

## I. INTRODUCTION

Charles Johnson in his famous novel *Middle Passage* (1990), leads the characters and plot towards the freedom for African American people from the racial discrimination and domination of whites. Afro-Americans passed their lives in the extreme physical torture and mental agony since they were brought from western coast of Africa, mostly as the slaves. Severe punishment, exploitation, suppression, whipping, sexual abuse, rape, dehumanization etc were the day-to-day experiences in the life of blacks. In society, they were regarded as an inferior race so they were not given the permission to live equally with whites. They were not given the right to vote. The condition of slaves was even more pitiful. Their life was no better than the life of an animal. Because of these existential problems and domination black people revolted many times to liberate themselves from the discrimination. Though this novel is a snap of their history and experiences, it dramatizes the core of middle passage and their struggle for freedom. Severely dominated slaves and outwardly freed blacks rebel against whites on the ship. Ultimately the blacks get victory by killing the white captain of ship then they go towards a new territory, sailing the ship, themselves which is their dream land, to live freely. Symbolically, Johnson's "narrative techniques and content is designed to liberate the blacks" (Vincent 2). At last, the blacks become able to realize that they have seen the diplomatic rebellion as the path way to liberate themselves from the discrimination and domination of whites.

The white society did not accept them respectfully as the citizen rather they called the blacks 'an inferior race'. So they were deprived of the right to equality and freedom. Whites would call them by the pejorative names like 'niger', 'gal' etc. The ghetto areas, poorly made without the facilities, were the places for blacks to live. Black females were sexually exploited. The production due to the hard labour of

blacks was sweet return to whites, by which they were being more and more wealthy, but the sweat and labour was not respected. ". . . those Africans who had skills found themselves unable to employ them in [. . .] equal salary" (Shade 101). Similarly, politics was out of the access of blacks. Though Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther argue very strongly for the equality and freedom, almost all of the proclamations remained in the papers only. Blacks were made exception from the theory of Jefferson: ". . . all men are created equal . . ." Because of these discriminations and dominations blacks fought many times for equality and freedom. The voices in the rebellion before civil war were lost in the air. Though the blacks were given the right to vote and equality in *Civil War* by Emancipation Proclamation, that could not come in practice fully. Because of these reasons, African-Americans are always conscious of their freedom. To be culturally free, they celebrated their voice in Harlem Renaissance, Black Rights Movement and Black Aesthetic Movement. Now they are searching their root and cultural freedom for that every one contributes from his/her point less or more. In this context, Johnson wants to refresh their past experiences and history so that they could be conscious. Exploration of history through Postmodern perspective is "Johnson's quest for freedom" (Lorraine 2).

All the Afro-Americans in *Middle Passage* are struggling for complete freedom from the acts of dominations imposed upon them by the whites. The central character or the protagonist of the novel, Rutherford Calhoun seems outwardly free when his master Chandler frees him. But he is not satisfied only with the freedom from slavery, rather he starts his journey on *Republic*. "Calhoun on the voyage from sin to salvation, ignorance to wisdom, bondage to freedom, a quest that eventually culminates in healing and forgiving reunions with flawed paternal figures" (Lorraine 7). He actively makes plan on the ship with other slave characters so that they could

rebel against the white captain of the ship, Ebenezer Falcon. By the victory in the revolution, the blacks have control over the ship then they start to go to the new territory driving their ship themselves. It symbolically suggests that blacks are ready to take any revenge against whites as they have killed the captain. And at the same time, by finishing the dominator, they want to go to the new territory, that is their dream land like past Africa without any dominator, discrimination, exploitations etc. Every black character has the hope and vision in his/her life so they revolt to reach to the new territory to live freely without whites and their influences.

African-American characters in the novel want to understand themselves so that it would be easier to rupture the conventional boundaries and start a new system based on equality. They want to create a new territory, new system, new mode of thought and new life style by collapsing the traditional system. "Calhan is not searching for his self but creating one" (Riggs 164). Education is the means to understand themselves and create their new life style. Calhoun and Isadora know about modern philosophy, socio-economical aspects, science, law etc whereas Papa knows diplomacy and traditional values. Other slaves also yearn for knowledge. If the black characters share a common hunger for education, they also share common yearning for freedom. "Education/literacy helps the slaves prove themselves worthy of freedom they so desperately seek" (Lorraine 2). Henry Louis Gates argues "Sheer Literacy was the very commodity that separated animal from human being, slaves from citizen, object from subject" (Lorraine 2). So education is the means by which characters come to understand the path way from slavery to freedom. As in the other black narratives i.e. Frederic Douglass's *The Heroic Slave*, Ellison's *Invisible Man*, education is the turning point in this novel. Educated characters like Calhoun, Isadora, papa realize that education would unfit them to be the slaves for ever. Douglass

realizes that "Knowledge is power, that access to education meant to freedom" (Lorraine 4).

### **About the Author and His Writing Trend**

African-American novelist Richard Charles Johnson was born on April, 23, 1948 in Evanston at Illinois. Though his economically poor family was not highly educated and able to create very good environment for his academic career, his mother who was only high school graduate introduced him to art and literature. Despite these challenges, he became successful to study philosophy at Southern Illinois University and completed B.A. in 1971, MA in 1973, earned his Ph. D. in 1976 and finally became a professor of English literature at Washington University. He started his career as a writer in his mid-twenties, when he was just a graduate in philosophy, by writing seven novels and publishing some books on visual art. Because of the African-American family background he was interested" to explore the connection between African-American historical experiences and various philosophical trends" (Riggs 467). So the expression of Afro-American historical experiences, sense of history and identity, racial tension and the search for freedom from every kinds of dominations are basic thematic aspects in his writings.

His novels are marked by a strong interest in the history and Afro-American experiences. He believes that reality can be redefined "as a some of many perceptions, he subjects the construction African-American history and the recreation of the world of Afro-American experience to many different perspectives and possibilities" (Riggs 476). While many writers are satisfied with what is available in traditional literary convention he is more interested in enriching contemporary American literature by searching for appropriate "approaches and form that can help reclaim Afro-American's sense of history and identity" (468). In his works he questions the

historical facts. He sees the need of recreation and redefinitions of historical truth so that social reconstruction would be possible. Most of his works explore the African-American slavery from the different theoretical point of view. Because of his special individual capacity as an artist, he can blend history, fiction, romance and experiences very beautifully. So he mingles the history of slavery with fiction and romance. Afro-American experiences come in the form of historical narratives. Past and present both are not satisfactory to him so he thinks it necessary to redefine the history, and change the present for the reconstruction of the society. After all the history and experiences inspire the blacks to recognize themselves and fight for the freedom.

Johnson's works are revolutionary in tone. By questioning historical facts, he suggest the new one which makes the reconstruction of society possible. Not like the other writer's narratives, and characters, his content and characters are always revolutionary. Rutherford Calhoun in *Middle Passage*, Faith in *Faith and Good Thing* and Andrew Hawkins in *Oxherding Tale* cross the traditional boundary to reach a new free territory. They are conscious about the condition of their lives so they are not passive rather they are progressive. Though his characters are living in slavery they have a sweet dream that one day they will be able to be free from every kinds of suppressions—cultural, economical, psychological, physical etc. More than that, his Afro-American slaves are some how educated so they have a vision to achieve the goal in their lives. So the black characters involve diplomatically in rebellion. Not only that even the "narrative technique and content are usually designed to liberate the blacks" (Vincent 2). By challenging the conventional mode of thought, he suggests the new perspectives which make the characters and theme revolutionary.

His first famous novel *Faith and the Good Thing* published in 1974 presents a character named Faith whose "search for ideal forces her to visit not only the past, but

also the metaphysical world" (Riggs 467). This metaphysical world is the world of imagination where every thing is possible. She wants to make the world free from every kind of segregation, domination and compulsion. It is a heaven-like world so every kinds of creative potentialities proliferate there. Unfortunately many characters can not cross the border that separates the two worlds: physical world and the metaphysical world, but "Faith can cross the boarder that separates the two worlds and learns how to balance her relationship with both" (Riggs 467). Faith only become successful to cross the boundary means, symbolically she does not care the traditional boundaries which do not enable to fight for the freedom.

Johnson worked for Public Broadcasting system writing television scripts and programs for eight years before he published his second novel *Oxherding Tale* in 1982. Several critics have pointed out that *Oxherding Tale* is a modern slave narrative. By using a controversial form that is as old as the slavery system, Johnson tried to draw the attention of the readers to approach the novel form a modern perspective. So it is one of the first African-American novels to explore American slavery from the point of view of the "different epistemologies embodies in his character's conceptions and reality" (Riggs 368). As a result a new vision of the characters can be seen in the novel. Andrew Hawkins, the narrator of the novel and a slave in the house of white master, Flow Hatfield, is conceived by him. On the one hand by exploring the gender politics, Johnson wants to make the women conscious of their position where they are directly exploited physically and sexually, on the other he explores the master-slave relationship by showing the severe abusing. The purpose, behind showing the unequal power relations between whites and blacks he wants to activate the blacks to liberate themselves form the domination of the white people.

*Middle Passage* is his the most famous novel published in 1990 which received the National Book Award immediately after its publication for its exploration of African-American history and experiences. In this novel, the central character, Rutherford Calhoun is a recently freed slave. He is an educated person, enslaved by a white master in Indiana, now emancipated, comes to New Orleans. As a result of his attempt to escape from there he happens to go to the illegal slave ship, "The Republic" as a cook assistant. He is a vague, trickster, revolutionary, a long standing character type in African-American literature. His experience as a black with the forty members of Allmuseri tribe, who are captured and destined to become slaves, see it necessary to rebel on the ship. The view of Calhoun changes later then sees it possible of the free existence by the means of revolution. Rutherford Calhoun including other forty Allmuseri slaves revolt on the ship to be free from every kinds of domination of white slave holders. By doing so, they do not intend the violence rather" on the conclusion that all forty crew members aboard the Republic are learners in search for "new frontier" (Riggs 464). The journey towards the new territory, sailing themselves and the revolution suggest that they want to create a new system, new life style and new social construction by collapsing the traditional boundaries.

His another novel *Dreamer*, was published in 1998, is a biographical fiction of Martin Luther King Jr. In the novel, the author again experiments with the style and from to destroy the conventional boundaries. He challenges to separate the reality from imagination and history form fiction.

By destroying the traditional boundaries he requests the reader to approach the text from new and different perspectives. By doing so he might have implicitly wanted to destroy the traditional social structure and create a new one. The biography of Martin Luther appeals to fight for the freedom of blacks.

## Literature Review

Charles Johnson's novel *Middle Passage* has drawn the attention of many critics after its publication in 1990. Different critics have made their judgement of the novel from different approaches. After the observation of the views of the critics, what can be found is that they are critical producing both positive and negative views.

One of the famous American critics Daniel Scott is positive regarding this novel. He interprets the novel from stylistic point of view, and appreciates it:

These habits feature expectations of rounded characters, seemingly exhaustive details, narrative closure, and a chronological, well ordered plot told with rational certainty in the past tense-all of which make for a passive reading experience, allowing witnessing of but not participation in, the story. (636)

Molly Abel Travis states that, "*Middle Passage* represents Calhoun's and reader's Odyssey into the middle a middle of ambivalence, in-betweenness, contradiction and interminancy. It crosses borders of containment and identity, eluding the false gods of fixity and resolution" (636). He assimilates the relationship between the protagonist and the readers. Similarly, Asharf H.A. Rushdy views: "In the novel various anachronisms and inter-textual allusions in Rutherford's narrative are performative for readers who must supply the necessary context to make the references meaningful" (187). He finds many references in the text which truly make it compact and philosophical. He views the text from autobiographical point of view and he further finds:

[. . .] the relationship between Johnson's protagonist and readers as close, collaborative, and holistic by the novel's end. He is able to escape the trap of telling history as if it were a procession and rather to



tell his story as an Allmuseri griot might have done [...] in the end, protagonist writes an autobiography which is essentially diological.

(637)

In the present context, many critics are curious to approach the text through interdisciplinary perspective. Such critics study the text in retaliation to other disciplines as linguistics, politics, history etc. Mr. Steinberg, studying the text through such perspective finds:

Charles Johnson's *Middle Passage* owes much to contemporary and postmodern themes and technique, as it asks us to reconsider any preconceived notions we might have of identity, history, and historical accuracy [. . .] after reading the novel one wonders to what extent the story's lead character, Rutherford Calhoun does grow, does develop into a different changes, and assumedly, better person, and furthermore, to what end is Johnson's political commentary concerning [. . .]. His focus is varied, with interests in relationships, home, narration and revision. (Steinberg 375)

Not only that, seeing the text through New Historical perspective, he finds blurring line between history and fiction. For such critics the history could be only the fiction but not the reality, and fiction also could be based on the reality. Questioning the truth on the history he finds the similarity between the history and fiction and he says:

In *Middle Passage* Charles Johnson's interest in the nature of writing, creating, and producing that goes beyond recovering history, and where the later assumes power over them and demonstrates that history is fiction. Johnson's postmodern retelling of the slave narrative offers the reader a lesson in historical possibility, but in doing so he

reminds one that his re-inscription is both fictional and plausible.

(645)

The critics who are negative with regarding this novel have criticized it as not having originality. One of the famous critics of America, Helen Lock, comments: "Charles Johnson's *Middle Passage* Frederic Douglass's *The Heroic Slave* and Melville are making the same point about such rebellions through the subtle use of paradox as the key rhetorical strategy [...] Melville, Johnson and Douglass usually fail to realize this [...] they can not recognize the inverted image as themselves" (54).

He sees the similarities among Johnson's *Middle Passage*, Douglas's *The Heroic Slave* and Melville's stories in narrative style. Mark Steinberg charges the novel as: "Johnson's interest goes beyond recovering history, for the demonstrates that by fictionalizing historical events, he can assume power over them. Hence, he demonstrated that history is fiction" (376). Approaching the text from New-Historical point of view he finds somehow similarities between history and fiction.

Different critics have the different perceptions about the text *Barbara Z* Thaden finds it very wide and difficult to read. He says "Johnson's *Middle Passage* contains variety of themes and allusions" (1). Some of the critics charge this novel on the basis of different judgments. Celestin Walby makes his judgment based on the philosophy and morality, and finds it as:

[. . .] the *Middle Passage* represents the moral failure abortion of Rutherford's and western cultures selfish, opportunistic individualism founded on a platonic bifrucation of the mind, it also represents the protagonist's initiation in to a higher unity, an other centered consciousness. (5)

The critical reviews by different critics can be divided into historical, biographical, narrative and other in style, which is not the complete understanding of the text. Approaching the text only through some of the perspectives do not help us to have proper understanding and intention of author. Different critics have made their judgement from their own perspectives but no one has paid attention to socio-political-economical context for the setting of novel. Johnson, being an Afro-American, might have given a lesson especially to the blacks and others, which is not researched yet. So, what remains to be done is to see the text from the perspective of 'black ethos' and struggle for freedom for Afro-Americans. Therefore the researcher wants to approach the novel through the lenses of racism under cultural studies and the concept of freedom in relation to contemporary socio-economical context, where there was shameless suppression of white people over the blacks. And he sees, how Johnson gives a way for freedom to the dominated blacks.

## II. RACE AND RACISM

### Introduction

Race is a socially constructed concept that divides human kind in different divisions on the basis of distinctive characteristics. It refers to a group of people which helps constitute the whole humanity. Generally, categorization of a group of race resulted from the biological basis. But the division of people on the basis of biological facts and the distinction made by it, is questioned in the modern time. "In its original use, race itself referred to origins in common stock. This could be family, religion or nation, but it applied equally to plant and animal life" (Gerzina 25). In its pure anthropological meaning race is understood in terms of breeding and mating population of people. As we know, all the living human beings constitute a single biological species known as *Homo Sapiens*. Now, the race is mainly studied by the vast number of people through the sociological perspective which sees the race as the product of social practice.

In the present time, race is defined differently from different standpoints. One who studies it from the biological perspective, finds it as a biological product and defines the distinctive characteristics on its basis. "Within the human species, a large number of population may be differentiated genetically through radically observable as well as non-observable physical characteristics. These biological groupings within the human species are commonly termed as races" (Vidyarthi 52). But now, scientists have found it impossible to separate human beings into clearly defined races based on biological traits. So they have reached a general agreement in recognizing that human kind is one and that all human beings belong to the same species. However, the race persists as a powerful social and cultural concept used to categorize people on the basis of perceived differences in physical appearances and behaviour. Anthropologists

and sociologists claim that variations in physical features mainly is the result of the environmental adaptation. So for them race is the product of social perception.

Though human beings differ in their skin colour, eye colour, hair colour, shape, stature and other visible characteristics, most of anthropologists, sociologists and even scientists regard these differences superficial and resulting from adaptations. Local climate, environment, social behaviour etc. play an important role in physical and mental evolution. Many people believe, without any proved reason, that the differences in physical appearances have something to do with differences in the behaviour, attitude, intelligence, way of thinking, or internal traits related to the brain. These false notions about the race help to promote racism.

In the simple terms, racism is a theory or an idea that there is a causal link between inherited physical traits and certain traits of personality, intellect or culture. Ruth Benedict says "racism is the dogma that one ethnic group is condemned by nature to hereditary inferiority and another group is destined to hereditary superiority" (qtd. in *Racism* 55). So racism is a way of thinking that considers a group's unchangeable physical features to be connected to psychological and intellectual characteristics. On the basis of these concepts racism distinguishes between superior and inferior social groups. "Racism refers to the unequal power relations that grew from the socio-political domination of one race by another and that results in systematic discriminatory practices, for example, segregation, domination and persecution" (Tyson 381).

To understand racism, it is better to distinguish it from the concept of ethnocentrism. The distinction between these lies in the fact that, "whereas the alleged inferiority, disabilities and negative traits of a group are thought to be culturally determined in ethnocentrism, but in racism they are believed to be inborn or

biologically determined" (Vidyarathi 53). The number of world cultures regard their own way of life as superior to that of others. So ethnocentrism is more or less a universal phenomenon. However, it should be noted that, whereas racist societies are invariably ethnocentric, many highly ethnocentric societies are not racist.

In the present time, racism is defined in terms of culture and identity which is shaped by the discourses. "By 'racism' we mean the predication of decisions and policies on considerations of race for the purpose of subordinating a racial group and maintaining control over that group" (Carmichael 112). The socio-political development of 1970s and 1980s gave way to the postmodern liberal and multicultural society. Jacques Derrida's theory of Deconstruction challenged the concept of center and margin then the relation between mainstream culture and marginalized ethnic culture paved way to be redefined. Therefore no race, no ethnic group, no culture, no nation now feels inferior to any other groups rather they feel proud to introduce in terms of their identities. Because of the development of multiculturalism everyone is struggling to establish their cultural, ethnic, social, religious, and national identities. In this context, conventional mode of racism has been replaced by a new one.

New racism does not see the race as biological issue or heredity but as a cultural product. "New racism is primarily concerned with mechanism of exclusion and inclusion" (Gilroy 250). The categorization of people under superior and inferior group is a false notion because race is not inherently meaningful category. But it is a socially constructed concept shaped by the power politics under different social institutions.

## **Racism: A Changing Concept**

The concept of racism has changed in the course of time. There was little consciousness of race before colonial period but it developed into practice immensely in this period because of the unequal power relation mainly between the white and black race in America. In medieval period, antagonisms between people were motivated chiefly by cultural, religious and linguistic differences. From the sixteenth century onward, Europeans ranged the earth conquering native people and established themselves as superior ruling aristocrats. Race relations are the direct outgrowth of the long wave of European expansion beginning with the discovery of America. Because of more highly developed technology and economico-political organization, the Europeans became able by military force to control over the colonies and influence around the world. They formed a colony in America and it was not in the interest of the colonial power to liberate the blacks from colonial discourse. Especially during the era of colonization, in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, ruling whites and subjugated blacks, brown and red people became conscious of their racial differences. Until the late eighteenth century race was distinguished mainly by its verbosity. Theoretically, Christianity argues that all men are spiritually same in the eyes of God, but in practice all sorts of arguments could be found to prove the inferiority of blacks. The late eighteenth century, the period of Enlightenment emphasized in the scientific understanding of race. The scientists of that time classified animals as well as human beings and arranged them falsely in a hierarchical order. "Distinctions were made between higher and lower races, European whites were placed at the summit in the hierarchy of races" (Snyder 92).

In the early nineteenth century there was a hot discussion on race between monogenists and polygenists. The monogenists believed that all races resulted from

the single creation. Varieties have been seen due to the process of natural and environmental evolution. Polygenists, on the other hand, argued religiously that God created each race separately, so mankind is composed not of one but of several species. Darwinian theory—the survival of fittest and the evolutionary thought—strengthened the idea of superiority and inferiority of races. They believed that fittest dominates the others naturally and the inferior race is dominated due to its weaknesses. Some critics in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century falsely studied racism in relation to their quality of language. They thought that the superior quality of mother tongue indicates superior mentalities and physical qualities of race. A language which is widely spread throughout the world reveals the civilizing capacity of all these who have the good fortune to speak that tongue. But this concept is very bitterly criticized by the French historian Julien Havet:

The truth is that the language and race are two entirely distinct notions between which one must not for a single instance admit even the shadow of the likeness, no anthropological argument, under the smallest pretext, should contain a single word of anthropology, when this essential separation has been resolved upon. Till then we shall be only wasting paper and ink. (Snyder 93)

With the beginning of European colonization and discovery of America, there was a considerable increase in race and colour prejudice. Colonizers defined the race in their favour. So the European race was superior and imposed superiority upon the poor and slave Africans. The colonizers wanted to prove the blacks, Natives, Indians etc. inferior. Once the racial ideology had been formed and widely disseminated, they constituted a powerful means of justifying political hegemony and economic control.



To exploit and dominate them white Europeans made them inferior race, and became successful too.

But in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, anthropologists and socialist reacted very sharply against the earlier concept of racism. "The anthropologists were also supported by the zoologists, geneticists and psychologists" (Vidhyarthi 55). Scholars of each discipline showed from their researches that the racist's arguments were biased and culture band. Then the anthropologists stressed that socio-cultural factors can not be neglected in evolution of any test results. The believes of superiority and inferiority of any group based on race was challenged by the anthropologists in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Lowie argues "there is no differences in the mental make up of the Negro race and of the other races" (136). Now the modern scientists also do not believe in the superior and inferior mechanism of man according to the races. It is the imperialists' effort to prove the superiority for their politico-economic purpose. So they tried their best to prove it falsely to make easier to dominate the other races. No one rejects the idea, now, that the race is not a biological product as such rather it is the socio-cultural product. It was constructed in the society without any reason by the power politics with the purpose of exploiting and discriminating others. Since 1960s the concept of race and ethnicity is not the subject of subjugation rather every cultural group feels proud to introduce themselves and search their identity and freedom through it.

### **Development of Resistance: Struggle for Freedom**

The history of the Afro-Americans is the history of their struggle to liberate themselves from the white domination. They started their struggle and rebellion, since their slave life in middle passage, many times throughout their history up to now. The experience of Afro-Americans throughout their history is marked by the discrimination, domination and exploitation. Powerful whites always inflicted severe

punishment upon the powerless blacks. Whites treated them very inhumanly since the time of middle passage to the present in South and North. Middle passage is the experience of blacks during the time when they were being transferred from one place to another to be sold, mostly as slaves. Because of the fear of possible revolt, whites would tie them with a chain so tightly that no one could move. They tortured the slaves very severely by ironing, raping, whipping, kicking etc. Dauglas writes:

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

It was the daily experience of blacks. Black people being obsessed by such domination started to fight against the whites.

Afro-Americans started the rebellion to be free from discrimination, exploitation and slavery since long back. One hundred forty-five revolts for the right of equality and freedom from slavery before the Declaration of Independence were not systematic and well organized. With the great hope of freedom, impressed by the theory of Jefferson that all men are created equal, more than five thousand blacks directly took part in revolution. America became free from British colony in 1776, but they were made exception from the Jeffersonian theory and treated as before. Then the deceived blacks started their movement in the leadership of Quok Walker in 1777 and 1780. The Pennsylvania and Vermont's constitution declared that "all blacks born after that year would be free" (Shade 93). While there were some agitations to end slavery in upper South, the main effort of the revolution was to encourage private

manumissions. In 1784 "the Methodists declared that slavery was contrary to the Golden Laws of the God" (99). In 1789 Free African Society started a movement which "advocated the return of American blacks to an African home land" (99). Samuel Cornish and John started first African-American newspaper *Freedom's Journal* in 1828 which encouraged all blacks to fight for freedom. In 1830-34, 1839-40 and 1843, they revolted by organizing an antislavery society, which influenced the whites minds. Reverend Garnet, one of the active leaders in that time, addressed to the blacks: "you had better all die, die immediately than live slaves and entail wretchedness upon your posterity" (Scott 101). The blacks were encouraged to do or die, for the sake of freedom. They felt that it is better to die than to live in slavery. Though they sacrificed many times, their voices were lost in the air. By 1840, when the whites turned for presidential election, only eight percent of free blacks lived in the states in which they could vote. Poor blacks did not lose their hope rather they most aggressively stood during the Civil War.

### **Civil War : Revolt Against Slavery**

Since the era of Civil War (1861-65), Afro-Americans mainly started their organized political struggle. Equality, justice, freedom and end of slavery were their aims in this war. Blacks took part in the Civil War, performing their best for the first time in their history. They were committed to their mission more aggressively with their demand of equal rights. They confidently thought that they were equal to the whites, since all human beings are creation of God. Vincent Harding writes:

Reason and revelation join to declare that we are the creatures of that God, who made one of blood, and kindered, all the nations of the Earth; we perceive by our own reflection, that we are endowed with the same faculties with our masters and there is nothing that leads us to

itself, or suspicion that we are any more obliged to serve them, than they us, and the more we consider of this matter, the more we are convinced by our right . . . to be free . . . and can never be convinced that we are made to be slaves. (25)

Blacks felt that there was no reason to be the slave forever. The more they thought about it, the more they were convinced to struggle for their rights. All they thought, they were treated unequally and dominated unjustly. Though they were not less competent than the whites, they were exploited. The blacks worked in the field, but they did not get the chance to harvest. Similarly, they struggled many times, but they could not harvest their rights. Blacks laboured hard for the whole day and night but its fruit was not given to them. Blacks worked in America but could not get anything than the domination. Vincent Harding writes, "And the black seed of Africa was ruthlessly casted into the winds, into the hungry soil, into the mines, into the river and sands, into the eyes and minds and white night nightmares of North and South America. And the harvest has not yet come" (24).

Whites never saw them with the eyes of equality rather they casted them to work in the fields, mines, sands, forests etc. However, blacks were hopeful that they could develop their position as the seed grows on the fertile soil. They were hopeful to use the challenge as the opportunity. Black people were always haunted by their history since they were brought from the west coast of Africa to make the slaves. Discriminated social practice they realized as the burden of their progress. Whites imposed the European laws upon them to take advantage exploiting their labour. But the blacks protested such inhuman practice of slavery and exploitation in the different areas where the blacks were ghettocized.

Afro-American men and women were no more ready to accept such imprisonment of white categories and laws in Virginia, South Carolina and New York. They had been prepared for their uprising. In the heart of prison states – South, Virginia, Mississippi etc – the experience was elaborated and expanded. Gradually, the black awakening from the dream of the middle passage became an unrelenting reality in the New World. It is not surprising that the movement of black struggle quickly leaped from the slave ships to American prison-states. Naturally, its shapes and forms often corresponded to the categories of white oppression and evoked memories of the shipboard experiences. Soon the struggle for black freedom in the states began to resemble a small river gathering its early force, moving against the domination of whites power.

It resisted against the debilitating definitions of white society against the control of black lives by Euro-Americans and its system of slavery and racism. They raised the most profound questions about the nature of white society and the legitimacy of its power to control and define black people. They challenged the whites, often creating the tentative new communities outside the domination of white masters. They struggled not to follow and only demand their rights but to create an alternative – the life without the domination of whites, it could be in new territory also. Male and female, old and young, individual and group took part in rebellion. Vincent Harding writes:

They often created an alternative communities outside the domination of white masters [ . . . ] and they organizing not only a source of strength of their active resistance; their action moved forward toward the creation of alternatives. Admittedly, these alternatives were often temporary, rugged, and dangerous, but they clearly challenged existing

order of slave society with another self determining black way [ . . . ]

Most participants in the movement toward freedom were not really organized. Rather, the mainstream of the river was filled with innumerable individual acts of protest rebellion. Today there is an tendency to place such individual action outside the compass of black struggle, but that is the wrong. (40)

Most of the blacks contributed for the struggle to freedom with an organized institution and some blacks contributed individually. Either organized or not they were strongly committed to fight for the sake of their freedom. They blindly declared to choose one liberty or death but not to compromise for "Freedom and honor and dignity for these slaves at any cost" (Vincent 47). The blacks very aggressively took part in the Civil War with the great hope of freedom. They did not see anything more than the freedom itself. Vincent Harding writes, "The slaves destroyed tirelessly. Like the peasants in the Jacquerie or the Luddite wreckers; they were seeking their salvation in the most obvious way, the destruction of what they know was the cause of their sufferings; if they destroyed much it was because they had suffered much" (49).

The more they were suppressed the more aggressively they resisted and involved in the destruction.

Because of the long struggle of blacks, they were given the right to vote in 1865, but partially. Many Amendments were passed only to deceive them. Only a limited and contingent freedom was offered in president Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation in 1863 and was supplanted by the general unconditioned Emancipation of the thirteenth Amendment in 1865. Three years later black citizenship was guaranteed by the fourteenth Amendment, and in 1870 the right to vote by the fifteenth Amendment.

Many Bills, Amendments and an Emancipation Proclamation were passed, however, the blacks could not be completely free in the practice. Emancipation Proclamation became a false cheque immediately after Lincoln was assassinated in 1865. Even after this, they did not lose their hope and confidence, rather they continued their struggle to bring it in practice. Richard Byrd says "Freedom we want and will have, for we have served this cruel land enuff" (qtd. 61). Blacks were hopefully searching their freedom and equality and it was their right since they served many years in America. After the Civil War, neither they could be free nor satisfied. Only some of the blacks got the right to vote but the majority were living in the ghetto areas where they had no right to vote. They were equally victimized as before by the whites. They passed their lives under domination, discrimination and white brutality, but they never felt humiliation. The most important thing is that they did not stop their struggle for the journey towards freedom. Harding writes:

The river of black struggle held all these speaking, acting and enlivening words, all these bold, challenging heroic lives, and it was always moving, rising in the midst of the slave community. Therefore this was not a community caught in flatness of despair. It was not a community without hope. It lived with brutality, but did not become brutish. Often it was treated inhumanly, but it clung to its humanity. There was too much in the river which suggested other possibilities, announced new comings, and hurled restless movements against the dam of white oppression. Always under the surface of slavery, the river of black struggle flowed with, and was created by, a black community that moved actively in search of freedom, integrity, and home a community that could not be dehumanized. (74)

This struggle was like the river which always moved to the black communities with the hope of arising the possibility of freedom. It convinced all the black communities that the river of black struggle towards their freedom could not be stopped.

### **Harlem Renaissance: Emergence of New Negro**

The majority of blacks who were living in the Ghetto areas where their search for freedom through native awareness flourished many times. One of their such great festival flourished in 1920s, as Harlem Renaissance. Harlem, a Ghetto area near the New York city became the national center of African American culture, including the arts of theater, music, literature and dance. They revived their original native culture to search their identity, root and freedom. New Negro appeared in Harlem with the original African cultural awareness and in the black literature as the revolutionary character. New Negro is a conscious black character who radically resists the white domination and influences. Such characters glorify their original native culture. In literature New Negro seems revolutionary against white. New Negro plays an important role to arouse the sense of liberation and inspires to fight against the inequality. These black characters do not feel themselves inferior to the white Americans in any fields. The era produced "a phenomenal race consciousness and race assertion" (Huggin 83). Harlem was making it all happen because black people were coming together there, some intending to build a cultural capital of black world. So "Harlem intellectuals looking at themselves, thought of renaissance" (83). The sudden emergence of immense number of gifted black writers appeared to search for their freedom as the force on the American literary scene, using the literature and art as the weapon. A Scott writes:

Third force in the American literary scene, and since by reason of its closeness to the nerve center of the countries cultural ferment and the



hospitality it offered radical movements in Negro life. New York city's Harlem was for this generation of Negro intellectuals a kind of Mecca toward which they gravitated in spirit if not as actual residents, the movement has long been spoken of as the Harlem Renaissance. (288)

Negro Americans of this period first encountered a large expression in lyric form of their ancestral memories and of the strange, bitter experiences with their fated involvement in the American reality. All the Afro-Americans had the common sensibility to create a new Negro—a black hero/heroine who resists the white influence upon them and heroically fights against them. In this New Negro movement or Harlem Renaissance blacks flourished their cultural and literary activities. Many prominent writers like Langston Hughes, Richard Wright, Countee Cullen etc. enjoyed their renaissance and developed the sense of resistance through literature for the search of identity and freedom. Among them, Langston Hughes had a longest productive career to develop the black sensibility among all. In his poem collection *Dream Variations*, he oozes out an experience of a black under the oppressive circumstances. They had a dream to be free but it was altered by the inhumanity and orthodoxy of whites. So he questions and challenges the whites by his famous poem: What happens to a dream deferred? / Does it dry up / Like a raisin in the sun ? Or fester like a sore . . . or does it explode?" (1951)

Another prominent writer Richard Wright published *Native Son* in which Bigger Thomas—a black hero opposes an oppressive social order in Chicago. In one of the stories in his book *Uncle Tom's Children* the husband of a Negro women who has been seduced by a white salesman says, "The white folks ain never gimme a chance ! They ain never give no black man a chance ! There ain nothing in yo whole life yuh

kin keep from em ! [ . . . ] Ahm gonna be hard like they is ! So help me Gawd, Ahm gonna be hard ! when they come fer me Ahm gonna be there !" (qtd. in Hoffman 289).

Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* presents a world view of art and reality and the relation between them but at the heart of the novel the same age-long problem of black sufferings under the oppressive white structure is highlighted. This novel captures an original feeling of a black under the different pressures. The hero of the novel is a nameless black who comes from South and lives in New York with a heart-breaking torture of anti-humanist social reality. The hero is invisible, that is, black is invisible because there is no identity and freedom of black. The hero resists against the whites by writing his own history and preparing himself to struggle in the underground.

Popularity of Jazz music, black art, blues song, revolutionary literature to create a New Negro and the development of black sensibility for the search of blacks' identity and freedom were the achievements of Harlem Renaissance. This sensibility contributed to go further towards their struggle. The question of black freedom was running as the blood through the veins of blacks. In 1950s American critics were hot with Black nationalism. Many students were marching against the racial discrimination and for the search of freedom in America. This sensibility proliferated as the Black Rights Movement heralded by Martin Luther King Jr. In the year 1963 the blacks celebrated their hundredth anniversary of their Emancipation Proclamation. On the same occasion Martin Luther delivered a famous Gutesburg speech:

But one hundred years later, a Negro is till not free. One hundred years later, the life of Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregations [ . . . ] so we have come to cash this check that will give us

upon demand the riches of freedom and the security of justice. [. . .]  
 Now is the time to rise from the dark and disolate valley of segregation  
 to the sunlit path of racial justice. Now is the time to lift our nation  
 from the quick sands of racial injustice to brotherhood [. . .] from every  
 mountains side let freedom ring. I have a dream . . . (From "I Have a  
 Dream")

This speech clearly shows that still the blacks are not free. Luther fought himself and encouraged others to struggle for the political and cultural freedom. Even in the late twentieth century blacks were under the shadow of slavery and they were deprived of the right to vote. But these struggle of the blacks did not stop rather their awareness exploded in the Black Aesthetic Movement in late 1960s. The literary figures of that period did not like the political, cultural, literary and any other kinds of influences upon them.

### **Black Aestheticism**

Afro-Americans resisted the western mainstream literary norms and values in 1960s to glorify their own literature and culture. They separated themselves from the main stream literature, culture and the standard of judgement in order to develop a uniquely blackness in those fields. The enriched cultural awareness in Harlem Renaissance inspired them to search their root, culture, literature and the standard of judgement. The black literary figures of that time did not like to judge their literature in relation to white mainstream trend, rather they developed their black literary universe for judgement. Their history and the experience were the main sources of their literature. So they argued that there should be the black ways of judging Afro-American literature. Black Aesthetic perspective was an appropriate tool to approach the black literature in their views.

Separatists did not feel themselves as a marginal literary group, instead thought equally important and glorious. The value of Afro-American literature which glorifies their experiences and history was equally important to them as the white mainstream was to whites. So the Afro-American critics emphasized on their own way of judgement for the literature created by themselves about black experiences.

The separatists argued that there had to be uniquely black ways of judging and seeing literature, and that not a trace of this method could be effectively implemented in a system that compared writing by blacks to the writing of very white "oppressors" the blacks were writing against. [. . .] prominent black writers such as Lorraine Hansberry and James Baldwin argued for 'universality' of their own writings as well as those of other blacks, while at the same time inspiring on some uniquely black messages and indexes in their texts. They saw no reason to eschew comparisons between their works and the works of others. (Martin 296)

The concept of 'separatism' developed as the Black Aesthetic Movement in the same decade. This movement is the celebration of African-American literature, culture and their experiences. Most of the Afro-American intellectuals in that time tried to search aestheticism in their own literary and cultural possessions. They tried to feel the pleasure in their own literature that spoke of their extremely painful experiences during slavery and white domination. Afro-American literature filled with agony, torture, bitter experiences, suffering etc- was the source of pleasure to them. These experiences and the cultural issues have made the Afro-American literature rich. Though their experiences were full of bitter realities, they found the actual identity of blackness and aesthetic pleasure in them.

Since the Afro-American literature possesses the blackness and celebrates it, they thought it unnecessary to see and judge their literature in relation to the mainstream white trend. They thought it important to make a separate black universe of literature and culture for the judgement. Black universe in the sense that, they created their literature from their own experiences and tried to judge their literature within the black parameter. So this movement is a kind of literary resistance in which they thought to make their own world of literature, culture and the standard of judgement. Ron Kerenga says:

Black art must expose the enemy, praise the people and support the revolution. It must be like Le Roi Jones' poems that are assassins' poems, poems that kill and shoot guns and 'wrastle cops into alleys taking their weapons, leaving them dead with tongues pulled out and sent to Ireland'. (qtd. 307)

By the Black Aesthetic Movement, they attacked the whites and supported the revolution. They encouraged the Native African culture, language and traditions. So it was the movement to celebrate the African tradition, encouraging the African against whites influence. Black art is "Affirmation of Black reality [. . .] Affirmation of black potential [. . .] to make sense out of his experience (307).

Just like the radical feminists, the Afro-American authors like Amiri Baraka, Lerry Neal, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. Charles Johnson etc. create their works on the basis of their experiences. They feel the pleasure to play with their experiences, history and native culture. Black experiences are sufficient to them for their literary subject matter. They argue that there is uniquely blackness in their literary works and arts which can not be judged in relation to white mainstream. Only the black critics

who can feel the black literature can see justfully and judge appropriately their literature. Challenging the American mainstream trend LeRoi Jones views:

The black artists' role in American is to aid in the destruction of America as he knows it. His role is to report and reflect so precisely the nature of the society, and of himself in that society, that other man will be moved by exactness of his rendering and, if they are blackmen; grew strong through this moving, having seen their own strength, and weakness; and if they are white men, tremble, curse and go mad because they will be drenched with the filth of their evil." (qtd. in Hoffman 307)

These scholars undermine the white mainstream trend. In literature, they seek aesthetic pleasure from their real life experiences. By rewriting their history they aim to reconstruct the society based on justice and equality so that they could feel freedom. "Black Aesthetic is one whose task is not of 'telling it like it is', but 'like it needs to be' to make sense out of experience" (Miller 307). Their aim is to make a separate black literary world where they could enjoy themselves. Addison Gayle conceives the Black Aesthetics to be "A corrective-a means of helping black people out of polluted mainstream of Americanism" (qtd. in Hoffman 307). The black writers and critics believe that whites can not feel and understand the black literature. So it is the responsibility of blacks to produce the criticism themselves on their literature. John Killens comments: "White critics are totally—and I mean totally – incapable of criticizing the black writers. They don't understand Afro-Americanese" (qtd. in Hoffman 310). They used their history as the subject matter in literature to glorify black culture and tradition. Black characters in such literature assert their identity with the help of unique black experience. These characters strongly resist against the white

domination and they struggle for their freedom. This is the central issue in black literature. Toni Morrison, one of the prominent black scholars says in *Playing in the Darkness*: "The contemplation of this black presence is central to any understanding of our national literature and should not be permitted to hover at the margins of the literary imaginations" (5). It is a positive point that, to glorify their literary universe, they do not devalue others. They want to break the hierarchy of center-margin but not to constitute another center. Toni Morrison further says:

I do not want to alter one hierarchy in order to institute another. It is true that I don't want to encourage those totalizing approaches to African-American scholarship which have no drive other than the exchange of domination-dominant Euro-centric scholarship replaced by dominant Afro-centric scholarship. More interesting is [. . .] what forces help establish the parameter of criticism. (8)

The dominated blacks since the long past search their liberation through literature. They do not want to be called dominated. By rejecting the outer subject matter, they refresh their past in order to search their root and identity. Black scholars try to understand their identity and position in relation to the universe. Addison Gayle says: "A Negro community daily confronted by the horrors of the urban ghetto represents a reality too much understress to be liberated by any exploration of such question as who am I? What is my identity? What is my relationship to the universe, to God, to existential other? (qtd. in Hoffman 309). Whatever their past may be, the black slavery and their experiences enriched the creative potentiality and force to the blacks. Using these as their tool they search their identity and freedom in the present. The flight from the old world to the new is generally seen to be a flight from oppression and limitation to freedom and possibility. Desire for freedom is preceded by

oppression; a yearning for God's law of equality. Toni Morrison says: "the concept of freedom did not emerge in a vacuum. Nothing highlighted freedom – if it did not in fact create it – like slavery [. . .] this slave population was understood to have offered itself up for reflections on human freedom in terms other than the obstructions of human potential and the right of man" (38).

The literature by Afro-Americans, about their experiences, to be judged by themselves, and the glorification of their culture help to develop the concept of Africanism. This is the real black aesthetics and the source of their pleasure. To seek the pleasure through their black literary universe, some of the writers explore their history and experiences. It is one of the means to search their freedom and identity. Toni Morrison says:

Africanism is the vehicle by which the African self knows itself as not enslaved, but free; not repulsive, but desirable; not helpless but licenced and powerful; not historyless, but historical; not damned, but innocence; not a blind accident of devolution, but a progressive fulfillment of destiny. (52)

As the New Negro of Harlem Renaissance is very progressive and revolutionary, the literary figures of Black Aesthetic movement are radical. They emphasize on context of blacks' experiences, events form history important to understand the Afro-American literature. They create, recreate and reapproach the texts from the perspective of Afro-Americanism. Reapproaching the texts through this perspective they see rose in their whippings, creation in raping, pleasure in tortures, possibilities in silence and the freedom in slavery. So the contemporary Afro-American writers remind their history to reinforce blacks to search their identity, freedom and pleasure



by reapproaching the texts, history and experiences – through the spirit of Black Aestheticism.

Many blacks were trying very hard to establish a black cononicity by pronouncing a need for Black Aesthetics. They were aware of racial order of society, and as a result, they embarked for an existence of this Aesthetics as a source for black identity and freedom. The concept of black Aesthetics appears in the writings by Amiri Baraka, Nikki Giovanni, Mari Evans, Don L. Lee etc. The contributors of this movement and the involved students in the Black Consciousness Movement in early 1970s, further rejected the western traditions. They felt important to express and expand the traditional Native African cultures and values to establish their identity and freedom.

The long history of their struggle for freedom suggests that the blacks are always under the discrimination and domination. Now the relation between whites and blacks is studied in relation to multicultural and multiethnic power relations. Socio-anthropological and postmodern perspectives have replaced the earlier mode of perception. Interdisciplinary approach and Foucauldian power politics has been the tool to study the text, which has paved the way to redraw the earlier boundaries. Now the critics agree that blacks were discriminated since the time of slavery because of unequal power relation. "Unequal power relation is the major cause for the racial discriminations since the primitive time (Robinson 108). In the present time, Afro-Americans are struggling for search of cultural freedom and their root. They do not feel America their own mother land rather they are foreigner in their own country, America. Bitterly segregated, exploited and life in slavery of the past haunt them in the present. Such past experiences remind the blacks to feel the white Americans as their oppressors. Many critics and the literary figures bring the references of the past

experiences, their Native Land, Africa, and the events from the history to refresh the reality with the hope of reinforcing and encouraging the blacks to do something for their complete freedom from white dominations. So the writers create the texts in such a way to encourage people by producing the aggressively protestant characters. It is important to study the "representation of black characters and the blackness in the literature" (Beterns 111). The writers have produced the radical characters "as the struggle against bondage on black mother conveyed these lessons in such a way that her daughter never forgot. She warned: "I'll kill you, gal, if you don't stand up for yourself, [ . . . ] fight and if you can't fight, kick; if you can't kick, then bite" (Jones 86). August Wilson, a hybrid son of a German father and Afro-American mother, uses the form, language, and the content in his pulizer prize winner play *Fences*, to destroy the boundaries shaped by the white ideologies. Crossing the traditional boundaries or fences his characters are hopeful to reach the land of freedom. So Gabriel, a black character says: "Hey, Rose. It's time to tell St. Peter to open the gates. Troy you ready? You ready, Troy. I'm gonna tell St. Peter to open the gates. You ready now" (Wilson 1312). So the contemporary writers produce such literature with the hope to create identity and freedom.

### **Black Consciousness**

Though black people could do no more than to tolerate the suppression imposed by whites in the earlier phases, the more they became conscious about their position, the more strongly they resisted against the white domination and discriminations. So they started Black Consciousness Movement in early 1970s for their freedom. The developed consciousness not only made them nostalgic, for their mother land, Africa, but also inspired them to resist differently to liberate themselves. Nyameko Pityana writes:

The Black Consciousness Movement is a term of convenience that refers not only to the organizations that sprang up in South Africa after 1968 but also to the widespread mode of black pride that encompasses the Blackman's commitment to a search for human dignity and liberation from all those forces that seek to oppress him psychologically and physically. (161)

So this consciousness was to lead the blacks towards the liberation of themselves to be completely free from white's influences. Initially, this mood was a less organized political movement that moved from protest to open revolt. This movement is an attitude of the mind or the way of life giving shape and direction to the feelings of anger and resentment that lay imbedded in the psyche of the ordinary people. It is an awareness by black people of the power they wield as a group both economically and politically. South African Student's organization defines it as: "those who are by law or direction politically, economically and socially discriminated against a group in South African society and identifying themselves as a unit in the struggle towards the realization of their aspiration" (qtd. in Pityana 162).

Those who suffered the victimization at the hands of oppressor had the only option to identify themselves as a unit. The question of colour and race was one of the major factors in seeking unification of all oppressed people towards a national consciousness. It did not exclude the clear possibility that there could be factors which might cause some blacks, otherwise fit themselves into earlier category. So it helped to identify themselves with the aspiration of other blacks and their struggle for liberation. This message of oppressed class was spread to reach all sectors of black community. It helped for the developments in the commitment by black people to the total liberation of the black community. Black consciousness mainly started from the

resistance of educational curriculum of America prepared for blacks, and paved way for resistance in economic, political, cultural, literary spheres as well.

South African students' organization expressed this commitment as representing the interest of students in all issues that affect them in their academic and community situation. The students resisted the education system that was available in that time for black people in terms of Bantu, coloured and Indian Education departments of government. They didn't like the imposed arrogant white education system, which in the eyes of blacks was defined to conquer the minds of black people from colonial days. In the Bantu education policy, syllabuses were prepared by the white in the way to impose their ideology. Students evaluated that syllabus designed by the oppressor merely presents the oppressors view and blinds the blacks to realize their condition and rights. Whites feared with the possible demand by blacks for equality so they imposed their ideology to dominate blacks. Christian national education stated that: education should enable the young to take over from their cultural heritage everything that is good, beautiful and noble, develop it in accordance with their own gifts. However, the national policy of whites was just the opposite:

Native education should be based on the principles of the trusteeship, non-equality, and segregation; its aim to inculcate the white man's point of view of life, especially that of the Boer nation which is the senior trustee. Education must train and teach people in accordance with their opportunities in life according to the sphere in which they live. National education should be in accordance with the policy of state . . . (qtd. in Pityana 165)

This shameless discrimination in the education system was not accepted by the college students of South African Students' Organization. They protested against the

Bantu education and rejected the right of National Government to hold the monopoly of total policy in the education of African child. They tried to establish an alternative system of education rejecting the apartheid motives of the government. The students' president JM Majola once said:

We will fight on until we have attend our rights. Only one brick need fall to send the whole pillar of apartheid crashing to the ground [. . .] on this earth where we now stand, our freedom was taken away, on this very earth we can gain the knowledge to free ourselves again. (169)

This obviously indicates that whites tried to deprive the blacks of appropriate syllabus which means they tried not to make the blacks educated. Having the failure mentality of oppressor, whites were afraid that if the blacks made themselves educated, their selfish interest to discriminate and exploit them will end soon. Despite their such efforts blacks revolted to achieve the education, means of their freedom. Blacks understood, despite the imposed false ideology, that access to education meant to freedom. So this educational consciousness is the basic means by which they became strong for political, literary, socio-economic resistance. Such awareness encouraged them to resist the white domination since middle passage to now for their freedom.

Racism, therefore, a socially constructed concept by power relation, studies mainly the relation between the races. It is the broader term that encompasses the elements of history, past experiences, literary representation, socio-political situation etc. Black racism is a burning issue, mainly in America where the blacks are exploring their relation with whites in terms of power politics. The relationship between whites and blacks in America is mostly based on the discrimination made by the whites on the basis of race, colour, language etc. where the discrimination is the

product of prejudice and stereotypical mode of thoughts, or assumption mainly based on traditional concepts of race or colour. Lois Tyson says:

Basically Afro-American literature focuses on a number of recurring historical and sociological themes, all of which reflect the politics – the realities of political, social and economic power of black American experiences. Among these themes are the following: reclaiming the African past; surviving the horrors of the Middle Passage; surviving the ordeal of slavery; the quest for freedom from slavery and other forms of suppressions; the quest for literary, the experiences of African-Americans during the Civil War and Reconstruction; surviving in the South under segregation; the problems and conflict in a racist society; the difficulties of economic survival [ . . . ] quest to reconcile double consciousness; importance of cultural heritage . . . (Tyson 388-89)

Afro-American authors write on racial issues to raise their racial voices against whites. They don't feel themselves inferior in the contemporary time rather proudly search their root, freedom and identity. Now the traditional mode of racism, which focuses on the race as biological product, is challenged and replaced by the 20<sup>th</sup> century science and the concept of New Racism, which believe the race as the social construction shaped by the power politics and the ideologies of the powerful group or race. In such contemporary context, black authors write with the purpose of liberating the Afro-American people completely from such discriminations, dominations, exploitations imposed by the whites. Though the past of black race was dark, now they are hopefully struggling for the bright future to live equally and freely among all. Black literature produces the positive literary resistance and focusing on their history

and experiences "share a common spiritual theme: the journey to spiritual awakening, to finding oneself, which is their important dimension of their journey to freedom"

(Tyson 392).

### III. TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

#### Discrimination and Domination

Though race in itself is not a manifestation of person's or a group's intellectual or superior status, black characters in Johnson's *Middle Passage* are victimized from racial discrimination. The whites themselves have a psychological arrogance to feel them superior and so-called civilized than the blacks. On the basis of such false notion every black in this novel is victimized and discriminated.

Forty Allmuseries (blacks) are severely dominated by the powerful whites Peter Cringle and Ebenezer Falcon. They are forcefully captured and enslaved on the ship in an inhuman way. They are being carried either to be sold or to be exploited in the ghetto factories. On the ship, whites pass their luxurious life whereas blacks are kept in a narrow deck of the ship so tightly that there is no sufficient air to breathe and least required place to remain. Anyone who has the heart can feel how miserably they are kept. Calhoun impartially narrates the condition of blacks from the middle point, "Sleep and I were strangers that night. All that evening moaning and sharp cries such as only Negro women can make drifted on the wind from the warehouse, where Africans living, dying and dead are thrown together like cattle" (58). Because of the mental and physical tortures, Calhoun cannot sleep for the hole night. He has to only listen the moaning and the sharp cries of the Negroes.

Mental agony and physical torture are the day-to-day experiences of blacks. Flacon, being a white captain always kicks them. Diamelo, a rebellious black character is more victimized. His feelings and experiences are very miserable. He says, "I passed the days on his boots" (25). Beating with an stick, ironing on their parts of the body has been a usual behaviour for them. Being in the powerless condition they have no option than to tolerate the dominations and tortures whatever



whites impose upon them. Male and female characters are equally victimized. While reading the novel it seems as if whites do not have even a single drop of sympathy and humanity. Falcon shamelessly and inhumanly treats them. Calhoun says:

Believe or not, a barker told us they thought we were barbarians shipping them to America to be beaten. They saw us as savages [. . .] He (Falcon) beat them until blood came. The male slaves he double ironed, removing the ladder to the hold and lowering them by the ropes so none can climb back up. (66)

Falcon imposes the physical torture upon the slaves very bitterly. He beats them, irons on the different parts of their body, kicks with his boot and makes bloody who are already chained. Such punishment the burning, raping etc. are the daily experiences of the blacks on the ship.

Akim, a wide, dark-furred man who was short but had the strength of three, squatted on this hams; he made them relive his sister's death five days after we set sail. Ghofan, a black who had been gelded, and then suffered the torture of the brand, pulled his shirt down to show them how Falcon had burned in the initials ZS not once but three times until the impression was as clear as stigmata, or the markings on cattle. Each man has his atrocity to tell. If not brutality to them then a bedroll of humiliations the midship-men had inflicted upon the women, two of whom had been raped, or on their children, to this list Diamelo added the small but nonetheless. (134)

Ebenezer Falcon is a cruel dominator and discriminator. He does not want the blacks to have their lunch and dinner. His concern is only with the profit. Perhaps, he is afraid of the possibility that if they become physically and mentally strong, they will over

come the whites. His concern is only with their breathe (if they die) but not with their condition how they are passing their lives. They are not given least required things to live. Calhoun, too much obsessed with their condition, helps the blacks providing something to eat without the knowledge and consent of Falcon. Calhoun wants to feed them in the relation of humanity but Falcon charges him, "We're about to weight anchor. You're in charge of feeding the Africans in messes of ten at nine in the morning and four, and give 'em half a pint of water three times a day. Squibb handles the crew as before, but no one is to feed the new cargo, or come near it except me" (67).

Falcon, a devil-like person, does not treat the Africans humanly even after they are killed. His concern is only with the profit in the slave trading. Because of his physical tortures and suppression blacks lose their lives on the ship. However, he cuts their parts of body to show the number of the slaves he bought. On that basis, the profit of slave trading is divided among the white shareholders. He wants to drag them to the hell by cutting the parts of body so that they cannot remain in the heaven peacefully. He orders other blacks to cut the pieces of the body when an African is killed. Calhoun narrates:

Striking up a tune of lighter tempo, Falcon pleased, tapped his foot, stopping only to stare as Ngonyama and Meadows carried an African corpse form below. As with previous cares like these, Falcon ordered his ears sliced off and preserved below in oil to prove to the ship's investors that he had in fact purchased in Banglang as many slaves as promised. (121)

Similarly, another African named Diamelo is beaten very severely. He enjoys by giving them physical torture and splashing buckets of salt water on them" (121).

While he dances with the tune, orders his faithful mate to beat and tie ropes on the legs of Diamelo:

Though he was scmistiff, blood giving way to the pull of gravity, motionless in his veins, was setting in his lower limbs, purplish in color as he entered the first stages of stench and putrefaction. The young not quickest, you know. The underside of his body had the squishy, fluid-squirting feel of soft, overripe fruit. If you squeezed his calves, a cheese like crisis oozed through the cracks and cuts made in his legs by the chains. (122)

Economically also black characters are discriminated in this novel. White characters represented here, have the well established jobs. Ebenezer Falcon, Peter, Cringle and Quackenbas have established themselves on the position of master or slaveholder and on the basis of that position they have exploited the blacks. Isadora, an educated black, teaches in a primary school but she is exploited. She teaches there whole time, mornings to evening however a full salary equal with the white teacher is not given to her. Economically, it is a kind of labour exploitation. Similarly, Calhoun is an educated person from black tribe. He does not seem less competent in his knowledge and diplomacy because his vision, policies and the strategy he creates, make the whites failure and stands himself as the winner. However, he is also deprived of the opportunities. He is not allowed the intellectual position in job and economical standpoint. Is it an appropriate job for such educated person to be an assistant of a cook? Before he came on the ship, *Republic*, he was made a slave in the field of Peleg Reverend Candler. When he escapes from there, he does not get an honourable job in New Orleans, though he wanders all over the city. He visits saloons and Negro bars at least for an honest job. How pitiful he is not to get such job though he is a so brilliant

man? Again on the ship, Falcon gets the twenty five percentage profit of caravan whereas Calhoun is so miserably deceived. The mind and education of such brilliant man is not acknowledged. He is not allowed to work freely according to his will rather he has been trapped as a slave, field worker and an assistant of cook. He feels humiliation from it and says, "How I fell in to this life of living off others, of being social parasite, is a long sordid story best shortened for those who, like the Greeks prefer to keep their violence offstage. Naturally I looked for an honest work. But arriving in the city, checking the Negro bars, I found nothing" (3).

The relationship between whites and blacks is the relationship of master and slave, oppressor and oppressed. The slave trader Quackenbush and Falcon seem as the incarnation of evil itself whose motive is to suppress the blacks. The name of the captain, Falcon represents the evil motive as the bird Falcon represents. As the bird Falcon captures the small birds and eats them, Captain captures the blacks and exploits. He could behave with Diamelol and other blacks somehow kindly but he imposes severe and inhuman punishment: Whites are being wealthier by selling the human beings. They are not only sold physically but also mentally. When their body is under control, their mentality is also kept under white ideology. This ideology is so powerfully imposed upon them that many uneducated blacks cannot understand their position and the relationship with whites. They want to make the blacks realize that they don't have the right of freedom and the identity. The identity and freedom of forty Allmuseries, along with Calhoun is snatched and captured by Falcon. Some blacks like Calhoun were once enslaved and again they are captured to be sold. They are oppressed and treated as if they are animal. Can a man buy people with their identity except in this case? These blacks have been sold on the market like the goods as many times as they like.

Relay Calhoun and Rutherford Calhoun are under the long tradition of slavery. Relay, with his family worked for many years in the plot of Reverend Chandler. Though he dies after he escapes from there, the long tradition of domination under slavery is not broken yet. Rutherford and Jackson remain there to fulfill the gap of their father. The relation between Reverend Chandler and Calhoun family represents the whole relation among whites and blacks.

Thus, Johnson's characters initially experience the discrimination, exploitation and slavery under the whites and develop from that point. But a kind of awareness develops in them from this discriminated life. They understand their position and study it comparatively with the whites. They find that their life is miserable because of the domination of whites. So this awareness helps to lead them towards the freedom from that white domination.

### **Rising Consciousness**

Because of their life in discrimination, domination and slavery, a kind of consciousness about their position develops in the characters in this novel. This consciousness is the self realization of the characters which makes unfit them to remain under the whites' domination. Most of Johnson's characters are educated so a kind of self consciousness develops within themselves from their experiences. Blacks, unable to understand their position in the beginning can do no more against whites than to tolerate the domination. But in the course of time they become conscious about their position and identity so they develop the idea of resistance. Blacks realize that whites are responsible for their backwardness.

Rutherford Calhoun, an educated character, becomes conscious about his position under Reverend Chandler. After realization, he escapes from him breaking the long tradition of slavery. He rejects to be a slave for ever and to work in his field

rather goes to the sea in search of knowledge . Sea is the symbol of vastness, openness and freedom. Calhoun's journey, Lorraine writes, "is a movement from sin to salvation, ignorance to knowledge, bondage to freedom" (1). These things Calhoun searches, help him to develop his awareness. It is the consciousness that makes him realize unfit to be a slave. He helps to develop the consciousness in other blacks that lack of freedom is the obstacle for their progress. More than his individual benefit, Calhoun wants to liberate all the blacks, so he teaches them and raises their consciousness to understand their position. The most important thing is that he does not only make them able to feel the discrimination and domination but also shows an appropriate path to come out of that—that is the path towards freedom. The awareness helps them to understand the importance of freedom. When the eyes of every characters are opened, they contribute more or less from their point. It is the role of this awareness that unites them to resist against whites.

Along with the developed awareness, a sense of justice, equality and freedom develops in Calhoun. Though he worked under Reverend Chandler, he talks about justice fearlessly. His ideology is very important for the whole human beings. He presents an ideological thought before Reverend Chandler how the things should be produced and divided among those who have contributed for the production. Rutherford thinks it necessary and possible to dissolve the traditional hierarchical boundary that exists between whites and blacks. In his opinion, the production should be divided on the basis of equal right of contributors among them. He presents his proposal and demands for that before his white master and slave holder, Reverend Chandler as:

I'm sure I speak for both of us (whites and blacks). Sir, when I say the property and profit of this farm should be divided equally among all

your servants and hired hands, presently and formally employed, for their labour helped create it - isn't that so? – the fixed capital spread among bondman throughout the country – I can give you their names and whatever remains donated to that college in Oberlin what helps Negroes on their way north. (117)

He speaks for the benefit of whole humanity with his developed awareness. Isadora, an educated lady and a school teacher, has the main purpose to spread the knowledge which enables all to evaluate truth and false, just and unjust. Wise person always argues for the humanity, equality and justice. Her purpose, enlightening the people is to abolish the rule of injustice from the world. Then she hopes automatically, the suppression, domination, exploitation on the basis of racial discrimination will put it to an end. More than that, she helps Calhoun to travel in different places including sea by making him free from the debt with the help of her collected money. If she were not there to pay his loan, he would be captured again in New Orleans. His journey is a kind of spiritual journey that develops his awareness and provides him a chance to know many things and understand the mentality of different persons. Isadora leaves her home to lighten the burden of her family and in search of knowledge. The effort of Calhoun to liberate himself as well as others on the ship, she welcomes at the last of novel. So she is strongly aware about her liberation and of others throughout the novel.

Diamelo and McGafin are two important characters to develop the consciousness on other blacks. Diamelo thinks cultural freedom is very important immediately after the physical freedom. He feels whites imprisonment of Allmuseries' god as cultural control. Moreover he evaluates the English language as the oppressor's language and suggests all to forsake that. Calhoun says, "Cringle was to

use maps McGaffin (Black) was preparing, he did not trust the ones Falcon had left. In addition to this, he forbade us to sing songs in English, his oppressors tongue, whilst we worked [ . . . ] Allmuseri medicine was to be used to treat sickness and injustice" (155). McGaffin makes all clear about their situation and appeals to follow his plan of revolt. It is McGaffin actually who successfully convinces all to unite for struggle. His policy is very helpful to develop the conscious among all by his plan.

Johnson himself, being an Afro-American is conscious about his cultural freedom and past experiences. He is a representative intellectually aware person who searches their history for the future prediction. His interest is to see how a late twentieth century people evaluate their history. Search for cultural root and their history has been a trend of modern people. The events and the experiences of *Middle Passage* refresh their past which arouses the interest to think about it. By doing so he wants blacks search their cultural root and origin from past. Reinterpreting the past from different postmodern perspectives, helps to reevaluate their past so that a new awareness would develop within themselves. Johnson tries to give equal importance to every cultural group so that one could respect the another in terms of cultural identity. So Johnson himself is conscious about his past experiences and history. In the present time, every cultural group has an equal importance so the domination or the influence of one over another is not acceptable. He inspires people to remain culturally free through the lense of history. By using the Afro-American language mostly in his novel to complete the black's real history, in the form of fiction, he tries to draw the attention of blacks towards their past experiences so that it could counter the white mainstream trend.

Black characters of this novel become conscious themselves after their experiences of discrimination. McGaffin, Calhoun, Isadora and Diamelo have



developed their awareness collecting the knowledge from slavery and their journey. The consciousness to fight for their freedom develops on them mainly from their discriminated life experiences. It is evident nature of man that no one bears the oppression or domination of others instead fights for his freedom sooner or later, whether in the case of inter racial issue or anywhere else. Awareness that develops from these things leads them towards the struggle for their complete freedom.

### **Struggle for Freedom**

Charles Johnson's novel, *Middle Passage*, presents a story of black people with their struggle to liberate themselves from the domination, exploitation and slavery, imposed upon them by the whites during middle passage. Though this novel is a gleam of middle passage- experience of blacks on the ship while they were being transferred from west coast of Africa to America, as the slaves—it vividly visualizes their whole history and experiences. Afro-Americans passed their lives in severe physical miseries and extreme mental tortures. But in the course of time they became conscious which enlightened them to think and understand their position. In this novel, Johnson presents educated and conscious characters whose effort remains to break the traditional domination and liberate themselves from the influences of whites. Rutherford Calhoun, the narrator and the central character of the novel, revolts against the whites while they were being carried on the ship to be enslaved or sold. Calhoun's individual diplomatic role and their mass revolt mainly become the means to defeat them. The victory of the blacks after the long struggle makes it possible for them to come out of the control of whites and be free from the dominations directly imposed up on them.

The whole story of the novel is dominated by the struggle of the characters to be free. Rutherford Calhoun starts his struggle, as we are indicated, before he came on

the ship. He is an educated slave, newly freed from the bondage of his master Reverend Chandler. As a conscious black character he is not satisfied with his partial freedom rather he starts to struggle for his complete freedom. He leaves New Orleans, the place where he was within the boundary of slavery, to escape. However, he is not an escapist in the sense that he goes to face any problems on the process of his liberation. A newly freed slave is enslaved again when he goes to the ship as an assistant to the cook. Though he happens to be an oppressed on the ship *Republic*, his purpose behind going there is different. Calhoun thinks it better to leave the traditionally influenced place and go to a new place to do something for his whole tribe. Being an educated and conscious hero, he has a clear vision to liberate himself and the whole tribe. An interesting and fruitful point is that the more he travels and comes to contact with many persons, the more he is enlightened. He is deceived by the whites once again when he is assigned as the cook's assistant on the *Republic* – a ship controlled by whites, carrying the Almusseri tribes and cargo. He evaluates their lives on the ship as more bitter than in a jail and expresses his condition: "But I'll tell you true. Jail is better. Being on ship is being on a jail with the chance of being drawn to boot" (25). But surprisingly he determines to utilize the journey as an opportunity.

Rutherford Calhoun plays a diplomatic role to solve the problem. To fulfill his purpose, at first he becomes close to the captain of the ship, Ebenezer Falcon. He tries to become the trustworthy person and finally wins the heart of the captain. On the other hand he helps McGaffin, leader of the slaves made by whites to control and direct the blacks, to make the plan of rebellion. These two roles led by the two talented characters develop simultaneously side by side to achieve their freedom. Calhoun and McGaffin represent the whole black race whose effort remains always to

liberate the whole race from the whites domination. Initially, Rutherford Calhoun is very sincere to the captain to take advantage from him. The best way, he thinks, to trap a person is to seem sincere on his/her eyes. Successfully he wins the heart of Falcon and comes in his contact frequently. Then Calhoun plays double role at the same time. His first role is to serve the captain very sincerely and develop a good relation with him. It helps him to understand the mentality and the policies of whites. He exceptionally goes to the cabin of Falcon which helps him to know where the guns are kept. By his second role, he makes the plan of revolt or helps McGaffin on this process. Anyway, Falcon believes him as his own faithful helper:

Give me a hand Mr. Calhoun. I hope you can see that I trust you. I need a color mate to be my eyes and ears once the Africans are on board. Same with the crew I want to know what each man's thinkin' [. . .] Once weekly I'll want a full report. If there is any talk you will tell me [. . .] I need some one to keep his eyes open and tell me if any signs of trouble. (57)

Falcon wants to make him a sincere and loyal personal assistant so that it would be easier to know what is happening among blacks and what they are thinking about. Because of possible fear of black's revolt on the ship, the slave traders take care if they are thinking so. Falcon has got a high ambition to use Calhoun as a spy to suppress the possible revolt of blacks. He is aware and curious to know what is happening among blacks. Just like Calhoun, Falcon also addresses him with the respectable word 'Mr.' for a black to convince and make him sincere. Falcon shows an artificial love and respect to impose his policy upon all the blacks. His policy is to dominate the blacks immediately after any sign of revolt appears in their thinking or in activity. Though he treats Calhoun very friendly his later purpose is to impose the

same fate like other blacks. Calhoun understands the mentality of Falcon, however, he seems sincere until the favourable time comes for revolt.

Very easily, Falcon and his evil motive to suppress the blacks using black persons is deceived. In the opinion of Falcon, to make Calhoun strong is to make himself strong so he gives him a gun for the benefit of the white's interest. Falcon handovers his gun to Calhoun:

I advise you to fix yourself a pair of such useful boots of the voyage back. Have you got a pistol?"

"No sir."

"Then we must find one for you." From among the contents of his chest Falcon selected a 45-percussion Kentucky pistol. "Lovely, isn't it? I've adjusted the sights, added precision rifling in the barrel, and damned if this beauty don't feature one of my own concoctions. See how heavy the handle is? There is a magnet inside. It locks down the trigger so no man kin fire it, or snatch it from you, who isn't wear in magnetized ring such as wear even when I sleep." Falcon unscrewed from his third finger, right hand, a metal band, pushed it on my finger, then snapped around my waist a holster of his own design. "You'll notice" says he, stepping back to study me, "that spare ammunition fits in to three policies on the sides and small of your back. The holster has thumb-break snap, so you kin draw back with one smooth motion to push away your blouse. From now on you'd do well to follow a formula I've developed. Every few seconds pat yourself: knife, guns, keys, in that order, to make sure you've got everything. A light touch now and then is all it takes; then I'll become

instinctive. I'd advise you not to let any of the blacks get too close when we bring'em on board." (56)

Here the diplomacy of whites fails whereas the black's succeeds. Falcon unknowingly thinks it his success but actually he is deceived. Falcon believes, if he gives Calhoun some responsibilities he will dominate the rebellion. So he says, "The best way to control the rebellious Nigger is to give him some responsibilities" (74). To capture Calhoun morally, Falcon gives the responsibility to dominate the rebellion. Calhoun and some other sincere mates are armed for his security. Falcon reveals his policy: "I'll arm a few mates on our side and we will chain the rebels in the hold with the blacks" (98). By giving the gun on the hand of Calhoun, he expects that, he punishes the rebels. He orders Calhoun, "if any Negro even looked as if he was thinking of rebellion, that man was to be birched and taught the sing of noose and yardarm" (66). By these revelation of Falcon, it is clear that, Falcon gives him gun for the benefit of whites. It is better to say, Calhoun snatches it by using his diplomacy. Using it as an opportunity, Calhoun wants to take revenge against Falcon. He thinks it will not be an injustice to deceive the whites in this way and take revenge against him. Since the whites have deceived and exploited the blacks throughout their history, naturally such kind of sense of revenge comes in his mind. Calhoun is ready to face any challenges but cannot compromise for the freedom at any cost. So he utilizes the knowledge he got from Falcon and the gun for the benefit of whole blacks on the ship. Anyone can understand that it is the sense of revenge that he points the gun towards the whites. Falcon talks about the power of the gun which he wants to relate it with his own power. He possesses the arms and uses others to use them, however he is afraid with of the armless blacks. So he orders Calhoun not to let any blacks near to him because of the possible revolt. However, whites cannot stop the strong desire of freedom at

any pretension. When Calhoun becomes successful to achieve the gun from the hand of Falcon, it encourages them to reach towards their mission. The gun is the means for freedom which gives the courage as well as strength to fight against the whites. So achievement of gun is the first step in their journey towards freedom.

McGaffin sees the revolt only option for their freedom. One can see the three possible options they can have on the ship. The first option for them is to be slave for ever, second commit suicide through starvation or jumping overboard and the third is to resist against the whites. The first is not acceptable for them at any cost, they say "better to die than to be a slave forever" (167). They are ready to face any problem for the sake of freedom, even to die, but they don't compromise for it. Diamelo dies but he is not defeated. Rather it is a kind of victory to die fighting against the injustice and slavery. He accepts the death for the sake of freedom but does not accept the injustice and domination. Second option left for them is, a suicide, outcome of hopelessness or defeated mentality. These blacks are neither hopeless nor have their defeated mentality. McGaffin, Calhaun and Diamelo are black heroes who are always progressive. So they don't come back from the struggle. They feel humiliation to talk about suicide, defeat etc. Rutherford and McGaffin are completely hopeful that when they get victory in the rebellion, they will be free. These black characters have realized that they have to get everything when they win the rebellion and nothing to lose even if they are defeated. When there is no other options than to fight against the whites they choose to follow the third option of rebellion.

McGaffin does not revolt randomly rather presents and evaluates many possible plans. The arms on the hand of Falcon and Peter Cringle is the main problem for blacks. It is important to disarm the whites before they start the revolt. So McGaffin suggests Calhoun to disarm Falcon to begin the resistance: "You have to

disarm the bugger first or draw him away from the rest. Get him alone somehow or, when he's sleepin' (90). To disarm the captain is to be powerful in their position and to make the whites powerless. The vision, courage and the plan prepared by McGaffin encourages all the blacks to unite and revolt.

McGaffin presents an appropriate plan and suggests all to follow step by step. They want to control the whites, mainly the captain of the ship, Falcon. Blacks want to snatch the ship from them, then to drive themselves towards their native land, Africa. If that is not possible they are ready to go to a new territory to remain freely. The intensive desire of these blacks is to be free from the white's control. If they go to a new place, they can live happily where there are not whites. It is possible, the place can be anywhere else, but that should be completely different than the place they are living. The place is their dream land where is peace, justice, freedom and fraternity. Like the people of twenty first century they want to be culturally free. To achieve their dream land and freedom McGaffin suggests all the blacks to follow his plan:

Tomorrow at six bells, said McGaffin. See we find some bothersome task to keep Falcon aft, something he'll need to supervise, like overseeing the blacks when they're brought up to give them air-he's alas there fer that – then Calhoun has the time he needs. We kin put Falcon over the side that night. Cringle kin made sure we're the ones on evening watch tomorrow [. . .] In a narrow room filled with grizzled, desperate sea rovers, all in agreement and armed, standing a little off to one side and behind the others. (91-92)

The phrase "then Calhoun has the time he needs" in the above plan suggests a broad meaning. The blacks on the ship are so tightly kept that they can not move anywhere from their place. They are in a pitiful condition within a small deck where there is no

sufficient oxygen. Sometimes they are brought up on the top of the ship for the fresh air so that they could live. In that time when Falcon supervises them, Calhoun plans to go to Falcon's private cabin and steal the ship's guns. Then, immediately, according to their plan, locks the door of cabin and capture the captain, Falcon.

The revolt of blacks, with an appropriate plan in their favourable condition, helps them to reach towards the gate of freedom. Their attack against whites immediately after they reach at the top of ship, succeeds them to capture the whites. Blacks fearlessly attack upon Falcon and Cringle and capture them. Aggressive resistance of blacks explodes suddenly, out of the expectation of whites on the ship:

How I wished I could believe him ! Cringel tried to speak, but the one called Atufal seized hair, yanking back his head. The strands stood out like stalks. His throat was bared. Against his white stalk the little black named Babo placed an English handsaw. Atufal said again that the mate should be killed. Ngonyama listened. He began to pace, and prime a horse pistol. The others tossed cringles life back and forth among them, some grumbling eye – Yebo in Allmuseri – to his exication, then making an clean slate of the crew; some like Ngonyama saying La, or nay. [ . . . ] I was black as they were but they had a common bond I could but marvel at. The little black Babo who had always seem so servile before, sat sharpening a hatchet with cloth and stone, . . . the others Atufal, whom Falcon often shacked to the ringbolts on deck, had gone kill – crazy during the mutiny, shooting and stabbing – that moved toward him. He'd taken a musket ball in his left shank, which was mangled, white bone visible through the black flesh of his thigh, but still he seemed more pleased than pained. All of



them were injured and exhausted, but transfigured by their victory.

(132-33)

Sudden revolt of blacks, becomes successful. Their attack upon the whites makes the whites surrender before them. All the blacks spoil their aggression and suppressed spirit of revolution upto now since their long past. Most of them attack physically with the sense of revenge. Though they are wounded on revolt they don't feel pain rather attack more aggressively. Perhaps it is the first time in their life to see the traditional flow upside down. They had never experienced and seen before such kind of victory. They kick and stab the whites and capture them. Rebellion always harms both side. Some of the blacks are injured but they are happy getting chance to kiss their victory. This victory makes them forget their pain, wounds and blood.

Ebenezer Falcon, another white oppressor, remains to be captured yet. He is the most powerful white on the ship to lead all the black towards the cities to make slaves. McGaffin believes, if they can capture the captain, the ship comes automatically under the control of blacks. Now blacks are able to sail their ship themselves. They do not need the whites to sail their ship of livelihood and society. Symbolically, Falcon has controlled and directed the lives and society of all blacks. They do not like the intervention of whites in their personal and social affairs. The blacks don't kill the captain immediately rather they want to make him their slave. So they lock him within his own cabin making fully powerless. McGaffin, after his success to capture Falcon, says, "only falcon speaks of eating flesh, and he is under lock and key in his own cabin" (139).

To be completely free from the whites they lock Falcon in the cabin making him fully powerless but they are more aggressive towards Cringle. Falcon becomes the slave of blacks forever but Cringle gets the different fate. Babo and Akim, two

young blacks attack him: "Glaring at Babo, Akim slashed the air with his hand. There with, Babo's finger tightened the blade on Cringles neck. The mate closed his eyes. [. . .] Cringle sat motionless waiting to hear his own head hit the floor" (134-35).

Blacks become successful to capture all the whites of the ship. Whether they kill or lock, whites become totally powerless and surrender before them. The diplomacy and the unity of blacks based on the principle of equality, goodness and justice is more powerful. Armless blacks succeed whereas armed whites and their evil motives of earning money by selling the human beings as cattle, fails. Discriminatory policy and the rule of injustice end with the demise of whites' position. Blacks follow the progressive process and believe on change whereas whites want to conserve the traditional trend of domination. With their victory, blacks become free from the domination, discrimination and exploitation of whites. The ship comes in the control of blacks.

The victory of blacks is confirmed when the whites feel their defeat. Whites shamelessly confess their defeat. After his defeat Cringle truly speaks: "The Negroes have the ship now. It is their move. The only protection we have from them is, I'm sorry to say, is Calhoun" (138). Now the lives of the whites remains on the hand of blacks. The traditional role relation between whites and blacks is opposite. Blacks uplift on the position of whites and the whites get down. Anyway traditional hierarchy of slave-master, dominator–dominated, exploited – exploiter is blurred. When a person becomes powerless, he/she speaks very truly. Falcon forsakes the control of ship and confesses that the ship and cargo don't belong to whites. With the complete defeat he confesses: "She was not our ship from that start Mr. Calhoun. Every plank and piece of canvas on the Republic and any cargo she's carrying from clew to earring – including that creature (African God) below – belongs to them" (147).

With this confession of Falcon and Cringle, the victory of blacks is confirmed. The confession of complete defeat of whites is the complete victory of blacks to be free from slavery. With this victory, blacks have got the challenges and responsibilities too. Blacks have only snatched the ship but they have to cross the sea safely. Now blacks are free but they have to carry out all the responsibilities. Anyway, Johnson's characters are educated, diplomatic, fearless, brave and aware. These characters have the capacity to lead their journey themselves. Anyone can believe that such heroic characters are able to utilize their freedom without the intervention of whites. Freedom is suitable only for those who can utilize it. Blacks start to fulfill their responsibility with the recording of log. Most of the description, on the long was about them and their ship, however they were deprived of right to record their log. But later, immediately after their success in the rebellion, blacks get the right to write the log. Blacks successfully record their log themselves. After his defeat Falcon hands over this responsibility to Calhoun:

"What is not changed is that I still need you to be my eyes and ears. I cannot write, so you must keep the log. No matter what becomes of me, I want others to know the truth of what happened in this voyage. Will you do that?"

"Captain I'm no writer. I don't know how a ship's log is done"

"Doesn't matter you are a bright lad. Do your best. Include everything you can remember, and what I told you, from the time you came on board." (146)

Falcon returns the log to whom it really belongs to, and gives the freedom to prepare their log themselves. At the same time, it suggests, his surrender before Calhoun. His request "I still need you to be my ears and eyes" suggests now whites need the help of

blacks. (140). At this last stage, Falcon realizes the capacity of blacks. He confesses Calhoun is a bright lad and he is able to record the log. Calhoun is ready to take this responsibility and face the challenges on the way towards the freedom.

The ship, vehicle of journey, symbolically suggests the journey towards freedom. Johnson gives the name to the ship-*Republic*. The word republic connotes to the country where every one gets the right to express his/her opinion freely. As the people of a republican country have the freedom of speech, to choose their leader and practice their rights systematically, the slaves are free to choose their captain. They are free to go wherever they want and they are free to develop their career. Calhoun's and other blacks' journey now develops as their journey towards freedom. The blacks experience the life on the ship, and develop a kind of awareness then finally become free after the success in rebellion.

Johnson's characters successfully develop with the changing circumstances in this novel. Isadora, Rutherford Calhoun, Relay Calhoun break the traditional trend. They struggle and escape from the domination and control of whites. Isadora, being a black girl does not remain in her house as a conventional girl instead moves many places in search of identity and freedom, and finally establishes her career as a school teacher. Her role as a teacher suggests us that blacks are also successful to establish their intellectual position and profession. She represents the black heroin who does not remain under the traditional boundaries. Isadora and Rutherford Calhoun are the examples of new generation. New and coming generation is totally different from the conventional one. They can change and develop themselves according to the different circumstances. So the representative characters of the new generation are ready to create their existence, identity and freedom. They are ready to face and challenge any

problems on their way. It inspires all blacks to struggle for their identity, existence and liberation.

Rutherford and his father Relay Calhoun, escape from the slavery to break the traditional role. The long traditional chain of slavery is broken in this novel to create a new point to start their lives from there. Rutherford searches the history of his father that inspires all the blacks to start their new life style. He finds his father: "Most of time Da did fight. He fought his family constraints of bondage and every other constraints as well: Marriage and religion, as white man imposed these on Africans. Finally in the light [. . .] saddled one of horses and ventured more than ten miles from home quickly" (170). Relay Calhoun escapes from the home of his master, on the horse of his master, at night. He struggled and fought on the field then at last escaped for his freedom from slavery. But Rutherford Calhoun, being an educated person planfully escapes to break the tradition of slavery.

Initially, whites dominate the blacks inhumanly, however, they feel the importance of freedom for black people. With their defeat when they surrender before blacks, they confess their domination. Perhaps they feel themselves as the slaves of blacks. Then they finally understand how it feels to be a slave under domination. After his defeat, Falcon expresses the importance of freedom.

Perhaps even more important to them than freedom was the fact that no leaf fell, no word was uttered or deed executed that did not echo eternally throughout the universe seeds, they were, that would flower into other deeds [. . .] the Republic would be a ferry boat to carry them across the flood to their ancestral home. (140-41)

Falcon has captured the idol of Allmuseri god, which represents their culture and identity. Falcon says, "we have captured an African god [. . .] Allmuseries have

worshipped it since the stone Age. They say it sustains everything into the universe. It never sleeps" (100). Because of these discriminations and dominations, they feel that they have neither their free culture, nor freedom to live equally. The cause of all their problems they realize is the white's discrimination and the lack of freedom. Such domination and discrimination help them develop a kind of awareness that reinforces them in their struggle to freedom.

In this way, the black characters in this novel, challenge the traditional practice of racism. They do not endure the domination of whites rather struggle against it. The awareness that develops within the black characters helps them to understand their position and encourages them to rebel against the whites. The success in the rebellion and developed consciousness help them for their liberation. So this novel shows a path way for their freedom.

#### **IV. CONCLUSION: POSSIBILITY OF BLACKS' FREEDOM**

Through the analysis of *Middle Passage* in chapter III, we come to know that Johnson's novel creates the possibility of blacks' freedom from the influences of whites. Johnson develops an individual awareness within the black characters which makes them able to understand their position. After the realization, they start to struggle against the whites. By reminding their real history of nineteenth century in the form of fiction, Johnson encourages the Afro-Americans to struggle for their search of identity, root, culture and freedom.

Johnson presents progressive characters who are always moving from traditional dark night of slavery to the glorious day of freedom. Calhoun and Isadora represent the progressive characters whose effort remains to struggle for change and reconstruction of the society. They have a dream to make a free society based on justice and equality so that one cultural group could respect the another. Calhoun escapes from slavery and goes to the sea to liberate the whole blacks from the domination of whites. He cannot feel comfortable with his partial freedom from Reverend Chandler instead he starts his struggle for the liberation of all throughout the novel. Isadora helps such humanitarian hero selflessly for his pious process. Her help for Calhoun is the outcome of their unity which suggests the harmonious relation among the blacks. Isadora and Calhoun leave their home in search of knowledge, identity and freedom. Both of them escape from the traditional boundary created by the whites' ideology and they contribute for the liberation of blacks. McGaffin, another progressive black, develops from a monitor or a whites employee to a great humanitarian black leader. He makes all the blacks realize their position and the cause of their domination. An appropriate plan prepared by him helps to capture the whites and snatch the ship from them.

By their organized revolt blacks successfully snatch the ship from whites and ultimately declare themselves free. The unity of blacks and their diplomacy is the means to capture the whites. The ship is the symbol of blacks' culture, life style, identity and means of freedom. The influences and the intervention of whites upon the blacks is unbearable to them. Blacks feel that they are able to sail their ship themselves which suggests their ability to manage their livelihood, culture, identity and freedom. At the end of the novel, blacks successfully control and drive their ship according to their will. It symbolically suggests that blacks are able to manage their life style themselves, so they resist the domination and intervention of whites. The beginning of their new journey with driving themselves, reminds us their beginning of new way of living freely without the intervention of whites. The possibility of their freedom from whites' control indicates the possibility of their complete freedom.

Black character's involvement in new journey is a spiritual journey after all. They share a common motive of their liberation throughout the novel. Their journey is the spiritual awakening to find oneself which is an important dimension of their journey towards freedom. By breaking the traditional role, they start a new journey with the possibility of their liberation. Johnson's *Middle Passage* tries to fulfill the contemporary Afro-American writers motive to search their root, cultural freedom and aesthetic pleasure through the literature created by themselves about black experiences.

Johnson's art of characterization, presentation of plot and the theme of the novel show the blacks a pathway for their freedom. The success of the blacks in their revolution to be free, help the Afro-Americans to be conscious about their cultural freedom in the present. It encourages all the Afro-Americans to search their culture, root, identity and freedom which are their present problems in America. As the



general tendency of African American literature, Johnson explores and searches all these things through their history. By presenting an event of 1930s in the form of fiction in his novel, Johnson encourages to struggle for their right to equality, justice, root, culture, and shows a possible pathway to their complete freedom from white influences.

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