

Tribhuvan University

Critique of American Dream in Yaa Gyasi's *Transcendent Kingdom*

A Thesis Submitted to Central Department of English, T.U.

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts in English

By

Kabi Raj Upreti

Symbol No: 280682

T.U. Regd. No.: 6-2-487-7-2015

Central Department of English

University of Campus

Kirtipur, Kathmandu

March 2023

Letter of Approval

This thesis entitled Critique of American Dream in Yaa Gyasi's *Transcendent Kingdom* submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University by Kabi Raj Upreti has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

Members of the Research Committee:

Prof. Dr. Tara Lal Shrestha
Internal Examiner

Asst. Prof. Laxman Bhatta
External Examiner

Prof. Dr. Jib Lal Sapkota
Head
Central Department of English

Date:

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I credit the successful completion of this thesis to my respected supervisor Dr. Tara Lal Shrestha for his unconditional and untiring guidance throughout the research. I would like to express my gratitude to him for his priceless time, patience and educational motivation which have been a strong milestone during the process of the thesis writing.

I would also like to extend my words of gratitude to respected Assistant Professor, Dr. Bal Bahadur Thapa for his inspirational role in searching the potential subject and the theoretical clarification of the inquiry. Likewise, I am also grateful to the team of proposal defense that include Assistant Professors Mr. Laxman Bhatta. Also, my gratitude extends to Head of English Department Prof. Dr. Jiblal Sapkota for his invaluable suggestions regarding management of the thesis and the procedures for viva.

I also owe my sincere gratitude towards all the faculty members of Central Department of English, T.U. for their direct and indirect contribution in my thesis research. Finally, I'm also thankful to my parents, friends, colleagues for their love, care and attention that have been the motivating force for making this thesis successful.

December 2022

Kabi Raj Upreti

Critique of American Dream in Yaa Gyasi's *Transcendent Kingdom*

Abstract

This research paper explores the critique of the American Dream in Yaa Gyasi's novel Transcendent Kingdom (2020). It presents the meager case of getting life, liberty and pursuit of happiness (Declaration of Independence, 1776), for the migrated ordinary people though they dream such things in their life, no matter what the circumstances are. As the majority of people have been mobilized by the few exploited group, there has been the failure of immigrants' aspirations. This paper shows that the dream of working class does not turn to reality during the contemporary time because of the oppressed groups of people. It shows that the promises of material prosperity rather lead lives of these characters to trouble, alienation, and fragmentation. The democratic values of equality and respect are crumbled by practices of discrimination based on gender, race, and nationality. Immigrants hardly achieve the prosperity and dignified life they had expected. This failure suggests the decadence of the American dream. This study deals with the disillusioned and disappointed lives of characters through the racial, gender and nationality-based prejudice.

Key Words: Alienation, American Dream, Inequality, Racism

Yaa Gyasi's novel *Transcendent Kingdom* represents the impact of racism, inequality and discrimination on the lives of the characters and its consequences in American Society, which negates the promises of the *Declaration of Independence* (1776). American Dream which is not new to these characters as it has been started earlier with the Lincoln's *Declaration of Independence* (1776) fails to perform its promises. The well-known phrase of *Declaration of Independence* is "Life, Liberty and Pursuit of Happiness"(1). This proclamation focuses on equal rights for

everybody regardless of birth, wealth and social status. However, the circumstances do not match with and are just opposite in America. Though all human beings have equal rights in America as presented in *Declaration of Independence* there are the issues like racism, gender biasness, sexuality, nationality and so on especially in case of immigrants. People leave their homeland to get better future. Despite their hard work they are not supposed to have such prosperous life in America. They hardly achieve prosperity and dignified life they had expected. This paper is analyzed through the perspective of American Dream analyst mainly Jim Cullen and bring ideas and references from James Truslow Adams, Jennifer L. Hochschild Thomas Jefferson and Louis Althusser

This research aims at revealing how Yaa Gyasi critiques the concept of the American Dream in her novel, *Transcendent Kingdom* tells the story of Ghanaian American family. The family has trouble settling in a new land after moving to America. The narrator covers the theme of loneliness, sacrifice, racism, and identity crisis. Immigrants' struggle against prejudice and hardship has been presented. The color discrimination faced by characters show the decay of democratic values in modern America.

The term American Dream is used in different ways, but essentially it suggests that anyone in America can succeed through hard work and has the potential to lead a happy and prosperous life. It mainly consists of issues like life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness as promised in the *Declaration of Independence*. American Dream is related to material prosperity, happiness, and glorious socio-cultural aspects of life as well as the emphasis upon the individual relationship. In Gyasi's *Transcendent Kingdom*, The Gifty's family does not know that moving to America may lead to the death of Nana and their family has separated. Nana is one of the central characters

who represent the futility of the American Dream. Mr. Thomas is to despise to the worker on the basis of race, gender and sexuality.

Gyasi's *Transcendent Kingdom* covers the story of Ghanaian American family. It tells the full story of the family highlighting the reason why they came America and what had happen after coming. Gifty's parents lead comfortable life in Kumasi, Ghana. Her cousin "Joyce" lives in America and sends money and clothes to them. When they see such things they are highly allured by American lifestyle so, they decide to go America. After the birth of Nana, they feel too cramped in Ghana. They have a dream of material success after going America. She wanted more space for him to grow. She thinks her children get what they want in their life. At that time few Ghanaians were immigrating to America in the search of comfortable and happy life. They had the belief that they would find more space in America to develop their personality and have a wonderful life due to the social socio economic development of America. They leave Ghana and move to America. Gifty is one of the major characters of the novel. After they came to America they shifted in Aunt Joyce's "small apartment" (56). Her aunt Joyce is in America and they stay there.

Gifty is a second child of her family. Her mother is very much surprised to find herself as pregnant. Her mother is forty at that time. Everyone is referring to her as miracle. They don't believe themselves to be parents of daughter at the age of forty. But her father is worried about their children's lives. He says "America is so expensive" (45). They hardly fulfill their basic needs. He is worried about her life. Her mother says "Nana was the first miracle" (45). It means she is not prioritizing in her family. Her mother is a deeply religious person and always says "If you are living a godly life, a moral life, then everything you do can be a prayer," (52). She creates faith of god to her children. She also goes to a local church in Alabama. She has a

faith towards god. She gives code name to her mother as Black Mamba and Buzz to brother as well. Gifty's father, referred to throughout the novel as Chin Chin Man. Narrator doesn't give specific name to mother. After moving America they don't get job for some months.

Later, Mother gets job at Mr. Thomas's home as a health service worker. She works twelve hours per day in very low salary. She takes all responsibility of family and shifted in a "small rented house in Alabama" (47). After a couple of months Chin Chin Man works in a mart later, he is "accused of stealing three times in four months" (27). Even though it is wrong he lost his job. As immigrants he does not go against them. He is suffering from extreme homesickness in difficult circumstances. After sometimes, in another place he gets a "job as a Janitor in day care center just he gets seven dollars an hour"(39). Most of Immigrants do not have option to do better job. They do work for survival. He works hours and hours in dark even without taking breaks for water and food. They do not get enough money from their work. Gifty's parents cannot fulfill the basic needs from their salary.

After some times, Financial crisis badly hit them. He is suffering from extreme homesickness in difficult circumstances. He says "In my country, people may not have money, but they have happiness in abundance. In abundance no one is enjoying" (69). It symbolizes that he is missing his birthplace or homeland. He is not enjoying America because he saw lots of injustice there like, racism, and gender biasness. He does not want to stay in America because he is a one who is a victim of injustice. He says, "In my country, we do not eat the red M&M's," he'd say, throwing the red M&M's at me"(69). He feels lonely and does not want to stay single minute in America. So, he returns back in Ghana. It shows that America is not equal to

everyone. Despite their hard work Gifty's family's dream of living a prosperous life in America remains unfulfilled.

Gifty's mother takes all the responsibilities of her children. Nana is good a in soccer and basketball player. He chooses basketball and has a dream of becoming a pro basket ball player. While he was playing basketball in high school he fell down and hospitalized. Doctor prescribes "Oxy-Contin for the pain" (140). He prescribes an opioid based painkiller to reduce the knee pain and cure the injured part. After that incident he is alone at home and gradually he uses drugs to reduce the pain. When he uses Oxy-Contin he feels good then he goes to the ground when his friends are there. Ryan invites him to play together and he says "I'll be back soon," "My ankle's healing up" (158). He feels far better while he uses medicine, other time his pain is as it is. Slowly and gradually he involves in drug addiction and mother finds some drugs in his room. She requests to Nana to go rehab. But he refuses her request. After that, she sends to rehab. In rehab Nana's conditions is good. Then he comes back in his home. Later, "Nana started stealing from our mother's small things at first, her wallet, her checkbook, but soon the car was gone and so was the dining room table"(178). He steals their properties to buy the drugs. He stucks in drugs addiction and totally involves in such type of addiction. He does not care about anything. When different types of game are running around in the society everyone is talking about Nana how he was and how he is. Mrs. Cline says "I heard he's on drugs" (172). He is not playing this season. His well wishers are talking about his absence in everywhere. After some days, police finds his death body on the parking area and police says the cause of the death is excessive use of heroin. Nana's tragic death shows the predicament of the American Dream.

After the death of her son Nana, she becomes unconscious slowly she does not recognize her own daughter Gifty. That incident badly hit to mother. Mother loses her son and husband while doing work in America. The mother thinks she is responsible for Nana's death. She is suffering from 'Anhedonia' and "she tried to kill herself" (208). She accuses herself to as a death of her son Nana. So she does not want to live in there because she loses her home country, husband and own son. So she wants liberation from the world. After that incident her cousin Joyce takes care of her. Slowly and gradually her condition is not good Gifty describes her condition as "she colonized that bed like a virus" (3). It means she is suffering from diseases and she cannot do anything and lies on the bed all over day and night. Gifty is worried about her mother and says "I didn't understand what my mother needed healing from" (4). She does anything to heal mother but mother does not get proper treatment. America which is known as the country with advance technology cannot heal mother. She says "I wanted my mother to get up from her bed" (204). As a daughter she worries about her mother and wants to move her mother like previous days of life. Then she decides to go Ghana with mother and her Aunt Joyce. Somehow her health is well there, she feels good at that circumstance. She decides to live her daughter till her last breath. Then, they back in America there her health is in critical and she totally unmovable from the bed.

Gifty is a second child of her family. She is born when their parents is in struggle phase of life. Her parents hardly fulfill their children's whims. She grows under of her mother surveillance. She is a victim of racism from her kindergarten class. Her skin is dark and She says "I'm actually a princess," (25). As a child she expresses her feelings in class room but her classmate Geoffrey says "No you're not,"(25). It means only white people can be princess. From their childhood they

learn bad things. This types of circumstance makes her introvert. She does not have any friend in her school life. In high school level her junior friend Fred calls her untraditional. It means black immigrants do not have their tradition. Slowly and gradually her maturity developed and she loses her brother, father and losing her mother as fast. She says “It took me many years to realize that it’s hard to live in this world” (244). She feels alone in American society and loses her family members as well. She realizes how hard to live immigrants in “new land” (226). New land indicates to the America where those immigrants lose their identity, happiness and victim of discrimination. At last, she decides to marriage with Han who runs the local church in America.

Jim Cullen argues that the American Dream is associated with the idea of equal opportunities and freedom. For Cullen, "homeownership" (9) is one of the elements of the American Dream. It is about getting the dream of prosperity and purposeful life. Leaving a victorious and perfect life is the ideal of the American Dream. It allows every individual to gain the highest aspiration and goals. It is the ideal that the nation ought to protect the opportunity of each citizen to pursue their goal of happiness and satisfaction. All people are created equal is the main idea of the American Dream. Making one's dream achievable and available to all people is the true spirit of the American Dream. Anybody can get whatever they want with their hard work.

In *Transcendent Kingdom*, the Gifty's parents migrated from Ghana to America searching for a better life many people think America is an ideal world and a great country of opportunity and security. Gifty’s family and other immigrants cannot find appropriate work and life in America. Gifty’s mother works “as a home health aide” (26). She works in very low wages in Mr.Thomas’s home. In her novel, Gyasi

depicts the poverty, unfulfilled dream, and depressed condition of immigrant families in the land of life, liberty and pursuit of happiness. Gifty's parents do all sort of hard work for just their economic growth and better life of family. Despite the hard work, they cannot get such version of success as presented by America. Because of poverty and homesickness Gifty's father leaves America and move to Ghana. Mother losses her son and husband while she is busy on work in America. Gyasi depicts the futility of American Dream through Gifty and other characters. The mother thinks that she is responsible for Nana's death. She gets frustrated and depressed all the time thinking about the uncertainty of their life in America. Gifty mentions, "My mom's depressed. She's staying with me at the moment"(183). After the death of her son Nana she cannot tolerate herself because Nana's death badly hit her. She suffers from depression and is the representative figure of isolation.

Gyasi's novel *Transcendent Kingdom* has been reviewed from a different perspectives. Various researches have been examined on this particular novel. Among them Dheeraj Kumar is the one who expresses the contrast between science and religion as he makes the following observation:

Transcendent Kingdom by Yaa Gyasi explores the intersection between faith and science. It tells the story of Gifty, a young Ghanaian woman, who finds herself at a crossroads when her brother, Nana, dies from opioid overdose. Having believed, worshipped, loved, and relied on God in her childhood, Gifty drifts away from the faith, unable to understand why an all-powerful God would allow such tragedy. (4)

According to Kumar, *Transcendent Kingdom* is the combination of two opposite things; science and religion. Gifty is religious person from childhood. She always utters god's name in her mouth. After the death of her brother, she losses all sorts of

faith towards god. She thinks god does not exist in the world. If god truly exists in the world, then no human being has to suffer from such pain because of the god's blessing.

Similarly, British novelist, Sara Collins in *The Guardian* comments that this is the story of "a young woman weighs faith and science as she searches for meaning in the wake of family tragedy"(5). It means the story is about a struggle of a young black girl. She sees the tragedy of her family in American society. Though she is a neuroscientist has faith in god.

Dina Yerima also puts her views on Gyasi's *Transcendent Kingdom*. She presents how the novel takes the idea of science. This novel presents the struggle of main character to become a successful neuroscientist. She writes, "The novel is loaded with scientific ideas and facts, giving readers insight into the work of neuroscientists as it intertwines with the life of Gifty's family. Gifty strives to answer questions which have plagued her childhood and shaped her adulthood" (183). According to Yerima, novel presents full of scientific ideas and how Gifty became neuroscientists at the young age. Gifty is a deeply contemplative character. From childhood, she has grappled with big questions about life. Her journey becoming a neuroscientist is in fact a continuation of this attraction to existential questions about the body, life, religion, God, and so on. Her childhood desires make to be neuroscientist in young hood. Though she is young but she tries to find the answer through experiments.

Elizabeth Toohey remarks that the novel provides a view regarding the subordinated relation between mother and daughter though they are different in thought. She makes the following remarks:

Gifty's relationship with her mother is also unusual and deeply affecting. Her mother's indefinite retreat to bed during a bout of depression frames *Transcendent Kingdom* and Gifty's anxiety and attempts to nurse her feel all too real. The mother-daughter relationship is intense and fraught, yet it's also undergirded by love. The only weakness of *Transcendent Kingdom* comes at its rather too tidy conclusion, but this is slight quibble in a novel that insightfully explores many pressing issues of our time, and in marrying science with faith, explores the limits and possibilities of both. (288)

According to Toohey, mother is in pathetic condition after the death of Nana. Despite being different in thoughts. She cares mother as daughter. Gifty's mother always gives instruction to her. She focuses on female bonding in her review. She tries to recover her health as fast as possible. She does not leave her mother in a single minute. She cares mother in very proper way. Toohey mentions weakness and strength things of the novel in her review.

Thus, various critics have focused on various aspects of Gyasi's *Transcendent Kingdom* no one has attempted to observe this text from the perspective of failure of American Dream.

This research paper investigates different aspects of American life. It makes discussion on how immigrants African black people came to in America and how those promises made by American Dream fail. The sadness and unsuccessful condition of Gifty's family and other characters show the mythical dream of American Dream. None of the characters live a successful and meaningful life in America suggested by the false ideal of American Dream. The dream of gaining name and fame of immigrants does not come true in life. Their obsession with the dream leads them to mental trauma and loss of their family members. The pursuit of the

dream destroys the life of Nana. It shows the futility and pointlessness of the American Dream.

The term American Dream was first coined by James Truslow Adams in his book *The Epic of America* in 1931. He makes discussion on what the America Dream is really about. The American Dream is dream of opportunity, guarantee of life, liberty and pursuit of happiness. Making life better is one of the dominant ideas of the ideal of the American Dream. He writes:

The American Dream is that dream of land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement. It is a difficult dream for the European upper classes to interpret adequately, and too many of us ourselves have grown weary and mistrustful of it. It is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position.

(215)

Adams opines that American Dream is a belief that everyone regardless of what class they were into or where they were born can attain their own version of success and happiness. The dream is achieved through hard work, sacrifice and risk taking rather than by chance. It is the dream of having richer, fuller, and better based on his or her ability. Everyone deserves to get equal opportunity in same thing in this dream land. Minorities, immigrants' people from all class should be provided opportunity based on their ability. The dream covers a wide range of issues besides monetary prosperity. For him, American Dream is built on not only material success but the most significant part is equality between among the people. One must be recognized for his

own contribution. Every individual has a right and freedom to seek happiness and prosperity, regardless of where or how they were born. American Dream is the view of American society that ignores the problems like racism, gender discrimination, classism, hierarchy and misogyny. Making the dream available to all inclusive genders, incomes and ethnicity is the ideal of American Dream.

The well-known phrase “Life, Liberty and Pursuit of Happiness” (1) from *Declaration of Independence* focuses on equal rights for everybody regardless of birth, wealth and social status, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, among these are Life, Liberty and Pursuit of Happiness” (1). So, the American Dream is the dream of a land in which life should be better, richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to his ability or achievement. It is a dream of a social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest liberty. This dream is not new to these characters in the novel as it has been started earlier with the proclamation which focuses on equal rights for everybody regardless of birth, wealth and social status. Unlike the proclamation *Transcendent Kingdom* presents another side of American dream, Chin Chin Man says “In my country, we do not eat the red M&M’s,” he’d say, throwing the red M&M’s at me”(69). He feels unhappy and lonely but he cannot do anything against them. Non American people suffer from such type of condition. It shows that America is not equal to everyone. This is how nonwhite people suffer in America.

American Dream is mainly related with the materialism. So, it hints that capitalism is the epitome of American Dream. Cullen argues, “A better life has been a core component of American Dream” (16). By this, it clarifies that to get American

Dream, they need the materiality. They get it only through the money economy and they think that happiness can buy with money and it comes through materialism.

The ideal of the American Dream proves to be false through the character of the Gifty's family and other immigrant families. Cullen argues equality as the "most unsuccessful part of dream" (8). Neither immigrants become rich nor do they get a proper job in America. They are suffering from discrimination, exploitation and domination Gifty's parents who come from Ghana to America dreaming about becoming successful and wealthy person cannot fulfill their dream. They are just victim of injustice in America "Chin Chin Man was accused of stealing three times in four month" (27). Immigrants black people are badly treated by American citizen. Even though he is not stealing anything but he is charged of theft. No one is enjoying America fully and freely. Such types of activities try to demolish the democratic value of America. Nana fails to pursue his dream of becoming a best basketball player. Gifty's family faces discrimination in the America which challenge the idea of equality as suggested by the American Dream. The Country with advanced science and technology fail to heal Nana's knee injury and mother's depression. Gifty says "I didn't understand what my mother needed healing from" (2). America is known as the country of advance technology and equipment. These things do not work in Gifty's mother. After entering America Gifty's parents worried thinking about the insecurity of their life not only economically but also physically.

Many critics and authors have tried to dismiss the concept of American Dream as myth. Greil Marcus is one of them. In *Dead Elvis*, Marcus criticizes the very ideology of the American Dream as nothing more than a "now-horrible-liché" (129). Likewise, in *Transcendent Kingdom*, Gifty's mother losses "her home country, her

husband, her son” (243). She suffers from such miserable condition in democratic land America where she losses everything.

Jim Cullen also defines American Dream. He states that “The Declaration of Independence” is “the Charter of American Dream”(8) through which the American Dream originated and expanded beyond the narrow goal of the document to gain freedom from the British . He further states that the American Dream is the dream of “upward mobility, a dream typically understood in terms of economic and social advancement”, “the most noteworthy-and unsuccessful of all American Dreams: the quest for equality, focusing specifically in the struggle of Africans Americans” (8). The most widely realized American Dream “homeownership” (9). And the final Americans Dream, which is “also a dream of personal fulfillment, albeit of a very different kind than that of the Puritans or Abraham Lincoln” (9). Regarding the definition of American Dream, he argues homeownership is cornerstone of American dream. For many Americans having a house is an essential. Because it conveys a number of financial advantages, such as that ability to collect wealth and access credit by making home equality, reduce housing costs through interest deduction and gaining long term savings over the cost of renting. For Cullen, one of the features of American dreamers is owning a home as it allows them to own a piece of the USA. This is a dream that everyone feels different from living in a rented apartment. For many Americans homeownership enhances the longing for self-determination at the heart of American dream. It develops a sense of being and belongingness. He argues that land is one of the powerful parts of ideal of American Dream. It is something worth. Cullen writes that land is a part of better life and establishes a legacy for immigrants. Owning a home is a one part of American Dream.

Not even a single character in *Transcendent Kingdom* owns house and land in the America. They are disappointed by their new apartment in the America. This is not the home they envisioned for themselves. Neither Gifty's family nor other immigrants. They cannot get house and land in the promising land as argued by Cullen. After coming to America they get one "small apartment" (37) which is dirty and messy. Their imaginative home does not come true. Failing to buy home and land makes them feel that they are not a part of the country. The hope of getting better home, job, and education turn out to be just a myth for them. Immigrants' dream becoming a successful singer, dancer, soccer star is smashed. The idea of equality is not in practice. Racism is rampant in the America.

American Dream also critically allied with the American politics. It is emerging concept of declaration of independence of the United State by Thomas Jefferson, where he declares, "All men are created equal that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, among these are life, liberty and pursuit of happiness" (1). This is the promise to the American people which becomes the American Dream. Along with this, thing it indicates something more than that which is also scripted in the preamble of United States constitution as, "provide for common defense, promote the general welfare, secure the blessing of liberty to ourselves and our posterity" (1). Constitution of America also advocates for the happy prosperous liberal and dignified life.

The ideal of American Dream proves to be false through the character of the Gifty's family. Cullen argues equality as the "most unsuccessful part of the dream" (8). Immigrants in the United States cannot find guarantee of life, liberty and happiness. Neither they become rich nor do they get good job in America. Gifty's parents who comes from Ghana to America dreaming a good life cannot fulfill their

dream. Gifty faces so many discriminations like racism and gender biasness from her childhood in America which challenge the idea of equality as suggested by the American Dream. The country with advance science and technology fail to heal Nana's injury. After entering America father is all the time worried and thinking about insecurity of their life not only economically but also physically.

Extensive social discrimination, racism and inequality in the United States, have caused frustration in the life of immigrants. These practices have decayed the democratic values in America. High class people like Mr. Thomas always dominate to the immigrants worker and called "nigger"(27). The rampant racial and color discrimination practiced in America are against the democratic values. The promise of equality is not yet put into practice as suggested by advocates of American Dream. Commitment to false dreams has resulted in the death of Nana and sense of alienation of Mother in the *Transcendent Kingdom*. Black Americans, ethnic groups and racially distinct communities are deprived of opportunities throughout. The hope, dream, vision is presented as nightmare and frauds in disguise.

David Madden, the author of argues about one of the major causes of failure of American Dream. He observes:

Poverty, of course, has always contradicted the Dreams of success. For most of the hopeful...immigrants...America became a nightmare of ironies. Even some of the anarchists, socialist and communist immigrants came to America believing in the dream of freedom, equality and justice. Perhaps they expected, as in a dream, a sudden...realization of all the ideals the European Nightmare has spawned. (31)

Madden explains why immigrants come to America and what they find after entering to United States. He argues that people enter to America in the hope of making their

dream come true but when the hope shattered by unexpected consequences, there comes the nightmare. The gaps between bourgeoisie and proletariat play major role to make American Dream unsuccessful. The discrimination done on the basis of class has crumbled the democratic values of American Society. Hard work alone cannot make people rich. The promise of material prosperity as suggested by the ideal of American Dream rather leads immigrants' life to harder, unhappiness and adversity. The ideals of freedom, equality and injustice are rampant in the America. This practice has challenged the ideals of American Dream. Madden explains that lots of immigrants are deprived of getting opportunities due to their financial opportunities. In *Transcendent Kingdom* Gifty's parents cannot fulfill their aspiration because of their poor financial condition in the America. Immigrants do not get good job opportunities not because of their inability but due to their miserable and poor economic conditions. It shows that economic crisis plays one of the pivotal roles in making American Dream to fail. Poverty overwhelms most of the people in America.

Regarding American Dream Luther Luedtke argues hard work alone cannot guarantee the triumph, accomplished and victory in USA as defined by the ideology of American Dream. He makes the following remarks:

America is a promised land, based on pride in American Government and political institutions, independence and self-reliance accompanied by the hard work and initiative, commitment to communal action voluntarism and 'organizational democracy'... optimism, rights of others equality... a preference for the concrete... coping with all sorts of problems were continuous marked conviction of initiatives. (20-21)

For Luedtke, hard work is essential to attain success. But the perseverance and struggle of blacks and other minorities have gone in vein. The legacy of democratic

republicanism and cultural colonialism and the feelings of superiority and inferiority between and among the people created problem in making American Dream come true.

Jennifer L. Hochschild writes, “American Dream includes no provision for failure; a failed dream denies the loser not only success but even a safe harbor within which to hide the loss” (30). The pursuit of financial security, economic security and personally fulfilling life and having ability to control and freedom to participate in achieving the dream have not been accomplished by the characters in the novel. Many people in America are excluded from taking part in the American Dream since race, gender and class determines access to opportunities. Hochschild argues “American who do everything they can and still fail may come to understand effort and talent alone cannot guarantee success” (20). Economic and educational attainments are also crucial component of American Dream especially for family with low income. Ethnic and social discrimination makes worse situation especially of immigrants. Inequalities existing in USA have helped American Dream to remain only as a dream which never gives birth to reality. The unfair opportunities given to pursue dream only to certain group and class are one of the major barriers to achieve American Dream.

The concept of American dream is changing over time it is still fascinating and inspiring people worldwide. Gyasi in her novel shows that people from minorities no longer have access to upward social mobility. Discrimination is one of the challenges and hindrance for accomplished of American Dream. Success has been like an expire principle.

The American Dream is associated with the idea of achieving prosperity through hard work, determination and courage. These values are still prevalent in the USA. The characters in the novel serve as Gyasi critique of the American Dream.

Characters in the novel embody a criticism of America and American experience. Gyasi deconstructs the concept of the ideal of American dream even in twenty first century. The inequity, prejudice and hierarchy between and among the people are responsible to destroy the ideal of American dream. Characters are rejected from good job just because he is not citizen of the United States. They are misrepresented by the white elite people just because of their color. They are treated as aliens. Such evil practices have caused the fall of American Dream. These negative practices contribute to the decay of moral values in the modern society. Moral values are decaying in the American society.

Racism in the United States has existed for centuries. It is a systematized form of domination by one race against another. Chin Chin Man is one of the central characters. His experience as an outsider helps to understand the widespread racial prejudice based on skin color prevailed and practiced in the America. Chin Chin Man says “In my country, we do not eat the red M&M’s,” he’d say, throwing the red M&M’s at me”(69). His characterization claim that people are treated differently based on the social implications from cultural meanings attached to skin color. He reveals that individual in America is treated unfavorably just because they are of a certain race and their personal characteristics associated with race. Race is undoubtedly taken as visual realities which badly affects lives of many African American. Regarding racial discrimination, Keith says “Assumptions linked to physical difference stem from the widespread belief during slavery times that dark skin and African features were a sign of lack of intelligence, ugliness and evil, whereas light skin represented purity, civilization and beauty” (27). It shows that all assumption about facial attributes such as skin color, hair texture, and facial features determines one’s characters. Non Americans are still supposed to be less intelligent,

ugly, barbaric and passive whereas whites are thought to be more intelligent, active and civilized in America. In kindergarten class Gifty says “I’m actually a princess” and her fellow Geoffrey answers to Gifty “No, You’re not,” Black people can’t be princesses” (25). In America, black people depicts in negative way from childhood white people discriminate to non white. High class people like Mr. Thomas always calls to Nana as “the little monkey” (27) and mother as “nigger” (27) “them nigger” (60) to immigrants. Immigrants’ faces racism and gender inequality from their childhood in the democratic country USA. Though United State is democratic country immigrants are biased by their skin color. Though they are working in perfect way white people blame them as a thief and hurt them brutally in the time and again. Chin Chin Man is “accused of stealing three times,” (27). The practice of prejudice black people in American society dismantles the democratic values and assumption.

Furthermore, Black Americans and immigrants are still suffering from hate crime in the United States. Such racially motivated hated crimes in threat to the equality and justice for all people as said by the American dreams. It reveals how much black faces are harshly treated and undervalued by the white people. The discrimination between white and blacks have contradicted the core values of fairness and equal treatment for all people in America. The idea of equality suggested by American dream is destroyed when African American family faces such racial discrimination in the society. Many individuals from around the world still are facing such kind of prejudices in the United States. Blacks are still oppressed and immigrants are still marginalized based on their skin color and racial background. African, Asian, and non American people are taken as source of wrongdoing and barbarism. When something wrong happens in the society, the very first thing the whites do is to doubt blacks.

Sexual objection of women is one of the reasons which decay the moral values of American society and ultimately leads to the failure of those ideas promised by American Dream. Women are supposed to be the prey and object of men in American society. Gifty's mother an immigrant from Ghana who got abused her owner Mr. Thomas at the working time. He treated female worker as an object. Every night she tells "Mr. Thomas's abuse" (40) in home. She cannot take action against the so called elite white people. She is representing figure of all working immigrants. For men, she is behaved as commodity without regard her dignity. She feels that she is constantly watched and targeted with sexual perspective by her owner just because she is a woman. Regarding sexual objectification of women, one of the famous writers Soraya Chemale put her views:

I was as much as object of reproduction as I have been an object of sex. The physical transformation of person's pregnant body, in rapid and highly visible way, is a marital objectification. Pregnant women are stared at, commented on, and touched; we belong to everyone. Even strangers feel free to comment on our weight or size and tell us how to eat, what to drink, and how to move. When women themselves perceive that they are being objectified, which happens every day to a visible pregnant woman, they act more like objects, moving less and speaking less. (103)

According to Chemely, women are treated as an object in patriarchal society. They are more likely to target with hateful violence simply because they are women, every day. Such practice prevails especially in male dominated society. They don't have any right on their own body. It is male who controls her physical body and they can use her whenever they want. They are supposed to be touched and stared at by male counterpart. Conservative values and patriarchal structures gains importance and

popularism. Gifty's mother becomes victim of the so called patriarchy even in America.

A home is always associated with the idea of security, safety and love but woman is not secure in home. Mr. Thomas abuses to the female workers. Gifty Says, "When she got home from work, feet swollen, arms aching, and ears stinging with Mr. Thomas's abuse"(40). She cannot complain against him. Her character reveals that America still has a patriarchy. Male dominance is weakening but it's not completely gone. Violence and injustice against women is not over yet. Such practices have caused the degradation of American society. Women have not completely been able to exercise their freedom as suggested by the American dream. For men, women are like an object and they can compulsion to endure the oppression and repression imposed by their male counterpart. Such discrimination has truly violated the freedom of women. Undemocratic practices and activities are some of the reason of the downfall of so called the American Dream.

In democratic country United States people run after money. This is pivotal problem for the immigrants. They have their own kind of dream in America. They are very obsessive to the material things so, they don't give much priority to the norms, values and culture. Humanity and human values are not measured. It is money and materiality which makes difference in the society. Social prestige only gains through the money and matter. In this regard Hochschild argues, "American Dream was that everybody was going to make...A billion dollars, but it was that everybody was going to have opportunity and chance to live a life with some decency and some dignity and a chance for self respect" (13). Here, she views that every Americans have dream of material success and get rich by money, opportunity and chance to live dignified life. In order to get their goal, people have to gone extend of doing even wrong things to

become the self-respected person in the society. Materiality and money economy are their pulling factor rather than humanity, social norms and values, ethics and morality.

Henry S. Nevins Commager argues that dream consists of success in social intercourse and each person have their dream in different ways they have same chance to fulfill it. Commager argues:

Everyone can put their own dream in different ways but banded in the same ideas same chance for everyone the same of level, the competition to achieve, and the important thing is the idea of success, individualism and hard work. Everyone must succeed in performance in social intercourse or succeed in collecting money. (156)

According to Commager, people have their own version of dream in America.

Actually, American Dream refers to having succeeded in the achievement, performance, social intercourse or success in collecting money. He also links it with money economy by the individual practice.

Another problem of American society is nationality based discrimination. The practice of nationality based discrimination is still widespread in the United States. The culture of immigrations is not accepted and appreciated in the United States. American culture is still practicing the worst kind of prejudice. Open discrimination against Gifty's mother and immigrants from different countries in the world has decayed the moral values of American society. People are not treated as they are but judged by the type of passport immigrant possess. Immigrants in the United States are still deprived of getting job opportunity just because they are not Americans. Gyasi in her novel introduces Gifty's mother who came from Ghana to be a wealthy person in America but Alabama becomes the very victim of Nationality based discrimination. She cannot get the proper job opportunity to be a wealthy woman just because she is

an immigrant. She is disqualified not because she was not able but due to her ethnicity. When Mr. Thomas sees Gifty's mother he utters, "DO. YOU. SPEAK. ENGLISH?" (27). It shows English is superior to other language. Language is the most important part of nationality. Language represents the country. It is not necessary to speak English language. It is just means of communication. In America many immigrants are there and they interact with each other in their own language. It is not necessary to interact in English. People speak their own language because they feel comfort in their own language. Mr. Thomas raises the issue of language he feels that English is far better than other language. He does not give space to immigrants' languages. He is a representative figure of the white society. He always biases to the immigrants' workers. Gifty says "his sharp tongue never dulled, and I never heard him say a kind word to her" (46). He never speaks politely to workers. In the democratic country people are born equally. All people have equal rights in the earth. This indicates the ethical degradation. Similarly, no one can be enjoying America fully and freely.

Moreover, hate crimes in the America play pivotal role for the decadence of American dream. Such activity has caused downfall of democratic values and assumption. The injustice based on the religion and race is still prevalent in the United States. Such factors have played pivotal role in making American dream fail. Immigrants' cultural practices are not appropriated in America. Chin Chin Man is one of them who is frustrated by the hatred attitude of Native Americans towards immigrant. In the democratic land people live their life happily and freely it's one components of American Dream. Unlike that, immigrants get frustrated in the land of United States. Chin Chin Man Says "In my country, neighbors will greet you instead turning their heads away like they don't know you" (69). It means people are not

greeting to each other when they met face to face they just ignoring to the people. He compares homeland Ghana and United States. In addition he says, “In my country, people may not have happiness in abundance. In abundance. No one in America is enjoying” (69). Only few groups people enjoying America. Immigrants especially from African country America is not suitable land for to those people. In democratic country, immigrants and non white people treated badly by whites. They are facing lots of problem racism is one of among them. Their behavior makes them frustrated in democratic country United States. Gifty observes circumstances and says “it’s hard to live in this world” (244). America is not same to the all people. Especially for immigrants they hardly sustain their life in United States.

The practice of ignoring and insulting people from around the world has violated and democratic values and assumption of the United States. Likewise, Chin Chin Man says “In my country, neighbors will greet you instead of turning their heads away like they don’t know you” (69). The rampant racial and religious biases persisted in United States are the sign of failure of all those ideas set by the American dream. Such hatred crimes lead to the downfall of American society. All immigrants who has lived and worked in the United States have contributed for the development of America but what they have gained in return is the discrimination and hatred. Their life is devalued and their contribution is always underestimated.

Gifty’ parents legally migrated to United States from Ghana. United States which is known as the country with advance technology cannot heal Nana’s knee and Mother’s treatment. “I didn’t understand what my mother needed healing from” (2). Gifty as a neuroscientist who does not know which medicine does work properly to get back her mother in normal. When they entered in United States they cannot find a better job and live meaningful lives. They are all the time unhappy after entering the

land of the United States. They are unable to accomplish their own version of a dream. There is so much discrimination within America. Immigrants are treated like barbaric and terrorist. Gifty's parents is best example of it. She wants to see Nana become a successful basketball player does not come true. He doesn't get anything as suggested by the ideal of American dream. Gifty's family gets in America is discrimination, prejudice, hatred and humiliation. Chin Chin Man's characters show the falsity of the American dream. Culture and linguistic barriers make characters feel that the American dream is fantasy.

The failure of American Dream emerges out of the seed of the dream itself. It means American dream invites its failure too. It is because American Dream refers to the upward mobility, the suggestive of success and prosperity. It encourages everyone to win but it does not encourage losing. In this way people try to get success for better happy and prosperous life. In the name of getting success people begin to compromise with social norms and values, ethics and morality. In this race of violating social norms and values people begin to surpass on another. In this regard what has been conceived the incantation and slogan of American Dream not to hollowness and futile resulting into decay, degradation, dismay and downfall equipped with alienation, frustration, disjunction, family disintegration and so on. American Dream turns out to be failure of people's wrong tendency to get success by any cost for better and dignified life, personal liberty and pursuit of happiness.

In this way the novel is concerned with American Dream and its failure simultaneously as represented by various characters. It moves around the longing of characters for better life and prosperity. But in the name of achieving success each and every character begins to indulge into cult of forgetting the social norm and value. Consequently, they face severe anxiety, perils and hazard resulting into alienation,

fragmentation, disjunction, and decay of family value, family disintegration and dismay.

The analysis of the novel shows that the uncontrolled prejudice and inequality that exist in American society are major reasons for the failure of American Dream. The widespread discrimination on the basis of skin color, gender, and nation and class causes hindrance to achieve those ideals set by American Dream. Undemocratic activities, immorality, hate, crime and sexual violence also lead to failure of American Dreams. Misrepresentation of immigrants in American Media is against the democratic values of American society. Black people are always treated as criminal in United States. Immigrants are treated as aliens in American culture. Similarly, the sexual violence is also prevalent in American society. Patriarchal belief system also contributes to American dreams fails. Women are also suppressed and dominated in the so called modern and free country, the United State. The ideal of equality and justice is limited only to the papers of American constitution. Racial prejudice is another important factor which does not allow achieving success. People are deprived of opportunities just because of their skin color and nationality. What people get is unhappiness, frustration and alienation in America.

Gyasi's characters struggle hard with the disappointment of not being able to be recognized in America and for not getting their dreams in reality. Characters suffer from the feeling of something and unrecognized. The pain of not getting what they want has been depicted by Gyasi in her novel. They are unhappy all the time on their uncertain journey. They are under compulsion to look back to their past for the solace and peace which was in their homeland. Chasing American Dreams makes their lives hard. It leads them to death as well. Looking for material progress and prosperity leads their life to sadness. Happiness is lost in their lives. The days of sadness and

frustration begins when they enter a new land or promised land, America. American dream turns out to be nothing more than just an illusion and myth. It shows the futility, pointlessness and predicament of American Dream.

Gyasi critiques on the ideal of the American Dream through her novel *Transcendent Kingdom*. The social injustice and prejudice in the United States are responsible forces for the failure of American Dream. Hard work alone cannot guarantee better life in the United States. Not everyone can attain his/her own version of success as suggested by the ideology of the American Dream. The ideal of life, liberty happiness is not guaranteed yet. The ideal of the American Dream is just an illusion. The reality of it is a life full of struggle, tragedy, unhappiness and most importantly uncertainty. The idea of equality is limited only to the theories mentioned in the constitution of America. This novel reflects the frustration and anxiety of people due to running after the American Dream. The quest for American Dream leads the human life in the illusion. The life is missed when one chases the ideals set by American Dream. It leads people to uncertain journey and direction. The tragic and miserable situation of characters in Gyasi's novel *Transcendent Kingdom* indicates the predicament of American Dream.

This thesis focuses on American Dream approach which has been highly analyzed, explored, interpreted and illustrated. However, many researches can be done in the novel *Transcendent Kingdom* critiques on the American Dream as unfulfilled passions that is equivalent to quest for uncertainty. The way Gyasi arranges the characters from different class during the post-modern or contemporary era reflects the internal decay of American society despite the external popularity. There exists the impossibility of getting life, liberty and pursuit of happiness for the downtrodden though they dream such things in their life, no matter what the

circumstances are. The fiction often shows the world as a place where characters have to fight to survive, in a universe with the dream world of freedom, world of poverty, friendship and loyalty. Hence, this dissertation captures the ethos and pathos of marginal and critiques upon the material American Dream, which has been originated and regulated by American official history.

Transcendent Kingdom involves many issues which have been unexplored in this paper as my target was to interpret the issue of immigrants. The novelist possesses philosophic ideas and the novel stands as a philosophy of living a life meaningfully. The readers are awoken, and granted vision to live happily. Even we have to be known about the dark truth, and pleasing pain of the state policy. As the state is governed by powerful people. Therefore, the novel is only one representative aspect of the world. We know that there is corruption, lack of rule of law; economic embezzlement, political turpitude etc. are present in every state despite the degree varies from one state to another state. Gyasi is successful to highlight this.

The analysis of this novel shows the flaw of American Dream which has been resulted into the decadence of American values and cultures. Rampant racial discrimination, sexual violence, hate crimes, patriarchal belief and poverty are the major reasons for the dissolution of America's democratic values. Characters' failure to achieve their own version of success suggests the decadence of moral values and ethics in America. The ideal of prosperity and richness suggested by the ideology of American dream remains unfulfilled at the end. The practice of social injustice and color discrimination are also responsible for the tremendous deterioration of democratic values in the United States. The promise of success and fulfillment fails. Most of the characters come to be unhappy and become the victim of tragedy running after American Dream

Works Cited

- Adams, James Truslow. *The Epic of America*, Simon Publisher. 2001.
- Chemaly, Soraya L. *Rage Becomes Her: The Power of Women Anger*. Atria Books, 2019.
- Collins, Sara. "Transcendent Kingdom by Yaa Gyasi review – a profound follow-up to Homegoing." *The Guardian*, 24 Feb 2021.
- Commager, Henry Stuever. *The American Mind*. Yale UP, 1971.
- Cullen, Jim. *The American Dream: A Short History of an Idea that Shaped a Nation*. Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Gyasi Yaa. *Transcendent Kingdom*. Penguin Random House, 2020. Pp 1-265.
- Hoshchild, Jennifer L. *Facing up to the American Dream: Race, Class and the soul of the Nation*. Princeton University Press, 1992.
- Jefferson, Thomas, Committee of Five. *United States Declaration of Independence*. General Congress Assembly, 1776. P.1.
- Kumar, Dheeraj, and Arun Singh. "Conflict between Faith in Religious and Science in Transcendent Kingdom by Yaa Gyasi." *Pindus Journal of Culture, Literature, and ELT* 2.5 (2022): Pp 62-66.
- Luedtke, Luther S. "Making America: The Society and Culture of the United States." *Amazon*, The University of North Carolina Press, 1992.
- Madden, David. *American Dreams, Americans Nightmare*. Carbondale, Southern Illinois University Press, 1970. P.31.
- Marcus, Greil. *Dead Elvis: Chronicle of a Dune Obsession*. Culturelle. Allia, 2003.
- Newson-Horst, Adele. "Yaa Gyasi Transcendent Kingdom." *World Literature Today* 95.1 (2021): Pp 81-82.

Nzusyo, Elizabeth. Strategies of Navigating Loss, Grief and Despair in Transcendent Kingdom by Yaa Gyasi. Diss. University of Nairobi, 2021.

Snow, Margaret Ann. "Transcendent Kingdom by Yaa Gyasi." *Appalachian Review* 50.1 (2022): Pp. 118-20.

Tocqueville, Alexis De. *Democracy in America*. Duke UP, 1949.

Toohey, Elizabeth. "Transcendent Kingdom" *The Christine Science Monitor*, p.288

Yerima, Dina. "Transcendent Kingdom." *Tydskrifvirletterkunde* 58.1 (2021): pp183-85.