

Identity crisis in Langsten Hughes Selected poems

**Vinayaka kumar,
Asst. Prof .of English,
Tara Government College,
Sangareddy, Telangana State**

ABSTRACT

African American culture also known as black culture; in the United States refer in the cultural United States either as party or distinct from American culture. For many years African American developed repeatedly from maintain American culture, both because of slavery and the per inheritance of racial discrimination. An America as well as African-American slave descendants describe to create and maintain there own traditions. Today African American culture has become a significant part of American culture and gets at the same time, remains a distinct cultural body. African American wants to create their own identity in terms of art and literature. They want top establish their own culture in American as African American.

Key words:-

African American, cultural contribution, racial discrimination, slavery, distinct cultural body

Black American Poetry

According to Jean Dubois Black American Poetry started with the publication of “Bars Fight” written in 1745 by a slave named Lucy Terry. It carries through with two generations of undistinguished poetry, and then living black American poetry group which forms the reason studying the subject. Philosophically, this poetry classified into five categories 1)slavery, 2)acquiescence, 3) integration 4)separation and 5)militancy.

The most militant poems, “*Epilogue*” and “**For my People**” should be noted were published in 1926 and 1942. It should be noted that separatists form a composite group, make up party of disillusioned integrationists, partly of “black is beautiful” philosophers and partly of militants. The militants themselves are divided. Some are separated but other have no real objection to the discrimination. The ” *black is beautiful* “ philosophy is evident everywhere as young black, wear their “Arfos” and study their ancestral beginnings.

Harlem Renaissance

The **Harlem Renaissance** was a cultural movement that spanned the 1920’s and 1930’s. At the time it was known as the “New Negro Movement”, named after the 1925 anthology by Alain Locke. Though it was centered in the Harlem neighborhoods as New York City. Many French-speaking black writers from Africa and Caribbean colonies who lived in Paris were also influenced by the **Harlem Renaissance**

Until the end of the civil war, the majority of African American had been enslaved and lived in the south. After the end of slavery, the emancipated African American began to strive for civic participation, political equality, economic and cultural self-determination

Many in the **Harlem Renaissance** were part of the *Great Migration* out of the south into the Negro neighborhoods of the North and Midwest. African American sought a better standard of living and relief from the institutionalized racism in the south. Others were people of African descent from racially stratified communities in the Caribbean who came to United States hoping for better life. Uniting most of them was their convergence in Harlem, New York city.

Influence of Harlem Renaissance:

The Harlem Renaissance was successful that it brought the Black experience clearly within the corpus of American cultural history. Not only through an explosion of culture, but on a sociological level. The legacy of the Harlem Renaissance redefined how America, and the world, viewed African Americans.

The progress both symbolic and real during this period , because a point of reference from which the African-American community gained a spirit of self-determination that provided growing sense of both Black urbanity and Black militancy, as well as a foundation for the community to build upon for the Civil Right struggles in the 1950s and 1960s. The urban setting of rapidly developing Harlem provided a venue for African American of all backgrounds to appreciate the variety of Black life and Culture. The **Harlem Renaissance** encouraged the new appreciation of folk roots and culture. For instance, folk materials and spirituals provided a rich source for the artistic and intellectual imagination and it freed the Black from the establishments of past condition. Through sharing in these cultural experiences a consciousness sprung forth in the form of a united racial identity.

Characteristics and themes:-

Characterizing the Harlem Renaissance was an overt racial pride that came to be represented in the idea of the New Negro, who through intellectual and production of literature, art and music could challenge the pervading racism and stereotypes to promote progressive or socialist politics and racial and social integration. The creation of art and literature would ‘serve’ to ‘up lift’ the race.

Some common themes represented during Harlem Renaissance were the influence of the experience slavery and emerging African American folk traditions on black identity. The effects of Institutional racism, the dilemmas inherent in performing and writing for elite white audiences, and the question of how to convey the experience of modern black life in the urban North are the themes of the poets of Harlem.

In his early childhood Hughes moved from place to place and suffered a lot because of the racial discrimination. Hughes emphasized that discrimination is on the basis of color is man made.

It all depends upon how human being broadens or shaped. To quote Anne Spencer's poem, "**Color is the natural thing in the world, which was given by the God**". The concept of natural color was brought up by Langston Hughes in his poems.

Biography

James Langston Hughes was born in Joplin Missouri on February 1, 1902, the Carrie Langston and James Nathaniel Langston. When Langston was eighteen his father moved to Mexico. Because of changing many places Hughes suffered a lot in his childhood. At last his father settled in Lincoln, Illinois, where Hughes enrolled at Central High School. There Hughes did well and began writing poetry for the School magazine. He wrote poetry at Mexico which published in 1921 in the National Association for the advancement of Colored People (NAACP) magazine *Broomies Book*.

Hughes then enrolled at Columbia University in New York city, where he encountered racism on campus, especially, in dormitories, as a result he left after his first year. By doing odd jobs like cabin boy and busboy he began to write poetry . Hughes first collection of poems, which included '**I Too**' as published was *The weary Blues* is 1926. While in Lincoln University in Pennsylvania, Hughes second collection of poetry, *Fine Clothes to the Jew* was published in 1927. With the financial support of Charlotte Mason he wrote first novel, *Not Without Laughter* . For this he won Harmon Gold Medal in 1931. Over the course of his life more than twenty collections of his poetry were published, including *The Negro Mother* (1931), *The Dream Keeper and other poems* (1932), *Jim Crow's Last Stand* (1931) and *Montage of a Dream Deferred* (1951). In addition to this Hughes first collection of short fiction *The Ways of White Folks* was published in 1934.

I have selected three poems for the analysis of identity crisis in Hughe's poems. These three poems with different themes project the problem of inequality, segregation, and racial discrimination of the Black Americans in America.

'Let America Be America Again', published in *Esquire* and in the international worker order pamphlet *A New Song* (1938), pleads for fulfillment of the Dream that never was. It speaks of the freedom and equality which America boasts, but never had. It looks forward to a day when "**Liberty is crowned with no false patriotic wreath** " and America is "The great strong land of love".

Hughes begins the poem "Let America Be America Again" with the general idea of the American dream a land for pioneer, where "opportunity is real...life is free and equality is in the air we breathe" and he also fantasize that there's never been equality for me, Nor freedom in this *homeland of the free*.

Hughes uses anaphora,"I am the poor white.....I am the Negro, to force the reader to step into the character shoes and give the reader a perspective into a new truth. Where is the American identify for the "read man "who cultivated the land for centuries only to have it torn away by foreign greed? Where is the dream for the "Negro", born into enslavement, never having the opportunity to taste freedom?

Hughes again uses anaphora, "*I am the farmer* "But the farmer is indentured to the earth, the factory worker is a slave to his employer. They toil endlessly to make ends meet only to find a never ending blaim of overwhelming expenses making it virtually impossible for them to rise in social or economic status. These people still believe in the core principles, " I'm the man who never got ahead yet I am the one who dreamt our basic dream ".

Hughes wants to convey through this poem that the pursuit of freedom isn't just an American aspirations but is innate to all humans. Every person has the desire and right to control their own destiny. Each human is "endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights [to] life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness "(Jefferson)

I, Too was included in Langsten Hughes first collection of poetry, *The_Weary Blues* in 1926. Hughes wrote this poem in 1924 while stranded in Genoa, Italy ,after his passport and wallet were stolen. '**I , Too** ' is a response to Nineteenth Century American poet Walt Whitman's "*I hear America singing* " where Whitman rejoices in a country that offers him all that he wants . In Whitman's poem every worker like carpenter, Masons and hawker singing America. In the poem "**I,Too**" Hughes expresses his optimistic feeling that one day he too sing America. Hughes response to Whitman's poem is a reminder that Black America also forms part of American culture. Hughes poem suggests that not all Americans are given the same opportunity to achieve their dreams. Some- those with dark skin are cast aside and kept from achieving the dream .

African American were victims of Jim Crow laws in the 1920's when Hughes was a young writer. These laws Kept back people separate from white people on public transportation, in restaurants, in theaters, at drinking fountain, and in public bathrooms. Miscegenation laws made

it illegal for a black person to marry a white person, and poll taxes and literacy kept Black American from voting. Black children were educated separately from white children. Hughes's reference to being sent to the kitchen when company arrived is intended to represent all of the ways in which blacks and whites were separated in American life during the early twentieth century.

Segregation is a part of life for black Americans though the poet ate in the kitchen and becomes handsome but his beauty not recognized. The poet taking solely about the kind of physical beauty that sets him apart from other people. He talks about the beauty of existence. There is beauty in life, is living. The poet claims that once white people are beautiful, they will be ashamed that they denied black people their equality.

Hughes poem , **"I, Too"** explores the duality of identity that defined black life in the United States in the 1920's Black Americans claims citizenship in a country that denied black citizens black life the same rights that were provided to white citizens . The poet claim that he is an American and entitled to the same privileges as all other Americans, including the right to eat with Americans of any racial or ethnic background. **'I, Too'** shows that the poet trying to establish his identity through the progress of the poem.

The poem Will *"V-day Be Me-day?"* Written by Langsten Hughes. It describes the poet plight sight of rascal combat due to inequality among colored individuals in America. The poet focuses his attention on his colored comrades and himself and revolving and rebelling against the discrimination and inequalities which they are forced to endure in their own nation. Langsten Hughes tried to express the feeling of injustice and revolt which was once felt by the poet himself.

The poet questions as Or will you do me as the German did the Jews? When I've helped this world to save, shall I still be color's slave? The poet compares himself with Jews and compares white skinned Americans as the Nazi Germans who brutally tortured the Jews even after they were promised freedom. Through much diligence. The poet also feels that he himself trapped individual in his own nation and even through constant tediousness and diligence, he still would not be treated equally nor be granted liberty.

The poet is trying to convey to the reader that his triumph can never be celebrated . He also feels that all his hard work of fighting for liberty and justice would be for nothing . Poet uses

a range of stylistic devices in this poem in order to describe his fight or racial combat due to inequality and injustice among colored individuals in America.

Conclusion

In this paper I tried to focus on the identity crisis of Black Americans. Through his poems Langston Hughes tried to put forth the problems that his people are facing in America. Black Americans gave their effort to build America. But they are neglected to share the facilities in America. The crisis that Black people facing in America is not recognized by the white people. In the poem , ‘**I, Too**’ and **Let America Be America again**’ the poet emphasizes the optimism that he too can sing America. He feels that the day will come when white people treat black people as their equals and they share the same dining hall or hotels etc... . It is also noted that in his farewell speech on 11/01/2017 Barack Obama felt that still racial discrimination prevailed in America. It is very sorrowful that Barack Obama is the Black American who elevated as the president of the USA , still the air of segregation and racial discrimination prevailed in USA even is 2017.

References:

1. An Introduction to Black American Poetry by Jean Dubos.
2. On “Let America Be America Again” , by James Presley.
3. Commentary on the Poem & Quot, “Will V-Day Be Me-Day too?” & Quot-----extract from this document.
4. “I,Too”-Poetry for Students
Ed.Sara Constantaks. Vol.30.Detroit:Gale,2009 Page:97-117, Copyright 2009 Gale,Cengage Learning.
5. Critical Appreciation of above Three Poems – Internet Sources.
6. Google-Biography of Langston Hughes.