

TRIBHUVAN UNIVERSITY

Identity Crisis in Jean Toomer's *Cane*

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This thesis entitled “Identity Crisis in Jean Toomer's *Cane*” by Mr. Tej Bahadur Singh has been submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University. It has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

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Abstract

Jean Toomer's *Cane* brilliantly portrays dislocation, isolation and identity crisis of educated Negroes living in north due to their strong attachment to white culture and way of life. It is about the anxiety and pain of educated black folks as they are inbetween push and pull of white and black culture, their sense of dislocation and isolation arise with the realization that they can neither be true white nor they can completely be aloof from African American heritage. In other words, *Cane* shows the difficulty of the educated black people to associate themselves with down-trodden, uncivilized and poverty stricken black folks who are considerably less advanced and civilized. In short, *Cane* shows how past continues to haunt the dreams and lives of the black intellectuals who have strayed far from their roots.

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I. Life and Works of Jean Toomer

Jean Toomer was born in Washington, D.C., on December 26, 1894, the son of Nathan Toomer, a planter, and Nina Pinchback, the daughter of Pinckney Bonton Stewart Pinchback, governor of Louisiana during Reconstruction and the first U.S. governor of African-American descent. Like his parents, Toomer could easily pass for white, his heritage comprising several European and African Bloodlines. Indeed, throughout his formative years until age eighteen, he lived alternately as white and as African-American. In 1895 Nathan Toomer abandoned his family, forcing Nina and her son to live with her somewhat tyrannical father in Washington. P.B.S. Pinchback agreed to support them only under the condition that the boy's name be changed. Though his name was not legally altered, his grand parents there after called him Eugene Pinchback; in school he was known as Eugene Pinchback Toomer. (Later when he began writing, he shortened his name to Jean Toomer)

When his mother remained in 1906, the family moved to New Rochelle, New York, where they lived in a white neighbourhood and he attended an all-white school. Toomer returned to Washington in 1909, following the death of his mother, and attended the all-black Durbar High School. After graduation in 1914, he renounced racial classifications and sought to live not as a member of any racial group but as an American.

For the next three years, Toomer studied agriculture, physical education, psychology, and literature at several colleges and universities. It was during these years, however, that he was preparing to be a writer, by attending off-campus lectures on naturalism, atheism, psychology, evolution and socialism and by reading numerous philosophical and literary works, such as those by William Shakespeare, George Santayana, Charles Baudelaire, William Blake, Sherwood Anderson, Leo Tolstoy,

and all the major American poets, especially the imagists. In 1920 he met Waldo Frank, who introduced him to several literary circles and later wrote an extremely laudatory introduction to the first edition of *Cane*. Toomer eventually became friends with many literary critics and luminaries, including Hart Crane, Sherwood Anderson, Malcolm Cowley, and Alfred Stieglitz.

Between 1918 and 1923 Toomer wrote the short stories “Bona and Paul” and “Withered Skin of Berries,” the plays *Natalie Mann* (1922) and *Balo9* (1922) and many poems such as “Five Vignettes,” “Skyline,” “Poemin C,” “Banking Coal” and “The First American.”

Symbolist and imagist aesthetics provided those equivalents, derived from both French and American sources. Of the French symbolists Toomer’s mentor was Baudelaire, whose *Petits Poemes an prose* provided models for the prose poems and lyrical sketches in *Cane*, of the American symbolists it was Walt Whitman, whose democratic idealism and mystical conception of the self appealed to Toomer’s idealist imagination. Symbolist idealism also figures prominently in his early fascination with imagism. In his attempts to fashion experience as a mystical moment of vision, and to create the immediacy and presentness of portraiture of literature, he found imagist aesthetics to be compatible with his own.

In September 1921, Toomer traveled to “Sparta, Georgia, where for two months he served as interm principal of the Sparta Agricultural and Industrial Institute. Living as an African-American in the rural South stimulated his racial consciousness, and he used this newly found identification with his racial past to create the poems, prose poems, lyrical narratives, and short stories in his lyrical novel and master-work, *Cane* (1923). While many critics have credited this work with ushering in the Harlem Renaissance, noting the book’s representations of African-

American characters and culture, others have located it within the Lost Generation, owing to its literary experimentation, its romantic primitivism, and its critiques of postwar values. Robert Bone, a critic, has noted that Toomer participated on equal terms with Gertrude Stein, Ernest Hemingway, Ezra Pound, and T.S. Eliot in the creation of a new, modern idiom during the 1920s and he ranks *Cane* with Richard Wright's *Native Son* (1940) and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) in the tradition of the African-American novel.

In 1925 the symbolist sketch "Easter" was published in *Little Review* and in 1927 Toomer completed a burlesque novel, *The Gallomwerps*, and a modern morality play, *The Scared Factory*. In 1928 he wrote the short story "Skillful Dr. Coville" while "Winter on Earth," another short story was published in *The Second American Caravan* and the short story "Mr. Costyve Daditch" in the *Dial*. In 1929 the poems "White Arrow" and "Reflections" appeared in the *Dial* and "Lettre D'Amerique," an essay on the election of Herbert Hoover as president and its impact on American values, was published (in French) in *Bifur*. In 1931 Toomer completed his long poem *The Blue Mmeridian*, a lyrical affirmation of democratic idealism modeled after Whitman's "Song of Myself", and *Essentials*, a book of orphorisms. In 1933 he wrote a closet drama on modernism and dehumanization, *Man's Home Companion*. In 1934 Toomer published an essay on spiritual development, "A New Force for Cooperation," in *Adelphi* and an essay tribute to Stieglitz titled "The Hill" in *America and Alfreia Stieglitz: A collective Portrait*. In 1934 he married Marjorie Content, daughter until his death. Because both of Toomer's marriages were interracial, they were highly publicized.

In 1935 Toomer dissociated himself from Gurdjieff after they argued over misappropriated funds. He and his wife then spent the summer in Taos, New Mexico,

where he wrote *A Drama of the Southwest*, a play that captures his mystical identification with the area's landscape in imagery reminiscent of *Cane*. When the Toomers moved to Doylestown Pennsylvania, in 1936, he established a Gurdjieff center, led groups modeled on Gurdjieff's teachings and gave lectures on spiritual self-development. During this time he published three monographs called "psychologic papers," *Living Is Developing* (1937), *Work-Ideas* (1937), and *Roads, People and Principles* (1939).

In 1938 Toomer began attending meetings of the Religious Society of Friends in Doylestown. Throughout his apprenticeship with this group, he immersed himself in Quaker religious philosophy and wrote numerous essays on George Fox and Quakerism. Still engaged in his perennial quest for new forms of higher consciousness, Toomer toured India between August and December 1939. During these months he began writing *The Angel Begori*, a novel that allegorizes a quest for spiritual enlightenment, and *The Colombo-Madras Rail*, a one-act play dramatizing poverty and the decline of spiritual authority in India. When Toomer returned to Doylestown in January 1940, believing that Quakerism provided a new and radical venture into the religious idealism of "Inner Light" consciousness, he joined the society of Friends. He quickly became involved in various Quaker activities, serving on four Friends committees in 1941 and as clerk of the ministry and counsel committee for Bucks county in 1943. In 1943, he was appointed to the ministry and counsel executive committee at the annual Friends conference counsel executive committee at the annual Friends conference in Philadelphia, and he served on the religious life committee in 1949.

Between 1940 and 1950 Toomer continued to write poems, such as "The promise", "They Are Not Missed", and "See the Heart", but his writings more often

shifted away from literary works to lectures, essays. Many of the essays, like “Santa Claus will not Bring Peace” (1943), “The Presence of Love” (1944), and “Blessign and Curse” (1950), were published in the Quaker journal *Friends Intelligencer*. After 1950 Toomer produced no literary works, as he began withdrawing from public life. After attending a talk on Gurdjieff in New York city in 1952, however, he committed himself to promoting higher consciousness, so he conducted workshops, so he conducted workshops in Doylestown until plagued by ill health in 1957. Following several years of invalidism, in and out of nursing homes and crippled by arthritis, he died in Doylestown.

Critical Review of Literature

Right from its first publication in 1923, Jean Toomer's *Cane* has been gravitating the attention of various critics. They viewed this novel from different perspectives. Peter B. High in *An Outline of American Literature* reflects the experience of black people in American society and beauty of them:

Cane (1993) by Jean Toomer, is the most famous work of the movement. *Cane* combines poetry with short stories. The first part is about black women in the South. Toomer sees a natural beauty in them. He describes girls doing hair in the morning: As they kneel there, heavy-eyed and dusky . . . they are two princess in Africa going through the early morning ablutions of their Pagan prayers. (195)

In the next section of *Cane*, he shows the feeling of uncomfortable and unfree, therefore his description, are full of locks and prisons: "There is a sharp click as she fits into her chair. The click is metallic like the sound of a bolt being short. The house contracts about him. It is a sharp-edged metallic house. Bolted to the endless rows of metallic house" (50).

Richard Ruland and Molcolm Bradbury in *From Puritanism to Postmodernism* express *Cane* as the initiation of black writing of the movement: Jean Toomer's *Cane* signaled the beginnings of the Harlem Renaissance of black writing and the radical voice sounded clearly, too, in the prose as well as the poetry of the Harlem Renaissance the such words as Jean Toomer's *Cane* (332).

Waldo Frank remarks the significance of southern land and its folk in *Foreword to Cane*:

‘This book is the south,’ declared Waldo Frank in the 1923 foreword to his friend Jean Toomer’s *Cane*. Toomer’s fresh, new treatment of southern folk, he averred, made *Cane* ‘a harbinger of the South’s Literary maturity.’ In *Cane*, ‘the Southland is not a problem to be solved; it is a field of loveliness to be sung: the Georgia Negro is not a downtrodden soul to be uplifted; he is material for a gorgeous painting.’ (139)

Reborn Brown comments *Cane* as a portrayal of Southern beauty, pain and black heritage:

Toomer confronts the black man with the pain and the beauty of his southern heritage. That pain and power to transform in into beauty in what the younger generation means by soul. It is Jean Toomer’s genius to discover and celebrate the qualities of soul, and thereby inaugurate the Negro Renaissance. (1436)

J. Lee Greene has clearly expressed in the book *The American South: Portrait of Culture* as:

Toomer’s ‘song of the son,’ the poem in *Cane* which best capsulizes the major theme in this largely autobiographical book, is a song of the ‘song-lit race of slaves,’ black American in general; the poem embodies the thematic approach the author takes to his material in order to produce a work which in essence is a spiritual and historical biography of black Americans. (284)

James D. Hart opines *Cane* as “a miscellany of stories, verse and a drama concerned with the emotional life of black people” (10).

Unlike Green and Hart, John Oliver Killens illustrates *Cane* as “a great work of experimental modernist literature to emerge during the Harlem Renaissance.” (40)

Nathan Irving Huggins states *Cane* as:

The essential of Negro identity rather than the circumstances of Negro life. He worked in symbols that served on the metaphors to allow a reader, whether white or black, to enter into the crux of those tensions that tugged at the Negro self. *Cane* stands apart because it was a self-conscious artistic achievement; the same cannot be said about any of the other novels associated with the Harlem Renaissance. (238)

Jean chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant comments in *Diccionario de loi simbolos* as:

Far from implying that evident and unequivocal signs of the author’s psychology are displayed throughout the place, the understanding of Toomer as the dreamer of “Kabnis” adds a profound layer of significance to the piece. “Kabnis” is not only the South, the “spirit and the soil,” as Toomer defined it, “Kabnis is the author, a symbol of its creator crafted by Toomer himself. And like true symbols, it gives and escapes as it clears itself up, it hides itself . . . it reveals as it veils, and it veils as it reveals. (16)

They highlight the character Kabnis psychologically significant of the spirit and symbols of its creator.

As expressed in “*Always You Heart*”: *The “Great Design”* of Toomer’s *Cane*, William Dow shows the recognition of multiple authentic voices of African-Americans:

Cane is a productive of rewriting of “race” allowing for the recognition of multiple authentic African American voices, identifications complicated by class, gender, and geography, and greatly enriched by the significant modulations in narrative address that Toomer undertakes. (60)

Robert B. Jones remarks in *Modern American Poetry: Jean Toomer's Life and Career* as:

Of the French symbolists Toomer's mentor was Bandelaire, who *Pettis Poemes enprose* provided models for the prose poems and lyrical sketches in *Cane*; of the American symbolists it was Walt Whitman, whose democratic idealism and mystical conception of the self appealed to Toomer's idealist imagination. (2)

Thus he located his opinion in the fact that symbolist and imagist aesthetics of equivalents derives from both French and American sources.

Many critics have tried their best to unfold the various aspects and approaches to fulfill the purpose of this text. Some of the critics have shown the experience of black people in life and beauty; a great work of experimental modernist literature and recognition of multiple authentic voice of African Americans. But the prime concern of this research is utterly alien to the issues of other critics. It tries to explore Kabnis and other black character's racially assimilated position and his identity crisis as a result of segregation, psychological and communal disintegration which is more of a struggle to separate his own impressions from the projection of the racist society around him.

II. Race, Racism and Identity with Reference to Afro –American literature

Race is the matter of culture and cultural history. It is a notion that divides human being into physical, biologically and genetically distinct groups on the basis of skin color. Oxford Learners Dictionary defines race as “any of several large subdivision of mankind sharing physical characteristics, e.g. color, type of hair, the shape of eyes and nose” (1030). The idea of race divides humanity into unchanging natural types on the basis of physical feature, more the practice of racial category brings forth the concept of superiority and inferiority. It is the human creation to rule over the weaker group of people. The motif of exploitation and domination is hidden behind the creation of the race.

The convention of categorizing mankind into different groups on the basis of their physical features can be traced in earliest human writing. In the earliest human writing, Appiah writes.

We can find more or less well articulated views about the differences between ‘our own kind’ and the people of other cultures. These doctrines, like modern theories of race have often placed a central emphasis on physical appearance in defining the other and on common ancestry in explaining why groups of people display differences in their attributes and aptitudes. (274)

In ancient time, Hebrews and Greeks thought themselves superior to others and their appearances, customs and language. Some classical writers idealized and at the same time other inferiorized the ‘Elhopians’. Martin Blumer and John Solomon summarize classical image of black in the following lines:

Throughout the history of classical literature elements of idealization and unreality appear in some descriptions of distant people, those in the far north and south. The distant regions of Scythia and Ethiopia, for example were at the same time the homes of fabulous creatures or wild and ferocious tribes at other times the inhabitants were characterized as a paragons of justice. (28)

Eighteenth century brought forth the concept 'Great Chain of Being' in order to rationalize the racial assumptions. Their attempt was to classify all living things and fit them into a hierarchy extending from man down to the smallest reptile, whose existence can be discovered only by the microscope, Biologist put white on the top, then yellow and finally blacks. Since there was no strictly scientific or biological justification for stating that one race was higher than another, the criteria of ranking had come from non- scientific assumptions. All of them put the white European variety at the top of the scale on the basis of European's achievement in art and science or even from the act that God had given the one true Religion to white. They link physical features to human achievement, culture and race.

In 19th century, racial ideologies became helpful to define blacks as slaves and savage in the south and deprive the Indians of the rights and opportunities. They took the help of medieval ideas to control and dominate the blacks in America. The recognition of race gave whites power and sense of superiority to black and other races. In the origin of species (1853), Darwin postulated the concept of race through natural selection. He accepted possibility for racial development (Eugenics).

The 20th century has brought remarkable transformations in the theories of race. The 1911 Universal Races Congress Organized in London, put forward the liberal thoughts and focused on monogenism - the notion that there is only one species

of man on earth. Similarly, Appiah believes that “such classification as Negro, Caucasian and Mongoloid are of no importance for biological purpose’ (277). In civil war, racial ideas in south rooted deeply because white people afforded hard to restore supremacy during and after the reconstruction period which caused racial violence and lynching .Race ideology was materialized through legislation, literature, movies and advertising.

Though, the historical ideology of race has vanished, the practice of the race and racism is still deeply rooted. Racial practices have developed in new way. The sense of superiority of their race is deeply rooted in the mentality of the people. Race in the modern world, has focused on individuals self perception in the fictional way. It encompasses numerous discourses such as inequality, segregation, discrimination etc. Theories of race keep on changing so as to trace new ways to dominate the racially others.

Theories of Racism

Racism is the doctrine that a man's behaviour is determined by stable inherited character deriving from one another in relations of superiority and inferiority. Besides, it is the matter of conscious belief and ideology that level one race superior to other. The Racial ideologies have successfully created and preserved unequal relationship between racial groups. It tries to connect physical traits to mental and moral characteristics. It is also taken as the prediction and policies on race for the sake of subordinating racially others and maintaining control over them.

Racism at personal level includes an individual belief that an entire racial group is inferior or superior on the basis of physical features linked with intellectual and moral characteristics. If these personal characteristics get connected with cultural institutions like religion, education and military institutions in order to exclude or include not a person but also an entire group, it takes the form of institutionalized racism.

Racism is generally known as the predication of decisions and policies on considerations of race for the purpose of subordinating a racial group and maintaining control over that group. "Race has been a cause of more misunderstanding and human suffering than anything else that can be associated with a single word in language" (Brace 116). It is in fact a prejudice conditioned by perceptions. In America, it has been the practice toward the black man. The practice as such is seen in two levels – individual and community. In individual level, individual whites act against individual blacks and in community level the total community acts against the black community. The first is related to death, injury or the violent destruction of property whereas the latter is less destructive of human life and originates in the operation of established

and respected forces in the society, and this receives far less public condemnation than the first type.

When a black family moves into a home in the white neighborhood and is stoned, burned or routed out, they are the victims of the act of individual racism which is condemnable by many people. But when hundreds of babies die each year because of lack of proper food, shelter and medical facilities, and thousands more are destroyed and maimed physically, emotionally and intellectually because of conditions of poverty and discrimination in the black community, they are the victims of the act of institutional racism. Institutional racism keeps black people locked in dilapidated slum tenements as slumlords, merchants and discriminatory real estate agents. The society either pretends it does not know of this latter situation or is in fact incapable of doing anything meaningful about it. A National Council of Churches work group has summarized this institutionalized racism:

Both consciously and unconsciously, racism is enforced and maintained by the legal, cultural, religious, educational, economic, political, environmental and military institutions of societies. Racism is more than just a personal attitude; it is the institutionalized form of that attitude. (qtd. in Feagin, 3)

Moreover, institutional racism relies on the active and pervasive operation of anti-black attitudes and practices. A sense of superior group prevails in this type of racism. The statement “whites are better than blacks, therefore blacks should be subordinated to whites” is a racist attitude and it permeates the society, on both the individual and institutional level.

Racism is not a stable ideological form consisting of the same assumption for a long period. It accepts the new scholarly ideas to be maintained in the society. Rather rejecting all the epithets of singularity, it prefers different shapes and different political relations. “Racist ideologies and practices have distinct meanings bounded by historical circumstances and determined in struggle’ (Gilroy 248). The struggle of racist ideology takes itself to the attachment with other forms of ideology. As a result, racism arises with its distinctive characteristics and shapes.

Contemporary form of racism i.e. new racism attaches to the concepts like patriotism, nationalism, gender difference, xenophobia, etc. These concepts give a way to a definition of race in terms of culture and identity.

The nations like Negro race in inferior race which lacks social organization and social action, social fellow feeling, originality of thought and artistic qualities and shows no tendency toward higher development, the Negro race is powerful in physique, strong and normal in intellect and has not achieved a higher social and intellectual civilization, reflect the racist attitude. The principles of Race Orthodoxy like “the white race must dominate; the negro is inferior and will remain so, this is a white mans’ country; no social equality; no political equality; let there be such industrial education of the negro as will best fit to serve the white man; let the lowest white man count for more than the highest negro” (*Racism* 16) are the essentials of racial creed and action, say Prof. Thomas Pearce Bailey. Regarding this Stonely Carmichael and Charles v. Hamilton say, “Racist assumptions of white superiority have been so deeply engrained into the fiber of the society that they infuse the entire functioning of the national subconscious . . .” (*Black Power* 31). Thus, racism is ubiquitous and it informs every level of discourse in American society.

The American race situation is very important because it is the most complex and dynamic. It possesses every element of the other phases and more. Here it challenges the further progress of Christianity and civilization in the foremost democracy of the earth. Here it presents the acid test to the culture of the most modern and progressive branch of the white race. Reflecting the factors of American race prejudice George W. Ellis says:

In the United States race prejudice is predicted upon the belief that the colored race is naturally inferior to the white race, physically, intellectually, religiously, socially and morally. As a matter of fact, it is actually based upon the advantages, temporary and imaginary, which the white groups believe they derive from this superior attitude to the colored groups economically, politically and socially. A historical study of these beliefs discloses that two powerful factors have contributed above others to the abnormal American situation and that in their broadest sense they are ethnological sociological. (*Racism* 11)

Thus, in America the practice of racism is much more deep-rooted. Though the society is itself plural, only the binary projection of whiteness and blackness is much more practiced. Afro-Americans are understood racially “Others” more strongly than the Native Americans and the Asian Americans the latter, too, are culturally different than Anglo-Americans.

Reflection of Racism in Literature

Literature is said to be the mirror of society. The racial matters found in the society are the main concerns of the study of race in literature. In the classical period, individual character counted rather than the skin color to determine person's worth. Homer's *Iliad* and the works of pre-Socratic Sophists focused upon individual behaviour as the important factor of individual's value. In Elizabethan England, Moors and Jews were the most despised citizens. Differences in races are found especially in Shakespeare's *Othello* and *The Merchant of Venice* and Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*.

It is from the turn of the nineteenth century that race formed an important body of literary writing. Appiah writes:

For literary purposes, the developments that begin at the turn of nineteenth century have another immediate consequence: race becomes important at the theme of great body of writing in Europe and North America – and, indeed, in the rest of the world under the influence of “western” cultures and the concept of race plays a crucial role in structuring plot. (279)

The book *Ivanhoe* (1819) by a Scottish writer, Sir Walter Scott, incorporates racial theme. There is hatred between Anglo-Saxons, the original inhabitants of Britain and Norman rulers. Scott presents Anglo-Saxons as noble and downtrodden and Norman aristocracy as lawless and corrupt. James Fenimore Cooper in Europe became popular as “the American Walter Scott”. He wrote *Leatherstocking Tales* which incorporates five tales: *The Pioneers* (1823), *The Last of Mohicans* (1826), *The Prairie* (1827), *The Pathfinder* (1840) and *The Deerslayer* (1841). Race fighting and

prejudice especially between whites and red Indians was very strong until the end of nineteenth century. Cooper makes these racial matters constant theme throughout the series. Herman Melville's *Moby – Dick* (1851), to some extent, carries racial theme. In the ship, Pequod, there are crew with multi-racial origins, from white to black. Pip, a Negro boy is dominated by the crew and isolated in the ocean.

Many American women raised their voices against slavery and women suppression. Lydia Child, a leader of this network published the first anti-slavery pamphlet *An appeal in Favour of that Class of American called Africans* (1833). Angelina Grimke and Sarah Grimke moved to North for the rights of blacks and women. They drew parallels between racism and sexism in letters and essays. Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote probably the most popular American book of the nineteenth century *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852). Abraham Lincoln greeted Stowe with, "So you're the little woman who made the great war" (Qtd. High 73). The novel talks about an old black slave, Uncle Tom who hopes to get freedom but never escapes from his slavery. It assisted to strengthen the campaign in the North against Southern slavery.

Harriet Wilson wrote the book *Our Nig: or, Sketches from the life of a Free Black, in a two storey white house, North showing that slavery's shadows Fall Even There* (1859). The novel realistically portrays the marriage between white woman and black man, it also describes the difficult life of a black servant in a wealthy Christian household. Born as a slave in North Carolina, Harriet Jacobs published "Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl". It condemns the sexual exploitation of Negro slave women. Frederic Woughess brought his "Narrative of Life of Frederic Woughass, an American Slave" (1845) into publication. The slave narrative was counted as the first black literary prose genre in the United States. It helped blacks establish an African identity.

Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* (1884) concerns racial theme, the novel deals with love and compassion between Huck and Jim, between the black and white. Huck, an escaped slave and Jim float down the Mississippi River on a raft. During their trip in the various towns and villages along the way, Huck comes to know the evil of the world. Meanwhile, Huck faces a big moral problem because he is violating the laws of the white dominated society. He determines to break the law, thinking that slave is also a human being, not a 'thing'.

William Faulkner was born to an old southern family and was raised in Oxford, Mississippi. He exposes the history of the land and many races such as Indian, African-American, Euro-American and various mixtures living on the land. His *Light in August* (1932) depicts how racism has made white community of the South mad. The major character Joe Christmas, who is of mixed black and white blood, belongs to neither race. Sad and confused, he kills the women who had protected him. In Faulkner's *Absalom, and Absalom!* (1936), Thomas Stupen plans to establish a great family but faces tragic fall through racial prejudice and a failure to love.

The struggle of African-Americans for their human and social rights became one of the most important themes in twentieth century American history. Though Abraham Lincoln abolished slavery system of blacks, their position in American society remained very bad. African-American society remained very bad. African-Americans achieved the literary development in the forms of protest literature, autobiography, sermons, songs and poetry. Booker T. Washington, educator and prominent black leader of his day grew up as a slave. He became popular for his relentless efforts to better the lives of African-Americans. His autobiography, "Up From Slavery" (1901) recollects his experiences as a slave. W.E. Bois in his essay

“Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others” praised African-American culture and tradition. Of mixed white and black ancestry, James Weldon Johnson examines the complex issue of race in his fictional “Autobiography of an Ex-coloured Man”. The book effectively imparts the African-American identity in America. Charles Waddell Chesnutt authored two collections of stories, “The Conjure Woman” and “The Wife of His Youth”. He reflects the ethical norms and radical solidarity of the black community.

During the exuberant 1920s, Harlem became the national centre of African-American culture, including the arts of theatre, dance and music. The African-American jazz became widely praised as beautiful music. Langston Hughes was one of the important poets of Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s in the company of James Weldon Johnson, Claude Mc Kay and Countee Cullen. He popularized African-American jazz rhythms. His poem, “The Negro Speaks of Rivers” glorifies his African Heritage. Zora Neale Hurston, one of the writers of the Harlem Renaissance, in her work “Their Eyes Were Watching God” evokes the lives of African-Americans in the South.

Richard Wright in his *Uncle Tom’s Children* deals with the violence of the Southern white society against blacks. In his novel, *Native Son*, he describes the violence in a black man. The central character, Bigger Thomas, murders a white woman and then murders his own lover. *Until Native Son*, black writers had always depicted blacks as victims of white violence. He insists that the social status of blacks causes them to become violent, too. His short story “The Man who Lived Underground” (1945) reinforces the theme of identity crisis of African-Americans.

The second half of the twentieth century brought a renaissance to multiethnic literature. Ethnic studies initiated during the 1970s. In 1980s, a number of academic

journals, professional organizations and literary magazines concerned about ethnic groups were begun. By the 1990s, conferences for the study of specific ethnic literature had started. Hispanic Americans such as Gary Soto, Alberto Rios and Lorna Dec Cervantes flowed minority poetry. They wrote of the departed ancestors and their ancient Mexican roots. Native Americans have created good poetry. Simon Ortiz explores the contradictions of being a native American in the United States. His poetry deals with the violence and injustice practiced by Anglo-American and seeks for racial harmony. Contemporary Afro-Americans have resisted racial stereotypes producing many beautiful poems. Michael Harper describes the complex lives of Afro-Americans. His “Clan Meeting: Births and Nations: A Blood Song” (1971) emphasizes the image of racial prejudice. Many Asian-American poets explore cultural diversity. Chinese-American Cathy Song in her “The Vegetable Air” (1988) projects multicultural life.

James Baldwin and Ralph Ellison reflect the African-American experiences of the 1950s. Their characters suffer from the crisis of identity. Baldwin wrote *Another Country* exploring the racial issues and homosexuality. Similarly *Nobody Knows My Name* (1961) incorporates a collection of passionate personal essays dealing with racial prejudice. Ralph Ellison in *Invisible Man* (1992) embodies the same concept as Wright used in the “The Man Who Lived Underground”. *The Invisible Man* is invisible because people blinded by prejudice cannot see him. Toni Morrison in her *The Bluest Eye* (1970) depicts the white hostility on black characters. Similarly, her *Song of Solomon* (1977), *Tar baby* (1987) and *Beloved* (1987) concern black and white relations.

In this way, the racial issues have become the constant theme of literature especially in the United States of America. American culture projects a hierarchy of

white and black culture. The differences among people play a vital role in forming our values and identities. So long as the racial differences last, the literary study and production will rest upon the theme of race. Appiah writes:

Differences among peoples, like differences among communities within a single society, play a central role in our thinking about “who” we are, in structuring our values, and in determining the identities through which we live . . . And so long as it continue to be a preoccupation, not only of the literary history of nineteenth century and twentieth centuries, but also of future literary production and literary study. (287)

So racial differences, prejudice and inequality have helped enrich the creative potentialities of the authors.

Racism in American-Soil: South And North

Blacks in the United States have been affected by racial oppression throughout history, and it still influences their daily lives. It has become part and parcel of the daily routine of living. Whenever we talk racism and its practices in the United States of America, both the Southern and Northern region appear as the dominant playground of racial discrimination. With the arrival of the European settlers in America, they brought with them some menial labourers from the west coast of Africa and later this little population increased very swiftly. As a result, the whole northern and southern parts of America including some of European continent became full of black population. From this period onward the relationship between the whites and blacks developed as that of master and slave respectively.

The south as agrarian region had the more demands of the laborer for the cultivation of the soil. As a result south, in a sense, became the real home of the mass blacks as they toiled hard in making south a beautiful place. They gave toiled hard in making south a beautiful place. They gave south new shape by clearing the forest, cultivating the soil and building the houses. Legally, the cultivated land was never their own but it is tragedy that they became slaves and received second class treatment. The whites invented the myth to oppress the blacks on the basis of so-called natural inferiority. Their labour was valued but they were dehumanized. Though they developed their intimate ties with the south, they became foreigner in their own dreamland.

The life of blacks during the slavery is characterized by extreme pain and misery sexual exploitation and inhuman treatment became rampant. The separation of father and mother slaves on the one hand and their separation with their children on the other was a common phenomenon. The slave holder held the total power as a

result the victim was helpless. Physical torture and mental agony was day to day experience in the lives of black slaves. Masters used to take pleasure by whipping a slave. It is what Douglass explains in his work. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*:

I have often been awakened at the dawn of the day by the most heart-rendering shrieks of an own aunt of mine, whom he used to tie up to a joist and ship upon her named back till she was literally covered with blood. He would whip her to make scream and whip her to make her hush, and not until overcome by fatigue, would he cease to swing the blood-dotted cow skin. (15)

It was the experienced of black slaves in the Southern Plantation land where oppression, exploitation and severe punishment were common. During the post-bellum period, the ex-slaves of the south moved to the north as an industrial labourer. So that they may attain the freedom and material success. But North, too, could not fulfill their wishes. In fact, blacks' Journeys from South to North is nothing more than "out of the fire into the melting pot" (Ellison 150). Everywhere blacks suffered from the loss of identity and social recognition and, then, they were dehumanized. As an industrial labourer, they felt the sense of alienation and frustration with their contemporary existence. They could not get equal level of opportunity, freedom and wages as the while labourer. The practice of racism was too severe even in the North. In the North, the average black population suffered not only from the hands of whites but even well to do blacks were ready to exploit the poor blacks. As a result they had to exploit the poor blacks. As a result they had to bear the double oppression. It is what Morrison's character Pouline experiences after her migration to North.

"Northern coloured folk was different too. Dicty – like, No better than whites for

meanness. They could make you feel just as no count, 'cept I didn't except it from them" (Morrison 117). Though in the surface level North appeared as a free land but underneath reality was something different. Freedom and equality were displaced by the practices of racial prejudice. Entrance into the public place, voting rights, equal level of wages was not available to the blacks. Discrimination was everywhere in social, political and economic level of the life. As a result blacks were forced to lead a miserable life. They spent their lives in the ghettos and poverty became their common lot.

During the presidential year of Abraham Lincoln, blacks were declared free from slavery and equal level of opportunities were pronounced even to them. The slave trade disappeared during the first half of the 19th century but the master-slave relationship between whites and blacks has replaced by "other forms of unfree labour such as indentures, share cropping, debt bondage" (Bulmer and Solmos 10). Thus again slavery was continued in the form of unfree labourer. Blacks were still made dependent and subordinate to their masters or the owners for whom they worked.

After the declaration of emancipation, blacks move to north for better opportunities and freedom but they felt themselves alienated and isolated in new urban life. Again in north they faced the problem of identity crisis, sense of dispossession and fragmentation. So in order to gain new identity they started to internalize white norms because it was the only alternative available to them but it caused the split in black self.

They tried to see the black self through white glasses. In fact, it was impossible task which brought the tragedy in their lives. This very tragic state is explained in Du Bois' *The Soul of Black Folk*. He says that the black people were "born with a veil, and gifted with second sight in the American world – a world which

yields him no true self – consciousness, but lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world” (364). Due to this they felt divided within themselves as they could not reconcile their divided selves into single self. The southern rural self and the new urban self could not find real adjustment. Rather there was conflict and people felt regional displacement.

The practice of Jim Crow Law and racism had made their life miserable in the south. But in the north the situation was no less tragic. As Beavers says that in the new urban area “they find their bodies transformed, citified, urbanized as distinctively metropolitan” (84). The so-called rumour about the value of labour in the north turned out to be quite deceptive. In fact, blacks’ journey from south to north was from plantation labourer to the industrial labourer. They became slave in both social systems. The major problem with the black race is that their African – American norms, values and cultural heritage, has been marginalized and dominated by the mainstream white culture. In course of different historical events blacks have started to internalize white cultural values so that they may be well accepted in the society. In fact, herein, lies the root cause of their misery. It is because neither they can totally reject their own cultural roots, nor are totally able to internalize white cultural norms. As a result they feel themselves. Their desire to have white selves in black is nothing more than mimicry.

Racial Identity

Identity involves intense desire for recognition and quest for visibility. Identity becomes an issue when a doubt and uncertainty replace fixed, coherent and stable assumptions. The scope of identity encompasses the study of class race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, culture and sub- cultures. Cornel West regards identity as matter of life and death .He writes:

Identity is fundamentally about desire and death .How you construct your identity is predicated on how you construct desire for recognition; quest for visibility; the sense of being acknowledge; a deep desire for association . . . then there is profound desire for protection, for security, for safety, for surety. (15-16)

Identity creates subject position which can't be entirely fixed in a closed system of differences for example the difference between black and white; majority and minority existence. Chantal views identity as a constant movement of over determination and displacement in the following lines:

The 'Identity 'of such a multiple and contradictory subject is therefore always contingent and precarious temporarily fixed at the intersection of those subject positions and dependent on specific forms of identification. This plurality ,however, doesn't involve the 'coexistence', one y one , of a plurality of subject positions but the constant subversion and over determination of one by the others, which makes possible the generation of 'totalizing effect' with a field characterized by open and determine frontiers. (153 – 153)

Similarly, William James expresses his opinion that a subjective sense of identity is a sense of sameness and continuity. In the Briefer course, he writes; “each of us spontaneously considers that by ‘I’ he means something always the same” (63).

Regarding human character and awareness, he says:

Mental or moral attitude in which, when I came upon him, he felt himself most deeply and intensely active and alive .At such moments there is a voice inside which speaks and says: ‘This is the real me’ such experiences always includes an element active tension, of holding my own, as it were, and trusting outward things to perform third part so as to make it a full harmony but without any guaranty that they will. (199)

Therefore, a grown up person has intense desire to establish self awareness of his identity, freud notion of identity is closer o James. He focuses the inner identity of human being .He says: “inner identity that he shared with the tradition o Jewry and which still was at eh core of his personality, namely, the capacity to live and think in isolation from the compact majority” (273). Both James and Freud claim that an individual achieves self awareness of his identity and visibility in a society.

A person faces identity crisis when he / she isn’t permitted to act and live according to him own will for his reorganization, visibility security and a good status in the society, Jean Toomer’s *Cane* unfolds the identity of educated black follow who have been familiar with white and their way of life.

Identity Crisis with Reference to Afro- American People in America

When African people migrate to American, they didn't get equal rights, opportunity and freedom in American soil. They were discriminated and behaved as if they were beast while, American political, social and economic systems provide boundless opportunities to whites. Afro- America try to preserve their culture and traditions but white people and their culture marginalized them. The trends of imitation and assimilation of white and its cultural heritage by the black increased. Gradually, blackness vanished when black people became more conscious about material comforts. They started following white way of life and culture as they get formal education from white educational institute. Thus black intellectual could neither forget their past, heritage nor could totally assimilate with main stream culture. Thus, their self is split and divided and are facing the pain of identity crisis.

Southern black literature since the turn of the century has shown that the Southern black character who lives close to his natural surroundings in nurtured and sustained by forces which minister to his spiritual being. His soul (a term with multiple meanings in black American culture) is shielded from the dehumanizing and spiritually deafening onslaught of a 20th – century materialistic and technological culture, a culture that some right term the “New South” and others might view as a thinly veiled “Old South.” It is within the contest of 20th century artistic expressions of primitivism or the 19th century back-to-nature aspect of romanticism that Southern life as it affects Blacks is treated positively. While his soul is nourished by his natural environment, the body of the Southern black character is victimized by “the Man,” by the white South which tempts him with its increasing materialistic assets. Tempted and then seduced by the tantalizing rewards of the new society's materialism and technology, the black character is primed for the destruction of his body and soul

when he tries to gain access to the fruits of this society through its social, political and economic institutions.

In *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois points out, “The History of the American is the history of this strife – this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double-self into a better and truer self” (365). An American Negro has two identification, two thoughts, two souls. He has strong desire not to lose his older self and to create better self which could lead him to impasse; he would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro people. The reason behind his ambivalent location is his education in white academic institute and acquaintance with white alluring cultural values. He is black by blood but as he is educated and familiar with white way of life; he no longer prefers the black community which is barbaric and uncivilized. His soul doesn’t get solace ever if he despise the black and their barbaric way of life because he finds no safe place in white community as well. Because he has unconscious fear that he is no more white hence can’t be as of white people. Darwin Turner illuminates inability to confirm neither of racial categories in *The Wayward and the Seeking: A Collection of Writings by Jean Toomer*:

We are in the process of forming a new race, that I was one of the first conscious members of this race I had seen the divisions, the separatisms and antagonisms. Yet a new type of man was arising in this country – not European, not African, not Asiatic but American. And in this American I saw the divisions mended, the differences reconciled . . . (144)

Toomer is like diaspora in his own country. He is diaspora because he is in between black and white culture and cultural values. He can’t totally identify himself

with uneducated, primitive and uncivilized black folks he has gone too far from the black cultural heritage and the way of life. He loves his culture but can't stay among people who implement his cultural values. He is a graduate man from white college. He has lived most of his life with white folks. As a child, he lived with his mother who married to a white man. As a result, he is closely got acquainted with white values and the way of life.

Similarly, he can't totally identify with white because he is in reality a black man having black man's blood and heredity. His original identity is black. So, he can't think himself white. Both cultural values are pulling it in their own imagines to create new race, named human race so that he could get his strong recognition in the society. Jean Toomer in *The Crock of Problems*. "Jean Toomer: Selected Essays and Literary Criticism" puts forth the idea that:

I am at once no one of the races and I am all of them. I belong to no blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes for a man to be both a Negro African as well as an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of opportunity closed roughly in his face. He becomes neither an African nor an American but an African – American. (17)

Like his parents, Toomer could easily pass for white, his heritage compromising several European and African bloodiness. Indeed, throughout his formative year until age of eighteen, he lived alternatively as a white and as a African-American. Thus, he was equally familiar and exposed to both black and white community. Biologically, he is a hybrid, having both black and white blood in him. In Washington, he grew in a white community. And he got his education from all black Gernet Elementary school. His familiarity with two different words black and white,

he from his childhood developed double-consciousness. That is his partial attachment to black people and their world and his partial exposition to white world. Because of this double consciousness or recognition, he failed to identify either of own community, he remains ambivalent. He tries to identify with several races and cultures.

Joel B. Peckham in *Jean Toomer's Cane: Self as Montage and the Drive toward Integration* exposes a human montage in which various elements were integrated within a single individual:

I am at once no one of the race that races and I am all of them. I belong to no one of them and I belong to all. I am, in a strict racial sense, a member of a new race. This new race, of which I happen to be one of the first articulate members, is now forming perhaps everywhere on earth, but its formation is more rapid and marked in certain countries, one of which is America . . . Heredity and environment will combine to produce a race which will be at once interracial and unique. It may be the turning point for the return of mankind, now divided into hostile races, to one unified race, namely, to the human race . . . (277)

Toomer being multiethnic subject has no stable racial identity. He neither wants to associate himself with black community nor can adjust to white of them and I belong to all ... Heredity and environment will combine to produce a race which will be at once interracial and unique. I may be the turning point for the return of mankind, now divided into hostile races, to one unified race, namely, to the human race (53-59).

Never comfortably identifying himself with any one element of his racial heritage, Toomer acts out his racial anxieties while attempting to deconstruct a stable racial identity in *Cane*, two notions that are not incompatible. To accept one element would be to reject the others; it would be like chopping off limbs. At the same time, however, integration of different racial groups was simply not a viable option at this point in American history, precisely because of the racial hostility that Toomer points out in his self-description. Thus a sense of unstable racial recognition causes an identity crisis in life.

III. Identity crisis in Toomer's *Cane*: A Textual Analysis

Cane is the productive rewriting of 'race' allowing for the reorganization of multiple authentic African American voices, identification complicated by class, gender and geography. *Cane*'s three sections records an emergence of radical ethos and identities of modern life. Part one contains the narrator striving to restore race and southern beauty to a metaphorical position and equal to soul while at the same time he expresses the impossibility of sustaining such creation because they are complicated by the poverty and horrible plight of the blacks in American soil. Toomer's lyricism of south and beauty of his race has been poisoned by the prostitution, dirt, random sex, poverty, racial antagonism and savagery. Donald B. Gibson has insisted that far from being a monument of black American utterances, *Cane* is the "response of one for whom black life was too much to bear" (172).

Southern lyrical world is represented by the southern African American women. Peckham views these women as: "Metaphors they are ambiguous and multitextured. They are representative of southern black lyrical world that is dying: they are the object of male desires: they are the battle ground on which white and black males contend for dominance and validity" (283).

Toomer describes Karintha as a representative of southern lyric and myths.

Her skin is like a dusk

Can you see it

Her skin like dusk

When the sun goes down (4)

She is not only the symbol of lyrical world but also a mysterious woman whom no male could fathom. Her beauty is compared with perfect dusk when the sun

goes down. Karintha is a woman men don't know the soul of her was ripened too soon. In addition to this she was prostitute and had committed infanticide and was a means to sooth the sexual passion of young man. "She had been married many times old man reminded her that a few years back they rode her hobby horse upon their knees. Karintha smiles and indulges them when she moods of it. A child fell out of her womb on a bed of pine needle in the forest" (4-5).

The black innocence, lyricism has been frustrated by random sex, backwardness and irrationality. Toomer, though has inner desire to be one with his own cultural heritage, he couldn't adjust himself in such a barbaric community.

Joel B. Peckham has pointed out:

Toomer: discomfort with his connection to black American his nevertheless strong sense of with that world, his intellectual understanding of social reality, and his desire for integration of all fragmented elements of his own psyche – all these pull and push against one another in *Cane*, creating a drama of longing and frustration . . . (278)

Cane's part two centers on the fragmentation, uncertainty and multi social position of the new urban black communities that the narrator attempts to 'reconcile' but with which he can't totally identify. The shift in time and place to Washington, D.C. and Chicago in the second section intensifies the narrator's need to anchor the self and emblemizes impossibility of sustaining the coherence and unity among the black and white people. Besides, the narrator becomes multi-personal and reflects the fragmentation and shattered quality of those urban people. Toomer himself passes the remarks about the life of North as: "The life in [Washington D.C.] becomes more

conscious, more restless and hence more complex. But the soft loveliness of the city street, the rich warm taste of dark-skinned life and music and rumour give a pervasive sub tone which is distinctly of the south” (South 14).

Blacks living in North attempt hard to create whole. They strive to regain the beauty of their race, culture and lyricism. But what they found was different kind of sterility. The threat to humanity here is in people’s attachment inorganic objects and property, in their enslavement to the abstraction like civilization and its conventions and in their alienation from the past which spawned them. Inanimate symbols command most of these stories. Object dominates people forcing a kind of death; “Robert [sounds like robot] wears a house, like a monstrous driver’s helmet, on his head . . . rods of the house like antenna of dead things stuffed prop up in the air” (55). Void and sterility takes place due to the separation from the cultural past. They are continuously tugged by the forces of their culture. The Irony is that they can’t restore it as they have been familiar with the white culture and civilization. The confinement of city makes them aloof from their past. In chapter ‘Avey’ the speaker is confronted with Avey’s impenetrable nature. He attempts to fill the void in his understanding with words:

I pointed out that in lieu of proper channels; her emotions had overflowed into path that dissipated them. I talked, beautifully I thought, about an art that should be born, an art that would open the way for women. I asked her to hope and build up an inner life against coming of the day. I recited some of my own things to her. I sang, with strong quiver in my voice, a promise song. And then I began to wonder why her hand hadn’t once returned a single pressure. (87)

In the body of the woman, speaker finds a place in which *Cane* - field sending a breeze blowing north to the city. Thus *Cane* field is the massive metaphor for the speaker's ancestral past. It is important to note that the speaker is unsuccessful in his attempt to give Avey a center. She doesn't realize her motive to rescue from her present life which has been uprooted due to her contact with white people and urban way of life. In fact, his words don't inspire her to follow his footsteps rather they make her get "unreachable realm of sleep" (Peckham 284). Due to her sleep, he couldn't give continuity to his desires: "Then I looked at Avey. Her heavy eyes were closed. Her breathing was as faint and regular as a child's in slumber. My passion died. I was afraid to move lest I disturb her. Hours and hours, I guess it was she lay there. My body grew numb, I shivered. I coughed" (64).

Still, the women in the novel represent the possibility of unification for the various elements in the text. Through consummation of sexual desire and birth they possess the capacity to receive all things through sexual activity. And because of this capacity they have the potential to produce, through miscegenation, the unification of black and white. Most of the women are objects of desire for members of races different from their own or they have the children of another race. Women are metaphorized as the consummation. Joel B. Peckham regards them as "representative of narrative's fundamental drive toward integration. In a sense, their reproductive capacity gives the women in *Cane* a superhuman, almost whitmanesque quality" – (280). These women connect cultural past of Negroes and rootless condition of present. Toomer intentionally mystifies and lyricizes the African women in *Cane* as Janet M. Whyde has pointed out:

The body of the woman meditates between the past and present, the ideal and real. The various characters function not representative as

individuals but as a signs to be interpreted and reinterpreted. As such “woman” in the first part is obliterated and transformed through interpretation by an outside agent – the narrator/speaker/ or male characters within the individuals sketches – into metaphor. The woman body is continually transformed into poem/songs in such a way that it becomes the narrative’s direct link to African American origins. (9)

Like woman, southern black males are intensely mythological; they are also lyrical. In ‘Blood Burning Moon’ for example, Tom Burwell, although instinctively skeptical of language, exhibits a lyric propensity: “Words is like the spots on-dice: no matter how y fumbles em, there is times when they jes wont come” (56). Reading *Cane* carefully, one becomes aware that Toomer has mystified not just the women but the entire southern African American realm as a lyric contrast to the superficial realm of Northern white culture.

Women like Carma are important to Toomer because they represent what Kristeva would term the main object presence in the sequence – a presence that “disturbs identify, system, order, “that doesn’t respect the borders, positions and rules. The inbetween, the ambiguous, the composite” (11). Without such characters there could be no hope of a breaking down of the social order that separates blacks from the whites, the lyric from the realistic. People like Karintha, Carma, Esther, Lousia, Avey, Fern, and even Bona are all figures willing to cross social borders. By making these central characters inherently transgressives Toomer makes us to identify them and their drive towards transgression and integration.

The desire for integration represented by these characters is, however never satisfied in *Cane*. Joel B. Peckham points out about failed attempt for integration in the following lines:

Whenever the prosaic world of white and the lyric world of southern blacks come into contact, whenever transgression is achieved, integration is frustrated. The result of transgression is either disastrous or violent or simply blocked by a reaffirmation of social order that seeks to contain and separate.

When Paul decides to accept Bona, she disappears; when Esther attempts sexual union with Barlo, she is mocked; when a white and Blackman desire the same woman, the result is a fight, a murder and a lynching; when a white woman has two black children she is first ostracized by society and then destroyed the house built to contain her. In every case, the controlling force of white society prevents any social changes.

Characters keeps on striving to forge wholeness out of the fractured relations between the black and white community he thought to be black, but apparently multi-racial like Toomer himself, Paul wishes to bring to his consciousness the natural and racial beauty of the south:

Paul follows the sun to a pine – matted hillock in Georgia. He sees the slanting roofs of gray unpainted cabins and tinted lavender. A Negress chants a lullaby beneath the mate-eyes of a southern planter. Her breasts are ample for the suckling of a song. She wears it, and sends it, curiously weaving, among lush melodies of *Cane* and corn. (73)

Paul affords hard to create racial wholeness which he must create not only to attain self-understanding but to come together with his racialized community. In doing so, he fashions his own racial authority and completely figuralizes his relations to his white community and white friend. Similarly, Bona Hale, a white southern

woman in love with Paul, can't transcend the racial tradition that implies her. As Helbing writes, "Bona's ambivalence the attitude of others, and Paul's ambivalence as to his racial identity contribute to the tensions he experiences. Paul however, respond to rather than avoids, the racial emotions that Bona chooses to deny (140). Paul's intense yearning to bridge the fragmented self in North is best described in following lines:

A strange thing happened to Paul. Suddenly he knew that he was apart from the people around him. Apart from the pain which they had unconsciously caused. Suddenly he knew that people saw, not attractive in dark skin, but difference. Their stares giving him to himself, filled something long empty within him and were like green blades sprouting in his consciousness. There was fullness, and strength and peace about it all. (77)

Green blades not only bring Paul to an artistic reenvisioning of the south and make him "cool like the dusk, and like the dusk, detached but signal his fragmented self." (75) Fullness, strength and peace that he gets due to the touch of southern African American people are momentary. Being a urban Negro, he always get the pain of being rootless. The narrator takes us to Paul's futile attempt to create a racial and communal harmony. William Dow, points out the pain of being unable to create racial harmony in following lines:

In the closing moments of 'Bona and Paul' after addressing the black doorman as "brother" (80) Paul takes the role of the narrator and in his narratorial capacity refers to the narrate as "brother" (80). Typically, like, *Cane's* narrator, Paul in the closing paragraphs, while unable to

effect his desired harmony, personalizes his relationship with narrate and actual reader. (50)

These black folks who are the inhabitant of North feel lack of secure self. They neither identify themselves with black folks who are relatively far less advanced nor they can adjust with white folk because their past continuously tugged them. In other words, their education in white educational institute and their familiarity with white way of life make them hate the uncivilized life style of colored folk. Their inner contradiction and frustration of being rootless has been described in Du Bois Dusk of down.

The young educated Negroes show here vast interpretations. He willn't sit in a street car beside a Negro, he willn't frequent a negro church; he will join few, if any Negro organization. On the other hand, he will take every opportunity to join in the political and cultural life of the whites. But he pays for this and pays dearly. He so often meets actual insults or more or less veiled rebuffs from the whites. Then, he becomes nerves and truculent through expectation of dislike. They suspect that he is ashamed of his race. (691)

Black-educated folks have been Diaspora in their own land. They are in between the two cultural boundaries. They are putting their legs in two distinctive cultures at a time. As a result, they feel insecure as they can't get warmth of their culture. black people in this section are unhappy because they are being pulled and pushed by black and white cultures.

Third section of *Cane* is closet drama in which we find setting of rural Georgia. In this section, narrator returns to rural Georgia from the urban environment

of Washington D.C. and Chicago. Unlike the preceding parts, characters like Kabnis and Hansby are highly educated professors. They have received their formal education from the white university of North. Kabnis the mouth piece of Toomer returns to south hoping to teach black folks and be one with them McKay insists that “Toomer places himself at the center of Kabnis” (84). Like Jean Toomer who disdains to connect himself with black folk, Kabnis too failed to establish link with them. The African American way of life southern environment and physical contact with Negro woman couldn’t sooth him. In other words, they couldn’t resurrect him. The first section of the drama portrays Kabnis’s isolated subjectivity. He is a weak, lonely person with confused mentality. As his mentality is confused and fragmented, he calls himself that he is no more real Kabnis. He finds his double selves working forcefully within him: “Kabnis: Now whoever you are, my warm glowing sweetheart, don’t think that the face that rests beside you is the real Kabnis. Ralph Kabnis is a dream. And dreams are faces with large eyes and weak chins and broad brows that get smashed by the fists of square forces” (114).

Within him are working the black and white selves. Both of them are equally powerful as a result he can’t favor one at the cost of other. He couldn’t sleep because south is unfamiliar to him. He feels lack of security in south. He gets disturbed by the cackling hen and noise made by rats which stands for the rustic lives of the southern Negros. Besides, the beauty of southern environment and his race couldn’t please him. He is made dumb and falls to his knees: “Kabnis is about to shake his fists heavenward. He looks up and night’s beauty strikes him dumb. He falls to his knees. Sharps stone cut through his thin pajamas. The shock sends a shiver over him. He quivers. Tears mist his eyes. He writhes” (116).

Being a highly educated man, he doesn't adjust himself in the environment of Negroes. The beauty of south tortures him because he finds himself standing nowhere. He doesn't become one with his ancestor's culture and way of life. The familiarity with white and white education becomes curse to him. The beauty of Georgia vanishes abruptly when he sees the unwashed niggers and their stinking houses: Kabnis hopeless utters:

God Almighty, dear God, dear Jesus, don't torture me with beauty.
Take it away. Give me an ugly world. Ha, ugly. Stinking like
unwashed niggers. Dear Jesus, don't chain me to myself and set these
hill and valley, heaving with folk songs, so close to me that I can't
reach them. There is the radiant beauty in the night that touches and ...
Tortures me. Ugh. Hell. Get up, you damn tool Hogs pens and chicken
yards. Dirty red mud. Stinking out house what's beauty anyway but
ugliness(116)

The hopelessness, agony and frustration of Kabnis results from his realization that he has been cut off from his root. His ambivalence stance is source of his agony and torture. In other words, his unstable cultural identity makes him psychologically weak and tormented. Edmunds Susan describes plight of Kabnis as:

A light-skilled Northerner who return to his ancestral home in rural Georgia to teach school. Upon his return, Kabnis begins to suffer in both mind and body from the family history that has conjoined the bloodlines of master and slave. At the heart of this history lies a deadly contradiction in the culture of respectability, which simultaneously promises and denies African American heritage. (160)

Kabina's agony and pain of being failure to connect himself with rural folks is stemmed from his association with the codes of an aristocratic and bourgeois tradition of gentility. The beauty embraced the codes of white traditions Susan views his connection to white people as the cause of agony and confusion in following lines:

But he also posses connection between this weapon of white supremacy and social and moral codes that many middle-class black activists were fighting to defend. In his portrait, Kabnis is defeated as much by his eagerness to embrace the codes of an aristocratic and bourgeois tradition of gentility and by his denial of the violence these codes have visited upon black families as he by any external threat of lynching. Kabnis's genteel ambitions further cut him off from the resources of southern black oral tradition, resources that many middle class African American were intent on disowning . . . (165)

Though Kabnis, like other educated black folks, has strong attachment to white people and their world, but he is still longing for the assimilation and integration with his colored community. His past grips him. He wants to uplift the black race. Though, he tries to live as white but he couldn't forget his cultural Heritage. "Impotent nostalgia grips him" (117). The more he wants to escape from the grip of the past, the closer he reaches into the trap of his nostalgia. Examining the life of common black folks in Gorgia, Kabnis says: "Negroes within it are content. They farm. They sing. They love. They sleep. Kabnis wonders if perhaps they can feel him. If perhaps he gives them bad dreams. Things are so immediate in Georgia" (177).

He finds big gaps between his colored folks and him selves. They are closer to their culture. Their self hasn't been fragmented. Under the cultural warmth, they sing, dance, and love. But Kabnis can't sleep, and can't get relaxation because he has a bad

dreams; dream to be close to white people: dream to live a civilized and advanced life. The *Cane*-field fails to please him. Toomer juxtaposes calm and happy life of rural folks with the restless and barren life of Kabnis. Narrator says:

Kabnis can't sleep. Light a cigarette. If that old bastard comes over here and smells smoke, I am done for. Hell of note, can't even smoke. The stillness of it tortures me . . . How did I ever land in such a hole? ugh. One might just as well be in his grave. Still as a grave. Jesus, how still everything is. Does the world know how still it is? People make noise. They are afraid of silence. Of what lives and God of what dies in silence. There must be many things moving in silence. They come have to touch me. I swear I feel their fingers. Come, Ralph, Pull yourself together. What in hell was that only the rustle of leaves, I guess. (118)

He is speaking to himself. He creates double consciousness or double selves. In fact, there is no one to listen his utterances. His one self is consoling him while another one is being agonized as it wants to hear and feel the dead things moving in the silence. That is his past heritage that he has left behind. As he was in deep agony due to which he can't sleep. His double self, tries to make him calm: "Ralph, go in and make yourself go to sleep. Come now . . . in the door. Put the poker down. Think nothing . . . a long time . . . nothing. Don't even count. Nothing . . . blank . . . nothing . . . blank . . . space without stars in it. No, nothing . . . nothing" (119).

Edmunds, Susan finds Kabnis as an alien figure: alien with the Southern culture and tradition. He describes Kabnis as:

A newly appointed professor and aspiring poet, he hopes, quite literally, to speak himself into being. Kabnis stakes this ambition on his inherent claim to the title of gentleman orator, whose word holds sway in the patriarchal enclave of home and elected assemblies of the state. But as the leading men in the Sempter are quick to point out, the power of commanding speech is precisely the power denied Kabnis as a Blackman in the south. Though their intervention, Kabnis's identification with a gentle white "family of orators" gives a way to an involuntary and phobic identification with the brutally silenced black family, haunted by an unspeakable history of sexual violation, bastardly, and lynching. (160)

Kabnis frustration and restlessness becomes more and more intense. Kabnis keeps on uttering the words 'Hell'. In fact the hell is within himself not out there. Kabnis, being the uprooted subject fails to realize that source of beauty lies "foul rays and bone shop of heart". Toomer describes him as a promised of soil-soaked beauty; uprooted, thinning out. Suspended a few feet above the soil, whose touch would resurrect him (126). At the drunken party he tells Lewis and Halsey that "some twisted awful thing has taken possession of his soul and he has to feed it with words. Not beautiful words. God Almighty no. Miss happen Split gut, tortured, twisted words (127). This failure is emphasized in a scene during which Layman, a local preacher, describes a lynching against a background of church spirituals. Suddenly a woman's voice swells to shouting. Kabnis hears it. His face gives way to an expression of mingled fear, contempt and pity" (139).

In fact, the narrator integrates into Kabnis. Unlike, Carma, Fern and Karintha whose minds the narrator can't penetrate, the narrator does know the mind of Kabnis.

He describes Kabnis as an outsider as a poet who wants to become the “lips of the mouth” as a ridiculous pathetic figure in his showy robe (110). The first section of drama according to William Dow portrays:

The first section in the drama portrays Kabnis isolated subjectivity, which is countered in the following section when Kabnis comes into contact with the community with communal contact, mostly among sempter’s black men, Kabnis searches for the security of self and identity of racial self. (81)

But Kabnis fails to find this self and to integrate into the community of “peace” (86). Instead, he feels “suspended a few above the soil. He dreams to give words and enjoy with his people but he can neither reconcile the culture of North and South nor even in moments of lightened self-consciousness, dare to face his racial past. Lieber has pointed out that “Kabnis with the memory of the past, he can either deny and let die an impotent and meaningless death” (192). Kabnis doesn’t want to associate himself with black folk. He openly claims that his ancestors were southern blue bloods.

Lewis: The old as symbol, flesh and spirit of the past, what do you think he would say if he could see you? You look at him, Kabnis.

Kabnis: Just like any done of preacher is what he looks like to me. Jam some false teeth in his mouth and crank him, an you have God Almighty spit in torrents all around the floor. Oh, hell and he reminds me of that black cockroach over younder. An besides, he aint my past my ancestors were southern blue-bloods

Lewis: And black.

Kabnis: Aint much difference between blue and black.

Lewis: Enough to draw a denial from you can't hold them, can you?

Master: slave soil; and the overarching heavens. Dusk: dawn. They fight and bastardize you. The sun tint of your cheeks, flames of the great season's multicolored leaves, tarnished, burned, split, shredded; easily burned. No use. (108-109)

Kabnis rejects his association with father John and blackness in himself. In other words, his denial of father John is a denial of the richness of the past. Scruggs, Charles has explained Kabnis as a cursed, alienated and pathetic figure in following lines:

Kabnis has become a cursed and alienated man. The rejection of father John and blackness in himself is closely related to his failure as an artist. Like Stephen Daedalus in Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a young Man*, Kabnis wants create something beautiful but he is appalled by the actual ugliness surrounding him. He can't reconcile the rednecks, red mud, rats, and with the beauty of natural world. (283)

Kabnis, being familiar with the advanced way of life of the North doesn't like the dirt and uncivilized rustic beauty and innocent way of life of black folks. His failure to create harmony between his civilized life and rustic life is the main cause of his agony and pain in his disgust and pain, he calls father John, The dead blind father of muted folk, "you old black Fakir". Father John was uttering word 'sin' but he couldn't hear it and couldn't understand the implications because he was light-skinned, intellectual and civilized Northern Negro who couldn't realize the value of their ancestors.

With disgust Kabnis couldn't understand what father John was saying. He misread him because his mentality was confused and poisoned with the touch of white norms and values:

Father John: Sin

Kabnis: Aw, shup up old man.

Carrie K: Leave him be. He wants to say something (she turns to the old man)
what is it, father?

Kabnis: What is she talking that Old deaf man for? Come away from him.

Carrie K: what is it, father?

The old man's lips begin to work. Words are formed incoherently. Finally he manages to articulate –

Father John: The sin what's fixed . . . (Hesitates)

In this regard, Charles W. Scruggs writes:

Kabnis reacts to; this platitude with disgust, calls father John "you old black fakir." (160). But he does not really hear what father John has to say: perhaps the truth would be too awful to bear. The lie that Father John speaks of is the myth that Negroes are the descendants of Cain. Kabnis's tragedy is that he accepts the white man's lie. The curse placed on him isn't his Negro blood but his own self-hatred. He fails to realize the implications of "that bastard race that is roaming round the country" (283).

As Kabnis has dual mentality, his physical contact with black women couldn't please him. He tries hard to escape from the grip of Cora a black woman who sexually tries to soothe him. In spite of being happy, he curses himself and finally submits to

her: “Cora glides up, seats him, and plumps herself down on his lap, squeezing his head into her breast. Kabnis mutters. Tries to break loose. Curses. Cora almost stifles him. He goes limp and gives up. Core toys with him. Ruffles lies hair. Braids it parting the middle” (156).

Next morning, Kabnis crumbles and sinks to his own knees. He fails to reconcile himself with black folks. Neither beauty of Gorigan and cool breeze coming from *Cane*-field nor the body of the Negro women could bridge his split soul and identify. Due his failure, he feel ashamed and exhausted (164) because he has strayed for from him roots. In this connection, Charles W. Scruggles writes “The *Cane*-fluted doesn’t die in North, it continues to haunt the dreams and lives of those who have strayed far from their roots (286).

IV. Conclusion

The most important motif in *Cane* is that is of hatred, isolation, dislocation and identify crisis of educated Negroes living in North. They are confused and feel lack of security because of their failure to connect themselves with their colored folks. The main cause of their agony and spilt identity is their strong attachment with the white people and their so-called advanced and civilized way of life. The anxiety and sense of dislocation arise with the realization that they can neither be true white nor they can forget the African American cultural heritage. In other words, they find difficulty in assimilation with down trodden, less civilized and poverty - stricken black folks who are considerable less advanced and civilized. These black intellectuals are inbetween the pull and push of white and black culture. In fact, they are diaspora in their own homeland.

The first part *Cane* contains narrator's attempts to restore the race and southern beauty. His attempts to be one with African American folks and understand them remain unfulfilled. He couldn't fathom the women like Karintha and Carma. Lyricism of the south and beauty of his race has been frustrated by the prostitution, dirt, random sex, racial antagonism and savagery. These women represent the lyrical world of south. Problems arises when the narrator fails to reconcile the lyrical world of south with the advanced and technocratic world of North Narrator's education from white educational institute and his familiarity with white people hampers him to reconcile himself with black folks.

Cane's second section, unlike the first one, centers on the fragmentation, uncertainty and identity crisis of the new urban blacks communities. We find the confused, anxious black people who are attempting to forge the whole. The shift in time and place to Washington D.C. and Chicago intensifies narrator's need to anchor

the self and emblemizes the impossibility of sustaining the coherence and unity among the black and white people. Besides, the narrator becomes multi-personal and reflects the fragmentation and shattered quality of those urban people.

Black living in the north attempts hard to create whole out of the fragmentations. They strive hard to bridge their fragmented selves and regain the beauty of their race, culture and their lyrical world. Quite contrary to their expectation, they found different kinds of sterility and threat to humanity. For example, when Paul decides to accept Bona, she disappears. When Esther attempts sexual union with Barlo, she is mocked. When the white and black desire the same women the result is a fight, a murder and a lynching when a white has two black children, she is misbehaved. Similarly, the attempt of Paul to create communal and racial harmony ends in futility.

In third section, narrator returns to rural Georgia from the urban environments of Washington D.C. and Chicago. Characters unlike the previous parts, are highly education professors. Kabnis, a black intellectual returns to Georgia hoping to teach black people and be one with them and get cultural warmth. But quite contrary to his hope, black people and their way of life torture him. At night, he couldn't sleep. His restlessness is stemmed from his failure to adjust himself with cultural milieu of south. The African American, way of life, physical beauty of North and physical contact with Negro women couldn't sooth him. His education and attachment with way of life become a curse to him. As his mentality is confused and self is split, he couldn't get pleasure of being own with his black folk and their way of life. In fact, two distinctive selves are working forcefully with him. Being unable to reconcile them, he becomes restless and falls in his knees. "Impotent nostalgia" grips him. The more he wants to escape from the grips of his past, the closer he reaches into its trap.

At the end of the drama, he calls father John, the ancestor of his race, black fukir and remains confused and tries to pull himself together.

Thus, *Cane* portrays pain and agony of the educated blacks who neither identify themselves with white nor can adjust themselves with down-trodden and poverty stricken African American people because of their attachment with white people and their so-called civilized way of life. The problem of dislocation, isolation and identity crisis take place when educated people try to imitate and internalize others way of life.

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