INTRODUCTION

African American literature has become an inevitable part of American literature and culture. The strong presence of African American literature has paved the way for the emergence of Native American, Asian American, and Chicano American streams of literatures. It is only with the significant representation of African American literature American society stands to be cleansed from the problem of racial discrimination. African American literature has examined the problem of racial discrimination in all its philosophical, existential and epistemological aspects. It has traveled from mid 18th century with slave narratives to the current times with all its socio literary exuberance initiating a literary and cultural transformation in the fabric of American society.

It was only during the mid twentieth century after the ground breaking influential socio political texts Washington’s *Up From Slavery* (1901) and Du Bois’s *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) and Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin devised a brand of African American Modernism. Right’s *Native Son* (1940), Ellison’s *Invisible Man* (1952) and Baldwin eloquent volume of essays *The Fire Next Time* argued for social and cultural emancipation of African Americans. Cutting above the influence of Civil Rights Movement that were taking place simultaneously, It is only James Baldwin who addressed the issues of Black masculinity, sexuality and the gay rights of African Americans. Exploring the
psycho sexual problems, Baldwin has dismantled the sexual myths that legitimized the discrimination and served as a projection of insecurity and fear of white people. He has rejected Black Nationalism and diverted the attention of the society towards dissolving the contradictions that plagued African American society. This perspective has paved the way for a more analytical and critical elucidation of African American society in the late twentieth century. The emergence of African American Women writings brought in double jeopardy of racism in Black Women’s movement. Gloria Hull examined the dilemma of Black women in *All the Men are Black. All the Women are White, But Some of Us are Brave.* This has made many black women to turn toward each other for a better introspective and analytical understanding of Black Women’s problems. Maya Angelou’s *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1970) and Tony Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* (1970) addressed the question of how self-identity and respect is achieved by a black girl in a society, which hardly values her existence. Tony Morrison expanded her thematic range from female identity to Black people relationship with African American past in her works *Song of Solomon* (1977), *Beloved* (1987) and *Jazz* (1991). These novels have explored folk heritage, slavery and mother hood. This is followed by Alice Walker’s The *Third Life of Grange Copeland* that discussed the issues of poverty and family violence. She exposed the contradictions within the Black movement depicting the issue of domestic violence, father daughter rape and female genital mutilation in *The Colour Purple* (1982) and *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1982). Despite the...
negative representation of Black men, Alice Walker’s works have initiated the renaissance of African Women’s writings. This has paved the way for the emergence of literature of place, small towns, and neighborhoods and of home. Many creative writers who are veterans of black movements and black feminism assisted by activist stance provided insightful literary and political essays. Gloria Naylor’s *The Women of Brewster Place* (1982), Audre Lorde’s *Zami* (1982), Paul Marshall’s *Praise Song of the Widow* (1983) and Gayle Jones *Corregidora* (1975) have redrawn the map of African American literary canon. The younger writers like Sherley Ann Williams with a sensitive portrayal of African Women’s life in *Dessa Rose* (1986), Terry McMillan with *Waiting to Exhale* (1992) broke the new ground in the genre of fiction for Black women. Amidst the great wealth of Black women’s creative production, African American Men’s writing has been receiving less attention. Yet the autobiographical resonances and the sharing of the themes continue to hold the significance and relevance African American Men’s writings. John Edgar Wideman’s *The Homewood Triology*, *Philadelphia fire* (1990), *Brothers and Keepers* (1984), Charles Johnson’s *The Middle Passage* (1990), *The Oxherding Tale* (1974) have charted out African American counter history. All these works have proved that African American literature has unleashed a new creative talent on par with other significant streams of Post Colonial and Post Modern literatures.
Elucidating African American literature has become a challenging task to every critic and academician. There is a good deal of African American literary theory even before the advent of Post Colonial, Post Modern streams of literary criticism. The usual criticism leveled against African American literary criticism is that it tends to be programmatic and prescriptive. All the significant African American writers chose to employ an appropriate mode of representation to advance the cause of African American creative expression. Du Bois, Alain Locke, Richard Wright tried to propose a theory of reading rather than a particular format of criticism. This perspective has undergone a rapid transformation, with the advent of European schools of thought in the American Academy. Beborah E. McDowell in the essay ‘The Changing same’ describes the arrival of the theory as a changing paradigm shift in African American literary study (Black Women’s Literature, Criticism and Theory 1995. xi-xii). Many of the African American critics have expressed their displeasure at the grand imperative of modern theory such as semiotics, structuralism, post structuralism, psychoanalysis. Crawling underneath the rubble of critical theory, African American critics have set to rebuild the format of creative expression. Expressing a mixture of hostility and enthusiasm some of the Black scholars have managed to establish remarkable understanding of new theory, which led for radical change. Instead of considering theory as a threat to their activism, they perceived it as a potential for social change and great philosophical foundation. This perspective was welcomed by a whole new generation of
African American students, who graduated from prestigious white universities with a conceptual clarity on modern literary theory. The new breed of academic critics encountering difficult conditions, tried to recover the broken past by drawing sources from Marxism, Feminism, Post Structuralism and Psychoanalysis. Eventually African American literary criticism has become a discourse to be reckoned with.

The first theoretical essay in African American literary study is Barbara Smith’s ‘Toward a Black Feminist Criticism’. It has opened a new line of thinking on Feminism and Black Feminism. Smith has postulated the interweaving of gender, class and racial politics essential for Black Feminist perspective. She argued that Black Feminist critics should have a good knowledge of the identifiable tradition of Black Women’s writing. She should have a good eye and ear for Black Women’s language and she should think and write out of her own identity. Black Women critic is not supposed to graft the ideas or methodology of white literary canon. Smith has demonstrated these principles in response to counter the homophobia in literary representation.

The Post structuralism has exerted considerable influence on Black Feminist Criticism and it has also changed the perspectives of African American male critics. Houston Bake and Henry Louis Gates Jr., giving up their former anti theoretical stance, have become potential African American Post Structuralist critics. The Journal started by these people ‘Black American
Literature Forum’, has become the focus of the theory of debate and became a podium to discuss many of the contradictions. Houston Bake conceded the critical weakness of Black Arts movement and the need of a new theoretical paradigm. He strongly opposed the imposition of new theoretical paradigm and sought for the liberation of African American cultural theories imprisoned in the hands of prominent white scholars. He expressed his allegiance to the holistic, cultural –anthropological approach implicit in Black Aesthetics. Baker’s conversion to Post structuralism was obvious in his *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature* (1984). This book was subtitled as *Vernacular Theory* signaling his commitment to vernacular Black tradition and to a systematic mode of thinking. Baker took the Blues as his matrix for a vernacular theory, arguing that the Blues are the multiplex, enabling script in which Afro American cultural discourse is inscribed. The pervasive use of *Blues* matrix is seen in his *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance* (1987) which argued for complete revision of modernism in the light of African American art forms and the literature of Harlem Renaissance.

conveyed as an indirect means of expression and power relations. It is this self-conscious, self-knowing; self-reflexive African American literary tradition Louis Gates has generated achieved a distinctive critical following. However, Joyce Ann Joyce in New Literary History (1987) contests his theory. In her article The Black Canon: Reconstructing Black American Literary Criticism, she attacked Gates finding his writing sterile and elitist. According to her Gates ignores the fact that African American history had a vital role in resistance and emancipation. However, there is confusion in accepting the theory as it is understood to be a homogenous entity against the plurality. Barbara Christian examines the negative obverse of theory in the essay ‘The Race for Theory’ in Transferences: Black Feminist Thinking: the ‘Practice’ of ‘Theory’ and inspired many black women to forge a critical tradition of their own.

Afro centrism begins with the premises that African American people are primarily of African descent, despite their centuries long existence in the United States. Afrocentrists believe that all the people of Black diaspora share a common heritage and they are conceived in terms of African culture. Molefi Kete Ashante in Afrocentricity(1988) has promoted the theory of Afrocentricity. It is in the light of these perspectives; the works of James Baldwin need to be elucidated. The critical and theoretical issues that are part of the evolution of African American literature and criticism are aptly reflected in the works of Baldwin. He has transcended the common themes of African American literature
and portrayed the issues of multiculturalism that continue to influence the life of African American in the contemporary situation. His attempt to initiate the relevance of theoretical application to the gay and lesbian issues of African American lives is almost obvious in all his works. His theoretical stance, apart from the proposed theories of Louis Gates, Baker and Barbara Smith, brought in the militant representation of African American social and cultural issues. Through his works, he emphasized on the process of activity rather than fixed outcome. Though, autobiographical mode is well rooted in African American thought, he has not depended much on autobiographical mode except on the remnants of autobiography. Other writers like Frederick Douglass, Alice Walker theorized the material and psychic conditions of slavery in their autobiographical narratives. Since 1980’s Afro American, critics have used theory in variety of ways. One of the significant critics Hazel Carby in *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of Afro American Woman Novelist* (1987) established a unified notion of feminist tradition and criticism. Carby’s approach invoked British cultural studies and is associated with the emergence of Stuart Hall, Kobena Mercer and Paul Gilroy. In contrast to African American centrism, theoretical projects have projected criss crossings of ethnicity, nationality, class and gender. Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic* (1993), Kobena Mercer’s *Welcome to the Jungle* (1994), Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble* reconceptualised the repeat performances of African American biological and cultural identities.
The literary and critical survey of African American literature offers the cross racial, cross-cultural scholarship necessarily for literary excellence and human importance. The possibility of distinction between white culture and black is discovered in a satirical and theoretical enterprise that does not objectify African American writing. James Baldwin can be located in the midst of the plethora of emerging theoretical streams and the contradictory contentions that try to establish African American literature as the ‘discourse of the other’.

The thesis titled ‘A Cartography of African American Redemption in James Baldwin’s Fiction’ makes a scholarly attempt to retrieve the bio critical and socio literary aspects of James Baldwin’s life and literature. It attempts to locate James Baldwin in the wider spectrum of the evolution of African American literature and criticism and explores the activist and theoretical stance of Baldwin in the wake of multicultural aspects deciding the very essence of African American life afresh in the contemporary times. Chapter one ‘Defining Commitment’ begins with the general definition of ‘commitment’ in all its general perception analyzing the existing definitions. Exploring the social etymology of the term the chapter initiates the discussion on the justifiable imperatives essential for the promotion of human values. It also discusses the problems encountered by an artiste in discharging his artistic responsibilities. Elucidating ‘commitment’ in all its social and cultural liabilities, the artistic freedom in view of the responsibility thrust on it is illustrated from the
understandings generated by some of the British works like *Animal Farm*, *Nineteen Eighty Four* etc. The major aspects of social commitment, the distortions of the socially committed writer are discussed establishing the difference between ‘commitment’ and ‘propaganda’ within the telescopic view of Marxism. Probing the critical perceptions of realism, naturalism and social realism, the literary reflection and analysis of these is substantiated. The chapter moves on to discuss the modern movements of ‘Existentialism’ and ‘Humanism’ in relation to the subscription of Afro American in their writings. The chapter ends with the note that the writings of Afro American literature need to be viewed in the light of the emerging philosophical and epistemological aspects of culture and knowledge.

Chapter two entitled ‘The Genesis of Afro American Literature’ explores the evolution of African American literature. The conceptual confusion that arises in employing ‘African American’, ‘Afro American’, ‘Black American’ is defused in evaluating the terms with a sense of their own values. The history of slavery and the import of Africans as slaves to America in relation to the circumstances that paved the way for the emergence of African American writers is discussed in the chapter. Later, the artistic articulation of African American literary tradition in all its multidimensionality as a reaction to the social experience in America is examined in the chapter. It is argued that the literature of African Americans is an attempt that explains the peculiar predicament. The
chapter examines the first known pieces of literature Lucy Terry, Jupiter Hammon etc. The thematic concerns of the 18th century African American writers like Phyllis Wheatley are discussed in relation to slave narratives of Briton Hammon’s *A Narrative of Uncommon Sufferings*. The literary characteristics of slave narratives are discussed dispelling the argument that the early writings are pro slavery. The writings of 19th century and the dominant literary form memoir is established as an extension of folk tale tradition. The autobiographies of Frederick Douglas and William Wells Brown are presented as redeeming autobiographies. William Wells Brown as a first African American novelist has produced a great amount of literature with a single-minded commitment to abolish slavery. All his works have unfurled a history of slavery that was concealed by the mainstream versions. Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* considered as a hybrid of sentimental melodrama is discussed as a touchstone for antislavery sentiment. In the process of accounting the literary evolution, the works of Paul Laurence Dunbar, Charles Waddel Chestnutt, and James Weldon Johnson’s works are discussed. The thematic concerns of all their works are discussed in relation to African American protagonism that subverted the obnoxious white dominant culture. The chapter discusses in detail the philosophical and intellectual contribution of W.E. B. DuBois in substantiating the cultural existence of African Americans. The dominant concerns of Harlem renaissance and the views of the Harlem writers are presented. The poetry of James Weldon Johnson, Claude McKay, Langston
Hughes, Edward Brathwaite, Countee Cullen is discussed as multifaceted mirror of the existence of African Americans. In the second phase of African American, literary renaissance Jean Toomer’s *Cane* and Alex Haley’s *Roots* is analyzed. It is in the second phase of Black Renaissance movement the location of James Baldwin, Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison is identified. The chapter concludes with the emphasis of providing a bio critical view and a thorough discussion of his prominent novels.

The third chapter entitled ‘A Bio Critical View’ presents James Baldwin as a true representative of American realities. His unique social and literary functioning is rendered characterized by poetic profusion and sagacity. As an ardent civil rights crusader, as a racial rhetorician, his task was a testimony to prophetic future of African Americans. His exhilarating role as a writer and critic has exposed the grim realities of American race relations. Baldwin’s social and literary career is unfurled in all its detailed discussion. His childhood and the early social experiences unveil the anguish and the survival of African American families during the period of Harlem Renaissance. His eternal love for God and the compassion for life acted as eternal influence on the younger generations for a long time. Baldwin’s attempt of liberation from the influences of home, street, church, school and the realms of imagination is presented as an everlasting inspiration and encouragement. The reasons for his loss of faith, the deterioration of his family and his oscillation between the mainstream American
culture and the African culture is portrayed as a period of transformation. His hard demarcation between sociology and aesthetic is seen in his polemical essay ‘Everybody’s protest Novel’ condemning the aestheticisation of African American protest. The chapter presents a brief synoptic view of Baldwin’s significant works *Go Tell it on the Mountain, Giovanni’s Room, Another Country, If Beale Street Could Talk, Fire Next Time, No Name in the Street*. The significant literary and critical aspects of these novels are discussed. The chapter concludes with the view of justifying Baldwin’s role as a spokesman of African Americans.

Chapter four entitled ‘Black Evangelism’ elucidates the most popular and polemical novel ‘Go Tell it on the Mountain’. The critical reception that the novel has received across the globe is presented in all its preciseness leaving a comprehensive thematic view of the novel. The strong religious theme that the novel has exuded is understood as proffering evangelism for the salvation of African society. It presents how each character uses the church as a form of liberation from the hardcore realities of the world. By using religion, how each character distances itself from the grip of reality is discussed with the textual illustrations. The chapter also makes a contextual reading of the novel and to some extent presents the history of African enslavement. As the novel is divided into three sections, the chapter presents a detailed discussion of the theme of the novel with textual illustrations. As the novel remains to be controversial even
today, the chapter presents the incomprehensible thematic illustrations to the best possible extent.

The fifth chapter entitled ‘A Journey of Self Definition’ discusses the novel *Another Country*. The novel delineates how the artistic hero is succumbed by the dominance of the racial concept of whiteness. Baldwin argues for the consideration of the influence of race, gender and sexual orientation in the artistic journey of hero towards self definition. The novel acknowledges all the facets of oneself. The critical reception the novel has received is systematically presented bringing forth the significant critical aspects of the novel. Critical evaluation of the theme is illustrated by the textual references. The artistic journey of the protagonist Rufus Scott is unveiled in all its multifaceted understanding. The failures of Rufus comprehend the failure of the experiences of an African American artist. Baldwin succeeds in exploring the epidermalisation of identity within the broader cultural context of African American situation. The character analysis of Rufus is presented in comparison with the protagonists of other novels. The chapter also brings in the theoretical arguments of Bell Hooks and Houston Baker and makes a dispassionate critical analysis.

The Sixth chapter ‘Artistic Quest’ examines the issues of the search for the real and the development of the personality of an artist. The demonstration of Baldwin in encompassing a competent artistic personality for representing
African Americans is explored in this chapter. The crucial aspects in Baldwin literary representation is the conceptual portrayal of history. His social and literary protests are perceived as the products of biological and environmental determinism. Baldwin’s presentation of characters as complete human beings not as propagandist caricatures is discussed in relation to the uncompromising thematic concerns. The chapter considers how Baldwin achieves his artistic quest through different patterns of narrative representation is dexterously presented in this chapter. His employment of irony, penchant for poetic expression, command of language and specially black speech, direct interactions with innumerable Black artists and execution of music for the elevation of etching the Black characters have helped him to greater extent to realize the artistic journey. The chapter makes a bold exploration of some of the pertinent personal experiences to illustrate the artistic refinement of Baldwin. 

*Conclusion* is the summation of all the social and literary qualities of Baldwin as a writer and social activist. It tries to relocate the placement of Baldwin in the context of changed cultural and literary evaluations.