Chapter – II

ALIENATION

Alienation is one of the most awful and gruesome experience of individuals. It is the greatest tragedy and curse on mankind. The word ‘Alienation’ has been used to express the negative notions and attitudes which sidelines the individual as well as the society. When an individual falls into the trap of alienation, he becomes sick and anxious. It is considered as the negative aspect of the society in such forms as estrangement, powerlessness, normlessness, meaninglessness, isolation, loss of the self and so on. It is linked with all aspects of social sciences, theology, psychology, philosophy and literature.

Alienation is referred to in social sciences as, “the state of feeling estranged or separated from one’s milieu, work, products of work, or self.” (Encyclopedia Britannica, 270) The critic, Keniston feels that “heroes of all kinds and all ages have been alienated and their stories are the tales of alienation and of struggles to end it.” (Keniston .K. 32-33)

Man’s alienation becomes grueling as he enters into the modern world. It affects both individual psyche, and the social fabric at large. It could further be defined as the complex interactions of racially motivated negative attitudes and actions; emotional and psychological maltreatment. Nisbet the critic and sociologist, compares this with values and degradation of the society, and he opines that “… any society that experiences sudden and violent change of its social order and values, gives rise to the thoughts of both community building and alienation” (Nisbet, 264). Eberhard argues that other generations also had the idea of alienation though they may not have expressed in it in the same terms. Instead, the idea “… manifested itself in the literature, poetry, sculpture, painting and general culture of the times.” (Eberhard, 17)
The term ‘Alienation’ can be classified differently in various contexts in every day milieu. In the historic English meaning, alienation is referred to with transfer of property or of individual rights. It is also used as frustration and hostility. Seeman identifies the five types of alienation. The first type, powerlessness, refers to lack of control over an individual’s action which comes out with helplessness. The second type of alienation refers to a lack of understanding of the individual’s own situation and thereby a failure on his part to predict the outcome of his behavior. This is the meaningfulness of the individual. Mills, in his study of the intellectuals, sees that “he cannot control what he is able to foresee” (Mills, 157). The third category of alienation is associated with a state of normlessness and is derived from Durkheim’s theory of suicide. Durkheim called this a state of anomie, where there exists a general breakdown of law and order in the society. It is manifested as a state of uncertainty and insecurity. Estrangement, the fifth type of alienation identified by Seeman, is probably the most popular term used to describe alienation. Marx used ‘estrangement’ as an idea to convey alienation. Mills also identified alienation in terms of estrangement.

Alienation can be physical, mental, religious, spiritual, political, social or economic and often it is an amalgamation of more than one of these types. Alienation handicaps an individual’s personality, curbs his self esteem and confidence, and makes him feel underprivileged and inferior in the society. In fact, socially alienated person experiences powerlessness and it leads him to feel insecure due to his fear of suppression and separation from the society and in order to paralyze his fear and the feel of insecurity, the state of meaningfulness frustrates him to seek for an identity. The alienated individuals like to remain loners rather than be mixed in the world that fails to understand them. If individuals do not take cognizance of the common values, interests, duties and responsibilities then they suffer alienation. However, without prejudice, the woman writers too have expressed their suffering due to alienation at the hands of male chauvinists, irrespective of their position in the society.
Lower caste people suffered alienation under the clutches of upper caste people and Negroes (blacks), as slaves, experienced the bitter taste of alienation under the tyranny of the Whites. Untouchability is another form of alienation making a person outcast and virtually denying all his rights.

While on a visit to India, to the astonishment of Martin Luther King Jr., he was referred as the “fellow untouchable from the United States of America.” This personal experience of Martin Luther King Jr., when Dr. King came to visit India in 1959 to attend a congregation, was narrated by Raj Razdan, Executive Director of the Senior Citizen Program of Georgia, on the Occasion of the Martin Luther King Day service. After his return to America, Dr. King told the members of the church how he was introduced to the public by the Principal of the school,

The principal of the school introduced me and then he came to the conclusion of his introduction. He said, ‘young people, I would like to present to you a fellow untouchable from the United States of America’ and for a moment I was shocked and even peved that I would be referred to as an ‘untouchable’, Razdan quoted King as saying years back. King said he then started to think “about the fact that 20 million of my brothers and sisters were still smothering in an airtight cage of poverty in an affluent society. And as I thought about this, I finally said to myself, yes, I am an untouchable and every Negro in the United States is an untouchable.” (Razdan, Raj, The New Indian Express, 9)

The phenomenon of racism and alienation is still prevalent in many parts of the world. Unfortunately, in India it is experienced even today. It is undeniable that segregation prevails in every society and it is common among the individuals who suffer the clutches of racism. They lead a rugged life. No man can exist separately in this world. The loneliness of an individual
hurts him very badly, in mind, soul and his spirit. It is inevitable that, women writers suffer alienation under the dominance of men writers. Women are isolated from the men in the society. Similarly, Dalit literature in India remarks a lot about the alienated caste discrimination by the upper caste people. Hopelessness and meaninglessness are the way of living for the alienated sect. Their life in the society becomes miserable without any nostalgia of the past, aimless in the present and the hopelessness of the future. The aimless life and absurdity make them as corpses. It is not uncommon to learn the news about the segregation of ‘powerless’ by the sect those who are in the power. As recently as November 2011, one such tragic incident has resurfaced again and the same has been made as a report by The New Indian Express;

A Village Administrative Office constructed at Kuladeepamangalam
Village near Thirukovilur, Villuppuram district in 2003 has not been inaugurated. Locals said that since the office building was situated near an area populated by the Scheduled Caste Community, no one had come forward to make it functional.

C. Arjunan, a resident of this village, said that no one had taken steps to inaugurate the building and no one cared, as the building was situated near an SC community. Caste Hindus hesitate to come here for their work. The building had been ruined due to absence of maintenance. V. Saravanan from this village said that this was a true example of the caste problem in the area.” (The New Indian Express, 6)

Modern technological advancements in many fronts of science all over the world in several fields like Education, invention of cloning, agricultural revolution, newer thoughts in social and cultural values in the society could not prevent the human race from sailing backward,
taking the foot-steps of the absurd habit of segregating their own species and look down at them for varied reasons like, illiteracy, caste, gender and race.

Slavery is the result of separate and unequal segregation in all aspects of life which prevented human races to live without discrimination; this complexity of racism motivated the negative attitude with emotional and psychological maltreatment by way of alienation. It created a barrier for the underprivileged and banished them by separation. Racism does not stop with slurs and insults. The other side of racism was the prerogative enjoyed by the privileged and the unfair dominance of the whites in the early history of America. Thus they determined that they were the rulers and they were born to rule the others. Thus, they believed in domination, and have all the rights, and they framed the laws to suit their interests. Rev. Larry Snyder, deliberated that

“Racism has never been solely or principally about insults, slurs, or exclusion, as demeaning and harmful as they are. These are but the symptoms of a deeper malady.” He further added, “Racism describes the reality of unearned advantage, conferred dominance, and invisible privilege enjoyed by white Americans, to the detriment, burden, and disadvantage of people of color. This network of racially conferred advantages and benefits has been termed “White Privilege”. (Rev. Larry Snyder, 8)

The white Americans who fought for their independence zealously fortified the rights of the individual by establishing a greater democracy, ironically chose to overlook the fact that their slave holders were violating the human rights of the Africans whom they were capturing like cattle and selling in the slave market of the United States. There are several authors who have written about the trauma that the Africans suffer when they get uprooted from their nature,
tradition, culture and religion. W.E.B. Du Bois wrote in his classic book, *The Souls of Black Folks* that . . . “the nation had not found peace from its sins, and that the freedman has not yet found freedom from his promised land” (Bois, Du, W.E.B. 14). The masters of the new found land after winning their struggle against their European masters did not apply the same yardstick towards the blacks, who were brought as slaves and sold in the slave market. But, the unfortunate slaves were burdened with ‘hard labor’ from sunrise to dusk. There was no choice left for them to demand freedom.

Negroes (blacks) were suppressed and separated to the core that, their basic rights of voting and education and a comfortable life style were all denied. They were isolated from the mainstream by the racist and prejudiced society. Blacks were forced to accept a religion of not their own culture, which they were not aware of, and finally to certain extent adopt themselves to the tradition of their masters. While they were told in clear terms that they are inferior, the Whites never realized of their act as inhuman and uncivilized. Here James A Banks opines that ‘white racism’ has become the part of black life. They had to accept their status of inferiority as ‘a way of life’ at all stages of life. It was demanded of them that they kept away themselves in schools, hospitals, and other public places. A separate housing for blacks called ‘black belt’ became a part of their perennial life system. James A Banks further elaborates this social malady as,

Black people have to contend with the normal developmental tasks in addition to the survival factors associated with the fact of inheriting an inferior class status. Segregated housing, schools and other facilities continually suggest a difference – an unacceptable one of inferiority.

Recently, as an explanation for the behavior exhibited by whites towards
blacks, the phrase “White racism” has become part of the daily language of a significant portion of the American public. (Banks, James. A., 118)

The psychological trauma undergone by the blacks invariably paved the way to vent out their sufferings. The emergence of many black writers’ novels and other works mirrored the agonies and mute cries of black people. For the Blacks, writings were the only solace for them to bring out the malady of the black suffering. Eventually, with the odds being against them, the African American writers went through the clutches of alienation because of the racial color, racial characteristics and racial prejudice. Several authors have dealt with the theme of alienation and brought out its maladies through their protagonists. In a similar fashion, Wright’s contemporary and the Afro-American writer Zora Neale Hurston, in her novel Their Eyes were Watching Gods speaks on how much farther the whites went in segregating the blacks. The story narrates the life of Janie and her troubled married life. She married Tea Cake as her third husband, who happened to be assigned with the job of cleaning the dead bodies for a living. Subsequently, in the story, many died due to a hurricane in the city. While the black men were engaged to dispose the dead bodies, a Guard orders Tea Cake to put aside the black bodies and white dead bodies separately. Then the dead bodies of the whites were put in the coffin whereas the dead bodies of blacks were dumped in a mass grave denying the dead soul, even a decent burial. The author proves to reiterate that the whites dictate their supremacy even in death. Richard too has echoed this plight in “How “Bigger” was Born”, as,

In Dixie there are two worlds, the white world and the black world, and they are physically separated. There are white schools and black schools, white churches and the black churches, white businesses and black businesses, white graveyards and black graveyards, and, for all I know, a white God and a black God. . . .

(“How “Bigger” was Born,” 857)
The experience of Cassius Clay (nee) Muhammad Ali, the great boxing legend, is relevant here to refer to his poem written by him upon his return from Rome after winning the Gold Medal in Boxing. He expressed his longing to be a part of a more civilized society. It is said that while the nations of the world admired him, America, which he claimed to be ‘his’, turned hostile and treated him just another “Nigger” by giving him the taste of alienation. His poem expresses his love and anticipation of what he expects from his land of birth. He shows his belongingness to America by saying, “But the USA is my country still,” and enthusiastically proclaims his feelings by stating,

To make America the greatest is my goal,

So I beat the Russian and I beat the Pole,

And for the USA won the medal of gold.

Italians said, “You are greater than the Cassius of old”.

We like your name, we like your game,

So make Rome your home if you will

I said I appreciate kind hospitality.

But the USA is my country still,

‘cause they waiting to welcome me in Louisville. (1-9) (Ali, Muhammed, 35)

Unfortunately, he was left with no reception and no glory. On another occasion, a restaurant in his hometown of Louisville refused to serve him food because he was a Negro (Black). Ali remarks with dejection, “The waitress looked at both of us and said, “we don’t serve Negroes” (Ali. M, 39), which made him feel shamed, shocked and lonesome. Disgusted
and distraught, he threw the Gold medal into the river. The living experience of Cassius Clay was one of anger, frustration and depression. Cassius Clay who was later famed as Muhammed Ali states, in his 1975 autobiography “... that the world should know the truth. It’s somewhere at the bottom of the Ohio River (Ali. M, 41). The dreams of blacks and their society were crushed under the sole of whites and were made to cripple and wither. This ill-treatment with a virtual hold of racism and discrimination defeated the achievements and victories of Negroes (blacks). They were merely ground to dust and neglected by the whites, thereby alienating them (the blacks) from the society, from the main stream and paralyzed the achievers and curbed their enthusiasm and vibrancies thence made them inactive. Kishori Nayak aptly mentions about the degraded Negro,

Yes, it was not merely slavery that degraded the Negro in America. The Blacks who came to America as freemen and the Blacks who were freed by their masters or through laws like the one passed by Pennsylvania in 1765, too, faced rampant racial, discrimination ... The Negro was forced to accept consciously a “go-slow policy” in the spirit of Booker T. Washington and to plead humbly for equality though it was his constitutional right. (Nayak, Kishori. K., 4, 5)

Generally, these humiliations and atrocities were accepted by the blacks as a routine normal lifestyle. It is considered by these humble souls that the society which runs on the wheels of racism can employ these ill-treatments to the other sect or group of people. As they underwent violence and oppression, whenever they turned to, the society gave them a limited scope to prosper and flourish in every field. They had to resist the burning desire of mingling with the society. It was so awesome that even the burial grounds were segregated for whites and blacks. The people of color were subjected to severe social and economic dislocation. They
were to undergo severe animosity marked by violence and domination. It was a socially patterned dictum which gave them limited opportunities to resist. Left with no alternative, the abuse was seen as normal and on certain occasions considered beneficial by the blacks.

Richard Wright focuses on the stresses, strains, anxieties, tension, failure, aggravation, inferiority complex and castration complex the black people underwent due to alienation. Such ordeal still exists throughout the world without any geological difference. Richard did not remain a mute spectator. The literary quest in him helped him to communicate his ideas. Initially he was attracted towards the communist ideologies, however being a man of words and not politics; he set himself out of the ideologies which did not help at times when he expected it to come to his aid. Wright can be regarded as the epitome of American literature. His works languish about the miseries of ‘being black’ in white America. Perhaps, Richard was the first writer who brought the naked misery of blacks and showed the real power of his characters. The readers once read Richard’s characters with an in-depth feeling could understand and feel the power of his writings and the flame of alienation. Thus, he achieved a platform for his writing in the new land.

Similar to his line of thinking, a number of black writers clearly felt, they needed, not only to defend their race’s innate abilities but also to affirm the Negro’s place in the human family. Richard Wright’s contributions to American Literature were perhaps best summed up by Dan McCall, Prof. of American Studies at Cornell University, in his 1969 book, ‘The Example of Richard Wright.’ “Theme for Negro writers will emerge when they have begun to feel the meaning of this history as a race as though they in one life time had lived it themselves throughout all the long centuries.” (McCall, Dan, 195)

The trace of isolation can be experienced in the writings of Richard. This feeling is vividly peppered everywhere in the novels of Wright. He speaks about the state of being lost in
alienation. Black Boy comes as an example that made the readers to track the impact of alienation which he went through his personal life. It also reminds the readers of the inferior living condition of the blacks.

As a victim of racial discrimination, and alienation, Richard Wright throws light on the sufferings of the black community. He has seen and felt the experiences of violence, denunciation, and lynching against black people. These cruel acts made Richard not only to flee to the North but also to find a way to release his pent-up emotions through his writings. His writings made the people to understand the sufferings the Blacks had undergone for generations together. Especially, through the novel Native Son, he brought out the dark desolation of the black society to the astonishment of the world.

The societal approach towards the Afro-Americans pushed Richard Wright to experience alienation, suppression not only from the outside forces, but also from his maternal family members. The act of negligence of his own family which drove Wright to Chicago in search of green pastures and there after reading the Mencken’s writings, the horrors of alienation burnt within him came out as flames from his mind and soul in his writings. Richard Wright handled the theme of alienation in most of his novels due to his experience of alienation socially, economically and personally.

In his autobiography ‘Black Boy’ he narrates the feeling of alienation which he underwent from the childhood. He says that every Black had to face isolation because their mothers were forced to do the household work as maids in the white’s houses. Black males generally could fetch trivial jobs where there was no skill involved and also that they were not allowed to learn the mastery in their work. It is a vicious cycle dictated by the white society that the black males are rejected for skilled labor and their job opportunities are crushed. Therefore a dominant white society conveniently draws a line so that the blacks do not enter into the main
stream of the society and stand equally with the whites for the job. Since, the black males are not in a position to earn and support the family; the black women are forced to work to meet both the ends.

Srinivasan too echoes a similar view with the cultural and racial determinants as to how the blacks are judged:

For the Negroes the price of cultural alienation is racial identification since they are judged in racial terms rather than as individuals. Thus, Negro literature is handicapped by its very virtues. It is a literature of passionate protests, intense feeling, incoherent characters, suffering people, the fatality of color, as the Negro writer can think of nothing else.

(Srinivasan. C, 69)

The hostile environment in his family, the violence and abuse from his maternal family members at home forced Richard Wright to quit the South and look for a fresh beginning elsewhere. At the time of publication of his first fiction ‘Voodoo’, he had to face severe restrictions from his family members, who considered writing stories were like committing a sin and was even considered as a behavior of a weak-minded person. Driven in quest of survival, Richard went to Chicago to seek a job. During this period, he felt sidelined, lonely and ultimately aggressive which later reflected in his writing. The journey of Richard in search of betterment was put to shake as he could not realize it in the manner he expected. The North he visualized was the copy of the racial South but the only difference he could see was the urban environment. As he however, had to carry the burden of his appearance as a Black, his dream of being accepted by the society was not real but a myth. In 1927, when he departed Memphis for Chicago, the most prominent baggage he carried was something he could never misplace or lose was the color of his skin. Brignano comments on the color consciousness saying, “The fact that
he was a Negro would intrude upon the very mode of his existence and would influence the
direction of his thought, and most certainly later did inform the bulk of his public writing.”
(Brignano, Russel Carl, 122)

The very thought of the word ‘Negro’ and the color of his skin disturbed his thoughts. It
influenced his spirit and every act of his life forever. This reflection perhaps disturbed him and
pictured the actions of his characters in all his writings.

Psychologically, Negroes were unable to shed their mark of black skin amidst the white
society. This consciousness prevented them to project themselves and forced to wear the mask
of submissiveness and politeness with a false grin on their faces in front of the whites. With this
pretext, the focus of Richard’s theme dealt with alienation, identity and insecurity in all his
oeuvres.

Alienated individual’s trauma and sufferings have time and again been depicted in the
modern twentieth century American, European as well as Indian fictions. Among the early Indo-
Anglian novelists, R.K. Narayan is the torch bearer in bringing out the reality of the loneliness of
man. Several examples can be quoted from his works; his character Chandran, in the Bachelor
of Arts, finds his friends away from him, after his college ends. In The English Teacher,
Krisnan is throughout looking for a stable existence.

Alienation is a sentiment of not belonging. The possible effect of alienation is classically
explained by Toni Morrison, the Nobel laureate; how the efflux of time, humans become alien to
one’s own self. In her novel, “Beloved”, the mother, ‘Sethe’ wants to kill all her children
because she did not want her children to live in an alienated society and undergo suffering
dominated by the white society. Her fear of the manner whites treating the blacks, raked her to
believe that blacks were treated worse than the animals and they did not get the treatment which
the white pigs got in a white society. The horrible thought of alienation made her mother to think
about killing of her own children. It goes to the extent that even the mother’s love is directed in a negative aspect for destroying or taking away her own children’s life.

Though far away from the Asian subcontinent, sentiment of similar frustration was expressed through the words of Georgia Douglas Johnson’s poems *Bronze, a Book of Verse* in 1922, she wrote about a woman’s agony with the following words bringing out helplessness in the prejudiced world.

Don’t knock at my heart, little one,

I cannot bear the pain

Of turning deaf ear to your call

Time and time again!

You do not know the monster men

Inhabiting the earth!

Be still, be still, my precious child,

I must not give you birth! (9-16) (Johnson, Georgia, D, 47)

With the arrival of Richard Wright in the literary world, his novels portrayed in great length the several implications the black community faced. In *Black Boy*, his autobiography, the writer’s agony due to alienation has pictured his childhood life, where he felt lonely due to the indifference of his father. Richard Wright was brought up in an alienated world. Since his father deserted his mother for another woman, Ella, Richard’s mother, was forced to find a job to fulfill the family’s needs. At the age of six, he realized that a fatherless house is a foodless house. Hunger gnawed at him always. Wright recollects, “As the days slid past, the image of my father
became associated with my pangs of hunger and whenever I felt hunger, I thought of him with a deep biological bitterness.” (BB, 17)

His mother Ella does the household work in white’s houses to quench the family’s hunger and most of the time she left Richard Wright at home alone in order to make both ends meet. His loneliness, in the world, left him with the scar of insults, miseries and led to live a poor standard of life, which ultimately reflected in his writings and characters. This dark world snatched away his education, prized him with ignorance, a childhood with poverty and hunger. He was forced to learn abusive words from the nearby parlor where gamblers, prostitutes, plantation laborers, drunkards were the regular customers. Richard was even forced to drink alcohol by the parlor customers at the age of six. At this age, when love and affection is sought by every innocent child, Richard had to undergo the dreadful experience of loneliness and alienation which diverted him from the childhood that every child dreamt of. He shares this situation, as,

One summer afternoon – in my sixth year – while peering under the swinging doors of the neighborhood saloon, a black man caught hold of my arm and dragged me into its smoky and noisy depths. The odor of alcohol stung my nostrils. . . . Somebody tried to jam a cigar in my mouth, but I twisted out of the way . . . whiskey was set before me. I shook my head. The man who had dragged me in urged me to drink it, telling me that it would not hurt me. . . . I took a sip and coughed. My head spun and laughed. . . . Soon I was drunk. (BB, 21, 22)

As a deserted child, Richard comes across all chances to ruin himself by learning the life style of criminals and evil minds. In the surroundings where he was brought up during his childhood in the Black belt, he came across the uneducated, poor and the dejected men with no
intellectual thoughts. Had he not met the coalman who taught Richard to count dollars, which
gave him a learning experience, had he not moved to Chicago, and had he not read M.L.
Mencken’s thought provoking books, Richard would not have become a great writer.

The children of poor black families were expected to care for themselves independently
from an early age because both the parents slogged for their livelihood all time. The
circumstances of Richard’s life forced him to look after himself, thereby making him lonely. He
writes his mother’s advice to her children;

My mother finally went to work as a cook and left me and my brother
alone in the flat each day with a loaf of bread and a pot of tea . . .
Sometimes, when she was in despair, she would call us to her and talk to
us for hours telling us that we now had no father, that our lives would be
different from those of other children, that we must learn as soon as
possible to take care of ourselves, to dress ourselves, to prepare our own
food; we must take upon ourselves the responsibility of the flat while she
worked. (BB, 17)

When Richard was nine years old, he was again isolated from his mother who became
sick and paralyzed. He recalls the heart breaking condition of his mother that ,

. . . my mother’s suffering grew into a symbol in my mind, gathering to
itself, all the poverty, the ignorance, the helplessness; the painful, baffling,
hunger-ridden days and hours; the restless movement, the futile seeking,
the uncertainty, the fear, the dread; the meaningless pain and the endless
suffering. (BB, 96)
The poverty and the never ending search for the rays of hope in life frustrated Richard and made him helpless. Indirectly it was the dominant society that denied any opportunity to the Blacks, and Richard was one among them. Richard Wright experiences alienation when his family lived in Arkansas, which he narrates in *Black Boy*. He had the fear of facing the whites and on many occasions a tough time fighting with the white boys. When his family moved to Mississippi from Arkansas, they had the good fortune of not to live close to the white neighborhoods. The isolated blacks were expected to live away from the white neighborhoods and such places were named as ‘Black Belt’. The habitat of this black belt was less sympathetic, engulfed in a slum area. Their houses were dingy and their kitchenettes were the breeding places for all kinds of diseases. But they had the solace of having their own Black Church to pray, a Black School to learn from the teachers who had limited knowledge. Thus, this black belt gave a limited scope to explore because there was a running undercurrent between the black belt and the white neighborhood, where the blacks were forbidden to enter. Richard depicts the entire scenario of the sickening black belt area, the life in it and how they felt alienated from the rest of the world. Richard left no stone unturned in depicting the living condition of the alienated blacks in the South and pictured it in detail.

We lived in the very heart of the local black belt. There were black churches and black preachers; there were black schools and black teachers; black groceries and black clerks. In fact, everything was so solidly black that for a long time I did not even think of white folks, save in remote and vague terms. (“The Ethics of Living Jim Crow”, 227)

He left the South and traveled to Chicago in search of green pastures. At the Chicago Railway station, he wondered by the lack of separation and there was no “for colored” board, to segregate as a mark of alienation of the blacks. It became monotonous for the blacks to hunt
with anxiety for the “for colored” boards. Subconsciously, they search such ‘sign’ boards wherever they go. When Richard went to Arkansas at the early stage with his mother, he happened to see the board “for colored” and questioned and pestered his mother for the meaning behind the words and what it meant to be.

At last we were at the Railway Road station with our bags, waiting for the train that would take us to Arkansas; and for the first time I noticed that there were two lines of people at the ticket window, a “white” line and a “black” line. During my visit at granny’s a sense of the two races had been borne in me with a sharp concreteness that would never die until I died. 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. . . . I had begun to notice that my mother became irritated when I questioned her about the whites and blacks and I could not quite understand it. I wanted to understand these two sets of people who lived side by side and never touched, it seemed, only in violence. (BB, 44, 45)

Thus, color played a strong and emotive sphere in the mindset of young Wright which often made him sense the enormity of alienation forced upon the Negroes (blacks) in every shade of life. From the beginning of his childhood, Richard had to take a glimpse of these “for colored” boards everywhere in the public places and out of eagerness to know its implications of it, he questioned his mother with an innocence but at the later stage he realized that “for colored” was a way of life for the blacks and a symbol of alienation which they went through. The “for colored” phenomena becomes so rational and repetitive that it becomes an imperative aspect to get it in the black’s mind to see for the board, thus alienating himself from the whites, subliminally it is registered in his mind and soul.
When he reached the station (Chicago) Richard started looking robotically, all about signs boards of “For White, For Colored” but he saw none. He felt overjoyed and thrilled, which he expresses saying, “... it was strange to pause before a crowded news stand and buy a newspaper without having to wait until a white man was served” (BB, 249). This psychological alienation by the whites to the black society makes them to accept the discrimination that they are inferior and indebted to the whites to do service and to be obedient. The “for colored” sign in all the public places is registered in Wright’s mind from his childhood. Wherever the public place he goes, his subconscious mind starts searching for the ‘sign’ and stands aside from the whites. Like a circus master makes a lion or an animal to get trained in the circus activities with a twist of a rope, white folks make the blacks play for their tune with the sign boards. For generations together the blacks were subjected to this monotonous enslavement in the society.

Wright expresses his concern for the ‘for colored’ signs, which psychologically disturbed the blacks in depth, in several of his novels and circumstances. In Richard Wright’s last novel, *Long Dream*, which was published in 1958, the impact of ‘for colored’ sign was vividly depicted through the protagonist Tyree Tucker and his son Fishbelly. When Fishbelly wants to visit a Farm Fair in a nearby village, he asks permission with his father to take him there on a Thursday. For this, Tyree the father of Fishbelly says he would be able to accompany his son Fish to the Farm Fair on another day, since he had two burials on Thursday. But Fish replies to his father that only on Thursday the blacks are allowed to visit the fair as it is the ‘colored day’, a day when the ‘colored’ are permitted to visit the fair.

“Thursday?” His father echoed.”I got two burials on Thursday.”

“Aw, Papa!” Fishbelly wailed in disappointment.

“Sorry, Fish. I can take you on Friday.”
“But Thursday’s the only day for colored folks, Papa.” (LD, 37)

Further, *Long Dream* reveals the protagonist’s state of insecurity in the White’s world and the struggle which he goes through to come out of the knitted web of slavery by the whites. Tyree Tucker breaks the old saying that, “The dream of a black will not come true” in a white society by his stance against White in the “*Long Dream*.” Not only that, he also made his son Fish a man of identity who tries to stand on the victory stand in the black race with the whites. It is Tyree’s dream to make his son a unique person amidst the blacks and among the whites. He induced Fishbelly’s (his son) ever burning fire to out shine by breaking the blocks and attaining the dreams in a hostile and the race prejudiced world.

Richard Wright makes his protagonists to sense the difference between blacks and whites in the early stage itself. Fish, Tyree’s son, realized this for the first time when he was seven years old. When he happens to wait in the office, for his father’s arrival, he views at calendar that held the photo of a laughing white girl. Suddenly he realizes and whispers to himself about the woman who was “with his father at his father’s underground establishment” (LD, 22). Though his mind comprehends with the color, Fish says, “She is Black.” He thinks of himself and his father by saying, “And he was black . . . and his father was black . . . He sensed a relation between the worlds of white skins and black skins, but he could not determine just what it was.” (LD, 22, 23)

The author attempts to trace the difference between the white world which is at the top of the ladder and the black world which is at the feet of its hostile force through Fishbelly, the protagonist of ‘*Long Dream*’. The photograph of a white woman in the calendar emerges as a swirling question in his young mind. He compares the white lady with the black woman, he saw few minutes ago with his father. The contradiction of white and black color conflicts in his mind and he was confused and could not decide the criteria which divide both the worlds.
Since whites are the dominant and “significant others” in American society, and black children derive their conceptions of themselves largely from white society and its institutions. The attitude of racial prejudice and segregation made a negative impact on the mindset of the black writers to contemplate them to seek for their individual identity. Several black writers joined this band wagon and made exemplary research on the attitudes of children and how they look up at the whites and what their expectations were. James has given a catalogue of writers whose concern is the difference between black and the white people.

Lusker’s (1929) pioneering research on children’s attitude indicates that young children are aware of racial differences, and illuminates some of the emotional components which accompany racial prejudice. An early study by Minard (1931) also suggests that children’s racial attitudes are formed during the earliest years of life. Since the seminal research by Lusker and Minard, a number of other researchers have studied race awareness and racial self-identifications of young children. This research has generally confirmed Lusker’s early findings. Horowitz (1939) found that most of the nursery school children, which she studied, were able to correctly identify race. (qtd., Banks, A James, 10)

The deep rooted segregation made the black child look down upon himself and to feel inferior. The education which was given and the area where they were brought up were far from appreciation. Therefore a kind of self-hatred started developing in the mind of every black child. Margaret Walker feels that it was due to lack of proper education and lack of confidence forced the blacks to devalue their culture and their upbringing and also their outlook.

With segregation the white child was educated to regard race as more important than humanity, and the black child was educated to regard a
white world as superior to his own. And thus, taught to hate himself.

(Walker, Margret, 49)

The seeds of hatred and race prejudice are sown even at the earlier stage itself among the white children through their parents or teachers or by the white royal society. At the same time, the parents of black children have a tough time in introducing about the racial discrimination and social disjunctions and disparities to their children and in teaching how to avoid facing the white world and to tackle situations tactfully with the whites. James A Banks reasons the words of Goodman. In a research, done by the critic Good Man, among the children, the black children suffer alienation at the hands of white children and they were segregated when the white children play. Black children were not allowed to play along with the white children. “Goodman noted, as the Clarks and Morland were to later confirm, that white children make more correct racial self-identifications than black children” (qtd., Banks, James. A, 10). This attitude of segregation is deep rooted in the minds of whites, since the days the blacks were brought in as slaves. Alienation was a fact of life, glorified by the whites because of the class and color prejudice. Richard had undergone the life style of a deprived black during his childhood which reflects in his novels Black Boy and Long Dream. Moss and Wilson give an account of the racism applied by the whites;

…by early twentieth century, all southern states had passed a law institutionalizing the separation of the races, public places was segregated, including churches, schools, libraries, phones, restrooms, beaches, water fountains, parks, auditoriums, buses, sports and recreation facilities, hospitals, the military, orphanages, prisons, asylums, and courthouses. There were separate white and black funeral homes, morgues, and cemeteries. Blacks are in their own restaurants. Lived in separate
boarding houses, and attended different theatres. Richard Wright grew up in a time when segregation touched nearly every aspect of southern life.

(Moss, Joyce & Wilson, George, 47)

It is evident that in every aspect of Negro (Black) Life, segregation was implemented by the whites under the Jim Crow Laws. When Fish and his friends had an argument about their race, i.e., where they belong to, whether they are American or African, Zeke, one of his friends answered,

“I am an American” Zeke thundered.


The attitude of Fishbelly reflects the mindset of every black child. Richard points out the cue towards the antagonizing Whites, because these invisible forces hold the whip and control the lives of blacks in such a manner that the unfortunate blacks do not feel the pain of being kept aside, as it was considered normal. In his own words Richard further adds, “To Fishbelly it was clear that those white powerful invisible white faces ruled the lives of black people to a degree that few black people could acknowledge themselves.” (LD, 62)

It is seen from the study that the racial indifferences implanted from a very young age. As a living example, Richard brings out this concept in three of his early novels, *Black Boy, Native Son* and in *Long Dream*. In *Black Boy*, the main character tells that in West Helena the black boys fought regularly with their rivals, the white boys. Whereas in *Native Son*, Bigger and his friend Paul, Gus and others play among themselves and imitate as though they mock at the
blacks by behaving like a white. He pokes at the whites through a conversation. They play the roles of white mockingly:

“Hello”, this is the President of the United States Speaking” Bigger said.

“Oh Yessuh, Mr.President” Gus said “Well You See, the niggers is raising and all over the country. We have got to do something with these black folks . . .”

“Oh, if it is about niggers, I will be right there, Mr.President”, Gus said.

They hung up imaginary receivers and leaned against the wall and laughed. (NS, 462)

Richard with a different tone summarizes the reflections of acting as white by the black children in Lawd Today. Blacks in general tried their best to seek the attention and acceptance of whites by changing their looks by adopting different ways like straightening the hair etc., Sam, the friend of Jake, questions the reason for straightening the hair like whites and imitating them. The inability of the blacks to join the mainstream and being neglected makes them to select any alternative so that they could come out of the segregation.

As the life was difficult for the blacks, jobs were not easily available too. There were many restrictions for the blacks to do any businesses either. While, the profit rendering businesses were under the control of the whites, the blacks were compelled to take-up works that are looked down by the society. Blacks were permitted to run the funeral parlors in the black belt area, which was considered as the job of an out-cast. Richard Wright pictures this disparity in his fiction Native Son with irony as, “Almost all businesses in the Black belt were owned by Jews, Italians and Greeks. Most Negro businesses were funeral parlors, white undertakers refused to bother with dead black bodies. (NS, 679)
Similarly, the central character of *Long Dream* also runs an underground establishment where he buried only the black bodies which the whites hate to take at their parlors. This ill treatment hurts the ego of Tyree Tucker, but he sarcastically remarks, “I make money by getting black dreams ready for burial. Mebbee you don’t know what I mean, hunh? A black man’s a dream son, a dream that can’t come true.” (LD, 73)

Tyree Tucker, being a black and having realized his state in the white world has learnt to lead the life within the boundaries destined by the whites. He does not rebel as he knew the consequences. Hence, unlike the other protagonists of Richard, Tyree, with a strong determination, facilitates his business by bribing the whites, prospering in his profession without entering into the foe’s ground. When the protagonist in *Black Boy* faces suppression in all his menial jobs, he could not contain his emotions which eventually come as an outburst. Tyree, on the other hand, grins at the white’s face, bow in front of them, but behind the screen he runs the show and becomes the head of the ‘Black Belt’. Tyree achieves what he wants with a grinning face and a submissive posture unlike Richard in *Black Boy*. Richard shows the two faces of a black with two different characters and attitudes, a father who wants to achieve with the available means showing a grinning face and his own son who vehemently acts the opposite, through the character of Fishbelly. Richard maintains and shows his own individuality. He tries to prove his opposition and hatred towards this “grinning” attitude. The act of ‘Uncle Tomism’ by Tyree makes Fishbelly feel ashamed and his self-respect crumbles.

The overpowering “Jim Crow Law” was yet another draconian virtue that bulldozed every opportunity for blacks for their decent survival. A majority of American states enforced segregation through “Jim Crow” laws from 1880s to 1960. From Delaware to California, and from North Dakota to Texas, many states (and cities too) could impose legal punishments on people for consorting with members of another race. The most common types of laws forbade
intermarriage and ordered business owners and public institutions to keep their black and white clientele separated. White racism throughout America, particularly in the South is the culprit in the tragedy of blacks’ life. Richard Wright sketches out these in the epics of Jim Crow. He narrates an incident how a black could easily be set aside, shown his place where he belongs to and make it acceptable to him that he is an outcast and estranged. The mind set becomes so ridiculous that he is ready to live with it, though his inner conscious wants to rebel, wants to come out but disdained to accept this as the way of life.

The second part of Black Boy (American Hunger) begins with Wright’s arrival at Chicago, where, he finds various short term jobs as porter, dish washer and postal clerk. With the onset of the great depression, unfortunately, employment opportunities depleted, as everyone was looking for a work that it became extremely difficult to find a job. Richard with no alternative, applied for relief at the local department of public welfare. The department assigned him a position as an Orderly in a medical research institute in a hospital. Richard noticed that almost all jobs of respect and attention were engaged with Whites, whereas the blacks were chosen to do the subordinate works and hard labor. Moss and Wilson support this point of view in their theory stating, “…the lowest jobs, those of Orderly and Janitor were held by Blacks, while the nurses and doctors were all Whites.” (Moss, Joyce & Wilson, George, 41)

Bigger Thomas, a twenty year old protagonist, had to live in a slum environment (in Chicago) to challenge and face unfairness. He, along with his friends, Gus, G.H, is jobless and roaming around the black belt and trying to steal from a black’s shop because, stealing in black’s place by a black is safe. The living environment of the blacks is aptly described by Manak Kumar as “The blacks live in a dingy, segregated dirty, polluted, rat infested area. Slave cabins were simple and crude, mostly consisted of a single dark room with a fire place for cooking and heat.” (Dey, Manak Kumar, 53)
Bigger and his family too lived in a rat infested dingy flat, but it was owned by Mr. Dalton, the white man, under whom Bigger Thomas goes to work as a Chauffeur. Even though Mr. Dalton offered charities to the Negro organizations, Bigger Thomas, was unaware of the charity Mr. Dalton had provided to his sect (the blacks). Where as in reality, Dalton had kept the blacks separately by providing them the worse and dirty flats and kept them away from whites. He never considered it as worthy to improve their living condition, it suited him to exploit the black race and to keep the whites happy and, eventually, follow the diktats of whites.

It speaks clearly about the status of the blacks in society. They belong to none, they are unaware of the happenings in the society; either it is their welfare or the disaster. They are kept in a dark corner of the society with their eyes and ears shut to the occurrences around them. This shows the segregation of blacks by the white dominant people, the atrocities which blacks face and denial of the basic amenities and a healthy environment to lead a normal life.

When they were in need, they did not belong to anyone. They (the blacks) were left alone painfully, pathetically to face the consequences of the horrors of white’s way and will for survival. The blacks were forced to adopt a frustrated life as slaves and the whites inflicted this misery on the blacks without any remorse.

The racial prejudice which is implanted in the hearts of whites since their childhood reflects in the society towards black by their dehumanizing acts. The same hatred and hostility of whites make the black to face the white world, always with fear and insecurity. This basic tendency of hatred of whites and the fear of blacks replicate not only in the American scenario but also in all the protagonists of Richard Wright’s works. Bigger in Native Son implicates through his annihilating act and Richard in Black Boy has shown his resistance by suppressing his violence through his silent state. But the protagonist Fish, unlike Bigger Thomas or Richard
Wright stood on his stance till the end and fought for his rights even though he had so many injuries and wounds on his soul owing to the unsympathetic white world.

At the time of the publication of *Native Son*, (1940) it brought a great furor and cultural change and paved the way for the world to know and realize what is happening to the blacks in the real America. Critic Irving Howe wrote “the day the *Native Son* appeared, American culture was changed for ever . . .it made impossible repetition of the old lies . . .” (Howe, Irving, 355). There is an old saying; “the greatest lie, that the devil ever told was, that he no longer existed.” Well the same may be said today about the white racism. Till today, racism had spread its dreadful claws to cling and crush the underprivileged and deny their rights.

The whites denied many basic rights, one among them was education to the Negroes (blacks), subsequently, when provided, and it was insufficient and inefficient. The feeling, that the blacks could go to school, study and make themselves knowledgeable, was beyond the comprehension and acceptance of the whites.

Studies show that number of domestic workers in any society rise with the level of inequality. It means that in order for this occupation to flourish, there has to be people who are desperate enough to do the work that no one else wants to do, and people well enough to pay them for the work they do not want to do. Thus “domestic workers occupy one of the lowest rungs in the social hierarchy, have little or no dignity, labor, and or exploited in both everyday and egrious way.” (Ray, Rakia, 11) “The Help” a film about the relationship between African-American maids and their employers in 1960s Mississippi gives the in-depth rationale of discrimination and alienation shown towards the black maids.

As a recurrent theme of discrimination, he endeavors to appraise the various obsessive stimuli that breed alienation in his life. *Black Boy* gives a glimpse of the experience a maid goes through. Richard Wright with the help of one of his friends goes to a white lady’s house to do
the household chores. The first question she asked him was “Do you steal?” the sarcastic answer by Richard Wright was “If I steal, I will not tell that” (BB, 141). Realizing the white lady’s rage he answers quickly that he would not steal. The same scenario is depicted in Native Son too, when Bigger was interviewed by Mr. Dalton, he questions him “If you had a job, would you steal now?” (NS, 492). This is the general opinion of what whites have on the blacks. They consider the blacks as criminals and liars, which makes them uneasy. At a later sequence in Black Boy, the lady witnesses him in the kitchen reading some books, she questions him about it and Richard answers that he would like to become a writer. This angers the lady and she reciprocates by uttering that “Who on earth put such ideas on a nigger’s mind. You will never become a writer.” (BB, 141)

Richard brings out through his narratives the expression of his dream, because he himself wants to be a writer, who was denied of education, which he rather longed for. In Black Boy, he pictures America to analyze the scenario of the Afro-American in the Southern belt and he highlights the fictional portraits he had earlier offered. Wright utilized the wide range of publicity, his book received, to say his piece on racism. Richard Wright says about his self-education in the local library and the dreams the books inflicted on him.

I dreamed of going north and writing books and novels. The north symbolized to me all that I had not felt and seen; it had no relation whatever to what actually existed . . . I was building up in me a dream which the entire educational system of the south had been rigged to stifle. I was feeling the very thing that the state of Mississippi had spent millions of dollars to make sure I would never feel; I was becoming aware of the thing that the Jim Crow Law’s had been drafted and passed to keep out of my conscious. (BB, 144)
The Novel, *Native Son*, tells the story of a young black man Bigger Thomas, who grows up in the ghettos of Chicago, knowing only a life of hardship and oppression. The novel opens with the most searing scene. Bigger and his family are woken up in their one-room tenement apartment when they are attacked by a wild, foot long monster of a rat. In an unforgettable and intense scene, Bigger wrestles with the rat and smashes it with a frying pan. The rat brings home at once the wretched conditions Bigger and his family live-in. But in an eerie way, the rat symbolizes Bigger’s situation in life – cornered, fierce, and rebellious but ultimately, smashed down. The scream of his sister Vera at the sight of the rat and Bigger’s anger proves the desperation of the family. Richard compares the rat’s condition with the living condition of every black household and Bigger’s anger is emitted out by killing the rat, which he could not show towards the whites.

The tragic life of Bigger Thomas, particularly his childhood, develops an aversion towards whites. Richard points out this malady as a societal negligence and the root cause of oppression. The psychological experience of Bigger, due to fear and hatred throughout his life, was injected in his blood through the lessons taught by the conditions prevailed in his society and family.

“We live here and they live there.”

“We black and they white.”

“They got things and we ain’t.”

“They do things and we can’t.”

“It’s just like living in jail. Half the time I feel like I’m on the outside of the world peeping in through a knot hold in the fence . . .” (NS, 463)
These categories of Negroes (blacks) try to violate the Jim Crow laws of the South. To get rid of the suppressed racial cage, which was designed by the whites, they indulge in anti-social activities, and enjoy the sweet brief spell for a short span of time. This leads them psychologically to drift over the oppressive life.

The racial situation heated up in the United States during World War II, as the Federal Government supported several discriminatory measures and chose to ignore the issue of prejudice. Blacks were denied jobs at defense industry plants and were permitted to serve only in segregated units in the army, where they had little chance of becoming officers. Another insulting policy prevented the black soldiers from donating blood to army hospitals. Eventually, a public outcry prompted the army to change their restrictions thereby enabling blacks to give blood. Their plasma was not administered to white patients however. This discriminating fact is endorsed by Joyce and George as follows;

Racial discrimination was common to military life. Until 1943, no black was allowed to enlist in the U.S. Marine Corps or in the army air forces. Blacks in the rest of the armed forces were trained in segregation camps and fought in separate units. Just as in civilian life, blacks in the military were regularly limited to the most menial jobs. American defense industries also discriminated against their black employees during the 1940s. (Moss, Joyce & Wilson, George, 59)

The racial prejudice and the suppressive attitude of whites made them to neglect humanity and they refused to take black blood even during the emergency period of war and they considered Negro’s (black) blood as dirty. Richard was interested to serve in the Army as a soldier, but like every other blacks, he was given odd jobs like washing the dishes and digging ditches. No black was considered for a dignified duty in the army or in the navy. It was painful
for any black that both the social and governmental agencies did not accept them or gave them their dues. Robert Ivanov supports the same theory, when he says,

Thousands; millions of black men were angry because they were allowed to fight in the war only as servants in the navy or in segregated units in the army. Jobs were opening up in industries for the white man, but the black man was excluded. Even his blood was segregated. At first the Red Cross Blood Banks had refused “black” blood entirely; then when a shortage developed it had been accepted but kept separate from “white blood.” The party would never recruit Negroes unless it fought on two fronts – in Europe against Hitler’s racists’ theories and at home against the capitalist racism. (Ivanov, Robert, 154)

During war, blacks were allowed to fight and die; otherwise they cleaned up the kitchen or dig trenches in the Army. Richard condemns this indifference of whites who curtail the black’s significance. Lack of the prevalence of higher level jobs was portrayed in Native Son too; they ended up as drivers, plumbers, cleaners, and servants. A respectable job becomes an unfulfilled dream of the blacks. Richard echoes blacks’ longingness in the words of Bigger Thomas by saying; “Why they make us live in one corner of the city, why do not they let us fly planes and run ships?” (NS, 463). At home too, he remains a loner as his mother always pesters him to search for a job. He remains defiant not to go for a job, because he was scared to face the world dominated by the whites. This made him disillusioned and detached from the rest of the society. This created a scar in his life. Hollowness occupied his mind, as he knew very well that it was a losing battle to ask for an equal status from the whites.

In “Big Boy Leaves Home”, Richard Wright, shows several modes of atrocities forced on the blacks in the South. It doesn’t confine with alienation alone but one can feel the helplessness
as they become a target of pleasure and their identity becomes a souvenir for the whites to exploit them as they wish. His story, “Big Boy Leaves Home”, is a combination of alienation, identity and insecurity. It tells how the main characters, the four black adolescents, momentarily forgetting their identity, their place in the society; unknowingly bring a disaster in their life. They are aware that entering into a white’s place endangers their life, and brings misery not only to them, but also to their families. But still, they unwittingly create a confrontation that leads to the death of the white man along with three other black boys. In the white neighborhood, a creek, owned by a white man Mr. Harvey, was barred of entry of the blacks. The boys knew that they were unwanted trespassers into the property of any Southern white man. But their temptation was so great, it made them to forget the consequences and they succumbed to their petty pleasure leading to a confrontation and ended up with a great tragedy. Richard intermingle the sequences of life of blacks, that as black boys, they do not have the same opportunities as their white counter parts, when they say,

“See the sign over yonder?”

“What it say?”

“NO TRESPASSIN.” read Hester.

“Mean ain no dogs n niggers erllowed,” said Buck (“Big Boy Leaves Home”, 246)

“Ah, wish we had a bigger place and swim in.”

“The white folks got plenty swimming pools n we ain got none.”

“They say colored folks up North is got ekual rights.” (Big Boy Leaves Home, 247, 248)
The words “colored folks up North is got ekual rights” (248) articulate their longingness and yearnings to fly to North to get equal rights in the society in spite of their color cosmos. The conversation among the boys bring the truth to the readers that blacks don’t have any swimming pools or recreation clubs to spend and enjoy their time as the whites have. Their conversations, filled with fun end up tragically when the white lady enters the pool area and sees the black boys enjoying themselves where they are unwelcome. While the boys attempt to trespass into Harvey’s swimming pool, Big Boy’s friend Bobo warns everyone, that, if caught, they would face a very bad situation by saying, “Theys gonna lynch us,” said Bobo again. (Big Boy Leaves Home, 252)

The playful boys do not take the warning and play in the swimming pool. Ultimately, they get caught by the white man, the owner of the pool. The boys, unable to confront their fear, exhibit their panic and as the story develops, they get killed. The discrimination between the white and black is so deep rooted in the mindset of black and the white, if a white sees a black they turn hysterical and any advance from the black is construed as if the black is going to harm the white. The hatred is so open that whites detest the sight of blacks, where they are not required or where they cross the place beyond their boundary which was drawn by the whites. It was obvious that any petty mistakes by the Negroes against the whites will end in lynching or hounding. They somehow escape and land up before Big Boy’s mother and explain what has happened,

“We wuz swimming, Ma, N the white woman . . .”

“White woman? . . .” (“Big Boy Leaves Home”, 249)

The very word white woman itself brings psychosomatic fear and they become panic because any misconduct towards a white woman is considered as a great crime that could take away the life of blacks. In panic the mother shouts, knowing pretty well what could follow,
“Lawd have mercy! Ah knowed yuh boys wuz gonna keep on till yuh got into somthin like this!” (Big Boy Leaves Home, 254)

Big Boy and his friends were scared of the unexpected presence of the white woman, at the opposite embankment. When they tried to grab their clothes lay near the woman, they were caught by the whiteman Mr. Heartfield. Out of four boys Lester and Buck were shot to death by the Whiteman. In order to protect him Big Boy shot the Whiteman and fled, but finally he was able to escape with great difficulty by hiding into the kiln. Bobo, his friend was caught red handedly by the whites on the way when he was about to join Big Boy to flee north by the train. Pathetically, he was burnt alive by the whites. It was considered by the whites that blacks were the commodities to amuse whites. They were the soulless creatures according to the whites.

In the younger days of Richard Wright, the blacks seldom had any recreation or clubs that they could spend time with in American society, perhaps it was felt that they were not entitled to have such facilities as it would not discriminate them from the Whites. As Margaret Walker points out, “. . . there were no swimming pools open to colored people and no recreational centers” (Walker, Margaret, 38). Negroes (blacks) were segregated in all the public places and recreational areas like bus stand, hospitals, rail road, swimming pool, parlors, restaurants, even the prison. In “Big Boy Leaves Home” and “Down by the Riverside” from Uncle Tom’s Children, Richard Wright depicts the way of life of blacks as unpredictable and unsure. In “Down by the Riverside”, he opines submissiveness, politeness, humility, determination are not the measuring rod for the survival of the Blacks. There were Jim Crow laws which segregated black from whites in every stages of life especially in Alabama, Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, Mexico, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Texas, Virginia and Wyoming.
In his in-depth study of the development of racism in American literature, on native grounds (1942), Alfred Kazin, the critic, warned that it was an illusion to assume that the interest in Richard Wright’s *Native Son* meant that the novel of social significance had entered the thinking of the middle classes. The “Manipulation of Terror” in Wright’s best seller struck the young critic as “sinister,” precisely because Wright was so “passionately honest” about “the suffering of his race”. (Pickney, Darryl, 68)

Other critics differ in their notion on Richard’s works. They praise him for his forthright commentary on the lifestyle and the approach of the society. He portrays the involvement of the society as the maker of the evil stance against the blacks. He develops the two dominant aspects of his personality, primarily the consequences of racial experience and his reaction to the hostile world. Russel C. Brignano views, that,

Although Wright’s fictional work emerge out of two periods, they comprise a thematic continuity which consolidate his literary vision. This vision seems to derive from two dominant aspects of his personality: firstly, a consequence of his racial experience, an involuntarily reaction to a hostile world which seeks to destroy him; and secondly, the stance of an intellectual and moralist fighting for freedom in a threatening and confusing world. (Brignano, Russel Carl, 122)

Wright’s first work, *Uncle Tom’s Children*, is set in rural Mississippi. His works move from rural to urban setting. The setting of *Lawd Today* and *Native Son* is metropolitan Chicago.

The varied illusory altercations between the Black and White characters are written thematically by projecting the prevailing crisis on identity and alienation in all his novels. While working for Illinois Federal Writer’s project, he wrote his first novel *Lawd Today* (1963), but he did not try to publish it in deference to the potential objections of the Communist Party. Some
of the stories that were later collected in *Uncle Tom’s Children* (1938) and *Eight Men* (1961) “Big Boy Leaves Home” (1936) were first published in the ‘*New Caravan*’. “Silt” (The Man Who Saw the Flood) 1937 was published in ‘*New Masses*’ and “Fire and Cloud” was published in the magazine ‘*Story*’ in 1938. The back grounds of these stories are set in the rural south of Wright’s childhood. They graphically portray the systematic racial oppression suffered by southern blacks. The black characters are pictured as burdened by poverty, dipped in racist violence, and tested by death. Yet, they reveal an inherent strength and potential for heroic rebellion.

White racism, throughout America, particularly in South, is the culprit in the tragedy of blacks’ life. Richard Wright sketches out these in “The Ethics of Jim Crow”. He narrates an incident how a black could easily be set aside, shown his place where he belongs and make it him accept that he is an inferior being in the society. The mind set becomes so strong that protagonist eventually accepts to live with it, though his inner conscious outrages to rebel and wants to come out but disdained to accept this as the way of life.

In the story ‘The Man Who Lived Underground’, from *Eight Men*, the unconscious recognition of the irrationality of the stranger is expressed by the approach of the protagonist towards the police and how he submits himself to them. Fred Daniels feels like a fish out of water when he comes out of the sewage longing to breathe the fresh air. In the beginning he started enjoying the ‘sewage world’ away from the real world dominated by the whites, without troubles and tortures of the whites. The first hand experience in the sewage echoes Daniels experience with the outer world. Wright narrates, “After a few yards he paused, struck to wonderment by the silence; it seemed that he had travelled a million miles away from the world” (“The Man who Lived Underground”, 31). It is the self-alienation that he has brought upon himself, puts him under his own burden and forces him to come out of its clutches. The
dinginess and the sluggishness suffocate him to move away from his self-inflicted alienation. Because of these compulsions, he emerges out to seek freedom, and unfortunately, he falls pray at the hands of the white policemen.

Fred Daniels, the black man was convicted wrongly of a murder which he did not commit; therefore he was forced to run away from the police and hides. In his attempt to get away from the false allegation of the police, he entered and hidden into an underground sewage and manages to spend his time there for months together. Accidentally, he was able to sneak into the underground department store through sewage hole. He enjoyed all the ornaments from the jewelry shop, fruits from a fruit stall, and currency notes from the locker. There was none to notice him, to find him or share his joy and sorrow under the sewage. He forgets his place of existence. The loss of comprehension and the loss of belongingness make him an alien. When the policeman enquires, Fred goes so engrossed with his present world that he forgets his name or the place he lives.

While at the underground sewage Daniel hears the singing and praying from a Church. Although Pain throbs his legs, a deeper pain induces in him by the sight of those black people groveling and begging for something they could never get. A vague conviction makes him feel that those people should stand unrepentant and yield no quarter in singing and praying. Yet, at the same time, though he has run away from the police, he pleads with them to believe in his innocence. In spite of this state, under the sewage, he feels that those people, who indulged in praying, are not going to get anything. It symbolically states, even the prayers of blacks are unanswered, unless and otherwise the white men’s hostile attitude towards the black changes. In other words, it can be said, the white men’s torture, discrimination, dehumanization towards black society has reached the state beyond the power or reprimand of the “Omni-potent.”
The stories, “The Man who saw the Flood” in *Eight Men* and “Down by the River Side” *Uncle Tom’s Children* are based on flood and its consequences where the blacks alone become the victims and face the wrath of the nature and after that the wrath of the White masters.

Brother Mann, the protagonist in the story of “Down by the River Side”, struggles and tries his best to rescue his pregnant wife and the child from the ferocious flood. In this story, Wright portrays the tragedy of a Negro family at the time of the destructive flood. Though he succeeds in overcoming the currents of the flood, all his efforts go in vain as he loses his pregnant wife’s life in the Red Cross hospital at the ‘colored’ section due to the recklessness, disregard to address the basic need of the white people. In the process of his struggle for survival, he hears a shot somewhere. It worries and makes him think that perhaps a black has been shot by a white for trespassing into his area.

> In times like these they’ll shoot a nigger down just like a dog n think nothing of it. Tha shotin might mean anything. But likely as not its jus some . . . black man gone. ("Down by the River Side", 278)

At the time of floods, cement bags were kept on levees to stop the flood water entering into the town. It is pertinent to mention that only whites were eligible to enjoy the facility and it is their prerogative of using the cement bag to stop the flood. If any daring black was found utilizing the sand and cement bags, the whites will not hesitate in shooting him down. Because, it was the first right of the whites to use the bags to protect themselves and with scant regard, like the cattle, the blacks are left at the mercy of nature. The alienated blacks were sandwiched from both the sides, on one end with societal suppression and racism and on the other side catastrophic natural disaster whenever it occurs.

Stuck in the unrelenting flood and forced to save his pregnant wife Lulu, who was in labor, Mann sends his brother-in-law Bob to buy a boat by selling the only mule that he owns.
But it becomes impossible for him to buy the boat with the meager amount Bob gets from the white Bowman. Left with no alternative it becomes inevitable for him to steal a boat, which happened to be a white’s boat. With great difficulty, Brother Mann, the protagonist rows the boat with his wife who was in severe labor, along with his family members against the heavy currents of the water and finally they reach the shore. Upon reaching the shore the white soldiers at Red Cross hospital shows their reluctance and indifference towards Brother Mann and finally, he is allowed to take her to the ‘colored’ section of the hospital but she dies there due to the soldier’s slow attitude and procrastination towards helping blacks. All efforts of Mann go futile.

After the death of his wife, they question him:

“Is that your mother there?”

“Yessuh. ‘Mai ma-in-law.”

“She’s just ol Capm. Her gal jus died n she takes it hard.”

“Oh, I see... But what’s wrong with you?” (“Down By the Riverside”, 301)

It shows that the whites have the utter disregard towards the misery and anguish of blacks. This conversation mirrors the condition of a black in remorse, who is not even allowed to feel any grief on the death of his kith and kin. Finally, he is sent to rescue the other flood victims. There he happens to meet the white man’s family (Heart Field’s) and they recognize him as their father’s murderer and without compassion, he too was killed by the white soldiers.

Both the life and death of a black are in the hands of whites. The state of every black can be compared with the cattle waiting for the butcher to slaughter. The death of Lulu was avoidable but the white soldiers made it inevitable by their slacky behavior. No requests could enter into their ears. A black husband’s love, her mother’s prayer, the determination of Mann to
reach the shores against the heavy current ditch them as the white chauvinism achieves what it decides. It kills the innocent pregnant wife of an innocent husband.

The dogma of alienation can be traced in many of Richard’s writings on many occasions. The plight of the blacks could be well understood by several sordid incidents. This bitterness of alienation was a daily routine in the life of a Negro as it was the way of life for him and Whites had no remorse on these happenings. Therefore, segregation of blacks and keeping them aside was considered natural by the whites and they expected the blacks to accept as their normal livelihood. While defending Bigger, Max the lawyer in Native Son portrays the scenario of the court room to the judge, which aptly conveys what Wright wants to emphasise;

Look, your Honor. Even in this court room, even here today, Negro and white are separated. See those Negroes sitting together, behind that railing? No one told them to sit there. They sat there because they knew that we did not want them on the same bench with us. (NS, 818)

Driven by the circumstances, blacks become the victims of violence. The Jim Crow law gave more authority to the whites so that they could crush the Negroes as they wished and there was no protection for the Blacks to rely upon. Whether it is the natural calamity or the normal day to day life, the Whites determined everything for the blacks. They made it clear that blacks dared not act on their own. If that happens the blacks can never expect any justification, ultimately they are put at the mercy of the Whites. As there was no mercy left for Blacks, death by way of punishment was never surprising and never shocking. It provoked none and the Whites felt that the blacks received what they deserved. This horrible truth is spoken by Bigger in his conversation with the lawyer Max,

They draw a line and say for you to stay on your side of the line. They don’t care if there is no bread over on your side. They don’t care if you
die. And then they say things like that about you and when you try to come from behind your line they kill you. (NS, 774)

Blacks, realizing their potentiality, wished that they should not be looked down racially. They were vehemently against the Jim Crow Law; though there was not much change and down grading were a regular occurrence and the blacks were forced to live like that. Limitations were drawn upon them and the blacks were never allowed to cross the line. This line determined what the black could become. Naturally, the whites called the shots while the blacks had no choice than to adhere. Bigger vents out his ire and complaints to Max, why the things become bad for the colored;

I wanted to be an aviator once, but they wouldn’t let me go to the school where I was suppose’ to learn it. They built a big school and drew a line around it and said that nobody could go to it but those who lived within the line. That kept all the colored boys out. (NS, 776)

Wright’s novels are replete with social consciousness. It evokes the loneliness of the individual as well as the physical and emotional concern in relation to the society. A close examination of Richard’s works gives us the true experience of the blacks in the American society. His novels and short stories were the output of personal tragedies which evoked mixed response, and the society is still trying to find an answer for the reasons of ill-treatment meted out to blacks for generations. Alienation can be ruthless and creates vast deviation amongst the society. It is still unfortunate that man’s status with the fellow human being is determined on color, caste and creed, despite symbolic gestures and fellow brotherhood. Study after study has shown that the world has not shed its true nature to consider all as one. Richards’s views will remain forever for the future generations to contemplate on values and virtues. Despite significant progress in race relations and racial tolerance in American society, Afro-Americans
encountered discrimination on several fields. Slavery and inequality was a reminder of the sordid history of institutionalized racism in America.