CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSION
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Where there has been a constant struggle to project women as victims, Morrison gives such characters, which have moved away from victimization to fighters with a self-made positive image. Women in her novels go through a stage of growth, a quest to understand, to be saved from the confusion and disappointment; they struggle to cope with the oppression, a coming in terms of an uphill climb, accompanied by a series of trials and successes.

Toni Morrison draws characters and themes of her novels from a rich store of black oral tradition as well as from her own imaginative angle. She illuminates the potentialities for both annihilation and transcendence within black experience through her novels. Traditionally, black communities have functioned as structures that sustain and preserve the individual, particularly in adversity. Morrison narrates and addresses the nature and forms of this connection between self and other, individual and group that both shape people’s values and impede their capacity to express them within the community norms. Morrison also exposes the false images of stereotypes that may contribute to this process. Another central motif that appears throughout the author’s canon is diverse implications of appearances and perceptions. The way people regard themselves, and the way they are regarded, permeates every relationship and suggests the intangible boundaries that arise between the groups and the individual.¹

Speaking of the visual emphasis in her diction, Morrison has implicitly drawn a connection between perception and invisible but more powerful inter-cultural divisions:
The interest in vision, in seeing, is a fact of black life

As slaves and ex-slaves, black people were
manageable and findable, as no other slave society,
because they were black.\textsuperscript{2}

Morrison’s work is always symbolic of the shared human condition, both engaging with and transcending lines of gender, race and class. The Bluest Eye was set amongst unforgiving provincial black people in a small town and narrated the experience of two little sisters as they watched a friend first becoming a pariah and then sink into madness. The book gives an account of witnesses to project the surrender of innocence and toppling of wide-eyed precocious kid into unwilling maturity.

Then comes Sula, who features another pariah, spans the year’s 1921 to 1965, and seems to take place in the same setting:

In that place where they tore the night shades and
black berry patches from their roots to make room
for the Medallion City Golf Course, there was
once a neighborhood […]. It is called the suburbs now,
but when black people lived there it was called Bottom […].
They are going to raze the Times and Half pool Hall,
where feet in long tan shoes once pointed down
from chair rungs. (2)

The heroine, Sula, grew up in a household pulsing with larger than life people and activity, presided over by her powerful and probably sorceress grand mother.
Her cherished friend Nel, plays perfect counterpoint to Sula’s intense life grabbing insistence on freedom. It is this insistence on freedom that eventually gets reckless and Sula becomes a threat as her life unfolds against the rest of the black community’s daily life of hardship, humiliation and scrabbling for survival.

What was taken by outsiders to be slackness, slovenliness or even generosity was in fact a full recognition of the legitimacy of forces other than good ones:

They did not believe doctors could heal for them none ever had done so. They did not believe death was accidental- life might be, but death was deliberate [...]. the purpose of evil was to survive it and they determined (without even knowing they had made up their minds to do it) to survive floods, white people, tuberculosis, famine and ignorance.

They knew anger well but not despair, and they didn’t store sinners for the same reason they didn’t commit suicide- it was beneath them. (89-90)

It is out of this that Sula emerges; she leaves the Bottom and returns 10 years later; after college and city life to be perceived as a sinister force, sex hungry, man stealing death dealing, a figure of darkness and betrayal. Having dared to smash the taboos that are her neighbor’s poor guarantees of simply surviving; she’s scorned, despised, abandoned by the people she grew with.
Morrison’s Sula stems out of the tightly compressed black society where people are so paralyzed by the horrors of the past and by the demands of just staying alive that they’re unable to embrace the possibilities of freedom until the moment for it has passed. Her extravagantly doomed characters are locked in a world where hope for the future is a foreign commodity yet they are enormously alive. This book is about them - and about how their beauty is drained back and frozen.

Sula represents the suppressed subconsciousness of the black especially the females and the tragedy lies in their non-recognition of their own suppressed feelings. Nel realizes the emptiness she had felt all these years. It was not the pain of Jude’s absence but that of Sula’s; it is with Sula that she had experienced the excitement of being alive and had the opportunity to go beyond the Bottom’s narrow principles of survival. Through Sula she could have transformed her own life just as the Bottom might have. If she and the community had sought to understand what Sula meant, if she and the community had explored the possibilities of life, perhaps Sula might have survived, Nel might have lived, and the bottom might still be. We could see therefore Sula penetrates further beyond the norms of any community, black and white, although through them to a deeper analysis of selfhood as a woman.

Morrison’s novels are quest tales in which key characters search for their hidden signs capable of giving them strength and identity. Although Morrison’s major characters struggle towards womanhood, their sense of what it means is drastically different. For Pecola womanhood means being loved; for Nel it is
straight narrow line; and for Sula, to be a woman means self-fulfillment.
Morrison’s first novel The Bluest Eye explores the reason why it is so difficult for
black women to achieve the definition of womanhood ascribed to by American
society and still, remains true to their social identity. The second novel Sula,
penetrates further beyond the norms of any community, black or white, although
through them to a deeper analysis of selfhood as a woman. Realizing that the
dominant norms are both impossible and undesirable Sula pushes beyond them. So
there is a development in the concept of womanhood and selfhood from one book
to the next.

The pursuit of womanhood and acceptance as it affects their wholeness begins
at that vulnerable age when Pecola and Sula are caught between the physical stages
of girlhood and womanhood. It is at this quivering point that Pecola is raped and
begins her search for blue eyes and that Sula discovers the hard emotional fact that
no one, not even her mother or even herself can be totally relied on. The
approach of adolescence marks the growth of their body, sexuality and the
emergence of their mental consciousness. Along with sexuality comes the desire
for knowledge - the knowledge of self. In both Pecola and Sula's quest for
wholeness and self-knowledge, and social acceptance, sexuality becomes the
vehicle. Pecola's rape by her father is the result of that deformity in which the
community and family is trapped. The barrenness and miscalculated emotions of
her father represents that of the community, black as well as white. Blacks
especially males in Morrison's novels are so drained away with confidence,
strength (both physical and mental) and courage that they are neither able to protect
nor nurture their progeny. And when they after a bleak realization or what could be said as an inner reflex try to do something end up with a miscalculated act. That is what Pecola’s father did. He wanted to give something to his daughter but due to his confused psyche raped her.

All Morrison’s heroines struggle to achieve their true accepted self all by themselves. Neither the community nor their families are able to nourish, protect and nurture them. They try to be what the society expects and few go beyond the given definition of “womanhood” by making space for their true desires.

In The Bluest Eye, the emphasis is based on inversion of truth caused by the attempt of two cultures to impose one’s value system inappropriately on other culture, so the effect even if seems successful, is grotesque. Pecola did not want to be a blue eyed, straight haired lady, but since that image being, an essential requirement is imposed on her part she gets defeated by her culture’s own inability to separate images from substance. Pecola’s family has already been defeated by social racism and callousness; the community of women around her as well as her mother, have fastened onto the prevailing concept of beauty as the reason why they cannot become all they want to be. How then, can Pecola become a woman, how then can she be loved, since she does not have any physical characteristics essential for happiness? Pecola wants the impossible blue eyes, a desire transmitted to her by her community and a desire that distorts her ability to perceive reality. Although Pecola seeks to elevate herself to the level of a desirable human being by possessing those blue eyes, Sula pursues her own divergent view, refusing to restrict her essence to the limits set by the human beings around her.
Thus her attempt to be more than human succeeds not only in the face of the prevailing definition of woman, but even the concept of what man should try to do. But the community reacts to these two women in much the same way, turning Pecola into a dumping ground for their own feelings of helplessness and inverting Sula’s godlike narcissism into witchcraft. Pecola’s madness makes everyone feel sane; Sula’s evilness heightens everyone’s goodness. Characters such as Pecola strives by doing every possible act that could make her as beautiful as the community thinks she should be. She struggle to achieve beauty as it is the only way she thinks acceptance could be hers, Sula on the other hand rejects community norms to be what she feels to be. Both these women in their own ways proved to be victorious as they are able to highlight that it is not they who are ugly, weak and brainless, it is the society, which wrongly perceives them.

Jadine wants to be out of the pre-defined roles of a mother, daughter and wife, as Son wants her to be; therefore he takes her away to his own black town. Jadine wants to come out of the women’s desires which are nothing but the auto centric wishes of men; she wants to be what she desires, not what the community thinks she should be. Unlike the stereotypes she moves ahead of just being free and having a status, she is beauty with talent, being a model, a star, her personality moves ahead by debunking the myth about black women, as Morrison opens her Pandora box full of beauty and talents in a personae named Jadine.

Morrison juxtaposes Son’s romanticized dream like version of Eloë with the more close-up qualified view when he brings Jadine home. Jadine immediately
feels the constriction of the rigid lines, which divides gender into separate male and female realms.

In the case of Jadine the roles of males and females are reversed. Here the woman takes the initiative ends the relationship, and goes off; the man’s desire for connection has made him vulnerable: “for if he loved and lost this women […] he would surely lose the world” (172). So strictly is this reversal that Jadine’s satisfaction about being “so expert at leaving” is presented as masculine “now she felt lean and male, having left quickly with no peeping back” (250).

Tar baby implicitly raises question of whether or not this assertion of power by a woman can be seen as a legitimate positive development. Morrison in Tar Baby appears to indorse the romantic mythology of black male flight that she describes in MR interview: the big scene is the travelling Ulysses scene, for black men:

They are moving […] Although in sociological terms that is described as a major failing of black men- they do not stay at home and take care of their children, they are not there – that has always been to me the most attractive feature of black male life.  

In almost every novel of Morrison we find this aspect. She makes her heroines’ achievers of their status, freedom and dignity with their own efforts without any masculine support. In Tar Baby Jadine is introduced to us as lady with
achievements to her credit. She appears as a made thing in the novel, Morrison projects the struggle for achievement in rest of the novels.

In Jadine we see a rootless female who chooses her freedom rather than community. In her dreams she confronts black women and they keep haunting her to remind her of her roots. Son on the other hand projects all that is his cultural world. He tries to move her from her white world. He takes her to Eloe the all black town where she feels caught up in boundations and limitations evading her freedom. Therefore she moves back to the world of her white patron.

She fits to be the role model for many black women who want to change the negative image imposed on them. She is an educated woman who has proved herself in both educational and professional fields. In my opinion though she is beauty with brains; she could have been a lot more if she would not have ignored her community. Community was her other-self, which she ignored and therefore became alienated from the part, which was hers. While Morrison shows all the glory she had, she also clearly makes us see what she lacked.

In Beloved though the novel revolves around the after effects of slavery, my basic concern remained with the female protagonists. As how Sethe being a slave in the Sweet Home plantation gathers the courage to run and escape from slavery. She very well knew that there were only few who were able to escape still she took the step, when she was both physically and mentally broken.

On the way she strangles her daughter so that if she is caught again her daughter would not suffer the tortures of being a slave. Though it was a cruel act it justifies her action, as her intention was not wrong. What she wanted was to free
her daughter from the shackles of slavery, as she later admits - "No one loved her as I did" (2).

The haunted memories of the past later take the shape of Beloved and become real. Beloved becomes the scourge of God when she tries to harass everyone and ultimately tries to kill Sethe. But Morrison makes Denver and Sethe realize that Beloved was their other part, buried deep inside them; as the word ‘Mine’ haunts Sethe’s house, heard by everyone- “Beloved... you are my face; you are me... Mine” (217).

Beloved’s presence makes everyone realize his or her inner-self. For the first time we come across a male character in terms of Paul D, who is able to nurture, love and support Sethe’s life. Both Sethe and Paul D are victims of slavery. Therefore they share a close affinity with each other but Morrison does not leave the aspect of ‘helplessness of men’ as she clearly depicts Halle’s impotence when he in front of his eyes sees Sethe being raped.

Therefore, the credit of surviving the escape entirely goes to Sethe who had all the courage to feel the freedom. When the hunger of Beloved for love and nurturance started taking violent shape both Denver and Sethe decide to put an end to all this by calling the ghost.

Sethe was not guilty of her crime as in her mind there was only one crime that of slavery itself. Similarly when Denver accuses Beloved of choking Sethe’s neck she said, “I did not choke it. It was the iron circle that choked it” (101).

Though Jazz is a story that revolves around all the characters irrespective of their sexuality, it is the female characters that most elaborately come out to prove
their struggle by achieving a rhythm of a healthy and normal life after going through a very tough time. All of Morrison’s female characters have a similar quest to move beyond the definition. There is quest for love, to love and be loved. Lack of nurturance plays a great role in giving all the characters an imbalanced shape. Joe searches love in Dorcas, a teenager in whom he finds similarity with her mother. And after Dorcas’s death, Violet starts feeling daughterly love for her; Dorcas’s memory takes place of the dolls she sleeps with.

The story takes its variations just like the music of Jazz. Violet and Joe after coming to City in order to survive, leave their past behind. The City offered little but there was no turning back. They start living but become mental wrecks as their quest in search of happiness and self-fulfillment, leads Joe towards Dorcas and Violet away from Joe.

Violet did listen to the parrot that kept saying, “I love you”, but she never believed those words. Morrison has symbolically shown the fall of the world with such a small act through the fall of the parrot. Violet’s profession as a hairdresser symbolically represents making people look good therefore ‘accepted’.  

When Violet comes to know about Dorcas she gets shattered having nothing to count on. But gradually with courage and patience she starts recovering. In the end Joe and Violet start living happily. This suggests a happy ending as Violet survives all the sufferings that life offered her. She along with Felice has debunked the myth about the negative image of Afro-American women.
Even in The Song of Solomon Pilate’s lack of attachment stems from people’s rejection of her. This isolation not only makes her aware of herself but also allows her to re-make herself. In Pilate Morrison imagines an alternative to the dominant ideals of femininity. Confounding stereotypes of female fragility; Pilate is as strong as any man. She can knock Milkman down a flight of stairs or “boil him a perfect egg”. Unique as she is Pilate represents the type of self-invented woman Morrison highlights in her novels:

“Wild or serene vulnerable or steel trap,
you are the touch stone by which all that is
human can be measured. Porch or horizon
your sweep is grand, you are what fashion tries
to be original and endlessly refreshing”.

Morrison’s much awaited novel Paradise also deals with the effects of slavery. The narrative is based on the plight of the small town of Oklahoma that was founded by the ex-slaves who travelled from Louisiana following the Civil War and were turned away from the lighter skinned black community during their journey. Originally called Haven, the sons of the town fathers relocate after World War II and rename the community Ruby. This town population 360, in its attempt to turn away from oppression of slavery, prejudice, and the insult of being tuned away by their own people, has instead changed. The novelists in the year 1976, as the second and third generation of the community, threatened by change, have decided to take matters into their hands. Times were changing and wisps of the black power movement and equal rights revolution had begun to wander through
the populace. Scapegoats were needed; they were found in the convent in the edge of the town where several torn and battered women have assembled from all over the country.

Like the original residents of Haven and Ruby, these women were outcasts of society, but in the minds of the leaders of this society, they were the enemies and must be exterminated. From this stark beginning, Morrison introduces the women of convent in their own voices, one at a time and begins the journey that will wind along a path all the way back to the story of internal conflicts of the original founders of Haven itself. Paradise cannot completely capture the full flavor of the past one hundred years of turbulent African American history, but I believe it does seize upon the essence of our human struggle to understand one another and our place in the larger universe.  

All Morrison’s novels clearly present an effort to redefine the negative image of Afro-American women. The standards of beauty in terms of white skin, blue eyes and blond hair have changed, as the ‘color’ cannot define what is beautiful and what is not. The ramp is full of black women who are successful in fashion and glamour world. Their blackness has attributed in their reward giving them undeniable charm and charisma. The centuries old myth has come to an end regarding their “blackness”.

With the wake of freedom and reformistic movements, started the ‘Pen Revolution’ by the black writers to illustrate all aspects, which needed change. Feministic movements renewed the spirit of reformation for the status of women.
Women did represent their pathetic position being victims of oppression in the male dominated society. They have in various ways let their voices be heard.

The socialists and politicians like Bethanue worked for the cause of the black people. The writers like Alice Mansfield; Toni Morrison worked on the psychological level to let the people know the fact, which remained in their own perception as a result of their mental block.

In professional fields of various streams like athletics, art, education, business etc. black women are at the top. In almost every game blacks have been in the first place. The centuries old suppression could not suppress their capabilities. They have emerged as achievers.

In America the Afro-Americans are facing identity crisis. The double consciousness has given rise to problems regarding their true identity. The negative mirage has not only shaped a mythical image of blacks but has also given the annihilating effects in the minds of whites but Afro-Americans as well. The negative mirage imposed by colonization and slavery still haunts the perception of the society. By tracing the foundational factors we come to know the cause, which remains in the white society itself to maintain its superiority. Blacks helped in building the infrastructure of many nations, including America. Colonialization snatched away their natural resources and habitats. If we see the historical facts we find a chronological sequence of suppression and at the same time their contribution in various fields. Still today when they are free the tag clings to their shoulder as an inferior race.
The economic social and political exploitation of blacks and discrimination of blacks have led them to various criminal paths. This tag of inferiority gave rise to the problem of psychosis in Afro-Americans. They do not have faith in justice due to discrimination.

Afro-Americans do not feel confident in holding their own cultural heritage, as they want to be accepted in the society, the standards of which are defined by whites. Women have been victim of triple oppression in terms of their gender, race and class. Their brutal exploitation has resulted in devastating effects but today their unheard voice is making itself heard. They are in the forefront to prove themselves. We could see that it is they who are the survivors of every kind of oppression, as Morrison found in them the best answer for every aspect. Her writings project the things that are best in being a female. The thinness of male characters in her writings shows that the best of things could be projected through only female characters.

Though her novels at first give the impression of being the mirror of suffering on the part of women but at the core, I found a clear illustration of survival; they have survived and it is not a mere survival, it has achievements added to it. Women have changed the centuries old prejudice of people, giving them their true personality. They proved the dictum that black is beautiful and it is just not beauty, it is beauty with brains. The myth has been debunked clearing the mirage and giving the wonderful true picture.
There are diversified perceptions about the image of an individual. The shaping up of this image includes caste, class, sex as few prominent factors out of various ones. The definition given to blacks has divided people in terms of their social status. For an emphasized notation, see Rubenstein, Roberta. “Pariah and Community”. Toni Morrison: Critical Perspective Past and Present. Eds. Jr. Henry Louise Gates and K.A.Appiah. Amistad Press : New York. 1993, 127.

The color of the skin has given Africans a distinct and prominent classification. Therefore even as slaves, they were more easily tracable not because of poverty but because of color. For more facts, see Morrison, Toni. “The Language must not Sweat: A Conversation with Toni Morrison”. Interview with Thomas le Clair. The New Republic.N.P: 21March, 1981, 29.

Morrison also saw a masculine aspect in Sula: “She will do the kinds of things that normally only men do [...] she really behaves like a man. She picks up a man drops a man, the same way a man picks up a woman, drops a woman [...]. She is masculine in that sense. She's adventurous, she trusts herself, she's not scared, she's really ain't scared [...] so that quality of masculinity - and I mean this in a pure sense - in a woman at that time is outrage, total outrage. She can't get away with that...”. (MR Interview, p.487). For more analysis on this topic, see Erickson, Peter. E. “Images of Nurturance in Tar Baby”. Toni Morrison: Critical Perspective Past and Present. Ed. Jr. Henry Louise Gates and K.A.Appiah. Amistad Press: New York. 1993, 300.

The words 'I love you' seem as fake as Joe's share of love for Violet. Since the parrot cannot fly it stays there looking in, which symbolically represents the helplessness of Violet, as she cannot do anything about Joe's affair with Dorcas. For more on this aspect, see Morrison, Toni. “Those Nights on the Harlem Rooftops”. Rev, of Jazz, by, Richard Eder. Times Books Review. 19 April 1992, 240.


The novel was immediately acknowledged by a number of critics as a feminist tone rehashing the oppression of the patriarchal society imposing its order on the creative and artistic women at the convent. But Paradise opens the doors beyond gender, race, to an acknowledgement of a higher order in the universe. The women at the convent form a community that transcends their past and is race blind. (Whitten Natasha, Book Review 1999, p.3). In a novel etched in violence, Morrison seeks not only to answer the question of "why Paradise necessitates exclusion", but also to explore the notion of perfection and Utopia on earth. Morrison said Paradise cannot completely capture the full flavor of the past one hundred years of turbulent African-American history, but I believe that it does seize upon the essence of our human struggle to understand one-another and our place in a larger universe. For more information on this, see Mulrine, Anna. This Side of Paradise. US News.19 Jan 1999,p.2