

I. General Introduction

This present research work is an attempt to find out the protagonist, Milkman's quest for cultural identity in Toni Morrison's novel *Song of Solomon*. Milkman moves from selfish and materialistic dilettantism to an understanding of brotherhood and friendship in the course of the novel. He is in search of self-identity between the altruistic values of his aunt and materialistic values of his father. His father advises his son to be obsessed with materialistic values. But feeling confused and dissatisfied, Milkman embarks on a journey during which he discovers the myths, songs, and the legends that contain his family history. He also learns the importance of community, and the nature of love and faith. This mood reflects Milkman's transformation which is spiritually bounded. At that moment, he travels from innocence to awareness, i.e. from ignorance of origins, heritage, identity and communal responsibility to knowledge and acceptance. Here, Milkman's portrayal of spiritual transformation is blending of fantasy and reality with frequent representation of myth and folktales.

Milkman begins to discover the richer and more remote dimensions of black life that his father has drained from their home. Increasingly dissatisfied with his soft, limited life and his dependency on his father, Milkman decides to set out on the search through the South for a purported bag of gold that is connected to his father's and Pilate's childhood and which he hopes will make him more independent. He soon realizes that he is really on a search for his family history and culture which are far greater treasures, full of strength and joy as well as suffering and pain. This quest in turn becomes a spiritual journey of great energy, depth and exhilaration as

Milkman learns for the first time of the contingency of life, the capacities and contingencies of human existence.

Toni Morrison, the outstanding living figure in contemporary American fiction, was born on February 18, 1931 in the multiracial steel town of Lorain, Ohio, U.S.A. She has won the international acclaim for works in which she examines the role of race in American society. By using the unconventional narrative structures, poetic language, myth and folklore, Morrison addresses such issues like black victimization, the emotional and social effects of racial and sexual oppression, and the difficulties African Americans face in trying to achieve a sense of identity in a society dominated by white cultural values. From her parents and grandparents, Morrison received a legacy of resistance to oppression and exploitation as well as an appreciation of African cultural practices. She recalls the cultural ritual like music, ghost stories, signs and visitations that are so vividly evoked in her writings. These ideas become prevalent and empowering forces throughout her life. The influence of such values is clearly seen in her early life that makes Morrison's commitment to inscribing the characteristics of modes of black cultural expression in her prose.

Literature was an important presence in Morrison's childhood and youth. As an adolescent, she read widely in a variety of literary traditions, counting the classics, Russian novelists, Gustav Flaubert and Jane Austen among her favorites. However, she was not exposed to work of those previous generations of black women writers until adulthood. Morrison graduated with honors from Lorain High School. She later attended Howard University from which she graduated in 1953 with a major in English. She describes the Howard years, during which she changed her name to Toni, with some measure of ambivalence. In 1955, Morrison received an M.A. from

Cornell University. She then began to teach English at Texas Southern University from 1955 to 1957 and at Howard from 1957 to 1964. At Howard she met and married with Harold Morrison. Morrison says little about her marriage but has remarked upon the sense of frustration she experienced during the period. In a result, she divorced her husband around the time she left Howard with the two young sons, she returned to Lorain and began to work as an editor for a textbook subsidiary of Random House in Syracuse, New York in 1966 and a few years obtained an editorial position at Random House in New York City. She was instrumental in publishing the autobiographies of such figures as Muhammad Ali and Angela Davis as well as the fiction of such African American authors as Toni Cade Bambara, Henry Dumos and Gay Jones. She left Random House in 1977 to focus on teaching and writing. Then she has taught at such Yale University, Bard College and Princeton University.

As an African American writer Toni Morrison has written many novels. Among them Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970) focuses on Pecola Breedlove, an eleven year old black girl, who believes that she is ugly and longs for blue eyes. Her fixation turns to insanity, however, after she is raped by her father and subsequently gives birth to a premature baby who later dies. Pecola eventually withdraws into a world of fantasy, believing that no one has eyes as blue as hers. In this work, Morrison addresses the conflict between black identity and white cultural values, the social repercussions of marginalizing impoverished members of American society, and the psychological and emotional effects of victimization. Remarking on the techniques, structure and theme of the novel, Unger Leonard in his book *American Writer: A Collection of Literary Biographies* says:

The Bluest Eye centers on a young black girl Pecola Breedlove, who goes mad because of the combined weight of her feeling of ugliness and the experience of being raped by her father. The novel illustrates the destructive potential of a culture over invested in rigid conception of beauty, propriety, and morality. The novel specifically addresses the psychological and political implication of black people's commitment to a standard beauty and order that are unattainable. So the structure of *The Bluest Eye* underscores the proliferation of stories and narrative voices within the novel. (364)

Response to *The Bluest Eye* was positive, with critics praising Morrison's exploration of complex themes, her accessible narrative, and her use of poetic language.

Nominated for a National Book Award in 1974, *Sula* (1973) begins with a brief account of the bottom, the community within which the novel is set. It traces the lives of two black women from childhood to maturity. Nel, the more conventional of the two, marries and has children, while Sula goes to college and travels. Although considered an inspiring symbol of freedom by some members of her community, Sula is also perceived as evil because her actions suggest that she can be violent, heartless and malicious. During the course of the novel, for example, she drops a young boy to his death, watches with interest as her mother dies by fire, and seduces Jude, Nel's husband. While some reviewers maintain that Nel and Sula represent good and evil, others interpret the relationship between the characters as representative of an intrinsic conflict experienced by black women: the conflict between the desire to rebel and the urge to conform. So, Sula is situated in a place associated with change and loss. Deborah E. McDowell in her critical essay "The Self and the Other: Reading

Toni Morrison's *Sula* and the Black Female Text" opines that "*Sula* as a work questions the existence and construction of unitary self defined in opposition to an 'other'. Indeed, at every turn in the text, Morrison interrogates the ground upon which individual and collective identities are constructed" (77).

In *Song of Solomon* (1977), her most widely acclaimed novel, she shifts her focus from female friends to male friends, expands her gallery of images, and evokes a folk myth as she continues to focus on themes of a world in which love is deformed and social class clashes with social class.

Morrison uses the protagonist, Milkman to demonstrate the inadequacies of human love in all conceivable relationships. Milkman's father, Macon Dead, Jr.; did not want him to be born; but, with the fact of birth, a reality, the father wants to mold Milkman into a materialistic, class-conscious replica of himself. Having used him to sublimate her sexual urges by nursing him far past the usual age of weaning, Milkman's mother submissively slips into the role of a servant to a young prince, even though his older sisters object to the fact that they are required to act in a comparable role. Maturing, Milkman exploits his female cousin sexually and tries to rob the aunt whom his father has taught him to condemn. Adventuring in search of the treasure of his grandfather, the original Macon Dead, Milkman begins to learn the foibles of pride in materialistic possession. He discovers love in family and community as he basks in the townspeople's memory of his grandfather and as he abandons his sense of class superiority in his desire to immerse himself in a community of black men.

Set in the isolated West Indian Island of Isle de Cheval, *Tar Baby* (1981) focuses on the relationship between Jadine and Son. Jadine, a black model who was

educated in Paris, is vain, materialistic, and alienated from African-American culture and her parents, who work as servants. Son is a young drifter from Florida who avoids social hierarchies and is critical of the corruption associated with wealth and power. As the novel progresses, Jadine must decide between Son, to whom she is passionately attracted, and a wealthy white man who has proposed her. Critics generally interpret *Tar Baby* as an examination of the conflicts that can arise when one attempts to deny one's past. Catherine Rainwater in her essay, "Worthy Messenger: Narrative voices in Toni Morrison's Novel" says, "Each of Son's invented identities, in fact, seems discretely separate from the others, as his final escape into the spirit realm seems disconnected from all parts of his earthly existence" (105). Although some commentators found *Tar Baby* obscure and claimed its characters lacked motivation, most praised it for its provocative themes and complex symbolism.

In *Beloved* (1987), Toni Morrison traces out the history of slavery. Set near Cincinnati around 1873, it records the fortune of Sethe once a slave on the Sweet Home plantation in Kentucky. Because of gross mistreatment, a number of the Sweet Home slaves plan to escape. Sethe sends her three children ahead, and then gets through herself after great hardship. A child is born to her in route with the assistance of a poor white girl after whom the baby is named Denver. Sethe murders her own child due to the fear of her daughter's slavery. Later, the house is haunted by the ghosts of her murdered daughter. Through the use of flashbacks, fragmented narration, and myth, Morrison details the events that led to Sethe's crime and her refusal to seek expiation from the black community. Carol Iannoe in her essay "Toni Morrison's Career" remarks, "The graphic description of Physical humiliation begin to grow sensationalistic and the gradual unfolding of secrete horror has an

unmistakably Gothic dimension which soon comes to seem, merely lurid designed to arouse and entertain” (62). While some critics have contented that Morrison’s depiction of violence and humiliation in *Beloved* are melodramatic. Most regard the reneam of slavery and its psychological manifestation as among the most affecting in contemporary American literature.

Jazz (1992) chronicles the tempestuous relationship between Joe and Violet Trace, a black couple from Virginia who move to Harlem in 1906. While the novel is set twenty years later when Joe and Violet are settled and content, Morrison uses flashbacks to reveal that Joe once shot and killed an eighteen-years-old girl with whom he had an affair. In this novel Morrison addresses such themes as jealousy and forgiveness, and depicts 1920’s Harlem as a symbol of freedom and excitement for many African Americans. Michael Doris in his essay, “Singing the Big City Blues” has stated that *Jazz* is “a novel about change and continuity, about immigration: the belongingness you leave behind and the tied-together suitcase you carry under your arm. It’s about coping with arrival in destination that doesn’t let you stay the same person” (12). While critical reaction was generally positive. Some commentators found Morrison’s improvisation narrative structure disjointed and confusing.

Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination (1992), Morrison’s first work of literary criticism was, first presented as a series of lectures at Harvard University. Maintaining that black characters in classic American have been marginalized by literary critics, Morrison seeks to expand the study of American literature through an area of study she calls American Africanism. Critics have praised *Playing in the Dark* as a thoughtful and original examination of how literary criticism has perpetuated and ignored the racism in American society.

As the main concern of the present research work is Morrison's *Song of Solomon*, it would be better to analyze what other critics, reviewers have said about it. *Song of Solomon* has received bulk of critical commentaries and responses from many writers, scholars and critics. Some of them have focused their commentaries on gender and racial discrimination, black cultural dimension, myth and magicity on the one hand, and on the other hand, their commentaries are related with the narrative technique, portrayal of character, trend and tradition of Afro-centric literature and morality and religious aspects. Among them, Roger Rosenblatt in his *Black Fiction* has opines that Afro-American fiction tends towards myth:

Because of acknowledgement of external and the anticipation, Afro-American fiction focuses towards myth. Morrison has always offered mythic possibilities in her emphasis on natural cycle, bizarre events, and narrative echoes. The mythic sensibility does seem to fit her view of the difficulties of freedom. (221)

Along with the myth, her writing is deeply concerned in her own black folk roots and the community in which she grew up. Moreover, her text is informed by her mother's stories, her tribe, and her ancestors--Africans and African-Americans. Morrison's attention to writing oral antecedents extends further than her precise recreation of the voicing of her community. Willentz Gay in his essay, "Civilization Underneath: African Heritage as Cultural Discourse in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*" remarks:

Her works incorporates the use of African American folktales, folksongs and legends. *Songs of Solomon* based on story she learned from her maternal grandparents is imbued with folk myths and legends

from the African diasporas. Most important is the tale of flying back to Africa. (63)

Here, it is common legend throughout the new world about Africans that who either flew or jumped off slave ships as well as those who saw the horrors of slavery when they landed in America, their anguish was sought to fly back to Africa.

Linden Peach, the editor of *New Casebooks: Toni Morrison* in the very introduction assures Morrison's moral responsibility towards a wider black community in *Song of Solomon*. Peach assures:

The concept of moral responsibility in *Song of Solomon* is not the same as that normally found in white American fiction. The moral vision underpinning the narrative fuses the reclamation of a black cultural legacy with responsibilities towards a wider black community. (6)

Here, Morrison through the Milkman makes the responsibility carried on in moral ground. The quest motive in the *Song of Solomon* is highly dominant issue. On the basis of this idea Ann Hulbert in her essay "Romance and Race" views this novel as the quest of self-understanding:

At her best, as in *Song of Solomon* [Morrison] imagines her way with seeming with effortless into the vast obscure corners and eccentric of the rural or small town black world that she maps in abundant details. She then intertwines her discoveries in plot that trace her protagonist's quest for self-understanding. (45)

Similarly, Cathrine Belsy in her essay “Critical Practice” takes *Song of Solomon* as “an interrogative text which literally invites the reader to produce answers to the questions it implicitly or explicitly raises” (91). Here, we can assume that within the context of Afro-centric cultural discourse the questions raised in the novel are interrogative in the manner of dilemma tale. It is certain that the ending of the novel reflects the open ended-ness of this West African form of orature. In “Knowing Their Names: Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*”, Marianne Hirsch explores the possibility of dual masculine-feminine legacy in *Song of Solomon*:

Possibility of dual masculine-feminine legacy in *Song of Solomon* that negotiates the material presence of the mother in the African-American family with the absence of the fathers. The two parts of the epigraph the fathers may soar/And the children may know their name to illustrate the contradiction inherent in culture that celebrate the escape of the father into freedom and yet long for a symbolic father in language. By knowing his father’s name Milkman inherits a legacy from his forefathers and extension his foremothers that unites the physicality of the maternal with the absence of the parental. (90)

Hirsch indicates that while Milkman has obtained critical knowledge of his heritage, the novel has not done the justice to the female children.

Denise Heinze in his essay “The Dilemma of Double Consciousness: Toni Morrison’s Novel” views the novel from cultural perspective. He writes:

While *Song of Solomon* is generally seen as myth of the male maturation, it also contains the subtexts of Pilate’s rite de passage and

the ritual of cultural immersion. In her history is the price by which she acquires the values that will sustain Milkman and by extension the black community. Pilate's initiation occurs much earlier than Milkman's. Having been raised in relative isolation in the edenic Lincoln's Heaven, Pilate is abruptly and cruelly cast out as an orphan into the greater reality. Her quest for acceptance, however, turns into rejection, her navel-belly a seme of exclusion. (133)

Thus, in a reversal of the male myth, her initiation doesn't act in integration into community but isolation from it. Barbara Hill Rigney in her essay "The Voices of Toni Morrison" expresses flight as theme in *Song of Solomon*:

Morrison's male characters imagine themselves in flights and are almost all in love with airplanes. In the tradition of black literature since Richard Wright's *Natives Son*, however, the privilege of flight, at least in airplanes, is mostly reserved for white boys. Black males, in Morrison, fly on metaphorically, and then only with the assistance and the inspiration of black women. (105)

But Dr. L. Constable, in his essay "Notes on Song of Solomon", says that it reveals spiritual experience at its highest level. He writes:

This was the ultimate intention of the divine author. This conclusion finds support in the fact that this was the belief of Jewish interpreters as well as Christian scholars in both Old and New Testament times. Furthermore the writers of scriptures used the example of bride and

groom, husband and wife, to describe God's relationship with his people in both Testaments. (7)

Here, it can be noticed that human life and spiritual life find their greatest fulfillment in the experience of mutual love. The moment, in which Milkman acquires the Solomon, he appreciates traditional African American culture. According to Wagner Martin in his essay "Closer to the Edge: Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*" observes Milkman's analysis of children's song: "Milkman seeks more through children's songs as he gets more information from the older woman-Circe who loves the cadre dogs in the Butler mansion and another woman Susan Byrd who reveals she reality of her Indian blood that she knows from her close companions" (150).

Valerie Smith in 'Introduction' in her "New Essay on *Song of Solomon*" writes about the structure of family in Afro-American society. She writes:

The Deads exemplify the patriarchal, nuclear family that has traditionally been a stable and critical feature not only to American society but of western in general. The primary institution for the reproduction and maintenance of children, ideally it provides individuals with the means for understanding their place in the world. The degenerating of the Dead family and the destructiveness of Macon's rugged individualism symbolizes the invalidity of American, indeed western, values. Morrison's depiction of this demands of life in black American community. (3)

Michael Wood in his essay "Life Studies" defining the significant role of character in *Song of Solomon* reflects historical events. He writes, "The very names

of Morrison's characters are a mark of their history, in slavery or out, and the jokes they make about their name are a remembering that history and fighting it" (8). It seems that Morrison herself is supporting the idea of Michael Wood. In the interview with Elssa Schappel, Morrison says:

In fiction, I feel the most intelligent, and the most free, and the most excited, when my characters are fully invented people. That's part of the excitement. If they are based on somebody else in a funny way it's and infringement of copyright. That person his life, has a patent on it. It shouldn't be available for fiction. (86)

Morrison creates a flying myth and makes her character, Milkman aware of it. Cynthia A. Davis in her essay "Self, Society and Myth in Toni Morrison's Fiction" declares, "The combination of soul observation with broadening and allusive commentary gives her fiction the symbolic quality of myth, and in fact, the search for a myth adequate to experience is one of Morrison's central theme" (27). Here, Morrison is aware of myth and she employs the myth popular in the black culture in her work of art.

Likewise, Carol Iannone in her essay "Toni Morrison's Career" tries to locate the Milkman as a mythic hero:

As in classical quest myths, Milkman journey requires him to face danger and loss and hardship and progressively to his trapping of his farmer life. He must learn to know and respect a wide assortment of black people, including many he would once have arrogantly overlooked. Through various depredations, he comes to emphasize

with his mother, his neglected sisters, and his cousin Hagar whom he had carelessly discarded after twelve years' affair. (60)

Moreover, Kubitschek Missy Dehn in his essay "Toni Morrison: A Critical Companion" views the novel on the basis of biblical reference: "The very fact of Milkman's survival after his father attempted to kill him before his born and his best friend Guitar also tries to kill creates a kind of biblical sense of wonder in the novel and instill in him a desire to create himself a new" (166).

Cathrine Rainwater in "Worthy Messenger: Narrative Voice in Toni Morrison's Novel" observes *Song of Solomon* as neatly arranged allegory of God's love for people, "What is reflected in the novel is full sharing of mankind with divine reality. Morrison implies that biblical illusions, like circular patterns and other narrative devices, generates expectations of order that life itself does not fulfill" (110). Here, we can notice that she enriches her characters by pouring the spiritual fore.

In "Rooted-ness: The Ancestor as Foundation", Morrison herself yearns for a closer identification of Black American artist with her community:

There must have been a time when an artist could be genuinely representative of the tribe and in it, when an artist could have a tribal or racial sensibility and an individual expression of it. There were spaces and places in which a single person could enter and behaved as an individual within the context of the community. (339)

So, Morrison exemplifies the relationship between the artist and the community that describes it as Afro-centric one, the discourse based in African orature whose artists

are both participants in and representative of the community. She is supposed to recreate this participatory experience in her fiction.

Regarding the tradition of Afro-American culture, Barbara Christian in her “Black Feminist Criticism” comments: “In her dramatizing the traditions of Morrison’s community, her novel resembles the oral techniques of her storyteller” (57). Here, Morrison in the manner of an African woman story-teller tells the tale of flying Africa to keep her traditions and culture alive on paper.

These critical views show that the issue of Morrison’s protagonist Milkman’s quest for cultural identity needs a serious attention. These critics, despite differences in their finding, agree on the fact that Milkman is truly a spiritually transformed protagonist by his performances throughout the novel in Afro-American society as well as the whole community of human beings. The present researcher will analyze African-American culture in the succeeding chapter.

II. African-American Culture

General Introduction

Generally, the entire way of life of a particular group of people, including its customs, religions, ideas, inventions, and tools is known as culture. In other words, culture is the sum of values and behavioral preferences that make up people's lifestyle and approach to the activities of everyday life. The most profound manifestation of culture is in common and routine daily activities, such as talking and communicating, childrearing, cooking, dressing, and recreation. When these daily activities, values, and behavioral-preferences are concentrated in a conscious process of creative expression, they become cultural forms of the highest order, what we call the arts, i.e. music, literature, sculpture, painting, dance, photography and so on.

Since culture is linked to the human world, it varies according to the variation in the human history that took place with the changing time, different geography, and the transformation in socio-political scenario and lifestyle accordingly. Thus, the cultural field, now, covers not merely intellectual and artistic products of a particular group of people. It avoids any exclusive concern with high culture and rather embraces all the aspects of life -- food, taste, habits and attitude, dress up, sports, music and entertainment, religious rites and rituals, and institutional celebrations, notions of beauty -- as well as the practices that determine ideas of good and evil. Culture, thus, is the accumulated knowledge of all social, literary, artistic and collective activity that is passed over from generation to generation. The study of art and literature forms parts of an analysis of cultural production. And these cultural products, both in their mode of production as well as in their dissemination, help us to define groups of people, societies or nations. Ferdous Azim, a Marxist critic, views,

“The cultural arena is ideological not only in the sense that it reflects and reinforces social hierarchies, but acquires greater significance as the carrier of social values and systems” (229).

According to Ferdous, culture is not indispensable alone but also a multiaccented one openly exposed to the history with all experiences of complexities. Culture has been the notion to refer to intellectual practices and artistic works, the individual characteristics and lifestyles, the tradition of any particular social group, and a historical movement that shape a human society.

Likewise, British cultural critic Raymond Williams takes culture as “the whole way of life of a social group or whole society [...], [i]t is a signifying system through which necessarily a social order is communicated, reproduced, experienced and explored” (55). Williams, here, focuses on the need of some kind of common culture as a unifying force in society. He basically seems to be interested in working class culture. In response to Williams, E. P. Thompson, a Marxist historian presents an alternative definition of culture as “the whole way of struggle” (10) in the place of as “the whole way of life.”

So culture has been an unambiguous phraseology by its very nature. Yet culture has been a common platform where any particular group of people is obliged to live together who accidentally happens to grapple with one another in the history of settlement. It has been a terminology to define the characteristic of individuals and their life styles, traditions along with a social, and historical movement. It has influenced all human experiences, ideas and attitudes. It is distinct from one race to another, one moment of gender, occupation, and ethnicity to another moment. Thus, culture has become the source of identity.

After 1990s, the theme of search for identity, especially cultural identity is rapidly rising among people. Since the values, norms, institutions, customs, structures and modes of thinking in culture provided a space to people, people create culture and vice versa. Mikko Lehtonen, regarding human beings as cultural beings asserts: “Cultural symbols are omnipresent precisely for the reason that they are essential for our survival. Culture is the ‘survival kit’ of humankind. Being biologically defective, human must resort to their reflective resources for survival” (5).

Lehtonen, in the above phrase, puts his logic on that one must secure individual existence to be a human being, and it is the cultural pattern that shapes one’s individual characteristics. The ungovernable and directionless acts, thoughts and sentiments of an individual find their appropriate route only because of culture, which indeed is a life saving mechanism, the ‘integrated whole’ or ‘totality’. It is an ‘integrated whole’ that has its own configuration though there exist different levels and sublevels. Thus, if we consider Lehtonen’s ideas, we can accept that every individual in that cultural configuration carries the characteristics of that culture and behaves according to that pattern. An individual becomes an integrated member of one’s own concerned culture community by acquiring its rule and instructions. Now it is more explicit to say that an individual is better understood within the specific cultural system as history of each culture is characterized by a set of values, beliefs and practices which are responsible for the individual behavior. Lehtonen remarks, “We do produce meaning, but as products of meanings [...]” (10), seems to support Heidegger’s regard on human being as a being thrust upon an alien world.

In recent time, the psychologists like Anotovella Fave and Meli Franco show great interest in the role of culture in shaping identity of an individual. They argue,

“Each culture has a codified and exhaustive set of instructions concerning psychological and behavioral issues” (14). According to these psychologists, no doubt, culture guarantees individual identity.

Regarding cultural identity, Stuart Hall, one of the prominent cultural critics, in his essay entitled *Cultural Identity and Diaspora* finds at least two different ways of thinking about cultural identity.

The first position defines ‘cultural identity’ in terms of one shared culture, a sort of collective ‘one true’ self, hiding inside many other, more superficial or artificially imposed selves; which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common. Cultural identity in the second sense is matter of becoming as well as of being. It belongs to the future as much as to past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. (11-12)

According to Hall, an identity is constituted not outside but within representation. Thus, an individual is culturally determined. A definite balance between individual behavioral characteristic and a community’s cultural pattern is possible only through a sound development of culture and an individual belonging to it. Otherwise, anarchy and savagery become natural phenomenon. If an individual is thrust upon in an alien world where the cultural practices including customs, rituals, and beliefs are quite different, s/he would certainly meet some crisis there. “When someone brought up in one culture and placed in another culture s/he may face cultural shock and the reactions may be anger, frustration, fear, curiosity, fascination, repulsion, hatred or confusion” (Saraswathi 223). Thus, the totality of culture as a frame of reference shapes and controls human idea about the world in surrounding. An individual loses

significant aspects of his/her culture or his/her world of experience by the time when estrangement occurs when there is a cultural displacement.

As the main concern of the present research work is African-American cultural identity, it would be better to focus on Afro-American culture in detail. Afro-American culture which emerged from slavery, was not solely based on African tradition. Afro-American culture was evolved through creolization. Afro-Americans succeed to retain their tradition and reform their past culture through creolization in which more than two people interact, with them taking the characteristics of other culture. Elements of African tradition were interacted with religion and language of the Euro-American culture where they maintained and built up their culture through music, song, folklore, myth, magic and so on. So mixing up of the elements of African tradition with the Euro-American culture is known as Afro-American culture. For black people in the United States, this cultural creolization has involved two complex and dynamic aspects. First, among Africans themselves, a creolization process developed as Africans captured from different places and from different cultural background was forced to live together under the conditions of slave trade and slavery. It was a process of mutual cultural exchange where synthesis took place. Secondly, almost simultaneously, this dynamic mixture of African culture was interacting and exchanging with Euro-American cultures, which were themselves varied because of the different national identities and cultural patterns of the oppressive slave traders and plantation owners.

Art was an important cultural part of the African way of life and was tied closely to everyday activities. They created their art mostly as an instrument by which to contact the spirit world using supernatural forces. They used their art to help

them to overcome the dangers of their environment and to express their religion. They believed in the universal life force which the almighty creator pours into the world and gives life to every created thing, human beings, animals, plants and stones. They even believed that the dead retain their living force. The divine power is manifested in partial aspects as 'sons of god' but it is also present in the ancestral father and the mother of the tribe and in great heroes of tribal mythology. The creations are also at work in the elemental forces of nature or in the powerful animals of the wilds.

The Africans felt that their life forces can be controlled through their good deeds and sacrifices. Their rituals and ceremonies enforced these beliefs. They felt that through sins the life force is taken away and misfortune is brought down. Sickness, fire, conflicts, and premature death are regarded as the consequences of evil actions. There is a magician or witch found in each tribe who had been designated the powers to remove these evil spirits. The whole community becomes involved in an effort to restore sacred order as well as prosperity of their village. It was at this point that the Africans developed a devoted commitment to these figureheads. Having made this commitment, they feel that they are under the protection of divine powers.

According to the Africans' beliefs, every phase of human life is inaugurated by magical practices. These practices were very lengthy and quite detailed at the time of death, which is regarded as particularly dangerous and sinister. Africans were afraid of the souls of the dead, because they believed the powers of the soul of someone to whom injury was done during his life and those powers were not released in death which were now intended on doing harm by using a revengeful force. Through the ritual of burial, they attempted to rid the soul of uncanny comings and

doings of the ancestral spirits. It was during those ceremonies that they called on souls who were favorably inclined towards them for counsel and help.

In some villages there was a priest or medicine man who was believed to be able to create a force which causes the divine power to flow and control its people in a meaningful way. The medicine man undergoes a long period of training, studied practical means of healing, illness. He was regarded as a wise man who knows how to convince the use of his methods to heal his victim. He also has the ability to appear in a mysterious and uncanny form.

Although Africans were inspired by what they do at the rituals, they also like invisible spirits to be tangible. Because of this reason, they create a sculpture which serves as a medium giving access to the spirit world. The figures of ancestors and spirits, masks and other cult objects were the link between God and man. The inspired figure was supposed to mediate fertility, riches and the blessing of children, made its advice and would know by the use of certain signs. They sacrificed and worshipped at regular intervals.

Masks were used by Africans to enable the souls of the dead to make their appearance in a tangible or visible form. The design of the masks depended upon its major purpose. They must be unreal as well as possible. In order to know the full meaning of mask, one must be able to witness the ceremonies of which the mask is used. Not only the mask but any other sculpture used in the Africans' rituals. Due to the fact that most people were unable to see mask or other sculpture in use, they must rely on their own interpretations of its meaning.

Human motifs were first priority to all tribes. They formed an analogy to particular divine forces and myths. The navel and genitals signified the continuance of mankind. The sculptures seen with a large navel can be interpreted as a sign that a very powerful spirit had left the body or womb. A large head could be an indication that great intelligence and will power of the spirit world.

Animal motifs were found less frequently in the culture of Africans. However, for reasons unknown to outsiders, they used antelope, spider, and the bird as an indication of a savior or tribal ancestors and buffalo, elephant, hippopotamus, boar, crocodile and ram were used to represent bodily strength. The tortoise has a very long life span which represented the long life. Similarly, the fish, frog or snake were used to represent life; giving water. A bird could be justified to serve as the mediator between this world and the world beyond because of its characteristics. Monkey was used as the jester or as the judge of the souls of the Dead. Sometimes the parts of some animals were used to symbolize the whole animals such as the horns, claws, feet and fangs. But cultural aspect of African art was lost and had to be found in Afro-American history. This lost heritage can readily be explained as the result of slavery.

Due to transportation around four million people from Africa to North America and the Caribbean Island over a period of almost four centuries by the slave traders, they became homeless and separate from their tribes and families where they were enslaved in a new world. Though they had brought rich heritage of Africa and other aspects of cultural life as sculpture, African languages, traditional African rituals, all practices were prohibited and were penalized. But music, song, folklore

and folktales, dances were flourished among them and practised by which it became their culture.

Language is one part of Afro-American culture. Afro-Americans were not intelligent enough to learn and speak the English language at first. So they spoke the Pigeon English language. It is learnt that English spoken by Afro-American ties to African language, i. e. dialogue. The Creole language like Gullah and Pigeon English which is still spoken in the parts of the United States of America today that reflects the pieces of the African culture. Not an inability to learn the English language, they were survived during the period of slavery.

The English speakers of slaves were greatly influenced by their native language. Gullah was influenced by the language of Fante, Ga, Kikongo, Kimbundu, Mandika, Twi, Ewe, Ibo and Yorba. As time went on, the Creole languages were also influenced by the language of settlers (French, German, Spanish, and Portuguese) as well as Native Americans such as the Creek, Cherokee and many others. By mixing parts of the language spoken around them, Afro-Americans created a way to express themselves and communicate with other in the 'New World', i. e. BEV, which became as parts of their culture later.

Many communities of slaves maintained the drums and the basic features of traditional African music. Even when they had no drums, they would practice "patting juba". Patting juba involved, as Solomon Northup described it, "striking the hands on the knees, then striking the hands together, then striking the right shoulder with one hand, the left with the other-all the while keeping time with the feet, and singing [...]" (10).

Though Afro-American culture was specific to each area, there were several general cultural themes that ran throughout the Afro-American population in the colonies; one of them was 'religion'. Africans merged their own beliefs with the existing Christian religion, and produced a theology of their own. Christianity spread rapidly throughout the slave communities during the Great Awakening, a surge of an evangelical Christianity which swept the colonies. This movement illuminated the mystical and magical elements of Christianity, a side which the African could understand identify with. Lawrence W. Levine states "magical folk beliefs encountered Christian myths, and the result allowed slaves to exert their will and preserve their sanity by [imposing] a sense of rationality and predictability upon a hostile and capricious environment. (63)

Here, both the African and European schemata were capable of providing hope and assurances for people in a great need of both. Christianity furthered a communal spirit among members of different tribes, while promising an eventual heavenly respite from the sorrows of slavery. Traditional folk beliefs held a more immediate appeal, as they "actually offered the slaves sources of power and knowledge alternative to those existing within the world of the master class" (63). It is ironic for white slave holders originally used Christianity as a tool to perpetuate obedience and docility in slaves; yet, African recognized the hypocrisy in the white's version of Christianity, realizing they were equal in the eyes of God. Africans took the tool meant to manipulate them and used Christianity to give them hope for the future and to strengthen their bonds between one another. But while slaves were Christianized and assimilated of white culture, they kept elements of their native culture alive.

Afro-Americans blended old styles with new when cooking, smiting, woodcarving, storytelling and gospel singing traditions. They sang folk songs reflecting their secular life, as Blaissingame points out:

The secular songs told of the slave's loves, work, floggings, and expressed his moods and reality of his oppression. On a number of occasions he sang of the proud defiance of the runaway, the courage of the black rebels, the stupidity of the black rebels, the stupidity of the patrollers, the heartlessness of the slave traders and the kindness and cruelty of masters. (23)

They sang songs that began in the fields of the plantations to pass the themes of salvation and freedom of Christianity with a native style of singing and dancing. Slave spirituals were among the earliest forms of artistic self-expression available to African Americans; the songs were based on Christian hymn tradition, but often departed radically from the complacent austerity to white hymns. This spiritual tradition provided the birthing ground for what Levine calls "the most highly personalized genre of African American music: the blues" (221). By the early 20th century, the blues had emerged as a dynamic and powerful addition to the music of black America. Schultz remarks, "In the spirituals, black American first started to sing of their feelings of homelessness; in the blues, they continued to sing it" (127). In a 1960 interview, blues musician Sidney Bechet identified the source of the essential connection between music and story telling. He says "Me, I want to explain myself so bad. I want to have myself understood. And the music, it can do that. The music, it's my whole story" (qtd. in Levine 190). Although gospel and blues often differ in

focus and style, both genres are musical expressions of the cultural need to the story of a people.

Mahalia Jackson once remarked that blue songs “are the songs of despair, but gospel songs are the songs of hope” (qtd. in Levine 174). This comment is not pejorative judgment of blue singers; perhaps the blues developed to fill a need that gospel could not address. The deep despair that fills so many blues songs provides a communal outlet for emotions that would otherwise choke the singer; the blues may provide a way of recognizing and sharing human pain in order to overcome it. According to John Lee Hooker, the blues are “not only what’s happened to you, it’s what happened to your fore parents and other people. And that’s what makes the blues” (qtd. in Levine 237). This historical and cultural breadth of the blues illustrates the vitality and strength of the close connection between music and folklore. Zora Neale Hurston suggests that “[s]omewhere songs for sound-singing branched off from songs for storytelling until we arrive at prose” (Hurston 877). She further asserts that folklore is nothing less than “the boiled-down juice of human living” (875). In his haunting short story, “Sonny’s Blues,” James Baldwin illustrates the transcendent power of the intermingled storytelling-blues tradition, for “while the tale of how we suffer, and how we are delighted, and how we may triumph is never new, it always must be heard. There isn’t any other tale to tell, it’s the only light we have got in all this darkness” (139).

In addition to music, they relied on the oral traditions, much as their African ancestors did. Orature and storytelling is a way of bridging gaps between the Black community’s folk roots and the Black American tradition. Blaissingame outlines the use to which folk tales were put in the slave environment. He asserts:

Primarily a means of entertainment, the [folk] tales also represented the distillation of folk wisdom and were used as an instructional device to teach young slaves to survive. A projection of the slave's personal experience, dreams, and hopes, the folk tales allowed him to express hostility to his master, to poke fun at himself, and to delineate the workings of the [...] system. At the same time, by viewing himself as an object, verbalizing his dreams and hostilities, the slave was able to preserve one more area which whites could not control. While holding on to the reality of his existence, the slave gave full play to his wish fulfillment in the tales. (36)

So elements of African culture synthesizing with the slave culture, slave experience, and Euro-American culture ultimately became the Afro-American culture.

Encroachment of White Culture upon Black Culture

Slavery and racism in America remain the main cause of encroachment of white over black culture. Though blacks brought their African traditions, culture with them during the period of slave trade but their culture was dominated through different activities of the whites.

By starting with Columbus's discovery of America, a large number of whites migrated to America and sponsored the colonization of American land, with them they had brought already captured blacks from the African states. During the time, whites being masters of blacks, subordinated blacks in every sphere of life. From such subordination of black race, racism appeared in the American soil. According to Ellis,

the cause of racism in America was whites' belief that their race was naturally superior and colored race was inferior:

In the US race prejudice is predicated upon the belief that the colored race is naturally inferior to the white race physically, religiously, socially and morally. As a matter ultimate fact it is actually based upon the advantages temporary and imaginary which the white groups economically, politically and socially. (11)

Racism, in America mostly plagued the relationship between blacks and whites. Historically their relationship took the shape on the basis of slavery, where segregation and oppression of black people was prevalent. African Americans suffered a lot after their arrival in America. White masters placed those poor and uneducated blacks in the rural plantations of the South where cotton, sugar, tobacco and rice were produced. Slaves were valued primarily for their labor.

Doubtless, there was cruelty and oppression in the time of slavery. Du Bois found slavery as "the root of all villainies, the cause of all sorrows and the root of all prejudices" (366). White masters suppressed blacks in various ways. The most horrifying experience blacks had undergone was the 'sale and buy' of their flesh. The masters totally commodified slaves, denying their potentiality. Slaves became mere chattels, possessions, things or mere extensions of their master's will. In the words of Helen Scott, the masters perceived the slaves as "property rather than as people and placed property rights over individual rights" (173). Objectifying slave masters began a regular slave trade between Africa and America. In this process, the slaves were separated from their land, people, culture and tradition.

The layer of oppression rose up when Colonial Laws in white plantations permitted brutal masters to discipline the slave, for the purpose of higher production. In the process of disciplining slave masters had to be “willing to maim and kill slaves” (Wilson 192). They did so without any fear. Millions of black people were inhumanly beaten as described in Harriet Jacob’s *Incidents in Life of a Slave Girl*:

Master was a cruel man, hardened by a long life of slave holding. He would at times seem to take great pleasure on whipping a slave. I had often been awakened at the day by the most heart rendering shrieks of an own aunt of mine, when he used to tie up to a joist and whip upon her naked back till she was literally covered with blood. No words, no tears, no prayers from his gory victim, seemed to move iron heart from its bloody purpose. The louder she screamed, the hardened he whipped the longest. He would whip her to make scream and whip her to make hush, and not until overcome by fatigue, would he cease to swing the blood doted cow skin. (15)

At the time of slavery, black women were forced to live in a degraded condition. The planters fully exploited and abused black women in public as well as in private sphere. They had to work all day, the same work as men. Julia Brown remembers, “I worked hard as always you can’t imagine what a hard time I had. I split nails like a man. I used a huge glut and an iron wedge drove into the wood with a maul, and this would split the wood” (qtd. in Mullings 36). Moreover, black women were terrorized through rape. These women bore illicit children. But, still, they had no rights over their children. Slave-holders snatched their babies and sold them to speculators. The separation of the mothers from the children was the marked feature of cruelty and

barbarity of the slavery. Such kind of discriminating practice tortured black women not only physically but also psychologically.

Whites developed an ideology to justify slavery on the grounds of racial superiority of whites and the innate and permanent inferiority of the Negro race. In the fifteenth century biblical story of Noah's son, Ham in the book of Genesis 9: 25-27. Noah had been angry because Ham saw him naked. So Noah laid a curse upon Ham's son, Canaan. The curse was that Canaan and all his descendents would be slaves. Whites believed that Canaan settled in Africa and the inhabitants of Africa should be slaves. Thus, as Furman Noted, "The holding of slaves is justifiable by the doctrine and example contained in Holy Writ, is therefore consistent with Christian uprightness, both in sentiment and conduct" (qtd. in Szwarc 33).

In this way, the belief in an inherent inferiority of blacks was proved. Rating blacks as inferiors, whites forced them to perform manual labor, which was the work of slaves. Meanwhile, slaves found no place of escape, except obeying the white masters. Masters always ruled over slaves and controlled slaves' lives and destinies. Masters took pleasure over slaves' toil, sweat and blood. Blacks remained colonized, oppressed, and broken totally. This was continued till late-nineteenth century.

Refusing assimilation with American whites, blacks were forced to leave America. When they did not leave, as in slavery every black man, woman and child worked either in farm or in other unskilled jobs. At the same time, some racist whites formed an organization titled under Ku Klux Klan, which aimed to maintain white supremacy in the South. This organization severely terrorized black people by dragging black people from their homes, whipping, and shooting, driving them away and destroying their property. Indeed, for the Negroes the new century provided more

violence and more blood shed. Franklin and Moss in *From Slavery to Freedom* have stated about the violence against blacks:

Blacks were dragged out and burned alive. This was the signal for wholesale terrorism against blacks. One Negro was severely whipped for riding a bicycle on the sidewalk while another was lashed on general principles. The Negro mother of three-day-old infant was beaten and kicked and her husband was killed. Houses were wrecked and countless terrified Negroes left the country. Although there was talk of punishing the leaders of most, nothing was ever done, whites began to attack every black person they saw. (283)

To escape from southern racist violence, blacks migrated to Northern cities. The primary motif was search for freedom from slavery. But, in the North they felt more alienation, isolation and fragmentation in their task of finding a new shelter and establishing a new community. Du Bois in *Souls of Black Folk* expressed the instability of black people, the harsh Afro-American experience, the continuing process of acculturation and alienation, of being so intimately different of and at the same time belonging to America:

It was a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of world that looks on an amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness—an American, a negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings, two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dragged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder [...]. The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife-

this longing to attain self conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better, truer self. (364-65)

Moreover, in the North, Black's lives were shaped by uncertainty, fear and apatness, they were expelled from job market. They were denied the possession of land. They were expelled from education, shelter and medical facilities. That reduced blacks to deplorable condition of illiteracy, hopelessness and poverty.

According to black American activists Charmichael and Hamilton, blacks degraded condition was a product of institutional racism:

When terrorists bomb a black church and kill five black children this is an act of individual racism, widely deplored by most segments of society. But when in the same city-Bringham-Albama-five hundred black 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 that is a function of institutional racism. (112)

Hence, the history of American society is a history of oppression and migration. American geographical and cultural space has provided limitless potential to the whites since its settlement, but the blacks have been denied such spaces. Over the different historical events-slavery, emancipation, migration, integration they tried to negotiate their relationships with their cultural traditions. But the white race and its cultural heritage consistently marginalized them.

To cross the boundaries of racial superiority, to break the ethics of institutional racism and to bring equality, freedom and justice, black's struggle continued in the 20th century. That reached in its full expression during the Civil Rights Movement of 1960s. It certainly protected and expanded the rights of African Americans.

Afro-American Resistance against White Culture for Identity

Afro-Americans began to resist against white dominant groups from the period of slavery. That is commonly known as 'slave narratives' which were the autobiographies written by black slaves who either escaped the brutality of slavery or had been freed. A large number of slave narratives, including Fredrick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Fredrick Douglass* (1861), were published between 1830s and 1865. Some of such narratives published during this period attacked the institutionalized oppression of the black people under slavery. The novels, like William Will Brown's *Garies and their friends* and Martin Delavey's *Blake, or the Huts of America*, that fuelled the anti-slavery movement and advocated for freedom, have been categorized as abolitionist movement. It was a kind of resistance against white for their liberation.

Even after the abolition of slavery in 1865, the whites adopted the tradition of plantation in order to simplify and defamiliarise the exploitation and oppression of the blacks. Therefore, the black intellectuals, being aware of this fact, began to attack the post-reconstruction repression, discrimination and segregation. *Appointed* (1894) by Walter Stowers and William H. Anderson was the first novel to deal with "peonage, convict labor, lynching, disfranchisement, and segregation" (Bone 32).

Another tendency became apparent in the period between 1890s and 1920s, before the Harlem Renaissance, when black novels invariably took a revolutionary stance. The novels like Charles Chestnut's *The House behind Cedars* and Suttan Groggs's *The Hindered Hand* contain an element of protest, for which they have been typically categorized as novels of accommodation and assimilation.

With the expansion of industries after the world wars, the American industries needed a large amount of labor, which the Negroes could supply. A large number of Negroes were transported to the North. They formed their community in Harlem, New York, where they had strange experiences which forced them to revise their traditional ways of thinking. They made their motto: 'buy property' (Johnson 137). After they uplifted themselves economically, they sought for their intrinsic values and independent life in a new place. The new experience and the elevated living standard called for a new literary movement to construe it.

In the midst of this great change emerged the New Negro Movement which was named after Alain Locke's "The New Negro", founding document of the Harlem Renaissance. This was the modern art movement of the Afro-American. Locke wanted the elevation of the black artists and intellectuals whose achievements should be seen as equal to that of the white dominant culture. The New Negro Movement was also a 'spiritual emancipation'. He stressed that the Negro has "American wants, American ideas and should therefore strive for recognition of those wants and ideas by white culture" (517). The "The New Negro" became the credo of movement of black writers, artists, musicians, actors, intellectuals, and their patrons which emerged during this period. The cultural expression of "The New Negro" was authentic and widespread. No longer was Black cultural expression isolated and shunned. Artists

like Langston Hughes were inspired to expose the life and culture of Black people in a way that had not been done before. Thus, it shows that the Black Renaissance Art of 1920s was self conscious and racially rhetorical. It interpreted the Negro and his cultural values. These artists craved for equality and recognition of the artistic values in white America. This made their literature what is popularly known as protest writing.

Moreover, two external forces to the Black Community had a tremendous impact on the development of the arts movement during the period of 1930s and 1940s. First, the federal government set up an unprecedented welfare program under Franklin D. Roosevelt that included the living of artist. Second, the overall condition of the masses of people led to a rapid increase in revolutionary political activity. That's why, black people were increasingly radical on all matters. Black people and their artists began to understand that racist discrimination was a product of capitalism and imperialism. They, thus, became active as leaders and participants in campaigns for radical and revolutionary changes. This theme of revolutionary class struggle pervaded the works of many artists. Richard Wright summarizes new perspective:

It means that a Negro writer must learn to view the life of a Negro living in New York's Harlem or Chicago's south Side with the consciousness that one-sixth of the earth surface belongs to the working class. It means that a Negro woman hoeing cotton in the South and the who loll in swivel chairs in Wall Street and take the fruits of her toil. (56)

Langston Hughes dramatically spelled out the nature of the revolutionary task of Black writers in a speech at the first American Writers' Congress in 1935:

Negro writers can seek to unite blacks and whites in our country, not on the nebulous basis of an interracial meeting, or the shifting sands of religious brotherhood, but on the solid ground of the daily working-class struggle to wipe out, now and forever, all the old inequalities of the past. (9)

On the heels of the Depression era and as a reaction to the turbulence of the war years, Be Bop arrived on the scene. The key aspect of the Be Bop experience was that it was a cultural revolt. The 'hipster' was in revolt; beard, dark glasses (even at night), beret, esoteric speech, and a militant political attitude, spiced with a love for 'art'. These were black people who had been emancipated from the South and who were bitter about being kept from realizing their full humanity. Their cultural revolt represented withdrawal into closed little circles. But it also represented a new cultural energy that swept throughout the world. A. B. Spellman opines:

The bebop revolution saw the jazz musician adopting an entirely different social posture [...]. Here, for the first time, a black artistic vanguard assumed whole styles of compartment, attire and speech which were calculated to be the indicia of a group which felt that its own values were more sophisticated than, if not superior to, the mores of the American society at large. The music and the manner developed concomitantly, which indicates that the musicians were aware that each musical innovation was a new way of commenting on the world around them. (36)

The Civil Rights Movement with its underlying cultural goal of assimilation was aborted by the reactionary repression the Blacks underwent in the form of assassination, imprisonment and racist ideological attacks. This movement had been the hope of a large and developing number of aspirations to middle-class life. When it failed, many of these young, middle-class youths formed the social base for a new nationalist movement against America. While this had a political aspect, it also had a cultural aspect. 'Black power' became a relying slogan for the newborn nationalist who began to defect from the Civil Rights Movement, particularly after the death of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr. In this context, the Black Arts Movement was born. This movement desired and had fought for full integration into the 'mainstream'.

Black power fell short of pointing out that the problems of black people resulted from racist oppression and capitalist exploitation. Similarly, the Black Arts Movement defined the problems of black people more as the result of 'European American cultural insensitivity' and not primarily as the result of the operations of the capitalist system. The solution proposed by the Black Arts Movement (and Black power) was essentially reformist: "A cultural revolution in arts and ideas" (Neat 26). This Cultural Revolution was to be rooted in a new aesthetic: The Black Aesthetics. The writer Larry Neat articulated its purpose as:

The motive behind the black aesthetic is the destruction of the white thing, the destruction of white ideas, and white ways of looking at the world. The new aesthetic is mostly predicted on an Ethics which asks the question: whose vision of the world is finally more meaningful,

ours or the white oppressors'? What is truth? Or more precisely, whose truth shall we express, that of the oppressed or of the oppressors? (27)

After the rise of the Black Aesthetic, black writer no longer pleads for their equal status in white dominated literary mainstream; they are on their way to establish a literary world of their own. Their long and sustained oppression in the white America has provided them with a unique experience out of which they now speak in a different way. Their works have become racially expressive rather than racially rhetorical; they like to speak as Negroes. As Alain Locke says that Negro youth speaks "[...] with arresting visions and vibrant prophecies; forecasting in the mirror of art what we must see and recognize in the streets of reality tomorrow, foretelling in new notes and accents the maturing speech of full racial utterance" (*Negro Youth Speaks* 17). With this unique experience and new way of expression Negro Youth--black artist or writer--has become a particular representative of his people who share his experience.

Instead of being self-conscious, Negro writer exploits what Locke calls 'race-gift' which for him is a "vast spiritual endowment" (18) in the process of literary creation. And he does not speak to others, but to his own people in his artistic creation and expresses what his unique experience has taught him, which, eventually, would liberate his readers (who are, of course, black) from the conscious motive of race and their oppression under its horror. Thus, "Speak as Negroes", as Locke says, has become the motto of the Black Aesthetic (19).

After having overcome the atrocities of racism and the tag of 'racist', the white critics have imposed upon him, Negro writer has achieved "an objective attitude towards life" (Locke, *Negro Youth* 18). Locke further explains:

The artistic problem of the Young Negro has not been so much that of acquiring the outer mastery of form and technique as that of achieving an inner mastery of mood and spirit. That accomplished, there has come the happy release from self-consciousness, rhetoric, bombast, and the hampering habit of setting artistic values with primary regard for moral effect—all those pathetic over-compensations of a group inferiority complex which our social dilemmas inflicted upon several unhappy generation. (18)

Thus, their focus on the intrinsic values of art would certainly help the Negro writers to throw off the shackles of discrimination put on them by white racism, and to establish their own aesthetic principle in creation and analysis of their art which, indeed, reflects the subtleties of their lives. They have brought with their art the virtue of finding beauty in them and through their art have offered ‘an emancipating vision’.

III. Quest for Cultural Identity: A Study of Toni Morrison's

Song of Solomon

Impact of Mainstream White Culture upon the Protagonist

Racism has long lasting damaging effects within the black community and especially Morrison's protagonist Milkman. Slavery and continued subjugation by whites had a devastating effect on African-American families; the men were often absent, whether they were taken by force or left of their own accord, leaving woman the burden of raising children alone. Due to the superiority and inferiority prevailing by the means of religion and language, we can find out the problems in African-American lives.

Morrison's *Song of Solomon* begins with the suicide attempt of a black insurance agent Robert Smith, who jumps off from the roof of a hospital officially called 'Mercy' for freedom. This event happened by tacking a note on the door on little yellow paper two days before: "At 3 P.M. on Wednesday the 18th of February, 1931, I will take off from Mercy and fly away on my wings. Please forgive me. I loved you all" (4). This scene introduces the most important thematical aspects; i.e. flying away. The flight can be seen as an escape from the constricting circumstances but it also scars those who are left in the novel. Milkman's flight from Michigan frees him from the Dead family environment of Not Doctor street but it causes Hagar to die of heartbreak. When Milkman is out of city, she becomes frustrated of her life. She is screaming and damn care of things and died lastly.

Men's repeated abandonment of women in this novel shows that the female characters suffer from double marginalization. Women are not only oppressed by

racism but they must pay the price for men's freedom. The scenes that describe women's abandonment show that in their novel, men bear responsibility only for themselves, but women are responsible for themselves, their families, and their communities. Solomon's flight allows him to leave slavery in the Virginia cotton fields, but it also leaves problems to his wife Ryna. It forces her to remain in Virginia to raise her twenty one children alone. It makes her mad: "She screamed and screamed, lost her mind completely" (323). Similarly, after Guitar's father is killed in a factory, his grandmother has to raise him and his siblings. Although she is elderly and ill, she supports her children financially, intellectually, and emotionally with difficulty.

Naming to others as a kind of oppression over black is found in this novel. It causes problem in Dead family. Because original names are deleted and slave names are recorded down and it becomes a cause of loss of cultural heritage. Macon Jr. says to his son Milkman:

When freedom came. All the colored people in the state had to register with the freedman's Bureau. They all had to register. Free and not free. Free and use-to-be slaves. Papa was in his teens and went to sign up, but the men behind the desk was drunk. He asked papa where he was born. Papa said Macon. Then he asked him who his father was. Papa said, 'he is dead'. Asked him who owned him, Papa said, 'I'm free'. Well, the Yankee wrote it all down, but in the wrong spaces. Had him born in Dunfrie, wherever the hell that is and in the space fro his name the fool wrote, 'Dead' comma 'Macon'. (53)

Sufficient impact of mainstream culture can be traced out in the behavior of Milkman. As Milkman has inherited a spiritual burden from Macon Jr., so has Macon jr. inherited a spiritual burden from Macon Dead I. The source of Macon Jr.'s bitterness seems to be murder of his father by Yankee to grab the land. Pilate told Milkman that "they blew him five feet up into the air. He was sitting on his fence waiting for 'em and they snuck up from behind and blew him five feet into the air" (40). Macon Jr.'s fanatical attachment to all material possessions, which develops after he sees his father death while defending his property, has alienated Macon Jr, from his own family and from humanity as a whole. Macon Jr.'s deadness, then, results also from the constant, numbing pursuit of material wealth and from a certain, unknown burden inherited from his father, similar to the spiritual burden that Milkman has inherited from Macon Jr.

Milkman's distorted personality is not entirely his fault. The generation of slavery and abuse has played a part in developing Milkman's selfish personality. Milkman's immaturity stems directly from the enslavement and ensuing escape of his great-grandfather, Solomon. As Solomon escaped, Milkman's grandfather, Macon Dead I, grew up as an orphan. In turn, Macon dead I's son, Macon Jr., witnesses white man murder his father. Macon Jr. never fully recovers from witnessing his father's death; he becomes a greedy, vicious man who raises his son, Milkman, to share those characteristics. Macon Jr. says to his son Milkman, "Let me tell you right now the one important thing you'll ever need to know: own things. And let the things you own other things. Then you'll own yourself and other people too" (55).

In contrast to Macon Jr., Sister Pilate is full of vitality and is somehow able to coax life even out of Macon Jr.'s stony heart. As she bears a daughter and

granddaughter without husband, she never knows the name of her mother. She says to Milkman “[O]ne morning we woke up when the sun was nearly a quarter ways cross the sky. Bright as anything. And blue like the ribbons on my mother’s bonnet. I’d know her ribbon color anywhere but I don’t know her name” (43). The reason is that when their father is shot by Butler, Macon and Pilate leave the place and surrender to Circe. Pilate says to Milkman, “We left Circe’s big house we didn’t have no place to go, so we just walked around and lived in them woods. Farm country” (42). Here, they see her dead father and Morrison neatly weaves the magicality. When Pilate says to Milkman, “Papa came back one day. We didn’t know it was him at first, ‘cause we both saw him blowed five feet into the air” (42).

Guitar confides Milkman that his father was killed in a sawmill accident, an accident that left him angry at his father’s white boss and white people in general. He says, “Since I was little. Since my father got sliced up in sawmill and his boss came by and gave us kids some candy. Divinity. A big back sack of divinity is sweeter than syrup” (61). It makes his mother unable to deal with that difficult task scarring a new generation. It is knowledge that his father died because of his white employers’ negligence. And it makes Guitar especially sensitive to the injustices perpetrated against African-Americans. “Emmet Till’s murder and Birmingham Church Bombing” reminds him of his own tragedy, transforming him into a ruthless, vengeful murderer (80). Emmet and a few friends went to a white-owned store, and on the way out he was dared by his friends to whistle at the white lady running the store. Later that day, “Sunday August 28, 1955, he was taken from his uncle’s home by the lady’s husband and was shot, beaten and with a 270 pound weight tied to his neck, thrown in the river” (80). His story shows that racism alienates its victims from their native communities and causes them to lose touch with their own humanity.

Freddie tells Milkman, “ I believe in ghosts and that my own mother went into labor, gave birth to me and died after seeing a ghost of a white bull” (110). Milkman shrugs with a smile. Freddie further tells Milkman about “growing up in jail because Jacksonville, Florida, did not have facilities for black orphans” (110). Here, Morrison even uses magical realism to show the racial problems of mid-twentieth century America in physical terms. For example, the ghostly white bull that terrifies Freddie’s mother and whose appearance seems to speed Freddie’s birth is a striking symbol of overwhelming white power and oppression. Similarly, the oppression to which Ruth is subject is also embodied in a supernatural event: “[H]er weak minded submission to domestic terror is symbolized by the passive welcome she extends to monstrous flower bulbs that try to choke her” (65). The aggressive, magical realist aspect of these supernatural encounters makes racism and sexism all the more immediate to us.

The blacks were not allowed to enter in a Catholic church. When Ruth is asked by priest whether she is a follower of Catholic, she replies as a Methodist, priest says to her “that only Catholic could take effect of dominant white culture could take communion in a Catholic church” (66). It shows that blacks were dominated even by means of religion.

More effects of dominant white culture could be found by means of language too. Waiting for the man on the hospital-roof to jump, a crowd of blacks has gathered in front of the building. In the confrontation of the crowd with the nurses, who are trying to get this apparently anarchic situation under control, shouting orders, we can identify two different levels of speech: the standard English spoken by white nurses, and the vernacular spoken by the blacks. As an order given by a white nurse to a

black boy reveals the language barrier that separates the white from the black community: “Listen. Go around the back of the hospital to the guard’s office. It will say ‘Emergency Admissions’ on the door. A-D-M-I-S-I-O-N-S. But the guard will be there” (18). In contrast to the nurse’s Standard English, the black boy addressed uses black vernacular when conversing with his mother: “You reckon he’ll jump? A nut wagon do anything” (7).

By contrasting different levels of language, Morrison also stresses the different social situations of the two racial groups. Significantly, it is the conflict between races, between a predominantly oral a literary culture. The nurse’s ordering tone reflects the social hierarchy in a society in which racism; segregation and the oppression of blacks are the characteristics features. When the white nurse addresses the black boy, she spells out for him the letters of the word he is to look for on the hospital door, presuming the boy cannot read well. The boy, however, tries to call her attention to a spelling mistake she makes: “You left out as [sic], ma’am” (7). The narrator then comments on this debate about correct spelling with the words: “The North was new to [the boy] and he had just begun to learn and he could speak up to white people” (7). In the North, where racism isn’t as powerful and omnipresent as in the Southern States, black may contradict whites; they may ‘speak up’ to them. Whereas oppression and slavery commodify them in the discourse of white people, they can now themselves enter this discourse and become speaking subjects. This process of entering a discourse with the whites instead of being its object is reflected in the dialogue cited above. To the nurse’s command to send one of the boys to the guard at the admission, the black grandmother responds by giving the boy’s name: “That boy there can go. That me, she pointed a cat-eyed boy about five or six years old- The stout women slid her eyes down the nurse’s finger and looked at the child

she was pointing to- Guitar, ma'am" (7). 'That boy' thus becomes an actual person with a name, who in turn can manifest his identity and become a speaking subject, agreeing with or contradicting the white discourse.

The hospital called 'Mercy', unto the day the narration sets in, has never accepted black patients, not has the only black doctor of the town been granted the privilege to treat his patients there: "Mercy wouldn't take colored then" (71). Among the blacks, the town's hospital is called 'No Mercy', due to the fact that it doesn't admit black patients, that is, in a wider sense, has no mercy on them. In opposition to the official naming, the other, ironical name has its root in the oral language usage of the black community. Another instance of a re-naming of the black community is 'Not Doctor Street'. Officially, named 'Mains Avenue', the black community, in the course of time, begins referring to it by the name of 'Doctor Street', as the town's first black doctor lived in it. When the (white) city legislation attempts to stop people from using the unofficial name by posting a sign with the correct name and a prohibition of the informal one, this attempt backfires. Instead of reading message the way the legislation intends to be read, the community discovers and adopts it double meaning. It was a genuinely clarifying public notice because it gave the southern residents way to keep their memories alive and please the city legislators as well. They called 'it Not Doctor Street' (4).

Dilemma of Milkman

Due to the effects of slavery and racism in Dead family, Milkman is in great dilemma. Milkman is a selfish young man who lacks any consideration for others. Although he fits at upscale parties, he feels alienated by his family, other African-Americans of all classes, and humanity in general. He is also physically different

from the people around him because “he has an undersized leg” (62). Since he is able to conceal his leg, he believes that he can also hide his emotional shortcomings. All the people are aware of Milkman’s oddities. His mother’s guest comment that he is a strange child. His schoolmates frequently tease him and beat him. Even when Milkman is a grown man, his behavior is much different from that of the rest of his community. He even walks against the flow of traffic on the street: “the street was even more crowded with people, all going in the direction he was coming from. All walking hurriedly and bumping against him” (78). Although Milkman is flawed, his family loves him unconditionally and he does not return their love, and causes them much pain.

Milkman Dead’s childhood realization that he cannot fly serves to set him apart from other people: “That only birds and airplanes could fly” (9). So he lost all interest in himself. In a way, he even detaches himself from his own life. Although Milkman grows up, finds friendship with Guitar who is a member of Vigilante of Seven Days group, meets his mysterious agent Pilate to whom his father restricted visit and falls in love with his cousin Hagar who is elder than him, these human connections curiously disappoint him. Milkman’s loss of ‘interest in himself’ does not constitute selflessness, for he becomes astoundingly selfish. He collects the rent from the tenants. But rather indicates a lack of real involvement in life and an ignorance of his true personal and racial identity that alienates him. It is generally known that when an individual can establish a specific connection with her/his people’s origins that s/he becomes a true rooted man. So, Milkman wants to fly, but his wish for flight is a selfish escapism that can never give him true freedom. Milkman is “struggling toward an acceptance of the fact that an active commitment to other is paradoxically the best of all possible means for fulfilling oneself and one’s

personal freedom” (136). Until he completes an odyssey of discovery and realize this absolute paradox--that a person must be rooted in order to fly--Milkman must remain flat-footed on the ground.

Milkman’s inability to fly is exacerbated by another perceived handicap. Living in the large shadow of his abusive and acquisitive father, Milkman grows up with a secret and shameful flaw. At age fourteen, Milkman “noticed that one of his legs was shorter than other [...]. It bothered him and he acquired movements and habits to disguise what to him was a burning defect” (62). Milkman “knew, because of the leg, that he could never admire” his physically powerful father (63). Because he feels that he cannot measure up to his father’s standards, Milkman outwardly rebels by adopting a different personal style, but he inwardly becomes more like his father: ‘dead’ in both name and spirit. As Milkman grows older, it becomes apparent that his short leg is merely an outward manifestation of his internal shortcoming. Milkman’s emotional and moral growth has been severely stunted by his parent’s twisted and barren relationship with each other. It denies their children the nourishing love they need to be whole. Milkman and his family spend much of their lives locked into a selfishly false way of loving; their ignorance of the past kills any hope for future and so present joys is poisoned. Milkman’s father loves the possession of property above all else, while his mother loves the defied memory of her father: this double distortion of love renders Macon ‘dead’ within their mutually antagonistic marriage.

A further indication of Milkman’s dilemma and an additional impediment to his spiritual growth is found in another childhood memory. When dead family’s shiny Packard, ‘Macon Dead’s hearse’ as it is half joking called by the neighbors, role

sedately through the city on afternoon driver, Milkman's view is restricted to what he can see out of rear window. He kneels on the seat to watch the passing scene, but "riding backward made him uneasy. It was like flying blind, and not knowing where he was going-just where he had been-troubled him" (32). Later in life, Milkman's necessary journey of discovery follows an uneven path because although he has a desire to know his origins, both of his name and his family. He has a conflicting desire to remain ignorant, to rest secure in unknowingness. The final truth Milkman learned is that "to see future he must see, remember and reconcile himself to the past" (312). Identification of the past, for Milkman, becomes the process of naming his ancestors. Only through knowledge of the names that have gone before can Milkman arrive at an understanding and acceptance of his own name, and at last feel true love for himself and his people.

The culture of renaming the black people in the white community is one of the common phenomena in the United States. It has become a source of racial discrimination and that has created a number of racial issues among the diverse ethnic groups. The renaming system becomes a matter of great concern to Milkman and it disappoints him to a greater extent. The trend of renaming becomes much painful as slavery and the black people consider it as one of the basic strategies of their victimization. It strikes Milkman in the novel and he does not only remain much aware about it, but he takes it negatively. He considers himself as a victim of the remaining culture when he thinks deeply about his own white preferred name as Milkman because the white people ignore his baptized name, Macon Dead III and rename him as their favorite name 'Milkman'.

It is the trend where the black people like Milkman feel their auspicious name being ignored and the nickname much recognized elsewhere as a puppet among the whites. It becomes a part of the bitter experience of Milkman and it begins to displease him deeply. He knows that it is not his individual case, but a problem of whole black community. In this context, he knows through Pilate that his great grandfather, whose name was Jake was dismissed from his ancestral name and had given a new name Macon and was added Dead as a stamp of slave determining about his poor social status. A senior officer named Yankee does it as he finds Jake illiterate, innocent and straight forward. Since then, the title Dead is added against the name of Jake's descendants about which none of the family members remains concerned except Milkman. He is the first person to speculate upon it. He questions himself why the employer of his younger sister, Magdalena rename her as Lena; his aunt Rebecca as Reba. Reflecting his grudge towards the white people in authority who gave the title Dead, Milkman says to Guitar, "I'm a Dead ! My mother's a Dead ! My sister, you and him ain't the only ones!" (38). But Guitar remains unconcerned, unaware and indifferent about it.

When Milkman does not find any reaction of Guitar against the renaming system and observes him being satisfied with whatever is being done it depresses him. He does not know the reality that the black people are themselves responsible for such unpopular trends imposed upon them. However, Milkman wants to be clear about their ancestral name and decides to explore the reality by asking his aunt Pilate. He says, "I'll ask Pilate. Pilate knows. It's in that dub- ass box hanging from her ear. Her own name and everybody else's. I'm gonna ask her what my name is. You know how my old man's daddy got his name?" (89). His concern reflects the anxiety of the whole black community and he intends to make his efforts to explore its root and cure

it permanently finds some proper solution to uplift the people of such that victimized community.

So, Milkman decides to explore his lost dignity through his personal efforts by a deep understanding of past history and knowledge of tradition which lies before him a vigorous and complex task. That is why, he takes pain for the improvement of the whole race and community to establish a new vision to look the black people in this universe.

When Milkman first embarks his journey toward freedom, he flies away from the unbreakable pain of his spurned lover Hagar, the conflicting demands of his parents, and the disturbing intensity Guitar Bains. This attempted escape is coupled with Milkman's greedy interest of gold, and the lost fortune from his family's past history. As he flies away from his life long home for the first time, he is elated:

The airplane ride exhilarated him, encourage illusion and a feeling invulnerability. High above the cods [...] it was not possible to believe that he had ever made a mistake, or could [...]. This one time he wanted to go solo. In the air, away from real life, he felt free, but on the ground [...] the wings of all those other people's nightmares flapped in his face and constrained him. (220)

After leaving the airplane "Milkman travels by Greyhound bus to Danville, Pennsylvania, his father's boyhood place" (226). The cave that contains the mythical family gold is located near the home of an old black woman named Circe who was sheltered the young siblings Macon and Pilate after their father was killed and his farmland seized by local whites. Here, Milkman begins his true journey when he

encounters and enters her image of witch from his childhood nightmares and enters her terrifying embrace. Circe directs Milkman to cave and he plunges into the dark and treacherous woods in search of gold. Milkman's civilized clothes and shoes are gradually ruined as he undergoes a ritualistic stripping of his sense of his power and egoism. Finding nothing in the cave but "rocks, boards, leaves [...] no flat little pigeon breasted bags of gold" (252) he is deeply disappointed. Deciding that Pilate may have earlier retrieved the gold had hidden it near her birthplace in Shalimar, Virginia, Milkman resolves to continue his journey for quest.

After a determined search, he finally locates Shalimar through chance when his seventy-five dollar used car breaks down in front of Solomon's general store in the center of town. As his journey expands and gets the layer of his family history, his money and possessions quickly becomes useless. Milkman's unconscious condescending demeanor soon provokes a vicious broken bottle fight with a local man. After this public taste of skill and courage, he is subjected to a further trial when a group of Shalimar's men invite him to accompany them on a night hunting expedition.

So, he is in great dilemma because he was looking for gold and worldly luxurious life. He thinks that money would liberate him from his father. When his parents, sisters, friend Guitar and lover Hagar love him, he does not respect them reciprocally. But later, when he searches gold, he came to know the layer of ancestral history despite gold and then he begins to realize his lost heritage.

Realization of the Cultural Value

When Milkman comes to know about his dilemma, he begins to realize all things that are important. So, he wants to escape from the usual life style that his people in community have practised. He realizes that such works give him no pleasure, and he wishes to devote himself in some significant achievement. The awareness of his family reputation emerges within him. He realizes that collecting rents, visiting wine shops and forms provide him no satisfaction. Involving in such works, he finds himself “tired of dodging crazy people, tired of his jive town, of running up and down these streets getting nowhere [...]” (118).

Milkman finds no interest in those things that the people around him involve and for him pleasure remains quite far. However, in spite of his alienation, nothing can deter him from his path that he determines to follow. His determination and devotion helps him to be different from others. He intends to detach from the rest of the world. “Milkman lay quietly in the sunlight, his mind a blank, his lungs craving smoke. Gradually his fear of and eagerness for death returned. Above all he wanted to escape the implications of what he had been told” (120).

His father still wants Milkman to involve in worldly life. He tries more to wash his brain tempting him with worldly luxuries. He assures Milkman to provide him through tricky business. But Milkman who is conscious of the nature of his father denies him tactfully showing his indifference towards money. Milkman begins to devalue what his father, in facts, values and responds his father tactfully:

I know Daddy, I know. But I have to get away just the same. I'm not leaving the country; I just want to be on my own. Get a job on my

own, live on my own. You did it at sixteen. Guitar at seventeen. Everybody. I'm still living at home, working for you not because I sweated for the job, but because I'm your son. I'm over thirty years old. (163)

Despite several requests to stay at home looking after the farms by his father, Milkman ignores all things and decides to do something to explore the reality of his ancestral dignity. First of all, he becomes grateful to Pilate because his mother reminds him about her contribution in the Dead family. Personally, she is the nurturer of both Milkman's own existence and his family. Therefore, Milkman starts his journey consulting with Pilate about various serious lost family matters that he needs to know. His mother assures about Pilate that "she saved my life. And yours, Macon. She saved yours too. She watched you was her own. Until your father threw her aunt" (126).

He came to know through Pilate that after the death of Macon Dead I, his father's father, his twelve years old daughter, Pilate and sixteen years old Macon Dead II found themselves homeless. They went to Circe, who was the closet colored woman in their neighborhood. She was the midwife by her profession who delivered them. Pilate worked in a house of a gentleman farmer. Circe kept the two children with her in the same apartment until they could to live on their own. At night, they slept in a haystack and they found a man like their father. They saw a farm beside the hill and an abandoned shed near by a cave and at its mouth stood their father. As they approached into the cave, their father had disappeared. They spent night there comfortably with bats. Next day Macon ate wild fruits and climbed off the shelf, saw a man and stabbed the man repeatedly. "He wanted the dead man to disappear, to be

covered, to be hidden, to be gone” (170). When he snatched the blanket, he found little gray bags tied with wire of gold. He piles the sacks of gold into the tarpaulin. She suggests him to carry the bag as an act of stealing, but his greed makes him deny it flatly as he says, “This ain’t money; it’s gold. It’ll keep us for life, Pilate. We can get us another farm. We can” (171).

He visits the cave after three days and finds the dead man still looking at him, but the tarpaulin and the gold were gone. Milkman remembers his father talking about gold accusing Pilate, “How she sneaked out of same cave with a big bag of gold that must have weighted a hundred pounds over her shoulder, all over the country for fifty years and didn’t just hung it from the ceiling like a fuckin a sack of onions” (207). But it gives Milkman father’s greedy impression which he terms as crazy. Milkman says to his father directly, “Crazy. All of you. Just straight out, laid-back crazy. I should of known. The whole thing was Crazy: everything it was crazy- the whole idea” (205). However, Macon II accuses Pilate as a snake which Milkman denies and says that she looks short and pitiful because he understands her idea of collecting bones as her responsibility to preserve ancestral dignity. Pilate collects her father’s bones because the funereal people demand fifty dollars which she cannot pay. “She just carried what was left of Mr. Solomon and put it in a sack and kept it with her” (207). She says, “So I thought I just as well keep him near me and when I die they can put him in the same hole as me. We’ll rise up to Judgment Day together. Hand in hand” (207).

Pilate says to Milkman that she is directly instructed by her father’s ghost: “He kept coming to see me, off an on. Tell me things to do. First he just told me to sing, to keep on singing” (208). The ghost told her, “You just can’t fly on off and leave a

body. A human life is precious. You shouldn't fly off and leave it" (208). Therefore, she goes to cave and finds him lying up on that every rock. She puts him in her sack, piece by piece. Along with some cloth his bones look clean and dry. Pilate emphasizes what her father insists, "You can't take a life and walk off and leave it-life is life. Precious and the dead you kill I yours. They stay with you anyway, in your mind. So it is a better thing to have the bones right there with you wherever you go. That way, it frees up your mind" (208).

It is the bones of his great grandfather that fascinates Milkman, which is completely a spiritual act. He decides to follow it immediately and he sighs, "Yeah. By myself. I need to get out of here. I mean I really have to go away somewhere" (221). Now he likes to live independently on his own. "I just know that I want to live my own life. I don't want to be my old man's office boy no more. And as long as I'm in this place I will be. I have to get out of this house and I don't want to owe anybody when I go" (222). Now he is bold enough to create and determine what justice is. He knows that it is the conflict in his family members which is fully responsible to make him crazy and he decides to get rid of it. He realizes, "My family is driving me crazy. Daddy wants me to be like him and hate my mother. My mother wants me to think like her and hate my father. Everybody wants something from me" (222).

After collecting all available information, Milkman realizes that he needs to find Circe face to face who becomes the crux of his mission. While planning to see Circe, he finds a man and asks to seek his help. "I'm looking for Circe, a lady named Circe. Well, not her, but her house" (228). Milkman in this context pretends himself to be a businessman to check on some property out there. But the man refers to a

person Reverend Cooper, who lives in the Stone Lane and is close to Circe. Cooper knows everything about Pilate and about her relation with Circe. His daddy was a blacksmith and remembers that she had come to Circe with a small piece of gold in a metal box to make earrings. Milkman knows that it was Circe, a good midwife who took care about the Pilate and Macon Dead II while their father was murdered and nobody was arrested as his murderer. Circe worked in the Butler family whom she had suspected as the murderer of the old Macon Dead I. Milkman knows that people around there accepted Macon Dead with his extraordinary credit. His wife, Milkman's grandmother was a good looking Indian woman with black hair and slanted eyes who died in childbirth. They had a farm of peaches. Macon Dead II was as strong as an ox. "The Good times, the hard times, things that changed, things that stayed the same- and head and shoulders above all of it was the tall, magnificent Macon Dead, who death, it seemed to him, was the beginning of their own dying even though they were young boys at the time" (235). He was a clever irrigator, the peach tree grower, the boy slaughter, the wild-turkey roaster and the man who could plow forty in no time flat and sang like an angle while he did it. He had come there with nothing "but free papers, a Bible, and a pretty black-haired wife, and in one year he'd leased ten acres, the next ten more" (235). Through his hard work, sixteen years later, he had one of the best farms, like a paintbrush and he spoke to them like a sermon:

See? See what you can do? Never mind you can't tell one letter from another, never mind you born a slave, never mind you lose your name, never mind your daddy dead, never mind nothing. Here, this here, is what a man can do if he puts his mind to it and his back in it. stop sniveling. (235)

He suggests that since they got home:

Grab it. Grab this land! Take it, hold it, my brothers, make it, my brothers, shake it, squeeze it, turn it, twist it, beat it, kick it, kiss it, whip it, stomp it, dig it, plow it, seed it, reap it, rent it, buy it, sell it, own it, build it, multiply it, and pass it on-can you hear me? Pass it on!. (235)

But they shot the top of his head off and at his fine Georgia peaches. Cooper looking at Milkman says much about Macon Dead proudly as a fabulous man, and addresses Milkman as Macon Dead's boy:

That's him! That's Macon Dead! He gonna buy the Erie Lackawanna! If he want it, he'll get it! Bless my soul. Bet he worry them white folks to death. Can't nobody keep him down! Not no Macon Dead! Not in this world! And not in the next! Haw! Goddam! The Erie Lackawanna! (236)

Milkman realizes that he needs to know his ancestor and plans to meet Circe. So he reaches Butler's place and pushes the door and he smells a hairy animal that makes him suffocating, then he pulls handkerchief. The spicy perfume like ginger root remains seductive. He dreams of the witches in red and black clothes chasing him down to the lawn trees from which he cannot escape. She grabs his shoulders-her head came to his chest made him dizzy. He wakes with a scream. He notices a pack of golden eyed dogs whom she speaks and they obey. The woman calls Milkman and takes his both hands on hers like a small kid being dragged to bed. He thinks perhaps this woman is Circe who must have dead, but this woman is alive. "That was a far as

he got because although the woman was talking to him, she might in any case still be dead” (240). She said, “I know one day you would come back. Well, that’s not entirely true. You see, I was right. You did come” (241). He interrupted her introducing himself as the son of Macon Dead and asks about his father, Pilate, grandfather and grandmother (sing) who belong to Indian-American family. Circe tells about Pilate staying in the cave where the Butlers dumped old Macon’s body. Actually the body was buried by a creek out it was floated that shows disgrace of the Negroes. She guides him towards the creek and cave. Milkman guesses, “Healer, deliverer, in another world she would have been the head nurse of Mercy” (246). She is the spiritual figure who discourages Milkman’s support through money. She stupefies Milkman, “Put your money back in your pocket” (246).

The woman reminds Milkman of his grandfather as Jake and Milkman forms a story in his mind, “Of course: looking for his grandfather’s remains-to collect them and take them for a proper burial” (248). He passes the thick woods and crosses the shallow creek. Milkman thinks while crossing the orchards that the Butlers might have eaten the Georgia peaches after they shot his grandfather’s head off. He takes a long breath and begins to negotiate the rock.

Milkman enters the dark cave and remembers the dumped bones of his grandfather as told by Circe. He struggles to go in, but gets scared with bats moving around in the darkness. He feels thirsty and hungry, tears off a few leaves and put them in his mouth. Though he feels its bitter taste, he chews them and spits out.

Circe says, “Macon’s body rose up from the ground at the first heavy rain, and that the butlers, or somebody, dumped it in the hunters’ cave one summer night [...]. And it was a body, a corpse when they hauled it away, because they recognized him

as a Negro” (258). But Pilate says that there were only bones. Four years later she visits the cave in the snow and takes the white man’s bones. Her father’s body is in the cave. Pilate further says that she took the white man’s bones and didn’t even look for gold. Milkman sees the bones in the cell.

Efforts of the Protagonist to Assert his Identity

Milkman reaches in Shalimar, which is the living place of Solomon. There he first encounters with a Solomon, a light-skinned redheaded man in a restaurant. While he sits down on the burnt grass and lights a cigarette, he observes there a crowd of children singing songs in rhyme about Solomon, the descendant of Christ who was popular as Jake with an ability of flying associated with the holy bird, Bird Jay. Milkman who already heard about Bird Jay feels exalted to be connected with Solomon, his grandfather. Milkman begins to perceive more about the naming of the song when the children sing in rhyme:

Jay the only son of Solomon

Come booba yalle, come booba tambee

Whirl about and touch the sun

Come booba yalle, come booba tambee. (264)

Milkman’s happiness gets no bound as he learns word by word from the children. He seeks more through children’s songs as he gets more information from the older women Circe who loves the cadre dogs in the Butler mansion, and another woman, Susan Byrd who reveals the reality of her Indian blood that she knows her close companions.

Milkman walks towards Solomon's store and Mr. Solomon smiles when Milkman asks a place to stay around there. He walks to store and asks somebody to fix his car but a nigger at the same time pulls a knife and threatens. Milkman abuses him and says, "My name is Macon; I'm already dead" (270). After making reconciliation with the reality, he feels survived. He is dead in the sense of knowledge and understanding that could not gain to prove his surviving. Earlier he had thought this place, Shalimar, which was going to be his home. His original home. His people came from here, his grandfather and his grandmother. He buys two cans of pineapple and a box of crackers from Mr. Solomon. He finds many people named Omar, King, Walker, Luther Solomon and so on. He expects something sublime: "He had come here to find trace's of Pilate's journey to find relatives she might have visited, to find anything that would either lead him to the gold or convince him that it no longer existed" (275). But he gets involved in a knife and broken bottle fighting in the first place, which he thinks as an obstacle to deter him from his mission.

Now Milkman accepts that everything either of big value or small does not work in his part of his life. He seems completely away from the wordly aspect and feels no use of the two hundred-dollar that lay in his pocket and the three pieces that he preserved in his suitcase. He reveals a complete detachment from the matter:

There was nothing here to keep him-not his money, his car, his father's reputation, his suit, or his shoes. In fact, they hampered him. All he had started out with on his journey was gone: his suitcase with Scotch, the shirts, and the space for bags of gold, his sharp-brim hat, his tie, his shirt, his three piece suit, his socks and his shoes. (277)

Milkman does not only deter himself from the materialistic development but also from his senses and physical pleasure.

He ignores what he feels of his senses. His realization of, “eyes, ears, nose, taste, touch—and some other sense that he knew he did not have: an ability to separate out, of all things there were to sense, the one that life itself might depend on” (277) shows his devotion and dedication to his final attainment of cultural tradition and values.

Milkman involves himself with the hunting group in the night and pretends to be enjoying with them for getting more information about his grandfather and family. He makes friendship with them and kills a bobcat that reminds him about his childhood. However, he talks about his grandparents, “Ya know, my grandfather came from somewhere near here. My grandmother too” (283) and enjoys with it. When he names Pilate and Sing, they joke Pilot Dead while flying the airplane, which he does not mind because he understands that it is the way to reach to the origin of his family.

Vernell, one of the members of the hunting group shows his interest to Sing, Milkman’s grandmother and says, “I believe that was the name of a girl my grandfather used to play with” (283) and they used to go fishing and berry picking. Vernell tells him that this Sing girl was light skinned with straight black hair. She was an Indian, one of old Heddy (Byrd) children. Byrd was a family that lived near Solomon’s leap, known as Susan Byrd’s people. Omar talks about a nice lady, Sweet living up the road and Milkman smiles. It seems to be slow but Milkman gets more and more information about his grandparents and it satisfies him a lot.

Milkman spends the night with a local woman named Sweet in Shalimar. He feels to be refined and seeking spiritual attainment when she bathes him. He realizes that “if this bath and this woman, [...] are all that come out of this trip, I’ll rest easy and do my duty to God, country, and the Brotherhood of Elks for the rest of my family” (285). Such realization makes him more elevate. After the realization of purgation, he begins to bathe her: “[H]e soaped and rubbed her until her skin squeaked and glistened like onyx. She put salve on his face. He washed her hair. She sprinkled talcum on his feet [...] she kissed his mouth. He touched her face and said ‘I’ll see you tonight’” (285). Unlike Milkman’s many sexual encounters, his love making with Sweet is unselfish and mutually fulfilling. For the first time, Milkman understands that giving love must be weeded to taking love. Later, in his dreams, Milkman flies “over the dark sea, but it [does] not frighten him because he knows he could not fall. He [is] alone in the sky, but someone was applauding him, watching him” (298). The unseen source of this applause may be the ghostly hands of his ancestors with him he is finally beginning to connect. The next morning, Milkman continues this new way of interacting with a loved one: “He made up the bed. She gave him a gumbo to eat. He washed the dishes. She washed his clothes and hung them out to dry. He scoured her tub” (285). Later, he regretfully acknowledges that although “his mother and Pilate had fought for his life”, he was in his mother’s womb, “and he had never so much as made either of them a cup of tea” (331).

Milkman visits Byrd house and introduces himself with Miss Byrd, a woman who lives along with Miss Grace Long. Milkman sitting together with Miss Byrd in sofa eats butter cookies with coffee. When he asks about his grandmother, Grace claps her hands and asks him if she is his relative. Susan Byrd says that Sing was his father’s sister who had remained unmarried. They say that Pilate lived in Virginia

and Sing lived in Shalimar and later went to Boston. They talk about Macon Dead, Known as Jake. Macon never went to Virginia but only Pilate. Milkman opens the parcel of Butler cookies given by Grace and eats them. “The question about his family still knocks around in his head like billiard balls” (294). Guitar asks Milkman for gold and both involve in a hot discussion. Guitar misunderstands the bag of cookie as gold and he accuses him a selfish. Wherever Milkman goes and whoever he meets helps him heartily and every help adds some layers of his progress.

When Milkman observes progress of his findings, he begins to hate his father’s greed and wordly ambition. He knows about his father who “distorted life, bent it, for the sake of gain, was a measure of his loss at his father’s death” (300). On the other side, Milkman hears the song sung by children: “O Solomon don’t leave me here/ Jay the only son of Solomon/ Come booba yalle, come [...]” (302).

He distinguishes his father and regrets about him for not recognizing the ancestral paradigms. Every object and creature in this town is named as Solomon. Solomon’s General Store, Luther Solomon, Solomon’s leap etc. So the Children sing praising Solomon and appeal not to leave them. The town Shalimar echoes Solomon and it appears Shalleemone (bird). Jay is the only son of Solomon known as Jake. The children chant, “Twenty one children, the last one Jake” (303). Milkman concentrates on the song of Solomon that the children chant enthusiastically in rhyme with their every grave and Milkman memorizes the songs. Sing as an Indian and her name was Sing Byrd or which is likely to be Sing Bird-Singing Bird and her brother Crowell Byrd are likely to Crow Bird or just Crow.

Milkman keeps interest in Heddy and knows about her Indianness. He deeply concentrates on the relationship among Solomon, Jake, Ryna and Heddy. The

children sing a song about their own people. Milkman too hums remembering Jake's father, Solomon, who flew away-meaning died or ran off-not Jake. It is Jake who begged to stay.

After these enlightening experiences, alone in the woods and together with Sweet he discovers the names of his ancestors: his roots and heritage. The children of the town sing a circle rhyme that tells the story of a flying African named Solomon; now he comes to know that it is the story of his family. Revealing the true source of Pilate's 'sugarman' blues songs, the children repeat the plaintive words sung by Solomon's wife, Ryna, who died of sorrow after his Africa-bound departure:

O Solomon don't leave me here

Cotton balls to choke me

O Solomon don't leave me here

Buckra's arms to yoke me

Solomon done fly, Solomon dine gone

Solomon cut across the sky, Solomon gone home. (303)

Thus, he comes to know in this song that its rhyme verse contains an oral history of Solomon's family, listing the names of twenty one children who were left behind when Solomon flew back to Africa. And milkman memorizes his ancestor's names, he becomes "as excited as a child confronted with boxes and boxes and boxes of presents under the skirt of a Christmas tree" and "as eager and happy as he had ever been in his life" (304).

Milkman again knocks Susan Byrd's door in front of the cedar tree. He asks her to talk about Sing who married black boy (Jake black as coal) whom her mother took care. She tells him that Jake was one of those flying African children, one of Solomon Children. Heddy always call him Shalimar. Heddy finds him and takes him home and raises him. She doesn't have any boy child then. Crowell, her father comes later. Jake and Sing grow up together. Sing's name is singing Bird whose father's name is Crow at first. Later, he changes it to Crowell Byrd, after he takes off his buckskin. Milkman asks why do they call Solomon, "a flying African?" (322). Some of those Africans brought over there claim kin to him. There must be more than forty families (21 children) of Solomon spread around there. They (the wife and children) say that they all saw him go where they were all working in the fields who use to grow cotton there in the hills. She tells about Jake, "He was supposed to be one of Solomon's [...] twenty one-all boys and all of them with the same mother. Jake was the baby. The baby and the wife were right next to him when he flew off" (322). Jake, as a slave had to register at the freedman's bureau, but he never remained slave. Milkman offered his gratefulness to Miss Byrd, his newly found relative. He wants to see photos of Sing, Crowell and Heddy, but didn't like to trouble his newly found relative.

Excited by his new knowledge, Milkman grabs Sweet and races to Shalimar's nearby river for a baptismal celebration. Plunging into the water, Milkman "began to whoop and dive and splash and turn. 'He could fly! You hear me? My great-granddaddy could fly!' Goddam! [Milkman] whipped the water with his fists, then jumped straight up as though he too could take off" (328). Milkman's joy blinds him to the bittersweet sorrow of Sweet's question: "who'd he leave behind?" (328).

Filled with pride and happiness at his discovery of these magical family roots, Milkman returns home to tell his findings about his lost family history to Pilate. There Pilate's precious granddaughter Hagar has committed suicide, shattered by Milkman's cold rejection of her possessive love Pilate welcomes Milkman home by "breaking a wine bottle over his head as just reward for his prodigal behavior" (331). While Milkman was away learning to fly like Solomon, Hagar's sorrow led her to Ryan's fate: the old pattern has been repeated once again. Milkman finally understands that the joy of flying away is exceeded by the pain of those left behind for "the consequences of Milkman's own stupidity would remain and regret would always out-weight the things he was proud of having done" (335). Shortly, before her suicide, Hagar concludes that Milkman left her for another woman because "he don't like hair like mine" (315). Pilate asks her granddaughter how Milkman can "love himself and hate your hair" which is "his hair too" but Hagar is inconsolable (315). After he learns of Hagar's death, Milkman goes back to his parent's house "with almost none of the things he'd taken with him. But he returned with a box of Hagar's hair" (334). Although he can never undo his past mistakes, Milkman at last achieves honest human understanding through sorrow, and thus gains a redemption.

Milkman makes the ferocity of Pilate's anger less strong by revealing his recent discoveries which finally explain the true origin of the bag of bones Pilate has carried with her for decades. He tells Pilate that hanging bag of bones wrapping of tarpaulin in ceiling is her father's bones. He suggests her to bury her Papa's bones in Shalimar. Pilate says, "If I bury papa, I guess I ought to bury this too—somewhere" (334). At that time Milkman remembers Robert Smith jumping off the roof of Mercy. In Shalimar, they stay in Omar's family. Next day Milkman and Pilate walk to Solomon's Leap. Pilate carries the sack, Milkman a small shovel. He digs a big hole

and Pilate opens the mouth of the sack; she lies the bone carefully into the small grave and Milkman heaps dirt over them and picks it down with the back of his shovel. In one side, it is the homage offered to ancestors, but on the other side, it is the continuous performance of ritualistic tradition. “Pilate [lays] the bones carefully into the small grave. Milkman heap[s] dirt over them and pick[s] it down with the sack of his shovel” (335). They question about what to put a rock or cross, but Pilate yanks her earring from her ear and places in it Sing’s smith box with the single word Jake ever wrote. But unfortunately, as Pilate stands up, “It seemed to Milkman that he heard the shot after she fell” (335).

Guitar Bains whose twisted love with Milkman has driven him stalk the very people he wants to protect, and he fires the bullet that kills Pilate. As Pilate’s life bleeds away on Solomon’s leap, her only regret is: “I wish I’d knowed more people. I would of loved ‘em all. If I’d a knowed more, I would loved more” (336). Dying, she asks him to sing. Like Ryna and Hagar before him, Milkman pleads in abandoned despair: “Sugargirl don’t leave me here/ Cotton balls to choke me/ Sugargirl don’t leave me here/ Buckra’s arms to yoke me” (336). When Milkman comes to know that Pilate is dead, he sings louder and louder as though sheer volume would wake her. He wakes only the birds who suffered off into the air and one of the birds “dive[s] into the new grave and scoop[s] something shiny in its beak before it flies away” (336). As Pilate’s name-earring soars away, Milkman suddenly knows “why he loved her so. Without even leaving the ground, she could fly” (336).

There Milkman stands up to give the murderous love of Guitar Bains, ready to give everything for love, replete with hard-won knowledge that a truly connected love is not bondage but freedom. Duplicating the flying leap of his famed ancestors,

without “wiping away the tears, taking a deep breath, or even bending his knees”, Milkman launches himself into the cold night air: “As fleet and bright as a lodestar, he wheeled toward Guitar and it did not matter which of them would give up his ghost in the killing arms of his brother. For now he knew what Shalimar knew; If you surrendered to the air, you could ride it” (337).

Finally, Pilate tells Milkman not only about his birthright but also about a legacy which allows him to fly. Learning the truth of Pilate’s life long understanding that the closer he is bound in love with her, the closer he is free. Milkman reaches the end of his journey as he begins a new one. In this way, he gets knowledge about his lost family history which is known as black cultural history. In other words, Milkman achieves his individual identity by means of his African-American culture.

IV. Conclusion

Historically speaking, Afro-American literature witnessed many vicissitudes in its development. From the 'slave narrative' to the 'protest writing' the history of Afro-American literature, like the history of blacks in America has undergone a series of severe ordeals. However, with the emergence of the Black Aesthetics in 1960s, the perspective of the black artists transformed remarkably. They abandoned their backlash in letters and began defining in themselves, and in their own terms, finding beauty in themselves and admiring the intrinsic values of their own cultural identity.

Through the spirit of the principles of the Black Aesthetic, Morrison centers *Song of Solomon* entirely on the Afro-American culture and the black's identity in America. The painful history of slavery has not been portrayed to fuel racism as it is to remind her readers (who are of course, blacks) of their ancestors' glory and the power of endurance. Thus, the painfully constructed history and their new identity in America, along with African myth (such as Flying Africa), places them on a new plain of consciousness-away from the racial revenge.

Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* concerns towards the burning issue of the black people regarding their poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, social discrimination, injustice and individual victimization. She successfully employs black cultural tradition and mythical devices to uplift her people and their lost cultural identity. It is revealed through Milkman, the protagonist of the novel, who discovers his real cultural identity through an African folktale about an enslaved African who escapes slavery by fleeing back to Africa. The novel tells the story of Macon 'Milkman' Dead, a man alienated from himself and estranged from his family, his community

and his historical and cultural roots. Morrison's long detailed imagery, visual language and writing of black history guides the protagonist a long thirty years' journey. This journey enables the protagonist to reconnect with his past and realizes his own self worth.

At the beginning of the novel, Milkman engages himself in the household works assisting his father, Macon Dead Jr. His life is limited within the materialistic achievement like collecting rents from the houses, wasting time in drinking alcohol, merry-making including love and sex. This pattern of life causes boredom and he feels alienated within his own community. But all of a sudden, he gets concerned over his name, being different from his father and his behavior. It arouses his interest to know the reality and the inquiries he makes with Pilate. It turns him to something greater than he knew. Pilate refers Circe as the woman who provided shelter to Jack (Macon Dead Sr.), Milkman's grandfather.

Milkman travels to Circe's place to discover more about his grandfather. Reverend Cooper, who is also associated with Dead family, guides him towards Circe's residence. He finds her in the image of a goddess. She welcomes him and talks about his grandfather's life style which was quite prosperous one. Milkman comes to know that his grandfather was the first black man who toiled a lot to turn the barren dry land into the fertile one. He initiated irrigation, farmed more than three acres of land, grew peaches and enjoyed with his continuous manual labor. But the people whom Circe served could not digest it, and shot him dead at his head at the fence of the farmland. Along with the pathetic story of his grandfather, she also reveals about her contribution, which she made to shelter Milkman's father, Macon Dead Jr., and his aunt Pilate. It is Circe who gave a wire of stolen gold from the

people she worked. Reverend Cooper's father helped to make earring that Pilate wore. She reveals more about Milkman's grandmother Sing and inspires Milkman to visit the Ryna Gulch in Shalimar.

In Shalimar, Milkman meets Calvin and Omar in front of the Solomon's store. It is the place named after the name of his great grandfather, Solomon, known as Shalimar. Actually, Solomon who could fly, dropped his son Jake there in the Ryna Gulch while flying back to Africa. Heddy, an Indian woman, the mother of Sing, Milkman's grandmother, found Jake and started looking after him with her daughter, Sing as she did not have her own male child. Later, Jake married Sing and started loving there as an ex-slave. In this context, Milkman knows about the reality of renaming and his lost familial history. Calvin and Omar revealed that the freed slave, Jake, once encountered with the drunken Yankee of Union Army, who written as Macon Dead instead of Jake. It was the illiteracy of the freed slave, which forced him to sign blindly.

Milkman feels Shalimar as the birthplace of the first black people in the United States. Everywhere he finds people praising Solomon as the descendent of Jesus Christ, and his son Jake as the only son of Solomon. Suddenly, he finds a group of small children singing a song admiring Solomon and Jake, which reminds him of Pilate singing the very song. Now he perceives the meaning with its complete sense, he moves to Virginia, reveals everything to Pilate and both rebury the bones of Jake, then Milkman becomes aware of his lost culture. Thus, the text *Song of Solomon* shades various images of the black people, but it reflects Milkman's quest for cultural identity as its unifying theme. It attributes to mythical and spiritual mastery of Morrison and finally contributes to the great identification of the black people.

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