

The Theme of Racism and Discrimination in Richard Wright's Writings

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A thesis submitted to the Department of English and Humanities in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Arts in English

Department of English and Humanities

Brac University

January 2023

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Declaration

It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my/our own original work while completing degree at Brac University.
2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material which has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
4. I/We have acknowledged all main sources of help.

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Approval

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Abstract

As an American writer, Richard Wright has portrayed his experiences of racism, discrimination, oppression through his writings. *Black Boy* and *Native Son* are the most popular novels among those. *Black Boy* is about his real-life experiences of racism from his childhood to adulthood. In this novel, he depicts how he has to face racism at such a young age and even after becoming a member of a political party. He also shows the hypocrisy of whites that how the racist society has already decided to harass, oppress and make blacks suffer even more. However, it explores racism not only as a hateful belief held by some individuals nor it simply exists in the society rather as an insidious problem which is rooted into the American culture and woven into the deep of the society. The description of racial discrimination and prejudice through the Jim Crow Laws is a good example of it. It also shows how people from lower class have to struggle to get good jobs and better opportunities in the class structured society. On the other hand, *Native Son* is a fictional novel about Bigger Thomas inspired by the real-life experiences of Richard Wright. It shows how a young black boy loses his opportunities and rights for being black in the United States. Because the white hypocritical society has already decided how much the blacks will get. This deprivation drives him out of control and results in criminal offences. Moreover, it portrays how poor people have to struggle more to fulfill their fundamental rights. Through these 2 writings, Richard Wright shows the hypocritical thoughts of white people about the black community and how they mistreat them based on their race, also shows the struggle of blacks in such a toxic environment and the sufferings of lower-class people against class discrimination. The aim of this paper is to discuss Richard Wright's two novels *Black Boy and Native Son* to show racism and class discrimination between whites and blacks

in the United States.

Keywords: Racism; class discrimination; social determinism; whites' hypocrisy; Post-colonial; Marxism; white people's thoughts about blacks; black people's sufferings.

Dedication

I would like to express my gratitude to my thesis supervisor, Dr. Sayeed Noman sir, for his assistance and encouragement during this journey. His ideas and teaching style have always grabbed my attention in his classes. His perspectives and way of thinking have amazed me all the time, and it makes me want to be like him one day.

I want to convey my sincere thanks to my parents as well as friends for their immense mental support while conducting this dissertation.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

“It might have been that my tardiness in learning to sense white people as ‘white’ people came from the fact that many of my relatives were ‘white’-looking people. My grandmother, who was white as any ‘white’ person, had never looked ‘white’ to me.”

- Richard Wright (Wright 1945).

This line is written by Richard Wright in his autobiographical novel *Black Boy*. This indicates his awareness of the differences between whites and blacks in the racist American society. It means that white people's skin color does not distinguish them from the black rather their attitudes, behavior, and treatment of blacks do. Because of this, he does not consider his grandmother as a 'white' person even though her skin color is white. As she is not racist like most of the whites with their stereotypical opinions and racist thoughts in the United States. However, Richard Wright is known as a protest writer and is considered one of the most influential African American writers of the twentieth century. He was born on September 4, 1908 in Mississippi, USA and died on November 28, 1960 in Paris, France. He was an African American author, novelist, poet, short story writer. He started his writing career at an early age. However, as a black African American, Richard Wright often witnessed racism, class discrimination, oppression and violence against the black community. He even had to face these based on his skin color and was exposed to these toxic issues since his childhood. He used to write his literary works based on his real-life experiences and observations. As a result, his life experiences of racism and discrimination, the suffering and plight of black people in racist American society are

displayed through many of his literary works that includes *Native Son*, *The Man Who Lived Underground*, *Black Boy*, *Uncle Tom's Children* and so on. Among these writings *Black Boy* and *Native Son* are his most famous novels. He was the first African American author who actually protested against the racism and discrimination of white people over blacks. In English literature, he is an inspiration to other black writers even in today's world.

Richard Wright's autobiographical novel *Black Boy* was first published in 1945. Through this novel, Richard Wright's real-life experience is portrayed. This novel is about a black boy who is introduced to racism, discrimination, Jim Crow Law and whites' dominance, oppression and violence over the blacks during such an early age that he is not even familiar with these terms. In this autobiographical novel, he also accurately describes his experiences with whites and his hardships as a black American in a racist society as a representative of the black community in the United States. Although as American citizens, black Americans deserve equal rights in society, they are deprived of it because they are not considered first class citizens by whites in the contemporary period. Through this novel, Richard Wright actually criticizes white people for their racist behavior and stereotypical mindset, while also showing some good sides of whites who are not racist. In this novel, the author shows in detail how black people are discriminated against in every possible aspect of daily life such as jobs, education, transportation, ticket counters, renting apartments, buying goods from any white shop and so on. In some cases, they have to endure this racist treatment to extremes that no one can imagine. There are a few white people who actually treat the blacks as human beings like them. That is why, this novel is not only an autobiography of Richard Wright but also a record and document of the misery and sufferings of African Americans in the white American society of that period. This shows that he has to face racism and discrimination from such a young age when he does not even understand the difference between

whites and blacks. He wants to talk and interact with the white people out of his curiosity but every time his family members forbid him to do it and it raises multiple questions in his mind. However, after growing up, he finally understands why he is forbidden to associate with whites and realizes the real difference between these two communities. After some bad experiences with the whites, young Richard Wright starts to fear them. In job sectors, he has faced a lot of hardship and is sometimes mistreated by his white colleagues. In some cases, he is forced to quit his job without making any mistakes. The only mistake/main reason is that he was born as a black man in the white racist American society where people are evaluated based on their skin color rather than their abilities, working skills and qualifications. By writing this autobiography, Richard Wright is actually portraying these hardships, sufferings and struggles of black people in American society while criticizing the whites by showing their true face to the whole world. Although racist whites mock him for his bravery, their mockery and hateful comments do not deter him from accomplishing his goals and he remains unstoppable.

1.1 Contextual background of Richard Wright and his writings:

Native Son is another novel by Richard Wright which was first published in 1940. This novel is about a twenty years old black boy, Bigger Thomas, the protagonist of this novel and his tragic end. In this novel, Richard Wright shows how Bigger Thomas has to face hardships, poverty and discrimination which fuels his anger, frustration and finally leads him to crime. He also shows the suffering of black Americans due to racism and discrimination, lack of rights and opportunities in Chicago during the 1930s. The perspective of blacks and whites about racism is perfectly shown in this novel. Whites consider blacks as inferior and do not treat them as human beings on their same level because of their black skin color and race. The whites oppress them, mistreat them and

decide themselves what the blacks should get. On the other hand, black people believe that white people are superior to them so what they do is good for them. In the apartheid American society, the blacks do not get enough opportunities to live or get better education or job opportunities or enough wages just because their skin color is different from the whites. Furthermore, it does not matter for a black man how talented or intelligent he is or capable of a good job, he will get a lower-class job. Even they have to struggle a lot to get their basic rights. The most shocking thing is that the blacks have been brainwashed by the white people to such an extent that they do not stand up for their own rights rather they silently accept whatever the racist society determines for them without any further thoughts or questions. Although this novel shows the reality of the judgmental society, after its publication, it is often criticized for its lack of positive role models by African Americans, such as the protagonist, Bigger Thomas, is a deeply flawed character and the other black characters are not strong in it. Living in such a racist society, blacks themselves begin to blindly believe that whites are superior to them and fear them which is shown through the protagonist Bigger Thomas and his black friends in this fictional novel, which is a complete misconception. Then Richard Wright also shows white hypocrisy that when white people convict a black person of any crime, they try to put more charges on him and portray the criminal as they want to show. Moreover, they blame the entire black community for a black criminal which also represents their hypocrisy. All these issues are perfectly depicted in this novel and through various characters.

In both novels, *Black Boy* and *Native Son*, Richard Wright presents the real condition of black people through the characters black boy and Bigger Thomas. Both the novels are connected to each other in terms of showing the reality of racism, discrimination over the blacks by the whites during the twentieth century of the United States. Through his writings, the author presents the

bitter and hidden truth of whites in American society to the world, how the white society determine what the blacks should get and how they should be treated, how they dominate over the blacks, oppress them using their power and hypocrisy, how white men try to present black men as harmful to white women, how they harass black women and how the blacks are forced to tolerate these injustices in silence. He also shows how poor blacks have to struggle and suffer a lot to survive in the class structured society. Although Richard Wright does not directly protest against white racism and discrimination, he showed his bravery, courage and strong voice against all the inequities and injustices against the blacks in contemporary white American society.

1.2 The purpose of this thesis:

The purpose of this thesis is to discuss Richard Wright's two writings *Black Boy* and *Native Son* and analyze the theme of racism, social determinism and whites' hypocrisy, class discrimination against the blacks, the impact of it on them and focusing on the condition and sufferings of the blacks in such toxic environment of the United States. Two theories, post-colonial theory and Marxist theory are being used to support my points. Through both the novels, *Black Boy* and *Native Son*, Richard Wright shows how blacks are treated under the white rule and dominance in post-colonial times. Even after decolonization, the whites are still treating blacks as inferior, uncultured, savages rather than as human beings like them. Moreover, in both his novels, the author depicts how the poor have to suffer in a class structured society and how the rich can easily achieve anything whereas the poor have to struggle a lot despite being qualified.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Richard Wright was one of the most prominent African American writers of the modern era. African Americans are one of the largest of many ethnic groups in the United States. But they had to suffer a lot in the white American society for their black skin color and race. Before the 1950s, the African-Americans had a very poor situation and were treated unequally in the United States and denied equality by American laws and regulations. In the earlier period, many Africans were forcibly enslaved from their native Africa, and the African Americans are their descendants. During the slavery period, the Blacks were considered an inferior race. The whites considered the black people uncultured, uncivilized, wild, and inferior. On the other hand, they considered themselves civilized, cultured and superior to the blacks. At that time, blacks had to struggle a lot for achieving their freedom. Finally, after the end of the civil war, the Thirteenth Amendment was passed by Congress on December 6, 1865. Thus, the slavery was abolished in United States and nearly 4 million slaves became free from their slave owners. During the Reconstruction period, African Americans gained their citizenships and the black men gained their rights to vote. Yet the Reconstruction period from 1865 to 1877 was considered a time of depression and despair for the African Americans. Because these new provisions of the constitution were often ignored, especially in many southern states of America. As a result, the African Americans were treated as second-class citizens and soon found themselves disenfranchised in the South due to the ideology of white supremacy and dominance in this racist American society. They also had to face difficulties in getting jobs and basic rights. Forced "racial" segregation increased in the South due to the white supremacy. However, after the end of the Reconstruction period, some African Americans found industrial jobs in the southern cities. While few rural African Americans in the

South owned their own farms, most of the remaining poor sharecroppers were heavily indebted to the white landlords. So, their condition was very bad. The condition of the urban North African American population was little better than the condition of African American in the South. In the 1870s, all southern states re-enacted other laws to prohibit marriage between the blacks and the whites. Even if a black man was found out of having an affair with a white woman, it would have considered a punishable offense at the time. During the late 19th century, the Southern states enacted Jim Crow laws to enforce racial segregation between blacks and whites in nearly all public places. The term "Jim Crow Law" was considered a racist term for a black people which was enacted in various states of the United States from the late 19th century to the early 20th century. Because of these laws, all public buildings, schools, restaurants, buses, trains were segregated for blacks and whites. This racial segregation started with slavery and continued with the racist Jim Crows law. In every sector, there were separate arrangements for the blacks and the whites. The laws and regulations also included signs showing where blacks could legally talk, walk, rest, drink, or eat. In the racially mixed locations, the non-white people had to wait until all white customers were dealt with. Most African Americans had to obey the Jim Crow laws, to avoid racial conflict and violence over them. This proves the line of John Lewis, an American politician and civil rights leader, "Ours is not the struggle of one day, one week, or one year. Ours is not the struggle of one judicial appointment or presidential term. Ours is the struggle of a lifetime, or maybe even many lifetimes, and each one of us in every generation must do our part". Lewis emphasized how the struggle against racial injustice is unending as it continues generations after generations. Here the slaves were freed from slavery but they did not get equal rights or respect in the society. They were humiliated in various new ways. However, to maintain self-respect, dignity and peace, some African Americans like Anthony Overton and Mary McLeod Bethune built their own schools,

churches, banks, and social clubs and so on. It was imposed to convince the blacks that they could not be part of or enter the whites. Even Richard Wright had to go through this racial segregation and Jim Crow laws from childhood when he did not even understand what it meant. Moreover, during and after Reconstruction, the African Americans who used to live in cities organized historical, literary, and musical societies for themselves. Some of the literary achievements of the African Americans included the historical writings of Timothy Thomas Fortune, a writer, journalist and editor and George Washington Williams. *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, the third autobiography of Frederick Douglass had become a classic of autobiography. The Blacks also began to have major impacts on American literature. Richard Wright is one of those whose literary writings have contributed much to modern American literature. Thus, he became an inspiration to thousands of black writers and even received appreciation from other prominent writers of his contemporary period. So, in reality the African American people did not get equal status, rights and respect in the racist society for a longer period. Even though the slavery was ended, the condition of the African Americans was still very bad and they had to struggle a lot to survive in such toxic and racist environment. As an African/Black American, Richard Wright had to face racism, discrimination and oppression based on his skin color which he depicts through his writings. Among them *Black Boy* and *Native Son* are two of his notable novels.

Richard Wright shows his experience of racial violence, crime and white discrimination through his autobiographic novel *Black Boy* (BB). Most critics read his works as sociological studies of the plight of African Americans. He draws on his real-life experiences to represent the racial animosity of the Deep South and his writing serves as an artistic representation of issues affecting society in contemporary times. In his writings, Richard Wright shows how black people suffer, their difficulties and hardships under the dominance of the whites in America. He was born

in 1908 in Natchez, Mississippi, one of the most destitute and racist parts of the South American states of the twentieth century. Writer Yoshinobu Hakutani says about BB, "though not intended as such, it is a convincing sociological study. Like sociology, it not only analyses a social problem but offers a solution to the problem it treats." (Hakutani, 2006). Richard Wright presents and criticizes the social problems of his contemporary time through his artistic works and writings. Like *Black Boy* most of his other writings are based on racism and discrimination against blacks which was one of the major issues of racist American society of that period. In *Native Son*, Richard Wright expresses his doubts about escaping white supremacy and dominance whereas in *Black Boy* (BB), he also shows possible opportunities for self-emancipation. In *Native Son*, the Bigger Thomas and other black characters are silently accepting their misfortune in the white racist American society and they have no chance to overcome it and lead a better life. But in *Black Boy*, although the black boy suffers a lot, he can change his life, gets freedom from the dominance and supremacy of the whites and even becomes part of a political party like its white members. Here, in the novel, Richard Wright shows a hope for African Americans to overcome their toxic situation. It also presents a sense of freedom and emancipation. Thus, Richard Wright not only portrays the social problems and sufferings of the African American people of that time but also shows the hope and possibility to overcome these through his inspiring and powerful writings like *Native Son* and *Black Boy* (Makombe, 2013).

The Black American literature appears on the brink of a bright future with Richard Wright who was one of the prominent contributors. Through the novel *Native Son*, he portrays a sensitive account of the feelings and traumatic experiences of a young black man, and succeeds in arousing the interest and sympathy of many readers, and is highly praised for such literary work by other contemporary writers and critics. Moreover, a certain progress was marked in the Black American

literature by the early 1945 with publication of Richard Wright's novel *Black Boy*. It is the autobiography of a black writer who for the first time in American history, dares to tell the whole truth about the hell condition of a black boy in the native South. Richard Wright was the first black writer in America who dared to present the deep and dark truth of the South and the extreme racism, discrimination and oppression towards the black boy through his autobiographical novel. As a result, this novel was successful in attracting public attention all over the world and it was a huge and immediate success that William Faulkner, an American writer who was also a Mississippian himself, had to write a warm, congratulatory and very encouraging letter to Richard Wright. Even many literary critics also praise him for his skill of writing. This autobiographical novel also created a lot of controversy at that period. Despite general literary acclaim and appreciation, the Southern whites react violently to Richard Wright's implausible but incredibly true account of the adventures of a black boy from Mississippi. Because Richard Wright portrays the reality of extreme racism, discrimination, violence and oppression against blacks in the South and also shows how the blacks have to suffer in such a prejudiced and toxic environment. By describing all of these in his autobiographical novel *Black Boy*, Richard Wright shows the cruel and brutal side of the racist whites in the South that made them react such violently. Even Theodore Bilbo, the Senator of Mississippi, a representative of the hostile white South who was very wary of any "would-be" black intellectual. On June 27, 1945, he declared in Congress, " It is the dirtiest, filthiest, lousiest, most obscene piece of writing that I have ever seen in print. I would hate to have a son or daughter of mine permitted to read it; it is so filthy and so dirty. But it comes from a Negro, and you cannot expect any better from a person of his type." (308). This announcement of Theodore Bilbo shows the racist thinking, perspective and opinion of the whites towards the achievements of the blacks in the South. He was so much obsessed with his racist and stereotypical

thinking that he found it pointless to expect anything good from the Blacks or Negroes and he also criticized the blacks as a representative of the racist whites. Clearly, the controversial response to the *Black Boy* was representing the attitude and characteristic of the racist white American society towards Black achievements. This reminds an important line from the British writer Wayne Gerard Trotman, “As long as there is racial privilege, racism will never end.” In this quote, he focuses on the fact that racism and racial privileges are connected to each other. That is why, as long as certain races have more opportunities and freedoms than others, racism and racial discrimination will never end. However, these controversies could not stop Richard Wright from achieving his goals, he continues to write more novels and stories about bitter and painful personal experiences of him which are caused by his skin color and race. Through his writings, soon he becomes recognized as a protest writer of the contemporary period. He raises his voice and protests against the racism and discrimination through his artistic works. These bitter experiences and depictions of grief and pain undoubtedly establish him as a prominent writer. He gets recognition and becomes so popular worldwide that the French government has raised an official invitation for the black writer and his family to come to France. Thus, he is recognized beyond America for his bold and honest portrayal of the racist American society. It shows that although white people mock and criticize him for his bravery, the world admires him with great love and respect. *Black Boy* and *Native Son* are considered his most powerful works, written when he was in close contact with the racial issue, he knew the best (Gounard, 1974).

The autobiographical novel *Black Boy* by Richard Wright is recognized as one of the classics of protest literature because it reveals the negative impact of racist environment on the development of human personality as well as physical and social maturity. In this autobiographical novel, Wright shows how a racist environment inhibits the higher development of human

personality including intellectual, philosophical and aesthetic, instead forcing them to invest all their energies to just merely survive in the racist society. This means that due to the racist environment of the South, black people waste all their energy just to barely survive in such bad and toxic conditions and they do not get enough time or opportunity to develop their personality and intelligence. Through this novel, he shows how he has to struggle against the limitations of the racist environment and for his physical survival in the racist American society. Richard Wright's *Black Boy* owes much to the novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* written by James Joyce. Imagination plays a key role in young Richard's relationship with the external reality. Because from the beginning of the novel, Richard Wright shows how he has to face the bleakness and limitations of the racist environment in which he lives. Due to racism and discrimination, he faces and experiences negative things like boredom, hunger, anger, poverty and hatred in the South which are barriers to experiencing positive nature. But he successfully tackles it with an active and fertile imagination and uses it as a weapon to be positive and healthy by staying in such a toxic environment. Although Richard Wright lives in such an environment and experiences these negative things, he does not let the negativity destroy his life; rather he uses his imagination as a tool to overcome it and keeps a positive and healthy mindset. Even in such a hostile environment, the young black boy Richard Wright nurtures the development of his personality and consciousness to a high degree while struggling to maintain his integrity despite a powerful system of racism and oppression specifically designed to destroy it. And turns his imagination into a devastating weapon against this toxic environment (Weiss, 1974).

Black Boy by Richard Wright is considered not only the best autobiography written by a black writer but also claimed to be “one of the greatest autobiographies ever written in America”. W. E. B. Du Bois, an American sociologist says about the autobiographical novel, “... it is probably

intended to be fiction or fictionalized biography. At any rate the reader must regard it as creative writing rather than simply a record of life." (70). So, the novel is written in such a creative way that the reader will consider it as a fictional work rather than just a simple life story. On the other hand, those who are not impressed by the excessive violence, oppression described in the novel, criticize his work. Some are not convinced by the description of the extreme racism and discrimination in his autobiographical novel. According to them, the world is bad but not as bad as Richard Wright presents in this novel. In *Native Son*, Richard Wright portrays some aspects of racism and discrimination. But in the autobiographical novel *Black Boy*, he shows extreme racism, discrimination, violence and oppression that some people are impressed by his creative work and admire him for it. On the contrary, some find it unrealistic and criticize it. They do not think the world can be so bad as Richard Wright portrays it in this autobiographical novel. Even those who are convinced of the authenticity of *Black Boy*, do not consider it a higher achievement than the novel *Native Son*. In this novel *Black Boy*, Richard Wright presents his experiences of "the essential bleakness of black life in America" specifically in the Deep South of United states. When this autobiographic novel was published, William Faulkner, an American writer wrote to Richard Wright that he was deeply touched by *Black Boy*, but commented that what is said in it is better to be said in *Native Son*. So, in *Black Boy*, Richard Wright shows racism, discrimination, oppression and violence in such an extreme level. According to Faulkner, it would be better if Wright describes them in the novel *Native Son* rather than in *Black Boy*. To him, art cannot be made from too much of one's own life. So, he said, "I hope you will keep on saying it, but I hope you will say it as an artist, as in *Native Son*." (70). Here, he is praising Richard Wright for his novel *Native Son* and encouraging him to keep writing literary works like *Native Son*. The novelist's reaction suggests that *Black Boy* suffers as a work of art because Wright writes it in a more impersonal way

than the novel *Native Son*. Faulkner's opinion is that *Black Boy* is an autobiography of Richard Wright, but the book is written in such an impersonal spirit that the book does not sound like a normal autobiography (Hakutani, 1985).

If the term “race” is a permanent fissure in the American mind, few Black autobiographers have lived in such dangerous and toxic environment and portrayed its seismic shock and bitter reality as Richard Wright. So, few Black American writers had the courage to reveal the cruel and dark side of racism in America and Richard Wright was the first to show it to the world. While telling their life stories and experiences, Blacks were busy improvising ways to escape the white oppression that roamed over black flesh, instead of enjoying the luxury of their successes and failures. However, while the writers were showing their bravery and revealing the cruel face of white racism, they had to find ways to escape white oppression because they did not take it lightly that the black writers are exposing their dark side to the world. In *Black Boy* and *American Hunger*, Richard Wright shows his struggles of hunger, anger, poverty, family disruption throughout his childhood and youth. But he never gets rid of these, nor gets he rid of the pathology and riddle of White racism. He suffers a lot in the toxic environment of racist America. But miraculously, in such a harsh and distorted soil and isolated environment, an artist germinates. This successful novelist with his positive thinking and nature portrays the biased, cruel and toxic side of racist America. Because a life of fantasy is a problem in the world where Wright was born and raised in, he had to suffer even more. As he was writing about the condition of the American society, the Whites dismissed his ambition to be a writer with mocking disbelief and criticize, while the Blacks used to keep a long distance from him, as if he were crazy for making up stories out of his head. So, it shows even after being a successful writer, he could not get rid of white racism (LEIBOWITZ, 1985)

Richard Wright's *Native Son* is an outstanding example of social protest fiction. In this novel, he shows the sufferings of the black people in the racist White American society. An examination of Wright's fiction reveals, "He drew from personal experience and observation, the condition of the society about him, and his theoretic concerns." (66). So, according to the critics, most of the writings of Richard Wright are based on his real-life experiences. The novel *Native Son* is also about Richard Wright's real-life experiences in Mississippi and Chicago, the social status and condition of the urban Negroes under the white racial supremacy, Nixon's judicial trial as the rapist and murderer of a white woman, and communist ideology. Even Charles Irving Glicksberg, a Polish-American literary critic and writer says, "Richard Wright is Bigger Thomas-one part of him anyway. Bigger Thomas is what Richard Wright, had circumstances worked out differently, might have become." (66). So, the character of Bigger Thomas in the novel *Native Son* may have been inspired and created from Richard Wright's own life and personal experiences. The imagery of the slum conditions on the South Side and the description of Chicago in the novel reflect the real conditions of black people. As a black American, Richard Wright also lives in a cramped and dirty flat with his mother, brother, aunt during his childhood; and there were hundreds of houses of other Negro people. These details are also described in his autobiographical novel *Black Boy*. Richard Wright had to go through the same difficult situation described in the novel about Bigger Thomas and the other black people. Through the character of Bigger Thomas, he may have portrayed his suffering as a black man in a white society. Just like Bigger Thomas, Richard Wright also used to work for a white family called the Bibbs in Jackson, Mississippi. He was fifteen years old then and his job was to cut wood, carry coal and tend the fire. Thus, Wright portrays these real-life events and experiences through the protagonist character Bigger Thomas in this novel *Native Son*. When he was working at a South Side Boys Club during his mid-thirties, he saw some young black men

like Bigger Thomas who were scared, frustrated, restless, moody, aggressive and struggling to survive in the urban jungle at the time. So, the character of Bigger Thomas came from the author's real-life experience. These events refer to the racism and discrimination that black people faced and suffered. Richard Wright not only writes about his personal experiences but also portrays the social and political discrimination against the blacks through the novel *Native Son*. The protagonist Bigger Thomas's crime, murder, and punishment is related to a rape case involving Robert Nixon and Earl Hicks of 1938. By the time when Richard Wright began to write this novel, the case had become a prominent issue and was even published about it in different newspapers of Chicago. Robert Nixon and Year Hicks, 2 young black Americans who had the similar backgrounds to Bigger's upbringing. In 1938, there was a murder case of Mrs. Florence Johnson who “was beaten to death with a brick by a colored sex criminal . . . in her apartment” (68). So, a white woman was killed and both Nixon and Hicks were arrested and charged with the crime. Although there was no evidence of rape, the tribune initially called the murder a sex crime and falsely accused both Nixon and Hicks. However, Nixon’s skin color was darker than Hicks, so he had to suffer even more. He was referred as “brick moron”, “rapist slayer”, “jungle beast”, “sex moron” and many more like these. He was also referred as “a giant ape”. The newspapers mainly focus on his race and level the entire community for his crime. The same things happen to Bigger Thomas in the novel *Native Son*. He is also accused of raping and killing Mary Dalton, but he did not kill her intentionally and he never raped her. It is just a false accusation of the whites. Later the whole Black community is also leveled as terrorist and dangerous by the newspapers. Finally, after “A complicated series of confessions and repudiations, charges of police brutality, and dramatic outbursts of violence preceded the trial,” (70), the death sentence was imposed on Nixon. In the novel *Native Son*, Richard Wright represents this through the tragic fate of Bigger Thomas. The Nixon assassination

case is properly portrayed by Richard Wright in his novel *Native Son* as well as his childhood sorrows and sufferings in Mississippi (Kinnamon, 1969).

While studying about the prose style of Wright, Edwin Berry Burgum primarily focuses on the short stories of Richard Wright, makes a valid general observation that Wright's "choice of diction" is "dictated by the needs of the situation" and he "maintains a balances between the expository and the emotive." (105). So, Richard Wright's choice and use of words depend of the exigency of the situation and he also balances the description and the emotion of the characters which makes his writings unique and significant. In the novel *Native Son*, Richard Wright shows 4 types of voices one is narrator's, other one is the inarticulate voice of Bigger himself, another one if the biased voice of the supposedly "objective" establishment of newspapers and the utterances of state prosecutor Buckley and the fourth one is the articulate and humane voice of the lawyer Boris Max. Firstly, the narrator's voice is neutral while telling the story of Bigger Thomas. Secondly, the voice of Bigger Thomas is expressing His wishes, dreams, ambitions and regrets for not fulfilling them. Later this voice also expresses Bigger's anger and frustration towards the whites and later guilty for committing crimes in this novel. Thirdly, the voice of the biased, toxic and racist voice of the newspapers and Buckley. When a white man commits any crime, the newspaper blames only that person for his bad deeds. On the other hand, the newspapers blame the whole black community when any black person commits any crime and levels the entire Black community as terrorist. It shows the biased and racist voice of the newspapers. Then the state prosecutor Buckley is a good example of white hypocrisy, racism and oppression. As Bigger Thomas is a black man, he falsely imposes and accuses him for committing other crimes and murders which Bigger did not commit. It shows the biased voice of the racist Whites. Fourthly, the neutral and humane voice of the lawyer Boris Max. He senses the suffering and hardships of

Bigger and the toxicity of his environment and presents it to the judge, hoping to sympathize with him. Here, this voice shows that although most of the whites were racist and oppressive, some of them still consider blacks to be their equals and show sympathy to them. Although these 4 kinds of voices are unique and different from each other. He accurately uses these voices in this novel with such consummate skill. It is this stylistic quality, along with its brutally frank treatment and description of the effects of racism that guarantees *Native Son* as a prominent writing among modern American novels. Thus, Richard Wright writes the novel using a unique style to describe the lives, sufferings and effects of racism on the Blacks as well as different perceptions and opinions of the Whites. The skill with which Wright animates the four voices of *Native Son* is testament to his artistic skill and mastery of literary writing. As a result, this novel has become one of the prominent novels of Modern American Literature. Robert Bohn and Edward Margolies, American literary critics who provide significant commentary on *Native Son*, agree that the values of the novel outweigh its faults. But, while asserting the excellence of most of the novel's narratives, they are equally quick to fault the "didactic" parts of the conclusion. According to Edward Margolies, Bigger Thomas is not so different from us, he is like us. Despite its exciting elements and contested structural flaws, *Native Son* is not that kind of novel that one reads it and never touches again. It proves the artistic skills of Richard Wright. The power of the narrative is so much strong that it brings one back to a guilty, horrifying fascination, like a murderer returns to the scene of his crime. The compelling power of the novel *Native Son* comes not only from its underlying tragic content, but also from Wright's virtuosity in molding the content (Larsen, 1972).

There has always been a debate about the novel *Native Son* whether it is truly successful as a "protest novel" or not and this debate still continues ever "75 years after its publication". James Baldwin, an American writer referred to the novel *Native Son* as a caricature of a social or political

agenda. Richard Wright talks about the condition of blacks in America, their poor living conditions, lack of education and job opportunities. Black people are already familiar with all this. This means, Richard Wright's target audience is white people and he wants to inform them about the condition of Blacks. But the way he portrayed Blacks, many Black people would not like. In the novel, the protagonist Bigger Thomas cannot overcome the blackness and his blackness is presented as ugly and humiliating as always. Then it also shows that he becomes a rapist, murderer and criminal because of his hatred and fear of white people and here this character is representing the entire black community. Other Black characters are also not strong and are presented as if they are being controlled by the Whites and they accept it so easily. In this novel *Native Son*, Richard Wright portrays that Black people are facing racism and they are not fighting against it rather they are silently accepting it. Here, Wright actually exaggerates the characters and portrays Black people as criminals and dangerous but in reality, not all of them are the same. According to James Baldwin, the Black people would not like "such a grotesque portrait of themselves". Though this novel is written by a Black writer, he portrays the Black character in such stereotypical ways. That is why, James Baldwin criticizes the novel because it is considered a protest novel but it is full of caricatures and moreover, the protagonist Bigger Thomas does not even have the courage to fight against racism and oppression over them. So, Richard Wright presents a one-sided picture of Black people in this fictional novel. The novel *Native Son* has become "a comforting aspect of the American scene", cherished by white liberals rather than being resented as a "protest novel" (Mathis, and Pankaj Mishra, 2015).

Moreover, the critics focus more on the environment and its influence on Bigger Thomas in the novel *Native Son*. In 1972, Louis Graham uses the term "white self-image conflict" in *Native Son* and says, "there is no question that Richard Wright's *Native Son* is Bigger Thomas' novel and

that Wright places major emphasis on the social, cultural, and economic influences in the development of Bigger's character" (46). So, various elements of Bigger's environment contribute a lot to the formation of his inner state of mind and character. In this naturalistic protest novel, Richard Wright shows how racial discrimination destroys Bigger Thomas, the protagonist of this fictional novel. In recent times, many critics have claimed that Bigger Thomas, the protagonist of the novel is "a tragic victim of implacable social forces" (Goldstein, 120). The "whiteness" and "blackness" or the concept of racial marker in the society influences Bigger's thinking and consciousness. This concept is related to one's physical appearance. As a black African American in the white racist society, Bigger Thomas has to face racism, discrimination and also has to suffer a lot for his skin color. In this novel, Bigger is always shaped in a limited way rather than a productive way. His desires and abilities are being oppressed and judged based on the color of his skin and he never gets the chance to show his abilities and it affects his inner state of mind. His fear and frustration towards whites makes him aggressive, violent and leads him to criminal offence. But no one tried to understand his condition (Hoose, 2011).

According to Arnold Rampersad, a literary critic, Richard Wright was "perhaps the most significant and influential" African American author of the 20th century. Even those critics who doubt the artistry and literary merit of Richard Wright and his writings cannot deny that he was the first African American novelist who opens the door of international stature to the black writers. So, Richard Wright is the first African American novelist whose work has received worldwide recognition and popularity and this fact is undeniable. James Baldwin, an American writer who is Richard Wright's most vigorous and insistent contemporary critic who admitted that he saw Wright as his "spiritual father" and Wright's work as "a road-block in my road, the sphinx, really, whose riddles I had to answer before I could become myself" (276). It shows how Richard Wright

and his writings have become an inspiration and courage to other Black writers and it secures his status as a prominent Black novelist for later twentieth century Black writers. Richard Wright shows his personal experiences through his artistic works. Richard Wright portrays how the majority of the blacks used to live in the racist environment of the South during the twentieth century, despite of the oppression, suffrage, peonage, and racial terrorism in the Post-Reconstruction and Jim Crow Eras through his writings. In the novel *Native Son*, He shows the condition and sufferings of the Blacks in the racist South. In *Black Boy*, he talks about the suffrage of the blacks in the South, racial terrorism and Jim Crow laws. Moreover, he describes the oppressive conditions and the struggles of blacks in *Uncle Tom's Children*. While writing on the issue of interracial (white-on-black) violence, Richard Wright follows the tradition of past Black American writers of his earlier periods. In *Black Boy*, Richard shows "the essential bleakness . . . the cultural barrenness of black life" (279) and in *Native Son*, he criticizes the whites for their racist thinking and hypocrisy by showing the tragic end of Bigger Thomas. Both of the novels allude to the racism and discrimination that black people face and suffer in the racist American society because of their dark skin (Matthews, 2014).

Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1 Research Question

This research examines how blacks are suffering due to racism and oppression in the South areas of America, how society is determining how much blacks should get and how they should be treated, the hypocrisy of racist whites to dominate blacks and make them suffer even more and the effects of class discrimination in Class Structured American Society. To answer the research questions, this research paper is organized by analyzing secondary data such as articles from authentic sources, opinions of relevant books and newspaper articles from renowned sources. My primary sources on which I have convicted my content research are Richard Wright's 2 novels *Black Boy* and *Native Son*.

3.2 Data collection method

Qualitative method is followed in this research paper. This paper is about racism and class discrimination against blacks as presented through Richard Wright's novels *Black Boy* and *Native Son*. These 2 novels are used as primary texts. Here, I have designed a systematic data collection in which I aimed to research according to thematic analysis. I have collected some journal articles from Jstor about racism, white's hypocrisy and oppression over the blacks. As this research is very concerned with how racism and oppression over the blacks are presented in the novels, it gains knowledge by primarily researching articles on the themes of racism in these 2 novels. This paper searched for research articles referring to famous writers and critics' works and opinions. This research mentions intellectuals and prominent authors like James Baldwin, William Faulkner, W.

E. B. Du Bois, Charles Irving Glickberg, and Arnold Rampersad to understand how they have reacted as well as their criticism on these 2 novels of Richard Wright. Some articles also discuss how Richard Wright's real-life experiences are accurately represented through his novels. Then some articles also discuss the hypocrisy of whites and their supremacy over blacks. Even a newspaper article about blacks' reaction to the novel *Native Son*. To discuss incident like Laura's lynching and L. d Nelson, this research takes help from a newspaper article. It first focuses on the themes and accordingly selects articles which fulfil the research questions of this paper. It looks for relevant and authentic articles from the recent period rather than the past. Since both Richard Wright's novels *Black Boy* and *Native Son* were based on twentieth century American, my dissertation also includes some articles that were published before 2000. This paper began by focusing on the theme of racism and class discrimination against black Americans by whites. Then in the thesis statement, it discussed how it is going to answer the research questions that how racism and class discrimination are portrayed in these 2 novels and its impact on black Americans, the concept of social determinism in racist white society and their hypocrisy to harass blacks. The research takes help from authentic sources which are described in the literature review which contain relevant information regarding this. In the methodology, the paper explains how it has conducted its research and talks about the literary theories which have been applied in later sections of this paper. This paper also finds gaps and aims to fill the gaps by analyzing this research. It then moves to the analysis part to analyze the primary texts with the help of relevant articles in the literature as well as the researcher's own interpretation.

3.3 Research gap

In the research paper, the analysis has contributed to answering the research questions. The paper concludes with a proper understanding of three claims describing the condition of black people under racism, social determinism and whites' hypocrisy, class discrimination in twentieth-century America. To make my research more effective, I used articles that referred to my primary texts *Black Son* and *Native Son*. Even though there are enough research articles about the portrayal of racism and whites' hypocrisy in the novels *Black Son* and *Native Son*, there is not enough research material about social determinism and class discrimination which are also presented in these 2 novels. My aim was to analyze racism, social determinism and white's hypocrisy, class discrimination in Richard Wright's *Black Son* and *Native Son* novels but I have founded insufficient research articles about social determinism and class discrimination. However, although I have found these to be research gaps while analyzing my data, I believe, my research can fill the gaps to some extent and future researchers can find the concept of social determinism and class discrimination in these two novels by looking at my research paper.

Then to understand the status and condition of blacks in such a racist American society, I used the articles accordingly. A meaningful and contextual analysis of both primary texts with my own interpretations and using an inadequate literature review, I conducted qualitative research applying postcolonial theory and Marxist theory. Through further literature review analysis, the research answers how blacks faced racism, social determinism and class discrimination by the whites in twentieth century America.

3.4 Analysis of theories

Post-colonial theory and Marxist theory are used in this research paper. Postcolonial theory is a literary theory of thought and critical analysis of the influence and impact of European colonial rule on the history, society, politics, and economy of the colonies from the 18th to the 20th century. It starts with decolonization and later talks about the results of colonialism and also discusses the life and condition of the local people under the influence of the colonial period. This theory was established in the book 'Orientalism' by Edward Said in 1978. He is considered the father of post-colonial theory. Though he did not use this term in his book, his arguments and thoughts provided a framework for formulating this theory. This theory discusses the impact of colonialism on the colonized areas after the end of the colonial period. Colonialism means the control of one country over another country or a dependent area in terms of social, political, cultural, economic spheres. It happens when one race subjugates another race. During the colonial period, the British or the whites established their colonies over other countries or dependent areas such as: Asia, Africa, America and so on. The Europeans not only tried to colonize the locals but also, they used to impose their own ideas, views, perspective over the colonial locals. They considered the blacks/Africans to be wild, barbaric, uncivilized, uncultured and inferior to them and considered themselves superior, civilized to them. The colonizers imposed the idea over the colonial locals that they were born to rule and the rest of the world would stay under their control. The locals were convinced that their culture was not as developed as the European culture. They tried to believe the colonial locals that the history, traditions, education system, literature of the colonial countries was not as developed and enriched as the European once. The colonizers were successful because the local colonies started to believe their ideas, thoughts, culture, traditions were not as good as the European's. So, they started to feel as they were total failure and at the same time, started to

accept the European culture and ideas. The European colonizers established the idea of “Otherness” among the non-Europeans or orientals. When the locals started to believe the Europeans were superior and they were nothing in front of them, it felt like they were the third person. According to them, they felt like they were sub-humans in front of the colonizers as they were the best humans in the world. This made the way easier for the colonizers to rule over the new colonies for a long time. As a result, they did not consider the blacks as people of the same level and made them slaves. After decolonization, this concept of racism and discrimination still existed in the colonies and post-colonial theory discussions it. Because, even after decolonization, whites still believe they are superior to blacks. They start dominating and oppressing blacks based on their race and skin color. This is the beginning of racism and discrimination in the American society.

Marxist theory is a materialist philosophical theory that speaks of social class struggle and seeks to transform the world into a classless society. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels were the first who introduced this theory. This theory talks about how people are struggling, suffering and being victims in the class structured society. According to this theory, progress is achieved through struggle between opposing forces. In terms of history, it proceeds and progresses through class struggle and social conflict which is presented in this theory. In a class-based society, there are two main classes of people one is the upper class and the other is the lower class. People from lower class or poor class struggle the most in a class structured society. They face difficulties and hardships to fulfill their needs. They do not get adequate education, healthy and enough food for their survival and due to lack of sufficient money they have to lead a poor lifestyle. In many cases, they also have to sacrifice their ambitions for lack of enough money. Moreover, they have to struggle a lot to fit into the standard of the society. But in a classless society there is no word like rich or poor. In such society, all are equal. They all have equal rights.

Chapter 4

Analysis of *Black Boy*

The autobiographical novel, *Black Boy* is a memoir of racism and discrimination of post-colonial period. It describes the hardships and struggles of Richard Wright as a black boy to survive in the South. This novel is set just after the decolonization period in America. It documents the worst conditions of the black people in the United States during the twentieth century. In this novel, Richard Wright shows how the American society has been divided into 2 communities, white and black, based on their skin color and race. Furthermore, the concept of race shows how a certain community feels themselves superior to other such as whites show their superiority to blacks and dominating, oppressing, discriminating and even showing violence against them. He also portrays the concept of social determinism and the whites' hypocrisy to harass and humiliate the blacks. He further shows the class struggle of poor blacks in contemporary times. The reason for choosing this particular novel is to show and describe the brutal reality of racist American society even after decolonization.

4.1 Racism

The term racism refers to the process by which people receive unequal privileges and opportunities in society based on their race. In this novel, we can see how black people are being judged, discriminated and oppressed based on their race. As Richard Wright is a part of the black community, he also has to experience all these issues from his childhood. Many times, he is harassed, mistreated and deprived by the whites.

The novel begins with Richard Wright as a child who lives with his parents, brother and grandmother. At such an early age, he does not know about the relationship between white and black. He sees a lot of white men and women; he thinks they are humans just like him but he never feels they are different from him. Once he sees a white man beating a black boy, he thinks he must be his father and so he has the right to beat him. But his mother Ella corrects him by saying, “the “white” man was not the father of the “black” boy,” (27). The author is puzzled after realizing that he is not his father and when he asks more questions about it, his mother refuses to discuss it further. Here, though he does not understand this incident, it is a good example of racism. He can do nothing but helplessly witnesses white oppression over the black. This incident raises a question in his mind about the whites and their injustice. After that, he starts to fear white people and this is proven when Richard Wright runs away from the orphanage to see his mother but unfortunately gets lost. Then a white policeman comes to help him. At that time, he remembers the past memory of the white man beating a black boy and then he wonders if he is going to beat him. But luckily this white policeman is a good and friendly person and helps him in his danger. So, the presence of the white police reminds him of his past experience with other whites. Thus, Richard Wright's view of white people begins to take shape from his childhood.

When he is staying in his aunt Maggie's house, a white man kills his uncle Mr. Hoskins to take over on his profitable business. So, his uncle is killed by the white for his own gain, even he has already threat him many times but he does not want to give up. However, after his death, the whole family flees away to Granny's house to save their lives and forcefully migrates from their ancestral home. “There was no funeral. There was no music. There was no period of mourning. There were no flowers. There were only silence, quiet weeping, whispers, and fear. I did not know when or where Uncle Hoskins was buried.” (51). Then Richard Wright asks his mother why they do not

fight back but his mother's fear make him silent. They are helpless as the law and order of contemporary period is in favor of the whites and the black people have to face hardships to get justice. It also refers to racism that a black family has lost the only earning member of the family but they do not have any courage to fight for this. Because the blacks are afraid of whites and they tolerate injustice and suffering in silence instead of standing up for their rights. They do not even have the right to ask for justice just because their skin color is black which shows the extreme racism of that period. If they have not run away, they might have ended up in the same situation like Laura, an African American mother and L. D. Nelson, Laura's 12 years old son. They were beaten to death on May 25, 1911 near Okemah, Okfuskee County, Oklahoma. Both of them were charged to murder Deputy Sheriff George H. Loney and were sent to jail. Nelson was accused that he shot and killed him during a search for a stolen cow on Nelson's farm and Laura was accused because she grabbed the gun first. Her husband, Austin, also pleaded guilty to robbery and was sent to the relative safety of the state prison in McAlester. On May 24, Laura and Nelson were captured from their cell. After they were beaten to death, their dead bodies were hanged from a bridge over the Northern Canadian River. The Associated Press also reported that Laura was raped by them and another child of Laura survived the attack. It shows that accusations of crime could lead blacks to death even before their trials (Clark, 2022). That is why, the whole family of Richard Wright have to flee away to save their lives from the white man who killed Mr. Hoskins.

Later when he sees black soldiers who are training for WW1 and he comes to know that they are going to fight for their country. His first question to his mother is why not they fight against the white. His mother tells him they cannot do it as the whites have more guns. This conversation indicates to racism against the black and the irony as well that they are going to fight against the enemies for their country but at the same time they are considered the second-class citizen in their

own country just because of their skin color. It ironically describes the condition of black Americans and the racism in the society. Blacks like his mother understand the racial discrimination against but they do not fight against it and tolerate it silently because the whites have more power than them which is symbolizes by the quote, “But the white men have guns and the black men don’t,” (55). This suggests that blacks are helpless against the racial discrimination of society and as a child, Richard Wright is interested in this issue. As a child, he finds it very strange that blacks are not treated equally in their own country, but they are not fighting to save it from outside danger. They are preparing to fight against other hostile countries where they are not getting enough rights in America because they are black in color.

Facing all the hardships at such a young age, Richard Wright embodies the fear and hatred of white people. As a result, when he wants to sell his dog Betsy to a white woman, he could not do it. He wants to sell the dog to buy foods for him as he is starving but because the buyer is a white and he fears them. Richard Wright says, “I did not want to sell her to white people. Because they’re white,” (75) So, he does not want to give his pet to a white because of his past bitter experiences with them. As a result, the white woman refers him as “the craziest nigger boy”. It shows how he starts to fear the whites just like her mother, granny and other family members where all of them should be treated equally. Then after the end of WW1, he listens in his neighborhood that “how a white woman had slapped a black woman, how a white man had killed a black man. It filled me with awe, wonder, and fear, and I asked ceaseless questions.”. Here, it shows how Richard Wright starts to fear white people at such a young age and realizes that white people are dangerous and harmful for them. Richard Wright's fear and loathing is the consequences of racism and discrimination against the blacks.

Even in some areas where blacks are more numerous, they do not enjoy the same rights and respect as whites. When Richard Wright starts to go to school for study, he does not have enough food or money for himself so he starts to sell newspapers like one of his classmates. But he never reads it. One day, a black customer reveals that the newspaper he is selling, something unfair about blacks is written there, “The only dream of a nigger is to be president and to sleep with white women! Americans, do we want this in our fair land? Organize and save white womanhood!” (124). It shows how black men are portrayed as harmful and dangerous for white women by the racist white men. This is also a part of racism and by publishing all these through newspapers the whites are spreading hatred towards the blacks in the society. This is how blacks are misconstrued as inferior and uncivilized, a threat to white women. The Newspapers is filled with propaganda of the Ku Klux Klan, an evil white supremacist group that kills blacks and by selling this newspaper Richard Wright is helping whites to do more harm to black people. After seeing this, Richard Wright is shocked. Here, it shows how the whites treat black people and their biased and wrong perspectives towards the blacks. Realizing this, Richard Wright felt guilty that he had unwittingly helped the whites kill him and his own people. Then he says, “But these papers come from Chicago,” (124). So, he is also surprised that the newspapers are printed in Chicago where there are thousands of blacks. It also shows his naivety and unawareness of the cruel world. As a child, he thinks as there is a lot of blacks in Chicago so there might be better condition of the blacks. But he is shocked when he read one article which is against the blacks. “I took the paper from him and sat on the edge of the steps; in the paling light I turned the pages and read articles so brutally anti-Negro that goose pimples broke out over my skin.” (125). This shows the racist behavior of the whites towards blacks. After that he stops selling newspapers.

He not only faces racism for being around of the whites but also experiences it while working as servant in white families where he is ridiculed for his aim in life. He is asked if he will steal anything and is given inedible food as a reward which represent the racist and stereotypic thoughts of white people about the blacks. However, in his first job interview, a tall, dour white woman offers him “Washing dishes. Chopping wood. Scrubbing floors. Cleaning the yard.” (136). He will get breakfast, dinner and two dollars a week. She also asks him whether he has stealing habit and she also says, “Now, look, we don’t want a sassy nigger around here,” (136). It also shows the racist, narrow and stereotypical mind and view of the white women towards the blacks and the treatment of servant. According to the whites, black people want to sleep with white women or they are thieves and steal money, precious things. The whites are stick with their baseless, wrong and stereotypical ideas about the black people. Though Richard wright is happy to get a job but he is also scared that “What would happen now that I would be among white people for hours at a stretch? Would they hit me? Curse me?” (137). It shows Richard Wright also fears of the whites because of his earlier experiences with them. He is also tensed about how they will treat him and behave with him. Because he now knows that the racist whites are powerful in American society and they do not need for an excuse to harass or beat up the blacks. However, he decides that if anything happens, he will quit this job immediately. All of these are the consequences of the racist behavior and deeds of the whites towards him as well as to other blacks. After experiencing so much at an early age, Richard Wright is very scared to work under the whites.

However, the next morning Richard wright starts to work under the white woman such as cutting wood for the cook stove, loading coal scuttles of for the grates, washing the front porch and dishes, and cleaning the back porch and kitchen. Then she gives him “a plate of thick, black molasses and a hunk of white bread on the table.” for his breakfast (137). They eat “They had had

eggs, bacon, coffee” for breakfast (137). On the other hand, the breakfast that the white woman gives to Richard Wright is inedible. He says, “I picked up the bread and tried to break it; it was stale and hard. Well, I would drink the molasses. I lifted the plate and brought it to my lips and saw floating on the surface of the black liquid green and white bits of mold.” (137). So, the bread is too stale and hard to eat. On the surface of the molasses, there are green and white bits of mold. It shows how badly the white people treat their black servants. The white people eat good and healthy food for themselves but do not want to give the blacks clean and eatable food to eat even after they do their job properly. Moreover, she even hopes that Richard Wright will like the breakfast and will be grateful to her for giving the food. How cruel are the whites to blacks! However, when she knows that Richard Wright is in seventh grade, she asks him why he is still going to school. For her, this much education is enough for a Negro boy, there is no need for a Negro boy to be highly educated and also indicates her racist thoughts. Moreover, she rudely mocks him for his ambition to become a writer in future. She says, “A what? A writer, For what? You’ll never be a writer; Who on earth put such ideas into your nigger head?” (138). She ridicules him for having an ambition in life as they think the blacks are not allowed to have any. This shows that whites still think blacks are inferior and should not get good education or job for a better life. It hurts Richard Wright’s ego very badly and he quits the job immediately. But he still thinks that there must be some exceptional white people who are nice to blacks and are not racist. Even, after experiencing so much racism, Richard Wright still has some hope that there must be some good white people among these racists. It shows his naivety and unawareness of bitter reality of the racist world.

Then, his next job under another white woman is still unpleasant for him. She needs “a boy who could milk a cow, feed chickens, gather vegetables, help serve breakfast and dinner” (138).

Richard Wright does not know how to milk a cow. After hearing this, she says surprisingly, “You mean to stand there, nigger, and tell me that you live in Jackson and don’t know how to milk a cow?” (138). So, these two jobs make him realize “a Negro’s reality—of the white world”. He finally realizes the condition of blacks in the white society and he loses his hope to meet a good white person without racist thinking. Because “One woman had assumed that I would tell her if I stole, and now this woman was amazed that I could not milk a cow, I, a nigger who dared live in Jackson...They were all turning out to be alike, differing only in detail.” (138). It shows the stereotypical thinking and assumptions of the white people. They assume that all the blacks are thieves and should know how to do servant jobs. He finds no exception among them. So, Richard Wright finally realizes that all the whites are the same, all of them treat black in the same way and he calls it “a Negro’s reality—of the white world.”. Though he starts the job, the family members are very rude and ungrateful to each other as well as to him. They use slang words and curse each other as well as Richard Wright. They refer him as “nigger bastard”. The bad behavior and manner of the family hurts him a lot of and he has to fight with all these. Richard Wright says, “I was always to be conscious of it, brood over it, carry it in my heart, live with it, sleep with it, fight with it.” (139). It shows how the bad behavior and poor treatment of the whites harm the blacks and they have to deal with these in silence just like Richard Wright. Here, he is representing the blacks who have to go through all these without any reason. But he still continues to work as he is able to get enough food for himself.

However, growing up in such a toxic environment, Richard Wright faces more racism in his life. He has to face mocks for his skin color by his white boss while his pet dog bites him. Before starting of his eighth-grade class, he works as a water boy and brick picker at a local brickyard during the summer. The owner of the brickyard is a tall white man. He owns a dog which is very

dangerous as it has already wounded a lot of black workers. One afternoon, it bites Richard Wright and the teeth marks appear deep and red on his leg. He fears infection as several other workers have fallen ill from the dog's bites. Later when he meets his boss and complains him about it. He does not take it seriously and even claims, "A dog bite can't hurt a nigger... But I never saw a dog yet that could really hurt a nigger." (150). This shows the extreme racist approach of the white man as he mocks him for the color of his skin instead of sympathizing him when his dog bites this man. The sorrows and sufferings of black people does not matter to the white boss as well as to other whites. Racism is so ingrained in their minds that they forget to show even minimal humanity to the blacks. Although it takes time but after a few days the wound heals on its own. Even after the brickyard is closed, Richard Wright tries to do other jobs to survive.

Then he not only faces barriers from the whites to share his opinion but also from the blacks. As the blacks also fear of the white dominance. As a result, they try to prevent and warn him from sharing his views and opinions in front of white people. At the end of Richard Wright's school term, he is chosen as the valedictorian of his class. He wants to give his speech which is written by him but the principal does not allow him. He writes a speech and asks Richard Wright to deliver it on the graduation night. The principal is not allowing him to deliver Richard's speech because the white people will be present on that night and he does not want to disappoint them or make them angry. He says, "You can't afford to just say anything before those white people that night." (161). This shows that even though the principal is part of the black community, he still cares more for the whites. It also shows his fear of whites and their power. However, Richard's family, friends all tell him to stay out of trouble and advise him to give the principal's speech that night. But he refuses and sticks to his own decision. On graduation night, Richard Wright gives his own speech because he wants to express his own thoughts that are not included in the principal's speech. Here,

though he is aware of the situation of the racist society, still he dares to share his honest opinion and perspective to the world without any fear and confusion. It shows his heroism and bravery which he further proves through his protest writings and literary works.

After finishing his education, Richard Wright is being introduced to more harsh reality of the world as he starts his working career. He takes a job as a porter in a clothing store where cheap goods are selling to Negroes on credit. Here, he witnesses extreme racism to the black customers. The shop is always crowded with black men and women. Even when it comes to buy clothes, black people still have to face racism and discrimination. Richard Wright says, “they paid whatever price the white man asked. The boss, his son, and the clerk treated the Negroes with open contempt, pushing, kicking, or slapping them.” (165). It shows the suffering of black people and the cruel treatment of white shopkeepers towards their black customers. Black people are so discriminated that even if they go to buy clothes, they have to endure racism, discrimination, insult just because they are born black. Richard Wright cannot tolerate these even though he witnesses these very often. Here, the discrimination, oppression and violence of the shop owner is so extreme that he can not accept it but he is helpless as he can not do anything to stop it.

One morning, while he is working in the store, Richard Wright witnesses a cruel incident. The shopkeepers are kicking and beating a black woman who is unable to pay installments of credit to buy her clothes. Many white people pass by the store without paying any attention to it. Even a white policeman watches it from a corner, but does not budge from his position. After a moment, when the woman has “stumbled out, bleeding, crying, holding her stomach, her clothing torn. When she reached the sidewalk, the policeman met her, grabbed her, accused her of being drunk, called a patrol wagon and carted her away.” (165). Whites, including shopkeepers, commoners, and police, show the same racist behavior toward the blacks. They do not care how much they are

hurting the black woman and do not bother themselves to show her even the slightest kindness. Even later, the white policeman falsely accuses her of being drunk to aggravate her condition and makes her suffer even more. All of these are the effects of racism and discrimination against the poor black people. In this moment, Richard Wright is so helpless that all of this happens in front of him but he cannot do anything to save her. It shows the helplessness and powerlessness of the black in the racist white society. After that Richard Wrights sees “The floor was bloody, strewn with wisps of hair and clothing.” (165). This indicates how much they torture the black woman, beat her and badly injure her and she does not get her justice as the policeman is also a white. By describing this cruel and extreme torture and violence, Richard Wright is actually showing the toxicity and brutality of racism in American society. However, then the boss says, “Boy, that’s what we do to niggers when they don’t pay their bills,” (165). It indicates their racist thoughts. The boss and his son then indirectly threaten him to keep his mouth shut, they will be kind to him or else he will face the same torture as the black woman. So, a black person sees violence and torture by whites against other black but he cannot even protest rather he is threated to be silent. However, he decided to keep quiet so that he would not get out of his job. It shows the hypocrisy of the whites.

The more Richard Wright is going forward in his life; he is experiencing more racism at higher level. Another day, while he is returning from the suburbs, his bicycle tire is punctured. At that time, a car is stopped and it is full of white men. A white man asks Richard Wright what happen. Then he shares his problem with them and they agree to take him to the town. Then a white man offers him a drink but he replies by saying, “Oh, no!”. It makes them angry as he does not address them by “Sir”. As a result, the white man smashes a whiskey bottle on Richard Wright’s face and he immediately falls from the speeding car into the dust of the road. Then the white man asks,

“Nigger, ain’t you learned no better sense’n that yet?... Ain’t you learned to say sir to a white man yet?” (166). It shows the racist thinking of whites and their violence and aggressive behavior towards blacks. The white man throws a whiskey bottle at Richard Wright for a stupid mistake. But just as he is a black man, his silly mistakes are a great offense to the white people. Due to this sudden attack, Richard Wright's elbows and legs start bleeding and the white man kicks his bicycle on the road. The white man also says, “Aw, leave the bastard alone. He’s got enough,” (166). They also hurt him by saying “you black sonofabitch!” and also threatens him by saying, “Nigger, you sure ought to be glad it was us you talked to that way. You’re a lucky bastard, ’cause if you’d said that to some other white man, you might’ve been a dead nigger now.” (166). Racist whites are so hypocritical that they do not bother when they hurt blacks for little things or for their entertainment. This indicates how a white's behavior and manner can suddenly change towards a black due to a silly mistake or for no reason at all. Racism and discrimination have reached to the point where the whites could kill a black over a silly issue, but blacks cannot do or say anything against it.

A few days later, when Richard Wright goes to a white neighborhood to make some deliveries, some policemen suspect him and tell him, “Get down, nigger, and put up your hands!” (167). Then aggressively search him, his pockets and packages at gunpoint. After finding nothing incriminating, they tell him, “Boy, tell your boss not to send you out in white neighborhoods at this time of night.” (167). White policemen suspect him as he is a black man and think he may have come to commit crimes or he is harmful, dangerous to the white neighborhood. How racist are white people to see a black person as a criminal in a white neighborhood at night! So, in every way, whites show their hypocrisy to prove that blacks are not part of this racist American white society.

However, the brutal treatment to the blacks in the shop is increasing day by day and it becomes too much for Richard Wright to bear. He says, "Each day in the store I watched the brutality with growing hate, yet trying to keep my feelings from registering in my face." (167). Yet for this work he tries to remain normal. But one day, the boss and his son fire him because of his silent disapproval of the way the store is run and how black people are treated. So, they realize that Richard Wright is not happy with their behavior and treatment of blacks and that is why they fire him. In apartheid society, black people like Richard Wright can witness racism, discrimination, oppression but they cannot express their feelings and sorrows even in silence. If the whites find out it, they will punish him for his humanity.

After being jobless, Richard Wright goes to his old classmate Griggs in search of a job. Then he suggests Richard Wright to learn how to behave in front of whites. He says, "Then, for God's sake, learn how to live in the South!" (168). He speaks of Richard's difficulty in hiding his sorrow and judgment in the presence of white men. He also says, "Dick, look, you're black, black, black, see? Can't you understand that?" (168). Richard Wright has to be more normal so that the white people cannot understand what is going on in his mind. Because in order to survive as a black man in white society, he has to be humble to them as the whites expect him to be. Here, his friend advises him how to survive in the cruel and harsh white world. Griggs also informs him that he is marked as a troublemaker to many whites. So, blacks fear of the whites so much that they advise other blacks to behave better in front of them. It shows their helplessness and the irony of being American citizens. Because they are not considered. He later helps Richard Wright to get a job with Mr. Crane, a northerner who is interested in training a black boy in the optical trade. He starts working there. But his white colleagues, Mr. Pease and Mr. Reynolds, refuse to teach him how to work the machines. Rather they also show their true color of being white. One day, Pease says to

him, “This is a white man’s work around here,” (172). They hurt Richard by asking crude questions about his anatomy and constantly, try to intimidate him. One day, Mr. Reynolds says, “I heard you call ’im Pease. And if you say you didn’t, you’re calling me a liar, see?” (173). Both Mr. Pease and Mr. Reynolds are angry about it and it is a plan of them to kick him out of his job. Richard also realizes that he has fallen into a trap. If he admits it, he will be punished for dishonoring Mr. Pease. Or if he denies, he will be punished for proving Mr. Reynolds a liar. So, he quits his job as they are planning to drive him out. It shows the white owners are not only the trouble makers for Richard wright but also the white coworkers of him. They have trapped him so that he himself quits the job and their plan become successful.

Day by day Richard Wright witnesses various forms of racism, discrimination and hypocrisy towards the blacks by the whites which he portrays through his writings. He also shows how he has to fight with himself to survive in the racist world. It also hurts him when the white people look at him and say, “Look, didn’t I tell you niggers were that way?” (234). As a result, the black man has to fight regularly to “control of his unruly emotions, emotions which he had not wished to have, but could not help having.” (234). Here, Richard Wright is expressing his sadness and frustration over experiencing such things throughout his life which also makes him to hate himself without any reason. Through his writings, Richard Wright brings out the thoughts and feelings of black people about their sorrows and sufferings.

However, signs of racism also can be seen at a medical research institute where Richard Wright gets his new job. On his first day of work, he sees “The sharp line of racial division drawn by the hospital authorities”. He sees

“A line of white girls marched past, clad in starched uniforms that gleamed white;

their faces were alert, their steps quick, their bodies lean and shapely, their shoulders erect, their faces lit with the light of purpose. And after them came a line of black girls, old, fat, dressed in ragged gingham, walking loosely, carrying tin cans of soap powder, rags, mops, brooms..." (263).

These two separate lines of white and black women refer to racial discrimination. The hospital authorities show racism at a higher level by showing that white women are slim, beautiful and on the other hand, black women are old, fat. Though he does not like it, he cannot say anything against it as he is black. Later, one summer morning, Richard's boss sends a Jewish boy to keep eye on him while he is cleaning, which makes him feel more like a slave than before. It also proves that the whites still treat the blacks as inferiors like they did in the earlier times. This incident again reminds him the racism in the white society.

Richard Wright still has to face racism even after becoming a member of a political party. When he goes to New York to attend a conference with other white comrades, he cannot find a house where he can stay not even any hotel where the blacks are allowed to stay. During the trip he does not feel like a Negro among the white members but now the white comrades are talking about his skin color which severely bothers him. There are many whites-only hotels in the city. It also shows racism that there is not even a hotel for a black man. This makes him even more upset and frustrated.

The autobiographical novel *Black Boy* supports post-colonial theory. During the colonial period, the British used to make their colonies and ruled over the native people. Since America was a colony of Britain, black Americans of that time were subjected to racism by the colonial

people and they also enslaved them. This racism and discrimination did not end with decolonization. White Americans continue to treat Black Americans the same way the colonizers used to do in the past. Even after colonization period, during the 20th century, blacks have to face racism, discrimination, oppression by the white community in America. In this novel, Richard Wright shows the suffering of black Americans by their own people in their own country. Like the black boy's experiences of racism and whites' oppression since his childhood even after grown up in the racist white American society. Then how the white society is determining the rights of the blacks. Then when the blacks go to buy goods from white's store, they have to endure insult, discrimination, oppression even sometimes violence against them. Then by enacting Jim Crow Laws, the whites are controlling the blacks in every possible way. So, in this novel, Richard Wright shows how the whites are still controlling the black like the colonizers used to control the local people.

4.2 Social determinism and whites' hypocrisy

The term social determinism means when society determines or decides the behavior of individuals. So, the society will decide how someone should behave, how many privileges he should get, how he should be treated, etc. This is shown many times in this autobiographical novel *Black Boy*. Whites themselves decide how to treat blacks, what rights they should have, and how they should be treated in the society. As a result, they decided to separate blacks from them in every sector and try to harass them in every possible way. It shows the hypocrisy of white people.

In this novel, after returning from the orphanage, Richard Wright visits his aunt Maggie's house with his mother Ella during his childhood. When they arrive at a railway station to go to Elaine,

Arkansas, he sees there are two separate sections for white and black travelers. Even when they enter a train to go to their destination, he sees separate sections for whites and blacks to sit in the train. He says, "I noticed that there were two lines of people at the ticket window, a "white" line and a "black" line...When I boarded the train, I was aware that we Negroes were in one part of the train and that the whites were in another." (45). It represents the racial differences between white and black community. It also refers to the concept of social determinism. The white people themselves decide the blacks should have their separate section in every sector of daily life and establish it as a law named as Jim Crow Law. Jim Crow laws were racial segregationist laws in the United States from 1876 to 1964. These laws were established in various states to segregate and discriminate against African Americans and the term "Jim Crow laws" was considered a racist term for a black person. All public buildings were segregated for blacks and whites. This segregation was also effective in armed forces, schools, restaurants, buses, trains and couches. It is a good example of racism. That is why, in the railway station, there are two separate sections for white and black people as well as in the train. The blacks are not allowed to enter into the white' section. These laws and social norms were passed to push the African Americans down and to keep the whites' position above the blacks in the American society. It shows the whites' hypocrisy in this novel. As a child, Richard Wright is curious to see the section of white people. He says, "Naïvely I wanted to go and see how the whites looked while sitting in their part of the train. "Can I go and peep at the white folks?" (45). It shows his naivety and ignorance of racial differences between the black and then white. But every time he says something about white and black, his mother Ella feels irritated. All of these make him curious about this issue and he wants to know why white and black people cannot sit together or cannot come in touch with each other. All of these refer to the sense of racial discrimination which

Richard Wright experiences in his childhood though he could not realize it properly. It also shows how the white people always try to show them superior and insult the blacks in every possible way. Richard Wright says about this issue, “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.” (38). Here he talks about black people in America that they live in the western society but they are never really allowed to be a part of it as the society has already decided it. In the earlier time, the whites used to treat blacks as slaves. During that period, they used to consider them superior, civilized and cultured. On the other hand, they considered the blacks as uncultured, wild, uncivilized and inferior to them. According to them, the blacks were sub-humans and they made them civilized and cultured people. So, even after the end of the colonization period, these ideas and thoughts are so ingrained in their minds that even after so long a time they can think of nothing but all these wrong, racist and stereotypical things about the black people and they make laws and rules based on such thoughts, views and perspectives. Richard Wright presents all these through this autobiographical novel.

Then the men of racist white society themselves declare the black men are dangerous and harmful to the white women. According to them, the blacks are concerned to sleep with the white women. Furthermore, the blacks who are suspected of having affairs or sleeping with white women are brutally punished, beaten, and sometimes even killed by the white men in the contemporary period. Because it is not acceptable and consider a punishable crime according to the racist white men. This is how black masculinity is suppressed from having relationships with white women. It shows the idea of social determinism and the hypocrisy of the whites. In the novel, the murder of Bob, the brother of Richard Wright's classmate Nod is a good example of it as he is killed on suspicion of sleeping with a white prostitute. However, one day while he is going towards the

center of the town, he meets Ned Greenley, one of his classmates. Here, he comes to know that Ned's brother Bob was shot by the whites because they suspected he was hooking up with a white prostitute at a local hotel where he used to work. It shows the cruel reality of the racist society. According to the whites, the black man dreams of sleeping with the white woman and Bud committed such a punishable crime which cannot be forgiven and had to atone for his sin with his life. Richard Wright is already aware of this but he never takes it seriously. But after hearing the death news of Bob, he is more afraid of the white death than before. He says, "Inside of me my world crashed and my body felt heavy." (158). This murder incident opens his consciousness and helps to realize the reality of white oppression of black people. This is how, the white men threaten the blacks and try to suppress their manhood in the racist society and also presents them as terror and harm to the white women. Despite these threats and misconceptions, if a black man dares to have a relationship with any white woman, he will be beaten, castrated and even shot as if he commits a sin. So, according to the racist white society, the black men are not allowed to have relationships with white women because they are black. It also shows that whites do not spare them in any sector, they make every law and regulation to harass and punish blacks which Richard Wright indirectly criticizes through his writings.

After the end of summer, he finally starts working at the same hotel where Nod's brother Bob worked before his murder. Here, Richard sweeps down a long white tiled hallway with a group of young black men. Many Negro girls also work there as maids. One day, a white security guard misbehaves with a Negro maid and slaps her on the buttocks. This misconduct is unacceptable to Richard Wright. His unpleasant reaction to the incident enrages the white security guard and he pulls out his gun to threaten him. He says, "Nigger, you look like you don't like what I did," (180). So, if a white man misbehaves with a black woman, the black man still cannot say anything for

her. All of these represents the social determinism that the whites' society themselves decide if a black man sleeps with a white woman or even a white prostitute with her consent, it will be considered a punishable offense. They will kill the person if they find evidence like Bob. But when a white man touches a black woman's private part without her permission, it is his right and no black can raise a voice against this. The white people in society decide what is right or wrong based on their biased opinions. It shows the hypocrisy of the whites and how they are using the idea of social determinism to fulfil their evil will.

Like other sectors, the blacks do not have the right to get a good education or gain more knowledge by reading books. The whites themselves decide the blacks do not need higher education or to get good jobs or read books in the library. It represents the concept of social determinism and whites' hypocrisy in this novel. That is why, the black people are not even allowed to enter into any library in the South. This is also a part of racial discrimination and Jim Crow Law in America. After reading an article about H. L. Mencken, Richard Wright wants to know more about him. Although there is a huge library near the riverfront, he cannot go there. Richard has already gone to the library to get books for working whites but he cannot go there to read books as the black people are not allowed to read or borrow books from public libraries. He then asks a white Irish Catholic colleague, Falk, for help and says, "I want to read. I can't get books from the library. I wonder if you'd let me use your card?" (218). Although Falk is white, he is not like other anti-Negroes. Because of this, Richard Wright has the courage to ask him, although he hesitates at first. But eventually he agrees to help him to get a book by HL Mencken. Moreover, he praises Richard Wright by saying "It's good of you to want to read," (218) and also advises him to be very careful so that no one suspects him. Then Richard says, "I'll write the same kind of notes to the library that you wrote when you sent me for books, I'll sign your name." (219). So, he

has to write a note on behalf of the white man and also uses his name otherwise he would not be allowed to get any books. Rather, it would be considered a crime for a black man who wants to read books. When he goes to library to get the book, the white librarian suspects him at first. She says, “You’re not using these books, are you?” (219). She wants to make sure that he does not read the books that he takes for the whites. Here, it shows the social determinism of the whites. The racist white people themselves decide that the blacks should not have the right to read books because their skin color is black. This white librarian represents the whole racist white society. However, she finally believes him and gives two books by H. L. Mencken. Then Richard Wright becomes happy that “the race question had gone out of her mind.” (219). It sounds so depressing and sad that the society has already decided that if someone whose skin color is black, does not have the right to read books and to gain more knowledge. After that he continues to go to library more often to get new books. But he always has to hide his book from his other colleagues.

In this autobiographical novel, Richard Wright expresses his feelings as a black man that “I did not feel that I was a threat to anybody” (233). It shows that although black people are innocent and normal human beings just like the whites. But whites still consider them a threat to them, discriminate and mistreat them. He also says. “Color hate defined the place of black life as below that of white life;” (233). It is a good example of social determinism. Based on the skin color of the blacks, the white American society decide whatever they should get and how they should be treated in the society. In this case, the whites use their hypocrisy and the blacks have to endure discrimination, humiliation and mistreatment by them. But the whites do not understand that they are also humans like them. He also shares that whites’ hatred towards black has become an organic part of white culture. Their constant hatred without any reason also makes a black man to hate himself. Moreover, he says, “I dreamed of going into business and making money; I dreamed of

working for a firm that would allow me to advance until I reached an important position; I even dreamed of organizing secret groups of blacks to fight all whites...” (234). Like the whites, Richard Wright also has dreams and ambitions to succeed in his life. But he knows that it is not possible for him to fulfil his dreams as the whites will never allow him to do these. Because he is black and the society has decided that a black man has no right to dream of being successful. It increases self-hate in himself that why he allowed his mind to have such dreams and ambitions. Richard Wright expresses the frustration of the blacks through himself. Through these events it is proved that racist whites cannot tolerate blacks and they can use any form of hypocrisy to hurt them. In this case, the hypocrite whites use the concept of social determinism to further disadvantage the blacks in racist American society.

4.3 Class discrimination

Class discrimination refers to judge people based on their social status, wealth and education. It is one of the main causes of poverty. In a class-based society, low-wage earners suffer the most from poverty. In poor families, there is not enough resources and sometimes they have to struggle a lot to fulfil their basic needs like enough food, education or healthy living condition. Thus, class discrimination creates frustration and anxiety among poor people. In the autobiographical novel, Richard Wright shows how poor black people are suffering in white American society due to the lack of adequate facilities, good education or good jobs.

In *Black Boy*, Richard Wright’s father leaves his wife and children for another woman. After his father’s leaving, he experiences a bitter relationship between his father and hunger. As his

father is the earning member of the family, after losing him, his mother Ella has to go through a lot of financial crises. As a result, this family has to struggle a lot to satisfy their hunger. During this time, Richard asks his mother for food but she is so helpless that she cannot provide food for them to survive. It shows how a poor family struggles to fulfil their basic needs in a class structured society. Hence, Richard Wright named the autobiographical novel *American Hunger* and shows the class discrimination and curse of poverty in the contemporary American society. Richard's father leaving them leads this family to extreme poverty which continues for a long time. However, his mother Ella has to start working as a cook in a white household to support the family. Then hunger Richard looks at the food of the white family. Though Ella starts earning, still this income is not enough for the family. Moreover, she does not receive any financial support from her ex-husband Nathan. As a result, she faces such hard times that she has to put her two sons in an orphanage. It shows how class discrimination and poverty forces a mother to keep her children away from her in order to survive. In this novel, Richard Wright shows how poverty turns a happy family apart just to survive in a cruel world.

However, his mother Ella and his aunt Maggie begin earning together to run the family. At this time, there is no shortage of money in the family. But after her aunt moves in with Professor Mathews, their family becomes poor again. His mother's earning is not enough to run the family properly. One day, he feels so hunger but does not have any money. At that time, he decides to sell his pet dog Bessy to buy some food for him. It shows the class struggle of poor people in such a class structured society. So, his family becomes so poor that he needs to sell his pet to satisfy his hunger and it shows the curse of poverty. It also portrays the struggle of the author Richard Wright as a poor black boy.

After some days, Richard's mother falls ill and suffers a paralytic stroke and is unable to work. As a result, the condition of the family becomes more miserable. Richard has to do various jobs to earn enough money to cover the family expenses. It is a tough time for Richard to manage everything. It shows how Richard Wright has to struggle for class discrimination and poverty. When Richard Wright starts to go to school for study, he does not have enough food or money for himself so he starts to sell newspapers like one of his classmates. As a result, he can earn some money for himself. It shows the poor condition of the black boy that to have food he has to start doing part time job at such an early age. Though he sells newspapers every day, he never read it. One day, a black customer reveals that the newspaper he is selling, something unfair about blacks is written in the newspaper. So, after understanding this, he stops selling newspaper. As a result, without money and job, he becomes poor again and struggles to satisfy his hunger. In this novel, Richard Wright shows how a poor black boy has to suffer for hunger and lack of money which indicates the class struggle and discrimination in the contemporary American society.

However, the black boy keeps changing his jobs because of racism and discrimination against him. In some cases, he is forced to quit his jobs by the hypocrite whites. After he grows up, he faces a tough situation. He loses his job when his mother, aunt and brother become ill. At such worse situation, he has to join an insurance agency to bear the expenses though he does not want to do this job. So, it shows that in a class structured society, it does not matter what job someone wants to do or not, the only thing matter is to earn money to survive in the cruel world. Here, he describes the struggle of poor people and class discrimination. Because, many of the workers have sex with the housewives as a way to pay their debts if they do not have any cash. Even Richard Wrights also starts relation with one of his clients, a single mother. So, with this description he

actually portrays the plight of poor people and their struggle to live with poverty in the contemporary times.

The autobiographical novel *Black Boy* supports Marxist theory. This theory is about the struggles of poor people in class structured society. In this novel, Richard Wright shows it through different characters. He shows how his mother has to struggle a lot to bear her family expenses. Then he also shows his difficulties to earn enough money to run his family. To earn enough money, he has to do any kind of job even though he does not want to do. Because of racism, he has to quit a lot of jobs. He also portrays the bad condition of the housewives who have to sleep with the insurance workers to pay off their debts. It shows how the insurance companies are exploiting their customers. In this novel, Richard Wright shows how the poor people have to struggle in the society after the colonization period.

Chapter 5

Analysis of *Native Son*

The novel *Native Son* is a social protest novel which belongs to African American literature. It is about Bigger Thomas, the main protagonist who is a 20-year-old poor, uneducated black American. This novel is set in Chicago in the 1930s. It is not about his life but it mainly focuses on how the whites treat the blacks, their condition and sufferings, how they survive in racism, discrimination and oppression in the American society. They are treated as others by the racist whites. The concept of social determinism and the whites' hypocrisy are also shown throughout this novel. The class struggle of poor people like Bigger Thomas and others is also portrayed. Richard Wright portrays the system of racism in the society and its effect on black people through the character of Bigger Thomas. Richard Wright actually protests against the racist system by showing the harsh reality of the society which makes this novel a classic work.

5. 1 Racism

In this novel, Richard Wright shows the poor condition of the blacks due to racism and discrimination by whites. The protagonist Bigger Thomas grows up in a harsh and racist environment and his family also suffer a lot for racism and white discrimination. He is frustrated with the treatment of the racist whites towards the blacks. However, Bigger and his friends rob black businessmen to earn money but they never dare to rob any white man. It shows the fear of the blacks towards the whites. However, at one point, he plans to rob a white man's store with his friends. But they have to drop this idea because they feel scared of the whites. It shows "the white world's rule over them" (23). Because of white dominance over them and their thoughts of white

supremacy, they fear robbing a white man and eventually drop the idea. As a black young man, Bigger is disgusted and frustrated with the racism, discrimination and oppression of whites. As he is suffering from all this since his childhood but he cannot change it or get a better life.

As a young man in his 20s, Bigger is frustrated with the way black people are treated and the discrimination they face in American society. He wants to become a pilot and has an ambition to improve his life. But he does not get any chance to fulfill his dream because the whites do not let the blacks to have any high-class jobs and work with them. It shows the racism against the black. Rather he is offered to a driver of a white man Mr. Dalton. As he knows that he will never get a chance to fulfill his will, he accepts his fate as a driver of a white man. It shows how the blacks are being forced to do low waged jobs because they are black in color. However, Mr. Dalton has a daughter named Mary Dalton and at one point Thomas becomes out of control and accidentally kills her. When he realizes he has committed a crime, he tries to hide the body in the furnace. Later his girlfriend Bessie finds out about the truth. Then she tells him that white society will never understand this and that they will accuse him for intentional rape and murder of Mary. It shows the racism of racist white society. When a black man accidentally kills a white, he does not get justice but is blamed for something he did not do. After revealing the body from the furnace, Bigger understands that they will soon find out about his crime. So he runs away from the Dalton house and goes to Bessie. He and Bessie then flee to an empty building to hide. He later loses control of his mind, then rapes and kills Bessie and becomes a criminal. The great conflict of this novel is that the fear, hatred, despair and anger for the whites have destroyed Bigger Thomas, destroying his life and personality so severely that he loses his control over himself, becomes aggressive and expresses his emotions through violence.

As Max is Bigger's lawyer, Bigger Thomas shares everything about his measured life and upbringing, apartheid environment. Hearing about Bigger Thomas's racist upbringing, Max realizes that this racist environment forces him to commit certain acts of violence. Because of this, he tries to convince the judge that he has suffered a lot in his life which led him to commit such violent and aggressive crimes. Also, the fact that Bigger did not kill Mary on purpose, it was an accident. So, he should get a chance to correct his wrongs and Max requests the judge to give him lifelong imprisonment instead of death sentence. But the judge shows no sympathy for him and sentences him to death. Since the judge here is on the side of the whites, he gives Bigger the biggest punishment without even trying to understand Bigger's problem without showing him the slightest mercy. So, these are all part of the hypocrisy of whites against blacks and the fate of Bigger Thomas is a good example of that. He is forcefully accused of raping and murdering Mary and later sentences to death. The novel *Native Son* also presents the racist attitudes, behavior and oppression of whites towards blacks during the 1930s period.

The novel *Native Son* supports post-colonial theory. During the colonial period, the colonizers used to control and dominate over the colonized people. In this novel, the whites are controlling the blacks. Through the novel, Richard Wright shows how the lives of black people are influenced by the effects of colonialism. Being a black youth, Bigger Thomas faces racism from an early age. His family is poor and their living conditions are very bad. He does not get a chance to apply for a good job. Because blacks are not allowed to work at the same level as whites and were denied their rights. So, what the blacks should get, how they should be treated are determined by whites, blacks cannot even choose for themselves. It indicates the dominance and control of whites over the blacks. The worst thing is that black people actually accept all of this. Furthermore, in the colonial period, the colonizers used to control minds of the colonized and

convinced them that they are inferior to the colonizers. Thus, the natives also started to believe this wrong concept. It is also can be found out in this novel. When any black person commits any crime, the whites portray him the way they want to show. Like Bigger Thomas is accused of the rapist if Mary but he did not rape her or intentionally kill her. Bigger Thomas and his friends fear of robbing the whites prove it. Here, it shows that even in the 20th century, the idea of colonialism is still in people's minds.

5.2 Social determinism & white hypocrisy

In the protest novel *Native Son*, Richard Wright shows social determination and the whites' hypocrisy against black people in the 1930s. The racist white community decides how the black people should behave, how they will be treated, how much rights and privileges they will get in the American society. They discriminate against blacks just because of their skin color, they give them less advantage because they consider the blacks less civilized and inferior. They offer them poor wage jobs because they think black people should not get jobs at the same level. They give them jobs like drivers, dishwashers and want to be their slaves like earlier times. They also offer shelter to the poor at high cost. As a result, blacks have to suffer a lot due to poverty. All these are presented in the novel *Native Son*.

One day, Bigger Thomas, the protagonist tells his friend Gus that he wants to be a pilot. He shows Gus a moving plane in the sky and expresses his wish by saying, "I could fly one of them things if I had a chance," (25). Although Bigger wants to become a pilot, he knows it is not possible for a black man like Bigger. Because blacks are not allowed to hold high class jobs like whites. It is decided by the racist white society which indicates to the concept of social determinism. The

white people do not want the blacks to work with them as their co-workers. The blacks are aware of it. That is why, Gus says, “If you wasn’t black and if you had some money and if they’d let you go to that aviation school, you could fly a plane,” (25). It shows that white society do not allow blacks to attend aviation school or get good jobs like them. So, it does not matter if a black is talented, he/she still have to do the lower-class jobs as the racist white society has already decided it. Even if blacks are recruited into the military, they are assigned to menial jobs such as dish washing or digging ditches. Therefore, they want black to always be in the lower position. That is why, the black people have to live in poverty. That is why, though Bigger wants to be a pilot, he starts the job as a chauffeur of a tall white man named Mr. Dalton. Because he knows that the whites will never allow him to fulfil his dream so he leaves it and accepts the bitter reality. It shows the hypocritical thinking of the whites.

Furthermore, Mr. Dalton is a good example of social determinism and the whites’ hypocrisy in the racist South of Chicago. He tries to be good and kind to the blacks but his true colors are revealed when lawyer Max questions him during trial. He gets extra money as rent from black people for small apartments. He then donates millions of dollars to black schools and offers jobs to poor, timid black boys like Big Thomas. By doing all this, he pretends to be a kind person that he cares a lot for the blacks and that the blacks should be grateful to him. Thus, black people are brainwashed by whites that they are nice and kind, the white people care a lot for their betterment, and so the blacks should respect and obey them. It represents the whites’ hypocrisy through the character Mr. Dalton. Then the Blacks are not even allowed to rent apartments outside of the South Side area in the white community. It is already decided by the racist white society. As a result, even though the population of this area increases, they cannot live in any other areas besides whites. It presents racism and discrimination towards the blacks that the racist white people do not

consider them as humans so they do not allow them to live or work with them at the same level. For this reason, Mr. Dalton refuses to rent houses to the blacks in other parts of the city of Chicago. When Max asks him what the reason is, he replies, “Well, it’s an old custom” (258). So, the white society has already decided to treat blacks in a racist and oppressive manner which Mr. Dalton is following when renting apartments to blacks. That is how, the whites themselves decide how to treat the blacks which indicates to the concept of social determinism. However, Mr. Dalton makes false excuses to avoid the truth like, “Well, I think Negroes are happier when they’re together.” (258). Thus, in the novel *Native Son*, Richard Wright shows how blacks have to suffer due to the social discrimination and determinism of the white community in the 1930s. The white community has already decided that they will treat blacks with racism and make their lives more miserable. And even after being discriminated in the white society, blacks can do nothing but silently accept it as shown in the novel *Native Son*.

In the novel *Native Son*, Richard Wright also shows how whites use political tactics and hypocrisy to blame and punish blacks and humiliate them. Thomas becomes a victim of it because of his crime and violence. One night, he unintentionally kills a white woman, Mary Dalton but he tries to hide his crime because he knows the white will not spare him if he is caught as a murderer. However, Mary's accidental murder case has become a weapon for whites to portray all blacks as terrorists and dangerous. After this incident, he loses his control and intentionally rapes and kills his black girlfriend, Bessie. After revealing the truth, he is arrested by white police. When the truth is revealed that Bigger killed Mary, newspaper headlines focus on the crime and portrays him as a sex criminal. Here, even though he did not kill her intentionally, he is falsely accused of being a rapist. It shows the hypocrisy of the white society. Bigger himself experiences it before he is arrested by the police. When he goes to steal a newspaper and sees a tall black headline,

“HUNT BLACK IN GIRL’S DEATH” (198). Then he looks down and reads in a newspaper, “REPORTERS FIND DALTON GIRL’S BONES IN FURNACE. NEGRO CHAUFFEUR DISAPPEARS. FIVE THOUSAND POLICE SURROUND BLACK BELT. AUTHORITIES HINT SEX CRIME.” (199).

Here, the entire black community is leveled as dangerous, aggressive, rapist and terroristic. It represents the whites’ racial hypocrisy and social determinism of the racist white society. When a white man commits a crime, the newspaper writes his name and says what he did. It means blaming that person individually, not the white community as a whole. On the other hand, when any black person commits a major crime like Bigger Thomas, he is portrayed as Black/Negro which refers to the entire black community. The whites call Bigger Thomas “a black ape”, “black sonofabitch”, “a sex criminal”. So here he is falsely accused by the newspaper which is also a part of the whites’ hypocrisy. He did not rape her and did not kill her intentionally but the newspaper is misrepresenting his crime and also blaming the whole black community for the rape and murder of Mary. On the other hand, the blacks also blame him because he gave whites a good excuse to insult, humiliate and oppress the entire black community. It shows the helplessness of Bigger Thomas.

Moreover, Whites use him as a symbol of terrorism of the black community and to control over them. It shows the hypocrisy of the whites that they have the opportunity to punish a black and they are doing it without considering whether it is right or wrong. One day, after he is arrested, he asks for a newspaper because he has not read a newspaper in a long time. When he gets a newspaper, look at the headline “Negro Rapist Faints at Inquest.” (221). There are also some lines such as:

“Bigger Thomas, Negro sex-slayer, fainted dramatically this morning at the inquest...He looks exactly like an ape!...Though the Negro killer’s body does not seem compactly built, he gives the impression of possessing abnormal physical strength...His lower jaw protrudes obnoxiously, reminding one of a jungle beast...It is easy to imagine how this man, in the grip of a brain-numbing sex passion, overpowered little Mary Dalton, raped her, murdered her, beheaded her, then stuffed her body into a roaring furnace to destroy the evidence of his crime...All in all, he seems a beast utterly untouched by the softening influences of modern civilization.” (221-222).

Here, Bigger Thomas is depicted as a jungle beast and rapist. He is also portrayed as an eccentric man who rapes Mary to satisfy his perverted sexual desires, then kills her and attempts to dispose of the body. But in reality, none of the allegations are true. So, the white people are using hypocrisy and making false accusations against him. On the other hand, he is asked a few questions about how he killed Bessie as the white people are not interested in knowing how he killed a black girl. It is also part of racism. When Bigger Thomas robs black businessmen with his friends, the white police are not interested in finding them, nor are they interested in why he raped and killed Bessie. Bigger also understands that if he receives any punishment, it will be for killing Mary, not for killing Bessie. Additionally, Buckley asks him if he has killed other white women before. He is asked, “Tell me, were Mary, Bessie, Mrs. Clinton’s sister, and Miss Ashton the only women you raped or killed?” (240). Bigger replies that he has never heard of Ms. Clinton or Ms. Ashton before. Then he is further asked, “Didn’t you attack a girl in Jackson Park last summer?” or “Didn’t you choke and rape a woman on University Avenue last fall?” or “Didn’t you climb through a window out in Englewood last fall and rape a woman?” (240). All of these questions surprise him. Here, the white society is trying to impose other unsolved rape and death cases on

him, without actually knowing if he did any of it or not. However, he states that he did not kill women other than Mary and Bessie. It is a good example of the whites' hypocrisy against the blacks which is already decided by the racist white society. This shows that whenever the whites catch any black for his bad deeds, they want to make the black suffer more by imposing more blames on him whether he has done it or not. However, Bigger Thomas confesses all the murder as he has no other alternative. The whites do not bother to think about the condition of a black criminal. Here, the term social determinism serves as a determination of the harassment of blacks by the white community and their racist hypocrisy.

5.3 Class discrimination

Richard Wright shows class discrimination through the lifestyle and living conditions of Bigger Thomas, who lives in extreme poverty with his family in a poor area south of Chicago. In this novel, he also shows how the rich people are exploiting the poor class by getting extra money from them. Here, the character Mr. Dulton is representing the upper class in this novel. Moreover, he also shows how poor people do not get the opportunities to fulfil their ambitions and sacrifice their wills to merely survive in the cruel society. However, Richard Wright shows how the blacks not only suffer from racism in a racist white society, they also suffer from a class-structured society for being poor through this fictional novel *Native Son*.

The novel starts with the description of Bigger Thomas's room. The protagonist of this novel, Bigger Thomas lives in a small one-room apartment with his mother, sister and brother. He says, "A surly grunt sounded above the tinny ring of metal. Naked feet swished dryly across the planks in the wooden floor and the clang ceased abruptly. Light flooded the room and revealed a black boy standing in a narrow space between two iron beds, rubbing his eyes with the backs of his hands." (15). So, it shows the one-room apartment is so tiny. Bigger Thomas's mother lives in this room with her three children. They live, eat, sleep in the same room. Then she says, "Turn your heads so I can dress," (15). So, there is no more room to change clothes. Here Richard Wright gives us a proper description of the poverty of this family in how they have to undress in front of each other. There is a little space in this room which indicates, they are so poor that they cannot afford enough space for them to stay in. There is literally no privacy for them. So, family members have to close their eyes to let the other members undress. In this way, Richard Wright presents that poverty is not just about lack of money or enough healthy food to eat or lack of dresses to wear, it also includes lack of space and privacy for one. It represents the extreme poverty of this black

family. Here, it shows the condition of a poor African American family and shows their struggle to survive in the racist society. There are other black families like them in the area and their living conditions are almost identical to Bigger's family.

The book is about the south side of Chicago during 1930s, when there is a combination of segregation and racism in the racist society. The blacks are deprived of their rights which they deserve. Moreover, they have to do a lot to get this much in the racist and class structured society which is portrayed in this novel. Because the African American families have to pay high rent to the owner Mr. Dulton for a one room apartments. It shows how the rich people are getting advantage of the poor condition of the lower-class people. This is how, the rich people are getting rich and the poor are getting poor day by day. As a result, the vast majority of African Americans have to live in extreme poverty. Therefore, they have to live in such a poor condition with low paid job without getting adequate facilities. As they are not allowed to have high paid jobs, the poor black families have to struggle a lot to fulfil their needs in a limited income. So, they are getting less income and have to spend more to stay in such tiny apartments. It shows the class discrimination in the class structured American society. To earn money, Bigger and his friend Gus, Jack all are involved in crimes such as robbing valuables from many black-owned businesses. It shows how the poor people get involved in such criminal offences to fulfil their necessities and survive in the cruel society. However, they feel it is easier and safe to rob their own people as white policemen never search for them. But they never rob any white people. So, they are robbing their own people to achieve better situation.

Moreover, because of the poverty, Bigger Thomas does not get education or good living condition or any facility to have a better life. As he is not educated, he does not get any collar job. Though he wants to be a pilot, he does not get the opportunity to fulfil his dream. Here, Richard

Wright shows the class discrimination through the protagonist Bigger Thomas in the novel *Native Son*. It shows that the rich people do not have to struggle to get whatever they want to have. But poor people have to go through hardship and difficulties to achieve their ambition. In some cases, they have to sacrifice their will as they do not have enough money and do not get the chance to fulfil their wills. Rather he has to be a driver of a white man named Mr. Dalton. It causes an anger and frustration in him which results in something worse later this novel. It shows the sad life of the poor people who have to struggle a lot to survive in the class structured society.

The novel *Native Son* supports Marxist theory and criticism. Marxist theory is about the class structure of society and the struggle of people because of it which also can be seen in this novel. Here, the character Bigger Thomas has to suffer a lot because he belongs to a lower class in American society. Because of this, his family has financial problems, their living conditions are very bad. They have to pay high rents for small one room apartments and people in this society cannot get high class jobs. This is how the rich people are actually exploiting the poor class by imposing extra money on them. So here the lower-class people are being deprived of their rights for being poor in such class structured society. On the other hand, those who are rich can have many facilities, good jobs and social status as they want. Thus, it shows the class struggle between upper class and lower-class people in terms of whites and blacks in the 1930s racist American society.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

In both the novels *Black Boy* and *Native Son*, the author Richard Wright shows the impact of social problems like racism and class discrimination in the contemporary society. He also presents the darkest and negative sides of the racist white Americans over the black Americans as well as the struggles of poor people in a class structured society during the twentieth century. He is the first who shows the toxic reality of the whites with bravery. Both the protagonist characters black boy and Bigger Thomas, as well as other black characters in these 2 novels, have to face racism, discrimination, injustice, and oppression because of their skin color and race by whites. Because the whites do not consider them equal. As a result, they dominate, oppress over them. Sometimes they forget their humanity and search for excuse to show extreme violence over them, humiliate them by referring them as terrorist, dangerous and savage for simple things or for no reason at all. It proves their hypocrisy. Moreover, the white men also present the black men as harmful and dangerous for the white women and they make laws and rules to forbid them from having relation with any of white women. Moreover, the author also shows the concept of social determinism to present the hypocrisy of the whites which make these 2 novels more realistic. The racist white society themselves decide what the blacks should get and how they should be treated in the society. By enforcing Jim Crow laws, they are separating the blacks for them in every sector of daily life and thus they are showing that the blacks can not a part of the racist white society. As a result, the blacks are not allowed to get high paid jobs even though they are capable of it, do not get better living facilities and deprive them from other right what they deserve. So, the blacks have to do low waged jobs and live in poverty to survive in the cruel world. But it should not happen. A

man/woman should be judged by his/her abilities, qualities, personality and not by his skin color, race, culture or religion.

Finally, the author Richard Wright is successful as a protest writer as he accurately shows the real-life struggle of the black people during the contemporary times in the racist American society. Though the racist whites criticize him for showing his courage, he is still considered one of the most prominent writers in African American literature. That is why, other writers like James Baldwin, William Faulkner appreciate him for his success. Although the stories of both novels are different, they are connected to each other in their representation of racism, class discrimination, social determinism and whites' hypocrisy with a strong sense of protest.

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