Preface

Literature of the people of African origin in America has been of growing interest to academics for some years now. Critics have started giving serious attention to the literary achievements of this people. This is so for two reasons. Firstly, an enthusiastic reappraisal of the achievements of the marginalized peoples in the world has been a global phenomenon over the last few years, and the black American community compels attention more than all others owing to several reasons. Secondly, eminent black writers of the new generation like Amiri Baraka and Toni Morrison have become reputed for their great literary works, and have succeeded in attracting the attention of the world to the black American literature as a whole.

However, studies and researches on the literary achievements of the black people in America, over the years, evince an obvious shortcoming. It is the application of the standards and yardsticks of the mainstream white literature in the evaluation of the literature of the black people. Fundamentally important factors pertaining to the history and the peculiar experiences of the black people as a race get overlooked in the process. Since the literature of this people has been perpetually conditioned by their peculiar experiences as a race in all stages, efforts to evaluate it have to be necessarily made with reference to these factors. New yardsticks and parameters, and a new set of criteria are to be accepted for the evaluation of their literature.

The present thesis is an attempt to study a peculiar trend in the black American literature in the post-war decades of the twentieth
century. This was a period of unprecedented creativity in the black American literature. During this period of great awakening in the black American society, they made certain important discoveries pertaining to their identity as a society. They came to learn about their African and Islamic ancestry. They further realized that a return to their ancestral cultural and religious legacy, leaving aside the Christian and Negro identity, was the only real solution to their problems. Movements of socio-political and religious orientation with high spirit of nationalism soon came into existence and became popular and powerful by attracting the masses. Islam once again became a dominant influence in their life. Many of them experienced the ideology of Islam as a big liberating force. Black American society thus began to identify themselves with the global Islamic society, and started practising the teachings of Islam in their everyday life. The activities of figures like Elijah Muhammad and Malcolm X transformed the black American society in a very fundamental way. Islam, thus, has become a dominant presence in the black American society. It has been able to attract many luminaries and celebrities of the black American society like Cassius Clay / Muhammad Ali, Le Roi Jones / Amiri Baraka, Roland Snellings / Askia Muhammad Toure etc.

The Impact of this "Islam experience" of the black people is most obviously seen in the literary and cultural fields. Many writers and artists were attracted to this movement. New literary and theatrical movements emerged, and new aesthetic theories and doctrines were formulated and followed. A thorough awakening was discernible.
Although literary works evincing this trend might have been analysed variously and in other different connections, a study identifying the impact of the Islam experience has not, so far, taken place. Therefore, this thesis is focusing on this particular aspect of their literary works. As a matter of necessity, sufficient attention has been given to the evaluation of the socio-political and religious backgrounds. The study, therefore, tends to be of a multidisciplinary character. The authors and literary works significant in this context, have not been analysed in detail in view of the limitations of this thesis. However, a comprehensive evaluation of the same is attempted to illustrate the phenomenon in question.

One of the many difficulties involved in the study has been the task of correlating, in its various aspects and different levels, the two elements: the Islam experience of the Afro-Americans and the trends in their literature. Although at the outset it seemed a fairly tough task, as no material was found available doing this job even on a peripheral level, the materials found available on these two elements separately, eventually, helped to draw conclusions; and when the various information thus obtained were put together, things began to speak on their own and to establish correlations and associations.

In the exploration of the issue under consideration, the present study has been necessitated to give a fairly large space for the description of the social and literary backgrounds held to be inevitable for a proper understanding of the phenomenon. The first chapter, therefore, has been exclusively devoted to an appraisal of the predicament of the black people since their arrival in America. Their experiences in America for
more than two centuries as slaves and a hundred years as ex-slaves or
freed people, attitudes taken to the question of slavery by various
societies and institutions, and the problems faced by the black people
following emancipation etc. have been examined along with a
retrospection into their status as a society in their African past in this
chapter.

The second chapter focuses on the emergence of the nationalist
movements and the Islam experience of the Afro-American society since
the third decade of the twentieth century. An account of the Moorish
Science Temple and the Garveyite movement of African nationalism has
been attempted as a background along with a brief description of the
Nation of Islam movement, its leaders, its goals, myths and doctrines etc.

The third chapter is an attempt, in general, to trace the
manifestation of the Islam experience in Afro-American literature. An
overview of the black American literature also has been made, as it was
found quite necessary.

The fourth chapter analyses the role of the Islam experience in the
black cultural revolution and the new black aesthetic of the post-war
decades. The leading figures of these trends, Askia Muhammad Toure,
Ron Karenga and Amiri Baraka, are taken up for discussion along with
the phenomena like the Black Arts Movement, the Black Arts Repertoire
Theatre School (BARTS) and Jazz, the black music.

The fifth chapter, following a sweeping analysis of the trends in
fiction, drama and poetry, supplies with illustrative evidences and
supportive specimens for the phenomenon of Islam experience in the
black American literature. Poems by Baraka, Toure, Etheridge Knight etc. have been briefly analysed along with brief accounts of Alex Haley's *Roots*, the Malcolm X phenomenon in literature and the American prison literature.

The concluding chapter, besides winding up the study, discusses the later issues like Malcolm X's split with Muhammad, his assassination, Organization of Afro-American Unity, American Muslim Mission and the current trends in the black American society.

Now that my efforts have been finally able to take a material form, I sincerely feel inclined to extend my gratitude to everyone who has been of help to me in this regard. I am indebted to the librarians and other members of the staff of the School of Letters, Mahatma Gandhi University, the American Studies Research Centre, Hyderabad, Jawaharlal Nehru University Library, New Delhi, and the American Centre Library, New Delhi. I recall with gratitude the encouragements I received from Dr. A. I. Rahmatullah, my brother, Mina, my dear wife, and a number of others in the absence of which this would hardly have come true. I am thankful to M/s. Fashion Avenue, Areacode, for lending me their computer system for the word-processing requirements of this thesis. Over and above everything, I wish to thank my supervising teacher, Dr. V. C. Harris, for the inspiring guidance and warm encouragement.

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