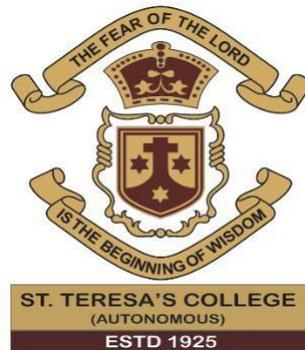


**AN INTERSECTIONAL FEMINIST READING OF THE NOVEL  
*THE BOOK OF NIGHT WOMEN***



*Project submitted to St. Teresa's College (Autonomous) in partial  
fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of BACHELOR OF ARTS  
in English Language and Literature*

*By*

**KAVERY ANIL**

**Register No.**

**AB20ENG015**

**III B.A. English**

**Literature**

**St. Teresa's College**

**(Autonomous) Ernakulam**

*Supervisor*

**Dr. Jisha John**

**Department of English**

**St. Teresa's College**

**(Autonomous) Ernakulam**

**Kerala**

**March 2023**

## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the project entitled “An Intersectional Feminist Reading of the novel *The Book of Night Women*” is the record of bonafide work done by me under the guidance and supervision of Dr. Jisha John Assistant Professor, Department of English.

Kavery Anil

Register Number: AB20ENG015

III B.A. English Language and Literature

Ernakulam St Teresa’s College (Autonomous)

Ernakulam

March 2023

## CERTIFICATE

I hereby declare that the project entitled "An Intersectional Feminist Reading of the novel *The Book of Night Women*" by Kavery Anil is a record of bonafide work carried out by her under my supervision and guidance.

Dr Jisha John

Asst.Professor

Department of English

Ernakulam St Teresa's College (Autonomous)

March 2022 Ernakulam

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## Introduction

Feminism is an ideology that has been questioned from the very beginning of its formation and those who believe in it are also constantly questioned for it. But why should there be such an interrogation on an idea that encompasses and works for an all inclusive and equality for everyone? The notion of feminism being interpreted as malicious towards men and the falsified actions of pseudo feminists have contributed to this question immensely which have resulted in questioning such a pristine and liberal ideology. From time immemorial, women have been considered the weaker gender and have been subjected to maltreatment from the sphere of masculinity. Feminism came up with the agenda to soothe the wounds caused by inequality. When a woman is viewed from various dimensions, the innumerable layers of discrimination she would probably be exposed to will be visible. This inequality that has been going on forever has several layers of reason and millions of factors have contributed to it. The subjugation of women makes them the marginalised subaltern whose sufferings and experiences can be studied under different lenses of feminism.

Postcolonial feminism is such a branch of feminist studies that review the experiences of women who belong to the once colonised nations. Audre Lorde introduced the idea through her 1984 essay 'The Master's Tools will Never Dismantle the Master's House'. Nudge Al-Ali (feminist writer and researcher) defines the postcolonial as being "characterised by a series of transitions, a multiplicity of processes and developments towards decolonisation and de-centring of the 'West'. Postcolonial feminism, therefore, aims to understand and undo the legacies of colonialism within feminist activism. In other words, postcolonial feminism wants to decolonize feminist activism — reclaim it as more than just a pursuit of the western world and its people. Postcolonial feminist academic writing seeks to understand and interpret everyday lived experiences through a postcolonial perspective,

de-centring the white, western, Eurocentric experience. Post colonial feminism looks beyond the white version of feminism and explores the nuances and complexities in the life of women who have suffered colonisation. It is an interdisciplinary theoretical framework.

Some of the early pioneers of postcolonial feminism include Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, bell hooks, Trinh T. Minh-ha, and Gloria Anzaldúa. These feminist scholars have contributed significantly to the study of how colonialism, imperialism, and globalisation impact the lives of women in different parts of the world. They have also examined the ways in which race, class, gender, and sexuality intersect and shape women's experiences of oppression and resistance.

Legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term 'intersectionality' in 1989 to describe how systems of oppression overlap to create distinct experiences for people with multiple identity categories. Although intersectional theory and activism today are far-flung and embrace a wide variety of people, Crenshaw began with Black women, whose oppression couldn't be encompassed exclusively with the terms "racism" or "sexism". Intersectionality is a critical framework that highlights the interconnectedness of social identities and the ways in which they intersect to shape experiences of privilege and oppression. It recognizes that people occupy multiple social categories, such as race, gender, class, sexuality, and ability, and that these categories are not isolated from one another. Rather, they are mutually reinforcing and create a complex web of social hierarchies. Intersectionality challenges the idea that people can be reduced to a single identity or experience of oppression, and instead recognizes the unique experiences and challenges that individuals face at the intersections of these identities. This framework is crucial for understanding the ways in which power operates in society and the ways in which marginalised groups are . By recognizing the intersections of oppression and privilege, intersectionality provides a more comprehensive understanding of social justice issues and a more inclusive approach to activism and

advocacy. It also highlights the importance of centering the experiences and perspectives of those who occupy multiple marginalised identities in movements for social change.

Intersectionality and feminism can be viewed hand in hand. Intersectional feminism is a perspective that recognizes the complex and interconnected nature of social identities and how they intersect to shape individual experiences of oppression and privilege. It recognizes that people's identities are not singular and that they experience multiple forms of oppression and privilege at the same time. Kimberlé Crenshaw argued that black women's experiences of oppression were not captured by either the feminist or the anti-racist movements alone. Instead, she argued that black women experience a unique form of oppression that is distinct from both racism and sexism. Intersectional feminism seeks to address the ways in which systems of oppression and privilege are interconnected and how they reinforce each other. It recognizes that people experience oppression and privilege differently depending on their social identities, such as race, gender, sexuality, ability, class, and more. It seeks to centre the experiences of those who are most marginalised and to work towards collective liberation for all. Intersectional feminism has been influential in a wide range of social justice movements, including feminism, anti-racism, LGBTQ+ rights, disability rights, and more. It has helped to broaden the focus of these movements to be more inclusive of people with multiple marginalised identities and to recognize the importance of addressing the intersecting forms of oppression that they face.

Black feminism emerged in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s as a response to the exclusion of black women from the mainstream feminist movement. Black feminist thought recognizes the unique experiences of black women, who face the intersection of racism, sexism, and classism. This intersectional approach emphasises the ways in which various forms of oppression intersect and compound to create unique experiences of marginalisation. For example, black women may face discrimination not only

for their gender, but also for their race and class status. Black feminists argue that the mainstream feminist movement, which has largely been led by white middle-class women, has historically neglected issues of race and class in its pursuit of gender equality. Thus, black feminism seeks to address the specific needs and concerns of black women, who often experience different forms of oppression than white women. Black feminism and intersectionality challenge traditional feminist approaches that focus solely on gender, highlighting the need for a more inclusive and intersectional approach to social justice. By recognizing the unique experiences of black women and the intersections of oppression they face, black feminist thought offers a powerful framework for understanding and addressing the complex issues of gender, race, and class in society.

*The Book of Night Women* is a historical novel by Jamaican author Marlon James. The story takes place in the late 18th century on a Jamaican sugar plantation called Montpelier. The main character is a young slave girl named Lilith, daughter of one of the slave women and the overseer Jack Wilkins. Lilith is different from the other slaves in that she has light skin, green eyes, and possesses a rebellious spirit. She is selected to be a part of a secret society of women by a house slave named Homer on the plantation who plan to rebel against their white oppressors. The book explores themes of race, gender, power, and freedom as Lilith navigates her way through life on the plantation and finds her way to the top tier from being a slave. The setting of the novel, on a Jamaican plantation during the time of slavery, provides a backdrop for examining the effects of colonialism and the struggles of enslaved black women to gain agency and autonomy over their lives.

The aim of the project is to exemplify how feminist theory, especially postcolonial and black feminism along with intersectionality, can be applied to the analysis of gender specific violence against both men and women. In this way, these theories will be examined in conjunction with related empirical examples exemplifying that gendercide and

femicide enable for the analysis of the intersection of violence with culture, ethnicity, power structures, economic structures and gender ideology using the example of Booker prize winner Marlon James's one of a kind complex work *The Book of Night Women*. The characters Lilith(the protagonist),Homer(a house slave) and Isobel( a white woman) are mainly studied during the course along with some general facts and incidents from the novel. This study will enable one to understand feminist movement from different perspectives and how feminism is different for different personalities according to their experiences.

The first chapter is a close study of the different aspects of feminism which is used to interpret the text, mainly Intersectional feminism,postcolonial feminism and black feminism. The origin,concerned areas and different aspects of each of these theories are discussed in this chapter. The main theory used which is Intersectionality is closely studied and analysed as it is one of the superior aspects in the text. A general history of these three branches of feminism is also described.

The second chapter focuses on how the text can be interpreted according to these theories. It is an elaborated exploration of the text through which it is understood mainly from an intersectional feminist lense. It briefly narrates the major events that happens through which each character is built and advocates on how the actions of each character is constructed according to their social circumstances and thought process.

The third chapter concerns with the linguistic aspects of the text.It analyses how the Jamaican creole known as Patoise is used by the author to narrate the story of an oppressed class through their own tongue and how successfully it represents the hierarchical differences and power dynamics as well as intersectionality of the personality of characters with authentic aesthetics and rawness.The concluding chapter sums up the findings of the study.

## Chapter 1

### Feminism: A Theoretical Framework

Postcolonial feminism is an inclusive feminist aspect developed during the 1980s. As the name refers, the theory probes into both the existing ideas of postcoloniality as well as feminism but through a different and universal lens. Postcolonial theory puts forward the idea that women face oppression in a twofold manner, that they are colonised by the imperial as well as by the patriarchal institutions. It specifically elaborates on how women becomes an easy target and a tool at the same time to assert and propagate the agenda of the dominating class, be it in power, race or class structures. Audre Lorde who identifies herself as 'black, lesbian, mother, warrior, poet' gave this whole theory a new orientation and momentum through her 1984 essay *'The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle The Master's House'*. Through this work the author challenges rampant racism and homophobia within feminism and also interprets how the ones who built America or rather western society cannot be removed from their dominant position using the tools upon which they built it. She states that white women fail feminism in their 'refusal to recognize differences and to examine the distortions which result from misnaming them'. This can be considered as the first feminist work that constructively criticise feminism. Following this, an uprise of writers who excelled can be seen in the field of postcolonial feminism, including the names of world renowned writers such as Chimamanda Adichie, Alice Walker, Mahaswetha Devi etc.

The purpose of postcolonial feminism is to decolonise feminist activism and beyond whitewashing, consider how the experiences of gender variant individuals and women encounter structural inequality owing it to the existence of suppressive structures such as racism, long-term effects of colonialism and patriarchy. The experiences of such people are usually marginalised and when discussed, the problems of the privileged women, especially those of white women are only given consideration and are valued enough to be discussed in order to find a solution or fight against. Postcolonial feminism is also a way of applying a

critical lens to this 'mainstream feminism' that ignores the Global South. The Global South refers to the poorer and more economically dependent countries when in comparison with the West. The division of world according to economic and living standards however does not apply when it comes to the suffrage of women according to their experiences and mode of living. This is explained by Chandra Talpade Mohanty in her 1984 essay '*Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses*' as she elaborates trenchant critique against the totalising tendencies of western feminism and its discursive colonisation of third world women.

Black Feminism is of utmost prominence when discussed about the sufferings of the Global South. The voices of the blacks were always generalised or rather hushed by the mainstream feminist ideologies that centre their truths and facts upon the experiences of the high-class high privileged white women which is completely different from the so called 'nigger life' of the blacks who were mostly born into slavery and lived their whole lives as some filthy petty humans as per the norms of those who are in power. The first articulation of the term 'Black Feminism' can be traced back to the work of the mother of black feminism Anna Julia Cooper's 1892 work '*A Voice from the South*'. The whole movement centres on the experiences of African-American women, understanding intersectionality between racism, sexism and classism as well social identities. The African feminist philosophy is a philosophy of dialogue and togetherness, one that seeks to rethink human lives and restructure social and political communities around ethical and philosophical issues. Even though the philosophy is meant to specially address the conditions and need of women who exclusively reside on the African continent, it sometimes aligned with, in dialogue or conflict in conflict with black feminism.

Intersectionality is an analytical framework for understanding how aspects of a person's social and political identities combine to create different modes of discrimination

and privilege. Intersectionality identifies multiple factors of advantage and disadvantage. Examples of these factors include gender, caste, sex, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, religion, disability, weight, and physical appearance. These intersecting and overlapping social identities may be both empowering and oppressing.

Intersectionality broadens the scope of the first and second waves of feminism which largely focused on the experiences of women who were white, middle class and cisgender to include the different experiences of women of colour, poor women, immigrant women, and other groups. Intersectional feminism aims to separate itself from mainstream feminism or white feminism by acknowledging women's differing experiences and identities.

The term 'intersectionality' was coined by Kimberlee Crenshaw in 1989. Intersectionality is a qualitative analytic framework developed in the late 20th century that identifies how interlocking systems of power affect those who are most marginalised in society. Activists use the framework to promote social and political egalitarianism. Intersectionality opposes analytical systems that treat each axis of oppression in isolation. In this framework, for instance, discrimination against black women cannot be explained as a simple combination of misogyny and racism, but as something more complicated.

What is intersectional feminism? Intersectional feminism takes into account the many different ways in which each woman experiences discrimination. 'White feminism' is a term that is used to describe a type of feminism that overshadows the struggles women of colour, LGBTQ women and women of other minority groups face. Intersectionality can only be felt truly by those who have experienced it for themselves. Black women comes at the top of that list. Racist as well as gender discriminations haunt them apart from religious, cultural and geographical.

Crenshaw defines intersectionality as 'a prism for seeing the way in which various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other'. It indeed is a

lens that scatters the light of injustice and discrimination that happens in various degrees and expose the single arrays of dark light that contributes to the catastrophic end result of discrimination. Intersectionality is also often used as a tool to analyse and understand the atrocities against women in respect with gender as well as other inequalities and oppressions. But seldom is it used to view the anticlimax of these feminist views using the same lens. There are instances where violence has took over the ideal and moral aspect of these revolutionary ideas that often kickstarted a revolt as a follow up movement or a practical application of it and many of them caused bloodshed which is unfathomable and unfavoured under any circumstances. Violence and bloodbaths can never be justified no matter what but the juncture of moral questioning comes to a halt when the reason for the violence is born out of yearning for basic rights and as a tool against violence itself which is an irony. The morality, values and basic rights of human beings are contradicted against each other in such situations and makes it a dilemma to choose the right from the wrong.

## Chapter 2

*The Book of the Night Women: An Intersectional Feminist Text*

Aspects of one's social and political identities combine to create different modes of discrimination and privilege. This intersection and overlapping of social identities can be both empowering and oppressing. When this intersectionality is viewed in a feminine or rather feminist aspect it becomes complex and meanders through different terrains with dark nuances. If the same idea is applied to the marginalised it becomes even more diverse. The oppression faced by coloured races, especially black people have always been a discussion topic. The problems faced by black women are even worse and when it is viewed during the colonial period it becomes the worst case scenario. This is an example of intersectional feminism. The undeterminable and external factors such as race, gender, class and other forms of identity intersect to shape the lives of the subjects and colonialism and imperialism works as a catalyst that makes the lives unbearable faster. "We women are used to being no one's and yet everyone's .Pawns, figures, concubines ,replacements, vessels, substitutes, compensation for someone else's death" (page 177). This is a picture of the life of black women in Jamaica during the colonial era. Women are treated as mere objects of pleasure and are exchanged as creatures of no value. The worst part is it has been going on for so long that they are used to it and most of them accepts it as their fate. The majority are refusing from rebelling against this even when the living conditions are hell-like. Lilith, the character around whom the story revolves tries to break from this predetermined fate for herself. But what even complicates the situation is not just her struggle, but the rebellion of some other women who turns out to be her half sisters collectively calling themselves 'Night women' under the leadership of Homer. Lilith is an orphan who is nurtured by Circe and Tantalus who are also slaves in the English plantation. They are taking care of Lilith not under compassion for an orphan but because of obligation by Jack Wilkins, the overseer at the plantation. Lilith is stranded during her whole childhood as she is not 'normal' like other nigger children around her known as pickneys. She is tall ,well built and her green eyes. She was too white with features to be truly

black and too black on skin to be considered as white. This identity crisis caused by intersectionality of race jeopardises her childhood and she views herself as a misfit. Lilith tries to be above this but this kind of trauma lingers and is visible in her struggle to connect with people and their protests.

Lilith's protest is not to liberate her completely from the system but to find a place where she fits and finds herself happy. She tries rather unconventional methods knowingly or unknowingly to become not one among the whites but one among the powerful. This path she chose meets conflict when Homer and the night women tries to make her join them and their controversial liberation plan where they plot to cause disrupt in different plantations simultaneously and take down the whole colonial rule over the plantation freeing thousands of Black people including men, women and children. The path of the night women was rather political even though Homer is focusing more on her personal revenge towards the colonials based on the harsh treatments she received. Lilith certainly is introduced to this path of bloodshed but she refuses to join them completely and stays own her own method of finding a place of her own in the hierarchy. This might be viewed as selfish but the colonial aspect explains it. The surroundings that Lilith was brought up in is not certainly an ideal one. Also her experiences of being the black sheep among both the black and white kids have made her think about her identity and question it from within. At the same time, she is viewed as a slave in the upbringing. A slave who can be used by the overseers and the Johnny-jumpers according to their will, be it sexually or manually. Nothing more. But being with Circe, the only non-working nigger in the whole plantation and possessing much more power than the slaves and living comfortably has obviously made Lilith question this predetermined destiny of hers. Circe always says to Lilith how she is supposed to behave especially towards men. Not just Circe but almost all the women in her life tells her how she must 'let a manchild win', how she must give way for their tantrums and

inhumane gestures and bear with all of it no matter what. But Lilith was not one to follow these norms. This so called rebellious attitude of Lilith's is always something that was pointed out as a mistake by many women in the plantation. Circe recounts "She too spirited. Think she be some nigger queen. She too spirited! She did need a man to fix her, damn girl" (page 18). Circe makes this remark at the scene of murder of a Johnny-jumper who was killed by Lilith as she tried to defend herself from an attempted rape. Here the fact that the Johnny-jumper was cruel and a rapist is not considered as a problem, but Lilith defending herself and protecting her own body and mind is considered as the wrong doing. For that she is considered too spirited and what seems to be a remedy for that illness is a man who can fix her by molesting and abusing her. This is a clear picture of how women are being a tool for patriarchy. The whole idea of women being soft natured is spreaded as a propaganda and those who don't go along with this are labelled as too spirited or outlaws. The traditional ideas of feminism are challenged throughout the narration. Many female characters are shown to be independent and strong at the beginning and sway away from that path later on.

Homer is a character who challenges traditional ideas of gender roles and power dynamics. As a black woman who is a personal servant for the colonial powers, she occupies a position of immense power in the novel. She can be seen as a warrior for freedom in the beginning but later on it is revealed that she is fighting the war for her own satisfaction and vengeance, not to ultimately free the people suffering along with her. She even covers for Lilith because she saw the wild side of her after she killed the Johnny-jumper and instantly knew that Lilith will be an asset. Homer saw the power that Lilith yields and how destructive she can be. Lilith is also diverse in the ideologies and the course of character she has. Lilith is a black woman who ended up in one of the top tiers of the much more complex hierarchy that existed between the Jamaicans during that period. She was directly put in the estate mansion

as a maid. Although she experiences many of the same forms of violence and oppression as the other enslaved women in the novel, she also occupies a unique position of power within the community. Because she is able to work alongside the men, she is able to witness their resistance efforts and become a key player in their plans for rebellion. Lilith's story challenges traditional ideas of gender roles, as she is able to use her position as a night woman to subvert the gendered power dynamics of the plantation. She puts herself in a position where she cannot be harmed by the whites due to the favours she did for the colonial power who is actually her father and neither by the blacks as they recognise her as one of them. This actually shows the intersectionality of her character. "We realise that one more reason why women have it worse is because we carry all the fear, the fear that the men have, and all the fear they don't have. And the men don't have our fear" (p. 36).

This quote, spoken by the protagonist Lilith, illustrates the intersectionality of race and gender in the experiences of enslaved Black women. Lilith recognizes that women not only experience the fear that men do, but also carry the additional fear of sexual violence and exploitation. By acknowledging the ways in which race and gender intersect to shape the experiences of enslaved women, Lilith highlights the importance of an intersectional approach to feminism.

When in talk about intersectionality, the language used cannot be forgotten. For someone proficient in the textual English language, the Jamaican creole used by Marlon James might be funny or subaltern. This exactly is the purpose of that language being used. The identity of the Jamaicans, especially the slaves were under threat. They were taught from childhood that the ways of the white, their culture, language, dressing etc. is the 'proper' way of living. This questions all of the native culture not just in the case of Jamaica but in every white-captivated nation. The gradual change in the living style of the native puts them amidst both the cultures, neither forgetting their own nor completely being a white. This

contributes to an utter confusion in the lives of those affected, who lacks a sense of belonging. The experiences thus got by the hybrids actually imprisons them in a limbo where they are bound to look down upon their own and worship the invaders, making them mental and intellectual prisoners to the latter. This makes breaking free from those shackles almost impossible. The women whereas are in a double strapped trap. They have to let themselves loose from the chains of slavery and patriarchy.

The immense pressure due to oppression makes the women in the story so dreadful deeds that makes the reader question the ideals of those characters. Throughout the course one may find the path chosen by the night women and Lilith to be bloody and chaotic and no matter what this kind of murderous instinct cannot be justified. But the other part of the same page is that they were brought up in a scenario where they have to answer the question 'do you want to be killing or killed?' Those in power are those who always yield the whip and almost all of them are men irrespective of race and tongue.

"I know how to lie to a man, and it give me a rush to see the confusion in his eyes when he don't know what's going on. And then I think of them, how many years men lie to women, and how many women believe it. And it make me want to do it more" (p. 89).

These words of Lilith highlight the power dynamics between men and women in the novel. Lilith recognizes the power that comes from being able to manipulate men and the satisfaction that comes from turning the tables on the gendered power dynamics that have oppressed women for centuries.

Throughout the novel, Lilith and other women are subjected to violence and exploitation by men in positions of power. However, Lilith also recognizes the ways in which women can assert their own power within these systems of oppression. By learning how to manipulate men and challenge traditional gender roles, Lilith and other women are able to resist the patriarchal systems that seek to oppress them. At the same time, Lilith also

highlights the ways in which power dynamics are not just shaped by gender, but also by broader social and cultural contexts. Lilith's experiences as an enslaved Black woman are shaped not only by her gender, but also by her race and social class. By recognizing the ways in which intersecting forms of oppression shape power dynamics, Lilith's story emphasises the importance of an intersectional approach to understanding power.

The maroons in the story make the diversity even more deep. They fight alongside the women including Lilith and Homer, but for a better cause in mind than them. When the latter two is fighting for their own existence, the maroons fight for the whole community. And in the end many of the maroons are killed but they achieve the greater goal to an extent. But the trauma created by the past and the occurred events cannot be erased and that has etched in them remoulding their characters on every single situation presented where they have to make a choice. The maroons make a choice on their mode of action which is rebellion through whatever means and follows it throughout the story. However Lilith is slightly different. She is portrayed as innocent who lives in the midst of all things chaotic but unaffected by them in childhood. But later on her life takes a different course of which the first step was nothing but murder. Later on she tries to change the course by setting her eyes on Humphrey, the white supervisor thinking that he might be her golden ticket to freedom. But that thought is disrupted by Isobel who came from the estate in Coulibre. This again makes Lilith take drastic measures for her own sustenance and winds up killing the whole Roget family, including the children while she was transferred to Coulibre. She is addressed as 'Lovey' by Robert Quinn, as a symbol of endearment and innocence. But she resents this nickname as she knows deep down that she ain't no innocent 'Lovey' but a murderess.

When taken into consideration, the life of the white women in the estate is also somewhat miserable. Of course they are not suffering physical and mental torture when compared to the black women. But they are also victims of patriarchal oppression. They are

described as 'good for only looking sideways and sipping tea'. This statement shows that their existence itself is somewhat irrelevant. They do have certain powers but they don't enjoy this life either. "I'm so sick of this place, this life. I don't want to be here anymore. But where else can I go?" (p.112). These words coming from the mouth of a coloniser herself marks the hatred they have towards the place and lifestyle. One may assume that Miss Isobel being one of the powerful will be leading a happy life at the estate. But her whole family was murdered by a black woman which even though is not proved, is a public secret. She could have been better off in some other place living happily with her family if it wasn't for the estate and her duty to her country. This shows us how the colonised themselves are affected by colonisation. In the novel, the white characters are shown to be deeply unhappy and disillusioned with their lives on the plantation. They are often bored, lonely, and unfulfilled, and they turn to alcohol, sex, and violence as a way of coping with their feelings of emptiness and despair. For example, Caroline Mortimer is shown to be deeply unhappy in her marriage and turns to sexual relationships with enslaved men as a way of asserting some control over her life. Similarly, Wilson Humphrey is shown to be deeply disturbed and unhappy, and his violent and erratic behaviour is seen as a result of his own personal demons which would have never occurred if it wasn't for a war for territory.

At the same time, the novel suggests that the coloniser's own misery is a direct result of their participation in a system of oppression and violence. The white characters are implicated in the brutal exploitation of enslaved Black people, and their complicity in this system weighs heavily on their souls. For example, Caroline Mortimer struggles with guilt and shame over her sexual relationships with enslaved men, and she is haunted by the knowledge that her pleasure comes at the expense of the enslaved people's suffering. This also shows as intersectionality within the white characters, where their characters are moulded from their own deeds, most of the times which are obligations rather than choice due to their

position in the social hierarchy. "Just off the ship and the Africa man sinking into nigger pose already. He already buckling under backra weight" (p.322). These words used to describe the shift of character of the African slaves ported to Jamaica shows us how the surroundings actually makes them who they are. Lilith is not used to see these men directly coming from Africa. She has only sent them as 'seasoned niggers'. She herself identifies as a 'nigger woman' rather than as a Jamaican or woman. But she wants to escape that chaotic life as she thinks that her identity is what makes her life unbearable. She musters up courage to face whatever that may come towards her and says

"I is what them call a slave, but that isn't a name given by God or my mother. That's what someone else call me and only when they want me to do something. But when I'm alone or when I'm with my own, then I am Lilith. I'm not a slave then. I'm a person then. I have courage then. I have strength then. But it's hard to keep that strength when every day a little bit more of you whittled away, every day a little piece of you stolen, every day you see your children sold away from you, every day you see your man whipped and killed." (p.246)

This quote reflects Lilith's understanding of the dehumanising nature of slavery and her desire to resist it by holding onto her sense of self and her own identity. She acknowledges the challenges of maintaining courage and strength in the face of constant violence and exploitation, but she also affirms her own humanity and her refusal to be defined solely by the label of 'slave'. Through her words, Lilith shows her determination to resist and to fight for her own freedom and that of her fellow enslaved people.

On the day of the rebellion, one of the night woman, Iphigenia sells out the plan to the whites and the whole rebellion is jeopardised. Homer is held captive and the slaves start to fight the colonisers. Many were killed and imprisoned by the red coats but most of them left the plantation. This shows the ulterior intent of everyone to save themselves while Lilith covers up Quinn and her father Jack Wilkins which ends in her imprisonment. But she is

saved by Humphrey who got to know the truth about how she fought for Mr. Wilkins and Robert Quinn. Here the personal attachment of Lilith towards the latter two characters is what makes her fight her own kin. She is not swayed by the fact that Quinn and Wilkins have tortured her but focuses on the way Quinn later behaved with her, with compassion and interest which she craved for and didn't receive from anyone her entire life. If viewed by the night women, they might say that Lilith indeed is a traitor to stand between their goal which is to kill as many white men as possible. Here their intention is to be questioned.

The night women says that they want to kill as many white men as possible and then flee from the plantation. Their prior motive is not to let themselves free but to kill the white men. This shows us the craving for blood and can be viewed under the postcolonial feminist theory. The mind of the subaltern has been jeopardised so much that they have began to think like the coloniser. What the colonised want was territory, land and power. They could have lived in harmony with the indigenous. But they chose oppression and tyranny. Similarly the night woman could have brew up a plan to sneak their way out of the plantation and slavery which would have been more effective. At the end of both the plans, they are not waging war to get the homeland back but ultimately for their freedom and plans to flee from that place no matter what. But they chose the path of bloody revenge for the satisfaction of their mind picturing how colonisation has got under their skin and made them question the powerful in their own style which is of guns, swords and war. Although the intent is superior the path cannot be justified making the readers question 'is this really what feminism is?'

### Chapter 3

#### Jamaican Patois: An Intersectional Tool

Language can serve as a powerful tool against oppression, as it allows individuals to name and identify the injustices they face, and to express their resistance to those injustices. One of the most striking linguistic aspects of *The Book of Night Women* is its use of Jamaican Creole, also known as Patois. This use of dialect is not only historically accurate, but also serves to immerse the reader in the world of the novel and highlight the cultural and linguistic differences between the enslaved population and their white masters. Jamaican Patois, known locally as Patois (Patwa or Patwah) and called Jamaican Creole by linguists, is an English-based creole language with West African influences. A majority of non-English loan words are of Akan Ashanti origin. Spoken primarily in Jamaica and among the Jamaican diaspora; it is spoken by the majority of Jamaicans as a native language.

Patois developed in the 17th century, when slaves from West and Central Africa were exposed to, learned, and nativized the vernacular and dialectal forms during the Middle Passage. The English language was spoken by the slaveholders: British English, Scots, and Hiberno-English. Jamaican Creole exhibits a gradation between more conservative creole forms that are not significantly mutually intelligible with English and forms virtually identical to Standard English. Jamaicans refer to their language as Patois, a term also used as a lower-case noun as a catch-all description of pidgins, creoles, dialects, and vernaculars. In the text, Patois is considered to be inferior and the symbol of an uncultured lower class by the whites, even though most of the words in it is loaned from English itself. This hypocritical approach of the coloniser is used by the author to criticise them using the creole itself. The language acts as a repulsion against the injustices and double standards of the colonisers and it also portrays the depth of each character showcasing the various nuances that moulded them, that is the intersectional view of their personality. For instance, the character Lilith is a prime example of intersectional oppression. The language used to describe her experience

highlights her struggle as a woman and a slave. In one instance, Lilith says, "I was a slave, a dead woman walking, so I didn't trust nobody" (p. 160). The use of the term "dead woman walking" emphasises the intersectional oppression faced by Lilith as a woman and a slave.

The language used to describe her experiences highlights her precarious position in society and her lack of agency. Similarly, Homer is a character who faces intersectional oppression, as she is not only a slave but also a woman who is sexually objectified and abused, like most of the enslaved women. The language used to describe her experience is blunt and unapologetic. For example, Homer says, "When him tell me to climb up and lie down, I climb up and lie down" (p. 194). The use of the word "lie" emphasizes the sexual objectification faced by Homer as a woman, and the lack of agency she had over her own body. Furthermore, the language used to describe the violence and trauma experienced by the women highlights the intersectionality of their experiences. For example, when Lilith is raped by a white man, she says, "Me no more than a slave to these men... slave to the white man who now is going to taste me" (p. 126). This quote highlights the multiple layers of oppression that Lilith faces as a black woman and a slave, and how her body is commodified and violated by men in power.

The Patois is also very well used in highlighting the basic rights which are denied for the enslaved. This outlines the hierarchical division and power dynamics. For instance, when Lilith hears a white man speak in proper English, she thinks, "him sound like one of them white folks who never see no slave, no nigger, no sugar cane. Him sound like him read" (James 20). This quote highlights the divide between the white slave owners, who are educated and literate, and the enslaved women, who are denied education and access to knowledge.

At the same time, the novel also incorporates elements of Standard English, particularly in the descriptions and inner monologues of the characters. This use of both

Standard English and Patois highlights the complexity and fluidity of language, and also reflects the multilingual nature of Jamaican society. It also serves to challenge dominant notions of what constitutes "proper" or "correct" language, particularly in the context of colonisation and the imposition of European languages on colonised populations. In addition to its use of language, the novel also incorporates elements of oral storytelling, with Lilith often weaving together different stories and legends to make sense of her world. This emphasis on storytelling reflects the importance of oral traditions in Jamaican culture, and also serves to highlight the power of narrative in shaping individual and collective identities. The language also highlights the gendered experiences of the women, with their dialect and phrasing reflecting their particular struggles. For instance, Lilith's inner monologue is written in a fragmented style, reflecting her fragmented identity as a mixed-race, enslaved woman. She expresses her pain and confusion in a way that is uniquely hers, originated from the nuances of her own personality that developed through the circumstances that she faced and her responses to the surroundings and events through which she grew.

Similarly, the language used to describe the experiences of women on the plantation reflects the ways in which they are oppressed by both race and gender. The women are subjected to sexual violence and exploitation by the white men on the plantation, and their language conveys the horror of these experiences. One example is when the character Homer describes her experience of being raped: "Him climb up pon me, lean him hand pon me neck, and take me down to the ground. All me see is his two blue eyes like him blind, and me feel him hard thing go inside me". This language is visceral, powerful and raw conveying the horror of the experience and the ways in which women's bodies were violated during slavery.

The language used in the novel is also a tool for resistance against the objectification and dehumanisation of black women. The women use language to assert their own subjectivity and to reject the labels that are imposed upon them by the dominant culture.

For example, Lilith, the protagonist, resists being called a "night woman," a term that is used to refer to enslaved women who are forced to engage in sexual acts with their masters. Lilith rejects this label, stating "I ain't no night woman... I ain't nobody's whore." (p. 63) By refusing to accept this label, Lilith is asserting her own agency and refusing to be defined solely by her relationship to men. The language this used is a powerful tool for feminist expression and resistance. It highlights the struggles and experiences of marginalised women, promotes cultural and linguistic diversity, and challenges oppressive systems of power.

### Conclusion

The definition of feminism differs from person to person according to their experiences and thought process in this society of patriarchal toxicity.' *The Book of Night*

*Women'* by Marlon James is a rich and complex novel that offers a powerful critique of the intersecting forms of oppression faced by black women in the context of colonial Jamaica. Through the lenses of postcolonial feminism, black feminism, and intersectionality, we can see how the novel highlights the ways in which black women were doubly marginalised and subjected to multiple forms of violence and exploitation under colonialism. We see this in the brutal treatment of the female slaves on the Montpelier estate, the sexual violence they experienced at the hands of the white male slave owners, and the intersecting forms of oppression they faced as black women in a patriarchal and racist society. Through the characters of Lilith and Homer, we see how black women could resist and challenge these oppressive structures, but also how their struggles were often fraught with danger and uncertainty. Ultimately, the novel offers a powerful portrayal of the resilience and strength of black women in the face of multiple forms of oppression, and underscores the urgent need to challenge these structures and work towards a more just and equitable society.

The resilience of the main two characters, Lilith and Homer portrays and proves intersectionality. Both of them are black enslaved women who share a fate full of miseries. They both were whipped, raped and tortured by many men both black and white and have been subjected to physical, mental and emotional trauma. They have experienced what it means to be on the lowest in a man-driven world even if you may possess some kind of power in comparison with others. But the path of rebellion chosen by both of them is different and is what makes their characters true to their own. Lilith wanted to find a place for her where she is not treated as a miscreant but is looked at with love and compassion. This is her idea of liberating herself from the slave circle. For this she chooses to seduce one of the white colonial who has power which is exactly what changes the dynamics of one's life in a colonial plantation. Even though she aims for Humphrey, it is Robert Quinn that finds her attractive and she too is seen to be fond with him, saving him and her father Jack Wilkins

from the rebellion led by the night women. Homer whereas chooses a rather murderous path. She says that the night women should kill as many white people as possible and then flee from the land. Instead of focusing on her freedom, Homer is clamouring for revenge which might be seen petty and unjustifiable but is totally normal for a person who has been on the receiving end of the same treatment from the whites. She doesn't want to find a place for herself or others but rather kill as many white people as possible even if it meant that her freedom is at stake which is exactly what happens.

This change of choice is what makes each human being different from another. Homer could have chosen Lilith's path and Lilith Homer's. But they didn't and that's what makes them individuals. A reader might comprehend a bad idea of feminism looking only at the end results of Homer's actions and might say that it is not feminism and such a bloodshed cannot be justified. But her character formation that happened right there at the plantation, suffering everyday and being treated as a pest rather than a human or woman justifies it. She gave way to the normal instinct, to make the doctor taste the medicine. Lilith didn't suffer as much as Homer as she was protected by Circe till teenage and thus her character development and thought process is entirely different. She found herself emerging from a girl to a woman by killing a Johnny-jumper who attempts to rape her. From there on she knew what to do to stay on top of the pyramid and what would get her out of that circle forever. This shows intersectionality of character and the irony is that they both share many similarities such as race, gender, sexuality, oppression and subjugation. But the choices they make are vastly different and viewing from a feminist angle they both are true feminists. Yes the paths are different and no blood shed is not the answer to anything. But emancipation of subaltern marginalised women was their ulterior motive irrespective of the paths they chose and it is what feminism is. This is powerfully conveyed through the curated use of the indigenous language which also appeals to the intersectionality of each character and acts as

a tool to portray the injustices and hypocrisy of the colonisers. Feminism is freedom, from the oppressive shackles of patriarchy, from a cycle of life full of miseries and marginalisation, from being treated as the second sex, from denied equality. Both Homer and Lilith thus can be viewed as true feminists and Marlon James portrays their struggle and the various nuances in their character giving a comprehensive and contradicting idea of intersectionality and feminism.

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