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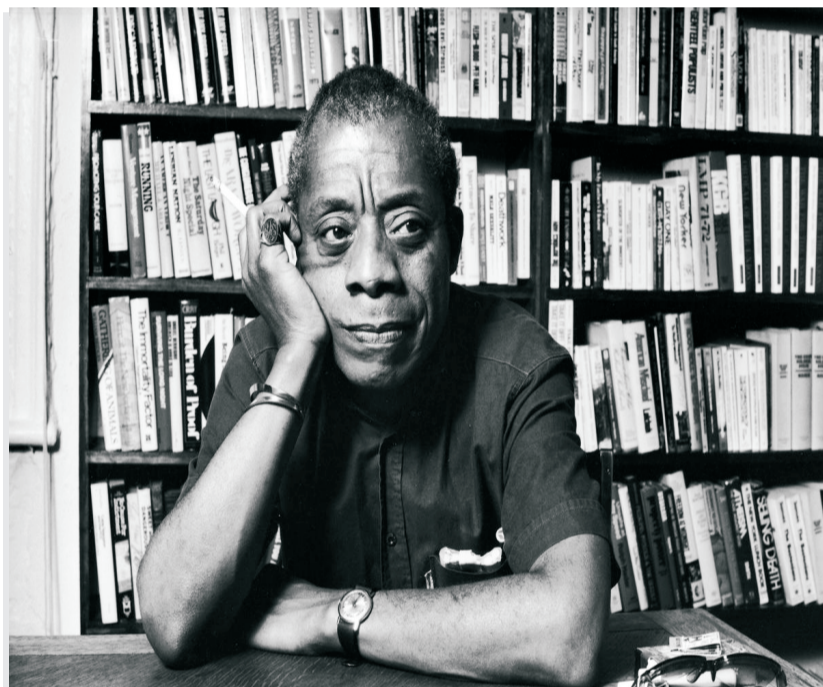
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ALIENATION IN JAMES BALDWIN'S ANOTHER COUNTRY



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ABSTRACT:

James Baldwin, an African American writer, presents the sufferings caused by alienation in most of his novels. His characters mostly being black and poor are isolated and excommunicated. They are made to feel as an unwanted lot in the society. They are stigmatized and debarred from establishing any contact with the civilized and cultural people, Whites. This kind of ill-treatments makes blacks feel guilty and shameful. Their attempts to indulge in love and sex with whites are severely dealt with and turns make their life more miserable. Though the theme of alienation recurs in

most of his novels, it is quite predominant in Another Country.

Baldwin's Another Country (1962) is his ambitious novel. Rufus Scott, the central figure of the novel has to struggle with his White wife Leona. He wants to travel to a country where a human being is treated as a human being. Baldwin portrays the protagonist's struggle for life in term of loneliness and yearning. Yearning for love and alienation are the main themes of this novel.

KEYWORDS

James Baldwin, principal characteristic, civilized and cultural people.

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INTRODUCTION:

The principal characteristic of the major characters become readily visible the existential reality of loneliness and estrangement. One is continually being jostled, yet longs, at the same time, for a human touch. The city appears in the novel as a wasteland in which each character struggles to live and relate to another in order to justify his own self-awareness and to renew continually his sense of being human.

Rufus, black musician, is an embodiment of alienation and estrangement. Generally the musician in the works of Baldwin is more than a metaphor. Most of the characters have at the centre of their portrayal on isolation from the society. They are also commentaries upon the brutal, emasculating, feared -and fearing- land from which they are so estranged. The living symbol of alienation is from the past and hence from self and the rhythmical link with the mysterious ancestral past. That past and its pain and the transcendence of pain is always an implicit part of the musician's characterization in Baldwin. Music is the medium through which the musician achieves enough understanding and strength to deal with the past and present hurt.

Rufus yearns for love and affection which are denied to him. He struggles to win them. The course of struggles fills with anger and vengeance. His choice of getting that is a nightmare. He is a black but chooses Leona as his beloved. This very choice leads to hate, despair, disappointment and finally to death. He becomes more entangled with Leona, wallowing in an ancient source of pain, but never calls upon his family or his music, the symbol of life, the talisman against death which might have been his salvation -and Leona's. He attempts to use sex as a weapon against her in the same way in which white society used on him. Leona is driven insane by his brutal behavior. He weighed down with guilt and the pain of both past and present, finally commit suicide.

Baldwin attempts to establish a contrasting structure between this relationship and the relationship of Vivaldo Moore, a white boy and Ida Scott, Rufus's younger sister. Rufus and Leona end their lives in despair and death, while Vivaldo and Ida are drawn together at first by love finally achieve an uneasy peace with each other. It is a peace based on a deeper understanding of themselves and each other and their relationship. Whereas, Rufus returns to the past and cannot find his way out again.

Another cause is also possible for the death of Rufus. His second choice to be loved by white is also a failure one. All of his best friends are white people. Robert A. Bone in his "James Baldwin" says "the underlying cause of Rufus' death is a failure of his white friends to comprehend the death of his despair" (43).

Baldwin's descriptions of New York contain striking images malaise, scenes and gestures that expose the moral chaos of contemporary urban life. Throughout the work the leitmotif of aloneness and the necessity for love is repeated – "He stood there, wide legged, humping the, filling his barrel chest, shivering in the rage of his twenty-odd years, and screaming through the horn. Do you love me? Do you love me? Do you love me? ... and yet the question was terrible and real" (13). This central question is framed early in the story, runs inextricably through the strands of narrative and forces itself upon the reader's attention in the closing section. There is a terrible tenderness, a hurting compassion beneath the violence and brutality.

Isolation is one of the main themes that recur in all his novels. George Kent in his *Blackness and the Adventure of Western Culture* states "Each of the major characters is suffering from a most profound isolation and estrangement from the past" (63). Cass, in choosing to marry the son of a Polish

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carpenter, has been condemned to live in social exile from her aristocratic New England family. Richard, in turn, has exchanged his Polish ancestry for the dubious fame and recognition which he achieves as a writer. Rufus becomes estranged from his white mistress. Ida earns the contempt of her parents because she dares to become involved with a white sexual partner. Vivaldo's isolation from his alcoholic father and his relationship with Ida makes him the traitor of the family. Eric has been banished for his youthful, illicit intimacies with his black Alabama friend, LeRoy. Yves has long since despised his mother who seemed to enjoy bargaining her favours with the German soldiers. But the cross of alienation becomes too heavy for these people to bear and they burst out in agony as they search for the redeeming power of love.

Baldwin makes us aware, from the very beginning of the novel, of ominous forces which conspire to oppress and kill, while Rufus strives to avoid the murderous crushing weight of New York, which becomes symbol of cunning, cruel and merciless of white oriented society. And he struggles amid feelings of frustration and hostility and a losing battle with the establishment of survival.

The sole reason for Rufus's alienation is the problem of race. He is black and therefore dispossessed. Loneliness is malaise that infects the life of entire city. Throughout his life he longs for things which are not easy to be achieved by him. Because of his wrongful choices, he has got enough of failure and frustration. He is not considered as a human being even by his fellow beings. Stanley Macebuh pointed out in his *James Baldwin: A Critical Study* that, He does not teach any new doctrine; neither does he consciously surround himself with any disciples. He departs the world with a curse on his lips and the only bequest he leaves behind is the memory of his pain and suffering. It is doubtless part of Baldwin's ironic comment on his world that in his life Rufus does not appear to be significant being does not appear to mean anything to anybody. (92)

Rufus longs for another country where his dream of love can reach fruition. But he did not attain his destination, since he is filled with despair, disappointments, vengeance, dreads and anger and frail mind. There is no choice of attaining his willingness rather he commits suicide no more he can bear the barriers of contempt alienation.

Another major alienated character in *Another Country* is Vivaldo who is tormented by guilt. He thinks that in some sense he also involved in the death of Rufus and as far as he is concerned it is a sin. His mind oscillates between the white culture and his friendship with Rufus. Even his own relatives avoid him for the only reason of having friendship with blacks. He is a stranger in his own country. He wants to comprehend his sins by helping Rufus's family and by marrying his sister, Ida. But he has to strive a lot to get the real love of Ida because of his wrongful behaviour. She thinks that Vivaldo represents the whole white society so that it is not easy for him to achieve and get the consent of Ida to marry him. Indeed in subconscious mind he feels the darkness of dispute and there is no other go for him except to lead life with her, often indulging in dispute, because of this colour discrimination.

Another important major character, Ida is also filled with anger like her brother. And like him she too hates the white society and dominance over black people. Ida is quite simply the personification of Baldwin's rage. Ida wants to take revenge upon Vivaldo on behalf of whole white society. But during the times that she has spent with him she fell in love with him. She too is notable to lead a peaceful life because of her wrong choice. Her parents begin to hate her for the only reason that she is having affair with a white man. Indeed her ambition is to take revenge upon him. So she cannot lead a happy life with her parents as well as her lover. She struggles between the goal of taking revenge and her peaceful life with her parents. However, Ida boldly fights against Vivaldo and gets the love of whites. She is the lady

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who looks forward and tries to transcend the past. Though she suffers a lot during the course of trial at last she is able to get the love of whites.

Both the whites and blacks have an indelible thought in their minds. That is the whites are superior to blacks and there is no sign of breaking this tradition. If anyone tries to transcend this for him life is nothing but struggles. The blacks, Rufus and Ida transcend the past by communicating with whites and so are Leona and Vivaldo.

All the characters in the novel, whites and blacks, struggle to break the race-barrier that confines and isolates them. The alienation which is the consequence of racial discrimination can be spelt only with practicing of understanding fellow- feeling and love.

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