

**ISSN** INTERNATIONAL  
STANDARD  
SERIAL  
NUMBER  
**ISSN-2321-7065**

**IJELLH**



**International Journal of English Language,  
Literature in Humanities**

Indexed, Peer Reviewed (Refereed) Journal

**UGC Approved Journal**



**Volume 6, Issue 9, September 2018**

[www.ijellh.com](http://www.ijellh.com)

Aiza Usmani,  
Research Scholar  
Department of Languages,  
Integral University, Lucknow, India  
aira\_usman@yahoo.com

### Psychoanalytical Analysis of the play Ruined

#### **Abstract:**

This paper talks about the psychological analysis of the female survivors of the war-struck zone of the Democratic Republic of Congo as portrayed in the play *Ruined* by Lynn Nottage. Sexual assault, rape and torture have been treated as weapons of war to demoralise and destroy the lives of people in DRC. Interaction with such events impacts the psychological well-being of women. Nottage tries to observe and generalise the lives of Congolese women and discusses the psychological implications of rape, torture, wars and genocide. This literature suggests that for the Congolese rape victims, post-assault help-seeking becomes a 'second rape', which is dual victimisation of the women of Congo.

**Keywords** - War-Rapes, Brothel, Congo, Psychoanalysis, Psychoanalysis

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

Lynn Nottage is a famous American dramatist and the Associate Professor of theatre at Columbia University. She also acts as a lecturer in playwright at Yale University. Lynn Nottage has won Pulitzer-prize for Drama two times – in 2009 for *Ruined* and another in 2017 for *Sweat*. Her plays are highly acclaimed in the USA and the rest of the world.

In most of her works, Nottage has concentrated on the marginalised people of the world, especially African women. In *Ruined*, she has depicted great concern for African women. In *Ruined*, the author has narrated the crisis of ordinary people. However, she has shown how despite such sufferings people still hope for life. Through her writings, she has provided affirmations of life and asked the Congolese women to introspect and rise. All through the play, the author has made them believe that they are gifted with boundless talents which they can utilise to control their destinies.

Sigmund Freud, the proponent of a psychodynamic approach to psychology, had looked carefully at the unconscious drives of people that motivate to work, follow, or act in

specific ways. Sigmund Freud had repeatedly talked about the performance of the mind because he believed that the human mind plays a significant role in both conscious and unconscious decision making. Freud at first classified the mental activity of three distinctive features such as conscious, pre-conscious, and unconscious activities. However, later Freud noticed that this kind of classification is not enough to identify all mental activities. He then introduced three new terms, viz. ego, super-ego, and id. These according to Freud, the psychologist, determine the personality of a person. According to Freud, very few things are within our control, and the majority of the activities we perform daily in different environments are merely under the control of the mind. Freud's theory on the psychoanalytic development was first published more than a century ago. He said that deep into the mind, the human personality represented the power struggle that was going on within us. Thus, it can be said that Freud's theory has some influence over Lynn. Though the author has never revealed this fact anywhere, her writing style depicts the inspiration she has got from Sigmund Freud. The most clear-cut similarity that could be noticed is that they both have described similar settings for their respective events. The psychoanalytic behaviour has some figurative behaviour patterns that act as a tool of characterisation. Both have used the personality as a literary element. Freud's theory and Lynn's play have a specific set of followers. They may differ in opinions on certain facts, but they share a similar setting called psychoanalysis.

## 2. ANALYSIS

Freud first analysed the explanation of the incidence of sexual abuse. He got several cases of sexual abuse of his female clients who disclosed childhood sexual abuse. Most of the cases, as Freud revealed, took place in the hands of close family members. He later postulated that the childhood sexual abuse later developed permanent trauma leading to psychological damage. This was the foundation of seduction theory which he presented at an international forum in 1896.

Ruined which was commissioned by Goodman Theater of Chicago won the Pulitzer Prize for drama in 2009. The theme of the drama is based on the war-torn Democratic Republic of Congo and the extreme sufferings of people there. The entire play is based on the personal experience of the playwright. She went to Uganda in 2004 and interacted with hundreds of refugees in the refugee camps there which developed into the play Ruined. She later planned to rewrite the play on the basis of the drama of Bertolt Brecht's "Mother Courage and Her Children" based on the 30 years' war in the 17<sup>th</sup> century Europe. However,

the extreme sufferings of the people in Congo moved the author more than anything else. The circumstance of Congo and Uganda was extremely poor with most of the women became prey to murder, rape, and sexual abuse. This prompted her to pen down the sufferings of women there and narrates the heart-wrenching conditions of women she met in the refugee camps. Freud also developed the Pleasure Principle which relates to the Nottage play, where he opined that the physical injury could protect a victim from the expansion of traumatic neurosis. In his own words, “a wound or injury inflicted simultaneously works as a rule against the development of neurosis.” Here, Freud has referred to the traumas of war, but similar type of trauma also develops in the women who have faced violent sexual assault.

The play shows a bar owned by a shrewd lady named Mama Nadi. She is a very clever person too. The bar offers foods, drinks, and cosy beds to the visitors. Women of different ages and more than ten in numbers working in that bar. These women have chosen prostitution as their profession as they think they have no other option for income is open. Of course, the chief concern of the play is a noble one as the author wants to show a new way of living with the women of Africa. It is comparable with the psychoanalytic theory of Sigmund Freud where he has shown how the super-ego functions at a conscious level. It works almost like a screening centre showing what is going on. This is the level where the parental control and social guidance are tallied with the personal pleasure and personal gain of an individual as directed by their id. However, the superego is not the last and only superpower. It has a conscience like setting is also sometimes controlled by ego. According to Freud, ego consists of a set of positive values and ethics. These aspects are followed because they are considered worthy socially and personally. Irrespective of circumstances, there is always a good reason to survive and follow a particular lifestyle. Ruined is a play full of human crisis, disasters, and sufferings. Even then, it shows a ray of hope where life's positive aspects still blooming.

Whenever people discuss or concern about positive affirmations of life, it makes us feel optimistic about life itself. The play narrates the touching stories of women who have been passing through a terrible time being expelled from the family and society just because of their profession. The play shows a ray of hope, new ways of living, and affirmation of positive living to these and all women who have been passing through the similar phase of life. The protagonist of the play is Mama Nadi, and the other prime characters are Sophie, Salima and Christian who is a travelling salesman. The external condition of the bar is very stressful; however, inside the bar people can talk freely. Hence, people often gather inside the bar and discuss various things. The brother of Mama Nadi is always crowded and full of life.

According to the Freudian concept in the adulthood, some persons are anal expulsive. This category of individuals is that who wants to share everything with you. For them, the great happiness is in giving their personal belongings. However, an anal expulsive personality is mostly disorganised, messy, and disobedient. In the play, the character of the protagonist, Mama Nadi is an anal expulsive character.

In the introductory part of the play, Mama Nadi is described as a young, gorgeous woman in her early forties. She is a shrewd fellow and an exploiter of women. This characterisation of the protagonist character of the play shows the human's ego-centric nature. Freud believed that at this level, the id is in the constant turmoil to get access to everything within our purview. Among the three Freudian psychological structures, the id is the most primitive one. It seeks prompt gratification of all the fundamental physical urges. It works in an unconscious state. Mama Nadi runs her brothel where prostitution is normal. Christian, the travelling salesman always tries his level best to impress Mama Nadi; however, she is always busy in her world. She ignores Christian and never opens up before him. The niece of Christian, Sophie and another woman Salima are both ruined in this brother, but they are very optimistic to develop something out of nothing. These women are thrown away by their communities as per the tradition of Africa. There is no hope that their families and communities will accept these women because the traditional society does not accept the profession they have chosen to earn their livelihood in Congo. However, this country is considered the capital of prostitution in the world. According to the data available with the United Nation, every hour more than 25 women are raped in Congo. In this condition, if these women had not chosen this profession or taken shelter in the brothel, they would have been raped somewhere and got nothing except social abuse. Nowhere in the play, it is said that they are getting any physical or mental pleasure in the bed, they are focused on their survival only. In the Freudian theory, it is said that when both the id and superego are involved in an event, the id can overrule superego as the former is stronger than the later. Women who chose prostitution as a profession may feel guilty and shame at any later period.

In one of the first psychoanalytic articles on Freud titled "Studies on Hysteria" published in 1976, it was narrated that trauma is the origin of the psychic conflict. It is a huge shock that hits like a quake and hits at the protectors of "I". In the words of Freud, it is a condition of "Shame and Silence". According to Freud, shame is the most accountable reason for an individual's inability to speak or even think about the event. At that moment, shame tries to express itself in various ways but mostly through physical and psychological

sufferings. Hence, Freud had asked for breaking the “state” of being ashamed through listening to the patients or hypnosis. These two therapeutic processes help the individuals to state their mental condition elaborately. Still, we could find that the condition of being ashamed that induces one to keep silence regarding their traumatic experience leading to several other types of the psychic and physical disorder have received much attention from the contemporary psychoanalysts. This includes the psychological impact of rape, torture, wars, and genocide.

Salima is the pregnant character of the play *Ruined*. Like Sophie, Salima is also sold to Mama Nadi. She became pregnant by one of the men who visit the brother frequently. Sophie knows about this pregnancy of Salima, but she hides the news from Mama Nadi. Consequently, Salima tries to perform the act of abortion on herself being traumatised but eventually ends her own life. Here again, the Freudian theory becomes relevant. According to Freud, the human mind consists of three levels – the superego, the ego, and the id. The ego creates the sense of self. However, Freud later revised the meaning of the term and said that it was a set of several psychic functions like tolerance, judgment, control, planning, memory, intellectual functioning, etc.

Salima’s pregnancy becomes open when she revealed the news to Sophie. The act of Salima is a part of her journey to self-realisation. Nottage used this character to show the condition of the war-prone zone of Congo. The character has been given the real experience where the author has not intervened much. The experience of being pregnant is an essential part of identity for a woman. In the 5<sup>th</sup> and final phase of gestation sketched for this study, the experience of postpartum which usually comes after the 6<sup>th</sup> week after the birth is used here for defining the condition when the labour to birth has already ended, but the trauma is still present for the new mother. There may be both physical and psychological trauma. According to Freud, the psychological trauma is everlasting.

Moreover, Freudian theory says that the psychic reality is formed out of worldly reality. Trauma causes anguish that develops the suffering of victims of war, violence, sexual abuse, etc. It causes a signal of psychic defence to open to organising the responses of a suffered individual.

Post the construction of psychoanalysis that took place a century ago, an array of events has been revisited that are in favour of the disorders in production that influence each one of us. In general, the psychoanalyst deals with a situation that discovers events which

leads to the sense of trauma in the patients. A girl named Sophie affected by trauma continues to read and sing. Irrespective of the fact that she is ruined, she does not give up on the hope and seek survival. She has a sense of positivity towards life and prefers rejoicing life rather than having a pessimistic attitude towards life. She sings and so beautifully as if she is trying to find meaning out from life. The woman character in the play that works in a bar is a medium to portray the choice of power that focuses on pulling themselves out of mud and hence giving a new meaning to life.

One of the questionable facts is Salima's death owing to the fact that she was pregnant and also her experience in the abduction and her baby murder. As per Freud's theory, the Id of Salima was so strong that it could oversee the concern of her ego. However, she preferred to abort but post her decision she had a feeling of shame and guilt for her deeds. The play of Lynn Nottage would seem to depict the death of Salima as naturalism. Salima considered her family as her bad fortune, but after she saw her husband retreat, she denied being with him as she was unable to see her future and if Salima had a baby girl then she would be treated as a sex slave for her entire life. The theory of Freud noted that the difference between anatomical sexes or set up a conflict between resentment, fear, agony, jealousy etc. Ego would be elaborating ways related to behaviour and thoughts that comprise of a person's executive actions. Ego would lead to delay in the motives of IDs and the behaviour of channels that would lead to outlets that are socially acceptable. This would lead to a person living effectively, getting people along with yourself, and then causing an adjustment in life.

Moreover, the Freud's theory considers ego as functioning in the several services of the principles. Hence, ego satisfies the pleasures urge but in ways that are realistic and takes into account all the possible activities in the real world. The several tension existing amidst the IDs instant urge and reality constraints helps to develop an ego that has more sophisticated skills. After the entire transformation, Salima dies.

As the play ends it is also found that Mama Nadi is also ruined and is not considered as women exploiter but a women feeder that provides safety as well as enables to have its identity build. The motion used by Freud deals with the unconsciousness ways that explains as to why people behave in a significant way. The various level consciousnesses comprise of

- Conscious
- Preconscious

- Unconscious

She aims to settle the lives of different people along with embracing the love of Christianity. Acting as a lion, Mama Nadi always works instead of rule and disconnects from the motion. She seeks better ways for survival and never asks for involvement in her rules. She works on her choice of Power and has dug all her past problems in mud and pulled herself out embracing the love of Christianity. The character of Mama Nadi is similar to the character in the theory of Freud where ego is regarded as a medium between IDs that calls for prompt gratification and the superego that seek ideals and irrational rules. It is, however, a risky task to balance the ego and the superego. For instance, if ego calls for the desire to pursue something that is not acceptable morally, then the superego would punish the same. The prime task of the ego is to look for a compromise amidst the gratification as the Id require and the rule that the superego follows. The notion of the process of unconsciousness as used by Freud is the irrational behaviour of people. As per the psychological viewpoint, the characters in the play depict a positive attitude towards life. The fact that influenced the most is brooding over past. For translation of the items lost in the past that leads to mourning paves the way for the recovery of symbolic language in order to lead to refusal of something that has already been lost.

It is seen that the most intriguing lady Salima mourns over the loss she experienced. Moreover, she was a sex slave and also suffered the loss of her child. Though she continuously mourns over the loss yet, she transforms herself but deep in she still has the character that is sad about the demise. She is always found to call her baby's name and perform gestures while eating. She broods and whimpers as she narrates the entire story of abortion and loss of her baby to Sophie.

After she has completed her narration, she refuses to meet her husband. Though her act was a little coward, yet she deems it as giving the act of love, on the other hand, She gave up on the life of her child to refrain from slavery. However, the baby has not yet arrived, and in order to save the future life of the child, she prefers committing suicide.

Mama Nadi is a strong character who never mourns her loss as she does not have time to brood over the loss as she is busy finding ways to survive. Only at the end, she comes to know that things have been better and as she wholeheartedly embraces Christianity with eyes full of tears.

The trauma leads to studies of psychology and is found to have a long-lasting effect on women after they have experienced rape however these theories have significantly less impact on women who have been raped in adulthood. Primarily, it is regarded as theories of psychoanalysis are seen to be biased toward the trauma dealing with aetiology would be found during either in childhood or when the subject is unconscious.

Literature reveals a study that is not told and would touch the human's heart to induce a feeling of bliss and happiness. In one of the conducted interview, Lynn Nottage states that her play is directed towards survivor and not the sufferers. From the aspect of both psychology and philosophy, the Ruined play by the author Lynn Nottage succumb lives to different characters along with the women of Congo Democratic Republic. The grim story is rendered entertaining by the bar's entertainment: Sophie who is too ruined to work as a prostitute sings, accompanied by a couple of excellent musicians. Moreover, there's some great, if desperate, dancing. Though the play revolves around stories of miseries as well as sufferings of the civil war victims along with enacting human stories about loss and humour, yet it unveils hope and positivity towards life. It is portrayed that they sunshine that brings new hope and sustains the miseries of life.

### 3. CONCLUSION

Mama Nadi is Mother Courage, a war profiteer who takes no sides and feels no loyalties, protecting while exploiting her damaged children. However, Nottage's conclusion is happier: Mama is courted by Christian who is a poem-writing travelling salesman. A sense of stasis is induced if the play is viewed in space and there prevailed moments that gave a feeling of not going anywhere. The word used in the play: psyche demoted human mind. As per the belief of Freud, psyche is mostly unconscious. A distinction was provided between superego (the prime source that causes guilt, pride or primarily self-evaluation), Id (source of energy to the human mind) and ego (the agent that adapts)

The Id was deemed unconscious as per theories of Freud. Superego, on the other hand, was unconscious in parts whereas the ego was mostly conscious. The conclusion of the play is highly dramatic and satisfying as it reveals dramatic measures. In the end, one found love, though Mama Nadi considered it as a statement fragile to be there. As the play reached the end, people became aware of the bitter truths that all have learned throughout about the region as compared to the development of character. However, the idea does not vanish, and

one can continue to drive energy from life by repression. As per Freud, the energy can be freed by replacing a thought of past and admitted as consciousness.

### Works Cited

Freud, Sigmund. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Dover Thrift Edition, Dover Publications, Inc. 2015.

Nottage, Lynn. *Ruined*, Nick Hern Books, 2012.

Psychoanalysis. *Literary Theory: an Introduction*, by Terry Eagleton, Second ed., Blackwell Publishing, 2005.

Freud, Sigmund, Joseph Breuer. *Studies on Hysteria*. Basic Books, 1976.