

Tribhuvan University

Politics of Memory and Experience in Washington's *Up From Slavery: An  
Autobiography*

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Submitted By

Pushpa Kumari Chaudhary

Symbol No. : 579

T.U. Regd. No.: 6-2-552-182-2010

Central Department of English

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Central Department of English

Letter of Recommendation

Pushpa Kumari Chaudhary has completed his thesis entitled "Politics of Memory and Experience in Washington's Up From Slavery: An Autobiography" under my supervision. She carried out her research from August 2017 to February 2018. I hereby recommend her thesis be submitted for viva voice.

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Pradip Raj Giri

Supervisor

Date : \_\_\_\_\_

Tribhuvan University  
Central Department of English  
Kirtipur, Kathmandu

Approval Letter

This thesis is submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University by Pushpa Kumari Chaudhary entitled "*Politics of Memory and Experience in Up From Slavery: An Autobiography*" has been approved by the undersigned members of the thesis Research Committee.

Members of the Research Committee:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Internal Supervisor

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

External Examiner

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Head

\_\_\_\_\_

Central Department of English

\_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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Pushpa Kumari Chaudhary

Politics of Memory and Experience in Booker Taliaferro Washington's *Up From Slavery: An Autobiography*

Abstract

*The present thesis entitled "Politics of Memory and Experience in Washington's Up From Slavery: An Autobiography," examines the transformation of a slave into a master of Tuskegee Institution. The narrative reflects how an oppressed, marginalized slave gains the desire of obtaining the meaning of life and existence of black race. The narrator undergoes many challenges who dares to combat with his predicament to make new perception about black people. He dedicates his entire life in the service of black race in order to make better life of his own people and community. This paper shatters the perception of whites with positive traits about black people and provides a positive note to those people who believe in strong will power and determination to reach in one's destination. His technique of using memory and experience succeeds him to show as a conqueror of his artificial fate. The narrator's determination assists him to be an important personality in not only history of America but history of whole United States.*

Key words : memory, experience, ethics, politics

Booker T. Washington, the author of *Up From Slavery: An Autobiography* depends on access to memory and experience to tell a retrospective narrative and to situate the present within that experiential history. These are dominantly used to get meaning about past activities and behavior in the present. He uses these elements as his weapon to recall his past, which content the tone of slave predicament and to reflect his mentality of portraying African- American people and their condition during slavery and after emancipation. His narrative reinforces the struggle for the betterment of whole black people and to rise from slavery. These elements are embodied with the slavery

and true history. His narrative records the vivid picture of exploitation represented his struggle and achievement. The narrator has made use of memory and experience from very beginning of his life: being a slave to the founder of Tuskegee Institution. His technique of using memory and experience succeed him to show as a conqueror who rises from slavery predicament, to reach in his goal and to self-represent as a fighter against fate. Revealing this fate the narrator tries to self-represent. The major argument-politics of memory and experience are used to self- represent, will be proved in autobiographical frame drawing on concepts from Avishai Margalit's *Ethics of Memory* and Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson's *Reading Autobiography*

The narrator being a real victim of slavery brings the detail reference from his childhood up to his escape from slavery. After his escape from slavery, he starts working as a labourer in salt mining. The narrator shares his experience of his childhood from the early age. As being an experiencer of slavery system, he has piled up several events that he had to face being a slave. The whole narrative presents the gruesome aspects of slavery incorporating the different activities and incidents which were inflicted by whites. Many inspirable pictures are led forward with the description. These events demonstrate that the blacks were treated as non-human being. There is not a single such testimony where slaves have experienced a comfortable life during slavery system but after their emancipation, some get success and desirable life by themselves due to their labour and struggle.

The narrative has made the dominant use of memory and experience in a different sense to show struggle, identity and courage of the narrator as well as to show the relationship between blacks and whites. These two elements: memory and experience have further aided to have a specific perspective of whites towards the blacks. On this ground, the real events and incidents which the author exposes in this

narrative disclose the dominative behavior of whites in American society. The writer, through this narrative is able to observe, judge and explain the manner of civilized, rational, developed and moral whites as well as blacks too.

The narrator makes the reader to realize that he has not missed anything to talk about his experience as a black in United States. Even a trivial matter is described. The narrative portrays the minute details during the time of his childhood and adulthood which is full of struggle, scarcity and success. He does not clearly remember his date of birth. He knows a very little about his father but gets both motherly and fatherly love from his mother. He has hardly got chance to hear about his father who is a white man and never loves his family. He used to spend night with mother who is the perfect mother to help, love and care her children in any situation. As the narrative progresses forward, he brings the account of the initiation of the hard, difficulties of the black people. He also provides his fearful experience when he was late in getting home from the mill, would always get a severe scolding or a flagging by master when he was child. He used to work as labourer for the master from his early age. The scene that he describes is so miserable and risky when he used to go to mill by carrying heavy load which is three miles away from his master's house.

Similarly, different condition and struggle of black people were created as fate for them which is made by whites on the basis of their color. The author was compelled to be a witness and participant of such outrages. Throughout the text, he further brings the references of different situations and struggle to overcome from that difficult situation. In this narrative, he also shares some whites quite loving and caring to their slaves. This exhibits that all whites were not strict and autocratic in nature. The author tries his best to gain honor, love and freedom in his life by working cleanly for the masters. The narrative too resembles that there is nothing left to resist from his being a

slave.

The readers definitely make an inquiry on the mystery of success and achievement of the author. They will get shocked when they know the struggle done from the side of blacks. For instance, struggle of the narrator shows that it was courageous and praiseful. The process of struggling is so difficult and miserable that it is totally high level act. Our mind even fails to imagine that. Some may reject that it may not be true but we easily get persuaded through his writing. The narrator can be rarely questioned because he is the eye witness and he is making us to believe that all the incidents and events are seen and experienced by him. On the other hand, the narrator attempts to shatter the complex identity-less boundary of slavery by struggling and laboring cleanly so that he would get chance and help to go forward in his life.

The narrative depicts the troublesome and miserable life style of blacks, get transform into freedom. It also focuses on transition from bondage to freedom. It exhibits that the slaves were totally confined in the hands of whites during slavery system. Blacks were deprived of getting plenty of food. There were no adequate sleeping hours and comfortable house. The quest for becoming literate from blacks was only limited in their dream and imagination. There was not any compromise at their work. In this sense, there was strict time schedule for their working hours. There was no excuse when they had any kind of problem at their duty. The example in the text is of Washington himself when he was unable to reach to master in time because of far distance. He describes that condition in the text.

The narrator who is compelled to spend his childhood time being a slave becomes an orator, master of English and leader after emancipation. He spends the remaining part of his life as a socialist for the betterment of whole humankind. Almost at the end of narrative, he describes about his long journey for speeches. He shares his



experience when he arrives in the new world. New world in the sense, that there is new identity, new life and new status of the narrator. He also gives his feedback and recalls his torturous moment of those bygone days. After his education, he gets married at first time. He gets marriage three times in his life. He starts to work totally for the blacks. He dedicates his entire life in the service of African American people. At the same time, he gets chance to be a speaker.

This research paper primarily focuses on how Washington's narrative reinforces some of the discourse of slave-hood due to their race and how he gets success by defeating that scarcity. And all these matters are presented through use of memory and experience. The narration has a particular point of view towards life of the marginalized people. In many instances, this narrative accepts the unacceptable and hard situation of black people. Despite of those hard conditions, some of them get meaning of their lives and value of their hard struggle. Why does it happen so and how might be such life? Though, Washington explicitly talks about the domination but time and again he assumes many facts mostly which tend to transit from bondage to freedom. He expresses the experiences which he gets before and after emancipation. After emancipation he starts new life along with other blacks. By doing so, it seems to have a particular stand in revealing the overall attitude, technique, behavior, manner and treatment of African American people.

Washington at first is exposing the nature of black people. He does not explicitly criticize that whites for their attitude towards blacks but they are not as they think about them. Rather we can raise queries on capacity, struggle of blacks. Blacks are intelligent as whites. The narrative itself is a clear picture which is likely to mention their deeds that were full of bravery, knowledge and dedication. Whites themselves claim that blacks are immoral, uncivilized, irrational people with farsighted vision. If

they were really the people having the entire negative attributes, would they dare to do such prestigious activities? The question of this query has been clearly shown in the narrative. For this, memory and experience of the narrator are sufficient to raise question against the concept of whole human kind in regarding the race. In response to this, the global people undoubtedly conceive blacks differently than their previous perception and understanding regarding the blacks. In a different sense, the perception of marginalized as well as civilized will get transformed by the global audience.

Generally, whites claim and believe that they are the most powerful, intellectual, rational and moral beings. On the other hand, blacks as weak, irrational and unintellectual beings. They thought blacks as a second human beings and blacks also accept as they are weak and less- intelligent than whites. The narrative presents the tone of slave predicament and fate made by one. It can be said that they regard themselves weak to whites. The researchers believe that the interest of the readers will get addressed and the hidden reality will be brought out by an autobiography. The way of looking not only so called civilized people but also marginalized people will get change because of the precious activities and their actual nature which will be revealed in the global scenario. People after knowing about the struggle for better life of entire mankind may doubt whether they are really the unintellectual, weak and barbaric human beings or something else.

The narrative is full of inspiration for achievement and irony on manner and quality of civilized. It is inspiration in the sense that any one starts from zero and gets success by hard struggle. So, no need to worry and be hopeless in difficulties and scarcity of anything. Irony in the sense that whites appeared as they are. People all over the world always understand them from positive point of view. These people have certain assumption that whites are always good helpful supportive and intellectual. But

they are also human beings and it is true that human is combination of both qualities good and bad. So they have also bad qualities. Here, the narrative supports and admires the actual behavior of whites. Almost all the people will get amazed when the narrative shares various evidences of inhuman behaviors towards blacks. The narrative makes us contemplate to every individual because it provides a different perception on the part of whites as well as blacks. This research paper will reveal the struggle of blacks by examining the use of memory and experience.

Numerous critics have examined *Up From Slavery: An Autobiography* as inspirable text. However only some critics including W. D. Howells, Jonathan Yardley, W. J. Button etc. have showed Booker's notion of remembering. The narrator is a Negro who is a master of English and founder of Tuskegee Institution. Trustees of Boston University published the article of Booker T. Washington under the title "Born a Slave- Now a Master of English." It writes that, "Mr. Washington was born on a slave plantation in Virginia. He is not quite sure, he says, of the exact place or date but suspect it must have been somewhere and at some time. As near as he can make out, it was near a cross road post office called Hale's Ford, in 1858 or 1859" (401). This article looks at Washington's transformation from slave to master of English, but the purposed research paper explores the politics of memory and experience in an autobiography. This shows Washington is a Negro whose prevail life spent as a slave in Virginia. He uses his memory to portray his life as unnoticeable slave whose family background and ancestral history not given priority. Even his date of birth is not exactly known by his family. It indicates that slave has not authentic background during slavery system period. They are not aware about themselves though they are people of United States America.

W. J Button notes that Washington is an exemplary citizen not only from the

African-American society but also from whole United State America. He explores:

Born a slave, by dint of his genius he rose to a position of influence and usefulness second to no man of his time. Like Lincoln, he sprang from common soil, and like Lincoln he met in life a great opportunity; like Lincoln, he was prepared when opportunity came; and again like Lincoln he rose to sublime heights in the service of his fellowman a benefactor of both the black and the white race. (399)

Button compares Washington with Lincoln who is similar to Lincoln in some cases like their race, soil and their heights in the service of their own fellowmen. This article focuses on Washington's work, struggle and achievement, which are existed in an autobiography, but he does not look some possible reasons behind remembering and forgetting some events by the narrator.

The technique using the politics of memory and experience in an autobiography has specific meaning. It is used to represent the history of America and story of the educator, Washington. But this thing is not glimpsed which the research will pay attention that is politics of memory and experience. W. D. Howell reviews the text where he brings remembering or memory of the narrator in the text but lightly. He looks it only as information about the narrator. He does not think about that remembering. He does not analyze that why the narrator is remembering and describing his experience.

He reviews:

Mr. Washington's remembers as one of the most significant features the slave life to which he was born, that his people had no tables or beds where they ate or slept, they never sat down to meals, but caught up a bone or crust and fed upon it wherever they happened to be. They never went to bed but dropped down anywhere, and slept upon a heap up rags or the bare floor. (286)

This also proves that narrator remembers his past in several times about his childhood experience which informs as a being slave how he spends his boyhood. And by telling this way he tries to self-represent as well as situation of the whole Negro's with the help of memory. He represents his fellowman life in slavery time or before emancipation proclamation.

Jonathan Yardley explores Washington's concern with remembering the past. He informs, Washington recalled, "She snatched a few moments for our care in the yearly morning before her work began and at night after the day's work was done. I can't remember a single instance during my childhood or early boyhood when our entire family sat down the table together" (508). Washington spends his childhood without sitting down the table together. They have no time for family because of strict schedule of the work. They are imposed hard tasks as they have born to do work. This is his past which comes as remembrance or memory in front of the narrator. It clears that how was the life style and status of African- American people during the slavery time.

The narrative is the product of his long struggle. The use of various literary technique exhibits his attempts to get physical and mental achievement. His final intention of effort of writing this narrative is to evince how he has overcome his social status of bondage thereby receiving a true sense of self. S.W. Scarborough reviews the book of Washington and reacts it as inspirable, motivational text. He assumes, the text is only in the unfolding of the life of Washington where the author is a man of parts, who sees opportunity, seizes it and firmly maintains his grasp.

The book begins with author's slave days, records his arduous struggles and ends with his days of triumph over caste and color prejudice. Tuskegee of course is his central theme, and he writes his labors there with simplicity that

appeals powerfully to the reader. As in all of his writings there is no striving after literary effect. Its worth as a story of a life is in the incentive it gives to the dependent Negro race to look forward and upward with hope, encouraged by the thought that what one man has done another may do. (150)

This mentions that Washington's autobiography is not only record of his life but also source of inspiration, courage, struggle, success and so on. He encourages every time to the people to help others and to be worthy. He writes about his experience, memory, struggle, concept etc with simple manner but its effect is forceful. As a result anyone can get motivation to do something special and noticeable in her/his life.

These critics focus on other issues like personality, capacity, achievement of the narrator but not the issue of remembering and experience closely. Though some critics review lightly about memory and experience of Washington's life they are not interested particularly in this subject. They do not try to find out why the narrator shares his experience and memory in the narrative. Rather they focus on his personality like what, how and why he does than his hidden intention of his technique where he shares his memory and experience. So, this research work critically unveils the politics of memory and experience in this autobiography.

These critics and writers have given their divergent views on *Up From Slavery: An Autobiography*. Some of them have taken Washington as an orator, speaker and master of English. Few of them have regarded him as socialist as he has succeeded to be master of Tuskegee Institution. Moreover, his use of literary devices in his narrative has been discussed by many critics. Besides these, many of them have considered that the narrative is a total struggle for better life. The struggle is between hard situation and his desire of the narrator to serve blacks in education. We cannot keep aside the ideas put forth by above intellectuals because they carry different concepts when the narrative is

viewed from the different perspectives. They seem that they have also used their effort to give justice to Washington because of his crucial role to provide an education for blacks and to end the illiteracy along with slavery. However, only less has been broached about the use of memory and experience in *Up From Slavery: An Autobiography*. In this sense, this research paper aims to analyze the politics of memory and experience.

The narrative is an autobiographical text. Being an autobiographical text, the researcher has selected only two autobiographical elements; memory and experience to discuss as part of the research. These two elements are sufficient to examine the motive of the author in writing this text. Many writers have provided their various views concerning memory and experience. In this context, this research paper makes use of autobiographical theorists; like Daniel L Schacter, Avishai Margalit, Linda Anderson, W. J. T Mitchell as well as incorporates the writers and theorists; Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson. By analyzing their divergent notions of memory and experience, the researcher makes use of their ideas to give shape to this research paper.

Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson in *Reading Autobiography* present the opinion of Daniel L. Schacter claiming "memories are records of how we have experienced events, not replicas of the events themselves" (16). This exemplifies that memories are not the exact copy of events rather it emphasizes the way of recording the events that someone experiences in his or her life. It is based on how the person perceives the events. It means, it totally depends on point of view of the experience. Memories to some extent assist us to know the experienced events. All the memories of events do not come as it is rather they come according to the preference of the author. At the same time, it depends on the subjectivity for recording the events.

In the same way Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson also explore the opinions of W. J. T Mitchell where he claims "Memory is an inter-subjective phenomenon, a

practice not only of recollection of a past by subject but recollection for another subject" (20). It matters how a person records the memory of different event of his/her life. It depends on the person what to recollect other subject matters along with the past events. In a sense, this sort of practice helps a large number of public to know about other things. Knowing something about other subjects also provides some sort of insights to the public.

Similarly in *Ethics of Memory* Avishai Margalit argues, "Memory is the cement that holds thick relations together and communities of memory are the obvious habitat for thick relations and thus for ethics" (20). It clears that memory is something like medium which joins people together. It helps to hold relations of the people. And it is a kind of habitat which people use to do with their daily life. It means that memory is not accurate because daily life activities are also not accurate and same rather it gets different and change. So, memory depends on how s/he experiences and remembers any incident.

In case of experience, Smith and Watson bring the next view of Joan W. Scott where he opines "experience as a process by which subjectivity is constructed" (qtd in *Reading Autobiography* 25). Basing this idea in terms of narrative, we will know the kind of subjectivity that is formed in the author experience is constructed on the basis of perspective of the person. It gets different from one to another person. This aids the narrator to have a different picture in his subjectivity. Experience as a whole is an element which helps to form the subjectivity of each individual. This research paper observes the role of experience in this narrative. This supports to analyze the narrative to find out its role in the entire narrative.

Correspondingly, Smith and Watson discuss about memory and its role in autobiography. Memory does matter with a specific point of time. For Smith and



Watson, "Similarly, the memory invoked in autobiographical narrative is specific to the item of writing and the contest of telling. It is never isolatable fact, but situated association"(18). This gives a broader concept of memory in relation to autobiography with specific time and context. Memory can never be an isolatable fact rather it gets situated in certain context. It is not matter of serial but happens according to context and situation. As a result memory comes in the process of back and forth process but not serially. In this sense, the narrative of Booker T. Washington functions according to the notion of memory and experience by Smith and Watson.

Furthermore, Smith and Watson share a different concept of experience. They have focused experience as a pivotal element in forming the several kinds of identities of a person. It helps to represent self and to reflect mentality of the narrator. They explore "Experience, then, is the very process through which a person becomes a certain kind of subject owning certain identities constituted through material, cultural, economic and inter psychic relations"(25). This concept of experience is a certain type of phenomenon where a person becomes certain kind of subject holding different identities in various spheres of life. An experience helps to form identities of someone. A person's multiple identities can be formed through various relations too. And in the narrative, by using memory and experience, the narrator tries to present himself with various identities.

The narrator shares about the memory and experience of his life throughout the text. With the help of these two elements, he tries to create his various identities where his multiple identities are shaped through the writing. According to time span he gets change in his position due to his hard struggle. Here is one excerpt where the narrator shares about the beginning stage of his slave hood:

I was born a slave on a plantation in Franklin country, Virginia. I am not quite

sure of the exact place or exact date of my birth, but at any rate I suspect I must have been born somewhere and at some time. As nearly as I have been able to learn, I was born near a cross-roads post office called Hale's Ford, and the year was 1858 or 1859. I do not know the month or the day. (17)

The narrator gives short information of his birth place and the location. He claims that the large number of slaves did not know their ages. Though, now the slave could tell their exact date of birth but during slavery system they can not tell. It means blacks were not aware and educated at that time. So, they do not know even their date of birth. There is a kind of contrast between the white children and slaves. The white children could tell their ages easily whereas the slaves were deprived of the same advantages.

The narrator is deprived from love and care by his father. In this context, he brings about the detail reference of his father. He is deprived from fatherly love because his father is white man. Instead of getting love, care and affection, he was totally detached from that sort of fatherly care:

Of father I know even less than of my mother. I don't even know his name. I have heard reports to the effect that he was a white man who lived on one of the near-by plantations. Whoever he was, I never heard of his taking the least interest in me or providing in any way for my rearing. But I do not find especial fault with him. He was simply another unfortunate victim of the institution, which the Nation unhappily had engrafted upon it at that time. (18)

The narrator talks about his father. This shows that he never sees even hardly gets chance to hear about father. The existence of father of the narrator remains only in his heard story about him but he doesn't get any experience with his father. By remembering his father, the narrator tries to portray his emotional agony where he deprived from fatherly love. On the other hand, he indirectly mentions that most of the

African American women who are compelled to be partner of the whites but only in sexual activities.

Though, he doesn't get fatherly love but gets both love of father and mother in any situation by single mother. Despite of busy time schedule she uses to snatch time for her children at night. She cooks chicken late at night and wakening children to feed them. She goes any level for her children. The author remembers, "but taking place the time it did, and for the reason that it did, no one could ever make me believe that my mother was guilty of thieving. She was simply a victim of the system of the slavery" (19). Bringing this narration, the narrator wants to show the situation of that time and result of that situation where stealing is not bad due to system. This shows that mother is not bad though she steals. She does not feel guilty that because by providing thing to her children gives precious happy to her. She has not any desire of thieving rather compelled to steal due to slavery system.

There are several opinions by different writers regarding the *Up from Slavery*.

W. Fitzhugh Brundage in the review discusses about the author:

This timely collection of sophisticated and engaging essays on Washington's *Up from Slavery* broadens and contextualizes our understanding of both the man and his book. John Davi Smith, North Carolina State University Booker T.

Washington's rise from slavery to the presidency of the Tuskegee institutes and an adviser to American Presidents and tycoons is an extraordinary saga of talent, an ambition and accommodation. Inspired by the centenary of the publication of Washington's autobiography *Up from Slavery*, this collection of essays reinterprets Washington's career and self-presentation. (1)

Washington's role as black leader has been highlighted by Fitzhugh Brundage

Washington is an extraordinary man who traces his journey from slave to an educator,

advisor, president and tycoon simultaneously. As a result he goes the way of awareness, and leadership for betterment of African American people. He was firm to bear witness in employing the self-awareness, intellectual independence and literary authority of the slave. At last, he was able to gain success and was able to extract meaning of his life by shattering the clutch of conservative thought about race and capacity.

Furthermore, in the article, Brundage advocates the perception about Washington as an important personality of the era in American history. He mentions him as the man of both races whites and black because he never biases people in order to their race and color.

As the most visible and widely acclaim black leader of his era, Washington played a pivotal role in advocating a strategy for the racial uplift of African Americans in an age of intensifying racism and discrimination. Whether white or black, Washington's critics and supporters acknowledged his skill at extending his influence overall areas of American race relations. (1)

Washington's writing brought an impetus by seeking meaning of good leadership and freedom. He has skill which helps him to extend his influence upon the people. In the same way, like he uses his skill in his work, he uses in the narrative too to create his image as a brave and will-wisher of the people. Finally, he succeeds to use all of his efforts to gain good relation between blacks and whites.

Washington played a paramount role being a leader at his life. After his freedom from the slavery system, education leads him to Hampton Institute (now Hampton University) in Virginia. After graduation he works as an educator. He gets change his post from student to teacher.

According to Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson in *Reading Autobiography*,

W.J.T Mitchell defines, "Memory is as inter subjective phenomenon, a practice not only of recollection of a past by subject, but of recollection for another subject" (193). The recollection of memory in fact is not only limited to a writer alone. In a way, the narrator is sharing his writing to wide public. In this context, there are many other subjects for the writer. In one situation, the narrator shares about his people and their behavior. He shares, " I don't know how many have noticed it, But I think that it will be found to be true that there are few instances, either in slavery or freedom, in which a member of my race has been known to betray a specific trust" (24). In black race, there would be not fault to say there is no word which called betray except rarely. Most of the blacks are helpful, faithful. They help each other from the bottom of the heart and without any selfishness. This is the praiseful feature of the African American people.

There were few blacks who were a bit literate in their society but they are true and rich by their humanity and honor. Whatever they do but do from inner intention. Cheating is not existed in the behavior of black people. They are rich in their words.

Notwithstanding that the Emancipation Proclamation freed him from any obligation to his master, this black man walked the greater portion of the distance back to where his old master lived in Virginia, and placed the last dollar, with interest, in his hands. In talking to me about this, the man told me that he knew that he did not have to pay the debt, but that he had given his word to the master, and his word he had never broken. He felt that he could not enjoy his freedom till he had fulfilled his promise. (26)

The narrator provides, suitable proof to clear that blacks are not dishonest rather they are sincere towards their morality and duty. They are clear internally as well as externally. They complete their promises from bottom of the heart then only they get satisfaction. Otherwise, cheating hurts them in every moment. So they do not such

behavior which leads regret in following days.

After his escape from slavery and get freedom in the process of setting new life and of gaining education, the author visited many places. He mostly got chance to make his visit as a speaker and leader. Even after his freedom, he was ill-treated in relation to the color in their very beginning of the days. Washington gets insult during the journey from small city, Malden to Hampton for his education. He shares:

It is true I had practically no money in my pocket with which to pay for bed or food, but I had hopped in some way to beg my way into the good graces of the landlord, for at that season in the mountains of Virginia, the weather was cold, and I wanted to get indoors for the night. Without asking as to whether I had any money, the man at the desk firmly refused to even consider the matter of providing me with food or lodging. This was my first experience in finding out what the color of my skin meant. (46)

The narrator brings the experience of his past life. Especially it was not easy for him to take part in any ceremony. He was prohibited to get food even to entering into the lodge. The situation was very miserable due to the cold weather and it becomes more painful because of attitude of the landlord. Though they had got freedom but had not get free from the hegemonic concept during recent period of emancipation. It took long time to get change. Slowly the situation got improved when he got chance to be master of school in Alabama. He faced many difficulties before he change his position as precious. He struggles in every moment of entire life from childhood to adulthood. At the same time, he did not limit himself as an inferior and weak person. The different is that at first he battles with situation for his education and betterment but later he struggles for education and betterment of whole people, especially for black race. He never feels himself as well as do not let other people to feel as they are weak and

useless. Rather he proves what he and his people are in the society. And all these are expressed through technique of sharing his experience by the author.

The role of Washington as a socialist, black leader has been raised in an Autobiography. He encourages blacks to get practical education but not only literal education. He tries his best to provide facilities in his school where he could teach numerous students about various subject matter which are related to everyday life. His desire is to teach students which lesson would be base to live life for the students. As a result, he teaches about health care, business, agriculture, industry and so on. There, he seems an important personality among the blacks. He got chance to prove himself as a dynamic and inspirable figure in the world.

According to Margalit in *Ethics of Memory*, the notion of Sigmund Freud is, “ward of the unconscious, disturbing memories are locked by a Censor Jailer. They are removed from consciousness, but they are not destroyed” (2). This clarifies that no-one can express or share every memory with public though s/he has not forgotten. Rather s/he tries to hide within herself/himself. It means s/he represses but not forgets. And if he shares those unpleasant, shameful experiences then expresses by modifying it from negative to positive way. Likewise, here in an autobiography, Washington expresses his disturbing memory:

I was extremely hungry, because it had been a long time since I had had sufficient food. As soon as it became light enough for me to see my surroundings I noticed that I was near a large ship, and that this ship seemed to be unloading a cargo of pig iron. I went at once to the vessel and asked the captain to permit me to help unload the vessel in order to get money for food.

The captain, a white man, who seemed to be kind hearted, consented. (47)

Here, this disturbing, miserable memory is shared by narrator but in positive way.

Though he expresses his critical situation but behind of this expression is something positive reason. Positive reason is that he wants to show how he struggle in his difficulties and how he is intelligent who can handle such miserable condition in very simple way. He depicts his past life in order to show his identity from past to present. Another reason is that through his experience, he wants to notice the habit of the blacks. He wants to clear that even in his difficulties he acts patiently and intelligently. He accepts his situation and handles it easily but never thinks any crime type work for his needs. Here he modifies his experience in order to show he has capacity to do good thing even in hard difficulties.

Similarly, he again shares his bitter experience when he gets during raising money for boarding department. He visits to beg money to raise money for the school. But he never feels as a beggar and never begged rather secured help. He expresses,

While I was waiting for an answer, her husband came in and asked me in the most abrupt manner what I wanted. When I tried to explain the object of my call, he became still more ungentlemanly in his words and manner and finally grew so excited that I left the house without waiting for reply from the lady. A few blocks from that house I called to see a gentleman who received me in the most cordial manner. He wrote me his cheque for a generous sum. (135)

Washington tries his best to secure money for the school of the blacks which would provide practical education. He wants to secure help by the people for that work but there are various kind of people. Some of them are positive about Washington's begging and some of them mistreat him for begging. Some people scold him which he has to bear that insult. He never forgets this experience so he mentions this in the narrative. But somehow by writing this bitter experience he wants to generally begging is not good on the eyes of people but there is no matter if that begging is for good work.



So none should be feel guilty and shameful to secure help in any way and he also does it for betterment of entire black people.

Most of the time, the narrator tries to portray African American people and himself through his memory and experiences. He uses politics of memory and experience to reflect the nature of blacks. He clearly memorizes his past life through which the readers can understand him and his capacity. He memorises various aspects of his life along with his other people.

In their poverty and ignorance, it was pathetic to see their attempts to get joy out of season that in most parts of the country is so sacred and so dear to the heart in one cabin I noticed that all that the five children had to remind them of the coming of Christ was a single bunch of firecrackers, which they had divided among them. In another cabin, where there were at least half-dozen persons, they had been bought in the store the day before. (103)

This description about blacks in the narrative shows that real nature of the African American people. Despite of their poverty and pathetic condition they have feeling of "we" instead of "I". They have actual humanity. As a result they share even little thing among them. They try to be equal in every moment and they do too. Here, sharing of something among them is not only sharing of things but also sharing of happiness too. This type of ritual is existed in the heart of every black people. It means blacks are symbol of humanity which Washington presents through his experience and memory.

Though, Washington is a black leader who devotes his life for others not only for blacks but also for whites too. He becomes source of inspiration for all colours. He never criticises whites but just shows his predicament due to white assumptions. He does not show to whites as a enemy rather takes them as a friend, who help him to be an important man in America. He reveals help form white side too.

From fearing Mrs. Ruffner I soon learned to look upon her as one of my best friends. When she found that she could trust me she did so implicitly. During the one or two winters that I was with her, she gave me an opportunity to go to school for an hour in the day during a portion of the winter months but most of my studying was done at night, sometimes alone, sometimes under some one whom I could hire to teach me. Mrs. Ruffner always encouraged and sympathized with me in all my efforts to get an education. (45)

The narrator, by bringing an experience of past days, explores the attribution of white people to raise his as an educator. He praises those people who support him in his education. Mrs. Ruffner is one who helps him to climb first step of his education by providing opportunity to go to school. He encourages him to get formal education at school. She never thinks him as her slave but as a human being who ought to get education which is his basic need as a being human. This behaviour of the white, Mrs Ruffner upon Washington and description of this behaviour in the narrative clarifies that Washington is not against white people rather he advocates all races like black, red, white races. This shows narrator's inner quality to adjust in any condition.

Despite of many obstacles, the narrator does not give up his hope of helping others who are backward by providing practical education. In a sense, he manages to teach about work which are related to everyday life and would be occupation of the students in their future. He practices:

Brickmaking has now become such an important industry at the school that last season, our students' manufactured twelve hundred thousands of first class bricks, of a quality suitable to be sold in any market. Aside from this, scores of young men have mastered the brickmaking trade- both the making of bricks by hand and by machinery- and are now engaged in this industry in many parts of

the south. (115)

The narrator, being founder of Tuskegee institution, tries his best to make his school perfect. Perfect in the sense that formal and informal education should provide to the students. Not only literal reading and writing ability but also should be able in every aspects of life due to that institution. So, he practices himself to make bricks along with the students.

Another thing that has been insisted upon at the school is the use of the tooth brush. It means Washington insists on sanitation too. He makes a good impression about health upon the students. And by mentioning of this thing, the narrator presents himself as a responsible professor.

Absolute cleanliness of the body has been insisted upon from the first. The students have been taught to bathe as regularly as to take their meals. This lesson we began teaching before we had anything in the shape of a bath-house. Most of the students came from plantation districts and often we had to teach them how to sleep at night; that is whether between the two sheets. (129)

In this way, the narrator teaches daily life activities to the students for their good habit and health. Even he teaches how to sleep and bath as well as how much those activities should be done in certain time. His first priority is cleanliness of the body.

Washington is an influential speaker beside his main identity as a professor. He gets various kind of experience during his whole life. He shares his experience as a speaker which is reported by Mr. Clark Howell, the editor of the Atlanta Constitution. He describes:

I do not exaggerate when I say that professor Booker T. Washington's address yesterday was one of the most notable speeches, both as to character and as to the warmth of its reception, ever delivered to a southern audience. The address

was a revelation the whole speech is a platform upon which blacks and whites can stand with full justice to each other. (161)

This supports that Washington is an important speaker who speaks notable speeches about relation between blacks and whites. He addresses influentially and clearly where the people or audience can understand each other. His speeches make them to realize mutual relation and cooperation among them. The narrator advocates this report in the narrative to present that he is a good speaker.

Avishai Margalit furthermore raises the issue about memory and experience. She has made the concept clear by bringing the idea.

The notion of reliving the past involves, I believe various ideas about remembering emotions and specially about remembering emotions with respect to the events and the people remembered. It is not only sense of the past that we try to recover in our memory but its sensibility what was like to be in that situation or with those people there and then? (16)

The act of remembering is not only remembering the past but it is also respecting the past events too. Though past might be unpleasant, painful, miserable and hard but when it gets remember with respect and positive point of view we remember past by mixing our sensibility. As a result, we modify our past events by adding what is like to be. It helps to get meaning of the past incidents in the present time. And this process depicts someone and something as valuable.

In the narrative, the narrator processes same technique. He remembers his past about his respected person with great respect.

I never heard him speak, in public or in private a single bitter word against the white men in the south. Form his example in the respect I learned the lesson that great men cultivate love, and that only little men cherish of spirit of hatred. I

learned that assistance given to the weak makes the one who gives it strong; and that oppression of the unfortunate makes one weak. (123)

The narrator shares how he learns to respect others and what makes a person weak. He expresses his behaviour and experience not only what, how he gets but also adds his respect towards his experience in present time. By bringing this narration, the narrator tries to inform about his habit to the reader from which he presents himself as an intelligent man.

Likewise, in autobiography, Linda Anderson raises same issue memory and experience. For this, she brings the idea of Sigmund Freud in relation to the role of experience and memory.

. . . To remember is not to restore something previously lost, to find a link in a chain which is previously missing. Rather the past can only be known belatedly, restructuring in the present what had previously been thought as past. . . History is never definite or friendly known, therefore is capable of constant alternation as more is remembered or released into consciousness causing the subject to think both the past and the present differently. (61)

Memory does not bring everything about past in present time. It brings randomly glimpse of the bygone experience and activates. Rather past comes in a delayed form. History is never definite or exact because it depends on act or remembering the past where every event, behaviour does not come serially as it has been happened. There is also different sense due to various experience and memory of the different people.

The concept of Linda Anderson which has been discussed in autobiography gets best suit in the narrative of Washington. The narrator, Washington himself merges both his memory and experience time and again. He presents his past experience in the narrative sometime directly and sometime through his memory.

The receiving of his invitation brought to me a sense of responsibilities that it would be hard for anyone not placed in my position to appreciate what were my feelings when this invitation came to me? I remembered that I had been a slave, that my early years had been spent in the lowest depths of poverty and ignorance and that I had had little opportunity to prepare me for such a responsibility as this. (152)

The narrator merges his memory about his past life and comes in present time immediately. He feels responsible and suitable for the position when he gets official invitation to speak at national occasion. He gets a kind happy equal feeling which is his first experience about equality among the people. First time he experiences as a speaker. In this way he brings his experience as well as memory at the same time the narrative. He memorizes himself as a slave suddenly when he gets opportunity to make his new identity. It means past does not come serially and continuously.

Most of the time the narrator memorises his past life but on the other side he hides something too. He pretends as he has forgotten those things so he does not mention those experience but that is not actual rather reality is something else. It means that he wants to hide those experience from the public. He describes his feeling but in vague way. In the narrative he expresses:

We were to sail on the frigate of the Red Star Line and a beautiful vessel she was. We went on board just before noon, the hour of sailing. I had never before been on board a large ocean steamer, and the feeling which took possession of me when I found myself there is rather hard to describe. (194)

The narrator expresses his feeling but not clearly. He wants to mention that experience in surface way but not in detail. It means he is not interested to provide his every details or feelings, experience to the public. And it clears that there is politics in the

autobiography of forgetting too.

Furthermore, in the narrative he doesn't mention his marital life with his first wife but suddenly informs that she is passed away in 1884. Before this incident he never talk about her even in a single word in the narrative. Here it clears that he does not want to talk about his first wife which indicates something weaknesses of the narrator. Because as we know life partner occupies great position in one's life and experience but he has just brought her death year. "After earnest and constant work in the interest of the school, together with her housekeeping duties, my wife passed away in may, 1884. One child, Portia, M. Washington, was born during our marriage" (111). It clears that the narrator is not interested to inform about his first marital life to the reader. It clarifies that the narrator is interested to memories only positive events specially in those events and experience which predict him as a great person but not interested to mention those experiences which are not related with his prestigious life. Though an autobiography regards as whole narrative form of entire life where every aspects are important to mention in the text but here the narrator ignores some aspects. It means the narrator has used politics of memory and experience in the narrative.

In conclusion, the narrator of the autobiography, *Up from Slavery: An Autobiography* has piled up the details of the struggle, scarcity and success by using politics of memory and experience. The narration shows the reality of that innocent and powerless child in course of time has been able to undergo various obstacles to make his new identity and to achieve the meaning and value of life. At the same time he becomes an orator, speaker and master of Tuskegee institution. The transition from bondage to freedom provides the narrator to be a powerful and an important figure in the United States America. His identity as a slave traces into a founder and black leader for betterment of all races is main evidence of the narrator in gaining the meaning and

value of life. His every struggle and support to the others is noticeable in the narrative. We are made to know everything about the capacity, success, struggle, scarcity and determination by the use of memory and experience. Use of memory and experience of the narrator also reflects his mentality of portraying African American people and their condition during slavery and after emancipation time.

The whole narrative captures the rising process of Washington from slave to a leader, founder and speaker with other blacks too. The narrative exhibits the earlier age of his slave along with the later phase of his life. He struggles against miserable situation is important work which provides the clear way to complete his determination. Furthermore, his concept of equality is also a precious task to entire humankind. He never criticizes others which would insult them rather he applies fair treatment not only between Whites and Blacks but also Red race too. Even in his childhood, he used to suffer as a slave boy, becomes liberal hero to all people. His dedication for the betterment of whole human makes him a great hero in the entire history of America as well as in the world. His dedicative participation to fight with difficulties for better life of entire human being can never be forgotten in relation to practical education and establishment of Tuskegee Institution.

By using the memory and experience, the autobiographer changes the perception or concept of all human kind who used to think that marginalized people especially blacks are weak, unintelligent, barbaric and incapable. The narrator also provides inspiration and courage to those marginalized people who want to do something noticeable act and facing hard difficulties. Through his memory and experience he shows his capacity, determination, dedication, struggle and so on which clears that nothing is impossible and everything starts from zero. This is the main concept which becomes source of inspiration to the people. His contribution helps to



shape new type of concept, attitude in the mind of entire humankind where they will think none is more or less intelligent and capable rather they are less or more in their struggle and in willing power. He shows his crucial role for the people through his remembering and forgetting technique. This entire politics of memory and experience are dominant to get meaning about his past activities and behaviours in the present as well as to show him as hero by hiding some negative aspects too. As a result, the narrator gets success to show himself as a conqueror, speaker, leader, and master of the Tuskegee institution. His technique of using memory and experience succeeds him to self-present and to gain meaning of his life.

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Tribhuvan University

Politics of Memory and Experience in Washington's *Up From Slavery: An  
Autobiography*

A Thesis Submitted to the Central Department of English, T.U.

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of Master of Arts in English

Submitted By

Pushpa Kumari Chaudhary

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Central Department of English

Kirtipur, Kathmandu

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Tribhuvan University  
Central Department of English  
Kirtipur, Kathmandu

Approval Letter

This thesis is submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University by Pushpa Kumari Chaudhary entitled "*Politics of Memory and Experience in Up From Slavery: An Autobiography*" has been approved by the undersigned members of the thesis Research Committee.

Members of the Research Committee:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Internal Supervisor

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

External Examiner

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Head

\_\_\_\_\_

Central Department of English

\_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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Pushpa Kumari Chaudhary

Tribhuvan University

Central Department of English

Letter of Recommendation

Pushpa Kumari Chaudhary has completed his thesis entitled "Politics of Memory and Experience in Washington's Up From Slavery: An Autobiography" under my supervision. She carried out her research from August 2017 to February 2018. I hereby recommend her thesis be submitted for viva voice.

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Pradip Raj Giri

Supervisor

Date : \_\_\_\_\_