

I. INTRODUCTION

HUGHES'S JOURNEY TOWARD POETICS

Langston Hughes (1902-1967) is one of the most original and versatile of twentieth century black writers. He is best known as the "poet laureate" of the Harlem Renaissance, an African-American literary and cultural movement that flourished in the 1920s. Born in Joplin, Missouri, to James Nathaniel and Carrie Langston Hughes Mercer, he was reared for a time by his grandmother in Lawrence, Kansas after his parents' divorce. Haunted by loneliness, Langston Hughes for a comfort turned to "book, and the wonderful world in books" (3) as he himself remembered. Sometimes, through the black American oral tradition of story telling, his grandmother, Mary Langston Hughes, would install in the young Langston Hughes a sense of indelible racial pride. From his grandmother, a radical abolitionist, Hughes learned constantly about the need to struggle on behalf of the ideals of social justice and African American progress. His childhood was not an entirely happy one, due to an unstable early life, but it was one that heavily influenced the poet he would become.

After the death of his grandmother, he went to live with family friends, James and Mary Reed, for two years. Later, he lived again with his mother (in Lincoln) who had remarried when he was still an adolescent and, eventually in Cleveland, Ohio where he attended high school.

His father immigrated to Mexico, where he was successful in business. In contrast, Hughes grew up lonely and near poverty in Lawrence, Kansas. Later, having been a victim of poverty and discrimination, Hughes wrote about being

seduced by the American Dream of Freedom, equality and justice - only to be denied its realization.

Meanwhile, Hughes spent a brief period of time with his father in Mexico in 1919. However, troubles and pains marked their relationship. As a result, separation between them became the necessary fact.

The poetic sensibility of Langston Hughes starts early from his schooling days. While in grammar school in Lincoln, Illinois, he was designated class poet as he had exhibited unique rhythm quality in his poems. From the early period of his life, Hughes started enjoying literature. During high school in Cleveland, Ohio, he wrote for the school paper, edited the yearbook, and began to write his first short stories, poetry, and dramatic plays. His first piece Jazz poetry, *When Sue Wears Red*, was written while he was still in high school.

Even though Hughes published works in a wide variety of genres - novels, plays, short stories, autobiographies, and histories - he saw himself primarily as a poet. Indeed, he had a prolific career as a poet, and his reputation has been based largely on the poetry he published 1920s, although the poems he published after the Harlem Renaissance have increasingly received critical acclaim and demonstrated his range as a poet.

Published in *The Crisis* in 1921, "The Negro speaks of Rivers" gave him large recognition and reputation, in which he quietly extols the historic beauty and dignity of the African American people. Referring to the same poem Sandra Merriweather writes:

It expresses the inner thoughts of a young African-American on a journey to meet the unknown, using the motif of rivers to reflect upon

the history of African-Americans and Hughes's own history. Its publication launched his career. (315)

Hughes was among the first of the writers and artists drawn to Harlem by its promise as a center of African American cultural activity. Especially he was interested in the African-American culture; to explore it; to sing its beauty; and to extol its dignity. In short, he celebrated the beauty and dignity of African-American culture to a greater extent. Stressing on Hughes's use of his own culture, Arnold Rampersad and David Roessel argue that:

Langston Hughes never sought to be all things to all people but aimed to create a body of work that epitomized the beauty and variety of the African American and the American experiences, as well as the diversity of emotions, thoughts, and dreams that he saw common to all human beings.(3)

In reference to the reiterated focus of Langston Hughes on his own culture, Anthony Dawahare says, "much of Hughes poetry celebrates his African and African-American heritage" (312).

The rhythms and language of the black church, the blues and the jazz of that era inspired much of his writing. The African-American music he believed to be the true expression of the black spirit. In this regard, Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay write:

His major step, encouraged in part by Sandburg's example (as in Sandburg's *Jazz Fantasies*, 1919) but anchored by his own near worship of black music as the major form of art within the race, was his adaptation of traditional poetic forms first to jazz, then to the blues,

in which Hughes sometimes used dialect but in a way radically different from that of earlier writers. (1252)

By the same token, referring to Hughes's love for his own culture and folks, Anthony Dawahare remarks, "from the start of his career, Hughes prided himself on being a black poet whose inspiration came from the black 'folk', that is, the working class and poor with whom he identified" (312).

Therefore, his own culture and people had been a great source of inspiration as well as the fertile subject matter for his writings. It is better to cite Dawahare once again in order to better understand Hughes's use of Jazz and blues. He states:

In his poetry Hughes adopted African expressive forms, such as spirituals, work songs, and the blues, because he believed they authentically express the way that black people have experienced and resisted slavery, racial discrimination, and oppression. Moreover, he saw jazz as inherently oppositional to an oppressive, urbanized American society. He writes that the 'jazz is the eternal tom-tom beating in the Negro soul- the tom-tom and revolt against weariness in a white world, a world of subway trains and work, work, work' ("The Negro artists and the Racial Mountain"). (312)

In addition to the uses of blues and jazz, Hughes prefers simplicity in his poems. However, being simple they do not lose the beauty and the expression. Simplicity and boldness go side by side. The possible reason behind his use of simplicity is that: first, he picks up words and phrases from common people: second, his poems are politically loaded with the aim of raising consciousness in common people to revolt against racism, oppression and exploitation in order to create a just society.

Therefore, his poems carry strong message of social and political change of the then society.

Another striking feature of his poetry is the use of image - image of dream, pain, suffering wounds, etc. By the exploitation of such imageries, he is doing two basic things: first he is exposing the reality of the society, that is, by writing the counter histories; second, he is pumping the energies of protest and revolt into the hearts of people to fight against the repressive society.

Hughes's "revolutionary" (Moore, 273) essay, "The Negro artist and the Racial Mountain", first published in *The Nation* in 1926, added significant height in his literary career. Besides being a dominant poet of the time, this essay established him as a brilliant essayist. In this essay, he powerfully argues for the freedom of expression, especially of Afro-Americans. Moreover, he argues that one should be fearless and be bold enough to talk what one wants to talk, as he writes, "An artist must be free to choose what he does, certainly, but he must also never be afraid to do what he must choose" (1271). When he writes that an artist must be unafraid, he is not only defending the need for his own work, but calling forth the next generation of poets; not only giving them permission to write about race, but charging them with the responsibility of writing about race.

Along with the start of the Great Depression of 1930s, Hughes moved swiftly towards the far left. He published anti-imperialist essays and poems in *New Masses* and elsewhere, and made ready to work closely with the communist John Read Club of New York. However, he had never been the member of communist party. Then, aided by a Rosenwald Fund Grant, he headed south to begin a yearlong tour bringing his poetry to the people. Reading mainly in black churches and school halls and selling books and pamphlets, and posters, he moved steadily through the south before

leading west. By this time, Hughes had given up blues and lyric poems for militantly radical socialist utterance.

In this regard, it is apt to cite Arnold Rampersad and David Roessel's remark.

They write:

In the 1930s especially, in response to the Great Depression, certain features of his verse were altered as he began to emphasize the need for radical political action. Hughes then wrote some of the most radical poems ever published by an American, as well as some of the most poignant lamentations of the chasm that often exist between American social ideals and American social reality. (4)

During World War II, he continued to write poems against fascism in Europe and in the United States, but his attention increasingly turned once again to black Americans and black expressive forms. *Montage of a Dream Deferred* (1951) uses the bebop form of jazz, popular at the time to represent the problems and aspirations of the black community in Harlem.

A very prolific and versatile writer, Hughes has successfully penned every genre of literature -- from poems to plays to fiction to Radio and television script to children literature, and even translation and autobiography. However, he is best known for his brilliant poems. He has composed many volumes of poetry. Among them, *The Weary Blues* (1926), *Fine Clothes to Jew* (1927), *The Dream Keeper and Other Poems* (1932), *Shakespeare in Harlem* (1942), *Montage of Dream Deferred* (1951), etc. are his wonderful volumes of poems that have left a significant mark in his poetic career.

Similarly, *Mulato* (1935), *Troubled Island* (1935), *Joy to My Soul* (1937), *Don't you want to Be Free?* (1937), *Freedom's Plow* (1943), *The Sun Do Move* (1942), etc. are his invaluable contribution to the field of play in particular, and literature in general.

Moreover, *Not without Laughter* (1930), *The Ways of White Folks* (1934), *Simple speaks His Mind* (1950), *Laughing to Keep from Crying* (1952), *The Best of Simple* (1961), *Simple's Uncle Sam* (1965), *The Return of Simple* (1994), etc. are his beautiful creation of stories.

Among his most important poetry collections, *The Weary Blues* is one, which was published in 1926, containing one of his most famous poems "The Negro speaks of Rivers." This poetry collection established his reputation as one of the most notable poets of the period now known as the Harlem Renaissance. In this poetry collection, Hughes renders the voices, experiences, emotions and spirit of African-Americans. Hughes has shown his mastery in using the Blue music in his poetry, both as a subject matter and a structure. Besides, in his attempt to capture the lives of everyday African Americans he deals with subjects like racism, prostitution, lynching, teenage pregnancy, despair and loneliness.

Montage of Dream Deferred, published in 1951, is another landmark poetry collection of Hughes. As a rejection of American racism, suppression and inequality, the volume consists of dramatic monologues and dialogues of Harlem residents that capture the vibrancy and spirit of black life. Some of them like "Dream Boogie" bring to bear the potency of unrealized dreams. In the words of Michelle L. Tylor:

"Montage of a Dream Deferred is Hughes's experimental meditation on the changes that took place in Harlem during the Great Depression

and World War II. . . . To capture the frustration and fragmentation in the lives of Harlem residents, Hughes turned to the broken rhythms and improvisation of bebop. In so doing, Hughes merged the individualistic impulse of Modernism with African American literary tradition, thus creating Afro-modernist aesthetics. (314)

Most of his poems are marked by simplicity. Simplicity, however, has not marred the beauty of the poems. Instead, it has become one of the striking features of his poems. Besides being simple, his poems are bold and expressive, and carry a deep vision -- the vision to transform the then socio-political structure so as to establish a just society.

POLITICS AND POETICS

Langston Hughes drew no essential distinction between politics and poetry. He was inspired by the view that instead of direct and open politics, politics through literature (here poetry) could have deep and far-reaching impact in the minds of people. He believed that poetry could better inspire, encourage and stimulate people for the transformation of society. That might be the reason, once he said, "for the poet, politics in any country in the world had better be disguised as poetry" (4). He wanted politics to be clothed in poetry to achieve political clout. Therefore, for him, poetry, a form of social action, was closely associated with politics.

Literature cannot remain aloof from the socio-political situation of the time. In one way or the other it is influenced by the social conditions. We cannot separate life from society and culture. Politics, like culture, is one of the most influential factors of life. Since life, which has deep relationship with politics, is expressed through literature, literature cannot be separated from politics.

The seminal line of P.B. Shelley that "poets are unacknowledged legislators of the world" (225) further strengthens the bond between poetry and politics. Therefore, for him poets are not only the legislator of certain area but the whole world. Their writings have power to formulate laws, but that is unacknowledged.

While exploring politics in the poetry of Langston Hughes, I will examine his poems against the backdrop of power because power is associated with politics. Politics is an exercise of power either by the center to dominate and maintain its authority or by the margin to oppose the domination and maintain its existence. For that purpose, literature, culture and language work as an effective medium. Stressing the same issue in relation to the black poets, Sharon L. Moore argues:

Language, literacy, and artistic creations are powerful tools in the struggle to maintain dominance and in the struggle to subvert that dominance. . . . Color has become a windowless room from which millions of blacks are unable to escape. . . . There have always been those who resisted, who attempted to carve out a place in a racist wasteland; there have always been those who spoke for the innumerable silent. Each wave of artists, writers, and critics that attempted to find the door does so by providing an authentic definition of blackness. (271)

The aforementioned extract clearly recognizes the vitality of literature as a device both for maintaining and subverting the dominance and thereby to exercise power.

In response to the question "who is poet?" Hughes once said, "a poet is a human being. Each human being must live within his time, with and for his people, and within the boundaries of his country" (5). This very definition clearly emphasizes

the relationship between poets and the socio-historical condition in which he lives, and duty of poet towards his people. In the case of Hughes, his people (black people) were seeking freedom -- political, social and economic -- independence, justice and equality. His duty therefore was to empower black people and bring them out from the windowless room of racism with the help of literature to ensure freedom, justice and equality. Thus, his poetry involves politics.

I will not utilize the term 'poetics' in a broad sense. To present things in concrete manner and avoid vagueness and ambiguity, I will use it to mean poetry only, poetry of Langston Hughes.

LANGSTON HUGHES AND POLITICS

Racial persecution was perpetuated for several centuries in America. The racist society itself became the base to drag Langston Hughes into the arena of politics. However, his way of doing politics was different and unique, that is, through poetics. He adopted art as a weapon to fight against the same racist society. With the help of his poems, he articulated the long-suppressed and unheard voices of black people. From virtually the start of his career Hughes had forged a special bond with the experience of African American people and their culture. He has depicted their joys and woes, pains and sorrows without losing their strong racial flavor; he has molded them into swift patterns of musical verse. He remained constant in his focus on the problems of racism and the failure of African Americans to realize the American Dream. Therefore, Hughes always took his poems as a social action.

From his grandmother Hughes learned constantly about the need to struggle on behalf of ideals of social justice and African American progress. For that purpose, he used art as a means. He always attempted to give space to the suppressed, unheard

and neglected voices. That means he attempted to empower the marginalized people, especially the African American.

He had a soft corner for leftist ideology. Indicating the same issue Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay argue:

He made a sharp turn toward the political left, although social and political consciousness, and an interest in socialist had always been one feature of his verse. He published verse and essays in *New Masses*, a journal controlled by the communist party. . . . Some of these plays were comedies, others were dramas of domestic African American Life or were radical in their politics. (1253)

The Great Economic Depression marked 1930s. Especially, its huge impact fell upon the lives of ordinary and working class people. Langston Hughes picked up the joys and sorrows of those common working class people in his poems.

In a way, his poems spoke the freedom, rights, equality and justice for the common working class people. Therefore, his poems were the real voices of those people. In this sense, his bend towards political left was not something unusual and unnatural. Sometimes his verse turned into overtly political by making a call for revolution. For instance:

Great mob that knows no fear-

Come here!

And raise your hand

Against this man

Of iron and steel and gold

Who's brought and sold

You. (Hughes, 175)

Langston Hughes attempted to raise socio-political and cultural consciousness in the minds of people from literary point of view. Therefore, the hidden politics of his poetry was to energize people with political sensibility so as to transform the overall structure of the society, which was based on racism, inequality, discrimination and exclusion. Thus, his poems, which were revolutionary in spirit, underpinned the radical change of the society by boldly exposing the follies of the society. Hence, he was a true revolutionary poet in rebellion against the socio-political institution of his society.

THE POLITICAL BACKGROUND AND LANGSTON HUGHES

The Harlem Renaissance of 1920s and 30s, The Great Economic Depression of 1930s, The World War II of 1940s, The Civil Rights and Other minority movements of 1950s and 1960s were some of the major historical events of America of which Langston Hughes experienced much. These all events, albeit not overtly political in nature, were hugely affecting and reshaping the political, social, cultural and literary scenario of America. The political overtone of these events could be realized and heard in the poems of Hughes. Indeed, he was deeply moved by the socio-political condition of the time, and thus responded to them through literature.

In order to explore more authentic meaning of Hughes's poem, it is necessary to unveil the relationship between the social context and the voices of his poems because either his poems are influenced by them or responded to them.

The exact date of the beginning and ending of the Harlem Renaissance, also known as "The New Negro Movement", is still debated. However it enjoyed its

heyday during the mid 1920s. It was an African-American literary and Cultural movement. Socio-political transformation was the focus of this movement. The undercurrent, and perhaps the most important, focus of the movement therefore was political. However, the medium of doing politics was different and somewhat indirect. Basically literature, music art, and culture were largely utilized in order to voice against the injustice and discrimination, and to demand equality, freedom and liberty. In this regard, emphasizing the political aspect of the movement, Hortense Spillers writes:

That scholars and students of the phenomenon (The Harlem Renaissance) might arguably adopt the long or short view and account for "deep" and "immediate" forces at work that converge on the period would suggest that these years - years rich with the promise and project of political and economic liberation - specify an especially dramatic moment in the long and perilous journey of cultural apprenticeship of African Americans within the context of the African Diaspora. (1985)

By the same token, he further highlights the same issue of politics associated with the movement that "The New Negro Renaissance pursued a fairly amazing idea- an art directly tied to the fortunes of a political agenda" (1987).

Most of the activities of the Harlem Renaissance were centered in the city, Harlem. Many scholars considered it as "the Mecca" for the African-American people that mean it became home to all classes of blacks, including the leading writers and artists. Therefore, it was crucial to the movement in the United States. Harlem quickly became the center of many of the most important African American cultural, political and literary national organizations including the National Association for the advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the National Urban League. Many

magazines and newspapers worked hard to stimulate a cultural and political awakening or renaissance. The prominent magazines like *Crisis*, *Opportunity*, *Messenger* and *The Negro* were proud of their radical leftist goals. Each was dedicated to social and political progress and upliftment of black Americans. Merging racial awareness with a desire for literary and artistic excellence, the articles published in these journals pointed up the need for socio-political transformation with a desire for a fresh achievement and independence in art, culture, and politics.

1920s was a decade of extraordinary creativity in the art for black Americans. Particularly the second half of the decade witnessed an outpouring of publication by African Americans that was unprecedented in its variety and Scope; so that it clearly qualifies as a moment of Renaissance. In poetry, fiction, and the essay, as in music and dance, African Americans worked not only with a new sense of confidence and purpose but also with a sense of achievement never before experienced by so many black artists in the long, troubled history of the people of African descent in America.

Many artists of this movement exploited art as a tool of affirmation of their dignity identity, and humanity in the face of poverty and racism. Writing largely had been a bold response to their social conditions.

The African people who had been uprooted and transplanted to a foreign soil were considered less than human. They had no autonomy, no voice, no power, and ultimately no home in America. Slavery silenced them and effectively rendered the race invisible on the American landscape. Their Languages, cultures, and families were eradicated. In such a condition, the Harlem Renaissance attempted to give back their long suppressed voices, languages and cultures. Therefore, literature, language and culture were used as a powerful device to oppose the white domination as well as to maintain their own stance or power.

Another equally important historical event was the Great Economic Depression of 1930s. Undoubtedly, it not only paralyzed the economic field but also paralyzed other fields as well. This Economic Depression gave rise to unemployment, poverty, unrest and crimes in the society. Especially the poor people received terrible blow because of it. The condition of the working class people became more unbearable, serious and pitiable.

In response to the Great Depression Hughes swiftly moved towards the political left. He published anti-imperialist essays and poems in *New Masses* and elsewhere. As the radical socialist utterance became the dominant tone of his poems, he began to emphasize the need for radical political action. Therefore, Hughes, basically, wrote against the backdrop of the Great Depression in 1930s.

Still another historical event of Hughes time was the World War II, which somewhat influenced his writing. Withdrawing the leftist focus of 1930s, he even wrote poems in response to the war. Similarly, in 1960s, civil right movement, black aesthetic movement and other many minority movements were in existence which were politically oriented. Even though Hughes did not get involved in those events directly, as an element of influence, those events appeared in his writings. Therefore, those historical events, directly or indirectly, influenced his writings, and his writings remained a response to the social and political impulse of the time.

OBJECTIVE

The main objective of the present research is to locate Hughes's poems in the particular context in order to examine, explore and better understand the unrecognized vitality of political vision embedded in his poems. Hughes used his poems as a platform for his political views. Therefore, his poems are not only the beautiful

pieces of literature but also the powerful pieces of political slogan. To materialize the objective, turn it into practice and to facilitate the project, I will interpret Hughes's poems in the light of the Negro Art and the New Historical theoretical model. Such attempt will explore the associative relationship between his poems and the political fervor of the time. All these things which are going to be taken into consideration for the final attempt of the present research are to propose Hughes not only a brilliant poet of African American people but also as a brilliant and the most eloquent political propagator and the counter historian of the ignored, neglected and marginalized people, especially of the African American and the working class people. To carry out this purpose, some of his selected poems like "The Negro Mother," "I, Too," "The Weary Blues," "A New Songs," "Revolution," "Freedom," "Freedom's Plow," "Harlem," "Good Morning Revolution," "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," "The Ballad of the Landlord," etc., will be discussed. The discussion will be based largely on textual analysis. However, the support from the aforementioned theoretical models and some other criticism of renowned critics will remain as constant support.

II. THEORETICAL MODALITY

INTRODUCTION

Interpretations of a piece of literature in the light of a certain theoretical modality not only make it more concrete, fruitful and interesting but also deepen the knowledge in the particular area. And whatever theoretical tool we choose to apply, our goal in using these approaches is to see, to learn, and to understand some important aspects of literature that we might not have seen so clearly or so deeply without these perspectives. Therefore, different critical approaches help us understand the various dimensions of a literary text from diverse angles, which certainly, will extend our horizon of understanding and knowledge. In this respect, I would like to employ the Negro Art and New Historicism as the theoretical modality in order to explore politics in poetics in the context of Langston Hughes's selected poems.

NEGRO ART

“Hang yourself, poet, in your own words
Otherwise, you are dead” (3).

Langston Hughes

“We want . . . poems that shoot guns.
. . . we want a black poem” (1883).

Amiri Baraka

“Black art will elevate and enlighten our people and lead them toward an awareness of self, i.e., their blackness. It . . . will aid in the destruction of anything nasty and detrimental to our advancement as a people” (1978).

Haki R. Madhubuti

Negro Art is not only a thing to be viewed, read and enjoyed, but also, and far more importantly, a thing to be used for social purposes -- to generate a consciousness in the mind of the people for the social, political, cultural, and psychological upliftment of the Negro people. It is a dynamically effective tool to fight for the liberty, freedom and justice against every type of discrimination, injustice and segregation. Therefore, socio-political orientation of Negro Art is common but bears paramount importance in the Negro world/community.

For Black artists, the socio-political role of Negro Art is vibrantly important and a must as well. Whether to spread consciousness in black community, to make them realize their position, or to better their conditions and to achieve better position, Negro Art functions as an important tool, the tool "which has a direct bearing as the most vital American Problem" (Johnson, 861), the tool which can also be used to empower black people from diverse perspectives -- social, political, economic, cultural, etc.

Either to prove racist argument wrong or to celebrate their rich cultural heritage and call for equal opportunity for black citizens, the social role of the Negro artists remained an important issue during the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s and the Black Arts movement of the 1960s. Negro Art undermines the racist ideologies that have kept the black people politically subdued, socially oppressed and economically disadvantaged.

According to the Negro artists, Negro Art should function as an effective weapon in the struggle of black people for their socio-political power. In his brilliant article entitled "Criteria of Negro Art", published in 1926, W.E.B. Du Bois very boldly highlights the social role of Negro Art. As he writes:

Thus all art is propaganda and ever must be, despite the wailing of the purists. I stand in utter shamelessness and say that whatever art I have for writing has been used always for propaganda for gaining the right of black folk to love and enjoy. I do not care a damn for any art that is not used for propaganda. (985-86)

By this Du Bois boldly states the social necessity of Negro Art. Therefore, For Du Bois, the primary concern of the Negro Art is to play a potent role in the achievement of the "rights" of black people. Rights may be of various types-- social, political, cultural, economical, etc. To make these rights realize, to turn them into reality, and ultimately to create a fair and just world where black folks can enjoy life are the sole responsibilities of Negro Art. Indeed, it is a catalyst in this genuine struggle of black people. Commenting upon the aforementioned quotation of Du Bois, Rebecca L. Walkowitz in her article "Shakespeare in Harlem: The Norton Anthology, 'Propaganda', Langston Hughes" argues, "for Du Bois, propaganda denoted a function; it demanded the recognition of what art could do; it announced art as a social and political intervention" (504).

Since the black folks were forced to live under the repressive features of racism and were denied the socio-political rights, it is the unavoidable duty of Negro Art, as Negro artists advocate, to break the shackles of racism in every aspects of life, and make a call to fight against them. Similarly further stressing the views of Du Bois on Negro Art as propaganda Vincent B. Leitch writes:

. . . he also stresses the market place conditions, and the racism, that black and undercut African American literary and cultural achievement, and he insists on the need for art to function as agitation, protest and racial propaganda Du Bois affirms that the central

duty of African American writers and artists is to advance the cause of race. (979)

Hence, purely political motives of Negro Art bear the profound importance. It has dual demands of art and politics. However, the latter, according to Du Bois, should be the focal interest and practice among the Negro artists. Likewise, Langston Hughes also joins in the debate that whether Negro Art should orient towards the realm of art or propaganda. In this case, Walkowitz in the same article explicates the idea that "Hughes does not explicitly join or even cite the call for propaganda voiced by Du Bois, but he nevertheless asserts that a poet's identity as a Negro artist is its own political practice" (506).

For the Negro critics like Du Bois, Negro Art should be utilized as a powerful weapon to launch a great fight to achieve "a world where men know, where men create, where they realize themselves and they enjoy life" (Du Bois, 982). In the same article, Du Bois further highlights and clarifies the function of Negro Art. As he stresses:

And it is right here that the National Association for the Advancement of colored people comes upon the field, comes with its great call to new battle, a new fight and new things to fight before the old things are wholly won; and to say that the Beauty of Truth and Freedom which shall some day be our heritage and heritage of all civilized men is not in our hands yet and that we ourselves must not fail to realize. (984)

The quotation points up the need of Negro Art to initiate a great battle against "the old things" which cut off the black people from the rights of freedom, liberty and justice and denied the socio-political power. Therefore, the social role of Negro Art is of

profound importance for it will work as a forceful medium to realize and exercise the aforementioned rights and power respectively. This is further foregrounded by Du Bois that "our new young artists have got to fight their way to freedom" (986).

The socio-political scenario is affected by the psychological attitudes of people. Therefore, to bring a change in socio-political condition, the change in the attitude of people is must. The point is that, besides having a social duty, Negro Art has also another duty that is to change the attitude of people which is primarily focused by Langston Hughes in his brilliant essay entitled "The Negro artist and the Racial Mountain." To put his words:

. . . it is the duty of the younger Negro artist . . . to change through the force of his art that old whispering 'I want to be white' hidden in the aspirations of his people, to 'why should I want to be white? I am a Negro- and beautiful! (1316)

Thus, the Negro Art has a serious responsibility to wipe out the hegemonic influence of white world upon black minds. Otherwise some of the Black artists who are still unaware about Negro realities and are hegemonized by white culture, run away from their race and shamelessly forget the spirit, duty and responsibility of Negro Art.

In the same article, Hughes again underlines the role of Negro artists. As he points out:

I am ashamed, too, for the colored artists who runs from the paintings of Negro faces to the paintings of sunsets after the manner of the academicians because he fears the strange un-whiteness of his own features. An artist must be free to choose what he does- certainly, but he must also never be afraid to do what he might choose. (1316-317)

Since the Negro people are crushed in the grind of racism and since their socio-political rights are denied, the role of Negro artist is not to run away from such painful realities of black people towards the beauty of nature but to depict that bitter reality in their art. Therefore, for Hughes, Negro Art is the response to the social climate. It should document the pain and suffering of the people, happiness and joy as well. Hughes also argues that Negro artists should not be afraid of documenting the pains and sorrows, laughter and smiles of the black people. By this, Hughes underlines the heroic action of Negro artists and boldness of Negro Art.

In the same essay, Hughes further underscores the boldness of Negro artists to depict the "blackness" in their art. He puts:

We younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased we are glad We know we are beautiful. And ugly too We build our temples for tomorrow, strong as we know how, and we stand on the top of the mountain, free within ourselves. (1317)

Hughes concludes that the chief responsibility of the black is to produce a racial literature drawn from African American life and culture. According to him, only that art can serve black people and society which is free of "fear" and "shame" of its author. And such art helps to create "temples for tomorrow", the temple where peace, justice, equality, freedom and liberty exist. Besides, the very art will enable black people to stand on the "top of the mountain"-- the mountain of victory -- where gentle breeze of freedom blows. In the article "Langston Hughes" Radical poetry and the 'En of Race' Anthony Dawahere further explicates the issue:

His idealistic conception . . . of this future 'temples', which, we can assume, will be the cultural centers of a divine black literati proclaiming freedom, led him to place an unwarranted emphasis on art as a way to gain equal citizenship in the US. (26)

For Hughes, as the job of Negro artists is to cross the racial mountain and be on the land of freedom, the job of Negro Art is to subvert the very mountain of racial discrimination, injustice and segregation in order to secure the land of freedom. Thus, "The Negro writer who seeks to function within his race as a purposeful agent has a serious responsibility" (Wright, 1384). Therefore, in such a repressive society where black people are devoid of freedom, justice and equality, "a new role is developing upon the Negro writer. He is being called upon to do so less than create values by which his race is to struggle, live and die" (Wright, 1384). In this connection, Richard Wright emphasizes the very effective role of Negro Art in their struggle of life.

The spirit of Negro Art which could be realized in the works of Harlem Renaissance of 1920s, and also be realized even more vibrantly in the Black Arts movement of the 1960s. In this connection, focusing upon the social role of black writers, Lois Tyson writes:

Some of the most vocal spokespersons for the movement, such as the poet Amiri Baraka, believed that black writers have an obligation to help the race through such literary means as depicting the evils of racism, providing positive images of African Americans, and offering possible solutions to social problems confronting the black community. (386)

By correcting socio-political evils and solving the problems, black art could serve its race, its people and society. Maulana Karenga in his essay entitled "Black Art: Mute Matter Given Force and Function" views Black art as an important part of Black Arts Movement." It must become and remain a part of the revolutionary machinery that moves us to change quickly and creatively" (1973). For him there are two levels -- social and artistic -- of judging the black art. But the former bears the primary focus. As he writes, ". . . and it is this criteria (social) that is the most important criteria. For all art must reflect and support the Black Revolution and any art that does not discuss and contribute to the revolution is invalid" (1973).

The given extract echoes the announcement of Du Bois that all art is "propaganda" and the art which fails to fulfill its being "propaganda" is a mere "damn". By the same token, for Karenga, any art which fails to support the Black Revolution is "invalid". Hence, both Du Bois and Karenga emphasize the active social role of Black art, Karenga further, even more boldly, underlines the social role of Black art in the same essay. He argues:

. . . characteristic of Black art is that it must be committing. It must commit us to revolution and change. It must commit us to a future that is ours. . . . This is commitment to the struggle. . . . Art will revive us, inspire us, and give us enough courage to face another disappointing day. (1976)

Therefore, black artists boldly accept Black art as a strong and effective weapon to gear up the black revolution to accelerate change, and ultimately, to bring wonderful future as Larry Neal in his essay "The Black Arts Movement" announces, "Black creative artist can have a meaningful role in the transformation of society" (1962).

Because he views, "poetry is a concrete function, an action" (1963). Similarly, Audre

Lorde, views black poetry, especially black women poetry, not a "luxury" but a "vital necessity of our existence" (2210). She further declares, ". . . it is our dreams that point the way to freedom. Those dreams are made realizable through our poems that give us a strength and courage to see, to feel, to speak and to dare" (2212).

Thus, Lorde highlights the potent role of Black art in materializing their dreams, hopes and aspirations. She further expresses, "poetry coins the language to express and chatter this revolutionary demand, the implementation of that freedom" (2211).

Undoubtedly, Negro Art or black art is a strong weapon for social change, even more important in the case of African American literature which has "focused on a number of recurring historical and sociological themes, all of which reflect the politics -- the realities of political, social, and economic power -- of black American experience" (Tyson, 388). As Negro artists advocate that Negro Art has a serious social role, the political content is an unavoidable part embedded in it, which I will try to explore in the context of Langston Hughes" poems.

THE NEW HISTORICISM

Adopted in 1982 by Stephen Greenblatt in a special issue of *Genre* to describe a new kind of historically based criticism, New Historicism highlights the 'historical' nature of literary texts and at the same time the 'textual' nature of 'histories'. Instead of reading a text as "self-sufficient entity" and "autonomous body," and viewing it in isolation from its socio-cultural historical context as formalists and new critics did, new historicists primarily emphasize the historical and cultural conditions of its production and also of its later critical interpretations and evaluations. New historicism has turned towards history, culture, society, politics, institutions, class and

gender conditions, the social context, etc. in interpreting any given text. Being above the practice of interdisciplinary approach and ultimately emphasizing the “transdisciplinary” approach, it seeks to blur the generic boundaries between different disciplines. Therefore, for new historicists literary texts and non-literary texts bear equal importance. They read them on equal footing, not making any hierarchy of 'high' and 'low', 'good' and 'bad' 'interesting' and 'boring,' etc. It challenges the canonicity of texts and writers. Even within the literary field, some texts were paid much attention and placed at the top of the ranking whereas others were less valued and placed at the bottom of the ranking by traditional critics. New historicism boldly challenges such practice of vertical reading/ranking and advocates for horizontal reading/ranking. Indeed, this is one of the most important paradigm shifts -- vertical to horizontal reading -- from the traditional critical practices.

More importantly, new historicists don't believe in single, authentic and unified history as Louis Montrose in his famous article "New Historicism" argues, "the various modes of what could be called poststructuralist historical criticism -- including new historicism or cultural poetics, as well as modes of revisionist . . . -- can be characterized by such a shift from History to histories (*Redrawing the Boundaries*, 411). Old or traditional historians focused on monolithic history, which has single narrative line that is taken for granted. For them facts or historical realities could successfully be known through textual form and also could be handed down to next generation. Besides, they took it for granted that there is single and unified history. In contrast, new historicists challenge such so-called 'authentic' and 'Unified' narrative and put forward the idea of 'histories,' not 'History.'

Unlike most traditional historians, who believe that history is a series of events that have linear, causal relationship and we are perfectly capable of uncovering the

facts about the particular historical events through objective analysis, new historicists argue:

Instead of a body of indisputable, retrievable facts, history becomes textualized; that is, it becomes a group of linguistic traces that can be recalled, but which are always mediated through the historian/interpreter. Objective history is therefore impossibility; every account is just that -- another text, and like any novel, play or poem, it is open to the same kind of critical interpretive scrutiny. . . . History itself is a large amorphous text consisting of various and often disparate accounts. (Childers and Hentzi, 207)

Therefore, new historicists posit the view that history is neither linear nor progressive, either factual or authentic. Instead, like any piece of literature, it is a constructed body to fit some ideological purposes, embedded in complex web of socio-political networks. History itself is a text, an interpretation, and that there is no single history. Lois Tyson in his book *Critical Theory Today* emphasizes the new historical notion that "history is a matter of interpretation, not facts, and that interpretations always occur within a framework of social conventions" (286).

Emphasizing the same issue, in the essay "Histories and Textuality," Philip Rice and Patricia Waugh write:

For new historicists, however, there can be no such seamless, overarching unity, but only the shifting and contradictory representations of numerous histories'. History can only be a narrative construction involving a dialectical relationship of past and present concerns. Thus the critic is neither a transcendent commentator nor an

objective chronicler because he/she is always implicated in the discourses which help to construct the object of knowledge. (*Modern Literary Theory: A Reader*, 252)

New historicists also acknowledge that "our subjectivity, or selfhood, is shaped by and shapes the culture into which we were born" (Tyson, 280). For the new historicists, our individual identity is not merely a product of society. Neither is it merely product of our own individual will and desire. Instead, individual identity and its cultural milieu inhabit, reflect and define each other.

Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle further explicate the issue in the book entitled *Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory*:

What is new about new historicism in particular is its recognition that history is the 'history of the present' that history is in the making, that, rather than being monumental and closed, history is radically open to transformation and rewriting. (112)

In this connection, new historicists argue that "man" is a construct of social and historical circumstances and not an autonomous agent of historical change. There is nothing essential about the actions of human beings; there is no such thing as "human nature". Instead individuals undergo a process of "subjectification," which, on the one hand, shapes them and, on the other hand, places them in a social networks and cultural codes that exceed their comprehension or control. Since each individual's way of thinking is shaped by this process, it follows that the historian is also a product of subjectification. Lois Tyson clarifies this idea as he writes:

Like all human beings, historians live in a particular time and space, and their views of both current and past events are influenced in

innumerable conscious and unconscious ways by their own experience within their own culture. Historian may believe that they are being objective, but their own views of what is right and wrong, what is civilized and uncivilized, what is important and unimportant, and the like, will strongly influence the ways in which they interpret events.

(Critical Theory Today, 279)

Hence, historians themselves are biased even though they are/seem unaware of it because they are controlled by certain discourses in a particular socio-political circumstance. Such circumstances form their view point about the world and that is the vantage point from which they interpret the things. Thus, new historicism views historical accounts as narrative, as stories that are inevitably biased according to the point of view, conscious or unconscious, of those who write them. The more unaware historians are of their biases, that is, the more 'objective' they think they are, the more those biases are able to control their narratives. The historians operate within the horizon of her/his own worldview, a certain broad set of assumptions and beliefs. Therefore, it is impossible to overcome these beliefs to achieve objective history. Highlighting the same issue, Tyson further writes:

By and large, we know history only in textual form, that is, in the form of documents, written statistics, legal codes, diaries, letters, speeches, tracks, news articles, and the like in which are recorded the attitudes, politics, procedures, and events that occurred in a given time and place. That is, even when historians base their findings on the kinds of "Primary source" listed above, rather than on the interpretation of other historians (secondary sources), those primary sources are almost always in the form of some sort of writing. As such they require the

same kinds of analysis literary critics perform on literary texts.

(*Critical Theory Today*, 283)

New historicism has attempted to eradicate distinction between literature and history, arguing that each partakes of the other and that both participates in social networks and deploy cultural codes that cannot be fully articulated. In this sense, new historicism deconstructs the traditional opposition between history (traditionally thought of as factual) and literature (traditionally thought of as fictional). Because new historicism considered history a text that can be interpreted the same way literary critics interpret literary text, and conversely, it considers literary texts as cultural artifacts that can tell us about the interplay of discourse, the web of social meanings, operating in the time and place in which those texts were written. Opposing the view that the categories of literature and history as intricably separate disciplines, new historicism argues that each partakes and influences each other.

The mutual relationship between history and literature is further highlighted by the off-quoted phrase "Historicity of texts and textuality of history" (Montrose, 781).

In his famous article "Introduction: Professing the Renaissance: the Poetics and Politics of Culture", he acknowledges new historicism as "a reciprocal concern with the historicity of texts and textuality of history (*Literary Theory: An Anthology*, 781). M.H. Abrams further explains the phrase in his book *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. He writes:

That is, history is conceived not to be a set of fixed, objective facts but, like the literature with which it interacts, a text which itself needs to be interpreted. "Any text, on the other hand, is conceived as a discourse

which, although it may seem to present, or reflect, an external reality, in fact consists of what are called representations—that is, verbal formations which are the "ideological constructs" or "cultural constructs" of the historical conditions specific to an era. New historicists often claim also that these cultural and ideological representations in texts serve mainly to reproduce, confirm, and propagate the power-structures of domination and subordination which characterize a given society. (183-84)

In the same article, Louis Montrose himself further attempts to clarify the phrase in the following way:

By the historicity of texts, I mean to suggest the cultural specificity, the social embedment, of all modes of writing. . . . By the textuality of history, I mean to suggest, firstly, that we can have no access to a full and authentic past, a lived material existence, unmediated by the surviving textual traces . . . secondly, that those textual traces are themselves subject to subsequent textual mediations when they are constructed as the "documents" upon which historians ground their own text, called "histories." (*Literary Theory: An Anthology*, 781)

Hence, new historicism has subverted the notion that history is purely objective and provide factual data, and literature is purely subjective and supply fictional data. Instead, for them, both options -- literary texts may provide factual data and history fictional -- are possible. In this sense, no longer does history act as the background to literary texts, and no longer are historical accounts considered reliable and unproblematic representation of what really went on during a particular time. New historicists argue that since works of literature are embedded in particular socio-

political and historical realities, they both influence and are influenced by historical reality. Like any other discourses, a work of art is a discourse, and also is the negotiated product of a private creator and the public practices of a given society. In this respect, viewing a work of art as a discourse, Habib points out:

It (new historicism) saw the literary text not as somehow unique but as a kind of discourse situated within a complex of cultural discourses—religious, political economic, aesthetic—which both shaped it and, in their turn, were shaped by it. (761)

Therefore, new historicists emphasize the need to examine and reexamine any piece of literature "within the broader context of its culture, in the context of other discourses ranging over politics, religion and aesthetic, as well as its economic context" (Habib, 760). For them literature is neither a "transhistorical" category, independent of the social, political and economic conditions, specific to an era, nor a "timeless" body. Instead, a literary text is simply one of many kinds of texts configured by the particular conditions of a time and place. Like any kind of text, a work of literature is profoundly shaped by different socio-political, economic circumstances. Hence, new historicists "view literature as one discourse among many cultural discourses" (Habib, 762). To put it in another way, "literary texts are bound up with other discourses" (Bennett and Royle, 110). Therefore, it must be read against the backdrop of those different discourses of the complex web of social milieu of the time and place.

Stephen Greenblatt argues that literary works themselves should be understood in terms of negotiation for any reading or writing of a literary text is question of negotiation, a negotiation between text and reader, and text and writer within a particular social and cultural situation. To clarify the issue, it is better to cite

Greenblatt himself, who in the book *Learning to Curse: Essays in Early Modern Culture*, writes, "work of art is the product of a negotiation between a creator or class of creators . . . and the institutions and practices of society" (158).

Literary texts are embedded with the social political and economic circumstances in which they are produced and consumed. But what is important for new historicists is that these circumstances are not stable in themselves and are susceptible to being rewritten and transformed. From this perspective, literary texts are part of a larger circulation of social energies, both products of and influences on a particular culture or ideology.

Since literary texts, as new historicist argues, are situated within a particular social, cultural, political, economic climate, and since the writer operates within the horizon of her/his own world view (a certain broad set of assumptions and beliefs), the task of new historicists is to explore "the historicity of texts and textuality of histories" (Montrose, 410). Therefore, while analyzing a piece of history, the questions like "is this account accurate? Or what does this event tell us about the spirit of the age? . . . What happened? And what does the event tell us about the history?" (Tyson, 278) are of less important.

Instead, as Tyson further argues "new historicists ask 'how has the event been interpreted?' and what do the interpretations tell us about the interpreters?" (278). Hence, the job of new historicists is to read a given piece in relation to other discursive practices in which it occurred. To put it differently, since the meaning of a literary text is situated in the complex web of discursive formation, the project of new historicists is to "analyze the interplay of culture-specific discursive practices" (Montrose, 415). It attempts to explore how the given piece of literature or history or anything else "fits within the complex web of competing ideologies and conflicting

social, political, and cultural agendas of the time and place in which it occurred. Besides, new historicists explore how the given piece serves or opposes the certain discourse of the time and place. To maintain dominance, control and power or to oppose them various discourse are circulated. Among them literature is one. In this respect, Habib in his book *A History of Literary Criticism from Plato to the Present* points out:

New historicists . . . have been profoundly concerned not only with situating literary texts within power structures, but also with seeing them as crucially participating in conflicts of power between various forms of social and political authority. (762)

By this he points up that literary texts not only carries certain ideological needs of certain socio-political authority but also involve in the conflict between them. In the same book, citing Louis Montrose, Habib further highlights the issue that "new historicists variously recognize the ability of literature to challenge social and political authority." (762). Indeed, they have acknowledged the "subversive potential of literature" (Habib, 762). Besides, Hans Bertens in his book *Literary Theory: The Basics* points out the political nature of a literature text. As he writes, "literary text is a time-and place-bound verbal construction that is always in one way or another political" (177).

In the critical analysis and investigation of new historicism "discourse" and "Power" bear important position. "Discourse" and "power" give a certain stance to the critical practice of New Historicism. Indeed, new historicism owes much to Foucault for the concept of "discourse" and "power" by which it has strengthened its own critical stance. For Foucault "discourses are coherent, self-referential bodies of

statements that produce an account of reality by generating 'knowledge' about particular objects or concept" (Childrs and Hentzi, 84).

Citing Foucault, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin in their book *Key Concepts in Post-colonial Studies* further explain that "a discourse is a strongly bounded area of social knowledge, a system of statements within which the world can be known" (70). Discourses provide a so-called vantage point to know the world. Indeed, discourses both influence and are influenced by socio-historical and cultural climate. As Tyson argues:

Discourse is a social language created by particular cultural conditions at a particular time and place, and it expresses a particular way of understanding human experience From a new historical perspective, no discourse, by itself can adequately explain the complex cultural dynamics of social power. . . . There is, instead, a dynamic interplay among discourses. . . . No discourse is permanent. (281)

Group of statements -- discourses -- exists historically and get changed as their material conditions for their possibility change. Therefore, no discourse is final and permanent. Besides, for Foucault, "discourse informs and shapes subjectivity, including the possible activities and knowledge of the individuals" (Childrs and Hentzi, 84-85). Discourses both influence and are influenced by socio-historical realities. Hence, "discourses wield power. For those in charge, but they also stimulate opposition to that power" (Tyson, 281). Power circulates through discourses, which I will try to explore in the poetry of Langston Hughes.

III. TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

POETICS: A DYNAMIC SITE FOR POLITICS

A seminal figure of African American literature, and a remarkably revolutionary poet, Langston Hughes penned most of his brilliant poems against the backdrop of the Harlem Renaissance, the Great Economic Depression, World War II, and social unrest and minority movement of late 1950s and 1960s. As new historicists argue that literary text is a good means of reading the history of the time, Hughes poems also exhibit the historicity of the contemporary scenario. Here, my attempt is not to present how powerfully his poems depict or capture the spirit of the time but to unearth how strongly they participate and forcefully circulate the discourses of the time. Anti-racist and anti-capitalist discourses were the prominent discourses of the time in which Hughes's poems both participate and help to circulate them. By participating and circulating the discourses, Hughes attempt to uplift the socio-economic conditions of Black people as well as try to gain political power for them. This very clear cut political motive of Hughes's poems, however, is supported by his uses of poetic devices like images, symbol, cultural metaphor, "orality," etc.

During 1920s, when Harlem Renaissance was rapidly flourishing, the anti-racist discourse was dominant and vibrantly circulating through different mediums. Indeed the movement highlighted the very spirit of anti-racist discourse and also stimulated many Black artists to embrace it.

Therefore many African American artists worked not only with a new sense of confidence and purpose but also with a sense of achievement never before experienced by so many Black artists in the long troubled history of the people of African descent in America. Undoubtedly, Harlem Renaissance marked an

extraordinary creative outpouring not only in the field of literature, art and music but also in the domain of culture, politics and other social sectors. While participating in the circulation of the anti-racist discourse, literature primarily came as a response to their dignity and humanity in the face of racism. In this respect, Hughes's poems also took part in the complex cultural dynamics of social power.

Since African Americans had no autonomy, no power, no voice, and since they were effectively silenced by racism, they adopted artistic creation as a powerful tool to subvert the dominance of racist discourse and thereby to carve out a place in the racist wasteland. Hence, Harlem Renaissance illustrates most clearly the political motives that lay behind the exclusion of African American from American history.

In such a socio-historical condition, Hughes's poems came into existence, and thus, were shaped by those conditions and, in turn, shaped them. Since Hughes created poems merging racial awareness with a desire for a fresh achievement and independence in art, culture and politics, his poems lucently involve politics because they make a call to awake Black folks for the equal socio-economic position and to achieve political power. While supporting anti-racist discourse, Hughes opposes racist discourse which treats Black people as a subject, put them at a margin and cut them off from their socio-political rights. Therefore, by opposing repressive racist discourse, Hughes attempts to gain a position for Black people, the position from where their socio-political rights could be secured, preserved and protected. Hence, opposing racist discourse and supporting anti-racist discourse clearly involve politics. Indeed, Hughes uses his poetry as a weapon to undermine the racist discourse which tries to legitimize the oppression done by Whites upon Blacks. His poems, thus, function as a strong device to better the socio-economic cum political condition of Black people.

The African American people had a deep pain, suffering and sorrow of being marginalized and being cut off from social, political and economic power.

Undoubtedly, it was racist discourse that effectively worked to exclude them from these powers and to exercise domination over them. Based upon racial superiority and inferiority, racist discourse tried to legitimize the social-political domination of White upon Blacks even in systematic discriminatory practices (for example segregation, domination and persecution).

Racist discourse believes in racial superiority and inferiority, and purity based on the conviction that moral, social and intellectual characteristics just like physical characteristics are biological properties that differentiate the races. So it refers to the unequal power relations that grow from the socio-political, economic and cultural domination of one race by another (here domination of Black by Whites) and that results in systematic discriminatory practices. In this regard, Whites who were in the position of power were the practitioners of racist discourse.

Economic hardship, social marginalization, political domination and cultural suppression were the common, but painful, experiences of African American people during the time of Hughes. Therefore, to resist or overcome these conditions, Hughes supported anti-racist discourse through his poems. Indeed anti-racist politics of his poems remained relevant to the needs of Black Americans over the long history of their struggle for justice, equality and freedom. In Hughes case it is not surprising; therefore, that writing which is a form of purely individual expression has a serious social role also.

As he feels an obligation to help the race through his poems, Hughes depicts the evils of racism, offers possible solutions to social problems confronting Black community. In this respect, Hughes poetry clearly reinforces the anti-racist discourse

and undermines the racist ideologies that have kept Black Americans politically oppressed, economically disadvantaged and socially marginalized.

Even though during 1930s and 1940s, anti-racist discourse, to some extent, was overshadowed by various social-political events like Great Economic Depression, World War II, it revived its spirit during 1950s and 1960s, and thus got circulated through different mediums. Hughes's poems again partook in the circulation of the discourse.

The socio-political scenario of 1930s of America was marked by the Great Economic Depression. As a result, the condition of poor people, especially poor Black people, became horrible. It caused many problems like unemployment, crime, scarcity of food etc, by which poor people were affected much. In such a juncture of socio-political scenario, anti-capitalist discourse was prominent, Hughes could not remain aloof rather responded the situation through poetry. During the time by raising the voice of working class people, who had been the serious victim of the Depression, he undermined the capitalist discourse. At the backdrop of such social condition, Hughes took part in the circulation of the anti-capitalist discourse and thereby tries to achieve equal socio-political and economic power for working class people.

While responding to the situation, his poems lucidly emphasize on a number of recurring historical and sociological issues all of which reflect the politics -- the realities of political, social, and economic power -- of Black American experience. Among these issues are the following: reclaiming the African American culture and heritage; the quest for freedom from all forms of oppression; the quest for equality, equity and justice; the problems of working class Black people; the difficulties of economic survivals, etc. As these themes suggest, the political content of Hughes's

poems include correcting the stereotypes and misrepresentations of African Americans in American history. Similarly, his poems try to establish the position of African American people in the American society -- which was earlier negated -- by celebrating their culture, art, music, achievement, experience, etc., in a full tone of praise. In addition, his poems very lucently explore the racial issues where lies his political vision of free society.

In terms of poetics, Hughes's poems, replete with images, symbols and other literary devices, most importantly are distinguished by two prominent features: "orality" and folk motifs. The "orality" is usually achieved by using Black vernacular and by copying the rhythms of Black speech, including, for example, the repetition of important phrases and alternating voices, devices associated with church sermons and with blues, jazz music. Folk motif, on the other hand, includes singing work songs, hymns and the blues. All the literary devices he has employed reinforce the political content. In other words, Hughes's use of forms is itself political, not just the content of his poems. He himself sees politics in his verse as he declares:

Most of my own poems are racial in theme and treatment, derived from the life I know. In many of them, I try to grasp and hold some of the meanings and rhythms of jazz. . . . But jazz to me is one of the inherent expressions of Negro life in America; the eternal tom-tom beating in the Negro soul- the tom-tom of revolt against weariness in a White world. (1316)

Some of his poems like "Revolution," "Good Morning Revolution," "Freedom's Plow," etc., are overtly political in tone and content, directly calling his people to rise, to protest, to fight and to involve in revolution for the transformation of the society. Some other poems like "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," "The Weary Blues," "I, Too,"

“The Negro Mother,” etc, though impregnated with political content, are implicit in political tone. Both types of poem will come under my investigation.

“THE NEGRO SPEAKS OF RIVERS”

Langston Hughes’s most anthologized poem, “The Negro Speaks of Rivers,” first published in *The Crisis* in 1921, is about heritage, history and strength of African American people. Even though the poem does not address the political idea directly, still it is suffused with clear-cut political overtones. By highlighting the history of Black people, the poem is trying to affirm the power of African American people. Besides, the vision of equitable society by ending the slavery is equally obvious. The literary devices like image, symbol, metaphor, refrain, allusion have been utilized to reinforce the very idea of heritage, history and strength of African American people. Hence, literary devices function so as to point up the political content embedded in the poem.

Since the poem was written when the Harlem Renaissance was slowly gathering its force, it participates in the anti-racist discourse. Through the intense imagery and profound metaphor of river, the poet claims that Negroes have very “ancient” and very old history. This very assertion of the poet strongly disclaims the racist discourse that Negroes are devoid of history. Since they were considered as having no history, they were also denied the socio-political position. But through this poem, the writer firmly establishes the history of African American people. Betty Taylor Thompson further highlights this very idea of history in the following way:

Pride in one’s history is a constant theme in the poem. Hughes views the history of Black people, even in slavery, with a sense of pride . . .
 .Hughes’s confidence in the strength of Blackness is a major part of his

theme of pride. . . . Black culture is still embattled; but Hughes provides a device for countering the argument that Black people are without a vital and universal history. (4)

Using river as forceful metaphor, Hughes captures the African American's historical journey from Africa to America. For Sandra Merriweather, the poem "expresses the inner thought of a young African American on a journey to meet the unknown, using the motif of river to reflect the history of African Americans" (315). He traces the movement of Black life from "Eupharates" and "Nile" river in Africa to the "Mississippi" in America. It pushed their history back to the creation of the world, and credited them with possessing wisdom no less profound than that of the greatest rivers of civilization that humanity had ever known, from the Eupharates to the Nile and from Congo to the Mississippi. The very title "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" is itself suggestive of it, that is, Negro is full of power and strength. That is the reason why the poet claims that he can speak of Rivers. As the river symbolizes the Black history, the title clearly suggests that Negro is full of potential of that power and strength as the poet writes:

I've known rivers:

I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the

Flow of human blood in human veins.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers. (23)

The speaker's assertion that "I've known rivers" underscores his ability, his power, and his potentiality of having known his Black history and heritage. This shows the intimacy of the Negro with his history in which he glorifies his history by metaphorically calling it "ancient" river.

Along with the rise and the flow of the rivers, Negroes have experienced the ups and downs of their lives. To Merriweather, “river’s . . . ebb and flow parallels the struggle of the African American race” (315). Like the rivers, the Negroes have undergone an adventurous journey of struggle of life, facing different difficulties and obstacles, hinder and hurdles, and thereby accumulating abundance experiences of life. The lines “I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep/ I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramid above it” (23) succinctly captures the story of struggle of the African American people. His building of the “hut” and raising of the “pyramid”-- image of the hut and pyramid -- are very much suggestive of their physical labor. Pyramid even suggests very significant task they had done in their journey of life. Similarly, raising the pyramids above the Nile even suggests the act of slaves. Therefore, by naming particular rivers and particular activities performed nearby, the poem implicates the whole history of African and American slavery without ever articulating the word. The following lines from the poem further reinforce the idea:

I bath in the Euphates when dawns were young.

I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.

I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.

I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln

Went down to New Orleans, and I’ve seen its muddy

Bosom turn all golden in the sunset. (23)

The given lines allude to the Mississippi river and Abram Lincoln. It is the context of American slavery and the civil war. The phrase “I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln went down to New Orleans” (23) suggests that the

river was singing the song of freedom and also the song of ending the slavery which was supported by Abram Lincoln by officially ending the slavery. The singing of the Mississippi “caused Hughes to think about Abram Lincoln and the role he played in the abolition of the slavery in the United States” (Thompson, 4). Therefore, through this poem, Hughes very subtly raises the issue of slavery, and highlights the need to end it, which is suggested by the allusion of the anti-slavery act of Lincoln.

In the long troubled history of African American people, slavery caused a great damage in their lives, not only causing socio-political exclusion but also by inflicting physical pain and psychological trauma. Besides, slavery helped to justify the racist agendas by approving every activities of racist society. Focusing the issue of the racism, Michelle L. Taylor argues,” the poem . . . conjures memories of the African past and the horrors of slavery but ultimately suggests that African-Americans will transcend racial injustice by asserting their pride in the shared racial heritage” (316). Therefore, the poet envisions a free state with the help of allusion of Abram Lincoln. The magical transformation of the Mississippi from mud to gold by the sun’s radiance is mirrored in the transformation of slaves into free men by Lincoln’s Proclamation. The phrase “Its muddy/ bosom turn all golden in the sunset” (23) capitalizes on the aforementioned issue. Hence, Hughes is deeply concerned not only with the history but also with the social condition of his people.

The speaker of the poem, “I” is not “a Negro” but “the Negro,” suggesting the whole of the African American people. The poem does not carry the idea of single Negro. Instead, it carries the voice of the whole Negro world. The inclusive nature of the poem also maximizes the heritage and history of the African American people. When the speaker says, “My soul has grown deep like the river” (23) he associates himself with the river, that is to say, he no longer finds any difference between him

and the river. His soul and river become one, and the whole. That is the reason why he proudly says, “I’ve known the rivers” (23). Now there lies no difference between the deepness of the river and the deepness of the soul of the Negro, between the forceful current of the rivers and the forceful current of the soul of the Negro. He further emphasizes the idea by the use of repetition of the phrase “My soul has grown deep like the rivers” (23).

To put in a nutshell, the entire poem is based on an extended metaphor comparing the heritage of the African American to the great rivers of the world. This comparison powerfully glorifies the history and heritage of the Black people. And by doing so Hughes supports anti-racist agenda and undermines the racist discourse which views African American people bereft of definite history. In other words, it firmly establishes the power and strength of the Black people by extolling their heritage and history. But that is achieved by the employment of poetic devices like metaphor, image, etc. Hence, poetics clearly involves politics.

“REVOLUTION”

Extremely outrageous and radically revolutionary in tone, the poem “Revolution” openly calls the “Great mob” (175) to involve in revolution to fight against those “who’s bought and sold” (175) the Black people. Strongly undermining the racist discourse of slavery, Hughes uses the present poem as an effective weapon to excite Black oppressed people to embrace revolution for freedom, equality and justice. Therefore, Hughes political motive of bringing change in the society through revolution is evident, obvious and clear. Direct address to the “Great mob” (175), vivid images and metaphor are the literary tools employed in the poem to communicate his political vision effectively.

As he emphasizes the collective struggle to challenge the White domination and inhuman activities like the business of slave, Hughes' radical perspective becomes apparent in the poem. In a full rage and excitement, the speaker directly addresses the mass:

Great mob that knows no fear –

Come here!

And raise your hand

Against this man

Of iron and steel and gold.

Who's bought and sold

You - (175)

History is evident that the African American people have been facing a great difficulty in their lives; they have been bought and sold; robbed and exploited; beaten and killed. Thus by presenting such terrible picture of the Black people, Hughes attempts to strike a spark of revolt in the hearts of the Black people to form a mighty flame of revolution for eliminating the inhuman activities of the “man of iron and steel and gold” (175). Here, Hughes employs powerful metaphor by comparing White people with “iron and steel and gold” (175). Indeed, comparing White people with non-human things is very much satiric and ironic. The point is that as iron, steel and gold don't have sensation, feeling and sentiment, White people also are devoid of them. Therefore they involve in brutal and inhuman activities like buying and selling human beings.

Hence, Hughes, through this poem, boldly speaks for the great need of revolution to exterminate the barbaric activities of White people, and also uproot their domination, exploitation and suppression. Just like in the political slogan, Hughes repeats the line “Great mob that knows no fear” (175) thrice in the poem. This repetition clearly pumps the force of revolution into the hearts of oppressed people, which means, it excites them to involve in the struggle for gaining every type of freedom. Indeed, due to utter exploitation of White, African American people have lost their fear and ready to face any challenges. This poem backs up that spirit of fearlessness of Black people, encourages them to be bold enough to face any challenges and difficulties that come across their way of struggle.

For Hughes, being fearful and submissive will not help to bring change in society. Therefore, the only way of transforming the ugly face of the racist society is to raise one’s mighty hand of revolution against the White exploitation and domination. Such idea of change and transformation of society through revolution strongly backs up the spirit of revolution of the Black people who have been facing an age-old White exploitation. His another poem “The Songs of Revolution” also highlights the spirit of revolution of this poem, “Revolution.” With the help of personification, Hughes directly addresses Revolution to end every type of discrimination, exploitation and segregation. He addresses:

Sing me a song of the Revolution

Drowning the past with a thunderous shout:

. . . .

O mighty roll of the Revolution,

Ending the centuries of bloody strife,

. . .

Breaking the bonds. . . (170)

Here, revolution has been personified as a mighty person who has power to drown past which was full of “blood and sorrow” (179); to terminate the century-long “bloody strife”; to free the “darker faces” from the bonds of domination; to break the chain of exploitation; to destroy the barriers that have been dividing people; and ultimately to create the world of “the joy of life” (170).

In this way, Hughes heavily emphasizes the great need of revolution for the socio-political transformation. Unless and until revolution is embraced, the racist society will continue to dominate, to suppress, and to oppress. That means ugly and troubled face of the society will remain troubled and ugly forever. Therefore, through this poem, he makes an earnest call to every Black person to involve in the great struggle by carrying the flames of revolution in their hands, in their heads and in their hearts with a sole purpose of achieving a world of justice, freedom, equality and beauty.

“THE WEARY BLUES”

“The Weary Blues,” written in 1923, stands out as one of Hughes’s finest poem because it powerfully captures the pains and sorrows, woes and wounds of the African American people of 1920s through the portrayal of a blues singer. Through the employment of puissant cultural metaphor and vivid imagery, the poem very boldly depicts the loneliness, weariness, and alienation of a blue singer caused by the socio-political oppression of racism. In this sense, the poem clearly takes an anti-racist stance and its circulation through literary means, and thereby undermines the racist ideology which puts African-Americans at the margin of socio-political

position. As a result, they, as the blues singer in the poem does, feel fragmented and frustrated.

The poem is notable for its deep meditation on African American music, especially on blues music, which helps to capture the complexities of African-American life during the 1920s. Historically, blues music has functioned as folk history of the African American experiences, telling of survival and transcendence in hostile world. Hughes was very much interested in using the blues as both:

. . . a musical and a literary form. Hughes uses the blues as a structural device . . . in “The Weary Blues”. . . . More important, however, he uses the blues form to capture the struggle of African Americans.
(Taylor, 316)

In the poem, Hughes deals with the blues singer and his song in relation to the speaker of the poem. Clearly, in this poem, the blues unite the speaker and the performer in same way. The speaker finds the blues singer and his song wistfully compelling; and he hears in his song the collective weary blues/pains of Blacks in America and tries reconciling the sadness with the sweetness of the form and expression. The speaker feels the trails and tribulations of the blues singer very much. He is very much interested in describing those difficulties of the blues singer. He describes them as if they are his own problems. The following narration also presents the intimacy between them:

Swaying to and fro on his rickety stool

He played that sad raggy tune like a musical fool.

Sweet Blues!

In a deep song voice with a melancholy tone

I heard that Negro sing, that old piano moan- (50)

Music, in the African American world, has been considered as one of the most powerful expressions of the experiences of life. In his brilliant article “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain,” Hughes considers African American music like blues and jazz as “the inherent experience of Negro life in America: the eternal tom-tom beating in the Negro Soul - the tom-tom of revolt against weariness in a White world” (1316). Therefore, in the poem, Hughes, by presenting the weariness of the blues singer, is not only depicting the troubled condition of the blues singer but also revolting against the conditions that caused him weary, lonely and exhausted. Undoubtedly, it was the racist society and its conditions which made the blues singer feel weary and lonely. As his song, which is the expression of his “soul,” clarifies:

Ain't got nobody in all this world,

Ain't got nobody but ma self.

I's gwine to quit ma frownin'

And put ma troubles on the shelf. (50)

Due to suppressive features of racism, African America people were socially marginalized, politically excluded and economically suppressed. They were at the bottom of the social position; prestige was a myth for them. In such a deadly condition exhaustion and loneliness overtook them; they felt terribly lonely as the blues singer of the poem. He says, “Ain't got nobody in all this world” (50). What caused him to think so? Certainly, it was the social milieu which was dominated by racism. In the next stanza, the blues singer again sings, “I ain't happy no mo/ And I wish that I had died” (50). This song exposes his extreme troublesome condition. Nobody wants to die due to simple reason. When the existing living condition

remains no longer bearable, only then the death wish dominates a person. In the present poem, the blue singer's death wish is caused by the unbearable social condition. For him death is dear to life that is to say, he is living amidst excruciating and insufferable conditions. Therefore, the root of his harrowing experiences is nothing but the racist society. The blues singer's "performance gives expression to the experiences of African Americans in a White world, as indicated by 'his ebony hands on each ivory key'" (Taylor, 316). In this sense, the present poem is a brilliant social commentary.

In the poem the phrases like "drowning," "drowsy," "sad raggy tune," "melancholy tone," all contributes to the piercing experiences of the blues singer. His grievous condition is further deepened by the moaning piano. The speaker narrates, "In a deep song voice with a melancholy tone/ I heard that Negro sing, that old piano moan" (50). Here the piano itself comes to life as an extension of the singer, and moans. As the piano moans, it intensifies the sad and troubled condition of the blues singer. Here, personification of the piano as a singer bears important role in highlighting the pains of the blues singer.

The tone of both the speaker and the singer, with his melancholy tone, and his playing that comes "from a Black man's soul" (50) indicates depression or sadness. Blues singers themselves identify melancholy and misery as the major theme of the blues/pains. The blues, however, "serves as more than a method of complaint: the very act of writing or singing the blues provides an antidote to the pain the songs express" (Clark, 2). For example:

And far into the night he crooned that tune.

The stars went out and so did the moon.

The singers stopped playing and went to bed

While the Weary Blues echoed through his head.

He slept like a rock or a man that's dead. (50)

It is in his singing that his inner self, his melancholy “soul”, is revealed. In singing the blues he releases “his pent-up emotional burden into musical expression. He receives solace after his trials and tribulations from singing his secular song, much as others have from singing religious songs such as spirituals” (Clark, 2). Ultimately, the singer turns his despair into song instead of suicide. The singing has resolved his melancholy; therefore, he is able to sleep soundly “like a rock” (50). In this sense, singing the blues can be seen as a means of revitalizing oneself. Therefore, “although the musician is weary, the power of the performance nevertheless affords him a sense of redemption” (Taylor, 316). Blues music, here, serves as a means of relieving pain and anxiety.

In order to present the piercing experiences of the African American people in the racist society, Hughes has employed the cultural metaphor and imagery. Blues song, associated with the African American cultural tradition, is the powerful cultural metaphor used in the poem. The whole poem is dominated by its utilization. In connection to the poem, Norris B Clark argues, “the poem utilizes the traditional musical structure of the blues and incorporates actual blues lyrics” (3). In most of the blues lyrics and poems, the last word of the third line rhymes or sometimes off-rhymes, with the last word of the first and the second line. For example, the word “died” of the third line rhymes with the word “satisfied” of the first line. However, it does not follow the same pattern in the second line. It is the variation appeared in the structure of the blue music. The repeated lines and the rhythm created out of the

rhythm add emphasis to the intensity of a thought or feeling. In the present poem, such repetition intensifies the feeling of sadness. Hughes has expressed the pains and pathos of African American people through a blues singer by employing the structural pattern of blues music, which is considered as a powerful cultural metaphor.

Similarly, another literary device used in the poem is imagery. Image of the blues singer singing blues songs “swaying to and fro on his rickety stool,” (50) image of the moaning piano, image of “his ebony hands on each ivory key,” (50) image of the blues singer sleeping “like a rock” all contribute us to understand the problematic and pathetic condition of the blues singer in particular and the complexities of the African American people in general. This intensifies the troubled lives of the Black people. Likewise, the extended metaphor is another literary device employed in the poem so as to reinforce the condition of the blues singer. The title “The Weary Blues” literally means the exhausted blues songs. But, at the deeper and metaphorical level, the weary blues can be taken as blues men or African American people who have been exhausted due to the oppressed racist social situation. Since the weary blues are “coming form a Black man’s soul” (50) they are the very parts of the soul of the Black men. Hence, they bear the status of Black men. In this sense, “the weary blues” equates to the “weary Black men”. So there lies the far-fetched comparison between the weary blues and the weary Black people.

To wrap up, by presenting a very much difficult and painful condition of a blues singer with the help of cultural metaphor of blues music and imageries, Langston Hughes implicitly has made a call to African American people to raise a voice against the racist social order for the socio-political transformation of the society in which Black people will have equal position and receive equal treatment in every sectors of life.

“FREEDOM”

The poem “Freedom,” published in 1940s, functions as a political slogan to raise socio-political consciousness in the minds of the African American people to take part in the great struggle of revolution to materialize the dream of freedom. Langston Hughes attempts to achieve this political motive by utilizing literary devices like metaphor, and simple, bold and straightforward language.

In the poem the speaker “I,” who has been denied the exercise of freedom, is very much rebellious. For him, freedom is not achieved “through compromise and fear” (289). As he declares:

Freedom will not come

Today, this year

Nor ever

Through compromise and fear. (289)

According to the speaker, since freedom is not granted through compromise and since it is not achieved being fearful, the ultimate way to embrace it is to stage rebellion against those forces that hinder the exercise of the freedom. In this connection, the anti-force of freedom, undoubtedly, is the racist society which has been treating African American people as subordinated, secondary and even as non-human. Therefore, these people were painfully cut off from the exercise of freedom in every sector of life. They were heavily denied socio-political and even cultural freedom.

However, the racist society every time made African American people to compromise and it promised to grantee freedom in every sector of life. But compromise and promises were limited in words and never appeared in practice. In 1860s when Civil War was going on, African American people compromised and the

racist society promised to provide freedom to Black people. But in practice it was appallingly avoided. Even after the compromise socio-political marginalization continued as it was before. Therefore, in the present poem, for the concrete realization of the freedom, Hughes emphasizes the need for staging rebellion against White discrimination, segregation and injustice. Since compromise did not work, its alternative can be revolution and protest. Even though the term “revolution” has not been mentioned in the poem, it is implied, and thus, taken as an alternative means of securing freedom. Hence, the poem can be taken as a political slogan to excite people to involve in revolution.

Throughout their troubled history, African American people were given the beautiful words of freedom, but they were always cut off from the realization of it. Freedom, for them, had/ has been a deferred dream, the dream which will never turn into practice. Therefore, the speaker in a very rebellious and subversive tone declares:

I tire so of hearing people say,

Let things take their course

Tomorrow is another day

I do not need freedom when I'm dead.

I cannot live on tomorrow's bread. (289)

His (speaker's) tiredness was/is caused due to waiting. African American people were made to wait and wait, but never given the freedom. In the name of “tomorrow,” they lived a long history hoping that freedom would be given to them one day. But beautiful “tomorrow” never came. However, White people kept on saying “*let things take their course/ Tomorrow is another day*” (289). Since many

generations of African American people lost their lives in the name of “tomorrow’s bread,” the speaker is not ready to live on the same fake bread. Instead, he emphasizes on today. He argues that freedom after death means nothing. It has great value only for the alive people. Therefore, the speaker repeatedly points up the need for freedom.

The given words are simple, bold and straightforward and equally are potential to impart a sense of protest in the minds of people. Simplicity functions as an easy access to approach the common mass and convey the idea. Therefore, Hughes’ framing of verse in simple, bold and direct language is politically oriented and thus strategic in itself. In addition to simple language, Hughes’s use of metaphor is also significant to reinforce his idea of freedom. In the poem freedom itself has been compared with a “strong seed planted in a great need” (289). We cannot imagine greenery and blossoming tree without seed. Here greenery and blossoming tree can be taken as a symbol of life itself. Therefore, as the seed is base for greenery and blossoming tree, freedom is base for beautiful and blossoming life.

As the poem highlights the sense of protest and revolution to achieve freedom, it emphasizes the idea as indicated by Audre Lorde in her essay entitled “Poetry Is Not a Luxury” in which she argues, “. . . it is our dreams that point the way to freedom. Those dreams are made realizable through our poems that give us strength and courage to see, to feel, to speak and to dare” (2212). In the same manner, Hughes has utilized the poem “Freedom” as a weapon to achieve freedom -- social, political, economic, cultural, etc. -- for Black people. Hence the poem speaks politics through poetics.

“I, Too”

Highly charming, moving and touching, the poem, “I, Too” very powerfully reflects themes of exclusion and forcefully depicts tales of discrimination caused by the racist White American society of the people of African American descent. As the poem was written during 1920s when Harlem Renaissance was enjoying its heyday, the poem clearly sides with anti-racist discourse and takes parts in its circulation by undermining the racist discourse. With the help of simple dictions and use of literary allusion, Hughes attempts to plant the seed of protest in the minds of people to fight against racist discrimination, segregation and injustice. In this sense, the poem is suffused with the sense of political vision of having just and nondiscriminatory society.

Even though the speaker of the poem has been facing a series of discriminatory practices due to White society, he is much daring, bold and optimistic. Even though the pressure and oppression of the racist society is too much, still he believes in his capacity. He boldly declares, “I, too, sing America” (46). Indeed, this is the clear cut assertion of the power, potency and strength of Black people. In the long and the trouble history of Black people, they were always considered as sub-human, inferior to White and intellectually weak by White racist society. Their capacity was neglected, ability was uncared and strength was unnoticed, rather negatively presented. But through this poem, Hughes powerfully counter veils such racist argument, and highlights the strength of African Americans.

In the poem, the word “sing” bears paramount importance for it has deep connotative meaning rather than literal and denotative one. Here, singing can also be taken as “understanding” or “knowing.” One does not sing unless he/she understands the things better. In this connection, the speaker asserts that he has understood

America. Therefore, he has the power and capacity to sing its beauty; to sing its grief and sorrow; to sing its happiness and joy; to sing its success and victory; and what not? In the poem, another word “too” is equally important for it provides a counter position to Whites. It is not only White but also Blacks are equally powerful in their capacity of singing America. For many centuries, the people of African American descent were believed to have little knowledge or having no knowledge about America. That means their capacity was highly minimized. But through this poem, Hughes firmly establishes the power, potency and strength of Black people.

The very line “I, too, sing America” alludes to the poem “I Sing America” by Walt Whitman in which he writes, “I sing America/ I sing freedom.” With the inclusion of “too,” Hughes rewrites “I, too, sing America” emphasizing the power of Black people. As he himself was White, Whitman’s verse carries the ideology of White society, which is successfully counterbalanced by the verse of Hughes.

The speaker of the poem is proud of both of his Black and American identities. So he proudly announces, “I am the darker brother,” “I, too, am America” (46). But the painful reality is that being on the land of America, he is victimized due to racist society and its injustice practices. The poet, through this poem, “condemns America for its racism while also promoting a more equitable society” (Taylor, 316). The following lines of the poem succinctly expose the discriminatory practices of the racist society:

I am the darker brother.

They send me to eat in the kitchen

When company comes,

And eat well,

And grow strong. (46)

His being sent “to eat in the kitchen” (46) means he is not given the equal status and position. Because they were slaves who were not supposed to eat at their master’s table. Here the word “kitchen” suggests very low and limited types of world where menial labor is required. On the contrary, the word “table” connotes the open world. Besides, it suggests the job of respect. But Blacks are always cut off from the “table” and forced to use “kitchen.” That means they are heavily discriminated. However, the speaker in the poem, though disappointed, is not discouraged. Rather, he believes in his power to “grow strong” (46) to fight against the discriminatory practices for the achievement of the equal position. Being sent to “eat in the kitchen” (46) is a mark of defeat but his vision of growing “strong” is a mark of dignity and determination in his power. Hence, he feels dignity in defeat. The speaker, who is a Black, is very much optimistic that his power and strength will put him on the equal social footing with Whites. He announces:

Tomorrow,

I’ll be at the table

When company comes.

Nobody’ll dare

Say to me,

“Eat in the kitchen,” (46)

Through these lines, Hughes presents a transformed society in which Black people will achieve equal socio-political position and the society will not dare to minimize the strength and power of Black people. Thus, the earlier unjust practices will come to an end.

The last line of the poem, “I, too, am America,” which has been given a separate status of a stanza, is a repetition of the first line with a slight variation to emphasize his assertion of being American. The word “sing” is replaced with the term “am” so as to focus the independent African American identity. Black history, history of pain and suffering, is evident that African American people were not considered as “American.” Instead, they were taken as borrowed creatures. White people firmly believed that America was their land and they were only the true American, that means they did not consider Black as American citizen. Here, Hughes, by making his speaker declaring boldly, challenges such a racist ideology which undermines the independent African American identity. “I, too, am America” clearly asserts his being American, and shows that speaker is also a part of America; and America also belongs to him. Opposing racist discourse, Hughes, thus, firmly establishes the independent Black identity in America.

To sum up, by presenting the tales of discrimination and themes of exclusion and also highlighting the power, strength and vitality of Black people, Hughes is trying to plant the seed of protest in the minds of Black people to fight for the equitable, fair and just society. Hence, the political vision of the poem becomes obvious.

“BALLAD OF THE LANDLORD”

Brilliantly powerful in its rebellious and subversive tone, “Ballad of the Landlord” presents how the racist White society has always been deaf to the problems, pains and sufferings of Black people. By exposing the unjust, unfair and injustice practices of landlord, who is a White, Hughes is attempting to inject the seeds of protest in the minds of oppressed people just like the tenant of the poem. By the employment of ballad form, symbol and colloquial language, Hughes attempts to

convey his message effectively and thereby tries to achieve his political motive by revolutionizing the Black people to fight against the racist discriminatory practices. In this sense, the poem takes an anti-racist stance so as to undermine the racist discourse.

At the beginning of the poem, the speaker/narrator, a tenant, complains to the landlord about the leakage in the roof that he first mentioned to him “last week.” He speaks out:

Landlord, landlord,

My roof has sprung a leak.

Don't you 'member I told you about it

Way last week? (402)

It is not the first time the tenant has complained about the leak of the roof; he has already informed the landlord. Still the complain is not heard, thus problems remained unsolved because the landlord is not concerned about the problems of the tenant. Instead, he turns deaf to the complain but the bitter truth is that the landlord is very much concerned about the rent and doesn't fail to come repeatedly. The narrator exposes his avarice with the help of these lines, “Ten Bucks you say I owe you?/ Ten Bucks you say is due?” (402).

In the present stanza, the roof, which “has sprung a leak” (402), can be taken as a symbol. At the micro level, it refers to an individual home of a Black man but, at the macro level, it refers to the house of every African American people. In this sense, it is the representative house of the people of African descent. But this house is in very critical condition in which a Black person is forced to live. Despite their repeated complains, White society is unaware. Such irresponsible behaviors of

the White people cause the hardships, complexities and difficulties in the lives of African American people in the racist society.

Similarly, the complain in the second stanza of the poem “Ballad of the Landlord” is about the broken stairs that have not been fixed; the narrator is surprised that the landlord, who has apparently come by the narrator’s house to collect the rent, has not injured himself. He says, “It’s a wonder you don’t fall down” (402).

In the third stanza, the tenant refuses to pay the ten dollar the landlord is demanding till the landlord fixes “this house up new” (402). In the next stanza, the tenant presents the multiple threats of the landlord -- to get an eviction notice, to cut off the heat, and to throw the tenant’s furniture into the street -- and, in the fifth stanza, the tenant, in a rage, replies by threatening to “land my (his) fist on you (landlord)” (402). Slowly, from the beginning, the poem receives the tone of rebellion, even of anger. Too much exploitation and suppression, undoubtedly, are the root cause behind tenant’s anger. The rest of the stanzas undergo a radical shift in point of view and tone. The sixth stanza is “italicized in order to convey the hysterical and exaggerated words of landlord” (Peck, 2). The stanza runs:

Police! Police!

Come and get this man!

He’s trying to ruin the government

And overturn the land! (402)

Since police and government are formed by White networks, they side with the White person, and, thus, don’t listen to the pains and troubles of the Black person. Even though the Blacks are right, they are belied to be wrong and punished unfairly. In the

poem, for example, the tenant is arrested, and is charged of “trying to ruin the government” (402). This, of course, is the culmination of exploitation of Black by Whites. Similarly, in the last three stanzas, Hughes presents society’s responses to those unfair charges: the police arrest the tenant, and throw him in jail; the newspaper headlines proclaim “MAN THREA TENS LANDLORD/ TENANTS HOLD NO BAIL/ JUDGE GIVES NEGRO 90 DAYS IN COUNTY JAIL” (403). In the first five stanzas, the tenant tells his pathos to the landlord who ignores the cries for adequate housing and fair treatment. In the last four stanzas, “the point of view shifts to the landlord, then to the society as a whole” (Peck, 2). Therefore, the shift of point of view takes the specific to general movement or direction: from landlord to society, and then to government. This very strategic shift in point of view highlights the idea that what he is facing is not an individual problem but the collective one -- the problem of the whole race.

All the power blocs of society -- landlord, police, newspaper, judge, government -- belongs to White racist society, which doesn’t do justice to the Black people even though they are right. No matter how fair argument they raise, as the tenant of the poem raises, their argument is misread, and consequently they are made victimized. Hence, the poem brilliantly presents the fact that in every level of society White exploitation, discrimination and domination are pervasive. This idea further gets highlighted in the poem “Always the Same” by Langston Hughes:

It is the same everywhere for me:

. . .

Blacks

Exploited, beaten and robbed

Shot and killed. (165)

It is very much ironic that the person who demands for fair practices and social justice has been labeled as criminal and sent to jail. Hence, Hughes uses irony to satirize the extreme exploitation of Whites and also to undermine the racist ideology. Another important device used in the poem is the ballad form itself. Here, Hughes “appropriates the traditional ballad form but uses it in a contemporary urban setting to relate a current and crushing racial problem. This conjunction of traditional ballad form and contemporary content lends further power to the poem’s cry for social justice” (Peck, 1). Generally traditional ballad form is used to narrate a tale of romantic adventure, heroic deeds or “noble subject” (Murfin and Roy, 27). The ballad, here, however, tells the tale of exploitation of the landlord, representative character of White society. In short, it narrates a tale of social problem. Therefore, unlike in traditional ballad form, Hughes, by narrating mean and cruel activities of the landlord, uses ballad form to deepen the sense of irony. Still another poetic technique used in the poem is the use of simple language and colloquial diction. The poetic diction of the tenant’s narration is conversational, simple and colloquial. For instance, he says, “Don’t you ’member . . .?” “You gonna cut off my heat?” (402). Such use of language of common people helps to create a mutual bond with them and helps to convey the message directly to them. Capitalization of letter is another technique of the poem. Hughes capitalizes the last stanza to focus the misdeeds of the landlord in particular, and to highlight the wrong doings of the racist society in general. Thus, the capitalization does not expose something good but, ironically, emphasizes the unjust practices of racist White society.

To sum up, with the help of ballad form, irony, symbol and capitalization of certain words, Hughes attempts to communicate his political idea. Besides, he has presented the socio-political exploitation and marginalization of Black people, and thereby attempts to inject the seeds of protest in the minds of the African American people to subvert the racist practices so as to establish an equitable society.

“GOOD MORNING REVOLUTION”

Remarkably revolutionary in spirit and radical in tone, the poem “Good Morning Revolution” makes a rousing call to Revolution itself for joining his/its mighty hands with workers, and then, to initiate a joint struggle in order to free working class people from the vicious cycle of exploitation of capitalism. When the poem was composed, the socio-political situation of America was dominated by the Great Depression of 1930s. As a result, millions of people, especially poor African Americans, were severely suffering from unemployment, poverty, hunger and starvation. This poem was produced amidst such a social milieu. So, the poem speaks from the workers’ perspective undermining capitalistic discourse. However, it attempts to circulate anti-capitalist discourse so as to spread the socio-political awareness in the minds of workers. In other words, it makes a rousing call to workers to launch a great battle for ending the capitalistic domination and exploitation.

By using the literary tools like personification, juxtaposition and simple language, Hughes attempts to communicate his political message of transmitting the spirit of revolution into the veins of the working class people for the achievement of his political goal of transforming society. Indeed, he intends the poem to be performative that is to appeal to working class people to embrace revolution for the socio-political and economic transformation of the society where “no one will be

hungry, cold, (and) oppressed” (163). By directly addressing to the Revolution, the speaker of the poem, a worker, makes a close bond with it (Revolution). He addresses, “Good morning Revolution: / You’re the very best friend/ I ever had” (162). Such address creates an intimacy. By showing such intimacy between the worker and the Revolution, Hughes emphasizes the great need of revolution for the freedom of the worker’s world. Of course, in this poem, Hughes treats revolution as an unavoidable means of bringing change in the lives of workers. Indeed, their life was sorrowfully miserable, severely painful, and chillingly unbearable due to different forms of exploitation of capitalism. The speaker himself is a living example of being seduced by the cruelties of capitalism, as he cries out:

But me, I ain’t never had enough to eat.

Me, I ain’t never been warm in winter.

Me, I ain’t never known security-

All my life been livin’ hand to mouth,

Hand to mouth. (162-63)

The given verse clearly depicts the bitter reality of the speaker who belongs to the working class people. As Hughes presents him as a representative character, the speaker carries the pain and pathos of hundred and thousands of workers. He works whole day for the boss, but ironically, he has to face “hand to mouth” (163) problem every morning and every evening. Besides, he doesn’t get a warm piece of cloth to wrap his body. Indeed, he is terribly victimized and crushed in a huge grind of capitalism. In contrast to the chilling condition of the speaker, the life style of his boss, who represents capitalistic world, is very much sophisticated, luxurious and comfortable. The following verse shows highly comfortable condition of the boss:

The boss got all he needs, certainly,

Eats swell

Owns a lotta houses

. . .

Runs politics, bribes police. (162)

Hence, by means of comparing and contrasting the lives of the worker and the boss, Hughes clearly shows the unbridgeable gap between poor and rich, or proletariats and bourgeois. Proletariats work for bourgeois throughout their lives, but in return, they receive exploitation, domination and injustice. On the other hand bourgeois enjoy their lives basing on the labor of proletariats. Such an unequal and unjust social order is against the basic rights of life of workers. Therefore, Hughes views revolution as a dynamic site to end such social order and thereby to establish an equitable society where every worker will get equal rights and opportunity.

As Hughes sees Revolution as a mighty power to fight the great battle of abolishing the capitalistic exploitation, he views that strong friendship of the workers' with it (Revolution) can achieve every thing. Thus, he addresses to the Revolution:

Listen, Revolution,

We're buddies, see-

Together,

We can take everything:

Factories, arsenals, houses, ships,

. . .

All the tools of production,

And turn 'em to the people who work. (163)

According to the poet, the unity of the workers with the Revolution can spark the flames of revolt, protest, and, of course, flames of great power, by means of such power they can turn the ugly face of the capitalistic world into beautiful and shining face of the workers' world. Besides, the unity will return the fruits of labor to the laborers, the person who works. Thus, the present poem excites the workers to come down on the ground of revolution to achieve that beautiful world of worker.

Another poem, "A New Song" by Hughes himself, also emphasizes the true necessity of revolution to fight against the capitalistic world order in which he addresses the workers, in a revolutionary tone, to "Revolt! Arise!" (171). Hence, Hughes uses this poem for clear cut political purpose. In these poems Hughes has raised above the national identities to the international identities of workers. He is not only addressing the condition of the workers of America but also of the workers of the whole world. In this regard, Anthony Dawahare argues, "his (Hughes) radical poetry works to situate national identities within international class coordinates. Thus he concludes "Good Morning Revolution" by imagining the singing of the radio broadcast from Soviet America to the world's workers" (33):

And we'll sing it: *Germany*

Sing it: *China*

...

Sing it: *America*

Sing it with my one name: *Worker*. (163)

To support his political motive of energizing workers to involve in revolution for a meaningful change of society, Hughes employs simple language which works as an effective medium to circulate the message. The language he has employed here can be characterized as a working class vernacular which he believes could have multiracial mass appeal. Therefore, the politics of using simple language is to convey the message of revolution to a greater number of people. The philosophical and jargon loaded language, of course, cannot capture the sentiments and feelings of working class people. So, Hughes avoids such use of language and employs the language of working class people. Thus, political motive is inherent even in his use of simple language.

“FREEDOM’S PLOW”

The poem “Freedom’s Plow,” extremely moving and emotional in tone, was written at the backdrop of 1940s’ America when African American people still were denied their socio-political freedom. By using powerful allusions, vivid imagery, bold symbol and forceful metaphor, Hughes charges his people with emotional appeal to keep their hands tight on the plow of freedom to materialize the dream of equality, liberty and freedom. In this respect, the poem sides with anti-racist and anti-slavery discourses and in their circulations.

As the African American people were cut off from the rights of freedom on the land developed by themselves, Hughes emphasizes the need of struggle for the achievement of freedom. In the poem he repeatedly asks his people to “KEEP YOUR HAND ON THE PLOW!/ HOLD ON!” (266). Hughes first gives the history of building of America: how African American people invested their great energies for its (America) building. He claims America was not built out of nothing, nor was it

built within a single day. Instead, African American people have poured down their sweats and blood, invested their great labor and perspiration, spent their strength and energies and, of course, endured pain and difficulties to shape and reshape the fate of America only for a single cause: freedom. Hughes focuses on the very idea by penning following lines:

A long time ago, but not too long ago,
 Ships came from across the sea . . .
 To a new world, America . . .
 Bringing men and dreams, women and dreams . . .
 They began to build our land . . .
 Hoping to find their freedom. (264)

But, unfortunately, despite their huge investment of strength and energies, they were denied to cherish the fruit of their labor – the fruit of freedom. So by presenting such predicament of Black people, Hughes energizes his people to fight for freedom with a new sense of determination, strength and confidence. The speaker claims that millions of Americans -- Black and White, rich and poor, men and women -- had joined their hands together in making of the fate of America: “Thus together thorough labor/ All these hands made America” (265). But the speaker is very much disappointed that, despite their great effort, African American people’s contribution was not only minimized, but not even considered.

To highlight the rights of freedom and equality, Hughes brings the allusion of the Declaration of Independence and its initiator, Thomas Jefferson. Hughes writes:

A long time ago, but not too long ago, a man said:

ALL MEN ARE CREATED EQUAL . . .
 ENDOWED BY THEIR CREATOR
 WITH CERTAIN INALIENABLE
 RIGHTS . . .
 AMONG THESE RIGHTS LIFE, LIBERTY
 AND THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS. (265-66)

Of course, the Declaration of Independence was declared with a sole purpose of gaining political freedom from England. Here, Hughes utilizes the political force of this allusion to make his people aware about their socio-political rights/freedom. Indeed the Black people took those charming words of the Declaration for granted; they believed, now onwards, they could breathe pure and fresh air of freedom. So they waited and waited those words to come into reality, but the words never turned into practice. The path of freedom remained as rocky and muddy as it was before. Hence, America as the land of freedom as declared by Jefferson turned out to be myth for the Black people. But Hughes by means of poems encourages them not to give up struggle; rather they should keep their mighty hand on the plow of freedom.

Another allusion, Hughes brings, is that of Abram Lincoln. The purpose of bringing the allusion, undoubtedly, is to highlight the spirit of freedom and to make the Black people aware about it. To quote Hughes:

But not so long ago at that, Lincoln said:
 NO MAN IS GOOD ENOUGH
 TO GOVERN ANOTHER MAN

WITHOUT THAT OTHER'S CONSENT. (266)

Unfortunately, in the case of African American people those words left opposite result. In opposite to what Lincoln said Black people were dominated, oppressed, exploited and suppressed for no specific reason. They were governed, used and sold just like an object. So America as the land of freedom and democracy of, by and for the people as envisioned by Lincoln again turned out to be myth for the African American people. Therefore, to gain the land as envisioned by Lincoln, Hughes, through this poem, tries to empower his people with strong political force.

Still another allusion, Hughes brings is that of Henry Highland Garnet, an African American writer of 19th century. The lines "BETTER TO DIE FREE/ THAN TO LIVE SLAVES" (266) allude to Garnet's words. In his essay entitled "An Address to the Slaves of the United States of America," Garnet, in a highly rebellious tone, addresses: "Rather die freemen than live to be slaves" (285). Through this allusion, Hughes attempts to charge the Black people with the spirit of revolt, rebellion and resistance for the achievement of freedom and equality. The following lines further pump the rebellious spirit into the hearts of African American people:

Keep your hand on the plow! Hold on!

If the house is not yet finished,

Don't be discouraged, builder!

If the fight is not yet won,

Don't be weary soldier! (267)

By comparing the Black people with soldier (here, metaphor is used), Hughes emotionally charges and encourages African American people to participate in the great battle of freedom, equality and liberty.

In the last stanza, Hughes presents a vivid imagery of a tree. The tree can be taken as the tree of freedom. The plow of freedom prepared a furrow and “into that furrow the freedom seed was dropped/ from that seed a tree grew, is growing, will ever grow/ that tree is for everybody” (268). But to keep the tree of freedom evergreen and ever blossoming, the Black people should constantly hold on the plow - the plow of freedom.

Thus, Hughes employs the present poem as a dynamic site to achieve his political goal, the goal of gaining socio-political freedom. The use of literary devices like allusion, metaphor and images strongly support his political vision.

“LET AMERICA BE AMERICA AGAIN”

Iconoclastic in spirit, the poem “Let America Be America Again” expresses Hughes’ revolutionary hopes for an egalitarian society, free from exploitation and discrimination of all kinds. In the poem, Hughes captures the voices of every marginalized person of America and thereby attempts to energize them to change the socio-political face of America. Even after the World War II, many marginalized people -- Blacks, poor Whites, immigrants, Native Americans -- could not get equal socio-political rights. Since the present poem is the product of that social milieu, and since it speaks from the perspective of common people, it partakes in the discourse of marginalized people. Metaphor and imagery are major literary devices used in the poem to communicate his political idea effectively for empowering marginalized people from all perspectives -- economically, socially, politically -- of life.

The speaker of the poem represents every marginalized person who wishes truly democratic and egalitarian America; who wishes it to “be the dream it used to be” (189); who wishes it to be “that great strong land of love” (189) where domination and exploitation never happens. Instead, liberty, equality, freedom and opportunity rule the land. Indeed, America was considered as the land of dreams and promises; hopes and aspirations; liberty and freedom; equality and opportunity. But ironically, it turned to be the land of woes and wounds; pains and sorrows; injustice and inequality. Its original dreams were lost or made to be lost. The “dream” in the poem refers to the marginalized people’s dream for the right to life, liberty and pursuit of happiness; for equality, liberty and opportunity in the land of prosperity. But common people are cut off from these dreams. Therefore, the poem, on the one hand, is “a lament for the American dream” (Dawahare, 33) and, on the other hand, it is a sincere “plea for a truly democratic and egalitarian America” (Dawahare, 33). Indeed, the democratic and egalitarian ideal of America doesn’t and has never existed in practice because of class inequality and because of “those who live like leeches on the people’s lives” (Hughes, 191).

Hughes, in the aforementioned lines, metaphorically compares exploiters and oppressors with “leeches,” whose sole concern is to suck blood. Hence, the exploiters and oppressors also are blood suckers of common people. As a result, common people are devoid of liberty, freedom and equality. In the following lines, the speaker cries for American dream -- dream of liberty, freedom and opportunity:

O, let my land be a land where Liberty

Is crowned with no false patriotic wreath,

But opportunity is real, and life is free,

Equality is in the air we breathe. (190)

Indeed, Hughes wants America to be true land of liberty, equality, freedom and opportunity where none will be discriminated. Therefore, the speaker dreams “a dream so strong, so brave, so true” (190). He is very much committed to the dream that is the reason why he repeatedly emphasizes the idea of American ideals to be restored. However, he painfully says, “(America never was America to me)” (189). The use of bracket in the present line is very much significant because it signifies his bracketed condition of being entrapped by the net of false American dream. So it boldly suggests that every common person in America, just like the speaker, are entrapped, and thus cut off from freedom and liberty.

Besides, the very line, “(America never was America to me)” (189), helps to expose “the most poignant lamentation of the chasm that often exists between American social ideals and America social reality” (Rampersad and Roessel, 4). Promises were made but were not put into practice. In the midst of such reality poor and oppressed people are forced to hang, just like a pendulum.

Now these poor marginalized people have nothing “except the dream that’s almost dead today” (191). Of course, these people worked day and night, poured down their sweats of blood on the American soil, and spent their energies to build America with a sole purpose of achieving the sacred dream of life. In an assertive and in rebellious tone, the speaker says, “who made America/ whose sweats and blood, whose faith and pain” (191). The unequivocal answer is that America was built by “poor man’s / Indian’s/ Negro’s” (191) sweat and blood. Therefore, at the end part of the poem, with a sense of hope and determination the speaker vows:

From those who live like leeches on the people’s lives,

We must take back our land again,

America! . . .

We, the people, must redeem

The land . . .

And make American again! (191)

Thus through this poem, Hughes powerfully charges the oppressed people with a sense of revolt, rebellion and protest to fight against the “leeches,” metaphorically speaking the exploiters. Besides, he focuses on the unavoidable need of socio-political transformation of American society otherwise America will not be true America again. Hughes, thus, envisions a beautiful America where every citizen will have equal freedom for the right of life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness.

“THE NEGRO MOTHER”

In the poem entitled “The Negro Mother” Hughes, through a moving narration of the trauma and tortures of the Negro Mother, hopes to transmit the revolutionary energies into the hearts of Black Americans to struggle together for the realization of their dreams and establishment of a society, free from exploitation of all kinds. In a full swing of emotional and rebellious spirit, the Negro Mother, the speaker of the poem, encourages her children to “march ever forward, breaking down bars” (156) of racial discrimination for the attainment of the sacred land of freedom, equality, opportunity, happiness and joy. Thus by presenting the lively pathos of the Negro Mother, and also by using vivid imagery as a structural device, Hughes hopes to accomplish his political motive of instigating revolutionary seeds in the minds of African American people for the meaningful transformation of the society.

In the poem, Hughes powerfully depicts the history of Black enslavement, its evil practices, effects and cruelties through the excruciating experiences of the Negro Mother. Such depiction, out rightly, helps to stimulate a sense of revolt in the hearts of people. The Negro Mother who has undergone through biting experiences of tortures, pain and slavery, however, feels dignity in defeat. Her feeling is very much inspiring, touching and encouraging. She was stolen from Africa, sold to America, made slave, even her children were taken away from her warm lap, and her husband was sold. She has such a bitter experience of life. Still she has full hopes and aspirations to achieve freedom, thus she feels dignity in defeat. The following lines clarify the idea:

Children, I come back today

To tell you a story of the long dark way . . .

Look at my face – dark as the night –

Yet shining like the sun with love's true light. (155)

She endured all those pain for the love of her children. Even at the time of the narration of her painful experiences of life, she sees her face, which is very much dark, shining and glittering. Such feeling of the Negro Mother further boils the revolutionary spirit in the veins of the Black people to fight against White discrimination. Indeed, the Negro Mother suffered for the freedom of her all children. Now she wants to transmit the revolutionary spirit into the veins of her children to uproot the slavery and racism for the achievement the sacred fruit of freedom. Therefore, she cries:

I am the dark girl who crossed the wide sea

Carrying in my body the seed of the free . . .

Now, through my children, I'm reaching the goal.

Now, through my children, young and free,

I realize the blessing denied to me. (155)

Her children, for the Negro Mother, are bright rays of hopes, and strong pillar of her faith through whom she aims to accomplish her long-suppressed goal of securing the free land. Indeed, for the achievement of this goal, she endured a great pain and sufferings. Even though “the valley was filled with tears” (155), road was extremely “hot” and seas on the way were “wide,” she didn't stop her journey rather kept on “till my (her) work was done” (155). There lies the greatness of the Negro Mother which emotionally empowers her children to launch a great battle for the total transformation of the society.

Hughes further makes the Negro Mother speaks, even in more emotional tone, to her children to heighten the revolutionary spirit in the Black people:

I nourished the dream that nothing could smother

Deep in my breast . . .

I had only hope then, but now through you . . .

My dreams must come true

All you dark children in the world out there,

Remember my sweat, my pain, and my despair

Remember my years, heavy with sorrow –

And make of those years a torch for tomorrow. (156)

Here the Negro Mother asks her children not to forget her “sweat,” “pain” and “despair” because, for her, they are the real source of force of rebellious spirit. So, she earnestly urges them to seek “a torch for tomorrow” (156) in the pool of her despair. By this she wants to change pain into pleasure, sorrow into joy. Of course, she wants them to receive the force of revolt out of her despair and sorrow; that means to use negative force for positive purposes. Her past life, albeit full of pain and sorrow, can be “a road to the light” (156) for the present and future of her children. That’s the reason why she repeatedly asks them to think of her past life. If something blocks their way to freedom, she allows them to break the “bar” and “march ever forward” (156). Besides, she energizes them to “look ever upward at the sun and the stars” (156), the symbol of hope, determination and goal. Her promise that “I will be with you” (156) till the battle is won further encourages the African American people to be committed towards the assigned goal. Similarly, by the structural refrain like “I am the child” “I am the dark girl” “I am the woman” (155) and the repetition of the words like “remember” not only add emotional impetus but also emphasize the idea of freedom she bears in the deepest part of her heart. Besides, it creates an emotional bond between the Negro Mother and her children, the Black people.

In a long and short, the poem celebrates the Black quest for freedom and social justice. By providing the highly emotional and rebellious force to the Negro Mother to narrate her chilling experiences, Hughes, indeed, narrates the experiences of all African American people’s lives. By this he aims to excite them to change the ugly face of the society. Hence, his political vision of transforming society into the land of liberty, equality and freedom is made explicitly clear and obvious.

“HARLEM”

Richly replete with a series of images of decay, waste, wound and explosion, the poem “Harlem,” in a prophetic manner, concentrates on the devastating effects of “deferred dream” in the racist White American society. Besides, it compels us to consider various disturbing psychological, emotional, and of course, physical circumstances African American people might have been experiencing due to the absence of realization of American dream of freedom, equality and justice. By presenting such a disturbing and painful condition of Black people, Hughes aims to transform the society. Hence, his commitment towards social change is explicit. To strengthen his idea, Hughes uses the literary devices like image, symbol, rhetorical, question, etc. The devices themselves carry political overtone as they accelerate the spirit of change by focusing on the rebellious and revolutionary tone of the poem.

Since African American people were given glittering dreams of freedom, equality and justice, they hopelessly waited its result. Unfortunately, those dreams were false ones. When promises are made and its practices are avoided, and when dreams are distributed and its actions are negated, frustration anger, pain and revolt overtake a person. So is the case with Black people. As the result of the deferred dream, now African American people are filled with deep pain frustration, anger and revolt. The speaker in the poem prophesies the powerful, yet disastrous explosion of deferred dreams. Although the effects and consequences of the explosion are not shown, the implication is that the erupted lavas of the deferred dreams will cause a great devastation in the racist society. The society built after devastation, thus, will value equality, liberty, freedom, justice and dignity of life. Only then, African American people will cherish their long postponed dreams.

The poem “Harlem” “oscillates between deferred action and the contemplation of its effect” (Walkowitz, 518). Hughes begins with the central question: “what happens to a dream deferred?” (426), and he offers six possible effects in response. Hughes paints a series of images of decay and waste, representing the dream’s or dreamer’s fate. The subsequent responses, except the last one, tentatively try to answer the question posed at the beginning. However, the last question, “*Or does it explode?*” which has been italicized and given a separate status of a stanza, receives a real force. This rhetorical question is very much suggestive that when frustration, pain, despair and disappointment are too much, they are potential to explosion causing larger social and political damage. The idea is obvious- too much suppression results in explosion. Indeed African American people were largely exploited, heavily suppressed and terribly discriminated in all walks of their lives by the racist society. That is to say, they were denied the promised dreams. Rather those dreams were deferred, put off, postponed, or even thwarted. That is the reason why poet cries “dreams/ Are not available / to the dreamers” (340).

The poem develops using a series of images supported by various rhetorical questions. In the first question, for example Hughes uses the image of a dried “raisin” to show the predicament of deferred dream: “Does it dry up/ like a raisin in the sun?” (426). The raisin was once a plump, moisture- laden fruit full with the promise of flavor and enjoyment. However, when the fruit was taken and put under the hot sun, like African American people were put under White exploitation, it metamorphoses into something less appealing, losing the charm and aura of life. Therefore, this dried image of raisin parallels the condition of African American people under racism. Similarly, another image is that of “a sore”, badly affected and causing continuous pain. This very image deepens the pain of the Black people caused by “deferred

dream". Indeed, for them, deferred dream has become just like a wound. Still another image, the poet highlights is the image of "rotten meat" (426) suggesting the very bad condition of African American people brought by the deferred dream. These all images prepare the ground for the last image of the explosion, that is to say, the image of explosion receives force from the earlier ones. "What happens to a dream deferred?"(426) ultimately intends its answer to be EXPLOSION -- the explosion of anger, of frustration and of despair of Black people against those who put off their dream. This image, very powerfully, blends together the spirit of revolt, rebellion and rage of Black people to form a mighty power of explosion.

Besides the employment of different disturbed images and rhetorical questions, Hughes employs metaphor to give a deeper acknowledgement of African American people's disturbed condition created by deferred dreams. In the poem, the speaker addresses the deferred dream as if it is a human being. Indeed, dream bears so close, so intimate, and so familiar relationship in the lives of African American people that they seem interchangeable. In this sense, the "deferred dream" can be taken as a metaphor of a Black person. Hence, the line "what happens to a dream deferred?" can be changed into "what happens to a Black?" Is his life dried up "like a raisin in the sun" (426) due to extreme racist exploitation? Or is he leading a life like a fester sore? Or has his life turned into the condition of rotten meat? Or is he loaded, packed and filled up with an extreme sense of frustration, anger and revolt, and thus going to explode? Therefore, "the dreams deferred" metaphor very succinctly captures the situation and sentiment of Black people whose dreams have been looted by the racist the society. As behind the poem's obvious simplicity lies the complex lives of African American people, the simplicity of language used in the poem is very much helpful to convey that complex aspect to a greater number of people to excite

them for the change and transformation of the racist society. Since he is speaking to the common Black people, the use of complicated language certainly cannot convey the message effectively. Hence, his simple use of language also strengthens his political message.

To sum up, the poem presents the tension between the unrealized dreams and the bitter realities of the African Americans' experiences. As the speaker ultimately capitalizes on the powerful image of EXPLOSION as the most probable consequence of the first question, the poem clearly captures the spirit of Hughes's artistic rebelliousness. The explosion, certainly, demands change. Hence, Hughes uses art for social reform; treats it as a social action. However, all these ideas are possible and get strength by the help of different literary devices used in the poem. Hence, there lies politics in poetics.

IV. CONCLUSION

In the present research paper, I have tried to divulge the deep political vision of Langston Hughes embedded in his poems. Besides being beautiful pieces of literature, his poems appear as moving political slogans with a power to awake, to excite, and to revolutionize people for meaningful transformation of society. Indeed, Hughes intends his poems to be performative. Hence, he beautifully blends politics and poetics together.

As New Historicists argue literary texts are cultural artifacts, they can tell us something about the interplay of discourses of the socio-political circumstances in which they were/are written. For them, as a literary text is a product of social milieu, it is shaped and, in return, shapes the socio-political and historical realities. In the context of Langston Hughes's poems, they participate in the anti-racist and anti-capitalist discourse of 1920s to 1960s. However, the motive behind participating in those discourses was/is political. By participating in those discourses, Hughes attempted to undermine the racist and capitalist discourses which viewed/view African American people and working class people as sub-human, an object to be exploited, and a thing to be enjoyed.

Indeed racist discourse denied the socio-political freedom to African American people. They were marginalized, oppressed and exploited in every field of life. Here, Hughes sees the racist society as the root cause of Black exploitation and marginalization. Besides, he views capitalistic world order as another root cause of the exploitation of working class people. Therefore, using his poetry as a dynamic site, Hughes attempts to pump the fuel of revolution into the veins of African American and working class people to subvert the racist and capitalistic world order for the achievement of socio-political and economic power.

Hence, Hughes appears as a strong advocate for Black liberation and freedom, and also for the liberation and freedom of working class people. Indeed Hughes is strongly committed to the use of poetry as an effective weapon for social change. Therefore, his struggle through poetry is to create a world of freedom -- freedom from all exploitation -- for Black and working class people. Therefore, as poetry and politics are intertwined in his case, besides being an eloquent poet, Hughes appears as an eloquent political activist, and his poems as eloquent political slogans.

Hughes' employment of literary devices like metaphor, images, symbol etc, themselves are politically oriented. They are used in such a way that they back up political force in the poem. For instance, the image of explosion in the poem "Harlem" compels us to envision a destruction of the racist society and the creation of a society based on justice and equality in which no one's dreams would be deferred. In some of his poems like "Revolution," "Freedom," "Freedom's Plow," the intended message is overtly political; whereas in some other poems like "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," "The Weary Blues," the political message is implicit. However, in both types of poems, his political vision of transforming the racist and capitalist society into the world of freedom, equality, and justice is widely pervasive and deeply rooted.

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