Chapter - 2

Social, Cultural & Religious Oppressions
CHAPTER II
SOCIAL, CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS OPPRESSIONS

Any society is structured with its indispensable and coordinating elements as class, culture, religion, gender, and race. Some societies consider religion, caste, and race as categories that belong to hierarchical order, while other societies may ponder a great deal upon culture and gender. Whatever might be the predominant element in the society, the status of women is always relegated to a secondary position only. The oppression of women is not determined only by their biology, as many contend. Its origins are social, cultural, and economic in character. Throughout the evolution of pre-class and class society, women’s childbearing function has always been the same. Their social status has always been that of a degraded domestic servant, subject to man’s control and command.

In a tradition-bound and conventional atmosphere of the middle class and bourgeois society like India, women are always considered to be inferior to men domestically, socially, emotionally, biologically, economically, culturally, politically, psychologically, and linguistically too. Unlike in India, in a developed society like America, the subjugation of women varies in degree and kind. The racial torment that the black women have been facing may not be within the experiences of any other women group across the globe.

Society has laid down certain norms and commandments exclusively for women, which have not been changed or radically altered over the years. Women of any society are expected to shape themselves by the roles offered by the society, and they have to survive by living up to the socially and culturally defined normative images given to them through various myths and epics. Most images show women as passive sufferers,
performing in silence, their role as daughters, as sisters, as wives, as mothers, and as grandmothers. In this survival struggle, sometimes, women become mere soulless creatures. They find time occasionally to protest against these subtle forms of oppression.

The present chapter proposes to explore the various oppressions the women characters of Toni Morrison and Bama encounter at the social, cultural, and religious fronts. The promising objective of the chapter is to seek out the customary and established codes, and prejudices of the society that obstruct and perturb only women. Although, Morrison and Bama belong to two farthest social milieus, the oppressions their women characters confront appear to be more or less the same. As women, their predicament is the same either in the society of the blacks among whites, or in the community of dalits among the upper classes and castes. The rationale behind the subjugation and oppression of these women characters lies deeply embedded in the existing social state of affairs and in the conventional cultural backdrop. However, the oppressions may be categorized under assorted heads like

a) Domestic   b) Economic   c) Political and ideological d) Cultural and religious, and e) Racial/Caste

These above mentioned oppressions are clustered, compounded, and intertwined in such a way that the women stumble upon these oppressive obstacles many times to establish themselves as dignified human beings in the world. Sometimes, they, despite their resistance and constant struggle, fail to ascertain their potentials, and end up in grief and bereavement. The social order is very stringent for women that they have to fight their way to make even small gains in the social, economic, political, and cultural spheres.
The root of any kind of oppression originates from family organization. Families in any society form the basic core of civilization. Any family might basically consist of two obligatory members, a male and a female either in the name of father and mother, or in the name of husband and wife. Whether it is a mother or a wife, the role of a woman is programmed as a subordinate to the male member of the family. If a woman happens to be a wife, she is expected to be a shadow, walking along with and sometimes following the husband with loyalty and devotion. If the same woman happens to be a mother, she should be affectionate, caring, considerate, and loving towards the family members, a dutiful caretaker of the household chores.

Home is the place where every human being would seek serenity and contentment. On the contrary, most women face torment. The kind of domestic oppression is an apparent phenomenon in all societies, across cultures. Instead of offering freedom to women, the domestic zone forces them into the shackles of oppression in various glamorous titles like "good homemaker", "domestic goddess", "perfect wife", and "ideal mother". Imprisoned as they are, it is evident that the women characters of Toni Morrison and Bama do not even attempt to escape into freedom.

A woman must always be aware of her domestic duties, and must be engaged most of the time in fulfilling her familial responsibilities. Invariably, she is extolled as the goddess of domesticity. The male projected images of a woman in a family are blended with myths, fantasies, and societal images that may very often tend to conceal the distinctive traits of women as individuals. Women are much more likely than men to be victims of domestic oppression. A much higher proportion of domestic violence is perpetrated against women, and this violence besides being an everyday reality is an aspect of women's oppression.
The high level of domestic enmity against women is caused by the hierarchical structure of a society that worships power and by the uneven power balance that exists between men and women. Men who use violence against women at home do so because they are in a position of power to rule women in the society and believe they have the right to enforce their will over women. They want to retain this position, and to control the women with whom they are related. Men use physical violence or the threat of physical violence to establish and then safeguard their control over their partner and force, bully and frighten them into submission and obedience. In TBE, early in the morning Mrs. Breedlove goes to take care of her routine kitchen work, and gets irritated by the non-availability of coal to cook. When she wakes up her drunken husband, “the brawl begins” (36). This happens not only occasionally, but almost everyday. Mrs. Breedlove is severely beaten up by Cholly. Being a victim of physical abuses daily, Mrs. Breedlove fights back “in a purely feminine way – with frying pans and pokers” (37), while Cholly fights her “the way a coward fights a man – with feet, the palms of his hands, and teeth” (37). “Wife beating” is not only a habitual observance but also a sickness found in men capable of misplacing their anger and other pent up emotions.

In Bama’s KU, the dalit men in their inebriated condition unleash violence against their wives in the evenings when they return to their homes. Bama refers to a man called Oodan, who is notorious especially for thrashing his wife in public everyday. The man drags her by her hair to the centre of their residential area, and rains blows on her mercilessly as if she were a thick skinned draught animal. No one intervenes in this domestic drama and everybody watches helplessly the tragic scene. The tragedy of their life is that very often male insecurity masquerading as male superiority prompts the man
to seize insignificant reasons and flimsy causes to let loose the beatings. In his case wife beating becomes a favourite pastime as well as an act establishing male authority.

In the complicated social conditions, the exploitation of other human beings becomes profitable for a privileged few. Women, because of their biological role in production, become valuable property to be possessed like slaves and cattle. In fact, they are a source of wealth. They alone are capable of parturition, which would make the family. Thus the owning of women by men is a license given by society in the name of marriage and family. Women's primary social role has been increasingly defined as domestic servant and child-bearer bordering on utilitarian principle.

A woman managing the home front skilfully and relieving the husband of his domestic responsibilities enjoys instrumental human relation based on contractualism. Women's domestic chores incorporate all kinds of lowly work like scrubbing, cooking, cleaning, washing, and rearing children too. It is an inviolable law that women are the endorsed custodians of the domestic tasks. It is beyond the comprehension and botheration of anyone whether women are really exuberant about their exacting and enervating domestic work or not. The domestic confinement of women is presumed to be a fortunate and blissful state. From ancient times, women handle the familial affairs, whereas men engage themselves in the business of bread winning outside the home. By denying women proper education and economic freedom, family tends to domesticate them, and train them in the chores of domesticity.

The concept of the ideal servant has been deeply ingrained in the female psyche. In TBE, Mrs.Breedlove is given the honourable title “ideal servant” by the white masters, the Fishers, for whom she works as a servant looking after the household work. She willingly accepts the role of being an ideal servant, and she fits in to that role very
naturally. She believes that the role of being a servant suits her much "for such a role filled practically all of her needs" (100). But she fails to be an ideal servant at her own house, leaving her daughter Pecola in a desolate condition. She rears the white child with utmost care and neglects her own daughter Pecola, showing her least attention. Her servanthood is not a choice but a compulsion, forced by circumstances. She wants an emotional outlet, and that happens to be her own daughter, Pecola. Most women around the world, who have not equipped themselves with proper education and skills, end up in taking up the profession of a maidservant, as they feel they are naturally qualified. Yet they invite the criticism that they fail to be good mothers and good wives. This accusation leads them to self-condemnation and life-long guilt.

Motherhood is an inexorable phase of woman’s life that again indirectly vanquishes women’s desires, if any, very subtly. All feminine characteristics of patience, self-sacrifice, love and care that construct and support the cult of true womanhood stem from the essential image of perfect motherhood. Julia Kristeva claims, “By giving birth the woman enters into contact with her Mother; she becomes, she is her own Mother. They are the same continuity differentiating itself.”1

In times past, for example, during the period of the American Revolution, the idea of Republican Motherhood was formed. The mainstream political philosophy of the day assumed that a republic rested upon the virtues of its citizens. Thus, women had the essential role of instilling their children with values conducive to a healthy republic. By stressing the society’s responsibility upon women for rearing children in a healthy surrounding to make them exceptional republicans and good human beings, the home front, and the society together oppressed women circuitously.
In the case of Sethe in *Beloved*, the remorse of the mother shatters the whole household. The killing of her infant is to accomplish her task as a true mother like the fierce tigress, dispensing eager love, and protecting the child from the iniquitous, outside world of slavery. The figure of Sethe standing in the woodshed, dripping with the blood of the murdered baby girl whose body she will not relinquish, “offering her blood-dripping nipple” (149) to the surviving infant, challenges any recognizable image of motherhood. Sethe commits infanticide to protect her daughter from going into the despicable and dreadful world of slavery of her ancestors. But the price she pays for her act is too high. Such motherhood evolved by women themselves as a substitutive and self-raised prop for their forlorn and aimless circumscribed existence is not a rare phenomenon in the life of most black women.

In *Sula*, Hannah, the mother of the protagonist Sula, while conversing with her friends Patsy and Valentine refers to the problems of child rearing. They are all of the same opinion that it is painful to rear children, and it would be advisable not to have children too soon in their life. Referring to the wild nature of their children, they accuse their husbands for not taking care of their children, and the burden falls heavily upon women only. But to live without children also is a grave problem for women, more than men. The woman is “barren” and “useless” according to the societal standard. Violet Trace in *Jazz* is an unpredictable woman, as she is deprived of child and her husband’s love.

Virginia Woolf posited the view that women needed economic independence, which alone would grant them some semblance of independence. The family institution rests on and reinforces a social division of labour involving women as unpaid workers, and men as the sole breadwinners, which in turn make women dependent upon the male or any other earning member of the family for survival. But in the contemporary world, the
notion of workingwomen in different societies has become an inevitable reality. Married workingwomen often enter work outside home either to supplement their husbands’ insufficient incomes, or to ascertain their individual identity as women in the society.

In TBE, Polly obtains the job of serving a white family as a caretaker, partly because she wants a break from all suffocating domestic atmosphere, and partly because to gain economic freedom. Her miserable life so long with her husband Cholly Breedlove has made her recognize her pathetic condition as a powerless and penniless married woman. She realizes the fact that her life is doomed as the wife of Cholly, who remains always as a drunken brute. To make her life meaningful and rich, she works under a white woman. But the irony is that instead of making her life happier, her occupation causes a sudden inversion in the domestic power equations, and destroys cruelly the love and affection she has for her children.

Being economically free may guarantee a happy state for any woman, who wants herself free from the oppressive shackles of domestic agony, mentally and physically. Profession can be a luxury or necessity of fulfillment for any woman, but the womenfolk of Bama and Morrison are mostly agents of conventional values and they are being forced to work to escape indigence. In the case of Sethe, in BD, she is made to work in the plantations of the white masters with other slaves like Paul D Garner, Paul F Garner, Paul A Garner, Halle Suggs and Sixo, the Wildman. The plantation is named as “Sweet Home”, ironically an acrimonious asylum like house that cruelly treats the slaves.

There is no question of choice in the case of Sethe. She is a gift given to Mrs.Garner, the white owner of the plantation, replacing Baby Suggs. Slavery perpetuates slavery. A woman slave replacing another woman slave has her future doomed forever. Sethe’s job, which is imposed upon her, does not give either her, or her family the economic
independence or liberty that any woman wishes for. Rather the job of a slave forces the
whole generation of them to be marginalized where they enact their self-abnegating and
self-subsuming roles with conviction and ultimately they live and die for their white
masters. Slavery robbed of the basic rights of being a human. The system increasingly
exploited women's labour and sexuality, and condemned them to lifelong servitude.

In her KU, Bama points out that all dalit women have to work along with their men
dfolk for their day-to-day survival. The whole day, these women have to carry out
backbreaking and the most exhausting tasks like:

- ploughing, manuring, watering, sowing the seed, separating the seedlings and
  planting them out; then weeding, spraying the fields with fertilizer, reaping the
  grain, working on the threshing floors, planting groundnut, selecting ripe coconuts.
- ... there’s construction labour: digging well, carrying loads of earth, gravel and
  stone. If even this is not available, then people have to go up to the hills to gather
  firewood, or they must work with palm-leaves, or at the kilns making bricks.

People have to do some work in order to eat. (41)

In addition to the exacting domestic work, the dalit women have to undertake hard
physical labour for exploitative low wages like 10 paise or 5 paise. In spite of the many
attendant risks and occupational hazards the women find themselves nowhere near
economic independence or freedom. These women are exploited and abused in many
ways. They come into direct and daily conflict with their upper class bosses in the work
spot, and with racists and sexists on every level of life. These women naturally develop a
keener awareness and consciousness of the multiple nature of their oppression as females
— caste, religion, and sex — than the most non-working, other middle class women, who
do not belong to the dalit community.
The unequal wages place the dalit women on constant dependency and economic thraldom. In the real sense, the hard-earned money never saves them from dire poverty and hunger. The economic privileges are too limited for them to find positive or healthy outlets. The prevailing caste and community inequalities, and social inequities isolate them as “untouchables”, and deprive them of education. As a result they are forced to find menial jobs like that of a scrubwoman or a charwoman or a maid of all work. In KU Bama’s *patti* (grandmother) used to wash and clean the toilets of the *naicker* (an upper class community) family everyday, and after the work is over she keeps her bowl for food near the back door. The *naicker*’s wife brings the leftovers of the house, and transfers them into the bowl of *patti*. While doing this, the Naicker woman is so careful that her container and hands do not touch the bowl of *patti*, for she fears pollution by touch. This leftover is the wage that *patti* earns for her degrading work as a shameful toilet cleaner.

To ascertain their survival, women have to put in more hard labour than their men folk to get equal wages. But the burden of gratifying the economic needs of the family rests on the woman, and the man takes the privilege of spending his money as he wishes. Frugality is yet another virtue that dalit women have to practice while the men may splurge their little earning on alcohol. In her SI, Bama remarks with rage:

> From this perspective, it seems to me that at least our women work hard and earn their own money, and have a few coins in their hands. They don’t hold out their palms to their husbands for every little expense, like those others. All the same, because of our caste and because of our poverty, every fellow treats us with contempt. If ever there is a problem or a disturbance, everyone, starting with the police, chooses to blame and humiliate the women of our community. The government does not seem prepared to do anything to redress this. So we must
take up the challenge ourselves. (66).

In Morrison’s *Sula*, the magnificent mamma figure Eva, the grandmother of the protagonist Sula, is portrayed as a one-legged woman. Though there are many conjectures, many believe that she has lost her leg in a train accident wilfully to collect the insurance amount of $10,000. Being a single woman abandoned by her husband Boyboy for another woman, the responsibility of bringing up her children Hannah and Plum falls heavily upon her. Like all deserted and desolate women, she also must have found herself in financial dire straits. Though it is a dishonest and dangerous way of making money, the looming financial crisis forces her to dismember her leg in an apparent train accident. Like a brave warrior in action, Eva Peace faces her economic oppression with grim grit and stoicism. In Morrison’s words:

> When she left in November, Eva had $1.65, five eggs, three beets and no idea of what or how to feel. The children needed her; she needed money, and needed to get on with her life. But the demands of feeding her three children were so acute she had to postpone her anger for two years until she had both the time and the energy for it. She was confused and desperately hungry…. Two days later she left all of her children with Mrs.Suggs, saying she would be back the next day. Eighteen months later she swept down from a wagon with crutches, a new black pocketbook, and one leg.(32)

The passage vividly depicts the dreadful economic doldrums that a mother of two children finds herself in. Being a woman, the most she can do is to lose her body part to get the insurance money. Penury of catastrophic proportions forces women like Eva to resort to deliberately losing any of the bodily organs. But women who lack the mental fortitude choose the next best alternative of submitting their bodies to the brutal
carnalities of men. The major portion of abandoned women in the society easily forms a unit called Whores, partly because of their inability to satisfy the basic needs or to meet out the greediness of their family.

Whores are not born, but they are created in the male-dominated society. The true reason for the existence of these whores as a separate class of citizens is either males neglecting their duties, or their desire to use the physique of women. In TBE, Morrison makes a reference to the triple whores who are very kind to Pecola. Women are saleable products, and all about them can be sold. Their labour, their physique, their bodily organs, their life, their biological convenience as child-bearers, everything can be used for making money, not for their advantage, but for their male owners and their dependent children.

The exploitation and abuse of women prevalent in the patriarchal society lead them to take such bleak decisions as Eva Peace’s, or the whores discussed in TBE. At the same time, it is clear that women resist such oppressions, and try to establish global standards for their right in general. Morrison’s women characters do not resign themselves to the fate of poverty; instead they valiantly defy patriarchal injunctions and societal discriminations, and courageously face prolonged conflicts. They face hostility and resistance from every quarter, especially from the white people, and from their own community and home. These economically downtrodden women of Morrison and Bama are predisposed to achieve equilibrium amidst the chaos and corruption in the economic province of the society around them.

Violet Trace, in Jazz, firmly asserts that she has to take care of her personal economic instability, though her husband earns a lot of money as a salesman for the Cleopatra beauty Products Company. She discloses to Alice that whenever she comes close to
borrowing, or need extra money, she can work all day on the heads of the white women in the town (84). She is an unlicensed beautician, who cuts and curls the hair of other sophisticated women. In a different context in the same novel, when Alice talks of the armed and unarmed women, she refers to them as:

Who else were the unarmed ones? The ones who thought they did not need folded blades, packets of lye, shards of glass taped to their hands. Those who bought houses and hoarded money as protection and the means to purchase it. Those attached to armed men. Those who did not carry pistols because they became pistols; did not carry switchblades because they were switchblades ... Bail out, dress the dead, pay the rent, find new rooms, start a school, storm an office, take up collections, rout the block and keep their eyes on all children. Any other kind of unarmed black woman in 1926 was silent or crazy or dead. (78)

The connotation might be that women who are financially secured, or attached to financially self-reliant men who are ready to protect their women are “armed women”. For any woman, the essential elements of survival are to be secured in terms of money. The most fundamental concern in life is survival, daily food, the possession of clothing, and shelter. So only, it is much essential to focus upon the economic stratification of any society. The economic system and the financial strength of a woman shape her beliefs. Since most women in the universe depend upon men for their pecuniary benefits, they automatically fall into the category of economically oppressed beings. But the women characters in the novels have the persistence to make daring efforts and the resilience that surprises them even.

The subordination of women under patriarchy across the world has been discussed as a complex matter down the ages. Patriarchy can generally be associated with three terms
authority, power, and influence. Women have not been presented with any power, though they implicitly have certain terms of power in some societies, and are able to exert a good deal of influence in social decision-making. Yet in the most apparently egalitarian societies, authority, the source of legitimacy in the exercise of power lay within men. This authority grants males the supremacy over the other group of the society – females.

In PD, the 8-Rock men consider themselves to be the supreme blacks than the desperate women in the convent, and they mercilessly try to eliminate the poor women so as to prove their authority. With sheer destructive power, the nine men “are obliged to stampede or kill and they have the paraphernalia for either requirement: rope, a palm leaf cross, handcuffs, Mace and sunglasses, along with clean, handsome guns.” (3). The women are so naïve that they never expect the massacre. Indeed, they enjoy the chilly rain falling upon them. “A backward noplace ruled by men whose power to control was out of control and who had the nerve to say who could live and who not and where; who had seen in lively, free, unarmed females the mutiny of the mares and so got rid of them” (308). In the patriarchal world, the control is the hands of the patriarchs like the gun, and the women are ever unarmed.

Subaltern incorporates the issue of the secondary position of women in the world. It signifies the oppressed group of human beings who are naturally and logically subordinated to the activity of the ruling class, the hegemony of the commanding class. The basic rights of women are not seriously considered, and most of the times, they are made silent, as silence only would give them peace of mind. Most women are encased and suffocated in the power structures and patterns of the existing society. These women are steeped in the conventions and customs of patrilineal society, which dislocates and
alienates them from the process of being and becoming.

The power structure of society created by men offers male-assigned roles for wife, and motherhood that entrap women in the masculine plot of desire, and thereby marginalize them from other spheres of life. Muted by the rules of patriarchy, women seem to have lost their individual identities as persons. Both in Western and Eastern civilizations, women are expected to follow the power structure without any opposition. It is ordained that women in the patriarchal society need to be subordinates of men. If they try to conquer the undocumented but predestined law, they are condemned not only by men, but also by the womenfolk of their own community too.

Sula can be compared neither with any other woman in the society nor with her friend Nel, who is married and with a family, doing the traditional and submissive role of a wife in her house. Nel scorns at Sula, when Sula is in her deathbed:

“You can’t do it all. You a woman and a colored woman at that. You can’t act like a man. You can’t be walking around all independent-like, doing whatever you like, taking what you want, leaving what you don’t.” (Sula 142)

The same defiant girl Sula proudly disowns all men saying that she is happy being a lonely woman, whereas Nel’s loneliness is a “second-hand loneliness” (ibid. 143)

“I always understood how you could take a man. Now I understand why you can’t keep none.”

“Is that what I’m supposed to do? Spend my life keeping a man?”

“They worth keeping, Sula.”

“They ain’t worth more than me. And besides, I never loved no man because he was worth it. Worth didn’t have nothing to do with it” (ibid 143-44)
Because of her rebellious nature and wayward behaviour as woman, which are much against the norms of patriarchy, she is condemned by the people of her society as a witch who has brought evil to Bottom.

Morrison's women record polyphonic voices behind every structure and relationship that have contributed to make women silent. These women face structural inequality between man and woman, and they become a willing victim of the trap. Black women are unaware of the shackles that repress them, and only through acquiring proper education and exposure any relief could be found. But in the case of TB, the sophistication because of education that Jadine receives from her white patrons Mr. Valerian and Mrs. Margaret Street does not provide her with security and peace. By transforming Jadine into a citified and fashionable woman, in fact, the white patrons succeed in imposing their white culture upon Jadine, so as to make her abandon her own roots.

The domineering white folks of the society make her a "Tar Baby". The plight is that she is not even aware of her role as a Tar baby. The power politics of white people formulated the pattern of the society in such a way that the black people, especially the black women are to be exploited extremely. Either they are treated inhumanly or diverted to travel in a different track than theirs, as in the case of Jadine. However, the help, the white folks do to the slave women have a hidden agenda. In the novel TB, Son angrily points out the story of a rabbit that always troubled the white farmer. The story goes on as this:

"Once upon a time, there was a farmer – a white farmer......"

"Quit! Leave me alone!"

"And he had this bullshit bullshit bullshit farm. And a rabbit. A rabbit came along and ate a couple of his ..... ow....cabbages."

“So he got this great idea about how to get him. How to, to trap….. this rabbit. And you know what he did? He made him a tar baby. He made it, you hear me?

He made it! (273)

In a patriarchal society, women’s primary struggle is for their essential rights as individuals and their democratic rights as human beings. It includes the right to get education and employment, the right to own property, the right to vote, the right to enter parliament, the right to birth control, the right to divorce, and even the right to claim conjugal entitlement. Though people say that there is a legal reform, a legally equal position in the society, in SOS, Ruth suffers from the denial of conjugal rights by her husband.

Morrison clearly explicates how Ruth wants to have a boy baby through her husband who is not interested in connubial relationship at all. She has to get the help of Pilate to seduce her husband with the power of some herbal medicine. Right from the age of twenty-one, after the birth of two daughters, Macon Dead abandons her and despises any physical proximity. For him, only money that matters. He never cares about the sexual needs of his wife, Ruth. After he becomes aware of the pregnancy of Ruth, he becomes furious, and wants to terminate the foetus. Once again, with the great help of Pilate, Ruth could save her child Milkman, who is the protagonist of the novel.

Morrison is much apprehensive in advocating the real emancipation of her traumatized women. Sethe, in BD, struggles hard to achieve equality, dignity, and freedom of choice to control her life and body within and outside the home. She establishes her basic right as a mother to free her children from slavery - the obnoxious and merciless evil prevailing in the society. She makes an attempt to murder her children and succeeds in killing one – Beloved. The act of murdering the child may appear to be a barbarous act.
However, what would an underprivileged woman like Sethe do to defend her unfortunate children as a mother? She, in fact, has saved the life of one of her children. The society and the power pattern have coerced Sethe to commit such a savagery on her children. She and Denver, her only daughter left with her, turn out to be the victims of the ghost of the murdered child. Sethe laments in her monologue, “Why I did it. How if I hadn’t killed her she would have died and that is something I could not bear to happen to her. When I explain it she’ll understand, because she understands everything already (200)”

Of all the women of the globe, the black women and the dalit women are presumed to be the most scorned, rebuked, and victimized by their own men folk who wield considerable power over their bodies and minds. This powerful design of patriarchy bounds and oppresses women at work, at home, at the places of worship, at other religious ceremonies, at the law, the education, and so on. The black men and dalit men are always treated inhumanly by their masters – white masters in the case of black men, and the upper class people in the case of dalit men. When the hardships of these men have been extreme enough to damage their pride, their only outlet happens to be the woman they have at home - their wives, sisters or daughters. As men, it is difficult for them to easily repudiate the physical humiliation and mental torment they confront in the society, and this grows into an inordinate wrath and unrestrained violence to be inflicted upon the women they possess.

Bama notices that, in her community the men’s favourite pastime is to whack their women for no reasons at all. The beating of the wives is the everyday activity of any dalit man to show the people that they are also as powerful as their upper class masters. In their work spots, they are exposed to the heartlessness of the rich and inhumane treatment by the masters. They are exploited with new cruelties and absurdities. The power
structure under which they live tries to engulf them, and make them unprivileged socially, politically and economically too. The dalit women are under double patriarchy - the upper class patriarchy subjugating the outcast patriarchy, and the outcast patriarchy, in turn, with stronger intensity and greater momentum suppress the hapless women. The callous power system blurs the underlying quality of humanity in dalit men. They find sadistic pleasure in beating women as if they were the voiceless and mute animals. The pity here is that the exploiter – the dalit men and the exploited – dalit women, both are very much unaware of their own victimization by the societal power structure.

In SI, Bama renders the plight of dalit women encountering the motivated malignity and spitefulness through the following lines:

> Even though they are male, because they are Dalits, they have to be like dogs with their tails rolled up when they are in the fields, and dealing with their landlords. There is no way they can show their strength in those circumstances. So they show it at home on their wives and children. But then, is it the fate of our women to be tormented both outside their houses and within? (65)

In TBE, Cholly Breedlove is portrayed as a victim of all the possible social evils that press heavily upon all black men - poverty, racism, family-break-up, identity crisis, rootlessness, and so on. Cholly Breedlove can be regarded as a very special black man of Morrison as she has never created another like him. The iniquity and the ruthlessness on the part of Cholly Breedlove are the effects of his miserable brought up and the systematic denial of the basic needs to him by the white society. Being a child abandoned by his mother, unwanted man among the begrudging kinfolk, and an object of humiliation among the local whites, he lends himself to self-deterioration, and develops a
kind of cruelty and a desire to inflict harm upon others. These negative qualities are more
fusilladed only towards his women – wife and daughter.

Morrison depicts the extremeness of his brutality in the last scene of the novel, where
Cholly staggers home one Saturday afternoon as an angry-drunk stranger to rape his
eleven-year old poor daughter on the kitchen floor. For all the adversities and cruelties
that Cholly Breedlove has faced in life as a black man, Pecola becomes a poor victim.
She is the representative of all the women of her community, who are forced to face the
unlimited atrocities and barbaric practices of their black counterparts.

In the current social system, the woman who crosses the boundary of the traditional
roles is considered to be an aggressive woman. Such an aggressive woman is always
perceived to be a threat to man’s power and superiority. A woman who does not pay
much attention to the fulfilment of her personality, according to the societal roles as a
wife and mother is always condemned as abnormal woman. The so-called “natural”
description of woman and the natural roles a woman has to play are imposed on her by
gradual and spontaneous indoctrination, training and culture. When a woman attempts to
overthrow male power from her life, she finds herself in a dilemma.

A woman who denies her femininity has to accept the disapproval of man and society.
Either she has to be like other women, or else she has no place in the society at all. Such a
problematic woman has to deprive herself of every kind of love and care from man. The
patriarchal social system has laid down the sanctioned ways of expressing womanhood.
A woman should live as daughter, wife, and mother or as a prostitute, whose sole income
depends upon men alone. The woman who refuses to bear any of these roles in her life is
estimated as an unruly person worthy of punishment.
Sula is one such woman, and she does not blame her fate as other women would. She realizes that she could not fulfil the desires in her life because she is just a woman. She refuses to turn her femininity into any of these images acceptable to the society where she lives. She has no place in such a society, and hence she destroys and dissolves herself in amorous relationships. She is caught in the man-woman and woman-woman dilemma. The outward struggle that she faces in the society becomes her internal struggle. The society orders such a split woman to end the struggle by herself. In the battle, on one side stands the black society and on the other side stands Sula alone. The society demands her to take up the traditional roles offered to any woman. If she does not accept the traditional role assigned to her, then the society offers generously the title “evil-doer”.

In SOS, the wife and daughters of Macon Dead are always identified in the society as the possessions of Macon Dead, and they never try to assert their individual identity. Pilate is the boisterous and rebellious woman in the novel. Though she has a family with a daughter and a grand daughter, she does not depend upon any man, and her family does not have any patriarch to dictate rules at all. Special symbols like birthmarks are to be found on these women that separates them from the other women. Sula is with a mark on her eyelid, and Pilate has no navel at all. These unusual birthmarks of these wild women scare men folk.

Women always wish to perceive their personalities, interests, professional preferences, and beauty concepts from the viewpoint of men only. Their identity is always blended with the identity of some men or the other who are closely related to them at the domestic front. The undemanding nature of women spontaneously makes them merge with the men who are associated with them in their life. A woman in any society is identified as a daughter or wife or mother of a man, rather than to be identified for what she is. In SOS,
Ruth is recognized in a party given by Anns Djvorak as “her father’s daughter”. Her husband is so unhappy that he pinpoints the fact that she is always her Daddy’s daughter. But Ruth gladly accepts the ridicule in a positive way. She even wishes to be identified with her daddy always than to be called by her own name. She finds her daddy more compassionate and loving than her husband and son in her life. She blithely accepts to be a woman with no identity of her own, as she loves her father deeply. In Sula, while talking about the respectable qualities of Helene, it is remarked as:

Helene Wright was an impressive woman … It was Helene who never turned her head in church when latecomers arrived; Helene who established the practice of seasonal altar flowers; Helene who introduced the giving of banquets of welcome to returning Negro veterans. She lost only one battle – the pronunciation of her name. The people in the Bottom refused to say Helene. The called her Helen Wright and left it at that.

Helene, who is noted for all her special qualities among the other unsophisticated black women, is always linked to the name of her husband Wright. It is taken for granted that women need not be called by their individual names, and it is sufficient if they are addressed as the wife of somebody. This inevitable appellation of her husband’s name to her name is an offensive act, according to Helene.

Sometimes the women confront the problem of namelessness. Their white masters deliberately deny the fact that these women exist as human beings. James Baldwin decries the complete loss of identity for the blacks with a deep sense of anguish of the soul. In a letter to his nephew he writes:

...I am writing this letter to you, to try to tell you something about how to handle *them*, for most of them do not yet really know that you exist. I know the
conditions under which you were born, for I was there.... Your grand mother was 
also there, and no one has ever accused her of being bitter. I suggest that the 
innocents check with her. She isn’t hard to find. Your countrymen don’t know 
that she exists, either, though she has been working for them all their lives.²

The names of the women characters of Morrison and Bama hint strongly of the 
subordination they confront in their day-to-day life and lack of self-identity. In TBE, 
Pauline is called “Polly” by the white people for whom she serves. In Jazz, “Violet 
Trace” is nicknamed as “Violent Trace” as she behaves oddly at times. In the same novel, 
the mother of Joe Trace is addressed as “wild” and history of the name is much unclear. 
Usually, the daughters of the black families are named by putting a pin in the Bible. The 
males are named after their father, since there is again to be found the influence of male 
supremacy. There is a belief that only males can inherit any property of their father, 
including the family names – the prime source of individual identification.

The names of the women in SOS, like Pilate, First Corinthians, Lena called 
Magdalene, are all Biblical names. Adjunct to the odd or unusual names of the black 
women, some of the places and streets of the black society, which do not show any mercy 
upon them are known by the black people as “Not Doctor street” (the street where black 
people live and where there is no doctor at all) (4), and “No Mercy Hospital” (the charity 
hospital that does not allow black people to take treatment) (4). In point of fact, they are 
not named after some idea, but misnamed after the plight and detriment that blacks suffer 
in the societies of whites.

In BD, Baby Suggs, the caring and compassionate mother-in-law of Sethe, has the 
original name as Jenny, which is used in only one place of the novel. Margaret Garner, 
the owner of the plantation has bought Baby Suggs as a slave to serve him, and he alone
calls her “Jenny”, as he finds that name on the sales ticket (142). Suggs is the name of Jenny’s husband, and he used to call her “Baby”. So, she acquired the name “Baby Suggs” in which Baby is the pet name offered to her by her husband and Suggs is the name taken from her husband’s name. Baby Suggs explains the reason for her name to Margaret Garner, who happens to be a white man with a regard for the self-esteem and a sense of self-worthiness of women in general. Baby Suggs insists that he should call her by the same name presented by her husband, as she is such an uninformed woman, especially of her self-identity. Garner with bemusement points out: “Well,” said Mr. Garner, going pink again, “if I was you I’d stick to Jenny Whitlow. Mrs. Baby Suggs ain’t no name for a freed Negro.” (142)

Identifying a woman with her name is not simply a matter of fancy and quirks. A name has a definite meaning, with some essential nuances of nature, ancestry, character, culture, religion, hopes, and desires. Only names exist in this perishable world even after the mortals depart this life. There is a naming ceremony for the newly born infants in most of the societies of the world that brings joy and ecstasy to the parents, as they establish their family lineage strongly through the names they choose for their infants. But this kind of significant joy is denied to the blacks, as they are just slaves, and it is the white men who decide the fate of the number of child/children for the slave woman. In the history of the blacks, there are the circumstances in which “mulattos” are brought into the world. So, like the fate of the blacks, the names are also entirely fixed by the white masters. In Margaret Atwood’s novel, The Handmaid’s Tale, the black women are depicted with no names at all, and they are the possessions of their white masters. The protagonist’s name is “Offred”, Fred being the name of the master of the black woman, and she is the chattel “of Fred.”
Individual names are the true identity that can be offered to any human being. But, in the case of women, albeit their original names, they are always identified with their men folk like father or husband. The names of dalits do not carry any significance as in the case of the upper caste people, as they do not have any identity of their own. Their life solely depends upon and concocted with the instructions and directions of their masters. The masters of the dalits are not much bothered about the original names, and use different names to address them.

Sometimes, related to the manners and actions of the dalits, there are several funny and abusive names are employed to refer to them, even among the people of their own community. Predominantly, women are the victims of these degradable names practiced much upon them. Bama in her novels, KU and SI, emphasises the problem that the dalit women have never been identified with their original names, and it may even be doubtful that they have any such original name at all. Even among the people of their community, no one is concerned with the importance of their name or the name of their children.

Some samples of names related to the manners and mannerisms of the dalit women are like "munkovam" (woman of short tempered nature), "matyana masalai" (woman who makes spicy items in the afternoon), "murugan conai panni" (woman equivalent to the hefty pig of Murugan Spring), "kalinca" (woman always suffer from loose motion), and "metanta" (woman who doesn’t know swimming and floating in the well). Some names that debase the physical deficiency of women like "kakka" (ugly-looking woman like a crow), "konnavacci" (woman stammering to speak), "cevuti" (woman who is deaf), "uoomai" (woman who is dumb), "kirukki" (woman who is mad), and "ula mukki" (woman always with running nose) are so common. These names are derived from their day-to-day life style, and it suits their oppressed nature also as they are much careless
about their self-identity. Dalit men also have some nicknames like “karuvayar” (dark skinned man), “natot” (gypsy like), and “arakkan” (man with only a half ear).

However, the dalit women are the more abused and demeaned than the men. The names of dalit women represent their insensitive life style, without any minor degree of botheration of their identity at all, even at the basic level of being addressed.

Within the broad definitions of patriarchy, the women of Morrison and Bama seek to assert their status as women through varied ideological systems of the society. The determining characteristics of the ideological system decide and escort the actions of these individual women that are emphasized by the structures of patriarchy, hierarchy of power, and other dominating aspects. The subordination of women under men is not enforced by means of visible coercion, but rather through the continued reproduction of some ideology or other that reinforces a separation between male and female roles.

Ideology locates the individual in a social order, and also shapes the individual’s identity. A personal identity exists primarily in the form of a number of social relationships. Again ideology is purely a subjective thought-construct, which has a material existence. An individual’s adherence to an ideology is clearly exhibited by the way he or she observes some habits or customs. For example, sexual love is revealed as a crucial part of the ideological structure that perpetuates male power over women with their full participation; for women, to fall in love with men is the implicit perpetuation of their subordination, both individually and collectively.

Pecola in TBE is the prototype of victimhood in a world in which there is a common ideology that emphasises the concept of beauty in terms of white people’s design. She becomes mentally disturbed, fantasizing that her eyes have turned blue, and so she fits into the existing world. The teenaged child believes firmly that the blue eyes if she gets
may remove her of her ugliness. She becomes a victim, like her father and mother, who have been blindly complying, and being perverted by the false, empty and often vicious ideological prescriptions of the white world, which in this case is the ruling class.

Pecola’s mother, Pauline is in despair because she cannot meet the white standards of beauty that she learns from the movies. These black women strive to make themselves fit in to the ideology created by the supremacist society of the whites, failing which may cause frustration in their minds and lives. They are caught in a rather spiteful circle of ideology. Ideology of the society does allow them to breathe freely, instead makes them suffocate and choke and make their life complicated. Truly all ideologies are framed by the ruling class, and they easily interpellate individuals as subjects.

Some of the characters of Morrison cross all the boundaries of ideology framed by the external world. Sula’s birthmark on her eyelid, “shaped something like a stemmed rose”(52) sometimes scares Nel’s children, makes Nel’s husband Jude furious, and brings evil to the black society in Bottom, according to the people. The male psyche never wants to see a woman with such an odd and scary birthmark. The rebellious and adamant nature of Sula is always to be blended with her bizarre mark. One of the significant reasons for her alienation in the society is her birthmark also. By possessing this strange mark, she does not fit into the ideological beauty of the world.

The “beauty myth” created by the superiors of the society appears to be very treacherous. The false myth has created a standard norm for femininity that may be improbable for average woman. While reacting with increasing obsessive behaviour to attain it, they end up in dissipated guilt, shame, and extreme unhappiness at their physical faults. If women do not subscribe to the patriarchal ideology of womanhood, then they may be stamped with derogatory terms like “witch” or “bitch”. Possessing power and
intellect and being a threat to the established order of the society, the “wicked” women splinter away from their traditional roles as “the blessed damsels”. These preconceived ideological incarnations provide women with only a confined and narrowed down space. Denying this crucial piece of their being in an attempt to conform to the conventional standards of femininity directly results in their inability to maintain a meaningful existence.

Nel, Sula’s intimate friend in Sula stands as a contradictory figure to the wild-natured Sula. She is so inclined to be easily trapped into the feminine ideology that she should be a subservient and devoted wife even to the imprudent husband who sleeps with her own friend shamelessly. Nel wants to fit into the ideology perfectly that she is the spouse of an ideal man, and she runs an ideal family. But the reality presses her so heavily that she falls a prey to self-pity and self-empathy. But for Sula, this appears to be very strange. As a friend, she has been sharing everything with her, and why shouldn’t she share her husband too? She thinks:

She was ill prepared for the possessiveness of the one person she felt close to. She knew well enough what other women said and felt, said they felt. But she and Nel had always seen through them. They both knew that those women were not jealous of other women; that they were only afraid of losing their jobs. Afraid their husbands would discover that no uniqueness lay between their legs (119)

Not only white men, but also black men expect their women to fit into the ideology of beauty. A woman without navel is something obnoxious for a man who wishes to share his intimate moments with her. Pilate had experienced the fright on the faces of men. For men, it is aberrant, and they consider that the strange woman might be a transporter of evil to them and to the society. Men admire only doll - baby like girls without any
physical flaw. Born with out a navel is the gift that slavery had offered to Pilate. The rejection by men makes Pilate alienated. However, her physical uniqueness is a mystery and a strange experience to her daughter Reba who enjoys her body’s fullness by giving herself freely to men, and has less faith in marital relationship.

Hagar, Pilate’s granddaughter, falls a prey to the culmination of white beauty as well. She develops a kind of love for her cousin Milkman, who is much younger to her. When her love is rejected, she fumes with rage, and goes to the extent of killing him. Finally she dies insane in a vain effort to make her sufficiently beautiful to win back his love. The unfortunate woman is much worried about her way of dressing and the hairdo. She longs to have blonde hair preferred by white people. She wants to transform herself to a pretty woman, fitting into the ideology of beauty fashioned by white people. She dies with a broken heart that she could not win the heart of the man whom she loves most, with her beauty. This is the plight of most women in the modern times too that they don’t come into the frame of “beauty myth”.

In TB, the pretty black damsel Jadine embraces intensively the ideological and cultural values of white cosmopolitan centres such as Sorbonne, Paris, and New York, the sophisticated world of fashion and modelling. She has been brought up by the white millionaire Valerian Street, for whom her aunt and uncle serve as sophisticated slaves. She has totally disconnected herself from her identity as a black woman belonging to a black community. She is the Tar baby of the myth, who is used to capture other blacks.

The piteous condition is that she is very much unaware of her state of being a slave to the white male ideology. She is so proud of herself that she is as fashionable and modern as the other white woman of the society. She never realizes that she is a trap to be used to capture other blacks, and she never wants to awaken from the magical spell of beauty and
modernity as she relishes her state of being as a high-level slave to the modern white ideology.

Love is the most alluring and unalterable bait of the men for women. In the novel Love, the shrewd fisherman Bill Cosey throws the bait – his wealth and charm – to attract the women he likes most. The egocentric desire of Bill Cosey is the cause of ruin of his women, Heed and Christine. Consequently, after the demise of Cosey, each woman does pointless and destructive things to the other and plots to ruin each other. Another wild girl Junior, too, concentrates upon the schemes to squander the wealth of Cosey. Being an errant girl, Junior appears with odd dresses, and reveals her flesh in a mini skirt with no underwear at all. These women do not fit into the frame of ideal womanhood existing in the society. They are violent in each one’s own way, and they strive to demand their rights and freedom in highly uncouth ways.

The oppression caused by the dominant ideology of the blacks emerges out to be different one that dominates Indian women and especially dalit women. Indian women are much preoccupied with the male-created ideology for female. To understand the different facets of the ideological oppression in India needs an understanding of the historical, cultural and social past.

Indian society, though it is known for Androgenic nature, is basically patriarchal, with the legal system supporting the superior power of the society, most obviously, the male power as they claim to be the custodians of culture, society, power structure, and women. The women are always the dependants of the supreme power of the society. The basic principle of equality between the sexes was established in Constitutional law, although not all the anomalies and discrimination are eliminated in practice and women always continue to be the victims of several forms of undocumented, but executable ideologies.
The oppression of women based on austere ideology in India is much severe than the one in the western region of the globe. The lives of Indian women are to be well synchronized in accordance with the existing ideology of femininity. Specifically, the dalit women live in separate realm, which is internally divided by the contradictory demands made by the ideals of femininity and its attitude to the women who deny these ideals. The ideology is ambivalent in nature.

From the childhood days the inequality begins. It is common in India that women face the social problem like Female foetus termination, female infanticide, dowry problems, and dowry deaths too, which may not be present among western women. Mainly Indian women alone endure these problems. In the modern scenario, many social activists, reformers, and feminists, attempt to eradicate these social evils in India. But, in dalit community, even after others attained freedom from most of the social problems, they are yet to be relieved of many social evils that chase them like a hunter. It is not possible, or allowed for any Indian dalit woman to let out her views in front of upper class or her own class men especially in a gathering in a village.

Bama, in her SI, angrily points out that the women of her community are not permitted to express any of their rightful thoughts in front of village men. Further, she opines that the people affected in all the contexts are only dalit people, though the upper class masters are the cunning minds behind any such happening in the village. One such incident is that a dalit woman is molested by one of the upper class masters, and when the girl challenges the man with truth, the man attempts to paint the girl as the real seducer. The case is brought to the local panchayat of the village and the so-called judges are none other than the upper class people. All stand together to accuse the girl, though they all seem to know the underlying truth. The people of the dalit community, especially men do
not want to defend their girl, or to oppose the upper class masters. Even Bama’s Patti (grandmother), old and matured enough to control all these men, dreads to express her views about the girl’s innocence. When Bama asks her Patti, her Patti replies vehemently that there is no point in talking for a woman by an old woman or a young woman. Once if a woman is born as a woman, it is destined that they cannot confront a single man or a group of men. It is an unwritten law that the downtrodden of the society only should be blamed for any fault done by the upper caste people.

Expressing personal views in favour of other women or solidarity with the affected is regarded an offence in a society, where male writ runs. Even when they are accused in the public place, they are not expected to disclose the truth boldly. What the society expects of them is that women should passively abide by the verdict passed on by the men of their community. Bama, finds no rationality or justice behind these kinds of cruelties and insults heaped upon women. She discovers that the bigotry is based on the motive to keep women submissive, dependent and silent. The prevailing ideology of Bama’s society never wishes the women to talk loudly or laugh noisily in front of men. Even while sleeping, women should never forget the fact that they are women. There are some norms to be followed. Women should neither stretch out fully nor lay on their backs. It is forbidden even to lay face down on their bellies. They always have to walk with their heads bowed down, gazing at their toes. While taking food also, only boys are given first preference and if anything is leftover, girls are allowed to consume them. “If nothing remains, then girls have to go to bed with empty stomach” (SI 29). Bama bemoans the atrocities committed at the domestic level itself, and wonders whether attitudinal change is possible.

The patriarchal society ever requires some inferior creatures like women, who would
meekly obey and follow the male dominated ideology created by the male ancestors. Rules are laid and implied only upon the powerless beings like women. To have women always under the control of men, the society has posited the ideals that really throttles and crumbles the existence of the women. The piteous position is that the women are neither aware of their inferior position nor wish to come out of the spider web like net. Bama observes that the women desperately aspire to qualify themselves to fit into the prescriptive male ideologies of domesticity, motherhood, wifehood, female duty, and feminine beauty.

Women are always treated as the ambassadors of culture, moral values, and religious codes in any civilisation. It is highly through women, the cultural implications of any society are proliferated widely, since women are the caretakers of the family lineage and the heirs to the patriarchal system. The supremacy of culture and religion revolves around women in such a way that they become victimised rather than being appreciated. At all times, the cultural perceptions of western and eastern society tend to silhouette women's role as a redeemer of cultural system and religious notions. By offering the responsibility as the hauler of culture from one generation to the other, in fact, women are pushed into the lowermost position of the society. Culture, being the puppet in the hands of patriarchs from the ancient days again reiterates the idea of a passive, submissive womanhood.

Women would like to follow the cultural conventions imposed upon them consciously or unconsciously, and attempt to pass them on to the future generation. But, when the modern women tend to break the images, any culture had laid for them, then they, in a way, annihilate the norms of culture indirectly. So, paradoxically, women act as the saviours as well as destructors too. On the whole, according to culture, it is meant that
women are not expected to possess a voice of their own. Strangely, the cultural principles and images are not applicable to the opposite sex.

In any society, men are associated with power and superiority, and always related to the attributes of power. When the cultural images, standards of the myths, and tales of any nation are analysed profoundly, it is evident that the cultural role of a male is accorded with power and prestige. If it is a monarchy, the queen is just a mannequin to accompany the king. If it is aristocracy, again the lord is more important than the lady. Cultural organization in a society has reserved many of the major and significant activities of society for men, as it is believed strongly that women are incapable of doing many of the activities that men do, especially the affairs that contribute much to society – to exercise political power, to be artistic or creative and to play an equal role in the economy.

Culture and religion have fixed place for women in the social milieu of any civilization. Polygamy is more common in most societies than polyandry. In both the cases, it is the women who struggle hard to get freedom in the name of marriages. From childhood, girls are repressed in many ways, and the most important one being the cultural repression, through moral instructions and sayings passed on from generation to generation by women. It is strange that the cultural practices and principles formed by men for women against women are recommended by women to their fellow women. It is like taming the feral elephants of the forest by the kumki (trained and tamed) elephants.

The mother or the grandmother or any other matriarch of the house take up the duty of preparing girl children mentally and physically to face the society with male-dominated culture. These women who surround the young girls are the carriers of the culture of the society where they have to survive. The culture-assigned roles to male and female are not
taught systematically, but imbibed upon the young minds by way of oral instructions and story telling.

Just as the inculcation of submissiveness in the mind of young girls, the value system of culture indoctrinate young boys with terms related to power, ego, pride, and superiority complex. With these attributes permitted freely by the society, even at a very early age, boys attempt to abash young girls. In *TBE*, when referring to the eve teasing of a group of boys, it is narrated as: “A group of boys was circling and holding at bay a victim, Pecola Breedlove. Bayboy, Woodrow Cain, Buddy Wilson, Junie Bug – like a necklace of semiprecious stones they surrounded her. Heady with the smell of their own musk, thrilled by the easy power of majority, they gaily harassed her.” (55)

The boys who surround her sing a song of insult upon her and her family that makes the fragile girl cry severely. She drops her notebooks down, and covers her face with shame. The boys, because of the power structure freely offered by culture, enjoys degrading the girls repeatedly even at a very early age of their life.

For a poor and innocent black girl like Pecola, there is no possibility of being aware of her own culture – black culture. As often being spurned and neglected by her own parents, and laughed at by her own friends and relatives for her ugliness, she wishes to have beautiful blue eyes. As there is no black matriarch and a compassionate mother to guide Pecola, she becomes an easy victim of cultural insistence. But it is the destiny of most of the black girls and women, because the carriers of black culture, and the context to pass on the culture of their own are less in number. It is again the fault of the elderly black women that they have not introduced black culture to the young ones properly. Like Pecola, many black girls have been countering the negative image of the dominant white culture.
Even while playing games in the childhood days, boys wish to take up the task of the ruler and girls, the ruled and subordinated. The male attitude towards activities such as the way of dressings, neglecting domestic works like cooking, not taking care of even the baby dolls, careful in not touching any of the belongings of girls have all been ordained in Indian culture. In *KU*, Bama refers to the games the children play with her, when she is a school-going girl, after the school hours. The boys in the game spontaneously take up the role of *naickers* (the upper caste patriarchs) and the girls play the role of the dalits, the downtrodden community of the society. The girls, who act as “dalits” used to address “the boys as ‘Sir’, ‘Sir’ and the boys, in turn use the abusive way of addressing lower class people like ‘Oye!’ and ‘Aai!’ and command the girls to work perfectly” (59).

Even in an innocent age like this, the grey matter of the boys are moulded in such a manner they come to believe themselves superior to girls and possess great power as the *naickers*. It is the fate established and sealed by the dominant culture. The verdict and policies designed by any victorious group in a society attain supremacy. The norms and features of the dominant class are acknowledged, and followed involuntarily by others with total consent.

In the case of Toni Morrison, her women characters have been enduring slave lives for ages since they had been brought from Africa to America. The culture they experienced in the United States was an alien culture for the first generation slaves. But, years of slavery and slave mentality have effectively diminished any memory of their African cultural roots. Though Africa is known as a Dark Continent, the culture to be found among the tribal people in Africa is rich and great writers like Aime Cesaire, Leopold Sedar Senghor, Wole Soyinka and Chinua Achebe endeavoured to express through their works the rich African culture.
However, the original culture of the blacks that is reflected in language, symbols, folktales, songs, religious beliefs, traditions, rituals, and organizations does not coordinate with the brutalizing culture of the white slave masters. The ethnic group called African-American is an evolutionary group, and not original. Culturally, they stand in the medial position between Africans and White Anglo-Saxon Protestant Americans. So Morrison raises the question applicable to all the black women in general through the character Son in *TB*:

He thought he was rescuing her from Valerian, meaning *them*, the aliens, the people who in a mere three hundred years killed world millions of years old. From Micronesia to Liverpool, from Kentucky to Dresden, they killed everything they touched including their own coastlines, their own hills and forests. And even when some of them built something nice and human, they grew vicious protecting it from their own predatory children, let alone an outsider. Each was pulling the other away from the maw of hell – its very ridge top. Each knew the world as it was meant or ought to be. One had a past, the other a future and each one bore the culture to save the race in his hands. Mama-spoiled black man, will you mature with me? Culture-bearing black woman, whose culture are you bearing? (271-272).

Jadine represents the cultural outlay of the African-American community of blacks who identify with white culture to the extent that they discard their own. Jadine is not only absorbed by white culture’s definition of beauty, but she fully identifies herself with European cultural values about art, nature, family and money.

Similarly, Bama is known as a dalit writer, and her novels revolve around the sordid and imbalanced lives of the people of her community. Generally speaking, she can be
identified as one of the Indian women. But, she and her people do not share a common culture with other Indians or South Indians. The slave group in America was constructed for the expediency of the white masters, and in India the Dalit community was created for menial and hard labour for the upper caste people.

It is the nature of any human being, especially a man to have a loyal, obedient, and mute servant to serve him. So, there is the black group and the dalit community. Bama lives in India, but her women characters face a completely different culture that is not the state of affairs of other Indian women. In addition to the dilemmas they experience as women, the socio-economic conditions also contribute to the cultural oppression of the dalit women. As dalit women are considered to be the outcastes, polluted, and marginalized, they are not valued and respected by other women. In fact, the dalit women are tormented by the women of other castes too. There is a strong belief even among the educated women that touching dalit women may contaminate them. So, the women of dalit community follow the culture that is more arduous and tyrannizing than the cultural oppression of the higher caste women.

Caste antagonism and class exploitation blended with stern cultural images frighten the women of dalit community. Religion or culture does not come to rescue the poor women from their pathetic position. As such, women are prohibited from entering into temples on select days and into the sanctum sanctorum. Women in general are considered polluted, and the Dalit women are totally barred from taking part in solemn ceremonies citing untouchability. In fact, the partial behaviour and injustice shown towards the exploited community make the Dalit women voiceless in front of a social and religious system. Their courage to rebel against the combined forces of religion and culture is blunted by further threats of social ostracism and religious excommunication.
In most cases, dalit women believe in converting themselves to another religion thinking it would help them to come out of misery and distress. Nevertheless, it is often a mirage, and their unmitigated suffering remains. In KU, in the name of religion again, people try to subjugate the weedy women of the society. It is really miserable, pitiable and helpless on the part of dalit women who take refuge in religion. Bama laments upon the alienation of dalit women because of the pressures of religious supremacy. In the novel, Bama states that she had become a nun, in order to avoid her sufferings as a woman of dalit community. She embraces Christianity not because of her love for the egalitarian principles of that religion, but because to erase her identity as an untouchable woman in the Indian society. She strongly believed that she would be known as a Christian nun, but to her dismay, she was considered to be a dalit nun than a Christian nun, and finally, she was isolated:

In that school, attended by pupils from very wealthy households, people of my community were looking after all the jobs like sweeping the premises, swabbing and washing the classrooms, and cleaning out the lavatories. And in the convent, as well, they spoke very insultingly about low-caste people. They spoke as if they didn’t even consider low-caste people as human beings. They did not know that I was a low-caste nun. I was filled with anger towards them, yet I did not have the courage to retort sharply that I too was a low-caste woman. (22)

In the Christian Missionary school where Bama was teaching earlier in her life, most of the ignominious works like sweeping, cleaning the toilets, cleaning the floor, and washing the clothes had all been performed only by dalit people. Bama could observe a feeling of hatred and dislike the nuns have for the poor and innocent dalits, because of their dishonourable profession. The nuns also treat them as untouchables, and they are
very careful in not touching the dalits. At first, Bama was not courageous enough to expose the truth about her community that she also belonged to the group of toilet-cleaners. Bama was so scared of the contemptible behaviour of the nuns in the beginning of her life in the convent, and then she developed a kind of antipathy towards the nuns.

She emphasizes that many dalits, unbearable to the scourge of untouchability, accepted Christianity. But, later on, they regret that there is no change in their status of being untouchables except for the change of religion. The birthmark they bear on their body and mind is like the Cross that Jesus Christ carried. The Cross that the dalits bear is so fateful, burdensome a symbol of disgrace, and fatal that they cannot come out of it even after their death.

There is separate street, residential area and crematorium for the dalits in the society. They are not allowed to walk through the streets where the higher caste people live. When they travel in the bus also, Bama points out that the dalit women are not supposed to sit with the higher caste women. When the dalits searched for some solace in the form of religion, once again, they faced frustration. In addition to the existing desperateness, the government had withdrawn the benefits like job reservation as they are Christians and no more dalits, and so casteless. Bama bewails at the situation as this:

How is it that people consider us too gross even to sit next to when travelling?
They look at us with the same look they would cast on someone suffering from a repulsive disease. Wherever we go we suffer blows. And pain. Is there never to be any relief? It doesn’t seem to matter whether people are educated or not. They all go about filled with caste hatred. Why, even the nuns and priests, who claim that their hearts are set upon service to God, certainly discriminate according to caste.
And in my heart I have even grieved over the fact that I was born as I am. (24)
Bama asks a series of questions fiercely with the wounded heart:

Are Dalits not human beings? Do they not have common sense? Do they not have such attributes as a sense of honour and self-respect? Are they without any wisdom, beauty and dignity? What do we lack? (24)

According to Mary Daly, "Christianity offers women "a derivative status" in relation to men, and it perpetuates a "planetary caste system" with women always at the bottom." All the religions of the globe converge upon the basic notions of "Fraternity, Equality and Love". Among the three notions, many religions fail to implement the most fundamental of the three, being "Equality". In reality, the inequality that is found in a society is extended to religion also. In the name of caste and different sectors of the society, religion tends to separate people, especially women.

In SOS, Morrison vividly illustrates the point of divisions among the same religion. Father Padrew who meets Ruth at a wedding party asks her point-blank question whether she is a Catholic or not. Ruth innocently replies that she is a Methodist. The Father tries to tell her that the sacraments of the Church are reserved only for Catholics. When he is trying to tell more about Catholics, he is interrupted by the truth that Ruth is the daughter of a famous doctor, Dr. Forester. So, he ends up the conversation saying that he is so pleased and honoured. Ruth is wildly shocked to see such a religious discrimination and utters that she is as innocent as lamb. When she discusses the same matter with the members of her family, her husband says:

"You didn't know that only Catholics take communion in a Catholic church?"

Macon Dead asked her, his tone making it clear that he didn't believe her.

"No, Macon. How would I know?"

"You see them put up their own school, keep their kids out of public schools, and
you still think their religious stuff is open to anybody who wants to drop in?"

"Communion is a communion."

"You're a silly woman."

"Father Padrew didn't think so."

"You made a fool of yourself." (66)

In PD, there is a place called convent, just down the road a few miles from Ruby, is a contrast to the world of blacks in Ruby. The Convent had been a Catholic school for Indian girls earlier, and now it is a place like asylum for desperate women. It is Consolata, who is the aging ward of the former mother superior, and the superior herself lived in the old residence. The women who live in the convent despise men strongly as they are, in some way, affected by men. Here, in this context, Morrison aimed for a convent a real paradise like religious place that can welcome the defeated women of the world without any question. But the convent referred to by Bama in the real life situation is totally divergent from the convent that Morrison created for desolate women.

Religion too has its own strangle hold on the women. Indeed, the clutches of religion is more terrifying and acute than the other forms of oppression. In all the possible religions of the world, there is an underlying current of meaning that women are in the debased status, and so are to be subjugated and muted. According to the Biblical mythology, at the time of creation of human beings, God created man (a common term to refer to both man and woman) in the image of God; dominion was given to both over every other creature, but not over each other. The actuality is that God wanted a helpmate, "a real companion with all equal qualities of man to love and live with man. Then He created woman [Gen. 2:7:18]". At the time of creating, there was no concept of oppression or subjugation or secondary status. The companion God gave to man in all
respects, his equal. The one who was almost like himself a free agent, gifted with intellect, and endowed with mortality. But after Eve was exposed to temptation and after they became fallen pair, the Lord God declared the subjectivity of Eve under Adam. When the curse fell upon both the human beings, only the wife (Eve) is more accused and cursed than the husband (Adam). For the common sin, ostensibly, the woman is penalised, and in this way, God was also partial towards the woman. This theory forms the base for all the other oppressive elements in the life of a woman. The Biblical reference leads to historical evidences too.

When there is a predominant hypothesis of the cause of women’s suffering as a sinner, Morrison’s women intend to disprove the theory by making the man a sinner. In TBE, in one of the everyday quarrels between Cholly and Mrs. Cholly, early in the morning, when Mrs.Breedlove calls him, Cholly is silently lying down under the influence of previous day’s hang over. The wife is much goaded by her husband’s imprudent silence and grumbles:

Mrs. Breedlove considered herself an upright and Christian woman, burdened with a no-count man, whom God wanted her to punish. Cholly was beyond redemption, of course, and redemption was hardly the point – Mrs.Breedlove was not interested in Christ the Redeemer, but rather Christ the Judge). Often she could be heard discoursing with Jesus about Cholly, pleading with Him to help her “strike the bastard down from his pea-knuckle of pride.” And once when a drunken gesture catapulted Cholly into the red-hot stove, she screamed. “Get him, Jesus! Get him!” If Cholly had stopped drinking, she would never have forgiven Jesus. She needed Cholly’s sins desperately. The lower he sank, the wilder and more irresponsible he became, the more splendid she and her task became. In the name of Jesus. (37)
According to Mrs. Breedlove, Cholly is beyond redemption, and even his redemption will not in any way help her to come out of her struggle. If Eve is the sinner of Desire, then who is Cholly? The harms and damages he has made to the family and his wife is more than the consequences of Eve’s desire. If Eve is to be punished, then strictly Cholly should also be punished for his desire for drinking alcohol and womanizing.

In PD, the women in the convent near Ruby personify evilness for the men who attempt to kill them. From the viewpoint of the men who are completely drenched in the stern beliefs of cultural and religious framework of the society, the frantic women gathered in the convent are perceived as the embodiment of immorality and sinfulness. The men associate the women with Eve, the first woman forbidden in the world for the loss of her innocence, and so expelled from the Garden of Eden.

Actually, the women are the sacrificial figures like Christ and the men are trying to execute the God Himself. To ascertain the authority and supremacy of the men of Ruby, Morrison has named the streets of Ruby after the Gospels of the Bible. Across the dividing road, the street names change to Cross John, Cross Luke, and so on. The patriarchs have manipulated religion according to their convenience to justify their vicious actions against innocent victims.

Racial prejudices done on the African-Americans have no parallel in the history of mankind. Slavery was institutionalized in the behaviour of the black people. Since the 16th century, the African-Americans have been encountering the ordeals under white masters. They were brutally snatched off from their homelands. So, they had to depend solely on their bosses as life-giving persons. The status of innocent black people under their masters was totally indescribable. Initially, black people were to be trained in
various difficult chores that were arduous for white men, as black people were always known for their physical power, efficiency and hard-working nature.

In the process of getting trained or tamed, they were also controlled and ruled by white people. It took many centuries for them to resist the cold-blooded activities exercised upon them. The cultural shock, the racial prejudices, and the struggle to maintain individual identity shattered them into pieces. The conscious attempt to become an indistinct part of the alien and scary culture led them to dual-natured lives in American society.

When black men were under the control of white people, it is natural that more cruelties and gender-biased afflictions were readily inflicted upon black women. In addition to the common sufferings of all black people, the women had to further endure the pain of being women. Physical abuses, sexual harassment, murder, and any such savagery were readily perpetrated against black women. For black men, at least they could have the claim for their bodies. But for black women, it was so unfortunate that they were not given the basic rights over their body, mind, family, children, or even their own existence. To any black woman in America, even in the present century with much improved laws to secure the blacks, slavery is a despicable concept. It is a double-edged weapon, ready to attack black women from any side. The double jeopardy of racism and sexism destroy, and cripple them from within.

The skin colour and the body frame are the most contributing elements to racial oppression of black women at the primary level. Their physical appearance and manners conform that they are below the standards of white society and values, and ascertain their inferiority in the society. The loss of roots, families, children, and love oppress the black women to the core of their life. Cultural conflicts, ideological disparities,
and social insecurity continue to oppress them as a result of racial discrimination. The loss of identity is an added crisis to black women. Sexual harassment of black women both by white and black men is degrading and dehumanizing. Poverty-stricken women, women with suicidal drive, madness, the inclination for infanticide, and weird behaviour become the most common attributes of black women. Black whores have been formed in the society to satisfy the exclusive perversion and promiscuity of men. The language is also oppressed, and blacks have a creolised dialect and usage among them that differentiate others from them prominently.

Pecola, the ugly black girl mocked at for her unattractive figure and her mother Pauline who despises her own self and her daughter in TBE confront racial snags in their life. Poverty-ridden life makes them abhor each other in the family. The young girl finds herself in a wrong place just like an ugly duckling’s oddity amidst beautiful peacocks. Pauline, her mother too believes strongly that blacks are not worthy of anything, and white people are Godly and noble because they hold the highest position in the social hierarchical order. Sula and Nel are teased by white boys in Sula, Pilate, Hagar, and Magdalene called Lena and First Corinthians in SOS, Therese and Ondine in TB, Sethe in BD, Violet Trace and Wild in Jazz, and other black women are forced to face predatory sexual dangers in their life.

The corresponding state of affairs with a different cultural and social backdrop of India is Dalits. They are also equally enduring the pain of belonging to the lower class of the society. They had not been imported from any other nation like the blacks. But, in their own country, they are alienated, because of their fateful birth as dalits. In a country like India, where there is the subsistence of caste system over many centuries, dalits became the sacrificial scapegoats. For any society, there need to be a substandard group
for the ruling class to exercise power always. The most damnable violence imposed upon
the dalits is untouchability. The upper caste Hindus considers strongly that there is
something evil about the body of dalits that is to be detested. Dalits are not allowed inside
the house or even the territorial boundary of the higher caste people.

Pa. Idayavendan, in his book, Dalit Aesthetics lists out the casteist prejudices done
upon the dalits by the upper class people in the society. The dalits, as their destiny of
being born into the socially downtrodden class, have been enduring the merciless acts of
the superiors in all walks of life. Making the dalits consume the dead cow as their food is
the basic brutality imposed by the ruling class. There are other atrocities such as separate
burial ground, separate bathing area at the pond or river, prohibition of wearing slippers
and jewels, and not allowed to fetch water from the common well imposed on the
oppressed community. Further, there are murders, slavery by the landowner and setting
the huts on fire are other destructions the dalits face.

The consequences of rebellious activities, if any, of the dalit men will devastate the
dalit women. In VM, when the dalit men run away from the police, the women “received
the blows...The beating went on and on relentlessly. All the women had swellings and
black bruises all over their bodies as the blood clotted and congealed under the blows”
(89). In SI, a small boy, by mistake touches the pot of drinking water kept for the upper
class man. “So the ayya (sir) picked up some young groundnut stalks and beat up the
child cruelly” (118). The dalits are not to be touched by any one and they also should be
careful enough not to pollute the upper class people. So, it appeared so strange for the
little Bama in her second standard when a priest from abroad who visited the church
lifted her up, kissed her and gave her 5 paise in appreciation. “I was pleased first of all
that the priest touched me and lifted me up. That he should have kissed me and even given me the money filled me with incomparable joy.” (KU 71).

Of all the oppressions discussed above, the caste oppression is the meanest in its nature. When the physically stronger men themselves could not stand the violence, there is no need to discuss the pain of the dalit women. At times, they are the ones who encounter dreadful troubles that the upper caste women may not even dare to think of in their life. In VM, the men of palla community clandestinely murders the men of paraya community, and because of the chaos and disorder, police take charge of the entire place. The paraya men are in the hidden places helplessly. When the corpses are brought, there is no one to do the funeral, except the fraught women. However, the women show the fortitude.

The policemen were so hard-hearted that they wouldn’t even allow them to cry!

The women gathered together, took the bodies in the cart to the graveyard, dug a big grave all by themselves, and buried all three bodies in that single grave. The policemen were astounded to see the women doing the burial themselves. These she-donkeys have much guts, eh, they remarked.(87).

Hence, in the second chapter, the indispensable forms of oppressions based on the customary and established codes, and the prejudices of the society are discussed. The starting point of all the oppressions is domestic sphere, and other oppressions spring out from the basic one. Since all the agencies such as home, society, culture, religion, and work spot are embedded, the predicament of the women is pathetic. All these oppressions may be common to other women in the society. Nevertheless, the racial prejudices and caste injustices are applicable to only the African-American and the dalit women.
Notes


