



## A CRITICAL STUDY OF ZORA NEALE HURSTON'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY 'DUST TRACKS ON A ROAD'

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### ABSTRACT

*As human history illustrates the inferior place of women in every walks of the life. The sacred texts also support the subordinate position of women which is willed in the Heaven. African Americans descended from Africa and they were brought to America by the White people. Blacks were slaves and they were worked in the plantations of Whites. The Institution of Slavery emerged as the cultural heritage of the Southern States of America. Black men were harshly treated by their White masters. African American women at the other hand were doubly marginalized due to the race and gender. Slavery ended after the Civil War, but it had not gone through the hearts of White. Therefore, racism raised in a form of segregation. Blacks had the different schools, water fountains, backs seats in the buses, different place for residents etc. White men sexually abused the Black women whereas Black also treated them badly. Zora Neale Hurston autobiography depicts her life from her childhood to one of self-made woman. Instead of the contemporary writers whose writings based on the theme as racial problems, she focuses on the Black folk tradition and celebration of Black individualism. The life of Zora is an ideal for those women who wish to empower themselves. She became the great Harlem Renaissance writer.*

**Key Words:** Slavery, Segregation, Freedom, Black women, Harlem Renaissance

The main purpose of this research paper is to bring out the critical study of Zora Hurston's autobiography *Dust Tracks on a Road*.

As already pointed that women held second position in the patriarchal society. Some scholars believe that women had discovered wheel, fire, farm, language, music etc. in the golden era of early paganism. Women were dominators of the society. She was considered equal to the Earth which recreates the new lives. Slowly as time passed, men established patriarchal social system and women are regarded only 'other' to men. Hierarchies which are based upon the caste, race, color, gender became the major element of the patriarchy. Human history illustrated the inferior place of women in every walks of the life. The sacred texts also supported the subordinate position of women which is willed in the Heaven. African Americans descended from Africa and they were brought to America by the White people. Blacks were slaves and they were worked in the plantations of Whites. The Institution of Slavery emerged as the cultural heritage of the Southern States of America. Black men were



harshly treated by their White masters. African American women at the other hand were doubly marginalized due to the race and gender. Slavery ended after the Civil War, but it had not gone through the hearts of White. Therefore, racism raised in a form of segregation. Blacks had the different schools, water fountains, backs seats in the buses, different place for residents etc. White men sexually abused the Black women whereas Black also treated them badly. It is racism which allows White men to seduce Black women whereas sexism permits Black men to abuse them.

Zora Neale Hurston's autobiography *Dust Tracks on a Road* depicts her life from her childhood to the one who is the self-made woman. Instead of the contemporary writers whose writings based on the theme as racial problems, she focuses on the Black folk tradition and celebration of Black individualism. The life of Zora is an ideal for those women who wish to empower themselves. The book is complicated to understand real Zora as pointed by Maya Angelou in the foreword of the book as, "It is difficult, if not possible to find and touch real Zora Neale Hurston".

The book *Dust Tracks on a Road* opens with the brief descriptive history of Eatonville, Florida the first Black town in United States of America. Her father John Hurston was the mayor of the town for three times. The first half of the book deals with the love marriage of her parents and the settlement in Eatonville, Florida. She was the fifth of eight children of Hurston family. The book follows the chart of the growth of Zora and her interest in education. After the death of her mother Zora was sent to school at Jacksonville, her father married again with a younger woman who hates the children. All the children thrown out of the house. Zora struggles to get her education. She does jobs form maid to waitress at different places and supported herself. After completing the education at the school she went to Morgan College for further education. She published her first allegory in the college assembly. Then she completed her education from Howard University, Washington and found herself a self-made woman. She did research by collecting the Black folk songs and dances from the South. She described her friendships particularly with Fanny Hurst and Ethel Waters and her love affairs. At the end of the book she becomes the self-illuminated woman.

According to Henry Louis Gates Jr. "Hurston's narrative has two voices that call attention to the simultaneous existence of two fragmented cultures in the United States-modern American culture."

The narrative voice of the book at one moment speaks as one formally educated in the Western European tradition and at the next moment speaks in African American dialects. He also wrote the Afterword in the book. He writes, "Dust Track on a Road is the controversial



account of her life. Hurston wrote herself and sought in her works to rewrite the ‘self’ of ‘the race’, in its several private and public guises, largely for ideological reasons. Her books are full with the ‘double consciousness’ and her double experiences as a woman in a male dominated world. Her language, variegated by the twin voices that intertwine throughout the text, retains the power to unsettle. Hurston used the two voices in her text to celebrate the psychological fragmentation both modernity and of the Black America.”

The book describes what it like to grow up poor, Black, and female; it shows an energetic woman who overcomes odds to achieve a liberated, rewarding life. She became the star of Harlem Renaissance. Hurston’s autobiography is a story of a self-empowered woman.

In the words of Bosnicova, “Her wish to portray herself as an empowered person is all reflected in her decision to present her life story as that of a ‘self-made woman.’ As Josie P. Campbell argues, the plot of *Dust Tracks* “is that of a pilgrim’s progress, of a poor, Black, orphaned girl who becomes a respected scientist, a well-known author, the winner of Guggenheims and other awards.” It is a story of a successful woman who grew up in poverty because of remarriage of her father. Her story of childhood was about a careless, rough girl as other children until her mother’s death. She grew up without a lot of mothering, she became a strong, vigorous, independent girl who did not back from fights with her brothers and other boys.

The world had the inferior status for women in human society. A woman who is Black especially in America was doubly oppressed. Because the Blacks who were the slaves was not treated equally as the constitution has given the equal rights to them by the Whites. It was because Blacks were their slaves nothing less than a property. The opportunity to take education have made a huge change in Black community. They have opened their own educational institutes. Zora was born after the civil war and in a separate Black town. She had special opinions about her own community. Her father was the mayor of the town but his remarriage made all his children to suffer. But they became successful in their respective careers. Zora Neale Hurston describes her struggle to get education and support to herself in her autobiography. At the end of the book she found herself self-illuminated, the star among Harlem Renaissance writers and artists.

To conclude, Zora Hurston was a great writer but her subject matter was different than her contemporary writers. The revival of interest in the life and work of Zora Neale Hurston is largely due to the efforts of Alice Walker. Hurston’s autobiography is an expression of self-emancipation of a great writer. And it is an ideal for those women who lived in poverty or who have dreams. The book focuses on the issues like Racism, Slavery in



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a new light as well as folk arts, songs, dances of Blacks at South USA and a quest, love for knowledge. The book is about a self-illuminated woman, Black community and the place of Black women in American society.

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