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A Study of Struggle for Love against Racism in James Baldwin's *If Beale Street could talk*

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Abstract

James Arthur Baldwin was a prolific American author. He was a Writer, novelist, essayist, poet, playwright, and social critic. Baldwin's writing explored the basic personal questions and social and psychological tensions of blacks, gay and bisexual men. He published his powerful and promising novel *If Beale Street could talk* in which he intricately told the love story of Fonny and Tish. He explored the themes of parental love, struggle between love and racism and survival of love. The novel of James Baldwin was multiple implications. Baldwin described different emotions of love couple and their experiences. Through this novel, Baldwin illustrated the honesty and reliance on family, strong message of survival love and unity of family against the racism. *If Beale Street could talk* gave a strong insight, good understanding, and high awareness to a new generation who was facing the problems of racism in their life.

Keywords: James Arthur Baldwin, African American Literature, Love, Racism.

1. Introduction

James Arthur Baldwin was a prominent American author. The present research was a study of conflict between love and racism in James Baldwin's *If Beale Street could talk*. He was born on 2 August, 1924 in New York. He was oldest son of nine children. Baldwin's father was a religious person. He was uneasy with his father. He grew up in poverty. Baldwin's works often explored the themes of alienation, poverty, rejection and racism. He joined the group of Negro novelists after World War Two and always explored the inequality in the treatment of blacks and whites. He illustrated the theme of racism for showing the blacks deserved the equal rights in society. Baldwin was an outstanding writer in American history as of both black and gay literature. He was also actively participated in the Civil Rights movement. He died in 1987 and remained as a most important and vocal advocates for equality.

If Beale Street Could Talk placed a strong emphasis on the importance of black families in African American society. It published in 1974. This book was about Tish and Fonny, who are in love. They become engaged. They wanted to be progressed their life happily, but Fonny falsely accused of raping a Puerto Rican woman, Victoria Rogers. The racist policeman Mr. Bell was taken Fonny into prison. After his imprisonment, Tish finds out she was pregnant. Tish, her family, and her lawyer struggled against injustice and racism to find frees Fonny before the baby was born. *If Beale Street could Talk* was about the struggle of love against the racism. Through the Tish and Fonny's journey in this novel, we realize that they unknowingly trapped in the racial issues. They struggled for their survival of love. From this novel, Baldwin created work of literary beauty and depth that will remain essential and important parts of the American literature.

2. Concept of Love and Racism

Love and Racism are two different things. Love is a positive thing in our life. It makes life beautiful. Love unites the peoples and bonds them together. Racism is a negative thing in our life. It destroyed the life of peoples. It discriminates the peoples in a wrong way.

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2.1 Love

Love understands as a natural expression of positive sentiment. It experienced that one person feels and caring for another person. Usually, love has three different components that are intimacy, commitment, and passion. First, Intimacy is related to the two people's confidence that they share their details of personal lives. Intimacy often showed in friendships and romantic love affairs. Second, Commitment is related to the expectation that the relationship should be permanent. The last is the passion which normally shown in romantic love. All components of love are varying combinations in one love form.

Love was a variety of different feelings, states, and attitudes that ranges from interpersonal affection ("I love my mother") to pleasure ("I loved that meal"). It can refer to an emotion of a strong attraction and personal attachment ^[1].

It can also be a virtue representing human kindness, compassion, and affection—"the unselfish loyal and benevolent concern for the good of another" ^[2].

2.2 Racism

Racism is related to the concept of race. It based on social perceptions of biological differences between peoples. The different racial groups considered by society and political systems ranked as inherently superior or inferior to each other. It based on perceptions that shared inheritable traits and qualities. These different racial groups are treated differently by the members of the society.

Merriam-Webster's Dictionary defines it as a belief that race is the primary determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority or inferiority of a particular racial group, and alternatively that it is also the prejudice based on such a belief ^[3].

These are some definitions of the love and racism. In this particular novel, love struggled against the racism for a survival of true love. In the African American society, racism was highly instilled in the minds of people. This racism was destroyed the life and their future of Fonny and Tish in *If Beale Street Could Talk*.

3. A Study of Struggle for Love against Racism in James Baldwin's *If Beale Street could talk*

If Beale Street Could Talk was a great and extraordinary novel by American author James Baldwin. The novel was a love story. It was the story about the two lovebirds, Tish, a 19-year-old Negro girl and Fonny, a 22-year-old young black boy. Tish's real name was Clementine Rivers, and Fonny's real name was Alonzo Hunt. Both lived in Harlem, New York and deeply in love with each other. The novel constructed in two parts, one was 'Troubled about my soul' and second was 'Zion'. The novel's story set in Harlem, an area in New York which mostly inhabited by poor Negroes. Tish and Fonny had been childhood friends. Fonny family was not very good. His mother was overly religious, and his sisters are also not very good. Fonny's father Frank was a very good man, but he becomes an alcoholic person. On the other hand, Tish's parents are very loving and caring. They did everything they can for Tish and Fonny. Tish and Fonny loved each other very passionately. They knew as Romeo and Juliet in their area. They decided to be married. Expect

Fonny's mother and sisters all are very happy. Fonny made sculptures and worked as a cook. They married and moved into a small apartment. After some days, they decided to look bigger apartment. It was very difficult because there are many prejudices against Negroes. Their one old friend was in jail for two years for something he did not do. After so many difficulties, they found the perfect apartment. They are doing shopping for shifting but while an Italian man teases Tish. Fonny got angry and beat him. The police come and the police officer Mr. Bell accuses Fonny of this incident. Mr. Bell was a racist and a liar. Fortunately, a lady in the shop said that the Italian man was responsible for this so that Mr. Bell cannot arrest Fonny. Mr. Bell becomes very angry. Once a Puerto Rican woman, Mrs. Rogers was raped. Mr. Bell asked her to recognize the person out the line of people. In that line, Fonny was the only black man. The woman demonstrated Fonny was the rapist. She was mistaken and without any mistake Fonny stayed in prison.

Tish was very upset. Eventually, she finds out that she was pregnant. She met him in prison and told about the pregnancy. Fonny becomes very happy and wants to be out of prison for the baby's birth. Both are loved each other a lot and tried to overcome out of this difficulty. Tish, her parents, and Fonny's father, are tried to release Fonny. They worked very hard, did extra jobs and trying to earn extra money to pay the lawyer. Their love struggled against the racism. Tish's mother meets Mrs. Rogers for rethinking on this incident but she was not ready to do this. After so many struggles, Fonny released on bail. The money collected after a lot of efforts. At the same day, Fonny's father found dead in his car. He has committed suicide after losing his job because he stole some money. He killed himself in shame and despair over his failure to free his son. At the end of the story, Tish's baby was about to be born but they did not win the trial.

This book described a strong family love through how they stuck together until the end of everything. Their paternal love struggled against racism for their children's love. They worked extra for collecting money to pay the lawyer. Tish's mother crossed the border of the city to meet the Mr. Rogers and tried to release her son in law. Tish's mother, Sharon insisted to the woman that Fonny indeed was her attacker. The parental love explored through the parents of Tish. Her mother, Sharon Rivers, had shown an abiding concern for her daughter and her unborn grandchild. Tish's father was very strong and supportive of his daughter. Baldwin suggested that love kept them functioning and co-operating. Love was also shown to be the necessary force that needed to build a world, and that will help the children to grow up safe and secure.

Throughout the whole story family's struggle shown through their troubles, they went through. Tish was a black Negro girl. Fonny was the black person too. Both are main characters in this novel. They loved each other and get married. But the racism was a biggest villain in their love story. Because of the racist policeman Mr. Bell Fonny was in jail for something he did not do. Tish wanted him out of jail because she loves him, and she was having his baby. Tish and her family struggled a lot to get Fonny out of jail. They wanted that before a baby will come, Fonny will release. But at the end of the story Fonny got the bail and saw his baby. Through the end of the story, Baldwin illustrated that racism never ends in our society. Tish and her family's struggle never successful because Fonny was not release from jail. He only got the bail.

If Beale Street Could Talk explored the experiences of a young black couple in the late sixties. Fonny and Tish grew up on the same street together, and they developed their relation in a loving environment. As they moved into their new love, they must also deal with an American society. It was very cruel and unjust to blacks. Fonny falsely accused. He arrested by police for rape. When the rape happened that night, Fonny had not left his apartment. Fonny was identified by the victim only because he was a black man in the line. The victim only knew that her assailant was a black man. Tish suffered outside the jail, and Fonny suffered in jail after knowing that she was pregnant. *If Beale Street Could Talk* explored the harsh reality of racism in American cities.

Of course, I must say that I don't think America is God's gift to anybody- if it is, God's days have got to be numbered. That God these people say they serve- and do serve, in ways that they don't know- -has got a very nasty sense of humor. Like you'd beat the shit out of Him, if He was a man. Or: if you were. (P 28)

In the novel, *If Beale Street Could Talk* by Baldwin, there was the harsh reality of injustices the government has the blacks. Fonny put in jail in terms of revenge by racist policeman Mr. Bell. Baldwin suggested that how racism spoiled the life of a common black man in American society. At the novel's end, Fonny was out on bail but he was neither free nor imprisoned which shows that racism remained in society. *If Beale Street Could Talk* was a traditional celebration of love. It explored not only love between a man and a woman, but love between members of a family which shown through their extremes of sacrifice. The heroic struggle of the family against the racism for a survival of true love was an outstanding reality in African American society. The novel's title refers to the street where Tish and Fonny live. Tish thought that people are not always truthful because Fonny accused of a rape case that he did not commit. Tish said, if the street could talk, Fonny would not have to go to jail. The street would tell the truth about Fonny. People would then treated fairly and equally. *If Beale Street Could Talk* was a most realistic story about African-Americans and their difficulty to survive and to progress. All African-Americans are fighting for their rights. Through the themes of love and racism, Baldwin was beautifully woven the real and honest story in African American society.

In this honest and stunning novel, Baldwin explored the struggle of a loved couple against the injustice and racism. Fonny was falsely accused of a terrible crime and imprisoned. The love of two African American teenagers in Harlem tested by the racism of the police and society in general. The language was beautiful, cruel, haunting, and passionate all at once. Baldwin explained the depth of love when it compromised by race, police injustice, poverty, and youth.

4. Conclusion

If Beale Street Could Talk was a very well-known and recognized novel by Baldwin. James Baldwin very aptly described the true love story of two young black people that was powerless to a dangerous system, painfully aware of their poverty and circumstances and cultivate the most touching relationship. Through the characterization, Baldwin expressed a great emotion of tragedy, sorrow, rage, beauty and hope with high intensity. Throughout the novel, love couple and their family struggled against the racism but at the end of the novel, we realize that racism was a strong root

in the society. Fonny and Tish was so innocent and honest couple, but they troubled because of only racism. They had the only power of love which motivates them for struggled against the injustice. Baldwin succeeds in his struggle to convey a depth of feeling through the delicate motions of youthful love.

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