

I. African American Women's Quest for American Dream in *A Raisin in the Sun* and their Critical Circumstances to Achieve Them

The study centers on the first Broadway play *A Raisin in the Sun* written by Lorraine Hansberry, one of the most prominent female black playwrights of the 1950's American theater. The whole play is essentially about the dreams and how much work and dedication is needed to realize the dream. It primarily touches upon many contemporary issues such as the Black American dream, the racial discrimination and racial segregation, the inheritance of black culture, class tensions within the Black Community, and the independent movement in Africa. The study focuses on the American dream of three black women characters who are in a critical position of triple oppression of African American women in the sense that they are black and economically backward but also because they are women as well. Its main focus is on their dream of achieving equality, self-reliance, self-identity, freedom and dignity as well as material prosperity and their struggle to achieve them. In this context there will be an elaborate discussion on American dream in chapter three. Next significant point of this study is to prove these female characters as the protagonists of the play who does not believe on self-progress instead they always fight for unity, communal achievement, social transition, cultural upliftment etc. It claims female as non-individualistic in nature.

The study also highlights the bitter fact that the dream of material success may be same for all but the attitudes towards the dreams differ from each other, particularly between men and women. Several studies have been done but only through the perspective of male and their failure of American dream. Concentrating on the three major female characters, it attempts to show the success of American dream in the sense that their dream of material prosperity is for the unity and the

welfare of the family, self-identity and self-respect, justice and equality and as well as for fighting against the social, racial and patriarchal oppression. An African American woman is family centered, male compatible, mothering and nurturing in emotional attitude. Her good attitude is what makes the family happy and fills with hopes and aspirations. In addition, this study tries to highlight the courageous and revolutionary black women who share struggles with each other and also with their men for their freedom and self-identity. It also focuses on the conflict between male and female characters for their version of dream fulfillment. It also analyzes the interpersonal family conflict and social conflict that takes the form of racial discrimination. Like a same way it also intends to show how and what ultimately unite the family is the achievement of the matriarchal perspective that Lena (Mama) espouses from the beginning.

A Raisin in the Sun is the play of African American family living in the South side of Chicago as immigrants. The whole play moves around the insurance check \$10,000 received from the deceased Mr. Younger's life insurance policy. All the characters of play have their individual dreams. These dreams mostly involve that money. Mama has always wanted a house, Walter wants to have spending money mostly interested on his own business, Beneatha wants to be a doctor, and Ruth wants more space for her family. After all, in the fifties, the stereotypical American dream was to have one's own house with a yard and enough space, a big car, own business and a happy family. Essentially, the Youngers seem to want to become a part of that dream.

Mama's son, Walter claims that he is entitled to it as the rightful head of the family, would rather use the money to invest in a liquor store with his friends. He wants to govern his own life, and to be the head of the household that his mama now

seems to control. When his friend escapes with his money, his dream for prosperity and material goods remain unrealized. Finally he "come[s] into his manhood," as Mama says. He realizes the importance of house and family value. Mama invests rest of the money on new house in white community despite of hindrance of white representatives. At last they realize their long-held dream by owning new house. Beneatha also gets money for her medical school.

In the play, the Youngers family seems to be divorced from white middle-class culture; they harbor the same materialistic individual dreams, yet unrealized. Instead they have to struggle racially, socially and economically, living in the dehumanized living condition. The blacks in the play are oppressed but the women characters are triple oppressed by class, race and gender. Racially women have an understandable fear and hatred of white people. Beneatha, daughter of Lena struggles with the desire to pursue her education and a career in medicine. Her longing for self-identity can be clearly seen in the conversation between Beneatha and Asagai "You see Mr. Asagai I am looking for my identity!" (Act I, scene II). It was difficult to follow the male profession for women during 1950s. Race, class and patriarchy used to hinder them. Ruth is fully domestic worker. Even though she does not fully agree with her husband what he says and what he does. During the 1950s, abortion was regarded as illegal. Patriarchy also does not allow doing so. But she decides to commit abortion to save her family from further distress despite of Mama and walter's disagreement.

Lena tolerates her husband's womanizing and remains loyal to him even though they suffer under the same impoverished conditions throughout their marriage. Now she is the head of the family only by default after the death of her husband. With different hopes, Mama wants to buy a house in Clybourne Park. Mrs.

Johnson, a white man is another obstacle that she must overcome. He tries to discourage the Youngers' decision to move to Clybourne Park. He offers the family money for not moving to its house in a white neighborhood.

Similarly, Beneatha is discouraged and ridiculed by her brother frequently due to the issue of her medical career. In the beginning she does not get money for her school. George is another discouraging figure for Beneatha, who is the representative of those black men, who fully assimilated into the white mainstream. His attitude is not only towards Beneatha, but also towards woman as a whole. George seems an obstacle that Beneatha must overcome.

In comparison to men, female characters appear as more intelligent and revolutionary. They hope for changes in the society and believe that society must be changed through self-knowledge, through celebrating of one's African heritage. They have strong sense of racial pride. Lena's dream is the determining factor that would see the other family member's dreams come true. Beneatha has several independent women's worldview.

Throughout the play, Walter provides an everyman perspective of the mid-twentieth-century African-American male. He is corrupted in America's materialistic world. Unlike his sister Beneatha, he doesn't even have a desire to find his identity through his African heritage. Like other capitalists, he chooses to enter a get-rich-quick scheme, and at last he loses his money. It seems that Walter is set up for quiet failure. It is the positive thinking of female characters to forgive him and make realize that he cannot raise the family up from poverty alone and it is only possible through the unity. Once all the money is lost, the family is saved. They realize the unity of the family by owning new house which they always dreamed. Their coming days seems uncertain and slightly dangerous, but women are optimistic and determined to live a

better life. They believe that they can get success if they stick together as a family and resolve to defer their dreams.

The success of African American women's dream of unity is the one of significant black aspiration. Their movement to white society by refusing the offer from Mr. Linder is most revolutionary and challenging act can be taken as the great achievement. Beneatha finally gets the money for her medical school, which she always dreams to be a doctor. She also rejected her two suitors saying marriage is not necessary for women and struggles to break away from the social norm and uncover a new passage to freedom.

People are opportunity seeker; always in the quest, it's better to say never satisfied being. He always runs after for name, fame, power, fortune for his better life. None likes to be ruled by others nor wants be slave. He has right to live his life in his own way. He ever tries to escape from discrimination, domination and injustice. He moves there where he can get better opportunities. America is that land of opportunity, where people can realize their dream through their own labor. German economist, Werner Sombart in his book "why is There No Socialism in the United States?" states "America is the Canaan of capitalism, its promised land"(page3). Many Migrants expressed that move is "going to the promised land. This land is not only the dream of American, but it is the common dream of all backgrounds of the people who live in America. People come here in the quest for social, educational, economical opportunities as well as political and religious freedoms.

When we see the African American history we get over 4,809,000 African-Americans fled the South's oppressive conditions, between the years 1900 and 1960 and the vast majority of these migrants settled in Northern cities such as Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, Pittsburgh, and New York. The younger family of the play A

Raisin in the sun represents those immigrants, who came to the Chicago in the quest of the opportunity, in the quest of better life and to escape from the slavery. The play is the provocative reflection of racial attitudes of the 1950s. The title *A Raisin in the sun* is derived from the one of Langston Hughes's famous poem "Harlem: A Dream Deferred" which portrays the tension between the need for black expression and the impossibility of that expression because of American society's oppression of its black population. Youngers move to Chicago was a journey out of bondage into freedom, the journey out of Africa into slavery in the New World and to fulfill the version of the American dream. As immigrants, their dreams were based on frontier myth. For centuries the frontier symbolized new opportunities and the chance of a better life for the common men and settlers. The frontier as an area which was beyond social control provided opportunities to people regardless origin and social status. Nevertheless millions of Americans have dreamt or still are dreaming of frontiers, because the frontier is a "place of challenge where the successful finds rebirth with a new identity" Their dream was to escape from the poor ghettos that they were residentially segregated into.

Jefferson stated that "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 that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." The quest of liberty and happiness was rooted in the American spirit either he is white or black, but black felt unrealized, staying between the optimism and pessimism. Their dreams were still postponed. Through they had actively participated in the period of Second World War, their dream were still deferred by white representatives (government). The goal of human being is to be central to what makes him the part of the society. To fulfill his goal, he waits until society transformation, until institution and law changes to

allow realizing their rights. If the society failed to do so, individual might explode from their own place. The play *A Raisin in the sun* is the preparation for the explosion and is for the contribution for the civil right movement. To achieve their goal, African American families like Youngers family attempted to get entry in white community, but they often encountered residential discrimination, in which white community prevented those immigrants from purchasing homes and renting apartments in white neighborhoods. They became the subject of discrimination and outright violence. They were totally excluded from the dream of being part of America. Their natural rights of freedom and equality as well as their dignity and ability to pursue happiness and prosperity, were taken away from them. They were considered to be inferior human beings who could not be granted their universal freedom, equality and any kind of political participation. Any possible sharing of the American dream was denied to them, first in the form in the slavery and later with the introduction of the Jim Crow laws and segregation. They were unemployed or lower paid.

The repression of 1950s, as victims of racial and sexual discrimination, black women began to demand equal rights, liberation movement, and women's movement. Societal pressure urged women to become independent and feminine; they sought for dignity and human rights. They quest for identity in racial, gendered, financial and educational terms. They rejected the traditional role that had been forcefully imposed upon them. They actively sought for employment at more interesting jobs for higher wages that they had ever known before. Further, they struggled for Abortion rights; they wanted individual control over their fertility. Brenda Joyces in his "Fighting Black to save women's lives", states "A feminism which realizes that the issues of reproductive activism by control are broader than just the fight for gender equality."

In 1950s, the term abortion was taboo, was taken as illegal act. The majority of abortions available to African American women in the 1950s and early 1960s were provided by midwives and quacks operating illegally. Their quest for abortion right was not only for the gender equality, it was the great challenge for the brutal society and for the whole civil rights. The civil right movement of the 1960s made some improvement in the social, political and legal status of African American men and women, the quest for equality in employment and economic well-being has lagged behind.

In 1950s, the dream of house ownership used to be the most important quest for black female. Mama's down-payment on a house reveals her belief that to be a happy family; the Youngers need to own space and property. Until the late 1960s, the National Organization for Women was not formed. The black women were not pessimistic, they developed a strong conviction that only access to resources and economic self-sufficiency in the form of good professional jobs could provide an equalizer against racial injustice. Beneatha represents new woman always seems in the quest of delightful future. Her conviction is so strong, is in the process of finding her identity. She tries to fight with current systems made by whites, fight society's expectations of her as a black woman. She is in the quest of own African roots, She tries to rediscover it overcoming sexism and patriarchy. She is eager to learn about African culture, language, music, and dress. In fact, her attitudes and her revolutionary nature can be taken as the beginning of awareness among the young African American women and their contribution to the civil rights movement of 1960s. Saying in one sentence, the quest of African American women is to live peaceful life breaking the boundary of sexism, class oppression and racism.

Commercial success/material success is of course the most important form of upward mobility but there are also other forms to improve one's standard of living. Without material success, the social transformation can't be established. The dream of materialism is not only the dream of whites; it's also the dream of blacks, it's not only the dream of men, but also the dream of women. The whole play is about quest for the fulfillment of the individual dreams, which include money, insurance money of father. It gives first priority to material success. The debate over materialism and integrity is framed by Walter Lee and Mama whose conflicts drive the play.

The play *A Raisin in the Sun* shows an entire black family in a realistic light, which is unflattering and far from comedic. It is the true picture of how a black family lived and how much of a struggle it was to be a minority in the forties and forties. In Bedford Introduction to Drama, Jacobus states

The play illustrates the American dream as it is felt not just by African Americans but by all Americans: If you work hard and save your money, if you hold proper values and hope, then you can buy your own home and have the kind of space and privacy that permit people to live in dignity. (1214)

It uses black vernacular throughout the play and deals with important issues and conflicts: poverty, abortion, and feminism, white colonialism, discrimination and the idea of African American racial identity. It highlights the conflicts between white and black worlds as well as conflicts within black communities in terms of gender and class and how to respond to oppression. This play focuses on the aspirations, dreams, frustrations and hopes of the Younger family in which each member has his/her own dream. Their dreams are hindered by the racial discrimination, gender biases and economic deprivation. Richard, dean of the Yale school of Drama, says "*Raisin* deals

with a man who has aspirations, hopes, dreams, needs....things that the society in which he lives is not prepared for him to achieve (EBONY).” Their struggle for happiness dried up because they had to concentrate all of their energies on surviving due to the poverty. Their needs seem no longer to be satisfied by each other. They are under the disappointment, false hope, and despair. Their dreams are dried up. It reveals the plight of all who have failed dream and the long-standing appeal of *A Raisin in the Sun* lies in the fact that the black family's dreams, hopes and aspirations for a better life are not confined to their race, but can be identified with by people of all backgrounds.

Set between the end of World War II in 1945 and the full momentum of the civil rights movement of the 1960s, *A Raisin in the Sun* examines racial prejudice and discrimination from several perspectives. Hansberry is able to see the black reality through the black eyes. In *African American Review*, vol.42, Gordon says:

A Raisin in the sun directly engages segregation struggles in Chicago as a penultimate symbol of black oppression and resistance. In doing so, she brought local, individual struggles of African Americans- against segregation, ghettoization and capitalist exploitation-to the national stage. Locating the younger family in Chicago's south side, Hansberry directly engages crisis produced by ghetto economies and dehumanizing living conditions, restricted educational access and explosive encounters along urban color line. (121)

The small apartment of the Youngers family shows the vivid poverty of immigrant African American who are living in the Chicago. When the Youngers buy a house in the white neighborhood of Clybourne Park, they are subjected to racist neighbors who try to keep the black family out of their neighborhood.

The play can be taken as the autobiography of Hansberry. Her biographer Steven R. Carter noted, “Her whole way of life was a repudiation of the limitations that society has tried to place on women. . . She peopled her dramas with many female characters whose strength was like that of their creator.” (160) Through the use of such chauvinistic male characters, Hansberry is able to convey in a more subtle but resonant manner the way in which men oppressed women than if she had crafted purely loathsome male villains. She made crystal clear in her work the ways in which the reigning male supremacy of the time hurt females in society, yet masterfully did so in a way that did not alienate men or arouse negative feelings.

Anderson and Collin state “The domination and oppression of women, achieved primarily through discriminatory and exclusionary practices, has been the subject of several studies whose impact has been well documented.” Of special importance to Hansberry’s *A Raisin* is the emergence of “feminism” since it deals with the lives of three black women characters who endure a double blow not only because they are black, but also because they are women as well. Some of the issues that Hansberry as a feminist cared about are racism, sexism, class and gender oppression, female representation in public and private life and sterilization. The portrayal of the three black women in the play challenged prevalent stage stereotypes of black women and introduced feminist issues to the American stage in a compelling way. Barthelemy tries to address the issue of Hansberry's feminism, directly basing his thinking on authorial intention

It may seem strange to say Hansberry's intentions were feminist, if at the play's end Lena seems to surrender and lovingly endorses the idea of patriarchy. But the play endorses patriarchy not at the expense of female strength or female governance. Manhood in *A Raisin* in the

Sun is wholly compatible with feminism. Lena does not surrender judgment to Walter simply because he is a man; she acquiesces because Walter is right. Manhood cannot be achieved until Walter demonstrates the pride and dignity that the women already possess. (779)

Lena is the household of the family only by default, after the death of her husband. Mama tells Walter that it's time he lead the family. It seems that Lena is definitely old fashioned in her view of gender roles. Lena feels guilty that she hasn't let Walter take his place as the "man." She appears to be always ready to hand over the reins to her son and let him be "head of the household" for one reason: He is a man. She entrusts Walter with the remaining insurance money because she feels that she has robbed him of his "manhood" by having done with the money what she thought was best. Mama is the type of woman who believes that the man should be in charge.

Hansberry also addressed feminist questions ahead of their time in *A Raisin in the Sun*. Bolton (2000) believes that both Mama and Ruth experience 'the third shift' which is a "widespread (womanist) phenomenon today precisely because we live in an era of social transition, when gender roles for women are in enormous flux" (8). The period of the 1950s is the phase of social transition. Awareness among the domestic women like Mama and Ruth was rising gradually. Hansberry even approaches an abortion debate, allowing the topic of abortion to enter the action in an era when abortion was illegal. Hansberry's depiction of the issue facing one of her characters, immediately qualifies her to fit the feminist definition. In her "With the growth of women's theater and feminist criticism," Hine writes:

Hansberry has been rediscovered by a new generation of women in theater. Indeed, a revisionist reading of her major plays reveals that

she was a feminist long before the women's movement surfaced...

Hansberry's portrayal of Beneatha as a young Black woman with aspirations to be a doctor and her introduction of abortion as an issue for poor women in *A Raisin in the Sun* signaled early on Hansberry's feminist attitudes. (528)

Hansberry created three black women character in the stage and portrayed Beneatha character as new generation of women. In the theater review of *A Raisin in the sun* by Brooks Atkinson, he states “The son is dreaming of success is a business deal. And the daughter, who is race-conscious, wants to become a physician and heal the wounds of her people”. Truly, Beneatha prides on her black heritage, she dreams of medical school and wants make service of her people. But Walter mocked upon her dream. For him business is everything. It is better to say he is the victim of a materialistic American dream. Ryan views “it was by no means uncommon to find black girls who were intent upon resisting the allure of ghetto street life and applying themselves to educational attainment and career preparation” (390). The belief that becoming a doctor in a white and male-dominated field is within her grasp as a black woman exhibits one example of Beneatha's feministic attitude within this play. She also gives the feministic perspective by supporting Ruth’s decision to make abortion that would save her family from further economic distress.

Through the character of Beneatha, Hansberry proposes that marriage is not necessary for women and that women can and should have ambitious career goals.

Harrison views that

So long as marriage is held out as the only aim of a girls’ life,.....so long will all attempts at improvement fail...marriage should not be the first object of a woman’s life, any more than of man’s; girls must be

trained from childhood to the idea that they, like other brothers, must take their share in the work of life....they should not only be allowed, but induced to work for their maintenance. (148)

Harrison also gives first priority to the women career/goal and gives less importance to the marriage. Beneatha rejected both Asagai and George and searches for her independent identity. It can be also considered as the great challenge for the contemporary society.

Quite clearly, through the character of Beneatha and her friendship with Asagai, Beneatha progressively seems to embrace more of her African roots and oppose assimilationists, such as George Murchison. "Beneatha's romantic encounters with Murchison and Asagi reveal that male chauvinism and prejudice against woman transcend cultural, educational and economic boundaries" (Lester in Fisher and Silber 246).

Anthony Barthlemey believes that the end of the play makes *A Raisin in the sun* "endorsement of patriarchy not at the expense of female strength or female governance in A Raisin is wholly compatible with womanist" (3). In the end of the play, the future of the Youngers family seems uncertain, but in the present time they realized their dream by owning house in white community. Courageously they have challenged the society in terms of class, race and gender that is the true womanist perspective.

II. Analytical Study of the Text in Relation to the Women's dream

The play *A Raisin in the Sun* repudiates the kind of materialism that values money and acquisition over human dignity and life. It is the conflicts between the two worlds, white and black worlds as well as conflicts within the black communities as how to respond to oppression. It portrays the life of the Youngers an African American family and their struggles against racism to attain middle class acceptance during the period of 1959. They are living on a cramped apartment in poverty stricken Southside Chicago, that is, comes to represent the hard lives of the characters. In *African American Review*, vol.42, Gordon has said

A Raisin in the sun directly engages segregation struggles in Chicago as a penultimate symbol of black oppression and resistance. In doing so, she brought local, individual struggles of African Americans- against segregation, ghettoization and capitalist exploitation- to the national stage. Locating the younger family in Chicago's south side, Hansberry directly engages crisis produced by ghetto economies and dehumanizing living conditions, restricted educational access and explosive encounters along urban color lines. (Gordon, 2008).

The Youngers family represents all African American Family, to whom the white society made it very hard for them to escape the cramped, vermin-infested apartment buildings of Chicago's Southside.

The tininess of the apartment definitely has a major effect on the action of the play early on. Although this family seems to be divorced from the white community and its culture, they have internalized the same materialistic dreams as white. They pose their individual dream, but yet unrealized due to the racism and classism. The dreams of the Youngers have gone unfulfilled too long. J Charles Washington in

Black American Literature forum discusses the dreams, hopes, aspiration and fear of the Younger family as whole: The dream, hopes and fears of the Younger family are universal reflections of those shared by people of all races all over the world and these are universally American aspirations” (109) Their hopes of enjoying the fruits of freedom and equality have been postponed as they struggled merely to survive economically.

In the play, The Youngers constitute a matriarchal family; there is Lena (Mama), the widowed mother; her daughter Beneatha, a medical student; Beneatha's brother Walter, a struggling chauffeur; and Walter's wife, Ruth, and their young son Tarvis. When the play opens, we get the Youngers are awaiting for an insurance check \$10,000 of Mr. Younger. Each of the members of the family makes an idea to what to do with this money and how to fulfill each dream. The check represents their key of achieving their long term dream such as house, liquor store and medical schools. After the arrival of insurance check, the tensions within the family build.

Mama always thinks about what made the family happy and filled with hope. As she says, “When the world gets ugly enough, a woman will do anything for her family” (Act I scene II). She is one representative of an African American mother, who is mothering and nurturing. She is still a fighter. She always dreams of moving out from current small apartment and into a nice house in a safer white neighborhood with a small garden and open space where her whole family members can accomplish their dreams. She states “Well, I always wanted me a garden like I used to see sometimes at the back of the houses down home. This plant is close as I ever got to having one.” (Act I scene I) This plant symbolizes her hope for new days and her care towards her family despite their poor condition they are living in. Her dream is not

only for herself, but for her family's future generations, it's a dream which she shared with her husband. She expresses this dream

“Big Walter used to say, he'd get right wet in the eyes sometimes, lean his head back with the water standing in his eyes and say, "Seem like God didn't see fit to give the black man nothing but dreams - but He did give us children to make them dreams seem worthwhile" (Act I, scene ii).

She says her husband couldn't achieve his dream when he was alive, she thinks that even after his death; he still had hopes, though that his children would have a chance to see their dreams come true. During that period, most of the women had no self-respect and were controlled by their men. Mama also remains loyal to her husband. She further expresses why she wants to make down payment on house:

“Been thinking that we may be could meet the notes on a little old two-story somewhere, with a yard where Tarvis could play in the summertime, if we use part of the insurance for a down payment and everybody kind of pitch in. I could maybe take on a little day work again, few days a week – (Act I scene I,)

She believes that through this new house and garden, they will be able to achieve emotional, moral and economic growth in the future. She seeks more physical space for the family and the psychological freedom it would bring, puts a down payment on a house that happens to be in Clybourne Park, a white neighborhood, it's the most challenging task she attempted.

She believes in the unity of the family and she demands that each member respect themselves and take pride in their dreams. She displays her “womanism” by using her control and sharing her dreams with her family. She does not have her

individual dream; she did not think or act for herself as other women of contemporary period. Her dreams and her challenging thought designed a new path for all contemporary black women to walk on. It also reveals her positive attitude towards the women's movement.

Ruth, Walter's wife, displays a typical domestic character of 1940s and 1950s. She appears herself as the family centered like Mama, most selfless, self-sacrificing and emotionally balanced character. She also does not have self-dream. She shares her dream with Mama and Walter both. Like other black women, she is in the mid, entangled between their primary needs and dreams of other family members and her individual desire to live peaceful life. She agrees with Mama and dreams for a new house and hopes that she and her husband can provide their son Travis a separate room to stay, open space to play and more opportunity for his future. She expresses her dream as "Now that's your money. It ain't got nothing to do with me. We all feel like that – Walter and Bennie and me – even Travis." (Act I scene I). She says "Well, for God's sake – if the moving men are here, let's get the hell out of here!!!" It shows Ruth's determination to get away from her old house as possible. She does not care about anything else but the fact that they can.

Commenting over the character of Ruth, in *Womanhood in America: from Colonial Times to the Present*, Ryan states "that black women like Ruth still carry the heavier burden, "Still, the facts remains that it is the black woman of America who is most likely to experience the worst of urban poverty, which brutally over-taxes her in the roles of wife, worker and mother" (381). Same statement has been repeated in Cheney's biography of Hansberry (1984) "at thirty, Ruth is caught between the ideas of the new and the old. She is a full-time domestic, but she values her roles as a wife and mother" (60). It's true she is playing the role of labor in White people, domestic

worker in own house, wife of Walter and mother of Tarvis. Beside those she doesn't pose her self-identity. She is left with no others choices.

Throughout the play, Beneatha searches for her self-dependent identity by rediscovering her African roots and aims to be a doctor. The ambition that to be a doctor in a white and male-dominated community is itself a great challenge and exhibits one example of her feministic attitude. She refuses the traditional beliefs and challenges the stereotypical female character of 1950s. In *The American Dream – A Short History of an Idea that Shaped a Nation*, Jim Cullen states “Commercial success is of course the most important form of upward mobility but there are also other forms to improve one's standard of living. There is also “transformation through education” which is vividly shown by Beneatha in Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*” (Cullen 60). Beneatha believes in education as the means of social transformation and she thinks that society must be changed through self-knowledge, consciousness and celebration of one's heritage.

She expresses her dream, often fighting with her brother Walter: "Listen, I'm going to be a doctor. I'm not worried about who I'm going to marry yet – if I ever get marrie". (Act I scene I). She expects some money from that insurance money for her medical school. She expresses her dream through her monologue:

That was what one person could do for another, fix him up – sew up the problem, make him all right again. That was the most marvelous thing in the world...I wanted to do that. I always thought it was the one concrete thing in the world that a human being could do. Fix up the sick, you know – and make them whole again. This was truly being God...I wanted to cure. It used to be so important to me. I wanted to

cure. It used to matter. I used to care. I mean about people and how their bodies hurt. (Act III)

This monologue of Beneatha tells us why she aims to be a doctor. Being a doctor, she just wants to help her people. She thinks service of people is one of the most concretely good things a person can do. Beneatha shows the power of change in gender roles by her desire to become a doctor. To Walter, her dream seems kind of far-fetched. He says to Beneatha “who the hell told you you had to be doctor? If you so crazy ‘bout messing’ round with sick people – then go be a nurse like other women – or just get married and be quite...” (Act I scene I). However, Beneatha is determined and she stands up to her brother for her right to want to become a doctor.

Walter appears as the victim of the American white society. He often fights and argues with other family members, he does not seem to understand that he must pay attention to them. He searches his identity in money. Most of his dialogue is about how to make money and who has money. He has not any academic skills, he only runs after to achieve the American dream. J. Charles Washington says “Walter is “high minded” and wants to “be something”. Walter readily accepts the American value which holds that owning one’s own business is the primary path to economic success and prosperity.” (109) He longs to invest his father's insurance money in liquor store because he desires to achieve financial success through his own efforts. The liquor store represents an opportunity for him to govern his own life, and to be the head of the family that his mama now seems to control. He believes that this investment will give the solution of family’s poverty forever.

Walter tries to convince his mother saying “I want so many things that they are driving me kind of crazy...Mama – look at me” (Act I scene II). He expresses his longing for a more independent life and a career beyond that of chauffeur for a white

man. Commenting on the nature of their dreams (mother and Walter), Harry J. Elam and David Krasner (2001) observe that

Both characters seem to be pursuing the American dream of upward mobility-property and money-when, in fact, Hansberry is using their aspirations as metaphor for dream of freedom and right to be respected as not only a citizen but as human being. (40)

Their dreams are obviously about the money and material prosperity. But in deep sense, that was the movement for the life, liberty and pursuit of happiness, which are the unalienable rights of every human being.

Sometime Ruth communicates with Mama for Walter's dream thinking it will be better for her son's future and the welfare of the whole family. She also supports Walter although she seems eager for owning its own home, she requests Mama to help Walter invest in the liquor store. She speaks to Mama. "Mama, something is happening between Walter and me. I don't know what it is – but he needs something – something I can't give him anymore. He needs this chance, Lena." (Act 1, scene 1). Because both Ruth and Walter have realized that they do have love left in their marriage and have been beaten by their circumstances.

Along with the materialism, feminism, the issue of fecundity (fertility; being fruitfully prolific) is threaded throughout the play. It can be illustrated through the dialogue of Mama "we [are] a people. Who give children life, not who destroys them." As the play progresses, Ruth finds herself pregnant. She determines to commit an abortion, despite Walter's rejection of that idea.. In fact she does not want to have an abortion; she believes this decision would be in the best interest of her family. She sees no alternatives. Also, Beneatha gives positive response to Ruth's pregnancy is "Where is it going to sleep? On the roof?" (Act I scene II). It shows that she is serious

about their poor living condition where it lacks enough space and room. Her views towards Ruth's unplanned pregnancy differ from her mother.

In Cheney's biography of Hansberry (1984), further it has said

As exhausted as Ruth is from domestic work for whites, her pregnancy, and her tension with Walter Lee, she does not share Walter Lee's monomania about money, business, and social position. She would be satisfied with a peaceful home life and an adequate income. But as she begins to understand the compulsion of Walter Lee's dream, their relationship becomes closer. Even Ruth's unselfish willingness to have an abortion shows her understanding of Walter Lee's plight: she does not want to add to the financial burden or to crowd the apartment with one more person. (70)

Ruth seems more understanding in this matter. She thinks if they have one more child, it will certainly create more financial pressure in the family. She considers an abortion in order to save her family from further economic distress.

Beneatha dates with two person: Joseph Asagai and George Murchison. But she rejected both, proposing that marriage is not important for women. Firstly, Beneatha rejects her first suitor, George Murchison, who claims to have no interest in African culture. To whom Beneatha believes to be shallow and blind to the problems of race. Her fight with George and the rest of her family represents a struggle and class tension within the black community: whether to celebrate their own black heritage or whether to join white culture and try to maintain their status within it. For her George is assimilationist. She says "I hate assimilationist Negroes!" (Act II scene I). Subsequently, she receives a marriage proposal from Nigerian boy, Joseph Asagai who introduces Beneatha to Nigerian culture. She seems so interested in her own

heritage and so eager to learn about African culture, language, music, and dress. In conversation with Asagai, she says “Mr. Asagai – I want very much to talk with you. About Africa. You see, Mr. Asagai, I am looking for my identity!” (Act I scene II, 1121) In the beginning, Beneatha has been presented with straightened hair. When Asagai questions her hairstyle, she cuts her Caucasian-seeming hair, saying (wheeling, passionately and sharply) “I am not an assimilationist!” (Act I scene II). That new hairstyle represents her embracing or celebrating of her black heritage and her anti-assimilationist beliefs as well as her desire to shape her identity by looking back to her roots in Africa. Her hair is a very powerful social statement, as it symbolically declares that natural is beautiful, that means black is beautiful. Therefore, Beneatha is the only one character that has a strong sense of racial pride and she makes an attempt to steep herself in the culture of African root.

As the play moves ahead, Walter loses his money in liquor store; his friend betrays him and runs off with his cash. Walter’s dream for money and economic success remains unrealized. Finally, he comes into manhood as Mama desired from the beginning. He understands the family value. Walter is so happy at the end of the play despite giving up his dreams of starting his own business. It is because self-esteem is at the heart of what makes people happy. Thus, once Walter has achieved a sense of self-worth (“come into his manhood” as his mother puts it), he has what he wants most of all.

At the end of the play, Youngers decided to move into Clybourne Park even frequently they are discouraged and offer money by white representatives like Karl not to move into their white neighborhood. None of the members of the Younger family become intimidated by this man. Instead, they know that they are about to achieve some of their dreams and are not going to let anyone get in their way. They

refuse the deal. Finally Mama makes down payment on new house on Clybourne Park through the rest of the money. Beneath also got money for her medical education. Ruth also chooses to keep her child.

Lastly in the play, it plays out the Youngers regain and realizes some of their dreams. In moving into new house, Mama's dream has, at last, become a reality. Yet, her last moment in the apartment and her transporting of her plant shows that although she is happy about their moving, she does cherish the memories of her life and appreciates the hard working that went into this new opportunity. And implicit in the sense of her memories is her husband, who did not live to see his dream fulfilled. The Youngers eventually move out of that poverty-stricken apartment, fulfilling the family's long-held dream. However, the play concludes with forgiveness for Walter from the female characters in his family, communicating the need for men to become familial and feminized. Moving into white neighborhood was not their ultimate solution of their problem. A time was still tough and complex for them, but they were ready to face the struggle together.

III. The General Concept of American Dream and its Portrayal on *A Raisin in the Sun*

Dreams are the part of our life which inspires us to be alive. Who does not have desire for a good and comfortable life? Without dreams, there is nothing to plan or look forward to; therefore, no reason to live. Without dreams a person has no motivation. "All men who have achieved great things have been great dreamers" said Orison Swett Marden. Any person that has achieved something great had a dream first.

What is American Dream? How does one achieve this Dream? The American Dream was and always will be something that makes America great. The American Dream is a dream that many people believed in and still do. It allows those with aspirations to make them come true. Ambition is the driving force behind the American Dream. It allows any one that has an aspiration, a desire, a yearning, to carry out the individual dream. It knows no bounds of race, creed, gender or religion. It stands for something great, something that everyone can strive towards. A dream can be a desire for something great.

In general, The American Dream is based on a national ethos of the United States in which freedom includes a promise of the possibility of prosperity and success. In 1931, the term 'American Dream' was first used by the historians James Truslow Adams. He popularized the phrase "American Dream" in his 1931 book *Epic of America*:

But there has been also the American dream that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for every man, with opportunity for each according to his 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.

In the definition of the American Dream by James Truslow Adams in 1931, "life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement" regardless of social class or circumstances of birth."

In the word of Jim Cullen; "the term American Dream seems like the most lofty as well as the most immediate component of an American identity a birth right for more meaningful and compelling than terms like "democracy", "Constitution" or even "the United States" (5) Originally, the most known passage "that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness" literally meant "men" – but only white men" (Cullen 38).

More, American dream can be defined as having the freedom that allows all citizens to achieve their goals in life through hard work not on a rigid class structure, though the meaning of the phrase has changed over America's history. For some, it is the opportunity to achieve more prosperity than they could in their countries of origin; for others, it is the opportunity for their children to grow up with an education and career opportunities; for others, it is the opportunity to be an individual without the constraints imposed by class, caste, race, or ethnicity.

The idea of the American Dream is rooted in the United States Declaration of Independence which proclaims that "all men are created equal" and that they are "endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights" including "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. "Martin Luther King Jr. in his "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" rooted the civil rights movement in the black quest for the American dream:

We will win our freedom because the sacred heritage of our nation and the eternal will of God are embodied in our echoing demands. . . . when these disinherited children of God sat down at lunch counters they were in reality standing up for what is best in the American dream and for the most sacred values in our Judeo-Christian heritage, thereby bringing our nation back to those great wells of democracy which were dug deep by the founding fathers in their formulation of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence.

Americans would like to consider America as a merit-based society where individual effort and abilities determine how successful one will be in life (Johnson 2006: 150) Likewise, Hochschild in his book *Public Schools and the American Dream*, defines American Dream as "the American dream is the promise that all who live in the United States have a reasonable chance to achieve success as they understand it (material or otherwise) through their own efforts and resources"(35).

Traditionally, through thrift and hard work, Americans attempted to realize the American dream of success, fame and wealth. Later in early days, they added something more, they dreamt of Freedom: Individual freedom, they sought for opportunity, protection of person's unalienable rights, including freedom of speech, press and religion. The dream of Self-reliant, self-sufficient, independent

individualism is still alive. Likewise, the mobility, flexibility, progress, patriotism were also the parts of American dream. Today, it generally refers to the idea that one's prosperity depends upon one's own abilities and hard work,

This is the age of globalization. America is regarded as one of the most developed country. The concept of American Dream is not limited within the Native Americans. It has become the common land for people of all backgrounds. People come to America dreaming of social, educational, economical opportunities as well as political and religious freedoms. But it is not easy to achieve as many people think due to the different barriers such as race, gender, age, social class, income, looks, and health. Each person has to confront with the limits of the American Reality in everyday life. This comes true to only a few.

In the process of fulfilling, different dreams of different people hinder each other. Some people can achieve and fulfill their dreams, some cannot. Sometimes luck works, people no longer work hard, but rather are lucky and by chance fulfill their goals. But it does not mean that the fulfillment of American dream necessarily creates happiness. People migrates to the United States, having certain dreams or hopes for a better life but unfortunately these promises often turn out to be not as strong as people originally believed them to be. Only a very less number of people achieve the famous idea of “rising from rags to riches” whereas many people fail to attain it. Hence it is not surprising that the American culture not only is shaped by the glorious American Dream but also by the grim truth of its failing or being flunked.

Between the years 1900 and 1960, over 4,809,000 African-Americans came to different northern cities of America escaping from South's oppressive conditions such as pervasive racism, which kept African-Americans permanently endangered, impoverished, and humiliated. The immediate cause of their migration was the

introduction of the mechanical cotton picker, which replaced the jobs for thousands of farm laborers. Their migration was a journey out of bondage into freedom, the journey out of Africa into slavery in the New World. They moved to North America to fulfill the version of the American dream. As immigrants, their dreams were based on frontier myth. The frontier constitutes a special place for the American Dream. For centuries the frontier symbolized opportunity and the chance of a better life for common men, settlers and adventurers. The frontier as an area which was beyond social control provided opportunities to people regardless origin and social status. Nevertheless millions of Americans have dreamt or still are dreaming of frontiers, because the frontier is a “place of challenge where the successful finds rebirth with a new identity” According to Josh Sides, the African American Dream was to escape the poor ghettos that they were residentially segregated into. Also they hoped that their children will receive the education to break the cycle of poverty.

Migrants often encountered residential discrimination. White home owners and white representatives prevented those African migrants from purchasing homes or renting apartments in white neighborhoods. In addition, when blacks moved into white neighborhoods, whites would often react violently toward their new black neighbors, including mass riots in front of their new homes, bombings, and even murder. Chicago was a focal point of the great migration and the racial violence that came in its wake. It was hard for many blacks to find jobs and find decent places to live because of the competition for housing among different groups of people. They were subject to discriminatory laws passed by white legislators, including racial segregation of public facilities. History of African-Americans in Chicago over the second half of the 20th century is regarded as one of achievement and struggle as well as oppression.

Hansberry's reference to Hughes's famous poem "Harlem: A Dream Deferred": "What happens to a dream deferred? /Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun" in her play's title highlights the importance of dreams in *A Raisin in the Sun* and the struggle that her characters face to realize their individual dreams, a struggle to the more fundamental black dream of equality in America. The ownership of consumer goods was believed to bring joy into a family's life in the play. This stereotypical view governs the dream of one of the main characters. Youngers family represents the whole African American Family and their dreams as common dream. Lena dreams of a house and a garden. She expresses the emotions and the feelings of what black woman had to cope with during the 1950s and 1960s. Beneatha possesses intellectual dreams, something women have struggled to pursue freely, she dreams of becoming a doctor, Ruth dreams of having a place with a lot of windows and plenty of sunshine, Walter dreams of having money to start his own business, and Travis dreams of having his own room.

In the play, their quest for American dream is based on the frontier myth that the immigrants will be free, independent, and successful with hard work. The three black women fight with family member and society for achieving self-reliance, self-identity, freedom and dignity, and material prosperity and equality. Hine and Christie Anne Famham view on the struggle of black women in this way

They struggle for sexual security, respect, social justice and citizenship rights or the power to make others treat them and their families fairly.

In their spatial communities, individually and collectively, whether sorority sisters or domestics servants, black women fought for decent housing, jobs, education and health care as well as for social justice and full citizenship rights, especially universal suffrage. (204)

As African American women, these three characters struggle socially, economically, racially and with every aspect of their life in.

In the play, the American dream and its realization has been linked with many aspects such as migration, race, education, social class, gender, wealth, working class, house ownership, American reality etc. The interpersonal conflicts between competing family members are for their version of dream fulfillment. The house the Youngers buy on Clybourne Park represents their dignity and freedom. Mama's plant is another symbolic of her dreams, to prosper. Her dream desired to make the dreams of her children successful by helping them to realize their dreams. Walter mentions to his Mama how the main goal of the black was to get out of slavery, now it's the money. For Walter, main goal of life is to be a real man. Being a black man is shameful to him, he does not have a "real job", and he is a chauffeur. Walter finds some success as a father and a son by pursuing positive elements within the American dream, including social responsibility, moral sensitivity and integrity (Benziman, 26), in the second half of the play. Walter is able to see the American dream, for what it is: something contradictory and flawed. We can much understand the value of money for Walter from the following conversation between Mama and Walter:

Mama: "Son, how come you talk so much 'bout money?"

Walter: "Because, it is life, Mama!"

Mama: "Oh—so now its life. Money is life. Once upon a time, freedom use to be life—now its money. I guess the world really do change..."

Walter: "No—it was always money, Mama. We just didn't know about it."

For Walter, money is the source of his family happiness and the ultimate solution of all problems. He always argues with his mother and sister for dream fulfillment. He hopes that investment in liquor store will lead him to highly material success. He believes in the instant wealth dream.

In the play, Asagai is only that character, who really understands the meaning of American dream. In conversation with Beneatha, while she making blame to Walter, he asks a very serious question with her “Isn’t there something wrong in the house-in a world-where all dreams, good or bad, must depend on the death of a man?” From this, we get a very important idea that the American dream is not all about money but about maintain a strong relationship within family and struggle together.

Finally they learn to support each other and put their families before their own. By owning a house, having a high morale, and the support of their family, each of them is on their way to fulfill their American dream.

IV. Conclusion: *Raisin in the Sun*: A Successful Depiction of African American Women's Quest for American Dream

Throughout this study I have made an analysis on American dream through the female perspective. To some level, materialistic achievement is the main point to measure American dream. Apart from that unity, equality, freedom, mobility, flexibility, self-identity, dignity, self-reliance, progress, patriotism etc. are also equally important aspects of American dream which are displayed by three women characters in the play *A Raisin in the Sun*. These three women revealed that wealth can be found in other forms too, money and materialism alone are worthless.

Frequently it is forgotten that African American women are inherent part of the human race and they are half of black history. Race has nothing to do with the so called American dream, whatever they are white or black, male or female, only it needs his/her ability and hard work. In the play, male characters are unable to deal with the expectations of the American dream, in regards to masculinity. Walter is the follower of false values of American dream. That insurance money of his father leads him to illusion. It brought nothing on him but dream of having his own business and material prosperity. He expects his dream come true instantly and miraculously without ever having a plan to achieve them. Finally he is quite failure.

The study further found that male characters were representing extreme of the American debate on assimilation. They were trying to achieve the American dream by following the dominant white culture. They symbolize the epitome of a black man that has fully assimilated into white mainstream. George is clear example of this. When Mr. Linder offered money to Youngers not to move into their community, Walter tempted and intended, accepts his offer. It shows his powerlessness, greedy manner and male selfishness as well. He does not possess enough strength to be the

real man of his family. As much he tries, he comes across a weak against the strong women in the family and so when it comes to assigning blame for his lack of power, he blames most of his problems on his women.

We can take Mama as much more courageous and revolutionary woman character. During that period, their move into white neighborhood was so risky and challenging. Even seeing and hearing the rumor of murder, bombing etc. she made an attempt to make down payment on house on white community. It may create an illusion that her dream to buy house in white society may be her first step to get entry into white mainstream. But it is not; instead she demands equality and dignity to white (or demands equality and dignity in white community). Her dream can be taken as the most determining factor that would see the other family member's dreams come true. Therefore, if she failed to achieve her dreams for them, they too would not achieve whatever it is that they desired. Her persistence and dedication to the plant fosters her hope that her dream may come true. Her plant does not only symbolize her dream of escaping from their poverty-stricken life in Chicago, but also represents a dream for equality of treatment.

In 1950s, the dream of house ownership was most significant part of the American dream for all backgrounds. Black also did have dream to live in their own house in which they could feel safe, secure and free to do what they want. That necessity was most realized by women because they were domestic worker. As a woman, Mama's aspirations to get a house were uncommon in those days. Her struggle to buy house can be taken as revolutionary act. During that period, the circumstances were not in favor of women. Women did not think or act for them on their own. Men used to control their women's lives. But Mama exhibited that women could live for themselves. It showed that women can live their own without the

guidance of men. It also revealed a positive attitude towards the women's movement. Mama not only represents the African American women, but women as a whole. Yes, her dream is simply a having own home. In terms of the theatrical space, the house is a spatial metaphor for the womb. (Scolnikov 44)

This study also found Beneatha as a representative of new generation of African American women having feministic perspective and the motive of afro-centricism, is grounded in the time period, as she deals with very timely socio-political issues. She also shows the power of change in gender roles. She intends to be self-dependent and dreams to be a doctor to heal her people who are in needed. She also searches her own identity having an idea that African American should be more in touching their African roots. She believes that society must be changed through self-knowledge, education, and celebrating of one's heritage. Like the male character, her dream is not individualistic. Her hair cutting is a very power social statement, as she symbolically declares that natural is beautiful, prefiguring the 1960s cultural credo that black is beautiful.

It is also found that the third female character Ruth has no self-dream like Mama and Beneatha. She is ready to sacrifice her coming baby for the best of her family that already has. It's true she is little passive than Mama and Beneatha, but she is conscious for the betterment of her family. Her decision to commit abortion can be taken as a great challenge for the contemporary society. During that period women did not have fertility control right. She revolted, not only challenged the tradition of patriarchy but society as a whole. It can be taken as the great contribution for the civil right movement.

This study also found the interpersonal conflict in the version of dream fulfillment. The conflict between Walter and Mama states the disparity between

views within the family as far as what freedom really means and the real impact of dreams. Similarly, the conflict between Walter and Beneatha where by each has as different notion of what a real identity is.

In the play, women characters have understood the true value of money. They want to utilize it in a meaningful way. They have merged their individual dream and have seen a common dream of house believing that they can succeed if they stick together as a family and resolve to defer their dreams no longer. Finally they have realized the unity of the family by owning new house which they always dreamed. Beneatha also got opportunity to attend in medical school. In this sense, the dreams of female characters seem somehow fulfilled in the play. Therefore, this study concluded that it's the success of American dream through the women's perspective. But male characters seems quite failure, because they could not attain their dream of material prosperity.

After moving into white community, the future of Youngers family seems uncertain and slightly dangerous, but they are ready to face the coming problems. After their move into their new house, their dreams to have better lives may come true or maybe not. But no matter, whatever their future would be, they are optimistic and determined to live a better life. The sunlight in the new house signifies a fresh sense of hope and wellbeing. They hope the racism and discrimination in new white community will not deter them from following their dream. They have confidence that they can succeed that if they stick together as a family and resolve to defer their dreams no longer. The title of the play itself symbolizes that the family's dreams and hopes for a better life will never dry up despite the intense struggles they are under.

Through the dreams, hopes and attitude of female characters of this play designed a new path for all contemporary black women to walk on. They have

challenged the stereotype of 1950s America which was a land for happy house wives and black content with their inferior status. Their dream of move into new house signifies the move from margins to the mainstream of American culture and oppression to freedom. Their efforts can be taken as the significant activism for civil rights and women movements that would finally find public voice.

This study also got most important lesson from these three female characters that everyone need to have something like a dream to keep themselves pursuing something in life.

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