

LANGSTON HUGHES AS A COMMITTED POET - A SHORT VIEW

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Abstract:

The basic aim of the paper is to analyze the negatively racial discrimination that happened to black people, such as skin colour, prejudice discrimination, stereotypes and racial segregation. Second, I intend to survey the various and evolving attitudes and approaches in the poetry of Langston Hughes with Negritude and other modes of cultural Africanism. Thirdly I will try to focus on the committedness of Langston Hughes who is one of the most celebrated and acclaimed authors in Afro American literary corpus recognized all over the world for his acute observation and portrayal of the life and experiences of his community.

Keywords: color, prejudice, racial discrimination, stereotypes, community, Blacks, racism and oppression etc.

Introduction:

Langston Hughes is one of the most celebrated and acclaimed authors in Afro American literary corpus recognized all over the world for his acute observation and portrayal of the life and experiences of his community. Hughes is known as the poet laureate of his ethnicity for the simple reason that he bespeaks like his people, of his people, and for his people. He can also be classified as a modern poet who puts emphasis on the splintered self not only of his people suffering affronts in American society but also of all the downtrodden suffering the pangs of exploitation and estrangement in societies mired in deception and sleaze. Poetry, for him, is not, what Wordsworth argues, the "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" (Arnold 180) but something more, that which interprets life for humanity, consoles it, sustains it and thus becomes "criticism of life." (Arnold 261) Hughes gives a robust and pragmatic expression to the life of blacks that had been an experience of sorrow and disappointments. Experiencing racial bigotry and its dehumanizing pressures, Hughes eloquently expresses his ethnicity's vaulting ambition of freedom, equality and justice in the United States of America. His poetry, as a result, becomes a life-long struggle against man's cruelty toward others on account of their origin, colour and other racial differences.

Discussion: People all over the world have been accepting Langston Hughes as the most eloquent spokesmen for the African Negroes in America. Several volumes of poetry, six novels, nine books for young people, two autobiographies, many short stories and sketches, plays, photo essays, translations, lyrics for musicals and operas, radio and television scripts, recording, and what not even including numerous articles on a variety of topics. Racial themes, controversial, and portraying his people filled with realism are much often in his writings. A Negro literature which was created by him later it became a part of the Harlem Renaissance Movement. He weaved into his poems the many-sided experiences of his race which were a victim of racial injustice in America. On the one hand, black Americans were fascinated by the over-enthusiastic character of the American Dream and, on the other, they were pained to be treated like a commodity and denied justice in the civilized society. This conflict between the reality and the dream finds an effective expression in his poetry at large.

In one of his poems, he blames New York city because it does not give the Negroes their rights as American citizens:

The Negroes who built a bridge made of
their bones in order to convey
civilization into the American land the
Negroes who are lost in your streets
even their bitter laughter turns into
horror and fear

Alas! New York the Negroes who suffer
in your fearful streets in your ancient
churches will surely forgive you and
forget that you are a killer a seductive
lady handicapped by fetters and chains
(Complete Works, Vol. I 1979: 442)

While condemning racism and the inequities it created for blacks and other minorities, Hughes called for co-operation among all races. He claims that the Negro remained aloof from the temporal, societal, and political realms when he rapturously transported himself in this envisioned life of freedom and dignity. It does not mean that the Negro forgot struggle, change and death completely but precedence was given to full realization of a strengthened and renewed world. The Afro-Americans in "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" was represented by an African vehicle by which the African culture finds its way to American society. By this same token, the American blacks in Hughes's "I Too" anchors the future and past from in an attempt to harmonize the wrongs that are done to the blacks in the past and mould the black identity with the American Negroes are proud to reclaim. The everyday struggle faced by urban blacks Americans who are neither American dream nor is human dignity was perfectly explained by touching hearts in his collection "Fine Clothes to Jews". The individuality of blacks did never isolate him from his brothers. He uses "I" individually and New Negro's is a collectively referable term. The usage of "I" in his

writings are indicative of the Negro awareness of his individuality as well as his diligent thought of representing all their black brothers and his role in articulating their problems and concerns in the American society.

In his poem "I, too, Sing America ", he portrayed the problems of assimilation right after the Negro's Self-recognition and reclamation of his individuality of blacks. An American Negro platform is made-up with his efforts in reclaiming his identity in America after the attempts of white society to exterminate the individuality and marginalize the personality of the Afro Americans during the tyranny period. Hughes's Negro, however, resists the world with his black identity as he speaks "I am the darker brother." The black identity here by this Negro is proudly claimed as it distinguishes him from others. And furthermore, He is also proud to talk about his blackness, which makes him distinctness and gives his uniqueness in society. He is much aware that he is not like others, but at the same time, that contrast does not alienate him from the rest. In the opposite hand, he propounded his presence and abiding in the American society as and when he says that he is a "brother;" who is having one of the rights to claim the citizenship of the land. He is no longer an outsider in the land of whites; rather he's just the darker brother of the whites in their land of American. America is no longer considered as the land of whites; it is instead the land for both blacks and whites, and the correspondence among them is not based on a master-servant relationship, instead is established on the new perception of brotherhood. Forgoing, the American Negro was required to be sent to the margins, he started accepting to be treated as an inferior to his owners. Yet, presently he does not want to send to eat in kitchen with servants. He no longer constrains these social barriers who categorize him as an inferior. He heals from the fetters of slavery and is prepared to beset the world with his revolutionary behaviour:

‘To-morrow I'll sit at the table
When company comes
Nobody'll dare
Say to me,
"Eat in the kitchen"
Then.’

Hughes makes his Negro to channelize the pain of the past events in order for his better tomorrow. The social marginalization imposed on him during the days of enslavement was once accepted by him but not now, he had to recover from the internalization from the inferiority to others during the period of reconstruction, but not the fetters now he frees himself from the visible shackles of slavery, and what which exploits his physical labour and also reliefs from the invisible restraints of servitude, which prolongs him for the classification of hierarchical order as an inferior to the white brother. As the Negro reaches the stage of self-realization and starts accepting his black identity, he inspects the requirement of casting the pain toleration to societal tangle. Being Black does not disgrace

him anymore; rather it determines and empowers his personality. The perception of the people changes as it happens them to see irrespective of colour on his skin is restored with the acknowledgement of his beauty and his desire that his white brothers could accept the blackness in order to see what beyond his colour. He desires they would understand the beauty behind his personality and regret the discrimination and prejudice against their black brother. Hughes says:

‘I am the darker brother.

.....Hughes claims the American Negro to have their right assert brotherhood with the whites, and at last, he allows him to completely identify himself in the new area. He is not only an inhabitant in America; he enhances as a metaphor from Hughes’s portrays him: "I, too, am America". He acquires the whole full recognition with the place. He is no longer dependent and needs to seek the permission of whites to claim his citizenship as rightful American. It is interesting to note that Hughes concentrates on the Negro's progress in America and his achievements in reclaiming his blackness and forcing his identity and his right of citizenship in a society where he was considered an inferior and an outcast.

Hughes's "Mother to Son" symbolizes a black mother's experience in American society and the difficulties that she faces during her attempt to identify herself with the place. There are two sections divided in the poem and which symbolically represents the manoeuvred from one side of the coin to the other as it is tossed. Further, In addition to this the thematic movement from estrangement to an identification, the poem depicted the temporal movement in accordance with this transition from the past to the day now. In the first section of the poem, Hughes writes-

Well, son, I'll tell you
And places with no carpet on the floor—
Bare.

The mother in the poem describes her past using such as “tacks” and “splinters” in order to describe her pain associated with her past. The words, however, are the unspoken physical pain rather than spiritual suffering. She only describes what kind of life she lived in American society. She talks about the pieces of memories in her life; how her life was “worn and torn up,” and the places she dwelled with “no carpets.” Then she reaches the point when she realizes that all that American society offered her was "Bare." She has come to a world that has nothing to offer but pain and hollowness. In the second section, the mother shifts from talking about what life offers her to her own reaction to the present situation. Hughes writes-

‘But all the time
.....
Where there ain't been no light.’

The use of the gerund highlights the mother's difficulties in integrating with American society. Hughes explicates the fact that the blackness is not an obstacle impeding the black writers from finding their voices in America's literary scene. He emphasizes that for the black writers to be recognized as members of the "white" canonical society in American, they should be recognized as black individuals first, and they can be as a common person in American society as individuals not any muffled voices referring to black writers. In 'Words like Freedom', Hughes tacitly exposes the double standard the American government plays regarding the freedom of the Blacks. He makes it obvious that words like 'freedom' and 'liberty' as used in the U.S.A. are different from their literal meaning of setting people free from oppression, hostilities and indignities. He expresses that the U.S.A. government is hypocritical about it. He further states that the Blacks do not enjoy the freedom being talked about. It is ironical that the words (freedom and liberty), which are supposed to make one happy and leap for joy, instead 'almost make me cry'. The persona moves on to state that he is not speaking merely to exaggerate, rather he is speaking out of personal experience because he has heard the words several times in his milieu without its being put into practice.

Hughes emphasized the importance of African culture. The tone of the poem "Cross" was anger at the beginning when the speaker made threats at his/her parents. During the middle of the poem, the speaker took the threats back and apologized. At the end of the poem, the speaker was in a state of confusion, wondering whether he/she is black or white, as follows:

"My old man died in a fine big house.

.....nor black?" (Cross)

The image of the blacks as an exploited and cheated race that is used to achieve impressive feats and is dumped and neglected is portrayed in 'Crown and Garlands', where the poet laments that the only thing blacks receive for distinguishing themselves or accomplishing a notable act to honour for the country is just laurels – which does not add any notable values to their economic lives, families or the community. In a poem "Merry Go Round" he drew a picture of a child who may have not ever ride merry-go unfortunately because of being a black. These words "can my child ride?" describes the pain of a father to make his child happy he must seek permission are really heart melting ones. Here once again the poet makes us aware about his and his people's pain and sufferings and he want to relocate his self by showing how cruel segregation it was:

"To a merry go round

Where is the horse

For a kid that's black" (Collected Poems: 240)

There is a radical change in the ideology of Hughes writings from folklore poetry to a revolutionary poetry in the 1930s, is explained in this poem "White Man"

where the racial conflict between Americans and the Afro-Americans is replaced with the class struggle of the majority against economic exploitation and capitalism:

“Sure, I know you,
you’re a White Man.
I’m a Negro.” (Collected Poems: 162).

The deprived blacks in the city who aren’t able to pay their debt for houses were becoming the victims of a conspiracy between the landlords, the police, the judge and the media:

Police! Police!
Come and get this man!
He’s trying to ruin the government
And overturn the land!
Copper’s whistle!
Parole bell!
Arrest.
Precinct station.
Iron cell.
Headlines in the press:
Man threatens landlord
Tenant held no bail
Judge gives Negro 90 days in county jail
(Selected Poems 1974: 239).

Anew in the poem “I Too, Sing America,” the miserable condition of the Negroes area expressed by real emotions and says America is not only of white men. Even I am an American, in general, we all are. By using a pictorial quality of writing he draws a picture in front of our eyes what life was in the 1930’s:

“I am the darker brother
They send me to eat in the kitchen
When company comes
But I laugh
And eat well and grow strong” (CP: 206)

Conclusion:

Langston Hughes tries in seeking the attention of black people throughout the catastrophic history of Africans and Afro-Americans. Summoning racism and ill-treatment and to bring down the humiliation and by narrowing the chaos and riots against their people, his main goal is to rebuild the history of bickering slavery and irony by colonizing and to rewrite the story from the perspective of colonized, the oppressed and humiliated. Hughes does not use his blues poetry to condemn the brutal treatment of the Blacks in the U.S. only; he equally uses the poetry to condemn racism, which he sees as the root of all woes bedeviling the Blacks in the world. He depicts racism as a serious issue, which could be found in every sector of the socio-economic, political and religious life in the country, including education. He probes into history to bring to memory the circumstantial influx of blacks into America, the untold hardship that surrounded it,

slavery, racism, the civil rights movement and the struggle for black freedom. Through the poem, Hughes is able to capture the suffering of the blacks and calls on the whole world to revisit the issue of slavery and racism, especially as it is practised in the United States of America and other sites of the Black's predicament in the world.

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