

## Chapter 1

### Introduction: Racial Experience and Black Boy

#### Discourse on Racial issues

The troubled life of a black boy depicted in Richard Wright's *Black Boy* presents the direct experiences of the novelist himself during his early life. The troubled black boy is exposed to various racial violence and injustice in the society of American South. He has the sense of resistance from the beginning as he thinks all the men are equal whatever their color is. But the sense of resistance crumples in its way and is crushed under the racial discourse of white supremacy. The resistance turns to failure in varying degrees to articulate the black consciousness.

When analyzing the novel and its protagonist Wright (in the light of the black consciousness) as a novelist has failed in various degrees in the representation of the condition of a black boy and his contexts. Various situations in the novel lack the elements of the black consciousness. Cultural aspects of the southern black are utterly assimilated to the ruling culture of whites. Similarly, the political awareness is negligible in the southern society of Jackson where the protagonist was raised.

Throughout the novel, Wright portrays pathetic racial discrimination, poverty, unending suffering from hunger, lack of treatment like a human-being to a negro, shame and continual mistreatment in the hand of the whites. But black characters only except a few, never realize and revolt against the subjectivity they are given by the ruling culture of whites. Instead, they are content to lead their life shaped by Christianity which serves the intention of whites to make Negroes tamed, meek and submissive.

The sense of racial consciousness is shown only with the few characters like Richard, Uncle Hoskins and Professor Mathews. The novelist fails to represent it in various situations with the major characters of the novel.

The black boy is shown vanquished in the face of white oppression and instead of giving the Negroes the sense of racial consciousness and fighting spirit to them. He leaves for North only to get his own freedom but not of the oppressed blacks as a whole. Here, Steve Biko defines black consciousness as:

the cultural and political revival of an oppressed people. This must be related to the emancipation of the entire continent of Africa since the Second World War. Africa has experienced the death of white invincibility. Before that we were conscious mainly of two classes of people, the white conquerors and the black conquered. The black in Africa now know that the whites will not be conquerors forever. (6)

Wright, thus, seen from this light of the vanquished protagonist, fails to articulate the racial consciousness and paves way to black rebellion. It is the basic focus of this study in the course of analyzing *Black Boy*.

### **Wright, Black Boy and Critics**

Wright is a successful black writer emerging during a period of racial oppression and economic hardships. He was one of those blacks who had been burdened of the fear of rejection and marginality. His parentage is emblematic; his father may be seen as the soil, the concrete in life; his mother as the world of idea, the abstractions that shape the sense of reality.

The trajectory of Wright's life from his birth in Mississippi to his death in Paris on November 28, 1960 at 52 years of age, marks and long an unfinished quest

for the liberation of black race and human spirit. His quest might be described at the multiple dimension of hunger. During his boyhood, his hunger was often physical due to his father's desertion of the family when he was only seven years old. In fact, the absence of food and of his father became interchangeable in the boy's mind. He exposes his pain in orphan home after father's desertion and mother's inability to sustain and family working for whites as he writes,

I had each day was hunger and fear. The meals were skimpy and there were only two of them. Just before we went to bed each night we were given a slice of bread smeared with molasses. The children were silent, hostile, vindictive, continuously complaining of hunger. There was an over-all atmosphere of a nervousness and intrigue, of children telling tales upon others, of children being deprived of food to punish them.

(37)

So Wright was the first African-American novelist to reach an ordinary audience, even though he had barely a ninth grade education. His turbulent and harsh childhood is depicted in one of his autobiographical novels, *Black Boy* (1945). His another autobiographical work, *American Hunger*, was published posthumously in 1977. He later said that his sense of deprivation, due to racism, was so great that only reading kept him alive.

The social criticism and realism of Sherwood Anderson, Theodore Dreiser, and Sinclair Lewis especially inspired Wright. During the 1930s, joining the communist party, he served his literary apprenticeship and maintained his political activism. He acquired a variety of journalistic and editorial skills. In the 1940s, he moved to France. He knew Gertrude Stein and Jean-Paul Sartre and became an anti-

communist, increasingly acknowledging the existential, absurd aspect of his writing. His outspoken writing blazed a path for subsequent African-American novelists.

Wright's novel *The Outsider* (1953) was acclaimed as the first American existential novel, not only has virtually the same title as Albert Camus's *L' Etranger* but a similar theme, as a rebellious black hero confronts with an act of murder in a meaningless world. Later, black writing has drawn repeatedly on his double heritage. In Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin, he found successors who could extend his mixture of discovering vision and rage against injustice. In the civil rights battle of the 1960s, that rage seemed to matter most, but later his broad sense of human exposure and artistic hunger proved even more powerfully influential. Black American fiction has flourished in recent decades and owes much to him. Like the best fiction of 1930s, his work reached towards a visionary distillation of an oppressed human condition.

Wright's another novel *The Long Dream* was published in 1958. His non-fiction *White Man, Listen!* (1957) was originally a series of lectures given in Europe. His popular collections of short stories are *Uncle Tom's Children* (1938) and *Eight Men* (1961).

Wright's masterpiece *Native Son* (1940) brought him to the summit of success as a novelist of having cosmopolitan perspectives with the aim of transcending the narrow and the local, the pinched and straitened outlook of the tribal soul. The novel was a major breakthrough for the Negro writer. With a view to demolish the walls of the ghetto, he attempts to provide the ideas of "nativism" and "territory" to challenge the American conscience.

Wright's *Black Boy* depicts the social life of American South during 1910s to 1940s through the experiences of Richard Wright, the main character of the novel. He

conveys his autobiographical experiences from childhood to manhood that is full of hatred, segregation, poverty, injustice, mental and physical torture. Since its publication in 1945, the novel has been interpreted from various perspectives. Various critics have highlighted on the theme of racism and racial issues underlying in the very core of the novel. Some critics see violence; besides the exposition of the evils of racism being the chief concern of the novel. An eminent critic of the novel, G. Robert Carlfen in his *American Literature* states, "*Black Boy* makes no direct appeals to end racism or any direct analysis of it. Yet, in its quite indirect way, it remains one of the best analyses of the effects of racism and one of the most moving appeals to end, it has ever been written" (615). He does not only convey his experiences but also the experiences of all blacks of the period.

Critics also highlight the autobiographical issues in the novel as the journey of the novelist from innocence to experience with the sentiment of southern black man. In the editorial review in Merion Encyclopedia of Literature, Jerry W. Ward writes:

*Black Boy* is a classic American autobiography subtly crafted of Richard Wright's journey from innocence to experience Jim Crow South. An enduring story one man's coming off during a particular time and place, Wright's *Black Boy* remains a sentimental in own history about what it remains to be a man, black and southern in American. (IX)

The essayist Nathan A. Scott in his essay "Black Literature" discusses the miserable and pitiable condition black portrayed in the novel *Black Boy*. He writes:

One suspects that the chief reason for the eminence accorded him by the black insurgency of recent year is that he, more powerfully than his

predecessors, is felt to have certified and given a large kind of moral prestige to the angers lodged in the hearts of those who have had to endure such cruel disadvantages as the penalties of color have ordained for the American Negro. (291)

He talks about the black insurgency which is the source of pristage for the black people. the black insurgency of recent year Similarly, critics like Tamare Dinessoa views Wright's *Black Boy* as having the theme of self-identification. In his essay "Richard Wright: The Problem of Self-identification", he writes:

For Richard Wright, the problems of self-identification provided the major quest of his life. Throughout his life, he was trying to define himself existentially, identify his root, his place in life as a Negro, an intellectual, as man, as an American. This is, he is literally observed with the ideas of self-identification. (10)

It tells us much about social breakdown and disorder in American life with a vividness sociological writing cannot provide. In his essay "Black Boy Comedy: Indestructibility and Anonymity in Autobiographical Self-Making" Peter Ramadonovic views the main intention of the novel was not to create a violent world but to redeem it. He states:" Wright's autobiography is an attempt to redeem the violent world and of his childhood and youth through his writing and in the process to give himself a definite, unified identity, keeping whole". (6) The black identity is represented through the text and different writings.\_Richard Ruland and Malcolm Bradbury, in their book *From Puritanism to Postmodernism* view the Wright's novel as a product of the artist's troubled life as they say, "Wright gave a black American

portrait of the troubled artists" (336). Thus, Bradbury highly praises and valorizes Wright for his mobility and uniqueness.

Hence, the novel has been reviewed and analyzed from various perspectives. This study, instead of plainly valorizing Wright and his novel *Black Boy*, focuses on somewhat invisible aspect of the text that is how he fails to portray the sense of black consciousness and how the chosen text is pro-black in its appearance and pro-white in its core. It also focuses on how the white cultural colonizers are able to hegemonize the literate blacks like Wright is the major focus of this study. It also examines the text to expose the failure of the novelist to represent the black consciousness that instead of enhancing the process of black liberation, retarded it giving the chance to white hegemony prevail longer.

## Chapter 2

### Black Consciousness and Resisting White Supremacy

#### Black Consciousness Movement

The Black Consciousness Movement was a grass root of the anti-Apartheid activist movement that emerged in South Africa in the mid-1960s. The political vacuum was there because the Apartheid regime jailed the many black activists and banned the major parties fighting for the right of blacks like African National Congress (ANC) and Pan Africanist Congress Leadership. After the Sharpeville Massacre in 1960, the Apartheid regime murdered the large number of blacks who raised the voice against the regime. In this regard, Amatoritsero Ede writes in the essay "The Black Consciousness Movement in South African Literature":

The Black Consciousness Movement developed at the end of the sixties as an ideological correlative of the South African students Organization (SASO) founded in 1969. On the heels of Sharpsiville notable black political organizations like the African national Congress (ANC) and Pan-African Congress (PAC) were driven underground and there was no visible platform of opposition anymore. (4)

Due to such banning of organizations those were working for the liberation of blacks, there was huge exodus of the intellectuals. They were mostly the members of those organizations that created the intellectual vacuum along with the political vacuum.

In that political and intellectual vacuum, South African Students Organization (SASO) was carried unto the political and cultural arena of the black of church and because of this, the University Christian Movement (UCM) was devised. In 1996, the Anglican Church under the incumbent, Arch bishop Robert Selby Taylor, convened a

meeting which later led to the foundation of University Christian Movement That became the vehicle for black consciousness.

The movement attacked traditional white values especially the values of the whites of liberal opinion. They refused to engage white liberal opinion on the pros and cons of black consciousness, and emphasized the rejection of white monopoly on truth as a central tenet of their movement. While this movement at first generated disagreement amongst black anti-apartheid activists within South Africa, it was soon adopted by most as a positive development. As a result, there emerged a greater cohesiveness and solidarity amongst black groups in general, which in turn propelled black consciousness to the forefront of the anti-apartheid activists.

The movement's policy of perpetually challenging the dialectic of apartheid South Africa as a means of conscientizing blacks brought it into direct conflict with the full force of the security apparatus of the apartheid regime. "Black man, you are on your own" became the rallying cry as mushrooming activity committees implemented what was to become a relentless campaign of challenge to what was then referred to by the movement as 'the system'. It eventually sparked a confrontation on June 16, 1976 in the Soweto uprising, when at least two hundred people were killed by the South African schools. Unrest spread like wildfire throughout the country. The black revolution in South Africa had begun.

Although it successfully implemented a system of comprehensive local communities to facilitate organized resistance, the movement itself was decimated by security action taken against its leaders and social programs. By June 19, 1976, one hundred and twenty three key members had been banned and confined to remote rural districts. In 1977, all Black Consciousness Movement related organizations were

banned, many of its leaders arrested, and their social programs dismantled under provisions of the newly implemented Internal Security Amendment Act. In September 1977, its banned National Leader, Steve Biko, was murdered while in the custody of the South Africa Security Police.

As black people continued to struggle to find ways to gain ground against apartheid, Biko and other black consciousness theorists began to concern themselves not only with political liberation but with the meaning of blackness itself. The term black consciousness stems from American educator W.E.B. du Bois's evaluation of the double consciousness of American black's being taught what they feel inside to be lies about the weakness and cowardice of their race. Du Bois introduced the term "double consciousness" into the study of African American psychology. Double consciousness comes from African Americans viewing themselves, individually and as a group, through the eyes of society they live in. Du Bois says, it is "always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of world that looks on in amused contempt and pity (299). This produces what Du Bois calls a "twoness, - an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body." (299). These two views are often in conflict with one another, as the American view, in general, has despised and dehumanized African Americans.

Du Bois echoed Civil War era black nationalist Martin Delany's insistence that black people take pride in their blackness as an important step in their personal liberation. This line of thought was also reflected in the Pan Africanist, Marcus Garvey, as well as Harlem Renaissance philosopher Alain Locke and in the salons of the Nardal sisters in Paris. Biko's understanding of these thinkers was further shaped

through the lens of postcolonial thinkers such as Frantz Fanon, Leopold Senghor, and Aime Cesaire. Biko reflects the concern for the existential struggle of the black person as a human being, dignified and proud of his blackness, in spite of the oppression of colonialism. They aim consciousness, which they felt had been suppressed under colonialism.

### **The Concept of Black Consciousness**

In the various leadership trainings and various speeches made for the black people by the founder of Black Consciousness Movement, Bantu Stephen Biko, the black consciousness has been discussed. In the speech of Biko collected in his book *Biko* by Donald Wood, he writes,

I must emphasize the cultural depth of Black Consciousness. The recognition of the death of white invincibility forces blacks to ask the question: "Who am I? who are we?" and the fundamental answer we give is this: "people are people!" so "black" Consciousness says: "Forget about the color!" But the reality we faced ten to fifteen years ago did not allow us to articulate this. After all, the continent was in a period of rapid decolonization, which implied a challenge to black inferiority all over Africa. (6-7)

Thus, from the issues raised by the definition of the Black consciousness by Biko, the basic constituents of the Black consciousness are the quest for the black identity and justice in the white dominated colonized African society. The resistance to the so-called superior white society should be voiced by a person who is black.

In the paper produced for a South African Students' Organization Leadership Training Course in December 1971 by Biko, he illustrates various things. The point

Biko makes, "Being black is not a matter of pigmentation – being is a reflection of a mental attitude" (1) is highly influential. Biko further clarifies:

Black Consciousness is in essence the realization by the black man of the need to rally together with his brothers around the cause of their oppression – the blackness of their skin – and to operate as a group in order to rid themselves of the shackles that bind them to perpetual servitude. It seeks aberration from the "normal" which is white. It is a manifestation of a new realization that they are seeking to run away from themselves and to emulate white man, black are insulting the intelligence of whoever created them black. Black Consciousness, therefore takes cognizance of the deliberateness of the God's plan in creating black people black. (3)

Thus, from the Biko's assertion above that Black consciousness is a phenomenon that flatly rejects the discourse created by the white men of their superiority. It also tries to subvert the white-discourse imbedded with the Christianity itself.

Black people are deliberately exploited by the white men and Africa has been exploited by them in larger scale than any place around the world such exploitation results in making black as poor as Biko says: "It is true that the history of weaker nations is shaped by bigger nations, but nowhere in the world today do we see whites exploiting whites on scale even remotely similar to what is happening in South Africa." In this way, the black consciousness examines and revolts against the colonial discourse that gives platform to the naked social, political, cultural and economic exploitation of the Africans by the white colonizers. The basic foundation of such prejudiced discourses lies on the racial injustice based on the color of the

Africans. The black consciousness endeavors to subvert such discourse based upon the prejudiced notion of inferiority, making Africans realize they can liberate themselves from the perpetual sufferings inflicted upon them by racism, both psychologically and physically.

Since the question of racism is at the base of the discourses of the colonizers, it is better to see what is race and racism. Racism is a belief of superiority or inferiority made on the basis of race. Race refers to the notion which divides human beings into distinct groups – physically, biologically and genetically as Kwame Anthony Appiah states:

We can find more or less articulated views about the differences between 'our own kind' and the people of other cultures. These doctrines, like modern theories of race, have often placed a central emphasis on physical appearance in defining 'Other' and on common ancestry in explaining why groups of people display differences in their attributes and attitudes. (274)

As seen with the Appiah's perspective, racism is the discourse founded upon the gap of cultural difference further widening the gap with the attitude of the people of one group as 'self' and regarding the another cultural group as 'Other' just on the basis of outward appearance.

Discourse is based upon the constructed binarism and gives the colonizer to pursue the naked exploitation of the unjustly constructed 'other', the colonized. The exploitation is highlighted with the statement of Frantz Fanon in his *The Wretched of the Earth*:

The zone where the natives live is not complementary to the zone inhabited by the settlers. The two zones are opposed, but not in the service of a higher unity. Obedient to the rules of pure Aristotelian logic, they both follow the principle of reciprocal exclusivity. Not conciliation is possible, for of the two terms, one is superfluous. The settlers' town is a strongly-built town, all made of stone and steel. It is brightly lit town; the streets are covered with asphalt, and the garbage-cans swallow all the leavings, unseen, unknown and hardly thought about. The settler's feet are never visible, except perhaps in the sea; but there you are never close enough to see them. His feet are protected by strong shoes although the streets of his town are clean and even, with no holes or stones. The settler's town is a well-fed town, an easygoing town; its belly is always full of good things. The settler's town is town of white people, of foreigners. (31)

Fanon draws a sharp line between the colonizers and the colonized and depicts the bright picture of the towns of the colonizers and the grim and pitiable picture of colonized, the Negroes. The foreigners, the white settlers exploit them on the basis of their colonial discourses based upon the racism in their own native land where they are born. Thus, with Fanon the real pathetic situation of the natives are deprived of their own resources. The foreigner justifies their action of exploitation by the circulation of the prejudiced discourses based upon the binarism of 'self' and 'other'.

While depicting the situation of the Negroes, Fanon goes on highlighting the difficulties of them in their own soil, the village of ill fame people by men of evil repute has become the native town. He says, in this regard, "They are born there, it

matters little where or how; they die there, it matters not where, nor how" (32). He shows the essential hunger in the people of native town as he says "The native town in a hungry town, starve of bread, of meat, of shoes, of coal, of light" (32). It is the town of Negroes or dirty Arabs who look at the lavish luxury of the colonizers with look of envy. This envy generates the fear in the colonizers that the luxury can be confiscated by the natives anytime.

Fanon's way of getting out of such a bitter situation gives emphasis upon the violence. Only by means of violence, the colonized can be able to chase the usurper of their nation and create a favorable situation. They feel equal to counter the colonial discourses and the seer injustice the blacks were experiencing in their own nation.

Thus, though both Fanon and Biko share the common ground that the natives should fight against the colonial regime to come out of the everlasting servitude, Fanon's solution is communist one. But Biko goes beyond communism and even uses the tactic of non-violence; he advocated for communalism. Biko does not like the label of the communist for the Black Consciousness Movement but moves ahead to the mission of both psychological and physical liberation of the blacks and exploited people with both the tactics of violence and non-violence. In his speech, Biko clarifies this point:

The Black Consciousness Movement does not want to accept the dilemma of capitalism versus communism. It opts for the socialist solution that is an authentic expression of black communalism. At the present stage of our struggle it is not easy to present details of this alternative, but it is the recognition of the fact that a change the system. In our search for a just system we know that the debate about

economic policy cannot be "pure", completely separate from existing system. (11)

Thus, black consciousness elevates up from the communist way of dealing with the problems of the black people, favoring communalism over communism. It subverts the collective discourse of the colonizers in various fields – social, political, economical and cultural and seeks the collective emancipation of the black people all over. It rejects the liberation of just an individual rather it opts for the both physical and psychological liberation of all the blacks. The sense of communal and collective liberation of the blacks lies in the heart of the Black Consciousness Movement.

### **Black Consciousness Literature**

In comparison with the Black Power Movement in the United States, the Black Consciousness Movement felt little need to reconstruct any sort of golden cultural heritage. African linguistic and cultural traditions were alive and well in the country. Short stories published predominately in Drum magazine had led to the 1950s being called the *Drum decade*, and future Nobel Prize winner Nadine Gordimer was beginning to be active. The fallout from the Sharpeville massacre led to many of those artists entering exile, but the political oppression of the resistance itself led to a new growth of black South African literature. In the 1970s, Staffrider magazine became the dominant forum for the publication of literature about black consciousness, mostly in the form of poetry and short stories. Book clubs, youth associations and clandestine street-to-street exchange became popular. Various authors Mbulelo Mzamane. But the most compelling force in black consciousness prose was the short story, now adapted to teach political morals. Mtutuzeli Matshoba famously wrote, "Do not say to me the I am a man." An important theme of black consciousness literature was the

rediscovery of the ordinary, which can be used to describe the work of Njabulo Ndebele.

However, it was in poetry that the Black Consciousness Movement first found its voice. In a sense, this was a modern update of an old tradition, since several of South Africa's African languages had long traditions of performed poetry. Siphon Sempala, Mongane Serote, and Mafika Gwala led the way, although Sempala turned to prose after Soweto. Serote wrote from exile of his internalization of the struggles, while Gwala's work was informed and inspired by the difficulty of life in his home township of Mpumalanga near Durban. These forerunners inspired a myriad of followers, most notably poet-performance artist Ingoapele Madingoane.

James Mathews was a part of the Drum decade who was especially influential to the Black Consciousness Movement. This poem gives an idea of the frustrations that blacks felt under apartheid. His poem "The Freedom's Child" expresses the idea of frustrations the black felt under apartheid regime. He highlights the continual denial of blacks in the apartheid regime. He makes his persona outrageous revolutionary or the freedom's child, that excites him to struggle with the regime for the rightful place for the blacks in the society.

The poem by anonymous writer that was also read widely was the 'Black Man' in which the poet views the blacks in the slumber. He, thus, makes effort toward the resistance to the slumber by awakening and fighting the war against the colonizers. Poets like Mandelankosi Langa write the poems on black resistance. Langa's poem "Banned for Blacks" has Biko as its hero in which he expects the blacks to raise their fists in anger and vengeance to the colonizers. Thus, the resistance and the fight against the colonial regime are the chief ideas of the black literature.

A main tenet of the Black Consciousness Movement itself was the development of black culture, and, thus, black literature. The cleavages in South African society were real, and the poets and writers of the Black Consciousness Movement saw themselves as spokespersons for blacks in the country. They refused to be beholden to proper grammar and style, searching for black aesthetics and black literary values. The attempt to awaken a black cultural identity was thus inextricably tied up with the development of black literature. Since the question of resistance for the quest of black cultural identity is imbedded with the Black Consciousness Movement, this study further analyzes the concept of resistance.

### **Black Consciousness and Discourses on Resistance**

Resistance generally refers to a voice against the prevailing discourse. The people in the power create certain discourses about the people who are governed under their power. The discourse says that they are rational, educated, civilized, kind and so on and the people under their regime are irrational, barbaric, wild, savage, cruel and so forth. These 'subjects' begin to follow the rulers' supremacy by hegemonizing themselves. However, the people who do not possess power can raise their voices against the stereotypical notions and the existing systems that insult and humiliate them. They deliberately stand against the notions of discourse through the medium of resistance. Resistance, thus, comes as an opposite notion of hegemony, 'the willful consent to be ruled'.

Resistance can be defined as the behaviors and the cultural practices of subordinate groups that contest hegemonic social formations and threaten to unravel the strategies of domination. In his book *Madness and Civilization* (1961), Michel Foucault states about the resistance by saying:

Resistance doesn't exist outside of the system power relations. It is instead inherently part of the relation. In modern day normalizing power relation. This tends very much to isolate the individual resistance into a series of "Special Cases" which do not allow generalization. (145)

Resistance is inseparable from power and Foucault defines it as the component of the inextricability of power relations. In fact, Foucault does not mean to disclose that power is evil in itself. His idea of power is related to productivity. This productive power limits an individual and subjects him to certain conditions. This subjection of an individual is viable with the help of 'techniques' of truth and knowledge. But the subject can resist his position and conditions that are set for him by the ideological framework of the discourse.

In such kind of resistance the liberation of human beings can not be guaranteed. In Foucault's view, the claims arising from the resistance are also the products of another discourse and can never be 'disinterested' and 'objective'. The best idea offers the subjects to develop a critical notion without any attempt to establish the 'essence' of his or her own.

Black consciousness gives the question of resistance a large currency as it sees and revolts against the constructed subjectivity of colonized blacks by the discourses of colonizers whites. The resistance for Black Consciousness Movement runs in all the lines of violence, non-violence, literature and their cultural revival. For that reason this study examines the basic feature and form of resistance with the black consciousness.

## Chapter 3

### Black Boy and the Failure of Black Resistance

#### Life under Racism

Life under racism Wright, in his *Black Boy*, significantly recounts the tormented life of himself, which is crushed under racism. The bitter life he experiences as a Southern Negro have been well articulated in the novel. The experiences of racism are recorded along with his emotional and psychological reactions to those experiences that arouse the sympathy that the seer injustice, poverty, hunger and the sense of exclusion of the narrator can be seen under racism.

The vulnerability of the tormented Negro boy is life has been associated with his poverty and hunger from the very beginning of the novel. Due to the miserable condition under poverty, hunger and the estrangement of the infidel father, the mother of Wright had to work in the kit of Whites, to sustain the life of him and his brother. As the narrator, he recollects the miserable life under poverty and hunger:

I always loved to stand in the White Folks' kitchen when my mother cooked, for it meant that I got occasional scraps of bread and meat; but many times I regretted having come, for my nostrils would be assailed with the scent of food the did not belong to me and which I was forbidden to eat. . . . If the white people left anything, my brother and I would eat well; but they did not, we would have our usual bread and tea. (26)

This statement highlights the unequal life styles of the haves and have-nots, the whites and the blacks, and the master and the servant. One is well-eaten and another is dying

of starvation. It is because of the poverty forced upon the blacks by racism, the mother of Wright has to work for the whites.

The pathetic situation of the hungry child forces him to ruminate upon the very issue of hunger and its causes. He broods, "Why could I not eat when I was hungry? Why did I always have to wait until others were through? I could not understand why some people had enough food and others did not" (26). These words evokes the shouting down of speakers whose ideas are somehow ideologically incorrect, the destruction of printing presses, the spectacle of parents angry that school texts contain language and ideas pernicious to underaged Dick and Jane (which they already think of as ancient), bans on the exhibition of Mapplethorpe photographs, the Inquisition, special markings for motion pictures and rap compact discs, and the pyramid of books aflame. Ideas and images deemed offensive must be suppressed or hidden or destroyed.

The innocence of the narrator can be seen with such ruminations. Though, the whole fabric of society has experienced the same problem of hunger due to the perpetuation of racism, he starts to question it from his childish experience of injustice. The ignorance of the vast hierarchical system of racism has been portrayed with further narration:

Though I had long known that there were people called "white" people, it had never meant to me emotionally. I had seen white men and women upon the streets a thousand times, but they had never looked particularly, "white". To me they were merely people like other people, yet somehow strangely different because I had never come in close

touch with any of them. . . . My grandmother, who was white as any "white" person, had never looked "white" to me. (31)

This situation of the boy illustrates his childish ignorance of the atrocity inflicted upon his life by the vast system of racism. He does not have an idea how he is subjected to face hunger and how he should behave with the whites.

Though, the little boy does not have the idea and critical ability to understand the hierarchy hard set in the fabric of society, and find the emotional implications of the hierarchical 'white' and 'black' society, he bears the dread of hunger and thirst because of same hierarchy. Only in the course of his growing up, he starts to understand the real implications of the racism and its harshness in his society.

The barbarity and cruelty of racism start to unfold to the knowledge of the protagonist only after uncle Hoskins was shot dead by the whites. Uncle Hoskins' profitable run of tavern in Arkansas and his attempt to live self – dependent and honorable life in society caused jealousy in part of whites. The killing of Uncle Hoskins is the result of their mentality disapproving the productive life of a black like that of whites. The greed of whites to capture the profitable tavern and to terrorize blacks letting them know they are not equal to whites. It has been clearly articulated with the murder case which in turn proves the barbaric nature of racist hierarchy. The awareness of the terror of racism and his inferiority in the hierarchy of society leads the little boy Richard to the continual experience of the real nature of the hierarchical racist society.

The society out of the dreadful terror, inflicted by white's atrocity, does not observe the funeral of uncle Hoskins as if nothing had happened which draws the bleak picture of life under racism. People of black community are not the people at

all; they are like the cattle who await silently the pain inflicted upon them by whites. Blacks do not have the right to see the dead body of Uncle Hoskins and, thus, whites show their absolute brutality to the blacks that became the real implication of the racism, sharply painted in the mind of little boy Richard.

The subjectivity of Richard as a boy has been challenged because of the bitter experience of the racial southern society. "The dread of white people now came to live permanently in my feelings and imagination" (83), he asserts when he is able to fathom the unfathomable torture born by his being, a southern boy. He says, "Nothing challenged the totality of my personality so much as this pressure of hate and threat that stem from the invisible whites" (83). Still, the little boy is not finding the direct interaction to the whites as they are invisible to them. The social construct of the racism torments and fills with the hatred towards the whites. Richard manages to maintain the integrity of his personality in his fantasies. In this way, in the imaginary world of fantasies constructed upon his mind to face the unfriendly fatal mob of whites that work as his moral bulwark as he admits:

My spontaneous fantasies live in my mind because I felt completely helpless in the face of this threat that might come upon me at any time, and because there did not exist to my knowledge any possible course of action which could have saved me if I had ever been confronted with a white mob. My fantasies were a moral bulwark that enabled me to feel I was keeping my emotional integrity whole, a support that enabled my personality to limp through days lived under the threat of violence. (84)

The frustration, dread and helplessness of a Southern black boy has been portrayed with the bleak reality in the racist south of America by the novelist.

The dread further manifests when the boy is requested to write his name in blackboard with a white chalk in the beginning day of disrupted school life in West Helena. The boy could not write his name. He narrates the incident as, "I lifted the white chalk to the blackboard, as I was about to write, my mind went blank, empty; I could not remember my name, not even the first letter" (85). It valorizes the enduring importance of slave narrative, for example, as a genre for understanding the insights and aspirations of the oppressed, a genre that has always named the lie upon which American society has and continues to batten: the beautiful and truly noble democratic theories of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. The reality for a substantial number of Americans has been death, unfreedom, and the flight from despair.

The white chalk represents the imaginary whites hostile to black as the notion of the white has already tortured the child's brain; he forgets his name because of his feeling of hostility. He remains so backward even though he knows to write his name well as he has been suffered with the anxiety of being a marginalized and inferior. It is because of his mental torture he receives from each and every nook of the society that perpetuates racism.

### **Developing Racial Consciousness**

Along with the torture that is enforced upon the family of Richard, various other difficulties have tormented of his family and the whole black community under racism has been portrayed in sympathetic way in the novel. Due to the hostility created by racial discrimination, the blacks are fragmented and isolated to their veins.

Because of this, the little boy Richard sees lack of unity and harmony in his own black society. Thus, he is critical of degeneration of values among the Negroes as he points out:

After I had outlived the shocks of childhood, after the habit of reflection had been born in me, I used to mull over the strange absence of real kindness in Negroes, how unstable was our tenderness, how lacking in genuine passion we were, how void of great hope, how timid our joy, how bare our traditions, how hollow our memories, how lacking we were in those intangible sentiments that bind man to man, and how shallow was even our despair. After I had learned other ways of life I sued to brood upon the unconscious irony of those who felt that Negroes led so passionate an existence! I saw that what had been taken for our emotional strength was our negative confusions, our flights, our fear, our frenzy under pressure. (45)

Richard, starting the reflection of the real condition of black society, sees the rampant loss of human values and degeneration in Negroes. He becomes aware of their futile life under the erosion of racism. More shameful and critical, he grows of their valuelessness. He criticizes not only the lack of human values in blacks but also the whole system of racism that denied the access of blacks to the world civilization and its mainstream.

The seed of resistance starts growing in the serious mind of the protagonist. He further expresses the exclusion of blacks from the current of civilization as:

Whenever I thought of the essential bleakness of black life in America, I knew that Negroes had never been allowed to catch the full spirit of

western civilization, that they lived somehow in it but not of it. And when I brooded upon the cultural barrenness of black life, I wondered if clean, positive tenderness, love, honor, loyalty, and the capacity to remember were native with men. I asked myself if these human qualities were not fostered, won, struggled and suffered for, preserved in ritual from one generation to another. (45)

Richard starts to understand the exclusion of blacks from mainstream civilization and this degeneration of values in blacks. The racist society fragmented the values of the community. They have become the matter of distant past and the shallowness of the values traveled with them in the name of rituals. This pathetic condition of the Negroes is conditioned by the racist discourse of the dominant white culture of America viewed blacks not as human beings equal to whites but inferior to them. The suffocating air of injustice and fragmentation has gulped the values of community. It is made to lag far behind the spirit of western civilization, with all the bleakness and despair.

Out of such painful awareness, Richard wants frequently the change in his condition. At the same time, he gains the insight to look at the sufferings of others. He gains the critical ability becomes tolerant of those things. He is just reaching twelve years but he comes up with the mature emotional build up and continuously finds the essential sufferings in society as general human condition of the blacks of the society.

The growing up is conditioned by poverty and the bleakness of black life in America. Still, he does not wither fall into the trap his fellow Negroes fall. He grows sympathetic to the causes and sufferings of the other Negroes even at the age of twelve. In this connection, he says, " The spirit I had caught gave me insight into the

sufferings of others, made me gravitate toward those whose feelings were like my own, made me sit for hours, while others told me of their lives, made me strangely tender and cruel, violent and peaceful" (112). Richard starts to feel the plights of others. He is defiant to the perpetual inferiority and marginalization imposed upon the whole black community by the whites. The religion is understood by him as institution that helps whites to perpetuate the racial injustice which shows his growing awareness of the troubled lives of the community. The awareness is of the seminal role of religion to perpetuate and essentialize the unjust white supremacy in the society. So, he refuses to be baptized. He is emotionally secluded from his Granny and mother who are the ardent devout of the God and the religion. His resistance to religion comes from the growing awareness of the institutionalization of the racist discourse. In the name of saving his soul, he is frequently coerced by his mother, Granny and his peers. They show the mercy and forgiveness of God of his sins.

When Richard rejects frequently the baptism, the peers show him the dread of rejecting God. They cannot convince him. When he rejects one of the boys' request, he puts his doubt of the religion as requests:

It would have been impossible for me to have told him how I felt about religion. I had not settled in my mind whether I believed in God or not; His existence or non existence never worried me. I reasoned that if there exist an all-wise, all-powerful God who knew the beginning and the end, who meted out justice to all, who controlled the destiny of the man, the God would surely know that I doubted. His existence and He would laugh at my foolish denial of him. And if there was no God at

all, then why all the commotion? I couldnot imagine God pausing in  
His guidance of unimaginably vast words to bother with me. (127)

He grows critical of religion as he understands the whole religion serves the interest of the ruling whites and the ruled were made inferior and fatalists. Religion, for Richard, was the perpetuation of racial violence as it would veil the actions taken by the whites to black and justify their supremacy. He further criticizes religion as, "Wherever I found religion in my life I found strife, the attempt of one individual or group to rule another in the name of God. The naked will to power seemed always to walk in the wake of hymn"(150). The pressure continuously generates to Richard to be baptized in the name of God that is also a form of racial violence.

To perpetuate the racial violence, the preachers would use the people of the same community exploiting the human relationship. What is potentially offensive in *Black Boy* may be profane language and violence, but the function of profanity and violence is a double-edged sword, wounding the "self" in the autobiography as it pierces a reader's consciousness of racism's systemic operations. At one level, these cultural dynamics preclude the book's being a proper target of censorship.

In writing *Black Boy*, Wright intended, among other things, to exercise his First Amendment rights. He did so with such power that his book is internationally acknowledged as a classic among American autobiographies, particularly in its depiction of the forces in American society that participated in constructing, to borrow James Baldwin's marvelous phrasing, "a low ceiling of actual possibilities" for young black males. That which can be verified by the traditional, rigorous procedures of historical and sociological scholarship does not warrant censorship. It is not far afield to speculate that those who would wound Richard Wright symbolically through

the censorship of *Black Boy* share some values with those who wounded the author more directly in his lifetime.

The situation turns to be more forceful and Richard starts to view the religion as his bitter adversary that corrupts and questions his position in the community. He further bitterly speaks of religion as:

This business of saving souls had no ethics; every human relationship was shamelessly exploited. In essence the tribe was asking us whether we shared its feelings. If we refused to join the church, it was equivalent to saying no, to placing ourselves in the position of moral monsters. One mother led her beaten and frightened son to the preacher amid shouts of amen and hallelujah. (170)

Religion, in the very systematic way, plays the vital role in the exploitation upon the blacks by whites. There is bitter racial violence that torments the lives of the southern blacks in America. More racial violence starts to unfurl before the narrator when he begins to work in town.

Richard finds it difficult to act according to the expectation of whites from a Negro. Richard gets fired from a boss's son just for not laughing and talking when the white man misbehaves the black people. The event was the result of Richard's inability to learn to get around with "white folks" as another black boy Griggs points out. He teaches Richard the way in which he could become faithful to the whites, subservient to them but Richard can't become like other black boys and never succumbs to Griggs' suggestion under which the survival of the black boy is very hard. Richard remains self-sufficient and defiant to whites on the contrary to Griggs' suggestion that frequently threatens his life.

Racism is bred by ignorance and Wright portrays that to survive as a black man, he must act as ignorant in front of his white counterpart. A black man must laugh and talk. He must act grateful towards a white man and mask his true feelings and hatred to be able to survive. Richards gradually learns better he conceals the hatred to whites, better will be the chance of his survival. He is totally isolated. The racial violence is well manifested with the firing him from the job.

There is no big gap between the racial violence perpetuated by the religion and the white man as they both try to baptize the blacks with the name in which they want Negroes to be. The childish curiosity of Richard reveals to the connection between the baptizing and controlling tendency of the whites and the religion both. Questioning his mother, he sees how whites have baptized and controlled the blacks so far. It is highlighted with the conversation of him and his mother as:

"What was Granny's name before she married Grandpa?"

"Bolden."

"Who gave her that name?"

"The white man who owned her."

"She was slave?"

"Yes."

[. . .] "Mama, where did the father get his name?"

"From his father".

"And where did the father of my father get his name?"

"Like Granny get hers. From a white man." (46)

This highlights the tendency of both the whites and religion to baptize the blacks so as to exert domination and exploitation upon them. Both regarded the blacks as inferior

people. Later, Richard also narrates how his Grandpa's name was misspelled as Richard Vinson instead of Richard Wilson so as to deprive him of his pension. The baptizing gave Grandpa perpetual poverty and whites were benefited as they did not need to pay him.

The life of the black boy is tormented in various aspects of life in various episodes. The black racism has shrouded the whole lives of the blacks and there is no way out. The ignorance of blacks is letting them play the puppets in the hands of whites. In 1924, Richard had obtained the job of bringing the pails of water to the black labourers and in the job, he gets the biting of a dog on his thigh. The dog belonged to the white boss. Out of the fear of infection, he reports it to his supervisor to get medical attention. But he gets humiliating answers like "A dog bit can't hurt a nigger" (164) as if a nigger is not a human being rather he is a machine without sense. Such bitter racial violences torture the blacks throughout but still they remain subservient and parasitic to whites that fail to articulate the resistance and hence the black consciousness.

Wright is highly successful in his portrayal of the tormented life of a black boy of the southern society conditioned by the racial injustice and violence. Despite such the vivid bleak realism of the constrained life of the blacks has been presented, this novel fails to articulate the resistance and the communal feeling to liberate the whole blacks from such miserable situation. So, this analysis endeavors to analyze the resistance on the part of blacks with the help of the various examples provided in the text.

Since the resistance has given very low voice, it fails to arouse the sense of black consciousness in the Southern blacks. It also, fails to lead the movement to

make the whole black community liberated both physically and psychologically. Only the protagonist is conscious of the pathetic life of Negroes and the resistance have been confined in the narrow boundary of the personal people conscious about their miserable condition in the racial South and just escapes from the real problem as vanquished. He miserably fails to articulate black consciousness as he looks for his personal freedom, not of the whole community. He is defeated and proves that the racism cannot be undone, giving the white-domination the supreme position.

### **Black Consciousness and Resistance**

The protagonist develops with awareness that the whole black community is being mistreated and condemned to live pathetic subservient life due to the racist discourse of white superiority perpetuated in the southern society. The act of resistance is not possible in anybody before the full-fledged awareness of the situation dawns in him. So, here, it is not the lack of resistance in Richard as a little boy, but he is unable to fathom the implications of the racism to its entirety. More mature he grows, more exposed he becomes to the racial hatred, racial violence. In such a situation, his resistance cannot articulate as one expects. The resistance articulated in the protagonist in various situations are not resistance at all. They are just the resistance for the resistance's sake. They are but the faint resistance and unlike the resistance taking into the whole community under consideration. Thus, they become the ordinary human reactions to the situations hostile to them. Hence, the resistance miserably fails to articulate black consciousness.

The racial hatred to the whites is enough to get him position among his peers. The bitter hatred of black boys towards whites is just the subject matter of their conversation. Though they have the air of fraternity among them and the same

awareness that they all are the victims of the same racial prejudice, they never look for the communal resistance. They lack the real unity among them. They can overthrow the whole social injustice created by whites, fighting with them collectively. The racial hatred is, thus, fruitless, the subject matter of their conversations and the jokes as narrated in the novel:

Having grown taller and older, I now associated with older boys and I had to pay for my admittance into their company by subscribing to certain racial sentiments. The touchstone fraternity was my feeling toward white people, how much hostility I held toward them, what degrees of value and honor I assigned to race. None of this was premeditated, but sprang spontaneously out of the talk of black boys who met at the crossroads. (88)

Racial hatred of the black community to whites, thus, works as the poison in their veins. Their conversations have the assertion of bitter life they pursue in South. They are not convinced that they can undo the system that forces them to live such a pathetic life. They do not live in their collective power that whites are forever strong, unchangeable.

Instead of collective resistance, they have the continual urge to escape to North. Their mindset is that of frustrated and vanquished. Such condition has been presented in the following dialogue between the boys:

"Man, you reckon these white folks is ever gonna change?" Timid, questioning hope.

"Hello, no! They just born that way." Rejecting hope for fear that it could never come true.

"Shucks, man. I'm going north when I get grown". Rebelling against futile hope and embracing flight.

"A colored man's all right-up north." Justifying flight.

"They say a white man hit a colored man up north and that colored man hit that white man, knocked him cold, and nobody did a damn thing!" Urgent wish to believe in flight.

"Man for man up there." Begging to believe in justice. Silence. (90-91)

Thus, instead of condensing the collective, communal resistance to the whites, they bow their heads to the white supremacy and always look for the way to escape. Thus, they all are regressive, which is a failure to articulate resistance. This is an act of belief, a pro-white instead of pro-black or pro-communal.

Characters like Uncle Hoskins is defiant to whites and always carries gun/pistol. He works hard to prosper his tavern in Arkansas that is like the fishbone in the throat of whites. He runs the tavern with considerable resistance to whites and always keeps himself safe of whites' possible attacks. But this resistance is selfish and individual, not collective communal resistance. So, he fails miserably with whites' shooting him dead. Such defeat in the blacks owes largely to the lack of communal resistance among blacks. The whole of the white community works to extinguish each and every spark of defiance extinguished so that they remain the ruler forever. The protagonist fails to light the minds of the blacks with such fire of communal resistance. He moves ahead looking for personal escape from the hostile situation of south and the resistance fails to articulate in materials sense.

Richard leaves a job in white woman's house as he knows the bitter reality of the white's discourse that a nigger cannot become the writer. In this regard, to quote the conversation between Richard and the White woman:

"Then when are you going to school?" she asked in surprise.

"Well, I want to be a writer," I mumbled, unsure of myself; I had not planned to tell her that, but she had made me feel so utterly wrong and of no account that I needed to bolster myself.

[. . .] "You'll never be a writer", she said. "Who on the earthy put such ideas into your nigger head?"

"Nobody," I said.

"I didn't think anybody ever would," she declared indignantly. (147)

Richard's resistance is articulated here in the conversation as he speaks with the white woman defiantly and does not return in the job. He has resisted the white's discourse that a negro boy cannot become a writer. Even after such miserable exposition to the discourse of white supremacy, the sense of communal resistance so as to improve the whole condition of blacks never dawns in him.

The resistance is confined in the purely personal level poisoning his blood and his continual urge for the personal freedom instead of the communal emancipation.

The resistance fails to liberate the community as different black characters are presented basically parasites to the whites and there is no proper sense of communal awakening. Resistance has been confined to mere subjective level of the characters as they are passive and mere supporters of the white domination. They have the sense of loss. They cannot imagine that, one day, they can turn to the winner's position and

their racial pride and subjective resistance is mere a fiasco. The resistance fails to articulate upto the level of black consciousness.

The friends to Richard like Griggs and Shorty are parasitic and blindly appreciate the white's action among them. Such portrayals of characters show the notion of resistance is much more problematic on the part of protagonist. Griggs, without hesitation instead of articulating the resistance to whites, suggests Richard follow the white's ideology to survive in the South as a black boy. He suggests Richard, "For God's sake, learn how to live in the south!" (185). Griggs tries to convince Richard, that there is no alternative to bearing the notion of whites' supremacy which suggests their hegemony imposed upon blacks. Griggs is aware that whites hate to see the face of a black boy with defiant and resistant look, and dissuade Richard to show his anger up, as saying,

"There it is now! It is in your face. You won't let people tell your things. You rush too much. I am trying to help you and you won't let me." He paused and looked about; the streets were filled with white people. He spoke to me in a low, full tone. "Dick, look, you're black, black, black, see? Can't you understand that?"

"Sure, I understand it," I said.

"You don't act a damn bit like it," he spat. (202)

Griggs is, thus, rejecting that he is black to survive in south as a black boy. He suggests Richard to live detached to the actions of whites, without letting them know that he has bitter hatred towards blacks. Even the black characters have been presented as pro-white and the communal identity has been just the matter of conversation.

Though Richard wants to act contrary to the Griggs' advice, he is compelled to compromise with the hostile condition. Thus, he is pro-white and the regressive tendency of the pretended black identity fails miserably to articulate the black consciousness and the resistance in proper sense of the community. The failure can be highlighted further with the episode where blacks are just treated as puppets to the hands of whites.

The utter failure to articulate the resistance comes to its culmination as the white man, Olin, is able to create the hostility between Richard and another black boy named Harrison. When they both realize that they are just being played in the hands of whites and are puppets to be moved by the whites, the white men are unable to generate the fight between them. Their intention to make them fight with the sharp weapons like knife and enjoy upon the bloodshed among the blacks by blacks is clear.

When they feel unable to generate the bloodshed making them fight with weapons, they use another method. They entice them of the money, five dollars each for a fight – boxing in the ring. Richard refuses the proposal for fighting for money but due to Harrison's acceptance for money, the fight is planned. The black boys Richard and Harrison fight with all vigor though they had the secret promise between them not hitting each other the hard blows. Richard says that "Our plans and promises now meant nothing. We fought four hard rounds, stabbing, slugging, grunting, spitting, cursing, crying, bleeding"(264). The barbaric nature of the whites is obvious and they enjoy the blood of blacks. Even then, the black boys fight as there is the great failure of resistance on their part. They forget their racial, the communal pride just for five dollars.

The shame after the failure to keep up with the racial, communal pride is narrated by Richard as, "I could not look at Harrison. I hated him and I hated myself. I clutched my five dollars in my fist and walked home. Harrison and I avoided each other after that and we rarely spoke" (265-66). It highlights the miserable failure of resistance. The communal pride has been crushed by the whites with the use of money. They are fairly successful in their policy of divide and rule. The failure of resistance and the communal sense among the blacks help the whites to maintain status quo. The whites always reign supreme in the Southern society. The social injustices are invincible and the blacks are the mere puppets in the hand of whites have been established as the discourse.

The bitter defeat of resistance and the failure to generate the communal sense of black consciousness have been portrayed as the fate of the narrator. The black boy being aware of his situation has been doomed to failure. The resistance on the part of him is individual and selfish, trying to escape to North. Hence, he fails to articulate black consciousness, proving him vanquished and pro-white.

### **Black Boy Escapes: The Final Defeat**

The black boy always wants to escape from the injustices, the racial prejudices of the society of South and go to the North to gain his personal freedom. His urge to escape and the sense of defeat has been highlighted in the novel. Though Richard seems to have strong fighting spirit that resists and fights with the sense of cultural, communal pride awakening the whole community to the course of communal liberation, he proves to be very fragile in the hostile racial environment of the society. In their playful conversations, the black boys frequently wish to escape to the North but Richard never refutes such ideas. He also covets the same urge to escape to North

that highlights the defeated mentality of blacks. He is bitterly exposed to the racial violence and aware that this situation should be resisted collectively but he always stays back-footed. He never prepares the blacks for the collective revolution by resisting the discourses imposed on them by the whites. Thus, Richard is hindering both the personal and collective, communal liberation and has been proved pro-white of pro-black.

The black boy marvels with the thought of the North and always wants to escape to that utopia as if the escape is so great adventure. The imaginary utopia of New York, full of miraculous things like forty-storeyed building is much coveted dream and emancipation for them. The boys forge their communal ground, their bitter reality and the racial pride. The conversation of those black boys goes like this, "They say they gotta building in New York forty stories high!" A thing too incredible for belief" (91). Such conversation highlights that the whole black community of the South is suffering from the same pathology of defeat, regarding the whites as forever supreme and blacks as forever subservient. There is no hope of resistance and black consciousness in them. The protagonist is no exception. So, he longs the escape to the imaginary utopia of the North as vanquished. He is utterly devoid of black consciousness without any hope of being a victor.

The significance of the book as commentary on other black American males changes according to a reader's affinities, social experiences, associations and knowledge of literary conventions. As Ralph Ellison informed readers, *Black Boy* is Richard Wright's blues. Attempts to condemn or censor Wright's autobiography for its negative portrayal of black males and females are perhaps misreadings of a

hypertextual kind, insufficiently attentive to genre and to the "acts" of race and gender at the time of the book's composition.

To remove the book from the material complexity in which it was formed serves to further conceal the dynamics of the specific historical and intellectual processes which inform the work's production and transmission. It is precisely the "facts" of race and gender in the United States that help us probe the sociohistorical matrix of this important work. The Trussells of our world are not driven by any passionate attention to literature that may lead to the discovery of a "truth." They would have tremendous difficulty understanding that what may be profane and violent in the text of *Black Boy* is an objective correlative of the very conditions the book seeks to address. For example, Wright would not have conveyed the autobiographical truth had he written "Crush that Negro boy's testicles, Harrison!" rather than "Crush that nigger's nuts, nigger!" (Chapter XII). Instead, the Trussells of the world proceed as naive readers with God on their side, confusing parts with wholes, the surface features of a text with the thick descriptions being evoked, what is only a reference to immorality with what is genuinely so. Their motives are not literary, but they are nevertheless embroiled with interpretation and the political economy of which literature is a part. They are not seeking out proper targets for censorship (if indeed any symbolic expression can be legally censored after the 1992 Supreme Court ruling on a St. Paul, Minnesota ordinance on hate speech and its 1989 decision regarding the Flag Protection Act), but rather any material which they deem offensive or disagreeable. Their concern is very noticeable if the material in question is used in publicly funded activities, especially in education. Those who appoint themselves

guardians of public morals and social values will always provide us with occasions for justifying the potentially redemptive value of such books as *Black Boy*.

When Richard faces the racial abuse in the hands of two white men – Reynold and Pease, he fervently wants to make his escape to the North. In the optical company, he is abused by those two senior workers just for the reason that he does not say white men Pease as Mr. Pease. If he confesses he said Pease instead of Mr. Pease, Pease would charge him and when he says he said Mr. Pease, it would challenge another white man Reynold proving him liar. Richard is sandwiched between two whites and sees no alternatives other than resigning. He utterly fails to resist the whites even in personal level.

Frustrated and defeated, Richard resigns from his job. When he meets the boss, Mr. Crane, after the resignation he overtly confesses his plan to escape. The conversation goes like this:

"I am awfully sorry about his", he said.

"I had hoped for a lot from this job", I said.

"I'd wanted to go to school, to college . . ."

"I know", he said, "But what are you going to do now?"

[. . .] "I am going away," I said.

"What do you mean?"

"I am going to get out of south," I breathed.

"May be that's the best," he said, "I'm from Illinois. Even for me, it's hard here. I can do just so much." (212)

For the liberal whites like Mr. Crane, the South is hard to live. This discourse of whites further enhances the sense of defeat in Richard. He frantically wishes to go to

the North. The failure of resistance and the sense of defeat have been presented with the frantic call or urge of the narrator to escape. He, thus, totally frustrated looking for the ways to escape. This marks the defeat of the sense of community, failing to generate the Black Consciousness Movement. He proves to be pro-white, letting the whites maintain the status quo in the society.

The defeat of the narrator reaches to its culmination as the anxious black boy breaks into the college storehouse with two black boys. He lugs out cans of fruit preserves and sells them to restaurant for the money to escape from south. This defeat asserts the invincible and unrivalled power of the white discourse that pervades the racial South. The boy goes to his mother before the final defeat and bids farewell, "Mama, I am going away," I whispered. "Oh, no," she protested. "I've got to, mama I can't live this way" (226). The hegemony of the whites to the blacks is, thus, appropriated by the white-discourses. The censoring agents are either "legally" constituted policies regarding heresy, obscenity, and sedition, or instant spokespersons for community values. On the other hand, there is no reason censorship should not also bring to mind the idea of taking a census, of counting heads and thus accounting for population, for in classical Latin *censor* refers to one of two officials who took the census. It is profitable for readers of Richard Wright's *Black Boy*, either the first edition of 1945 or the unexpurgated Library of America edition of 1991 to consider options in positioning Wright's autobiography. The book might be suppressed in public school curricula on the grounds that it is morally (and politically) "dangerous." The greater danger is nurturing cultural illiteracy by denying students the opportunity to learn why *Black Boy* might free the mind to remember what the hypocrisy of censorship would conceal.

The white discourse is so dominant in every vein of social representations that the protagonist cannot tear up the web generating the collective resistance in the community. The individual resistance is doomed to failure as the white discourse has surpassed the individual limit and has become the corporate institution that shatters the individual's hope to come out of it. It jeopardizes the advent of Black Consciousness Movement as the protagonist does not pile up the communal resistance making the community to unite against the white discourse.

The manifestation of discourse in the society gives rise to hegemony that means the domination of particular group of a society to the other. Defining hegemony, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin in their book *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies* write:

The term is useful for describing the success of imperial power over a colonized people who may far outnumber any occupying military force, but whose desire for self-determination has been suppressed by hegemonic notion of the greater good, often couched in terms of social order, stability and advancement, all of which are defined by the colonizing power. Hegemony is important because the capacity to influence the thought of the colonized is by far the most sustained and potent operation of imperial power in colonized regions. Indeed, an 'empire' is distinct from a collection of subject states forcibly controlled by a central power by virtue of the effectiveness of its cultural hegemony. (87)

Social discourses give rise to the hegemony over particular group of the society from other group that considers itself superior. In this context, the resistance is necessary

component to come out of the constructed discourse of superiority of particular group of the society and injustices.

Power categorizes the individual, marks him, attaches him to his own identity and imposes a law of truth on him. It is a form of power that makes individual 'subjects'. Due to this power, an individual becomes 'savage and barbaric'. This is to say that power's attempt to subject an individual becomes successful with the help of knowledge. To subject an individual means to compel someone else to be under control or dependent and to tie a conscience or self knowledge to his own identity. Therefore, the subject is always placed in a net like organization of power, knowledge and representation.

A subject can always raise question about the system he lives in. He can also bungle the 'consent' with which the power functions on the two parties involved. Supporting such a revolt of the subject in "Subject and Power" Foucault says:

Maybe the target nowadays is not to discover what we are but to refuse what we are. We have to imagine and to build up what we could be to get rid of this kind of political 'double kind' which is the simultaneous individualization and totalization of modern power structures. (336)

Here, Foucault does not say that governed have no right to resist against the domination and exploitation. Rather, he is of the opinion that a subject can possess a 'critical attitude of not being governed.' So, subjects according to Foucault also keep 'guts' to resist from a certain location in the power structure. They resist from 'within' and try to alter the power relations by rising from another discourse. By virtue of being the components of the power structure, the subjects can not get rid of the subjectivity imposed on them but only try to alter the prevailing power relations.

Although, the subjects cannot liberate themselves from the ditch of the state's institution but they can, according to Foucault, "promote new forms of subjectivity through refusal of this kind of individuality that has been imposed on (them)for several centuries (336). Subjects, according to Foucault, are sure to fail if they attempt to create the next essentialist notion by rupturing the prevailing one. This kind of discourse will also be no more appreciable and adjustable in comparison to the previous one. As a result, the process of rupturing the traditional discourse and effort of creating the identical type of discourse is no more than a ridiculous and ludicrous idea in the view of Foucault. So, only to develop the 'critical attitude they will not be governed' without trying to develop the new essence is the best revolution of subjects against the system that imposed order on them.

To sum up, the black boy sees the escape as solution that hinders the Black Consciousness Movement in the South perpetuated with racial hierarchy and injustices. Personal freedom and emancipation mean nothing to the Black Consciousness Movement as it gives top priority to the communal resistance, communal awakening, resistance and the both physical and psychological liberation of all the blacks. The black boy is vanquished and escapist from the mission of liberating the black community, miserably falling into the discourse of white supremacy.

## Chapter 4

### Conclusion

Wright, in his *Black Boy*, is successful in portraying a troubled Negro boy in the American South perpetuated by the racial discrimination and the discourse of white supremacy. The protagonist black Boy has grown up and is exposed to the very hostile environment, full of psychological dread, racial violence, and victim of the exploitation. The religion is also a discourse that has been helping the white domination, appropriating the injustice born by the black community of the South. Very effective discourse to enhance the feeling of dread among the blacks and to keep them out of the bitter social reality. It has robbed the blacks of their cultural, communal pride. The representation of the blacks is apt in this ground of the racial injustice imposed upon them. They are made helpless by the white discourses. They are divided to their vein made weak and are compelled to turn their deaf ears to the cultural identity.

The black boy, Richard, shows some degree of resistance with his reserved manner of defiance at the beginning. Resistance in him is the result of this continual exposition to the bitter life of a black who is inquisitive. But his resistance remains in narrow boundary of the quest of the personal liberation and cannot turn into the vehicle of the liberation of the whole black community. He is vanquished in this sense that the quest for the communal identity has been hindered with his faint articulation of the private resistance instead of communal one. The resistance in him cannot turn into the ember to light the whole rubbish of the injustice. Hence, it fails to bring the communal resistance with the sense of communal emancipation. He is aware of the pathetic condition of blacks in the South and aware that the hope of Negro never

materializes there. He does not act to solve the communal problem, helping the community to come up with collective resistance. Rather he longs continually for the escape out of the collective problem.

Black Boy is attesting the invincibility of the white discourses that proves him vanquished and pro-white. Instead of helping the community to develop the black consciousness, the protagonist crumples and escapes out of the bitter situation of life of the Southern black. His escape is not the move to the liberation rather it is the final defeat.

From the perspective of Black Consciousness Movement and its documents practiced in South Africa during 1960s, the novel Black Boy fails to articulate the black consciousness and the liberation of the blacks all over the world. The novel shows the failure of the articulation of the black consciousness and gives way to the whites to be the ruler forever.

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