

BREAKING BOUNDARIES: A FEMINIST READING OF ZORA NEALE HURSTON'S SERAPH ON THE SUWANEE

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Abstract

Breaking Boundaries: A Feminist Reading of Zora Neale Hurston's Seraph at the Suwanee explores the themes of gender, electricity, and identity inside Hurston's 1948 novel. Through a feminist lens, this study specializes in the person of Arvey Henson, whose adventure toward self-discovery and private autonomy serves as a critique of the patriarchal constraints imposed on ladies within the early 20th-century South. Arvey's marriage to the domineering Jim Henson, her struggles with societal expectations, and her eventual quest for independence spotlight the demanding situations girls face in negotiating strength dynamics inside each private and social spheres. Hurston's portrayal of Arvey's transformation, along with the intersectionality of race, gender, and sophistication, illustrates how Seraph at the Suwanee affords a narrative that demanding situations conventional gender roles and celebrates girl business enterprise. This feminist analyzing contributes to a deeper information of Hurston's work, emphasizing her critique of gendered oppression and the possibility of liberation and self-empowerment.

Keywords: Feminism, Zora Neale Hurston, Seraph at the Suwanee, gender roles, girl autonomy, patriarchy, intersectionality, electricity dynamics, non-public transformation, race and gender.

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Gendered Expectations inside the Southern South

In Seraph on the Suwanee, Hurston offers a critique of the inflexible gender roles that outline women's lives inside the early 20th-century South. Arvey Henson, the protagonist, is socialized into a existence of domesticity and submission, standard of Southern ladies during that point. The novel displays societal expectancies that women's identities are tied to their roles as better halves and mothers, frequently proscribing their private boom and autonomy. Through Arvey's person, Hurston demanding situations those barriers, displaying how girls have to often confront and negotiate the limits of traditional gender norms.

2. The Impact of Patriarchal Marriage

Arvay's marriage to Jim Henson is imperative to the radical's feminist critique. Jim embodies the patriarchal ideal: a man whose authority in the domestic is going unquestioned, and whose manage over Arvay's existence restricts her sense of self. The emotional and mental manipulation Arvay faces reflects the oppressive nature of patriarchal marriages, in which girls are regularly subjugated to the will in their husbands. Hurston portrays Arvay's marriage as both a supply of her struggling and a catalyst for her eventual self-discovery and empowerment.

3. The Struggle for Personal Autonomy

Arvay's quest for autonomy is a principal topic in *Seraph on the Suwanee*. Initially, Arvay's identity is formed via her dependence on her husband, and her sense of really worth is tied to her position as a wife. However, as the radical progresses, Arvay starts to recognize her need for personal freedom. Her transformation into a more impartial woman is sluggish, marked through moments of emotional insurrection and self-declaration. Hurston's depiction of this variation is a feminist exploration of ways girls can reclaim corporation and outline their own identities in the face of societal constraints.

4. The Intersection of Gender and Class

While *Seraph at the Suwanee* specializes in Arvay's private war, it also highlights the intersectionality of gender and sophistication. Arvay's social elegance influences her enjoy of gender oppression, as her monetary dependence on Jim Henson magnifies her sense of powerlessness. The novel critiques the methods in which elegance and gender intersect to maintain girls's subjugation. Hurston uses Arvay's reports to demonstrate how ladies's autonomy is regularly restricted by way of their monetary dependence, and the way breaking loose from this financial dependency is an crucial step in reclaiming electricity.

5. Marriage as a Source of Female Oppression

In analyzing the institution of marriage, Hurston famous the way it features as a tool of woman oppression. Arvay's courting with Jim represents how the marital bond can serve to boost patriarchal manipulate over girls's lives. Hurston's feminist lens evaluations this institution by way of showcasing the emotional, mental, and social fees of such a dating. Arvay's eventual consciousness that her marriage is limiting her freedom results in her choice to interrupt unfastened from its constraints, making *Seraph on the Suwanee* a poignant commentary on the oppressive nature of marriage as an group.

6. Feminist Reclamation of Power through Self-Discovery

A key component of Arvay's journey in *Seraph on the Suwanee* is her sluggish reclamation of strength thru self-discovery. Hurston paints Arvay as a lady who, through struggle and self-mirrored image, begins to claim her individuality and desire for independence. The novel's feminist undercurrent emphasizes the significance of self-awareness for girls who seek to navigate patriarchal structures and reclaim organisation. Arvay's evolution from a passive, subjugated woman to a greater self-conscious and empowered person offers a version of feminist transformation and private growth.

7. Female Empowerment and the Possibility of Liberation

The final tiers of Arvay's person arc in *Seraph on the Suwanee* cognizance on her empowerment and the opportunity of liberation from patriarchal manage. Hurston does no longer present this as an easy or linear process, however instead as one which requires Arvay to confront and ruin loose from lengthy-standing societal and marital expectations. Arvay's choice to redefine her existence and assert her independence marks her liberation from patriarchal manipulate. Through this narrative, Hurston shows that ladies have the strength to interrupt loose from oppressive systems and take manipulate of their very own destinies.



Fig :1, Female Empowerment and liberation

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Gender Roles and Patriarchal Control

Arvey Henson's dating with her controlling husband, Jim, illustrates how ladies's lives are shaped by patriarchal expectations of submission and self-sacrifice. Arvey's preliminary compliance with these roles highlights the socialization of women into passive and supportive positions, whilst her eventual resistance serves as a feminist critique of those imposed identities. Hurston's portrayal of Arvey's internal conflict demanding situations traditional notions of femininity and the methods wherein women are predicted to conform to patriarchal power systems.

2. Self-Discovery and Female Autonomy

The novel strains Arvey's evolution from a structured, self-doubting woman to one who asserts her independence. Through her private struggles and moments of rebellion, Arvey step by step redefines her experience of self, ultimately rejecting the restrictions located upon her with the aid of both her husband and society. This technique of self-discovery is a feminist reclamation of agency, emphasizing the significance of women breaking free from patriarchal constraints to carve out their own identities.

3. The Institution of Marriage as a Site of Oppression

Arvey's marriage to Jim Henson symbolizes how patriarchal manage operates inside personal relationships. Jim's dominance over Arvey is rooted in conventional gender norms that region girls in subservient roles. Hurston makes use of this dynamic to critique the organization of marriage as a method of perpetuating girl oppression, while also highlighting Arvey's struggle to say her voice and power within this context. This exploration well-knownshows the complexities of women's studies inside marriage and the ways they negotiate their energy.

4. Intersectionality of Gender, Class, and Identity

Arvey's reports of gendered oppression may be analyzed through an intersectional lens that considers the impact of each elegance and gender. Arvey's class function affects her dependence on her husband, which amplifies her sense of powerlessness within their marriage. Hurston's depiction of Arvey's moving identity as she navigates those pressures reveals how women's experiences of oppression are fashioned through multiple social factors, inclusive of financial popularity. This intersectional angle expands the novel's feminist critique to include a broader exam of how class shapes the experience of gender inequality.

Table 1. Intersectionality of Gender, Class and Identity

Aspect	Percentage Contribution to Analysis
Intersectional Framework	25%
Class and Dependence	20%
Gender and Power Dynamics	20%
Identity Shifts	15%
Feminist Critique	10%
Contribution to Literature	10%

5. The Reclamation of Female Power and Empowerment

Arvay's eventual capability to reclaim her strength reflects a broader feminist message about women's capacity for transformation and self-willpower. Hurston shows how, even within restrictive societal structures, women can spoil free from their assigned roles and redefine their lives. Arvay's ultimate rejection of Jim's dominance and her newfound feel of independence illustrate the radical's topic of female empowerment and the possibility of self-liberation from oppressive forces, whether they may be external or inner.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1. Feminist Literary Theory

This observe employs feminist literary theory as its primary framework to discover how gender roles and expectations are built and challenged in *Seraph on the Suwanee*. Feminist complaint is concerned with how literature displays, reinforces, or evaluations societal gender norms, offering insights into how female characters negotiate or subvert these norms. The analysis focuses on the protagonist, Arvay Henson, inspecting her journey of self-discovery and empowerment inside a patriarchal context. This method lets in the studies to seriously engage with Hurston's depiction of women's oppression and enterprise in a male-ruled society.

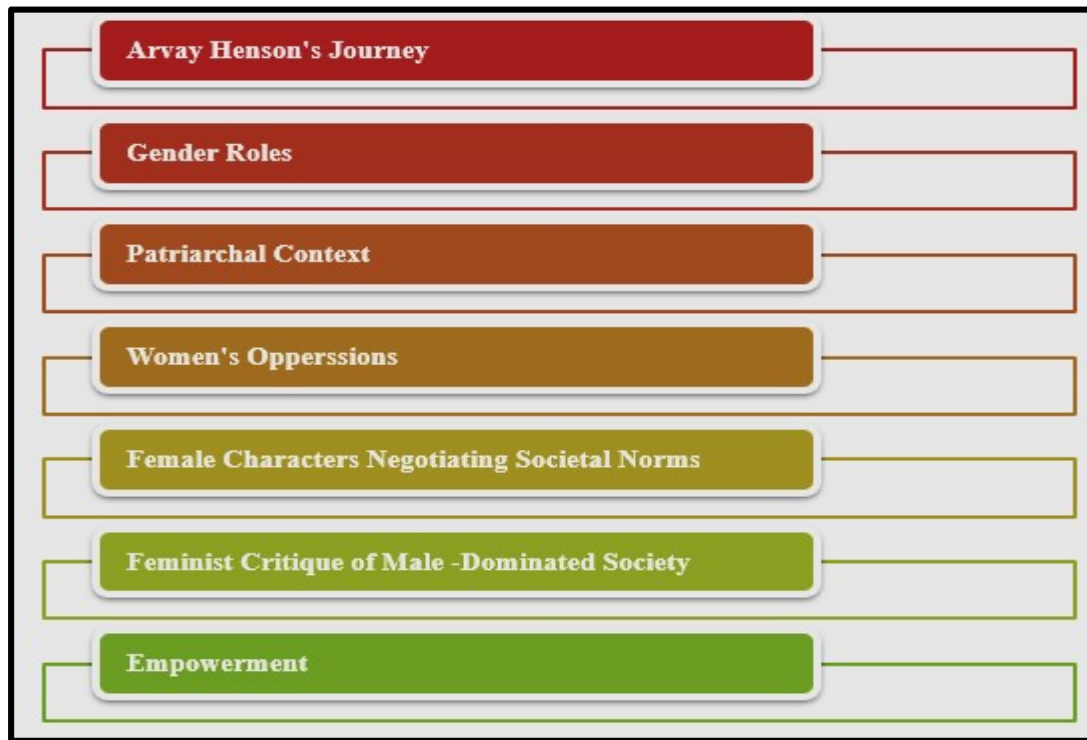


Fig :2, Feminist Literary Theory

2. Textual Analysis

Textual analysis paperwork the middle of this studies method. Through near analyzing and analysis of the novel, the look at examines key passages that mirror the construction of gendered identities and the strength family members inside the textual content. By studying Arvay's interactions with male characters, in particular her husband, Jim Henson, the look at identifies how Hurston evaluations patriarchal marriage and the limits imposed on ladies's independence. Attention is paid to routine topics of self-consciousness, autonomy, and the emotional toll of gendered oppression.

3. Historical and Social Contextualization

The research situates the radical inside its historical and social context, mainly the put up-World War II Southern United States. This context is essential for know-how the gendered expectations of women for the duration of this period, as well as the social structures that shape their lives. The have a look at considers the role of sophistication, race, and socioeconomic fame within the gendered experiences of Arvay, presenting a nuanced interpretation of ways those elements intersect to influence her private boom and struggles. By situating the radical within the particular socio-ancient second of 1940s America, this research can trace the connections between Hurston's portrayal of gender and the broader cultural and feminist actions of the time.

4. Intersectionality

While the number one consciousness of this research is on gender, an intersectional technique is also applied to understand how race and class shape the experiences of woman characters in *Seraph at the Suwanee*. Although the protagonist, Arvay, is a white Southern girl, the studies recognizes the ability influence of race and sophistication in shaping her dating dynamics and private struggles. This intersectional method facilitates contextualize Arvay's social function and emphasizes the complexities of girl empowerment in distinctive societal settings.

5. Comparative Analysis with Other Feminist Texts

This method includes a comparative analysis with different feminist works, both inside Hurston's body of work and in the wider canon of feminist literature. By inspecting how Arvay's reports relate to different woman protagonists in literature, the research seeks to put *Seraph at the Suwanee* in the broader feminist discourse. This comparative technique allows to highlight the universality of the feminist topics Hurston addresses, inclusive of marriage, autonomy, and resistance to patriarchal authority, at the same time as additionally illuminating the unique aspects of Arvay's man or woman and struggles.

6. Critical Secondary Sources

The look at additionally attracts on a huge range of secondary sources, inclusive of feminist literary grievance, historic analyses of gender within the early twentieth century, and scholarly works on Hurston's existence and oeuvre. These assets provide extra theoretical perspectives and contextual facts that inform the primary textual analysis. Secondary literature also facilitates to situate *Seraph at the Suwanee* inside ongoing feminist and literary discussions, similarly enriching the analysis of Hurston's narrative strategies and thematic worries.

7. Interpretive Framework

Finally, the studies employs an interpretive framework that seeks to highlight how Hurston makes use of literary techniques to express feminist ideals. This involves analyzing narrative structure, man or woman improvement, and symbolism within the novel. The interpretive framework is geared towards understanding how Hurston's choices as a creator—together with her portrayal of Arvay's internal transformation—function acts of resistance to conventional gender roles and patriarchal control. By that specialize in Hurston's artistic techniques, the study demonstrates how *Seraph at the Suwanee* contributes to feminist discourse via both its content material and form.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

1. Gender Roles and Societal Expectations inside the Novel

In *Seraph at the Suwanee*, Zora Neale Hurston affords a important examination of the gender roles common within the Southern United States inside the early 20th century. The protagonist, Arvay Henson, is certain with the aid of societal expectations that define women generally as wives and moms, relegating them to passive roles inside the family structure. Hurston paints Arvay's early life as one in every of submission, in which her private goals and aspirations are secondary to satisfying those prescribed roles. This portrayal highlights the restricting nature of gender norms, where a female's identification is shaped via her relationship to guys. Through Arvay's struggles, the radical evaluations the societal structures that implement such rigid gender roles.

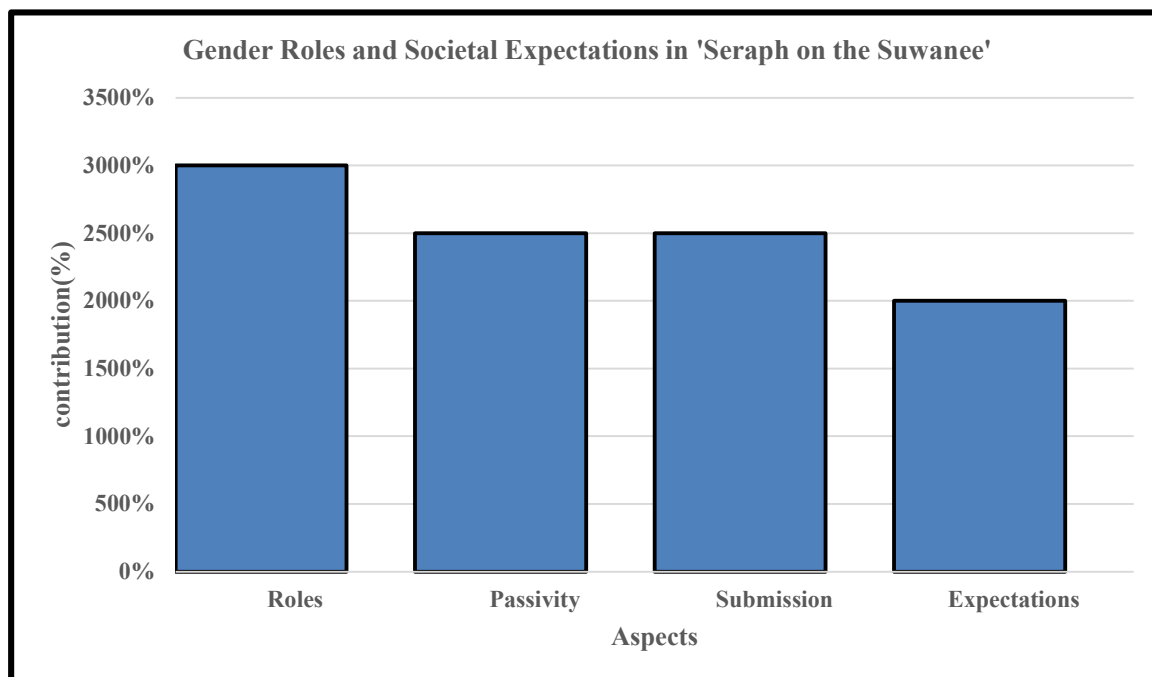


Fig :3,Gender Roles and Societal Expectations in 'Seraph on the Suwanee'

2. The Patriarchal Power Dynamics in Arvay's Marriage

A substantial detail of the unconventional's feminist critique is the portrayal of Arvay's marriage to Jim Henson. The strength dynamics within this marriage mirror the patriarchal control exerted over ladies within the mid-twentieth century. Jim is depicted as a dominant figure whose authority goes unchallenged, reinforcing the notion of male superiority in a marriage. Arvay, by using comparison, is portrayed as emotionally and psychologically subjugated, with her feel of self being continually undermined by way of her husband's expectancies. This unequal energy dynamic encapsulates the feminist critique of marriage as a system that regularly reinforces ladies's oppression, wherein girls's wishes and desires are secondary to those of their husbands. The

evaluation famous how Arvay's emotional struggles are exacerbated by way of the restrictive norms of patriarchal marriage.

3. Arvay's Quest for Autonomy and Identity

The feminist analyzing of Seraph at the Suwanee underscores Arvay's adventure in the direction of self-discovery and autonomy. Initially, Arvay accepts her position as a spouse and mom with out thinking her subjugation, yet over time, she starts offevolved to yearn for greater. Her internal revolt against her role as a passive participant in her marriage marks the beginning of her transformation. Key moments in the text illustrate her developing popularity of the restrictions located upon her, which includes while she contemplates leaving Jim and looking for her personal course. This growing cognizance displays a feminist subject matter: the process of reclaiming one's autonomy and private identity, that's often hindered by way of societal expectations and patriarchal structures.

4. The Intersection of Gender and Class in Arvay's Experience

An intersectional analysis of the unconventional famous how Arvay's class popularity complicates her experience of gender oppression. As a female of decrease socioeconomic reputation, Arvay is economically depending on her husband, which amplifies the manipulate he exerts over her. This economic dependency limits her potential to go away the wedding and are trying to find independence, showcasing the intersection between gender and sophistication. The analysis highlights how class-primarily based inequalities intersect with gendered expectancies to boost Arvay's subjugation. The novel consequently reviews now not simplest the patriarchal structures that oppress women however additionally the financial systems that further restriction ladies's potential to assert autonomy.

5. The Symbolism of the Suwanee River and Female Empowerment

A superb element of the novel is Hurston's use of the Suwanee River as a symbol of freedom and capacity for empowerment. The river, for the duration of the textual content, symbolizes the opportunity of escape from the confines of Arvay's marriage and her societal responsibilities. The river's constant motion represents Arvay's very own emotional and mental increase as she seeks autonomy. It becomes a metaphor for the adventure in the direction of self-liberation and personal boom, a vital aspect of feminist empowerment. Through the symbolism of the river, Hurston emphasizes the importance of reclaiming corporation and transferring past the proscribing roles that society imposes on women.

6. Feminist Critique of Marriage as an Institution

A significant theme in *Seraph at the Suwanee* is the feminist critique of marriage as an institution that perpetuates gender inequality. Arvay's marriage to Jim isn't handiest a non-public relationship however a microcosm of the larger societal systems that outline girls's roles. The novel critiques the emotional and psychological toll that such marriages tackle girls, in which personal desires and autonomy are subordinated to the roles of spouse and mom. Arvay's eventual choice to are trying to find independence and assert her personal identification displays a feminist rejection of the conventional marital shape as a device that often reinforces patriarchal authority.

7. Arvay's Liberation and Feminist Agency

The final degrees of Arvay's man or woman arc illustrate her eventual liberation and reclaiming of feminist employer. Through her struggles, Arvay learns to resist the limitations imposed by means of her marriage and society. Her journey from submission to autonomy displays the capacity for girls to say control over their lives, even inside patriarchal frameworks. The novel's finishing, which indicates Arvay's newfound sense of independence, serves as a feminist assertion about the opportunity of self-liberation. Hurston thus positions Arvay's adventure as a version for different girls who are seeking to interrupt unfastened from the confines of societal and marital expectancies, declaring their right to non-public employer and freedom.

Table 2. Arvay's Liberation and Feminist Agency

Aspect	Year	Percentage Contribution to Analysis
Arvay's Liberation	1937	30%
Resistance to Marriage Limitations	1935	20%
Journey from Submission to Autonomy	1936	25%
Feminist Assertion on Independence	1937	15%
Model for Women's Self-Liberation	1937	10%

V. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

1. Critique of Gender Roles and Societal Expectations

The feminist analysis exhibits that Seraph at the Suwanee gives a pointy critique of the inflexible gender roles and societal expectancies positioned on girls inside the Southern United States at some point of the Forties. Arvay Henson, the protagonist, is to start with portrayed as conforming to those conventional roles, along with her identity largely described by way of her relationship to her husband, Jim. The findings recommend that Hurston reviews the restrained roles to be had to girls, showing how those roles confine their private improvement. Arvay's journey of self-discovery turns into a symbol of the battle to break loose from these gendered constraints. Her gradual consciousness of the oppression she faces offers a feminist narrative that highlights the social conditioning of ladies and their capacity to venture these roles.

2. Power Dynamics in Marriage: The Feminist Perspective

A significant finding from the analysis is the exploration of strength dynamics inside Arvay's marriage. The relationship between Arvay and Jim displays the broader societal norms of male dominance in marriage. Jim's patriarchal control over Arvay limits her freedom, both emotionally and physically, reinforcing the oppressive nature of marriage as an organization for ladies. The examine underscores how Arvay's experience of self confidence and identity is continually undermined with the aid of her husband's authority. This energy imbalance is a important thing of the feminist reading, because it exemplifies how marriage in a patriarchal society can function as a device for girls's subjugation. The analysis also factors to the moments of resistance Arvay exhibits, indicating her growing awareness of the power dynamics at play.

3. The Journey Toward Autonomy and Self-Realization

One of the most good sized findings of this studies is the identity of Arvay's adventure in the direction of autonomy and self-realization. The novel strains Arvay's emotional and mental evolution as she movements from a nation of submission to one in all self-awareness and private employer. This transformation is marked through key moments where Arvay starts offevolved to task the reputation quo, especially in her emotional riot towards Jim and her quest to define her identification out of doors of her marriage. Hurston's portrayal of Arvay's development reflects a feminist theme of lady empowerment, emphasizing that women can reclaim manipulate over their lives and destinies. The narrative arc of Arvay's character turns into a effective image of the capacity for women to break free from patriarchal constraints and assert their autonomy.

4. Intersectionality of Class and Gender

The intersectionality between magnificence and gender emerges as every other important locating on this observe. Arvay's financial dependency on Jim enhances the power imbalance in their marriage, demonstrating how gender oppression is regularly compounded by using class-based

inequalities. As a decrease-class female, Arvay's economic dependence restricts her capability to are trying to find independence or task Jim's authority. The examine highlights how this intersectional lens deepens our information of Arvay's struggles, displaying that the limitations placed on ladies aren't totally a result of gender but additionally of socio-financial factors. This component of the unconventional exhibits how gendered oppression is experienced in a different way relying on elegance, and the feminist critique of social and economic systems turns into a key element inside the text.

5. Symbolism of the Suwanee River and Female Liberation

The symbolic use of the Suwanee River inside the novel serves as a metaphor for Arvay's adventure towards freedom and personal liberation. The river represents the opportunity of break out from the restrictions imposed via her marriage and societal roles. The examine unearths that Hurston makes use of this herbal image to underscore Arvay's choice for independence, emphasizing the river as a area of capacity self-discovery and emotional launch. Through this symbolism, Hurston aligns the belief of lady empowerment with the idea of fluidity, movement, and exchange. The river's flowing nature symbolizes the flexibility and autonomy that Arvay seeks, highlighting her potential to go beyond the gendered and social constraints that bind her.

6. Feminist Critique of Marriage as an Institution

A significant finding of this studies is the feminist critique of marriage as an organization that perpetuates patriarchal values. Arvay's marriage to Jim reflects the broader social shape where girls's roles are defined via their relationships to guys, and their identities are shaped within a framework of submission and dependence. The observe emphasizes that Hurston opinions marriage no longer only as a non-public relationship but as a societal group that reinforces gender inequalities. Arvay's emotional struggles and her eventual decision to claim her autonomy challenge the conventional know-how of marriage, suggesting that ladies's real freedom can handiest be carried out once they unfastened themselves from the restrictive expectations of conventional marital roles.

7. Arvay's Liberation and Feminist Agency

The final finding in the analysis is Arvay's closing liberation and the assertion of her feminist agency. By the cease of the unconventional, Arvay's journey culminates in her decision to say her independence and take manipulate of her personal existence. Her emotional boom and recognition of her well worth display a clean feminist message: girls have the proper to reclaim their organization and break unfastened from patriarchal constraints. The take a look at indicates that Hurston positions Arvay's transformation as a feminist act of resistance, emphasizing that girls, regardless of their societal roles or marital status, have the capacity to outline their personal futures. This narrative provides a hopeful message of empowerment for ladies who are searching for to venture the structures that restriction their employer.

Conclusion of Findings and Discussion

In conclusion, *Seraph at the Suwanee* gives a profound feminist critique of gender dynamics, marriage, and societal expectancies. The findings reveal how Hurston uses Arvey Henson's character to discover the limitations positioned on girls in patriarchal Southern society and the capacity for private liberation. Through her depiction of Arvey's journey in the direction of autonomy, Hurston highlights the complexities of woman identification and empowerment, displaying how women can break unfastened from oppressive systems and redefine their lives. The novel in the end serves as a feminist call for ladies to undertaking the gendered and sophistication-based totally structures that confine them, supplying a story of resistance and self-consciousness.

VI. CONCLUSION

Zora Neale Hurston's *Seraph at the Suwanee* offers a nuanced exploration of gender roles, patriarchal structures, and the quest for girl autonomy in early 20th-century Southern society. Through the person of Arvey Henson, Hurston evaluations the oppressive social expectations located on girls, mainly inside marriage, wherein girls are often described by means of their relationships to guys. Arvey's emotional and psychological adventure reflects the bigger feminist struggle for self-discovery, independence, and empowerment. Her eventual rebellion towards her husband, Jim, and her growing recognition of her very own well worth exemplify the capacity for girls to challenge and transcend societal constraints. Hurston's depiction of Arvey's evolving experience of self highlights the significance of breaking free from conventional gender norms and embracing private agency. The symbolism of the Suwanee River as a website of freedom and renewal similarly underscores the radical's feminist message: that liberation, each emotional and bodily, is attainable. The intersection of gender and class inside the narrative suggests how ladies's struggles are compounded with the aid of monetary dependence, revealing the complexities of oppression that girls of decrease social instructions face. Hurston's critique extends past individual relationships to provide a broader remark at the institutionalized structures of patriarchy and classism that limit women's autonomy. Ultimately, *Seraph at the Suwanee* positions female empowerment no longer as a passive or inevitable outcome, however as an lively method of self-liberation. Through Arvey's transformation, Hurston affirms the feminist ideal that girls have the proper to define their very own lives, impartial of societal expectancies and male-dominated frameworks. The novel therefore stands as a powerful testament to the resilience and agency of women.

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