CHAPTER III
ALIENATION IN SELECT NOVELS OF TONI MORRISON

Toni Morrison’s novels aim to critique the myth of black inferiority and subordination which prevails in largely white culture. Her novels investigate the devastating effects of the beauty standards of the dominant culture on the self image of the African – female adolescent. Toni Morrison’s novels are, quest tales in which key characters search for the hidden sign, capable of giving them strength and identity Toni Morrison’s shows the exploitative nature of logo centric orders. Her novels are exploration of the meaning of Blackness. She wants the reader to work jointly with the writer in formulating the meaning of her novels. She puts forward the characters, which are evacuated to the margins of the society, in the name of their race and gender alienation. She also brings them out of the anonymity and narrates their own history in their own words. She also assesses the core of the African American reality, particularly that of an African female and female alienation, feminist issues in most of her novels.

This thesis is a study of the issues of alienation of African American women who were transported as slaves to The United States. It focuses on their physical and mental tortures from the white men and women because of their Blackness. The inhuman treatment to the Black women from men, both Black and white is explored. It investigates the struggles of Black women in their search for identity and their failures in achieving their identity. Toni Morrison has distinguished herself as an author, editor and critic who has transformed the American literary landscape with her presence in the African American literary tradition.
Toni Morrison helped to promote Black Literature and authors when she worked as an editor for Random House in the 1960's and 1970's. Morrison herself emerged as one of the most renowned African American writer in the twentieth century. She has written ten novels. Toni Morrison’s works have taken her to the skies. She had genuinely portrayed the true voice of African – American slave life. She keeps her people in touch with myths, which enable them to act out their potential recuperate and portray their inner spiritual imaginative lives hidden beneath historical facts. ‘Toni Morrison’ asserts the importance of identity, speaking out against racism, sexism and silencing. She explores the deep layers of everyday texture of people’s lives, emphasizing the lives of victims and strong imaginative energetic women and men. She creates historical reality when she reveals the energies, hardships and experiences of Black men and women. Her famous novel *Beloved* won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction. Toni Morrison is the first African American woman to win the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1993.

Toni Morrison deals with the themes of love and friendship, search for identity, concept of beauty and ugliness, and life and death in her novels. Her heroines and heroes struggle to understand all the better aspects of the human conditions. The theme which is common in her novels is alienation. Alienation proves to be a devastating phenomenon for the Black women in America. Being away from their own land, they are tied with the chains of slavery. The Black women are portrayed as breeding women, maids and domestic workers. Black women are viewed and treated just as the commodities to be handled by the white masters. They were not allowed to have any human rights whatsoever. But their white masters have all rights over them. They are forced to live in a set-up which is full of racism and sexism, which result in alienation.
In Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola is kept away from her parents, classmates and the large society. In her second novel *Sula*, Toni Morrison depicts the quest of the protagonist Sula creating her own self and coming to terms with her identity as a Black and also a woman. The novel demonstrates the difficulties that the Black women face when they try to explore different aspects of their lives. Sula is alienated. She believes that she can create an identity for herself and she lives out of her community and social expectations. In *Beloved*, Sethe is kept in isolation by the masters of sweet home and by the black men in Ohio. She is haunted by her dead daughter Beloved at the end.

New Historicist Criticism may for instance help, shed light on Morrison's writing as it looks at a work's discourse as something which is strongly linked to the society in which the author has created it. The gender codes in *Sula*, the oppressive environment in *The Bluest Eye*, and the complexity of sexuality and love in *Beloved* can all be recognized as aspects of the society of the twentieth century, not only familiar to the author, but also to the reader.

The reader too, is strongly linked to society – its ideology and belief systems and will understand a work of literature accordingly. As the “*American Version Of Cultural Studies*” shows: “Its sympathy for disadvantaged, ‘marginalized’ people...”(179). Toni Morrison clearly demonstrates in her literature a sympathy for marginalized people through her portrayal of the most vulnerable members of society such as the children and the women in her fiction. She also clearly draws parallels between the oppression of Blacks in America and the oppression within the Black communities.
The use of a social and cultural approach when analyzing Morrison is thus helpful, as her writing portrays behaviour as a social and cultural construct. As Griffiths puts it, "In an anthropological sense, “culture” is the total way of life of a particular society – its language, economy ... a collection of codes that everyone in a society shares and allows them to communicate..." (179-180). The colloquial language that for example Morrison applies in her discourse is an example of how she draws on different aspects of black culture, which help to make her stories representative of the time and place in which the stories are set. She also uses, as part of her discourse, inter textual references, such as nursery rhymes, historical references from the civil rights era, and iconic figures like Shirley Temple, which help to place her characters in a specific environment and at a particular time. The culture and society of the cosey's are for example illustrated through Heed's language, which reveals her to be an intruder and an outsider in the family, as both her spoken language and her writing skills are poor. Morrison lets the young Christine ridicule Heed's use of language when wanting to set herself above her former friend. “People with power – social, economic ... use discourse to manipulate other people and maintain their own power” (Griffiths, 180). Other examples of how codes of behaviour are used to reveal differences in class and power in Morrison's fiction are, the social conduct in Sula, which serves to separate sula from the common blacks in the Bottom, as well as Geraldine's assertion of superiority in her meeting with Pecola in The Bluest Eye. As Griffiths notes: “Power elites can be persons within a society – wealthy persons, politicians, white people, males... Thus, some people are “marginalized” and made vulnerable to exploitation”. (180-181) Racism, patriarchy and sexism are part of the ideology in the societies that Morrison portrays. By telling the stories of a young girl’s exposure to sexual harassment and how this affects them, and by showing how
marginalized people in *The Bluest Eye* like the poor Breedlove's, along with the prostitutes, are made vulnerable by the norms of society. Morrison's writing explains human behaviour as something which is the result of oppression and marked by social and cultural constructs. As Raynor and Butler point out:

> critics examine how Morrison ... illustrates the destructive nature of patriarchy both within the mainstream of American society and African American communities. Morrison's novels serve as historical “narratives by showing the links among gender, race, and class. (178)

In *Sula* all the main characters are women. We follow the main character Sula from her early teens in the year 1921 to her death in 1940, from being a lonely little girl to someone who due to her promiscuous behaviour has at the time of her death become the object of hatred and superstition in the Bottom society (the Black, segregated part of the town of Medallion where Sula lives). Sexuality proves to be an issue also in Sula's friendship to Nel, a friendship which Sula in the end ruins by sleeping with Nel's husband. The main character Sula is not, however, introduced by Morrison until 1922, after the character Shadrack is presented in 1919, and Sula's best friend Nel in 1920. It is evident that Morrison uses this way of opening to characterize the environment in which Sula grows up, and which has shaped Sula’s character, personality and sexuality.

Sula stands in opposition to the ideal of a woman because her desire is not towards getting married or having children. Friendship with Nel is Sula’s first choice. Nevertheless, when Sula loses Nel to a man, she is willing to find a new life for herself away from her family and community.
But not finding what she had been looking for, she comes back to Medallion ten years later. Sula quickly recognizes how much has changed between her and Nel during her absence. Sula is disappointed to find Nel living the same life as everyone else does; Sula cannot accept the fact that her friend is now as boring as all the other women in the town and that Nel “had given herself over to them” (S120). Sula shows how a Black community develops and shapes itself within its own cultural resources. It is about the friendship of two Afro-American girls Nel and Sula, from their childhood to adulthood.

However, in *Sula*, Toni Morrison creates a strong female character who “not only refuses the role (the standard role assigned for a woman), she steps outside the cast of woman, beyond any class or definition and insists on making herself” (Christian 76). Sula will not surrender to the assigned role and she counts on her friendship bond with Nel because this bond allows both Nel and Sula to fight against oppression; but the two women separate in their adulthood because of the different roles they take up in their community.

Christian argues that “African American women who internalize the dominant society's definition of women are courting self-destruction” (79). In *Sula* Toni Morrison critiques motherhood as the Black community's primary definition of woman. *Sula* depicts, among other things, the importance of female friendship because when men are absent and preoccupied with their own struggle to win their manhood back, women need to stick together and support each other in order to survive and in order to overcome the obstacles life brings them.
Female friendships are also central in Morrison’s works, and particularly in the novels of my investigation. In both *Sula* and *Beloved*, friendship between lonely little girls and later women serve as background for studying the effects of thwarted sexual behaviour on vulnerable individuals. In both novels these friendships last a lifetime. In *The Bluest Eye*, there is also a special friendship among little girls, where Frieda and Claudia try to rescue Pecola. The fate of Pecola, however, is so devastating that a mutual and lasting friendship between her and the two sisters is beyond reach.

The interpersonal relationships among the characters in Toni Morrison's second novel *Sula* suggest that African Americans still face many difficulties when trying to assimilate into the American mainstream society. Discrimination of African Americans is still strong which is clearly visible in the denial of job opportunities for African American inhabitants of Medallion. The Bottom's men fear of emasculation and their attempts to win respect of the dominant society result in the men's frustrations which they consequently project in their personal relationships with African American women and with their children. The major problem of the novel's characters is their acceptance of the dominant society's ideas of masculinity and femininity and their submission to the dominant society's views of marriage and social roles. Most male characters in the novel look for a submissive woman who would help them feel better about their own masculinity.

The only male character who is not interested in proving anything to the mainstream society and who does not accept the defined notions of masculinity and femininity is Ajax, who leads a more contented and satisfactory life than the rest of the men in the Bottom. Women's fears of
being alone and unloved force them to accept sexist oppression and to submit to the menial position. Nel Wright represents the submissive female character. Her need to nurture and to be needed by someone force her to settle down. Nel is not questioning her position in the society and she surrenders to the role of a wife and a mother and believes that these roles will make her life complete. However, the opposite becomes true because in her marriage with Jude, Nel must constantly comply to her husband's demands and she only lives to make him happy and to take care of their children. Jude is one of the community's men who is willing to prove his masculinity by getting a suitable working position and by having a wife. In his marriage to Nel, Jude is not looking for an equal companion, he is looking for someone he can dominate. Jude's view of marriage and Nel’s submission to it consequently result in the reduction of Nel’s personality. Male / female relationships portrayed in the novel are based on cultural conditioning and obligation more than a free choice. Motherhood also represents the relationship which is based on cultural conditioning and obligation. When male characters leave their families, African American women are left without support or protection from African American men and therefore, African American women in the novel must take care of their families on their own and are put in the position of a family provider.

The lack of the support, African American mothers receive projects in the mother’s ways of expressing affection to their children. Consequently, the relationships between mothers and their children become complicated because mothers fail to communicate about their struggles with their children and children miss their mothers’ affection. Motherhood does not represent a fulfilling relationship in Sula. Sula sees things for what they truly are and she understands the dynamics of male / female and mother / daughter relationships. Sula comprehends the fact that
relationships with men involve the reduction of women's personalities and that being a mother involves an enormous sacrifice on the side of mothers. Sula believes that it is better for a woman to live without a man and she becomes an outcast in her community. Nonetheless, even Sula is forced to experience the need to possess and the absence of a man in her relationship with the only man of the community who does not reject her. The community's men give Sula the final label because she poses a threat to their masculinity. The differences between Sula's and Nel’s view of marriage, motherhood, and a woman's role in the society become the main cause for their estrangement.

However, Sula values her friendship with Nel because in contrast to male / female relationships and mother / daughter relationships, women's friendship involves equality of participation and is based on free choice. Nel represents Sula's center in childhood and these two girls find the sense of belonging in each other's company. The girls realize at a young age that their situation in the society is complicated because they are African American females. Sula and Nel help each other, define their personalities, they provide each other with the protection they lack and they fight against oppression together. The girls feel safe in each other's company and they complement each other. Sula never competes with Nel and sees Nel as an essential and equal human being. Neither Sula nor Nel find this kind of protection, understanding, and equality in their relationships with men. To conclude, women's friendship is the only relationship in the novel which does not involve the reduction of personalities and the only relationship which supports a healthy growth of characters. The fact that the female characters in the novel are left alone and that they experience the absence of male characters intensifies the importance of women's bonding. Women's friendship helps the two female characters see that they are not alone in
facing the life's obstacles in their adolescent years and their friendship enables them to cope with social expectations. Nevertheless, most female characters do not appreciate women’s bond. But when there is a lack of women's bonding, women's lives in the novel are not fulfilling. Toni Morrison portrays the friendship of Sula and Nel in the novel to show that if women cultivated women's bonds, they would be able to fight against oppression.

Slave women were wretchedly abused. The Black Women Writers have documented how the black women were made ‘Breeders’. Their masters use them for their sexual hunger and they are subjected to public fondling and exposed naked on the auction block. W.E.B. Du Bois says:

A slave woman is treated as an unwed mother so few women are born free and some amid insult and scarlet letters achieved freedom; but our Women in Black had freedom thrust contemptuously upon them. With that freedom they are buying an untrammelled independence, and dear as the price they pay for it, it will in the end be worth every taunt and groan. (234)

Toni Morrison has vividly portrayed the condition of Sethe in *Beloved*. The cruel situations of the plantations at Kentucky is painfully narrated in her novel. The slave women are immersed in physical and emotional fetters of life. The position of sethe is very pathetic. Even her escape from slavery was not really for herself. Her swollen breasts and the baby kicking within pressed her onward to the baby waiting for her milk. Biological necessity made her create a life that would allow her children to
grow up. Sethe carries Beloved on her conscience and in her heart. For the mother, the dead child is maternity in potentia, the mother truncated.

Sethe curses her own future by bitterly remembering her past until she conjures the past; the baby ghost haunts her sons and they run away, right out of the house unable to bear the fear and uncertainty, isolating her into a totally female realm. Sethe further fixates on the past by never mingling with the Black community, by protecting the only child who stays with her, her daughter Denver, from the past without seeming ever to think of the girl’s future or need for community. When we first enter the home, only Sethe and Denver inhabit it, and it is claustrophobic indeed. More pathetic is the state when the infant dies, Sethe trades her body in a sexual exchange with the engraver to have the letters engraved on her dead daughter’s tombstone.

Toni Morrison’s women are linked by a three generation chain of scars, marking both bond and breach. Sethe’s mother urges her daughter to recognize her body in death by the scar under her breast, and Sethe’s resurrected daughter bears on her neck the mark of her mother’s handsaw. Between them, Sethe has “a chokecherry tree” on her back, the scar of a brutal whipping. The School teacher’s nephews whip Sethe for reporting their first act of violence against her-the one which looms much larger in her memory, forcibly ‘nursing’ her breast milk. The tree is thus associated with Sethe’s violated motherhood, the visible sign of the crime she repeatedly laments. She remembers with depressed heart when the school teacher and his nephew tied Sethe down, beat her and suckled her breast “they took my milk!” (B 17).
Sethe’s life thought and feelings go un-strengthened. Her meaningless life unanimated makes her feel dry, fatigued and frail in spirit. Sethe represents the slave women world which always bears the seeds of oppression from their birth, even though they give birth to mankind they are treated as only ‘Breeders’. They are discarded and degraded. They seem to have been framed for men and work in the field.

In a very emphatic way, Morrison uses Beloved to show in painful detail one of the ways Black women’s bodies were “scarred and dismembered by slavery and then salvaged and remembered in the acts of free love.” (Ashraf Rushdy 102). The novel is about a love relationship gone awry between mother and daughter. Women as mothers had the greatest psychological blow within the American slave culture. The practice, which denied the women the opportunity and privilege of loving their children, only served to alienate them from their children. Susan Willis avers, “The tragedy of a woman’s alienation is its effect on her as mother. Her emotions split, she showers tenderness and love on her employer’s child, and rains violence and disdain on her own” (265). The type of love relationship between mother and daughter in this novel is also suggestive of the unusualness and complexity of Toni Morrison’s art. She has been credited with creating characters with dual and moral uncertainties. In an interview, she calls her fictional characters:

The combination of virtue and flaw, of good intentions gone awry, of wickedness cleansed and people made whole again. If you judge them all by the best that they have done, they are wonderful. If you judge them by the worst that they have done, they are terrible. (McKay 423)
As Taylor observes:

‘Sixty Million and more,’ is the inscription at the beginning of the novel *Beloved*, written by Toni Morrison. She devoted *Beloved* to the roughly sixty million people who died during the slave trade and who never experienced slavery. These victims never experienced the long disturbing and psychologically painful period that Africans and generations thereafter had to endure. Although the book is dedicated to those who died in the Atlantic trade, however, its story serves to memorialize the institution of slavery itself as it existed in the United States. According to Toni Morrison, there is a necessity for remembering the horror, but of course there’s a necessity for remembering it in a manner in which it can be digested, in a manner in which the memory is not destructive. The act of writing the book, in a way, is a way of confronting it and making it possible to remember. (248)

In other words, Morrison argues that overcoming the trauma of slavery entails remembering rather than forgetting. In contemporary American culture the institution of slavery has been largely forgotten. But Morrison tries to show that the past never ends. She wants the readers to re-vision and understand African-American history through non-western eyes by re-telling history through the lives of former African slaves.

*Beloved* takes place in 1873, in a house in Cincinnati, Ohio. Sethe, a former slave, and her daughter Denver are the only women living in the house, besides the ghost that haunts them. It has been many years since Sethe escaped from the farm ‘Sweet Home’ in Kentucky, where she had lived as a slave. While pregnant, Sethe had made plans to run away from
the farm with her husband Halle, with the intention of fleeing across the Ohio river to Halle’s mother, Baby Suggs, in Cincinnati. Their three children were already living with Baby Suggs.

However, on the day of the escape, Halle was nowhere to be found and Sethe was forced to flee alone. On her way to Ohio she delivered a baby girl, but otherwise arrived safely at Baby Suggs’ house. For Sethe, living in freedom with her mother-in-law and her four children lasted only for a short period of time, as her master ruthlessly hunted her down in an attempt to reclaim his property. When he finally found her, Sethe attempted to kill her children to avoid enslavement for them, but she only managed to kill one daughter. The ghost now haunts the house where Sethe and Denver live. Little by little we learn about Sethe’s past through her conversations with Paul D., one of the other slaves from ‘Sweet Home’ who visits Sethe to remember about old times.

According to Dolan Hubbard, the novel Beloved is centred on “the historical fact that there were Black women during slavery who terminated their babies’ lives rather than allow them to be offered up to the destruction of slavery” (137). Through the flashback technique “with a sympathetic omniscient narrator”, we are presented with the tragic story of Sethe who escapes from slavery in Kentucky, “but is haunted by profound guilt over killing of her daughter, whose ghost traumatizes the family” (B 138). Sethe kills her daughter because she loves her so much that she does not want her daughter Beloved to ‘die’ - undergo slavery as she has. This death kills both body and soul. However, the love that imputes this kind of logic in Sethe’s head is a strange type of love.
Toni Morrison suggests that Beloved can be read in two ways, both as a psychically damaged real-life slave girl and as a ghost (fantasy object for the emotions of others). According to classical psychoanalysis, children begin at this age to undergo the oedipal crisis, which should instigate their development into separate selfhood. Normally, the oedipal crisis is supposed to properly socialize the child into imbibing the norms of its surrounding family, society and culture. This process always involves repression of unwholesome desires. Certain importunate demands, inappropriate behaviour by the code of the given society are streamlined in this socialization process, so that the child should be able to differentiate between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour in his or her environment. By Beloved’s death at the age of two, this process of psychological development is terminated and she is by implication denied the privilege and opportunity of entry into Melanie Klein’s depressive position, where she would mature properly into culture and make reparation to her mother for her monstrous behaviour.

Another important implication of this failure to enter the depressive position is that Beloved’s psychological development is still within the pre-oedipal stage where there is still a symbiotic relationship with the mother. Beloved still clings tenaciously to her mother and does not therefore have an independent existence. Her dependence on Sethe is such that she expresses aggressively whenever Sethe fails to align her thoughts with hers:

And it was so much better than the anger that ruled when Sethe did or thought anything that excluded herself. She could bear the hours – nine or ten of them each day but one – when Sethe was gone. (100)
It becomes clear that Sethe’s decision to kill her children rather than allow them to be slaves is influenced by the traumas she endured at Sweet Home, including rape at the hands of the overseer, called “School teacher” by the slaves. It also becomes clear that Sethe and Denver are the only ones left in the house, because Baby Suggs has died and soon after Howard and Buglar, Sethe’s two sons, have long fled the house. Later on, it turns out that her boys vanished because they were afraid Sethe would kill one of her children again. Even though Sethe killed her daughter a long time ago, she is still troubled by her spirit. Eventually the ghost of her daughter comes back as a real person, a girl named Beloved, who comes to live with Sethe and Denver. When it becomes clear that Beloved is obsessed with Sethe and that she tries to destroy her because of what Sethe did to her, Denver and the people from their community rally to help Sethe purify the house by driving Beloved out of it, which works, giving resolution to the story.

Toni Morrison, has a singular goal and ambition that of creating a new consciousness about the Black experience. Though one of Morrison’s concern is to “define the beauty and brutality of human condition and evoke the pathos and tragedy of human life, she wrote to make “the black history, contemporary and brought black literary experience into the American mainstream”. (Sinha 46) what makes Anita Desai and Toni Morrison similar is the depiction of human relationships, while the former focuses mostly on marital discord and individuals drifting in search of an identity, the latter makes the relationship among women as her major focus.

The concept of alienation, which is the chief concern of this study, is to explore the difference in alienation experienced by a man and a woman, who are essentially and biologically different from each other. The society is stratified on gender divisions with a man permitted to exercise his central
domination on almost all issues with the women having toedined the dictates of a social order, the rule of the patriarchy with the woman left with not many alternatives or options and alienated from all important concerns, the woman invariably experiences alienation that is more intense, emotional and sensitive. Their alienation becomes more acute as there is no long or short solution in sight. As rightly expressed by a critic Parikh:

The theme which cuts across the novels of Anita Desai and Toni Morrison is that of alienation. Alienation proves devastating for black women in white America. Away from their native land and chained by the chains of slavery, black women were reduced to the roles of breeder, domestic maid and several other such menial roles. Thus they have endured the most vicious form of racism and sexism which results in their uniquely agonizing alienation. (18)

One of the factors which perpetuates this alienation happens to be racial, the Blacks when they entered the white world of supremacy and racial superiority had to wage one of the bitter battles, that has gone down in history as a struggle for achieving equality as equal citizens in a white country. As victims of racial discrimination and slavery for the American Black, the march from slavery to freedom has been a transforming experience. Alienation stemmed from belonging to another race, a race which was brought to America to bear the white man’s burden. Much, as Morrison is concerned about the Black man’s oppression, she is equally concerned with the Black woman’s struggle for freedom, from racial oppression and the oppression of the black man. The sense of alienation rises as the very cause of race discrimination; this is best illustrated in the novel Beloved. Sethe’s story is the story of American black woman
fighting against both the racial and sexual prejudices. The prevailing situation of the Kentucky plantations is a representation of other parts of the country. Sethe’s position is a representative life of the other slave women. The very alienated state of Sethe resembles the alienation of all slave women. Breaking all the stereotype of motherhood, Seth is set to save her children from slavery even if it means by killing them, she manages to save ‘one’ before she is restrained. To this extent, race continues to act as a strong force, as Kwame Anthony Appiah points out, “Races are like witches. However unreal witches are, belief in witches, like belief in races has had and in many communities continues to have profound Consequences for human social life” (28).

Growing up in Loraine, Ohio which was essentially a working community, Morrison experienced a youth and adolescence largely free of race consciousness. Like Zora Neale Hurston, Toni Morrison never absorbed racism, she says, “I never took it in. That’s why I wrote The Bluest Eye, to find out how I felt of it”. (Morrison 78) Besides, race and colour became another constituent which determined the acceptability of an individual social class. When Morrison left Loraine to attend Howard University, she was confronted with being black. Toni Morrison mentions that she did not like Howard’s Social life, which turned on skin colour, and she recalls a friend who was asked to be out because of her dark coloration. Perhaps, The Bluest Eye was written with this motive, a black girl desires for the impossible, Pecola’s only desire is to have the bluest eyes.

In The Bluest Eye (1970), the narrator, Claudia MacTeer, tells the story of Pecola Breedlove, a little black girl whose irresistible hunger for love is established as a desire for blue eyes and beauty. In the end this desire drives her to insanity. She perceives the image of the white
community to be perfect and her own image to be abnormal. Pecola exposes the realities of life of a girl in a bankrupt African American community. The novel opens with an ironic passage from a Dick and Jane school primer, presenting it as an ideal family to be followed by the Black children. Idealism seems to be the standard for the Black girls who start reading with the book. Pecola is emotionally driven inward by the humiliation done by white society. This results in the destruction and splitting up of her psyche into a mental illness of schizophrenia.

_The Bluest Eye_ is about the victimization of a small black girl named Pecola. She is told that she is ugly. She wishes to emerge from the isolation of childhood and from the isolation of the family stigma: They are poor, and they are ugly. She is obsessed with blue eyes as she believes that they are the symbol of beauty. The loneliness of her mother Pauline and the futile struggle of her father to support the family cause failure of love within family. She is carefully taught that there is no one to love her. Even for some, she does not really exist. In the absence of self identity she wants to disappear, “Please God...please make me disappear” (BE 33).

Her alienation is complete as she is accepted by few as her ‘real’ self a poor Black girl, even her mother Pauline rains on her, her own frustration and worthlessness. Pauline’s alienation is much greater and intense to her-these purblind her own affection and love for her child. Each character be it Pecola, Pauline or Cholly Breedlove, each of them are locked and cloistered in separate worlds. They fail to relate to each other. Pecola’s tragedy is due to her “alienation from family, friends and the Black community of Loraine, Ohio” (Parikh 19).
Toni Morrison writes out of a consciousness of living in a “wholly racialized world” (Sinha, 47). Her fiction centers about the effects of living in a highly racialized society as she says “I am always annoyed about why Black people have to bear the brunt of everybody else’s contempt. If we are not totally understanding and smiling suddenly we are demons” (Morrison 47). Toni Morrison in novel after novel depicts the intense trauma and psychological scars of inheritance of the racial oppression, the Blacks have been subject to over the decades, since the times they were dubbed as ‘slaves’. In the context of the Blacks discriminated and totally marginalized from all section of the white population of the Black woman, living in a world of multiple repressions, the white repression and the Black male domination, she questions thus “Tell us what it is to be a woman so that we may know what it is to have no home in this place. To be set adrift from the one you knew. What it is to live at the edge of town that cannot bear your company” (qtd. In Sinha 48).

The racial displacement is voiced once and again by many Black writers like Zora Neale Hurston, Alice Walker, Maya Angelou and others. Maya Angelou referring to the searing pains of growing up in a community where one does belong, says “If growing up is painful for the growing southern Black girl, being aware of her displacement is as the rust on the razor that threatens the throat” (29). Many Black writers expressed their anguish regarding the state of slavery, being terrible for a man, but being far more terrific for a woman. Small girls grow up, inheriting the notion that Black is ugly ‘and to be white is to be beautiful’. *The Bluest Eye* narrates the tragic story of a little Black girl Pecola, who wants to somehow escape from the ‘blackness’ within her and that surrounds her, she yearns to perceive the world with a pair of blue eyes. This novel is a combination of aspects of racism colour and class.
In lieu of her total alienation, one is not surprised that Pecola later deludes herself into believing that if she can somehow possess a pair of the bluest eyes that this distinction will make her special enough for people to love her, maybe even her mother. After all, her mother, Mrs. Breedlove, treats the little blue eyed girl at work better than her own daughter. In fact, she does not even permit Pecola to call her 'mother’. Pecola must address her as Mrs. Breedlove. This act orphans Pecola and severs the mother-daughter relationship thereby confirming to Pecola that she is indeed so ugly that even her own mother is ashamed to claim her.

Precisely because Pecola is so young and impressionable, she does not have the knowledge nor does she own the wisdom to distinguish who she is from how she looks. As a result, each time Pecola is maliciously taunted, verbally attacked, discarded by her mother in favor of her blue-eyed charge, or molested by her father, Pecola internalizes it all, utterly destroying any possibility of making a healthy transition into adulthood. Instead, Pecola loses her "self" entirely as she lapses into madness and multiple personality disorder, believing that she now has the bluest eyes of them all and is the envy of the town. The tragedy began by the Breedloves' acceptance of their own ugliness as a family unit: "No one could have convinced them that they were not relentlessly and aggressively ugly ... Their ugliness was unique" (Morrison 38).

Pecola Breedlove emerges as a tragic victim and the tragedy is more horrific as it concerns a child, the most delicate member of Society, a child the most vulnerable member, a female, who is obviously ignorant of the notions of race, colour or class that is the segregatist divide that compartmentalizes the entire humanity. As a child, she can only sense and feel the resentment her mother has towards her, and, that she is shunned by
her friends who are not empathetic to her desires, and in the end she is betrayed by her own father, her Blackness becomes ‘Blackest’, as she conceives and loses her child, sinking, into the pit of madness and Blackness from which she had sought to escape. In the afterword Toni Morrison outlines what prompted her to write this novel:

The *Bluest Eye* was my effort to say something about that, to say something about why she had not, or possible ever would have the experience of what she possessed and also why she prayed for so radical an alternative, implicit in her desire was racial self loathing. (Afterword 167)

She further says that the ‘reclamation of racial beauty in the sixties stirred these thoughts” (167), and that Pecola’s wound ability was lodged in all young girls, and that is exactly what Morrison explores in these novels. The sense of self is another significant theme in the fiction of contemporary African American women writers. There is a comprehensive attempt by them to study the self, as for women; it has become an all important pertinent issue “women see themselves primarily in relation to be people around them and their sense of self comes from rootedness” (Aray 14). The African American women themselves have been victims of the double yoke of racism and sexism, and whose existence was much more complex and ambiguous compared to other women of the world. Morrison herself has claimed that the search for self ‘informs a great deal of her work’ Toni Morrison has revealed through her novels how the racist and sexist stereotyping has so ingrained itself within the psyche of a community that it unquestioningly adheres to letter. This theme is fully exploited in the novel *Sula*. Here it is the woman who is forced to become an outcast. *Sula*, tells of a woman who refuses to confirm to community mores. The novel speaks
about the story of two black, women friends - Sula and Nel – both black, poor, and raised in a small Ohio town. Sula defies the conventional expectations of the community and she defines herself outside of the sex, class race definition of the society. *Sula* explores the destructive limits imposed on the black women, the “bottom “becomes the metaphor for the bottomless abyss into which Sula eventually sinks into, in her quest for selfhood. She is punished for turning an iconoclast defying the social and moral values of the society which makes for its secured ground. Sula dies alone in Eva's house, a pariah because her society cannot accept her selfhood, the authority and freedom of asserting her independence and individuality. Toni Morrison wrote about the Black man’s burden but she was more concerned with the black woman’s quest for freedom. Before her fifth novel *Beloved*, Toni Morrison wrote *Tar Baby*, which is situated at a Caribbean mansion of a white Millionaire Valerian Street. This novel again focuses on the themes of racial identity, sexuality class and family dynamics. The sexual assault unleashed on the black woman as Calvin Herntan remarks, reveals the dire situation.

The sexual atrocities that the negro woman has suffered in united States, South and North and what these atrocities have done to her personality as a female creature is a tale bloodier and brutal than most of you can imagine. (123)

In her another novel *Paradise* is located in all Black town again called Ruby in Oklahoma and the violent attack made on a small female community, by a group of men. The book rightly tackles the issue of the “idea of where Paradise is, and who belongs to it,” As Sinha points out : “weaving together folklore and history, memory and myth Toni Morrison beautifully renders a meditation on race, religion and gender” (50).
Speaking about gender, Toni Morrison has stated in an interview that “there is a serious question about Black male and Black female relationship in the twentieth century. “I just think that the argument has always turned to something it should not turn on gender. I think that the conflict of gender is a cultural illness” (Sinha, P 31). In *Sula* the character of Nel who exemplifies a black woman who is all nurturing and self – sacrificing the stereotypical black woman as an eternal carer and rearer, the perpetual, mammy akin to Virginia Woolf’s notion of the Victorian white woman as the angel in the house is opposed to the character of Sula who defies the gendered limitations on her life, and lives the life she wants to live. However to Toni Morrison both the women do not communicate the ideal image of the Black woman. Sula comes off as a better character, though she is self-centered and contradictory, there is a space that she creates for herself where she is an autonomous empowered woman, Self- assertive and confident in her power as a woman. She calls the shots as the white man kowtow to her sexuality.

Sula and her friend are mutually creative selves in relation. Their learning from one another's fault could have made them adult women capable of well being. But both are unable to learn that lesson, their friendship ruptures, consequently leading them to isolation. Nel, with the community, considers Sula as a ‘Paraih’. She blames Sula for robbing her of her marriage and thereby both her happiness and identity is lost. As a result she denies her real self until her last confrontaion with Sula at the latter's death bed.

Jazz emerges as a novel that breaks the lock of gender oppression clamped on the black woman. The women of the 1920’s have become ‘wild’ due to the defiance, rebelliousness and aggressiveness triggered by
the abysmal conditions they live in, caused by class exploitation, race and gender oppression, Toni Morrison lays bare all the sordid realities of the conditions of many African families living with increasing rate of teenage pregnancies, impact of deadly chemicals, the middle class dropouts and the increase in disease like Aids and cancer. Utility and egalitarian altitude could alone bestow a wholesome future for all people of American decent, particularly the women. Such an approach could alone bring to an end the violence, displacement and chaos that have disintegrated the black people. Finally Toni Morrison does not confine herself to narrow strictures of parochial nationalism or racism or sex or gender or class, she records the human experience transcending colour and creed to become one of the greatest storytellers commanding to the world, that the human spirit, be it black, blue, white or yellow may tear asunder the vital spirits of the human, but eventually there is always the triumph of life. Toni Morrison’s concern is with gender and gender tension that permeates her fiction. Mathew and Nair point out that the world of Toni Morrison is “pre-eminently the Black woman’s world and the themes are recurrently related to the inscrutable female psyche, the region of the uttered and the unutterable” (121). With her novel Love, Beloved is also about love—the unbounded love of a mother for her children. Toni Morrison creates in the character of Sethe, a mother who is strong and resourceful and who loves her children that she is willing to risk anything including the wrath of god to save them from slavery. She is able to ‘save’ one of her children before she is restrained, the novel is a strong statement on the state of slavery.

Beloved (1987) is the masterpiece produced by Toni Morrison. She narrates a real story of the runaway slave Margaret Garner in 1856, who killed her daughter, tried to kill her other children and herself at last rather than coming back to slavery. The novel describes the story of Sethe, who
killed her young daughter, Beloved, when faced with a similar threat of enslavement. The novel unfolds the struggles of many characters that are forgotten. They rememorize to live the present life free of guilt. The scheme of the novel circles around the disliking of the history by the Blacks on one hand and the need to remember them, tell them aloud, rather than to forget, on the other hand. The genuine aim of both the story and it’s protagonist is to name the unnamable person.

A Sense of alienation and race discrimination give the constitutive formation to the novel Beloved. Racial discrimination results in a sense of alienation of all Blacks, Sethe’s life is one of the representative lives of slave woman, the inhuman effect of slavery and the subjection of woman to functioning as potential breeder, for breeding more children to work as slaves in the plantations and the laborious work to which they were subjected. The black woman is a dual victim, on the one hand she is a handy victim for the black man who heaps, vents his individual frustration and defeat on the hopeless woman, on the other hand, she is sexually exploited by her master, and as a slave mother, she has little control over either her children or the destiny of her family. The master or the owner decides when a slave woman can marry and for how long. Taking the slaves circumstances, some marriages are declared invalid or they were parted, to go in different directions. Baby suggs, Sethe’s mother-in-law is shown to have endured the pain of such separations, the physical wretchedness which Sethe undergoes, makes her determined that her children should not suffer the similar harassment. She chose rather to kill them than see them be caught in another vicious circle of slavery. She decides to secure their liberation by killing them. In death they would be free, and eternally escape victimization.
Sula centers around the ‘sisterhood’ concepts, a sister kinship which yokes the two women together – Sula and Nel. Both are drawn as a foil to each other. Sula emerges as a character unlike any other kind, in getting into her own queer way, she announces her freedom, however Sula in her quest for autonomy, becomes the personification of both the potential of a black woman and ironically, the pariah of her community, Nel on the other hand gives up her ambition of leaving the Bottom society for the sake of her husband and children, reducing herself to the expected role of a wife and mother.

It describes how their deep bond is battered by societal pressures. Sula and Nel are together in every act they do in their adolescent age. The girls also have a mysterious secret because they play a part in the accidental death of a young boy named, Chicken Little. Their friendship continues even after this incident. The novel describes the different ways present in front of the Black females to follow. One choice is to live traditionally as part of the society or the other choice is to live a revolting life, isolated from the African community. It is also a story of motherliness, friendship, sisterhood and love. After Sula has an affair with Nel’s husband, she is unable to speak to Nel, and she spends her life of seclusion in Medallion. She is hated and shunned by the people of Medallion as a devil who would sexually seduce their males. Then Sula’s illness brings the two women closer again. They argue further upon the unconventional life style of Sula. Nel becomes further frustrated by Sula’s attitude towards conventionality and tradition. Sula dies alone in her home after Nel leaves out. After Sula’s death, the people of Medallion are pleased. They abandon their righteousness and become relaxed in performing their, duties as, mothers and daughters.
Pin-chia –Feng argues for the textual construction of identity in novels by African American writers centering on minority women in a society “permeated by race, class and sex / gender oppression” (2). Sula fails to find her own identity though, there is great assertion in her outlook and action. She is all that Nel is not. Traditional feminists criticism interprets the intimate relationship between Sula and Nel as resembling that of the nurturing bond between mother and daughter and just ‘as a substitute for the lost sense of kinship in the post-diasporic Black community. Toni Morrison draws the two female characters drawn together out of a shared, lived experience as Black women in a white patriarchal society.

Sula returns to the Bottom after an absence of ten years, her sexual exploits and indiscriminate manner of stealing husbands, be it even the mate of her close friend Nel, Sula does it without any regret or remorse. Her sexual indulgence alienates her from the rest of the community. Her audacity stands strong in refusing to enter the conventional marital ties or to conform to the heterosexual formativeness of marriage. Sula’s relationship with Nel breaks under the strain of Sula demanding all from Nel, where Nel expects nothing from her, Nel comes to a stage where she is unable to tolerate the exploits of her friend, when it crosses a certain limit, she too like the rest of the community, turns her back to Sula. Despite having travelled the country and gained a college education, Sula is still rejected and ostracized because she obstinately refuses to confirm to the ideology of Black womanhood to which Nel bows down. The breaking up of an intimate relationship, throws up their inherent differences, they drift apart, totally alienated from each other. It is after Sula’s death that Nel realizes that their friendship is a bond which nurtures the construction of a new privileged Black womanhood.
*Sula* is a text which deals with the interrelationship between gender, class and race. Toni Morrison strives to create in this novel a social order which the black women attempt to structure but are defeated by their slave and race identity. Both Sula and Nel are lonely individuals and essentially fail to connect with the other Blacks around them, they can however connect with each other spiritually and in a kinship supporting and sustaining each other as is implied in Sula’s speech that heterosexual bond is fickle and unstable because of the male ego, whereas the female friend is reciprocal and enduring. This is till Sula betrays Nel by stealing Jude from her. It is however claimed that though Toni Morrison created Sula as a tragic character who fails to negotiate her own identity, her character carries weight as Sula emerges as a role, model for women at large, implementing among women a notion of kinship and unity particularly among Black women as a means of recreating a lost community, more of a ‘womanist’ than a ‘feminist’ in her relationship with Nel. What makes Sula deny Nel is her loss of identity.

Now Nel belonged to the town and all of its ways. She had given herself over to them, and the flick of their tongues would drive her back into her little dry corner where she would cling to her spittle high above the breath of the snake and the fall. It had surprised her a little and saddened her a good deal when Nel behaved the ways the others would have. What ostracizes Sula from the rest of the Black Community is their conformity their ‘hooded’ self at any new private thoughts the dreads, their narrow lives and when she chooses to differ, the knife comes down on her, she was a pariah and she knew it “Knew that they despised her and believed that they framed their hatred as disgust for the easy way she lay with men” (S 122). Sula’s sexuality is her way of connecting with men, but after a
passage of time, the turbulence of her sexuality gives way to a silence. As Mckay points out:

There in the center of that silence was not eternity but the death of time and loneliness so profound the word itself had no meaning. For loneliness assumed the absence of other people, and the solitude she found in that desperate terrain had never admitted the possibility of other people. (123)

Sula’s deviance from the conventional, the accepted social norms is her inner craving for recognition, to be someone with a definite identity, even her gesture of depriving off her best friend of her husband is a deep yearning, anguished cry from her lonely friend though she feigns a bold metallic façade, inside she longs to be loved, to be owned and respected. Her love for Ajax is one such relationship which gives her a deep feeling of being wanted. His departure empties her. She is devoid of all emotions as if his going away has ripped from her, her vital entrails her life and her breath itself. She moans:

There aren’t any more new songs and I have sung all the ones there are. I have sung them all. I have sung all the songs there are. She lay down again on the bed and sang a little wandering tune made up of the words I have sung all the songs all the songs I have sung all the songs there are until, touched by her own lullaby, she grew drowsy, and in the hollow of near-sleep she tasted the acridness of gold, left the chill of alabaster and smelled the dark sweet stench of loam. (137)
When Nel strides out in anger with Sula, deeply hurt that Sula had not spared her husband, Sula sinks into fond memories of her old friend.

So she will walk on down that road, her back so straight in that old green coat, the strap of her handbag pushed back all the way to the elbow, thinking how much I have cost her and never remember the days when we were two throats and one eye and we had no prices. (147)

To Sula’s query if they were still good friends, Nel angrily retorts, “You laying there in that bed without a time or a friend to your name having done all the dirt you did in this town and you still expect folks to love you? (145).

To the close of her life, Sula’s alienation from all-her best friend Nel, Ajax, her lovers and the community, is complete. Her dying is brutally lonely. It is the whites who come forward to arrange for her funeral. As P. Hunt points out:

Toni Morrison interrelates gender, class and race by creating situations which concentrate on the way in which black women attempt to structure their own social orders but unto are limited by their class and race identified. Sula foregrounds the conflicted status of race and gender impact slavery in American culture. The ‘Bottom’ represents a political system which has enslaved a people, emancipated people, enfranchised them, and disenfranchised them. (459)
Like Harlem, Bottom is also an isolated Black grotto, where the racially alienated people are forced to live. But Toni Morrison does not simply dwell on the problem of being ‘Black’ the racial discrimination they are subject to. Her novel Sula also details the predictable political social and economic changes that are ushering in bringing along with them an impact on the lives of the black people as well. With Sula’s death, racial apathy and isolation seem to be collapsing, with economic empowerment of the Black comes, growth and development. The first thing is the promise of work of the tunnel, next was the construction of an old people’s home, all these changes instilling in the Black people a strong sense of hope. Even the lonely Shadrack comes to life. Bottom has collapsed with people, with money approaching the valley, and white people were building homes in the hills, the community, has yielded to “separate homes with separate televisions and separate telephones and less and less dropping by” (S 166).

The novel closes with Nel realizing their friendship has actually been a bond which nurtures the construction of a new, privileged black Woman hood. At the end there is no Black or white or race class or gendered that mattered Nel in an anguished voice calls out from what matters to her most- “O Lord Sula”, she cried, “girl, girl, girl, girl, girl” (174), a siren that rises from the pit of being without a top or bottom an endless circle of sorrow lashing her.

Morrison’s novel The Bluest Eye centers around a black girl’s desire for the bluest eyes, Pecola in her worthless state craving for the impossible becomes a metaphor of what it is to be Black, poor and ugly. The Bluest Eye is about the contradictions fostered by racism, sexism and class distinctions that assail the black. The contradictions are too intense for Pecola to sustain her sense of worth as an escape from a highly intolerable
situation, she sinks into madness. The other girls Claudia and Frieda manage to survive. The novel also shows the tragic effect of race prejudice on children. The novel basically underlines the principle that ‘to be black was to be a victim’. Pecola is a victim of the vicious genocidal effects of racism on a Black girl. Much of Toni Morrison’s novels experiment with the concepts of class and its relation to sex and race which forms an integral part of many of her novels.

In Sula’s refusal to be a part of community, be good and be accepted by everyone, she unconditionally refuses that race and steps outside the cast of women beyond any class definition within that cast, she does not work and is not interested in men, she defies the male concept of beauty and demolishes the seared forms of motherhood, she defines herself outside of the sex, class, race, deprivation of the society. Sula and her grandmother Eva, share a great deal in common, both leave home in medallion’s ‘Bottom’ and return only to inhabit willful isolation. Both are indifferent to love and have caused the death of another.

One of the worst effects of historical transition for a ‘used to be slave mother’ was alienation and repression. Sethe’s alienation is not the outcome of her separation from her family or the social cultural mores but due to murdering her own daughter to save from living an abject life as a slave. Like Sula, Sethe is an outcast, an outlaw, like her, Sethe does not care for the society but seeks to assert a sense of self.

The 1930’s saw the growth of capitalism an age of increased production and consumerism between the two, there was a spread of feelings of desperation, isolation and alienation. As pointed by Zhong Wang:
The social background of *Beloved* is also left in an alienated world of slavery. The characters in *Beloved* share alienation and exile either psychologically or physically under the oppressive world dominated by the white standards. Sethe and Paul.D represent the twisted absurd people who live in absurdity and rebel against the absurdity through their action escaping from slavery both physiologically and psychologically therefore achieve the freedom eventually.

(71)

The Afro – Americans had experienced a bitter part of slavery. *Beloved* presents cruel picture of Afro-American slavery in the 19th. Arriving at a strange place, an alien culture, the Blacks were subjected to a horrific history of repression and marginalization. The worst aspect was that the Blacks were treated as sub-humans and next to animals and were made to work and were subject to hard laborious work. Millions of Blacks died tragically in middle passage. If the condition of the Black male was unmanageable and unredeeming, for the Black woman, the condition would be simply unspeakable. Women slaves were loosely used and often raped by their white owners; the final ignominy was that the black women did not own their own children. Their children did not belong to them, the children removed from their mothers were objects of cruelty, as they were defenseless passive and vulnerable. Most Black men and women unable to bear the shifting oppression in the south, strove to migrate to the industrial North, a freer place where they felt, they could lead an economically and socially elevated life. But they were again proved wrong. They were hard put to job opportunities and they countered a different set of difficulties. The white racist discrimination again alienated them from conforming to any system. As Thanga points out:
Even if they tried to ape the white standard of living, but having a socially depressed status, their struggle results in a traumatic experience of social powerlessness and devalued racial identity which lead them to develop a sense of mistrust, shame, doubt alienation, guilt and inferiority. (20)

Song of Solomon (1977) concentrates on the growth of a distinctive Black identity and community. The novel tells the story of a young man, Milkman, who comes to know himself through going back to his origins. The narration consists of complex embroidery of memory and myth in the slave legends of the protagonist’s family. The protagonist learns life through the stories of men who ran away to freedom and women who remained to promote freedom. The novel takes the protagonist back to history and makes him learn through the past, and how to live in the present. This is a story about materialism and brotherhood.

Tar Baby (1981) deals with the themes of heritage and self-identity, mainly through two contrasting characters. Jadine Child is a Black model, who has been brought up with the help of White patrons and then she likes to live White culture’s life. William Son Green, who is an outcast and vagrant, remains intentionally outside the White culture. The characters are drawn towards each other and they try to liberate each other from mixing and leaving the White society respectively.

In any society the most vulnerable people are the women and children. The child in particular is the weakest and feeble protector of the self. Physically defenseless, psychologically immature passive and largely ignorant of the adult world, they are docile victims of the society, family and friends. As Sigmund Freud, the psychologist says, “The child is a
bundle of oceanic desires, seeing himself as the centre of his own universe and having no sense of differentiation” (Robbins 108). It is true that in *The Bluest Eye* all the characters are alienated from each other, their preference lies elsewhere, they cannot relate to each other, their connectivity as a family unit is torn asunder, even at the beginning while the adults learn to somewhere survive this dirty ugliness and chaos which had enveloped their family, it is the child who submerges under, unable to surmount the filial betrayal of the family, friends and community for Pecola there is no comeback, either she has to die or escape into the forgetting zone – madness. She slips into the latter, alienated forever from the incommunicable world by the adults.

It is a sad plight for the Blacks who fail to affirm themselves. All human generally aspire for things that are out of reach or denied to them, this is a basic want which underlies all human existence. But as adults, we somehow try to reconcile, compromise adjust to ensure a meaningful life. But when adults, who can comprehend an impossible situation, begin to tilt the balance and impose on the child, their failings and frustration, dreams and desires, the child simply breaks under the strain. Pauline and Cholly have their share of sufferings as emancipated slaves in a white world. Pauline immerses herself in her admirable picture of the whites, Cholly has, as a ‘brunt’ Black man, his own conflicts and confrontation with life. But what he does to his daughter is what an animal will do to its own, his physical disintegration of his daughter does her incompletely which he safely does in the workhouse, he leaves his daughter searching the garbage – a measure of her own state.
In *Sula* where brighter days begin after her death, political system changes to bring in an alienation in “Bottom”. The white raid the hill country, there is sure to be a interface between the Black and white community but in *The Bluest Eye*, there is no individual redemption for Pecola. “… the land of the ensure country was possible to marigolds that year… It’s too late. At least on the edge of … the town among the garbage and the sunflowers of… town, it’s much, much, much too late” (BE 164).

Pecola’s fate is forever sealed, a marigold, a common flower crushed in its bud. What makes Pecola’s life more tragic is, though she suffers racial discrimination and ostracization by her friends and community, one who mainly fails her and betrays her completely is her father. The filial betrayal breaks her already weak self – esteem and identity.

*Beloved* deals with the life of a female slave, Sethe. As a mother, she is opposed to Pecola’s mother Pauline, who simply abandons her daughter and her needs to cater to the children of the white family, who represent for her, the order, discipline and cleanliness that she had not known in her family. Sethe is a mother given to caring for her children, since she desires that their life should not resemble her own. She would rather kill them than have them sold into slavery. Sethe’s is an act that is performed by a mother out of her concern for her daughter. It is said that the story is based on the true story of Margaret Garner, a slave woman from Kentucky who attempted to kill her children rather than have them enslaved when they were captured in Ohio in 1850: Like Sethe in *Beloved* she too managed to kill one of her children before being restricted and tried in court. *Beloved* as a novel is set in an alienated world, one of slavery. The characters share as Zhong and Wang, points, “alienation and exile either psychologically or physically under the oppressive world dominated by the white’s standards”.

(71) In keeping with the ideology that the modern world was one of chaotic
irrational happenings, Toni Morrison in *Beloved* produces a world full of dread, disorder and irrationality. The novel contains a rich matrix of magic realism with the ghost of Beloved coming to haunt Sethe for her ruthless murder of her child, but it also packs up crude realism of the human infliction of cruelty on another. *Beloved* presents a very realistic and cruel picture of the practice of American slavery in the 19th century.

In the contemporary period, black women writers have systematically analyzed the relationship between class, race and gender. The novels of black women from 1892 to the recent times have been a loud vociferous and articulate voice against the aspects of oppression of race, class sex and color, the factor upon which the societal definition of the black women is based. The concept of women in society is not only sexist, racist but is also classist. Black women were considered as belonging to a lower class. Critics have rightly pointed out that elements of sexism and racism as political social system inadvertently affected the physiological and psychological functioning of the lives of Afro-American women.

As a slave, Sethe is treated as sub-human. She even seems to be alienated from herself. Even Paul. D thinks that she is inferior to a cock. Sethe sees her entire existence as a slave as futile. Most often she is isolated and desperate. Hence she chooses to free herself from the slavery and even decides to kill her children to protect them, from the utter humiliation and racial suffering from the whites and she decides to live in isolation with her daughter Denver.

Among Black women race and gender are two equal and simultaneous concerns. As much as they abhorred both sexist and racist oppression, because they were a minority ethnic sect, there was much they
could do to actively formulate a political agenda to end this bias. However scores of Black women took up these issues by writing about them. Toni Morrison was one who wrote almost all her novels centering about these concerns. Pauline and Pecola of *The Bluest Eye*, Nel and Sula in *Sula*, Sethe and Paul D. in *Beloved* are all victims of the sexist and racist oppression of an Anglo – Saxon Standard. The men are not the only oppressors- Black or white but the entire social and cultural norms have perpetrated the racist and racist atrocities on them, from the media to the elementary school primers Carolyn Denard very aptly sums up the situation:

It is not however, the physical standards of beauty that these later women feel most oppressed by and subsequently reject but the subservient roles that black women have generally filled in society. They believe that community and societal roles traditionally expected of black women are too limiting. Too much of their time has historically been given over to the domestic work of making life comfortable for others resulting in few chances for them to think about or to real life their own self fulfillment. (173)

*The Bluest Eye* carries the author’s most telling statement on the tragic effect of race prejudice on children. Toni Morrison here depicts the outcome when a person alienates from positive black traditions.

Pauline has lost her inner self and the beauty of her own people she tries to fill an aching void with the “white picture shows” and makes efforts to look like Jean Harlem. Her daughter Pecola is further removed from community strengths.
and longs for “the bluest eyes to gain entrance into a world that doesn’t accept her. (Russell 45)

One dominant aspect that which Toni Morrison outlines in her novels is the concept of sisterhood, which has a larger meaning in Afro American culture Toni Morrison, explains the concept:

The term ‘sister’ has a deep old meaning - it was valid, never secondary. Black women had to be real and genuine to each other, there was no one else. In pre-ageing days they took care of the sick, the elderly, and the children. There was a profound and real need there for physical as well as psychological survival. (Morrison 18)

Denying that Sula has any lesbian contact, she points out what happens when a relationship between women is not taken seriously, she explained that in Sula she aimed to throw that relationship into relief. She pointed out that there was always the ‘other’ who is a friend and the friendship becomes spiritual and women must hang on to that.

Morrison emphasized on the “historical ability of Black women to keep their families and their household together, the far quality the protective value of the Black community is evident in Sula. The community hates and abhors Sula and what she does to the male members, but they first allow her to be. What makes Sula frightening through is because “Racial and sexual circumstances has determined that she will have no way of expressing her brilliant inner fire” (23). As a social rebel, Sula protests against the kind of indulgence of the Black women, harnessing themselves to a domesticity, bearing and rearing, steeped in daily works that effaces their realistic arising and ability to do anything else.