

May 2018

Tribhuvan University

**Quest for Identity and Self in Gayl Jones's *Corregidora***

– Deepa Neupane

**A Thesis Submitted to the Central Department of English, TU  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the  
Degree of Master of Arts in English**

**By**

**Deepa Neupane**

**Symbol No: 02251**

**T. U. Regd. No.: 6-2-55-156-2009**

Quest for Identity and Self in Gayl Jones's *Corregidora*

**Central Department of English**

**Kirtipur, Kathmandu**

**May 2018**

Tribhuvan University

Central Department of English

**Letter of Recommendation**

Deepa Neupane has accomplished her thesis entitled “Quest for Identity and self in Gayl Jones’s *Corregidora*” under my inspection. She carried out her research from August 2017 to May 2018. I hereby recommend her thesis to be submitted for viva voce.

---

Prof. Dr. AnirudraThapa

Supervisor

Date:

---

Tribhuvan University

Central Department of English

Letter of Approval

This thesis entitled “Quest for Identity and Self in Gayl Jones’s *Corregidora*”  
submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, by Deepa  
Neupane has been approved by the undersigned member of the Research Committee.

Members of the Research Committee:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Internal Supervisor

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

External Examiner

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Head

\_\_\_\_\_

Central Department of English

\_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my respected supervisor Prof. Dr. Anirudra Thapa. This thesis most probably would not be completed without his scholarly guidance, constant encouragement and valuable suggestions.

I would like to extend my profound gratitude to Prof. Dr. Amma Raj Joshi, Head of the Central Department of English for his approval of this thesis. And I am also grateful to my respected lecturers for their co-operation and valuable guidance and who provided me authentic materials and many ideas. Similarly, I am grateful towards all the teachers in the Central Department of English who directly or indirectly helped in course of my thesis writing.

I am deeply indebted to my parents Mr. Hom Krishna Neupane and Mrs. Haridevi Neupane for their belief, encouragement and inspiration. And I must express my very profound gratitude to my Husband Mr. Prakash Sharma for providing me with unfailing support and continuous encouragement throughout my years of study and through the process of researching and writing this thesis.

Finally, I would like to thank my friends Pabitra Poudel, Anu Dahal, Prakash Khanal, Pujan Gnawali and Dharendra Thapa, Janak Prasad Dulal and all my class and university mates who directly and indirectly helped me to complete this thesis. This accomplishment would not have been possible without them.

May 2018

Deepa Neupane

## Quest for Identity and Self in Gayl Jones's *Corregidora*

### Abstract

*This paper explores the quest for identity and self of the protagonist in the novel. It analyzes the text from the perspective of African-American Feminism. Corregidora is a neo-slave narrative written by Gayl Jones. Neo-slave narrative is a contemporary narrative that often deals with issues related to slavery. It depicts the violence of sex, rape, incest, and trauma. The protagonist of this novel, Ursa Corregidora is suffering from the identity crisis. Her longing for making identity and struggle to escape the burden of her past enforces her to search for her identity. Because her matrilineal line has a very haunting and troubled past of slavery. Her ancestors were brutally abused by the slave master. Ursa was victimized by her marital relationship. Sexual violence of her first husband Mutt makes her very sad, whereas her second husband Tadpole turns out to be a cheater. She falls from stairs and has a hysterectomy, which makes her sterile. She has lost her sexuality and her real self. However, she wants her life to be different from her matriarchal line. She decides to stay far from her familial story, which always hinders in her way. She chooses blues as her self-reflecting source but later on reunification with her first husband makes her complete self.*

Keywords: Identity, Self, Individuality, Past, Memory, History

This paper aims to analyze the issue of quest for identity and self in Gayl Jones's *Corregidora*. Critics have viewed this novel as neo-slave narrative, which uses the theme of slavery. This novel *Corregidora*, tells about the traumatic memory of racial slavery. The protagonist of this novel, Ursa Corregidora suffers from the lingering consequences of her ancestors' enslavement as well as she suffers from her unsuccessful marriages. Nevertheless, Ursa is able to break the cycle of traumatic history of her family narrative through her career as a blues singer. Her matrilineal line has very dark and abusive history of past. Simon Corregidora was Brazilian slaveholder, who forces her great-grandmother and grandmother to become a prostitute. Old man Corregidora fathered his own daughter. Ursa's great-grandfather and grandfather was the same man. That man rape, abuse them, he forced them to run the whorehouse. Her great-grandmother could not able to bear the pain and she is able to escape the incestuous, corregidora household and flees North to Louisiana later settle with her daughter in Brackton, Kentucky.

From the age of five, Ursa had been listening the story of slavery, rape, sex, incest, violence towards her matriarchy by Simon Corregidora. Therefore, she has to make evidence. She has to keep evidence alive by making a generation. This is her passing stories of familial history. The record of slavery had burned by the slaveholder, so her foremother wants to keep their brutal and traumatic past to be alive in their mind. By internalizing, the past story of her ancestors, Ursa has lost her own individuality. Her upbringing had been the injunction to 'make generation' whereas she is unable to make generation. Her first husband Mutt causes her to fall down a flight of stairs (Jones 4). In addition, she has lost her unborn baby as well as she has lost her reproductive ability, which is the source of her sexual being. She lost her sexual identity because of her husband. The forced hysterectomy severely

damages Ursa's sense of her own sexuality and her self-esteem. By losing the child she was carrying, she has left emotionally incapacitate.

For women losing a baby is not a small thing; mother figure makes a woman completes. But unfortunately Ursa can no longer bear children and thus, in her eyes, fails in her commitment to her matrilineal line (Jones 14). She gets psychologically damaged that suffers her relationships with men. She has no longer believe in the marital relationship, love, care, and affection. Then she tries to make her new self and identity through her blues.

Blues becomes the source of finding her distinct self and identity in the new society. Her blues singing become a healing source for her as well. She wants to forget the dark past of her ancestors. For women her sexuality is the means of empowerment, whereas a woman whose only source of power is the ability to make generations and she is unable to have children, it echoes with a scream of despair. She bears identity crisis because she has lost her female power, female sexuality, which is based on female reproductive power. That loss and despair forced Ursa to search her new identity in the new world. Women have their own identity and self, without being a mother. They are also a female being, female sex. That is why she wants to create her own self-identity in the male dominated society. She has chosen her singing as a tool to generate her own identity. Through the blues singing, she sings the songs of her ancestral memory.

Ursa's identity is clearly comprised from the history of the matriarchal discourse. She links with a familial legacy of violence. Yet, she feels in ways that are real in present. However, she has lost her fertility but she embraces her foremother's traumatic memory in her singing. She tells the bitter truth and history of her family through the lyrics of her songs. This is her new identity making politics in a new

world. She has adopted blues as her identity and self-maker that will help her to recognize all over the world through her voice and lyrics. Her failure relationships with Mutt and Tadpole force to know herself and create her own identity in the society.

The novel hovers around the issue of African-American Feminism. It is very difficult to make own identity and self in a male-dominated society for women. It is more difficult to make own identity when there is no one for you to support and accompany you. For African-American female, there is no easy way to generate their particular self. Because female body is not regarded as the particular being or the self. Males think that female is the part of their body. Women have not their own identity. So here, this paper has used the idea of Patricia Hill Collins, Anna Julia Cooper, Judith Butler, and Michel Foucault. Many writers and critics have put their views on the topic of African-American Feminism. Shometric Davis and Kelly Brown say, “black feminists have expanded notion to include issues of class and sexuality, in addition to race and gender” (2). After the abolition of Slavery in the United States and the emergence of African American Feminism, feminists have raise the issues of the race, class, gender and sexuality.

The protagonist of this novel is an African-American woman who is a blues singer and sings in the Happy's Café where she and her first husband Mutt had met. Moreover, they got married, after some months of marriage, they got divorced. Because of Mutt, Ursa has lost her unborn baby, and lose her reproductive power. She has gone through a hysterectomy, which makes her sterile for a lifetime (Jones 3). That incident made her emotionally and psychologically disturbed. She has lost her female self, female sexuality. For the women, being a mother is a real sexuality that makes women as real women but Ursa has lost her that identity. Which makes her



complete female self. That incident makes her to quest for her real identity, who is she? Why is she here? What is her purpose in life? These questions reinforce her to search her real self.

A very dark and haunting past of her matrilineal line makes Ursa distorted. Her foremother has abused and despoiled by the Brazilian slave master Simon Corregidora who has fathered her grandmother and her mother (Jones 10). That old man rapes his own daughter and makes her pregnant. Ursa's great-grandmother, grandmother, and mother have a very desecrated and bitter past where they were abused by the male characters. According to Anna Julia Cooper "Due to their inferior position within society and matrimony, colored women are silenced and prohibited to ventilate their emotions about men's maltreatment" (qtd. in Theys). Black women have not their own voice in the society. They were forced to endure the pain and suffering. They were forced to be work in a prostitute house. Ursa's ancestors have very painful and pathetic history of slavery. There are no any written records regarding their slavery and their past. Therefore, they make evidence by making generation and they pass the story from one generation to another generation. Oral narrative is the only source to make their history alive.

Ursa had been listening the passing narrative from the age of five onwards. She also has the responsibility to make her matrilineal story to be alive. Ursa has embraced her matrilineal past as her own past. She has assimilated them as her own story (Jones 11). Nevertheless, the real thing is that she is unable to pass the story. She cannot make generation and she is not able to keep evidence because she has lost her reproductive power and she cannot be able to bear children (Jones 9). However, Ursa has come to know that taking her mother's legacy of slavery as her own story; she feels that she has lost in their past memory. She has lost her own identity and self.

She feels that she has to make her own self-identity and her sexuality. She started to struggle to make her own identity through her singing. She wants to generate her personal identity through her blues singing. Her lyrics of the song tells the story of her past memory which can help her to make her identity and keep the evidence of her foremother's past history as well.

Similarly, as a female it is difficult to make her own identity, she has to struggle very hard to get success in life. There is nobody to support her, but she has to fight alone in a long run of her life to make a new self. Ursa's marriages also enforce her to search her identity. Identity is a constructed element, so she also can construct her own identity through her singing talent. Her blues singing is not only her profession rather it is also a source of the healing process as well. Now blues become the medium to the healing process as well as an identity-making process.

Many critics have defined that identity is a fluid complex of discourses, identity changes considerably. Identity formed by his/her social location, which included his /her race, class, gender. All person needs to develop a personal identity that distinguished from other. For Ursa Corregidora making her identity in a patriarchal society is very important. Her family, her matrilineal line is brutalized and violated by the male. Ursa also betrayed by the male characters so, She has to prove that female also can create their own personal self by without taking help from anyone. Female sexuality has its own identity; the female is a different being, a different self which has proven in this research work.

Many critics have given their views on this issue of female identity and their relationship with other comes as controversial. For this Narjes Tashakor Golestani in his article name "A Study of the Construction of Female Identity: John Fowel's *The French Lieutenants woman*" he writes, "The issue of identity and female

consciousness as one of the major concerns of feminist has always been polemical for, there are different attitudes in formulating gender identity and consequently defining what a woman is" (321). Women's identity and their consciousness have seen as a contentious term. Women are a different self like a man. Real women's identity lies in her sexuality. Women's reproductive power makes her identity in a society. In the novel, *Corregidora* Jones writes:

"It bothers me because I can't make generations."

"What bothers you?"

"It bothers me because I can't."

"What bothers you, Ursa?"

"It bothers me because I can't fuck."

"What bothers you, Ursa?"

"It bothers me because I can't feel anything." (90)

In the given lines, there is a conversation between Ursa Corregidora and her friend Catherine Lawson. Ursa is expressing her feelings towards Catherine that she is not able to bear children. She has lost her female sexuality because of her first husband Mutt. Ursa does not know about her fall from the stairs whether Mutt pushes or not. However, Ursa thinks that he pushes her and she has a forced hysterectomy, which makes Ursa physically and mentally distorted. She feels that as a female, she lose her real self. For women being a mother is her real sexuality. That inability forces Ursa to quest for her identity in a society.

Ursa Corregidora sees the real picture of her first husband Mutt. His oppressive nature and jealousy make her to lost her female identity. She has lost her unborn baby. Because of Mutt, she fells down and she has a hysterectomy and become sterile for whole life. Judith Butler in her article name "Sex and Gender in

Simon de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* says that "Gender must be understood as a modality of taking on or realizing possibilities, a process of interpreting the body, giving it cultural form" (36). He tries to say that gender is a cultural aspect it is constructed from social norms and values, whereas female gender will become a real female when she is able to bear the children. This is how female gender has constructed through our cultural values and norms. Caroline Brown in his article name, "Of Blues and the erotic: *Corregidora* as a New World Song", he writes, "Corregidora as a novel fluidly reveals the conflicts and ambivalence between generations of black mothers and their daughters" (Brown 130). He tries to say that there is a contradiction between the Corregidora mothers and daughters. Ursa ancestors force her to make a generation but she is unable to make a generation. Moreover, she wants to free herself from the burden of her familial past. She is suffering from the identity crisis and she could not be able to make her promise that she cannot make generation to pass their history. When Ursa and her second husband Tadpole are talking, she said, "as if part of my life's already marked out for me the barren part" (Jones 6 ). Ursa becomes depressed by knowing the truth about her inability. Therefore, she is expressing her feelings towards Tadpole about her sterility. She thinks that she fails to keep her promise to pass the familial story. Her ancestors have given her the responsibility to make generations and pass their narratives of racial slavery. They want to make their history be alive in their mind so they can carry the passing stories to next generation. Whereas Ursa breaks down her pledge which she has made to her mothers.

Furthermore, the novel *Corregidora*, has a very bitter reality of slavery. That history of past cannot make the Corregidora women live freely. They cannot make them permitted from their past and memory. They are obsessed with their past. Jones

writes:

"My great-grandmother told my grandmama the part she lived through that my grandmama didn't live through and mygrandmama told my mama what they both lived through and my mama told me what they all live through And we were supposed to pass it down like that from generation to generation so they'd never forget. Even though they'd burned everything to play like it didn't never happen. Yeah, and where's the next generation?"(9)

Given these statements and the last question has questioned on the identity of the Ursa Corregidora. She has lost her reproductive power. In addition, she could not be able to bear children anymore. Therefore, there will be no generation in future to pass their story. Nicholson in her book name *Gender Trouble* she writes, "Female no longer appears to be stable notion" (1). "Women's lives were either misrepresented or not represented at all" (1). It is true that female has always shadowed by the male figure. Moreover, women's story and their suffering have nothing to do in this society. Female is not considered as a different sexuality. Female sexuality has seen as a part of male sexuality. Women are always underestimated by the male. As well as women's identity also be misinterpreted by the society.

Similarly, gender issue has become the global issue in today's world. Women also have right to live freely like a man in the society. Therefore, black feminist have raise their voice against the male dominated society. Patricia Hill Collins gives her view "black feminism as a social justice project involves developing a complex notion of empowerment" (288). The 19<sup>th</sup> century has brought the different changes in the lives of African-American women. Male and female have the equal right to do in the

society. The notion of equality has emerged in the society. While Ursa and Tadpole talking to each other, she memorizes her past and tells her story to Tadpole. While they were talking to each other, Ursa states, “She was the pretty little one with the almond eyes and coffee-bean skin, his favourite. A good little piece, my best Dorita. Little gold piece” (Jones 30). Ursa’s great-grandmother told her that story that Old man Corregidora captivating her foremother’s body as his property. Simon Corregidora exploits their body and takes advantage of their female self. That exploitation and violence make them stronger and they dare to free them from all the brutal history. Linda J. Nicholson writes in her book *Gender Trouble* “Gender is a ‘relation’ indeed, a set of relations and not an individual attribute” (Nicholson 9). It is true that one person is related to another, one's personal identity is linked with another person's identity. Ursa Corregidora is in this world because of her mother and matrilineal line; they forced her to find the identity and self. To prove this claim Gil Zehava Hochberg in his article titled, “Mother, Memory, History: Maternal Genealogies in Gayl Jones's *Corregidora* and Simone Schwarz-Bart's *Pluie et vent Sur Telumee Miracle*” he keeps his view, “The centrality of the maternal figure as the originator of women's alternative voice and as a transmitter of memory is an outcome of the particular history of black enslaved mothers” (2). He wants to say that maternal figure is the source to bring the history in next generation. For them making generation is only one source to make their history alive.

Gender identity viewed as a constructed term; one can construct his/her identity through his work and dedication. Female are always excluded from the male in the male-controlled society. Another critic name Sirene Harb in his article name he puts his view, “Ursa reconstructs her present by rethinking the configuration of the historical past” (132). Ursa tries to make her self-identity different than her familial

line. She does not want to carry a burden of past which hinder her identity-making process. Female are not taken as separate being in man rules society, male regard female is part of their body. Women are marginalized by the male. They have to live in the margin; they have not their own voice and power to fight against the male-dominated society. To make their own identity and being oneself, they have to struggle in the society. Gayl Jones in her novel *Corregidora*, she writes:

My grandmother was white. He said, she was an orphan and they had her working out in the fields along with the blacks and treated her like she one. She was a little girl about nine, ten, eleven. My granddaddy took her in and then when she got old enough he married her. She called him papa. And when They were married she still call him Papa. (13)

Tadpole tells his family story to Ursa that his granddaddy married to girl who is like his daughter. This shows that how brutal was the period. Male only need sex from the female nothing more than that. Male members treated female members as a sex toy. They keep female with them to fulfill their physical need and desire. Women's identity was confined in men's sexual desire and need. Out of that, women should know herself and try to recollect her identity.

The female body has taken a site of exploitation. Patriarchy shows the authority towards the female body. Furthermore, women always try to resist patriarchal domination. Gayl Jones in her novel writes "I am Ursa Corregidora. I have tears for eyes. I was made to touch my past at an early age. I found it on my mother's tidies. In her milk. Let no one pollute my music. I will dig out temples. I will pluck out their eyes" (77). Given these lines are narrated by the protagonist of the novel *Corregidora*. Ursa frequently repels her past and memorize her conversation with her great-grandmother. She had been listening that horrible past of her foremothers at

the age of five, but she resists to pass this story to next generation. Perhaps she wants to forget all the traumatic past and she wants to make her new self by her singing talent. She has been gone through an internal personal struggle. Narjes Tashakor Golestani in his article, he writes, “gender is not what one is but what one does” (321). In this sense gender is not a stable identity from which various acts proceed; rather it is an “identity constituted through a stylized repetition of normative gender role and performances” (321). Female gender has been known as by their acts and performance. Female gender has known by their reproductive power. Women sexuality has based on her childbearing capacity. Jones writes further:

"Y' all women so act funny at wedding time"

he said. He was excited with drink. He sat down and hold me around the waist and kissed me. I'd been sitting stiffly but relaxed and returned the kiss. He squeezed my breasts.

"That's hurt?"

"Naw."

"It hurts some women."

"It doesn't hurt me "I said.

I sat there, letting him hold me around the waist.

I was saying nothing. (68)

Ursa comes to know that female identity is only for male desires. Female sexuality stands to fulfill the physical need of a male partner. To show the female sexuality they have to perform in the bed to entertain the male member.

The quest for identity and self Ursa Corregidora go far from her familial story. Her desire to know herself and her longing to grab the goal in her life makes she



question to herself. What is her purpose in life? What does she stand for? To know the answers to these questions, she digs her past and resettles her past in her present life. She does not want to make her life as her foremother's life. She wants happy and meaningful life. Therefore, she scrabbles to make her life to be completely different from her ancestor's life. Jones states:

Sometimes I wonder about their desire, you know grandmama's and great mama's Corregidora was theirs more than hers. Mama could only know but they could feel. They were with him or what they feel? You know how they talk about hate and desire. Two humps n the same camel? Yes, hate and desire both riding them, that's what I was going to say. (102-103)

Every human being has different kinds of need and desire. Female body also need a physical desire. It proves that desire can exist even in the most abusive situation.

Corregidora women also have feelings; they also want to enjoy their life.

Nevertheless, they are forced to do what the master tells them to do. In Maja

Milatovic article name “Cycles of violence: Ancestral subtexts in Gayl Jones's

*Corregidora*”, Harb points out that “paralyzing their struggle for transformation and wholeness, the ancestral stories shape immutable and objectifying effects of

psychological enslavement” (qtd in Milatovic 2). Ursa Corregidora every time tries to

come over from the story of past but she caught in the psychological entrapment. Her

familial story takes a huge part in her memory so she cannot come over from that

burden of past.

The stalking memory of past hinders the way of making a new identity of UrsaCorregidora whenever she stepped into a new world, she finds that she cannot come over from her memory. She repeatedly goes to her past and thinks about her enslavement of her matrilineal line. Jones keeps her statements through Ursa; she

again memorizes her past and says:

It was as if the words were helping her, as if the words repeated again and again could be substitute for memory were somehow more than the memory. As if it were only the words that kept her anger. Once when she was talking. She started rubbing my thighs with her hand and I could feel the sweat in my legs. Then she caught herself, and stopped, and held my waist again. (11)

Ursa's grandmother repeatedly told her the story of their violence and trauma. Telling constantly the same thing becomes the ways of their curing. They are healing themselves by telling the same thing frequently. Smrity Sonal and Rajni Singh write in their article name "Black Female Bodies and Resistance in Gayl Jones's *Corregidora* and *Eva's Man*" Jones suggests "self-acceptance and celebrating the difference to be the powerful means of alleviation and reconciliation with the self" (210). Ursa has accepted that she cannot bear a child, she never can be a mother again. She celebrates her diverse nature and her quest for new identity and self.

Women body have power to endure the pain and suffering that makes them more powerful by mentally and physically. Relating this idea in the novel that Ursa *Corregidora*, has imposed by her great gram, gram and mother's stories. All mothers teach her to take their story with them, passing the story by breeding the children. However, she becomes sterile by falling down from the stair. By knowing, the truth that she never can give birth to a child that makes her broken but slowly and gradually she knows that she has to live with the new identity. In addition, she has to fulfill her lack. To support this idea Jones writes further:

He kept asking if he could touch me certain places, and I kept saying yes and then all of a sudden it was like I felt the whole man on me, just felt the whole man, in there. I pushed him out. It was like it was just that feeling of him in

there. And nothing else. I hadn't even given myself time to feel anything else before I pushed him out. But he must have ... I ...still that memory, feeling of him in me. I wouldn't let myself feel anything. It was like a surprise. Like a surprise when he got inside. Just that one time. (117-118)

Given statements uttered by Ursa Corregidora's Mama. Her Mama has told about her sexual relationship with Martin. Her Mama is not doing this for her desire or for taking pleasure. She is doing this for making a generation. She is the result of that sexual relationship with Martin. Corregidora women are obsessed with their past. Her matrimonial line engages in sexual activity only for the sake of procreation. To prove this statement Timothy J. Owens, Dawn T. Robinson and Lynn Smith-Lovin write in their article name "Three Faces of Identity" they point out "Identities that guide social action come from role relationship, affiliation with social groups, identification with social categories, or personal narratives" (477). Person's identity based on their societal role relationship as well as identity formed by their family history.

Individuality comes from one's family relationship. Her matrilineal line and their slavery legacy force Ursa to make her different identity from her mothers. For making a different identity and self, Ursa has to struggle in a society.

The protagonist of the novel *Corregidora*, Ursa Corregidora's matrimonial story insists her to find her lost identity and prove her as particular human being. She wants to make her own name and fame through her own labor. Judith Butler gives view in her article name "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory", she quotes that "Gender is no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceeds rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time- an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts"( 519). Butler tries to say that gender identity is not a fixed term rather it changes

by the time through its performance. Every human being's distinctiveness is a constructed term; they construct their identity by their hard work and by their talent. Ursa and her matriarchal identity also made by their repetitive memory and past history. Jones puts her view in this context:

He said he only know one thing about when his people were slaves, but that it was enough for him, I asked him what it was. He said that his great-grandfather-he guessed great grandfather-had worked as a blacksmith, hiring herself out, and bought his freedom, and then he had bought his wives freedom. But then, he got in debt to these men, and he didn't have any money, so they come and took his wife. The courts judged that that is was legal, because even if she was his wife, and fulfilled the duties of a wife, he had bought her, and so she was also his property, his slave. He said his great-grandfather had just gone crazy after that. (150-151)

Mutt says these lines while Mutt and Ursa are talking with each other. Moreover, Mutt tells about his familial history to Ursa. Mutt's ancestral subtext improves his life and his relationship with Ursa. Socialized by acquiring oppressive ideas of masculinity and sexuality, Mutt perceives her as his own property and describes as a hole. He always strives to control her. He is unable to relate to her in an open and equal way. That perspective of her husband Mutt forces her to dig out her identity in a male-dominated society where she can live freely.

Gayl Jones's protagonist Ursa's identity is link with her familial line. She wants to make her life distinct from her matriarchal group. She does not carry their burden of making generation and passing stories. She is a blues singer, who always sing about their traumatic past and history of her matrilineal line. She wants to stop the blues, she has the desire to sing a different song, not a song of sadness. Here she

states "Trouble in mind, I'm blue, but I won't be won't be blue always, I sang and stopped" (Jones 44). She knows that she belongs to the family who has suffered and violated. Despite that, she does not want to sing blues. Perhaps, her self-making process can be hindered by the blues. Angela King in her article name "The Prisoner of Gender Foucault and the Disciplining of the Female body" she keeps her view "Foucault identified torture as characteristics of pre-modern times, who's as per women this form of spectacular discipline has extended well into the modern period"(31). Here, Angela King tries to say that female is identified by the torture, suffering, and pain what they bear. In modern time, female sexuality is identified by their agony. Torture has compared to the characteristics of female identity.

Feminine sex is always marginalized by the masculine sex. Male member never takes female member as an equal being. Protagonist of the novel *Corregidora*, Ursa Corregidora becomes the victim of male-dominated society. Man only need sex from the woman. Here Gayl Jones notes:

"I won't have you working on your wedding day."

"you won't start that too, will you?"

"start what?"

"Nothing. It's not the working, I'd like to sing for you"

"sing for me here," he said. He unbuckled his pants

and lay down on the bed. I sang for him, then we

made love." (68)

Ursa compares Tadpole's possessiveness to Mutt her first husband, as both men attempt to limit her freedom of movement and control her singing. Similarly, Tadpole states "sing for me here" affirm his authority over Ursa and keeping her to himself. The man shows their power in the bed and women always give them a service. Her

own desires are limit by her husband's possessiveness and entitlement. To prove this Patricia Hill Collins further comments on her book name *Black Feminist Thought*; that female sexuality is always enslaved by the masculine sexuality “gender roles were similarly shaped under slavery” (50). It is true that female sexuality has not the separate identity and meaning. Female sexuality has seen as a part of male sexuality.

Ursa Corregidora's identity has bound by her familial history and her own relationships with her husband. She has lost the familial relations to maintain the other relation. This paper's focus is to put light on how the protagonist of this novel, Ursa lose her identity and she is searching for making her own identity and self. At this point, critics Mardi J. Horowitz in his article name “Self Identity and Research Methods” he quotes “Identity exists in past, present and future time frames” (2). Personal identity formed by his/her past, present and future. Person's identity is defined by their history, present, and future. In the novel *Corregidora*, the narrator of this novel Ursa Corregidora's life is also entangled in her matriarchal history. Gayl Jones writes, “Now she was born down in Louisiana. Then we come up here, you know to get better work and Mama was working for some Irish peoples and I was staying home taking care of your mama and then little, later on, Mama would stay at home and I was out working” (79). Ursa states these lines about her grandmother and their past life. There is no male member like, grandfather, father to help them in their daily life. Corregidora women have to struggle to run their family.

The history of Corregidora women have very painful and torturous past, which never let them forget their horrendous days of slavery which can be seen in these lines:

. . . they burned all the documents, Ursa, but they didn't burn what they put in their minds. We go to burn out what they put in our minds like you burn out a

wound. Except we got to keep what we need to bear witness. That scar in that's left to bear witness. We got to keep it as visible as our blood.(72)

Ursa's grandmother speaks these lines about their slavery days. They cannot forget their past, if they want to be. That incident takes place in their mind, which never let them to forget. Patricia Hill Collins states “maternal politics represents an immature form of political activism certainly raise questions for motherhood as a symbol of power in African-American communities” (186). For African-American female become a mother is their tools to fight against the male dominated society. But here in the novel, Ursa has duty to pass the story to next generation but it is impossible to take their story as a passing narrative because of Ursa's sterility that has ruined her reproductive power, so she cannot bear a child. That makes her incomplete sexual being. The critics Ifeona Fulani in her article name “Gender, Conflict and Community in Gayl Jones *Corregidora* and Jamaica Kincaid's *Lucy*” she writes, “Black women's struggle to fashion coherent selves in both necessitated by the histories of slavery, plantation society, and colonization and reflective of those histories” (2). Black women had been sexually exploited in the plantation society. They were colonized and enslaved by the Brazilian slave master, who gives them a lifelong wound in their mind.

Post-slavery societies that have based on the routine and realistic destruction of familial bonds. Black women continue to live with a high degree of endangerment, which has generated by the multiple trouble of blackness, femaleness and class position. Collins further keeps her points “black feminism as a social justice project involves developing a complex notion of empowerment” (288).The African American Feminism has been flourished for the welfare of the female. It gives justice to them who have suffered and tortured by slaveholder as well as by their own man. Suffering

from all the pain and injuries Corregidora women recollect the courage and power to fight against the patriarchal society. Enduring all the trouble of slavery, Corregidora women want to give different life to their coming generation by telling the stories of their own history. Gayl Jones writes further:

The master shipped her husband out of bed and got in the bed with her and just as soon as he was getting ready to go in her, she cut off his thing with a razor, she hid under the pillow and he bled to death. And then the next day, they came and got her and her husband. They cut off her husband's penis and stuffed it in her Mouth and then they hanged her. They let him bleed to death. They made her watch and then they hanged her. (67)

This is the real image of the time of slavery. Slave master was very cruel with no emotion. They can easily take their lives. Ifeona Fulani writes in this context “Mother, daughter relationship as a site of colonization and therefore a site is need of decolonization” (3). Here, Fulani tries to say that, everything has happened because of the childbearing, if one stops to give birth to a child everything will be stopped and nobody will be a victim of those pain and sufferings.

Female sexuality has been seen as a part of male sexuality. Female sexuality is not complete without the male sexuality. However, here in the novel *Corregidora*, the main character of this novel Ursa Corregidora has dismantled the contemporary thinking regarding the women sexuality and identity. In Gayl Jones novel she writes “But look at me, though, I am not Corregidora's daughter look at me, I am not Corregidora's daughter” (103). Ursa does not like to be known as Corregidora anymore. Because her foremother's haunting past troubled her that they are Corregidora women. Here, the critics keep his view in the context of “sexual politics that aims to control black women's sexuality and fertility, African-American women



struggle to be good mothers” (qtd in Fulani 2). Yes, black women give their hundred percent to be a good mother, but here in Corregidora, the matter is slightly contrastive. Corregidora women are obsessed with their past and they produce a child to make an evidence of their sexual violence, rape, and incest, trauma which has given by the slaveholder.

After the rise of African-American Feminism there has been a lots of changes occurred in the society. Collins gives her view “the existence of black feminist thought suggests that there is always choice, and power to act no matter how bleak the situation may appear to be” (290). Person should have to know themselves and they have to take the right decision. Ursa tries to break the passing narratives of her ancestral slavery legacy. Her matriarchal line makes a huge impact on her marital status as well. Ursa says to Mutt:

“I come to get you”

“He made them make love to anyone, so they couldn't love anyone”

“you'll come back”

"If I do, I will come with all my memories. I won't forget Anything”

“I'd rather have you with them, then not have you

Mutt don't". (Jones 104)

Ursa talking with her husband about what her foremothers talk to her. Corregidora

women never love to any man; they only keep physical relation for procreation.

Therefore, Ursa becomes used to with these stories and she also has assimilated her matrilineal line as her own story. Charrotte Theys in his article name “Black

Feminism in America” he makes his claim that, “these revolution do not strive for the

rights of women, but they do raise questions of equality and lifestyle” (15). She wants to say that female identity lies in the sexual differences. They have to raise their voice for their identity. Women sexuality has compared with the mother figure. Despite that, female also have their identity. Women cannot make their own identity in a world where everything is in the hand of man. So in the novel *Corregidora*, Ursa wants to make her life different and free from the entire past burden without the interruption of anybody else.

Identity is viewed as a constructed term. It is a self-realization process one who realized who they are and what is their purpose in life, then one can get their real meaning to come in this world. In the novel *Corregidora*, Ursa Corregidora frequently visits her past memory and recollects her identities through these histories. However, she always fails to get the real self. Gayl Jones writes “then let me witness the only way, I can, I'll make a fetus out of grounds of coffee to rub inside my eyes when it's time to give witness. I'll make fetus out of grounds of coffee. I'll stain their hand” (54). Here Ursa is conscious of the fact that she has reached back to the horrors of her family's past in order to re-appropriate it into a space of her own choosing. Ursa becomes unable to keep witness because she has lost her fertility power. Ursa comes to know that for her liberation, she has to break those passing stories. Her lack of procreation ability is the symbols of Ursa's liberty and freedom. To support the Ursa's voice, Daphna Oyserman, Kristen Elmore and George Smith in their book name *Handbook of Self and Identity*, they write, “Identities can be focused on the past what used to be true of one, the present -what is true of one now, or the future the person one feels obligated to try to become, or the person one fears one may become” (Smith 69). Identities form by the ones past, present and future life. Identity is made of what person have done in their life. Person's performance determines their identity. So here

in the novel *Corregidora*, to rebuild her new identity and new self, Ursa has to let her past back and she has to move on from those burdens.

Ursa Corregidora encloses with her past and her matrilineal line. She heard the same story of sex, rape, incest, torture, pain since she was a child. Moreover, she internalizes those stories in herself. Neither she can be able to make her promise to 'make generation' nor can she make happy and healthy relationship with her husbands. Here Ursa puts her view:

"He wanted me to come out and talk. Mutt did

And you didn't"

"He says Mutt's released me"

"He was stroking my thigh"

"You heard what I said", he said.

"Yes"

"I want you to be my wife"

I nodded but he wasn't looking

"Did you hear what I said?"

"Yes. I mean, yes I'll marry you"

"He drew me into bed". (55)

Two men come in her life; both men only need the physical happiness. Both of the men need Ursa's body; they do not care about Ursa's feelings and emotions. Both of the men are like the Old Corregidora who gave torture to her foremothers. Other critics name Linda Martin Alcoff keeps her point, "The reality of identities often comes from the fact that they are visibly marked on the body itself guiding if not determining the way will perceive and judge others and are perceived and judged by them" (5). The body becomes a site of identity formation, whereas Ursa's body has

lost its identity. To become a real woman one should have to bear a child. However, Ursa lacks ability to procreation.

Furthermore, in spite of lack within her, Ursa does not stop her search for her sexual identity as a real woman. To promote her new self, she chooses blues as her source of identity formation. She recites her emotions and feelings through blues, she states, “Something you give me once, but stopped giving me. I want to fuck you. That ain't what I mean. I still want to fuck you. What you stopped giving you too?”.(Jones 98). These lines show the physical intimacy between the Mutt and Ursa. She does not love Mutt but she wants him. Her body needs a man to fulfill her physical desire because desire takes place in a painful situation as well. Judith Butler keeps her view to support this argument, she says “Gender cannot be understood as a role which either expresses or disguises an interior ‘self’ whether that self-conceived as sexed or not” (528). Gender identity cannot be understood until or unless one expresses their feelings. One's performance and act help to recognize the person's identity. Sexual power arbitrates the gender identity. Here Ursa Corregidora also feels that to become a complete self she needs a real partner who completes her.

Similarly, Gayl Jones has presented her protagonist as a quester who tries to find out her real being within the entangled family history. Jones writes, “I wasn't looking for a man. They'd tell me, they'd tell me, they'd be telling me about making generations but I was not out looking for no man. I never was out looking for no man” (112). Ursa's foremother repeatedly told her to make a generation, and find a man whereas she rejects the notion of finding a man for making babies. She does not want to repeat the story of her ancestral lineage. She wants a different life than her mothers. To prove this argument Jane Price Tangney points out “being a self requires others who endorse and reinforce one's selfhood, who suffers a sense that one's self-matters

and that one's efforts can produce results” (76). It is true that to get one's identity everyone needs the supporter and enforcer. In the novel *Corregidora*, the story of Ursa Corregidora is slightly different. Her foremother reinforces Ursa to make children, nobody tells her to make your identity, make yourself free from all the burdens.

Corregidora women have very afflictive past, which cannot let them live freely. They are emotionally and psychologically wounded. They are victim of the patriarchy. They have challenged the notion of gender and sexuality. All Corregidora women live their life alone without male member in the family. They are with their men for making generation and keeping the evidence. Ursa's mama tells her painful memory of her past life. She memorizes her past “He just stood looking at me like he was real, real calm now and then all at once the evil came back and then he said, ‘Get Out’. He told me to get out. I didn't never see a man look like that, Ursa” (Jones 120). Ursa's mother tells her about his father how he actually was. There is no man with a kind heart. Furthermore, Ursa Mama tells her “I only went back to him once. He was staying at this boarding house, Ursa. All he did was start beating on me. He started beating on me” (121). This shows that Martin, father of Ursa, how cruel he was. A man with no feeling, no sympathy. To support this claim Rasul A. Mowatt, Bryana H. French and Dominique A. Malebranche in their article name, “Black Female Body Hypervisibility and Invisibility”, “*Corregidora* is about the very sad complexity of one woman life” (651). It is true that corregidora women are the single mother, they have struggled to look after their children. There is no male member to support them. Ursa always has seen a negative side of male; she has become indifferent towards the male partners. To prove her thought, the critic Wijtbusaba Marone in his article name “Foucault Work for the analysis of Gender Relations: Theoretical Reviews” he states,

“Women are socialized to be for others, for men” (120). Women are regarded as the personal property of the man. Ursa Corregidora has challenged the patriarchy that she does not need a man to be complete being, women are the different self.

In addition to, Ursa’s life becomes more troublesome to find her real identity and self. She finds herself hanged between her matrilineal line and her unsuccessful marriages from these two factors of her life, she tries to find her oneself. Ursa is a woman every human being need love, care from their partner and husband. Exactly, she is also longing for love and physical desire. She neglects and hides her desire for a long time but she comes to know that one female can be completed with her man Ursa keeps her line, “My pussy, ain’t it Ursa? Yes, Mutt, It's your pussy. My pussy, ain't it baby? Yes. Well, it's your's now” (Jones 156). Given these lines, prove that Mutt has colonized the body of Ursa. They make a physical relationship. She also enjoys his company. She does not resist him to come close. This also shows that her mindset is changing. The critic's name Wijitbusaba Marome says, “women's worth is often dependent on the male gaze” (120-121). This line proves that become a complete woman there should be a man. Without man, woman's identity is incomplete.

Similarly, in the Gayl Jones novel *Corregidora*, the protagonist of the novel who is seeking for her identity and trying to make different self than her ancestors. Her great-grandmother, grandmother, and mother have suffered a lot. That suffering and trauma of her mothers pushed her to quest for her new self. Here Ursa's grandmother tells Ursa about her past “... he fucked her and fucked me. He would've fucked you and your mama, if y'all been there and he wasn't old and crooked up like he god” (172). How cruel was the Simon Corregidora? Even he did not let her own daughter. Other critic keeps his view “Making sense of oneself- who is, was, and may become, and therefore the path are should take in the world- is a core self-project”

(Tangney 70). Self-realization is the core thing to know oneself. Self-knowledge and longing to become the particular self that leads towards the goal of the particular person. Ursa also discovers that she should come over from her past and she has to make her new identity.

Furthermore, from the initial part of the novel *Corregidora*, has shed light on the protagonist of the novel Ursa. She is an African-American woman who has suffered from a distressful past of her matrilineal line, so she wants a carefree life, different human being with freedom. She wants to live her life in full on manner. Ursa's miscarriage is a symbol to free from her ancestral burden where she has to make generation and make evidence of their history. Nevertheless, Ursa does not like to be her foremother. She wants a different life than theirs. When Mutt comes close to her life, Ursa decides to give him a chance because Ursa also needs a partner to complete herself. Ursa states, "I don't know what he saw in my eyes. His were different now. I can't explain how. I felt that now he wouldn't demand same things. He'd demand different kinds of things" (Jones 183). These lines show the changing perspective of Ursa towards Mutt. Perhaps she loves him, and she seeks his company and support in her life that makes her a complete self, which will fulfill her quest for identity. Nicholson points out "Gender is an aspect of identity gradually acquired" (135). She wants to say that gender identity is formed systematically, what person act in their life. It has proven that in the initial phase Ursa seeks for her identity and self, but later on when Mutt and Ursa reunite she gets her individuality.

For making ones identity and self, one should have to know oneself. In the beginning part of the novel *Corregidora*, Ursa has seen as a quester and she wants to make her own identity in a patriarchal society. However, in the last phase of the novel, she knows that her identity is link with her love with her husband. After a long

gap of time, when Mutt approach Ursa to be unite, she cannot refuse him. She is ready to accept him after 22 years of gap. But Ursa's silence shows that she still wants him in her life. To support above arguments Jones writes:

He come and I swallowed. He leaned back .Pulling me up by the shoulders.  
 I don't want a kind of woman that hurt you, he said. Then you don't want me.  
 I don't want a kind of woman that hurt you. Then you don't want me  
 I don't want a kind of woman that hurt you. Then you don't want me. He shook  
 me till I fell against him crying. I don't want a kind of man that'll hurt me  
 neither, I said. He held me tight. (185)

These lines prove that Ursa's quest for identity is stopped there. Because she gets her self-identity with Mutt. She realizes that she become completes with her husband. She tries to say that gender is a excogitate term, female is the part of man. In the same way in the novel *Corregidora*, Ursa also knows herself and identity which comes from the healthy relationship and mutual understanding.

To sum up, this paper depicts the slavery and the outcomes of that legacy of slavery. Gayl Jones has presented her protagonist, Ursa Corregidora as a quester who searches for her individuality in the patriarchal society. Jones's novel most of the part has set in the memory of the protagonist who frequently visits her past, and memorizes her history in her present life. The narrator of the novel, Ursa's ancestors had very traumatic and dreadful past during the period of slavery where they were tormented and tortured by the slaveholder Simon Corregidora. Therefore, Ursa's ancestor wants to keep their dark past alive by passing the story from one generation to another generation.

Ursa's inability to procreation reinforces her to quest her identity and self in a male-dominated society where she can make her own personality without any



disturbances. Her ancestors' stories hinder her to make her new self. Because she has grown up by listening to the same story of her family where they were frequently raped, abused, tortured by a male. Therefore, she wants her life different from her matrilineal line. However, she is entrapped in her familial past and history. Later on, she chooses blues as a self-making tool. She recites her familial stories through her singing talent. Despite that, she lacks something in her; she cannot able to find her selfhood.

In addition to, Ursa's reunion with Mutt after twenty-two years of long gap, which makes Ursa, revitalize. Ursa loses her procreation power by falling down from the stair because of her husband Mutt. That time she was, disturbed by her husband, Mutt because she has lost her female sexuality. Reproductive power matters a lot in female life, but she has mislaid that ability. However, she started to find her identity and self in the community despite the lack within her.

Hence, Ursa suffers from identity crisis and she chooses her singing as her self-making source despite all of that still she dearth something in her. After reuniting with her first husband Mutt, she feels her identity is linked with her relationship. She realizes that to become a complete female self, she needs a male partner. Male sexuality completes the female sexuality. The sudden realization of her helps her to recreate her new self with her life partner. By adopting an optimistic view in life, she becomes victorious over struggle and gains transcendence in her life. Thus, the novel celebrates black women's quest for identity and self in patriarchal society.

## Works Cited

- Alcoff, Linda Martin. *Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self*. University Press, 2006, pp.1-345.
- Brown, Caroline. "Of Blues and the Erotic: *Corregidora* as a New World Song." *Literature in the African Diaspora* vol. 5, no. 1, 2004, pp.118-138.
- Brown, Kelly. Shametrice Davis. "Automatically Discounted: Using Black Feminist Theory to Critically Analyze the Experiences of Black Female Faculty." *International Council of Professor of Educational Leadership Preparation* vol. 12, no. 1, 2017, pp. 1-9.
- Butler, Judith. "Performative Arts and Gender Constitution an Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory." *Theatre Journal* vol. 4, no. 4, 1988, pp. 519-531.
- Butler, Judith. "Sex and Gender in Simon de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*." *Yale French Studies* vol.72, 1986, pp. 35-49.
- Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Routledge, 2000. pp. 1-354.
- Fulani, Ifeona. "Gender, Conflict, and Community in Gay Jones *Corregidora* and Jamaica Kincaid's *Lucy*." *A Journal of Women's Studies* vol. 32, no.2, 2011, pp. 1-30.
- Golestani, Narjes Tashakor. "A Study of the Construction of female Identity: John Fowels The French Lieutenants Woman." *Cienciae Natura* vol. 37, no. 1, 2015, pp. 321-335.
- Harb, Sirene. "Memory, History and Self-Reconstruction in Gayl Jones's *Corregidora*." *Journal of Modern Literature* vol. 31, no. 3, 2008, pp. 116-136.
- Hochberg, GilZehava. "Mother, Memory, History: Maternal Genealogies in Gayl Jones's *Corregidora* and Simone Schwarz-Bart's *Pluie et vent sur Telumee Miracle*." *Research in African Literatures* vol. 34, no. 2, 2003, pp. 1-12.
- Horowitz, Mardi J. "Self-Identity Theory and Research Method." *Journal of Research*

- Practice*. vol. 8, no. 2, 2012, pp. 1-11.
- Jones, Gayl. *Corregidora*. Beacon Press 1975. pp.1-185. Print.
- King, Angela. "The Prisoner of Gender: Foucault and the Disciplining of the Female Body." *Journal of International Women's Studies* vol. 5, no. 2, 2004, pp. 29-39.
- Leary, Mark R, and Jane Price Tangney. eds. *Handbook of Self and Identity*. The Guilford Press, 2012. pp. 69-95.
- Malebranche, Dominique A, Rasul A. Mowatt, and Bryana H. French. "Black Female Body Hypervisibility and Invisibility." *Journal of Leisure Research*. vol. 45, no. 5, 2013, pp. 644-660.
- Marome, Wijitbusba. "Focault's Work for the Analysis of Gender Relations: Theoretical Reviews." *Journal of Architectural/Planning Research and Studies*.vol. 3, 2005, pp. 117- 126.
- Milatovic, Maja. "Cycles of Violence: Ancestral Subtexts in Gayl Jones Corregidora." *Post Colonial Text*. vol. 9, no 2, 2014, pp. 1-19.
- Nicholson, Linda J. ed. *Gender Trouble*. Routledge, 1990. pp.1-170.
- Owens, Timothy J, Dawn T. Robinson, and Lynn Smith-Lovin. "Three Faces of Identity." *The Annual Review of Sociology*. vol. 36, 2010, pp. 477-499.
- Sonal, Smrity, and Rajni Singh. "Black Female Bodies and Resistance in Gayl Jones Corregidora and Eva's Man." *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*. vol. 9, no. 2, 2017, pp. 204-209.
- Theys, Charlottee. *Black Feminism in America: An Overview and Comparison of Black Feminism Desting through Literature and Music Up to*. Diss. KU Leuven, 2015. Print.