

Resilience, Self-Discovery, And Black Motherhood In Terry Mcmillan's *Mama*

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Abstract

The experiences of Black women as mothers are characterized by distinct obstacles and hardships that arise from the convergence of racism, gender inequality, and structural subjugation. In addition to navigating social expectations, stereotypes, and intergenerational trauma, they often have to deal with racism and poverty. The Black mothers have to juggle work and family obligations, handle complicated family dynamics, and put their own mental health and self-care first all while worrying about their kids' safety and wellbeing. Terry McMillan's novel *Mama* explores the themes of resilience, self-discovery, and black motherhood through the vivid depiction of the protagonist Mildred's experiences. This novel examines how McMillan challenges dominant narratives of motherhood, race, and gender. Despite facing poverty, abandonment, and racism, Mildred's journey showcases her determination to provide for her family and find her own identity. This novel argues that *Mama* is a powerful expectation of black women's struggles and triumphs, offering insights into the complexities of motherhood and the important of self-discovery.

Key Words: Self-discovery, Racism, Identity, Struggles, Motherhood.

Introduction:

Terry McMillan's *Mama* explores the theme of the struggles that black women face with her discrimination and Eurocentric beauty standards. She depicts the protagonist in *Mama* striving for improved living conditions. The protagonist Mildred is a single mother who is abandoned by her husband. The two main obstacles Mildred faces throughout the novel is poverty and social status. This research paper looks at how McMillan depicts African American women's identities in *Mama*. It seems sensible that someone who has experienced comparable conditions would be the most genuine person to represent a member of society. This paper discusses the difficulty in black women's life and struggles. The difficulties faced by black women are multifaced and complex, and some of the common difficulties include that black women face racism, sexism, the legacy of slavery, barriers to education, employment, healthcare, and economic independence. The novel illustrates the historical and cultural significance of black hair and the ways in which it is politicized and stigmatized.

Terry McMillan is an American novelist born on October, 1951 in Port Huron, Michigan, US. She is a renowned American novelist known for her insightful and empowering stories about black women's experiences. Her works often explore themes such as family, relationships, identity, and personal growth. Resonating with readers worldwide with her unique voice and perspective, McMillan has become a beloved and influential figure in contemporary literature. Terry McMillan's works focuses on the experiences of black women in United States, and exploring themes such as: racism and discrimination, gender roles and gender diversity, identity and self-discovery, family and community, economic struggles and poverty.

McMillan portrays the struggles that black women face in a society plagued by systemic racism and prejudices. Her work highlights the unique challenges that black women face in a patriarchal society, where they are often marginalized and subjugation also. McMillan's characters navigate the complexities of identity, culture, and tradition, seeking to define themselves and their place in the world. With influence to the life style of Black Women, the bonds between their families and communities are important aspects which are evident in McMillan's work showing the strength and resilience that come from this relationship. The economic struggle and poverty highlights the economic crises faced by Black women, denial due to poverty and employment opportunities and the struggles for financial stability.

Mildred's daughter Maggie was sent home from school, considered "unrespectable" by the school administration. Mildred is forced to face the painful reality of hairstyle, appearance discrimination and the Eurocentric beauty standards that consider black hair "unprofessional" or "unattractive". Mildred's own experiences of hair straightening and the damage it caused to her hair and self-esteem are also revealed.

McMillan draws her personal story at several points in this novel. *Mama* can be considered a half-lived novel; therefore, it can be read as the author's personal statement. Freda's character parallels to McMillan's life and personality. She is the eldest daughter of someone who is divorced and abandoned mother Mildred.

The novel has autobiographical elements because McMillan as five children likes Mildred. McMillan's father was a sanitation worker and a bad drinker. Her parents divorced when she was thirteen, and three years later her father died. Her mother engaged in various jobs including an auto rickshaw worker and pickle factory worker. She was responsible

for teaching McMillan and her siblings how to be strong and how to be resilient and face challenges in life. After ten years of marriage, Mildred decides to leave her husband Crook due to infidelity. She was stunned Mildred embarking on a long painful journey of constant struggle after his divorce.

Mildred finds herself coerced to take up low-wage jobs to support her family. As a single mother she is the sole caregiver of her family. Mildred must make up for her children for their father's missing love and care. She advises her daughters: "Don't waste your time or your money on cheap shot, baby, cause all you'll end up doing is paying for everything twice" (146). This quote highlights the importance of decision making wisely, financial prudence and assessing quality rather than quick fixes or negotiations. In essence, the mother teaches her child the value of investing in temporary or substandard solutions that need to be readjusted or repaired again and again, rather than wasting money. She struggles with a series of accidents while trying, out disciplining her children.

Mildred's daughter was robbed at gunpoint as she walks home from work. Maggie is walking home from work at the hospital when two men approached her. They demand her purse and jewelry, and when she refuses, they threaten her with a gun. Maggie tries to run, but they grab her and take away the wallet containing her check and ID card. The robberies took away her jewelry, including a precious locket with a picture of their deceased father. Maggie waving and crying after the robbery, on the sidewalks feeling violated and defeated. When she finally dares to go home, she meets her mother's anxiety and outrage. Mildred is furious and wants to report the incident to the police but Maggie hesitates, embarrassed and ashamed. The robbery serves as a harsh reminder of the dangers and injustices that black women face in their daily lives, and the ways in which they are disproportionately affected by violence and crime. This incident is a pivotal moment in the novel, highlighting the struggles and vulnerabilities that black women face, and ways in which they are forced to navigate a society that often seeks to silence and disempower them.

Mildred's faces unfold sufferings and problems, as she raises five children as adults. It revolves around the life of Mildred Peacock, an African American woman living in a black community which is segregated and discriminated against in the United States. In addition, Mildred hails from a lower working class, she was harassed by her aggressive and alcoholic husband who could not work. "With five growing kids to clothe and feed" (Jaker 247). Indeed, Mildred's unconditional love and her commitment to her five children Freda, Money, Bootsy, Doll and Angel no remarkable. She prevents her daughters from her divorcing husband. Mildred's eldest daughter Freda praises and supports her mother. She is the faithful daughter and understands her mother's distress. She also supported to her mother for improve her family's situation.

The theme of the novel is the struggle of Black women in the workplace. Mildred faces discrimination in her job, where she is sent for promotion and subjected to racist comments by her colleagues. Her white colleagues assume that she is an illiterate and incapable of performing tasks. The subjugation and biases that black women face are highlighted through the ill treatment and by Mildred from the supervisor. Mildred's contributions are ignored, and her ideas attribute to her white co-workers, to illustrate the ways in which black women's work and achievements are often erased or appropriated. The struggles black women face workplace, including discrimination, racism, micro aggressions, and erasure. These experiences are a testament to the systemic barriers and biases that hinder black women's career advancement and create a hostile work environment.

Mildred fierce spirit of resistance makes the readers understand the strength of the black women especially mothers and the importance of community and activism in the fight for justice. Tejashri Shivajipatil says, in her article opines that: "They are capable enough in taking their own decision in life" (256). The novel explores the struggles the triumphs of black women. Mildred reflects on her life, acknowledging her struggles as a black mother. Abandoned by her husband the struggles she faced raising their five children alone and the trauma of her past. The novel highlights Mildred's resilience and determination to create a better life for her children. She comes to terms with her own strength and the sacrifice she made for her family. The novel ends with Mildred realizing a sense of pride, and achievement and self-love, and finally accepting her worth as a black woman.

This novel is a powerful tribute to the experiences of black women. The work is a testament to the power and beauty of black women's lives, highlighting their capacity to thrive despite the odds against them. Terry McMillan's iconic novel *Mama* as left an indelible mark on the world of literature. This story of Mildred, a black mother, resonated with readers for generations. Through Mildred's journey, the readers or reminded of the transformative power of love, resilience and determination. McMillan arts as exploration voice the experience of black women, shedding light on the complexities of motherhood, identity, and society. The novel explores themes such as poverty, racism, and gender roles that have sparked essential conversation and reflections.

Mama is more than a novel it is a testament to enduring power of black women's lives, a celebration of their and unwavering spirit, and a reminder that the stories matter. Through the novel one can be inspired by Mildred to build a world that honors the strength of beauty, and resilience of black women everywhere.

Conclusion:

Terry McMillan's *Mama* offers a powerful exploration of experiences of Black Women in America through Mildred's character. McMillan provides a relatable and compelling portrayal of the challenges faced by Black women. She argues for recognition, empowerment and social change for women. Through the role of *Mama*, she portrays the struggles and triumphs of black women as they are recitation, gender divide, and class division. The novel also shows how black women historically been marginalized and silenced, but also how they use their voices, wisdom, and love to elevate their families and communities. *Mama's* story is a testament to the power of black women's lives, their unwavering dedication to their family, and their unwavering faith for a better future. Focusing on the experiences of black women, McMillan's novel celebrates their beauty, complexity and humanity.

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