



A Portrait Of Social Maladies In The Select Short Stories Of Richard Wright

Resistance and Resilience

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Abstract: Richard Wright is one among famous writers from African American Literature. His novels are deeply rooted in the themes of racism and Poverty. This project is to study some short stories written by Wright as effects of colonialism. It is to trace the torment inflicted upon the black people who live in America. To analyse the narrative in terms of revealing the inner conflict of both the coloniser and the colonised. To critically examine the modes of resistance used by the African Americans to resist oppression. To analyse the historical reflexivity in the stories and also its relevance in the Contemporary society. To give a message that discriminating people based on their colour can lead to psychological issues.

Key Terms- Torment, Racism, Colonialism, Resistance

I. Introduction

African American literature is an area that includes writers who are born in Africa and migrated to America or born and settled in America, belonging to an African descent. The major thematic concern has been the lives of those African black people who are treated inferior even as slaves in that white-dominated America. The writers have recorded their own experiences as slaves as in *Twelve Years of a Slave* by Salmon Northup. Slavery was abolished in the North in 1865 by then-US president Abraham Lincoln. People are left independent then equality among blacks and whites is given importance. In the 1920s a movement called Harlem Renaissance flourished with the introduction of Jazz music, the Blues, and traditional oral poetry.

The poets and novelists of the Renaissance period projected the lives of Afro-Americans in the North and South uniquely as Langston Hughes and Alain Locke. Amidst this, the horror of Systemic racism prevailed in the South. The white people segregated the black folks by enforcing laws to control them. writers like Richard Wright, James Baldwin, and others had shown their rage towards the worse treatment of the black people. It led to the Civil Rights Movement that demanded equal rights for African Americans, the

result of which was a great migration of African Americans from the South to places like Chicago and Harlem. This opened a new door of opportunities for them.

This project delves into the social issues portrayed in some short stories written by Richard Wright, who himself had experienced migration, Identity crisis, and the psychological trauma of Racism. He was born in 1908 at Mississippi, US. His four grandparents were slaves. When Wright was five his father Nathaniel Wright left their family and they were prone to poverty and migration. His mother fell ill and the family moved to Memphis, then to Tennessee and Wright alone later went to Chicago to seek opportunities. He had been forced to quit his education to support his family after completing junior high school. Even at a very young age, he was subject to mental and physical abuse, knowingly or unknowingly the hatred for whites sprouted within his psyche and he started reflecting that in his literary works. His childhood was full of unpleasant memories, as he had done some unskilled jobs to support the family. He had done some jobs like street sweeper and ditch digger.

He became a supporter of communist party and his writings appeared in publications such as *Anvil*, *Left Front and Midland Left*. In 1937 he became Harlem editor of the Communist newspaper, *Daily Worker*. He also involved in the Federal Writers project, Chicago's South Side Writers' Group, which Richard Wright founded in 1936. It included such prominent members as Arna Bontemps and Margaret Walker, with significant influence from the Communist Party USA (CPUSA) and the University of Chicago's New School of Sociology, established criteria that would define social realism in literature among African American writers. The usage of words as a powerful weapon to criticise the dominant power could be witnessed in his works. Milton Moskowitz in his article "The Enduring Importance of Richard Wright" commented as follows, No one, before Richard Wright, had exposed with such emotional power the oppression faced by Negroes in America. It would not be an exaggeration to say that Richard Wright's books helped to lay the ground for the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s (Moskowitz 2006).

The first book that gained him significance was *Uncle Tom's Children*, a collection of four short fiction and one non-fiction essay published in the year 1938 which deliberately condemns how whites subjugate black folks and gave them the feeling of "otherness" a term used by Edward Said to indicate the state of colonised people. His novel *Native Son* published in 1940 had earned him popularity internationally and he had won the Spingarn Medal for it in 1941. This medal was awarded by the National Association for the Advancement of coloured people for outstanding achievement by an African American. The novel deals with the life of Bigger Thomas who was chased down and demonised after he accidentally killed a white woman and the theme of society's influence over an individual's fate is dealt with skilfully. After the success of *Native Son*, Wright wrote an essay explaining "How Bigger Was Born".

In 1945, he published a memoir titled *Black Boy* in which Wright described those years 1912-1927 as "dark and lonely as death." This book led one to how the author was brought up and his emergence of love towards literature and writing. He was influenced by the writings of Fyodor Dostoevsky, Mark Twain, and Albert Camus. It was his passion for reading that made him a writer despite being not educated properly. He spent his last years in Paris writing the works *The Outsider*, *The Long Dream*, and *Eight Men*, a collection of short stories, published posthumously in 1961 after he died in 1960.

II. Literature Review

This Writer has been chosen for research to analyse the realistic portrayal of African American life. His narrative itself reveals the minds of the coloniser and the colonised, and how their minds are tuned. Research has been done on Wright's stories based on Psychoanalytic perspective. His novels *Native Son* and *Black Boy* were critically acclaimed, so this project will focus on his short stories to deal with varieties of experiences. The primary objective of this project is to examine the various forms of social maladies as resonated in the lives of the Black people. It also aims at exploring whether the tone of the writer differs when speaking about two varied groups. The title, **A Portrait of social maladies in the select short stories of Richard Wright** implies the vivid pictorial representation of the society at that time. Historical reflexivity is predominant in the stories. Wright belongs to the category of Realism and Naturalism. A portrait has various colours, similarly, his stories provide a variety of experiences each contributing to the whole. This project is to call out the various issues portrayed by Wright together while analysing through postcolonial context it aims to provide insightful observations of the text. Racial prejudice is the prime issue that suffocates the colored people even in this postmodern era. If a man is black then he has been made a subject to crime though he hasn't done any fault or he did that to resist horror.

These selected stories reflect the harsh reality of the American society that segregated one particular group, just because of their colour. The minds of the whites are psychologically captivated by the colonial power. Colonialism aims to make the colonised people believe that they were inferior at different causes and that they must change their way of life. The common theme of all these stories is dehumanising Black folks. Though the crime has been initiated by the dominant, in the end, the burden is on these people who are shackled by an identity crisis.

III. The Subjugated Heroes:

The short story "Big Boy Leaves Home" is about the transformation that occurs in the life of the protagonist Big Boy. The story follows a young Black boy named Big Boy and his friends, as they skip school and go swimming. They confront serious issue of Racial trauma leading to a murder. Big Boy and his friend Bobo manage to escape, but they are separated. Big Boy is forced to flee his home and family, while Bobo faces a tragic fate at the hands of the mob. Big Boy is eventually forced to migrate to Chicago, forever marked by the trauma of his experience. Big Boy's "leaving home" is not a choice, but an of survival in the face of racism and violence.

"Man of All Work" taken from the collection *Eight Men*, is a short story about Carl, who works as a cook in a white man's restaurant. After the restaurant is shut down, he has no other jobs. His wife has delivered her second baby, so she can't go to work. The financial condition is unstable, leaving the family in dejection. Carl witnesses an ad in the newspaper demanding a coloured woman for cooking, housekeeping, and taking care of one child. Carl decides to disguise as a woman and go to work. What happened to him is the rest of the story. The major thematic concern is colour prejudice.

"The Man Who is Almost a Man," is about Dave Saunders, a 17-year-old Black man living in the segregated South. He feels trapped in a state of boyhood, treated patronisingly by the older farmhands. He believes owning a gun will grant him respect and prove his manhood. Dave browses a gun catalogue at the local store, fixated on a pistol. He convinces his hesitant mother to give him money by claiming it's for his father. With the money in hand, Dave purchases the gun. What happened after that is the rest of the story.

IV. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this project involves highlighting the legacy of colonialism and also the role of black women as doubly marginalised. Postcolonialism is a broad term used to denote the writings that speak against colonialism. It contains theories formulated by Homi.K.Bhabha (Hybridity), Edward Said (Orientalism), and Franz Fanon. All of these theories deal with the horrors of colonisation, its impact, and the resistance done by colonised people. This theory cannot be directly applied to the American context but just the major ideas could be related in terms of systemic racism. Franz Fanon's *Black Skin White Masks* talks about the physical and psychological effects of colonialism in Africa. How Blacks are viewed through the eyes of white colonialism in Africa. The Europeans colonised Africa and made black people feel that their identity and culture are inferior. In the American context, black people are not even considered humans and, in that case, both Black's and white people's minds are colonised generation after generation, race is a constructed one in the psyche.

The motto of Postcolonialism is to deconstruct the legacy of colonialism and power dynamics, delving into the modes of resistance, human resilience, and negritude. Postcolonial scholars analyse how these racist ideas and structures continue to affect people's lives. They examine how language, culture, and education systems might still reflect the colonial power dynamics. Richard Wright's short stories and other works are anti-colonial by nature. Overall, postcolonialism helps to understand how racial discrimination isn't just a historical issue, but a complex problem with roots in colonialism that continues to shape societies today. The contemporary period is also not free from racism, but the numbers are less. There are both similarities and differences between the postcolonial context of the other nations in the hands of Europeans and Black Americans in the hands of American society.

Colonised countries refer to the regions that are subjected to European imperial rule during the age of colonisation. The impact of colonialism on these societies includes economic exploitation, cultural subjugation, and the imposition of Western ideologies. The scars of colonialism are still there, manifesting in economic disparities, political instability, and cultural Hybridity. Black Americans, on the other hand, have a distinct history shaped by the slave trade. Forced migration, slavery, and systemic racism have left enduring legacies, influencing socio-economic disparities, identity formation, and struggles for civil rights. The historical context for both groups is marked by oppression and the persistent effects of subjugation.

Postcolonial theorists like Homi Bhabha emphasise cultural hybridity, where colonised societies fuse indigenous traditions with colonial influences. This results in a complex, layered identity that challenges binary categorizations. The mixing of cultures leads to the creation of a third space, which contests colonial power dynamics. Similar to colonised countries, Black Americans grapple with cultural hybridity. The fusion of African and American cultures has given rise to a distinct identity, expressed through language, music, and art. The struggle for identity formation is embedded in a history of resistance against cultural erasure and the imposition of a dominant narrative.

Feminism theory is also taken into account for the short story "Man of all work", as it deals with the traumatic situation undergone by coloured women. Both coloured and white women confront different hardships. So, Feminism is used as a tool to analyse the state of white women, and Postcolonial feminism and intersectionality are used as tools to analyse the state of Black women. It includes the ideas of Gayatri Spivak who popularised the term Subalterns for the people who undergo multiple levels of oppression and are put down as voiceless.

The desperate state of the oppressed in Afro-American works lends itself to a nuanced examination through a postcolonial lens. While it may not be a direct application of postcolonial theory, the parallelism in experiences allows for a compelling exploration of shared themes and struggles. In the works of writers like Richard Wright, major social maladies of the time are vividly portrayed, offering a poignant narrative that resonates with postcolonial themes. These narratives serve as a bridge, facilitating a discussion that transcends geographical boundaries and historical contexts.

These theories can help to provide insightful observations on what is the reason for the social maladies that are being inflicted upon black people. Relating concepts from postcolonial theory can lead to valuable insights into the interconnectedness of struggles against oppression, drawing parallels between the experiences of colonised societies and the Afro-American community in their shared pursuit of justice, equality, and liberation.

V. Discussion

The short story "Big Boy Leaves Home" was first published in 1937, It was added to the collection *Uncle Tom's Children (UTC)* in 1938. The story is divided into five parts. It is narrated in a third-person limited point of view. As Wright is a great observer of his society, he used this technique to tell the story delving into the character's inner thoughts. Name of the protagonist is Big Boy Morrison, "Big Boy Leaves Home" critiques racial oppression and the dehumanisation of Blacks in the segregated South. As the title implies, the character Big Boy undergoes migration, whether it is a voluntary act or forced action is the question here. Big Boy and his friends try to be radical against the existing norms determined by the Whites. It follows a linear plot structure. The exposition introduces Big Boy and his friends, the setting in the rural South, and the racial tension that underlies their lives. The rising action begins with their decision to swim in the forbidden pool, escalating with the arrival of the white woman and Jim. The climax is the violent confrontation and Big Boy's escape. The falling action details Big Boy's desperate journey, and the resolution is left open-ended, emphasising his uncertain future.

The main conflict is external, a person vs. society. The swimming hole is owned by a white man named Harvey, and the boys have some hesitancy to move forward. It is obvious that 'internalised racism' is within their psyche. Postcolonial theory explores how colonised people can be conditioned to believe in their inferiority. In the story, Big Boy and his friends hesitate before swimming in the pool, reflecting an awareness of societal norms that restrict their freedom. Their initial fear suggests an acceptance of the racial hierarchy. When discussing the effects of colonialism in Africa Fanon points out, "Out of the blackest part of my soul, across the zebra striping of my mind, surges this desire to be suddenly white" (Fanon 63). It means that black people are made to believe that they are inferior because of their race and being black is established as uncouth and inhuman.

Lester reads a notice that says, "NO TRESPASSIN." near the swimming hole. It serves as an ironic reminder of the limited freedom for African American individuals. Buck explains, "Mean ain no dogs and niggers are allowed" (UTC 22). They live as strangers in their birthplace. These are laws that must be followed. If a place is reserved for the whites, then blacks have no place in it. In the North of America, slavery is abolished and equality is spread, in contrast, the South brims with segregating one group of people.

Big Boy at first has been hesitant, later he insists everyone to go forward and play there, but other friends are frightened as anyone may notice and punish them. After so many talks, they decide to play in that pool. This is a collective action to take their rights by themselves. While facing oppression, colonised people may resist in various ways. Big Boy's decision to swim in the pool can be seen as an act of defiance against

racial restrictions. While they swim naked keeping their clothes away, they look upon a train that goes at a distance from their place that it goes towards north. They converse with each other saying, "Lawd, Ahm going North someday...They say coloured folks up North is got equal rights"(25). These coloured people believed that going to the North could earn them freedom and opportunities, but apart from that racism continued to exist there even after independence. Wright himself speaks about this in his short story, "The Man Who Went to Chicago." Their desire to move towards the north can be considered as a mode of resistance to stay away from the domination of colonial rule.

The white woman named Bertha, who crosses by that side while they are swimming, screams and shouts the name Jim. What she means is that she is afraid that they may attack her. She tries to portray her situation as being caught amid animals in the jungle. Their unconscious mind is tuned in this way as a result of power dynamics that started to prevail during the 19th century. The characters Bertha and Jim embody the colonial gaze. Their fear and suspicion of the Black boys reinforce the idea of Black people as a threat. Their limited perspective doesn't acknowledge the boys' humanity or their right to enjoy the swimming hole. This instance resonates on establishing the black people as 'the other' and treating them as different.

The name Jim represents the Jim Crow laws that are enforced upon Black people. Wright himself underwent such false accusations, in his essay "The Ethics of Living Jim Crow" he says that, "...but the color of a Negro's skin makes him easily recognizable, makes him suspect, converts him into a defenseless target"(9). This statement can apply to most of the African American writers and their characters. Skin colour matters for them to determine one's character. The tone of the writer varies while showing the characteristics of two varied groups. The white people speak in a harsh language with a sense of superiority in their minds. The Black boys adhere to them and their fear is resonated in their speech.

After some time they rush to take their clothes which are behind that woman. Jim comes with a rifle, as he thought they are going to do something bad for her. He shoots Buck and Lester, Big boy shockingly looks at it and suddenly grabs that gun and shoots the white man while he aims at Bobo. The gun can be seen as a symbol, representing the suppressed rage of the oppressed people. Big Boy used one single opportunity that came to him in the form of a gun. The condition of the white man isn't revealed. While Big Boy and Bobo escape from there. Big boy goes home and conveys all that has happened to him. People in the family suddenly guess that a lynch mob may be formed at this time. They ask about the condition of the other three boys too. He explains Buck and Lester are shot. His mother is shocked and says, "Lawd Gawd in heaven, have mercy on us all! This is mo trouble, mo trouble"(31). God is the only source of hope for them. Though her son didn't commit this crime intentionally, she takes the burden and asks God to show mercy for Big Boy. He decides to hide in one of the kilns they had been making in summer, and wait for Bobo to meet him. It has been arranged that a truck driver named Will would pick up Big Boy and Bobo in the morning and they would escape to Chicago in his truck.

This leads to a powerful scene of imagined defiance, in which Big Boy confronts and actively resists a white lynching mob, running towards the unused kilns to bide from them. Big Boy is suddenly struck by the idea that white men might use "blood-bounds" to trace and catch him. The situation of Bobo is revealed as he has been caught by a mob. The burden of an act that he has done to safeguard himself and his friend turned into a horrible crime.

The whites, without any proper investigation, chase the boys, completely blinded by colour prejudice. While Big Boy is in search of Bobo, the mob sets fire to his home. The mob has burnt Bobo also. Big boy after witnessing the burning body of Bobo when rain came is terrified. At that moment, he becomes speechless and motionless. This scene clearly shows it is the whites who are inhuman, not the blacks. One of the effects

of this is to transfer the stereotype of African Americans from Blacks to whites. He calls for Will and both dodge a truck that is going north. It is shown that when they wake up in the morning, they reach the city of Chicago. The character Big Boy as an individual is not able to rebel against a group. He has the fire of vengeance in his heart towards the white people, but in reality, he cannot withstand the oppression. His voice is suppressed and he is being tuned to act as voiceless.

"...surviving is also overcoming white oppression, humiliation, and achieving revenge. A character who dies can be a winner, even more so than a character who lives. For instance, Big Boy's success is synonymous with flight and uprootedness, a sign that his proficiency has not yet reached maturity and power (Cossu-Beaumont, 2006)

Big Boy privately condemns the members of the white angry mob for not giving him a chance to fight them individually. In his daydream he imagines, boldly confronting the white mob and with his friend Bobo he attacks them. The narrative hasn't revealed some aspects such as the owner of the pool Mr. Harvey is not shown in the scene. Wright here shifted his focus from the issue of the segregated pool to the execution of revenge for Jim's murder.

The Civil Rights Movement is one of the most significant historical events in which African Americans from the South left their place and migrated towards the North. In this short story, Wright describes the desire of the oppressed individuals to move towards a land where they can live with independence. As Bigger Thomas in *Native Son*, Big Boy has been forced to take up violence as a tool for resistance. A significant thing to notice is their names. Instead of giving a proper name, the writer has used 'Big' and 'Bigger' to imply that the voices of those people, buried within their hearts can burst at any time. The theme of human resilience is evident here, as they didn't voluntarily show their rage, but resisted from horror.

The characters are developed in a way that reflects broader societal dynamics. Big Boy and his friends represent the collective struggles of African American youth against racial oppression. The white characters, such as the woman and Jim, serve as embodiments of the prejudiced attitudes prevalent in the South. The story serves as a commentary on systemic racism and the dehumanising effects of racial segregation. Wright uses the characters' experiences to shed light on the larger societal issues of the time.

Colonialism is an ideology that insists on the dominant group's complete control over the oppressed group. All theorists have given their opinions as to how race and class differences are constructed. Franz Fanon too reflects on this idea that people may not have hated intentionally, but it is because the differences are structured in that way.

Hate is not inborn; it has to be constantly cultivated to be brought into being...Hate demands existence and he who hates has to show his hate in appropriate actions and behavior...That is why Americans have substantiated discrimination with lynching (Fanon 53).

Lynching means killing someone in a mob. It is the punishment given in America if black people violate the rules. This is one social malady found in this short story. Big Boy's forced escape to Chicago can be seen as a desire to decolonize his mind. By leaving the South, he seeks to escape the ingrained racism and forge a new identity in a more egalitarian space. This story can be taken as reflecting the minds of black Americans, as they quest for a land that can give them some air of freedom to breathe. As a result of power dynamics, every coloured individual had the desire to escape to the North during Wright's time.

"The Man Who is Almost a Man" is from the collection *Eight Men*. The protagonist, Dave, is a young African American boy who desires to assert his manhood and autonomy in

a society where he is systematically disempowered. He is a young black teenager living with his family in the American South during the 1930s. He finds himself frustrated by the patronizing tone of the older workers around him. He believes that obtaining a gun would validate his maturity and earn their respect.

He goes down to the local store owned by Joe and asks to see a catalogue that, among other things, sells guns. This power dynamic is reflective of colonial structures where the coloniser holds dominance over the colonised. By viewing through the lens of Postcolonialism, the story reveals the complexities of navigating and resisting systems of oppression as well as shedding light on the enduring legacy of colonialism within American society.

As mentioned above in the analysis of Big Boy's Tale, Dave Sanders is also captivated by internalised racism. It is evident in his belief that owning a gun will make him a man in the eyes of others. This internalisation of racist stereotypes and ideals perpetuates his oppression and limits his ability to recognize his true worth and agency beyond the standards set by the dominant white culture. The postcolonial theory would analyse Dave's internalised racism as a consequence of colonialism, where the colonised come to view themselves through the lens of the coloniser's prejudices. Wright introduces Dave in this way, "One of these days he was going to get a gun and practice shooting, then they couldn't talk to him as though he were a little boy"(EM 3). African Americans have always been made to be in a state of powerlessness when compared to the whites in America.

Despite poor financial condition Dave had a vision of buying a gun to establish his superiority. His desire to own a gun can be seen as being driven by his perception of masculinity, which has been shaped by the dominant white culture. The gun symbolises power and agency, traits traditionally associated with masculinity in American society. However, Dave's attempts to assert his manhood are fraught with insecurity and naivety, highlighting the complexities of identity formation within a colonial context where the dominant culture imposes its values and norms on marginalised groups.

His aspiration to own a gun also reflects his desire to escape the oppressive conditions of his existence as a sharecropper. His inability to confront the systemic racism and economic exploitation he faces leads him to seek a superficial form of empowerment through the possession of a firearm. This mirrors how colonised peoples may adopt or internalise aspects of the dominant culture in an attempt to resist oppression or assert agency, often resulting in a distortion or appropriation of their own cultural identity.

Mr. Hawkins lives in a big white house is a significant thing to be noticed. The colour of his house invokes the White House, where United States presidents live. Through this image of the house, condemning the role the United States government played in ignoring or even promoting these imbalances of power.

Generally speaking, the Black Americans weren't recognized as full human beings, even after emancipation. In "The Man Who Was Almost a Man" this process of dehumanisation begins with Mr. Hawkins. The story shows how a white man in the United States can exert frightening and unjust power in terms of showing their superiority.

The Negro enslaved by his inferiority, the white man enslaved by his superiority alike behave in accordance with a neurotic condition...In the man of colour there is a constant effort to run away from his own individuality, to annihilate his own presence (Fanon 60).

This psychological examination of racism provides a clear idea that what the people undergo now is because of the constructed or institutionalised discrimination that evolved in the past. Everything is constructed over many years and people act according to that. The legacy of colonialism is that it lasts till the present day in some places. In this story, gender stereotypes refer to the construction of the nature of manhood.

Dave constantly urges his mother to give him money for the gun. In this story mother is considered as the head. His mother is more hesitant as the gun can cause him suffering and danger. Dave's quest for a gun to prove his manhood is similar to Pecola from *The Bluest Eye* published after this short story by Toni Morrison. Both of these characters have a feeling that there is a vacuum within them and they yearn for a better future.

A key irony in the story is Dave's misuse of the gun once he finally obtains it. Instead of using it responsibly or for legitimate purposes, he fires it recklessly and accidentally kills Jenny, the mule. This ironic twist underscores the mismatch between Dave's idealised vision of manhood and the harsh reality of his actions. Throughout the story, Dave demonstrates a lack of understanding about the true nature of power and responsibility. He believes that owning a gun will earn him respect and autonomy, yet he fails to grasp the gravity of his actions and the consequences they entail. This ironic contrast between Dave's aspirations and his actual behaviour highlights his immaturity and misguided notions of masculinity. "In the grey light of dawn, he held it loosely, feeling a sense of power, Could kill a man with a gun like this. Kill anybody, Black and white" (EM 10).

This line appeals to the torment inflicted upon Dave by the people of his community. "Blacks and Whites" indicates that Wright's works reflect his opinions about the whites, as he had undergone various forms of discrimination, he developed hatred towards the white folks. In this story, even black people too try to discriminate against Dave for his manhood. This means that Dave can be taken as a representation of black people who want to earn a "sense of power" in their hands.

With that gun, Dave accidentally kills the mule Jenny given by Jim Hawkins, the owner of the farm. Punishment is the reward he got for his act of using the gun at the wrong time. So, the attempt to gain authority has failed. Franz Fanon has also quoted the ontological nature of black men. They are always made to work to prove their existence as a human, "I found that I was an object in the midst of other objects" (Fanon 109). Fanon's ideas resonate with the nature of colonial power structures embedded in a society.

After Mr. Hawkins asked Dave to pay money for the mule, he thought his future was uncertain. Even then he had rage towards him. The story ends with Dave realising the gravity of his mistake and the futility of his quest for manhood through violence. This poignant ending underscores the destructive consequences of internalised racism and the harsh realities of life for marginalised individuals striving for recognition and agency in a society marked by systemic oppression.

When he reached the top of a ridge he stood straight...looking at Jim Hawkins's big white house, feeling the gun sagging in his pocket. Lawd, ef Ah had just one mo bullet Ah'd taka shot at the house. Ah'd like t scare man Hawkins jusa little...jusa enough to let im know Dave Sanders is a man (EM 18).

Here, the most significant thing to be noted is the tone used by Dave. The way Wright narrated this story is in such a way both voices hear distinctly. The big white house is a symbol of power. That house creates a sense of longing in the heart of Dave. The last line captures the whole essence of the story what happened next isn't stated clearly; rather it ends, "...away to somewhere, somewhere where he could be a man"(18). On the whole, Through Dave's misguided quest for a gun as a symbol of manhood and autonomy, Wright unveils the

insidious effects of internalised racism and the enduring legacy of colonial oppression. Dave's journey reflects the struggle of marginalised individuals to assert their agency in a society marked by systematic disenfranchisement and racial hierarchies. Through vivid characterization and poignant symbolism, Wright exposes the complexities of navigating and resisting systems of oppression while highlighting the urgent need for collective action and solidarity in the ongoing pursuit of social justice and equality.

The short story "Man of All Work" takes place in the 1950's rural South right before the events of the Civil Rights Movement. It was written as a radio play. The narrative follows a cook named Carl who takes his wife's name and clothing for a day to interview for a domestic job meant for women for the Fairchild family. Through the white couple being unaware of Lucy's true gender, Wright demonstrates the lack of compassion shown by the Whites through colour prejudice. The story is written in a conversational pattern. Each character differs in their tone.

Carl's status can be viewed as a reflection of the African American people as their financial condition is clearly stated through him. He and his wife Lucy lost their jobs at the same time. The restaurant of a white owner in which Carl worked as a cook has been closed suddenly and Lucy also had to leave her job soon after giving birth to her second baby. This occurrence indicates that the financial conditions of black people are so poor, that the reason is the lack of opportunities provided to them. Initially in the story, the family is shown to be happy with the newborn child; amidst they are confused about the loan amount that they have to pay to live in that house. Carl's desperate situation is evident when Lucy says, "I wouldn't be so worried if I knew that we weren't going to lose the house" (EM 111). This highlights the economic hardship Black families faced and Carl's fear of losing their homes. They need to pay two hundred dollars to stay in that house. Fear is within the psyche of any black man, as how their life may turn if they loses their job or not work properly.

Carl notices an ad saying, "Cook and housekeeper wanted. Take care of one child and small modern household... Coloured cook preferred" (114). They have also mentioned that they need a woman. Here, the focus is on both race and Gender. In the place of a maid, people always wanted women and in America preferably a black woman. This is a way of subjugation. "Racist ideologies identified different sections of people as intrinsically or biologically suited for particular tasks" (Loomba, 108). This job is particularly reserved only for coloured women. The term "Subaltern" is used by Gayatri Spivak to indicate women who belong to third-world countries. It means double marginalisation. Generally, coloured people are marginalised by the white community, in that coloured women face additional consequences. While the story unfolds, the buried voice of the subaltern, a black woman is unveiled.

Carl decides to go in for the job of cook and housekeeper. He disguises as a woman using his wife's clothes and others. Lucy doesn't like this and she tries hard to stop him from going, but he cheats her and goes out. For Lucy and his children Henry and Tina, he risks his life. He promised his wife that he would work just for two months and earn the money required to recover their house. He takes his wife's name Lucy for his new character.

The title of the short story "Man of All Work" implies that without any gender bias, anyone can do any work. This particular job of housekeeper was restricted to women at that time and even today appointing men to this role is a rare event. Wright's description can be taken as a critique of these gender stereotypes. He tried to establish that a man can do work not just outside but also in the household. The story unfolds in three swiftly changing scenes: Carl's home, the Fairchild's house, and back again to Carl's home.

Dave Fairchild and Anne are the couple who recruit Lucy (Carl) as their maid. Here the name Fairchild must be taken into account. In the name itself, Wright included that they are fair people, in terms of colour

and attitude. The work that has been assigned to the maid is to cook and look after Lily. While Anne is bathing, she calls Lucy to wash her back. Along with her job, Lucy (Carl) is made to perform additional tasks. The tone of Anne is authoritative at first in calling her but later she talks gently and warns her to be aware of her husband's actions.

The significant thing to be noted here is Anne, being a white woman, can't resist her husband from unnecessary activities. The conversation goes like this,

-Lucy, do you drink?

-No ma'am. Not a drop.

-Good as long as you don't drink, my husband won't bother you and you can defend yourself very well. Just push him away. Now, as one woman to another, do we understand each other (129-130)?

It is evident that despite being a working woman Anne is also not free from societal constraints. She has witnessed his behaviour with old maids. That is the reason, she cautions Lucy about it. Instead of questioning her husband, she cautions the woman. This means that women are mostly considered as subservient. Edward Margolis has understood the situation as,

Mrs. Fairchild plays a dominant part in her relationship to her husband. She makes it clear to Carl (who calls himself Lucy) that she regards her husband as an irresponsible child, particularly when he drinks...she has in her way emasculated her husband, who attempts to recover his virility in drink and Negro girls (146).

Dave is the one who asked Anne to interview Lucy as she is going to be recruited as a cook. So, a woman taking the upper hand is not taken at ease by society. Carl, while he is a man, had some authoritative attitude as he rebelled against his wife's advice not to go as a maid. As Lucy he has to be in a fearful state because women are prone to abuse and violence. The name of the old maid Bertha often appears in the story though she is not in the scene. The child repeatedly compares Lucy and Bertha and gives feedback. "But you are not at all like Bertha" (EM 134). This is the sentence used by the child to indicate Lucy's physical and mental strength.

During the interview session, Anne clearly stated that Bertha had been fired, as she drank and behaved awkwardly. Her husband is the one who gave Bertha the drink. This proves the white woman's passivity. That is why black women can be considered subalterns. Even the little girl Lily is controlled by Dave. For her age, she understood the issue between Dave and Bertha as they wrestle with each other, even the child could predict something is wrong between them. She explains this to Lucy.

The crucial turning of the story is when Dave tries to seduce Lucy (Carl). She tries to resist being subject to his sexual advances. He forces her to drink and she tries to keep him away. She says, "Mr. Fairchild, you're going to make it impossible for me to work here" (137). As Lucy repeatedly pushes him away and says that she will grab his hand, his mind filled with anguish. He utters, "Look who is threatening, you're going to grab me? (137). His tone is evident and he doesn't want her to speak. Her voice is being silenced as she is a subaltern. Lily is unaware of what is going on between them comments, "Papa's wrestling Lucy like he wrestled Bertha"(138).

Lily's voice is also suppressed and he behaves rudely to Lucy and tries to blame her when Anne arrives there. He tries to portray her as an immoral person. Anne becomes furious as he does what she doesn't want to happen. "LUCY! I'M SICK AND TIRED OF THIS! THIS IS THE END!" (139). All these dialogues from the text direct to one point that black women as maids undergo such traumatic incidents. This particular job is meant only for coloured women and being in this particular job they face such consequences. The white woman, too fed up with her husband's actions, even tries to shoot him, which accidentally hits Lucy's legs. Dave's attitude towards women shows that he wants them to feel inferior to him. As Virginia Woolf points out, "...he was concerned not with their inferiority but with his own superiority. That was what he was protecting rather hot-headedly and with too much emphasis because it was a jewel to him of the rarest"(38).

Intersectionality is a concept that is applied when different kinds of oppression such as gender, race, and class intersect and give a collective understanding about a character. Carl belongs to a poor African American family. As a black he is an oppressed individual, when he became Lucy a different form of oppression is added, that is gender. So, class, race, and gender intersect and provide an understanding of Carl as Lucy.

After that Anne accidentally shoots Lucy, Dave tries to frame Lucy as a criminal to protect his wife. When they came to know that Lucy is a man, both of them were shocked. To save his wife from being arrested Dave projects as if Carl is the prime reason for the issue.

I've got it solved. It's simple. This nigger put on a dress to worm his way into my house to rape my wife! Ha! See? Then I detected him. I shot him in self-defence, shot him to protect my honor, my home. Any jury'll free me on that. Anne, that's our case. (147).

What's striking in this passage was the fact that instead of trying to blame the shooting on someone else, they automatically try and make Carl responsible by saying that he was trying to rape his wife. This is because of the power imbalance that prevailed at that time. Carl's radical action to hit Dave can be taken as a mode of resistance for self-defence. They solve this issue by providing two hundred dollars to pay the amount for recovering their house. Though the stories in the collection *Eight Men* focus on the life of black men, the story "Man of All Work" deals with hardships faced by women too. On the whole, Richard Wright's 'Man of All Work' paints a disturbing picture of racial and sexual prejudice in the segregated South. Through Carl's experience, Wright exposes the dehumanizing effects of racism, where Black people are viewed as subservient and denied equal opportunities. The story also critiques ingrained sexism, where domestic work is seen as women's duty and Black women are particularly vulnerable to exploitation. The web of oppression tightens for Carl when he takes on the persona of Lucy, highlighting the complex ways race and gender intersect. While the story takes place before the Civil Rights Movement, its themes remain relevant today, urging us to acknowledge the intersectional nature of oppression and fight for a more just society.

Till now the focus has been laid upon the stories separately. Now the focus shifts to a comparative deeper level analysis. The common element in all these three stories is the gun. It has played an important role in shaping the plot. The gun represents the power that is given to an individual. If one has a gun, he can prove his superiority. This is the idea that follows in these stories. Resistance is a concept given by postcolonial thinkers to indicate the power of resilience among the colonised people. Violence is used as a form of resistance in these stories.

If the narrative of these stories is looked upon simultaneously, in the exposition the black characters are introduced as innocent, in the rising action they confront white characters or get influenced by the white way of life. In the climax there occurs a conflict with the white character and in the falling action they undergo

a transformation into a different personality and in the end are ambiguous or their future is shown as uncertain. The concept of "othering" must also be taken into account while situating postcolonial studies in Wright's works. Roger Rosenblatt in his essay "Black as a colour of chaos" discussed how black people are discriminated against based on colour and he also analysed some works from African American Literature. He argues,

Black heroes are deprived both of time and eternity, and the result is a special kind of terror. Terror is directly related to whiteness; in black fiction white is a colour of suffocation, disorientation, deafness, blindness, of threat, of being cornered (256).

How the white characters view the blacks is a kind of colonial gaze as mentioned earlier in the analysis of Big Boy. In Big Boy's tale, Bertha views the black boys as a threat to her. In the story of Carl, Dave Fairchild tries to objectify Lucy (Carl) just because she is a black woman who works in his house. The term colonial gaze signifies the major conflict of segregating one particular group of people. In the case of subalterns, it is the women of the colonised society who undergo both the male gaze and the colonial gaze. Their voices are buried within and outside they are projected as voiceless. "We are interested in recovering subaltern voices because we are invested in changing contemporary power relations"(Loomba 203). In the case of Wright's story, Dave tries to suppress Lucy's voice of resistance but his wife as a white woman supports Lucy.

To give a deep analysis Big Boy can be compared to Bhaka, the protagonist from the novel *The Untouchable* by Mulk Raj Anand. Both protagonists undergo significant transformations as they confront the harsh realities of their respective societies. Big Boy evolves from a naive youth to a determined individual who defies societal constraints. Bhakha experiences a journey of self-discovery and empowerment as he challenges the oppressive structures of caste hierarchy.

"Big Boy Leaves Home" explores the brutality of racism and the violence perpetrated against African Americans. It also highlights the resilience and resistance of individuals fighting against systemic oppression. *Untouchable* Examines the insidious nature of caste-based discrimination and its impact on individuals' lives. It also illustrates the struggle for social justice and equality amidst entrenched societal norms. If it is racism in America, it is caste discrimination in India.

The narrative structure of "Big Boy Leaves Home" features a stark and gritty narrative that captures the intensity of racial tensions and conflicts, utilising vivid imagery and language to evoke the atmosphere of fear and defiance. *Untouchable* employs a more introspective and lyrical style, delving into the inner thoughts and emotions of the protagonist. The narrative balances moments of despair with instances of hope and resilience, offering a nuanced portrayal of social struggle. It is also set in British colonised India.

The swimming hole owned by a white man is restricted to black people, in the Indian context too wells are prohibited for use by certain groups of people. Meena Kandasamy, a contemporary Indian writer mentioned this issue in her poem "We will rebuild our worlds", "electrocuted children to instant death because they played in your well/ and other ghastly carnages// but the crimes of passion/ our passion/ your crimes." The legacy of this discrimination continues to exist till the present time in both countries, the numbers may be less but still the mindset continues. The people with higher status continue to do this without realising that it is wrong and the oppressed also get used to it. Slowly because of their protest, they got their rights. In America it is Black Lives Matter and Dalit activism in India.

What is striking in this aspect is that though the historical and cultural background of the countries is different, the struggle undergone by marginalised people is the same. Negrophobia is a term used to indicate the fear whites had as a threatening factor in the blacks. The first story "Big Boy Leaves Home" is taken from his first collection *Uncle Tom's Children*, The next two stories are from his last collection *Eight Men*. The effect of Jim Crow laws is the major concern of both collections. The name Jim too is mentioned in two short stories, both are white characters.

Orientalism deals with the construction of the East (Orient) as inferior, uncultured, and irrational by the West (Occident). The people of the West always try to establish themselves as superior in all aspects. In America too they judge people of the East and African Americans as "The other."

The life of an Arab Palestinian in the West, particularly in America, is disheartening...The web of racism, cultural stereotypes. political imperialism, dehumanising ideology holding in the Arab or the Muslim is very strong indeed, and it is this web which every Palestinian has come to feel as his uniquely punishing destiny (Said 27)

Edward Said has mentioned in this passage the experience of a Palestinian in the US. This idea is similar to what Big Boy and his friends confront as black boys and what Carl undergoes as Lucy. Carl's financial condition forced him to decide to go as a maid. Big Boy's unintentional act of violence forced him to migrate from his place. The misguided aspect of manhood forced Dave Sanders to use the Gun. All these are forced actions that bring a complete change in an individual's life.

Finally, Richard Wright's stories portray different kinds of experiences faced by African Americans in the South. More than just a literary work they can be considered as a visual representation. That is why the project is titled as a portrait of social maladies. Wright as a person who lived in a time when Jim Crow segregation was at its peak, his work reflects the trauma undergone by him.

Richard Wright's work laid the foundation for the Civil Rights Movement. It happened after his death. This work *Eight Men Too* has been published posthumously, though it is not a very famous work it has shown the different lives of Black men. All of them share common themes, especially Negrophobia.

The key findings of this research work are listed and these are found based on associating the texts of Richard Wright with the ideas of Franz Fanon, Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, and Homi Bhabha. Some critics like Roger Rosenblatt and Edward Margolis are also taken into account. The reason for Social maladies faced by the African American people and their fight against it are analysed through the lens of Postcolonialism.

In all three stories, power dynamics are deeply entrenched within the social fabric, with dominant groups exerting control over subalterns through various means, including economic exploitation, racial hierarchy, and physical violence. The protagonists, Big Boy, Carl, and Dave, navigate oppressive systems where their agency is limited by the dominant white culture.

Despite facing overwhelming oppression, the Protagonists exhibit forms of resistance, albeit often fraught with complexities and contradictions. Their acts of resistance range from overt defiance, such as Big Boy's escape from his oppressors, to subtler forms of subversion, like Carl's manipulation of white authority figures. These acts of resistance serve as a means for the subalterns to reclaim their agency and challenge the structures of power that seek to confine them.

The protagonist's internal struggles with identity and self-worth reflect the pervasive influence of colonialism and white supremacy on their psyches. Dave's desire for a gun in "The Man Who Was Almost a

Man," for instance, underscores his internalised belief that possessing a firearm will validate his masculinity and earn him respect within a society that devalues black lives. Similarly, Big Boy's journey in "Big Boy Leaves Home" exposes the psychological toll of racial violence and the struggle to assert a sense of self in a hostile world.

Through the experiences of Big Boy and his friends, Carl, and Dave, the stories highlight the multifaceted nature of the African American experience. While these characters resist oppression, they also grapple with internal conflicts, societal pressures, and the weight of historical trauma. Their narratives reveal the intricacies of navigating identity, power, and resistance within a colonial context, shedding light on the resilience and humanity of those marginalised by systems of oppression.

Finally, the stories underscore the enduring legacy of colonialism and its impact on contemporary society. The power dynamics, racial hierarchies, and systemic injustices depicted in the narratives reflect the ongoing effects of colonial exploitation and domination. By interrogating these themes through a postcolonial lens, the stories invite readers to confront the historical roots of oppression and consider how colonial legacies continue to shape social relations and structures of power today.

Through Fanon's ideas in *Black Skin White Masks*, it can be said that the blacks always wished for a better world. This line "Hate is not inborn, it must be constantly cultivated..." indicates that race and gender discrimination has not been grown by themselves but grown as a plant constantly watered generations after generations. On the whole, A black is made to feel inferior and a White is made to feel superior.

George Floyd, a Black American who had been brutally murdered while he was in the custody of white police officers is an example that racism exists in contemporary society. This incident happened on May 25, 2020.

The solution for this issue will be Collective Resilience rather than individual action. People must change their minds to make the nation available for any individual. The stereotype of Black as a colour of chaos must change. A proper investigation must be done rather than a conclusion by racial prejudice. The white mob in "Big Boy Leaves Home" represents this attitude. They don't know about the issue clearly, who is the reason for the crime. They continue to chase Big Boy and Bobo. Their minds are collectively tuned as only the black boy could have done the fault.

The social maladies analysed in this discussion are Forced Migration, the Legacy of Colonialism, dehumanisation, subjugation, Abuse, Violence, Internalised racism, racial hierarchy, and colonial gaze or Negrophobia. These issues are dealt with by Wright in these short stories. There is a story titled "Down by the Riverside" from the collection *Uncle Tom's Children*, in which black people are not provided with boats at the time of the flood. As their financial condition is poor Mann's family cannot afford to buy a boat, despite this he gives some money to a boy to buy a boat to save his pregnant wife. One dialogue that captures the essence is, "They would not let a woman die just because she was black; they would not let a baby kill a woman"(UTC 58). Likewise his other stories "The Man Who Lived Underground" also talk about Fred Daniels who lives by hiding himself to not be caught by the police for a crime he didn't commit.

VI. Summation

To sum up, the analysis of Richard Wright's texts through the lens of postcolonial theory, in conjunction with the ideas of Franz Fanon, Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, and Homi Bhabha, has provided profound insights into the social maladies faced by African American communities and their enduring fight against systemic oppression. Through characters like Big Boy, Carl, and Dave, we have witnessed the entrenched power dynamics and racial hierarchies that permeate society, as well as the myriad forms of resistance employed by marginalised individuals.

Moreover, the intersectionality of identities within these narratives has highlighted the complexity of the characters' experiences, illustrating how factors such as race, gender, and class intersect to shape their realities. This nuanced portrayal serves as a powerful critique of societal injustices and underscores the importance of literature as a tool for social critique and empowerment.

Furthermore, while rooted in the African American experience, the themes explored in Wright's texts resonate globally, resonating with struggles against colonialism, imperialism, and oppression worldwide. This underscores the importance of solidarity among diverse communities fighting for liberation.

As we reflect on the lessons gleaned from these narratives, it becomes evident that education and critical engagement with literature are essential in fostering empathy, understanding, and empowerment. By studying texts through diverse theoretical frameworks, individuals gain insight into the complexities of social dynamics and become better equipped to challenge injustices.

Yoshinabu Hakutani in his introduction to *Critical Essays on Richard Wright* quotes the words of Edward Margolies. "Unlike some critics, who regard Wright as merely a proletarian writer, Margolies successfully demonstrates Wright's theme of fear and alienation, though he admits that 'Wright seldom achieved his fullest treasure of artistic promise'"(introduction 4). This statement says that Wright could not present his artistic ability properly, but his works are well crafted though they speak about oppression. The way of storytelling, usage of symbolism, diction everything tells about his artistic capability. He wanted everyone to stand up for each other during Hard times, his stories reflect this opinion.

I Have a Dream is a speech given by Martin Luther King Jr in 1963. This epoch-making speech was rendered after five score years subsequent to the emancipation proclamation. He shared his vision of how America can be still more progressed if there is equality among people. If this dream must be made real then collective effort matters more. Rather than growing the plant of discrimination that yields sorrow, People with togetherness must grow the plant that yields happiness which says all are equal or all are God's Children.

VII. Concluding Message:

Through this project, the message conveyed to society is one of awareness, empathy, and a call to action. By delving into the themes of dehumanization, forced migration, yearning for power, and the demonisation of black folks in Richard Wright's short stories, the aim is to shine a spotlight on the enduring social maladies that continue to afflict marginalised communities, particularly African Americans.

Wright has used Literature as a tool to pour down all his rage and also to record in books as an observer of society. People must actively participate in efforts to dismantle oppressive systems and promote social justice. In present times, through advocacy, ally ship, and ongoing dialogue, we can work towards creating a more equitable and inclusive society for all individuals, transcending boundaries of race, gender, and class.

As we strive for a better future, let us heed the wisdom of Wright's narratives and continue the fight for liberation.

Furthermore, the project seeks to foster empathy and understanding by centering the experiences and perspectives of marginalised individuals. By exploring the complexities of their struggles and resilience, it challenges the readers to confront their own biases and privileges, and to actively engage in dismantling systems of oppression. The Social maladies discussed in this project relate to other countries too irrespective of the cultural background in which they are from. By amplifying marginalised

voices and narratives, it seeks to inspire meaningful change and pave the way for a future where all individuals are afforded dignity, agency, and equal opportunity. This exploration has enriched the researcher's understanding about the intricacies of race, identity, power and the importance of solidarity in dismantling oppressive systems.

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