

---

(Peer Reviewed and Refereed Journal)

---

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7929584>

---

## IDEOLOGICAL SHIFT IN THE WORKS OF AMIRI BARAKA

**Bhumbar A. R.**

Department of English,  
Brijlal Biyani Science College,  
Amravati, India

&

**Deshmukh S.R.**

Department of English,  
Matoshree Vimalabai Deshmukh Mahavidyalaya  
Amravati., India

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

### Abstract

Amiri Baraka, a poet, playwright, essayist, activist, lecturer, novelist, editor, anthologist and director is one of the most influential and versatile African American writers of the twentieth century. Amiri Baraka's poetry and drama are classified into four distinctive phases. Each depicted his attempt to find a philosophy capable of responding adequately to corrupt culture. The voice of each phase is shaped by a different set of beliefs. No other poet in African-American literature has gone through such a continual process as Amiri Baraka. He has adopted different kinds of ideologies, which are not only artistic but cultural and political also. His writing reflected the growth and expansion of his understanding and consciousness of the world around him

**Keywords:** Racial consciousness, Beat period, Transitional period, Black Nationalist period, Black empowerment, Marxist, Racial discrimination, Black culture

---

**(Peer Reviewed and Refereed Journal)**

---

Amiri Baraka, a poet, playwright, essayist, activist, lecturer, novelist, editor, anthologist and director is one of the most influential and versatile African American writers of the twentieth century. Amiri Baraka never the less has trodden over many stoppages in his one giant leap. His prima-facie appears to have achieved what his many predecessors would not do. Amiri Baraka first came to the attention of readers and critics as LeRoi Jones.

Throughout his literary career, Amiri Baraka went through a two-name change. At the beginning of his career, he was influenced by the Beat movement. Hence, in the Beat period, he changed his name from Leroy to LeRoi. In his Nationalist period, the writer changed his name and became Imamu Amiri Baraka. In the Marxist period, he goes by Amiri Baraka. The changes in his name show his progress as a writer regarding society. In the middle of his literary career, he indulged in active politics. All three important phases in his career as Bohemian Intellectual to Black Nationalist to Third world Marxist include reflecting these changes in Society.

Baraka's work is chronicles the development of society and his own racial identity. Baraka's poetry is classified into four distinct periods. Each phase depicted his attempt to find a philosophy capable of responding, adequately to a corrupt white culture. The ideology of each phase is shaped by a different set of belief. No other poet in African American literature has gone through the such a continual process as Amiri Baraka. Baraka has adopted different kind of belief system, which is not only artistic and cultural but political also.

Baraka's writing reflected development and expansion of his understanding and consciousness of the world around him, Amiri Baraka's importance as a poet rests on the diversity of his work. He has handled many social issues and actively participated in politics. Race and religion are pivotal pillars in the literary works of Amiri Baraka He is a very multitalented writer and it is hard to find a vocabulary to give a whole description of his literary work. Baraka was acclaimed as the creator of a new consciousness. In African American poetry, the works of Baraka can be divided into four periods such as the Beat period, the Transitional period, the Black Nationalist period, and the Third world Marxist period.

---

(Peer Reviewed and Refereed Journal)

---

In the earlier period of his career, he believed in the significance of Western civilization as and precursor to intellectual development. In the Beat period, Baraka retains a light touch in his perspective on racial consciousness. Beat poets kept themselves apart from the need and egos of materialistic and capitalist society. In the Beat period, Baraka tried to escape from racial identity but he realized that race is significant in American culture and he could not escape from it by refusing to take part in the conflict.

Lacey notes that the preface was most noticeably  
*“Characterized by the pervasive sense of despair,  
alienation and self-deprecation and reflected “the  
Beats Scorn for the pressures exerted by the forces  
of convention pretense and materialism.”<sup>1</sup>*

*Preface to a Twenty Volume Suicide Note* is a book of verse with personal and domestic poems. The volume reflects his consciousness as a Black artist. In the 1960s, Baraka was accustomed to ongoing conflict for civil rights and was unable to keep himself apart from the conflict. A Lacey notes, Baraka.

*“Though often comical in his comments on the civil  
Rights movement of the early 60s was profoundly  
affected by its.”<sup>2</sup>*

*In memory of Radio* shows Baraka's position in the Beat movement and the poem offers a description of mid-century American society and western culture. Although the poem criticizes middle-class bourgeois and typical views of culture, it does not show strident political views. In the first stanza, Baraka shows how a figure from popular culture can also be divine. He also has given a reference to Jack Kerouac. Kerouac is one of the prominent writers of the Beat of the 1950s and 1960s.

*“Who has ever stopped to think of  
The divinity of  
Lamont Cranston?  
(Only Jack Kerouac that know of and me.  
The rest of you probably had an WCBS and kate*

---

(Peer Reviewed and Refereed Journal)

---

*Smith*

*or something equally unattractive). ”<sup>3</sup>*

The poems illustrate the idea of appearance and reality and reflect that the world of appearances is never to be trusted by Baraka. Scholar William J. Harris describes the writer's relation to his fantasies as follows:

*“In Baraka there has always been a battle between the imagination and the real world Baraka was attracted to the world of the imagination because there he could be anyone and has anything he wanted. In his Beat days, the late 1950 and early 1960s, the propensity for fantasy displaced history and ethnicity from his work feeling kinship with the other Beats; he could say that he was as any other Sad man here/An American. ”<sup>4</sup>*

*In memory of Radio* has no trace of Black consciousness, yet the poem easily reads as statements that African-Americans live in a white society and have a special ability for the divination of evil. The central image in the poem is a superhero from comic books and radio shows named shadow, which hunts down, and roots out evil in the world.

During this transitional period, Baraka was in constant contradiction with himself. He was unable to be completely free from the popular culture of his childhood which was inherited by him in his own formal and self-education through literature and its western culture. He was confused about his identity. Baraka did not know who he was or where he belonged. Baraka realized the truth that he was not part of white society. For Baraka the conflict between the Beat philosophy and the feeling as a black man within the Beat movements is very ambiguous.

Baraka drifted away from the Beat writer's influence Banks drifted from beat poetry to the Black Nationalist period. The middle period between the beat and Black Nationalist periods is known as the Transitional period. It depicts the development of black consciousness through black empowerment. He refused the concept of assimilation and

---

(Peer Reviewed and Refereed Journal)

---

integration with white people. For Baraka, the conflict between the Beat philosophy and the feeling of a black man within the Beat movement is very ambiguous. He has attempted to embrace the solely black perspective and create a new definition of art.

In 1964, Baraka's second volume of poetry entitled *The Dead Lecturer* was published. *An Agony As Now* is published in this anthology which reflected Baraka's emergence from intellectual to black activist and described Baraka's personal anguish. The opening lines of the poem are:

*"I am inside someone  
who hates me I look  
out from his eyes smell  
what fouled tunes come in  
to his breath."*<sup>5</sup>

It was the voice of African-Americans within the white western culture. Baraka realized that African-Americans were trapped in white western society in the Beat phase, Baraka accepted white culture as his culture. The lines *I am inside someone who hates me* show that in the Beat period, though he accept the white culture and became part of American tradition, he suppressed black consciousness. By adopting American culture, he drifted himself from African culture. During his transition period, he experienced an inner voice starting to whisper within him the concluding lines of the poem:

*"It burns the thing  
Inside it. And that thing  
Scream."*<sup>6</sup>

The above lines show the divided self of a Black intellectual in a white culture expressed in terms of guilt fear and inferiority. He was torn between his political self and artistic self which was truly painful for him.

Amiri Baraka during his transition period and career as a Black Nationalist concentrated on the oppression of African Americans in a white society. African-Americans were unable to realize their own culture, heritage, music and literature. Baraka realized he as part of the African American community and moves to build a consciousness based on

---

(Peer Reviewed and Refereed Journal)

---

realism and action Baraka realized that there could be no true reconciliation of culture without an African American culture to stand in opposition of white western principles.

Amiri Baraka was intensely dissatisfied with the Black Nationalist movements and their control over orthodox politics. Baraka found little satisfaction in the Black Nationalist movement and turned toward the cohesive struggle of class Baraka's narrow opinion as a Nationalist had ignored some of the basic realities of the African-American conflict and stunted the movement's growth.

In *Black Magic* Baraka writes specially for African-Americans and urges them to because reactive and took pride in their race. Baraka realized that to revive pride in African American society, steps liberated themselves from the grip of colonizers Baraka managed to the negative stereotypical images of African-Americans Baraka and helped the African-American community to strengthen their pride and self-love. Hence, described and achievements of African culture which are rich in music, literature and He also tried to unite black and make them proud of their culture and heritage His significant poem entitled 'Ka' 'Ba'. The title itself shows that it symbolises Islam and the poet here uses it as an embodiment of the black colour.

*"We are beautiful people  
With African imaginations  
Full of masks and dances and swelling chants  
Though we sprawl in grey chains in a place  
Full of winters, when what we want is sun  
We have been captured  
Brothers And we labor  
To make our getaway."*<sup>7</sup>

Baraka as a Marxist, returned to his role as a social activist Baraka realized beyond the barriers of racial identity. His Marxism shows the reconciliation of political and black consciousness and is concerned with capitalism, which is the root cause of the oppression of African American in America. Amiri Baraka was intensely dissatisfied with the Black Nationalist movements and their control over orthodox politics. Baraka found little

---

(Peer Reviewed and Refereed Journal)

---

satisfaction in the Black Nationalist movement and turned toward the cohesive struggle of class Baraka's narrow opinion as a Nationalist had ignored some of the basic realities of the African-American conflict and stunted the movement's growth.

*“His 1974 conversion from Black Nationalist to Third World Marxism coincided with the end of the black power movement’s infrastructure, which was being dissolved and “co-opted” by government agencies due to administrative and tax issues.”<sup>8</sup>*

Baraka as a Marxist, returned to his role as a social activist Baraka realized beyond the barriers of racial identity. His Marxism shows a reconciliation of political and black consciousness and is concerned with capitalism.

Baraka's anthology entitled *Hard Facts*, which was published in 1975 displays Marxism. Many poems included in this anthology, and some of his subsequent collections mark Baraka's open advocacy of Marxist ideology. In his first anthology of Marxist poetry *Hard Facts* Baraka shows the destructive nature of a capitalistic society. *When will worship Jesus show* Baraka's rage against capitalistic forces? In this particular poem, Baraka goes beyond criticizing Christianity and shows the poet's disillusionment about accepting religion as a tool to fight against racial oppression and economic injustice.

Baraka writes:

*“Capitalists racists  
Imperialists not afraid  
Of Jesus shit they Makin money  
Off Jesus [...]  
Jesus aint did nothing for us  
But kept us turned towards the  
Sky (him and his boy allah  
Too, need to be checked out).”<sup>9</sup>*

---

(Peer Reviewed and Refereed Journal)

---

Here Jesus symbolizes religion which means oppression. Religion is unable to provide any solution Christianity crushed the voice of oppressed people Christianity has been a failure to be a powerful tool for African Americans who fight against racial discrimination.

Baraka's consciousness went through several stages, but its soul never changed. He was dedicated to advancing the rights of oppressed groups generally and black people in particular. Baraka uses art as a tool to instill a sense of blackness in the brains of people of colour. The black population feels terrible about their skin tone. They perceive their skin tone as a curse and consider themselves to be beneath white people. By using his works to advance black culture, Baraka urges people to eradicate their guilt consciousness from their hearts and develop new sensibilities

#### Works Cited:

- 1.Lacey, Henry C. *"To Raise, Destroy and Create: The Poetry, Drama and Fiction of Imamu Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones)"*Troy, NY: Whiston Publishing. 1981. Print.
2. Ibid
- 3.Baraka, Amiri. *"In Memory of Radio.Transbluency: The Selected Poems of Amiri Baraka"*1961-1995. New York: Manillio. 1995. 15 27. Print.
- 4.Harris, William. *"Amiri Baraka: Biography and Historical Context Modern American Poetry"*. 1991. Web, 6 Feb 2009. <http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/posts/atio htm>
- 5 Baraka, Amiri. *"An Agony, As Now", Transbluency. The Selected Poems of Amiri Baraka 1961-1995.*New York Marsillio, 1995. 60-61.Print
- 6.Ibid
- 7.-----*"Ka' 'Ba Transbluency.The Selected Poems of Amiri Baraka"* 1961-1995. New York. Marsillio, 1995. Print
8. Ya Salaam, Kalamu, *"Historical overviews of the Black Arts Movement Modern American Poetry"*, Web. 10 Mar 2009 <http://www.english.illinois.edu Maps/blackartes historical.htm>
- 9.-----When We'll Worship Jesus, *"Anthology of Modern American Poetry"*.Ed.Carl Nelson. New York. Oxford University Press, 2000.999-1001. Print.