Chapter – II

Racial Discrimination

African American literature is grounded in the experience of black people in the United States. Even though African Americans have long claimed an American identity, during most of the United States history, they were not accepted as citizens and were obviously discriminated. As a result, they felt that they were part of America even being outside of it. Racial discrimination is like an alphabet for black authors to start their work of art, as they have visualised it for many a years. Wright and Walker are no exceptions. They too had had numerous experiences in their life which is in fact seen in their works. This chapter focuses on how racial discrimination is evidently brought out in the select works of these two authors. Though they vary in their perception of writing, they get united in projecting racial discrimination and share many similarities.

Racism is the belief that it is a primary determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial difference produces an inherent superiority of a particular race. The term racism usually denotes race-based prejudice, violence, dislike, discrimination or oppression. As an ideology, racism existed during the 19th century as scientific racism, which attempted to provide a racial classification of humanity. Such racist ideologies have been widely discredited after World War II. It was already noted by W.E.B.Du Bois that, in making the difference between races, it is not only race that everyone
thinks about, but it is culture too, “…a common history, common laws and religion, similar habits of thought and a conscious striving together for certain ideals of life….“ (18).

Late nineteenth century nationalists were the first to embrace contemporary discourses on race, ethnicity and survival of the fittest to shape new nationalist doctrines. Ultimately, race came to represent not only the most important traits of the human body, but was also regarded as decisively shaping the character and personality of the nation. In colonial America, before slavery became completely based on racial lines, thousands of African slaves served European colonists, alongside other Europeans serving a term of indentured servitude. In some cases for African slaves, this term of service meant freedom and a land grant afterward, though these were rarely awarded, through this way few former slaves became landowners. In a precursor to the American Revolution, Nathaniel Bacon led a revolt in 1676 against the Governor of Virginia. The system of exploitation he represented was exploitation of poor colonists by the increasingly wealthy landowners where poor people, regardless of skin colour, fought side by side. However, after Bacon’s death, hundreds of participants in the revolt were lured to disarm by a promised amnesty and the revolt lost its steam.

Black slavery in the Northeast was common until the early 19th century, when many Northeastern states abolished slavery. Slaves were used as a labour force in agricultural production, shipyards and docks and also as domestic servants. In both regions, only the wealthiest Americans owned slaves. Slavery was not actually abolished in the United States until the passage of the 13th Amendment which was
declared ratified on December 6, 1865. About 4 million black slaves were freed in 1865. Ninety-five percent of blacks lived in the South. All the blacks were in danger of the exploitive conditions caused by the change in the United States economy from slavery to industrialisation and induced racism to the core.

Unconscious racism as a socio-psycho-cultural phenomenon is ubiquitous in American society and affects the lives of all African American and European American. The behavioural manifestations and racism span a spectrum from subtle to extreme. The genesis of racism resides in the institution of black slavery, myths, and stereotypes regarding African and African American and pathological thoughts and feelings of European American that use pro-white, anti-black projective mechanisms. Discriminatory behaviour by European American directed towards African American represents trauma and engenders symptoms, that may be categorised in different ways and that may evoke multiple forms of behavioural responses. Increasing clinical evidence has shown that discriminatory behaviour can and does cause not only psychiatric symptoms in people but also organic changes like hypertension.

Black and White segregation is declining fairly consistently in most metropolitan areas and cities. Despite these pervasive patterns, many changes in individual areas are negligible. Thirty years after the Civil Rights era, the United States remains a residentially segregated society in which Blacks and Whites inhabit different neighbourhoods of vastly different quality. African American people have had to cross many obstacles to get their standing in the present world. In the beginning it was the selling of black people into slavery. Then, they endured slavery itself, being treated like animals.
After slavery was abolished, black people still had to deal with racial discrimination, demoralisation, subjugation and hatred, especially black women. Black women had to face unbelievable odds at obtaining self-assurance. Quest for identity as a changing issue of life engaged the minds of great African American intellectuals. With their creative imagination and American ingenuity, they closely started analysing the theme of search for identity.

In the 1920s, black writers and artists in Harlem led a flourishing new movement in literature, theatre and jazz. Black women also contributed to African American works through literature. Zora Neale Hurston’s novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* came out in the 1930s and Dorothy West published *The Living is Easy*, a novel detailing an upper-class black family during the World War. A trinity of particularly notable writers emerged in the 1940s and 1950s. Richard Wright published an unflinching condemnation of racism in his novel *Native Son*. His friend Ralph Ellison brought readers inside the world of an ordinary black person in *Invisible Man*. James Baldwin produced *Notes of a Native Son* which is a direct response to Wright's book and a novel *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, which reflected upon his life in Harlem as the son of a Baptist Minister. The Civil Rights Movement made a powerful impression on black voices in the 1960s. Baldwin’s fiction and essays dealt not only with race but with sexuality, family life, his childhood in the Church and his return from Paris to participate in the burgeoning movement. Baldwin's most significant works, including *Another Country* and *The Fire Next Time*, were written in the 1960s.
From the beginning, the black novel had to struggle with the cloak of theological terror that Baldwin elucidates in his discussion of protest literature. That is, black writers would constantly have to distinguish between black people, as white Americans saw them as a moral problem. At the same time, black writers would have to wrestle with the ramifications of white American stereotypes that so strongly affected the lives of black people as a group. Black thinkers would have to articulate the concepts of their own culture, even as there was resistance to that articulation from within as well as from without. Only then could they begin to draw inspiration and materials from the forms of their own culture that lay embedded in the rich oral and musical tradition of the folk. One of the important concepts they would have to articulate would be the images of female and male within the community of the black folk even as these images were being assaulted by the dominant society.

Without the freedom to write about life as they saw it, restricted by the concepts of good and evil that black people represented to the majority culture, it is no wonder that their expression lacked the imagination and richness of the folk expressions of the day. The shadow of white racism hung over early black novelists. Many years would pass before it would be lifted, allowing glimpses of reality to revise the distorted black image of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Though people around the world are alert about the racial discrimination and great leaders have fought against it, still problems arise due to racial discrimination. Even in the current era racial discrimination cannot be uprooted completely.
Richard Wright emerged as a major Black intellectual warrior who was driven by the quest to defend Black humanity against the cultural domination of white supremacist ideas and practices. Moreover, he and others linked imperialism, colonialism and white supremacy, pointing out that the dehumanisation and humiliation of Black Americans, Asians and even ethnic Russians were generated by the same global system of domination. It was in this way that he began to call for the revolutionary overthrow of global white supremacy and the implementation of scientific socialism and popular democracy on a world scale.

Wright had a natural instinct of presenting his native picture through his remarkable works. As a poor black child growing up in the Deep South, Wright suffered poverty, hunger, racism and violence and those experiences later became the central themes of his work. He stands as a major literary figure of the 1930s and 40s; his writings are a departure from those of the Harlem Renaissance School. Steeped in the literary naturalism of the Depression era, Wright's works express a realistic and brutal portrayal of white society's oppression of African Americans. Anger and protest served as a catalyst for literature intended to promote social changes by exposing the injustices of racism, economic exploitation and imperialism. Through his art, Wright turned the torment of alienation into a voice calling for human solidarity and racial advancement.

The most frequent mood in his early life is tension, if not the tension arising from direct contact with whites, or at least the tension resulting from the pressures brought to bear on African Americans stemming from the racial climate. Wright
makes abundantly clear that the most intimate interactions involving friends, family
members, lovers and African Americans are largely influenced by the pervasive
impact of race. Wright keenly felt that all his fiction reveals interracial social
relations, in both North and South where race is an omnipresent factor.

Wright was the most important black literary spokesman of that period.
In his *Blueprint for Negro Writing*, published in 1937, he summarised the weakness
of past Negro literature and directions that new and conscious Negro writers should take.
In the past, Wright had asserted that Negro writing assumed two general aspects. First, it
became a sort of conspicuous ornamentalisation of the hallmark of achievement. Secondly,
it became the voice of the educated Negro pleading with white America for justice.
What Wright advocated for the New Negro writer was that he writes for the Negro
masses, shaping their lives and bringing consciousness for these masses towards new
goals.

Around this time, Wright's interest in race relations and radical thought led him
to join the Communist party. Within the Communist ranks, he found, for the first
time, a formidable peer group sharing a common goal of promoting racial and social
equality. For a brief period, Wright's sense of loneliness subsided. Communism
appeared to offer an alternative that not only could quell his own inner conflict, but
also the threat of poverty and racism which was confronting the disenchanted people of
all nations. He changed the landscape of possibility for African American writers.
Wright's defiance, his refusal to give the reading public what it had hitherto demanded
of the African American writer and his insistence on the expression of an African
American voice, allowed later writers to do the same. Toni Morrison, for example, wrote as she would without any concern for explaining her sometimes obscure meanings, her references to news events from long ago or words or phrases from African American vernacular speech to a mainstream reading public.

Wright's early and persisting radical estrangement from American culture, black or white, together with his exposure to Marxism and the techniques of naturalism in American fiction, enabled him to isolate and depict some of the harshest truths about the consequences of slavery, segregation and racism in America and the truth that often evaded in more genteel approaches to literature. As a result, Native Son remains a major literary landmark in the racial history of the United States and Black Boy one of the most compelling documents about the struggle of an artistic individual for identity and achievement on the American scene. Black Boy undoubtedly attacked the racism of the South from the period 1908 to 1927 when Wright was growing up there. Many of the hardships of Wright's family life are either direct or indirect results of racial discrimination. Once Wright enters the world of work, he finds racism pervasive and intolerable. Thus, the autobiography concludes with Wright's fleeing to the South and the racist conditions he has been forced to endure there.

Wright’s understanding of African American life is rooted in his southern background. He states what he thinks of black life in America in Black Boy:

…whenever I thought of the essential bleakness of black life in America, I knew the Negroes had never been allowed to catch the full spirit of Western Civilization that they lived somehow in it but not of it.
And when I brooded upon the cultural barrenness of black life, I wondered of clean, positive tenderness, love, honor, loyalty and the capacity to remember were native with man. I asked myself if these human qualities were not fostered, won, struggled and suffered for, presented in ritual form from one generation to another…. (37)

Richard Wright’s influence began primarily with the publication of *Native Son* in 1940. The significance of the novel’s publication lay in the new and daringly defiant character of its content and in its adoption by the Book of the Month Club. It signaled for the first time since the nineteenth century fugitive slave narratives the willingness of a mainstream reading public to give an ear to an African American writer, even one who appeared unapologetic in his bold and forthright representation of a large segment of African American culture.

Wright, through his *Native Son*, had enormous impact on the direction of the new black literature. Without avenues to power, black life was bleak, cut off from the possibilities of fulfillment and threatened by the ever-present hostile world. His novels and essays issued a cry of protest to a white audience that, unless America recognises its native sons and give them their due; some blacks would rise up and destroy their oppressors. This statement is perhaps too simplistic a rendering of Wright’s works. He analyses by penetrating the effects of social deprivation upon the black man’s personality and he uses the elements of protest.

*Native Son* moves with the intensity of a powerfully realistic crime novel. However, it is much more than that. Wright raises issues concerning the underlying
problems of black men living lives that are stifled by the oppression of racism and classicism. For Bigger Thomas, murder is a way to feel his own power. Wright presents a grim picture of human degradation and destructive results caused by racism. At Bigger’s trial, through his communist-oriented lawyer, Max, Wright presents a worldview of a more equitable society that would, possibly, not have produced a person like Bigger.

The main concept of *Native Son* is an argument that social conditions of deprivation motivate people to act in anti-social ways. Wright paints a clear picture of the impossible lives led by African Americans in 1930s Chicago.

But they made him feel his black skin by just standing there looking at him, one holding his hand and the other smiling. He felt he had no physical existence at all right then; he was something to be hated, the badge of shame which he knew was attached to a black skin. It was a shadowy region, a No Man’s Land, the ground that separated the white world from the black that he stood upon. (67-68)

They are forced into overcrowded, overpriced and substandard housing. They are given such low-paying and transient employment that they cannot maintain a secure living, they are cut off from education and they are the victims of racist media misrepresentations. When Bigger acts in an unfeeling way, killing and then disposing of the bodies of his victims, Wright argues that these are conditioned responses to overwhelming stimuli. “If you killed her you’ll kill *me*,” she said. ‘I ain’t in this…. You told me you *never* was going to kill.’ ‘All right. They white folks They done killed plenty of us.’ ‘That don’t make it right’” (168).
Throughout the novel, Wright illustrates the ways in which white racism forces blacks into a pressured, dangerous and unsecured state of mind. Blacks are beset with the hardship of economic oppression and forced to act subserviently before their oppressors. Given such conditions, it becomes inevitable that blacks such as Bigger Thomas will react with violence and hatred. Wright's development of Bigger's view of whites as an overwhelming force that sweeps him toward his fate can be seen in the context of naturalism. Wright uses the conventions of naturalism in this novel, in order to force one to enter into Bigger's mind and to understand the devastating effects of the social conditions in which he was raised. Perhaps Bigger was not born a violent criminal. He is a native son, a product of American culture, but the violence and racism that suffuse it. It is just an assessment of Wright’s achievement. "The day Native Son appeared, American culture has changed for ever. No matter how much qualifying the book might later need, it made impossible a repetition of old lies...." (Howe 100-101).

With the newspapers presenting him as a murderous animal and Buckley using the case to further his own political career, anything said in Bigger's defence falls on deaf ears. His fear, rage and conflicting and unexamined desires torture him to the utmost. The public may desire to build a wall of hysteria surrounding Bigger in order to justify its racist stereotypes. It thus also attempts to deny its racism by creating the illusion of equal treatment under the law. The motto of the American justice system is equal justice under law, but Wright depicts a judiciary so undermined by racial prejudice and corruption that the concept of equality holds little meaning. In response to his crime, the white-dominated press and authorities incite mob showed hatred against him.
Bigger and his family lived in cramped and squalid conditions. All he can do is to act out the role of the subservient black man that he has seen in countless popular cultural representations. However, as Bigger's life demonstrates, this constant fear actually causes violence. Throughout the novel, one can see that when Bigger is cornered, like the rat, he is overwhelmed by shame and fear and lashes out with violence, the only weapon at his disposal. Here is an example from his speech to Bessie and she cries out to Bigger after he admits to her that he killed Mary Dalton: "Lord, don’t let this happen to me! I ain’t done nothing for this to come to me! I just work! I ain’t had no happiness, no nothing. I just work. I’m black and I work and don’t bother nobody…." (170).

Wright uses the conventions of naturalism to portray the effect of racism on the oppressed and the hypocrisy of justice. In this chain of events, Wright depicts the irrational logic of racism, a vicious cycle that reproduces itself over and over again. The attention prompts Buckley, the State's Attorney, to hurry Bigger's case along and seek death penalty. Unable to face the reality of his life as a black man, Bigger is forced to keep his thoughts and his feelings apart. Bigger's guilt and punishment are decided before his trial ever begins, perhaps even before he is arrested. These characters' lives are shaped by forces of society that are uncontrollable.

The racial climate in Wright’s eyes, from a reading of Native Son, is that of the perspective expressed by a black American who says: "To Bigger and his kind, white people were not really people; they were a sort of great natural force, like a stormy sky looming overhead or like a deep swirling river stretching suddenly at one's feet in
the dark” (109). It could be found that Bigger Thomas’s history is the history of every black American. It coincides precisely with the finding and evolution of the United States of America. It irrefutably demonstrates that Richard Wright is one of its finest artists and sensitive chroniclers of black sensibility to the whole world.

Wright’s early life, which had experienced extreme poverty and anti-Black racism, in the American South, shaped his proletarian world view. The violent, racist and impoverished circumstances of Wright’s upbringing in the old segregated South made him search desperately to find out whether black men could live with human dignity and without fear in a world dominated by white male power. Wright’s own complex consciousness, strongly influenced by modern rationalism, also made him fascinated by the irrational aspects of life. He wanted to find out if black men could be or become psychologically free of their white oppressors. Accordingly, Wright believed that the Black creative intellectual had a strong responsibility to contest white power’s conception of existence and, in the process, to assert the validity and complexity of the Black experience. In his 1937 article, Blueprint for Negro Writing, Wright argues:

The Negro writer who seeks to function within his race as a purposeful agent has a serious responsibility. In order to do justice to his subject matter, in order to depict Negro life in all its manifold and intricate relationships, a deep, informed and complex consciousness is necessary; a consciousness which draws for its strength upon the fluid lore of a great people and moulds this lore with the concepts that move and direct the forces of history today…. (Gayle 320-321)
The Outsider, Wright’s novel of ideas, is his most sustained and compelling inquiry into the question of the possibility and quality of black freedom in an anti-black American world. Wright also is concerned with the issue of power and the knowledge that buttresses its performance. Ultimately, he constructs the image of a self-possessed black man, who is fearless, knowledgeable and courageous. Untamed by the culture of modern society, he is an intellectually authoritative existential nihilist — a rebel-criminal who creates and tries to live by his own social rules. Significantly, to counteract the prevailing literary notions of the black man which was as ignorant and submissive one, Wright was engaged in creating a new conception of the black man. Finally, The Outsider represents Wright’s disillusionment with the Communist Party and with the possibility of racial justice in America.

In The Outsider Cross Damon, a disillusioned black man in Chicago, who takes the opportunity of a train crash that he is involved in, to change his identity and disappear in the attempt to refashion his life. In New York, under several assumed identities, he encounters both Communists and a segregationist. Knowing and seeing the world from the standpoint of a new freedom derived from his outsider consciousness, Damon also develops the cynical view about human life.

Damon’s knowledgeable double vision puts him in possession of the double lies of the Communist Party nihilists’ will to power. Employing a critical Marxian analysis of capitalist industrialisation, Damon mocks at the Communists’ quest for power, suggesting that they are similar to Western imperialists. As he is intellectually
powerful, he sees through and challenges the ideological duplicity of his Communist Party adversaries.

In one exchange, he declares authoritatively:

…I’m propaganda-proof. Communism has two truths, two faces. The face you’re talking about now is for the workers, for the public, not for me. I look at facts, processes…. You did what you did because you had to! Anybody who launches himself on the road to naked power is caught in a trap…. You use idealistic words as your smoke screen, but behind that screen you rule…. It’s a question of power. (354-355)

In some sense, Damon sees both Communists and the racist segregationist, Langley Herndon, as existential-nihilists, who, like himself, understand the meaninglessness of human existence. Their exercise of power seeks to fill the emptiness of human life. Damon concludes that it is this awareness of the character of human existence, as nothing in particular, that allows both Communists and segregationist to wield power with such evil dexterity. Finding the cynicism of these petty nihilists reprehensible, Damon kills Herndon, the Southern racist and Blount, the Communist. Ultimately responsible for four murders and one suicide, Damon, ironically, is forced to confront his own arbitrary and cynical exercise of power. Wright portrays Damon as an ethical criminal, a rebel outsider who sees the system of legal justice as a veil of illusion. Finding no real justice in this system, Damon breaks the rules of
civil society and creates his own principles by which he will try to live. However, in
doing so, Wright seems to be suggesting that Damon emerges very much like the
petty gods whom he despises.

The rebel-outsider Cross Damon is the product of Wright’s own urgent
obligation to speak on behalf of the black masses deprived of public speech, to witness
their living. Indeed, Wright saw himself as an intellectual warrior, belonging to the side of
the dispossessed, weak, unwanted and resentful victims of modern Western civilisation.
The words that Wright had Damon hurl at his adversaries about the horror of modern
life and his critique of Western ideology and culture, constitute a critique that
emerges from Black people’s special history in the modern world. Like double
vision, Damon’s critique represents the product of black people’s turbulent voyage of
dislocation from Africa to relocation to America; isolation on slave plantations from
racial slavery to racial segregation; and from the rural South to the urban North.
Through Damon, Wright expressed their predicament, as well as their hopes and
aspirations.

Like many other black Americans who concluded that America was beyond
redemption with respect to racial justice, Wright chose exile in the 1950s. Life in France
allowed him to interact not only with French intellectuals, but also with other intellectual
warriors of the African Diaspora. In this way, Wright’s stature as an international
creative intellect was established. While his earlier novels spoke on behalf of poor
and racially exploited black Americans, Wright broadened the scope of his concern to
include African and Asian elites in his non-fictional writings. Employing some of the
same themes, especially the expression in it but not of it to describe the position of blacks in the capitalist and anti-black world, Wright sought to understand the crisis of Third World elites as the victims of modern western civilisation.

Wright’s *Lawd Today* opens with Jake’s dream of running up an endless staircase after a disappearing voice. That dream gives way to the reality of his life by representing hunger, anger and discrimination. Throughout the novel, Jake along with his friends reveals his brutish and trivial character. Although some of the experimentalism of *Lawd Today* seems artificial and though the protagonist is too limited to sustain the interest, this early work is powerful and economical in expressing the black man’s struggles. The situation is typical of Wright’s work and Jake’s violent frustration could easily be understood. The novel to a certain extent seems to be merely an entertaining novel about everyday black life, since nothing in the novel presents itself as being didactic in nature. The book connotes the black experience by showing how its language use, especially its black language use, reveals a way of communicating that articulates aptly and ably the metaphysical aspects of a culture that by its very existence has contributed a prodigious amount of variety to the American English language.

Wright’s last novel, *The Long Dream*, gives a clear picture of racial discrimination in the white dominated society and shows how the situations are worse for a black to lead a peaceful life. It states about Rex Fishbelly Tucker’s growing up and coming to terms with his environment. His father, an undertaker, is the richest black man in town, but he also earns from a brothel he runs. Tucker admires his father’s success
while detesting his obsequiousness with whites. Though Wright's racial views in the novel are realistic and convincing, it is found that the ending of the book is abrupt, because Wright allows Fishbelly, despite his emerging manhood, to remove himself from the African American world and goes to jail and then flees to France in search of freedom and equality. What seems lacking at the crucial point in Fishbelly's development is his mental and physical toughness in battling against racism and achieving the independence of other Wright’s heroes such as Bigger Thomas and Cross Damon.

In spite of Fishbelly's rapid growth, his comfortable family life prevents him from gaining an insight into racial oppression. He is not aware that his father is a successful businessman only because he freely cooperates with powerful white people. Also Tyree exploits black people by owning illicit establishments and rental property. It is he who pampers Fishbelly and hampers him from becoming a man of honour and vision. Though he was brilliant, Fishbelly had not grown up to be able to listen to such a voice.

In the final part of the novel, he challenges Cantley and surpasses him in wisdom and action. Cantley tells Fishbelly: "You're one of these new kind of niggers. I don't understand you'…"(365). Later when Tyree was dead, Fishbelly attempts to create a self by splitting himself from his father's image of an ideal son. All through his life he has been compelled to follow his father's footsteps in business matters, but in his heart he has detested Tyree for recoiling when talking to white people, for keeping a mistress which makes his mother unhappy, and for minting money by running a brothel. As he grows older, Fishbelly receives a lesson from his father:
I make money by gitting black dreams ready for burial…. A black man’s a dream, son, a dream that can't come true. Dream, Fish. But be careful what you dream. Dream only what can happen… If you ever find yourself dreaming something that can’t happen, then choke it back,’cause there’s too many dreams of a black man that can’t come true. (79)

The crucial dimension in Wright's work as a whole is the development of a social and personal discourse in telling a story. Native Son comprehends not merely as a protest novel but as a powerful narrative that dramatises the polarities between oppression and rebellion as they impact Bigger. Black Boy is eloquently focused on the young Wright's rejection of the South and his escape to the North. Despite the fact that Wright treats the problem of miscegenation throughout his writing from time to time, he makes a concentrated effort to explore this issue in The Long Dream. As a result, this novel polarises Mississippi and France, America and Europe, where the protagonist's eventual transportation takes place. Right from his sixth year till he becomes eighteen, Fishbelly gradually realises that he cannot call himself a human being until he has the freedom to have sexual relations with a woman regardless of her skin colour. Consequently, miscegenation, the word itself triggers and provokes his conflict in achieving manhood. Wright illustrates in this novel that however natural and spontaneous the interracial sexual relationships are, on the whole it is suppressed and condemned as socially unacceptable factors. Hence, a black man like Fishbelly can only dream about such an experience, and the status of such relationship becomes mythic.
Towards the final part of the novel Wright carefully integrates a serious racial discourse. Zeke in his last letter argues:

You remember that night when we went to that fair and we saw that crazy white woman showing us her tits? That’s the way they do and they say we rape them. Damn. Man, white folks is mean. If somebody would prove to me that God's white, I don't think I would ever go to church no more. God just can't be like these goddamned white folks.

(372)

If Fishbelly has said these words, it may not sound right, for he has not obtained the perspective that Zeke has by contrasting American life with French life. Wright's achievement in the final section of the novel is the creation of a unified vision in which Zeke's informed point of view and Fishbelly's new dream intensify each other. This new vision, moreover, is reinforcing by an existentialist view Wright has earlier stated in characterising Fishbelly as an emerging hero. When Fishbelly is asked by McWilliams, his lawyer, whether he supports Cantley or Tyree, whom Cantley had killed, Fishbelly becomes confused, but Wright replies on his behalf: "Yessir he confessed finally, realizing for the first time that he did not know whose side he was on. He was on nobody's side. He was for himself because he felt he had to be. He was black" (335).

As the conversion of his feelings about himself occurs, the theme of sexual initiation is united with that of racial relationship. To Fishbelly, leaving Mississippi for Paris means leaving a society where sex and race are intertwined, as if black people
were less than human. Though he is fully aware that Paris is no heaven, as Zeke has
told him, he is convinced that the French will not be as obsessed with miscegenation
as Southerners are.

Wright's influence on American literature is nearly inestimable. He demonstrated for
the first time that an African American could indeed be a major writer of international fame
and stature. He modelled possibilities hitherto not seen or known for African American
writers. His influence extended well beyond the writing community, demonstrating that
success was possible and that militancy in the face of racism constituted a valuable
response. It was not Wright alone who influenced the progressive social changes that
occurred in the 1960s, whose effects are yet pervasive, but surely his was a great influence
at that time. Because of his place in literary history and because of the widespread
influence of his work, many see him as among the greatest writers of the century.

Likewise, Alice Walker, more than any other Black author, is concerned about
guarding her work in a traditional way of black writing, paying particular homage to
the exuberant imagination of Zora Neale Hurtson. Walker’s patient work established
Hurtson at the structural centre of a tradition of African American women’s writing
and indeed, within a larger tradition of black letters, as a counterpoint to the naturalist
art of Richard Wright. Walker encumbers stereotypes about black life with the full living
weight of social reality. Both these authors have remarkably represented their frustration
caused by society. Racial discrimination, being a common issue for the whole black
family, Wright and Walker could not exempt it. Being prominent writers of their age,
they assure that through their works they contribute to their society.
Walker has been an influential writer throughout the black community and her audience is very much interracial. Although many of the criticisms are controversial on her view of black men and their abuse of black women, that depiction cannot be narrowed down. Walker’s feelings, morals and the opinions are towards black women, sexuality and racial equality which shine through her works. She is a fighter as well as a meditative poet and a lyrical novelist. She has taken part in the struggles her people have waged and she could anticipate the struggles they must yet face in this greatest world of democracies. She also knows that not even ample bread and wine or power and the applause of one’s countrymen can give one the calm and the freedom that comes with a mind’s acceptance of its own worth.

Walker's first novel *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* describes the economic oppression that African Americans suffered under the share cropping system and its tragic effects on black families and the black community. Walker asks to what degree blacks themselves have been harassed in their victimisation by the white power structure, which destroys their dignity and shatters their dream. She also explores the intersection of racism and sexism in the oppression of African American families, depicting black men who vent their anger and frustration, not on the whites who exploit them, but on their wives and children. So, they cannot react towards their oppressors liberally. The two main male characters, Grange and Brownfield Copeland, try to prove their manliness through methods endorsed by white patriarchy: through assertions of power over women in the form of sexual conquests and wife abuse.
In refuting stereotypical portraits of black men and women, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* falls into the literary tradition of African American novels that focus on racial oppression.

The depletion of love and the erosion of the sources of affection are various aspects of *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, which is a powerfully knitted subject about three generations of a black family in rural Georgia. This novel has heroes and villains as any other novels do. The villains are those who have a genius for hate, but no capacity for love. The heroes acquire the ability to care deeply for another human being which is obvious. Walker skillfully depicts Brownfield turning into a murderous, whining beast. Walker’s sympathy, however, is plainly with Brownfield’s wife and with all black women, whom she sees as the victims of both whites and their own husband’s rage. At one time, the self-hatred of Brownfield’s father Grange Copeland was so intense that he could not bring himself to touch his son. But when he discovered in New York that he hated whites even more, that he could not act on his hatred and preach it in the streets, Grange lost his self-loathing. By beating up as many whites as he could, he presumably glimpsed his own worth. Then, as an old man, he is able to return to Georgia and feel love for his grand daughter.

The novel, through its juxtaposition of parts, relates the monstrous ramifications that results from blacks believing what society, at every turn teaches them. It is that they are not capable of being responsible for their own action, that white folks are to blame for everything. This abnegation of responsibility is what it means to be a nigger. All of the bits and pieces of the violence in the novel are arranged to reiterate this motif.
By George, I know the danger of putting all the blame on somebody else for the mess you make out of your life. I fell into the trap myself! And I am bound to believe that that’s the way the white folks can corrupt you even when you done help up before because when they got you thinking they’re to blame for everything they have you thinking they’re some kind of gods! You cannot do nothing wrong without them being behind it. You grits just as weak as water, no feeling of doing nothing yourself. Then you begin to think up evil and begin to destroy everybody around you and you blame it on the crackers. Shit! Nobody’s as powerful as we make them out to be. We got our own souls, don’t we? (3)

Yet the dilemma for a poor black Southern is not as simple as all that. In every corner of this novel there is a feel that the tight control the white bosses have over the black Sharecroppers and how this control, although seemingly focused on a work relationship, fends its way into the relationship among black men, black women and black children. At first, precisely Grange loves Ruth, he wants her to understand the nature of her world, how white folk have caused the misery of black folk and how she must learn to hate them, better still, to avoid them: "They are evil. They are blue-eyed devils. They are your natural enemy. Stay away from them hypocrites or they will destroy you. They killed your father and your mother" (23).

Grange works full day in an atmosphere of racial oppression. He is always expected to act as though he is the one who is socially inferior among his employers.
A sort of racial tension that Grange and his fellow people have to survive prevails throughout:

When the truck came [Grange's] face froze into an unnaturally bland mask... A grim stillness settled over his eyes and he became an object...

Some of the workers laughed and joked with the man who drove the truck, but they looked at his shoes... never into his eyes. (9)

Grange’s first life ends in flight and his wandering son takes flight too. His second life in Harlem is equally disastrous. His hatred of whites presses more relentlessly, to make him go south and find escape from them at any cost. The whites are everywhere still powerful and hence it is not political and economical freedom he achieves. But he does take care of his son’s youngest daughter after her mother was killed by her drunken husband. Harris asserts:

Powerless against his oppressor, he turns to exert power in that one place he is presumably dominant … his home…when the oppression intensifies… Grange walks away …. He simply takes himself out of a situation he is impotent to change. (239)

Towards the end of his third life, Grange Copeland can at last stop being hard on himself and look with kindness upon himself and wonders whether any achievement can be more revolutionary. Grange regrets that he had attempted to assert his manliness by using Josie and abandoning his wife. In his third life, Grange redefines manliness in terms of devotion to wife and children and a commitment to fulfilling one's family responsibilities in spite of racial oppression. He articulates the importance of taking
responsibility for one's actions which is the main theme of the novel. But the racist context of the novel exposes this solution as oversimplified. At the outset, Walker reminds that white racists control institutions and prevent African Americans from enjoying power or privilege and that white takes no responsibility for their unjust behaviour.

Walker vigorously brings out the plight of black men and their mental depression because of racial discrimination through Brownfield. In the course of the novel, Walker stitches together squares that grotesquely reveal how dependent the children are on the humaneness or inhumanness of their father. One of these squares, perhaps more than any other in the book, lays out the damage done to Brownfield by his father and by his own inability to accept responsibility for his soul. Brownfield tells Josie that his last child, a boy, was white, not real white but an albino baby who looked just like Grange, and in his insanity, the figures that have controlled his life. The child also brings out the image of Brownfield’s father who rejected him and the white man too which seems to mesh in this baby. Thus Brownfield deliberately kills his only son.

An’ one night when that baby was ‘bout three months old, and it was in January and there was ice on the ground, I takes ‘im by the arm when he was sleeping, and like putting out the cat I jest set ‘im outdoors on the do’ steps. Then I turned in and went to sleep….I never slept so soundly before in my life—and when I woke up it was because of her
(Mem) moaning and carrying on in front of the fire. She was jest
rubbing that babby what wasn’t no more then than a block of ice. Dark
as he’d ever been though, sorte blue looking. (312)

Brownfield explains his action with no regrets. He killed his son, his future;
because he does not believe there is any future. The instinct in all living things to see
their offspring as the future is reversed in Brownfield’s mind. For him his son is only
despair and not hopes:

All it was that I jest didn’t feel like trying to like nobody else. I jest didn’t
feel like going on over my own baby who didn’t have a chance in the
world whether I went on over him or no. It too much to ask a man to lie
and say he love what he don’t want. I had got sick of keeping up the
strain. (314)

In Brownfield’s twisted mind, his despair, his futility, meshes with his hatred of his
father and his hatred of himself, for his father’s blood flows through him to his son.
His act shows the essence of self-hatred.

Even as Grange instructs his granddaughter in the ways of the cruel world and
in understanding how racism affects her life, Ruth’s love and her questions lead him
into self-examination and reflection. Through the clarity of the third life she gives
him, his first and second lives begin to make some sense:

The white folks hated me and I hated myself until I started hating them
in return and loving myself. Then I tried just loving me, and then you,
and ignoring them much as I could. You’re special to me because
you’re a part of me; a part of me I didn’t even used to want. I want you
to go on a long time, have a heap of children. Let them know what you
made me see, that it ain’t no use in seeing at all, if you don’t see

straight! (275)

Meridian, Walker’s next novel is remarkable for the massive issues she is
concerned with. Events are strung over 25 years, although most of it occurs between
the height of the Civil Rights Movement and the present. Walker shows us the
emotional, physical and psychological stages of resistance that Meridian goes through
during the height of the Civil Rights Movement. In fact, if one looks at the life of
Walker, similarities undeniably exist between the two women. She writes with a sharp
critical sense as she deals with the issues of tactics and strategy in the Civil Rights
Movement, with the possibility of interracial love and communication, the vital and
lethal strands in American and black experience, with violence and non-violence,
holiness and self-hatred.

One of Meridian's acts on behalf of the black community in a small town in
Alabama is to force the end of the flooding that troubles the children. The city has
closed the swimming pools sooner than integrate them. In the hot weather, black
children were in the ditches behind their houses, where the city without warning
flushes the reservoir of excess water.

It was Meridian who had led them to the Mayor's office, bearing in her
arms the bloated figure of a five-year-old boy who had been stuck in the
sewer for two days before he was raked out with a grappling hook….To the people who followed Meridian it was as if she carried a large bouquet of long-stemmed roses. The body might have smelled just that sweet, from the serene, set expression on her face. They had followed her into a town meeting over which the white-haired, bespectacled Mayor presided, and she had placed the child, whose body was beginning to decompose, beside his gavel…. (191)

Unlike *The Color Purple*, *Meridian* explicitly addresses the paradoxes of African American identity. To Meridian, Black Nationalism must dedicate itself to constructing a political and cultural context in which one might, indeed, enjoy a positive relation to national identity, rather than a negative relation to a race always marked by its status as a social problem.

Walker’s *The Color Purple* is no doubt an impressive work. Walker explores the estrangement of her men and women through a triangular love affair. In *Meridian*, however, the friction between the black men and women is merely one of several themes. In *The Color Purple* the role of male domination in the frustration of black women’s struggle for independence is clearly focused. Walker proves that she has not turned her back on the Southern fictional tradition. She has absorbed it and made it her own by infusing the black experience into the Southern novel. In this novel the burden of operating within a racist social context, which includes working through the oppressive collaboration of racism and sexism, is generally averted from Celie’s tale onto events in the economic and cultural marketplace.
In *The Color Purple*, the identity crisis that grows from the violence within the family during Celie’s childhood is explained, traced to its origin, in two significantly different ways. The first narrative installs the greed of patriarchal sexual practice in the unflattering mirror of the private family; the injustices manifested in the world outside that central core. The trial of thinking and making it through the racial problem in *The Color Purple* falls mainly to Sofia Butler, the Amazon who enters Mr.’s [as he is referred to in the novel] or Albert’s extended family as Harpo’s first wife. She voices the sexual and racial resentment. For instance, she twice expresses her desire to kill her sexual and racial oppressors.

Sofia is the first woman Celie knows who refuses to accede to both the patriarchal and the racist demand. But the mystic test of Sofia’s strength takes place in her refusal to enter the servitude of double discourse demanded of blacks by white culture. She says a big no to the Mayor’s wife’s complimentary suggestion that Sofia has come to work as her maid. Next, Sofia answers the Mayor’s slap on her face with her own powerful punch. This violent reaction against whites shook everyone. For her effort to stay honest in the face of the white demand for black hypocrisy, Sofia gains incarceration in set of penal institutions that work by a logic which is similar to that of lynching. To racialise the scene of class struggle in the public sphere and to deploy prejudice against woman she is behind the walls of the prison and the household.

Walker’s concern for spiritual wholeness and cultural connectedness completely ascended in her next novel, *The Temple of My Familiar*. Walker’s first work since her highly acclaimed *The Color Purple* is a book about time and change.
Though written from a womanist viewpoint, *The Temple of My Familiar* follows both women and men through what becomes a history of the evolution of humankind. This evolutionary aspect is especially found in the chapters that tell the tales of Miss Lissie’s various incarnations.

Fanny is the granddaughter of Mama Shug and Mama Celie, both mama characters are from *The Color Purple*. She challenges the West's Eurocentric vision of the world, its myths of human origins, its concepts of history, its ideas on political relationships, its attitudes toward the environment and its views on male and female relationships. The central theme in the novel is the challenge marginalised people face everywhere in creating an identity. Fanny, for example, faces two unacceptable roles either as a victim of racism and sexism or as a possible perpetrator of retaliatory violence. She, like many characters in the novel, seeks a new role. The impact of Lissie’s revelations upon modern black consciousness is traced in the lives of Fanny and her ex-husband, Suwelo, a middle class man.

Fanny’s crisis is not only the crisis of an oppressed woman, but also of a black person living in the gun sights of white racism and who does not want to turn into a hate-filled racist herself. In reply to the question by her therapist as to what she thought of white people, she recounts a terrible recurring dream. A feast is going on at which white people are endlessly eating. Sometimes she is the one being devoured. And sometimes she sees herself participate in the joyless eating. Whether as victim or horrified participant, Fanny cannot escape racism.
The most intriguing scenes dealing with racism are the ones taking place in Africa. On the one hand, Africa is the homeland of black people and so it rightfully belongs to them. Consequently, when white people come there and discriminate against the blacks, this seems even more unfair than when they do so elsewhere. In that way, Africa is presented as a kind of micro-cosmos, displaying on a smaller scale where all the things are going on in the rest of the world. Olivia says:

The Africa we encountered had already been raped of much of its sustenance. Its people had been sold into slavery. Considering both internal and external “markets” this “trade” had been going on for well over a thousand years; and had no doubt begun as the early civilizations of Africa were falling into decline, around the six hundreds. (148)

Ola, Fanny’s father, also tells his daughter about how the white man came to Africa and made everything go wrong. Ola says:

Whites had done terrible things to us; … But beyond what they were doing to us, as adults, they were destroying our children, who were starving to death – their bodies, their minds, their dreams – right before our eyes. (307)

Yet, on the other hand, the scenes in Africa display other significant things revolving around the race issue. First of all, the Africans show a profound race pride themselves. Ola says:
…the government, after throwing out a majority of the white man’s laws, because they oppressed the native population, decided that the one law they would assuredly keep was the one forbidding interracial marriage. This proved they had as much race pride as the white man, you see. (348)

Revulsion against the death feast of the west and equal revulsion against a countervailing black violence are the agony at the root of *The Temple of My Familiar*. Its fierceness erupts at many places in the world. But the brand of salvation discovered by Fanny and Suwelo will help few of them. The words of Fanny’s father, in whom there are elements of Wole Soyinka and Nelson Mandela carry a greater conviction to Lissie, although she herself claims to have almost no positive memory of a white person and clearly is very proud to be a black woman, who has had the experience of being white. She has used that experience to harmonise within herself and does not let racism devour her inner peace and wholeness. It is obvious that racism is a destructive force that only leads one to be away from their goal as a human being.

Walker, at every point of her life, thinks that until she is free of racism and sexism, her people cannot be free of and until her people are free of these two factors, she cannot be free of factors. She stresses the interrelatedness of these two obstacles to wholeness, for the struggle against them is not merely a question of replacing whosoever is in power; rather it is a struggle to release the spirit that inhabits all life. Walker’s knitted works restate the basic concept in interviews with Black writers that
“…the greatest value a person can attain is full humanity which is a state of oneness with all things,…..” (O’Brien 205). This is possible for all living beings and for those who seek wholeness to be a willing thing to struggle towards that end.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, slavery had long been abolished in America, but old habits die hard, especially in the Deep South of America, where barely any politicians would set foot. The black community is still plagued by the white man’s retained mannerism, although the black community had won a Civil Rights campaign to be considered equal to the white man. To many people the Civil Rights Act was of no consequence.

Thus, both the authors, through their works, bring out the fact that black people are never given liberty to live with freedom and as per their choice. This is evident in almost all their works. Both Wright and Walker have voiced out in an effective way how they were affected by racism. It is clear that they are similar in presenting their views on racism and have no great difference projecting the suppression of blacks under whites through their works. The white’s accountability sustains in all the ages of a black man until he ends up his life. He is under the supervision of a superior, probably a White throughout his life time. The proceeding chapter focuses on double marginalisation of black women. In African American society black community as a whole should struggle a lot to overcome racial discrimination where the voice of a Black woman is very meek and most of the times negligible. So black woman should first come out off hurdles created by black man and secondly should fight for her identity as a human being and specifically as a woman. It is in this point of view that both the authors differ. They
vary in large scale while presenting the troubles of black women. As a male, Wright articulates a great deal about black men and as a female Walker to a large extent addresses black women. Basically, none of these could be a way for gender solidarity. The coming chapter analyses the perspectives of a Black male author and a Black female author in relation to the double marginalisation of black women through their respective works.