

## Violence and the Discourse of the Marginalized: A study of Amiri Baraka's *Dutchman and The Slave*

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Oh,when i think of my long suffering race,  
For weary centuries despised,oppressed  
Enslaved and lynched,denied a human place  
In the general life line of the christian west  
And in the Black Land disinherited  
Robbed in the ancient country of its birth  
My heart grows sick with hate,becomes lead,  
For this my race has no home on earth...

(Claude Mckay's Enslaved)

Any group or community confined to the outer edges of the society, deprived of a desirable life of dignity and freedom, suffering multidimensional disadvantages, lives a life of marginality. When it is done deliberately, systematically this social, political and economic repression can result in aggression and ultimately violence that justify's itself as being the only answer to the existential dilemma of the marginalized.

African Americans have a painful identity and a history of despair reflected in a rich and varied literature also known as black literature. This is the literature written around and written after the civil war period, replete with experiences of the "other" or the marginalized of American white dominated society. To keep alive the marginalization, myths of black inferiority and strange demonic behaviours are created that according to many somehow justify the political and socio-economic exploitation of the black minority community. It was in mid twenties that a change was working slowly in the form of resistance from the marginalised community; forcing to the fore a new generation of the freshly educated from the colleges and universities to rekindle the hope of a better future in the marginalized. It was a herculean task –to restore self esteem and also to make them convincingly aware that a life of dignity was possible with a collaborative effort. In other words a revolution was taking place with the younger generation leaders and highly committed-to-the-cause writers, intellectuals using their skills to steer the movement to a positive result oriented conclusion.

Many black writers entered the field with great confidence churning work after work- novels, poetry, short stories, essays, and plays projecting their experiences of confrontations, conflicts, humiliations psychologically damaging and demeaning sexual assaults. These writings came as clear,strong statements of calls for 'freedom'. Most of this discourse of the marginalized had violent scenes-appalling tragedies and bloodletting that had cathartic effect on those suffering rejection for centuries. Chroniclers recorded casual fights having serious consequences and larger dimensions and writers portrayed the hate and the boil of anger over spilling the streets in work after work. And the language used in this literature matches the abuse of human dignity. In these writings

authenticity and beauty comes from the originality, the genuineness of the experiences of suffering survival in a hostile atmosphere of marginality.

Amiri Baraka- a black African American, is one such very loud poet, novelist, playwright and social activist, exploring the experience and anger of the marginalized African American people. He uses his writing and theatre skills against racism and for advocating scientific socialism to reverse the political power structure that according to him was necessary to end the age old suffering of his community- the black people. Amiri produced four plays in 1964-The Baptism, The Toilet, The Slave and Dutchman. The last two are apt examples of the state of mind- miniscule the greater mind of the community; the mind that was so readily provoked by the word 'nigger'(also referred to by Mark Twain in The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, William Couton in The African, and so many writers) -thus revealing the deep seated hurt and complicated psychological behavior resulting in violent destruction of life and property.

In The slave-A fable in a Prologue and Two Acts , when walker the black educated protagonist had married Grace -a white woman but the failure of this relationship leaves him bitter and infact he comes a full circle with his compromised position of the oppressed.Walker in a bizzar scene loses his cool and hits Easley -the present white husband of his former white wife where upon Grace in a hysterical fit shouts 'you nigger murderer'; thus inadvertently exposing the deep seated prejudice and perhaps the fact that Grace as a member of the dominant community knows where it hurts most. No wonder, the protagonist of the play thinks white liberals to be hypocritical ;utterly disgusted he gives vent to his militant revolutionary ideas of the destruction of the city. For him destruction of the city is not much of a price to be paid for bringing about a change. The image of their black forefathers as victims provides the backdrop as the play opens with Walker Vessels as an old field slave introducing the play in the prologue and thereafter he transforms himself into the Black revolutionary...so there is a literal old field slave while the play proper reveals figurative slaves. The play closes with Walker as that old slave of the beginning of the play and explosions continuing in the background-a referral, a reminder to the continued violence in the world of the marginalized. Walker rejects easy, politically uninvolved life of a liberal man because he realizes social protest was not enough but it was action that in the world 'makes some place for itself'. The children of this mixed marriage important symbolically to the fabric of the play; have a very uncertain future and their father thinks in white society they will be 'freakish mullattos' and their father 'some evil black thing' while in black society their mother will be 'some white evil thing'. To him the answer lies again in violence-the death of these children .Here death is necessitated by a need to escape from a life of humiliation and rejection. He announces the death of their daughters to his dying former wife (though one of the final stage directions provides a tantalizing ambiguity).

The Slave is full of violence...Walker killing Easley and watching his former wife die ( hit by some explosive) ,the chilling suggestion of killing his daughters in addition to confessing having 'dragged piles of darkies'(the polluted elements) 'out of their beds and shot them for being in Rheingold ads'. This mutual slaughter of blacks and whites and the question whether blacks will necessarily create a better society is to the protagonist of the play, unimportant. What matters for him is that whites had the opportunity and they failed; now the black revolutionists should have a chance. He declares that it supersedes

considerations of murder, artistic creativity and intellectuality. He even dances and whoops like an Indian on the warpath; demands, mixing clichés about Indian & Africans, "Bwara, me want more fire water"& imitating a cliché Japanese soldier of world war second, calls Easley" doomed American dog"; - extending the scope of the revolution across boundaries.

In the Dutchman a play of two scenes, the protagonist Clay again a marginalized black man, is provoked and humiliated by a white neurotic woman Lula; who claims to know his 'type'. Clay with his white society education absorbs, plays modest- and even meek and consequentially gets murdered for his passivity. He pays a heavy price for the barbaric images of his race and ironically the punishment meted out to him is equally barbaric and speak of the sickness of the white radicals. It seems if Clay had somehow survived and lived on, in the next scene of the play he would as well be violent Walker of The Slave, killing whites and through their death restoring his own psychic-health. The history of America is a witness to similar disturbing scenes repeated time and again and that accounts for such political, racial and social themes of most of the black writings.

The Dutchman shows the age old prejudices force a white woman to confront the black man and question "what right do you have to be wearing a three-button suit and striped tie? Your grandfather was a slave; he did not go to Harvard". she is aware of his insecurities therefore dares him to pretend "that you are free of your own history." it is a searing two-character confrontation that begins playfully but builds rapidly in suspense and resonance. The dialogue between the two is fast -paced and intensifies into a dueling rhythm as both become openly confrontational.

Amiri's concept of the 'Revolutionary Theatre' applies to this early play the Dutchman. Marginalization and rejection gears psychic paralysis leading to annihilation of the marginalized and for the writer this is the real issue and he advocates violence as a means of solving it.. For as White Americans felt privileged to judge and to condemn, passivity of blacks to the atrocities against them made the situation even worse. In this play Amiri says tragic flaw of the protagonist is his passivity -a weak faced dalliance in order to seek a way into cultured white society and, he should have resisted that type of murder. Clay represents that form of foolishness with his bookish pretentious and narrow shouldered coat, interestingly, a coat that does not fit his body. Clay wants to hide behind a mask of culture and to fit his body and mind into the image that white culture dictates, reminding us of Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye, where the black family Breedloves disintegrate because of low self-esteem as they desperately wanted to match the white standards of beauty.

In Dutchman when Lula's taunts finally break through Clay's controlled resistance he responds violently. He grabs Lula, clubs the drunk to the floor, throws Lula back in her seat and slaps her. Next Clay vents his anger in a monologue that expresses scorn of white liberals and defends his personal decision to avoid murder by assuming a middle class life-style.He shocks her and himself, with his own hostility '...a whole people of neurotics, struggling to keep from being sane. And the only thing that would cure the neurosis would be your murders'-'just murder would make us sane'. But his own hostility surprises him, he has been trained to abhor hostility and that he would rather not kill but be with his words, and 'no death'. His retreat is his tragic flaw. He fails himself and Lula goads him to restrain her by warning him that he is dying because of his

assimilation, that he must release himself from his self imposed bonds. Clay is not clear on whether the rage or the repression has taken the greater toll on African American sanity. The scene escalates in dramatic force and now that Lula has the reason enough as the oppressor, to translate her hate into action Lula removes a knife from her bag and unexpectedly stabs Clay to death. Soon with the help of other passengers his body is removed and she spots another young black man enter the car and with the exchange of glances the ritual of seduction and murder begins yet again. As often is the case, the marginalized become stigmatized and are often at the receiving end of negative public attitudes failing to act to bring about the desired change which the playwright as an activist of the black American political movement, advocates through his plays.

Where in *The Slave Walker* resorts to violence to make up for the ultimate powerlessness of his community, in *Dutchman* Clay suffers for hiding behind the mask of white culture absorbs and an interesting interpretation of Lula's violence can be traced to the fear even panic of being pushed to marginalized position by the black man who apes the white culture constructs; thus his very presence on the scene poses a threat to Lula.

These plays are angry and shocking & the language is also violent and equally abusive. The black themed writings sought to establish the artistic validity of African American cultural idioms and that was openly anti-white. Since the history of the blacks in white America can be read as an epic of their painful identity and writers like Amiri Baraka choose to work toward a cultural communal evolution and theatre being very powerful medium, has been used most appropriately to this effect.

Violence in these plays is an expression of the marginalized since In the matrix of these plays the intensely felt sense of marginalization and rejection justify' the aggression and violence which for the powerless becomes the mantra of survival.

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