

CHAPTER - IV

**CONCLUSION**

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The present study has sought to provide a comprehensive statement on the short stories of Toni Cade Bambara. The statement has taken into account the important relationship between Bambara's personal life and her creative talent as a short story writer. It is obvious that she spent her early years in New York City – in Harlem, Bedford Stayvesant, and Queens – and in Jersey City, New Jersey. Bambara has credited the variety of cultural experiences found in the New York City area as well as the encouragement of her mother and other women in her neighbourhoods as major influences on her development.

Bambara also attended several European and American universities, dance schools, and the Studio Museum of the Harlem Film Institute. She traveled in the 1970s to Cuba and Vivetnam, where she met with representatives from the Federation of Cuban Women and the Women's Union in Vivetnam. Upon returning to the United States, Bambara settled in the South, where she became a founding member of the Southern Collective of African-American Writers. Later she turned her attention to scriptwriting often conducting workshops to train community-based organizations to use video technology to enact social change. She died of colon cancer on December 9, 1995. It is this common life which Bambara translated into fictional terms.

The powerful creative individual talent of Bambara relates itself to the tradition of the American short story from Washington Irving to the post Civil War writers like Bret Harte, Sarah Jewett, H. C. Bunner, Henry James, and William Dean Howells. When she appeared on the

literary scenario, Bambara inherited a tradition of the short story which was characterized by realism, local colour, and which in the hands of Paule Marshall, Claude McKay, Richard Wright, Jessie Fauset, Nella Larsen, Ann Lane Petry, Tonny Morrison, Gloria Naylor, Alice Walker. The great exponents of short story like Thomas Aldrich, H. C. Bunner, Brander Matthews and a host of others paid great attention to the structural principles of the short story. It was at this moment that the basic tenets of the short story as a literary genre came to be defined in a much more precise manner. Aspects of the short story such as its structure, technique and point of view emerged into the foreground. With this, the short story as a literary genre differentiated itself from its narrative antecedents like the tale, the tall tale, fable etc. and emerged as a modern literary form capable of dealing with socio-moral, economic and racial themes. Bambara inherited the tradition of the short story, and the short story assumed new thematic and technical dimensions in her hands.

## II

The present dissertation has sought to provide a critical focus on the short stories of Bambara. In Chapters II and III, the two collections of short stories have been critically analysed and evaluated. The stories of the Chapter II are ten, under the heading – *The Sea Birds Are Still Alive : Collected Short Stories*, published in 1977. Stories from 1 to 5 grapple with ‘revolution thrust’ of Bambara, and from 6 to 10 deal with the relationship between Afro-American men and women. The Chapter III is about *Tales and Stories For Black Folks*. The major intention of the volume was to teach young blacks the historical value of one of their daily activities – telling stories.

The two collections of stories reveal certain important aspects of Bambara's writings :

First, the question of identity emerges as a central motif for Bambara's writing. Her female characters become as strong as they do, not because of some inherent "eternal feminine" quality granted at conception, but rather because of the lessons women learn from communal interaction. Identity is achieved, not bestowed. Bambara's short stories focus on such learning very carefully to present situations in a highly orchestrated manner, Bambara describes the difficulties that her characters must overcome.

Secondly, Bambara's stories present a decided emphasis on the centrality of community. Many writers concentrate so specifically on character development or plot line that community seems merely a foil against which the characters react. For Bambara the community becomes essential as a locus for growth, not simply as a source of narrative tension. Thus, her characters and community do a circle dance around and within each other as learning and growth occur. Thirdly, Bambara's women learn how to handle themselves within the divergent, often conflicting, strata that compose their communities. Such learning does not come easily; hard lessons result from hard knocks. Nevertheless, the women do not merely endure; they prevail, emerging from these situations more aware of their personal identities and of their potential for further self-actualization. More important, they guide others to achieve such awareness.

Fourthly, Bambara posits learning as purposeful, geared toward personal and societal change. Consequently, the identities into which her characters grow envision change as both necessary and possible, understanding that they themselves play a major part in bringing about

that change. Fifthly, although many of Bambara's stories converge on the school setting as the place of learning in formal patterns, she liberates such settings to admit and encourage community involvement and ownership. Learning then influences social liberation and self-determination. These stories describe learning as the process of problem solving, which induces a deepening sense of self. Finally, her characters achieve a personal identity as a result of their participation in the human quest for knowledge, which brings power. Bambara's skill as a writer saves her characters from being stereotypic cutouts. Although her themes are universal, communities that Bambara describes rise above the generic. More fully delineated than her male characters, the women come across as specific people living in specific places. Bambara's best stories show her characters interacting within a political framework wherein the personal becomes political.

To conclude, Toni Cade Bambara's stories do more than paint a picture of black life in contemporary black settings. Many writers have done that, more or less successfully. Her stories portray women who struggle with issues and learn from them. Sometimes the lessons taste bitter and the women must accumulate more experience in order to gain perspective. By centering community in her stories, Bambara displays both the supportive and the destructive aspects of communal interaction. Her stories do not describe a predictable, linear plot line rather, the cycle enfolding of characters and community produces the kind of tension missing in stories with a more episodic emphasis.

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