CHAPTER – III

AUGUST WILSON’S PLAYS: 1930s-1950s
THE PIANO LESSON 1930s

August Wilson’s *The Piano Lesson* is the most outstanding contribution in the African American theatre, which explores various socio-economic and cultural dimensions of the 1930s African American life. The heritage and legacy of the African American family are most leading issues of this play. Moreover, it also contains various supernatural elements in order to present the African American culture on the stag. *The Piano Lesson* is set in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in 1936, was first produced in 1987 at the Yale Repertory Theatre. Moreover, it also own Pulitzer Prize (1990), New York Drama Critic Circle Award and Tony Award Nomination (1990) for the best play.

All the scenes and actions of the play take place in the house of Doaker Charles at Pittsburgh. Doaker is a 47 years African American railroad cook. Boy Willie, a 30 years nephew of Doaker Charles, comes to Pittsburgh with his friend Lymon from Mississippi in order to sell watermelons and Piano. Boy Willie wants money to buy Sutter’s land in the Mississippi who was their master in the slavery era. Hence, he wants to sell family piano and watermelons to Pittsburgh to be a landowner like other white people. However, his sister Berniece migrated three year before at Pittsburgh with family piano in the house of her uncle Doaker Charles because her husband Crowley was killed in the Mississippi in the wood robbery. In addition, she considers her brother Boy Willie responsible for her husband’s death.

The fundamental clash between Boy Willie and his sister Berniece is 137 years old family piano. When Boy Willie tells his plan to sell the piano and to buy Sutter’s farm, Berniece goes against him saying that the piano is family’s legacy and heritage.
Although, Berniece does not welcome Boy Willie, he stays there asking his uncle about the drinks. Moreover, he informs Doaker about the ghost of Sutter. Thereafter, they enjoy the drink on the death of Sutter’s ghost who was their family’s master during the slavery days.

Avery Brow is a Southern 38 years old sharecropper who also comes to Pittsburgh after Berniece husband’s death in the South. He comes to the North and becomes a preacher in order to marry with Berniece. He wants Berniece’s piano in order to build a Church of his own. However, Berniece does not agree with him and never gives her Piano.

Thereafter, at upstairs Berniece shouts loudly and tells to Boy Willie that she has seen the ghost of Sutter. She says, “Sutter.... Sutter’s standing at the top of the step.” (TPL, 13). Boy Willie consoles her that the ghost of Sutter is already died in the well. Thereafter, he tells her the plan to sell the piano. However, she does not respond to his plan.

The second sense of the first act begins after three days when Doaker’s brother Wining Boy a 30 year old blues musician brings recent news about Boy Willie, Lymon and Crawley. He informs that Boy Willie, Lymon and Berniece’s husband Crawley were working in the Parchman Farm where they stole woods. Hence, they are hunted by some men and Berniece’s husband Crawley was killed and other two were imprisoned. Having completed the news, Wining Boy sings a work song.

In the act II Doaker Charles dictates the history of the 137 years old family piano to Lymon and Boy Willie. He illustrates that in the slavery days Robert Sutter owned the Charles family. He wants a piano in order to give it as an anniversary present to his wife. However, he did not have money. Hence, in order to purchase the piano he traded Doaker’s grandmother, Berniece and her father for the piano. However, in due
course of time, Robert Sutter’s wife missed her slaves. Hence, Robert Sutter ordered Doaker’s grandfather to carve the pictures of his wife and son on the piano, thereby Mrs. Sutter can see them. Mr. Charles carved many scenes of his family on the piano.

After the slavery and a generation latter, Boy Charles, Boy Willie and Berniece’s father stole the piano from Sutter because he believed that the Piano itself it is heritage and legacy of Charles family. Hence, keeping piano in the house of Sutter is a kind of slavery of his ancestors. However, after robbery of the piano from Sutter, he was hunted and fired alive in a train boxcar with his hob and became a ghost. His widow preserves the piano for 17 years and passed it to Berniece. After Berniece husband’s death in the South, she carries it to Pittsburgh to her uncle’s house.

Though, Boy Willie knows the history of piano’s legacy, he wants to sell it because he believes past could be used to protect the future. He tries to move the piano. However, Berniece comes and warns him that he can’t do so because doing so is destruction of family legacy and heritage. Thereafter, Meritha, an eleven years daughter of Berniece cries in fear on the top of the house. It indicates audiences the presence of Sutter’s ghost.

The first scene of the second act of The Piano Lesson opens in the following morning when Doaker sings a cook song. Thereupon, Boy Willie comes with a suit; he sells his suit to Lymon saying that it is magical which helps to play magic on women. Then, they plan to watch movie and find some local girls.

The second scene of the second act opens at the evening when Berniece sets a tub for bath in the kitchen. Then, there is knock on the door and Avery comes in the home. He purposes to Berniece to marry. However, she denies the proposal saying that why a woman cannot be a
woman without a man. Moreover, she request Avery to bless her house in order to get rid from the ghost as a holy man. On the other hand, Avery asks her to give the Piano to him in order to help to build Church. Burniece tells him that piano is untouched because the ghost of Sutter would awaken.

The third scene of the second act begins when Boy Willie enters with Grace, a local girl, in the house. Berniece orders them to get out from the house. Meanwhile, Lymon comes there with his magical suit and perfume. He gives it to Berniece and plays its magic on her.

The fourth scene of second act discloses the plan of Boy Willie to move piano from the house and to sell it.

The final and crucial scene of the play opens on the next day when Boy Willie sits on the sofa. Boy Willie tells Meretha about the ghost of yellow Dog. He tries to move Piano from the house; however, Berniece comes and warns him with Crawley’s gun. Meanwhile, Wining Boy comes and the tension of the situation is released to some extent. Thereafter, Avery tries to bless the house to get rid from Sutter’s ghost. He reads the Bible and throws some water from the bottle on the piano. At the end of the play, Sutter’s ghost comes and Boy Willie struggles against him. Berniece understands that the only Christian faith is not sufficient in order to save her brother from Sutter’s ghost. Hence, she take piano and sings a ritual chant to call her ancestors to save Boy Willie. Finally, Sutter’s ghost is defeated Berniece, and Boy Willie reconcile. Boy Willie prepares to move to the Mississippi after thanking his sister and the play ends.

The African American family is central and pivotal subject of The Piano Lesson. Wilsonhian dramaturgy indicates that through accepting family history, culture, and faith they can move further in order to safe
their future. If the African Americans forget the legacy and heritage of
their family, they would be found in cultural dilemma. Hence, Wilson’s
present play appeals to the community to preserve their family history
and heritage, because that is authentic source of their culture and religion.
In this connection C. Patric Tyndall notes:

> With this play, Wilson suggest that only through
> acceptance of a family’s experience, both good and
> bad, and the power that is derived from long – gone
> family members can African American families
> move bravely into their future, healing old
> wounds.

Therefore, Wilson explores the history of an African American family
through this play to enlighten and empower the community towards their
cultural consciousness in order to strengthen their confidence.

Although, family history and its legacy are important themes of the
play, Wilson does not go back to Africa in order to search the roots of
African American culture and heritage in *The Piano Lesson*. He suggests
that they should search their identity within their family history in the
South America. Wilson wants to lead the community towards the proper
direction in order to grand them from the tyranny of cultural dilemma.
C.P. Tyndall notes, “although this play makes use of the past, it does not
go back to Africa; rather, the play finds its strength and its history by the
more recent, southern, African American family tree.” Wilson wants to
avoid the complexities and turmoil in identity of the African Americans.

Boy Willie, a major character in the play believes that the past of
the family should be used in order to safe family’s future. He wants to
sell the 137 years old piano which is the symbol of his ancestry. Boy
Willie wants to sell this piano in order to buy the land of Robert Sutter
where his ancestors have worked as the slaves. Now, the last hair of Sutter is ready to sell his land to Boy Willie. He is the man of new generation and believes that one can find one’s destiny only when one can have his land. His ideology symbolizes the American capital social order and dilemma of the American dream to be a landowner. As Qun Wang observes:

Boy Willie represents the new generation of African American growing up in the South. He believes that the only way for African Americans to gain freedom, dignity and respect is to stand up for what belongs to them.\(^3\)

Boy Willie is practical and wants to be like white man as independent and self-dependent. On the other hand, his sister Bernice wants to preserve her family’s legacy and heritage. She does not want to sell piano.

BOY WILLIE : Sutter’s brother say he selling the land to me. He waiting on me now. Told me he’d give me two weeks. I got one part. Sell them watermelons, get me another part. Then we can sell that Piano and I’ll have the third part.

BERNIECE : I ain’t selling that piano, Boy Willie. If that’s why you come up here you can just forget about it

(TPL, 27)

Berniece is aware about the struggle of her ancestors in the past. Her ancestors suffered a lot to save the Piano. Her father was killed in the robbery of the piano and mother suffered for 17 years in order to save this piano. Hence, she does not want to use the past to change her future. It
means she wants to preserve her identity as an African American. “The Piano Lesson dramatizes the struggle of African Americans to reclaim their sense of history and identity. The question is not whether the piano belongs to Berniece and Boy Willie but how to claim what belongs to them.”

The use of dramatic devices and symbols are most significant characteristic of Wilsonian dramaturgy. In order to connote deeper meaning and significance of the events he uses various dramatic devices. The Piano Lesson contains the qualities of epic, which are incorporated in the names of the characters. The names such as, Berniece, Boy Willie, Doaker and Wining Boy symbolizes some significant event or the history in the past. As Qun Wang illustrates:

The Piano Lesson takes on an epic scope that is emphasized in the characters names. For example, Berniece is named after the great-grandmother who was traded for the piano, and Boy Willie is named after a great grandmother named Willie Boy. Doaker and Wining Boy also remind the audience of the bards in Greco-Roman epics, whose responsibilities are to ensure that the past and present, are connected.

Wilson studied the history of the African Americans and decided to write the experiences of the African Americans. In order to write dramas, he uses various techniques of dramatic art.

The use of the ghost throughout The Piano Lesson is most momentous feature of Wilsonian dramatic art. Past is key tool of the African American community to reestablish their identity after freedom from the slavery. To remember the past of the African Americans the use
of the ghost in the theatre is panoramic in order to explore the African American culture on the stage. In *The Piano Lesson*, use of Sutter’s ghost arises many events of the Charles family in the past. Tyndall notes, “Narratively, ghosts and spirits often are manifestations of the past, so it is highly appropriate that they are present in the play.” Wilson strongly believes in the past of the African American in order to strengthen and direct them towards darkness to light and ignorance to knowledge. Wilsonian dramaturgy repeatedly suggests that the past controls the present. C. Patrick Tyndall observes, “*In The Piano Lesson*, the sin of the past control the present.” The plight and predicament of Charles family in the past affect the lives of Bernice, Boy Willie, Doaker and Meretha in the present time. The past for Bernice is her husband’s death before three years earlier, affects her present life.

Wilson presents the unset and greedy life of Boy Willie and Wining Boy. Both of them come from Mississippi to Pittsburgh in order to save their future. However, they live free and unsatisfied life in Pittsburgh. They want women to enjoy. Boy Willie and Lymon were imprisoned in the South and suffered in Parch man’s farm. Hence, they got chance to live tree life in Pittsburgh and they enjoy it.

Although, Berniece is a young woman of 35 years, she refuses to marry Avery who considers himself as a Preacher. She does not forget the death of Crawley, her husband who died in the wood robbery. Berniece, “Avery ain’t ready to get married now.” (TPL, 65) Wilson presents the disturbed and unsatisfied life and the African American woman through the character of Berniece.

Berniece wants to forget her painful past and wants to forget her family identity because, she has seen the plights and predicaments of her mother. Hence, she does not touch the piano believing that the ghost
would awake and terrorize her. However, at the end of the play, she sings family song and accepts her identity. Tyndall notes:

When Berniece sings her song, she accepts her identity as Charles family cultural mother, who now honors and transforms the family’s painful past, instead of ignoring it. Once this happens, both Berniece and Boy Willie know that family history should neither be forgotten nor sold.⁸

Both Berniece and Boy Willie understand the value and significance of family tradition and its past after emancipation from the ghost of Sutter.

Wilson follows the black aesthetics in order to present the African American culture, on the stage. The black aesthetics lies in various cultural mythical and musical oral traditions of the African Americans. In The Piano Lesson, he uses blues, work songs and plantation songs to highlights various faiths and beliefs of the African Americans. In order to illustrate the scenario of the musical tradition, Wilson creates many musical characters throughout his plays. For istance in The Piano Lesson, he creates Boy Willie who is blues singer and symbolizes the vehicle of the African American music. Tyndall observes, “at the base of all of his works, Wilson realizes and wants his audience to perceive that one can not tell the African American story without couching it within music and spirituality.”⁹ Blues, Jazz and Swing are most leading sources of the African American oral history and cultural heritage. Although Wilsonian musician have their great knowledge and quality, they do not know its importance because, they get very lower status as musicians in the established white social and economic system. Hence, they suffer and struggle in order to establish their identity as musicians in the American society. Harry J. Elam Jr. observes:
Wilson’s musicians don’t realize the power they possess. Lyons in *Fences*, Jeremy in *Joe Turner’s Come and Gone*, Wining Boy in *The Piano Lesson*, Floyed in *Seven Guitar* all represent blues musicians who to varying degrees have not recognized the spiritual force of the blues song and the cultural responsibilities inherent in their musical ability. As a result, they are exploited for their music and fall victim to those who wish to control their spirit and song.\(^\text{10}\)

The tradition of story telling is also important part of the black aesthetics, which Wilson uses in *The Piano Lesson*. Various facts about the African American history are transformed from one generation to next generation through the art of story telling. Wilson uses same techniques in *The Piano Lesson*. Doaker who is 47 years old African American is known his family history and he dictates it to young generation of his family. “Doaker invents history: his revelation of the family’s travails over the ownership of the piano are an authentic “historical record with multiple and multilayered meanings.”\(^\text{11}\) Art of story telling was developed in the slavery days. Slaves did not have education and the art of writing. Hence, they passed their experiences through the art of story telling wherein the literary genre, slave narrative were developed.

Wilson studied the African American history, which was incorporated in various myths and oral tradition in order to avoid the cultural dilemma and crisis of the African Americans. Because of the domination of slavery, the identity of the black was found in crisis and turmoil. To reestablish their self-respect and identity, it is obligatory to go back to their family history that is what Wilson is strongly agreed with it
and applies the same ideology in *The Piano Lesson*. Pamela Jean Monaco states, “*The Piano Lesson*, on the other hand, teaches the necessity of accepting one’s family history. This history is symbolically represented by the piano that has been passed down to the, Siblings, Berniece and Boy Willie.”

Wilson also beautifully presents the predicaments of the houseless African Americans. Although, Wining Boy is prime African American singer, he suffers a lot to establish his status in the American capitalist society. He is social boycotted and useless in the eyes of whites. He expresses his predicaments in following song. He sings:

I am a rambling gambling man
I gambled in many towns
I rambled this wide world over
I rambled this world around
I had my ups and downs in life
And bitter times I saw
But I never knew what misery was
Till I lit on old Arkansas. (TPL, 47)

Torturing from the southern feudalists to the black community is responsible for heavy migration from the South to the North. Although, many African Americans migrated to the North for the new lease of life, they heavily suffered to earn their brad and butter. They wondered from town to town to fix their location. However, they were termed as the social boycott in the U.S. Wining Boy, the significant character of Wilson represents the circumstances of the African Americans of the 1930s. August Wilson’s point of view to see towards the suffering and the predicaments of the black community is to some extent unmatchable to
the other dramatists and critics. One of the interviews with Vera Sheppard he states:

The suffering is only a part of black history. What I want to do is place the culture of black America on stage, to demonstrate that it has the ability to offer sustenance, so that when you leave your parents house, you are not in the world alone. You have some thing that is yours you have a ground to stand on, and you have a viewpoint, and you have a way of proceeding in the world that has been developed by your ancestors.  

Wilson believes on the cultural heritage of the blacks. He repeatedly appeals to the community that they are not culturally and socially marginal in American society. They have their rich cultural heritage to stand as independent human being, though, they were separated from their family and society.

*The Piano Lesson* represents the African Americans experiences of the 1930s, wherein the legacy and heritage of the family are highlighted in order to attract the attention towards great ancestry of the community. The issue of accepting one’s legacy and neglecting one’s legacy is central plot of *The Piano Lesson*. Both, Barniece and her brother suffer from their painful past; however, Boy Willie tries to safe his future by using his past. On the other hand, Berniece does not want to use her past or legacy to grand her future. Boy Willie wants to sell the family Piano to buy Sutter’s farm, to safe his future, on the other hand Berniece wants to preserve the piano as legacy and heritage of their ancestors. Hence, the central conflict of the play is raised. However, at the end of the play both agree that the family legacy and heritage are more important to live their
lives with respect and dignity and reconcile. Wilson suggests the significance and uniqueness of the legacy and heritage in the lives of the African American through *The Piano Lesson*.

**SEVEN GUITARS-1940s**

August Wilson’s *Seven Guitars* records the oppressive experiences of the African Americans of the 1940s through the racist American society. The play was first produced in 1995 at the Goodman Theatre, Chicago and published in 1996. At the outset of its production and publication, it got New York Drama Critics Circle Award and Tony Award nomination for the best play in 1996. The action of the play takes place at the backyard of the apartment of Hedley, Louise and Vera in Pittsburgh in spring, 1948. Moreover, it explores various issues related to oppressive life of the African Americans. The crisis of one’s identity, racism, the place of African American music in the U.S., memory and dilemma of the African Americans are most leading issues of the *Seven Guitar*.

First Scene of the first act opens when Canewell, Vera, Louise, Red Carter and Hedley gather in the yard after Floyd’s funeral. Louise sings a bawdy song (vulgar) that is, “Anybody here like to try my cabbage just step this way” (SG, 1) which attracts the attention of the audience. Thereafter, Red Carter and Canewell eat sweet potato pie when they discuss about Floyd’s funeral function. Vera, Floyd’s lover says that she has seen angles at the cemetery that have black hats and suits. Furthermore, she states that angles were six and they came from the sky. Other characters also agree with her except Louise. At the end of the scene, Vera plays Floyd’s famous recording “That’s All Rights.”
The second scene is a flashback, which lights up the previous life of Floyd Barton. Floyd is far older than Vera who is a blues singer. Moreover, he recently comes back from Chicago city. However, he wants to return there with her lover Vera in order to record blues songs. Vera refuses to go with him because Floyd develops affair with Pearl Brown. When he first visited to Chicago, he arrested and when asks the guard to show him the exit door to go away if there is fire. This articulation of Floyd leads him 90 days in workhouse without any rhyme and reason.

Vera and Floyd discuss about T.L. Hall who is their manager whom Vera does not trust. Floyd informs Vera that T.L. Hall has fixed his recording at Hurricane Club where he has seen Muddy Waters, a great blues musician. Thereafter, Louise comes and informs that her niece Ruby is likely to come in order to live with her because she has problems with her lovers in Alabama.

The third scene begins when Hedley enters from the basement, carrying a piece of tin in order to set up stand where he kills chickens. Hedley sings a song of Buddy Bolden when Louise asks him to give her a pack of old Gold Cigarettes. Hedley tells her that he has Chester field. Thereafter, Canewell appears with a Golden seal plant cigarette to Vera, and he informs that he would bring Bible next time. Louise complains about the heavy sound of Floyd’s records.

The letter, Floyd got from Chicago Record Company which he shows it to Canewell in order to come with him. However, he refuses to do so because first times he was arrested there.

Hedley expresses his dream to have plantation in Pittsburgh, although there are no any other plantation. Moreover, he tells that he would grow Tobacco, oats on his plantations. Canewell suggests him about sugarcane, however, he refuses to grow it because sugarcane has
enslaved many African Americans. Hence, Canewell got his name as Canewell otherwise his name could have been Cottonwell. When Vera comes with Canewell’s hat Floyd suspects her. However, his confusion is cleared when Vera gives clarification. Thereafter, Canewell offers Vera Golden seal to plant.

Louise informs about her niece who is likely to come from Alabama. Moreover, Louise advises Vera that she should not go to Chicago because within a few days Floyd would run with woman. Floyd insists Red Carter to come with him to Chicago, however, he refuses. Louise’s niece Ruby comes who is young and pretty girl of 25 years. Floyd and Canewell play card, Canewell adds that roosters in Alabama, Georgia and Mississippi did not crow during slavery, they started to crow after Emancipation proclamation. There are more roosters in Chicago than Pittsburgh.

First scene of the second act begins when Floyd’s record, “Thats All Right” runs on the radio. Hedley makes Chicken Sandwiches to sell and sings blues song that is ‘Buddy Bolden’. He also tells that he always likes great men like Jesus. Although Hedley is 59 years old, he proposes Ruby for sex is only for born a child. She accepts his proposal and they love. Floyd promises Ruby to show Pittsburgh as a part of entertainment. Hedley tells Floyd that Buddy Bolden’s money is his father’s money and Bolden will come to pay money to him in order to buy plantation.

Louise and Vera discuss about the Chicago journey. Thereafter, Ruby discloses her predicaments in Alabama wherein one of her boyfriends was killed and other was in Prison. Floyd and Canewell come with good news that Mr. T.L. Hall selected them to present their band on Mothers Day at Blues Goose. T.L. Hall offers him money. However, he says that money would get tomorrow. Thereafter, Hedley comes and
Louise exposes that Hedley has T.B. However, he refuses to go to the sanitaium.

Floyd tries to meet Mr. Hall but he does not meet him. Then, Red Carter comes with bad news that T.L. Hall arrested for his fake insurance company.

In the next scene, Floyd shows up while burying something in Vera’s guarder. Then he calls Vera, who asks him where he was since last two days. He shows her new guitar and offers new dress. When she suspects, he tells that everyone gets chance to be rich and insists her to move with him to Chicago.

Canewell comes with a newspaper to inform him about the Robbery that has takes place in the city. When he comes after Floyd’s Mother Day performance, he comes to know that Vera’s garden is disturbed. He tries to set it, however, he finds handkerchief with $ 1, 200 which is Floyd’s money stolen in the robbery.

Thereafter, Floyd comes there, and sees that Canewell tries to take his money. He asks him to give back this money; however, Canewell refuses to give money back. Therefore, Floyd takes his gun and Canewell gives it back to Floyd and go back.

Thereafter, while counting money Hedley comes there with heavy drinks. He sees Floyd and misunderstands him as Buddy Bolden asks him to give money back Floyd refuses to give it back. Hedley goes upstairs, comes back with his machete, and cuts Floyd’s neck.

The last scene of the play appears with flashback when all characters gather after Floyd’s funeral function. They discuss about Floyd’s death while playing Floyd’s famous record “That’s All Right.” All characters go but Hedley and Canewell play Buddy Bolden’s song.
Wilson tries to explore socio-economic and cultural fabric of the American society throughout *Seven Guitars*. All characters of the play are scattered and disordered people and try to guard their identity in the white racist society. Their efforts and predicaments lead them towards the destruction of social and life oriented values. Wilson insists that economic identity is more important to establish the African Americans as the human being in the U.S. social order. He argues, “[T] hat economic empowerment is essential for black America to recover its sense of identity and self worth and suggests method for accomplishing this tasks.” Wilsonian dramaturgy explores and enlightens the community to make aware about their economic position.

At the outset of opening of the play, faith of the characters in Christianity is explored. As they claim that they have seen angles at Floyd’s funeral function. It is indicated as:

VERA : Did you see them angels out there at Cemetery?

RED CARTER: Uh-oh, Vera done saw some angles (SG, 2).

It seems us that the faith of the African American in Christianity, although, they are originally not the related to Christianity. Though their African religion which was brought by them when they come to the U.S., they forced to forget some tenets of it by teaching Bible to them. Many characters believe on the holy Bible regarding their destiny. As Vera says, “The Bible say some things aint for you to know. It says you know neither the day nor the hour when death come.” (SG., 5).

The trust and faith in the Bible is most leading issue of *Seven Guitars* which is handled skillfully and dramatically by August Wilson. The character of Canewell represents the views of the African Americans
towards the Bible of the 1940s in America. Canewell is known about the tactics and politics of religion to subjugate the African Americans. He says:

CANEWEL: I’m talking about ain’t but a hundred and forty-four thousand people going to heaven. That’s what it say in Revelations. Say one hundred and forty-four thousand of all the tribes of Israel shall be saved. All the rest gonna be cast in to a fiery pit. Next time I’m going to bring my Bible and show you. (SG, 20)

Canewell’s impression about the Bible is clear. He believes that the Bible makes injustice with black race. Hence, he considers it is responsible for predicaments of the African Americans. In this connection Daniel Addis states:

Conewell’s view implies that religion or perhaps more specifically, Christianity, does not relieve one’s suffering. It did not relieve the suffering of African Americans. This interpretation is reinforced when Canewell mentions that he neglected to bring his Bible but brought a golden seal. Canewell does not give extra importance to the Bible in his life. Though, he wants to show a reference in the Bible to his friend, he neglects it with the purpose believing that the Bible is responsible for their suffering.

In order to explore social discrimination in the American society, Wilson uses various metaphors and symbols in Seven Guitars. The metaphor of Chicago city is most suggestive and innovative use of August Wilson so far as struggle of the African Americans is concerned.
It is to be said that Chicago is the city in the U.S. wherein the dreams of men can be fulfilled. However, Wilson presents Chicago as a nightmare for the African Americans in *Seven Guitars*. Wilson’s character Floyd tries to be a famous recording star in Chicago. But in reality it is a nightmare for him. Daniel Addis illustrates:

Chicago symbolizes the place where dreams are suppose to be fulfilled, but where nightmares occur instead. Floyd continuously says that if he gets to Chicago he can make a hit record and become a big recording star. However, he was there before and made a hit record, but let himself be cheated by his manager and the recording company; instead of taking a cut of profits, he accepted a flat fee.\(^{16}\)

Wilson exposes the white tactics of dominating the talent amongst the African Americans. Although, Floyd is a great genius recording star, the white producers cheats him. Floyd represents many African American musicians of 1949s who were dominated and exploited by the white producers and managers. Charles Patrick Tyndall states, “Floyd is metaphor for many African Americans in the early 20th century”.\(^{17}\) Therefore, in Chicago only white men’s dreams can be fulfilled, the dreams of the blacks remain unfulfilled. Moreover, the experiences of Canewell and Red Carter in Chicago are also humiliated and ruthless. Canewell says, “... I was up there and couldn’t get back home. They arrested me for nothing. I ain’t back up there.” (S.G., 22). Canewell has arrested in Chicago without any rhyme and reason. Hence, he is not ready to move there for to be a successful man. Red Carter’s experience is also ruthless and oppressive in Chicago. Hence, he does not agree with Floyd to go there again.
Seven Guitars exposes the economic crisis of all characters in the play. They try to establish their status in order to live satisfactory life. However, they fail to achieve it. To explore this crisis Wilson uses Old Gold Cigarettes as the symbol of wealth and Chester Field Cigarettes as the symbol of poverty. Wilson’s character in Seven Guitar, Hedley does not smoke Old Gold Cigarettes because his poverty and he represents the all African Americans of the 1940s. On the other hand, all Americans smoke Old Gold Cigarettes it indicates the poor life style of the black people of the 1940s.

LOUISE : Hey, Hedley. What kind of Cigarettes you got? Give me a pack of Old Gold. Give me some Cigarettes. What kind you got?

HEDLEY : Chesterfield.

LOUISE : There’s a whole lot of people smoke Old Gold. Anybody want a good cigarette smoke Old Gold. (SG,17)

Louise rightly points out the backwardness of the community. Daniel Addis puts:

Hedley, the character of Wilson mentions Old Gold Cigarettes, that is the symbol of wealth. Louise says that lot of people in the America smoke Old Gold which seems that large number of people in America are wealthy, Hedley and Louise are not hence, they smoke Chesterfield. 18

Wilson’s intention is to pin point the exploitation of the blacks in the capitalist American society.
The metaphor of rooster, which is incorporated in *Seven Guitars*, is innovative example of Wilsonian dramaturgy. He compares the African American leaders with rooster. Canewell gives the account of the roosters in Georgia, Alabama and Mississippi. He says, the roosters (the African American leaders) started to crow after the emancipation proclamation against the racism, domination and injustice. In order to fight against the white tactics many black leaders migrated to Chicago. Canewell says, “There are more roosters in Chicago than there is in Pittsburgh. There’s more people from the country in Chicago than there is in Pittsburgh. (SG, 61) The role of the African American leaders was most significant in order to enlighten their community towards proper direction. Many African American leaders like Martin Luther king Jr., and W.E.B. DuBois have contributed to empower the African Americans. However, their life was like rooters. Daniel Addis observes:

The rooster is a metaphor for a black leader who speaks out against injustice: just as a rooster’s crow wakes people up an outspoken black leaders wake people up about the unjust condition of the country.\(^{19}\)

Many Black leaders were exploited and harassed by the whites when they talked against the established white racism. Abraham Lincoln was assassinated because taking the side of the slaves. Martin Luther king Jr. was also assassinated because he wants to abolish slavery. Wilson explores this historical significance of the black leaders. Daniel Addis states, “Floyd is irritated by the rooster crowing next door. Hedley gets up, brings the rooster, and slits its throat. This implies that when one speaks out, he gets killed.”\(^{20}\)
The characterization of Hedley is projected to explore the dilemma of the African American in most artistic fashion by August Wilson. He represents the failure of African American heroes. He has many falls dreams of himself. He is 59 years old and interested in marring a 25 years old girl; moreover, he wants to be a plantation owner through the money of Buddy Bolden, which leads him to kill Floyd. His icons are also failed to safe their lives. Daniel Addis illustrates:

Hedley’s heroes are Buddy Bolden, Joe Louis, Marcus Garvey, and Toussaint L’ Overture. All four were great leaders of black people in their prime, but each has a tragic end. Buddy Bolden was a great jazz musician, but he ends up dying in an asylum. Joe Louis was a great boxing champion, but he ends up a host has Las Vegas casino. Marcus Garvey was a great political leader, but he ends up involved a failed business venture and gets sent to prison. Finally, Toussaint L’ overture led his people to freedom but was duped by Napoleon and died in a French dungeon.\textsuperscript{21}

The tragic end of the black heroes in Wilsonian dramatic art awaken his community. The dilemma and identity crises leads them towards total destruction of their lives, although, they were genius and talented figures. “Wilson wants his audience, specifically his African American audience, to determine and realize their own identities, along with its resultant behavior, and recognize how this identification impacts, if at all, their black rage.”\textsuperscript{22} Their dilemma creates their black rage and this rage leads them towards destruction of human values.
Wilson remembers the initial stage of the slavery. Hence, he uses machetes and sugarcane as the symbols of the slavery. The whites enslaved the Africans in order to plant sugarcane as a result plantation of the sugarcane is one of the reasons of slavery. In *Seven Guitars* Wilson’s character Hedley hates to plant sugarcane in his future plantation planning because, he believes that plantation of sugarcane enslaved his ancestors. It clears through the dialogue:

**HEDLEY**: No, No sugarcane.

**CANEWELL**: That’s how I got my name
My grand daddy used to cut sugarcane in Louisiana. Somebody seen him say “Otherwise my name would be Cottonwell. (SG,63)

Hedley’s negation to plant sugarcane supplements by Canewell when he tells the history of his name. Many African Americans were harassed in the plantation of the sugarcane to strengthen the economy of the whites. Daniel Addis clarifies:

The slaves used machetes to cut sugarcane. Cutting sugarcane was the primary reason why the Spanish began enslaving Africans.... Hedley uses the machete to kill chickens. He uses machete to kill the rooster. And in the end, he uses the machete to kill Floyd, slicing through his neck like a slave cutting down sugarcane.  

Using different metaphors and symbols, Wilson wants to reveal the inhuman treatment of the African Americans throughout the 20th century America. In order to prove brutality of the slavery, he takes the support of the history of African Americans in his ten-play cycle.
The use of the African American music, especially blues, is leading characteristic of Wilson’s dramatic art. Wilson’s songs throughout his play carry the temperaments of the characters and various themes of the African American life. In Seven Guitars, he uses music throughout the play. At the outset of the play “Louise’s song, anybody here wanna try my Cabbage is sexually suggestive.” The above song exposes the temperament and passion of the character towards sexual attitude and interest.

Floyd is most tragic character in the play. He wants to be a successful musician; however, he does not get success. Floyd’s recording song, “That’s All Right” is about a man who is in love with a woman, but the woman is in love with another man.” As suggested in the song, Floyd does same thing with his lover Vera. He loves Vera but moves with Perl Brown to Chicago to be a famous musician.

Hedley wants to be a plantation owner but that is his illusion, which is expressed through the song of “I thought I heard Buddy Bolden Say.” The tone of the song is very musical. Harry J. Elam Jr. states, “They engage the physical burdens and limitations of life through cultural expression and improvisation, through music, through song.” All the characters of the play want relief from their hard life. They cannot bear the harsh reality of their life. As a result, they take the support of music, which is best way to forget the sorrow for some time.

At the end of the play, Hedley kills Floyd understanding him as Buddy Bolden to get money, which was given to Buddy Bolden by Hedley’s father. He says, “No Buddy, give me the money. You say, come here... here go the money.” Give it to me. It’s my father’s money. Give it to me.” (SG, 104) This is the illusion of Hedley, which leads him to kill Floyd. Through this incident, Wilson wants to explore that the dilemma
and illusion of the African Americans towards their culture, heritage and society, which led them towards the destruction of their own selfhood and identity.

**FENCES 1950s**

August Wilson’s Pulitzer Prize winner play *Fences* is set in the late 1950s in Pittsburgh. The late 1950s was the time of pre-Civil Rights Movement as well as the war between Korea and Vietnam. Therefore, the psyche of war and enlightenment of the African Americans through Civil Rights Movement are leading aspects of *Fences*. The protagonist of the play, Troy Maxson is a victim of sharecropping in the South. Hence, migrate to the North in order to live better life and to get the benefits of urban citizenship. However, at the outset of his arrival, he has to live the life of homeless and criminal.

The present play of August Wilson explores the various aspects of African American life of 1950s, especially complex father-son relationship, husband-wife relationship and the tactics of the whites to marginalize and exploit African Americans in the sectors of sports, music and various corporate services.

As the play unfolds, we can understand that Troy Maxson, the protagonist of the play and his friend Jim Bono are the African American garbage collectors. They used to gather every Friday at the dirty front yard of Troy Maxson in order to drink and share their life experiences as the African Americans. Through their discussion, Troy Maxson complains clears to Mr. Rand who is their boss and who never appoints any African American as a truck driver, except appointing them as garbage collector. In due course of time, he wins the case and becomes the first African American truck driver.
While sharing different experiences, Jim Bono, the close friend of Troy Maxson points out Troy Maxson for keeping illegal relationship with a woman Alberta. However, Troy Maxson denies the fact of having such relationship with Alberta.

Cory Maxson is a teenager son of Troy Maxson who is taken in the college football team. However, Troy oppose his son to make his career as a football player because he was also baseball player in the Negro League but he didn’t get a chance to play in the Major League because of his black color. Hence, the major conflict of the play rises on the issue of Cory’s career in the sport.

Lyons is a son of Troy Maxson who was born before his present wife Rose. Lyons is Jazz musician and used to come to meet Troy Maxson in order to take some dollars on his payday.

On a Saturday morning, Rose, the wife of Troy Maxson, sings a song in order to pray Jesus Christ to protect her and her family like fence. Thereafter, Troy Maxson points out Rose and Lyons about their card playing game. Troy believes that playing such game in order to win money is a foolish things.

Gabriel Maxson, the brother of Troy Maxson appears in the house. Gabriel Maxson is a victim of Second World War because his brain was damaged in the war. As a result of this, he behaves like mad man. He believes that he has seen St. Peter’s book for Judgment day and Troy’s name is written there. Moreover, Gabriel informs Troy that he should be ready for a judgment day as per his name is written in the St. Peter’s book. Troy Maxson plans to build a house by the money received to Gabriel Maxson from government because his brain is damaged in the Second World War.
On the Saturday afternoon, Cory comes from football rehearsal. Troy is unsatisfied with his son Cory because he does not pay his attention to housework, especially the construction of fences. Troy orders Cory that he must not go to football practice instead of housework. Furthermore, Troy does not sign the papers of Cory in order to allow him to play in the college football. Although, the coach is coming from the North to recruit Cory, Tory does not change his decision to allow his son to play in the college football team. As Troy wants to work his son in A & P supermarket in order to help the family. Troy Maxson’s expectation of the respect from his son in the fashion of military way led him and his son towards conflict. On the other hand, Cory wants freedom for his career opportunities in the sector of sports. Rose, the sensible wife of Troy Maxson insists him to allow their son to play football; however, Troy believes there is no career for the blacks in the sports.

On Friday, as usual Troy and Bono come to Troy’s house to drink and chat. Through their discussion it clears that Troy won the case and was appointed as the first African American truck driver. Troy and Bono tell the stories of their childhood experiences in the South to Lyons. Cory comes home and tells to Troy that he is trying to keep away Cory from sports because there is fear in his mind that Cory would be greater than him.

Gabriel Maxson was arrested by police under the crime of disturbing the peace of the city. Hence, Troy brings him home by bailing him out of jail giving fifty dollars. Troy and Bono conclude that police arrested Gabriel in order to make easy money. Thereafter, Bono points out illegal relationship of Troy with Alberta. However, at last he accepts the fact that he develops his relationship with Alberta. Cory and Troy do not understand the motif of Rose to build the fence. However, her motif is
only to protect her family from outside forces. Troy tells Rose that he would be a father of a child of Alberta. Rose gets the shocks of his immoral act and gets upset. Moreover, Gabriel also reacts against Troy about his immoral behavior. Troy explains Rose that he kept such relations with Alberta in order to escape from his unsatisfied life. Thereafter, there is quarrel among Troy, Rose and Cory.

After six months, Rose is trying to speak first time to Troy, though they were living in the same house. She asks him weather he would come to the house on the next day after his work because he used to go to Alberta’s house every Friday. He refuses to do so and tells Rose that he has to accompany Alberta at the hospital because she is likely to deliver a child. Rose is disappointed by listening the Troy’s care about Alberta.

Gabriel was taken to live in the mental hospital because Troy has singed the papers in order to get half of the money to Gabriel and himself. During this Alberta gives birth to a child. However, she dies during the time of delivery.

Thereafter, Troy brings his illegal daughter to his home. Rose Maxson, the wife of Troy Maxson accepts the child without any complaint saying that the sin of the father should not affect the child. Moreover, Rose believes that this child is innocent and needs motherly warmth. Although she neglects the sin of Troy Maxson, she does not respect him as she used to so earlier.

Rose becomes more religious than eelier and does not pay any attention to her husband. Troy Maxson is separated from his wife and son. In due course of the time, Troy Maxson orders Cory, his son, to leave the house, since, he does not respect Troy as a father and breadwinner of the family. Cory points out that, the real owner of the house is not Troy but Gabriel because Gabriel provided the finance to
build the house by the money received from the government. Furthermore, there is strong quarrel between Troy and Cory on the same issue and at last Tory kicks Cory out of the house forever.

Seven years later, Troy dies by heart attack. Troy’s seven years daughter Reynel is playing at the front yard of Troy’s house. Lyons and Gabriel come to the funeral function of Troy. Cory also comes; however, he refuses to participate in the funeral function. Rose, the mother of Cory consoles him that if he does not participate in the funeral, he would not be a man. Hence, he participates in the function. Gabriel says this, is the time St. Peter opens the doors of the heaven to Troy. Therefore, he plays his trumpet but it does not play. Gabriel gets upset; however, he starts the African dance and asks heaven to open the doors. Thereupon, he gets response from the heaven and the play ends.

There is discussion between Troy and Bono in the first scene of the play regarding racist practice in the U.S.. Troy and Bono are the African American garbage collectors. Troy Maxson, the protagonist of the play asks direct question to his boss Mr. Rand that why the all African Americans are appointed to collect garbage? Why are they not appointed to drive the truck? Mr. Rand suggests him to lead this issue in front of the Union of the U.S. Troy tells his opinion to his friend Bono.

**TROY** : I ain’t worried about then firing me. They gonna fire me cause I asked a question? That’s all I did. I went to Mr. Rand and asked him, “Why? Why you got the white men driving and the colored lifting?” Told him what’s the matter, don’t I count? You think only white fellows got sense enough to drive a truck? That ain’t no paper job! Hell, anybody can drive a truck. How come you got all whites
Wilson examines the view of African Americans of the late 1950s. Although, the African Americans got freedom from slavery, they were the victims of racial discrimination until the late 1950s. However, the African Americans of the 1950s were aware about their exploitation. In August Wilson’s *Fences* Troy Maxson rebelled against the racism. He directly asks his boss that why they do not appoint the African Americans as the truck driver instead of garbage collector. Moreover, Mr. Rand advises him to take the matter to the union of the states. It is the indication of the liberalization of the whites toward the black community. It is also the sign of the changing radical perspective of the white majority toward black minority. Kim Pereira illustrates:

> This spirit of protest is manifested in the very first scene of the play when Troy Maxson, an ex – baseball player who works for a garbage collection company, tells his buddy, Bono, that he has protested to his bosses the unfairness of having black workers lift garbage while white workers drive the trucks. That a black garbage collector can do this without repercussion is a sign of the changing time.²⁷

Wilson’s *Fences* is a historical record of the complex racial relations of the whites and the blacks in the United States of America of 1950s. It explores the changing social milieu and social fabric of the American society.
*Fences* also explore the generation gap between the father and the son. There is no mutual understanding between them. Troy Maxson is highly radical and orthodox in order to accept the changing time and opportunities for the blacks in the sports. Although, he faces racial discrimination in sector of the sports before seventeen years, his family consoles him that the time is changing for blacks in order to enter the field of sports. However, central conflict of the play creates.

ROSE : Why don’t you let the boy go ahead and play football, Troy? Ain’t no harm in that. He’s just trying to be like you with the sports.

TROY : I don’t want him to be like me! I want him to move as far away from my life as he can get.... I decided seventeen years ago that boy wasn’t getting involved in no sport. Not after what they did to me in the sports. (FEN, 137)

Troy Maxson is confirmed on his thinking, although he is asked to change his view to look at sports. Rose Maxson, his wife, is flexible and egger to enter her son in the sports sector. The radical and irrational approach of Troy Maxson creates much turmoil in his family. Kim Pereira observes:

Part of the play’s action concentrates on Troy Maxson’s refusal to accept the fact that social conditions are changing for the black man. This creates much of the dramatic conflict, leading to problems between him and his family particularly his son Cory.  

Why does not Troy Maxson allow his son to enter in the sport sector is most significant event in order to understand the American societal
Troy Maxson, the head of the black family has ruthless experience in the sports when he was young. Although, he was genuine baseball player, he was deliberately marginalized because of his race and never got chance to play in the Major Baseball League. When after seventeen years his son has shown the talent in the football, Troy Maxson opposes him considering that no black can make career in sport because of the racist practice in the U.S. Moreover, another significant aspect of Troy Maxson’s personality is his masculinity. The treatment he got from his father in his early age was absolute inhuman. Therefore, the same pattern of thinking and behavior he indicated by his son, Cory. Gregory J. Hampton states:

In August Wilson’s contemporary tragedy *Fences*, the main character, Troy Maxson, suffers from his inability to develop a productive black masculinity. Troy is doomed, as most “tragic heroes” or “common men” are to follow in his father’s footsteps down a path of the marginalized.\(^{29}\)

The problem of the black masculinity is always central while studying the African American life. The whites ruined the masculinity of the black men in the time of slavery. The white masters were the masters of the black men hence, the whites sexually used the black women. Therefore, the white master was her hero. Hence, the masculinity of the black man was brought in crisis. Thereby, the turmoil about Troy’s masculinity is being reflected throughout the play. Moreover, to prove his masculinity, Troy Maxson enforces his own son, Cory, to behave and respect to him in a military fashion.

CORY  : How come you ain’t never liked me?
TROY : Liked you? Who the hell say I got to like you? wanna stand up in my face and ask a lamn fool – ass question like that. Talking about somebody. Come here, boy when I talk to you. Straighten up, goddamn it! I asked you a question.... what law is there say I got to like you ? None.

TROY : Well, alright then! Don’t you eat every day? Answer me when I talk to you ! Don’t you eat every day ?

CORY : Yeah

TROY : Nigger, as long as you in my house, you put that sir the end of it when you talk to me

CORY : Yes ... sir (FEN, 136)

The expectation of the Troy Maxson from his own son to respect him in military fashion is nothing but psychological appetite of Troy, which was created by racism in the U.S.

Separation and migration are also leading issues of *Fences*. In order to explore the harassment of the African Americans created by the migration, Wilson presents the life of Troy Maxson. Wilson uses the technique of story telling, Troy and Bono gather on every payday in order to share their experiences of childhood in the South. Through their discussion, we come across the fact that they were separated from their family and migrated to the North in order to gain a new lease of life. Moreover, Troy Maxson and Jim Bono, were harassed by their fathers in the South. Kim Pereira states:

Separation is a major theme in this play one that Wilson continues to explore in *Joe Turner’s Come*
and Gone. Therefore several references to people leaving their homes, families, and lovers. In many instances, the separation is linked to migration, where people take off down the road in search of new pastures. Bono’s account of how his father left home represents a common pattern in black families during the early part of the twentieth century.30

Wilson’s Fences explodes the foolishness of the publicity of ‘American Dream’. Contemporary Americans mostly propagate the concept of the American Dream in order to apply the political tactics to hegemonies the various ethnic minorities in the U.S. Moreover, they believe that every American is self-sufficient and independent. However, Wilson’s Fences explores the ruthless and tragical history of the Negro sport League in the U.S. The African Americans are exploited in the sectors of sports and music. Susan Roprince states:

Besides invoking, the history of the Negro League in Fences, Wilson makes use of the mythology of baseball to reveal the failed promise of the American dream.31

The character of Rose, the wife of Troy Maxson, is most significant in order to understand the black woman. Rose Maxson is very mature woman. When Troy tells her that he is going to be a daddy of somebody, she got humiliated. However, she accepts the facts. Rose says, “Okay, Troy ... your right. I will take care of your baby for you.... cause... like you say... she’s innocent... and you can’t visit sins of the father upon the child.” (FEN, 173)
The illusion of Gabriel Maxson is also worked largely to create dramatic effect in *Fences*. Gabriel is injured in the war and got brain damage. However, he speaks in the fashion of a mad man. This role has mythological values in the play. He always tells to his brother, Troy Maxson that, “St. Peter got your name in the book. I see it. I say.... Troy Maxson. I say.... I know him! He got the same name like what I got. That’s my brother!” (FEN, 126) Gabriel carries beliefs in Christianity and traditional values of religion. Wilson creates Gabriel’s character in order to explore the cultural and religious values of the African American throughout the play. To create characters like Gabriel Maxson is most significant characteristic of Wilsonian dramaturgy. Many plays of Wilson contain characters like Gabriel Maxson.

At the end of the play, denial of Cory Maxson to participate in funeral function of his father is a significant event in *Fences*. The denial to participate in one’s father’s funeral, Cory reveals a protest against masculinity of Troy Maxson. Wilson wants to suggest the exploitation of the African American Children by their own fathers. Rose, the mother of Cory tells him to participate in the funeral.

Rose : You Troy Maxson all over again.
Cory : I don’t want to be Troy Maxson. I want to be me.

Negative treatment in the childhood days by Troy Maxson is responsible for denying the identity of one’s father by Cory. However, this negative attitude is erased by Rose, which is deeply rooted in the mind of Cory. She suggests him to participate in the funeral of Troy, otherwise, he would not be a man. This cultural protocol enforces Cory to participate in the funeral of his own father.
Through these three plays of August Wilson the socio-economic and cultural life of the African Americans of 1930s to 1950s is reflected in panoramic fashion. The play, The Piano Lesson explores the legacy and heritage of African American family with their ancestry. Wilson wants to suggest to the Blacks that their cultural and religious heritage is superior. Hence, they should search their identity in their own heritage.

The play Seven Guitar explores the dilemma and illusion of African American towards their culture, heritage that can be led them towards the destruction of their selfhood and identity.

Fences explore the father and son relationship of 1950s African American family. The negative treatment in childhood of Troy Maxson leads him to exploit his son Cory. Hence, Cory denies to participate in the funeral faction of his father which shows the cultural crisis of the new generation of the Black.
REFERENCES AND NOTES:


2. Ibid, 87.


4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. Charles Patrick Tyndall.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.


11. Ibid, 12.


160

16. Ibid.


19. Ibid.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid.

22. Charles Patrick Tyndall.


24. Ibid.

25. Ibid.


