CHAPTER FIVE

HUMANISTIC CONCERNS

Little comrade, never min'
Though another is unkin';

Little comrade, moan not so,
Oh, you fill my heart with woe!
Sad I listen to your cries
[My Emphasis]...

We come to seek
on earth
something that we forgot
to carry
under the earth
hence this sickness
which seizes us sometimes
when the wind mimics
a flamenco guitar....

Man is the crown and glory of God's creation. The Bible affirms this fact thus:

And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image [My Emphasis]...

479 The Holy Bible, Genesis, 1:26-27.
Man is superior to other living creatures by virtue of his unique mental faculty. Otherwise, in other aspects Man is biologically similar to other living beings. Hajime Nakamura points out that according to Aristotle "appetites and desires are shared in common by men and animals. What distinguishes man from the animal is his power of reason." Mencius terms it as the faculty of the mind. It is his mental faculty that gives him the dignified status of a human being and the moment it fails, he degenerates to be animalistic.

It ought to be stressed that man's human dignity rests on his capacities to exercise his mental potentiality which has within its ambit both human feelings and reason. Human passions embrace the whole gamut of human sentiments such as love, pity, kindness, mercy and goodness. On the other hand, reason governs rationalistic and intellectual abilities. Thus human emotions, and sentiments or the human aspects of man's mental faculty are brought under humanism.

Humanism as a philosophy focuses attention on the dignity and significance of man. S.Z.H. Abidi remarks: "Humanism

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believes in the dignity of man. Man is its central focus." Humanism stresses the importance which must be given to man who is conceived as supreme and is elevated to the highest status.

Humanism is a way of looking at our world with man as its centre and lays emphasis on his nature and his place in the universe. There have been many varieties of humanism, both religious and non-religious. But all humanists agree that man is the centre of their study. As such "it [Humanism] is a genuine concern for Man as such, everywhere, whether in Dallas or in Paris, Moscow or Tokyo, Colombo or New Delhi." 

The cardinal virtue of humanism, as a way of life, places the accent on the equality of man. It carries with it a belief in the biological equality of man*, as well as a moral equality. Man is man everywhere and as a species suffers from the same biological determinants**. Similarly all men are born equal and are therefore endowed with natural gifts. As such discrimination of any kind is unnatural and hence anti-humanistic. Every individual has


* and ** These bear repetition.
got his own traits, innate talents and inherent greatness. It is thus observed in The World Book Encyclopedia:

Humanism teaches that all persons have dignity and worth. Therefore they should command the respect of their fellowman....

Humanism advocates that irrespective of colour and creed everyone must be treated alike as equals. Whether he be black or white or yellow, his own individualistic merits and worth must be recognized.

Moreover, the tenets of Christianity are essentially humanistic in nature and they place emphasis on the ideal of equality. Jesus is seen mingling and eating with the commoners. In order to establish equality in a personalized fashion apart from proclaiming the highest credit in being humble and in humility is individuality, Jesus himself washes the feet of his disciples.

On another occasion looking about his disciples Jesus says, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister, and mother." St. Paul echoes and explains the logic of equality saying:


484 The Holy Bible, Mark, 3:34-35.
There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.\textsuperscript{485}

It is of immediate interest to record that to the Americans equality gets defined in the equal opportunities thrown open to all according to the perfected American democratic processes.

The Buddha also stressed the moral equality of man and asserted that all discriminations based on caste should be discarded. Hajime Nakamura observes thus: "If it were up to the Buddha, the castes as in India would have been annulled and abolished."\textsuperscript{486} The Buddha preached that what counted was not the hierarchical order of the castes but the significance of human virtues.

Humanistic equality does take into account the collective good of man and the human race as a single entity without entertaining disparities or distinctions. At the same time it also gives equal importance to the worth and merit of every individual. As Prabhakar Machwe points out humanism deals with

Not the faceless masses or abstract crowds without a caption, but the real alive person

\textsuperscript{485} The Holy Bible, Galatians, 3:26-29.

\textsuperscript{486} Hajime Nakamura, A comparative History of Ideas, p.273.
as an individual [My Emphasis]...\textsuperscript{487}

Man should not be treated "like a cog in a wheel, a small peg on the assembly belt, a creature without volition."\textsuperscript{488} Humanism elevates Man to a higher level and establishes the fact every individual has human dignity and rights. The Society and the Establishment through the roles that they define for every individual should ensure that humanistic concerns do not suffer at any stage of thinking, doing and living.

Love or compassion for others is considered to be the fundamental and motivating principle of humanism. All other virtues of human goodness stem from a selfless love, which is the quintessence of all moral ethics and doctrines. Christianity teaches: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."\textsuperscript{489} The Buddhist's golden rule is expressed in the maxim: "Do as one would be done by."\textsuperscript{490} Humanistic concern does not stop with merely doing the right or advocating the positive virtue but it also lays the emphasis on refraining from doing the bad. It is

\textsuperscript{487} Prabhakar Machwe, Modernity and contemporary Indian Literature, p.83.
\textsuperscript{488} Ibid., p.98.
\textsuperscript{489} The Holy Bible, Matthew, 19:19.
\textsuperscript{490} Sacred Books of the East, Quoted in Hajime's A Comparative History of Ideas, p.277.
pertinent to recall the teaching of Confucius: "Do not do to others what you do not want them to do to you." \(^{491}\) Humanism also requires that one does not offend others in any manner of action or speech.

Hajime Nakamura points out the fact that "the spirit of love was highly stressed by Ramakrishna." \(^{492}\) He adds that according to Ramakrishna "the more we love people, ... the nearer to God we are." \(^{493}\) Love, indeed is given so much importance by Indian thinkers that love replaces every spiritual discipline.

Thus firmly based on love and compassion, these twin essentials of life, humanistic ideals extend beyond to embrace such virtues as benevolence, justice, propriety, austerity and integrity. In short, humanism concerns itself with everything one's human conscience decides as positive virtue or essential goodness as opposed to the evil or the bad.

Another manifestation of humanistic concern is the readiness to render service to others. Hajime Nakamura points out that "such humanitarianism seems to be

\(^{491}\) Confucius, Quoted in Hajime's A Comparative History of Ideas, p.278.

\(^{492}\) Ibid., p.537.

\(^{493}\) Ibid., pp.537-538.
Helping the needy, the destitute and the meek through physical acts of kindness or through words of comfort is in keeping with the spirit of serving mankind. Such a noble attitude of helping the poor, the needy, the destitute and the diseased served as the high watermark in the life and mission of Jesus Christ. And taking the lead from Jesus Christ, Walt Whitman recommends love and compassion and service as the motivating factors to right living and loving and transcending. Whitman's glorious assertion which is a fine re-echoing of Jesus Christ's life style runs thus and is worth quoting here:

Agonies are one of my changes of garments,
I do not ask the wounded person how he feels,
...I myself
become the wounded person,
My hurt turns livid upon me as I lean on a
cane and observe [My Emphasis]....

Christianity considers service rendered to others as an outward manifestation of love. Buddhism also stresses the need to show kindness to all creatures that have life. Buddha claimed oneness with suffering humanity saying "whoever would wait upon me, let him wait upon the

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494 Hajime Nakamura, A Comparative History of Ideas, p.541.

sick.\textsuperscript{496} Similarly Christ also said, "As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me".\textsuperscript{497} Christ commended the Good Samaritan who helped the wounded man saying that he was well pleased in the sight of God. Christ healed the sick, made whole the deformed, gave sight to the blind, restored the lepers and showed compassion to the harlot. Thus the best part of Christianity revolves around humanistic concerns. It is as a humanist that Jesus Christ appeals the most.

Humanistic concern gets defined in one's ardour and willingness to endure pain for the sake of others. It is in this willingness to take up the yoke of burden on one's own shoulder in order to alleviate the pain of the sufferer lies the crux of humanism. An individual with humanistic concerns is drawn towards the suffering human race and he expresses his love and compassion and solidarity towards them. He forgets his own sufferings and minds the sufferings of others. He becomes a co-sufferer. Thus he becomes a symbol of the whole suffering humanity. Jesus Christ took up the sin of the whole humanity on himself and gave up his life on the cross for the sake of mankind. So ardent was his human pity that he suffered in lieu of mankind so that mankind might escape the punishment of divine wrath.

\textsuperscript{496} The Buddha, Quoted in Hajime Nåkamura's A Comparative History of Ideas, p.278

\textsuperscript{497} The Holy Bible, Matthew, 25:40.
One of the Vaishnava devotees of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu once fell at his feet and prayed:

My heart breaks to see the sorrows of mankind. Lay thou their sins upon my head, let me suffer in hell for all their sins, so that thou mayest remove the earthly pangs of all other beings [My Emphasis]....

Humanistic concerns for the well-being of others and their salvation remain the driving force behind these instances. Furthermore, humanistic concerns call for supreme sacrifice. The individual undergoes vicarious suffering such as that of Jesus Christ without expectation of any recompense. It is the ultimate goal that love could lead to and it is humanistic concerns developed to perfection. The individual braves physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual torture. He neither complains nor grumbles. He endures cheerfully and overcomes adversity. Thus the whole of humanity experiences an upward curve and his sacrifice does honour to mankind. At this point it ought to be noted that in struggle is existence. In fact, continual struggle, pain and suffering mark the human scenario. But as Stephen Crane, Walt Whitman, William Faulkner and Saul Bellow argue what is required is the will to endure and prevail

498 Carpenter, Theism in Medieval India, Quoted in Hajime Nakamura's A Comparative History of Ideas, p.542.
over the circumstances and triumph and redefine one's life. Saul Bellow affirms this saying:

We are called upon to preserve our humanity in circumstances of rapid change and movement. I do not see what else we can do than refuse to be condemned with a time or a place. We are not born to be condemned but to live

[My Emphasis]...

Every nation has its own reason for the prevalence of suffering. Even so in America, it is one of colour. Colour has the insinuating implication of treating a large section of the American Population as subhuman and thus subjecting them to untold sufferings. James Baldwin defines the real tragedy of Richard Wright's Bigger Thomas which is the common denominator for every Black.

[It] is not that he [Bigger Thomas] is cold or black or hungry, not even that he is American, black; but that he has accepted a theology that denies him life, that he admits the possibility of his being subhuman and feels constrained, therefore, to battle for his humanity according to those brutal criteria bequeathed him at his birth

[My Emphasis]...

Black poetry projects the injuries, insults and excesses meted out to the Blacks. It is an inexhaustible but


faithful record of their woeful existence. At the same time it also echoes their yearnings for humanistic consideration. And the "still sad music of humanity”\textsuperscript{501} qualifies Black poetry. As Echeruo aptly puts it: "The 'human' appeal becomes in effect the stabilizing ingredient of this [Black] poetry."\textsuperscript{502}

Claude McKay and Tchicaya U Tam’si are conscious of their racial determinants. But they are not carried away by the suffering caused by their personal loss and deprivation. They rise above their personal angst and elevate their thoughts to a higher level by looking deeper into the hearts of the other fellow sufferers. To them every Black becomes a type of a sufferer. They want to assert the dignity of the Black man. The Black should not be treated as an under dog or a menial. He is in no way inferior to the Whites. Not only the suffering Black but also every human being who is suppressed receive the writer's sympathetic consideration. The suffering Black stands for the whole suffering human race. With humanistic concerns these two writers analyse the problems of the sufferers


and become the voice of the sufferers. Their poetry does not age since their poetry stands for the sufferer of all ages and all nations and thus gain universal character. In a way their poetry does not get constricted by their racial determinants but rise above them and gain universal implications and emphasis.

Claude McKay has inherited humane feelings like love, compassion and kindness from his mother* for whom he has had a great love and admiration. He writes in Boyhood in Jamaica thus:

She loved us so much because she loved all people -- it was a rich warm love
[My Emphasis]... 503

He also adds that his mother "wanted to help those who were outcast, poor and miserable." 504 Naturally McKay has been endowed with his mother's loving kindness. Based on cooper's contention that "McKay identified most completely with his mother," 505 John Condit affirms that it is only "natural for her encompassing love to have influenced her son." 506

504 Idem.
505 Wayne Cooper, ed. The Passion of Claude McKay, p.3.

* This bears repetition.
To a man with such sensitive and humanistic feelings the constabulary job was the least suited one. As a constable, McKay witnessed the ignoble cruelties and horrible punishments imposed upon his fellow Blacks. He was unable to bear the sight of his own men being punished and was moved to pity. Therefore he quit that post.

As Arthur D. Drayton points out:

So both early and late McKay evinces a sensitive identification with his people, whose suffering is his suffering, whose joys are his joys. He is proud of his race, and is hurt by the wrongs they suffer.

[My Emphasis]...

McKay himself admits the fact that he is not fit for the job of a constable. In his Preface to the Constab Ballads, he writes:

I had not in me the stuff that goes to the making of a good constable, ... it is my misfortune to have a most improper sympathy, with wrongdoers. I therefore never "made cases," but turning, like Nelson, a blind eye to what it was my manifest duty to see, tried to make peace, which seemed to me better....

507 Arthur D. Drayton, "McKay's Human Pity," p.82.

McKay also adds that "...the inevitable rubs of daily life"\(^{509}\) are "trifles to most of my comrades, but to me calamities and tragedies."\(^{510}\)

McKay's poem "Strokes of The Tamarind Switch," reveals McKay's tenderness which cannot stand the sight of a Black lad of fifteen being flogged. He writes:

This was a lad of fifteen. No doubt he deserved the flogging administered by order of the Court; still I could not bear to see him -- my own flesh -- stretched out over the bench, so I went away to the Post office near by. When I returned all was over. I saw his naked bleeding form, and through the terrible ordeal -- so they told me -- he never cried....He could scarcely walk, so I gave him the tickets for the tram. He had a trustful face. A few minutes after, my bitterness of spirit at the miserable necessity of such punishment came forth in song

[My Emphasis].... \(^{511}\)

McKay feels one with the boy and suffers pain as if it were his own flesh that has been stretched and flogged.

It is worth quoting the poem "Strokes of the Tamarind Switch" in full:

I DARED not look at him,
My eyes with tears were dim,
My spirit filled with hate


\(^{510}\) Idem.

Of man's depravity,  
I hurried through the gate.

I went but returned,  
While in my bosom burned  
The monstrous wrong that we  
Oft bring upon ourselves,  
And yet we cannot see.

Poor little erring wretch!  
The cutting tamarind switch  
Had left its bloody mark,  
And on his legs were streaks  
That looked like boiling bark.

I spoke to him the while;  
At first he tried to smile,  
But the long pent-up tears  
Came gushing in a flood;  
He was but of tender years.

With eyes bloodshot and red,  
He told me of a father dead  
And lads like himself rude,  
Who goaded him to wrong;  
He for the future promised to be good.

The mother yesterday  
Said she was sending him away,  
Away across the seas:  
She told of futile prayers  
Said on her wearied knees.

I wished the lad good-bye,  
And left him with a sigh  
Again I heard him talk --  
His limbs, he said, were sore,  
He could not walk.

I'member when a smaller boy,  
A mother's pride, a mother's joy,  
I too was very rude:  
They beat me too, though not the same,  
And has it done me good?...^512

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This incident created a reverberating impact on McKay's mind and his humanistic concern for the sufferer finds expression in the poem. As Arthur D. Drayton points out: "Strokes of the Tamarind Switch" is "based on an instinctive feeling of sympathy for a suffering people, and no less for an individual." 

McKay's humanistic concern does not stop with simply feeling sympathetic towards the boy. He goes a step further and offers him money to purchase his tickets. Feeling of kindness and words of kindness are meaningless unless they are accompanied by deeds of kindness. It is an instance of McKay's humanism getting expressed in a compassionate and loving act of kindness and goodness. Another poem which illustrates McKay's sense of pity and compassion is "Jim at Sixteen". His constabulary job offered him many chances not only to witness the sufferings of his fellow men but also to inflict sufferings on them. During these occasions, his heart bled. He regretted for his predicament as a policeman to handcuff the prisoners. He was extremely sorry to see the wound caused by the handcuff he had put on the hand of the prisoner Jim, a lad of sixteen. It is relevant to quote the poem here:

513 Arthur D. Drayton, "McKay's Human Pity," p.82.
Corpy, it pinch me so,
   De bloomin' ole handcuff;
A dunno warra mek
   You put it on so rough.

Many a policeman
   Hab come to dis before;
Dem slip same like a me,
   An' pass t'rough lock-up door....

McKay's note to this poem reveals how McKay recoils at inflicting injury on others, however inadvertently it may have been done. He feels guilty when he sees the raw wound on the prisoner's hand. He writes:

I happened to escort a prisoner, a stalwart young fellow, and as I was putting on the handcuff, which was rather small, it pinched him badly, making a raw wound. And yet he was so patient, saying he knew that I could not help it. Although it was accidentally done, I felt so sad and ashamed [My Emphasis]....

McKay is highly sensitive to the sufferings of others. The Petrograd Correspondent affirms this fact saying that McKay's poems "about the oppression and exploitation of the black race are produced with great sensitivity."

McKay's poem "Ribber Come-Do'n" narrates the plight of the five little children left alone. The mother has gone away to buy fresh fish to sell and the father has gone to toil in the field. Due to heavy rains the river is in floods and both the parents do not turn up for two whole days. McKay feels sorry for these children and writes:

But de dark ribber kept her back,
Dat night she couldn' get home,
While a six-week-old baby wailed,
An' wailed for a mudder to come.

Dere were four udder little ones
'Sides de babe of six weeks old,
An' dey cried an' looked to no use,
An' oh dey were hungry an' cold!

[My Emphasis]...

The fourteen-year old girl, the eldest of the lot tries to get some food for the crying children.

She look 'pon de Manchinic tree,
Not a piece of mancha fe eat;
De Jack-fruit dem bear well anuff,
But dere wasn't one o'dem fit....

Disappointed at not getting any banana or jack-fruit, she begs of a neighbour thus:

518 Idem.
"Ebenin', cousin Anna,
Me deh beg you couple banna,
For dem tarra one is berry hungry home;
We puppa ober May, ma,
We mumma gone a Bay, ma,
An' we can' tell warra time dem gwin' go come"... 519

But for the kind and timely help of the district mother the children would have perished. McKay depicts movingly how both the parents fend for their little ones under gruelling circumstances toiling all day. In spite of their desperate attempts to earn their daily bread they are scarcely able to stave off starvation and there is no food left at home at times of need. McKay's human pity is drawn towards these suffering children.

McKay cannot bear seeing young children toiling and moiling in the hot sun. In "Fetching Water," McKay describes a young Black boy staggering under the heavy weight of a gourd-load of water. He is grieved at heart and says:

De pickny comin' up de hill,
Fightin' wid heavy gou'd,
Wont say it sweet him, but he will Complain about de load:
Him feel de weight,... 520

McKay is genuinely concerned about the misery of his people. In particular, the miserable existence of the poor Jamaican peasants arouses his pity. It is pertinent to recall Wayne Cooper's remark:

> In these early works [Songs of Jamaica and Constab Ballads] he [McKay] identified with the black peasantry of rural Jamaica and recorded as his own their tribulations and joys....

A poor peasant in "Two-An'-Six" rides his dray to market hoping to sell his sugar to buy food for his six starving children and ailing wife. True to McKay's humanism the peasant is seen placing their needs before his own. Joyfully he rides along thus:

> In de early marnin'-tide
> When de cocks crows on de hill
> An' de stars are shinin' still,
> Cous' Sun sits in hired dray,
> Drivin' long de market way;
> Whole week grindin' sugar-cane
> T'rugh de boilin' Sun an' rain,
> Now, a'ter de toilin' hard,
> He goes seekin' his reward,
> While he's thinkin' in him min'
> Of de dear ones lef'behin',
> Of de loved though ailin' wife,
> Darlin' treasure of his life,
> An' de picknies, six in all,
> Whose 'nuff burdens 'pon him fall:
> Seben lovin' ones in need,
> Seben hungry mouths fe feed;
> On deir wants, he thinks alone,
> Neber dreamin', of his own,

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Wayne Cooper, ed. The Passion of Claude McKay, p.107.
But gwin' on wid joyful face
Till him re'ch de market-place.... 522

But disappointment awaits him at the market. The price of sugar is very low and he gets very little money. McKay depicts how the peasant returns home with a sad heart and sorrowful face. He says:

Tekin' out de lee amount,
Him set do'n an' begin count;
All de time him min'deh doubt
How expenses would pay out;

So he journeys on de way,
Feelin' sad dis market day;
No e'en buy a little cake
To gi'e baby when she wake, --
Passin' long de candy-shop
'Douten eben mek a stop
To buy drops fe las'y son,
For de lilly cash nea' done.
So him re'ch him own a groun',
An' de children scamper roun',
Each one stretchin' out him han',
Lookin' to de poor sad man.

Oh, how much he felt de blow,
As he watched dem face fall low,
When dem wait an' nuttin'came
An' drew back deir han's wid shame!

[My Emphasis].... 523

McKay reveals a great deal of human understanding in his graphic depiction of the effects of frustrated hopes on individuals. He captures their moods and behaviour with

great insight and sympathy. Jean Wagner attributes it to his humanistic concern saying:

How close the bond of sympathy was between McKay and the people is manifested also by the realism with which he characterizes the black Jamaican peasant....

McKay's anguish gets kindled at seeing not only the physical sufferings of his people but also the moral degradation to which they have been reduced. He analyses the reason why some of the Black girls suffer the deplorable predicament as prostitutes. Circumstances force it upon them to lose their human dignity. McKay makes it clear that the young women go about it reluctantly. His "Harlem Shadows" and "Harlem Dancer" visualize the young prostitutes as going from door to door just to earn their livelihood. Economic deprivation is the major cause of their moral degradation and physical degeneration. As Eugenia W. Collier observes:

One of McKay's most famous poems, "Harlem Shadows" shows the paradox of the Black man's lot in America. The poem is a sad, tender, loving, compassionate view of Harlem prostitutes, whom the poet sees as symbolic of the destruction which racism has wreaked upon Blacks [My Emphasis].

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524 Jean Wagner, Black Poets of the United States, p.206.

Far from being indignant at these Harlem dancers McKay forgives them by focussing his attention on the motive behind their act. He emphasizes their moral detachment in their act. Despite their physical presence their minds are not there*. As Eugenia Collier remarks:

The theme of the poem ["The Harlem Dancer"] is not lascivious dancing, but human dignity, not mid-night gaiety, but unobtrusive tragedy....

Kerlin wonders at McKay's talent and faculty at giving dignity to these dancers. He writes thus:

It ["The Harlem Dancer"] is an achievement in portrayal, sufficient by itself to establish a poetic reputation. The divination that penetrates to the secret purity of the soul, or nobleness of character, through denying appearances -- how rare is the faculty and how necessary [My Emphasis]....

Similarly, "A Country Girl" is an expression of McKay's compassionate view of the country girl who has deserted the country with the aim of earning money and getting comforts from the town. With a sorrowful heart, she


* This bears repetition.
narrates how under trying circumstances, she has to stoop herself from her moral standards. McKay does not blame her, but only pities her since she has left the country for the town to escape from poverty, hunger and loneliness. The country girl Lelia confesses thus:

But troubles there were an' in plenty, my lad,  
Oh, dey, were bitter, an' oh, I was sad!  
Weary and baffled an' hungry an' lone,  
I gave up my spirit to sigh an' to moan.

After dat? -- O Feddy, press me not so:  
De truth? -- well, I sank to de lowest of de low:  
I gave up all honour, I took a new name  
An' tried to be happy, deep sunk in de shame.

Dere was no other way, Fed I could live,  
Dat was de gift dat a gay town could give;  
I tried to be glad in de open day light,  
But sorrowed an' moaned in de deep o'de night

[My Emphasis] ....  

With utmost humanism McKay feels sorry for the lot of this poor country girl. He does not find fault with her but rather, blames it on the "obscene phenomenon" as McKay's mouth-piece Ray in his novel Home to Harlem aptly puts it, "... civilization is rotten. We are all rotten who are touched by it."

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McKay's humanistic concern for his people finds expression in his attempt to seek oneness with his people. His racial solidarity is explicit in many of his poems. He is fully aware of the forces acting against his people to the point of their destruction. McKay confesses thus:

I cry my woe to the whirling world, but not in despair. For I understand the forces that doom the race into which I was born to lifelong discrimination and servitude.\[531\]

His poem, "The Bobby to the Sneering Lady" is a fine proof for his racial solidarity. When the lady asks McKay as a policeman to arrest the servant girl, he shows his reluctance in doing so. He replies:

Our soul's jes' like fe you,
    If our work does make us rough;
Me won' t'res' you servant-gal
    When you're beaten her enough.

You may say she is me frien',
    We are used to all such prate;
Naught we meet on life's stern road
    But de usual scorn an' hate.

Say dat you wi' 'port me, ma'am?
    I was lookin' fe dat, --well,
Our Inspector's flinty hard,
    'Twill be few days' pay or cell.\[532\]


McKay is firm in his resolution not to arrest the girl in spite of the lady's threat to report him to the Inspector. Jean Wagner points out: "At stake here is not only his sense of justice, but also racial solidarity."\textsuperscript{533}

The police man replies:

\begin{verbatim}
Ef our lot, then is so hard,
   I mus' ever bear in mind
Dat to fe me own black 'kin
   I mus' not be too unkind [My Emphasis]...
\end{verbatim}\textsuperscript{534}

He implores the lady to forgive her saying:

\begin{verbatim}
Ah! you turn away your heed!
   See! dere's pity in your face!
Don't, dear madam, bring on me
   This unmerited disgrace [My Emphasis]...
\end{verbatim}\textsuperscript{535}

McKay's sense of justice and morality transcends the artificial penal codes of conduct. It is firmly grounded on humaneness and racial solidarity.

McKay is sad to note the injustice done to his people in the name of tenant laws. They are cheated out of their hard labour. The poor Black peasants toiling in their lands and producing fine crops are swindled by their White masters. And the gullible peasants are easily

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{533} Jean Wagner, \textit{Black Poets of the United States}, p.220.
\item \textsuperscript{534} McKay, "The Bobby to the Sneering lady," in \textit{DP}, vol.II., p.67.
\item \textsuperscript{535} \textit{Ibid.}, p.68.
\end{itemize}
relieved of their products for a pittance. His poem, "Quashie to Buccra" illustrates how an emaciated Black peasant in penury succumbs to White craftiness. McKay expresses his concern over his fellow men who are ruthlessly exploited. In "Whe' Fe Do?," he writes:

We hab to batter in de sun,
An' dat isn't a little fun,
For Lard! 'tis hellish how it bu'n;
Still dere's de big wul' to live do'n--
So whe' fe do?....

Arthur D. Drayton comments on this poem saying:

...he [McKay] mourns the hard lot of the Negro and sees the social injustice inherent in the polarization of the world into black and white....

The repercussions of this injustice felt on the Black psyche are manifold.

Thus the "handsome bronze-hued lad" in "Alfonso, Dressing to Wait at Table" is an ironical presentation of what it is to be human in an inhumanely treacherous world. He sings melodiously about carefree men only to forget his bondage and its attendant misery. It is worth quoting the poem in full:

536 McKay, "Whe' Fe Do?," in D P, vol.I, p.27.
538 McKay, "Alfonso, Dressing to Wait At Table," in S P, p.76.
Alfonso is a handsome bronze-hued lad
Of subtly-changing and surprising parts;
His moods are storms that frighten and, make glad,
His eyes were made to capture women's hearts.

Down in the glory-hole Alfonso sings
An olden song of wine and clinking glasses
And riotous rakes; magnificently flings Gay kisses to imaginary lasses.

Alfonso's voice of mellow music thrills
Our swaying forms and steals our hearts with joy;
And when he soars, his five falsetto trills Are rarest notes of gold without alloy.

But, O Alfonso! wherefore do you sing Dream-songs of carefree men and ancient places?
Soon we shall be beset by clamouring Of hungry and importunate pale faces....

The concluding lines bring out the hard-hitting reality that though he is born free he is in the clutches of a hostile society. The reader is reminded of the inescapable predicament of the Black that "there are barriers of discrimination everywhere against the coloured people," as Ray puts it in Banjo.

Seeing all these injustices McKay's tenderness of heart responds humanistically with an emphatic affirmation of their close brotherhood. He seals his fate with theirs saying:

539 McKay, "Alfonso, Dressing to Wait At Table," in S P, p.76.
540 McKay, Banjo, p.194.
Macy is seen voicing his concern not only for the Black race but also for the sufferers of all times and all races. His racial concern assumes larger dimensions to embrace the universal concern. To him the Black becomes a symbol of a sufferer. This "embracing universalism" characterizes his every verse. As Arthur D. Drayton points out:

...there is a certain poignancy as he [Macy] attempts to reconcile his reaction as a Negro with his larger section as a human being. To see his verse in terms of mere racialism is to miss this quality...

Macy's humanistic concern is explicit in his poem, "The Desolate city". He conceives the whole of humanity on his person where the conflicting forces of human passion play havoc. It is relevant to quote the poem "The Desolate city" here:

My spirit is a pestilential city,
With misery triumphant everywhere,
Glutted with baffled hopes and human pity.
Strange agonies make quiet lodgement there:

Its sewers, bursting, ooze up from below
And spread their loathsome substance through its lanes,
Flooding all areas with their evil flow
And blocking all the motions of its veins:
Its life is sealed to love or hope or pity,
My spirit is a pestilential city

Arthur D. Drayton comments on these lines as follows:

No doubt the baffled hopes were to accumulate gradually, but the human pity was there from the beginning and evident in his early dialect verse. Its source lies in the poet's tender gentle spirit. And both in his early and later verse it saves him from racial extremism.

McKay's own ordeals in life and sufferings due to racial determinants help him to understand human suffering. In his poem, "The Tired Worker," he describes vividly how the tired labourer longs for the night since it is the only time which will relieve him of his tiresome work. He writes:

...for soon the moon
From out its misty veil will swing aloft!
Be patient, weary body, soon the night
Will wrap thee gently in her sable sheet,
And with a leader sigh thou wilt invite
To rest thy tired hands and aching feet.
The wretched day was theirs, the night is mine;
Come tender sleep, and fold me to thy breast.

545 Arthur D. Drayton, "McKay's Human Pity," p.78.
But what steals out the gray clouds red
like wine?
O dawn! O dreaded dawn! O let me rest
Weary my veins, my brain, my life! Have pity!
No! Once again the harsh, the ugly
city.... 546

James R. Giles points out thus:

At no point does the poem [The Tired Worker]
specify that the worker is black, and one
senses that McKay's concern is for all
laboring people [My Emphasis].... 547

Even in McKay's Songs of Jamaica the Jamaican peasant
that he projects represents the peasants in general. Jean
Wagner affirms this saying:

McKay's portrait of the Jamaican peasant is in
substance that of the peasant the world over.
Profoundly attached to the earth, he works the
soil with a knowledge gained from age long
habit; although a hard worker the Jamaican,
like his counter part the world over, is
condemned to exploitation.... 548

As a humanist, McKay feels that human rights must be
enjoyed by all and that their freedom and privileges
should not be curbed. It is basically as a human being

547 James R. Giles, Claude McKay, p.57.
548 Jean Wagner, Quoted in The Harlem Renaissance
Remembered, p.128.
that he responds to human affairs. Drayton wonders at "McKay's capacity to react to Negro suffering, not just as a Negro, but as a human being; to react to human suffering as such."  

McKay's sense of justice and moral well-being cuts across racial barriers and extends to the whole of humanity in general. Such a humanistic attitude is apparent from McKay's treatment of the inhuman act of a Black boy's hanging in his poem "The Lynching." Arthur D. Drayton makes a pointed reference saying:

In 'The Lynching', he [McKay] approached the agonising subject if not in a dispassionate mood [how could any Negro?] in a disciplined one; in a mood which allows him to see more than one painful aspect...McKay sees not only the violence done to his own people, but the violence which the whites inflict on themselves as well [My Emphasis]...  

Thus McKay is concerned about the moral implications and the harmful effects of the lynching on the onlooking White young lads. McLeod echoes this idea saying that McKay "shows his constant concern for moral integrity, for social justice, for true charity in the every day affairs of all men."  

550 Ibid., p.85.  
Whenever McKay protests against the injustices and cruelties done to his race, he is doing so only on behalf of the suffering humanity. As Drayton observes:

...one does not get the impression that his protest emanates primarily from a sense of race but rather from his shocked sense of fair play, ultimately and instinctively from that very characteristic trait of McKay's ...tender, gentle spirit that was appalled at human suffering [My Emphasis]...  

McKay is thus seen as an advocate of the whole suffering human race. He transcends racial considerations to a higher level of universal humanism and contributes as a Black to universal human uplift. Drayton observes that:

In seeing, as he [McKay] does, the significance of the Negro for mankind as a whole, he is at once protesting as a Negro and uttering a cry for the race of mankind as a member of that race. His human pity was the foundation that made all this possible....

McKay's sonnet "If We Must Die" is not a cry of a Black man, but it is a human cry over injustices. As Stephen H. Bronz remarks:

The poem, [If We Must Die] as McKay later commented, was meant to be universally

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552 Arthur D. Drayton, "McKay's Human Pity," p. 79.
553 Ibid., p. 88.
applicable to those cornered and desperate before a superior foe...\(^{554}\)

It is due to this universality, the sonnet receives much welcome from people all over the world. Jean Wagner makes a poignant reference thus:

> The welcome accorded to this sonnet 'If We Must Die' is also due, in part, to its being one of those poems in which McKay's poetic gift reaches beyond the circumstances of the day to attain the universal. Along with the will to resistance of black Americans that it expresses, it voices also the will of oppressed peoples of every age who, whatever their race and wherever their religion are fighting with their backs against the wall to win their freedom [My Emphasis]...\(^{555}\)

McKay's humanistic concern urges him to delve deep into the problems concerning the whole human race. In the words of Max Eastman, McKay's poems are "characteristic of what is deep and universal in mankind."\(^{556}\)

McKay can never tolerate the cruelties done to humanity as such. He rises against such things. As A.L.McLeod declares:

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\(^{556}\) Max Eastman, Quoted in Arthur P.Davis' *From the Dark Tower : Afro-American Writers 1900-1960*, p.39.
... he [McKay] never repudiated his violent antagonism to man's inhumanity to man, his hatred of injustice, hypocrisy and denigration. He was like Robert Burns and Walt Whitman, a poet of the people he was a singer of canticles to the brotherhood of all men.

[My Emphasis]...

In his poems, McKay expresses his innate urge to save mankind from losing its human dignity. Arthur D. Drayton comments thus:

The poet [McKay] ... is moved by what he sees as a noble duty devolving on the Negro to save not just himself but the human race to restore, if necessary through the Negro's very sacrifice the dignity of man.... This is one reason why as Coulthard has pointed out, 'his poetry has not aged'

[My Emphasis]. ...

Throughout McKay's life and literary career, as Cooper points out "the man's basic humanism and his great personal integrity stand out."

McKay's letter to Max Eastman shortly before his death reads as follows:

I still like to think of people with wonder and love as I did as a boy in Jamaica and the Catholic church with its discipline and


558 Arthur D. Drayton, "McKay's Human Pity," pp.77-78

traditions and understanding of human nature is helping me a lot...\textsuperscript{560}

Humanism has thus kept his heart throbbing and serving as his life breath.

In the case of Tchicaya U Tam'si also humanism plays a vital role in moulding his character. Particularly his poetic sensibility is tempered with humanistic concerns. As a poet he is more than keenly aware of the sufferings of his fellow country men and reacts much more strongly than any other common man in his place would do.

Writing as he does against a painful reality of centuries and centuries of oppression and deprivation, Tchicaya is touched in diverse ways by human suffering. Pre-colonial tribal infighting, colonial violence, the slave trade, Western racism, post-colonial failure, betrayal and massacre are the chain of events, that have brought in their wake, misery and degradation to the people. Tchicaya responds with an outburst of humanistic concerns for his long-suffering race. He is so much overwhelmed with sympathy for his people that he cries out in Epitome thus:

\textsuperscript{560} McKay, Quoted in John Hillyer's "An Urge Toward Wholeness: Claude McKay and His Sonnets", p.357.
My heart is no desert speak oh christ speak
Was it you who put living gold in my wine of joy
Do I owe to you my twin sources
And my soul and my heart
Was it you who set at my heart two ventricles
such tiny ones .... \textsuperscript{561}

Tchicaya makes a passionate identification with his African homeland and its people. He feels that his fruitless quest for the lost key of his life is sealed with the fate of his people. He is ready to stake his life and status on his country's well-being and prosperity as is evident from the fertility imagery he evokes in "Low Watermark," thus:

\begin{quote}
my own head is a ploughshare
but upon my earth
not a groove not a furrow
where is the breast of my mother
that I may throw my head high there
before the new moon
and the high tide.... \textsuperscript{562}
\end{quote}

Tchicaya's humanistic concern for his people is so intense that he goes to the extent of foregoing his joys. It is evident from the following sacrificial image:

\begin{quote}
stratify my nerves
joy brims up
its sword-like thread
crosses our reliquary gaze.... \textsuperscript{563}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{561} Tchicaya, Epitome, in S P, p.74.
\textsuperscript{563} Ibid., pp.6-7.
Tchicaya is prepared to undergo trial by purgation so that his people might understand the genuineness of his intent. He says:

beat the iron
link by link make me a corselet
which will imprint me on the fire of the world
and beat your hands my false sweet hearts

beat false money
of immortal loves
or else correct your laughter
you who dream of sailing with me...

His humanistic concerns bind him to his people with an ever tightening grip thus:

I have known every drunkenness
they will see me dying laugh a thousand deaths
in splitting my cold belly
with the warm air of little pink dawns
then poison your laughter
and join my voyage
my nailed fetiches
will be like bindweed
on the river
born from my throat...

It is relevant to quote Gerald Moore's comment that

. . .the poet’s [Tchicaya's humanisitic] preoccupations begin to take on a more representative character; he is both literally and imaginatively closer to the experience of his people....

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565 Ibid., pp.7-8.
566 Gerald Moore, "The Uprooted Tree," p.162.
The more Tchicaya comes closer to identifying himself with his people, the more he is troubled at heart over the developments there. The political upheavals, as he says, try "to strip me in the epitome of my passion...." Clive Wake observes:

The young poet [Tchicaya] evokes the emotional impact made on him by the realization that the human condition, and in particular that of the black man, condemns him to the role of victim, not hero....

Patrice Lumumba's assassination leaves Tchicaya terribly shaken.* His anxiety over the future of Congo, the survival of democracy which was won at great cost and the humanistic ideals that Lumumba stood for gives way to apprehension. He wonders:

How could I rejoice
to be born all of flesh
which is no coat of mail
nor this wind which raps at every door one opens
on the heart beating sky-blue sail-white blood-red?...

Watching as he does from a distance in Paris, Tchicaya moans over the tragic events in Congo. As Dathorne says:

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* This bears repetition.
Since he [Tchicaya] cannot be there physically to provide whatever material help is needed, he can only sympathize and lose himself in those melodies from Kinshasa which obsess his mind... 570

Tchicaya realizes the humanistic aspect of how sympathy in turn rebounds on the sympathizer and says: "Who is worthy of love is worthy of slow death." 571

Tchicaya is uneasy at heart that he is away from the scene of suffering. His sense of being away adds to his misery. At the same time, by his passionate mental presence in the suffering Congo from afar he partakes of their suffering caused by race-riots and European imperialism. Thus Tchicaya, on the level of his humanistic concerns, suffers double suffering; one caused by his inner feeling of exasperation and the other external. He confesses: "I fly from their panic and die of their misery." 572

It is in place to recall Senghor's assertion:

He [Tchicaya] assumes the mingled hope and despair of the negro, the epical suffering,

572 Ibid., p.52.
the passion, in the etymological sense of the word....

Senghor's statement is made valid in the light of Tchicaya's own reaction to the bloodshed and strife in Congo. While Tchicaya admonishes his country men to be wary of delusions, he exhorts them to remember the sacrifices made by dedicated compatriots like Lumumba which have gone into the making of the nation. His humanistic concerns hinge on the need for self-preservation and the sacrifices it entails thus:

Keep moving time is waiting to seduce us
learn from this that the oil in your lamp
is really my blood brimming up
and that, if it overflows, you mustn't light your lamp
We must have a dark corner somewhere
for our ancient orisons [My Emphasis]....

Tchicaya is given to dark ruminations on the prospects of his country's future to remain united. It fills him with intense emotional involvement and he utters his humanistic concern thus:

You are falling into the trap
Go on! I will give you my head
against your lingering fear of water

Senghor, Quoted in Gerald Moore's "Surrealism and Negritude in the Poetry of Tchikaya U Tam'si," p.100.

or else these erupting pestilences
of my heart
to buckle your loins against my passion....

Tchicaya makes common cause with his fellow country men. He bears their afflictions. He casts his lot with that of his people and shares with them their fate of suffering, misery and restlessness. He says:

Thus following the path of this river to the sea
to mingle with the salty current my candour allotting from sea to source the tidemark at the whim of a congolesian will and then giving all the water-hyacinth to toil for mercy putting fresh cresses on the neuralgic joints not tattoos on the cheeks of Congolese so that seeing them beautiful each may dance with sadness....

Tchicaya mingles with the salty current of his country men's life flow which is full of toil and fruitless labour and tastes their lives of poverty and disease. There are no more tattoos which are a sign of celebration. But they are afflicted with a neuralgic condition that they suffer both physical and mental numbness.

Tchicaya has lived a lifetime of service to others that his very being is consumed with passion and that his

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575 Tchicaya, "Viaticum," in S P, p.64.
576 Ibid., p.71.
destiny is being shaped by others. Tchicaya's humanistic outburst runs as follows:

I know from others the alpha and omega of my flesh as blazing as my flesh against that of my loved ones

Revolutions feed on human flesh - who forbids me to make flesh with the flesh of my neighbour --

These lines on my hand are the forerunning signs of our final sadness and the oil in your lamp is also my blood brimming up And this head which smells of water-hyacinth is my head made round by others'...

Tchicaya's two collections of poems, Epitome (1962) and The Belly (1964), were published so closely on the heels of the Congo violence of 1960's that these poems show a great deal of its impact on the poet. The disastrous events must have been fresh in his mind. That is why the poems reveal a grim reality and an aggrieved heart. Some of his poems are full of his passionate incoherence at bloodshed. He relates his own confusion of thought thus:

...Keep hold of radio, radio, above all the telephone ... No, I am not against.... There is always a woman under that angle whom a wave will lift to climax ... this brings the seeming disorder in my brain! Admired by the navel, everything there can be attested. So look at my hands....

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Tchicaya's humanistic concerns take on a new dimension as he overlooks his own suffering and focuses his attention on the suffering of others. Clive Wake makes a pointed reference thus:

...whereas he [Tchicaya] has so far tended to reflect mostly on the pain caused to himself by the wearing of the poet's crown of thorns, he will instead now concentrate on the pain felt by others....

Another interesting aspect of Tchicaya's humanistic enthusiasm is that, it is basically as a human being that he is concerned about others and not as Blacks. Other considerations of their racial or national proclivity are only secondary. Clive wake argues that Tchicaya arrives at his "awareness of himself as a blackman via his awareness of himself as a human being first and foremost...."

Tchicaya feels that his compassion for the suffering people stems from an all-consuming love that defies the physical limitations imposed on it by the flesh. Neither the physical world nor his body can restrict it and its sway is over the whole of humanity. He says:

My soul is a thorn
in my body...
I kill what lives by the flesh
now your body is of gold and shadow

Do not seek my soul
neither the sea nor my body
contains it

go and look elsewhere
elsewhere the world gapes at its vomit
see I am drunk with some new love
I have lost my own forearms
one can read here that
by listening to the song
of certain waters
we learn the rhythm
of their beating hearts... 581

Tchicaya's human love is the pivot of his whole being. He
is prepared to sacrifice anything for the sake of love
thus:

For what love
and at what a price
I die at every song of love!... 582

Tchicaya is thus full of loving kindness for men all over
the world. Whoever is oppressed, wherever he may be,
appears to the humanistic consideration. He is sorry for
the plight of the under dog and creates a trans-world
brotherhood:

What do you know of New Bell
At Durban two thousand women
at Pretoria two thousand women

at Kin also two thousand women
at Antisirabe two thousand women
What do you know of Harlem...\textsuperscript{583}

Further, Tchicaya adds in "Madness" thus:

> ordain my human flesh
> I am the brother of man
> join me
> where the river flows...\textsuperscript{584}

Gerald Moore affirms that "the poet's physical identification of himself with all the currents of existence acquires an almost cosmic magnitude."\textsuperscript{585} Tchicaya's humanism thus reveals a universal human understanding as it covers the whole gamut of human experience of struggle, suffering, misery, pain and death.

There is an undercurrent of humanism throughout Tchicaya's writings. Subdued and mild as it is, it imparts to his poetry a richness and freshness which make his poems relevant even today.

\textsuperscript{583} Tchicaya, "The Scorer," in \textit{S P}, p.76.

\textsuperscript{584} Tchicaya, "Madness," in \textit{Brush Fire}, p.8.

\textsuperscript{585} Gerald Moore, "Introduction," to \textit{S P}, p.XVI.
It is interesting to note that both McKay and Tchicaya U Tam'si show remarkable similarity in being humanistically concerned about their people. Love is the common bond that aligns both McKay and Tchicaya with their people. Firmly grounded on the rock-basis of their love the two artists feel sorry for their country men's deprivation and misery.

Both McKay and Tchicaya do not merely clamour for kindness and sympathy with high sounding words. Rather they reveal their sympathy in deeds of kindness. McKay as a constable goes out of the way to help Black prisoners. Tchicaya also risks his life and stays in Congo during the turbulent period. Thus the artists are ready to partake of their people's sufferings, both physical and mental.

The two artists in unison voice their concern over the exploitation of their country men. At the same time, it is primarily as human beings that they react to their people's sufferings. Colour consideration is only secondary to human consideration.

Another striking similarity is that both McKay and Tchicaya advocate the principle of human oneness and thus universalize their humanistic concerns.
Apart from these apparent parallelisms, the two artists show marked differences as well. While McKay lives in America which is the place where the objects of his concern also lives, Tchicaya lives in France spatially separated from his suffering people in Congo.

McKay is struck by the immediacy and proximity of the offence done on his people. But Tchicaya gets only a second hand knowledge of the offence. McKay sees the sufferer now and then just across the street and through the window. Tchicaya only hears about the sufferer. Thus, while McKay's reaction is direct and raw, Tchicaya's reaction is much more prolonged and accentuated by the absence of any consoling factor.

McKay's humanistic concern is occasioned by colour discrimination and social injustice prevalent in the American society, whereas Tchicaya's concern is not so much on colour as it is on the bloodshed and violence in Congo. McKay, being a much travelled man, is concerned about the status of the Blacks everywhere. But Tchicaya is concerned about the Blacks in their African context. He does not at all even speak about the Blacks who are in France, apart from the broader context of their universal significance as man.
While McKay laments also over the moral degradation of his people as is seen from the "Harlem Shadows," Tchicaya is concerned only about the material deprivation of his people. Tchicaya often embarks upon self-accusation on his inaction* and reveals a sense of guilt. But McKay, on the other hand, gets even with his hecklers.

Thus it is seen how McKay and Tchicaya subject the humanistic concerns to imaginative poetic treatment. In fact as stated elsewhere it is the universals and their humanistic concerns that lend dignity, charm, strength and lasting quality to their poetry.

* This bears repetition.