Chapter III

Understanding and Analysing Scarred Consciousness: ‘Being Black’ in Morrison and ‘Being Dalit’ in Dalit Writings
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1. Introduction

Bernard W. Bell writes,

“Radical Protestantism, Constitutional democracy, and global industrial capitalism are the White American trinity of values. In contrast, black American values emanate from a cyclical, Judeo-Christian vision of history and of African Americans as a dispossessed, colonized people, a vision that sanction their resilience of spirit and pursuit of social justice…an extraordinary faith in the redemptive power of suffering and patience, a highly developed talent for dissimulation, a vigorous zest for life…are basic black American values” (Bell, *Contemporary 77-78*).

These issues and themes constitute the main content of the African American novel, conspicuously, in the writings of Black women writers as they have the consciousness of being Black and female in a White dominated society. These Black women confront the negative shades of social exclusion and segregation along with familial neglect and ejection. The same lot has been shared by Dalit women in India. They live in a social ghetto as marginalized section of society.

In the cases of African American literature and Indian Dalit writings, the consciousness of being Black and Dalit is not gender bound. Nor is it bound to economic classes. It’s quite pervasive. In the interest of the study, however, the focus is limited to the particular shape of Black consciousness in Black literature with special reference to Toni Morrison, and to the character of Dalit consciousness in the
writings of selected women Dalit writers in India. Though, the discussion may occasionally bring in male Dalit writers for the purpose of theorizing and studying the concept of Dalit consciousness, in general, in male Dalit writers.

Black women in America have been pushed to the margins not only by the White society but also by their own community. The trio of race, class and gender marginalizes these women into hapless life governed by isolation, inferiority and agony. To quote Gloria Jean Wade-Gayles:

“There are three major circles of reality in American society, which reflects degrees of power and powerlessness. There is a large circle in which people, most of them men, experience influence and power. Far away from it there is a smaller circle, a narrow spare, 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. There are the distinguishing marks of black womanhood in white America” (3-4).

Black women’s lives have been replete with atrocities and are relegated to the border on the basis of their gender. Working for a living, these women have endured horrible and intimidating conditions on account of racism, sexism and class hierarchy. The mechanism of these three brings in the social and psychological exploitation in the lives of African Americans in general and Black women in particular. Comparatively, the traumatic conditions of Dalits have an analogy, “Casteism, classism and sexism are deciding factors of the life of Dalits in general and Dalit women in particular. Caste and gender are the two important identity building mechanisms that create a Dalit Feminist perspective. Dalit feminism redefines woman
from the socio-political perspective of a Dalit, taking into account the caste and gender oppression” (Ragamalika 1).

Black Women in America and Dalit women in India have been victimized not only by racist, sexist, class and caste biases, but also by intellectual inattention. Yet, they have tried to intimate the world about their plight, their search for emancipation and attempted at self-redemption through literary expression. In the context of world literature, African American women literary voice meets the unheard cry of Indian Dalit women. Patricia Hills Collins records the cause of this scholarly neglect in these words, “The shadow obscuring this complex Black women’s intellectual tradition is neither accidental nor benign” (3). In fact the scholarly neglect culminates from the socio-political inequalities meted out by Blacks (more adversely by Black women) making it easier for the mainstream hegemony and patriarchal domination to execute power on this subordinate group placed in vacuum.

The account of Morrison’s literary career as seen in the previous chapter speaks of her vision and comprehension of Black culture, myth and community in the running century. The same is the case with Dalit writers. Perhaps it is this sense of belonging and comprehension which has woven the texture of their work (both Morrison and Dalit writers) with the threads of Black and Dalit consciousness. It is quite tangible to explore the concept of consciousness to investigate this element in their writings.
2. Theorizing and Tracing Black American Consciousness in African American Literature

The definition of consciousness is generally given as the state of being aware of and responsive to one's surroundings. Merriam Webster’s Dictionary defines it as “the condition of being conscious/a person’s mind and thought/knowledge that is shared by a group of people” (“Consciousness”). This state of awareness is nurtured in individuals in various degrees depending on upbringing and surrounding of them. In fact, the nurturing of the human being is the sole key to forming consciousness and, it, eventually, creates identity. Allan Prince Okech and Rick Harrington have sought to define Black consciousness as “an individual’s beliefs or attitudes about his or her self, own race, and the White majority vis-à-vis the Black experience” (214). Several researchers have documented the stages or levels that a Black individual undergoes toward achieving a sound Black consciousness or racial identity. Cross, in 1973, has stated that African Americans can progress in a linear sequential mode through four distinctive stages of Black consciousness. Cross’s four stages of Black consciousness are, in progressive order, pre-encounter, encounter, immersion, and internalization. Each of these stages is described by an individual’s perceptions, feelings, and attitudes toward other African Americans, toward Whites, and toward the self (267-285). Sue, in 1981, has opined that Black consciousness levels and subsequent perceptions of the cause of their individual conditions determine how African Americans view themselves and the outside world. Parham, in 1989, has expanded on Cross’s model and viewed the progression through these racial identity stages as cyclical rather than linear. Thus, a person may cycle back to a previous stage, stagnate, or move forward.
In fact, the African American people are one of the many uniquely ethnic races who have struggled over many generations to find identity in the country of the United States. From the onset of slavery in the United States in the early seventeenth century to the present time, African Americans have struggled, physically as well as socially and all the more psychologically, to establish themselves as equal human beings. They have lived years of atrocities, afflictions and pangs developing their consciousness accordingly.

The consciousness of being Black has been evolved through literary world as well as socially, politically through movements, laws and literary works. The two hundred and forty six year existence of slavery in the United States of America presented the idea of slave consciousness as in the writings of Frederick Douglass. The protagonist of his work, *The Heroic Slave*, Madison Washington has an awareness of his status as a slave and knows he must escape it one way or another. He, quite perplexed in the grip of slavehood, asks, “What then, is life to me?” (Douglass 8). This questioning spirit shows the rising awareness of the exploited self of Blacks. Black writers strive to imprint the contribution of Black people in the making of America in such a dimension of hostility. James Baldwin in *From Notes of a Native Son: Stranger in the Village* says,

“The idea of white supremacy rests simply on the fact that white men are the creators of civilization (the present civilization, which is the only one that matters; all previous civilizations are simply contributions to our own) and are therefore civilization's guardians and defenders. Thus it was impossible for Americans to accept the black man as one of themselves, for to do so was to jeopardize their status as white men” (Baldwin qtd. in Bell *Bearing Witness* 140).
The years of Reconstruction, after the end of the American Civil War (1850-1865), brought a whole new problem for the African Americans. Freedom was now a reality for all Blacks as well as Whites, although one would have inevitable doubts based on the treatment that nearly all Blacks received during this time. Education was also another opportunity that suddenly became apparent to the African American conscience. In the philosophies of W.E.B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington, two different levels of consciousness are seen. In a famous passage in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), W.E.B. Du Bois characterizes Black American existence in terms of “a peculiar sensation of “double-consciousness”” (3). “One ever feels his two-ness”, he writes, “—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife...” (3). In the period from the Revolution to the Civil war the “double-consciousness” of being Black and being American, of which Du Bois speaks, comes into sharp focus for free Blacks in the Northern States. The next great period of development in the African American consciousness came about in the form of the Harlem Renaissance during the 1920's and 1930's. Some of the great works of Black authors of the time reflect Black consciousness. Social and economical issues were also being addressed more directly and thoroughly than previous years. This period beholds the venture of Blacks to substantiate the Afro-centric roots. In the works of African American writers such, as Alice Walker, Toni Cade Bambara, and Gloria Naylor, the African American consciousness is inherent with a sense of belonging to African American community. The Black consciousness speaks of a sense of belonging to African American community and it is one of the major concerns in Morrison’s work.
The seeds of cultivating Black Feminist thought may be traced to 1831 in Maria W. Stewart when she asked, “How long shall the fair daughters of America be compelled to bury their minds and talents beneath the load of iron pots and kettles?” (Richardson 38). As the first Black American woman to address public on political issues, Stewart foreshadowed a variety of themes taken up by her Black feminist successors. Collins writes, “Black women intellectuals have laid a vital analytical foundation for a distinctive standpoint on self, community, and society and, in doing so, created a multifaceted, African American women’s intellectual tradition” (2-3). Although such a rich intellectual tradition existed, it remained virtually invisible for a long time. Many African American intellectuals worked hard but, unfortunately, in isolation and obscurity like Zora Neale Hurston. Some of them got recognition but quite late. In fact, the Black women’s point of view in the literary and political circles of mainstream White society was invisible by the early 1970s. Two other African American women, Gwendolyn Brooks, a poet, and Loraine Hansberry, a playwright, had been published in the 1960s; their writings did not receive the due acclamation in the national literature. Nellie McKay, an editor and scholar of American and Afro-American literature, notes that at least fifty-nine books by African American women were in print between 1859 and 1964. And in the 1920s and 1930s, only one woman, Jesse Fauset, had published three novels. While other African American women writers had come before Toni Morrison, few had received much acknowledgement for their work from mainstream literary discourse. Toni Cade Bambara and Toni Morrison have created a hope to bring attention to African American women writers and their role in literature. The consciousness of being a Black and a woman underlines the composition of these writers with a sense of belonging to African American culture and community.
Black Consciousness in Morrison’s Fiction

The reader in Morrison evolves the writer in her,—“at some point—not early, I was 35 or 36—I realized there was a book that I wanted very much to read that really hadn’t been written, and so I sort of played around with it in trying to construct the kind of book I wanted to read” (Morrison qtd. in “10 Questions”). Such a discovery and the impact of all-pervasiveness of African American culture rituals in her formative years of life; the music, folklore, ghost stories, dreams, signs and variations have inspired her to evoke the Black elements so vividly in her writing. The thread of the consciousness of being Black runs constantly in Morrison’s life as well as writing(s). Morrison has spawned such memorable African American characters who struggle to live their lives as individuals and members of the African American community. Her characters must often thrash the ferocity of slavery, racial and economic oppression, and sexism but they rely on their own inner strengths, the bonds of the African American community, spirituality, and their love of African American culture, to shape their lives. “It’s true [my characters] go through difficult circumstances,” Morrison once told an interviewer. However, by the end of her novels “people always know something profound and wonderful” (Donahue). In her work, Morrison explores the African American experiences as Lucille P. Fultz observes, “Morrison’s fiction engages the complexities and varieties of African-American experiences and the best modes of representation for these experiences” (10). Morrison articulates this view when she asserts that “writing and reading are not all that distinct for a writer. Both exercises require being alert and ready for unaccountable beauty, for the intricateness or simple elegance of the writer’s imagination, for the world that imagination provokes” (Morrison, Playing xi).
3.1 Two-faceted Consciousness-Being a Black and Being a Woman

The thoughts and writings of Toni Morrison present her two faceted consciousnesses - consciousness of being a Black and being a woman. She has distinguished her work as proudly and unapologetically ‘black’. She has stated in her conversation with Claudia Tate that “[w]hen I view the world, perceive it and write about it, it’s the world of black people” (Morrison qtd. in Taylor-Guthrie 157). Black experience and more importantly Black women are assigned the central place in her work. As Morrison has explained to Dreifus, “When I began, there was just one thing that I wanted to write about, which was the true devastation of racism on the most vulnerable, the most helpless unit in the society - a black female and a child” (qtd. in Denard 102). Morrison depicts the traumatic conditions of Black women ranging from lower to middle class especially in *The Bluest Eye, Sula, Beloved, Song of Solomon* and *Tar Baby*. Pecola Breedlove confronts the rejection not only from outsiders but from insiders also. Pecola’s encounter with the White shop assistant Mr. Yacobowski leads her to believe her non-entity. He does not even think of her to be a human being. While Pecola is in the shop, the narrator admits, "He does not see her, because for him there is nothing to see" (Morrison, *Bluest Eye* 48). Her mother Pauline Breedlove has not been satisfied either with the life of her own family or with herself, so she spends most of her time working as a housekeeper at a White family’s house where she is happier than at her home. After an accident with splashed juice, Pauline consoles the white girl saying: "Hush, baby, hush" (Morrison, *Bluest Eye* 109). However, Pauline scolds Pecola, “Crazy fool …look what you…get on out” (Morrison, *Bluest Eye* 109). Moreover, Pauline does not share good relationship with her husband, Cholly Breedlove. The negligence and desertion at the hands of her parents leads Pecola to wish, "Please make me disappear" (Morrison, *Bluest Eye* 45).
Sula in *Sula* and Jadine in *Tar Baby* also leave their native places to be assimilated in the mainstream i.e. White culture around them. Somehow, Sula comes back to her native Black community, Bottom and Jadine revisits Isle des Chevaliers in the Caribbean to meet her uncle and aunt where they confront their own Black culture. However, Sula returns disillusioned by White world and all the more she is not accepted by her community. In case of Jadine, she is alarmed by her lover, named Son who represents true core of Blackness. Jadine’s own culture that is Black scares her: she does not want to end up leading a traditional Black life and feeling inferior “minding the pie-table” (Morrison, *Tar Baby* 119). She longs for “air, and taxi-cabs and conversations in a language she understands” (262). Pecola, Sula and Jadine adversely carry the impact of the White culture in their vain efforts to be assimilated into the larger part of society and it proves fatal to their life and damages it.

Morrison takes a stance for feminist writing by the choice of her main character in *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola. “Her destruction is a demonstration of patriarchal culture of domination, where adults think they are allowed to rule their children despotically” (hooks, 73). Through the character of Pecola, Morrison describes the experience of being a Black girl in the world: “Being a minority in both caste and class, we moved about anyway on the hem of life, struggling to consolidate our weakness and hang on, or to creep singly into the major folds of the garment” (11). “Adults do not talk to us_”, Claudia states, “they give us directions. They issue orders without providing information” (5). Black female characters in *Sula* are burdened with more restrictions than men. Nel and Sula do understand this while they are just twelve, “[b]ecause each had discovered years before that they were neither white nor male, and that all freedom and triumph was forbidden to them, they had set about creating something else to be” (Morrison, *Sula* 52). Like Sula, Junior emerges as a
rebel against the circumscribed format of patriarchy in her neighbourhood, “Unlike the tranquility of its name, the Settlement heaved with loyalty and license, and the only crime was departure. One such treason was undertaken by a girl with merged toes called Junior” (Morrison, *Love* 55-56). The realization of being Black and, at the same time, alienated is expressed by the narrator of *A Mercy* in these words, “I learned how I was not a person from my country, nor from my families. I was negrita. Everything. Language, dress, gods, dance, habits, decoration, song—all of it cooked together in the color of my skin. So it was as a black that I was purchased by Senhor.” (Morrison, *Mercy* 163).

3.2 Black Female Insight in Morrison’s Fiction

*The Bluest Eye* seems “an imagined history of what it was like to grow up Black in the 1930s and 1940s” (Matus 37). Jill Matus mentions that the rhetoric of the 1960s and 1970s was behind the story of the African American girl who wanted blue eyes to become beautiful: “However self affirming assertions such as ‘Black is beautiful’ were in the 1960s and 1970s, they were too simple to redress the complex and long-prepared effects of valuations based on color” (37). However, through the character of Claudia, the retrospective narrator of the novel, Morrison displays great Black female insight and wit to preserve Blackness. Claudia, with fervour to rebel, feels the need to change the social system and reject the White standards of beauty, “More strongly than my fondness of Pecola, I felt a need for someone to want the black baby to live just to counteract the universal love of white baby dolls, Shirley Temples, and Maureen Peals” (Morrison, *Bluest Eye* 149). Morrison begins the novel with an excerpt of the hegemonic text of the “Dick and Jane” primer featuring a White family that was used to teach American children to read between the 1930s and 1970s. This symbolic act dissects the blind faith in the White hegemony and questions the validity
of this primer to teach which ignores or marginalizes the Black community. *Song of Solomon* basically draws upon the concern for the quest for identity of a Black family, which is dis-inherited and has lost its name in Black America. Pilate, a Black woman, plays quite significant role in this search through imparting a sense of self-acquisition to the main character, Milkman Dead. The search for individual identity is present in the novel, *Beloved* and evident in the character of Baby Suggs. Through Baby Suggs, Morrison advocates an authentic Black consciousness which insists on agency of self-discerning and self-creation. She finds a way to fight against racism and oppressive social structure through “confrontation with the structure of white power by saying yes to the essence of their blackness…affirming that which the oppressor regards as degrading” (Cone 16). Baby Suggs in *Beloved* gains the freedom from slavery yet she carries its internalized impact on her psyche. Her act of asking people to laugh can be interpreted as the way to realize independent consciousness. Baby Suggs seeks to restore her ‘self’ through the laughter. This laughter interrupts both the system of racial oppression and the state of despair and paralysis that affects White people. As slavery, “‘busted her legs, back, head, eyes, hands, kidneys, womb and tongue,’” she had nothing left to make a living with but her heart—which she put to work at once” (Morrison, *Beloved* 102). Hereby she becomes “holy, loved, cautioned, fed, chastised and soothed” (102). Thus through using her heart Baby Suggs signals her non-acceptance of racism and calls attention to its absurdity. Thus, Morrison has sought to discover the way to deal with the racism in this novel.

### 3.3 Artistic and Political Aspects of Black Consciousness

Morrison’s work indicates an exigency to assert the artistic and political trait or value of Blackness within and against the ideological and cultural dominance of Whiteness. In an interview with Christina Davis in 1986, Morrison asserts that “the
reclamation of the history of black people in this country is paramount in its importance…and the job of recovery is ours” (Morrison qtd. in Gates, Jr. and Appiah 413). Her statement highlights a major theme of her work. She finds the affirmation of Black existence in the requisite resurgence of Black culture. The characters of Claudia in *The Bluest Eye*, Son in *Tar Baby*, Pilate in *Song of Soloman*, Shadrack in *Sula*, and Baby Suggs in *Beloved* affirm and rejuvenate Black identity. Pecola becomes the victim of the dominant culture’s oppressive standard of beauty whereas Claudia McTeer claims her Black identity. Acting as a foil to Pecola, she hates Shirley Temple and Jean Harlow and doesn’t acknowledge the idea of worshipping White stars. More importantly, Claudia’s act of destroying white doll speaks of the rejection and resistance to the White ideal of beauty. Claudia and her elder sister, Frieda, have learned the positive value of Blackness through their mother, Mrs. MacTeer. Son has been placed in contrast to the assimilation of Jadine to White Euro culture through his act of taking Jadine to Eloe, introducing Black indigenous traits of Black people to her and linking his identity to his Black roots in the heated conversation with Jadine in the New York City. “New York made her (Jadine) feel like giggling, she was happy to be back in the arms of that barfly with the busted teeth and armpit breath” (Morrison, *Tar Baby* 221). “But he (Son) insisted on Eloe (a Black town)” (223). Shadrack, in *Sula*, has the acrid effect of war and afterwards racism in form of loss of his sanity. Although he “know the smell of death”, somehow he restores to live after “the first sleep of his new life…A sleep deeper than the hospital drugs; deeper than the pits of plums, steadier than the condor’s wing; trainquil than the curve of eggs” (Morrison, *Sula* 14). Morrison depicts the ability of Blacks to rebuild themselves even amid adverse situations through his character. Pilate in *Song of Soloman* emerges as a strong envoy of Black culture bearing the torch to the protagonist of the novel,
Milkman Dead. Pilate, like Baby Suggs, functions as the emblem of Blackness by offering a great insight, inspiring to reclaim the lost identity and providing shelter to other Blacks.

Linden Peach argues that her work is not to be read as merely oppositional. He states that Morrison’s “novels are not simply reactions to or inversions of European models, but, because of their African-American origins, attempt to pursue subjects and narrative possibilities which had not been previously realized in fiction” (2). Peach, further, explains that for African-American writers “the novel has been an important vehicle to represent the social context, to expose inequality, racism and social injustice,” and thus “Morrison’s work should be seen as being proactive in an African-American context rather than being reactive to a European tradition” (2, 17). Speaking of the role of the African American tradition in her work, Morrison underscores her aesthetic project in her non-fiction, “If my work is faithfully to reflect the aesthetic tradition of Afro-American culture, it must make conscious use of the characteristics of its art forms and translate them into print: antiphony, that group nature of art, its functionality, its improvisational nature, its relationship to audience performance, the critical voice which upholds tradition and communal values and which also provides occasion for an individual to transcend and/or defy group restrictions” (Morrison, “Memory” 388-89).

3.4 Retrieving Black History

Morrison’s fiction, particularly her novels The Bluest Eye, Sula, Song of Solomon, Tar Baby, and A Mercy, indicates the destructive or acrid impact of White ideology and culture on Black cultural identity. These novels express the need for cultural memory and consciousness in the self-assertion. In her interview with Jones
and Vinson, Morrison explains that, “I am geared toward the past, I think, because it is important to me; it is living history” (qtd. in Taylor-Guthrie 171). In fact, in these novels, she suggests that individual Black identity is an essential extension of its ancestral Black community. In a conversation with Elsie B. Washington, Morrison states of the Black ancestral community, “it’s DNA, it’s where you get your information, your cultural information. Also it’s your protection, it’s your education” (qtd. in Taylor-Guthrie 238). Susan Willis suggests that each of Morrison’s novels “pinpoints strategic moments in black American history” in a turmoil and disruption. (309). *Beloved, Jazz, and Paradise* invoke early and contemporary American and African American history. Morrison’s later fiction plays off her earlier fiction and calls into question the African American community’s struggles against racism; its ability to recognize and resolve the conflicts within that community; and its willingness to change class and gender formations within the Black community. Morrison feels deeply the lacuna which Afro-Americans experienced in their migration from the rural South to the urban North from 1930 to 1950. They lost the bond to their culture and legacies of past, and their sense of community. The oral tradition of storytelling and folktales was no longer a source of strength. Another source of strength, their music, which healed them, was taken over by the White community; consequently, it no longer belongs to them exclusively. This sense of loss becomes one of the major themes of her work. Insisting upon the necessity of a conscious and inevitably painful engagement with the past, her work attempts to ameliorate (to recover) past memories to draft a denied history. With *Beloved* Toni Morrison wants to proclaim what has fallen into oblivion/abeyance. In a conversation with Angelo she affirms as follows: “I thought this has got to be the least read of all books I’d written because it is about something that the characters, white people don’t
want to remember. I mean, it’s national amnesia” (Morrison qtd. in Taylor-Guthrie 257). Morrison aims this national amnesia as she challenges the obliviousness through her fiction. In Beloved, Morrison uses memory as a technique to re-sketch the forgotten past and denied history. Sethe, the chief character of the novel is guilty of infanticide although the killing of her elder daughter is in an effort to save her from slavery. Though she has become free, she finds herself still enslaved by her grief-stricken past and her horrific crime that intrude in her life. The novel delineates Sethe’s reawakening of the past that she has attempted to forget.

The function of narrative, Ricoeur states evolves from the “necessity to save the history of the defeated and the lost” (75), and it is a chief concern in Morrison’s fiction. Commenting on the African American “artistic presence,” Morrison states, “We are the subjects of our own narrative witnesses to and participants in our own experience and in no way coincidentally, in the experience of those with whom we have come in contact. We are not…other and to read imaginative literature by and about us is to choose to examine centers of the self and to have the opportunity to compare these centers with the ‘race less’ one with which we are all of us, most familiar” (Unspeakable Things 9). For this purpose, Morrison’s fiction reflects her search for metaphorical forms that assist African Americans in recovering their lost or diminished selves. These narratives present several characters like Pecola, Claudia MacTeer, Mrs. MacTeer, Frieda MacTeer, Jadine Childs, Sula, Pilate, Milkman, marginalized figures within an already marginal community – seeking to carve a space for themselves within the chronicles of their communities.
3.5 Cultivating Black Culture

Morrison explores in her work the issues which have the strong influences on African Americans, particularly African American women. Through her novels, Toni Morrison dissects the predicament of Black people who must fight the inferior social and economic status in a genderized and racialized hegemonic culture. She declares her protest against the dominant society for its unjust exploitation of African Americans. The subjugation of Afro-American culture is made visible by her literary representation. As an African American female writer, she has given a voice to the Black minority, and her writings are abundant in information about Black culture. Her responsibility as a Black artist is to cultivate Black cultural consciousness, to enlighten and strengthen the values of Black cultural heritage. In an interview with Jane Bakerman, Toni Morrison talks about her responsibilities as a Black writer, “I feel a responsibility to address. . . At first, I didn’t feel anything; I just thought that I wanted to write the kind of a book that I wanted to read. Later on, it changed. There was also something else--I felt that nobody talked about or wrote about those Black people the way I knew those people to be. And I was aware of that fact, that it was rare” (qtd. in Taylor-Guthrie 38). This consciousness defines her work both fiction as well as non-fiction. In her novel, Love, Morrison has captured the important historical event of the African American history- the Civil Rights Movement bringing the desegregation in the American society. However, the spirit of preserving Black culture is so intense in Morrison that the novel, though implicitly, indicates to the loss to African American life in form of the disappearance of Black educational institutes, hotels and resorts after the abolition of the segregation. The story of Bill Cosey’s business and family from the heights of success to the decline seems to express a sense of loss of African American life and institutions as it has been labeled as “a cautionary lesson in black history” in the words of L, a character (Morrison, Love 201).
4. Black Consciousness in Morrison’s Nonfiction

Morrison has contributed greatly to the publication of African Americans and worked with a tremendous zeal for them. She celebrated their work working with writers like Toni Cade Bambara, Paule Marshall, Angela Davis, Muhammad Ali, and Gayl Jones. The project for which she became best known as an editor is The Black Book, a collage of African American literature and history that was “a major event in the world of African-American letters” (Gates, The African-American Century 367).

‘The Black Book’ by Morrison is her first non-fiction work and it speaks her love for Black culture and past and her whole hearted effort to restore it by reinventing it through rare pictures of Black life. She observes in ‘Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination’ that “traditional, canonical American literature is free of, uninformed, and unshaped by the four-hundred-year-old presence of, first, Africans and then African-Americans in the United States” (4-5). Morrison talks of the negligence and absence of African American writing in the mainstream American literary tradition. She discusses at length the importance of Black presence in authentic comprehension of American literature, “The contemplation of this black presence is central to any understanding of our national literature and should not be permitted to hover at the margins of the literary imagination” (Morrison, Playing 5).

Morrison’s response to the Clarence Thomas-Anita Hill controversy is an illustration of how she has functioned as a public intellectual. She puts together a collection of eighteen essays titled Race-ing Justice, Engendering Power: Essays on Anita Hill, Clarence Thomas, and the Construction of Social Reality in order to advance thinking about the issues raised by the congressional hearings. Morrison writes in the introduction that what is at stake is history—how, as has been typical, “the site of the exorcism of critical national issues was situated in the miasma of black
life and inscribed on the bodies of black people” (i). She concludes, “It is clear to the most reductionist intellect that black people think differently from one another; it is also clear that the time for undiscriminating racial unity has passed” (xxx). ‘Race-ing Justice, En-gendering Power’ illustrates how Morrison has chosen to write for both black and white readers as a public intellectual, even though she has written her novels for African Americans. In his 1995 *Atlantic Monthly* article on the “new intellectuals,” Robert Boynton points out that “blackness was the beginning . . . of their intellectual journey” (60) for most Black public intellectuals. Certainly, that has been true for Morrison. Morrison has not been able to avoid the White gaze—millions of White readers have read her work, and the early scholarship on her work was written primarily by White scholars, even though in the beginning they didn’t always understand the Black vernacular or the tropes that were accessible to Black audiences. However, she has been able to direct the white gaze. As this essay demonstrates, she has been very forthcoming about discussing her work with all audiences.

The entrenched passion and commitment for Blackness in Morrison comes from the influence of her grandmother and mother. Her grandmother left home in the South with seven children at the age of thirty to escape sexual violence and repression of racism and her mother worked “embarrassing jobs” in order to help Morrison go through college and graduate (Morrison qtd. in Taylor-Guthrie 138). Another important formative influence of her childhood in preparing Morrison to experience essential Blackness is music. Morrison grew up immersed in the rich panoply of African American music, from spirituals and work songs to blues and jazz. Her mother was a singer. During a conversation with Cornel West printed in *The Nation* in 2004, West asked Morrison, “You’ve got a blues sensibility, don’t you?” Morrison’s response conveys her appreciation of the complexity of blues music, “A very
complicated sense of blues as it morphed or changed or influenced jazz, but for me it’s a question of not whining. The blues is about some loss, some pain and some other things. But it doesn’t whine. . .There’s a sense of agency, even when someone has broken your heart. The process of having the freedom to have made that choice is what surfaces in the blues. I don’t see it as a crying music” (Morrison qtd. in West “Interview”). She has entitled one of her novels as Jazz which introduces the blues and strains of Jazz played by musicians. The music in the novel symbolizes the protest to the injustices done to the Blacks.

Morrison’s statement about her determination to write without the white gaze uses the simile “like a jazz or blues musician” (Morrison qtd. in Houston 4) because she believed music had been “the art form that was healing for black people” but had realized that it was “no longer exclusively ours,” so that another form—the African American novel—had to take its place (Morrison, “Rootedness” 340). Morrison saw fiction as a means of working through the historical and political challenges that Black Americans have faced, as is evident in her understanding of what the novel should do: “A novel ought to confront important ideas, call them historical or political, it’s the same thing” (Morrison as qtd. in Taylor-Guthrie 238).

5. Mapping Dalit Consciousness and Dalit Writers: Annals of Oppression, Suffering and Pain, and Efforts of Redemption

Like all other minority groups, African Americans speak out to claim their rights and assert their existence. Likewise, the output of Dalit writing discloses the desperate struggle of Dalits to survive and secure the most basic rights and equality in hostile and adverse social and economic conditions. Dalit writers aspire to find a secure and recognizable identity by reconstructing the mainstream hegemonic
discourse like African American writers. This consciousness, realization and awareness is a visible element in Indian Dalit literary stream. Now the question is what is Dalit Consciousness? Here is an attempt to define Dalit consciousness and an effort to locate this consciousness of being Dalit among Dalit writers.

“The idea of Dalit consciousness is basically an issue that is related with the realization of human sensibility” (Agarwal 81). Dalit consciousness or Dalitness has been defined as “a process towards achieving a sense of cultural identity”. It is “a source of confrontation”. It is “a matter of appreciating the potential of one’s total entity” (Paswan and Jaideva 109-110). “The inferiority complex based on ‘to be Dalit’ has now finally disappeared. Now Dalitness is a source of confrontation. This change has occurred in the process of the evolution of Dalit consciousness and this consciousness has its essence in the desire for justice for the entire mankind. “In Dalit writings, the double consciousness of representation and revelation induce a distinctive spectrum of experiences constructed within caste oriented texts. Pain, agony, resentment, contempt and anger within Dalit writings constitute the real spirit of Dalit consciousness” (172). In the process of the construction of Dalit consciousness, writers exhibit their awareness for the distinction of the responses of two generations; the elder and younger generations of Dalits. All Dalit characters of the first generation accept their Dalit identity as birth determined fate and therefore they are not anxious to break the periphery of Dalitism. In contrast of their calm stoicisim, the young generation moves with the ideals of rational insight, protest and retaliation (Agarwal 175).

In different Indian regional languages like Marathi, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and in Hindi, various remarkable literary and critical works have been produced by
authors and critics writing in these languages. Along with literary genres, critical writings embody an emerging theory of Dalit aesthetics stating consciousness as an essential component. In his eminent critical work, “Dalit Sahitya ka Saundarya-Shashtra”, Omprakash Valmiki seeks to understand and define Dalit consciousness (Chetna) (109). In Sharan Kumar Limbale’s critical work, Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature: History, Controversies and Consideration, the very first sentence of this book sets the context for the Dalit consciousness; “By Dalit literature I mean writing about Dalits by Dalit writers with Dalit consciousness” (1). In Limbale’s words, Dalit consciousness is “the revolutionary mentality connected with struggle” (Towards 32). The distinct feature of Dalit literature, Limbale defines as, the objective of this consciousness of Dalit literature is to make “slaves consciousness of their slavery” (32). And this trait adds the distinctness to Dalit literature among other literatures. At the same time, this trait connects it with African American literature. Omprakash Valmiki finds the source of Dalit chetna in the life and vision of Dr. Ambedkar (Valmiki, Dalit Sahitya 31).

The stream of Dalit consciousness assumed a concrete shape near about in 1950s in India, when Dalit writers made their serious and organized effort. One of the earliest voices in the domain of Dalit literature is that of Annabhau Sathe who belonged to the Untouchable Mang Caste. By this time, Dalit consciousness started being reflected in Dalit writers in the form of various literary genres like short stories, poems, novels, memoirs, and narratives.

The literary production by eminent Dalit writers like Om Prakash Valmiki, Narendra Jadhav, Namdeo Dhasal, Baburao Bagul, U.R. Anantha Murthy, Arvind Malagathi, Neerav Patel, Bama, Sivakami, Shantabai Kamble, Baby Kamble, Kumud
Pawde and Urmila Pawar has become a saga of Dalit consciousness as it represents the annals of suffering, humiliation, mental anguish, self-realization, rebellion, retaliation, and rehabilitation that are the life spirits of Dalit literature. Omprakash Valmiki, in his writings, speaks of the pain of being Dalit. In his work, *Joothan*, written in Hindi, Valmiki pours out suppressed fury and rage buried in his consciousness through the series of painful memories. He narrates the story of his life and through it the agony of being Dalit as he could never forget the lifelong sufferings those kept on scratching his consciousness.

The celebrated memoir by eminent economist Narendra Jadhav entitled *Outcaste: A Memoir* is a record of the (conscious) effort of the writer to reconstruct the past and gives a voice to the sensibility of the entire community of untouchables (Dalits) who persistently make struggle to preserve their identity against the dominance of the higher caste communities and the burden of restrictions imposed by religious conventions. His work traces the transformation of Dalit consciousness. Likewise, Baburao Bagul, U. R. Ananthmurthy and Namdeo Dhasal reflect the consciousness of being Dalit in their works. Baburoa Bagul, a chief Dalit voice, depicts Dalit life in its most explicit way. For Bagul “Dalit means one who wants to restructure this world and life…Dalit means one whose hands in this age have been made intelligent and transformative and for whom all ‘weapons’ and ‘science’ have been made available” (Nimbalkar 30.) His work is committed for establishing Dalit identity in the existing social framework. He conveys a message to young Dalit to raise his voice, in spite of obstructions to change the social set up. In his stories, the atrocities imposed by upper class people on weak and Dalits and the protest against such specific surroundings are the central themes. He himself was the sufferer of
discrimination on the basis of caste hence lively reflects the awareness of being Dalit through his works.

In the discourse of Dalit consciousness, both male and female Dalit writers propagate the idea of oppression through their writings. However, Dalit women writers sustain their inner robustness and strong will to assert their rights of self sustenance and it leads them to contribute significantly to Dalit literature. The account of self-experience and burning indignation for being Dalit has been reflecting from the expression of Dalit women whether literary or not. Muktabai is said to be the first example to initiate the tradition of voicing Dalit consciousness among Dalit women by reading an essay on the problems and sufferings of untouchables in 1852. This tradition has been strengthened with the literary expression of the realization of being Dalit women. Kumud Pawde, Jyoti Lanjewar, Urmila Pawar, Baby Kamble, Hira Bansode, Sugandha Shende, Asha Thorat, Arun Lokhande, Sushila Mool and Meena Gajbhiye are example from Maharashtra. Bama, Sivakami and Meena Kandasamy hail from Tamil Dalit literary tradition. Geeta Nagbhushan belongs to Kannada literary tradition. Chandra Srimali, Jasumati Parmar, and Daxa Damodara represent the Gujarati Dalit women tradition. Dalit women writers discuss with clarity and authenticity the reality of developing as a whole person through the adversity of being Dalit women both in the past and present. They all discuss and dissect the lives of the women who have come before them and their own lives (literally and figuratively).

The study has an aim to read the inherent element of consciousness of being Dalit and Black in select Dalit writers and Toni Morrison respectively. The exploring of themes, narrative techniques, language and style in the works by these writers
would set a ground to trace this commonly shared element of consciousness. The ache of being a Dalit and the agony of being a woman find expression in Indian Dalit women writers’ narratives. The Dalit writing seeks to bring out the trauma and suffering experienced by Dalit women in the hands of the upper caste forces and their own community. Bama in her works *Karukku* and *Sangati* has vocalized the unarticulated tribulation and pangs of Dalit women in the wider context of Dalit community. Bama states that *Sangati* (which means news or events) is all about what it means to be a Dalit and a woman. Bama states her work *Karukku* as “a means of relieving the pain of others who were wounded” (*Karukku* x). Bama finds compatibility between her struggles filled life as a Dalit woman and the sharp edged karukku. As Bama describes in the preface of the book, “The driving forces that shaped this book are many cutting me like karukku and making me bleed; unjust social structures that plunged me into ignorance and left me trapped and suffocating; my own desperate urge to break, throw away and destroy these bonds; and when the chains were shattered into fragments, the blood that was split then; all these taken together” (xxiii). Drawing attention to the fact that mainstream society which discusses the ‘position of women’, takes no notice of Dalit women, she states, “We have all come across news, broadcast widely and everywhere telling us of the position of women in our patriarchal society, and of the rights that have been plucked away from them. But news of women who have been trapped not only by patriarchy but also by caste-hatred are often side-lined, hidden, forgotten” (Bama qtd. in Srinivasan 113). This mindset to ‘side-line’ Dalit women and their issues have been brought into discourse by Kumud Pawde. She narrates how she becomes aware of her marginalization and repression denying her to study Sanskrit discipline. Dalit women writers’ work presents the powerful portrayal of relegation and trauma inflicted on
Dalits. This is the consciousness of Bama which makes her share the life story of characters of Mariamma and Thaayi, Bama shares heart-rending and shuddering experiences of Dalit women and is forced to feel, “…one should never be born a woman” (42). Due to the stupidity of men, “Mariamma was made a scapegoat, and her whole life was destroyed” (42). She was accused and abused for no fault by the village council and was married to a gambler and drunkard. As a result, Mariamma suffered blows, kicks and beatings every day. Same is the case with Thaayi who had been beating by her husband without any hope of escape. This raised a variety of emotions in Bama’s heart, “anger, fury, resentment, and hatred” (44). Bama externalizes these complicacies of Dalit women’s existence to bring in the idea of resolution among them to get rid of it.

The case of Anandhayi and Lakshmi in Sivakami’s *The Taming of Women* reveals the gender oppression within the four walls of home over their casteist oppression outside the walls. However, as the time passes, the resistance and protest are heard in the voice of Anandhayi, though meek and submissive so far. She demands dignity and respect from Periyannan, “You shut your gob and give me respect” (167). But Periyannan “hated her more and more” (169).

Baby Kamble in her work *The Prisons We Broke* depicts the transformation among Dalits as a result of Dalit consciousness. Maya Pandit writes in the introduction to the work, “Baby Kamble brings out the internal trauma in the psyche of her people situated on the threshold of a fundamental transformation…their urge for self-assertion, the intense struggle between the pulls of an oppressive yet familiar way of life and the promise of a more dignified yet unfamiliar new world” (xiv-xv). Urmila Pawar concretizes the abstract form of the awakening consciousness of Dalit
women spurred by a profound political and social change. Depicting the biting experiences of her life she voices the inner voice which was crushed in the weaving of racial and gender politics otherwise. The journey from village to metropolitan represents the journey of her self-awareness or self-creation. She moves through the various stages of it in her life and there is a deep urge for claiming self identity in her expression of this confrontation. Hunger, scarcity of necessities, humiliation, and gender discrimination, all weave the structure of Dalit’s life in which Pawar seeks to construct her ‘being’.

6. Comparability between Morrison’s and Dalit Writers' Work

Marable and Mullings write, “The theme of reform, resistance, and renewal formed the cultural and social matrix of black consciousness, community and public discourse. They were the foundations for the construction of a Black American society that was self conscious and motivated to define and achieve its specific interests” (xxii). These words can be applied to the fiction of Morrison as well as to the literary works by Dalit writers. As Morrison’s work and Indian Dalit writers’ writing, especially women Dalit writers, revolve around the theme of ‘reform, resistance, and renewal’ generating the awareness of their status. In an interview with Thomas LeClair in 1981 Morrison announces, “I write what have recently begun to call village literature, fiction that is really for the village, for the tribe. Peasant literature for my people, which is necessary and legitimate…From my perspective, there are only black people” (qtd. in Taylor-Guthrie 370, 374). In her interview with Jones and Vinson she explains that “in trying to write what I call Black literature which is not merely having Black people in or being Black myself, there seems to be something distinctive about it and I can’t put it into critical terms. I can simply recognize it as authentic” (qtd. in Taylor-Guthrie 175). In her interview with Ruas,
Morrison explains that, “I was very conscious of trying to capture in writing about what black life meant to me, not just what black people do but the way in which we look at it” (qtd. in Taylor-Guthrie 100). Her commitment to producing “Black literature” is not a mere act of racism but a thoughtful response to extensive White hegemonic discourse. It is not just a protest literature rather it links it to the reconstruction and reestablishment of African American tradition. The same idea is traced in Dalit literature when Kumud Pawde chooses resistance as well as reconciliation as the theme of her autobiography. As a Dalit woman, she is not allowed to study or teach Sanskrit. But, she protests against this prohibition and takes steps to achieve the desirable i.e. learning Sanskrit language considered as sacred language of the upper caste hence denied to her. This prohibition is outcome of the discrimination and discouragement Pawde faces throughout her life. As a result of the consciousness, an image of a strong woman emerges out of the struggle to learn the classical language even amid the discriminatory environment.

6.1 Trauma of Being Other and Absent

Morrison discerns a vacuum in mainstream male dominated literary discourse in American literary tradition which excludes Black presence. She presents the case of Black people while she talks to McKay, “Black people have a story, and that story has to be heard” (qtd. in Taylor-Guthrie 152). The kind of treatment meted out to the Dalits in the Indian mainstream literature seems to be identical to the treatment given to Blacks in the mainstream American literature. The idea of absence in the mainstream characterizes Dalit literature also. D.P. Das, a Bengali Dalit writer, writes in his autobiography that “we do not exist” in the Hindu literature (xii). This consciousness of non-identity is distinctly reflected in Toni Morrison. Reflecting on Black history, Toni Morrison in her essay “Black Matters” points out to the absence
of African American culture from American history for more than four hundred years. Black people and Black culture have been invisible in white-dominated social and literary world. Black literature receives meager academic attention. It has created vacuum in American literary discourse. In an interview with Claudia Tate in 1983 Morrison suggests that the situation is due to limited perceptions and knowledge: “Critics generally don’t associate black people with ideas. They see marginal people; they just see another story about black folks” (qtd. in Taylor-Guthrie 160). In a conversation with Bill Moyers in 1989, she has castigated the ‘silence’ that accompanies this misrepresentation, especially so in nineteenth-century literature: “Blacks don’t speak for themselves in the texts” (qtd. in Taylor-Guthrie 262). In fact, she argued, Black characters are typically “discredited and ridiculed…all of these negative things that white Americans feared are projected onto this presence” (264).

Therefore, Morrison strives to break the silence by representing the Black people in literary and intellectual tradition and to replace the absence with the presence of Black by reconstructing it in a way she knows. Her writing is imbibed with the affluence of the richness of Black culture consisting Black language, music, myths, rituals and beliefs. Above all, she includes “the traditional Black female activities of root-working, herbal medicine, conjure, and midwifery into the fabric of [her] stories” to reveal the Black woman’s cultural experiences (Smith 174). Her work has been characterized by the typical experiences of Blacks, particularly those of Black women. They are placed from the periphery to the restructured center. Through her fiction, Morrison attempts to fill in the “extraordinary gaps and evasions and destabilizations” (Smith 174) in the representation of African American experience within American literature. The void and lacuna in mainstream literary tradition in Indian context connects it with American literature. Indian mainstream literature has
not represented the voice of oppressed people in the truest sense. In its essence, Dalit literature is essentially an effort to fill this vacuum and absence seen in the mainstream literature. But in this process, consciously or subconsciously, another absence is seen in the sphere of Dalit literature itself. The feeble image of Dalit women in male dominated Dalit literature is rejected and the muteness is given voice by Dalit women writers.

6.2 Quest for Identity

Selden and Widdowson write, “Black feminists have long been concerned with problems of identity in which race and sexuality are interlocking systems of oppression” (231). In fact this statement of Selden can be applied to Dalit feminists also. Black feminists depict Black women not static but dynamic, showing their voyage from the crippled identity to the personal autonomy and access to liberty or even creativity, in both the terms, familial and societal relationships. Many Black women have used writing as a means to discover or assert their identity. Black women novelists as well as Dalit women writers of the twentieth century have openly portrayed in their works the experiences of exploitation -political, racial, sexual and emotional. They strive to present Afro-American and Dalit quest for total freedom and equality as a human being.

Likewise, the search for identity is a recurring theme in the Indian Dalit literature as well. Dalit literature “stands as a means of strength to the multitudes whose identities have been destroyed and denied” (Holmstrom x). Holmstrom has labeled Bama’s work as her “personal struggle to find her identity…against patriarchy and caste oppression” (xiv).
6.3 Political and Artistic Aspects

The consciousness of being Black in Toni Morrison leads to attributing her work the characteristics of Black arts literature. Black arts, or Black aesthetic, call for literary expression that has an African American point of view. Black arts literature addresses the major issues of the Black political movements of the 1960s and beyond, and it demands for recreation of Black history, symbols, myths and legends and more importantly, language. Morrison’s fiction represents Black literature both ideologically and aesthetically having the accountability to Black culture and art, use of Black myths, story-telling, symbols and language etc. Morrison has stated in a conversation with Alice Childress that the artist is “a politician” and thus he/she “bears witness” to the lives and lived experience of Black people (qtd. in Taylor-Guthrie 2). Political concerns are very important to Morrison as she herself admits having an ideological agenda in her work, “The work must be political. It must have that as its thrust…The best art is political and irrevocably beautiful at the same time” (Morrison, “Rootedness” 64). Her novels reflect the influence of the ideologies propounded by Black movements of 1960s and 70s when they discuss the oppressed Black minorities in isolated communities. Her all major characters are Black; the use of Black myth of flying man and Black folk songs sung by Pilate in Song of Solomon, the herbal medicinal knowledge of Black ancestry (Baby Suggs and Black women of Eloe, a small Black town) in Beloved and Tar Baby, a sense of Black location in Tar Baby and Paradise bear a witness to Morrison’s effort to retrieve the cultural past of Black community.

Interestingly, writers like Bama, Sivakami, Baby Kamble, Urmila Pawar, and Kumud Pawde largely concentrate on Dalit women characters, some of them are oppressed and suppressed under the patriarchal hegemony, and through those
characters they explain their own community’s womanhood and other social political and cultural practices. Holmstrom writes in the preface of *Karukku*, “It (Dalit writing) has gone hand in hand with political activism, and with critical and ideological debate, spurred on by such events as the Ambedkar centenary of 1994 and the furore following the Mandal Commission report’” (xviii). Indian Dalit writing consists of quintessence of political activism being an outcome of political and social movements, overtly or covertly. This political activism attaches the concern for human rights, social justice and equality. However a large portion of this writing has concentrated on the theme of victimhood and alienation as in Bama, Kumud Pawde, Baby Kamble, Limbale, Valmiki, and Urmila Pawar. It also reinvents, in Bama, Pawde, Kamble and Pawar, the theme of rejuvenation of Dalit community especially Dalit women through presenting their rehabilitation and explores Dalit identity with “a powerful sense of engagement with history”, (Holmstrom xix) culture, rituals and beliefs.

### 6.4 Women in Black and Dalit Writings

Morrison’s novel relies more on cerebral or psychic realities or experiences of Black women. The portrayal of actions, deeds, and experience of the women characters reveals their strength and valour. Claudia, Pilate and Ruth are characters of fortitude and pride for Black women. Pilate and Claudia have overcome harsh realities and survived with African American characteristics in them. Pilate shelters pregnant Ruth against the heavy odds of male dominance in her family and offers her both physical and spiritual care. Nellie Y. McKay finds that "For women, there is always a strong female bond that exists with forbears, and this invests them with the power to resist, survive, and transcend their own oppression” (232).
Likewise, Pawde, Kamble and Bama finds Dalit women in better position than upper caste women in some regard, “if you look like that, our women have an abundant will to survive however hard they might have to struggle for their last breath” (Bama, Sangati 68). Bama depicts the strength of Dalit women. Sangati reveals the unique solidarity strengthening the spirit of Dalit women. Sivakami also traces the picture of solidarity in The Taming of Women. Anandhayi and Lakshmi could be perceived as rivals being the wife and the concubine of Periyannan respectively, but they show a solidarity between them through helping each other in the household work, and nursing each other’s injuries, mental or physical, “in the evenings, Lakshmi sat chatting with Anandhayi…Though Anandhayi was bogged down with her own problems, she listened to her, feeling quite sorry for her” (Sivakami, Taming of Women 131). At the escape of Lakshmi from Periyannan, Anandhayi feels relieved not because her competitor has left, “Instead, she was happy that the parrot had fled from the eagle’s clutches” (134). Dalit women have an extraordinary quality of being vital, robust and lively even amid the harsh and adverse situations. Bama listens to their laugh and chatter “even though they left at dawn and hardly ever came back until after dark, they still went about laughing and making a noise for the greater part.” (Bama, Sangati 76).

In Morrison’s novel Jazz, Malvonne augments the Black sisterhood in her novel, Jazz. Her reaction to the complaint made by Joe against Violet is scolding Joe for his ruthless behaviour, “Okay there’s no love lost between Violet and me, but I take her part and not yours, you old dog” (Morrison, Jazz 46). Violet and Felice develop a noticeable bond as Felice learns the fact that Violet is not violent but Violet.
Morrison's fiction enlivens the legacies of Black American women through the characters of Baby Suggs, Pilate, True Belle and Malvonne. Apart from it, her work delineates the predicament of Black women- Pecola, Pauline, Sula, Nel, Sethe, Denver, Baby Suggs, Violet, Christine, Heed, Eva, and Hannah. In her work the principal characters are women and it is through the female protagonists that Toni Morrison creates the woman consciousness. “Morrison’s *Sula*…raises question about black women’s individuation and independence. *Song of Solomon* asks, among other things, what is the role of women in African-American cultural memory?” (Fultz 7).

Morrison balances in *The Bluest Eye* Pecola’s and Pauline’s tragic experience with positive female models of strength of Claudia. Claudia’s deep comprehension of society at an early age promises hope for the African American woman. Mrs. MacTeer and Claudia portray strength of character being disillusioned of White beauty standards and possessing self-reliance crucial to the survival of the whole black culture. Likewise, Dalit writing, mainly by Dalit women writers, are replete with women characters as the protagonist for example, Baby Kamble, Kumud Pawde, Urmila Pawar, Bama themselves, and their mothers, grandmothers, Patti, Aaja, Aaji, Mariamma, Anandamma, Gowri, Lakshmi, Anandhayi, Thangum, Santamai, Masamai, Sitayvahini, and several others unnamed. Dalit writing is studded with the examples of capability of Dalit women to take initiative, to preserve their culture, to take care of their family independently and to participate in Dalit movements actively. Baby Kamble’s *The Prisons We Broke* recalls the active involvement of Dalit women of Maharwada (locality of Dalits) in the campaign against atrocities led by Ambedkar, “Maharwada join(ed) the Ambedkar movement” (*Prisons We Broke* 70). Kamble tells, “Sitayvahini was the first to stop the eating of dead animals in Veergaon” (*Prisons We Broke* 71).
Apparently, women and the issues concerned with them constitute the major themes in the work by Dalit women writers and Toni Morrison as well. *The Bluest Eye* is stuffed with female experience. Morrison visits several issues of the Black women’s life from the devastating impact of slavery, gender inflected discrimination, identity crisis to quest for self, and self-reliance. She does not avoid the subjects of rape and violent marital distress in her narrative. Likewise, Bama, Sivakami, Kamble and Pawar also cover up these issues in their work. Bama’s narrative *Karukku* deals with the experiences of a Dalit woman in a various social institutions from the family, locality, the school, the Church and the village. Bama herself says that in her work *Sangati* women are the main theme. *Sangati* has its theme of “growth, decline, culture, and liveliness of Dalit women” in the Tamil Paraiya community (vii). Urmila Pawar writes, "My mother used to weave aaydans, the Marathi generic term for all things made from bamboo. I find that her act of weaving and my act of writing are organically linked. The weave is similar. It is the weave of pain, suffering, and agony that links us" (ix). These words of Pawar reckon three tiers of generations of Dalit women. Their journey starts from the invisibility of their existence and culminates into the self-recognition though enduring burden of their caste and atrocities. In her narrative memoir, *The Weave of My Life*, Pawar and in *The Prisons We Broke* Kamble are set out on the same path. They not only utter their incessant act to subdue mortifying affliction of casteism and male dominance but also exclaims the thrill of an emerging consciousness influenced by the stream of social and political transformation. A metamorphosis in the role of women in their community is clearly perceived in the works of these writers. Now the women are perceived not as timid, coward and meek beings; the stream of consciousness runs in them and they take steps further towards the formation of their identity. The description of Sammuga
Kizhavi is interesting in Bama’s *Sangati*. This character resists the patriarchal caste based oppressions through various comical ways.

### 6.5 The Difference between Black and White Women/ Dalit and Upper caste Women

Morrison narrates the differences between White and Black women’s situation in a scene in *The Bluest Eye* where Pauline remembers her argument with her White employer. Pauline’s reality is far from the White middle – class woman’s world: “she told me I shouldn’t let a man take advantage over me. That I should have more respect, and it was my husband’s duty to pay the bills, and if he couldn’t, I should leave and get alimony…I seen she didn’t understand that all I needed from her was my eleven dollars to pay the gasman so I could cook” (93-94).

In Bama’s *Karukku* and *Sangati*, the depiction/voice of Dalit female expresses the difference between upper caste women and Dalit women. Being different in caste and class the character in *Karukku* and upper caste women’s concerns are very different. The same is the case with Black women and White women. Being different in race and class, Pauline’s and the White lady’s concerns in life are different. In fact, these kinds of dilemmas had been the preventing factors from integrating the black and the white women’s liberation movements. White women wanted to step into the working world as they chose and the considered equal to men. Black women had been forced to work beside their husbands for the mere survival of their families. They were not concerned about getting even with their husbands; they were worried about putting food on the table/providing food to their families.

Morrison’s idea of rejecting White standard of beauty resonates with Bama’s who appreciates the robust dark-skinned bodies of the women of her community. In
one of the episodes in *Sangati*, Devi, a Dalit child, supposes the cause for their being ‘born coal-black in colour, just like crows’, in the dark coloured *ragi kuzh* (gruel) which is the staple food of her community of Dalit people and the skin of upper caste children is fair “because they eat rice and milk. Rendupalli, a woman from the Dalit community rises in defence to reply: ‘Black is strongest and best, like a diamond. Just go to their [upper caste] streets and look about you. Yes, they might have light skins, but just take a close look at their faces. Their features are all crooked …’ (Bama, *Sangati* 114). The novel *Karukku* expresses the sense of pride in Dalit culture felt by the author representing the community. To quote her, “*Karukku* has enabled many to raise their voices and proclaim, ‘My language, my culture, my life is praiseworthy, it is excellent’. *Karukku* insists only on a humanism which crosses all boundaries; the truths it tells may be bitter to some, to some they may be ridiculous” (xi).

### 6.6 Language of Protest

In case of Morrison, not only the content but the means of communicating her thoughts and ideas carries the rich tone of Black people. Fultz analyses it as, “Morrison’s fiction especially calls attention to the power of language to construct alternative ways of viewing the African-American experience” (17). Morrison, herself, accepts, “I wanted to restore the language that black people spoke to its original power. That calls for a language that is rich but not ornate” (qtd. in Taylor-Guthrie 121). The language of Black people is displayed in her fiction through her narrative style of story-telling, oral-tradition (songs), shifting narratives and use of flashbacks as a technique to recall past and retrieve history and use of flashbacks thereby interconnecting past and present of Blacks. All these stylistic devices conform to her political message of her work deeply infused in the rich legacies of Black treasure of language. *The Bluest Eye, Sula, Beloved, Jazz* and *Song of Solomon* are
full of examples of flashbacks. The depiction of the past life of Pecola’s parents and Sula, journey of Milkman and Sethe into their history, connect the form with the theme of Black history.

The same is the case with Dalit writers. Bama’s work establishes the language of Dalit community through her narratives, *Karukku* and *Sangati*. She uses “the demotic and colloquial” (Holmstrom xix) language to have congruity between content and form. *Karukku* is not written in the linear mode; it is written in an informal speech style and confessional mode. This novel does not follow the linear mode and often uses as its narrative strategy, the confessional mode. Other Dalit writers Valmiki, Limbale, Kamble, Pawar, and Pawde also use the colloquial tone and dialects of Dalits with a purpose to secure connectivity to Dalitness. The use of their language in literary expression substantiates their evolving consciousness of being Dalit.

7. Conclusion

Thus, in Morrison’s writing as well as life, the thread of the consciousness of being Black runs constantly. John Duvall talks of the constant yet ever-changing epithets given to African Americans, “In the seventy years of her life, Morrison has been identified—whether by legal documentation or by social custom—as ’Negro’, ‘Colored’, ‘Black’, ‘Afro-American’, and ‘African American’” (2-3). Morrison’s lifetime has spanned some fundamental changes from legalized segregation to the election of America’s first Black President. Thus, Duvall argues, “It does matter to her that she grew up in pre-civil rights America, just as it matters that she became a writer in post-civil rights America” (2). David Theo Goldberg notes that in a racialized culture “racial identity itself becomes the space from which resistance is launched, the stage of self-assertion” (110). According to Peach, the major aim of
Morrison’s fiction is “the pursuit of individual advancement by black people in a white-determined nation and culture at the expense of their black ancestry; and the reclamation of black solidarity” based upon the “rememory” of slavery and white America’s continual denial of black people” (4). Morrison corresponds to Black struggle for emancipation from racist approach and ideologies and Black heritage and culture throughout her writings whether fiction or non-fiction. Likewise, the history of Dalits is the struggle for freedom, physically, politically, economically and psychologically. African American and Dalit literary traditions speak clearly and eloquently for change. These are the calls to struggle against the abjectness of acceptance. Most of the African American and Dalit literary products are structured upon and influenced by the impact of American slavery and casteism, respectively. Their traditions are opposed to the status quo, which they believe as the bane for their existence. The visions and voices of their writers, their perspectives, their histories and legacies aim to spell out the legitimacy of their constant striving for rehabilitation through exempting from neglect and marginalization. This consciousness of being exploited, marginalized and expelled produce a longing among them to overcome the abjectness of their lives through preservation of their culture, rituals, traditions and customs.
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