

BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE ROLE OF THE BLACK WOMAN

The arrival of the Whites in 1652 brought in a new dimension in the politics, religion, culture, economics and morality of the Black People of South Africa.

Politically, Blacks were, and still are excluded from participating in the formulation, application and implementation of policies and decisions that affect and impinge on their destinies. The self appointed decision makers - whites - belong to a minority group who enjoy life at the expense of Blacks who are in the majority. Whites believed, as they still do, that Blacks are incapable of taking decisions which concern their way of life. This belief is based on false assumption that whites represented a race that is endowed with an acute sense of moral responsibility, precise intelligence, racial purity and a divine right of guardianship over Blacks. This is indeed a naive belief that is only characteristic of Whites - It is a belief that feeds and thrives on an irrational philosophy - a philosophy that postulates that Blacks can never evolve beyond the level of a modern lizard.

In the economic field, Blacks have been made objects of a ruthless exploitation and manipulation characteristic of the classical Feudalism. Blacks are denied the enjoyment of the fruits of their labours, despite the fact that South Africa is prosperous because of their sweat, and rich because of sheer conspiracy of circumstances and natural resources. It is depressing indeed to see Black children dying of malnutrition and other deficiency diseases in the midst of suffocating white affluence.

Because of their belief in the purity and ^{cr}sanity of their culture and value system, whites have systematically destroyed our cultural heritage with impunity and arrogance. They believe that ours is a culture that embodies primitiveness and evil. They imposed, and are still imposing their cultural value systems that are foreign^{ac} and incompatible with the cultural norms of the Black Community. It is very very interesting these days to see how Whites try to realise themselves through us by wearing beads which they initially shunned.

They had all the arrogance to label our religions "Ancestor Worship" in order to make it easier for them to force their religious ethics into our community.

despite all these injustices the so called "liberal establishment" if it does exist, still wants us to believe the lie that they are not part of the White Community that is responsible for the sufferings of Blacks. They want us to believe that they are prepared to suffer the brutalities of the system that they and their fellow Whites have created at the expense of Blacks. They do not appreciate that Whites in South Africa form a total Power-Structure - a structure that can be summed up in two words-: White Racism.

"Liberals" do not realize that they are a major stumbling block towards the liberation of Blacks in South Africa. For more than three hundred years they have been involved in designing strategies that are meant to confuse the Black World and thus make it impossible for Blacks to identify and isolate their enemy.

But the nakedness of their lie made it possible for Blacks to realize that they have to define themselves in terms of their situation without the assistance of and interference from their "Know - all" White masters . Hence the emergence of Black Consciousness.

Black Consciousness is in essence an attitude of the mind and a way in which Black People live, act and express themselves.

It is founded and based on the principle of self-appraisal by Black People themselves and it therefore emanates from their own definition within the context of their daily lives.

It must be appreciated however that Black Consciousness is not a product of frustration or rejection by Whites, it is a product of self-realisation. It is a philosophical medium through which Black People are able to find themselves and their own identity in an environment which menacingly threatens to destroy or dilute their Blackness, with a view to dehumanize them. It is a philosophy that unites and reconciles the Black Man with himself in the face of political, economical and Socio-Cultural submersion by a culture that claims the monopoly of purity, superiority and truth.

Black Consciousness sprouts from the depth and heart of Black People, with their peculiar problems, a peculiar cultural heritage, a unique history of oppression and sufferings are able capable of tackling and solving their own problems and difficulties in the midst of white racism. This is necessarily so because Black people are not a reflection of others but they are human beings and complete in themselves.

The necessity and relevance of Black Consciousness cannot be over-emphasized. It is a philosophy that speaks the language of the injured

the disinherited, disregarded and dispossessed. This is a philosophy that fosters Black Cohesion and pride and it finds nourishment on the belief and awareness by Blacks that the noblest asset of freedom is the moral ability to define one's self - possibilities and limitations.

But you and I ^{are} aware of the fact that there ^{are} those who would remind us that the so-called Coloureds, Indians, and Africans do not belong to the same group, because the Coloured and Indians are "light skinned" But these people do not seem to appreciate that if one scratches these peoples' skins lightly one would be surprised to discover the intensity of the blackness of their skins. - uncoloured and untainted. They further do not seem to realize that the Blackness of Black People does not only refer to the colour of their skin, it also refers to the uniqueness of their history - a history that portrays the scars of their oppression - it refers to the peculiarity of their cultural heritage. It is therefore clear that Black Consciousness shows Black People that there is a golden thread that unites and binds them together.

It instills in the minds of the Blacks that they need to rally together with each other around the cause of their oppression and injury - the Blackness and the uniqueness of their skins - and to operate as a group in order to rid themselves of the shackles that bind them to perpetual servitude.

It also helps Blacks to eradicate that sense of inferiority and inadequacy induced by the helplessness of their situation. It inculcates a sense economic, political and social self-reliance in their minds.

Black awareness must not be viewed as a mere speculative philosophy a theoretical postulation which has no relevance to the realities that confront and challenge Black people in the country bequeathed to them by their ancestors, a country which unfortunately is riddled with political diseases. It also helps Black people to rid themselves of the influence of fear, the over present fear that besets the vast poor, the economically exploited, the politically deprived and the socially submerged and ofcourse it is the Black people who are ruled by fear.

Black Consciousness must not become a philosophy of escapism. Rather, it must become a philosophy of realism, a realism that accepts Blackness as a noble virtue of being Black. It must enable Black People to be reborn into a new world created by themselves and not by others.

Black people should therefore reject integration as advocated by the so called "liberal establishment" because to these people integration means acceptance by Blacks of the values of White Society. It should be clear to Blacks that there is nothing to integrate because this liberal establishment in the very asking of the question assumes and takes for granted that they have something precious which Blacks want or should want, as if being close to white people ennobles and enriches the humanity of Blacks.

But if integration means that each man meets the other on equal footing with neither assuming that he alone possesses the ability to define the meaning of integration, then perhaps, mutual and meaningful dialogue could be possible.

Black people must therefore reject all stereotypes that come from the white world because they cannot live according to what ought to be, as defined by whites but according to what is as defined by Blacks themselves.

Black Consciousness is therefore the key to the emancipation and the liberation of Black People from their distorted self-image, a self image that once tried to realize White personhood rather than seeking to integrate with itself and its own mind. It must be seen as a means to an end as well as an end in itself.

It is within this context of Black Consciousness Movement that the place of the Black Woman should be evaluated. We must appreciate that we are Black first and then woman. Thus Black Women must play a meaningful role in the struggle of the Black community.

But now, more than ever before in the history of the Black people, the Black Community can no longer afford, if it ever could -the luxury of ignoring and neglecting the role that Black Women could and must play in the moulding and building up of a society in which Black People would be able to translate their ideals, ambitions and dreams into reality. The struggle therefore calls for the liberation of Black Women from their feeling of inadequacies. This liberation of Black Women must however not be confused with the current "Women's Liberation" movement that is taking place in the white world.

But in our situation the role of Black Women has to be relevant to the role and meaning of Black People as a whole. It has to be seen within the context of Black Consciousness. Our struggle calls for the involvement of the entire Black Community. It is therefore essential that Black Women must shed that built-in feeling of inferiority that dogs

men the most courageous Black woman. This feeling of inferiority feeds on the false assumption that only men are capable of having and withstanding the difficulties that exist in our Society. Black Women have tended to shirk their responsibilities because they have convinced themselves that these are the preserve.s of Black man. They still cling to that out-moded poisonous belief that they belong to a sex that must not be exposed to the hostile realities of life.

Black Women must realize that oppression is not only an individual basis but that it is an oppression of the whole Black Community. They should and must work hand-in-hand, with their menfolk to overcome whatever, pressures that face the Black Community.

Thus in the drama of politic.s Black Women have an important role to play in the political education and "conscientization" of the Black Children at a very early age in the familt. They are part of the cast on the stage and not part of the audience. Their responsibility is that of the Socialization of Children. It is a fact that every society has an orientation process through which its children pass. This is a process by means of which children learn and imbibe, the values, ethics and morality that sustain and keep the society intact. Black Women therefore being the people who exercise the strongest influence on the Black Children, must feed these children on values and ethics that have given the Black Community its indestructability and durability in the face of the politics and cultural racism. Thus Black women must stop considering themselves as flower-pots for decoration in the Black Community. In times of political stress and strain they must be prepared to share the difficulties with their menfolk. They must also participate in the decision making process.

The building up of Black economic self-reliance is also an exciting challenge for Black women. They have to appreciate that the Black Community is living under the most oppressive economic pressures.

Thus it is essential for Black Women to realise that the only people who could uproot these economic injustices are the Black people . Hence the necessity for Black women to join in the struggle , to have a share in the economic wealth of the country.

Health of any struggle can only be sustained if and when there are healthy homes and families. Thus it is the duty of Black Women to try create a healthy family atmosphere in which they and their Black men able to take healthy decisions - a healthy home atmosphere that ble to produce clear minded Black Youth because, like the many lies our youth lack direction because there is nothing they

aspire to.

must realize that ours is a struggle directed against a violent and vicious system, a system that tries to destroy what ever seems to stand in its way.

As Black Women we must always be wary of the power of darkness. White women who will come to us parading in costume of Womens' liberation. These are tactics designed by the enemy to divide Black Community and we must refuse to be part of a conspiracy against our selves. We must refuse to be misled by our enemy. We know what we want- total liberation of the Black Community from the gripping claws of White Racism.

We must also refuse to be intimidated. We can no longer afford to live in lies. We must be prepared to stand up and strike out against white racism. She who is impelled and inspired by the love of liberation will not be deterred.

We can no longer allow ourselves to be ruled by fear. We had enough of it when we joined in the struggle we must always keep in mind that the enemy will always nibble us, but it is better to die on one's feet than on one's knees. It is better to be poor in freedom than rich in slavery.

We must be always be driven forward by a singleness of vision and thorough oneness with fellow Blacks. We can no longer afford to enter into political collusion with whites. We should be ready for the cause- a cause born of years and centuries of political persecution, economic exploitation and cultural assassination- a cause born of our realization that only blacks are capable of solving their problems.

Our struggle will be won only if we are prepared to win it. We must stop hoping for a Messiah. We are our own Messiahs, Saviours and redeemers.

"The nation needs your brainHave you ever thought of time? The greatest and most revolutionary time is NOW. The past is dead with all its iniquities and sins of postponing things-What a loss ... The future never comes. It runs away from us, as we approach it. The only exploitable time at our disposal is NOW, now, just Now.."

This was my late father's voice in 1963, and this is my late father's voice echoing in the dying stages of 1971, and how appropriate.