



Research Paper

The deplorable condition of African Americans in the light of diasporic, subaltern and gender studies.

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There was a lore “Aunt Aggy”¹ sung by African American slaves but even after so many years and the abolition of slavery the words are still very much true.

“You t’inks I’m mistaken, honey! But I know t’ings dat de wite folks wid all dar larnin’ nebber fin’s out, an nebber sarches fo’ nudder...”² (LOC 160)

The African Americans, usually constitute or denotes to a community who are either brought or are born Africans on the soil of America. Some are the offspring of both African parents while some are partly African and partly American or white on one side but legitimate births on the American soil. A mixed cultural community where we find people following different religions and customs yet are considered as one because of their ‘color’. Color has been playing an important role in their lives. And it is the color discrimination which has led them to this deteriorating state. Color in itself has no meaning whatsoever, just an outer texture, something visible and it cannot be controlled. No one can claim that they can temper with their complexion and features without undergoing any physical or psychological repercussions.

Similarly, the inability to except also leads to physical and psychological imbalance in one’s life. Color complexion plays an integral part in our lives. Although it is futile and nonsensical for that matter but it definitely alters our life. Appearance decides the attitude of an onlooker. The society had set some rules which we are following without questioning their reliability and relevance. The concept of Whites and Blacks has been an age old tradition and as Indians we do understand the plight of African Americans and the jeopardy they are in.

The recent case of George Floyd is a classic example of the color blindness that the white community is professing, associating the very existence of the African American community with their appearance. The atrocious behavior is sometimes done openly and sometimes in closed court rooms and halls of power in the name of security, protection, safety measures and legal constitutional policies which forebodes serious calamities. These things have been a whistle blower in the past and are still persisting. The incumbency of the whites to accept others as their equals.

On the other hand the discrimination and biased behavior has led to mass ghettoization of the Africans into suburban or suburbs or safe heaven as they are popularly known; like Harlem in New York. Not to mention the mental and psychological distress they undergo. The common perception of this is something happening internally without appearing on the outside. The inferior treatment has altered the inside framework of the African Americans who are among the largest population in the world suffering from mental distress disorder.

Like for instance, if we take the recent case of the homicide of George Floyd and the reaction of the African American community was quite predictable and relatable to previous notable incidents of Amadou Diallo in 1999 or Michael Brown in 2014, where the assaults or actions of police led deaths of African Americans as justified act of protection. But the question is how much the ill treatment be justified.

The most common emotion of mental distress is “Rage”. The African Americans and few liberals displayed their agitation and frustration in the form of “Violent Rage”, by rampaging, burning and looting. Three different cases in different years but same reaction from the community. Some experts suggested that they are barbarous, uneducated, lethal etc. while some joined hands in protest so that justice can be served. But the basic question of justice is still debatable.

The black urban life consist of people belonging to different social and financial strata. Literature indicates that racial segregation has been the driving force behind ghettoization or the formation of

predominately African American urban communities. Similar process have also taken place in suburbs from which whites flee when an influx of blacks occurs.

Due to mass accumulation of population the American Police Department and other controlling agencies, even the government for that matter had drafted some policies which according to them reduce crime and have entirely dismissed African American concerns about racial profiling, stop and frisk and the most awful is police brutality. Generally the government and bureaucracy's actions displays meager sensibility and empathy towards blacks. They have been accusing the Afro American community, which accuses them of favoritism and caring for the affluent. Some bureaucrats even claim that instead of finding flaws in their working the community should take responsibility of the issues in their neighborhood. The past of the ghettos has been tarnished with smuggling, human trafficking and illegal arms supply. The situation has been such that the survival at any cost was the motto.

The African community was brought in America to quench the dearth of labor. America at that time was no superpower but a newfound land where every other imperialist power of that era was trying to get a hold of. Colonization was rampant and new areas were located and inhabited by colonist pushing the natives out. For development labor was required. Evidence have proven that Columbus was the first explorer who brought African slaves to prove that he has found a new land and the people are different. He described the beginning of journey was like following the sun³. Deliberately to compensate the loss incurred by the monarchy for funding and aiding him in the expedition, and the promises made by Columbus about finding gold were blown in thin air. To compensate, he captured Africans and asked them to bring gold everyday or they were killed in punishment. This was the beginning of slave trade. Dutch, Spanish and British were the major players. Jonathan Gill in *Harlem, the four hundred year history from Dutch village to Capital of Black America*, has considered that the fate of African American could not have been different from the past as it had been all along an 'unrighteous beginning'⁴(LOC 34). The African American community has made a tedious journey of two centuries to reclaim their rights. With World Wars and Human Rights declaration, in backdrop and forefront, respectively, they have fought the Civil War as well.

The ongoing protest has been labelled as brutal while entirely missing the point. No one is inquiring the reason behind their actions. The African American community has always been denied equality on the basis of education, livelihood and finances. Strange but true in real sense it has been noticed that policing, housing, voting and employment usually carry undercurrents of racial inequality, although slavery has ended so is the civil rights movement and the recent past has witnessed the presidency of Barack Obama, keeping aside the Black Rage and thinking about the invisible violence instilled by the Whites against the Blacks their intention must be clarified.

The whites agitation is not something visible but rather concealed and applied through court laws, legislative policies and a range of government bureaucracies that wreck and corrupt the system with unethical outlook and inhumanity.

The whites agitate because they cannot digest black advancement. It is not about that the black community, their color or problems are troubling, but it is the impression of progress, the purposeful aspiration, equal citizenship rights, demand for full equality and refusal to subjugation by the African Americans is the main problem for the Whites. To hamper black resilience and determination the police, government use legal contortions by placing these on moral high grounds, they cite examples of past, like fathers abandoning their families, drug dealing, smuggling, sex and slave trade, black poverty, children hating the school as they are 'acting white', and even cases of gay and lesbians as gender disabilities devaluating the worth of education, responsibility, hard word and ambitions.

With this mindset in the foundation of America the progress of the African Americans is made very difficult. The past also holds truth that the enslaved Africans have plotted and worked very hard even fighting in the union army for their freedom and citizenship. And after the Civil War was over they took that little they had and built schools, worked on the lands to establish the economic independence, and searched desperately for their families which got separated due to slavery. Their sacrifices were vehemently condemned and their properties confiscated on behalf of the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth amendments. When the First World War provided the opportunity for the African Americans to get jobs in north and better chance for their children to finally have good schools they fled the oppressive conditions of the South.

Their attempts for better livelihood were met with serious repercussions, the White authorities stopped the trains, arrested people whose only crime was leaving the state. National newspapers were banned, people were jailed for carrying poetry or books, this was a new kind of slavery which was enforced under federal law.

Carol Anderson has described the anticipation of the African Americans. According to him after the popularly known Great Migration the African Americans moved into the cities, were ready to work hard for decent housing and good schools, they were locked down in uninhabitable slums. They tried to break the squalor by striving to attain degrees and get into respected professions but this only intensified the unspoken truth and a future judgment of this state law, leading to even the bitterest newspaper rivals to join together when it came to upholding a lie.⁵(5-iv)

Another instance is the Brown versus Board of Education Decision of 1954 in which the African Americans children were assured of decent education, but the American or the White authorities could not see these children striving for the quality schools and an opportunity to fully contribute to society, what they saw was a threat and they took measures like shutting down schools and shoving public money into private coffers shattering the aspiration of millions of children, undermining national security in the midst of major crisis all to ensure that the blacks did not advance. Not only this but even after hard victories of the Civil War the cancellation of Voting Rights Act, closed higher education, banned boat cooking, Carol Anderson had claimed that huge number of black people were locked up in prison perhaps more than the Apartheid era of South Africa.⁶(6-iv)

America has been at the crossroads between its slaveholding past and the possibility of a truly inclusive, vibrant democracy. The four year of Civil War led to enormous loss of life, more than one million disabled ex soldiers were adrift with a nonexistent veteran pension system. And along with this millions of black people who were treated as mere property, were demanding their full rights of citizenship.

*"I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just, that his injustice cannot sleep forever."*⁷(qtd.

Jefferson,7)

Thomas Jefferson who was a war hero and considered as close companion to Abraham Lincoln, was internally biased of the black community he suggested for expatriation as the solution to the Civil War. He wanted to settle them somewhere where the white interest don't get hindered. He has suggested black expulsion so the nation can be saved. On the other the great emancipator Lincoln himself had neither the clarity, the humanity nor the result necessary to fix what was so fundamentally broken. Initially even before the war ended, and in the late 1863 and early 1864 representatives like James M. Ashley and senator John Henderson introduced in Congress a constitutional amendment abolishing slavery. The 13th amendment was in important ways very revolutionary. It transferred the responsibility for enforcement and protection of civil rights from the state to the federal government and sent a strong, powerful signal that citizens were first and foremost the US citizens and a strong message to those who were overwhelmingly concerned with state rights.

Finally, the amendment sought to give real meaning to what we hold true to be self-evident by banning not just government sponsored but also private agreements that exposed Blacks to extralegal violence and widespread discrimination in housing, education and employment. According to James A. Garfield the 13th amendment was designed to significantly more than confer the bare privileges of not being chained.⁸(qtd.in.Anderson.8)

By this time Henrik Lee had established the American colonization society, which had moved thousands of free Blacks into what is now Liberia. Lincoln soon laid out his own resettlement plans. He had selected a resource poor area of Panama, to be the new home for millions of African Americans. Lincoln just had to convince them to leave. In August 1862, he called upon five black leaders to the White House to remind them of their duty, about what their people had done to United States and to accept the extruders to South America, he explicitly told them that for your race there will be no war amongst us, Lincoln had very conveniently ignored the concept of democracy and displayed the power of racism over patriotism.

Blacks who fully supported the union and did not want to leave the United States of America. They claimed that despite slavery and enforced poverty they will work, pray, live and if required die for the Union. Millions of enslaved people and their ancestors had built the enormous wealth of the United States, about eighty percent of the nation's gross national product was due to slavery, and yet in return for nearly 250 years of toil the African Americans had received in nothing but rape, whippings, murder, the dismemberment of families and forced subjugation, illiteracy and abject poverty. Safety meant killing first and asking questions later, a very real warning was sent that black lives don't matter.

The blacks have claimed freedom as their natural right and they were asking that in harmony and corporation, the roots should be cut from the system of slavery. But the source of all the evil was the state. It was the southern states whose savory, corrupted self, corrupted all. It had influenced all the slave states to rebel against the Federal government, in order to set up a government of Pirates, under which slavery might be perpetrated.

The president and his successor Andrew Johnson had insisted that the four years were all about preserving the Union while the Confederates were clear about their motive for war. They were fighting to protect their property. This was a war about slavery. It was the region's determination to keep millions of black people in bondage from generation to generation. Frederick Douglass had explained that in the hurry and confusion of the hour and the eagerness to have the Union restored, there was more care for the sublime superstructure of the Republic than for the solid foundation upon which it alone could be upheld⁹. (qtd.in.Anderson.10)

Despite all this an African American was elected president of United States of America, which is an ultimate advancement. It was not surprising that voting rights were severely curtailed, the federal government was shut down, and more than once the office of president was shockingly, openly and publicly disrespected by other elected officials.

With a history so profound with hatred and double standards, how can a community change its fate. There is discrimination at every level. If the male are facing issues on mental and psychological level they mistreat their women to vent their frustration. The African American women which had a terrible past, have become quite strong headed. The thinkers have observed their behavior and discovered that the women are suffering from SWS or Strong Woman Syndrome.

The fundamental role that has been played is the literature and music. It has provided recluse to all negativity. The African American community is genetically bestowed with strong built, flexibility and rhythm. Jazz, cabaret, rap and club nights, Christmas carols are their inventions. Apart from all the worldly trouble they undergo they are spirited, they are energetic and alive. Its not wrong to say that Africa is cradle of life. So are the African Americans who have inherited these features.

We have countless number of African American poets and Authors who have etched their name in world literature despite lack of education and resources. Maya Angelou for example, she was left by her mother to grandmother's house, than again taken away by her mother, raped by her mother's boyfriend, no education, than to support herself she left home, did all sorts of jobs, from waitress to bartender, to sweeper, maid etc. Finally became a poetess who has the honor of addressing and reciting her poem in the presidential address of Bill Clinton. So are many more examples like Richard Wright, James Baldwin, Langston Hughes, Frederick Douglas, Malcolm X, Zora Neale Hurston etc. These African Americans have carved their name internationally.

Lastly we can easily conclude that the desired human rights should be provided to the African American, its not something that they should be begging for, right to equality is their birth right. And they are still striving to attain it. But it would be better that the world take stand for so should the literary community raise their voice in their favor.

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