PREFACE

Toni Morrison, the celebrated African American novelist, through her works celebrates and heralds the fact that her race no longer wants to be at the margin but prefers to be at the centre. An analysis of her works endeavours to prove that her belief in herself and her community is the motivating factor in her life. She writes about and for African Americans. She believes that black women writers are the only writers who focus on black men and black women. Morrison in her works addresses the position of the African American person in the contemporary world. She is especially concerned with the way that African American individuals and communities are expressive or silenced within a dominant culture which historically has been intolerant of racial difference.

Morrison’s novels explore the ways in which different values and conflicting ways of life interrelate and affect each other, and the main focus here is on the way the dominant society directly or indirectly interferes in and imposes itself on black culture. The present thesis offers an account of Toni Morrison’s novels as a body of psychological and social documents which express the psychic state of the people who are on the point of acquiring self-awareness and beginning to articulate their demand for social and cultural emancipation. To date, Morrison has published nine novels. Seven of the nine novels are discussed in the thesis. The two that are not mentioned are Love and A Mercy. The thesis is organized into five chapters.

The first chapter entitled Introduction begins with the main focus on the historical genesis of the Black-White problem. The first section of this chapter includes a historical perspective on the Black-White encounter in America and its reflection in literature,
which is an essential knowledge for an understanding of the important landmarks in the depiction of the racial encounter. An attempt was made to assess the far-reaching issues of exploitation and the quest for equality, from the point of view of the Blacks. This chapter aims at gaining an overall perspective and greater insights into the racial problem.

The next section of the introductory chapter presents a survey of fiction by Afro-Americans on the Black-White encounter which is quite essential for the present project. It includes major women novelists of the African American Literature, each one’s contribution being illustrated with one of her masterpieces. This vast hinterland of feminist tradition in black women’s writings in America provides a solid supportive background to an in-depth indulge into the realm of Toni Morrison, the writer considered for present study. The remaining part of the first chapter winds up the introduction with the summary of Morrison’s nine novels and briefings of the remaining chapters in the thesis.

The second chapter entitled *The Ideology of Silence* views silence as a diverse concept. The analysis of Toni Morrison’s fiction shows that she tries to uphold the dignity of blacks and expose the designs of whites. The fact is, the whites seem to have developed a vested interest in subjugating and exploiting the blacks. In order to subvert this grand design, black consciousness comes handy both to highlight the injustice and the age-old tragedy. Morrison’s works were heralded by abolitionists as ‘silent arguments’ against the existence of human slavery. Hence an attempt has been made in this chapter to study and analyse the concept of ‘silence’ as an ideology. This chapter is planned in a way to underscore the richness of the forms of silence, their meanings and functions.
Silence does not always perform all communicative functions to the same extent as speech. Speech is the liberty to express opinions and ideas without hindrance and especially without fear of punishment. Freedom of speech acts as a ‘safety valve’ to let off steam when people might otherwise be bent on revolution. When people remain silent, representative writers come forward to act as a safety valve, to speak on their behalf, to voice their grievances. Toni Morrison is a living example who represents her race and their voice in her writings.

In each of Toni Morrison’s works, the act of writing is a breaking of silence that becomes embodied within the narrative itself. To speak, to break the silence, becomes in this context fraught with anxiety. Violence is potential within both speech and silence. Toni Morrison therefore represents her speech i.e., her works, as a liberation from the internalized violence of her enforced silence. Morrison’s works record not only the literal violence but also the symbolic violence of a white cultural hegemony that metaphorically threatens the intellectual as well as physical existence of the African Americans. Morrison’s novels help her race emerge from the cocoon of silence in which they enveloped themselves. A committed and engaged writer like Morrison cannot content herself with simply being silent.

This provides an opening for the third chapter, *Articulation of the Inarticulate*, where we can hear the protest in the voices of the African Americans through Toni Morrison’s novels, which are considered the ‘voice of the voiceless’, ‘speech of the silent race.’ In her novels, Toni Morrison effectively transforms black silence to speech. She defines speech as a force that embraces blackness. 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.

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 fourth chapter entitled *Explosion of the Repressed* 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 chapter presents the journey of the African Americans which is a tale of resilience and courage.

This chapter also analyses how Morrison through her novels, has voiced her protest against all the unjust systems holding African Americans down, silencing them to submission. She gets her protest registered through her manner of fictionalizing the experiences of her race. This chapter attempts to analyse the works of Morrison as tools of protest and revolt against unjust and inhuman systems imposed on the repressed blacks. Anyone whose right is denied has the right to protest. We find in the works of Morrison how the oppressed and exploited blacks try to explode against all the unjust systems.

In the hands of a creative writer like Morrison, protest is an effective tool to generate change. It is an appropriate medium to highlight the plight of the exploited. Thus the writer becomes the voice of millions of marginalized communities which are
widespread all over the world. Through her writings she urges the underprivileged blacks that the time has come to break the shackles of racism, casteism and sexism.

The fifth and the concluding chapter, *Summation*, reiterates the arguments explicated in the preceding chapters and validates the thesis statements. It attempts to establish Toni Morrison as a conscientious writer committed to values. It is hoped that the present thesis will extend the existing body of research on Toni Morrison, thus contributing positively to the knowledge community by helping it to not only appreciate Toni Morrison as a novelist, but also by providing a better understanding of African American literature which can be very well considered as protest literature. Protest literature consists of variety of approaches, from the earliest literary efforts to contemporary times. These include articulating the plight of enslaved persons, challenging the larger white community to change its attitude towards those persons, and providing specific reference points for the nature of the complaints presented. In other words the intention of the protest literature was—and remains—to show inequalities among races and socio-economic groups in America and to encourage a transformation in the society that engenders such inequalities. For African Americans, that inequality began with slavery. African American writers like Toni Morrison started using their imaginations and pens to bring about change in the society. Therefore the present study aims to explore the ways in which Morrison’s works, have focussed on such issues and worked to rectify them.