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**ON READING LANGSTON HUGHES'S "THEME FOR ENGLISH B"****Dr. Susheel Kumar Sharma**Professor of English  
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I remember it distinctly  
That I was passing on  
Instructions after instructions  
And wanted him to  
Take them down each one of them  
In his note book  
So that in the moments of crisis  
When he was losing hope  
And when our relations  
Were tense and turned sour  
They were the reference points  
To begin a new relationship  
Or save the old one  
From getting snapped.  
It was then  
He had come like a bird  
Looking for a place  
To make its nest  
Or like a father trying  
To gather his self bit by bit,  
After his son's death.  
And sat silently  
Staring with his blue eyes  
Into void of  
A small room of 3 \* 10 feet  
He neither spoke nor did he take out his pen.  
He left as silently as he had come.  
Next day, again he appeared  
Dull and morose  
As if he was weary  
Of a long walk.

With a twist/twirl  
I moved my fingers  
To know his purpose  
He wished to study further.  
It was a surprise  
Thrown at me.  
For I had treated him  
To be a purposeless friend of the other boy.  
“Go and write a page  
About a novelist. See me tomorrow,”  
Said I very curtly.  
He returned with a diary  
At the appointed hour  
With a page on Shakespeare.  
Was he a novelist? I queried  
He dropped his head  
Like a chicken  
To see an eagle dawning.  
Come tomorrow  
With a page on thyself.  
Write, just write something,  
Say a page, concerning you,  
Write in one writing.  
Next day he appeared  
Again at the appointed hour  
And put forward  
A ruffled page  
On which  
He had written  
With confident words  
“I am a poor boy.  
I travel 20 kms daily on foot.  
To reach the glorious university,  
Where I am treated like dirt.  
I do not mind this  
For I have been raised in dirt.  
I am twenty six now.  
My classmates have left  
The university several years ago

But I come back here  
Every two years  
Having earned some money  
To pay my tuition fee.  
My schooling has not been smooth but chequered  
My schools were located in scruffy areas  
But my spirit is indomitable  
I shall give you my best.  
I know Shakespeare wrote  
Dramas of various types  
But I have not seen  
Any plays performed.  
Where was the time  
For this luxury,  
Toiling day and night  
To earn money, to pay  
The bills of my ailing mother's doctor,  
Had been my priority.  
I read Shakespeare's stories  
Not his plays, to answer questions  
To pass the examination  
Which I cleared every time  
Not of course with flying colours  
But to get me a seat  
In the course that I desired.  
I am the only person  
Aspiring for higher education in my community.  
Not many are there here either;  
There is none in the teaching community as well;  
No wonder they do not know me  
Or my parents or my struggles;  
I am writing this sitting where-  
Can you guess it Sir?  
Sitting in a shanty placed  
Over a big drain,  
Created to carry filth of the city  
To the barrage near Ganges;  
In the name of light.  
I have a kerosene lamp

And all kinds of moths  
Give me company at night;  
Have you ever stayed  
In such a place, Sir?  
How then will know my agony?  
It is easy to charge me  
Of not being a careful student  
And not being a capable student.  
I have seen hostels  
Where students like me  
Can take a shelter  
By paying fees and  
Be raised like officers;  
But naives like me  
Are not allowed to take possession  
And the warden's apathy I understand;  
It is better where I live.  
I have a dream of a better life;  
I have a dream of freedom  
To change my conditions  
I have a dream to love and beloved  
I have a dream not to give up  
My community but to go back to it  
To live with them and sleep peacefully  
When neither a policeman comes  
For an unauthorized search  
Nor does a hooligan extort money.  
I am told if one is educated  
One gets power.  
I wish to taste power.  
Will I ever get a chance  
To taste it? Will you be another  
Stumbling block on my way?  
I am told, you justify Dronacharya,s every act-  
Will you repeat him? Will you replicate him?  
In your victory will lie your defeat;  
My statues will be raised – not yours.  
Justice will be done; I have patience for it.”  
This made me crazy

This made me go wild.  
 I doubted my qualifications to teach him  
 The place appeared to be sifting.  
 It is better to face  
 A challenge and change  
 Than to be burden with a life  
 Of self-guilt.  
 I put my signatures on his form willy-nilly.

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### Thus Spake a Woman

I

A thousand suns lit my life  
 When the strings of a violin stirred my heart  
 To the tune of harmonium in my mind  
 While I stood before the mirror.  
 You used to appear stealthily from  
 A corner afar looking for a comb and hair oil  
 And held me in your arms and sang in a flavoured tone.  
 The deep red roses devoid of any thorns  
 Laid a carpet to yellowish moon  
 And the night passed by side-tracking the lullabies.  
 The lull created a storm in my heart  
 Which was rocked by the music of the violin.  
 I am looking for those days on the moon  
 Which I was unable to clinch in my fist.

II

Do I need wings to fly  
 Or the sky to make me soar?  
 I am the bird of a cage.  
 I have the will  
 But no gas cutters.  
 I'll request an ant  
 To bail me out  
 To bite the keeper  
 On his nose  
 And make it red  
 And make it bleed.  
 My dream will not lie

Snowed and buried  
In the heap of broken images.  
I shall not miss the chance  
To fly to the moon.

## III

In my country there are no sycamores  
So no autumn comes here  
And the ground is not covered with coloured dead leaves.  
In my country nightingales do not sing sweet songs  
So the notes of electric guitar do not make any sense to me.  
How can I develop a sense of soothing music?  
I did not see my mother decorate her body with beads  
Nor could I gift a bead crochet to my beloved  
As in my country there are no coral reefs.  
Choral-bells do not tinkle here  
Nor are any cakes exchanged with friends  
For I have no festivals. The world goes on  
Without beaconing me to join them in the firmament  
Of freedom for I am an outcaste in the cellular jail  
Of development and politics of colour.  
My beloved also lived in style;  
I too wore fashionable dresses;  
I too sang soothing songs for my baby;  
My mother also prayed for my welfare.  
Our fault was simple  
We had a different God to worship.

## IV

It was not so easy to give you birth, O child!  
Today I saw you jumping from the Yamuna Bridge  
To end your life which you felt was loathsome.  
You had not come to life unasked for;  
I had gone praying to Vindhyaachal and also to Maihar  
Your father had gone to Ajmer with your grandma;  
Your grandpa had secretly performed a Yagya  
While staying in the far off Arab land, risking his life.  
I recollect how painful it was even to conceive you;  
Moving from doctor to doctor, from clinic to clinic  
Weathering all seasons, consuming all those nauseating pills  
Undergoing various operations in the harrowing hospitals

At the hands of foul smelling doctors – do you think  
 All this was a pleasure? Perhaps, it was.  
 I had gone to the Ganges once in December  
 And had sat down on its banks in the wee hours  
 And then moved into it when was unable  
 To think of anything beyond;  
 Two unknown women had held me  
 By arms and did not allow any forward movement  
 Saying it was very deep any further. The rays of the sun  
 Did not bring in any warmth and I shivered  
 Till your father was called; his sight made me quiver.  
 Today, I feel who had sent those women and why?  
 But for them I would have been one with water.  
 This city was not a city then; the high rise buildings  
 I had not seen here; lifts I was not familiar with.  
 Still that tower which you had seen from our roof  
 Was there; its stairs were winding but had been blocked  
 At the fourth floor. There were open balconies however  
 To invite me to jump them from. I might have jumped  
 And died but for the cry: “Life is precious.”  
 Why didn’t you hear that baby before escalating  
 Those wires and crossing the railing?  
 I had to live and you had to die?  
 Life was precious for me  
 You were precious for me, o child?  
 Why did you have to die?  
 If was bold to live this misery  
 Why were you so weak my child?  
 Why did you have to die?  
 I was born to live for ever  
 Nor were you born to live so.  
 Why then do I live  
 And why did you have to die?  
 “I will be dogged sweet baby --  
 Why did she have to die?”  
 “Life was fine.  
 Life is fine.  
 Each one of us has to die.”

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