Chapter Three

Articulation of the Inarticulate

“The history of liberty is a history of resistance” – Thomas Woodrow Wilson

‘The Land of the Free.’ Most who hear this phrase are likely to associate it with the United States. America is the nation of immigrants, the place to which persecuted people flee for liberty. In ‘America’, all citizens are ‘created equal’ and ‘endowed’ with the ‘inalienable rights’ to ‘life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.’ In actuality, of course, the history of the United States is scarred by moments when the nation’s own government, originally established ‘of, by, and for people’ has turned against certain of its citizens by denying their ‘inalienable’ rights. The relocation of Native Americans to reservations offers one illustration. The post – September 11, 2011 detention of South Asian and Middle Eastern immigrants suspected of involvement in ‘terrorism’ provides another. Between these came the oppression of African Americans. Using the writings of Toni Morrison, the third chapter examines how Toni Morrison portrayed and attempted to articulate the harrowing tale of sufferings and the struggles of the African Americans in America.

The marginalized people in America, the African Americans do gain momentum while they amplify their voices which have been unheard of for the past many centuries. As they are politically weak, territorially segmented, economically unfortunate, culturally stigmatized and socially marginalized they could echo their voices to this world only through their writings.

This chapter attempts to convey the sufferings and distress of the African Americans in the American socio-political scenario as found in the works of Toni
Morrison. She echoes the voices of the marginalized who suffer the burden of racism and sexism.

More specifically, this chapter shows how the oppressed African Americans used silence as a literary device--indeed, even silence as a coded language--as a strategy of confrontation and resistance. African Americans deliberately used silence as a technique to convey profound meaning. In Japanese culture, silence can signal attentiveness, self-awareness, and enlightenment as opposed to American association of silence with passivity, powerlessness, and suppression. By interrogating ‘silence’ as a specifically ethnic mode of communication, this chapter enriches our appreciation of how “the unsaid” was used as a form of coded language by the African Americans to describe the experience of being rendered powerless, invisible, and dispensable by the government designed to protect them.

Post-Colonial Studies have been most concerned with the oppression of people by colonizers; thus, most of the work has been dedicated to giving voice to the oppressed and exposing the injustices perpetrated by their oppressors. Colonization and imperialism continue to be enacted and suffered. But Post-Colonial Studies have also expanded, with perspectives, to account for recent phenomena in the articulations of colonization and, more poignantly, of the ramifications of liberation, diaspora, immigration, and assimilation. Articulatory spaces are the multifaceted areas where discourses and performances negotiate and amass meanings. They create clusters of coherence out of multiple ideas, objects, subjects, and people. Articulatory spaces emerge in effect of individual and collective actions, sometimes consciously and sometimes inadvertently
performed and more or less emotionally and conceptually at a given moment and location.

Post-Colonial theory is a discussion of “migration, slavery, suppression, resistance, representation, difference, race, gender, place, and responses to the influential master discourses of imperial Europe…and the fundamental experiences of speaking and writing by which all these come into being” (Ashcroft 118). It is built around the concept of resistance, or resistance as subversion, or opposition which can carry with it ideas about human freedom, liberty, identity, individuality, etc.,

African American Literature exists within the larger realm of Post-Colonial Literature, even though scholars draw a distinctive line between the two stating that:

African American Literature differs from most Post-Colonial Literature in that it is written by members of a minority community who reside within a nation of vast wealth and economic power. (Mohanram 135)

As Henry Louis Gates, Jr., one of the most important African American literary scholars, once said:

My desire has been to allow the Black tradition to speak for itself about its nature and various functions, rather than to read it, or analyze it whole from other traditions, appropriated from without. (19)

African American Literature often focuses on race relations and the effects of racism and usually indicts white and colonial societies. Colonized countries have been profoundly affected by the exploitative, racist nature of the interrelation which was and still remains economic, political and cultural. In Europe and North America, the economic and political legacies make up of societies, bringing with them the problems of
white ethnocentrism, ethnic conflict and racism. As in the colonial period, the legacies of colonialism are invariably tied up with racism and the works of literature that are defined as African American often record racism or a history of genocide, including slavery and apartheid.

From the beginning, Black writers have produced a literature of social protest and human enlightenment. Black writing did not come into being as a result of some black person’s desire to exercise the ‘inspirational muse.’ What motivated Blacks to write was the condition of oppression and what they desired of their writings was for it to ameliorate their condition. Black people have often summoned and even harassed black writers to report on and define the condition of the race. Since writers possess the ‘Word’ and the word is powerful, blacks feel it is the inherent duty of writers to communicate their wishes and, if need be, lead them against those who oppress them. By virtue of its origin, nature and function, black writing is thus “mission conscious” and is necessarily a hazardous undertaking. Black literature constitutes one of the supreme enrichments of black culture and black life. This has been and is the burden as well as the heritage and the legacy of every black person who takes up the pen in the United States.

Black men write a lot about the ‘castrating’ black female and feel righteous in doing so. But when black women write about incest, rape and sexual violence committed by black men against black women of all ages in the family and in the black community at large and talk of them as castrators and oppressors of black women, they are accused of sowing seeds of ‘division’ in the black community and of promoting animosities between males and females in the black family itself. But instead of being constrained by such dominance, the literature of the woman is expansive and liberating. There are black
women writers, poets, novelists, dramatists, critics, scholars, researchers, intellectuals and ideologists hard at work. They are wielding their pens like spades unearthing forbidden treasures buried in old soil. It is an adventurous literature and scholarship.

With Toni Morrison’s writings one comes to a definite turning point in the history of black women’s literature. Her works are abundant in earthy realism. They are deeply rooted in history and mythology; her works resonate with mixtures of pleasure and pain, wonder and horror.

Whenever people interact verbally, power is exercised. One person acts, another reacts, and either interpersonal balance is achieved or imbalance is created. We are so thoroughly used to negotiating power in verbal interaction that we become aware of doing so only when things go wrong. In such points of imbalance in the interaction silence becomes very significant. There is no need to equate silence with literal silence. After all, repression is classically interpreted to be ‘defence mechanism.’ Toni Morrison’s works are directed at understanding how repression is achieved or resisted during social interaction in the discursive acts of individuals or whole communities. This is the general agenda that this chapter addresses: where and how the articulation of the inarticulate took place in the works of Toni Morrison.

Suppression of one’s history and culture are effective means of silencing the voices of the oppressed. In this sense, the silence of African Americans can be simultaneously viewed from various perspectives. The second chapter made a thorough survey of existing literary scholarship on the concept of silence for minorities in the United States. While our culture valorizes speaking out as a form of power and conceptualizes silence as powerlessness, some critics have suggested that silence can
have a more complex valence. Contribution made in this chapter hopes to add in some way to our understanding of Toni Morrison’s role in articulating the silent sufferings of the black people, who were the passive victims of oppression.

In 1931, a little girl named Chole Wofford was born in Lorain, Ohio. Though her family was poor, her parents did not let their daughter lower her expectations, nor would allow her to feel demeaned by the racism often directed at African Americans like themselves. By the time she was a famous writer known by the name of Toni Morrison, she looked at racists as pathetic creatures to be pitied, not threats to her immense intellect, because she has always refused to compromise, to settle or be silent. Toni Morrison’s nine novels, including the Pulitzer-Prize winning *Beloved*, are triumphs of language and imagination. Her lyrical fiction has been recognized with the highest honours in the world, including the 1993 Nobel Prize.

Though her books are some of the greatest of the twentieth century period – fans and critics have been hung up on Morrison’s identity as a woman and an African American. Apparently, it is still hard for some people to realize that the cannon of great American authors can include people of different races and genders. She has been asked why she only writes about black people, even though no one seems to have ever asked James Joyce why he only wrote about white guys. Since people are always so quick to box her in as a Black woman writer, Morrison says: “I’ve decided to define that, rather than having it to be defined for me…. I really think the range of emotions and perceptions I have had access to as a black person and as a female person are greater than those of people who are neither. I really do” (Mori 310), Morrison said in a comment that presaged the controversial comments of Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor: “So it
seems to me that my world did not shrink because I was a black female writer. It just got bigger” (Mori 311). That big world is evident to the legions of readers who have been entranced by her fiction.

Contemporary women writers like Toni Morrison, through their fiction have chosen to talk back: “Moving from silence into speech is for the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited and those who stand and struggle side by side, a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life and new growth possible. It is that act of speech, of ‘talking back’, that is no mere gesture of empty words, that is the expression of a movement from object to subject—the liberated voice” (Sinha xii).

Toni Morrison, the Nobel Prize winner, broke through the barriers for women and blacks and beautifully evoked the legacy of displacement and slavery in her various novels. Her works articulated key issues for African Americans, presenting the true face of racism in all its human complexities. Her novels fuse the universal themes in the particularity of the African American experience and define the beauty and brutality of human life.

Toni Morrison is a writer who is deeply interested in depicting, preserving and perpetuating the culture and practices of Black community. She is a major voice in Black writing. Her works present many voices and versions which place the readers at the centre of community. Morrison’s work is essentially dialogic, that is, it presents arguments about individual values, experiences, periods and reading of events. Morrison invites the reader to engage in a dialogue between different versions of history and reality. Toni Morrison thus ensures the participation of the reader in the experience of her novels.
African American Literature deals with mutually reinforcing the systems of oppression such as racism, classicism, and sexism, forming a matrix of oppressions. Being one among “the Other” (Said 54) in the salad bowl culture of America, Toni Morrison, an African American writer, speaks the silence of the blacks by jotting down the bitter experiences of her race. The language of grief is often silence. But it can be considered as a ‘powerful voicelessness.’ Toni Morrison believes that struggles and aspirations of African Americans need to be communicated systematically. In order to achieve this, she has written nine novels, which can be rightly called the ‘articulation of the under-represented’ who suffer the burden of racism and sexism.

Morrison goes much deeper into the very roots of racism and sexism in her novels, *The Bluest Eye,* (BE) *Sula, Song of Solomon,* (SS) *Tar Baby,* (TB) *Beloved,* (BD) and *Paradise.* In a subtle way she reveals the ideological basis of these pernicious social evils. To bring them out effectively, she digs out the legends, myths, folk stories and folk songs of African Americans. No doubt, Morrison, being a versatile novelist never uses the same theme and pattern in her novels. She brings out a variety of experiences of Black life to articulate the silence of the Black world in order to create a vivid portrayal of the Black world. This led the researcher to consider for analysis the above mentioned novels of Toni Morrison in this chapter.

Toni Morrison’s works demonstrate her ability to create life-like and at the same time imaginative stories. Her treatment of themes is at once powerful and convincing. Morrison’s recurrent themes are those of the social and psychic effects of race, gender and class. She gives her novels a special touch of variety by presenting the myths, created by the white man to mystify the Blacks. Morrison vividly analyses how racial
discrimination and gender bias act as powerful tools of oppression and harm or destroy individuals.

Morrison’s *Beloved* depicts the evils of the oppressive system on Black men in general and on Black women in particular. It portrays the lives of the slaves in Garner’s slave house which is ironically called Sweet Home. She depicts the physical and psychological effects that slavery has on an African American woman and her family. The atrocities and mental trauma Sethe, the protagonist, had to face in Sweet Home chronicle the total subjugation of a race which was made a victim of coercion, sexism and racism, practiced successfully to obliterate their individuality.

Sethe and the other slaves experience the full oppression and inhumanity of slavery. Schoolteacher, who administrates the plantation after the death of his brother Mr. Garner, beats the male slaves and deprives them of their guns, game and food. The worst she suffers is when the boys at the farm steal her breast milk. African American women could not live peacefully and secure under the control of the Whites. They were raped even though they were “ugly” blacks. They were sexual objects not only to the white men, but to the men of her race as well. They were seen just as a reproductive commodity to increase their race, that is, to be thrown again into the cruel hands of slavery. The central character Sethe is tortured, raped and she is treated merely as an animal. Almost cruelly, her milk has been stolen and it affects her psyche. Commodified to such an extent that even the milk in her breasts was not hers to own. She recalls the cruelties inflicted on her in the Sweet Home to Paul D:

After I left you those boys came in there and took my milk. That’s what they came in there for. Held me down and took it …. School teacher
made one open up my back and when it closed it made tree. It grows there still. *(BD 16-17)*

Morrison exposes how both Black men and women are victims of racial and sexual prejudices. For example, Halle, a slave in the Sweet Home, brings his mother freedom at the cost of his own life. He helplessly witnesses his wife, Sethe’s milk being taken away by the racial masters. Halle watches the scene from the hay-loft where he is hiding unable to protect his wife from sexual abuse. This affects his psyche, upon which he loses his mind, buttering himself all over with fresh churned cow milk. Sethe being tortured by the school teacher’s nephews and his inability to go to her aid convinces one of the Black man’s impotence and self-negation. The scene reveals how there is a vehement denial to consider the African American woman as a subject. Contrastingly, she is held on a par with a mere object.

The experimentation of the school teacher in *Beloved*, on the Black woman is nothing but an instance of law of the jungle where an individual is denied dignity or self-respect. He orders his assistants to open Sethe’s back, and study her features. The school teacher strictly wants his students to note the animal and human characteristics of the Black woman separately.

Servility in the name of racism and gender bias has continued from generation to generation through denial of education. Most coloured men are not able to read or write as they are never exposed to education. Black women again have it worse because they are women. Women are believed to be weak and incompetent in comparison with men and denied equal opportunities. Equality of the sexes has remained only on paper. In so far as the plight of the Black women is concerned feminization is only a myth.
Sethe suffered a lot due to slavery. The cruel effects of slavery can be noticed by the words of Sethe: “The one I managed to have milk for and to get it to her even after they stole it; after they handled me like I was the cow, no, the goat, back behind the stable because it was too nasty to stay in with the horses” (BD 236).

The scars on Sethe’s back serve as another testament to her disfiguring and dehumanizing years as a slave. The ugly scar on her back is described as having the trunk, branches, leaves and blossoms of a chokecherry tree. Symbolically, the chokecherry tree signifies the physical and psychic suffering that Paul D shares with Sethe. The scars work as a metaphor for the way, that how the past tragedies affect the slaves psychologically, by haunting or menacing them throughout their life.

It is important to note how the practice of branding slaves came into existence. As soon as the slaves are brought out for sale, the ship’s surgeons would carefully examine them. Like animals, both Black men and women, if sound, are set aside and branded with “a hot iron on the breast (later it was more customary to brand on the shoulder) with the mark of the company or the individual trader, so as to prevent the natives from substituting slaves in poorer condition” (Dow 10). Beloved seems to expound the havoc wrought upon Black bodies under slavery. Most of the characters are ruthlessly branded with red hot iron. The circular scar under Sethe’s mother’s breast and Sethe’s back with the appearance of ‘a tree’ speaks volumes of the horrid experiences. Sethe is handled tyrannically by her racist masters whom she endures voicelessly. But Morrison renders a powerful voice by vividly bringing out the physical torment and agony of the African American characters.
In Morrison’s *Beloved* blacks are regarded as the personal property of white oppressors. If a parent is a slave to the master then the children also belong to them. The method of possession is similar to the possession of non-living things. Very often the black children are snatched away from their parents and are sold to others as slaves and forced into hard labour. Blacks are deprived of the togetherness and sanctity of a well-knit family. Even animals cling on to their young ones fondly but not a black woman. They are sold and sent to different places where they have to bear the brunt of injustice and discrimination.

African American women are discriminated against generally because of colour and particularly because of gender. The Blacks are considered to be of no importance and, therefore, not recognized as worthy enough to be human beings. According to the literary theorist, marginalization is “racial or social or class discrimination, political disenfranchisement, economic exploitation often approximating slavery and culturally sanctioned social segregation” (Leitch 101).

Group enjoying hegemony through systemized oppression, marginalize some communities. Notable among the groups are the Blacks, the Dalits and women. The African American women in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* are marginals who strive to possess selfhood in the American society dominated by racist whites. The source of this degradation is racism which makes the life of the black characters of the novel vulnerable and life for them becomes unbearable and destructive when it comes to the discourse of sexism. Very often the blacks suffer from want of an autonomous self.

The word ‘domination’ is closely related to marginalization. John B. Thompson defines domination as the condition “when particular agents or groups of agents are
endowed with power in a durable way which excludes other agents or groups of agents” (59). It is clear that domination is related to power. The whites enjoy unreasonable and unjustifiable power because of blind belief in myths. Consequently, the racists and the upper castes have acquired economic power with which they dominate the lesser privileged groups.

Along with racial struggle the dreadful system of oppression operating in an African woman’s life is patriarchal power. Morrison’s characters experience themselves as wounded or imprisoned not only by virtue of their colour but also by gender and class conflict within the American culture. The entire African American community is condemned to endless suffering, where the Black woman’s condition is much worse than the Black man’s. It is because “To be Black and female” is to be in “Double Jeopardy” (Beal 90). As she has the ability to do a man’s work the Black woman is both economically and sexually exploited. The racist’s aim is two fold – profit and pleasure.

In the brutal system of slavery, the African American woman’s condition is more pathetic than the Black man’s because of her blackness and femaleness and motherness. Constantly, she undergoes ill treatment from the white American slave owners, who very tactfully hold on to economic exploitation to earn more profit. Because of a Black woman’s ability to do man’s work and her extraordinary reproductive capacity, she is seen by her master as a significant profit making tool. According to Ashis Sengupta, “Miscegenation played a vital role in their relationship during the days of slavery. White mercenary planters saw profit in it: the children born out of such a sordid union would be their sole property” (90). The Blacks are helpless and inactive when exploited economically and sexually.
Morrison, in *Beloved* demonstrates the combination of the strength and constraints of a woman who is basically a mother and a black slave in a society which is divided in the name of racism and sexism. It deals with a mother struggling to save her children from a dreadful future. Morrison articulates the myriad problems faced mutely by a black woman.

The African American woman’s identity is invisible to the race conscious whites. In fact, they are immeasurably dehumanized by them. In *Beloved*, the racists limit the blacks by ignoring their humanity and equating them with non-human. Edward Said, a postcolonial critic, observes in *Orientalism*: “Since the white man, like the Orientalist, lived very close to the line of tension keeping the coloreds at bay, he felt it incumbent on him readily to define and redefine the domain he surveyed” (228). In keeping with this dominating strategy, the school teacher in Morrison’s *Beloved* instructs his nephews to study the black slaves in order to trace their ‘animal’ and ‘human’ characteristics.

The black woman is deprived of subjecthood and seen as a mere object. Sethe, for instance, is denied her human status by the school teacher who instructs: “No, no. That’s not the way. I told you to put her human characteristics on the left, her animal ones on the right. And don’t forget to line them up” (*BD* 193). In fact, the only writing done by the pupils of the school teacher is to list the features of the Black that resemble to a non-entity. Regarding this, Nancy Jesser states: “She is the udder they drink from and the sexual body they work their pleasures on - adjusting her characteristics whatever shape their fantasies demand” (qtd. in Gaur 53). Under the school teacher’s tutelage, the pupils learn to turn people into animals.
Morrison gives yet another instance to realize the dehumanized nature of whites. The school teacher identifies the black women with horses. Elaborately, he teaches his nephews how to handle them and he adamantly uses the term ‘creatures’ to denote them. Note the following gruesome explanation of the white experimenter to his students:

School teacher had chastised that nephew, telling him to think—just think—what would his own horse do if you beat it beyond the point of education … see what happened when you over beat creatures God had given you the responsibility of—the trouble it was, and the loss. (BD 149-150)

The school teacher thus dehumanizes Sethe, and part of that dehumanization arises from his refusal to look into her emotions or feelings. He is unable to encounter Sethe’s undeniable humanness and her status as a subject as opposed to an object. The animal theory of the school teacher finds echoes in Morrison’s fiction *The Bluest Eye* where Pauline Breedlove, a black woman is compared to a horse. For instance, the doctor tells a group of medical students about the pregnant Black woman, “… these here women you don’t have any trouble with. They deliver right away and with no pain. Just like horses” (BE 97).

Very often, the African American woman is restricted from having either autonomy or familial relationship. For example, in *Beloved*, Sethe remembers that slavery has denied her a relationship with her own mother and is determined to have a nurturing relationship with her own children. “The discourse of slavery” according to Fitzgerald, “privileges humanity, autonomy, and participations in a family by denying these values to slaves” (111).
Beloved repeatedly makes reference to the Middle Passage between Africa and North America. The slave trade is notorious for its dirty, crowded ships, into whose cellars Africans were forced to lie for many weeks. The slave’s voice is either reduced to silence in Anglo-American society or ignored as non-human. Morrison’s novel forcibly argues to recognize the existence of slavery in a nation that would prefer to forget that such a crime is ever committed.

Morrison exposed the racial prejudice against African Americans which results in the stunted growth of their genuine self. Their identity is in question and the racial tragedy is such that they are forced to endure the image imposed on them by the white authority. W.E.B. Dubois draws attention to the tragic aspects of the Black American in his celebrated book The Souls of Black Folk (1963). It is, he writes:

… a world which yields him no true self-conscious, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world … this double-consciousness, the sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others …. One ever feels the two-ness – an American, a Negro … two warring ideals on one dark body. (54)

The actual story of the novel is based on the factual account of a runaway slave from Kentucky named Margaret Garner. When she realizes she is about to be recaptured in accordance with the Fugitive Slave Law, she kills her child rather than allow it to return to a future of servitude. She was in history, in fact, convicted of escaping rather than murder. In the novel, Margaret Garner becomes Sethe, a fugitive slave. Hence Beloved is a calculated series of shocks and the novel is dedicated to the innumerable victims of American slavery.
Silence and breaking silence are the central issues of the novel. There is a debate through the novel about hiding or articulating the unmentionable histories of slavery and the community plays a role in this. *Beloved* is manifest history, the guilt and pain of slavery as it enters personal lives causing brutal, dehumanized actions in self-defence. That denied human right, such as Sethe, acts in a terrible fashion, but the guilt is slavery’s. “It was not a story to pass on” (*BD* 275), ends the novel. But it is crucial to pass on the tale in the shape of the novel, and let its horror undermine the ability to confront, live with and move on from memories of slavery and everyday racism. This is an empowering recognition for African Americans, for whites, and for Sethe herself.

Toni Morrison, like other Black women writers, is attempting to articulate “the muted voices of tale-telling women …” (Mori 20). Fortunately, the rich oral traditions of black culture preserved the sagas of story telling women and this helped history from sinking into oblivion. What Morrison does is to give her women the much denied centrality. Mori observes:

By placing a woman at the centre of her novels, she takes a historical approach in order to reconstruct African-American culture and history in slavery. Aiming at subverting a racial hierarchy and validating African American culture, she challenges a dualistic Western Civilization which has mutilated and debased African Americans physically and psychologically: right or wrong, black or white, the oppressors or the oppressed. African Americans have been subject to the harmful dichotomizing by race which has strongly restricted their behaviors and social and political participation. (21)
Black women writers have a rich black tradition to fall back because of their strong links with the ancestors. In her interview with McKay, Morrison sounds a note of caution and exhorts them not to dishonour this praiseworthy tradition when the interviewer raises her genuine doubts as to their connections with their ancestors.

... black women writers consistently look back to their mothers and grandmothers for the substance and authority in their voices, ... many white women writers say that they are inventing the authority for their voices pretty much from scratch in an effort to break the silence of Shakespeare’s sisters. Black women writers--having the example of authoritative mothers, aunts, grandmothers, great-grandmothers – have something special to contribute to the world. They have a distinctive and powerful artistic heritage. It is not white, and it is not male. (141)

*Beloved* is based on the want of power, a homeland and a language. Toni Morrison articulates these historical problems through the action of the novel. Language, the power to express oneself, is denied to the slave as Sixo realizes before he stops speaking altogether, “definitions belonged to the definers – not the defined” (*BD* 190).

In her novel *The Bluest Eye*, Toni Morrison graphically depicts the effects of the legacy of nineteenth-century classical racism for poor black people in the United States. The novel tells of how the daughter of a poor black family, Pecola Breedlove, internalizes white standards of beauty to the point where she goes mad. Her fervent wish for blue eyes comes to stand for her wish to escape the poor, unloving, racist environment in which she lives. For a long time, the mainstream white Western feminism paid scant attention to the question of race. Racism was seen as secondary to patriarchy and, at best,
the problem of non-white women. Many white women took a liberal, colour blind position which claimed not to see the difference or act upon it. It took a long, hard struggle by Toni Morrison to have racism included on the feminist agenda. The strong tendency of white women to disregard racism was an effect of white privilege—a point that women of colour were forced to make repeatedly: “As Third World women we clearly have different relationship to racism than white women, but all of us are born into an environment where racism exists. Racism affects all of our lives, but it is only white women who can ‘afford’ to remain oblivious to these effects. The rest of us have had it breathing or bleeding down our necks” (Essays from Sojourner’s First 20 Years 22).

The myth of racism is that white skin and blue eyes carry with it reason and virtue that whites are superior to Blacks. Votaries of white supremacy fail to notice that the lack of melanin pigments is the cause for whiteness. In the American society, Blacks are treated with aversion and contempt and are denied individuality. The assumption of many Europeans and Americans is that difference in externals such as skin colour, hair and other physical features between black Americans and white Americans signifies difference in intelligence and morality too. Such racial prejudice contributes to psychic and emotional problems. Often black men and women are not treated with any respect. In fact, racist Americans deprive the blacks of human rights and dignity and stamp them as non-human.

The basic myth of racism is that white skin colour brings with it cultural superiority, that the white is more intelligent and virtuous than the Black by the mere fact of being white .... Whiteness is thus automatically
equated with beauty and culture and Blackness with ugliness and savagery. (Sengupta 89-90)

Another key question in African American literature is who speaks for whom and whose voices are heard in discussions of Black’s issues. The question of voices is raised by Gayatri Spivak in her influential essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* in which she analyses “the relations between the discourses of the West and the possibility of speaking of (or for) the subaltern woman” (Spivak 271).

In *The Bluest Eye* and *Song of Solomon*, Morrison provides a voice to African American children, men, and women. In these two novels, she presents individuals trying to find their self-identity and their heritage within the community. Morrison demonstrates the effects of the traditional culture’s beliefs and values on African Americans. Morrison in *The Bluest Eye* provides a voice for the major characters, Claudia, Frieda, and Pecola, who are children between eleven and thirteen years old. The characters focus on a string of events that occurred at the Breedlove’s house before the story begins. When Morrison wrote this novel, very few novels provided a voice to children of any ethnic background.

Morrison’s first novel *The Bluest Eye* caused adequate response among critics because of its direct representation of the life and perceptions of a young Black girl, Pecola. It delivers a depressingly negative message in its investigation of the lived realities of racial prejudice. The damaging internalization of negative representations of beauty and Blackness is Toni Morrison’s major focus in this novel. Loss of identity, confusion and a devaluation of self emerge in Pecola’s tragic story. As a tale of a girl growing up, it contrasts with more conventional nineteenth century tales—*Jane Eyre* or *Oliver Twist* in which individuals develop and relate to the values of their society. Here,
Pecola’s development is one of loss and lack of self-worth. Morrison in this novel highlights the silencing and devaluing of Black people in American society, and the resulting pains and evils. Morrison shows us that one of the great losses for Black people is to internalize a version of themselves that makes them always seem lacking, just because of their colour. Everything around them weighed down both their body and mind and as a result their life became miserable. This pattern is concretized by the dictum, which is clearly expressed by Calvin Hernton: “If you are white you are all right; if you are brown you can stick around; but if you are black…get back” (143).

The idea that blue eyes are a necessity for beauty has been imprinted on Pecola. “If she looked different, beautiful, may be Cholly would be different, and Mrs. Breedlove too. May be they would say, ‘Why look at pretty eyed Pecola. We mustn’t do bad things in front of those pretty eyes’” (BE 34). Many people have helped imprint this ideal of beauty on her. They seem to think that because she is not beautiful, she is not worth anything except as the focal point of their mockery.

Here Morrison regards racism as a primary obstacle and a primary cause of the African’s oppression in the United States. She emphasizes that an exploitative economic system gives rise to racist ideology. She articulates that racism devastates the self-image of the African female in general and the African female child in particular. According to her, the African’s self-image is destroyed at an early age as a result of the ruling class’s promotion of its own standard of beauty: Long, stringy hair, preferably blond; keen nose, thin lips; and light eyes, preferably blue. By analogy, if the physical features of the Europeans are accepted as the standard of beauty, then the African must be ugly.
This is the type of logic that the Breedloves use to convince themselves of their ugliness:

They had looked about themselves and saw nothing to contradict the statement; saw, in fact, support for it leaning at them from every billboard, every movie, every glance. “Yes”, they had said. “You are right.” And they took the ugliness in their hands, threw it as a mantle over them, and went about the world with it. (BE 28)

Blacks crave for impossible white ideals that make them radical. The criticism is two edged—against the white majority who sets standards and expects every American, black or white to accept them against the black minority who tries to ape the white despite the incongruity that arises. The novel attempts to show the terrible consequences for blacks of internalizing the values of a white culture that both directly and indirectly rejects them. That Pecola craves for blue eyes is the fault of both the whites and the blacks. She becomes the victim of one after the other in a chain of black people in this novel, including her own mother and father, who have been trusted and perverted by the false, empty and often vicious standards of the white world. She is undermined psychologically by playing with toys suitable for white children and being made to admire white movie stars with standards of beauty. The psychological undermining is subtle and begins very early in life. Morrison dramatizes it in the episode where Pecola gazes admiringly at the blue eyes of Shirley Temple on a cup:

Frieda brought her four graham crackers on a saucer and some milk in a blue-and white Shirley Temple cup. She was a long time with the milk and gazed fondly at the silhouette of Shirley Temple’s dimpled face. (BE 12)
Morrison further says how Pecola “was fond of the Shirley Temple cup and took every opportunity to drink milk out of it just to handle and see sweet Shirley’s face” (*BE* 16).

Morrison uses this myth of the Shirley Temple persona of having blonde hair with blue eyes as the ideal beauty marks of traditional culture. The film industry, and Hollywood perpetuate the Shirley Temple persona, who is a child star that MGM turned into America’s little sweetheart and the ideal child. The traditional American culture completely bought into the Shirley Temple persona as being the ideal of that culture, and this myth is still present and perpetuated in the twenty-first century. Many of the commercial industries followed a similar pattern; for example, until recently the dolls for children all have had blonde hair and blue eyes and the commercialization of only these ‘ideal’ dolls excluded all other hair types, eye colour, and skin colour.

Frieda, Claudia and Pecola are different in their acceptance of this persona. Frieda and Pecola believe completely in the traditional values of beauty because they “had loving conversations about how cu-ute Shirley Temple was” (*BE* 13), showing that these girls had been taken in and consumed by the traditional values of beauty, promoting by their actions. Claudia tells the reader, “I couldn’t join them in their adoration because I hated Shirley” (*BE* 13). Through the girls’ different beliefs, Morrison shows how false myths such as the Shirley Temple persona can distort reality and affect those caught up in the illusion.

Morrison, through her conscious use of the impact of racism on the psyche of the African Americans, rouses them out of their complacency and shocks them into the recognition of various possibilities. Not only is she conscious of the many ways of portraying the issue of race, lest her novels become stereotypes; but also more
importantly the problem of race gets entwined with the problem of class and gender. It is this characteristic of her work that makes for its rich complexity and its compelling and continued interest.

Thus Morrison provides a voice to those who have been silenced through representing two systems of language--codes of recognition and imagined codes. The first of these is the “codes of recognition that are inherent in ‘inherent language’” (Peach 12-13). These codes are the “inherited Euro-American language that organizes and structures its culture’s relations with the world so as to exclude African-Americans” (Peach 13). By using the power of educational and social institutions, the patriarchal white culture utilizes these recognition codes to exclude anyone who is not a member of their group. One of these codes is the ‘white norms’ imposed upon the African Americans like the definition of beauty, and the norms for love and marriage.

Another code is embodied in the “white definition of blackness, which is associated with violence, poverty, dirt, and lack of education” (Peach 35). The narrator states: “Pecola knew them. They were the codes and touchstones of the world, capable of translation and possession” (BE 35-36). Through the narrator’s statement, Morrison presents the depth of the embodiment of these codes in society, the family, and school.

Morrison presents several levels of victimization through her concern “with the ideological nature of language” (Peach 84). The Ideology of language is the “staple of daily living, embodied in language and in social institutions such as the school, the family and the media” (Peach 35). Morrison’s quest takes an ethical stand against the traditional values of beauty in The Bluest Eye when the narrator states “the most destructive idea in the history of human thought” (BE 95) is the traditional conception of beauty. Claudia
makes several statements about the ideology of the community, “And all the time we knew that Maureen Peal was not the Enemy and not worthy of such intense hatred. The Thing to fear was the Thing that made her beautiful and not us” (BE 58). The Thing is the traditional culture’s ideology of physical beauty, which is blonde hair and blue eyes. In order to be beautiful, a person needed to have the ideal qualities, and if they do not have the ideal, the features are equated with ugliness. Claudia seems to be too aware of the ideology that is represented in the white dolls; even as a child, she just didn’t know what to call it, so she called it The Thing; later she calls it The Gaze. In this novel, “The Gaze is a function of patriarchal culture and has the effect of fetishizing and/or commodifying women” (Middleton xi). The Gaze reduces the individual to an object in someone else’s reality and takes away the individual’s sense of self and potential to be. Morrison dismantles the traditional value of beauty when Claudia disfigures and mangles the white dolls.

The ideological nature of language embodies the traditional values of beauty in objects in the characters’ worlds. One object used repeatedly is the mirror because it “represented only white standards of beauty” (Rigney 35). The narrator states: “Long hours she [Pecola] sat looking in the mirror, trying to discover the secret of ugliness, the ugliness that made her ignored or despised” (BE 34). Pecola carries her mirror everywhere because her mirror is a representation of a mirror into the human condition. Morrison’s novels themselves become a mirror that expresses the effect of unvoiced dominant ideology on the people. Morrison wants the traditional culture to see its true reflection in the mirrors, to see how the ideals of beauty affect and distort African Americans’ perception of themselves. By doing this, Morrison reclaims and reasserts the
value of African American culture in America and expresses the true dominant culture’s methods of oppression.

Morrison also uses American myths to demystify the traditional concept of beauty. In the opening sentence, the narrator provides three different physical structures of the myth of Dick and Jane:

Here is the house. It is green and white. It has a red door. It is very pretty. Here is the family. Mother, Father, Dick, and Jane live in the green-and-white house. They are very happy. See Jane. She has a red dress. She wants to play. Who will play with Jane? See the cat. It goes meow-meow. Come and play. Come play with Jane. The kitten will not play. See Mother. Mother is very nice. Mother, will you play with Jane? Mother laughs. Laugh, Mother, laugh. See Father. He is big and strong. Father, will you play with Jane? Father is smiling. Smile, Father, smile. See the dog. Bowwow goes the dog. Do you want to play with Jane? See the dog Run. Run, dog, run. Look, look. Here comes a friend. The friend will play with Jane. They will play a good game. Play, Jane, play. (BE 1)

The simple repetitive sentence structures and the simple vocabulary mimic the way the recognition and Utopian codes are presented in institutionalized reading programs so as to indoctrinate under the disguise of teaching reading.

Morrison casts three African American families in this Dick and Jane scenario. Maureen Peal’s family and Junior’s family represent the traditional ruling class. The second family is the MacTeer family--Claudia, Frieda, and their mother and father--who
represent the working class in the community. The MacTeer family does have a house to live in, which makes them better off than the Breedloves.

The Breedlove family - Pecola and Sammy and their parents, Cholly and Pauline--represent the exploited class. The family lives in an old storefront divided into the living room, the bedroom, the kitchen in the back, and a toilet bowl. The narrator refers to the family: “They lived there because they were poor and black” (BE 28). Many negative implications can be made about the family’s name. It suggests that the family should breed love, but, since Cholly impregnates his own daughter, the family, instead, breeds violence and self-destruction. Whatever Morrison’s intent with the name, she portrays the three African American families in terms of the traditional dominant culture’s mythology, but represents the reality of the economic and social class levels that exist even in America today. Through the juxtaposition of myth and reality, she underscores the impossible nature of the dominant ideology and exposes the hideous indoctrination methods that create a desire for the unattainable while representing it as the norm.

Claudia’s narration presents Pecola as being silenced and victimized by her environment on several layers. On the first level, Pecola is physically and mentally victimized by her father at home. A home is supposed to be a safe place for a person, but not in this novel. In the very beginning of the story the narrator states: “Pecola was having her father’s baby” (BE 3). This makes it perfectly clear that her father raped her, the worst thing that her father could do to her, but she does not realize this. The only reference she makes to the event is when Pecola’s ‘imaginary friend’ states: “That was horrible, wasn’t it? (BE 159), Pecola replies, “Yes” (BE 159). The narrator tells the reader that Pecola’s father, Cholly, saw his actions as an act of love, which suggests that
insanity is not genetic, but environmental because of Pecola’s insanity at the end. Her insanity can be linked to this horrible event and others that occurred to her.

The narrator tells the reader that Pecola’s home life with her mother and father consisted of alcohol and fights. When Pecola is talking about her father and mother, she states: “All he did was get drunk and beat her up” (BE 156). When Pecola’s mother, Pauline remembers the past, she states: “Cholly commenced to getting meaner and meaner and wanted to fight me all of the time” (BE 92). Pauline “sustains the misery of some silent mothers” (BE 47) because she acts as though nothing has happened and does not do anything about the tragedy. During Pecola’s conversation with her ‘imaginary friend’ she states: “She didn’t even believe me when I told her” (BE 158). When Pecola went to Pauline’s work to get the laundry, she spilled the pie on the floor and Pauline violently abused Pecola in front of Claudia and Frieda. The little girl that lives in the house where Pauline cooks asks her who Pecola is. Pauline answers, “Don’t worry none” (BE 85), which provides more evidence she apparently does not care about Pecola. Pecola surmised that the reason she is abused at home and ridiculed at school is that she is African American, which she feels the community equates with ugliness.

Pecola is “victimized into insanity” (Bjork 163) by the traditional values of beauty. Morrison does not provide any other path or choice for Pecola except insanity, which is parallel to the African Americans’ lack of choices in traditional American culture. In an interview, Morrison states: “Pecola surrendered completely to the ‘master narrative’ of traditional American literature. There is no way for her back into society. She can only escape into fantasy and to madness” (Moyers 262). Pecola’s surrender to
the victimization reflects some of the African Americans who surrender completely to the traditional beliefs and values such as buying the ‘ideal’ dolls.

At the end of the novel, the only thing that is changed is Pecola’s way of seeing and interpreting the events around her. Pecola believes that “only a miracle could relieve her” (BE 35) of her home life and make things different for her and her family; so she prays for a ‘miracle,’ the miracle of blue eyes. She believes that if her eyes are blue, “she herself would be different” (BE 34). Pecola believes that having blue eyes would make her beautiful and lovable, which is why she prays for blue eyes.

Pecola wants nothing more than to have her family love her and to be liked by school friends. These rather ordinary ambitions, however, are beyond Pecola’s reach because of the traditional culture. But after Soaphead’s prophecy comes true, Pecola changes her way of seeing and interpreting the events around her.

Pecola is in the position at the end of the novel to belong to the community. According to Yvonne Atkinson, “Pecola could gain entrance to her community by practicing the communal rules of discourse, but she did not learn these rules at home and so she is lost” (17). The reason for Pecola not learning anything at home and possibly in school is that the adults “issue orders without providing information” (BE 5) to the children. The children are unable to learn because they have not been shown how to learn or to accomplish self-identity within the community or at home. The community cannot teach the young people how to belong because it is still learning how to become a community.

On a second level, Pecola is victimized by some of the people in the community. The community stigmatized and labelled Pecola because her father raped her and she had
his baby. A few direct incidents show Pecola being tormented by other kids at school and by other people in the community. One incident occurs after school: “A group of boys was circling and holding at bay a victim, Pecola Breedlove” (BE 50). Pecola becomes a scapegoat for ugliness in these boys’ eyes, when the narrator states: “They dance a macabre ballet around the victim, whom, for their own sake, they were prepared to sacrifice to the flaming pit” (BE 50). Many of the children treat Pecola this way because she is African American and poor.

Junior is another schoolmate who victimizes Pecola. He invites her to come and play with him; then he lures her into his house on the pretense of showing her his cat. Junior throws his scared cat in Pecola’s face and then blames the cat’s injuries on her. Junior’s mother, Geraldine reacts irrationally to Pecola, stating, “Get out. You nasty little black bitch. Get out of my house” (BE 72). Pecola feels this happened because she does not have blue eyes and she is African American. This scene is a reflection of the Dick and Jane story told at the beginning of the text. The children playing, the cat, and the mother are similar to the Dick and Jane myth, but the outcome is not. Pecola did not have fun playing in the ideal Dick and Jane house; in fact, she was terrorized by Junior and he “was laughing and running around the room” (BE 70).

Pecola did not find a safe place at home or in the outside world, so she retreated into the world in her mind. The reader learns at the beginning of the novel that Pecola is “a girl who had no place to go” (BE 11). In an interview, Morrison reflects on why Pecola is in the position that she is at the end of the novel:

She had no exits, no one to help her. She was isolated. She was manipulated. She was despised. Those are classic causes of disassociated
personalities. The people who don’t live happily ever after are the ones who are silenced and those were the stories I wanted to tell. (Interviews with Toni Morrison)

This explains why Morrison did not leave Pecola any other path or options and why she uses non-traditional narratives. Pecola is a symbol of all the African Americans who have no options in traditional American culture.

Morrison’s narrative techniques provide a voice to African-American children and women. Claudia narrates the story from the point of view of an adult woman looking back into her past, and Morrison as an omniscient narrator provides inner details of the characters that Claudia cannot. Through her narrative techniques, Morrison presents the ideology of the traditional culture’s value of beauty as being destructive and oppressing for African Americans’ culture. The African American child is the most affected by the commercialization of the Shirley Temple persona in America. The effect upon Pecola is insanity and the effect upon Claudia is the loss of her innocence from observing the events that had happened to Pecola. Morrison asks the reader to identify with Claudia, to seize the moment to reject the destructive monolithic definition of beauty promoted by the dominant culture, to take responsibility for freeing all those who can never conform to those standards, and to establish inclusive conceptions of beauty that will provide soil for all the flowers to grow and flourish.

Morrison articulates the problematic and the pathetic life of African American women in the white and male dominated American atmosphere. She presents a vivid picture of how the black men are arrogant sexual exploiters of black women. At the Sweet Home the absence of young black women seems to have made them crazy.
However, for them rape appears to be the only gift of life. Black men are obsessed with the thought of women. In the slave house, Sethe is expected to obey and be submissive to her racial masters as well as black men. In Morrison’s novel *The Bluest Eye* the narrator referring to the plight of the black women observes that, everything in “the world is in a position to give them orders.” White woman said, “Do this.” White children said, “Give me that.” White men said, “Come here.” Black men said, “Lay down.” (*BE* 108). The black women have been doubly oppressed.

Morrison portrays poignant scenes of cruelties the Blacks are forced to endure for generations. Morrison’s novels present facets in the lives of the Blacks who are denied humanity and identity. It is quite evident that the black women, in addition to being cruelly treated by the Whites because they belong to an inferior race, also suffer and occupy a marginal position in the society because they are women. Emancipation of women, no matter where she lives, is a distant dream.

Character after character is smothered in Toni Morrison’s novels and the contours of oppression take varied forms. In *Jazz* Violet’s violent self is a consequence of Joe’s infidelity. And her maternal need for a cradle song drives her to “street-sitting” (*JZ* 17). Violet pins the responsibility for her tragedy to Dorcas who has lured him from her nest.

Morrison vehemently critiques the passivity of women which allows men to control and dictate submission. Female autonomy has to be wrested from the men. Women have to be on guard so as not to be worn down by men. The roots of oppression has made inroads into Violet’s perception and made her vision myopic.
That is why she shifts the blame to Dorcas:

“Women”, answers Violet. “Women wear me down. No man ever wore me down to nothing. It’s these little hungry girls acting like women. Not content with boys their own age, no, they want somebody old enough to be their father. Switching round with lipstick, see-through stockings, dresses up to their you-know-what ….” (JZ 14)

Everywhere, conquered people have suffered humiliation. But no other people on Earth suffered and continue to suffer such cruel humiliation of social and cultural Segregation sanctioned by economic and political exploitation as African Americans. Morrison’s novels are considered as the authentic expression of the suffering masses and classes.

In the Song of Solomon, Morrison uses Milkman’s journey, the characters’ names, and identity to provide a voice for the silenced middle class African American male. The protagonist, Macon [Milkman] Dead III, is on a quest to find his self-identity and family’s history because his present life is unsatisfying to him. The narrator states: “He was bored. Everybody bored him. The city was boring” (SS 107). This leads him on his quest for his family’s history and heritage because he does not want to live the life that his father and mother live. The narrator states: “He just wanted to beat a path away from his parents’ past, which is also their present and which is threatening to become his present as well” (SS 180). This leads to the many levels of Milkman’s search for his self identity and family heritage.
First, on the surface, Milkman searches for his self-identity and background within his community on Lake Superior, then in Danville, Pennsylvania, and Shalimar, Virginia. This novel is different from her other novels because it is narrated from a male character’s perspective, but he questions his self-identity as the female characters do. The narrator states: “He wondered if there was anyone in the world who liked him. Liked him for himself alone” (SS 79). This statement represents the humanistic quality, and it suggests that all people want to be liked for who they are. Milkman came to terms with his individual identity and history because he realizes that “there was nothing he could do about it. . . . You can’t do the past over” (SS 76). The concept of knowing the past in order to be able to forget the past and move into the future is presented in all of Morrison’s novels.

Centuries of female oppression across the globe makes it difficult for men to acknowledge the sources of life contained in femininity. Men have always believed that womanhood is a source of evil, which had the sanction of religions and traditions. Morrison in this novel raises her voice against female oppression. Macon Dead embodies all the deadly and dreadful aspects of a patriarchal culture. In Macon Dead’s male dominated house, everyone suffers some kind of diminishment, until Corinthians and Milkman dare to create a life of their own. Those who remain in the home lead a very sterile existence of oppression. Oppression reaches its highest peak when the oppressed begin to feel that being oppressed is the most natural thing in life. Oppression is camouflaged as nurturance. Ruth’s oppression has gone deep into her psyche that she is incapable of any aggression whatsoever. Her oppression begins even before her marriage,
in her own home, by her own father. Her father overshadowed her to such an extent that she grew up without any social links which compressed her into smallness.

Ruth painfully recalls her depressing days in her home and among her schoolmates:

...because the fact is that I am a small woman. I don’t mean little; I mean small, and I’m small because I was pressed small. I lived in a great big house that pressed me into a small package. I had no friends, only school mates who wanted to touch my dresses and my white silk stockings. But I didn’t think I’d ever need a friend because I had him. I was small, but he was big. (SS 124)

That she should be suppressed even by her own son Milkman speaks of the magnitude of women’s enslavement at home. Ruth is terribly pained. Indeed, her life presents a very dismal spectacle. One’s own son oppressing the mother is the story of women in general because in the family nursery it is the father who initiates and encourages the process:

When his father told him about Ruth, he joined him in despising her, but he felt put upon; felt as though some burden had been given to him and that he didn’t deserve it. None of that was his fault, and he didn’t want to have to think or be or do something about any of it. (SS 120)

Morrison takes up cudgels against Macon Dead who compresses Ruth Dead’s domestic life to such an extent that this woman who is the daughter of first coloured doctor of the town spends her days digging the earth, planting bulbs at the backyard of her house.
It is not only Ruth Foster who is compressed small, but also her daughters. They embody the ugly facets of oppressed womanhood. In the very beginning of the novel the reader’s attention is drawn to Ruth spilling the artificial roses from the peck basket. The attention it got as well as the attention the pregnant Ruth’s moans did not get are deliberate narrative devices, underscoring the inhumanity shown to African American women in general especially when she carries within her womb the seed of life. The total disregard and insensitivity to the birth pangs of a helpless woman is contrasted with the undue significance attached to an inanimate thing namely the artificial roses. “The rose-petal scramble got a lot of attention, but the pregnant lady’s moans did not” (SS 5).

Like the artificial roses, Black women’s lives too have become sterile robbing them of any degree of naturalness and spontaneity. For being natural is so opposed to being artificial. Just like the artificial roses, women’s oppression too goes against the grain. She is hampered from making original contribution to life. Luce Irigaray observes: The ‘feminine’ is always described in terms of deficiency or atrophy, as the other side of the sex that alone holds a monopoly on value: the male sex” (69).

The liberality with which men sucked out the sanity of women finds repeated expressions in Morrison’s novels and it is a missile attack on men. The immunity with which men oppressed women has a universal character about it. The Black women’s bodies bore physical torture, sexual exploitation and psychological denigration and denuding. They were ruthlessly robbed of their self and self-worth and it created deep fissures in their psyche. Morrison condemns the tendency of men to keep women on the edge of life. Keeping them on the “hem” is dangerous not only for her but for him too. It surely bounces back to the offender.
The novel *Tar Baby* is totally different from the other novels of Toni Morrison. Because the novel throws light on the racial discrimination reflected in the Caribbean and American society and how the Blacks suffer under the Whites because they considered black people as cursed by God. *Tar Baby* presents the current social world as a barely changed continuation of historically unjust social and economic structures. In a reprise of European invasion and domination of the Americans, the novel shows that only whites and their servants live on this Caribbean island. The strong continuity between past and present is explicit.

Like a slave fleeing without a pass, Son is a fugitive without a passport. Although European domination and African slavery provide the underlying structure for social interaction, personal identity is more complex than the roles of master and slave.

Characters may share positions in one or two of the power structures yet be widely separated by their experience in another. Margaret and Jadine, for example, share gender and class, but not race. Thus, as unusually beautiful women, and as hangers on to the upper class, Margaret and Jadine can initially agree to reject Son as lower class. Margaret makes Jadine uncomfortable when she adds racial stereotypes by calling him a gorilla. In fact, Jadine frequently experiences discomfort “...with the way Margaret stirred her into blackening up or universalling out, always alluding to or ferreting out what she believed were social characteristics. She ended by resisting both…” (*TB* 64).

Although any single aspect of identity—gender, race or class—may be dominant at onetime, the others do not vanish. Jadine is simultaneously female and black, and attached to the upper class. In another instance of overlapping identities, Valerian and Son laugh over “three colored whores who went to heaven” (*TB* 148). Here, their being
male matters more than any other factor. Almost always, however, race and class separate them, as when Valerian thinks of the Isle’s phantom warriors as Europeans and Son thinks of them as Africans.

In *Tar Baby* which deals with the sufferings of the African American people, Toni Morrison articulates what it means to be black and the influences of the past on the present as well as what is the relationship that a black person has to his/her community. Each of the black characters in this novel has formed a conception of their “blackness” which varies as well as often conflicts with other characters. *Tar Baby* is a novel about the many ways to be ‘black’. The differences between urban and rural blacks as well as class differences create misunderstandings among the black characters.

With *Tar Baby*, Morrison traces the struggle of an African American woman to find and keep her identity and her own individuality despite the efforts of her lover, who would domesticate her like the ladies of his childhood, her mother figure, who would chain her to the past, and her white, wealthy patron, who would subtly bind her to his world-view.

In *Tar Baby*, Morrison alludes to the history of sugar, a story at the centre of the economic and social relations in Valerian’s house and at the centre of colonization and enslavement in the America. In her novels, the marked absence of characters and histories is further emphasized by reference to the silences surrounding individual lives and collective histories, to the stories of horror and suffering that have not been told and can hardly be articulated or grasped in language – what Morrison calls the “unspeakable things unspoken” (1).
Stuart Hall, in this regard, writes:

Everything that can be spoken is on the ground of the enormous voices that have not, or cannot yet be heard through narrative absences, Morrison calls attention to these other absences, and she incites readers to fill the textual and historical absences with knowledge and imagination. (48)

Most critics discuss “tar” in Morrison’s novel in relation to the tar baby tale. In a common version of the tale, a white farmer creates a tar baby to catch Brer Rabbit. Brer Rabbit tries to speak to the tar baby, but he is answered by silence, so he hits it and gets caught in the tar. When the farmer gets hold of him, Brer Rabbit tricks the farmer into throwing him into the briar patch, his home and safety. In most readings of Tar Baby, Brer Rabbit is associated with black people struggling against white domination, and the tar baby is a deception created by white society that compels black people’s complicity and entrapment. ‘Tar Baby’ and ‘tar’ represent white constructions of blackness in general. But in Tar Baby, there is no safety, no briar patch, and no place outside of white ideology for characters or readers.

Son represents Morrison’s ideas about black art; black art exposes the oppression and suffering hidden beneath the façade of sweetness and light and articulates the relationship between cultural and economic power. Morrison asserts her desire to make visible what is invisible in representations of race. Blackness is a revelation beyond the visible, a move from blindness to insight, a form of vision usually accessible only to the oppressed who see through and beyond the reality constructed by dominant ideology.

Toni Morrison’s works are concerned with African American people and their culture. Her writing focuses attention on the predicament of black women and their
double-eyed persecution, sexism and racism. The Blacks lament as though in anguish and anger. Their problem was always a cry in the wilderness. As Toni Morrison’s works embody the personal experiences of African Americans, their sufferings and miseries, their hopes and dreams, they are truly considered the ‘Voice of the Voiceless’. Through her works, she attempted to establish a new paradigm of justice totally the opposite of the unjust social structures that prevailed in the American society

Morrison’s *Sula* concentrates on an unconventional black woman, Sula Peace, whose life of unlimited social and sexual experiment is unusual, outrageous, and even evil. Morrison here explores how black people accept evil as a part of their lives, and do not feel that they need to destroy it, as white people do. They have a different concept of the ‘Other’ – that which is socially outcast – perhaps because they have been outcast in a predominantly white society. She says:

> Black people never annihilate evil. They don’t run it out of their neighbourhoods, chop it up, or burn it. They don’t have witch hangings. They accept it. It’s almost like a fourth dimension in their lives. They have to protect themselves from evil, of course, but they don’t have the puritanical thing which says if you see a witch, then burn it. (Taylor-Guthrie 172)

White people’s reaction to something that is alien to them is to destroy it. That’s why they have to say black people are worthless and ugly.

*Sula*, defined by Morrison as a ‘classic type of evil force’ is a pariah figure, and the black community is also like a pariah community living apart from others. Sula also represents the community and its conscience. Evil is a fact of life, part of them. In *Sula,*
through investigating the pariah, Morrison investigates the social forces which create one person or a group (Black Americans, women, etc.) as pariahs and as ‘Others’. By exposing this, perhaps we could learn how not to Otherize and blame.

Toni Morrison’s novels have examined the general socio-psychic interaction with reference to black reality in America. The wounded psyche under white duress is perhaps the strongest theme of Morrison’s novels. She shows us the way black people feel psychically injured and their wounded psyche works on their behaviour in its various forms.

Toni Morrison’s novels portray the complexity of how Black people behave under the pressure of the White. She has produced some of the most intense studies of the strains that a madness inducing white society puts on its black members in America. The social history found in her novel is a history of daily inescapable assault by a world, which denies minimum dignity to the blacks. In the words of the critic Davis:

White brutality and insensitivity are part of the environment the black characters must struggle with but they are most often conditions, institutionalized and often anonymous, rather than events with ritualistic over-tones. (325)

This allows Morrison to focus attention not on the white characters’ forcing direct authority, but on the black characters’ troubled psyche and its effect on their behaviour within the context of oppression.

In Sula, Morrison presents the trauma of black life. Here, she narrates events in the black community from 1919 to 1965. She universalizes oppression where whites oppress blacks; blacks torment blacks, women against women, parents to their children,
an endless picture of the harrowing black’s life. It is a grotesque picture of colonization taking place at various levels—semantic, political, economical, cultural and of the mind. Not only the land but also the landscape of the mind has been appropriated.

The first chapter of the novel with no title is symbolic of the blacks with no names and titles. There is an absolute negation of the blacks by whites. *Sula* is an embodiment of catastrophic society, although lives go; although there are births and deaths; children and churches, what is missing is a spirit within the community that brings them any joy or temporary blessing or hope that comes from internal faith. They have lost touch with their African selves; instead, mere caricatures of family. Men who have been driven mad with desire are the centre of the community. In this spiritual Bottom land there is no hope of recovery, and that is why they need a day of Suicide. It is important to underscore that this community is a caricature. Morrison’s aim in presenting the community is to make us understand the conditions, when a spiritually empty civilization like the West is responsible for the evolution of a culture.

Toni Morrison places the story of oppression in the context of historical World War I by giving the title 1919. The political system demanded their military service and denied them citizenship through civilian lives of poverty and terror. Shadrack is the victim of the white’s exploitation of the Black Youth in the war. He is just a twenty-two years old “motherless child”. His family is a mystery not only to reader, but also to other residents of the Bottom. Morrison characterizes him with complex irony; Shadrack is a “long, long way from his home,” (*Sula* 11) whether that home is understood to be Africa or an America that would embrace him as her child.
In fact, Shadrack has no nation to defend:

… he didn’t even know who or what he was… with no past, no language, no tribe, no source, no address book, no comb, no pencil, no clock, no pocket handkerchief, no rug, no bed, no can opener, no faded post card, no soap, no key, no tobacco pouch, no soiled underwear and nothing nothing nothing to do… (Sula 12)

A catalogue of “no’s” string together highlighting Shadrack’s unimaginable sufferings. He is terrified that death may happen unexpectedly. He commemorates National Suicide Day every year to compartmentalize his fear of death. Every January third, Shadrack marches through town ringing a cowbell and carrying a hangman’s rope. The residents are disturbed at first, but eventually National Suicide Day infiltrates the consciousness of the community, becoming a part of the routine of their lives. Everyday was a suicidal experience for the blacks.

Eva’s only son, another character with the effects of the war is Plum. Like Shadrack, Plum seems to have suffered a psychic war injury. His silence and ever deeper withdrawal into drug induced euphoria finally spur Eva into action of killing him. Thus Plum and Shadrack become casualties in a war that brings African Americans no gain whatsoever.

The novel carries the theme of dual oppression. In their effort to run after and adapt the value system of whites, the blacks suffer intolerable psychological trauma. Nel’s mother Helene dons the garb of white middle class respectability and looks down on her own kind. She enters the coach with her daughter and opens the door marked “COLORED ONLY.” Despite the splendour of her clothes, she is insulted and humiliated
by the white conductor on the train. She inadvertently gives her approval to biased racist authority inciting the anger and hatred of the other passengers. Her effort to placate and please the rude conductor only results in failure. Helene tries desperately to maintain composure but her dazzling smile has a hallow, disturbing implication.

Helene’s daughter Nel also faces hardships in the hands of the whites. Nel was twelve in 1922 while she was studying in Garfield School. On her way to school, a group of Irish Catholic boys begins to harass black children: “These particular boys caught Nel once, and pushed her from hand to hand until they grew tired of the frightened helpless face” (*Sula* 54). After Nel falls victim to their bullying, she and Sula avoid them by taking a circuitous route home from school.

All the women characters of Morrison fall a victim to the cruel hands of the society. They experience an endless agony of suffering through life for some cause or the other. The black women living in Africa and America faced many problems, such as racism, sexism, classicism etc., For years and years their problems were going on increasing. The black women find themselves in their early life burdened by family and responsibilities. They face traumatic moments in life as blacks, females and children.

Owing to slave society, stable women-men relationship was not possible. Men found it more difficult to get jobs. The black man is thus depicted as a weak man who is incapable of living with dignity and respect. The patriarchal system is a reversal of weakness, a fear being changed to power, superiority and dominance. Poverty compelled woman to look for a job in the world outside and assume the role of “provider”. The black man began to see her as a loose woman. The entire African American community was condemned to endless suffering, yet the black women’s condition was much worse
than the black man’s because, in the words of Beal, “To be Black and Female” was to be in “Double Jeopardy” (90).

In *Sula*, Morrison depicts the quest of a female protagonist, Sula, for creating her own self and coming to terms with her identity as a black woman. Morrison demonstrates the exploitation and difficulties that black women face when they try to explore different aspects of their self.

In the character of Eva Peace, Toni Morrison depicts this exploitation that brings tears in one’s eyes. When her husband BoyBoy deserts Eva, she exhibits a kind of abnormality. “It hit her like a sledge hammer, and it was then that she knew what to feel. A liquid trail of hate flooded in her chest” (*Sula* 36). She lays her leg on the railroad tracks for the train to run over in order to get insurance money to take care of her family. When one considers the horrors of that act and the accompanying pain that Eva underwent in order that she and her family could survive, it is highly conceivable that she could sufficiently disorient herself to do anything else that she felt necessary.

All Sula experienced is a repeated rejection and brutalization. Even more chillingly her parents, never having experienced nurturing love, do not know how to love. They cannot give their children a sense of worth, for they have none of their own. This predicament of her parents is also the outcome of racial injustice. There are many incidents, which hurt her into feelings of isolation and pain. Cleage asserts:

> Men are taught that women are inferior, unworthy of their respect, subject to their whim and are present on earth for their sexual pleasure and the bearing and mothering of their children. (Pearl_Cleage)
Sula is frightening because racial and sexual circumstances have determined that she will have no way of expressing her brilliant inner fire, yet she absolutely refuses to settle for the ‘coloured’ woman’s lot of marriage, child raising, labour and pain. The people of the Bottom hate Sula for good reasons because she is a living criticism of their dreadful lives of resignation.

Morrison provides good examples of a special kind of violence, which emerges from the inability to express love in a positive way. She explores how each member of the family fails to love each other because they live behind a ‘mask’. Their ‘conviction’ distorts a natural relationship between the members of the family. Their relation becomes strained because their priority for other things in life weakens their ability to express their love for each other. Owing to a sense of social inadequacy and damaged psyche they do not have any sense of goal in life. Consequently, the breakdown of communication results in heavy drinking and domestic violence.

Towards the end of the novel, just before the outbreak of World War II, Bottom, once a living viable entity, collapses under the weight of economic need and the encroachment of an ever-greedy white world. The novel does not end in 1941, but in 1965, historically considered a period of great change and social upheaval. Historians see it as progress but Morrison recognizes this only as an exchange of one set of values for another. Black Bottomites, having moved in to the white community, relinquish family, community and tradition for the almighty dollar. Young people had “growed up… with the cash-register keys around their necks” (Sula 163). The material poverty of Bottom residents becomes the spiritual dearth of integrated blacks. Reflecting the unending
nature of black oppression and confusion, Nel’s final cry at the end of *Sula*: “… it had no bottom and it had no top, just circles and circles of sorrow” (*Sula* 174).

From Morrison’s viewpoint, the greatest tragedy of the Bottom is neither the physical collapse of the community, nor the hardships suffered by the Bottom-dwellers as a result of bigotry. Rather, she condemns the apathy that allows human beings to go zombie-like through life, without knowing who they are. She admonishes the readers through characters who vegetate and live a whole time without seeking a positive meaning for life.

A close analysis of Morrison’s characters in *Sula* reveals how white standards of beauty and acceptance have instilled an inferiority complex in the minds of the blacks. Black men and black women have internalized the racist and sexist attitudes of the white capitalist society that says that one’s value as a man is determined by one’s work and by that work’s economic rewards, including ownership of a woman and children and that one’s value as a woman is determined by one’s ability to attract a man and then to provide that man with children. In the novel, Sula becomes a symbol of all that is corrupting and the people of the Bottom forget their true enemy—namely racial discrimination whereby they are themselves marginalized in the capitalist world. White supremacy was maintained at the cost of subjugation, colonization and categorical dehumanization.

The concept of Afro-American womanhood is quite complex, rooted as it is in the socio-historical factors, which shaped the black woman. Thus African American womanhood becomes a ‘battleground for racist and sexist ideology’. In American society, the black women had to fight her own battle and also bear the rage of her black man.
Toni Morrison, with an acute social consciousness and racial awareness, directs the blacks and black women to safeguard their black Identity against all odds. It is the sum total of African cultural values. It indicates and exalts Black heritage. It is very essential for the blacks to accept themselves.

Morrison is essentially an explorer of the black experience and the interpreter of the black life that is uprooted from the native soil and grafted to an alien culture. Morrison’s mission in literature is to project and highlight the problematic inherent in African American life and social structure. She has been successful in putting across that African Americans are not a marginal class but are as important to the American mainstream as the settlers. With a distinctive style and technique of her own, she has portrayed the maladies of African American life, especially that of the African American female in *Paradise*.

*Paradise* is a story where African American women of various ages and backgrounds find freedom and happiness in isolation from a racial and sexually oppressive society in a Convent in Oklahoma, far away from everywhere. But unfortunately, their paradise is short-lived. The dominant patriarchal society of Ruby does not allow for a ‘Herland’ to exist. The Convent threatens Ruby’s basic power structure and questions its dominance. Hence, it is out to extinguish this paradise before the concept of this kind of freedom can contaminate its hegemony.

Toni Morrison in *Paradise* successfully articulates the glaring problems of the African American women who are haunted and hunted by a discriminating and oppressive society. Western cultural and religious values fail to give an alternative to these women living in the convent. Convent is the symbol of staunch Christianity, yet the
pagan rituals conducted inside the convent do not seem like blasphemy because it helps to calm the turbulent spirit of the inmates.

The problems of the African American women seem more glaring and stark as we are taken in by the language and images through which Morrison depicts the problematics. She goes beyond the depiction of racial and sexual oppression in *Paradise*. In *Paradise*, female domination is used as a tactic to suppress. The form of domination that occurs most often in the town of Ruby is the silencing of its women. By keeping the women silent, they are keeping them powerless. Women in Ruby were not given a voice and were not included on the majority of the decisions that were made in the town.

In addition to keeping the women from using their own voices, the male dominators of Ruby speak down to and about women. The descriptions that the men of Ruby use when they speak of women are degrading and condescending. Steward Morgan is the most vocally misogynistic of the Ruby men. While in the Convent, during the attack he criticizes the women in the Convent, and insults all women. Morrison tells us that Steward thinks "what ... could do this to women? How can their plain brains think up such things ...?") (*Paradise* 8). He is perplexed by the idea that a woman could conceive such a thing. Women in the town of Ruby were expected to look and act in a certain way, one that was mild and non offensive to the men: "the women of Ruby did not powder their faces and they wore no harlot's perfume" (*Paradise* 143). They were not to challenge the male authority that ruled the town. Even Steward's own wife is not included in the events that take place in Ruby. Dovey Morgan comments on how no one asked her opinion about the words on the Oven and what she thought it should say. It is stated that
"they were just women, and what they said was easily ignored by good brave men on their way to paradise" *(Paradise 201-202)*. The thought and ideas of women were simply cast aside as insignificant and trifle ideas.

The power that the women in *Paradise* have is given to them by the men in their lives. The men in the town have an idealized perception of women and their roles in society. The male desire to silence women does not simply apply to the women of Ruby, but in all women that they perceive as a threat to their perfect existence. It is this desire that motivates the brutal attack on the Convent. For the men, the attack is necessary:

Silencing these women provides an outlet for the anger that the townspeople have for their own static lifestyle as they deny and cover over Ruby's limitation. These women have seen the people of Ruby at their weakest, as adulterers, drunks, liars, would-be murderers of unborn children, and men expressing emotional needs as sexual desires not fulfilled or endorsed by their belief system and rigid code of behaviour. *(Romero 418)*

The knowledge of the women at the Convent has made them dangerous. Dangerous because they have healed the wounds that have kept them silent. They have overcome through their relationship. The women at the Convent have gained a voice through Morrison, as explained by Collins: “...black women's journeys often involve 'the transformation of silence into language and action'” *(Collins 105)*.

Speaking out against history that silences you and establishing the worth of your own identity is a major issue in Black women’s writing. By exploring different individuals as part of different communities in all their variety, at different points in
history, Toni Morrison can fill in everyone’s knowledge and understanding of, and appreciation and empathy with the diverse lives of African Americans. These insights lead us to appreciate her works in terms of how the Blacks experienced and perceived their lives.

Writing seems to be the answer for Toni Morrison as well as for many of the black women writers who, through their protagonists and in a dialectical fashion, attempt to uncover and discover the sites of oppression and repression while, simultaneously, creating a safe space for themselves. Toni Morrison wants her writing to bring about some change in the lives of poor children, women and people of colour. Writing that is born from real human beings and returns to them liberatory and useful: this is Toni Morrison’s solution for what she and other black women writers see as the problem with detached, objective writing.

When majority is marginalized socially, physically and psychologically and compressed in to a little area, it becomes minority. The basic struggle for every human being is the quest for a fuller humanity and their own dignity. The people who are considered marginals in American society are expected and even forced to find their recognition in conforming to prescribed roles and thus they are made powerless. The opportunities and avenues available to African Americans for voicing their grievances and agonies are very few. Through the works of Toni Morrison, these African Americans have now appeared as ‘speaking objects.’ The insatiable quest of the human soul for identity, and in the process, for emancipation and empowerment is the inescapable predominant feature of African Americans. These dynamic Blacks have commotion in their inner minds and it takes them towards revolt. Their revolt is not person-centred but
society-centred. The victimized African Americans rebelled against the oppressive structures. Hence their suffering, viz., namely, pain, agony, shame, loneliness, helplessness, hopelessness, anger, lament and their protest have contributed to the revolutionary situations for emancipation of the victims. Therefore, the suffering experience of African Americans is not just sources for the struggles but also the sources of creativity and energy to proceed in the process of the transformation of the personality. It is the emotional basis for the establishment of a just society, which is free from caste, gender, racial and cultural oppression and exploitation.

The most important truth one needs to understand is that liberation of the oppressed is possible only when the oppressed make up their mind to participate in the struggles against their oppressors. Hence the next chapter portrays the protest and the explosion of the repressed African Americans against the matrix of oppressions such as racism, classicism and sexism. Toni Morrison’s portrayal of protest is remarkable. One can find that she has portrayed the African Americans carving a space for themselves and shaping history with their determined struggles. This is clearly substantiated in the next chapter where the journey of the African Americans which is a tale of resilience and courage is the focus.