

Black Feminist Thought – The Importance of Self Definition

G. Anburaj, and Dr. T. Mangayarkarasi

1. *ManonmaniamSundaranar University (MSU)Abishekapatti,
Tirunelveli – 627012, Tamilnadu, India
2. Rani Anna Govt. College for Women, (ManonmaniamSundaranar
University (MSU)Abishekapatti, Tirunelveli – 627012, Tamilnadu, India

Abstract: Audre Lorde explains that because of the racialized oppression and devaluation African-Americans have putatively experienced a social philosophy which is a source of inward twoness and many black women were disguised and forced themselves to adopting the life style and traditions of the oppressor and dominant group so that they could fit into the society's standards and to be respected. The period was African- Americans were not given basic rights especially women started protesting and speaking and demanding for their right and standing up for their own people. Pauli Murray, famous black feminist speaks out how the dominant group in the society have gained their power from the concurrence of its sufferers, who are forcedly made to mentally accept the superiority of the oppressor and are benumbed based on their race, religion, caste etc. It gives an idea how the feelings and ideologies of the black women were not given any kind of significance. Many U. S Black women writer and directors have reconnoitered many ways to portray the astonishing relationships among the black women. With their continued determination in overcoming the struggles and social stigmas, they are finally starting to self-define their own identity.

Keywords: *Dual Identity; Marginalization; Canopy; Formation; Ideology*

1. INTRODUCTION

Audre Lorde explains that because of the racialized oppression and devaluation African-Americans have putatively experienced a social philosophy which is a source of inward twoness and many black women were disguised and forced themselves to adopting the life style and traditions of the oppressor and dominant group so that they could fit into the society's standards and to be respected. The period was African- Americans were not given basic rights especially women started protesting and speaking and demanding for their right and standing up for their own people. Pauli Murray, famous black feminist speaks out how the dominant group in the society have gained their power from the concurrence of its sufferers, who are forcedly made to mentally accept the superiority of the oppressor and are benumbed based on their race, religion, caste etc. It gives an idea how the feelings and ideologies of the black women were not given any kind of significance. Many U. S Black women writer and directors have reconnoitered many ways to portray the astonishing relationships among the black women. With their continued determination in overcoming the struggles and social stigmas, they are finally starting to self-define their own identity.

Murray has explained the role of proper education for the black women so they can portray their perspective more effectively and powerfully to the world. The time when all the women, lesbians, gays and other suppressed groups of the people of the black civil society abolished the segregation and began to speak, is the same time when the integration of the U.S society started parallelly. The communalistic orientation is also seen among contemporary African-Americans but the most important relation would be that of a mother and her daughter. Because mother is the only one who can fill her daughter's heart with braveness to fight the world and to stand against all the stigmas put Infront of them based on their race or ethnicity and to live a life they deserve. Karla Holloway, through her books explains us how the humanity among the black women makes them stronger and by helping each other they stand strong. Audre Lorde gives us a clear sketch about how listening to one another within the black women's committee plays a key role in the process of transformation, because only a victim can understand the pain and suffering of another victim. To put a stop to all types of abusive relationship belittling relationships and giving a better future to young girls, scholarships were offered, which caused quite a stir in the political situation and created a new cerebral perspective. The blues tradition is an indispensable part of the African-American music. The powerful literary voices of the African-American women played a key role in making them more inferior and effective. During the 70s, education played an important role for the African-American women to make use of the scholarships and make their own mark in the society. Individualization was the most important thing all the black women have stressed about because it gives them the freedom to live a life happily however, they want without depending on others.

2. LITERARY REVIEW

“Black Feminist Thought” can be taken as a critical look inside the minds of Black Women, and a study of how Black Women survived or even thrived and grew under the oppressive forces of patriarchy and racism in mid 90s USA. The author has compiled her works taking inspirations and inputs from already existing works and thoughts of great feminists before and alongside her, while providing base for future Black Feminists to stand on. Patricia Hill Collins has extensively mentioned and at times quoted great thinkers and feminists like Audre Lorde, Ella Surrey and many others. The chapter” The Importance of Self Definition” can be treated as a combined effort of PH Collins and countless other feminists before and alongside her. The Author has described Black Women as having dual-identity. A confirmable, malleable metaphorical outer shell and a strong, intellectual and courageous inner self. She has discussed how this dual identity helps develop and nurture the spirit of resistance against mighty tides of racism and patriarchy so rampant in mid-90’s Afro societies.

PH Collins has suggested hints of a common collective identity among the female African American community and their role in promoting both homogenous communal as well as heterogenous individualistic positive growth. This is quite accurate and even evident in oppressed minorities around the world. As an example, Indian marginalized communities figuratively stick together, cause strength in numbers is highly prevalent in this case. It can be agreed upon, that a homogenous collective voice provides idealistic weight to marginalized opinions.

Under the figurative canopy this “voice” provides, individualistic growth can take place. This is quite obvious if we analyze the “harijan” community in India. Under their collective rights movement they propelled their individualistic growth and raised themselves up the perceived social hierarchy. PH Collins also discusses the concept of safe spaces and their viability in the current scenario, while concluding they are a necessity for growth in any community at any time and in any social frame. The spaces she discussed are both physical and mental, described as places of reflection, mental self-image or even ideology formation. These spaces are free from external oppressive surveillance and can facilitate something as mundane as food recipe passage between generations to as critical as formation of a strong positive self-image to resist oppression. Safe spaces can even lead to formulation of interpersonal relationship bonds both formal and informal. Safe Spaces, can be agreed upon to be necessary for growth even in today times where oppression and discrimination is not as big of an issue as it used to be.

Construction of Safe Spaces in modern times turns out to be even more challenging with the threat of presenting oneself as being separatist. Safe Spaces in modern times can take forms of communal gatherings, cultural meetings or even household to neighborhood relations. While societal integration is important, its necessary or even critical to have to space to think and self-reflect. The Author does a critical discussion of role of media both written and of audio-visual nature in promoting self-growth and a culture of resistance. This is especially true as words and images can convey emotions and ideas far beyond possible reaches of their originator. The “Blues” a type of music genre provided support and strengthened the Black community while even providing financial and intellectual opportunities to the Afro American communities. Music has been an integral part of resistance across the world. Rhythms convey ideas and emotions in such effectiveness that its almost magical. Music was always a part of Indian Freedom struggle or even more recently Indian struggle for Lok pal bill by Anna Hazare. Music can bring people together, ignite dormant emotions and convey artistic ideas that mere texts are unable to.

Black Women Writers have also been discussed, whose writing provided coming generations of thinkers a platform to base their ideologies upon, learn and even reaffirm their believes. This also empowered black women to be express themselves and get recognized intellectually. Ideas and second-hand experiences are instrumental in formation of ideologies. Although, multimedia provides stimulated input, but the inputs aren’t as extensive as those of textual medium. This can also be observed in the case of Indian Freedom fighters as text-based idea sharing inspired and essentially, raised a new generation of intellectual freedom warriors like JL Nehru and MK Gandhi who finally carried India to its freedom. The Author Talks about importance of self-definition, self-valuation, self-reliance and independence in personal and communal empowerment. This is highly logical and can be understood in the following way. Self-definition helps us clearly define who we are and thus, we are less likely to be swayed away by negative external self-images and even if not physically can mentally resist the oppressor. Mental crackdown and breaking of someone’s will is instrumental in defeating them. Mental and self-image preservation would help combat this. Self-valuation would allow resisting positive minds, to understand its importance and demand for rights

and justice. Self-valuation would eventually bring people together and would facilitate formation of a positive community. Finally, self-reliance and independence would reduce dependency on others while promoting a self-dependent culture which would help break the chains of bondage. Self-Dependence has even been an integral part of Gandhi's version of struggle for freedom where it was observed to be extremely successful. Victims are usually reliant on their oppressor and freeing them of this reliance would be truly liberating.

The present scenario is different from the one described in this book and even the author seems to be aware about this. The way she has presented and futureproofed her ideas is an evidence of the same. The ideology described in this chapter is also very same as the one observed among oppressed marginalized communities in India. The description of safe spaces, dual identity can even be observed in an abundance of struggling communities across the world. Even, in a time, where conditions for black women in USA, is not as hostile as it used to be. These ideas still stand in regards of their promise for growth, interpersonal positive linking and prosperity.

3.CONFLICT DISCUSSION

1.Author says that to ridicule strong, assertive Black mothers by labelling them matriarchs reflects an effort to control a dimension of Black women's behavior that threatens the status quo. (Page: 115) This statement by author is quiet a good decision to change mindset of mothers. But, right now we have access to technology which allows us to go all around the world by just sitting at home. So, by use of technology if black mothers came to know what is happening in others parts of the world with women, they will understand benefits of freedom to women by observing other countries and different types of societies will make them to understand modern feminism in a much better way and they will come to know what is status quo of women in this world. 2. The author says that laws forbidding gay and lesbian marriages coupled with resistance to gays and lesbians having and raising children seem designed to stop the "spread" of homosexuality. (page:131) Right now, laws are reformed in many parts of the world including U.S.A. Around 2015 U.S Supreme Court guaranteed right to marry to same-sex couples. It is the 14th amendment. This proves that the world is changing its point of views with respect to LGBT community. Many governments made amendments in their constitution to give equal status to LGBT community. Even India made an amendment with respect to article 377. LGBT community is also slowly gaining rights and privileges which are enjoyed by heterosexual community.

4. INFERENCE ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

From so many years, people are discriminated due to their caste, creed, gender, color and tone. There is discussion on problem faced by them and various method they, i.e., black woman and black feminists and how often they cop-up with that and solution they applied to motivate themselves and their colleagues. This includes how they raised their voice and their relationship with one another their Blues tradition which helped them a lot in gaining importance in society and provided them with employment.Patricia Hill Collins in Fifth chapter talks about

verbal and thoughts of black feminist and also women who are outside academia. Author tries to say that black race women always are in contradiction with violating their self-definition and also, they are against the people who often deprive them due to their color, skin tone and they have no right to say that. Author says that Black women are often neglected by society and they are always alienated and other race people make them feel shame. It has been seen that black women are not in higher position in authorities and that the reason why they are never getting their respect back as white in higher position always demolish their thought and give them another direction without solving their problem and harassment.

Black women are always as structure for harassment. Author Collins says that whole world speaks for black but does not allow to speak themselves, that is, black women herself. Author says that from ancient times, United States black women self-construction and unity appeared in three phases. One of them was Black Women relationship like mother-daughter relations, Sister-friend relations. Mothers used to train their daughter and used to taught them survival tactics during that era for black women who were harassed. Black women as writers were primarily for those black women who were educated, though other who were denied writing were busy in reading novels and books written by them to raise their voice for criticism done to them. Through black women relationship and black women writers every black woman gained potential to raise their voice against injustice and oppression done to them and also it cleared and uplifted image of black-woman-hood. Music was second location which made black women community to strength to gain freedom. Blues were sung and were considered religious by black women as it gave them strength to face difficulties. Black women are epitome in rebuilding, redesigning and spreading blues in American-African culture. Popularity of blues and its lyrics gave black women to upraise and gain their identity in world. "Queen of Blues" by Ma Rainey and major female blue singers were recorded which points tradition expressed by working class black women. duCille used to call Blues as authentic as it led to dividend of Black voice into two groups, namely, middle class women-literati and working-class women blue singers. Due to popularity of Blues Working class black women were recording it in white-men companies and middle-class women consider it as means to outspread cultural movement. Then also, many times Blues of Black women were considered as low-culture.

Self-definition includes Black womanhood reality in society while self-valuation is term that describes valuing yourself that is actual content of self-definition. Self-valuation is needed in individual to sustain in this world and respect for others and self is necessary as they make an individual to gain prosperous life. Changing the consciousness changes the way we live. According to Nikki Giovanni we live in a real world where everything does not happen according to our belief, so if you don't like world you live change it and is you can't change it change yourselves. So, self, change is related and Voice of empowerment gives you freedom to speak against injustice. So, through these black women got instinct to uplift their existence. Though four pillars of consciousness, that is, Self-definition, Personal empowerment, self-evaluation and respect and self-reliance and independence are present but these did not encounter and fit the problems of Unite states Black women very well. Changing world and group individual ides are changing and are

getting new meanings. These changes persist and survival is for sure till they know power of self-definition.

5.UNEXPECTED FINDINGS

While going through the book, an unexpected thing was found out that amazed reader and it was that music is the tool which helped black women and black feminists to gain inevitable respect and status rather than an image of discrimination. Blues tradition and its lyrics got fame in U.S. and this led to upliftment of these women. Even White American male were ready to record blues from black women, and these tells us that if you have knowledge and talent in any field then, there is no barrier which can prevent you from becoming successful in your life though path through which you get success can be arduous. Writing novels and other literacy work also gave them fame and respect but music gave them immense respect and status.

6. CONCLUSION

The fight of these women against the dominant group is still pursuing but now it is stronger than before since the literacy rate and awareness among people is growing rapidly. Black feminism has hold out against the test of time and continues to be a splendid political archetype. Author included blues of Many African-American writers in the book for readers to show their point of views and thoughts on African-American women regarding Self-definition and sexuality. There blues were main source of inspiration for many women at that time. The author also included literary works of many African-American women which depicts the struggles of black women in the society. The author included struggles of women from the past who strived to live as slaves and as sexual objects under white men in the society. She included ideology of black mothers who were not accepting modern feminism which shows thinking of women from olden days. Thus, by including blues, ideologies, movies of black women she made the readers to come across opinions and goals of black women in the society. Black women then and now were evolving constantly to gain important and status in life. In this journey education was performing leading role. Many black women gain recognition in society through education, they became writer, influencer and many more. Many black women through education uplifted their race like Angela Davis, Bell Hooks and others.

REFERENCES

1. Patricia Hill Collins - Black Feminist Thought, Second edition – Hyman - 1990
2. Paula J. Giddings - When and where I Enter – Harper Collins - 2007
3. Melanie L. Harris - Gifts of virtue, Alice walker, and womanist Ethics – Macmillan - 2010
4. Angela Y. Davis - Cornel West, Frank Barat – Freedom is a constant struggle – 2016
5. Dr.D.PaulDhinakaran, “Exports and Imports Stagnation in India During Covid-19- A Review” GIS Business (ISSN: 1430-3663 Vol-15-Issue-4-April-2020).

6. MalaikaAdero - A Black Woman Did That - Simon & Schuster Logo – 2020
7. Imani Perry - Breathe: A Letter to My Sons - Beacon press Boston - 2019
8. Mikki Kendall - Hood Feminism - Bloomsbury Publication - 2020