

Tribhuvan University

Reconstruction of Black Experiences in Richard Wright's *Black Boy*

**A Thesis submitted to the Central Department of English
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master
of Arts in English**

By

Suraj Manandhar

University Campus

Kirtipur, Kathmandu

August, 2007

Tribhuvan University

This thesis entitled "Reconstruction of Black Experiences in Richard Wright's *Black Boy*" submitted to the Central Department of English Tribhuvan University, by Mr. Suraj Manandhar has been approved by the undersigned members of the research committee.

Members of Research Committee,

Internal Examiner

External Examiner

Head of the
Central Department of English

Date: _____

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my thesis supervisor Mr. Ghanashyam Bhandari for his scholarly guidance and suggestions, His in-depth knowledge and constructive ideas helped me a lot in preparing this thesis in this form.

I owe my gratitude to Dr. Krishna Chandra Shamra, Head of the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, for the approval of the proposal for this dissertation. I am grateful to Mr. Shanker Subedi for his invaluable suggestions and guidance. I am also indebted to Mr. Sadan Raj Adhikari for his help in preparing this thesis.

I would like to convey my sincere thanks to my brother-in-law Mr. Khyam Narayan Manandhar and my sister Mrs. Yam Maya Manandhar for their financial help for me in preparing this thesis. I am pleased with my friends Tika Ram Pradhan, Bhesh Raj Manandhar, Rajendra Sharma, Prakash Raj Aryal and Buddhi Raj Sharma Kandel for their valuable suggestion and encouragement. I am also indebted to Mr. Ashok Kumar K.C. of Creative Computer Center, Kirtipur, Kathmandu for his help in typing of my thesis.

Suraj Manandhar

September 8, 2007

Abstract

Richard Wright's *Black Boy* stands as a novel unfolding the racial issues in the American society. This work basically focuses on the deplorable condition of the oppressed African Americans and their consequent resistance against the white domination. The long-standing history of racial discrimination has made Richard the victim of oppression and humiliation and this ultimately leads his life to tumultuous uncertainty and hatred. Realizing that his life is a deep sense of disordered human identity, he finds his dignity and self forces him to develop rebellious and aggressive attitudes towards the rigid social values and norms. With this rebellion, he sets out to reconstruct his experiences in the white dominated society.

Contents

Acknowledgements III

Abstract IV

I. Introduction 1-7

II. Racism, Discourse and Resistance 8-26

Race and Racism 8

Discourse and Politics of Power 10

Hegemony and Subjection 15

Resistance 23

III. Reconstruction of Black Experiences in Richard Wright's *Black Boy* 27-47

Black Boy and the Issue of Racism 27

Power Relations between Whites and Blacks 31

White Hegemony in *Black Boy* 37

Resistance against the Whites in *Black Boy* 41

IV. Conclusion 48-50

Works Cited

I. Introduction

Black history is the history of exploitation, discrimination and suppression. Black people have been associated with merely the negative impulses in the history of the whites. In the literary writings of eighteenth and nineteenth century, the blacks were highly victimized and misrepresented. They were considered as second class citizens. In that time, in every genre of literature, the black characters were depicted as submissive and highly parasitic. Similarly, in the domain of dramas too, the black characters were given the roles of servants, butlers and so on. It was so because the so-called “great whites” invariably looked at blacks with the eyes of biasness. Moreover, the blacks were considered as erotic, irrational, barbaric, emotional, cruel, savage and so on.

The realities of whites’ domination and suppression over the blacks came through the texts written either by the white abolitionists or by the blacks. Such texts were produced especially in the late nineteenth and twentieth century. Harriet Beecher Stowe’s novel, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852) can be taken as an example of whites’ atrocities over the blacks in the slavery system. Even Abraham Lincoln, the sixteenth president of United States of America, greeted Stowe by stating, “So you’re the little woman who made the book that made the great war” (High 73). This novel tacitly talks about an old black slave, Uncle Tom, the titular character of the novel, who hopes to get liberation and emancipation but can never escape from the ditch of slavery. Throughout this novel, he is dehumanized and ill-treated by his white masters. In fact, the ground of brutalization, dehumanization and marginalization of Uncle Tom was the actual reality of that time.

The black authors of the twentieth century, Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin began to denounce in their writings the whites’ totalitarian and autocratic

attitudes. These writers wrote on the themes of violence, protest, identity crisis, dehumanization and human trafficking. Thus, by diametrically rupturing and subverting the stereotypical notions of that time, they candidly struggled to reconstruct the black identity and self.

James Baldwin and Ralph Ellison strongly portray the bitter experiences of African-Americans of 1950s. In his prominent book *Another Country* (1961) Baldwin, explores the issues of race, color and homosexuality. In the same way, in *Nobody Knows My Name* (1961) he depicts the issues of racial prejudice.

Similarly, Ralph Ellison in his master piece, *Invisible Man* (1952) discloses how American society willfully ignores and oppresses African Americans. Throughout the novel, the unnamed narrator finds himself passing through a series of communities, from Liberty Paints Plant to Brotherhood. He finds different ideas about how blacks should behave in the society. The unnamed narrator proclaims that he is an 'invisible man' because people are blinded by racial prejudice cannot see him. He has taken to an underground life. Where he remains unknown and invisible to the people of New York. He convinces the readers that he is actually invisible. He claims, "I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me" (3).

Like his contemporary writers, most of Richard Wright's literary writings are enveloped with the theme of liberty, equality and fraternity. In *Uncle Tom's Children* (1938) he deals with the violence of the southern whites society against blacks. On the way of getting equal rights, it was the obligation of the blacks to become violent and aggressive. Similarly, in his ground breaking and sensational master piece, *Native Son* (1940), he skillfully designates the violence in a black man. In this novel, the rebellious

and violent protagonist, Bigger Thomas murders not only his own beloved Bessie, but also a white girl Mary in the course of his angered, feared and frustrative mood. Until Richard Wright, black writers had always depicted blacks as victims of white violence. Wright insists that the social status of blacks causes them to become violent. In the regard to *Native Son*, a prominent critic, Jack B. Moore comments:

Bigger Thomas represents in *Native Son* a black man (ultimately any human being) trapped under the oppressive weight of a history of cruelty, oppression and violence that has no role in creating. His ignorant, cowardly, hostile and ultimately murderous behavior seems completely determined by the history of inequality and mutilated opportunity into which he is born. (132-133)

Apart from his masterpiece, in most of Richard Wright's collection of stories and novels, we can find the identical theme of justice and equality. His short story *The Man Who Lived Underground* (1945) reinforces the theme of identity crisis of African Americans. Similarly, his autobiographical novel *Black Boy* (1945) designates the struggle for justice of a black narrator, Richard in the white-dominated society.

Nevertheless, Wright differs from his contemporary writers in this autobiographical novel *Black Boy*. In this novel, Wright himself 'reconstructs' the experience of blacks minutely and meticulously. Before Richard Wright, blacks were always represented by the white writers. This kind of monopolistic ideology and notion needed to be abolished and blurred and he did it dexterously. For reconstructing the black experiences in his autobiography *Black Boy*, Richard discloses two types of black characters - parasitic or submissive and rebellious or aggressive. The parasitic characters

like Griggs, Shorty and Harrison are privileged and valorized because they support the traditional system and stereotypical notions which were created by the whites. Shorty is the white man's clown. He has adapted his own personality and behavior to feed off the perceptions of average black man: stupid, ignorant and foolish.

However, the characters like Richard Wright, his mother, Uncle Hoskin and Professor Matthew are quite rebellious and aggressive. In other words, the sense of rejection, rebellion and aggression can be seen in these characters. Uncle Hoskin, a profitable saloon runner, is even ready to die than to become the servant and subservient of whites' barbarism. Time and again, during the course of this autobiographical novel, the protagonist Richard unlocks his uneasiness towards the dismissive attitudes of the whites to the blacks. The incidents like burning of the house, killing a kitten and fighting with the white boys designate that Richard is a violent and aggressive character. One day, when bitten by a white man's dog Richard complains to the white master only to receive 'a medical treatment' in the form of an inhuman statement, "A dog bite cannot hurt a nigger" (180).

Being unable to find a conducive environment to work in the South, towards the end of the novel, Richard plans to go to live in the northern part of America. He wanted to stay in the terrain of the North because at that time, the northern part of America was considered an area of liberty and opportunity. It was also because he couldn't tolerate the humiliation and domination of the Whites in the South.

Besides the exposition of evils of racism, violence is an underlying theme of Richard Wright's writings. Agreeing with this view, an eminent critic, G. Robert Carlfen in his *American Literature* states "*Black Boy* makes no direct appeals to end racism, nor

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).

Black Boy, like the other books of Wright, has received criticisms from numerous critics of different fields. The essayist Nathan A Scott in his famous essay “Black Literature” discusses the miserable and pitiable condition of blacks. He further states:

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

Nevertheless, the critic like Petar Ramadanovic does not agree with the view that this autobiography's main intention was to create a violent and turbulent world. In his essay *Black Boy Comedy: Indestructibility and Anonymity in Autobiographical Self-Making*, he says that "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).

Some critics also have claimed that the arrival of Richard Wright was no more than the demand of time. Historian John Henrik Clarke states "He came like a sledgehammer, like a giant of the mountain with a sledgehammer, writing with a sledgehammer” (9). Here, Clarke highly praises and valorizes Richard Wright for his nobility and uniqueness.

Either autobiographical or documentary based on racial injustice and prejudice or anything else, when the text is analyzed from the perspective of expressive theory to which the above criticism and thorough study of primary source is essential. However, this research tries to study *Black Boy* from the view point of political power of the whites upon the blacks and resistance of the blacks against whites' power system. It also sees how Richard Wright, as a black writer, represents other black characters. In American Society blacks have to suffer a lot because of whites' power system.

As seen with the notion of Gramscian 'hegemony' this autobiography presents the black characters who are diametrically subservient and are suffering from inferiority complex. These characters are quite submissive and loyal and they always follow their white masters as the shadows. They prefer to be ruled and governed by the whites.

Furthermore, the white characters like Mr. Olin, Reynolds and Pease, create a discourse of their superiority and seniority towards the blacks. Through the medium of different discourses, they create the truth. This truth remains true only because of the power of the whites who remain strong and change as the system of the society changes. But the aggressive and rebellious blacks never regard the whites their superior. They want to blur and subvert the demarcating line which was created by the whites in the name of race.

This research also focuses on the intraracial and interracial problems of the characters. So the clarification of the terms like 'reconstruction', 'race' and 'racism' is essential. Archie Hobson defines reconstruction as "an impression, model or reenactment of a past event formed from the available evidence" (361). Thus, an act of constructing something again is known as reconstruction.

Race is a notion for the division of human beings into distinct groups. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin in *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies* state “Race is a term for the classification of human beings into physically, biologically and genetically distinct groups” (45).

The term ‘racism’ can be defined as a way of thinking that considers a group’s unchangeable physical characteristics. According to *The Cambridge Encyclopedia*, “Racism is an ideology that claims to explain an alleged inferiority of certain racial or ethnic groups in terms of their biological or physical characteristic” (360). This prejudiced mentality is the cause of racial discrimination.

In a nutshell, Richard Wright in *Black Boy*, reinforces the theme of violence of the southern white society and that of identity crisis of African Americans. Besides that, he also strongly denounces the parasitic and submissive attitudes of the black characters who always like to be the whites’ puppets. The struggle of African Americans for their inalienable rights-life, liberty and pursuits of happiness, becomes one of the most important themes in this novel.

II. Racism, Discourse and Resistance

Race and Racism

Race refers to that notion which divides human beings into distinct groups- physically, biologically and genetically. Appiah states:

We can find more or less well-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 the 'Other' and on common ancestry in explaining why groups of people display differences in their attributes and aptitudes. (274)

Later color became the means of distinguishing and identifying human beings. In another version, human beings are identified in terms of the color. Cuvier, a French anatomist, classifies human beings into three main groups: the white, the yellow and the black. This division of the whole humanity in three groups seemed so vague and complex for any kind of analysis. This notion, however, has become influential for the ideological reason that this typology is based upon a gradation from superior to inferior.

Furthermore, by virtue of its complexity and flexibility, the race situation is very prominent in America. Reflecting the factors of American race prejudice, George W. Ellis says:

In the United States race prejudice is predicted upon the belief that the colored race is naturally inferior to the white race, physically, intellectually, religiously, socially and morally. As a matter of fact, it is actually based upon the advantages, temporary and imaginary, which the

white groups believe they derive from this superior attitude to the colored groups economically, politically and socially. A historical study of these beliefs discloses that two powerful factors have contributed above others to the abnormal American situation and that in their broadest sense, they are ethnological and sociological. (11)

Racism is an ideology which is based on color discrimination. Moreover, it is an ideology of racial domination, based on the beliefs that a designated racial group is either biologically or culturally inferior and the use of such beliefs to rationalize or prescribe the racial group's treatment in the society, as well as to explain its social position and accomplishment. Briefly, it is a belief system about the superiority of one's own race or ethnic group of people on the basis of race, color, religion or culture. Furthermore, the discrimination itself is the product of prejudice and stereotypical mode of thoughts or assumptions.

In a broader term, racism encompasses the elements of culture, ethnicity and history. It consists of the superiority of one group, ethnicity or its cultural practices over the other because the entitled inferior group lacks the set of criteria as prescribed by privileged group. *The Encyclopedia Americana* undercuts this kind of stereotypical notion by saying that "racism at individual level involves a misguided personal belief that an entire racial group is deficient or superior because of a set of moral, intellectual or a cultural traits that are thought to be indicated by the group's biological origin" (126).

Racism refutes all the epithets of singularity and prefers different shapes and different political relations. Poul Gilroy claims, "Racist ideologies and practice have

different meanings bounded by historical circumstances and determined in struggle” (248).

At a personal level, racism includes an individual notion that an entire racial group is inferior or superior on the basis of physical features to be linked to moral and intellectual characteristics. If these personal characteristics are yoked with cultural institutions like religion, education and military institutions, in order to exclude or include not a person but also an entire group, it takes the form of institutionalized racism.

Discourse and Politics of Power

The term, 'discourse' in its general sense means a unit of meaning that is coherent succession of utterances. It further refers to the use of language in a particular way or rather a special type of language. Here, discourse means a special type of language use or a particular language 'genre' like .conversation, letter or song. Literature, conversation and letter are called discourses in the sense that they are particular uses of language; they use language in different ways for different purposes and focus on different aspects of language. From the linguistic point of view, every genre like poetry and drama, the sub-genres like lyric and epic are called discourses.

Discourse was originally used from about the sixteenth century to describe a kind of speaking, talk or conversation, but later it was increasingly used to describe a more formal speech, a narration or a treatment of any subject at length, a treatise, dissertation or sermon. More recently, discourse has been used in a technical sense by linguists in order to describe a unit of speech longer than a sentence.

The formal approach to discourse analysis considers discourse in terms of text. Its main precursors are the linguists Z.S. Harris and T.F. Mitchell. Following Harris,

formalist discourse analysts worked with variations of formal linguistic methods of analysis. Similarly, followers of Mitchell, were interested in the social functions of language and used naturally occurring samples of linguistics usage as data. In this regard, the formalistic discourse analysis is very close to the disciplines known as socio-linguistics and ethnography of communication.

However, Michel Foucault's early writings like *The Order of Things*(1971) and *The Archaeology of Knowledge*(1972) undercut the formalistic notion of discourse by stating it a mechanistic one because for him it only attempts to find general underlying rules of linguistic or communicative function, 'behind' as it were imagined or invented. In this way, the idea of discourse in formalism, according to Foucault, becomes quite narrow and rigid. For Foucault, the term, 'discourse' refers to not the language or social interaction but to relatively well-bounded areas of social knowledge. Thus, for Foucault, a discourse is a strongly bounded area of a social knowledge, as a system of statements from which the world can be known.

Foucault's view of the role of discourse is even wider and more pervasive. He argues that discourse is a crucial feature of the modernity itself. In the classical times, intellectual power could be maintained by the rhetoric in the persuasiveness of the 'discoursing' to a body of listeners. But gradually the 'will to truth' came to dominate discourse and statements were required to be either true or false.

For Foucault, discourse is always inseparable from power because it is the governing and ordering medium of every institution. It determines the truth of an object, the criteria of such truth, and the people allowed to speak with authority. In *The Order of Things*(1971) Foucault describes power:

If power were never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but to say no, do you really think one would be brought to obey it? what makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't weigh on us as a force that says no but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure forms knowledge, produces discourses. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs throughout the whole social body. (119)

According to Foucault, power works through discourses and discursive formations. There are cluster of claims to knowledge and Foucault calls them discourses. To be more precise, a discourse is a loose structure of interconnected assumptions that make knowledge possible. In his *The Archeology of Knowledge*(1972) Foucault tells us that a discourse is 'a series of sentences or propositions' and that it can be defined as a large group of statements that belong to a single system of formation- a so-called discursive formation.

It is also necessary to understand the Foucauldian concept of truth in relation to his idea of discourse. Foucault says that truth itself is the product of relations of power and systems in which it follows and it changes as systems change. He believes that there are certain systems in the society. So, he does not focus on any individual power. Society under the system creates discourse and it consists of representation, power and truth. Representation has different forms like oral, written, audiovisual and so on. Power is circulated through different forms of representation and this power creates certain truths which ultimately become true to everyone under the system.

Unlike Marxist concept of power which is based on vertical axis - is from upper class to lower class, Foucauldian notion of power is horizontal, which refers to the power that lies everywhere. Marxist power is just political and economic whereas Foucauldian power is applicable everywhere. Marxism believes on hierarchical relationship between upper class and lower class but Foucault diametrically ruptures this hierarchy. It means, there is equality in terms of power distribution. Thus, Foucauldian notion of power is pervasive, which resides in all social bodies. In his book *History of Sexuality*(Vol.One) he states about the all-pervasive nature of power:

Power is everywhere: not because it embraces everything but because it comes from everywhere [. . .] power comes from below; that is there is no binary and all-encompassing opposition between ruler and ruled at the root of power relations, and serving as a general matrix no such duality extending from the top down and reacting on more limited groups to the very depths of the social body.(93-94)

According to Foucault, war and politics are both strategies of power. The change in the politics dawns a drastic change in the power. In this regard, his notion of power is dynamic and is opposed to the static. Thus, by entirely rupturing the traditional notion of power which is thoroughly impregnated with hierarchical structures, Foucault further says:

In the traditional notion, power is monolithic, hierarchical and clearly visible. Power is embodied in the law, is wholly negative, consisting of prohibition: and taboos (thou Shalt Not...). That might describe power

well enough in a traditional monarchy, but in the last two centuries new methods of power have developed. (140)

Here, Foucault clearly exposes that the new notion of power is completely different from the stereotypical ideology of power. He further designates this new ideology of power which is not ensured by right rather by technique, not by law but by normalization, not by punishment but by control and by the methods employed in every nook and corner of the society.

Foucault understands power as associated not with repression, or straightforward domination but as working through institutionalized and accustomed discourses which open up delimited forms of action, knowledge and being. In Foucault's understanding, power is dispersed and without a specific source of agency and this clearly affects forms of resistance to it. Definitions of power, therefore, affect ideas of the individual and society, the object of study, the scope of the intellectuals or cultural critic's work and influence. While viewing power as constitutive and inescapable, Foucault writes that "the analysis, elaboration and bringing into question of power relations are a permanent political task in all social relations." (255) He states that every epoch of human society is governed by diversity of discourses each of which is related to the particular arena of human knowledge. Human knowledge encompasses various fields as a result in Foucauldian opinion, in a society, there are multiple discourses rather than a discourse. This notion sees such discourses contradict each other and as a result, there is no harmony and 'oneness' in the society. It happens because every discourse consists of power which is produced out of network of representation and truth. By means of representation that power creates certain truth but it is temporary in the view of Foucault.

Power for Foucault is all pervasive and resides in every domain of a society. It is according to him neither evil nor dominating but is always dangerous.

Hegemony and Subjection

The term 'hegemony' generally refers to the domination of one state within a confederation while in its broad sense it indicates 'the domination by consent'. This broader meaning originally coined and popularized in the 1930s by an Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci who investigated why the ruling class was so successful in developing and promoting its own interest in the society. Gramsci defines 'hegemony' as the 'willful consent to be ruled' and doesn't examine power relationship in it in terms of domination. People belonging to certain discourses, according to Gramsci, may have that consent to be ruled.

Gramsci coined this term, when Mussolini's fascist government in Italy incarcerated him. Although Mussolini's monopolistic force becomes intolerable for Gramsci that becomes a life-governing and life-sustaining force for the whole Italians. Gramsci describes "spontaneous consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is historically caused by the prestige [and consequent confidence] which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production"(12).

In the hegemonial orchard the rulers heavily exploit and dominate the ruled but the latter are not aware of the domination and exploitation of the former. So, they rather glorify and valorize the rulers' ideology and principles. As a result, whatever notions are

exercised by the rulers easily become digestible and appreciable to the ruled. Gramsci has defined hegemony as:

Fundamentally, hegemony is the power of the ruling class to convince other classes that their intentions are the interests of all. Domination is thus exerted not by force, nor even necessarily by active persuasion but by a more subtle and inclusive power over the economy and over state apparatuses such as education and the media by which the ruling class's interest is presented as the common interest and thus comes to be taken for granted.(Key Concepts in Post-colonial Studies 116)

The main intention of the Europeans entering the terrain of Africa is no other than the hegemonial practice. Though, they have said that their main motto was to civilize the impoverished Africans, the reality was quite different. Actually, they were yearning to exercise their power in that isolated land. These white Europeans even consider themselves as gods which have abundance of authority to rule and govern their 'subjects'. Whenever and wherever they can, they have the entire mandate to handle the marginalized. In Gramsci's words, the hegemonic exercise of power also becomes what he says:

[. . .]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 a 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.(116)

Focusing on the importance of hegemony, Gramsci further says "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(116).

According to Gramsci, the amalgamation of the force and the consent plays a pivotal role in the hegemonial scenario. For him, hegemony is produced by the proper intercourse of these two things. In this context he further says:

The normal exercise of the hegemony in the new classical terrain of the parliamentary regime is characterized by the combination of force and consent, which balance each other reciprocally, without force predominating excessively over consent. Indeed the attempt is always made to endure that force will appear to be based on the consent of the majority, expressed by so-called organs of public opinion-newspaper and association-which therefore, in certain situations, are artificially multiplied.(80)

In Gramsci's opinion, for a ruling class to maintain its hegemonic position, the institutions, hierarchies, ideas and allied social practices which serve its fundamental economic interests must be accepted spontaneously as the 'natural' order of things. Hegemony therefore, seeks to articulate and renew the prevailing 'common sense' mentality in society as a whole. Observing the dualistic notion of rulers and the extremely parasitic principle of the ruled, Gramsci further states:

Consent is achieved by the interpellation of the colonized subject by imperial discourse so that Euro-centric values, assumptions, beliefs and attitudes are accepted as a matter of course as the most natural or valuable.

The inevitable consequence of such interpellation is that the colonized subject understands itself a peripheral to those Euro-centric values, while at the same time accepting their centrality.(117)

Periodically there may develop an organic crisis in which the governing group begins to disintegrate, creating the opportunity for a subordinate class to transcend its limitations and build up a broad movement capable of challenging the existing order and achieving hegemony. But if the opportunity is not taken, the balance of forces will shift back to the dominant class which reestablishes its hegemony on the basis of a new pattern of alliances. Agreeing in this context Raymond Williams furthers "The key to 'revolutionary' social change in modern societies does not therefore depend, as Marx had predicted on the spontaneous awakening of critical class consciousness but upon the prior formation of a new alliances of interests, an alternative hegemony or 'historical bloc', which has already developed a cohesive world view of its own"(27). In his book *Marxism and Literature*(1977) he says:

'Hegemony' goes beyond 'culture', as previously defined in its insistence on relating the whole social process to specific distributions of power and influence. To say that 'men' define and shape their whole lives is true only in abstraction. In any actual society there are specific inequalities in means and therefore in capacity to realize this process. In a class society, these are primarily inequalities between classes. Gramsci therefore, introduced the necessary recognition of dominance and subordination in what has still, however to be recognized as a whole process.(108)

Besides Raymond Williams, the critics like Todd Gitlin and Dominic Strinati become influenced with Gramscian notion of hegemony. In the opinion of Gitlin, "It was Gramsci, who in the late twenties and thirties with the rise of fascism and the failure of the Western European Working-class movements, began to consider why the working class was not necessarily revolutionary, why it could, in fact yield to fascism"(516).

In the same way, Strinati asserts, "It can be argued that Gramsci's theory suggests that subordinated groups accept the ideas, values and leadership of the dominant group not because they are physically or mentally induced to do so, nor they are ideologically indoctrinated, but because they have reason of their own" (166). For him, there is 'spontaneous consent' of subordinate groups, including the working class, through the negotiated construction of a political and ideological consensus and dominant and dominated groups. It is a set of ideas by means of which dominant groups strive to secure the consent by subordinate group to their leadership. So, the dominant class had succeeded in persuading the subordinated group to assert its own moral, political and cultural values.

In fact, the working class can develop its own hegemony as a strategy to control the State. Nevertheless, Gramsci stated that the only way to perform this labour class control is by taking into account the interests of other groups and social forces and finding ways of combining them with its own interests. If the working class is to achieve hegemony, it needs patiently to build up a network of alliances with social minorities. This new coalitions must respect the autonomy of the movement, so that each group can make its own special contribution toward a new socialist society.

In the arena of civil society, hegemony operates with both culturally and ideologically. In this context, Strinati describes:

Pop culture and mass media are subject to the production, reproduction and transformation of hegemony through the institution of civil society which cover the areas of cultural production and consumption. Hegemony operates culturally and ideologically through the institutions of civil society which characterizes mature liberal-democratic, capitalist societies. These institutions include education, the family, the church, the mass media, popular culture, etc. (168-169)

Hence, having everything we just said in mind, one could take it that first consists of a class "building" a specific concrete ideology which is based in its specific and concrete interests and it will dominate the rest of the society because of the unavoidable influence of capitalist relations. This set of ideas will constitute the hegemony that will be expressed as the nucleus of culture. If these assumptions are correct, we can conclude that the media are the instruments to express the dominant ideology as an integral part of the cultural environment.

For Raymond Williams, culture is not only a vehicle of domination but also a language of co-operative shaping of common contribution. He also considers that Gramsci proposed the concept of hegemony as a uniform, static and abstract structure. In *Marxism and Literature*(1977) he further states:

A lived hegemony is always a process. It is not, except analytically, a system or a structure. It is a realized complex of experiences, relationships and activities with specific and changing pressures and limits. In practice,

that is, hegemony can never be singular. Its internal structures are highly complex as can readily be seen in any concrete analysis. Moreover, it does not just passively exist as a form of dominance. It has continually to be renewed, recreated, defended and modified. It is also continually resisted, limited, altered, challenged by pressures not all its own. (112)

Antonio Gramsci's notion of hegemony and the distinction between civil society and political society can clarify Saidian notion(Edward Said's notion) of hegemony in terms of Oriental stereotype. The civil society is made up of voluntary affiliation of schools, families and unions. Culture according to Gramsci, operates in civil society because here the influence of ideas of institution and people works by consent not by force. However, the political society is made up institutions of every police, central bureaucrat or the direct domination of power. In such civil society, certain culture plays the dominant role over others so much so that the people of other cultures remain satisfied of being ruled by other culture. Such cultural leadership is hegemony. In *Selection from the Prison Notebooks* (1929-1935) he clarifies:

What we can do for the moment, is to fix two major super structural "levels": the one that can be called "Civil Society", that is the ensemble of organisms commonly called "private" and that of "Political Society" or "the State". These two levels correspond on the one hand to the function of "hegemony" which the dominant group exercises throughout society and on the other hand to that of "direct domination" or command exercised through the State and "Juridical" government.(12)

Gramsci's above lines portrait two types of society- the civil society and political society. Here, he says that the former is always guided and handled by the later with the instrument of hegemony. Through the device of hegemony, political society invariably exploits and dominates the civil society by exercising its power upon the subservient one. The dominant group ceaselessly exercises its values and norms to the subordinated groups but the later group is hardly aware of it. By presenting the facilities of education, employment, health and so on, in the opinion of Gramsci, the political society is exercising its power towards the civil society.

Supporting the view of Gramscian notion of hegemony, Abhi Subedi explains that the dominant groups use certain rites and rituals to hegemonize the subordinated groups where the priority is given to the power fetish rather than the benefit of the democratic culture. Commenting on the hegemonic notion of the dominant class he describes:

A feudalistic system strongly uses certain rituals to hegemonize power. In autocratic regimes, ritual celebrations are almost imposed upon the people. In non-monarchical dictators too leaders birthdays are used as nationalistic fetishes to bring diverse power locations under one structure. [. . .]. That is prioritizing the power fetish rather than promoting a democratic culture which indicates a repeat of the concept of absolute ruler and one-party hegemony that you create by making your opponents ineffective. (4)

Subedi's above lines clearly define about the hegemonic notion of the king to his subjects. By organizing the grand festival on the occasion of his birthday, the king is demonstrating his superiority. This kind of fetish will never add any positive rays to broaden and widen the democratic culture rather in the views of Subedi it will help to

convert the king into an absolute ruler and his opponents as ineffective and impotent. Thus, the king, according to Subedi, is exercising his power upon the subordinated groups by creating the drama of birthday fetish.

In this way, hegemony, at the level of class society is to determine the continuation and consolidation of the existing power maintenance and at the level of nation is to prove dominance of one nation over another as the U.S.A. has been exercising in the late of twentieth century and in the early twenty first century not only in Iraq and the Middle-East but also throughout the world positioning her to be the most democratic state in the world. Hegemonial exercise of power seems to be the result of the indirect physical threat and it proves that powerful is always strong and powerless is always deficient. In the hegemonial orchard, domination is exerted not by force, nor even necessarily by active persuasion but by a more subtle and inclusive power over the subordinated groups.

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 exit 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 individuate 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.

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 the 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't 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 the will not to be governed' without trying to develop the new essence is the best revolution of subjects against the system that imposed order on them.

In such kind of resistance the liberation of human beings can't 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 for the subjects to develop a critical notion without any attempt to establish the 'essence' of his or her own.

III. Reconstruction of Black Experiences in Richard Wright's *Black Boy*

***Black Boy* and the Issue of Racism**

Richard Wright uses his autobiographical novel *Black Boy* (1945) not only to recount significant experiences of his life but also to record his emotional and psychological reaction to those experiences, his intellectual awakening, his "hunger" for a meaningful life, and his condemnation of American racism. In his attempt to capture his significance of his own life, both for himself and of the reader, he creates a profoundly moving "record" of his remarkable life. Wright sees the racist environment of the South create and sustain his feeling of exclusion. His attitudes towards whites begin to form only when he watches from the kitchen as a white eats from a "loaded table" while he and his brother wait for whatever food is leftover. Though at this he feels only "vaguely angry" and decidedly hungry, such experiences eventually convince Richard that "White folks" are in some way responsible for his exclusion from literacy and education from knowledge of the wider world, from justice and equality, from possibilities in life, even from meaningful relationships with other people.

Although the issue of racism in the American society has declined in recent years, in the past it had been one of the most embarrassing episodes in the United States. Richard Wright's, focuses on the situation of discrimination against blacks during the early twentieth century. It explores racism not only as a horrible belief held by odious people but also as a dangerous problem knit into the very fabric of society. In fact, *Black Boy* is nothing rather than the minute designation of American racism. This racism affected Richard Wright a lot and he had to assert the environment that he was in, although he didn't know how he should react in front of white people in the beginning of

his life. When Wright was a little boy, he still didn't comprehend racism, but he did know that something was different between blacks and whites. In the course of development of the novel, he understands the harshness of racism in his society. When Uncle Hoskins was shot by the whites when he was at saloon, Richard directly faces and experiences the cruelty and barbarity of racism. As a negro, he tried to earn money without the permission of the whites, so, he was murdered. Uncle Hoskins, according to Richard, was an affable man who owned a profitable tavern in Elaine Arkansas. Since it was profitable, some greedy whites wanted it. Thus, those who coveted his property shot him dead. The community diametrically ignored the murder of Uncle Hoskins. Richard describes the events:

There was no funeral. There was no music. There was no period of mourning. There was no flowers. There was only silence quiet weeping, whispers and fear. I didn't know when and where Uncle Hoskins was buried. Aunt Maggie was not even allowed to see his body nor was she able to claim any of his assets. Uncle Hoskins had simply been plucked from our midst and we figuratively had fallen on our faces to avoid looking into that white-hot face of terror that we knew loomed somewhere above us. This was as close as white terror had ever come to me and my mind reeled. Why had we not fought back, I asked my mother, and the fear that was in her made her slap me into silence.(52-53)

Richard, in these lines, tries to depict the actual situations of blacks of his time, which were quite deplorable due to whites' brutality, inhumanity and cruelty. Even after the inhumane and cruel murder of Uncle Hoskins by the Whites, his wife and relatives can

not get license to perform his funeral ceremony, nor get right to see his dead body. It all happens because they are from the subordinated groups.

Including Uncle Hoskins, many of the hardships and difficulties of Wright's family as well as the whole members of the black community are directly or indirectly the results of racial discrimination. Wright finds this racism quite pervasive and intolerable. Due to the air of this racism, all the minds and hearts of the blacks are fragmented and isolated. As a result, even inside their community, Richard sees the lack of unity and harmony. Wright even criticizes these black communities for the absence of their unity and harmony both culturally and traditionally. In Richard, this kind of feeling emerges due to his isolation from his community as well as his own family. Describing the blacks, he further says:

Wherever I thought of the essential bleakness of the 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. In addition when I brooded of black life, I wondered if clean positive tenderness, love, honor, loyalty and the capacity to remember were native with man. I asked myself if these human qualities were not fostered won, struggled and suffered for, preserved in ritual from one generation to another.(35)

Wright quickly points out that despite the oppressive society established by whites and the southern tradition, blame was entirely to be held over the black community since they allowed themselves to be subordinated and subservient. He further claims that the black

life in America was essentially bleak and that the emotional strength of the community was simply born out of negative confusions.

Wright experiences the actual racial violence when he begins to work in town. He finds it difficult to act properly as per as the whites' expectations from a black man; the way Griggs acts who criticizes Richard for not learning how to get around "White folks" when the boss's son fires Richard for not laughing and talking. Further, Griggs tells him that he should learn how to live in the Whites' society:

Do you see what I mean ?' he asked. 'White people want you out of their way'. he pronounced the words slowly so that they would sink into my mind. ' I know what do you mean', I breathed. 'Dick, I'm treating you like a brother,' he said. 'You act around white people as if you didn't know that they were whites and they see it.' 'Oh, Christ, I can't be a slave', I said hopelessly. 'But you have got to eat,' he said. 'Yes, I got to eat.' 'Then start acting like', he hammered at me, pounding his fist in his palm. 'When you're in front of white people, think before you act, think before you speak. Your way of doing things is all right among *our* people but not for *white* people. They won't stand for it.(186)

Despite the ceaseless suggestions of Griggs of becoming loyal and subservient to the whites, Richard never succumbs to it in his life. Rather he undercuts this kind of ideology and learns to be self-sufficient and defiant. Racism is bred by ignorance and Wright portrays that to survive as a black man, he must act as ignorant as his white counterpart. A black man must laugh and talk and act grateful towards a white man; it is not enough to

simply be subordinate. Richard must learn to mask his hatred and true feelings to be able to survive.

However, one of the most crucial moments in Wright's life is when he realizes that in order to survive in the south, he must obey rather than challenge those who suppress him. He feels and learns that the safety of his own life depends upon how well he is able to conceal and hide his true feelings from all whites. Wright is isolated both emotionally and intellectually from those around him and isolation is what comforts and secures him. He learns that he should dissemble to survive, at least as a black man in the black community. This way, he learns how to act in the south. It is then towards the end of the novel, he realizes in order to accomplish his goals, he must leave for North, which is the terrain of liberty, and opportunity for the blacks.

Wright conveys his point of view about the intolerable discrimination against blacks through his autobiography which is a literary work that contains real historical facts and the author's own experience. Wright, like all blacks, experienced both physical and psychological barriers in his social life. His autobiography aims to portray the factors that led to the discrimination in the American society against blacks based on the social and psychological facts and rules.

Power Relations between Whites and Blacks

Richard Wright's *Black Boy*, when seen through the methodological tools like Foucauldian notions of discourse, power and representation, can be studied as the depiction of power as exercised in its own terrain which dawns a contamination in the relation between the blacks and the whites. In the novel, due to the discourses of the white characters, the colored characters are highly victimized and misrepresented. They

are even considered as second class citizens. Throughout this novel, these blacks are dehumanized, brutalized and ill-treated by the sugar-coated discourses of the whites. The blacks are spiritually fragmented and intellectually isolated. Richard, the protagonist of this novel, becomes frustrated and fragmented from the beginning of the novel because of the unfavorable environment for the blacks.

Frustrated Richard even sets his own home of fire as he says, "I was angry, fretful and impatient" (1). This easily unmasks that he is living the life of constant humiliation and isolation. His dignity and identity as an individual is not admitted and he has got no respect and reverence from the whites as well from the non-whites. In the course of his frustration and alienation, Richard undergoes with many pathetic conditions of the blacks. He further states:

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 memories, how lacking we were in those intangible sentiments that blind man to man, and how shallow was even our despair. After I had learned other ways of life. I used 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 that was our negative confusions, our flights, our fears, our frenzy under pressure. (35)

Wright states that the root cause of the absence of the real kindness of Negroes, their restlessness and instability of mind, their hopeless condition and the timidity of joy and shallowness and hollowness of their existence occur on account of whites' irrational

discourses. At that time, the society was completely mobilized through the discourses of the whites because whites were in power. Even the baptism of blacks is carried by the whites. Baffled Richard, seeing this kind of tendency asks his mother:

'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 got hers. From a white man.'(46)

This designates how inhumanly and carelessly the whites, creating their discourses, baptizing the blacks through the means of exploitation and domination. They behaved with blacks them as if they were second class citizens. They get their names from the whites and the whites can alter if they like" In filling out the papers, the white officer misspelled Grandpa's name making him Richard Vinson instead of Richard Wilson"(138). This shows whites are even ready to change the name of the blacks if the converted name benefits them.

For Richard, the discourse of whites become quite indigestible and intolerable when as a worker, he used to work in a white woman's house. That woman claimed that a colored person cannot be a writer:

'Then why 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 earth put such ideas into your nigger head?'

'Nobody,' I said.

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

Richard after being scolded and deprecated by the white woman, learns that whites expect him to be loyal and parasite. So, he denies to return to that job. However, he must learn that he cannot get rid of the sphere of the whites' supremacy. In the year of 1924, he obtains a job in a brickyard bringing pails of water to the thirsty black laborers. One day, a white boss's dog bit him in his thigh. Afraid of infection, Richard reports it to the supervisor but receives the medical attention as: "A dog bit can't hurt a nigger" (164). When Richard states that it is swelling and becomes intolerable for him then, he gets reply, " But I never saw a dog yet that could really hurt a nigger" (164).

Richard obtains more and more unbearable conditions of the blacks due to the whites' dismissive attitude towards them. He feels that the utter barbarism and totalitarianism of the whites dawn a havoc and turmoil in the arena of the colored people by paralyzing them spiritually, burning them intellectually and suffocating them physically. The whites have the discourse of their superiority and seniority. Richard further finds that the subordinated blacks should address to the whites as 'sir' before their respective names; otherwise, they have to face the whites' utter humiliation. As Richard

remembers when he had forgotten to address 'sir' on the course of conversation with the whites, he was violently punished:

'Nigger, ain't you learned no better sense'n that yet?' asked the man who hit me. 'Ain't you learned to say sir to a white man yet?'

[. . .] 'Aw, leave the bastard alone. He's got enough,' said one.

'You wanna ride a town now, nigger? You reckon you know enough to ride now?'

'I wanna walk,' I said simply.

Maybe I sounded funny. They laughed.

'Well, walk you black sonofabitch'. (183)

This unmasks how inhumanly and violently the blacks are ill-treated when they forget to pronounce a simple word 'sir' to the whites. The ideologies of the whites, their attitudes and their conversation diametrically humiliate and suffocate the colored people. Richard feels that domination and suppression have reached the climax when a white man called Reynolds tells him: "If I was a nigger, I'd kill myself"(190). This statement adds more pain, to Richard's heart.

Richard had deep yearning of getting training in the optical trade of Mr. Crane, a white businessman, but becomes unsuccessful due to the intolerable discourse of the whites. According to Reynolds, a white man, Richard doesn't have any authority to get trained because of being a colored one. Richard remembers his conversation with Reynolds in this issue:

'Nigger, you think you're white, don't you?'

'No, sir.'

'You are acting mighty like it,' he said.

'I was only doing what the boss told me to do,' I said.

'This is a white man's work around here,' he said.(190)

Besides the discourse '*sir*', the whites also made discourse that they should be addressed with '*Mr*' by the blacks. In fact, it is also nothing rather than their presentation of superiority towards the colored people. Once, Richard forgets to add 'Mr.' before Pease's name and he gets extreme humiliation;

You black sonofabitch! You called me Pease, then!' he spat, rising and slapping me till I bent sideways over a bench. Reynolds was up on top me demanding:

'Didn't you call me Pease? If you say you didn't, I'll rip your gut string loose with this f- - k- - g bar, you black granny dodger! You can't call a white man a liar and get away with it!(192)

Being aware of Afro-American's miserable condition, Richard brilliantly concentrates on their deep-rooted lodgings to create space for them by destroying the disciplines and restrictions of civilizations and find minority a space in the mainstream of American culture. Due to the sugar-quoted discourses of the whites, the political, social and economic conditions the blacks are highly bounded and restricted. They further become the victim of racial discrimination, segregation, mass violence, illiteracy, hopelessness and poverty like Richard, the central character of Wright's *Black Boy*. In order to fulfill their basic needs, they have to work as slaves in the residences of the whites under unbearable conditions. They are even raped, seduced and killed.

White Hegemony in *Black Boy*

Negroes in America live under the shadow of whites' superiority. They can neither express their suffering before the whites nor can they protest strongly. They continuously become the object of crime and violence at the hands of the whites. They are simply labeled as thief, rapist, savage and so forth. When the colored family moves into the neighborhood of the whites, they are stoned, burned or rooted out. In order to protect their lives from whites barbarism, these blacks have to assert blindly by becoming their fans. Slowly and gradually, they start to undertake the ideology of the whites. Now, they even begin to state that whites are their masters, so they have to respect and follow their masters. In *Black Boy*, Wright states about the American whites' hegemony towards the subordinated people like himself. The characters like Griggs, Shorty and Harrison seem quite parasitic and subservient to the whites. They assert the values and norms of the dominant groups.

Before his job, Richard has never really been informed about the relationship between the blacks and the whites. In his childhood the value placed on one's race was learned second-hand, from his relatives, peers and elders. When he takes his first job in the home of the white woman, Richard experiences first-hand prejudices he has only heard or dreamed about. He is treated without respect and without human decency. Due to whites' hegemony, Richard finds the lack of good educational system in the terrain of the blacks. Black children are taught in ignorance, given no goals or motivation to grow as intellectual. To Wright, the educational system he grew up in was corrupt and geared to teach subservience.

In the course of his life's journey, Richard meets a lot of people who addresses him to become subservient and loyal towards whites. Once, Richard was selected as a valedictorian of his class and got opportunity to deliver a speech at one of the public auditoriums. Richard had to deliver the speech written by the whites rather than his own. When he rejects, the principal says:

You know we've never had a boy in this school like you before. You've had your way around here. Just how you managed to do it, I don't know. But listen take this speech and say it. I know what's best for you. You can't afford to just say anything before those white people that night. The superintendent of schools will be there. You're in a position to make a good impression on him. I've been a principal for more years than you are old, boy. I've seen many a boy and girl graduate from this school, and none of them was too proud to recite a speech I wrote for them.(176)

Here, the whites had the notion that a black can never be a good speech writer. Even the classmates of Richard appreciate the notion of the principal because they have a submissive and loyal attitudes towards the whites. So, by hegemonizing themselves they suggest that Richard follow the advice of the principal, "Richard, you're fool. You're throwing away every chance, you've got. If they had known the kind of fool boy you are they would never made you valedictorian" (179).

Richard, moreover, finds the friends like Griggs and Shorty who diametrically and blindly appreciate the whites' domination and exploitation towards them. Griggs even asked Richard to follow the whites' ideology and notion unhesitatingly. He advises Richard, "For God's sake, learn how to live in the south!"(185). In fact, Griggs is

unsuccessfully trying to convince Richard to bear and tolerate the whites' supremacy and barbarity towards them. Richard strongly designates Grigg's hegemonic notion forward:

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? You don't act a damn bit like it. (185)

Griggs here is criticizing Richard for not learning to get around "white folks." He even warns Richard to think before he speaks and to think before he acts. "When you're in front of white people think before you act, think before you speak. Your way of doing things is all right among our people but not for white people. They won't stand for it " (187).

Like Griggs, Richard finds Shorty, a white man clown, quite parasitic and submissive. In the name of getting money, he even allows whites to hit him. Shorty says, "Just watch me, get a quarter from the first white man I see"(229). He gets his quarter by letting the white man kick him. Richard is repulsed because Shorty knows the system too well and has allowed himself to be beaten by it. Dissatisfied Richard asks Shorty;

' How in God's name can you do that?'
'I needed a quarter and I got it', he said soberly and proudly.
'But a quarter can't pay you what he did to you,' I said.
'Listen, nigger,' he said to me, "my ass is tough and quarters is scarce".(231)

Richard also finds other black workers like Edison, John and Dave, "with assumed silent, obedient smiles"(231), towards the whites. In their minds, "the white folks formed a kind of superworld" (231). Although, the whites frequently fire and hire them as animals they never talk against it. Rather, they are delighted on remaining in the state of subordination. Richard, thus, finds that "Negroes who worked in jobs in the south were usually loyal to their white bosses; they felt that that was the best way to ensure their jobs"(237). Here, Richard makes a thorough examination of the consciousness of blacks and whites in the south. The blacks suffer themselves from a sense of inferiority and inability complex to revolt against the whites' exploitation and domination. Instead, they are accustomed to enjoy their ill-treatment. These characters are quite submissive and loyal and they always follow their white masters as the shadows. They prefer to be ruled and governed by the whites.

Like Shorty, Richard also finds the behaviour of Harrison quite parasitic, submissive towards the whites. In the name of getting five dollars, he is even ready to become the puppet of the white, by becoming ready to fight with Richard. However, Richard refutes "I don't want to fight for white men. I am no dog or rooster"(242).Richard defines the parasitic notion of Harrison:

"But why do a thing like that for white men?"

"To get that five dollars."

"I don't need five dollars that much."

"Aw, you're a fool," he said. Then he smiled quickly.

"Now, look here," I said . "Maybe you are angry with me?"

"Naw, I'm not." He shook his head vigorously.(242)

The speech of Harrison, here, seems quite ironic and satiric because he addresses Richard as a "fool" but in reality, he himself was the foolish person. Richard is appalled at how others degrade themselves and their dignities to make money. When the white men try to organize a fight between Harrison and Richard, they treat the boys like dogs. This relates back to the incident where Richard is bitten by a dog and receives no medical attention; the black workers are treated as savages rather than human beings.

Resistance against the Whites in *Black Boy*

Richard Wright's *Black Boy* stands as an outstanding novel unfolding the racial issues in a broader sense. This work basically unmask the pathetic condition of the oppressed African Americans and their extreme hatred and anger towards the stereotypes. White people deliberately ignore and oppress African American minorities. Central character of this novel, Richard Wright, seems to be the victim of this white dominated society.

Long-silenced history of color discrimination has made Richard the victim of oppression, and psychological breakdown which leads his life to tumultuous uncertainty and hatred. Realizing his life as a deep sense of disordered human identity, he finds, his dignity and self to the position of dislocation. His dislocated and fragmented identity forces him to invite the rebellious attitude towards the rigid social values and norms. His deep and melancholic voice is heard by the racist society. As a result, his purposeless and identitiless social status compels him to seek his self-recognition by going against the rigid social norms.

Richard Wright, is one of an unsupervised, exuberant characters whose frightening poor socio-economic background prepared him for violence and resistance.

For him, violence is only the means of protest against the stereotypical notion of the society where he lives. From the beginning to the end of the novel, Richard seems quite aggressive. Even in four years of early age he sets fires to his home, on the state of his extreme frustration and boredom;" I made for the kitchen, smoke was surging there too. Soon my mother would smell that smoke and see the fire and come and beat me"(3). Rebellious and aggressive Richard even kills the kitten. It is Richard's mother who strengthens him to be rebellious against the prevailing status quo because it doesn't give anything to the impoverished blacks except pain, suffering and agony. Richard's mother provides him the job of shopping food for his house. But while on the way, again and again the whites boy grabbed his money by brutally hitting and kicking him. His mother wants him to be bold and brave:

You just stay right where you are. I am going to teach you this night of stand up and fight for yourself. [. . .] Take this money, this note and this stick! Go to store and buy those groceries. If those boys bother you then fight. Don't come in this house until you've gotten those groceries.(15)

After getting the reliable and credible license from his mother, baffled and angered Richard starts fighting against the white boys violently and bravely and was getting success in his mission. The incidents like burning of the house, killing a kitten and fighting white boys unmask Richard as a violent and aggressive character. Richard's resulting attitudes towards white is volatile combination of powerful anger and powerful fear. He conceives "whiteness" as an overpowering and hostile force that is set against him in life. Due to his sense of rejection and rebellion, he is not only isolated and alienated by the white community but also from his community as well. He even

criticizes the black community for their lack of cultural unity and tradition. This believes seems to stem from Wright's own experiences of alienation from the black community as well as his own family. This distrust is also seen in Richard's aversion to religion. Unlike his extremely religious grandmother, Richard fails to place his faith in any kind of God. Religion for Richard, is more a hindrance than a path of salvation.

Little by little with his increasing interaction with white people Richard learns more about their dismissive attitudes towards black people. He is treated inhumanely when he is not given medical attention for the dog bite. This incident further adds fuels in his temper. As he finds the sense of subjugation and marginalization of whites towards blacks, he feels quite disturbs emotionally and psychologically. Richard further defines:

The things that influenced my conduct as a Negro didn't have to happen to me directly. I needed but to hear to them to feel their full effects in the deepest layers of my consciousness. Indeed, the white brutality that I had not seen was a more effective control of my behavior than that which I knew. [. . .] I was compelled to give my entire imagination over to it, an act which blocked the springs of thought and feeling in me, creating a sense of distance between me and the world in which I lived.(173)

While Richard was selected as valedictorian of his class and got opportunity to deliver a speech in front of public mass, he utterly refutes the speech written by the principal, "I won't make a speech that you have written"(176). Rather he deliberately delivered the speech written by himself. In fact, he knowingly rejected the principal's speech because it was completely white-based and he successfully breaks this kind of stereotypical notion of discourse. By solving the question of Uncle Tom, Richard further says, "The

principal's speech was simpler and clearer than mine, but it did not say anything; mine was cloudy, but it said what I wanted to say"(178). Richard here makes a strong claim that the principal's speech thoroughly excluded the colored people and their painful experiences by only valorizing the status quo. Angered and frustrated Richard merely sees his hostility and enmity towards the prevailing discourse of the whites. He says:

The hostility of the whites had become so deeply implanted in my mind and feelings that it had lost direct connection with the daily environment in which I lived. Tension would set in at the mere mention of whites and a vast complex of emotions , involving the whole of my personality, would be aroused. It was as the whole of my personality, would be aroused. [. . .] I had never in my life been abused by whites, but I had already become as conditioned to their existence as though I had been the victim of a thousand lynching. (72)

In the course of his angered and profound hatred mood towards the whites Richard remembers a tale of a black woman who powerfully and successfully able to take revenge upon his husband's murderers who were whites. This news further makes Richard restless and sleepless and it adds more fuel in his burning psyche:

A Negro woman whose husband had been seized and killed by a mob. [. . .] The woman, so went the story, knelt and prayed, then proceeded to unwrap the sheet; and, before the white men realized what was happening, she had taken the gun from the sheet and had slain four of them, shooting at them from her knees. (71)

Richard further claims that this story was emotionally true because he had already grown to feel that there existed men against whom he was powerless and could violate his life at will. Richard resolved that he would 'emulate' the black woman if he was ever faced with a white mob. He furthers:

I would conceal a weapon pretend that I had been crushed by the wrong done to one of my loved ones then just when they thought I had accepted their cruelty as the law of my life, I would let go with my gun and kill as many of them as possible before they killed me. The story of the woman's deception gave defensive feelings that had long been sleeping in me.(71-72)

Unlike the parasitic and submissive characters like Shorty, Griggs and Harrison, Richard also unlocks the rebellious and aggressive characters like Uncle Hoskin, Professor Matthew including he himself in this autobiography. The feeling of rejection, rebellion, aggression, resentment and wrath can be seen in these aggressive characters which gives the novel a distinctive quality. Uncle Hoskins owned a saloon that catered to blacks who worked in the sawmills and experienced a great deal of economic success. Due to his high ambition and boundless guts, even becoming from subordinated group, he was able to run the saloon smoothly and ceaselessly. The white mobs had frequently threatened him not to run that saloon but bold and brave Uncle Hoskin never bows his head down in front of them until he was murdered by the white men. In the side of Uncle Hoskin Richard writes; "Uncle Hoskins had been killed by Whites who had long coveted his flourishing liquor business. He had been threatened with death and warned many times to leave, but he had wanted to hold on a while longer to amass more money"(52).

Richard, thus, sees a very boldness and greatness in the characteristics of Uncle Hoskins, who even become ready to be died than to face the whites' brutality and barbarity. Similarly, Professor Matthews was also a revolutionary character who dislikes to flourish in the orchard of the whites. In his angered and frustrated moods towards the white folks, he not only hit and made the white woman unconscious but also fired her house. "I had hit her, she was unconscious. If they found her, she'd tell, I'd be lost, so, I set the fire"(65).

Towards the end of the novel, by not getting the conducive environment in the south, decides to go to the north, which is regarded as a place of liberty, equality and opportunity for the blacks and there he can breath the air of relief:

With ever watchful eyes and bearing scars, visible and invisible, I headed North, full of hazy notion that life could be lived with dignity, that the personalities of others should not be violated, that men should be able to confront other men without fear or shame, and that if men were lucky in their living on earth they might win some redeeming meaning for their living on earth they might win some redeeming meaning for their having struggled and suffered here beneath the stars.(262)

In this regard, *Black Boy* as a whole is the manifestation of Richard's long oppressed and repressed psychology in a white dominated society. The aggressive and rebellious blacks never regard the whites as their superior. They rather try to blur and subvert the demarcating line which was created by the whites in the name of race. Through this book it seems that the main character of the novel, Wright himself 'reconstruct' the experiences of blacks minutely and meticulously. Before, Richard

Wright blacks were always represented by the white writers as giving only the negative impulses and Richard successfully and dexterously blurred and abolished this kind of monopolistic ideology and notion of the whites.

IV. Conclusion

Wright's time of America was the period of racial segregation, where the blacks had to suffer intolerably from the Whites' domination, exploitation and suppression. Wright's *Black Boy* is the actual presentation of the hierarchy based American society, where exploitation, corruption and violence were exercised by the whites who kept themselves at the top and hurled the blacks at the bottom. Besides, Richard also depicts the aggressive and rebellious black characters in order to reconstruct the experiences of the blacks.

The whites deliberately create different types of sugar-coated discourses in order to disclose their superiority and seniority. Through these discourses, Afro-Americans were understood racially 'others.' They are supposed to be barbaric, savage and coward. By the means of these discourses, the whites are establishing the system of privilege in terms of oppression and exploitation. Blacks are beset with the hardship of economic oppression and forced to act subserviently before their oppressors. Even the media constantly portrays them as animalistic brutes.

Besides the typical account of Richard's childhood and adulthood, *Black Boy* is also a piece of literary art which gives us message to struggle even in the time of suffocation and alienation, because according to Richard, the meaning of living came only when one is struggling to wring a meaning out of meaningless suffering. Richard, throughout the novel, is struggling to create his own identity as well as the identity of the blacks by going beyond the black stereotypes and fighting against the ill treatment of whites in the white dominated society, though his family members, except his mother, never favors him.

The submissive and loyal characters like Shorty, Griggs and Harrison, who always like to swim in the pond of the whites, are also defined in *Black Boy*. These characters are able to serve their masters unhesitatingly. They themselves suffer from a sense of inferiority and inability complex to revolt against the whites' exploitation and domination.

Nevertheless, the characters like Richard Wright himself, his mother, Uncle Hoskins and Professor Matthew strongly stand against the barbarity and the brutality of the whites. The novelist deliberately designates these characters as rebellious and aggressive towards the status quo because the white power structure invariably overshadowed the identities of blacks in American society. Where there is oppression, there emerge the sense of resistance. Richard becomes rebellious in order to get his identity which is in crisis because he was restricted from acting according to his own will for his visibility, recognition and protection. The possessive nature of whites people, their extreme exploitation and their swindling behavior towards the innocent and ignorant blacks, compel Richard to be a rebellious black figure. These whites are in fact wolves in the lambs clothes.

Richard, further presents Uncle Hoskins as an emblem of boldness and greatness who ceaselessly struggled against whites' domination until the last drop of blood remained in his body. Richard's mother, Ella Wilson, though suffers from paralysis, invariably supports Richard in his trials and tribulations. It is she, who provides stick to Richard and urges him to fight against white boys. Professor Matthew even fires the white woman's home by making her unconscious in the course of his hatred and frustrated mood towards the whites.

In sum, by producing the black characters who are enveloped with the sense of rebellion, rejection and aggression and subverting and blurring the hierarchy created by the whites, Richard is getting success in his mission, i.e. reconstruction of black experiences in the white dominated society. His own quest to escape the suffocating world of his childhood and find a place where he could freely exercise his individuality, creativity and integrity was eventually successful.

Works Cited

- Appiah, Kwame Anthony. "Race." *Critical Terms for Literary Study*. Ed. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas Melaughin. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1990. 247-87.
- Ascroft, Bill, Geneth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, eds. *The Postcolonial Studies*. New York: Routledge, 1995.
- Ellis, George W. "The Psychology of American Race Prejudice." *Racism: Essential Readings*. Eds. Ellis Cashmere and James Jennings. New Delhi: Sage Publication, 2001. 10-17.
- Ellison, Ralph. *Invisible Man*. New York: The Modern Library, 1994.
- Foucault M. *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences*. London: Tavistock, 1970.
- - -. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. London: Tavistock, 1972.
- - -. *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*. London: Tavistock, 1967.
- - -. *History of Sexuality*. Trans. Robert Hurley. Vol. 1. New York: Pantheon, 1978.
- Gilroy, Paul. "The Whisper Wakes, The Shudder Plays: Nation and Ethnic Absolutism." *Contemporary Post-colonial Theory: A Reader*. Ed. Padmini Mongia. Delhi: Oxford UP, 1997. 248-71.
- Gramsci, Antonio. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*. Trans. Eds. Hoare, Quintin and Nowell Smith, Geoffrey, London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971.
- High, Peter B. *An Outline of American Literature*. London and New York: Longman, 1997.

- McHoul, Alec and Wendy Grace. *A Foucault Primer: Discourse, Power and the Subject*.
New York: New York University Press, 1997.
- Moor, Jack B. "Native Son." *American Literature*. Ed. Thomas Riggs. London: St. James
Press, 2000: 125-45.
- Ramadanovic, Petar. "Black Boy's Comedy: Indestructibility and Anonymity in
Autobiographical Self-Making." *Academic Research Library* 27.2 (Spring, 2004):
1-20.
- "Racism." *The Encyclopedia Americana*. New York; Cambridge University Press, 1986.
- Scott, Nathan A Jr. "Black Literature." *Harvard Guide to Contemporary American
Literature*. Ed. Daniel Hoffman. New York: Oxford University Press, 1979: 287-
341.
- Strinati, Dominic. *Concepts of Hegemony*. Baltimore: Blackwell publishers, 1996.
- Subedi, Abhi. "Birthday Fetish and Democracy." *The Kathmandu Post*. July 11, 2007, 4.
- Williams, Raymond. *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1977.
- Wright, Richard. *Black Boy*. London: Vintage, 1946.