

## **The Analysis of Black People’s Psyche: A Brief study on Afro-American Folktales**

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**ABSTRACT-** This research article examines the representation of Afro-American folktales and its role in the lives of enslaved Black people who regained their self-identity with the help of written narratives. In the Postcolonial Literature, they have intrigued researchers because these tales reveal the concealed history and lost traditions of Afro-Americans during the enslavement era. The purpose of writing this article is to examine how White Americans controlled and overshadowed the cultural beliefs of Afro-Americans through manipulating their mind forcefully. Since, White people belonged to the ruling class they dehumanized black people. They controlled their life which caused a sense of fear and lack of confidence in them. Through this research article my main aim is to analyse the deep and psychological meaning Afro-American folktales that explore slavery, gender oppression, class conflicts and other social taboos faced by enslaved black people.

**Keywords–** Afro-American Folktales, White Supremacy, Double-Consciousness, Suppressed minds, Self-identity.

**Introduction-** Afro-American Folktales is a glorification of the past oral storytelling better known as “Orature” based on old customs traditions, multifarious myths, songs, riddles and phrases. They carry mostly painful emotions and feelings that are embedded in the most realistic way. In the canon of Afro-American Literature, they are described as a unique literary mode of expression. They have constructed a new world and hope for oppressed Black slaves who were given traumatic life due to White people during the time of slavery. As long as it was used orally, folktales were not well organised, but as it was accepted a place in the literary world it became more systematic and conducive. After the end of slavery in 1865, Afro-Americans got the opportunity to document their experiences and concealed history through literary works. These tales are connected with the cultural performances, social

growth and personality development of Negroes. Slavery costed them adapting a life that was forcefully implemented by White people. With the help of Afro-American folktales, they were able to free from the traps of them. It was due to fact that several writers knew their responsibilities to unveil the brutal face of White Americans such as Zora Neale Hurston, Langston Hughes, W.E.B. Du Bois, Toni Morrison, Gayl Jones and several other penetrating voices like them. In a historical context, to be a black skin in America was not that easy as they were judged, mocked and humiliated on the basis of their race and colour. To understand the difficult life of Afro-Americans, it is important to understand the cultural backgrounds of them which can be best understood through folktales.

For this purpose, I have chosen Afro-American folktales as it is also one of the medium through which one can execute their historical backgrounds in a psychological manner. It is an artistic way of expressing black culture, tradition, beliefs, hopes and fears and other kinds of emotions. Like every country, they too have their own folktales. Earlier, it was spoken in the oral medium but later on it was carried to literary world in the written form. Through their folktales they created their own heroes and spirits to outwit White people. Most of the animal characters talked like human and shared moral values. Folktales, led them towards a hopeful life that also resulted in overcoming pain and anxiety. Thus, it can be said that Afro-American was like a therapy for them. In the beginning it was spoken for the amusement, moral lessons, communication but the written medium of folktales examine the hardships of slavery. The best thing it teaches is that we should not be fear of expressing what we feel and what we are going through be it bad or good. The written medium of Afro-American folktales are based on:

- It offers a relationship between expression and experiences.
- It is the construction and reconstruction of both the medium oral folktales as well as written medium of folktales.

By collecting the memories of their past experiences about slavery Afro-Americans had tried to reconstruct their identity as their identities were completely lost. Identity is not something that is related with individuality of a person but it also defines the sameness of a community, race and ethnic identity. It is also not something that is giving by others but is constructed through self-belief and uniqueness. It also differentiates between two different groups and is

unique in its own way. Thus, Afro-Americans were also unique and had different culture that was not same as white people but they were not allowed to present their culture. White people never let them to show their feelings, attitude, behaviour and aspirations that made them unrecognized for several years. They were dominated internally as well as externally.

Today, it has gained a lot of popularity in the world of literature. One of the common things that it preaches us is that living a sad life is just a choice but coming out from traumas and solving our problems without any fear is a matter of heroic thing. Most of these folktales are autobiographical in nature as they are related to author's own personal life, culture and traditions of African Americans. It is a humanistic approach to cultural and racial values as it preserves humanity in common. It teaches us to value every culture and respect every tiny object. It is a unique way of self-liberation that prevents one from isolation. Folktale helps in recovering from the lost voices and finding a vision of true self. For instance, Zora Neale Hurston, an Afro-American folktale writer focuses on the mutual needs of enslaved people. Hurston offers storytelling as the sine qua non for black life. In fact, storytelling for her is synonymous with the mastery of life. Thus, in her novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, she says:

*“It was time for sitting on porches beside the road. It was time to hear things and talk. These sitters had been tongueless, earless, eyeless conveniences all day long. Mules and other brutes had occupied their skins. But now, the sun and the bossman were gone, so the skins felt powerful and human. They became lords of sounds and lesser things. They passed nations through their mouths. They sat in judgment.....”* 1

This paper highlights that to get free from the clutches of upper-class people one should believe in their own potential. At a closer look one is influenced and is captivated by the pasts of Afro-Americans. It conceals the painful relationships between White people and Black race. It also offers a subtle understanding of social, cognitive and personal lives of Afro-Americans that reshaped their own identity in the society by facing so many hardships. There is no superior culture and inferior culture. The only thing that exists is a popular culture that spread humanity. Afro-American Culture is one of them.

Today, it is not seen as an inferior culture rather it is seen with great pride. It was only possible with the great Afro-American writers.

One another important feature of Afro-American folktales is the idea of double consciousness, a term used by W.E.B. Du Bois. It is often situated with marginalized people who live a life in dilemma. This experience is clearly mentioned in Afro-American folktales to express the oppressive life of Black people. It was a mental and emotional challenge for them. Their value was measured through the eyes of White racist Americans. They never allowed them to live a liberated life. From the core of their heart they wanted to enjoy, sing, read, write and spend their time according to their choice. For them, it was very painful. But, the only one thing that made them alive was their folktales. With the help of it they could achieve their aspirations and dreams, disobey their White masters and rule on them through it. It is an imaginary way of healing and they derived pleasure from it. Afro-American folktale is the emergence of black consciousness and awareness through black culture and black identity. The characters in the folktales were not fictional but real characters that had individual literary voices. The identity that was lost because of ignorance was reconstructed and regained through literature. They realized that they were colonized and voiceless and thus emancipated to seek their identity when they understood that they were not treated equally. W.E.B. Du Bois stated that:

*“It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. Double Consciousness is a constant struggle to having to be a Black people in society. They were treated like footstools in United States of America. One ever feels his two-ness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.” 2*

The concept of double consciousness made them feel that they are Negro and dark-skinned people which means these people are born only to serve White people obey their harsh rules. It was also due to the fact that they were low-power-groups which made them feel that it is their right to obey their masters and please them. As White people were in power, they thought that they possess African Americans and influenced them by their authoritative nature. But things

did change when some of the African Americans leaders and writers protested them and decided to live their life as they wanted.

Afro-American Folktales is an emblematic representation of black issues and hardships. Racism, slavery, gender inequality and high-class propaganda are some of the hallmark themes of African American folktales. It can be examined with the critical race theory that states racism is a part of the society and it can only be erased if people have the self-courage and are strong enough to defeat the poor thoughts of upper class people. The same notion is also presented by the Afro-American folktale writers who propagated and appealed from Black people to respect their culture and self-identity. Through their written narratives, they proved that there is no such power on earth that can make an individual inferior. They helped in giving a unique identity to black culture and demanded fundamental rights for their community including right to vote. In 1867 Black men and women publicly assembled at a convention in Lexington, Kentucky, where political leader William F. Butler stated -

*“First, we had the cartridge box, now we want the ballot box, and soon we will get the jury box. I don’t mean with our fists, but by standing up and demanding our rights.” Butler argued that Black men fought to maintain the Union, “but we were left without means of protecting ourselves. We need and must have the ballot box for that purpose.” 3*

**Conclusion**– To conclude, it can be said that today Afro-American folktales is the means of celebrating Black culture. With the help of these tales, they were able to regain their self-identity. Afro-American folktales are the process of enlightenment of Black people’s psyche, emotions and their personal experiences. When people suppressed the voice of Black race, it was the pen and paper that gives us courage to stand for our freedom. When their freedom of speech was denied due to slavery their passion for living a liberated life became indispensable desire and they got inspiration from the folktales. It made them hopeful and optimistic.

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