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THE MARGINALISATION OF QUEER BLACK FEMINISM IN THE SELECT POEMS OF AUDRE LORDE

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Black women have experienced marginalisation due to gender discrimination, oppression and identity. Black feminism is a type of feminism which discusses the struggle of Black women. Black women's voices were continuously marginalised but they formed groups and stood up in the face of oppression. Black feminists empowered black consciousness in the society through their writings.

. The perception reveals that queer theory is solely about gender and sexuality which has been opposed by having an intersectional approach that begins with hypothesis that gender cannot be disconnected from the other categories of social status and identity. This allows queer theory to become interdisciplinary studies.

Audre Lorde, is a famous American writer, feminist, womanist, activist and essayist, who was born on February 18, 1934. She is well known for emotional expression and technical mastery as a poet as well as her poems express anger and outrage of social injustices which she observed throughout her life. Audre Lorde's poems focus on the issues which relates to black feminism and the exploration of black female identity. Lorde expressed her discussion about difference not only on differences between groups of women but between conflicting variance within the individual. Lorde considered herself as a "lesbian, mother, warrior and poet".

Audre Lorde's portrayal of her self-image gives a picture of true condition of black women in the marginalised society. Black Feministic narrative represented by Audre Lorde through poems in which she describes the picture of black females from the African-American society. In Lorde's volume *The Black Unicorn*, she describes her identity with mythos of African female deities of creation and warrior strength. Lorde's poetry became more open and personal about her own personality as Black women as well as feminist. While acknowledging that the differences between women are wide and varied most of Lorde's works are concerned with two subsets that primarily focus on gender and race. Lorde's writings are based on the "theory of differences".

Lorde analyses that black women's experiences are different from those of white women. This is because the experience of the white women are normative while, the black women experienced are marginalised. Likewise, the experience of lesbian particularly black lesbians are considered aberrational, not in keeping with the true heart of the feminist movement. Although they are not considered normative, Lorde argues that these experiences are nevertheless feminist.

This paper focuses on the Select Poems of Audre Lorde which highlights the Queer Black Feminism and the representation of Black feminism, minority ethnics and identity. The chosen six poems of Lorde: *A woman Speaks, Who said it was simple, Coal, Black Unicorn, Now, For Each of You* are the echoes of unspoken Black Women. The central theme of these poems are gender discrimination, identity, black feminism and oppression.

Coal is one of Lorde's most famous works in poetry which consists of five sections. This book explores the different layers of her identity; a "black, lesbian, mother, warrior, poet". A unique feature of this book is

that her anger against racism is not destructive; but has been transformed into 'self-assertion'. Lorde's characters show strength, endurance and overcoming oppression in their lives.

In 1991, she became the Poet Laureate of New York. In 1992, she received the Bill Whitehead Award for Lifetime Achievement from Publishing Triangles. In 1981, Audre Lorde won the American Library Association Gay Caucus Book of the Year Award for her book *The Cancer Journals* published in 1980.

A Woman Speaks is a poem published in the year 1997. It is both a warrior's song and the conversation between women of different cultures. It seeks to affirm the lived experience of black women in the United States and across the diaspora, and at the same time it opens a dialogue about what could still be done within the feminist movement to improve the lives of women of colour. The most important thing in this poem is that there is no accusations, only declarations of Lorde's own truth. This poem is meant to open up a perspective of the world to others who may not have ever experienced it in black feministic way.

"Moon marked and touched by sun

My magic is unwritten" (Lorde1)

From these lines, Audre Lorde brings attention to how black women are portrayed as both unearthly, goddess-like beings described in Jazz and many other artforms that praise their features and beauty, but at the same time, their history is mostly forgotten.

"I do not mix

Love with pity

nor hate with scorn" (Lorde12)

She calls attention to be needed for understanding and action rather than feelings of regret. She expresses a sense of being unknown by others. She describes that the unvoiced can be attributed to the historical discrimination against women in the workplace and lacking political representation for queer women in the context from the late 70s and the early 90s American society. The theme throughout this poem draws attention to the strange position of women of colour as both too strong and also underestimated. This relates to the theory of Queer and Black Feminism.

"I am

Woman

And not white" (Lorde34)

Though Black women were discriminated and oppressed in the American society, Lorde boldly presented herself as Black feminist, African-American and still a woman, engaged in similar struggles for equality in the last six words.

Who said it was simple is the poem published in the year 1973, which discusses the gender discrimination which she witnesses in the feminist movement in this poem. Lorde is a woman who was assigned female at birth and identified as such a lesbian and Black. Her tone in this poem is witty and a tad sarcastic. All of Lorde's social locations intersect to form her experience, she cannot separate her women-ness from her black-ness from her lesbian-ness.

"discussing the problematic girls

they hire to make them fire" (Lorde6)

These lines explain the true condition of Black women who are oppressed by domination of men and the society. Discrimination of Black women is clearly focused through this poetry of Lorde. Class and age intersect with identity in this line, because not everyone can afford to hire someone else to care for their children and Lorde differentiates between women and girls. This could be alluding to age or it could be alluding to the oppressed roles of white women and women of colour.

In the poem *Coal* she breaks out the silence and speaks out about herself and how words can be used to give name to new feelings. In the title poem "Coal" she asserts and celebrates her blackness. This poem is a reflection of Audre Lorde's personal relationship with society and herself as she understands them.

"I

Is the total black, being spoken

From the earth's inside" (Lorde1)

The poet describes the metaphorical impact that different words can have on the person to whom they are spoken. However, this explication is wedged between lines regarding diamonds, blackness, and the inside of the Earth. The speaker's use of personal pronouns in discussing blackness and the effect of words are reflection of Lorde's role in society. In this way, the poem addresses the discrimination and identity as a form of social resistance against it. This applies to the theory of Black Feminism.

The poem *Black Unicorn* not only addresses discrimination, but also confronts the fiery spirit of something which refuses to be held down despite its imprisonment. In essence, it addresses Lorde herself. It speaks against prejudice and stands for all of those who struggle against the mandates of a societal norm – women, African Americans, homosexuals – particularly as those mandates were enforced in the seventies, when Lorde wrote this poem.

“The black unicorn is restless
the black unicorn is unrelenting
the black unicorn is not
free”(Lorde13)

The fact that African Americans are still not free keeps her fretting and fuming beyond belief. Lorde reveals the attempt to deny anger, the blame conditions of oppression on the oppressed, diverting attention from people's pain and confusion, and avoiding responsibility or action. This poem specifically addresses the issue of anger in an oppressed African American. Lorde writes this poem, because people can see the expressed anger in words of an African American who is unnoticed but “unrelenting”.

The poem *Now* highlights the notion that human rights are not separate from women's rights nor civil rights. Gender and race are all a part of what it means to be human amongst other qualities.

“Black power
Is
Woman power
Is
Human power” (Lorde 1)

Lorde expresses that the Black power is stronger than the other. The pulsing rhythm that builds in these lines of pure human sensation ultimately shows that understanding humanity and power are beyond gender and race. They rest in our ability to feel, and as we have discussed throughout this course, in our ability to empathize. This focuses the power of Black women and Black feminism.

In the poem *For Each of You*, Lorde urges women specifically Black women, to break through their silence into their words. Lorde addresses the parts of her identity which may be unconventional. She writes about being black, lesbian, and a mother. Her most common themes include racism, sexism, gender discrimination, childhood, motherhood, and death.

“Be who you are and will be
Learn to cherish
That boisterous Black Angel that drives you
Up one day and down another” (Lorde4)

Lorde explains the word Angel as the roles of angel such as protecting, guiding humans and cherishing her. Women who are oppressed as difference in colour are portrayed as Black Angels. Theory of Black Feminism is applied to this poem.

Audre Lorde's poetry discusses mainly on the Black Feminism, queer and gender identity. She speaks out the sufferings of her own life as Black feminist, mother, warrior and lesbian

Application of Queer theory and Black Feminism theory is to be understood as the way to test the established and stable categories of identity. It should not be defined too early because of the possibility of it becoming too limited. Lorde overcomes her oppression and gives potential for other women to resist the discrimination culture due to gender, identity, and Black Feminism.

Works Cited

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