

Paradigms of Marginality in Literature
Marginalization Interwoven with Slavery
A Critical Analysis of Booker T. Washington's *Up From Slavery*

Chithra P.

II M.A. English

**E. M. G. Yadava College of Arts and Science for Women
Madurai-14**

Abstract

Marginalization is mistreatment by the society against an individual or group of people who belong to the same community, which is inhumane. 'Identity crisis' and ignorance due to 'forced illiteracy' are the consequences of slavery and it is the cruelest act against humanity. Lives of the slaves were exploited by the 'dominating race' as they were restricted from gaining knowledge through education. The slave holders also 'enslaved' the minds, controlled and suppressed the voices raised against them and treated less than human as they were tortured economically, socially, physically and mentally. The subject of identification was totally ignored which resulted in questioning their own identity. Slaves were purchased in markets just because they are 'black' and this is the plight of each individual who were slaved. Marginalization is enigmatic. Booker T. Washington's autobiography *Up From Slavery* demonstrates the hardships faced by the African Americans owing to slavery and racial discrimination.

Keywords

Identity crisis, Forced illiteracy, Slavery, Racial discrimination, Dual identity, Child labor.

Marginalization means disregarding or subjecting a community under of race, gender, class, culture, caste or social status. Here subjecting means bringing one under mastery by coercion and preeminence. Merriam Webster's online dictionary defines the term marginalization as To relegate to an unimportant or powerless position within a society or group. Marginalized people are restricted from their basic rights.

Marginalization arise when a sole or a rabble are cloistered and constrained from securing civil liberties. Unalienable rights are right to life and liberty, freedom from slavery, freedom of speech, freedom of expression, freedom of work and right to education. These privileges vest to each person and everyone is legitimized to these basic rights without chauvinism. Marginalization occurs, when people are bounded not only from these rights, but also from every other right too. Slavery established in early seventh century in United States of America held many black people in bondage.

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Slaving a community, under race can be witnessed the writings of African American writers. African Americans are the community, who are descendants of enslaved blacks. African American literature is the literary work written by the descendants of the Africans who live in United States of America. As the conditions of African American changed over the time, (after 'Emancipation proclamation') so was the African American literature. It deals mainly with the theme of slavery, racial discrimination and their experience as slaves during the phase of enslavement. There is also "Slave narrative". Slave narrative is a literary genre, which is an autobiographical account of enslaved. More slaves are whipped for oversleeping than for any other fault. Neither age nor sex finds any favor. The overseer stands at the quarter door, armed with stick and cowskin, ready to whip any who may be a few minutes behind time. When the horn is blown, there is a rush for the door, and the hindermost one is sure to get a blow from the overseer. Young mothers who worked in the field, were allowed an hour, about ten o' clock in the morning, to go home to nurse their children. Sometimes they were compelled to take their children with them, and to leave them in the corner of the fences, to prevent loss of time in nursing them. The overseer generally rides about the field on horseback. A cowskin and a hickory stick are his constant companions... A blow with it, on the hardest back, will gash the flesh, and make the blood start" manifests Fredrick Douglass in his autobiography "My Bondage and My Freedom" (102-103). The slave narrative speaks of the hardships faced by the slave men and slave women during their period of enslavement.

Freedom plays vital role in everyone's life. Not only humans, but all beings on earth has a strong desire for freedom. No one wants to be enslaved. Despite, a group of people of a particular community was enslaved in the name of race and their rights were grabbed from them. Africans Americans were displaced from their native land in the proposition of enslaving. Racial discrimination is ill-treatment of individual or group of people under their race and it is the fiendish act against humankind. 'Displacement' is removing the native people by force, from their land for various causes. 'Slavery' is one among them and this gave rise to major problems such as identity crisis, child-labor, forced illiteracy, dual identity and so on. Slavery is inhumane and it is against humanity. Slavery comes off, when a person is forced to work for another, without getting paid. Their freedom was seized from them mercilessly and they were treated cruelly. Booker T. Washington's autobiography, *Up From Slavery* depicts us the perspective of the author, regarding enslavement and his bitter childhood experience under 'the system of slavery'. We could come across the situation were, the children under slavery were marginalized, in Washington's work.

The children of the slaves were restricted from their right to education, where it is a basic right of a human, which resulted in 'forced illiteracy'. Education can metamorphose an individual's life. But education was plucked from their innocent minds. Restricting the education based on the skin color, is obnoxious. I had no schooling whatever while I went as far the

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schoolhouse door with one of my young mistresses to carry her books. The pictures of several dozen boys and girls in a schoolroom engaged in study made a deep impression upon me and I had the feeling that to get into a schoolhouse and study in this way would be about the same as getting into paradise (9). The chosen words of the author shows us the longing for education and he is also representation of other children in the plantation who were enslaved like Washington and they would have also had the same dream about education as that of authors' dream. Washington compared the 'classroom' with 'getting into paradise'. The children were used up to "carry books" for their young mistresses. So, they not only faced the problem of forced illiteracy but also the issue of 'child labor'. Child labor kills the innocence of the child; it gives them stress and serious mental and physical injuries. The children under slavery were made to work in the plantation which belong to 'white men' and assigned them with difficult jobs. The children were ordered to 'clean the yard', 'carry water to men in the field' and they went to mill to ground corn once a week, which is three miles away from the plantation. Washington loathed this (grounding corn) job particularly, but he was made to do it anyway and this was the dreadful life of every other children in the plantation. They couldn't stand against this wantonness, as they are the 'submissive', they were framed to accept the reality of their lives. The children under slavery were bound to live in this vicious circle of enslavement.

During the period that I spent in slavery I was not large enough to be of much service , still I was occupied most of the time in cleaning the yards, carrying water to the men in the fields, or going to the mill, to which I used to take the corn, once a week, to be ground. The mill was about three miles from the plantation. This work I always dreaded. The heavy bag of corn thrown across the back of the horse, and the corn divided about evenly on each side ; but in same way, almost without exception, on these trips, the corn would so shift as to become unbalanced and would fall off the horse , and often I would fall with it. As I was not strong enough to reload the corn upon the horse, I would have to wait, sometimes for many hours, till a chance passer-by came along who would help me out of my trouble. The hours while waiting for someone were usually spent in crying. The time consumed in this way made me late in reaching the mill, and by the time I got my corn ground reached home it would be far into the night. The road was a lonely one, and often led through dense forests. I was always frightened" (8-9).

This shows us the clear picture, of how the child was confined with the work and the stress it accorded. Besides, the job was too much for his age, but nothing was taken into deliberation. Washington during his period of enslavement, was made to wear wooden shoes which made scary noises. He hearkened back to the memory of wearing 'flax shirt' for the first time which was gruesome experience, which was like 'trying ordeal'.

The first pair of shoes that I recall wearing were wooden ones. They had rough leather on the top, but the bottoms, which were about an inch thick, were of wood. When I walked, they made

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a fearful noise, and besides this they were very inconvenient since there was no yielding to the natural pressure of the foot... The most trying ordeal that I was forced to endure as a slave boy, however, was the wearing of a flax shirt. In the portion of Virginia where I lived it was common to use flax as part of the clothing for the slaves. The part of the flax from which our clothing was made was largely the refuse, which of course was the cheapest and roughest part. I can scarcely imagine any torture, except, perhaps, the pulling of a tooth, that is equal to that caused by putting on a new flax shirt for the first time. It is almost equal to the feeling that one would experience if he had a dozen or more chestnut burrs, or a hundred small pin- points, in contact with his flesh. Even to this day I can recall accurately the tortures that I underwent when putting on one of these garments. The fact that my flesh was soft, and tender added to the pain. But I had no choice. I had to wear the flax shirt or none; and had it been left to me to choose, I should have chosen to wear no covering...Until I had grown to be quite a youth this single garment was all that I wore (10).

As a slave boy, Washington was forced to wear 'flax shirt' which he considered a great torture and he assimilated it with dental extraction (when he wore for first time). It was like hundreds of pins, were prickling his skin, when it made direct contact, even to present day Washington was able to remember the pain thrust in him, as his skin was so tender. As far as, the slave children are concerned the only material provided for them to wear was 'flax', no other clothing was taken into consideration and it was author's choice to choose in between wearing the flax shirt or none. He wore it until he was grown up to be a youth. Even, the type of clothing was a torment to the children, who grew in the plantation. Those under slavery, were bound by the circumscription laid by the white men. Enslaved were suppressed and heavy-handed by the predominant.

Of my ancestry I know almost nothing. In the slave quarters, and even later, I heard whispered conversation among the coloured people of the tortures which the slaves, including, no doubt, my ancestors on my mother's side, suffered in the middle passage of the slave ship while being conveyed from Africa to America. I have been unsuccessful in securing any information that would throw any accurate light upon the history of my family beyond my mother. She, I remember, had a half- brother and a half-sister. In the days of slavery not very much attention was given to family history and family records- that is, black family records (7).

It cast light on how black men and women were displaced from their land through 'slave ships' abruptly. Even worse their identity was not considered to be substantial. There is 'psychological identity' or 'personal identity' and 'social identity'. The author is representation of the whole community of blacks who also faced 'Socio- psychological identity crisis'. Slaved mass didn't have right to earn, right to vote, right to voice out their opinion and so on. Psychological identity is 'Who we are?'. Enslaved black people were uncertain of where they belong to (whether to their native or America) and they didn't have personal identity of their own.

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They are just 'enslaved blacks' who were displaced from their native land for the purpose of slaving them to work in the plantation of white men. 'Family records' of the enslaved was just chronicled as 'black family records'. The people under slavery was under dilemma when the "Emancipation Proclamation" enunciated because all their life they were made to depend on the white men for food, and shelter as they were unaware of the outer world apart from plantation. Questions ran through their mind about their nationality, personal identity and what are they going to do for their living once they were freed.

The distinct thing that I now recall in connection with the scene was that some man who seemed to be a stranger (a United States officer, I presume) made a little speech and then read a rather long paper - the Emancipation Proclamation, I think. After the reading we were told that we were all free, and could go when and where we pleased... The great responsibility of being free, of having charge of themselves, of having to think and plan for themselves, of having to think and plan for themselves and their children, seemed to take possession of them. It was very much like suddenly turning a youth of ten or twelve years out into the world to provide for himself... These were the question of a home, a living, the rearing of children, education, citizenship, and the establishment and support of churches. Was it any wonder that within a few hours the wild rejoicing ceased and a feeling of deep gloom seemed to pervade the slave quarters? To some it seemed that, now that they were in actual possession of it, freedom was a more serious thing than they had expected to find it. Some of the slaves were seventy or eighty years old; their best days were gone. They had no strength with which to earn a living in a strange place and among strange people, even if they had been sure where to find new place to abode. To this class the problem seemed especially hard (13).

Slaved people were so dependent (unfortunately) that, the feel of freedom felt like a great responsibility. Old people as their good young days have passed, felt like they are abandoned all of a sudden. Enslaved blacks later gained their rights and came to be known as African American.

"Dual identity" is African Americans living in United States with two conflicting identities which cannot be brought together. They were known as African Americans because of the remnants of slavery in the past. "Identity Crisis" is the primary consequence of slavery.

In a nutshell, the 'school of slavery' is one of the greatest tragedies of world history. Emancipation Proclamation just stayed as words, where it was not followed by the fellow citizens (white people) of America. Slavery marginalised community of 'blacks' even after they are freed. The impact of slavery could be felt to till date and still they are despised in some corner of the world. No 'social stigma' (class, gender, religion, race, culture) could separate one other. Every man is equal under the sun. This should occur in every individual's heart only then discrimination

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and marginalization can be truly eradicated. Those who deny freedom to others, deserve it not for themselves; and, under a just God, cannot long retain it (376). Abraham Lincoln, a great personality, who fought for the African Americans (the blacks), abolished slavery and freed them from the agonies of enslavement. Eradication of discrimination could be attained through numerous ways. One such powerful approach is 'edification'. Enlightenment should betide by heart, not by mind alone. Malala Yousafzai in her uplifting autobiography "I Am Malala" stated I told him (Barak Obama) that instead of focusing on eradicating terrorism through war, he should focus on eradicating it through education. Correspondingly, marginalization can also be annihilated through education, as Yousafzai suggested. In "Long walk to freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela", Mandela declared Education is the great engine of personal development. It is through education that the daughter of a peasant can become a doctor... that a child of farm workers can become the presidents of a great nation. It is what we make out of what we have, not what we are given, that separate one person from another.

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