



**HEALING THE SCARS OF SLAVERY: REFLECTIONS IN 18th
CENTURY LITERATURE AND BEYOND**

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ABSTRACT

The main theme of the present paper is the socio-economic, religious and psychosomatic encounters in the literature written about the Slaves and the Oppressed. The paper is an attempt to explore psychosomatic and socio-economic consequences of the forced slave trade of eighteenth century through literature of the sufferers of Africa and America. Eighteenth century has been condemned for the scars and stigma of full-fledged slave trade. The European nations and the American States were the dominant players of the cruel inhuman but commercially motivated slave trade and socially and economically weak populace from the continents like Africa were the tragic sufferers. The present paper is divided into four parts: (i) origins of slavery, (ii) slave trade and its religious implications in Africa and America, (iii) the survey of the slave narratives with illustrations of healing the scars of slavery from Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin and (iv) present day scenario of neo slavery. The paper attempts to elaborate socio-economic and religious interests of the masters and psychosomatic problems of the slaves of the eighteenth century. All the philosophers and social reformers have guided the humanity by being virtuous. The concluding part will try to highlight guiding principle and spiritual path of enlightenment shown by Mahatma Gandhi from India, Martin Luther King Junior from the USA, Nelson Mandela from South Africa and Dalai Lama from Tibet by becoming non-violent and righteous. (words- 231)



Key Words: *Slave Trade, African Americans, Masters, marginalized, Uncle Tom's Cabin, Virtues and Vices*

Introduction:

Modern civilization led to urge for earning money which became the power and it allured people to destruction of human values and conscience. One of the important but negative events of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries from the humanity point of view is the slave trade which crossed all the boundaries of morality due to enslavement of human conscience. Slavery and slave trade took different shapes, twists and turns in the subsequent centuries across the globe. African blacks suffered tremendously in large quantity for a very long time in this trade. This paper attempts to make critical analysis of slave trade and its implications since the eighteenth century. The paper is divided into four parts: (i) origins of slavery, (ii) slave trade and its religious implications in Africa and America, (iii) the survey of the slave narratives with illustrations of healing the scars of slavery from Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and (iv) present day scenario of neo slavery.

1.1: Origins of Slavery: Old and New

A slave is a person who is forcibly kept under somebody's supremacy. In the primitive ages human beings started stalling property and it gradually turned into dire greed. People were kept under ownership like a pet or commodity that was sold either in the name of God or as a business. In ancient times of wars, the human beings were pirated and imprisoned by their own fellow beings. According to the Bible, the first reference to the slave trade is found in 3000 BC. The slaves were at the bottom of social hierarchy. In the hegemonic structure society acknowledged the king as the super power; the next was the Prince, then the Archbishop, the soldier, farmer and finally the slave. The physically strong slaves were used in the place of animals for hard labour. Those who were in debt, sold their children as slaves. Powerful people kept many slaves. The person under the burden of debt sold himself out in the market of the slaves. It was a formal business and a legal practice of ancient societies.

Throughout history, men have looked differently upon the practice of slavery. Plato, for instance, in *Politics* mentions that he was in favour of the slave trade that transported people from other country than Greece. He asked the Greeks that they should not make their own people 'slaves'. His disciple Aristotle supported slavery by stating that it is very natural and healthy practice of any society. According to Nietzsche the division of the society into good and evil leads us to divide the society into two classes: the master and the slave. He further states that financially and materially strong people come under 'good' category and are usually known as the 'masters' and opposite of it stands for weak or evil that belongs to slave identity. Charles Darwin was the first humanitarian who called all people as 'humans' and not

the masters and the slaves. The ancients and the medieval philosophers defended the practice of slavery. After the age of enlightenment there came a change in the attitude to slavery.

1.2: Slave Trade:

A human being was treated as a commodity, a product to be sold in slave trade. The agents, the masters, the archbishops and even the kings were active in this business though they had never studied the art of marketing and management. Branding the slave was a marketing strategy of the agents. The agents took utmost care of creating powerful image of their slave brand. The price of the human trade was calculated after displaying the features, strength, history and previous record and such other necessities of the market. The marketing strategies were innovative. The slaves were displayed on a moving wheel so that the buyer could see him and inspect him from all sides and angles. The slaves were asked to jump, run, hop and were made to perform many utility tricks that would prove their overall strength. Stowe's trader Mr. Haley in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* reads an announcement about lawful trade in a newspaper advertisement:

"Executor's Sale. ...Negroes! ...Agreeably to order of court, will be sold, on Tuesday, February 20, before the court-house door, in the town of Washington, Kentucky, the following Negros: Hagar, aged 60; John aged 30; Ben, aged 21; Saul, aged 25; Albert, aged 14. Sold for the benefit of the creditors and heirs of the estate of Jesse Blutchford, Esq. Samuel Marris THOMAS FLINT Executors". (Stowe, UTC, 2011: 149)

The king or the master appointed the officer who would take care of law and order. Some portion of the profit was rechanneled in a charity work like building roads, bridges and such other social welfare works. The warranty of the slave was decided as per his/her demand in bargain. The sick slaves were sold without warranty. The owner took care of providing basic things like a pair of clothes, and wooden shoes once in two years. The slave was the commodity of the owner which he could use as he wished. Being a commodity the slave did not get any right to build his hut or to raise his family. The African continent was the worst sufferer of this trade. Majority of the slaves were brought from Africa. Different unjust laws in the favour of the slave trade were introduced in America as the Fugitive Law of 1793, Black Codes of 1865, and Jim Crow Laws of 1876, Ku-Klux-Klan (KKK) of 1865 which denied any kind of freedom to slaves.

1.2.i.: Slavery in Africa:

African nations had gone through several conquests in the sixteenth and seventeenth century which resulted in slave trade. Nearly nine hundred thousand slaves were transported to the



Caribbean islands and America through sea voyage. Gang war for power between two tribes of the natives was a regular practice of the native Africans. The defeated group was sold to the European agents who sent them to America and the Caribbean island as slaves. The European traders very diplomatically provoked the group leaders to fight and then exploited the native Africans as the slaves. The profit in the business made the agents greedy to find ways of captivating common man as a slave. People who were involved in small crimes or those who had taken debts, those who were dying due to hunger were abducted as slaves. Philip Curtin in his book *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Sensus* (1969) states that nearly seventeen million African slaves were transported to Europe and America. Out of them nearly ten million Africans survived during the horrible sea voyage and seven million died during the journey due to starvation and exploitation at the hands of their master and unwillingness for survival. The Portuguese transported most of the slaves from South Africa to gold and diamond mines of Brazil in 1695. It was very difficult for them not only to work hard but also to survive in extreme situations. Haiti had five hundred seventy thousand black slaves in 1770. Among them sixty-six percent slaves were hired from Africa. European settlers and Muslim masters and agents were involved in slave trade. It was a very profitable business for them. Most of the traders blackmailed the ignorant populace in the name of God and injected the idea of 'sinners of God' in their minds due to which they easily accepted it as God given fate.

1.2. ii: Religious Strategy:

The concepts of virtue and vice are introduced through religion. Christianity was the prominent religion in Europe and America when slave trade was in practice. The Christian religion was initially neutral about the practice of slave trade. The agents of this religion neither provoked nor tried to eradicate it. Christian priests induced the idea that the sinners being Adam's successors had to repay for their sin of 'forbidden fruit' by becoming slaves, and their hard labours would redeem them from their sins. Ironically some were chosen as Adam's sinners and some declared themselves as judges of God. The scriptures portrayed that Jesus had supported master-slave relationship by saying that honesty and sincerity of the slaves would work for their fortune if it was noticed by their master. The church played a very important role in making the slave trade legal. Religious scriptures and laws circulated by the church strengthened the power of the master and those who would help the slave to rescue would be treated as culprits of God. Harvard Sitkoff in his book *The Struggle for Black Equality* throws light on the white supremacy of the churches in following words:

'It exemplified their teachings of inherent and irremediable racial differences, of blacks as the most primitive, degraded, and least civilized of the races, and of the folly of governmental tampering with local folkways. Whether appealing to scriptural or scientific evidence, to Darwinism, the gospel of Anglo-Saxonism, or



the new interest in eugenics, a generation of clergymen, editors and educators propounded the intellectual rationalizations for white supremacy.' (04)

Islam was in favour of slavery because Mohammed and his followers bought and sold slaves for profit. The *Kuraan* was in favour of slavery. If a slave converted himself into a Muslim he would be freed from slavery. Education played an important role in making the marginalized classes aware of their subordinate status. Literature written by the former slaves was highly appreciated for their sufferings. Literary works vented out the scars of slavery and can be seen as struggle to heal the scars.

1.3: Slave Literature: A Survey

After the abolition of slavery by legislation the former slaves encoded their experiences in order to heal the scars. Slave narratives and other literary texts came into being in the mid nineteenth century. The first ice-breaking novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* written by the white author Harriet Beecher Stowe is about inhuman treatment given to slaves that opened the eyes of all. It gave birth to a prolonged war against slavery and human rights in America. It helped the marginalized to get cathartic and soothing effects and led them towards a path of freedom. A brief survey of the eye opener master pieces and narratives would help us to understand the major role played by literature in building abolitionist movement and making human appeal. Fredrik Douglas's autobiography *Narrative of the Life of Fredrik Douglas: An American Slave* (1845) is a tale of a black slave who went through hell due to tortures of his masters but William Lloyd Garrison, journalist and activist of abolitionist movement, through his speeches changed his perception due to which he became an activist. He delivered many speeches in order to make his people aware of the injustice done to them. The narrative is succeeded by two more parts. Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) was the bestseller that raised voice against the most cruel and inhuman 'fugitive law' in America. William Wells Brown's *Clawtell* (1853) narrates the pains of the coloureds that were born due to mixed racial contacts between the master and the slave and had to live a life of the 'outcaste'. Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) narrates a tragic story of sexual exploitation of a black slave Linda Brent who was sexually exploited by her master. She tries to rescue herself with the other white master who becomes an exploiter.

Twentieth century literature gives a good number of slave narratives that has been mentioned here in brief. Booker Washington's *Up From Slavery* (1901) is an autobiography and chronicle of his fifty years from a slave to a school master who pursued higher education and helped the blacks to become self-reliant through education. Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) addresses social and intellectual issues of African Americans in early twentieth century. It deals with individual and personal identity. Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) is a semi-autobiographical novel that deals with the injustice done to the African American



community in the ghetto of North and South America. Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969) is an autobiography in seven volumes. It projects celebration of black motherhood, a revolt against racism, family bondage, personal dignity and independence. Alex Haley's *Roots: The Saga of an American Family* (1974) is a story of a coloured boy who tries to search his roots, the family history of slavery, where he found himself as the seventh generation descendent. It is known as the best informative fiction about slavery. Alice Walker's *The Colour Purple* (1982), an epistolary novel focuses on the life of the African American women in the Southern United States in the 1930s. The novel deals with the sad story of a girl raped by her father. She gives birth to a child and her endless sufferings begin. It is a gruesome presentation of the girl's turbulent voyage against all injustices. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Stowe has been selected to show how religious beliefs helped Uncle Tom to face inhuman vindictiveness of the masters.

1.3.i: Uncle Tom's Cabin: A Healer of the 18th Century

Harriet Beecher Stowe is 19th Century American novelist and one of the early women writers. Her novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), initially entitled as *Uncle Tom was a Thing*, is a controversial yet very popular work of stark reality of nineteenth century American slaves. It was heavily criticized and condemned for the subject, style and narration, yet got translated in most of the languages of the world. It was praised by Abraham Lincoln as the novel that laid the ground for civil war for 'abolition of slavery', the second best seller novel after the Bible that broke the ice for the slaves of African American origins who learnt to fight against all evils and racial inequality. Tom, the central character is killed and crucified like Jesus by his own people, for the noble cause of saving his fellow beings from the cruel master. He is the protagonist and a pious Christian African American slave who exhilarates his community not to lose faith in God in extremely passive but negative living conditions and to follow Biblical principles of humanity. The novel projects conflict between good and evil. The author, being an anti-slavery activist and a journalist by profession explored her female sentiments and wrote heart rendering story of Tom and his fellow beings. Tom guides humanity not to lose hope. His belief in human values makes him the hero of entire humanity. He lives and dies for his religious faith like Jesus. His journey from the 'shipwreck to the salvager' is a guiding force for the marginalized.

Uncle Tom's story is a lifelong odyssey of pain and suffering. Tom is a middle-aged slave who works with a slave trader Mr. Shelby that treats him sympathetically. In order to clear his debts he sells him to a slave trader Mr Haley. During the journey towards the south, Tom saves Haley's drowning daughter Eva due to which he becomes her personal servant. She dies due to illness but asks her father not to sell Uncle Tom and to free him from slavery. St. Clare who is appointed to make papers of Tom's freedom is killed by the agents of slavery and Tom is again sold in an auction to Mr. Simon Legree, a cruel slave trader. Despite very cruel



inhuman treatment, Tom behaves patiently and never loses faith in God. He is beaten to death when he refuses to tell whereabouts of his fellow slave women who have run towards Canada. The master tries to shake his belief in the Bible but he remains an ardent follower of Christ. His white friend George comes in the end to purchase him and then to free him but unfortunately Uncle Tom dies before getting freedom from slavery.

This highly dramatic novel is known as a religious text. Religion plays a significant role in providing mental peace and strength to the characters in the novel. Saint Augustine Clare, the third owner of Tom and Eva's father, is on the verge of winning God against demon within oneself. He is not willing to rule slaves. Tom preaches Bible to all. Stowe's novel is a public display of private, religious feeling designed to change both feelings and policy, and an intellectual argument about ideology and theology. Her novel ends with the triumph of the virtues over the evils. It gives an emotional sensitive appeal to entire humanity to fear God's wrath and His judgment on the sin of slavery. The novel brings forth religious and moral dilemmas. The biblical allusions are scattered all over the text. The author appeals to all for evangelical concepts of brotherhood and sisterhood and popular evangelical piety of a concept of sanctification. The slaves George and his family run to the north in order to become free human beings. This exhibits the conflict between the southern and the northern churches regarding slavery. It is shown that George and his family are set free in North America.

1.3.ii: The Dawn of Spring after the Abolition of Slavery:

Nineteenth century onwards the African Americans started their journey towards success. Hundreds of blacks have demonstrated their prowess in several fields such as sports, art, literature, politics, religion, social work etc. Following are some of the examples. The white supremacy in boxing came to an end by the rise of the African American champion Jack Johnson. Paul Robeson is remembered as the best football player, actor, singer and writer of nineteenth century. Wilt Chamberlain became the top rank Basketball player. Langston Hughes was known as the poet, playwright, short story writer and columnist. Josephine Baker was remembered as the first woman singer, dancer and civil rights activist of African American race. Mahaliya Jackson reached the hearts of the people due to her Gospel singing. Mohamed Ali, Mike Tyson and others rocked in boxing sphere. Tony Morrison won the Nobel for her novels. Tennis was conquered by Arthur Ash and the glorious tradition is continued even today by Serena Williams. How can one forget Michel Jackson, the king of Pop music and dance? The anti-slavery movement won accolades when Barak Obama became the first African American President of the United States.

1.4: Be Human to Overcome Neo Slavery:



The history of the world is a story of the clash for power between the center and the margin, the superior and the inferior, the oppressor and the oppressed, the dominant and the dominated and such other relations. The entire humanity in the era of globalization is not completely free from gender bias, child labour, poverty, and illiteracy. The manmade walls of distinction and discrimination are difficult to eradicate completely but are not insurmountable and unattainable. Mahatma Gandhi and Mahatma Phule from India, Martin Luther King Jr. from America, Nelson Mandela from South Africa and Dalai Lama from Tibet have fought as leaders of the marginalized. Humanitarian concern must transcend the evils of race, gender and creed. Being human is being kind, compassionate, helpful, responsible, judicious, and responsible and a true, humanitarian citizen of the Globe. Maya Angelou's courage in her poem *Still I Rise* is apt to sum up the statement, 'Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave, I am the dream and the hope of the slave. I rise.'

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