



Negritude And Reverse Racism In The Works Of Leopold Senghor

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Abstract

Africa has been colonized in large scale by three major powers - France, Britain and Portugal. The aftermath of colonization, especially by France in Senegal of Africa has produced a famous postcolonial writer- Leopold Sedar Senghor, one of the fathers of the idea of Negritude has authorized many works like chant d'ombre, Nocturne and many books and occupies a unique place in African literature. Senghor focused his writings on expressing the assimilation strategy behind French colonization. In this context, this paper attempts to show how the idea of Negritude and Reverse Racism was used in his selected works and how he glorifies African Literature.

An Introduction on Africa and Leopold Senghor

African continent is the world's second largest in area and population. African continent has fifty-one countries with 645 million population. The African population is rich in oral tradition with nearly 800-1000 languages spoken by different ethnic groups. The colonization in Africa began with the entry of Portugal in 19th century and then by different colonial powers such as Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Belgium and Spain. In the year 1960, Africa became independent (i.e.) colonization ended. The end of colonization gave birth to postcolonial writers like Leopold Sedar Senghor, Wole Soyinka and many.

One of the popular postcolonial writers from the African country Senegal is former president of Senegal Leopold Sedar Senghor. Senghor born in Senegal and became a great poet, politician, writer and sociologist. Senghor is famous for his concept of Negritude and is the author of several collection of poetry including "Chants d' Ombre" (1945) and "Nocturnes" (1961). His non-fiction works include numerous volumes on politics, philosophy, sociology and linguistics. Senghor is the first African to join in "Academie franchaise" (French academy), was awarded honorary doctorates from 37 universities, in addition to many other literary honors.

Understanding Negritude and Reverse Racism

The word Negritude comes from the French word “Negre” which means Negro or black and “tude” which means the State or condition of, so Negro+i+tude became Negritude. Aime Cesaire coined and first used the word Negritude in his poem “Notebook of a Return to My Native Land” in 1939. Though Cesaire coined the word Negritude two other writers too share the ownership of this concept, they are Leopold Sedar Senghor and Leon Damas. These three writers, the Francophone black intellectuals belong to different French colonies of Africa and Caribbean Island were united together by their studies in Paris; Where they experienced the derogatory views of Black people in writing poetry and essays by French writers. The three Francophone intellectuals saw that their own race is being depicted by the white-French writers in derogatory and bad perceptions. These incidents made these three intellectuals to bring in a new personality for black people (Negro) called “African Personality” which is the direct derivative for the idea of “Negritude”. Although the three fathers had different perceptions about Negritude but their aim is to glorify African Literature.

The general characteristics of the idea of Negritude is the complete rejection of western domination and ideas with denunciation of Europe's lack of Humanity caused due to colonization, acceptance of pride in being black, the valour of African history, traditions and beliefs, very realistic literary style and Marxist ideas. So, finally Negritude can be defined as the self-affirmation of African people, giving Africans a self-identity to live with respect to their cultures, language and nationality and pride as Africans. Negritude has something to do with reverse racism or not? Is a big criticism for Leopold Senghor by several critics like Jean Paul Sartre. As the concepts of Reverse Racism and Negritude are tangled somewhere in their meaning Senghor found himself entangled. These two terms remain linked until today, where the term race makes this concept of Negritude biased and politicized. So, Reverse Racism can be defined as a discrimination against the dominant racial group in a society (i.e.) in Africa the dominant black people's discrimination against the invading white people. Although these two concepts are tangled, Negritude achieves its target of glorifying Africa. Thereunto, the term Negritude glorifies Africa in a benevolent manner, but when the term Negritude is understood with the term Reverse Racism it becomes malevolent term creating chaos and problems for African intellectuals.

Senghor's Idea of Negritude

Senghor's idea of Negritude is clearly stated by Senghor that: “Negritude ... is never racism or self-negation. Yet it is not just affirmation; but it is rooting oneself in oneself and self-conformation: confirmation of one's being. It is more or less than some English speaking Africans have called it as African Personality”. The main objective for Negritude is defined by Senghor as “the sum total of values-economic and political, intellectual and moral, artistic and social not only of the people of black Africa but also the minorities of black people in America and Asia. According to Senghor the subjectivities of Negritude meant to assume the values of Black civilization, to realize and nurture them. The person who embodied this subjective quality is called as Nouveau Negre which means New Negro. To be authentically black meant as “Pride in his race, possession of heritage, culture and identity”. ”The refusal of the other, the refusal to be assimilated, to love oneself as the other” are the Senghor's idea of Negritude.

Senghor's idea of Negritude in his poems to glorify Africa

In his poem “Nuit de sine” senghor exemplifies “Night”, which is a key symbol of African identity and a clear reference to the idea of Negritude. “It is the hour of star's, of Night that dream's”. Senghor says Night as the perfect time for meditating upon ancestors; Night is a time for peace with good breeze. Senghor

brings in the poem with images of stars, moon "See the tired moon comes down her bed on the slack sea". Senghor makes effective choice of words to relate his poem on his nostalgic love for his homeland, "My head on your bosom warm like a dang smoking from the fire" in this line Senghor uses the word "dang" which relates to his childhood, ancestral ethnic group where he belongs. He also says about the name of his ancestor's village in Guinea called "Elissa" in the poem "To the voice of the ancients of Elissa. Exiled like us". Senghor's glorification of the African landscape and the frequent usage of symbols of "Night", show this Francophone Black intellectual's love for his native land Africa. . In another poem titled, "Black Woman" acts as a perfect Identity to Senghor's idea of Negritude. Likewise, in the poem *Black Woman* translated from French as *femme nue, femme noire* which translates as Black and Black woman.

Senghor with the help of first-person narration directly addresses the black woman. Senghor in this poem compares black woman to Promised Land, lover, goddess and the sun. Senghor praises the black woman for her physical beauty. He compares her flesh to a ripened fruit. Her black skin is as smooth as an oiled skin, adorned with heavenly ornaments. Senghor through this poem challenges the western romantic poems which glorified white woman and also glorifies the feminine beauty of the black skin. Senghor known to the African literary world as a father of Negritude is seen clearly glorifying the blackness in this poem. Thereby through this poem Senghor shows the beauty of black woman which is no different from the beauty of a white woman. Senghor brings out the beauty of the blackness of the African woman's skin which breaks the stereotype that only white skin signified beauty. By comparing her to the Promised Land he highlights the importance the culture of the black woman's land. If her physical beauty with its unique features is praised, the land which she lives in with its unique culture is also praise-worthy.

Although Senghor's concept of Negritude is an effective tool in glorifying Africa, he tries to make a bond between the colonized and colonizer. He highlights the Africans craving to live in harmony with the colonizers. He tries to show that the Africans are craving to live in harmony with the colonizers. Especially in his poem "In Memoriam" Senghor brings in the concept of universal brotherhood stating that blacks have extreme sensitivity to integrate with whites but the whites deny mingling. The above statement may highlight reverse racism but on the other side it is the longing of the African people to live harmoniously with white people.

Conclusion

The terms Negritude and Reverse Racism is found to be bound in the lives of African people. These concepts serve as a pole star (like a pole star which showed the way to the scholars to see the Infant Jesus) for African scholars in reaching their target of attaining self- identity and in sustaining the culture and literature of Africans. Especially, the clash between Leopold Senghor's idea of Negritude and Anti-racist racism by Jean Paul Sartre paved way for a clear view that , Negritude is a movement for sustaining the African Culture , Tradition and Language by which Africans attain individuality and an African Personality, not by race . Negritude makes African to be oneself and celebrate their identity and true self.

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