CHAPTER-III

STRUGGLE AGAINST RACISM

In America, Racism is a distinct phenomenon of social and political milieu, which was deeply rooted in the history of slavery. In human history, beginning of slavery and the years following, mark one of the ugliest examples of superiority of one race over another. Torn from the womb of their communities, African’s were shipped across the sea bound in chains. So, dehumanization of the black slaves into static was only one of the steps that went into the creation of a racist America. For economic prosperity blacks were objectified which lead to the initiation of racial discrimination on American soil. Afro-Americans were ghettoized and were brutally outlawed from the main stream participation. In racist social order Afro-Americans have been marginalized. Gloria wade-Gayles explain the phenomenon of Afro-Americans in American society through the imagery of circles:

There are three major circles of reality in American society, which reflect degree of power and powerlessness. There is a large circle in which white people, most of them men, experience influence and power. Far away from it there is a smaller circle, a narrow space, in which black people, regardless of sex, experience, uncertainty, exploitation, and powerlessness. Hidden in this second circle is a third, a small dark enclosure in which black women
experience pain, isolation, and vulnerability. These are the
distinguishing marks of black womanhood in white America. (7)

Thus, a sense of inferiority and inadequacy had been inculcated the
Afro-Americans, throughout the several years of their oppression and
exploitation by the dominant white group. The basic myth of racism is
that the white are more intelligent and more virtuous than the black.
Furthermore whiteness is automatically equated with beauty and culture;
blackness with ugliness and slavery. What we see here is the
omnipresent, all – embracing reality of racism as a common factor in the
lives of all blacks irrespective of sex. The man faces with the hard fact
and cruel reality to racism realized right from the days of slavery that his
color and physiognomy were terrible handicaps, and as such would mark
him off as evil, despite all claims, to the contrary. Judged by the white
man’s standards of life, behavior and beauty, his life became unbearable.
Universal codes of social and psychological praxis as laid down by the
dominant white culture were forcibly thrust upon him.

Thus began the oppressive story of racism in America. It brought
with it pain, sorrow, bloodshed, death and above all, the negation of an
entire race. The African American race was ghettoized, persecuted and
viciously outlawed from all avenues of decency, hope, progress and
livelihood. Racism, as life-threatening, non nurturing force, exists even
today, thus becoming the forum for all types of discussion.
Racism, as a man-made phenomenon, may be defined according to Hernton as:

All of the learned behavior and learned emotions on the part of a group of people towards another group whose physical characteristics are dissimilar to the former group: behavior and emotions that compel one group to ........ Treat the other on the basis of its physical characteristics alone, as if it did not belong to the human race. (75)

Racism started in America when white masters of the land brought the first Africans in Chains and used their labor to enrich their coffers. As a result, black people soon ceased to exist as human beings in the white world. In an illuminating study of the origin of racism in the United States, Joel Kovel says that the white master:

First reduced the human self of his black slave to a body and then the body to a thing; he dehumanized his slave, made him quantifiable, and thereby absorbed him into a rising world market of productive exchange. (18)

The novels of Toni Morrison reflected the triumphs and complexities of black life from the painful past of slavery to the frustrating and agonizing, racial discrimination hovering over the present. At the beginning of her writing career, she thinks that racism is the main source of oppression of blacks in white America, but at the later stage of writing her emphasis of race matters varies from novel to novel.
Whatever would be the basic concern in the novels, but racial matters are ever present as Afro-Americans have their origins in it.

Inspired by the climate or revolution and evolving black consciousness of the sixties, a period characterized by an almost evangelical struggle for personal and racial identity, Morrison chooses, as the basic theme and subject of her first major work, the obsession of black with an American standard of beauty that seems both inescapable and destructive.

The novel, ‘The Bluest Eye’ is the story of the destructive effects of inter and intra-racial prejudices upon impressionable black girl children in America. It is about the contradictions fostered by racism, sexism and class distinction, affecting the black people in white America. It is primarily the story of dark-skinned Pecola, who, knowing that people consider her ugly, believes they would love her if she had blue eyes.

The main idea in the novel is the domination of blacks by the existing American standards of beauty: blue eyes, blond hair and white skin. It deals honestly and sensitively with the damaging influence of white standards and values on the life of black people. It portrays in poignant terms the tragic condition of blacks in the racist America. It shows how the ideologies, perpetuated by the institutions controlled by the dominant groups, shatter the psyche of the black people, especially children.
Pecola, who never considers herself beautiful, is all admiration for the eyes of the whites which she longs to possess through some miracle. According to Morrison when the strength of a race depends on its beauty, when the focus is turned to how one looks as opposed to what one is, we are in trouble and the concept of physical beauty as a virtue is one of the dumbest, most pernicious destructive ideas of the western world, and we should have nothing to do with it. Physical beauty has nothing to do with our past, present or future. Its absence or presence was only important to ‘them’ the white people who used it for anything they wanted.

It is tragedy of Pecola who becomes a victim to white values of beauty mainly through the influence of her own family on her tender and formative soul and mind. Her tragedy begins at the time of her birth, when her own mother Pauline, feels repelled by her sight and does not even wish to have a second glance at this new born baby. Her mother’s indifference and hatred towards her breeds in her a feeling of being unwanted and unloved by everyone around her. Pauline’s attitude makes her daughter Pecola hate her black self more and more. This hated for self in Pecola further deepens when her mother one day scolds her for spilling blue-berries in fisher’s kitchen where she is working as a housekeeper. This makes Pecola feel that her mother is more concerned about the little yellow girl and the floor than for the feeling and comfort of her own daughter. Her mother’s preference to white owner’s daughter leaves her
own daughter Pecola with a feeling of inferiority. Her mother’s temptation towards the glamorous life of whites instills in her an irresistible longing for blue eyes. It is not only the mother of Pecola but her father also responsible for her flight from reality. Her father, Cholly Breedlove has himself been a victim of certain perverted relationships and humiliating experience in his life. He has been rejected by his parents and raised by his aunt. Cholly, who has had no family or parents, knows nothing about the significance of the family or parent-child relationship. As a result of this, he is incapable of giving love, protection and care as a father, which he himself has never known. This manifests itself in his erratic, irresponsible and violent behavior towards the member of his family, forcing his son, Sammy, to run away.

The experience of blacks in America has been full of horrendous sufferings and humiliations. The slavery system not only uprooted them from their cultural and family moorings, but they were also subjected to a systematic exclusion from participation in the major institution of the American society. American society has been working overtime to deny the blacks their rights and privileges as citizenship of America. Glazer and Moynihan came out with observations that Negro has no values and culture to guard and protest. This kind of systematic decimation has incapacitated the blacks to relate themselves fruitfully to their culture, community, history, and even their family.
The family is at once the most sensitive, important and enduring element in the culture of any people. Whatever its structure, its most important function is everywhere the same to ensure the survival of its people. It plays a very vital and multidimensional role in the development of a child. It serves not only as a source of warmth and love, which nourishes the child, but also goes a long way to shape the psyche of the child. The protection and care which family provides to the child engenders in him sense of self worth and confidence. Thus the family acts as a primary unit of social organization, initiating child in human relationship and preparing him to encounter challenges in life.

But the study of black family in America shows that they have been under a tremendous disruptive and disintegrating pressure of the white, undermining its very viability as an institution. The white American society distorts and dehumanizes at least some of them to extent that they appear too incapable of a normal family life. They thus have been dispossessed of their own past, their culture and even the basic norms of a human life. This has pushed them deeper into the quagmire of slavery, making them believe that all that is white is good and all that is black is bad or evil.

The sense of violence between Cholly and Pauline in *The Bluest Eye* throwing missiles at each other, breed a sense of fear and insecurity in their children. This is a family which, lives together without the
structure of a strong relationship or punctuation of living gestures or deed. Thus, Breedloves, ironically enough, instead of breeding love, breed only hate among their family members. They are so much absorbed in self-hatred that they see each other as mere objects. Pecola becomes an object for her father, when his fatherly tenderness and protectiveness, unfortunately, slip into lust and rage towards her. In his drunken state, he tries to show his love for his daughter Pecola, but tragically enough, this show of love leads to most heinous crime of incest: “The sequence of his emotions was revulsion, guilt, pity then love. His revulsion was a reaction to her young, helpless, hopeless presence.” He makes his daughter pregnant, which ultimately makes her totally deranged. Pecola, thus, is the epitome of the victim in a world that reduces persons to objects and then makes them feel inferior as objects. Thus, Pecola’s predicament arises mainly out of his rejection by her parents. In her desperate bid to be loved, she yearns for blue eyes, symbol of white beauty and the cause of her tragedy. Pecola’s presents fail miserably to develop in her a sense of self-confidence and security which, in turn, totally incapacitates her to confront the outside world.

Morrison has depicted this destructive role of the black families with so much of understanding and insight that it emerges as a powerful and authentic treatment of the predicament of the American black in the white society. This has led some of her critics to accuse her of betraying
the black race in their racial struggle by diverting the focus of her criticism away from of white to the failure of the blacks themselves, even in the area of their family relationship. But the lack of substance in this charge against Morrison becomes evident when one examines the role of other black families such as the MacTeers’ in *The Bluest Eye*.

In contrast to their courage and confidence, Pecola suffers silently and internalizes all the humiliations heaped upon her where Maureen Peal hurts at her most sensitive point of feelings: “I am cute!” Pecola fails to protest because of her deep-rooted feelings of self-negation and even hatred.

Unlike Pecola, who longs for the white’s standards of beauty, Claudia rebels against them? Pecola loves blue-eyes Shirley Temple doll, but Claudia hates them. She tears their heads off and wonders why adults love them. Claudia and Frieda appear as rebel figures, and unlike Pecola, they refused to be helpless victims. They oppose all kinds of white tyranny and even protect Pecola from bullying boys at school.

Morrison, however, does not confine herself to the depiction of the predicament of black child in her family alone; she places the black families in the context of the larger milieu of the American society, dominated by the white, and shows critically how the black families and the psychology of their members have been distorted by racial prejudice and hatred. This is evident from the way she gives us scenes and
situations where the outer world impinges on the self-image of the African female in general, and African female child in particular. Morrison’s purpose of revealing the psyche of Pecola under the pressure of white dominated society is to expose the vicious genocidal effects of racism on the black thereby providing insights into what it means to be black in a racist society.

This is further discernible in the novel when Morrison described how an innocent child like Pecola, whose child like desires and demands have all along remained suppressed, yearns to have a candy, but feels terribly shocked and demeaned when she received no recognition whatsoever even from the shopkeeper, a white man.

The way Morrison has drawn the character of white shopkeeper Yacobowski clearly indicates her intentions of exposing the callousness of the white male in his attitude towards black people. He appears in the novel not as a well-developed human being, but only as a sinister and shadowy figure. His whole behavior is rather mechanical and he seems to be utterly devoid of human feelings. Thus, Morrison delivers a scathing attack on the dehumanized whites that are too self-centered and suffer from a myopic vision, failing to recognize blacks even as human.

Slavery and racism, thus, according to Morrison, are the two chief causes for the systematic decimation of black people, especially the children. But Morrison offers a counter point in the novel by contrasting
the MacTeers with the Breedloves. Through the MacTeers, Morrison shows that the blacks have to learn to reject the flash superiority of the white values. This rejection of the white value would bring back the lost sense of self-worth and importance in the lives of black, which will go a long way in rejuvenation, of the sick black family in white America.

From a feminist perspective, ‘The Bluest Eye’ is a study of the various degrees of fulfillment women experience as women. Although Morrison’s class analysis is immature at this point, she is at least conscious of a limited role that economics plays in the exploitation of African people. In the words of Rodney:

Oppression of African people on purely racial grounds accompanied, strengthened and became indistinguishable from oppression for economic reasons. (100)

The major predicament that Morrison considers in her second novel Sula is, twofold the effect of racism upon black identity formations, and the effect of racism and sexism upon the identity formation of the black female. In an interview conducted by Colette Dowling, Morrison states that:

Blacks, if they are to succeed in American society, must leave their native communities, and in so doing, cut themselves off from their old lives. (58)

This amounts to double isolation, since the doors to the white American mainstream generally remain closed to blacks.
In *Sula* Morrison captures most profoundly the way concepts of good and evil are related to societal definitions of woman. For the Bottom, a Black community located in the hills above the fictional town of Medallion, Ohio, that definition has much to do with the status of black people within the larger society which ironically is the basis for the adventure and rebellion that Sula represents. The novel certainly helps to set a new agenda for black women’s social and narrative possibilities. Coming significantly on the heels of the Black Power Movement that rendered black women prone or the ‘queens’ of the male warrior, the narrative invites the reader to imagine a different script for women that transcends the boundaries of social and linguistic conversions. Further, it offers a useful model of self, of identity and identification in the reading process, a model that springs the traditional African-American critic from the rhetoric of opposition that has kept the discourse in arrest.

Day and night are mingled in our gazes …………… If we divide light from night, we give up the lightness of our mixture ………

We are always one and the other, at the same time. (Iriggray, 79)

In the beginning of the novel we are given the Medallion, Ohio, particularly the area known as the Bottom. It is a normal and closely-knit black community where the strongest thing is probably Shadrack, a shell-shocked veteran from World War 1. He has proclaimed Jan 3 to National Suicide Day and often marches through town. He encourages the citizens
to plan the day of their death in defiance of the horrible unexpectedness of dying naturally. The civil conventional community of the Bottom dares to treat Shadrack with familiarity and tolerance.

The black inhabitants live in the Bottom and white landowners live in the valley. There is a story behind the settlement of the Bottom, a story that has become a significant piece of local lore in the previous century. According to the story a slave owner promised his slave freedom and a piece of rich bottom and in exchange for some difficult work. The slave did the work and got his freedom but the slave owner played a trick on him in regard to the land. According to the tale the owner gave the slave a piece of land at the top of a hill, rather than in the rich bottom land that was good for farming. The slave was told that the hill was indeed bottom land-The Bottom of heaven, closer to God. In the beginning the slave felt lucky to have the piece of land, but soon he came to know about the cruel trick played on him by his owner. The planting was very difficult and many times the soil washed away and the wind blew hard. But the hard work of the blacks brought fruit and in spite of the hardships soon the bottom developed into a lovely town with close-knit inhabitants by 1965. 

The circumstances become worse for the blacks when the white neighbors in the valley declared the Bottom as best dwelling place. They decided to proceed to level the small black town in order to build a golf course and fancy horses. Finally the blacks were forced to move into the
valley. There are seven main characters in the novel and five or six minor characters.

First of all concerns must be made of Sula Peace. She is a wild and defiant girl who lives with her mother Hannah, the town slut, and her grandmother Eva, a strong-headed, one legged matriarch. Sula has a birthmark shaped like a rose over one eye. She is headstrong and self-driven. She leaves The Bottom for years and returns with worldly air sophistication. She sleeps with her best friend’s husband and later dies alone. For the most part, she misunderstood and mistrusted all her life.

Secondly there is Shadrack who is a shell shocked veteran of World War I. Shadrack lives by the river in a shack and is a fixture on the land of the Bottom. He often talks sensible nonsense and wanders aimlessly. He has founded his own holiday, National Suicide Day On January 3 of every year he marches the streets of the town and invites people to commit suicide, in acknowledgment of the crazy world they all live in. Nel Wright is Sula’s best (and only) friend. She lives with her mother, Helene, a proper and respectable woman who has tried to shield her daughter from anything shameful or improper. Nel is the opposite of Sula. She is a quite girl who obeys her mother perfectly. Her family is the essence of respectability, in contrast to crazy chaotic household of Eva Peace. For a time, Nel becomes more independent and self-driven, like Sula, but when Sula leaves, Nel returns to being conservative, traditional,
and proud of having goodness. She is heartbroken when she catches Sula in bed with her husband.

Helene Wright Nel is a church going and socially active mother. Her own mother was a prostitute in New Orleans, so she tries very hard all her life to battle any suggestion of impropriety, shielding herself and her household from anything dirty or shameful.

Eva Peace is Sula’s grandmother. She has one leg and the people of the town suspect her amputation was an insurance scam in order to help her raise her small children. She lives on the second floor of her house in a makeshift wheelchair and rents out rooms to a motley assortment of people. She cares passionately for her children, to the point that she ends the life of the drug- addicted son rather than see him suffer. She also throws herself out a second story window to save her daughter, Sula’s mother, who has caught on fire.

Hannah is Sula’s mother who likes men. She is considered a loose woman in The Bottom, though the women tolerate her quite well. Since she only wants love, not commitment, she offers no threat to the other women. She says once she does not like her daughter Sula, and when she catches on fire, Sula watches her burn to death without helping.

And finally there is Plum who is Eva’s son and Hannah’s brother. Plum is his mother’s favorite. When he returns from the war, he is a wreck. He lives in a room downstairs in his mother’s house, and spends
his time sleeping; stealing, and taking drugs. Eva cannot bear to see him suffer from his drug addiction, so she douses him with kerosene and lights him on fire.

Tar Baby—one of Eva’s brother who have a beautiful voice. A white and an alcoholic man, he does odd jobs and scrounges for money for his liquor. Blackness has come to mean utter negation of self and acceptance of evil as unalterable: “In spite of their fear, they reacted to an oppressive oddity or what they called evil days, with an acceptance that bordered on welcome”. And again the purpose of evil was to survive it and they determined without ever knowing they had made up their mind to do it to survive floods, white people, tuberculosis, famine and ignorance self pity has overtaken their youth: “a Negro man had a hard row to hoe in this world”. Some specious religious arguments decide their fate: “God had four faces… and it wasn’t that they believed God would take care of them. It was rather that they knew God had a brother and that brother hadn’t spared God’s son, so why should he spare them”.

These internal factors of self-negation, self-loathing and self-pity, coupled with external factors of oppressions and discriminations have rendered their existence a joke: “A Nigger joke”. Sula chooses to make her life “experimental” to confront the uncertainties, ambiguities and contradictions.
She defies the traditional notions of the society: morality of “right and wrong,” gender and caste: “you say I’m a woman and colored. Isn’t that the same as being a man—Religion, Marriage and Children”? She proclaims: “Half this town need killings”, and the other is “A drawn out disease”.

She makes her aim clear to Eva: “And I’ll split this town in two and everything in it before I’ll let you put it out”. Her relationship with Ajax seemed to be heading a little towards stability but he leaves her sensing her surrender.

Sula initiated into life with the twin disadvantage being black and female, “and that all freedom and triumph was forbidden”. Besides the racism and given inferior gender status, two more unusual incidents become central to the formation of her personality. Accidental death of Chicken Little and the reaction to it of Nel and Shadrack to make her conscious that life is inherently a paradox without any absolute truth in it. Her mother’s comments of loving but not liking her sever her form natural natal bonds. Sula finds her center dislocated at the realization of the implication of these four facts of her life. Sula too realizes: “I did not hold head stiff enough when I met him and so I lost it just like the dolls”.

In the novel, Morrison through periphery of characters mirrors her recurrent themes: the impact of community on the individual’s quest for self, the particular problems of black women, and the laughter and pain
which characterize the survival struggle of Black Americans in the racist American society.

It is, however, to be noted that if the African people’s struggle for individual freedom is the primary focus of Sula, their racial struggle for national freedom is a secondary one. Morrison is concerned with issues of national importance that blacks as Americans, and with those of local importance that pertain to them as blacks. The culture in which the black man lives is American, but his status as a black prevents his full participation in white American society. Racial issues are interwoven into the fabric of the novel throughout.

Basically, Morrison deals with a cyclic repetition of the historical injustices perpetrated upon blacks. The Bottom bears witness to the sociological, psychological and economic plight of the blacks in Medallion. It strikes a parallel to:

The lowers depths described by Maxim Gorky when discussing the poor and oppressed classes in the nineteenth century Russian society. (Jones, 50)

Morrison’s focus in Sula is on gender, but there are enough illustrations of periodic inclusion of racial matters throughout the novel. As the imagery of Deweys is very much compellingly racial:
The Deweys still playing chain gang their ankles bound one to the other they trembled, struggled backs to their feet and tried to walk single file. (15)

Deweys had physical characteristics completely distinct from others. Yet they appear to look alike, reminding the reader of the stereotype “all niggers look alike.” Again the chained Deweys symbolize that the Blacks had been chained up in the cruel limitation as implied by the superior race i.e. whites and their struggle to get themselves freedom is in vain as the Dewey struggled and they get back to their feet repeatedly.

Morrison’s characters discover that they escape the black community’s socio-economic disorder only to face, later, the all-encompassing psychological chaos characteristics of life in a society polarized along racial lines. The hostile environment that surrounds the blacks makes them helpless scapegoats of subservient acceptance of everything white. Sula, thus, signifies the horrid inevitability of black culture facing cruel distortion against the back drop of white man's oppression.

*Song of Solomon* illustrates the importance of African’s awareness and acceptance of their history, for without knowing where they have been, African does not know where they are going. *Song of Solomon* emphasizes that knowledge, acceptance, and commitment are needed to
help liberate the oppressed people. In the novel *Song of Solomon*, the fictive world shifts from that of black women in their peculiar oppression to that of a young black man in search of his identity. Racism hovers in the background, as the actual presence of white America rarely intervenes into the action. Most of the actions take place within the community.

The novel, *Song of Solomon* marks a qualitative leap in Morrison’s consciousness as an African and as a writer in several other respects. Regarding the structure of the novel, Barbara Harris comments:

The textual richness of the novel derives from the present which spans three generations with each narrative tied back into the development of the novel’s hero. The digressions, explanations, and expansions which interrupt Milkman’s own story suggest not a serial or chronological unfolding but an interlace, in which dominant narrative is embellished and enhanced through meticulously articulated subplots and images, threading their way through Milkman’s life. (71)

In *Song of Solomon* locations like Not Doctor Street and No Mercy Hospital are forms of counter-negation of the white world that delimits the black one. The very existence of Not Doctor Street, the name given by the people to the Mains Avenue, reflects the racist nature of the American society.

In *Song of Solomon*, the focus is not primarily on the concept of woman, as in *Sula* for its protagonist is a man bearing a peculiar, but
highly symbolic name—Milk-man Dead. Though Milkman’s quest for his identity is the dominant strand in the novel, the major obstacle he must overcome is the deadening effects of his father’s need to own as much property as possible in order to protect him against racism. This inordinate craze for ownership manifests itself in its worst forms, but is countered throughout the novel by the non-appropriative view of life, most often represented by the women. As Denise Heinze, a recent critic says, in *Song of Solomon*:

Blacks are affected by a double-consciousness of racial values and gender. (132)

The novel presents the effects of middle-class values of black families as well as an exploration of African-American culture and myths that depict the conceptual notion of the ethnic experience. *Song of Solomon* marks a qualitative leap in Morrison’s consciousness as an African and as a writer in several other respects. She is now more aware of the importance dialectical and historical materialism—the role that capitalism plays in the African’s exploitation and oppression—and of the need to create a protagonist who develops during the course of the novel.

Morrison understands that the African in the United States experience national and class oppression. She is also aware that the African male’s exploitation of the African female is related to this oppression.
Milkman’s pre-luminal stage is marked by his low level of consciousness about his people’s race and class oppression manifested in his very name Milkman.

Milkman’s quest for his identity is dominant in the novel. He lives the limbo life of the living dead, always struggling to make up his mind whether to go forward or to turn back. His face reveals the confusion he feels. In spite of Milkman’s lack of consciousness, he seems instinctively aware of the importance of the past, for he is obsessed with things behind him. Milkman’s class consciousness is just as weak as his race awareness. Believing in his father’s capitalist philosophy that is to make wealth is the goal of life; Milkman has little regard for the masses in the community. Consequently the people have little regard for him. In order to establish close ties with the community, Milkman must rid himself of the Macon Dead mentality and what is more, he must begin to love his people more than his money like Pilate who, “gave up, apparently, all interest in table manners of hygiene, but acquired a deep concern for and about human relationships”. Milkman enters the luminal stage of discovery and growth when he begins to question the people and events around him thereby developing his consciousness. He not only questions everybody but also discovers the answers to crucial questions of identity. What is more, he makes an attempt through his death wish to renounce all that he has learned so far inasmuch as such knowledge brings with it an acceptance
of the responsibility of adulthood in general and African-hood in particular.

Above all he wanted to escape what he knew, escape the implications of what he had been told. (Mbala, 55)

The black community of the Michigan, living in Mains Avenue, consists of Midwestern black men and women who were uprooted from the historical bond of the south and slavery. Macon Dead II and Pilate witness on brutal murder of their father by local whites in order to acquire their land exemplifies the very attitude of the whites towards blacks. For white people, black humans worth nothing and so they have been brutally assassinated even for little cause. Macon Dead’s childhood memories which he encountered while living in racist social order, accentuate him to accumulate more and more property, so that he could protect himself against racism. Hence Macon Dead is shaped by ugly circumstances over which he has not control. Guitar Bains, the golden eyed boy, “somebody who is fearless and who is comfortable with his fearlessness,” has experience the White’s hostility during his childhood when his father was sliced in two by sawmill and then the white owner gave candies to him and his brothers and sisters. Now he has grown up into a young man who reacts to the oppression of black people in America with a righteous, solemn anger which culminates in the formation of the seven days, a group of black man dedicate to justice through fierce vengeance.
There is a society made up of a few men, who are willing to take some risks. They don’t initiate anything, they don’t even choose. They are as indifferent as rain. But when a Negro Child, Negro woman, or Negro man is killed by whites and nothing is done about it by their law and their courts, this society selects a similar victim at random, and they execute him or her in a similar manner if they can. (154)

Milkman’s race consciousness can be gauged by his relationship with the local community as well as his awareness of national events that affect African people. So isolated is he from his people that he is the last to know about the relationship between Henry Porter and his sister. Milkman is board by all the other events, revealing his complete estrangement from the community. Milkman’s death wish, as Malian points out, is, “A necessary phase in his development, for his confrontation with and subsequent defiance of death teach him both sensitivity and sympathy, allowing him to look beyond self.” (56)

What we have to realize is that Milkman brings back to the community is the very essence of its meaning. As Blake suggests:

Community...is closely related to individuality, for it depends on individual relationship, which in turn both produces and measure decency in individuals.

Morrison’s creation of a character who must develop both race and class awareness prior to developing an egalitarian and humanistic view of
women reflects her own increased consciousness of the dialectical
relationship between the African male’s nation-class oppression and his
exploitation of African women. To say more, Milkman’s awareness of the
racial problem is very central to his quest. He consciously questions the
dubious morality of the white race.

_Tar Baby_ is the expansion of her vision of the family beyond the
constraints of time, place and dimension in an endeavor to reconstruct the
origins and significance of family. In the novel she continues to expand
the range of her subject and characters. There is not one single narrative
voice in the novel but many, each belonging to a major and each
contributing to the universal truth of the work marking it clear that
Morrison’s emphasis in the novel is on class struggle between the ruling
class and the subject class.

Valerian Street is a typical capitalist who has made his fortune by
exploiting the labor of the African masses and by stealing their land. And
it is quite significant that:

His wealth emanates from the production of candy, the main
ingredients of which-sugar and cocoa-come from the Caribbean,

once the sugar capital of the Western World. (Williams, 28)

It is true that the ruling class in the united State consists largely of
whites who own and control the means of production. But, at the same
time, it is also true that there are some blacks who so ardently wish to
belong to this class that they exhibit the same behavioral patterns, dress in the same manner, use the same languages patterns, and most unfortunately share the same ideology as those of their oppressors.

*Tar Baby* is the testimony to Morrison’s increased class consciousness. Morrison, in her novels deals with not only conflicts within the self and the black community, but also with confrontation with the white society at various levels. Living in a completely radicalized society, the lives of the black people are determined and influenced in one way or other, by this whiteness. It is for the first time that white characters have got the full attention and the Afro-Americans have experienced the direct encounters with them. Valerian Street, an American Capitalist, has made his future bright by exploiting the labor of the African masses, while Sydney and Ondine symbolize those unconscious servants who identify themselves more with their employers’ culture than they do with their own people and their own culture. Racism and sexism, although equally oppressive, are treated as by-products of capitalism in *Tar Baby*.

Pecola Breedlove struggles with the questions of racial approbation, Sula struggles against the traditional role of African women, and Milkman individually struggles with the issues of race and class, the two protagonists in the novel *Tar Baby* Son and Jadine-must struggle together to resolve their opposing class interests in order to unite.
Valerian Street and Margaret Street are the aristocratic whites, who have been enjoying their racial superiority over their servants, Ondine Child, Sydney Child and Therese and Gideon.

The novel *Beloved* is based on a newspaper clipping about a fugitive slave in Ohio who killed her own infant rather than sees her return to bondage in the South. In the novel the white people basically enjoyed the privilege status in society. They are considered as superior race, but horrified black children see whites as men “without skin.” (Beloved, 154) Because the Africans are faced with circumstances almost equally oppressive as those in slavery, Morrison shows them the need to unite as one to confront a common enemy-capitalism, the same enemy they struggled against more than one hundred years ago. Certainly Morrison has come to understand that “Capitalism is but the gentlemen’s form of the Slavery.” (Nkrumah, 72)

The novel deals with Sethe’s former life as a slave on Sweet Home Farm, her escape with her children to what seem a safe heaven, and the tragic events that follow. Morrison’s conscious focus on the collective rather than Sethe’s personal history is clarified when she says that the novel, “has to be the interior life of some people, a small group of people and everything they do is impacted on by the horror of slavery, but they are also people.” (33)
Set in post-civil war Cincinnati, Beloved is a womanliest neo-slave narrative of double consciousness. The novel hinges on the death of Sethe’s infant daughter, Beloved, who mysteriously reappears as a sensuous young woman. Beloved gains full possession of her present and throws off the long, dark legacy of her past. One of the most damaging effects of the dual oppression of black women, against which Morrison writes, is murder of one’s own child. This murder becomes Sethe’s act of mother love, which she explains saying: “I took and put my babies where they’d be safe.” (163)

She prefers to murder her daughter, Beloved rather than see her in bondage.

Morrison’s next novel Jazz set in Harlem in 1926 is known near to the black literary movement of Harlem Renaissance. The novel spans the period from 1855 to 1926 and traces the lives of the people from Vesper Country, Virginia, to New York City. Born, raised and married in the south Joe and Violet had come to Harlem so full of hope that even the train they rode from Virginia felt like it was dancing.

The quick darkness in the carriage car when they shot through a tunnel made them wonder if may be the train shivered with them at the thought…and the trembling became the dancing under feet. Joe stood up, his fingers clutching the baggage rack above his head. He felt the dancing better that way. (30)
In all her novels Morrison tells the story of her people passing through their American experience from the days of slavery up to the present. The very title of the novel *Jazz*, reiterates the black folk nature of Morrison’s inspiration. The novel is the pathetic story of violet and Joe Trace who were married over twenty years. The narrative glides between the present and the past, to the rural Virginia of the 1880s where Joe and Violet met and from which they eventually migrated to the magical place they call the city. As the story unfolds, we come to understand what happens. Like many jazz pieces, the novel has a fast opening, establishing a dominant note and theme and then breaks into different parts, various stories and voices.

Morrison uses the mode of jazz to depict the experience of black community in the city of New York during the 1920s, a decade itself known as the jazz age.

*Jazz* is the story not only of single couple but it offers the reflection of contemporary Southern rural society and the Northern urban society. After the civil war, The Reconstruction Era, from 1863 to 1877, gave way to one of the most repressive periods of white-black race relations, a period of social, political and economic terrorism carried out against freed men and women, so it was the time of mob violence and the period was marked by the Great Migration: “The wave of black people running
in want and violence crested in the 1870s; the 1880s; the 1890s; but was a steady stream in 1906 when Joe and Violet joined it.” (33)

Like Joe Trace and Violet, Afro-Americans are the victims of racial violence. Joe Trace does not leave the south even after Vienna, his birth place, is razed: “Red fire doing fast what white sheets took too long to finish: canceling every deed; vacating each and every field; employing us out of our places so fast we went running from one part of the country to another.” (126)

Joe Trace moves north after he is run off the land he has brought with two slips of paper he never saw or signed. Then he becomes part of the black exodus from Vienna: “One week of rumors, two days of packing, and nine hundred Negroes, encouraged by guns and hemp, left Vienna, rode out of town on wagons or walked on their feet to who knew where. With two days notice, how can you plan where to go, and if you do know of a place you think will welcome you, where is the money to arrive?” (173-74)

The oppression suffered by the black people and the series of dispossessions they have suffered because of their racial inferiority could be easily perceived in Joe Trace’s remarks: You could say I’ve been a new Negro all my life. (129)

*Jazz* is inspired by the whole range of human feelings. Through a meticulous use of jazz idiom, Morrison relates the story of Joe Trace, a
50 year old sample-case beauty products salesman, and his wife, Violet, a hairdresser, both of whom had in 1906 train-danced to the New York City, leaving behind all the traumas of their childhood. The backdrop of the action is New York of 1926 “when all the wars are over and there never will be another.” Amidst this post-war euphoria, the black community receives a jolt when Joe Trace Kills his paramour, an eighteen-year-old creamy-complexioned girl, named Dorcas. Joe shoots Dorcas dead at a dance Party because she has left him for another boy, Acton. And then, his crazy wife crashes the funeral of Dorcas and disfigures with a knife the dead girl’s face. To find out why any of this happened, all of it on the first page of Jazz, we will have to listen to the end of Morrison’s song: As if Sidney Bechet had met the Archdulce Trio; as if Ellington had gone Baroque.

Morrison gives us a multifaceted view of Joe, Violet, and Dorcas as well as of the rest-Malvonne, Joe’s neighbor, Rose Dear, Violet’s mother, True Belle, her grandmother, Alice Manfred Dorcas’ aunt, Acton, her boy friend and Felice, her girl friend by the seemingly simple device of letting different voices tell the story or related episodes of the same story. Thus Jazz becomes a:

“Multi-perspective novel in which the main narrator and the characters are like the performers in Jazz ban. Each turn, improvising upon his
Jazz represents the culmination of Morrison’s fictional attempts to connect with her readers, to move them beyond sympathy, empathy, and even understanding of:

What it means to be black in a white America. (Heinze, 195)

Morrison adds a new dimension to the solution arrived at, in the novel Jazz, with its thematic emphasis on the unity of women as a solution to gender oppression. In the novel violet too finds herself through her relationship with Dorcas, Aliec Manfred, and Felice. It is the identification of self with the black women that leads violet to discover the real ‘me’ as she goes out in search of Dorcas’ past, and encounters Alice Manfred, Dorcas’ aunt. Unlike Jadine in Tar Baby who rejects her culture and solidarity with those black women who help her confront reality, Violet accepts the influence of various black women on her life. Dorcas, Alice and Felice not only lead Violet to self discovery but also help her work on her relationship with Joe Trace. Violet, the wronged wife, is a many facet creature and, like Harman Hess’s Steppenwolf, admits to many selves within herself, occasionally stumbling into a psychotic limbo.

Like Joe’s mother, Violet is described as being black and skinny. Felice describes her vividly when she says:
Herself is very dark bootblack, the girls at school would say. And I didn’t expect her to be pretty but she is…..she is what my grandmother calls pick thin. (206)

The novel traces the path to the understanding of the self Violet comes to in her relationships which are not quite apparent with other black women. Morrison adopts a new technique of telescoping the ‘philosopher’s double’ into a ‘split personality.’ She attempts to show how Violet turns ‘violent’ and how she recovers her last self by destroying the violent in her. Even a woman like Malvonne, Joe’s neighbor, who admits that she hates violet, cannot turn her back on another black woman. She tells Joe: “Okay, there is no love lost between Violet and me, but I take her part not yours.” (46)

For violet has never met Dorcas, nor seen her when alive. Her “memory is a sickness in the house-everywhere and nowhere.” (28) Violet reminds us of Sethe in Beloved. Though Sethe kills her daughter with the idea of saving her from slavery, she, later on feels guilty of murder, till the dead daughter returns to her in flesh to redeem her mother from the torment. The photograph of Dorcas serves the same purpose in Jazz. It becomes a symbol of her guilt.

The subject of race is not mentioned a great deal in Paradise, perhaps because nearly all the inhabitants are black. But the novel’s
opening sentence reflects the racial tension prevailing in the contemporary society, thus: “They shoot the white girl first.” (3)

The very existence of Ruby is due to the racial discrimination. During the 1880s, a group of ex-slaves from Louisiana and Mississippi let by nine patriarchs, traveled west on foot to settle in the Oklahoma Territory. After great difficulty, they reached Fairly, Oklahoma, an all-black town, and asked its leaders if they could stay. The people of Fairly denied on the account that they were light skinned blacks and the new band of people were very dark; they called themselves as rocks-men with the skin color of coal from deep in the mines. The rejection, by the whites as well as light skinned blacks, which the outcasts called the ‘Disallowing’, became the defining event in their lives, thus:

Afterwards, the people…..became a tight band of wayfarers bound by the enormity of what happened to them. Their horror of whites was conclusive but abstract. They saved the clarity of their hatred for the men who had insulted them in ways too confounding for language….. (189)

The outcasts eventually built their own town, which they called Haven, established in 1890s. In 1949, the second generation of the community was removed to another secluded place, still in Oklahoma and:

Neither the founders of Haven nor their descendants could tolerate anybody but themselves. (13)
Thus forged in the fires of white racism and black rejection, the founders of Ruby constructed a paradise of stability and safety entirely detached from the rest of the world.

It was in 1880s, Haven came into being, as the founders of Haven were turned away by rich Choctow and poor whites, chased by yard dogs. And even almost a century later, racial difference has been prevailing in the American society. As in 1950s:

……..Sweet, modest laughing girl whom he (Deek) and Steward had protected all their lives. She had gotten sick on the trip; seemed to heal, but failed…..she needed serious medical help….. (But) no colored people were allowed in the words. No regular doctor would attend them…….She died on the waiting room bench while the nurse tried to find a doctor to examine her. (113)

As soon as the Morgan brothers learned that the nurse was trying to reach the ‘Veterinarian’ for their sister’s treatment, they rushed back to their home. What could be more inhuman then the fact that the life of a black girl has been lost just because of doctor’s negligence and for a white nurse, blacks means animals, as she was trying to fetch vet for the purpose?

Morrison reveals how racism and white hegemony create hurdles for a black man in realizing his American dream. Even if a man succeeds in realizing his dream, ultimately the impact of white culture and racism dehumanize and degenerate him. Novels reveal the far deeper impact of
dominant ideology and cultural hegemony on the life of black people, especially black women who want to be modern and advanced. It is the cultural confusion of the black people which ultimately cuts them off both from the white and the black worlds. Hence, these people ultimately become ‘dinging men/women’ who neither belong to one group nor another.
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