

CHAPTER-IV

BLACK BOY

Black Boy is an incomplete autobiography of Richard Wright. It is a record of his childhood and youth. Young Richard, the elder son of Ella and Nathan Wright, is the hero of this autobiography.

Black Boy begins with a striking incident in Richard's life when he was simply four; living with his parents in Natchez, his birth-place in the South America. Richard, a wanton and naughty boy who delighted in playing and shouting, was forbidden to make noise because his seriously ill grand mother-Granny was lying abed in the house. When he was standing before the fire-place of the house, the glowing embers and the dancing flames fascinated him. He thought of throwing something into the fire and seeing it burn. He then started throwing some straws of a broom into the fire and was amused by their burning. Suddenly a thought of burning 'the white curtain' which he was forbidden to touch flashed into his mind. He, not foreseeing the consequences of his deed, took a few straws from the broom; set them ablaze and quickly held them below the white curtain. Within no time the white curtain was on fire. Richard wanted to see how the burning curtain would look like. He had now burnt both the white curtain and the whole house at the risk of his own life and that of his grand mother.

This incident is important from the Psychological point of view. Richard was four. It means he was too young to think

of the whites emotionally. He had no conscious hatred for the whites. But somewhere deep within him lay buried the hatred for the whites and the white colour that stood for the white civilization. The burning of the white curtain brings his 'collective unconsciousness' on the surface of his mind. According to the Psychologist, Carl Jung, beneath the individual consciousness lies not only the memories of our infancy and childhood just as Freud says but 'the collective unconsciousness'-the blocked off memory of our racial past, even of our pre-humanity.¹

Richard seems totally blind to what he felt about burning it. He himself could not probe into the depth of his feelings. We cannot even think of such an understanding or emotional response from a child who is simply four years of age. This is definitely the unconscious hatred for the white people. And it is manifested in the form of a violent action. The burning of the white curtain is a symbolic deed. The impulse to destroy what was white was dormant and dominant in this black boy. It seems that the racial hatred overrode his decisions and actions.

Richard, in his childhood, was a curious blend of misdeeds and mischiefs. The next mischief is his killing a kitten that was disturbing his father. His father was working as a night porter and he used to sleep in the daytime everyday. What he wanted was a sound sleep, an undisturbed sleep. It was, of course, a binding on this naughty boy to keep mum, to observe complete

silence while his father was fast asleep. It was quite unnatural because he was forced to be quiet. Richard, therefore, could not enjoy playing. Elizabeth B. Hurlock says in her book entitled Child Growth and Development :

Play is an activity done for enjoyment it gives...It is not a waste of time. Instead it is essential to the development of a normal, well adjusted personality. It gives a child a chance to develop physically, emotionally, mentally, socially and morally in a way that no other single type of activity can.²

And how tremendous is the zeal for playing in children ! There was an obstacle in the 'pleasure-seeking ' process. He knew that his father reserved a right to beat him if he made noise. Elizabeth B. Hurlock says that 'early childhood is an emotional age...emotional outbursts are stronger and take place more often at this age than at any other time of life.'³

What a child wants in his childhood is love, affection, security and safety. A child is sensitive enough to understand the affectionate people. Richard's father was devoid of a father's affection for his child. Richard writes about him :

He was always a stranger to me, always somehow alien and remote.⁴

Naturally he hated his father. Richard had to perform a double duty. He himself had to keep quiet against his will when his father was fast asleep; and not to allow anybody to disturb him. One day a kitten mewed continuously. It terribly upset his father who warned Richard to stop that noise by all means, if possible by killing it.

The plaintive voice of the kitten and, in addition to it, the threatening of his father made him cruel enough to take the warning literally, and he killed the kitten. He tied a rope around its neck and hanged it. Richard's hatred for his father, his hatred for the thing that hinders his pleasure-seeking process is expressed in the form of violence. As his father was a dominant parental figure, he could not challenge him openly, nor did he neglect his order. So he killed the kitten though he did not intend to do it. He displaced his anger from his father to the kitten. According to him, it was the most suitable way to respond to the situation. This event reveals Richard's hatred for the troublesome authority.

We can, also look at Richard's life in the light of Erik Erikson's Psycho social theory of personality development. In his opinion, the human personality develops through out life. The socio-cultural environment and its various agents like parents, teachers, priests and friends play a major role in creating certain Psycho-social determinants like trust or mistrust, autonomy or shame and doubt; identity or role confusion and so on. As everybody has to go through the various stages of development, at each stage, he has to face certain problems or conflicts.

Each of the stages certain Psychological traits are formed which either help or hinder the further development of personality. Erikson believes that ' an infant is torn between trusting and mistrusting the things and people in his environment. A sense of trust develops if his needs are met without much frustration. A trustful

atmosphere also determines the development of trust in one's self and self -confidence; as sense of trust is manifested in faith in the environment and optimism about future. A sense of mistrust is revealed through the suspicious men, inwordness and fearful and anxious concern with security. The child who has achieved a basic sense of trust views his surroundings as predictable and consistent.⁵

There are some incidents which can be seen from this point of view. Richard's family suffered from a forced migration. It went to the city Memphis . After some months his father abandons his mother and starts living with another woman leaving behind his family members hungry, baseless and insecure. His mother tried to get justice in the court. But in the court his father told the Judge a lie that he was doing all he could do for his wife and children. Actually he had already set up a new home with another woman. The Judge's efforts to make his father support them had failed.

Sharp and sensitive Richard who was present in the court with his mother understood that his father was not going to feed them any longer. He expresses his impression about it :

For some reason the entire thing struck me as being useless; I felt that if my father was going to feed me, then he would have done so regardless of what a judge said to him. And I did not want my father to feed me; I was hungry, but my thoughts of food did not now center about him. I waited, growing restless, hungry ⁶

The court scene brings a feeling of mistrust in Richard's life. It indicates his loss of faith in his father.

In his unhappy childhood the acute human sufferings surrounded him. However, this black boy who had got the unusual sense of endurance from his personal life boldly faced them. The prolonged illness of his mother gave him the courage and power to suffer. He writes about it :

My mother fell ill and the problem of food became an acute, daily agony. Hunger was with us always. Sometimes the neighbors would feed us or a dollar bill would come in the mail from my grand mother...After the court scene, I tried to forget my father; I did not hate him; I simply did not want to think of him. Often when we were hungry my mother would beg me to go to my father's job and ask him for a dollar, a dime, a nickel.... But I would never consent to go, I did not want to see him.⁷

Elizabeth B. Hurlock says that 'the home is every child's castle'⁸ It is the place where a child is surrounded by his most loving people and he feels safe and secure. As it became very difficult for his mother to feed him and his younger brother, she, against her will, was forced to send her two children to the Orphan home. The ill fated Richard now lives in it with his brother. He moves us with the description of his mental state :

During the first days my mother came each night to visit me and my brother, then her visits stopped. I began to wonder if she, too, like my father, had disappeared into the unknown. I was rapidly learning to distrust everything and everybody.⁹

In the orphan home, he was not safe and secure. Nor could he get enough to eat. For him the affection and attachment of his men was more important than the food. And Miss Simon, the rector of the orphan home, was not a loving figure. He writes about her :

I was afraid of her the moment I saw her and my fear lasted during my entire stay in the home.¹⁰

The Misfortune had placed Richard in the hands of careless and cruel people. Richard describes one more meeting episode. He and his mother meet his father. His mother takes him to meet his father, long after the court scene when they were hungry and helpless. She said that she was begging for the sake of his children. To this his careless father flatly said that he had no money at all. However, the strange woman, with whom he was, told him to give the child a nickel coin. But Richard was determined not to take it. He recollects the past moment :

I looked at my mother, at the strange woman, at my father, then into the fire. I wanted to take the nickel, but I did not want to take it from my father.¹¹

Young Richard had decided not to live at the mercy of his father or anybody else eventhough he was dying of hunger and poverty. One is wonderstruck with his amazing iron-will as not to take a single coin from the person who had spoiled and overthrew his life. It seems that circumstances and adverse situations gave him insights into his living.

Later on he does not blame his father for his sufferings or miseries. Herein lies the greatness of Richard Wright as a man. Because he entirely dwells on his own vices and virtues and his responsibilities that he shoulders. But we cannot forget that the breakdown of the family ties had created a lot of problems in the life of this little black boy. Hunger, the social circumstances and his family background taught him the lessons of life. He learnt not to trust anybody and anything. It was definitely a psychic effect on him.

The dialogue between Richard and his mother in the train is significant from the Psychological point of view. The whites and the blacks were seated in the separate parts of the train. Little Richard was more curious to know the whites. So he asked his mother :

"Can I go and peep at the white folks ?"

"You keep quiet," she said.

"But that wouldn't be wrong, would it ?"

"Will you keep still ?"

"But why can't I ?"

"Quit talking foolishness !" ¹²

He had a strong desire to look at the whites. He was attracted to the whites. But his mother vetoed him. It is true that "the best characterization of kids is obtained by dropping the 'k'"¹³ The life of children is characterized by their id-impulses. And as he was not allowed to see the white people, he was disappointed. Moreover, he had to repress this impulse against his will. He knew that his mother was irritated with his questions.

He then remembered that his granny was white. So he asked so many questions and made his mother unable to answer. But from the conversaton, he understood that his granny was a slave, born of mixed parentage or blood. Even his father had Indian, white and Negro blood in him. And when he asked about his own, she said, "They'll call you a colored man when you grow up." She smiled and asked him mockingly, "Do you mind, Mr.Wright ?"¹³ He was really angry but he kept mum. He thought aloud and resolved :

All right, I was colored . It was fine...Truly I had heard that colored people were killed and beaten...If anybody tried to kill me, then I would kill him first.¹⁴

Actually Richard suffered from the inferiority complex when his mother told him about his mixed blood. He had not a good heritage to fall back upon. Ethnically he was inferior to the whites. He therefore tries to satisfy him is a false way, because he thinks he is powerful enough to resist anybody.

One day uncle Hoskins takes him in his buggy. He was to water the horse. So he was going to the middle of the river-Mississippi. Now Richard was nine. He could think about the fearful things. When he looked at the 'long stretch of water' before him he screamed. The conversation between them brings forth Richard's fear.

"Naw !" he screamed.
 "This horse has to drink," Uncle Hoskins said grimly.
 "The river's deep !" he shouted....
 "Sit down or you'll fall out !" Uncle Hoskins shouted.
 "Let me out !" he screamed.¹⁵

The deep water of Mississippi was the object and source of fear. And as Richard was very close to the surface of it, he had to catch the sides of the buggy to get out of that conflicting situation. For the time being his ego had no solution to the conflict which was triggered by that experience.

However , as soon as they came out of water, he said that he wanted to get out of buggy.

"I want to get out." he said,
 "What's the matter ?" Uncle Hoskins asked.
 "I want to get out !"
 "We're back on the land now, boy"
 "Now ! Stop ! I want to get out !" ¹⁶

But the uncle didn't stop. Therefore he leapt from the buggy and landed into the dust of road.

The fear of water was so tremendous that he was terrified even he was out of it. It was now associated with the buggy and Uncle Hoskins. So he tries to go away from them. Besides, he started crying. So that the Uncle wouldn't force him. Richard writes about his Uncle :

I never trusted him after that. Whenever I saw his face the memory of my terror upon the river would come back, vivid and strong, and it stood as a barrier between us.¹⁷

This was his conditioned emotional response to the situation.

A few days later, an important incident took place in Helena- the place where Richard was living with Uncle Hoskins and Aunt Maggie. His Uncle was running a saloon and making a good profit. However, the whites who were jealous of the Negro businessmen, had threatened him to kill. Therefore, Uncle Hoskins used to keep a gun with him.

But one day he forgot to take the gun with him when he went to the saloon. And the next day, all his family members awaited him only to find him nowhere. And there came a tall black boy with a sad news of his death. The white men had shot him dead. When Aunt Maggie was running toward the saloon, he warned :

"They'll kill you if you go there !
white folks say they'll kill all his
kinfolks."¹⁸

Poor Maggie had no right to sob, to express her grief even when she was deprived of her life-partner. Her grief for the loss of her dear husband vanished under the tremendous threat from the

whites. Poor and frightened Maggie could neither see his dead body, nor knew where he was buried. And it was beyond her thoughts to claim his property.

A child learns more from his parental authority. Richard had seen his mother and aunt frightened and shocked with the sad death of Uncle Hoskins . He therefore feared the whites. It is interesting to note that though he was not actually in touch with the whites, he feared them and their cruel deeds. It was the unseen 'white-terror' that led him far away from the whites. Later on they fled to Jackson to be safe.

The episode that brings Richard face to face with the white world is 'the dog selling episode.' A small dog named Betsy that he owned was a gift from the new Uncle-Professor Matthews. He was Maggie's new partner in life. They had fled to North under the threat of the whites.

As Maggie was gone, his mother couldn't earn enough to feed them. Hunger made them weak and crazy. One day, when he was almost dying of hunger, he decided to sell his dog. He washed it and tramped from door to door in the white world. Because he knew that only whites could purchase it. But most of the white women shut the doors of their houses as soon as they saw him. He was terribly disappointed. The white women were closing the doors only because they couldn't bear the sight of his black face. Richard understood a terrible Southern white reality.

At last a young white lady came to the door and smiled. She took the dog in her arms, kissed it and asked its Price. Richard told her that he wanted a dollar. when she went inside to bring the amount, he brooded over the social environment he was placed in. He was now in the world that had everything. The people who lived there were ruling over the blacks and very often crushing them. He then feared the white lady. He brooded :

What was keeping the woman so long ?
 would she tell other people that
 a nigger boy had said something
 wrong to her ? Perhaps she was
 getting a mob ? Maybe I ought to
 leave now and forget about Betsy?
 My mounting anxieties drowned out my
 hunger. I wanted to rush back to
 the safety of the black faces I
 knew.¹⁹

As a result, though the white lady was offering him ninety seven cents, at the eleventh hour, he refused to sell the dog. He spoils the bargain purposely. Richard reveals his heart while conversing with his mother.

"But I didn't want to sell Betsy to
 white people." he said.
 "Why ? "
 "Because they are white," he said.²⁰

This 'dog selling episode' exposes Richard's distrust, fear and hatred for the whites. His superego conscience was telling him not to trust a person who belonged to the white race. Soon he feared the white lady, for the threat of death was associated with the white

colour. The white lady in the white area was a source of objective anxiety.

His id-motive especially hunger had driven him to the door of a white lady. But his superego was not allowing him to sell the dog. His id-motives and the superego demands were in conflict. Therefore he experienced anxiety. In the end, his ego had found a way-not to sell Betsy to the white lady. Richard thus becomes racially conscious and defends himself. He determines not to yield to the whites even in the fits of hunger, crazy hunger. Richard had learnt to ride on his hunger, to defend himself and his black race when he was simply nine.

The next incident that mirrors Richard's utterly disturbed state of mind is his 'sleep-walking' Richard's life at West Helena was a failure. As his mother suffered from the strokes of paralysis, she couldn't earn. Richard and his younger brother were facing starvation. Therefore Granny brought them all to Jackson.

At Jackson, in the joint family conference of all his Uncles and Aunts, it was decided to bring up these two children. Accordingly, his younger brother was to live with Aunt Maggie. Actually Richard wanted to be with her. But now he knew that he had no choice. He suppressed his desire. Again he was more anxious to know whom he was to live with. One night he was found walking in sleep in the bright moon light.

One of the members of the joint family shook him and asked what the matter was and what he was doing. Actually Richard was walking in sleep.

According to Freud, id, which is active all the time, is the main driving force in human personality. 'Besides wishes, which are representations of the biological needs, the id contains at least one other class of material : repressed ideas, impressions, or desires. Such material must be held in check by counterforces from the ego.'²¹

We can look at the 'conflicting situations' he was in. While his mother lay motionless in West Helena, he had faced anxiety-an unknown or vague fear. He had repressed the most important id-impulse of hunger. So he lost an appetite for food. And now the time of separation from his mother was approaching. A mounting tension of what would happen to mother and the vague fear of his black future had broken him down. Richard's ego was almost ineffective to control his id-impulses. His id actually controlled his physical activity. And so he walked in sleep.

'Abusing the water bucket' is one more incident that exposes Richard's repressed unconscious motives. Richard was living with his Uncle Clark and Aunt Jody against his will in Greenwood. His relatives failed to kindle affection in his heart. Richard was not yet prepared to meet the new challenges of the strange place. For the first time in his life, he was treated as a grown-up and was given specific jobs. One day, the miracle about the room in which

Richard used to sleep in Greenwood was exposed by the owner of the house. In it had died the son of its master. No sooner had he listened to it than he thought of his ghost. Because Richard had been taught to believe in God, His existence. And if there was God, he thought there must be ghosts. Although he told his Uncle that he feared the ghost, he was forced to sleep in the same room. Richard had to spend some sleepless nights due to the fear of the ghost. He felt lonely, estranged from his relatives and then became homesick. One day while drawing water from the hydrant in the background, he spoke :

"That goddamn lousy bastard
sonofabitching bucket !" ²²

Aunt Jody heard it and then she made her husband punish Richard for it. Abusing the water bucket is an impulsive outpouring of the repressed anger for his Uncle and Aunt. In the light of Freudian Psychology, Richard's behaviour was governed by the unconscious motives of which he was unaware. It is indeed a displacement of emotions like hate and anger.

Unfortunately, Richard was placed in the hands of the persons who were dogmatists, cruel and ignorant of their true roles. His mother was a victim of a prolonged illness while Granny always indulged in her religious ideas. And there was Aunt Addie, Granny's youngest daughter and stern disciple. She was a strict school teacher in the church-school.

The unnecessary punishment that was inflicted on Richard at school focuses on the development of his 'ego'. Once Addie beat Richard for a wrng he hadn't committed. Richard knew that she (who was his aunt at home and teacher at school) punished him though he did nothing mischievous. So he was angry with her. As if, she was not satisfied with what she did at school, she was ready to beat Richard again at home. Richard was 'a determined boy' now . He was not going to allow her to beat him any more. So he became violent, took the kitchen knife in his hand and defended himself.

After few years, he had to face the same problem when Uncle Tom was about to beat him. Thanks his 'ego-conscience' that was not going to admit a wrong authority when he himself was blameless.

Richard's encounter with the principal of his school reveals his self-respect, self-esteem and his search for identity. He was yet unaware of his social position.

The pricipal, a powerful agent of social environment evoked in him 'self-respect'.

Richard was seventeen by the time he passed his ninth-grade school. He was, of course, graduated. And as he was the class monitor that year, he was selected as a valedictorian of his class. Accordingly, he was to read a paper before the

heterogeneous group of the black and white people in the public auditorium.

One morning, the principal called him in his office and gave him the printed speech that he was supposed to make at the function. Richard flatly refused it. He said, "But professor, I've written my speech already."²³ The principal tried to convince him how he was inexperienced and his speech would not probably be a good one. But he emphatically replied :

"Professor, I'm going to say
my own speech that night."²⁴

And although his principal and parental authority threatened him, he made his own speech. It was an 'innate-motive' in him to express his own thoughts. His self-esteem motive was so powerful that he easily overcame the conflict with the principal. Richard had just started his 'search for identity' and for it he had to fight his principal.

In the Adlerian sense, Richard's efforts to outweigh others, or excel others is the outcome of his long-standing inferiority complex. He had no place or position at home; at school he was nothing more than a learning black boy. His whole life-experiences were humiliating him and his black brothers in the South America. He was being smothered by the whites and the representatives or the agents of the whites. So he tried to surpass others and prove that he was not a mean black boy.

Richard's search for identity is not an easy process. He had been preparing for it since he was a school boy. Even though he was in rags and without books for many days his orthodox and dogmatist Granny did not allow him to get a job. Hunger taught him to refuse to accept Granny's authority and he worked in the morning and evening, before and after the school-hours. His job-seeking never ended in his youth. He worked at many places, houses and institutes. He had been a porter, a worker, a helper, a moppper, a ticket collector, a dish washer, an errand boy and a washer of the eye-glasses in the South America. His life had taken him from one place to an other in search of job. The forced migration was thwarting his progress. Still he loved a change in his life for he had a strong ego and will-power to develop, to achieve 'identity'. All his efforts in the South were his cry for identity. This identity crisis engulfed him when he joined school and after his schooling. Richard learnt less in the Negro-schools and more outside them in the white world. His childhood and youth at home had taught him to challenge the wrong authority however mighty it might be. The social environment, the Southern atmosphere, the Jim Crow laws and the states polices made him hate and finally leave the South. He faced the puzzel :

Then how could one live in
a world in which one's mind
and perception meant nothing
and authority and tradition
meant everything ?²⁵

There are so many incidents which made him both self-conscious as well as socially conscious.

When he was out in the white world either to seek a job or to perform it, he came across many white men and women who insulted, abused, undermined and hated him. Sometimes he seriously thought of the insults but he had to cling to his job to get enough food. A white lady gave him, after a day's full hard work, molasses on the surface of which was floating the white bits of mold. He told himself that he couldn't eat that. When he was working as a waterboy, a dog bit him. But his boss showed indifference to his life simply saying ' a dog bite can't hurt a nigger.'²⁶ When he was working as a porter in a cloth store, a street car of the whites took him with it and the white members humiliated him. He had seen his master mercilessly kicking and dragging a Negro woman till the floor was bloody because she had failed to pay their bills. Later on, the son of his master terminated him from the job as he disliked Richard's gestures. When he was working in the optical company the white skilled workers Reynolds and Pease had threatened and maltreated him; and made him leave the job. When he was a moppper in a hotel, he had seen a white night watchman slapping the buttocks of a black girl, a humiliating treatment that angered him. And the watchman had pointed his gun at Richard for he disliked his gestures.

One more incident made him introspective and restless. One of his friends' brother Bob Greenley was shot dead by

the whites for his relations with the white prostitute in a hotel. He writes about it :

What I had heard altered the look of the world, induced in me a temporary paralysis of will and impulse...Indeed, the white brutality that I had not seen was a more effective control of my behaviour than that which I knew...I was compelled to give my entire imagination over to it, an act which blocked the springs of thought and feeling in me, creating a sense of distance between me and the world in which I lived.²⁷

When he had had much of the 'white humiliation,' the hostile white world gave him a wrong understanding of his environment. It distorted the reality. The white world seemed crooked-minded to him. Richard honestly confesses it :

The words and actions of white people were baffling sings to me. I was living in a culture and not a civilization and I could learn how that culture worked only by living with it. Misreading the reactions of whites around me made me say and do the wrong things. In my dealing with whites I was conscious of the entirety of my relations with them, and they were conscious only of what was happening at a given moment.... I had to feel and think out each tiny item of racial experience in the light of the whole race problem, and to each item I brought the whole of my life....

In the past I had always said too much, now I found that it was difficult to say anything at all. I could not react as the world in which I lived expected me to; that world was too baffling, too uncertain.²⁸

His experiences and encounters with the various agents of the white civilization made him socially conscious. However, he could not expose 'social hatred' directly for he knew it was highly impossible for a black boy. He therefore became excessively conscious of his inner self. He could not express his racial pride in public. He was burning with racial hatred but he concealed his feelings and thoughts. In short he had developed a kind of 'emotional tolerance' only when he was in the company of whites.

There are two more events that bring shame and fear to him. The first is his fighting with another black boy Harrison, and the other is his conversation with the Yankee in the optical store. Young Harrison was a worker in the neighbouring optical company. Mr. Olin, the supervisor in the optical company where Richard was a worker, managed to plant fury and anger, hatred and fear in the minds of these two young Negroes. Richard knew what was in future for him. By all means he wanted to avoid the duel. But all his efforts were useless. He had to face Harrison against his own will. They fought terribly, hurting, wounding and crushing each other; and when both of them were on the point of fall, the white people separated them.

Richard seriously thinks of this fight arranged by the whites. Harrison, a fool, knew nothing of the intention of the whites. The black boys were treated as dogs or roosters,

the resources of their amusement by the whites. Their tussle excited the whites, their bleeding made them happy. It was a thrilling moment in the life of the whites while the black boys were fighting at the risk of their lives. Richard was ashamed of this deed. He hated himself and Harrison for it. They were cheated by the whites. Richard writes :

I felt that I had done something
unclean, something for which I could
never properly atone.²⁹

The guilty feeling that once in his childhood he had fought against his black brother to please the whites remained with him for a longer period in his life. In the light of Erikson's psychosocial theory this fighting is the output of 'role-confusion.' Until he fought with Harrison he did not know what he was doing. He thought that he was displacing his anger of the whites into his fighting. To some extent, it was true. But when he realized his ignoble deed which was done to meet the vulgar delights of whites he shamefully shrank into nothingness.

Once in his late childhood he had started selling a weekly published from Chicago. This news paper boy had suddenly stopped his business when he knew that the paper preached the 'Ku Klux Klan doctrine' that despised Negroes. His racial pride made him alert. Many a time while working at various places he couldn't help expressing his dislike for 'the humiliation of the blacks.' Therefore, very often, he had to say good bye to his jobs; and he never minded it.

His encounter with the Yankee of the optical store reveals his racial hatred. Richard had delivered the pairs of glasses to him and was awaiting his sign on the account book. The Yankee (the native of the New England) tried to probe into his personal and private life. He directly said that he could see hunger in Richard's face and eyes. He then affectionately offered a dollar bill to him.

Poor Richard was wonderstruck for he was exposed to a whiteman. No one, before it, had come so closer to reach the inner recesses of his life. Richard tried to explain his plan that he was saving money to go to the North America; and naturally he was a thin boy. But he couldnot conceal his reality for he was already exposed. However, Richard refused to take money from him. Formerly, in his early childhood, he had refused to sell his little dog to a white lady. And now, he was not willing to take a dollar from a person who was white. What matters is not the money but the colour of the people. Well, he was hungry, there is no doubt. But he was not to take money from a white person though charitable he was. It was true that his consciousness was centred upon obtaining 'a loaf of bread'. But he forgot it, kept mum and tried to leave the place as early as possible.

A black boy was running away, deviating from a white person, a kind white person. Because his whole life-experiences had taught him to fear the whites, to hate them, to conceal the feelings and thoughts of his so long as he was among the

white people. Moreover, Richard couldn't share those affectionate moments of conversation from the core of his heart. He was not born to do it.

He was destined to be a victim of racial hatred in the white South. Richard hated the white people who had conditioned his life, had impoverished the lives of the black people. He knew that the white South had given him the role of a non-man. A role is a pattern of behaviour that is approved by the social group', says Elizabeth B. Hurlock.³⁰

Well, the principles like liberty and equality were there in America; but they were in theory and not in practice. It was a mass deception, mass exploitation in the name of race. The flowering of a Negro personality was blocked from all sides. Richard knew what it was to be a Negro. He simply shared the life of hatred, social neglect, social injustice; life of hunger and uncertainty, only the bleak-black life.

Fortunately, he continued in Memphis his reading of the American classics that widened the horizons of his knowledge about life and people. It sharpened his sensibility. The more he read, the more concerned he was with the life that was entirely different from his. He asked himself :

Could I ever learn about life and people?³¹

He writes about the effects of reading :

My reading had created a vast sense
of distance between me and the
world in which I lived and tried
to make a living.³²

A man in order to live has to face one of these two
alternatives : He has to adjust with the situation or to leave
the place and seek a new situation where he may fit in.

It was said that the blacks had a place in the South
America. But he had realized that he had no place in social
life. Young Richard was denied his own true identity in the
South. He knew the North meant something and not nothing
like the South. The racial atmosphere of the North was
different. Somehow he told himself :

I've got to get away;
I can't stay here.³³

His reading had created in him a strong desire to have a
new mode of life, to open the treasury of new possibilities
of life.

He withdrew into himself, into the inner resources of
his being and headed North. Richard's 'social hatred' had
forced him to leave the South permanently. More than that,
his strong will-power, to transcend the limits of poverty and
the role assigned to him by the South, drove off his inertia.
It gave him the inner momentum in his search for identity.

It is surprisingly true that though Richard arrived in Chicago bearing all the previously fixed scars like anger, fear, insecurity, shame and doubt, the traits that mar the development of a person, he marched towards a successful life.

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