

The Glimpse of the Growth and the Development of the Black Narrative: A Critical Discourse

Dr. Meenakshi Thakur

Lecturer, Department of English, GDC Kathua, J & K

meenakshi14thakur@gmail.com

Abstract:

Literature is not only about the reflection of society but also about the reflection of human activities in that particularly society through its own imaginative poetic beauty since ages. In this framework, the literature of colored people has reflected the Black society, their activities, pains, pangs, pathos, and exploitations and so on and so forth. But, since the very beginning, their narratives have been given less emphasis while they have been read and studied throughout the globe. Therefore, Black narratives have been neglected from the American and other white literary canon of history for a long period of time by the logo centric White. But, with the passage of time, it has dismantled the old stereotypical framework and broken the long silence of the marginalized blacks, specially the black women who have been trying to possess everything such as the sea, wind, sky and earth and moves out to create their space in human logo. In this context, Black narratives of African American literature become the centre for reshaping the pains, pangs, pathos, sufferings, humiliations, and anguishes of Black people because they have reflected the real life incidents of their life. This paper attempts and analyses the glimpses of the growth and the development of Black narratives in which they have reshaped the pains, pangs, pathos, sufferings, humiliations, and anguishes of Black people.

Keywords: Literature, Poetic Beauty, Black Narratives, Stereotypical, Glimpses, Growth, Development

In this world, every nation has its own literature though some of them remain unknown due to hegemonic influence of dominant nations. In this context, Black literature is a renowned name. Their history and life are extremely varied, even, their literature too. Their literature has generally focused on themes of particular interest to Black people in the United States, such as the role of African-Americans within the larger American society and what it means to be an Afro-American. As Albert J. Raboteau has said, all African-American studies, including African-American literature, speak to the deeper meaning of the African-American presence in America. The rejection of white values and

standards is one of the most powerful aspects of the Black literary works. Hence, it can be said that African-American literature explores the very issues of freedom and equality which were long denied to Black people in the United States as a marginalized group.

The Institution of Slavery is the main topic in the first half of 20th century in the political conversation, art, literature, and culture in Afro-American history. African-American literature dates back to the earliest times of slavery, it has been ignored and considered as 'offshoot rather than part and parcel of American literary history (361). Despite this environment has begun to change, the change is slow. The position of African-Americans in American society has changed over the centuries from at least explicit marginalization into implicit one. As their place altered, the focus of their literature also changed. Before the American Civil War, African-American literature first and foremost paid attention on the topic of slavery, as indicated by the subgenre of slave narratives. According to Tyson, at the turn of the twentieth century, books by authors such as W.E.B. Dubois and Booker T. Washington discussed whether to tackle or calm racist attitudes in the United States. During the American Civil Rights movement, authors such as Richard Wright and Gwendolyn Brooks wrote about issues of racial segregation and Black Nationalism. Today, African-American literature has become acknowledged as a fundamental component of American literature. The most important ground for the wide prevalence of this brand of literature is the nature of resistance/protest depicting the experience of the marginalized.

The literary preferences of Black Americans changed during the period from the publication of Uncle Tom's Cabin (1852) to World War I (1914). Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin gained instant fame. Written by a White woman, the novel threw heart-rending light on the life of African Americans.

World War I and its results brought about a fundamental shift in African American perceptions. Thousands of Blacks migrated from the south to the north. They gained entry there into various industries. They also entered the professions of education and politics, which increased their social support. A new consciousness emerged in the personality of the traditional Black people. Compared to the African American of the past, this was a new person. This transformation had an impact on Whites too. Besides, differences arose

among Blacks and Whites vis-à-vis questions of descent, these differences were not only confined to Blacks and Whites; there were also inter-generational differences among the African Americans themselves.

Harlem in New York City, in the history of African American literature became the centre of power for African American Black people. In 1920, with the beginning of the Harlem Renaissance movement, we find a new spirit in literature, musical, theatrical, and visual arts. Besides, we find the social foundations of this movement such as the Great Migration of African Americans from rural to urban spaces and from South to North, the rapidly rising levels of literacy, the creation of national organization, the African American civil rights – all these gradually help to raise the consciousness of Black people. It also made them realized about the racial discrimination, marginalization, alienation, exploitation, enslavement and so on so forth faced by them since ages and at the same time it also pushed them to socioeconomic opportunities.

Music, poetry, and art became to the central medium for the artists to express the physical pains, psychological pangs and emotional pathos African American Black people in this movement. Music especially, the blues and jazz, brought the sensation of Black people at the door of the entire world. it provided the pulse of the Harlem Renaissance. Artists and musician, like O'Keefe's recording of Mamie Smith's "Crazy Blues" in 1920, Alberta Hunter, Clara Smith, Bessie Smith, and Ma Rainey performances in the circuses, clubs and tent shows for years provided the new gems in the heart of Black folk. Poets, like Langston Hughes, Sterling Brown, Jean Toomer, Jessie Fauset, James Weldon Johnson, Alain Locke, Omar Al Amiri, Eric D. Walrond and so on revealed the spiritual values of the blues as an indigenous art form through their artistic craftsmanship.

The spiritual value, fearlessness and highly energetic attitude of African American Black folk also came to light through the creations of Claude McKay, Arna Wendell Bontemps, Countee Cullen, Zora Neale Hurston, Rudolph Fisher, Wallace Thurman, and so on. Their writings encourage and motivate not only the Black folk to rebel against the racial oppression they have faced since ages but also inspired the writers to write for the emancipation of Black people from the men made cage.

After 1930, Richard Wright (1908–1960), Margaret Walker (1915-1998) and Ralph Ellison (1914–1994) inspired the later African American writers to write for them. Communist ideology initiated to surface in the writings of post-1930 writers. Richard Wright's *Native Son* (1940) is permeated with this ideology. Claude McKay went to the USSR in 1923, and his writing too espoused communist thought, though perhaps without the same force. George Schuyler, on the other hand, opposed communist thought. The African American poetry of this period is also highly realistic and expresses the social problems faced by the Black people.

After 1940, realistic expression of pains and pathos, and a tone of defiance of African American Natives became stronger in Black writing. The years between the Depression and the end of World War II in 1945, were filled with helplessness, suffering and pain not only the black folk but also the entire world. The end of the war, instead of bringing peace, saw the beginnings of conflicts. The US had to confront many problems, internally and internationally. The arms race and the cold war with the USSR also had their impact. Besides, the time of the Vietnam war, dissatisfaction among the youth social unrest due to urban decline had also reached their n the US. This period was consumed by unrest, instability and fear of insecurity.

World War II was fought in defence of democratic values. Because of this war, declarations were made in support of freedom from want and fear, and freedom of speech and worship. But disappointment was the lot of African Americans. This, too, made a difference in Black consciousness.

In the post-World War II period, an important sense of resistance could be felt among African Americans. Martin Luther King's civil rights movement of the 1960s, the non-violent boycott of buses in Montgomery, the Kennedy assassination of 1960, and Nigerian civil war in 1967- all these help to build an intellectual unity as organization among African Americans.

The writings of Alan Stewart Paton's *Cry the Beloved Country* (1943), Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), *No Longer at Ease* (1960), and *Arrow of God* (1964), Wole Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forests* (1960), Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin White Masks*

(1952) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), Nadine Gordimer's *The Conservationist* (1974), and *Burges's Daughter* (1979), Bessie Head's *When Rain Clouds Gather* (1968), Ngugi wa Thiong'o *Decolonising the Mind: the Politics of Language in African Literature*, Ayi Kwei Armah' *The Beautiful Ones are not yet Born* (1968) and so on inspired not only the African and Caribbean writers but also the entire globe.

In the post-World War II period, besides the African Americans, the British Caribbeans also provided their own contribution in the history Black literature which gave a strong shape in Black consciousness. The fictions and non-fictions such as Vic Reid's *New Day* (1949), Samuel Selvon's *A Brighter Sun* (1952) and *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), George Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin* (1953), and V.S. Naipaul's *Mystic Masseur* (1957), *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961) and *A Bend in the River* (1974), Jamaica Kincaid's *At the Bottom of the River* (1983) and *A Small Place* (1988), Caryl Phillips' *The Final Passage* (1985), *Cambridge* (1991) and *Crossing the River* (1993) others deal with the pathetic plight and lack of identity of Black as well as the people in the third world country in post colonial era. They further deal with a sense of oscillation between home and unhomeliness of the third world natives, who keep on moving here and there, lending ultimately nowhere. In this context, they resemble the speaker of Elizabeth Bishop in her poem "Questions of Travels" when she utters; "Think of the long trip home./ Should we have stayed at home and thought of here? / ... / No. we should have stayed at home, / wherever that may be?"

The poetry in Caribbean literature gives a unique voice to the Caribbean people. Through it, the poets express not only the ideas in local dialect reflecting local customs and traditions of the colonized people but also reveal the hidden darkness of the history of colonizers. In this context, we can mention the words of Michel Foucault which he utters in his book *Order of Things*; "a history restored to the irruptive violence of time," as well as "the common affinity of things and language with representation" (*Order of Things* 132). The most notable poets, who deal with the violence of past as well as the common affinity of things and language, are the noble laureate Derek Walcott, Louise Bennett, Kamau Brathwaite, Edouard Glissant, Giannina Braschi, Lorna Goodinson, Aim Frnand Cesaire, Linton Kwesi Johnson, Kwame Dawes and Claudia Rankine.

After the above discourse, there is no doubt to say that the narrative of poetry, novel and art offer new perspectives to the history of African and Caribbean literature. It gives the general coverage and specific information of the native people, their traumatic tragedies, racial discrimination, indiscriminate opportunities, inhuman treatment, quest for logo-centric beauty, long wish to mingle with the common human stream and the search of their identity in the pre and post colonial era.

Works Cited

- Baker, Houston, A., Jr. *The Journey Black: Issues in Black Literature and Criticism*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980.
- Baldick, Chris. ed. 3rd. 2008. *Dictionary of Literary Terms*. Oxford.
- Bhabha, Homi K. *The location of Culture*. Routledge, 1994.
- Carbal, Amilcar. *Resistance and Decolonization*. London: Rowman and Littlefield International, 2016.
- Kolodny, A. "Dancing through the minefield: some observations on the theory, practice and politics of a feminist literary criticism," qtd. in Gilbert, Sandra M., and Gubar, Susan. 1989. *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory*. New York: Virago Press, 1989.
- Mukherjee, Alok. Sharankumar Limble: *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature*. New Delhi: Orient Blackswan Private Limited Publisher. 2018 print.
- Nayar, K. Pramod. *Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory: From Structuralism to Ecocriticism*. New Delhi: Dorling Kindersley (India) Pvt. Ltd licensees of Pearson Education in South Asia. 2010 print.
- Patterson, L. Ed. *International Library of Negro Life and History: An Introduction to Black Literature in America from 1746 to the Present*. New York: Publishers Company, Inc., 1968.
- Tyson, L. *Critical Theory Today: A User Friendly Guide*. (2nd Ed.) New York: Routledge, 2006.
- Voss, N. *Saying the Unsayable: An Introduction to Women's Autobiography*. In Spector, J. Ed, *Gender Studies: New Directions in Feminist Criticism* (p. 218-33). Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press. 1986.