IDENTITY AND CHOICE: A STUDY OF BIRACIAL REPRESENTATIONS IN SELECT AMERICAN WOMEN NOVELISTS

Thesis submitted to the
University of Calicut
for the award of the degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN ENGLISH

by

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DECLARATION

I, Ms. Resmi R, hereby declare that the thesis titled, "Identity and Choice: A Study of Biracial Representations in Select American Women Novelists" is a bonafide research carried out by me under the supervision and guidance of Dr. Praseedha G., and it has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, associateship, fellowship or any other similar title or recognition.

Place: Palakkad
Date: 01/11/2022

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CONTENTS

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Preface

In general, this thesis intends to explore separately, the dynamic facets of the biracial identity development along the sociological, psychological, historical and legal angles. It also extends its planes to focus on the various stages the biracial characters in the selected texts are in, in the process of attaining selfhood. Specific objectives of the thesis are, to expose the vicissitudes of stereotyping of the biracial individuals along chromatic, racial, sexual, class and gender lines as present in the novels taken up for the study, to identify different contexts that articulate and categorise the lives of the biracial individuals, to reveal the different aspects of time and space that offer a platform for the identity construction and to trace out the approach of the biracial characters towards stereotyping that triggers their self-fashioning.

Chapter I gives an introduction to the biracial identity issues in general and in particular, in America. It also traces the history of biracial writings in American literature, and gives an introduction to the authors and works selected for the study. It discusses the theoretical framework taken up for the analysis in detail, relevance and scope of the study. Chapter II analyses Frances Ellen Watkins Harper's *Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted* with the help of African American theorist William E Cross Jr.'s "Nigrescence Model." Samira Kawash's observations about colour line and the legal tenets of the reconstruction era such as the rule of "Hypodescent," "One-Drop Rule," "Anti-miscegenation" rules as well find place in the analysis. The chapter also examines the identity crisis and challenges faced by the biracial individuals in their journey towards self-identification. The factors that lead to the specific identity choice of the biracial characters in the novel and various stages of their identity construction are also discussed.

Chapter III, with the help of W. S. Carlos Poston's "Biracial Identity Developmental Model," George H. Mead's views on mind, self and society, John Howard Griffins' record of his experiences as a black individual in the Southern US during the segregation era in his classic work *Black Like Me*, analyses Jessie Redmon Fauset's *Plum Bun: A Novel Without a Moral.* Various ideologies and legal factors that determine the biracial identity construction, the consciousness of the biracial characters and the stages of their identity construction too are discussed. Chapter IV analyses Danzy Senna's *Caucasia* with the help of Maria P. P. Root's solutions for the construction of biracial identity, Nikki Khanna's observations on the formation and performance of racial identities in America, legal standards of the turbulent 1970s in Boston and Tenets of the Critical Race Theory as observed by Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic. The contractions between visible and subjective racial identities and the social patterns of race associated with various parameters in detail have also been examined. Chapter V analyses the customary ideologies, standards and the frontiers set by the identity policies prevalent during the twenty-first century in Joan Steinau Lester's *Black, White, Other: In Search of Nina Armstrong*. It examines the trials faced by the borderline identity of the protagonist and the strategies of identity construction adopted, using Gloria Anzaldúa's "Borderlands theory." Chapter VI concludes the thesis with a comparison of the works taken up for the study in terms of the challenges, choices and chances supplied to the biracial individuals in their journey for survival. The characters of the various texts are grouped on a general ground of four different identity options based on their choices of identity. Narrative strategies in all the selected works have also been analysed and added at the end of all the core chapters.

Chapter I

Introduction

"One day our descendants will think it incredible that we paid so much attention to things like the amount of melanin in our skin or the shape of our eyes or our gender instead of the unique identities of each of us as complex human beings."

--- Franklin Thomas, qtd. in "World Quotes: Living in Community"

Identity formation is a complex procedure based on various contexts – social, cultural, historical etc. It is gradual because an individual's mind constantly reflects upon his/her as well as the society's perception about oneself. Race is one of the most disputed issues which challenges one's choice of identity. Binary paradigms such as right/wrong, good/bad, superior/inferior, shades of black/white etc. usually control all the cultural beliefs regarding race. Biracial people who navigate a racially segregated social world are those who strive in real terms to ascertain their identities. It is especially problematic for them, as their parents belong to two different and distinct federally recognized races or ethnic groups (Chapman-Huls 11). Being biracial in general means, to put one's identity under constant trial, and frame the same according to the societal yardsticks set for the identity development. Choices with regard to self-affirmation have been generally meagre for the biracial individuals historically, and hence most of the times they are pressured and destined to choose any one side of their identity, thereby leading to a total erasure of the other.

Racial identity and the methods of self-identification adopted, especially by the black-white biracial individuals, are significant at different levels. For those with non-white lineage, race becomes the deciding factor, an identity that supersedes every other status in a predominantly white society. 'Being white' has been the general ideology, and anything 'other' is viewed with a total disgrace and disappointment.

Identity construction of the biracial lot has forever been contested upon, mainly because they are visibly characterised by the mixing up of various physical traits like their skin colour - dark or light, hair texture - curly or straight, eye colour etc. Their predicament is looked upon with amusement and aversion by monoracial individuals who stereotypically try to confine the former's identity to a particular race. While some find it easy to accept their coloured selves, some are made to give up the same and some others are forced to accept the identities out of their social environment. Some others totally ignore the black part of their identity and go for the advantageous act of "passing off" the invisible yet visible "colour line," a concept that dates back to the late nineteenth and initial half of the twentieth centuries, which is the era of Jim Crow and legal segregation.

Biracial studies have always aimed at unbolting the nuances of the experiences faced by the biracial individuals in an unparalleled world. Bordered by the high standards of segregation fixed by the white lot and the ever persisting need to choose an identity, their lives have garnered the world's attention since time being. Globalisation which transcends various boundaries of nation, culture, economy etc., makes it difficult for even an ethnic identity or a culture to survive. It aggravates the difficulty of a biracial individual's struggle to seek an identity, for, it remains more or less the same in the present times as it has been in the past. Pre-conceived notions of self and the standards that codify the same, exist in a dichotomous association with each other. Judged by the chromatic standards in common, and factors like class, gender, sex etc. in discreteness, there arises a need for the biracial individuals to constantly prove themselves and their essence.

American culture is a platform that ensembles the multitude of aspects, which defines an individual and his/her individuality. Racial lineage is one of the factors for

an individual to survive and gain acceptance in this 'melting pot' culture. Various study reports have observed that the biracial individuals are often called names, some of them derogatory, thereby inviting negative attention regarding their identities in a predominantly white society. The names include 'mulatto,' 'mutt,' 'half-breed,' 'oreo' (black on the outside and white on the inside), etc. In the US, a formal description of people with more than one racial lineage can be identified from the census records. In 1790, the categories of identification for those other than white males and females have been 'other free persons' and 'slaves' living in the property of the whites. A bit more obvious inclusion of racial categorisation by the US Census Bureau can be noted in the 1850 decennial survey with the new categories, "B" for blacks and "M" for mulatto, a term referred to a person with one black and one white parent. As per the "Blood Quantum Laws" or the "Indian Blood Laws," practised in the US and thirteen colonies, a person's Native American lineage or black blood is determined in terms of fractions. While the state of Virginia adopted these laws to term a person with a certain amount of black blood "black," so as to limit the Civil Rights to Native Americans and persons of one-half or more Native American ancestry, other states identified blackness by fractions of blood: 1/2 black, 1/4 black (Quadroon), 1/8 black (Octoroon), 1/16 black (Hexadecaroon) and so on.

Throughout this thesis, the terms such as "biracial," "multiracial" and "monoracial" have been used to refer to the characters in the works under analysis or otherwise. This is in relation to the definitions identified by Maria P. P. Root, a Washington-based Clinical Psychologist in her *The Multiracial Experience: Racial Borders as the New Frontier*. "Biracial" refers to "a person whose parents are of two different *socially* designated racial groups, for example, black mother, white father" (ix) (Italics in original). "Multiracial" refers to "people who are of two or more racial

heritages" (xi). Hence it is important to note that the term "multiracial" encompasses the term "biracial" as well. As per Root, "monoracial" are people who claim a single racial heritage" (x) for eg., black or white.

Biracial identity development and crisis related to the same have been the subjects of constant analysis in the fields of Sociology, Counselling Psychology, and Clinical Psychology. The same problem has been explored in the American literature as well over the years, but studies focussing on the sociological and psychological angle of the issue in the texts have been limited. *Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted* has been studied mainly as a War novel, Slave narrative and a Tragic Mulatto narrative. Themes of Ambivalence, Colour, Moral didacticism etc. too have been explored in the novel. Catherine Coughlin Goetz's "Emerging Identity in Afro-American Women's Novels: 1892-1937" (1989) has studied the socio-political developments in the Reconstruction Era, the identity conflicts of the mulatto heroine in *Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted*. "The Intersectionalities of Identity in Young Adult Fiction with Biracial Protagonists" (2016) by Tiffany Nicole Browne explores the concept of biracial competency by focussing on the genre of Young Adult Fiction. Concepts such as "passing," objectification of women, tragic mulatto etc., have been studied by Dana Des Jardin in "A Thesis Without a Moral: Regarding *Plum Bun* and *Quicksand*." Racial Performances, "Passing," Invisibility and Disappearance etc. have been explored in the studies on *Caucasia*.

This study intends to explore separately, the dynamic facets of the biracial identity development along the sociological, psychological, historical and legal angles. It also extends its planes to focus on the various stages of identity development the characters are in, in the process of attaining selfhood. By attempting a comprehensive study of the problem with the biracial characters in the significant literary productions

over the periods under focus, and also by employing the identity development models based on Clinical and Counselling Psychology, relevant legal codes, sociological findings etc., the thesis intends to bridge the gap between fact and fiction, thereby projecting the subtleties of the otherwise inexplicable problem under discussion.

The works chosen for analysis within the thesis follow a timeline between the span of 150 years from 1860 to 2011. The first work is Frances Ellen Watkins Harper's (1825-1911) *Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted*, set during the historical times of American Civil War and Reconstruction. Jessie Redmon Fauset's (1882-1961) *Plum Bun: A Novel Without a Moral* is the second novel taken up for the study. This is set during Harlem Renaissance, and is associated with the New Negro Movement. *Caucasia* by Danzy Senna (1970 -) is the third novel, and it historically places the characters in 1970s and early 1980s Boston affected by the desegregation of Boston Public Schools, resultant racial tensions and Black Power Movement. The twenty-first century modern novel *Black, White, Other: In Search of Nina Armstrong*, written by Joan Steinau Lester (1940 -) traces the predicament of the biracial individuals in the twenty-first century America with the Oakland racial tensions and burning of the city forming the setting.

The history of America and Americans is incomplete without acknowledging the central role played by African Americans in constructing the American national identity. Slavery and racial supremacy are interlinked in the strongest manner in Pre-Civil war America. Slave system has been an easy manifesto for many white slave holders, powerful Northern traders and New York bankers to invest in various aspects of supply, thereby earning themselves high financial shares. Though average white individuals do not have any stake in the whole system, they have managed to heave strong defence and backup for the same as it has been linked to the aspect of racial

ascendancy. The preference for whites has slowly become stronger in terms of employment opportunities, political representation, citizenship, property rights, voting rights and in a variety of other fields such as migration, settlement on free land etc. This has evidently grouped up the whites, who have gained a lot from the scheme by conveniently avoiding the black lot and instilling a code of racial dominance.

Racial inequality continued to exist between the whites and blacks even after the Civil War fought from 1861 to 1865 to bring an end to the enslavement of black people. Three constitutional amendments have modified the disposition of African American rights. They include the Thirteenth Amendment that formally abolishes slavery in all states and territories, the Fourteenth Amendment that forbids states from denying any male citizen of equal safety under the law, regardless of race and the Fifteenth Amendment that grants the African American males the right to vote and prohibits all kinds of discrimination on the basis of colour, race and the earlier situation of slavery. The Reconstruction Era also addressed the issue of the reintegration of the Confederate States, which initially resisted the ratification of the aforementioned amendments. Social, economic and education services have been guaranteed to the newly freed slaves. Education has been one of the major sources that strengthened their search for civil equality. Though the end of the Civil War has also seen the end of armed encounters, Reconstruction Era has been a spell of incessant pangs and queries regarding the integration of the confederated States to the Union, rights of Congress and the President, position of the newly freed blacks in the South etc.

Harlem Renaissance which spanned between the 1920s and 1930s is the extraordinary blossoming in African American culture. Harlem in New York City has been the epicentre of activities associated with the Renaissance when the richness of

the African culture started getting explored in a remarkable manner. Prosperity boom among both whites and the blacks, after the civil war, has been another great feature of this era. Harlem Renaissance is also termed as Black Renaissance and New Negro Movement. In the 1920s, a large number of black poets, writers, artists, musicians, and performers expressed themselves and their experiences as blacks in America through their literature, art, and music. Black artists made use of black arts and culture as a means to overcome the negative stereotypes attached to them since the Antebellum, thereby taking pride in their black heritage. The New Negro Movement has been famous for the deed of racial passing. “Passing” is the act of crossing boundaries set between the dominant and the marginal racial, cultural and ethnic groups, by a member of either group to gain acceptance in the ‘other’ group. Mostly, this is done to get included within the dominant group. Many light skinned people of African and European descent decided to “pass off” as whites at that time to gain socio-economic advantages.

1970s Boston has witnessed tough times due to the Black Power Movement and desegregation of Boston Public Schools (1974-1988). The political slogan, ‘Black Power’ is associated with various ideologies that aim at the self-determination of people of African ethnicity, as safety and self-sufficiency have not been available within the African American neighbourhoods. These areas with considerable Black population have been segregated using the practice of redlining, which is the marking out of those areas that suffer from lower investment levels, using red ink on maps as a warning to the loan lenders. The movement has been in vogue in the US during the late 1960s and early 1970s. It highlights racial pride and the establishment of various black political and cultural institutions to encourage and develop the collective interests and values of the black Americans as identified by its proponents. The main

objective of the movement is that the black people should construct their own identities, despite being subjected to and stereotyped by the pre-existing societal aspects. The 1971 US Supreme court decision *Swann v. Charlotte Mecklenburg Board of Education* gave the authority to the Federal Courts to eradicate *de facto* segregation in the schools through a system of "Race-integration busing" or "busing." "Busing" was the practice of allocating and carrying students to schools within or outside their local school districts to better the racial diversity of the educational institutions. Verdict of desegregation and the beginning years of its implementation led to a series of racial protests and riots which invited national attention, particularly from 1974 to 1976. With the passing of the Racial Imbalance Act that legalised the desegregation of the state public schools, W. Arthur Garrity Jr. of the United States District Court for the District of Massachusetts drafted a plan for the compulsory "busing" of students between primarily white and black areas of the city. The impact of the desegregation plan has lasted for more than a decade and has been an influential factor in the Boston politics. It has contributed highly to the demographic shifts of the school-age population, for, Boston witnessed a dip in the public-school enrolment and white flight to the suburbs.

America in the twenty-first century continues to harbour racial preference, discrimination and extreme prejudice. The election of Barack Obama as the nation's 44th President in 2009, seemed an era that heralded post-racial America, an environment free from all discrimination and prejudice. However, the happenings in the recent times validate that the whole concept of "post-racial America" has been nothing but a myth that existed throughout the US history. Though race is regarded as a social construct, the fact that the US decennial surveys continue to track the demographic changes of the nation by focussing on the racial data clearly declares the

idea that race continues to remain a social reality in the US society. This in a way asserts the fact that people continue to get identified and categorized into different races which becomes crucial in patterning their experiences, opportunities, rewards etc.

It is important to notice that for decades, black communities across America have been undercounted in the US Census. In a blog post, "Following a long history, the 2020 Census risks undercounting the black population," of 26 February 2019 published in *The blog of the Urban Institute*, an undercount is regarded as the indication of the variance between an assessment from a post-enumeration survey or a demographic analysis and the official Census figures (Runes). Though efforts are made to bring down the disparities, it is to be noted that the "Black Undercount" has been an intentional and a constitutionally developed strategy in the first census.

Formal recognition of the biracial and multiracial individuals has been out of question in the US during the earlier decades. Most of the biracial and the multiracial children who were born during the time of slavery in America, mainly have been the products of "Miscegenation," a term of abuse coined in 1864 to denote "sexual relations, cohabitation and marriage between whites and blacks" (Matterson 140). Like other identities, mixed race people have not been easily accepted in the United States. Various laws and practices prohibiting interracial sex, marriage and therefore multiracial children have been passed at various periods of time in the American history. They mainly include "Anti-Miscegenation" laws, the rule of "Hypodescent," "One-Drop Rule" etc. which have enabled biracial and multiracial categorisation.

"Anti-Miscegenation" laws that ban the sexual relations between whites and non-whites in America have existed right from the times of colonisation, the first of which got passed being the Maryland Statute in 1691, criminalising interracial

marriages. As miscegenation is regarded a crime, “Anti-Miscegenation” laws have been formulated to prohibit the solemnization of interracial marriages and the presiding over of such weddings. All “Anti-Miscegenation” laws ban the marriage of whites and non-white groups, primarily blacks, but often also include Native Americans and Asians. Prior to the California Supreme Court’s ruling in *Perez v. Sharp* (1948), no court in the United States has ever struck down a ban on interracial marriage (Italics in original). “Anti-Miscegenation” laws are declared unconstitutional with the United States Supreme Court’s unanimous ruling of *Loving v. Virginia* in 1967 (Italics in original). Miscegenation has been mainly a proscribed subject on one hand, but on the other, it delineates the hypocrisy of the whites in their claims to racial superiority and quashes the general conviction that there exist major dissimilarities between racial groups. This practice is viewed as a dangerous one that stained the white racial purity, thereby weakening the white race.

By the nineteenth century, there developed an intense faith in the hierarchical structure of race which propagated the concepts of species superiority of the whites and the species inferiority of the blacks. Fear of miscegenation created a prejudice against the offspring of interracial amalgamation, for, the characteristics of monstrosity and freakiness automatically got associated with them. British Colonial law allows a child to receive its status from his or her father. But, *Partus sequitur ventrem* or *partus*, meaning “that which is born follows the womb” as defined in the article, “Partus sequitur ventrem” was passed in colonial Virginia and other English crown colonies in December 1662 and legally defined the free status of the child (*Wikipedia*) (Italics in original). This law that has been derived from the Roman civil law mandated that a child takes the legal status of its mother, and so the child of an enslaved mother becomes a slave for life. These children would often become their

father's property. As William Waller Hening, a 19th century attorney, legal scholar, publisher and politician who codified the laws of Virginia identifies in his *The Statutes at Large; Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia from the First Session of the Legislature, in the Year 1619* that the Act XII of the Hereditary Slavery Law Virginia states:

> Be it therefore enacted and declared by this present grand assembly, that all children borne in this country shalbe held bond or free only according to the condition of the mother, And that if any Christian shall commit ffornication with a negro man or woman, hee or shee soe offending shall pay double the ffines imposed by the former act. (170)

Not all biracial children have been born as the result of the sexual abuse of African women. Even a free woman of colour might have had a child out of a white man. In such cases, the biracial children were declared free.

"Hypodescent" is an anthropological concept that has been deemed lawful in America. It is mainly concerned with the automatic assignment of children of mixed union between socio-economic or ethnic groups, to the group with the lower status. As whites are historically a dominant social group, people of black and white ancestry would obviously be classified as black, as per this concept. It prohibited the multiracial individuals from identifying with any racial category other than black. As it is noted in "Racing to Theory or Retheorizing Race? Understanding the Struggle to Build a Multiracial Identity Theory," that the existence of individuals in a deeply segregated world created social position "inevitably marked by tragedy" characterised by the instances of alienation, stigma and denunciation from both the dominant as well as the marginalized racial groups they belong to (Rockquemore et al. 16).

"One-Drop Rule" is another social and legal principle of racial classification that has been historically prominent in the United States asserting that any person with even one ancestor of sub-Saharan-African ancestry ("one drop" of black blood) is considered black ("negro" in historical terms). This idea is generally influenced by the concerns of blacks "passing off" as whites in the deeply segregated south of the US, and evolved over the course of the nineteenth century to get codified into a law in the twentieth century. It has been associated with the principle of "invisible blackness," and is used as a way to make people of colour, especially multiracial Americans feel more inferior and confused about their existence.

American literature has always explored the mundane as well as the philosophical encounters and experience of belonging to more than one racial category. Biracial and multiracial voices have received recognition and representation in different ages mainly through the works like *The Death of Jim Loney*, *The Invisible Man*, *The House Behind the Cedars*, *Passing*, *Everything I Never Told You*, *The Girl Who Fell From the Sky*, *The Vanishing Half* etc. by authors like James Weldon Johnson, Ralph Ellison, Charles W. Chestnutt, Nella Larsen, Celeste Ng, Heidi W. Durrow, Brit Bennett etc. respectively. The authors chosen for this study are Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, Jessie Redmon Fauset, Danzy Senna and Joan Steinau Lester and such a choice is made mainly owing to their biracial and multiracial connections. The texts chosen for this study are *Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted* (1892), *Plum Bun: A Novel Without a Moral* (1928), *Caucasia* (1998) and *Black, White, Other: In Search of Nina Armstrong* (2011). They are the representative texts of each period in which biracial identity crisis and identity development process of the characters become the central point of discussion, and which also offer the realistic portrayal of the US society during the concerned eras. These texts are particularly selected to have a

comprehensive idea about the biracial identity issues, the final negotiation of the choices of identity by the fictional representations of the biracial characters especially siblings, and the factors leading to the same at various points of the history ranging from the segregation period to the twenty-first century.

Frances Ellen Watkins Harper (1825-1911) an African American novelist, poet, abolitionist, suffragist and public speaker, was born in Baltimore, Maryland, earlier a slave state, to a free black mother. Her writing career started with publishing pieces in antislavery journals in 1839 and it reflected upon her politics as well. She was one of the first African American women to be published in the United States. Her long and productive literary career began with the publication of the first volume of poetry, *Forest Leaves* in 1845 when she was just 20. This helped her in establishing herself as an important abolitionist voice. Her second volume, *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects* published in 1854 was extremely popular and was reprinted many times. Her career as a public speaker and political activist began in 1853 on joining the American Anti-Slavery Society. She wrote and spoke of eradication of enslavement, temperance, voting rights and other forms of equality for women, the reformist reasons that were connected before and after the American Civil War.

Harper's "Two Offers," which appeared in the *Anglo-African* in 1859, was the first short story published by an African American woman. She published 80 poems. After the Civil War, Harper published a long blank-verse poem, *Moses: A Story of the Nile* (1869) and three novels serialized in a Christian magazine, *The Christian Recorder*: *Minnie's Sacrifice* (1869), *Sowing and Reaping: A Temperance Story* (1876-77) and *Trial and Triumph* (1888-89). Her other works include, *Light Beyond the Darkness, The Martyr of Alabama and Other Poems, Idylls of the Bible, In*

Memoriam, Wm. McKinley, Free Labor etc. She was also the founding member of the National Association of Colored Women.

Slave narrative, one of the major literary genres dealing with the accounts of those enslaved in the Antebellum years and the former slaves after the US Civil War, is indispensable in closely examining the eighteenth and nineteenth century American history and literature. Primarily, they have recorded the first hand experiences of the people in the American South and later, they included the experiences of people of colour in the North. These records clearly expose the disparities between American promise of freedom and the reality of racism which existed in the so-called free-states. The ruling class in the Antebellum South which mainly consisted of the planters and estate owners has survived on slavery as it provided them with the much needed economic stability and profit. The working relationships and sometimes tacit expectations and obligations between slave and slaveholder made possible a functional, and in some cases highly profitable, economic system. Despite the exploitative and oppressive nature of this system, slaves emerge in numerous Antebellum slave narratives actively, sometimes aggressively, in search of freedom, whether in the context of everyday speech and action or through covert and overt means of resistance.

Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted, Harper's widely acclaimed novel was published in 1892. It discusses a wide range of social issues such as education for women, miscegenation, abolition, reconstruction, temperance, and social responsibility, following the tradition of the nineteenth century writing about women. The novel which is a slave narrative as well, is set mainly in the Post-bellum years along with exploring the Antebellum and Civil War times as well. It tells the story of Iola Leroy, a beautiful young biracial woman whose racial identity is ambiguous until

it is disclosed during the time of her father's death, resulting in her enslavement. Born free in Mississippi, she and her brother Harry are the children of a wealthy white slave owner Eugene Leroy and his mixed-race wife and a former slave, Marie. Interracial marriages were illegal during the slavery period, thereby intensifying the gravity of the whole situation. Her father sends Iola to the North to be educated. After his death, Iola is kidnapped, told that she has black blood, and is sold into slavery in the Deep South.

In a plot that follows the conventions of the late nineteenth century tragic mulatto genre, Iola struggles to elude the intentions of the various owners, who try to exploit her sexually. After she is freed by the Union Army during the war, she seeks to find her family members. Embracing her African heritage, she works to improve the social and economic condition of blacks in the United States. Iola is supported in her struggle by people who relate to various aspects of her complicated life: a devoted former Leroy family slave Tom Anderson who rescues her from a lecherous master, her brother Harry Leroy and her newfound uncle Robert Johnson, who introduces her to her dark-skinned maternal grandmother Harriet, who is mostly of African descent. During the Post-bellum Period, Iola Leroy continues to identify with the black side of her identity. She declines to "pass for" white when her New England suitor, Dr. Gresham, makes it a condition of his proposal of marriage. He wants her to promise to never reveal her African ancestry. Leroy later marries Dr. Frank Latimer, a man of mixed ancestry who also identifies with the black community. They both return to North Carolina with an aim to work for the racial uplift of their community.

Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted was for some time cited as the first novel written by an African American author until Professor Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s 1982 discovery of Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig* (1859). Later, William Wells Brown's 1853

novel *Clotel or the President's Daughter*, although first published in England where he was living at the time, came to be viewed as the first novel by an African American author. Harper's novel till date remains important as one of the earliest novels written by an African American, and as a fictional work dealing with complex issues of race, class, and politics in the United States. Recent scholarship suggests that Harper's novel provides a sophisticated understanding of citizenship, gender, and community, particularly the way that African Americans developed hybrid forms of *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* before, during, and after slavery.

Jessie Redmon Fauset (1882-1961) an African American author was born and brought up in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. She served as the literary editor of *The Crisis* magazine along with W. E. B. Dubois to promote the ideas and thoughts of the African American authors. The same has served as a medium for Fauset to showcase her creative skills. During this time, she has written book reviews, short stories, personal essays etc. Fauset has four novels to her credit which include, *There is Confusion* (1921), *Plum Bun: A Novel Without a Moral* (1928), *The Chinaberry Tree* (1931), and *Comedy: American Style* (1933). These novels "originated in protest against the unfaithful portrayal of the educated Negro in T. S. Stribling's *Birthright*" (Franklin 222). Miss Fauset's novels are important because they have been among those first works written about the privileged class of black people by a black author. She was concerned about black people, who in education and wealth were not very much unlike their white counterparts. The essential emphasis made by her novels is race, and a close look at them reveals that each and every novel is a testimonial on behalf of the black middle class.

Between 1913 and 1923, she also published five short stories, all appearing in *The Crisis*. As the literary editor for *The Crisis*, Fauset was in part responsible for the

attention and recognition given to the new and talented black writers who had been associated with the Harlem Renaissance. Langston Hughes acknowledges her encouragement in providing him and other young black minds, a way to express their thoughts and ideas, resulting in the growth of black literature. Fauset's most creative works were her poems that began to appear in 1912 in *The Crisis*. She made consistent use of the archetypes of love and nature in her poems which was the typical feature of the Harlem period. Her poetry reflected the genteel tradition of depicting race in art as expressed in the works of earlier black poets and sought cultural recognition of the race.

Fauset's second novel, *Plum Bun: A Novel Without a Moral*, was published in the year 1928. The novel set during the times of Harlem Renaissance posits a pair of biracial siblings, Angela Murray and Virginia Murray who negotiate and renegotiate their identities. The work focuses on the protagonist Angela Murray who is born with a white phenotype. The ways in which she constructs her identity, faces the segregation rules of the society and the choice of her racial self, form the crux of the novel. The title of the novel *Plum Bun: A Novel Without a Moral* is taken from a folk nursery rhyme: "To Market, to Market / To buy a Plum Bun / Home again, Home again / Market is done." Fauset has divided the novel into four sections, 'Home,' 'To Market,' 'Plum Bun,' and 'Home Again,' with their titles adopted from the rhyme. Each of these sections vividly portrays Angela Murray's physical and psychological migration to each stage of her life. The first section, 'Home,' tells about Angela Murray and her hometown in Philadelphia with her black family. The second section, 'To Market,' tells about her migration to New York and her "passing off" as white. The third section, 'Plum Bun,' tells about Angela's affair with Roger Fielding, a white man, and her friendship with her white peers. The fourth and the last section, 'Home

Again,' tells about Angela's longing for her people, and her coming home back to her family.

Danzy Senna an American novelist and essayist was born in Boston in 1970 to the Civil Right activist parents. Her father Carl Senna has been an African-Mexican poet and her mother Fanny Howe, an Irish-American writer. Her parents' interracial marriage and the divorce that followed have been the major factors that influenced her works, which mostly dealt with multiracial identities and interracial relationships. She is considered to be one of the highly respected literary figures who constantly challenges the established race, class and gender patterns of the African American culture. She has written five books and several essays to her credit which extensively deal with the issues of race, gender, motherhood etc. Her works include, three novels, *Caucasia* (1998), *Symptomatic* (2004), *New People* (2017), an autobiographical work *Where Did You Sleep Last Night?: A Personal History* (2009) and a short-story collection, *You Are Free* (2011).

Senna's first novel *Caucasia* published in 1998 recounts the coming-of-age tale of two biracial sisters, Birdie Lee and Cole Lee. It upholds the themes of invisibility and disappearance. Racial tensions of 1970s Boston form the backdrop of the novel. Divided into three parts, 'negritude for beginners,' 'from caucasia, with love' and 'compared to what' indicate the passing of time and space, while the novel also examines the contractions between visible and subjective racial identities. The story is mainly seen through the eyes of the protagonist, Birdie Lee, the younger of the siblings and whose character has been drawn from Senna's own childhood experiences of self-identification. It also explores the social constructions of race associated with various parameters in detail, and the standpoint of the characters, who experience it. Gender and race intertwine clearly in the work, which questions the

demarcations of the yardsticks that define and differentiate a biracial individual from a monoracial individual. The novel has been translated into ten languages and nominated for the Orange Prize for Fiction, long-listed for the International Dublin Literary Award and recognised as the "Best Book of the Year" by *Los Angeles Times*.

Joan Steinau Lester, born in 1940 is a well-known American commentator, columnist, and author of five critically acclaimed books, including *Mama's Child* (2013) and *Black, White, Other: In Search of Nina Armstrong* (2011) and a memoir, *Loving before Loving: A Marriage in Black and White* (2021). Her *The Future of White Men and Other Diversity Dilemmas* (1994) is a collection of her previously published articles on multiculturalism and the role of multiplicity in the US. Another work written by her, *Fire in My Soul* (2003), is the official biography of politician Eleanor Holmes Norton, who has been a constant participant in the Civil Rights Movement. Lester has been actively involved in the battle for Civil Rights and a strong voice in the late twentieth-century feminist movement. In the late 1950s, Lester marched and protested as a white ally and young woman during the Civil Rights Movement thereby coming to terms with her own racism. With the dawning of the women's movement, Lester discovered her voice, her pansexuality, and the courage to be her own self. An active member of the New York City-based group 'New Women' she attended the first Women's Liberation Conference in Chicago in 1968. An active spokesperson for the equal rights for all ethnic groups, she was also the co-founder and Executive-Director of the Equity Institute, an organization that embraced diversity and worked for the same. Her writing appeared in various publications such as *Chicago Tribune, Huffington Post, Cosmopolitan, USA Today, Los Angeles Times, San Francisco Chronicle* etc.

Being a member of a biracial family, she has always been passionate about understanding the concept of "race," tracing its exclusive origin and history till its normalcy. All her works are focussed on this immensely charged topic. Besides writing, she has been actively involved in the right to education and ally activism. She has won many recognitions which include, National Lesbian and Gay Siegenthaler Award for Commentary on National Public Radio, a Finalist Award from PEN/Bellweather Prize for Socially Engaged Fiction, and the Arts Letters Creative Nonfiction Award for narrative nonfiction.

Black, White, Other: In Search of Nina Armstrong, published in 2011 traces the journey of a young biracial girl Nina Armstrong born to a black father and a white mother with a dark brother Jimmy. Her phenotype is characterized by mocha-coloured skin, ringed brown hair with red streaks. The divorce of her parents pushes Nina to the abyss of her identity crisis. Definitions of identity and relationships start shifting in no time with the formulation of new patterns and borders related to racial identity. Nina finds herself waging a perpetual battle between the fragmented family and the identity crisis following the racial tensions splintering her hometown, Oakland, California in the twenty-first century. Feeling stranded in the "nowhere land" between racial boundaries, and struggling for personal independence and identity, Nina turns to the story of her great-great-grandmother Sarah Armstrong's escape from slavery.

As the study is set in a period ranging between the nineteenth-century to the twenty-first century in the American history, the focus of the analysis is in terms of the sociological, psychological and legal angles. The sociological research which is the foundational analysis for the biracial identity formation is generally participatory in nature (using questionnaires, case-studies, surveys etc.). This thesis borrows the theories, findings and conclusions of the approaches by various leading sociologists,

clinical psychologists, cultural theorists and also uses references to various legal codes, and extends them to the fictional narratives in order to bring out the identity of the biracial characters in the texts taken up for the study.

Biracial identity depends on numerous internal and external forces such as family structure, cultural knowledge, geographical locations, phenotype, peer culture, socio-historical context etc. Various models and theories of racial identity development that focus on the persons of colour, biracial and multiracial individuals have been formulated by researchers over time. They include the "Marginal Person Model" by E. V. Stonequist in 1937, "Nigrescence Model" proposed by W. E. Cross Jr. in 1971, G. Morten and D. R. Atkinson's "Minority Identity Development Model" of 1983, W. S. Carlos Poston's "Biracial Identity Development Model" of 1990, Kich's "Conceptualization of Biracial Identity Development" in 1995, Christine Kerwin and Joseph G. Ponterotto's "Biracial Identity Developmental Model" (1995), "Continuum of Biracial Identity Model" by Kerry Ann Rockquemore and Tracey Laszloffy in 2005, Renn's "Ecological Theory of Multiracial Identity Development" in 2008 etc.

This thesis mainly integrates racial identity development models and cultural theory formulated by W. E. Cross Jr., W. S. Carlos Poston, Maria P. P. Root and Gloria Anzaldúa to analyse the texts. W. E. B. Du Bois, an eminent African American sociologist has keenly disputed the view that propagated the biological lowliness of the African American race. He believed in the social rather than the scientific validity of the outlook, and viewed race as a category that evolved out of various social practices and discourses rather than being scientifically demonstrable. Race has been manufactured by the society to differentiate a group of people based on physical characteristics and used as a kind of validation of racial prejudices and exploitation of

the enslaved people. This concept has become highly prominent in the eighteenth century to describe the different populations in colonial America. The chapter titled, "Hallmark Critical Race Theory Themes" of *Critical Race Theory*: *An Introduction*, summarises the concept of race in the following manner, "Race is a social construction, not a biological reality" (17).

William E. Cross, Jr., is one of the foremost American theorists and researchers who focused on ethnic identity development in general and black identity development in particular. Widely regarded as a social and clinical psychologist, *Shades of Black*: *Diversity in African-American Identity* (1991) is his classic contribution to this field. Black Consciousness Movement that had been in vogue in1960s and 1970s greatly influenced Cross. Various beliefs, practices and ideologies such as Eugenics, Social Darwinism and Nazism have always combined racial prejudices with scientific theories which concentrate on, and at the same time demonstrate that the Africans and their descendants around the globe have been a biologically inferior race. Following this, the remarkable "Nigrescence Model" has been constructed in order to explicate the identity change process, linked to the subtleties of various social movements. Cross's model thus became the prototype for many other future models on Native American Identity, Women's Identity, Gay-Lesbian Identity, and Asian American Identity.

Cross' original model that appeared in "The Negro-to-Black Conversion Experience: Toward a Psychology of Black Liberation" (1971) connects the conversion to black identity through a five-stage model. This theory is called the "Nigrescence," which can be translated as "the process of becoming Black". It consists of five stages and they include, the Pre-Encounter, Encounter, Immersion/Emersion, Internalization and Internalization-Commitment. The people in

the “Pre-Encounter” stage recognize and follow many standards and belief systems of the dominant white culture which includes the taking-in of the prominent notion that characterises the US society that ‘white is right’ and ‘black is wrong.’ They maintain attitudes ranging from low importance to race neutrality to anti-black. There will be a total de-emphasis of one’s own racial group membership, and focus of the people will be on other important elements of life such as occupation, life style, and religion. The acknowledgement regarding the essential effects of the race on lives until then will be totally absent during this stage. According to Cross, “anti-Blacks loath other Blacks; they feel alienated from them and do not see Blacks or the Black Community as potential or actual sources of personal support” (191). In the second stage, “Encounter,” an individual will have to work around, or shatter the ideology or perspective that he/she harbours. At the same time, there will be a hint regarding the point of direction to which an individual will be changed. The event or series of events in this stage will force the individuals to acknowledge the impact of racism in their lives. The social reality that one cannot truly be white will be realized by them. The question of identity comes into discussion in this stage and the individuals will be made to focus on their selves as members targeted by the very stain of racism.

The third stage of “Immersion-Emersion” makes the individual actively avoid white symbols, and at the same time, surround oneself with obvious symbols of one’s own racial identity. Cross observes, “immersion is a strong powerful dominating sensation that is constantly energized by rage, guilt, and developing a sense of pride” (203). The black individuals start to give up on the old line of thought and build up a new frame of reference with the newly gathered information about race. They will discard all the negative stereotypes associated with being black and view the black existence from a new and affirmative angle. A comfort zone is built among the

members of one's racial community, and with the peer support, an active seeking-out of opportunities to explore and experience one's history and culture can be seen. Cross notes about emersion as "an emergence from the emotionality and dead end, either/or, racist and oversimplified ideologies of the emergence experience" (207). A complete sense of one's racial identity will be developed in this stage of "Internalization," and pro-black attitude too becomes more obvious and unrestrained. A keenness to institute meaningful association with whites who admit and admire one's self-definition is visible during this stage. Cross notes that at this stage, "[b]lack identity functions to fulfil the self-protection, social anchorage, and bridging needs of the individual" (220). The fifth stage of "Internalization-Commitment" of the model expresses an individual's finding of innumerable means to transmute one's personal sense of blackness into a plan of action or a general sense of obligation to concerns of blacks as a group, which gets prolonged over time. A feeling of comfort and security will be achieved by the individuals with their race and those around them.

In 1991, Cross has revised his model to explain in detail the unpredictability of the identity development at the "Pre-encounter" and "Internalization" stages. This is generally referred to as People of Colour Racial Identity Model (PCRIM). The realization that the initial stage of "Pre-encounter" must also include the African American individuals who may not base their identity on their attachment with black people and culture, those with low salience, has made Cross revise the original theoretical framework. He has also developed the themes of racial self-hatred and miseducation in the revised model in order to capture the negative dimensions of "Pre-encounter." Thus, the revised model splits up the negative (miseducation and racial self-hatred) and low-salience (assimilation and other low racial salience exemplars) dimensions in the explication of "Pre-encounter" stage.

A multidimensional approach has been incorporated by Cross into the "Internalization" stage as well. Mediocre to high prominence is given to blackness by the people who reach the stage of "Internalization." Various perspectives that are developed at this stage include monocultural, dual-cultural and multicultural frameworks. He has also put forward the argument in the revised model that the content of the identity stage has been unconnected to individual well-being. In other words, assimilation, Afro-centricity, and multiculturalism identities may be different, but equally efficient conduits towards mental health. According to the revised model, a correction occurs to the misunderstanding or racial self-hatred which a person has developed in the previous stages, in the form of nigrescence or black identity change at some point. An individual can also opt for an identity that agrees of a moderate to high salience attached to the black race. This change may happen to the assimilated worldview that he holds due to the gravity of the encounter at a particular point in his life. This model is used to analyse *Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted*.

Poston's "Biracial Identity Development Model" is the theoretical framework used in the analysis of *Plum Bun: A Novel Without a Moral*. W. S. Carlos Poston, Senior Principal Investigator and Director of the Institute for Behavioural Health Research at NDRI, California, challenged the American sociologist Everett Stonequist's "Marginal Person Model," which claimed that developing a biracial identity is only a marginal experience, in which biracial people belong to two worlds and none all at the same time. Poston claims that the existing models of minority identity development do not accurately reflect the experiences of biracial individuals. Hence, he proposes a new and positive model in his article, "The Biracial Identity Development Model: A Needed Addition," (1990) which focusses on the development of biracial and multiracial identity, thereby resolving the limitations of

the previous ones. This linear model with five stages has been developed from research on biracial individuals and information from relevant support groups.

Poston mentions in the first stage of "Personal Identity," that though a child's sense of self is fairly independent of all the influential domains, it is not altogether unaware of its race and ethnicity. He adds the observations of J. S. Phinney, an American Psychology Professor in Psychology and M. J. Rotherham-Borus, licensed Clinical psychologist and Professor with the University of California. According to them, the children's Reference Group Orientation (RGO) attitudes not getting developed at that stage is a result of their idiosyncratic and conflicting early understandings about their race and ethnicity. Hence, they rule that it is the "Personal Identity" factors such as the children's personal esteem and feelings of self-worth that they develop and learn in their families which determine their identities.

The second stage, "Choice of Group Categorization" is the one in which the individuals are pushed to choose an identity. As the choice gets limited to one ethnic identity alone, the individual tends to suffer from alienation and crisis. Poston refers to three different aspects that influence the biracial individuals in making the identity choice as observed by researcher Christine C. Iijima Hall in her doctoral dissertation titled, "The Ethnic Identity of Racially Mixed People: A Study of Black-Japanese," and these factors include and are not limited to, the status factors, social support factors and the personal factors (153). Status factors consist of the group status of parents' ethnic background, demographics of home neighbourhood and ethnicity and influence of peer group; social support factors encompass the parental style and influence, acceptance and participation in cultures of various groups and, parental and familial acceptance; and personal factors include physical appearance, knowledge of languages other than English, cultural knowledge, age etc. and also environmental

factors such as perceived group status and social support. At this particular stage, the major choices will be between majority and minority group identities.

The third Enmeshment / Denial stage is an offshoot of the denial of the choice of identity made in the second stage. This situation leads to the inability to fully identify with all the aspects of one's heritage and can result in feelings of anger, shame, self-hatred and lack of acceptance from one or more groups. Resolving guilt and anger thereby learning to appreciate both parental cultures is necessary to move beyond this level according to Dr. Deborah L. Sebring, Psychologist in Durham, North Carolina (qtd. in Poston 154). Parental and community support are the essential factors that help the individuals to go past this stage. The fourth stage, "Appreciation" as described by Poston broadens one's reference group orientation, racial group membership and knowledge about multi-ethnic heritage through learning about all aspects of their backgrounds. Even though individuals broaden their horizons with regard to various cultures, they may choose to identify with one group in particular more than the others. The fifth and final "Integration" stage represents a platform of multicultural existence in which, the individual values all of his or her ethnic identities. There will be a sense of wholeness, which the individual feels on integrating multiple identities that make him or her unique. This model is used in the analysis of *Plum Bun: A Novel Without a Moral*.

Maria Primitiva Paz Root aka Maria P. P. Root, is a renowned clinical psychologist, orator and educationalist based in Washington. She is the editor of two award-winning books, *Racially Mixed People in America* (1992) and *The Multiracial Experience: Racial Borders as the New Frontier* (1995) on multiracial people and has taken effort to produce the Bill of Rights for Racially Mixed People. Her works are the major forces behind the inclusion of the "check one or more races" category as an

option to the race question in the 2000 US Census form. Root proposes a non-linear model of biracial identity development in her article, "Resolving "Other" Status: Identity Development of Biracial Individual" (1990) which has an alliance to the early levels of minority identity development models. This model is used to analyse Danzy Senna's *Caucasia*.

Alterations to the typical later stages of the minority models which generally showed that once the biracial individuals with white lineage reach the adolescence stage, they would not reject their majority identity to conform to the minority community, can be observed in Root's "Resolutions for Resolving Otherness." Four affirmative solutions have been proposed by her to resolve the identity issues faced by the biracial individuals, especially the strong phenomenological experience of "otherness." Therefore, she introduces a new identity category, "multiracial." Her findings that are rooted in Cultural Psychology suggest that the major conflict in the identity construction of biracial and multiracial individuals is the struggle between various racial factors within one's self. She has offered alternate resolutions for the ethnic identity by taking into consideration the role of various factors like, racial hierarchy, US history, family, age, gender etc. in the individual's identity development.

The four solutions which can be imbibed by the biracial and multiracial individuals in order to positively cope up with their identity crisis are as follows. First resolution is the "Acceptance of the Identity Society Assigns." Biracial individuals who face racial oppression will lack the freedom of choice of any particular racial identity. They will largely identify and be identified as people of colour, which is a category associated with the inferior status. This passive strategy which may appear positive in reality triggers from an oppressive process. This solution becomes positive

if the individual truly identifies with the assigned racial category. As per Root, "[a]ffiliation, support, and acceptance by the extended family is important to this resolution being positive" (199). Second solution is the "Identification with Both Racial Groups." Here, the biracial person will be able to identify with both or all heritage groups, depending upon the support from the society and personal capability to uphold this identity against all kinds of possible resistance from others. This becomes a positive resolution when the personality of the individual remains stable across various racial groups and he/she enjoys privileges in both the groups. Root opines that the biracial individuals, "may simultaneously be aware that they are both similar and different compared to those persons around them" (200). The third option is the "Identification with a Single Racial Group" where the individual opts for one particular group regardless of all kinds of societal compulsion. Though it may look similar to that of the first resolution, it is different, as it is active and also not a result of the oppression. It becomes a positive strategy when the individual does not feel marginalised to the asserted racial reference group and also does not reject any particular part of the racial heritage. According to Root, "[w]ith this strategy, the biracial person needs to be aware and accept the incongruity and have coping strategies for dealing with questions and suspicion by the reference group" (201). The fourth and final resolution that Root offers is "Identification as a New Racial Group." In this, a person will feel allegiance towards other biracial individuals in such a way that he may not feel to any particular group due to his struggle with the marginal status. This becomes a positive resolution if no rejection or hiding of any aspect of his/her racial lineage happens from the part of the individual. Root observes that the "individual may move fluidly between racial groups but view themselves apart from these reference groups without feeling marginal because they have generated a new

reference group" (201). Root proposes the possibility of a new racial identity group, biracial or multiracial taking into consideration the effect of racism on identity development.

Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa is an American scholar whose area of research includes, Chicana cultural theory, feminism and queer theory. Her seminal text that is also a semi-autobiographical work titled, *Borderlands / La Frontera: New Mestiza* (1987) focusses mainly on the identity development of Chicano and Latino mixed race women based on factors like race, gender, colonialism etc. Her life along the border area and her experiences of marginalization also find a major place in her work. The fourth text taken up for the study, *Black, White, Other: In Search of Nina Armstrong* is being analysed using the "Borderlands theory." Anzaldúa uses the term "borderlands" in the Preface to the first edition of *Borderlands / La Frontera: New Mestiza* to refer to the geographical area of Texas-US Southwest/Mexican border, which is the most prone to mixing up, and a growing community along the borderlines who have identified themselves as a part of both the worlds beyond the divisions. Latinas/os and non-Latinas/os, men and women, heterosexuals/homosexuals and several other groups in between whom an unseen division exists, come under Anzaldúa's classification of the borderland inhabitants.

In addition to the factors defining the complexities of black mixed-race women's identity development, Anzaldúa takes into consideration the "in-between" social space where they inhabit and experience both the privileges and consequences. Thus an intersectional analysis is provided by Anzaldúa in the area of mixed-race identity development which has earlier been based on external racial signifiers alone. Acculturation problems of the borderland inhabitants result in psychological issues of alienation and fear. The borderland residents possess a dual identity wherein, they

experience a sense of belonging and not belonging at the same time thereby being unable to make a choice. She mentions the concept of "cosmic race," (99) that encompasses all the other racial categories as discussed by Jose Vasconcelos, but also finds it hard to identify with, as far as the borderland individuals are concerned.

Anzaldúa also delineates the concepts of stance-and-counterstance in relation to the outlook towards the complexities of identity development. Stance is regarded as the position maintained by the hegemonic white racial class. It is in order to deny the community access to all those individuals who possess complex identities in terms of race, class, gender etc. This is an authoritarian stand that exploits the helplessness of the individuals who fail to fit into an established identity category.
Counterstance according to Anzaldúa "refutes the dominant culture's views and beliefs, and, for this, it is proudly defiant. All reaction is limited by, and dependent on, what it is reacting against. Because the counterstance stems from a problem with authority-outer as well as inner-it's a step towards liberation from cultural domination. But it is not a way of life" (100). The stance-counterstance dichotomy of the characters has been explored in all the novels taken for the study in this thesis. Anzaldúa proposes a divergent thought process to achieve liberty from the clash of identities wherein an individual learns to include the borderline categories by rejecting the exclusive nature of the convergent thinking. This develops a new and whole perspective in *new mestiza* that helps in the survival from oppression and transcendence of the stance-counterstance positions by developing *la facultad* (Italics in original).

Bordered by high standards of segregation fixed by the white dominant class and the need to earn an identity, the lives and choices of biracial individuals have always garnered the attention of the world. This thesis intends to explore separately,

the dynamic facets of the biracial stereotyping along the chromatic, racial, sexual, class and gender lines that articulate and categorise the lives of the biracial characters in the novels taken up for the study. Challenges, choices and chances supplied to a biracial individual in his/her journey of survival and the different aspects of time and space that offer a platform for the identity construction have also been dealt with in detail. It also extends its planes to focus specifically on the various stages, the characters are in, in the process of identity development using the tools of biracial identity development models and the concepts associated with the same.

Chapter II

By Blood and By Choice: Frances Ellen Watkins Harper's *Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted*

"I didn't always see colour in people, I really didn't. It was other people that made me see the colour all the time."

--- Halle Berry, qtd. in "Halle Berry Quotes"

Race can be regarded as a factor which is at the same time unyielding and flexible. It is powerful enough to both exclude and include individuals on the basis of set standards of a nation's civil society. Racial categories on the surface level may be explained using differences in culture, appearance, location etc. But on a much deeper level, they have serious consequences that are invisible to the normal eyes. Race has a tight connection with power, for, the former ensures categorisation and differentiation among the individuals, with the end result being exploitation and suppression of those groups. As Gregory Smithsimon, Associate Professor of Sociology at Brooklyn College at the City University of New York, and the CUNY Graduate Centre in his essay, "How to See Race" published in the newsletter, *Aeon* observes,

> Fundamentally, race makes power visible by assigning it to physical bodies. The evidence of race right before our eyes is *not* a visual trace of a physical reality, but a by-product of social perceptions, in which we are trained to see certain features as salient or significant. Race does not exist as a matter of biological fact, but only as a consequence of a process of *racialisation*. (Italics in original)

Racism and racial stereotypes are the products of slavery that have been long etched in the history of America. These started getting operational since nineteenth-century thereby having a negative impact on families and communities, especially of

that of the African Americans. Many of the generalizations regarding the slave children are mainly concerned with their intelligence, conduct and character. Therefore, these children are deemed unintelligent, barbaric, criminals, ugly etc. with the stereotypical tags getting extended over many generations. With these tools of negative tagging entering into the general belief system, the scope of getting better education, employment and social status etc. gets limited thereby leading to the denial of the basic human rights.

Slave era strongly held the view that the interracial mixing or miscegenation is a taboo, for, it might stain the purity of the white lineage. This belief stemmed from the dominant white ideology that upheld white superiority and black inferiority as a leading force for slavery. But the racial hierarchy that existed between white masters and black slaves in the plantation during the times paved the way for interracial intercourse to happen, despite the ratification of various anti-miscegenation laws. As G. Reginald Daniel, Professor of Sociology at the University of California, Santa Barbara mentions in his "Black and White Identity in the New Millenium: Unsevering the Ties That Bind," "many mulatto children were conceived within the context of rape, brutal force, and sexual domination" (qtd. in Khanna 28). These biracial children were regarded as valuable property that fetched good amount for the white masters in the Southern slave markets. Though identified as black, the intelligence of the biracial children was also highly appreciated when compared to monoracial or pure black children thereby reserving the high status and many other privileges for themselves. Civil War altered the entire scenario and with the cry for the abolition of slavery became widely spread, the dominant class defended the institution of slavery and "One-Drop Rule." The three level racial classification that included whites, blacks

and the intermediate class of mulattoes which existed until then gave way to the binary system that consisted of only blacks and whites.

From the US Census from nineteenth-century marked by slavery and segregation till the mid-twentieth-century, it has been proved that the idea of race is mainly a political category and not a biological one. This is evident from the conclusions drawn by the renowned sociologist Nikki Khanna, in her work, *Biracial in America: Forming and Performing Racial Identity* where she says, "Race is a socially constructed category, not a biological reality, and adding a multiracial category to the census only strengthens the concept of race rather than destabilizes it" (8).

Before the 1960s, census officials went door-to-door and finalised a person's race on the basis of his/her looks and descent. Since the 1960s, Americans were given the opportunity to self-identify with their own races — whether American or African descent — in census forms, but, the racial identity failed to include people of mixed ancestry. This further led to the sidelining of the biracial individuals, and thus between 1960 and 1990, Americans were instructed to fill-in one racial category in the census forms. Mixed-race descendants were asked to choose a category they felt that would fit them the best and thus they were simply "boxed in" or confined to one category. The very same approach challenged the entire way in which the data was collected. This obvious ignorance of the authorities and the resultant isolation faced by the biracial people from the white dominant lot began to change only with the 2000 census, which garnered increased media attention since the early 1990s. It was in 2000 that the federal government allowed Americans to check more than one box in the census forms to signify their various racial backgrounds.

Samira Kawash, Professor Emerita of Rutgers University in the preface to her seminal work, *Dislocating the Color Line: Identity, Hybridity, and Singularity in African-American Narrative* (1997) recognises certain borderlines of racial disparities that have ever since established in numerous ways throughout the US history as a part of racial segregation. This boundary that gains access to each and every point of the society and intricacies of the subject is what she calls as the "colour line." As Kawash observes in the chapter, "Condition: Hybridity and the Color Line," the colour line is something that has continuously "assured white privilege in the form of unobstructed access to the resources and pleasures of public space, while providing harsh sanctions against those on the other side of the line who risked reaching for something more" (1). Hence, it can be noted that ambivalence and apprehension circulate around the biracial individuals in the course of identity development, and drive them to act along, get disillusioned or go against conventional choices.

Many theories and models have been proposed in various fields to examine the racial identity construction of the individuals. One such model is proposed by William E. Cross Jr., one of America's leading theorists and researchers on black identity development in particular, and racial ethnic identity development in general. He has aimed at the psychological liberation of the Black Americans under oppressive conditions. He is best known for his Nigrescence model. Cross has referred to "Nigrescence" in his *Shades of Black: Diversity in African-American Identity* as, "an identity change process as a Negro-to-Black conversion experience, the kind of process that could be seen in Black behaviour during the Harlem Renaissance" (189). In 1991, the theory has been revised into the Black American Racial Identity Development Model, which appeared in his *Shades of Black: Diversity in African-American Identity*. This model reflects on Cross' expansion of the earlier works and

findings of the Black psychologists in the field of racial/ethnic identity development. Cross has reconsidered this theory as a one that transforms a pre-existing identity, most probably a non-Afrocentric one to the one that is Afrocentric. Cross' original model consists of five different stages of identity development and they are the "Pre-Encounter," "Encounter," "Immersion/Emersion," "Internalization" and "Internalization-Commitment."

Self-definition of an individual gets tougher with the setting up of various stereotypical patterns and formulae related to identity during various historical periods. Such identity constructions that have been apparent since the times of slavery get focus in the American novelist Frances Ellen Watkins Harper's widely acclaimed fourth novel, *Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted*. Harper sheds light on a wide range of social issues such as slavery, education for women, "passing," miscegenation, abolition, reconstruction, temperance, and social responsibility in this novel through a gripping account. The spurious notions of slavery made popular by the white authors who provided the view of plantation life to the readers through a rose-tinted glass get defied by Harper in this novel.

Harper has modelled her major characters of *Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted* on the steadfast middle class African Americans who toil for the progress of their community and society, and who inspire her writings to the core. The novel tells the story of a beautiful young biracial woman Iola Leroy, whose racial identity is ambiguous. Life of Iola Leroy from childhood through adolescence to womanhood during the times of slavery, Civil War and the Post-bellum period is traced by the novelist. It also follows the lives of black families in slavery during the Civil War and after Emancipation. It coalesces three genres of sentimental romance, slave narrative and plantation fiction that have been gaining popularity among the readers. As Hollis

Robbins in the introduction to *Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted* mentions about Jennifer James and Elizabeth Young's observations, this novel "offers one of the very few accounts in fiction of black women's experience as soldiers during the Civil War. Recasting the conventions, it foregrounds heroic black soldiers in combat" (Harper xxvi). Harper has redefined the roles of black soldiers in this novel from being only fighters to someone who may help educate and shape the next generation of citizens. She has also reworked on the stereotype of tragic mulatto as a thoughtful and deliberate political move to address the issues of her own times, and this has had significant historical repercussions in the growth of the African American novel as well.

Iola's father Eugene Leroy, a wealthy white Mississippi planter and slave-holder, married her mother Marie, a mixed-race woman and a former slave before the American Civil War. His liberal attitude towards race and the counterstance that he takes at the despotic white system when it comes to marrying Marie is perceptible when he criticises the draconian US legal system and people's outlook, '"We Americans boast of freedom, and yet here is a woman whom I love as I never loved any other human being, but both law and public opinion debar me from following the inclination of my heart. She is beautiful, faithful, and pure, and yet all that society will tolerate is what I would scorn to do"' (Harper 52). Eugene Leroy's definition of purity based on the personality of an individual rather than his/her ethnicity makes him unique among the other white slave owners like Alfred Lorraine, Eugene Leroy's cousin. Lorraine's reply to Eugene Leroy's condemning attitude asserts his position as an oppressor and an advocate of the superior white stance, "But has not society the right to guard the purity of its blood by the rigid exclusion of an alien race? . . . . Don't you know that if she is as fair as a lily, beautiful as a houri, and chaste as ice,

that still she is a negro?"' (Harper 52). Thus, Eugene Leroy's act becomes revolutionary in an era when miscegenation has been termed illegal. The fact that the mixing up of people who belong to various racial types through marriage, cohabitation, sexual relations etc. has been viewed as the one which affects the integrity of the white race in particular, intensifies the gravity of the whole situation.

Harper tries to showcase the idea that factors such as community, culture, heritage, society etc. in relation to a biracial individual are matters of social choice rather than something associated with one's physical indicators. Iola Leroy grows up as a privileged white girl in the South without having any knowledge about her black pedigree. No direct description of the physical traits of Iola Leroy is provided by Harper, but, her polite, gentle and gracious nature is revealed through various instances in the novel. Harper's characters never discuss or appreciate each other's physicality such as clothing, height, weight, demeanour, expression etc., as Hollis Robbins manifestly adds Geoffrey Sanborn's observation in his introduction to the novel (24). Other characters seem to get attracted to Iola, from this the readers become aware of her phenotypic feature and appealing nature.

Harper's novel debunks the notion of ideal master-slave relationship by portraying one characterised by innate faithfulness and mutual respect. Though a White mistress "rears" one of the characters Robert Johnson as her favourite slave by teaching him to read and caresses him "as a pet animal" (7), the nearing opportunity for freedom when the Union Army advances the town makes him realise that "[a]ll the ties which bound him to his home were ropes of sand" (28). His words to his mistress when the former meets the latter after the war, "'[y]ou were good, but freedom was better"' (116) undermine the romantic ideal of the master-slave relation. Iola's mother, a former slave validates this negation when she reproaches her White

slave owner husband with the words, '"you do not see the undercurrent of discontent beneath their apparent good humor and jollity"' (62).

But Iola Leroy, being a Southern white girl and the daughter of a white slave-owner, is seen defending slavery during the initial stage. She grows up as a normal privileged white girl in terms of upbringing and education by her parents. At a very young age, she is sent to the North for her education and also to be kept away from the race problems, and in her father's words, '"Riches take wings to themselves and fly away, but a good education is an investment on which the law can place no attachment"' (Harper 64). The strong relationship that exists between race and income is obvious in Iola's case. Her identification with the white lineage is mainly due to her family's higher socio-economic status, which is actually impossible for those individuals who identify themselves with the monoracial minority categories.

As a school-girl, Iola Leroy has harboured notions that slavery can never be wrong, and that her mammy and her own mother are the same in loving her and her siblings. She even opposes anti-slavery campaigns, and to her, abolitionists foster prejudice against the slave owners and they simply aim at abducting the latter's property. The *whitening* effect of money on the racial identification process of a biracial individual despite his/her parents' educational background, region and the racial set up in the neighbourhood is notable. Iola Leroy's choice of white identity at this point is a result of this effect where she gets opportunities to be a part of peer circle with higher status. Her choice thus parallels others' perception of her as a white person as well as her ability to fit in to the white community. The crossing over the colour line in Iola's case is enabled by her affluent background. This proves that the high-income status enables a smooth "boundary-passing" for the biracial individuals through the black-white divide. It also provides them with the opportunity to move up

the socio-economic ladder from singular minority status to making a choice of singularly white identity.

The fact that Iola Leroy tries to uphold her father's attitude towards slavery in a manner, makes her prefer the choice of white identity initially. She enters into the first stage of Cross' model, "Pre-Encounter" during the time of her studies in the North. She defends the act of slavery in the South every time a discussion kick-starts among her peers. Iola Leroy is aware of the fact that her mother hates slavery, and that she also behaves in an unbiased manner to all her servants. In one of the discussions with her friends on slavery, abolition of the same and its after effects on the slaves, the attitudes of Iola's father, mother and her attitude itself are revealed as she says,

> I know mamma don't like slavery very much. I have often heard her say that she hoped the time would come when there would not be a slave in the land. My father does not think as she does. He thinks slavery is not wrong if you treat them well and don't sell them from their families. I intend, after I have graduated, to persuade pa to buy a house in New Orleans, and spend the winter there. You know this will be my first season out, and I hope that you will come and spend the winter with me. We will have such gay times, and you will so fall in love with our sunny South that you will never want to come back to shiver amid the snows and cold of the North. I think one winter in the South would cure you of your Abolitionism. (Harper 76).

Iola Leroy is noticeably in the "Pre-Encounter" stage, for, she looks at slavery and slaves as the 'other.' She fails to realise the mixed lineage of her mother, and that the rule of "Hypodescent" may make her the "other." This is because of the very fact that

the reality of black descent has not been revealed until then, not only to the world but also to herself.

Harry Leroy, Iola's younger brother is also in a similar "Pre-Encounter" stage, for, he too receives privileged education at a Boy's Academy in Maine. Eugene Leroy has confided with Mr. Bascom, the Principal of the Academy and abolitionist, the truth regarding Harry Leroy's identity. Ignorance of the reality of his black ancestry to a degree, grants him the right to enjoy a peaceful and secured life with good education, opportunities etc. According to Harper, Eugene Leroy has always taken much care not to reveal to his children their inherent connection with the African American race. Marie at the same time finds the secrecy of this mixed ancestry extremely disturbing, and she even suspects that her husband regrets entering into matrimony with her. But Eugene Leroy while discussing the issue, once tells Marie:

> . . . it is not that I regret our marriage, or feel the least disdain for our children on account of the blood in their veins; but I do not wish them to grow up under the contracting influence of this race prejudice. I do not wish them to feel that they have been born under a proscription from which no valor can redeem them, nor that any social advancement or individual development can wipe off the ban which clings to them. No, Marie, let them go North, learn all they can, aspire all they may. The painful knowledge will come all too soon. Do not forestall it. I want them simply to grow up as other children; not being patronized by friends nor disdained by foes. (64-65)

While Eugene Leroy is of the opinion that the strongest men and women of colour may face many hostile situations in their lives and also develop the courage to survive adversities, he has protected his children from the same. Eugene Leroy tries his best to insulate his children from the brutal world of racial prejudice.

Black women have always been accused of the lack of sexual ethics by the superior White lot, thereby guaranteeing absolute freedom for the Whites to execute and uphold their racial prejudice and immoral behaviour. Any kind of prominence attributed to their bodies and phenotype automatically align them as sexual objects. Sex has been widely regarded and used a tool of social oppression against Black women and Black multiracial women who existed farther from the proximity of whiteness and the seduction by the power of whiteness. Patricia Hill Collins in her *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* classifies a different set of controlling images encountered by the African American Women, "The fourth controlling image – the Jezebel, whore, or sexually aggressive woman – is central in the nexus of elite white male images of Black womanhood because efforts to control Black women's sexuality lie at the heart of Black women's oppression" (77). The image of Jezebel is integral to the interlocking system of African American race, gender and sexual oppression.

Iola Leroy, a biracial, is also misjudged by the same controlling images. She comes across a range of happenings which result in the further change of her identity and ideology. She is misinformed about her father's health by Louis Bastine, an attorney who had been appointed to look into the interests of Alfred Lorraine. He comes to the New England village where Mr. Galen's Academy is located. Iola Leroy is taken out of the Academy tactfully to the South, and within no time she becomes a victim of the white racial principles in the form of sexual advances from Bastine. This is because, her status changes to that of a Black woman as per "One-Drop Rule" which is unknown to her, and she is looked upon as a commodity and the exotic 'other', an object for sexual consumption by the Whites. The effect of gender on racial identity is effectively proven in Iola Leroy's case. Harper describes:

> In her dreams she was at home, encircled in the warm clasp of her father's arms, feeling her mother's kisses lingering on her lips, and hearing the joyous greetings of the servants and Mammy Liza's glad welcome as she folded her to her heart. From this dream of bliss she was awakened by a burning kiss pressed on her lips, and a strong arm encircling her. Gazing around and taking in the whole situation, she sprang from her seat, her eyes flashing with rage and scorn, her face flushed to the roots of her hair, her voice shaken with excitement, and every nerve trembling with angry emotion. (79)

Louis Bastine, the attorney appointed by Alfred Lorraine, Iola's father's white cousin reinforces the interlocking system of the Black women's oppression. He advocates the white superior stance in the most emphatic manner by taking advantage of her black identity and the controlling image of Jezebel associated with it. She feels disgusted at her treatment as a sexual object by someone who is appointed as the guardian by her father and wishes for the end of guardianship then and there. On the other hand, she deeply wishes for the presence of her father who is the envoy of white power according to her, in order to deal with the whole situation which is not possible as he has passed away. Slowly and unknowingly, she gets into the "Encounter" stage — the second stage in Cross's model.

Life of the biracial children has not been easy since the slavery times in the US society. In spite of the white or the black phenotype the children receive genetically, it becomes hard for them to gain an acceptance in either white or black communities. Those individuals with a white parent and a parent of colour have been automatically designated to the socially and legally identified inferior racial category by the system of "Hypodescent." With the compulsive isolation of the subjective self, a clear demarcation between the marginalized racial category and the dominant group

who act as the representative of the societal norm becomes obvious. This polarisation becomes a tool to curb the intermixing of races in order to maintain the white dominance and racial purity in the society. Dr. Rainier Spencer, former Assistant Professor at the Department of Anthropology and Ethnic Studies, University of Nevada, Las Vegas in his, "Assessing Multiracial Identity Theory and Politics: The Challenge of Hypodescent" observes that "Hypodescent" functions on the principle of white existence as a "pure essence whose purity cannot withstand mixture with blackness," thereby reinforcing the myth of the purity and impurity associated with White and Black racial categories (362). Therefore, manifestation of uncompromising identity politics through the dualistic split among individuals ensures isolation and privileges exclusively reserved for the influential groups. Consequently, it contributes to the hushing up and obliteration of the existence as well as the stance of the side-lined categories.

In the second stage, "Encounter," a change occurs to the worldview that an individual develops in the "Pre-encounter" stage. People in this stage will have to work around, slip through or shatter the relevance of their belief system and worldview. Simultaneously, Cross opines, "others must provide some hint of direction in which to point the person to be resocialized or transformed" (qtd. in Ritchey 102). Following their father's death and mother's illness, the Leroy siblings encounter and personalize their racial identities.

During the times of slavery in the US, African American and mixed-race women could not legally inherit their white husband's property as per the rule of "Hypodescent." "Anti-miscegenation" rule that nullifies the marriage between Blacks and Whites and "One-Drop Rule," which is "the ruling that 'one drop' of black blood disallows a person from being legally defined as white" (Matterson 160). This legal

principle of “One-Drop Rule” is a racist one because, it crops up from the belief regarding the hierarchical positioning of the races with ‘Whites’ enjoying the top-most position in the order and ‘Blacks,’ the lowest one. The top position makes the white race liable to all kind of weakening or ignominy through miscegenation. Hence, the canon also seeks to reserve a set of privileges and benefits exclusively for Whites thereby upholding the essentialist notion that race is a biological fact rather than a social construction. In a world with such a notion, little encouragement and support is provided to people to make an identity choice that exists outside the prescribed categories. This many a time makes them misfits in the society’s view point, as they fail to get classified into any of the racial or cultural categories.

Marie and her children lose their right to inherit Eugene Leroy’s property when Alfred Lorraine, the cousin of Eugene Leroy plots the whole incident by making use of the legalities in his favour, specially the miscegenation tenets, following Eugene Leroy’s death. Immediately after the tragedy, a flaw is identified by Lorraine in Marie’s manumission issued from Eugene Leroy’s part, and the reporting of the same ends up in the illegality of the marriage. Right to inherit Eugene’s property legally, is also lost by Marie and her children thereby reducing them to slavery. Her mother’s words sum up their predicament following the sudden demise of her father, “I was your father’s slave before I married him. His relatives have set aside his will. The courts have declared our marriage null and void and my manumission illegal, and we are all to be remanded to slavery” (Harper 81).

Iola Leroy and family are left with no choice but to accept black identity. As per the rule of “Hypodescent,” the whole family is classified as socially ‘below Whites.’ Iola reaches the “Encounter” stage which becomes apparent when she faces the ground reality and responds, ‘“I used to say that slavery is right. I didn’t know

what I was talking about"' (Harper 100). Following her hypodescent, Iola Leroy is sold as a slave in the Deep South. Under slavery, she bravely dodges the intentions of her various owners to use her sexually. She maintains her dignity and stability of the newly attained identity throughout. Her resistance as a slave, whose black identity is at stake at the hands of her lecherous white slave master Tom is revealed by Harper through the words of one of the characters and Iola's saviour, Tom Anderson:

> I tell you, Bob, de debil will neber git his own till he gits him. When I seed how he war treating her I neber rested till I got her away. He buyed her, he said, for his housekeeper; as many gals as dere war on de plantation, why didn't he git one ob dem to keep house, an' not dat nice lookin' young lady? Her han's look ez ef she neber did a day's work in her life. One day when he com'd down to breakfas', he chucked her under de chin, an' tried to put his arm roun' her waist. But she jis' frew it off like a chunk ob fire. She looked like a snake had bit her. Her eyes fairly spit fire. (33)

Harry Leroy on the other hand, does not have to face the adverse effects of "Hypodescent" through a direct encounter like Iola. Instead, he goes through an indirect encounter with the reality of his lineage. He receives a letter revealing the truth from his sister Iola Leroy weeks after the terrible incident that has happened with the Leroy family. His reaction, on realizing the truth is notable, for, it becomes the first step of his indirect encounter:

> The doctor came at once and was greatly puzzled. Less than an hour before, he had seen him with a crowd of merry, laughter-loving boys, apparently as light-hearted and joyous as any of them; now he lay with features drawn and pinched, his face deadly pale, as if some terrible suffering had sent all the

> blood in his veins to stagnate around his heart. Harry Leroy opened his eyes, shuddered, and relapsed into silence" (Harper 92-93).

His position as a privileged, joyous white man gets subverted to that of a mere slave within no time. The psychological impact of the encounter on him is so immense that he remains silent for a quite long time with no reference to the horrendous catastrophe that befalls him. In Harper's words, "It seemed as if the past were suddenly blotted out of his memory" (94). His recuperation stage lands him in utter confusion whether the incident is a mere dream or reality which he painfully expresses to his doctor. Harry's expression of shock and astonishment at the society's stance to his principal once the former recovers fully, is actually a strong reproach from Harper's side itself. He says, '"I hardly think barbarians would have done any worse; yet this is called a Christian country"' (Harper 95).

"Personalize," the second step in this stage is the result of the action that one takes due to the personal impact of the event on his/her worldview. The event encountered acts as a catalyst to speed up the change in the thought process of an individual. At this stage, he/she slowly begins to move towards the choice of black identity. Reduction to slavery denies Iola Leroy a choice of identity, and acceptance of the assigned identity makes her realise the white lot's real intention of repression. Monoraciality thus becomes a tool of white supremacy. Sexual advances and the denigration of her status by forcefully thrusting the black identity upon her by the authoritarian lot gives her a reality check regarding her impression about the white people. It also alters her idea about the practice of slavery and slave owners which she had had in general in the "Pre-Encounter" stage of her identity development.

The encounters take her closer to the fact that not all white people and slave owners nurture similar attitude as that of her father towards slaves, and that slavery in

itself is an awful practice, which is contrary to her earlier belief. Iola Leroy's reply as a white individual in the "Pre-Encounter" stage, to her friend's question of whether the former will be content being a slave just as the slaves at her plantation if all the niceties are provided, holds a great significance at this point when she is at present a slave and a Black woman, '"Oh, the cases are not parallel. Our slaves do not want their freedom. They would not take it if we gave it to them"' (Harper 75). Later, on escaping from the clutches of slavery with the help of the Union Army, she is recruited as a nurse in many black regiments of Civil War. The caring and loving attitude of Iola Leroy towards the black soldiers at the field hospital is portrayed through Anderson's words:

> I jis' think dat she's splendid. Las' week I had to take some of our pore boys to de hospital, an' she war dere, lookin' sweet an' putty ez an angel, a nussin' dem pore boys, an' ez good to one ez de oder. It looks to me ez ef dey ralely lob'd her shadder. She sits by 'em so patient, an' writes 'em sech nice letters to der frens, an' yit she looks so heart-broke an' pitiful, it jis' gits to me, an' makes me mos' ready to cry. (Harper 32-33)

Iola Leroy's black-sentient mixed-race identity (Dagbovie-Mullins 82) is her realisation of the oppressive nature of the despotic group through her personal setbacks. This is the reality which she had failed to recognise as a white individual. She slowly comprehends and approves of the bitter truth of her identity, that she will never be acknowledged as a white person in spite of having a white lineage to her credit according to the societal standards. Thus, she strikes a chord with the black people whom she recognises to be the real oppressed category in the society. The identity of Iola Leroy thus gets shaped by the racial and the class subjugation encountered by her at this stage from the external sources, representative of the

hegemonic or dominant "stance" position in the US society just as the sociologist Gloria Anzaldúa observes in the case of black mixed-race women.

The difference in experiences of Iola Leroy and Harry Leroy, when compared to other slave children, in terms of acceptance, love, care and good upbringing from their father and mother gives a strong push to their self-discovery. In many other cases, the biracial children are either treated as slaves in their own fathers' plantations or sold in markets due to any of the conflicts in the plantation. Isolation and a sense of loss, drive Iola Leroy to go in search of her speckled family members once she is freed by the Union Army during the war. She vows to find them at any cost. Her search is strengthened by the knowledge that her parents' liaison has not been illicit. Iola's search for identity is in a manner, a journey to retain the connections to her community. This begins towards the close of the Civil War. The fact that she has never received any second-class treatment unlike several other biracial individuals, and also that she has received the luxury of good boarding education outside the plantation, instils in her a strong desire to get back to them as soon as possible, fighting all the odds. Embracing her African heritage, she works to improve the social and economic condition of Blacks in the United States and this becomes the resultant action to the encounter that she has in this second stage.

"Personalize," the second step in this stage is crucial as far as Harry Leroy is concerned for an identity choice has to be made as resultant action to the one that has happened in the step of "Encounter." Harry Leroy is stopped by Mr. Bascom from heading towards South to trace his family to prevent him from getting into the hands of Lorraine. He too does not become ready to get victimised again at the hands of white dominance in the form of Lorraine. He is also advised by Bascom to enlist himself in one of the regiments, white or coloured, in the ongoing Civil War. Reality

of the situation hits Harry Leroy hard as never before, when two choices of regiments pop in front of him which indirectly are the two choices of identity offered to him. He weighs both the choices at this stage, for he has to make a call to move further in life. Harper describes his confusion over both the categories, and the acceptance of one that is being forced upon him by an encounter that he has at this stage,

> It was as if two paths had suddenly opened before him, and he was forced to choose between them. On one side were strength, courage, enterprise, power of achievement, and memories of a wonderful past. On the other side were weakness, ignorance, poverty, and the proud world's social scorn. He knew nothing of colored people except as slaves, and his whole soul shrank from equalizing himself with them. (96)

Harry Leroy's white phenotype is something that could have easily gained him an access to the white regiment and further promotions too would have been assured if he decides to "pass off" as white.

"Passing" has been considered important for biracial people to belong to a racially superior class as it earns a person advantages such as better access to education, career opportunities and innumerable material benefits. It refers to an "act by which members of a minority may surreptitiously enter and be accepted into a dominant majority group" (Matterson 164). This is generally considered as a way out for many biracial groups to survive in the society and earn an identity for themselves. Though it represents a sort of acceptance within the authoritarian society, it also tends to polarise the individual from the oppressed group. Harry Leroy's choice of the oppressed identity over the highhanded one strengthens his allegiance with his familial identity. In his own words, Harry remarks, "To find my mother and sister I call no task too heavy, no sacrifice too great" (Harper 96). Miville et al. in their article

titled, “Chameleon Changes: An Exploration of Racial Identity Themes of Multiracial People,” observe that the single most instrumental factor in the identity development of multiracial individuals is the physical and emotional availability as well as the unavailability of parents and therefore the individuals either go for a choice of racial identity of the parent whom they feel they are emotionally attached to or they have identified to hold the dominant position in the household (512).

“Immersion-Emersion,” the third stage of Black Identity development adds a psychological attribute to the model. This is the stage in which the individuals reframe the ideologies regarding the oppressor-oppressed communities. According to Cross, “Immersion is a strong powerful dominating sensation that is constantly energized by rage [at White people and culture], guilt [at having once been tricked into thinking Black ideas], and developing a sense of pride [in one’s Black self, Black people, and Black culture]” (203). The rage against the white people and culture acts as a stimulus for the biracial individual to seek out his/her oppressed culture’s history, art, music etc. Biracial people thus tend to discard all negative stereotypes associated with being Black. Their choice of Black identity becomes more obvious during this stage.

Iola Leroy reaches the third stage of “Immersion-Emersion” which is a continuation to the second stage. Assertion of black identity for Iola Leroy begins during the Civil War years. Her angelic demeanour, caring attitude and professional devotion as a nurse make her a favourite and a soothing presence among the wounded soldiers. Dr. Gresham, the one-armed white physician gets greatly impressed with Iola Leroy thereby turning him into an admirer of her various qualities. Iola Leroy reaches the peak of Cross’ third stage when she rejects the marriage proposal of Dr. Gresham twice. All the ideologies and views associated with the whiteness in her past are totally discarded by Iola Leroy with this decision.

Right from the beginning, Iola's overt concern for Black soldiers mystifies Dr. Gresham. As a prototype of the white identity, he expresses his confusion regarding Iola Leroy's going against the basic dictum of the US society. Iola Leroy's phenotype – fair skin and blue eyes – makes her the ideal white racial prototype. Yet, her actions do not validate the white racial identity status. Her invalidation of the domineering group is evident from her heart-breaking reaction on the death of Thomas Anderson, a coloured soldier. As she affiliates her identity with the Blacks, Dr. Gresham's stance that aligns himself with the totalitarian ideology is clear when he says,

> I can eat with colored people, walk, talk, and fight with them, but kissing them is something I don't hanker after. . . . that puzzles me. She is one of the most refined and ladylike women I ever saw. I hear she is a refugee, but she does not look like the other refugees who have come to our camp. Her accent is slightly Southern, but her manner is Northern. She is self-respecting without being supercilious; quiet, without being dull. . . . I cannot understand how a Southern lady, whose education and manners stamp her as a woman of fine culture and good breeding, could consent to occupy the position she so faithfully holds. It is a mystery I cannot solve. (Harper 44-45)

Colonel Robinson solves the mystery for Dr. Gresham by revealing the secret of Iola's biracial ancestry and her past as a slave. Dr. Gresham who is strongly driven by white principles unconsciously, begins to perceive Iola Leroy as a part of the oppressed community. He attempts to refrain from the thoughts of her as he begins to disassociate himself from getting intimate with a member of the oppressed community.

Despite his attempts to keep away from Iola Leroy, his interest in her and high regard for her nursing service deepen with each passing day. But he wishes to adorn the cloak of a saviour in her life than that of a lover. This indirectly builds up a dichotomy of superiority and inferiority between the former and the latter. The illegality of miscegenation that defines the racial disparities between people plays an important role in Iola Leroy's choice at this stage. With her parents' case to validate the same, she at once rejects Dr. Gresham's proposal thereby clarifying her stance. Though she too admires and wishes for a person like Dr. Gresham in life who can offer her the best in life, she is assured that he and his family, particularly his mother will automatically reject her once her racial lineage is revealed. As the narration goes, "His father was a devoted Abolitionist. His mother was kind hearted, but somewhat exclusive and aristocratic. She would have looked upon his marriage with Iola Leroy as a mistake and feared that such an alliance would hurt the prospects of her daughters" (Harper 85). Her allegiance with the black community gets strengthened with her decision of not crossing the colour-line at present. She decides not to make use of her light-skin to "pass off" as white so as to accept Dr. Gresham's proposal, though she has attempted "passing" earlier without her knowledge.

Iola Leroy's decision reflects upon her genuine understanding of the plight of the submissive Black community that suffers at the hands of oppressive forces. Her encounters with the instances of monoracial racism from the members of the social world, mainly her white slave owners regarding one part of her racial identity instil in her the feelings of pain, hurt and anger. These experiences that remain fresh in her mind lead her to develop a heightened sense of socio-political consciousness. Therefore, the rejection of Dr. Gresham who fulfils the standards of a perfect white prototype, as a life-partner, by Iola Leroy becomes the denunciation of the rejected

person's race itself. This act cements Iola Leroy's assimilation into the Black community. She defends her identity before Dr. Gresham as a woman and an emancipated black individual through some bold comments regarding her gendered and racial subjugation:

> I was never tempted. I was sold from State to State as an article of merchandise. I had outrages heaped on me which might well crimson the cheek of honest womanhood with shame, but I never fell into the clutches of an owner for whom I did not feel the utmost loathing and intensest horror. I have heard men talk glibly of the degradation of the negro, but there is a vast difference between abasement of condition and degradation of character. I was abased, but the men who trampled on me were the degraded ones. (Harper 88)

Unlike those multiracial individuals who are silenced, following the compelled choice of monoracial identity that leads to the erasure of the other side of their ethnic lineage and internalisation of pain, Iola Leroy voices her racialised experiences thereby undermining the white supremacist ideology. The declaration of her choice of identity as a black woman and the prospect of a potent affiliation to the Black community can be identified from her words:

> Doctor, I did not choose my lot in life, but I have no other alternative than to accept it. The intense horror and agony I felt when I was first told the story are over. Thoughts and purposes have come to me in the shadow I should never have learned in the sunshine. I am constantly rousing myself up to suffer and be strong. I intend, when this conflict is over, to cast my lot with the freed people as a helper, teacher, and friend. I have passed through a fiery ordeal, but this ministry of suffering will not be in vain. (Harper 87-88)

Iola Leroy's pain and the internalized oppression when her identity as a white woman as well her multiracial existence gets invalidated in the encounter stage, and the realisation that 'black is right' which Iola Leroy attains through a number of harsh encounters that catalyses her wilful choice of a monoracial Black identity is evident in her words.

Therefore, Dr. Gresham's offer of support, care and tenderness through a second-time proposal that could have taken Iola Leroy to the "Pre-Encounter" stage of identity is easily denied by her. While replying to his proposal for the second time, Iola Leroy reminds him that, he would start to look at her as someone belonging to an inferior race once his friendship that blossomed out of concern and kindness recedes. When Dr. Gresham speaks about the proud, domineering, aggressive, successful and ever-victorious Anglo-Saxon lot, her earnest reply to him on the same reveals her commitment towards her black self and people: "I believe the time will come when the civilization of the Negro will assume a better phase than you Anglo-Saxons possess. You will prove unworthy of your high vantage ground if you only use your superior ability to victimize feebler races and minister to a selfish greed of gold and a love of domination" (Harper 89). Iola thus becomes a spokesperson for her community, and envisages a much superior position to the Blacks than to the Whites if the former is given a chance to dominate the latter.

Iola Leroy affirms her individuality in the third stage of Cross' model, "Immersion-Emersion," when she takes on a counterstance at the notions put forth by the superior white race and their ability to degrade the minority racial categories on the basis of various standards. Her certainty to continue using the counterstance of Black identity, by accepting her heritage and culture places her at the peak of Cross' third stage. This happens when she throws light on how Dr. Gresham's stance could

get disrupted from having fathered coloured children. The life of her own parents stands a testimony to this, as her father could not take a counterstance towards the dictums of the society. Her mother, on the death of the father becomes a victim and Iola who inherently realises what the future could hold for a biracial like her, refuses to follow her mother's footsteps. She thereby reminds Dr. Gresham that if he attempts to take a counterstance, they would be faced with limited choices. The fact that lighter-skinned women and their appearances are generally preferred, celebrated and stereotyped as exotic, when compared to darker skinned and monoracial black women, gets proven with Dr. Gresham's proposal. The obsession with the Eurocentric notions of beauty is apparent when he assures her about the certainty of his proposal towards Iola Leroy despite her coloured heritage, for, her eyes are as blue and skin is as white as his. Iola Leroy's reply to this justification of the doctor clearly subverts the Eurocentric standards of beauty thereby validating her counterstance:

> Doctor, were I your wife, are there not people who would caress me as a white woman who would shrink from me in scorn if they knew I had one drop of negro blood in my veins? When mistaken for a white woman, I should hear things alleged against the race at which my blood would boil. No, Doctor, I am not willing to live under a shadow of concealment which I thoroughly hate as if the blood in my veins were an undetected crime of my soul. (Harper 177)

Now that she has moved on from the "Immersion-Emersion" phase where she reacts and develops a counterstance for her survival through her choice of prioritizing happiness of her mother more than the privileges that she could have enjoyed by marrying Dr. Gresham. Even as the focus of the biracial individual Iola Leroy is towards her family, the concept of Black racial identity comes to the forefront with

mother's identity as a slave puts Marie, her mother, as following the dominant stance by being a victim.

Harry Leroy who is in the counterstance phase enters into the third stage "Immersion-Emersion" following his recovery from muteness after he learns of the truth regarding his racial lineage. His choice of identity and his priorities in life are made visible with the narration,

> His father was dead. His mother and sister were enslaved by a mockery of justice. It was more than a matter of choice where he should stand on the racial question. He felt that he must stand where he could strike the most effective blow for their freedom. With that thought strong in his mind, and as soon as he recovered, he went westward to find a colored regiment. He told the recruiting officer that he wished to be assigned to a colored regiment. (Harper 97)

His decision to join the coloured regiment is a counterstance that speaks out against the stance, which astonishes even the white commander of the regiment who has seen immense number of biracial and mixed-race people eagerly shedding their coloured side to "pass off" as white. Harry Leroy is described by Harper from the eyes of the Commander as a person in his early manhood crashing all the dreams and opportunities of promotion to be a successful General by identifying with the Negro race that is treated as despicable.

Harry Leroy's courage and swiftness make him the favourite among his superiors thereby earning him the position of Drill Sergeant. His kind and respectful attitude towards the coloured people in the regiment just as he used to behave in his childhood as per the advice of his mother earns him respect. The total rejection of an advantageous and respectful white life in the society by Harry Leroy places him at the peak of Cross' third stage. More than the declaration of the choice, it is the

assimilation into the newly acquired identity that is notable at this stage. This is in reality the same as in Iola Leroy's case, for, the realisation of the oppression endured by the Blacks at the hands of the Whites which finally makes him align with the Black community. On making the choice of monoracial identity, both the siblings intend to connect with others, to develop a sense of community and society, a social support system and a Reference Group Orientation.

Iola Leroy, during the Post-bellum period tries to break away from playing the victim, thereby securing the future of her Black community using education as a tool. This is the counterstance that she adopts when the hospitals get closed and schools were getting opened everywhere. Education suddenly seems to gain much prominence as the basic means to strengthen the inferior race. It is an undeniable fact according to Iola Leroy that one of the greater powers of knowledge, is the power of stronger white race to oppress the weaker racial categories. Education has been considered as the greatest investment that has ever been made by Eugene Leroy for his wife and children as well. In doing so, he has felt that he has enabled them to survive in a world that will judge their black identities with every passing second.

"Internalization," as in the original model proposed by Cross, is the fourth level in which an individual goes through a number of challenges and problems related to the newly found self — the Black pride. People tend to define themselves and move towards a newly found direction which offers them stability and security. In his *Shades of Black,* Cross testifies that the "internalization marks the point of dissonance resolution and reconstruction of one's steady state personality and cognitive style" (220). People develop a self-love and totally embrace the very fact of being black. The newly received identity is viewed from a critical angle by the biracial individuals as to the ways in which the same has shaped their lives. Cross also

opines that “Black identity functions to fulfil the self-protection, social anchorage, and bridging needs of the individual” (220).

Iola Leroy enters into the fourth stage “Internalization” of Cross’ model in the Post-bellum years. Opportunities to teach coloured folks have been offered to only superior and excellent women from the North. As per such an offer to teach the freed folks, Iola Leroy takes up a teaching position without any second thought which again confirms her choice of black self. She mentions confidently, ‘“I used to be a great favorite among the colored children on my father’s plantation”’ (Harper 111). Though the freed men approach her in a friendly manner, their former owners look at her with suspicion. The strength and power of education which is meant to uplift the shadows from the lives of former slaves is obvious from Iola’s approach:

> But here was a new army that had come with an invasion of ideas, that had come to supplant ignorance with knowledge, and it was natural that its members should be unwelcome to those who had made it a crime to teach their slaves to read the name of the ever blessed Christ. But Iola Leroy had found her work, and the freedmen their friend. When Iola Leroy opened her school she took pains to get acquainted with the parents of the children, and she gained their confidence and co-operation. Her face was a passport to their hearts. Ignorant of books, human faces were the scrolls from which they had been reading for ages. They had been the sunshine and shadow of their lives. (Harper 111)

Without any prejudice, she harmonises with her black identity by dealing with the coloured students, who come from distant places, and parents alike earning their respect and love. She establishes the benchmark in the management of those below her in education and class. Not just knowledge, but the foundation of good character

too is passed on to the students by Iola Leroy. This effort of hers is destroyed in no time as her school is set afire by some evil elements in the society. She gets shattered by the whole incident that once again reiterates the society's stance. But the undying strength of mind that her students exhibit while dealing with the whole incident makes her emotional and optimistic, thereby, hardening the belief that no evil can destroy their hope for the future. This asserts the counterstance of not just the protagonist but the whole race itself. It also validates that the monoracial identification as a person of colour by multiracial individuals signifies the emotions of dignity, self-esteem and closeness. As Miville et al. in "Chameleon Changes: An Exploration of Racial Identity Themes of Multiracial People" record one of the participants' response during their study, "racial and cultural identity development based on race and ethnicity was not a passive intellectual activity but was, instead, a process of emotional and cognitive engagement that emerged from meaningful relationships with significant others" (511).

Various people at several stages of her complicated life back Iola Leroy up to accept and ascertain her black self. They include, a sincere former Leroy family slave, Tom Anderson, who has rescued Iola Leroy from a lecherous master, her brother Harry Leroy who joins her in refusing to "pass off" as white and Robert Johnson, whom she meets as a wounded soldier in the hospital. Robert Johnson turns out to be her newfound Uncle, who loses his sister Marie at a very young age. He later introduces Iola Leroy to her dark-skinned maternal grandmother Harriet, whom she proudly accepts as her kin. This provides her with immense strength to trace back her lost family. In spite of her sophisticated upbringing and refined demeanour owing to good education, she does not become fastidious while frantically searching for her relatives in the camps, hospitals and plantation cabins of the South. As Hollin

Robbins, in the "Introduction" to the novel, mentions about Young's observation, "Iola's demeanor accords with that of middle-class white womanhood far more than with a rebellious or intransigent black community" (Harper 24).

The "Internalization" stage shows Iola Leroy more strengthened after spending years in the South with her family, which she finally traces. Her journey from individual to community is the one that helps in establishing her spirit and commitment to bring about a change. She moves on with a strong resolve to help people's progress, but the journey she believes in, is the one that will specially focus on the improvement of women's lives. Her empowerment is evident from the confidence that she exudes, when she decides to adorn the role of a leader to get every woman out of their inefficiency and weakness. With utmost confidence, she decides to join the lot of bread-winners by applying for the job of saleswoman.

Racial lineage becomes one of the major factors in deciding upon the economic stability of an individual in the US society. Coloured people are not provided with good job opportunities, for, the economic structure handled by the Whites does not allow it. Poverty and financial instability characterise the lives of the purported mediocre race as the Blacks are denied the access to good ways of living. Though Iola Leroy receives the job of the saleswoman easily because of her white features, she loses it in no time, for, the truth of African American blood in her veins gets revealed. Though Iola Leroy is unknown to her neighbours, she addresses an unmistakably dark lady in her house, "grandma" which confirms her black identity and dismissal from the job. Her phenotype allows her to act as per the white manners in public, and anything that deviates from the same is not affordable for her.

Another humiliating incident that proclaims the existence of white stance happens with Iola Leroy when she joins a shop as a saleswoman after informing the

owner about her roots. Though the details of her identity don't make any particular change in the attitude of the owner, they definitely affect Iola's colleagues when they finally find out that she is coloured. They understand that she attends black church and that she loves to be with her own coloured lot. David A. Snow and Leon Anderson in their article titled, "Identity Work among the Homeless: The Verbal Construction and Avowal of Personal Identities" published in the *American Journal of Sociology* discuss the various strategies of employed by the biracial individuals for identity construction. They mention, "We conceptualize identity construction and proclamation as variants of the generic process we call *identity work*, by which we refer to the range of activities individuals engage in to create, present, and sustain personal identities that are congruent with and supportive of the self-concept" (1348). The identity work entails various corresponding strategic activities such as (a) procurement or arrangement of physical settings and props (b) cosmetic face work or the arrangement of personal appearance (c) selective association with other individuals and groups and (d) verbal construction the assertion of personal identities.

Iola Leroy makes use of "selective association with other individuals or groups" for her self-actualization. As per this strategy, individuals tend to selectively associate themselves with a specific racial group through friends, social groups, romantic partners etc., organizations and institutions such as clubs, colleges, churches etc. in order to highlight their preferred identities to others. This technique has been mainly adopted by those who pass as black or those who wish to accentuate their black identities. But the reaction to Iola Leroy's revelation of black identity is awful. While in the first case, she gets treated insolently and creates an uncomfortable working ambience for her and in the second case, her fellow workers protest against her working as an employee in the firm. In both cases, the segregation ideals are

effectively instilled to maintain the racial transparency of Whites. Though Iola Leroy is advised by her uncle not to reveal her identity anymore as she plans to go in search for a job in New England, she firmly declares: '"Uncle Robert, I see no necessity for proclaiming that fact on the house-top. Yet I am resolved that nothing shall tempt me to deny it. The best blood in my veins is African blood, and I am not ashamed of it"' (Harper 158). She defines herself in the most persistent manner by overcoming all the hardships encountered by her newly found self.

In another instance, she is denied the stay at a Christian Boarding House for Working Women by the board of managers when she honestly informs the matron about her black ancestry. The matron acts friendly in the beginning and finds Iola Leroy as a much pleasant addition to the home. On listening to the truth, her facial expression changes suddenly, she quickly withdraws her hand put around Iola, and heads towards the board office to inform the matter. This discrimination from the part of a religious group of women is a shocking revelation for Iola which underscores the white stance exhibited by the religious institution as well. It states the existence of colour-line and the fact that how the revelation of an individual's racial identity automatically leads to the subversion of the perception about and judgement of a person by others.

Harry Leroy enters the fourth stage of "Internalization" in the Post-bellum period when he reunites with his long-lost mother but not sister, thereby fulfilling his aim with which he had joined the regiment. Honourably discharged, he becomes totally devoted to his mother and does everything possible to make her happy. Aiming to work for his people during the rest of his life, he joins the team of Northern teachers on identifying the need of education for the coloured thereby affirming his black self. Here too, as in Iola's case, his education guarantees him the much-needed

determination to recover immediately and gain an identity for himself in a society reigned by stereotypes.

Harry Leroy continues to attend various Black Methodist Conferences at various places with an aim to find his lost sister who he believes to be alive and would have passed for white for better fortunes. To take his commitment towards his race further, he becomes a leader of the rising young men of the State. His introduction of Miss Delany, who is a successful coloured lady with vision and feeling and works for the progress of coloured woman is notable in his validation of black self. Iola Leroy too is pleased with Harry Leroy's choice, for, she immediately strikes a chord with Miss Delany in terms of tastes, views in life and duties in the first meeting itself. His aim of tracing out his family and taking revenge against the white people while joining the coloured regiment has turned into a total commitment to work for the emancipated community. This shows the way in which he has matured in definition of his personality and racial identity with utmost commitment.

The fifth and the final stage "Internalization-Commitment" is combined with the Internalization stage in the revised model of Cross. The communal affairs of the African Americans over a period of time are brought into focus at this level. A positive and healthy self-definition of the black identity happens, resulting in th ultimate transformation. The poor self-worth related to the black identity is given up totally by an individual leading to a positive self-definition. Iola Leroy's marriage with Dr. Frank Latimer, a man of mixed ancestry who identifies with the black community, is an important decision that defines Leroy's black identity at this stage. Latimer, who is a respected physician in his professional circle, has the gift of his aristocratic inheritance in the form of white phenotype. Being the grandson of a Southern lady, he could have easily got acceptance and the position of natural heir

from his grandmother if he had given up his coloured lineage. His decision on his identity choice is noteworthy, for, it is influential in the development of Iola's identity. Harper narrates the self-definition of Latimer thus: "Before him loomed all the possibilities which only birth and blood can give a white man in our Democratic country. But he was a man of too much sterling worth of character to be willing to forsake his mother's race for the richest advantages his grandmother could bestow" (182).

Latimer is seen stressing upon his racial choice by openly defending the black race against Dr. Latrobe, a Southern white doctor. At one of the meetings to discuss the supposed Negro problem in the South, Latrobe exhibits his repressive attitude openly. To him, a Negro has always been and will forever be a feature of disagreement in the US and the only solution for the same is to eliminate him from the politics of the country. The belief in the hierarchical positioning of the races which is one of the characteristic features of the era is what guides Latrobe throughout. His repressive white attitude can be unambiguously seen when he observes, '"Because we Southerners will never submit to negro supremacy. We will never abandon our Caucasian civilization to an inferior race"' (Harper 168). Latimer's defence of the black race during the discussion is notable as it avows his choice of identity. He says, "If the negro is ignorant, poor, and clannish, let us remember that in part of our land it was once a crime to teach him to read. If he is poor, for ages he was forced to bend to unrequited toil. If he is clannish, society has segregated him to himself" (Harper 169). He raises his voice against the prejudiced notions and stigma associated with the Blacks in relation to their social, economic and intellectual backgrounds.

As Latimer shares many common interests such as education, domesticity, and moral progress with Iola, he turns out to be a perfect partner to assist her in life and

her community fortifying endeavours. Iola's admiration for Latimer is discernible from her words:

> I must have within me, answered Iola, with unaffected truthfulness, "a large amount of hero worship. The characters of the Old Testament I most admire are Moses and Nehemiah. They were willing to put aside their own advantages for their race and country. Dr. Latimer comes up to my ideal of a high, heroic manhood. (Harper 201)

For both Iola Leroy and Latimer, "passing" appears to be a wrong process of establishing one's identity. Iola Leroy feels that it is something that will make one lose their hard-earned honour and self-respect within no time. Her reply when she comes to know from her uncle Robert that Dr. Latimer has had the doors of achievement, privileges, opportunities and occupation opened to him which otherwise would be closed for a coloured man, is important. It strongly proclaims her take on her choice of identity and the choice of her life partner as well. She says,

> I know that, uncle, answered Iola; "but even these advantages are too dearly bought if they mean loss of honor, true manliness, and self respect. He could not have retained these had he ignored his mother and lived under a veil of concealment, constantly haunted by a dread of detection. The gain would not have been worth the cost. It were better that he should walk the ruggedest paths of life a true man than tread the softest carpets a moral cripple. (Harper 202).

Latimer joins Iola Leroy in bringing out changes in the lives of coloured women and the entire community by completely believing in Iola's capacity to lead the movement. He too becomes an active member of all the discussions concerning programmes to strengthen the people and also becomes an active proponent of

women's independent status. On taking Latimer as her companion for life, Iola Leroy justifies her choice of black identity in the Internalization-Commitment stage. *Iola Leroy* mainly aims at the emancipation of women in various arenas — personal, academic and intellectual by creating an urge in them to survive odds, gain education, obtain a job and participate in intellectual discussions.

Harry Leroy's fifth stage of identity development is highlighted by his marriage with Lucile Delany, the college-educated Southern belle, who according to Hazel Carby as noted by Hollis Robbins, "is the novel's real representation of the future intellectual black elite," (Harper 24). He settles happily along with Delany and they launch a large school for the coloured children. Both work hard using their experiences to lift the conditions and homes of many people. Though Harry Leroy gets blamed and pitied for his choice to be with coloured people and to be a Black, he is too proud of his choice, as can be understood from these words, "he knows that life's highest and best advantages do not depend on the color of the skin or texture of the hair. He has his reward in the improved condition of his pupils and the superb manhood and noble life which he has developed in his much needed work" (Harper 213-14). Thus, his internalization of and commitment towards the black self becomes intrinsic to his nature.

Fortitude of the community and togetherness are the major aspects that shape the lives of Iola Leroy and Harry Leroy when they enter the fifth stage of Cross' model. The cruel shades of slavery kept them away from the bonding with the community from their birth onwards. A close-knit community has never been in their destiny as they have been separated from their families and continuously engaged in the selling process at a young age itself. Many children have been conceived of rape and illicit affairs which often results in the breaking up of relationship. As Hollis

Robbins mentions in the introduction to the novel, "Harper's characters are not "naturally" tied to each other (and do not immediately recognize one another). Only after lengthy reflection do they choose deliberately to acknowledge their associations and to travel and live near each other" (Harper 22). The efforts of Iola, Harry Leroy, Robertson etc. to trace back the family and establish a community spirit thereby taking their community too in the foreword voyage keep up the spirit of oneness.

Identification as a person of colour by the siblings for the sake of family on one hand and for the communal benefits on the other is truly noteworthy due to the essential communal nature of the Black community that can be traced back to the concept of kinship during the slavery times in which unrelated people would care and support each other in various activities like child nurturing and rearing. The community that gets started in *Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted* upholds the true staying power of kinship and togetherness. It encompasses the people of all the colours, classes and educational and intellectual background and with Iola Leroy attaining the central position. It consists of Iola's family, which includes her mother and brother with high quality Northern education, dark-skinned Harriet who is illiterate, highly educated Northern professionals and public leaders who are the regular participants of the intellectual conversazione, a lot of former slaves from the rural South who uphold their strength, doggedness and dialect, and all those survivors who have worked hard to earn the freedom of their soil and their uncanny perseverance which make them remain attached to the same. These meetings are held by gathering all the black representatives in the society. On one such meeting conducted by Stillman, Iola Leroy says, '"His object is to gather some of the thinkers and leaders of the race to consult on subjects of vital interest to our welfare . . . . "I am glad that it is neither a hop nor a german," said Iola, "but something for which I have

been longing"' (Harper 184-85). She is excited to be part of some serious gatherings to discuss the ways for the expansion of her race which declares her identity choice of monoracial blackness.

The younger generation is given the key to open vistas for the successful upgrade of a race that has been caught up in the shadows of discrimination and stagnancy. Conversazione represents a version of all the uplift movements and Welfare organisations set up for the progress of the Black lot. It is a Northern urban assembly wherein both the light-skinned and dark bourgeois intellectuals who are educated and well-spoken participate. The belief of Marie and Robert in the younger generation Iola Leroy, Harry Leroy, Miss Delany, Dr. Latimer etc. are expected to take the mission forward is evident from their thoughts and words. Robert's insight in this regard is notable: '"Some one," said Robert, "has said that the Indian belongs to an old race and looks gloomily back to the past, and that the negro belongs to a young race and looks hopefully towards the future"' (Harper 185). The opportunities which Marie and Robert missed as young lot to function for their race due to lack of skill and opportunity in the times of slavery have been handed over to the next generation regarding whom they are proud of. This again reflects the identity strategy of selective association in which the individuals become part of various organizations that reflect upon their preferred black identities.

The novel that is set during the Civil War and the following era of Reconstruction becomes a platform that offers an objective and analytical commentary on the socio-political circumstances of the times. It employs several narrative techniques to effectively bring out the same. Personal histories and major happenings of the era are unveiled before the readers by a seemingly neutral third-person, omniscient narrator who becomes the spokesperson for the author.

Harper employs flashback analeptic references while reporting the events. Shifting of place and time is a characteristic feature of this non-linear narrative as the characters move from Southern part of America to the North and back again, and from past to present and vice versa.

In addition to answering the traditional set of questions about race, the novel also provides a comprehending explanation as to how a biracial individual is "othered." The narrative thus is an opportunity to explain differences from inside and an attempt to reveal the inner psyche of certain major characters through their actions, thoughts and personal histories. Thus, the novel has distinct chapters that are exclusively reserved for multiple characters in addition to the focus on the protagonist Iola Leroy. The struggle to trace out an identity in a society that is judgmental about her biracial existence and never advocates equality of rights between Blacks and Whites reflects upon the inner consciousness of Iola Leroy. Harper's areas of action in her public life such as opposition to slavery, advocating equal rights for Blacks etc., become the major points of discussion in the novel as well. The tone is reflective, instructional and at times grave when it comes to the chapters that are commentaries on major issues.

The widespread images of Harper as "a man" and "a painted person" validate the nineteenth-century ideals that curbed women from speaking in public and alignment of the racially mixed individuals with the African American community. Given the fact that Harper's father has been an anonymous figure and mother a free black person, her ambiguous racial background has resulted in her appealing nature among the audience across racial and gender lines. Harper's upbringing by her uncle Reverend William Watkins, a black abolitionist has imparted a sense of duty and activism in her, resulting in her choice of the African American identity. Her uncle's

strong influence made her devote her life into activism and betterment of her race. This sense of dedication to her race and community gets reflected in the strong comments that she makes in the novel.

Harper's employment of the vernacular dialect as a performance of the community identity becomes a technique to depict camaraderie among social and educational classes. When Iola Leroy speaks the dialect in the early part of the novel, her educational background and privileged life does not come to the forefront. It also creates an ambiguity whether she is well-versed and adept in the dominant dialect or not. But this gets manifested chiefly at the later stage of the story when she reaches out to the mass across educational and class range and expresses solidarity with the uneducated lot of her race. This strategy of black vernacular has been exclusively utilised by Harper in order to capture and elevate a distinct African American culture. Two of the white characters, Eugene Leroy and Dr. Gresham speak the vernacular dialect to stress upon their closeness with the black characters. As Hollis Robbins mentions about Houston Baker's observation of Iola Leroy's uncle in the introduction to the novel, "Robert Johnson's use of both dialect and standard English distinguishes him as the "true ideal" of Harper's novel" (Harper xxix). This act of the character establishes his correlation with the refined class as well as the less educated members of his family when he later reunites with them. The narrator also acts as an interpreter to the readers when the conversation between the slaves about the news from the battle-field uses invented phraseology so as to avoid any suspicions. The conversation between the slaves regarding the freshness of fish, egg, butter, other produce etc. while going to the market, and the change of expressions following the same from careless countenances to gratified ones and dull eyes to the ones lit with happiness secretly conveys the intelligences of the war. The success of the Union Army is

conveyed through the phrases denoting the good condition of the products and the failure through the rotten condition of the same.

Harper has named her characters in the novel after the then well-known personalities. Her protagonist is named “Iola” as a tribute to Ida B. Wells, a writer and an activist who wrote under the pen name “Iola” and also sued the Chesapeake & Ohio Railroad for compelling her to sit in a smoking car instead of the first-class ladies’ car. She herself has tried and failed to desegregate the streetcars in Philadelphia in 1850s. Lucille Delany takes her name from an author Lucy A. Delaney and Martin Delany, a nineteenth-century activist and newspaperman, Dr. Frank Latimer after the black inventor Lewis Howard Latimer, mother figure Harriet in honour of Harriet Beecher Stowe etc. Many other characters in the novel share their names with Stowe’s characters. The cousins Eugene Leroy and Alfred Lorraine evoke Augustine St. Clare and his cousin Alfred. They both are married to a lady named Marie as well.

Era of Civil War and Reconstruction marked by slavery and other legal checkers like “One-Drop Rule,” “Anti-miscegenation” laws, “Hypodescent” and Jim Crow ideals of racial segregation to ensure the racial purity in the society intensify the identity construction of the biracial siblings. Their proclamation of the counterstance position is in a way a stand that they take for their people immobilized by the shackles of slavery. The choice of monoracial Black identity and the resultant commitment which Iola Leroy and Harry Leroy exhibit towards their community overthrows the common belief that “any achievement of a Negro is to be attributed to the white blood in his veins” (Brown 194) associated with the ‘tragic mulatto’ stereotype as represented by the early authors. Iola Leroy and Harry Leroy’s efforts and devotion to improve the socio-economic status of Blacks in America, especially women who

suffer from double marginalization in the name of race and gender come to focus at this point. When they execute their power of education and manners for their community's emancipation, there happens the undermining of stringent Jim Crow laws of racial segregation that kept many Blacks at the back seats of the opportunity bus as enforced on the basis of "separate but equal" doctrine of the U.S. Supreme Court as rightly identified by Big Bill Broonzy in his 1947 Blues Song, "Black, Brown and White,"

> . . . if you's white, you's alright
>
> If you's brown, stick around
>
> But as you's black, oh brother
>
> Get back, get back, get back. (00:00:13-25)

Frances Ellen Watkins Harper takes a different stand when it comes to the interpretation of the largely familiar 'tragic mulatto' stereotype associated with the biracial individuals in the early anti-slavery novels. Certain fixed ideas are associated with this type of stereotype when it is generally portrayed as destined to unfortunate longevity and a victim of divided inheritance as well. Rebellious nature, vindictiveness, struggle to unite white intellect with black consciousness etc. are expected from a tragic mulatto rather than a monoracial Black individual. As observed by Sterling A. Brown in his "Negro Character as Seen by White Authors," the expectations become gruesome when it comes to a mulatto girl and are driven by her desire to have a white lover, and the "disclosure of the single drop of midnight in her veins" (196) leading her to the tragic fate of suicide. Both Iola Leroy and Harry Leroy sabotage this stereotype and establish themselves as an empowered category by upholding the dictum of 'racial pride.'

Identity development of Iola Leroy and Harry Leroy through five different stages as proposed by Cross begins with a low sense of awareness and slowly heads towards developing positive thought about themselves as black individuals and their people. They get acquainted with the historical implications of being Black and work for their community. Both the siblings make use of their knowledge and experiences in the most effective manner possible to give back to their people and community. The self-actualization that they attain does not remain at the personal level alone, but it gets transmuted to the collective communal plane as well.

To conclude, the chapter offers an essentialist understanding of the biracial individuals, their identity development and the choices concerned with the same through the sociological framework of W. E. Cross' 'Nigrescence Model' of identity construction. Iola Leroy and Harry Leroy opt for the choice of hegemonic monoracial blackness in the end after passing through the five stages in the linear model. The significant aspect that characterises this decision is the counterstance that they adopt because of their lived experiences and the inhuman positioning of the dominant stance. Slave status and denigrated life following the hypodescent of the entire family trigger the siblings' counterstance. Hence, reuniting with the sequestered family members, especially their mother becomes the primary aim for both of them. This leads to the rejection of many coveted offers by Iola Leroy and Harry Leroy. They refuse to "pass for" white and thereby lead a privileged and secured white life, but prefer to be on the black side of their identities.

Chapter III

Invariable and Mutable Identities: Jessie Redmon Fauset's *Plum Bun: A Novel Without a Moral*

"When there is a gap — between your face and your race, between the baby and the mother, between your body and yourself — you are expected, everywhere you go, to explain the gap."

--- Senna, *New People* 87

While an outright autonomy over the self exists as a far-reaching dream for even a white individual in the American society, this is much more acute in the case of a biracial person, as is evidently observed by the American novelist Danzy Senna in the opening quote. The definition of the biracial individuals' identity in terms of their parents' varied racial lineages seems to look past many of their experiences and issues. One such problem as identified by the clinical psychologist Maria P. P. Root in her *Racially Mixed People in America* is that, "[f]or instance, because multiracial individuals cannot be classified in either the monoracial majority or monoracial minority groups, they face rejection from both majority groups and minority groups in society" (qtd. in Shih, et al. 125). Also, when they try to proclaim their individual choice, several divisional factors navigate their consciousness and tend to complicate their existence and their very definition of "identity."

Various concerns resulting from the pigeonholing of biracial people according to the dominant standards can be identified. They do not feel accepted in or connected to any of the factions led by the ruling ideology. People interact with them on the basis of what they think the biracial individuals generally are. Expectations build up regarding their choice of language, food, culture, costume etc., depending on their physical traits and racial roots. Once, their actual lineage is revealed and, if it goes

against the general parameters of the society, then it becomes immensely arduous for the dominant lot to accept the same. Isolation from the peer group following the revelation of the biracial identity form one of the major concerns of the biracial individuals. They lose their self-belief and begin to underestimate themselves. Hence, a need arises for them to act according to the accepted parameters as a means of survival.

Harlem Renaissance literature is characterized by the theme of intraracial angst and concerns over the skin colour and the variant shades associated with the same. “Dictie” and “tragic mulatto” have been the general labels of stereotyping reserved for the biracial individuals during the Harlem times. “Dictie,” usually a mulatto, is an established stereotype of the era indicative of a conceited black individual. A target for all kinds of allegations and blames, “dictie” often denotes the arrogance of the person but connotes the possession of light skin which she uses to act as white. Tragic mulatto is often associated with the aspects of incompetence, treachery, self-ruin. These stereotypical images dominate the popular culture of the Harlem Renaissance to such an extent that they often trigger pressure and apprehensions among the multiracial individuals.

Biracial individuals often go through the struggle to search for an identity and make a choice of the same as they identify with more than one racial group. An inherent multiplicity creates confusion in their choice of self-identification. Jessie Redmon Fauset’s second novel, *Plum Bun: A Novel Without a Moral*, published in 1928 at the height of Harlem Renaissance traces the journey of two biracial siblings Angela Murray and Virginia Murray. In analysing both Angela and Virginia’s identity formation, Walker S. Carlos Poston’s “Biracial Identity Development Model” has been adopted. “The Biracial Identity Development Model: A Needed Addition,”

Poston's article published in 1990 aims to scrutinize all the previous models of racial identity development and their inadequacies. Rooted in counselling psychology, Poston's "Biracial Identity Development Model" adapts W. E. Cross' concept of Reference Group Orientation (RGO), which includes constructions of racial identity, self-esteem, and ideology. Poston's linear model has five different stages of biracial and multiracial identity development. They include, Stage-I, Personal Identity, Stage-II, Choice of Group Categorization, Stage-III, Enmeshment or Denial, Stage-IV, Appreciation and Stage-V, Integration.

The first stage occurs during the early childhood, when young children's sense of self and personal identity is not linked to a racial or ethnic group. Second stage in Poston's model may be seen as a time of crisis and isolation. At this point, biracial individuals are compelled and constrained to make an identity choice by various factors, or else the fear of getting alienated haunts them throughout. The three factors that influence the individuals in making choices as per the observations of Phoenix based Asian American Psychological Association's Past-President Dr. Christine Catherine Iijima Hall, as mentioned by Poston in his article are the status factors, social support factors and the personal factors. The third level is the one in which people have guilt and confusion in choosing an identity that is not fully expressive of all their cultural influences. It is in the fourth stage that the individuals expand their reference group orientations and begin to realize and be pleased about their multicultural uniqueness. The fifth and final phase is the one in which the people attain a sense of totality in which they will value all their ethnic backgrounds and cultures. Altogether, Poston's model aims at developing an integrated identity in which all racial components are valued.

Angela's phenotype favours the white lot whereas Virginia's reflects the phenotype of the black lot. Angela's physical appearance which befits the stereotypical standards of the society, offers her a much stable life and, provides the reinforcement for the biggest change that comes later in her life. Therefore, her sense of self-identification with the dominant white identity begins at a young age. Yet, she inherently realises that she is unfairly privileged because of her phenotype, when compared to her younger sister Virginia.

Angela dreams of a socio-economically stable life in Philadelphia and even uses her privilege to achieve the same. This helps her conclude that all the niceties in life are distributed unevenly. To her, "Certain fortuitous endowments, great physical beauty, unusual strength, a certain unswerving singleness of mind, — gifts bestowed quite blindly and disproportionately by the forces which control life, — these were the qualities which contributed toward a glowing and pleasant existence" (Fauset 12). She has always been passionate about dressing up and her appearance. This dominant stratum of ideology which influences her life by means of all kinds of discourses, images, ideas etc. starts to channelize her thoughts and actions as she grows up. This also gets developed into the stance that she emphasises later in the process of her identity construction.

The personal identity that Angela develops is in no way linked to the sense of her racial or ethnic lineage; rather, it gets developed from the mere idea of her skin colour being white and the unconscious working of gender over the racial identity development. Freedom, for Angela Murray is associated with colour, and according to her, this is the basic dictum to achieve a successful life which she dreams of, right from her childhood: "Colour or rather the lack of it seemed to the child the one absolute prerequisite to the life of which she was always dreaming . . . the mere

possession of a black or a white skin, that was clearly one of those fortuitous endowments of the gods" (Fauset 13-14).

Perception of skin colour as an ideology comes into play in the identity formation of Angela. In relation to the slavery which has been an important aspect of the American history, there has always existed the invisible colour line that separated blacks and whites from intermingling or miscegenation. As a light-skinned girl, Angela can cross the colour line or attempt "passing over." When she does so, people perceive her as white, the racial category with which she identifies the most and which denotes freedom and socio-economic stability for her. Sociological studies prove that, for biracial women with black lineage, possession of fair skin is associated with self-respect as is witnessed in Angela's case, thereby indicating the strong relationship between gender and her choice of racial identity.

Personal Identity factors such as children's personal esteem and feelings of self-worth that they develop and learn in their families determine Angela's identity as well in the early stage. Her assessment of freedom and joy in life as associated with whiteness, is a notion that she has received from her mother. Consciously or unconsciously Mattie Murray, Angela's mother with mixed-blood strongly influences the choice that the latter makes regarding her identity in the first stage of Poston's model. Mattie Murray loves her husband Junius in spite of his African ancestry. She gives him the credit for their happy and successful married life. However, Angela notices that her mother has always made use of her colour, smile and voice in gaining advantage in the white dominant society: ". . . it amused her when by herself to take lunch at an exclusive restaurant whose patrons would have been panic-stricken if they had divined the presence of a 'coloured' woman no matter how little her appearance differed from theirs" (Fauset 15). Parents and their actions influence children in their

identity formation. The children try and align their actions completely with that of others, and develop one for themselves through a process of self-indication as recognized by American sociologist and psychologist George Herbert Mead in his *Mind, Self, and Society*, while explaining his sociological theory of Symbolic Interactionism. Herbert Blumer, an American sociologist, observes Mead's explanation of the self-indication process in his *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method*. He quotes:

> Fundamentally, group action takes the form of a fitting together of individual lines of action. Each individual aligns his action to the action of others by ascertaining what they are doing or what they intend to do—that is, by getting the meaning of their acts. For Mead, this is done by the individual "taking the role" of others—either the role of a specific person or the role of a group (Mead's "generalized other"). In taking such roles the individual seeks to ascertain the intention or direction of the acts of others, this is the fundamental way in which group action takes place in human society. (82)

Within their familial structure, the Murrays create a symbolic world through the interaction among individuals and the society, which in turn, pattern the individual behaviours.

Angela like her mother, finds shopping interesting while Virginia finds the same boring. She mistakes the pleasure Mattie has in perfecting her looks and appearance for exploring exclusive restaurants, shops, streets etc., to being white. Mattie also finds her freedom getting constrained when Virginia accompanies her while shopping. Both the children find comfort in joining the parent with whom they share a similar phenotype, for all their outdoor routine. Though Fauset portrays the picture of a loving and supportive family settled in Philadelphia in her novel, the

home is actually divided by the indiscernible band of colour that segregates the family members into two groups — the ones with darker skin and those with lighter skin. This shows the kind of self-perception which the parents possess and the same being indoctrinated into their children unconsciously.

One such incident is a description of a Saturday outing where Angela witnesses Mattie's failure to acknowledge Junius and Virginia (both with black phenotype) in a public street where there are shops exclusively reserved for whites. This is because the conversation between a black man and a white lady would have caused alarm to the general public which asserts the dominant stance position that is unconsciously upheld by Mattie. This automatically ingrains within Angela the belief that her possession of the privilege is a result of the white skin. Later, Mattie feels ashamed and regrets the act of distancing herself from her family – especially the act of neglecting her own daughter Virginia. However, by then, Angela draws her own conclusions that "the great rewards of life — riches, glamour, pleasure, — are for white-skinned people only" and that "Junius and Virginia were denied these privileges because they were dark" (Fauset 17). Angela Murray at a very young age, unconsciously aligns her thoughts and perceptions regarding her identity to her mother's view of self and society. Her personal identity thus gets moulded by Mattie Murray's conception of her own self and the way she executes the dominant stance position as a tool against the stigma posed by the society.

Virginia on the other hand, is a sharp contrast to her sister in terms of her phenotype and outlook. As per her mother Mattie, she has a transparent nature. Unlike her sister Angela, she is a dark-skinned girl who is content and happy with her coloured existence. She opts for the choice of hegemonic monoracial blackness from the initial stage and holds onto it till the very end, harbouring black pride thereby

reflecting upon the true essence of the era. Virginia thoroughly enjoys church visits on Sundays as she senses an immense cosmic rightness in the whole affair unlike Angela, who finds the same stupid and hence prefers to shop on Saturdays. She has always loved the church-like purity of her modest home. To her, Sunday chores were rituals, and she found a delightful and indescribable contentment in participating in it. She has always believed in the unity and power of a family. More than that, she has an earnest sense of gratitude towards her parents for the benevolence and selfless care they have always shown for her and Angela. She also has great respect for the struggle undergone by her parents in their journey to construct their lives as she "meant to live the same kind of life; she would marry a man exactly as like her father and she would conduct her home exactly as did her mother" (Fauset 22). Junius Murray, her father becomes an influential factor in her life and also in her identity construction. Virginia adores and admires every aspect of her father's persona. Like her father, she too possesses a sympathetic attitude towards Mattie and considers her as someone who must be given support and security. Virginia's personal identity gets shaped with all these factors together.

With many of the instances that happen at her school and public places, Angela is led to a situation of crisis, isolation and the forceful choice of an identity in the second stage "Choice of Group Categorisation" of the "Biracial Identity Development Model." Public places such as restaurants, shops, theatres etc. work as the representatives of the ruling dictum, thereby affirming their economic dominance as well. As she grows up, Angela loses close intimacy and contact with the peer group who knows about her coloured identity from her interaction with Virginia and her father. Though she is unaware about it during the initial years of her school, solitude

strikes her hard when she reaches the high school. Changes start becoming apparent to her:

> [W]hat did confront her was that the very girls with whom she had grown up were evading her; when she went to the assembly none of them sat next to her unless no other seat were vacant; little groups toward which she drifted during lunch, inexplicably dissolved to re-form in another portion of the room. Sometimes a girl in this new group threw her a backward glance charged either with a mean amusement or with annoyance. (Fauset 39-40)

Angela slowly begins to go through the extreme happiness and gratification by being the chosen friend of a popular, powerful white figure, Miss Mary Hastings at school. She starts to escape from the experiences of being left out of groups and class plans as Mary could not be left out of any plans made. A sea change in the perception of her peers is experienced by Angela when she befriends Miss Hastings. But she is once identified black and thus established a "dictie" by her peers, which pains her immensely though her appearance and manners do not reveal her true identity in any sense. It was a wonder for her that though she possesses a biracial existence in which both parts of her identity deserve equal treatment, she enjoys privileges and courtesies when identified white and contempt and hatred when categorized black. As Du Bois observes in his *The Souls of Black Folk*, "After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world,—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world" (8).

Angela's coloured existence is revealed for the first time to herself through the eyes of the white world. This unfortunate incident happens when she is chosen as one

of the two representatives from her class to be in the editorial staff of the school magazine. Mary Hastings is elected through ballot by the class as the chief representative, whose duty is to attend executive meetings and have a say about the policy of the paper. Angela is selected by the chief representative as her assistant whose duty is to collect subscriptions, fees and deal with the complaints that are reported and received. The reaction of Esther Bayliss, one of Angela's classmates, who coveted the position and title to the selection of Angela as Hasting's assistant is to be noted. It is not just a revelation of Angela's coloured identity before the whole class, but also the racial prejudice and stance associated with the same that becomes evident when Esther Bayliss says, '"I don't know how it is with the rest of you, but I should have to think twice before I'd trust my subscription money to a coloured girl"' (43). Angela's is tagged "black" and her identity gets questioned as per the rule of "Hypodescent," before the whole class. An indifferent sort of amazement is expressed by Miss Hastings as well at this which ascertains both Hastings and Bayliss as the prototypes of the white stance. Angela gets placed in the second stage of "Choice of Group Categorization" of Poston's model.

The contemptuous mind-set of the stereotypical society that the people of black lineage tend to be immoral and untrustworthy gets into play in the classmates' attitude towards Angela resulting in her total isolation. Judging an individual by his or her skin colour rather than their innate qualities has been a strong tool of racial segregation during the time of Harlem Renaissance. Moreover, a whole set of false racial and ethnic characteristics is automatically assigned to the individual when identified black. This kind of racist attitude displayed by Angela's fellow students can be seen as an extension to the stereotyping practised during the slavery times. Educational institutions perform their social function of promoting class dominance,

thereby, maintaining economic superiority. When Miss Hastings evidently expresses her discontent and dominant stance position to Angela for not revealing her black identity, Angela retorts with her counterstance, “Coloured! Of course I never told you that I was coloured. Why should I?” (Fauset 43). Angela resists the prejudice of the white world through her words, and she does not do anything active further to align herself with the black side of her identity.

Children are made to think, act and perform according to the ways of superior class dictum which results in the segregation among the students on the basis of race, class etc. Later, Angela gets assured with the thought that Mary withdrew herself from Angela not because of the latter’s coloured existence, but by the fact that she did not inform her regarding the same. She wonders about the important aspect in life as a biracial person. She also thinks of whether to insist on the aspect of colour and lead a normal life throughout or to accept all the elegant things of life which America would offer her. These offers by the American society will be something that she truly deserves if she is not coloured, as the reality of her racial consciousness has not been made known to anyone. Similar incidents which stress upon the stereotypical attitude of the white society towards the coloured existence get repeated in Angela’s life.

Art is seen by Angela as a means to gain fame, money and liberty from what she considers as a restrictive life in Philadelphia. For Virginia, art does not become a propelling force to access the high-end social circles. Corroboration of white power and the stance that it proclaims is visible later, when Angela joins the Philadelphia Academy of Fine Arts at Broad and Cherry to pursue her dream of becoming an artist thereby breaking free from a rather pedestrian existence. Thus, the novel becomes a Künstlerroman or an “artist’s novel.” Fauset showcases the plight of black artists of 1920s through Angela’s character.

The Art Academy in *Plum Bun: A Novel Without a Moral* can be seen as a space that encourages white painters, sculptors etc. in order to promote white ideology. In the beginning, Angela Murray comes across a cordial and an amiable group of peers and instructors who perceive her as white at the academy. She does not reveal the truth about her biracial lineage to anyone, owing to her belief that the artists possessed certain broad-mindedness in accepting everyone on the basis of their talent alone. From previous experiences, she has been aware of the consequences that might befall her on openly accepting her coloured side in a nation that has always held strong the "One-Drop Rule." The fact that Miss Henderson, one of her fellow students and a visibly coloured lady whose work displayed immense originality and talent has not been received in the circle as cordially as Angela, hints at the role played by the institutions in propagating the dominant agenda. Fauset describes it as follows: "Certainly she never spoke unless spoken to; she had been known to spend a whole session without even glancing at a fellow student" (63). Miss Henderson's almost invisible existence in spite of her artistic genius accounts for the validity of the harsh law and the stance maintained by the Whites in America.

Angela who begins developing affiliation towards the dominant order and their dogma, as she restlessly aims for broader horizons in her life, gets substantiated at the Academy. The unwritten dictum that the possession of black lineage leads to the denial of opportunities and positions for a coloured person and the same gets reserved for the superior white lot gets strongly stressed upon by Fauset. Her physical appearance and pleasant demeanour turn out to be the advantages for her to get easily accepted in a higher peer circle. She even receives invitations from her classmates to visit their homes which she deliberately avoids knowing that the practice of returning them the same would invite trouble due to her visibly coloured sister, Virginia's

presence. Just like her mother, whom she had seen avoiding communication with her father and sister on a shopping day in the past, Angela too tries and secure her position in the public by deliberately avoiding her sister. She adopts the role of "others" thereby validating the intended purpose of their acts as indicated by Mead. She develops and aligns her actions to that of her mother's, and on a broader context, to that of her peer group through the self-indication process associated with Symbolic Interactionism.

The prejudice that all the positive qualities are attributed to the domineering white faction and the negative qualities to the black lot gets proved by more instances in the novel. Angela is an aspiring artist who believes in and breeds white bourgeois whims like marrying a white man to earn a socio-economically stable life. Ironically, she uses folk themes in her art and sketches Miss Hetty Daniels, a coloured lady who starts to live as a companion, housekeeper, chaperone etc., along with her and Virginia in the house at Opal Street, after Junius and Mattie's death. She also portrays working class black people in her creation series, *Fourteenth Street Types*. Miss Hetty Daniels who loved to pose for Angela had the realisation that "she was, in the artist's jargon, 'interesting,' 'paintable,' or 'difficult.' (Fauset 65) She also understood about the unwritten rule in the modelling industry that beauty becomes the primary yardstick for the choice of models and that coloured people were not accepted as models at all.

The requirement of fair skin to be a female model in the art world hints at the connection between gender and racial identity. On taking the sketch of Daniels to the Academy, Angela encounters numerous questions about the model. Daniels' introduction as an American coloured lady who had worked for her family for years, and not as a companion by Angela to her fellow artists at the Academy implicitly

states her unwillingness to accept her original racial affiliations. The revelation would have marred her already established white ties and the prospect of a socio-economically stable life which she dreams of.

One of the white girls, Gertrude Quale's reaction on noticing a kind of cosmic and tragic unhappiness on Daniels' face and his derogatory remark on knowing about Daniels' coloured identity from Angela, is typically racist. Quale reacts, "Oh coloured! Well, of course I suppose you would call her an American though I never think of darkies as Americans. Coloured,—yes that would account for that unhappiness in her face" (Fauset 70). Angela's reaction to Quale's words is not recorded by the novelist. It can be assumed that it might be either because of the fear of isolation from the peer group or the strength slowly gained by the fact that coloured existence will not guarantee a happy and successful life in her mind that she would have refused to take a stand. This can also be interpreted as Angela's silent approval of the dominant stance upheld by the privileged group and her non-justification of her people that will place her too in a position that affirms the same. Fauset's employment of the past of the common folk in *Plum Bun: A Novel without a Moral* can be regarded as a proletarian commentary that she makes on the politics of race, class and gender. She believes that the folk past must be rightfully comprehended to realise the reality of the bourgeois present by the middle-class blacks of the twentieth century who wish to come up in life.

An amplified sense of anxiety and inquisitiveness always exists regarding the skin colour of an unborn baby of mixed-race parents, just as it is the first question that people often ask about the gender of a new-born baby i.e., "Is it a girl or a boy?" in the normal case. There is an additional tartness in the question, "Who does the baby takes after?" as it begins to frame the real perception of the world towards a biracial

or a mixed-race child. One's pedigree or race will forever be traced at each stage of a person's life. Thus, Angela's coloured lineage gets questioned once again just like the way it had happened in her school. She is identified black by the whole Academy in contrast to her slowly developing self-perception of being white. This happens when Esther Bayliss, Angela's high school classmate enters as a model for the artists.

Angela has been engrossed in the portrayal of the model's minute features by forgetting about her identity. Esther Bayliss on the other hand, keeps her eyes fixed upon Angela with a deep and fuming reaction that she totally forgets about her pose while modelling, and gets warned by Mr. Shields, the Arts Academy instructor. Bayliss refuses to pose for the coloured girl Angela, thereby disclosing the latter's black strain resulting in the clear stereotyping of the latter as a "dictie." Her reply to the warning noticeably reveals the stance taken by the dominant faction:

> I don't want you to keep me on. . . I haven't got to the point where I'm going to lower myself to pose for a coloured girl . . . . Well, she's coloured though she wouldn't let you know. But I know. I went to school with her in North Philadelphia. And I tell you I wouldn't stay to pose for her not if you were to pay me ten times what I'm getting. Sitting there drawing from me just as though she were as good as a white girl! (Fauset 71)

This also reveals the prejudice held by the white models who refused to pose for the coloured artists and the dangerous position in which the latter were in during the era. It also hints at the unconscious working of gender in the racial identity for the acceptance of black female artists just as models back then came up mainly with fair skin and white lineage. The ever-continuing questions regarding a person's identity repeatedly invoke racialised standards as Linda Martín Alcoff, a Latin American philosopher describes in her *Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self*:

> When mythic bloodlines which are thought to determine identity fail to match the visible markers used by identity discourses to signify race, one often encounters these odd responses by acquaintances announcing with arrogant certainty 'But you don't look like...' or then retreating to a measured acknowledgement 'Now that you mention it, I can sort of see ...' to feel one's face studied with great seriousness, not for its (hoped for) character lines, or its distinctiveness, but for its telltale racial trace, can be a particularly unsettling experience. (31)

Revelation of Angela's coloured side makes Mr. Shields, the Art Academy instructor and his wife who had regularly invited her for the dinner shockingly surprised. They visibly express their discontent over her, for not revealing her true identity to them. Mr. Shields confronts her and exclaims, "But, Miss Murray, you never told me that you were coloured" (Fauset 71). To this, Angela responds with the same offended and painful words which she used in her reply to Mary Hastings, and for her, it was as if performing a pre-rehearsed act. For the first time ever, she begins to wonder whether there is anything wrong with the act of "passing." This incident reaffirms her position in the second stage of Poston's model. Angela also wonders if ever her mother has faced anything similar to that of her experience while attempting the "crossing over" of the colour line. She is reminded of a hospital incident in the past, and the realisation which she has had since then that her mother "was perfectly satisfied, absolutely content whether she was part of that white world with Angela or up on little Opal Street with her dark family and friends" (Fauset 73). Angela feels that "her mother had deliberately given the whole show away," (Fauset 73) when the latter's decision of "passing" or "not passing" would have made a clear distinction between the goodness and nastiness.

Once in the past, Mattie falls unconscious and is admitted to a hospital in Broad Street following a routine excursion. This hospital which generally denies entry to coloured women, easily allows Mattie due to her acceptable white phenotype. When Junius Murray arrives at the hospital in his shabby working clothes following Angela's phone call, he receives a hostile treatment from the entire hospital staff. Rising as per the situation, he announces that he is no one but Mattie's chauffeur and on noticing his weak wife, he deliberately addresses her as 'Mrs. Murray.' He immediately offers his shoulder for her to lean on to, then lifts her up, and drives home along with his wife and daughter to the shocking surprise and rage of the young intern. Fauset describes the stance of the dominant class as, "[t]he interne stepped back into the hospital raging about these damn white women and their nigger servants. Such women ought to be placed in a psychopathic ward and the niggers burned" (Fauset 59-60). Within a few days after this incident, Mattie recovers but Junius falls seriously ill and dies with his hand on Mattie's. Following his death, Mattie gets engrossed in her husband's memories and follows him very soon and this gives Angela, the realisation that her mother "had not considered this business of colour or the lack of it as pertaining intimately to her personal happiness" (Fauset 73).

Angela's affinity towards whiteness gets instilled in her mind primarily by the thought that all those things that she has ever wanted have been exclusively reserved for the Whites and that all the good things belong to them. This according to her was not just because they had been whites, "[b]ut because for the present they had power and the badge of that power was whiteness, very like the colours on the escutcheon of a powerful house" (Fauset 73). Angela realises that her judgement of the Shields family, especially Mr. Shields who has encouraged her immensely to increase her earning capacity by applying for a scholarship, has gone wrong with the revelation of

her lineage. Her words to Virginia are clear evidence of the stance maintained by the dominant lot. She says:

> Well you see as long as the Shields thought I was white they were willing to help me to all the glories of the promised land. And the doorman last night, he couldn't tell what I was, but he could tell about Matthew, so he put him out; just as the Shields are getting ready in another way to put me out. But as long as they didn't know it didn't matter. (Fauset 78)

Plum Bun: A Novel Without a Moral also depicts one of the psychological effects of double consciousness as described by W. E. B. Du Bois. "Double consciousness" is a term derived from Du Bois' article titled "Strivings of the Negro People," published in the August 1897 issue of the *Atlantic Monthly*. The article has been edited and republished under the title, "Of Our Spiritual Strivings" in his classic autobiographical and at the same time ethnographic work, *The Souls of Black Folk*. The term denotes the internal clash experienced by the inferior factions in a repressive society. It has originally denoted the mental challenge of looking at oneself through the eyes of a racist, dominant white society. It also has led an individual to gauge himself/herself on the basis of the parameters set by a nation that always looked back in pity and disdain. Du Bois defines "double consciousness" as follows:

> It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, — an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (8)

The phrase has its major reference to the "double consciousness" experienced by the African Americans who find it difficult to decide upon their true consciousness between the two – being American and being African. The novel portrays the double consciousness experienced by the biracial protagonist Angela Murray. Though she has been identified by others as black, she seems to understand the importance of self-esteem, acceptance and opportunities that one can gain in the society with his or her mere physical characteristics, especially her light skin colour. She also starts to strongly perceive herself from the white point of view on realising the advantages that her skin colour can bring and begins to focus on her white part of identity in spite of being biracial. Angela thus, develops a double consciousness where she is made to view and identify herself from the perception of the governing dominant order. A biracial individual's choice of identity getting manipulated by the ruling dictum and the societal pressure which leads him/her to develop a particular identity perception happens in Angela's case as well.

While Angela is in the second stage of her identity development, Virginia maintains an optimistic and proud attitude towards life and her choice of coloured existence. She wants to fulfil her parents' wish of their children becoming teachers and gain economic stability, thereby proving her worth and her identity. The only profession that the coloured individuals could undertake in America during the era of Jim Crow and legal segregation has been nothing but school teaching. Fauset's personal experience as a teacher when both the educated and uneducated coloured female individuals had only liminal professional opportunities is reflected here. The invisible existence of the so-called colour line tends to maintain and limit both the superior and inferior lots on its either sides. W. E. B. Du Bois observes in the second chapter, "Of the Dawn of Freedom" of his work *The Souls of Black Folk*, the

cornerstone of African American literary convention that “the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line” (15). Though the idea of an impalpable colour line in the present is totally a reminder of the segregation times, it has been absolutely a blatant line of division then. This concept has been widely propagated to ascertain the white superiority, thereby strengthening the stance on the need for maintaining the racial purity of the nation.

The legally recognized segregation unquestionably confirmed the white privilege to have an unhindered admittance to all the facilities, pleasures etc. while clearly and harshly keeping those on the other side of the colour line away from it. A border within the border of a nation has been slowly setting in among its citizens, thereby, undoubtedly marking out obvious reservations in terms of skin pigmentation for both the groups. The Foundation Distinguished Professor of American Studies and History at the University of Kansas, David Roediger in his work *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* cautions the readers against the existence of black and white nations. He observes that this binary image of a nation as a black and white “lens is to be sure, an ideological one. As such, it not only distorts but accounts for lived experience” (qtd. in Kawash 3).

Discrete sections of blackness and whiteness existed in various public spaces such as educational institutions, restaurants, parks, transport, towns, theatres etc. Coloured individuals had to consider their position every time they think of making an entry into any profession, public places or having food outside their homes. Virginia reacts calmly as if nothing can be done about the reality, “[a]t present, it’s one of the facts of our living, just as lameness or near-sightedness might be for a white man” (Fauset 53). Lack of intellectual capacity in blacks as identified by whites is one of the greatest arguments which the latter makes in denying the former their

rights and keeping them in a subservient position thereby asserting their stance position. Economical pattern of the society also plays an important role in curbing the educational and professional rights to the coloured people especially.

Racial difference is seen as a visible marker in determining the economic development, rights and welfare of a person in nation-states. While the whites enjoy economic and personal freedom to choose and pursue various educational institutions and careers, coloured people in the South face absolute injustice. In spite of their brilliance in earning good grades in colleges and careers, the coloured people end up with menial jobs. A decent standard of living and a life devoid of poverty seems to be impossible for them, as the set economic structure deny the same. Hence, most of them in the South fail to receive education either they cannot afford the same or they are quite aware of the fact that education will not earn them the desirable jobs as it would to a white person. This shows the whitening power of income and the racial privilege that it guarantees for those identified as white. It also hints at the inability of those people with black lineage to gain socio-economic stability, acquaintances among the higher social and academic circles and better opportunities. This showcases the powerful relationship between income and race just as the gendered nature of racial labels.

One of the major methods practised by those who desired acceptance in the dominant sector during the Jim Crow era and beyond has been “racial passing.” This kind of “crossing-over” suggests “that the individual racial identity of black and white remains demarcated by a symbolic color line that is conceived in geographical terms echoing the spatial divisions instituted by segregation” (2) as observed by Samira Kawash. Fauset’s description of Angela’s “passing,” along with her light-skinned mother on the shopping days, thus becomes positive and celebratory. Simulation of

white appearance earns them the access to opportunities and benefits that are exclusively reserved for the dominant lot.

It can be observed that with the "racial passing," the ethnic minority groups tend to lose individuals to the socially, politically and economically dominant sections in their movement up the socio-economic ladder. With this kind of playing with the appearance, the social view of white identity being right and is something that takes Angela closer to her dream life and black identity being bad enters into her mind firmly this time. She feels that being recognized as white means absolute happiness for her. She gladly thanks her fate for having bestowed on her the boon of her mother's fair complexion when she could have easily received her father's dark skin. But one thing which she fails to realise is that the act of "passing" can only hide the outer appearance. Samira Kawash, in her *Dislocating the Colour Line: Identity, Hybridity and Singularity in African-American Narrative* opines about the person who "passes" as, "[t]he one who passes is, in this common understanding, really, indisputably black; but the deceptive appearance of the body permits such a one access to the exclusive opportunities of whiteness" (126). The whole act of "passing" has not posed any challenges to alter the then existed segregation ideologies set by the superior lot. Hence, the moment the true identities of the people who have undertaken this act are revealed, they are termed undisputedly "black."

Fauset mentions about an unwritten law getting worked in Philadelphia where through educational institutions discriminated against coloured teachers. She says, "[s]trictly speaking there are no coloured schools in Philadelphia. Yet, by an unwritten law, although coloured children may be taught by white teachers, white children must never receive knowledge at the hands of coloured instructors" (Fauset 48). Earlier, Angela considers Virginia fortunate when the latter announces her

appointment as a music teacher in the school, for, in spite of coming sixth on the list of coloured graduates, the former has been denied the opportunity, as a white lady has been working in the concerned vacancy. Educational institutions thus act as a platform to not just propagate the ruling class dictum. In fact, the articulation of the ideologies of the exploited classes and the strong proclamation of the stance also happens there. Unlike Virginia, Angela denies the job finally when she gets it. With the increase in the number of coloured normal school graduates, it gets difficult for the city authorities to maintain coloured and white children in the same school with coloured teaching faculty and principal. Hence, only coloured children have been admitted to the schools or rather, white students have to leave the entire district to join the next nearest white or "mixed school," to which nobody pays any attention.

While it becomes difficult for a coloured woman to get a job as a teacher in Philadelphia, it is equally difficult for a coloured man to get into any other profession other than teaching. As one of the characters, Arthur Sawyer remarks:

> I'm sick of planning my life with regard to being coloured. I'm not a bit ashamed of my race. I don't mind in the least that once we were slaves. Every race in the world has at some time occupied a servile position. But I do mind having to take it into consideration every time I want to eat outside of my home, every time I enter a theatre, every time I think of a profession. (52-53)

Virginia's reaction to the same explicates the normalisation of the bitter reality that underlies the coloured existence, "[a]t present it's one of the facts of our living, just as lameness or near-sightedness might be for a white man" (53). Sharon L. Jones, Professor at Wright State University and an author who has focussed on African American Literature notes in her "Deconstructing the Black Bourgeoisie: Subversions and Diversions in the Fiction of Jessie Fauset," "Virginia believes that aligning

oneself with other blacks represents the best way to counter racism in the world of art" (41).

In his article, Poston points out C. C. I. Hall's examination of the biracial persons' conviction that they are forced by the society to make a racial choice in the "Choice of Group Categorisation" phase to take part or get included in any of their companion, family or social circles (153). The incapacity to do so, will result in alienation to the core of the biracial people. The final incident when her friend Matthew Henson is not allowed into a theatre just because of his dark appearance, while she is allowed in because of her white phenotype underscores racial discrimination that Angela has experienced from the beginning. Though she gets shocked with the attitude of the attendant, she simply acts as a silent spectator and an approver of the stance position of the theatre authority when she could easily have stood up for her friend and indirectly for her own community. This incident leads her to taking the extreme decision of leaving her native Philadelphia — her home, friends, relations, culture etc. for New York, to pursue her dream life by taking up white identity. It is Angela's inability to get accepted among her peer group and the empathy which she feels for Henson that results in her choice of white identity. She wishes to take her life out of the complicated framework of intertwined identities by opting for a definite choice of a monoracial identity.

For the first time ever in the novel, Angela openly justifies her decision to leave for New York and take up the white identity, when Virginia asks her to stay back and do something good for all those who cannot look the way Angela looks. On declaring her white identity, she says: "Now be practical Jinny; after all I am both white and Negro and look white. Why shouldn't I declare for the one that will bring me the greatest happiness, prosperity and respect?" (Fauset 80). Angela also adds that

she could neither accept nor return the invitations to the homes from and to the girls at the Arts school just because of Virginia's presence. She also expresses her wish for a freer and fuller life with socio-economic stability thereby making clear the dominant stance adopted by her. Angela is not from an affluent family wherein the whitening effect of money smoothly ensures her a higher status in the socio-economic ladder. Therefore, her pursuit of a privileged life through the act of "boundary-crossing" involves great risk, for, the racial privilege which she enjoys at this point is owing to her phenotype and not income, reaffirming the unconscious working of gender.

Along with the acceptance of Angela's decision half-heartedly, Virginia indirectly states her choice of hegemonic monoracial blackness and the counterstance position. She says, '"After that, Angela dear, I'm beginning to think that you have more white blood than I, and it was that extra amount which made it possible for you to make that remark"' (81). These events show how strong the connection between society and race is and how a person is judged by his/her skin colour and racial lineage and not by his/her personality.

Angela has been a true friend and a successful student for everyone, but as soon as it is revealed that she has black strains in her blood, her talent and success mean nothing to her fellow people. Angela experiences "fragmented individualism" which is thought of by the thinkers and philosophers as one of the weaknesses built into the system. A black person who wishes to make big in the society is made to imitate the appearance, manners, culture, values etc. of a white person deliberately to the core at least in the presence of the white lot. The otherwise implied undercurrent in this, as observed by the notable American journalist John Howard Griffin, in his classic autobiographical account *Black Like Me* as a negro in the southern US is "the hiding, the denial, of his selfhood, his negritude, his culture, as though they were

somehow shameful" (190). Also, making a choice of an identity that is dominant over the other owing to societal pressure by a biracial individual as described by Poston in the "Choice of Group Categorization" stage of his model becomes asserted in Angela's case.

Fauset's representation of Angela's movement from Philadelphia to New York in pursuit of the American dream is a metaphor employed by the author to indicate Angela's passage from folk to bourgeois class. Though Angela slowly starts to lead a contented life of her choice in New York as a white person, the feeling of being caught, getting denunciated and isolated haunts her. She tries her best not to reveal her black lineage to anybody. On concealing her black identity, she finds herself in the midst of opportunities to lead a high-profile socio-economic life which she has always dreamt of. She firmly describes herself as "free, white, and 21" and, in this feeling, that she "own(s) the world" (Fauset 88). She even changes her surname to that of a middle-class white woman's, "Angela Mory" to get accepted among the elite white lot. She also believes that for her to become a renowned artist, she needs immense wealth, power and position and that '"[m]arriage is the easiest way for a woman to get those things, and white men have them"' (Fauset 113) indicating the whitening effect of money. Predicament of the biracial and multiracial students with regard to their choice of groups is indicated in "Growing up Biracial":

> Nearly everyone wants to be part of a group. For bi- and multiracial teens, it can be hard to choose that group, or community. Racial unity clubs, such as African-American and Asian-American student groups, are not always comfortable for people who are half black or half Asian . . . experts suggest that mixed-race teens who choose to "be" just one race may be looking for a

> way to belong. Being simply black, white, or Asian is often easier to explain — and easier for others to accept — than being mixed. (Damio)

Angela also gets to identify the real difference between the Harlem life and the New York life when she visits Harlem one afternoon. She gets impressed with the busy, fun-filled lives of the Harlem people, especially the complete and vibrant coloured life. She finds Harlem and its life to be a microcosm that has reproduced all the features of a metropolis and the life anywhere else respectively. But a major difference is spotted between the two worlds: “In all material, even in all practical things these two worlds were alike, but in the production, the fostering of those ultimate manifestations, this world was lacking, for its people were without the means or the leisure to support them and enjoy. And these were the manifestations which she craved, together with the freedom to enjoy them” (Fauset 97). It is notable that though Angela finds Harlem to be a great city, she feels that it is just a city within a city. She is even glad “that she had cast in her lot with dwellers outside its dark and serried tents” (Fauset 98), and also wishes “to be sought after, to have the circumstances which would permit her to pick and choose, to refuse if the whim pleased her” (Fauset 112).

Angela becomes friends with many civilised white people who offer her the chance to experience a more affluent and broader world that is cosmopolitan in nature. The advantage of Angela’s white side is suddenly propelled by her rich, white New York lover Roger Fielding, who presents her with several opportunities as he is unaware of her black identity. Their relationship heads on absolute dishonesty and trickery. Angela needs a comfortable and wealthy life and feels that it is only with him that she experiences the city in a way that she had not dreamt of and, he is able to afford pleasures of life regardless of the monetary cost. Her sister, Virginia, on the

contrary, decides to pursue her career later in New York, for, she is mainly attracted to Harlem, the centre of New Negro Movement. To her, "New York rather appeals to me. And there certainly is something about Harlem" (Fauset 171). This helps her strongly maintain the choice of black identity again.

Racial disparities have resulted in fierce campaigns against particular races and groups. Michael Banton, the renowned British social scientist effectively points out that the category of race has never been explored as a concept; rather, it has been used to discuss upon the differences between populations. He elaborately defines and conceptualises race in terms of culture, science, demography, biology etc. The definition of "race" as descent is mentioned in Banton's taxonomy where he observes: "When race meant descent, then it was expected that whites considered alliances with blacks as socially dishonourable" (qtd. in Nayar 221). Fauset's characterisation of Roger functions as a stark criticism of the class and colour prejudice bred among the bourgeoisie.

While in the city, Angela gets shocked and pained when she becomes a witness to several instances of racism, from Roger. During a particular lunch date, he sees three black people about to take a table close to where he and Angela are seated. He begins to exhibit his authority and dominant stance by angrily informing the head waiter regarding their presence as he could not stand them. His xenophobia and the racial privilege become obvious with the racist terminology that he uses when he refers to the blacks. On returning triumphant, he joins Angela and adds insult to her injury saying, "Well I put a spoke in the wheel of those 'coons'! They forget themselves so quickly, coming in here spoiling white people's appetites" (134). He addresses them as 'darkies' and continues to recount the various ways he had 'spoked the wheels' of various coloured people. He behaves in this manner, for, he is very

confident about his position as a high-class white American as no one could ever question his superiority. This gets clear when Angela thinks of the group's economical background to be one of the possible reasons for Roger to behave in such a manner thereby asserting the advantage guaranteed by money. His basic attitude towards the coloured people, right from the childhood is backed up by his dominant background and living conditions in terms of race, class, economy etc.

Exertion of authority and control over the weaker sections by the superior lot happens at two levels in the novel. Roger's father, by employing the immediate threat of force, controls his son's life. Roger is never allowed to marry outside the rules as set by his father, for, he feels that Roger should marry a lady with pure blood and if he goes against this, he would be denied the rights over his property. Thus, in a way, Roger's father ensures that his son is a much desirable white prototype. Fauset mentions, "The old man wouldn't care a rap about money but he would insist on blue blood and the Mayflower" (128-29) as it is considered a matter of pride to be a descendant of the White European settlers, who embarked on a journey, some in search of religious freedom and others to seek a new way of life from Plymouth UK in the Mayflower and landed in Plymouth Bay, Massachussets in 1620. The landing of these people in New England and who are regarded as "Strangers" and "Saints" by the historians owing to the motive behind their journey is known to have a dreadful impact on the Native American population in the form of establishing racial hierarchies and manipulation of the people of colour.

Angela and Roger's relationship is a metaphor for black-white, male-female and rich-poor relationships. It is in a way, emulates the black artists' correlation with their white patrons during the Harlem renaissance wherein the former's life and living will be at times obliged to the latter, who hold prejudice against African Americans.

Roger's character functions as a representative of the dominant ideology in the novel which through repressive attitude constantly reminds the black people and therefore Angela, of her subjective position and the expected submission to these conditions for acceptance and survival. Though the unfortunate incident at the cafe disturbs Angela a lot, the realisation regarding the revelation of her true identity and the following rejection, isolation and loss of opportunities stops her from reacting further. "Economic factors contribute in a complex manner to ethnic definitions and identity maintenance" (7) as observed by the pioneer in ethnic identity studies, George A. De Vos in his "Ethnic Pluralism: Conflict and Accommodation: The Role of Ethnicity in Social History." The attitude of Roger seems to get accepted by the whole lot in the cafe, which is evident from the normalcy maintained by them. The cafe acts as a platform that establishes the dominance of the ruling class and their economic superiority.

According to Roger, coloured people should be treated as weak subjects and excluded from either joining or being in the same platform with the prestigious groups as they are considered inferior to and different from the whites. Also, that, they should never be given the status of human beings and should continue their marginalised status as per the Whites' stereotypical view. Angela also does not voice her opinion even when she gets an opportunity, instead she promotes the dominant stance position. Though she initially gets disturbed with the racist attitude of Roger, she remains quiet and dismisses his actions as typical white male behaviour, for, she needs him to achieve her dream life and does not want to have an alienated existence. Therefore, she is only temporarily angry with Roger and continues to see the difference in colour and the lack of it.

Angela acts as a mute spectator again, thereby, denying her feelings and support for the whole community. Though Angela wishes the group to be served and to have a pleasant evening, she fails to recognize her own people. Fauset identifies: "She was silent, lifeless" (134). She refers the fellow blacks as "them," thereby dismissing her ties with the black community and having learnt to align herself with the dominant white community. The fighting spirit which the group exhibits by making its entry to a place, which, as per an unwritten rule has been exclusively reserved for the whites does not seem to inspire Angela to stand and fight for, in any manner. She does not even make an attempt to, at the least evidently voice her dissent to what has been happening against her own people. Through these events, a new Angela who confidently claims and defends her choice of identity of being white and the stance position associated with it has been portrayed by Fauset.

Angela shifts from the initial role of that of a mute spectator to that of an interlocutor perfectly well, and it happens after the incident, when she translates the feelings of the group consisting of two men and a young girl who attend the cafe: ". . . she could interpret their changing expressions as completely as though those changes lay before her in a book" (Fauset 135). She feels that the elderly person has been ready to accept whatever result that comes with their entry into the cafe as he might have experienced the same in many other similar instances. All those negative experiences that might have come off to them as surprises in earlier instances no longer appear to them as surprises but probably prejudiced notions. Angela similarly interprets other members' feelings as well. To her, the younger man looked as if he is going to wage a Great War and is about to meet his enemy's discharge. This indirectly shows the indomitable spirit which the black people like them exhibit in trying to

ascertain their position by fighting against the attitude and dominance of the ruling class.

The black people put their identities under constant trial in a society segregated by colour line, lineage and the ideologies of the so-called superior lot against which they put a fight, as a means of survival. The reality of Roger's nature which Angela deliberately covers up and her failure to take a stand for herself just for the sake of a comfortable and socio-economically stable life at the goodwill of Roger make her an opportunist. It is very essential to note Angela's observation of the young girl from the group as to she might have entered the cafe with the "gay hardihood" regarding which Angela rightly interprets, '"Oh I know it isn't customary for people like us to come into this cafe, but everything is going to be all right"' (Fauset 137). Later, she shockingly realises that she could have easily been in the girl's shoes facing the wrath of people like Roger. To her, the girl appears to be a brave soul, and reminds her of Virginia who is equally brave. This brings in again the contrasting attitude of the sisters towards the establishment of their identities.

Angela also observes the self-same courage of the girl turning into a comforting assurance after the incident. She feels that though the group had been valiant enough in affirming their stand and they left the cafe with their highly held heads and poised gaze, a kind of cynicism, a growing bitterness and a new form of timidity would align the lives of the elderly man, the young man and the girl respectively following this. The cafe incident reminds her also of the unfortunate incident at the theatre which happened with her friend Matthew Henson. It fills her with immense regret that in spite of being a witness to the happenings to her own people, she had not been articulate enough about their rights in both the cases.

More than the people who are the actual victims of the dominant ideologies and civil standards of colour and race in both these incidents, it is Angela who gets immensely affected. Though after the first incident, Angela is seen taking a step to run away from her problems, with the second instance, she is seen praising her destiny and fortune. She feels that she has been blessed with the unique weapon of physical features, and that it is an accident as she could have easily received her father's phenotype like Virginia. She also thanks her mother for showing her well how to use the self-same weapon to survive "in a country where colour or the lack of it meant the difference between freedom and fetters" (Fauset 138). She feels absolutely confident of her choice of identity made in the second stage, "Choice of Group Categorization," and is not ready to reject the same for what she tags as a petty incident. In both the cases, she gets affected badly and is constantly reminded of her black lineage. But more than facing it boldly, she chooses the easier way out. She effectively plays the role of an interlocutor translating the emotions of the black people as an outsider. It actually shows her inclination towards the black lineage which she has been deliberately putting away.

Roger's discriminatory attitude gets affirmed noticeably before Angela in another incident. Both Roger and Angela establish themselves to be the carriers of white ideology at an instance for Virginia. They become the representatives of classes in power executing the politics of the class struggle through their actions, attitude and stance. On receiving a letter from Virginia who decides to come up to New York to try her luck and attend an exam, Angela gets ready to go and meet her. But, at the station, Angela unexpectedly confronts Roger with whom she has decided to cut all ties and move on in her life. In an effort to protect herself and knowing very well how he feels about black people, she prays for a miracle by which she can delay meeting

her coloured sister Jinny. This again reveals Angela's selfish and prejudiced attitude towards her dark-skinned sister and, indirectly towards her own community. Virginia, on addressing Angela through their childhood game of mistaken identity is dismissed by Roger rudely as a black inquirer and takes Angela away from her sister. Mattie's strong influence on Angela gets once again asserted here when she remains the silent spectator. George A. De Vos observes in *Ethnic Identity: Problems and Prospects for the Twenty-First Century* "passing is not simply a procedure used for direct social advantage; it also has expressive emotional implications" (21). As it can be seen in the case of Angela, it can lead to various internal tensions in individuals related to alternatives in reference groups as much of psychic and external behavioural patterns seem to be involved.

Angela is still at the peak of the second stage, "Choice of Group Categorization" of Poston's model. Roger and Angela directly and indirectly force Virginia to accept her "other" status and thereby the ruling class ideology. Gendered racial labels under working can be identified in Virginia's case at this point. Angela however, is not ready to give up on Roger and thereby the prospect of a stable life which he can offer. She believes that she would have lost everything if she had a conversation with her sister and, she convinces herself that she will help lots of coloured folks, especially Jinny, once she gets into position of one of the most coveted girls in New York. Also, that, Virginia would understand the situation if Angela later gives an explanation regarding her relationship with Roger. Meanwhile, Virginia becomes all the more confident and evident in asserting her choice of monoracial black identity after the subway incident. Virginia starts socialising as is observed by Angela when she meets the former to patch things up, but ends up getting surprised with her change of attitude. As envisioned earlier in her life, Virginia feels

that she has truly lost her sister. She says, "'I'm twenty-three years old and I'm really all alone in the world'" (168). She also realises that as Angela has already cut her off for the sake of a person whom she must have known meant to insult her, her sister will not be acknowledging Virginia again. She accepts that fact when she says, "[p]erhaps you're right Angela; perhaps there is an extra infusion of white blood in your veins which lets you see life at another angle. If that's the case I have no right to judge you" (Fauset 169), the difference in their identity choices becoming obvious.

Confusion slowly sets in within Angela's mind regarding her choice of identity and relationship with Roger. She finds her skin colour to be a curse, for she feels that, at a point when she has already reached a milestone in her life, she will not be able to withdraw from the acquaintanceship with Roger. Even if it happens, she will never be able to face herself with the same self-confidence and pride with which she had made the decision. Her decision and dream to lead a life of freedom and acceptance at the stake of so many other things result in pain and trouble. Though she decides that she does not want to be like Virginia, she is sure of the fact that, had Virginia been blessed with Angela's colour, the same which she now feels is a curse, she would have saved herself from everything. Though Angela at a later point falls for Roger genuinely and intends to marry him, he reveals his chauvinistic and racist nature by absolutely cutting her off. This she realises as his cruel and treacherous attitude towards her race and herself. She feels that "in his eyes, she was separated from him by race and by more than race" (Fauset 299). Gradually Roger becomes a symbol of all that was futile, in her choice of white identity.

Changes that happen to Angela gets reflected in her attitude as well. When loneliness strikes her badly, she understands the value of her home, relationships etc. which she had deliberately kept aside for selfish reasons. She badly yearns for

companionship, decides to make sacrifices - even if it is that of her well-cherished independence gifted to her by her white identity. Virginia on the other hand, after her unfortunate affair with Mathew Henson in Philadelphia deliberately seeks a change in New York through her friends, occupation, activities etc. She no longer goes to church as she used to earlier, and Sunday turns into her "'pick-up day,' the one period in the week which she devoted to her correspondence, her clothes and to such mysterious rites of beautifying and revitalizing as lay back of her healthy, blooming exquisiteness" (Fauset 256). On clearing the examination, she establishes herself as a successful and enthusiastic teacher in New York as she has always wished for, and starts spending time with a happy, intelligent, rather independent group of young coloured men and women. She starts reaching out to her community on a much larger and emphatic manner, and lives up to the dictum that race and ethnicity are the concerns not solely of an individual; rather, the community also plays a major role in establishing the same. Also, she starts getting involved in the activities of Harlem, especially attending the lectures of a great coloured American, Van Meier, a fearless and dauntless spirit who stood for the rights of man. Angela recognizes her sister making way into the "curious, limited, yet shifting class of the "best" coloured people" (Fauset 211) which recognises her affiliation towards the coloured identity all the more.

Angela slowly starts getting confused regarding the anomalous position that she has been in and on thinking about the choice she made in life. At a certain point, she justifies herself by saying that even the harshest of her critics would feel that unlike the people of her lot, she took a strenuous line to establish herself. Also, the stage of absolute 'denouement' (Fauset 335) sets in at times, when her blood boils and feels that in spite of being a coloured person, she got well established in white man's

America on hearing about how the coloured people are affected by the standards set by the nation. She understands the real meaning of her mother's old dictum that gets recurred at this stage: "Life is more important than colour" (Fauset 335). Angela realises that the artistic talent which she used to conceal her real motives to make an entry into a wealthy white nation is going to be her strongest force more than anything else to establish her identity opening up vistas of opportunities to go abroad on winning an Arts scholarship.

Skin colour, phenotype and black ethnic roots are the major factors that decide upon one's identity and worth in the US society. This fact holds well in the case of Miss Powell, Angela's fellow classmate at the art class in which she enrols at the Cooper Union. The kind of injustice faced by Miss Powell in the name of race, when it comes to the award of scholarship further strengthens the idea of Angela's coloured identity. Talent does not seem to offer any kind of higher status in the society and the kind of recognition that a person deserves is also not received, as can be seen the case of Miss Powell. As is mentioned in *Black Like Me* regarding the nexus established in the white society between colour and talent, "Thousands of them sacrifice everything to get the education, to prove once and for all that the Negro's capacity for learning, for accomplishment, is equal to that of any other man—that the pigment has nothing to do with degrees of intelligence, talent or virtue" (Griffin 93-94). Though Miss Powell remains consistent in her achievement, she receives negative treatment from the white authorities. This validates the fact that has been extensively discussed upon by various scholars that the race is a social category and that such a categorisation has no biological basis.

Angela notices the self-consciousness of colour and racial responsibility that lies upon Miss Powell with which she survived every second in the segregated South.

The Nehemiah Sloan prize, an arts scholarship to study abroad, is won by Miss Powell and Angela feels relieved as she could justify herself, and her decision to pursue her talent and her choice of racial identity. But, when it is discovered by the American Committee for the Fontainebleau School of Fine Arts that Miss Powell is black, they withdraw both the travel money and award. The committee says that though they are without any prejudice, "they were sure the enforced contact on the boat would be unpleasant to many of the students" and couldn't help but think that such contact would be embarrassing to Miss Powell too" (337) that undoubtedly showcases their stance. Thus, the Committee on indirectly mentioning Miss Powell, points out how her presence would violate the segregation ideals neatly maintained in the civil society. They also remind her about the need to remain an ideal subject to those greater ones by following the essential ideologies. This shows the significant role played by the racial identification process of an individual in the allocation of government fund and resources for the government programs and not-for-profit organizations. The real intention behind the racial categorisation of people, especially into minority categories in the name of executing Civil Rights legislation gets debunked here.

Just as the Committee, the southern newspapers take up the role of watchdogs in the novel. The reporters constantly remind Miss Powell of her "inferior" position by making her give out a statement that she has absolutely withdrawn from the fight. This helps the Committee, for, the Arts School allows her to take advantage of their arrangements. Griffin's observation that the "Southern newspapers print every rape, attempted rape, suspected rape and 'may be' rape,' but outstanding accomplishment is not considered newsworthy" (94) becomes significant in this regard. The reporters in the novel try to justify and establish the white dominant ideology as a natural law by

substantiating Angela's actions of neither making any visible attempt to create friendship with Miss Powell nor making her the partner for the trip to France on winning the scholarship.

The concept of Pan-Africanism in which the black people of African lineage find connected and compassionate to the blacks from all over the world to withstand white exploitation is advocated by Fauset in *Plum Bun: A Novel Without a Moral*. Fauset got inspired by this idea and became aware about the oppression faced by blacks in common all over the world, when she had attended the second Pan-African Congress in London in 1921, which she incorporated later into her fiction. The white community strongly believes that as Miss Powell is black, she may not possess any talent and cannot contribute anything productive to the society. This is the time when Angela absolutely feels nauseated and rethinks as to what she has to do at that particular moment. She slowly starts feeling empathetic towards Miss Powell. As they are "more than 'sisters under the skin,'" (Fauset 342) she even thinks of giving up the small publicity stir that got triggered with her reception of John T. Stewart Prize along with Miss Powell, on knowing about Miss Powell's fate. On witnessing an instance of racial injustice with a fellow being of hers yet again, Angela, who has been mute in all the previous instances, reacts suddenly and openly thereby declaring her coloured identity before the award committee. She too decides to not leave for France thereby reflecting upon Fauset's affinity towards the Pan-Africanist ideology. As Wilbert L. Jenkins, Professor in the History Department at Temple University, identifies in his "Jessie Fauset: A Modern Apostle of Black Racial Pride":

> Fauset was fascinated by the display of brotherhood between Black Americans and Africans at the Congress. She discovered that Blacks in America and Africa not only shared a commonality of blood, but also were plagued by

> some of the same social and political problems. American Blacks and most African Blacks suffered similarly from the lack of political power; and many African Blacks shared with American blacks the limitations which segregationist policies imposed upon them (16).

Angela deliberately denies her chosen dominant identity in the third stage "Enmeshment" or "Denial" of Poston's model, because of the self-same anger and hatred which she initially felt, while choosing the same. Though the only difference is that, while in the beginning, she had made a choice thinking simply of herself, in the end, she feels and takes a stand for the entire community. Angela thus undertakes the role of an active speaker leaving aside her earlier roles of a mere silent spectator and an interlocutor. It is very essential to notice the change in Angela's attitude towards both blacks and whites. She declares her counterstance clearly by speaking up for the black community against the Whites when she openly declares, ". . . Miss Powell isn't going to France on the American Committee Fund and I'm not going either. . . . And for the same reason. . . . I mean that if Miss Powell isn't wanted, I'm not wanted either. You imply that she's not wanted because she's coloured. Well, I'm coloured too" (348-49). This in fact, asserts her choice of favouring the black side of her biracial identity which she has ever since denied to accept. Angela's decision truly reflects upon Pan Africanism when she tries to make an active effort to denounce the white ways of exploitation which is an offshoot of European colonialism and establish sympathetic bond with other blacks, thereby making a deliberate choice of identity.

Black people's achievements are carefully excluded by the newspapers and even if any of the same seeks for an attention, it is handled in such a way to avoid the impression that anything good the black individual does is emblematic of his or her lineage as per the observations of John Howard Griffin. It gets clear from the headline

of the news story done by Miss Tildon which appeared next day after the reporters took the girls' statements. It says: '"Socially Ambitious Negress Confesses to Long Hoax"' (Fauset 353) referring to Angela. Tildon has also added that mixed-blood has been a curse that threatens national racial purity to the greatest extent. She has praised the unending battle of Ku Klux Klan which considers racial prejudice as the greatest virtue to gain hundred percent and also has exhorted for Americanism.

Angela's Reference Group Orientations and the experiences that she has gathered by then from Philadelphia and New York provide her with a clear distinction between her two ethnic backgrounds. Though in the beginning, Angela deeply feels that she has done a blunder by throwing away every chance in the world to live, later she comes to the realisation that the "matter of blood seems nothing compared with individuality, character, living" (Fauset 356). Also, the widening horizons of life and experiences revealing the true racial prejudices of the society make her reconsider the identity choice she had once made.

Severe alienation and deception which she experiences with the successful upward movement towards the dominant category too, add to Angela's realisation. This isolating effect due to the cutting down of the entire ties with her past — home, city, relations, culture — results in the loss of an unfathomable meaning of her identity which has not been evident to her earlier. According to George A. De Vos, "The sense of anomie in American society that is commonly attributed to social mobility may often have more to do with the loss of ethnic inheritance that with the simple movement from a lower to a higher class" (20). With this, she starts appreciating her black identity, its culture, and practices more than ever. Also, she understands the value of home and the security offered by her "little redoubt of refuge against the world" (Fauset 368) from where she badly wanted to run away in the past.

Angela reaches the fourth stage of "Appreciation" as a continuation to the third stage and on immediately after the denial of her white identity. As De Vos and Wagatsuma rightly put it, "In some situations, individuals re-identify with their ethnic origins, having found the alienation and malaise involved in maintaining a new identity too great a strain" (qtd. in Poston 21). Virginia at this stage approves of Angela's choice of identity and accepts the latter completely as her sister whom she once lost. She emphasises on her choice of identity as well as the counterstance against the white dominance when she says,

> Tell them to send your passage money back; say you don't want anything from them that they don't want to give; let them go, let them all go except the ones who like you for yourself. And dearest, if you don't mind having to skimp a bit for a year or two and not spreading yourself as you planned, we'll get you off to Europe after all. You know I've got all my money from the house. I've never touched it. You can have as much of that as you want and pay me back later or not at all. (Fauset 352)

"Integration," the fifth stage in the model could be noticeably seen in Angela's character towards the very end of the novel. She understands the value of both the sides and develops a secured and integrated identity. She visits Philadelphia and takes in the warmth of home, which she had once rejected. Further, she decides to pursue her passion of becoming renowned artist in Paris. She realises that earlier when she was just ninety miles away from her sister physically, they were miles apart mentally. But now, she finds the distance of three thousand miles between herself and her sister as nothing as there is love, trust and understanding as she has headed back to the closeness of being at home. She declares to her friend Ralph about her choice of identity at this stage, "'I can't placard myself, and I suppose there will be lots of times

when in spite of myself I'll be 'passing.' But I want you to know that from now on, so far as sides are concerned, I am on the coloured side'" (Fauset 375). She accepts her coloured identity in its wholeness and at the same time, values her white side as well. During her stay in Paris, she gets united with Anthony Cross, a biracial individual whom she meets at the art class in New York. Thus, the integration of identity gets completed in the case of Angela, and a sense of wholeness is achieved by the character. Virginia, on the contrary upholds her identity choice of hegemonic monoracial blackness, and the primary importance of having a home by choosing as her life partner, Matthew Henson, whose features she had always compared and contrasted with that of her father's.

Plum Bun: A Novel Without a Moral is noted for its ingenious craftsmanship and narrative technique. Major incidents in the novel are narrated by a third-person objective narrator focussing on the lives and happenings of the biracial Murray siblings. The novel comprises of plots within plots and texts within texts that serve as commentaries on each other. The main plot concerning Angela Murray and Virginia Murray can be regarded as a Bildungsroman narrative that exists as an arching framework. Set against the vibrant background of Harlem and Greenwich Village in the Roaring Twenties of the American History, Angela's journey through seduction, betrayal, protest, and solidarity toward self-identification is skilfully tracked by the narrator. The novel also becomes a significant add-on to the small but a continuing standard of passing novels of the times. Fictionalised portrayals of the renowned figures of Harlem Renaissance such as W. E. B. Du Bois and the sculpture student and a graduate of Cooper Union Augusta Savage who has been denied a chance to study in Paris because of her skin colour are brought in by the author at various crucial junctures in the novel to exemplify the cultural, social and creative fervour of

the era. Flashback technique is also employed to powerfully touch upon various events in the lives of major and minor characters that become crucial in the shaping of their identities. The novel remains a testimonial on behalf of the black middle class as Fauset always thought to be the preliminary responsibility of the black authors. In the introduction to the 1985 edition of the novel, Deborah E. McDowell notes Fauset's exploration of the theme of power in the novel as well as in the publication scenario of the times as indicated in "Plum Bun by Jessie Redmon Fauset (1928): An Analysis" as follows:

> The questions which Plum Bun raises about power, about fulfilled and unfulfilled expectations, extend beyond the novel to comment pointedly on the literary world of the 1920s and Fauset's negotiations as a black female writer in that world. Her exploration of power poses specific implications for her experience as a black writer during the Harlem Renaissance, a movement dependant on the power of a patronage system and publishing industry controlled by whites. (Atlas)

Angela's identity development can be explicitly tracked through the five stages of Poston's "Biracial Identity Development Model." Several issues and assumptions have been introduced through this model by him and Angela's identity development seems to validate a kind of assimilation to the same. Initially, she faces identity crisis when she internalizes the prejudices and values of her Reference Group Orientations, which has a severe impact on her self-worth. Slowly various factors like familial set up, peer group patterns etc. influence her identity choice. She experiences alienation and pressure during the choice phase and finally makes a choice and declares her stance. Though she enjoys many advantages due to her choice of one identity over another i.e., white side of her identity over the black side, the revelation

of the rejected side of identity before others results in the denial of the chosen one. This resultant denial is associated with a kind of guilt and disloyalty which she experiences for keeping aside the other part of her identity. She gets out of the confusion and prejudices experienced in the earlier stages on reaching the final stage with the counterstance position that she exhibits, where all sides of her identity are recognized and accepted in an integrated manner.

On the contrary, Virginia's choice of hegemonic monoracial blackness with a sense of pride gets stressed in parallel to the various stages of Angela's identity development which reflects upon the essence of the Harlem times. She is a sharp contrast to what Angela is, in terms of physical appearance, temperament, attitudes which get reflected in her choice of identity and in upholding the same. The issues and questions of identity crisis that haunt the biracial individuals at each phase of their lives have been unveiled in detail through the sociological, psychological and legal angles. Roles of gender, income and government funding in the identity development of biracial individuals have also been recognized. Major stereotypes of the era are subverted with the identity choices that the siblings make and the counterstance position maintained by them.

Chapter IV

Exclusive and Inclusive Identities: Danzy Senna's *Caucasia*

"Defining myself, as opposed to being defined by others, is one of the most difficult challenges I face."

--- Carol Moseley-Braun, qtd. in "Carol Moseley Braun Quotes"

Biracial people have been on a relentless search for a relatable identity from their earlier stages of life. From their childhood, they are made to feel that their appearances are entirely different from other children, and this awareness grows along with them. A need for the definition of one's identity pressurises them, as is indicated in the opening quote by Carol Moseley-Braun, the first African American woman to serve in the US Senate. The configuration of identity by the society with the spotlight on the chromatic standards and by being completely blind on a person's talent or character has always been evident in the segregated US. "One-Drop Rule" which tags individual as "black" on detecting even a single drop of black blood or black ancestry, though the person appears visibly white aggravates the situation. The twentieth-century US society is no different in being a host to stereotypical figures and concepts. One such least known of the major anti-black misrepresentations is that of the Golliwog. *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (2011) defines Golliwog as a "doll fashioned in grotesque caricature of a black male" (3141). A popular image in England and European countries, Golliwog is often characterised by jet black skin, large white-rimmed eyes, red or white clown lips, and wild, frizzy hair. Though in the earlier half of the twentieth century, Golliwog doll has been children's favourite soft toy associated with bravery, adventure and love in Europe. But in the latter half of the century when the relations between the whites and the

Blacks turned complex, and the racial tensions in the US started affecting the British culture too, the Golliwogs became the emblems of racial insensitivity.

Maria P. P. Root in her article "Resolving "Other" Status: Identity Development of Biracial Individual" (1990), proposes four affirmative solutions to resolve the identity issues of the biracial individuals. These have been proposed in such a manner that no solution is regarded as better than the other and that "the individual may shift their resolution strategies throughout their life-time in order to nurture a positive identity" (186). The first resolution is the acceptance of the identity the society assigns, in which the identification with a particular group into which other people assume the biracial individual mostly belongs happens. The second solution is the identification with both racial groups. The third option is the identification with a single racial group where the individual makes the choice of a particular racial identity against all the pressures to identify in a particular way. The fourth and the final resolution that Root offers is the biracial person's identification with a new racial group. In this, a person moves flexibly among racial groups but tends to identify most strongly with other biracial people irrespective of their specific ethnic backgrounds. According to Root, for the biracial individuals, "the resolution of major conflicts inherent in the process of racial identity development may result in a flexibility to move between strategies which may reflect positive coping and adaptive abilities and be independent of the integrity of the individual's personality style" (186).

Caucasia, published in 1998 and brilliantly penned by Danzy Senna, is a narrative that deals with the coming-of-age tale of two biracial sisters, Birdie Lee and Cole Lee. Divided into three parts indicating the passing of time and space, the novel also examines the contractions between visible and subjective racial identities.

Physical appearance and the discernment of the same by the people become the key factors in deciding a biracial person's identity during the times. Both the sisters grow up along with their parents in a black community in 1970s in a racially tensed city of Boston, Massachusetts during the Black Power Movement. Their father Deck Lee is a black man, a revolutionary who fights against racism, and an intellectual who believes in his oratorical skill to win against the segregation ideals. Their mother, a Caucasian lady Sandra Lee, the "blue-blooded" daughter of a Harvard Professor, is an activist who works for the black power cell. Birdie is perceived as white because of her lighter skin colour and straight hair which she has inherited from her mother. Her sister Cole with black features such as darker skin, kinky hair and small, round nose as that of her father's is identified as black.

Caucasia mainly traces Birdie's journey along the lines of time and space. Throughout the novel, Birdie struggles to express her racial identity in a social set up that offers her two extreme choices - of being either black or white. Definition of Birdie's identity as a biracial kid, has always been in relation to that of her elder sister, Cole. According to M. E. Goodman, *Race Awareness in Young Children*, "[t]he awareness of "otherness," or ambiguous ethnicity begins early when a child starts to be aware of color around age three but before a sense of racial identity is formed" (qtd. in Root 189). Right from the childhood, Cole is considered to be Birdie's exact mirror reflection that provides the evidence of the latter's being. Birdie states that she has seen Cole even before she has seen herself. She adds, "Back then, I was content to see only Cole, three years older than me, and imagine that her face—cinnamon-skinned, curly-haired, serious — was my own. . . . That face was me and I was that face and that was how the story went" (5).

Though both the siblings have distinct phenotypes, Birdie's inherent blackness which she has ever treasured or relished has been represented by Cole's image thereby adding meaning to her existence. Thus, she opts for Root's third resolution of identification with a single racial group by identifying herself as black. Birdie's choice of identity is an active process, devoid of pressure and is free from oppression. Root observes that "the individual chooses to identify with a particular racial/ethnic group regardless if this is the identity assumed by siblings, assigned by society, or matching their racial features. This is a positive strategy if the individual does not feel marginal to their proclaimed racial reference group and does not deny the other part of their racial heritage" (201). Birdie has established a connection with Cole since the former has been in her mother's womb. This is evident from Cole's words as she leans against Sandy's belly to "tell secrets with her three-year old gibberish genius, all the while using her finger to trace a kind of invisible hieroglyphics against our mother's swollen flesh" (Senna 5). Birdie feels that Cole must have done this to comfort and console her, as she thought that Birdie must have been lonely and frightened in the darkness within the womb.

Birdie's identification with her black self happens mainly with the existence of Cole, which further shapes her choice of identity. At the same time, Cole's absence makes Birdie lose her sense of the self. Also, the mirror seems to make her lose her black identity as it reflects the light skinned identity instead of the truly identified black inner self. This becomes essentially significant, as it typically replicates the perception of the outer world. It propels the confusion in her choice of identity, and she starts considering herself as an invisible outsider, who vanishes away easily from the black world. Every time a confusion arises, disappearance seems to be her way out to avoid the situation. She has felt an ecstasy of anonymity and inconspicuousness in

many instances. Birdie thus gets caught between visible and latent identities which she performs depending upon the situations. Unlike Birdie, Cole is wholly clear about her choice of identity with hegemonic monoracial blackness and she overtly expresses the same. She identifies with a single racial group, which is Root's third resolution. Her choice of the black identity gets shaped primarily because of her black phenotype, along with the various familial and societal factors that determine one's identity. She therefore becomes a mirror that reflects upon Birdie's real self.

Objectification of the light-skinned mixed-race people has been an important aspect of the quadroon balls held in nineteenth-century New Orleans which establishes the gender connection with the racial identity development. As Ronald Hall, Kathy Russell, and Midge Wilson observe in *The Color Complex: The Politics of Skin Color Among African Americans,* "Pretty quadroons (one-quarter Black) and exotic octoroons (one-eighth Black) were in particularly high demand. Light-skinned beauties, called 'fancy girls,' were auctioned off at 'quadroon balls' held regularly in New Orleans and Charleston" (18). White men have easily fallen for the exotic beauty and light skin tone of these women thereby choosing the latter as their mistresses. Such a manipulative approach towards the mixed-race women makes them vulnerable targets of the objectifying gaze of the white men. The act also reveals the stereotypical ideology of power and superiority that the white skinned people has wielded over the others. Though Birdie has not been subjected to any exploitation, she definitely experiences objectification owing to her outward image, while her complex inner identity is conveniently side-lined.

Family plays an important role in the development of identity of biracial individuals as per Root:

> A positive self-concept and view of people is promoted in interracial partnerships and extended families in which a person's value is independent of race though race is not ignored. This environment, whether it be as a single or two parent household, gives the individual a security that will help them weather the stress of adolescence. It is this unusual objectivity about people which determines the options the biracial person has for resolving their identity. (191)

Both the sisters are made to face the racial problems, especially, preferential treatment right from childhood hinting at the working of gender in the racial identity development. Possession of a white phenotype helps Birdie to get easily accepted in her mother's family of bluebloods, whose ancestry can be traced back to Cotton Mather, one of the significant intellectual figures in English-speaking Colonial America. Appreciation of Birdie's Italian or French looks by finding similarity to the distant white relatives, and a total rejection of Cole's presence during the meeting with their grandmother reveal the deliberate segregation of the siblings on the basis of skin colour and the stance position that she maintains.

Birdie senses that the compliments paid, and the care given by her grandmother are not out of the sincere love that she has for her granddaughter, but, due to the sheer societal and cultural preference for whiteness: "'Birdie, dear, you look lovely. I think she looks a bit like Arabella, those old photos of when she was young. Don't you think, Sandy?"' Arabella was one of my mother's distant cousins from England, whom I had seen only in photographs. As I recalled, she looked nothing like me" (Senna 104). One of the assumptions made by Maria P. P. Root that despite being a variant and polychromatic nation, there clearly exists a division between individuals in terms of black and white becomes valid here. As Root

observes, "[t]he positive imagery created by the "melting-pot" philosophy of the United States is relevant to white ethnic groups of immigrants such as the Irish, French, and Scandinavian people and not Africans, Asians, Hispanics, or on home territory, American Indians. Cultural pluralism is neither appreciated nor encouraged by the larger culture" (187). Birdie's grandmother and her equation of colour with beauty standards showcase and assert the white aesthetic superiority which is perceptible in the earlier 'quadroon balls.' Sandra Lee's agreement in the '"Yes, mother, she could be" (Senna 107) to her mother's question perplexes Birdie who was anticipating her mother to openly proclaim that she is black. The incident accentuates the grandmother's racial preconception thereby expressing Birdie's inability to proclaim her preferred choice of identity as a black.

Racial mixing or the general interaction between whites and blacks have been avoided through the strict anti-miscegenation rules. This helps to maintain racial superiority and purity, which is evident in the extra concern of her grandmother when she enquires about the school to Birdie alone thereby ignoring Cole. Birdie records her grandmother's reaction when Sandy says that Birdie is going to the Nkrumah school, which focusses on African American culture and arts: '"It's crazy, child abuse, to send your child onto a neighbourhood like that. She could be robbed or killed or anything! Jesus Christ, Sandy'" (Senna 106). Her grandmother thereby insinuates that African Americans could be violent and intolerant to a mixed-race individual and, therefore she prevents the chance of any kind of racial mixing. Root makes an assumption regarding the hierarchy of colour that exists in the US when she notes, "[A]ttempts are made to prevent racial mixing because free interaction assumes equality. A corollary of this assumption is that mixed-race persons who are part white and can pass as such will be very likely to strive for this racial identity in order to

have maximum social power and to escape the oppression directed towards people of color" (187).

Cole's black phenotype gets acceptance and appreciation mainly from her father's side because of the strength of her choice of identity. Though Birdie is not rejected fully, she is not complimented either. Aunt Dot's words when she meets her two nieces reveal this: '"Look at you two, so grown. Hot damn Cole, check you out." She spun Cole around in her hands, then said to my father with a wink, "Watch out there, big daddy. She's gonna be a heartbreaker"' (Senna 11). Cole's clear memory of Deck's mother is absent for Birdie, is indicative of Cole's definite choice of identity and the counterstance that she maintains, along with Birdie's desire to assert her inner self which the world doesn't approve of:

> We always referred to her as Nana, to distinguish her from our white one, who was always Grandma. Nana had died when I was still a baby and Cole was three. Cole claims to remember her. She says Nana taught her, at that young age, to have an appreciation for coffee (she would give it to Cole with a dollop of sweetened condensed milk, so it was like coffee ice cream). I was jealous of those memories. (Senna 8-9)

These lines show how there are inherent ways devised within the society by which the stereotypical ideologies operate within the family. It becomes evident from the kind of toys gifted to the siblings at a tender age. Once during Christmas, Sandy's mother whom Deck Lee jokingly addresses as "the last of a noble line," (Senna 25) gifts Birdie an unexciting children's book, while Cole is given a Golliwog doll. Both the girls find the doll very different from those black dolls with brown plastic skin, dark and curly hair and African cloth sewed to their pinafore hems gifted by her father. Birdie says, "Golliwog was completely different—wild, laughing, cool. He wore little

tuxedo pants and a bright-red bow tie that matched his lips in color and cloth" (Senna 98). This proves the racial divide and segregation that is practised within the family and it also highlights the representative societal stance expressed by the grandmother towards Cole. "Though Sandra Lee tries hard to make the children understand that the Golliwog doll gifted by their grandmother is nothing but '"a racist tool, a parody, a white-supremacist depiction of African people"' (Senna 98), the sisters don't seem to really comprehend the prejudice behind the same at that age. As she grows up, Cole gets deeply influenced by the family members' attitude of openly appreciating and expressing her identity and hence she expresses the same without hiding it or getting oppressed. Birdie in fact, recognises the real ideology only as she grows up, and therefore totally denounces the same as she wishes to identify herself as black just as Cole does. One of the reasons of oppression faced by the biracial individuals as identified by Root "stems from society's silence on biracialism as though if it is ignored, the issue will go away" (188).

Home space plays an important role in shaping the racial identity of both the siblings at a very young age. An earlier sense of self-consciousness enters the children's minds through their home in Boston. This occurs in the attic bedroom that turns out to be the embodiment of their wildest imagination in terms of self-realisation. In the attic bedroom, the siblings develop a little universe, thereby, keeping themselves away from the dangers of racial cataloguing in the outside world. Thus, the concept of invisibility and disappearance seem to be convincing enough to keep themselves away from the unpredictable racial equations of Boston. As Birdie describes the realistic world outside their attic:

> "The summer before I turned eight, the outside world seemed to bear in on us with a new force. It was 1975, and Boston was a battleground. My mother and

> her friends spent hours huddled around the kitchen table, talking about the trouble out there. Forced integration. Roxbury. South Boston. Separate but not quite equal. God made the Irish number one. A fight, a fight, a nigga and a white . . .” (Senna 7)

The convoluted and muddled racial scenario of the city seems to largely influence the sisters that make them establish a haven where they can realise their selves with utmost clarity. As Sika Alaine Dagbovie Mullins in her article, “Fading to White, Fading Away: Biracial Bodies in Michelle Cliff’s *Abeng* and Danzy Senna’s *Caucasia*” clearly observes: “Cole and Birdie’s awareness of the volatile nature of race relations in their city makes the idea of disappearing particularly appealing to them” (102).

Birdie and Cole establish a kind of imaginary mixed community named “Elemeno,” based on each other’s imagination, where, they are the only members. They resort to Root’s fourth solution thus identifying themselves as a new group though an illusory one and also to ignore past the racial reality. Race thus becomes a game of make-believe or performance in the novel. The true attachment of the sisters slowly develops into a mutual communal feeling, which ultimately is the reflection of their own psyche. Racial tension enters their household as soon as their parents’ start squabbling over the same, and shout obscenities at each other’s racial identities. The siblings resort to the discussion about their “Elemeno” world, so as to insulate themselves from listening to their parents’ frenzied exchanges. As Birdie notes Cole’s observation:

> The Elemenos, she said, could turn not just from black to white, but from brown to yellow to purple to green, and back again. She said they were a shifting people, constantly changing their form, color, pattern, in a quest for

> invisibility. According to her, their changing routine was a serious matter—less a game of make-believe than a fight for the survival of their species. The Elemenos could turn deep green in the bushes, beige in the sand, or blank white in the snow, and their power lay precisely in their ability to disappear into any surrounding. (Senna 7)

This feature of "Elemeno" as a new reference group is reflective of Root's fourth resolution as the siblings find themselves different from the established reference groups. Cole takes her make-believe identity seriously, for, she finds some sort of power attached to it. She too wishes for a space where the significance of race as a concept doesn't hold good enough and, she therefore totally eliminates the very concept of racial categorisation. While Cole interprets the concept of the "Elemeno" world from the aspect of strength, Birdie tries to view the attic as a space to where she can safely escape from the chaos of the real world.

Birdie gets truly immersed in the identity of an "Elemeno" which is the fantasized version of her real biracial identity and wishes to continue in the self-constructed world forever. Identity becomes a performance which Birdie and Cole continue to perform with each other using a variety of costumes that they have kept stuffed up in a trunk. Along with the costumes, the language too which they have perfected over time in their attic bedroom in the brownstone on Columbus Avenue helps them assert their "Elemeno" selves. The language which their father termed "high-speed patois" is called "Elemeno" (Senna 6) by the sisters. The word "Elemeno" stands for English alphabets L, M, N and O which are uttered at a fast pace. The description of the language by Birdie underscores both their identities:

> It was a complicated language, impossible for outsiders to pick up—no verb tenses, no pronouns, just words floating outside time and space without owner

> or direction. Attempting to understand our chatter, my mother said, was like trying to eavesdrop on someone sleeptalking, when the words are still untranslated from their dream state—achingly familiar, but just beyond one's grasp. (Senna 6)

The make-believe world and the fascination of a safe identity choice that the home space offers, keep both the sisters away from the identity crisis of external world to a certain extent. For them, the make-believe identities become their true identities for quite some time in the childhood. Hence, a kind of running away rather than the real survival happens. Birdie observes: "When Cole and I were alone in our attic, speaking Elemeno and making cities out of stuffed animals, it seemed that the outside world was as far away as Timbuktu—some place that could never touch us. We were the inside, the secret and fun and make-believe, and that was where I wanted to stay" (Senna 7). These words reveal that the idea and choice of Birdie's racial identity simply depended upon her sister's bonding with her and her inner consciousness. She feels that it is unable to define herself outside the "Elemeno" world. This sense of mysterious identity development is something that the siblings associate with those strangers who have run away from the Federal Police and taken shelter with the aid of Sandra Lee in their home at odd hours of the night. As the only evidence for the strangers' existence and identity, a wide range of items such as lipsticks, wigs, combs, accessories, t-shirts etc. which those unknown people have left behind after staying for either a few weeks or months in their home before leaving for their new hideouts are recovered by the siblings. These products are then carefully hidden by Birdie and Cole in the trunk at the bottom of their bed beneath their "Elemeno" costumes.

Race and class are the most obvious factors in deciding the strength of the interracial family set up in the novel. The backgrounds of the couple Sandra Lodge

and Deck Lee get established in a way that portrays the slow fragmentation of the family. Sandra, the white lady has grown up in Cambridge as the daughter of a Harvard Professor and a socialite wife, with roots from Boston families with ancient ancestral lineage. She is an activist as well, who gets involved in several community development programmes. Deck, on the other hand is a black intellectual, a race theorist and the student of Sandra's father. Differences in race, class status, educational background and heritage which was initially not a deterrent begin to pop up at later stages of their life, thereby, ripping the family into pieces. The fact that they didn't possess a wedding album, for, no one cared to document the event as per Birdie's observation, is proof of a racially segregated society that was not welcoming towards interracial marriages, and also throws light on their lack of acceptance of such couples and their children as an integrated family unit. The ratification of anti-miscegenation laws that were deemed constitution until 1967 in order to maintain the white racial purity is regarded as the major reason for this. It is to be noted that the only proof of her parents' wedding is a photograph which Birdie gets from a marked page that explains the three racial phenotypes in the world in Deck's encyclopaedia. This can be symbolic of the racial differences that existed among the couple and Birdie's description of the picture is to be noted:

> My mother looks like a missionary in her flowing Guatemalan skirt and peasant blouse: she wears her hair in twin braids on either side of her face. Her transluscent blue eyes are those of a child on her first day of school—terrified, blinking, expectant. My father looks frightened as well in his stiff collar, the kink of his hair cut close to his scalp. The lawn around them is sprinkled with relatives, smiles so tight it could have been a funeral. (Senna 30-31)

The photograph thus captured the fear of her parents, the resentment of their relatives and the society at large at such an interracial marriage. Variant racial identities and ideologies have resulted in the bitterness that existed in Deck and Sandra's relationship, in spite of their consistent effort to get over the same. At times, Birdie felt that it is with her birth that her parents' relation begins to sour. Birdie recapitulates the disagreement in deciding upon her name, which finally ended in naming her as Birdie. She notes that her father has wanted to call her Patrice after the Congolese liberator Lumumba, but her mother has wished to name her Jesse after her great-grandmother and a white suffragette. On the other hand, Cole is born when their relationship is strong and both agree to name her Colette, after a French writer and shortens it to Cole. The difficulty of naming a biracial child is evident here for it plays an important role in deciding an identity for the children later in their lives. Birdie's identity crisis from her childhood days is evident when she says, "Cole just called me Birdie—she had wanted a parakeet for her birthday and instead got me. For a while, I answered to all three names with a schizophrenic zeal. But in the end, even my parents grew tired of the confusion and called me Birdie, though my birth certificate still reads, "Baby Lee," like the gravestone of some stillborn child" (Senna 19).

The attitudes of Deck and Sandra Lee towards the political ambience of 1970s Boston give a vivid picture of their natures as well. The difference that has persisted between Sandra, the activist and Deck, the theorist becomes visible in various situations. Sandra's take on politics as per the observation of Cole is pretty simple. To her, people are worthy of mainly four basic needs – food, love, shelter and good education and rest everything is extra. Birdie has observed that in comparison to her mother's attitude, her father has always found politics a complex scenario. Also, as Kathryn Rummell has mentioned in her, "Rewriting the Passing Novel: Danzy

Senna's *Caucasia*," Deck Lee is someone "who believes that rhetoric can easily win the war against racism" (1). As he is totally preoccupied with theories about race and white hypocrisy, Sandra's activism appears to him as an interruption in many ways. Birdie notes that in her mother's opinion, "intellectuals like him were parlor-pink creeps who never really practiced what they preached" (Senna 22) and also he is absolutely down with '"the weight of his intellect. . . . He thinks too much to be of much use to anybody"' (Senna 23). At a certain point, Birdie feels that the whole house seems to tremor with the intensity of the vehemence that one had for the other. Deck's inclination and navigation towards his racial identity is noticed by Birdie once the fragmentation of her parents' relation starts:

> My father always spoke differently around Ronnie. He would switch into slang, peppering his sentences with words like "cat" and "man" and "cool." Whenever my mother heard him talking that way, she would laugh and say it was his "jive turkey act." In the past year, he had discovered Black Pride (just few years later than everyone else), and my mother said he was trying to purge himself of his "honkified past." (Senna 10)

One of the major issues as an interracial couple on which Sandra and Deck Lee initially agreed upon initially was about raising their children as biracial individuals. In order to keep the children away from the perils of racism and violence that characterise the outer world, Sandra decides not to send them to a real school to which Deck too agrees. Instead, she believes that it would be better to teach them along with her dyslexic pupils who come to take lessons at home in the afternoons, thereby safeguarding her children from the outer world. She is also proud that both Birdie and Cole are well above the reading and mathematical skills for their ages. Deck Lee has issued a theoretical base for the same when he jokingly says to his

friends as Birdie notes, “Cole and I were going to be proof that race mixing produced superior minds, the way a mutt is always more intelligent than a purebred dog” (Senna 26). Sandra too validates this theory by mentioning that, excessive inbreeding has made the wasps and golden retrievers, stupid races. Such free attitudes of the parents beyond race and class, which to an extent are the ways to justify their interracial familial set up, have been essential in shaping the children’s identities exclusive to the home space.

Familial factors that had earlier contributed to the identity and intellect of the children, fall apart later, thereby altering the lives of both parents and children. Sandy and Deck try hard to beat the negative effects of race and class, by being a compatible interracial couple and by raising confident biracial children. But gradually, these self-same factors pervade everything that they had constructed within their small family, elements such as — unity, bond and sibling love. The words of Deck Lee that have been directed to taunt Sandra when their separation happens and the disintegration of family becomes complete, ‘“You belong in the Square, just where I found you, Sandy, no matter how much you try to fight it. You’re a Harvard girl at heart. . . . And I need to go to Roxbury. Find me a strong black woman. A sistah. No more of this crazy white-girl shit”’ and Sandy’s reply for the same, ‘“Don’t blacken your speech around me. I know where you come from. You can’t fool me”’ (Senna 25) prove this. As David L. Brunsma, Professor of Sociology at Virginia Polytech Institute and State University rightly points out in his “Interracial Families and the Racial Identification of Mixed-Race Children: Evidence from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study” about the complexities faced by the interracial families,

> Contemporarily, they are trying to navigate a complex, “changing” racial terrain where multiraciality is discussed and debated, where racism is

> denounced and supposedly diminished, race still matters as an axis through which goods, services opportunities and life chances are distributed unequally to members of the same society. (1132)

Deck's sudden announcement of choosing a school at Roxbury for Birdie and Cole to continue their studies without consulting Sandra marks a deep strain within their marital life. The real test that awaits the siblings as biracial individuals and the impending take on their selves by the outer world are also indicated by this decision. Deck also announces his decision to join the Black Power School. Sandra's reply to Deck's announcement that his choice of a Black Power School would not make up for his absence in their lives is an indicator of his leaving home soon and an open expression of his inclination towards the black race. In addition to this, the issue of children's identity crisis gets discussed by Sandra and Deck clearly for the first time. When Sandra mentions in a perplexed manner to Deck that the Black Power School will be of some advantage only to Cole and not to Birdie, the reality check with a direct implication to the imaginary colour line that divides the Americans and the position of biracial individuals in the same happens. The privileging of one colour over the other is apparent in Deck's choice.

Deck's answer to Sandra's confusion on his choice of school, '"May be you need to cut this naïve color-blind posturing. In a country as racist as this, you're either black or you're white. And no daughter of mine is going to pass"' (Senna 27) exposes the perilous effects of racial and colour segregation that exist in America. He also dismisses the idea of an in-between existence in America, for, a biracial individual will definitely be tagged as either black or white depending upon his/her skin colour primarily. Deck's premonition of how the society would treat his daughters is also one born out of experience. Ultimately, Cole benefits more than Birdie because of her

black phenotype. Thus, the concerns of both the parents can be interpreted as the ones for their like-coloured child, and at the same time an indirect inclination towards their own racial categories. Deck's book *Wonders of the Visible World* portrays the destiny of black people in an integrated society in detail. He has tried to read this book aloud to Cole to validate his choice of the school. It is also to be noted that the name of the book itself angers Sandra Lee, for, she is reminded of the racial IQ test which Deck took of his young children by providing them with building blocks, questionnaires and dolls of different colours as a part of his research for the book. As children, they had fun with the whole procedure, but it really infuriates Sandra, for, her children being Deck's mere subjects of research. The ultimate divorce of Deck and Sandra is particularly interesting as the children choose parents with similar phenotype as their guardians which seems an unwritten rule, just as they had unknowingly been exhibiting favouritism towards the children from their birth. When Cole asks Birdie whether they should try and go with Deck, the latter determinedly rejects the proposal and says that he would be back soon. But Birdie's real thought-processing and her willingness to remain with her mother gets revealed further when she says, "Really, I wasn't sure he'd be back. But I knew I didn't want to go with him. He was distracted all the time. I thought my mother was more fun, even if she did act wild on occasion" (Senna 25). Meanwhile, Cole is the only one who is heartbroken when Deck leaves home. The specific choice of the parents as per phenotype of the siblings shows how the imaginary colour line positions people in the American society. It is as if some unwritten rule has always existed and divided the parents and children based on their skin colour.

The two different identities of the siblings is apparent to Birdie for the first time when she looks at the mirror to understand the meaning for the term "Sicilian,"

to which she is likened by her other family members. On looking herself at the mirror, Birdie realises that she and Cole were not similar. She had always thought of them as identical in all ways, but there existed obvious differences. Birdie observes: "Her hair was curly and mine was straight, and I figured that this fact must have had something to do with the fighting and the way the eyes of strangers flickered surprise, sometimes amusement, sometimes disbelief, when my mother introduced us as sisters" (Senna 29). The bitter reality that society's perception and acceptance of an individual based on the phenotype plays an important role in shaping one's identity, is made clear to Birdie. As the novel progresses, this becomes the basis of her struggle to define her racial identity and survive in a world that offers only two choices of being either black or white.

Later, when Sandra Lee too thinks about the public schools being the best, she takes the decision to admit her children in a public school. She also doesn't want them to get separated from people and learn to lead a normal life. This actually intensifies the make-believe game of the girls in the attic. The fact that they soon would have to leave the world they've set up, draws Birdie and Cole closer using the game of speaking "Elemeno" and wearing extravagant attire despite the hot weather outside. An anxiety of losing her mysterious identity which has always been in relation to Cole, and the speculation about developing new ones is clear in Birdie's words: "We didn't have other friends, just each other, and sometimes while we drove around in the back of my mother's Pinto, I would stare at the children outside with a newfound interest, wondering which one of them I would become" (Senna 37).

Awareness about "otherness" happens to a biracial individual once she/he gets out to the real world. Similarly, the societal judgement of Birdie and Cole's phenotypes and identities become obvious as they leave the imagined world created at

the attic. This happens in the case of the siblings when once a lady at the City Hall assigns Cole to an Irish dominant school in South Boston, and Birdie to a black school in Dorchester. This allocation is done as a part of the 1971 US Supreme Court verdict to exterminate segregation and improve the racial make-up of the school by "Race-integration busing." She fails to recognise the siblings as real sisters and therefore she does this, but later reworks her decision and puts them both to South Boston when Sandra furiously reveals the reality. However, the siblings are not able to attend the class on the first day, for, the school gets closed when a black man who was pulled out of his vehicle disappeared "under a cloud of white fists" (Senna 39). Atrocities towards black people in the name of race and colour seem to question their right to live and the choice of identity.

Cole too faces judgemental attitude and brutality at a young age from the society. Birdie is reminded of the altercation once she and Cole have had with a group of Irish girls in the underwear department of Decelles in West Roxbury. The girls initially smile at them as if they wanted to be friends with the siblings and they also wanted the sisters to join them as well. Though Birdie returns the smile initially, she immediately stops it with the incident taking a turn when the girls thrust Cole into the shelf of bras, and one of them begins sticking bubble gum in her hair. Birdie clearly remembers the girls' abominable words which express the stance maintained by the dominant group and their stereotyping attitude when they abuse, "Go back to the jungle, darkie. Go wash your ass. Go you little culahd biscuit" (Senna 40). The shivering bottom lip of Cole who is left standing still in the curtains reveals the trauma faced by her. This is in total contrast to the acceptance that Cole once gained from her father's family. As Root observes, ". . . previously neutral acknowledgment or special attention is interpreted as negative attention. It is with these reactions that

the child in her or his dichotomous way of knowing and sorting the world may label her or his otherness as bad" (189).

While Birdie finds it hard to comply with the perception of her identity by the majority white society wilfully and completely, she also feels it equally difficult to successfully establish her black self, overcoming the hindrances. She doesn't find a solid ground to stay put and strongly assert any of the choices offered in terms of the colour line. This inability to assign to a particular racial category and negotiate her position in the colour line with complete sense as an insider is aggravated later in Birdie's case when the sisters join the Black Power School at Nkrumah, dropping off the home education provided until then by Sandra Lee. The reality check of her identity happens in the new physical space in the beginning itself. Cole with Deck's "kinky hair and small, round nose" (Senna 43), and Sandra's sea glass hued eyes is thought of as the new student by the lady at the registration counter and Birdie with a beige skin colour is totally ignored. As Root rightly observes, "a significant part of identification of self in reference to either racial group is influenced by how siblings look, their racial identification, and people's reactions to them" (190). It is again when Sandra makes it clear that the girls are sisters that both get admission into the school.

The hostile attitude of the school children is difficult for Birdie to negotiate as the black side of her identity is totally ignored by her peer group members when she is identified as white by them. Her biracial identity undergoes a trial in several instances due to peer pressure. As Root notes,

> [i]t is the combination of inquisitive looks, longer than passing glances to comprehend unfamiliar racial-ethnic features (an "unusual or exotic look"), and comments of surprise to find out that the child is one or the other parent's biological child along with disapproving comments and nonverbal

> communication that begin to convey to the child that this otherness is "undesirable or wrong. (189)

Birdie also gets addressed by a question from the students about her presence in an all-black school, as she is considered a misfit on account of her phenotype. She is made a laughing stock and is abusively called a "Rican." In spite of feeling black inside, she is not able to make an open choice in a public space. However hard she tries, still her features announce her identity to the whole world. The suffocation that she feels when a boy throws a spitball that hits her forehead is described in the following manner:

> I felt the familiar tightening in my lungs. . . . Underneath the desk, I could feel dried lumps of bubble gum, and there was something comforting about those lumps, as if they were the writing on the cave wall from some ancient civilization—proof that others had lived through this moment. I moved my fingertips over the gum slowly, as if I were trying to read Braille. (Senna 43-44)

At that moment, Birdie seems to empathise with all the biracial individuals, who have had to go through the identity crisis due to the trials posed by the society, to make a clear and definite choice of the self. As Root clearly observes, the biracial individuals "are teased by their schoolmates, called names, and or isolated-all the result of the prejudice that is transmitted by relatives, the media, and jokes" (190).

The attitude of her schoolmates towards her identity and the fear of being laughed at makes Birdie extremely reserved and hesitant to mingle with them. However, this doesn't make her accept the choice of identity assigned by the peer group; rather, it deepens her struggle to prove herself. She faces rejection all the more from the black community at school though she tries to gain acceptance into the

stereotypical framework. She becomes unable to carry off either of the racial binaries that characterise the colour line in the American society. The instance where the tradition of teaching students to take pride in their black heritage by shouting out the slogan, 'Black is beautiful' is followed at the school proves the same. Birdie falls in a serious dilemma as she feels that her light skin makes her totally unfit in the world's eyes to follow this convention. Though she desperately wants to assert her black identity, she fails to do so in front of the whole class as Senna notes: "When it was my turn, I stood. My fingers clenched the cloth of my skirt, and my voice quavered: "Black is beautiful?" It had come out more like a question" (45). She is mocked at, and this further heightens up her identity crisis. When the biracial students tend to become more aware about their identities, they move through a kind of "identity see-saw" as White rightly points out, where they really "struggle between how they choose to define themselves and how society sees them" (qtd. in Perkins 214). As a result, though a biracial person chooses to identify with a particular identity according to the way they have been raised, the societal outlook pressurises them to make a choice of the identity according to their phenotype. Birdie finds it difficult to choose her black identity before the peer group in her class as they perceive her more as white than black. As Charles H. Cooley, American Sociologist observes, "[s]elf-concept is in part internalized by the reflection of self in others' reactions" (qtd. in Root 190).

Cole, on the other hand, is easily accepted and listened to by everyone in the school because of her black phenotype. She establishes her black self without any hassle and makes friends with other children thereby adopting Root's third solution of identification with a single racial group. Cole also takes initiative to solve Birdie's issue by warning the other children and providing her sister with the much needed

will power to get over her fear and reserved nature. Her confidence is evident with the counterstance that she adopts on behalf of Birdie, "C'mon, Birdie, come play. They know you're my sister" (Senna 45). Strangers' welcoming attitude towards Cole's black self and immediate acceptance, builds within Birdie an added pressure to make herself heard.

Birdie reaches the verge of leaving the school after an incident that occurs in the girls' room. A group of girls once bully her to the core and pretend to cut her hair off using paper scissors. She is left petrified and remains rooted in front of the broken washroom mirror with the laughter of the girls echoing in the background. Birdie openly expresses her terror and hatred for the girls, to Cole that night, '"I don't want to go back, I'm scared. They're gonna kill me"' (Senna 47). She becomes unable to clearly define her position in terms of colour line due to the influence of peer group. This condition has been identified as one of the status factors by C. C. I. Hall in her unpublished doctoral dissertation, *The Ethnic Identity of Racially Mixed People: A Study of Black-Japanese* in making an identity choice by the biracial individuals. Ironically at the same time, the Nkrumah school tradition enables Cole to assert her choice of hegemonic monoracial black identity. The peer group functioning also proves to affirm her sense of self. This gets evident from Cole's answer when Birdie asks her whether she too doesn't hate the school, after the washroom incident. Cole replies: "No Birdie. I kind of like it. It's fun. I want to stay" (Senna 47). Thus the identity choices of both the siblings diverge from each other and each begins to reassure themselves using their way of looking at self.

Daniel Grassian in his "Passing into Post-Ethnicity: A Study of Danzy Senna's *Caucasia*" clearly points out the rigidity in accepting the socially legitimate ethnic racial identity: "While the school provides an empowering atmosphere for its African-

American student body, that same student body, governed by codes for 'black' the ethnicity, does not tolerate the ethnic difference" (qtd. in Jin-Yu Lin 325). This rigid attitude by the Afro-centric Nkrumah school aggravates Birdie's confusion and makes her reconsider her identity choice. In yet another incident when Birdie is confronted with racial aggression at school, Cole steps in to help her sister and threatens one of the girls, Maria, "Listen, metal mouth, Birdie isn't white. She's black. Just like me. So don't be messing with her again or I'll cut off all your hair for real this time" (Senna 48). With this incident, Cole takes on the role of a protector of Birdie with an open display of confidence that gets developed in the former owing to her acceptable look at school. This however results in the total isolation and mental stress for Birdie, for, no one either troubled her or talked with her. This is evident when she says,

> I often found myself alone, chewing on my hair and nails with an insatiable hunger, as if trying to eat myself alive, picking at my scabs with a fervor, as if trying to find another body buried inside. I pondered whether it was better to be harassed or ignored. My insomnia grew worse. Cole slept soundly beside me, ... (Senna 48-49)

As Root observes, "[f]or many biracial individuals, the teenage years appear to be encumbered by a more painful process than the monoracial person. . . . Turmoil is generated when acceptance at home is not mirrored in the community" (194).

Birdie's difficulty lies in the fact that she tries to convince others of her identity, which is contrary to what is visible in terms of racial lines. Her racial performance therefore challenges the established racial categories. She finds it really hard to assert her blackness on her own as against her white phenotype. She realises that along with Cole, it is her friend Maria who knights her black, helps in making her an insider in the black community while Ali, her boyfriend reaffirms her beauty in her

appearance. They make the whole school view her in a different manner. Slowly, she gets her black identity established in the real world. Inherently, she also fears that the bestowed acceptance of her identity may turn out to be a joke if she doesn't continue to perform well before others. She starts feeling conscious and also explores the various ways in which her body can be used to vanish with the environment.

Birdie's statement of being black comes out in open when she visits Maria's house and enjoys several luxuries over there. She imagines herself to have always lived at Maria's place, wishing to have named Yolanda and not Birdie or Patrice, and also desires for Maria to have been one of her cousins. She also cherishes every detail about Maria's life and family and wishes to be like Maria's mother when she grows up, which clearly indicates her affinity towards her choice of black identity. With Maria transforming Birdie's straight hair into curls which the latter admired, Birdie's fancy of having a life like Maria's momentarily turns into reality which parallels Root's third resolution of actively identifying with a single racial group. Birdie notes: "The tint of the ceiling mirror darkened me, and with my newfound curls, I found that if I pouted my lips and squinted to blur my vision in just the right way, my face transformed into something resembling Cole's" (Senna 70). Birdie's choice of identity at this point is totally is contrary to what the society expects from her as well as her racial features. The flexibility with which Birdie adapts herself into the new look with the modification or downplaying of her Eurocentric features, especially hair texture and also by attempting new costumes, establishes the strong connection between gender and racial identity. It actually enables a biracial woman to stand on either side of their component racial lines.

Birdie's "passing for" black is unique, and unconventional — especially in terms of its intentions. She decides to pass for black as a means to get complete

acceptance among her peer group unlike, possessing an aim to gain any socio-economic benefits, which is quite normal in the case of passing for white. She is not bothered about the economic benefits that trigger the passing process. This is evident when she imagines herself in Maria's position when she is at her home and narrates: "I lay awake late into the night, listening to the dramatic beeps and yells on the streets outside, pretending that my mother worked the late shift and my daddy stole TVs" (Senna 71) just as Maria's mom and dad did. Birdie realises that she will have to work really hard to get assimilated in the school and among the schoolmates or else she will "lose [Cole] for good" (Senna 62). Her passing for black is therefore devoid of any intention other than to hold on to her black side and familial mixed identity strongly rather than "passing for" white and rejecting her family roots. This is the worst scenario that Birdie can ever imagine, for, it is in relation to Cole's presence and self, that her identity is chiefly defined.

Difference in the visible phenotype of children has led to an unknown segregation within familial grounds as well. There are several instances within the text that reveal that each parent shows an inclination towards like-coloured child. Sandra Lee is not able to do up Cole's hair even after so many years and it can be noticed that she doesn't attempt to learn about the proper way of braiding the kinky hair of her elder daughter. As Birdie observes: "When Cole was very little, my mother had simply let her run around with what she called a "dustball" on her head. She had thought the light and curly afro adorable and didn't quite understand the disapproving glances of the black people on the street" (Senna 50). Cole's choice of hegemonic monoracial black identity is made clear from her choice of reading Black fashion magazines like *Jet*, where she admires icons such as Kiesha Taylor, listening to Black rock bands such as Ohio Players. She wishes to adopt the hair style of Kiesha Taylor

and her reaction to Sandra's failure to do it prove the same. Cole throws down the mirror and says: '"You liar. It doesn't look like Keisha Taylor. You can't do it! You'll never do it right. It looks like a bird's nest, the same way it always does"' (Senna 51). This Cole's attempts to accentuate her black features through the styling of her hair clearly indicates the working of gender in the development of racial identity.

Cole's perpetual complaints to Birdie on Sandra styling her hair makes her choice of black identity and Sandra Lee's inability to be compatible with the black aspect in her life: "They all laughed at me last week. Just like the time my knees were ashy. 'Cause of my hair. It looks crazy. They were calling me 'Miz Nappy.' None of the boys will come near me. Mum doesn't know anything about raising a black child. She just doesn't" (Senna 53). Cole's words throw light on the pressure faced by the parents of biracial children who are ill equipped to deal with such situations. It is Deck Lee who gives enough money to Cole to finally visit a black hair salon, "Danny's His and Hers" after much persuasion and her words, '"Mum just doesn't know how to handle raising a black child, Papa"' (Senna 55). It should also be noted that when once Birdie and Sandra go for grocery shopping, the latter gets emotional at the sight of black children with clean and elegant hairstyles. Birdie's consolation is that Sandra can do up her hair well unlike Cole's. Thus, we find the existence of an invisible colour line within the familial set up.

Cole's choice of black identity and Root's third resolution gets asserted again when she expresses concern over the language which the sisters use. She realises that their language doesn't belong to the Black way of doing and understands this from an article titled, "Black English: Bad for Our Children?" that appeared in the black magazine *Ebony*. Cole mentions to Birdie that their spoken language was that of white girls and not that of black people. Her excitement at the new knowledge and her

willingness to learn the new way is clear when she goes on to provide examples from the article as to what to and what not needs to be said. Cole tells Birdie, '"They have examples in here. Like, don't say, 'I'm going to the store.' Say, 'I'm goin' to de sto'.' Get it? And don't say, 'Tell the truth.' Instead, say, 'Tell de troof.' Okay?"' (Senna 53). More than her choice of identity, mimicking the features of the group to gain acceptance into a particular community is something that influences Birdie as well who responsively nods and tries to lisp and learn the new way of talking.

On the other hand, Birdie realises that Cole is her father's favourite daughter and his strength, while she is Deck's major weakness. This is because the predominantly Black community around her makes her feel so. This is made apparent when Redbone, a revolutionary who closely works with Sandra Lee and is disliked by Deck Lee in between a banter says, '"Deck, watch your step. Don't get black and proud on me. You're the one with the white daughter"' (Senna 16). Deck fails to recognise Birdie's blackness and Birdie also feels that she receives far less care and attention from Deck Lee. Later, he moves out of the house following an argument with Sandra Lee only to visit his girls every Saturday morning to take them out on what Birdie calls the "Divorced Father's Day." Birdie never looks forward to these visits with Deck Lee as he never takes an effort to see or say anything to her. Though she always yearns for her father's affection and care, she feels that Deck has always treated her with a bit of impatience as he always waits for her to finish off her sentences for him to concentrate on other important subjects. He rarely calls her "Patrice" the name he used to call her with utmost affection. According to Birdie, "Cole was my father's special one. I understood that even then. She was his prodigy—his young, gifted, and black. At the time, I wasn't sure why it was Cole and not me, but I knew that when they came together, I disappeared. Her existence

comforted him. She was the proof that his blackness hadn't been completely blanched" (Senna 55-56). Birdie also notices that to her father, Cole has always been the evidence of survival of the plot to turn him into a merciless being through an integration rearrangement and that he still effectively remains human. The counterstance position that he maintains against the dominant ideologies is very well evident in his preferences and attitude. More than that, Cole who bears his physical traits also validates his feeling that she would remain as the proof of his existence. In her article, "Fading to White, Fading Away: Biracial Bodies in Michelle Cliff's *Abeng* and Danzy Senna's *Caucasia*," Sika Alaine Dagbovie observes: "Even Cole's name connotes black (coal, colored) and thus Cole represents the blackness that Deck tries to hold onto despite his anxieties that he "sold out" by marrying a white woman" (103).

One of the incidents that happens at the Public Gardens when Birdie and Deck Lee go on an outing and when Cole falls sick, too proves the segregation ideals being very stronger and evident in the US society. It is the first time ever that Birdie feels closer to her father than ever before. Thus, while she has been enjoying the rides, small shopping and playing around Deck, a couple starts keeping a watch on them and finally informed two white policemen who were on their beat about them. This results in the questioning of Birdie and Deck on the grounds of suspicion regarding their relation. It comes as a shock to Birdie when she finds that the cops don't believe her father even after showing them his identification card and both of his children's photos in his wallet. Birdie also feels sick when the cops try and assert their stance against Deck by asking her whether the man along with her touched or hurt her in any manner. But she is able to manage only the words, '"No, he didn't. He's my father"' (Senna 61) as her reply, in a trembling voice. The realisation that her sister Cole

would never have to face a situation such as this, is notable and it is also a blow to her identification process. The racial prejudice which associates the whites with all the goodness and the blacks with negative aspects gets evident with the cops' intervention. The incident fuels Deck's desire to leave America as he realises the widening gap that already exists between himself and Birdie: "Usually he kissed me on the top of my head before he said good-bye, but this time he just touched my forehead with the back of his hand, as if he were checking for a fever. His own hand was cold, and he pulled it away quickly, as if the touch had burned him" (Senna 61). The incident transforms both Deck and Birdie individually and also creates a rift between them.

Birdie and Cole learn to change their appearances at Nkrumah School by outgrowing the "Elemeno" phase where they were the rulers of their make-believe empire and had been thrilled when they tried out the costume changes as a game. For Cole, the transformation is easy with the aid of various lotions and hairstyles thereby catapulting herself into becoming one of the popular girls in school. This also indicates the working of gender in establishing the racial identity. As Kathryn Rummell notes in "Rewriting the Passing Novel: Danzy Senna's *Caucasia*," "*Caucasia*'s most striking departure from the traditional passing narrative is in Birdie's "double" passing" (3). Birdie "passes for" black initially, in order to project her black self and gain acceptance among her peers before "passing for" white at a later point in time. Birdie's "passing" brings an interesting twist to the whole idea of this act. She wants to get accepted as black, and so she tries to somehow convince her Nkrumah schoolmates of her blackness through her performance. Birdie says:

> I started wearing my hair in a tight braid to mask its texture. I had my ears pierced and convinced my mother to buy me a pair of gold hoops like the

> other girls at school wore. . . . I stood many nights in front of the bathroom mirror, practicing how to say "nigger" the way the kids in school did it, dropping the "er" so that it became not a slur, but a term of endearment: *nigga*. (Senna 62-63)

Deck's ignorance for Birdie becomes all the more evident since the Public Gardens incident. He starts spending more time with Cole by discussing his racial theories and ideas, watching the sitcom "What's Happening" along with her, reading to her the chapters from Harold Cruse's *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, and listening to the BBC international news together on radio. Birdie observes, "He spoke through her, above her, but still to her, as she continued to be the exclusive object of his lessons, leaving me to absorb his platitudes only through osmosis" (Senna 72). Birdie also notices that Cole no longer plays with her as she is getting older. All this while, she tries her best to make herself and her identity visible, to get both her father's and sister's attention. She does it by either flaunting the knowledge in black history that she has learnt from school or by doing some humorous routine. These means occasionally help to make herself visible, but only for a while. Once when she tells her father, "Stay black, stay strong, brotherman," (Senna 74) a line from her Professor's poem, Deck Lee seems to recognise her identity as a black girl and more as the daughter on par with Cole for the very first time. But he doesn't accept it seriously as Birdie observes, "[m]y father flashed me a fierce look of bewilderment, then burst into laughter as he ruffled my hair, as if he had just discovered I could talk when he pulled the string on the back of my neck" (Senna 74). Moreover, he simply brushes away her slapstick tricks as mere foolishness, thereby asking her to stop behaving like a clown.

Cole's growing indifference towards her mother becomes obvious since Deck Lee has left the house. Once, she walks behind Birdie and her mother at a careful distance in a supermarket so as to avoid Sandra Lee's strange behaviour of throwing all the food items randomly into the cart. Birdie feels that her mother was anxious not be seen together. Cole ignores Sandra's offer for a chocolate bar which the latter has stolen from the market, and asks Birdie, who accepts the same, as to why she encourages her crazy mother. Sandra's imitation of Cole's voice and the comment that Cole spends too much time with Deck Lee angers Cole. Birdie's confusion regarding the choice of her identity becomes clear when she thinks of being with her mother, who is on an escape from some confusing reality:

> My mother was slipping. . . I could see it sometimes in her eyes when we walked down the street—the way she had begun to glance over her shoulder—that she was scared of something huge and pressing and unsuitable for children. And I understood in those flashes, her hand clutched tightly in my own, that she had nobody—not my father nor Cole nor the radicals in the basement, not even her own blue-blood Cambridge clan—to protect her from this unnamed threat. Nobody, that, was, but me. (Senna 82)

Inclination of children towards the parents of respective colours becomes stronger as Cole gets closer to her father, and Birdie towards her mother. Cole finds Deck's new black girlfriend Carmen who knows to do her hair up, awesome and beautiful. Cole's new looks and attitude develop under Carmen's influence and it makes her slowly drift away from her mother, thereby asserting her choice of being black. This decision parallel the third resolution of affiliation towards a single racial group as proposed by Maria P. P. Root. She also loses trust in her mother and self-affirms her father's opinions of Sandy, that she is crazy for getting involved in

rebellious activities. This is evident when Birdie notes Cole speaking about the fun they have together: “As she spoke, I saw the new life in my sister’s face, as if she had found some reflection of herself in this tall, cool woman” (Senna 91). Cole starts relating to Carmen easily than to her mother, thereby reflecting her choice of identity. Carmen’s irritation for Birdie increases with the passing of time. This makes Birdie aware that the visible difference between herself and Cole, right from their childhood is much profound than it should be. This realisation and Carmen’s indifferent attitude towards her, slowly makes Birdie reject the offers of joining Cole and Deck on an outing.

Racial identity of the siblings which is developed in the attic bedroom initially in a stronger manner gets influenced by the family a lot. Light-skinned Birdie disappears along with the white mother who is fleeing away from the FBI, while the dark-skinned Cole leaves with the father and his new black girlfriend Carmen to Brazil. More than the siblings, it is their parents who make the obvious choice of the child to be taken along with them which gets stimulated by their phenotype. This gets clearer at a later stage from Sandy’s words which come more as a confession than a justification of the choice she made, before Birdie: “It was illegal. Very. Nobody was hurt or killed. But I was a part of something big, and because of it, we had to split up. Your father and I. And we had to choose which one of you looked more like the other. We had to. In order for me to disappear. We had to choose” (Senna 275). Cole gets an opportunity to present her black identity in a pronounced manner on joining her father, who leaves for Brazil with the hopes of finding an ideal racial paradise. The only thing that is left with Birdie to remind her of her father and sister and indirectly her black side is a parting gift by Deck and Cole — a shoe box filled with objects and titled, “negrobilia.” Birdie says:

> It included a Black Nativity program from the Nkrumah School, a fisted pick (the smell of someone's scalp oil still lingering in between the sharp black teeth), a black Barbie doll head, an informational tourist pamphlet on Brazil, the silver Egyptian necklace inscribed with hieroglyphics that my father had bought me at a museum so many years before, and a James Brown eight-track cassette with a faded sticker in the corner that said "Nubian Notion," the name of the record shop on Washington Street. (Senna 127)

Collection of all those strange objects might be intentionally done by Deck and Cole so as to make Birdie remember her blackness even in their absence and a white mother's presence. These objects also refer to the various points in black history. The Egyptian necklace — the oldest item in the box — indicates an ancient point in the history. The Black Nativity directs at the misrepresentation of Judeo-Christian religious history. The James Brown's cassette is a reminder of his songs of social commentary. The black Barbie doll head denotes the ever-incompatible concepts and images of black beauty. Gifting of all these antique and symbolic objects that allude to the substantial moments of black history to Birdie is actually an indication of the idea that she too is a part of a rich heritage.

However, on not choosing Birdie to be a part of their journey to Brazil and boxing out all the elements reminding her of blackness, Deck and Cole, have also indirectly boxed away the black side of her identity. Birdie's sense over self is shattered and she very soon becomes lonely and insecure following the rebellious activities of Sandy that force both of them to run away from FBI and their Boston home. Birdie and Sandy move across various parts of continental US which is the fictional "Caucasia" in the novel. This change in spatial locations takes away from Birdie, the black identity to which she mostly aligned with earlier as she had resorted

to invisibility gradually so as to avoid the alienation. Thus, this part of her built-up identity gets lost when she moves away from a concrete location and it gradually establishes an association between identity and physical place as well. Birdie recounts the day when she had disappeared into the fabric of America in the "Preface" of *Caucasia* as she says:

> A long time ago I disappeared. One day I was here, the next I was gone. It happened as quickly as that. One day I was playing schoolgirl games with my sister and our friends in a Roxbury playground. The next I was a nobody, just a body without a name or history, sitting beside my mother in the front seat of our car, moving forward on the highway, not stopping (Senna 1).

Birdie's disappearance has both literal and figurative significance. Literally, Birdie disappears from her Boston neighbourhood, Nkrumah school and life as Birdie Lee. Metaphorically, her black identity gets erased at the moment when the mother-daughter duo escape from Boston. Birdie is no longer able to project her black self in relation to the strong presence of that of her sister's.

Sandy convinces Birdie of the advantage of "racial passing" in order to escape from being caught. Birdie says that according to her mother, possessing white phenotypical features such as straight hair, light skin and other Caucasian features, make it easy for Birdie to "pass off" as white. Birdie fails to assert her choice of black identity. She notes that with Cole's absence at present, it is going to be easy for Sandy and herself to identify themselves as white people: "The two bodies that had made her stand out in a crowd—made her more than just another white woman—were gone; now it was just the two of us. My body was the key to our going incognito" (Senna 128). Sandy thus becomes successful in assertively making the choice of white identity for her daughter.

Birdie and her mother take-up the new identities as Jesse and Sheila Goldman when they go into hiding. Birdie's erasure thus gets completed as her past identity becomes totally insignificant in the eyes of her white mother when she accepts the identity the society assigns. Root's resolution is about choosing the black side of the identity associated with the minority status. But Birdie here is assigned white identity for she will be perceived so, and is easily acceptable in that part of the country where her mother decides to settle down, thus making it a tenuous strategy. The reason for this as Root observes is, "[b]ecause one's self-image in the mind's eye is stable across significant changes, the conflict and subsequent accumulated life experience would need to be tremendous to compel the individual to change their internally perceived racial identity" (199). This doesn't become a positive resolution at this stage for Birdie as she doesn't feel affiliated to the white side of her identity and also the choice is influenced by her mother. This kind of recreation of identities through the "passing for" white is a total escape from the earlier chaotic racial existences. Birdie therefore stops being nobody initially and takes up a white identity which is as "white as my skin, hair, and bones allowed" (Senna 1).

As Birdie moves from place to place, she believes that the new identities are simply public performances. Daniel Grassian observes that Birdie almost feels like "a chameleon, unable to find a stable identity or home in either the predominately white or black environments that she inhabits, forcing her to adopt a performative identity" (qtd. in Jin-Yu Lin 319). She starts viewing people on the basis of their colour. Though she tries to maintain a connection with her much sorted but unexpressed black self, she says, "Only in the privacy of our car, on those long drives up and down the eastern seaboard, was I allowed to ask her about our real past" (Senna 140) which actually reveals that she is totally restricted from expressing her black side. However,

just like the artefacts collected in the negrobilia, in actuality is a memorabilia which refers to the bygone events in the black history, and that Birdie's blackness has not been totally turned into an aspect of the past initially.

Settlement at a house in an epitome of Caucasia, which in reality is a small town in New Hampshire after much travel earns her a new identity. Birdie's growth suggests a growth in her consciousness of her racial identity as she gets many opportunities to observe people belonging to various ethnic backgrounds. But the same allows them to enjoy the freedom to live a new life in New Hampshire. Birdie fakes everything, right from her name, family history and personal details. This can be seen as her attempt to fit into the new social set up. Though she makes the choice of identity on the compulsion of her mother, the identity is definitely based on the society's perception of her. This is also referred to as the situational identity, which the biracial individuals develop according to the environment, and which allows them to switch easily between various racial groups as per Root in her *The Multiracial Experience: Racial Borders as the New Frontier* (qtd. in Ijima Hall 399). Though Birdie makes a choice of being white before the whole world, she slowly gets caught in-between the dual consciousness of being both black and white that exist within her. Memories of her past haunt her initially as she settles down in the whitewashed heartland of New Hampshire, after a long run:

> Here there was nothing, just an emptiness. The few times I had slept alone here, I had stayed awake till morning, listening to the clock beside the bed tick louder and louder, and playing a game with myself, a game I hadn't played since those first few years of the run. A game where I would try to remember as many details about Nkrumah, the house on Columbus Avenue, my father's Roxbury apartment, Maria's mother's bedroom, as I possibly could. . . . And

> Elemeno—the grunts and phrases that were only now beginning to sound like gibberish. (Senna 151-52)

Birdie at this stage, identifies herself in two ways resulting in an inconsistency of choices made by her. Ursula M. Brown, a mental health professional who studies experiences and identities of biracial individuals observes a compartmentalization of two identities (45) in her *The Interracial Experience: Growing UP Black / White Racially Mixed in the United States*. The first category is the public identity of a biracial person which is all about how one publicly defines oneself to others. The second is the private identity that offers a clear self-perception of a biracial individual's racial identity. This classification of identities by Brown affixes a multidimensional angle to the racial identity chosen by a biracial individual.

Birdie chooses to publicly define herself as white with an objective to avoid any possible threat posed by FBI for herself and her mother. She does this in order to influence the ways in which the public perceives her. She continues to identify herself as black once she is in her home space so as to keep her past and relationship with her father and sister alive. David L. Brunsma reiterates this when he finds an incongruity between the public identification and private racial categorisation by the biracial individuals based on his study result. In his essay, "Public Categories, Private Identities: Exploring Regional Differences in the Biracial Experience," he notes: "a disjuncture does exist between the ways in which these black-white biracial people understand themselves racially and the ways that they wish to present and manifest themselves in other contexts" (573).

Later, with the new identity slowly taking over her racial consciousness, her blackness vanishes, with the whiteness emerging in a strong manner. Birdie who has always identified herself in relation to Cole, begins to slowly create an identity for

herself. She realises that there is nothing in her similar to that of her sister that she can identify with. The phase that she has always thought would quickly pass seems to last for an unpredictable length of time. Her earlier wishes of getting identified and accepted as a black girl at this point seem to her as nothing but a passing fantasy which expresses her dominant stance position. "Elemeno," which is the language and community that she has always associated herself with also seems to turn out irrational to her. The kind of fragmentation of black identity experienced by Birdie is evident from her words:

> My father was fading on me. . . . It was my real father, Deck Lee, whom I was having trouble seeing. . . . I tried to see his front side, his face, but he lived only with his back to me while his words, his music, reached me all the same. I wasn't really sure why it hadn't happened to me before, this fogging in my memory of him. May be the perpetual motion had kept my vision clear. It was as if the blankness of our identities before had left enough room for the old to survive. Now that we had stopped moving, allowing our new selves to bloom, it seemed the old had to disintegrate. (Senna 188)

Birdie, for the first time begins to identify with the white self. This is the point where her passive adoption of the first resolution turns into an active and a positive one in the challenging ambience as observed by Root.

Ultimately, the box of negrobilia becomes the only symbol of her black identity. All the objects in the box to which Deck and Cole had attributed their Black identity turn worthless to Birdie. She locks it away, for, she realises that her past life would definitely land herself and Sandy into unaffordable trouble. Hence, the once valued possessions appear as mere artefacts to her and she is unaffected by it. Birdie says:

> At night I stared into my box of negrobilia, fingering the objects—the fisted pick, the Nubian Notion eight-track cassette, the Egyptian necklace, the black Barbie head—and tried to tell myself, "I haven't forgotten." But the objects in the box looked to me just like that—objects. They seemed like remnants from the life of some other girl whom I barely knew anymore, anthropological artifacts of some ancient, extinct people, rather than pieces of my past. And the name Jesse Goldman no longer felt funny, so thick on my tongue, so make-believe. (Senna 190)

As Jesse Goldman, Birdie starts to get estranged from her black self, the one to which she feels she truly belongs. Her incessant performance as Jesse Goldman makes her disappearance complete at their new home at New Hampshire. The fantasy world that Birdie and Cole develop as a game in their attic bedroom slowly gains far more major realistic corollaries in Birdie's life.

Birdie continues to perform her white public identity in a more pronounced manner when she befriends Nicholas Marsh, the white house owner's son. This friendship comes to her aid especially when she joins a white dominant school and the need to get accepted among the peers arises. When being asked about herself by one of the children at school, Birdie identifies herself as Jesse Goldman thereby asserting her choice of the first resolution. Acceptance in the new circle comes as a welcoming surprise for Birdie after a long time and she gets a sense of pleasure and security by being among the new set of friends. This, she feels is similar to the one that she has received earlier at the Nkrumah school by being among Cole, Maria, Cherise and Cathy. She decides to enjoy this friendship till it lasts. It is important to note that Birdie, who had throughout her early phase of her life tried to define her identity in relation to Cole, and had received the much-needed acceptance initially at the

Nkrumah school for simply being Cole's sister, is trying to define her identity once again.

Yet Birdie's identity remains in flux. For, later in the novel, reclamation of her black self begins, when her equation with Sandy worsens. It happens when once she shockingly discovers a hidden postcard from her aunt Dot Lee in one of Sandy's books. She begins to view her mother as a traitor who has secretly kept an important information that may have come as an aid to discover the whereabouts of Cole and Deck. She thus starts spending more time with her schoolmate Mona identifying with the white identity rather than being at home. Birdie tries hard to impress her white friend, and never lets her know about the real self, acting like a typical New Hampshire girl by talking, walking, swaying of hips, doing makeup etc. just as the other white girls in the area. She tries to accentuate her appearance to establish her racial identity indicating the fact of racial ambiguity being associated with the labels of femininity and beauty. She performs it so naturally and she hides her black identity well without reacting to the obnoxious words hurled at the black race by Mona and her family. This clearly reflects upon the effect of gender in establishing the racial identity and the dominant stance position that Birdie adopts at this point. This however is a survival strategy of Birdie and, it is well-defined as is evident when she says, "Strange as it may sound, there was a safety in this pantomime. The less I behaved like myself, the more I could believe that this was still a game. That my real self—Birdie Lee—was safely hidden beneath my beige flesh, and that when the right moment came, I would reveal her, preserved, frozen solid in the moment in which I had left her" (Senna 233). The defining moment that she expects might be the reunion with her long-lost father and sister.

Birdie begins to reclaim her black self through various ways. Subconsciously it happens when she experiences Cole and Deck's presence in her dreams. Visibly, she starts making addition to the box of negrobilia which had once lost its value. She begins by adding the postcard from Dot and many other things including a page from a library book that provided with the information on Candomblé, a religion practised in Brazil. She gets impressed with one of the gods Exu Elegba, whom she identifies as a trickster always altering forms and always at the intersections unlike many others who think of him as a devil. She also offers a small prayer that she makes up in Elemeno to Exu, whom she considers the God of change in order to bring about some kind of difference. This brings out Birdie's deep yearning for reclaiming the black side of her family and her own identity. It also symbolises the crossroads of biracial identity in which she is caught in. She says:

> I looked at the picture of Exu. I didn't know why I had stolen it from the book, or why I kept it here, in this box of negrobilia. My mother said it was okay to steal a book from the library now and then, but not to deface a book. Books were sacred. But I had wanted a piece of Brazil, a piece of Cole and my father as they were now, not just the stale artifacts my father had left me with from that other time. And something about this god's face—this squinting creature entering the world—had made me want to keep it close by my side. (Senna 242)

Memories of Cole and Deck start haunting Birdie more than ever. Her choice of being black doesn't get truly asserted at this stage, as it becomes evident when she says that she cannot do anything to avoid her white peer circle as well as people in general who make statements and talk ill of black people. She tries to avoid the situation again where she can publicly declare her choice of internalised identity.

Once when asked about her skin not getting sun burnt, she rushes to the washroom nervously, and tries to think of her father's face. She also tries to remember Cole's hand holding hers when the latter had come to Birdie's rescue at the Nkrumah school thereby asserting Birdie's black identity on her behalf. In another instance wherein she visits New York along with Sandy, Sandy's boyfriend Jim, and Mona, Birdie wishes to run away for the first time from her white identity.

Birdie desires to visit Josephine, Deck's cousin from New York in order to gain some information about Deck so that the tracking process of her father and sister would become easier. While staying in an apartment there, for the first time she feels like running away and hiding safely in Josephine's house just as Deck, until the coast gets cleared as it happens in a childhood game of "Now You See Him . . ." which the whole family used to play together. Cole and Birdie not realising its actual significance, have always found Deck's disappearance funny, because he would hunch really low in the passenger seat covering himself with a shabby blanket. This happens whenever the whole family crossed any white neighbourhood and won't show himself up, until Sandy announces that the "coast is clear" (Senna 249). The incident throws light on the sense of insecurity and unease that Deck and Sandy felt as a pair while facing the society. Their parents were in some ways mimicking the "Elemeno" game by behaving differently in the public and private spheres.

New York triggers in Birdie some unknown connection that she has left behind. It happens particularly when she watches a group of black Puerto Rican teenagers grooving to a kind of music which she feels that she has known long ago. She feels embarrassed to be seen along with her mom and the white family in front of them and also visualises that the whole city is watching her wondering about her identity. She ponders about her past life and wishes for something that she has put

behind. Birdie confesses her feelings on observing the teenagers: “It was dawning on me as I watched these kids dance how long I’d been away. Six years. I felt that I had missed some great party and I was now hearing about it the day afterward. A lump of disappointment and envy rose in my throat” (Senna 261). The thought of leaving the borders of her white identity to complete what she has left incomplete in the past slowly begins to take root within.

Birdie’s attempts to trace out her long-lost father and sister is a way to trace out her real self. Her reconnection with Cole will definitely break the life which her mother has chosen for her and ensure the reestablishment of her racial, familial and emotional bond with her sister. She relies totally upon her body with white features in order to realise the reunion. It is fascinating to note how her body has maintained its connection with Boston. Birdie on arriving at Boston says: “MY BODY REMEMBERED the city. And outside, déjà vu hurt my eyes, made me squint as if to block out brightness, though the sky was gray. I scanned the stained bricks and cracked pavement with a vague longing” (Senna 296). She says that she has been led by her body to the T station that will open up her chance to meet her aunt Dot as an initial step towards the reconnection with her real identity. It is as if Birdie has allowed her bodily self to simply follow the mental thought processing whenever she is lost.

Meeting her aunt re-establishes Birdie’s connection with the black side of her identity. Birdie finds her aunt’s principles a total contrast to her father’s ideas that are based on bodies and their position in the world. Her aunt Dot’s theories depend on the soul’s effort to fit into the world that seem to be much truer to her. In spite of trying to be sceptical, Birdie who often resorts to disappearance as a means of survival finds Dot’s philosophical explanations more convincing and acceptable. According to Dot,

the colour of an individual's soul exists beyond the usually vital parameters of identity i.e., skin colour, eye colour and hair colour. She adds that this is an invisible colour that rises above every individual and, it reposes beyond the skin. Birdie, who always feels erased due to her biracial identity gets attracted towards Dot's idea of an invisible colour that provides each and every individual a self-image. Her ponderings validate the same: "I wondered if I'd ever transcend the skin, the body. If I would ever believe in something I couldn't see. It seemed that in order to be as light as Dot, one couldn't afford to believe in evil. Not the way my mother and father did. They believed in evil they could see, and evil they couldn't. Dot believed in good" (Senna 321). Unlike the relegation of an individual on the basis of a particular colour, Birdie's position in the world too is secured by an invisible hue, which Dot later reveals to be dark red, to the former's surprise.

Keeping in mind Aunt Dot's world view, Birdie struggles hard to think and identify beyond the aspect of race. This attempt of hers reaches its climax when she openly defies her mother, who begs her to return to the life by taking up her fictional identity in New Hampshire. Birdie declares: My name's not Jesse. It's Birdie Lee" (Senna 332). With this, Birdie successfully expresses her self-identity and the growing liberty from her mother. This declaration of Birdie truly aligns with the third resolution proposed by Maria P. P. Root which is the identification with a single racial group where the individual opts for one particular group against all kinds of societal compulsion over a person to identify himself or herself in a particular way as well as her counterstance. It also reminds of Birdie's desire to be black like someone else and not to have a condemned black shade like that of Samantha's. Birdie wishes to be totally different from other biracial girls especially Samantha, who always appear to be trapped and tragic in her nappy hair and cinnamon toned skin. The words to her

grandmother when they both meet before Birdie begins the last lap of her quest, unveil for the first time her frustration and dissatisfaction at her choice of the first resolution since she has adorned the white identity on following her mother's decision. Birdie rejects the person she has become by "passing for" white and throws away as "Victorian crap," her grandmother's hinting at the tragic nature of Sandy's life as she did not stick to her world. Expressing her strong counterstance and she says on aiming at not only her grandmother, but also Sandy, Jim, Mona, and the whole state of New Hampshire, '"Oh, please. I'm not in the mood for this Victorian crap. You and all your ancestors are the tragedies. Not me. You walk around pretending to be so liberal and civilised in this big old house, but you're just as bad as the rest of them. This whole world—it's based on lies"' (Senna 365).

Reconciliation of Birdie with Deck Lee on a later note too leads to nothing but a sense of let-down and ignorance of self. The realisation that her father has not tried to search and track down her or her mother in spite of being in the US for over five years comes as a huge shock to Birdie. When Birdie informs him about the white life she has been leading until then and her long wait for his arrival to pick herself and her mother up, she receives his usual detached answers resorting to his racial principles which he has put together during the previous seven years of separation from her. His theories hurt her badly and make her totally invisible and homeless. He explains: "There's no such thing as passing. We're all just pretending. Race is a complete illusion, make-believe. It's a costume. We all wear one. You just switched yours at some point. That's just the absurdity of the whole race game" (Senna 391). Deck Lee goes on to explain a chart titled, "Canaries in the Coal Mine" depicting the mulattos over the history to her as a Professor: " . . . the mulatto in America functions as a canary in the coal mine. The canaries, he said, were used by coal miners to gauge how

poisonous the air underground was . . . . mulattos had historically been the gauge of how poisonous American race relations were" (Senna 393). The disappointment regarding her father turns out to be unbearable for Birdie, who has always tried to incorporate Deck's racial theories in her life to some extent unlike Cole. This disillusionment that she experiences makes her think that the box of negrobilia was not of much help in ascertaining her identity. She doesn't get any clear perception either about her body or racial identity on meeting her father.

Birdie's meeting with Cole gives her a strong sense of identification. Cole's relation with blackness becomes evident with her yearning for "America, for Black America, whose pathology she at least could call her own" (Senna 406) while in Brazil. This reiterates her choice of the third resolution of identification with a single racial group, hegemonic monoracial blackness in this case. But, the fact that Cole did not make an effort to find Birdie in spite of settling down in Oakland on her return from Brazil upsets the latter when she says, "I had believed all along that Cole was all I needed to feel complete. Now I wondered if completion wasn't overrated" (Senna 406). This is reflective of Birdie's fugitive days which she describes as "unreal" and "dreamlike" and when she felt "incomplete—a gray blur, a body in motion, forever galloping toward completion—half a girl, half-caste, half-mast, and half-baked, not quite ready for consumption" (Senna 137). Further in a discussion about Deck's new racial theories by the two sisters, Cole is seen validating her father's view that race is a constructed category but at the same time, she is assured of the fact that it definitely exists. Birdie doesn't seem to agree with her father's views, but agrees with the particular assurance of Cole's as it offers her the memories of strained racial identifications by different people, but primarily by herself:

> I thought of Samantha, in that thick forest, with her cheap white shoes and blue eye shadow. I thought of Stuart at the party, laughing along to all those jokes spoken to him in fake slang. That was how they had learned to survive. Everybody had their own way of surviving. . . . And then I thought of me, the silent me that was Jesse Goldman, the one who hadn't uttered a word, ... It had come so easily to me. I had become somebody I didn't like. Somebody who had no voice or color or conviction. I wasn't sure that was survival at all. (Senna 408)

She tells Cole about the choice: '"They say you don't have to choose. But the thing is, you do. Because there are consequences if you don't"' (Senna 408). Cole in her reply, adds that there are consequences if a person goes for a particular choice as well. Birdie's realisation about the individual differences between herself and Cole, when the latter accuses their mother of doing something wicked, is notable when she says that they might be sisters but they are definitely as different as sisters can be with regard to their personal experiences.

Birdie's thoughts about her inability to settle down at a particular place despite her agreement to do so with Cole in Oakland hints at her inability to settle down for a particular side of her identity. The reminiscences of her "racial passing" and that of the other's "social passing" lead her to opt for a category that exists beyond the prevalent racial grouping. On deciding not to abide by the colour codes and canons of racial segregation that have offered her nothing but an invisible existence against her real self-image anymore, Birdie decides neither to choose nor to reject any particular side of her racial heritage. The blurring of various colours representing different racial categories as Birdie observes a group of school children asserts her identity choice:

> They were black and Mexican and Asian and white, on the verge of puberty, but not quite in it. . . . It was a cinnamon-skinned girl with her hair in braids. She was black like me, a mixed girl, and she was watching me from behind the dirty glass. For a second I thought I was somewhere familiar and she was a girl I already knew. I began to lift my hand, but stopped, remembering where I was and what I had already found. Then the bus lurched forward, and the face was gone with it, just a blur of yellow and black in motion. (Senna 413).

Maria P. P. Root's fourth resolution of her proposed model offers a clear position of Birdie's choice. It is the biracial people's identification as a new racial group wherein they feel a strong connection with other biracial individuals but "may not feel to any racial group because of the struggle with marginal status" (Root 201). This turns out to be a positive resolution for Birdie as well as for other biracial individuals for there exists a fluidity in the movement between racial groups "but view themselves apart from these reference groups without feeling marginal because they have generated a new reference group" (Root 201).

Thus, *Caucasia* can be seen as a coming-of-age story that addresses a major issue of coming into terms with the self while also understanding the US society by employing various narrative strategies. It is a first-person narrative offered from the protagonist Birdie's perspective. The narrator tells and not shows, unlike the third person narrator, about the major events of her life that align with the events of Boston. Senna uses realism and satire to explore the female characters in the novel as a contrast to the usual "passing narratives," which are essentially characterised by melodrama and exaggeration. The mulatta representations in such novels are generally females who are compelled to make a choice between the two sides of their identity. They also will go for the act of "racial passing" and marry a white man so as

to secure a stable life. But Senna deviates her narration from the traditional line and doesn't assign her protagonist with a tragic end. In her interview with Bertram Ashe for *Columbia: A Journal of Literature and Art*, she expresses her love for satire and desire to see female authors employ the same in their works. Senna says, ". . . the way that I deal with satire . . . a lot of it is the inside jokes in *Caucasia* that nobody outside of my family and friends would get it. . . . It's almost making fun of people and types" (139-40).

Senna mainly satirises the very concept of American Dream and the access to the same granted to only the white individuals, especially men, thereby conveniently ignoring black people. Her naming of the novel "Caucasia" is thus symbolic of the fictitious Caucasian region where the mother-daughter duo decides to settle down to proceed with their lives. She satirises the entire system that creates White Anglo–Saxon Protestant (WASP) individuals such as Sandy Lee, and others who make them as white, desire life in Caucasia and participate in the American Dream. Sandy's easy reception of a job without any references and a permanent residence of her choice just because of her white phenotype, manners and language denotes her being part of the race towards realising the American dream. This idea that conveniently ignores the merit of a person, especially a black or a biracial individual is clearly brought under her satirical scrutiny by Senna. "Caucasia" thus, not only represents a racial category alone, but also a predominantly white, unidentified area in New Hampshire where Sandy and Birdie settle down leading to the erasure of Birdie's blackness. Thus, the fictional backdrop turns out to be the much sought-after destination for those who aspire to attain and who have already attained the American Dream. Claudia M. Milian Arias in her "An Interview with Danzy Senna" mentions, "*Caucasia*

interrogates, displaces, and transforms the normative meanings of whiteness, and by extension, Americanness" (447).

Biracial individuals or the people with multiple identities often have to define not just one side of their ethnicity. The quest to find out and define a particular identity is a never-ending one in the case of many as they go through the complexities of understanding and deciding upon their identity choices. The novel is explored from sociological, psychological and legal angles, with the aid of Root's proposal of four resolutions to tackle the biracial identity crisis and by decoding the stance-counterstance positions adopted by Birdie and Cole while making their identity choices. Birdie begins her journey from the need to position herself in the colour line at a particular point to a position where she develops such a mind set to look beyond the conventions of colour and ethnicity, resorting to various resolutions of Root at different stages. Her self-acceptance and self-belonging is in actuality, the knowledge that she has gained coming a long way in search of her biracial identity and finally making a choice of biracial identity that exists beyond the conventional categorisation. Cole on the other hand, accepts the choice of identification with a single racial category i.e., hegemonic monoracial blackness throughout, without any transmutation happening at any point in the later part of the novel. By not providing a tragic ending for the characters, Senna has left the readers speculate about the sisters' future. Thus, conventions of a traditional "passing" narrative along with that of the established racial stereotypes of 1970s get subverted in the text.

Chapter V

Navigating Otherness and Bondage: Joan Steinau Lester's *Black, White, Other: In Search of Nina Armstrong*

"Being biracial paints a blurred line that is equal parts staggering and illuminating."

--- Meghan Markle, qtd. in *Elle*

Twenty-first century US society has been widely regarded as a "post-racial" one, especially following the election of Barack Obama as the forty-fourth President of the United States in 2008. In the 12 November 2009 episode of "The Lou Dobbs Show," its conservative radio host Lou Dobbs has argued that the Americans clearly exist "in a twenty-first century post-partisan, post-racial society that is being led by those who are racial and those who are partisan" (qtd. in Heneks 60). Colour-blindness becomes a major feature of a post-racial society wherein, an individual is given primary significance and his or her race turns out to be an irrelevant factor. This sociological concept has been influentially advocated by the Civil Rights Movement and international anti-racist campaigns of the 1950s and 1960s with the hope to build an ideal society that upholds racial equality and Martin Luther King Junior's idea wherein people would be judged by "the content of their character rather than the color of their skin" (qtd. in "Martin Luther King, Jr. Quotes").

But in "One Year Later and the Myth of a Post-Racial Society," the editorial to *The Du Bois Review,* Michael C. Dawson and Lawrence D. Bobo opine that Dobbos' view aligns with majority of the white Americans' view that the African Americans have already attained or soon will realise the status of racial parity in the United States, though clear-cut evidence that contradicts the same exists. They also state that the racial order is an essential aspect in the construction of American life,

society and politics and that the thronging imprisonment of African Americans at various levels have given a tyrannical and oppressive angle to the existing racial order (247-48). Fresh challenges are faced each year by the biracial individuals in terms of their identity and position in the social and racial order. This issue takes the centre stage as it can be witnessed through various movements like "Black Lives Matter" in the twenty-first century as well. The US society has always had and still has definite strategy and various institutions as tools to keep the mechanism of slavery in the past and hegemonic monoraciality in the present intact, and ensure the white dominance up the racial order.

Joan Steinau Lester's *Black, White, Other: In Search of Nina Armstrong* is a Bildungsroman narrative that shuns the idea of choosing between two sides of identity by a biracial person on totally rejecting an entire racial side against will and self-integrity. Bildungsroman novel is a coming-of-age-story that focuses on a narrative of a young individual growing morally and psychologically into an adult. Hence, it is also regarded as a novel of formation or novel of education. The most important element of a Bildungsroman narrative is the character development that the young adult undergoes through the course of the narrative. It has four stages that lead to the transformation of an individual. They include - loss, journey, conflict and personal growth and maturity. The novel traces the journey of a fifteen-year old biracial girl Nina Armstrong who gets estranged in a nowhere space between the racial borders of her identity. She is the daughter of a black father Silas and a white mother Maggie and also is in a continuous struggle to earn independence and an identity. The story is set against the background of the racial tensions that happen in Oakland, California, Nina's native place. Nina's life and existence that is usually filled with a variety of colours in terms of her as well as her family's phenotype, suddenly encounter the

harsh reality of her parents' separation. The internal as well as the external tensions result in the ever-changing boundaries and definitions of identity choices and racial relations in Nina's life.

This chapter examines the identity development of the protagonist Nina Armstrong using the "Borderlands theory" proposed by the American scholar, Gloria Anzaldúa. The theory mainly deals with the construction of borderland consciousness that navigate and subvert the hegemonic monoraciality and dominant heteropatriarchy which is stereotypical of the US society, by a borderland inhabitant. Nina's identity development is juxtaposed with her great-great-grandmother Sarah Armstrong's journey from slavery to freedom during her teenage years in the nineteenth-century. This strengthens Nina in making the choice of her identity thereby forging together both the historical periods under analysis. It also explores the duality of the stance that represents the external oppression which maintains the white dominance, and the counterstance position that is characterised by the internal resistance and reactions to the suppression and superiority.

Devaluation of an individual in the name of one's racial identity has been typical of the US society over a period of time and, it also becomes the central point of discussion in the novel. While slavery offers the plane for degradation in the case of Sarah who is the biracial representative of nineteenth-century, the compulsion to identify oneself in the light of hegemonic monoraciality, that is typical of the twenty first-century becomes the reason for devaluation as far as Nina is concerned, thus completing the vicious circle of human debasement. This gets operated mainly through various institutions such as family, peer group and civil society in the case of both the characters.

Family of a biracial individual plays an important role in the identity development and the choice of racial identity. Parental guidance and advice often lead biracial children to opt for an identity choice which favours one over the other. Mary Ciprani-Price, a Marriage and Family Therapist and an Assistant Professor in the San Diego Department of Marriage and Family Therapy, Ben K. Lim, a relational systemic therapist, and Donna J. Alberici, associated with the Department of Graduate Psychology, Immaculata University, Pennsylvania have found that there may be several consequences in bringing up a biracial child with an idea to choose a single half of their identity. They observe that such an upbringing "has the potential to alienate the children from their heritage and possibly cause ambivalence toward that race, as well as a sense of a fractured loyalty to the parent of the other ethnicity" (qtd. in Browne 45). A similar rupture can be noticed in Nina's otherwise calm and easy life with the divorce of her parents. Initially, though the parents try to uphold the act of miscegenation through their marriage and by raising the children in a racially divided society, later they fail to carry on with their liberal attitude, probably owing to societal pressure, thereby, ending up in separation. This is evident when they decide to settle with their like-coloured children following the divorce, thereby rooting for their respective cultures and its corresponding identities for their children.

The choice of children based on phenotype by Nina's parents, results in an invisible colour line. The racial tensions that splinter her hometown and the terrifying gas explosions that burn down several houses of black people result in protests on the streets and add to Nina's crisis following her parents' separation. Nina who remains unaffected by the explosions and considers it as a mere accident initially, gets puzzled at her father's reaction to the same. For the first time ever to her surprise, she sees Silas reacting impulsively and emotionally: '"If it were white people . . . the Red

Cross would be swarming by now" (Lester 12-13). He also feels that CG&E has enhanced their pipelines in rich areas and not in Oakland to save money on blacks, and he accuses the white cops of arriving at the scene with a shoot-at-sight order.

Nina finds her father's open allegiance to blacks quite odd and that the casualty and loss suffered by the people is similar to the one that occurs during any other calamity. She tries to make sense of the whole situation which has led to a change in her father's attitude and wherein he has started prioritising the aspects regarding skin colour and particular racial lineage which were deemed unimportant by him earlier. The unwillingness to agree to her father who favours the idea of hegemonic monoraciality is evident when Silas expresses solidarity with the victims of the Oakland issue. Nina wonders, "Who is this dad? *My* dad always told me, 'People are people.' That we're all God's children underneath. The color of their skin is the *last* thing that's important. 'It's the content of their character, like Dr. King taught us'" (Lester 13) (Italics in original).

Nina is bewildered with her father's counterstance position when he mentions the need to bring out the Black Power again. This happens due to the recruitment of a white police official at the forefront of the racial tension site to deal with the African American and Latino victims. Nina says:

> He acts like I don't know about the explosions. I've seen the news. Everybody knows what happened. The newscasters are calling West Oakland a "war zone" with "unprecedented devastation" that will take years to undo. It's sad; of course it is. Nobody likes it, Dad. Dad's grief-stricken eyes are glaring at me like I personally put that white woman at the front of the line. (Lester 14)

In addition to this, when Dad expresses his fear about himself and like coloured Jimi getting attacked in the streets in a similar fashion, Nina finds the entire

status quo, her father's apartment and her father himself too strange and scary to comprehend. She tries hard to take control of the entire state of affairs, but when her dad bursts out laughing, she wishes to believe that she has been simply imagining the changed "other Dad" (Lester 15). The turn of events all the more force the siblings, especially Nina who has never in her life considered race a significant factor in the division of people, to examine the ethnic and cultural differences that exist within her own family and herself for the first time ever:

> Though he probably did have a point. I never heard about a white neighbourhood exploding and the fire department taking forever to get there so that blocks of houses burn for days, and hardly any ambulances arrive. And no food. I never thought about tragedies that way, about what town it happens in and how who lives there could determine whether people live or die. (Lester 15)

Nina's association to her black heritage is all the more pronounced when she reads her great-great-grandmother Sarah's journal that charts the story of escape from slavery. Sarah is the daughter of a slave couple, Albert Winston and Yasmine, who is the child of the white slave owner, Master Armstrong. Nina initially finds the history of her ancestor who lived one hundred and fifty years ago some "baby stuff" (Lester 30). But Silas insists that she reads the chapters that he has written incorporating her life into a novel with the research help extended by his new black girlfriend, Helane, an African American History Professor. Silas' choice of his girlfriend hints at his black separatist emotions and the caution he exercises after his interracial marriage has ended. His modelling of Sarah's character on Nina not only asserts his strong alliance to his ethnic roots but also his desire to make Nina choose the black side of her biracial identity causing the devaluation of her biracial identity. The role of a

family in instilling the notion of monoraciality is all the more pronounced in Silas' words, "'I actually based her character on you,'" he says. "'You know what they say: 'The best way to know a parent is to look at the child.' Well, I figured the best way for me to imagine my great-grandmother's nature was to take a hard look at one of her descendants, another feisty young woman'" (Lester 30).

Sarah's devaluation of the self happens due to the effects of slavery which begins at the age of six. This is recorded through her memories in the journal while running away from the Armstrong plantation in her native place Hanover County, in North of America. The birth and identity of slave children as institutionalised by the white society was one of debasement and discrimination based on colour. In Ol' Master Armstrong's words as Sarah clearly remembers, "'[y]ou're hatched from a buzzard egg,'" he'd say with a laugh, his great belly shaking while he swatted at flies. "The stork brings the white babies." (Lester 35-36). The slave children's upbringing too is the one intended for the auction, as is clear from Sarah's mistress' words when the latter flicks her cat-o'-nine tails at the children following their lunch, thereby, making them run, "The more they scamper, the more they grow for market"' (Lester 36). Sarah's willpower is visible from the first chapter of Silas' novel titled, "Miss Sarah Armstrong: On the Run," when she stops thinking about her past and fights her negative thoughts that she is never going to escape. Her vow, "'I'm never going back"' (31-32) in spite of the confusion in her mind to go forward and at the same time to return to her place exhibits her strong determination.

Initially, Nina's parents attempt to introduce her to both the cultures and impart both the perspectives which makes the movement between the cultures and maintenance of relationship with her parents, less challenging for her. Both of them to an extent seem to foresee her future and the struggle that she may have to endure from

the society. Maggie's teachings such as "'Race doesn't matter'" and "'Claim every bit of who you are'" (Lester 94) at various instances become words of encouragement for Nina to be the way she is, as well as to see both parts of her identity as equal without any bias. Silas too encourages Nina to visit him often, and tries to maintain her ties with the black culture, while also aiding her in dealing with the stigma of belonging to a minority community. Hence, Nina's initial thoughts on reading Sarah's story validate her idea of biracial existence and belief in the current US society to accept her identity choice: "Doesn't he think I learned anything about slavery at school? But why be furious about it now? It's the twenty-first century, Dad. The world has changed. I'm the living proof, aren't I? Nobody's growing me for market. And our family shows how different things are" (Lester 39). Though Maggie's take on the racial tensions reflects a white perspective, her efforts to make Nina realise the perfection of being biracial in the US too is notable.

Social pressure to choose a single side of the identity over the other, in vogue with the hegemonic monoraciality lands a biracial individual in a confusing and traumatic situation. Thus, monoraciality is generally considered as a tool adopted by the whites to maintain their supremacy, power and stance position. Nina is confronted with both the cultures and their predicament every single time she shifts between her parents' homes which is reflective of both her stance and counterstance. This does not just provide her with a change in ambience; instead, she manages the variant aspects of her racial identity to the fullest through her parents' individual identities. But the separation slowly starts affecting Nina especially when she continuously juggles between both of her parents' homes which becomes obvious when she says: "Ever since the last summer when everything went crazy, Mom and Dad have acted like I'm a robot they can simply program" (Lester 8). This juggling to an extent is the one

between two places that carry the essence of the two sides of her biracial identity as well. Nina notes: '"My neighbourhood is so green it's like a park . . . . Here, where El Camino Boulevard changes its name to Martin Luther King, storefronts sprout up. Cajun Fish, E-Z Credit, and Best Beauty Supplies. By the time I get to Dad's corner, everybody is black or Latino" (Lester 10). Nina's confused state of existence is similar to the one in borderland as Anzaldúa clearly mentions, "[t]he prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants . . . . the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulato, the half-breed, the half-dead; in short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the '"normal"' (25).

Peer group involvement turns out to be another factor that influences Nina's identity choice. Racial segregation and judgemental attitude on the basis of skin colour become an inevitable part of her school life. As Miville et al. in "Chameleon Changes: An Exploration of Racial Identity Themes of Multiracial People" rightly point out that the most important setting for the identity development of mixed-race individuals is the location where they grow up and receive education (512). The slang "ghettos" and "preppies" that are used by the school children to refer to black and white children respectively, validate the internal division that exists among them. Nina starts getting affected by the white people's take on the whole racial tensions. Once, one of her white schoolmates Claudette addresses the black people at the protests as "looters and animals," thereby asserting her dominant stance position. At that point, Nina tries to make sense of the situation and starts mouthing her dad's words in defence of black people, automatically expressing her counterstance position.

In contrast to her ideas on validating her biracial identity, Nina is put in a position where she has to forcefully defend a single side of her identity over the other.

But it is one of her closest friends Jessica's unexpected agreement to Claudette's accusation that totally upsets Nina. Claudette says:

> "Yeah, thieves. Common thieves," Jessica says, with so much vehemence that the top of my nose gets tight and tingles. It's a warning: tears are about to come if I don't concentrate, so I bite my cheek. I've never heard Jessica talk like this is the whole world going freaky? First my dad has a personality implant, and now Jessica? Am I suddenly on some parallel planet, where everybody looks the same but they are strangers? (Lester 19)

Nina is made to feel like an absolute stranger in the world that is segregated according to racial terms by her best friend. All those who have been closer to her until then seem to have undergone a radical change. She thus becomes unable to identify herself among new people and stranger places. This is mentioned by Anzaldúa as 'the struggle of borders' or *Una lucha de fronteras* as she notes, "[t]he ambivalence from the clash of voices results in mental and emotional states of perplexity. Internal strife results in insecurity and indecisiveness. The *mestiza*'s dual or multiple personality is plagued by psychic restlessness" (100) (Italics in original). The loss experienced by Nina represents the first stage in the Bildungsroman narrative.

During the nineteenth-century, enslaved African Americans were made to work under inhuman conditions in large plantations owned by white slave masters. These slaves who were considered to be mere property were subjected to strict racial policing, chastisement, sexual exploitation etc. Sarah's story is a narrative that introduces many such issues suffered by the minority groups at the hands of the white masters. The formative years of her life is characterised by the trials and tribulations of slavery that get asserted through various ways. Being ever inquisitive, Sarah continues to pose questions about her existence, identity, fate etc. to her parents. Her

curiosity leads her to ask her dad about the master's preaching on Sundays in their African Baptist Church. But her dad conveniently ignores her question and chastises her to avoid carrying big thoughts at such a young age.

Sarah is constantly reminded of the old master's lectures which he pretends to read out from the Big Book. His words are commands in the name of God to keep the slaves under white dominance, "Servants, obey in all things your masters, . . . He that knoweth his master's will and doeth it not shall be beaten with many stripes! . . . Faults you are guilty of toward your masters and mistresses are faults done against God himself, who hath set your masters and mistresses over you in his own stead" (Lester 48). Religion and religious principles, thus, become important tools for the propagation and maintenance of white dominance, thereby attributing the white slave owners, Godly status. When she has serious doubts regarding a different surname from that of her father, her mother casually explains that the masters' slaves usually adopt master's second name and nothing more.

Sarah's curiosity increases as she listens to various things and she questions everything, but her mother Yasmine gives more importance to the daily chores rather than replying to the questions. Her doubts about the master that stemmed from Aunt Sally's words, "He made him some more dark babies. Like shelling peas out a pod" (Lester 62). Her mother simply brushes aside this thought as Aunt Sally's madness and Sarah is silenced as well. This hints at the deeply rooted consequences of slavery and the rigorous exploitation of the black women in its name. It also hints at the strong connection between gender and racial identity wherein Women with black lineage are often viewed as the exotic ethnic other and viewed as mere objects by the dominant lot. Sarah observes, "Mama, who was so kind when Sarah got hurt or scared, never seemed to answer the deepest questions. Whenever Sarah brought up

anything about ol' massa, Mama simply flushed, wiped her hands on her apron — even when her hands looked clean — and looked away" (Lester 62). Failure of Sarah's parents in answering all her questions thus propels the intensity of slavery and their silent acceptance shows the helplessness and trauma faced by the family that is subjected to this cruelty.

Later, when Sarah enquires to her mama about the latter's parents, Yasmine slaps her for the first time without bothering to answer her question. Sarah starts to stare at the old master with immense pain in her heart which is evident from Lester's narration, "Watching him move threw broken glass into her heart; when he bent his head to the side, cocking it in a familiar way to examine a fence rail or a broken wagon wheel, his gesture knotted her stomach" (49). Her anxiety increases with the sight of the young master raking over young women thinking about whether she too would have to experience the same when she grows up. While the Sunday mornings normally offer her happy family time, Sunday nights add sadness to her life as it signifies her father's return to the Winston place where he worked as a slave. Her crying when he leaves, is due to the realisation of the fact from the words of her neighbours that her father may or may not return as it entirely depends on his slave master and his economic condition.

In contrast to nineteenth-century America, twenty-first century US society which does not overtly entertain slavery and its brutalities, does so in a subtle form. Nina, as the representative of this era initially ignores the importance of race in her life. Making a specific choice of identity in the society is unimaginable as far as she is concerned. She gets surprised when she has to defend the black people who are the victims of discrimination when an explosion takes place, and thereby she indirectly talks for her dad before her friends:

> It wasn't *stealing* if they didn't have any food! . . . . When white people grab food, the news people say they're 'scavenging.' Like it's smart. I'm surprised to find myself on Dad's side, but this is so insulting I feel like protecting him. How can she say this, like being black automatically makes you dangerous? What does race have to do with anything? (Lester 19) (Italics in original)

Nina starts to realise the effects of belonging to a particular racial category. This hints at Nina's *la facultad* which Anzaldúa explains in detail (Italics in original):

> *La facultad* is the capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities, to see the deep structure below the surface. It is an instant '"sensing,"' a quick perception arrived at without conscious reasoning. It is an acute awareness mediated by the part of the psyche that does not speak, that communicates in images and symbols which are the faces of feelings, that is, behind which feelings reside/hide. The one possessing this sensitivity is excruciatingly alive to the world. (60) (Italics in original)

Nina develops this ability as she is different from the rest of the lot and also starts feeling psychologically unsafe with her environment.

Nina starts to find her best friend Jessica annoying for the very reason that she terms her dad "crazy" when he brings up the concept of race into their relation. Jessica at a later point questions Nina about the latter's company with black children. When Nina uses curse words while replying, Jessica says that she talks like a black child which hints at the negative stereotyping of the biracial individuals with black lineage. These instances turn Nina into a silent onlooker which is the first resistance strategy adopted by her in dealing with the issue. Anzaldúa observes the borderland inhabitants' power to react when she says, "[t]he ability to respond is what is meant by responsibility, yet our cultures take away our ability to act—shackle us in the name

of protection. Blocked, immobilized, we can't move forward, can't move backwards. That writhing serpent movement, the very movement of life, swifter than lightning, frozen" (Lester 42-43).

Nina slowly stops her routine of texting Jessica immediately after returning home every day. At a later point, she refuses to join Claudette for ice-skating when the former is reminded of the proposal by Claudette's father to shoot the "looters" during the Oakland tension. She also suddenly stops sharing with Jessica the confused predicament she finds herself in after reading Sarah's story and on concluding that it must have been Jessica's ancestors who had been the Sarah's slave owners. She gets surprised when she begins to notice the racial differences among her schoolmates which she had failed to notice earlier. Anzaldúa clearly details the forcible development of *la facultad* by the borderland residents when they are confronted with all sorts of oppression when she says, "[p]ain makes us acutely anxious to avoid more of it, so we hone that radar. It's a kind of survival tactic that people, caught between the worlds, unknowingly cultivate, it is latent on all of us" (60-61).

Nina's phenotype that mainly favours the white part of her lineage gets established in the earlier part of the novel as is clear from her own description:

> Everybody says I'm the clone of my mom — except I'm the tall, tan version with "mocha skin," as Dad calls it, and Mom jokes that she's the short, white original. But it's true: we've both got red hair (mine's curlier and darker, with red highlights), the same perfect pitch, the same guitar licks. My face is wider and my cheekbones higher, but we sound exactly alike. When people call and I answer, they start, '"Maggie . . ."' I have to interrupt with, '"No, it's Nina."' (Lester 7-8)

The physical description of Nina appears again in the novel through her own words when she observes and compares herself with the features of a black schoolmate Lavonn. She says: "Her eyes are deep brown and huge, lighting up her round face. My face is all angles. Sharper. I'm also thinner and taller, with long legs and arms like Anansi the wise spider, as Dad likes to tease me — "a trickster" — and my eyes change from green to brown depending on what I'm wearing" (Lester 21). These words reveal her acknowledgement of the black phenotypical features while it also charts her reluctance to identify with a particular racial category. But her inability to do so and the perplexity that she confronts gets asserted throughout the initial part of the novel.

Alienation is experienced by Nina in general from her peers belonging to both the racial categories in spite of her resistance mechanism of silence employed by her. While she gets disturbed by her white peers' attack on black people, she feels extremely lonely and alienated despite being in a crowd when her black schoolmates speak ill of white girls. She says:

> After a few minutes I start to feel strange, with everybody ignoring me. I shift from one foot to another, trying to look casual, like I fit in, when I hear the boy Lavonn's talking to say something about "white girls" with a sideways glance at me and what sounds like a snicker. Maybe I'm making it up, but it looks that way. I start to sweat. The more I replay "white girls" and how he said the words, sneering, the lonelier I feel, standing on the edge of the crowd. (Lester 21)

Furthermore, Nina feels as if she is everywhere and nowhere at the same time, for, a sense of acceptance and belonging is absent due to her biracial status. As Anzaldúa rightly observes about the life in the borderlands, "Alienated from her mother culture,

"alien" in the dominant culture, the woman of color does not feel safe within the inner life of her Self" (42).

Nina's personal identity crisis intensifies with regard to her phenotype, especially skin colour. This is evident when she later thinks that her hands are darker when compared to that of her mother's and that she does not resemble anyone in her family in terms of skin colour. In addition to the puzzlement that she is in, an unknown fear grips her mind following the dream of her brother Jimi getting chased. The fear which Nina's father expressed earlier in the novel starts gaining authority over Nina's mind. This is an indication of Nina being confronted by the reality of the racial divide that persists in the American society. Her rap lyrics clearly reflects upon this fear of hers: "*Fire's coming, better get to shelter, everything's goin' helter-skelter*" (Lester 23) (Italics in original). Anzaldúa expresses the emotional turmoil of the borderland inhabitants when she says, "[t]ension grips the inhabitants of the borderlands like a virus. Ambivalence and unrest reside there and death is no stranger" (26).

Freedom is a long-cherished dream for the enslaved of the nineteenth-century as they are not at all guaranteed the basic human rights. One of the acts of everyday resistance which the slaves engage in is the conduct of furtive conferences which were both dangerous and daring at the same time. The thought of freedom starts taking shape in Sarah's mind when she begins attending the secret prayer meetings in the woods. These gatherings, conducted by Preacher Thomas, are usually night-time services wherein he recites long Bible verses from his memory. This gathering is entirely different from those conducted under the leadership of the slave masters. They intend to gather the slave community to fight for the cause of freedom. Sarah starts to imagine her entire community marching towards freedom whenever the

preacher tells the stories about Jesus and Moses and paints a beautiful world that offers them all the exclusively reserved privileges for herself, her family and her people:

> She imagined great gates bursting open. Gates to that heavenly place called Freedom, which seemed so far away that she could only picture it in another realm. Laughing, people would change into fine, new, shiny clothes before settling down to eat all they wanted: biscuits, butter, pork and chicken, gravy, vegetables, three kinds of pie. They would sleep right past first light. At Freedom there would be no field work, no beatings, and shoes for everyone. Shoes that fit, that didn't pinch or rub her ankles. And her father would stay all week. (Lester 61)

This clearly hints at the connection of an identity that she wishes to develop not for her alone, but for her entire people. Education is one of the most important rights denied by the white masters to the slaves. It is considered a crime, and punishments are meted out to those who have committed it. The story of a white man who chopped off a finger when he caught a girl learning to read the Bible reveals the cruelty of the white slave masters to keep the slavery and slaves in place: '"Hell," . . . "you don't need no learnin'. You'll never be free. And you ain't got sense enough to make a living if you were free" (Lester 64). These words reveal the white people's need to suppress and limit the coloured people from getting ahead or on par with them and the racial privilege guaranteed by the white lineage and high socio-economic status.

Yasmine's answer to Sarah's question on the old master's denial of education to her people reveals the predator – prey relation: "There's not a reason for everything. He is what he is. Seems like they're put on earth to peck at us poor colored folks, the way a buzzard pecks at a dead man's eyes. Peck, peck, they won't

leave us alone" (Lester 81). Sarah realises the importance of education in the journey towards freedom when she thinks of learning to read the Good Book, all by herself. Moreover, she assures herself that all her questions which remain unanswered by her parents would be answered once she acquires education. Therefore, she takes it up as one of her resistance mechanisms to deal with slavery. Her determination to attend a night school conducted by Aunt Rachel in a nearby pit arrangement which secretly provided education against her mother's warning of getting caught and whipped by the Master, helps in making her more confident as an individual, "Sarah burned with a passion to decipher the Good Book herself. Was it as Preacher Thomas told them: that they'd get to heaven no matter what they did, and the sooner they got there the better? The masters were going to hell for sure. '"Better yet,"' Preacher Thomas said, '"go on and run to freedom! That's what ol' Moses did!"' (Lester 64).

Colour line is an aspect that creates an invisible divide within a family. It tends to showcase its sharp presence in Nina's life as well since her parents' split up. She notices:

> When Dad and Jimi stride through the front door, I see they have a new way of walking together, swaggering in rhythm. Jimi's growing his hair out too, so he's even closer to the spitting image of Dad. They're like Dad and Little Dad. Jimi always did take after him — those full lips and jet-black hair — while I favoured Mom's redheaded family. (Lester 25)

The colour line has always grouped the parents and children in the Armstrong family together, even without their knowledge. Nina recognises this division and categorisation when she sees an invisible circle surrounding her father and her brother Jimi which she feels "as if somebody took a brown crayon and drew a line around the two of them" (Lester 25). This hints at her brother's choice of identity being black and

the interracial family's role in it. Jimi's allegiance towards his father and his teachings gets asserted when he explains to Nina about the reason behind his act of stealing Nina's white schoolmate Tyrone Jackson's red bike. Much to her shock and disappointment, he accepts his mistake and says, '"I took it . . . . I was only going to borrow it. But he saw me — . . . . Dad says they *owe* black people!"' (Lester 74) (Italics in original). He also adds that dad has told him that the whites are obligated to give blacks some kind of compensation in general and after the Oakland racial tensions in particular, which Jimi thinks to be the bike in his case.

Nina misses her mom badly at her dad's place. This is evident when she says she does not see her mom's initials in the form of pancake among everyone else's. She even feels that her dad is inconvincible when compared to her mom. At her dad's house, Nina has a conflicting feeling that all those things that are familiar to her — photographs of her grandparents, oil painting — in the united and cosy ambience of her home have got changed entirely since the alteration with the equation of her family. She starts perceiving the world from both of her parents' angles rather than having an equated view of the same. Moreover, Nina turns intolerant towards Helane at the thought of her taking the place of Maggie. She starts hating Helane's appearance and presence alike when she says, "[s]he looks as bad as ever with her nappy hair, short skirt, and big grin. . . .Who does Helane think she is, coming in and saying hi like she knows me, and high-fiving Jimi, letting him hug her like she's his *mother*" (Lester 78) (Italics in original).

Nina curses Helane without the latter's knowledge, but Silas hears the same and gets angry. Silas hates swearing, and so he asks Nina to apologise to his girlfriend. His favouring of Helane over Maggie and his rudeness towards her is unbearable for Nina. His rudeness and unyielding attitude is visible when he says:

‘“Look, Nina, your loyalty to your mother is admirable, but you have to understand . . . . I am seeing Helane. Whom you, young lady, will respect . . . . And the things you said to me . . . . I will not have it, Nina Armstrong. You will apologize for being rude. To her. And to me. You will ask forgiveness from us together”’ (Lester 79-80). Jimi on the other hand is seen comfortable in Helane’s company more than that of his mother’s, which is suggestive of an influential factor in the development of his identity choice. Nina’s identity crisis intensifies with these personal factors as well when she starts experiencing alienation from within the family. She says, “Three months ago I knew who I was: Nina Armstrong, with no color that was important. With one mom, one dad, a pesky brother, and one best friend left after Francesca moved — Jessica Raymond. And there was no scary thug chasing Jimi” (Lester 80).

Nina describes her relation with her mother as a complicated one. She says that though the friends find them lighter and darker versions of each other, many people fail to recognise their relationship. She recounts how someone had enquired to her mom if the children had been adopted, for, they looked like “sweet caramel candies” (Lester 26). She also remembers of the incident that happened when once the whole family has been taking a walk in San Francisco, a man sitting on the sidewalk shouts at Maggie to leave “brother” Silas alone. Horrified, Nina thinks of running away from there so that the stranger won’t identify her as white and shout at her as well. This hints at how the invisible divide that exists among people affect biracial children from a very young age. Nina questions God about this very difference later when she reads the title of the second chapter “Did God Make White people Too?” of her father’s novel on Sarah Armstrong: “Why would a being who knows everything make people look so different they want to fight each other?” (Lester 45).

Nina's bewilderment about her identity tag heightens at a certain point, and her dilemma of divided existence and separated parents get apparent through her thoughts which is representative of the first stage of a Bildungsroman narrative: "If Lavonn and Demetre are ghetto, and Jessica and Claudette are hills or preppy, what am I? some kids say they're "mixed," but I'm not mixed, I'm scrambled—a bunch of separate pieces all jumbled in one body that hardly recognizes my best friend, shuttles between two homes, and has no idea what's terrifying my brother" (Lester 42). Nina's inability to gather her fragmented world and identity and openly make an identity choice gets obvious with this. A similar kind of psychological quandary is identified by Anzaldúa with regard to the Mexican-American individuals in general and herself in particular, who suffer from the difficulty in acculturation to either American or Mexican cultural values:

> This voluntary (yet forced) alienation makes for psychological conflict, a kind of dual identity-we don't identify with the Anglo-American cultural values and we don't totally identify with the Mexican cultural values. We are a synergy of two cultures with various degrees of Mexicanness or Angloness. I have so internalized the borderland conflict that sometimes I feel like one cancels out the other and we are zero, nothing, no one. (85)

Biracial individuals are generally looked on with utmost suspicion by the members of the minority ethnic group. This happens mainly because they may disown the minority part of their identity for the supreme privileges and opportunities in life by making a choice of the majority part of their identity. As Dr. Sandra Hughes-Hassell, Professor, UNC School of Information and Library Science has rightly mentioned in her "Multicultural Young Adult Literature as a Form of Counter-Storytelling," they "on daily basis . . . must navigate a world where other people are

making assumptions about who they are and what they can achieve based on their skin color" (qtd. in Browne 10). At one point, Nina's defensive approach when she interacts with some of her black girl friends at school hints at her transformation into a stereotype to the racial binary system by keeping aside her pride of being a biracial. When her friend Demetre says, "White girls. You can't trust 'em. . . . I'm gonna keep my eye on you! You might turn all white. We got to watch out," (Lester 113-14) Nina says, "I'm part white!"' . . . Funny how now I feel like defending the white part of me, the white part of my family. My mom, my grandparents. Even the white part of Jimi" (Lester 113-14). Nina on the other hand finds it really difficult in expressing her desire to choose both her racial origins alike. She ends up defending one half of her identity owing to the peer group pressure, thereby, expressing her counterstance to tackle the external pressure. Anzaldúa notes regarding the predicament of those who exist in borderlands like this, "Not only was the brain split into two functions but so was reality. Thus, people who inhabit both realities are forced to live in the interface between the two, forced to become adept at switching modes" (59).

Redirecting to Demetre's statement, Nina is confronted with "biracial efficacy," a term which has been identified and defined by Counselling Teresa Davis Lafromboise, Psychologist by Training and a Professor of Education in Developmental and Psychological Sciences in the Graduate School of Education at Stanford University. She defines the term "bicultural efficacy" as "an individual's belief or confidence in his or her ability to live effectively and satisfactorily within two cultural groups without having to compromise his or her sense of cultural identity" (qtd. in Ivory 141). There is a need for the mixed-race people in general and biracial individuals in particular to develop what Lourdes India Ivory terms "biracial competency" which is the skill to be responsive to the various social signals,

convolutions and personality traits of proudly being in two entirely different cultures (qtd. in Browne 40). This they should achieve by not choosing one identity over the other. Nina is also caught up in the identity crisis, but does not seem to think of the act of "passing" into any particular racial category as a way out of her problems.

Nina slowly gets to realise that her parents fail to understand her, though she spends her life with both of them. She feels that they tend to conveniently ignore her take on race issues and most importantly her real-life existence and experiences as a biracial in a city deeply rooted in segregation principles and racism. Once it happens when Nina attends a class on the US Constitutional Amendments where the Amendment Thirteen that bans any form of slavery comes up for discussion. Though most of the white children and some black kids seem to remain casual after the class, Nina clearly notices the intense look on the faces of certain African American classmates. Her thoughts on witnessing their discomfiture clearly show that the problem of segregation among individuals on the basis of skin colour which has been relatively unimportant in Nina's life has started to take the centre stage: "At this minute, I am completely, one hundred percent, one of them" (Lester 89). This visibly asserts her wish and will to be a biracial individual in the strongest way possible. Nina thus exhibits what Anzaldúa puts forward as the idea of reconstructing identity by totally ignoring the essentialized monoracial categories. She identifies with the mixed-race identity as a new and distinct racial category that embodies all the primary monoracial groups. The biracial individual develops this consciousness in a continuous process by deconstructing his/her place in different patterns of subjugation. The "increment of consciousness" (Anzaldùa 48) breaks down the various aspects that pose hindrances for the identity of a biracial individual to seek group membership. All the ambiguities, uncertainties, multiplicities etc. of locations,

cultures will be accepted without fragmentation or rejection thereby resulting in racial fluidity.

The blacks who are the victims of the Oakland fires and explosions and who managed to take food and other essential items from the stores as they have not been provided with any are termed “looters” and “robbers” and “animals” by Nina’s white friends. This is stereotypical of the twenty first-century US society in establishing white hegemony and anti-black attitude thereby maintaining the mechanism of monoracialisation. The disadvantageous position of Blacks and the central question of crime, punishment and race gaining significance in the twenty first-century is reiterated at this point and gets aggravated when Nina too gets judged easily in one of the incidents that happens at a store, Fat Slices. The stereotypical image that has been built of the blacks following the fires is nonchalantly imposed on her as well, just because of her skin colour. Once when Nina, Jessica and Claudette visit the store, Claudette accidentally stumbles onto a stand of birthday cards thereby scattering many stationery items. Amidst the chaos, Nina sees Claudette stealing something and stuffing it up in her pocket. While she fears and expects the shopkeeper to get hold of Claudette for the incident, Alvin the white shopkeeper identifies Nina as black and in turn directly accuses her of shoplifting. Here we find anti-black stereotypes operating against Nina in the form of Alvin directly and her friends indirectly. As Anzaldúa notes, “Dominant paradigms, predefined concepts that exist as unquestionable, unchallengeable, are transmitted to us through the culture” (38).

Nina’s biracial identity experiences an obliteration with the act of monoracialisation by Alvin. The automatic assigning of Nina to a widely recognised inferior monoracial category of black thus becomes representative of the legacy of “Hypodescent” that demands for a biological determinism of race so to maintain the

black-and-white duality that establishes white racial purity and supremacy. Alvin utters rancorous words and lashes out at Nina without offering her a chance to prove her innocence. He turns immensely virulent when he makes racist remarks on Nina's identity: '"Don't you 'hey' me, missy. I've seen what you people have been doing in Oakland, using the fire as a cover"' (Lester 68). This incident throws light on how the society automatically assigns a particular monoracial category to a biracial individual based on the physical aspects thereby propagating and administering false ideas of what and how a monoracial category should be like phenotypically. This may completely disrupt the identity choices of the multiracial individuals who possess many physical features, and identify differently from the established patterns which include not only the physical aspects but also, the upbringing, education, personal and social relations, locations etc.

Alvin's condemnatory attitude is all the more visible not only when he avoids questioning the white girls but also when he advices them of keeping away from Nina, whom he identifies as their black companion. He warns Jessica, '"If you're in on this gang, you better think twice or you'll end up in juvie right along with your friend here"' (Lester 69). The incident is a validation of the racial oppression by the sources that represent hegemonic stance position that hinders the identity development of the coloured people thereby breeding hostility in the whites towards the latter. Nina's encounter with monoracial racism thus reveals the age old stereotypical and judgemental nature of the society. "This hints at Anzaldúa's observation of the power and the stance position asserted by the dominant lot on borderlands. She notes, "The only '"legitimate"' inhabitants are those in power, the whites and those who align themselves with whites" (25-26).

Hence, Alvin becomes the representative of the heteropatriarchal US society that uphold the concepts of white racial purity and supremacy. The way he tries to silence Nina also shows the internalized oppression of dark-skinned women who already belong to a marginalized category instilled by the whites' anti-black attitude. Jimi too is identified as a "looter," when he steals his schoolmate's bike at a later point. Robbery is a crime when committed by anyone but the mechanism of monoracial racism operates strongly when a person of black ethnicity is accused indicating the after effects and the undercurrents of "Hypodescent" and "One-Drop Rule." It also indicates the working of gender in negatively stereotyping and racially labelling an individual of black lineage.

Nina's existing turmoil and insecurities heighten with the Fat Slices incident. She is shattered to the core when she sees Jessica and Claudette remaining silent throughout. Neither does Claudette confess her mistake nor does her best friend Jessica stand up for her. It is as if they silently authenticate the negative stereotyping of Nina's existence as a biracial individual. Moreover, Claudette coolly walks away after the incident as if nothing has happened and negates her act of stealing. Nina's despondence and disappointment is clear when she says "Jessica doesn't say a word. I expect her to be furious at Alvin and to follow my lead in questioning Claudette, but she's totally quiet" (Lester 69). Peer pressure too builds up around Nina. At this point, Anzaldúa's feminist analysis about the real creators and transmitters of culture and their dominant stance position become obvious when she says, "Culture is made by those who are in power — men. Males make the rules and laws; women transmit them" (38).

Religion played an important role in keeping the mechanism of slavery alive in nineteenth-century. This is evident when the white slave owner Master Armstrong

constantly warns the slaves against stealing through his preaching thereby exploiting the religious practices and the religious beliefs of the slaves to his advantage. The slaves who are denied all the privileges are therefore checked constantly and anyone caught stealing is harshly punished as well. Religion thus becomes a prominent force in validating the words of white slave master. Master Armstrong is seen reading out from the Bible that if anyone witnesses the act of stealing the chicken eggs, then it should be reported immediately to the old mistress as it is considered a crime. Sarah who learns to read is unable to find the words and stories the old Master quoted from the Bible, especially, the story which described how the buzzards hatched black babies. The power to read the Bible, especially the Biblical story in which Moses had led the Israelites out of bondage is seen instilling in her the hope and desire of a promised freedom. It also provides her the power to move forward as well as the power to lead her people "And the Day of Judgement swore justice. When she read this, Sarah, who habitually stopped, pulled back her shoulders and lifted her head. '"Hold your head up, daughter,"' her father told her. She'd ignored him before, but after reading the Bible, something inside thrust her shoulders back, yanking her upright" (Lester 83). Slaves adopted various methods to put up with the harsh reality of their servitude. Their resistance strategy does not just include organised rebellions; instead the slaves engage in activities of everyday resistance as well such as stealing food to compensate their meagre ration supplies or faking illness to do away with the labour. One of the incidents in the novel proves this well: "Sarah thought back to her mother returning to the cabin one Saturday evening, saying she'd '"found a stray chicken"' and promised, '"We'll have a broiling."' The next day they'd roasted potatoes in the fire and burned rags to keep the white folks from smelling the cooking chicken" (49).

Various decrees and constitutional amendments have been supplementing factors for the institution of slavery to flourish in America. The poignant life of her enslaved ancestor affects an already distressed Nina. Though she perpetually tries to express her thoughts and problems to her mother, Maggie pacifies her about the current worldwide understanding of human rights and therefore the impossibility of the reinstatement of slavery, thereby, increasing her stress level. Nina starts thinking about the death of black people in the shoot-out by the cops in Oakland. She imagines her dad, Jimi and herself in the victims' positions just as her dad has been afraid of. The class on the US amendments also builds up anxiety within her. Further, fear of Jimi's robbery getting revealed traumatises her and this feeling gets aggravated when the bike-owner Tyrone Jackson chases her. Nina's agony over her disintegrating existence is manifested in her words: "I never thought my family would fall apart either. I never thought a bully would call my brother a thief — or that Jimi would steal. I never believed Jessica — *Jessica!* — would stroll by and act like she didn't even know me" (Lester 92) (Italics in original).

The thought of another constitutional amendment by the State that may make slavery legal again as easily as they had made slavery illegal, terrorises Nina and makes her insecure. But when she thinks about all the unexpected things that have happened like the slavery in Sudan, divorce of her parents, Jimi's robbery and Jessica's indifference, fear and doubt over the practice of slavery getting restored get instilled in her mind. But when these concerns are expressed by Nina to her mother, she feels that she and her mother are two different individuals who are separated by race, in the ways of thinking. She feels that her mom whom she had always counted on, did this on purpose thereby leaving her alone: "My feelings about my mom are so mixed up, I'm gonna explode. She's always been my confidante, because she could

understand what I was going through and help me out when nobody else could, except may be Fran and Jessica, but now it seems like she's standing across a wall from me — this wall called race — and suddenly I'm on the other side" (Lester 92). Anzaldúa clearly observes the desperation and hopelessness which the borderland inhabitants encounter at a certain point:

> We do not engage fully. We do not make full use of our faculties. We abnegate. And there in front of us is the crossroads and choice: to feel a victim where someone else is in control and therefore responsible and to blame (being a victim and transferring the blame on culture, mother, father, ex-lover, friend, absolves me of responsibility), or to feel strong, and for the most part, in control. (43)

Nina goes to the extreme level of openly likening Maggie to the image of a domineering white lady Miss Ann in the event that slavery gets re-established. On the other hand, Jimi who possesses a darker complexion than Nina finds it easy to get adjusted to his father's house and its cultural ambience when compared to Nina. This definitely instils in her an uncertainty, for, following the divorce, she feels neglected by her father and thereby by the black side of her family as well.

It is interesting to note that while Nina's parents become unsuccessful in discussing her biracial issues and offering any kind of solution to resolve them, Lavonn's mother Saundra discusses the problem in detail with Nina and tells her that '"It's a trip"' (Lester 57). The fact that Saundra is biracial and thereby Lavonn too is a multiracial individual astonishes Nina, for, Nina has always thought that Lavonn is black. Her statement that along with African Americans, the white people who try and dominate the biracial individuals will keep their secret of having an ancestor whom they cannot acknowledge and accept, is an open censure on the white hypocrites. This

actually reminds Nina of Claudette. Saundra's take on the biracial existence makes Nina all the more confused. Nina is reminded of her mother's words that Jewish lineage and Irish line from her mother's and father's sides respectively are not treated as white in the present times, and that she had seen many '"No Irish need apply"' (56) signs when she had tried for jobs. She feels that Saundra herself who has gone through the identity crisis would find it difficult to understand Nina's problems of having divorced parents, a dad who has started acting strange and changed following the separation, shuttling between two homes and the maddening matter of race which she has of late, started noticing.

Saundra's take on the subject of race, identity choice and the age old One-drop rule which tags a person either black or white based on the blood line, is a practical solution that can impart in the biracial individual, a sense of confidence and determination to steer through the challenges posed before them which expresses her counterstance:

> You know, Nina, biracial kids signed up for a big life . . . . You might feel fragmented now — especially with Silas and Maggie on such bad terms — but, in the end, you'll see. If you can pull it off, you'll have access to two complete, fascinating worlds . . . the culture will call you African American — one-drop rule still reigns — yet you get to choose. It's complicated, but you can play it all. (Lester 57)

However, immediately after Saundra mentions that the biracial children can play with their identities, it is ironical to see Nina being identified as "black" by Saundra. Nina gets shocked and confused when Saundra asks Nina to call up Lavonn, who is at the James Baldwin Theatre rehearsing for *Black Nativity*, so that Lavonn could use black kids like Nina for the programme. Nina feels frustrated with the classification of her

identity on monoracial grounds as black and also the fact that she is forced to choose either one of the racial categories every time, despite her biracial existence. Her thoughts at this point exhibits an affinity towards white identity: “I’m not a black kid: I don’t watch BET, I sing white folk songs with my mom, who I suddenly feel, in the oddest way, is the person I’m closest to. And she’s white. Or so-called white, Jewish-Irish white. It’s hopeless” (Lester 58). Later, while singing the Union songs along with her mother and grandmother, she feels that the songs reflected racist ideology and her mother’s voice sounded real “white” to her. In fact, a serious thought that the unions have been meant only for the working-class whites and the blacks have not been allowed to join the same strikes her. She feels nauseous with this and stops singing. This reflects on Nina’s identity crisis where she becomes unable to express herself. Anzaldúa’s observation on the chaos faced by the queer people regarding their sexual identity holds true in the case of all biracial and multiracial individuals. She notes, “What we are suffering from is an absolute despot duality that says we are able to be only one or the other. It claims that human nature is limited and cannot evolve into something better” (41).

Nina realises that the only person in the whole of universe with whom she can relate to is Sarah, her great-great-grandmother who lived during the nineteenth-century. It is her great-great-grandmother’s journey from slavery to freedom dealing with all the negative thoughts that discouraged her that catalyses Nina’s travel to self-identification from a confused existence in a segregated world. She traces back the steps to Sarah through her father’s novel and relates all her struggles to that of her ancestor. From a girl who has been totally unresponsive to a lady’s struggle, Nina becomes the great-great-granddaughter who gets inspired by her great-great-

grandmother's bold take on the issues, and gathers strength from those acts to resolve her problems.

Biracial children often grow up facing various questions such as "What are you?" "Who are you?" etc. on their identity and ethnic descent. Right from their childhood, they face rigorous pressure and complications in answering these questions which in a way is a forceful manner of making a choice between their blood lines. Race thus becomes a divisive factor among the children resulting in the alienation from the friends as well as the same community individuals. Nina too faces these questions especially from her peers at school leading to what can be regarded as the multiracial racism that occurs at the institutional level. Oakland racial tensions affect multiracial individuals more than the white or black children. While totally black or white students can easily express their solidarity to the group of their choice in the Oakland issue, Nina falls in an utter confusion first of all because she has not ever been ever taught to do so, and secondly due to the peer pressure at school. It becomes all the more difficult for her when it comes to taking sides thereby making the choice of her identity as she does not know how to openly do so.

Constant pressure to take up any one of the socially constructed monoracial categories rather than the personal multiracial identity is one of the major issues in the identity development of biracial individuals. The performative aspect of choice-making is an unwritten rule normalized in the US society to gain acceptance among social groups. This impacts Nina psychologically, as, she receives limited or almost no support at all in order to offer any affirmative solutions and strategies to deal with the multiracial racism. The characterisation of the 'in-between' limits as the one wherein the individuals navigate through the aspects of belonging and non-belonging within the monoracial groups to which they want to be a part of, as observed by

Anzaldùa, gets true here in Nina's case. With utmost frustration, she once explains her dilemma and tension to her mother. She says, "It's all about race at school. You have to be one or the other. You don't understand at all" (Lester 94). This experience of hers reaffirms the existence of mutually exclusive black and white racial categories as opposed to each other and that are not supposed to mix up. Her parents' attitude adds to the pressure on her, for being able to make an obvious identity choice.

Nina struggles and gets frustrated with the questions of her identity and discrimination from within her school community. She is denounced and estranged by friends owing to her failure in openly asserting her choice of self-identification. Both her white and black schoolmates equally pose challenges before her, especially by forcing her to pick a side. This becomes essential for Nina as her assertion of a lineage will not only fit her into the identity of her choice but also into a fixed peer group as well. The racial duality enforces the oppressor-oppressed power dynamics which results in the constant "othering" of the biracial individuals by the individual groups. Miville et al. in "Chameleon Changes: An Exploration of Racial Identity Themes of Multiracial People" point out that the multiracial individuals generally develop an understanding about their mixed heritage and experience either isolation or self-esteem in relation to the spaces characterized by pressure regarding the acceptance of their identities. They also add that as the social context becomes influential in identity development, the mixed-race individuals are more likely to be pressurized to choose a monoracial identity than their multiracial existence thereby resulting in a drop of their self-respect and enthusiasm (512). Nina too loses confidence in her own self, family, her parents' upbringing, communal allegiance and peer bonding. It is not only the identity of a person, but also the personality and life of an individual that is at stake. This gets absolutely clear from her thoughts: "How

could my whole world have erupted exactly like Oakland did, from one day to the next: everybody at school hates me, plus my own family doesn't even want me, and then this insane stealing thing ricocheting between the bike and Fat Slices" (Lester 94).

Nina is the representative of many such biracial children whose racial and cultural allegiance is questioned in unending manner. Nina once asks, ". . . nobody talks to me anymore, because who am I, a black girl or a white girl?" (Lester 78). She is caught within a duality where she is either monoracialised as black or deracialised and considered as a normal person who signifies whiteness in the US. Lester has strongly brought into spotlight the identity crisis of the biracial individuals which is an issue as old and as relevant as the US State. The pressure that builds up on the biracial individuals to identify monoracially thereby overturning their biracial status as mere self-declared identity may often bewilder their sense of belonging to particular racial groups. Clinical Psychologist Maria P. P. Root has observed that the mixed-race people face neglect and denial from both monoracial majority and minority groups as they cannot be fully classified into the same (qtd. in Shih, et al. 125).

Nina's identity crisis gets heightened with the pressure from her community as well as a lack of understanding and estrangement which she feels on the part of her family and friends. Anzaldúa clearly describes this crisis experienced by the borderland residents in terms of the queer people, which truly holds well for the biracial individuals as well who deviate from the conventional choices of racial identification. She says,

> Deviance is whatever is condemned by the community. Most societies try to get rid of their deviants. Most cultures have burned and beaten their

> homosexuals and others who deviate from the sexual common. The queer are the mirror reflecting the heterosexual tribe's fear: being different, being other and therefore lesser, therefore sub-human, in-human, non-human. (40)

This conflict in connection with the biracial existence is never easy to solve. Nina too realises much later that her story and predicament parallels her great-great-grandmother Sarah Armstrong's journey. It's her past that helps her navigate through her present identity issues and script a future. Sarah's story becomes a comforting and encouraging factor for Nina at a crucial point when the latter is asked by her father to apologise to Helane. This comes as a great blow on her individuality resulting in her leaving to her mother's house:

> My feet sprout wings, all on their own, and before he touches me I've bolted out the door and I'm sprinting toward home. *All I can think through the fog of terror is, At least I've got more Sarah Armstrong to read about. I hate my dad, but I do care about her*. All I want to do when I get to my room is bury myself in the pages and forget about everything else in my rotten, crummy life. I race home as if my life depends on it. (Lester 81) (Italics in original)

Slaves and the children of plantation are generally considered assets to acquire economic progress and stability for the slave masters. Thus, without any compunction, it has been a routine for the owners to conduct auctions in the slave markets which resulted in the splitting up of many families. Sarah's world too starts to change once the Master loses his money and decides to sell off slaves for high prices through auctions outside his plantation. She gets to hear about many unknown places like Georgia, Alabama, Louisiana, Mississsippi etc. with cotton fields to where her near ones are being taken. Problems rise for Sarah and her friends Tamra and Wilbert who attend the pit school once the secret is discovered by the Master's black drivers who

seize them for punishment. Tamra is given thirty whiplashes on her bare back till blood comes out with the driver shouting, '"This will teach you to take up white-lady airs! No good comes of reading!"' (Lester 99).

However, Sarah gets spared as the driver gets tired; but he promises to come back next morning to complete Sarah's punishment. Her mother provides her strength to deal with the situation when she says, '"It's too dangerous to run. You got to work with what you got. What you got is here" (Lester 101) and to pray for deliverance. Though a new head slave arrives next day to carry out her punishment, the whip never touches her skin and escapes unbelievably thereby providing her with the sign of hope and determination to strive for liberation:

> This was a miracle like one of the many she'd read about, like Moses wandered in the wilderness with his people, so thirsty, and he smote the rock that gushed forth a great stream of water for everybody to drink. Or when the Red Sea parted and the children of Israel walked through in order to escape the Egyptians. God was her Shepherd, and had given her the signal. She wasn't born for this life, no matter what Ol' Master Armstrong said. One day she would no longer be enslaved. And she would never, ever, let herself be whipped. Before that happened she'd run away. O man would ever tie her down like that. (Lester 102)

One of the major ramifications of slavery is the splitting up of families thereby bolstering their underprivileged, yet, harmonious lives. Sarah too faces this consequence when her world crumbles following the auction of her mother to the extreme South leaving her and her younger siblings, Esther and Albert alone. Before leaving, Yasmine passes onto Sarah a small Bible, asks her to pray for guidance and escape to the North with her siblings. She also assures Sarah that they would be

delivered soon. Sarah's grief can be comprehended from the sight of her looking at the mother for one last time: " . . . Sarah heard the screech of the large wooden wheels and her mother's alto voice, choked with furious tears, singing — almost screaming — 'Hold on a little while longer.' Sarah stood, bent with grief and fury, holding wailing Albert's hand on one side, silent Esther's on the other, until the wagon and her mother's precious voice were completely out of range" (Lester110).

Longing for her family and hot temper become the stoic emotions and in a way Sarah's coping strategies following her mother's auction and she totally becomes unconcerned about the changes in nature. The questions such as why the whole family did not run away when they were all together and that how the earth kept on rotating, with her mama not by her side were thoughts that Sarah had to grapple with. This helpless condition of the slaves also throws light on the rigorous legal constraints over them especially the Fugitive Slave Law passed in 1850 that caught the runaway slaves in any state for "[t]he law affirmed that enslaved people were not citizens, no matter where they were" (Lester 161-62). The younger children too are badly affected with the rupture of their home, "Albert cried every night in his sleep, and so, she imagined, did she. Esther had stopped speaking altogether, rigid, she moved through the days like a ghost" (Lester 118). Sarah is slowly seen taking up the role of a mother figure in her siblings' lives till they too get auctioned one day.

Sarah turns totally silent after the fateful auction but gets mysteriously spared from auction every time though she would have been a premier bidding. Isolation and memories of her family haunt her: "Sarah stopped praying, the habit of a lifetime, because she knew God had given up on her. Or she'd given up on God, it didn't matter which. She was alone" (Lester 123). Life starts to rekindle in Sarah by means of old songs and her friends' efforts that broke the wall of her shock. She realises the

purpose of her life, starts to rebuild the resilience and decides to find a way to live, '"Pharaoh's army got drowned, Oh, Mary, don't you weep,"' she and Ruth sang together. If Mary wasn't supposed to weep, Sarah thought, she wouldn't either. And Pharaoh's army would get drowned. It was a promise" (Lester 124).

Nina begins to feel the pain of Sarah when she attends the class on Constitutional Amendment. She begins interpreting her life in relation to that of Sarah's and understands that Sarah's struggle is much more difficult than that of hers. It offers her comfort and at the same time, inspires her to run away from home to sort out all her problems out: "I need time when I'm not looking over my shoulder for Tyrone, worrying about Jimi every minute, dealing with Jessica and her idiot friends, and wondering if Lavonn's friends think I'm really black. *And* last but not least, Dad. . . . Old-school dad; he doesn't have any patience with kids who talk back, which is how he still views me, even though I'm fifteen" (Lester 111-12) (Italics in original). She adds that chocolate and Sarah's story have been her major pleasures off late.

Nina refuses to extend apologies to her father's girlfriend and continues to experience the need to make a choice of identity at school. Once she automatically defends the white side of her identity when Demetre tags white girls as untrustworthy with reference to Jessica and Claudette: "Funny how I feel like defending the white part of me, the white part of my family. My mom, my grandparents. Even the white part of Jimi" (Lester 114). Her reaction to a nameless whisper, "thief," from behind her back evokes a shudder in her which reveals the disorder that persists. The discussion on "ghetto" and "preppy," the slang words for black and white categories respectively among Nina and her black friends assert the former's choice of being both, just like Lavonn's mother. This is in contrast to Nina's friends' attitude of making a deliberate identity choice and accusing her of being totally white for she

does not wish to participate in the Black Nativity Programme. Her firm belief that the division among individuals is man-made and not one that simply exists in the world, for, it is God's great universe as had been mentioned by her father in Sarah's story, points to the fact that race is a man-made concept. Jessica's accusations over Nina regarding the change in the latter's attitude, dressing, and especially of the robbery at the Fat Slices reveal the hatred and the stereotypical attitude of the peers when race comes into play, "Your father thinks stealing is right — oh, excuse me, depending on who does it — and your brother evidently thinks the same, so what should I believe about you?" (Lester 128).

The initial strategy of silence does not work out for Nina in resolving her identity crisis. With the weakening bond between herself and her best friends as well as her parents' failure to comprehend her identity crisis, she decides to adopt another strategy of running away from her home just as her great-great-grandmother had also done. Her reaction, once she manages to keep back Tyrone's bike before she runs away, clearly expresses the pressure that she has had to handle with the "robber" tag that degrades one side of her identity and tags her monoracial. She says, "I'm drained, but I walk with my head high, as if it's the most normal thing in the world for me to be half jogging on a Thursday morning, pulling my green luggage, headed in the opposite direction from Canyon Valley High" (Lester 135).

Nina's running away to San Francisco from her home and her problems is paralleled with Sarah's escape from slavery to the North with the help of a white abolitionist Dr. Ross who approaches her and other slaves in the plantation as an Ornithologist and hands over compasses and provides instructions that might aid their escape. Both their journeys signify the second stage of the Bildungsroman narrative. She realises that it is her great-great-grandmother's story that will offer her the

necessary strength and the much-sought solution. She uses her ancestor's journey as another resistance mechanism to counter the racial dissonance. Sarah decides to follow the North Star and divine intervention to escape to Washington D.C., the city where communities of free black people existed and various churches and buildings aided the runaways: "Strengthened and inspired, she understood that if she focused all her energies on one point — freedom — a path would open. It was already appearing. Her numbed body tingled as blood flowed again. She felt coming back to life" (Lester 140). Memories of the happy times with her parents and thoughts of her younger siblings who might be living free in the North also encourage her to strongly plan an escape.

Just as Sarah waits for the right opportunity to move towards the North to get reunited with her lost family, Nina too waits for the divine message that will help her solve her problems. She realises that race and its effects continue to exist in her world even after reaching San Francisco, where a black social worker tries to help Nina out to get her back home, contrary to her will. She doubts if things will get better for her after ninth grade when she identifies two white and two black girls of sixteen or seventeen having a good time together. She is reminded of her mom's words, "[S]ocial life is more fluid, . . . [n]ot as exclusive" (Lester 150). She enters into the Grace Cathedral, and chides herself when she tries to identify a person on the basis of his race. This instance hints at her progress towards the development of a consciousness that is all inclusive in nature. Anzaldúa notes about this inclusive aspect of consciousness developed by *la mestiza* thereby subverting the existent patterns of binaries:

> Only by remaining flexible is she able to stretch the psyche horizontally and vertically. *La mestiza* constantly has to shift out of habitual formations;

> convergent thinking, analytical reasoning that tends to use rationality to move forward to a single goal (a Western mode), to divergent thinking, characterized by movement away from set patterns and goals and toward a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes. (79) (Italics in original)

Father Jorge's prayer, seeking divine guidance and help for Nina to choose the right way in her journey makes Nina realise the fact that Yasmine, Sarah's mother too has spoken exactly the same words when she has been forced into wagon to be sold in the South. Nina fails to receive enlightenment with her walking and prayers which she attempts as per Father Jorge's advice, to bridge the gap between her black and white friends. This reaffirms and heightens her uncertainty all the more. She soon finds herself immersed in reading Sarah's story asking for guidance and comfort, thereby forgetting about her problems for a while. Her words reveal the faith that she lays in her ancestor's life, which seem to influence, inspire and interconnect with her own. Nina feels that Sarah will be proud of her for taking her fate into her own hands. At one point, she realises that Sarah, her world and her journey are closely intertwined with hers and she says, "[w]ith food in my belly my brain starts spinning again, until Sarah's world and my world are all mixed up. It's so strange and surreal being here; *I could hide in some bushes,* I think groggily, *like she did*" (Lester 167) (Italics in original). The argument which one part of her mind makes while half asleep truly reflects upon the ultimate race question as well as the division of people on racial grounds.

Nina's realisation of the need to deal with her predicament face-to-face happens when she has the memory of a dream in which she and Sarah have been flying and having a wonderful time together just as two young girls would have. In a

dreamy encounter, Sarah asks her not to wander in San Francisco at night and return home soon. She then advises Nina to listen to her heart and seek for the ultimate guidance. Nina feels protected with the very thought of Sarah, though at first, she tries to totally ignore it. When she sees a black cat crossing her path, she is reminded of her mother and father's words when they had told her that black cat is a symbol of good luck in Irish and African American tradition hinting at the right time to openly assert her biracial lineage. Anzaldúa mentions about the incident which helps the new *mestiza* get out of her confusion:

> She can be jarred out of ambivalence by an intense, and often painful, emotional event which inverts or resolves the ambivalence. . . . The work takes place underground-subconsciously. It is work that the soul performs. That focal point or fulcrum, that juncture where the *mestiza* stands, is where phenomena tend to collide. It is where the possibility of uniting all that is separate occurs. (101) (Italics in original)

Sarah's running away to the North as per the bird watcher's instructions, interpreting all the symbols inspires Nina to resolve her problem. It provides an awakening in Nina as she realises, "Sarah was running *to* something — to freedom. She was brave. But I'm running *away* from my problems. Not solving a thing" (Lester 181) (Italics in original). This makes her think about the need to return home and choose between Jessica and Lavonn. The thought that her choice between friends is something that will indirectly decide upon the choice of her racial category, once again hits her. She thinks, "If I'm with Lavonn, Jessica and Claudette are going to harass me as "ghetto." And if I even could hang with them, the black kids will diss me as "too white" and hate me" (Lester 181).

The perpetual "othering" which Nina experiences owing to the absence of a reliable community space which accepts and acknowledges her identity wholly directs at the racial binary system that patterns the black and white racial categories as mutually exclusive. She realises that returning home is definitely a tough decision, but far easier than travelling to Fran's home. This is what Anzaldúa observes as the anxiety of getting rejected by one's mother, culture, race etc. is always experienced by the borderland individuals. She explains, "Fear of returning home. And of not being taken in. We're afraid of being abandoned by the mother, the culture, *la Raza,* for being unacceptable, faulty, damaged" (Anzaldúa 42) (Italics in original).

An incident that follows when a lady screams at a boy named Jimi, asking him not to leave her alone and apologises for some mistake reminds Nina of her brother Jimi and his plea for protection. To Nina, this seems to be a play that staged before her which strengthens her thought of returning home and therefore, she boards the train. The final chapter of Sarah's story is read by Nina at Café Suzette, her favourite coffee shop, on reaching her hometown. Sarah's story ends with her brilliant escape from the South to the North, from slavery to freedom. This is attributed to her strong and clear vow to herself of not returning to slavery and her hometown again despite her conflicting mind voice that remind her to return and move ahead at the same time, and also to find out her siblings Esther and little Albert. This appears to be magical for Nina, for, it clearly signifies the personal growth that Sarah attains when as she reaches the third stage of the Bildungsroman narrative. Sarah finds inner peace or maturity when she finally realises that she is free on reaching the North as the narrative closes, "As twilight deepened and she began to move, Sarah felt her first peace in many months. Her mother was with her, after all. And tonight, with the clouds scattering, it should be clear; the North Star would confirm the shaky little

needle in her compass" (Lester 179). This is representative of the fourth stage of the Bildungsroman narrative.

Though Nina revels in the pleasure of Sarah's escape into a safe haven, she feels personally unsafe and decides to head home on her own with a decision to encounter her issue thereby not being tagged as a "missing girl" who is reported by someone to the cops. This represents Nina's personal growth as an individual. Her choice of biracial identity is hinted at, while she heads for home by grooving to the rap lyrics that appears wonderful to her and that which unintentionally comes out of her mouth, "I'm big and bad and bold. Comin' in from the cold . . . . I be black and I be white. If you my friend, you all right" (Lester 193). According to Anzaldúa, a total embracement of one's social identities and locations becomes the primary step towards a disidentified position that upsets the division of one's own overlapping social identities. She says:

> This assembly is not one where severed or separated pieces merely come together. Nor is it a balancing of opposing powers. . . . the self has added a third element which is greater than the sum of its severed parts. That third element is a new consciousness-a mestiza consciousness-and though it is a source of intense pain, its energy comes from continual creative motion that keeps breaking down the unitary as peer of each new paradigm. (79-80)

The final confrontation that resolves her crisis happens following Nina's return. Her choice of identity gets asserted following her meeting with Jessica, who finds black children scary and does not wish to be friends with either the black students or Nina who is closer to the former. Jessica's attitude represents her hegemonic dominant stance position as well as the dehumanising effect which it produces on acknowledging Nina's identity and humanity based on the latter's ability

to fit herself into monoracial identity categories such as black and white. This effect gets neutralised with Nina's final take on her. Nina proudly expresses this idea when she tells Jessica in the presence of Claudette, '"You said I've changed. . . . I have. Now I know I can be friends with anybody. Even you, except not if you're gonna act like this. But if you change too, who knows?"' (Lester 203). By leaving out any kind of mention about white or black kids to Demetre when the latter asks about her running away makes Nina's decision about her identity clear.

Nina's choice gets underlined when she tries to get connected with other multiracial kids like Amy. She says, "Yeah, G-H-E-P-P-I-E-S. Ghetto and preppy. That's what we are" (Lester 205) which is significant of her maturity that represents the fourth stage of a Bildungsroman narrative. Nina's choice of the biracial identity status undermines the white superior heteropatriarchal system in the US society by not identifying with the generally enforced and exclusive monoracial categories. As per the concept of *la facultad* proposed by Anzaldùa, she develops a *la mestiza* or a "new consciousness" around the subservience and honour experienced by her at various instances (Italics in original). This consciousness leads her to make a choice of biracial existence thereby being inclusive of all her complexities rather than opting one side of her identity over the other that upholds the subject-object duality. As in Anzaldúa's words, "By creating a new mythos—that is, a change in the way we perceive reality, the way we see ourselves, and the way we behave — *la mestiza* creates a new consciousness" (102) (Italics in original).

The very split that exists between the individuals in terms of race and colour has been overcome and uprooted by Nina thereby developing a collective and encompassing consciousness that is inclusive of all the generally accepted differences. The search for a solution to her problem ends up in the choice of biracial identity

which offers her a much more grounded existence when she realises and repeats Sarah's words in the end:

> I don't have to choose friends, the way Jessica threatened, or Lavonn told me that day she was so mad. Amy and I might start a Gheppie Club. Our anthem could be my rap: "I be black and I be white . . ." or whatever you are, and the club would be open to everybody. We'd have hecka fun. I bet there are lots of kids who'd want to join. Who knows? Someday even Jessica Raymond might want to be a member. But still, even if she doesn't, as my great-great-grandmother said, *I came all the way by myself, and now I'm home*. (Lester 206) (Italics in original)

Existence of hegemonic monoracial categories so as to maintain racial purity and dominance deprives the multiracial categories, recognition and general acceptance in the US society. Thus, the manifestation of multiracial identities in people has not been defined to a longer extent of time which has led to the invisibility of those multiracial categories. Therefore, in the public sphere, this identity choice is not at all recognised owing to the over-emphasis of monoracial categories leading to multiracial invisibility. A lack of visible multiracial communities, results in the denial of acceptance and belonging for biracial individuals. Hence, this will hinder them from understanding and developing a stable self-conception thereby facing various questions and apprehensions about their identities in reality.

Nina too goes through a multiracial invisibility as she falls short of asserting her identity choice publicly owing to the lack of positive connection with her biracial identity. But, a continuous effort to define her racial identity helps Nina sort out the identity crisis and project her biracial identity that has always rejected her membership in various monoracial identity categories. This becomes the

counterstance which Nina exhibits by internalizing the externally patterned cultural identities as opposed to the stance of the dominant lot which demands the internalization of externally fashioned monoracial identity categories for acceptance and authentication. Anzaldúa observes, "The new *mestiza* copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity. . . . She learns to juggle cultures. She has a plural personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode — nothing is thrust out, the good, the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned" (101) (Italics in original).

The novel combines the voices, lives, histories and memories of two fifteen-year old protagonists from two different eras, Sarah Armstrong and Nina Armstrong as the former's story inspires the latter to self-reflect upon her issues and be influential in resolving the same. Lester says, "[t]he voice that emerged from my two 15-year-old protagonists - one contemporary, one historical - sounded appropriate. . . . It felt natural to write in that voice. Memories of both myself at 15 and my daughter, as well as other teens, surfaced easily" (Peitzman). Nina's journey to resolve her problems and discover an identity offers an autobiographical link to Lester who comes from a biracial family and who has attempted a runaway herself. This Bildungsroman narrative employs first person narration in exploring the themes of biracial identity crisis, slavery and the complications associated with the identity development and freedom of the central character.

The first-person narrator in the novel is the titular character and the biracial protagonist Nina Armstrong. She tells her own story and experiences of change, thereby becoming the reliable protagonist narrator who gains the immediate trust of readers. This device has also aided the narrator to pass on the dialogues and information received from other characters to the audience so as to present a finer

point of view of the issue discussed. Nina is in the middle of an action which is the crisis created by her parents' separation which will affect her life and identity further with the racial riots happening in the city adding to the same. Thus, a story-within-a story is explored by the author using the contrapuntal narrative technique while tracing the life story of Nina's ancestor Sarah Armstrong using third-person narration. The changeover between the stories is deliberate which is evident with the two different fonts employed for the separate stories – Times New Roman for Nina's and Georgia for Sarah's.

The language used by the slaves in the parallel narrative is not fully unrefined though the novel is set during the slave era and slaves were denied education. This is because it is a novel about the protagonist's great-great-grandmother, Sarah Armstrong written by the protagonist's father based on Sarah's small journal entry. But, the employment of double negatives, addressing terms for the white slave owner and his wife, erred grammatical expressions etc. bring in the rustic flavour. Music in the form of songs and chants has been used by the slaves in Sarah's story as a means of hope and "rhymes of rebellion" (Lester 84). Yasmine, Sarah's mother is seen repeating her favourite lines that reflected the spirit the resilience of slaves to face the harsh reality of their existence head on. Sarah's father too sings to her and her siblings before leaving the plantation without any hope of return. New songs spread like wild fire among the slaves whenever a successful act of resistance come up from the part of any of their fellow beings. Once Sarah and her friends' trap the pattyrollers who try to get hold of the former for conducting pit school, a new song is mouthed by the slaves as a sign of victory: "Horses reared, horses pitched, throwed them pattyrollers in the ditch" (Lester 84). It is the songs that bring Sarah back to life and instil in her the hope to live once she loses her whole family through auction.

The author has resorted to real and factual details while describing the lives of the slaves, their escape stories and various events in the novel-within-a-novel. Slave narratives, interviews of those who had been under servitude and the published life stories of some of the free slaves have helped her in it. Several characters in Sarah's story have been based on real life people by the author. Dr. Alexander Ross, a scientist from Belville, Ontario who conducted frequent "bird watching" trips to the Southern states of US is the model for the white abolitionist who appears as the "bird watcher" in front of Sarah offering her help to escape. Another character Henry "Box" Brown who flies from Richmond, Virginia in a wooden box and has his wife and being plunged into slavery is in reality a historical figure who turned into renowned abolitionist speaker later. Sarah Armstrong's story itself is the one which Lester got inspired from a real-life escape account from slavery to freedom by the great-grandfather of Eleanor Holmes Norton, Washington D. C.'s Congresswoman. Though Sarah Armstrong is a fictional character, in Lester's words as given in the "Author's Note" of the novel, she "is a could-have-been-true-figure" (208).

An alternate shift of time and place and the final imaginary encounter between the characters has been brought in and skilfully layered by Lester to the main narration. While the protagonist Nina is placed in the twenty-first century, the protagonist of the parallel narrative Sarah Armstrong is placed in the nineteenth-century thus tracing the racial trajectory in the US society starting from the Civil Rights era till what is termed as the "post-racial" era. Thus, the journeys of Nina and Sarah become parallel to each other with the connection getting established across time, place, history and generations.

To conclude, the protagonist Nina Armstrong's choice of biracial identity or the "other" as indicated in the title, *Black, White, Other: In Search of Nina Armstrong*

makes Nina Armstrong's identity development process an unconventional one. Lester proclaims the idea that the struggle for personal freedom and identity is always the same as is portrayed in the novel being endured by two teenagers belonging to different eras. This all the way debunks the stereotypical identity patterns, prejudiced outlook of the people and the "post-racial" tag that characterises the twenty-first century US society. The shift of racial identification in the US census procedure in the twenty-first century, wherein the Federal Government allowed the Americans to check more than one box to signify their various racial backgrounds too gets influential in Nina's choice of self-identification.

Chapter VI

Conclusion

The unique yet, problematic aspect of multiracial identity development is the categorisation of individuals mainly into monoracial categories. Biracial people generally carry an insider/outsider status when it comes to "fitting in" within a particular racial category. From the analysis of the biracial characters in the novels chosen, what differentiates them and their issues from the individuals belonging to monoracial identity categories is that most often, they view themselves from others' perspectives and try hard to reconcile their dual racial heritages. Biracial identity development is a process that spans across one's lifetime based on various internal and external forces.

The thesis has analysed biracial characters from four literary works in the American fiction across the historical periods spanning from Antebellum (1860) to the twenty-first century (2011). Social, cultural, historical and legal contexts have been considered as the crucial factors that affect the biracial identity development. Racial identity development models, cultural theory, findings and conclusions by the prominent sociologists, clinical psychologists and cultural theorists have been used as the theoretical framework in the study of the selected literary texts. It has been identified that, for biracial individuals, their racial identity and the implication related to the same are generally regarded as the product of social, psychological, economic and historical processes. They mainly get navigated through coercion from social, material, cultural, economic institutional forces, and rarely through their own volition.

Generally, racial and ethnic connections are developed due to an individual's family life, social background, cultural practices etc. All these factors help in the comprehension of the multidimensional character of identity formation. But the race

in practicality and to a meaningful extent gets shaped by the aspects of gender and income. In all the works chosen, the effect of gender on the development of a specific racial identity happens in a largely unconscious manner, while economy is among the instantly distinguishable factor in the choice of the identity. It is something that mainly triggers external judgements and perceptions about the authenticity of a racial self.

Gender differences in the case of racial identification are exemplified by the concept of beauty. Physical charm and variants of skin tone in particular decide upon the automatic ascription of a racial category onto the biracial individuals by the society. While light skin tone and Eurocentric features hint at the higher social and class status in the case of Asian, Latino and black cultures as per various studies, they especially elevate the physical appeal of women. In the case of women, specifically with black lineage, fair skin is the symbol of self-esteem, but it is not the same with their male counterparts. Possession of light skin is never equated to the evaluation of physical beauty or attractiveness as far as black-white biracial men are concerned. But it is the presence of non-whiteness more than the whiteness in skin that results in racial ambiguity for them. It triggers many negative stereotypes connected to minority status, masculinity, aggressiveness, criminal behaviour etc. Thus, the encounters of these individuals also vary as per this stratification that exists based on skin colour.

Income and socio-economic status of a biracial individual's family play an important role in his/her racial identity development and the choice of identity. The privilege to choose a white identity than singular minority or the hegemonic monoracial blackness is easily guaranteed by rich parents or wealthier neighbourhood. Evidences from the texts show that biracial people from affluent families are ensured

opportunities to be a member of communities and peer groups with higher social status.

Biracial individuals are subjected to the prejudice and stereotypical perceptions of the society in terms of their identity. Phenotype becomes an influencing factor in shaping the public's notions about them and the reception or rejection that they receive in terms of membership from the various racial groups. In what can be considered as a bias on the basis of racial phenotypes, only those individuals who get closer in appearance to the typical characteristic features of a particular racial group will be given its representation by others. They will also be the most liable to all the beliefs and conventions pertaining to that group.

Kerry Ann Rockquemore in her 1999 article entitled, "Between Black and White: Exploring the Biracial Experience," conceptualises four identity choices: a singular identity (either black or white), a border identity (exclusively biracial), a protean identity (sometimes white, sometimes black or sometimes biracial) and a transcendent identity (no racial identity) (qtd. in Rockquemore and Brunsma 32). On analysing the identity choices opted by each of the characters chosen for analysis within this thesis, they can be segregated into different categories. These choices could be either made voluntarily or through compulsion due to their circumstances.

Identity choices of the biracial individual have been significantly restricted owing to their racial background. Several aspects tend to be influential in making the individuals exercise a choice of identity in a free or a limited sense. These factors include phenotype, interracial family background, peer group, institutions, historical context, legal tenets of the times, individual experiences etc. The characters across all the novels taken up for the study can be analysed and grouped according to the choices made at the end of the works. The black-white biracial individuals may get

accepted in ethnically and racially diverse groups but receive less acceptance or experience isolation in homogenous racial groups.

All the literary texts chosen for analysis in this thesis focus on biracial siblings, of which three pairs possess prominently dissimilar phenotypes and one pair with has similar phenotype. Primarily, the choice of the identity of these characters with reference to their phenotype does or does not contrast with the final choices of racial identity that they align with. Instances of acceptance and rejection they encounter at the individual level becomes significant in helping them identify with a particular category.

Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted (1892) by Frances Ellen Watkins Harper is set against the historical times of slavery, Civil War and the Post-bellum period. It focuses mainly on the biracial siblings Iola Leroy and Harry Leroy and both possess white phenotype. "Nigrescence" model formulated by William E. Cross, Jr., one of the leading social and clinical psychologists has been used in the delineation of the identity choices of Iola Leroy and Harry Leroy. Both Iola Leroy and Harry Leroy – pointing to the choice of black identity.

The major factors that affect the choices of the biracial individuals include the historical context of slavery and Civil War marked by hypodescent and segregation, phenotype, interracial family and the individual experiences. Iola Leroy's identification with the monoracial category of black in *Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted* makes her establish a connection with others who identify similarly thereby developing a sense of community, a supporting network, and a Reference Group Orientation. Her choice of hegemonic monoracial blackness and the negation of white part despite having the choice to "pass off" as one and secure an elite status, do not really uphold the white supremacist heteropatriarchy in the US society. This sort of

identification as a person of colour for the sake of family and community by a black multiracial person also signals at the epic harmony and communal nature of the black community that traces back to the kinship concept since the slavery times. This choice also validates the counterstance asserted, as the positioning of the stance is totally inhuman and influential on her lived experiences.

Harry Leroy's case of self-identification in *Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted* is similar to that of his sister Iola Leroy's as he also makes the choice of monoracial black identity. He establishes a strong connection with the individual self by negating the positions and power which his white phenotype could have easily guaranteed in his life and career. This automatically propels him to trace his family back and revive the blood ties despite the adverse conditions. It is the personal experiences and legal tenets which denigrated the status of Harry Leroy into the lower strata of racial hierarchy and resulted in the fragmentation of his family, that become crucial aspects in determining the choice of his identity. Harry Leroy's final choice has been made without any pressure, for, he chose the same despite other options and opportunities.

Characters whose choices are limited and not limited by various aspects are identified in the works taken up for analysis. In *Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted*, the identity choices of the biracial siblings Iola Leroy and Harry Leroy are not limited. Such an identification out of volition by the educated and privileged people is definitely a strong move towards the emancipation of an entire community during the Post-bellum era in *Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted*.

Plum Bun: A Novel Without a Moral (1928) by Jessie Redmon Fauset explores the historical period of Harlem Renaissance and also the New Negro Movement. The novel traces the journey of two biracial siblings Angela Murray and Virginia Murray who have white and black phenotypes respectively. The choice of identity

development, therefore vests exclusively with Angela Murray and the procedure used to examine her character by using Walker S. Carlos Poston's "Biracial Identity Development Model." Angela Murray opts for a situational identity by being either black or white as per her convenience thereby integrating all the aspects of her biracial identity in the end. Virginia Murray also makes a choice of identifying with the black side of her identity in the end.

Angela Murray's identity choice in *Plum Bun: A Novel Without a Moral* is prompted by several factors right from the beginning. The idea of a white phenotype guaranteeing everything to lead a dream life in the American society gets instilled in her at a very young age. Possession of the same makes her believe in it more, for, a successful career and personal life are easily achievable for the whites when compared to the blacks. The choice of being white at the beginning stage is due to her mother's involvement, school incidents, peer group behaviour as well as her friend's experience. But the declaration to be on the black side towards the end following the bitter experience to another biracial girl, rekindles the connection which she broke earlier with her family and community. Angela Murray realises the positive as well as the negative aspects of choosing both sides of her biracial identity separately. This leads to the desire to "pass off" as white in France if the opportunity arises, leading her to choose a flexible identity by integrating all the aspects of her biracial existence.

Virginia Murray in *Plum Bun: A Novel Without a Moral* identifies herself as a black individual primarily because she possesses black phenotype. Virginia and her dreams from the very beginning are rooted in the traditional values and her middle-class family existence. Therefore, "passing off" as white becomes an essential strategy which Angela adopts to survive in New York which Virginia definitely cannot because of her black phenotype. A sense of racial pride prevails throughout

whenever she asserts her choice echoing her counterstance. Non-resistance to blackness and the pride which Virginia showcases in her identity is evident at various points and the self-same attitude of hers becomes the counterstance against the racist approach. But it can be easily comprehended that neither the stringent laws during the Harlem times would have favoured her and nor the society would have accepted her, if she had chosen otherwise. Her attempt at identifying with any other identity other than black would have been tagged as "passing off" to earn all the benefits for a stable socio-economic life.

In *Plum Bun: A Novel Without a Moral*, the choices of identity of the biracial siblings Angela Murray and Virginia get limited mainly by phenotype, interracial family issues, peer group, historical context of Harlem Renaissance etc. Though the biracial individuals do have a middle existence theoretically, their identities are often subdued and generally tagged "black." Phenotype favours and ensures many opportunities and facilities to Angela Murray which Virginia Murray is denied. While white features open up the possibilities to secure a stable socio-economic life during the Harlem times in New York, and be a renowned artist thereby rejecting the family life, black features limit Virginia Murray from achieving the same. It is the alienation resulting from personal experiences, loss of family as well as the negative treatment which her friends have to endure at various stages trigger the folk values in Angela Murray and the choice of the black identity. Her identity thus is totally limited on account of the personal experiences regarding the unequal treatment of the individuals and the societal pressure which she endured.

Danzy Senna's *Caucasia* (1998) set in the 1970s Boston which is turbulent with the racial tensions resulting from the significant Black Power Movement, desegregation of the Boston public schools etc. Birdie and Cole with white and black

phenotypes respectively, are the biracial siblings whose identities come under scrutiny in the novel. Birdie's identity formation gets investigated in detail as her phenotype offers her more avenues and choices of identity. The affirmative solutions recommended by Maria P. P. Root in the area of biracial identity development is used as the theoretical framework for analysis. Birdie is found to have chosen a biracial identity in the end while Cole opts for a black identity.

In *Caucasia*, the choice of identity that the biracial siblings make for themselves is shaped by factors such as interracial family background, peer group involvement, the racial tensions of Boston, location change etc. Birdie of *Caucasia* opts for a biracial identity of fluid nature in the end, following her earlier strong affinity towards the black identity. Her confusion in choosing an identity is evident from the beginning as she defines herself more in relation to her sister Cole. Disappearance turns out to be her surviving strategy, whenever a need arises to define herself. Peer pressure, parents' separation from an interracial marriage and the racial tensions in Boston add more to her struggle. Birdie identifies with the white side of her biracial existence during her temporary stay in the New Hampshire region along with her mother. This region, which is the fictitious Caucasia that Senna portrays and the life it offers, makes Birdie automatically lose her black side of identity as well as her family (father and sister). But the reconnection with her father too does not offer a solution for her identity crisis. She establishes an affinity towards all the biracial individuals in the end, refusing to choose any particular side of her identity.

In *Caucasia*, the late nineteenth-century novel, Cole has always defined her identity with the hegemonic monoracial blackness from the beginning of the novel. Her identification is unlike her sister Birdie's self-definition which happens after many changes of identity shifts and confusions regarding the established racial

patterns. Cole's black phenotype is the major limiting factor that does not prompt her to think about choosing any other option. Cole's acceptance in the society would have been uncertain if she had decided to identify differently, owing to the racial identification standards and legal tenets that existed in the nineteenth-century US society.

In *Caucasia*, Cole's choice of identity is limited mainly by her black phenotype. Birdie's identity choice gets shaped mainly by her inability to strongly project either side of her identity or her biracial existence despite having affinity towards the black part of her lineage. Her final choice of the biracial identity is also a result of her helplessness to establish a permanent kinship with the white racial group which her mother forced upon her, and failure to gain acceptance from the black racial group where her allegiance lied to a great extent because of her father and sister.

Black, White, Other: In Search of Nina Armstrong by Joan Steinau Lester is a twenty-first century novel that has Oakland racial tensions and the resultant burning up of properties in the black majority areas as the backdrop. Nina Armstrong and Jimi are the biracial siblings in the novel and they have tan skin and black phenotypes respectively. Gloria Anzaldúa's "Borderlands theory," helps in understanding the identity crisis and the biracial identity development of Nina. The development of her identity is studied by juxtaposing it to the story of her great-great-grandmother's journey from servitude to self-determination.

Nina Armstrong, the protagonist of the twenty-first century novel, *Black, White, Other: In Search of Nina Armstrong* strongly identifies with a biracial identity at the end of the novel. Despite many compulsions and emotionally draining experiences from her peer group at school, alienation following the divorce of her

parents and their lack of understanding of her predicament, judgemental experiences from the society and the impact of the racial tensions in her relationships, she never compromised her choices to identify against conventional patterns. Rather than choosing a particular side of her identity, she opts for a middle-path and establishes a kinship with like-minded people in the end. Nina's journey is a perfect example of the development of the biracial consciousness in relation to the journey of her ancestor. Subversion of the established hegemonic racial standards happen in her journey. Through various modes of resistance, she reaches the stage of an open declaration about her sense of self.

Jimi in *Black, White, Other: In Search of Nina Armstrong* chooses black identity. In reality, it can be considered as more than his choice of identity, rather, it is an extension of the choice of the children which his parents make, following their separation. His identity, choice and activities are guided mainly by his black father's teachings, for, Jimi is too young to express his choice of identity in evidently on his own, when compared to his elder sister Nina Armstrong. Hence to an extent, he does not have his own choice, but he definitely is at ease being with his father. In *Black, White, Other: In Search of Nina Armstrong*, the identity choice of Nina Armstrong though limited with the possession of her mocha skin, she executes her will.

Sociological research findings indicate that the multiracial individuals sometimes identify according to their resemblance with racial groups and observers' perception of their phenotypes. The thesis also points to the limiting effect of phenotype in the development of the identities of black-white biracial individuals specifically, thus validating the sociological findings. Therefore, people with white phenotype identify themselves as white, and those having dark phenotype or resemblance to any minority category will identify themselves with that group.

Possession of a darker skin tone especially stymies the racial labels which the biracial people believe that they can easily adopt.

For a biracial individual with tan complexion, kinky hair etc., the choice of "white" gets automatically removed from the identification platforms as they strongly believe that the society hardly ever identify them as white. Those Americans with multiracial backgrounds who cannot identify themselves as biracial/multiracial/ mixed-race thus limit their choice of identity to a single racial category, especially black, mainly because of their obvious likeness to the minority group. This happens mostly with black-white biracial individuals than their Asian-white or Latino-white counterparts as the former's choice of identity if white, and their identification process, get challenged by others. The slave past and the legacy of the stringent "One-Drop Rule" and "Hypodescent" also make the choice of a white identity near to impossible.

From the analysis, it has been identified that racial discrimination, stereotypical judgement, discrimination etc. are the major reasons for the biracial individuals to identify themselves as non-white. The appearance makes them vulnerable to these issues, which are the negative social and political consequences of identifying themselves with a particular group. Those with Afrocentric features despite their biracial/multiracial lineage will be easily judged as possessing the characteristics such as hostility, criminal background, less brain power, sexual aggression, laziness etc. This also happens with the revelation of the individuals' black lineage as can be seen in the case of several characters in the novels taken up for the study. Biracial individuals who are distinctly or by revelation identified as the racial minority (black as per the study) are more subjected to explicit racism than the

light-skinned people or who are less prototypically Asian, Latino, American Indian or black.

With regard to the singular identity option, biracial people show their allegiance with the racial identity of one of their parents. Hence, they identify themselves as either exclusively black or exclusively white. On analysis, Iola Leroy and Harry Leroy from *Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted*, Virginia Murray from *Plum Bun: A Novel Without a Moral*, Cole from *Caucasia* and Jimmy from *Black, White, Other: In Search of Nina Armstrong* are found to identify themselves with a strong singular identity i.e., exclusively black, thereby choosing one side of their racial lineage.

Border identity option is the one in which the individuals do not choose an exclusively black or white identity. Instead, they choose an identity that is a blend of both. Thus, this identity category breaks away from the legally valid and approved monoracial patterns. Nina Armstrong from *Black, White, Other: In Search of Nina Armstrong* is the person who opts for a border identity option. She roots for this identity choice right from the initial stage of her life. She surpasses her inability to declare it open only when she realises her self-worth as she undertakes a journey of self-maturation on reading the story of her great-great-grandmother Sarah Armstrong. Nina exhibits a true and broader sense of self-understanding, which is typical of the biracial individuals who opt for this category.

Protean identity is the one in which the biracial individuals move freely and fluidly between and among various racial identities. The choice of this identity is absolutely situational, depending on the cultural communities. Angela Murray of *Plum Bun: A Novel Without a Moral* opts for a protean identity by integrating the pros and cons of her diverse racial background. She openly declares to be black in the end,

and at the same time, decides to “pass off” as white for career benefits in future. Hence, she opts for a situational identity wherein she decides to put forward a performance whenever necessary. Birdie too opts for a protean identity when she finally identifies with all the other people with similar multiracial background and predicament.

The final type of identity is the transcendent one in which the biracial people refuse to make any choice of their racial identity. These people reject the very institution of race as a determining factor of one’s status in the society. This category of racial identity has not been identified in any of the characters chosen for study. This is primarily because the ideas of race, construction of racial self-identity and racial labelling continue to have major social and political consequences in the national structure of America. Also, the American history itself is interlaced with racial movements, codification of legal tenets related to race, racial enumeration procedures of its citizens etc. which make it impossible for an individual to do away with race on the first hand, and for a biracial individual who possesses a “two-ness” in terms of his/her racial identity, it gets all the more complicated.

On analysing the choices of the characters across centuries, limiting factors exist on a major scale rather than the aspects that help the individuals to execute their choices in a free manner. While an escape from slavery had a major say during the eighteenth-century, the choice of being black and the rejection of white side can be regarded as a strategy adopted against the dominant lot. Though in the following periods even though slavery got replaced by various historical contexts, the issues alarming the biracial individuals continue to remain the same with the legal tenets of each changing era keeping their choices under check. This is evident during the

Harlem times in 1970s and across centuries until the present day in the twenty-first century.

Gender's role in the racial identity development of the biracial characters can be assertively seen in *Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted*, *Plum Bun: A Novel Without a Moral* and *Caucasia*. Objectification of Iola Leroy and the sexual advances that she encounters with her descent into the black identity reveals the strong working of gender in *Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted*. Angela Murray's huge obsession with the white identity can be seen right from her childhood. The idea of fair skin ensuring a white individual like herself and her mother all the privilege in the society, unlike individuals like her sister Virginia Murray and father who have black phenotype is the supreme example of the role played by gender in Angela Murray's identity development in *Plum Bun: A Novel Without a Moral*. In addition to that, the idea of female models and artists with black lineage getting rejected in Art Academies of the period under discussion also gain focus in the novel. In *Caucasia*, Cole's identification to an extent happens with the styling of her kinky hair and the usage of cosmetics to perfect her looks. On the other hand, Birdie's strong identification to her sister and thereby her much preferred racial identity at one point, once happens when one of her friends does her makeover with her hair, new costumes etc. indicating the working of gender. The accusation that falls upon Nina Armstrong and Jimi especially of shop lifting and robbery respectively and the sexual exploitation of the women slaves by white masters during the Sarah's time period are identified as the working of gender in the negative stereotyping and racial labelling of individuals with black lineage in *Black, White, Other: In Search of Nina Armstrong*.

The powerful relationship that exists between income and race gets explored in *Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted* and *Plum Bun: A Novel Without a Moral*. The

privilege of Northern education, opportunity to mingle with peer group of higher social class etc. which Iola Leroy enjoys with her identification as a white individual in the early stage of the identity development. This is mainly owing to her rich family background. Angela Murray's "passing for" white in New York to pursue her passion and earn a higher socio-economic status by using her phenotype in her favour despite her middle-class upbringing too clearly establishes the racial privilege ensured by money. In both cases, income guarantees a passage wherein the individuals could easily incorporate themselves in the mainstream American society despite the difference in the historical eras to which the characters belong.

The sociological angle of analysis undertaken in this study blurs the boundaries between lived experiences can be seen in the case studies and surveys and experiences in the fictional world. A clear statistic of the biracial representations based on their choices of identity in the literary texts chosen for the study is attained after the final grouping, just as the end results of any other sociological study based on questionnaires, surveys etc. Interracial alliances which are thought to be progressive and something which aid in bridging the gaps between various racial categories add to the identity crisis encountered by the biracial characters in the context of the selected works. The family status of the characters in terms of class in the selected novels is different and updated with the eras, but the issues that persist within each of them are similar when compared to each other.

In the US, racial identification of the individuals is a deciding factor in the allotment of funds and resources for the government initiatives as well as for the programmes headed by the not-for-profit organizations. It has been therefore necessary to classify all the individuals, into monoracial categories and especially differentiated as clearly belonging to a minority racial group. This distinction done by

means of enumeration procedure is mainly to limit the financial services from the government to those categorised as minority - black. The legislative principles of the Civil Rights endorsed this agenda for a long time since its execution. The need for the enumeration of the data and inclusiveness of the multiracial categories posed racial questions before the government which led to the change in the 2000 census.

According to the 2020 US census data released by the US Census Bureau, two ethnic categories such as Hispanic or Latino and Non-Hispanic or Latino and five racial categories such as White, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander with an addition of another category "Some other races" (Jensen) have been included to collect the individual responses to the racial and ethnic identity question in the Census questionnaire. These categories which increased the bandwidth of available options are closer to the choices of the lived individuals, and are included according to the 1997 standards set by the U.S. Office of the Management and Budget.

The website of the US Census Bureau makes it clear that the inclusion of various ethnic and racial categories in the Census questionnaire is to actually define race and ethnicity of an individual socially rather than anthropologically, genetically or biologically. In an aim to provide an accurate representation to the Black people who are subjected to undercounting in the US Decennial surveys, which has been the all-time highest (2.45%) in 2020 as indicated in the USA Today article "2020 census may have massively undercounted Black population, analysis shows" by Marc Ramirez, many mobilization efforts like the Black Census Project and Data for Black Lives etc., have been launched.

The Black Census project aims at bringing into the forefront, the underrepresented Blacks in the US and thereby encouraging them to be an influential

factor on all the executive institutions which are part of the policymaking. This debunks the very concept of a "Post-racial" America. Adding to this misrepresentation or the underrepresentation of the Blacks is a timeline of the major incidents since 2014 till date wherein the police officials getting involved in the deaths of Black Americans. The movements like "Black Lives Matter" and the public reaction to the same reflects upon the divide in the public opinions on the status of race in America. Anna Holmes, award-winning columnist for *The New York Times* mentions in her article, "America's 'Postracial' Fantasy" of 30 June 2015 that blackness is generally regarded as something contrary to the default concept of the ideal whiteness. She also adds that the chattel slavery, wherein slaves were considered as property and the vestiges it left behind continue to structure American society. She also speculates whether the yearning for a Post-racial America is an attempt by white people to free themselves from the encumbrance of carrying on and deal with such a legacy (Holmes).

Considering the fact that the term "biracial" at present refers to an individual whose parents belong to any two racial categories, the exclusive choice of biracial individuals with only black and white phenotypes for the study becomes the primary limitation of this thesis. Issues pertaining to the biracial individuals with Asian or Hispanic/Latino phenotypes or across phenotypes have not been explored. In addition to this, only one representative text of each historical era has been chosen for analysis and, other possible works of the same era discussing the biracial identity problem and the characters arriving at choices different from that of this study result have been excluded. Also, the analysis has been limited to the American context and works of female fictional authors alone. There is a scope for further study of the issue foregrounding biracial individuals with other phenotypes or by focusing on the

literature of other nationalities. The study can be extended to non-fictional categories such as memoirs, autobiographies etc. of the real biracial individuals from different walks of life as well.

In a general context, the choices available for a biracial individual as far as his/her racial identity is concerned include monoracial identity, fluid identity, biracial identity and post-racial identity. While the first three categories have been identified in characters in the study, the major solution which can put an end to the biracial identity crisis i.e., the fourth category of a post-racial identity could not be identified in this study. Biracial authors writing about and still continuing to produce literature on the biracial identity crisis is all about documenting their selves as well as that of many others, which is otherwise easily ignored. The same can be taken as a wakeup call to the government and the society to strategically plan well for the inclusiveness of multiracial individuals. The concept of “Post-racial” US society can be regarded as a myth as the society still has in place several institutionalised limiting factors that restrict the biracial individual’s freedom of choice of identity.

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Appendix

List of Published Articles

Sl. No	Authors	Title of Publications	Journal/ Anthology Name, Vol. No. & Year	National/ International	Publisher with ISSN/ ISBN	Impact Factor
1.	Resmi R. & Dr. Praseedha G.	Divulging the Ideological Framework in Biracial Identity Development: A Marxian Reading of Jessie Redmon Fauset's *Plum Bun: A Novel Without a Moral*	*Pursuits* Vol. XVII October-November 2019	National	ISSN 0974-7400	
2.	Resmi R. & Dr. Praseedha G.	Decoding the Representation of Colour Line in Danzy Senna's *Caucasia*	*BODHI International Journal of Research in Humanities, Arts and Science* Vol.3 Special Issue 2 March 2019	International	E-ISSN: 2456-5571	2.135