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Politics of Rhetoric in Barack Obama's *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming American Dream*

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Letter of Approval

This thesis entitled “Politics of Rhetoric in Barack Obama’s *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts and Reclaiming the American Dream*” submitted to the Central Department of English Tribhuvan University by JeewanBahadurKhadka has been approved by the undersigned member of the research committee.

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Politics of Rhetoric in Barack Obama's *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming American Dream*. Abstract

This research paper is an attempt to explore politics of rhetoric in Barack Obama's The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming American Dream. Obama expresses personal and political visions and also has described how 'American dream' in the modern age can be achieved with available resources and skilled manpower of the country. Publishing it as his mouthpiece just before his candidacy for the president of the United States of America in 2006, Obama tries to address the problems of common citizens. The purpose of the research paper is to analyze rhetorics applied by the writer as a political leader. By examining the text, the researcher has tried to find out the reason why Obama is applying this type of tone. To accomplish this task, the researcher takes theoretical insight primarily from rhetoric related texts. The whole research is focused on use of rhetoric in the political context. In addition, the researcher also analyzes rhetorics in relation to the social, cultural of Obama's autobiography. Obama's use of rhetorical language in speech and writings is the main concern of the research paper. Along with this, the attitude of the writer regarding his personal character has also been discussed in the main part of the paper. Obama makes a departure from the racial politics practiced by most other Afro-American politicians. In short, how Obama as a leader intends to win the sympathy of majority voters of America, is the basic issue of the thesis.

Keywords: politics and persuasion, argument, rhetoric, function of language

This research paper analyzes Barack Obama's political autobiography *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts and Reclaiming the American Dream* from rhetorical perspective. This text is a "political biography" of an Afro-American Senator who raises the issue of nationalism and equality among different races, ethnicity, gender, religion etc. The book was published just before Osama's candidacy for the president of the United States of America. Published in 2006, this book includes the future president's political vision and desire to make America great, economically stronger. The main point is, America cannot progress unless different forms of discrimination are eradicated. His vision of unity for the betterment of the country is most appreciable. For example in his speech at the senate of Illinois he addresses the common interests of people. He prioritizes the unification of all in different sectors including political, social, economic etc. And regardless of the color of their skin, what every real American wants, is peace, harmony, economic and social development of the country. In this regard, the researcher tries to highlight the persuasion power using rhetorical strategies to set a new trend in national political course.

In this book, Obama emphasizes the idea of American dream in favor of national unity; though by celebrating the diversity in culture and respecting multiculturalism even regarding his personal life, his father was from Kenya and his mother from Kansas and he grew up in Hawaii and Indonesia. His statement of "there is not a Black American and white American and Latino American and Asian American – there is a United States of America", (231) indicates that national unity and national issues are more important than the issues of a particular group, race, and genders. Why does Obama, particularly in this book, emphasize national interest unlike most of other Afro-American leaders?

The reason Obama carries such a different opinion, unlike other Afro-American leaders, is his candidacy for the upcoming presidential election of 2008 A.D. As published in 2006 A.D., this book became one of the cheapest and strongest mediums to convey the message to his voters. In the election of 2008, most of the candidates were from the white community, with years of political experience and sufficient money to run an election campaign whereas Obama was a newcomer with his limited team and dependent on sponsors. Therefore, delivering his message through the book was a great idea because his message could reach a wider public.

Every politician has his/her own view which reaches the public through persuasive speeches. The effectiveness of a speech depends upon different factors. Same ideas may not spread equally because personality also plays a great role in this regard. It means not only the ideas themselves are enough to get public support because marketing and advertising are equally important to make such things possible. The audiences give importance to the valuable, credible, and authentic speech as well as epigrammatic language. So the speaker must balance the use of rhetorical elements in the speech, debate, discussion etc., in order to be more effective.

Generally, rhetoric deals with the art of communication which comes with persuasive power of an individual. In American political history, there are many speeches which have become very famous because of use of proper rhetorical elements. Speeches from that of Abraham Lincoln to Martin Luther King Jr. and some former presidents like John Kennedy, George W. Bush, Barack Obama, etc. are rhetorically decorated. Rhetoric is all about persuasion, making understanding, and the political world needs a good orator who can use rhetorical elements properly thereby making an impact. From ordinary conversation to formal speech rhetoric

plays a vital role to communicate with audiences. Such persuasive power is defined by Aristotle “as art of persuasion” or in details, it is a “faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion (3)”. The “art of persuasion” is always related with language and function of communication.

To deal with, the researcher has brought theoretical perceptions from Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* as primary methodology which explains the nature of rhetoric and its relation with the meaning of language. Aristotle defines the persuasive art which helps to understand the intended meaning of speech. It examines the function of language in a practical way. In general there is a deep connection of politics with rhetoric. The power of politics relies upon the influencing capacity of a politician. A successful politician is a perfect word-player according to Aristotle because from the ancient period, leaders, with great convincing power, have been controlling the mass and they have successfully ruled their states. Furthermore, Aristotle believes that a good orator also has a perfect combination of ethos, pathos, and logos in speech.

Ethos refers to the character or fundamental values of a specific person. Any particular idea that Obama expresses as a writer/speaker, is analyzed on the basis of his moral character. Likewise, pathos deals with emotions, feelings and human sentiments. Every time fact alone may not be enough to persuade the mass. There is a need for some emotional appeal to catch the sentiment of the people. The researcher will consider Obama’s personal feelings and perspective under the pathos. And a ‘logos’ is an appeal to a logic that is to say persuading through the help of fact, reason, logic or using fact figures. As Aristotle believes, to be a great leader or speaker, one needs to be well known about the politics behind the rhetoric. From *Rhetoric*, the researcher will examine how communication, language used by Obama won the sympathy, empathy of the public and what the embedded meaning of the text

is. Similarly, the text will be inspected through a deliberative type of rhetoric.

Deliberative, also known as political type, deals with the future time. Political speech resembles this type of rhetoric because most of the speakers talk about future plans, strategy, vision etc. in their speech.

In this research paper, the researcher analyzes Obama's text *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming American Dream* by locating the text on deliberative type as this writing piece has some significant features that help to categorize it in the given type. Additionally, to show the social and cultural reliability, the researcher has used Kenneth Burke's *The Motives of Rhetoric* as a secondary theoretical tool. His theory gives effort on socio-cultural practice and the individual background while making persuasion. Burke critically accepts Aristotle's definition of rhetoric but also adds the concept of 'social context.' It with little departure can be helpful to examine the text properly. This additional claim of Burke prioritizes connotative or implied meaning using rhetorics in the text, speech. With the help of this tool, the researcher will be able to show the intentional meaning of Obama's political vision especially in this text. Moreover, the researcher has borrowed some concepts from other rhetoricians' texts like James Martin's *The Politics of Rhetoric*, to reconnect the classical definition of rhetoric into contemporary political practice.

Many researchers have been carried diverse views about Obama's rhetoric style. However, most of them have presented their opinion on the basis of Obama's persuasive power, language selection and speech quality. In the article "Senator Barack Obama – The Rhetoric of Hope and the American Dream," Deborah F. Atwater states that Obama has implied the 'hope' as the use of positive signs. This article briefly discusses the rhetoric of hope that Obama talks as a senator of Illinois.

Despite some challenges, there is hope for better when all people take their responsibility and cooperate with one another. Atwater further states:

I am defining rhetoric of hope as the use of symbols to get Americans to care about this country, to want to believe in this country, to regain hope and faith in this country, and to believe that we are more alike than we are different with a common destiny and a core set of values. Rhetoric of hope also entails an important persuasion campaign. Senator Obama really wants more people to participate in the political process and ultimately to vote for him. If you only believe and have hope, then it really is possible for Senator Barack Obama to be the first Black president elected to lead the most powerful country in the world. (123)

Deborah F. Atwater inscribes that Obama uses 'hope' as a symbol of belief, to regain the real American dream, and requests the people to stand above race, gender, and geographical politics. Obama wants people to vote for him for positive changes.

Deborah sees Obama as a hopeful person who is trying to bring positive change in society by improving the standard of living. Obama's strategy is to include more people in his political campaign by talking about common problems of every American instead of focusing on racial and gender based discrimination as most of the political leaders do carry at the starting phase of their political career. According to this critic, Obama conveys "communal value and mutual responsibility" in his political vision. The use of rhetoric of hope is in a positive way. Despite his background from the African American community he didn't focus on race based political agendas because he is aware that society only can progress when all the members stay with mutual respect and accept the existence of others.

Similarly Dewey Clayton gives a collective review of this text, and the keynote address at the Democratic National Convention held in 2004. Clayton analyzes the persuasive power of Obama. He is impressed from speech style and perceives him as the “rising star in the Democratic Party.” In his paper - *The Audacity of Hope* - Clayton articulates: “He was only the third African American to deliver such a speech at a major political party convention. In that address, Barack Obama declared that there is no Black America or White America - only the United States of America” (51). Clayton argues that Obama’s rhetorical power in speech and his moral character have helped him in his successful political career. Becoming the president with his just two years’ experience, as senator of state, is rare in political history. Not only that, he is also the first African-American president elected not only by the colored but also by the white people. Clayton believes Obama’s “charismatic style” connects with people and his effort to break the “racial stereotypes” in U. S. politics. Likewise, Clayton again claims that Hilary Clinton as a strong opponent with many years of political experience whereas Obama with less experience and from a middle class family won the election. And another important thing was during the election campaign, Obama’s team announced the raising fund of \$25 million. This money came from more than 100,000 donors, all around the world. It was not just the sympathy of people but they had also accepted him as a viable candidate for the president. However Clayton has just explored the speech quality of Obama as a political leader but has not examined most of the elements of rhetoric.

A critic and Professor of African and African American Studies -Tommie Shelby has compared Obama’s rhetoric level of speech, with that of Martin Luther King Jr. “Indeed Obama is frequently compared to King. Some of the comparisons flatter the president; others do not. Both leaders are highly educated and charismatic;

both have a gift for oratory and the ability to inspire; and both have indelible marks on U. S. history” (95). In his article, “Justice & Racial Conciliation: Two Visions”, Shelby adds though there are several varieties between these two leaders many American people remember them at the same time when it comes to the issue of race relation in the U. S. He observes: “Their writings and speeches on race explain where we are (including how we got here), where we should be going, and how we can get there. Their visions have much in common” (96). Both leaders faced different realities and both have some contrasting views regarding race issues but their rhetoric meets at some level. This critic compared the leadership level of Obama with visionary leader Martin Luther King Jr. From making speeches in public to making policy for people, both leaders have some mutual points for Shelby. Shelby’s analysis revolves around the leadership qualities of Obama which somehow resembled that of King Jr. – one of the father figures in the history of U.S. politics.

Another professor Willie J. Harrell Jr. highlights the presentational style of Obama in *The Audacity of Hope*. He says that Obama employs political discourse to show both positive and negative consequences of people’s decisions. Willie, in his article “The Reality of American Life Has Strayed from Its Myth” he argues:

Obama confronts America with a profound discourse that criticizes the nation for straying from its ideological myths, while offering his opinion and potential approaches to reform in order to recover from economic disaster.

Grounded in historical analysis, Obama's restoration rhetoric in *The Audacity of Hope*, I argue, functions as the American reclamation jeremiad, in which he employs political discourse to restore a positive vision of America's democratic mission and warns Americans of the dangers of not fulfilling that mission. By combining this ideological warning in his positive vision of

America, Obama constructs a message that is unifying while at the same time indicative of a risk in not challenging the destructive path of the American political system. Aristotle sees the important of rhetoric in meaning making process. Regarding oration he has separated three types of persuasive speech – forensic, epideictic, and deliberative. Former two are consequently talked about the past and present but the third one focuses on the future. (165)

The warning of impending economic disaster in the country is tried to show in the text. Obama not only mentions the problems but also offers the ways for recovery. His ideas are quite relevant as well as impressive for all Americans. That is his beauty to fascinate the mass with his words. And Willie claims: “the object of Obama seems to create new areas of public concern instead of lamenting the current status of society” (167). Along with this, Willie has taken out so many slogans, agendas talked by Obama to analyze the rhetoric level of Obama.

Primarily, above mentioned reviews are limited to the rhetoric power and Obama’s speech quality to show him as a powerful orator. Some of the reviewers like Atwater marks that Obama has used ‘hope’ as representation of belief, positivity and new politics. Similarly, Dewey Clayton calls Obama a rising star and praises his ‘charismatic style.’ At the same time, Willie J. Harrell Jr. efforts to make separate myth and reality of American life, especially American dream that people have been talking about since so long and, real American dream that today’s generation needs. Tommie compares Obama’s speech power with the rhetoric level of Martin Luther King Jr. Here, King’s idea of American dream and Obama’s ideas of regaining the American dream – are naturally different at the certain level – both catch the attention of the masses. These reviews have analyzed the rhetoric in Obama’s text *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts and Reclaiming the American Dream*. They have reflected the

political situation, American people's support to the African-American candidate for the president – ultimately who became two times president of the U. S. A. They have critically analyzed the text to interpret the power of rhetorics used in the text.

Provided that, these reviews have not analyzed, *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts and Reclaiming the American Dream*, from the perspective of political rhetoric. They have not attempted to explore the reason why Obama has used such a tone though he was supposed to speak for the sake of his own racial identity. Their reviews mostly circulate on rhetorical aspects; speech quality and its impact to the voters, but they have ignored the intention of using the rhetorical elements in the text. This researcher, in this research paper, is attempting to deal with the politics of using such rhetorical elements. In addition the researcher will also try to find out how rhetoric is important for the politician; this second point will be analyzed on the basis of Obama's text *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts and Reclaiming the American Dream*.

Ancient Greeks highly prized rhetoric as an important tool in “public political participation” for the positive influence of politics. And, rhetoric has been interconnected with politics since the beginning of history. However, Sophists – known as the original instructors of Western speech – argues that a convincing speaker in any topic is a successful rhetorician. This view suggests rhetoric as means of communication in any field including politics. But, Plato criticizes this idea of Sophists. He claims that Sophists have used rhetoric as a “means of deceit” whereas “discovering truth” should be the focus. Plato says rhetoric is a form of flattery where an orator uses sweet sounds and deep meaning given words. Hence, Plato gives importance to speech, good sounding, flattery as well as deep meaning to study the rhetorical scope. When Aristotle divided speech rhetoric in three genres as forensic

speech, epideictic speech, and deliberative speech, he gave importance to deliberative. Other two types of speech go according to predetermined situations however, deliberative type of speech has no certain structure like that of the others. In *Rhetoric*, he further says:

The party in a case at law is concerned with the past; one man accuses the other, and the other defends himself, with reference to things already done. The ceremonial orator is, properly speaking, concerned with the present, since all men praise or blame in view of the state of things existing at the time, though they often find it useful also to recall the past and to make guesses at the future. Rhetoric has three distinct ends in view, one for each of its three kinds. The political orator aims at establishing the expediency or the harmfulness of a proposed course of action; if he urges its acceptance, he does so on the ground that it will do good; if he urges its rejection, he does so on the ground that it will do harm; and all other points, such as whether the proposal is just or unjust, honorable or dishonorable, he brings in as subsidiary and relative to this main consideration. (7)

These three types of genres talk about different times. For instance, forensic issues are concerned with law and they talk about history. Epideictic refers to the ceremonial type of speech which functions on the basis of on-going situations. And, finally it is a deliberative or political type of speech that deals with future time. Thus this third type of speech includes more rhetorical techniques. Political speech is more closely associated with rhetorical elements because it talks about the future time while the other two are based on past and present time. In a nutshell, forensic oratory talks about the past so it is fully grounded on proof, lab tests and other types of facts. Similarly ceremonial oratory deals with present situations thus; it also depends on

situation, mood or current environment. Unlike these two, political oratory addresses the future matters thus it is more likely to be influenced by possibility, dream and plans instead of fact. Because of its relationship more with the future, political speech is analyzed through acts, condition, personal characteristics, purpose, etc.

Though rhetoric, in Aristotle's view, is completely connected with language and its meaning. Kenneth Burke adds rhetorical meaning is dependent on the social structure of a particular place. He claims that the meaning making process is totally different in each society as so many factors are responsible for it. Thus Burke, in his book *Rhetoric of Motives* says: "The idea underlying principle must be approached by him through the sensory images of his cultural scene" (137). For Burke, interpretation or persuasion power is usually guided by the cultural practice, social norms and values. Meaning doesn't come purely isolated from social, cultural assumptions because different societies, cultures, religions have different meanings of the same object. Thus rhetorical meaning is beyond the dictionary meaning and so many social and cultural factors play vital roles to understand the particular meaning of the situation. If we follow the idea of Burke rhetoric is not only the matter of word meaning but the whole systematic process of language structure, meaning, and coding. Theorist, James Martin quotes in his book – *The Power of Persuasion* "Rhetoric is now an inclusive term for a wide range of themes related to communicating, arguing, and persuading through symbols" (7). According to these two writers' opinions, rhetoric is a comprehensive term which includes both verbal and non-verbal communication, words and attitude expressed in speech.

Most of the great speeches have appeared with rhetoric elements because language and persuasion have interdisciplinary relationships with rhetoric. Successful leaders significantly use rhetorical elements in speech to motivate mass people. Not

only great politicians, but also common people from all walks of life need rhetorical technique for effective conversation. Even for the day to day conversation there is a need of persuasion. As we take reference of James Martin's opinion about the importance of rhetoric; he, in his book *The Politics of Rhetoric* writes:

At such moments – moments of dramatic crisis, perhaps, but also in the more routine, day-to-day choices – people need to be persuaded in order to proceed with any degree of confidence. If everything was certain and clear, if nothing were open to chance, it would be a world without choices, a strangely inhuman world devoid of the anxieties such choices generate. (1)

Even ordinary conversation needs some sort of rhetoric level for easy understanding, effective meaning, and good results. But the political and speech profession related speech requires rhetorical tools. For instance, great speeches by Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King Jr. and Ronald Regan have a great impact on the public because of rhetorical elements. Thus political leaders employ those elements into speech to achieve their purpose. In the history of American politics, oral power has had a great impact on the personal and professional level. After all, speech is not only the structure of sentences, language, or set of words; it is the combination of many things like context, speaker's attitude towards the world, language tone and so on. A fine speaker, who well knows how to use rhetorical features, always makes a great impact through his words.

While defining 'rhetoric', there are many definitions given by some famous scholars but the central ideas of these several definitions deal with the better understanding of speech, text or writing. James Martin in his book *Politics and Rhetoric* states that rhetoric is persuasion of language. Similarly Aristotle in his book *Rhetoric* defines rhetoric as "the faculty of observing in any given case the available

means of persuasion” (3). According to the Oxford Learning Dictionary it is defined as speech or writing that is intended to influence people. Overall, rhetoric is the study of the connotative as well as denotative meaning of speech, piece of writing. It is very important when it comes to political speech. Because of its importance in politics, leaders have been using it since the beginning of civil society. Political and rhetoric has been inseparable from the very beginning. In ancient times, Greeks extremely appreciated the participation of the public in politics so that rhetoric became a fundamental tool for politics. Therefore, rhetoric has been interconnected with political origins. From the very beginning rhetorical element has been used in political activities, speeches, slogans, and everywhere when it comes to the matter of language, persuasion, and argument.

Aristotle has categorized three divisions of oratory – political oratory, forensic oratory, and ceremonial oratory. He claims that political oratory is more closer to the rhetoric world because for Aristotle it is: “concerned with the future: it is about things to be done hereafter that he advises, for or against” (7). Thus political leaders are practicing rhetorical technique in their speech. Writer James Martin says speech is one of the ways of persuading people. In his book *Politics of Rhetoric* he explains:

There are many ways to persuade, no doubt, and threatening violence is one of the most common. But human communities are perhaps unique in their use of speech in making persuasion a matter not always or exclusively of brute force, but also of mutual understanding, shared perceptions and interpretations, however temporary or tenuous. (1)

For Martin, speech is the finest way of convincing because the speaker normally doesn't use brutal force in speech unlike the other ways, for example threat, violence, etc. There is mutual understanding between speakers and audiences and those

audiences are convinced with the appealing, emotional power of the words. Such kind of appeal is highly considered in the political profession.

Though rhetoric was mostly used in public domain, especially in the politics, it was initially related to language and intellectual power of individualism. However, over the time, it became associated not only with language but also with the role of social context. Some of the theorists including Kenneth Burke, claim that the same words, symbols can create huge differences in meaning according to the socio-cultural practice. Burke, in *The Rhetoric of Motives*, has tried to define the role of society or culture to create the actual meaning. He emphasizes that “the same rhetorical act could vary in its effectiveness, according to shifts in the situation or in the attitude of audiences (62). For Burke, effectiveness of rhetorical acts depends upon the attitude of the individual and the attitude is the result of his/her socio-cultural background, in general. Thus he believes that certain ideas should be approached on the basis of communal background. He said so because according to him “ideology” creates perception and it affects the thinking level of people. His point “in this new usage, “ideology” is obviously but a kind of rhetoric” (88) shows some sort of priority between rhetoric act and ideology that has been practiced in society. All the great speakers out there have been impressed by this concept in today's world.

Barack Obama has crafted this text in order to put forward his visions and his understanding of modern politics. He simply describes his social-life experiences, his considerations regarding the society but in a very appealing way. As he planned to enter politics, he observed society in multiple perspectives. He started to listen to people’s personal problems, public concerns, etc. Most importantly, he closely observed the sentiment of all American regarding nationalism. Then he tried to stand up in the position of national hero: “I reject the politics that is based solely on racial

identity, gender identity, sexual orientation, or victimhood generally” (11). Rather raising the race issue as a member of African American blood, he gave importance of such issues of national interest. Majority of the Americans, including white, Latino, African, etc. appreciated his ways of delivering a positive message as a leader.

The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream evokes Obama’s personal experience regarding political career, in general. But in detail, the writer clearly expresses how today’s American people perceive the American dream. Once, American dream was defined in “Declaration of Independence” as ‘Life, Liberty and the pursuit of happiness’ as all people are created equal. However, Obama believes that expectations of modern people are in the updated version. Issues of equality, racial discrimination, the opportunity for good education were matter of discussion in the past. But, there are some variations in today's problems of citizens. People want a respectful life with good income, well-built physical infrastructures, developed and educated society, and so on. Keeping these things in mind, Obama has planned to observe people’s real problems. For this he started talking with people, collected their feedback, and requested people to give him suggestions for his political career. Though the most important realization that he made was people’s common emotion, feeling for their neighbor, community, and nation at the ultimate level:

Whether we are from red states or blue states, we feel in our gut the lack of honesty and common sense in our policy debates, and dislike what appears to be a continuous menu of false and cramped choices. Religious or secular, black, white, or brown, we sense – correctly – that the nation’s most significant challenges are being ignored, and that if we don’t change course

soon, we may be the first generation in a very long time that leaves behind a weaker and more fractured American than the one we inherited. (9)

Obama has focused on changing the current course of policy debates, nation's significant challenges instead of religion, race, and ethnic issues. People whether from red states or from blue states; the first priority of citizens in common is all people should be clear about the national unity and mutual benefit. This presents the clever way of using emotions in speech. Such domination of emotion is what Aristotle calls, use of pathos to catch audience's attention. For Aristotle, emotions are: "all those feelings that so change men as to affect their judgments, and that are also attended by pain or pleasure. Such are anger, pity, fear and the like, with their opposites" (37). These sentimental words have deeply affected the mind of people, which Obama himself accepts in his book. When he spoke during the senate house in the Democratic National Convention address in 2004 – such phrase he also has included in this text – "There is not a black America and white America and Latino America and Asian America—there's the United States of America" (231). Through this strategy of word selection, Obama became successful "to capture the vision" of national unity and sovereignty in his speech.

Obama has also tried to highlight his agendas by drawing the outline of contemporary needs. He wishes to uplift his political level by declaring that he rejects the politics which is established on race, gender, geography, and so on. It is prejudiced for most of the leaders from minority roots that they carry such racial, gender, or geographical agendas; however, Obama has broken that tradition. Ever since Martin Luther King raised the issue of contrast between American dream and racial discrimination, in his speech, most of the others political leaders adopted the same idea in their political agenda. The issue raised by colored leaders is the

American dream, which is for all American citizens and the hardship to achieve such American dream just because of belonging from minorities. However, Obama chose a different path from other political leaders, who believed ethnic issues to be taken at first. Unlike others he focused on national unity, development and making the country powerful. It is clearly seen in his words:

How can I, an American with the blood of Africa coursing through my veins, choose sides in such a dispute? I can't. I love America too much, am too invested in what this country has become, too committed to its institutions, its beauty, and even its ugliness, to focus entirely on the circumstances of its birth. But neither can I brush aside the magnitude of the injustice done, or erase the ghosts of generations past, or ignore the open wound, the aching spirit, that ails this country still. (96)

In the context of emotions, leaders may use different types of tone in speech, such as politeness, emotional blackmailing, anger, love, hatred etc. This confession of Obama shows his gratitude towards the nation. He is well known about his past generation with African root, but he loves America as much as a native American does.

James Martin, one of the famous writers claims that political leaders employ such tone in their speech and writing to catch attention and for propaganda. He, in his book *The Politics of Rhetoric* says:

Anxiety, joy, fear, anger, contrition, love, as well as ambivalence, hatred and desire are better conceived as prompts and devices for orienting citizens than simply as distractions from serious debate. It is for this reason that emotions have always been important to rhetoric and its idea of persuasion based on the combination of ethos, pathos and logos. (136)

For James, it is one of the straightforward strategies of political leaders to use rhetorical devices. They use rhetorical elements to set slogans and agendas as per their interest. Above given strategies are popular for political and propaganda purposes. Leaders focus on such elements while speaking to create deep meaning, make the issue more serious, or create controversy and take benefit from it. Although Barack Obama has mentioned noble, progressive, hopeful ideas concerning the country, his ultimate goal is to gather more supporter for his political career.

There can be different ways to use rhetorical devices in speech. For example, Obama has associated his speech with the reference of “American dream” by Martin Luther King Jr., and vision of nationality, carried by Abraham Lincoln, along with many others national leaders of America. Obama not only brought reference of big leaders in his speech, but also imagined himself seeing how these leaders worked:

I can imagine Paul Douglas or Hubert Humphrey at one of these desks, urging yet again the adoption of civil rights legislation; or Joe McCarthy, a few desks over, thumbing through lists, preparing to name names; or LBJ prowling the aisles, grabbing lapels and gathering votes. Sometimes I will wander over to the desk where Daniel Webster once sat and imagine him rising before the packed gallery and his colleagues, his eyes blazing as he thunderously defends the Union against the forces of secession. (14)

Obama wants to relate himself with great leaders by linking his personal views of all-time leaders of the United States of America. The view he carries in his speech speaks not only of the particular race, but of the nation as a whole, however, trying to make a connection between personal opinion and opinions of great leaders, instead of standing alone with such opinion is totally different. Such making of connection is another kind of rhetorical element. here, Obama is trying to establish himself as a

good personality having moral character. And the moral character of individual plays an important role in interpreting the meaning of spoken words. For Aristotle: “There is moral character in every speech in which the moral purpose is conspicuous: and maxims always produce this effect, because the utterance of them amounts to a general declaration of moral principles” (62). If we follow his idea the moral character of the speaker helps to make speech more effective as it is one of the options to cross-examine people regarding his words and personal behavior in particular.

The political career of an individual depends upon the persuasive power because one can get more support if he/she can convince people and make them understand the agendas that he/she carries. In ancient times political leaders and commanders used to speak to motivate members or followers. Thus, this persuasion power is closely associated with the capacity of public figure. However, rhetoric is not limited within predetermined meaning; rather it helps to meet the intention or purpose of speech, writing with effective delivery. For example, this extract from the text:

Let’s start with wages. Americans believe in work—not just as a means of supporting themselves but as a means of giving their lives purpose and direction, order and dignity. .. On the other hand, Americans also believe that if we work full-time, we should be able to support ourselves and our kids.

(180)

Americans ‘believe in work’ is just a saying because it is certain that everyone believes in the work. But some words from next line like – life purpose, direction, dignity, etc. helps to construct the especial meaning. Obama has told this line as if only American people believe in work. This grand-narration of simple statements is one of the examples of giving emphasis to create deeper meaning.

When written, dictionary meaning is failing to reach to such level that is intended in speaker's speech there comes rhetoric elements. How rhetoric works while speaking – Aristotle says:

Of the modes of persuasion furnished by the spoken word there are three kinds. The first kind depends on the personal character of the speaker; the second on putting the audience into a certain frame of mind; the third on the proof, or apparent proof, provided by the words of the speech itself.

Persuasion is achieved by the speaker's personal character when the speech is so spoken as to make us think him credible. We believe good men more fully and more readily than others. (3)

The sense of believing to the good men relates to the credibility of individual persons. Such a person may have good character, moral richness or public admiration personality. People desire to know the real character of a speaker before accepting his/her ideas and vision. That is why the moral character of a person plays an important role to set the meaning of his/her spoken words. The persuasive level of public speaking also depends on the speaker's capacity to adjust him as an audience. Otherwise, there is possibility of miscommunication. Furthermore, proof and details play significant roles to increase the effectiveness of communication.

When we deal with the level of effective communication, language is one of the primary things to consider. A good function of language produces effective meaning because language is the systematized medium for meaningful communication. But the language doesn't develop overnight. It has certain rules as it is the result of long time social and cultural practice. From so many signs, symbols, and verbal words particular society rehearse their own version of meaning. Grammar and vocabularies can be universal, but a situation or intention of words can differ the

meaning. People construct meaning on the basis of their experience, knowledge which they have gained from socio-cultural practice. Leaders use local and practiced words, phrases, and proverbs to make speech meaningful and more effective. For instance, Obama has used some referential words related to American history and culture like “St. Patrick’s Day parade”, “civil war”, “Rosa Park”, “Jim Crow”, “American dream” etc.

James Martin in his *Politics and Rhetoric* also has talked about the nature of language and how it is constructed. He explains:

Accordingly language is the medium through which humans construct their cultural and material world and their sense of self. The grammars and vocabularies, concepts and categories of language shape what can be thought, perceived and said. To understand human beings, then, we must not only observe their behavior but also interpret the meanings they employ to construct a world. (9)

Like Burke, Martin also believes that meaning is the result of social and cultural practice. For Martin, language and vocabularies are the reflection of what we think, or perform in the day to day world.

Another element of rhetoric is content. It is one of the major elements in rhetoric because the effectiveness of the rhetoric level depends on the depth of content. Ethos and pathos only are not enough in speech; there should be some serious, contemporary, and worthwhile issues regarding the interest of all citizens. Aristotle believes; there are five matters on which every leader wants to talk about. They are, in his words: “ways and means, war and peace, national defense, imports and exports, and legislation.”

In terms of content, leaders are always focused on these five matters. Under the ways and means they talk about the resources and sources of revenue; it is highly important to discuss the development, modernization and enhancement. And these things come under the ways and means. Being a visionary person Obama has the plan to uplift the life standard of working class people. His plan include better health, full employment at least for one member of the family, etc. He is confident that such plans allow factory workers to 'move into the middle class' by supporting income of the family and enjoy the stability of retirement security in future. In addition, Obama has mentioned some other policies found in this text which he has applied in his political career at different times. And at the same time he has hope of a golden future of his country; "And I'm confident that we have the talent and the resources to create a better future, a future in which the economy grows and prosperity is shared" (149). As a good leader, he has discussed all kinds of living facilities such as electricity, clean water, indoor plumbing, telephones, household appliances, etc. Obama's superiority of dealing with those 'ways and means' is nearly close to what Aristotle has told about good leader: "As to ways and then, the intending speaker needs to know the number and extent of the country's sources of revenue, so that, if any is being overlooked, it may be added, and, if any is defective, it may be increased" (9). A good leader is very much updated about a country's source of revenue and possible ways of national income.

The issue of war and peace is another important matter which Obama has brought into discussion. Obama celebrates the victory of American soldiers achieved in different parts of the world, but at the same time he rejects the idea of combat. "I questioned the Administration's evidence of weapons of mass destruction and suggested that an invasion of Iraq would prove to be a costly error" (47). War is not in

favor of civil society and general people, however, it can be beneficial to power holder leaders. Obama has empathy for those commoners:

Moreover, whenever I write a letter to a family who has lost a loved one in Iraq, or read an email from a constituent who has dropped out of college because her student aid has been cut, I'm reminded that the actions of those in power have enormous consequences—a price that they themselves almost never have to pay. (48)

Obama's ambivalent attitude towards war and peace represents the very biological nature of each and every politician. They always oppose the idea of war in their speech, but they indirectly take actions in supports of conflict. George W. Bush's address after 9/11 can be taken as one of the immediate examples of similar nature. He mentioned in his speech "freedom itself is under attack." He blamed al Qaeda as a dangerous terrorist organization for the world. By establishing the point Bush wanted support from all over the world against al Qaeda. His words were for peace, but at the same time he was appealing the neighbor countries to help America in the war against terrorism. Bush ordered to drop bombs on Afghanistan to end the terrorism; this idea was something like Tit for Tat. Obama also continued this war, though he advocated all the time for humanity and peace in his speech. He defended such action in the name of protection of national integrity and inevitable consequence against terrorism. "War might be hell and still the right thing to do" (23).

Another important matter of a leader's speech is national defense. Aristotle, in this matter, articulates that national leader should know about all "methods of defense" like strength, characters of the defensive force, etc. Obama has enlarged this sense of national defense from military force to economic strength and international market assessment. He worries about the protective strategies of the country: "for

starters, our defense spending and the force structure of our military should reflect the new reality” (179). And he makes a strong statement regarding private property that could be one of the ways for the national defense. “There is the absolute of the free market, an ideology of no taxes, no regulation, no safety net indeed, and no government beyond what’s required to protect private property and provide for the national defense” (24).

The matter of food supply is an issue linked to the livelihood of the people. Therefore, the leaders should not only be knowledgeable, but also be able to make appropriate decisions regarding food supply. People’s leaders should be informed about the effects of importing and exporting the amount of food in the country. Aristotle, again in this matter, argues: “must know what outlay will meet the needs of his country; what kinds of food are produced at home and what imported; and what article must be exported” (9). Similarly the fourth issue of speech is import and export. The state’s import and export situation, determine its economic status. That is why Aristotle claims leaders should be well known about “agreement and commercial treaties may be made with the countries concerned” (9). Like Aristotle says, Obama is conscious about home production, import and export reality of food. He also gives details of import and export business: “Business continues to struggle with high health-care costs. America continues to import far than it exports, to borrow far more than it lends” (93). He compares the business import export ratio of America, China, Japan and other developed countries of the world and he believes trade policy needs to be changed.

Last matter, among these five, is legislation. To become a leader, he must be well updated with the “subject of legislation”. It is the legal side that determines what kind of governance to apply to the whole nation, to which parties and to what kind of

rules to make. The same thing comes to fruition for Obama because he is a long-time advocating political-player. Obama writes that most of the American Acts need to be updated, changed over time. Some of the laws that he has mentioned in his text are - Civil Right Act of 1964 (38), Voting Right Act of 1965 (38), Clean Air Act (77), Landmark Homestead Act of 1862 (89), Pure Food and Drug Act, The Meat Inspection Act (90), Social Security Act of 1935 (91) and many more. Likewise, he has mentioned in this book about the importance of the law, how a small change in the law clause affects people's daily life.

James Martin in his book *The Politics of Rhetoric* remarks the importance of rhetoric "in so far as politics involve responses to events in the world such as war, military conflicts, natural disasters, financial crises and the success or the failure of policies, there will be, by necessity, a place for narration" (67). Here, Martin also indicates the political power and command of language always stand at the same side and they go together in all above cited matters like war, military conflicts, natural disaster, etc. Aristotle and martin have the same opinion about main five issues that every politician proceeds with.

Being a national level leader, Obama always supports the system, law and he is glad that the law has given equal rights to every American either from "blue state or a red state." He is not an extremist in terms of race though his upbringing is supposed to have made him. He has an ambivalent attitude regarding the issue of any kind of discrimination. Objecting to this kind of inequality, he requests mass to focus on positive parts of society. A feeling of closeness and unconditional support comes from owns community which is natural and inevitable. "A black teenage boy walking down the street elicits fear in a white couple, but if he turns out to be their son's friend from school he may be invited over for dinner" (236). There are both positive and

negative sides of society. One can notice eliciting fear in the face of a black teenage boy among white people and another may notice him being invited for dinner. Obama wants to assure that inequality can be further reduced in the days by focusing on positive rather than negative things in society. For instance, if the first incident of facing insecure among white is highlighted then it creates negative vibes towards social harmony whereas the second incident indicates positive signs. “Today not only is the city filled with black doctors, dentists, lawyers, accountants, and other professionals, but blacks also occupy some of the highest management positions in corporate Chicago” (240). Here he analyses the situation of American society, bringing some facts of the current situation. There are many incidents of racial discernment happening in society, but at the same time lots of white people speak about racial equality. Therefore, Obama put forward the vision of cooperation and mutual action. In another circumstance, Obama says in his text:

As these laws were being debated, there were those who argued that government should not interject itself into civil society, that no law could force white people to associate with blacks. Upon hearing these arguments, Dr. King replied, “It may be true that the law cannot make a man love me but it can keep him from lynching me and I think that is pretty important, also.”

(38)

What Obama believes is, law can play its parental role to all public and at least it can preserve the right of every citizen. So the nature of the legislation determines the system, structure, and social functioning. Also, he accepts that every action of society cannot be controlled by rules. Like law cannot force white guy/girl to marry a black girl/guy, however, no one can stop if someone wants to. And Obama wishes to adopt the positive parts and ignore the negative. He strongly objects any kind of social and

racial discrimination but he doesn't want to raise these issues because, for him, there are some others ongoing issues which need to be addressed at first.

In addition to this, Obama incorporates compassion and emotion into his speech. This is known as pathos. Among three elements mentioned by Aristotle - ethos, pathos, and logos; among these, pathos is an important element that deals with human emotions. Aristotle defines emotion as: "feelings that so change men as to affect their judgments, and that are also attended by pain or pleasure. Such are anger, pity, fear and the like, with their opposites. We must arrange what we have to say about each of them fewer than three heads" (85). As a popular leader Obama uses, such trick to catch public emotion, sentiments in his words, action and working strategies. Knowing the public sentiment, Obama address:

A government that truly represents these Americans—that truly serves these Americans—will require a different kind of politics. The politics will need to reflect our lives as they are actually lived. It won't be prepackaged, ready to pull off the shelf. It will have to be constructed from the best of our traditions and will have to account for the darker aspects of our past. We will need to understand just how we got to this place, this land of warring factions and tribal hatreds. And we will need to remind ourselves, despite all our differences, just how much we share: common hopes, common dreams, a bond that will not break. (25)

Obama here focuses the representation of government should be on the reality of American history because no any packaged government can deal with people's problem until and unless it is well known with the country's past and tradition. Also, he focuses on the dark side of the history. By talking about a darker side, he connects the issue with civil war, racial discrimination, and geographical politics of

America. Actual construction of the United State is on the basis of conflict, war between different tribes. There was no particular tribe that was ruling the whole part of America. Thus he wishes the policy of the country to address all communities, tribes and groups because the American society is made up of people from all over the world who once migrated there. Obama's first generation also was immigrant and Obama is known as the first African-American president of the US. There are lots of changes in Obama's opinion about racism if we compare his first book *Dream from my Father* and this one *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream*. The first book is a memoir in which personal experiences of being Afro-American are narrated. However, the second book takes political orientation. Though there are lots of personal incidents written, the main intention is to establish his political vision among American voters.

To conclude, Obama's strategy has covered most of the rhetorical techniques. First of all he has broken the tradition of racial politics and tried to establish himself as one of the leaders of mainstream politics. He has tried to redefine the meaning of the "American dream" on the basis of today's American society. He has become a national idol of most of the white, black and other people because he has emphasized real problems of the public instead of highlighting sweet sounding slogans and so-called ideas. The unique thing about this text is most of the personal details are used as examples. Sometimes he is extremely emotional and sometimes he is fully practical. But every point written by him is fully supported with details to make strong claims. Basically, this text totally focuses on how the United States of America can achieve the modern and developed sphere with its updated American dream. He creates a sense of closeness by saying that there is only one America and all the people inside country should be treated equally.

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