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***Voices of Resistance and Identity:
The Evolution and Relevance of African American Criticism***

Dr. Quadri Syeda Arshia Farooq Hussain

*Assistant Professor and Head Department of English
Chishtiya College of Arts, Science and Commerce
KhuldabadDist- Chh. Sambhajinagar (Aurangabad)
(Maharashtra) India. (Email: syedaarshiaq1@gmail.com)*

Abstract:

African American literary criticism has emerged as one of the most influential fields within literary and cultural studies, offering powerful frameworks for understanding race, identity, power, and representation. Rooted in the historical experiences of slavery, segregation, and systemic racism, African American criticism seeks to challenge dominant Eurocentric literary canons and foreground the voices of Black writers, thinkers, and communities. This paper traces the evolution of African American criticism from its early foundations in the writings of W.E.B. Du Bois, Alain Locke, and the Harlem Renaissance to later developments in the Black Arts Movement, Critical Race Theory, and Black feminist thought. Drawing on

theorists such as Henry Louis Gates Jr., bell hooks, and Toni Morrison, the study examines the central themes of language, representation, identity, and resistance. It also situates African American criticism within the larger debates of postcolonial and cultural studies, highlighting its global resonance. The paper argues that African American criticism is not only a method of literary analysis but also an ethical and political project aimed at transforming cultural understanding and challenging systemic inequalities.

Keywords: African American Criticism, Race, Identity, Black Arts Movement, Critical Race Theory, Black Feminism, Representation

