

Social Problems in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*

B. Jayanthi,

II MA English, Sri Sarada, Arts and Science College for Women, Ulunderpet, India

Abstract: Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), but is set in Puritan settled Boston in the 1600 hundreds. It is about a young married woman that commits adultery and tolerates a child. This was pondered to be very disgraceful, and punishable by the church centred community. The woman, Hester Prynne, gives natal to her child in penitentiary and is made to attire a scarlet "A" on her outfit. The A stands for adultery. She is derided and ashamed for her actions, and their penalties. The struggle of Hester and Arthur to have a secret love affair.

Once Hester Prynne is released from penitentiary, with the infant, and is made to cavalcade through the town's people to the Market-Place. The book portrays the reactions of the women and men of the community to Hester, the child, her punishment, and the scarlet letter on her costume. The wild-natured strength that is created within Hester, the source of which lies in the rejection of patriarchal law, and therefore inaccessible by men or even women living within this law, is the new kind of femininity that Hester (and later Pearl) come to represent.

Hawthorne paints Hester as a free woman in the ending pages of this book, and also makes her and Dimmesdale equals by having them share the same marker on their tombstones. This story presents a vibrant portrait of feminism.

I. INTRODUCTION

The definition of feminism would be women are inherently equal to men and deserve equal rights and opportunities. In Nathaniel Hawthorne's, *The Scarlet Letter*, Hester Prynne is the key example for feminism in the novel. In Puritan times, women were thought of as lesser than men. Women's purposes were to raise children and give them good morals and values. Women did not have jobs; they wore the plainest clothes, and sat quietly by their husbands' sides. Passion and happiness were considered to be a sin in the Puritan faith.

II. WOMEN OPPRESSION IN THE NOVEL *THE SCARLET LETTER*

The Scarlet Letter was written by Nathaniel Hawthorne in 1850 masterpiece, but is set in Puritan settled Boston in the 1600 hundreds. It was about an adulterous woman, as a feminist text. This is the story of Hester Prynne and her daughter, Pearl, and the chastisement Hester withstands at the hands of her Puritan community, a community pursuing to purify society by gratifying Christian principle on Earth, in 1640s Massachusetts Bay Colony. In this story, we get an exclusive outlook of women, love, sexuality, and sin. It was about a young married woman that commits adultery and tolerates a child. This was pondered to be very disgraceful, and punishable by the church centred community.

III. THE CHARACTERS

"In *The scarlet letter* Hawthorne exposed not only a great array, but an even superior complexity. The characters

Hester Prynne and her lover, the reverend Arthur Dimmesdale, are the chief to step out from their assumption and become persons in their personal right. The theme is the now aware one of a sin committed earlier the story releases and of the recounting of the significances of that action in the survives of a community. It was about feminism the sin is adultery, but Hawthorne does not share the total ethics of the puritan community which stresses lasting penance through the wearing of *The scarlet letter* "A".

Hester Prynne has to overcome many obstacles in the novel, emotionally, socially, and psychologically. Living in a Puritan Society, where they had strict rules that everyone had to abide by, the society showed that men overruled women, and women were subjects to men. Hester's place within Puritan society changes within the novel, where she defies male authority. In the novel *The Scarlet Letter*, written by Nathaniel Hawthorne, the key character is Hester Prynne who has to wear the Letter "A", on her bodice of every garment. "Behold, verily, there is the woman of the scarlet letter. The scarlet letter is a visible sign of her sin, so that everyone is able to see and judge Hester. She is not able to go anywhere without people running away from her, because they do not want to catch her evil spirits. The scarlet letter has made Hester an outsider of her own community. Socially Hester Prynne's place in the Puritan community and her attitude towards Puritan authority changes throughout the novel. "The predominating quality of Puritan life was hard, good sense, a good sense which could value the realities of life

...a story about the scarlet letter which we might readily work up into a terrific legend. They averred, that the symbol was not mere scarlet cloth, tinged in an earthly dye-pot, alight, whenever Hester Prynne walked abroad in the night time.

And we must needs say, it seared Hester's bosom so deeply, that perhaps there was more truth in the rumour than our modern incredulity may be inclined to admit. (56)

In the novel *The Scarlet letter* Hester is in love with Dimmesdale. But she's wife of Roger Chilling worth, whom she not ever loved, and who has been mislaid and reputed lifeless for years. Hester has additional problem: the man she loves, Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale, is the ethical core of the Puritan community they live in. As somebody who is invented to be the accomplishment of Christ's demands on Earth, Reverend Dimmesdale, if exposed to have fathered a child with Hester, would face undying ruin. When faced with chastisement for her adulterous sins, Hester trashes to give Pearl's father's name, however her rebuff assurances that her individual chastisement will be multiplied. Hester displays herself to be far-off sturdier than her lover, Dimmesdale, who can't concede his sin. But the culpability chucks him up inside. Dimmesdale develops frail, whereas Hester's forte appears only to upturn with the years.

“She hath good skills at her needle, that’s certain,” remarked One of her female spectator; “but did ever a woman, before This brazen hussy, contrive such a way of showing it! Why, Gossips, what is it but to laugh in the faces of our godly Magistrates, and make a pride out of what they, worthy Gentleman, meant for a punishment” (15)

[2] Cairns, W. B. *A History of American Literature*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1912
Macy, John. *The Spirit of American Literature*. New York: Boni and Liveright, 1913

Hester arranges an encounter with Dimmesdale in the forest because she is aware that Chillingworth has probably guessed that she plans to reveal his identity to Dimmesdale. The former lovers decide to flee to Europe, where they can live with Pearl as a family. They will take a ship sailing from Boston in four days. Both feel a sense of release and Hester removes her scarlet letter and lets down her hair. Pearl, playing nearby, does not recognize her mother without the letter. The day before the ship is to sail, the townspeople gather for a holiday and Dimmesdale preaches his most eloquent sermon ever

Throughout history, politically and socially newsworthy events have compelled writers and journalists to report, support, and reflect thoughts or feelings about those events through their writing. Such was the case for early feminist writers in America. Shortly after Abigail's written entreaty to her husband, many women, stifled by the strict conventional social boundaries of the day and the lack of women's rights, followed suit and wrote to convey feelings of frustration and outright indignation regarding voting restrictions, marital repression, and male dominance.

CONCLUSION

Nathaniel Hawthorne redefines the protagonist role and identity in the sunny of the feminist concepts. Through this novel, *The scarlet letter*, Nathaniel Hawthorne ensures with the protagonist Herter Prynne, and he says about the desolation of Hester in the puritan society. The women are retains quiet with their spouse if they are unambiguous too. Since they are the women, have to uphold the quietness before the bloke. That is the woman’s nature and they accepting all the gaffes if they are not responsible for the erroneous too. And here, also Hester upholds the silence, when her husband and too her concubine doing the malpractice. She didn’t inquire anything to her concubine, she keep quietness all along. Albeit she didn’t exposed her mouth and tell the veracity to anybody. As a chastisement, she put on *The scarlet letter* in her torso throughout her lifetime. This indicates her desolation in the puritan society.

Meanwhile, Hester has learned that Chillingworth knows of their plan and has booked passage on the same ship. Dimmesdale, leaving the church after his sermon, sees Hester and Pearl standing before the town scaffold. He impulsively mounts the scaffold with his lover and his daughter, and confesses publicly, exposing a scarlet letter seared into the flesh of his chest. He falls dead, as Pearl kisses him. Frustrated in his revenge, Chillingworth dies a year later. Hester and Pearl leave Boston, and no one knows what has happened to them. Many years later, Hester returns alone, still wearing the scarlet letter, to live in her old cottage and resume her charitable work. She receives occasional letters from Pearl, who has married a European aristocrat and established a family of her own. When Hester dies, she is buried next to Dimmesdale. The two share a single tombstone, which bears a scarlet “A.”

Works Cited

[1] Hawthorne, Nathaniel *The Scarlet Letter*. Maple Press: India. 2018. Print.