



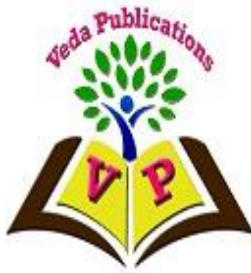
RESEARCH ARTICLE

**STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL IN NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE'S****THE SCARLET LETTER: FEMINIST PURSUITS**

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*(Associate Professor, English, Department of Education, RTM Al-Kabir Technical University, Sylhet, Bangladesh)*Doi: <https://doi.org/10.54513/JOELL.2024.11404>**ABSTRACT**

This article aims to address how Nathaniel Hawthorne portrays the character of Hester Prynne embarking on her life under the presumption that the protagonist, Hester, is morally deficient due to her act of adultery, which is considered very forbidden in her day. The analysis tries to consist of many explanations to facilitate the readers' comprehension of how Hester Prynne's resilience enables her to thrive.

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INTRODUCTION

The novel, *The Scarlet Letter*, is written by Nathaniel Hawthorne that the researcher aims to examine. This novel has gained a lot of notoriety and attention due to its numerous moral lessons that may be applied to everyday life. One example of socialist feminism in action is the ability of a woman to balance her work and family obligations in her day-to-day existence.

The protagonist, Hester Prynne, in the novel *The Scarlet Letter* is at the centre of the controversy. She is a young woman whose husband is unknown and about whom there had been no word for a year. She is found to have an affair with a young minister in Puritan, which is highly forbidden at the time, as the novel presents, and she becomes pregnant as a result of her affair. She receives a penalty and social exclusion for that forbidden act of adultery.

LIFE OF HESTER PRYNNE

Hester Prynne started her life by establishing a little stitching enterprise. Her business embodies her unique originality, a quality not possessed by many in her days. Hester started her new life by depending on her daughter, Pearl. Pearl is also one of Hester Prynne's motivations for survival. It occurs subsequent to Hester's liaison. Being humiliated and ostracised from the group, Hester becomes introspective. She risks an exploration of human nature, societal structures, and broader ethical dilemmas. Hester's adversities foster her tolerance and rationalism. Before elaborating on the subject, the novelist wants to delineate Hester Prynne and the origins of the ensuing tragedy and struggle. Hester Prynne is a young woman originating from Boston. She is an attractive woman. She possesses a towering physique and a large, elegantly

proportioned form of physical structure. Her hair is lustrous, dense, and so glossy that it mirrored sunlight. Her face appears attractive not only due to its excellent form and alluring skin tone, but also because it is striking with thick eyebrows and huge black eyes. To speak the truth, she is a real beauty indeed. Her persona exhibits a very feminine quality in nature, akin to the ladies of her day, marked by certain elegance rather than a soft, ephemeral, and indefinable flexibility that signifies the age.

According to Nathaniel Hawthorne, Hester Prynne married Roger Chillingworth despite the fact that she did not love him and like him at all because of his uneven shoulders. He is a bright and intelligent individual. He is always fond of reading books from his library. He sends her wife, Hester Prynne, to Boston since he is always travelling around Europe and other parts of America to investigate medicinal treatments. However, the novel starts with Hester Prynne's friendship with Arthur Dimmesdale, a young preacher in Puritan society- the minister. They have a baby as a result of relationship, which enrages the entire Puritan community. So, Hester receives a penalty from Puritan society without informing the child's father. She wears a sign of scarlet A that represents her humiliation and horrible fate. On the other hand, the physician has the ability to reveal Arthur Dimmesdale's true identity in order to facilitate his aircraft's successful flight and his future relationship with the minister. The physician is an individual who is responsible for the health of the pastor in the society. As the narrative progresses, Hester becomes increasingly frustrated with her situation, particularly with regard to concealing the physician's identity. Arthur Dimmesdale is informed



of the truth by her. Additionally, Hester is unable to conceal an imperative matter: the pastor's condition, which is deteriorating day by day. This occurred as a result of the pastor's inability to endure his immorality and his deception of God.

HESTER PRYNNE'S PLANNING FOR A BUSINESS IN MASSACHUSETTS

Hester Prynne's release from jail is rapidly approaching. She was given full access to the jail. She leaves the jail while bearing a baby and continuing to wear the symbol of A. She has the option to leave Boston, but she decides against it. In a secluded cottage on a desolate area on the town's edge, she starts living. Hester is still not accepted in Puritan culture. Town fathers, well-respected ladies, beggars, children, and even strangers are all revealed clearly before the readers of the novel. She helps by serving as a living example of a lady who has fallen in her practical life, serving as a cautionary story for everybody with whom she is living. Hester's unusual skills in needlework allow her to maintain herself while being "an untouchable". Her preference for the lovely details in her stitching, judging her creation suitable for the governor to wear the scarlet letter despite its deplorable origin.

The craft gained popularity at that time gradually by step, without dragging out too long. Whether out of sympathy for unlucky women or, more importantly, because only Hester can cover the gaps in the society. Many embroidered requests can definitely be completed. The excellence could be considered to humiliate the others by donning garments embroidered by the hands of the sinner, Hester in great magnificent events. Her creations are seen on the governor's ruffled collar, on the shawl of

military officers, and on the claws of the clergy. The child's small cap also had needlework, and it would be limited and worn in the coffin. But, never once did her creations adorn a white veil covering the bride's crimson colour, therefore, reflecting her purity. This exception highlights the efforts of those who constantly despise the crimes they have transgressed.

As the author said above, Hester showed the public something important when she was being judged: the creative needlework she had made herself. On her shirt, there was needlework in the shape of a bright red sign that everyone could see. Everyone was shocked to see a red sign that said she was a sinner. Not because of the sign, but because of the cool stitching she did in jail. The way she stitched it looked like it would leak all the tears in her heart. A lot of people were amazed by how beautiful her needlework was, since not many people could even play her finger on a needle right at that time. Some people think that Hester does not think the sentence is harsh enough because she made a beautiful embroidery, but she knows the truth.

HESTER FAITH IN PEARL'S STRENGTH

Hester Prynne was relieved to see her daughter, Pearl, who was extensively detailed in the novel. Pearl is the name of the lovely flower that blooms in a sinful nation, given that she was purchased with all of her money. And, Pearl is her mother's lone treasure, having owned it at the time. "She called the baby Pearl, describing it as her mother's only treasure, one that she "bought with everything her had" at a high cost!" (Hawthorne 83). Because a very huge law has been broken in granting it existence. Pearl is a creature that appears to naturally defy



Puritan society's rigid standards. Pearl is always causing harm and possesses all of Hester's traits of passion, sadness, and disobedience. Though Hester was deeply in love with him, she was also concerned for his daughter.

Among Hester's possessions that attest to her hardship is Pearl. It is possible for Hester to care for her infant while living in relative isolation inside Puritan culture. She is alone; she does not have a neighbour, no friends, and no spouse to lean on. When she puts in context with the hardships of her day, her fight for independence and the care of her child is incredible. It was far more difficult to enforce household rules back then than it is today. Not only is it used to punish transgressions, but it also helps youngsters develop all the excellent qualities—anger, harsh reprimand, and punishment with a bat—often accompanied by instruction from the holy book. Because Hester Prynne is a single mother raising her only child, she cannot afford to make a fool of herself by trying too hard. Because she had a keen awareness of her own shortcomings and misfortunes from an early age, she made it a point to establish a system of punishment for her daughter that was both firm and compassionate.

Pearl is captivated by the crimson emblem on Hester's garment. At times, Pearl appears to bring her distress by manipulating the red sign. One day, when Pearl adorned the letter with wildflowers, Hester screamed with exasperation, "Child, what art thou? cried the mother. O, I am your little Pearl! answered the child" (Hawthorne: 90). Pearl redirected her inquiry to her mother, asserting that Hester disclosed her origins. Hester questioned whether Pearl was truly the intelligent child that

many saw her to be, as she was taken aback by the impudence exhibited by such a young child, who was perhaps three years old at the time. the demeanour towards the child exhibited profound concern. Her concerns revealed the depth of her affection for her child Pearl, and she feared that Pearl might lack intelligence.

They will choose to perform things that are useless because they are embarrassed of their behaviour. They would rather not appear in public wearing red emblems, given how brutal they were to sinners back when. Another example of Hester preferring to battle to raise her child alone, without the need for a father figure or a husband whom she marries without feeling love. Her daughter Pearl had been taken away from her because Hester was deemed unfit to parent her alone. They also argued that Pearl should receive more suitable care and education. But, Hester refused to give up her child. She was resolved to take care of herself, even without the assistance of others in the society. Because Pearl represents God's destiny for her to care, and receives a decent education for that.

HESTER'S EFFORT IN PURITAN SOCIETY

Hester is modest among other things that help the Puritan culture see and value her. Her professed dedication to the disadvantaged people makes her Hester Prynne is not weak when she is alone, without friends, without a husband, without a neighbour. She never gives up. She raises her daughter nicely and carries on her life with her needlework ability. Hester only wants her life to be basic. Hester never lived idly in luxury. She has plenty in her usual life and in the gorgeous daughter. Hester merely intended to live a hard life, with the simplicity that matched a hermit



for herself, and basic abundance for her child. She wore the coarsest and most depressing clothing, and one of the scarlet letters meant for wear was among them. On the other hand, her child's clothes stand out with incredible designs that really highlight the beauty full of brightness which from the beginning has started to emerge inside the small girl but also have a deeper significance. Apart from a small expenditure on her daughter's attire, Hester gave all of her strengths to social concerns, for underprivileged people who suffered more than her, and for those who frequently denigrated the hands that had fed them. She could really spend a lot of time embroidering, but instead she worked on manufacturing rough garments for the underprivileged. Perhaps she sought to atone for her wrongdoing by working on such projects, which also made her forgo pleasures of life.

Hester has a great ability to build relationships with the underprivileged and those in need of assistance. Hester endured a difficult existence, having to provide for both herself and her child despite the negative perceptions of her, but she made the most of what she had and all of her energy to help others around her. She devotes a lot of her precious time to her stitching hobby in order to listen to others who are in need of confiding in her. Hester is able to live a lavish lifestyle since the needlework provides her with several advantages. She would rather live modestly, nevertheless, and split her money with the underprivileged.

Hester was not scared to live despite the terrible circumstances of her day and the people's indifference to anybody who dared to transgress. She also contributed a portion of her life to those in need.

It may never be possible for those who are hesitant to do the right thing because they have sinned to save the lives of others in need. It was quite possible that they would disregard other impoverished individuals since they would believe that their life was just so awful. Therefore, Hester Prynne's great deed was a first for women at the period. Hester would so cheerfully greet everyone she encountered on the road, even though she would never reply. Eventually, though, when Hester placed her palm on the red sign, she would be forced to consider their greeting. Hester was well-known among the populace, and they would be pleased to demonstrate and discuss her previous acts of compassion towards visitors to their city.

HESTER'S SELF-CONFIDENCE

Alexandra Kollontai (1972) points out that human relationships are a significant aspect of each individual's experience and, hence, are vital to that individual's pursuit of a better life. Based on Hester's personal experience in establishing relationships, she concluded that women were perceived as dependent on males in Puritan culture. This circumstance results in the unfortunate existence of several women. To achieve freedom, women must act promptly, as Hester believed. She believes that the initial action required is the complete dismantling of all current communal systems, followed by their reconstruction with superior alternatives. Subsequently, the opposite sex and longstanding ancestral behaviours, which have been ingrained, must be completely altered before women can be granted access to positions deemed suitable and equitable. Ultimately, any remaining challenges may be promptly resolved. Women cannot benefit from the preliminary reform



unless they undergo more significant and robust adjustments themselves.

HESTER'S INDEPENDENCE IN ECONOMY

In Puritan civilization, people hold the view that God, not themselves, will decide who succeeds and who fails. There are two types of humans. Furthermore, evildoers are powerless to act, save anything, or excrete until they seek divine assistance. According to Li (2006), this kind of thought is immutable and sacrosanct. However, Hester's experience was unique as it was believed that Hester altered it by her deeds.

At that time, embroidery was a craft that was mostly accessible to a small number of individuals. Hester Prynne, who was proficient in embroidery, possessed it in order to satisfy the daily requirements of herself and her developing infant. "Only a change in the economic role of women, and her independent involvement production, can and will bring about a weakening of these mistaken and hypocritical ideas" (Kollontai, 1972). As previously stated, numerous sutures are worn by high-ranking officials, governors, military personnel, ministers, infants, and others. Beautiful embroidery is also used to embellish holy and regal locations. It is undeniable that Hester achieved her independence in the economy she managed through a diligent effort, without seeking assistance from God. She did not even request or impose a burden on her spouse, Chillingworth, or her lover, Dimmesdale, who should have been held accountable for her tragic existence. The genuine triumph of womanhood is demonstrated by the matter, which implies that women are not perpetually dependent on males. With the assistance of their own intelligence and limbs, they can secure their existence.

HESTER'S INDEPENDENCE IN THOUGHT

Even if a woman does not harbour any romantic feelings for her husband, she is nevertheless required to submit to him in puritan countries. Moreover, she has to eliminate her innate love for him rather than let her disdain for her husband to ruin his family's lives. But Hester paid absolutely no attention to this guideline. She left her previous husband Chillingworth—whom she did not love and who was not heard—in favour of falling in love with a young priest named Dimmesdale. With her love, she dared to bring her freedom. The entire narrative makes clear that Hester never downplays the importance of human values like uniqueness, autonomy, and personal life. She keeps her own secret from other people. She completely withheld the identity of her lover—that is, the father of her child—when questioned about it. Hester employed her own freedoms and saw them as tools to combat puritanism.

Hester once again demonstrated her independence of thought when she confronted the Governor of Bellingham regarding Pearl guardianship. She undertook an immense and unfathomable struggle to decline the trusteeship of Pearl. Hester claimed that Pearl had been bestowed upon her by God. Hester's actions demonstrate that femininity does not indicate frailty; rather, it demonstrates the fortitude that is derived from her femininity. Additionally, it was capable of devising a means to preserve itself.

Hester has evolved into a community's proto-feminist mother figure for women. Meng (2003) provides evidence that the humiliation she felt when she received her red letter has long ago vanished.



They came to Hester in search of safety from the sexist pressures they themselves endured, and the woman acknowledged that part of the reason for her sentencing stemmed from the misogyny of the city father. This statistic demonstrates how women are beginning to acknowledge Hester's independence of thinking. All of her independent work to date has yielded outcomes she never would have imagined. Because of her mistakes, the Puritan society had treated her unfairly for a long time.

Hester was forced to operate within a society that regarded her as contemptible in order to defend her life. They did not exhibit the faintest inclination to fear or hesitate, and Hester persevered in her arduous life journey. Hester is a prime example of a remarkable woman during that era, as she was able to encourage women who were still under the control of numerous males to engage in activities that would secure their rights as women. Therefore, people will be less inclined to regard women arbitrarily in light of such a significant transformation. And, the treatment elevates the status of women, enabling them to share social, political, and cultural similarities with men.

CONCLUSION

In the novel, *The Scarlet Letter*, Hester Prynne's character receives a harsh punishment for committing adultery, which at the time was regarded as the ultimate sin and as a severe guilt. The Puritans harshly evaluated and treated Hester. Because, she refused to reveal Pearl's paternity in front of the audience of the Scaffold in Boston, Hester came to be despised more and more by the society people around her. Hester indicates that she is a sinner by wearing a red symbol of A on her breasts. After all of

her struggles, Hester was ultimately acknowledged by many Puritans. They now understand the red sign on Hester's shirt to represent something else than sin itself. Hester's attempts to become distant from the others helped others to truly recognize her. As a consequence, Hester, the protagonist of the novel, overcomes the challenging circumstances to emerge as a powerful woman. Hester discovers for herself that her adultery with the young pastor was a passionate affair. Even though they are surrounded by cruelty, Hester also imparts good lessons to her daughter and to the others in the society. Towards the end of the novel, it seems that Hester, the severe sinner of adultery turns a prophetess to if not to all the people of the Puritan society but to many of the people.

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