Chapter Two

Return to the Roots: the Islam Experience

Cultural Genocide and the Development of Black Consciousness

The period following the abolition of slavery was characterized by rapid changes in the Afro-American society. It was, in fact, a period of rising Negro consciousness and radical deliberations. The Negroes were in a big crisis of identity and were looking for a proper role in social life. The deeply segregated condition of life and the indignity and disrespect heaped on them only augmented their crisis. Though slavery was not prevalent now, the life of the ex-slaves was not practically very different from that of slavery. Julius Lester, who made original studies of the Negroes' problems, comments on the matter in his essay "Cultural Nationalism":

Blacks have always been made to view their predicament in terms of Whites. They have been the "outs" trying to get "in". This immediately gives those who are "in" a power. It is their decision whether or not you will get in. They set the qualifications. Black people have to qualify for a job or enter a school according to standards set by Whites. Life for a black person can be nothing more than a series of tests with a nation of White school teachers grading every step you take every breath you breathe. In the South you can fail the test if you wear a white shirt and tie. In the North you can fail if you don't wear a shirt and tie. (519)
Besides, the blame for the poor condition of Negroes' life too was always put on their shoulders. Julius Lester further remarks:

By saying that America has a "Negro problem," the burden for solving it has been put on the one who carries the burden of being oppressed. "If Negroes would do this and do the other, we wouldn't have this problem." It is always the Negro who is wrong. (519)

The white domination over the black people in America was almost complete and part of a deliberately planned project. The black people were so successfully brainwashed to believe that things black were bad and things white were all good. They were constantly bombarded by the symbols of the dominant culture. They had to see their own culture ridiculed by Whites. "The western culture," Julius Lester points out, "has equated the evil of the world with black - black as sin, "the blackest day of my life," "blackball" etc. There are over sixty synonyms in Roget's Thesaurus for black; and all of them have connotations of something not good" (526).

Besides, the white slave-owners whose economy depended considerably on slavery had been for long implementing a programme of cultural genocide of the black people. As a result of all these, the black people, in the course of time, lost their dignity and self-respect, and began devoting much of their time trying to erase their blackness. They tried to solve the pain of their being black by denying what they were, or at least, by hiding it, covering it up, because to deny it had been impossible. The abolition of slavery and the governmental measures to improve the conditions of Negroes' life did not bring about any considerable change in
this. In the words of Julius Lester, "Even after the laws were off the books, custom did not change. A nigger is a nigger is a nigger" (520).

It was in such adverse socio-political conditions that the Negroes began to think seriously and radically about their problems. The white-designed education they got in America didn't help them much to know their genuine history and ancestral civilization, but it improved their general standard and sharpened their awareness about their predicament. It was perhaps the second generation of the free Blacks that got the leisure and a conducive intellectual milieu for a thorough enquiry into their own past. Many of the black intellectuals of this generation were involved in deep and meticulous studies pertaining to this issue. It was primarily a search for an identity, an identity that they could be proud of and that will fetch them a certain amount of dignity and respect. These studies on the part of the black intelligentsia yielded very revealing and immensely useful information which soon made the black masses deeply aware of the cultural genocide at work for about four centuries. It was this awareness that, in turn, developed into a powerful black consciousness, an eagerness or an obstinacy, to go into the depths of things and to find value in things pertaining to the black culture.

**Two Trends: Integration and Separation**

Attempts on the part of the black people to solve their problems in America were of two different kinds. Efforts for an effective integration of the black people in the American mainstream society, and efforts in the diametrically opposite direction for a total separation of the black Americans from the predominantly white American society. These
trends represented two different outlooks concerning the Negro problem. However, they both aimed at a successful solution of the crisis of the African society in America.

Organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Urban League and the other anti-segregation organizations strove to improve the conditions of Negroes' life within the American society. The question of rehabilitation in the wake of the large scale migration of the ex-slaves from the South to the cities in the North, the issue of getting better conditions of life for the ex-slaves, augmenting the facilities for their education, getting better job opportunities and finding cordial settlements for the racial conflicts etc. were some of the important tasks of these integrationist movements. Their clear objective was to create a socio-political condition for a peaceful survival of the Blacks in America. They, however, did not champion the cause of the black American's cultural identity which would win them dignity and respect, and liberate them, in course of time, from their social predicament. The integrationists did not much bother about the moral degeneration the Blacks were undergoing in the white-dominated society.

But the movements such as Black Fraternal Organization, Student Non-violent Co-ordination Committee (S.N.C.C.), the black Muslim movement, the Black Panther Party and the black Churches did not view the issue in the same way. They, in varying degrees, stood for the separation of the black Americans from the white American society. A separate identity - social, political and religious - was considered quite inevitable. A rediscovery and further revival of the genuine African
culture would help the Blacks gain dignity and respect in their opinion. Integration would cause only a loss of identity, and they were against any kind of integration. In the words of Malcolm X, the late veteran leader of black Muslims, "the only permanent solution to America's race problem is the complete separation of these twenty two million ex-slaves from our white slave master and the return of these ex-slaves to our own land, where we can then live in peace and security among our people" (The End... 132).

These organizations evinced their separatist and integrationist character in their strategies and organizational methods. Most of the integrationist organizations had both the Blacks and the Whites in the leadership as well as the general membership. But the separatists did not let the Whites involve themselves in their activities on the ground that it would mitigate their struggles, and would have a reverse effect. The result of the white involvement in the black activities, in Malcolm X's opinion, would be as follows:

It's just like when you've got some coffee that's too black which means it's too strong. What do you do? You integrate it with cream, you make it weak. But if you pour too much cream in it, you won't even know you ever had coffee. It used to be hot, it becomes cool. It used to be strong, it becomes weak. It used to wake you up, now it puts you to sleep. (Malcolm X... 16)
Search for Identity and the Emergence of Black Nationalism

By the turn of this century, the intellectuals among the coloured people came to realize, in the words of E. U. Essien Udom, that "the tragedy of the Negro in America is that he has rejected his origins - the essentially human meaning implicit in the heritage of slavery, prolonged suffering, and social rejection. By rejecting this unique group experience and favouring assimilation and even biological amalgamation, he thus denies himself the creative possibilities inherent in it and in his folk culture" (vii). They further understood, Essien Udom suggests, that "this dilemma is fundamental; it severely limits his ability to evolve a new identity or a meaningful synthesis, capable of endowing his life with meaning and purpose" (vii). To their disappointment they found that they, robbed of their tradition and the sense of dignity, decades after the so-called emancipation, were still seeking acceptance by the white majority and were continuing to live in semibondage on the fringes of American society.

The awareness about the loss of identity in the process of assimilation and the stark predicament of living in the white dominated American society compelled them to have serious deliberations about their conditions. Though many of the middle class and upper class Negroes with steady sources of income and good conditions in life were more or less contented with their life in the American society, the Negro masses continued to be in stark discontent and dissatisfaction. The poor economic status, the low moral standards and the predicament of having to live and die trapped in the Negro ghettos kept them perpetually dissatisfied and out of touch with the relatively satisfied middle class.
"The Negro masses." E. U. Essien Udom points out, "unlike the middle class and the upper class, are seeking a way out of a socio-cultural environment, a spiritual and psychological impasse, fostered by the stubbornly lingering mores of slavery and complicated during the present century by the urbanization of American society" (3-4).

These were the circumstances that fostered a group feeling and a commonality of interest leading to the growth of nationalism in the black American society. It was primarily a search for identity and a proud heritage mixed with a strong tendency to repudiate the present Negro identity and to be separated from the white slave-masters' society that perpetually exploited them. The black nationalism that thus emerged in the early years of this century had a number of unifying elements. The most prominent among them was a common desire to get established the right to shape their destinies, in the social, economic and political realms. E. U. Essien Udom observes:

Although black nationalism shares some characteristics of all nationalism, it must be considered a unique type of separatist nationalism seeking an actual physical and political withdrawal from existing society. Apart from the unifying symbols of race and religion, it employs the heritage of abuse and indignity to which the Negro people in the United States have been subjected and, perhaps more importantly, their common desire for self improvement. (7)

The emergence of the free African states after a period of colonial rule, has been pointed out as another significant factor that augmented nationalist tendencies among the coloured people in America. C. Eric
Lincoln points out:

Many Blacks for whom Africa once seemed as remote as the planet Jupiter now find themselves exhilarated and encouraged by the emergence of black national states in what American text books had always referred to as "the dark continent." Suddenly, the "dark continent" became "the Motherland," and identification with Africa and the African peoples became the trademark of the liberated Blackamerican. (The Black... 11)

The "mood ebony" (pride in being black) popularized by intellectuals like James Baldwin and the new awareness about the African ancestry and heritage with the new knowledge about the glorious civilizations of the African states were powerful impetus in the nationalistic revival of the Afro-Americans. Many talented youngsters of the generation of the early ex-slaves took special interest in studying the history of their race from perspectives other than that of the Whites. Many undertook the difficult task of tracing their family lineage, history and ancestry. The result yielded by these intellectual efforts was of very inspiring nature that the black Americans in general began to feel proud of their blackness and their being Africans.

Another aspect of the "mood ebony" trend was that the Afro-Americans, most of whom were then in all respects Christians, became increasingly repulsed with Christianity and everything else of the white man's civilization. The words of one of the black students of C. Eric Lincoln reveal this clearly:
The Christian religion is incompatible with the Negro's aspirations for dignity and equality in America. It has hindered where it might have helped; it has been evasive when it was morally bound to be forthright; it has separated believers on the basis of color although it has declared its mission to be a universal brotherhood under Jesus Christ. Christian love is the White man's love for himself and for his race. (The Black... xi)

Further, the Negroes of the generation following the abolition of slavery were gradually disproving the "myth of the Magnolias" of the obedient and docile darkies lounging peacefully under the sweet-scented magnolias behind the big house—the image of the happy and contented Negro of the period of slavery. Left alone, they were keen on having things in their own way.

Thus the search for identity and the realization of black nationalism soon found an explicit outlet in the rejection of everything of the white civilization and an enthusiastic acceptance of everything black and African. Thus they soon rejected the white way of life, Christianity, the white man's religion, the white history of the black men and Africa. They were looking for black and African substitutes for all these. C. Eric Lincoln remarks:

Black nationalism is more than courage and rebellion; it is a way of life. It is an implicit rejection of the alien white culture and an explicit rejection of the symbols of that culture, balanced by an exaggerated and undiluted pride in "black" culture. It involves a drastic reappraisal not only of
present realities but also of the past and future. (The Black... 46)

The black people, especially the masses, thus recognized, in the words of C. Eric Lincoln, that their "race has a rich cultural heritage, extending thousands of years into the past; but the black men who were torn from their homes and shipped to the New World in chains were carefully isolated from that heritage" (The Black... 50). The history of the "Negro" begins in the torments and degradation of slavery in America. That is not the sum of his history; rather, that is the distortion of history. To him "Negro" means humiliation, inferiority and perpetual contingency. He is anxious to rediscover himself as a black man linked to the ancient civilization of Africa.

Thus, by the turn of this century, many movements and organizations with the vigorous spirit of black nationalism came into existence one after the other. The most influential and the most enduring among them was the black Muslim movement or the Nation of Islam that emerged in the early 1930s. But there were the minor organizations such as the Ras Tafarians, the United African Nationalist Movement, the Moorish Science Temple Movement of Noble Drew Ali and the Universal Negro Improvement Association of Marcus Garvey, the early manifestations of black nationalism that paved the way for the black Muslim movement. A brief study of these organizations is essential for a vivid understanding of the later Islam experience of the black people in America.

All these black movements were observed to have had three common characteristics: a disparagement of the white man and his
culture, a repudiation of Negro identity, and a concomitant search for and commitment to the black / African heritage. A careful study of these organizations, however, will reveal that, besides these three common characteristics, they had an Islam connection in common. At times overt and at times covert, they always had to do a lot with the Islamic heritage of Africa. These were the early instances of the Islam affinity of the Africans in America. Their search for identity and their nationalism lie intertwined with their African Islamic heritage.

The United African Nationalist Movement, with its New York city street-corner evangelism and the Ras Tafarians, the West Indies based ultra-militant secret society that operated in New York were two other small groups with black nationalist tendencies that existed in the early years of the twentieth century in certain localities. Their influences, however, were confined to small areas.

The Moorish Science Temple Movement and the Garveyite African Nationalism

The Moorish Science Temple Movement and the Universal Negro Improvement Association were two early influential black nationalist movements that flourished about the time of the World War I. Of these, the former had a religious orientation and the latter was concerned more with politico-economic goals. E. U. Essien Udom observes:

Noble Drew Ali and Marcus Garvey represent two traditions of black nationalism in the United States. Both men are now dead, but their teachings form the core of contemporary nationalist ideologies, and both continue to have adherents.
Drew Ali was an American citizen. Marcus Garvey was a West Indian. Both began nationalist agitation during the decade of the First World War—a decade of unprecedented Negro migration from the southern rural areas to northern cities. The two leaders disappeared from the scene shortly before the depression. Garvey was deported from the United States in 1927 and Drew Ali died mysteriously in 1929. (33)

Noble Drew Ali, before appearing as a "prophet of Islam," was known as Timothy Drew. He was born in North Carolina in 1886 and at one time was an express man in Newark, New Jersey. In 1913 he founded the first Moorish American Science Temple, in Newark. Before he came to Chicago in 1925, he had established a temple in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and one in Detroit, Michigan. Although Drew Ali had little formal education, he had become acquainted with certain phases of Islamic teachings, and had become convinced that Islam was the only instrument for Negro unity and advancement. E. U. Essien Udom writes:

According to the legend, Drew Ali is said to have visited North Africa where he received a "commission" from the king of Morocco to teach Islam to the Negroes in the United States. He is also reputed to have met with the president of the United States (which president is not specified) in order to receive a "charter" for the propagation of Islam. The president is said to have told him that "it would be as difficult getting Negroes to accept Islam as trying to fit a horse with a pair of pants." (34)

Drew Ali taught that the people known as "Negroes" in the United
States were Asiatic and, specifically, that they were Moors whose forebears inhabited Morocco before they were enslaved in North America. Thus he not only denied the affinity of Negroes to the white centre of power, but also attempted to differentiate them from their "Negro-ness" or from their sub-culture. He insisted that for a people to amount to anything, it is necessary to have a name and a land. North America is the Negroes' land—it is only an extension of the African continent. He taught that the so-called Negroes must know their national origin and refuse to be called Negroes, black folk, coloured people, or Ethiopians. They must call themselves Asiatics, Moors, or Moorish Americans. He believed that before having a god, a people must have a nationality and the Moorish nation is Morocco. The word "Ethiopian" signified division. Negro or black meant death, and "coloured" signified something that is painted. He contended that the name was all-meaningful, for by stripping him of his Asiatic name and calling him Negro, Black, Coloured or Ethiopian, the Europeans robbed him of his power, his authority, his god and every other worthwhile possessions.

Besides being a propagator of religious ideas, Drew Ali is reported to have been taking interest in improving the economic conditions of the black men. A number of small businesses collectively owned by his followers were established. However, all his efforts in the religious and social fields were interrupted and nullified when he was arrested and imprisoned in March 1929 following the death of his opponent Sheik Claude Greene. Later when he was eventually released on bond, he died under mysterious circumstances.
Marcus Garvey, who established the Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League, was born in Jamaica on August 17, 1887. He was widely known as the "Black Moses." As an African nationalist, he strongly differed from Noble Drew Ali. Garvey identified the problems of the Africans in America with the problems of colonialism in Africa. He believed that until Africa was liberated, there was no hope for black people anywhere. He not only travelled extensively in the Latin American countries, but in 1912 he journeyed to London to learn what he could about the condition of Negroes in other parts of the British Empire. While in London he associated himself with an Egyptian author, Duse Mohammad Ali, publisher of the "Africa Times" and "Oriental Review." This association, meeting with African and West Indian students, African nationalists, sailors and dock workers, and extensive reading helped him delve deeply into the condition of Africans under colonial rule. In addition, he developed an outlook on the condition of Negroes in the United States. Garvey's own words quoted in Essien Udom's study of black nationalism reveal his conclusions:

The reliance of our race upon the progress and achievements of others for a consideration in sympathy, justice and rights is like a dependence upon a broken stick, resting upon which will eventually consign you to the ground ... The Negro needs a nation and a country of his own, where he can best show evidence of his own ability in the art of human progress. Scattered as an unmixed and unrecognized part of alien nations and civilizations is but to demonstrate his
imbecility, and point him out as unworthy derelict, fit neither for the society of Greek, Jew nor Gentile. (17)

In the summer of 1914 Garvey returned to Jamaica with a vision of "uniting all the Negro peoples of the world into one great body to establish a country and government absolutely their own." On August 1, 1914, he established the Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League, with the motto: "One God! One Aim! One Destiny!" Garvey's movement won popularity very soon and he enlisted a large following in a short period in New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Detroit, Washington D.C., Jamaica, Guatemala, and other states. E. U. Essien Udom remarks:

Garvey's ideology was both nationalist and racial. His nationalist objective was the redemption of Africa for "Africans abroad and at home." He advocated racial purity, racial integrity and racial hegemony. He sought to organize Negroes in the United States into a vanguard for Africa's redemption from colonialism and hoped eventually to lead them back to Africa. The major instrument for achievement of these objectives was economic co-operation through racial solidarity. He believed that if the Negroes were economically strong in the United States, they would be able to redeem Africa and establish a worldwide confraternity of black people. Above all he believed that the Negroes of the world, united together by the consciousness of race and nationality, could become a great and powerful people. (37)

As Garvey's movement gained momentum and succeeded greatly
in uniting the Negro masses, it was checked by governmental interferences. He was convicted of using the mails to defraud and was imprisoned. Later he was deported as an undesirable alien. These were, apparently, measures taken by the white regime to check his growing influence on the Negro masses. After deportation, Garvey returned to Jamaica and then went to London, where he died in 1940. The ill-fate Garvey suffered affected his movement quite adversely and caused its premature death. It was never after effectively revived.

Garvey's association with the Egyptian scholar Duse Mohammad Ali and his attitudes to various issues pertaining to the predicament of the Negroes reveal that the inspiration for his movement, like that of Noble Drew Ali, too was the religion of Islam and the Islamic heritage of Africa. The black Muslims of later years, however, proudly claim both Garvey and Drew Ali as their brave leaders of the past. The remark of Elijah Muhammad, the powerful leader of the Nation of Islam movement, quoted in Essien Udom's study reveals this:

I have always had a very high opinion of both the late Noble Drew Ali and Marcus Garvey and admired their courage in helping our people (the so-called Negroes) and appreciated their work. Both of these men were fine Muslims. (63)

Referring to the relationship his movement had with those of the two leaders, Elijah Muhammad continues:

The followers of Noble Drew Ali and Marcus Garvey should now follow me and co-operate with us in our work because we are only trying to finish up what those before us started. (63)
The movements of Garvey and Drew Ali were successful in fostering in the Negroes a sense of unity and common identity. They undoubtedly paved the way for the later nationalist movements. C. Eric Lincoln's observation with reference to Noble Drew Ali's movement that "It was not Islam, but it signified a dim awareness of Islam" (Race... 160) was true about Garvey's movement too.

Islam Experience: The Lost Found Nation of Islam in the Wilderness of North America

The pride in being Black, the enthusiasm for Africa and the early nationalist spirit soon developed into an inclination towards Islam. The movements of Noble Drew Ali and Marcus Garvey coupled with the new awareness in the African history of the black race gradually brought the Negroes psychologically closer to Islam. The new knowledge that Islam was the religion of their ancestors persuaded them to treat it as their own religion. The teachings of Drew Ali had shown Islam to them as a means of liberation. Christianity, for the Negroes in America, was an agent of oppression and denial of justice. To their great relief, they discovered that Islam, their ancestral religion, was totally against racism and social discrimination and that it would give them dignity, respectability and justice. This was an experience that created repercussions in all realms of the black American's life. Thus it could be concluded that the more meaningful and comprehensive manifestation of black nationalism took shape through the Islam experience of the Negroes in the middle decades of the twentieth century. Black nationalism was soon identified with the Islam experience of the black Americans, or in other words, it was the
black Muslim movement that came as the genuine expression of black nationalism.

The movements of Noble Drew Ali and Marcus Garvey had not been successful in winning a strong popular base and redeeming the black race, for two reasons. They did not possess, in Elijah Muhammad's view, "the key" and the "time was not ripe." The methods of organization adopted by them were not very effective and the Negroes were not psychologically prepared to receive them.

But the Nation of Islam movement was destined to have a different fate. Its immense success depended a lot on the charismatic leadership it had and the socio-political conditions in which it emerged. Commenting at length on the circumstances in which the black Muslim movement emerged in the scene, C. Eric Lincoln writes:

The Black Muslim movement had its beginning in the black ghetto of Detroit. The time was 1930. It was the first year of the Great depression - a time of hunger, confusion, disillusionment, despair and discontent. It was a period of widespread fear and anxiety. Between 1900 and 1930 two and a quarter-million Black Americans left the farms and plantations of the South. Most of them emigrated to selected urban areas of the North - New York, Philadelphia, Chicago and Detroit being among the most popular destinations...

(The Black... xxiii)

The condition of Negroes' life in these northern cities initially was congenial. But soon, with the growing black population and the economic depression following the World War I, it deteriorated and the Blacks in
the ghettos of these cities became very miserable. The discrimination in social life and the denial of good opportunities made them all the more disappointed. It was in such a condition of misery that the Blacks in the ghettos heard the voice of Islam. Obscure and mysterious though it had been, it still had quick and widespread appeal to the Negroes. C.Eric Lincoln notes:

It is an interesting historical phenomenon that when a people reach the precipice of despair, there is so often waiting in the wings, a savior, a messiah to snatch them back from the edge of the abyss. So it was that in Detroit there appeared in the black ghetto a mysterious Mullah who called himself W. D. Fard Muhammad. He had come; he told the handful of Blacks who gathered to hear him, from the holy city of Mecca. His mission, as he described it, was "to wake the 'Dead Nation in the West'; to teach [them] the truth about the white man, and to prepare [them] for the Armageddon." (The Black... xxiv-xxv)

W. D. Fard and his Mission

The appearance of the pedlar in the black ghettos of Detroit in the midsummer of 1930, who called himself W. D. Fard and claimed to have come with the mission of securing the Blacks "freedom, justice, and equality" marked the beginning of the movement known as the Nation of Islam or the Lost Found Nation of Islam in the Wilderness of North America. This being not long after the death of Drew Ali under mysterious circumstances, he came to be accepted as the successor of
Drew Ali or "Drew Ali reincarnated."

W.D. Fard who claimed to be racially identical with the North American Negroes and to have been born in Mecca, the son of a wealthy member of the Koreish tribe of which the prophet Muhammad was a member, was known by various aliases: Walli Fard, Professor Ford, Farad Muhammad and F. Muhammad Ali. Reputed to have been educated in England and at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles and to have been trained for a diplomatic career in the service of the Kingdom of Hejaz, he is also held to have peddled silks and raincoats from door to door in the Negro neighbourhood of Detroit with the purpose of getting Negro audiences.

As he got a considerable number of followers subscribing to his message he founded a Temple in Detroit in 1930 itself. Although W.D. Fard exerted big influence among the Detroit Negroes, he didn't linger there longer than three or four years. After having thoroughly organized the Detroit Temple, Fard receded to the background and in 1933 mysteriously disappeared altogether. Nothing authoritative is known concerning the disappearance of W. D. Fard.

W. D. Fard who is held to have introduced himself to the Negroes as prophet on a mission of redemption and restoration of the Blacks in America, taught them that members of the black African diaspora were all of Muslim heritage, "lost found members of the tribe of Shabazz." C.Eric Lincoln observes:

The essence of his message was that black debasement had occurred over the centuries because Blacks were separated from the knowledge of Allah and the knowledge of self.
They were estranged from the one true God to whom they owed allegiance, and ignorant of their own history and their previous high status in the hierarchy of human achievement. The problem was to restore the truth to the Lost-Found Nation, the only truth that could make Blacks free. (Race... 161)

Following the disappearance of W.D. Fard, Elijah Poole, his most charismatic disciple, became the leader of the movement. Elijah Poole, assuming the name Elijah Muhammad, introduced the late Farad as Allah and himself as Allah's Messenger. The Detroit Temple was since then called Muhammad's Temple of Islam No.1, and the formidable task that Walli Farad had undertaken was soon taken up by his charismatic successor.

**Elijah Muhammad and the Nation of Islam**

The black nationalist movements of Marcus Garvey, Noble Drew Ali and others suffered a big set back in the late nineteen twenties owing to a number of reasons. The tragic experiences of the leaders and the splits that occurred in their movements after them were important among them. It was the inception of the Nation of Islam, claiming the legacy of both Garvey and Drew Ali, that gave new life to the black nationalist movement. Although the movement was obscurely founded by W. D. Fard, the credit of turning it into a powerful Negro organization goes to Elijah Muhammad who succeeded Fard. It was under the leadership of Elijah Muhammad that the Nation had its rise and growth into a nationwide movement. The psychological and pragmatic approach of
Elijah Muhammad quickly found effect. The revelation that his movement was only a continuation of the mission of Noble Drew Ali and Marcus Garvey and that he was "only trying to finish up what those before us started" won the followers of both these leaders to his side.

Elijah Muhammad who became the supreme leader of the Nation of Islam and "the Messenger of Allah" after the disappearance of Walli Fard, was born Elijah Poole in Sandersville, Georgia on October 7, 1897. One of the thirteen children born to an itinerant Baptist preacher, Poole was destined to become one of the most controversial religious leaders of his time. But, controversy aside, he must be reckoned among the more remarkable religious leaders of the twentieth century. He made a considerable contribution to the dignity and self esteem of the black undercaste. Beyond that, and more far-reaching in its implication, is the fact that it was Elijah Muhammad who must be credited with the serious reintroduction of Islam in America in modern times, giving it the mystique and thrust without which it could scarcely have penetrated the American bastion of Judeo-Christianity.

Although his knowledge of Islam was confined to what he knew of it from the shadowy and mysterious W. D. Fard, the emergence of the Islamic movement in the black American society owed a great deal to him. His methods were sometimes adhoc, and usually controversial, but they were always addressed to the reality that the Blacks in America were the pawns of other people, not let to have their own way, and that the same kinds of cultural mythologies which were used to keep them debased could also be used to free them and give them dignity and power.

Thus, going out of the genuine way of Islam, Elijah Muhammad
created certain myths that easily appealed to the Negroes in the peculiar socio-political conditions, and developed a keen popular awareness about Islam, for the first time in the history of America. Starting from the poor slum-created outcasts of the black ghettos of the industrial cities in the North, the range of his followers extended, in a short while, to a large number of noted celebrities of the world of sports, entertainments, cinema, literature and the world of black intellectuals. Under him the Nation of Islam became the prevailing Islamic presence in America. As C. Eric Lincoln remarks, "It was not orthodox Islam, but it was by all reasonable judgements proto-Islam; and there in lies a religious significance that may well change the direction of history in the west." (Race... 163)

Hailing from a low social background and poor economic conditions, and having worked as sawmill helper, field boy and foreman for a brick company etc., Elijah had known what the crisis of the ghetto Blacks was. His appeal to the Negroes, as the supreme leader of the Nation, was direct and plain. He left no room for suspicion and no ground for doubt. And when, as the assistant to W.D.Fard, he established the Nation's Temple Number Two in Chicago in 1932, and after the disappearance of Fard he deified Fard as Allah and introduced himself as messenger of Allah, the Blacks had no reluctance to believe him. Muhammad's attempt, it was quite clear, was to effect a thorough reshaping of the black community, its identity, beliefs, socio-economic and educational conditions, etc. He was largely successful in achieving his goals. And when Muhammad died in 1975 the Nation was an important religious, political and economic force among America's
Blacks. From 1933 to 1975 during which period Muhammad was the supreme leader of the Nation, he exerted great influence on Negroes of all classes of the American society, and caught the serious attention of the white authorities. Although the Nation's primary influence was on the Negro mass in the ghettos of the various Northern cities, it was never confined to this class alone. It gradually reached out to the middle class and upper class Negroes in comfortable conditions too, and had been immensely reciprocated. Many of the Negro celebrities became his followers. By the time of his death in 1975 his movement had grown into a big community with its own well-planned activities and enterprises.

Malcolm X and the Rise of the Nation

Notwithstanding the influential and effective leadership of Elijah Muhammad, the growth and popularity of the Nation in the 1950s and 1960s largely depended on Malcolm X who, for about two decades from 1947, worked as the chief aide and right hand of Muhammad. C. Eric Lincoln comments:

No one man could carry alone Muhammad's immense burden of responsibility. In directing the complex affairs of the Black Nation, co-ordinating its program, managing its economic enterprises, founding new temples, and so on, he relies heavily on the closely knit circle of Muslim leaders. Foremost of these was his chief aide Minister Malcolm X Shabazz, once minister of the powerful Temple No.7 in Harlem, one of the few ministers granted an "original" (that is, one Arabic) surname. One observer has described
Malcolm as the best thing that ever happened to Muhammad. (The Black... 207)

Malcolm X, the most indefatigable organizer and speaker of the black Muslim movement, was born Malcolm Little in Omaha, Nebraska, about 1925. He was one of eleven children and, like his acknowledged master, the son of a Baptist minister. While he was very young, the family moved to Lansing, Michigan, where the father Malcolm called him a "raceman" and a little too outspoken for Lansing soon incurred the hostility of the Whites. When Malcolm was only six, the family home was burned by the Ku Klux Klan. "The firemen came," Malcolm recalled in his autobiography, "and just sat there without making any effort to put one drop of water on the fire. The same fire that burned my father's home still burns my soul." But the worst was yet to come. "A typical Garveyite," the father was making his first step toward economic independence by building his own store. At the time they were the only Negroes in the block. His initiative drew a swift reprisal — "my father was found with his head bashed and his body mangled under a streetcar." Malcolm was certain that this was a calculated murder.

The bitterness over his father's troubles with the white people of Lansing never left Malcolm X. On the contrary, like the rest of the black people in similar conditions, he seems to have nurtured and fed it, so that it structured and oriented most of his interpersonal and professional relations.

After his father's death, the Little family fell upon evil days. His mother boiled dandelion greens every day to try to keep the children from starving to death. "We stayed dizzy and weak because we stayed hungry,"
Malcolm recalled. What he and his brothers could pilfer augmented the wild greens his mother picked along the roadsides. They fought desperately to remain together, but eventually the family broke up, and Malcolm was sent to an institution for boys. There he recalled with a rare touch of tenderness. "When everybody else at school was kicking me around, the housemother took up for me. She was good to me, and I followed her around like a puppy. I was a kind of mascot." Soon it was arranged for Malcolm to attend a nearby school. He was the only black student at the school, and he stood first in his class often enough to incur resentment from teachers and pupils alike.

He was asked in the eighth grade what he wanted to become. He preferred law, but was told that law was not a suitable profession for a Negro and that instead he should think of a trade such as carpentry. "This," Malcolm X observes, "was the turning point in my thinking." Eventually he left school and moved East to what became a life of juvenile delinquency. By his late teens, Malcolm was operating successfully on the fringes of the Harlem underworld.

Admitted to the underworld's fringes, sixteen year old Malcolm absorbed all he heard and saw. He swiftly built up a reputation for honesty by turning over every dollar due his boss. By the age of 18, Malcolm was versatile "Big Red." He hired from four to six men variously plying dope, numbers, bootleg whisky and diverse forms of hustling. Malcolm personally squired well-heeled white thrill seekers to Harlem sin dens, and Negroes to white sin downtown. His best customers were, in his own words, "preachers and social leaders, police and all kinds of big shots in the business of controlling other people's lives."
Thus Malcolm lived a delinquent life earning mostly as much as $2,000 a month and paying off "the law from a $1,000 roll from the pockets of his $200 suits!" But eventually a less susceptible "law" caught up with him, and "Big Red" went to prison _ not once, but several times.

In 1947, while in maximum security prison at Concord, Massachusetts, Malcolm was converted by one of his brothers who had become a member of the Detroit Temple. After that, the movement claimed all his energies and all his loyalties until he broke with Muhammad seventeen years later. During his long ministry, his personal loyalty to his mentor seemed unshakable, but in spite of this there did come a day when Malcolm and the messenger went their separate ways. As the messenger's messenger, Malcolm enjoyed great popularity with Muslims across the country and abroad. In 1959, for example, he visited several of the Muslim states in the Middle East as Muhammad's emissary. He was the guest of minor officials of several governments, but refused the invitations of those of higher rank on the grounds that such honours should be reserved for Muhammad himself. On the other hand Malcolm's impatience with some of the older ministers' "softness" toward the white man was seldom disguised.

The Big X was suddenly a leader of great charisma. His formal schooling ended at the eighth grade, but experience taught him after that. He more than held his own, in numerous radio and television appearances, against men with far better formal education. In the Massachusetts prison, the minister's son read thousands of books because he "wanted to know what made people the way they are." He was confident of his own abilities, yet he credited Elijah Muhammad with
teaching him "everything... that's worthwhile." Whether addressing the masses on a Harlem street corner, the Muslim faithful gathered in any one of the messenger's scattered temples, or a university seminar, his important statements were inevitably prefaced with "The Honorable Elijah Muhammad teaches us ... ." And there was pride and confidence in his voice. The one time hooligan considered himself "completely reformed by the teachings of Elijah." Before coming in touch with Elijah's movement he had been, in his own words, a brainwashed Negro completely unaware of the truth about his race: "When I was in the world of the Christians, I behaved as they did; I did what the white man did because, like everybody else I thought his was the best possible thing to do." Recalling the indebtedness he had to Islam as the biggest factor in his life, Malcolm later stated:

The religion of Islam had reached down into the mud to lift me up, to save me from being what I inevitably would have been: a dead criminal in a grave, or, if still alive, a flint-hard, bitter, thirty-seven year old convict in some penitentiary, or insane assylum. Or at best, I would have been an old, fading Detroit Red, hustling, stealing enough for food and narcotics, and myself being stalked as prey by cruelly ambitious younger hustlers such as Detroit Red had been. (The Autobiography... 290-1)

As a leader of the masses Malcolm viewed Islam as a means of fighting for the oppressed and he believed that Islam was the only religion that would liberate the oppressed Blacks and get them their due share of justice. He remarks: "Any time I have a religion that won't let me
fight for my people. I say to hell with that religion. That's why I am a Muslim" (The Autobiography... 290-1).

It was with the aim of organizing the Negroes in America, united under the flag of Islam, to fight for their liberation, that Malcolm X strove with success to impart the spirit of nationalism to the black Muslim gatherings. Many of the doctrines and mythologies of the movement were vehemently presented for this purpose. George Breitman observes:

He stretched the bounds of Muhammad's doctrine to the limit, and sometimes beyond. He introduced new elements into the movement, not only of style but of ideology: There was more than a grain of truth in the complaint... that "it was Malcolm who injected the political concept of 'black nationalism' into the Black Muslim movement... ." (The Last... 9)

Quite before most others in the field, Malcolm X had realized that the most urgent need of the Negro people was their mobilization and unification into an independent movement to fight for their freedom and that black nationalism contributed to that process, in much the way that class consciousness contributes to the formation of an independent movement of workers for their emancipation from exploitation. It was the realization of this fact that made Malcolm X a most eloquent spokesman of black nationalism. The broader outlook that Malcolm X has always had, made him different from the rest of the black Muslim leaders and attracted celebrities of all fields to the black Muslim movement.

That Malcolm X's role in the rise and growth of the nation was disproportionately great is undeniable. The crisis the movement suffered
as he left it in 1964 was sufficient proof for this.

Goals of the Movement

Of all the protest organizations, the Nation of Islam movement was the most influential and popular and the one that enjoyed the support of the masses. Organizations such as the N. A. A. C. P and the National Urban League, for all their virtues, did not catch the imagination of the black masses. The black Muslims, by contrast, were undeniably a mass movement, reaching for the support of the entire black lower class and ultimately, of all black Americans. In C. Eric Lincoln's opinion "The Black Muslims are among the best organized and most articulate of the protest movements" (The Black... :xx). The popularity of the movement was, apart from the charismatic and influential leadership, because of the peculiarities of the movement with regards to its goals, doctrines, myths, organizational methods, the morality and discipline it taught, the educational system it introduced, the socio-political and economic programmes it implemented and the awareness of black American's history it developed.

An examination of the goals of the movement as they have been stated or implied in its literature and public lectures and as they may be inferred from careful observation and analysis of the movement's activities, will facilitate an unbiased understanding of the movement and its influence on the Negro society of America.
a) The United Front of Black Men

One of the basic objectives of the Nation of Islam movement was organizing the black people of America into a united front to get them prepared for a fight for justice and equality. Elijah Muhammad, the supreme leader of the movement, as well as his ministers, was very aware of the necessity of the unity of the black people. An awareness of the black man's history was viewed to be very helpful for the Blacks to unite. That was why Muhammad in his addresses to the black community emphasized the necessity of reclaiming the African and Islamic heritage of the Blacks.

The nation being an organization with predominantly lower class following, Muhammad and the important ministers took special care in making the movement's message reach the middle and upper classes, the satisfied black men, generally held to be harder to reach. Muhammad's declaration in an interview, quoted in C. Eric Lincoln's study reveals this:

We are trying to reach all black men, those in the colleges and those in the jails. We need leaders at every level to challenge the lies of the white man. We need scholars to search out the truth independently of what the white man has written. (The Black... 87)

As a religious movement, the black Muslims had been quite likely to make a split in the predominantly Christian society of the Blacks in America. But the Muslim leaders were very careful in avoiding any such splits in the society. In their view, all the Blacks in America, whether they joined the nation or not, were Muslims. They were of Muslim ancestry and heritage, though the majority didn't know. The Muslims
were carefully taught not to view the non-Muslim Blacks as different from themselves. What was most important was the unity of the Blacks. The best banner under which they could unite was that of Islam and their African heritage.

In his famous speech "Message to the Grass Roots," Malcolm X stated the idea very vividly:

So we're all black people, so-called Negroes, second class citizens, ex-slaves. You're nothing but an ex-slave. You don't like to be told that. What else are you? You are ex-slaves. You didn't come here on the "May Flower." You came here on a slave ship. In chains, like a horse or a cow... We have a common enemy. We have this in common: We have a common oppressor, a common exploiter, and a common discriminator. But once we all realize that we have a common enemy, then we unite on the basis of what we have in common. And what we have foremost in common is that enemy - the white man. (Malcolm X... 4-5)

Islam, the religion of their ancestors, according to them, was the only religion that would get them justice and equality. They, therefore, propagated that it was the best means for the unity of the Blacks. C. Eric Lincoln observes:

The Muslim ideal is a "United Front of Black Men" who will "take the offensive and carry the fight for justice and freedom to the enemy." Through such a united front "the American Negroes will discover themselves, elevate their distinguished men and women... give outlets to their talented
youth, and assume the contours of a nation". Because he pursues a United Front, Muhammad's attacks against black leadership have been mainly retaliatory and the necessity for such a public display of disunity is distressing him. Special attention is given to removing the differences which divide Muslims and black leadership. (The Black... 88)

In the fifties and sixties when the Muslim call for unity got greater acceptance and was viewed as the "black man's one hope for freedom." it became the white man's most haunting fear. The idea of the black men organizing into "a nation within a nation" was viewed to be dangerous, and deliberate attempts were held to have been made to create split and divisiveness in the black Muslim society. The Nation was branded seditious and was deliberately infiltrated by the white agents for causing differences in opinion. The media as well as the governmental machinery were active in misrepresenting it. All these methods were accepted for foiling the Muslim attempt for the unity of the black people. Muhammad warned the black community about this saying that the government makes every Negro who opens his mouth in favor of their own kind a promoter of sedition, and labels their teaching as being subversive or un-American. The black community, he told them, should not be panicked into avoiding Muhammad's teachings as seditious, for this accusation is only a white trick to isolate the Muslims and frighten the black masses.

b) Racial Separation

Unlike the black organizations like N. A. A. C. P, the black Muslims were against any kind of racial integration. Seeking integration
with the white society in America was meaningless and stupid in the opinion of the black Muslims. Those so-called Negroes, who seek integration with the American white men, are unrealistic and unreasonable in their view. The white man would not share with his erstwhile slaves the advantages and privileges because of their subordinate position. And usually, when the white men speak of integration, they don't mean integration on equal grounds. Integration of any kind will not get the Negroes dignity, equality and justice. It was only a means of keeping them perpetually subordinated and exploited. "The only permanent solution to America's race problem," Malcolm X remarks, "is the complete separation of these twenty-two million ex-slaves from our white slave master" (The End... 132).

A complete separation of the black race from the white society in all walks of life was advocated as a means of getting rid of the white domination. A repurification of the "lost-found nation in the west" ideologically, morally and above all, biologically, was held to be necessary for the black people of America to assume their rightful place of dignity and leadership among the triumphant black nations of the world.

Besides, the integration of the Blacks with the Whites was of no benefit in the view of the black Muslims. The reason that Muslims didn't want integration with the white men, according to Malcolm X, was that they had seen what was coming to the white man, what was in store for him. The white society, in his opinion, was a sinking ship. The white civilization, they argued, was declining and their culture was deteriorating and it is therefore stupid to integrate with them. Muslims
rejected the black organizations such as N. A. A. C. P., CORE, Urban League, Legal Defense Fund etc. because these organizations stood for integration and they had a great deal of white involvement in their leadership. The involvement and interference of white men in the Negro organizations, in the view of the black Muslims, was a big obstacle to the unity of the Blacks and further it weakened their strength considerably and effected dilution in their arguments. This was, in Malcolm X's opinion, what had happened to the Civil Rights Movement and the March on Washington, originally exclusively black initiated movement, weakened and misguided by the white involvement.

The racial exclusiveness the black Muslims advocated had good appeal to the non-Muslim blacks too. George Breitman comments:

The Black Muslims won mass respect and a following in the ghetto because they "told the white man off" in bold and confident tones. They voiced the discontent that the black masses felt with their lot in this country, with tokenism, gradualism and White hypocrisy. They exposed the vacillations of the "moderate" Negro leaders, accusing them of representing the white ruling class more than the black masses and by their pressure pushed them to the left, at least verbally. There were millions of Negroes who would never join the black Muslims but were glad that they existed. (The Last... 13)

In their arguments in favour of racial separation, the black Muslim leaders often sought the support of the biblical events. Racial separation, they contended, was not a sin, for it has been accepted earlier
by biblical prophets. Malcolm X says:

God wants us to separate ourselves from this wicked white race here in America - because this American House of Bondage is number one on God's list for divine destruction today... He warns us to remember Noah never taught integration: Moses never taught integration, Moses taught separation. The innocent must always be given a chance to separate themselves from the guilty before the guilty are executed. No one is more innocent than the poor, blind, American so-called Negro who has been led astray by blind Negro leaders, and no one on earth is more guilty than the blue-eyed white man who has used his control and influence over the Negro leader to lead the rest of our people astray. (The End... 72-73)

When the black Muslims argued for racial separation they were with unmitigated racial pride and fully aware of the loss of dignity incurred by racial integration. In fact, it was a genuine rebuff to the racial segregation long practised by the Whites in America. There was, however, no confusion regarding the concepts of segregation and separation. This has been made quite clear by Malcolm X:

The Honorable Elijah Muhammad teaches us that segregation is that which is done to inferiors by superiors. Separation is done voluntarily by two people... We are not for segregation but we are for separation. When you are segregated that is done to you by someone else: when you are separated you do that to yourself. (The End... 75)
c) Economic Independence

The black Muslims, "quite in the early stage of the movement itself, had realized that the general backwardness of the black people was largely because of their total economic dependence on the white government and the white man's economic enterprises. Economic independence of the race was viewed to be quite inevitable for the revival of the black society. C. Eric Lincoln rightly remarks:

The call for a Black Front has important economic overtones, for the Muslims' economic policies are a fundamental aspect of the total movement. Their premise is that the white man's economic dominance gives him the power of life and death over the blacks. "You can't whip a man when he is helping you," says Muhammad; and his oft-quoted aphorism is economically, if not socially or politically cogent. (The Black... 93)

Economic self-reliance of the nation was emphasized from the first days of the movement. Muhammad was reported to have taught his followers, as early as 1937, that they were descendants of nobles, and that to show their escape from slavery and their restoration to their original high status, they were obliged to live in good houses and wear good clothes. A strict and effective economic discipline was implemented among the Muslims in general. C. Eric Lincoln further observes:

Muslims still prize industriousness and a sense of responsibility, but they shy away from conspicuous consumption. They do not live in the residential sections generally preferred by the black
business and professional classes, and they do not sport the flashy automobiles usually associated with black revivalistic cults. On the contrary, they strongly affirm their identity with the working class. There is a strong emphasis on the equality of ministers and the "brothers," and all tend to live pretty much alike in terms of housing and visible goods... (The Black... 93-94)

As part of the economic discipline, thrift was encouraged and credit purchase as well as debt was strongly discouraged on the ground that "debt is slavery." Muslims were further strongly cautioned against wasting money and spending beyond one's means. Addressing his followers in his Pittsburgh Courier column "Muhammad Speaks," Aug 9, 1958, the leader said:

Stop wasting your money! Your money was not given to you, so why should you give it away for what you can do without? ... We could save millions of dollars (for) education... land, machines, cattle... homes and factories... Feed your own stomachs and hire your own scientists from among yourselves. (5)

The rigorous self-discipline especially in economic matters was implemented not only as a virtue in itself but also as a step toward the establishment of the black nation that they dreamt of. Muslims were urged to be competent and honest in all their dealings and to respect authority. These virtues in the black Muslims put them in good stead in many respects. They became more acceptable for jobs and in turn they got respect that the rest of the Negroes didn't normally get. C. Eric Lincoln has observed
...(they) claim they have secured work more easily than have other Negroes. To some extent their claim seems to be justified... Through the Nation of Islam they have gained a new status and a new confidence in themselves... Employment managers tend to accept more readily persons whose appearance gives evidence of clean living and self-reliance. than those who show the marks of debauchery. defeat and despair. (The Black... 95)

As an ideal the Muslims advocated a complete economic withdrawal from the white community. Their transitional goals seemed to hinge on the establishment of black businesses and industries which would reduce interracial contact to a minimum, provide jobs and capital for black workers and entrepreneurs, and offer the sense of group security proper to an "independent" people. To accomplish this end, Muhammad had drawn up an "economic blueprint" which was published occasionally in some elements of the black press and which was the basic text for Muslim lectures on the economic plight of the so-called Negro. The blueprint opens with a description of the black man in white, Christian America as a Lazarus under the table of the rich, "begging for crumbs" and "entangled in want in the midst of plenty." Lazarus is asleep _ "but I go," says Muhammad, "that I may wake him."

The key to the black man's economic security, according to Muhammad, consists of five simple propositions. C. Eric Lincoln quotes Muhammad in his study:

1. Know thyself and be yourself. Islam makes a true Brother to (every other) Brother... Acknowledge and recognize that
you are a member of the Creator's (i.e. the Black) Nation. and act accordingly... Recognize the necessity for unity... This requires action and deeds, not words and lip service.

2. Pool your resources, physically as well as financially.

3. Stop wanton criticism of everything that is black-owned and black-operated.


5. Observe the operations of the white man. He is successful. He makes no excuse for his failures. He works hard _ in a collective manner. You do the same. (The Black... 95-96)

Following these propositions, Muslims involved in all sorts of economic activities. They pooled their resources and techniques in merchandising, manufacturing, building, maintenance etc. They were further enticed to have a "buy black" tendency to encourage black enterprises. As a result of all these steps, it was not very long before the Muslims were on the path to economic self-reliance and exclusiveness. C. Eric Lincoln has observed:

...(they) maintain numerous small businesses and other enterprises. In Chicago they operate department stores, groceries, bakeries, restaurants and various kinds of service establishments. They own large farms in Michigan, Alabama, and Georgia; and in practically every city with a temple, they have restaurants, barber shops, clothing stores and occasionally other businesses. (The Black... 96)

The measures and disciplines adopted by Muhammad for attaining economic security for the black people were immensely successful. His
efforts in terms of getting Blacks to do something for themselves and feel a sense of accomplishment in doing it has been widely appreciated.

d) A Separate Nation for the Blacks

Apart from religious and economic goals, the black Muslim movement had, properly viewed, certain political destinations too. But they were not quite plain and explicit as to their political goals. A political separation of the black people with absolute political power seems to be what they had as their political dream. Like the earlier black revivalist movements, the Nation of Islam movement too recognized the significance of the establishment of a black nation for realizing the revival of the black people and getting their right share in America in all respects. They were outspokenly aware of the claim they rightly had on the wealth and resources of America. Their unpaid service to the making of America for about three hundred years as slaves, and about hundred years as free-slaves, they argued, made them now entitled to have a just claim on the wealth and resources of the United States of America. But they were fully aware of the consequences of making demands of political separation at a time when the movement was not ripe for it. The dubious nature of the proclaimed political goals of the movement reveals this fact. C. Eric Lincoln's remarks in this regard throw more light on the matter:

When Marcus Garvey began to speak too plainly about the political aspirations of the Universal Negro Improvement Association, his movement was labeled "seditious." Elijah Muhammad, who is not only a student of Garvey but was
himself arrested and charged with sedition very early in his Muslim career, has learned the hazard of plain talk in the area of politics. It is doubtful whether any except the top leadership know exactly what the movement's political aspirations are, or why. The characteristic mood of the Muslim laity is simply a blind faith—a complete confidence in Elijah Muhammad, "who has a plan for all of us" and is considered well nigh infallible. The Muslim brotherhood has a sense of manifest destiny, an awareness of some kind of impending social cataclysm in which they will figure prominently. (The Black... 99)

Muslim leaders showed little inclination to announce their ultimate intentions. Their statements about political goals were couched in mystical and eschatological innuendo or else in cryptic allusions to "a separate nation for ourselves, right here in America" or to "some good earth, right here in America, where we can go off to ourselves."

The claim of the Muslims for a portion of land in America was grounded on two propositions: firstly, the white man stole the country from the Indians, who are non-white people and brothers to the so-called Negroes, and secondly, the so-called Negroes worked for three hundred years as absolute slaves and an additional one hundred years as "free slaves," thereby earning a share in the country. But this claim, although made explicit occasionally, was not made vehemently and seriously for many reasons.
Doctrines and Myths

The black Muslim movement had developed for themselves a unique body of myths and doctrines. The doctrines and myths they propounded were quite central to the ideological stand of the movement and were considerably important in determining its character. These doctrines and myths pertaining to the predicament of the black people were aimed at effecting a revival of the nation. Though not approved of by the genuine Islamic ideology, the doctrines and myths of the Muslim movement were immensely successful in developing and keeping alive a national consciousness in the black man's society. The important among them are the following:

a) Black People are not Negroes

The Muslims, like all other black nationalists, do not consider themselves "Negroes." They resent and reject the word and its implications. It is, in their view, no more than a label the white man placed on them to make his discrimination more convenient. This is the reason why they use the word "Negro" with the qualifier "so-called." They believed that the indignity of the black people began with the loss of their true identity and their being called "Negroes." The rejection of the name "Negroes" was therefore quite central to their faith in their search for identity. The Muslims preferred to be called "black men" and taught the downtrodden masses that they were "Asiatic" and not "Negroes." Malcolm X's speech at the Boston University Human Relations Centre quoted in C. Eric Lincoln's study sheds more light on the matter:
If you call yourself "white," why should I not call myself "black"? Because you have taught me that I am a "Negro"!

Now then, if you ask a man his nationality and he says he is German, that means he comes from a nation called Germany. The term he uses to identify himself connects him with a nation, a language, a culture and a flag. Now if he says his nationality is "Negro" he has told you nothing except possibly that he is not good enough to be "American"... If Frenchmen are of France and Germans are of Germany, where is "Negroland"? I'll tell you. It's in the mind of the white man... You don't call Minnie Minoso a "Negro," and he's blacker than I am. You call him a Cuban! Nkrumah is an African, a Ghanaian... you don't call him a "Negro"... No matter how light or dark a white man is, he's "White." Same way with us. No matter how light or how dark we are, we call ourselves "black" — different shades of black, and we don't feel we have to make apologies about it. (The Black... 70-71)

America's so-called Negroes, the Muslims explained, have been kept in mental slavery by the white man, even while their bodies were free. They have been systematically and diabolically estranged from their heritage and from each other. They have been educated in ignorance, kept from any knowledge of their origin, history, true names and religion. They have been shackled with the names of the slave masters; they have been duped by the slavemaster's religion; they have been divided and have no language, flag, or country of their own.
The black man's plight was forced upon him by the white man, but it persists because the black man has been willing to remain in a land not his own, mingled with the Whites. The black people in America, according to the Muslims, must now realize that they are not Negroes and that they were children of men and women brought from Africa, and that their ancestral history was not anything to be ashamed of.

b) The Lost Found Nation of Islam

Another basic tenet of the movement was that America's so-called Negroes were the Lost Found Nation of Islam in North America, that the black men in America were all descendants of the Muslim ancestry in Africa. They have so long been lost in the wilderness of North America, that Allah chose Elijah Muhammad, his messenger, to teach them about themselves, their ancestry, religion, history, language, civilization etc. They further propounded that Christianity, the religion of the slave-masters, was not their religion, nor was it compatible with the aspirations of the so-called Negroes. Christianity, according to Elijah Muhammad's teachings, was the white man's religion, a contrivance designed for the enslavement of non-white peoples. Wherever Christianity has gone, he declared, men have lost their liberty and their freedom. Muhammad further taught them that the genuine religion of the black people was Islam. Only in Islam could the so-called Negroes find freedom, justice and equality. The religion of the Black people, Malcolm X argued, was the religion of Abraham who lived well before Judaism and Christianity originated: "The Honorable Elijah Muhammad teaches us that Abraham's religion was the religion of Islam. Islam only means complete submission
to God. complete obedience to God" (The End... 31).

Muhammad's advice to the black people including the Negro clergy was that they should return to Islam, their true religion, and follow him. Muhammad's claim was that he was Allah's messenger, sent specially to the black people in America to teach them their history and religion.

c) Allah Comes to the Rescue

A tenet, closer in nature to the concept of "Christ, the saviour" in Christianity, and quite strange to the ideology of Islam, that had popular appeal to the black people, was the idea of Allah's coming to rescue His people in America. The so-called Negroes in America were ignorant and servile, and the behaviour they had copied from the white man was shameful. Yet, they being sacred to Allah, He came, as had been predicted, to rescue them from their oppressors. America, Muhammad taught, was the place where Allah would make himself felt.

The stranger, who appeared in Detroit in 1930 and used the name Wallace D. Fard, and later Wallace Fard Muhammad, was held to be Allah's incarnation. Elijah Muhammad, Allah's messenger, proclaims his own intimacy with Allah saying that he "knows Allah" and he is "with him." But he never presumed to Allah's supreme status. According to him "Allah alone is the 'Author of Islam,' and it is a perfect insult to Allah to worship anyone other than him." Now that Allah has come to his people. He will soon punish the white slave-masters for the evil they have done. As soon as Allah was identified with a black man, the black colour came to be glorified. All colours are but shades of black, and white is the
absence of colour. It was further held that the coming of Allah signified the beginning of justice for the black man. Allah came to expose the "great enemy of justice and righteousness" before the entire world.

The image of Allah given to the black people by Elijah Muhammad was that of a patron and saviour of the black people. The Negroes being a people, who have had the stark and bitter experiences of slavery for a long period, the idea of a saviour was particularly appealing to them. When the same was presented associating it with their own ancestral religion and heritage, it found quick effect.

d) The Original Man and Yacub's Creation

A doctrine that boosted the sense of dignity and self-esteem of the Negroes was that the original man was black. Elijah Muhammad maintained that the original man was none other than black man and that the black man was the primogenitor of all other race including the white race. He further maintained that the original man included all non-white people, and that the so-called Negro in America was a blood descendant of the original man. "Everywhere the white race has gone on our planet," Elijah says, "they have found the original man or a sign that he has been there previously" (The Supreme .. 29).

The black people in America, accordingly, were descendants of the Asian black nation and of the tribe of Shabazz, the first human race to inhabit the planet, which settled down in places like the Nile valley and the holy city of Mecca in Arabia. It was held to be the task of Elijah Muhammad and his followers to teach the so-called Negroes that they were of the tribe of Shabazz and, therefore, "original." Once they
understand this, they will know themselves to be Muslims, heart and soul.

Corollary to the concept of the original man was the myth of the creation of the white race and the natural inferiority of the white man. The original man being black, and the black race held to include all except the white race, the leaders of the black Muslim movement argued that the white race was a later creation. They were only about six thousand years old. They are inferior in many respects — morally, physically, racially, culturally and on religious grounds. "White," they argued, meant deficiency; it is the absence of a colour. Moral inferiority coupled with cruelty of nature and religious bankruptcy together have turned them into a race of devils — "the Caucasian devils" as the black Muslims called them. From the time of the creation of universe until six thousand years ago, they maintained, there was only the black race belonging to twelve tribes. Malcolm X observes:

And six thousand years ago, a scientist named Yacub created another tribe on the Earth... It was made different from all of the twelve tribes that were here when it arrived. A new tribe, a weak tribe, a wicked tribe, a devilish tribe, a diabolical tribe, a tribe that is devilish by nature. (The End... 47)

It was about 8400 years since the creation of universe, according to the black Muslim leaders, that the young black scientist Yacub created the white man. Yacub was predicted to create this devilish race. The creation of the white race was done by the methods of grafting. The principle "unlike attracts and like repels" was an inspiration for Yacub. The white race was palpably different from the black and they were
unlike each other. Therefore, the newly created white man would attract, subjugate and rule over the black race. Malcolm X says:

So Yacub knew that all he had to do was make a man unlike any other man on this earth and because he would be different he would attract all other people. Then he could teach this man a science called tricknology which is a science of tricks and lies and this weak man would be able to use that science to trick and rob and rule the world. (The End...51)

They further held that the centuries old white domination over them was about to end and the black man was once again going to be at the helm of affairs. The concepts of the original man and Yacub's creation of the white race, though not supported by Islamic or Christian or any other religious ideologies, however, had very good effects on the black society in America. The black men looking for rational explanations and justifications for the peculiar condition of their race, got some useful arguments. Although unfounded and baseless, these doctrines enabled them to strengthen their morale and confidence.

e) Shabazz and his Tribe

One of the basic tenets of the black Muslim faith, as mentioned earlier, was the doctrine that the original man was black. They had further argued that all the black people were Muslims and that they were of Arab descent. A myth pertaining to the Arab and Islamic ancestry of the black people of Africa was the story of Shabazz and his tribe. Though historically unverifiable, it had a functional value in the process of
strengthening the morale of the black people in America. Malcolm X remarks:

The Honorable Elijah Muhammad ... says that fifty thousand years ago another scientist named Shabazz became angry with the scientists of his day. He wanted to bring about a tougher people. He wanted the people to undergo a form of life that would make them tough and hard and the other scientists wouldn't agree with him. So this scientist named Shabazz took his family and wandered down into the jungles of Africa. Prior to that time no one lived in the jungles. Our people were soft; they were black but they were soft and delicate, fine... But this scientist took his family down into the jungles of Africa, and living in the open, living a jungle life, eating all kinds of food had an effect on the appearance of our people ... We undertook new features that we have now... (The End... 2-7-48)

The Africans as well as the Afro-Americans, according to the black Muslim leaders, were thus descended from Shabazz, this Arab Muslim who inhabited the African jungles with his family. This was how they came to have certain new features which differentiate them from their original Arab ancestors.

f) The Myth of the Magnolias and the Doctrine of the Superiority of the Black Men

Just as the black Muslims were keen on formulating certain myths that strengthened the black man's psyche, so were they in denying certain
myths in currency that kept them servile. A significant one of this category was the myth of the Magnolias, a doctrine that explained the black man's deplorable condition in terms of his natural docility, his instinctive servility, and his inherent imbecility. The myth of the Magnolias was, in fact, a moral justification given by the white slaveholders for the inhuman institution of slavery. The expression "the myth of the Magnolias" came into use, according to C. Eric Lincoln, because it was usually accompanied by a fantasy of banjo-strumming darkies lounging peacefully under the sweet-scented magnolias behind the big house - happy and contented in their station, and for ever loyal to the kindhearted master, and his arrangements for their mutual felicities... It alleged that the black man's "docile nature" led to his willing acceptance of his condition of bondage, and that his "instinctive servility" made him an ideal slave, a being equipped psychologically to submit his will completely to that of another; ... *(The Black... xxii-xxiii)*

As made clear above, this doctrine spoke of the natural inferiority of the black men. The black Muslims and the other protest movements vehemently refuted this myth. The black Muslims went a step further and created for themselves a counterm myth, the myth of black superiority. Malcolm X says:

So the Honorable Elijah Muhammad tells us that ... the black man has the most powerful brain in the universe. So there is no intelligence more powerful than the intelligence of the black man... *(The End... 44-45)*
The black people, compared with the white men, according to Elijah Muhammad, were of superior nature in all respects—physically, psychologically, morally and ethically. The white men, on the other hand, were in their moral and cultural deterioration.

g) The Armageddon War

Another doctrine that came into currency because of the efforts of the black Muslim leaders pertained to the biblical concept of the Armageddon war. The black people of America enslaved and Christianized for some centuries now, were quickly attracted to the black Muslim interpretations of this biblical concept. In his introduction to The End of the White World Supremacy: Four Speeches by Malcolm X, Benjamin Goodman writes:

Black people who are Christians are taught, and believe, that the war referred to (the Armageddon) is war between spiritual forces, between the concepts of good and evil. We taught that the war is one that will take place on this earth, a war between the oppressed and their oppressors—a race war. It will be a race war simply because the oppressor is by and large white, except for the nonwhites he has pressed into his service. It will be a war in which there will be a winner; a war where one side will survive and the other perish. In this war, this final war, no prisoners will be taken; all of which relates and brings us back, to the prophecy in the Bible which we know as the War of Armageddon.
The black people, accordingly, were encouraged to believe that a fierce battle was soon to take place between the oppressor Whites and the oppressed Blacks and that only the Blacks would survive after the war. The white race predicted to live only 6000 years would be destroyed completely in the battle. This doctrine too, like the other ones, gave the cause of the black revival movement a sense of "now and here."

**Morality and Discipline**

The conditions of servile life for a long period in America had deprived the Africans of all values and moralities. They were forcefully made to abandon their African and Islamic moral values. Besides, in the conditions of slavery, values of any kind, Christian or Islamic, had no special relevance too. In the period following the abolition of slavery, the former slaves who were now let to have freedom in many respects only deteriorated in their moral standards and cultural moorings. Landless, homeless and jobless, they got crowded in the slums and ghettos of big cities where life for them was miserable, bleak and devoid of any values.

The black Muslim movement, which emerged in this background, had to inculcate in them a comprehensive set of values and disciplines. Muhammad insisted on the black Muslims being governed by a stringent code of private and social morality. That the black Muslims could considerably improve their respectability and social acceptability through these measures is definite. The effect of this was that before long the Muslims among the black people in America were widely held to be more dependable and suitable for delicate responsibilities. Employers had a special preference for the Muslims because of the better morality and
discipline they were taught.

Although emphasis was not put on any doctrine of salvation, the black Muslims were taught a discipline in life mixing ritual requirements with moral injunctions. This discipline and morality, though not fully Islamic in the real sense, introduced to them many of the important tenets of the Islamic morality and made the path of Islam more accessible.

Among the ritualistic performances they were taught was the five times' daily prayers viz., at sunrise, noon, mid-afternoon, sundown and before retiring. All prayers were made facing the east, toward the holy city of Mecca, and before each prayer, they were to make the proper ablutions.

Foods such as pork and hogmeat were forbidden and lamb, chicken, fish and beef were approved. Foods must be used fresh and clean. Alcohol and tobacco were forbidden and they were admonished against overeating. Attendance in the temple (black Muslim mosques were called so in the early stage) meetings was compulsory.

Sexual morality was strictly enforced. Courtship or marriage outside the group was discouraged. Extra-marital sex relations were strictly prohibited. Divorce was frowned upon but allowed. No Muslim woman was to be alone in a room with any man except her husband; and provocative or revealing dress and most cosmetics were absolutely forbidden. Clear lines were drawn to indicate the behaviour and social role appropriate to each sex; and Muslim males were expected to be constantly alert for any show of interest in a Muslim woman on the part of a white man.

The regeneration of criminals and other fallen persons was a
prime concern of the black Muslims, and they had an enviable record of success. Muhammad claimed that his movement had done more to clean up the so-called Negroes than all the Churches and social agencies combined. Malcom X's words quoted in C. Eric Lincoln's study scarcely exaggerated the fact:

It is a known fact, and sociologists agree that when a man becomes a follower of Mr. Muhammad, no matter how bad his morals or habits were [before], he immediately takes up on himself a pronounced change which everyone admits. He [Muhammad] stops them from being alcoholics. [and alcohol] is a curse of the so-called Negroes. He has taken men who were thieves; who broke the law _ men who were in prison _ and reformed them so that no more do they steal, no more do they commit crimes against the government. I should like to think that this government would thank Mr. Muhammad for doing what it has failed to do toward rehabilitating men who have been classed as hardened criminals... The psychologists and the penologists _ all the sociologists _ admit that crime is on the increase, in prison and out. Yet when the Black Man who is a hardened criminal hears the teachings of Mr. Muhammad, immediately he makes an about-face. Where the warden couldn't straighten him out through solitary confinement, as soon as he becomes a Muslim, he begins to become a model prisoner right in that institution, far more than whites or so-called Negroes who confess Christianity. (The Black...84-85)
The general character traits evinced by the rank and file Muslims benefited the society as a whole. Men were taught to live soberly and with dignity, to work hard, to devote themselves to their families' welfare, and to deal honestly with all men. They were asked to obey all constituted authority—even the usurped and corrupt authority of white man, until the black nation returns to power. Women were especially enjoined not to imitate "the silly and often immoral habits of the white woman," which would only wreck their marriages and their children. While equal in every way to their husbands, they were taught to obey them. Modesty, thrift, and service were recommended as their chief concerns. Above all, self-reliance and a sense of mutual responsibility were the hallmarks of Muslim morality. Muhammad urged his people in his column "Mr. Muhammad Speaks" in *Los Angeles Herald Dispatch*, Aug 9, 1958:

> Put your brains to thinking, for self; your feet to walking in the direction of self; your hands to working for self and your children ... stop begging for what others have and help yourself to some of this good earth... We must go for ourselves... This calls for the unity of us all to accomplish it!

The Organizational Methods

The black Muslim movement, in a short time, was widely accepted as a mass movement. For it grew rapidly and soon it enjoyed a popular base. Its growth into a mass movement was enigmatic for the sociologists who ventured to study it. The organizational methods
adopted by Muhammad were found largely responsible for the success it had as a mass movement. Under Fard, the Muslims never had more than eight thousand members, although the conditions for rapid growth were almost ideal. But during the long span of Muhammad's leadership the number of Blacks who have been attracted to the movement was quite substantial. The difference may well lie in the fact that Fard was the leader of a cult. Muhammad made that cult a movement. C.Eric Lincoln observes:

Muhammad's strategy has been to put the cult on parade - on the streets, in the press, in the temple, wherever there are people. And he has done this with impressive success. For local action, he has had an able corps of ministers in the field; but there were not many at first, and their fight was uphill. The press gave him his first major assist, for it made him "controversial": as a columnist in one of the most important black papers in the country, he became a conversation piece for hundreds of thousands of Blacks across America. Thousands of letters were sent to Muhammad and to the Pittsburgh Courier, denouncing and defending both the messenger and the newspaper which provided space for his message. (The Black... 112)

The people, who went to the temples with curiosity to see the "controversial" man, were appealed deeply by his revealing speeches and were attracted in large numbers to his movement. Muhammad's denunciation of the white man and talk revealing the "truth" about the black people were particularly appealing to them. In fact, the appeal
Muhammad had to an important segment of the dissatisfied black masses was immediate and widespread. Muhammad's attempts to keep the movement a "movement" rather than permit it to become an "institution" were keen and deliberate. A variety of methods and devices were adopted and practised in this connection.

That the movement offered the lure of personal rebirth for the black people, who were fully aware of their identity crisis, was one factor that made the movement particularly appealing to them. Becoming a Muslim meant undergoing a thorough change in everything pertaining to an individual, the old self is cast off and a new identity is accepted. He changes his name, his religion, his homeland, his language, his moral and cultural values and his very purpose in living. He is now a new man in all respects. To commemorate his rebirth, the convert drops his last name and is known simply by his first name and the letter X. Muhammad would grant the convert a new _ that is an "original" surname at a later date. Till then he is known thus _ first name and the letter X such as Malcolm X, Benjamin X etc. The symbol X has a double meaning: implying "ex" it signifies that the Muslim is no longer what he was; and as "X," it signifies an unknown quality or quantity. It at once repudiates the white man's name and announces the rebirth of black man, endowed with a set of qualities the white man does not have and does not know. "In short," Malcolm X explained, "X is for mystery. The mystery confronting the Negro as to who he was before the white man made him a slave and put a European label on him."

This change of name is, of course, only the most outward token of rebirth. Perhaps the deepest change promised _ and delivered _ is the
release of energies that had been damned or buried in the old personality. This release may account, in part, for the regeneration of criminals, alcoholics, and narcotic addicts which is a hallmark of the movement.

Recruitment of the black people into the movement by means of clever and strategically effective proselytizing, was an organizational method Muhammad successfully employed. C. Eric Lincoln observes:

In pursuit of his goal to make Black Muslims out of black Christians, Muhammad has an ambitious program of recruitment. His ministers go into jails and penitentiaries, pool halls and bars, barber shops and drug stores to talk about Islam. They invade the college campuses, the settlement houses, and the YMCA. Young Muslim brothers hawk their newspapers along with insistent invitations to attend lectures at the Muslim temples. They speak from street corners and in parks, and they distribute literature wherever large crowds of Blacks may be gathered. Invariably, the proselytizers are young, personable, urbane and well-dressed men of confidence and conviction. (The Black... 116)

The visit to the mosques facilitated the black men to be easily attracted to the movement. Although the message of Islam envisioned by the movement is widely propagated in the black society by all possible means and at all places accessible to them, the actual recruitment was done in the mosques. There the import of Muhammad's message was heard at best advantage. The chances given to the non-Muslim blacks to attend the services in the mosques had quick and dramatic effect. A
number of potential converts joined the movement as a result of their visits to the black Muslim mosques. The lectures delivered at the mosques particularly by Muhammad and Malcolm X made them aware of the glorious history of the black race. Their eyes were opened to their proud heritage and their most pitiable predicament in America. The knowledge about themselves they acquired from the mosque events led them to no other destination than the black Muslim movement.

The black Muslim mosques, which were known as Muhammad's Temple of Islam in the early stage, had a very significant role in the growth of the movement. For them these mosques were the centres of all their activities. For them it had been a centre of learning, a meeting place, the office of their movement, a centre of cultural exchange and everything in one. They learned their history, lessons on Islamic subjects, Arabic language etc. at the mosque. In short, it was the nerve centre of all their activities.

A powerful and long-range recruiting device of the movement was its parochial schools, with their massive emphasis on education about the black man, his resplendent past, his divine nature, his triumphant future etc. Many lower class blacks found this approach, for all its exaggerations, a welcome change from the white-oriented teaching in nearly all public schools which had so long cast black children adrift in a sea of nonidentity and nonbelonging. To have their children learn something of themselves and their heritage was strong among black people of all classes. The parents who sent their children to the Muslim schools were impressed with the concrete evidence of the Muslims' determination to free themselves from all white influence and to prepare
their youth for roles as reclaimers of the black man's heritage. The schools had important status value as private schools for the low-income families, who could not hope to afford the luxury of ordinary private schools.

The black Muslim schools were called the Universities of Islam and they were numbered too, such as University of Islam No.1, 2 etc. There were about fourteen such schools in operation in early 1972, the number of which considerably increased later. The first of this sort was established in Detroit in the early thirties under Muhammad's direct supervision. School education was accepted as a serious matter by the Muslims. They always associated it with their search for identity. Sports and the usual extra-curricular activities were, therefore, not a part of the Muslim programme except in so far as they contributed directly to the serious search for knowledge.

The curriculum of these school courses consisted of science, reading, mathematics, history, arts and language. Language especially Arabic, and Mathematics were taught to children from the age of three. All classes at the more developed schools were taught in Arabic and English.

The establishment of these parochial schools was time and again opposed by the authorities. In 1934, Muhammad was found guilty of contributing to the delinquency of a minor and was given six months' probation when he refused to withdraw his children from the University of Islam and enroll them in the city's public schools. The authorities, since then have, many times, interfered with the operation of these schools. But these schools, in spite of all these, only grew in popularity,
and large number of Muslim and non-Muslim black students were admitted every year. Since these schools didn't have sufficient infrastructural facilities, hundreds of candidates didn't get admission and had to remain in the waiting list. The non-Muslim black students admitted to the Muslim schools usually converted to Islam along with their parents within a year after their enrollment.

These schools were staffed by Muslim and non-Muslim teachers, and most of them were graduates, accredited by the local accrediting agencies. These schools developed a sense of seriousness and self-respect in the black children and made them intensely aware of the serious role they were to take in the revival of the black people.

The teachers at these schools had few of the problems of discipline common to other schools. The students of the Muslim school were reared with strict discipline and stern moral lessons. As a result of all these, there were no cases of juvenile delinquency among the children of Muslim schools.

Besides, the children at these schools were separated by sex. In some schools boys attended in the morning and girls in the afternoon. The girls were to dress ankle-length, flowing white gowns with matching head wraps or scarves, in accordance with the Islamic principles pertaining to women's dress. The educational requirements of girls were different from those of the boys in the opinion of the black Muslim leaders. And therefore, they argued, they have to be educated separately.

The Muslims placed a high premium upon special education for wives and mothers, and their Muslim Girls' Training and General Civilization Class was an effective means of drawing black women into
the movement. The M. G. T, as it was generally known, concentrated primarily on the art of home making. It met on weeknights at local temples, and the women were taught how to sew, cook, keep house, rear their children, care for their husbands, and how to behave at home and abroad. High moral behaviour was an absolute requirement, for they believed that "a Muslim can rise no higher than his woman."

The black Muslims spared no effort to contact the black masses through every available medium of mass communication. Apart from Muhammad's speeches which attracted thousands in big cities like Baltimore, Pittsburgh, New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, Chicago, Atlanta, Washington and other cities across the country, other methods of mass communication such as newspapers, magazines, radio and television programmes etc. were effectively used.

Muhammad's Column in Pittsburgh Courier, for several years, attracted wide attention among blacks and stirred a lively debate between those who supported his views and those who were indignant that he was granted space in the paper. When his column was later dropped from the Pittsburgh Courier, it began to appear in the Weekly Los Angeles Herald-Dispatch which soon became, in effect, the official Muslim organ with new regional edition in Chicago and new local offices in other Muslim concentrated cities.

The articles that appeared in the Dispatch made the movement more widely understood and won it popular support among the Negro masses. When, eventually, the Dispatch faded into oblivion, the Muslims founded their own newspaper, Muhammad Speaks.

Among the special publications designed by the Muslims to
attract the attention of the black masses, the most important was a volume called *The Supreme Wisdom: Solution to the so-called Negroes' Problem*, a book by Muhammad that contained his main teachings.

The Messenger, The Islamic News and *Muhammad Speaks to the Black Man* are some of the magazines published in several stages by the Muslims. In addition to these publications, the speeches by Muhammad and Malcolm X over the radio and programmes on television etc. were immensely successful in propagating the doctrines of the movement.

The Fruit of Islam (FOI), the secret army of the movement, established as a protective unit in the early years of the movement, was another of the black Muslim devices that made the movement respectable and significant in the eyes of the black people. Later, under Raymond Sherieff, its supreme captain, the FOI became the most powerful single unit within the movement, with sections in every temple and local officers to execute its decisions. The FOI with its headquarter in Chicago, was a virtually autonomous body of elite group, carefully chosen, vigorously trained, aware of its own distinction and responsibilities, and deeply admired by the rest of the Muslim brotherhood. It is entrusted with top security assignments and remains on constant alert. Its activities were shrouded in nearly absolute secrecy. Although the FOI was raised on military lines, and the Muslims were taught to fight for the cause of the black nation and when attacked, they were strictly cautioned against initiating a battle.

From the initial role of guarding the black nation against trouble with the unbelievers, or with the police, it gradually turned into an internal police force and judiciary, an effective device for the
enforcement of internal discipline. As an organizational device the FOI
was immensely successful.

**Responses of the Traditional Muslims**

The black Muslim movement, over the years, had to confront
hostile and harsh reactions from various quarters both as a religious
movement and as a political or racial movement. On the racial grounds,
the movement endured the severely critical and unsympathetically harsh
reactions of the white racist organizations, the Jewish community, the
governmental agencies, the white press and other white controlled
enterprises. They were not prepared to approve of the black Muslim
movement's activities and outlooks. On the religious ground the
movement was criticized and denounced by the Christians as well as the
traditional Muslim organizations. Of these, the reactions of the traditional
Muslims deserve special mention.

The traditional Muslims, black as well as white, scattered about
the country in small numbers, do not generally accept the black Muslims.
Muhammad's extreme racial views, his emphatic militancy and his
unhistorical teachings about the black nation are among the reasons
pointed out for the rejection of the black Muslims by the traditional
Muslim groups. They disliked to be identified with the doctrines of the
black Muslims. The organizations like the Federation of Islamic
Associations, and Muslim leaders like Jamil Diab of Chicago issued
statements dissociating themselves and their followers from the black
Muslims. They denounced the movement as a cult totally lacking in the
requisites which constitute any Muslim group propagating their views in
the name of Islam.

The black Muslims, especially Elijah Muhammad, their supreme leader, had their own explanations on these matters which convinced the black Muslim masses. They asserted that whatever the white man touched, he tainted. Just as the so-called Negroes, in their attempt to appropriate the white man's culture had been corrupted by its disvalues, so the American Muslims have suffered the corrosive influence of white, western Christianity. In their yearning to gain the white man's approval, they sometimes behave suspiciously like "the blue-eyed devils" themselves. The American Muslims, they argued, who join the white man in denouncing the black Muslims are little better than the so-called Negroes who have been "Tom-Ing" for generations. When they finally see the movement through their own Muslim eyes, rather than through the distorted lenses of the white Christians, they will rally to Muhammad and recognize him as the true messenger of Allah himself.

Although the arguments of the traditional Muslim groups with regards to many of the black Muslim doctrines, from the perspective of the Qur'an and the tradition of the prophet, were irrefutably right and pertinent, the peculiar condition of the Afro-American society and the unique way in which Islam emerged in their society enticed many orthodox Muslim figures of the time in America to view the whole issue sympathetically. This was why many authentic Muslim groups kept themselves away from the fray. Muhammad at the same time successfully cultivated the goodwill and respect of a significant corps of informal representatives of Afro-Asian Islam. The Harlem organization called Asian African Drums headed by the Pakistani Muslim Abdul Basit
Naeem, which served as an important liaison between the black Muslims and various Muslim nationals from Asia and Africa, also had considerable success.

A careful study of the issue will reveal the fact that Elijah Muhammad's movement was one that evinced the characteristics of a reviving religious society. A society so long out of touch with its religious, cultural and racial roots, will take a considerably long stretch of time before it reclaims its roots in full. Muhammad, therefore, knowingly or unknowingly, had to make amendments and changes in the genuine version of Islam to suit his people. This will, to an extent, account for his doctrines pertaining to Allah coming in person to rescue the black people, his claim to being messenger of Allah, the history of the black man, the creation of the white man, the Armageddon etc.

Muhammad had no hesitation to admit that some of the teachings and practices of his movement were at variance with those of other Muslim groups, but he presented these as differences of interpretation within a unity of belief. Black Americans, he argued, had been the victims of a harsh and cynical oppression, and the Islamic faith in its pure traditional form was not appropriate to their needs. Muhammad observes:

My brothers in the East were never subjected to the conditions of slavery and systematic brainwashing by the slavemasters for a long period as my people here were subjected. I cannot, therefore, blame them if they differ with me in certain interpretations of the message of Islam. (The Supreme... 4)

Many of the black Muslim doctrines and practices over which
they differ with the traditional Muslims have to be regarded, as George Breitman has pointed out, "as symbolic rather than literal truths, or as useful weapons in the struggle against the enemy, rather than truths" (The Last... 7-8). This was perhaps why the Muslims all over the world tolerated Muhammad's movement to a degree many times greater than they did the Ahamadiyyah movement which altogether lacked any such miserable story to relate.

Thus we find that the Islam experience of the black people in America was a phenomenon of multidimensional implications. It was a revival they experienced in the religious, cultural, social, economic, political, and racial aspects of their life. It had, naturally, its bearings on all activities in their life including literary imagination.