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Racial Ventriloquism in James McBride's *The Color of Water*

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Letter of Approval

This thesis entitled "Racial Ventriloquism in James McBride's *The Color of Water*" submitted to the Central Department of English by Asmita Khadka has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

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Abstract

This thesis entitled "Racial Ventriloquism in James McBride's The Color of Water" examines the exploitation of black and Jewish people living in America and their continual struggle for their identity as narrated in the memoir. Primarily, it investigates how Jewish people employ racial Ventriloquism to resist the forms of discrimination and to bring their voice in literature. I apply Jennifer Glaser's concept of Racial Ventriloquism that counter against the dominant ideology and power of whites which allow them to exploit the blacks physically, mentally as well as sexually. And at the conclusion, these kinds of suppression and abuses compel blacks and Jewish to resist against supremacy of whites and liberate themselves from their suppression by utilizing racial Ventriloquism as a tool.

Keywords: Identity, Ventriloquism, Black Power, Parenting, Race, Religion, Moral values.

The research studies how the racial Ventriloquism enables Jewish people to bring their voice in literature and it also analyzes the characters James and Ruth, and their roles as Racial-Ventriloquist. The characters of the text are going through racial discrimination and to overcome from it they are advocating for each other. Moreover, it deals with the issue of African-American racism that McBride raises in *The Color of Water*. He raised this issue to counter against the suppression of black in terms of race and religion. His focus is on African-American as well as bi-racial people who lived in U.S and struggle to achieve their independent identities beyond white domination. In this life narrative, author combines his own experience with his mother as a tribute to her. James a black boy is humanizing his white mother in treatment with race, religion and moral values. Ruth is a central character of the memoir. She is tough, determinant and a strong woman who raised her twelve children by living in

Black community during the Black Power Movement. That's the motivational factor to the writer to give tribute to her by crossing the color line.

In this research my argument is racial Ventriloquism is a tool to bring the voice of a marginalized group in literature by taking the ideas from Jennifer Glaser. The major character of this memoir Ruth got married to an African man and abandoned by both the white and Black communities. Though she is a white-skinned female, her suffering and struggle are not less than those of an African in America. Another character, as well as the writer of this memoir James, is an African man who is a victim of a racist society from his early childhood. While he was a young teen, he tried to escape from the racist society but could not. Later, when he became a matured man, he understood the suffering of his mother who lived in the Black community and was victimized by both communities during the Black Power Movement. Then he tried to dig out the reality of his mother's Jewish history.

By doing so, he gives tribute to his white mother by crossing the color line. Thus, the significance of my research is that the suffering and hardships of one marginalized group can be understood by another marginalized group. Here, the suffering of Blacks and Jews is nearly similar. Both groups are dominated by whites in America and they are trying to find their identity in America. James' memoir is a strong tool to fight against racism and injustice, and my thesis studies this memoir from the perspective of Racial Ventriloquism.

The Color of Water presents racial prejudice in America. This memoir was first published in 1996. The writer of this memoir is a younger son of Ruth who was a young teen during the Civil Rights Movement while his elder sibling had taken part in the Civil Rights Movement. It centered on Ruth, a Jewish woman. She was born on April 1, 1921, to a Polish Orthodox Jewish family. Her father's name was Fishel Shilky

and mother's name was Hudis Shilky. While her family was immigrated to America her name was changed to Rachel by her parents. Ruth become dead to her family while she married with an African-American man Andrew, Dennis McBride, James's biological father. Through this life narrative McBride presents the racial tension between Whites and Blacks.

During Civil Rights Movement there was hatred and conflict between two races. In such a harsh condition of racial tension McBride's own mother was white skinned and lived in a black community. So, all the members of his family were gone through the suffering and hardships due to the bi-racial relations of their family members. In such a crucial time of racial tension Ruth lived in Black community and raised her children alone. Neither Ruth was accepted as white in whites' community nor was she accepted as black in blacks' community. Though she was not accepted in both communities she neverstops struggling. Her moral values and humanitarian behaviors always makeher different from the rest. Thus, Ruth is not only James mother but also a role model for those who gives more focus on humanity rather than race. She always teaches her children that every person is equally beautiful and important. All this elaboration makes clear that Ruth is a woman of humanitarian value. She believed in freedom and she told her children that education and hard work were paths towards that freedom. All these things were well explained by James in his memoir.

McBride is one of the renowned Black writers, who crossed the color line and wrote this memoir. He was born on September 11, 1957 in Brooklyn, New York city. He is an accomplished musician and author. He was awarded the masters in Journalism from Colombia University at the age of twenty-two. He published dozen of books including biography, memoir and novels. Moreover, he is the recipient of the

2013 National Book Award for his novel *The Good Lord Bird*. As a journalist, McBride worked on the staffs of many well known publications, including *The Boston Globe*, *The Wilmington News Journal*, *The Washington Post* and *People's magazines*.

This memoir is arranged story of a Jewish mother and mixed race twelve children growing up, experiencing poverty and chaos in racially segregated society. It is a story of Ruth's struggle and converting Christianity as well as the painful journey of her life from childhood to her adulthood. In addition, it's a story of Ruth's struggle to adjust in one place to another in America. This memoir was spent over two years on *The New York Times* best seller list and has become an American classic. It has been translated in to sixteen languages and sold more than 2.5 million's copies which prove the suitable content of the book and contemporary issue of that time.

In his writings James made a deliberate attempt to challenge the common structure of the memoir by critiquing, challenging and expanding the genre. In this life narrative he challenged the previous notion of memoir because in this memoir, in one page he wrote his mother's life story and in another page he wrote his autobiography. Most of his books center on themes such as racism, identity and family love and war experiences.

Many critics and popular magazines have highly praised his memoir for showing the experience about his growing up years and his mother's mysterious life story and his own painful experience of bi-racial person and also for their struggle against racism. That they fought together to overcome from it. During his childhood he struggles against the odds of being a black child of white mother at a time when prejudice especially in south, was at its height. As bell hook states in her book *Black Looks*:

We experience our collective crisis as African American people within the realm of the Image. Whether it is the face of homeless folks encountered in city streets or a small town alleyways, the wandering gaze of the unemployed, the sight of our drug addicted loved once, or some tragic seen from a film that lingers in the mind's eye, we see that we are in trouble.(6)

In this quoted lines hook explains the experience of torture and odds of being black as a same way McBride is experiencing. Many times he was frustrated for being black child of white mother. His frustration can be seen in his memoir where he states that he grew accustomed to being only black or Negro in school and were standout students, neat and well-mannered, despite the racist attitudes of many of his teachers, who were happy to knock his 95 test scores down to 85's and 80's over the most trivial mistakes. He suffered inside because of his race which becomes a course to lives in America.

Being the token Negro was something he was never entirely comfortable with. He was the only black kid in his fifth-grade class then all white enclave of Rosedale, Queen and one afternoon as the teacher dutiful read aloud from Blacks' history book's one page on Negro History, someone in the back of the class whispered, "James is a nigger! Followed by ripple of tittering and giggling across the room"(McBride101). This is the painful experience even in the school experienced by James. Due to the series of such embarrassing moments he did not wants to go school. He wanted to stay alone in his room. Because of such racist insult he became drug addicted since his early childhood.

But later his mother continuously supporting and teaching him moral lesson he becomes a great person. So, this memoir carries the story of family love, discovery of self who he is and working his way through a multi-faceted identity crisis. When

James become young he got conscious of his identity and eventually he digs the past of his mother who she was, where she was from and why she was different from them. By doing so he found that she was a Jewish woman who married with a black man (James's Father) and lived in black community. She become dead to her family when she married a black man and she continually struggled first as a Jewish living in south and later as a white living in black community. Then he comes to realized that she is a woman who is facing same kind of identity crisis in America and she was also a victim of racist society. There after he wrote this memoir on the behalf of Jewish people where I'm analyzing his act of Ventriloquist through this research.

Therefore, in his writing he tries to show similar kinds of suffering of both groups where they are struggling to find and established their identity in America. As he states:

Mom sat up late at night with my elder sibling and talked about the revolution against the white man while we little kids slept upstairs. My little sister Cathy and I creep to top of the stairs in our underwear, listening at the big kids animated conversation about changing the system and the revolution, extolling the virtues of Martin Luther King over Malcolm X and vice versa and playing records by the last poets. Helen once a peripheral figure of these discussions became that epicenter, instigator and a protagonist. You have to fight the system! She'd yell. Fight the man! (81)

In my view this extract clearly shows the condition of James house. The topic of their discussion is race and Black Power Movement in which his mother is constantly supporting the Blacks who were fighting for their freedom and rights. Though in some ways she was victimized by blacks in her community who assumes that she was white and dominating blacks but she stayed strong and by standing in the side of

marginalized group. During the Black power Movement James and his siblings were worried about their mother because of her color. But she was totally unaware of it. As McBride mentioned:

Her oddness and her complete non awareness of what the world thought of her non challenge in the face of what I perceived to be imminent danger from blacks and whites who disliked her for being a white person in a black world. She saw none of it. (8)

As a boy, James noticed that his mother looked nothing like the other kids mother and he is always scared of her color. McBride wished his mother would stay at home otherwise she may fall in danger. Thus, during his childhood he was always scared and worried for her but Ruth didn't care about it she moves here and there without any fear. Here, we can clearly observe the psyche of a child who is seriously conscious about race differences and danger of it. This can show the clear picture of harsh discrimination among black and white races and imminent danger of being black in America.

I am going to apply the racial Ventriloquism method to study this text. Racial Ventriloquism is a method proposed by Jennifer Glassier. In which she argues how Racial Ventriloquism is a hallmark to bring Jewish voices and culture in English literature. Racism is a constructed ideology of whites which oppressed black people. According to Tyson, "Racism refers to the unequal power relation that grows from the sociopolitical domination of one race by another and that results in systematic discriminatory practices" (Tyson 318). In addition it is a collection of several ideologies which aimed to establish a state of unequal political, economic, cultural and social rights for Afro-American people. It is also a state of banning African people from every opportunity in education, employment and in every work place.

James McBride *The Color of Water* deals with the issue of race, identity, family love etc. it combines the black and Jewish consciousness at a same time. The memoir depicts the warped mind and heart of blacks and Jewish in segregated southern states. It protests against the racist and white supremacist policies that controlled and saved the life of African-American and Jewish American in the south. It depicts the unity among black and Jewish to resist the oppression. McBride in the memoir demonstrates a strong female character who witnessed the black suffering. So it shows and emphasizes the concept of racial Ventriloquism to fight against the racist society.

Moreover, Afro-American racism theory which is the extension of racism into theoretical or philosophical discourse, aims to understand the nature of race based inequality. Racism theory examines the suffering experiences, interest and social roles of black people in a variety of field. Blacks are always the site of domination and they are always treated as an object for white masters. And black people are always presented badly negatively through the lens of white people. James tries to resist against racism through his memoir by exploring about his life story where he victimized by white supremacy from his early childhood.

At the beginning part of his life, he suffers from an inferiority complex, identity crisis and the humiliation of racist insults. He was frustrated for his identity and he falls in a drug addiction. As McBride state in his memoir,

To further escape from painful reality, I created an imaginary world for myself. I believed my true self was boy who lived in the mirror. I'd lock myself in the bathroom and spend long hours playing with him. He looked just like me. I'd stare at him. Kiss him. Make faces at him and order him around. Unlike others, he had no opinions. (102)

At a time he was so frustrated because of his race during that time, he love to stay alone because he was afraid of racial insult. But gradually he grew up with strengths and he no longer feels inferior knows who he is and knows that he can respond racism. Behind his strength there is the continual effort and support of his mother and sister who had convinced him by saying everyone is equal and everyone has their own worth. His sister tries to tell his worth several times that is stated by James:

Put yourself in God's hand and you can't go wrong. I knew Jack was right and when I got back to New York in the fall of my junior year in high school, I resolved to studies and rebuild myself like my own mother did in times of stress. I turned God. I lay in bed at night praying to God for making me strong, to rid me of anger, to make me a man and God listened and he began to change. (184-85)

When he was a teen, he did not get a way to overcome from it that's why he becomes drug addicted. He thought he is only a person who is going through such a pathetic condition. He did not have such courage to accept and handle the situations. So, he chooses the drugs to avoid that pain and discrimination. He was so hopeless for his identity that he lost somewhere in America. Even he was unaware about his mother identity. But, through the time passes by he starts observing his mother which she is silently handling all those hardship and moving on in her life. Then McBride starts understanding things and situations. He used to remember his sister who tells him to choose between what the world expects of him and what he wants for himself. Later, he becomes a writer and fights for various minorities and voiceless people through his writing which can play a vital role for the betterment of minorities and can create a better situation to them. However, James's memoir can be taken as a progressive process of affirming identity, learning about power of words and resisting racism.

And he also offers the alternatives that loving self is a way to overcome from such pain. When he becomes matured he understood his mother and her unstoppable fighting spirit. He starts to thinking about other and he realized there are so many people who are facing similar problem that he has been through. So, instead of his own suffering he advocates for Jewish American through his mother who represents Jewish American. He is not only fighting for her rather he is speaking and fighting for all those Jewish people in America who are searching their identity and constantly fighting for their rights. So, he is resisting against discrimination and dehumanization of Afro-American and Jewish American through his writing. Thus, he is speaking a voice of voiceless people.

My argument will take Afro-African race theory for the support which deals with race role practiced in the society of America. Along with race relation, my argument will be build upon the concept through racial Ventriloquism where a black boy speaks the words of white Jewish mother. By taking the ideas from Jennifer Glaser in *Borrowed Voice: Writing and racial Ventriloquism in the Jewish American imagination*, she talks about how this technique enables to bring Jewish ethnic minorities in the mainstream. She raises the issues of Jewish American and explores the ideas that how Afro-American and Jewish American are experiencing the same kind of suppression in America. Jennifer Glaser in *The politics of difference and the future(s) of American Jewish Literary studies* states that,

Levinson's concept of the power of the Jewish outside is reminiscent of Dubois's early writings about double consciousness in *The Souls of the Black Folk* (1903). To Levinson, as to the African-American intellectual, being an outsider to American culture was a gift in the double-edged, etymological sense of the word. Being located on the periphery of U.S culture was painful

according to Dubois but it was also supremely productive in its ability to supply a critical subject position to the outsider.(481)

This review essay was published by Indiana University press in 2009. In this reviewed essay Jennifer talks about the history of Jewish who were migrated in America during WW-II. By bringing the ideas from many critics, she argues that for the critical value of Jewish difference and the mutually constitutive nature of Jewish and American culture there is need to maintain Jewish literature as a viable subject of the study in English Department where it has been increasingly consigned. Moreover, she also draws the link between critical race theory and racial Ventriloquism. Criticalrace theory examines the implicit discrimination and exploitation of black people. Italso analyzes how race and racism are foundational elements in historical and contemporary social structure and social experience. Seemingly, racial Ventriloquism is a hallmark for Jewish people to bring their voice, culture and social roles in literature. Thus, critical race theory and racial Ventriloquism both examine the implicit discrimination among people and both focuses on marginalized group and help to brings the marginalized in main stream. And when a Black writes about Jewish he can give justice to Jewish because suppressed people only can understand the suffering of others.

Therefore, through racial Ventriloquism Jewish American voice can brings in literature which is not highly heard in literature in America. So, here McBride wrote about a Jewish life in America who were exploited and unloved in many places of America because they are holocaust survival. American people treated them as barbaric and uncivilized citizen when Jewish immigrated to America, African also hate them by thinking that they are whites who exploits black mentally, physically and psychologically.

Ruth is a character who has been going through all those circumstances which I discussed before. She is a victim of racist society but her endurance gives her strength to live in black community during Black Rights Movement with her twelve mixed-race children. There is an ultimate question that how a black boy can be a Ventriloquist of white Jewish mother? And how can a black understand the suffering of Jewish? But my claim is that a victim of racist society can understand the suffering of another victim who is going through a same kind of suffering. Somehow blacks living in America and Jewish living in America are facing similar kind of racial suppression, they are experiencing shared experience and both of these groups are struggling for finding their identity in America. In a same issue, a renowned scholar and a writer W.E.B. Du Bois in his book *The Soul of Black Folk* argues that, "He experienced.....the tyranny and circumscription of an ambitious human being who was classified as a real estate"(Du Bois 86).

This line shows the torture and deadly suppression of blacks as a slave. He presents the brutal violence of white supremacy that leads him to revolt against tyranny system of White masters. The extreme level of torture Du Bois has been through compels him to speak out and revolt against the white supremacy. This memoir also gives an account of suffering and harsh conditions of black who were dehumanized and exploited by white supremacy and the identity of black is in crisis. That's why McBride is raising his voice for Jewish American for establishing equal rights and identity of them.

During slavery system, African people are totally handled by tyranny white masters, black were objectified by them and they were harassed, dehumanized and tortured but after black peoples' revolution against slavery, inequality and injustice the condition of black is better than the past. Though explicitly the suppression and discrimination

is comparatively decrease from the past but implicitly they are still exploited and oppressed in work places, school and various social institutions.

The Color of Water gives an account of the race-relation between Jewish-American and Afro-American. Though, the conflict of race is ongoing issue in America such kind of text can helps to establish the mutual understanding and harmony among bi-racial people. In this memoir McBride highly appreciates his Jewish white mother. He gives the tribute to her through the memoir.

Critics have analyzed his memoir from different perspectives but this research analyzes from the perspective of African-American racism along with how racial Ventriloquism functions in the memoir and what is the significance of it? This research is dealing with the troubles and struggles of Afro-American and white Jewish immigrants in American societies who were facing same kind of discrimination and marginalized by main-stream Whites.

This memoir can convey a good message as well as a lesson to all people for living in harmony and minimizing the conflict and hatred among different races. As France Winddance Twine, *The white mother* argues that

The Color of Water provides a complaining compliment to these middle class narratives and lends a crucial context to their pioneering tone. Ruth was a poor Jewish woman who married black man and raised her twelve black children among extreme poverty in New York City. In the past, woman like Ruth appeared in the footnotes and margins of anthropological and sociological studies of black communities. So, this memoir is a significant work which details the American racial history. Ruth's silence speaks for many working class white woman and men who did not write and published their memoirs. But who do establish friendship, families and political alliances with people of

color.(1997)

As Twine states woman like Ruth was unnoticed and they never appeared in memoirs of their own but their role is vital. Due to Jamesher story is revealed and her good deeds and greatness is noticed. So, Racial Ventriloquism is a hall mark or medium to bring the voice of Jewish in English literature.It is also beneficial for the people of different color. Similarly, Jane Lazzare in his essay *Beyond the Whiteness of Whiteness* argues that:

The past decade has witnessed the birth of new literary genre: the memoir by a white mother of black children. Although most of its practitioners are academics schooled in sophisticated critiques of race and racism, their books intended for a non-scholarly audience.(144)

As Lazzare shows, McBride's memoir provides the humanitarian value of his white mother, through which he tries to remove the hatred among bi-racial people. In past decades such memoir was not published because black inks on white pages were challenging acts. So, James memoir can be taken as a new mood of autobiography where a black boy spoke out the voice of suppressed Jewish people. Moreover, he also shows that such memoir is useful for both scholarly and non-scholarly audience. James's writing incorporates the moral and humanitarian issues rather than race. Though he is resisting against white domination he resist through his memoir not through violence. He always gives more focus on mutual- relation among people of different races and he tries to convince that family love is a strongest thing by which we can fight against racism and can establish the peaceful society in which different color of people can live in harmony.

In the essay,*Crossing the Color Line:Race, Parenting and Culture* Maureen Reddy argues that, "memoir of a white mother by black son is exemplary instances of

this new mode of popular autobiography"(145). Hence, memoirs are part of the cultural production of the history. James's shows how popular such memoirs have become over decade even if they inter to non-scholarly readers. So, here his role is a Ventriloquist. In which one race suffering and life story is spoken by another person. As Glaser states,

Racial Ventriloquism is a form of cultural appropriation or commending it as an act of emphatic imagination. It can help to understand the larger anxieties about ethnic identity, authenticity and authorial voice that emerged in the wake of the Civil Rights Movement.(470)

Racism is a socially constructed phenomenon where James wrote this life narrative by moving beyond the conventional notion of race. As Glaser argues that it's a form of expressing cultural identity and authenticity of their voice which was unheard. The question of authenticity and anxiety of ethnicity is there in racial Ventriloquism. But the newness of his memoir gives justice to the Jewish culture and identity. Though he is a ventriloquist he portrays Jewish story very clearly by bringing the voice of his Jewish mother and expressing their shared experience of life.

The Washington Post Book World reviewed this memoir, "As lively as novel as well-written thoughtful contribution to the literature on race"(n.pg.). According to this newspaper review this memoir brings the evolution in the field of racism. It is taken as a contribution to the literature on race through the Ventriloquism. James explained Ruth's sacrifice and devotion rather than her color. This memoir is a powerful portrait of growing up, a meditation on racial identity as the son recaps the memory of mother. It is a story of two suppressed groups who fights together against racism for finding their identity.

The New York Times viewed this memoir, "All a time when the relationship

between African Americans and Jews is deeply fissured, *The Color of Water* reminds us that the two groups have a long history of existence-sometimes within a single person"(11).As stated in the review, this memoir plays the vital role in a history of America. The purpose of his writing was to protest against the ideology of suppressing black people as well as other minorities.

So, it worked as a medium to raise the voice of the voiceless people. This memoir is *New York Times* best seller for more than a year which is an evidence of outstanding theme of this memoir. James as a writer tries to counter and subvert the discourse created by whites over blacks. Similarly another critic H.Jack Geiger in *Rachel and her Children* highlights the newness of structure.

There are two voices in this complex and moving narrative and on the surface- they could not seem more different. Inevitably, these two voices are connected and ultimately convergent. For Rachel Shilky and James McBride are mother and son. And just as inevitably, their accounts are suffused with issues of race, religion and identity. (57)

As a boy in Brooklyn's Red Hook projects James McBride knew his mother was different. But when he asked about it, she'd simply say, "I'm light skinned". Later he wondered if he was different too and asked his mother if he was black or white then she replied, "You are human being". She snapped, "Educate yourself or you will be nobody!" And when James asked what color God was, she said, "God is *The Color of Water*"(57).

As an adult, McBride finally persuaded his mother to tell her story of Rabbi's daughter, born in Poland and raised in the south, fled to Harlem, married a black man, founded a Baptist Church and put twelve children through college. Then he wrote her life story through the memoir that she has faced the ocean of sorrows in her life.

Again, Geiger argues that, "*The Color of Water* is a James McBride's tribute to his remarkable, eccentric, determined mother and an eloquent exploration of what family really means" (10).

According to Geiger, those issues are so much a part of their lives and stories are not central. The triumph of this memoir and of their lives is that race and religion are transcended in these interwoven histories by family love, the sheer force of a mother's will and her unshakable insistence that only two things really matters love and church. Moreover, through those lines H.Jack Geiger states that this memoir is packed up with various themes and ideas of self-empowerment, endurance, faith upon Christianity, tenderness towards identity and all those theme gives strength and support to the struggles of a young black boy and a white Jewish mother living in a bi-racial family in America. And it gives more courage to speak for each-other.

This thesis is the study of the Afro-American writer James McBride's memoir *The Color of Water*. In this section I am elaborating the hidden purpose of racial ventriloquism. It focuses on the major characters James and Jewish woman Ruth. They are representatives of Afro-American, Jewish American and all the bi-racial people who are struggling for their freedom and identity in white society of America. Ruth and James are fighting for each other against the domination which they were facing through the years. In the memoir a black boy James himself is exploring his early childhood's bitter experience of being a black he was humiliated in many public places just because of his color. Moreover he feels odds because of his white mother who looks different with all the members of his family and his friends' mother.

On the basis of color blacks were always dominated and regulated by whites. Thus, this thesis analyzes the suffocation and struggle of the black people through which the autobiographer portrays the white American as superior to the blacks. It

also examines the issue of marginalized people who are subordinated from the time of slavery system and it also enhance the idea of revolution against the suppression through the lens of racial ventriloquism which only incorporates the issue of black and Jewish people who has been dehumanized by main-stream whites in America.

Memoir is a genre in which author gives the description of true past event of his private and public life. It's a collection of memories about the events and the experiences of author's life. Memoir is a non-fiction genre and it is written in first person point of view. According to Nancy K. Miller, "Memoir is fashionably postmodern, since it hesitates to define the boundaries between private and public subject and object" (198). *The Color of Water* is a memoir where writer describes his past life experiences and he shows the pathetic condition of blacks. He also demonstrates the picture of his painful past where he was always treated badly. As a black boy, he was dominated everywhere in America in terms of his color and race. So, this memoir provides the vivid details of starvation, poverty, beating and exploitation of black people by whites. Moreover, it also describes many incidents between Jewish American and Afro-American and how together they stand against racist society. And it also explain , how a black man and a white Jewish girl got married by going against the law of society and how they speak for each other through ventriloquism.

Race and color are the medium of dehumanizing people by stereotyping them, by denying them, their complexity on the basis of their physical, mental, moral, social and religious varieties, which is socially constructed notion. White race is regarded as superior to the black and white people always dominated and dehumanized black people by objectifying them. A black boy James suffered a lot from his early childhood because of his race and also because of his white Jewish mother. So in this

memoir writer draws the suppression, injustice, and identity crisis of African people in America. Along with this issue he also speaks on the behalf of Jewish American people whose condition is likely to African in America. He gives tribute to his white Jewish mother through the memoir. Through this memoir as a ventriloquist of all Jewish people he explores the suffering and struggle of Jewish people for their identity in his own voice. He did it not only because of his mother and emotional touch with her but in some ways they were experiencing similar kind of pain and they were going through same kind of crisis. Moreover they belong to same group. Ruth is double victimized person in a sense that she is dead to her white Jewish family when she got married with an African man. Later when she lived in black community with her husband she is hatred by Black people because of her color. James and his siblings were unknown about her originality. She was always mysterious to them.

The Color of Water written by James is highly dedicated to his mother and all the mothers from the world who bears all the troubles and pain for the sake of their children who gives more focus on humanity and education rather than color. So when James became adult and successful in his life then he asked the story of his mysterious mother then she revealed her painful past. As a Jew her childhood was not less painful than James. She said, "Jews who didn't leave before Hitler got through with Poland were wiped out in the holocaust" (3). So she was immigrated to America along with her family. Her father was very cruel person he abused his daughters and he misbehaves blacks and other poor and disable people. Ruth doesn't have her family life because there is no love among the members of her family, "My family mourned me when I married your father. They said kaddish and sat shiva. That's how orthodox Jews mourn their dead" (2).

When she married with Dennis her parents cut all relationship with her and

declared she is dead to them. This incident of her life illustrates the harsh issue of race in America. However, this thesis analyzes the suffocation and hardship of bi-racial people as well as shared struggle of Jewish and blacks. It also studies how Jewish and blacks are advocating for their right.

This thesis examines the issue of marginalized minorities who were subordinated from the time of slavery system to Civil Rights Movement and it also enhance the idea of revolution against the suppression through the lens of racial ventriloquism which incorporates the issue of black and Jewish who were dehumanized by white supremacy in America. There is always a risk of speaking one's voice by other which may possibly controversial. Diane E. Goldstein in *Rethinking Ventriloquism Untellability, Chaotic Narratives, Social Justice and the Choiceto Speak For, About, and Without* argues that,

Representational politics in folklore have continually emphasized the inclusion of multiple voices in our published texts, as well as the need to find more and better mechanisms to let underrepresented voices be heard. Over the years our strategies of representation have been criticized, however for focusing on the integration of marginal voices by sometimes choosing to speak on behalf of underrepresented communities, rather than letting them speak for themselves(18).

He states that when representing to other there is always a danger of misrepresentation. And here a black boy is representing Jewish suffering. There is also an immense danger of miss-representation. But I like to show the departure from his opinion that a black boy is a ventriloquist who speaks for Jewish people presents Jewish peoples' suffering and tries to get them out of it. Similarly, Ruth is presenting blacks' suffering and she explains the endurance of them. So, both of them belong to

minorities and suppressed group. They are experiencing same kind of pain and hardships. That's why there is no any risk of representation. As it is mentioned by Ruth in the memoir,

I had my own friend and he didn't care that I wore secondhand clothes or was Jewish....He never judged me. That's the first thing I liked about him, in fact that's what I liked about black folks all my life. They never judged me. My black friends never asked me how much money I made or what school my children went to or anything like that. They just said, Come as you are. Blacks have always been peaceful and trusting. I don't care what they show on TV, these stupid boys with guns and these murderers they show on the news. These aren't the majority. Most of the Blacks are peaceful and trusting.(123-124)

Ruth is explaining about her husband and other Blacks. This is what she thinks about Black people in America. She felt more comfortable with black people because they never judged anyone. She found blacks as suppressed and marginalized as Jewish people. Here Ruth and James role is ventriloquist and they speak for each other and advocating for Jewish American and Afro-American. Both of them are trying to show the hidden truth and reality about one another's race and history. And also trying to show that how they were misrepresented by white supremacy. Thus, there is not any chance of misrepresentation because both of them are marginalized and suppressed group and their purpose/aim is same that they are trying to establish their identity in America.

Furthermore, Diane E. Goldstein in *Rethinking Ventriloquism Untellability, Chaotic Narratives, Social Justice and the Choice to Speak For, About and Without* argues that,

In an excellent critique of representational politics in folklore- one modeled on

Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" –Susan Ritchie writes about the folklorist as Ventriloquist or one who presumes to speak on behalf of some voiceless group or individual. Ventriloquism, she writes, establishes the folklorist as a kind of medium or channeler, who presents the true voices of those otherwise lost to an audience so eager for diverse articulations that they fail to note this diversity issues from a single disciplinary throat. (367)

Here the protagonist gives tribute to his Jewish white mother who was a victim of racist society. By doing so the writer gives the voice to the voiceless people.

Therefore he is a ventriloquist in my research as explores the greatness of his white Jewish mother. And she represented all Jewish people who were struggling for their identity in America. According to McBride, she is a courageous woman who married a black man by crossing the boundaries of color-line which is constructed by white supremacy. She challenged the law by taking risk of her life because at that time the law was against inter-racial marriage. The case of Ruth and Dennis is similar with Mildred and Richard Loving because they crossed the boundaries and takes a step against law which banned the inter-racial marriage in America. In the text, *Virginia Wasn't Always Been For Lovers* it is stated that,

This book started out as a very simple law, I wanted to tell the story of Loving Virginia, the 1967 Supreme Court case that struck down laws banning marriage between people of different racial backgrounds. I fancied myself journeying to the Central point, Virginia to interview Mildred and Richard Loving, their attorneys, the state attorneys, other peripheral to the case, and the family, and to review the legal documents. Alas, nothing is as easy as it seems. Richard Loving died in automobile accident in 1974. Mildred Loving doesn't see what she did as partially heroic or even newsworthy. (11)

It shows a true life story of Mildred and Richard Loving who belong to different race and they wanted to marry each-other but law banned the inter-racial marriage in Virginia. They dare to marry each other by going against the law. After a long time of law processes and struggle, finally they got married. So, this book carries an account of a couple who shattered the law against inter-racial marriage in America. It also shows the strict law of America against inter-racial marriage. The case of Ruth and Dennis was quite closer to the case of Richard and Mildred Loving. Both of these couple challenged the law and got married by crossing the color line. Ruth is a victimized person of the law while she married an African-American man and lives in black community. She was double marginalized as well. Though there are thousand reasons to give up but she never did so instead of giving up she moves forward strongly without showing any pain. Though, she faced many tragedies in her life but she perfectly raised her twelve children. And she always taught moral lesson to her children. As a result all of them are very successful in their life.

The motivating factor of staying and struggling in black community is the love towards her children. We can see the mother-son loves in this memoir. As James mention in many place that his mother is a source of inspiration because she always taught the value of education and freedom. She used to tell him the equal importance of every individual. James internalized her faith and starts to realize the value of his life. Through the memoir, he explores the greatness of Ruth that she never tries to escape and ran away from her chaotic family condition. She assimilates herself within it.

Racial discrimination is a serious issue in America. Many groups of people were discriminated and victimized on the basis of colors. Black Power Movement, Civil Right Movement and various Movements have been taken place to dismantle the

prejudice against Black and to establish the equal opportunity to them. Afro-American, Jewish American and immigrants were always dominated by White supremacy in America. These groups of people are still fighting for their identity in America. In my research I carried the same issue of race relation and practices in America. And my research counter against racial discrimination through racial Ventriloquism, here, it is used as a kind of strong tool or means to fights against white domination towards blacks. Moreover, it's a hallmark to bring the voice of marginalized groups in literature. It's a revolution through the words for establishing the identity of blacks and Jewish in America. So, this research can help to minimize the discrimination among two races and establish the existence of blacks in white society. It can help to create a peace and mutual understanding among blacks and white people in all over the world.

The Color of Water is a documentation of person's, personal experiences and memories like every form of life narrative. But it bears the possibility to convey the greatest message for the world. Traditionally, autobiographical writing has been understood as a more reflection of one's past experiences. However, reading McBride's memoir upgrades the fact that the personal story with the lived experience is more likely to affect the public positively. It gets vindicated once McBride's memory is read.

This memoir incorporates with the view that the liberation of blacks and Jewish is possible only after the freedom of both groups. It depicts the notion of racial Ventriloquism that focuses indiscriminately on the experience of Jewish woman but desires the reconciliation of all the people.

The notion of racial Ventriloquism is directed to gives the voice to voiceless for the equality and demands for the society with racial harmony. For McBride, being

a racial Ventriloquist of his white Jewish mother is the best way to solve problems in white racist society. Though it challenges white supremacy but it seeks and moves towards the harmony and humanity among different races.

Black and Jewish peoples' suppression takes many forms in *The Color of Water*. James mother maintains her dignity by seeing things realistically and keeping to herself. Though Ruth struggles with insecurity and displacement throughout her childhood, she is a remarkable strong female role model.

James learns along the way of life by his mother. He feels like he is reborn in his life. He accepts all those struggles and challenges not as obstacles but as possibilities of growth that leading him to understand *The Color of Water*. At the end he realized and gives the message that love is only a way to overcome from the pain and established peace and harmony in the world.

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