



STRIDE TOWARDS FREEDOM: A CRITICAL STUDY OF ROSA PARKS' AUTOBIOGRAPHY *MY STORY*

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Abstract

*Slavery was the stigma to United States of America's social history. Abraham Lincoln ended the Slavery era by winning the Civil War. But the Whites of the South disagreed to give their formal slaves equal rights with them. They tried to oppress the Blacks by racism, segregation. Blacks had the different schools, water fountains, backs seats in the buses, different place for residents etc. Blacks were tired off the segregation and discrimination in all walks of the life. This treatment was not the specialty of the South but it had some association to North also. They wanted to fight and they made some organizations. But there were no organized protest against the social injustice. African Americans needed the organized revolution to get freedom. And Rosa Parks born and she initiated the Civil Rights Movement and became the mother of the movement. Rosa Parks' autobiography *My Story* depicts her journey of the life from childhood to an old age. The autobiography focuses on her great contribution in the Civil Rights Movement. The book opens with an important incident in her life. She had refused to give up her seat to a White man because of tiredness in a Montgomery segregated bus. She was being arrested and punished. Because of this act Blacks got the inspiration to orgainse a well united movement of their freedom. Rosa had faced racial exploitation of Blacks from her childhood days. She came to know the segregation laws when she lived in Montgomery to get education. The bus segregation she understood after her marriage. She was a secretary of NAACP. She worked with Martin Luther King Jr.*

Key Words: Slavery, Segregation, Freedom, Mother of Civil Rights Movement.

Human society is based upon the hierarchies which may be existed in all the aspects of the life. Human history is blooded with the struggle between the inferior classes with the superior classes. The superiors exploited the inferior and made them slaves, physical as well as psychological. The African Americans originated from Africa. They bought to United States to America as a slaves to work in the plantation. Due to the heavy rain planation grew in the Southern part of United States of America. Because of this the institution of Slavery emerged as a strong social phenomenon of the South. After the end of the Civil War, Slavery ended from the US. But Whites did not like it and started the racial segregation to banned Blacks to get some basics human rights. African Americans needed the organized revolution to get freedom. And Rosa Parks born and she initiated the Civil Rights Movement and became the mother of the movement.

The main purpose of this research paper is to bring out the critical study of Rosa Parks' autobiography *My Story*, to focus upon the struggle of Rosa against the segregation in the Montgomery city buses.

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arrested and punished. Because of this act Blacks got the inspiration to organize a well united movement of their freedom. Rosa had faced racial exploitation of Blacks from her childhood days. She came to know the segregation laws when she lived in Montgomery to get education. The bus segregation she understood after her marriage. She was a secretary of NAACP. She worked with Martin Luther King Jr.

The opening scene of the autobiography *My Story* indicates that in some sense one could think that her act was the prophetic one. The act of refusal to surrender her seat to a White passenger on a Montgomery, Alabama bus spurred a city-wide boycott. The city had no choice but to lift the law requiring segregation on public buses. After the success of boycott the Civil Rights Movement breaks out to the other Southern cities and States. This act of disobedient of segregated rules in the bus had come through her tiredness. She and her community was tired to give up their seats to the White folks. This was just the act of protection to her community. She got this virtue from her grandfather Sylvester who taught his daughters and grandchildren self-respect and protection.

Randall K. Bush writes in his essay *'Remembering Rosa Parks: Recognizing A Contemporary Prophetic Act'* as, "As the United States prepares to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the 1950 act of civil disobedience by Rosa Parks, it is critical that any false emphases and flawed cultural myths associated with that December day be challenged and corrected. By exploring some of the historical-political, social, and personal influences that encouraged Parks' refusal to move from her bus seat, it is possible to recognize in her deed the markings of a true prophetic act."

The act of protection of her brother in the childhood and herself from the teasing of some White children had been converted in the prophetic act for the Black community. She fought to protect Blacks by helping Black victims through NAACP, activating the vote register movement, participating in long marches with Dr. King, delivering her speeches on liberty and other issues etc. After the success of the Civil Rights Movement she worked for the development of her community. She was not the firm believer in non-violence like Martin Luther King Jr. but she agreed that without non-violence principles of Dr. King the movement would not succeed. That is why she was called to be the mother of the Civil Rights Movement. At the end the author of the book appeals to the Black people that the Civil Rights Act and other acts have provided mere protection to them. The laws have not changed the hearts of the White people. Therefore, they must preach the equality and love rather than the hatred for Whites.

The autobiography describes the fighting of a Black woman against the exploitation, racial discrimination and the inhuman tradition of segregation. It also deals with the terrible exploitation against Blacks by Whites, great violence and bombing and killing of the main leaders of the movement. It also gives a brief illustration of the progress of blacks in all walks of the life after the Civil Right Movement.

1. Segregation and exploitation:

At the begging of her book she narrated the racial oppressions against her community and getting inspired by her grandfather. She was faced the inhuman tradition of racial oppressions from her childhood. The book itself takes us in the flashback when she was arrested by not giving up her seats in 1955. After giving some brief account of her family history she narrated the horror of violence against Blacks by the White people. African American were got their freedom after the Civil War. They got some rights and they participated in the Army and became soldiers. Few of them got various jobs and their economic condition was growing. Some Blacks felt themselves equal to Whites. Because no Black could call any White by his first name and he could never shake his hand with White people. Very few Blacks had their own land like Rosa's grandfather had. Most of Black people do household works. The feeling of equality made White folks mad and they wanted



to teach lesson to Blacks by beating, killing them and burning their homes. The White mob who did such a violence against Blacks were called Ku Klux Klan.

Rosa got the experience of Ku Klux Klan at the age of six. It was riding through Black community, burning churches, beating up and killing people. She could not realize that activity but later she learnt that it was because African American soldiers were running from World War I and acting as if they deserved equal rights because they had served their country. The Whites did not like this attitude of those soldiers. So they started doing all kinds of violent to Blacks to remind them that they did not have any rights. The violence was so bad, her grandfather kept his gun close by all times. He told that they if Klansmen broke into their house, they should go to bed with their clothes on so they would be ready to run if they had to. He says, "I don't know how long I would last if they came in breaking in here, but I'm getting the first one who comes through door." Their house was on the highway. The Klansmen rode on the highway. Rosa wanted to see her grandfather with the gun. But the Klansmen never break in their house.

Rosa was admiring Raymond Parks as a defender of Black victims. He fell in love her and she too. Soon they got married. After the marriage he was the actively participating in the activities of NAACP. Rosa also got interested in it and she became the secretary of NAACP. One of her major work is to maintain the records of the exploitative cases of Blacks. She was the protestor and she took actively participation to help such oppressed people in Montgomery. Rosa has written variety of such cases in the autobiography. There were one case which was about a White woman who used a teenage delivery Black boy Jeremiah Reeves for an affair. He was a delivery driver. One day a neighbor saw them making love through window. As soon as she detected that someone looking in, she started yelling rape. The police came and caught the boy. His mother brought his case to NAACP. Rosa tried to help the boy. There were no evidence against the boy, except that woman's words that he raped her. But the union could not save him. Other case was a White widow who had nine years boy. She had a Black friend who visited her. One day police caught them. She told them that it was not the rape but they had an affair. She saved the man but she was ostracized by her own community. Later she committed suicide. It was terribly hard for the people to come forward with the cases of White violence against Black folks. A Black minister saw a White man shooting a Black man. When Rosa went to him for an interview he was frightened and refused to tell anything about the killing. All the case files were put in a small building of Mr. Nixon. But it was lost when his house was bombed.

2. Stride Towards Freedom:

Rosa was glad that she was not born in slavery era. But the conditions of life for Black families were in same ways not much better than during the slavery period. The Black school was not good as White school. The White children rode in the buses. There were no such buses for Black children. They had to walk, while the White children mocked at them through windows of the bus. They had no city rights and nobody to protest. Pine Level was too small village, therefore it had less segregation than the cities. The town had very few facilities. There were no drinking fountains marked 'colored' and 'white'. There were three stores of Whites.

The autobiography opens with an important incident of Parks' life. She was sitting in front of the colored section of a bus one evening in early Dec. 1955 in Montgomery, Alabama. The Whites were sitting in the white section of the bus. More white people got on, and they filled the white section. When it happened then Blacks were supposed to give up their seats to the Whites who were standing. But Rosa did not move from her seat. The driver said, "Let me have those seats." She was tried by giving seats to Whites. She did not answer. The driver threatened her by saying "I'm going to have you arrested." She replied, "You may do that."



Two policemen came. She asked one of them that why they all push the Blacks around. He answered, “I don’t know, but the law is the law and you’re under arrest.”

Thus, in the words of McGuire, “In popular history, Rosa Parks rarely moves off that seat on the Montgomery city bus making her defiance of segregation a thoroughly southern story. But she spent the next forty years as an engaged activist in Detroit, fighting segregation, police brutality and discrimination in jobs, housing, and education, reminding us that racism was not a southern phenomenon...instead of a tired seamstress who tiptoed into history, she was a woman who marched proudly with strength, conviction, and purpose, a woman whose tireless efforts at community engagement and activism over seventy years helped make the world a better place for all of us.”

Blacks were tired off the segregation and discrimination in all walks of the life. This treatment was not the specialty of the South but it had some association to North also. The African American wanted to fight and they made some organizations. But there were no organized protest against the social injustice. The autobiography *My Story* of Rosa Parks gives details of her struggle and protest against this cruel and exploitative social inequality. It explores the issues like self-identity, united protest against the racial segregation. At last the words of Reed conclude the paper, “In the years since her arrest, Rosa Parks has been recognized throughout America as the mother of the modern day civil rights movement. For children and adults, Mrs. Parks is a role model for courage, an example of dignity and determination. She is a symbol of freedom for the world.”

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