Chapter II


Slave narrative is an account of life or an enormous position of life of a fugitive or a former slave. They are often stories of enslavement, suffering, endurance and escape, either written or orally narrated by the slaves or fugitives. The abolitionist uses the personal testimonies of the escaped slaves. Narratives are used in a tactful manner for organizing the stories which are foretold to influence the public opinion. Slave narrative is embalmed as the most influential in American and African American literature. They play an explicit role in shaping the form and themes of the most celebrated and controversial writing, in both autobiography and fiction.

The slave narratives segregation and disfranchisement depict about the white supremacy in the South from about the 18th century to the early part of the 20th century. These slave narratives depict the plight of the blacks, both during post bellum and
antebellum era. The most popular antebellum narrative is brought forth through the writings of Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, and William Wells Brown. The modern blacks' autobiographies are written by writers such as Richard Wright, Margaret Walker, Ernest J Gaines, Shirley Ann Williams, Toni Morrison, and Charles Johnson. They are widely understood and being discussed in African American Literature. As a realist, Gaines as a writer has found his own way of postulating his literary label. The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman brings out the tradition of slave narratives.

The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman reconstructs black's slavery, which existed during the 19th century. It narrates the struggle of the blacks for self-determination and betterment. This novel depicts the lives of black people in America from Civil war to the Civil Rights movement. This slave narration is viewed through the eyes of Jane, a woman of hundred and ten year's old woman who has lived through these years. Gaines through this novel brings out small truths, and everyday agony of the black society.
Miss Jane Pittman’s journey spans over a hundred years, from 1860 to 1960. The slave narrative novel is told by Jane herself. Even though it is an interview for a school project the background fades away. Ernest Gaines creates one of the memorable women in all of American Literature. Through the slave narrative, the writer works for the national dream of every African American’s quest for individual freedom in life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Gaines through this novel, which has been nominated for the Pulitzer Prize, has brought out the dismantling walls of segregation in the southern town. Gaines is inspired by the strong, determined character of his Aunt Augustine Jefferson, to whom he dedicates this novel. The slave narratives are expected to focus primarily on the account of eye witnesses about slavery. Thus Jane, as an eyewitness of her life’s journey which spans over a hundred years narrates the incidents in the novel vividly which amplifies the humanity of Miss. Jane.

Miss Jane’s story is divided into four sections. It begins with “The War Years”, “Reconstruction”, “The Plantation”, and “The Quarters”. The novel is moving forward to convey the fact about the slave situation. The plot is moving from national expansion and political
agitation into the relativism of black quarters.
Logically the story of one hundred and ten years old
Jane's life is narrated throughout the novel. The story
moves round not only around Jane but also around the four
men in her life: Ned, Joe Pittman, Tee Bob, and Jimmy.
The multiple perspectives do not lower Jane's position to
any reduced significance; rather, it helps to see her as
a character with an unconscious and unplanned leadership
quality. She says "people and time bring forth leaders"
(228). The significant character of Jane enables her to
encounter the social pulse of black people.

The first part in the book, "The War Years", seems
that the novel moves towards the post war period. In
south Louisiana, the war continues for a long period,
even after the cessation of shooting. The first part
explains the Civil War period which is quite revealing
through images and catch phrases. The narrative starts
when Jane is eleven years old and is called Ticey- she is
commanded by her mistress to draw water from troops,
first the retreating confederate soldiers and then the
advancing Union army.
The second part of the novel deals with the "Reconstruction" and focuses on the black people's struggle to reconstruct their lives. The situation takes the shape of Joe Pittman in his chosen role of "Chief" wrangler. Joe's insistence upon his manhood automatically puts him at risk. But Joe is willing to pay rather than accept lesser status. His death by a black stallion signifies that the time has not yet come for his survival on those conditions.

The third part of the novel titled, "The Plantation," presents two brothers of the South called Timmy and Tee Bob. Both are the sons of the plantation owner Robert Samson, Timmy, nevertheless, accepts the lesser status because his mother, Verda, is black.

In the last part, "The Quarters" the image fades as the horse has been replaced in the quarters. The disappearance of this image also signals a shift of social structure. This part focuses on the people claim for their Civil Rights.

Ernest J. Gaines brings out The Autobiography of Miss. Jane Pittman, his remarkable work just before the abolition of slavery. Slavery is an important role in
this autobiography. Slavery is not the main theme of this novel, but it focuses on the emancipation of the blacks.

The word "freedom" has a different sense, but here in this novel, it depicts the emancipation from cruelty or tyranny is a great deliverance by an alien force towards the people. The underlying concept of emancipation is the core concept of the novelist’s work. This commences from the story of being unchained from slavery into a tale of self liberation.

Ms. Jane for the first time disobeys and rebels against her master’s wife, after she meets the union soldier who tells that the Yankee soldier “came down here to beat them Rebs set y’all free” (8-9). The words of the union soldier surface a way and increase her self-confidence for the first time. Jane tells out the story of deliverance from slavery. This initiates the power of rebellion which has become a reality in the life of Jane which she links to her own rebellion against those who enslaved her.

Eric Foner, a critic, advocates that “the occupying Union army reinforced the freedmen’s assertiveness and inspired constant complaint on the part of the whites”
(80) after investigating the impact of the Union Army’s way of ill-treatment of the slaves.

Jane does not leave Mr. Brown, the union soldier. Even though Jane is aggressive and the newfound sense of urgency, she clings to him as he and his words have the assurance of freedom. Mr. Brown resides in Ohio. Jane primarily relates freedom with Mr. Brown. She wants to go to Ohio as she considers it will ultimately secure her freedom. In Jane’s childlike mind, “freedom and its fulfilment are thus identified spatially, rather than psychologically and spiritually” (Andrews 146).

Recognizing the futility of this association, Uncison senses that Mr. Brown initiates a sense of false freedom in Ms. Jane and he mocks her faith as she gains, receiving a new name of the soldier; “Yankee told you your name was Jane; soon as Old Mistress start beating you, you can’t find Yankee” (13). Jane believes the words and his promise of the soldier regarding the declaration of freedom. But Uncisom puts forth that the soldier’s declaration and his promise of liberation would be of no use and that she would be scorned because she trusts in the words of the soldier. After the liberation, the happy
life of the Black people was only a dilemma for the former slaves like Jane. “If they openly declare their freedom and their rights, they are beaten like Ticey or gunned down like Big Laura; if they are silent and compliant, they are reduced to life only just short of slavery”. (Wertheim 223-224)

Jane begins her journey to Ohio, but she again encounters the conceptualization of freedom. Another Yankee soldier whom Jane concocts in her journey elucidates in a detailed manner, that freedom is not secularized only in the North. He also suggests that he can find out her place. He says that: “you don’t have to go to Ohio now... your friend Brown might not even be there. I’ll find you a place to stay till you find yourself at home.” (34).

Jane lacks self-determination due to slavery and the oppression. The Yankee soldier advocates Jane to find home for herself. Thus, if she finds a home, her self-determination would be attained. Jane and the other former slaves are in pursuit of true deliverance without knowing: the actual prediction of liberation which they are desperately looking for, towards the path of freedom.
There are lots of stages before one achieves freedom. This is true in the life of Ms. Jane also. The first and foremost is changing of her name. This is an act of freedom that Jane experiences from Ticey to Miss Jane Brown. The replacement of the name from Ticey to Miss. Jane Brown depicts the changeover from slavery and the beginning of freedom and respectability for blacks. The master of slaves names the slaves. This naming of slaves does have or any connection with the family’s lineage and history. Likewise, the name Ticey is a slave name given to her by the slave holders “Ticey is a slave name” (8).

Ticey renamed into Miss Jane Brown reflects a sign of respectability she gains as a freed slave. The soldier gives her a former name and the address “Miss” raises her standard from slavery to liberty. The union soldier adds a tag “Brown to name Jane, which indicates the lineage or history of a person. The surname Brown illustrates the unity of the black and white in the struggle for equality. But Jane does not have a chance to choose her own name due to the fact that renaming is done by the union soldier himself, which deprives her freedom even though she is a freed slave. The action of the union
soldier rejects the slaveholders’ naming of slaves. He believes that the freedom of the freed black slaves can be won by the Union army’s victory without any help from the black community.

The other freed slaves also take new names for themselves. The new names that they have are either entrusted to them or desired by them. The naming of names between Jane and Frederick Douglass is a contrary experience. Douglass permits “Mr. Johnson the privilege of choosing me a name”, and accepts the name “Douglass” by “continuing to use it as [his] own” (116). Douglass’s most recent encounters in the novel’s narration of Frederick of Douglass “I subscribe myself, FREDERICK DOUGLASS” (116) point his proprietorship over his name. Douglass, the Freedman is not given the name “Dou” by force, but he is allowed to choose the name and he takes possession of his name. The soldier, who acts as a liberator, refuses to give the ownership of their struggle. He denies the ownership of Jane as well as the freed slaves.
The act of changing names makes a remarkable notice in the lives of the black after emancipation. Foner relates:

The newly freed slaves sought to ‘throw off the badge of servitude,’ to overturn the real and symbolic authority whites had exercised over every aspect of their lives some took new names that reflected the lofty hope inspired by the emancipation. (79)

Jane narrates as, there is a drastic change in the freed slaves: “We must have been two dozen of us there, and now everybody started changing names like you, change hats, nobody was keeping the same name Old Master had given them” (18). The relinquished black now has the opportunity to choose the name for them. Renouncing the name given by slave masters; they choose the names of notable white and black politicians and leaders according to their own passion. Ned named himself as he was taken over by a black leader. Miss. Jane relates Ned, who assumes the name of a black leader, which was significant for Ned. She says:
He had changed his name now Ned Douglass. Before he was Ned Brown after me.... Then he changed it to Douglass, after Mr. Frederick Douglass. He was go’n to be a great leader like Mr. Douglass was. He was Ned Douglass a while, Ned Stephen Douglass awhile, and then Edward Stephen Douglass. All the rest of the young men round him were taking on names like that. Some Douglass, some Brown after John Brown, not Jane Brown; some Turners, after Nat Turner; Sumner; some Sherman. Ask one his name, right off, he would tell you John Brown. Ask him his daddy’s name, he told you Ed Washington. (76)

According to these freed young men, the name of the black leaders denotes strength. It also acts as an achievement in attaining respect which was generally depicted to the black people. The freed young men choose the names of white and black leaders. This specialized choice in choosing the names signifies their antipathy and the longing of these young men’s aspirations for leadership position in the black community. Choosing a name is part of a collective family system even though it does not reflect the legacy of an immediate family. The initial
step of transforming their names did not improve the physical condition. This change does not influence the attitude of Jane’s mistress who is a white lady. As there was no symbolic change which altered the reality of life after liberation, the blacks went in search of real emancipation by moving away from the South, the place where they lived for the mean time.

The freed slaves are familiar with the term “freedom”, but they do not know the actual meaning of freedom to be free. The real craving for freedom emerges after the emancipation proclamation. Jane explains, “We had never thought about nothing like that, because we had never thought we were go’n ever being free. Yes, we had heard about freedom, we had even talked about freedom, but we never thought we was go’n ever see that day” (16).

The concept of freedom has become a source and a subject for debate over the abolition of slavery. This debate has become frequent between the former slaves and the whites soon after the initial change after emancipation or liberation. The freed slaves began to recognize that there was no true definition of freedom which could be practised by them.
Eric Foner explains that freedom did not exist as a biased classification perception, “straightforward definition” of sovereignty did not present as a “predetermined category or static concept Therefore, “‘freedom’ itself became a terrain of conflict, its substance open to different and sometimes contradictory interpretations, its content changing for whites as well as blacks in the aftermath of the Civil War” (77).

By his release of responsibility for his former slaves, the plantation owner of Miss Jane Pittman defines freedom for the blacks. The plantation owner says “You free and don’t belong to me no more. Got to fight your own battles best you can” (12). Jane at last comes to the real understanding of fighting her own battles. This term means that striving against white violence and fighting for freedom without the help of the union army.

Emancipation proclamation has brought in the choice of places where the freed slaves can live according to their wish. Few freed slaves have proposed to stay on the plantation and few freed slaves want to go to the North. The elderly slaves like Unisom preferred to “stay... see if the old Master can act different” while the younger
slaves declared that they were “leaving out… if the old people want to stay here, stay over free, let’s move” (13-14). The mentality of the freed slaves is that they are free and that they can move. It seemed that “half the South’s black population took to the roads” (Foner, 80).

One of the Texas slaves recalls, “… coloured folks started on the move. They seemed to want to get closer to freedom, so they’d know what it was like a place or a city” (Foner 80). Wright in his noteworthy work “Black Boy” marks the North as a symbol of freedom. He also portrays the slave’s recognition of freedom as coming from the northern union army. The link between freedom and place becomes significant while speeding towards north. Jane as she goes north in search of freedom. But her journey towards the north is hindered as many people discourage her journey towards the North. She gradually comes to understand that search of freedom by going to the north is not fruitful. Therefore, she says; “all of a sudden it came to me how wrong I had been for not listening to people. Everybody, from UncIsom to the hunter, had told me I was. I wouldn’t listen to none of them. I felt like crying” (51).
Ms. Jane decided to remain in Louisiana instead of journeying to Ohio and north. The decision of many freedmen after emancipation is reflected by the decision taken by Ms. Jane. As Foner relates: “a majority of freedmen did not abandon their home plantations... and those who did generally travel only a few miles” (81). Some former slaves stayed in the South. They want to find out whether they are truly free from slavery even though they stay in the same place. Uncirom does not believe in true freedom which reflects his disbelief in the proclamation’s ability to end the bondage of slavery. Jane stays in Louisiana for the sake of survival and “live rural life out of necessity, not choice” (Karem 116). Jane also thinks that journeying towards the north would burden or increase the struggle of life on a sharecropping plantation. Jane works in the plantation. She provides food and housing for Ned and herself by working on the plantation. She does not care about the suppression due to slavery of the sharecropping system. Joe pitman, Jane’s husband refuses to live the life of a sharecropper. He pursues a job that would give him a sense of urgency and freedom. He prefers a self governed work.
Joe Pittman defines freedom in the sense of autonomy, self determination, pride and self-respect which he craves to experience in his employment. According to Joe, “freedom is not merely movement away from the control of others, but is in fact the exercise of his own power” (Byerman 118). Joe worked in colonel Dyes plantations. He felt that working in colonel Dye’s plantation is an economic enslavement. He wants to withdraw from his work as he wants to escape the plantation mentality of the colonel.

The owner of Joe wants Joe to be with him in relative slavery. Colonel yearns to trap Joe to stay back on the plantation by using an old debt to trap him in relative slavery until he pays off his debt. However, this old doubt which the colonel entrusted to him is only a weapon to prohibit him to get away from the plantation. The Colonel is even more tactful when he adds thirty more dollars as interest after he pays off a sum of one hundred and fifty dollars. Colonel Dye’s plantation follows the share cropping system, which exploits the black workers. As their purpose for survival has to be retained colonel Dye keeps them dependent on him. By “breaking heroes,” Joe “doesn’t take orders from a soul
on earth” (93) a situation that greet him the autonomy and freedom. He desires white or black economic freedom as inheritable and vital to a human being.

According to Eric Foner, economic freedom was a major concern of the blacks after emancipation:

Freedom meant more than simply receiving wages. Freedmen wished to take control of the conditions under which they laboured, to free themselves from subordination to white authority, and to carve out the greatest measure of economic autonomy... economic emancipation meant freedom from white control. (103)

Joe knows that his new autonomic job might result in danger or even his death. Even though he has to encounter various hazards of creaking horses, he is proud to have the title “Chief”. It can view the depth of slavery by the invoice of Joe. He says and he prefers autonomous death to that of a submissive life. The jobs are quite contrary between the husband and the wife. The farmer chooses to work in the plantation, quite submissive under the plantation owner, while the latter yearns for an
autonomous work and choose by breaking losses by taming horses. Jane senses the danger for Joe and inwardly seeks the help of a foreteller, who would predict the future. The hoodoo woman narrates that Joe’s passion for breaking horses stems from his desire for the recognition as a man: “He probably rides for many reasons. That’s a man’s way. To prove something, day in, day out he must prove himself” (97). She further makes clear this as “man must always search somewhere to prove himself. He doesn’t know everything is already inside him” (99). Due to the language of slavery, Joe and many black men need to prove themselves.

The senses of infantile debilitate the black men. Joe wants to prove himself as a real man; Jane recognizes him as a real man because of his personal acceptance of his wife Jane. Jane accepts that he is a real man because of his “acceptance of her barrenness and nonconformity to gender role stereotypes that call for a man to prove his masculinity by impregnating his wife (81). Joe is raised high in the esteem of Jane due to various reasons. She praises him for his uniqueness. She pleads with him to discontinue his work breaking horses. As the hood-Doo predicts, Joe eventually dies while he traces to maintain
his sense of autonomy in a white dominated culture. He struggles hard and keeps his autonomy. He prefers death rather than a subservient life.

After the death of Joe, Jane does not pursue her journey towards the North. She acknowledges that her flight is an essential act and that it will pave way for better understanding and freedom. Jane and Ned are brought up together from their childhood. Even though Ned is elder to Jane, Jane considers him to be her son. She shows motherly affection towards him. When Ned raises a question of going to the North, she is able to understand his situation. She recognizes that he must leave both, South and Jane, to gain a sense of selfhood or recognition and for safety reasons. For Ned to go away from the south is essential, as his plight contributes against slavery. Thus Ned fights against slavery. He is also sure that he would have imminent death which is caused by the white people. Ned had been to another place after he got away from Jane. He studied and equipped himself. He also got married and had kids. After the death of Joe, Ned returned. He is involved in the freedom Bureau committee. His presence in the South was problematic due to the white racists. He has been
threatened to withdraw his place because the white people hired a few men to kill Ned. His flight to the North, however, signifies not just an escape from the threat, but journey to freedom a journey Jane determines that the journey is not important to her but the journey is very much essential for Ned’s own self discovery:

‘I can’t stop, Mama,’ he said.

‘Then you have to go,’ I said.

‘... What’s up there?’ I asked him.

‘Everybody else going,’ he said.

‘Many going, but not everybody,’ I said. ‘I think you ought to go but not me’. (78)

Slavery not only brought them physical turmoil’s but also it had a great psychological impact. Jane’s notion of flight towards the north reveals that the freed slaves are made fun for their physical freedom, but also they suffer psychologically due to the lingering mental trauma in their minds. While the old former slaves resolve to stay on the plantation, the young people in the formative stage of their lives surge for autonomy and freedom. William L. Andrews explains:
Jane’s agreement shows that she understands the essential psychological nature of [Ned’s] quest; she sees that he needs to break the ties of home, to become his own man, to leave the South rather than ‘go back’ to a slave status or voluntarily stop black progress westward. But she also understands that such movement would not be progressive for her. (147)

Slavery has a great impact on the lives of people. Jane experiences the adolescent search for northward freedom which she denies to look into, but recognizes the importance of Ned’s journey for his self-development. Ned moves to the north (Kansas). He does his schooling gradually, raises his standard to that of a teacher. He becomes a teacher in Kansas. Later joins the army. Ned is now a full man. He gets married and has children. After a long span of time, he returns home to the south. Ned, the self-reliant man wishes to spread the same sense of autonomy to his community through education. Thus he wants to eradicate slavery, even in psychological level, whereas the liberation existed in the physical realms.
Ned’s flight was not only regarded as an individual escape, but has become a political act that informs his leadership of the community. According to Ned, the journey towards North and coming back home represents the “life-enhancing and empowering public sphere mobility” (33) which Houston A. Baker Jr. recognizes as essential to the development of black modernity. After the death of Joe, Ned returns to Louisiana. With new perspectives on his mind Ned intends to begin a school. This school, which helps to create awareness in the lives of the black, indeed proves upon the black’s equality. Booker T. Washington or Frederick Douglass, the two black spokesmen, whom the black community knew a little about them because of the church: this has been assumed by Ned. In one of his conversation with Jane, he explains that:

Mr. Booker T. Washington taught that all coloured ought to stay together, work together, and try to improve their own lot before they tried to mix with white folks. Mr. Frederick Douglass taught that everybody ought to work together… always believed in Mr. Douglass’s teaching…. (105)
After the emancipation, many blacks seem to brave an unquenchable thirst for education. Ned, who proposes to begin a school would serve the purpose: his goal and the black's quench for education. According to Foner, "blacks' hunger for education arose from the same desire for autonomy and self-improvement that inspired so many activities in the aftermath of emancipation" (97).

The inciting of hunger for education in the Louisiana community becomes a challenge for Ned. The self-confidence of Ned due to slavery is predominant. He rather offers an optimistic view rather than a frustrated aspect of being reluctant. He holds a hope for an eventual dissolution of their fear and willingness to fight. Ned is very much initiated while the others do not listen to him. Jane observes that despite his teaching, "... The person wasn't listening. Not [because] they didn't believe in what he was talking about, but they had already seen too much killing. And they knewed what he was preaching was go'n get him killed, and them too if they followed" (106).

In spite of the relationship and unity of the community in Miss. Jane Pittman, the fear of racial abuse
in the Jim crow south initially stifles the communal power among themselves Ned is killed by a hired man due to the communal powers. The black people, however, overcome the persistence towards education. They maintain the school even after his death. By purchasing the land and the school, the community takes ownership of Ned’s teaching. They also set it free from the white society’s restriction against black land ownership.

Ned plays a dual role: educator and pastor. Ned does not preach religious values, but he preaches the politics of fighting against the oppressor and the downtrodden’s submissive mindset. He wants his people to get rid of this in order to gain freedom. Ned recognizes the racial abuse which kept the blacks complaint with Jim Crown. His laws are like that of Richard Writhe which prevents them from achieving freedom and agency. Still, his attitudes are the blame for slavery for both black and whites:

I won’t blame all white men. I’ll blame ignorance. Because it was ignorance that put us here in the first place. Because the white man didn’t have to go to Africa with guns to get us. The white man came with rum and beads. And
why? Because we were already waiting for him when he came there in his ships. Our own black people had put us up in pens like hogs, waiting to sell us into slavery. He didn’t tell the white man how to treat us after he got us on his ship, the white man made up the rules himself. (113-144)

Ned interprets the story of the slave trade in a different perspective. This is a story in which the blacks allow the white to strip off their decency and humanity by “selling into slavery” and by “not telling the white man how to treat us,” (114). Due to the prolonged slavery Ned connotes that blacks have become so submissive, allowing the whites to manipulate them. The whiter dominated the blacks by both fear and financial incentive. The blacks brood over their follies.

Ned, who wants them to experience the spirit of liberty, urges his audience to fight actively against their own fear and the fear of the racial abuse. He also emphasizes on the importance of community and relationship which adds to thin strength to fight against oppression; “The white man never would have brought us
here if we were together. He never would have separated a nation. But little tribes beat each other, and all the white man had to do was wait” (114). Here the author says that there is no unison in a family or in apparent movement; it can be easily divided by an outside force. Ned says that oppression of the black pursuit as the blacks do not utilize the collective strength that exists among them. But instead they fight against each other rather than being united. Ned also does not consider that white people are not a collective unit of oppression. He identifies them as individuals who either help or terrorize the blacks:

You got some black men... that’ll tell you the white man is the worst thing on earth. Nothing horrible he wouldn’t do. But let me tell you this... if it wasn’t for some white men, none of us would be alive here today. I myself probably’ll be killed by a white man. I know they are following me everywhere I go (113).

Ned does not analyse the exact reason for the blame. Ned’s concept of fighting is an abstract idea rather than a physical act. The community’s leader is Jimmy. The idea
of fighting denotes the type of non-violence protest and Civil disobedience. Jimmy also urges fighting who is supported by Martin Luther King’s teaching: “But we have to fight. We have to fight. I’m not the only one doing this. They do it everywhere…. They listened to Martin Luther was teaching in Alabama” (238). To a great degree known and esteemed Civil Right movement is being recognized by the blacks, Ned’s character underscores the fact that fighting may mean death.

Ned understands death to be the consequence of action. Instead of slavery, Ned prefers death. There are lots of incidents in the novel, which motivates courage. One such incident is that a young boy fears death and he desires for safety. Ned asks “But if you must die, let me ask you this: wouldn’t you rather die saying I’m a man than to say I’m a contented slave” (117). Manhood wants for Personal independence, yet it is black or white. But that is in slavery aspiring for autonomy, which is attained through liberty. Like Joe Pittman, Ned perceives agency which is essential for manhood. This right was denied, especially to the blacks. Ned thrusts that everyone needs to recognize selfhood both for male and female.
The language or the tone which Ned utters to his fellow people is patriarchal in nature. He links fight with manhood. He seems to define man as humanity. In the case of children, he raises his voice denoting "I want my children to be men.... I want my children to fight. Fight for all not just a corner" (115). Ned urges the blacks to fight for their rights after slavery.

The purpose of fighting for the agency is not mere a show, but the demonstration of black agency and self-determination. They not only decimate the anticipation of submissive behaviour from the blacks: “Show them, warriors, the difference between black men and niggers” (117). Because of slavery for ages, the blacks were very meek and submissive. They were afraid to raise out their queries and their disgust openly. In such a situation they were named as niggers. Thus Ned wanting to break out from the bondage, initiates the blacks to fight which will allow them to break free the demeaning of nigger stereotype. This demeaning illuminates their humanity in the eyes of white racists. The black’s deeds do not get proper recognition for their achievements. They are only used as a tool that brings success through their hard work. Even though they strive hard for their
achievements, the whites do not recognize their humanity but they are treated more as slaves even after their liberation.

However, Ned figures black as an instrument in their own oppression. This attitude he obtains from the teachings of Booker T. Washington. The two spokesmen, Frederick Douglass' and Booker T Washington's notations and instructions portray the path of liberty, but with a modified diction. Ned follows the former politically rather than the latter. Ned was instructing the teachings to Washington, a young boy who finds his teachings to be safety, questions Ned's perception of Washington:

You keep saying we ought to not listen to Mr. Washington, but ain't Mr. Washington saying that to keep the race from getting slaughtered? Mr. Washington grewed up round these white people He knows a man'll shoot a black man down just for standing on two feet. This something maybe the people in the North don't know yet. And another thing, Professor Douglass ...ain't he saying learn a trade because a trade is the thing that's go'n to carry this country? (116)
The debate between Washington and Douglass is a matter of compliance to white society’s expectation for blacks. Instead of portraying the quest of liberation after liberation by the two great spokesmen, Gaines brings out the debate between Washington and Du Bois. These two spokesmen reflect Ned’s hope for belief in the possibility for black who would be a part of American culture and politics. Du Bois has the concept of black double consciousness which is a split between black and American. Du Bois “saw little hope in a black white alliance” (5).

In The Souls of Black Folk, Du Bois expresses that:

One ever feels his two-ness, an American, a Negro simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face. (5)

Ned’s disposition is to get a complete entry for the blacks. He also suggests the need of recognition and rights through the struggle.
The struggle of the blacks is to seek full citizenship rights to the notion of the word “American”. Ned connects the term “American” with that of struggle which the black long to attain it after their liberation. Dubois insists that an alliance between the races is impossible, but Ned recognizes the effort and the helpfulness of some whites in achieving their freedom.

Gaines uses Washington and Douglass to highlight the importance of black agency and self-determination rather than recalling the debate between Washington and Dubois. Washington’s argument is supportive and is appealing to the narratives of the black community from the announcement of emancipation to the Civil Rights movement and it seeks first and foremost, to maintain whatever economic security can be had under such a system. Trading imbibes and equates with servitude and implies that the blacks will neither have the mental capacity or equal opportunity to be successful in higher education. Washington posits this point (which acts as an argument which is quite appealing to the narratives’ black community) in a positive manner for trade labour. Ned
sees more possibilities which instills more possibilities for the blacks than Washington.

I agree with Mr. Washington on trade..., but trade is not all. I want to see some of my children become lawyers. I want to see some of my children become ministers of the Bible; some write books; some represent their people on the law. So trade is not all. Working with your hands while the white men write all the rules and laws will not better your lot. (116)

Isolation and improvisation of the black community by itself is improved a lot before integrating with white society. Ned understands that this plan will not establish equality for blacks: "Mr. Washington might have had the safety of our race in mind, I think Mr. Washington did, but since he made that statement over five years ago over a thousand men have been lynched and for no other reason but their black skin" (117). Violence has been predominated and it lingers among the blacks even though they followed the teachings of Washington. They want to elude themselves from the white society. Washington’s plan of survival has been effective as it
brought little change to the racially tensed environment, even though violence lingers amidst the blacks. Washington’s plans are quite contrary to that of Ned. While Washington’s plan is to comply with white society’s segregation policies, Ned believes that fighting is essential to gaining self-respect and recognition in American culture.

Richard H. King, the historian considers that Frederick Douglass’s *Narrative Life of Frederick Douglass* is contrary to Washington’s limited option for the black community. It is a “canonical black American account of self-transformation and self-respect... anticipate the problem of the free, self-respecting, self as it emerged in the Civil Rights movement” (74). Douglass wants the blacks to be their own master. This indicates that empowerment and self-determination is more essential rather than to accept the white’s social limitations. Douglass further highlights that “the connection between the willingness to fight for freedom” by urging blacks to “cast off the aura, the dependency and create pride and ‘If we are elevated, our elevation will have been accomplished through our own instrumentality’” (32). Washington does not examine the consequences of accepting
white society’s standards and the impact it will have on black identity. His emphasis is on the economic stability and reciprocates the material concern of the blacks. Richard H King explains that:

It was not that Washington denied the importance of self-respect; indeed, his whole effort was to give black people a sense of worth and importance. Rather, it was that Washington saw such a state of mind as being achieved not through confrontation with but through the conciliation of the white world. It was not that Washington advocated passivity and quiescence; it was that action for him was limited almost exclusively to the economic sphere and implied an abdication of the political, at least in the present. (86)

Washington’s botheration is only to improve the condition of the black community. Rather than abdicating the political, Ned brings out the importance of the black to be recognized as the citizens of America.

Ned instructs his people many times about the struggle for freedom. In his sermon at the river, Ned
defines that being an American they could only satisfy the struggle for freedom. Freedom can be obtained only after the laws are set forth. If this happens, the inmate should not violate the laws. Ned determines and comes to an understanding that freedom is a process of the fight. He also says that after attaining freedom, the leaders postulate a set of rights and privileges. This is an understanding of the views of Douglass. He also states that the black community’s elevation has been accomplished through their own instrumentality. Ned insists that the blacks will remain as subservient nigger slaves, if they do not fight for freedom. He also says that, they would attain freedom, only through struggle. Ned, while he preaches, urges his congregation to show the difference between the black American and the nigger blacks. Thus he insists:

Be Americans... But first be men. Look inside yourself. Say, 'What am I? What else besides this black skin that the white man calls nigger? ' Do you know what a nigger is? ... First a nigger feel below anybody else on earth. He’s been beaten so much by the white man, he don’t care for himself, for nobody
else, and for nothing else. He talks a lot, but his words don’t mean nothing. He’ll never be American, and he’ll never be a citizen of any other nation. But there’s a big difference between a nigger and a black American. A black American cares, and will always struggle. Every day he gets up he hopes that this day will be better. The nigger knows it won’t. (115)

Ned’s wrong inclination to fight for manhood, or humanity resurfaces in the idea of the black American. Ned urges and strongly emphasizes that blacks must first be men. He also says that according to him, Americans can be understood as a man: “I’m much American as any man; I’m more American than most” (114).

The notion of Ned is to be more American than most. He also believes that his hope and willingness to fight makes him a man. This aspect of being more American is quite contrary to the notion of nigger who is deemed suppressed all the ways. Ned brings out the contrast between the slave nigger and that of an American.

In Ned’s opinion his hope and willingness to fight to make them human, even though they are niggers at the
initial stage. Ned’s keen desire of his people to be termed as American has no regard for the wholesome rights of citizenship. The ultimate desire is to make them to get a mindset of hope for the ultimate attainment of these rights and liberties. Ned confronts many problems. One such encounter is his experience with the Freedom Bureau. He understands that freedom for the blacks must be attained by themselves instead of depending on the American government for freedom. Jane, after observing the impact of the Freedom Bureau’s retreat, suggests that slavery can and did still exist after abolition. It was slavery again, giving the South a chance. But when the people saw them treated just as bad now as before the war, they said to heck with Mr. Frederick Douglass and started leaving. Ned moves to North, after the liberation. He realizes that moving to north means accepting racial hatred. Ned returns after a few years along with his family. Initially, he accepts it, but later he retreats in the South. The notion of his retreat is to fight and to challenge the ever present problem of racism. Ned expresses his regret for leaving the south, Ned explains that “I left from here when I was a young man, but most people thought that was the best thing to
do then. But I say to you now, don’t run and do fight. Fight white and black for all this place” (115). The black communities call south as their home. Ned urges the community like Douglass to stay and fight together for the south. The freedom which Americans attain should not be confined to the Northern bound area, but should be extended to all regions of America. This helps the black community to experience the rights and liberties of American citizens and democratic freedom.

The struggle for freedom which the blacks encounter is not only physical, but it is psychological too. Jane like Ned realizes that struggle is a fight against a mentality held by both blacks and whites. Jane shows a contrary impact of racism and prejudice on white as well as blacks. This negative effect which Jane possesses is known to the readers when she tells the relationship between Tee Bob and Mary Agnes. Tee Bob is the son of a wealthy white plantation owner. He loves Mary Agnes, a Creole teacher, his love is considered to be illicit because of her mixed blood. Jimmy Caya, the friend of Tee Bob, illustrates and emphasises the reason to Tee Bob. The former emphasises the latter not to engage in a relationship with Mary Agnes: “Don’t you know who you
are? Don’t you know what she is? Don’t you know these things yet? …. That woman is a nigger, Robert. A nigger, she just looks white. But Africa is in her veins, and that make her nigger” (182). Caya replies to Tee Bob that he must learn cultural tenant and should abide by these barred interracial relationships. Caya, in an explicit manner says that this cultural restriction does not prevent white men from raping or having sex with black women: “he told Tee Bob what everybody had always told him. From his daddy to his teacher had told him. ‘If you want her you go to that house and take her. If you want her at that school, make them children go out in the yard and wait. Take her in that ditch if you can’t wait to get her home. But she’s there for that and nothing else’” (183).

When Tee Bob questions, Caya defends himself and explains that he “told [Tee Bob] no more than what my daddy told me…. What my daddy’s daddy told him? What Mr. Paul told Mr. Robert? What Mr. Paul’s daddy told him? What your daddy told you. No more than the rules we have been living with ever since we have been here” (201). Caya does not oppose the rules by asking questions as tradition enforces and justifies the rules.
Tee Bob learns the rules of racial interaction from Caya. The true love which he has for Mary Agnes does not allow him to accept the racial discrimination and the cultural tenant which lies as a boar towards deep loyal affection that he has for Mary Agnes. He understands that the black society forces the black women like Mary Agnes, to be used as a recipient of white, so that they could molest them. Tee Bob, unlike the other white who try to utilize the black women for their sexual urges, is ashamed and understands his awful power as a white man. He does not want the white society to violate his love for Mary Agnes, so he commits suicide. Jane realizes the reason behind Tee Bob’s suicide and consults Tee Bob’s Parrain, Jules Raynard and explains that both black and white society is responsible for the death of Tee Bob:

We all killed him. We tried to make him follow a set of rules our people gived us long ago. But these rules just aren’t old enough.... Somewhere in the past.... Way, way back, men like Robert could love women like Mary Agnes. But somewhere along the way, somebody wrote a new set of rules condemning all that.... But Tee Bob
couldn’t obey. That’s why we got rid of him.

All us. Me, you, the girl—all us. (204)

Jeff Kareem explains that Gaines “represents the black and white communities as colluding in this suppression of freedom. Rather than perceiving them as ‘culturally separate,’… the novel shows the white and black communities working together to uphold a set of limitations on individual assent” (110). Through Tee Bob’s who kills himself intentionally, it is exemplified that the set of limitation has a hold over the blacks as well as the whites who do not abide to its standards.

This story which Jane narrates enlightens the idea of the freedom struggle in a broaden manner. It inculcates a multiracial struggle against the racist society which hinders the freedom of black and white relations. His story demonstrates the dangerous rigidity of the community itself, revealing the struggles faced by those who break the rules of the majority. The sole people who stand against a rigid and racist societal order is Tee Bob, believes that the society will never change, commits suicide. Though we may consider it as an irrational behaviour, he has taken the first step towards
emancipation. Tee Bob’s, rather than a fight of black and white, resistance is considered to be the forerunner of things to come. The freedom struggle in Jane’s narrative emphasizes to be a black movement for equality and Civil Rights. Through the narration of Jane, a black leader emerges only at the end who leads the way towards collective movement.

In Miss Jane Pittman, the community searches for a leader. The concept of collective deliverance sets as a pathway to the notion of freedom. The idea of freedom is a collective deliverance which embellishes a hope for a Moses-figure who leads the people out of slavery and into freedom. Likewise, the black community searches for a leader, who will lead them in the fight for Civil Rights.

This emphasis on the individual racial champion of the community and the black community has fear and lack of determination. This paves way for them to rely on a leader to fight for progress rather than to engage in the fight against them. Jane brings out the need for a leader and the hope for a leader exists only amidst the oppressed group. People are always looking for somebody to come to lead them. “Go to the Old Testament; go to the
New. They did it in slavery; after the war, they did it; they did it in the hard times that people want call Reconstruction; they did it in the Depression another hard time; and they are doing it now". (211)

The people do not believe in themselves, but in an outside agent. They wait patiently and search largely for a leader who will deliver them. Every birth of a child in the black community is looking at a view, to set them out of bondage. They ultimately choose Jimmy as they choose one. The leader, as they are in need of the one who would pave way towards liberation. Jane explains the community's selection of Jimmy as their leader: "Why did we pick him? Well, why do you pick anybody? We picked him because we needed somebody. We could 'a' picked one of Strut Hawkins boys or one of Joe Simon's boys. We could 'a' picked one of Aunt Lou Bolin's boys but we picked him" (212). The black community is quite aware of the movement in Alabama. This enforces a belief and hope for them, as they desire to have, their own leader for their group: "we said if Alabama could give "One" that's good, Samson, Luzana could do the same. Oh, no, no, no, we didn't say it exactly like that. We felt it more. In here, in there. People never say things like that. They
feel it in the heart” (212). Jane’s community desires to commence a movement in Louisiana. As they are desirous of the leader to lead the movement, this movement is kept away from the action.

The community views that every action of Jimmy is a sign of his future leadership. They also force him to adapt him to their standards the chosen one: “by the time he was twelve he was definitely the One. We watched him every move he made. We made sure he made just the right ones. If he tried to go afoul and he did at times we told him what he had heard and what he had seen” (220). By “look[ing] at him hard,” (222) the community members try to remind Jimmy of the prophetic calling they believe he hears. The community has a blind hope in Jimmy and promotes and entertains each and every action which he postulates. When Jimmy gets in a fight with a group of boys, the communities “catechize him no matter who was wrong. He wasn’t supposed to fight these in the quarters; he was supposed to stand up for them” (215). Jimmy becomes religious and the community is anticipating him to become a preacher just like the other movement leader. Since they have a preplanning about him, they relinquish upon that idea: “Just because we made him the One, don’t
let’s try to make him a preacher too” (226). Jimmy decides to leave for Washington a year before. Jane’s community pacifies themselves by saying, “that was the reason... we had made him the one” (227). The people assume that Jimmy had a significant influence on the Civil rights movement at the time. Jane explains to Ned that “if [Jimmy] was the One, he was going to have to leave sooner or later,” and would return with an education and the ability to lead (215). When Jimmy returns, the community denies following him.

The community, seeing the threats and abuses which accompany the civil right movement, is afraid. The fear of threat and abuse makes the community to be content with what they possess. Moreover, they are unwilling to challenge the oppressive share cropping system that defines their life in the quarters. The land owner plays a major role by threatening the tenant and keeps the community from indulging in the movement. He tries to discourage the people from acting by convincing them of their freedom to his land:

I just want to remind every last one of y’all y’all living on this place for free. You pay me
no rent; you pay me no water bill. You don’t
give me a turnip out of your garden; you don’t
give me one egg out of your hen house. You pick
all the pecans you can find on the place and
all I ask for is half, what I never get….
Anybody ‘round here think he needs more freedom
than he already got is free to pack up and
leave now. (232-233)

Jimmy after returning is enthusiastic to lead the
community. But Robert Samson argues against the necessity
for a freedom movement and the threat of Robert Samson
hinders his zeal. But Jimmy does not withdraw; he
attempts to make necessary steps to begin a movement in
the black church. He argues that “Good Christians fight”.
The community does not understand the necessity to fight:
“You don’t come to our church no more, Jimmy. But now you
come because you want us to help you. A cause we don’t
even understand” (237). The people are not united to form
the movement, but they get separated from Jimmy and the
moment, even though he is born in their community, they
think him to be an outsider. His retreat is isolated
from the communal space of the church. The novelist
narrates of the elder generation to reciprocate against
racial oppression: “I know how you feel, Jimmy.... I was young myself once and I know how the young feel. But we old now, Jimmy. This church is old... All we want to do is live our life quietly as we can and die peaceably as the Lord will allow us. We would like to die in our homes, have our funerals in our church, and be buried in that graveyard where all our people and loved ones are” (239).

Elder Banks say that the people remain silent due to the community’s age and the fear of racial violence that lingers among the black people. Due to their inconsistency of hope the people give up their hope: “What happened in Birmingham, what happened in Atlanta, can’t happen here. Maybe something else; maybe when all of us in here are gone” there is no unity in the black community. Due to fragile brotherhood the community could not pin its hope on a central character. The community protests against Jimmy. Cooke’s Kinship stage has been shattered due to the negligence of collective and communal spirits. Jane defines: the dilemma that lingers in the black community. It is they who are in need of a leader. They are expecting him to lead them into a movement.
Simultaneously, it is they who protest against Jimmy. The black community chooses Jimmy as their chosen one. But they deny his guidance. This can be postulated as the people do not need Jimmy’s deliverance nor do they want to fight for themselves. Jane defines the collective psychology that exists in the black community; both rely on him and reject him as a leader:

It’s not that they don’t love you, Jimmy; it’s not that they don’t believe in you; but they don’t know what you talking about. You talk of freedom, Jimmy. Freedom here is able to make a little living and have the white folks say you got…. Oh Jimmy, didn’t they ask for you? And didn’t He send you, and when they saw you, didn’t they want you? They want you, Jimmy, but now you here they don’t understand nothing you telling them. You see, Jimmy, they want you to cure the ache, but they want you to do it and don’t give them pain. And the worse pain, Jimmy, you can inflict is what you doing now that’s trying to make them see they good as the other man. (250)
Even though the people are in need of the freedom which Jimmy struggles to bring but they seem to be content with the kind of economic freedom and social security which is given to them by the white society. Jane understands that freedom and opportunity must be conceived in the folk mind and actualized, there before it can be affected by the immediate social situation. The community does not expect to get freedom from outside its current state. But the community is willing to accept.

The black community opts for a leader who is like a Messiah who will deliver them and possess them liberty and bring salvation to them. They internally feel that they will not take part in action towards liberty along with the leader. Jane, who belongs to the black community differ from them. She outwardly speaks to Jimmy about the inadaptability of the community to follow him. She explains to him that Jimmy as a chosen one should convince the black community. She also tells him that people must understand that death is worse than fear before they will move:

Something got to get in the air first.

Something got to start floating out there and
they got to feel it. It got to seep all through their flesh, and all through their bones. But it’s not out there yet. Nothing out there, but white hates and nigger fear. And fear they feel is the only way to keep going. One day they must realize fear is worse than any death. When that time comes they will be ready to move with you. (241)

Jimmy tries his best to prove himself to be a leader among the disobedience folk. He concocts a plan for protest. The old people do not show any interest in this protest, but the young people promise to join in hands with him in the protest at Bayonne’s courthouse. When Jimmy leaves for some accident works which happens unexpectedly, the young Mob change their mind not to follow him. A few committee members who have a great zeal, including Miss Jane gather in the morning of the protest to walk to Bayonne. Their walk, instead of having belief in their movement is filled with turmoil and fear: “They were not marching, they were not hurrying; it didn’t look like they were even talking to each other. They were walking like every last one of them was by himself and any little noise could turn him around”
Jimmy’s determination and his zeal towards liberty instill the black community. Inspiration due to the fear which lingers in them, the people determine to fight for themselves expecting this determination from the people: “Most of them were scared and they have not shamed to show it but they were standing there, and that’s what mattered” (257). Jimmy’s death has made the mentality of the group change from fear to outrageousness. Robert Samson, the white man and plantation owner dissuade the movement and instills fear among the people. He approaches the crowd and discourages them; but Jane and the braver one do not accept his words and neglect his persuasion to give up the movement. Jane explains that Jimmy is mortally dead, but he lives through the movement of the people: “Just a little piece of him is dead…. The rest of him is waiting for us in Bayonne” (259). Jimmy’s desire for liberty through the movement is not achieved when he is alive, but his individual fight and his death thereafter implore-entrance into the community. It is through him, the community gains back its kinship and togetherness. It is exploring the independence of the individual and the community.
The efforts of Jimmy become significant and the blacks protest, but it occurs only after Jimmy’s death. Gaines postulates, through the story of Jimmy, that the self-determination of an individual person is essential. This self-determination of an individual eventually leads to the collective sense of pride and self-respect for the black community. Jane, who cannot protest against Richard Samson, improves her standards, by challenging him. This has occurred only through the self-knowledge she acquires through her journeys. Through her varied journey, she turns out to be an effective organizer for the community by the end of the narrative.

In Jane’s life, she encounters various changes. One such change is the religious conversion. This develops a sense of self-determination in her and it also strengthens her religious freedom. Jane’s journeys, through a coarse path, in which the fear of death beats as she realize the struggle which she undergoes is a heavy one, the struggle for survival. Jane is motivational and uplifts the spirit of other blacks in the struggle towards liberation. Jimmy encourages Jane, who inspires others to be a part in the movement. She lacks the fear of death as she passes over a different
path of life. She does not fear inwardly or outwardly and states to Mary outwardly saying that she “will die in Bayonne only if the Lord wills it…. If not, I’ll die in my bed. I hope” (249). The black community is hindered by fear in the movement. But this does not agitate Jane’s individual strength. She also defies the words of the plantation owner, Robert Samson by word and deed and thus become the leader of her community so that the others could follow her. The long span of her life of about one-hundred years indicates that the movement does not focus on the young but to the whole of the black community. Just like the river that runs in its own course, Jane has already mentioned about the river in her narrative: the black will ultimately achieve freedom one day. Although the levee holds back the water, the “water will never die… will run free again” (158). The restrictions and racial violence are barriers which hinder the progress of the black community. Jane understands that their people will overcome such barricades. As “Miss Jane’s religious travels take her across the river to the freedom of the soul, social freedom,” which lags behind, is like the freedom of the river, inevitable. Throughout her life
where she endures and fights against oppression, she assures future freedom for her people.

This chapter has dealt with the enslavement which has been taken from Gaines's autobiographical concept of Miss. Jane Pittman. It evokes in “The Narrative Self: Race, Politics, and Culture in Black American Women’s Autobiography,” Nellie Y. McKay suggests that “black autobiographies used narrative to fight their battle against chattel slavery and to engage on the search for political and psychological freedom for all black people” (96). Even though the novel bears the title “An autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman,” this novel is not a true autobiography but just a fictional one. The novelist, Gaines suggests that Miss Jane’s story is all of their stories, and their stories are Miss Jane’s. Gaines implies that Miss Jane’s autobiography postulates a collective self-identity of the black people and she voices in the black community as they struggle from enslavement. Although others “carry the story for her... When she was tired or when she just did not feel like talking any more, or when she has forgotten certain things,” Jane asserts herself by stating “No, no, no, no, no” when “she did not agree” and “the other person would
not contradict her” (99). Even though Jane voices her idea of self identity, she emphasizes on the struggle of the blacks, the tales which are untold.

Miss Jane Pittman makes it a universal story of the long lasting black struggle and the promise of black determination towards liberty. It also emphasizes on the individual worth, group pride, and the humanity of black people. Thus, through this novel Gaines highlights the struggle of a woman towards freedom both politically and psychologically. This enthrals on the personal life of Miss. Jane Pittman’s personal life and her upheaval towards liberation out of enslavement. Thus, this narrative of the struggle towards emancipation is narrated by Jane herself in an explicit manner.