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The Book of Lamentations

Oficio de tinieblas is a novel written by Rosario Castellanos which was published in 1962. Mayan Indians were uprising in Chipas, a Mexican city during 1712s and 1868s. The Book of Lamentations includes a wealth of information which gives us knowledge about the nature and universality of oppression during the years 1712-1868.

The plot for this novel does not have only a single character; it has a number of characters including Julia, Isabel, Fernando, and Catalina. The book of Lamentations is mentioned in the period of Hezekiah to the exile (586-686), and it is placed after Jeremiah. Rosario was much concerned about the indigenous people and worked for her family. By creating characters in her novel, she shows her satisfaction for the level and place of women in Mexican society. The chronology is mentioned in historical events such as rape cases and takeover by the landlords. This book starts with the promises of government officials with the Indians to return their lands and rights which were taken by the Ladinos.

**Racial Discrimination**

In 1860, the Mayan Indians were uprising against the rule of the white class of the Chipan state. In the late 1920s, poor Indians were considered slaves and they served as mules. Castellanos, in her novel, reflects the oppression, miserable situations like slavery and punishments and the ignorant behaviors of the white people. Indians used to hide in caves and were living life in fear because of Caxlans oppressions. People of Caxlans kept acting against them, Indians as hopeless and without power could not fight back (362). Indians were silent in this situation and they were hopeless.

 There were gender issues, racial discrimination such as differentiation among white people and Indians, and the class system. The landowners were exploiting Indians by misguiding the politicians and creating clashes among corrupt religious leaders who were indulged in the greed for power-grabbing. Upper class was the reason for injustice in the valley of Chamula. They defeated the Indians and took away their lands, they were hopeless and made them slaves. In Chamula, Indians were treated unequally they were living a dark life and they were not able to raise voice for their rights. Chamula was different before “a place of small rivers and fog” (360). Indians were afraid because of oppressions, they were angry but they were hopeless because they had no power and authority. They were nothing more than slaves and mules.

**Gender discrimination**

Castellanos sheds light on the gender discriminatory behaviors of the people, and explains that the incidents kept repeating in history. She is well aware of how a woman is treated without her children, this seems very ugly and unsupportive (p.315). Wife of Winikton being childless decides to marry a girl being raped by a Ladino with her brother. She is the wife of a judge, becomes superior over the women in the community for marrying the victim with her brother who was a retarded person. The Indians were treated based on their races and they were discriminated against. After taking lands away from them, they were sexually abused, they were enslaved, Indian religion was targeted and they tried to mislead people. Leonardo Cifuentes raped and Indian girl, the community decided to execute him but it was considered as a threat for the Ciudad Real leaders, later on, they left the city to save Leonardo. The father Baltzcar defended the people of Chamula and claimed that they were not doing anything wrong and they were obeying the laws. They were no creating any violence in the area. (pg. 348).

Marcela was taken advantage of by a man from Caxlan, she was not supposed to act against and resist against him, Dona Mercedes gives money to stay silent but Marcela throws the money back to Dona, afterward she shouts at Marcela by saying "filthy Indians" (pg. 14). The power was a weapon for white people to make Indians polite and silent so they could no act against them.

Women were treated very badly, they were raped, beaten and they had no recognition at that time. The societal mindset was that women were considered as submissive to their husbands and they had to obey them no matter what they say. Catalin being childless becomes a symbol of inefficacy and a symbol to start a rebellion.

**Conclusion**

Racial discrimination, sexual abuse, and mindset of the class system were part of the society, and such injustices have been repeated in the historical events (p. 315). Events like rape of Indian girl is an example of gender discrimination and sexual abuse of women in the society. The writer tried to convey some messages, that there are social pressures for women and they are expected to fulfill the demands of others. Women of all ages have faced issues and it is continuing. This novel reflected the oppressions and injustices systems which existed in the past and one can learn from the past experiences to avoid and act against the injustices prevailing in the society. One can learn about the consequences of being polite and hopeless. However, Castellanos has tried to highlight the issues of feminine and how being powerless and ignorant can kill the spirit of individuals. However, the incidents from history have been exaggerated and being an outsider the writer is considered as hypocrisy and ignorance which she left behind in the provincial world. Outsider’s ideas and perspective in the novel leaves a way for criticism.

**Works Cited**

Castellanos, R. (1998). *The Book of Lamentations*. Penguin Books.