CHAPTER III
INTEGRATION AND SEGREGATION:
SHIFTING IDENTITIES

One of the first things to be considered in the study of Black self-concept is the racial conflict, which forms an all-pervading reality of the Black man's life in America. Racism imposes a heavy burden on the Blacks through severe social, political, economic inequalities and consequent psychological handicaps. It is an undeniable fact that, for the Blacks, it is the colour that forms the very basis of racism in America. "The inescapable reality of colour shades and shadows the Black child's emerging sense of self making the development of racial identification an integral part of his total development of self."¹ As the awareness of self emerges it emerges in a race-conscious social context, which assigns certain prejudiced values to colour. The Black American, from the experience of generations of slavery and racism knew that to the white American, he was either a sub-human servant or a primitive barbarian. The Black woman was the dumb domestic menial or immoral witch-like creature. James Baldwin opines that, "the American image of the Black lives also in the Black's heart and when he has surrendered to this image, life has no other possible reality."²

The tendency of equating black with inferiority or evil, even though highly unjust and even irrational, establishes its sway on the human psyche very quickly. We in India have been following what is known as the Krishna-cult. Krishna the Sanskrit equivalent of 'Karuppu' or black, is the supreme

God of the Hindus. How the black Krishna became a supreme entity transcending the powers of the earlier Aryan (White) gods like, Indra, Varuna, Agni, Vayu etc. is itself a wonder. Krishna, who is seen in Rasakreeda similar to some of the fertility rites of primitive tribes — a communal rejoicing of young men and women, like the one described by Keats in ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’ — is the most desirable and attractive male that a young girl can dream of. Krishna’s pseudonyms are ‘Shyamavarnan’ and ‘Ganashyam’, which also mean black as a cloud. It is interesting to note that, the word ‘Shamala’ denotes a beautiful woman, black in colour.

Yet, the concept of black as beautiful remained limited to a countable number of gods and Goddesses and a few legendary heroes and heroines. The postcolonial impact on our national psyche is manifested in our unconscious admiration of the Europeans or the white-skinned men and women, as something superior and beautiful. One may worship the dark Krishna, but in the other walks of life we prefer people with light skins, more so after we came under the European influence and colonial rule. This mystery, when decoded, proves quite irrational. Yet, it is a fact that the European concept of beauty as involving a fair skin, blue eyes and blonde hair, deliberately perpetuated among the dark-skinned races of Africa and Asia took firm roots as the ideal to be aspired for. The worst of the situation is the equating of whiteness with beauty and this beauty with virtue. This acceptance of the values glamorized by the majority white culture leads to the inference that, anything not white was ugly, bad, evil or derogatory. Hence, Black men and women by virtue of the black colour of their skin were inferior. Even slavery could be justified, following this line of reasoning.
1. The Aftermath of Racism

Racism has been defined in terms of “an antipathy based upon a faulty and inflexible generalization.” It is a phenomenon made and enforced by man. It can be described as:

all of the learned behaviour and learned emotions on the part of a group of people towards another group, whose physical characteristics are dissimilar to the former group, behaviour and emotions, that compel one group to conceive of and to treat the other on the basis of its physical characteristics alone, as if it did not belong to the human race.

Racism was introduced in America, when the first group of Africans were dragged in to work as cheap labourers in cotton and sugar fields. The white American owners treated these helpless Africans not as people, but as property, as machinery that could do large amounts of work without complaint. Joel Kovel explains how the white slaver:

first reduced the human self of his black slave to a body and then reduced the body to a thing; he dehumanized his slave, made him quantifiable and thereby absorbed him into a rising world market of productive exchange... Thus in the new culture of West, the black human was reduced to a black thing, virtually the same in certain

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3 Quoted in Peter Watson ed., Psychology and Race, op.cit., p.36.
key respects as the rest of non-human nature all of which could become property. This reduction of human to non-human was the first definite step towards the establishment of racism as an innate archetype of white American civilization.\(^5\)

Cruelty, torture, lynching, rape and bestiality, which were the hallmarks of slavery were also the methods of traditional racism. In the process, the Black man's self was distorted, abused, dismantled and even destroyed.

A more subtle, but long lasting consequence of racism was psychological. It was the deliberate thrusting of the Anglo-Saxon definition of beauty and behaviour into the African culture, which has a completely different criteria. Proshansky and Newton in their psychological study, "Colour : The Nature and Meaning of Negro Self Identity" explain how as a young Black child grows up in America, he acquires value laden racial stereotypes to describe his own and other racial groups. Both Black Americans and white Americans learn to associate black with "dirty," bad, ugly and white with clean, nice and good. The Black child is eventually compelled to accept his Negro identity as vastly inferior. What he is or could ever hope to be as a Black American is somewhat less than if he were white. The "real tragedy is that, the Black American comes to believe more and more that he is the inferior, passive and servile role he is forced to play."\(^6\) The individual's awareness of this racial conflict may be conscious or unconscious. "However, the conflict itself tends to nourish the feelings of

self-doubt and a sense of inadequacy, if not actual self hatred." He begins to characterize himself in unfavourable terms, that is, to develop a negative self image.

At the same time the Black man's unconscious mind urges him from time to time to develop a positive self concept. A report by the group for the advancement of psychiatry, suggests that beneath the Negro's mask of compliance lie anger, resentment and fear. "In hiding the feelings, the Negro may suffer serious psychological consequences, such as distorting his capacity for expressing his feelings or actually lowering his potential for affectivity." The frustration engendered by the racial conflict, adversity and powerlessness, if not expressed in acts of aggression may seek other channels of escape. The inferiority feelings come out as long as they don't reach pathological levels or get metamorphosed into feelings of aggressiveness, control, conquest and ambitious action all targeted at the so called white superiors. This power of transformation is a kind of alchemy resulting from a self concept that is sufficiently uplifting.

The need to escape from racial conflict is frequently manifested in the form of excessive use of alcohol, drugs and gambling. In the case of the very light skinned Black Americans, this desire is sometimes accomplished by a complete rejection of one's self by attempts to look white and to be accepted as white by the white Americans. This sort of extreme repression being a denial of reality manifests itself as various psychological disturbances such as schizophrenia. When the conflict between the conscious and unconscious mind becomes unbearable, the individual fails to distinguish between reality and appearance: desire and truth. The Black American, thus torn apart by

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7 Ibid., p.185
8 Ibid., p.188
ambivalence, either strongly identifies with or entirely rejects his racial self. In some cases he becomes mentally ill.

It should not be supposed that racism undermines the efforts of all Afro-Americans towards a healthy and positive self image. There are ample examples in life and literature to prove the contrary. Even in the worst sort of racism and adverse situations, some tough and strong men and women have been able to thrive without losing their personal integrity. Those who have received a positive image of self from their peers in childhood or strong family support are able to transcend all oppression, because they understand the real nature of racism, which urges them to hate themselves for no fault of theirs.

After the Second World War, the entire world turned critical eyes towards the racial situation in the United States. After the great migration of the Black Americans from the South to the cities in the North and West, they had become comparatively free from full-blown caste system of the rigidly prejudiced South. At that time, when the first, of what the Europeans called, the "coloured" nations, India gained independence from the colonisation of Britain in 1947, the racial question in America's capital, Washington had become notorious. All the colonial nations were aware of the race problem in America; though not of the fact that Washington was a Southern city. All the international pressures forced America to re-align its foreign policy towards the non-white nations of Asia and Africa. It began to encourage a more egalitarian treatment of its Black minorities at home. The civil rights movements of the 1960s and the right to vote secured for the Blacks more protection from law. Social researchers and mass media began to present Blacks in a better light. The improved opportunities for education provided them a better chance for improving their status.
In spite of all these movements, towards desegregation no one can deny that the Black Americans still experience discrimination, insult, segregation and threat of violence. Even though legally racism was prohibited, prejudice and segregation as a common attitude still prevail. In matters of education, housing, inter-marriage, employment and so on the shadows of past discrimination still haunt in such a way as to create inequality and lower opportunities for the Blacks. The present generation of Black Americans, who have been taught the American creed and principles of democracy are more conscious than ever of the injustice of the social structure and are less and less ready to adjust to it. They know that most white Americans are either ambivalent or openly hostile to the idea of integration. The Whites pay a kind of lip service approval to the idea in general, but in specific instances close to their houses they have found integration intolerable.

2. Approaches to Racial Integration

The word integration taken to its extreme sense would mean “complete biological amalgamation through extensive inter-marriage.” This implies that the end result would be complete disappearance of the immigrants as a visible group. Miscegenation between white male and Black females though quite common during slavery had later diminished to negligible proportions. Racial intermarriage in the United States, though some times much publicised and dramatic, is still extremely rare. Both Blacks and Whites seem agreed to leave aside the question of inter-marriage until other forms of desegregation should be removed. Moreover it would take too long, centuries perhaps, for America’s race problem to be resolved through the methods of assimilation.

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Segregation on the other hand, taken to extreme, would mean the exact opposite of participation or social mingling. It involves complete separation of the races. This implies that there would be no contact at all, between the people of the different races. All Blacks would then live within the ghetto, go to school there, work, recreate and die there. A few Black separationists have advocated segregation, but it was only the fear, that integration may be used by the Whites, as a device to control Blacks forever or as an attempt to prolong Black dependence and oppression, that made them do so.

A more widely used meaning given to integration comes between these two extremes. This implies changes in the degree of interaction according to the nature of contact involved. For example, it is usual to find a higher degree of integration in situations that involve very superficial contacts, such as shopping in the supermarket. In places like the railway stations or restaurants, increasing instance of such integration may be found.

There is also a third meaning of integration which is less common involving the idea of the degree to which two groups are culturally similar. This is what Hubert M. Blalock calls "The notion of cultural pluralism." by which he means the groups may possess, sharply distinctive culture, while possibly interacting rather extensively with each other. The groups may lose their separate cultural identities through borrowing and diffusion, so that it becomes impossible to identify any distinctive characteristics.

In the case of the Black Americans it has been argued that even after emancipation they have not possessed a sufficiently distinct subculture in the sense that the Japanese-Americans or Chinese-Americans can be classed as

\[^{10}\text{Ibid., p.39.}\]
ethnic as well as a racial group. It is true that Black Americans don't possess a distinct language of their own and have few direct African cultural hangovers. Yet many Black Americans are opposed to integration, if it means they give up their cultural identity totally. They feel that Blacks cannot develop any self respect if they are forced to imitate the white culture.

Some Black Americans argue that it would be better to wish for integration or full participation while retaining at least the most acceptable features of their own culture. But such efforts to emphasize some selective accomplishment of their race are now leading to patronizing stereotypes such as those of the Black athlete, entertainer or musician. Cultural contributions of which Blacks should genuinely feel proud thus become symbols of subordination and inferiority.

In a very broad sense, we can thus define integration as the process by which the immigrant becomes, to some extent, absorbed into the community. For example, "He has been accepted into certain social organizations or into informal friendship groups, or he feels emotionally, that he is part of the new society." Integration may also refer to economic absorption in the sense that the immigrant has found a place in the economy. It refers to all aspects of the immigrant that are relevant to his adaptation to the host country — his appearance, his style, his speech, his social behaviour, his beliefs, values and attitudes. Inspite of apparent integration at various levels most importantly economic, there are chasms yet to be filled in the areas of emotional life and cultural achievement. Because of this, the conflicts continue to be rather strong and beyond easy solutions.

\[11^\text{Peter Watson, Psychology and Race, op.cit., p.227.}\]
Most countries experience some sort of difficulty in integrating their immigrants or minorities. For example, the Indians are reluctant to integrate the so-called lower castes and the Japanese have a certain heterogeneity towards the Koreans. Usually, however, the difficulty is not so salient as it is in America. The issue has probably never been as heated and as potentially explosive as the question of integration versus segregation is in the United States.

3. Black American Fiction and Racism

Since the bulk of Black American fiction runs its course within the modern and post modern literary period it has all the elements of modern literature such as elusiveness of meaning, opposition to established and traditional systems, a tendency towards fragmentation, complexity of expression, a sort of wry humour, ironical laughter mixed with pain, elements of violence and the pre-eminence of subjectivity. The subjectivity often takes the form of a sense of loss, alienation and dislocation on the part of the major characters. It may be argued that in general all twentieth century heroes are portrayed as undergoing some exploitation or undeserved oppression. What distinguishes the characters in Black fiction is not that they are oppressed but that a greater part of the nature of their oppression is due to their black colour or the fact that they are of African origin. In most Afro-American novels racism exists either in a subtle or crucial way but it is certainly the background. Apart from these sufferings racism imposes a double burden on the Blacks that is primarily psychological and this is well expressed in the Afro-American literature as no white man can ever express.

Images of darkness in many combinations appear in the Black American writing. The images are a natural off-shoot of their own
experiences or those of their characters. The organized moments of suffering get crystallised in these images as motif. This pattern has a kind of general application as it is noticed in many Black American writers. At such moments the Afro-American novelist more often makes his characters think in images of darkness. Baldwin describes his hero Grime's struggle in *Go Tell It on the Mountain*:

> to flee-out of this darkness, out of this company — into the land of the living, so high, so far away. Fear was upon him, a more deadly fear than he had ever known, as he turned and turned in the darkness, as he moaned and stumbled and crawled through darkness finding no hand, no voice, finding no door. Who are these? Who are they? They were the despised and rejected, the wretched and the spat upon, the earth's off-scouring and he was in their company, and they would swallow up his soul.  

Richard Wright's protagonist, Bigger Thomas in *Native Son* moved “ensnared in a tangle of deep shadows, shadows as black as the night, that stretched above his head.”

Almost in all circumstance black becomes synonymous with rejection, defeat impossibility or some aspect of a pre-determined life. In Black fiction, colour is what determines their fate. The peculiar conditions of Black life in a white racist society may give rise to intense moments of introspection. The hero's search for their proper place in the conspiring world may compel them

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to examine those flaws in their personality, which keep victory away. But almost always the hero cannot control his destiny, which overtakes him. Thus, Roger Rosenblatt in his book *Black Fiction* remarks that “Black is both the colour the hero bears and the force against which he pits his strength. It is specifically this acknowledgement of external limitation and the anticipation of it, which distinguishes black fiction within modern literature and brings it close to classical tragedy.”

The tension in Black fiction is derived from the anticipation of the hero’s fall caused by a combination of a personal disability with the uncontrollable external circumstances caused by racism. The Black man who has once been taught to conceive of his self in a negative image begins to see his whole life as a series of oppositions. This process has been observed in novels like *Go Tell It on the Mountain* and *Another Country*. On witnessing the disintegration of the main character, the reader feels that it must be so and that there could have been no other way. “That is the feeling,” Rosenblatt says of Black fiction, “this literature conveys, from which it takes its power and its form.”

The major part of Black fiction also carries within it either boldly stated or subtly implied the desire of the Afro-American for assimilation, integration or acceptance by the Whites. This may result in an unconscious acceptance of the prevailing negative stereotypes or the debasing inhuman images thrust upon Blacks as Baldwin seems to do with some of his characters in *Another Country*. It may also be expressed as a Black character trying to be as near white as possible as Pauline Breedlove in Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*. Another point repeatedly made by the Black American novelists

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15 Ibid., p 10.
is that for a Black character to be accepted within a white framework he must, to a certain extent, be brutalized. Black characters are goaded again and again to fight against each other. If they refuse they face rejection and are compelled to become violent. If they fight they prove themselves to be the subhuman stereotypes. The Black-White encounter, relating to sexual matters has been notorious in America. The mutual accusations, double standards, sexual stereotyping and racial violence have been examined at length in Black American fiction.

These novels thus speak of the despair, frustration and helplessness of a people whose attempts at integration lead to the breakdown of their native values such as self respect, dignity, love and pride in one’s own race. They deal with the collective responses by recently urbanized poor, relatively powerless, Black people to basic survival demands in a highly organized competitive impersonal racist urban society.

In spite of their racial unity, Ellison, Baldwin, Walker and Morrison have shown great diversity in their different ways of encountering the cruel system of racism. Richard Wright, with his novel, *Native Son* which has been called the best of the protest novel tradition, shocked the world with an awesome picture of the life of a Black man in white racist society. It showed how receptive Americans had become to the image of the Black man etched in violence, hatred and revolt. Ellison being optimistic somewhat softened the harsh strokes by adding the dimensions of hope and intellect and modern techniques of narration. But, he too depicted the white man as the suppresser of the Blacks. Baldwin with his belief in religion, articulates the hope that the Black people will be the redeemers of a world of racial equality. Women writers like Alice Walker and Toni Morrison, though they confront racial discrimination in their novels give equal importance to gender
discrimination too which aspect will be discussed in a separate chapter. Morrison attempts in her fictions to devise strategies to overcome “the hidden signs of racial superiority.”

Though Morrison must be extolled for breaking new grounds in her attempts to create a new myth, to use language that would take away all the negative implications from everything black or African, she has not been entirely successful. The harmful effects of centuries of psychological oppression cannot be wiped out so easily.

4. The Injured Black Psyche Under Racism

Modern studies in psychology reveal that external experiences of man in his environment tend to influence his psyche and that it is the peculiarity of the psyche that manifests itself in human behaviour. Whether an individual reacts positively or negatively to a predicament, depends on the particular temperament, attitudes and beliefs of the person on whom it works. Generally people may become, weak, insane, destructive or lose their sense of self, when subjected to some unbearable pressure. A few people may turn out to be strong, sane, constructive and balanced with a developed sense of one’s self, under the same circumstances.

Being disinherited and abandoned by the white society, the Black American experiences a strange sense of alienation from his own self. Not being able to develop a sense of himself as a distinct individual he sees himself in terms of how the whites view him. James Baldwin writes of a similar experience in Notes of a Native Son: “I learned in New Jersey that to

be a Negro meant, precisely that one was never looked at, but was simply at
the mercy of the reflexes the colour of one's skin, caused in other people.\textsuperscript{17}
He remarks that if the Black American has reconciled himself to this
degrading image, life has no other possible reality. For a long time, this
remained valid in the American social milieu, but the rumblings of change are
heard everywhere, though in a subdued and implicit manner owing to the
dynamics of self concept.

The peculiar irony of the Afro American's situation is that being black
in white racist America, he remains invisible. Unlike other ethnic groups in
America, African-Americans, because of their blackness, are physically very
conspicuous. At the same time, they are almost non-existent as unique
individuals for the other citizens of America. This leads to a frustration
regarding identity and as Marcus Klein has argued, the primary reason for
this, is his black colour. "Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man speaks first of all for
himself a negro, whose career because he is a negro, has been a search for a
primary existential sense of himself."\textsuperscript{18}

From the end of the nineteenth century, the Afro-American was a man
without an identity. Torn from his African tribal origins, separated from his
immediate family and if he had moved north, out of touch with the familiar
American environment, the Afro-American was very much a non-person. The
historical experience of slavery and racism was unique to him and because of
this he could never be fully integrated to the American society. As in any
bicultural situation, the Afro-Americans are torn between the opposing

\textsuperscript{17} James Baldwin, \textit{Notes of a Native Son} (London : Michael Joseph., 1964), p.90.
\textsuperscript{18} Marcus Klein, "Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man," \textit{Images of the Negro in American
Literature} eds. Seymour I. Gross and John Edward Hardy (Chicago : Univ. of Chicago Press,
forces, the urge to adopt the culture of the dominant group, become totally integrated into white society and the urge to continue with their own separate culture. W.E.B. Du Bois describes this dualism as a perpetual twoness: "two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled stirrings, two warring ideals in one dark body." It is precisely this racial conflict that is given a chilling account by the nameless protagonist of Invisible Man as he keeps oscillating between submission and rebellion to the traditional degrading roles thrust upon the Black man by the racist society.

In order to achieve material success, the hero of the novel, tries deliberately to live as the Whites expect of him or what he believes the whites expect of him. He seeks to rise through the Southern system by impressing the white society with his humility, earnest and hard work. In his valedictory address, he echoes the ideas following Booker T. Washington's speech that racial harmony could be attained only if the Blacks stayed in their subordinate place in society. But, the events which follow soon prove the impossibility, even for a Black man aping the Whites like him.

He is invited to repeat his speech in front of the town's important dignitaries. Prior to his speech he and his friends are to stage a battle royal as entertainment for the Whites. The Black boys are herded before a magnificent stark naked blonde and made to suffer sexual harassment, threatened by the obscenities shouted by the white citizens whether they looked or didn't look at her. They are goaded, threatened, tantalized, promised money, beaten, degraded and thrown blindfolded into the battle royal where in blind passion they punch and kick each other while the white mob howls around them. After this, weak and exhausted they are forced to scramble for coins on an electrified rug. When the harassed hero in the

course of his speech inadvertently utters the forbidden phrase "social equality" instead of "social responsibility" the crowd becomes dangerously silent. He is allowed to continue his speech on the condition that he never forgets his place.

This episode thus "not only mocks the hero's earnest dogma of pacific humility but also baptizes him in the terror that he will find lurks in all adventures of Negroes among American whites. There is no telling what craziness and what brutish violence lie at any next step."\(^{20}\) The episode also exposes the interior facts of caste, not only its mechanism or economic exploitation but all its deeper exploitation of the negro as a ritualistic scapegoat."\(^{21}\) The protagonist is not only discriminated against, but the politics of racism also goes much deeper. He is used by the Whites to act out the cruelty, greed, lust and self destruction, which they seek to repress.

Although the protagonist never fails in obeying the dictates of the Whites, he finds himself expelled from college. He then moves from the rigidly strongly prejudiced Southern town to the North, where there is no segregation or Jim Crow Laws. Here too he keeps running in a vicious circle unable to give up his attempts at racial integration. It is only much later, when following an explosion in the factory, he is admitted to a hospital and the doctors there subject him to a lobotomy, which is the equivalent to another operation, castration, as suggested by one of the doctors, that the truth of his racial identity begins to dawn on him. When his friend Tod Clifton working with him in the brotherhood dies a futile death at the hands of police, he realizes that the brotherhood too had only been manipulating the


\(^{21}\) Ibid.
Black man. As an act of repentance, he sells sambo dolls which cavort and grin at the pleasure of the stringpuller parodying his own hated self image. He is then thrust into a race riot and unable to face the violence and confusion of images, he runs away and stumbles into the opening of a coal cellar.

This stay underground enables the protagonist to finally understand that in order to achieve visibility, to acquire an identity of his own he must deny all the identities and negative values that he had received from the white world above ground. He says "my problem was that I always tried to go in everyone's way but my own. I have been called one thing and then another but no one really wished to hear what I called myself. so after years of trying to adopt the opinion of others I finally rebelled."\(^2\)

Thus, Ellison in his *Invisible Man*, gives a realistic and convincing picture of the inner life of Afro-Americans in the nineteen fifties. The protagonist grows out of the stature of an Afro-American and becomes part of the universal heritage of man with all its struggles and handicaps which aren't essentially colour related.

James Baldwin's first novel *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, is about the Black man's search for roots and acceptance and of reconciliation with his Afro-American past and racial heritage. The Grimes family had lost touch with reality, because of the religiosity of the storefront Pentecostal church. His next novel *Giovanni's Room* is about the moral and social problems of white homosexuals in Europe, but it forms an important link to his third novel *Another Country*. Protest against racism is the dominant theme in

Another Country, where he calls down the wrath of history on the heads of the white oppressor. Rufus Scott, tortured by a series of racial and sexual encounters, commits suicide, but this becomes the rite of passage to self understanding for his sister, Ida Scott, a singer of jazz. The last three novels Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone, If Beale Street Could Talk and Just Above My Head depict the agonies of racism and Black-white relation but they are also about love and salvation.

Go Tell It on the Mountain is the story of the religious conversion of an adolescent boy. At first the boy experienced white power only indirectly through the brutality and degradation of the Harlem Ghetto. Yet, a vague terror of the power of the racist white world transmitted to the child through his parents. As the young boy began to grow, the pressures of race and sex began to mount and he grew afraid of the evil within himself and the evil outside. In despair, he struck a bargain with God. "In exchange for the sanctuary of the church he surrendered his sexuality and abandoned any aspirations, which might bring him into conflict with the white power."23

His aunt Florence had dealt with racism by aping the whites or the values of the Whites. She had been so ambitious, that early in life she had left her dying mother to go north to better her lot. Later she had driven from her side a husband whom she loved. "It hadn't been her fault that Frank was the way he was determined to live and die a common nigger."24 Baldwin remarks that "All her deeper feelings have been sacrificed to a futile striving for whiteness and respectability."25 Afflicted by cancer, she had come to church

24 James Baldwin, Go Tell It on the Mountain, p.92.
25 Ibid.
in her extreme fear of death, to die in a lonely room.

Baldwin portrays how "The Negro child rejected by the Whites for reasons, he cannot understand, is afflicted by an overwhelming sense of shame." As he grows up he comes to associate this cruel ostracization of his peers with the colour of his skin. He feels perpetually dirty and unclean. Baldwin describes how John hated sweeping the carpet for the dust rose clogging his nose and sticking to his sweaty skin. "He felt that should he sweep it for ever, the clouds of dust should not diminish and the rug would not be clean. It became in his imagination his impossible lifelong task, his hard trail...."  

The Black man's eternal struggle with his own blackness is symbolized by Baldwin in the family name Grimes. He suggests that this sense of personal shame, when it comes into contact with the Pentecostal tradition transformed itself into an obsession with original sin. No wonder then that Gabriel's sermons take off from such text as "I am a man of unclean lips or he which is filthy let him be filthier still." "No human personality can escape the effects of prolonged emotional rejection" says Robert A. Bone, "The victim of this cruelty will defend himself with hatred and dreams of vengeance." Gabriel, the Gospel preacher, who learns to equate blackness with evil, tries to disown everything black. Though he is father of an illegitimate child, he cannot face the evil in himself and in disowning the child Johnny, he is actually disowning the blackness in him. The psyche of

27 James Baldwin, Go Tell It on the Mountain, p.27.  
John is so weak and vulnerable that Gabriel with his hypocritical speech of death and damnation compels him to give up a precious part of himself out of sheer fright. The black psyche unfortunately is liable to be manipulated in the absence of a sturdy, self-sustaining and healthy self image.

In Another Country, Baldwin creates Rufus Scott, a martyr of racial oppression. Rufus can neither be fully reconciled to nor fully defiant of white society. His love affair with a white mistress soon develops into sadomasochism, revealing his lack of confidence and paranoia, rising from his consciousness of his black skin. Real or imagined altercations with neighbours, landlords and visitors to the village, where the couple lived force Rufus to a recognition of his own impotence in the face of white racist attitudes.

Unlike his white friend Vivaldo, he is unable to protect his white girl friend "The lowest whore in Manhattan would be protected as long as she has Vivaldo on her arm. This was because Vivaldo was white." As a talented jazz drummer, he tries to give vent to his anger by beating on the white skin of his drum. His feelings of bitterness, hatred and fear pushed him towards physical brutality against the symbol of his oppression, his white mistress, driving her insane. This brought him low and made it impossible for even his friends to understand him. Feeling lonely, unwanted and unloved, Rufus throws himself from the bridge and commits suicide. The damage done to Rufus Scott's psyche has a long history behind it.

To begin with, being a Black, Rufus was isolated and ostracized by the white society. Yet, his friends remain apathetic and un-involved. He takes

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out his frustration upon his white mistress and inflicts physical violence on her, yet another sort of torture. His mistress goes mad and he feels guilty and he has no one to turn to for help, support and consolation. The poor self image results in self torture, which ultimately prompts self destruction. According to Baldwin "it is up to the whites to break this vicious circle of rejection, hatred and destruction. They can do so only be facing the void by confronting chaos by making the necessary journey to another country."

Toni Morrison's, *The Bluest Eye* is concerned with the theme of racial discrimination and its far reaching consequences. It reveals the dominant culture's control over the colonized, by limiting the image making process. Marked early in life as ugly, Pecola Breedlove longs for blue eyes, the ultimate standard of beauty in the American white society. "White American prescription for beauty includes blonde hair, white (sic.) skin and above all, blue eyes."

Pecola's mother, Pauline Breedlove is herself a victim of the notion that the values and patterns of affluent culture should be imitated. "Alienated from her own femininity in a racially dominated society, she denies the harsh reality of existence — the reality of her own life and family..." She rejects her own daughter and adopts the children of the white Fishers for whom she works, preferring mammyhood to motherhood. Instead of loving her daughter, she beats her, ignores her and makes her incapable of having any self esteem.

The ultimate act of brutalization and betrayal for Pecola comes, when her father rapes her. Cholly’s brutal and irresponsible behaviour is also the result of white hegemony. He was humiliated and taunted during his first sexual encounter. So, he doesn’t know about nurturing love. His rape of Pecola is the distortion of his love for her. Cholly thus can only give his daughter what he received, which the psychologists call ‘replay’—transferring the injuries, the negative aspects from one generation to the next. “In a sick and power obsessed society there seems every possibility for distortion and anarchy.”

Suffering rejection at the hands of her parents as well as from school and the Afro-American community as well, leads to Pecola’s personal disintegration. Unable to get anyone to love her, she withdraws more and more into a private world of suffering and fantasy and finally goes insane. Receiving absolutely no chance to develop an integrated whole self; it becomes weak and fragmented. Pecola’s sense of self collapses completely and she becomes schizophrenic.

Racial discrimination is the underlying force in Song of Solomon. The injustice and pressure exerted cause certain psychologically perverted tendencies and lawless behaviour in Black people like Guitar, Macon Dead Circe and Henry Porter. Guitar becomes a terrorist because he cannot forget the miserable fate of his father, who was sliced up in a saw-mill. The pain inflicted by the white mill owner, who gave his mother forty dollars was made unbearable by the acceptance and willingness of his mother. Tortured by these bitter memories, Guitar joins the terrorist group called the “Seven Days”, which avenged violent crimes committed by Whites against Blacks. “You cannot stop them from killing us, from trying to get rid of five to seven

generations. I help to keep the numbers the same.” 35 This argument is the outcome of mental turmoil rather than reason.

The first Macon Dead was killed by his white neighbour, who wanted his land. The second Macon Dead saw his father being killed, by the Whites. This makes him lead an unethical, exploitative life of greed. The injured psyche becomes influenced by wrong priorities—greed for wealth, for owning land and property becomes his primary ambition.

In Beloved, Toni Morrison probes deeply the unconscious emotional and psychic consequences of slavery. The conditions of enslavement in the external world have such deep repercussion, on the individual psyche that one may do things which are unnatural. Sethe’s murder of her baby daughter, Beloved, is caused by such a psychic state of the mother.

Sethe has been suffering the worst conditions of slavery from the sadistic slave master, the school teacher. Even as a baby, she had been deprived of her mother’s milk. Later, when she was raped by white boys what hurt her most was that they held her down like a cow and milked her. Having escaped from such unbearable humiliation, Sethe on the verge of being recaptured kills her daughter to save her from the cruel consequences of slavery. She wants to avoid the psychic death for her daughter. “Why I did it. How if I had not killed her she would have died and that is something I could not bear to happen to her.” 36 The complexity of this inhuman behaviour is the manifestation of her wounded psyche under the cruelty of slavery. The violence shows clearly that part of the injured psyche of Blacks

is actually directed towards one's self, for a child is after all an extension of the mother's self.

Morrison's Sula, in the novel of the same name confronts the oppressive social forces inherent in the system of white domination. In her desire to break free from all racial and sexual stereotypes, she leaves her native town, Bottom. She also rejects the accepted social roles expected from a woman like marriage and motherhood. Fighting against all attempts at fragmenting the self, she is able to achieve a sort of wholeness of self. But unlike Meridian, who is a child of the race, Sula becomes lonely towards the end of her life. She seduces the husband of her best friend Nel and as a result is abandoned by everyone to die a lonely death afflicted by cancer.

In *Tar Baby*, Jadine is torn between the desire to affirm her western education and European values, where as a sophisticated model she has everything in her life and between her African identity and racial culture, which suggested that she is to be a loving daughter to her Black aunt, Ondine, and Uncle Sydney. Even though her final decision is to reject her Black lover, son of her Black culture, she is able to make this decision only after confronting her unconscious desire to be appreciated by the members of her own race the women at the supermarket, the women of Eloe and, of course, the Black culture bearer, Son. The outcome of this decision, whether Jade will be able to remain confident in her inauthentic European self, internalizing white values — is left rather dubious.

In *Jazz*, it is the identification of self with another Black woman, Alice Manfred, that leads Violet Trace to discover her real self. Violet had become so violent as to disfigure the corpse of Dorcas, who had been her husband's beloved. Yet, through her friendship to Dorcas' aunt Alice, she learns to
identify with all women and is able to redefine herself and her relationship to her husband in a positive manner. Though her psyche had been badly injured due to the twin pressures of racism and sexism, like the jazz performer, she is able to transcend all the sorrow and pain and retain a positive sense of selfhood.

Morrison's latest novel *Paradise* depicts how the memories of rejection and hatred continue to haunt the descendants of the ex-slaves, the Afro-American patriarchs who travel far overcoming many trials and reach Haven to form a town of their own. But the effect of the bitter memories of slavery and racism aroused in them a desire to replay history in their own terms. So they undertook another journey to Oklahoma and renamed their place Ruby. The next generation of Afro-Americans, however, fail to understand their forefathers who considered the town's "Oven" a sacred monument. They want to rebuild the Oven and rewrite the inscription on it. Thus racism continues to play havoc in the lives of the Afro-Americans causing misunderstanding and conflict among themselves.

Alice Walker's first novel, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, encompasses three generations of a Black share cropping family and examines the effect of poverty and racism on their lives. It explores the conflict between traditional Black values handed down through slavery and the revolutionary ideas of the Black power movement. The first Grange Copeland and Brownfield are victims of racism. Unable to exert any power over their lives, they turn in on themselves, their wives and children. They release their pent-up anger towards the white world by inflicting violence on their women. Grange Copeland is so brutal to his wife, Margaret, that she commits suicide. This pattern is repeated by his son Brownfield, in a sort of "replay", who murders his own wife, Mem. But her daughter, Ruth is brought
up by her grandfather, Grange, who in the third phase of his life attempts to atone for some of the time wasted by protecting Ruth. For this, he murders in cold blood his own son, Brownfield, who is symbolic of Grange's self hatred. The injured psyche gets involved in a couple of murders. Yet there is a semblance of redemption, owing to the belated realization of the gravity of the crimes by the grandfather who takes upon himself responsibility in bringing up the grand daughter.

In Meridian, the heroine, an active participant in the civil rights movement had been pressed to answer the question, whether she would kill for the revolution, the civil war of anti-slavery movement, and her answer had been in the negative. She had renounced her child so that she could go to college. But Saxon College, she realized, is the symbolized manifestation of white values, that had seeped into the thinking of middle class Blacks. She and her friends decided that they had two enemies. "Saxon, which wanted them to become something — ladies, that was obsolete — and the larger, more deadly enemy, white racist society."

While demonstrating against segregated facilities, Meridian and Truman, another Black, were often beaten and arrested. It is through her relationship to Truman who deserts her to marry a white woman that she finally understands that she must rise above her race as well as sex to attain a wholeness of self. Even though injured, the psyche reflects both negative and positive results. The positive result, her independence, is possible because of her improved self image and better confidence in herself.

Truman, on the other hand, finds that he is ostracized by his own Black

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companions, because of his white wife. Again and again, he confronts the question whether one can be guilty of a colour. Just as the Blacks were guilty of the crime of being black, could his wife Lynne, be guilty of being white. Truman is also hurt by racism, forced to be isolated and alienated because he married a white woman.

In *The Color Purple*, Walker recognizes that Black women need to be educated and made aware of the need to recover from the psychological and social traumas of inferiority due to racism and sexism. Black women are made to feel insignificant, faceless, inferior and devoid of identity, both by the racist white men and women, but also by Black men. Celie is a dumb, speechless silent girl, who is raped by the man she believes is her father. He brainwashes her so thoroughly that she looks upon herself as chattel. She submits to the beatings and sexual abuses from her husband, Albert also, until she meets Shug Avery, his mistress. Shug Avery teaches Celie to free herself from the shackles created by White men and women and Black men. What most Black women lack is the capacity for self assertion. It is because they do not have a self-worth, worthy of assertion. The self assertion marked by "I-statements" is an important step in the development of a persons personality. The issue of sexism does get resolved at the end of the novel, but that of racism is not resolved. Yet we get the feeling that one need not always succumb to racism — like Celie one may move by positive self assertion from despair to hope.

The racial overtures in the novel are stressed in the scene, where the Major’s haughty wife patronizingly confronts the strong minded Sofia. It is the white, racist domination that causes the arrest and imprisonment of Sofia, causing her to become hard and bitter. In *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, Walker depicts the complex systems of racial domination, in which those
oppressed become oppressors themselves. Tashi, or Evelyn Johnson as she was called, was an African woman married to a non tribal white American. As her native village was colonized by Whites and gradually destroyed, she engages in the revolutionary activity of going back to tribal rituals. She willingly volunteered to be bathed by the Tsonga — a ritual of female circumcision practised by many African tribes but becomes the victim of her own belief in tribal systems. Neither the Tsonga, who performs the disabling operation and is herself a victim nor the other victims inform Tashi about what the process involved. Only after the ritual she finds that she cannot walk properly ever again or take any joy in sexual activity. Although she is executed for murdering the Tsonga, M’lissa, her message, “Resistance is the secret of joy” becomes apparent. Thus, Tashi becomes the symbol of the power of the oppressed self to transform itself from passive victim to an active agent.

Racism is thus a construct in the lives of all the Black characters, which makes their plight hopeless. Either directly or indirectly through their ignorance, the white people as individuals or as community are responsible for the wretchedness, horror and misery of the Blacks. Morrison and Walker insist that the Black communities “have deeply internalized racist stereotypes that radically affect their definition of woman and man.”

In their novels the Black community is also responsible for the tragedies of the major characters — for the madness of Pecola Breedlove, for the suicide of Copeland and for the murder of Mem Copeland by her husband. “In these novels, it is not only that an individual heroine accepts the sexist and racist definitions of herself, but that the entire community, men and women accept these constructs

resulting in the destruction of many black women."39 Ellison, Baldwin, Morrison and Walker thus posit the Black predicament in the white racist society and its devastating effects on the self of the Blacks.

It must particularly be noted that the novelists do not portray all Black people, who undergo psychological torment as responding negatively. Deconstructing the evidence provided earlier we also have a few characters like Celie, Son, Milkman and Paul D, who react positively. The same psychic pressures that led to Sethe’s murder of her daughter, fosters in Paul D. a balanced sense of responsibility to all Black people. In spite of the devastating manner in which he was physically and psychologically emasculated by the school teacher, his determination to achieve self-affirmation is not abated. He teaches that all Black men must struggle to be freed from oppression. Saved from the shackles of slavery by her son Halle, Baby suggs becomes almost a preacher dedicating her life to loving African people and encouraging them to love themselves. Meridian is another, who is able to transcend all sorts of oppression to achieve a sense of wholeness as a person and to help and console others.

Though Ellison does not prescribe a panacea for all ailments of racism in his novel Invisible Man, he does posit the idea that in spite of the dual loyalty and may be owing to this, one can attain a positive sense of selfhood. Morrison on the other hand transforms language itself to evolve a new and multifaceted self concept. She advocates that to free the Afro-American’s collective unconscious from all the effects of injured psyche, one must make a conscious determined affect. From Pecola, who suffers a total disintegration of self into a non-self, Morrison evolves her characters in her consecutive novels. Sula and Jadine, who redefine their concept of self

39 Ibid.
breaking away from all European myths and their own Afro-American culture.

In the light of the foregoing analysis, it is inferred that different processes are at work in damaging the Black psyche. Some of them are psychological and the rest are social. They may be summed up as follows. On the psychological side, the Blacks feel that their complexions is a curse on them and the idea gets passed on from generation to generation. The premium placed on the complexion results in the false notion that they are less capable than their white counterparts. This leads to diffidence, discouragement and despair. The result would be obviously a weak, unhealthy and negative self concept. On the social side, the discrimination embarrasses them in socialization — starting and maintaining relationships, isolation, social exile, all resulting in anti-social actions marked by hatred and revenge.

5. Breaking at the Seams

An examination of intimate personal issues, like family, friendship, sexuality and marriage especially as regards Black and White relationships in society may provide greater insight into the problem of racism. A comparative study of these issues as portrayed by the four novelists and their themes, contexts, ideologies and symbols used would further highlight the question of how far racial integration is from reality or if it is only a myth, forming an invisible barrier to a positive Black self-concept.

Ellison "has perhaps deliberately left out situations involving a family to structurally bring home the dis-possession of the Negro in America." In

his novel he has made the hero almost homeless, as a metaphor for the Black man's deprivation by Whites. The few scenes where he does depict a family either of the Blacks or even of the Whites are not very laudable. They are depicted as lacking in affection. The hero hides from his family the fact that he has been expelled from college and is in search of a job. He lets them think that he is progressing well. Yet he repeatedly remembers at critical moments in his life his grandfather's death-bed-advice and draws strength from it. The repetition of images that suggest fights, enemies, danger, political manipulation and pain imply that a Black man's life in America is itself like a fight taken into enemy territory.

The Black family is a dispossessed entity without much unity, mainly because of the racist attitudes of the whites. This is suggested by the eviction scene, where all the signs of a family togetherness of the old Harlem couple—their portrait, when young, the card with "God bless our home", the greeting with "Granma, I love You" — are all thrown out by the agents of the white landlords. The symbolic significance of the act becomes clear in the words of the old lady, who screams "It's all the white folks, not just one, they all against us, every stinking low down one of them."\(^{41}\)

For Baldwin, the metaphor of the bastard child often served as symbolic of race relations in America. Being disowned and homeless, his protagonists wander about, in search of racial and sexual freedom. In Another Country Baldwin's description of New York contain "Striking images of malice. scenes and gestures, which expose the moral chaos of contemporary urban life" and "aching loneliness of the city where harassed commuters and jostled pedestrians seem to yearn for closer contact."\(^{42}\)

In the village bar, "denizens clutch their drinks with a gesture of buried despair." Nobody, neither the Whites, nor Blacks hear "the frantic plea of Rufus" who sings repeatedly "Do you love me." In Go Tell it on the Mountain, it is Gabriel’s terror striking behaviour at home which produces the anti-social behaviour in his son, Roy. But, John, who is disowned by his father is yet able to derive some sense of self-worth from his school principal, who assures him that he is a very bright boy and has a good future.

The best example of the significance of familial support in withstanding the vicious attacks of racism is, perhaps, Toni Morrison’s The Bluest Eye. In this novel we have two adolescent Black American girls suffering from the same set of racial oppression. Pecola whose parents are themselves victims of racism are unable to provide a sustaining homely atmosphere, is destroyed. while Claudia, whose, parents have the inner strength to provide a strong family support, survives. It is fear of becoming homeless or shelterless that causes Celie in The Color Purple to undergo the worst humiliation at the hands of her step-father and her husband. But once she learns to assert herself, she gets back not only her maternal property but also her sister, her son, daughter and daughter-in-law, thus completing her family.

The after-effects of slavery and racism on the institution of family have been devastating. The Black men and women inflict physical and psychological pain on one another. The Black male, unable to secure jobs or provide for the family cannot take on the traditional role as head of the family. He takes out his impotent rage and frustration by harassing, beating, torturing or abandoning his wife and children. Grange Copeland and

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43 Ibid.
44 James Baldwin, Another Country, op. cit., p.5.
Brownfield in Alice Walker's *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* and Albert in *The Color Purple* are examples. The women on the other hand distrust and have contempt for the male, because he cannot validate his nominal masculinity in practice. Some of them may actually turn into the degrading stereotyped roles thrust on them by Whites like Pauline in *The Bluest Eyes*, the Black mammy, who does not love her own child, like Meridian, who gives up her child for adoption or like Sethe, who kills her daughter Beloved. Some of them are immoral, the emasculating female like Mem in *Third Life of Grange Copeland*, Cass in *Another Country*, Pauline in *The Bluest Eye* or Jade in *Tar Baby*.

Parental love sometimes turns to incest as Cholly, raping his daughter, the stepfather repeatedly raping Celie, and the primitive countryman in *Invisible Man* violating his daughter. Filial love changes to Oedipus complex as in the case of old singer of spirituals in *Invisible Man*, whose sons make merry over the death of their father, who was also their master and who did not give them freedom. Yet, a closer reading of the text reveals the subtle manipulation of the white racist structures which subvert and pervert breaking the strong sustaining ties in normal family relationships. Black men and women hurt each other to release their pent-up anger towards the Whites.

Meridian did not find it easy to break the restraining frame of motherhood, which society imposed upon, her. She did so for she wanted to participate in the creation of a world, where Black children would be valued and could grow up with out feeling guilty for being black. Sethe killed her own daughter in cold blood, because under the barbaric system of slavery, this was the only way she found to save her child from the debasement of slavery and later, of racism. Grange Copland, although he tortures his wife
to death and kills his son, is later redeemed as he brings up his granddaughter, Ruth, decently.

The majority of the Black mothers are portrayed as suffering violence and degradation and making supreme sacrifices for their children. In *Sula* answering the daughter’s question whether she loved her the Black mother says “what you talking about did I love you girl. I stayed alive for you.” Thus, it is in their roles as husbands, wives, parents and children that racism hits them hardest, taking away the very basis on which one could build a positive self concept.

6. **Inter racial Sexual Relationships**

In the depiction of inter-racial sexual relationships, all the four novelists break up much of the racial stereotyping and reveal the double standards and situations of Whites in America. The early exploitation of the slave woman is very tellingly brought out in the scenes involving the cruel school master in “Sweet Home,” in *Beloved*. Sethe is not only brutally gang raped but milked like a cow and whipped badly. This left a permanent impression of a chokecherry tree on her back. Instances of the white masters’ sexual abuse of the Black women are either narrated or implied in all Afro-American novels which examine the history of the Blacks in America; Baldwin’s *Go Tell It on the Mountain, If Beale Street Could Talk, Walkers The Color Purple* and so on. The hypocrisy of the white males who deliberately thrust upon these helpless females the image of the loose, immoral woman is exposed.

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In the *Invisible Man*, the episode involving the battle royal, Ras the destroyer or the vet "the demasculinization of the Black male and even a kind of sexual deceit are brought out when a white woman is held up as a standard to be aspired to, but the Black male is prevented from fulfilling his fantasies as only the dregs are offered to him." The tendency of the white masters to exaggerate the potency of the Black male and liken him to some uncontrollable beast is also brought out in the episode where the white woman, Hubert’s wife Sybil approaches the protagonist directly. He repulsed her when he understood that "they see not him but a creature with sexual vitality of mythic proportions."  

The mindless insensitivity of the whites in *The Bluest Eye*, who stumbled on Cholly’s first sexual encounter and cruelly force him to go on performing laughing derisively and calling out obscenities is paralleled by the scene in *Invisible Man*, where the town’s important dignitaries gather together and force the young Black boys to entertain them by fighting with each other in the presence of the naked blonde. Similarly, while the actual action of incest is committed by the Black man, Ellison suggests that it was the white philanthropist, Mr. Norton, who represses a latent incestuous wish for his daughter. Critics have suggested that in the interview between the nameless hero of *Invisible Man* and the white Emerson’s son, there are signs of homosexuality. Emerson’s son is afraid of the white women. He admires the protagonist’s athletic build, refers to Mark Twain’s Jim and Huckleberry Finn and finally invites him to the club Calamus. The Black protagonist is however, innocent of such intention. Baldwin too exposes much of the hypocrisies of whites in sexual matters and implies that even hetero-sexual

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47 Ibid.
love between the whites was pale and colourless; Hence they project their dark longings on to the Black male.

The American approach to miscegenation has been found to be one of double standards. The offspring of an illicit relationship between a White man and Black women was considered a “negro” and there was no social stigma attached to it. But intermarriage between a white woman and Black man was violently opposed. The early practice of lynching Black males in the south was mainly defended on the ground that the Black man had an insatiable desire to rape the white women. The Black men and women too disapprove of such inter-racial relationships. In *Sula*, Sula who, it is hinted, sleeps with white men is called a Black bitch.

In *Meridian* Walker analyses intermarriage between the Black Truman and white Lynne Rabinowitz. Truman abandons Meridian, the Black woman, whom he loved to marry Lynne, for “he wants a woman, who is perfect in all the eyes of the world, an ideal woman and the white woman is the closest thing to power, he can get in white America.”48 But the other Black revolutionaries, his comrades, fear, mistrust and hate Lynne. Inspite of their best intentions, they cannot overcome the effect of centuries of humiliation, degradation and injustice meted out to them, by the Whites. Under pressure of ostracism from his comrades Truman himself begins to wonder whether he was guilty of marrying a white woman. In any case, the marriage cannot endure the opposition from both the Whites and Blacks, and Truman leaves Lynne and goes back to Meridian.

Baldwin’s picture of inter-marriage in *Another Country* ends in a more

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violent context. Rufus Scott, talented, sensitive and capable of love could have made a success of his life and marriage, if he was in another country. But, the pressures of the racist society, which continually insults him and his white wife, Leona, prove too much for him. Continually rejected, humiliated and taunted by the Whites his hatred of the Whites causes him to torture his innocent wife driving her insane. Though Baldwin goes on to describe the reconciliation of Black-White relationship in the story of Ida, Rufus’ sister, who after his suicide marries Vivaldo, it does not make a lasting impression. It sounds more like a hope than a reality.

7. **Black-White Interaction**

Many critics have condemned Ellison for his assimilationist denouement of *Invisible Man*. Maybe it was a concession to his desire to be considered along with the mainstream American writers. At the end of the novel the “Invisible Man” from his underground coal cellar does try to identity with the oppressed people everywhere and he does reiterate his belief in the American ideals of democracy and equal opportunity. But, a closer reading of the text, specially its imagery, reveals that Ellison was far from confident about any sort of integration between Afro-Americans and Euro-Americans ever taking place.

At the end of all his adventures after trying out all the stereotyped roles and still being thrown out by the white the “Invisible Man” has a dream, a dream of gigantic vengeance. He dreams that Jack, Emerson, Bledsoe, Norton and Ras, all demand that he return to them and when he refuses, they castrate him, what they have already done symbolically and throw his bloody parts over a bridge, which catches there and drips blood into the red water. He then mocks at his torturers, telling them that the blood dripping into the
water is the only history they are ever going to make. "And then the bridge itself slowly starts moving off, like an iron man, whose iron legs, clanged doomfully as it moved."49 The protagonist dreamt that full of sorrow and pain he shouted that it must be stopped. But, "that terrifying figure is its own metamorphosis and the great dark threat in it is his resolution."50

All in all, the impression that we get from Ellison's *Invisible Man* is that he had a cynical view of any sort of racial integration taking place in American society. Whenever he portrays instances of Black-White contact, he depicts such instances as turning out to be harmful, defective, repressive, violent or artificial. The hero's experience with Mr. Norton, Sybil or George's wife all prove injurious to him. Though Norton and Emerson are benevolent figures in the eyes of the white people, they emerge as exploiters of the Black people in one way or the other. Though the hero moves from a deeply prejudiced south to the north, where there is no segregation, he finds that racial exploitation of the Black people continues there too. Even organizations like the Brotherhood that upheld the American principles of equality and fraternity did not hesitate to take advantage of them.

Ellison does depict Black people like Dr. Bledsoe and Lucius Brockway, who exploit their own people, showing that he was aware of intra-racial exploitation too. But "the values of tenderness, humanness, hope and promise, those which concern man as a human entity are possessed only by certain Black characters in the novel. To them (he) awarded courage and dignity under fire, the existential attempt to carve meaning out of absurdity."51

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50 Ibid.
James Baldwin seems to oscillate between the poles of integration and segregation, between confirmation and denial of the stereotypes. His portrait of Ida in *Another Country* seems to go well beyond a healthy race pride. Ida is described as exotic, full of grace and poise, almost a stereotype of jungle grace attributed to wild Black woman “to a touch of primitivism he adds flat assertions of superiority. Negroes are more alive, more colourful, more spontaneous, better dancers and above all better lovers than the pale grey milk white, chalk-white, dead-white, ice-hearted, frozen-limbed, stiff-assed zombies from downtown.”

Baldwin too views Black-White relations as harmful to Blacks. *In Go Tell It on the Mountain*, Richard is portrayed as a proud young man, who kills himself in reaction to extreme humiliation by the police, who have imposed upon his consciousness the image of the low bestial negro, that he has tried to escape. With the exception of the homosexual, Eric, he judges white characters more rigidity and sternly than he does the Blacks. In the same novel, Deborah is another example of a woman who was gang-raped by southern Whites.

Vivaldo, in *Another Country*, in spite of being such a close friend of Rufus could not understand him because he failed to face up to the reality of race relations in defining his own selfhood as a White. Baldwin suggests that in the given social-political structure, the context of racist society, no relationship between Blacks and Whites can survive. If there is to be equality in society then both races must accept miscegenation. Otherwise all interaction between Blacks and Whites will end in violence or suicide of the Blacks.

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The only instance of Black-white friendship provided by Walker is in *Meridian*. Meridian had always imagined white women as frivolous, helpless creatures, lazy and without ingenuity. She thought of the Black woman as adventurous and courageous. The relationship between the Black Meridian and the white Lynne Rabinowitz begins because of their mutual commitment to the civil rights movement, becomes stronger because of their relationship to the Black movement worker Truman Held. This acquaintance changes to friendship only when they are able to transcend the racist and sexist stereotypes imposed on them. Their recognition of themselves and of each other as anguished, erring and struggling human beings comes only when they have decoded the myths of the racist structures. Walker too suggests that any enduring pattern of inter-racial friendship is possible, only when both races achieve a clear sense of selfhood, accept their origins and skin colour. Lynne has to learn to accept her Jewish heritage and the interpretations of her white skin, before she can share Meridian's humour, hope and visions.

*Tar Baby* is the only one of Morrison's novels, where she describes white and Black people in sustained interrelationship. Like Walker, she too suggests that if the white and Black women move towards a friendship in the novel's conclusion it is because they have confronted head-on the stereotypes and emotions generated by racism. Margaret Street, white, young, lower class, married to an elderly wealthy businessman presumes instant friendship from the middle class Black housekeeper, Ondine, who has long maintained order in Mr. Street's estate. But the friendship never develops, because Ondine keeps secret her knowledge of her mistress' horrible abuse of her only son, so that she could hold moral authority over her. Towards the conclusion of the novel the two women, both middle aged and bereft of children, both vulnerable and afraid of the future do confide their knowledge of their own and each other's weakness. But, Morrison implies that it is too late. To
Margaret’s query whether they could be friends, Ondine can only reply that it is almost too late.

Thus, the very few instances of possible interracial relationships described by the novelist stop almost always short of intimate integration, whereas any number of negative consequences can be cited. The desire for integration expressed directly or indirectly is often met with jibes, sneers, neglect or with violence. All the four writers succeed from the angle of narratology in relating the agonising pain of the dehumanizing system of slavery and racism and the attempts at integration ending in failure. They realize that three hundred years of unsuccessful interface between Black and white people cannot be overcome all of a sudden. Ellison and Baldwin against the earliest tradition of the protest novel have tried to fit in their novel within broader universal structure acceptable to white and Black readers. Alice Walker and Toni Morrison have succeeded in what the post-colonial critic would call writing back to the imperialistic master. The colonizer controls the image-making process, which plays a vital role in undermining the concept or self of the colonized. In their novels, the readers are also made to participate in the creation of the text by coming into the holes and spaces in between and in-decoding the myths of white superiority. Attempts at integration were not totally devoid of hope, yet they are replete with too many psychological, social, economic and political problems. Thus there is some validity for the ambivalence expressed by the novelists as Ellison does in the conclusion of the Invisible Man.

Although Ellison has used modern surrealistic and symbolic methods of narration, he does not claim any ideology taking sides with Whites or Blacks as such for his fiction writing. He wants to be, considered a mainstream American writer, but is not ashamed of his African Origin.
Baldwin, on the other hand, had a whole philosophy about the writings of Black writers but unfortunately he does not succeed completely in putting it into practice in his own fiction. He has opined that Afro-American authors should transcend racism in their writings. Toni Morrison and Alice Walker have succeeded thematically and structurally in beginning the process of freeing the unconscious Black minds from the after-effects of racism. Morrison, in her works, develops from a self destroyed by racism (Pecola in *The Bluest Eye*) to a self rejecting Black culture (Jadine in *Tar Baby*).

The perennial shifting of identity of the Black Diaspora between the African part and Euro-American part of their self and its long lasting effects on the Black psyche is tellingly brought out by all the writers under study. It is a fact that unlike white skinned ethnic groups in America, even the third and fourth generation of Blacks are not much better off than the first generation immigrants. Thus the self concept of the Afro-Americans is, to borrow a term from Derrida, a trace, the meaning of which keeps flickering between the boundaries of absence/presence unconscious/conscious superior/inferior and denial/affirmation.