

Empowerment of Women: *The Scarlet Letter*

Abstract

The term Empowerment of Women refers to the strength and courage of female who violates the norms of the society to establish their identity or to fulfill their desires. The present paper discusses the themes and also highlights the element of women empowerment through the analysis of female character that plays a vital role in the novel. In *The Scarlet Letter* Hester Prynne is the protagonist of the novel and she was accused for adultery and forced to wear scarlet letter 'A' on her bosom. Though she has been punished by the Puritan society for the crime but through her courage and positivity she represents the new image of woman who is self-reliant and independent. She lives freely in the outskirts of the Puritan society and at last of the novel her scarlet letter 'A' which is known for adultery transformed into able and angel.

Keywords: Audacious, Independent, Empowerment, Self-Reliant, Self-Dependency.

Introduction

The present paper is an attempt to bring out some elements of women empowerment through the analysis of the protagonist of the novel *The Scarlet Letter* written by Nathaniel Hawthorne. The novel represents the different themes and concepts but it also highlights the strength and courage of a woman who violates all the norms of the society to live freely and independently. The term empowerment means to give power to someone for their own benefit. It is defined by Dr. Meenu Agrawal that "Empowerment of women would mean equipping women to be economically independent and personally self-reliant with a positive self-esteem to enable them to face any difficult situation...The empowered women should be able to participate in the process of decision-making" (2-5 Agrawal). And the term women empowerment means to give power to women and make them able to understand their worth and self-dignity. An empowered woman can restrict the factors which affect their lives and create barrier to achieve their aims. Now the time has been changed, today's women are educated, active and independent politically, socially and economically. Empowered women are free from all type of restrictions which are imposing upon them by the patriarchal society. They can live according to their own priorities and maintain their strength, self-esteem, self-respect in the society. They can also use their strength and skills to live freely without any restriction. These are the themes to be discussed through the protagonist of the novel- Hester Prynne.

Aim of the Study

The paper discusses the various themes of women empowerment from different perspectives. It highlights the conditions of women in the society and it also represents the power and strength of women through which they can establish their identity in the society. Through out the history it is evident women in the society have always been played a pivotal role to make the civilized society and for the development of the country. In the society their contribution has always been uncared and insignificant. The term empowerment means to give power and the term women empowerment means when women get power through education, awareness and economic independency to understand their own worth in the society. These characteristics assist them to stop domestic violence and exploitation. If the women are economically independent they can take part in the process of decision making which play a vital role for the development of the country. It will help to spread awareness among women to overcome social and political barriers, and strengthening them to participate in the economic and political process for the improvement in their quality of lives.



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Main Text of the Study

Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* published in 1850. It is counted among the masterpieces of American literature. It opens with a long introduction about how the book came into existence. The novel presents a sad tale of love and betrayal set within the context of Seventeenth - century Puritan New England. Hawthorne narrates the story of Hester Prynne, female protagonist of the novel who is condemned by Puritan law to wear the letter 'A' on her bosom as a punishment for adultery. The story throws light on several issues of seventeenth century and it is set in a Puritan context and their rules. It has been read with different interpretation of sin and its consequences, of social isolation, of redemption, of passion and love of an individual struggling against society's convention. Hawthorne has profound interest in Puritanism and Salem witch trails. He had studied the history of his ancestors which played a vital role in witch trails. So many females were to be sentenced by them in the accusation of witch trails and this makes him sad. Hawthorne is the writer who chooses females to hold chief importance playing the lead role in the novel. As it is stated by the Devaleena Das in her book *Critical study of Nathaniel Hawthorne* The Scarlet Letter:

Though popularly known as a Romance writer, Nathaniel Hawthorne is equally brilliant in dealing with the most poignant issues of his days- Puritanism and its effects Transcendentalism and Feminism. (Chapter 1 Devaleena Das)

Hawthorne always promotes and comprehends the inner strength of a woman which always seen in his writings. Even he applies this in his novels *The Scarlet Letter* and *The House of Seven Gables*.

This chapter discusses the theme of empowerment of women through the analysis of female protagonist Hester Prynne. Though being a woman she is considered inferior in Puritan society but she challenges the society and also presents a new image of woman who is strong, self- dependent, self confident, rebellious, optimistic and kind hearted which are considered the themes of women empowerment. An empowered woman is defined in the terms of a sense of self worth, dignity, self – reliance and equipped with intelligence and Hester Prynne fulfills all these criteria

The novel opens with long introduction named *The Custom House* which includes Hawthorne's short autobiography, personal experience as a surveyor, manuscript of *The Scarlet letter*, description of society of his time and thoughts about Puritanism. In the chapter he tells the readers how he discovered a number of documents and a manuscript which was bundled with a scarlet, gold- embroidered patch of cloth in the shape of an 'A' which is the work of a custom Surveyor Jonathan Poe, a hundred years earlier. When Hawthorne lost his job due to political changes, he decided to write fiction which is recorded in the manuscript in the form of *The Scarlet Letter*. The story is set in the context of 17th century Boston of Puritan settlement New England. Hester Prynne,

the protagonist of the novel, emerges from the prison door and leads towards Scaffold, a raised platform in the market place with her infant daughter Pearl in her arms and the scarlet letter 'A' on her breast. The Scarlet letter 'A' stitched in gold embroidered badge. She is being punished for adultery and present before the crowd amid disparaging comments about Hester's adultery. When she was asked about the partner and the father of her child but she denied revealing the truth. The crowd condemns Hester Prynne for her adultery. Suddenly in the crowd, Hester spots her husband Roger Chillingworth, who is a scholar and disguise physician. He had sent her wife to America alone. While waiting for her husband, Hester has an affair and she gives birth to a child named Pearl and gets imprisoned, publicly disgraced and forced to wear a scarlet letter 'A' for committing adultery and bearing an illegitimate child Pearl.

Though Roger is dressed in a strange combination of traditional European clothing and Native American dress, Hester recognizes him. When Roger comes to know about Hester's crime and punishment, he settles in Boston for taking revenge and trying to find out the father of Hester's child. Roger does not reveal his identity to anyone except his wife Hester. Several years, Hester lives with her daughter and supports herself and her daughter by working as a seamstress. Once community officials attempts to take Pearl away from Hester but with the help of Arthur Dimmesdale, a young and eloquent minister, Hester and Pearl manage to stay together. Later it is discovered that Arthur Dimmesdale, is the father of pearl. He is the minister who seeks to establish his place among the Puritan divines of New England. Being afraid on the revelation of his fatherhood to the society and it affects him that he suffers from mysterious heart trouble. Roger Chillingworth gets involve with Arthur Dimmesdale for some intention and he also suspects some connection between Dimmesdale's torments and Hester's secret. And one day when Dimmesdale sleeps, Chillingworth discovers a mark 'A' on his breast which probes that his suspicions are correct.

Dimmesdale Psychological agony gets intense when he comes to know about Hester's charitable deeds and quiet humility relieve her from the disdain of the community. Once upon a time when Pearl and Hester are returning from a visit to a death bed, they encounter with Dimmesdale standing at Scaffold and trying to punish himself for his sins. Hester and Pearl also join him. When Hester comes to know about the involvement of Roger Chillingworth for the miserable condition of Dimmesdale, she restrains him but he refuses.

One day Hester arranges the meeting with Dimmesdale in the forest to reveal Roger's identity to him. She also encourages Dimmesdale to leave Boston and get settled down in Europe with Pearl and make a new family and live freely. They plan to take a ship to Boston in four days. Both feel a sense of freedom and Hester removes her Scarlet letter and scarf and let down her hairs. The day before voyage begins, the town people gather for a holiday and Dimmesdale preaches his most eloquent sermon.

Meanwhile Hester comes to know about Roger's plans that he has also booked the same ship for spying. After leaving the Church, Dimmesdale sees Hester and Pearl standing before the town scaffold. He climbs the Scaffold with Hester and Pearl and confesses publicly, with exposing a Scarlet letter which sears into the flesh of his chest. Then he falls dead.

A year later Chillingworth dies. Hester and Pearl leave Boston and after many years, when Hester returns alone, still wearing the scarlet letter to live in her old cottage and resumes her charitable work. She receives letter from her daughter Pearl who married to a European aristocrat and established a family of her own. When Hester dies, she is buried next to Dimmesdale. Both share single tombstone, which bears a scarlet letter 'A'.

Hawthorne is the first American novelist to write a novel with a female protagonist and his female characters are strong, independent and self-confident. In the novel, he creates a new image of woman through the delineation of Hester Prynne, a female protagonist of the novel. Hester Prynne represents the image of an empowered woman through her different actions and skills. Though she suffers tremendously because of public humiliation and forced to wear a scarlet letter 'A' for committing adultery yet as a strong woman she does not compromise and never accepts obligation of the Puritan laws and always aspires for freedom and individuality. She conserves her self-respect and protects herself through intellect, forming a new image possessing qualities of rebellious spirit, self-reliance and strong mind. These are the qualities of empowered women who never care about laws of society and live their own life without fear and hesitation. And Hester Prynne is the one who represents the image of a new woman in the Puritan society of seventeenth century.

In the beginning of the novel, when she walks to the scaffold from prison, and women of the crowd criticize her by saying 'This woman has brought Shame upon us all and ought to die... thank themselves if their own wives and daughter go astray!' (49) The exclamation from the crowd "Mercy on us good wife", is there no virtue in woman, save what springs from a wholesome fear of the gallows?" (49) these lines represent the conditions of the women in the patriarchal society who are always considered inferior to men in the society; extra marital relationship is taken to be a crime and consequently culpable. It is accepted in the society that women are fine with household responsibility; and don't have their own rights. However Hester Prynne is the one who transgresses the code of the puritan society by satisfying her wish and desire through adultery. This is the reason she has not been accepted by the society but disgraced. But Hester has no regret and shame for her deed moreover she is confident, holds her head high with dignity and stands alone without fear as author narrates her personality that she 'stepped into the open air, as if by her own free-will' (50) by keeping her baby in her arms. She represents a rebellious spirit and her strong will is

reflected in her refined needlework of the Scarlet letter. She decorates it beautifully as 'fantastic flourished of gold- thread' (50) which is against the Puritan law as they want somber, unadorned attire. Through her personality and the decoration of the scarlet letter, she illustrates pride in her isolation. She feels agonized but her face reveals no such thoughts and her deportment described as 'with burning blush and yet a haughty smile and a glance that would not be abashed...' (50). She displays a dignity and a grace that expose deep trust and confidence in her. When she was asked about the name his lover but she replied with confidence and courage 'never... I will not speak' (65). This scene of the novel plays a vital role because here the personality of Hester can be identified as an empowered woman who has courage to face the crowd and answer them with confidence. Here Hester is not getting nervous or puzzled but with courage she replies to the crowd. After her declaration Arthur Dimmesdale relieves and praises her courage that 'wondrous strength and generosity of a woman's heart!' (65). It is noticeable that as the Dimmesdale elucidates the point of view of the author and the concepts of an empowered woman personified in the protagonist of the novel. Hester defines her own identity instead of letting other do it for her. The reoccurrence of the events display her self-reliance and her adherence to self-conceived ideology. When Governor Bellingham, a minister of the community wants Pearl's guardianship, Hester defends her with enormous courage and also shows that her badge is not a punishment but enlightenment. She claims 'it daily teaches me;' (107) and she can teach her little Pearl what she has learned from this. Hester forms the image of rebellious strong woman who is not subservient to the autocracy of the society. She defends her right to raise her daughter Pearl bravely while in the confrontation with Governor Bellingham. This is her first speak of rebel and challenge to Church. For the sake of the safety of her daughter she cries almost a tierce expression. She is also grateful for the Almighty which shows her gratitude towards God's decision as she states in the novel. 'God gave me the child. He gave her in requital of all things else, which ye had taken from me. She is my happiness... God gave her into my keeping... I will not give her up.' (107). Hester through her actions proves herself as an audacious woman and a personality of strong single mother. It is the notion of the society that single mother is not able to bring up her child but Hester represents her amazing energy to prove herself as a strong woman and able mother. She represents her strength, free will by decorating her scarlet letter and by taking the custody of her daughter against the wish of Puritans. Her courage is defined in the terms of Leland S. Person in her paper *Puritans and Feminists Women's Issues in Nathaniel Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter*:

Hawthorne has his heroine break the rules of female submission by elaborately decorating her badge of shame, conducting herself proudly, and refusing to allow those in power to remove her child from her (as nineteenth-century divorced men could legally do).

Hester's historical connections to the Puritans and the nineteenth-century reformists highlight her feminism and her belief that the whole fabric of society must be changed for woman to have equality, opportunity, independence, and a voice. (57 Leland S. Person)

Hester's action proves her strength, courage to challenge the norms of the Puritan society and her strong will, which enables her to find out methods to rescue her selves and her daughter. Though she is an ordinary woman she is independent thinker and hides her rebellious desires beneath her calm nature and also shows her extraordinary courage and rebellious spirit for her infeasible rights. During the seven years of her isolation, she experiences her conversion as liberation of the self which makes her true. Through her needle art, she stitches clothes and supplies food to the needy ones. Her fine needlework can be seen in noble and holy places as Hawthorne states:

Sufficed to supply food for her thriving infant and herself... her needlework was seen on the rellf of the governor; military men wore it on their scarves, and the minister on his hand; it decked the baby's little cap; it was shut up to be mildewed and molded away, in the coffins of the dead. (39)

Hester gets economically self refined through her needle work. She never prays to God's help, nor does she turn to her lover Dimmesdale or her husband Chillingworth who have been responsible for her miserable life. She is delineated an empowered woman who is independent and can earn with her own efforts and intelligence. Although Hester has been rejected by society but she is accepted by nature. The forest becomes the only possible place where Hester expresses her hidden strength. As Nina Baym expressed her views on the strength and courage in her paper *Hester as Hero* in Women's issue in Nathaniel Hawthorne's:

Hester's actions and strengths reveal her to be a true hero. Her power is shown, early on, in her decision to remain in Boston. The letter she wears never changes her inwardly, as is evident from her radical musings and her forest conversation with Dimmesdale. (67 Nina)

Hester's beautiful hair is hidden under the cap; her beauty and warmth are gone. When Hester removes the letter and takes off her cap in the forest, and encourages her lover Dimmesdale to abandon the world to look for another, since the universe is not limited to the city boundaries. She becomes the radiant beauty. When Hester does these actions actually she removes the burden of social laws provided by the Puritans. In the end of the novel Hawthorne writes Hester becomes a strong woman and her scarlet letter 'A' which is known for 'adultery' eventually becomes symbol of 'able':

The letter was the symbol of her calling. Such helpfulness was found in her, - so much power to do, and power to sympathize, - that many people refused to interpret the scarlet

A by its original signification. They said that it meant Able; so strong was Hester Prynne, with a woman's strength. (152)

Roger Chillingworth: alias is Roger Prynne is an English scholar who moves to the New World with his wife Hester Prynne. He attempts to migrate from England to Puritan Boston and for this purpose, sends his wife to set up a life in Boston and he fails to come with her due to some problems at sea and is being captive by Indian for a year. When he arrives, Boston, he finds Hester on Scaffold, being shamed for adultery. He meets Hester in jail by disguising himself as a doctor and pressurizes her to reveal the identity of his partner. But when Hester refuses, he decides to live in Boston by assuming the new name Roger Chillingworth to disguise his identity from the society as well as to hide his relationship with Hester to avenge upon her lover. After some time he discovers that her lover is the town minister, Arthur Dimmesdale. He disguise himself as a doctor to take revenge with Arthur, he treats his unexplained sickness. He manipulates Arthur Dimmesdale into insanity who he confesses of sin publicly before dying. Roger plays a role of villain in the novel. He represents a man of Patriarchal society through his character where woman is supposed to be of lower status and confined with the norms of the Puritan society. Roger never fulfills his own duties towards his wife Hester. When she was being disgraced publicly he does not come to help her or even the town people of the Puritan Society rather blaming her husband, they blame Hester for her present condition by giving statement. 'Wife of certain learned man...he sent his wife before him, remaining himself to look after some necessary affairs' (59). According to this statement, Roger has some personal work that is the reason why he left his wife for two years. Society should blame Roger rather than Hester for not taking care of his wife. Roger is an irresponsible husband who knows how to take revenge with Hester's lover but doesn't know his own responsibilities towards his wife. Hester has also some emotions and feelings for her husband but Roger never care for these emotions. When he comes to know about Hester's adultery he starts to take revenge with her lover. Through out the novel he tries to take revenge with her lover Dimmesdale without thinking of the condition of his wife that how she manages the things, how she has brought up her daughter. In short he is negligent about all his duties and he never supports her physically, mentally and financially.

Arthur Dimmesdale is another male character of the novel. He is an ordained Puritan minister who is fully devoted to God, passionate in his religion and effective in the pulpit. He is well educated and has a philosophical turn of mind. According to the Puritan norms, he has to restrict his desires to a married woman but because of uncontrollable lust, he commits adultery with Hester Prynne. Unlike Hester, he does not confess his guilt publicly, and throughout the narrative he endures the agony of undisclosed guilt. On the one hand, he really wants to get rid of this agony and on the other hand he lacks courage to confess his sin to the Puritan community as he does

not want to spoil his image. In the end of the novel when he meets Hester in the forest he expresses his love for Hester but not able to show it in front of public. Even in the forest Hester encourages him to flee to Europe in order to make a fresh start. Here, this is the second time when he acts according to his own emotions and feelings rather than the norms of Puritan society. As Hawthorne expresses his thoughts in *The Scarlet Letter*:

The decision once made, a glow of strange enjoyment threw it flickering brightness over the trouble his breast. It was the exhilarating effect- upon a prisoner just escaped from the dungeon of his own heart- of breathing the wild, free atmosphere of an unredeemed, unchristianized, lawless region (192)

In this scene he feels freedom and wants to forget all the titles and burdens he has from the society. He feels that he might have enough power to surmount to all the obstacles and fight against Puritan society. But when he leaves the forest, the agony of remorse surrounds him. Arthur Dimmesdale has been suffering from this agony for last seven years and the only moment he feels relief is when he delivers his last sermon to the congregation. At the end of the novel he experiences a sense of deep relief by confessing his sinful act in front of the people. By confessing his sin he feels endless peace and redemption that he has been searching for seven years. His relief and belief in God's mercy can be understood by these lines:

For thee and pearl, be it as God shall order; said the minister; 'and God is merciful! let me now do the will which he hath made plain before sight. For, Hester, I am a dying man. So let me make haste to take my shame upon me;' (240)

Dimmesdale's relief is only because he leaves this world with clean soul by confessing his sin to public. He purifies his soul and finds peace when he reaches God. Dimmesdale's peace and relief can be seen by these lines

My little Pearl; said he feebly- and there was a sweet and gentle smile over his face, as of a spirit sinking into deep repose; nay, now that the burden was removed it seemed almost as if he would be sportive with the child,- " dear little Pearl wilt thou kiss me now? (242)

Lastly Dimmesdale achieves unification with his family. By revealing his sin and admitting Pearl as his daughter. It helps him find redemption and peace in death. Dimmesdale also represents the Patriarchal society where men are free from all the norms of the community. In the case of Dimmesdale, through out the novel, he suffers greatly from his sinful act and he wants to confess his sin to the public in order to free himself from the burdens of his guilt. He is the lover of Hester and also the father of her child but he never presents any sense of responsibility towards Hester and Pearl. He is self- centered who always think about his own guilt and sin but never think about his own liabilities towards his actual family. He keeps relationships with Hester but when it

comes to his dignity, he never supports her. Community has strong faith in Dimmesdale, this is the reason why his pains grow day by day as he does not want to spoil his image in the Puritan society.

Dimmesdale is not courageous like Hester who faces shame publicly. Dimmesdale confesses his guilt and sin publicly so that he can go to the God with clean soul and peace. And lastly he dies by confessing his sin and guilt publicly only to make his soul free from all the burdens and leaves Hester and pearl alone. Dimmesdale just knows his duties towards God and society only but not for his love Hester and daughter Pearl. As he states in these lines: 'that I leave no public duty imperformed, nor ill performed' This confession makes him relieved. He says farewell to his family and dies without sharing a life with his real family and even though never thinks about Hester and Pearl, that how will they live without him. He is not as strong as Hester Prynne to confront the results of his confession. Hester has lived with Pearl for seven long years without any patriarchal help. Even during these seven years Dimmesdale never thinks about his own responsibility towards his family. Hester brought up her child with the torment of her neighbors and shame of her Scarlet letter.

In the novel Hester represents the image of an empowered woman who never cares about the society, takes her own decisions, earns her livelihood and live with dignity. Hawthorne creates a woman protagonist who is endowed with stunning beauty, sexuality, artistry and intelligence. His biographers always tried to probe into his reserved nature as well as his reactions of ubiquitous presence of various pervasive women in his personal and professional life. These women not only influenced him but also presents in his writings. It is believed that the character of Hester is the reflection of his widowed mother Elizabeth Manning who struggled a lot to rear her children without the help of patriarchal society. And the self- dependent and rebellious nature of Hester is believed to be taken from Hawthorn's close acquaintanceship with Margaret Fuller. This is asserted by David B. Kesterson who writes:

Margaret Fuller, author of one of America's first feminist texts, has often been considered as one of the models for Hester Prynne. Her character also contributes to Hawthorne's protagonists in other novels...Like Hester, fuller reportedly conceived a child out of wedlock, though she was married to her son's father at the time of her death.(34 Kesterson)

He had always been indulged in the history of Salem witch trials in which women were only victims who has been sentenced by his ancestors. The reality of Salem witch trials really affects him and his writings as he always feel guilty because his ancestors were played a vital role in this crime. Even he studied the laws of old colony which he discussed four years before *The Scarlet Letter*. R. Thomas Mitchell states that:

"The life of a woman who by old colony laws, was condemned always to wear the letter 'A'

sewed on her garment, in token of her having committed adultery”

Through his master piece novel he presents the reality of Puritan society who never cares about the women's feelings and rights. The woman who involves in adultery she has wear the token. This is also done with Hester Prynne but her Hawthorne presents her as not a victim but as a strong woman who knows her rights and liberty. Hester Prynne is courageous woman in the novel who never loses her hope and desires. Hawthorne was well aware with the qualities of a woman because he has been surrounded by females such as his mother, sisters, wife and his daughters who always motivates and encourages him. This is the reason that he has a soft corner for women. As James and Mellow states in *Nathaniel Hawthorne in his times* that:

Hawthorne spent much of his childhood in a household of active women. He lived with his Grandmother, Miriam Manning, two aunts, his mother and sisters and Hannah Lord, a Manning niece who worked as a servant (16 James and Mellow)

So Hawthorne really comprehends the qualities and capabilities of a woman and even he realized the real womanhood who is not only delicates in nature and love but also strong enough to handle the critical situations of the life. Hester Prynne is one of them who empowered and liberal in her thoughts.

Nathaniel Hawthorne is the first writer of America who introduces a rich variety of female characters as a protagonist endowed with beauty, sexuality and intelligence. Even in his short stories and Romances, female characters are strong, independent and enduring repercussion patriarchal society. In nineteenth century, women were supposed to be stay indoors and take care of their children and responsibilities of the family. They were not allowed to raise their voice against the society and they are asked to behave according to the codes and customs of the society. Hawthorne introduces women as a protagonist at the time when women were subjugating by patriarchal society. Hawthorne is the man whose life is always surrounded by women that had a great impact on his creativity. And this impact always directs in his writings. The company of women like his widowed mother, two sisters and his intellectual wife who has made him realize that women are spiritual emotional and intellectual partners not object of dominance and subjugation. Nathaniel Hawthorne in one of his letters in the Salem Gazette writes a biographical essay on Anne Hutchinson, the American feminism. In the letter she has been portrayed by him as a strong woman with strong convictions that the town people find offensive. He presents her as smart, talented and brave but ultimately she is silenced by the leaders of the town. This letter presents the inner quality and strength of a woman and discusses the attitude and approach of a Puritan Society towards women. In a very impressive manner he expresses the strength and capability of the American women that they can surmount any barriers put forth by the circumstances. He writes:

As yet, the great body of American women are a domestic race; but when a continuance of illjudged incitement shall have turned their hearts away from the fireside, there are obvious circumstances which will render female pens move numerous and more prolific than those men, though but equally encouraged; and the ink stained amazons will expel their rivals by actual pressure, and petticoats wave triumphantly over all the field (Mrs Hutchinson 12)

These expressions regarding women makes clear that Nathaniel Hawthorne's perception of woman and predominance of their inner strength which he presents in his novels *The Scarlet Letter* and rest of his other novels. Hawthorne attempts to presents the modern eve who is according to him, is a forerunner of salvation not a blind follower of Adam. As he discussed in his short story "The New Adam and Eve" that is Eve who is rejecting the age old stigmatization that she is a temptress. For Hawthorne men like Dimmesdale, Chillingworth need such type of modern eves who can give them spiritual guidance as Hester has given them in the novel. As Devleena Das states in her book '*Critical Study of Nathaniel Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter*' that :

'Gilbert and Guber in *The Madwoman in the Attic* explain how the virtue of a 'good woman' remains in her virtue "making her man great". The Angel is meant to please the man, to lift him up and to give him the appearance of greatness. Gilbert and Gubar also suggest... "For the more secular nineteenth century... the eternal type of female purity was represented not by a Madonna in heaven but by an angel in the house. (chapter 6 Devleena Das)

Through the depiction of Hester Prynne Hawthorne presents the position of women in the society. In the novel the market place scene where women were criticizing Hester for her extra marital relationship represents the conditions of women and also reveals the lack of power and authority. Their opinions show the repression of their desire which Hester Prynne succeeds in translating into concrete reality. Through Hester, Hawthorne represents a complete woman who is confident full of strength, self-independent and fortitude. In the novel though she is the woman of seventeenth century, but presents the image of modern American woman of nineteenth century who is not afraid of the society and dare to exemplify the concept of single motherhood. Hester in her own way dominates society by having relationship with two men and she transforms herself from an obedient woman into a strong self willed individual. Being a married woman she still hopes to reunite with her lover Dimmesdale. It reflects her spirit of rebellion and by the end of the novel; she represents an empowered woman as well as a proto- feminist mother figure. A Single mother, widowed mother, abandoned mother, impoverished mother and criminal mother are not accepted by the Puritans. But Hester uses motherhood as her weapon against patriarchy. Anne Hutchinson was banished from the society and

killed in an Indian attack. But Hester after having punishment from the puritan society to wear Scarlet letter on her bosom, lives at the outskirts and enjoys freedom as well as her motherhood unlike other women of New England. Hawthorne's description of the first appearance of Hester Prynne with baby is similar to the descriptive character sketch of Anne Hutchinson:

In the midst, and in the centre of all eyes, we see the woman. She stands loftily before her judges with a determined brow and unknown to her-self, there is a flash of carnal pride half hidden in her eyes, as she surveys the many learned and famous men whom her doctrines have put in fear" (10 Hawthorne)

Through out the novel Hester Prynne reflects the quality of empowered women who is never afraid from the society and has positive attitude. Hester Prynne in the novel is the perfect example of modern woman who has spirit of female leadership, independent decision maker and above all having spirit of both father as well as mother. Hester becomes mother at her own will and also made a choice. She continues her day to day existence with dignity, raises her daughter in her own way, acknowledges her own will and by her social service and kindness she changes the definition of The Scarlet Letter 'A' is not the letter of shame but it is the letter of her autonomous strength untouched by masculinity. Unlike Dimmesdale and Chillingworth who are pre-occupied with their own sufferings, Hester Prynne being an empowered woman is able to realize the suffering of Minister and plays the role of motivator. Keeping aside her own pain and sorrow she feels the pain of others. Firstly being involved in adultery she was not accepted by the society but later she has been accepted because she becomes selfless maternal figure. Her endurance and patience are extraordinary that people develop admiration for her because of her immense strength to endure the entire sorrow that life has in store for her. Being an empowered and liberal woman, she expresses her desire, love, rebellious spirit and benevolence deportment toward others. As Devaleen das writes in her book '*Critical Study of Nathaniel Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter*':

'If the German Philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche has developed the discourse of "the superman" who is the incarnation of human will power, then Hester Prynne can definitely be claimed as "super woman" who has the extraordinary strength of emerging with feminine will power'(chapter 6 Devaleena Das).

At the end of the novel when Dimmesdale and Chillingworth died she has an opportunity to leave the place and can go anywhere but she remains in New England and presents individualism and liberty. Throughout her life Hester chooses her own path and lives with individuality. Being involved in an unwanted relationship with Dimmesdale and gives birth to Pearl, she decides to keep away Pearl from the Puritanical society, she chooses to return back to

New England and wears the scarlet letter proudly till the end of her life, finally because of her own choice. Nina Baym's essay, "Revisiting Hawthorne's Feminism," describes Hester as the new heroine of American literature:

In Hester Prynne, Hawthorne created the first true heroine of American fiction, as well as one of its enduring heroes. Hester is a heroine because she is deeply implicated in, and responsive to, the gender structure of her society, and because her story, turning on "love" is appropriate for a woman. She is a hero because she has qualities and actions that transcend their gender reference and lead to heroism as it can be understood for anyone. (98 Nina)

Conclusion

Thus through this ultimate creation of an empowered woman Hawthorne has tried to represent the image of new woman of the world. All the female characters are empowered with their intelligence and skills. Though they all are of simple personality but they all are empowered that they never give up or compromise with the challenges of their life rather they fight with it and set their own image in the society.

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