wa Thiongo." *European Scientific Journal*, vol. 10, no. 5, 2014.
- Saliba, Therese. *On the Bodies of Third World Women: Cultural Impurity, Prostitution, and Other Nervous Conditions*. no. 1, 1995, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25112169>.

Shaw, Carolyn Martin. "You Had a Daughter, but I Am Becoming a Woman": Sexuality, Feminism and Postcoloniality in Tsitsi Dangarembga's "Nervous Conditions" and "She No Longer Weeps." no. 4, Winter, 2007.

Uwakweh, Pauline Ada. *Debunking Patriarchy: The Liberational Quality of Voicing in Tsitsi Dangarembga's "Nervous Conditions."* no. 1, 1995, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3820089>.

Loutsider, Rebecca, *Post-Colonial Studies*, Scholar Blogs, 16 Feb.2020, retrieved from scholarblogs.emory.edu/postcolonialstudies/2014/06/10/dangarembga-tsitsi/.

David William (1992) 'With Their Consent': Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Condition*, *Novel. Passage*. Retrieved From <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/p/passages/4761530.0004.008/--with-their-consent-tsitsi-dangarembas-hi1-rendinervous?rgn=main%3Bview>

