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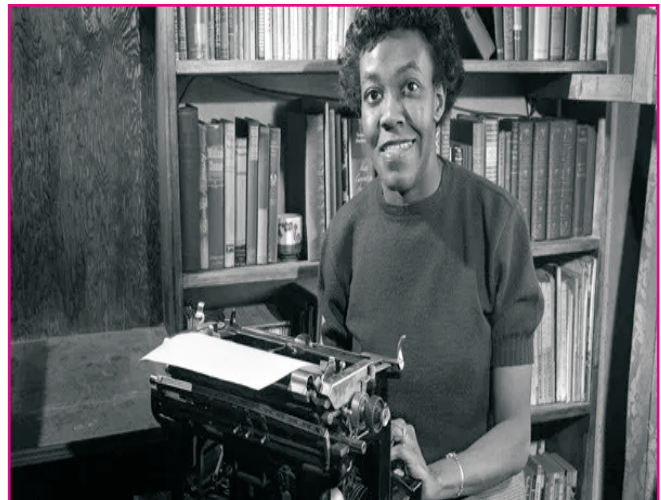
RETHINKING COGNIZANT PLEAD IN THE POETRY OF GWENDOLYN BROOKS

Bharat Sonar

Department of English, Smt.H R Patel Arts Mahila College,
Shirpur,Dhule District (M S) India .

ABSTRACT

Gwendolyn Elizabeth Brooks, a prominent and established literary figure in the world of commonwealth literature. She has gifted the multiplicity of art forms. Her writing shows the predicament of being the black person. Every creation of her has a capacity to penetrate the heart of the common man because of her exploration of the internal conflict. Each piece shows her attempt to change the social and cultural fabric and bring the ethical universal equality. Her experiences of life, an attitude to see vigilantly towards life and a nature to comment on the life made her poetry more sharp and lively. Her attempt



of creating the awareness put her on the pinnacle of success. Her literary work including 'A Street in Bronzeville (1945)', 'Annie Allen (1949)', 'The Bean Eaters (1960)', 'In the Mecca (1968)', 'Riot (1969)' and many more showed her increasing concern with social issues like racism, war, patriotism, oppression and a sense of alienation. Art of Gwendolyn is having impressionistic style and explores her passion, emotion and internal wish. Her poetry expresses the multicultural bequest of Africans. The enslavement and oppression of Afro-Americans are vividly picturised by the poet through apt reference of negation of history. Present paper is the humble attempt of mine is to show the inner pain of Africans due to repressive situation.

KEY WORDS: Africans, Discrimination, Equality, Humanity, Society.

INTRODUCTION :

Gwendolyn Brooks' poetry has been observed as the realistic and naturalistic portrayal of life. Brooks is obsessed by the past and she finds her poetry the perfect repository for her laments about the situation which her people faced from the generations. The poetic personas of her poetry are victims of bigotry, subjugation and their life is full of complexities. Every premise of a poem itself has a power to make a poem flourish and make the mind restless. As we go through the poetry of Brooks, our inner response begins to feel the agonies of the specific community and think that this is the quite painful. The notable black writer Brooks demonstrates her private experiences and reopens the American history. Her poetry is political, social and critical presentation of the American past. Her work is mirroring the status of blacks especially black women in white society. It is her outcry which opens the humiliation and rejection. Her poetry shows her intolerant feelings, finding her attempt hopeless for survival. It is intervention in American historiography where the overwhelming presence of black people is felt. i.e. The people, who were taken to America, used as the workers, slaves but treated like less than

animals, uprooted from homelands, the people felt orphan. They remain homeless, identitiless and even considered cultureless. Brooks felt impatient due to this stipulation and so she unveils her inner world and exhorts the masters to stop the assault on the blacks and recognize their humanity who forbidden the citizenship. The sensitive world of Brooks expresses the inner violence and makes her poetry livelier.

Black writers, being the members of the subordinate and oppressed voices were in the damaging conditions. The brutal and neglected status of these writers had to face the censorship and banning. The police and the political strategies did not allow them to write in free and frank way about their experiences. Generally, all the creations of the blacks and coloured were banned and exiled due to the enforced restraint of the communism Act. Ezekiel Mphahlele, Dannis Brutus, Lewis Nkosi, Alex La Guma, Peter Abrahams, Arthur Nortje were some of the black writers who were the sufferers of the system including Gwendolyn Brooks. The writers had to face the multitasked oppression due to the restriction. They suffered in many ways like aggravation due to the low wages, restriction by the police, pass laws, job reservations, curfew laws and restrictions to live the free life. The surroundings made these people face the problems of their identity and so they struggle to create their places not only on the physical level but also at the spiritual and emotional levels. They were so eager to give an outlet to their inner wounds through their pen.

Brooks' poem, *The Negro Hero* shows her protest against the military establishment. It beautifully unveils the desperate inhuman situation. A black hero did not find his own position. He is still experiencing a fix, a predicament. Through the poem, the poet effectively portrayed various measures of a black Negro. He is a victim of xenophobic society. This poem is from the volume, *A Street in Bronzeville*. The term 'Bronzeville' was commonly used to signify a segregated black northern population. It is her wish provide platform to her community to know the reality about their life. It is her political commentary opening the black life as deep hollow in the American society. *A Negro Hero* whose real life model Dorie Miller defied America's incarceration of black sailors to the role mess men, seized an anti-aircraft gun, and downed four attacking Japanese guns, an act for which he was awarded the Navy cross. The poem illustrates the straightremonstration. The speaker of the poem determined to save democracy notwithstanding the fact that the nation may prefer racial hatred to its independentdoctrine. The Negro Hero saw the war as a natural working out of the capitalistic system. The hero's dignity and self possession and his love for the hostile democracy are what the poem speaks about. It is the war that has shattered their promises, dreams, longings and joys.

In a southern city a white man said
Indeed, I'd rather be dead;
Indeed, I'd rather be shot in the head
Or ridden to waste on the back of a flood
Than saved by the drop of a black man's blood.

(Brooks, Gwendolyn, 1945, p. 20-21.)

The poem shows the inhuman treatment the blacks are facing from the generations. The white troops had their orders but 'the Negroes looked like men' remains an undisturbed image. It unveils the heritage of the black men. The protagonist wishes to oppose his exiting place in the society and solve the problem of the humiliation. The poetesssqueezes not only the personal sorrows but states the sorrow of her people and shows her clear protest against the military establishment. Her root of the pain is in the past and sensibly conversing to appeal to her people for being strong and overcome these ill-treated past. Being a writer she is very much conscious about her responsibility for fetching the needed change in the society and clears the cultural fabric which has been rooted in the domineering past. Magically she brings her own life to the level of poetry. The personal experiences make Brooks the poet of acute sensitivity. Commenting on the situation, Ron Welburn points out:

The black art movement has reached a new level of commitment and sophistication; its focus is no longer protest against America, but should (be an) embracement and celebration of the black experience.

(Ron Welburn, 14 Feb. 1971, p. 20.)

The hero as a young man is thrilled by his adventurous and spiritual resources but on the other level he is possessed by a unilluminated hope that his heroic risking of life in the battle might help him ending his exile status. The exile tensions are closely associated with the triumphs in the human struggle. Thus the reality is deeply impressed on her creative imagination constituting the history and civilization with the help of art, culture and literature. It is observed that Brook's increasing concern with social issues gives her poetry continuity within the changing atmosphere. The poem also remains memorable for its rich imagery, sophisticated use of sound values, speech tones, and wit, ironic situations and the tension felt by the hero as a self and as a soldier. Her art was nourished by Western traditions and the complexity of verse relates her poetry to the stream and strain of the metaphysics. Her poem, 'The Sundays of Satin-Legs Smith' can be regarded as an odyssey of ritualistic and naturalistic self creation. It is the 'microcosmic dramatization' of thousands of black men forcibly transported from their own land to the new or Promised Land of America. This poem is an example where the poet successfully develops the humanistic aesthetic characterized by the idea of alienation and quest for identity. It posed the existential question. It presents the exploitation of women.

Pictures, too, as usual, are blurred.
 He sees and does not see the broken windows
 Hiding their shame with newsprint; little girl
 With ribbons decking wornness, little boy
 Wearing trousers with the descent patch,
 To honour Sunday; women on their way
 From "service", temperate holiness arranged
 Aboard on asking faces; men estranged
 From music and from wonder and from joy
 But far familiar with the guiding awe
 Of foodlessness.

(Brook, Gwendolyn, 1945 p. 15-16.)

The poem is so powerful. The ethical expected world has been very powerfully explained by the poet. The animal imagery of cat used in the first part of the poem confined the human dimension and then proceeded on metaphor of life's dramas. According to Baxter Miller,

An oxymoron communicates Satin-Leg's confusion ("clear delirium"), yet the phrase clarifies a double consciousness working in the poem where the narrator's thinking occasionally merges with that of Satin-Legs. Whereas his perspective is generally muddled, hers is usually clear.

(Miller Baxter R, p. 102.)

The poem shows more pensive and perplexed attitude. The final stanza establishes the opposition, an overall difference that separates Satin-Legs who needs an peripheral description of life. Images used to show oppression shows the narrator's sensibility and a tone of enquiry of existential predicament of humanity. The second part of the poem is screening Smith as a pictogram of humanity. The images of diamond, silver plate; pearls etc. characterized the sophisticated modern upper class. It is a piece of art written in a black folk perspective and paradoxically on linguistic ground it divides Smith from his narrator. The theme of the poem is illustrated by contrasting black folk style with the traditional one. Sunday has a religious importance as it is a day of Sabbath prayer. But Sunday shows the social atmosphere where the blacks are getting suffocated. Thus the third part of the poem shows that Smith lacks a true imagination and he enjoyed feast with a diverse prostitute each Sunday. He was so much infatuated by sex that he fails to recognize the reality. The wear of little girls' ribbons and the neat patches on a little boys rag does not make him any difference. Morally and socially blind he purposely ignores the women returning from church on Sunday. On the other hand chooses a different prostitute, a lady with queen lace stockings and vivid shoes. The poem ends with Satin Legs submerging consciousness as the narrator creates a syntactic paradox. The poem stands as an example that distinguish the tradition, culture, style and habit of black

, the slaves and whites, the masters.

Gwendolyn Brooks expresses the complex meaning and opens the real wounds. Chicago, the metropolitan city plays very crucial role in Brooks life. It provides her the raw material for her creation. It gives her an idea to elaborate the class and racial segregation. She very keenly observes and feel the pathetic conditions of her people and so she opens her voice through pain. Being the subjectivity in the poetry, her works have a capacity to create awareness in the community and make them feel the need of ethical changes where they can live the life with equal right. Thus even if we take a cursory glance at her work of art, we find a strict comparison between black folk culture and American popular culture. As Maria K. Mootry has pointed out:

If region has played a large role in Brook's literary development, racial consciousness, with its attendant pride, pain and defiance, intruded very early in Brook's poetic career. Her first serious encounter with racial prejudice at Chicago's then elitist, largely white, Hyde Park High School, led her in 1933 to submit a poem of outrage and youthful defiance to the black newspaper, the Chicago Defender. In the poem she avoided explicit references to race, anticipating a strategy of indirection that would become a hallmark of her later poetry.

(Mootry Maria Kp.6-7.)

Brooks is quite aware of her minority status and she shows her humble attempt of creating the place for self. Her poems show her continuous revolt against the military establishment. As a black artist, Brooks racial themes and protest made the critics to undervalue her literature forgetting the fact that her minority status itself is the reason for her themes. By doing so they tried to negate her visibility as a woman writer. She became the victim of intracolonial and racial injustice. On this object, Simpson has pointed out that:

Although a Negro might not be able to write well without revealing her race, the writing's unimportant if being a Negro is the only subject.

(Simpson Louis, 27 Oct. 1963, p.6, 26)

She is larger than life figure in literature due to her exploration the womanhood throughout her creations. Her ethical bent of many verses are the result of the outward circumstances. Susanne Juhasz made the following comment;

Like the white women poets of her generation, Brooks may write about women, but rarely will she include herself among them. She never achieves either the personalism or the engagement that I have identified with the 'feminine' poet. Yet there is a difference between her presentation of women and that of the white women poets who are her contemporaries: in Brooks poetry- and indeed throughout the poetry of black women- there is a pride in womanhood that does not exist in the poetry of white women until recently.... The black woman...as wife and mother has been many things but never weak....Indeed! Gwendolyn Brooks, like the black women poets who have followed her, has always expressed pride in the black woman.

(Juhasz. Susanne, 1975, p.154.)

She is bold enough to create her existence in such racial suppression and able to create the awareness about the real conditions of the blacks. . The racial, social and political status of black woman has been expressed discursively in her most celebrated poem, The Weaponed Womanhood that appeared in her volume of verse, Selected Poems. She felt acute distress hearing blacks talk of prejudice. The poem appears to be an outlet for her anger.

Well, life has been a baffled vehicle
And baffling. But She fights, and
Has fought, according to her lights and
The lenience of her whirling place.

She fights with semi-folded arms,
 Her strong bag and the stiff
 Frost of her face (that challenges “when” and “if”)
 And altogether she does Rather Well.

(Brooks, Gwendolyn, 1963, p. 125.)

She is quite aware about the denial and the insulting place of the woman and so she joins the liberation movement and stands against the massive forces of racism, sexism and classism with her weapon of the expressive medium. She emotionally opens the multilayered oppression of a black woman.

She becomes the outstanding figure in the world of literature because of her vision and the unique presentation of the painful themes. She is the poet of dominant sentiments. They signify the ethnic perception of Books. *Gay Chaps at the Bar* in this poem she asked the chaps to curb excessive eagerness. This poem shows her immense apprehension for a theme that has had demands on the literature of the whites. The poem shows that the life of blacks is amid the stress and tension. It also shows her concern for the dilemma of the oppressed minorities struggle for identity.

My dreams, my works must wait till after hell

I hold my honey and I store my bread
 In little jars and cabinets of my will.
 I label clearly, and each latch and lid
 I bid, Be firm till I return from hell.
 I am very hungry. I am incomplete.

(Brooks, Gwendolyn, 1945, p. 23.)

The metaphors of food used here are characteristic of her writing. It expresses the incompleteness caused due to the war. It expresses the mental torment. The poem becomes far more attentive to blacks. Exile and quest are at the center of her writing. It operates upon our aesthetic perceptions through oppositions. Her artistry and energetic struggle for the existence of individuals formed the basis of her poems.

To conclude, it is necessary to mention here that Brooks's poems can be read with the new perception and poetic voice with her sensibility in the background of social experience and cultural environment significantly forms thematic material for her art. One cannot deny her artistic integrity to black art form and black power.

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