

Preface

It was in the 1990s, I attended a Seminar at the American cultural centre, Kolkata. It was here that I heard for the first time about Amiri Baraka (Le Roi Jenes). An American scholar presented an excellent paper which introduced me to Baraka and his poetry against the Canvas of the Black Americans' movement for both political, social and cultural freedom. It was Baraka's time that nurtured his poetic sensibility. Baraka's upbringing as a creative artist owes everything to that epoch in which he was born. A Black as he was, he could feel the pangs of the Blacks. From such pangs grew his poetry;

Who

You, to concern

The write that stomachs

Of maidens, inside houses

Dying. Black.

My color

Is not theirs. Lighter, white man

Talk (Baraka "Notes for a speech")

I was so enthralled by the paper that soon after the seminar, I collected Baraka's poetical works from the American Library. I began to read. The more I read Baraka, the more I was in love with his poetry.

Now came the period when I was thinking to do my research work. Whether Baraka's poetry would be a fitting subject for my research was the question. I discussed my idea with my supervisor Prof. Benoy Kr. Banerjee. He Okayed my decision. In this way, my exact academic pursuits of Baraka's poetry began.

It was in the 1970s that Baraka drew much attention from the critics. And over the years, there have been continual discussions of this prolific and influential writer. As such, quite a substantial critical literature is produced about Baraka. Such prominent Baraka critics as Kinberiy Benston Leioyd Brown, Theodore Hudson, William Harris, Hudson Henry Lacey, Wernor Sollars all looked for "Baraka's restless search for the artistic and political forms appropriate for his vision of African - American life". (Nankins- Dad, 56). Few critics have found a kind of tension in Baraka's Poetry. Since both art and music were Baraka's taste, interesting readings have been made about Baraka's aestheticism for which Baraka owes much to music.

Baraka's political ideology, social philosophy and cultural vision went in the making of Baraka, the literary artist. There are critics who have studied Baraka's poetry against the historical, socio-cultural backdrop. When almost everything is said about Baraka, something still remains that way unsung. As the poefs "Spiritus mundi" is replete with varied themes which are wedded to myriad images. I decided than I would be exploring in

my thesis the poetical oeuvre of Baraka, where the readers come across varied themes and plethora of images. This area has not been till now adequately studied.

Modern criticism has little to do with the biographical reading of a writer. Since a writer is the production of his time, a historical perspective of the writer's age should be studied with much care. For we need to situate him against the cross-currents of his time.

Accordingly, in my first chapter, I have shown how in the formative period of Baraka's poetical career, his time played a significant role to mould him. I have specially titled this chapter as Portrait of a Poet as a Black American.

As W.B. Yeats poetry is a journey from the Celtic twilight period to the tragic and ironic last phase, Baraka's poetry similarly is a journey amidst so many vicissitudes of life. Accordingly, his poetry is studied under three distinctive phases. Each phase is equally important to know about the artist both as man and his poetry.