Abstract

This paper analyses the writings of two African-American women writers Harriet Jacobs and Adrienne Kennedy. It argues that their works challenge patriarchy and contemporary Anglo-American feminist discourses. It uses as its critical framework postcolonial theories of “othering” as enunciated by critics like Said and Spivak, to demonstrate the way in which Jacobs and Kennedy manipulate standard American English, to highlight the linguistic power of African-American women’s writings.

Keywords: feminism, othering, otherness, slavery, language

Introduction

African American women’s writings are a product of a successful struggle against hegemonic value systems perpetuated by a dominant imperio-political culture. Apart from its deep creativity, the writings are also cast in a deliberately defiant mode since these literary works are often interesting sites of resistance against epistemic enslavement. Such form of creative confrontation is evident in women’s writings from the earliest slave narratives to the contemporary performances on the stage.

This paper proceeds to analyze Black women’s linguistic inventiveness, their deliberate subversion of standard American English and the rooted complexities in two seemingly diverse texts- Harriet Jacob’s slave narrative Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl (1861) and a play by Adrienne Kennedy entitled A Lesson in Dead Language (1968). It examines the linguistic modes of resistance that these works interestingly offer and to perceive these texts as creative answers to the hegemonic strategy of “othering” that attempts to silence non-white female creativity. Written in apparently varied genres, the aim of both Jacobs and Kennedy is to linguistically experiment and counter the dominant culture’s tactic of “othering” to vindicate their creative selves.

The Concept of ‘Othering’ and ‘Otherness’

Before moving to analyze the selected texts, it would be rather appropriate for us to explore this practice of “othering” at a deeper level. “Othering” and “otherness” are processes that remain intensely debated in contemporary postcolonial, cultural, feminist and subaltern studies which seriously discuss how the powerless and the non-white groups are grossly misrepresented by the
white supremacist discourses for their imperial aggrandizement. Basically, the term “other” is borrowed from continental philosophy where it is construed as a binary of “self.” Philosophically speaking, Hegel was among the first thinkers to have used the term “other” as a vital aspect of one’s self-consciousness, since he contends that each aspect of the consciousness pursues the death of the other. The term involves the demise of an earlier consciousness in the place of a new one, while also entailing deep chasm between the “self” and the “other” that is ultimately resolved only with the help of the famous master-slave dialectic.\footnote{1}

An existentialist dimension to the concept of “othering” was further added by Sartre who in his *Being and Nothingness* (1943), pronounces an altered perception of the world on the appearance of another person. But Sartre does not perceive the process as being radical or life-threatening. De Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1949) infers to a master-slave dialectic in the relationship between a man and a woman. The “other” is thus always a woman who is defined as being opposite to a man. Post-colonial critics like Edward Said and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak locate the process in a post-colonial imperialist subaltern praxis and also attempt to provide alternate historical insights of the larger imperialist discourse. Said’s views are contained in his *Orientalism* (1978) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1994) where the “orient” is always Europe’s “other” and its binary opposite. The “othered” are thereby relegated to objects of observation, reduced to a sub-human status and associated with non-activeness, non-autonomy and non-sovereign selves. Spivak’s works also concede on the point of the “epistemic violence” inflicted upon the colonized nations\footnote{2}.

These postcolonial, imperial axioms of othering are crucial for our understanding of the African American women’s predicament since these women face major challenges on account of their distinctiveness. The only race which was brought to the United States by force, their status in a largely white nation is an interesting source of enigma. Transplanted in the First world, their positions are largely akin to that of the Third world colonized women who have been othered by the dominant powers. Writing from liminal positions, they are confronted with a unique perplexity of quite naming their peculiar agonies. Spivak’s works like *Can the Subaltern Speak* and *French Feminism in an International Fame* critiques the hegemonic feminist models that have so dominated the world literary scenario. The latter essay is significantly concerned with the issue of naming the concerns of the “othered” women. The problem of naming is crucial to African American women’s studies since it involves an innate identification of hitherto unrecognized issues which have surfaced as an aftermath of a seamless struggle. Succinctly speaking, the African American women’s positions are closer to the postcolonial, Third world “othered” women as pronounced by Spivak.

![Image]

There is a simultaneous other focus: not merely who I am, but who is the other woman? How am I naming her?... how does she name herself in her own narratives? How does she find meaning in her own experiences, and how does she understand the role of language in her efforts to name these experiences? (Spivak, 1981: 150).

Although Spivak only has in mind Indian women and the other women of the Third World, the statement is clearly applicable to African-American women also who are in a peculiar state of limbo on account of their peripheral existence in an imperialistic culture. The women needed to create a language to name their “selves” in their creative works. For instance, the poem “Slave
Mother” by Ellen Watkins Harper is one of the most powerful and short discourses on slavery. What Brent explains in her entire full length autobiography is succinctly encapsulated by her in a single page. The soul of the poem lies in the helplessness of an agonized maternal figure best delineated in a moving language thus:

He is not hers, although she bore
For him a mother’s pains
He is not hers, although her blood
Is coursing through his veins.

He is not hers, for cruel hands
May rudely tear her apart
The only wreath of household love
That binds her breaking heart.

One of the most moving discourses against slavery, the poem attains profounder meaning in the concluding lines:

Their lives a streamlet blent in one
Oh Father! must they part?

*Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* and *A Lesson in Dead Language*

This paper analyses two texts by African-American women writers: *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) by Harriet Jacobs and a play by Adrienne Kennedy entitled *A Lesson in Dead Language* (1968). Separated by more than a century, the former is a private genre, an autobiography, which chronicles the life struggle of a woman who fought her way to freedom. It is a kind of a feminist writing which seeks to represent the conditions under which African-American women lived during slavery. As a pioneering prose text, it had to wade through linguistic and literary “othered” spaces from which they attempted to talk back to the dominant culture. *A Lesson in Dead Language* (1968) by Adrienne Kennedy is a public genre. It is a play aimed at a performance before a live audience. The play is deeply concerned with the process of education of young African American women, which Kennedy seems to suggest needs to be in consonance with their ethno-specific experiences. Most importantly, this particular play focuses on the inadequacy of the English tongue to delineate the particular racio-sexual experiences that the African American women in particular face. In many ways Kennedy's dramatic text could be perceived as a historical and logical corollary of Jacob's autobiography. Jacob's autobiography narrates in a linear mode, the condition of African American women grovelling under the horrendous system of slavery, with little literary and creative spaces through which they could express the multiple rapes, forced motherhood and coerced sexual liaisons in an explicit style, Kennedy's plays in fact deftly encapsulate the racial horrors meted out to Black women in America and the historicity of the legitimised rape which has almost annulled their psyche and their linguistic capacities in a deft and condensed dramatic style. As a contrast to Jacobs, Kennedy follows a circular style. These two outwardly dissimilar mediums of creativity in fact vindicate the linguistic spaces of African American women’s writings.

As stated above, the earliest imprints of the power of African American women’s language is evident in their slave narratives. A pioneering, yet powerful discourse produced during the
tumultuous times of slavery, *Incidents* is an early attempt by an African-American woman writer to both define the horrendous system of slavery and to also look back at the overriding culture with its linguistic assertiveness. The very act of writing was valorizing for the African American women given the times at which Harriet Jacobs penned the narrative. It is an act of epistemic vindication given the fact that she penned the incredible narrative only at irregular intervals whenever she could take some time off from her domestic drudgeries.³ It is indeed a part of the larger discourse of abolition literature with the added gendered dimension. As the protagonist Linda Brent concisely expresses:

> Slavery is terrible for men; but it is far more terrible for women. 
> Superadded to the burden common to all, they have wrongs, sufferings and modifications peculiarly their own (Jacobs, 1861).

The gendered facet of slavery is effectively recounted in a language of her own. Jacob’s language depicts the peculiar woes of a slave woman like forced sexual coercion, rape, paranoid fugitiveness, fear of discovery, paralyzed life in the attic, flight towards freedom, maternity, protection of children etc. Jacob’s discourse is both aimed at exciting sympathy, and at consciousness raising, especially amongst the women of the North regarding the dehumanizing dimensions of slavery and its impact on the southern slave women. The powerful discourse is not an individual voice of protest, but a collective voice aimed at the elimination of slavery:

> I want to add my testimony to that of abler pens to convince the people of the free states what slavery really is. Only by experience can anyone realize how deep, dark and foul is that pit of abomination (Jacobs: 1861)

Slave narratives thus form an important early milestone in the journey of African-American women’s literary discourse, since it simultaneously enacts the rhetorical role of claiming their selves with their symbolic language, resounding with a liberatory aura that orders their otherwise chaotic existence. Their discourse then validates their psycho-linguistic terrains since as Morrison says that Harriet Jacobs had “nothing to fall back upon”: “not maleness, not whiteness, not anything, And out of the profound desolation of her reality, the Black female may have invented herself”. Slave narratives like *The History of Mary Prince-A West Indian Slave* (1831), *Memoir of Old Elizabeth-A Colored Woman* (1863), *The Story of Mattie Jackson* (1866) or that of Harriet Jacobs form a unique landmark in the annals of African-American writing since the language and style not merely asserted their womanhood, but also authenticated their aesthetic existence.

A better understanding of Harriet Jacob’s work emerges when her work is compared with the 1845 male slave narrative of Fredrick Douglass. Douglass’s narrative was an international bestseller. A reviewer of a Massachusetts newspaper compared him to Daniel Defoe and called it “the most important book the American press had ever issued” (Stauffer, 2007: 204). Cast in the larger discourse of transnational abolitionism, the “I” in Douglas, opines Stauffer is cast in the mould of an “Emersonian self” holding within him a power to embrace an “indwelling god who is present within the self and the world” (Fisch, 2007: 205). The text achieves an “ekphrasis” (Stauffer, 2007: 205) that triggers every reader towards abolitionism. But Douglass’s narrative presents only a limited picture of slavery. It does not deal with how the other half of his people suffered under the cruel system. The gyno-critical subtext of slavery was not represented until
the female slave narratives emerged. The gap of 16 years that exists between the narrative of Fredrick Douglas and that of Harriet Jacobs explains the constricted linguistic and intellectual freedom available to black women since both of them were abolitionists. Jacob’s tale for the first time chartered a specialized voice to highlight the gender-specific complexities deeply embedded within the cruel system of slavery. In a way it is both a compliment and a counter-discourse to patriarchy. In fact it is one of the most compelling narratives of the conventions of African American womanhood by a black woman author before emancipation.

Incidents remarkably reflect two modes of linguistic resistance: the contest of spaces between the oral and the written dialects in the text and the presence of an assimilative tendency known as La Mestiza. Basically, Incidents tests the self-inventiveness of Jacobs where she struggles to fuse an inherited oral tradition with a literary tradition of her self-education. Incidents is therefore transformed into a site for contending spaces where the oral and the written registers war for legitimate spaces. The simultaneous presence of these twin registers in the narrative, amalgamates the seemingly contradictory traditions and communicates a creative vision that forms an interesting pattern. Harryette Mullen makes an interesting comment on this aspect of Incidents:

Their texts, by focusing on a continuum of resistance to oppression available to the illiterate as well as the literate, tend to stress orality as a presence over illiteracy as an absence (Mullen, 1992: 255).

The dominant presence of the oral dialect is in consonance with African American women’s slave experience and not that of a dominant American society. The literal address, direct conversation and informal speech are consistent with their lives in the plantation. In fact, Jacob’s text presents a resilient pattern occupying both the oral and written words/worlds into it. The Tejana feminist, Gloria Anzuldua, refers to a process of La mestiza which is actually a consciousness of the borderlands wherein the value systems of one group are transferred on another:

...cradled in one culture, sandwiched between two cultures, straddling all three cultures and their value systems, la mestiza undergoes a struggle of borders, an inner war... (Anzulda, 1987: 78).

Similarly, Jacob’s text straddles multiple linguistic registers, committing acts of linguistic border-crossings that is aimed at freedom from narrow linguistic confines to effectively combat philological hegemonies that attempt to silence them. It provides a critical consciousness that helps the reader to unearth the deepest maneuverings of patriarchal power that is almost ubiquitous in the literary domain. The language forcefully questions the fundamental structures of male-controlled power play and thus disseminates an alternative feminist model that is non-eurocentric, non-white and does not covertly reproduce the imperialist axioms.

From an intensely personal domain of creativity like the autobiography, which is linear, presenting little textual complexities, I now turn to interrogate a more public genre, the drama. Requiring the architectonics of the theatrical space, Kennedy’s drama is performative, complex, condensed, intense and non-linear. A poet of the American theatre, Adrienne Kennedy is a part of the lineage going back to O’Neill, Williams, Sheppard, Baraka, Bullins and the like. Her plays
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make a steep departure from the realism of Hansberry or the protest tone of Baraka and Bullins. Kennedy’s theatre is aimed at shredding layers of the troubled consciousness of her protagonists in an intense, non-linear, dramatic space that reverberates in the spectator’s consciousness long after he/she has witnessed the plays. As a postmodern poet of the American theatre, her characters are located in multiple selves, metamorphosing their African-American states. Philip C. Kolin (2005) describes her works as being “intense jabs to the psyche.” Kennedy’s plays are largely autobiographical. If Jacob has produced a single, prose, linear autobiography, Kennedy’s oeuvre of plays is constant enactments and re-enactments of her autobiographical core since she presents her intense personal life in a concentrated dramatic medium. If Jacobs presents a holistic, single self in her work, Kennedy’s plays depict fractured identities, postmodern plural selves devoid of any intention to attain wholeness. To forge such an intense personal psyche onto the stage, Kennedy uses a language that is forcefully her own. In a complex way, she seems to agree with Ntozake Shange:

We have to murder the King’s English before it murders us [. . .] because that particular language can’t speak for us [. . .] language determines how we perceive ourselves and unless women and people of color take charge of language, we are nothing (Lester, 1995: 271).

Her use of English is different from that of Baraka, Bullins or Sanchez who impart a raw intensity to their dramatic discourse. It is not also in terms of abandoning capitals and contraction of auxiliary verbs as in Shange or Ishamael Reed. In fact, England and the English language interact with her in a strange way. Her autobiography, *People Who Led to My Plays* reveals both her fascination for England and her acute realization of her place as a Black woman in a white patriarchal English world. English literary figures like Chaucer and Shakespeare emerge as tyrannical characters in her play *The Owl Answers* who thwart the creativity of the Black woman who continues to love them though. In fact, her short and powerful play *A Lesson in Dead language* (1964) examines the outmoded educational system that fails to validate the epistemic existence of African American women in a land of promise.

Kennedy’s *Lesson* takes place in not an ordinary classroom, but in an intense subterranean world, where the minds of seven African American adolescent girls are indoctrinated with irrelevant Latin lessons, while their bodies undergo a sexual rite from adolescence to womanhood. Caught in a profound gyno-psychological terror, they are unable to comprehend the language as also their bodies. Kennedy skillfully uses an evocative form of English to describe the locale. It is no mere accident that she devotes a half-page description for a three page play. The classroom is “bright”, the teacher a “great white dog”, the seven adolescent girls wear “white organdy dresses” and they write on “imaginary tablets”. The ironic presence of statues of religious figures like Jesus, Joseph, Mary and Two Wise Men is significant, since these religious figures stand as a mute witness to the horrific happenings on the stage. The classroom depicted is a classroom of the mind which may be different from Kennedy’s Cleveland education, but it could be closer to her experiences at Ohio as depicted in *Ohio State Murders*.

Kennedy’s language moves in a state of intense concentricity, accompanied by forceful repetition. The play’s movement is circular, with an incantatory repetitive style. The key to the play is her repetition of three words and phrases to heighten the effectiveness of the dominant
emotion of the play so as to make the audience also partake of this painful intensity. There are three stylistic traits evident in the play.

Firstly, she frequently alludes to the terms “blood” and “bleed.” Blood is the central image of the play. Kennedy uses the words “blood” and “bleed” synonymously with an overwhelming power that it occurs 37 times in the short play of three pages. Her symbolic use of blood is similar to that of Lorca’s Blood Wedding. In People, she mentions Lorca as having a strong influence on her dramatic consciousness. Blood is a persistently loaded metaphor in Lorca’s plays. While it signifies revenge in Blood Wedding, it symbolizes life and birth in his Yerma. Kennedy loads it with religio-sexual connotations. Blood symbolizes the crucifixion of the race, especially the African American women whose lives see little resurrection in Kennedy’s fragmented world. The statues of Jesus, Joseph, Mary and the Two Wise men are therefore an ironic presence since these patriarchal white colonizer’s religious icons stand as mute witnesses to the multiple forms of violence inflicted on their bodies and psyche. Education does not empower them; rather as Gadby Rogers mentions, it is a “terror trip” where the young girls speak artificially like a “corps de ballet” where their individuality has been “practically obliterated.” (Jackson and Overbeck, 1992: 200). “Blood” is a racio-sexual symbol reminding them constantly of their horrors like rape, miscegenation, lynching etc. It evokes strong bodily memories, as blood in this play not merely exists but also acts. Blood is in the movement. From small spots on the dresses of these women, it becomes larger and larger until it fully drenches them and they stand desiccated. Towards the end of the play “their skirts are covered with bright blood, heads hung”(40). Their sapped out bodies echoes Billie Holiday’s image of African American bodies in her famous song “Strange Fruit.” The dramatic enactment of the alphabets is also clear. The two o’s in the word blood connotes the circular, continuous ever-returning nature of the horrors that so predates the psyche of African American women.

Secondly, juxtaposed to the haunting image of “blood” and “bleed” is the image of “lemons and the grass and the sun.” Collectively, these three images together connote a single image of sunshine, joy, optimism, a lost Eden and a prelapsarian state of innocence. The word “lemon” occurs at least five times in the play along with “grass.” Philip. C. Kolin gives at least two other symbolic interpretations of the term “lemon”.

It symbolizes the girls “ovaries and the bitter taste of womanhood before them” (Kolin, 2005: 93). The onset of the menstrual cycle connotes the increased anxieties and their greater vulnerability to be raped. Kolin also contends that “lemon” is also a Roman Catholic symbol which Kennedy must have been familiar with. He quotes Anna Chupa who describes the rituals of Saint Joseph’s altars. Kennedy must have been familiar with the Virgin Mary rituals like stealing the lemons from the altar which is seen as a sign of good luck, during which coins are left for the poor. Further, a lemon on St. Joseph’s altar was believed never to turn black (Kolin, 2005: 96)

Finally, the vision of the “falling pinnacle” is yet another haunting image in the play. Though literally referring to Caesar’s death and Calpurnia’s dream (which Kennedy has borrowed from Plutarch), it signifies the fall of the young girl’s hope and confidence. In Shakespeare’s play, Caesar goes to the capitol only to be killed. Calpurnia’s foreknowledge does little to avert the catastrophe. Similarly the mothers are also unable to avert the disaster that may befall their daughters. Rosemary Curb considers the pinnacle as a “phallic principle” since the girls understand their sexual vulnerability for the first time.
These three major images and poetic symbols are used alternatively, repetitively and simultaneously by Kennedy thus forges a peculiarly powerful language which creates an emotional stasis for the spectators. Hers, like Maeterklinck, is a theatre of stasis. The repetitive, cyclical style wherein the three images act with a powerful simultaneity create a visual blitzkrieg in the spectators. The repetitive style of Kennedy could be traced to two sources: Her African ethnic roots where repetition is an integral element. It could also be traced to Jazz, the music with which she would have grown up with. Although Kennedy does not make any confessions on her dramatic art, Susan Lori Parks, her dramatic descendant who also uses a non-linear, repetitive circular style in her plays makes statements on her craft which could be applicable to Kennedy’s plays too. Parks confesses that “Rep & Rev” being a major element in her works, her dramatic texts appear more like a “musical score.” Her plays, she contends, are “dramas of accumulation . . . where . . . all elements lead the audience toward some single explosive moment.” (Parks, 1995: 9). The single explosive moment arrives in all of Kennedy’s plays. In this play, it occurs when all the seven women wither towards the end with their gowns soaked in blood. The repetition is not done for repetition sake. As in poetry where repetition is an accepted tradition, the poetic theatre of Kennedy is also repetitive with improvisation. Each repetition gives a new and a nuanced layer of meaning into the words. Susan Lori Parks uses the word “incremental refrain” wherein each repetition creates an increased tempo of weight and rhythm. The movement of the play is not from “A-B but from A-A-B-A. (Parks, 1995: 9). Time itself in plays like this is not linear but circular, moving forever towards the central explosion. At the core of the emotional turbulence is stillness, a silence which is inexplicable and enigmatic. Her plays continue to haunt the minds of the spectators long after they have watched it because of this strange dialectical relationship between the ominous silence and the exploding images which together act a with a power that overrides the consciousness of the spectators. This dialectical pattern resonates with a metalinguistic authority that disturbs our complacency.

On the whole, an analysis of the philology of these texts suggests the fact that their language is a product of their experiential consciousness. This experience is reflected in their language. Bell Hooks’ Ain’t I a Woman (1981) devotes an entire chapter to “Sexism and the Black Female Slave Experience”. Experience affects consciousness which in turn shapes their language. Phenomenologists like Husserl, Heidegger, Ponte and Sartre agree on the basic issue of the impact of the structures of human experience on consciousness. Husserl uses the term “intentionality” to refer to the structured pattern of human experience. This emerges from a first person point of view, encompassing within it a wide range of thought, emotion, desire and action. African American women accord primacy to the lived experience that has been meted out to them in America. The first person point of view is naturally incorporated in their works since all the characters created by the creative conscience emanate from the strong racial consciousness of the writer. The lived experience is a necessary strategy needed for their emotional survival in a legacy of genocidal diaspora. Language thus graphically describes their psycho linguistic domains and maps their inner topographies not merely as an act of delineation but as a semiotic signal, enacting the inner life onto the stage.

Conclusion

Language is an intensely contested space where colonial linguistic imperialism continues to dominate long after political emancipation. The linguistic tirade waged by these women assumes complex proportions given the interlocking nature of their liberatory politics where race, gender
and class issues overlap each other to form a single continuum, on the one hand, which is at loggerheads with the linguistic and colonial domination striving to seek expression in a legitimate linguistic space, on the other hand. Basically, language itself is a symbolic space where non-Europeans and women occupy peripheral positions.

Bell Hooks; *Talking Back* (1989) defines three modes of resistance adapted by African American women: speechlessness, self-reflexive speech and talking back. These are the three distinct stages of the linguistic fruition of the African American women. “Speechlessness” is the first stage of linguistic perplexity experienced by the “othered” women when they were first imported to the white man’s land and bequeathed with harsh racist treatment. Bereft of speech and the initial ability to translate them creatively, they stood speechless. “Self-reflexive speech” is the second stage of their discourse wherein they first communicated their harsh experiences with themselves as is evident in their spirituals, songs and lullabies. This act of communication imparts to them a strange sense of satisfaction as one would have after having emerged out of a confession box. “Talking back” is the third and crucial stage wherein the enslaved subject forges a new language for herself and ventures to create her works in such a manner as to both write back to the subjugating hegemony, while also creating unique linguistic identities that orders their tumultuous experiences in a creative manner. Both Harriet Jacobs and Adrienne Kennedy “talk back” through their respective texts thereby vindicating the intellectual traditions bequeathed to them by their foremothers like Sojourner Truth, while also countering essentialist, stereotypical notions of Black womanhood and replacing them with positive images. Though, clearly demarcated into marginal positions by the dominant imperialist culture, they continue to voice their hitherto unexpressed contours of their experiences and thus create novel epistemes that finds legitimacy through their creativity. Through their art they transcend their second sex status and express themselves with a hitherto unknown vibrancy.

**Notes**

1This is a famous section in Hegel’s *Phenomenology of the Spirit* (1807) which narrates the development of self-consciousness in two distinct self-conscious beings. Hegel contends that human consciousness is an innately social process and that none can ever be fully certain of consciousness unless it is mediated through another entity. The person needs to receive an acknowledgement of consciousness from another person to validate one’s own. When two such self-conscious people meet, there may be an abstract metaphorical struggle in trying to validate each other’s consciousness, which eventually leads to the annihilation of one. As an alternative is the willing subordination of one’s self to another in a master-slave relationship. Here, the slave does not die and the master also possesses someone who can provide a conscious mediation. However, this relationship is also gradually soured since the power relations between the duo are asymmetrical. This basic Hegelian model has been modified by contemporary thinkers. Edward Said sees this model as replicating the imperial power axioms of colonial domination. De Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* uses the model to delineate the imbalance of power between the sexes whereas Spivak’s works blend both the imperial postcolonial and the gender dimension in her *Can the Subaltern Speak?* and *French Feminism in an International Fame*.

2Spivak analyses this issue in her seminal essays like *The Rani of Sirmur* (1985) and *Can The Subaltern Speak* (1988) where the Indian subjects remain analysed as Europe’s “other”. If Said’s concern was the Arabs as Europe’s other, Spivak’s thrust was on the Indian women who remained bereft of a voice and history.
The act can truly be perceived as an epistemic triumph since Linda Brent had to struggle against multiple odds to pioneer for legitimate linguistic spaces for herself with the limited historical, geographic and epistemic spaces available to slave women. Her self-education was also to a certain extent, a limiting factor. Her case has a few parallels in the literary world. An Indian woman writer of the nineteenth century, Rassundari Debi’s autobiography *Amar Jiban* (“My Life”) (1876) depicts her impediments to gain literacy since women in early colonial India had no access to education. She had to steal pieces of paper from her son’s notebook and keep them in the kitchen and pursue her self-education by merely looking at a group of boys being imparted education from a distance.

The same disparity also exists between the genders also exists in the field of African American dramatic creativity. The first African American play to have been written was William Wells Brown’s *Escape: Or a Leap to Freedom* (1858). The first properly produced play by an African American woman was Angelina Weld Grimke’s *Rachael* (1961). The long hiatus of 58 years between Brown and Grimke adequately reflects African American women’s lack of access to language and knowledge systems.

A similar form of ritual is also present in the Hindu faith of the Southern parts of India. Like Mother Mary, *Maariamman* (an incarnation of Goddess Durga or Shakti) is worshipped with lemons which the southern Indian Hindus believe as being auspicious.

References


