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RACISM AND OPPRESSION IN RICHARD WRIGHT'S NOVEL 'BLACK BOY'

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ABSTRACT

Richard Wright, a famous African American writer presents the sufferings and struggle of African American people in his novels. He explores the subject of racism and oppression in his works. As it is true that the condition of African American people was very pathetic in. This paper tries to explore the racism and oppression of black American people, who suffered discrimination and brutality by the whites. They were oppressed by the whites, being an African American Richard himself faced many problems while growing up. This paper reflects the condition of African American through the novels Black Boy.

KEY WORDS: Block Boy, Racism, Oppression, Discrimination.

INTRODUCTION

It is a very familiar fact that racism and oppression are one of the important and major problems for black American. This study will try to make the readers to realize the theme of Richard Wright's Black Boy and Native Son by examining the concept of racism of Blacks in America.

Much of Richard Wright's writing deals with racial themes. As he has observed that the major reason for racism is being a "Black". It means there is a difference between black and whites and they are oppressed by whites. Black Boy and Native Son depict the struggle of young boy and his search of the knowledge.

Black Boy is written by an African American author Richard Wright. He portrays the condition of blacks under suppression. In the novel Black Boy he presents his childhood recollection from early age of his life. From the beginning of his life he had some quest for knowledge. At every situation he was curious to know the reason behind every fact, as he grows up he faces many problems like poverty, hunger for food as well as for knowledge, family segregation. He observes that some people are

different from each other i.e. color different some are lighter in color and some are dark and that light color people are superior than black and they are given more respect than darks. Another thing he observe that for black people there is separate place to live in the society, this is not enough even white people children studies in their own school and darks are not allowed there.

The novel begins when he was four year old and the ignorance started, at every situation he was told to keep silence or ask any question and his father ignored his family for another women and lives with her. Here as son he faced ignorance of his father this made to develop a negative association between Richard and his father 'Nathan'.

After all this Richard and his family faced many problem even sometime they had shortage of food this made Ella, Richards mother to join the children in the orphanage and they also lived with many relatives because his father Nathan refused to help them. After some time his mother retrieves the children from the orphanage and goes to aunt Maggie in Arkansas, from here begins the struggle of racism and segregation of Blacks. While travelling to

aunt Maggie's home in Arkanas he notices that there is separate section for whites and black traveller. As he by nature very curious to find the reason behind it but his mother Ella stopped him, this instance reflects the racism that a black should not ask or raise any question regarding their segregation.

Secondly while playing at granny's house he notices from window a regiment of black soldier training for World War I and later he sees a black chain gang working by road side guarded by armed white men. As World War I ends the racial disputes rises. In this regard Richard thinks that black soldiers were given training to guard the country it seems very friendly relation of blacks and whites and on the other hand the chain gang treated unfairly harsh treatment from whites. Even blacks are risking their life to defend the country on other side they are brutally treated.

Another instance from the novel small local boys group had fight with each other in the neighborhood because of racial dispute even these small boy had the feeling of segregation of blacks and whites.

To earn for his family he works at many places but with no satisfaction and with some reason he left many jobs. Once he comes to know that by selling newspaper one could make more money and Richard started selling the newspaper. Meanwhile one black man asked him about the newspaper and told him that this paper deals with propaganda from Ku Klux Klan the vicious white supremacist group and he stopped selling it and again he goes with hunger. Then he takes a job writing for brother Mance, an illiterate insurance salesman who lived next door, it's like a new experience for Richard to know about universal poverty and ignorance of south blacks. One day he learns that his grandfather falls ill land aunt Addie met and ask his "come and say good bye to your grandpa,"(140) he goes to meet him where Richard says "good bye, grandpa,"(141). His grandfather was a union Veteran of the civil war he was deprived of pension and told by the whites that he did some error in his pension application actually he was cheated by them because he was a black and illiterate. Here Richard reflects a shade of racism

oppressed over the black that one could not avail the benefits of his own hard work because he is black.

Next Richard tries to get job at whites' family there also he was questioned if he steals them because he is black. The following summer he gets job a saw mill but again he leaves it also. One morning he comes to know that whites have killed the brother of one of his black classmates because they thought he was consorting with a white prostitute, here is also whites dominates where blacks are not allowed to do anything they like.

In a valedictory function of Richards, his name was given for speech but he discovers that principal has prepared speech for Richard and he was told not to present his own speech at the ceremony because the whites will be present at the ceremony but Richard refuses and delivers his own speech. His action at function seems like moral victory for him.

After completing his studies he presents his dream of becoming writer on this to his white boss reacted that writer is predictable brutal, debased and disdain. Richard already expected these types of criticism and he knows that whites never support blacks. Again Richard takes a job at cloth store and he finds that racism dominates at every place; he observes that his white boss was beating black women who are unable to pay the credit installment on her clothing purchase. From a distance a white policeman watched everything but he didn't even move from his place. This also implies that the racism on blacks that even she was beaten so harshly and no one helped her instead she was carted away. When Richard went to the store and saw the white boss he looked at him and said "'boy, that's what we do to niggers when they don't pay their bills," (182)

Not long thereafter when Richard goes to deliver cloths in white neighborhood, a policeman takes him to the side and searched him and said that he should tell his boss not to send him to deliver in whites' neighbor after dark. Eventually Richard's boss fires him from the job. All these instance in cloth stores and the behavior of the policeman seems like as if blacks are mend for oppression.

Again at crane's optical shop Richard's white co- worker refuses to teach him the work because he was black and the work is for whites. Richard works at many places and shifted from job to job so exhausted with racism because frequently he has experienced racism.

Once Richard reads an editorial in Memphis newspaper of H.L Mencken he was an essayist and critic. Richard wanted to read Mencken's books but as blacks is not allowed to issue or borrow books from public library. Here Richard asks an Irish co-worker to borrow his card anyway he gets it. Mencken's words inspire Richard to become devouring reader. The books take him towards the new life and now he wants to write of his own

After sometime Richard moved to the north, where the city depresses him for his success. In Chicago he understood that being black in America is a life of mental pain. There he shifted to another job as a dishwasher in a café then to post office. He was taken from every job with some reason and again his family falls into hunger

Through a federal relief program he gets job at medical research institute. There he notices the segregation of labor. All health professionals are whites while all menial workers are blacks. As he was curious to find out reason for every fact he was interested in research but whites rudely rejects his questions.

Richard joins his friend for political discussion and he attends the meeting. At John Reed club a revolutionary artist's organization he was given issues of magazines "Masses and international literature "Richard reads this issues and this aspect of communism begins to appeal Richard. After many meetings with John Reed Club Richard begins to trust the whites' members who were with the communist club. Richard started to present the biographies of black communist to other black people so that they could get inspiration from them.

When he joins a unit of communists he finds dispute among them. Later relief authorities grants Richard as the publicity agent for the federal Negro theatre to depict the experience of blacks Americans and then he was transferred to federal writer's project. He himself faces conflicts with the

domineering communist partly like other problems in Richard's life.

Richard thought that through his communist party he could unite the suffering people and could change some aspects of their life. Richard finally recognizes his potential and thinks of himself as thinker artist with accepting all difficulties and limitation. He hopes that there will be some change in Chicago. His most curious, independent, challenging and creative tendencies caused him trouble. As he already knew that no such environment will support him to raise his profession. He reaches to a new understanding of imperfect world that surrounds him and finally he discovers that there is nothing which makes the black people to recognize their being in this world and he learns that only through writing one could reach every individual and common people of the society.

CONCLUSION

The novel black boy reflects the racism and oppression of the black people at every place. Even women were not spared from this suffering. As a growing child Richard faced many problems of hunger, family and his identification and at last he recognized his potential and understands the knowledge which he was searching from childhood. He came across many difficulties and faced boldly instead running from it. Being a black is like a punishment for the blacks. Richard worked at many places and experienced many events which made him to acquire knowledge of solving difficulties. The novel is about the struggle of an individual to survive in the atmosphere of oppressors and cope up with the environment. Richard was able to break away the racial system of the society at that time of segregation of blacks. Through his life long struggle with racism and oppression in the society he discovers his potential, self-worth and as a writer.

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