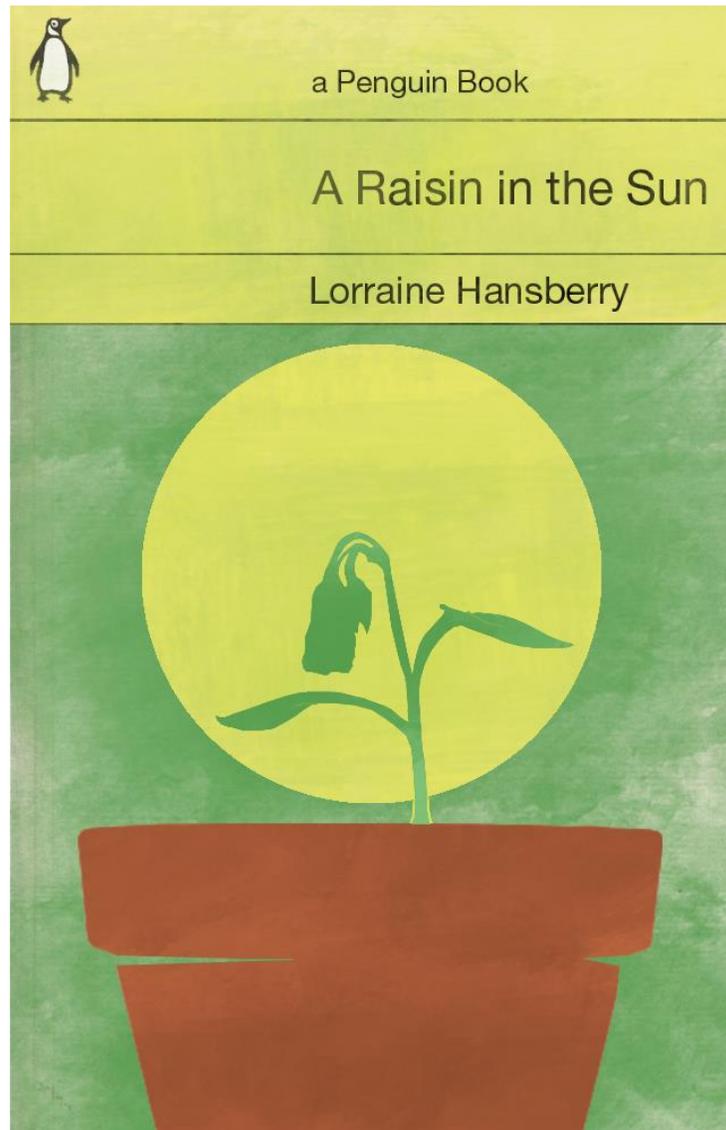

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**Power of Love in Moulding Black's Dignity in Lorraine Hansberry's
*A Raisin in the Sun***

A. Kandhan and Dr. P. Prem Chandar



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Abstract

The progress of American drama both as an art and a medium of expression has been witnessed with the dawn of the twentieth century. Joseph Wood Krutch states that significant American drama emerged during the 1920's, when it became a serious part of American Literature. The Province town which was the considered to be the cradle of American Drama also had given impetus to several women playwrights. These female playwrights have showcased the frenzy and confrontation experienced by them, in the society they lived, in their works.

Passionate, confident and committed, they struggled through art to bring about fruition in the lives of black Americans. They perceived the world from feminine perspective to provide much to the American theatre in the name of new subject matter, powerful dialogue and variety in characterization.



Lorraine Hansbury

Courtesy: <https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/black-women-in-art-and-literature/pictures/black-women-authors/playwright-lorraine-hansberry>

Lorraine Hansbury is one of the most prolific writers whose poetic voices occupied a special place in American Theatre. She dedicated her life for fighting the violent forces which destroyed human beings. She beautifully presents the tension and frustrations of the blacks' existence in USA through the characters in her dramas. And this paper suggests the theme that power of love in moulding the blacks' dignity and self-respect in Lorraine Hansbury's *A Raisin in the Sun*.

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A Raisin in the Sun

The progress of American drama both as an art and a medium of expression has been witnessed with the dawn of the twentieth century. Joseph Wood Krutch states that significant American drama emerged during the 1920's, when it became a serious part of American Literature. The Province town which was the considered to be the cradle of American Drama also had given impetus to several women playwrights. These female playwrights have showcased the frenzy and confrontation experienced by them, in the society they lived, in their works.

Passionate, confident and committed, they struggled through art to bring about fruition in the lives of black Americans. They perceived the world from feminine perspective to provide much to the American theatre in the name of new subject matter, powerful dialogue and variety in characterization. Lorraine Hansberry is one of the most prolific writers whose poetic voices occupied a special place in American Theatre. She dedicated her life for fighting the violent forces which destroyed human beings. She beautifully presents the tension and frustrations of the blacks' existence in USA through the characters in her dramas. She was often celebrated as "St. Joan of the Black Cultural Revival".

A Raisin in the Sun was her first play which was produced at Broadway in 1959. And with the staging of her play, she gained widespread reputation and won the New York Drama Critics Circle award for the best American play. The play portrays the life of a black family living on Chicago's south side struggling to hold the family together with the power of love to gain self-dignity among the White neighbourhood.

The play focuses on the Younger family—Lena Younger (Mama), a sixty-year-old matriarch of the family is carved as a strong, confident and pious lady who was shown as a symbol of love. Her husband Walter Lee Sr., has suffered a lot and died due to overwork but remained an inevitable moral force to unite the family among several hardships. Walter Lee Jr., a thirty-five years old son of Mrs. Younger, who is a chauffeur aspired to start a business to enhance the dignity of his family's social status. Ruth, his wife is portrayed as a lovable personality who can even go to the extent to abort her child for the sake of her family. Benetha, Mrs. Younger's only daughter wishes to enhance her social status and dignity by pursuing medicine as her career and do service to the society.

A Black Family's Uphill Battle from Poverty

The play is the story of a black family's uphill battle from poverty and of the dreams and delusions. Its theme is the need to recognise that personal pride and dignity lie in a refusal to allow one's own possibilities to be determined by others. Their inheritance enables them to challenge the rules written and unwritten by the white society.

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The play goes beyond the hackneyed complexities of blacks and whites. It has an immense issue which last for generations. Walter Lee's difficulty is that he wants to inherit the American dream of success. Each one of the characters is in pursuit of his/her goal. Their dreams do not dry up like raisin in the sun nor do they explode. Mama wants her children to be worthy and self-esteemed citizens in the society. She insisted on having good qualities in them and always guided them to step in the right direction.

When Walter decides to accept the offer made by Karl Linder, on the compromise that they shall withdraw their plans of moving into the white neighbourhood, Mama retorts by insisting "Son – I come from five generations of people who was slaves and share croppers – but ain't nobody in my family never let nobody pay 'em no money, that was a way of telling us we wasn't fit to walk the earth. We ain't never been that poor ... we aint't never been that dead inside" (143).

Purchase a House

Mama's aim to purchase a house in the white neighbourhood shows her faith in dignity and honour. It shows her dream of reconciliation with the whites. She envisages a bright future when the blacks and whites would live together like the members of a family. Ruth's dreams are somewhat similar to that of her mother-in-law. She yearns for a comfortable living place for her family. She wants her baby to be aborted in order to reduce the financial burden of the family.

Her dreams are like mirage because of the condition that she is black, poor and also a woman. Benetha and Joseph Asagai represent the new values in the modern American social scenario. Benetha aspires to become a doctor to enhance the conditions of her family through education. But much more, she wants to hold on her dignity. Each and every character in the play seeks an opportunity to win over and to prove themselves not inferior to anyone in the world.

Struggling for Independence

Hansberry was a lover of freedom. The characters in her plays struggle for independence and identity. They rebel against the forces that try to destroy their dreams and aspirations. They are prepared to struggle to become free but not prepared to live as slaves. *A Raisin in the Sun* is about human dignity and talks of the attitude we must have towards the material things in life. The implied message is that we should not become slaves to the material things but must have control over them.

The play held an optimistic view of life and believed that it could be reconstructed. In Atkinson's essay on "The Theatre: *A Raisin in the Sun*", he expresses his view on the play that it "has a vigour as well as veracity and is likely to destroy the complacency of anyone who sees

it.... It is a play about human beings who want, on the one hand, to preserve their family pride and on the other hand, to break out of the poverty that seems to be their fate” (345).

Title of the Play

The title of the play suggests that one has to make attempts to fulfil his dream; otherwise life will be futile. The Younger’s family dreams are only deferred temporarily; they have not dried up. There are hopes for fulfilment of their dreams. Walter has not become rich but now, he deserves his position as the head of the family and they have managed to get out of the ghetto. Ruth has to work but now she has new responsibilities.

Beneatha may not be able to continue her medical course, but she may join hands with Asagai in building a strong society. Thus, the title is puzzling. But it is certain that the Youngers are not going to explode in rebellion against the Whites. They no longer consider the oppression of the White people as hindrance. They will learn to adjust themselves to the white values and to maintain a permanent harmonious atmosphere.

The family becomes a paradigm showing the path to mould the blacks’ dignity with the power of love. In her play, she tries to convince people that the world is beautiful, and one can live a wonderful life if he learns to understand and love people.

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