

A post Colonial Contemplation of The Subjugated Afro-American Captives in Colson Whitehead's the Underground Railroad

G. Santhana Lakshmi

II M.A. English Literature, V. O. Chidambaram College, Tuticorin

Abstract: - Post Colonialism dealt with the colonization, decolonization and neocolonizing process. Post Colonization discusses the political ethical and metaphysical concerns about gender, nationality, cultural identity, nationality ,race ,ethnicity, language and power. Subaltern was the main concept of Post Colonialism. Colson Whitehead was an American writer. His works are about the issue of slavery, race and cultural identity . His style of writings were languorous. Among the works of Colson Whitehead The Underground Railroad is a fantabulous novel .He worked The Underground Railroad as a genre of historical fiction. The novel is about whether the protagonist taste the essence of freedom or not. Colson Whitehead depicted the Underground Railroad .There was a record that there was an actual underground railroad system. The novel may not present the actual life of the African people but it is literal. While analyzing this novel we would come across the issue of slavery, brutality, violation and inequality. The Afro-Americans were endured these kinds of oppressions for their lifetime.

I. INTRODUCTION

The numerous Afro-Americans were moved against their determination from their native soil to serve the economic needs of empire in the societies that advanced from the wave of European expansion from the sixteenth century. In 1613 twenty Africans were kidnapped and sold as captives at Jamestown and Virginia for the first time. The Massachusetts was the primary colony which legally recognized enslavement in 1641. The African people were sold as slaves in exchange for wine, sugar and tobacco by followed triangular trade route of Americans in 1645. The underground railroad was established to help the African captives to escape from the life of enslavement in 1815. In 1872 William Still had documented the facts of authentic narratives and letters of slaves. These documentations kindled Whitehead to portray the life of Afro-American captives in The Underground Railroad. Colson Whitehead's The underground Railroad is not just a novel but it is a record. It presents the clear cut picture of the life of slaves and their enslavement and their quest for freedom. While analyzing Colson Whitehead's The underground Railroad, the novel would come across variety of issues around Post-Colonialism. The issues such as Heritage, Family, Home, Endurance, Rebellion, Slavery, Value, Ownership, Commodification, Death and Freedom. Post-Colonialism is focused on the human consequences of the control and the exploitation of colonized people and their

lands. Post-Colonialism analyses the metaphysical, ethical, political concerns about cultural identity, gender, nationality, race, ethnicity, subjectivity, language, and power. In Post-Colonialism the term Subalterns designates the population who are socially, politically and geographically outside of the hegemonic power structure of the colony. Subaltern is a term introduced by Antonio Gramsci (1891– 1937) notably through his work on Cultural Hegemony to refer to the working class. The term Subaltern and Subaltern studies entered Post-colonial studies through the works of the Subaltern Studies Group, a collection of historians of the Indian subcontinent includes Ranajit Guha, Gayatri C. Spivak, Shahid Amin, David Arnold, Partha Chatterjee, David Hardiman, Dipesh Chakrabarty and Gyanendra Pandey. Subaltern dealt with marginalization, brutality, oppression, violation, gender bias, enslavement of lower, inferior or working class people, discrimination, exploited on the cultural, political and religious grounds.

The novel opens by Caesar's approachment to Cora to flee to north but Cora refused his opinion. Her thought of refusing to escape was inherited from Cora's grandmother Ajarry. Ajarry was kidnapped from Africa since her childhood. She travelled for six weeks to the Port of Ouidah in a ship. The life in a ship was hellish for Ajarry because apart from the ill-treatment under enslavement Ajarry weren't able to communicate or express her feelings or needs to the slave mates. The reason is even though the ship

is filled with living colored people, they were existing as trees because they were all mixed people who belonged to different languages. The masters separated the people of same language in order to avoid rebellion. Ajarry tried to commit suicide twice on the voyage to America once by denying herself food and then by drowning. Though Ajarry was planned to face death she didn't think about escapism. Cora stressed that thinking to escape from the plantation life equates to invite her death by herself. But later, Cora's fear to lead a life under Terrance Randall's enslavement was more and more than the thirst for freedom and so Cora decided to taste the essence of freedom which was inherited from her mother Mabel.

Mabel's life was full of bitterness that Mabel was continuously raped by Moses. Moses threatened her if not, he would kill her babe Cora. Virginity or chastity is more valuable to a girl or woman. According to the ladies, the virginity is her life and soul. But Mabel became deflowered woman to save her child's life. Mabel respected her child's life than her chastity. As a lady she might be unsuccessful to save her virginity or chastity but as a mother she was successful in her life by lose her virginity to save her motherhood and she proved that Mabel was one of the best mothers in the world. But, how long she could tolerate this rubbish experience in her life? Mabel was not seduced by Moses for the first time or the last time but it was a continuous process. So Mabel decided to escape not from the life of plantation but from the rubbish experience. So Mabel planned to get rid off from Moses and so she made her way but by leaving her family [lovable daughter Cora] in the plantation. Every Sunday noon Cora used to tend her garden. The habit of tending her garden was inherited to Mabel from her mother Ajarry and to Cora from her mother Mabel. When Cora planned to flee to north, she digged yam in the ground as her mother Mabel did it and her longingness for her garden which was the one and only companion for Cora after her mother had run away was equal to the feelings of Mabel when she had left her lovable child Cora in the plantation.

The Africans didn't know the meaning of family life. Because their great grandmother, great grandfather, grandmother, grandfather, mother, father, brother, sister, uncle, aunt, baby had been sold to different masters and so they lead a lonely and hellish life just to fill up the stomachs. According to the Americans, the horrible sin was harboring the black people. Whitehead fantastically depicted the punishments by Americans for harboring the Africans. In North Carolina, Martin rescued Cora and accommodate her in his home but it was leaked out by his servant Fionna and so Americans hanged Martins family in the Oak tree and the people were stoned Martin to death. The Americans didn't allow the Africans to live with their family but the Americans made another American to die with their family for accommodating a black. The Americans had not only destroyed the life of colored people but also destroyed the

life of same coloured skin who rescued Africans. Through the depiction of Whitehead, the people would understand the reality of Afro-Americans that is the Africans had no home to live. Of course, the Africans accommodated them in the place which is similar to the way we determine the place where our pet animals should be in our home. Thus the Americans treated Africans as Other, in the sense the Afro-Americans are farm animals to Americans. The Africans had a shelter but the Africans couldn't possess the place as their home. The Americans demanded the Africans accommodation and there the Africans should be ready to live with anybody at anytime. In The Underground Railroad, Cora didn't have a place to possess it as her home. Cora didn't know which was her home? Cora was in dilemma for, Cora's ancestors were born somewhere whether it was Cora's home or Cora was born somewhere whether it was Cora's home or Cora was going to lead her rest of the life in unknown place whether it was Cora's home. Cora's dilemma was still the dilemma for readers. As all the people know the fact that the first person- I can be introduced by name and profession and the third person- They can be introduced by their identity that identity is their home. But what is cora's identity? is still a question amongst the readers. However, it is not just a question but a history. Finally, the readers come to know the fact that the colour of the skin is the one and only identity of the coloured people. The fate of the Africans were to endure the brutality of enslavement or endure the outcome of a risk attempt to rebel. The Americans cunningness made the Africans to believe that there was no hope of rebellion. According to the Americans, rebellion was an offensive word and the Americans believed that the rebellion starts from escapism. So, if any of the enslaved people tried to escape from the plantation life or enslavement, the American masters demanded rubbish and hellish punishments to the African slaves. The character Big Anthony tried to escape from the enslavement of American master Terrance Randall for three days. Big Anthony was more likely to die than enduring the hellish punishments. Terrance ordered the slaves to assemble to show the slaves how they will be punished if the slaves are attempted to escape. The incident was:

The slaves gathered on the front lawn. Terrance's visitors sipped spiced rum as Big Anthony was doused with oil and roasted. The witnesses were spared his screams, as his manhood had been cut off on the first day, stuffed in his mouth and sewn in. The stocks smoked, charred and burned, the figures in the wood twisting in the flames as if alive. (The Underground Railroad 55)

No words to explain Big Anthony's endurance for his penis had been cut off. Even animal has never do such harmfulness to another animal. But the human beings had done wordless harm to other human beings. The irony is the brutal characteristic human beings are associated with animals in the universe. The Americans threat the Africans by punishing them cruelly in order to avoid

rebellion. As a girl, Cora endured the cruelty of masters as much as possible. Once on the birthday party of Jockey, a boy called Chester who unknowingly poured some wine in the Terrance shirt. Eventhough , Chester asked apology to him, Terrance whipped him cruelly and so Cora tried to rescue Chester. Cora' s bravery made Terrance more anxious and Terrance couldn' t tolerate how dare the black girl came forward to rescue her slave mate. It made Terrance to whip both cruelly. Through this incident the endurance is the only possibility among the black people but not the rebellion. Whitehead also depicted the life of abolitionists in Virginia. Once there was a meeting, Elijah Lander presented sparkling speech to the black community against white American' s enslavement. The speech was: Our ancestors came from all over the African continent. They had different ways of subsistence, different customs, spoke a hundred different languages. And that great mixture was brought to America in the holds of slave ships. To the north, the south. Their sons and daughters picked tobacco, cultivated cotton worked on the largest estates and smallest farms. We are craftsmen and midwives and preachers and peddlers. Black hands built the White House, the seat of our nation' s government. The word we.

We are not one people but many different people. How can one person speak for this great, beautiful race- which is not one race but many, with a million desires and hopes and wishes for ourselves and our children. (341)

As a result Elijah Alander was shot death. One more incident was Ridgeway trapped Cora and Jasper. Cora asked jasper' s life story while they were travelling. Jasper was the man who never stop singing, he outpoured his feelings and bitter experiences to Cora by song. Ridgeway shot him to death because according to the white supremacy the black people had no rights even to lament. The only possibility for the black people was to endure, endure and endure. The people would understand that the rebellion among the black people might be spooky, foolishness and risky. But anyhow after a complicated struggle, Cora as a Phoenix bird, tasted the essence of succeeding in her life. Therefore the protagonist created the fact among the readers that no one will save us, we have to save us. Americans related the aspects of slavery to the economic status of white supremacy. The Africans were treated as machines by the white supremacy. At one point, even the machine would take rest during the time of servicing. But for the black people, taking rest was impossible at any cost. The Africans were treated as farm animals. The African bodies were viewed as money making tools by the white government. Ajarry says:

In Charleston, the slave Ajarry was demanded by her master to stood naked on the platform. Just before sunset an agent bought her for two hundred and twenty six dollars. She would have fetched more but for that season' s glut of young girls. His suit was made of the whitest cloth she had ever seen. Rings set with colored stone flashed on his fingers.

When he pinched her breasts to see if she was in flower, the metal was cool on her skin. She was branded not for the first or last time. (5 – 6)

If we buy a product, we will check the quality of the product. The Americans had followed the same concept of checking the quality not only on product but also on the women while the Americans were purchasing the black people. The American masters continuously raped the slave women. The Americans didn' t allow the economical and social development of Africans. The white Americans weren' t ready to admit that the black people were human beings. But the Americans had enjoyed the bodily pleasures by seducing the black women. The American' s cunningness equates nothing. Almost more than half of the Americans had seduced the black women mainly for two reasons. The first season was the Americans wanted to fulfill their thirst for bodily pleasures. The second season was to increase the population of black people. Consequently, the Americans had treated the entire black society as slaves to work in their plantations for a meagre payment. Every human being' s enthusiasm is on their birthdays and their generations' birthdays. But this was impossible for coloured people. It' s very hard to hear that niggers didn' t know their birthdays and their names and their parents. The black people used to pick a favourite day as their birthday especially a Sunday [Sunday was a half working day].

The Americans had controlled sterilization among the African women in order to abolish the new black generations. According to the Americans the Africans were not privileged to raise voice against the Americans. In South Carolina, the Americans had commodified the African' s body. The American doctors had used the African body as medical tools. The Americans had marketing the African dead bodies for medical students to practice the medical experiments. The life of Africans was filled with only negative images. It was clearly visible when Cora stated that she had not known the meaning of optimism. This is because of their life is full of darkness. The Americans didn' t allow the Africans to smell and taste the essence of freedom. If Africans had tried an attempt to escape, the Africans had to meet their fatal ends by Americans. We are all well known about the concept of binary opposition that is black and white, dark and bright, happiness and misery. According to the linguists, our universe is filled with binary oppositions. But the colored people had only known about the melancholic images and dark images of life. Tasting the freedom was the dream of every nigger but the death was the gift of the Africans who had practicing their dream of freedom in day-to-day life, despite the fact of All are created equally by God. No matter if the Americans did not treat the Africans equally but it is bitter to hear that the Americans treated the Africans as animals. In some plantations the Americans hadn' t allow the Africans to wear dress.

The Americans and slave holders attitude towards the slaves were so cruel especially Terrance Randall' s attitude towards the slaves were that much brutal. Terrance Randall used to rape women slaves. He stated that he was interested to taste his women slaves before the slaves sold to the slave traders. He disturbed the slave' s wedding night and seduced the newly married slave woman in front of the slave' s husband and left the mark on the woman' s body. One more incident was Ridgeway captured the escaped slave. The slave demanded that she was ready to lose her virginity to him in exchange she needed freedom. At first Ridgeway accepted her deal but after the slave became deflowered, Ridgeway dragged the slave to her former master in order to get money. Thus, Whitehead depicted the niggers longingness for freedom. A woman was ready to lose her chastity to get freedom that means they couldn' t endure the brutality of their masters . In North Carolina if any white family accommodate black people, the Americans lynched them or hanged them in the oak tree or cut the penis and placed in the gap of the mouth or they were stoned to death. Similarly, in Georgia a man called Big Anthony who attempted to escape from the slavery. Unfortunately, Big Anthony was captured by the slave holders and the master killed him by roasting him in oil. It was worse that the American body snatchers snatched the African bodies to make money by selling it to the medical school for anatomical experiments. What a hell life the Africans have!

The novel *The Underground Railroad* may not have exposed an exact life of Africans but it has recorded the melancholic and hellish life of Africans. Thus, the key concept of Subalternity in the Post-Colonialism depicted how the slaves had been broken in various ways by the violence and trauma of enslavement. Furthermore, the system of punishment that governed enslavement discourages solidarity and mutual support. White men were trying to kill the African people slow everyday and sometimes trying to kill the African people fast and so the relationship between white people and black people became an ever increasing cycle of violence and fear. Thus, Colson Whitehead' s *The Underground Railroad*, would come across several issues of Post-Colonialism and it portrayed Afro-Americans endurance of suppressions by the oppressions of Americans. The trauma of enslavement, fear and violence are bounded in the life of slaves. Hence, Colson Whitehead is critically acclaimed as a American novelist of Afro-American literature.

The novel reflects the fact that the African identity, history and heritage are systematically erased by white slave owners who punished slaves for speaking their own languages or engaging in traditional social and religious practices. Ultimately, the African people were continuously oppressed emotionally, culturally and financially by the white Americans' enslavement. The Life of Afro-Americans made to wonder, how the civilized and modernized Americans had oppressed the other group to be

uncivilized ever. The one who support others to be civilized is the real civilized people.

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