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Research Article

The Rhetoric of Origin: American National Ethos in Barack Obama's *Dreams from My Father*

Mahendra Bhusal 

Department of English, Patan Multiple Campus, TU, Lalitpur, Nepal

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Corresponding Author: Mahendra Bhusal, Email: mahendrabhusal10@gmail.com

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Abstract

This paper examines how Barack Obama ruminates on trials and tribulations from his past and ponders over his root in terms of biracial identity to explore his American ethos in his first memoir *Dreams from My Father* (1995). The paper argues that Obama struggles hard to locate his ethos out of the complexities of the relationships that his parents underwent in terms of their mixed marriages. Eventually he settles to his American identity, which is essentially biracial. From the perspective of Kenneth Burke's notion of 'identification', Obama evokes an awareness of American national ethos identifying with the American character as such and with this he explores his sense of purpose in life to be a public figure. He asserts that one of the fundamental characters of American national ethos is the biracial or multiracial that emanates from the contemporary American mixed society.

Keywords: Rhetoric, ethos, identification, consubstantiality, biracial identity

Introduction

Barack Obama wrote his first memoir *Dreams from My Father* in 1995. He has divided his memoir into three major sections entitled 'Origin', 'Chicago' and 'Kenya'. This paper concentrates on the first section only since it examines the rhetoric of origin that Obama manifests in the narration gleaned from the fragments of the familial and ancestral memories. Obama states that the exigency of writing his first memoir arises due to his intense desire to know who he is and equally to explore the sense of purpose in his life. This paper seeks an answer of why Obama rummages in anguish through his past and contemplates over his origin in writing his memoir. A key concern of the study is to answer the following questions: What does he achieve in writing the first section of his memoir the way he writes it? What form of rhetoric does he employ to convey who he is and what ethos he has? The literature review on Obama's life narratives reveals that study related to the rhetorical dimension of Obama's first memoirs in terms of evoking

the sense of national ethos has gone unnoticed to the date since the studies reviewed concentrate mostly on the racial and hardcore political dimensions.

This study contends that Obama struggles to explore a sense of self and identity and thereby his national ethos in *Dreams*, particularly in terms of biracial identity. The paper further argues that he painstakingly locates his origin out of the web of the relationships that his parents underwent pertaining to their mixed marriages in America, Kenya and Indonesia and eventually he reinforces and settles to his American identity rhetorically, which is essentially biracial. By way of what Kenneth Burke calls 'identification' with the ethos of both black and white communities around him, Obama evokes an awareness of American national ethos and his civic duty to reinforce it in public as a public figure. He qualifies himself to be endowed with American national ethos which is the biracial or multiracial in its essential character that emanates from the multicultural setting of the USA.

He begins his narration with an odyssey of his alienation, anguish and ambivalence predestined to his biracial identity. He draws a trajectory of his upbringing and his growth into manhood in which the legacies of African father and American mother have engendered the predicament of unsettled ethos. However, as his narrative progresses, he gradually develops and tends to crystallize his sense of American self through several incidents and constant interactions with grandparents, parents, mentors and friends. Rhetorically, through the lens of Burke's theory of 'identification', I argue that he conceives the national ethos and embryonic state of his statesmanship in *Dreams*. This rhetoric of statesmanship later culminates to its climax, which he demonstrates as the President of the United States of America.

Literature Review

Critics have interpreted Obama's *Dreams* from multiple perspectives. Most of the studies emphasize on the racial dimension and its blunt political implications. Some have read this memoir in terms of the reflection and dynamics of 'American dream' and some others have highlighted on transnational identities and American exceptionalism.

Sidonie Smith assesses Obama's *Dreams* as a political tool to convey his message to the general public that his dream is not only a personal dream but an American dream. Smith argues that "Obama's personal writing projects himself as 'the dream' of America, at once the conjunction of differences that is 'America' as global dream and the 'dream' of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X that is the embodiment of educated, disciplined, and empowered black manhood affiliated transnationally to all human beings" (vi). Through the autobiographical discourse, Smith argues that Obama creates a dream, a hope for the future that people with the similar stories like his may aspire like him for a substantive success in one's career. According to Smith, Obama's autobiographical discourse became a political discourse of biracial identity which also supported his presidential candidacy race.

Georgiana Banita, however, observes that despite the comprehensive account of Obama's engagement with transnational diverse experiences of African, Indonesian and American nationhood in his memoir, he remains and settles to be an American of Emersonian kind. He settles his confusions and ambivalences of his origin and identity through Emersonian 'self-reliance' as Banita argues, "In Obama's case, self-reliance is manifested in a discourse of transnational empathy, which, however, remains perfectly consonant with the image of the United States as a redeemer nation, and more generally with the precepts of American exceptionalism" (25). American exceptionalism in general means, the USA is distinct and unique in its political and value system compared to other nation. She claims that through his autobiographical discourse, Obama creates a sense of

self, which transcends the national boundaries and thus turns himself into a cosmopolitan in identity and, by that token, remains an American at its core.

Glenda R. Carpio evaluates Obama's *Dreams* from a racial perspective. He finds it as a record of a "plenty of evidence for Obama's dark view of race relations in America" (79) but which he argues, has changed in his second autobiography, *The Audacity of Hope* published in 2006 almost around his pre-candidacy years. Carpio opines that Obama's emphasis on the issues of race and origin in the first autobiography "should not lead us to repudiate him as a racially obsessed man who regards most whites as oppressors, and who sees the USA history as a narrow, bitter tale of race and class victimization. Instead, it should allow us a better appreciation of the gravitas of Obama's audacity of hope" (80). This means, despite the predicament of racial conflict Obama experiences and observes that he is inclined to the hope. In addition, this hope again is characterized as fundamental to an American character, a character like that of Obama who grows in a multiracial community.

Angela McMillan Howell reviews Obama's autobiography, arguing that he has been "a symbol of many things to many people" (187). Black people take Obama as a symbol of "dream deferred now realized" (187) and common Americans take Obama as a symbol of "repentance, confession and atonement" (187). Howell evaluates Obama's *Dreams* as a rich account of personal stories which is a public story. She remarks that it is a "dense, ethnographic text, ripe with images and stories, in which the characters leap off the page to such an extent that one can hardly believe its non-fiction" (188). Whereas Stephanie Li and Gordon Hutner perceive Obama's life narrative "as no more than the clever rhetorical play of a promising politician" (421). They notice Obama's political motif in writing his memoir and read it from the political perspective.

David Mastey examines that *Dreams* not only reflects the actual identity of Obama as an Afro-American, but also this political memoir serves two important purposes. First, it "demonstrates a personal and political self-making" (490) of the narrator and second it creates the stereotypical images of black so that the white could get the sense of racial identity by contrasting themselves against those images. Mastey asserts that "White people comprehend who and what they are in comparison to what they are not" (490) through which this notion of binary opposites emerges. Mastey uses the term 'slumming' to define this act of comparison in which white people 'slum' around the stories of black stereotypes to compare and contrast what they are and what they are not. This is how he argues that Obama's memoir functions upon the white audience's psychology.

Gregory D. Smithers opines that *Dreams* demonstrates the fact that the race relation is the essential social relation of American identity. In the name of 'post-racial America', one cannot ignore the fact which Obama depicts that "race and racism continue to shape the lives of millions of Americans" (1), which he acknowledges in his memoir. His memoir, despite the complexities of racial divides, "demystifies his parentage, childhood, and racial identity by framing his personal story in a way that reflects the individualistic mythology of the 'American Dream': the triumph, through hard-work and education, over humble origins to achieve social and economic independence" (5). This signifies that America is a land of promises and hope, which could be materialized through toil and perseverance despite the racial rifts.

These reviews focus on the manifestation of issues like American dream by Smith, transnational empathy and American exceptionalism by Banita, racial dynamics by Carpio and presidency rhetoric by Hunter in *Dreams*. However, none of them discusses the rhetorical dimension of *Dreams* in terms of national ethos and biracial identity. To address this issue, the researcher observes a recess on the study of how

rhetoric of life narrative is employed to create a common ethos and how the rhetoric functions in doing so, after the review of the research work approached so far. Thus, this paper particularly examines how Burke's theory of 'identification' works in Obama's *Dreams* in building a common national ethos as well as setting a stage to rehearse the statesmanship of then would-be President of the USA.

Theory of 'Identification': A Theoretical Approach

The study adopts the qualitative research approach to analyze the rhetorical dynamics of Obama's *Dreams* in terms of the manifestation of the American national ethos. A close textual analysis of the first section of the memoir has been done in the light of the Kenneth Burke's theory of 'identification'. Primarily, the paper draws on Burke's concept of 'identification' to examine how Obama rummages for his sense of belongingness and origin. By way of a search of his self and roots, Obama struggles to associate his self in particular with a community which he could feel at home and in general with the nation at large. This is where he tends to identify himself with the community or the nation of his belonging. It is a search of 'consubstantiality' among the community of his people according to Burke's notion. 'Consubstantiality' according to him is a deliberate choice of finding a common substance which we share with others. In this case, he exemplifies, "A is not identical with his colleague, B. But insofar as their interests are joined, A is identified with B.... In being identified with B, A is 'substantially one' with a person other than himself" (21). This is essentially a rhetorical act of constructing one's self and identifying such a self with one's own community. It is like 'A' finding commonalities in 'B' employing an appropriate rhetoric, the language as such.

This act of 'identification' through 'consustantiality' has the ultimate rhetorical aim of persuasion. Here, Burke draws the legacy of Aristotle's rhetoric which largely aims at finding "in any given case the available means of persuasion" (Herrick 86). Aristotle defines rhetoric as an instrument of finding an available means of persuasion in an any given situation. It is not directly a persuasion in itself, "rather the detection of the persuasive aspects of each matter and this is in line with all other skills" (70). In this sense, while in a harmony with Aristotle's view Burke adds on the skill to detect how a rhetor persuades through the tactful use of language. He discovers that the act of 'identification' is an effective means of persuasion. Therefore, Burke's theory of 'identification' is an advancement on Aristotle's ground. At an inherent level, the act of 'identification' lies in the cultivation of shared ethos by the rhetor.

Clifford Geertz defines such shared ethos in a more comprehensive manner. He defines this shared ethos in this way: "A people's ethos is the tone, character, and quality of their life, its moral and aesthetic style and mood; it is the underlying attitude toward themselves and their world that life reflects" (623). His definition is more appropriate for the national sense of such ethos if it is associated with a larger public and their tone, character and quality of their life. Aristotle puts a greater emphasis on the power of ethos in the act of persuasion. Ethos is the character of the rhetor. Aristotle asserts, "[C]haracter contains almost the strongest proof of all, so to speak" (75). The identity and virtues that have shaped the character of the speaker or the writer enhances his/her credibility to the audience. In addition, Burke's 'identification' is an act of cultivating and sharing the ethos with the ethos of the people to whom one addresses. This is essentially a rhetorical act.

Burke cites Aristotle to demonstrate how 'identification' works. He states, "It is not hard, says Aristotle, in his *Rhetoric*, quoting Socrates to praise Athenians among Athenians" (55). Praising Athenians in terms of the virtues like "justice, courage, self-

control, poise or presence (magnificence, *megaloprepeia*), broad-mindedness, liberality, gentleness, prudence and wisdom" (55) is not hard; it is easy and obvious. But it is "hard to praise Athenians when you are talking to Lacedaemonians" (55). This example demonstrates how the character and the ethos of the speaker in correspondence with the audience, used in an appropriate situation, which Aristotle terms as *Kairos*, is significant in the act of 'identification' and thereby persuasion. Burke claims, "You persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, identifying your ways with his" (55). In parallel, this is also an act of finding shared attributes among the people being addressed. It is an act of stepping into the ground of 'consubstantiality'.

Finding common attributes or substance between the speaker and the audience is what Burke calls 'consobstantiality'. He asserts, "A doctrine of consobstantiality either explicit or implicit, may be necessary to any way of life. For substance, in the old philosophies, was an act; and a way of life is an acting-together; and in acting together, men have common sensations, concepts, images, ideas, attitudes that make them consobstantial" (21). This 'acting together' is a significant aspect of rhetoric's motive since it aims at the audience to create a bond of unity and togetherness where persuasion is deliberated by the rhetor.

Thus, what follows is an examination of how Obama reflects upon his origin and his sense of identity in the *Dreams*. Moreover, in doing so, how he resorts to 'identification' rhetorically and finds a niche of his own. It is an examination of how Obama's rhetoric establishes his sense of self and purpose in life, consobstantially with the contemporary American ethos and assumes his responsibility towards the nation conceiving the statesmanship.

Textual Analysis I: Obama's Search for Origin and American Identity

Taking the side of liberal universal values that the USA is supposed to uphold, Obama begins his book *Dreams* cautioning his readers in the preface that he is aware of the pernicious impact of extremism and fundamentalism. Here he warns, "I know that the hardening of lines, the embrace of fundamentalism and tribe, dooms us all" (xi). With this self-assurance he rhetorically alerts the readers that extremism and fundamentalism ruin America. According to him, American ethos does not vindicate any form of extremism in the name of origin or creed.

Setting this premise in the very beginning of his narrative, Obama develops three important ideas in the first section entitled 'Origin'. First, he struggles to identify with his genuine origin and make a consistent attempt to answer who he is. Second, he settles that his is the biracial or multiracial identity which is the American identity, an American ethos. Third, he finds a sense of purpose in life, which is to take a leadership of the people who are struggling for a sense of identity and purpose in American life. Thus, I argue that he performs these three acts rhetorically through the notion of 'identification' with the civic ethos that is American ethos.

In an introduction to his memoir, he probes into his authentic root with a strong sense of thirst for his attachment with his father or progenitor who is virtually absent in his life except for a short company, when Obama was in his early school days. He remembers, "I listened to my grandmother, sitting under a mango tree as she braided my sister's hair, describing the father I had never truly known" (xiv). He stresses on his strong desire to search for his roots which haunted him intermittently before he penned his memoir. He shares his experience in these words: "Distant voices appeared, and ebbed, and then appeared again" (xiv). These distant voices are the voices of his father and ancestors that he vaguely actualizes while preparing to write his memoir. He

declares that his autobiographical account is "a record of a personal, interior journey – a boy's search for his father and through that search a workable meaning for his life as a black American" (xvi). This actualization of his sense of identity as a black American is the main plot of his narrative; however, there are several subplots in the account, which reinforce his American identity.

Several incidents in the narrative comply with his persistent effort to identify himself with the Black people and community, but equally due importance is laid on the maternal inheritance which is white and American as such. Timothy W. Crusius analyzes Burke's concept of 'identification' and claims that "to identify is to share substance with something or someone, the study of substance (or motivational essence) being the affair of dialectic, the study of tactics for achieving identification (or consubstantiality) being the affair of rhetoric" (31). Obama's personal affair is the affair of rhetoric to identify himself with the black people and community as one of his loci of origin. The central image of his attachment with the Black or African heritage is his father. Moreover, he identifies himself with the places he got attached to, friends and public figures to actualize his identity. On the other side, the presence of mother in his every step of life is remarkable.

Regarding the virtues and character of his father, Obama narrates the stories that he often hears from his maternal grandmother about his father. According to her, his father is "honest and confident" (8). He remembers an often-told story, which is a kind of anecdote that depicts the values of his father. The incident occurred at a bar where Obama's father and maternal grandfather had gathered with other whites when one of the whites offended Obama's father saying "not to drink good liquor next to a nigger" (11). Instead of the impending attack against the white who made the offensive remarks from his father, Obama states, "Instead, my father stood up, walked over to the man, smiled, and proceeded to lecture him about the folly of bigotry, the promise of the American dream, and universal rights of man" (11). Referring to this story, Obama justifies that he is the son of such a father who upholds and regards 'American dream', human rights and liberal values, which he has indicated earlier in the preface. This is his identification with the American ideals and Black community through his father's virtues since his father connects him with the entire black community.

In a similar note, Obama not only mentions the virtues of his father, but also the dream and legacy of his maternal grandfather. As there is a considerable contribution of his maternal grandparents in his upbringing, Obama refers to the character they bear which has a direct impact upon his own character formation. He knows that his maternal grandfather was a typical American. He observes, "His was an American character, one typical of men of his generation, men who embraced the notion of freedom and individualism" (16), a liberal American ethos. This juxtaposing of both black and white's character has a rhetorical effect in Obama's 'identification' with biracial sentiments.

Regarding his attachment with the places and biracial sentiment, his identity is formed out of his connection with Kenya, the place of his father, Indonesia the workplace of his mother where he spent a part of his childhood and America where he actually belongs. In terms of America, particularly his remarks on Hawaii are significant. He visualizes Hawaii as a miniature of America as "the legend was made of Hawaii as the one true melting pot, an experiment in racial harmony" (24). Furthermore, Obama emphasizes the impression of his father about Hawaii, which harmonizes with his personal impressions. In spite of some racial discrimination Obama's father had observed in the Hawaiian community, he himself did not experience it. Obama's father shares his experiences in Hawaii after his graduation writing for *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*. Obama narrates his father's observation in these words: "One thing other nations can learn from

Hawaii, he says, is the willingness of races to work together toward common development, something he has found whites elsewhere too often unwilling to do" (26). His father's impression of the place is his own impressions as well which he identifies with the Hawaiian community and his sense of this place in his identity formation.

He recalls his attachment with his colleagues and black identity, Obama remembers his high school days' friend Ray as he claims, "I was living out a caricature of black male adolescence, itself a caricature of swaggering American manhood" (79). In terms of his attachment with the ethos of black community, he recalls how he was inclined to the basketball team at his school sports club. His inclination to basketball aligns him to common preferences of the black adolescence which he used to love during his school days. Not only black's preference but also, he finds basketball court a symbol of his comfort zone where he could feel comfortable equally with white friends as well. He admits:

At least on the basketball court I could find a community of sorts, with an inner life all its own. It was there that I would make my closest white friends, on turf where blackness couldn't be a disadvantage. And it was there that I would meet Ray and the other black close to my age who had begun to trickle into the islands, teenagers whose confusion and anger would help shape my own. (81)

Joseph Schwartz observes Burke's notion of identification in which the speaker's ethos is important in the act of identification. Schwartz refers to Burke and opines that "the persuader becomes vitally important. He is the one who must achieve some kind of social cohesion. He does this through the method of identification. He must be able to identify with the needs, values, and desires of others in order to understand, and hence, persuade" (211). In this context, Obama rhetorically identifies with his basketball community, though basketball is often associated with blacks; however, he assumes black as well as white friends' ethos were essentially his own ethos. He used to feel at home in the basketball court where he could meet his closest black friend Ray and can identify with the ethos of the blacks who were confused and raged by the racial discrimination inflicted upon them by the conventional white society as was usual in American society.

Moreover, his attachment with Regina, a black lady in his college years, is really epiphanic. Regina has been depicted as a stout and confident lady. She has a similar story like Obama's: brought up by single mother, Chicago childhood, life of scarcity and struggle, and discrimination. But she is determined to accept her black identity as natural and live a life with a sense of pride. Obama narrates an incident in a coffee talk with Regina one afternoon which changed everything that he used to think about himself before the incident. It is revealing when he remarks, "Strange how a single conversation can change you" (105). This is the context when he experienced an epiphany, after the conversation, that he must live a life of reality rather fleeing away from it. He has been paranoid due to his connection with black roots and trying to suppress it since his school days. The epiphany that a black can live a life with a self-esteem and pride was brought about by his conversation with Regina that afternoon. He remembers, "That's probably what had drawn me to Regina, the way she made me feel like I didn't have to lie" (102). This is an epiphanic moment of how Obama realizes that he should feel proud of his black identity. With this acceptance and realization, he undergoes, Burke's 'identification', an 'identification' with the ethos of black colleagues of his times.

As per the interpretation, Obama states who he is through the significant stories and anecdotes from his memories. Through his linkages with the black father, friends and black racial roots he tends to associate himself with the black community. On the other hand, his mother has a big presence in his overall subjectivity formation which is

inherently linked with the white community. He rhetorically establishes that he has both black as well as white ethos which is an American ethos.

Textual Analysis II: Obama's Identification with American National Ethos

Obama's 'identification' with black public figures especially the classic writers is equally significant in terms of his rhetoric of black ethos which is American ethos. In *Dreams*, he remembers how several notable black writers and leaders helped shape his identity and ethos. After an incident in a black party in which Ray and Obama had invited white friends Jeff and Scott, who did not feel comfortable, Obama felt an anguish due to his white friends' intolerance to accept a black way of life. However, his own experience of blacks always being governed by the white's rules engendered indignation in him. This led Obama to read black writers to understand his predicament. He reveals, "I gathered up books from the library- Baldwin, Ellison, Hughes, Wright, DuBois. At night I would close the door to my room, telling my grandparents I had homework to do, and there I would sit and wrestle with words, locked in suddenly desperate argument, trying to reconcile the world as I found it with the terms of my birth" (86). His experience of reading these writers only exacerbated his anguish and pain and the doubt and self-contempt, since he found the ethos of such anguish and pain in the sensibilities expressed by those writers in their narratives. But, his reading of autobiography of Malcolm X, as he argues, casts a beacon of hope in him. He admits, "If Malcolm's discovery toward the end of his life, that some whites might live beside him as brothers in Islam, seemed to offer some hope of eventual reconciliation, that hope appeared in a distant future, in a far-off land" (86). In a state of ambivalence, both the anguish and hope are the currents of turbulence occurring inside him while he was cultivating his American manhood and which is a typical ethos of his community to which he identifies with himself. After examining the way Obama struggles to shape his self, it is argued that he settles after all, to assure that his identity in a mixed identity that fundamentally characterizes an American identity.

Regarding his American identity, Obama acknowledges his mother and the presence of his mother is no doubt overwhelming in his life. He remembers his days when he was in Indonesia with his mother in his early childhood when she made a watershed decision to pursue his middle school education back in America. After the realization of the 'chasm' between Indonesian and American life, his mother opted for an American life. Obama claims, "She knew which side of the divide she wanted her child to be on. I was an American, she decided, and my true life lay elsewhere" (47). This is how Obama clears the ground and declares himself fundamentally an American in terms of his ethos.

Obama articulates his love of America and particularly his mother when he experiences the chasm between the life in Indonesia and that in America. He paints the picture of Indonesia as indigent, wild and painful where suffering either from poverty and primitiveness or due to natural calamities is a bitter truth. He remarks, "The world was violent, I was learning, unpredictable and often cruel" (38) while depicting Indonesia. But in a stark contrast with the life in Indonesia he paints somehow a utopian picture of America. He recalls his grandfather's response after they first visited Punahou Academy, his school in Honolulu Hawaii. Grandfather remarks, "Hell Bar, he whispered, this isn't a school. This is heaven" (58). Furthermore, he recalls his schooldays and his way of life with grandparents in America immediately leaving Indonesia. He expresses in elation, "Nested in the soft, forgiving bosom of America's consumer culture, I felt safe; it was as if I had dropped into a long hibernation" (62). This is how he compares Indonesia with America. He demonstrates his love for the American way of life.

Next, his love of mother is equally significant as that of his love of land. During his alien experiences in Indonesian days, he remembers his mother's tender care and articulates: "I always appreciated the attention- her voice, the touch of her hand, defined all that was secure" (38). He always feels safe and blessed in her mother's bosom as he used to feel in Hawaiian days. The rhetoric of his 'identification' with mother and with America by that token has a strong nexus with his American identity and American ethos. Equally significant is the matter that he claims her mother as secular humanist and before he declares this, he mentions what his mother once said, "If you want to grow into a human being ... you are going to need some values" (49). The 'values' that his mother indicates are not other than American values embedded in American ethos. Eventually, after preparing the groundwork for his origin, identity and ethos what follows is how Obama rhetorically assumes his community leadership role during his college years which later culminated into his presidential rhetoric as such.

Out of his 'identification' with the black as well as white community in his college years, Obama assumes the community leadership. As Burke claims, the true function of rhetoric is "the manipulation of men's beliefs for political ends" (41). Obama sets his move for this end. His initiation into the leadership is essentially rhetorical to the extent that he extremely realizes the power of the words that are correctly chosen and used among the audience to create a bond of togetherness or Burke's 'identification'. He remembers his days: "[A]s the months passed and I found myself drawn into a larger role- contacting representatives of the African National Congress to speak on campus... I noticed that people had begun to listen to my opinions. It was a discovery that made me hungry for words. Not words to hide behind but words that could carry a message, support an idea" (105). In this incident, when he delivered something of common black ethos among the college students, he tends to realize for the first time, that he has conceived the embryo of leadership in him.

In the book, Obama recalls an event when he got a chance to deliver an opening remark on the support of the struggle going on in South Africa among the campus students as per his rudimentary leadership. He shares his experience how his short and pithy speech was sufficient to scintillate the audience in realizing the power of common ethos he points to. Referring to his speech, he asserts, "I started to remember my father's visit to Miss Hefty's class; the look on Coretta's face that day; the power of my father's words to transform. If I could just find the right words, I had thought to myself. With the right words everything could change- South Africa, the lives of ghetto kids just a few miles away, my own tenuous place in the world" (106). Obama clearly assumes the power of rhetoric to change the world for the better that depends on the way it is shaped and delivered. Selecting the right words at the right place is what moves the audience for a good cause. Perceiving correctly what one's audience wants to listen to is the act of identification that Obama correctly does to move his audience and sets himself into motion.

This is the most climatic example of Obama's first appearance in the public, addressing them in which he resorts to 'identification' with his people for the first time through rhetoric's motive defined by Burke as he avers the function of rhetoric that "is not just trying to tell how things are, in strictly scenic terms; it is trying to move people" (41). In this line, Obama articulates:

It's happening an ocean away. But it's a struggle that touches each and every one of us... A struggle that demands we choose sides. Not between black and white. Not between rich and poor. No- it's harder choice than that. It's a choice between dignity and servitude. Between fairness and injustice. Between commitment and indifference. A choice between right and wrong. (106)

With this core content of his rhetoric, taking a side for justice and advocating the right over the wrong in the society, he narrates the excitement he got when he sensed the reactions from the audience. As per the reaction, he narrates the event: "I stopped. The crowd was quite now, watching me. Somebody started to clap. 'Go on with it, Barack,' somebody else shouted. 'Tell it like it is.' Then the others started in, clapping, cheering, and I knew that I had them, that the connection had been made" (107). The connection that Obama refers to in this narration is the 'identification' with the audience in which he was successful to make a correspondence of his ethos, with the ethos of the audience at his disposal and that's how he identifies with the American national ethos.

The second interpretation stresses on the way Obama narrates how he appropriates his ethos with the American national ethos. He evokes the sense of black national ethos through his reading and identification with the black public figures and colleagues on the one hand and his sense of satisfaction with the culture, people and places in the USA, particularly his mother and maternal grandparents, the liberal values of his country on the other demonstrate his attachment with American national ethos through white lineage.

Conclusion

The rhetoric of narration about Obama's origin and sense of self is significant in terms of national ethos. He narrates about who he is because he needs to establish that he is an American in essence and represents the genuine American national ethos. Obama mentions a context in which his *Dreams* was written in the introduction. He states that he had intended to write a very different book of intellectual kind including the topics like civil rights litigation in bringing about racial inequality, his ideas on the meaning of community and the restoration of public life through grassroots organization and mobilization but the book took a different shape. His longing for a search of his identity, ethos and his sense of purpose in American life gave way to the present shape of his book. This is the exigency of writing on his origin. An explanation of this context itself is rhetorical. This reveals how he decided to drop writing on an intellectual topic and enter the domain of narrating his identity and American ethos to know who he is and what his purpose in life is.

This paper has thus illustrated how Obama contemplates over the American ethos and devises the rhetoric of origin and American sensibilities through the concept of 'identification'. In doing so, it argues that Obama primarily gives a shape to the biracial identity through the exploration of his root and his attachment to his Kenyan father and American mother. He explores his sense of self out of his association with the places, people and their ethos. After a long musing, he arrives at a point that his identity is fundamentally American which he associates with the land and the people's ethos. Finally, he is successful to explore a sense of purpose in his life towards the end of the first section of his memoir in which he assumes the role of a community leadership, which is in the embryonic state that later flourishes into the presidential statesmanship. He performs all this rhetorically through the act of identification.

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