Abstract

While literature is an effort to portray the life, the African-American literature portrays a race and the survival of slaves in a soil with both geographical and demographical alienation. African-American literature is significant because of its contribution to the development of its nation in all the aspects. As slaves in the plantation, the African-Americans contributed for the economic development. With their part in the army, they aided to defend the country. Their role in the enhancement of aesthetic culture like music, dance and literature was laudable in the arena of literature. The blues, spirituals, jazz and pop are some of the aesthetics contributed by them. Though these were the forms to express their psychic trauma and physical strivings, they were novel in the field of literature to an extent of being popular till date. The spirituals are sung in the church throughout and the jazz has its own charm for the musicians. The African-American writers wrote poetry, fictional and non-fictional works to exemplify their intellect as well. Despite all the above literary genres, autobiographical slave narrative was the primitive form of their literature. It is historically factual and psychologically analytical and the African-American writers are at ease in producing autobiographical novels which are otherwise termed as ‘faction.’ The objective of this thesis is to study their origin, tradition carried over to the United States, the values and ethics inherent in them and their significance in their survival amidst the segregation
and suppression in the select autobiographical novels of Alex Haley, James Baldwin, Richard Wright and Maya Angelou.

The thesis consists of five chapters with the **Introduction** as first chapter. This chapter introduces the African-American background that is, the facts behind the slave population in America, their survival, their trials and tribulation, threats to their life in the name of various organizations like Ku Klux Klan and Jim Crow laws and their successful evolution in the literary arena despite all the impediments. There are few definitions for autobiography and introduces the writers as well. With the brief summary of the select autobiographical novels of the above mentioned writers, the review of the same writers and the novels by reviewers and eminent writers has been presented to show the resources already available in this arena.

The second chapter entitled **The Familial, Ethnic and Cultural Root** tracks the origin of the African-American in their native soil and their heritage. It sounds very conservative with various ceremonies and training to lead a healthy life both physical and psychic. As the heritage is deeply implanted, the African-Americans in the alien land also follow and practice certain traditions like their craftsmanship in carving, weaving, forging and preserving their gatherings. Their belief in the presence of supernatural power named “Almighty” is another inherent tradition they could not get rid of despite their poverty and segregation in the white dominated land.
The third chapter with the title *Exodus in Hope of Deliverance* describes the journey of the protagonists, various in nature but with the similar purpose. The protagonist in *Roots* is sold into slavery, which of *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, travel towards deliverance seeking God for salvation. Richard Wright’s protagonist shift from one place to another to get rid of his hunger, which literally means for the sustenance of life and Maya Angelou’s life course in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* reveals the pompous urban life, the power of her parents and the sexual abuse makes her mute which in turn opens the avenue of reading to develop companionship with books and revelation of the charm of words.

The fourth chapter is entitled *Destination-Dynamic Tour de Force* which analyses the endeavour taken by the protagonists to reach their destination. Alex Haley’s protagonists are the pioneers in the vanguard of emancipation and their journey becomes complete with the freedom, properly utilized by the family members. Baldwin’s main protagonist reaches the altitude of salvation with his fantastical revelation of heavenly vision, excellently described by the author. Richard’s journey teaches him the reality of segregation and empowers him with the strength of ‘words’ and ‘knowledge’ to confront them with utmost energy as a ‘protest’ writer. Maya Angelou’s journey shows her spirit to overcome all the impediments in the name of race colour, gives her the spirit to encounter life as it is and also gets the self-knowledge of her womanhood.
The fifth chapter is the **Summation** which recalls all the efforts put in by the African-Americans to confront, to endure, to survive, to emerge and to be a potential participant in the development of nation. It also gives hint of the writers’ skills in developing their narrative and concludes with the scope for further research in future. An updated Bibliography is annexed at the end of the thesis.