

CONCLUSION

Travel, as an enterprise, presupposes the existence and operation of ways of seeing or gazing. This gaze, in particular, works on a relational foundation between the traveler/gazer/subject and the 'native'/gazed/object, where the subject-object binary often tend to waver and exchange positions. Thus, the phenomenon of gaze is not actually a direct activity of seeing between the viewer and the object, but a received perception that has been already mediated, becoming a virtual gaze. Gaze, therefore is, a socially organized and systematized phenomenon and travel writing develops a visualization of the travel experience into a gaze.

Herein comes the concept of power, for, power is a constituent element in interactions. In this regard, travel writing has been a domain of power play as, traditionally, travelers mapped far-flung (not necessarily 'unknown') territories, described and registered its people, geography, culture and exhibit power as a referential phenomenon in the process.

On that premise, travel as an activity and travel writing as its corollary reckon with the fact that antecedent literarios, also known as pre-conceived ideas/knowledge gathered from the prior literary productions, shapes the gaze of a traveler to a large extent. Broadly speaking, it is the ideology that the traveler carries from the 'home' culture to the 'alien' culture. However, travel brings about reciprocity between the cultures of 'us' and 'them', and on most occasions, results in the travelers revisiting the ideologies/perceptions carried from 'home'.

Talking about 'home', it is a matter of hypothetical supposition in traveling or travel writing to delineate one place as 'home' and the other as 'away'. For, as we see in the case of African Americans, the 'away' has almost always served as the 'home' than their 'real home'. It is the places out of America that has treated them as human irrespective of color and provided prospects for growth, both spiritual and material.

In the light of the broad conclusions drawn above, the texts selected for this study deduce several interesting observations. The long and ill-reputed socio-political history of the Jim Crow ethics in America has left a permanent scar in the minds of the African Americans, so much so that the numerous changes and revolutions till date have not been able to abandon the agonizing memories altogether. As a result, the

African American traveler tends to carry an archetypal 'black' outlook towards life that has been thrust into the very consciousness of his/her race over centuries. Considering this attribute, traveling (primarily outside America) has been almost always a welcome change and an obliging element for the African Americans. In this light, be it Frederick Douglass in Britain or Nancy Prince in Russia, the 'away' has always served them with something pleasant to be cherished. They were for the first time in their lives made to feel human and at par with the whites. For that matter, even Carolyn Vines in the twenty first century, temporally far away from Douglass or Prince, feels much strong and more at home while in Holland. Travel thus, makes the distinction between 'home' and away' blur and melt away for most African American travelers.

Having said that, it becomes pertinent to note that while traveling, cultural transactions bring about changes or modifications in the perspective/s of a traveler, for travel is an experience in perceptions. In this regard, the African American travel texts studied in this work show three ways of proliferation of the gaze: additive, diminutive and persistent. Additive perception indicates the accumulation of knowledge and understanding and annexation of the existing/innate knowledge/ideological platform. With the encounters and insights gathered during travel, the ideas and concepts about the world evolves, with the result that DuBois increasingly celebrates the idea of nationalism and feels the call of the downtrodden brethren in America more than ever; he sees the myth of American progress almost as a sham as he witnesses countries like China and Russia ever and fast growing in the ladder of progress, both of humanity and economy.

In a similar vein, Nancy Prince feels the hollowness of the Great American Dream, and could project all its theory unto the 'great' nation Russia. While in Jamaica, she notices that the people "are not the stupid set of beings they have been called" (*The Interesting Narrative* 50), rather, they are industrious, honest and friendly. Maya Angelou and Carolyn Vines learn to negotiate the gender boundaries and appreciate the fact that outside America, there are places which have such boundaries but that are much littoral and fluid, and not tightly compartmentalized. For Douglass, the stay in Britain makes him realize that there is more to the white world, and all positive, than all those nightmarish incidents back at 'home'.

Alternately, diminutive outlook suggests the relinquishing of the set of ideologies and pre-conceived knowledge that the traveler has before he/she begins the travel. Just as cultural encounters bring about new knowledge that expands the existing information base, similarly, certain experiences during the travel tend to break certain myths or forged knowledge one might have before gaining first-hand experience/s. It is seen that most of the African Americans who participated in the Back-to-Africa movement embarked on it with an optimism to reach out to the severed roots and generate a Utopia with the 'black' brethren of Africa. However, it is largely observed that African Americans find it tough to survive in Africa once they return to the Mother continent and to settle and to make a difference becomes all the more a challenge for these returnee diasporas. In his book, *Out of America: A Black Man Confronts Africa* (1997), Keith Richburg profusely thanks god for having saved his ancestors during the middle passage and thereby making him an American now. He rejects his Africanness altogether, for having seen the horrors in Africa makes him more of a stranger.

Similarly, the present study shows how travelers like Maya Angelou, Richard Wright visits Africa with high hopes of being accepted and assimilated in the African soil, or at least to verify where and how close do they stand to their roots. Maya Angelou, who settles in Ghana with a job and her son getting admitted to a college there, ends up returning to America after a few years of stay. Comparing her return to America to the forceful journeys off the middle-passage, she says, "Many years earlier I, or rather someone very like me and certainly related to me, had been taken from Africa by force. This second leave-taking would not be so onerous" (*Traveling Shoes* 227). Richard Wright, with his temperament, is far from coming to terms with the ways of his ancestors. He just has to walk into a scene, and his attire, physical movements, etc. shouts out loud his foreignness despite the camouflaging 'black' color as when he says, "I was black and they were black, but my blackness did not help me" (*'black' Power* 127). On a similar note, Martin Luther King Jr. visits India, a place of 'pilgrimage' for him. However, all he sees in India is poverty, beggary, and population.

This brings us to consider the third type of gaze that seems persistent. As the cultures of 'us' and 'them' interact verbatim, it is not necessary for the pre-conceived ideas/knowledge to get annexed or to recede, rather, sometimes the traveler comes

back 'home' with a persistency in his/her perceptions that was initially carried into the travel. The resultant gaze can be the denouement of several circumstantial considerations that present before the traveler a set of observations or experiences that either precisely complement his/her existing knowledge base or does not generate satisfactory impact to have a sway over his/her perceptions/gaze in any way.

Most of the travel writings of Richard Wright showcase him as a traveler who seems to be little conditioned in his travels to be relocated in his ways of seeing. Despite being a person of the African descent, his African sojourn seems to have little impacted him to differ/waver in his opinion about the continent. He comes to Africa as almost as a spokesperson of Africa from the West and for the West. The only thing he realizes is that he has been far removed from the roots and that even feels ashamed at thinking the ways in which his ancestors might have behaved here. Beyond that he is least stirred in his idea about the continent, but he ends with the suggestion, "Never again must the outside world decide what is good for you" (*'black' Power* 349). His views about Spain and Indonesia in *Pagan Spain* and *Color Curtain* respectively also don't seem to alter much during his travel. Spain serves him as a classic case of a European nation pitifully stuck in its medieval past.

A 'black' man (though America looms large in his consciousness) almost dissects the white nation in all its appalling truths. He had, in fact, come to check how Spain has survived the wounds of the civil war, for he knew, it had been too tough and violent a journey for Spain during and after that as he observes, "Spain, despite all the heroic sacrifices of her liberals, of her poets, of her lovers of liberty, had remained stuck right at that point" (*Pagan Spain* 240). His travel thus, provides him with the experience that squarely complements his pre-equipped knowledge and ideas, and hence the title, "Pagan". Even before setting sail for Indonesia, Wright is looking forward to confronting two of the most "powerful urges" (*Color Curtain* 7) that guide any 'third world' nation, race and religion. And it is race and religion that he experiences everywhere, on water, land or in the air. He also understands beforehand that this meeting of the twenty-nine newly independent countries of Asia and Africa must be a repository of long-suppressed desires and a "decisive moment in the consciousness of 65 per cent of the human race" (*Color Curtain* 207), and thus, must

pose a threat to the western world. Towards the end of his journey, his experiences vouched for his perceptions that had been framed much before he traveled.

Having said so, it becomes necessary at this point to consider power as a strong functional element in traveling, for traveling is an exercise through gaze, and the act of gazing dictates power. Looking and being the object of a look are in themselves a meaning-arbitrating social activity which in many ways affects us, or, to put it in the language of research, the production or construction of our subjectivity.

The subject position mandates power, whether in its undecided status or when it gets absorbed into the regime of power and knowledge. Wedged long in the stereotypical structure of being-looked-at for long, African Americans don the garb of subjectivity in their travel/s and thus, execute power. It is the African American traveling subject looking at the 'black' and white 'objects' of his/her gaze. Former slave, Frederick Douglass's autobiographical travel reflections act as a way of focusing on the power and mendacity of whiteness, its bearing on the 'black' body, and the 'black' body's efforts at engaging in existential claims to freedom. Douglass along with Nancy Prince produces early metaphors of the oppositional power of 'movement' and 'seeing' undoing whiteness. Prince, while torn almost asunder in America with the white surveying gaze, takes up power with her marriage and embarks on distant journeys while appraising the world through her 'black' eyes. In this regard, Richard Wright transfigures himself as an ethnographer of both the 'black' and white worlds that he travels through, and largely in consonant to the powerful white ethnographic gaze. The powerful 'black' gaze thus, forge new ways of seeing, knowing, and being.

In a broad way, it is comprehended that the ways of seeing also transfigures itself into three fields of visual literacy. The first field is fashioned based on the reciprocal look. There people encounter one another through looks and the look grows into an element of interaction. The reciprocal look is culturally determined and has its own norms, which must be paid regard to in a similar way to the other expectations that influence activity. Therefore, understanding a look as a bond and interaction is fruitful but limited, because it ties the look to a subject. It is learnt from Sartre that the look is detached from the eye and is transferred to the outside of the viewer. Hence, the

central place is an occupied not by the viewer's own look but in the gaze of the 'other'.

However, gazing is not just about the subject, object and the human. Rather, it is also about the ideological shield through which a subject looks, which in other words is/are the cultural or political influence/s on the gazer which largely shapes the perception and thinking of a person. This, however, also brings in the fact that every individual participates in different visual orders both in 'pictorial' and 'non-pictorial' reality, in which he/she is both a subject and an object of gaze. When a person looks at something or some picture, he/she always looks at them as part of some broader visual order, which in turn at least partially determines what the person ultimately sees in the pictures.

African American travel writing is a critically established frame of reference for a close study of the ways and working of gaze. It is all the more compelling owing to the long relegation of the African Americans to the margins. It is only with the significant analysis of the diverse trends of movements of the 'black' body along the contours of nations that might help to dispel the myth of the hypothetically superior white gaze. That 'black' gaze is a credible medium of looking at the world and understanding it, is what this dissertation attempts to manifest. In looking at the world the African American traveler produces patterns of gazes that incorporate the major ideological moorings: color, religion, race/nation and gender, besides others.