

Elusive Happiness Reference to African American Women

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Abstract

The African American women had either been oppressed or their relatives had been hard pressed for freedom. So, when they got a bit of freedom, they felt a different emotion. They thought that they were happy. But if they were happy, why was the need to compare themselves with anyone else? They looked at American women for acceptance and approval. If they were happy, they would have just been themselves. They would have accepted everything as they were and would have worked to better themselves. What they underwent had deep rooted effects on their personalities as well. There was no acceptance of one's self and one's worth. So, there was no sense of self-fulfillment either. The women had no meaning or purpose in life except to continue living, go on forever and be like the American women.

Keywords: acceptance, freedom, compunction, expectation, respect.

'Happiness starts with you. Not with your relationships, not with your job, not with your money, but with you', says *Sadhguru*. Happiness is an emotion which has been the driving force behind all human actions. Human beings have essentially three basic needs – food, clothing and shelter. Man has been on the move for fulfilling these basic requirements. When the basic needs got fulfilled man started aiming for more. Food turned from basic stuff to exotic cuisines, clothing turned from bare minimum leaves to hi-fashion couture and shelter turned from caves and mud houses to villas and palaces. Even after achieving the higher levels of food, clothing and shelter, man missed something, he was always looking for that one thing – happiness. It is relative, it is elusive, one cannot get it if one runs after it – This, the human beings understood at a stage in life when nothing much could be done. Yet again, these material things came and went, what remained was contentment, emotional satisfaction, soul refreshing something which could be termed in one word – Happiness.

In the research, it was found that women were hardly happy. The study focuses on the happiness of women in African-American Literature. Women were suppressed, oppressed, turned into slaves and every kind of torture – mental, physical, emotional – you name it, was

inflicted on them. Still, they persevered. There was this driving force of happiness. It was and is an unwritten right of every person. Everyone pursued it. Women were no less behind. But this happiness was elusive. Women tried to run after it and grab it. But the happiness became all the more out of reach and it became a challenge. Women failed to understand and this applies to men and every being – Happiness cannot be defined, it is different for each individual. What might make a person happy might not be applicable on another person. It is relative, subjective.

What one perceives as happiness could simply be a deception. When the senses and the mind are deceived, there is no question of the feeling of happiness. It would then just be an illusion. The women had certain conditions on their mind and it was amply influenced by what they were seeing and also by what had gone on before with people around them. The light skinned were supposedly the superior race and they were treated accordingly too, by everyone. That was the cause of the Whites' happiness and misery in the extreme for the dark skinned. The women were considered mere objects and anybody and everybody could play with their bodies and emotions. They were abused at the extreme levels. The males and females alike were tortured and forced into slavery. But the females were oppressed more, here too. They were made to feel inferior even in slavery. Undergoing all these, the womenfolk could never imagine that they could ever be happy. They thought that the solution for happiness and peace of mind was something very easy. They just started with no choice of thought, the first solution was.

The women would be with the Whites. Being with them the women would get a first-hand understanding of the respect and love which the Whites got. The black women craved for them. But that didn't make them happy. The second and very obvious or easy solution was to be like them, in simple terms, to blindly ape them. To what extent could they go to attain the White status? They couldn't move a dot when it came to the color of their skin. So the quest was on for another solution. The women looked for approval in everything they did from the Whites. And were the Whites obliging? - No, not at all. So, the women were back at square one. No peace of mind and hence no happiness.

In fact, all these led to Compunction. The women stopped trying as they were tired of trying. They did everything in their will and power to have some satisfaction in life. But all they got was a lot of frustration and guilt. They felt guilty copying the American women and not having their own identity. They were tortured, discriminated and oppressed in the highest degree that could be thought of. They didn't get any peace among their folk, in their families, society there was none which they could call as their own. Apart from guilt, the women felt unhappy. Contentment was nowhere. In nothing either, as there was nothing which they could call their own or which they could associate with something cheerful.

When these women, copied the American women in everyday affairs, they felt happy. Or so they thought. It was just an illusion of happiness. They thought that it was how they should live. One expectation leads to another and when they realized where they were going, it was too late. The damage was already done and they suffered too. Compunction was also deep rooted. When so much damage was already done, there was no point feeling the guilt. These women felt it their duty to feel good about themselves and that they had to spread the message too.

What they should have done is that the women should not have looked or pursued happiness as they did. They should have done the following which could have given them a whole lot of encouragement and empowerment. They should have fought against sexism, Racism and Oppression. If they had come together and had fought against all the torture, there would have been so much oppression and bondage from the Whites. They should have been with them but with their own identity. The women wanted to be with them. This is understandable. They could be with them. But they didn't have to ape them. Aping had given the Whites a lot more confidence than required. And that added to their becoming monstrous. And they should not have treated the Whites as Gods. Light colored skin meant divinity kind. Again, this was so unnecessary. The women treated the Whites with respect and wanted the same color for themselves so badly that they forgot when the respect turned to worship.

Happiness is not doing what others want you to do. The African-American women were not doing anything which gave them any peace. They were doing what they were asked to do or compelled to do. If a woman does what she wants to do and with encouragement she can reach heights and that can give her happiness. It is accepting oneself as one is. Happiness comes when one is happy as she is. Not saying that if there are bad habits, they should not be done away with. If they accept themselves with all their faults and appearance, they would be happy. The women in that time didn't accept themselves as they were. They tried copying. They wanted light skin, they wanted light colored eyes. If they had accepted what they were born with and had done some improvement in their behavior, they would have been happy. It is also expressing choice. Happiness is expressing choice. The females had no choice. Things and people were forced on them and they had to accept that way of life. 'I stand in front of the glass trying to make something out of my hair. It too short to be long, too long to be short. Too happy to be kinky, too kinky to be nappy.'

It is definitely not aping. When aping happens, one loses that connect with the self and is totally lost. Forget happiness, there is no way out. The thinking act is affected. And when that happens, there is no way out. It gives pleasure. Happiness generally is doing things which make anyone light-headed and they have a pleasing and an endearing attitude. It gives a purpose. Happiness gives a purpose in life. The women were so busy being oppressed,

depressed, hurt that they were not living for another day. Every day was another day of suffering. A person should feel involved or belonged. Again, where was the involvement? The women were so oppressed and in slavery that there was no way that they were involved in any way. They never felt involved. The sense of belonging was never there. When they were always discriminated, they were also busy being depressed.

In, *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison, the lead character wishes for the Bluest Eye. She thinks that if the color of her eye is different, she would be viewed differently and she too would view differently. Again, here, if the character had accepted her the way she was she wouldn't have to suffer so much. Wishing something like that was ridiculous. The other characters' wishing that the lead character's baby would be born with blue eyes was another idiotic thing the females wished for. In, *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker, the girl was attacked sexually, throughout her life. The abuse continued after her marriage too. But she evolves and finds a way out. The abuses make her a strong person and with a little help from someone who was supposedly her rival, she identifies herself and comes out winner. The character accepts all and then leaves her husband; to become a free woman. Happiness comes from accepting and respecting oneself. If a woman gives a chance to others to demean her, she will surely be treated badly.

Happiness comes from self-acceptance and self-respect. If it is not so, then it is just an illusion of happiness, Not the real one. Happiness has a temporary feel to it. The permanent feel comes from contentment.

Reference

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