



## Study of Racism, Discrimination and Exploitation in Zadie Smith's 'On Beauty'

Mamta, Research Scholar, Baba Mastnath University Asthal Bohar, Rohtak

Geeta, Professor, Department of English, Baba Mastnath University Asthal Bohar, Rohtak

### Abstract

A very fundamental issue for the narrative of *On Beauty* is beauty, both physical and non-physical, therefore it should come as no surprise that the title of the book recognises this. In the story, the characters have a difficult time comprehending the foundation or predictability of human responses to beauty. The book also places a significant emphasis on the attractiveness of women and the effects that this beauty has on the men in their lives, on the people in their lives in general, and on the women themselves. As an illustration, the main character, Kiki Belsey, was once stunning when she was younger. However, as she has grown older and has gained a significant amount of weight, Kiki is aware that she will never be able to achieve her former weight or return to her youthful beauty. A young woman named Victoria Kipps, who is now enrolled in college, is so stunningly gorgeous that all men ever desire from her is sex. Furthermore, the only thing that she is able to provide and take advantage of from her own attractiveness is her sexuality. Carl is a young man who is stunningly gorgeous and, similar to Victoria, Zora is only interested in him because of his physical appearance. This situation may be considered an abnormality. Carlene, Victoria's mother, is a soothing and calming presence in the tale, despite the fact that she does not possess significant physical beauty. This is an example of how non-physical beauty continues to exist and presents itself in the acts and behaviour of women. Throughout the course of the narrative, the characters struggle to comprehend whether one type of beauty is superior to another, as well as how to respond appropriately whenever they encounter either physical or non-physical beauty. In the end, none of them end up triumphing over the other; nevertheless, if love is there, it is possible that non-physical beauty will continue to endure.

One of the most significant ideas that is explored in *On Beauty* is the concept of family; in fact, the narrative may be referred to as a "family saga." Something resembling a family quarrel in the academic world sits at the heart of it. Can you explain what it means to be a family? Both the Kipps and the Belseys are examples of families who are held together by their shared ideals. On the other hand, Jerome Belsey, for instance, does not identify with the primary ideals that the Belsey family practices. Jerome, who is just beginning his journey as a Christian, "falls in love with a family" (44), which occurs when he is working as an intern at the Kipps office. Jerome is still extremely close to



his mother and his siblings, and he loves them very much, despite the fact that he holds these views differently from his mother. It would appear that family is more than just a collection of people who are bound together by shared beliefs; for instance, Howard would never consider even his coworkers who share his convictions to be his family. The readers are able to observe that the Kipps and the Belseys have quite different methods of loving one other, which is a reflection of the fact that families require a profound love that brings them together. As an illustration, Monty and his son have a strong relationship, and the Kipps are not hesitant to discuss financial matters (278), but the Belsey family does not engage in such conversation.

**Key Words :** Racism, Discrimination and Exploitation

### **Introduction**

Zadie Smith is a young British author who has been honoured with a number of literary distinctions in the United Kingdom during the past few years. She is well-liked not only by academics, but also by her audience, who recognise and appreciate the quality of her writing. She is a wonderful observer as well as a fascinating storyteller. She portrays all of the noises and scents of the world that is all around her, and she observes human disappointments and triumphs from a dispassionate vantage point, despite the fact that she has a great deal of compassion and sympathy for individuals. It is possible for her to record it in a manner that is abundant in remarkable terms and exquisite poetry language, which causes one to laugh, dream, contemplate, and feel envious. Through the medium of writing, she is able to engage all of the human senses. She is a master at making her characters sound extremely real by utilising all of the many sorts of dialects and accents that are conceivable. This allows her readers to feel as though they are a part of the plot and are listening in on what is being said. In her works, Smith adopts a wide variety of accents, which span from those of different ethnic minorities to those of different socioeconomic classes. This demonstrates her skill of monitoring certain characteristics and components of the English language that are spoken by particular groups of people. She demonstrates a profound understanding of the human mind and the manner in which it provides the foundation for the actions of individuals, in addition to her artistic skill. Her extensive grasp of the historical, philosophical, and cultural backdrop of the English-speaking world, with its wide range of religious traditions and ethnic peculiarities, is demonstrated by her extensive expertise. She is conscious of the significance of the customs and origins to those who have relocated for a variety of reasons and have arrived at their new homes with anticipations and anticipations. The most important thing is that she is able to impart her wisdom and expertise to her audience without passing judgement or offering moral advice the majority of the time.



Each of the three novels that Smith has written up to this point reveals the incontestable abilities that she possesses as a writer. *White Teeth*, *The Autograph Man*, and *On Beauty* are three of her works that explore distinct regions of inspiration. As a result, her books deal with a variety of different backgrounds and issues. However, each and every one of them demonstrates Smith's zeal for writing about topics that she is passionate about, and her knowledge appears to be applicable to virtually every aspect of human existence, ranging from philosophy, history, and art to science and politics.

### **On Beauty**

It follows two families who are related and both have fathers who are in the academic field. First, there is the Belsey family, which includes “Howard, a white English professor who specialises in Rembrandt, his African American wife, Kiki, and their three children, Jerome, Zora, and Kiki. They reside in the made-up town of Wellington, which is located close to Boston. Both Zora and Howard are students at Wellington University, where Howard is a professor of liberal arts. For the time being, Levi is still in high school, while Jerome is currently attending Brown University. Monty Kipps, a conservative university professor, his wife Carlene, and their two children, Victoria and Michael, make up the Kipps family, which is the second family that plays a significant role in the story of *On Beauty*. Monty and Carlene both consider their ancestry to be very important, as they are of British-Caribbean descent.

Smith narrates the tale of two families, one of which resides in Wellington, which is located close to Boston, and the other of which has recently relocated from London to the same location. There is a significant amount of tension in the connection that the Belseys have with Monty Kipps's family. Both Howard Belsey and Monty Kipps are professors at universities, and with the exception of their mutual admiration for Rembrandt's body of work, they do not have any other opinions in common. Their competition has been going on for a considerable amount of time, and it reaches its zenith when Dr. Kipps is presented with the opportunity to become a visiting professor at the Humanities Faculty in Wellington, which is also where Howard lectures. Due to the fact that everyone is aware of their covert antipathy towards one another, Howard views Kipps's acceptance to the Faculty as an act of hostility towards him. The problem is made worse by a series of occurrences that took place during the time that Jerome, Howard's eldest son, was working as an intern in London with the Kipps. After falling in love with their daughter Victoria, Jerome makes the announcement that the two of them are going to be married. Because of the awkward intervention of Howard, who makes the decision to travel to London as soon as he gets Jerome's email, the situation has become more complicated. By alerting the families about his goal, the interaction between the families becomes intolerable,



particularly for Jerome, who is extremely sensitive. Despite this, the love that he has for Victoria is, in part, a representation of his admiration for the entire family and the way that they live their lives. One might easily draw parallels between Jerome's character and that of Irie Jones. Both of them are dissatisfied with their upbringing and are looking for a home that is more harmonic and where they may improve their understanding and sensitivity.

In reality, Monty Kipps is a man who utilises his position and knowledge to subtly control other people, despite the fact that he presents himself to the world as a man who has strong values. The fact that he had sexual relations with a young black girl who does not come from a wealthy household and does not have the financial means to pay for her education at a university is certainly an example of someone abusing their position. Through the use of his power at the institution, he makes a promise to her that she will receive certain benefits in exchange for her attention. In his public persona, Kipps portrays himself as a devout Christian who values his family and Christianity above everything else.

When Howard's daughter discovers that Kipps has been having an affair, he is forced to reevaluate his public presentation of his attitude to minority groups and the prejudice they face in society. In order to save his academic career, he is ready to sacrifice his beliefs. The hypocrisy, on the other hand, is concealed by Jerome, who is too young and too dissatisfied with the connection he has with his father. In the critical period of Jerome's youth, when young people are required to establish their thoughts and hunt for role models, Howard appears to give less attention to his oldest son than what Jerome would require. He is not strong enough to resist the impact that the Kippses have on him, and as a result, he accepts their extreme ideals, which are, in reality, partially directed at people like his mother, people whose past is intertwined with segregation and injustice.

Despite the fact that they are black themselves, the Kippses are controversial in many different ways. The cohesiveness that they exhibit as a family is not as strong as it appears to be. When Monty's wife Carlene passes away from cancer and they learn that she has been afflicted with the disease for a considerable amount of time, it is the most heartbreaking moment when they are forced to confront it. This attention that is displayed to the public and the supposed interest that is shown in other members of the family is nothing more than a stance that is intended to create the idea that the Kippses are honest and have good intentions. In point of fact, Kiki Belsey, Howard's wife and a possible adversary of the Kipps, is the only person who cares for Carlene and spends a significant amount of time with her, despite the fact that she is very ill and lonely. Whatever the case may be, it is a natural consequence of the hypocrisy displayed by the Kippses.



## **Women's empathy versus men's intrusion**

In a manner that is both kind and supportive, but also firm, Kiki establishes a strong foundation for the professional development of her three children and her husband. Her family receives the stability that is essential for their healthy development, which she provides for them. In spite of the fact that there are storms hitting her house, she is able to guide her family through them with the least amount of harm possible.

Midway through his fifties, Howard Belsey is at the pinnacle of his professional career. He hails from a family that is of a lower social level in London, and the only thing that ties him to his original background is the fact that he does not visit his father very often, and he despises his father because of his behaviour. His son's IQ is far higher than that of his father, Harold Belsey, who worked as a butcher. When it comes to his father, Howard is embarrassed, just as his sons are embarrassed around him. Despite this, he makes an effort to be a good dad so that he may be involved in his children's problems, even though the solutions he selects are not always the most effective ones.

Having become enraged by Jerome's Christian faith and his internship, he has chosen to refrain from communicating with him. Through the announcement of his foolish relationship with Victoria, Jerome is able to successfully divert his attention from him. Even though Kiki has warned him and pleaded with him, Howard is determined to impose his own will on his kid. A gulf is created between him and Jerome as a result of his trip to London and his experience at Kipps's residence. If it weren't for Carlene Kipps, who, like Kiki, had a good understanding of how relationships work, Howard's visit would be a complete and utter failure. When Howard comes into her home and unleashes a whirlwind of emotions, Carlene behaves in a manner that is respectful yet at the same time stern.

The revelation that Jerome has feelings for Victoria is made public, and Carlene, who is the only one in the Kippses' home who is aware of the issue, is tasked with rectifying the humiliating circumstance and ensuring that Howard behaves in the most appropriate manner. Immediately after leaving, Howard and Jerome depart, and Jerome takes his time to recover from the disappointment he felt because of his first love. In point of fact, the event establishes a strong foundation for the bond between Kiki and Carlene. When Kiki finds out that the Kippses have relocated to Wellington, she quickly pays Carlene a visit and extends an invitation to the entire family to attend her wedding anniversary celebration. Kiki is humiliated by the manner in which her husband began to resolve the issue. Despite the fact that it begins too soon before Carlene's passing, their friendship quickly becomes significant for both of them. Because of their infrequent encounters, they are able to discuss



topics that their spouses find to be too simple to understand. This brings them great satisfaction. Kiki's upbringing in the United States, during which she was exposed to the feminist movement, makes it abundantly clear that she places a higher emphasis on problems pertaining to women. Carlene is a conventional housewife, but she is supportive of women who are able to create their jobs and maintain their own place for themselves.

### **Identification within society**

The look of Zora is similar to that of her mother, and her white father is similar to her in terms of her talents and desires. She is more proud of her intellectual abilities than she is of her appearance, and she supports her father. At her age, she is a highly smart young woman who has strong ideas on current topics. She is a student at Wellington University, and she is doing very well in her studies. However, she does occasionally remind others around her that she is Howard's daughter and that she has advantages associated with the fact that she is Howard's daughter. She is able to create her own method to achieve the goals. Zora is a powerful combatant, especially when compared to Victoria, who is rather shallow. In contrast to Victoria, who is able to accomplish her objectives due to the fact that she is stunningly beautiful, Zora must use their intelligence and their will to convince others. The fact that Victoria intentionally caused Zora's brother so much pain is not the only reason why the two sisters are unable to get along with one another. Victoria is disliked by Zora because of her propensity to manipulate men due to the fact that she is naturally beautiful. When Victoria admits that she has had sexual relations with Howard, Zora's animosity for her becomes even more intense.

Due to the fact that Zora is similar to her father, she is able to triumph over her father's shortcomings and use his connection with Claire to further her own personal goals. In light of the fact that Claire Malcolm is a well-known poet and that her name is well regarded in the academic community, Zora cannot wait to enrol in her lessons”.

The manner in which she communicates and behaves is rather hostile and devoid of warmth, and it creates barriers between her and her mother. However, she is able to do what she has set out to do and enrolls in Claire's class. One evening, the group makes the decision to go to a bar called the Bus Stop to see a performance by street poets and rappers. While there, Zora meets Carl, a black lad who comes from a more disadvantaged neighbourhood in Boston. She has had previous encounters with him, but this is the first time she has had the opportunity to recognise the brilliance that he possesses. Claire is drawn to his poetry and finds it appealing. In order to collaborate with her pupils, she extends an invitation to him to join them.





## Conclusion :

In his book "On Beauty," Smith illustrates the transformation that has taken place in the United States of America over the latter part of the twentieth century. The characters in the works of African American writers such as Zora Neal Hurston or Toni Morrison and playwrights such as August Wilson show African Americans whose living situations are a consequence of their race. Smith, on the other hand, describes Levi, who feels discriminated against, as a bored adolescent. On the other hand, this does not imply that she intends to underestimate the significance of the problem of racism; rather, she recognises the evolution of the situation and believes that racism is not as prevalent in the United States as it was in the past. There has been a shift in the lives of people who are members of minority groups as a result of the Civil Rights Movement, and the society in all of its multicultural colorfulness may be watched with a lightness that is bearable.

As the two major male characters engage in political manoeuvring, the fundamental focus of *On Beauty* is marriage and family life, which is depicted against the backdrop of the political manoeuvring. The role of the family as an essential component in the formation of the perspectives and personalities of children is still a necessary component. If all goes according to plan, it can serve as a reliable foundation for exciting excursions into the world of grownups. Over the course of thirty years, the Belseys have been a faithful and affectionate marriage who have shown their children both love and support. As a result of Howard's romance with Claire and, subsequently, with Victoria, the peace in the relationship is ruined, and he is forced to deal with the challenges of everyday life as his life begins to become chaotic without Kiki. The heartfelt conclusion, in which Howard delivers a lecture about Rembrandt and notices Kiki in the audience, alludes to the possibility of a conclusion that is not yet definitive: "He looked out into the audience once more and saw Kiki only."

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