

CHAPTER THREE

**'I TOO AM AMERICA': AFRICAN AMERICAN TRAVEL
WRITING AND THE CLAIMS OF NATIONALITY**

Our national identity and literature are marked by the lore of the open road.

(Susan L. Roberson, *Cambridge Companion to American Travel Writing*)

No African American writer had ever done what I did – none of the writers I knew, even the ones I admired – which was to write without the white gaze.
(Toni Morrison)

When Langston Hughes celebrated America in a Whitmanesque fashion, he did not rule out the continuance of color consciousness and color divide in America. He insisted on giving the ‘black’ American people their due. The position of African Americans within the American nation state and the constitutional apparatus that defined and guaranteed the ‘black’ people their rights are important in so far as the integrity of America as a nation state is concerned. The dream that created America was democratic and inclusive at its moment of birth. The course that America took to realize the dream turned out to be anti-democratic and discriminatory. From the time of Douglass repeatedly returns to the creation of an equality in America and highlights the need to revise America’s notion of its past and present, especially its willingness or otherwise of the rights and identity of the ‘black’ people in America. Even as Americans debated some of the darkest chapters in American history the role of slavery in the realization of the great American dream continued to be debated. African American travel writing uniquely positions itself to examine America as a nation from the point of view of the African American. This examination of America—serious, comic, ironical, revisionist, angry, unforgiving, and understanding—is not reflected better anywhere than the writing of African American writers like Richard Wright, Maya Angelou, Ralph Ellison, Alice Walker, Ernest Gaines, and Toni Morrison. In fact, as Toni Morrison suggests, American writing remains incomplete as long as the ‘black’ writer considers the life of white people a forbidden zone. Morrison pleads for maturity, not just among the ‘black’s but among the entire American people. America must be prepared to examine its nationalism and

nationality, keeping in mind the color consciousness and divide it has created over the years. Testimonies to this effect come from different genres of writing, including African American travel writing.

I

This chapter aims at examining what we have called the American gaze in African American travel writing when the critical site is outside America. This analysis develops from the basic argument that one's views of the world are grounded not only in the ideology of belonging but also of difference or otherness. As we see it, the site of travel becomes an instrument through which the travel writer ('black'/African American in the present context) reexamines his/her own views about race, writing, and difference with the predominance of a particular racial or nationalistic gaze. This expression made famous by the seminal work of Henry Louise Gates Jr. and others looks at lived and examined experiences of postcolonial at home and abroad from the perspective of race and difference. The whiteness or the American eye in the gazes of African Americans is not physical but cultural and to examine this argument, this chapter attempts to study Richard Wright's *Black Power* (1956), *Color Curtain* (1956) and Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "My Trip to the Land of Gandhi" (1959).

This chapter assumes (i) that every African American Travel writer carries an imminent white consciousness in her/his gaze; (ii) that this consciousness is acquired (cultural) and thus, tends to contest with the inherent (physical) consciousness that the African American Travel writer bears; and (iii) that the consciousness/es which they carry along with the ideas of race/nation further oscillate and gets redecorated when they come across other races.

This chapter takes into consideration the fact that African American Travel writers carry into their travel the larger gaze of the American nation, which is apparently white, and thus, paves the way for the assertion that Nation/Race is a cultural signification. Meanwhile, in the course of the travel, this racial/national consciousness interacts actively with other racial consciousness/es and creates an apparatus for revisiting the acquired National gaze on the part of the traveler leading to a proliferation of the gaze.

This chapter argues that African American travel writers, to a large extent, align themselves with the (acquired) American part of their consciousness even though their consciousness also finds its pedestal in their African roots and the Jim Crow days that followed in the New World. This leads to a study on how race and nation ‘comes into being’ as a cultural implication more than a social polity and that how new layers of meanings and definitions unfold as different cultures and races interact.

It is necessary here to review the work that has gone into mapping the relationship between race and nationality in America and to check if the spirit of the discussion is at variance with developments across disciplines in the human sciences. The review of literature for this chapter covers the varied temporal addresses to the concepts of ‘race’ and ‘nation’. These concepts and definitions is then aligned with the idea of the gaze to facilitate the study of ‘nation and gaze’ of an African American traveler.

It is seen that Race refers not to an imaginary but culturally and politically defined anthropological category. Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities* says:

Nation-ness, as well as nationalism are cultural artefacts...the creation of these artefacts towards the end of the eighteenth century was the spontaneous distillation of a complex *crossing* discrete historical forces, but that, once created, they become ‘modular’, capable of being transplanted, with varying degrees of self-consciousness...wide variety of political and ideological constellations. (48)

In this regard, the American nation as a cultural artifact becomes an assortment of self-conscious social forces with varying political and ideological beliefs. African American is one such constellation of strong consciousness and ideologies, and which has been over the years transplanted with an overt American consciousness. “Regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail...the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship” (*Imagined Communities* 50) and African Americans tend to nurture this national comradeship in their unconscious which can be made out in their gazes at other nations, even while looking at their roots, i.e. Africa.

Similarly, in *Nation and Narration* (1990), Homi K. Bhabha, who draws from Anderson largely, observes, “Nations, like narratives, lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind’s eye...An idea whose

cultural compulsion lies in the impossible unity of the nation as a symbolic force” (1). Nation is a narration through the mass memory. In time, the nation as an idea fuses with the consciousness of its occupants, just as Africans came to be largely understood as African Americans in time. For Bhabha, “the nation as a form of cultural elaboration...is an agency of ambivalent narration that holds culture at its most productive position, as a force for ‘subordination, fracturing, diffusing, reproducing, as much as producing, creating, forcing, guiding’” (3-4). The nation thus, is a phenomenon that includes the dissemination and combination of people belonging to diverse racial or tribal origins.

Further, talking about the marginal or minority or the ‘other’, he says that, “boundaries of the nation...may be acknowledged as ‘containing thresholds of meaning that must be crossed, erased and translated in the process of cultural production” (4). Truly, the ‘other’ is never outside or beyond the central forces of a nation. It is very much within the dominant cultural discourse. The slave Africans and their descendants, for instance, are as much a part of the America’s history and the present consciousness as are the master whites. It is together, that they create the American nation.

Hannah Arendt views in *The Human Condition* (1958) that, in the modern world, the society of a nation is “that curiously hybrid realm where private interests assume public significance” (33) and the two spheres flow perpetually and uncertainly into each other “like waves in the never-ending stream of the life-process itself” (35). If applied to the American society, the private realm of the African Americans has attained a public significance over the centuries, a significance that has become central to the American nation building process.

In this regard, the Spartan song— “‘We are what you were; we will be what you are’—is in its simplicity, the abridged hymn of every *patrie*”, says Earnest Renan in “What is a Nation” (*Nation and Narration* 19). He opines that the nation is a soul and a spiritual principle, one that rests in the past and another in the present. “A nation”, he further says, “is therefore a large-scale solidarity, constituted by the feeling of the sacrifices that one has made in the past and of those that one is prepared to make in the future” (19). In this view, the African American camaraderie instituted by the

shared history of their sacrifices has largely come to shape the canvas of the American national consciousness. Frederick Jameson cites something parallel in his idea of 'situational consciousness' or national allegory "where the telling of the individual story and individual experience cannot but ultimately involve the whole laborious telling of the collectivity itself" (Jameson 85-86). African American race is a conception of the 'self in the people and people in the self'.

To look further into *race*, it is a trope of classification which differentiates between cultures, linguistic groups or adherents of specific belief systems which also have fundamentally opposed economic interests very often. In the postcolonial context race is at the heart of what has also been called "white mythology" (see Young 32). In this formulation anthropology serves as a colonial tool to divide humanoids in terms of racial types with pre-decided intellectual and cultural attributes. On the one hand, colonial anthropology created a vast structure which was instrumental in understanding cultural traits specific to indigenous cultures, broadening the understanding of civilizational practices. It also created the apparatuses for studying histories of culture with greater objectivity given that one had data and descriptions of cultural practices for comparative analysis.

On the other hand, however, anthropological studies patronized or facilitated by colonialism played on the differences between the 'West and the Rest' as has been demonstrated by Edward Said, Jan Mohammed and Patrick Bratlinger to name only a few (See Said, *Culture and Imperialism* 10; Mohammed, "The Economy of Manichean Allegory" 59; Bratlinger, "Rule of Darkness" 3). The consequence of this colonially generated anthropological device is that it reiterates, with strategically chosen evidence and age-old color bias: that 'black' is a distortion and destruction of white. On this ground alone colonialism seeks to legitimize race and color based hierarchies that get replicated even at other levels. Interestingly, therefore, what was once a creation of colonial anthropology gets retrospectively used to divide cultures and communities and to grade them a notable common factor in anthropological profiling of races seen during colonial rule across countries. At similar practices before colonial rule is objectification of color boundaries.

‘Black’ and white is presented understandably as different. In addition, however, the difference is transfigured and codified in and through corporeal, cultural and critical symbols surrounding the everyday lives of people. It is not difficult to see that the legitimization of race is primarily an act of retrospective ordering that began with colonial prospecting during the 15th and 16th centuries. It is significant to note that the hierarchy of human coloration—suggesting that ‘black’ shall forever remain under whiteness—begins roughly with the colonization of Africa and Asia, but it is somehow given a historical legitimacy that goes before post-renaissance geographical explorations.

It thus, can be discerned that the racial divide that goes into objectifying slavery and into justifying racial abuse is more a creation of colonial anthropology than anything else. Further, if we look at the word in a broader sense, race does not remain confined to a politically demarcated area of people sharing a common religious belief, culture or color. In this regard, DuBois says in *The Conversion of Races*:

The question now is: What is the real distinction between these nations? Is it the physical differences of blood, color and cranial measurements? Certainly we must all acknowledge that physical differences play a great part.... But while race differences have followed mainly physical race lines, yet no mere physical distinctions would really define or explain the deeper differences--the cohesiveness and continuity of these groups. The deeper differences are spiritual, psychical, differences -undoubtedly based on the physical, but infinitely transcending them. (77)

Clearly, race is a social and ideological phenomenon. One can happen to share any community’s shared ideologies and practices if she/he has a very long history of stay in that community, and if the history stretches back to generations, then differences almost disappears. Apart from the discernible morphological distinctiveness of skin, hair, and bone, by which we are disposed to assign people to the broadest racial categories - ‘black’, white, ‘yellow’, ‘brown’- the other generic categories almost vanish and matter little. DuBois further calls race a “sociohistorical” concept. The African American tries to “deny the difference” (Appiah, “The Uncompleted Argument” 6) and tries to become racially one with the American. Edward Said’s observation in “An Ideology of Difference” that all populations, states and groupings

are mixed and that there cannot be anything such as a pure race or a pure nation also conforms to the above arguments.

We see that, America, Spain, Israel, China, India etc. are politically recognized 'nations', but racially every nation comprises of a mixed closet and amidst all the differences there is a oneness or affiliation at a certain level of nationalistic ideology of a geographically demarcated socio-cultural entity. Thus, whether one is white, 'brown', 'yellow' or 'black', while living in a single geo-politically demarcated area, one or the other kind of gaze is common to all of those inhabitants, and this shared ideological mooring narrates the 'others' at some point of time in their lives and creates a consciousness called *nation*.

In this regard we can look at Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin White Masks* (1952), where he states that the 'black' person moves on two dimensions: at one level there are whites, and on the other, there are his fellow negroes/'blacks'. The 'black' person interacts differently at both the levels, which is a self-division and is a direct result of colonialism. With each systematic rebuttal of his blackness, the Negro becomes *whiter* and gets raised above his "jungle" (9) standing, as he embraces the culture of the "mother country" (9). Fanon gives a paradigm of the 'black' man who has lived in France for a considerably long span of time returns fundamentally changed, "To express it in generic terms, his phenotype undergoes a definitive, an absolute mutation" (10). In accepting one culture, the 'black' man (or as a matter of fact any human mind) alienates another, one wherein his root lies. Substantiating this premise to the theory of gaze of an African American traveling subject, we see similar differentiation in gazing at a white world and a 'black' world. For Fanon, a man who has mastered language, more so the language of the white/master, subsequently possesses/owns the world articulated and inferred by that language.

Having been born and brought up in America, makes an African American inculcate the cultural traits of that white/modern society. The 'black' man even masters language and gains power over his all other 'black' brethren living in some third world nation. This state of the African Americans can be equated to those of the converted people in matters of religion, where one often finds, for example, a converted Christian being a much more die-hard Christian (sometimes to the level of

fanaticism) than the one who is a born Christian. Nevertheless, the two powerful factors, first world (white) ideology and language, makes an African American travel around the world and look at other cultures and perceive them in a way which is typical of the transformative nature of personality that Fanon talks about, and in this case, a 'black' person wearing a white mask.

In the case of African Americans, amidst all the painful memories of the Middle Passage (see Rediker 73), and the eventual discriminations in the New World, the generations born and brought up there, happen to get drenched in the American ideologies which have been largely shaped by the 'whites'. Her/his position that infers a socially shared knowledge (social representations) about groups, heralds and limits the individual's development of an understanding of her/his position in society (social identity). This typical social, cultural and political conditioning of the inhabitants of the constitutionally demarcated nation, America, tends to make the 'black' Americans garner the outlook of her/his white counterparts and thus carry many layers of ideological gazes while on a trip, *home* or *away*. Race is a distinctive psychological trope, whereas nation is a geo-political concept.

Although it is difficult to think about a time before nation-states, but they are intrinsically a modern phenomenon. As a matter of fact, nation emerges only as a response to modern industrial-capitalist society and the nationalist political movements. Nation as a concept is intrinsically related to race. A state is nothing but the people living in it. The state or nation could grow with war, i.e., the state initiates in the clash among races, which in turn are merely primitive groups. The sociological system of a nation-state is founded on a number of elemental dogmas or principles: (1) social phenomena are directed by universal laws that function in an entirely secular manner, unconnected to religious or moral deliberations, and they must be considered by using a meticulously scientific method; (2) sociology discards all value judgments and subsumes the individuality of the people/inhabitants; and (3) sociology is finally the science of the relations between groups. Relating these principles to the advancement of society and states, it can be apprehended that the original forms of group lives were natural, small, ethnic or blood-kin packs. People were spun into race as nations stretched and demarcated their political hegemony and mark international/overseas success. Within the European states, racist theories and politics

intertwined and the twin powers, race and nation were fused and developed together. Racism, as it is understood today, was used by Europeans to segregate themselves internally as nations. Later, as an expansion of the enlightenment theory and its passion for ordering and classification as an instrument of colonialism, it was used to differentiate between human beings too. In this sense, in the present work, the term ‘race’ has been used as a Siamese twin to ‘nation’. The idea is that one cannot deal with anyone of the concepts in total independence of the other. Such an approach may help interpret the national ideology of America which is shaped by a theory of ‘otherness’, despite itself. In the context of travel writing, the African American travel writer alerts America to its fascination with the otherness of its own citizens. In other words, there is a way of seeing America—for every American, ‘black’, white, Asian, Mexican—when she/he is on an ‘away’ trip.

New societies, new communities, new people, generally originate in acts of migration. One people resolve to move from one place to another, they select a new destination and break their ties with their traditional community or society as they set out in search of new opportunities, new lives. In human history, most societies have a migration chronicle in their stories of origin. Every community in American society traces their origins in the United States to one or more migration episodes. America, after all, is “a nation of immigrants” (see Martin, *A Nation of Immigrants* 7). Living in America for more than two centuries made African Americans accept the soil of America, its customs, religion and essence to be their own, sometimes to such an extent that their Americanism or patriotism surpassed that of the white Americans, or those residing in the continent since a time much before their (then Africans and the now African Americans) arrival. But the call of the African soil makes them keep coming back to their roots too, like Richard Wright, Henry Louise Gates, Jr., etc. Because of which, African Americans, or thereby any such ‘conjoined’ race co-carries a *mixed* feeling of patriotism or inclination towards the *home soil* and the *root soil* at the same time.

The numerous inter-continental and intra-country journeys and migrations not only relocated, shaped and reshaped the African people, but over time brought major changes in their sentimental affiliations along with the nationalistic affiliation. Migration, whether forced or free, brings about a change in the migrated subject

leading to her/him get acclimatized to the new society, culture and politics over some time, which might amount to a generation or two or even more. In such a case, the African Americans are no exception. With a history, which initiated itself with the advent of the 16th century, this phenomenal transformation had to occur to the newfound race. After being ‘dumped’ in the Americas, started the vicious slavery chain followed by the Jim Crow days and the subsequent Civil Rights movement. Numerous changes and developments, some welcome, whereas a few unwelcome, inundated the African American journey so far. The most important change, perhaps, by far has been the socio-psychological affiliation of the ‘black’ people with their new home soil. This will bring in unprecedented changes in their lives and in the host communities. The relationships get politically and economically mediated and increasingly minimize the possibilities of human bonding.

Writing without a white/American gaze (here I make use of the term white synonymously with that of American because African American gaze has been well established as ‘black’ over decades and American gaze as such stands for the ‘white’) becomes difficult when one is born and brought up in the American soil, which, as a matter of fact, might be true for any nation. The white outlook is glancing at the world through a white person’s eyes. In America, it is almost omnipresent. It is in history books, on billboards, on small screen, in films, in fashion arsenals, on the Internet, etc. It is the world as put in the picture by white people for white people. We see how often the lived experiences of the ‘blacks’ are erased by the formation of the archetypal white look which becomes evident when those ‘black’ bodies leave their soil and visit a new place and its people.

Applying the theories discussed so far to the primary materials selected for the chapter, it becomes clear that the African American travel writers do carry an American (white) sensibility in their consciousness or gaze while viewing other cultures and races, despite the shared history of slavery and suffering that their entire race had gone through. The African American tends to unconsciously hypostasize the existence of nationalism and then categorize ‘it’ as an ideology. For instance, Nancy Prince while in Jamaica or Richard Wright while in Spain, Africa or Indonesia, cannot but look through a veil of Americanism at those so-called underdeveloped or backward nations, despite having themselves shared a history of terrible persecution,

intolerance and discrimination in the past. However, such encounters also bring about a revisit to the acquired national/cultural/political ideology or consciousness on the part of the African American travelers because of the linking or interfering into other gazes. Thus, the one-dimensional gaze proliferates.

This chapter aims at exploring (i) how the lived experiences of the ‘blacks’ are erased by the formation of the conventional white look which becomes manifest when those ‘black’ bodies leave their soil and visit a new place and its people; (ii) the ways in which the white gaze functions through an African American consciousness in which the ‘black’ memories and experiences move alongside the dominant white ideology; and (iii) how the first world sensibility of the African American travelers interacts with the African, European or the Oriental sensibilities which leads to a propagation of gazes and consciousness.

II

It is contended here that the contributions made by the African American travel writers to create or revise the structures of gazing out at the world arises from and results in a politics of gaze and several ideological moorings. This, in turn, is predicated on attempts to form *patterns of gazing*. The act of gazing thus turns out to be a fuller activity amidst the ‘subject’ and ‘object’ and the selected text serve as a comprehensive hypothesis to study the theory of *gaze* and one gaze in particular, the American.

3.2.1 Martin Luther King, Jr.: “My Trip to the Land of Gandhi” (1959)

Reasons for coming to India

Martin Luther King, Jr., often addressed as the American Gandhi, was the leader of the SCLC (Southern Christian Leadership Conference). As the leader of the organization, King retained a strategy of not publicly endorsing a U.S. political party or candidate: “I feel someone must remain in the position of non-alignment, so that he can look objectively at both parties and be the conscience of both—not the servant or master of either” (Jordan 444). King was a ‘black’ Nationalist leader who fought for

the upliftment of the 'blacks' in America and thereby tried to bring about equality in society. His fights, though, did not resort to any violent or extremist ways. Marx, Henry David Thoreau, Mahatma Gandhi, Malcolm X, Henry David Thoreau, Mahatma Gandhi and Paul Ramsey are few who influences King in forming or shaping his own viewpoint/s and philosophy/ies with which he marched through the world.

King's visit to India is designed much before his visit. During a short visit to the United States in 1956, Pandit JawaharLal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, said he wished he had met King. Indian senates trailed up, as did former U.S. Ambassador to India Chester Bowles, to bring about a passage to India for King. And thus, is framed the travel of a 'black' hero to the land of Gandhi.

King notes, "My truest test would come when the people who knew Gandhi looked me over and passed judgement upon me and the Montgomery movement" (232). It thus, seems, is going to be a visit where the subject is willingly set to be the object of his objects of gaze. It is his biographer, Lawrence Reddick, who instills in him this wish of visiting the land of Gandhi and meet the associates of Gandhi and the Indians in general. Since Gandhi is one of the strongest influence on King, the latter's true test would be only when he passes the Gandhi-test in Gandhi's land itself. He says:

While the Montgomery boycott was going on, India's Gandhi was the guiding light of our technique of nonviolent social change. So as soon as our victory over bus segregation was won, some of my friends said: 'Why don't you go to India and see for yourself what the Mahatma, whom you so admire has wrought?' (231).

One could, however, say that the scene had been laid years before, when King, as a teenage student at Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia, first reads the writings of Gandhi which becomes one of the greatest influences on King's life. He describes the ensuing, so-called hurricane tour as "one of the most concentrated and eye-opening experiences of our lives" (232).

3.2.1.1 The Celebrity Gaze

He states, “At the outset, let me say that we had a grand reception in India” (232). King arrives in India with an awareness of the privileged mobility that he enjoys as a ‘first world’ traveler in a ‘third world’ nation. In the original draft, King mentions, and which is subsequently removed, “Our pictures were in the newspapers very often and we were recognized by crowds at the circus and by pilots on the planes” (232). King wears an unintended elitism in his outlook. The first worlder self in him unconsciously but effortlessly seems to outdo his insider status in this third world setting. King remarks, “Virtually every door was open to us. We had hundreds of invitations that the limited time did not allow us to accept” (232-33). It seems King could very well discern his privileged, celebrated status on his arrival to India, and he perceives India from this vantage point. He writes, “We were graciously received by the Prime Minister, the President and the Vice-President; members of Parliament, Governors and Chief Ministers of various Indian states; writers, professors, social reformers and at least one saint” (232). Only a person of some significant stature and high political significance will have such a reception. King understands that, and thus, does not fail to mention it.

3.2.1.2 Indian Masses

First sentence of the essay says, “Even as a child the entire Orient held strange fascination to me—the elephants, the tigers, the temples, the snake charmers and all other storybook characters” (231). Like any westerner, the idea of the ‘Orient’ as a place of wilderness, magic and strange creatures is instilled and well developed in his mind. Years later when he visits India, an ‘Oriental’ country, this idea looms large in his gaze. He draws on the typical “colorful and picturesque” (235) image of the oriental people while describing the Indian attire, “their turbans for their heads, loose flowing, wrap-around *dhotis* that they wear instead of trousers and the flowing saris that the women wear instead of dresses” (235). He seems to be displaying what Mary Louise Pratt terms “antecedent literarios”, or prior/earlier literary productions. However, King’s India-gazing seems to be engineered not exclusively by what Said calls Orientalist biases, but also by ahistorical compulsions while constructing India and her people.

He is recognized by even the most 'ordinary' Indian while in India, "Occasionally I would take a morning walk in the large cities, and out of the most unexpected places someone would emerge and ask: 'Are you Martin Luther King?'" (232). King, perhaps, is pleasantly surprised by the fact that even the layman in India keeps a track of the international arena. Similarly, he is also impressed by the sharpness and awareness of the Indian media, an 'Oriental' media. He writes, "They asked sharp questions and at times appeared to be hostile but that was just their way of bringing out the story that they were after. As reporters, they were scrupulously fair with us and in their editorials showed an amazing grasp of what was going on in America and other parts of the world" (233). King's celebratory status in India is much a gift of the Indian media, as he himself says that, "Thanks to the Indian papers, the Montgomery bus boycott was already well known in that country" (233). He appreciates the Indian media for being globally aware.

Belonging to the 'darker' race and sharing a history of terrible persecution at the white hands just like him, King finds the Indians having a lot of interest in racial matters. He says, "Because of the keen interest that the Indian people have in the race problem these meetings were usually packed" (233). However, he does not fail to mention, indirectly though, that English is limitedly known in India, "Occasionally interpreters were used, but on the whole I spoke to audiences that understood English" (233). His reach, thus, seems restricted to the elite class.

King's wife Coretta is as much a hit in India as is King. Everywhere he lectures, Coretta ends up singing Negro spirituals as "the Indian people love to listen to the Negro spirituals" (233), remarks King. However, celebrity as they are, they are almost stalked by autograph seeking Indians everywhere. He writes, "We discovered autograph seekers are not confined to America. After appearances in public meetings and while visiting villages we were often besieged for autographs" (233). It is very amusing to know that Indian pilots come out of their cockpits to take King's autograph, "Even while riding planes, more than once pilots came into the cabin from the cockpit requesting our signatures" (233). Even here we find King illuminating his celebrity status by showing the over enthusiastic hovering of the third world people around a first world 'black' political celeb.

Here, King sees his privileged position. His well-known face and his fame travel well before him to places he visits. He might be a 'black' person facing racist injustices in his country, but in India he is a celebrated global *messiah* of the minorities/subjugated. However, both ways of phrasing depict conscious writing and gazing on his part. His essay exhibits a 'hybridity' in the lines of Bhabha's Hybridity (see Bhabha, *Location of Culture* 159-160) which talks about the hybridity of colonial individuality, which, as a cultural system, made the colonial masters ambivalent, and, as such, transformed the authority of power. Similarly, King seems to be simultaneously 'invoking and subverting' the legacy of the colonial travel narrative.

3.2.1.3 The Indian Poor

"India is a vast country with vast problem" (234), King declares. At certain points in the essay, King is impressed by the brotherhood and kindness of Indians, but at the same time he seems to be disgusted on seeing the "ill-house, ill clad and ill fed" (235) India. He further observes:

In the city of Bombay, for example, over half a million people sleep out of doors every night. These are mostly unattached, unemployed or partially employed males. They carry their bedding with them like foot soldiers and unroll it each night in any unoccupied space they can find-on the sidewalk, in a railroad station or at the entrance of a shop that is closed for the evening. (235)

It seems intertextual references leads to several ambiguities in King's gaze/s at India and the understanding. For example, one can find observations in the writings of travelers like Mark Twain to India preceding King. Twain paints a dual canvas for India in *Following the Equator* (1897), one that is, for instance, is poor in terms of economy in comparison to America, but rich in terms of spirituality. The intertextual references, along with his personal ideologies and experiences, create ambiguities and discontinuities, which move together in King's India-gazing. King's employment of the term "Orient" sounds little problematic since he comes as one exclusively from America, the 'first world' nation, and nowhere near to being an Oriental country, whereas his root, as a matter of fact, lies in an underdeveloped country with a traditional culture. Further, he specifies what he intends to find and spot in India- elephants, tigers, temples, snake charmers and all the storybook characters. It is interesting to note that King's picture-vocabulary of an Oriental country consists of

only those milestones which made rounds in books like Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book* (1894). It paints a typical canvas for the Oriental countries, and King's beginning sentences seems to reiterate that very scenario and essence.

A couple of lines from his draft, deleted in the final essay, show it is instructive to look at his views of India from the perspective of an American, even though he happens to be a 'black' American. King says: "The people have a way of squatting, resting comfortably (it seemed) on their haunches. Many of the homes do not have chairs and most of the cities have very few park or street benches" (235). The tone seems not at all appreciative and with an American/white gaze, he stereotypes the India scenario like the colonial travelers. Gandhi is the "guiding light" of his major movements in America, his biggest inspiration, and thus, he ardently wants to visit India. However, despite his repeated invocation of Gandhi and the desire to see India at first hand, his knowledge of India seems very limited and ahistorical and hence the vacillation in tone.

As has been mentioned previously in this chapter, King says that he comes to the land of his greatest inspiration where people treat him as their comrade, but at many places we find him using tones that sound patronizing and demeaning. He writes, "Jobless men roam the city streets...Great ills flow from the poverty of India but strangely there is little crime...They are poor, jammed together and half-starved but they do not take out on each other. They are kindly people...We saw but one fist fight in India during our stay (235). King's opinion of India waver, it is appreciative and patronizing at the same time.

The popular west vs east supposition also comes out in his views about India in the following lines from his draft which are subsequently excluded from the essay:

There is great consideration for human life but little regard for labor and time. We saw men mending shoes almost without tools. Five persons may be sent to bring down a package that one could carry. Human muscles there do many jobs that *our* machines do here. Moreover, nobody seems to be in a hurry and it is surprising when arrangements and appointments come off according to schedule. Begging is widespread...what can you do when an old haggard

woman or a little crippled urchin comes up and motions you that she is hungry?" (235) (*italics mine*)

In the above lines, King portrays irony in that he simultaneously glorifies and demeans India.

Being an African American himself, he understands the poverty and sickness amidst his brethren here, but due to his lack of an accurate historical knowledge, subjective understandings and ideologies regarding India, he seems to garner a very condescending and demeaning gaze at the latter's poverty. However, fluctuating that his views are, he gets depressed on seeing millions of Indians going to sleep on roadsides on empty stomachs, he wonders whether America, with all her resources, can do something about it? Or does she even have a will to do it? In his one of the major last speeches, "Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution", he says:

But I say to you this morning, my friends, there were those depressing moments. How can one avoid being depressed when he sees with his own eyes evidences of millions of people going to bed hungry at night?.... They have no beds to sleep in; they have no houses to go in....And most of them have never seen a doctor or a dentist....As I noticed these things, something within me cried out, "Can we in America stand idly by and not be concerned?" And an answer came: "Oh no!" Because the destiny of the United States is tied up with the destiny of India and every other nation. (Stanford.edu publications)

He seems to be repelled by India's acute poverty no doubt, but at the same time, he feels for those countless poor as he carries empathy from home, from the African American circles, empathy for the impoverished around the world. He venerates India's culture of considering human life's value but sees it also through the bifocals of a 'first worlder' when he seems to compare Western and Indian (Eastern) ways and marks that Indians don't value time and labor, unlike Americans or the westerners where utmost consideration is for time and labor which they consider as the real assets.

3.2.1.4 Gandhi and Gandhi's India

King praises Gandhi and his ways and says that the trip has a "great impact" (233) on him, personally. King's name is as firmly associated with Gandhi's name as is the

former's life with the latter's principles, thoughts and beliefs. It is this huge impact of Gandhi on King which leads King fight his crusade in America and win it and it is this inspiration that leads to his India visit materialize. He says:

It was wonderful to be in Gandhi's land, to talk with his son, his grandsons, his cousin and other relatives; to share the reminiscences of his close comrades; to visit his ashrama, to see the countless memorials for him and finally to lay a wreath on his entombed ashes at Rajghat. (233)

This trip is more of a pilgrimage to him than a mere trip. Moreover, taking into consideration his principles, he is positively impacted and his belief in the theory of nonviolence is strengthened further. He finds it amazing that the customary aftermath scenario of a war is not found in India, the "hatred and bitterness" (233) and "moral and spiritual suicide" (233) that engulfs most former colonies could not make way to India. Seeing India thus, he even goes on to suggest that "Africa will have a more positive effect on the world, if it is waged along the lines that we first demonstrated in that continent by Gandhi himself" (234). Thus, he leaves "India more convinced than ever before that non-violent resistance is the most potent weapon available to oppressed people in their struggle for freedom" (233). He perceives India's strength in her peaceful fight.

King sees that "Gandhi is not only the greatest figure in India's history but his influence is felt almost every aspect of life and public policy today" (234) and when he looks around he finds "nobody today who comes near the stature of the Mahatma" (234). King says that "India can never forget Gandhi" (234) which goes down aptly with him too. King literally hero-worships Gandhi and so he is "delighted" (234) when Gandhians accept him and his delegates with open arms.

He lauds Gandhi and his people's efforts to do away with the problem of untouchability and even goes on to compare it with America where, he says, they could not make so much progress in terms of racism. Gandhi's endeavors and practices, his introduction of the term *Harijan* (children of god) for the untouchables, the moral power and consciousness of the government has brought noticeable results in India; King notices all of these.

However, King does see that modernization had made its way to this spiritual land and leaves the country divided between those who welcome it and those who fear its adverse effects. In this regard, King is all praise for Prime Minister JawaharLal Nehru. He perceives him as a man “who’s at once an intellectual and a man charged with the practical responsibility of heading the governments, seems to steer a middle course between these extreme attitudes” (236). To King, a man respecting Indian tradition but educated in the western norms, can only lead India towards progress.

Discussing India’s *Bhoodan* movement, a practice which he looks at with great admiration, he seems impressed but while mentioning the famous *Bhoodanist* “sainted” Vinoba Bhave, he says the later is a highly sensitive intellectual but does not fail to mention that he is trained in American colleges. This is followed by a long discussion of the *Bhoodan* movement and the ideal, “self-sufficient village” (237). Such ideas sound “strange and archaic” (237) to Western ears, he says, but praises the effort which has brought about considerable positive results. At this point, he once again turns towards showing the pitfalls of the five-year plans and alarming unemployment that it might bring in the next fifteen years.

It is interesting to note here that instead of the word *saint*, King uses the word *sainted*, “The Bhoodanists are led by the sainted Vinoba Bhave and Jayaprakash Narayan, a highly sensitive intellectual, who was trained in American colleges” (237). The word, in certain contexts, does not seem to carry a very positive tenor which may refer to a community’s coronation of a certain person to the status of divinity, however, the question of divinity remains a matter of conjecture at times. Nonetheless, Acharya Vinoba Bhave, who had been anointed as Saint, earns that reputation with his quality activities that he does for the good of the society in his life time. This frail man walks almost seventy thousand kilometers in almost 14 years and earns around forty-two lakh acres of land which he donates amidst the landless farmers. It has been a one of its kind of an act of genuine love and compassion in the history of humanity. King seems not to have acquired the precise impression of the entire scenario, the emotional panache of those “oriental” folks. Even with his selfless goodwill, Bhave is more of a saint, then a “sainted” one, as King sees him.

Towards the end, however, King again comes up with his condescending gaze when he says, “India needs help...It is in the interest of the United States and the West to help supply these needs and not attach strings to the gifts” (237). The overall gaze through which King looks at India is one of that appears to be patronizing. In spite of being a ‘black’ and originally an African, while in India, he is a celebrated ‘hero’ from America, a country much ahead of India in terms of development. He seems to depict India’s vulnerability and suggests she needs help from countries like America when he says, “Whatever we do should be done in a spirit of international brotherhood, not national selfishness...It will rebound to the credit of the West if India is able to maintain her democracy while solving her problems” (237-238). In all his praise for India, he does find out the country’s weak points, which, in his opinion, must be taken care of by the West.

King carries an ambiguity in his mobility as a “first world traveler” (see Nayar, “Mobility” 2) in that his travel to India and the subsequent travelogue exhibits a “cultural insiderness” (see Nayar, “Mobility” 7) that redefines his mobility as a ‘different’ (being ‘black’/colored) First World citizen in a Third World context and setting. It is functional to mention here that though the terms ‘first world’ and ‘third world’ does not stand valid in the present context, however, for the global-political scenario during King’s visit to India, the segregation between the ‘first world’ and ‘third world’ could be very well discerned, and hence the seeming consciousness on part of King.

The text also shows King in the light of certain cosmopolitanism in that his trip to the ‘third world’ was funded by the first world. As such, it is significant to note that King is not simply a ‘black’, but a privileged American on a trip which is monetarily very well secured. It can be suggested that his gaze is more affiliated to his socio-economic and national affiliations (American and a first world citizen). The gaze that King carries while on his trip to India reflects a ‘hybridity’ which springs out of his mixed closet of ideologies and experiences as an amalgam of his roots, his new-found nationality and the popular space that he carves out for himself in the global arena.

The aim of putting his self to a Gandhi-test in the land of Gandhi himself is also in his mind. So, his travel seems to have a certain agenda, we can say, one that is political and personal at the same time.

King can be termed a cosmopolitan person/leader, one who tries to embrace multicultural demographics. He comes to India as a comrade of the Indian masses, one who, perhaps, stands on the same ground with the latter based on skin color, a history of colonialism (if King's root in Africa is considered) and racial discrimination (if King's American root is considered). He says, "We were looked upon as brothers with the color of our skins as something of an asset. But the strongest bond of fraternity was the common cause of minority and colonial peoples in America, Africa and Asia struggling to throw off racialism and imperialism" (233). He might be one fighting for equality in his own country, but the fact that his country is a developed/western world country, makes all the difference in his and the world view, and thus on coming to a third world or the then newly-independent underdeveloped nation which too is fighting against immediate post-colonial predicaments, he involuntarily becomes an *asset*. Thus, we see a difference between King's institutional position in visiting India and his personal opinions in undertaking the journey, which, however, at times overlap.

King seems to differ from his colonial counterparts in travelogues in that at times he carefully seems to undermine the authority of the 'First World traveler'. The colonial travelers had a sense of cultural authority implicit in their writings. They were the 'all knowing' subjects set out to study the 'objects'. In King's case, he comes as one who wants to pass the "Gandhi Test", as has been previously mentioned in this chapter. Lawrence Reddick had titled King's biography, *Crusader Without Violence*, and now on his august advice, King comes to India to see whether the people from the land of the one who has been his greatest idol, applauds him on equal grounds or not. Thus, he seems to be prepared to be an object at times as well instead of being the subject throughout, i.e., he not only observes and registers his objects of gaze, but lets himself be seen/observed, after all he comes for the Gandhi-test, as he himself declares. On the other hand, we get to see another facet of King as he portrays himself fully aware of his celebrated status on his world tours, and while in India, his narrative often holds a mirror to this fact.

Like any traveler's gaze, King's gaze also seems to establish an engagement which can be called as the discourse of 'mutuality and differences' when in contact with the Indians, as is evident from this essay. In his homeland, he might be a leader, but he is relegated to a separate 'black' space. But when he is on his trips outside America, he is a globally celebrated figure or a leader. While in India, King looks at the people with a mutuality which comes out of a similarity in the skin color as well as a shared history of subjugation. But at the same time, he cannot escape his American eye at several instances when he abruptly talks about the acute poverty of India and its ills which sounds very patronizing at times.

Moreover, even the Indians are similarly ambiguous in their outlook towards King.

They also look at his skin color and feel closer to him than they would to a white American, but at the same time, he is a celebrated leader for them coming from a first world, and thus they trouble him for autographs almost everywhere. King's portrayal of India could have been, perhaps, different and more consistent had he understood the inner turmoil, and contradictions of the country from a deeper level.

Nevertheless, his subjective and objective positions capture India well, the background study/knowledge, however, needs more potency and discretion on the part of a reader. King is aware of the legacy of colonial movements and is not able to overshadow it much, and instead sets out to convert what is a clear First World to Third World expedition into a personal and/or political one. King is aware that his position in India and the monetary back-up comes because of his racial, socio-economic and nationalistic affiliations. Aware of being an American celebrated-'black'-political personality himself, King tries to veer away as far as possible from the fact, leaving alone the racial part, which he cannot but disengage with.

3.2.2 Richard Wright: *The Color Curtain* (1956)

Richard Wright has been considered one of the supreme writers of the bygone century, chiefly in his amazing ability to capture the authenticity of the 'black' experience in the United States and the unbending nature of white supremacy and racism that has been bent on annihilating the humanity of 'black' people and other people of color in the world. It is this consciousness that leads him to connect to the

persecuted consciousness of the rest of the 'third world'. However, it is important to note that Wright's persona and writings have come to portray America (whether 'black' or white) at large to the rest of the world. In his travel writings, especially, Wright consciously and unconsciously gets transformed into a "First worlder" most of the times, although his forefathers belonged to Africa, a 'third' world nation, and he himself belongs to a segregated 'black' race in America, his 'home'. It may well be put that Wright's decision to travel to Africa in 1953 and to Indonesia in 1955 was related to his reticent hope of finding a satisfying 'connection' with humanity, a desire for shared closeness.

In *The Color Curtain*, he says, "I'm going to the Orient" (18) where he looks at people who, he says, are "the despised, the insulted, the hurt, the dispossessed...the underdogs of human race" (12). Wright's wish was, thus, to be at this meeting of the "rejected" (12), however, it is very amusing to notice his use of such a coalescing tone for the rest of the world against the west when he himself belongs to one of those "rejected" races, one who has been marginalized in his own *home* so much so that he had to permanently shift his pedestal to Paris. He says, "I've had a burden of race consciousness...I've a class consciousness" (15). Throughout the African American oeuvre, it is, perhaps, difficult to find another African American who was more of an outsider than Wright in America and one who might have written about slavery and its horrors with more of an insider's view than Wright. However, at the same time, his American eye at people and places during his extensive travels has inevitably previewed itself intermittently.

3.2.2.1 People

As a documentation of Richard Wright's travel to Indonesia in 1955 to be present at the Bandung Conference of African and Asian nations, *The Color Curtain* reveals Richard Wright's effort to comprehend the non-western cultures, and to verify where does the 'black' man from the west stand amidst these non-westerners. On a pre-Christmas day, Wright idly picks up the evening newspaper and reads the article about the Bandung conference. He was flummoxed and a streamline of thoughts ushers his mind and the baseline of all his thoughts is that "these people were ex-colonial subjects...the white West called 'colored' people" (11). Wright himself

labeled them as “The dispossessed, the insulted, the hurt, -in short, the underdogs of the human race were meeting” (12). Thus, however he might have felt in the midst of those people while in Indonesia, his initial impression of or reflection on them is that of a homogeneous group of “colored” ex-colonial lots. Wright calls them the “brown, black and yellow men” (14) and feels it is only these people who had been made agonizingly self-conscious, under the severity of colonial rule, could feel the passionate need of such a meeting. The first impression we collect of him while in Indonesia is that of a Westerner amid a horde of newly independent Africans and Asians. He writes about them, “people whom the white West called “colored” people....under the domination of Western Europe....men who had lived lonely lives in exile....men to whom sacrifice and suffering had been daily companions” (11-12).

Wright is present at the conference, but primarily as an observer, not as an integral part of the consciousness of those people. In fact, while talking to his wife before embarking on the journey, he tells her that his primary aim is to give account of the meeting to the non-oriental, non-eastern audience, “I’d try to report this meeting, what it means.... For somebody” (15). There seems to be a distance on his part instantly, at least mental, between him and those people. A colored comes from America sees a group of “people yelling for freedom” (15) in these “hot, muddy faraway places” (15). These same phrases can be aptly used for his brethren in Africa, and for ‘black’s in America fighting against racism till a few decades back. However, despite having a similar race consciousness, he still has that elite American way of looking at these people.

Moreover, calling Indonesia and other Oriental countries as “faraway places” bells the ring of the colonialists who placed themselves and their countries as the center and the rest as periphery. If Indonesia, for instance, is a “faraway place” for America, vice-versa is also true. Even before setting out for Bandung, Wright garners a classic patronizing, western gaze when he says he wants to report the meeting of “these hot, muddy faraway places filled with people yelling for freedom” (15). Wright seems to have taken the burden to relay the words of these people, whom he seems to treat as almost *new-born*, to the world. The discourse of colonialism delineates ‘others’ in various forms of illustrations like visual, textual which show calculative ‘images’ that are associated with power of inequalities and subordination. Writers like E. M.

Forster, Joseph Conrad and Daniel Defoe deal with colonial discourses which divulge foreign cultures as 'dark' and 'depraved'.

To further understand Wright's view of the people he comes across in Indonesia, the questionnaire that he prepares for them is remarkable. He starts off by wanting to know their level of education and the quality which he seems to estimate through the fact that whether one attended "European schools" (21). Certain questions that he prepares reflect that he perceives them as potential threat to the Western bloc and he knows that "fear makes the white Western nations act as a racial and political bloc against the Asians and Africans" (39). His questionnaire reads:

Do you believe that Asia is for Asians, Europe for Europeans, America for Americans Africa for Africans? How frequently do you read European newspapers? What have your experiences revealed to be the attitudes of Europeans and/or Americans toward your people?... Have Westerners ever made you feel self-conscious because of your race, religion, color, or culture? Do national inferiority feelings find expression in your country?... Do you recall in what connection you first heard the phrase "White Man's Burden," "Yellow Peril", "Lunch", "nigger"?...Are there any secret societies in your country? (22-23)

Wright understands that there lies a latent abhorrence amid these people which might finds its way to out against the Western world, but he also knows their suffering. In this, his stance is like the Singapore born Journalist he comes across in Indonesia, "She fears Asians, yet she knows how much they suffer" (38). This girl "has many white friends and associates with them without any emotional disturbances" (35), however Wright sees how she "has had racial feelings" (35) and is "as highly color-conscious as an American Negro" (44). In his regard, Wright resembles her in so far as he has may white friends and he is racially consciousness.

For Wright, however, there is one tangible advantage in questioning the Asians, which he says is his color, "a factor that no white Westerner could claim. I was 'colored' and every Asian I had spoken to had known what being 'colored' meant. Hence, I had been able to hear Asians express themselves without reserve" (25). The 'color' factor looms so large in this part of the world that he finds "many Asians hated the West with an absoluteness that no American Negro could ever muster" (25). He also learnt

that the “presence of whites constrained Asians to a startling degree!” (34). Moreover, Wright had also learnt to look at the Asian mind as “tenacious, pragmatic” (170) and they took everything at face value, for instance, “when you speak of social justice and freedom to an Asian...he does not suspect double talk” (170). He perceives the simplicity and straightforwardness of the Asians.

Wright’s reaction to the strangeness of culture is found in his friendship with a young Indonesian born Dutch journalist, who, he says, “readily consented to be my guinea pig” (26). Without his knowledge, Wright seems to be painting a rough sketch of his own socio-cultural-political stance. Wright notices how the Asian had been taken out from her/his own culture before she/he had embraced or had pretended to embrace Western culture. Moving ahead, Wright marks the journalist’s European attitude that is more than what even a European portrays, “he had felt a high degree of consciousness about his European values and possessed a detachment...he assumed a natural European superiority in all phases of life” (26). He also comes across a single, Singapore-born journalist who is “thoroughly Westernized in manner and speech” (34). He goes on to encounter an Asian, but, “strangely, a Westernized one...he was more Western than the most Westerners” (45). Wright perceives the West making its way steadily into the East.

Wright’s study of these characters and the subsequent commentaries on them can sometimes fit to his own position in a Western world. As a ‘black’ man, whose origin lies in the traditional, *raw* Africa, today Wright is an American-educated-most-celebrated African American writer across the world. Wright stands for an intellectual and gifted genre of ‘black’ writers who appear to augur the inception of a Third Force on the American literary scene, and the “New Negro” (see Locke 10). However, Wright, in his very smart Western attires, demeanor, the lack of a strong mental and spiritual bond with and the knowledge of his African roots resembles the Asian or the Indonesian born Dutch journalist that he describes. However, he draws a picture of these people, especially the Asian who lives in ideal world than a real one and who was “by far the most impractical of all the Asians” (53) he talks to. Wright then declares, “compassion was this Asian’s hallmark” (54). These people lived on the realm of a quaint dream world, which is ideal but impractical.

The Asian pathos seemed more palpable to Wright in talking to a full-blooded Indonesian in his twenties “who hides a bitter knowledge” (55) behind his quick smile. For the white world, he wears a laugh but “for the nonwhite world he drops his smiling mask and his eyes stare with the unblinking fixity of the fanatic” (56). Wright looks at him as if “the world was a problem to him, and he was a problem to himself” (61). Wright says that “the classical conception of the East is dead even for the Easterner...He lives in his world, but he does not believe in it any longer” (70). About the Asian elite, he looks at them as a “restless” (71) lot of people who wants change drastically. In fact, Wright sees them as “more Western than the West” (71) who, he says, are trying to “build a world that would be a duplicate of *ours*” (71) (italics mine). The interaction with the Asians made him realize that there is a “narrow zone where East met West, and that zone was hot and disturbed” (72). The Asian to Wright is a quintessence of someone who is “neither Eastern nor Western” (79) and “all you had to do was to touch an Asian, and out spewed hate, bitterness, and a long-nursed desire for revenge” (79). Wright could sense a tension in the air, an aura of repressed, volatile hatred.

Arriving at Indonesia, he observes that the “Indonesians seemed a delicate people, thin, small” (98). Wright notices the bureaucratic world of Indonesia where people showcased “an appalling amount of inefficiency” (93) and that there are “really no office hours” (118). Jakarta, the “hot mudhole of a city” had chaotic streets full of men, women and children—all trading. He says that it is clear to a spectator “who is acquainted with colonial practice” that “one must sell to earn money to buy products shipped from Europe” (94). However, he experiences revulsion on seeing the lack of hygiene and cleanliness amongst people, “I saw a young man squatting upon the bank of a canal, defecating in broad daylight into the canals’ muddy, swirling water...children used the canal...young women washing clothes...a young girl bathing; she had a cloth around her middle and she was dipping water out of the canal...a tiny boy was washing his teeth” (94). It is not only about lack of hygienic, but to a person of Western sensibility, it’s almost profane and Wright’s subtle description without any remark says it all. Use of water instead of toilet papers in average homes is very normal a practice in the East/Oriental countries. However, the Americanized Wright finds it surprising that “the Indonesians use water” and that “there is no bathtub” (117).

Talking to his taxi-driver in Jakarta, Lubis, Wright finds out that government is a business there. He remarks, “A country in which men make careers and fortunes out of government is a sick country” (99). He finds that Indonesians portray “grim picture, yet quite typical” (99). However, there is another face of the country too which he observes when he finally arrives at his lodging, the house of an Indonesian engineer. Surprisingly, he finds “their home modern to the *n*th degree” (101) and his house in the poshest locality which was once, ironically, the European quarters. He finds a similarity with Africa’s Gold Coast in that “almost every item in the home...had been imported from faraway Europe. There is a nervous kind of dependence...they are encouraged to develop a taste, yea, a need, for goods which are only to be had from the European mother country. Then, when the natives rise and make a revolution in the name of values of the West, they find themselves trapped, for they cannot build even a modern house without Western aid” (113). Wright brings out an anxious state that these western oriented ‘native’ people carry within.

Wright comes across another startling face of Indonesia, her bandits. He says, “Try as I could, I was never able to resolve the mystery of the Indonesian bandits” (107). To him, these bandits must be those “hordes of young men who were, in the daytime, respectable wage earners and who found it impossible to make ends meet...during nighttime a good part of the population, resentful of the status quo, took to the byways with guns to get what they felt society owed them” (107). However, he observes that “shoes are regularly shined, even though gangs of bandits may be roaming the countryside” (118). He sees it as a “caricatured aspect of the Western world” (118) and sardonically remarks, “there are not many shoes to be shined in a nation where most of the population goes barefooted” (118), thus, the regularly shined shoes.

Wright, however, has not engaged much in describing the Oriental attire. Nevertheless, while at Bandung, he saw the city covered with “stout, squat, white helmeted troops lined the clean street, holding sten guns in their hands and from their white belts hand grenades dangled” (132). He says that “open force is better than swarms of plain-clothed men. You know where you are with a machine gun” (132). In the conference, the *properly* suited Wright from the west seems very amused at seeing the delegates enter the conference in their respective national/cultural dress codes and especially three Gold Coast delegates presenting a varied and colorful assemblage

thereby “adding a blaze of brightness with their colorful togas” (135). The Burmese flowing skirts and “soft white caps with knots angling at the sides of their heads” (135) and the Arabic long white and ‘black’ robes were very perplexing to him, the Arabs specially seemed “outlandish” to him, “like men from another world” (136).

Nevertheless, day in and day out there would be swarms of people throng in the “tropic sun, staring, listening, applauding; it was the first time in their downtrodden lives that they’d seen so many men of their color, race, and nationality arrayed in such aspects of power, their men keeping order, their Asia and their Africa in control of their destinies....These children did not know who the personalities were; all they knew was that they are colored and important, and so they asked indiscriminately for signatures” (134). Wright understands how big and important an affair it was for these “underdogs of the world” to take control of their present and future.

3.2.2.2 The Oriental Race

Before setting his feet at Bandung, Wright knows where he is headed, “this was a meeting of almost all of the human race living in the main geopolitical center of gravity of the earth” (12) who are the “despised, the insulted, the hurt, the dispossessed...the underdogs of the human race” (12). Along with religion, he knows that ‘race’ is also an irrational, “vague but potent” force in this part of the world. Thus, he sets out to look at these ‘races’ from within.

Wright finds the presence of a strong race-consciousness amongst the third world people which he says is a “result of the Western impact” (192). Along with this race consciousness is the mushroom growth of “chaotic literature born of inferiority feelings” (192). Wright gazes at this situation because of the Asian’s “smarting under his loss of face, were trying to offer to his now god of industrialization a sacrifice of ultramodernity of attitude and idea to redeem his state of racial degradation and humiliation” (192). It is a state of utter confusion amidst the march of progress that grips Indonesian people.

The Eurasian race of “those ‘black’-white men of Asia” (193) is being looked at by Wright the “most racially pathetic of all the Asians” (193). He says that the West

created this class a “buffer” (193) between themselves and “the illiterate yellow and brown and ‘black’ masses” (193) but now they want none of these Eurasians in their ordered Western societies. On the other hand, the brown, ‘black’ and yellow will not have them amongst themselves as “their European dress, attitude, and manners remind the masses too much of the white Europeans who once held them in subjection. Hated by both sides, shunned by all, the Eurasian ends by hating himself, alone in lonely world” (193-94). Like the mulatto kids in America, the Eurasian suffers due to their indefinite frame of identity.

The most agonizing echo of race-consciousness, however, is mirrored by the Whites who try to penetrate the color curtain. A young, morally sensitive white Christian tells Wright, “I must earn my living; I have a wife and children. Yet what I’m doing is hurting these Indonesians. I try to make...friends among the Indonesians....My white comrades in the company think that I’m odd and crazy...The company pays the Indonesian who works with me less than they pay me....And the Indonesian knows it and it makes him bitter...I’m rewarded for doing wrong and penalized for doing right” (195). Wright thinks hard to give him some solution, but “it was not simple or easy” (196).

Meanwhile, Wright notices ‘reverse racism’ in Indonesia, as he had also witnessed in Spain. In the Ministry of Information, where he inquires for his press card, “all the faces behind the desks were dark, as dark as mine...” (113). This acted as an advantageous point for him. A white American reporter was putting up an argument with the official who was not at all interested in or bothered about his case. However, the moment the official sees Wright, “there was another and different attitude” (113). Wright got his press card at once and realizes, “I was a member of the master race!” (114). That official identifies himself with the dark color of Wright and the long history of racism that they share. Wright ponders, “I was disturbed. I was not proud of what had happened, but I understood it. It was racism...but it was a defensive, reflective kind of racism...all dark skins were bad and all white skins were good, and I saw that same process reversed” (114-115). However, Wright is quick enough to clarify his stance regarding racism. He says, “I’m not advocating racism or trying to justify it; racism is a loathsome thing. I’m trying to explain how easy it is, and with what justification the colored races can and will...practice racism, a racism that they

have been taught too bitterly and too well” (115). Wright experiences a reverse racism, this time on his favor, but which disturbs him nevertheless.

Wright observes racism even in the intellectual circles of Indonesia. In the city of Jakarta, supposedly the most modern city of Indonesia, “there were not many contacts between intelligent Indonesians and Europeans and American” (189). The communists, of course, “maintained the closest and most intimate contacts of all” (189). In fact, in a ‘third world’ country, next to imperialism the biggest problem is racialism. In Indonesia, Wright sees it loud and clear.

Wright’s conclusion/s regarding Asian and African nations, their culture and people carry an array of mixed feelings. He reflects, “It was my belief that the delegates at Bandung, for the most part, though bitter, looked and hoped toward the West...The West...big enough, generous enough, to accept and understand that bitterness” (201). Wright’s view about these people has a similarity to King’s view of India and Indian people. He understands that, “The West is much simpler in many ways than Asia and Africa, and Asians and Africans can understand *our* civilization much quicker than we can grasp their poetic and involved cultures!” (206) (*italic mine*). He sees the Bandung conference as an “attempt in history on the part of man as man to organize himself....And he is not prepared to do so” (206). In the view of Wright, Bandung, thus, represents mankind negatively freed from its traditions and customs.

3.2.3 Richard Wright: *Black Power* (1954)

In diverse people, history galvanizes diverse sentiments. Thus, some derive shame, others critical glory, or some a middle path of identity crisis from it. Amongst the many definitions of history that we have today, it is very difficult to hook up to one which is all inclusive and universal. To many people, in whose national histories one sees the avant-gardes crushed for heresy, the dissenter martyred for treason, the reporter/columnist vanished for sedition, history must be a bloody bulletin of crime, avarice and murder. This statement perhaps very aptly fits in for the graphic illustration for no other quixotic continent than Africa. The very names like, “Dark Continent”, “Punt”, “The Seat of Sphinx”, “Primordial” etc., which have been attributed to her by various people, resonate her mercurial historical character and for

a study of such a scholarship on Africa writers like Henry M. Stanley, Sir Richard Frances Burton, Henry M. Stanley etc. can be brought into consideration. This interesting and ‘intriguing’ continent further features itself in several travelogues like those of Richard Barrow Robert Burton, Joyce Cary to Joseph Conrad in which we see such many mythical pictures of Africa. The initial remark that Richard Wright holds about Africa is: ““Africa!” I repeated the word to myself, then paused as something strange and disturbing stirred slowly in the depths of me. I am African! I’m of African descent.... Yet I’d never seen Africa; I’d never really known Africans; I’d hardly ever thought of Africa” (3). Thus, he sets off on his African sojourn with an intense desire to know the continent and understand his roots.

3.2.3.1 People

“Africa was a vast continent full of ‘my people’” (4), reflects Wright even before stepping into the continent, however, in due course he realizes, “being obviously of African descent, I looked like the Africans, but I had only to walk upon a scene and my difference at once declared itself without a word being spoken” (137). For the first time, he sees Africans on the platform of Euston Station in London who are “Western in manner and dress” (7). The first African city that Wright arrives at is Takoradi. As any American/western born and bred person he is startled but fastened to many African/tribal scenes that he beholds. He sees Africa through a frontal vision. It is a ‘black’ life everywhere, “the whole of life that met the eyes was ‘black’” (34). He meets an uncannily dark life.

His attention was drawn to a lady wearing a brightly colored length of cloth that was used to hold her baby fastened to her back, its legs sprawled about her hips and thighs:

The cloth held the eight of the baby’s body and was anchored straight across the woman’s breasts, cutting deeply into the flesh. Another woman was washing in a pan set on the ground; she was bent at an angle of forty-five degrees in the broiling sun, her black child also sound asleep upon her back. (34)

The eye of another baby was blank which was staring at the world from side to side. Nonchalantly, thus, the woman went about her work. All that Wright could see around

himself was naked children, women bare to the waist and men, with cloths tied to their waist. Description of tribal women sounded very erotic with Wright's felt tip. On seeing a woman who was nursing a baby still tied to her back he goes on to describe, "woman had given the child the long, fleshy, tubelike teat and it was suckling" (48). It is a raw, erotic description of an everyday African scene.

Wright doesn't seem to be very poised on seeing the blackness, nakedness, a tribal insouciant and almost sedated ways all around him on a sudden arrival at this intriguing country here from a culture and society which almost everything that Africa was not, and vice-versa. Gazing from the eyes coated with western sensibility, Wright sees nakedness everywhere around him. He comes across a bare-breasted young girl, "she saw me studying her and she smiled shyly, obviously accepting her semi-nudity as being normal" (38). He seems to be so much amused and startled by the half-clad women that he invests a lot of time describing them. He meets some older women who have breasts which are "remarkably elongated, some reaching twelve or eighteen inches hanging loosely and flapping as the women moved about" (38). He learns that longer the breast more is the fertility. However, slowly his eyes become "accustomed to the naked bodies" (38). Moreover, even those "half-nude black people" (39) return his gaze "calmly and confidently" (39). For Wright, such uninhibitedness seemed to "partake of the reality of a dream" (39). He reflects, "in the Western world where my instincts had been conditioned, nude bodies were seen only under special and determined conditions" (39). Nonetheless, he comes across one episode when he sees a young woman at a local market. Sitting cross-legged in front of him, she was nude to the waist. Wright observes her scarred and tattooed face. She bursts out into an embarrassed laughter. Suddenly a friend of hers comes and covers her breasts, "she evidently knew something of Western ways" (41). The half-nude girl offers him a holed coconut and continues to laugh as their gazes collide. This half-naked woman seems to fascinate Wright's American eyes. While at Accra, he comes across a nursing mother at a street corner. He describes, "the woman had given the child the long, fleshy, tubelike teat and it was suckling. (there are women with breasts so long that they do not bother to give the baby the teat in front of them, but simply toss it over the shoulder to the child on their back...)" (48). In Jamestown, he barges into a crowded compound, walking slowly, he notices "women, as they saw me approach, stopped their work, reached down and took hold of their cloths and covered their naked

breasts. I walked on for a few yards and glanced back; they felt that I had gone and had let their cloths fall again to the ground” (82). Another interesting aspect that Wright finds out in Africa is the fear for a menstruating or pregnant women, for such a creature is involved with the dark and dismal forces and is “a deadly creature whom one had better avoid-a tabooed being coming directly under the influence of the unseen” (262). He sees a highway truck with a painted sign saying, “FEAR WOMAN AND LIVE LONG” (262) and is utterly amused.

Wright is also “amazed at the utter asexuality of the mood and the bearing of the people!” (39). In what he saw, he feels that sex *per se* is absent, “sex was so blatantly prevalent that it drove all sexuality out” (39). His mind tries to comprehend as to why is such a phenomenon, “Was it hunger? Was it war? Was it climate? Or was sex *deliberately* brought into the open? (40). However, this kind of a behavior remains utterly “alien” (40) to him.

In physical demeanor and built, Wright perceives a “sense of fragility, of delicacy almost, of the physique of the people. For the most part they were small-boned, of medium height, well-developed muscularly but tending towards slenderness” (69). Wright finds African men and women almost harmonizing each other. For instance, he observes, “between both men and women there were no wasted motions; they seemed to move in a manner that conserved their energies in the awful heat” (48). The women’s carriage is remarkably graceful and they walk as “straight ramrods, with a slow, slinging motion, moving their legs from their hips, their feet just managing to skim over the earth” (48). He has an intuitive impression that “these people were old, old, may be the *oldest* people on earth” (69). However, he develops a sense of melancholy knowing that “their customs, laboriously created and posited for thousands of years, had been condemned as inferior, and shattered by a strong and predatory nation” (69). He sees the Africans as “naked men” (69) with “naked impulses” (69) who still cling to those impulses, but in “secrecy and shame” (69).

African children are also tough and sturdy as compared to those seen by Wright so far in his life. He says, “I was astonished to find that even the children were engaged in street trade, carrying their ware on their heads” (49). He is struck by the “incredible number of mere tots engaged in buying and selling” (123) and gets a feeling that “as a

whole, there is no period of 'youth' here in Africa" (123). The sun was killing, and Wright was completely enervated. On the other hand, "boys and girls of eight or nine years of age were balancing tins holding ten or more gallons of water upon their tiny heads and walking off toward their homes with careful strides. A girl, a cloth fastened about her middle, was bent over a basin assiduously doing the family wash" (49). He comes to a brutal conclusion, "perhaps, 'youth' is a period of luxury which middleclass Westerners could give their children" (124). However, Wright finds that hygiene has a different implication in Africa altogether, in which the *outdoor hydrant* plays an important part. He observes, "...another girl, twelve or thirteen, was nude and standing in a small tub and bathing herself in full view...A man went to the hydrant, took a sip of water...rinsed his mouth, spat, then...in his cupped palms and drank...A woman came leading a boy and girl by their hands; she carried a big galvanized bucket on her head...filled it with water...bathe the children with a bar of laundry soap and a sponge made of rough exterior...The girl wore a string of white and blue beads about her hips ...The boy wore nothing" (50). This hydrant also plays the role of a social club which is used as a gossip quarter and news exchange bureau, mostly amongst ladies. He remarks, "The intimacy of the African communal life can be witnessed in all of its innocence as it clusters about an outdoor hydrant" (50). There is fellow-feeling amidst lack of hygiene.

Wright notices an interesting toilet practice amongst the Africans. Men and Women urinate openly in the street, as he sees in Accra, "many men and women urinating publicly, in drains, on the sides of roads, in bushes, behind hedges, that I've begun to think that Africans urinate oftener than other people?" (107). Wright knows that this is not a sensible reason that he works out because it cannot be that "as a nation, they have weak bladders; racially no such fact could be proved" (107). Nevertheless, it remains a mystery to him.

Another extensive lot of people in the African society is that of the beggars, which however, receives a repulsive gaze from Wright. He says, "Beggars were in thick evidence, their black, gnarled hands out-stretched and their high-pitched voices singing out; 'Penny, Massa! Penny, Massa!'" (50-51). Poverty makes its ugly face surface everywhere in Africa.

Moreover, Wright finds them a horrific sight for the eye, “so deformed were some that it was painful to look at them. Monstrously swollen legs, running sores, limbs broken so that jagged ends of the healed bones jutted out like blackened sticks, men whose empty eye-sockets yawned wetly...sat nude to the waist with cloths draped modestly over their loins” (51). Wright wonders if these are “professional” (51) beggars, for who would otherwise display their painfully pathetic selves and sit indifferently asking for alms. He finds that they had “surely overdone it in terms of Western sensibilities, for I was moved not to compassion, but to revulsion” (51). Similar pathetic sight was put up by majority of African children too who have bellies that look like “taut, black drums, so distended were they. Almost every child, boys as well as girls, had monstrous umbilical hernias” (145). Despite all this, Wright sees a “chastened and sober mood” (261) about these “jungle children” (261).

The African tongue too, while it speaks English, creates loathing in Wright. The Pidgin English sounds utterly awful to his ears. For instance, at a hotel in Accra, he finds it difficult to communicate with a steward:

“What is it?”

“Massa want chop?”

“What?”

“Chop? Hot hop? Cold chop?” (47)

Wright didn't understand anything. He finds out that the steward had come to take order for dinner. Later, as he enters the dining room, he finds an altogether different Africa, of English trained, in language and manners, of African servants and he thinks, “This was Africa too” (48). However, this Pidgin English makes him “shudder” (48) and he vows to never speak it again. All this is a result of the long years of colonialism, no doubt, but its carrying on is, as Wright observes, a result of an “American Negro's passionate identification with America” (66). He ascribes this to two factors- (i) a natural part of the African's assimilation with Americanism (ii) the long description of Africa as something shameful, barbaric and naked, and the African's urge to disassociate himself with such realities.

The Africans he meets know that he knows something in general of the conditions of their “lives, the disorder, the polygamy, the strange burial customs” (104). They believed in these but were also ashamed of believing in them in front of the world, an irony that Wright could not understand. Africans tried to imitate Americans so badly and ended up creating jokes of themselves which can be seen even in a movie hall. Wright finds “natives trying to imitate American movies, but, having no idea of the distorted context of life in which Hollywood actions take place, they vulgarize those actions, making them even more fantastic” (162); “Psychologically distant, they mocked at a world that was not their own, had their say about a world in which they had no say” (173). The educated African petty bourgeois ‘black’ clerks wore Western attires and “heaps of woolen clothes” (206) even on a hot and humid day to draw a clear line of distinction between them and the illiterate ‘black’ masses. At this point, it is interesting to read what Wright draws Africans as, “the black human beings had so completely merged with the dirt that one could scarcely tell where humanity ended and the earth began; they lived in and of the dirt, the flesh of bodies seeming to fuse insensibly with the soil” (67). It is a grim picture filled with pathos.

Wright finds a very funny aspect too about these “naked men” (69). Africans nonchalantly goes on talking in their tribal language in the presence of someone who doesn’t understand the language, which puts the stranger in a tight spot. Wright thinks that it might be done deliberately so that ‘others’ don’t understand their talk. He says:

I felt that some of them regarded me as an outsider who’d scorn their habits, their manners, and their attitudes. I found the African an oblique, a hard-to-know man who seemed to take a kind of childish pride in trying to create a state of bewilderment in the minds of the strangers. Only a man who himself had felt such bewilderment in the presence of strangers could have placed so high and false a value upon it (85).

Wright, however, recognizes that “African secretiveness defeated itself by calling insistent attention to what was being secret” (107). Wright later decodes that “unless you exhibit strong, almost passionate emotion, the African is never quite sure that you are honest” (290). Africans relate to instincts and emotions more than anything else.

Wright, however, notices a strange sense of dignity in the African society for their women. He writes, “It seemed that it was beneath the dignity of a tribal woman to

work in a European home, and only a declassed woman would do so” (98). And it must be due to this reason that Wright’s sees “men were cooking most of the meals in all the European homes and hotels, that men did all the washing, scrubbing, dusting, sweeping, kindling of fires, and making of beds.... These black men did everything except the wet-nursing of European babies” (98). However, while talking to Mrs. Hannah Cudjoe, the propaganda secretary of the Women’s Division of Nkrumah’s, Wright is made aware of another facet about African women in their society. She says, “We are chattel...under our customs the woman is owned by the husband; he owns even the clothes on her back. He dictates all of her moves, says what she can and can’t do.... A tribalized African simply cannot, will not believe that a woman can understand anything, and the woman alone can do nothing about it” (103). This brings out a depressing picture of the status of women in Africa.

However, as Wright moves on in his journey into African life, he finds they are a strange lot of people, probably the strangest on earth. Most of the Africans have a “ready laughter” (289) but are highly reserved and suspicious men” (289). He says, “They are static, they move and have their being...For housing, they do not build a house, they erect a shelter. For food, they do not eat for taste, but from hunger, habit, from what they recall of what their fathers ate” (264). In their physical tendencies, Wright notices:

Most of the Akan people...have a peculiar way of making odd mouth and head noises when engaged in conversation. For example, when we would say, “Unh hunh,” an Akan would say, “Haaaan”....when listening to a roomful of Ashanti talk, your ears are startled by a succession of ‘Haaaans’. (283)

Wright also finds people spitting almost all the time, “young and old, men and women, people of high and low stations in life, spit.... And this spitting is not just ordinary spitting; it’s done in a special manner. First, taut lips are drawn back over clenched teeth and from out through the clenched teeth comes jet of saliva, straight, clean, strong, like a bullet from a gun, never touching the lips” (283). Wright tried this peculiar way of spitting but ended up soiling his shirt. Cleaning teeth with a toothpick sort of thing, known as a chewing stick locally is in wide circulation. He notices, “It’s publicly done, no shame being attached to cleaning teeth in this manner. Africans regard it about as we regard chewing gum” (295). An African can nonchalantly leap through a window to get into a bank, Wright being a firsthand witness to such a weird

event. Initially he was shocked taking it to be a robbery, but relaxes as no one pays any heed to it and work goes on peacefully. Another amusing tribal habit comes to light in Takoradi, Kumasi and adjacent areas. Due to the strong clan spirit, one shares and/or substitutes everything and even duties at the work front, “thus, if a boy felt that he didn’t want to go to work one morning, he asked his tribal brother to work in his stead, telling his pal to use his name. The European bosses didn’t know one African from another.... This widespread system of masquerading was not employed to cheat; its aim was to rest and while away the hours” (305). It is a situation of cheating and duplicity no doubt, but the African mind does not see it that way.

Looking at and interacting with tribal chiefs made him find deceptions, comic humor and scoundrels in them whom he describes as “these preposterous chiefs, their outlandish regalia, their formal manners, the godlike positions that they have usurped, their pretensions to infallibility, their generosity, their engaging and suspicious attitudes, their courtliness, and their thirst for blood ad alcohol and women and food” (307). He finds them as illiterate as their simple-minded victims. He concludes that the “African mind works logically, but, in the confines of tribal life, it works with the wrong material: spirits, bones, blood, funny little dolls and sticks” (308). To the western mind of Wright, the traditional items and values are all “wrong”.

Trying to understand his ‘black’ brethren of Africa becomes a labyrinthine task for Wright. The people pose a world unknown to him, even though his root lies in them. Moving ahead, it will be examined that how the ritualistic and religious life of these people pose an even bigger to mystery to him.

3.2.3.2 Place

Africa is the quintessence of a tropical place “in all its squalor, vitality and fantastic disorder” (80). Heat and moisture is an oppressive, excruciating wrap for outsiders. The heat makes “insect life breed prolifically” (207). Says Wright, “No breezes blew here to freshen the air. My skin was always oily and wet.... The humidity was so dense that each time I shaved I had to clean a film of sweat from the mirror”

(80). With its high rainforest, stifling heat and lush vegetation, Africa “might well be mankind’s queerest laboratory” (159). While at Jamestown, Wright moves to stay in a hotel of the three available hotels there. Africans, Wright points out, seem to have a notion that “there was something immoral about a hotel” (81), thus all the three hotels are owned by foreigners. He chooses a sea view room but “the sea view was grim, with dingy mosquito nets over the beds; there were flies, greasy food, spattered walls, wooden floors whose crack held filth” (80). The mattresses on the bed are damp and “stained by god knows what” (80) and the lavatory when flushed sets up a “groaning, howling noise that penetrated every room of the hotel at all hours” (80). It is odor all around, but to his own surprise, he quickly gets “used to the medley of odors” (81). Besides, the entire hotel seems to be in “the grip of the heat, mastered by it” (80). While his oily skin gets bitten by tiny mosquitoes in his arms and legs, “an army of stewards dressed in white” (80) attends him, with no hurry or no voices raised. He is served with food “prepared by a chef whose god seemed to have been named grease” (80). He finds the hotel just like the ones described by Joseph Conrad in his novels and so intrigues him most. Then he looks out and he sees Africa in its “fantastic disorder” (80). To add to that, at Old Town, Wright observes that “sanitation, just a simple animal cleanliness, is the crying need here” (310). He comes across a boy who, while he looks at Wright and his Western attire intently, defecates upon the porch of his hut nonchalantly. Wright feels “that pathos of distance!” (310).

Green is a color that is missing in Jamestown altogether, observes Wright, “practically no grass grew in James Town and there were but few trees” (82). He also finds no flowers around to the extent that he wonders if it is done by intent. Some tells him that it is done to “keep down the invasion of snakes” (82), which, however, Wright doubts. He opines that the abundance of jungle makes people disinterested in growing some green in a domesticated setting. However, he is told that vegetables grew swiftly in this hot and red earth and due to this “they are not really nourishing!” (206) and rather turn into “soft, pulpy masses” (207). Corns mature and shoot up very quickly and the ears become full-sized before the grain matures on the cobs.

As a place, for foreigners, Africa is very testing and tiring. Wright feels enervated almost all the time due to excessive heat and sweating. Sometimes, in the mornings, he feels tired as one gone to sleep. His clothes get “mildewed” (160) easily and shoes

turns into a “yellowish green color” (160). Among Europeans, “tropical ulcers were common and they were forever doing themselves with vitamins” (207). There is the constant fear of sleeping sickness from the tsetse fly. In the hotel where Wright stays, all meat taste the same.

African markets are other remarkable places to pass through. It’s a bustling area where mostly ‘black’ faces are busy buying and selling, for “the great majority of the Africans buy not from the European stores, but from each other” (111). The markets are largely covered by African “mammys” (112) who skillfully get into the network of selling and distributing goods bought from British by African firms. It is interesting to notice how African wives are “expected to aid in augmenting the income of the household and they thus take to the streets with their heads loaded with sundry items” (112). However, Wright observes that “the frantic concentration of the African mind upon making a profit out of selling a tiny fragment of a bar of soap or a piece of a piece of cloth” is an awfully pathetic sight (112). In the process, the African will “ask you ten times the value of any object he’s selling without batting an eye” (112). African children also actively share the market space as sellers. Similarly, the central market of Kumasi is, as Wright sees it, is a “vast masterpiece of disorder sprawling over several acres...it was filled with men and women and children and vultures and mud and stagnant water and flies and filth and foul odors” (294). Disarray and lack of hygiene rules the markets.

The repeated use of “and” which seem to reiterate the point that this is a place whose *pathos* (from Wright’s Western viewpoint) knows no bound. In a very witty approach he further writes, “In these teeming warrens shops are social clubs, offices are meeting halls, kitchens are debating leagues, and bedrooms are political headquarters.... This is the Wall Street of the Gold Coast” (294). However, he brings out the sharp contrast that his Western/American gaze maps in this Africanized Wall Street, “Coming on foot, you are aware of a babble of voices that sounds like torrents of water. Then you pause, assailed by a medley of odors. There is that indescribable African confusion: trucks going to and fro, cooking, bathing, selling, hammering, sewing... Men and women and children, in all types of dress and degrees of nudity, sat, lay, leaned, sagged, and rested.... The African landscape of humanity where

everybody did everything at once” (294). It is a portrait full of life, movement and noise.

Wright visits cinema halls while at the Gold Coast, and projects those as queer and funny places where ‘Africanism’ mixes with Hollywood fantastic artificial dreams. He enters a hall from its rear which he supposes is due to the “absence of sidewalks” (172). The interiors are “vast, barnlike, undecorated” (172). One must grope through seats, collide with people to find a vacant seat in the dark. Wright is surprised that smoking is allowed in the closed hall.

Despite having money, he buys a ticket for the gallery for he wants to be “close to the side of the black boys and girls” (172) whom he crosses in the streets. Throughout the movie, he finds more noise, hustle-bustle and movements in the crowd than on the screen. They simply create uproar, hoot and laugh violently on seeing scenes of drinking, villains trying to violate a woman or the hero beating up the villain, etc. Fist fights occur out of nowhere amongst them. Wright finds that in such a place Western values are being dismantled by the ‘natives’ as in the “dark movie, they didn’t have to pretend” (173). It is altogether a different place than one outside.

Such being the state of one of the best considered recreations of all time, Wright also could not see any public cafes or restaurants “in which one can buy a cup of tea or coffee” (178). There are, of course, a couple of private clubs, but “they are either far from you when you need them or you have to be a member to use their services” (179). Thus, in western scales of recreation and leisure, Africa lags far behind.

Wright finds Africa a “dark place, not black, but somber, not depressing but slightly haunting” (242). It seems a very moody place to him with a deep aura of dreaminess about it. As he visits different places, he concludes that “one does not react to Africa as Africa is, and this is because so few can react to life as life is. One reacts to Africa as one is, as one lives; one’s reaction to Africa is one’s life, one’s ultimate sense of things” (158). Wright understands that a huge psychological distance between the African and the Western world has made it increasingly difficult for the African to be known. He says, “the distance today between the tribal man and the West is greater than the distance between God and the Western man of the sixteenth century” (117).

Very aptly he senses that a Westerner must “make an effort to banish the feeling that what he is observing in Africa is irrational, and unless he is able to understand the underlying assumptions of the African’s beliefs, the African will always seem a “savage” (117). In this regard, try as hard Wright might have, the psychological distance between him and his root remains, and remains large.

Wright understands that trying to gauge and undergo a mental-mapping of Africa is a naïve attempt. He says, “I feel strange; I see and hear so much that I don’t understand” (46). He goes on either denouncing or disbelieving the African and his ways throughout the narrative. The Africans have a poetic view of life, which the practical-minded American didn’t believe in, or to say it differently, he could not grasp it itself at the first place. Religion is their life, but it seems Wright relegates their religion, one which he could make any sense of, to backwardness and primitivism. This ‘black’, tribal life is reflected in the mind of this ‘black colored white man’ in a strange and perverted way. His reactions seem to ferry between superciliousness which is teamed with a strange suspicion. In his letter to Nkrumah at the end, he suggests, “AFRICAN LIFE MUST BE MILITARIZED!...not for despotism, but to free minds from mumbo-jumbo” (347). He quaintly but strongly believes in the Africans getting liberated from their “mumbo-jumbo” daily routine and practices that sum up their life with the help of a practical, regimented life as in the West.

III

It is, thus, seen that the African American travel writers, Martin Luther King Jr. and Richard Wright, look at the places they travel and people they meet with the apparent and unavoidable white consciousness that envelop their sight. One can make out that there is a constant sense of condescension, patronizing attempt, pity or repulsion in their outlook towards the ‘natives’. The American-white-world-sensibility looms large over their approach. Wright goes to his roots, Africa, a country that he covetously wanted to visit and know, however, his overall rendering of Africa almost amounts to the impression of the human sense and intelligence ultimately disillusioned by an ‘animal bestiality’ and nonexistence of any sense. It is, however, his own mental distance from the continent that renders him unable to make any sense out of Africa

rather than Africa's so called "strangeness". Like a shaken westerner, Wright imagines a being born in an African tribal family or that his ancestors had once been such similar tribal people practicing strange customs and performing weird dances. Similarly, while at the Bandung conference, he constantly wears a gaze that paints those newly independent Asian and African countries as new-born infants who need to learn walking, who have great hopes and ambitions, but will finally need western support in their efforts. King, on the other hand, visits India, a country that he considers to be a place of pilgrimage. He says, he comes to be tested by the people of the land of Gandhi, however, one does not find such instances in the text where he becomes the object of gaze and passes some Gandhi-test. In fact, the times when he comes under the scanner of Indian masses are those when people notice him in parks as King from America or when pilots come out of cockpits to take his autograph. He is a celebrity in India, a "comrade of the Indian masses" and he is aware of this. He is an admirer of the spirituality of India and he knows that the world can learn a lot from India, but he also says that to keep the Indian spirit alive, India should look towards the west, and the west should not falter in helping.

The African American travel writer operates with a Janus-like gaze when it comes to her/his nationality and Americanness. It is true that various patterns of racial and color-conscious gazing raise questions regarding 'black'-white relations in American life and culture and blunts the power and lure of the American dream insofar as the 'black' American is concerned. However, when African Americans go abroad, they are representatives of American values and partners in American life. When they go to places in Africa, they are reminded of the opportunities that America provides, the history of slavery notwithstanding. In other words, the 'black' American is forced to recognize aspects of her/his American nationality while traveling abroad. The American constitution appears in its full power and glory when Americans travel abroad. In many ways, how a person looks at the world and how the world looks at that same person is neither one dimensional nor inflexible. Gazes that people—in this case African American travel writers—invite or transmit are complex, determined more by situations of travel and mobility than by such apparently stable categories as race and nationality.

Works Cited

- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 1983. Print.
- Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*. Chicago: Chicago UP, 1958. Print.
- Appaih, Anthony. "The Uncompleted Argument: DuBois and the Illusion of Race." *Critical Inquiry* 12.1 (1985): 21-37. Print.
- Banton, Michael. *Racial Theories*. 2nded. Cambridge: CUP, 1998. Print.
- Bhabha, Homi. K. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994. Print.
- . *Nation and Narration*. London: Routledge. Print.
- Brantlinger, Patrick. *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1988. Print.
- DuBois, W. E. B. "The Conservation of Races." American Negro Academy Occasional Papers, No. 2, 1897. Rpt. in W. E. B. DuBois Speaks. Speeches and Addresses 1890-1919. Ed. Philip S. Foner. New York: Pathfinders, 1970. 73-85. Print.
- Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Trans. Charles Lam Markmann. London: Pluto Press, 1986. Print.
- Jameson, Frederick. "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism." *Social Text* 15 (1986): 65-88. Print.
- JanMohamed, Abdul R. "The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature." *Critical Inquiry* 12 (1985): 59-87. Print.

- Jordan, John H. *Black Americans 17th Century to 21st Century: Black Struggles and Successes*. Canada: Trafford, 2013. Print.
- King Jr., Martin Luther. "My Trip to the Land of Gandhi." *The Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers Project* Vol. 5 (1959): 231-238. Print.
- . "Remaining Awake Through the Night", Address at Morehouse College Commencement. *The Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers Project* Vol. 5 (June, 1959): 219-226. Print.
- Kipling, Rudyard. *The Jungle Book*. New York: The Century Co., 1920. 15 Aug. 2015. Web.
- Locke, Alain. *The New Negro: An Interpretation*. New York: Touchstone, 1997. Print.
- Martin, Susan Forbes. *A Nation of Immigrants*. New York: CUP, 2011. Print.
- Nayar, Pramod K. "Mobility and Anxious Cosmopolitanism: Jamaica Kincaid's Among Flowers." *Transnational Literature* 6.1 (2013): 1-16. Print.
- Said, Edward W. "An Ideology of Difference." *Critical Inquiry* 12.1 (1985): 35-38. Print.
- . *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Vintage, 1994. Print.
- Rediker, Marcus. *The Slave Ship*. New York: Penguin, 2007. Print.
- Roberson, Susan L. "American women and travel writing." *Cambridge Companion to American Travel Writing*. Ed. Alfred Benedixen and Judith Hamera. New York: CUP. 2009. Print.
- Twain, Mark. *Following the Equator: A Journey Around the World*. New York: Dover Publications, 1989. Print.

Wright, Richard. *Black Power*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1954. Print.

---. *The Color Curtain: A Report on the Bandung Conference*. New York: World Publishing Company, 1956. Print.

Young, Robert J.C. *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West*. New York: Routledge, 2004. Print.