CHAPTER - VI

Summing-up

It is quite significant to note that prior to 1960s, the Black American consciousness in literature was not remarkable except a few writings. But in the 1960s, the Black American consciousness reached a peak with the emergence of a very powerful movement called the Black Arts Movement, a cultural and aesthetic counterpart of the Black nationalist movement or the Black power movement of the 1960s. The movement “Sought to embrace the range of black cultural and artistic production and to connect aesthetics with the needs of ‘the black community,’ it was informed by a spirit of expansiveness”. The writers under the movement advocated a kind of Black economic self-sufficiency and tried to free the Black people from what they perceived as the destructive power of European culture and ideology. The leading literary figures were an eclectic mix of poets, fiction writers, playwrights, and essayists like Amiri Baraka, Ed Bullins, Larry Neal Adrienne Kennedy, Addison Gayle, Jr., Gwendolyn Brooks, Nikki Giovanni, Ron Milner, Etheridge Knight, Sonia Sanchez, Don L. Lee and Ishmael Reed. But the pioneers among them were the first three. They wrote poems, essays and plays in a variety of ways to serve the purpose of the Black Arts Movement.

Among the various literary forms adopted by these three writers, drama particularly offered a very powerful means for expressing the needs of the Black Americans. So being committed and talented writers, they wrote powerful plays suiting to the purpose of the movement and made these plays virtually a weapon in the class struggle against the whites and a means for arousing the racial and social consciousness of the Black people.
Nobody can turn down the practical effect of these plays on the Black American audience. The artistic and socio-political aspects of these plays are quite dynamic and can be analysed in a systematic manner. First of all, these plays can be taken as plays of "accusation and self-flagellation". All the three playwrights point out the drawbacks inherent in the Black community and try to bring about a purgatorial effect. Secondly, they can be taken as plays of "self-celebration" in which the playwrights show possibility of victory of the Black people over the prolonged white supremacy at all level. Finally, these plays are "cultural and nationalistic". The attempt of these playwrights in reviving Black culture and Black nationalism is immense. They give a new meaning to the terms 'arts' and present their leftist or revolutionary ideologies by arousing the socio-political consciousness of the Black people.

Amiri Baraka, Ed Bullins and Larry Neal have struggled a lot to come victorious with their plays serving the true purpose of the Black Arts Movement. According to a critic named Abbenyi, the plays written by these playwrights are not by-products of American Literature. They are:

The origin of Afro-centricity specifically in the Black Arts and Black Theater Movement and also in the Civil Rights and Black Power Movement of the 60s. They promote the aesthetic values during the movement proposing separate terminology, symbolism, mythology, iconology, and methods of critique inaugurating cultural revolution in art and ideas.

In fact, these playwrights have followed the ideals of the Movement to the best possible extent. They have tried to raise the level of consciousness of their people; their approaches are purely political and social, dealing with the existing
conditions of whole oppression; they have tried to educate their people to bring out knowledge and truth; they have classified their issues and tried to eliminate the negative conditions prevailing among their people; they have set all the possible ways of providing entertainment to their people by using the language of Harlem spectators and presenting Black music very effectively.

Coming to Amiri Baraka in particular, the use of myth of Dutchman in his *Dutchman*, the racial consciousness of Walker in *The Slave*, the role of the homosexual in *The Baptism*, the expression of anger of foots in *The Toilet*, the role of the Black Woman and the paramilitary Black youth in *Experimental Death Unit # 1*, the struggle of the Black protagonists—Black man and Black woman with death and life in *Madheart*, the myth of Africans in *A Black Mass*, Rochester's rebelliousness in *Jello*, the mythical journey of Afro-Americans in *Slaveship*, and the repeated reflection of cultural and racial awareness in almost all his plays present the true spirit of the Movement in an effective way. His use of typical Black music like 'Nature Boy', 'Holy ghost', 'Blue free', 'Hambone' 'Brilliant Corners' is very effective on the Black audience. Baraka beautifully presents the use of Black cultural and artistic things in his plays:

In order for the non-white world to assume control, it must transcend the technology that has enslaved it. But the expression and instinctive (natural) reflection that characterise Black Art and culture, listen to these players, which can transcend any human state. That is, the spirit, the world explanation, available in Black lives, culture, art and speaks of a world more beautiful than the white man knows’
The study of Baraka's plays is in many ways emblematic of the collective experience of African-Americans since the momentous decade of the 1960s. His spiritual and artistic journey through plays reflects in microcosm and to be sure, in the extreme, the movement from doubt to self-contempt to self acceptance.

The achievements of Ed Bullins as a playwright are quite remarkable. All his plays reveal the true purpose of the Black Arts Movement. He beautifully explores the political, social, cultural and artistic identity of Black Americans in his plays. The consciousness of the Black protagonist, Paul is reflected in his play, *How Do You Do?*, the empty political rhetoric of the Black protagonist, Boss Brother is reflected in *Dialect Determinism*, treachery in Black community is portrayed in *Goin' a Buffalo*, Cliff's sense sacrifice and exploration of meaning of manhood is projected in *In the Wine Time*, the satirised cultural and scholastic consciousness of Mr. Jones and Mr. Carpentier is presented in *The Electronic Nigger*, the brutal life experiences are discussed with tenacity and grace in *Clara's Ole Man*; the call for evolution of Black culture is shown in *In New England Winter*, the influence of the Civil Rights Movement for the rise of Black Militancy is found in *The Taking of Miss Janie*, the sense of protest and anger against social and political chaos is reflected in *The Gentleman Caller*. In an interview with Jarvis Anderson, Bullins expresses his purpose of writings plays very clearly. He says, "I donot write the kind of plays they want me to, because I believe in trying to come at the audience fresh.... We are not protesting to whites; we are having a discourse, a discussion, a dialogue between black writers and the audience." His plays are really effective and result oriented since they define Black values, Black cultural nationalism and the socio-economic realities of Black Americans.
In the same way, the plays of Larry Neal bear the testimony of Black social and cultural consciousness. Although he has written only two plays, they are of great significance to the Black Arts Movement. They present the reaction of Black Americans in a constructive and positive way. In his *The Glorious Monster in the Bell of Horn*, he presents the hopes and aspirations of Black middle class people. The feelings of Shammy and Iverson in this regard ought to be noted. His *In an Upstate Motel* explores brilliantly the artistic and healthy aspects of Black American life. If Baraka and Bullins constitute the body of the Black Arts Movement, Neal is the spirit of it. The contribution of Neal to the movement is not only theoretical but also effectively practical. In fact, Larry Neal, along with Amiri Baraka and Ed Bullins declare the beginning of a new time for the entire Black community. All the three are included in an accredited list of awakened dignitaries, because they have written devotedly with a positive and effective target for the social and spiritual freedom of their people. This kind of sacrificial literature of them gives us an evidence of their vision and greatness altogether.

In their plays, all the three have projected the psychological, social and political problems of Black Americans in one hand; and on the other, they have tried to revive the historical, cultural and artistic value of African-American and the tragic and nostalgic reminiscences of the characters in the plays are really impressive. The roles of black rebels and antisocial are thought provoking. These playwrights use rhythms of black music and Blues, the consciousness as well as sub-consciousness of African-Americans, the lack cultural nationalism, the black revolutionary nationalism, dance, as in Black life style and patterns, black religion and its numerous forms-gospel, negro spiritualism, black mysticism, magic, myth-scene, history, fables and legends, Afro-American street styles and
of course Black music in an effective manner in their plays in order to fulfil the real objectives of the Black Arts movement of 60s. Congregations of bare reality, excess of protest and anger, and at times absurdity enrich the plays of these three artists. However, they write plays with high seriousness for the Black community. The opinion of Larry Neal is relevant here. He says, "Blues, spirituals, folktales recounted from mouth to mouth; the whispered words of a black mother to her black daughter; the confidential wisdom of a black father to his black son; the swapping experience on street corners from boy to boy in the deepest vernacular; work songs sung under blazing sun", form the channels of their plays through which the message of the Movement spread throughout the world. Ed Bullins opinion in this regard is relevant. In an interview with Marvin X, he says, "Many of us came into Black Arts in similar states of agitation, hostility and madness. It was a purging experience to go through, to start a theatre on nothing and make it work, to pull all our energies and lives into it and to have our people-our Black people appreciate it". Really, the plays written by these playwrights under the force of the Black Arts Movement establish a tradition in American literature exposing their enormous creative talent.

Notes


