CHAPTER- I

INTRODUCTION
I

History of the African Americans

The history of the African Americans is history of slavery and exploitation. Therefore, while writing about the history of African Americans, it is necessary to write about the brief overview of the slavery across the world. Slavery is a system of the society since the ancient civilization to till today. The evil structure of slavery system is being worked out in various forms. It may present in the forms like labours, child workers, prostitutes, sex workers, farm-workers and domestic servants. The ignorant people have been forced to do such inhuman work for the sake of the betterment of exploiters. These people are kept aside from their natural rights and freedom as human beings. The established system of slavery has enforced them to follow the instructions of this system’s ideology to become mental slaves. Once, the people become mental slaves, then anything can be imposed on them. The slavery as a system takes the advantages of illiteracy, ignorance, poverty and directionless of the people.

The organization Anti–slavery International defines slavery as “forced labors”. By this definition, there are approximately 27 million slaves in the world today, more than at any point in history and more than twice as many as all African slaves who survived being taken to the Africans in the Atlantic slave trade.¹

There are 27 million slaves in the world today; hence, no one can deny the harsh reality of slavery in the form of labours. Although, there were strong anti slavery movements and organizations, slavery is survived by changing its form, face and policy.
There were many ancient civilizations in different parts of the world. However, these civilizations were the victims of the evil and cruelty of the slavery system. Moreover, this civilization fought against each other in order to guard their political and cultural existence. Therefore, the winner civilization enslaved the loser civilization. Losers’ next generation ultimately become the slaves of the winners. The face and policy of slavery in ancient civilization is quite different from modern civilization. It was presented in ancient civilization in the forms of “debt-slavery, punishment for crime, the enslavement of prisoners of war, child abandonment and the birth of slave children to slaves.” These are the strong social structures of slavery which were deeply rooted in the psyche of the exploiters.

Slavery was known to accure in civilization as old as summer, as well as almost every other ancient civilization including Ancient Egypt, Ancient India, Ancient Greece, the Roman Empire, the Islamic Caliphate and the pre-Columbian civilization of the America.

Ancient Greece civilization was one of the leading civilizations amongst other old civilizations across the world. Although, it was democratic and liberal by its nature, slavery was the prime and pivotal part of it. Athens and Sparta were on the forefront states of the Greece in terms of democracy and civilization. However, the slavery was as a system introduced in these states in the form of domestic servants. These domestic servants were totally dependent on their owners. In addition to this, they did not have freedom of socio-economic, political and cultural nature. They had been enforced to do hard jobs in the houses of their owners and they got absolutely inhuman and painful treatment from their owners and they got absolutely inhuman and painful treatment from their owners.
owners. In case of the women servants, they were forced to do extraordinary works and services for their owners. To serve their owners was important for these slaves because the favor of their owners would have decided their future and direction of life.

The majority of Athenian slaves are domestic servants. Their fortunes depend entirely on their relationship they develop with their owners. Often it is close, with female slaves looking after the children or acting as concubines, or a male slave running the household as a steward.4

Slavery in Arab in the 9th and 10th centuries was most notable thing. The slaves were captured and purchased for the sake of hard work in the farms and houses of their owners. Moreover, the most shamefulness of this practice is that, there was auction of these slaves. The owners had kept away these slaves from all kinds of freedom and equality. Hence, slaves were treated as animals in the Arab world under the evil practice of slavery system. There were many markets of the slaves for the sake of profitable business of their masters. “Zanzibar was once East African’s main slave trading part and under Omani Arabs in the 19th century as many as 50,000 slaves were passing through the city each year”.5

Although, the European man was white, he was also the victim of slavery. The white slave trade was most popular industry between the 16th and 19th centuries. The monarchy and feudalism were responsible for exploitation of the common people of Europe because there were the most dominant social orders. The slaves in Europe were sold and exploited in farms and houses without paying anything to them. Robert Davis states, “[B]etween 1 million and 1.25 million Europeans were
captured by Barbary Pirates and sold as slaves in North African Ottoman Empire between the 16th and 19th centuries”. The ideology of religion in Europe in these centuries was most dominant and orthodoxy. Hence, the blind faiths and beliefs of common people on the religion was prime reason of European slavery system.

Slave trade in Africa was in the full swing between the 16th to 19th centuries. Unfortunately, the African people were caught by the African gangsters and exported to company businesspersons of the Dutch, French and English. The gangsters in the Africa kept good relationship with the businesspersons of the slaves for the sake of materialistic gains and enjoyment. Therefore, they exchanged these slaves to them.

One of the most famous slave trades on the East African coast was Tippu Tip, who was himself the grandson of an enslaved African. The prazeros slave trades, descendents of Portuguese and Africans, operated along the Zambezi. North of the Zambezi the Wa Ya and Makua people placed a similar look as professional slaves raiders and traders.

The slave business was being continued in Europe under the different names like Tippu for many centuries. Later on the Christian businessmen exchanged these slaves to Christian farm owners.

Asian slave trade was most crucial phenomenon in the history of slavery in the world. It has affected the culture and civilization of contemporary time of the Asian people. Although, there were many dominant ideologies of slavery, in due course of time, people rebelled against dominant hegemony of the slavery system in different countries of the Asia. “As late as 1908, women slaves were still sold in Ottoman
Empire. A slave market for captured Russians and Persians was centered in the central Asian khanate or khiva”. There were many slaves trade in Russia and Persia. Slaves in these countries were sold in the various parts of the world. As far as India and China are concerned, people fought against the evil system of slavery. As a result of this, slavery was abolished by law in these countries. However, slavery is existed in different forms such as labours and prostitutes in the present time.

The slavery as a system the in India since ancient time to till today has a strong and continuous hierarchy. Varna system, caste system, untouchables and gender discriminations are most prime weapons of the slavery in India. There are four varnas in India as per the social status of people: Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaisha and Shudra. This Varna system was later transformed into caste system; hence, there are uncountable castes and cults in India. The Shudra means untouchable. The untouchables in the India were slave as per the law of the “Manusmriti”. One of the greatest social reformers in India, Mahatma Jotiba Phule rightly pointed out the miserable conditions of the Shudras. He says:

Since the advent of the rule of Brahmins for centuries (in India), the Sudra and the ati- Sudras are suffering hardship and are leading miserable lives. To draw people’s attention to this, and that they should think over their misfortune and that they should eventually set themselves free from this tyranny of the Bhats (Brahmins) perpetrated on them.

Mahatma Jotiba Phule is the first revolutionary in the modern India to fight against the slavery of Shudras and women. He rebelled against established social order for emancipation of the shudras and women.
Hence he was victimized by the Brahmins. However, he didn’t stop his activities and reformations.

Although, we find the slavery in many ancient civilizations, the slavery that of in the United States of America is quite different. The structure of slavery in America was created while considering the farms as the capital. At the outset of the 16th century Christian businessmen purchased many African slaves for the sake of agriculture. Hence, the capitalist ideology of the Europeans, created the structure of slavery in America. The problem of slavery in America is not only the issue of physical slavery but it is the problem of their social, economic and cultural identity. Since Abraham Lincoln abolished slavery by law, they were struggling to achieve their Civil Rights and initiate various anti-slavery movements.

The rise of the American civilization is most momentous and outstanding phenomenon in the history of the world. When the European especially protestants, entered in the virgin land of America, they termed themselves as the “chosen people of the God.” They believed that the God created the “Garden of Eden” like Adam and Eve, only for the white race. Believing in such myth, they settled in America. When the European entered in the virgin land of America, they destroyed the culture and life of Red Indians who were the native sons of America. The white believed that these Red Indians are lazy and struggling. Thereby, they are not useful for plantation and domestic work. Hence, that, they purchased the African slaves for the sake of plantation and domestic work. The artificial myth created by the white suggests that the Negroes of Africa are marginal because of their black colour and race. Therefore, the Negroes were forced to serve the whites because that was the expectation of the God. This man made myth of Christianity was
responsible to establish the slavery in the U.S. in terms of moral and ethics.

The rise of slavery in America is most significant phenomenon. A Dutch businessperson imported twenty African Negroes in the British colony of Virginia and sold them in the city of Jamestown. Thereby, slavery of the Negroes came into existence in America. However, when the Negroes were brought to America, they were not slaves but they were the indentured servants. It simply means that their servitude would be ended after their agreement with their owners. However, in due course of time, Dutch, English and Portuguese businessmen imported many African slaves and exported them in the British colonies. Therefore, the problem of these indentured servants was central and major. Hence, in the year 1661 status of the Negroes as indentured servants was canceled by the law of the British colonies and made them the slaves of the white race.

The first Negroes brought to the English colonies were not slaves but indentured servants who were liberated after years of faithful service. By 1661, however, Virginia made all newly arrived Africans and children born to them slave forever.\textsuperscript{11} Thereby, the slavery was initiated in America for plantation as well as domestic works.

At the outset of the 17\textsuperscript{th} century, the Negroes were the slaves in the British colonies. These African Negroes were not only enslaved by their physique but also their culture, religion, customs, language and identity. In addition to this, Negroes were forced to forget the original and genuine heritage of them. Moreover, they forced to accept the artificial religion and myths created by their master. Hence, they were deprived from their glorious motherland and their own golden history. As a result of this, they
were suffering from identity crisis. They got animal like treatment from the white masters. Moreover, the family as a system of Negroes was thoroughly disrupted by the ideology of slavery. The white master could sell any member of the Negro family. Who could be a father, mother, daughter or son of the slave family, the socio-economic and cultural situations and status of the Negroes in the America during 1619 to 1863 were very bad and critical because they had to work in the mines, farms and shops. During the working period, they got inhuman treatment as if they were inhuman beings. In addition to this, they were kept aside from education, politics, media and business. Therefore, American Negro lost his identity in the democratic and liberal country. J. M. Waghmare observes:

The slave accepted this commandment and translated it into realities. But this was his spiritual identity. His earthly identity had, however, been negative during slavery and racial segregation. He had lost the positive aspect of his identity in the white man’s world. America deprived him of the meaning and the purpose of life and kept him in limbo of social isolation and psychological alienation.12

As per J.M. Waghmare’s observation, the Negro community during the slavery period was trapped in the dilemma of their identity and recognition as a human being. They were the victims of illiteracy and ignorance of knowledge. They were deliberately kept away from their master’s religion and their own. Hence, their spiritual need was unfulfilled. Therefore, they survived their spirituality through the spiritual songs, which is the most significant part of Negro culture and civilization.
The predicament of the Negro woman in the slavery era was much more serious and critical than the Negro man. “[B]lack women in America were made victims of triple jeopardy: racism, sexism and classism.”\(^{13}\) She was the victim of the white and Black patriarchal social order. Whenever the white master felt, he was able to rape or harass the black woman who was in his ownership as if she was an inanimate thing. The Negro woman in the slavery era was forced to be used and was used as a sex instrument in order to create more slaves for the sake of plantation and domestics works. Therefore, there were many “breeding houses” of Negro women in America as if these Negro women were cows. The Negro women were treated like the private property of their masters. “Some masters branded the letters of their names on the inside of both of their legs”.\(^{14}\) It indicates us the harassment and inhuman exploitation of the Negro women that was done by their masters.

The Negroes in the slavery period were kept quite away deliberately from education. As a result, they lost the sense of their art and culture. However, they kept their oral tradition of art and music alive through spiritual songs. The spirituals are most fundamental characteristic feature of Negro art and culture. The Negroes were not given freedom of expression. Hence, they developed the art of spirituals songs. They were able to sing these oral spirituals during their alienated time when they got exhausted from plantation and heavy domestic works. The spirituals are leading source and codes of the Negro culture and life. These spirituals could be sung when there were the feelings of sorrow and sadness of exploitation.
No more, auction block for me
No more, no more
No more, auction block for me
Many thousand gone\textsuperscript{15}

The spirituals express many themes and issues of their life and culture such as, attitude towards the God, prayer to Christ, predicament of family, status as the slaves and protest against the slavery. Present spiritual requests to the white master that they should stop the auction of the Negroes because many Negroes were already sold and exploited.

Though, there was exploitation of the Negroes, some of them have shown talent in art and literature. In this connection, the name of Philips Wheatley is most considerable. She was brought the America at her early teen age as an African slave by a white slave trader. Fortunately, she was sold to luckily to an honest and sensible owner. The owner himself taught to the slave girl. As a result of this, the slave girl has shown talent in literature, especially poetry. She has written an anthology of poems entitled \textit{Poems on Various Subjects} (1773). This book is recognized as the second book published by African American woman. She got fame and name in America as well as in Europe.

Miss Wheatley’s book of verse became the second book published by an African woman and own the Praise of Benjamin Franklin and Governor Hutchinson. George Washington invited her to his headquarters in 1776 because he was impressed with her poem on his part in America’s fight for freedom.\textsuperscript{16}

The contribution of Miss. Philip Wheatley has the great significance because in this slavery period the Negroes were trapped in cultural
dilemma. In this critical situation, Miss. Wheatley was ideal of the slaves. Miss. Wheatley’s contribution created confidence in Negro ethnic minority to some extent.

Although, the Negroes were deprived from the main flow of national life, their role in the American freedom struggle is most crucial and foremost. They participated in army of the nationalists and fought against imperialists forces. Many Negroes devoted their lives for the sake of unity and integrity of America though they were treated as sub-human being by the white Americans. Hence, their contribution in the American freedom movement is unavoidable although they are neglected in case of the history of freedom movement. “American Negroes played a significant if neglected part in the American Revolution .... some served as pilots in the colonial Navy of John Paul Jones. A few served as spies for the patriots.”

Although, the Negroes were exploited so far religion, culture and tradition are concerned, they did not rebel against their exploiters. The exploiters created and propagated such kind of ideology wherein “slaves were taught to hate themselves and to stand in fear of every white man.” Such deep structure of hegemony was deeply rooted in the minds of the slaves. Therefore, they were the puppets in the hands of white man.

The predicament of the Negroes in the South was thoroughly critical than the North America. The North America was strongly against the slavery because they believed that slavery of the Negroes a is stigma on the humanity and it is entirely non-democratic and non-secular practice in the history of human civilizations. However, Northern industrialists used Negroes in their industries as a labours. On the other hand, the South America strongly demanded the continuation of the slavery because their economy and richness entirely depended on the hard
work and exploitation of the Negroes on the farms. Negroes had to work on the plantation of cotton, tobacco and rice.

On the plantations Negroes lived under rules and laws enforced by masters and overseers; they had no rights any white person bound to respect. Their diet was poor, their living conditions primitive, and their working hours long...some times worked overtime for pay. They labored on railroads, barges and construction projects; built ships, hotels, and statues; worked in factories, homes, and laboratories.\(^{19}\)

In the various cities of the South, they were enforced to work on construction projects, railroads and barges. They did not get sufficient quality food and clothes. Their life was nothing different from the primitives. Thereby, the exploitation of the Negroes was deeply rooted in the South American society. However, some Negro leaders initiated the protest against their cruel owners. In this context Nat Turner’s revolt is most notable. Nat Turner rebelled against the South owners with his sixty followers. “Nat Turner, 1831 slave revolt led to the death of sixty whites, surrenders to authorities. Although, slave resistance was rarely this violent, it was omnipresent in Southern ante-bellum life.”\(^{20}\) Nat Turner’s protest is most significant in the history and contemporary life of the Negroes. Negroes initiated many anti-slavery movements in the South because of Nat Turner’s adventure and success.

The abolitionist movement initiated by the activists in order to emancipate themselves from slavery is a hallmark in the slavery period. The movement got momentous and leading popularity in the North America. It was initiated to abolish slavery and give justice to the slaves.
Slavery was the national issue and it was responsible for the partition of the North and South America. The abolitionist movement protected the Southern slaves from their masters.

The abolitionist movement included Negroes and whites men and women, direct actionists and moral suasionists. Some whites sought to restrict Negro leaders to symbolic rules, white others insisted on a fully integrated anti-slavery movement. Sojourner Truth, William Wells Brown, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, Harriet Tubman and many others Negroes gave the abolitionist movement some of its most important speeches, pamphlets, and arguments.²¹

In order to enlighten the Negroes against cruel practice of slavery, the activists propagated many anti-slavery arguments, speeches and pamphlets. The activists supported many Negroes to run away from the South to the North and Canada in order to emancipation them from harassment of the white masters. Those slaves ran away by unknown way to the North and Canada, which was called “Under Ground Railraod.”²²

The contribution of Frederic Douglas in the abolitionist movement is momentous and foremost. He was an American slave, however, escaped himself from his master through his shrewdness. Moreover, he also helped many slaves to escape from the slavery and enlightened them towards the proper direction of their emancipation. In addition to this, he went to England and achieved the favour of British against the cruel practice of slavery in the U.S. His autobiography entitled, *Narrative of the life of Frederic Douglass an American slave* is outstanding
contribution in the African American literature and history. The autobiography is a historical record of the lives of slaves and him during the slavery period. Frederic Douglass narrates:

I do not remember to have ever met a slave who could tell of his birthday. They seldom come nearer to it than planting time, harvest – time, cherry-time, spring – time, or fall – time. A want of information concerning my own was a source of unhappiness to me even during childhood. The white children could tell their ages. I could not tell why I ought to be deprived of the same privilege. I was not allowed to make any inquiries of my master concerning it.23

Indeed, Frederic Douglass’ autobiography presents the Negro life in artistic and realistic manner. Douglas is very intensive to catch the predicaments of the slaves and their relationship with their white masters.

The economy and glorification of the Southern landholders is totally based on hardship of the slaves on plantation. Hence, the whole South was pro-slavery. During the Abolitionist Movement, many Southern pro-slavery thinkers and philosophers applied their genius in order to protect the slavery system. To protect the slavery, they took the supports of religion, history, logic and ethics. Thomas R. Dew was pro-slavery thinker in the South and supported slavery by providing many historical and logical references. Thomas R. Dew argues:

It has been contended that slavery is unfavorable to a republican spirit; but the whole history of the world proves that this is far from being the case. In
the ancient republics of Greece and Rome, where the spirit of liberty glowed with the most intensity, the slaves were more numerous than the free men. Aristotle and the great men of antiquity believed slavery to be necessary to keep alive the spirit of freedom.24

There were many Southern philosophers and professors who tried to protect slavery like Thomas R. Dew. To protect slavery is the protection of the capitalist and feudalist system of the South landowners, they did not want to break their hierarchy of domination over the slaves.

In the slavery period, William Wells Brown shows the genius in fiction writing. He is the first African American novelist. He was the victim of slavery. However, he escaped from it and helped many slaves to emancipate themselves from their masters. He attempted to write a “[R]alistic portrayal of black militant life that exposed the Psychological and physical assaults.”25 His fiction is characterized by deep sorrows and sadness of the Negroes life. His novel entitled Clotel or the President’s Daughter (1853) is a most remarkable record of the lives of the slaves. He writes not only on the fictional ground but also realistic picture of physical and psychological suffering of the slaves.

Another significant novelist of the slavery era was Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe. Mrs. Stowe’s novel Uncle Tom’s Cabin (1852) is significant landmark in lives of the Negroes and their enlightenment towards the emancipation. The novel got tremendous popularity and fame in the U. S. and some European countries. At the outset of its publication, three lack copies of the novel were sold. Moreover, the novel reveals the deepest sorrows in the life of slaves in general and in the life of Uncle Tom in particular. Mrs. Stowe visited the South America in order to
realize the lives of the slaves. Hence, she could write such penetrative novel on the lives of slaves. *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was the new lease of lives in the contemporary slaves because the novel exploded the panoramic picture of Negroes sorrow to the world. Within stipulated time, the novel was translated into many languages across the world and was considered as the masterpiece in literature. David Levin makes a comment about *Uncle Tom’s cabin*. “I have also appealed to historical authorities, including a not wholly facetious declaration by Kenneth Stamp that *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* is one of the best books ever written about American slavery.”

David Levin considers it the most important book on slavery because it was the key cause to initiate the Civil War between the North and the South America on the issue of slavery. Abraham Lincoln himself praised the book because of its genuine contribution in the enlightenment against slavery.

In the year 1860 on the behalf of Republican Party, Abraham Lincoln, was elected as the president of the U.S. The election was strongly centralized towards the issue of slavery. The role of Lincoln about the slavery was already declared by his speeches. Therefore, the southern landowners thought that Lincoln would abolish the slavery. Hence, the Southern States declared their partition from the U.S. For the sake of national unity and integrity, Abraham Lincoln announced the Civil War against the Southern States of the U.S. in 1861.

The Civil War was a turning point for America and its Negro population. Though a few Americans knew it at the time, the guns that opened fire on fort Sumter in 1861 were announcing both the death of American Negro slavery and the rise of Northern
industrial power. The American Negro played a vital role during these four crucial years of conflict. Although, there are some demerits of Civil War according to historians and philosophers, the Civil War is most significant cause of unity and integrity of the U.S. Because of slavery, American life was divided in the two sections but the Civil War united America as a modern nation in the world. Though, at the outset of Civil War there was rare possibility of emancipation of the slaves but during the war Abraham Lincoln declared the freedom of the slaves. Moreover, on the 1 January 1963, “The Emancipation Proclamation” of the slaves came into force, thereby, the slavery in the U.S. was abolished by the law of the land

Abraham Lincoln was one of the most key and crucial presidents amongst others who applied their political genius in order to preserve the unity and integrity of the U.S. He believed in democracy and tried to build the democratic national life of the U.S. Moreover, the courage and patience, which he has shown during the Civil War is rare in the history of the U.S. He skillfully handled the issue of slavery during the Civil War and made historical announcement of the abolition of slavery because he said, “I believe this government can not endure permanently half slave and half free”. Lincoln destroyed the cruel disorder of the American society by law hence, he is the hallmark in the life of the slaves. Lincoln knew the harassment of the slave life in his childhood; though, he was not a slave .Hence, his attitude ultimately became negative towards slavery. In his *Letter to Joshua Speed*, he revealed his opinion about it. He writes, “You know I dislike slavery; and you fully admit the abstract wrong of it”. Lincoln was constant when there was intense turmoil on the issue of slavery; many pro-slavery scholars persuaded him to change his decision but his belief was constantly anti-
slavery. “I am naturally anti-slavery if slavery is wrong, nothing is wrong. I can not remember when I did not so think, and feel.”

The period from 1863 to 1896 is considered as “Reconstruction Era” because the Negroes were emancipated from slavery and their socio-economic and educational reconstruction was most central issue of the period. Although, Abraham Lincoln announces the freedom for Negroes by declaring the Proclamation of Independence, Negroes were trapped in to the intense turmoil and dilemma of their settlement. Where should we go? What should we do? These questions were initially faced by the Negroes. Their predicament and turmoil were more critical and painful than earlier in the reconstruction era. Though they were free and could not be sold, their so-called freedom had very limited meaning because they did not get their all civil rights as whites. Therefore, the reconstruction of the Negroes remained only ideology, which did not have any practical purpose. Booker T. Washington rightly noted the foolishness of the government policy so far as the education of the Negroes is considered in his famous autobiography entitled *Up From the Slavery*. He notes:

> During the whole of the Reconstruction period, our people throughout the South looked to the Federal Government for everything, very much as a child looks to its mother.... I had the feeling that it was cruelly wrong in the central government of the beginning of our freedom, to fail to make some provision for the general education of our people.

The Negroes expected to avail the facilities of proper education for themselves. However, they were deprived deliberately from education. When the Negroes were emancipated from slavery, education was indeed
proper way to their empowerment and enlightenment. In fact, government did not pay any attention towards this issue and pushed them into the deep valley of the darkness and ignorance.

Although, the reconstruction did not implicate in methodological way, some Negroes overcame on their predicament. They initiated newspaper like “L Union” which is credited as the first Black newspaper in the South. New Orleans Tribune is the first Black daily in the U.S”. This development of the Negro minority was the hallmark of their empowerment and enrichment.

As it is already stated, the North was quite anti-slavery because the Northern industrialists wanted the labours to enhance industrial products and capital. Hence, they opposed the Southern slavery society. Moreover, the new trend in the North American capitalist society was to achieve money and fame by breaking laws and democratic values. As the South landowners exploited the slaves on the plantation, in the same way Northen industrialist wanted to exploit them in the industries. Therefore, the lives of the Negroes were very sorrowful in the slavery and reconstruction era.

Since the slavery abolished by law during the tenure of Abraham Lincoln’s Presidency, the white racist leaders in the South initiated radical movement like Ku Klux Klan to terrorize the blacks. The foremost objective of Ku Klux Klan was to keep away the Blacks from their political rights in general and right to vote in particular. In addition to this, the radical people of the movement murdered and harassed many Blacks during the reconstruction. The fundamental characteristic of the movement is that all members were the white orthodox because they were against the racial equality. The policy of the movement was all
Blacks are racially marginal than the white. Hence, they should be banished from America.

Another movement initiated to terrorize the Blacks was Night of the White Camellia. This movement is responsible to murder two thousand Blacks in the year 1868 in the Lawsonia State.

In 1896, Plessey Vrs. Ferguson Supreme Court case gave the verdict that the Blacks are “Separate but Equal”. However, it is one of the dark chapters in the history of African Americans. Constitutionally they were separated from the national life of the U.S. The Supreme Court argued that the Blacks are separate but equal. There is no injustice in it. In fact, the separate but equal doctrine strongly affected the lives of the Blacks. Douglas J. Ficker explicates:

The Segregation era was a contradictory period in American legal history. For almost one hundred years, Court had the necessary language, the Fourteen the Amendment, needed to out law the institutional separation of African American from European Americans. Yet the nation had to wait until 1954 when the U.S. Supreme Court in Brown Vrs. Board of Education ruled that segregation deprived African Americans of the equal protection of the laws, which had been guaranteed by the language of the Fourteen Amendment.\footnote{33}

The fourteenth amendments did not come in the force, which was made for the Negro enrichment. The 1896s decision of Supreme Court divided America life into two groups these were the white Americans and the Black Americans. Thereby, the Supreme Court led the Black towards injustice, ignorance and poverty. There were the separate inns, trains,
buses, schools, residences and playgrounds for the Blacks and the whites. No black could enter in the white church in this period, although, the God is almighty. Such logical separation led the American Society towards cultural conflict, non-trust and destruction. Because of the segregation, many ghettos were developed in the Northern cities. These ghettos were the centers of crime and slum.

Although, the slaves were emancipated and the law of the land abolished slavery, many Southern States were not following this. In spite of the reconstruction, many Negroes entered in education and politics. Hence, the Southern leaders restricted them from the natural and open development of their race. Therefore, many Southern states sanctioned non-constitutional laws. These laws are known as “Jim Crow Laws” or “Black Codes”. Political dictionary defines Jim Crow laws:

- Laws or practices designed to separated Whites and Black in public and private facilities used in Southern States of the United States to preserve segregated schools, transport facilities and housing, until the doctrine of ‘separate but equal’ was declared unconstitutional in 1954.34

These laws restricted Blacks from many social opportunities like education, housing and traveling. Moreover, the Black and White women were unable to work on the same farm. The White and Black children could not play on the same school ground. They could not eat and travel with each other during the segregation period. This was the policy of the Whites to suppress the Black ethnic minority in the U.S. during the segregation era.
During this period, the Negro leaders initiated many movements in order to stop the segregation because it was totally against their socio-economic and cultural development. The paramount characteristic of the Negro movement in this age is that there is no same ideology and leadership to fight against segregation. However, the motivation and intention of the Negro movements in this age were the same. Although, there were many ideologies in the Negro Movements, the ideology and leadership of Mr. Booker T. Washington was most significant and momentous among the Black people. He did not follow the radical agenda to empower the Blacks as far as their education and economic interests were concerned. He emphasized on the compromise between the Whites and Blacks. The white community appreciated the Black. In addition to this, he specified his agenda about the directions of the Blacks in his famous “Atlanta compromise speech” in 1895. He addressed, “Cast down your bucket where you are”. Washington suggested to his people that they should not fight against the whites; they should concentrate on their works. They should develop themselves where they are. Washington did not oppose segregation and concentrated himself to enlighten the Blacks towards education. He believed that self-dependence is the most crucial factor in the development of the Blacks. Hence, he started Tuskegee School for the sake of education and enrichment of the Blacks. Through this school, he emphasized on the agricultural and business oriented education to create self-dependant Blacks. He states, “Cast it (Bucket) down in agriculture, mechanics, in commerce, in domestic service, and in the profession.” Washington provided the confidence and promise to his people in order to overcome from their predicaments. He believed in economic development. Moreover, he motivated the Blacks towards the education and development. His autobiography
entitled *Up from the slavery* is most significant record of his thoughts regarding the slavery and his life as a slave and leader.

The contemporary intellectuals and youths denied the conservative ideology of Mr. Booker T. Washington about the Negro issue. The intellectuals of his contemporary time believed that the conservative agenda of Mr. Washington would not direct Blacks towards their empowerment. Although, Mr. Washington tells the way of self-dependence, he does not tell the way of self-respect and total freedom. Moreover, there is no way of revolutionary emancipation in the policy of Mr. Washington. The agenda of Mr. Washington is more ideological and practical. Hence, it would not be the direction of Blacks towards their emancipation. Mr. W.E.B. DuBois challenged the agenda of Mr. Washington. He apposed Booker T. Washington’s policy in his famous essay entitled *Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and others*. He argues:

Mr. Washington represents in Negro thought the old attitude of adjustment and submission; but adjustment at such a peculiar time as to make his programme unique. This is an age of unusual economic development, and Mr. Washington’s programme naturally takes an economic cast, becoming a gospel of work and many to such an extent as apparently almost completely to overshadow the higher aims of life... Mr. Washington’s programme practically accepts the alleged inferiority of the Negro race.\(^{37}\)

Many intellectuals attracted towards the radical presentation of the Negro problem by W.E.B. DuBois, especially youths were fascinated by his speeches and writings. Segregation era was the era of confusion among
the Negro community because the leadership was divided between Washington and DuBois. In this connection Nichel Anderson’s observation is most notable. He observes:

Booker T. Washington felt the power of industry and the working labour of the black man could provide extraordinary advancement in life of the freed slaves. However, W.E.B. DuBois was passionate on the development of the Blackman mentality to higher intellectual in order to require and obtain the greatest fruit of life.\(^{38}\)

Both leaders wanted the higher development of the Negroes. However, their visions to think over the Negro problems were different from each other.

The rise of DuBois as a leader of African Americans was most crucial phenomenon, because he strongly challenged the traditional policy of Washington and led the African Americans towards the radical change of their education and culture. DuBois was higher intellectual who obtained Ph.D. degree and was the first African American who achieved Ph.D. He deeply studied the racial problems in the U.S. during his studenthood and coined most realistic theory of “Double Consciousness” of African Americans in his famous book *The soul of the Black Folks*. He writes:

The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife, - this longing to attain self – conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging, he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize
America, for America has too much to teach the world of Africa.\textsuperscript{39}

W.E.B. DuBois strongly stated that the self of Black is ruined in the racist American society. In addition, his wounded self led him towards the identity crisis. The Black were trapped in identity crisis and this crisis is two-ness. This is the two-ness as American and African. Black is suffering from the question weather their identity is being an African or America. Hence, every Black in the U.S. has the feeling of “Double Consciousness” and that is African as well as American.

DuBois articulated that the American society is influenced by color conflict “[T]he problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line”\textsuperscript{40} The Blacks were color is tortured and ruined by the whites due to the color of their skin. Hence, there is color line between the Blacks and Whites. Because of the color line, they are not able to exchange culture, beliefs and faiths to each other.

Being a higher intellectual and educated, DuBois rationally refused the importance of the church to solve the racial problem of African Americans “[H]e had always been mildly skeptical about the ability of religion to solve any man’s major dilemmas”.\textsuperscript{41} ‘DuBois redefines the concept of democracy and religion in connection with the dilemma of African Americans. He strongly asserted that the religion is not the solution of human dilemma. Moreover, he has shown that the church itself is a weapon for exploitation of the African Americans.

DuBois cultivated the cultural heritage of the Blacks to empower their confidence as the Africans. To create negritude among the Negroes he initiated the Niagara Movement in the year 1905 in order to gain civil liberties and freedom of Blacks. DuBois and his followers held a meeting
at Niagara Falls and decided to fight against segregation as well as traditional leadership of Booker T. Washington. Mary Law Chafee notes:

The protest movement held a first formal meeting in the summer of 1905 on the Canadian side of Niagara Falls, for the group had been refused hotel accommodations on the New York side on open grounds of racial discrimination with branches in each state to fight discrimination and Booker T.

W. E. B. DuBois’ Niagara Movement within four years transformed into National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Although, the movement was established considering the empowerment of the Blacks, the white social activists were also on the forefront to expand the ideology of the movement. The NAACP is very strong and constant organization today in the U.S. to solve the racial issues. Moreover, the significant characteristic of the NAACP is its progressive and mixed racial members. The important objectives of the movement were to annihilate the segregation, to achieve the equal rights for education and vote and to implement the fourteen amendment. This movement succeeded in achieving the various rights of the Black by the constitutional way. The NAACP is credited to achieve the rights of equality, annihilation of segregation and socio-economic as well as cultural enlightenment among the Blacks.

At the outset of the First World War, many Southern Blacks migrated to the North in order to emancipate themselves from segregation and to get new job opportunities. The North was liberal regarding the Negro issue, however, there were separate residences for the Negroes. They had to live in separate ghettos; the exodus of migrants blocked
these ghettos. However, the Blacks got the opportunities in industries, army and education. Hence, the New Negro was born among the ghettos. The New Negro was intellectual and educated. Therefore, the discourse of knowledge was initiated among them. They initiated the discourse of culture, art, literature, music, dance and sculpture. This Renaissance of various disciplines started in the suburb of New York known as Harlem. Hence, it is called the Harlem Renaissance. The Harlem Renaissance created the New Negro who competes with the white in every discipline of knowledge. M.H. Abrams summarizes the Harlem Renaissance in the following words. He writes:

A period of remarkable creativity in literature, music, dance, painting and sculpture by African Americans, from the end of the first world war in 1917 through the 1920s. As result of the mass migration to the urban North in order to escape the legal segregation of the American South, and also in order to take advantage of the jobs opened to African Americans at the beginning of the war, the population of the region of Manhattan known as Harlem became almost exclusively Black and the vital center of African American culture in America.43

When the Harlem Renaissance was in full swing, the Jamaican Negro leader Marcus Garvey propagated his programme of “Black Nationalism”. He initiated the Universal Negro Improvement Association. The nature of the movement was different from the other movements, which were initiated for the Negro empowerment. The prime
purpose of Marcus Garvey’s movement was establish a separate nation in Africa for the scattered Negroes across the world.

    In 1914, Garvey founded his Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities Imperial League. The purpose of this new body “was to unite all the Negro peoples of the world into one great body to establish a government absolutely their own”.44

In order to create Black Nationalism among the American Negroes Garvey propagated the concept of “Pan Africanism”.45 He affirmed that the Negro race in the world is being exploited by the whites and other races. Their glorious culture and religion were ruined in the U.S. In order to achieve the previous glorification once again, the Negro should be reunited for separate nation in Africa.

    Garvey created the self-respect and self-motivation among the Negroes in the U.S.. In order to propagate his philosophy, he has written many poems and essays. One of his poems entitled Hail! United States of Africa expresses his dream of separate nation for the Negroes in Africa. He expresses:

        Hail! United States of Africa-free!
        Country of the brave black man’s liberty;
        state of greater national hood they hast
        won, A new life for the race is just begun.46

Garvey changed the attitude and thinking of the Negroes towards their predicaments. He addressed many times to the Blacks that they should not expect justice in the prejudiced white society. Hence, they are not be ready to participate in them. Although, he did not succeed in establishing the independent state in Africa, he is credited to create the self-respect
among the Blacks in the U.S. Garvey and his followers struggled to establish nationalism in America through various programmers of social development. They fought for freedom, justice and equality for the Negro race. Therefore, the contribution and struggle of Garvey’s movement can not be neglected in the history of the African Americans.

The great depression of the 1929 has strongly affected the lives of the Blacks. On 24 October 1929s, Friday, the share market collapsed and all Americans were trapped into the economic crisis. Moreover, the Blacks were trapped in the evil of poverty and unemployment. The depression increased the predicament of the Blacks largely than earlier.

The Depression that crippled the United States during the 1930s hit the Negro wage earner with particular severity. The Negro found he was the last hired and the first fired, and Negro unemployment percentages soured above those for whites. The Black was prominent victim of the depression. Because of the joblessness and poverty, many Black youths turned towards crime and robbery in this critical period of the depression.

Roosevelt’s New Deal program was launched to provide the relief from the depression. New Deal programme of President Roosevelt was most remarkable to establish the American economy as earlier. The New Deal was a new lease of life for the Blacks because “Negroes were among the main beneficiaries of the recovery programme instituted by the New Deal”. Therefore, New Deal programme has significance in the life of the Blacks because it provided funds and many job opportunities to the Black youths.

During the depression, Blacks were attracted towards Marxism and communism to some extent. However, they understood the limitations of
it because the race and class conflicts are different from each other. The Negroes during this period were deprived from the trust in American society and democracy and they became revolutionaries. The writers and poets produced the protest literature during the depression. Richard Right’s *Native Son* presents the disordered Black life in the U.S.

After the great depression, the prime and crucial event, which affected the life of Blacks, is the Second World War.

American Negroes were part of their country’s massive World War II effort. Three million Negroes, registered for selective service and half a million Negro men and women saw service overseas; most Negro units, however, were assigned menial work. The paramount reason behind the enthusiastic participation of the Blacks in the Second World War is their belief and faith in democracy. They thought that the Second World War is against racism in the world. At the outset of the Second World War, Hitler killed many Jews under the name of racism. Hence, ultimately the Blacks thought that the Second World War was against racism in the world. The Blacks believed that the Second World War would destroy racism across the world and ultimately the racism in the U.S. would be destroyed. After the Second World War imperialism was banished from many Asian and African countries. However, the Blacks had to live segregated life until 1954.

The 17 May 1954 was remarkable day in the life of African Americans because the segregation act of 1896 in the case of Plessey Vrs. Ferguson was cancelled by the case of Brown Vrs. Board of Education, of Topeka, Kansas. According to this judgment, any African American
student can register his / her name in any school in the U.S. This historical decision was given by Warren court. The court concluded:

    To separate them [children in grade and high school] from others of similar age and qualifications solely because of their race generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely to ever be undone...\textsuperscript{50}

At the outset of this decision, the African Americans were benefited to seek admission in various schools. Thereby, this decision was landmark in the history of educational empowerment of the African Americans. However, the role of NAACP was leading in annihilating the segregation. After 58 years, the Supreme Court of the U.S. gave the justice to the African Americans. “The Brown decision was a watershed in American legal and civil rights history because it overturned the “separate but equal” doctrine first articulated in the Plessey Vrs. Ferguson decision of 1896”.\textsuperscript{51}

After the 1954s decision of the Supreme Court about segregation, the leadership of the African Americans changed its direction and it became faster than earlier. The major movements after 1954 were the Black Muslim Movement and the Non-Violence Movement of Martin Luther king, Jr., These two movements were contradictory to each other. Martin Luther king, Jr. believed in the policy of Non-violent resistance to solve the problems of African Americans. However, the activists of the Black Muslim Movement believed in revolutionary and radical way in order to solve the racial problems.

The origin of Black Muslim Movement goes 1930 when Wallace D. Farad established the first masque in Detroit. The Black Muslims
believed that they would not get self-identity and self-respect until they establish their own religion and culture. Marcus Garvey who initiated the Pan-African Movement in order to go back to the African culture and heritage influenced the Black Muslims Movement. However, Marcus Garvey failed in establishing the separate nation in Africa, and his ideology for separate nation remained only ideology. On the other hand, Black Muslims believe that they have to establish separate Islamic nation in America itself. After F.W. Farad his follower, Eliza Muhammad continued the Black Muslim Movement. Elijah Muhammad succeeded in attracting many Blacks towards Islam to empower the Black Muslim Movement.

The family names of the slaves in slavery era were inherited by them after the names of their masters. Although, they got freedom, their family names were being continued until today by the family names of their previous masters. In case of Black Muslims, they throw their family names and added the word “X” instead of family name of their former masters. The Black Muslims wanted to establish their own identity in the U.S. However, their dream remains as a dream because they did not have any practical agenda to fulfill their dream.

The most outstanding leadership of Martin Luther king, Jr. was the hallmark in the life of African Americans. King, Jr., was different from the other leaders of the African Americans because of his philosophy of non-violence resistance. He was influenced by the non-violence thoughts of Henry David Thoreau and Mahatma Gandhi, the father of the nation in India. Using the non-violence tactics, he successfully led the 1956s Montgomery bus boycott movement in Alabama State and helped to organize the 1963s March on Washington D.C..
Using tactics of non-violent resistance he had learned from Henry David Thoreau and Mahatma Gandhi, Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., led Montgomery, Alabama, Negroes in an effective boycott of the city’s segregated buses. Dr. King became the Negro leader of his day, his principle of non-violent resistance to unjust laws the theme of growing civil rights movement.52

Because of King’s tactics of non-violent resistance led him towards the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964. King especially applied Mahatma Gandhi’s concepts of love, truth and non-violence resistance. The credit of Dr. King, Jr., is that he used non-violence tactics against the White violent society. He could do this because of his love and moral attitude towards the human being and dignity.

Rosa Park’s Montgomery bus boycott case was most pivotal event for the rise of Martin Luther King Jr. as a leader of the African Americans. On 1 December 1955, Rosa Park a colored woman caught a bus in front of Empire Theatre in the Montgomery city. In spite of the tiredness and heavy work, she sat on the first row near the white section in the bus. Conductor ordered her to move from the place, however, she didn’t move because her health problem. Thereafter, conductor used heavy wording for her misbehavior and with the help of police dropped her out from the bus. Moreover, he registered a complaint against her misbehavior. The police department in the Montgomery city registered the complaint against Rosa Park in following words.
We receive a call upon arrival the bus operator said he had a colored female sitting in the white section of the bus, and would not move back.... Rosa Park (of) was charged with chapter 6 section 11 of the Montgomery city code.\textsuperscript{53}

In fact, Rosa Park was not common Black woman. Moreover, she was the vice president of NAACP in the local branch of Montgomery city and a white bus conductor denied her self-respect. Hence, the humiliation of Rosa Park is the insult of all Blacks in the Montgomery city. Therefore, they announced one-day denunciation against Montgomery city bus boycott. However, one-day denunciation was not enough to give the justice to Rosa Park and all Blacks in the city. Therefore, to fight against bus boycott and racial discrimination they established Montgomery Improvement Association. In addition to this, Martin Luther king Jr., became the president of this association. Thereby the leadership of Mr. King, Jr., came into existence in the U.S. Thereafter, he led many marches and movements followed by his non-violent resistance. Although, religion was most dominant influence on Martin Luther king, Jr., he was a research scholar of Christian Theology. Hence, he was deeply known the complex social relationship of American society. He addresses, “[F]reedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed”.\textsuperscript{54} He led the mass movement towards the righteous direction of freedom and equality.

The contemporary Black Power Movement leaders of Martin Luther King, Jr., believed in “Resistance of violent”. Therefore, they opposed the non-violent resistance of King, Jr., Bobby Seal, H. P. Newton, Eldridge Cleaver propagated the revolutionary ideology among the Blacks, and attracted many people towards them. After the
assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., the Black power and Black Panther Party led the Blacks towards revolutionary and violent principle. However, the contribution of Martin Luther King Jr., is a milestone in the history of Civil Rights Movement of the

The rise of the Black Panther Party is revolutionary phenomenon in the Black world. The Black Panthers believed that society could be changed by violent way and revolution. The prominent influence on the Black Panther Party was that of Malcolm-X who the activist of the Black Muslim Movement. The six original Black Panthers are Elbert Howard, Huey Newton, Sherman forte, Bobby Seal (Chairman), Reggie Forte Eldridge Cleaver and Little Bobby Hutton. Moreover, these Black Panthers initiated many revolutionary programme for the Blacks like free breakfast for schoolchildren, free medical centers, and door-to-door programme for health services. In addition to this, the prime objective of the Black Panther Party was to establish socialism in the U.S by the way of revolution.

In October of 1966 in Oakland, California, Huey Newton and Bobby Seale founded the Black panther Party for self-defense. The Panthers Practiced militant self Defense of minority communities against the U.S. government and fought to establish revolutionary socialism through mass organizing and community based programme. The party was one of the first organizations in the U.S. history to militantly struggle for ethnic minority and working class emancipation.\textsuperscript{55}

The Black Panthers initiated the revolutionary activities in the American society. Hence, the U.S. government stood against them. Moreover,
government took police action against the Black Panthers and many panthers were killed in police action. Some of them were imprisoned and executed by the government to annihilate their movement.

Another revolutionary movement in the U.S. is the Black power Movement. The Black Power Movement is the culmination of various ideologies, which are generated in order to separate nation, religion, culture and identity. However, the world “Black Power” created tension and confusion in the minds of many thinkers and scholars. Some of them believe that this is revolutionary movement initiated to challenge the white power in the U.S. In fact, the white racism and exploitation is responsible for the rise of the Black Power Movement in the U.S.

Black Power is a racist political slogan and a name for various associated ideologies. It is used in the movement among the people of Black American descent throughout the world, though primarily by African Americans in the United States. Most prominent in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the movement emphasized racial pride and the creation of black political and cultural institutions to nurture and promote black collective interests and advance black values.\(^5\) Black power initially emphasized on the self-identity and self-respect which was denied to them in racist white American Society. The whites established Ku Klux Klan movement to terrorize the Blacks. As a result, the Blacks felt unsecured in the American Society. Hence, they attracted were towards Black power to answer the white racism. The Black power is the culmination of various ideologies, “the first use of the term “Black Power” as a social and political slogan was by Stokely Carmichael”\(^6\). In
the year 1909, Stokely Carmichael and his friend Charles Hamilton wrote a book entitled *Black Power* to decide the programme and policy of the Black Power Movement. Moreover, the theme of the book is centralized towards the power; it means the power is the most significant aspect for the Black empowerment. Carmichael strongly argued that without the political power the Blacks would not get equal rights in the racist American society. In order to achieve the power, the Blacks should throw their imposed religion, culture and faiths. “He [Carmichael] would carry his Black power message throughout the world, motivating activists in other countries to support his cause and to take up their own campaigns for black liberation”.\(^{58}\) Carmichael appealed to all Blacks in the world to unite under one umbrella in order to create the Black power to fight against racism and exploitation.

Today the Civil Rights Movement of the African Americans led by many leaders of different ideologies. The African Americans are divided in various movements like Black Nationalism, Black Power Movement, Black Panther Party and Black Muslim Movement. Some African Americans initiated Black Art Movement, Black Aesthetic Movement, and Black Theatre Movement in order to show their separate identity as African Americans.

II

**History of the African American Theatre**

Theatre is an ancient form of artistic performance in order to entertain and enlighten the people amongst various cultures and civilizations across the world. It is said that ancient Greece theatre is very old among the all other theatres in the world. However, in the 20\(^{th}\) century excavation in Mohandaro and Hadappa in India proved that before five thousand years there was glorious culture and civilization. The statues of
man and woman in form of dance can prove the existence of mature theatrical art in this unique civilization. Hence, it can be logically stated that the ancient Indian theatre is as old as other ancient theatres across the World.

Although, theatre is an ancient form of artistic performance, its nature and style changed in due course of time. Therefore, theatre has its glorious journey of development since ancient to the modern time. Moreover, religion, rituals, and myths are the basic grounds of raising the ancient theatres. In case of ancient Greek theatre, it was born through the adoration of Dianosis who was their God. As far as the Roman mythological beliefs are concerned, they believe in their Goddesses who is Venus. In order to worship Venus, they performed various religious activities in the forms of theatrical art and style.

Beside, the ancient theatrical background, although, the American theater is not too old, it is most significant and foremost theatre in the world today. Since Columbus discovered America continent, many people in the world migrated to America under the background of various reasons regarding their settlement. Hence, the various myths, rituals, religions and traditions that they had brought with them, were mixed to each other and the multicultural civilization of the America was born. Therefore, the American theatre is also the output of Americanization of all these rituals, myths, beliefs, legends, fables and traditions of various multicultural people across the globe.

Today, in America, various ethnic groups like European Americans, Spanish Americans, Latin Americans, Indian Americans and the Indian Americans (Red Indians) have been living together under the ideology of American nationalism. However, the African Americans among all of these were the former slaves and the white world did not
give a chance to them to mingle with the mainstream of the American Society. Therefore, ultimately they were deprived from the American national and social life. Hence, they preserve the indigenous and independent artistic tradition of their own. Because of this, they hold their independent theatrical tradition in the U.S.

African Americans were brought to America as the indenture servants and were treated as the sub human being by their white masters. When they were brought to America, they brought with them their African culture, myths, rituals, legends, fables, folklore and religion. In due course of time, they were force to accept the religion and beliefs of their masters. However, they did not forget their indigenous cultural heritage of their ancestors until their emancipation from the slavery. At the outset of their arrival in America, the white masters enforced African American women to work as servants and used them as breeding animal to produce more slaves for plantation. Therefore, newborn generation of the slaves was found in the darkness of identity crisis. Hence, their socio-economic and cultural crisis is presented through the Black Theatre. Because of the lack of identity crisis, many Black artists and dramatists are found in identity crisis. In this connection, Paul Carter Harrison’s observation is most notable. He observes:

- Black Theatre is suffering an identity crisis, an inability to define its ideological purpose and performance practice. Unclarity has encouraged uncertainty, even an ambivalent indifference about weather or not the experience should be designated African American.\(^59\)

Harrison’s observation rightly points out the turmoil of the Black Theatre identity. The Black theatre is confused in its ideological direction. What
kind of drama should be performed on the stage? This is the major problem of the Black Theatre. However, the Black Theatre accepted many ideologies and themes in modern age. Therefore, it can be said that Black Theatre is multi thematic and multi-ideological. Paul Carter Harrison illustrates:

Black theatre might even be consigned to the hybrid status of the new performance orthodoxy that agglutinates race, gender, and gay / lesbian social and philosophical issues into a newly marginalized other, designated by the dominant culture as Multicultural Theatre. Presentation of marginality and exploitation are major thematic concerns to the Black Theatre. Moreover, it explores the issues such as racism, sexism and classism. In addition to this, it also presents the newborn problems in the American society such as gay /lesbian relationship and gender based discrimination in the new forms.

It is believed that the roots of the African American folk religion is derived from the Greek Theatre. However, the African American folk religion, formerly the African folk religion, is as old as the Greek Theatre.

“Lee Breuer’s The Gospel at Colonus as an African American play which illustrates the influence of black church rituals especially the black sermon, on the black theatre”. Lee Breuer’s observation seems us the primitiveness of the African folk religion and ultimately realizes the glory and richness of the American folk religion. Lee Breuer suggests:

[T]he roots of ritual are not only in the theatre of the ancient Greeks, but also in African American folk religion. The fusion of the message and the
delivery in Gospel is important to both the church and the theatre.\textsuperscript{62} Lee Breuer’s suggestion, therefore, lights on the deeply rooted African religion and rituals on the Black Theatre. It seems that the originality of their primitive culture is very much a source of this theatre.

Although, the African Americans have their previous cultural and theatrical background, the African American theatrical tradition in America began in 1619 when the African Americans were brought to America as indenture servants. The indenture servants, when they were in Africa, had their glorious cultural heritage. Therefore, when they were brought to America, they brought with themselves their myth, rituals, ceremonies, fables, legends, songs and dance. The cultural heritage brought by them gradually began to assume their means for entertainment and amusement. The most significant aspect in this context is the practices of their African myth and religion which was helped them to keep alive their indigenous culture, which was taught to them by their ancestors. Professor Trylor maintains, “When the lore, songs, dance and masking rituals of African slaves made their entrance on the stage, a native American form was born”.\textsuperscript{63} In due course of time, the indenture servants were transformed into the slaves. Therefore, the slavery became dominant. Thereby, the white masters on the plantation used these slaves. Hence, after being exhausted from the heavy work and torture from white masters, they used to gather in order to entertain themselves and their masters. Moreover, they used to dance for the sake of relaxation from the heavy burden and tiredness of their work. As a result, the slaves played double role as a worker and an entertainer.

In due course of time, this kind of show came to be recognized as “Minstrel show”. It is in this fashion the African American theatrical
tradition was developed. At the outset of these practices, these shows were born out of the plantation times around the houses of the Negro slaves. Thereby, this kinds of shows were the masking rituals and that was the first phase of the development of dramatic form of the African Americans. Moreover, their plantation performances were in the form of caricatures of the slaves especially to please their masters and themselves. “Minstrel show lampooned black people as ignorant, lazy, buffoonish, superstitious, joyous and musical.”64 The African Americans were presented as foolish human being through these shows in order to entertain the white masters. Moreover, the white people also performed the Minstrel show in black face to entertain themselves.

The minstrel show or minstrelsy was an American entertainment consisting of comic skits, variety acts, dancing and music performed by white people in blackface or especially after the Civil War, black people in black face65

At the outset of arrival of the African Americans in the U.S. was basic cause for the creativity of minstrel shows and its further development. However, what is the foundation of all over African American arts? This is most penetrating issue in the discourse of African American arts and culture. In order to understand this discourse, there are different perspectives. Molefi Kete Asante asserts:

The foundation of all African speculation in religion, art, ethics, moral customs, and aesthetics are derived from systems of knowledge found in ancient Egypt. To some extent it is this foundation, rather than the Greeks, that has made a lasting impact on the Western World.66
Molefi Asante’s assertion points out that Egypt was the most significant source of ancient culture to the world instead of Greece. He argues that all Western civilizations are rooted in Egypt not in Greece. Asante writes from an African oriented perspective in which he offers as a corrective to the Eurocentric perspective that informs almost every aspect of Western culture. Going a step ahead, Afro-centric theorists argue that in actuality Greece was also African in culture and color if not in geography, and that most Greek Gods, heroes and rulers were blacks. Therefore, the issue of color conflict in the U.S. is not rational, although various mythologists and philosophers support it.

The early African American drama was in musical forms; hence, the role of African American music is most fundamental in order to understand the African American Theatre. When the slaves were on plantation, they used to sing various songs; through these practices, the musical forms like slave song, sorrow song and plantation songs were created by them in order to relieve their sorrow.

The African American spiritual is most important form of music. These spirituals fulfilled the appetite of spirituals needs of African Americans. Moreover, the African Americans expressed their will to go beyond the material world through this musical form. Hence, spirituals played prime role in developing the theatrical tradition of the African Americans. Although, the poets of spirituals were illiterate, they used mythological references and symbols.
Lord, I keep so busy praisin’ my Jesus
Keep so busy praisin’ my Jesus
Keep so busy praisin’ my Jesus
Ain’t got time

Although, the predicament and sorrows of the slaves were incomparable with anything, they did not lose their courage. They got merciless and pitiless treatment from the white man on the plantation. Their masters were ruthless and pitiless. However, they praised to them and their senseless God.

Try my best for to serve my master,
Try my best for to serve the lord
Try my best for to serve my master
Hallelujan.

The roots of slavery were deeply rooted in the psyche of the slavery. The white men not only implemented slavery on the physical grounds but also implemented it on the psychological grounds of the slaves. Therefore, African Americans are the double victims of their masters. However, they express their sorrows through spirituals.

Gospel is also central musical form, which influenced the Black theatrical tradition. At the beginning, the African American church is a source of its creation and inspiration. Moreover, the gospel music is not only related to the predicaments of day-to-day life but it also expresses the moral and higher values of human life.

After the abolition of slavery, the most significant form of African American music is Ragtime. It influenced the Black theatrical tradition. It was born and propagated in the South American in order to earn money for survival by the of African American artists.
The Ragtime music expresses the materialistic experience of the African Americans. Moreover, Ragtime does not express the things beyond imagination; it expresses day-to-day life of the Blacks. “Its main characteristic trait is its syncopated or “ragged” rhythm. It began as dance music in the red-light districts of American cities such as St. Louis and New Orleans”.70

It is said that “Blues” are the codes of the African American culture and heritage. Although, the origin of the blues goes back to the days of slavery; it was popularized in the twentieth century in the U.S. “The Blues were born in the North Mississippi Delta following the Civil War. passionate performances of them are deeply rooted in slavery and the African American compositions were field Hollers, Ballads, Church Spirituals and Rhythmic Dance”.71 The Blues are the true expression of history, culture and heritage of the African Americans; hence, it is unique form of African American music. “In the history of music there has probably not been one musical style that has “Popular Music” more than Blues. Blues is also unique, “a musical art from”72 Moreover, many African American blues singers contributed for this specific form. Ma Rainey and Bessie Smith are the most notable names in this connection.

The Jazz is an outstanding and the most popular form of African American music. Hence, the period, from 1940 to1960, is termed as the Jazz era in the U.S.. The Jazz was originated from the Ragtime and Blues. The Jazz freely expresses love, affection, passion and devotion of the African Americans. In addition to this, Jazz is very attractive dance musical form wherein many youths are attracted towards its artistic performances.

Besides these musical forms, shouts, field Hollers, Mellows, jubilees are also pivotal musical forms, which have influenced the Black theatre.
The tradition of dance along with music is also most influential aspect of the African American theatre. Yet, the oral tradition of poetry and music helped to kept alive the indigenous cultural heritage of the African Americans. In addition to this, to please their masters the slaves used to dance, sing, play a drum and banjo before their rough cabin. Moreover, they used to play the role of buffoon who danced and joked.

The African American dance and musical tradition derived from the African heritage. There are various similarities between both the traditions regarding their forms and performance as if both are the sisters of each other. The Juba dance is very famous among the African Americans. However, it is borrowed from the African dance tradition. Moreover, Bamboula and Calinda, especially South American dance forms are also influenced by the African dance tradition. These are also significant forms of dance, which influences the African American theatre like Buck-n-win, Turkey Trot, clog and cake, walk. Thereby, these performances of dance, music helped the African Americans to enter on the stage of theatre. The African American artistic tradition is dominated by the white world in the U.S. They were treated as animals and sub human beings. Hence, whatever was created by them was marginalized by the white audiences and critics. bell hooks maintains:

[W]henever African American created music, dance, poetry and theatre, it was regarded as testimony, bearing witness, challenging racist thinking which suggested that black folks were not fully human, were uncivilized, and that the measure of this was our collective failure to create ‘great art’. 73

54
bell hooks’ point of view rightly throws a light upon the exploitation of the African American artistic tradition. In fact, no art can be uncivilized, however, the white critics considered black art as marginal in order to dominate the black heritage.

Slave narrative is a subgenre of the African American literature that began in the middle of the 19th century. At the outset of middle of the 19th century, there was strong controversy over the slavery in the U.S.. In every respect slavery was protected by Southern States wherein many writers, professors, thinkers and philosophers created pro-slavery thoughts in order to continue slavery in the U.S.. Professor Thomas Dew, a pro-slavery thinker argues:

> In ancient republics of Greece and Rome, where the spirit of liberty glowed with the most intensity, the slaves were more numerous than the freemen. Aristotle and the great men of antiquity believed slavery necessary to keep alive the spirit of freedom.⁷⁴

Although, Southern States protected slavery system, many writers contradicted the evils of slavery. Harriet Beecher Stowe’s book, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852), is the most momentous to expose the cruelty, and brutality of the slavery.

In order to expose the ruthlessness of the slavery number of former slaves wrote slave narratives that are the major part of the African American literature. Harriet Jacobs and Frederic Douglas were most leading writers of the slave narratives of their contemporary time. These slave narratives expose the savageness and merciless life of the slaves. Frederic Douglas’ autobiography entitled *Narrative of the Life of*
Frederic Douglass an American slave is most leading example of the slave narrative. He narrates:

I never saw my mother, to know her as such, more than four or five times in my life; and each of these times was very short in duration, and a night. She was hired by Mr. Stewart who lived about twelve miles from my home. She made her journeys to see me in the night, travelling the whole distance on foot, after the performance of her day’s work.\textsuperscript{75}

Frederic Douglas’ slave narrative exposes the hardship and deep sorrows of the slave life. Moreover, six thousand former slaves wrote oppressive account of their lives. The slave narrative was the first black literary prose genre in the United States. It helped slaves to establish their identity as an African American. In addition to this, it continued to exert the most important influence on African American fictional techniques and themes throughout the 20\textsuperscript{th} century.

At the outset of 1845, the slave narrative stood as a key literary device. It was first used with skill and dramatic manner by William Wells Brown in his *Escape or a Leap for Freedom* which became the first African American dramatic text. William Well Brown’s contribution to the African American theatre is most notable. Although he was not the first black dramatist, he was one of the earliest African American dramatists. With the publication of *The Escape or a Leap for Freedom* in 1888, Brown became the first African American playwrights to be published in the U. S.\textsuperscript{76} Moreover, his present five acts melodrama explores racism and predicament of the slaves to escape from their masters. The play centralizes around the two characters Clean and
Melinda who were the victim of slavery. In fact, the play is based on the autobiographical experiences of Mr. Brown as a former slave.

Ira Aldridge (1807 – 1867) was most popular actor and dramatist associated with the African Theatre Company. Moreover, his two plays contributed to the Black Theatre movement and its development and extension. *The Black Doctor* (1847) and *Le Docteur Noir* (1840), his plays, were famous among the people. The thematic concern of his plays is the slavery and emancipation from harassment. Moreover, he also presents the complex human relationship with their masters. “Aldridge was the first U.S. born actor to gain popularity and ultimately critical acclaim on the European stage”. He introduced the African American culture to the European stage and achieved sympathy for Black people and their struggle. Linda Carter Notes:

He worked backstage at the Chatham and Park theatres around 1816 or 1820 and gained acting experience with the African company, a group founded and managed by William Henry Brown James Hewlett, the African company’s leading actor; and other blacks. The group built the resident African American theatre in the United States in 1821. Aldridge’s contribution as an actor and playwright is most key aspect of the theatrical tradition of the African Americans.

W.E.B. DuBois, the most outstanding African American thinker and philosopher, states that there was not proper writings of the plays by the 1920s. On the other hand by the 1923 this situation changed and a dozen of or more plays appeared on the African American themes. The most significant thing in this specific period is some of the American
dramatists also wrote plays on African American themes. In this connection, the contribution of Eugene O’Neill is most remarkable who explored the new themes regarding the African American life such as racial introversion, self-identification, family relationship and interpretation of their psyche.

At the outset of vast development of the African American theatre, the musical plays were most popular among the audiences. *Bandona Land (1908)* was musical play, which earned a great deal of fame in the time. The most remarkable phenomenon of this specific time is the establishment of The Crescent Theatre (1909). This theatre contributed largely to create the basement for the African American theatre. This was the time of mobilization of the African Americans in order to enlighten them about their socio-economic and cultural development. Therefore, many black artists and dramatists tried to establish theaters in the U.S..

Jason L. Ellerbe states:

> There were very few Black-managed playhouse that existed before 1900, but by 1910 the Indianapolis Freedman recorded that there were fifty three theatres owned by blacks in the United States, with the large marginality (forty – two) of them in the South.  

The decade 1910 onwards was the time of the black theatres. The Black Theatre after 1910 was looked as profession and many blacks turned towards theatre especially in the South.

Thereafter, the abolition of slavery and the American Civil War, the African American playwrights created many plays regarding the socio-economic and cultural turmoil of the blacks as the Americans.
Moreover, the Civil Rights Movement, like NAACP, initiated by radical African American activists propagated that the African American theatre could be used as a weapon to destroy the prejudices and archetypal images of the blacks in the minds of both the whites and blacks. In addition to this, W.E.B. DuBois, the founder president of NAACP, believed that the problem of 20th century is the problem of color line which means the problem of racism. Therefore, he appealed to the black dramatists, actors and producers to work together in order to battle against inequality and inhumanity.

Thereafter, the First World War, the African American theatre came into full swing because of the Harlem Renaissance. Many African American actors, dramatists and producers came to the Harlem in order to establish theatres to achieve glorious career in dramaturgy and acting.

Georgia Douglas Johnson was the most successful woman playwright of the Harlem Renaissance. She wrote *Sunday Morning in the South* (1925), *Safe* (1929) and *Blue-Eyed Black Boy* (1935). These plays are characterized by the themes such as racism, lynching, rituals and encounter of two races.

Eugene (Jean) Pinchback Toomer was another important figure in the Harlem Renaissance. His plays, *Natalie Mann* (1922), *Cane* (1923) and *Balo* (1924), handle the various issues regarding the African American life. Moreover his play, especially *Cane*, explores the issue of freedom of African American women as well as the problem regarding the identity crisis. *Cane* is significant contribution to Harlem Renaissance by him. Emma Waters Dowson notes, “While critics and scholars credit Jean Pinchback Toomer with heralding the beginning of the Harlem Renaissance with the publication of *Cane* in 1923.”

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The most pivotal play of the age is *Harlem* (1929) by Wallace Thurman that is based on Thurman’s short story entitled *Cordelia the Crude*. The play contains a number of themes prevalent in Harlem Renaissance literature like, “the devastating effect of the depression of black family, the color and ethnic prejudices among black; the migration of black from the South to find the better life”. Moreover, it explores the urban predicaments of migrated people from rural to both urban and Northern States. *Appearance* (1925) is another important play of the age by Gerald Anderson.

The great depression of the 1929 strongly affected on the life of African American and their arts. However, in 1930 the African American theatre got the recognition and popularity. Moreover, the African American playwrights got commercial importance in the theatre. They genuinely portrayed the struggle against poverty, racism and identity problems of the Blacks.

The 1930 was the most remarkable and momentous year for the African Americans Theatre. It is the year in which the Blacks established the Federal Theatre. In addition to this, Federal Theatre helped them to create new themes and techniques. The most important plays by Frank Wilson, *Meck Mose* and *Walk Together Chillum* (1934) were produced in the Federal Theatre.

The Federal Theatre was always on the forefront to organize the experimental drama, classical plays and musical shows. Hall Johnson’s play *Run Little Chillum* (1933), Rudolf Fisher’s *Conjure Man Dies* (1936) and Hugh Alison’s *The Trial of Dr. Bake* were most popular plays of the age.

Rudolf Fisher’s *Conjure Man Dies*, “is an adoption of his novel, *The Conjure Man Die: A Mystery Tale of Dark Harlem*, a detective story
that until recently has been considered the first detective story by an African American”.  

The eminent figure of the Harem Renaissance is Langston Hughes. Although, he is especially popular for his poetry, he wrote forty plays separately and twenty-three elaborately on various themes and techniques. *Mulatto* (1935) is his outstanding creation, which reveals tragedy of Mulatto. Robert, the protagonist of the play, is the victim of slavery because he is the son of a white master and black housekeeper Cora Lewis. Moreover, *Don’t You Want to be Free?* is also remarkable play by Langston Hughes produced on Broadway Theatre.

The tragedy related to the Federal Theatre was abolished by Congress in the year 1939. Langston Hughes and Hilary Phillips established Harlem Suitcase Theatre in 1939. Thereafter, various African American plays were produced on Harlem Suitcase Theatre. Hughes was genuine dramatist who was interested in the plays since his childhood and boyhood. “When Langston moved to New York in order to attend Columbia University, he spent more time on Broadway than in classroom”.  

The leading event of the 1940s was African American artists established The American Negro Theatre. The establishment of the theatre was motivational force for African American playwrights and artists; hence, they were able to produce many plays on the black themes.

The plays of Theodore Ward were popularized largely in this specific age. He wrote *Big White Fog* (1938) and *Our Land* (1947). These plays are meaningful in order to expose the suppression of the African Americans.

The outstanding contributor in the African American literature of this age was Richard Wright. He initiated the tradition of protest literature
in African American literature. His most outstanding protest novel *Native Son* was converted into a play under the same title. *Native Son* appeared on Broadway in 1941 and propagated the themes like, “injustice, racism, violence and oppression”. Bigger Thomas is protagonist of the play and represents black youth as inhuman being. Walcott Gibbs considered *Native Son* as “one of the few satisfactory drama of this unfortunate season.”

Abraham Hill’s *Onstrivers* (1940) and Theodore Browne’s *Natural Man* (1940) are notable production of 1941.

The 1950s brought the impact of modernization and technology on every day life of the blacks. The 1950s provided most Americans the materialistic pleasure and prosperity. The most influential dramatist of the 1950s was Lorraine Hansberry who presents the socio- economic and cultural struggles amongst the Blacks and Whites. In addition to this, her play, *A Raisin in the sun* (1959), exposes racial stereotypes and some important ideas of the Harlem Renaissance like examining racial human dignity. Loretta G. Woodard states, “Using conventional twentieth – century social drama and realistically portraying black family life, all of Lorraine Hansberry’s plays break new ground as she reveals the struggles of blacks and whites in America”.

William Branch’s play, *A Medal for Willie* and *In Splendid Error* were produced in the year 1951. Furthermore, notable playwright of the period is Loften Michal. In his famous essay entitled *Negro Writers and His Materials* (1959), he pointed out, “White writers have portrayed blacks as inferior beings to keep them in place”. His another play, *A Land Beyond River* (1956), is a plea for the equal education of all the children regardless of their race.
Luis Peterson’s *Take a Giant Step* (1953) and Theodore Ward’s *John Browne* (1950) were also produced in 1950. Peterson’s *Take a Giant Step* “demonstrates the difficulties of a young black adolescent male growing up in a predominantly white middle-class neighborhood in New York and confronting the insidious racism of his teacher and his classmates”.

The 1960s was hallmark in the African American theatre and literature. The absurdity and sense of alienation are most significant themes of 1960s literature. Moreover, The Civil Rights Movement, feminism, anti-war protest, minority activism and arrival of counter culture were part and parcel of the American society. Many social activists contributed in the Civil Rights Movement such as Frederic Douglas, Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. DuBois, Betty Freidan and Martin Luther King, Jr.. These social activists tried to enlighten the African Americans in order to go for their socio-economic and cultural development.

The Black Theatre of the 1960s made changes in its form and themes. Therefore, theatre of the 1960s was known as Militant Theatre or The Theatre of revolt. The most notable playwrights of the 1960s were Imamu Amiri Baraka and Ed Bullins. Braka’s play *Dutchman* (1964) *The Toilet* (1964), and *The Slave* (1964) were most influential to awaken the African Americans. These plays especially present the militant mood. Susan C.W. Abbotson states:

> Black Theatre of 1960s in particular, presented the public with vehemently militant, as well as sensitive, portrayals of African Americans and their role in American society and history.
The Black Power Movement initiated by various African American activists strongly affected the Black Theatre. In order to empower the African American ethnic minority in the U.S., the activists of the movement propagated various ideologies such as separate nation for blacks and radical way to oppose the domination of the white race. Therefore, to propagate their ideology, they used Black Theatre as a weapon against the whites. Therefore, the Black Theatre movement came into existence in the U.S. Amiri Baraka (L‘Roi Jones), was the most important and key figure to initiate the Black Theatre Movement in the U.S. This can be understood by the following statement:

From 1964 at least through 1970 Baraka was generally considered to be the dominant force in the contemporary black theatre movement. His plays were written as a weapon with which to confront racism on a cultural level just as other Blacks were using other means to confront it in the streets. Plays such as *The Toilet, Great goodness of life, Baptism, and Madheart* told off threatened, condemned, accused, and hurled righteous invectives at the system for past and present injustices inflicted on black people.91

After, the inception of the Black Theatre Movement, many Black Theatres comes on the forefront in order to enlightenment of the Blacks. In addition to this, The Black Art Theatre, The Negro Ensemble Company and New Federal Theatre contributed for the Black Theatre Movement. These Theatres presented various plays on racial themes and the ways to empower the Blacks.
Ed Bullins has written one hundred plays related to the various themes of African American life. His twentieth century cycle plays are, *In Wine Time, In New England Winer, The Duplex, The Fabulous, Miss Marie and Clara’s old Man*. Bullins highlights the predicaments of lower middle class and their intoxicated life style. Ladrica Menson Furry states: “The plays of Bullins’s twentieth century cycle not only reflect his adherence to the tenet of the black aesthetics, black theatre movements through their subject matter or even their specific audiences, but also through the important message that Bullins attempts to send the African Americas themselves. For example, the alcohol abuse that is present in the majority of these seven play.”

The outstanding and unique figure of 1980s was August Wilson. The technique he developed for his dramaturgy is his own creative genius, which he applies to stage the African American’s predicaments. His plays are important because he incorporated hundred years history of African American in order to present their experiences on the stage.

The Black Theatre in general explores the various socio-economic, cultural and political issues of the African Americans. The genuine fact regarding their exploration is that they followed their indigenous African heritage in order to perform various plays on the stage. Moreover, they followed fables, legends, arts, blues, spirituals and culture that are full of myths, folk songs and folk instruments that are African. In addition to this, the African religious tradition also helped the Black Theatre to some extent. On the other hand, some of the African Americans created their own aesthetics to establish independent identity in the U.S. “[A] separate symbolism, mythology, critique, iconology” that would become known as
the black aesthetics”93 Hence, many African American writers and dramatists try to create literature under the principles of the Black aesthetics.

Today, the Black Theatre has established strong recognition and identity in the United States of America. It is the most significant means in order to explore various issues of African American life. It explores the issues such as racism, gender bias, ethnic discrimination, poverty, myth, folks and rituals.

III

August Wilson

August Wilson was born in the Hill district of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. His father was a German immigrant baker. He seldom spent time with his family. August Wilson’s mother Daisy was African American cleaner. His parents stayed together until he was five. His mother raised their children in a two-room apartment above a grocery store at 1727, Bedford Avenue. This financially depressed neighborhood was inhabited by many black Americans, Jewish and Italian immigrants. During Wilson’s teenage in the late 1950s his mother married to David Bedford, and the Bedford family moved from the Hill area in Pennsylvania to a white working class neighborhood, at “Hazelwood”. There, they suffered from the racial discrimination. Wilson was the only black student at the Central Catholic High School in 1959 at Pittsburgh. He was threatened and abused by other students. He dropped out of Gladstone High School in 1960 when a teacher accused him of plagiarisation of 20 pages paper on Napoleon. Wilson was treated as second human being in his childhood days. Regarding his experiences as an American, he states: “I think the black Americans have the most dramatic story of mankind to tell”.94 Though, he suffered from racial
discrimination from the whites, he is artistic towards the grief, anguish and anxiety of his childhood experiences as a black American boy. He believed that art is a foremost weapon to express the suppression of the African Americans.

Although, he was banished from American school as a black student, he made extensive use of the Carnegie Library to read a lot of books. The role of Carnegie Library in Wilson’s life was crucial and significant. He gives the credit of his career to the Carnegie Library. He Says:

I got my first library card from the Hill District branch of the Carnegie Library on Wylie Avenue in 1950. Labor historians do not speak well of Andrew Carnegie ... [but he] will forever be for me that man who made it all possible for me to be standing here today.95

He learned to read at the age of four by the help of his mother Daisy Wilson. At the age of 12, he spent his teen years educating himself by reading Ralph Ellison, Richard Wright, Langston Hughes and Arna Bontemps. He says, “I sought out black writers. I read books on history, sociology. I began to understand the world and the society in which I lived”.96 Wilson is very multi-dimensional writer because he had read books from multidisciplines in his early age. Hence, his vision to look at black issues is incomparable. In his early age, he was fond of books. Books were the heart of Wilson, He says, “from my early childhood, books have always been an important part of my life.... I have often fallen asleep with a book in my arms where there should have been a woman”.97

By this time, Wilson knew he wanted to be a writer but this created tension with his mother who wanted him to be a lawyer. She forced him
to learn the law. Therefore, he joined the United State Army for three years. However, he left it and went back and started odd jobs such as being a porter, cook, gardener and dishwasher. During this time he changed his name from August kittle to August Wilson to honour his mother after his father’s death. “August Wilson officially erased his connection to his real father when he adopted his mother’s name in the 1970s.”

August Wilson biologically is a mixed child of mixed race. His father was German and mother was African American. Wilson wants to continue the African American name. Hence, he had changed his name that is a pivotal event in his life as an African American.

In 1968, Wilson co-founded the Black Horizon Theatre in the Hill District of Pittsburgh along with his friend Rob Penny. Wilson wants to explore the African American culture through the art of theatre. He believed that theatre is an effective weapon to establish the African American culture and consciousness as a Black. He also wants to establish theatre to politicize the various issues regarding the Black life and their experiences. In an Interview in *Paris Review*, August Wilson states, “With my good friend Rob Penny, I founded the Black Horizons Theatre in Pittsburgh with the idea of using the theatre to politicize the community or, as we said in those days, to raise the consciousness of the people.”

Wilson was married three times. His first marriage was to Brenda Burton in 1969. In the same year, his stepfather, David Bedford, died. Wilson’s oldest daughter Sakina Ansari was born on January 22, 1970. In 1981, he was married to Judy Oliver, a social worker. However, they got divorced in 1990.

Wilson received many honourary degrees and awards for his literary contribution in theatre including an honourary “Doctor of
Humanity” from the University of Pittsburgh. He also got honors and awards such as Pulitzer Prize, New York Drama Critics Circle Award, Tony Award Nomination, Drama Desk Award, Literary Lion Award, American Theatre Critics Association Award, National Humanities Medal and Outer Critics Circle Award. Wilson is most influential literary academician. He is a major voice of the African American Theatre. He tried to establish African American theatre as a fundamental weapon to propagate African American culture throughout America.

At the outset of his career, Wilson envisioned theatre as a means to raise the collective community’s consciousness about black life in twentieth-century American and committed himself to write a cycle of ten plays that would rewrite the history of each decade of this century so that black life become a more fully acknowledged part of American’s theatrical history.\(^{100}\)

Twentieth century is full of various movements in life of the Blacks. Hence, Wilson writes twentieth-century cycle to bring out socio-economic and cultural turmoil and suppression of the African Americans through the art of theatre.

The Black Art Movement of the 1960s has influenced Wilson deeply. The Black artists and activists launched a movement to establish the Black culture and separate identity. They also argued that it has many good things like music, oral history, folklore and great myths. Hence, it is not lesser than any other culture in the world. To establish Black as important as the white, many black artists, musicians and dancers used their genius to contribute to the Black Art Movement of the 1960s. Wilson is one of the playwrights and theatrical artists of this 1960s
movement. Wilson “became a part of the Black Art Movement in Pittsburgh during the 1960”\textsuperscript{101}

Many writers and their traditions have influenced Wilson. The tradition of African American music, especially ‘Blues’, has influenced him to a great extent. He knows that the African Americans do not have the written tradition of culture, if they want to explore their culture, they must go back to their black music, particularly the ‘blues’. He believes that Blues are the codes of the African American culture that his ancestors preserved since the day they came to America in the chains. He strongly believed that if they want to establish African American culture, history and mythology, they should go back to the Blues. He says, “My discovery of the blues in 1965 was the last piece in puzzle of my education. With the blues I had discovered the mythology, history and social organization of the culture I had learned at my mother’s knee.”\textsuperscript{102}

When he first listened the records of “Bessie Smith’s” “\textit{Nobody in Town can Back a Sweet Jelly Roll Like Mine}”, he was inspired so much from this blue that started to study African American oral tradition through the blues music. Moreover, he says, “I see the blues as the book”.\textsuperscript{103} Above statement can state the faith and trust of Wilson on blues music.

The influences we find on Wilson’s dramaturgy are ‘four Bs’, they are Romare Bearden, Imamu Amiri Baraka, Jorge Luis Borges and Blues. Wilson Says:

\begin{quote}
My influences have been what I call my four Bs – the primary one being the blues, then Borges, Baraka and Bearden. From Borges, those wonderful gaucho stories from which I learned that you can be specific as to a time and place and culture and still have the work resonate with the
\end{quote}
universal themes of love, honor, duty, betrayal, etc. From Amiri Baraka I learned that all art is political, though I didn’t write Political plays.... From Roamer Bearden, I learned that the fullness and richness of everyday ritual life can be rendered without compromise or sentimentality.\(^\text{104}\)

To understand the art of any artist, it is important to understand the key influences on him. In terms of Wilson, many great artists and dramatists influenced him. Burden’s painting influenced Wilson’s visual language; it is reflected in many plays of Wilson. The influence of Amiri Baraka on Wilson is fundamental because Baraka is a key dramatist in African American theatre. He is the spokesperson of African American slavery, racism and history of the blacks. Hence, he is significant aspect of Wilson’s dramaturgy and ideology. Burgess is outstanding storywriter. He has written mythological and ritual oriented stories. The use of Wilson’s rituals in his plays is the model of Burgess stories. The use of history, ritual, dance and quest for ones own self through the blues are important aspects that Wilson took from LeRoi Jones. Moreover, Wilson’s presentation of the social structure of American society is based on Imamu Amiri Baraka’s writing. It seems that socialism was the part and parcel of Wilson’s thinking. He followed the technique of story telling of Jorge Borges, an Argentine short story writer. Apart from these influences, Wilson was influenced by socio-economic and cultural history of the Black race.

Wilson started his career as a poet and slowly turned into a dramatist. Poetry is a base of his dramaturgy. His ability to use the ordinary language and poetic sensibility are useful in expressing indepth insights of the black people through his plays. He states, “(T)he
foundation of my playwriting is poetry. Not so much in terms of the language but in the concept. After writing poetry for twenty one years I approach a play the same way”. Music and poetry therefore, are the most important aspects of Wilson’s consideration of dramatic art. He believed that music is central in the history of the Blacks. Therefore, music should be considered as prime factor of African American history and art. He articulates: “The only research I do is to listen to the music. There is lot of history of our people in the music”. At the outset of his career as a dramatist, he did not get proper success. However, he didn’t stop his writing. His first play, *Jitney*, was rejected from Eugene O’Neill Theatre Centre of National playwrights’ conference. However, it was accepted by the Minneapolis playwrights’ center in 1980 and produced at the Allegheny Repertory Theatre in Pittsburgh in 1982. He was with Claude Purdy at St. Paul in ‘Science Museum of Minnesota’ as a scriptwriter His success as a dramatist, he says, “I think ultimately the writer can only write himself”. This vision of Wilson is considerable. He believes that writing is nothing but a self-satisfaction and any writer can write for self-glorification and catharsis. He articulates, “(A)s an artist, you do whatever’s necessary”. His attitude and vision as an artist and playwright is clear and these are not ambiguous or vague. He believes that what should writer and what should not be done by him is totally dependent on himself. This kind of thinking of Wilson as a playwright is different from the other black playwrights. Hence, his contribution and direction to the Black theatre is incomparable and uncountable.

Wilson was born in Pittsburgh in 1945. The role of Pittsburgh’s surroundings in the development of him as a playwright are foremost and fundamental. In Pittsburgh, he experienced the harassment of the Black
people. Therefore, the setting of his many plays is Pittsburgh. He took
dialects of the people and events from Pittsburgh to develop his
dramaturgy. For the sake of his career, he left Pittsburgh. However, the
image of his native place was permanent and forever in his mind and
psyche as a source of inspirations. He articulates, “I left Pittsburgh but
Pittsburgh never left me”.110

On August 26, 2005 Wilson told his home town newspaper The
Pittsburgh Post Gazette that he had been diagnosed by liver cancer. He
also declared that he would die after two or three months. The declaration
of one’s own death is very unfortunate event in the life of a human being.
Wilson had to face such event with great courage and confidence. Harry
J. Elam Jr., states about the last movements of Wilson’s life, “It was with
spirit, faith, courage and hope that Wilson faced in his last movements of
life. He was prepared to die, as he felt he had completed his life’s
work”111

First three plays of August Wilson’s Ten-play cycle cover
chronologically each decade of the 20th century. These dramas are Gem of
the Ocean (1900s), Joe Turner’s Come and Gone (1910s), and Ma
Rainey’s Black Bottom 1920s). These plays have explored the African
American life of the first 30 years in the twentieth century. Each play is
separate and contains 10 years experiences. The other three plays of
August Wilson are The Piano Lesson (1930s) Seven Guitar (1940s) and
Fences (1950s). These plays have reflected a flood of light on the African
American myths, rituals, folklores, racism, migration, legacy, and
heritage. Moreover, in other
four plays of August Wilson’s ten play cycle are Two Trains Running
(1960s), Jitney (1970s), King Hedley II (1980s), and Radio Golf (1990s).
The themes and issues of these plays are urban renewal, migration,
Hurry J. Elam. Jr. has rightly stated that, Wilson had prepared to die, having been completed his life work. Wilson has written a century cycle of ten-plays. It is his life work and it is complete and perfect as if he knew before death that the life mission of himself is over. About his life Wilson says:

To arrive at this moment in my life, I have traveled many roads, some circuitous, some brambled and rough, some sharp and straight, and all of them have led as if by some grand design to the one burnished with and small irrevocable tragedies. Although, Wilson’s life is full of struggle and obstacles, he faced these great challenges with great courage. He made his life meaningful by devoting himself for writing plays and performing them in theatre for the sake of exploration of the Black culture and life. One of the critics of Wilson, Marion Mclinton, articulates, “August Wilson is the griot, our Homer, our Shakespeare, our grand father sitting on the front porch telling us the stories that we need to know.” The place of Wilson in the minds of African Americans is very respectful as he devoted himself to serve and preserve the African American culture and society.

Wilson died on October 2, 2005. On October 10, 2005 only 14 days after Wilson’s death the Virginia Theatre in New York’s Broadway theatre district was renamed as “The August Wilson’s Theatre”. This is the first Broadway theatre to bear the name of an African American. In addition to this, the vacated Republican street was also renamed as “August Wilson Way”. After his death, he got recognition in the
American society, which was not given to anybody except the white Americans.

Therefore, in the present research an attempt has been to analyze the social, economic and cultural aspects of August Wilson’s plays and the achievements made by the African Americans. These plays also reveal the African American experiences of each decade of the twentieth century. Various African American issues and themes such as slavery, poverty, racism, classism, sexism, identity, myth, legend, fable, religion, and rituals are revealed in Wilsonian dramaturgy.

Wilson records the one hundred years history of the African American life through these plays. Therefore, an attempt has been made to study his plays in detail in the following chapters.
Notes and References:

3. Ibid
4. Ibid
5. Ibid
6. Ibid
7. Ibid
8. Ibid
9. Manusmriti: A prejudiced and evil constitution of India before the Independence. The laws in the book was written by Manu who was the Brahmin by Varna.
15. No More Auction Block For Me, Retrieved August 2010 URL: http:// www.negrospirituals.com/new song/all
17. Ibid, P. 58.
20. Ibid, P. 73.
22. **Under Ground Railroad**: It is a movement initiates by abolitionists in order to protect and emancipate the slaves from their masters.
27. Katz, P. 95.


36. Ibid.


40. Ibid, P.5.


42. Ibid.


45. **Pan Africanism**: The concept coined by Marcus Garvey in connection with the Negroes in the world. It means go back to the African for the culture and religion.


47. Katz, P. 144.


49. Ibid, P. 151.


51. Ibid.

52. Katz, P. 160.


57. Ibid.


60. Ibid.


62. Ibid.


65. Ibid.

67. Ibid.


72. Ibid.


77. Ibid, P. 2.

78. Ibid, P. 1.


82. Ibid, 437.

83. Ibid, 168.

84. Ibid, 223.

85. Ibid, 499.

86. Ibid, 501.

87. Ibid, 211.

88. Ibid, 304.

89. Ibid, 349.


97. Ibid.


102. **Bessie Smith** was African American Blue musician, she has constructed and collected many Blues, and hence she was famous in African American world.


109. Ibid.

