

**RIFFING THE GROOVE, JUGGLING THE HIP:
A KINESTHETIC STUDY OF AFRICAN-
AMERICAN RAP MUSIC VIDEOS**

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by

VED PRAKASH



**Centre for English Studies
School of Language, Literature and Culture Studies
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi - 110067, India
2011**



**Centre for English Studies
School of Language, Literature and Culture Studies
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi- 110067, India**

Date: 18.07.11

Certificate

This dissertation titled “Riffing the Groove, Juggling the Hip: A Kinesthetic Study of African-American Rap Music Videos” submitted by Ved Prakash, Centre for English Studies, School of Language, Literature and Culture Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy, is an original work and has not been submitted so far in part or in full, for any other degree, diploma of any university or institution.

This may be placed before the examiners for evaluation for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy.

(Dr. Navneet Sethi)

Supervisor

Dr. Navneet Sethi
Associate Professor
Centre for English Studies
School of Language, Literature & Culture Studies
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi - 110 067

(Prof. G. J. V. Prasad)

Chairperson

Prof. GJV Prasad
Chairperson
Centre for English Studies
School of Language, Literature & Culture Studies
Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi-110067

Date: 18.07.11

**Declaration by the
Candidate**

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Ved Prakash

(Ved Prakash)

M.Phil Student

Centre for English Studies,

School of Language, Literature and Culture Studies,

Jawaharlal Nehru University,

New Delhi, India

To Amma and Kaka who mean everything to me

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Introduction

There is no such thing as alternative Hip Hop
Because only alternative to Hip Hop is dead silence
And we all know such silence signifies a lack of breath
There is no such thing as good Hip Hop or bad Hip Hop
Progressive Hip Hop or reactionary Hip Hop
Politically incorrect Hip Hop or Hip Hop with a message
Hip Hop is beyond good and evil, Hip Hop is beyond life and death
Hip Hop is half black and half Japanese
Digital chips on the shoulder of African lips
Hip Hop is black Prozac
Hip Hop is if you can't beat them blunt them
Hip Hop is black sadomasochism
Where the hurting ends and the feeling begins.¹

In its present form, Rap music has enlarged into an immense cultural as well as a commercial industry. Initially the art of Rap was associated in particular with African-Americans but today Rap music has widened its roots across multifarious cultures. Besides, the African-American rappers like Ice T, N.W.A, Schoolly D, KRS One, Public Enemy, Queen Latifah and Foxy Brown and so on; the white rappers such as The Beastie Boys and Eminem have also become the part of popular rap imagination. On the other hand, The Black Eyed Peas, The Neptunes, and N.E.R.D are the well known Filipino-American Rappers on the landscape of Hip Hop and there is British and Japanese Hip Hop too which subsist outside the boundaries of America. Hip Hop has truly become a global phenomenon. In its journey from being an art of a minority group to an art of the mass Hip Hop has evolved in the troubled terrain in terms of politics, culture and race. It is viewed

¹ These lines have been taken from a rap song titled "What is Hip Hop?" by Greg Tate. Tate is an African-American cultural theorist and writer. 'The Source' magazine acknowledged him as the godfather of Hip Hop journalism. Tate is also the music director of 'Burnt Sugar' a band which is known for assimilating rock, jazz and African music.

and criticized through several lenses and numerous tags are often stapled with Hip Hop. For example it is generally believed that Hip Hop is misogynistic, sexist, and violent in its nature. Adam Bradley in *Book of Rhymes: The Poetics of Hip Hop* remarks:

It is Rap's perennial problem. Most Hip Hop fans find themselves at one time or another in the position of defending the indefensible, of making the case to excuse the coarse language and the misogynistic messages behind some of Rap's best known lyrics. (Bradley 86)

This research work attempts to see how true these classifications are in context to Hip Hop. Though, one needs to delimitate Hip Hop to identify with Rap as there has always been some kind of perplexity regarding the categorization of Rap and Hip Hop. Hip Hop is a larger umbrella term which encompasses 'Rap', 'Graffiti', 'DJing', 'MCing', and 'Break-dancing'. In the present scenario more often than not Rap and Hip Hop are used as synonyms of each-other. There is no ambiguity with regard to Rap's indispensability to Hip Hop culture. In fact one could deduce that Rap emerged out of Hip Hop. Beyond general cataloguing, I propose that streets or ghettos are also a requisite part of Hip Hop culture.

Hip Hop is a youth movement that evolved in the Bronx, New York. From these origins, it has developed in a popular music phenomenon in United States and all around the world. It is claimed that the term Hip Hop became renowned after the release of Sugar Hill Gang's 'Rapper's Delight' in 1979. This song created an immense impact and because of its simple and captivating pattern of beats it made music lovers in America realise that Hip Hop had some kind of vivacious energy which was not very simple to be overlooked. It is believed that the lyrics of the song "What a hip, hop, the hipit, the hipidipit, hip, hop, hopit, you don't stop..."² made the term 'Hip Hop' popular and relevant amongst youth. 'Rapper's Delight' (1979) is perceived as a marker which made the beginning of Rap in popular imagination. While another school of Rap considers that 'Rapper's Delight' did not initiate the commencement of Rap but in fact the first song which initiated rap was 'Kim Tim III' by the Fatback band. It is believed that 'Kim Tim III' was released in late 1979 by Spring Records just before the Sugar Hill Gang launched 'Rapper's Delight' officially. The reason why 'Rapper's Delight' is perceived as the originator of Rap music is its commercial success and mass recognition as most of the African-Americans could identify with the form.

² The lyrics are from the song called "Rappers Delight".

According to Russell Simmons: "...Hip Hop is the musical medium through which the story of life in America at the end of twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first centuries is being told...future scholars may need to turn toward Rap music to gain key insight into this period of history" (Green 15). What Russell Simmons advocating is that Hip Hop has been a mode of representing the narratives of African-Americans and the indication that Rap music will be a tool to provide insight into history further proves the point that Rap is the most audible artistic form of Hip Hop. The most captivating characteristic of Rap is that it created something out of the old music records, a microphone and two turntables. Initially, before rap reached its culmination point in terms of popularity; gigantic speakers and loud music played by DJs could be heard across streets. When boom boxes which are also known as ghetto blasters were popular there was always a dispute about claiming or re-claiming the public space amidst Hip Hop artists but as Emcees started to take over loud music of ghetto blasters by their verbal fluency, the focus began to shift from DJs to Emcees and that is how Rappers came into the forefront.

The famous black activist and writer, Eldridge Cleaver, used the word Rap to mean 'a conversation' in his book *Soul on Ice* (1965). As far as the origin of Rap is concerned, some claim that Rap emanated from sixties lingo, the word 'Rap' meaning conversation. In the 1960s and 70s, people would have Rap sessions as opposed to group counselling. Rap music consists of chanted street poetry that is often extemporised. The progression of Rap has been a long and remarkable excursion; Rap was not invented all at once but it was the overgrowth of years of musical expressions, excogitation, experimentation, and innovation. During the time of slavery and brutality, African-Americans used to share their narratives amidst each-other, the partaking and exchange of stories and experiences also contributed a lot in the progression of the Rap art.

My first introduction to Rap music as a form of literature took place in the Masters Programme when I decided to make a presentation on Queen Latifah's Rap song "Evil That Men Do". At that time, I was completely oblivious of the multi-layered surface of this art form and complex canvas underlying the swagger of rappers. I had no estimation that Rap music provides blacks a location where unheard voices are remixed with loud beats to such an extent that one could not afford to let these voices lose their presence in the air without having noticed them. From that one presentation to the present research dissertation it has been a long and pleasurable journey to explore the various terrains of Hip Hop and Rap music within its variegated cultural milieu and sociological context.

The primary objectives of this research will be to look at Rap music videos of both African-American male and female Rappers of late 1980s and early 1990s. The reason why I chose this particular period lies in the fact that late 1980s - early 1990s was the epoch when an entire new generation was getting inclined towards Rap and this was the time when Rap music was at its pinnacle and hence it is considered to be the golden era of Rap. Ice T's 'High Rollers' (1988), N.W.A's 'Express Yourself' (1989), Public Enemy's 'Fight the Power' (1989), Queen Latifah's 'Ladies First' (1989), and Sister Souljah's 'Slavery is back in Effect' (1991) will be the centre of critical focus here. Additionally, songs of other Rappers will also be incorporated to develop a broader comparative perspective of Rap.

Rap music video is a site which constructs a space full of signs and symbols that can furnish a new way to perceive the meaning and philosophy behind this youth oriented musical art. The present research will not only confine the scope of analysis within the rubric of music videos and Rap lyrics but the other aspects which are often associated with Hip Hop and Rappers such as graffiti, tattooing and fashion will also be analysed from the perspective of cultural studies. To broaden my argument, I would like to asseverate that this research will explore and function on three major areas: Rap as music of substance; body in videos; and the visual space within the black socio-cultural and political frameworks.

As far as the nature of Rap is concerned, Adam Bradley remarks that the way Rap functions is quite different than other musical genres because "Rap is not speech exactly, not is it precisely song, and yet it employs elements of both." (101). I would like to state that Rap is a genre in which sounds are mixed, additional lyrics are added, and linearity loses its trace and finally a totally different product comes out. Before moving further into Rap, one should address the artists who are not only considered to be the forefathers of Rap but in fact these artists gave so much to this genre that their involvement and contribution cannot be outdone. One such Artist is Gil Scott Heron who signifies the soul of Hip Hop.

Gilbert Scott Heron is an American poet, musician and author who is known as a performance poet, singer and a rapper of immense influence. During 1970s – 80s, Heron highlighted serious social and political issues concerning the blacks. His collaborative efforts with Brian Jackson resulted in the fusion of the soul, jazz, blues and Rap. His

albums 'winter in America' (1974) and 'Pieces of a man' (1971) influenced music genres such as Hip Hop and neo soul. He is addressed as 'the godfather of Rap' and 'the black Bob Dylan'. Though, Scott Heron has sung many songs but he got immense critical and mass acclaim for his composition 'The Revolution will not be Televised' (1971). This song gave new meanings to the dimension of revolution within African-Americans.

The primary sources for this research will mainly be the selected videos, songs, and concerts of Rap. But to enhance the quality of the research, I have also looked upon Hip Hop culture in America in its totality along with other genres of African-American music such as Jazz, and Blues. Essays, books, interviews, survey reports, critical documents, journals and articles pertaining to Rap music have also been read and analysed during the course of this research.

African-American music in general has been an area of great interest within academic intelligentsia. Hence, a reasonable amount of work has already been done on it. As far as existing research with regard to Rap music is concerned, I would like to mention the name of works which have been accessed in great details for a comprehensive understanding of the form which helped me to formulate my research enquiries and ideas.

Adams Bradley's *Book of Rhymes: The Poetics of Hip Hop* (2009) provided key insights in context to Hip Hop culture and what socio-political and cultural changes Hip Hop has brought in America. This study does not – unlike others – concentrate on the history of the so-called Hip Hop revolution but the primary focus of this book is on the poetics and the politics of Hip Hop culture. Though, in my work I am not particularly contemplating the poetic qualities of Hip Hop but this book helped me in explaining the art of Hip Hop within multiple socio-cultural and political dynamics. Another important work is Cheryl L Keyes's *Rap Music and Street Consciousness* (2002). Keyes begins with tracing the roots of Rap music. How Rap music came into existence? Why Rap is called Rap? And how Rap art travelled from West Africa to Jamaica and then to America? These are some of the areas that are addressed in this book. The advent of Rap music videos and the existence of subgenres like gangsta Rap, Southern Rap, and dance-centered Rap as well as interviews with performers, producers, directors, fans, and managers have been highlighted in this book. Keyes detailed analysis helped in providing information about ghettos and street culture which I have used in my work.

As far as Jeffrey O. G. Ogbar's *Hip Hop Revolution: The Culture and Politics of Rap* (2007) is concerned, it offers a wide-ranging and conversant addition to the field of Hip Hop. This piece of work is one of the most substantial and thoughtful works on the cultural politics of Hip Hop. Through this book, Ogbar probes deeply into the roots and realities of Hip Hop which provides a real picture of the Hip Hop world.

Imani Perry in *Prophets of the Hood: Politics and Poetics in Hip Hop* (2004) mentions the affirmative and pessimistic aspects that Rap has brought into the world of African-Americans. Perry views Hip Hop as the democratic space for the blacks. Perry judges the art, tradition, politics, and culture of Hip Hop through the study of song lyrics of Hip Hop artists such as Ice Cube, Public Enemy, De La Soul, KRS-One, Outkast, Tupac Shakur, Lil' Kim, Biggie Smalls, Lauryn Hill, and Foxy Brown. Last but not the least in *Black Noise* (1994), Tricia Rose takes a comprehensive look at the lyrics, music, cultures, themes, and styles of rhythmic storytelling with the most salient issues and debates that surround Rap music and Black Culture. Tricia Rose highlights Rap's multiple voices by exploring its underlying urban cultural politics and discusses Rap as a unique musical form in which traditional African-based oral traditions fuse with cutting-edge music technologies.

The proposed methodology for this research is on the basis of both textual and visual reading-based exegesis. During my research I shuffled through the old and new literary texts along with the old and contemporary oral records of 'Rap music' videos to frame up my argument more strongly. I have gone through the interviews of Rappers as well to know the approach and psyche of these music artists towards the Rap form. Literary reviews and analysis helped me to have a theoretical perspective of Rap. Once the data was collected, I commenced research keeping in mind the scope and objectives of discourse of the research work.

As far as the chapters are concerned, the first chapter "Rap: Music of Sound and Sensibility" assesses the dynamics of power and culture as revealed in lyrics and rap songs. The lyrics of Rap songs across gangsta, conscious and female Rap will be analysed to see any transformation in the nature of Rap lyrics. This chapter will look further at Rap lyrics in relation to Rappers and streets or ghettos and see the whole progression of Rap and try to understand which constituent out of Rappers, streets or lyrics contributes the most in the signification of rap. I thought of examining the lyrics before getting into the

nature of Rap videos because lyrics will create a base for the study and understanding of the rhetoric of rap. A brief glance is also given to perceive the influence of Rap lyrics in the lingual transformation of both African-American literature and black people. This section of the research will also shed some light on Rap and its genealogy while highlighting the connections between Rap music and folk songs of Africa and Caribbean besides blues and Jazz.

After introducing Rap and having been able to engage into various discussions and issues in the first chapter, the second chapter 'Body in Rap: Being and Becoming' will deal with the function and politics of black male and female body in Rap music videos. Body has been a site of immense significance for blacks. From being a site of exploitation to an emplacement of empowerment black body has been the symbol of culture, politics and contestation. This chapter will also look at the scope and possibilities of body within the tropes of power while distinguishing changes between male and female Rappers from the depiction of body to the construction and representation of it. An attempt is made to get into the multi-layered surface of the body to see what meanings a video adds to the concept of body. With the history of videos and music channel MTV, this segment will also look at the stereotypes which are associated with the black body.

The third chapter will try to initiate a debate amidst subcultures and mainstream culture of society. This section seeks to discover the role of subcultural forms like tattoos and graffiti in the construction of the foremost voice of a culture. I will try to contest how peripheral nature of subcultural forms is fluid. Apart from graffiti and tattoo, fashion of black Rappers both male and female will also be a subject of concern. The focal objective of this chapter will be to contend the visual identity and visual voice which is formed by graffiti, tattoos and fashion. The problems of masculinity and femininity within the arts of graffiti and tattoo will especially be questioned because in general the parameters of masculinity are associated with the graffiti walls and tattooed bodies. This chapter will try to break the stereotypes and contest that female body can fit within the so called generalised masculine forms in the Hip Hop culture.

Most of the researches which have been done on Rap music so far emphasize a lot on the political and historical background of Rap music. Moreover, there are books in abundance on Rap music which just deal with the Rap lyrics and its socio-politico implications. In my research, the foremost focus will be on the three very essential

constituents of African-American culture: 'music'- as the language of protest, celebration and lyrics related to streets; 'self'- as the body and its identity politics and 'space'- the confluence of cultures, technologies, sub-cultures in an urban-scape to subvert the general notions of power and sexuality. The visual impact of Rap videos on the spectators and viewers are analysed to open up new ways and means of discussions for further research studies.

Chapter 1

Rap: Music of Sound and Sensibility

“I start to think and then I sink
Into the paper like I was ink
When I’m writing, I’m tRapped in between the lines
I escape when I finish the rhyme”³

Music has always been an integral component of a society. Music is just not about the sound, beats or lyrics but infact it delineates the culture and subsistence of a society. One can essentially contest that music works as a mirror of a culture. If one scrutinizes the whole contextual setting of music within the historical and socio-political context of African-Americans then it would not be an exaggeration in claiming the fact that music for them has been much more than just music. Music rendered a sense of space, tolerance and credence for African-Americans in a world where the colour black was never considered beautiful in comparison to white. Music has served as an apparatus of both resistance and power to blacks.

However, there have been many kinds of African-American music such as Slave Protest music, Gospels, Jazz, Blues, and Rap and each genre of music gave a socio-cultural identity to them. The music of African-Americans has travelled far from cotton fields to the streets of America and then from the streets it moved to the studios but this voyage of music from cotton fields to the studios has not been very pleasurable and effortless. Initially when Blues and Jazz were invented by the blacks, the reaction from the various sections of America had not been very receptive towards these musical forms especially it was believed that these black musical arts will not endure for long. On the contrary, Jazz and Blues developed and both became popular arts not only in America but

³ The lines have been taken from rap group Eric B & Rakim’s ‘I Know You Got the Soul’ (1987). This group is from New York, America. During mid 1980s and early 1990s this duo was ranked amongst the top Hip Hop artists.

outside of it as well.

As the title of this chapter suggests, I will be contesting Rap music being an art of both sense and sound simultaneously. The chapter will concentrate on Gangsta, Conscious and female Rap but the primary justification is to critically analyse the Rap lyrics of artists such as Ice T, N.W.A, Public Enemy, Queen Latifah and Sister Souljah and provide a well detailed perspective. Lyrics of other well-known Rappers such as Run D.M.C and Schoolly D will also be taken into a notable consideration. Though there are numerous books written on Rap music which emphasize on Rap lyrics within the socio-economic and cultural domain but this chapter will look at the relationship amidst Rap, Rappers, streets or ghettos and lyrics within the sphere of power and culture and observe the transformation in Rap lyrics across different genres. Moreover, I would attempt to inquire as to who plays a pivotal role in deciding the significance of Rap music? Is it the nature of Rap lyrics or the ghettos or the Rappers themselves who contribute in the signification of Rap?

The reason why these Rappers have been given importance over the thousands of others is that these Rappers not only created music but they created history besides playing a remarkable role in the evolution of Rap form. Moreover, I will be looking specifically at the selected, widely known and renowned songs of these Rappers addressing the issues of racial discrimination, violence, gang trouble, drug abuse, social hostility towards blacks, police brutality, empowerment, resistance and so on.

When music is studied in context of the African-American experience, one should not pretermite the fact that music for them has been a movement; a movement against exploitation, slavery, subjection and the catalogue can go on further. Music functioned as the solitary source of strength and power for blacks at a time when not only black voice but black psyche as well was suppressed but more than strength and power music furnished a cognisance of collectiveness and integrity within blacks. It connected African-Americans to each other and to their own selves regardless of their class, colour, religion and social prominence. Moreover, it helped blacks to ameliorate their social and economic eminence. In capitalist America, money is a sign of influence and accomplishment and music gave a sentience of both to blacks. Some might remonstrate here by pointing out that music did facilitate in generating money but it was confined only to a group of people? Though, it is factual but what in actual fact matters is that, this affluent group

managed to communicate across a sense of recognition and identification. If the whole politics of the centre and the margin is contested then can one enunciate that music helped blacks in changing the centrality of the centre and in moving them beyond fringes? It will not be unproblematic to answer this question because was it music which actually gave power to blacks or the acquisition of success by blacks lies in the way they approached music? These questions will be answered in the latter part of this chapter.

S. H. Fernando Jr. in his preface to *The New Beats: Exploring the music, culture, and attitudes of Hip Hop* substantiates that music portrays an innermost picture of a culture and it is true about all cultures of the world. Fernando Jr. writes: "Some people consider music as purely entertainment, when, in fact, it is one of the most intimate reflections of a culture. Like other modes of artistic expression, music also offers a direct insight into the soul..." (Fernando Jr., xi)

Rap music does provide an insight into the soul of blacks. It takes us to the streets and ghettos where Rap was originated and later on it disseminated across numerous cultures. It is not very simple to comprehend what Rap actually is? According to some, Rap is all about a person signing a song without a rupture, while others think that Rap is all about Rapid beats and Rappers do not really care whether people can follow this art or not. Of course Rap is about fast beats but there is so much more which give a sentience of significance to this art. At the present moment Rap music has moved across spheres and margins from Television, Radio, and Commercials to Fashion, Magazines, and Advertisements and so on.

Rap music has a long trajectory which is not very simplistic to be placed. Rap retains traces of the folk songs and vocal and musical rhythms of Africa and the Caribbean that often served as a means of communication for Africans transported forcibly to America under slavery. Paul Gilroy writes:

Hip Hop culture grew out of the cross-fertilization of African American vernacular cultures with their Caribbean equivalents. (Gilroy, 1993:103)

However, the most crucial thing to be comprehended about slavery from the perspective of the enslaved is that millions of African Americans endured slavery by creating music for themselves in the midst of their bondage which was later known as 'Slave Protest Music'. Music helped African-Americans in creating a world away from the interference of white Americans, a world in which African-Americans sang their souls and

hearts out.

The art of Rap shares a close relation with the West African “Bardic” tradition. The “Bardic” tradition of West Africa covers numerous facades of music starting from oral culture to history to performative aspects of African societies. Cheryl L. Keyes in *Rap music and Street Consciousness* remarks: “...the bard is a storyteller-singer and above all a historian who chronicles the nation’s history and transmits cultural traditions and mores through performance.” (Keyes, 2002:19)

Moreover, a bard has the ability to play around with words with simplicity and this is the reason a bard is highly respected in an African community. After diaspora the role of a bard was later on embraced by most of the MC’s. Apart from diaspora, slavery, displacement, and so on the issue of language cannot be overlooked within the cultural and socio-political rubric of African-Americans. Language for Africans in America became more than a mere tool of communication. Language moved beyond the paradigm of mere communication in fact it also served as a device for personal presentation and cultural representation. Moreover, when one canvasses the language then it becomes essential to glance at African-American music and construct a bridge between language and music. Though, it is apodictic that languages vis-a-vis music of a community or society always co-exist with each-other and it will be fractious to get an inclusive essence of the one without the other. It will be a subject of significance to examine Africa and its linguistic and musical set-up before one begins to deal with African-American music.

Africa is a huge continent, measuring about 11,700,000 square miles (roughly four times the size of the United States). It has around 250 million indigenous inhabitants belonging to at least four major racial divisions and forming at least 2,000 tribal groups, speaking between 800 to 2,400 tongues, depending upon one’s definition of what is a language and what is only a dialect. Every one of these units has its own customs, including its own music. (Roberts, 1998:xxii)

If one perceives the entire African continent as one singular entity then the handclapping and human voice are the two most important driving forces in African music. The complete essence of African music can be perceived when the whole group and the community partake in it. John Storm Roberts in *Black Music of Two Worlds: African, Caribbean, Latin and African-American Traditions* uses the phrase “call and response singing” with regard to African music and this phrase more or less defines the nature of African music in its integrality. Since music is so much rooted in African culture, there are songs about the various ordinary and everyday activities of human life.

There is a song children learn to sing or the loss of their first tooth. The akin of Ghana have a song of derision aimed at habitual bed wetters sung at a special ritual designed to cure enuresis. Punishment for wrongdoing has its own music... the Bagman of Cameroun have some eerie and impressive music to be played when a court official is taken to be hanged. Examples of the social use of music are endless. (Roberts, 1998:xxiii)

Drawing a route from African music to Rap, it is evident that Rap music has imbibed a lot from African music. The sense of “call and response singing” and group songs, community songs, social-awareness songs, songs of mere aggravation against the administration, songs of harsh day to day realities of life are apparent and perceptible in Rap music. The concept of call and response is integral to the status and honour of Rap artists to an extent that Rappers are not given much importance if they do not have an entourage. This might be one of the reasons of Rappers having a whole gang with them. For this reason, Rappers re-create in their records a sense of liveliness by incorporating many elements such as audience cheers and responses. Rappers or African-American artists belonging to other genre of music give a momentous amount of importance to the audience in fact their music cannot accomplish its entirety without the involvement of audience. “They thrive on audience response to the extent that the success of a performance is thrived by the active interplay between the performer and the audience.”(Keyes, 2002:26)

Rap also shares a close alliance with Minstrel shows which began in the early 1830s with brief burlesques. These burlesques would be of dance, music and comic skits. In addition, when Minstrel shows are studied then the governing lens of analysing at them are the tools of performativity but the tropes of performance in Rap will be explored in the second chapter. Nonetheless, by 1848 Minstrel shows had become a full-fledged art of entertainment. One might speculate that what association minstrel shows have with Rap? Then I would like to put forward that there were many problems regarding the representation of black figures in these shows. A sense of tumultuousness was created among the blacks regarding their portrayal on stage by such shows and hence a sentiment of retaliation. “From the Harlem Renaissance to post-war jazz to the era of Black Power and beyond, black artists reacted by making copious expressions of resistive art that explicitly rejected the minstrel” (Ogbar, 2007:16) This movement of resistance against the buffoonish and preconceived depiction of blacks continued in Rap music too wherein there are songs against racial biasness, police brutality on blacks, social discrimination and so on. The ground of this resistance was laid by minstrel shows and these shows do play

an authoritative role in drawing the course of confrontation in African-American music.

Another element which Rap shares a sincere affiliation with is “Street”. Street culture, street lingo, street fashion, street violence and so on have played a significant role in shaping up Rap. The streets are considered to be an institution in itself in African-American Culture. Streets are as important as school, church and family because streets not only became the vehicle of revolution, political movements, power and success but for some people it became the site of endurance.

However, many Rappers claim that one needs to grow up in streets to know Rap or to become a Rapper. Does it mean that someone who comes from a well off neighbourhood or a good economic background can never be a Rapper? Not precisely, the issue here is not of the authenticity of the art of Rap but to understand what difference do the streets make in Rap and why ghettos are considered to be the centre of Rap music?

Ghettos have been a home for African-Americans, a home representing blackness and suffering of being a black in America and which is why many Rappers believe that to be a Rappers one needs to know how it feels like to be born and brought up in ghettos. Many of the Rappers reclaim ghetto as a marker of power, legitimacy and identity. KRS-One came up with a song called “Ghetto Music” in 1989, in this song he makes a distinction between the underground music and the commercial music and draws a conclusion that underground music is more authentic. The lyrics of the song would give a clearer picture of his perception of the underground Rap.

Learn the lesson, before you plan your career
Do you fit, cause both sides write hits
And all is Rap, I'll admit
But what I'hv come to explain
Is that these people love to play a game
They wanna make it seem like you're wrong
Or writin the reality song (KRS-One “Ghetto Music”)

Moreover, ghettos have their lingo and it is called ‘Jive Talk’. Jive talk is something in which metaphors are used to convey the meaning across. For instance a girl becomes ‘chick’, a man becomes ‘dog’, street becomes ‘stroll’ and so on and so forth. Even today Jive talk is spoken by people. Though, the technique of jive moved beyond

street and created a space for itself in black literary canon too. For instance, Langston Hughes experimented with jive in his poems. One such example is “Homesick blues”.

De railroad bridge's
A sad song in the air.
De railroad bridge's
A sad song in the air.
Ever time the train pass
I wants to go somewhere.
I went down to the station
Ma heart was in ma mouth.
I went down to the station
Ma heart was in ma mouth.
Lookin' for a box car
To roll me to the south.
Homesick blues, Lawd,
'S a terrible thing to have.
Homesick Blues is
A terrible thing to have.
To keep from cryin'
I opens ma mouth an' laughs. (Hugh,1259)

In this poem, the style of writing has a street touch. There are many words in this poem which are written as they are spoken in the streets. When one reads this poem then the pronunciation and construction of De, Ma , Lookin', Lawd, An, and Cryin eventually take the reader into the streets of African-Americans. The presence of jive talk is found in Jazz too. Jive was very much operative in Jazz culture. Jazz artists used jive to create idiomatic expression or to communicate with their fellow artists in their personal lingo which was specifically personal to them. They used words such as 'jam' for having a good time, 'bad' for good, 'Shed' for practising well. The whole politics of words, meanings, signs and signifiers, comes in when one talks about the local words which were coined by African-Americans with regard to communication amidst themselves. These words have their own politics for example anyone cannot use nigga, dog, bitch, bad, ho etc. in their communication until the person is an insider. A black person can address a black man with

'nigga' but a white person will think twice before using this word to address a black man. Another example which can be given is that 'bad' actually means 'good' in many African-American street language codes. For instance "you are ma bad man" suggests the goodness of the man. For instance Rap music entrepreneur Leyla Turkkkan remarks:

Males sometimes refer to each other as "bitches" as a form of play. They will call each other a bitch. It's really a linguistic thing. It's just a bunch of boast Raps and exaggerated tales. It's just kind of like flexing their muscles, and kind of how they talk when they are hanging out together, but it's not to be taken seriously. (Keyes, 2002:19)

Nonetheless, contesting the point that one needs to be from a ghetto to be a Rapper, here I would like to mention that Eminem, a white Rapper was born and brought up with blacks in ghettos despite that many Rappers consider him to be an outsider. If this is the case scenario, then more than the geographical location alone the colour of the skin also plays a role in the politics of Rap and being a Rapper.

Nevertheless, Streets have played an integral role in the Rap music videos as well. There are many Rap songs which have been placed within streets. One genre of Rap which is intrinsically intertwined with streets is Gangsta Rap. Gangsta Rap basically evolved from gang groups of ghettos. The word gangsta came into existence from 'gangster' and the lyrics of gangsta Rap cover from real reflections to the fictional accounts of blacks. It is believed that everybody in the Bronx in the early seventies belonged to gangs. There were more youths in gangs than was out of gangs. Every street belonged to some squad or the other. One important thing about gang culture was that there were both white and black gangs. There were more black gangs in south such as the Black Spades, the Turbans, and the Immortals than in north. North was primarily the province of white gangs such as the War Pigs, Ministers Bronx, Bronx Aliens and so on.

Schoolly D, Boogie Down Productions and Ice T are considered to be the groundbreaker of gangsta Rap and this genre was pioneered in mid 1980s. This was the time when a lot of violence was happening in America, blacks were bitten up brutally by the U.S.A police and they were being put up behind bars on mere suspicion. Gangsta Rap retaliated against this injustice by making songs which were anti-police, anti-biasness, anti-power and at times these songs became evident of the helplessness and nuisance of blacks. In the later part of 1980s, this genre was popularized by N.W.A. and no doubt by this time gangsta Rap had become one of the most visible and lucrative form of Hip Hop.

However, gangsta Rap has got criticism from various wings of society. It is

criticized for promoting sex, profanity, streets gangs, vandalism, crime, drugs, racism and violence. But the Rappers claim that they describe the inner harsh reality of the streets. Gangsta Rappers address problems correlated not only with their personal disputes but they also highlight the larger picture pertaining to the social and political set up of streets. Gangsta Rappers never believed in hiding the problems under the carpet.

Robin D.G. Kelley in his article "A Culture of Violence: Gangsta Rap in Context" writes:

Most gangsta Rappers write lyrics attacking law-enforcement agencies, the denial of their unfettered access to public space, and media complicity in making black youth out to be criminals. Yet these very stereotypes of the ghetto as "War Zone" and the black youth as "criminal" as well as their (often adolescent) struggles with notions of masculinity and sexuality, also structure and constrain their efforts to create a counter-narrative of life in the inner city. (115-116)

On the other hand, Boogie Down Productions's *Criminal Minded* and Schoolly D's *Smoke Some Kill*, came out in 1987 and both the albums are considered to be the landmark as far as the gangsta Rap is concerned. On the cover of *Criminal Minded*, DJ Scott La Rock and KRS-ONE posing with grenades, guns, bullet belts, reproduce the environment of inner-city warfare in which they live. However, the roots of the gangsta aesthetic in Hip Hop take us back to the 'Blues'.

Blues originated in the deep south in America at the end of 19th century. Blues can be partitioned in many sub-genres ranging from country to urban blues, the term 'Blues' represents grief, melancholy and sadness. On the other hand, some believe that it is not simple to define 'blues' because the blues is more of an emotional state which cannot be expressed in words. Lonesome Jimmy Lee, a blues singer defines the blues:

I will say that the blues is an expression of the so-called Negro in America. Of his hard tribulations that he had...see, this people they had so much torment, lynched, burned, tarred, feathered and they have sung sadder blues than we could ever imagine, in this daytime, you see. (Evans, 1982:18)

The blues has spread around the world over the period of time and many people associate themselves with the art of blues because universal facts of life such as contradiction, conflict and anxiety are expressed in the blues. A former blues singer Reverend Rubin Lacy defines that the blues is all about worrying for something or the other and it is this anxiousness about the events of life which leads to the construction of the blues. Rubin Lacy remarks:

...what is the blues, then? It's a worried mind. It boils down to worry. Sometimes you

worry so, it cause you to jump off the Frisco bridge up here, worry so it cause you to stick a gun in you... That's all, it's worry. Some folk says, "Well, he went out of his head", Well, if worry cause you to go out of your head, that's what it is. But that's the blues. (Evans, 1982:18)

There is a co-relation between the blues and gangsta Rap because both somewhere down the line express the spirit of not giving up in life. Just like gangsta Rappers, blues singers offer no solution to life's problem but instead they dramatise the events to express their feelings. The real emphasis of the blues is on feelings, emotions and perceptions. The question which arises often is whether these feelings and perceptions are based on actual or real experiences of the singer or they are simply the products of singer's imagination. Even though, the blues rarely give any descriptive or detailed account of events but that does not really mean that the perceptions the blues is based upon are all fictional. Both gangsta Rappers and blues singers not only draw inspiration for songs from their personal lives and experiences but they also get influenced by the pain and problems of the others.

Additionally, another similarity in between gangsta Rap and blues is their relationship with violence. Both forms have songs which got their origin out of the experiences entailing both physical and psychological violence. It is believed that Rap promotes violence and gangsta Rap not only provide a platform for violence to flourish but in fact it celebrates the violence. Do these Rap critics care enough to know why gangsta Rap has been violent in its approach? There has to be a reason for this violence to exist and flourish. I would like to say that more than Gangsta Rap being violent; its reaction against the American Police brutality, social evil, anti-black policies and racial biasness was violent. Here the question is not of justifying violence but the real issue is that can violent response to violence be unjustified? Was it a conscious choice of gangsta Rappers to keep the nature and the treatment of Rap lyrics violent or were there other reasons for this approach? And should gangsta lyrics be taken on face value?

Robin D. G. Kelley in his essay "Does Rap Glorify Sex and Violence?" states that gangsta Rap has nothing to do with violence. He believes that gangsta Rap has always been over-hyped by the media and the critics. He states:

Gangsta Rap has generated more debate within and without the Hip Hop world than any other genre. Unfortunately, much of this debate, especially in the media, has only disseminated misinformation. Thus, it is important to clarify what gangsta Rap is not. First, gangsta Rappers have never merely celebrated gang violence, nor have they favoured one gang over another. Gang bangin' itself has never been a central theme in the music. Many of the violent lyrics are not intended literally. (118)

I do agree partly with D. G. Kelley's remark that many violent lyrics of Rap are

not meant to be taken literally. These lyrics are the portrayal of what happens in the streets and at times they represent the personal point of view of the Rappers. I would reiterate that more than anything it was the reaction which was violent of the gangsta Rappers. Rappers such as N.W.A. and Ice T come under the genre of gangsta Rap.

Ice T or Trace Morrow is from New Jersey, America. His music is considered to be a very essential fraction of gangsta Rap. The reason why Trace Morrow is called Ice T is that he used to read the poetry of Iceberg Slim, a pimp who wrote street poetry in hustler-like rhyme and Ice T would memorise the lines and recite amongst his friends. On accounts of his love and appreciation of Iceberg Slim, Morrow took the name Ice T. However, many people believe him to be a source of inspiration that influenced many gangsta Rappers including N.W.A. He started his career in 1980s, the time when the art of Rap was evolving in its full bloom which is why I thought it is vital to dive into the world of Ice T to have a glimpse of events belonging to efflorescence era of Rap. Ice T collaborated with Sire Records in 1987 and came up with his first album called 'Rhyme Pays'. He formed his own band in 1991 which was called 'Body Count'. However, I will be looking at two Rap songs by Ice T: 'High Rollers' (1988) and "Cop Killer" (1992). Though, "Cop Killer" was banned in U.S.A and even it was pulled out absolutely from the records. A new record "The Iceberg" was introduced by Ice T on the place of "Cop Killer". The newly introduced song was recorded with Jello Biafra. Before I get into the whole politics and controversy surrounding the song, I would like to talk about 'High Rollers'.

'High Rollers' is a song which depicts the fast life of youths in the streets. In this song Ice T talks about the plush life which the youths enjoy irrespective of having a sense of social responsibility and obligation. Moreover, Ice T states that because of such lackadaisical approach towards life, crime is increasing and the society might reach the juncture of breakdown. Though, this song is not very violent or aggressive in its nature but Ice T talks about the fear of banning it by the official authority of U.S.A. Before the song 'High Rollers' begins Ice T is asked by a reporter about what is the reason that street violence and crime are at all time high? Ice T replies that because of the corruption in the government and in the system many people are gaining from it by making a lot of money and youths think that if they also make a lot of money then they will be above the law and hence they want to be 'High Rollers'. In the song Ice T sings:

“People of the city, stop foolin’ yourself

Crime rules the street, who the hell else

All the police have gone out to play

Because for enough cold cash they’ll look the other way”

However, in these lines Ice T notifies people of the city against being unaware about crime and events happening around them. Since, police is not going to be of any assistance because they all are corrupt and busy in making money consequently Ice T continues by saying:

“When I say high rollers, I mean the best

Forget the half-stepper, eject the rest

Because these high ranked officials of our city streets

Make millions all triggered by electric beeps.”

Ice T reiterates that officials make millions by erroneous means and it work as a barricade in the way of advancement of the whole community. One more thing which I would point out is that at times people have certain notions about an art and they see that art within a fixed framework which is constructed by them. The same goes for gangsta Rap, it is always viewed as a violent art but in fact it does address some serious problems and concerns. One issue which cannot be missed out in most of the gangsta songs is ‘crime’. Crime is something which gangsta Rappers grew up with, not because they always wanted to be gangsters but it was the reality of the streets and in ‘High Rollers’ as well Ice T draws attention towards crime.

Although, crime has several layers attached to it. Crime is just not about killing a person or doing something fallacious which is against the law. Cannot we see ‘crime’ as a site of power? In L.A and New York, when blacks were being killed by the police, ‘crime’ for blacks had become a route of gaining power and success. Ice T in one his interviews once said that it is easy to tell people that you are a gangster then convincing them that you are not one and the reason you get into crime is the lack of hope. This sense of conjunction with gangs and crime didn’t happen over a night; in fact it happened over a period of time. Crime created a ‘space’ for gangsters. I would like to make it clear that I

am not defending crime and violence rather I am critically looking at both violence and crime. How does it feel to have a 'space' of one's own irrespective of how you create that space in antagonistic and unreceptive conditions?

bell hooks in her essay "Homeplace" talks about the value and importance of having a space of one's own and above all importance of having a homeplace in the world where a black person was not allowed to stay in a white town, the world where different benches were made for the people of different skin colours. bell hooks writes:

Despite the brutal reality of racial apartheid, of domination, one's homeplace was the one site where one could freely count the issue of humanization, where one could resist...where all black people could strive to be subjects, not objects, where we could be affirmed in our minds and hearts despite poverty, hardship, and deprivation, where we could restore to ourselves the dignity denied us on the outside in the public world. (hooks, 1994:449)

Music helped African-Americans in creating a world away from the interference of white Americans and music gave blacks a sense of being a subject rather than an object and moreover it did restore the decorousness which was denied to them. Though, music did facilitate in creating a separate world but yet there was always a sense of uncertainty from outside and the same intimidation can be ascertained in 'High Rollers' in which the possibility of resisting the expression of freedom by prohibiting the songs on radio is evident.

Now radio stations probably won't play
This record because of the things I say
They'll say I'm glamorizing the hustlin' hood
And a record like this can do no good
But I'm not here to tell ya right or wrong
I don't know which side of the law you belong.

However, Ice- T came into notice specifically for his song called "Cop Killer". Ice T was criticized for voicing against the American Police in abusive language. The song represents the perturbed and unpromising state of a criminal who is seeking for revenge against the police officers by killing them and taking the law in his hands. The song "Cop Killer" came out in 1992. Ice T who wrote this song called it a "Protest record". This song also invited a lot of negative reactions from the political gallery of U.S.A. George H.W. Bush who was the president of U.S.A at that time also stated such songs spread wrong message in society and record companies should not promote such products. On the other

hand, Vice President of U.S.A Dan Quayle classified “Cop Killer” as being “Obscene”. In the song Ice T states;

“I got my twelve gauge sawed off.

I got my headlights turned off.

I’m ‘bout to bust some shots off.

I’m ‘bout to dust some cops off.”

These lines clearly confirm the objective of a person who wants to kill the cops. Though these lines have been written in first person narrative and Ice T claimed that he never killed any police, it is just a song about an individual who wants to eradicate the authority of cops. Ice T in one of the news articles of The New York Times titled “Rapper Ice T Defends Song against Spreading Boycott” stated that this song should make police officers nervous. The news paper reports:

The Rap artist Ice T, responding to criticism and boycotts of his “Body Count” album, said yesterday that his song “Cop Killer” should make officers nervous. ‘I think cops should feel threatened’, he said before delivering the keynote address at the New Music Seminar being held at the Marriott Marquis Hotel. “I feel threatened. I grew up threatened. They should know that they can’t take a life without retaliation.

Since this song has been written by Ice T himself than one cannot avoid the possibility that Ice T may have incorporated his personal experiences and point of views in this song. Ice T sings;

“Fuck the police, break it down

Fuck the police, yeah.

Fuck the police, for Darryl Gates.

Fuck the police, for Rodney king.

Fuck the police, for my dead homies.

Fuck the police, for your freedom.”

I would like to state that the use of slangs in above mentioned lines illustrate the antagonism and ferociousness of blacks in context to Rodney King getting beaten up brutally by the Los Angeles Police Department in 1992. In these lines Ice T highlights

Darryl Gates, Rodney King, his dead homies and the freedom of blacks. Just to provide a background, Darryl Gates was the chief of Los Angeles Police Department from 1978 to 1992. Gates is considered to be the founder of SWAT (Special Weapons and Tactics) which was established to deal with the grave and extreme circumstances involving armed and dangerous suspects. Gates was criticized thoroughly for 'Operation Hammer', a police operation which is conducted by the Los Angeles Police Department in South Los Angeles.

As far as Rodney King is concerned, he was arrested and barbarically beaten up by LAPD (Los Angeles Police Department) officers for driving against the law. While this whole act of violent behaviour was going on, a bystander called George Holliday recorded everything on his camera and when the video came out in public it created a great furore in U.S.A. It is believed that Rodney King was over speeding on his way back from a party and when the police tried to stop him he refused to stop his car. Though, one cannot say that Rodney King was all innocent but yet LAPD should have acted more responsibly. The video created riots in Los Angeles in 1992 in which close to 50 people died, more than 1300 people got injured, more than 4000 people got arrested and a loss of 200 million dollars. Rodney King after coming out of the hospital appealed for peace. In the news report of CNN, May 1, 1992, Rodney king says:

Can we all get along, can we get along, there is enough smoke in Los Angeles and this is not going to change anything. They have won the battle but they have not won the war. I love people, I love everyone, I love colored. We all can get along, we are stuck here. Let us just try to work it out.

"Cop Killer" song highlights the dark history of blacks along with their brighter economic successful surface but the brighter surface in fact is not all that vivid. Ice T has been an extrovert Rapper who speaks what he thinks and expresses his emotions without any baggage. He has always been a Rapper who took audacious steps without any sense of apprehension. As far as 'freedom' is concerned, Ice T voices for liberty in his song "Freedom of Speech" (1989). He sings:

I want the right to speak
I want the right to walk where I wanna
Yell and I'm gonna
Tell and rebel every time I'm on a
Microphone on a stage cold illin'

The knowledge I drop will be heard by millions

We ain't the problems, we ain't the villains.

Nonetheless, apart from Ice T one more Rapper who got enough acceptance and success is N.W.A. N.W.A (Niggaz with Attitude) is a gangsta Rap group from South Central Los Angeles, California which consisted of Arabian Prince, DJ Yella, Dr. Dre, Easy-E, Ice Cube and MC Ren. Arabian Prince left the group in 1989 to have a solo career and Ice Cube had to leave the group over a royalty dispute in 1990.

N.W.A received a lot of condemnation for the explicit nature of their lyrics in fact this group was banned from many mainstream U.S.A radio stations but despite all this they managed to sell more than 9 million copies of their records. In fact, it is believed this group started the new epoch of gangsta Rap as their lyrics were revolutionary and moreover N.W.A became a foundation of stimulation and courage for many other Rappers. N.W.A's music too is very much rooted within ghettos. Though, primarily I will be looking at a Rap song 'Express Yourself' which came out in 1989 but I will be digressing in between to locate other songs of N.W.A to have a well comprehensive understanding of the message which is proposed by their music.

Before, 1988 nobody knew about the existence of 'Compton', a city in Los Angeles County was just another lower income enclave. Nobody knew what happens in the streets of this small place but N.W.A came up with their first album 'on August 8, 1988 and they had put Compton on the world map and had brought the gloomy state of affairs to the attention of the whole nation. The opening song of the album "Straight Outta Compton" introduces the group; this song portrayed the intensifying anger of urban youth in ghettos, who were not really contented with their surroundings and the events which had been unfolding with regard to their socio-economic upliftment. Another song in the album called "Fuck the Police" resists against the racial profiling and the violence of American Police.

"Fuck the police

Comin straight from the underground

Young nigga got it bad cuz I brown

And not the other color so police think

They have the authority to kill a minority.”

These lyrics underline many issues starting from race and power to the problem of a minority group. Though, when we talk about a minority group then it becomes important to talk about how a minority group functions and how a minority group handles the dynamics of power and hegemony controlled by the dominant groups of society. Antonio Gramsci's notion of 'Hegemony' explains how a social structure functions. Gramsci's notion of hegemony is the power which the dominant groups exercise throughout a society. It's the over imposing centre which is achieved through the combination of coercion or consent. Hegemony's role in the society can be gathered from the fact that the entire super structure works to achieve it. The function of 'Organising Social Hegemony' and 'The State domination' certainly give rise to a particular division of labour and therefore to a whole hierarchy of qualifications. So basically power is a form of hegemony and hegemony is power. Gramsci says hegemony is exercised by dominant groups in both public and private domain.

I would like to state as it has been pointed out earlier that for African-Americans money had always been the sole source which could confirm them the path of power and needless to say that they used this power to dismantle the stereotyped notions.

However, Langston Hughes too criticises in his poem "Who but the lord", the exploitation of power through hegemony which is exercised by the police he writes:

Now I do not understand
Why God don't protect a man
From police brutality
Being poor and black,
I' hv no weapon to strike back
So who but the lord
Can protect me?
We'll see. (Hughes, 1959: 196)

Moreover, Patricia J. Williams in her essay called "Fire and Ice" talks about a woman who is shot by the police officer for not paying rent on time. This essay clearly explains the mistreatment of power through hegemony. Patricia J. Williams writes:

On October 29, 1984, Eleanor Bumpurs, a 270-Pound, arthritic sixty-seven-year old woman, was shot to death while resisting eviction from her apartment in the Bronx. She was \$96.85, or one month behind in her rent... Stephen Sullivan, the officer

positioned farthest away from her and the one with the shotgun, took aim and fired at her. (Williams, 525)

After the death of Eleanor Bumpurs, allegations that killing was illegal, unnecessary, and should be prosecuted were met with responses like: “the laws permit police officers to shoot people... as long as police officers have guns, there will be unfortunate deaths.” (Williams, 528)

This can be compared with the incident of Rodney King and there must be numerous incidents which must have lost their significance in the alley of silence and ignorance but at times the silence is broken and the ignorance is not ignored and this is what N.W.A did with their song ‘Express Yourself’ which came out in 1989. This song revolves around the idea of freedom of expression. This song highlights the ambiguity which is found in many Rappers who go through the apprehension of what they are and what people want them to be. Mostly this song is handled by Dr. Dre.

This song also raises concern over radio censorship. In fact, in 1989 a youth radio station ‘Triple J’ in Australia played this song 360 times in a row to protest against censorship. However, the issue of censorship with regard to the music of blacks is not at all a new phenomenon. The whole issue of censorship has its own politics, I would not like to state that whites always have been biased and brutal to Rap songs sung by blacks and neither would I agree blindly with blacks suffering the most because of the nature of censorship. If that was the case then whites would not have produced the music of N.W.A or any other Rap group. Moreover, white youth must have bought some copies out of 9 millions of “Straight Outta Compton” which had got sold out.

Nonetheless, when we explore the domain of censorship then I would like to propose whether censorship affects a product positively or it (de)publicises that product. Censorship is the containment of speech or any other public communication which is determined by some controlled body or a government. Censorship extends from moral censorship to political, religious and corporate. In Hip Hop, at times various techniques such as ‘disk scratching’ or ‘distorting’ are used to avoid the uncensored words which fall within the category of obscenity. In disk scratching the word is scratched to make it sound like it is some other word and in distorting the word is distorted by shifting down the pitch of the song. Within gangsta genre one can notice that censored songs managed to create a lot of curiosity amidst the people and N.W.A is one such group who has always been in the centre of public attention and their song ‘Express Yourself’ is no exception.

It's crazy to see people be
What society wants them to be, but not me
Ruthless, is the way to go, they know
Others say rhymes which fail to be original
Or they kill where the Hip Hop starts
Forget about the ghetto, and Rap for the pop charts
Some musicians cuss at home
But scared to use profanity when upon the microphone
Yeah, they want reality, but you will hear none
They'd rather exaggerate a little fiction
Some say no to drugs, and take a stand
But after the show, they go lookin for the "Dopeman
Or ban my group from the radio
Hear N.W.A and say, 'Hell no'.

However, one concerning shift in Rap music which can be seen is from gangsta Rap to Conscious Rap. Conscious Rap is a sub-genre of Hip Hop which focuses on creating awareness and consciousness. Conscious Rappers deprecate hostility, resentment, bigotry and any other social ailment. There is a very thin line between conscious Rap and political Rap because both genres verbalize about the collective societal chaos. One more perception which is attached with conscious Rap is that it is not very commercial oriented because of its nature but I don't think that is true because Public Enemy is a Rap group which got both commercial and critical recognition. Mostly conscious Rap contains the affirmative and uplifting message and one Rap group who is affiliated with conscious Rap is Public Enemy.

Public Enemy consists of Chuck D, Flavor Flav, Professor Griff, S1W, DJ lord, Khari Wynn and Brian Hardgroove. The name 'Public Enemy' was coined by Chuck D. It dates back to the time when Chuck D made a tape to promote the radio station WBAU he was working with. He called the tape "Public Enemy # 1". This was the most primary reference to the conception of 'Public Enemy'. Chuck D delineates that the group member S1W represents the 'Security of the First World'. Chuck D believes that blacks are not the third world people but in fact they are the first world people. Although Chuck D might be right in his intention but I have a problem with his definition of classifying the first world and the third world. My dilemma basically lies by seeing 'The first world' as an ultimate

stage of accomplishment and entirety. I would like to question the fixation with the first world.

However, Public Enemy came up with many songs which made a huge difference in the canon of Rap music such as “It takes a nation of millions to hold us back”, “Don’t believe the hype”, “and Shut them down”, and ‘Fight the Power’. Out of all these songs, I will be focusing on ‘Fight the Power’.

‘Fight the Power’ came out in 1989 and this song too highlights the freedom of speech. First this song was used for Spike Lee’s movie “Do the Right Thing” and later on a different version was released for the album “Fear of a Black Planet” which came out in 1990. The below mentioned lines reiterate the issue of autonomy of speech.

Got to give us what we want
Gotta give us what we need
Our freedom of speech is freedom of death
We got to fight the powers that be
Lemme hear you say
Fight the power.
People, people we are the same
No we’re not the same
Cause we don’t know the game
What we need is awareness, we can’t get careless. (Public Enemy “Fight the Power)

Musically and literally, no other group has communicated and articulated the black rage and alienation, mobilizing the community towards actions than Public Enemy. Public Enemy assaulted the fixed Rap stereotypes of gold chain wearing noisy Rappers who do not have any significant role to play in music. Moreover, Chuck D coined Rap as ‘Black CNN’.

Though I have already defined what gangsta and conscious Rap is and what are the characteristics of both the genres within the larger framework of Rap but Rap music cannot be achieved in its totality if female Rappers are given a cold shoulder and are disregarded completely because female Rappers too played a substantial role in the

development and the evolvement of Rap as an art form. Though there are many female Rappers but I will be focusing on Queen Latifah and Sister Souljah because these two Rappers are diverse in their approach and moreover both of them are considered to be the early momentous figures of female Rap.

As far as the female Rap is concerned, Rap has often been presented as a male-dominated form by the media; though, women have been a part of the Rap scene since its early commercial years. For instance, a number of times when Rap was just evolved as a street art, many girls used to go with the dj's to help them out with their music. While DJs is busy in mixing two tracks, girls used to interact with the audience and at times, they used to cheer the crowd up.

Rap music journalist Havelock Nelson notes in "New Female Rappers Play for Keeps" that:

While women have always been involved artistically with Rap throughout the '80s, artists like [MC] Lyte, [Queen] Latifah, Roxanne Shante, and [Monie] Love have had to struggle to reach a level of success close to that of male Rappers. Challenging male Rappers' predominance, female Rap artists have not only proven that they have lyrical skills; in their struggle to survive and thrive within this tradition, they have created spaces from which to deliver powerful messages from Black female and Black feminist perspectives. (Nelson 77)

When Rapper MC Lyte was asked in one of her interviews in 1996, if she felt that there is a distinct female Rap category, she separated women Rappers into three groups, referred to as "crews," reigning in three periods-the early 1980s, the mid-1980s through the early 1990s, and the late 1990s. She suggests Sha-Rock, Sequence, is the first crew. The second crew belongs Salt-N-Pepa, Roxanne Shanté, The Real Roxanne, me, Latifah, Monie [Love], and Yo-Yo. Then after that you got Da Brat, Foxy Brown, Lil' Kim, Heather B.

In the female Rap tradition, four distinct categories of women Rappers emerge in Rap music performance: "Queen Mother," "Fly Girl," "Sista with Attitude," and "Lesbian." Black female Rappers can, however, shift between these categories or belong to more than one simultaneously. More importantly, each category mirrors certain images, voices, and lifestyles of African American women in contemporary urban society.

Queen Mother The "Queen Mother" category comprises female Rappers who view themselves as African-centered icons, an image often suggested by their dress. In their lyrics, they refer to themselves as "Asiatic Black women," "Nubian queens," "intelligent

Black women," or "sistas droppin' science to the people," suggestive of their self-constructed identity and intellectual prowess.

Their rhymes embrace Black female empowerment and spirituality, making clear their self-identification as African, woman, warrior, priestess, and queen. Queen mothers demand respect not only for their people but also for Black women.

However, Queen Kenya, a member of Hip Hop's Zulu Nation, was the first female MC to use Queen as a stage name. But the woman of Rap who became the first solo female MC to commercially record under the name "Queen" is Dana "Queen Latifah" Owens. Latifah, in one of her interviews said, that she didn't want to be MC Latifah. It didn't sound right for her. Then, one day she came up with this name of queen. And she decided to be Queen Latifah.

Queen Latifah's role as a queen mother of Rap resonates in her platinum single 'Ladies First' (1989), ranked in the archives of Rap music history as the first political commentary Rap song by a female artist. The lyrics of 'Ladies First' respond primarily to males who believe that females cannot create rhymes:

“...Some think that we [women] can't flow
Stereotypes they got to go,
I gonna mess around and flip the scene into reverse
With a little touch of ladies first”.

Queen Latifah opened the doors for other Afro-centric female MCs, such as Sister Souljah. Souljah, a former associate of Rap group Public Enemy, launched her first album in 1992. The album features "The Final Solution: Slavery's Back in Effect," which highlights the picture where slavery is back in effect and how it creates the chaos.

With her candid and somewhat quasi-preachy style of delivery, she earned the title "Raptivist" from her followers. She is considered to be a great orator. Souljah's fame grew after her speech at the Reverend Jesse Jackson's Rainbow Coalition Leadership Summit in 1992, where she suggested that African-Americans instead of getting into gang fights should take up a break and kill the white people. As a consequence, Souljah was ridiculed by presidential candidate Bill Clinton. In the wake of the controversy, her record sales plummeted dramatically. Sister Souljah advocates racial, social, and economic parity in

her Rap messages; she also looks within the community at relationship issues between Black men and women in her songs. In “The Final Solution: Slavery's Back in Effect” Souljah sings:

“It’s time for us to take the stand
Women to women and men to men
Blood rushes through your veins
Feel the fear
Who had thought that it will happen here?”

Souljah urges from the people to stand and fight for their right. The above mentioned lyrics not only show the fear of blacks but they also state that nobody had thought that blacks will have to suffer so much in America.

“Guns are packed up on a mission
Now they will see it’s a critical condition
Racism was here but they didn’t take it seriously
And they say that I was crazy.”

These lines mention the violation of humanity which happened during slavery and Souljah warns that the possibility of slavery coming again in America cannot be doubted. Though, Souljah has been a Rapper who raised her voice over many issues pertaining to slavery, welfare policies, and education and so on and so forth.

Nevertheless, one question which always arises is that, was there any difference in the approach of male and female Rapper towards Rap music at all? One might suggest that Rap male artists are more oriented towards violence and aggression in their lyrics but this is not the case because there are female Rappers too like Souljah who is as aggressive as any other male Rapper and not all male Rappers are antagonistic and hostile, there are Rappers such as Boogie Down Production who is sensitive. In his song “Stop the Violence”, he condemns violence in any form.

However, to complete the circle by getting back to the question which I was trying to answer in the very beginning regarding who plays a pivotal role in deciding the significance of Rap music? Is it the nature of Rap lyrics or the ghettos or Rappers who contribute in the signification of Rap?

Giving a fixed answer to this question won't be a justice to Rap. I believe Rap is a form which becomes Rap by many elements. Rap is a like a creation and this creation attains its formation when many social, political and cultural components are added to it. It is difficult to decide which element contains more essence of Rap than the other because streets, ghettos, lyrics, sound, and Rappers all play a subsequent part in Rapping the art of Rap. Furthermore, Rap is an art which is in a flux always because it evolves constantly.

In this chapter I restricted my vision within the module of Rap lyrics specifically. The next chapter will be the continuation of this chapter which will answer the questions which could not be taken up here. In addition, the subsequent chapter will explore the tropes of body, performance and politics within Rap music videos. The next chapter will focus on the evolvment of videos within the art of Rap.

Body in Rap: Being and Becoming

...Black, god damn, I'm tired my man
Don't worry about what colour I am
Because I'll show you how ill, this man can act
It could never be fiction cause it is all fact
And if you get in my way, I will not turn back
I'm proud of my name, my name is Darryl Mack
I'm black and I'm proud, and I'll say it out loud
I'll share my story with the whole crowd.⁴

The body shows more than what one can perceive because it has abundant layers attached to it. One's body not only reflects one's self but it also represents the socio-cultural location in which it is located. When I talk about body, I do not want to confine the analytical scope of it within the literal sense of the term because the body itself has the ability to break away from the models within which it is often viewed or analysed. What essentially I am trying to advocate here is that body should be viewed beyond conventional perspectives and definitions which are associated with it. Keeping in mind the site of body and the representation of it one should look at the delineation of Rap within Western and Eastern coast of America. The Rappers of Western Coast mainly from Los Angeles signify the very harsh, violent, strong, inexpugnable and masculine image of them while the Rappers coming from the Eastern coast primarily belonging to New York portray susceptible, conscious and less violent image. The Rappers of both Eastern and Western coast created Rap within the societal and cultural set up they grew up with. As I acknowledged in the last chapter that Rap is much more than a mere string of fast beats and it has its own significance. Rap music evolved and hence the view of the body which

⁴ These lines are from a rap song called "Proud to be Black" by an American Hip Hop group Run D.M.C. During 1980s Run D.M.C was one of the most well known Hip Hop groups of America. This group was formed by Joseph Simmons, Darryl McDaniels, and Jason Mizell.

is signified or explicated by it got metamorphosed and progressed over the period of time. After the innovation of videos, the politics linked with the demonstration of body has become intense because videos have bestowed several symbols to the structure of body. Videos have the aptitude to furnish a newfangled form to anatomy. Videos in matter of fact recreate the body. However, the conception of videos imparted new heights to the world of entertainment but videos erected an alternative 'space' for blacks through which they could manifest their inner realities to the outer world.

In this chapter, the body will be investigated within the tropes of power and an attempt will be made to perceive or excogitate what changes the body goes through when it comes in contact with power. However, I was having a quandary in placing and defining the power colligated with 'power'. In the present context, the word 'power' represents the supremacy which is enjoyed by the ideological and repressive state apparatuses of a society. Furthermore, other questions which will be given a close scrutiny are; does body get new dimensions in terms of depiction through Rap music videos? If yes then how? Whether this representation of body constructs a stereotyped Hip Hop image of African-Americans or it empowers the black body? Is there any difference between black male body and female body in the way they are publicized in videos? And finally is Rap more of a performance than just any another musical art and how videos contribute in the act of performance? There are five music videos which will be looked at critically through the lens of power, culture and body politics. The videos which will function as the backbone of this chapter are; 'Express Yourself' by N.W.A., 'High Rollers' by Ice T, 'Fight the Power' by Public Enemy, 'Lady First' by Queen Latifah and 'The slavery is back in effect' by Sister Souljah.

As far as the 'body' is concerned it cannot be defined within a fixed framework because the body itself denounces the parameters of fixity as it is not a fixed entity. The body is more of a process which is always in the progression of being. African-Americans and the image which is associated with them too have gone through diverse alterations. Initially during the epoch of slavery black body was subjected and exploited to a great extent and this subjection was not limited within the configuration of body but in fact subjugation of psyche also took place simultaneously. Michel Foucault, a French philosopher and a social theorist thinks that body is a political field and politics of power cannot be separated from it. In his article "The Political Investment of the Body" Foucault postulates: "The body is directly involved in a political field; power relations have an

immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs” (Foucault 100)

Though, signs do participate in the existence of being and agreeing with Foucault, I would like to asseverate that when slaveholding was rampant in America, power could be accessed only by a selective few and mostly it was in the hands of whites. Blacks were marked, trained and tortured and forced to carry out tasks and moreover whites tried to emit signs which blacks had brought with them from Africa so that they could be subjected and power could be used to engineer their body movements according to the need. The whole act of subjection was handled more with coercion than consent.

Foucault in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* mentions that another way of exercising subjection is through ‘Discipline’. Foucault remarks that soldiers are expected to function and perform in a manner and this functionality comes from discipline. They are taught how to stand, how to talk, how to walk, to remain immobile until the instructions are given, and they are told under no circumstances to fix their eyes on the ground but to look at directly at those they pass by. Discipline worked as a substantive apparatus of dominance in the seventeenth and eighteenth century. Foucault asserts ‘discipline’ produced subjected or practised bodies or ‘docile bodies’. I would like to remark that ‘discipline’ even today works as an influential method of dominion which is widespread in several institutions of society. Foucault says slavery is different in comparison to discipline because slavery was not based on a relation of appropriation of bodies. In slavery bodies were forced and the signs were fragmented so that the sense of collectiveness could be snatched away from a group or a community.

I would like to raise certain counter questions regarding the body and its subsistence. Is body an object which can be analysed from outside? Can one look at one’s own body objectively when the body itself cannot be seen by oneself? Does the existence of one’s body lie in the reception of others? And if one sees the reflection of one’s body in the mirror then how real is the reflection of that body? The province of body is so multifarious that it cannot be defined or embraced in one straight description.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, a French philosopher who belongs to the school of phenomenology asserts that body is not an object but it is rather the condition through which it is possible to have relations with the objects and these objects form the world. In a way Merleau-Ponty is suggesting that the body functions as a device to erect a bridge so

that a correlation with the world can be probable. Maurice Merleau-Ponty contests the permanence of the body. He asserts:

The permanence of my body is entirely different in kind... Its permanence is not a permanence in the world, but a permanence on my part. To say that it is always near me, always there for me, is to say it is never really in front of me, that I cannot array before my eyes, that it remains marginal to all my perceptions, that it is with me. (Merleau-Ponty 52)

The way body has been represented from spirituals to blues, and jazz to Rap; it surely has transfigured the conceptions which have always been linked with blacks. There has been a growth of conception and meaning and as Merleau-Ponty pointed out that it is impossible to stand outside one's body. The blacks visited, re-visited, analysed and re-analysed the conceptions of their bodies and the understanding of the dynamics of one's body made them realise the importance of it and hence its continuation to create a space.

Body for African-Americans has been a site of both struggle and strength and they gained strength out of their struggle for identity. African-Americans made a canvas for themselves shaped out of the scars which were made on their conscious and physical self. Initially the blacks were categorised as 'Inferiors' and hence the lack of rationality and sensibility among them as pictured and seen by the whites. These biased representations of the blacks created a big gap between blacks and whites.

The apprehension of segregation between colored and the whites can be felt in a short story called "Colored People" by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. It is a story of a family which is caught up in two different set ups of thinking and functioning. The narrator of the story is a young boy who is cognisant about his colored skin which is a part of his identity but his father tells him not to have coffee because it will make him black. The narrator addresses his father as 'daddy' and he says daddy does not like to see black people in loud clothes and he hates traditional names. Being a colored himself daddy is always hard on colored as the narrator explains. Once, the narrator saves a 60 year old black man Stanley Fisher from a white man called Mr. Frank Price. In the course of saving the old man, the narrator releases a string of slangs addressing Frank Price. Though, daddy does support the narrator in his act because Frank Price is a racist and nobody ever raised his/her voice against him. But in the end of the narrative daddy tells the narrator:

You know you are supposed to respect elders, don't you? And you know you are not supposed to talk back to older people, now don't you? And you know Stanley Fisher can take care of himself? And you know that you can get in trouble talking back to white people, don't you? Don't you, boy? (Gates Jr. 91)

These lines leave many questions unanswered. The father is in a dilemma whether to associate himself with the colored or with the whites. Though, he feels contented that his son protested against the prejudice which was being performed by a white man but at the same time he enlightens the narrator that if you talk back to white people then you might get into a trouble.

I would like to use a phrase ‘the apprehension of affiliation’⁵ to envelop this whole situation. However the confusion of being with colored or the whites can be analysed at multiple levels. Just to make it unambiguous I am making these levels of analysis keeping a colored person in mind. The first level is to be with whites and dissociate from the colored group completely and hence the arrival of ‘invisibility’. Can somebody exist by being invisible or can existence and invisibility both subsist simultaneously? Ralph Ellison in *Invisible Man* (1953) highlights the voyage of an un-named black narrator who is searching for his identity. The idea of not having a name in itself shouts out the perplexity of being invisible. In the book, people inflict their individual ideas concerning the narrator’s identity ignoring to see who he really is. The second level is to get assimilated with the whites and try to bridge the gap between the hegemonic and repressive apparatuses and develop the message that black is beautiful. The third level is to maintain the distinctions specifically and voice opinions if any injustice or prejudice is committed by the whites or for that matter by any other group.

However, African-American Rap music has made the whole discourse of affiliation very blurred and hazy. In the present scenario Rap music is appreciated all over the globe and after the invention of videos Rap music has become more influential. Rap music has been able to constitute itself as a music art for a long itinerary of time. Needless to say that ever since the advent of Rap, it has gone through many changes and in the present scenario Rap is one of the dominant forces of mainstream music.

As I mentioned earlier that an attempt to empower the black body was made through Rap music and videos but black body has always been the site which was seen through the stereotypical lens long before music came into being. However, many black poets, writers, activists have written against the stamped typecast representation of blacks. Claude McKay, who emerged as one of the foremost voices of Harlem Renaissance wrote

⁵ This phrase is self-coined to delineate the apprehensive mental state of the colored in context to the subject of their association with other groups of society.

poetry to give voice to blacks and to deprecate biased and racist attitude towards them. In his poem "If We Must Die" Claude McKay asserts about the struggle of blacks for equality. McKay also hints at the notion of death. He mentions that if we die in this fight for equivalent rights then our death must become the symbol of our survival spirit. He writes:

If we must die, let it not be like hogs
Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,
While around us bark the mad and hungry dogs,
Making their mock at our accursed lot.
If we must die, O let us nobly die,
So that the our precious blood may not be shed
In vain: then even the monsters we defy
Shall be constrained to honour us though dead! (McKay, 1919:984)

Furthermore, Gordon Parks who is an African-American photogRapher, writer, activist also wrote about segregation based on the colour of skin. In his short story called "Shannon" he highlights the predicament of a young black educated man Hannibal Jones, who cannot find work for himself after studying business administration. This story highlights the pre-conceived assumptions which are made normally about blacks. In the story Jones is told by his professor Hawkins before he leaves the Fisk University after completing his course:

The white man is going to be expecting you to come in dirty. Go in clean, spanking clean. He's is going to expect you to come in begging, with your head hung low. Go in proud, with your head held high as your black neck can stretch. Look to him eyeball to eyeball and say, I'm here, white man, clean, educated, and ready- and I hope you are ready for me.(Parks 348).

When Jones goes for his interview he had no estimation that the colour of his skin will matter more than his qualification and credibility in deciding the outcome of his interrogation with Meath Sullivan, the company owner. However, after meeting Jones for barely a few minutes, Meath tells his assistance Bert that:

If you ever cause me another moment- yes, just one more moment- of such embarrassment, you will be fired!

'I don't understand, Mr. Sullivan', Bert said, looking at the resume. 'Just what did I do?'

'What did you do'? Well I will tell you what you did. You cause me to waste a whole precious half an hour of my valuable time on a dumb darky.'

'I still don't understand sir.'

'Why hell man, don't you analyse those applications when they come across your desk? Don't you know that Fisk University is a darky school and that H. R. Jones had to be a nigger. (Parks 350-51)

In this story, beyond the colour of body, social institutions too are seen through a biased eye. Nonetheless, black schools and black universities have served a great purpose in altering the approach of blacks towards racism. Education taught them to fight with their knowledge than taking up the means of violence in order to retaliate. In this story Jones is prepared to make a mark of himself with his wit and understanding. Consciously, I have refrained myself from comparing Jones to a white person. If I postulate that Jones is as estimable as any white person and hence he should have got the job offer then in this condition the dynamics of comparativeness will get intensely complicated because by saying that I will propagate the image and personality of a white man as the marker of 'superior being' which is not the case at all. If one believes that Jones by getting closer to this marker can undo his blackness then on the contrary I would like to argue that why no one thinks about undoing the whiteness of whites so that the distinction between the blacks, colored and whites can be eradicated. By undoing the whiteness of whites I mean by breaking the wall which exists between whites and people belonging to other racial groups. Just to see whether racism still exists in America? I thought of going through the archives of The New York Times and The Washington Times. One of the news articles of The Washington Times titled "Racism Leaves Parents Struggling to Explain" which got published on Wednesday, July 22, 2009, explores the apprehension and anxiety of parents who do not know how to prepare their kids to face racism if it comes on their way? The news article says:

Stephanie Ward drives her two biracial children to a black school an hour away to give them a break from their predominantly white neighborhood in suburban Dallas. Yet it's hardly enough to eliminate racism from their lives.

Some of the neighbours in Plano, Texas, won't allow their children to speak to her 4 and 6 years olds "They act as if we're from Mars," she says.

Though the rebuff can be stressful - on the children and mom - Mrs. Ward was outraged when she learned that a private swim club in suburban Philadelphia recently revoked a summer membership for 65 mostly black and Hispanic campers. Several campers reported hearing racial comments the first time they showed up at the club, and some members pulled their children out of the pool.

"The Philly situation angers me and reminds me that I'm still black in America," Mrs. Ward says. "I won't tell my children about this. I refuse to pass on the legacy of paranoia and the sense that they are not good enough.

This article highlights the trauma of racism which crops up even today in America but what happens when Eminem being a white Rapper is told that he cannot be a Rapper in true sense of the term because he is white? What happens when white Rappers are not allowed to enter in the underground Rap circuit? These incidents too belong to racism. When one talks about racism then one needs to be vigilant and cautious at both ends of the thread so that preconception, biasness and ambiguity does not manipulate the conclusive end result.

However, one cannot ignore 'Minstrel Shows' which projected the black body as an object of commodification which was commoditized by the whites for their entertainment. 'Minstrel Shows' played a substantial role in projecting blacks within preconceived categories coined by the whites in America. In these shows, whites basically used to impersonate blacks after painting their faces with black colour. Through these shows, the childlike and infantile image of blacks was created in America. Moreover, Blacks were represented as they were incapable of doing anything reasonable. These shows were the consumption of black performance by the whites. Jeffrey O.G.Ogbar in *Hip Hop Revolution: the Culture and Politics of Rap* writes: "The minstrel was not only a central icon of entertainment; it functioned as well as articulates the terribly complicated racial landscape of the United States." (Ogbar, 2007: 13)

During 19th century many blacks also became part of minstrel shows and there were many reasons for the assimilation of black and white artists for these shows. The reason why blacks accepted to be a part of minstrel shows despite of having a troubled racial backdrop to these shows is the financial security and economic upliftment of blacks as unemployment was rampant during that time in America. Some black people benefitted from the offensive caricatures of their image. For example Lincoln Theodore Monroe Andrew Perry, an American comedian actor developed the character of 'Stepin Fetchit' known as the 'Laziest man in the world'. The name of Stepin Fetchit was a contraction of 'Step in and fetch it'. Lincoln Perry became the wealthiest black entertainer of 1920s and 1930s but similarly he was also criticized for the negative stereotyping of African-Americans.

Nonetheless, Minstrel survived as a professional mode of entertainment until about 1910 and till 1960s it was performed at high schools, public places, and theatres and so on all over America. It was the time when Minstrel shows had become one of the

considerable sources of amusement irrespective of the issues of colour and stereotyping of race. Nonetheless Langston Hughes in his powerful essay, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" which was published in 1926 maintains about the free soul of blacks which has moved beyond racial restrictions:

We young Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, it does not matter. We know we are beautiful and ugly too. The tom-tom cries and the tom-tom laughs. If colored people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, their displeasure does not matter either. We build our temples for tomorrow, strong as we know how, and we stand on top of the mountains, free within ourselves. (Hughes, 1271)

However, blacks used various means of resistive art to discard the biased image publicized by Minstrel Shows and Hip Hop became one of the resistive arts which condemned the pre-conceived image of the blacks. The quasi-nationalist group from New York 'The Nation of Gods and Earths (NGE) which is also known as the Five Percenters was the antithesis of ideologies on which the Minstrel Shows used to function and survive.

The first Hip Hop organization, 'The Zulu Nation' borrowed philosophical ideas from NGE. The philosophy of NGE was that black men are gods and black women are earths. NGE viewed blacks beyond the colour of their body. Cognition, perception, wisdom and understanding were the basic sources of the foundation of NGE. However, by 1960s - 70s the winds of change had started blowing in America. This was the time when a receptive and affirmative transformation in the characterization of blacks in T.V shows and Films could be seen. Jeffrey O.G.Ogbar in *Hip Hop Revolution: the Culture and Politics of Rap* writes:

By the late 1960s, television shows such as *I Spy*, *Julia*, *Hogan heroes* and *Star trek* featured black people in nonpathological and nondemeaning roles, even if they were rarely central to the cast. Black images on films such as those starring Sidney Poitier in *In the Heat of the Night* (1967), *Lilies of the Field* (1963), and *They Call Me Mister Tibbs!* (1970) reflected black characters as dignified, sophisticated, and intelligent in ways that were generally avoided in most pre-60s productions. (Ogbar, 2007: 16)

But by 1980s the winds of change had turned into a storm when the invention of 'Music Video' happened. Before I discuss Rap music videos, I would like to give some details pertaining to the background of music videos. A music video is either a short film or a video made out of various images or short clips. Many videos are made out of montage technique in which a number of pictures are used and the pictures are put together to create the effect of a video. In the present time, music videos work as a great tool of marketing. Although music videos came into their own in the 1980s when Mtv

based their format around the medium, and later with the launch of VH1. The credit for the success of the music videos in 1980's also goes to the technology because 80s was the time when people were getting curious about this new found mode of communication and entertainment. Music videos were described by various terms including, 'promotional (promo) film', 'promotional (promo) clip' or 'film clip'.

Josh Tyrangiel in his article 'MTV Brings Hip Hop to the World' remarks that:

The history of music videos before MTV is like the history of newspapers before the printing press... When cable television became a nationwide reality in the early 80s and people suddenly had more channels than programmers could fill, music video was an idea whose time had come. (Green, 2003: 48)

Initially when MTV began many viewers realized that something was missing on MTV. In the early stage MTV was more inclined towards the taste of white music lovers. There were hardly any black performers who used to come on it. Josh Tyrangiel in the same article mentions the records which came in *Rolling Stone*. Tyrangiel writes that: "Rolling stone observed that of the 750 videos MTV showed during its first year-and-a-half on the air, fewer than two dozen featured black artists." (Green, 2003: 49)

MTV came up with some bizarre explanation in response to Rolling Stone's observation. MTV claimed that the main reason of having more white artists than the black ones was that white audience was more passionate for the rock music which used to get featured on it often than blacks were for their music such as Rhythm and Blues, disco and so on. The state of affairs got so critical that some people suggested that MTV should rather call itself 'White Rock TV'.

However, apart from MTV there were other sources through which black music was being promoted. For example BET (Black Entertainment Television) started a ninety minutes show called '*Video Soul*' in 1981 which endorsed R&B videos. WTBS in 1983 came up with '*Night Tracks*' show. This show mixed black music with clips from rock and country music. The major breakthrough happened when Run- D.M.C got together with Aerosmith and both the bands came up "*Walk This Way*" (1986). This is supposed to be Hip Hop's first video classic which was played by MTV continuously. Soon many Rap groups such as Schooly D, Ice T, Kool Moe Dee, Big Daddy Kane and Kurtis Blow and so on started making videos and they would submit these videos to MTV.

In August, 1988 MTV started with *YO! MTV Raps*. This show gave new heights to

Rap video culture. Many Rappers who never thought that their songs will be on MTV now were coming on the show for interviews and live performances. This show sometimes left the studio and travelled across America to interact directly with the viewers. One can say this show redefined Rap video culture.

Another characteristic of Rap videos which I explored during my research is that many Rap videos in late 1980's and early 1990's were shot in streets. I have already opined about the significance of streets in the previous chapter therefore I do not see the necessity of penetrating into the surface of street culture once more. Nonetheless, one of the reasons of placing the setting of Rap videos in streets might be that many movements of black revolution started from streets and hence streets are used as one of tropes which bring Rap videos closer to reality. During Civil Right Movements', streets served as more of a stage on which black revolution was performed.

It will be noteworthy to observe what changes a video goes through when Rap videos are placed within studios? Can one say that shooting in studios create a sense of displacement and hence a sense of alienation. In my opinion, I do not think it is true. In fact I would assert studios assist in creating an alternative location which is as pertinent as streets are in the representation of subjects which are related with Rap videos.

Getting back to the assessment of the behaviour of body in Rap videos, the first video in which I would like to travel around is 'Express Yourself' by N.W.A. In this video there is a growth of black body in terms of movements with freedom. It begins with the time when blacks were treated as slaves in the fields. In the beginning a submissive and repressed form of black body is shown but in the latter part of the video, the same body brings a transformation and revolution. In the video, a white police man is shown whipping black field workers cruelly and when one of the workers tries to strike back he lands up in jail for standing against something which is utterly erroneous. This demonstrates the subjugation of blacks and the tyrannical behaviour of American police. The body of the collectivity or 'society' takes its formation when N.W.A retaliates in the streets and people collectively join the group. In this video white and black body exist at two different ends. The white man who belongs to the American police is publicized as the exploiter while on the other hand blacks are the victims who get exploited. This video nonetheless provides space for counter-hegemonic discursive expressions to blacks and these expressions are put across with aggression along with a sense of unity. What is the

reason that aggression is considered to be an imperative fraction of Rap? Does aggression delineate the rebel spirit of blacks or it signifies the wrath and helplessness of blacks? In my opinion aggression indeed represents the fury and resentment of American-Americans but Rappers used this fury to create the sense of revolt and revolution. Jeffrey O. G. Ogbar in *Hip Hop Revolution: The Culture and Politics of Rap* writes: “To Rap in hip-hip without expressing some sort of a rebel style is to call into question one’s own legitimacy as a Rapper” (Ogbar, 2007: 55)

I ask here does this rebellious attitude have anything to do with the stereotypes which are often associated with male body? For instance in a common set up of society, being soft for men is considered to be a sign of effeminacy. This is not a general assumption which I am trying to make here. I will evaluate this question after shading some light on Ice T and Public Enemy to ascertain how much value this question holds.

However, another noteworthy constituent of ‘Express Yourself’ is the projection of colours. The scene where blacks are shown as slaves has been shot in gray colour. The colour gray might signify or stand for African-American past or it can also be a symbol of lugubriousness which was an indispensable part of blacks in the initial years of their revolution for their rights. On the other hand, in the entire video there is a sound of whistle which is made by the police. This sound creates a sense of tension and restlessness in the video. In N.W.A’s another music video “Straight Outta Compton” the sound of siren or alarm bell of police car is used. The sound along with body plays its own politics in both the videos. Sound conveys a sense of reality in the atmosphere of videos and this sense gets conveyed in the bodily actions as well.

Moreover, ‘Express Yourself’ moves back and forth in between streets and studios. Can one say that the use of streets and studios in the video create two different localizations, one which is public and another which is private? I believe studios do create a private space where Rappers can give reality to their wings of imagination and furthermore certain actions which cannot be performed in the streets or public space such as the trial or execution of a person can be performed in the ambit of studios. Besides in ‘Express Yourself’ the white house is called ‘Black house’ which actually represents the sense of black empowerment and it subverts the whole idea of white hegemony and authority. But in the end the cruelty and spitefulness of American police haunts back the black body when one of the group members of N.W.A becomes the object of killing and

the video ends with him getting an electric shock on an electric chair. The video in the ends hints that there is still a long path to cover in order to reach the final point.

On the other hand, Ice T's 'High Rollers' is about drugs and how the young generation is getting tRapped in this chaotic world of narcotic substance. As I mentioned in the last chapter, this song demonstrates the gray surface of youth's accelerate life and highlights the unlawful activities in which they get absorbed. In the video, the footage of various drug raids conducted by the American Police such as 'Swat Rockhouse Raid', 'Crenshaw cocaine homicide', 'PCP⁶ arrest', 'Hollywood hills drug czar murder⁷' etc have been used. There might be multiple grounds behind assimilating these footages in the video. One reason which can be pertinent is addressing the young generation about the consequences of getting engaged with illegitimate and unlawful actions and hence the influx of death ahead of time. Most of the footages which appear to be authentic present the police with guns and other weapons while dead bodies of people are shown being carried away which creates a sense of horror and fear and yet a sagacity of consciousness.

In 'High Rollers' the movements of body happens on two levels. On one level, viewers see the youths making wealth and spending it on sumptuousness without any conscientiousness while on the other level, the whole image of drugged body is penetrated in the mind of the viewers and how this drugged body is not only controlled by the authoritative apparatus of social order such as police but at times bereavement remains the end result for this passive body. However, in police raids numerous people were arrested but at the same time several guiltless people had also got affected by it. I had mentioned in the last chapter about Daryl Gates and his actions regarding the anti-drugs crusade. Though, he was admired by the media for taking a huge mission against drugs in his hands but this is also the reality that many a times black body had become the site of exploitation for no reasons. It was shot and exploited without any guilt.

Mike Davis, who has written extensively about the inner world of ghettos, in his book *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* mentions one such event where the body becomes the location of intimidation because of its colour. Davis writes:

⁶PCP is a recreational drug which is known by many street names such as angel dust, killer weed, super grass, rocket fuel etc.

⁷ To make the term 'Hollywood hills drug czar murder' clear, I would like to mention that 'drug czar' is an informal name for the person who directs drug-control programme in United States.

...Soon afterwards came the police killing of Eulia love, a 39-year-old Black widow in default of her gas bill. Community outrage was so great that Watts Assembly member Maxine Waters demanded, 'Chief Gates, we want you out!' As Gates defended the twelve 38-calibre holes in Mrs Love's body before a cowed police commissioner, several hundred black clergy members petitioned the Carter administration to intervene. They asked the Justice department to probe the pattern of systematic abuse of non-whites, including 'more than 300 police shootings of minority citizens in the last decade'... In 1982, for example, following the rash of LAPD 'chokehold' killings of young black men in custody, Gates advanced the extraordinary theory that the deaths were the fault of the victim's racial anatomy, not excessive police force. (Davis, 2006: 271-72)

This incident shares a close resemblance with Eleanor Bumpurs, who was shot for not paying her rent which was discussed in the previous chapter. Nonetheless the remark that 'deaths were the fault of the victim's racial anatomy' raises some grave questions about how the black body is perceived through the eyes of non-blacks.

Judith Butler in her essay "Endangered/Endangering: Schematic racism and white paranoia" examines the case of Rodney King and look at the white paranoia in relation to its obsession with black body. Butler uses Fanon's argument that how black body is constituted through fear and also through 'seeing' and 'pointing'. Just to elaborate a bit more on this point 'seeing' and 'pointing' both are different because the phrase 'pointing' gives formation to threat and uncertainty while perceiving an object. Butler moves further on Fanon's argument that how the black body is circumscribed as dangerous prior to any gesture or movement. For LAPD the mere sight of black body conveys the forth coming danger which could come on their way or harm them. Adding to the point, Butler regarding the case of Rodney king and the boisterous behaviour of LAPD writes:

"He is hit in exchange for the blows he never delivered, but which he is, by virtue of his blackness, always about to deliver." (Butler 142, Emphasize mine).

In 'High Rollers' there is a juxtaposition between the self and the other in the end and it is demonstrated when Ice T is killed by the American Police and he Raps about his own dead body.

Regarding Public Enemy's 'Fight the Power', it has two versions. Spike Lee produced and directed two music videos. The first featured clip of several scenes from the movie 'Do the Right Thing'. In the second edition of video, Lee employed hundreds of extras to reproduce an enormous political rally in Brooklyn. Public Enemy's 'Fight the Power' reminds of the Civil Rights Movement of 1960's.



Figure 1 A still from Public Enemy's 'Fight the Power' 1989⁸



Figure 2 Women while demanding economic justice in 1963 March in Washington. Photo by Wally McNamee⁹

⁸ <http://arttattler.com/archivelookingatmusic3.html> as assessed on 6th June 2011

⁹ <https://lcrm.lib.unc.edu/blog/index.php/2010/08/27/glenn-beck-to-reclaim-civil-rights-movement/> as assessed on 6th June 2011

I thought of comparing the portrayal of 'Fight the Power' with the era of 1960s, the time when a new consciousness took its formation within blacks for their voice. This was the time when African-Americans recognised the authority of their right to be heard. In above mentioned both the pictures there is a stark similarity. Both pictures communicate the spirit of blacks.

However, 'Fight the Power' has been shot in the streets in which there are many people carrying various sign boards. On some of the sign boards names of various places of America such as Philadelphia, Bronx, and Brooklyn have been mentioned. I would like to reveal that these places have immense importance in context to black art and culture because during the civil rights movements these were some of the most disturbed places in U.S.A. While other signs featuring Paul Robeson, Marcus Garvey, Chuck Berry, Harriet Tubman and Martin Luther King draw the source of inspiration for the young generation, the signs in the video colligate African-Americans not only with their past, present but also with their history and landscape. Before I further analyse the body and its function in this particular video, I would like to furnish a concise description about Paul Robeson, Marcus Garvey, Chuck Berry, Harriet Tubman, and Martin Luther King. Robeson, Garvey, Berry, Tubman and King are some of the figures in black history who have struggled to empower the black body.

Paul Leroy Robeson (April 9, 1898 – January 23, 1976) was an internationally renowned American singer, scholar, actor, recording artist, writer, multi-lingual orator, who was known for his political radicalism and his activism in civil rights movement. Robeson was the first significant concert star who gave recognition to Negro spirituals. However, Robeson was banned from performing on stage, radio and television for his songs which discarded the U.S. imperialism. On the other hand, Marcus Garvey (17 August 1887 – 10 June 19) was a Black Nationalist and a Pan-Africanist. Marcus Garvey contributed a lot for the social upliftment of Africans. He was the founder of the 'Universal Negro Improvement Association' and 'African Communities League'. He campaigned against lynching, Jim Crow laws, denial of black voting rights and racial discrimination. He believed in the principle of Europe for Europeans, Asia for Asians and Africa for Africans because he was not sure whether the whites of America will ever embrace blacks.

Furthermore, Chuck Berry (born October 18, 1926) is one of the pioneers of rock and roll music. He developed rhythm and blues into major elements that made rock and roll distinctive. In addition, Harriet Tubman (March 1822 – 1913) was an African-

American activist and humanitarian who contributed till no ends in anti-slavery movements. After escaping from slavery into which she was born, she made various attempts to rescue slaves and in her mission she managed to liberate more than 70 slaves.

On the other hand, Martin Luther King Jr. (1929-1968) was an activist and a prominent leader in African American Civil Rights Movement. He is one person whose voice travelled across different regions of U.S.A and it became the quintessence of black strength and power. He is seen as a heroic leader of modern American liberalism who worked for the upliftment and advancement of blacks through his non-violent ideologies. He was actively associated with the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP) and the Alabama Council on Human Relations. NAACP was formed on 12th February 1909 and its primary aim was to maintain social, political and economical equality and uproot racial prejudice absolutely. In 1955, king initiated the Montgomery Bus Boycott protest campaign in Alabama U.S.A against the city's rule of sequestration between whites and coloured in public transit system. In context to this campaign, king asked coloured people to boycott public transport completely. This protest lasted from December 1st 1955 to December 20th 1956.

In 1963 King's well known speech '*I have a dream*' brought all African-Americans together and inspired them to stand for their human rights without any shame and guilt. I would like to mention some of the excerpts from Martin Luther King Jr's speech which created revolution in America and helped in dismantling the walls of segregation.

There are those who are asking the devotees of civil rights, "when will you be satisfied?" we can never be satisfied as long as Negro is the victim of the unspeakable horrors of police brutality. We can never be satisfied as long as ore bodies, heavy with the fatigue of travel, cannot gain lodging in the motels of the highways and the hotels of the cities. We cannot be satisfied as long as the Negro's basic mobility is from a smaller ghetto to a larger one. We can never be satisfied as long as our children are stripped of their self-hood and robbed of their dignity by signs stating: "For Whites only." We cannot be satisfied as long as a Negro in Mississippi cannot vote and a Negro in New York believes he has nothing for which to vote. No, no, we are not satisfied, and we will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream.

... I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal."

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit together at the table of brotherhood.

I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character.

I have a dream today.¹⁰

Robeson, Garvey, Chuck Berry, Tubman and Martin Luther King Jr. all of them facilitated in creating the dignified image of blacks and transforming Martin Luther King's dream into a reality so that blacks could be seen beyond the colour of their skin. One of the ways through which the body functions in 'Fight the Power' is through performance. Though, performance is considered to be an intrinsic part of Rap and other musical genres of blacks. In this video the streets are used as a stage and people as performers. Moreover, this video creates an entire trajectory starting from Harriet Tubman, Marcus Garvey to contemporary Rap artists. The image presence of Garvey, Robeson and other black political figures depicts the entire narration of what all endeavours were performed for the current status of blacks in America. These figures highlight the revisionary approach to black bodies in this video.

However, before I delve into the female Rap videos, I would like to get back to the question of rebel attitude of male Rappers and hence the masculine representation of them. Is it essential for a man to look macho or rough? Are men obsessed with their manhood?

bell hooks in her book *The Will to Change: Men Masculinity and Love* explores the milieu of masculinity and according to her it is not the blunder of men to be obsessed with manhood but rather it is patriarchy which conditions them since their childhood that violence and anger are the signs which make someone a man. bell hooks writes: "There is only one emotion that patriarchy values when expressed by men; that emotion is anger. Real men get mad. And their mad-ness, No matter how violent or violating, is deemed natural- a positive expression of patriarchal masculinity." (hooks 2004: 7) As far as patriarchy is concerned, bell hooks remarks:

Patriarchy is a political-social system that insists that males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females, and endowed with the right to dominate and rule over the weak and to maintain the dominance through various forms of psychological terrorism and violence. (hooks 2004: 18)

I do agree with bell hooks in context of masculinity. It is indeed the political-social system which teaches males to act like a man and it is the similar system which gives birth to the idea of 'man'. However, if the idea of 'man' is contested then it will become problematic because having a penis does not give the licence of manhood.

¹⁰ Martin Luther King Jr. delivered this speech on 28th August 1963, at the Lincoln Memorial, Washington D.C.

Nonetheless, considering male Rappers; aggression and violence have become an inherent part of them. It is not because they particularly want to be violent and aggressive but there is always a fear that if they are not belligerent then they might not be taken seriously. Byron Hurt made a documentary in 2006 called “Hip Hop: Beyond Beats & Rhymes” which initiated a whole new discussion in the Hip Hop world about manhood and sexism. This documentary highlights how most of the Rappers stay in a box in which one has to be strong, tough, affluent and dominating else there is always a fear of being called soft, weak, chump or a faggot and nobody wants to be addressed by any of these terms. The documentary features interviews about masculinity with Rappers such as Fat Joe, Mos Def, Jadakiss, Chuck D, and Busta Rhymes along with Hip Hop mogul Russell Simmons and cultural commentators such as Michael Eric Dyson and Beverly Guy Shetfall. One of the Rappers in the documentary confessed: “before Hip Hop man was seen as docile but when Hip Hop came around it brought masculinity back into the game and some of it is a bit misguided.” Byron Hurt highlights that most of the Rappers have two sides to their self. First, what they essentially are and second, how they want them to be seen or projected as. When it comes to act masculine many Rappers get trapped in the predicament of being and becoming. It is true that during slavery, the tag of manhood was completely snatched away from black male bodies and in fact a demonic image of blacks was portrayed. The acts of killing and lynching black bodies added further shades of gray in representing feeble and vulnerable images of black men. It is believed that Hip Hop became one of the ways of attaining the lost masculinity of black males back.

Nonetheless, as far as female Rappers are concerned, they devour the conventional and conservative conceptions of patriarchy and masculinity. They have crossed the boundaries which were marked for them and have created a space for themselves in an (Rap) art which was always seen as something which belongs to the male sphere. There have always been a kind of precariousness in the air regarding female Rappers getting credence in the world of Rap but this air of doubts soon disappeared when female Rappers such as Queen Latifah and Sister Souljah made their mark and assured the world courageously without having any fear that women too can Rap.

Queen Latifah’s ‘Ladies First’ is a political representation of African past. Through this video, Queen Latifah is connecting African-Americans with Africa. The video contains the live footage of South Africa’s apartheid riots and it begins with a slide of Black Female activists such as Harriet Tubman, Rosa Parks, Angela Davis, Winnie

Mandela, and Madam C. J. Walker. Though, Harriet Tubman and her contribution for anti-slavery movements have already been mentioned. As far as Rosa Parks (1913-2005) is concerned, she was an African-American civil rights activist. U.S Congress called her 'The First Lady of Civil Rights. Parks became an international face which resisted the racial segregation in any form. In 1955, Rosa Parks herself faced racism when she was asked to stand up from her seat to give it to a white person while travelling in the bus. This was the time when there were two different sections for whites and blacks in the bus in America and if the whiter section would get full then blacks were supposed to leave their seat and move further at the back if any white person entered. Rita Dove in her article "*The Torchbearer ROSA PARKS*" which came in Time magazine writes in the same context:

We know the story. One December evening, a woman left work and boarded a bus for home. She was tired; her feet ached. But this was Montgomery, Ala., in 1955, and as the bus became crowded, the woman, a black woman, was ordered to give up her seat to a white passenger. When she remained seated, that simple decision eventually led to the disintegration of institutionalized segregation in the south, ushering in a new era of the civil rights movement.

On the other hand, Angela Davis (born 1944) too is a political activist. She was most active during 1960s and 1970s, the time when black awareness about their rights was at its zenith. She was associated with communist party of U.S.A., the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Panther Party. Furthermore, Winnie Mandela (born, 1936) is a South African politician who has headed the African National Congress Women's League. She is referred as 'The Mother of the Nation' in South Africa. Finally, Madam C. J. Walker (1867-1919) was an African-American businesswomen and a philanthropist. She made a good fortune for herself and became the iconic figure of success.

'Ladies First' demonstrates the cicatrix which black body got during the apartheid regime. In the video there are scenes which depict the violence which blacks faced. How they were treated like sub-humans. This video does celebrate the liberation of blacks and Africa. There is a portrayal of pan-africanism in this video.

In addition, Sister Souljah's "The slavery is back in effect" starts with an interrogation in which a white person asks her '*Sister Souljah are you a racist?*' Sister Souljah replies that "you can't call me or any black person or any place a racist. We don't have the power to do what white people did to us and even if we did we don't have that low down dirty nature".

“So do you believe there are not any good white people?” Souljah replies “if there are I haven’t met them, where are they?”

In this video, a radio announcement takes place which entails: “Good evening America, this is your President, please listen the announcement I am about to make. After careful consideration and research Vice President Duke, Congress and myself have concluded that black people have not advanced technologically, their educational testing scores run a Rapid decline. The vast majority of them are on welfare and producing babies at a faster rate than they can support them. We will not carry them anymore and we are not left with any choice but to put slavery back into effect , all blacks will report to the designated camps in their area to receive further orders the only blacks excused will be those serving in the united state military and police. Any black who do not co-operate will be terminated immediately. I repeat slavery is back in effect”.

In this video, the black body is shown in bondage again. From men to women, they all are handcuffed with chains. The whole portrayal of repression of black body is very gory and violent. There are black men who get beaten up by the American Police and simultaneously a black man who is shot by a white police is shown while he tries to run away. In another incident a woman and her small daughter is shown dead supposedly killed by the police. I won’t emphasize that the video of this song is all fictitious because references of real incidents in which many innocent blacks were killed by the police have been given previously. This video also highlights the contribution of women in resisting the violence which was inflicted upon blacks. Sister Souljah herself in the video shoots at one of the American police which subvert the whole dynamics of power and authority. In the end, blacks are shown with pointing guns at American police.

In conclusion, responding to the questions which were raised in the beginning, I would like to state that videos provided layers to the structure of body and videos gave visual voice to Rappers which gave additional power to their words and through this visual voice their words created this picture which was not easy to ignore. I do believe that videos not only gave this sense of empowerment to Rappers but they also gave visual identity to blacks. Before the invention of videos, it was the voice which people used to associate with but after the discovery of videos the voice was no more the sole source of identity.

As far as the disparity between the male and female Rappers is concerned in context to their projection in videos, I would maintain that female Rappers were no less than male Rappers in any sphere. They not only broke the convention that women cannot

Rap but in matter of fact they contributed equally in creating the world in which blacks could be seen beyond the colour of their skin. But over the period of time the whole portrayal of body in Rap music video has suffered a major downfall. Rappers such as 50 cent and snoop doggy dog use body as an object to get attention so that commercial success can be attained.

The next chapter will take the visual identity and visual voice of Rappers much further because in the upcoming chapter I will be looking at the visual culture in Rap world and how this culture created a space for Rappers. To be specific I will be looking graffiti, tattoos and fashion, and will investigate the trope of identity and space within all of them.

Visualising Identity: Rapping Graffiti, Rapper's Tattoos and Fashionable Rap

Graffiti, Tattoos and Fashion are three apparatuses which share a close affiliation with the tropes of popular and visual culture. In the current scenario, there has been an invariable progression in the expansion of all three contents. Graffiti is an art of significance for one section of society. It is moving beyond the walls of ghettos and streets and today it is used as one of the important tools for granting a sense of understanding of Hip Hop culture beyond songs and dance. On the other hand, tattoos have been an indispensable constituent of Hip Hop world. It is not just a popular mean of body art at present but I believe tattoos have their own alliance of social, cultural and political codes and these codes adjudicate the proposition of tattoos and moreover tattoos have their own gender politics which will be taken into a notable consideration in the latter part of the chapter. Furthermore, as far as fashion is concerned it is one of the most significant fractions of Rappers which create a manifestation and reflection of Hip Hop. However, it is also believed that Hip Hop culture is spreading a wrong sense of fashion especially amongst youths but despite that Hip Hop fashion has grown to be one of the most popular pillars of urban youth fashion. What is the reason that youth culture and Hip Hop cannot be separated?

However, the primary aim of this chapter is to look at the visual identity and visual voice which is formulated by graffiti, tattoos and fashion. When graffiti, tattoos and fashion will be talked about then the attempt of exploring the seeds of these arts in selective Rap music videos which I analysed in the prior chapter will also be made and similarly the visual lineament of the visual identity and visual voice will also be contested. This chapter will also glance beyond the golden era of Rap and will analyse the contemporary Rap artists as well within the paradigm of graffiti, tattoo and fashion so that a broader understanding of Hip Hop can be perceived. Graffiti and tattoos in general are considered to be the tools of constructing masculinity but graffiti, tattoo and fashion will be examined beyond the masculine gaze in this chapter and moreover, the role of subculture forms will be investigated in discovering the focal voice of a community. In addition, this chapter will complete the circle of Rap and Hip Hop art which I started with

my first chapter. Another rationale of taking up graffiti, tattoos and fashion is that I thought of examining and comprehend the psyche of Hip Hop culture outside Rap songs and videos.

Graffiti as a cultural entity can be used as a measure to divulge the layers of customs and attitudes of a particular community. The word graffiti originates from the Greek term 'graphein' which means 'to write' and it is the plural of the Italian work 'graffito'. Graffiti has its own history, in ancient times it was used for inscriptions and drawings on walls with a sharp object. There are inferences of presence of graffiti in Rome and ancient cities such as Pompeii. One can peep into the inner consciousness of a community through the art of graffiti. However, today graffiti has become a global phenomenon but my primary concentration will be limited within U.S.A.

Graffiti for African-Americans has been more than a meagre mean of cultural expression. It has been a site of conflict and control simultaneously. Like many other black arts, it too emerged out of the urban space. It is believed that this art first started in Philadelphia and then it reached to New York and other part of America. It is believed that graffiti started in 1970s with a kid name Taki 183 who decided to write his name not only in his neighbourhood 183 street in Washington heights but all over the place. Initially nobody thought of it to be a name of a person and by the time people got to know he was already famous. After Taki 183 came Papo 184, Junior 161, and Cay 161 and so on. In my assumption, these numbers along with the name signify the place the graffiti artists come from. It was time when blacks and Latinos revived the art of graffiti in New York, it was not considered to be a legal art but marginalized groups used this art to mark out the space which meant by gaining authority and recognition.

Nancy Macdonald in *The Graffiti Subculture: Youth, Masculinity and Identity in London and New York* explores the various spheres of graffiti. Nancy calls graffiti "an urban noise which is recognized but rarely registered" (1). One of the reasons of graffiti not being registered is that it is an illegal art and vandalism of urban space by this art creates a sense of assertion beyond the set up of negotiation. It is true that graffiti is an urban noise but is this noise creating a chaos? Moreover, is there any sense of coherence in this pandemonium? These are some of the questions which need to be taken up seriously to examine this art. Graffiti has its own set of rules and laws and it is very much location-oriented but the larger segment of society is not attentive and conscious of these

set of laws consequently this slice of society does not understand the rationale of graffiti artists having so much of passion and dedication in them for this art.

My motive is not to defend this art without any substantial reason but rather to look at it objectively and then come to a conclusion. I was speculating in context of officially authorized and illegitimate prohibited arts that the tag of lawful art communicates an implication of acceptance and acknowledgment amongst the people and the legal reception of an art plays a considerable role in deciding the absolute significance of it. Since, graffiti is not even registered as an art which is why it has to combat for its legal substance. For some people it is an art but for many it is a vicious cycle which never ends. Nancy Macdonald interviewed many graffiti writers while working on her book *The Graffiti Subculture: Youth, Masculinity and Identity in London and New York*. The research in this area has not been moderate enough subsequently I will be glancing at Nancy's book on and off to observe what graffiti writers have to say about this art. Zaki, a graffiti writer remarks:

There's a lot of misunderstanding about it and a lot of graffiti writers can't work out what all this aggression and hatred is for what they are doing. I think it's just people not understanding. If people understood a little bit more about it, then some might say, 'No, no, I don't like it because it's illegal', but other people would go 'Oh right, I see now. (Macdonald 3)

Graffiti is barely thirty to forty years old. Like Hip Hop it too had its main stay in New York. From being a submissive voice of a marginalized group, in the current scenario it has become a domineering voice which is not very simple to pretermite. Graffiti art has become a mode of expression and communication. Graffiti is considered to be a subcultural art which is different than other subcultural forms because of its explicit nature. One of the main reasons of people's association with this art is to attain the fame, status and recognition. But before I delve further into the realm of this art it is necessary to highlight what actually subculture is? and how it contributes into the mainstream culture of a society?

In the broader sense, a subculture is a group of people within a culture which maintains seclusion and differentiates them from the larger culture to which they share an affiliation with. A subculture group challenges the normative surface of a society. Dick Hebdige in his remarkable work on subculture and its significance called *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* highlights that a subculture subverts the normal flow of a culture.

Style in subculture is, then pregnant with significance. Its transformations go 'against nature', interrupting the process of 'normalization'. As such they are gestures, movements towards a speech which offends the 'silent majority', which challenges the principle of unity and cohesion, which contradicts the myth of consensus. (Hebdige 18)

Similarly, all subcultural forms whether it is graffiti, music, punk culture, music or tattoos or Hip Hop fashion interrupt the process of normalization. Moreover, these forms are never static they always produce, reproduce, construct, deconstruct themselves to oppose the hegemonic pattern of society because hegemony itself is never universal as it always reproduces itself to sustain. Subcultural forms work like a compilation of mottled symbols and these symbols generate a 'noise' (Hebdige 90) and this 'noise' attempt to fill up the gaps of a main stream culture.

However, subculture is often seen or perceived as negative because of its criticism from the dominant fraction of a society. And this is factual not only about graffiti but jazz, blues, and Rap too were given the second hand treatment because when these forms came into existence they were not associated with the mass and hence their rejection by the foremost governing part of society as I had pointed out in the first chapter. Nonetheless, Hebdige argues that the tropes of subculture help people with analogous or similar ideology to develop a sense of identity who feel neglected by the standards of society. I would like to analyse the nature of identity which is constructed by graffiti. Since, graffiti is considered to be an unlawful art consequently the identity which gets constructed by it can be termed illegal. Can an illegal identity be static? Or do graffiti writers enjoy the status of fluid (illegal) identity? Graffiti writers normally does not voice out about their work. They maintain a low profile because of the abundance of danger in their profession hence they create an alternate identity or an alternate name for themselves which they put all over from subways, buses, trucks, abandoned walls, buildings to trains.

By moving through the subculture's recognized stage of activity, writers can make justified changes to their identities. This flexibility allows them to negotiate the difficulties of their illegal position and, indeed, avoid them when they become too much. To illustrate, an established or 'veteran' writer with increased responsibilities can discard his/her 'illegal' identity and adopt a 'conformist' one by announcing his/her subcultural 'retirement'. (Macdonald 88)

The identity which is constructed by subculture is always in a flux because of its precarious nature. Furthermore, the term subculture in itself is capricious and arbitrary because something which is considered to be a subculture today can be a mainstream culture tomorrow and hence a shift towards the centre. The relationship between a subculture and a mainstream culture is perilous. Hebdige explains how subcultural forms

shift into the profitable merchandise. For instance 'Safety pins' and 'plastic' which were made fashionable by the punk culture were transmogrified so that they could be accepted in the normative world.

As soon as the original innovations which signify 'subcultures' are translated into commodities and made generally available, they become 'frozen'. Once removed from their private contexts by the small entrepreneurs and big fashion interests who produce them on a mass scale, they become codified, made comprehensible, rendered at once public property and profitable merchandise... this occurs irrespective of the subculture's political orientation: the macrobiotic restaurants, crafts shops and 'antique markets' of the hippie era were easily converted into punk boutiques and record shops. It also happens irrespective of the startling content of the style: punk clothing and insignia could be bought mail-order by the summer of 1977, and in September of that year *Cosmopolitan* ran a review of Zandra Rhodes' latest collection of culture follies which consisted entirely of variations on the punk theme. Models smouldered beneath mountains of safety pins and plastic (the pins were jewelled, the 'plastic' wet look-satin) and the accompanying article ended with an aphorism- 'To shock is chic'- which presaged the subculture's imminent demise". (Hebdige 96)

Similarly, graffiti writers have changed their location from being illegal to commercial ones. The tag of being a commercial artist opens the legal door through which artists can make a living by selling their work. Now days there are studios which sell graffiti canvas and apart from this cloth designing and tee shirts printing have become other modes of providing economic support to artists. Moreover, one thing which should be taken into notification is that "commercial legal work moves writers out of the boundaries of the subculture". (Macdonald 90)

In an article which got published in The New York Times titled "Graffiti's Story, From Vandalism to Art to Nostalgia" talks about the journey of Eric Felisbret, a graffiti writer who himself became a part of change which took place in the domain of this art.

What started in the 70s as a visual assault on commuters has attained a certain acceptability, if not cachet, thanks in part to the city's crackdown on subway graffiti in the late 80's. Today, ambitious aerosol canvases hang in galleries, while corporations like Nike, Coca-Cola and Sony hire graffiti muralists to paint storefront advertisements. Vintage photogRaphs plucked from archives have inspired a small industry of coffee table books.

11

¹¹ <http://pichaus.com/+sneakers+nike+air/> as assessed on 15th June 2011

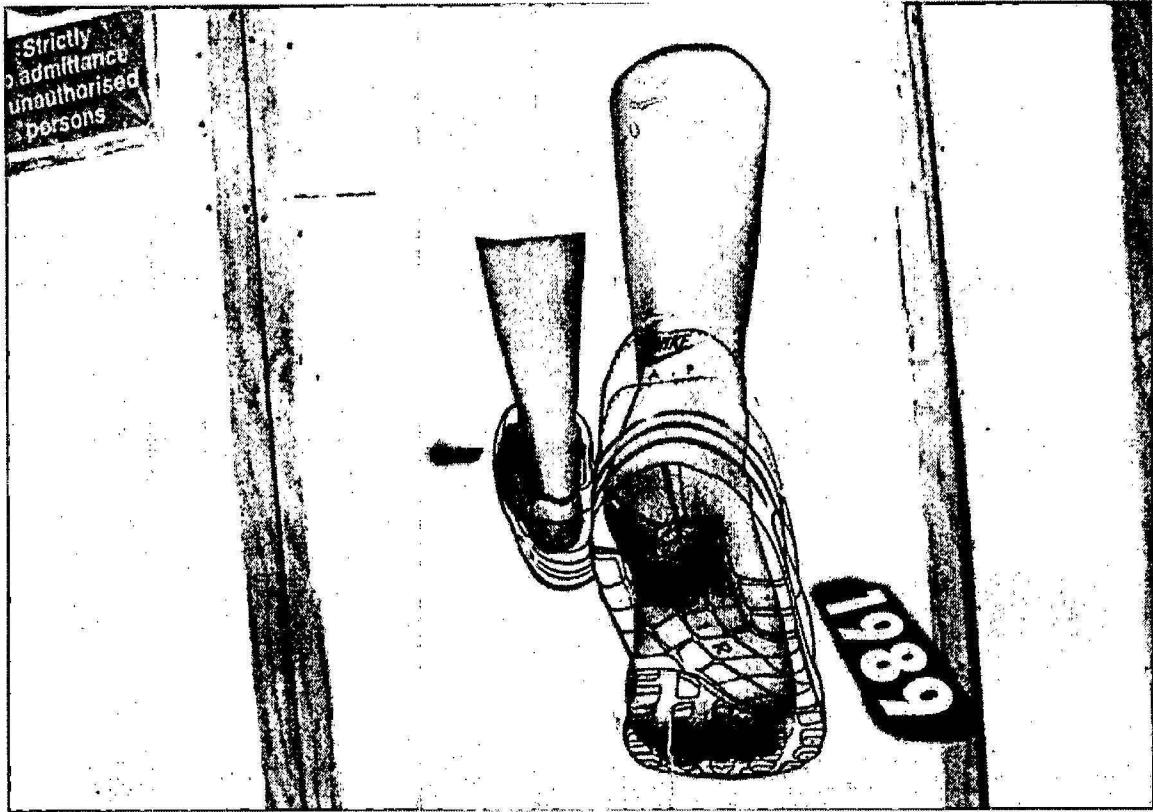


Figure 3 Nike advertisement

This advertisement reflects the promotion of Nike brand within the artistic paradigm of graffiti art. Nonetheless, graffiti has its own techniques and without acquiring them it is not easy to follow the path of this art. The very basic level is markings slogans, slurs and political statements. Most of the writers' start their career with it after then comes the more stylist way of writing which is called "tagging". "Tagging" is a technique in which the writers write their names at as many locations as possible because this becomes the essential gateway of gaining recognition and fame and most of the writers tag their names till the time they achieve a sense of control over their ability to get into the serious art.

"It's a very natural process. I mean you start and I don't know if you've ever used spray paint, but it's not an easy medium, so you start by tagging because it's the easiest thing to do". (Macdonald 74)

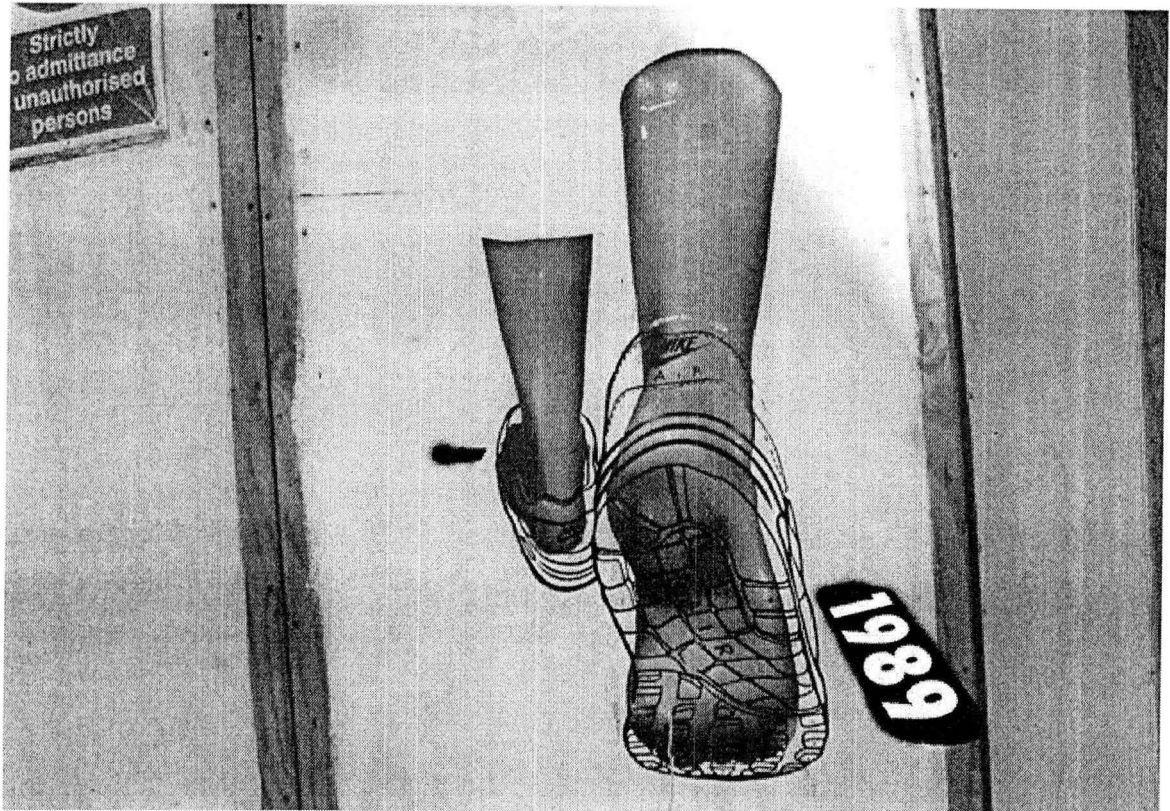


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Figure 4 A man while tagging¹²

“Tagging” is also referred as “bombing”, it is more of a sign of signature of an artist. Mostly spray paints are used for this but other tools such as marker pens, shoe police, stickers, paint sticks and sharp tools are also used to do graffiti. ‘Tagging’ gives the exposure to the artists and the underlying rule is to tag everyday if possible so that the name revolves around in the graffiti world and it does not get lost. This is the reason that the older and experienced writers get back to this world of colours on and off to make their presence felt. On the other hand, there are many writers who complement their work with the use of ‘throwups’. It is a technique in which simple but larger outlines are added to a tag. As the writers get bigger and bigger the technique too goes through the various transformations. A well known writer may transubstantiate tags into ‘three-stroke’. “A three-stroke is basically a throwup with one letter of your tag, probably the first letter. Like if you write “Cherish”, you just do a big bubbly C and everyone knows it’s Cherish’ (Mear)”. (Macdonald 77)

¹² <http://untitledname.com/2005/05/jesus-saves> as assessed on 15th June 2011

However, tagging alone does not help, one has to prove oneself to gain power and status and 'piece' promotion is an efficacious way to do that. 'Piece' is a short form for 'masterpiece'. It is a much convoluted, colourful and graphic depiction of the writer's name. The best canvas for the work of these writers is the one that moves, broadening their audience and the reach of their name which is why trucks, buses and trains are the popular target for graffiti. Trains and buses not only move from one place to another but they also extend the identity of the artists. Dondi, a graffiti artists remarks:

The trains moved, they went from one borough to the next and back.... we pieced on buses for a while, but it didn't work that well. They clean it really quickly and buses are kind of local, they'll only remain in one borough. The trains were the perfect medium, they went underground, they went everywhere. (Macdonald 83)

As far as the association of graffiti with Rap videos is concerned, it has been one of the tools of substantial significance. In the Rap video 'Express Yourself' one can see the inscriptions of graffiti on walls in the background. Some letters can be understood distinctly such as N.W.A group member Rapping with a backdrop of an immense graffiti which reads out as the title of the song but the video moves so fast that everything which has been written on walls cannot be followed.

N.W.A comes from Los Angeles and this fact is being reiterated to remark that in the beginning graffiti started from gangs. The gangs in Los Angeles used to spray on walls to mark out their territory so that other gangs would stay away from the marked location. The graffiti by gangs was not only a sign of information but it was also a threat to outsiders. Graffiti and Rap both evolved from the streets and hence the anxiety of claiming a legal space can be traced mutually in graffiti as well as Rap. The issue of location has been central to graffiti.

Moving from Los Angeles to New York, the place where Public Enemy and Sister Souljah come from, there is a differentiation in the approach of graffiti writers in both places and there is a distinction of location as well.

The major difference was space. In New York they were bombing subway cars but L.A's paint spots were the thousands of free and open walls, either city-owned or the miles of state operated freeway walls.... Los Angeles graffiti instantly revolved around the fact that it is a car city. A car city that travelled the vast freeway system lined mile after mile with 12-foot high concrete walls. Perfect for bombing! L.A graffiti writers took advantage of this huge gallery space. (Gastman & Teri, 2007: 16)

In Public Enemy's 'Fight the Power' and Sister Souljah's 'Slavery is back in Effect' the presence of graffiti can be seen. In 'Fight the Power' the huge graffiti of the

logo of the group is very much apparent throughout the video. On the other hand in 'Slavery is back in Effect' too graffiti cannot be ignored. Graffiti does manage to grasp the attention of the viewers and because of its bold and vivid colour pattern it becomes all the more difficult to see and not notice this art.

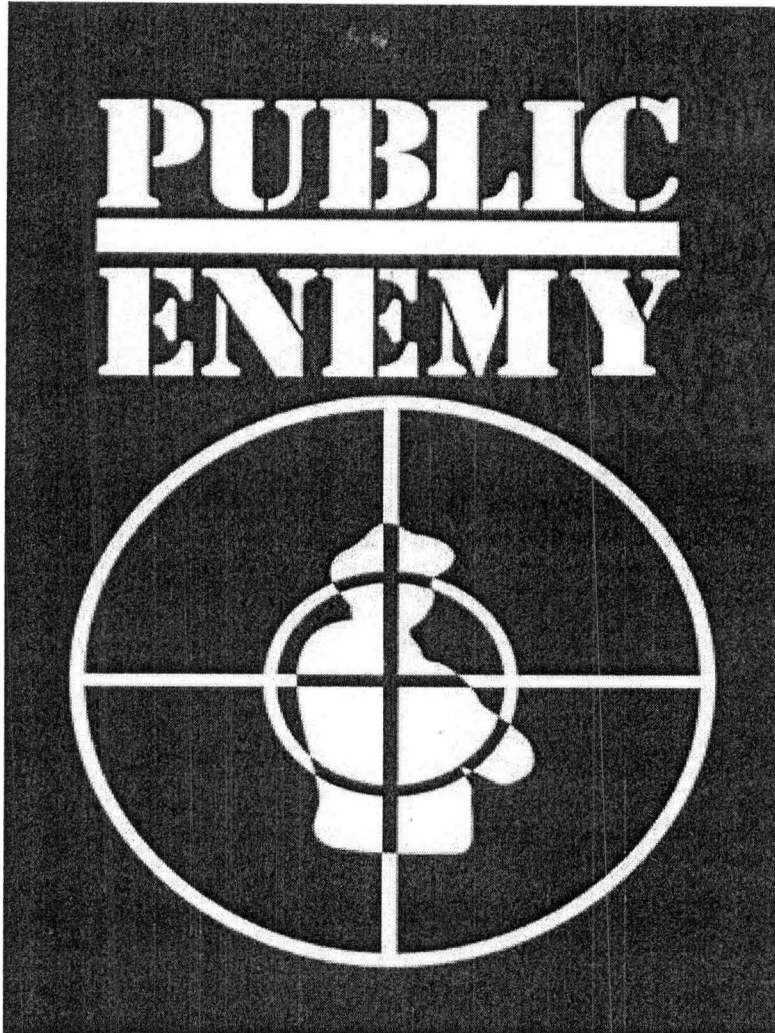


Figure 5 one of the graffitis in Public Enemy's 'Fight the Power'¹³

However, as Rap is considered to be the domain of male Rappers by one section of society it is believed that the art of graffiti is meant for men. What are the reasons that not only graffiti but tattoo too is perceived within the masculine sphere in general? In fact subculture itself is seen as the men's world. What is the reason that normally graffiti art is not associated with women? Is it because graffiti involves danger and hence it becomes a vehicle for men to prove their manhood?

It is true that male writers take danger and go out of their way to prove their

¹³ <http://www.amoeba.com/blog/2008/06/jamoeblog/public-enemy-brings-the-noise-to-ireland-paul-lowereports.html> as assessed on 22nd June 2011

masculinity but female writers have to go through a dilemma because they have to prove that they are not delicate girls who will get scared or faint when the police will come. Female writers have to discursivize their femininity and renegotiate the self to get accepted or to be taken seriously. To establish their identity they have to first undo who they are. Just like female Rappers struggled initially to enter into the world of Rap in the same manner female graffiti writers had to pass many trials to achieve a sense of belonging. There are very few female graffiti writers and Claw is one of them. She says, "People have tried to repress me. This is my total statement to all of them that I'm going for it, love it and lick it... I'm doing it as my feminist statement to the world." (Macdonald 140) Claw wants to alter the male mentality by her work. She wants to confirm that no one should have the authorisation to question the authority of female writers. She goes on to say:

I want to do the riskiest, the most outrageous stuff because I'm a woman. So people would say how the fuck did she do that... I write and I write for women. I'm doing this to say, 'you and your closed little mind, we can do this, anybody can do it, as long as they have the will and desire to do it. (Macdonald 142)

Can one postulate by holding the same thread that tattoos too have become a cultural and political medium for black female Rappers to subvert the so called manly representation which is often seen with tattooing? Do tattooed female Rappers just like female graffiti writers confront biasness and sexist nature of men? Are there female Rappers with tattoo inscribed on them? Or do male Rappers feel masculine when they exhibit tattoos? These are some of the questions which I will be interrogating within the context of tattoo culture. While dealing with tattoos, I would also explore the history of this art which will give a background of tattoo customs across multifarious cultures but the crucial spotlight will be limited on tattooing within African-American Hip Hop culture. To begin with I would like to explore how tattoo culture essentially started and how it became a global phenomenon.

Tattooing, the art of inscription on human skin, is a primordial cultural practice which exist even today. The presence of the art of tattooing can be found across miscellaneous cultures. This fine art is considered to be as old as mankind. Since human civilization signs and symbols have been very pertinent irrespective of their location. Some signs were made or drawn on walls and some on skin. In the primitive time there were no needles and machines to carve out tattoos. At that point of time, tattoo was thought of being a form of constructing a bridge between the human souls and the god. It

was more a form of a sacrificial which involved wounding oneself and putting ash or dirt in cuts or scrapes which would discolour the skin permanently and would leave out marks or tattoos.

As human culture evolved, tattoos continued to took on new meanings. In Egypt, tattooing gained the status of funeral art. An article titled "Tattoo: Pigments of imagination" which got published in National Geographic Magazine mentions: "Egyptian funerary figures of female dancers from around 2000 B.C. display the same abstract dot-and-dash tattoos on their bodies as those found on female mummies from that period. Later images represent Bes, god of fertility and revelry." In Egypt, tattoos were applied to ensure the peaceful journey of the human spirits to the other world without being disturbed by the evil entities. It is believed that Egyptians spread the art of tattooing all around the world from Greece, Persia and then to Arabia. By 2000 B.C it reached to Southeast Asia and in no time it dispersed from Japan to china and Burma.

As far as the etymology of the word "tattoo" is concerned, it emerged from the Polynesian word 'ta' which means striking something and the Tahitian word 'tatau' which means to mark. 'Tattoo' seems to come into existence for the first time from James Cook's *Voyage to Polynesia* sometime in the eighteenth century. As it was mentioned in the beginning that tattoos have their own association with social, cultural and political codes and these codes decide the nature of tattoos. Over the period of time tattoos have been the signs of many spheres of society starting from ranks in army and religious symbols to the indicator of slaves and convicts.

The 'Ainu', the indigenous people of Japan had facial tattoos like the 'Maori' of New Zealand. In 'Maori' culture, head is considered to be the most essential part and the face is covered with the embellished work of tattoo art. Each tattoo conveys its own agency and signifies its own prominence, other groups such as 'Atyal' of Taiwan, 'Hausa people' of Northern Nigeria, 'Berbers' of North Africa, 'Aborigines' of Australia, Native Americans and so on share a close affiliation with this art. For Native Americans most of the tattoos symbolise the warrior's emplacement within the tribe. Warriors often had tattoos of weapons while women were given tattoos of several labour tools.

In the 1820s, Europeans started the brutal business of trading the guns for tattooed heads of 'Maori' group. This inhumane practice continued for quite some time. The Maori traders to keep up with the demands started keeping slaves and then tattooed them against

their will and then killed them to sell off their heads. The barbarous journey finally came to an end in 1831 when the British government made this commerce illegal.

In 1891 the tattoo artists from New York 'Samuel O'Reilly' invented the first electric tattoo machine by adapting Thomas Edison's engraving tool so that it could work on flesh. The advent played a prodigious role in amending this art and made it promising to depict intricate tattoos with sophistication. American circus by the end of the 1920s started creating a spectacle out of the tattooed bodies of the artists. These circus tropes portrayed the tattoo art within the classification of 'exoticism' but in between 1960-70s, the hippie culture reinvented this art by embracing it.

There are basically two modes of tattooing. One which is probably the oldest and the traditional method encompasses the technique in which cuts are made in the flesh in such a way that it leaves a cicatrised mark but this technique generally takes place without the addition of any colour. In the other which is more of a popular process, a pattern is drawn on the skin, which is afterwards pricked in with using the needles or other razor-sharp pointed object, several colouring regarding the subject of the tattoo is rubbed into the wounds to produce an enduring picture.

"Tattoos articulate not only the body but the psyche as well." (Demello 10 emphasize mine)

As, the above mentioned quotation suggests that tattoo is about the psyche as well and in the whole process of tattooing psyche does play an essential role. In past sailors used to have tattooed self so that in case of a shipwreck, their bodies could be identified. Sometimes prostitutes used tattoos to designate their profession and then prisoners too would get tattoos as an act to protest against the system which used to obstruct their freedom. Prison tattoos have numerous layers attached to it because these tattoos function not only within an individual or group identities but they also assert cultural conflict between prisoners. Prison tattoos not only redefines the body but these tattoos provide a sense of identity to them because tattoos become a way of seeking an enrolment to a particular group of prisoners.

Margo Demello in the article "The Convict body: Tattooing Among Male American Prisoners" draws a chart in which tattoo culture is viewed within a hierarchical method. Demello remarks:

I recognize four separate spheres within the culture which include the professional sphere (within which is found the fine art style of tattooing most popular among the middle classes), the semi-professional sphere, street tattooing, and prison tattooing. Prison tattooing falls at the lowest end of this hierarchy, and tattoos that are created in prison, because of the technology used to create them, the style in which they are worn, and the imagery portrayed, can be easily distinguished from professionally executed tattoos. (10)

The classification which has been drawn by Margo Demello does create a curiosity and make sense to an extent but I am in a quandary regarding the immutability of this hierarchical approach. I believe that the relationship amidst all levels of this hierarchical method is fluid because outside the boundaries of jail, prison tattoos do not seem to get the societal acceptance or recognition and hence the status of the lowest level but inside the jail these tattoos act as the marker which distinguishes the convict from an inmate. An inmate is supposed to give respect to a convict because of his tattooed body. In this set up the entire hierarchical system changes its nature because earlier the tattoos of a convict which were looked as stains by society now in jail glorify his skin and work as objects of respect and esteem. Before 1970's when the coloured tattoo could only be afforded by a certain section of a society, black and white tattoo would be classified as 'street tattoo' but as the time progressed black and white tattoo became a popular phenomenon. This example too projects the clear signs of disruption in the conventional hierarchical method.

On the other hand, as it has been discussed in the last chapter that body is a process, which is always in the progression of being. I was contemplating whether some changes occur in the agency of a body when a tattoo is carved? A body signifies the gender and ethnicity similarly a tattoo on a body creates cultural boundaries. For instance Tupac Amaru Shakur, a well known Rapper who was killed on September 7, 1996 in a gang related dispute in the Las Vegas metropolitan area of Nevada got several tattoos on his body during the course of his career and all his tattoos signify various meanings related with diverse understandings of his life from being a Rapper and an actor to a person who came from a ghetto. I would like to emphasize on some of his tattoos out of all which he possesses. There is a machine gun and the word "50 Nigaaz" in the middle of his chest. On his abdomen a tattoo reads "Thug Life", 'I' has been written in the shape of a bullet. There is panther head on his left shoulder, which it seems, stands for the 'Black Panther Party'¹⁴. On his left upper arm, there is a tattoo of Jesus head on a burning cross; off to the

¹⁴ Black Panther Party was an African-American revolutionary leftist organization which worked for the upliftment of blacks. It was active in United States from 1966 to 1982. The party raised voice not only

slight left of the cross it says “only god can judge me” on the other hand, his left inner arm reads “trust nobody”. On his right upper arm, there are skull and crossbones under the word “heartless”. Under the skull and the crossbones, it is written in miniscule prints “my only fear of death coming back reincarnated”. On right side of his neck “Makaveli’ is written. The origin of this tattoo lies in Tupac’s liking for Niccolo Machiavelli. Machiavelli was an Italian humanist, philosopher, and writer. In fact Tupac used to be referred as Makaveli by many of his fans. Apart from Tupac there are other Rappers too such as LL Cool J, 50 Cent, Lil Wayne, Ric Ross, Game, Jim Jones, and so on who have tattooed body.

Rappers spend thousands of dollars on their jewellery and cars and clothes but at the same they splurge on ink too. Tattooing has become a rage among Rappers. LL Cool J has a tattoo of a large microphone on his right shoulder which signifies his colligation with music. Lil Wayne has tattoos on all over his body. He has tattoos on his face as well. On his right eyelid is written ‘fear’ and on his left eyelid ‘god’ and there are four tear drops which symbolise the people who had been killed in his family. Lately facial tattoos in Hip Hop world have become the axis of attention but at the same time criticism cannot be kept away from this new found location for ink. 50 cent in an article “50 Cent Gives His Opinion on Rappers with Face Tattoos” claims that there is a sense of legitimacy which is attached with these tattoos and young Rappers should think twice before getting them on their face. He remarks:

I’m an artist. That’s it. That’s the statement you make when you go and tattoo your face...but know that public will not have interest in you as an artist for life. You have to be phenomenal. Talk to the best that do it and they will tell you that it will take more than you being an artist. It takes marketing, manoeuvring to generate that long, when you got 40-year-old Rappers in the game, those guys have manoeuvred and survived.

Furthermore Lil Wayne also has a prayer tattoo on his back. Some of the lines of the tattoo delineate Wayne’s desire for courageousness. The lines read: “Give me the courage to face life’s trial, and not from troubles run, let me keep this thought in mind. Thy will. Not mine be done.” Lil Wayne or Dwayne Michael Carter Jr’s tattoos get their subsistence not only from his unhinged past but they also carry an essence of optimistic prospect within them. Lil Wayne was born in New Orleans, Louisiana. His parents separated when he was just two years old and in fact his father abandoned the family

against racism but also against American police brutality. The party was found in Oakland, California on 15th October 1966.

completely soon after the divorce.

Russian linguist Mikhail Bakhtin introduced the term *heteroglossia* which delineates the co-existence of divergent voices with a wide variety of social links. Bakhtin uses this term to discursivize the authorial nature of the narrative pattern of a novel. He opines a narrative is infused with many languages, speeches, and dialects including both the dominant and the marginal ones hence a narrative is partial without the multiplicity of voices. *Heteroglossia* includes: “Social dialects, characteristic group behaviour, professional jargons and generic languages, languages of generations and age-groups, tendentious languages, languages of the authorities, of various circles and of passing fashions, languages that serve the specific socio-political purposes of the day, even of the hour, each day has its own slogan, its own vocabulary, its own emphasis.” (262-3)

As Bakhtin postulated that *heteroglossia* creates multiple voices and these voices lead to a noise. The tattooed body of Rappers too lead to a noise which includes many voices. For instance Tupac and Wayne’s tattoos have layers of voices attached to them.

On the other hand, 50 cent is also the owner of many tattoos. He is a Rap icon and he has a gangsta Rap group which is called G-Unit. 50 cent had a very disturbing childhood and it is believed that his tattoos remind him of his past. Curtis Jackson III in April 2000 was shot at nine times at a very close range. He was shot at his hand, face, legs, arm, chest and hip though somehow he managed to survive. He has got most of his shoulder tattoos removed because of the film projects which required him to hide them so he decided to get them erased completely. Nevertheless there are several tattoos on his back. Number ‘50’ covers his entire back and on the upper part of 5, the word ‘gangsta’ is written while on the lower part of 5, the phrase ‘cold world’ appears. ‘Southside’ is written on his upper back while on his lower back ‘G-unit’ tattoo has been inked. ‘Southside’ represents the place he comes from and ‘cold world’ symbolise the cold world of gangsta Rappers.

There are few more Rappers who have tattoos of their homeland. Such as Rapper David Banner has a tattoo of his home state Mississippi on his back. Xhibit, a Rapper from West coast, Los Angeles has got Los Angeles written in gothic style on top of his back.

To draw a comparison between graffiti and tattoo, as graffiti writers mark street

corners in ghettos to send across the message of authority and affiliation in the same way some Rappers use their body as a canvas and the (tattoos) signs on the canvas draw not only a personal but a communal cultural pattern of representation as well. However, there have always been debates about the tattoo culture and masculinity which is often seen with it. To reiterate, have tattoos become a mode not only for male Rappers but for males in general to demonstrate their masculinity?

The article "Body Modification: Masculinity and Tattooing in Santa Cruz" deals with tattooing and various meanings which are culled out of this art. A tattooist while interviewing about tattooing and masculinity and what are the popular locations for tattoos on the male body opined; "shoulder blades, chests and forearms are because men want to show off their muscles as they are proud of it." This was a survey based article which was conducted in Santa Cruz, a place in America. Here one might argue that how can one reach to a conclusion on the basis of a survey which was done in one part of some country? It is true that on the grounds of a survey one cannot decide the final outcome but this is equally true that there are quite a number of men who prefer to get tattoos on the muscular parts of their body as this survey suggested.

I am not trying to suggest that for men tattoos solely have become a way of looking macho and rough as on the contrary, some men get tattoos for very personal reasons such as Rapper Lil Wayne got four tear drop tattooed on his face for the loss of his beloved ones or Tupac Shakur who has end number of tattoos signifying end number of meanings of his thug life. But at the same time, the possibility of the availability of the tropes of masculinity in tattooing cannot be avoided because initially in the western world tattooing was rather considered to be a male oriented art and women were tattooed only to entertain and to create a spectacle in fact even today there are large number of people who think tattoos are meant for bikers and gang members.

To elaborate further, a sense of anxiety and restlessness comes into being whenever the issue of ink on female body arises. There are prejudices which exist towards tattooed women body. Unlike male tattooed bodies which represent heroism, bravery and masculinity, female tattooed bodies fail to represent any of this. Since, tattooing is a popular phenomenon and in the current scenario blog has become a powerful medium of expression hence I checked few blogs concerning the angst of tattoos and female body.

Delaney a blog writer in "Tattoos and Their Stigmas and Stereotyping: Women

and Their Ink” remarks

Men and women of various professional backgrounds now get tattoos regularly along with the average tattoo wearer. Tattoos cross all social and economic levels and show no bias. It is simply used as a freedom of expression in an artist manner. Point blank, that is it. Unfortunately, individuals insist on reading more into it and that is where part of the continuing stigma comes to play. People don't like to have their preconceived ideas mucked around. It was easier when guys with a tattoo either were in jail or were biker. Women just weren't tattooed if they were a “good” girl.¹⁵

On the other hand, Christine Braunberger in her article “Revolting Bodies: The Monster Beauty of Tattooed Women” remarks: “Tattooed women register on many people’s radar screens for the first time either as circus side-show acts, “the tattooed lady”, hippies, prostitutes or “biker chicks”. The rebellious politics and performances of these “types” of women seem easily identifiable: they are physically transgressive, rootless, loose, troublemakers”... when a woman’s body is a sex object, a tattooed woman’s body is a lascivious sex object; when a woman’s body is nature, a tattooed woman’s body is primitive; when a woman’s body is spectacle, a tattooed woman’s body is a show.” (1-2)

However, tattoos have a long history and tattooed body of women enjoyed different sense of prominence in different cultures. In freak shows in America tattooed bodies of women were commodified for entertainment while, on the other hand in the society of Papua Guinea, which is the Maisin community, facial tattooing remains the marker of feminine identity. It is a tradition for women on reaching adolescence.

However, I thought of conducting a survey through a social networking site to see whether the male gaze towards the tattooed body of a woman has changed? And to analyse whether stereotypes are still associated with tattooed female body? Most of the people who participated in this survey were women. Some of the comments in response to these questions were:

“Yes, they (women with tattooed body) are stereotyped as the people who break stereotypes”

“Well. Yeah I guess, women with tattoos are not exactly classed as “good girls”, but that label kind of differs from society to society. In India its gonna be a big deal with your family and all “my mom pulls a freak show when I told her I want one and am

¹⁵ <http://delaney55.wordpress.com/2008/06/02/tattoos-and-their-stigmas-and-stereotyping-women-and-their-ink/>

getting one”...in U.S too, I suppose it would vaguely still label you as either a ‘biker chick’ or a ‘punk rocker’. But this stereotype, in whatever way is just assassin. My body, my ink, my money, my life.”

“Women from lots of different sphere want to get inked. More so because it is cool.”

“At least in big cities n amongst informed n educated groups, having a tattoo no longer means you are a “bad girl”. A tattooed girl might be perceived as liberal, artistic, flamboyant and so on.”

“You could call her a free spirit or a whore. It’s up to you.”¹⁶

These comments clearly mention the diverse meanings of tattooed female body in different cultural set ups. Nonetheless, the number of women with tattoos in America is increasing. The shift of location which started in 90s has formed a different space altogether for inked female body in the current state of affairs. A news report of 1996 of The New York Times titled “Tattooing: More Female Clients Enter a Formerly Male Realm” distinctly marked the change or the shift as more and more women were getting inked.

BIG JOE KAPLAN learned the tattooing trade 35 years ago at Sailor Barney’s in Coney Island, putting his mark on what he describes as the bad and the ugly. He still tattoos the good, the bad and the ugly, but today more than half his clients are women.

On the other hand, just like male Rappers there are female Rappers with tattoos. They too use their body art as a representation of themselves. Rapper Lisa Nicole Lopes who is known by her stage name ‘Left Eye’ has several tattoos. She has a large eagle on her left arm, which represents freedom. On her upper right arm there is a tattoo of the name Parron, which signifies her late step-brother who died in a boating accident. She also has a tattoo of a moon (bad moon) on her foot which refers to her boyfriend Andre Rison because he used to physically and mentally harass her. Rapper Jackie O Brown’s left arm is fully tattooed which is not very conventional among women. Other Rappers Foxy Brown and Queen Latifah too have tattoos.

¹⁶ This data was collected through ‘Facebook’ which is a social networking site on 14th July, 2011. The people who participated in this survey are mostly Research Scholars. Sutapa Singha, M’Lady Biswas, Mansi Tikko, Tanvi Malik, Laxmi Menon, Maitreyee Mandal, Jhinuk Sen, Gourab Ghosh and Siddhartha Chakraborti.

However, as tattoos define the culture of a community in the same manner fashion or style of dressing too forms a window to glance at a particular community. Fashion not only emulates the quintessence of a society but it also reflects the spatial and temporal settings of a culture as well. The word 'fashion' in its French and Latin origin signified the structure and contour of an entity. But over the period of time, the word and the meaning which it entails within has gone through a modification. Colin Blackmore and Shelia Jennett in *The Oxford Companion to the Body* define that fashion implicates not just a consciousness but a desire as well to be at the cutting edge of changes in subjective manifestation and styles of costume.

On the other hand, Daniel Leonhard Purdy in *The Rise of Fashion: a Reader* asseverates that there are levels of fashion and each level delineates fashion in a distinguishable manner.

For some 250 years, social theorist have acknowledged that fashion is a distinctive feature of modern life. To be modern means to be fashionable, if not in a trendy and up to date manner, then with a reserved and understated elegance. To be sure, there are as many ways of being modern as there are levels of fashion, whether one adopts the brashness of the street or the detachment of corporate business. Anyone who cares about his or her place in the present is in the same breath modern and prone to fashion. (Purdy 3)

Hip Hop fashion emerged from African-American youth culture and it has been an intrinsic element of Rap music. Rappers create an ambience of aliveness through the colourful clothes they wear when they record or perform. "Rap music is an amalgam of street language coding, style, and raw beats... On a paramusical- lingual level, particular posturing, street dress, jewellery, and hairstyles underscore the message of the music." (Keyes, 2002: 150)

Like graffiti and tattoo, Hip Hop fashion too represents the attitude of Hip Hop culture. Though, numerous transubstantiations have occurred in Hip Hop fashion since the time of its subsistence and in the current scenario it has become a popular panache all over the world.

Fashion is considered to be a silent but influential communicator of a culture. As far as the development of Hip Hop fashion is concerned in the early 1980's which is addressed as the old school Hip Hop, various fashion trends such as vividly coloured tracksuits, bucket hats¹⁷, leather bomber jackets¹⁸, big eyeglasses, name belts, sneakers,

¹⁷ Bucket hat is a soft cotton hat with a broad brim. It is wore by both men and women

numerous rings in fingers and gold jewellery became popular. This was the time when many big brands such as Adidas and Kangol affiliated themselves with the Hip Hop world. In 1986, Run-D.M.C came up with a song 'My Adidas' which evidently delineates the close relation between fashion brands and Hip Hop. The lyrics of 'My Adidas' read:

I wore my sneakers but I'm not a sneak
My Adidas touched the sands of the foreign lands
With mic in hand I cold took command
My Adidas and me close as can be
We make a mean team my Adidas and me
We got around together, rhyme forever
And we won't be mad when we're caught in bad weather.

By the end of 1980s Hip Hop fashion took on new solemn meanings. As I mentioned in my first chapter that during this time a new consciousness amidst blacks was emerging for their voice and a sense of Black Nationalism was sinking in within African-Americans and Hip Hop fashion at that point of time was a continuation of this spirit of nationalism. African influence on clothes and hair style could not be overlooked as well during 1980s. Dreadlocks, blousy pants, and colours such as red, green, and black which are often associated with Black Nationalism had become immensely popular. Rappers such as Public Enemy, Queen Latifah and KRS-One are considered to be the representative of this era of fashion.

In Public Enemy's 'Fight the Power' which deals with the freedom of expression featuring Flavor Flav of the group wearing huge clock around his neck which signifies the need and desire to change of time for the betterment of blacks. Flavor Flav wore clock for many of his stage performances as well. On the other hand the militant position of Public Enemy also gets conveyed by their way of army dressing. Image and style of Public Enemy play an indispensable role in the message which the group communicates across cultures.

¹⁸ Bomber jacket was originally made for pilots which is why it is also called the flight jacket. In early 1980s many rappers made this jacket a part of popular culture.



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Figure 6 Flavor Flav during one of his performances

On the other hand, Queen Latifah whose songs address not only black women but black community as well wears afro-centric attire which makes her stand out among other female Rappers and moreover her clothes delineated her African-oriented ideology. Apart from Queen Latifah, N.W.A popularised Cholo gangsta style from the Chicano gangs. Cholo style included jackets and dickies pants.

In early 1990s, Kriss-Kross a teenage Rap duo from West Coast popularised baggy pants. This duo was known for wearing their clothes backwards and during the same time starter jackets which were made by the starter clothing line had become a status symbol. Moreover, by 1990s many brands such as Hood Wear, Nike, Tommy Hilfiger, Phat Farm got linked with Hip Hop. However, in the current scenario there are many Rappers and Hip Hop executives who have their own fashion labels Such as Russell Simmons (Phat Farm), Jay Z (Rocawear), 50 cent (G unit clothing), 2pac (Makaveli) and so on.

However, getting back to the questions where this chapter started from, I would like to put forth that graffiti, tattoos and fashion have become a foremost constituent of popular culture. Graffiti has moved beyond the boundaries of America and in fact there are graffiti studios at present time which provide a sense of legitimacy to this art. On the

¹⁹ <http://hiphophoney.com/blog/flavor-flav-talks-success-ventures-video/>

other hand, more and more people are getting inked like never before. For some people it is an authorization to appear as cool, for some it is a sign of being a rebel, some want to look masculine while for others tattooing is not just a body art but a part of their self which signifies the essence of their being. Similarly, fashion too has moved beyond big tags and more than anything it has become an indispensable symbol of one's subsistence. To conclude, I would asseverate that graffiti, tattoo and fashion all three of them provide both visual identity and visual voice to Hip Hop. By visual identity and visual voice one need to understand that a visual encapsulates colour, form and shape of an entity to communicate the symbolic implication which cannot be understood through words alone and Graffiti, tattoo and fashion are three arts which cannot be imparted just through words.

Conclusion

This work has primarily concentrated on canonical Rap music. The nature of Rap is so diverse that it was not probable to encompass all facets of this art in the present research. I have attempted to be coherent and selective in my approach so that a productive outcome could be attained or perceived. Various other issues such as Rap and religion, Rap and queer nature, Rap as a form of poetry etc I didn't touch upon consciously to maintain the conceptual cohesiveness of this research initiative. These issues undoubtedly have significant prospective within them to structure and formulate a new set of debates altogether.

From 1980's to contemporary Rap, a lot has changed and the form of Rap is altering continuously. Rap music had to cross numerous obstacles to establish itself as an art so that it could be taken sincerely. Initially, when Rap was still an underground music at that point of time it became a way of constructing an alternative space and African-American youths explored a new voice for them through this alternative location. Underground music provided a platform to black voice to break away from the normative suppressive social order and defy the conventional rigid approach towards black music.

It was during 1970s, Rap saw the dawn of fame and social acceptance by one section of society in America but by 1980s and 90s Rap had transformed into an immense industry and for many ghetto boys it became a great source of generating money and finding economic prominence but more than money it was the sense of empowerment which came along with it. During 1980s and 90s, ghettos such as Bronx and Brooklyn were considered to be perilous which is why these places had no direct co-relation with the outside world hence Rap became a door through which the angst and social and political issues of the inner world of streets could be addressed and highlighted. The projection of street and ghetto culture through Rap built a world which was no more alien to people belonging to other parts of U.S.A. As a matter of fact Rap which is the most audible form of Hip Hop became so prominent that soon it travelled from ghettos to the big cities and from there to all across the world. "Rap gave voice to a group hardly heard before by America at large, certainly never heard in their own often profane, always assertive words." (Adam 101) As a matter of fact, songs such as 'Straight outta Compton'

had a larger purpose to serve. This song brought Compton to the forefront from the world of obliviousness. However, almost after forty years of Rap's advent, there are speculations whether Rap is losing touch from its roots or the broken voice of African-American musical arts still resonates in Rap?

This research has tried to maintain a clear distinction between Hip Hop and Rap. Hip Hop and Rap both are often confused with each other in popular imagination. Rap is not Hip Hop but it is a part of Hip Hop. Furthermore, I built up a framework of power relations between lyrics, streets and ghettos and came to a result that lyrics do play a foremost role in formulating Rap but at the same time the role of sound, beats cannot be overlooked. The voice of Rappers or the way they sing also invents new perspectives within the nature of Rap. Their voice functions as an instrument. With regard to the voice of Rappers, Tricia Rose in *Black Noise* asserts:

The Rappers voice is imbedded in powerful and dominant technological, industry, and ideological institutions. Rappers tell long, involved and sometimes abstract stories with catchy and memorable phrases and beats that lend themselves to black sound bite packaging, storing critical fragments in fast-paced electrified rhythms. (Rose, 1994: 2-3)

As far as streets are concerned, I maintain that streets played an imperative role during the golden era of Rap in the actual process that shaped the persona of Rap. Contemporary Rap is moving overtly towards the realm of imagination and exaggeration. Does imagination create the domain of role playing? I believe role playing cannot be separated from Rappers. Rappers coming from different cultures and location play different roles. From being a political activist to a young bragger to social conscious Rap, Rappers do put on many caps. Role-playing is a generic constituent of the rap performance; it's not only acting but also representing the dialogue of protest, culture and the form itself. This research has focused distinctively on N.W.A, Ice T, Public Enemy, Queen Latifah and Sister Souljah and these Rappers constructed a world in which issues of African past, violence and brutality were addressed and these Rappers did more than mere role playing to perform these issues. Queen Latifah addressed the African times of yore in 'Ladies First'. On the other hand, Public Enemy songs such as 'It takes a nation of millions to hold us back' (1988), 'Don't believe the hype' (1988) and 'Black Steel in the Hour of Chaos' (1989) shook black people and conveyed the sense that one need to stand up for one's own rights.

I tried to analyze the lyrics of Rap songs within the power and politics of

African-American culture. It is true that the Rap songs of N.W.A and Ice T have addressed certain essential issues such as police violence and biasness and segregation based on colour of the skin but at the same time N.W.A and Ice T are also seen as the originators of violence by one section. Gangsta Rap genre emerged out of gang culture and for many gang Rap provided an outlet to show power and assert their hegemony. The assertion of hegemony took place not only between black and white Rappers but in fact within black Rappers too hegemony played its own politics. Rappers of West and East coast of U.S.A became the victim of power game and perhaps this is the reason that Tupac was killed.

Furthermore, I had raised question whether violent response to violence can be justified? I respond by saying that the issue is not of promoting violence but violence has different connotations within Hip Hop culture. One needs to understand that violence both physical and mental has been a part of blacks throughout their struggle for the attainment of recognition and equality. I would like to establish again that the aim is to examine the abundance of the traces of violence in Rap culture. There is violence in N.W.A's song "Fuck the Police". The lyrics of the song create disruption in normative pattern of society and most of the Rappers justify the violence by suggesting that they represent the reality of ghettos. After Jazz and Blues, Rap erupted as a form of protest music. Now the issue which I would like to raise that where does this violent aggression come from? Does aggression and belligerence nature come to Rap naturally or it is a conscious choice of Rappers to perform or act violent to provide Rap a sense of authenticity. With regard to violence I stated that one needs to look at the broader canvas of violence because violence is not about killing someone but in fact silence too can act as a form of violence. In the short story "Shannon" as I discussed in my second chapter, the silence of Meath Sullivan over not giving a job to Hannibal Jones function within the skeleton of violence. It is surely an act of violence too when Rosa Parks is told her to give her seat to a white person.

Moving beyond the paradigm of violence, in 1980s the invention of music videos added layers to the structure of the body. In my argument I looked at the visual voice which videos created and how videos extended the social, political and cultural dynamics of body. As far as the representation of body within videos is concerned, there has been a shift in the way body is delineated. The body which I believe is represented as a symbol of an empowered self in songs of N.W.A and Public Enemy; on the other hand, goes through

the fear of being an object in 50 cents and Snoop dog's songs. The visual voice which gets continued within the tropes of graffiti, tattoos and fashion give an all new meaning to Rappers and Hip Hop beyond songs and videos. Graffiti and tattoos have become the modern markers of depicting identity and reclaiming and re-establishing the self. On the other hand, Hip Hop fashion has given new ways to define the body of Rappers.

However, the transnational configuration of rap is evident in British Rap, Punjabi Rap, Asian Rap, Indian Rap and Japanese Rap and etc which have made the boundaries of Rap flexible as the contemporary Rap portrays the picture which has emerged out of an assimilation of several cultures. There is Bohemia who is a Punjabi Rapper from California. On the other hand, in India, Baba Sehgal who is known as an Indian Rapper provided an alternative space for music beyond Bollywood in mid 1990s. Baba Sehgal made "Thanda Thanda Pani" which was a remake of "Ice Ice Baby" by Vanilla Ice. This song became a huge success. At present, there is Ishq Bector and hard core who have made a mark in popular imagination.

In this research, I tried to cover varied aspects of Rap and Hip Hop music to reach a wider understanding of this genre. Before I started this project my idea of Hip Hop and Rap was not panoptic at all. I had always associated Rap with hard core music but as I moved deeper in my research, various constituents of Rap emerged in front of me which made me think and glance at Rap beyond fast beats. This research has covered a miniscule part of Hip Hop world. There is so much which can be explored and analyzed but because of the limitation of this research I had to primarily stick to few Rappers. It was a conscious choice to work on N.W.A, Public Enemy, Ice T, Sister Souljah and Queen Latifah because these Rappers have seen the transformation of Rap music closely and more than that these Rappers became the part of that transformation. Another reason of working on these Rappers was to achieve the general consensus of people's perspective on Rap as these Rappers were commercially well known as well. Finally I would like to assert that the aspects of Rap which could not be covered in the present research might be taken up at later stage to explore.

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