



Saga of the African-American Experiences: An Iconic Representation

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Abstract

Malcolm X was a key figure in shaping out Black Muslim movement. He was referred to as “the St. Paul of the movement” (Louis E. Lumax) because of his life’s mission to carry America’s 20 million Negroes with him. He was preaching separatism and aloofness from the White people in the beginning. This individuality and credibility was evident in not seeking integration with White people although this was the aim of certain social organizations. This study seeks to investigate Black consciousness and activism which are the themes and social protest. Primary sources are the biographical accounts by John Herik Clarke’s Malcolm X: The man and his times. Much of the active life of Malcolm X revolves around his life in prison and involvement in the criminal underworld. He was in prison for ten years. His prison life introduced him to Nation of Islam and emerged as a leader and spokesman in 1952. The black experience has influenced American studies. It has influenced and shaped public thinking to such an extent that it has put a Blackman in the white house at present. Much of Malcolm X’s works and speeches consist of common strands and persistent themes of black experience. Black experience deals with plains, opinions, treatises and manifestos of everyday problems facing black people in America. This includes and goes beyond the bread and butter issues of people demanding racial unity and equal status.

Key Words: conventional, movement, nation, non-violence, organization, people, public, social

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Introduction

As an influential African-American Leader since 1950’s Malcolm X was an outspoken national minister of the Nation of Islam. In his autobiography and in speeches he opposed the main stream civil rights movement. He pleaded for black Separatism and rejected nonviolence and integration. He was outspoken in combating racism. His efforts were controversial and in 1960’s he embraced conventional Islam. All these are documented in his The Autobiography of Malcolm X. Alex Harey the American writer helped in compiling those experiences. This was published after his assassination.

The Autobiography of Malcolm X is the story of a man killed on his way to becoming a revolutionary and a liberator of Black people. He adopts the name Malcolm X to avoid being called Slave man or little. He does not die because of self-betrayal or inner weakness but a fall from heights of promise. He was killed by

assassins and he knew that five of his father’s brothers were lynched and killed by the police and Harlem. The white press always accused him as an imitator of violence.

Malcolm refers to the ghettos of Detroit, Boston, New York and Philadelphia. In the Ghettos and near the stores the black liberation became a cult and Malcolm made it as a powerful religion of fighting. He created hundred places of worship and fifty states as a Missionary. Malcolm was organizing black Nationalist or civil right gatherings and collected men from these ghettos. He raised many questions and made about 400 Muslim blacks in the beginning. The strength grew to 40,000/- over a period of time. A TV programme called The Hate that produced Hate covered all these aspects. The strength of Malcolm’s missionary because visible all over America. Other programs brought the public reaction alleging that these Muslims are a potential source of violence. The abolition movement was to

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liberate black Americans from slavery. It was called as an extremist movement and Malcolm X was a radical pleading for separatism. This was because they burned the constitution and did not know how to eliminate slavery which they opposed. Revolutionary ideology played lot of importance and role in the context of abolition movement. This led to militancy and in it the genealogy of Elijah Muhammad could be traced. Reform was not popular and the large number of the black supported separatism under his leadership.

The civil Rights movement gave a new experience to the black. Blacks and whites worked politically in what is called as populist era. Negroes got protection from violence and the whites because of Political patronage got economic advantages in restructuring of the society. The twelve year period from 1865 to 1877 witnessed former slaves becoming independent farmers, voters and delegates in the south. Some blacks become Judges and state legislatures. This period was called as the beginning of the Reconstruction Era. The blacks have gained the legal base for equality and the fourteenth amendment defined the rights of the citizens.

The black experience from the close of the civil war to later years was embittering. The status of the Negro was represented by the Hollywood Negro with comic inferiority and isolation from changes in American life. The concept of Negro inferiority, social theories, Darwinian concepts were popular with conservative Americans. Many traced their lineage to Northern and western Europe and considered themselves to be superior. These racial attitudes of late 19th and 20th century created troubles all over America.

The intellectual genealogy of Malcolm X could be traced to his academy and particularly to DuBois. Talking about the conservation of Races he says: The American Negro always felt an intense personal interest in discussions as to the origins and destinies of races. Primarily because back of most discussions of race with which he is familiar, have lurked certain assumptions as to his political, intellectual and moral status, which he felt were wrong². (DuBois speaks, 189).

The speeches of Malcolm X which are studied in the Chapter III indicate DuBois' the Niagara Movement. As the founder and general secretary he launched an organization in 1905, in Buffalo, N.Y. It had only fifty four members and the planning of the method of organization was done by C.C. Bentley. The organization was simply to convene Negro – American for specific objects. Afro – American council was in existence but was ineffective because of lack of simplicity of organization and indefinite aims of it. The race was scattered in a large country and the movement Spokesman W.M. Trotter Said.

Negro suffrage was the Key issue of 1909 conference in the last three hundred years. The struggle of the blacks in America and all over resulted in a conference dealing with general relations. It was held in London from July 26 to 29 in 1911. The object of the conference was to discuss the relations between the East and the west in light of science and Modern consciousness. This London conference held in 1911 reflects the struggle of the blacks for over ten years. It was called as the universal Races congress and was held in the university of London. DuBois presented his evaluation of black experience in America.

Malcolm X's life is a crusade for the freedom of the American blacks. As a civil rights activist, he is an example of a life described in elegies and historical tragedies. In the elegiac tradition his life is a struggle for the blacks and mourning him is like the mourning the blacks who were victims of white imperialism. Malcolm the child, in Lansing, in Michigan State, transforms himself to EL – Malik – Shabar. He experiences the harms of white discrimination which his race has faced over several generations.

Black nationalism may be a political philosophy and result of black activism. But black experiences are the tragic circumstances of life inspiring the black consciousness and their knowledge power. Malcolm X grew out of such unrelieved suffering and psychological traumas. His genealogy and map of struggle at various places are desired from a group of people so far discussed. They were subject to overcast racism for four centuries in the USA. The growth and manifestation of black consciousness from the predecessors of DuBois for a decade until the World War I indicates that African Americans had definite economic traits of the erstwhile



slaves. The slave narrators described them but had no pride in those idiosyncrasies which the eccentric Americans called as primitive. Malcolm, under various identities, takes pride in his height at 6' 5", his jolly way of Walking and talking with people. The consumption term Nigger was replaced with Negro, black and now to coloured people. Malcolm's belief and arguments about mythic real blackness are present in his speeches and writings. He always questioned the "peculiarly European quest for racial purity, a troubling Manichaeu mind – set that distinguishes between "us" and 'them'. (Dyson, 1995) His autobiography argues for abhorring working against black culture in African and black diaspora. For several years he believed in uniting all of them. But in practice, he only worked with black muslim separatists. This led to reemergence of racism and his photo was printed on base ball bats and T-shirts for business promotion.

The greatest influence and authority an Malcolm was Elijah Muhammad whom he considered as a divine saint and served him. He only repeated his saying in all the speeches for a decade. The Nation of Islam reunited people from the Prisoners. This was because Christianity rejected them for their criminal record. Other members and agents of the Nation of Islam were hustlers, drug dealers, pimps, prostitutes and thieves. They were proselytized saying that they were neglected racially. The Nation of Islam offered them fundamental needs such as self-respect, social dignity, dignity and superiority of black race, and also about black God. Malcolm was the chief minister of Elijah Muhammad.

The literature on Malcolm X and the literature he created are regarded as classics by his followers. His autobiography reflects the need to shape his personal life with public racial struggle. Dyson considers that Alex Haley who co-authored his autobiography had some ideological prejudices. He says that "much writing about Malcolm had either list its way in the murky waters of psychology dissolved from history or simply substituted – given racial politics in the U.S. defensive praise for critical approval. Malcolm's ideas were legitimate bastles of black muslim separatists. It also is an expression of minorities who want to fight. His blackness and background from ghettos gave

new identification for their brand of intellectuals. He was also unyielding and inspired black male students for racial struggle. His activism and recorded statements have created a personal narrative. He's tone indicates, in his own words, "because I'm black, poor, male and angry I understand him better than you". This is a different tone and narrative voice in literature of variety. Is intellectual genealogy and activism represents a new variety of autobiography that represents ideological justifications of racial practices. His lifelong struggle and writings express colonial dilemma.

The Legacy of Malcolm is in respect of his Black Muslim separatism achieved through speeches and writings. His autobiography, as told to Alex Haley and other speeches documented by Benjamin Goodman are the two primary efforts that mobilized twenty two million Negroes during 1960s. His own amount of black man's history, his effort to create black revolution through cultural Institutions exclusively for black are the main activist efforts of Malcolm. His joining Elijah Muhammad under Nation of Islam and the writings as a warrior, diplomat, minister, apostle of manhood dignity and freedom led to Black Muslim separatism that threatened the integration movement of Martin Luther King. His doctrine of Negro supremacy and the end of white supremacy in Africa and Asia were mainly achieved through literary and ethnic writings. His autobiography reveals the skill of narration, life and times in America and also a pattern of moral regeneration. He combined paradoxes. He used facts and fiction for verbal manipulation. This is because the works were meant to be didactic and give a programme of action to Black Muslim separatists. They show that he was a hero capable of suffering for his beliefs and worthy of leadership in a crisis.

Conclusion

Malcolm's speeches at Harvard are the basic legacy of his movement. Archie Epps in his editors note describes his book and effort "about one of the most powerful black voices of the twentieth century". His writings comprehend the resurgence of interest in Malcolm X" because of "language and the unique logic of his thoughts". He preferred the name Negro which was in usage and hence his legacy was for the "so-called Negroes" rather than stated as "black and African – American". These references are



not being accepted “both within and outside the group”. “The resurgence of interest” in Cambridge, Massachusetts especially coming to the college students of black origin about the life and times of Malcolm X speaks about his legacy.

This group believed that “some argue that toward the end of his life Malcolm X’ views were converging with those of Martin Luther King” as “authentic voice of black underclass” (Malcolm X, 91). His description of the Negro predicament and the Yoke of slavery established him as the powerful black voice of twentieth century.

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