



Suppression of the Black Spirit in Richard Wright's Black Boy

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Abstract : Originally, the blacks were suppressed by the white for their own economical interests. In the course of historical events, the suppression was being mitigated. After the declaration of freedom of America, the blacks wanted absolute freedom. But, the absolute freedom meant, to the whites, the black would emancipate themselves. Traditional mentality of the white would like to maintain the suppressed position of the black for it could be used for their own cause. If some wanted to raise their voice, they were threatened with troubles in their life or even with the death penalty, inflicting some crime on them.

Keywords : The black, the white, spirit, suppression.

Introduction : The paper presents how the white suppressed the black people in Richard Wright's *Black Boy*. Richard Wright is an African American (black) writer who represents how the black were suppressed by the whites.

In *Black Boy*, Richard found his uncle Hoskins in well-to-do condition. Hoskins flourished his saloon business. He worked whole night and slept in day. Hoskins was ambitious to work hard and get rich, but it was not easy and safe while he developed his business. His feeling of being unsafe made him sleep with revolver near him. One day, uncle Hoskins didn't return home till late. Aunt Maggie feared and doubted of mishap. She wanted to go and see at salon, but Hoskins had forbidden her beforehand to go to that place for it would not be safe for her. Despite of that, aunt Maggie decided to see at the place, but Richard's mother would persuade her not to go. Aunt Maggie found that Hoskins had forgot his gun at home and she guessed that as a reason of mishap. Sooner, a black boy came with the news of Hoskins' murder. Even after the murder of Hoskins, no family member could go to see his dead body. The black boy advised them- 'Don't you all go to that saloon'... 'They will kill you if you go there!'... 'White folks say they will kill all his kinfolks!' (Black Boy, 52).

Fear of their own death surpassed the grief of the death of uncle Hoskins. Taking the useful materials, the family fled away in the night.

The whites had killed uncle Hoskins because they coveted flourishing liquor business of Hoskins. They had threatened him with death and warned to give up the business. Despite of that Hoskins wanted to earn more money and the whites had to finish him on any rate. The family members of Hoskins were so terrified that they couldn't arrange the funeral for dead Hoskins. They couldn't even expose their mourning. They wept silently and whispered with fear. Aunt Maggie wasn't even allowed to see Hoskins' dead body. Later, she couldn't claim any of the assets of uncle Hoskins. When Richard asked his mother about fighting back, the mother made him quiet with a slap. In this way, the minds of the black were suppressed with threats right from their childhood. The revolutionary spirit was suppressed not only by the white but also by the black, especially in their own families.

The black themselves would suppress the voice of the enraged black, because the whole family or even the society suffered due to a single person's raged voice. Uncle Hoskins acted against the wish of the white and behind him, the whole family had to run to save themselves. Such threats and killings played the role for suppressing the mind of new black generation. As a child, Richard would ask the questions which were taboo for the black people. His mother would make him quiet by scolding and slapping him.

His mother always warned him not to fight back with the white. One day, Richard got hurt in fighting with white boys. He tried to hide it, but the cut was deep and he needed medical help. His mother first took him to doctor, but, after returning home she beat him. She did it for she knew that her child might be killed by the white any time. She warned him not to fight with the white boys again. Richard's grandmother, also, warned him not to break the so-supposed rules. She was always angry with him for his being atheist. The grandmother would threaten him saying about the punishment given by the god for breaking the religious rules. Grandmother tried to suppress him so much that he had to leave the home.

Whoever revolted against the system of the Jim Crow society, was killed; and, it became the threat to the others who kept the revolutionary spirit. At the same time, the black, who were suppressed, would suppress their own relatives, friends, if anybody questioned the tradition. At the workplaces, the black, especially women, were insulted by the white workers as well as owners. The boss would even beat the black woman, if she did some mistake or be indebted. Richard asked a black girl how she could bear the insulting behavior of the white. The girl told him that the treatment given by the white was normal way of life and there was nothing to mind; and, talking against the white would not be good for the black. The suppressed black spirit had to bear whatever came to their way.

In the ninth chapter of *Black Boy*, Richard gives the picture of how the black lived the suppressed life. During the time of 1925, though, the black economically became independent, they were not mentally free. At the age of seventeen, Richard got a job as a porter in a clothing store. The shop was always crowded with black men and women pawing over cheap suits and dresses. Richard says –*‘And they paid whatever price the white man asked the boss, his son, and the clerk treated the negroes with open contempt, pushing, kicking or slapping them.’* (Black Boy,181)

Richard was shocked to find a frightened black woman in a store. They beat her badly while the woman screamed. The white people passed by the place indifferently, as if nothing happened before them. Even the policeman didn't move, but watched quietly. After some time, the woman came out stumbling, bleeding, holding her stomach and crying. Her clothes were torn. After the beating, the policeman came who was present there to accuse her of being drunk and send her away in patrol wagon. They found Richard watching them. They would be kind with him for the time only if he kept his mouth shut. They just laughed while washing their hands at the sink. The floor was stained with blood and strewn with wisps of hair and clothes.

The black were suppressed even to show their inner feelings on their faces. They would forcefully hide their feelings like shock and surprise. Having an expression of some question on face would not do before the white. Uncle Tom found that Richard was not fit enough to the Jim Crow society. So, he warned his daughter to keep away from Richard. In their view it was dangerous even being in the company of a black person who couldn't prevent his feeling from being reflected on face. In *Black Boy*, it is found that the white folks didn't like the facial expression of Richard. Realizing that, Richard had to try hard to conceal his revolutionary feelings for survival. Richard himself was suffered from the treatment given by white people. They would torture the black even for fun. One day, Richard was walking on roadside with his bicycle which was punctured. A car stopped at his side, full of the young whites. They made fun of him. They made Richard to cling at their car as a help. Richard sat on his bicycle and clung at the car. They drove the car with speed and offered him drink. In that situation Richard couldn't say them yes. They didn't like Richard's way of saying no to their offer and hit at his forehead with empty whisky bottle. Richard fell from the speeding car, bleeding at his elbows and knees. They stopped the car. An angry white man said that Richard didn't know the proper way how to talk with a white man. Seeing Richard hurt, they took contemptuous pity on Richard. They said- *'Nigger, you sure ought to be glad it was us you talked to that way. You're lucky bastard, 'cause if you'd said that to some other white man, you might've been a dead nigger now'*. (Black Boy, 133).

One Saturday night, Richard went to make some deliveries to white people's houses. The police found that wrong. They stopped him and searched his pockets and packages. They wished to make Richard victim. They seemed unsatisfied as they couldn't find any incriminating thing. They told him to tell his boss not to send him to the white people's houses in the night time.

Such experiences made Richard feel bitter. Sometimes, he wouldn't hide that reflection on his face. Once, the boss's son caught it up. He asked- *'Say, nigger, look here;... 'Whats on your mind?'.... 'Why don't you laugh and talk like the other niggers?'... 'I don't like your looks, nigger. Now get!'* (Black Boy,184).

Feeling as a human being, failing to hide it from facial expression meant the expulsion from job. The white boss never liked the black workers who felt injustice. That was the one of the ways of suppression of the black. They would create inconvenience in the life of the black and would even threaten them with death punishment, if they were not defeated.

Richard found it foolish and impossible thing to fight lonely against the white. He would think of the unity of the black. He would express before his black friends that the white people's treatment enrages him. Some of them, well trained for not to fight the white back, would advice Richard that it was sanity not to fight back and take all that as normal what he thought as injustice. Some of them found Richard as a strange black boy who felt injustice. A friend of Richard advised him that whenever Richard would act and speak before the white, he must think before that. His behavior would do before the black, but the white would not stand it. The black were suppressed by the white with the sense of the superiority of the white.

When Richard reached at workplace, he kept it in mind that he had to be polite, to think before speaking. Mostly he should respond with *'yes sir'* or *'no sir'*. He had to behave so that the white would not think of him different from the black they expected. He had to keep his voice low. But senior white colleagues at workplace were not satisfied with Richard's expression. Even Richard's effort of concealing his consciousness made them think of him as different from the black who were suppressed in their heart. One of them asked, *'Nigger, you think you're white, don't you?'... 'you didn't like what Reynolds just said, did you?'... 'I could see it on your face'... 'Well, watch yourself and don't get into trouble.'* (Black Boy, 190,191)

A white senior could not expel Richard out of work. They blamed him that his manners with them were not proper. They hit him and made Richard feel unbearable to be at workplace. Richard was threatened to leave the job on any rate.

Richard had listened from other's stories how the black were shot for breaking the image of a typical black. He himself felt that he would be shot at any moment if found in his consciousness of freedom; so, he became more careful about how to perform before the white.

Conclusion: The white suppressed the black for they found benefit in their suppression. Even in the free America, they would try to maintain the same. Some of the white would openly hate and exploit the black. Some of them would play with conspiracy to keep them suppressed and believe in the matters of superiority and inferiority of the races. To save themselves from the collective torture, the black parents, also, trained to their children to be suppressed.

References:

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