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Black Feminism – Ain't I A Woman by Sojourner Truth

Abstract

Literature has traditionally been applied to those imaginative works of poetry and prose distinguished by the intention of their authors and perceived aesthetic excellence of their execution. Literature may be classified according to a variety of systems including language national origin, historical period, genre, and subject matter. The eleventh edition of Merriam Webster's collegiate Dictionary considers literature to be "Writing" having excellence of form of expression and expressing ideas of permanent or universal interest. "Ain't I A Woman" was a speech delivered by Sojourner Truth in 1857 in women's convention, Akron, Ohio. This paper analysis the speech of Sojourner Truth and analysis the main points as theme, symbol, characters and imagery aspects. This speech was concluded with the sufferings of Negroes of the South and the women at the North.

Keywords: Slavery, Sufferings.

Introduction

Literature is derived from the Latin word "Littera", it means letter or handwriting. It

was used in spoken as well as written form. After the invention of Printing machine (1439) the hand written form changed into printed form. It was given a vast development in the field of literature such as drama, poetry, and prose. Literature classified in to two major forms such as fiction or non-fiction, in simple it is poetry or prose.

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Sojourner Truth was an Afro-American writer. African-American literature is the body of literature produced in the United States by writers of American Descent. It begins with the works of Phillis Wheatly. The African American literature mainly focuses about slavery. The writers of African American got the highest awards especially the Nobel Prize to Toni Morrison. The themes and issues focused the cultural racism, slavery and social imbalance against the white and Negro. Their writings also incorporate such as spirituals, sermons, gospel music, blues or rap.

Sojourner Truth was born as a slave in Hurley in New York in 1797. Her original name was Isabella Baumfree. At the time of her birth slavery was permitted only in New York, New Jersey and Northern States of America. The name Sojourner Truth signifies her role as a walking traveller telling about the slavery. She was the first black woman to become directly involved in the women's suffrage movement. The name reflected her new freedom religious devotion and her acceptance of the religious faith was a source of a great solace. "She said that Jesus loved her Jesus would loved her always".

Dalmas A. Taylor and Geneva Smitherman Donaldson (1989), discusses about the history associate with black women's struggle against multi culture and heritage. They also explores the critical dimensions of black women's contemporary struggles. Avtar Brah and Ann phoenix (2004) discuss the nineteenth century contestation among feminists involved in anti- slavery struggles and Champaign for women's suffrage.

Analysis

Sojourner Truth, an African American woman delivered a moving speech at Women's convention in Akron, Ohio in 1851. The speech was noted for its emotional and powerful deliverance. This speech was a self-confession with the use of biblical reference to provoke the souls of the Negro's in rebellion for their rights and freedom. The personal experience connects the speaker's mind with the audience which helps them to understand and to feel the importance of the freedom. Truth was a victim of discrimination and faced problems for being a black woman.

Truth wants other women to raise up against the discrimination and the injustice the come across, and for treating them low in comparison with men. She points out a man who mouths women need to be helped into carriage, lifted over the bridges and to have the best place everywhere. She bluntly replies that no one had performed the courtesies to her. She said she had never experienced any of the civility in her life. By depicting the injustice of her own life she wants others to realize the injustices in their own life. She plays trick on the emotions of her audience to have their attention. Sojourner's repetition of the rhetorical question, Ain't I a woman? Stir up the emotion of the women in the audience, so that they would crave for the freedom from discrimination.

Truth shows her arms to the audience and draws a picture that she is equal to men by possessing both physical strength and hardworking ability. She rhythmically continuous to

ask the rhetorical question, and “Ain’t I a woman”, which makes her feel she is capable of doing what all the men do. She settles the picture of grief and hardship she faced as a black woman and slave. By using biblical reference Sojourner addresses her audience as “children”. By calling them children she creates a scenario where all the men and women are equal in the sight of God, who created them on his likeness and image. She foreshadows her speech completely focusing on the equality and against the gender division. Truth refers the Negroes of the south and the women of the north are seeking their rights which are the freedom and equality.

“If the first woman God ever made was strong enough to turn the world upside down all alone, these women together ought to be able to turn it back, and get it right side up again!” by referencing the strength of the first woman Eve, she say that even now they can make the changes in world if they work for it. Sojourner effectively preaches the powerful message on the hypocrisy, unjust, and moral inaccuracy of gender and race discrimination to her audience and leaves the stage saying she got nothing to say anymore.

Theme:

PHYSICAL STRENGTH OF WOMEN TO MEN-Women do as much as men when their life is completely dependent on men. Truth is as strong as men slave who works in the field.

RHETORICAL QUESTIONS-The overriding theme of the speech is the metaphorical question that is “Ain’t I a Woman”. The question invokes the spirit of the women to fight against the gender division.

Symbol

SOJOURNER TRUTH-NAME AS A SYMBOL-Truth’s name has a symbol in itself.

The name 'Sojourner Truth' means the 'owner of the truth'.

HAWK BIRD-The hawk is a bird of prey, capable of preying on weaker creatures.

Hawk is the man who tries to prey on the women who fight their equal treatment.

FEMALE STRENGTH-Sojourner Truth refers to the physical strength of women. The physical strength is also a reference to the spiritual and mental strength of women.

Imagery

EQUAL RIGHTS FOR EQUAL LABOUR-Truth works in par of men but she is underestimated for being a women. "I have plowed and raped and husked and chopped and mowed", says Truth that she need equal rights that men get for their work.

INTELLECTUAL CAPACITIVE- Women has a pint and men has quart of intellectual capability. Women's brain is a pint which cannot fit too much knowledge as men, but she questions, why not allow the pint to be filled to the brim?

Conclusion

When she comes to the end of her speech a black man protest her saying they cannot give equal rights to women because Christ is not a woman. She questions against him that where did the Christ come from? From God and a woman. She concludes that only men has no part in Christ arrival to earth and say women are equal to men because woman has the power to turn the world upright down. But all women wanted was no violence but freedom and equal rights.

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