Chapter - IV

Destination-Dynamic Tour de Force

“We’s free!”… “Free at las’!”… “Thank You, Jesus”… “Freedom! Freedom!” (RTSAF 828) was the outcry of Kunta Kinte’s descendents after four generations. Ever since the day of landing in America as a slave Kunta Kinte was looking forward for an opportunity to gain liberty. Kunta’s wonder surged up as he saw more black men in the white man’s land but quite contrary to him, that is, more submissive and without any sympathy for one of his fellow men. Kunta was hopeful that he might be rescued by one of the black men, but their sarcastic smile hurt Kunta, “Hope surged in Kunta. Would the black ones free him now? But… they were laughing at him. What kind of blacks were these who looked down upon their own kind and worked as goats for the toubob?” (RTSAF 260) Kunta felt drained and depressed and regretted for his carelessness and inattentiveness in the Juffure woods, the consequence of which he was bound in chains in the alien soil.

Kunta tried hard to control the overwhelming emotion to avenge the white man and the black men assisting him as seen in the following passage,

He made himself remember that if he was to survive,

having survived so much until now, that he must keep his senses collected, he must keep control of himself, he must make himself wait, and he must not expend his
energy until he knew that it was the right time. (RTSAF 262)

Despite the depression and the physical hardships, the dignity of Mandinkan tribe was not curbed. The food and the coverlet offered to him was denied and the thought to escape from the clutches of those people dominated his mind, “Kunta knew only that he must escape from this dreadful place- or die in the attempt” (RTSAF 264). Kunta was sure that he could not see Juffure again and he dared not even to dream of returning to his place but only to get out of the clasps of slavery and waited patiently for the right opportunity.

The opportunity did arrive and Kunta broke free from the black man under whose care he was placed. He sprang on the black man pounding, tearing and clawing at him as Haley describes,

Spring up, fearing above all another barking dog, Kunta slipped away like a shadow from the fallen driver and the overturned flame. He ran bent low, legs crashing through frosted stalks of cotton. His muscles, so long unused, screamed with pain, by the cold, rushing air felt good upon his skin, and he had to stop himself from whooping out load with the pleasure of feeling so wildly free. (RTSAF 266)

This enchantment of freedom was only for a short duration for he was sniffed, traced, beaten and carried back to the white man’s farm. The punishment was to be whipped harshly which did not diminish Kunta’s dream
for liberty. After a brutal treatment chained in the dark hut he tried to remind himself of his African heritage. His identity of being Kunta was shattered with his English name ‘Toby’, an identity forced on by the English master, a frustration he could not endure but only cry to let out his emotion with the determination, “But he kept on telling himself that the chances of gaining freedom depended upon continuing to force himself to do whatever was wanted of him, all behind a mask of complete blankness and stupidity.” (RTSAF 281)

Other black men, like Kunta, would have encountered the same difficulties years before. They would have been uprooted, captured, abducted to America, enslaved, whipped, lashed, renamed and forced to work in the plantations. Kunta abhors those people for being submissive but little did he realize that the hunger and harassment could not be endured for long. They worked hard from dawn to dusk with whatever meagre food they had. The white men were inhuman and for Kunta, “it was simply senseless to try to understand.” (RTSAF 282) He could not find out the reason for blacks’ extreme obedience and he was watchful for an opportunity to escape and a weapon to defend himself.

Kunta pretended submissiveness to observe things around him to learn the way out of the plantation. He had learnt a good deal of the white men’s language, but he showed ignorance. He started realizing the same pretension in other slaves also,
It occurred to Kunta that these blacks masked their true feelings for the toubob as carefully as he did his changing attitude toward them. He had by now many times witness the blacks’ grinning faces turn to bitterness the instant a toubob turned his head away. (RTSAF 290) They deliberately broke their working tools and took twice as much time they needed to do whatever they were doing. These are the small revenge they took in the way they could afford. They also shared some kind of communication and songs to pass message secretly among themselves. But Kunta observed that both black and the white were indispensable to each other,

...in some strong, strange, and very deep away, the blacks and the toubob had some need for each other…it had seemed to him that the toubob were at their happiest when they were close around the black ones-even when they were beating them. (RTSAF 294)

Kunta, though busy with his work, kept on watch to find a way out of the plantation; he tried to find all possible weapons to defend but could not find one actually. He found two opportunities to run away but was caught, whipped and lashed out mercilessly to unconsciousness. The swine in the farm and the black men in the field were treated in a similar manner. But Kunta was unrelenting in his determination, “Let them kill me, thought Kunta, I will die as a man should.” (RTSAF 300) He was not allowed to do so and he was found and bound. The white men were well aware of the black men’s ablutions
and abominations and their worst punishment was to violate those. Kunta on
his third escape was caught as on earlier and he was beaten so hard that his
shoulders and back were bleeding and the half-opened welts in his skin
exposed the muscles beneath. Kunta, on recovering from his unconsciousness
burnt with fury as he was stripped baked and wrapped in a cloth soaked with
grease of the swine. It stank and stifled Kunta from breathing clean and
strengthened the spirit of avenge in him. But he was certain that, “When he
became well, he would take revenge-and he would escape again. Or he would
die.” (RTSAF 301)

As per his plan, he watched the wagons passing in and out of the
plantation and drew his plans very carefully. On the right opportunity he
slipped away from the plantation in a tobacco wagon. He managed to get away
from the plantation though the destination of his journey was unknown but the
thought of being freed from the clutches of slavery overwhelmed him. This
freedom, he managed to wrench away from the hands of white masters was not
completely accomplished one and not a permanent one also. His dream of
being free in the alien land was shattered by the baying of hounds and Kunta
realized that he had been tracked again and ran to save his life for he was sure
that he would not be spared this time. He was tracked and the nightmare
returned with the slave catchers. Though Kunta fought terribly, his tired and ill
nourished body gave away and was in the clutches of the catchers. The
punishment this time was quite expensive. For the slave catchers tied him to
the trunk and the ax flashed up and down so fast:
severing skin, tendons, muscles, bone…As the explosion of pain bolted through him, Kunta’s upper body spasmed forward and his hands went flailing downward as if to save the front half of his foot, which was falling forward, as bright red blood jetted from the stump as he plunged into blackness (RTSAF 313)

As Mazrui says:

The theme of escape acquired two contradictory meanings in Roots. One is psychological escapism- a retreat from harsh realities through make-believe…The other sense of “escape” in Roots is the ambition to escape bondage. (8-9)

and thus, Kunta’s last effort to escape slavery was an utter failure making him lame and limp in the white man’s land but the dream of liberty lingered in his heart.

Kunta’s sick days on bed were very painful and all he could remember was a hut which was not his. Every now and then a white man, he had not seen before, administered medicine to him and a black woman ‘Bell’ fed him with food and medicine. Though Kunta was furious he knew very well that he had become too weak, even to lift his head and arms. He could not resist the treatment for his ailment from the white and the care from Bell. But he had to walk on crutches until the white master gave him shoes to wear with cotton stuffed on the right shoe to fit his right stump. The idle days on the plantation
unraveled the mystery behind the submissiveness and obedience in the black slaves in the farm. For the first few days in the new plantation, the slaves there avoided Kunta’s presence and without any useful work to do, Kunta felt the sickness of loneliness in him. First time in America, “He was amazed and ashamed to realize that he felt the need for love.” (RTSAF 323)

The reality unfolded through the Fiddler in the farm Kunta learnt that law in America supported slavery. The white men had all the freedom to buy, to ill-treat, to thrash and even to kill if they tried to escape. Kunta was also made to realize that he was lucky not to be killed at the hands of slave catchers. Kunta also learnt that he was not the first one to do so and many had been caught in the effort to escape from the slave owners. The old gardener in the plantation reveals the fact that, “Run two states away, dey jes’ tell about it in dey papers an’ sooner later you gits cotched an’ nearly kilt an’ win’ up right back where you come from.” (RTSAF 329). The law in America was harshly against the black men as put out by Haley through the gardener to Kunta,

It’s a law niggers can’t carry no gun, even no stick that look like a club. Law say twenty lashes you get caught, widdout a travelin’ pass, ten lashes if’n you looks white folks in dey eyes, thirty lashes if’n you raises your hand ‘gainst a white Christian. Law say no nigger preachin’ lessen a white man dere to listen; law say can’t be no nigger funeral id dey think it’s a meetin’. Law say cut your ear off if’n white folks swear you led, bothe ears if
dey claim you lied twice. Law say you kill anybody
while, you hang; kill ‘nother nigger, you jes’ gits
whipped. Law say reward a Indian catchin’ a ‘scaped
nigger wid all de tobacco dat Indian can carry. Law
‘gainst teachin’ any nigger to read or write, or givin’ any
nigger any book. Dey’s even a law ‘gainst niggers
beatin’ any drums-any dat African stuff. (RTSAF 325)
Kunta was astonished and a fear developed in him as the reality was explained
to him by the gardener and the fiddler. The best thing any black man could do
was, “…you settled down and made de best of things de way de is, ‘stead of
wastin’ yo’ young years…plottin’ what cain’t be done.” (RTSAF 329) Like
any other slave, Kunta realized that it would be better to get his mind off his
home which he could not see any longer and to work in this land-though it was
not his own. He also mingled, worked, ate, did his work to his content and
never failed to say his prayers in his hut in private. Despite all his adaptations
and admittance to survive in the soil of white man he could not accept the
white man’s God. The new plantation was far better than the earlier one and
nobody suspected of Kunta’s running away again and Kunta himself had no
idea of doing so in future for any reason as it meant death to him which was
quite contrary to his previous determination,

Though it shamed him to admit it, he had begun to prefer
life as he was allowed to live it here on this plantation to
the certainty of being captured and probably killed if he
tried to escape again. Deep in his heart, he knew he would never see his home again, and he could feel something precious and irretrievable dying inside of him forever. But hope remained alive; though he might never see his family again, perhaps someday he might be able to have one of his own. (RTSAF 342)

Stein comments on this decision of Kunta as follows,

The new rootedness is not without anguish and sacrifice and risk. Kunta Kinte must choose among divided loyalties; his choice reveals what sort of man he is, his values, and his priorities. He must decide between acting upon his vow to be a free man at any cost, and remaining with his new family...Ultimately, it required greater courage for Kunta Kinte to choose to remain behind, to establish new roots, than it would have been to make a daring escape. To the maturing Kunta Kinte, the freedom of dogged ideological adherence to the individualism of the past became less attractive than commitment to those who were by love and promise of the future committed to him. He found new reward in meeting the new demands and opportunities of family life. There were other ways of fighting slavery than fleeing it. (13)
As Kunta realized, it nearly took twenty years in the plantation to have a family of his own. He intended to marry Bell, the cook, who had soft corner for him. He also learnt that Bell already had two children, who were taken away from her mercilessly. Kunta and Bell were married with the permission of Master Waller. Though Kunta was disappointed at the birth of his daughter, he was overwhelmed with joy and wanted to name her as per his wish. Blayney comments that, “Kunta first defies the master by naming his daughter Kizzy, thus giving her an African rather than a slave identity.” (184) He knew very well that the naming ceremony could not be grand and he had no right to name his daughter and only the white man who owned them had all the rights to name her. But Master Waller was not very rude and he named her ‘Kizzy’ as per Kunta’s wish with his surname and thus Kunta’s first generation in the American soil was found root with Kizzy Waller.

Kunta showered all his love and care on his daughter and never failed to teach her few African words and his family heritage in Juffure, West Africa. She became the close playmate of Master Waller’s niece Anne. Bell was glad at perceiving her daughter’s growth in close association with the white girl but little was she aware of the danger Kizzy was getting into. Kunta, though had spent more than a quarter century in the plantation, he did not trust in the white man completely. Kizzy learnt to read and write secretly from Anne and Bell was proud of that. But Kunta sensed danger as he knew very well that learning to read and write for Negroes was against law. Kizzy was trapped into the danger by forging a pass to Noah, the young slave born in the plantation.
Seduced by the words of liberty promised by him to Kizzy and as she loved him. She forged pass in the name of Master Waller. It was not quite easy to escape from the plantation and had to pass similar places on the way to North, the promised land of liberty and prosperity. The escaping slave would be tracked and traced by the slave catchers’ hounds before they pass two states. Noah was caught and the forgery was found out. Master Waller was enraged by the forgery and handed Kizzy over to the slave traders mercilessly. Kunta was aware that Bell was, “…gullible, deluded and deceived about the goodness of the massa- or any other toubobs.” (RTSAF 542) Bell tried hard to stop her master from selling Kizzy as she had already undergone the agony of being torn up from her children. But all her efforts were in vain as Master Waller said, “The law is the law. She’s broken my rules. She’s committed a felony.” (RTSAF 544) Despite Bell’s pleading, Kunta’s shouting and Kizzy’s screaming, Kizzy was taken away from them and Kunta knew the truth, “His Kizzy was gone; she would not return. He would never see his Kizzy again.” (RTSAF 546) He was once again ripped out from his family, his daughter this time in his fifty fifth year.

Alex Haley, sticking on to the fact that the torn away black slave family had no chance to meet again in their lifespan, follows the life line of Kizzy in her new master Tom Lea’s plantation, Kunta and Bell, though mentioned by Kizzy and her grandchildren are never seen again and their whereabouts is never mentioned by Haley in his pages. This is the harsh reality the black slaves had to face in their life. If obedient and submissive adhering to the laws
of the white masters, the slaves were fortunate to spend their lives at least with their family throughout their life. The slaves did not dare to violate the laws so that they would live and die together as they also knew that not every slave was fortunate to have a master like Waller for which Kizzy’s future in Lea’s plantation is evidence.

Kizzy’s tragic life in Tom Lea’s plantation began with physical harassment. Tom Lea, the poor white man with a small farm and less number of slaves was a womanizer and he mercilessly assaults Kizzy sexually on the very first day of her arrival in the plantation. Unaware of the position she had been placed and the place she had been sold Kizzy could not even think of escaping from the place. The reality of black slave women being abused by the white masers and the birth of mulatto children is exposed by Haley through Kizzy and her son George, born to her master Tom Lea. Kizzy reared her son by narrating her father Kunta’s descend and African heritage. George inherited his father’s interest in chicken rearing and had the skill of his African forefathers in training the gamecocks. Kizzy took every care in not educating her son as she had the panicking experience of being separated from her beloved parents, the sexual assault and the birth of her mulatto son, the consequence of her education. But nothing could hinder the skill in her son and he was ascending the fortune wheel with the well trained cocks and he won almost all the game his cocks fought. George became the idol of worship to Lea but his white man’s conscience never allowed to him to accept George as his son. George nicknamed Chicken George, learnt the identity of his father
but the dignity and pride constrained him from revealing his knowledge or to accept him as father. George, being born and brought up in the slave plantation knew that reality and was matured enough to understand and adhered to the white man’s law, for he did not want his mother Kizzy to undergo another agony of separation and isolation.

Kunta’s descendants from Kizzy onward lived a very normal life of any other slave. The heritage of Kunta, though a little, like religion started diminishing. The religion of origin, that is, Islam was completely forgotten and they had to follow the Christianity, the white man’s religion. The naming ceremony, the manhood training, wrestling, the harvest festival, the grand wedding, the bride price, the birth of the child, the remembrance and honouring of the elders and the education, in particular was soon forgotten by the slaves as their abduction and deprival of opportunities were the main reason for the deterioration. But the pride, dignity and the artistry in them never diminished and could never be mitigated.

George excelled in taming and training gamecocks while none of his sons was interested in it. The three elder sons Virgil, Ashford and little George were interested in the field work and his younger son Tom had a skill for blacksmithing. His debut was “a small water pitcher that looked as if it were woven tightly of thick strands of wire” (RTSAF 697) for his grandmother Kizzy. The white man Tom Lea’s greedy mind thought of making money with Tom and his apprenticeship with an elderly Isaiah, proved worthy, as he developed his skill to perfection. Tom was, “visibly putting the plantation into
an enviable state of repair, his talented hands wielding his mostly homemade tools, transforming foraged old rusted, discarded, scrap iron into eventually scores of sturdy new farming tools and implements along with both functional and decorative household items.” (RTSAF 752) His wife Irene was yet another asset to the Murray plantation. With the help of a handloom made by her husband, Irene “carded, span, wove and served matching ruffled dresses” to nearly everyone in the farm not neglecting the master and the mistress who were “openly delighted with the amazingly finely stitched dress and shirt she made for them, from cotton grown right on their own plantation.” (RTSAF 772) Her artistry added colours and contributed brightness to their lives. She collected plants and leaves to dye the cloth which reminds Binta in the village of Juffure. Irene’s artistry extended further,

she plaited rugs of cloth scraps; she made both tinted and scented Christmas-New Year holiday season candles; she carved dried cow’s horns into pretty combs, and gourds into water dippers and birds’ nests in fancy designs…she put some of the fragrant dried-rose leaves or sweet basil between the folded garments, making the black and white Murrays alike small about as fine as they felt.

(RTSAF 773)

Whatever be the benefits, the white men received from the slaves, they were keen on enslaving them and persuading them to remember that they are only slaves and had no right to be free to think and act or even to talk louder.
Stein comments, “Whites, excepting Old George, are cruel, inhuman, immoral, pretentiously mannered, innured to human suffering, calloused in their emotions, obsessed with property and propriety and order.” (14) Tom Lea forced Chicken George to go to England to train gamecocks for an English man and sold the entire family of George to Murray at the time of economic crisis. But nothing could depress the black people and were happy on the thought that they were fortunate to be sold as a family except the eldest slaves in the plantation including Kizzy. Of this, Gerber states,

Yet even under circumstances of sale and forced separation, family and kin were able to provide various kinds of aid to support the victims… In this way, their culture fostered the possibility of resilience and a measure of continuity even under circumstances of disorienting change. (92)

The uprising in the north and exiting potentials enjoyed by the free Negroes there lured George’s family too. Chicken George and Matilda planned and saved money to buy their freedom to which Tom added as soon as he started to earn. The revolt and the rebels in the north excited anxiety in the white masters and they in turn threatened their slaves, even the most faithful and sincere servants in the plantation. Kizzy, Chicken George and Tom felt the necessity of freedom and looked forward eagerly to the days of freedom. But it was not as easy as they thought. They had to save for nearly fifteen years to buy freedom and the path of revolt had no trace of success for nearly a decade.
Abraham Lincoln arose as a prophet of promise against slavery. With all his efforts to free the blacks from the clutches of cruel white men, he seemed Moses, trying to free the children of Israel. There were lot of discussions, about famous northern blacks who were fighting against slavery, traveling around, lecturing large mixed audiences to tears and cheers by telling their life stories as slaves before they had escaped to freedom. (RTSAF 709)

News about free blacks like Frederick Douglass, who learnt to read and write secretly and worked hard to earn his freedom, famous women like Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman who lectured and attracted huge crowds of both white and black people excited the slaves in the south plantation. But there was no trace of approaching freedom and the white masters became more alert and anxious about their position every day.

The era of freedom struggle was very significant for the black slaves as it was their concern completely. Abolition of slavery was a subject of great debate between white men in the northern part of America. The quite pleased and pleasing white masters like Waller and Murray deliberately threatened and frightened their slaves as it posed danger to their status as masters. They were irritated and furious about the war between the Yankees and the confederacy. The November of 1860 was an important phase in the life of black people in America, as Abraham Lincoln was elected President and he was against the slavery. There were agitations and peculiar behaviours thereafter in the
southern part of New United States. The abolition of African slave trade was declared to the surprise of every black but they also knew that the abolition was in effect only on papers and no white master dared or bothered about the abolition. To them they enjoy life with black men as slaves. Master Murray declared this to Tom, “...we want you to tell that we look forward to us all enjoying the rest of our lives together just as soon as we get these Yankees whipped.” (RTSAF 825) They failed to realize that, “being owned by anyone could never be enjoyable.” (RTSAF 816) It had become natural for any white man to eye a free negro with suspicion, Chicken George was not allowed to live with his enslaved family after he had earned his freedom from Master Lea. It was a law in the Alamance county that a freed slave could not live for more than six months and if he did, he could be taken back as a slave. Chicken George had to leave his family after gaining his freedom which was too expensive to lose again and none in the family wanted him to lose it.

The Emancipation Proclamation by President Abraham Lincoln on the New Year’s Day of 1863 set the black slaves free which meant complete abolition of slavery in America. But “… the joyous awaiting of the freedom dwindled, diminished and finally receded into a new despair…” (RTSAF 826) as there was no further steps to let the slaves out of the slave plantation and created a bitter atmosphere of suspicion and the President Lincoln was despised more by the whites. The war between the Yankees and the confederates went on till April 1865, when the whole confederate army was surrendered. The ridiculous sounding freedom at last was granted to the black
slaves and “the jubilance in the slave row was beyond any measure” (RTSAF 827) but the assassination of Abraham Lincoln shocked them all. They shrieked and wept for him, whom they revered as their Moses and who had indeed delivered them out of Egypt.

When Master Murray declared freedom in choked voice, the slaves “began leaping, singing, praying, screaming anew, “We’s free!”… “Free at las’!”… “Thank You, Jesus!” (RTSAF 828) But freedom meant taking care of them. Bereft of shelter, food and money, they had been let free into a wilderness blindfolded. But Chicken George had utilized his freedom to explore the northern part of America and had discovered a land of promise. Led by the sixty-seven-year-old Chicken George, Kunta Kinte’s descendants moved out after not less than a century of slavery toward what Chicken George had sworn would prove to be the promised land, that is, Tennessee without a travelling pass from the white master, which marked the first step ahead with freedom for them. They could talk aloud, particularly to a white man which Tom did to the two-haughty sheriff Cates. But Tom also realized that it was very difficult to live a free life but he took every opportunity to preserve the pride and dignity inherent in him. He set up a makeshift forge and started a decent life and soon became indispensable to the people in town, “Tom seemed to them the kind of man who did his job and minded his own business, and they couldn’t help respecting that.” (RTSAF 837) Of this Stein comments,
Neither Kunta Kinte, nor Chicken George, nor others in
the later succession of Black males, were weak, passive,
docile, fatalistic, resigned. For survival they may have
feigned what submission the credulous master and
mistress needed for their own dehumanizing
entertainment. But everything was a finely rehearsed
outward act… Defiance was the underlying flame that
made brokenness and despair impossible. Rootedness
endured… (14)

The hardworking, suppressed black slaves with hand to mouth
eexistence in the slave plantation had their houses, barns, sheds and fences built
by 1874. They built their own church named New Hope Colored Methodist
Episcopal Church and dedicated exclusively to sing aloud, and listen to the
sermon in ringing voice of the preacher. The heartrending chorus of “The Old
Rugged Cross,” sounded meaningful to them and Matilda had a small reverie
of the way they had staggered on and the overwhelming joy had the yearning
to see Kizzy right on that moment to see her family in complete liberty. They
were free to read, to write, to pray, to sing, and to have their own trade, to have
dignified manner and obvious intelligence. The journey, Kunta went on
towards liberty was continued by his daughter and her descendants reached the
destination after a century. As Haley says at the end of his work, Kunta, Kizzy
and all those who suffered as slaves, “… do watch and guide … and join… in
the hope to alleviate the legacies of the fact that preponderantly the histories have been written by the winners.” (RTSAF 888)

Written nearly after a century after Emancipation Proclamation, James Baldwin’s *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, portrays the lifestyle of black people, of course, not in slavery in the original sense but not completely freed from the impact of slavery in the name of racism. Though Baldwin mentions little about racism and colour discrimination, the same could not be neglected completely; as it has become an inherent part of their life and they had to face the harsh reality of their race and colour in the so-called slavery abolished United States of America. Gabriel’s mother Rachel saw the day of deliverance, the promise in which their trust was deeply rooted in, “He done brought us out of Egypt, just like He promised and we’s free at last!” (GTIM 81) She walked out of the slave plantation’s gate but to enter as a servant in another. The life style was never better than her previous position, but worsened as she had to forego the rations provided by the master and had to find a job to feed herself and her children. But this time, of course, no master could sell her children any more. Unlike Chicken George’s family in Alex Haley’s *Roots*, there was no prosperity and savings to start her life anew or probably she was not prepared for the days of freedom and it all came down on her suddenly. As a woman and deprived of education she had the only choice to live, that is, to be a servant maid, the only work she knew and she could do.

Florence also walked out of her cabin seeking freedom from the boring house-maid job and from the lustful eyes of her white master. She moved
north laden with dreams of prosperous future. She loved Frank and married him with dreams of a decent life. But his drunkenness and the discrimination in the north led her nowhere near her dream. Though slavery was abolished and the black slaves were liberated, the segregation and the suppression did not mitigate. Florence’s life was not different from her mother’s except that she lived up north. Florence had an impression that she had control over her husband who always promised to live up to her expectations but did not. He was, “… determined to live and die a nigger.” (GTIM 95) Her married life of ten years was a failure and she realized that, “all women had been cursed from the cradle; all, in one fashion or another, being given the same cruel destiny, born to suffer the weight of men.” (GTIM 94)

“Getting away” is very prominent in autobiographies, as the slaves in Alex Haley’s Roots saved the little they got to buy their freedom and to get away from the plantation. Florence saved money in her mother’s to “get away” from south and in north and she wanted to save money to get away from the little two room apartment in the city and from the common niggers. Being a woman of aspiration, she wanted to have a modest life away from the niggers who had completely surrendered themselves to the ways of living designed by the white people. Frank was one among them and Florence’s dignity and pride stifled her, “He had never made enough money to buy the home she wanted, or anything else she really wanted…” (GTIM 95) Frank was a hardworking man and he earned a lot but he did not save enough to fulfill her dreams, the dreams of her own home which is similar to that of many others in United States of
America. Often “…she would wonder what on earth had possessed her to undergo such hard trials and travel so far from home, if all she had found was a two-room apartment in a city she did not like, and a man yet more childish than any she had known when she was young.” (GTIM 96) But the battle between them never ended and they never bought home. Later, in her old age, “she felt the stony ground of her heart break up, and tears, as difficult and slow as blood, began to trickle through her fingers… And was this the way she should have gone? Had she been wrong to fight so hard… And she had nothing for all her battles.” (GTIM 100) With all her dreams and aspiration festering like a sore, death was near Florence pestering her with the thought of her failure in the world of common niggers without self-respect. Bone comments, “All her deeper feelings have been sacrificed to a futile striving for “whiteness” and respectability. Now she contemplates the wages of her virtue: an agonizing death in a lonely furnished room.” (217)

Florence’s psyche disputes over her failure despite righteous life and her brother Gabriel’s success despite his sinful life. Gabriel’s life after Deborah’s death was peaceful to him as nobody knew his sin with Esther and about his bastard son Royal. He wanted to be forgiven when he realized that Deborah knew what he had done with Esther and how determined was he to deny his own son Royal. Deborah was a saint, for she did not abandon Gabriel even after his adultery and the revelation of truth was the harsh punishment he could not bear. Her advice to fear God and to ask for his forgiveness was deep rooted in his heart and he waited for the day of forgiveness, the slight
symptom of forgiveness from God. He was constantly in search of right opportunity to pay the penalty for his sin till he met Elizabeth.

Elizabeth’s dream about a happy life with Richard was a tragedy. Richard’s self-respect took his life as he could not bear the unjustly thrust blame on him by the police. Elizabeth late in her life realized that it was her sin of forsaking God in Richard’s love, “And this was why God had taken him from her. It was for all of this that she was praying now, and it was this pride, hatred, bitterness, lust-this folly, this corruption-of which her son was heir.” (GTIM 183)

After Richard’s death, Elizabeth came into acquaintance with Florence who worked with her. Elizabeth was badly in need of a friend, a confidant to confess and a companion to sympathize her. Deprived of Richard’s love and with his son in her hand, her dream of future was completely shattered and she was left in the wilderness of, “… poverty, hunger, wandering, cruelty, fear…” (GTIM 207) Florence, who was also alone, happily provided her with what Elizabeth lacked, love, care and companionship, a soothing balm to the painful heart of Elizabeth. All pent up emotions of Elizabeth rushed out in the presence of Florence and her consoling words were a promise of happy life thereafter.

Elizabeth’s meeting with Gabriel after few weeks was a beginning of new life. She felt her pride affected by Gabriel’s familiarity with her past. “Yet when she looked into his eyes she found there a strange humility, an altogether unexpected kindness. She felt the anger go out of her, and her defensive pride;
but somewhere, crouching the fear remained.” (GTIM 212) She could not any
how restrain herself from so humble a man like Gabriel who seemed to shower
love and care on little John. The desire for better life in Elizabeth and
promising words of Gabriel created an air of confidence in her. Her mind
started to ascend towards God’s word uttered by Gabriel. The following
passage indicates her yearning,

What it made her feel, for the first time since the death of
Richard, was hope; his voice made her feel that she was
not altogether cast down, that God might raise her again
in honour; his eyes had made her know that she could be
– again, this time in honour – a woman. (GTIM 215)

But she failed to recognize the warning note in Florence’s eyes and words. She
did not approve of Elizabeth’s developing relationship with Gabriel but
Elizabeth was so excited that nothing could have stopped her to think of
Florence’s words because Gabriel had become her strength and a seed for the
hopeful bright life for herself and her son.

Gabriel’s affection for little John, his, love, care and prayer, all affected
Elizabeth. She thought that God had been merciful to her despite all her sins in
the past. With Gabriel, she thought that it had been another opportunity given
to her to, “….embrace again the faith she had abandoned, and walk again the
light from which, with Richard, she had so far fled.” (GTIM 216) Gabriel
seemed to provide her with the love she had missed from Richard. In her
loneliness in the abandoned city, she had been yearning for words of love and
Gabriel’s attention and care, once again basked her in the sunlight of hope and joy. Gabriel’s proposal to Elizabeth in the threshold of church filled with promises of love and care for little John but was an easy trap for Elizabeth. No lady with a child could have rejected the proposal with the following promising words:

And I’ll love your son, your little boy, he said at last, just like he was my own. He won’t never have to fret or worry about nothing; he won’t never be cold or hungry as long as I’m alive and I got my two hands to work with I swear this before my God,…because He done give me back something I thought was lost. (GTIM 218)

It sounded like that of a savior to Elizabeth with all his grace and humility at that moment. To her it was, “…a sign of His mercy, a sign of His forgiveness.” (GTIM 217) When he kissed her on the brow with tears and said that God had brought them together for deliverance, she wept with overwhelming joy. Elizabeth failed to realize at that moment that Gabriel with the sugar coated words, had been trying to deliver himself from the sin, he had committed in the past and she had been the path towards deliverance, “…she was the sign, she and her nameless child, for which he had tarried many years before the Lord. It was as though, when he saw them, the Lord had returned to him again that which was lost.” (GTIM 173)

Years later, Elizabeth prayed for little John for Gabriel’s promising words had all been forgotten. Gabriel, as Baldwin says, “…had kept the letter
of his promise: he had fed him and clothed him and taught him the Bible – but the spirit was not there. And he cherished – if he cherished her – only because she was the mother of his son, Roy” (GTIM 204) The holier, humble man Gabriel’s real colour was revealed after the birth of his children. He, who promised to cherish and nourish John, hated him all the more and called him a Satan. Gabriel’s aspiration for his own children was however fulfilled and his aspiration further more extends to see his son Roy to be chosen by God. He had made a toy of Elizabeth to create a sign of deliverance from his sin and he always thought that it was he who had saved Elizabeth from her fall. Elizabeth was innocent enough to confess all to Gabriel as she looked at a God in him but as usual, he had utilized her to fulfill his desires. Elizabeth regretted badly for what she had not done with little John, “… to have given her son away to strangers, who might have loved him more than Gabriel had ever loved him.” (GTIM 203) And Gabriel loved his son Roy more than John, which Elizabeth could not do, as they are all her flesh and blood. While Gabriel prayed for his reckless, disobedient son Roy, who acutely resembled his father and had inherited all his father’s characteristics. In other words Gabriel’s conscience was guilty, on witnessing Roy, engaged in all activities which he abhorred. He spoke bad words, had bad companions, had no fear of Lord and hated father. Despite all the drawbacks in his son Roy, Gabriel was in the position of his mother, who had been constantly praying for him and he had taken up the duty of praying for his son. Bone says, “The church thus offers to the Negro
masses a ritual enactment of their daily pain.” (8) Gabriel took upon his shoulder the burden of his son Roy’s fatally sinful life.

Gabriel could be seen in the state of shock, in the end of the “The Seventh Day” as his son had called him a bastard. Gabriel was more shocked as these words came from the mouth of his own son, whom he thought would take up his line of ministry for God. Little did he think that John, instead, would take up his path, for John who was always sleepy and silent in the church was waiting for a revelation surrounded by saints in the store front church on ‘The Seventh Day.’ John was engrossed with queries about salvation. When ‘salvation’ is real and ‘God’ is real, John wondered about the troubles in life. “Why did his mother weep? Why did his father frown? If God’s power was so great, why were their lives so troubled?” (GTIM 167) But deep down in his heart John knew the answer for all these questions. At the age of fourteen, John was matured enough to know the trouble and the value of deliverance of soul. He waited for that moment of transformation and lift up in honour, to be touched by God so that, “He would have been changed, as they said, forever; sown in dishonor, he would be raised in honour: he would have been born again.” (GTIM 167) John was ignorant of his biological father and he always wondered on the unbiased love of his mother and the biased love of his father. But he wanted to develop a kinship, not with Gabriel but with God. Of all around him, it was John who had the wonderful moment of revelation on “The Threshing Floor.”
John, from the very beginning of the novel had been wondering at the spiritual revelation and what, it might be to be chosen by God? Elisha’s handsome feature and his confidence in leading the whole congregation in prayer was amazement to John. Though he did not think of being ‘saved’, he always admired the way Elisha carries on himself amidst the congregation. Gabriel’s insistence, often, on John’s sin and the cruelty in his eyes always had a hatred for his father and the suspicion about God’s existence. John had to listen to a long lecture regarding the sin, soul and salvation from Elisha, the vast church which appeared ready for the harvest of the souls, the praying saints all around him excited him a little in the beginning. His hands refused to clap and his throat refused to sing as his heart told that him that he had no right to sing or to rejoice. The communion of Elisha with God, the upliftment in his life and the great responsibility of leading the congregation in songs kindled the spark of aspiration in little John. Elisha stood as a testimony to the wonders God performs in a person’s life, “…a young man in the Lord; who, a pries after the order of Mechizedek, had been given power over death and Hell. The Lord had lifted him up, and turned him around, and set his feet on the shining way.” (GTIM 70) Florence’s arrival in church with Gabriel and Elizabeth, John thought, assured God’s presence in the church and it was a premonition of a wonder to be taken place that night before dawn.

The tempo of the songs, the effective lyric and the loud, deep, praying of the people around him disturbed John. His mind was preoccupied with queries and he was searching for the answers, which no one could answer,
He was ill with doubt and searching. He longed for a light that would teach him, forever and forever, and beyond all question, the way to go; for a power that would bind him, forever and forever, and beyond all crying, to the love of God. (GTIM 91)

Gabriel prayed hard for his son and deep down in his heart wished for John’s damnation. Elisha’s cry on the threshing floor startled Gabriel and was relieved on seeing Elisha instead of John. He wanted, only his sons to be saved and chosen for the service of God and unfortunately his sin was on his sons’ teeth. Neither of his sons were on the church, one Royal, born to Esther was in grave and the other Roy, born to Elizabeth was at home hard hearted and hardly hurt by the white gang. The cry of Elisha tore through the heart of Gabriel, “He heard the cry of his dead son and his living son; one who cried in the pit forever beyond the hope of mercy; and one who would cry one day when mercy would be finished.” (GTIM 131) It pained him more, when he saw John, “the son of bond-woman stood where the rightful heir should stand.” (GTIM 130) and with his entire holier attitude blamed Elizabeth for Roy’s sins. His vanity restrained him from accepting his sin which had made Roy’s teeth sour. The over-confidence of his righteousness made him to believe in his salvation and Elizabeth’s persistence on sin. But Gabriel’s destination in life was to see his son,

That God had promised him, who would carry down the joyful line his father’s name, and who would work until
the day of the second coming to bring about His Father’s Kingdom? For God had promised him this so many years ago, and he had lived only for this – forsaking the world and its pleasures, and the joys of his own life, he had tarried all these bitter years to see the promise of the Lord fulfilled (GTIM 132-33)

But it was John, not Roy, contrary to Gabriel’s expectation had been identified to carry on his mission for God. Lunden comments:

The tragedy of Gabriel is that he has so deceived himself that he does not see how petrified his heart has become. He cannot rejoice even at the salvation of his stepson John. And still he believes that he has been doing the will of the Lord and that he has put his hand in Jesus’ hand and gone where He has told him to go. (29)

Elizabeth’s prayer had been heard and she heard the cry of John who lay astonished beneath the power of the Lord on the threshing floor. John could realize the anguish in his heart and head and he felt the agony of fear in darkness. Nothing around him seemed quite real and he wondered at the experience of being swallowed up in chaos. Bone rightly describes this moment in John’s life as follows:

Images of darkness and chaos, silence and emptiness, mist and cold…these images of damnation express the state of the soul when thrust into outer darkness by a
rejecting, punishing, castrating father – figure who is the surrogate of a hostile society. The dominant emotions are shame, despair, guilt and fear. (8)

John sought help to rise up from the darkness from those surrounding him looking at his father whose face was black like an eternal night. But still he could perceive a fire like that of in an eternal night. He felt no warmth from that fire but trembled more on where he lay. John realized that he needed, not the warmth, but was on a search of something hidden in darkness and felt that he would die if it was not found. Nobody around him could aid him in his search and his soul was in despair. He could hear the moaning, which he is accustomed to but he realized, in the burden of sin, that it was a sure witness to the glory of light. The moaning tore his heart apart and he could see the rage, the startled soul, boundless melancholy, bitterest patience and there was no healing in the darkness where he lay. He started to struggle to flee from all these raging into the land of living. But it was not as easy as he thought. He had to moan, stumble and crawl through darkness without any voice or light to lead him out when he was unable to bear the pain and all his energy exhausted,

…he turned again in the darkness, trying to remember something he had heard, something he had read…*Jesus saves. Call on Him. Ask Him to take you through…* He could not call, for his tongue would not unlock, and his heart was silent and great with fear…And yet, it came to him that he must move; for there was a light
somewhere, and life, and joy, and singing — somewhere, somewhere above him. (GTIM 234-235)

James Baldwin, aptly describes the vision of redemption which John had on the threshing floor and it springs from his self-experience which otherwise is difficult to enunciate,

Then John saw the river and the multitude was there…some stumbled… and some crawled…some did not cease to pluck at their flesh, which was rotten with running sores. All struggled to get to the river, in a dreadful hardness of heart, the strong struck down the weak, the ragged spat on the naked, the naked cursed the blind, the blind crawled over the lame. And someone cried: ‘Sinner, do you love my Lord?’ Then John saw the Lord – for a moment only; and the darkness, for a moment only was filled with a light he could not bear. Then in a moment, he was set free; his tears sprang as from a fountain; his heart, like a fountain of waters burst. Then he cried: ‘Oh, blessed Jesus! Oh, Lord Jesus! Take me through! (GTIM 235-236)

This unique experience of John filled him with sweetness and it was a moment of exaltation. And Barr says, “This experience is a fit, brutal, unexpected seizure.” (5). Whatever it may be, it transforms John and makes him optimistic and reenergizes him to encounter the future with whatever it holds for him. His
drifting soul was anchored in the love of God and he felt his feet on the rock
that could endure him forever. He walked with Abraham, Moses and Job. He
encountered Thomas, Peter, Stephen and Paul and looked:

    unto Jesus, the author and the finisher of their faith,
    running with patience the race He had set before them;
    they endured the cross, and they despised the shame, and
    waited to join Him, one day, in glory, at the right hand of
    the Father. (GTIM 237)

John could not speak out of joy that rang in his mind. The
overwhelming joy in the heart of John did not make Gabriel happy as he did
not expect it to happen to John, but to his own son Roy. The upliftment which
Gabriel experienced once, of which he was very proud about had been
showered on the son of bond-woman by the unbiased Almighty. His mother
was full of tears, bright, pained with love and with pride of his communion
with God. His father, in his astonishment was astounded and did not move to
touch, to kiss or smile at him and was rigid at his heart. Florence’s voice was
gentle and encouraged him to pray for complete redemption and for pursuance
in the path of God. While Gabriel was disappointed in reaching the destination
of forgiveness which is evident from his son Roy’s sinful words and deeds,
Elizabeth’s destination of John’s redemption had been attained and John was
ready to pursue his journey in the path of righteousness. Allen states,

    Those who find the novel’s ending ambiguous fail to
    catch in Elisha’s words the echo of Isaiah’s promise,
“They shall run and not be weary,” as well as the shout of faith in ultimate victory which is implied symbolically by the title. (175)

Richard in *Black Boy* landed in the northern town Chicago which was his predetermined destination for the so-called liberty. But all his fantasies were shattered at the first glimpse of the black stretches of Chicago, and unreal city. He saw none of the signs saying “FOR WHITE – FOR COLORED” and both the race moved about not bothering other engrossed in their own mission and there seemed to be no racial fear. Richard at this moment, “…began to grow tense again although it was a different sort of tension…this machine-city was governed by strange laws.” (BB 262) He started to question himself about his destination but it was too late to return to the known terror from which he had fled and decided to cope with the unknown terror. The taboos in the south were a liberty in north. No separate queue, no separate compartment and no separate seat in the bus. Though Richard was baffled, he felt ill at ease in Chicago as everything around him appeared to be temporary. He could see the “frightened black faces trying vainly to cope with a civilization that they did not understand.” (BB 263)

Richard’s career as a porter in a Jewish store was yet another bitter experience to him. Though both the Jewish and the blacks were aliens to America, they were able to run a store and lead a modest life whereas the blacks could not even live. Anger and frustration was the outcome on both the sides. Richard felt more stifled as he could not even express his emotions. He
was baffled at the incomprehensible factor based in which the whole white complexioned people were against the black ones. When one alien could lead a prosperous and peaceful life in America, it was a “No Man’s Land” (BB 265) to the Negroes. He was ready to lead a life of any kind to escape the racial attack on him. As he expresses in the following passage,

I would have agreed to live under a system of feudal oppression, not because I preferred feudalism but because I felt that feudalism made use of a limited part of a man, defined him, his rank, his function in society. I would have consented to live under the most rigid type of dictatorship, for I felt that dictatorships, too, defined the use of men however degrading that use might be.

(BB 265)

Richard realized the fact behind the humiliation, the blacks readily accepted. A kick on the behind was better than uncertainty in which he lived. Though he had elected not to submit to the racial discrimination or to the oppression from the dominant race, he realized in Chicago that by doing so he, “…had embraced the daily horror of anxiety, of tension, of eternal disquiet.” (BB 265) Richard Wright, in Black Boy defined the place of black life in America and the reason behind it,

(Color hate defined the place of black life as below that of white life; and the black man, responding to the same dreams as the white man, strove to bury within his heart
his awareness of this difference because it made him lonely and afraid. Hated by whites and being an organic part of the culture that hated him, the black man grew in turn to hate in himself that which others hated in him. But pride would make him hide his self-hate, for he would not want whites to know that he was so thoroughly conquered by them that his total life was conditioned by their attitude; but in the act of hiding his self-hate, he could not help but hate those who evoked his self-hate in him. So each part of his day would be consumed in a war with himself, a good part of his energy would be spent in keeping control of his unruly emotions, emotions which he had not wished to have, but could not help having. Held at bay by the hate of others, preoccupied with his own feelings, he was continuously at war with reality. He became inefficient, less able to see and judge the objective world. And when he reached that state, the white people looked at him and laughed and said:

“Look, didn’t I tell you niggers were that way?”) (BB 266)

It was an emotional constraint and Richard attempted to come out of it by loading the empty part of his personality with fantasies of ambition. He loaded himself with dreams, a common attitude of any black man in the white
man’s land. He dreamed of becoming a business man to make money; of working for a firm and to reach an important position in it; of organizing secret groups of blacks to fight against whites and realized quite well that none of the above was possible and the only outcome will be the self-hatred and to dwell upon the unattainable. At one point Richard could not dream as anything he dreamt of, had the barest possibility of becoming true. Only in Chicago, he got the revelation of what life meant to a Negro in America of which Richard says, “A dim notion of what life meant to a Negro in America was coming to consciousness in me, not in terms of external events, lynchings, Jim Crowism, and the endless brutalities, but in terms of cross-up feeling, of psyche pain.” (BB 267) The psychological trauma in him gave him a new sense to his life in Chicago, in an unknown land of terror and anxiety.

In the strange city of unnatural equality, Richard could live only with suspicion in his mind. Every white person around him and their cordial behavior to him raised suspicion and they always looked forward for a peril behind them. He could not tell Mr. Hoffman, the Jewish store-keeper that he would like to take leave to appear for an examination as he may scorn it; he could not believe himself when a white girl in the café leaned against him for a cup of coffee and he was baffled when the white prostitutes walked naked in front of him. Though there was an emotional safety outwardly, deep in his mind he knew the truth that he did not exist for them. The discrimination in north was not a physical but a psychological one. It was the psychological distance which separated the races and culture also differentiated them.
Richard had taken pains throughout his life to cultivate his feelings but the white people were free enough to strive for petty goals and the trivial material prizes of American life. For Richard, the meaning of life was beyond those trashes.

Negro, culturally, was a paradox. By trying to exclude him out of American culture in the name of colour hate, it was indulged in war with itself and was “…convulsed by a spasm, of emotional and moral confusion.” (BB 272) As Wright says the anti-negro attitude is only a tiny part of the nation’s moral attitude. The nation in its adolescence was “a stranger to suffering and travail enemy of passion and sacrifice.” (BB 273) and the plight of the Negro in this adolescent nation was that he was doomed to live in isolation and he reconciled to his plight with the belief that his sufferings were for some remote, high, sacrificial end. Richard was proud and dignified with all the above notions and contented with his cultivated emotions and the dream of higher impossibilities.

One of the dreams which lay within the hold of Richard was reading magazines but that too would be impossible if they were read in public as it was a taboo for the black men to read. Richard always had the attraction for books and in the north, as he had the opportunity to come across various books related to psychology and sociology he utilized it by reading books like Stein’s *Three Lives*, Crane’s *The Red Badge of Courage* and Dostoevski’s *The Possessed* which unraveled new realms of life to him. Despite the hunger
cramming his stomach, he could not resist reading and it became the one and only reliable companion to Richard.

A modest employment was beyond Richard’s reach and all he could do was either to be a dishwasher or an orderly in the hospital. The racial division was more prominent among the hospital authorities. Richard describes two long lines of women, an example for racial division,

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…But the two lines I saw graded status in purely racial terms. (BB 303)

When a Jewish lad could be a doctor, a Negro can only be orderly cleaning operating rooms, dog, rat, mice, cat and rabbit pens, and feeding guinea pigs. While young Jewish boy and girls received instruction in chemistry and medicine; the Negro boys can only assist them in slitting the vocal cords of dogs kept for research. The devocalization of the dogs lodged in Richard’s imagination as a symbol of silent suffering, particularly, that of the black race.

Richard, with his pride and dignity was ashamed to openly acknowledge his hunger, throttling him to suffocation and it was very acute at the time of depression. Poverty made him a handicap and he burned with
shame at the thought of approaching relief stations. The war between dignity and poverty was won by hunger and he felt at the end of his life when he had to plead for bread. Making a public confession of his hunger could not be endured by him. The day he begged bread was the day of revelation which revealed to him that he was not alone in his poverty and the society had cast millions of people along with him. Richard was able to comprehend the meaning of his environment. He began to feel something more powerful that he could express. He got rid of cynicism and he developed an attitude of questioning as it always opened the avenue for new knowledge. While the ignorant men drank to drown their frustration, Richard wanted to express it.

The initial steps of Richard to write were but a failure, as he could not put his thoughts and emotions in appropriate words. Despite the physical hunger, his senses refused to be dulled by starvation and he read more and more and wrote more and more. His ability to endure tension had grown amazingly and his attitude of watchful wonder had usurped all other feelings. And it had become an integral part of his personality. He starved to live and measure things, as he aspired to write of his people in equal thoroughness, to measure accurately the reality of the objective world. The habit of reading and writing opened new avenues to Richard and he was able to discern many modes of Negro behaviour. He also realized that his word was only an attempt at understanding his self than a self-expression. Smith rightly comments, “…it is the “word” which will ultimately become the weapon, the sword, with which he attacks society and liberates his own essential self.” (128) He also
knew that his pages were filled with tension, frantic poverty and death and he felt a need for objective approach to social action.

Richard, at one point, came into contact with ‘Negro Literary Group’ on Chicago’s south side. The boys and girls, the members of the group possessed academic learning, economic freedom and vague ambitions to write. He identified those boys and girls as more formal with stylish clothes and had no real quest for knowledge. All they could read, write, ponder and arrive at was only sex of which Richard was not interested at all. To him, they all appeared to be a pack of emotionally sick people, denying the racial and material foundations of their lives. As Richard says:

Swearing love for art, they hovered on the edge of Bohemian life. Always friendly, they could never be anybody’s friend; always reading, they could really never learn, always boasting of their passions, they could never really feel and were afraid to live. (BB 286)

Richard’s quest for expression took him into contact with “Garveyites, an organization of black men and women who were forlornly seeking to return to Africa.” (BB 286) They rejected America as they knew that they could not live a full human life in America. They were too pragmatic to believe in illusions and they were very well aware of their non-existing existence. Richard admired the emotional dynamics of Garveyites and at the same time he pitied them as he knew that their goals were beyond their reach. Africa was owned by the imperials of Europe and their lives were alien to the natives of
that land and they were people of the west and would forever be so until they either merged with the west or perished. Richard could comprehend the passionate need of a separate country with their own culture, as he shared their hunger partly.

Another attraction for Richard in Chicago was the role of communists. The ignorant jobless Negroes were led by communists with no solution which could convince the mass of jobless Negroes. He was also aware that the black communists were literally duping the Russians,

…wearing their shirt collars turned in to make V’s at their throats, wearing their caps—they wore caps because Lenin had worn caps—with the visors turned backward tilted upward at the nape of their necks. Many of their mannerisms, pronunciations and turns of speech had been consciously copied from White Communists whom they recently met. While engaged in conversation they stuck their thumbs in their suspenders or put their left hands into their shirt bosoms or hooked their thumbs into their back pockets as they had seen Lenin or Stalin do in photographs. Though they did not know it, they were naively practicing magic; they thought that if they acted like the men who had overthrown the czar, then surely they ought to be able to win their freedom in America.

(BB 295)
Richard sympathized with those people as he realized that mere aping of white communists and the communist leaders was of no avail. The incomprehensible policies and principles of communists had frozen the Negroes at even lower level of ignorance than they had been before meeting the communists instead of stimulating them in their hearts to become masters of ideas and life. Their world was one of fantasy and was too simple to believe while one group of communists talked of annihilating the enemy in any manner possible, another group accused and inveighed against religion which frightened the people instead of convincing them.

Richard’s association with John Reed club was an amazing experience to him as he saw the unity of thought among outcasts and there was already an organized search for the truth of the lives of the oppressed and the isolated. The cynicism in Richard started to slide from him and he wondered about the possible solution for unity. He also wondered at the acquaintance of budding painter, composer, writer and film director who were backed up by the unusually kind and caring white Americans. Though, suspicion lurked behind everything which happened in the John Reed club, the revolutionary words in the printed pages of the magazines of the club struck him with tremendous force. Richard was contented that at last, only in the realm of revolutionary expression, Negro experience could find a home, a functioning value and a role. He recognized a passionate call from the magazines to discharge of his pent up emotions through his favourite medium of writing.
Richard’s few poems were published and to his surprise, he was elected the executive secretary of the club within a period of two months. Despite his protests and decline, he was elected and the reason behind was the sheer politics between two groups, that of, artists and writers. Richard, however tried to understand the purposes and policies of the organization and his position was in the “middle” but could please nobody. Richard did not forget in his busy schedule of John Reed club, his aspiration to write biographical sketch of Negro communists. His aim was to reveal the dramas of hope, fear, love and hate that existed in their life and he wanted to make those people’s lives merge with the mass of the mankind in America. But impediments were awaiting him in his path of writing biographical sketches. The other members in the party started suspecting him as an intellectual and they had no place for intellectual in the party. Richard was shocked to find that he had been classified as “intellectual” and had commented upon his shined shoes, clean shirt and his tie and was labeled bourgeois. He could not bear the idea of being segregated within the party and the taboo to read the books that were not endorsed by the communist party. French observes, “Actually his fellow communists and fellow Negroes probably understood him only slightly better than his white oppressors and not nearly so well as the few of any color or persuasion who possessed his capacity to respond to life.” (126) Though he was afraid of their ignorance, he was confident of his attempt to drive away the fear and ignorance in them.
The real terror came to Richard when he started to write the biographical sketches of the Negro communists. It was painful to Richard to find out that the Negroes were not free from suspicion. Despite the fact that both were living in the same situation and had to depend on the charity houses and relief stations for their food and shelter, they could not trust each other. Richard was disgusted at this status and was painful to see his attempt to render voice to the voiceless was in vain.

Richard’s experience in New York was more terrifying to him and his search for a place to sleep in shocked him, as he could not find a place and nobody was ready to offer him one. The most developed city of America, where everything was clean and nobody seemed to bother about another had the heart of segregation, the fear for the black and the hatred for the race in the core. Now for Richard the question was “could a Negro ever live halfway like a human being in this …country?” (BB 349) and it appeared the most prominent problem in New York, which revealed to Richard, the spark of segregation still alive under the liberty proclaimed.

The segregation, Richard had to experience in his place among his own people was worse than what he did in New York. He was called a traitor, an unstable personality and one whose faith had failed. Though it was a torment for him to be left in emotional isolation, he was glad to be out of the communist party as there were only factional fights and hair-splitting political definitions. Richard’s job in the Negro theatre opened yet another opportunity to come across the Negro dramatics. He was baffled at the actors’ attitude
towards the reality of the coloured people’s status in the south. They had stereotyped themselves to act only in cheap plays filled with fantasies and they were completely ignorant of legitimate theatres and they did not want one, which meant to Richard, as whites called them, Negroes did not like to grow. Richard decided to keep his ideas to himself, as he faced threats for survival even amongst his own people who refused their identity or never wanted to be reminded of what had been lost already.

Richard’s frustration increased as he was isolated deliberately by the communist party members. He could not realize the real motive of the party and the goal they were all aiming at. The public physical assault at him in the May Day March was the worst humiliation he could endure. He saw that the white and black faces in the march were all alien to him. He remembered the stories in which he had assigned a role of honour and glory to the party but could never express any passionate hope thereafter. His concern for the people, groping in the darkness to find what they know not, was painful. Richard wanted to fling spark into that darkness to make them realize the least sought of goal, of living a human life. He determined to look at himself first and started to question himself, “Well, what had I got out of living in the city? What had I got out of living in the south? What had I got out of living in America?” (BB 383)

Richard, at one point, realized that his country had given him only words and had not given any examples of how to live a human life. Throughout his life, he had been hungry for a new way to live of which the
Americans, irrespective of the race and colour, were ignorant about. Richard sympathizes all, “Yes, the whites were as miserable as their black victims, I thought. If this country can’t find its way to a human path, if it can’t inform conduct with a deep sense of life, then all of us, black as well as whites, are going down the same drain…” (BB 383) He wanted to build a bridge, with the words given by his country, between him and his world outside and his revelation came at last that only through his writing, he could unravel the mystery of distant and eluding unreal world. He concludes his autobiography with the following determined words:

I would hurl words into this darkness and wait for an echo, and if an echo sounded, no matter how faintly, I would send other words to tell, to march, to fight, to create a sense of the hunger for life that gnaws in us all, to keep alive in our hearts a sense of the inexpressibly human. (BB 384)

And thus his destination to find a place to lead a human life was on pursuit. Smith states, “Writing, for a black, lay beyond the structure of socially acceptable possibilities in the South and thus is linked with self-assertion, individuality, manhood, and by association, with rebellion.” (129)

Maya Angelou’s pursuit was towards self-revelation. Ever since she encountered the sexual harassment, she secluded herself from others and led a silent life observing others. The life of observation extended to California, where Bailey and Maya were destined to go, to live with their parents. Maya
left Stamps for the second time, forever to live with her parents. The reason behind the journey was Bailey’s maturity and his growing questioning attitude about the hatred between blacks and whites. Momma sensed the dilemma in Bailey’s mind which may mislead him in the path of rebels and revolutionary and decided to send them to their parents. Though Maya was anxious about leaving Stamps and her friend Louise, she was contented with the companion of ‘djinn’ who has served her all her life, that is, books, a magician who could soothe her at times of pain and loneliness.

As usual, Maya was with all admiration for her mother who could manage to survive in an alien place. Maya admired and amazed at her mother’s power and intelligence, next to Momma. As Maya points out:

Since I was enchanted with the creation of my own world, years had to pass before I reflected on Momma’s remarkable adjustment to that foreign life. An old Southern Negro Woman who had lived her life under the left breast of her community learned to deal with white landlords, Mexican neighbours and Negro strangers. She shopped in supermarkets larger than the town she came from. (IKWCBS 203)

Maya’s mother was beautiful which made her powerful and her power made her honest. She was competent to manage her children with humour and imagination.
With her mother in San Francisco, Maya’s lifestyle changed a lot and she could sense that apart from the Negroes, there were other people living in America. World War II made America to realize the need of Negroes and even appreciated. It was something alien and very pleasing for him. Maya could sense these changes in the blacks who had led a life as, that of concentration-camp for centuries in slavery’s plantation and later in sharecropper’s cabins. As they were recruited by war-plant labor scouts, they had the chance to live in two or three-story apartment buildings which in truth became instant slums. It was an unexpected fortune for the black man to earn two and even three-figured weekly cheques and an entirely new experience was that he was in a position to pay other under him. As Maya says:

For the first time he could think of himself as a Boss, a spender. He was able to pay other people to work for him, i.e., the dry cleaners, taxi drivers, waitresses etc., the shipyards and ammunition plants brought to booming life by the war let him know that he was needed and even appreciated. A completely alien yet very pleasant position for him to experience. Who could expect this man to share his new and dizzying importance with concern for a race that he had never known to exist? (IKWCBS 211)

Maya was in chasm to see the segregation which she thought, did not exist in the city. As she says:
The southern white illiterates brought their biases to the city and the black man, on his part, did not leave his distrust and fear of whites which history had taught them in distressful lessons. Though they worked together in the war plants, their animosities festered and opened like boils on the face of the city. (IKWCBS 213)

Maya was not spared from this as she too carried her distrust and fear to the San Franciscan school. The white pupil had better vocabularies and less fear in the classrooms. What Maya observed was that, “They never hesitated to hold up their hands in response to a teacher’s question; even when they were wrong they were wrong aggressively.” (IKWCBS 215)

It was in the city, Maya was able to identify and courageously approve of her love for Shakespeare, a white man, otherwise in Stamps, would have brought in the rebuke of Momma. Her love for drama, consequence of her uncurbed love for exaggerated gesture and the emotive voice drove her to the dramatics class. Her mother and Bailey encouraged her to take dance. Her complex for poor appearance which was not as attractive as her mother or her brother was driven away by the overwhelming fancy to “occupy space” through dance. She owed allegiances in her life to, “Momma with her solemn determination, Mrs. Flowers and her books, Bailey with his love, my mother and her gaiety, Miss. Kirwin and her information, my evening classes of drama and dance.” (IKWCBS 218)
Maya learnt more about black men with association with Mr. Clidell, whom she calls Daddy Clidell, her mother’s new boyfriend and unlike Mr. Freeman, a very fatherly person with love and care. A down-to-earth man and very simple with “no inferiority complex about his lack of education and …no superiority complex because he had succeeded despite that lack.” (IKWCBS 220) He owned apartments and pool halls, very conservative in dress and proud when Maya was called his daughter. It was through him, Maya came to know more about black men, who, though con men were smart enough to outwit the rich, greedy white men through their intelligence. With their intelligence, they try, “to pry open the door of rejection and not only became wealthy but got some revenge in the bargain.” (IKWCBS 224)

Each and every day in Maya’s life was a various stage of education. Her vacation with her father Bailey in California was awaiting for yet another lesson for Maya. She learnt of her father girlfriend who was very younger to him and the possessive woman who did not want Maya between her and father Bailey. Maya could find it difficult to live like Dolores who kept her home speck and clean. Either she crushed it or dropped it down carelessly which upset Dolores. Father Bailey enjoyed the discomfort to the adoration of his lover. She was proud of her sweet heart’s taste and expertise in cooking Mexican dish. Dolores and Maya cherished a secret mutual hatred for each other. Dolores was jealous when Maya’s father took her on a Mexican trip. Despite her surprise she never failed to notice the envy behind Dolores’s silence.
In Mexico, Maya was taken aback by her father’s companions and his fluency in Spanish. The trip brought her yet another surprise on her ability to drive a car with her drunkard father beside her. The accident on the way and the easy way in which her father coped up with the situation was a wonder and she was indeed proud of herself. Maya, back in California, sensed the irritated Dolores and there was literally a brawl between Maya and Dolores in which Maya was wounded in her waist. Maya could not tolerate the abusive words about her mother and fought back with all her might and escaped from the sensitive, possessive Dolores once for all. Her Christian attitude to console Dolores had been misunderstood and Maya was desperate at her failed endeavour. To relieve her father of his anxiety Maya left without alarm.

Once out of her father’s place, she was left alone to encounter her future. With no destination to aim at, she wandered on the streets of California and decided to take refuge in a junkyard littered with the old cars. “The idea of sleeping in the near open bolstered my sense of freedom. I was a loose kite in a gentle wind floating with only my will for an anchor.” (IKWCBS 251) says Maya. With the new companions, Maya spent a month in the junkyard, collected bottles and worked weekends with other girls, danced in jitterbug contest and led a carefree life. She could find the equality and fraternity from among those homeless children. Maya accounts,

After hunting down unbroken bottles and selling them with a white girl from Missouri, a Mexican girl from Los Angeles and a Black girl from Oklahoma, I was never
again sense myself so solidly outside the pack of the human race. The lack of criticism evidenced by our ad hoc community influenced me, and set a tone of tolerance for my life. (IKWCBS 254)

But this sense of brotherhood left herself unrecognized and she wanted to go back to her mother badly and felt at home in San Francisco in her presence.

Return to San Francisco was a revelation to Maya, the loss of some youth for knowledge and she was glad at gain rather than to be sorry at the loss. The realization of her craze for dance was yet another revelation to Maya and soon Maya and her brother were famous at dancing floors. The revelation extended further to unfurl the maturity of her brother and the oedipal skein between him and his mother was at strain. Though Bailey was forced to leave home Maya understood the growth in him and the reality of fending for himself, a step forward in his life. The stepping out of her brother and an easy way in which both her mother and Bailey took it instigated a feel to be independent in Maya too.

Maya’s intellectual pride wiped out the idea of working among the files or teaching in schools. Her age was a restrain to work in wars and shipyards and hence the well-paying defense jobs were also out of question. Her interest surged towards the streetcars in which women were replacing the men and Maya was excited at the thought of dark-blue uniform with a money changer at her belt and sailing up and down the hills of San Francisco. The significance of her mother’s role is emphasized in this particular decision of Maya. The
immediate reaction of her mother was rather the question of race than that of the job itself. But Maya was rather disappointed than being infuriated followed by the noble determination to break the restricting tradition. She was not prepared to drop out her fancy for the uniform and as she says, “…I gradually ascended the emotional ladder to haughty indignation and finally to that state of stubbornness where the mind is locked like the jaws of an enraged bulldog.” (IKWCBS 265) Maya’s inheritance of her mother’s stubborn and optimistic aptitude is very apparent where her mother encourages, “That’s what you want to do? Then nothing beats a trial but a failure. Give it everything you’ve got. I’ve told you many times, ‘Can’t do is like Don’t care.’ Neither of them have a home.” (IKWCBS 265) The above quoted words were significant in the sense Maya’s progression from a dumb timid girl to an active brave girl enabled to encounter the life with all her might. Her mother’s words, “Translated, that meant there was nothing a person can’t do, and there should be nothing a human being didn’t care about. It was the most positive encouragement I could have hoped for.” (IKWCBS 265)

As pointed out by Vivian and unexpected by Maya, in her curiosity, Maya had to face the reality of ‘black and white in the Market Street Railway Company. The white receptionist had the formality of admitting the black people forwarded by the agencies and Maya, behaved in a braver straight forward manner of answering with guts. But Maya knew that both the white receptionist and she were puppets in the show designed by the ancestors, “The secretary and I were like Hamlet and Laertes on the final scene, where,
because of harm done by one ancestor to another, we were, bound to duel to the death. Also, because the play must end somewhere.” (IKWCBS 267) It was very much obvious that the blacks had to put on the mask of courage and to encounter the reality of segregation. The whites on the other side had to put on the mask of equality behind the reality of colour bias. Maya’s determination was not supported by the Negro organizations and was assumed to be crazy as she persisted to have the job of conductorette, a taboo for a coloured woman in San Francisco. The struggle to enter the job was never to be dropped out by Maya. She also felt the beginning of mutual adult admiration between her and her mother as “She comprehended the perversity of life, that in the struggle lies the joy. That I was no glory seeker was obvious to her, and that I had to exhaust every possibility before giving in was also clear,” (IKWCBS 265)

Maya’s persistence to be a conductorette or whatever it may be was encouraged by her mother Vivian Baxter. Though she had a store of aphorisms which she gave out on right occasions and though was bored with all her clichés, they had something new and inflected Maya. Her mother’s words, “Life is going to give you just what you put in it. Put your whole heart in everything you do, and pray, then you can wait.” (IKWCBS 269) had a long way, to run in Maya’s life. Vivian Baxter’s support was fruitful when Maya was hired as the first Negro on the San Francisco street car. Maddocks comments:
With the support of her fierce...mother Maya not only recovers her sense of sexual self respect, but by the end of this volume, is fighting the white authorities to become the first black ever to work on the San Francisco street cars. (33)

It was only a sugar coated pill as her working shifts were split haphazardly and it was chosen by her superiors maliciously. It was again Vivian who came up with another cliché, “Don’t worry about it, you ask for what you get. And I’m going to show you that it ain’t no trouble when you pack double.” (IKWCBS 270) Vivian was ready to drop or pick up Maya in the car barn and she did not want to entrust her daughter to a taxi driver.

Maya, entering the stage of adolescence was really excited about all her adventures down Mexico, her schoolmates, whose lives were completely a strange one to that of hers. Unlike Maya, the girls of her age were concerned and excited over the football games, interested in the election for student body president and the metal bands of their teeth. As Maya says,

Without willing it, I had gone from being ignorant of being ignorant to being aware of being aware. And the worst part of my awareness was that I didn’t know what I was aware of. I knew I knew very little, but I was certain that the things I had yet to learn wouldn’t be taught to me at George Washington High School. (IKWCBS 271)
The stage of getting into maturity was rather painful to Maya and the school, for the first time in her life sounded boring.

The trauma of passing from childhood to youth, from ignorance to awareness and to unravel the mystery of physical and psychological changes was acutely experienced by Maya. The confrontation of loneliness and the conflict between the hidden secrets of sex and the physical development frustrated Maya. The loneliness, the change in the physique of other girls and books on sexuality raised the doubt and curiosity to discover the undiscovered in her. The lack of attraction to the opposite gender and lack of interest in sex when other girls of her same age discussed queer things and laughed at dirty jokes, created a suspicion about her normality in Maya. Though Vivian Baxter explained and cleared the doubt regarding the changes in her body, Maya was not relieved of her suspicions and her dangerous experiment of sex landed her in pregnancy. Maya’s mother took it not seriously and was relieved at Maya’s decision of not marrying that boy but helped her with all heart and might to reduce the strain and stress as usual. Maya was really glad for she survived the teens as she says,

To be left alone on the tightrope of youthful unknowing is to experience the excruciating beauty of full freedom and threat of eternal indecision. Few, if any, survive their teens. Most surrender to the vague but murderous pressure of adult conformity. It becomes easier to die and
avoid conflicts than to maintain a constant battle with the superior forces of maturity. (IKWCBS 271)

Maya explicitly explains the pain of entering and living the youth, particularly in the geographical backdrop of colour discrimination and hindrances in the path of progression. Maya states,

Until recently each generation found it more expedient to plead guilty to the charge if being young and ignorant, easier to take the punishment meted out by the older generation (which had itself confessed to the same crime short years before). The command to grow up at once was more bearable than the faceless horror of wavering purpose, which was youth. (IKWCBS 272)

Maya was fortunate enough to have a mother, who could understand the strain and relieve the frustration in Maya’s psyche and was readily available to render her helping hands at the crucial moment. Maya, as a mother, in turn was possessive of her new born son and a satisfaction of possessing a life of her own and she says, “He was beautiful and mine. Totally mine. No one had bought him for me. No one had helped me endure the sickly gray months. I had had help in the child’s conception, but no one could deny that I had had an immaculate pregnancy.” (IKWCBS 288) Thus the evolution of little innocent black girl from Stamps became complete with the new motherhood and Maya always remembered her mother’s words’ “See, you don’t have to think about
doing the right thing. If you’re for the right thing, then you do it without thinking.” (IKW CBS 289) Smith comments,

The birth of the baby brings Maya something totally her own, but, more important, brings her to a recognition of and acceptance of her full, instinctual womanhood. The child, father to the woman, opens the caged door and allows the fully-developed woman to fly out. Now she feels the control of her sexual identity as well as of her social identity. (373- 74)

Maya’s evolution is of great significance as it is an exclusively unique experience of a black female who has encountered assault at the very tender years and emerged a phoenix. Of this Cudjoe comments,

It must be regarded as the (re)discovery of that primal innocence, at a higher level of consciousness, which was lost in her original encounter with the American dream. The sinking into the slime of the American abyss represents the necessary condition of regeneration, and (re)birth into a new and hopefully, more consciously liberated person. (21)

Maya summarizes the status of black women as follows in her autobiography,

The Black female is assaulted in her tender years by all those common forces of nature at the same time that she is caught in the tripartite crossfire of masculine
prejudice, white illogical hate and Black lack of power.

The fact that the adult American Negro female emerges a formidable character is often met with amazement, distaste and even belligerence. It is seldom accepted as an inevitable outcome of the struggle won by survivors and deserves respect if not enthusiastic acceptance. (IKWCBS 272)

O’Neale also states,

No Black women in the world of Angelou’s books are losers. She is the third generation of brilliantly resourceful females, who conquered oppression’s stereotypical maladies without conforming to it expectations of behavior. (26)

Hence Maya was successful in reaching the destination of realization and awareness of her existence with nothing to subside her energy to ‘live’ a life of freedom. It was true not only of Maya but also of Haley who descends from the family of winners, of Baldwin who ascends the staircase of spiritual exaltation and of Wright who takes up the words as a weapon to march in the path of emancipation.