



## A STUDY OF THE POEM “I, TOO” BY LANGSTON HUGHES FROM AN INDIAN PERSPECTIVE

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### ABSTRACT

*The ‘Adivasis’ or the ‘tribes’ in the North-Eastern Region of India are still looked down upon by the upper class people in the society. The Upper Class people looked at the ‘Adivasis’ or the ‘Tribes’ as being a part of North-East. Langston Hughes, in his poem, “I, Too” says how African-Americans have been oppressed in America. There was a strong racism in most of the countries. While reading this poem, I could visualize the picture of the ‘Adivasi’ community who are being ill-treated by the upper-class people. They look down upon the ‘Adivasis’ as their slaves or servants. I could somehow relate the temperament of the Adivasis to that of the African-Americans. Herein, with the help of Hughes’ poem, “I, Too”, I am delineating the lives of the “Adivasis of the North-East India” which comes out to be a study of the poet’s poem in an Indian Perspective.*

**Keywords:** Racism, Oppression, Adivasis.

### INTRODUCTION

The poem, “*I, Too*” has been written by Langston Hughes in the year 1932 when he confronts racism in America and the struggles of African-American as part of the lower class. This poem is a cry for recognition on part of the African-American. The Adivasi community in North-East India has however been compared to that of the African-Americans as part of their lower class. Langston Hughes said:

*“I have discovered in life that there are ways of getting almost anywhere you want to go, if you really want to.”*

The poem “*I, Too*” by Langston Hughes goes as:

*I, too, sing America.  
I am the darker brother.  
They send me to eat in the kitchen  
When company comes,  
But I laugh,  
And eat well,  
And grow strong.*



*Tomorrow,  
I'll sit at the table  
When company comes.  
Nobody'll dare  
Say to me,  
'Eat in the kitchen,'  
Then.*

*Besides,  
They'll see how beautiful I am  
And be ashamed, –  
I,too, am America.*

### **STUDY OF THE POEM FROM AN INDIAN PERSPECTIVE**

When the poem has been read from an Indian perspective, the African-Americans have been substituted by the 'Adivasis.' The Adivasis in India are treated as slaves or servants by the upper class people as compared to that of the African-Americans in America who are being ill-treated by the Whites respectively. The poem focuses on the racial oppression of America in the beginning. And from an Indian perspective, the Adivasis are oppressed by the people of the upper class. They live in cloistered, remote and inhospitable areas such as hills and forests, in fact without electricity in some areas. Primitive agriculture is their livelihood, a low-value closed economy with a low level of technology that leads to their poverty. They have low levels of literacy and health. They have their own culture and language. The degree of contact with other culture and people are marginal.

Hughes, by uttering, "I am the darker brother" puts forward an ironic recognition of the racial discrimination amongst the Americans. This also suffices in the Indian perspective when the Adivasi people are being differentiated on the basis of their looks and skin colour. They are looked down upon by the upper class people in their society because of their declining health and illiteracy, which is suggestive of the small-mindedness of the society that judges a man through his/her looks, the major cause for which is the upper class themselves.

As far as their life is concerned, they work in the tea gardens for hours but are comparatively paid less by their managers who are generally from the Upper class societies. The Adivasis work hard in the tea gardens and also at the houses of the upper class people as maids or slaves or servants. They are asked to eat separately in the upper class homes where they work. Though the upper class people looked at the Adivasis or Tribes as not being a part of the North-East India, the feeling of freedom was, however, limited in the Adivasis.

Amidst these difficulties, in the dominating society, the indigenous people eat properly which means "nourishment of the people" and grow properly which means "to become educated". Though they are looked down upon by the people of the upper class society but they have faith on themselves and are wise enough to believe in the fact that there will be a day when the upper class people would not dare to segregate the majority of their population and would



allow the Adivasis to sit along with them in the same row, maintaining equality. And that, there would be a day when the people of the upper class society would realize their lack of commonsense to judge merit by color and health alone. Perhaps we could observe the facts that were very similar in the lives of the Adivasis as compared to that of the lives of the African-Americans.

### **Conclusion**

Hughes wrote "I, Too" from the perspective of an African-American man-either a slave or even a domestic servant. There is a high degree of universality in this poem because of the situation which reflects a common experience for many African Americans during his time. The African-Americans faced discrimination in every aspect of their lives. They were forced to live, work, eat and travel separately from their white counterparts, were victims of racial violence and faced economic marginalization. The speaker demonstrates a heightened sense of self and proclaims his ambition as an American citizen and as a man. He expressed his belief that African-Americans are a valuable part of the country's population and that he predicts a racially equal society in the near future. Hughes suggests that even though the conditions are distinctive for African-Americans, they still deserve to experience patriotism. From Hughes poem "I , Too" from the perspective of a North-Eastern Adivasi, we could compare each and every situation of racism of the North-East region to that of the racism of America thus, expressing the hope that, in the process of evolving that one day or the other, everyone will hold an equal position in the society without any discrimination. By this, he would have conveyed that the North-Easterns are a valuable part of country's population and there would be a racial equality in the near future. Also that, Hughes, from the perspective of a North-Eastern would have ended up the poem as:

**"I, too, am North-East."**

### **NOTES**

**Adivasis-** Here, the tribes who are working in the tea-gardens in the North-Eastern regions of India.

**Racism-** Discrimination.

**Oppression-** mental pressure or distress.

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