



Asserting the Problems: The Catastrophe of Afro American Lives and Truth Telling

Dipkesh Kumar

Address: Behind Krishna hospital, cinema chowk, Villchaksalem, at& po-patory, distr-samiastipur, Bihar pin-848504

Abstract

In the African-American literary canon, a fresh domain of prospects for Africans in the body of literature in the United States by writers of African descent. In the ideology of African-American literature, fecund writers have explored themselves as poets, novelists, short story writers, critics, essayists and supporters for Black Literature. They have showcased the malicious effects of racism, classism, sexism and gender dissonance. These works of literature have concentrated on the vision of the struggle between individual freedom and physical freedom, psychological freedom, particularly in social restraints. These dehumanizing characteristics have bequeathed untreatable wounds on the emotional and psychological planes upon the individuals. Writers in this area have metaphorically transformed through their works of fiction by shining a light on the impact of their approaches to comprehend and bring out the intricate nuances of African behaviour. Writers, through their works, have shown how the Africans have been under white supremacy for generations together. Their fictional works have often explored the lives of marginalized Africans in multi-ethnic and multicultural America.

Keyword: Racism, gender, class, slavery, history and Afro-American literature.

Introduction

Afro-American literature traces a new world of possibilities for black despite classism, racism and sexism with the interchanging tendencies of an external connection. It is a manifestation that combines strategic thinking and emerging ideas to obtain revolutionary solutions that consistently break new grounds. It was in the eighteen century that Phillis Wheatley began writing. She is one, among many, who had initiated and articulated the profundity of the need to reconnect with a new world of literature.

On the other hand, the element that seems to distinguish Afro-American literature even more intensely from the rest of the works of literature is the shifting currents of history. Considerably, it showcases the conviction that involves a commitment to an understanding of self is as wide as the world is wide. The narrative voice in Afro-American novels evolves around the world of Africans. It goes without saying that the Africans who grew up in the United States were in one form or the other subject to class and racial discrimination, and it is precisely this aspect that Afro-American writers quite poignantly portray in their works. These novels eschew the conventional linear structuring of the narrative and multiple story clusters that focus on the racial and social concerns associated with colour bar and cross-cultural



experiences. For that reason, the significance behind strengthening these writings is that they assist as eternal indicators of the circumstances in which sociological issues and maltreatment of those who were consistently affected.

These works of literature are associated with manifold provisional adherences and progressive constancies, as well as cross-cultural intersections experience that echo the origins and the impression of slavery and subjugation of Africans. To illustrate the importance of creative dimension "A literature that is so historic can supply numerous insights into the cultural, social, and political thoughts of its people and their impact on society as a whole" (Thompson, 15). It acknowledges the extremely broad range of issues that are intertwined with the literary works. Amiri Baraka's *Afro-American Literature & Class Struggle* offers a reading that highlights the significance:

The Slave Narratives are an ideological and emotional reflection of the great majority of the Afro-American people as well as a stunningly incisive portrait of Slave America. They are the voice of the majority of Black people, as literally as that can be taken. They are also a genre, a distinctive body of work that indicates a way of living and thinking in the society. (5)

The utilitarian and candid narrative voice in Afro-American literature deliver ethnic elevation and also highlight the theorization of double mindfulness that connects the world of fiction with the world of readers. The development, establishment and maintenance of the Afro-American literature as an economic and political institution relied mostly on Afro-American writers' contributions.

Contributors such as W. E. B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington by no mean to reduce their impact on it, but it made the difference like their influence on it. There was something worthily that tented towards utopianism about their effort that focused on the new foundation. In the year, 1907 *The Negro in the South* highlighted the criticism of American politics that designated the social accountability of Afro-American in the southern United States.

In connection with Afro-American literature, the rebuilding epoch stimulates the literature of ethnic elevation and the theorization of double mindfulness. African-American literature writing is marked by the consistent effort that garnered the black arts era and the Harlem Renaissance. Writers during this era went to pragmatist remonstrance narrative, expressive verse, and dedicated theatre to progress a traditional patriotism that struggles on-going discrimination and Jim Crow marginalisation.

African American Literature became popular all over the world, such work mostly describes the protagonist's identity. More often, presenting how these characters every so often struggle for the fulfilment of their psychological, physical, sexual, individual, professional aspirations against collective absolutism of class, political, racial and identity crisis that conflict with the external environment.



Blyden Jackson, the highly acclaimed author of works such as *A History of Afro-American Literature*. (1989) and *The Waiting Years: Essays on American Negro Literature*. (1976) in African-American literature, also be certain of that Afro American writers do not depict mere characters in the novel but instead creates real people, people that one probably meets in the course of a day while running errands. In Jackson's determined account of history instigates promisingly with the earlier mentioned significant volume that touches upon the history associated with the slavery of African. This is because of his reclusive nature and his univocal appeal to let him be. Jackson's literary contribution also includes contemplation to the epoch and on the other hand, the United States was changing from a farming society to an industrial society of its slaves.

All of Afro American works involve themes such as a complex interaction of class, race and gender issues and how these have influenced the African society as a whole. Afro-Americans always experience different forms of suppression at the same time. Constant allusions to the truthful account of the horrors perpetrated, reconstructing the past to anticipate the future, issues related to lapses in communication theory, nihilism as a philosophical stance, characters embarking on futile quests for meaning, an effort to show man's inhumanity to man is something that African American writers are good at depicting. Their encyclopaedic range of subjects often makes them difficult to pigeon-hole writer and they use their commendable expertise to give the reader as full a ride as they possibly can.

Taking into consideration, contemporary African American Literature, one can relate it to anxieties of black postmodernism, Afrofuturism and neo-slavery. Contributors during this epoch basically focused in the areas of development of pioneering practise, from the obscure prevailing philosophies of racial issues to illustration elapsed with considerations over aesthetics and politics, transnationalism and migration, and sexuality and gender.

In African American literature, writers present a character's identity that progresses psychologically and emotionally through the different roles as one more phase of life. To investigate how a character's identity develops, one has to relate them to the socially recognised conception of adulthood that contributes an inventive approach for the building of selfhood. Most of these elements that these writers focused on. Most of the stories, in their novels, take place in Africa settings, finally culminating in the city of America. Primarily, bildungsroman in its nature, these novels explore the familial relationships in the context of collective conflicts and loyalties in stark contrast to the bearings of individualistic persona, which emerges strong to defy the vicissitudes of social impositions. When researching on Afro-American literature what becomes clear is the fact that identity and individuality are the focal points around which the characters are woven. Some critics believe that African American Literature has a political and utopian focus which other works lack. Writers in Afro-American Literature ascribes to shape an unprejudiced perception of existence. They use the tool of writing in scrutinising the history and using their characters as vivid testimonies to the past. The symbol of the transitivity analysis in



these characters' essence is critically scrutinized and are abundant throughout the fictional works. For African American writers, boundaries between fact and fiction are often clear, but it becomes almost impossible to differentiate between the two as the reader, who progresses through the novel.

Francis Harper, Robert Hayden, and Phillis Wheatley are the great contributors, who gave a vivid picture of their perspectives of African cultures and the slave trade. Identity is significant to these writers' work, wherein they showcased the conduct of the Africans in their distinctive approach. The work of literature exhibits the character of Africans who persuade anxiety and obedience, create hopelessness, exhibit abuse, and violence, and indicate revenge because they hunt for acquiring the manhood that has been taken away from them by their white oppressors. The emotional response that the Afro-American novels evoke and the tightly bound epistolary structure of the work are what makes these piece of literary art indefatigable. These work of fiction by African writers also became the touchstone or a yardstick with which other works of fiction produced by other Americans novelists could be measured. In an article entitled "On "What Was African American Literature?" (2010), Kenneth W. Warren states:

African American literature assisted in helping persuade liberal elites that the 'race problem,' defined primarily as the black-white inequality, was the nation's most pressing moral problem, and that something like national greatness and American ideals could be realized only when that problem had been confronted, regardless of whether or not that confrontation meant the problem could finally and forever be resolved. (742)

Writers such as W. E. B. Du Bois, James Mercer Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, James Baldwin, Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker and Maya Angelou incorporated critical works in African Literature that determined the closest observation with African culture, who have envisaged the frame of literature as one enormous story written from a multitude perspective by writers from just as many different cultures. Rather one can say the writing journey of all these writers are appreciated by various critics and they can be considered as critics who judgmentally analysed from the societal and historical opinion of assessment. Most of the novels in this area, emphasise on the contemporary racial issues of African-Americans. Both racism and sexism form an integral part of Afro American Literature and this is implicitly seen in the present study.

Paradoxically, though the protagonists of the Africa American novels are central, they are never the protagonist of their world. Initially, a victim of poverty, alienation, violence and class brutality, they nevertheless refuse to give up hope and ultimately emerge as a strong and independent persona who refuse to conform to traditional societal norms that are based on gender and class by the time the novel ends. All the difficulties that these characters encounter with the lives problems and these troubles transform their personalities profoundly. Kimberly W. Benston deals with this point by suggesting in the article entitled "Facing Tradition: Revisionary



Scenes in African American Literature" (1990) that emphasised:

African American literature has given us, in fact, a rich and complex figure for the intertextual activities by which the tradition constitutes itself as this conjunction of exegesis and inscription: the face catching its reflection in some version of the other (be it racial, familial, or even psychical. (99)

African American Literature passionately denounces the degrading social system, stemming from the writes of their own belief and direct encounter. Their humanist values were not only concern about the painful situation of the society but also be prepared to take up challenges like a responsible being who could help to reconstruct the humanity of African American. This gave greater scope for the nature of literature. Literature that can be considered a highly dynamic one and one can understand their contributions to the times in which they live, where social, political, and environmental progress is needed and can be changed. By showcasing such elements, not only in their fictional world but also outside the world of reality that is based on an adaptation of changes that centred on the cultural, social, economic and environmental advances pertinent to represent a strong bond of humankind.

African writers placed importance on heterogeneity, thereby, sweeping aside traditional boundaries to allow for previously submerged voices to be heard in their craftsmanship. To investigate how African's identity develops socially and emotionally through their different roles, one can take into account such textual details in which one gets to see the unusual position as southern African culture and carved a niche for in the world of literature. From the literary perspectives, Kadiatu (1998) has highlighted "Discourses of Africa are significant in relation to the politics of African identities and cultures in the African Diaspora, and any theorisation of these constructions and subjectivities needs to recognise, not only the interrelatedness of disciplines in the present, but also the ways in which the present has been constructed by its historical traces" (ix).

The writers during this period were also essentially concerned about African women's problems. From the beginning, African women have been put their imprint in the success of African American writings. The twentieth century is known as the Black Renaissance or the New Negro Movement, this movement was the outcome of the actual experiences and real suffering of Africans and very precisely women in America, more specifically in North America. Drawing the attention on these achievements, it is essential to define and express the particularity of this movement not only in the limited fields but also unlimited sectors.

As Daphne Lamothe (2008) articulates about the accomplishments of writers who contributed to this movement. "Although these writers worked in many genres and fields of the social sciences, including dance, education, politics, they used ethnography in some of the most important works of fiction and nonfiction because it provided a clear, powerful, and socially accepted language with which to observe and document a folk culture that many Americans were convinced was populated by dark and primitive



others.”(12)

The significance of the African American literature can be summed up as follows: understanding the core meaning of African slavery history in American and elaborating its theoretical schools, ideologies and perspectives that are interwoven with the novels or literary work. Highlighting the principal themes of these novels and scrutinizing them from a different standpoint. Studying and exploring various objectives of novels which are going to convey numerous messages to the readers; namely, a quest for autonomy, self-creation, sexual identity, integration and establishing a new wholeness in the context of family, home, relationship and the society they live.

Although the colonial inclination of the “New World” is seen as an evolving factor and it is as firm as the colonizing of the other parts of the world. These historical and social happenings hard-pressed several African Americans to be poets and writers. These writers are the representative of a collective voice to ask for an equal appraisal of human’s freedom, personality, individuality and existence. They have revolted in their novels against the existing traditional and conventional man, a superior set, including its unfair power division. They dream and visualize a world based on equality, harmony and sorrow sharing between men and women. They desire for social uprightness and lack of restrictions.

In the year 1619, many Africans arrived in America, Virginia for the first time. Approximately, more than 20,000,000 African men and African women were brought from Africa. They were taken by ships to the American continent in horrible circumstances. The African’s sensibility has influenced not just the literary world but also about how it has provided the readers with a tool to combat the ennui and hopelessness in a world that is stagnating in its staleness.

What one needs to understand is that when seen from a bird’s eye view, the various purposes for the African to migrate to America. The most lucrative and tempting options were left was the possibility of Negro slaves that appeared to be the best solution for “white” settlers. Initially, the first Negro slaves were safe under the safeguard of the international law, but gradually the law changed as with the increasing requirement of labour. Along with the sense of providence and increase in demand for the various reasons why the Negro slaves were treated contrarily than their white “colleagues”. These Negroes were available free of cost with a long list of advantages like a replacement, low wage, and other sense of providence. These facilities gave a great sense of comforts with the purpose of great benefits during that time. The Negro slaves were mostly used for southern cotton and tobacco plantations.

Lovalerie King and Shirlye Moody- Turner (2003) “African American literature has always been about telling uncomfortable truths. It began its prose with the slave narrative, transitioned in the nineteenth century into the protest novel, and was often judged by both white and black critics more by how effectively it held a mirror to white oppression than by its artistic merits.”



African American literature as a construct is analysed not just concerning fiction but also other genres such as television shows, motion pictures, poetry, drama, music and pop culture. Examples of the aforementioned genres have been cited when and where required in the study. Influences and antecedents that have gone behind the shaping of African's sensibility and works are noted in the study.

Gustavas Vassa creates a remarkable impact to this theme, happening through his direct experienced, wherein he had a painful experience and he directly voiced his agony account about the expedition through the sea route in his literary discourse, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself* (1789). However, the African American integrity of heritage and diversity of culture were disregarded by their white owners, who took them for their advantages. The African, who came from different places in African were considered as all the same category disregard of their background and feeling in this concern.

With the analysis of the significant development in African American Literature, African American women writers have remarkably made a common thread that was established during the last three decades of the twentieth century. These African American women writers' prodigious contribution towards astride more than one genre. This genre became mainstream concerned with the individual identity of the African woman. The construction of character's identity according to social background, showing how female characters often struggle between their identity as women and they can relate their individuality with the other woman since they share the common problem in terms of men. It is precisely this universal feeling that will be the central subject of these characters. At this point, it is common to mention that African American women writers' work became bestsellers. Women writers gave scope and made it more legitimized their works in the United States which concurrently on the list of African American literature a separate branch of study.

One of the recognized voices, Zora Neale Hurston, who was the creator in African American literature to established a platform for African women to release themselves and encourage others to do the same. The concept of freedom has always been associated with the white society, in contrary to what was considered for the African women who have to liberate themselves not only from the white but also from their abusive African men and the American economy, which was a difficult task to escape from the evils of such oppressive behaviours and take control.

Positively, by the mid-twentieth century, some noteworthy and influential feminist voices have made remarkable approaches to holism, unity that ironically emphasized fragmentation. Other famous voices such as Toni Morrison, Rosario Castellanos, Kaye Gibbons, Marilyn French, and Alice Walker also have contributed Feminist principles that have existed ever since the growth of feminism throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in English literature.

According to Carole Pateman, a feminist and political theorist, who suggests in the text, *The Sexual Contract* (1988) as "The patriarchal construction of the difference



between masculinity and femininity is the political difference between freedom and subjection”(207). The feminist ideologist intent to investigate the subject matter of female pleasure and it also builds a relationship between such ideologies.

According to Kimberlé Crenshaw, who coined the term “intersectionality” in her essay “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics” (1989). According to her, the notion of intersectionality is not an immaterial concept, rather it is a justification of the way numerous oppressions are experienced. Certainly, Crenshaw uses this essay to highlight the similarity, mentioning the intersection circulation, or crossroad, to concretize the concept:

Consider an analogy to traffic in an intersection, coming and going in all four directions. Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars traveling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them. Similarly, if a Black woman is harmed because she is in the intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination.

According to Crenshaw's claims, the African women were discriminated by all means, because they were not suitable precisely for the legal categories of either “racism” or “sexism” or rather the combination of both.

Women's development from the family life to that of the occupational is more expected to employ impact in the family realm, consequential in the opinion of an independent woman who has been reformed. However, which has not occurred and one can still see a woman who is predestined to be a wife, mother, and the keeper of a domestic household. Retrospectively, women were expected to take care of the house, exactly as how Martin Luther claimed in his work, *Martin Luther's Table Talk* (1566):

Women should remain at home, sit still, keep house, and bear and bring up children. A woman is, or at least should be, a friendly, courteous, and a merry companion in life, the honour and ornament of the house, and inclined to tenderness, for thereunto are they chiefly created, to bear children, and to be the pleasure, joy, and solace of their husbands,” (“Of Marriage and Celibacy”)

One of the dynamic and recognized voice, Betty Friedan, who spreads awareness about the plight of the American woman during the 1950s and 60s. In her famous book *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), acmes the traditional gender roles, the rules which are unfair to women at politics, work, and education. This work became exceptionally controversial during that time, which is often attributed to inciting the second-wave feminist movement. Friedan often dealt with the subject of the discrimination of women who suffered. She debates that women were socially pressured into becoming homemakers by their “feminine mystique”: an idealized image of domestic femininity



that arose in the 1950s. She also expressed about the women being submissive at home and the direct accountability of man for subduing their personalities and causing the loss of their identity.

Many benefactors have voiced for the difficulties of African women in their literary works like Weldon Johnson, Claude Mackay, Sterling Allen Brown, Nella Larsen, Jean Toomer, Zora Neale Hurston, and many others, who have focused dynamically in articulating the problems of women. Women writers always aim for a broader scope in their fiction, wherein their characters grow higher, they continue to develop their identity into adulthood as one more phase of their lives. Undoubtedly, this can be considered as a significant component of these writers' presentation of such character. This can be seen in search of one's self and they may reveal the sub consciousness of the protagonists. Furthermore, taking into consideration the emotional traits of their characters in the process of analysis in their novels will surprise their readers with their brutal tale.

Writers such as Toni Morison, Alice Walker, Maya Angelo and many more exhibited their characters' justification and construction, which restates the story from a woman's perspective that had marked these writers as real feminist writers. Nevertheless, their core purpose is to remark on 20th-century life, which necessitates substantial compression upon women--and to refer to humanity as a whole. By making it all possible, they use the tool of literature to influence society, with the help of their female characters. To achieve such desired goals, they accomplish pivotal independence and freedom from racism and sexism by maintaining their ethnic inheritance.

Conclusion

Afro-American Literature reflects the African's story in such a way that it echoes the condition of Africans predicaments. The narrative technique evolves an understanding of life that develops awareness about the circumstance and works for the solution that these writers have been striving for. It is the certainty in the dimensions of the human race to prosper paranormal powers which are not simple ingenious fictional themes, but profoundly apprehended belief. These themes are associated with the personal identities of both African man and woman, which are painfully sought out and worked for through the gradual shedding of masks, disguises, roles, attitudes and customs. These basic themes always seem to have been in the mind of the novelists, who seek to update the extent of agony and structure their fictional work to improve the circumstance. These novelists have always been concerned with a larger view of the problems of wholeness in a disconnected and compartmentalised world. The arena of literature has no formal entrance deliveries to provide the content that can navigate the desired outcome and eliminate the distorted state of affairs. Subsequently, benefaction and peer associations that develop significant contrivances for the enlistment of innovative writers, for acquisition right of entry to a fictional coliseum, and for accomplishing eminence there. Taking the responsibility, these writers believe to assist and guide through a comprehensive literary refurbishment. The ideal goal of



Afro-American literature is not only connected to its readers but also to society as a whole to provide strategies and solutions that go beyond the limit of literature. Novelists embrace the ideation process of writing.

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