

Hope and Exploitation: The Ambivalent Use of Christianity in *Twelve Years A Slave*

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Abstract: *This paper studies the ambivalent use of Christianity in Solomon Northup's autobiography *Twelve Years A Slave* in the context of colonialists interest. Northup laboured for twelve years under different slave owners with one thing in his mind that one-day God will do justice. Several times he is being exploited by the owners by the name of God. Religion is a part of culture where faith and ritual are important but this faith and ritual might be imposed by a dominating or superior culture. An analysis of this memoir with a postcolonial reading, especially under the notion of Aime Cesaire's ideas from *Discourse on Colonialism* and Edward Said's ideas from *Culture and Imperialism*, will help to examine the religious ambivalence created by a particular culture, imposed by European priests. This memoir is an illustration of religious ambivalence where Christian religion is a part of colonial instrument which has generated hope among people and sometimes people used it for exploitation.*

Keywords: *Ambivalence, Christianity, Hope, Exploitation, Slave Religion, Postcolonial Literature*

Introduction

Solomon Northup was an African American abolitionist and author of the famous memoir *Twelve Years A Slave*. He laboured for twelve years under several masters. When he regained his freedom, he wrote an autobiography of those years as a slave which was published in 1853. Northup was kidnapped in Washington City in 1841, and rescued in 1853 from a cotton plantation near the Red River in Louisiana. He was a free black man living in New York who was lured to south, kidnapped and sold for slavery. He was free man who was brought up in a society of brutality against humanity who saw the situation of the slaves but, the interesting thing is, like every other normal human being, he never felt that situation. He never understood what made that slave dazzled and what lured him in Mr. Parker's shop. He didn't understand how that young man felt, when he saw a nigger like him, all dressed up and smiling, and nigger children running in a shop, owned by a white man. Mr. Northup never understood the pain and misery of the slaves, until he himself was put in that position. His memoir gives an account of horrified events of his kidnapping which includes violent and dehumanizing treatment as a slave on different plantations in the inner part of Louisiana. He worked there as a slave for long twelve years and during all those years; he looked for a chance to escape. But he was hoping that God will help him to find him an escape. Several times he got exploited by different plantation owner brutally. He remained a slave until he met a Canadian named Mr. Bass who helped him to get word to New York. His family and friends enlisted the aid of the Governor of New York and Northup regained his freedom on January 3, 1853 (Northup, 1853, p. 318). Christian religion played an important role on behalf of both being hopeful and being exploited, during the enslavement period of Northup's life. His memoir does not show that he was a regular church guy. But his unshakeable faith upon God and repetitive references from the Bible make us eager to excavate the ambivalent use of Christianity during that time.

1.1 Background of the Study:

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Twelve Years A Slave is a striking narrative by Solomon Northup which was published in 1853, just before the civil war broke out. Three years after the Fugitive Slave Act, Northup's narrative served as an important cultural symbol of slave life on southern plantations during antebellum America before the Civil War. Solomon's strong faith upon God that was especially evident during his most difficult struggles attracts me to begin this study. In the history of America, Christian missionaries came from Europe to convert the locals to Christianity. Some of them kept themselves to their mission. Others, however, aided in colonizing of African Americans by the Europeans. They use Christianity to give natives some hope for better life and natives believed them. But finally they plundered all the resources from them and made them impoverished slaves. In this memoir I have found such conformity regarding Christian religion in African American society which creates keen interest inside me to find out the ambiguous meaning of it.

1.2 Statement of the Problem:

Christianity is used as a tool of exploitation and at the same time it has offered hope and consolation to the slaves. It is Christianity which has power over hope and exploitation in antebellum period which creates an ambiguous meaning in *Twelve Years A Slave*.

1.3 Research Question:

To proceed the writing of this paper the following research questions can be answered:

1. How can Christianity be a source of hope for Solomon Northup?
2. To what extent is Christianity used as an exploitative system of behaviour in *Twelve Years A Slave*?

1.4 Objective of the Study:

The objective of this study is to navigate into Solomon's memoir to find out whether Christianity has overpowered on both hope and exploitation at the same time.

1.5 Literature Review:

Many works have been done on *Twelve Years A Slave*. Critics have examined this book from different perspectives. This book has a film adaptation released as *12 Years a Slave* (2013). This film has many criticisms but no one examined this memoir from a Christian point of view. My point of departure lies here that ambivalence in Christian religion among African Americans, even among the white Americans, is absent in every work. However, my research will aim at explaining the features of Christianity which was created by colonial authority to make slaves obedient to their masters and how slaves had put their faith on God which was also a part of mimicry of white masters.

In an article named "The Cultural Significance in Solomon Northup's *Twelve Years A Slave*", Molli Lieblich shows that it is a slave narrative which becomes a significant cultural symbol of life as a slave during the antebellum period in America. In her writing, a clear concept of Solomon's slave life is portrayed through a vivid description of the text. By publishing this kind of slave narrative Solomon not only expressed traumatic portions of his life in captivity but also brought to light the atrocity of American slavery. However, Molli Lieblich shows that Solomon Northup's slave narrative will serve as a "cultural reminders" of the horrible part of American history that left its impression on those who were its victims as well as on American society as a whole. (n. p.) In this article there is no mention about Solomon's silence while he was a slave. Slave masters were using extractions from the Bible to make them obedient to their masters, whip them, and punish them. But these are not mentioned by her at all. Solomon's memoir has put significance between cultural issues and political issue

of American society. But how a culture can be forced by another culture and what is its effect remained silent in Molli Liebliche's article. In my work I shall try to illustrate these issues elaborately.

Another thesis entitled "A Study of Post-Colonialism Analysis in Solomon Northup's *Twelve Years A Slave*" by Augustina Indah Nilem Kurnia is an analysis of how post-colonialism can be found in this memoir. By taking the notion of Ashcroft and Griffin, she has analysed Solomon's memoir from postcolonial look. Though she mentions about different key concepts of postcolonial theory like hybridity, mimicry, ambivalence and otherness but somehow she skipped the issue of religious significance in it. This research paper is based on postcolonial theory which is partially related with my paper but I shall discuss my research from postcolonial point of view where religion is part of colonial tool.

1.6 Theoretical Framework:

I have taken postcolonial theory which will help me to analyse significant issues regarding religious ambivalence in *Twelve Years A Slave*. I shall include Aime Cesaire's ideas from *Discourse on Colonialism* and Edward Said's ideas from *Culture & Imperialism* in my research paper to examine the religious ambivalence created by a particular culture, imposed by European priests.

Aime Cesaire's "Discourse on Colonialism" is an essay where he mentions that colonization process makes a colonizer barbaric and brutal. It is such a process through which one's inner covetousness, violence towards lower class, hatred against race and moral degradation awakes step by step in his or her inner psyche. According to him, "colonization dehumanizes even the most civilized man" (p. 5). Christian missionaries were not out of this barbarism. Putting on a mask of civilized man, they destroyed old cultures, religions and humanity. They made "slave" of savage people telling lies that if they become obedient to their master, God will send them in Heaven. This is the situation in *Twelve Years A Slave*. The cruel master Edwin Epps tortures slaves in order to achieve his mental satisfaction. As he is the master of a group of slaves, he can punish them and use them for his own benefit. Actually this authorial power towards slaves makes him arrogant, avaricious and self-obsessed. Putting a mask of civilized man, he not only considers the Bible as a holy book but also uses it against slaves. According to Aime Cesaire, Christian missionaries came to the east not to preach Christianity among savage people rather they came to make profit from them by destroying their culture. He said that today's biggest "culprit" regarding colonization is the "Christian pedantry" (p. 2) because they made a differentiation between Christianity and Paganism, where Christianity is compared to civilization and Paganism to savagery. And the reason of dreadful colonization emerged from here and its victims were the yellow people, American natives and Negroes. Solomon mentioned in his memoir about using African American people by white masters for their own profit. They wanted to make them civilized and that is the reason why they used Bible in an unconstructive way through which slaves were under their control.

Edward Said in his book *Culture & Imperialism* draws a connection between culture and imperialism. Said defines "imperialism" as "the practice, the theory and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory" (p. 9). His definition of culture is more complex. Religion is a cultural arrangement of behaviours and exercises, world views, sacred texts, moral principles, holy places and societal organisation that connects humanity to an order of existence. It gives inspirational meaning and rationale, and often, a goal to desire a life which is absolute. So, many cultures have bound themselves together by a common

ground that they might all achieve the goal of life as long as those social structures which combine religion and man remain. The word religion (from which we get our common perspective of Religion) means to attach back. Religion often gives codes of activities for society and culture. Religion practices are outlined by the culture around them. According to Said there are two categories of behaviour towards culture. First one that conceives culture as an idea that includes humanizing and inspiring elements, each society's reservoir of paramount that has been recognized and considered. The other is the antagonistic and defensive aspects viewing culture as a foundation of individuality that discriminates between "us" and "them". Edward Said's idea of culture and imperialism describes the inhuman activities of Western people towards Easterners. In chapter two "Consolidated Vision" of *Culture & Imperialism*, Said has said to draw connection in important cultural text to enrich and sharpen our study (p. 196) to express his thought regarding "the native under control". If we consider *Twelve Years A Slave* as a major cultural text, we can easily draw connection between imperial authority and its major cultural issues.

1.7 Rationale of the Study:

In 2013, a film was released named *12 Years a Slave* which was directed by Steve McQueen. I watched that movie and became interested to know more about that movie. And I have found that this movie is an adaptation from a novel named *Twelve Years A Slave*, written by Solomon Northup. This book is an indication to the power of the human spirit and the durable willpower of hope and an evidence of colonial authorities over slaves and religious ambivalence among slaves and masters. Christian religion played a noteworthy part in colonisation process. European priests came here and converted African Americans into Christianity. By doing so, they wanted to make them compliant towards their masters. In this memoir, Solomon expressed the relation between slavery and Christianity in an ambivalent manner.

1.8 Methodology:

I have used content analysis method for my paper where secondary data includes different books, journals, study guides, critique, and criticism on the author, literary works, and various articles. I have taken two postcolonial literary criticisms and analysed how colonial authority manipulated Christian religion during colonisation process which delivers ambivalent meaning in *Twelve Years A Slave*.

1.10 Scope and Limitations:

My research will contribute to the existing research providing a fresh look on the cultural study. The most serious limitation I have faced was that I could not get hold of some articles which could have been more useful to the research.

2. Discussion:

In this chapter I shall try to examine the portrayal of Christian religion in *Twelve Years A Slave* and how it is used by the colonial masters in different plantation at that time. And I shall try to gather some historical information regarding Christianization in America to relate with my topic.

2.1 Slavery and Christianity in American History:

Slavery was one of the unfortunate practices in America that had been engraved in American history. The Colonialists of North America in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries accepted slavery to grow in the early American colonies. The slaves were collected from Africa and brought into America to work on in the plantation. There was a "Triangular

Trade” amendment which included commerce triangulation and slave ship route from Africa to America. (Appleby, Brinkley and McPherson, 2000, p. 301) From 1619 until the end of the Civil War 1865, thousands of Africans were brought to America into slavery, yet little evangelism took place. Slowly, masters would teach slaves about Christ, until Africans were able to establish their own churches. Religion became more significant in the settlement of colonies. And “religion became the subject of thought and effort of private individuals, denominations, missionary societies and even legislative bodies to an extraordinary degree, most of the slaves lived and died unknown to Christianity” (Jernegan, 1916, p. 504). One of the most significant expansions in African American culture in antebellum period was the spread of Christianity within both the slave and free black communities. The English revivalist George Whitefield visited America seven times between 1738 and 1770 which was a part of this development programme. Whitefield worked for the conversion of the slaves. He believed that the duty of slave owners was to convey their slaves to Christ. Whitefield and his colleagues concerned the duties of masters to care for their slaves in a compassionate way and grow an ethic of Christian paternalism that was a fundamental principle of the American slave process. As a replacement for this care preachers told their slave converts that they owed complete submission to their owners, just as they did to God. In this way religion has indirectly recommend punishment for the slave’s misdeeds. Frederick Douglass in his memoir named *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* mentioned about two kinds of Christianity in American Land. They are “True Christianity” and the “White Christianity”. First one is pure good and holy and the second one is motivated, developed and ruled by white missionaries. (p. 101) He also said, “Slaves knew enough of the orthodox theology of the time to consign all bad slaveholders to hell.” (p. 186) After the American Revolution northern states progressively began to abolish slavery. But there grew a sharper dissimilarity between those who were once enslaved to the Whites and those who were relatively free then. By 1810, slave import became lesser and the slave population started to increase naturally. That situation gave them an opportunity to transform and preserve religious exercises which were in fact African-American. This transition corresponded with the time of powerful religious restoration which is known as “Great Awakening”. In the southern states, where most of the slaves lived, many slaves were converted to different creeds of Christianity such as Methodists and Baptists faith. Many priests promoted the idea that all Christians are equal in front of God which provided hope and nourishment for the slaves (Young, 2008, p. 28). European priests also encouraged a technique of worship which many Africans have found similar to their worship system. But many white owners forced slave attendance at sermons organized by the white Churches because they feared that if slaves were permitted to pray freely then it will hamper their authority over slaves and ultimately they will revolt against the slave masters. In those white-controlled churches it was taught that obedience towards master is the highest religious principle which was the opposite as well as the mockery of true Christian meaning of impartiality and freedom.

Slavery stands as one of the most wondered concerns in American history. Slavery which was also powerfully recognized and institutionalized between the 1680s and the 1780s was also formed by religion. The use of aggression against slaves, their social dissimilarity, together with the settlers’ disrespect for all religions other than Christianity “resulted in destructiveness of extraordinary breadth, the loss of traditional religious practices among the half-millions slaves brought to the mainland colonies between 1680s and the American Revolution” (“Religion”). Even in churches which attained to convert slaves to their congregations the Baptists are a good illustration slaves and they were most often a silent alternative. European missionaries came to this land, plundered everything, made native

people slaves, traded slaves from world's darkest corners, and imposed a different culture on them which ultimately resulted in barbarism and cruelty.

2.2 Religious Ambivalence in *Twelve Years A Slave*:

Generally religious ambivalence represents a kind of idea where a single religion has two opposing purpose or meaning. In the narrative of Solomon Northup, religion is a key term. Religion always teaches us to show mercy, to have faith in God. But in this memoir we see that, one person has complete faith upon God and concurrently another person uses that faith to torture them. This narrative is divided into long twenty-two chapters where Solomon mentioned his journey of slave life.

2.2.1 Christianity as Hope:

Alison Twells has said in his book *The Civilising Mission and the English Middle class, 1992-1850* that, “[m]issionaries were representative Christians trying...to do Christian things, things that were specifically, characteristically Christian. They were trying to share the knowledge of Christ” (p. 31). In colonisation period, westerners came to eastern lands to civilise people. And in this civilising mission they had forced people to make Christian choices and live in a Christian way. In this way they had practiced superior culture among slaves and natives.

In the life of Solomon Northup, Christian religion played an important role. He was enslaved for twelve long years under different masters of different plantations in the southern part of America. Solomon worked in many employments, including farming, lumber jacking, and performing on the violin and his wife Anne earned money as a cook. In chapter one, where he mentioned about his past life, he repeatedly mentions how he was so glad with all the happiness and strength that God gave him. His family members like his grandfather and father were also slaves during their past life. But they got freedom from their masters for their good behaviour and attitude. The second chapter of this memoir depicts the culminating point of Solomon's life where he gets an invitation from two gentlemen who came from Washington, to play violin in the circus. They will pay for each night and pay the expenses of his return from New-York to Saratoga. Solomon accepts their offer as he will get a handsome amount within a very short time. Those two men were worried to leave for New-York immediately. So, Solomon left Saratoga with them without writing to Anne, his wife. He joins them their journey to Washington. On that journey several incidents happen. But none of them looked suspicious to him about those two gentlemen. After a day of unusual celebrations, he became terribly sick. On his way to see a doctor, he fainted. In the next morning when he woke up, he discovered himself penniless, with tattered clothes and chained in darkness in a slave pen. The owner of that slave pen was James H. Burch who was the cruellest slave owner of Washington and in other southern states. After discovering himself in a slave pen, he wants to clarify some matters and assert his right to freedom. But James had beaten him up and threatens him that he will kill him if he ever mentions about his freedom again. His partner, another white man, is a kind man. Solomon insists that he was a free man. But “[a]ll this time the incarnate devil was uttering most fiendish oaths.” (p. 45) Solomon fears for his life and became silent. Then the next day he was transported to downriver, New Orleans, Louisiana. He was thinking of his family, wife and children's “but no good angel of pity came to my bedside, bidding me to fly—no voice of mercy forewarned me in my dreams of the trials that were just at hand.” (p. 35) From these lines it can be easily recognized that he was hoping that this time it will be a dream where angel will wake him up and warned him about his next situation. Solomon gets so depressed about his situation and repeatedly thinks about his family.

In the next description we can see that his name was newly given by his trader named Theophilus freeman. He was brutal like James. When he counts slaves for trade, he asks about “Platt”. But no one stands up. Then he comes to Solomon and asks him if he is Platt. But Solomon refuses it. Then Freeman threatens him that if he ever refuses his name as Platt then he will bring death for him. When Solomon was a free man, he never understood the position, pain and sufferings of a nigger, a slave. Now he realises that this situation is deadly terrifying. Then he is reminded of his God and asking for help and support from Him. Time and again he remembers. He knew that only God can help him from such agony.

The new master is named William Ford, a pious and noble man, a Baptist preacher of Red River, Louisiana. This is an irony that he is pious and a Baptist preacher but he kept some slaves under his supervision. He gave Solomon a special position in his house. Mrs Ford is another kind woman to Solomon. John Mr. Tibeats, another cruel person was in that house who hated Solomon for his qualities. But Solomon never stood up against him. Mr. Tibeats was a sick person because he never saw any good among slaves. He thought himself a God of them. One day he tried to kill Solomon hanging him a tree. But other overseer saved him. Mr. Ford sold Solomon to Mr. Epps to save his life from Mr. Tibeats. In chapter twelve we have encountered the character Mr. Edwin Epps who is literally a nigger breaker. There is a girl named Patsey who is the mistress of Mr. Epps. And several times his wife attacks her out of hate and regret towards her. One day she is whipped by her master and she is praying to God to have pity for her. She is praying for mercy to God. According to Solomon, “It was the Sabbath of the lord. The fields smiled in the warm sunlight—the birds chirped merrily amidst the foliage of the trees—peace and happiness seemed to reign everywhere.” (p. 257) One night she goes to Solomon with a gemstone and an offer that there will be a prize from God if Solomon drowned her in the Red River. But Solomon said that it would be a heinous sin if he does that. Patsey was crying in front of him and Solomon told her to go. Then he said, “Why could you consign me to damnation with such an ungodly request?” (p. 278) Then she told that, “There is god here. God is merciful. And he forgives merciful acts. Won’t be no hell for you” (p. 278). She does not have strength to kill herself and end her agony. There is a clear mention that even killing oneself is not considered as a sin in front of physical tortures by masters. And God will have mercy over all who have mercy on people. Solomon refuses Patsey but inside his heart he feels for Patsey and her situation in that cotton field. Solomon was strong in that feeling about God’s mercy. But he did not want to kill Patsey because killing is a heinous act he has ever seen. Before god, he will never be able to clarify himself. The next summer the cotton production gets diminished because of the bad weather. But Mr. Epps was asking God that what has he done that God hates him so much. In this narrative, every character is afraid of god’s activities. They do not know what they have done but they ask God about the reason of their failure. Uncle Abraham who looks after several slaves in their childhood suddenly died. They have prayed to god to give him mercy, peace in the afterlife. All the slaves were looking for God’s help. They did not stand up against their master rather they prayed to God for freedom. When uncle Abraham died in that plantation, everybody took him to bury the dead by the yard side. Aunt Phebe was singing a hymn for him which says,

Went down to the river Jordan where John baptised three,
When I woke the devil in hell said Johnny Baptized me.
I said, roll Jordan roll, roll Jordan roll my soul will rise in heaven, Lord
For the year when Jordan roll. Some say John was a Jew, John was a Baptist.
My Bible says it too. Roll Jordan roll... (p. 301)

“John the Baptist” is also known as John the baptizer. He was known to be a major religious figure. He is called a prophet by all traditions and is recognized as a saint in many Christian beliefs. All of them made a Chorus hymn. Out of their own pain and sufferings they made it towards Uncle Abraham’s death. These lines explain how much they were dedicated to their own beliefs and customs but could not practice it. In the history of American slavery, slaves were not allowed to make a chorus hymn.

In chapter nineteen, while Patsey goes for Mrs Shaw’s house, Mr. Epps calls for her. She is late. It is Solomon’s responsibility to call her. Patsey comes in front of Mr. Epps and Mr. Epps ordered Solomon to whip her hundred lashes. Solomon becomes helpless and he is confused about his next step. Then Mr. Epps takes the whip and starts stripping her at her back. It is a very touchy and inhumane scene which Solomon can never forget. Solomon said to Mr Epps, “Thou devil, sooner or later justice should be somewhere in the course of eternal. Justice should answer the sin”(p. 278). And in reply Mr. Epps says, “Sin! There is no sin. Man does how he pleases with his property” (p. 278). He believes in God’s justice. And he believes that one day or other justice shall be done to these masters who punished their slaves with such barbarity.

After several months a man named Mr. Bass, a Canadian, comes to that plantation for part time job. Solomon met him. While working with him he told him about his story of being slave. Then Mr. Bass promises him that he will write a letter to his family regarding his situation. Solomon believed that Bass came to him as an angel from God. Bass understands Solomon’s situation and believed that Justice should be done with everybody. He went to his country in the next day. Solomon had waited for his freedom so long in that plantation. But nobody came there for him. After a few months later, a sheriff went to that plantation field where all the slaves were working and ask for “Platt”. Solomon came out. Then Sheriff asked him if there was any name other than Platt. He answered positively that his name is Solomon Northup. He has three children and a wife. Then Sheriff understands that this is the Solomon Northup who was kidnapped and sold into slavery. He was working under several plantations with the name “Platt”. Finally Solomon became free, went to Saratoga and met his family. Even at the end of this memoir we see Solomon’s mercy and gratefulness towards God as if God actually comes in front of him and save him from inhumane tortures. As he concludes his memoir with these words,

Chastened and subdued in spirit by the sufferings I have borne, and thankful to that good being through whose mercy I have been restored to happiness and liberty, I hope henceforward to lead an upright though lowly life, and rest at last in the church yard where my father sleeps. (p. 321)

Solomon never loses hope towards God and his faith upon God reminds us on his respect for and believes in Christianity.

By the word “exploitation”, we can understand the fact of using a situation in order to get a facility for oneself. In this memoir, masters of different plantations used the Bible to control their slaves. If they had not control their slaves, they would have protested against them. N.S.S. Iwe has described colonialism as:

... a phase in the evolution of Africa characterized by intensive geographical explorations, the slave trade, the scramble for Africa, the territorial ambitions and pretensions of the Western nations, the imposition of alien rule and institutions, the planting of Western forms of Christianity, acculturation, racialism and exploitation... (Iwe, 1985, p. 1985)

In *Twelve Years A Slave*, religion is working as a tool of exploitation. Slave masters used the Bible to have control over them. In long twenty two chapters of Solomon's description, we can observe the use of Christianity. Christianity was working as a hope for black people but at the same time they were exploited by this religion. Slaves were exploited by different slave masters in different ways. Mr William Ford was a good master. Every afternoon he gathered with his slaves and read some lines from Holy Scripture. He was the Baptists preacher but he bought slaves for his own benefit. That was quite unnatural. When Eliza was lamenting for her children, Mr. Ford did not console her. Rather he kept on reciting biblical extracts before everyone to calm down. Lamentation could not help them to be free from their pain but his lines could. Such exploitative behaviour was only possible for the slave masters to their slaves.

While he was in Williams slave pen, a man came to Solomon. He said that, there is nothing to fear. God is always with them. But the man evidently appeared kind as he wastouched at the sight of his soul's condition or with the view of silencing on his part. These very descriptions of that man remind us of his faith in God. Slave traders knew that these slaves were afraid of God and punishment. So, they used that very religious issue against them just to rule them under their authority. Clemens Ray, a slave in that slave pen, advised him to be silent henceforth. Otherwise, James will bring him death.

When Mr. William Ford bought Solomon for his work, he mentioned about God and His will several times. Once he quoted from the Bible, "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And the multitude heard this; they were astonished at these doctrines. And then one of them which were a lawyer asked him a question, tempting him" (p. 48). These lines show his attitudes towards his slaves. His view regarding keeping slaves for his own betterment and business is depicted here. He thinks himself as a God of those slaves who were under his power. While talking to Eliza, he showed mercy but concurrently he used his power to stop her. Peter Tanner, brother of William Ford has also habit of reading the Bible in front of niggers. The next Sunday when Solomon goes there, he began to read Bible. He began with the twelfth chapter of Luke. Then he came to the forty seventh verse of it. According to Solomon's description,

[h]e looked deliberately and continued, "And the servant which knew his lord will," – here he paused, looking around more deliberately than before, again proceeded— "which knew his lord's will and prepared not himself"—here was another pause— "prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. (p. 128)

In this narrative, some lines are too strong to show hope and exploitation at the same time. Sam, a religious slave, was dwelling intensely on the subject of religion in one summer. His mistress gave him a Bible which he carried with him in work. Whatever time he got spared from his work, he spent perusing it. But it was a matter of great difficulty that he could not master any part of it. Solomon used to read to him and in exchange of it Sam gave him a lot of good gratitude. Actually masters of that time were afraid of slaves because they knew that what they did with them, there must be an after-effect. Mr Edwin Epps, who also bought Solomon from tanner, was the cruellest master. Due to the debt they actually trade slaves between them. Before he introduced himself with the slaves, he mentioned a rule for the slaves. Slaves should maintain that rule. No slave should run from his plantation. Masters were using their motivated scripture to control their slaves, punish their slaves. That was not new because this was the system of colonization. Colonization not only means plundering all

wealth from a country by a superior country but also implanting some culture that was not there before. Slavery and Christianity are two opposing terms. Exploitation by a stronger country of a weaker one or the use of the weaker country's resources to reinforce and enrich the stronger country is what is termed as colonialism.

Domination of superior culture is another part which is used by superior country to rule over another distant land. In this novel *Twelve Years A Slave* there is a superior culture that can be observed between White people and Black people. As we know that the superior is the head of colonizer and the superior culture is the head of the culture, it explains that the dominant culture shows the colonization process. "Why he not relieves me, why he suffered me to remain in agony the whole weary day, I never knew it was not for want of sympathy, I am certain." (p. 119)

The only hope from relieving those activities of day to day life was during Christian holidays. Mr. Epps allowed them to go to the churches. He allowed five or six days, according to his wish, to have respite from constant labour. It was the custom that every planter should give his slaves Christian supper which includes good food. Sometimes the cooking was performed in the kitchen on the plantation field. The holidays were part and parcel of the disgusting scam, erroneous, and brutality of slavery. They had professedly a tradition recognized by the compassion of the slaveholders but it was the consequence of selfishness, and one of the heinous acts committed upon the subjugated slave. They did not give the slaves leisure time not because they would not like to have their work during its persistence, but because they know it would be insecure to leave them without it. According to Solomon, Master Epps possessed some good qualities but those qualities were not counted. He mentioned, "[t]hat in the eye of Almighty there is no distinction of colour. He looked upon the black man simply as animal; differing in no respect from any other animal, save in the gift of speech and the possession of somewhat higher instincts and, therefore, the more valuable." (p. 261) According to Solomon, "Practice and whipping were like unavailing, satisfied of it at last, swore I was a disgrace—that I was not fit to associate with a cotton-picking nigger—that I could not pick enough in a day to pay the trouble of weighing it, and that I should go into the cotton field no more." (p. 179) In *Twelve Years A Slave*, we can consider Mr. Epps as a colonizer because he tried to impose his own beliefs among his slaves. This is in the case of Mr. Ford too because by reading the Bible in front of his slaves, he tried to impose his thoughts on other. There was no conversation or query between him and slaves because he tried to give them the idea of slave and master from the Holy Scripture.

One year the cotton production was hampered due to the bad weather. Plague had occurred on the whole plantation. Mr. Epps had just found it biblical. He said, "Two seasons that God had done sent a plague to smite me. What I done that God hates me so? It's that godless slot. They brought this on me. I brought them God's word and heathens they, they brung me God's scorn." (p. 298) This "godless slot" means the group of slaves that were under his plantation. Mr. Epps did find them responsible for his economical loss. He mentally got afraid that his brutality towards slaves may affect God's view towards him. But outside he wanted to make his slaves suffer for this loss.

Edward Said believes that the impacts of colonialism are still continuing in the form of disorder, rebellions, bloodshed and civil war which encompass many countries, mainly because of the remainder of colonization. In this respect, Said believes that a powerful colonizer has forced a language and a culture on an alien people, whereas cultures, histories,

values, and languages of the eastern peoples have been mistreated and even deformed by the colonialists in their pursuit to dominate these peoples and exploit their wealth in the name of civilising, enlightening and even humanizing them. *Twelve Years A Slave* can be considered a cultural text where colonizers forced their culture to exploit slaves in the southern part of colonial America.

3. Conclusion

Twelve Years A Slave can be considered a major cultural text in the history of American literature. American history tells us about the brutality, torture, oppression and inhumanity of the European colonizers. Solomon Northup has given the description of his life as a slave life which includes all true incidents that happened in his life. His description gives us the reflection of his faith in God. And it becomes the main theme of his narrative. But the role of Christian religion is ambivalent as it shows us freedom on one side and exploitation on the other. From Solomon's narration we can see a clear depiction of how a culture can instruct a religion which is imposed by imperialism.

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