

**ISSN : 2454-3365**

# **THE LITERARY HERALD**

**AN INTERNATIONAL REFEREED ENGLISH E-JOURNAL**

---

*A Quarterly Indexed Open-access Online JOURNAL*

---

**Vol.1, No.1 (June 2015)**

---

*Editor-in-Chief: Dr. Siddhartha Sharma*

*Managing Editor: Dr. Sadhana Sharma*

---

[www.TLHjournal.com](http://www.TLHjournal.com)

[sharmasiddhartha67@gmail.com](mailto:sharmasiddhartha67@gmail.com)

## LANGSTON HUGHES' 'THE NEGRO SPEAKS OF RIVERS': A DECONSTRUCTIVE READING

**Veeramani, S. Ph.D.**

Assistant Professor

School of Languages and Culture

St. Joseph's College (Autonomous)

Tiruchirappalli

Tamilnadu, South India

### **Abstract:**

The system of language and semiotic network in the linguistic ecology are the key features in a poststructuralist approach. The unread meaning is exhumed critically in the linguistic play within a work. The poem 'The Negro Speaks of Rivers' is categorized in the postcolonial/subaltern/ Black literature. This paper delves with the unread meaning strategically.

**Key words:** Deconstruction, emancipation, experience, memory, text.

## LANGSTON HUGHES' 'THE NEGRO SPEAKS OF RIVERS': A DECONSTRUCTIVE READING.

**Veeramani, S. Ph.D.**

Assistant Professor

School of Languages and Culture,

St. Joseph's College (Autonomous),

Tiruchirappalli Tamilnadu, South India

### **INTRODUCTION:**

Structuralism has its continuity with the application of Post structuralism. Structuralism defines itself as a topological network of semiotics within the ecology. Therefore, structuralism and its approach have confined the textual meaning with a single and determined perspective. On the contrary that post structuralism has made its interpretive meaning in an indeterminant way. The Post structuralism has given a method of analysis called 'deconstruction'.

Deconstruction is an intellectual method of analysis and dangerous also in the academic course. But Derrida himself says that deconstruction is not a method or movement. (Wolfreys, 119)

Rather, it is understood vehemently that it is a strategy to read and unpack the unread meaning in a text. Because, a text is made up of 'signifiers'. The dispute between a reader and a text relies on only in the state of 'signified' of authenticity. If a signified leads a chain of signifier/meaning, there is a further mode for interpretations. This sort of play makes 'undecidability' of meaning. So that, Roland Barthes who takes off his career of literary critic from structuralism to post structuralism. Barthes influential essay titled 'The Death of the Author' in which a reader can get the full-fledged idea of what is deconstruction extensively. Here, in the essay what he says is when a reader reads a text and brings out an 'unread' or unintended meaning becomes deconstructed meaning. Deconstruction is not to deface the intended meaning in a text, but to proclaim and project another meaning in a same literary text.

#### **Literal and Figurative Meaning:**

In a text meaning is produced not by the authority of the emotional language but by the use of metaphor, and other figurative language. Literal meaning always gives the mono/singular/one authoritative meaning on the surface level. Whereas the figurative meaning can enable the reader to have plurality of meaning. Therefore most of the readers would read only on the literal sense. By means of the play of figurative language a reader can deconstruct a text.

The conventional reading is to say that a 'linguistic imperialism'. This authoritative meaning is decentered by the act of deconstruction.

In the practice of deconstruction the term 'Differance' is used. According to Wheeler 'differance' is difference with in the sameness (P.78).

To find out the difference within the sameness the rhetoric and figurative languages are made use of. It helps a reader to find out what is left unread. Moreover, the binary opposition is also involved in the practice of deconstruction. Binary oppositions such as *sky/earth*, *nature/culture*, *young/old* and the like.

And another important term 'aporia' is also helpful to render the 'pluri-meaning' in a text. Aporia means 'suspect'. It is a nihilistic attitude.

This paper deals with the a deconstructive reading of the poem The Negro Speaks of River written by Langston Hughes. Langston Hughes is an African American writer. His well known poem is 'The Negro Speaks of Rivers'. This poem is read with the intended themes are 'freedom', 'enslavement' and the author's 'past experience' portrayed.

In this poem the author has used figurative and paradoxical language. The title of the poem is 'The Negro Speaks of Rivers'. The Negro here is the writer and speaks

of rivers. It can be understood that the writer is talking about the rivers. This poem is very short one.

**Analysis:**

*'I've known rivers*

*I've known rivers as ancient as the world and older than the flow of human blood in human veins'.*

In these above lines the author describes about rivers in general. It may refer to all the rivers in the globe. Because, the author has described a few particular rivers in which he used to contact. In the first three lines the author talks about rivers in general not the particular rivers which he had experience. He compared the rivers to 'as ancient as the world' and 'older than human blood in veins'

The author speaks of Rivers at the same time mentions about 'ancient'. It is understood that the rivers have the same quality at the same degree. So that the writer may not elevate the rivers, because he needs the assistance of other 'ancient world'. The word play of 'ancient' means that now the comparable object is a bit modern. In this point of view it is better understood that the state of binary opposition '*ancient/modern*'. To him the rivers may be modern.

The rivers flow is older than the human blood flow. To represent the elevation of rivers once again he needs the assistance from human being. Human being is the agent of culture. Rivers are the agent of nature. Therefore Nature is elevated by the emphasis of Culture.

The author mentions the rivers like, Euphrates, the Congo, and Nile, Mississippi. These are the rivers particularly written by the author, but in the beginning he talks about only in general about rivers without using the 'the'. The 'the' only splits the difference between 'generality' or 'particularity'. It shows that he might have known many rivers which are in the line of ancient. Among which those mentioned are some. Therefore, the author may not have the intention of these particular rivers to be mentioned.

*'My soul has grown deep like the  
Rivers'*

In the above lines 'grown deep', there two words' actions are totally contrary with one another. 'Grow' and its movement would be outward and upward growth, but deep is the inner ward growth. Here, the author may not have praised the growth of river but his 'soul' only. River can be measured but soul cannot be measured. In a simple, soul will be 'unfathomable' river will be fathomable. The author seeks for unfathomable from fathomable. This comparison may not to elevate the rivers but praises '*himself*', his 'soul'.

In this poem the author has used the personal pronoun 'I' in eight times. And possessive personal pronoun 'My' thrice. By the use of these 'I' and 'My' may refer to the 'self-centered one' not to praise or elevate the rivers and their heritage with history. Some critics say that 'I' would be the representative to whole black community.

To maintain the unity among the black community the author might have used the pronoun 'we', instead 'I'.

The author might have used the black identity as a platform to center 'himself' in the poetic world. He might have done the 'mono identity' of himself from 'pluri- identity'.

The personal pronoun 'I' may refer to 'human hegemony' over nature.

*I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe  
Lincoln went down to New Orleans;*

Here, in these lines, the author heard the 'song'/singing, when Abraham Lincoln went riding on the Mississippi. It is bound about a 'time'. He hears the singing of Mississippi only when Lincoln goes. To hear the singing of nature he wants to refer to a human being. Therefore, the sweet melody lies in the arrival of a human.

#### **CONCLUSION:**

Therefore, the author in the title fixes 'The Negro Speaks of River' and is used to proclaim the heritage qualities of nature and Rivers. This is the author's intended meaning. On the contrary to that consciously or unconsciously seeks for assistance from human being, the nature and quality of rivers in general and 'self-centered'. This poem would be elevating human and their importance of being rather the elevating 'the' rivers and heritage. The Negro Speaks of River' in the literal meaning a person from Negro community speaks about rivers but the speaks of himself only by the support of nature and rivers

#### **References:**

Barry, Peter, *Beginning Theory: An introduction to Literary and cultural Theory*. UK: Manchester University Press. 2010 Print.

Wheeler, Kathleen and Indra, C.T. *Explaining Deconstruction*. Chennai: Macmillan, 1997. Print.

Wolfreys, Julian. *Introducing Literary Theories: A Guide and Glossary*. UK: Edinburgh University Press. 2001. Print.