Chapter IV

Probing the Self: Introspection as Thematic Substance in Morrison and Dalit Writings
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1. Introduction

The writings of Morrison serve as a lens to comprehend the agony of being Black and slavehood. Likewise, Dalit writings voice the deep agony of being untouchable and caste discrimination for the entire Dalit community. These sufferings and agonies generated by marginalization and oppression produce and construct a conscious thought of self-assertion. The narration of the slave hood and untouchability by Morrison and Dalit writers respectively speak of the dejection, desolation and exploitation. Morrison depicts the corrosive effects of slavery, racial segregation in her writing. She does not merely depict the doleful status of Blacks and pain of being Black but rather portrays striving for self-affirmation and this portrayal, according to Cornel West, is “for identity, meaning, and self-worth” (West, Race Matters 13). The element of self-evaluation and criticism in Morrison’s as well as Dalit writings runs along the construction or discovering identities.

Going back to the basics of creative writing, the idea that it grows from lived and conceived experiences still holds ground in spite of all the conceptual upheavals created by structural and post-structural theory. Again, going back to the basics, so much of writing- creative or otherwise, grows from extroverted thinking and introverted introspection. In some ways, these basics serve well to define and explain the works of social protest like those of Toni Morrison in the US and Dalit writers in India. Introspection, thus, constitutes a strong thematic component in their writings.
A: Identity and Crises and Introspection in Toni Morrison

1. Introspecting Identity

In order to understand how slavery and the caste discrimination of Black Americans and Dalits respectively influence their sense of identity and self, it should be known what ‘identity’ means. Identity refers to “the enduring aspects of a person’s definition of her or himself…” (Kelman 3). Basically an identity characterizes an individual person in distinguishing his or her characteristics from the characteristics of other people. Identity formation starts early in life and depends on cultural demands and personal capacity. In this process, two types of identity are speculated-social or community identity and self or individual identity. Social identity is a self definition that helps to evaluate oneself. Baron, Byrne and Branscombe define it as, “A person’s definition of who he or she is, including personal attributes and attributes shared with others, such as gender and race” (161). Whereas self-identity or self-concept is basically the result of what we have learned from other people. It can be said that, “one’s self-identity is a basic schema consisting of an organized collection of beliefs and attitudes about oneself” (Baron, Byrne and Branscombe 162).

2. Identity and Self Reflection in Toni Morrison

Although White racist approach affected the identity of all Black people, Black women, however, had to face its biting and cruel torments more. Cornel West traces the reason of Black women’s trauma in Morrison’s novels as connected with the effect of “the suppression of Black race…reinforces the black obsession with the psychic scars, ontological wounds, and existential bruises” (West, Future 81). West finds these ‘obsessions’ activates the agency for ‘self-making’, ‘self-inventing’ (Gates and West 92) or discovery of self which are core components of the “human struggle
for black space (home), black place (roots), and black face (name)” (West qtd. in Kella 145). Making Blacks believing that their black bodies are ugly (West, Race Matters 122), racism aimed first and foremost Black women. Placed at the lowest rung of Black society, Black women became the subject of sexual abuse by White oppressors. In her book Circles of Sorrow, Lines of Struggle, Gurleen Grewal theorizes that Toni Morrison clearly portrays that there is more to the “equality of oppression” since under slavery women were routinely the “subjects of rape, enforced childbirth, and natal alienation from their children” (100).

2.1 Individual Identity in Morrison’s Work: Sethe, Baby Suggs and Denver in Beloved

Quest for identity is one of the central devices in Morrison’s fiction. In the struggle of Sethe in Beloved, Morrison traces the commonly experienced hardship and trauma of Black women. Sethe figures out the dehumanizing forces of the White oppressors, while she is not a human being according to the schoolteacher’s education. He grades Sethe as a representative of the animal realm. Overhearing this, Sethe begins to trust in the words of Baby Suggs that “there is no bad luck in the world but White-folks” (Morrison, Beloved 89). Sethe feels intensified grief caused by slavery much later in her life when she is pregnant with Denver. Sethe’s milk is taken from her to feed the schoolteacher’s nephews. This cruel act haunts Sethe very much, because through it she was deprived of her milk and her rights as a mother. This violation accentuates her determination to mother her children and leads her to self realization.

Morrison’s Sethe lacks self valuation and needs to assert her individuality to continue her existence. It’s quite later that she overcomes the danger of losing self-
recognition, when Paul D stimulates her awareness of a true “self”. During a
conversation Paul D affirms: “You your best thing, Sethe. You are” (Beloved 273).
Sethe’s subsequent reply: “Me? Me?” though timid, is nevertheless one step further to
affirm her individual identity. This realization by Sethe finds an affinity to Baby
Suggs’ “maturing from the phase of not knowing what she looked like and not being
curious” to the moment of “suddenly seeing her [Baby Suggs] hands and thinking
with clarity: ‘These hands belong to me. These my hands” (Morrison, Beloved 141).

Through Beloved, Morrison portrays successful and bodacious act of tracing the Black
identity in times of slavery when such a thing was quite alien to a Black person.
Through the striving for self-definition of Sethe and Denver emerges the collective
self-recognition. Sethe stands on behalf of those Black Women who have strived for a
sense of self amid the traumatic experience of being Black women.

Morrison’s novel Beloved focuses on the individual aspect of the spiritual
quest for self–valuation. Sethe, the protagonist and her daughter, Denver are
important characters in the novel. Morrison delineates the struggle for self-affirmation
through these characters. This struggle is not only against the slavery and racial
approach of Whites but also against the Black community as it rejects Sethe for her
act of murdering her baby. The formulation of Sethe’s and Denver’s identity
concretizes with the arrival of Beloved, the ghost. The appearance of the ghost
reminds Sethe of her past. In fact, she re-experiences the pangs of slavery. For
Denver, it is a realization of her responsibility to her family and it brings forth her
subsequent transformation from being a girl to becoming a woman. Baby Suggs is
another important character who represents the communal struggle for self-
redefinition. Thus, communal as well as individual search for self have been sought
after in this novel. The novel investigates the ways of self-affirmation. The institution
of slavery has removed the ‘self’. Therefore, the characters of the novel are in quest of self-recognition which is an impetus traced back to the terrifying memory of past experience:

“Worse than that–far worse–was what Baby Suggs died of, what Ella knew, what stamp saw, what made Paul D tremble. That anybody White could take your whole self for anything that came to mind. Not just work, kill or main but dirty you. Dirty you so had you couldn’t like yourself anymore. Dirty you so bad you forget who you were and couldn’t think it up.” (Morrison, Beloved 251).

In a film interview, Morrison has stated, “I suppose The Bluest Eye is about one’s dependency on the world for identification, self value, feelings of worth” (O. Moore Richard 2). Morrison castigates the concept of beauty set by White standards. Her novel, The Bluest Eye, shows the worthlessness of White standard of beauty. Morrison’s narrator, Claudia labels ideas of univocal standard of beauty and romantic love as two of the most destructive. Morrison’s Sula narrates the life of Sula peace and Nel Wrights from childhood to adulthood and illustrates the formation of women’s identities. Sula and Nel both represent two different identities. While Nel is presented as unimaginative and conservative, Sula is given an image of a person void of any sense of responsibility to herself and to the community. The reader travels with both the women as Morrison asks her readers to decide for themselves which women has successfully found her ‘self’. She introspects various issues such as quest for self, cultural identity, the dynamics of Black women’s life, their familial and societal oppression and most importantly the course of actions of Blacks in dealing with these issues. She highlights the need to “choose whether to exist in the shadows, submerging their identities, or to fight back to prove that they have a self worth respecting” (Beaulieu171).
2.2 Hagar, Ruth, Lena and Romen

Morrison’s *Song of Soloman* addresses the question of self and identity of Black women within Black community. In this novel, Morrison has delineated the characters of Pilate, Hagar, Ruth and Lena. Pilate is an exemplary character of Black woman who denies being a victim of male or societal oppression and sustains a strong individual identity. The action of wearing her name in her ear by Pilate is a symbolic act of cherishing her identity. Likewise, she “had taken a rock from every state she had lived in—because she had lived there” (Morrison, *Song of Soloman* 329). This act indicates a sense of belonging of Pilate to her Black culture and land. Pilate accepts, though later, her mysterious biological fact of missing navel, “After a while she stopped worrying about her stomach and stopped trying to hide it…Then she tacked the wanted of live and what was valuable to her” (Morrison, *Song of Soloman* 148-149). She has a sense of self reflection through her songs and realizes her own worth, repudiating servitude designed for Black women by racially structured society. Ruth and Hagar, meagerly, share Pilate’s strength to some extent. Ruth feels for herself a “small woman…pressed small” by living conditions (Morrison, *Song of Soloman* 123-124). Throughout her life, her marriage acts like a restrain or repression: “(she) began her days stunned into stillness by her husband’s contempt and ended them wholly animated by it “(10). Quite contrary to Pilate, Ruth has not any realization of self identity and no communication with self rather she assimilates it in her husband and son. Hagar also shares this mute identity with Ruth leading to self destruction. Hagar, Ruth and Lena face the patriarchal approach from their father, who “mangle (s) their grace, wit and self-esteem” (Morrison, *Song of Soloman* 10). Lena, somehow, amid these muffled and hushed identities, is able to recover her individuality. She contends the repression and patriarchal domination in a heated argument with her brother.
“You’ve been laughing at us all your life…Mama. Me using us, ordering us, and judging us…Where do you get the right to decide our lives?…I’ll tell you where…Now get out of my room” (215-216).

As the novel progresses, Morrison develops Lena’s character embellished with self consciousness or awareness. She now claims the identity that was crushed by her father and brother. She emerges as a strong, self-aware individual demanding autonomy. Lena and Pilate carry a message for African American woman to restore their individual identity amid the oppression. Pilate, as a singer both literally and symbolically, expresses the outcome of Morrison’s examination of her society in the form of the cautionary tale to empower the collective cultural identity of Blacks. As Alice Walker writes in Meridian, “It is the song of people, transformed by the experience of each generation, that holds them together” (205-206). In the novel Love, Romen efforts constantly to seek his genuine self and finds, “What made him do it? Or rather, who? . . . But he knew who it was. It was the real Romen who had sabotaged the newly chiseled one” (Morrison, Love 49).

2.3 Nomenclature an Important Act for Self-Realization

Song of Soloman also deals with individual identity of a person conceptualized with the importance of nomenclature. In the novel, the author shifts her focus on African American man, Milkman Dead. While exploring his family heritage, Milkman moves from innocence to self-awareness. Such an exploration succeeds when Milkman examines traditional African American history, mythology, and culture and “discovers, understands and respects these traditions” so that he then “discovers the meaning of his name, his own life, and his familial past” (Mobley 95). The novel explains that acquiring names of their own choosing is necessary to secure
an identity. Because losing one’s name results in loss of connection with their ancestry. Milkman sets out in search of his identity. During this quest he comes across the significant difference between a given name and choosing it deliberately.

Milkman’s aunt, Pilate ripped her name out of the family Bible and placed it in a brass box she then hung from her left ear. This symbolic act of her aunt instills the sense of self-identity in Milkman. On the other hand, Milkman’s father, Macon Dead, weighs earning money and possessing things over any other thing in life. He seems to be under impact of White and capitalist culture where identity results from material possessions. Initially, Milkman believes his father, but eventually, he discovers the emptiness of this materialism on his journey to the South. This subconscious journey transforms Milkman and he discovers that his identity is not obtained from material accumulation; instead his individual and communal history is the genesis of his sense of self. His journey is not the sequel of Western heroic myths; it is not about finding the gold or even about proving his manhood. Rather, Milkman’s journey is about his gradual acquisition of an identity and more importantly, the fact that his identity emerges and depends upon his connection to the African American community.

Apparently, the quest for individual self is connected to the collective identity for its fulfillment and completion. Circe, Pilate and Sweet play a very important role in the novel as they assist Milkman in finding out his identity at different stages of his life.

‘These Black women function as preservers of Black culture and serve as spiritual guides for the wayward Milkman’ (Beaulieu 317). They enable him to define himself and his family’s past.

### 2.4 Jadine in *Tar Baby*

In *Tar Baby* a young Black woman, Jadine Childs has light skin colour which alienates her from Black culture. Although she gets good exposure and has been
educated at the Sorbonne in Paris, she is in search of the self. Jadine is perplexed between the Black and White worlds. She does not know how to be “just me” and quests, for “me” in her relationship with Son (Morrison, *Tar Baby* 45). At one time she rejects the past through turning back on the women ghosts but as the novel ends, it implies that Jadine would struggle to find her ‘self’ within Black culture. The encounter of Jadine with a Black woman (a symbol of African American traditional female identity) in a yellow dress in a French supermarket initiates the process of her self-reflection and marks the beginning of her path to self-redemption. Jadine sees a woman with “skin like Tar against [her] canary yellow dress” (*Tar Baby* 45) and “eyes too beautiful for lashes” (*Tar Baby* 45). The woman arouses the feeling of awe in Jadine and Jadine’s sight follows her, and suddenly the woman “look(s) right at Jadine” and “with a small parting of her lips, sho(ots) an arrow of saliva between her teeth down to the pavement” (46). Before this incident Jadine thinks of herself as “intelligent and lucky” (45). Somehow this insult makes her feel “lonely and inauthentic” (48). After this encounter Jadine leaves Paris and goes to Isle des chevaliers to meet her uncle and aunt. Jadine feels externally that “actually [the women’s insult] didn’t matter” (46), the image of the African Women keeps haunting her throughout the novel. Evelyn Hawthorne opines that, “the contrasting images of Jadine and the African woman…spotlight the novel’s continual highlighting of cultural values and the need to know the past, for the African symbolizes Origin” (104).

Through the application of symbolism, Morrison, here, adds the concept of self to the woman in yellow. The woman can be taken as the symbol of Africa and maternity. Jadine views the woman before the spitting as a “woman’s woman-that mother/sister/she” (46). Morrison, herself, has suggested that the woman in yellow symbolizes “a complete individual who owns herself” and “the original self-the self
that we betray when we lie, the one that is always there” (Morrison qtd. in Taylor-Guthrie 147, 148). The Black woman evokes in Jadine the idea of lacking authenticity. She stands for stereotypical or conventional images of Africa with her deeply black skin, “many-colored stands” and hair” wrapped in a glee as yellow as her dress” (Morrison, *Tar Baby* 45) and thus represents a vision of African womanhood that Jadine cannot subscribe to, and makes Jadine flee from Paris. Here begins the reflection on self in the mind of Jadine. Further in the novel, Jadine is reminded of her cultural heritage and roots, when she literally falls into a tar pit in a marsh called Sein de Vielles. Jadine manages to save herself by clinging on to a tree “which shivered in her arms and swayed as through it wished to dance with her” (*Tar Baby* 182). Here Morrison has introduced supernatural element as the tree Jadine holds onto acts like a human being and Jadine’s stream of consciousness imagines the “swamp women” whispering introductions to her, “Count. Just count. Don’t Sweat or you’ll lose your partner, the tree” (182). These words seem to show the need to hang on to Jadine’s African roots and adopt the stereotypical role of a woman that is having “exceptional femaleness” (Morrison, *Tar Baby* 183). The image of tree on the back of Sethe in *Beloved* also connects to the image of African roots and culture.

Another facet of Jadine’s journey to trace the self embraces two dimensional struggle- struggles against White colonialism and Black patriarchy. Jadine is being haunted by people, real and supernatural, who all seem to have decided roles for her. The values associated with those roles are mainly Black defined and come from the Black community. These values include motherly or wifely roles as well as the typical images of women “minding the pie table” (Morrison, *Tar Baby* 119) of Son’s dreams. The people who try to “get her, tie her, bind her” (262) are Black as well as White. As Margaret “stirred (Jadine) into blackening up or universalling out, always alluding to
or ferreting out what she believed were racial characteristics” (64). While Jadine “ended up resisting both” (64). Margaret and Valerian’s son, Michael, seems to share Son’s views on what Jadine should become. As Jadine feels, “he wanted me to string cowrie beads or sell Afro combs” (73). Quite interestingly, it is Valerian, a White man, who supports Jadine’s growth as a person, without the burden of Blackness or femaleness. He thinks the world is open for a person like Jadine, “look what she has to go back to…Everything. Europe. The future. The world” (Tar Baby 29). However, Son, later, indicates an inherent irony in the thoughts of Valerian.

3. Collective or Social Identity in Toni Morrison

The importance of individual relationship with social reality/social circumstances/community can be traced from the view of cultural ideologies. Examining the social awakening of the self with outer selves is a significant step to understand how these writers, Morrison as well as Dalits, communicate the relation between individual and community in the context of self-consciousness, self-examination and self-identification. Stephen Butterfield’s view is very pertinent here, “The self belongs to the people, and the people find a voice in the self” (Butterfield 3). Throughout her fiction, Morrison emphasizes that the construction of individual identity is inseparable from the community. Her work outsources that self identity is not just a reflection of an inner essence rather it is constructed through social circumstances and relations. In her novels, the characters, generally, discover self who are close to the community for example Son in Tar Baby, Milkman Dead in Song of Solomon, and Claudia in The Bluest Eye. Whereas, the characters who fail to internalize community or reject it, confront tragedy. Pauline Breedlove in The Bluest Eye and Sula in Sula are such examples. Morrison herself has described community as “both a support system and a hammer at the same time” (qtd. in Smith 50)
When Claudia, the narrator, uses the term “we” in *The Bluest Eye*, she is not just referring to herself and her sister, Frieda. Rather, she is connecting herself to her community. Milkman Dead’s character italicizes or gives emphasis on the community’s influence on creating individual character. The sense of discovering self comes to Milkman Dead as he gets to know the legend of his great grandfather, Soloman, who could fly and this self is realized through selves of his African American community only. Through this relation between individual and community, Morrison dissects not only individuals in their journey of self-realization and self-examination, but she evaluates and introspects her Black community as well. Sometimes, community fails the main characters as Pecola in *The Bluest Eye* and Sula in *Sula*; sometimes helps to find their roots as Milkman in *Song of Soloman*; sometimes initially betrays the individual and later rescues as Sethe in *Beloved*. Morrison portrays Black community with dissecting pen which writes the voyage of self exploration and self-introspection of the characters.

Thus, Morrison’s writing is not a document to lament or exaggerate the desolation of past or haunting memories of slavery, rather, it efforts to bring the recognition to self be it individual or collective through seeking relief to “the broken heartstrings” (*Beloved* 105); it strives to portray the process of individual and collective battle against the mortifying ramifications of racial apartheid. This battle is in fact the struggle for self-acceptance which also implies the effort to become the definer or the describer instead of just being the defined or the described. The idea of self-valuation is reflected through the characters of Baby Suggs, Paul D and Sethe who find the definition of freedom, which becomes a practical instrument to eliminate the suffering caused by repression (Kella 142).
4. Autobiographical Elements in Morrison

Morrison also considers the suffering of her community as her own and her work manifests the true core representation of the exploitation faced by Black people. In this process of representation, some autobiographical references enter her work, somewhere explicitly or somewhere implicitly. Morrison’s fiction is not strictly labeled as an auto-biographical as she delineates her characters keeping herself outside the periphery of her fictional world. Morrison says, “I never use anyone I know [for characters]” (Schappell and Lacour, “Art of Fiction” 105). Somehow, the auto-biographical element shapes/ outlines corporeally her early, first three novels and implicitly her later ones. Some of her characters bear the resemblance to Morrison’s ideology. The character of Claudia MacTeer in *The Bluest Eye* can rightly be said the alter ego of Morrison. Claudia contrasts the adoration of White girlhood- in the form of White dolls and the child star Shirley Temple- with her own disdain for White girls. Through Claudia Morrison dissects the Black community and inspires to retain their self-esteem suggesting that objective definitions of physical beauty are created by the ideals of the dominant culture in order to reinforce dynamics. She resembles to Morrison in her ability to survive in an inverted world order that would teach her to despise herself and recognize her own worth. Even Claudia’s mother, Mrs. MacTeer’s strength makes her daughters learn to fight back against the forces that threaten to destroy them psychologically and it reminds the strength of Morrison’s mother. Like the MacTeer family, Morrison’s family struggled to make ends meet during the Great Depression. Morrison grew up listening to her mother singing and grandfather playing the violin, just as Claudia does. To add more the hometown of Morrison, Ohio, Lorain is the place setting of the novel.
Morrison’s great grandmother may be seen as the model for M’Dear in *The Bluest Eye*, Ajax’s mother in *Sula*, for the women who haunt Jadine in Eloe in *Tar Baby*, for Baby Suggs in *Beloved*, and for Lone DuPres, a former midwife of Ruby in *Paradise*. Morrison puts the traits of a woman of her acquaintance in the character of Sula as she says, “There’s a woman in our town now who is an absolute riot. She can do anything she wants to. And it occurred to me about twenty years ago how depleted that town would be if she ever left... And that quality is what I used in Sula” (Morrison qtd. in Stepto 15). Later Morrison created Junior and Celestial in her novel *Love* with the traits of outlaw and wayward woman like Sula. In this way some of the life experiences can be traced to Morrison’s novels and the autobiographical references are strongly represented in some of her novels. However, later ones rely more on ideas plucked from news sources from the past or from current events.

5. Self Critique or Self Introspection in Morrison

The issues of self-identity and reflection on community lurk throughout Morrison’s work, whether fiction or non-fiction. The search for true identity recurs as the main theme in her fiction like *The Bluest Eye, Beloved, Sula* and *Tar Baby* and as a chief idea in her non-fiction like ‘Playing in the Dark’ and ‘Remember: The Journey to School Integration’. This search for true identity serves as a channel for self-consciousness. Self-consciousness as a tendency to introspect and examine one’s inner self and feeling is imprinted in Morrison’s several novels. This kind of self-consciousness leads to self-monitoring and self-introspection. Toni Morrison, as a writer or thinker, does not hold Whites the sole responsible for the plight of Blacks, rather she looks into Blacks and introspects her own community. Dalit writings too have a fair record of discovery of self-hood and formation of identity which has been
suppressed for a long time. This discovery reaches to the realization of self-respect and worthiness of their culture among Dalit writers. Bama, Pawar, Limbale, Valmiki, Pawde, Shanta Roa, Kamble, and Sivakami ransack and scour their true self concealed amid societal alienation.

Morrison’s self-examining approach makes a critique of racial inferiority and tendency among Black community to assimilate into White hegemonic standards. Dealing with the issue of self-introspection and thereby, the issue of acceptance of racial inferiority, Morrison has created the kind of characters especially Black women who long to assimilate into the American society and submit or surrender to the American standard of beauty or culture in life. The yearning of to be accepted leads these characters or Black women to strive to be free from their Blackness. They have learnt to live with the feeling of being inferior and scorn themselves (Blacks) through their life-experiences.

Pecola, a little Black girl, Sula and Jadine young Black women share some common traits. They all carry the notion that they are part of a culture which is viewed as inferior and they try to assimilate into the culture of the dominant white population. They carry the constant anxiety of being relegated in their surroundings and their actions take the form of self-loathing. Consequently, this kind of problem can lead to self-destruction in some cases. This issue of self-identification, self-hatred, has led Morrison to self-examination or self-introspection. In fact, feeling of inferiority was the consequence of the acceptance of the rejection of Blacks by Whites. The long and constant rejection of Blacks created a borderline between Blacks and Whites in the American community. Blacks remained on the margins of society with their exclusion from the hegemony of society. Charles E. Silberman aptly
traces the strengthening of inferiority among Blacks, “Having created the system of slavery on the assumption of Negro inferiority, and then having produced the behaviour that seemed to justify the assumption, it was inevitable that American would refuse to admit free Negroes to full membership in their society. Slavery became associated with race, and race with inferiority; the two concepts merged. And so black man meant inferior; inferior meant black. Thus, even when a black man became free, White America offered him neither equality nor citizenship in any meaningful sense of the word” (91).

In *The Bluest Eye* Pecola has experienced ill-treatment in the public sphere as well as in her private domain. She is harassed by Black boys’ uproar, “Balc e mo, Black e mo” (65). Morrison refers to the self-contempt of these Black boys which results in bullying Pecola and following Maureen, a light skinned Black girl. However, Maureen also shouts at Pecola, “I am cute! And you ugly! Black and ugly e mos,” (Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 73). These negative experiences make Pecola (believe in her ugliness and) reject her Blackness and yearn for the blue eyes. Through her character, Morrison delves deep into the question of self-hatred among Blacks and examines this tendency to show how this element of self-hatred can lead to self-destruction.

Pecola’s mother Pauline Breedlove is another character who internalizes the White values and escapes her African American heritage by imitating White people and finds “beauty, order, cleanliness and praise” (Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 99) in the house of her White employers. Pauline’s own culture as well as her family becomes distant and detestable for her as she is trapped in the conventional frame of “the ideal servant” (99). In this role, she soothes the little fisher girl (her employer), whereas she
beats into all well Pecola “a fear of growing up, fear of other people, fear of life” (100). This internalization of White culture leads her to become alienated from her culture and this is what happens to every character that escapes from his or her true self in Morrison’s work. Through Claudia MacTeer in The Bluest Eye, Morrison implies that the reason for the intra-racial discrimination or victimization lies in “ignorance”, “self-hatred” and “hopelessness”,

“It was their contempt for their own blackness that gave the first insult its teeth. They seemed to have taken all of their smoothly cultivated ignorance, their exquisitely learned self-hatred, their elaborately designed hopelessness and sucked it all up into a fiery cone of scorn that had burned for ages in the hollows of their minds – cooled – and spilled over lips of outrage, consuming whatever was in its path” (The Bluest Eye 50).

In The Bluest Eye, the characters of Pecola Breedlove and Claudia MacTeer encounter racial prejudice and are enforced to feel being inferior and lesser. Pocola is gripped by this feeling of being inferior coupled with a lack of understanding as she surrenders to the White standard of beauty. And this leads to the loss of Pocola’s self. On the other hand, Claudia has a fight for survival and critiques the White Beauty standard rejecting the feeling of otherness, of degradation and loss of identity.

Morrison castigates the concept of beauty set by White standards. Her novel shows the worthlessness of White standard of beauty. Morrison's narrator, Claudia labels ideas of univocal standard of beauty and romantic love as two of the most destructive ideas. Claudia contrasts the adoration of White girlhood-in the form of White dolls and the White child star-Shirley Temple- with her own disdain for White girls.

Through Claudia, Morrison dissects the Black community and inspires to retain their self-esteem suggesting that objective definitions of physical beauty are created by the
ideals of the dominant culture in order to reinforce dynamics. Claudia represents Morrison’s psyche on the issues of self-respect and self-worth.

Morrison’s Sula, as an adult, has, unlike Pecola, the opportunity to leave her hometown and live in cities. She returns to her native place, Bottom, accompanied by transformation: “she was dressed in a manner that was as close to a movie star as anyone could ever see” (Sula 90). Sula’s adoption of her new attire may be interpreted by Silberman’s claims that there are many ways in which discontentment with oneself is manifested, “The most obvious is the use of hair-straighteners, skin bleaches, and the like in the desperate but futile attempt to come close to the White ideal” (119). This can be applied to the character of Sula, as she desires to be somebody else and to make herself visible.

Jadine is another Black woman in Morrison’s province of work tries to assimilate into mainstream society that is very much different from her traditional one. In one of the arguments with Son, her lover, Jadine stands up for valerian: “I was being educated…I was learning how make it in this world” (Morrison, Tar Baby 266-67). They all have similar experiences and what to survive in the world according to their own ideas about a worthwhile life. Pecola desires blue eyes because to have them means to her to become more satisfied with herself. Jadine, because of her chance to live in cities, does not need to identify with her own heritage.

These Black women characters, in the process of identification with the culture of the dominant society, face many negative effects on their lives. According to Silberman, “Pursuit of the White ideal…is a symptom of self-hate” (119-20). Morrison points out this self-hatred and the need to eliminate it from Black people and restore their value and esteem for their culture through introducing the element of self-invention and self making.
While probing the Black society, Morrison puts in the fore the class hierarchy among Blacks. In *Tar Baby*, Sydney presumes the superiority over Son. Sydney retorts to Son, “If this was my house, you would have a bullet in your head” (Morrison, *Song of Soloman* 162). Morrison seems quite critical to this presumption of supremacy as the reader notices the prejudice that Sydney shows in pointing out the difference between his class and Son’s, “I am a Phil-a-delphia Negro mentioned in the book of the very same name. My people owned drugstores and taught school while yours were still cutting their faces open so as to be able to tell one from the other” (163).

Morrison’s characters employ the sense of humour to fight the threatening living conditions. This act of extraction of laughter from the miseries of their experience underscores their effort to make them bearable. In *Song of Soloman* Morrison indicates that this laughter is both self-critical and self-therapeutic, “They laughed then, uproariously, about the speed with which they had run…to escape or decrease some threat to their manliness, their humanness” (*Song of Soloman* 82). This technique of survival comprises the transformation of the harsh and grim moments into laughter and humour. In Sula, “a nigger joke” is seen as “a little comfort” by the narrator (4). This irony of existence is explained in her novel *Jazz* as the peculiar trait of African American sense of humour. Alice Manfred’s appeal to other women victims, “Laughter is serious. More complicated, more serious than tears” highlights this (Morrison, *Jazz* 113).

Morrison in *Love* introspects the concept of love and its various forms in Black community through unfolding the life of Black characters like Bill Cosey, a Black entrepreneur and owner of a Black resort, his son Billy Boy’s widow- May, his granddaughter- Christine, his second wife- Heed (Christine’s friend), and his
employees- Celestial, Junior, L, the cook, Vida and Romen. Through the case of Christine and Heed, their childhood friendship and animosity after Bill Cosey marries Heed, Morrison evaluates the existence of Black women being dependent upon a male and messages to women to form their own identity and develop solidarity among them. As Morrison has said about Cosey, Christine and Heed in an interview, "It's not that he didn't ruin their lives the way they believe he did. The point is get rid of it...Move on. It's only after they relegate him to a phantom that they can finally begin to talk" (Soloman). The conversation between Christine and Heed in the end of the novel affirms Morrison’s intent of self introspection of her community. Christine says, “It's like we started out being sold, got free of it, then sold ourselves to the highest bidder.” Heed asks, "Who you mean 'we'? Black people? Women? You mean me and you?" (185). Morrison has elaborated her message of reinforcing women empowerment through this case, “Patriarchy is assumed, but women have to agree to the role...It's not that [Cosey] gobbles them up, but they allow themselves to be eaten. When you're able to stop blaming other people-your father, your grandfather, your husband-for your shortcomings or confusion or failure, then language is possible, and so is love” (O’Connor). Thus, Morrison explores Black community reflecting on Black life, culture, intra-classicism considering its strengths and loop holes both to ameliorate the status of Black people.

B. Identity and Crises and Introspection in Dalit Writings

1. Individual Identity in Dalit Writing

In case of Dalits, the issue of identity has been negated by ‘othering’, caste based hierarchy and untouchability. Dalit women’s case is all the more problematical as the kind of oppression faced by them is multilayered and complex. The layers of
being low caste and being woman have suppressed their self-identity and this agonizing suppression finds a representation in Dalit writings particularly in Dalit women writings in the form of an act of assertion for a self which is unburdened. Like Morrison, the Dalit writers address all forms of subjugation and oppression, be it caste system- untouchability, or patriarchy- gender discrimination, or subalternity in general in order to empower their own self or identity.

1.1 Limbale’s *The Outcaste*

Generally, Dalits struggle for their identity and their existence as equal status in the caste based hierarchical social system. But in case of Sharan Kumar Limbale, he bears the burden of being rejected not only by mainstream people but by his own community also as he was born as a result of illegitimate relationship between a woman from a Mahar community and a man who belongs to so called high caste, hence a question mark on his identity. Limbale explores his identity of being aakarmashi i.e. outcaste or half-caste which has been attributed to him by the social system. While examining this unjustified social system, Limbale searches for his self and finds it crushed, trampled and injured in the hands of exploiting and humiliating community. Through his autobiographical narration, he describes the pathetic condition of caste based oppression and struggles of a Mahar caste person in the state of Maharashtra. Limbale acknowledges it in his work, “High caste people look upon my community as untouchable, while my own community humiliated me calling ‘aakarmashi’. This humiliation was like being stabbed over and over again” (Limbale ix-x). He has always lived with the burden of inferiority. The mother of narrator Masamai’s life is the tale of a victim of a social order which makes Dalit women as easy dupe of the licentious upper caste landlords, “What sort of life had she been living, mortgaging herself to one owner after another and being used as a commodity?” (Limbale 59).
1.2 Bama’s Karukku

Bama faces the dehumanizing forces of caste oppression and presents her life as “a process of lonely self-discovery” (Karukku xvii). In her work, Karukku the harrowing experiences of her life get reflected in a way which represents the collective struggle and sensibility of all Dalit women of her time. She delineates the individual as well as community struggle to build up their identity and explore their own culture as Bama admits, “My book talks about the condition of Dalit women and Dalit culture. The need for unity among Dalit sub groups, the need to get political power, the need to get self-confidence, to own up to their identity and be proud of their own culture” (Bama, Labouring). Lakshmi Holmstrom also shares this view when she writes in the introduction of the book, “Clearly she understands that her own experience is part of a larger movement among Dalits. Yet, it is interesting that she appears to come to this awareness of her own accord” (Karukku xvii). Karukku is, in fact, concerned with the issue of caste oppression in society as well as in Catholic Church and its institutions. The voyage of Bama’s life from a child to a woman as a nun drives her to make sense of her life as a woman, a Christian and a Dalit. The obsessions of religious and socio-political life carry a vital significance for the process of ‘self-making’ and ‘self-education’ in her life. There is a revelatory moment when as a child she first understands what untouchability means. Bama narrates, “He came along, holding out the packet by its string, without touching it. I stood…” (13). When Bama is in the convent, she feels angry at the upper caste convent authorities, because all the menial jobs are done by Dalits. The Dalits are abused all the time and treated in a shameful and degrading way. Dalits are frightened by the power and wealth that nuns have. At this traumatic condition of Dalits, Bama feels embarrassed among the unfair and cruel upper caste nuns. Bama writes, “I was dying several deaths within” (23).
Holmstrom defines the main argument of the book as “the narrator spiritual development both through the nurturing of her belief as a Catholic, and her gradual realization of herself as a Dalit” (xvi). This realization is not limited to the individual, rather this formulation of individual identity moves on to collective struggle for self-making, self-identity as Bama points out the gradual growing awareness among Dalits of their exploitation:

“But Dalits have...become aware that they too were created in the likeness of God. There is a new strength within them, urging them to reclaim that likeness which has been so far repressed, ruined, and obliterated; and to begin to live with honour, self-respect, and with a love towards all humankind” (*Karukku* 109).

In this novel, Bama moves the process of self discovery from individual to community. Bama herself describes *Karukku* in an interview as ‘the depiction of a collective trauma” of her community. It investigates the ways of self-affirmation through depicting a very powerful sense of the self and the community as Dalit. This realization rejects the long established cultural hegemony of caste structure and puts forth the reconstruction of the self in the form of the process of self-making.

### 1.3 Kumud Pawde’s Struggle for Self-access

Indian Dalit woman bears the grudges of casteism and Dalit patriarchy. Kumud Pawde takes up her steps to the journey of her enlightenment through education. She proceeds on this journey of discovery of self struggling against caste barriers and Dalit patriarchy. She receives the treatment of being ‘other’ and marginalized in the mainstream society. Along with this, her writing is about the reconstruction of the self after the traumatic event as in other Dalit writings. Pawde narrates an incident outraging her “self-respect” (Pawde qtd. in Dangle 115). She is dreadfully scolded at
being present at the thread ceremony and enchanted by the chanting of Sanskrit. This insult brings several thoughts to her mind, “Why should that woman behave so badly with me?...Is Sanskrit very difficult? Can’t we learn it?” (115). Such experiences make her “as firm as a rock” (116). Prasad confirms this process of construction of self as he analyzes the representation of Dalit women in literature, “The female characters in Dalit Literature are dynamic and not static…(They) end the journey of deep darkness and behold dreams of sunrise…They fight for truth and for themselves. They revolt to protect their self-respect…The revolt of Dalit women is not person-centered but society-centered…” (46).

1.4 Urmila Pawar’s *The Weave of My Life*

The search for identity is a recurring theme even in *Aaydan* by Urmila Pawar. Labeled as memoir, her work narrates the tale of transformation and growth of a woman to establish her individual identity in the society. The word ‘aaydan’ means weaving of cane baskets. Pawar herself reveals the importance of this activity by Mahar community to which she belongs and establishes the connection between this activity and self-making and self-realization, “My mother used to weave Aaydan and I was writing this book, both were activities of creation of thought and practical reality of life” (Pawar 1). Her work records a Dalit woman’s discovery of selfhood and claim of identity.

1.5 Crippled Identity and Sense of Self-making

Masamai, in *The Outcaste*, is treated as a commodity without any dignity or self-esteem. She receives the caste based patriarchal treatment and assimilates this treatment devoid of sensitivity and sense of respect for women. She does not seek for justice or dignity, rather merges her identity by the act of submission to exploitation.
and harassment not voluntarily but a forced compulsion. As a result, her existence is delimited to a property or commodity. Masamai is left with no other option but to surrender her to a person like Hanmanta after her desertion by her husband, Kamble. Her womanly beauty becomes a curse for her as instead of feeling self-gratified, she feels abused on her being exploited by all those who could afford to have her as a concubine. The caste council forced Masamai to divorce Kamble and leave her toddler baby and four year old son Dharma. There is no heed to the fact that “The relationship between a husband and a wife can come to an end but what about the relationship between a mother and her sons?” (Limbale 37).

This situation portrays the fact that a Dalit woman doesn’t have the right to even bless her children with motherly care against the wishes of social practices which bar them to practice autonomy in the matters as crucial as child care, family planning, divorce, remarriage and other crucial issues affecting her life significantly. Like a typical Dalit women, Masamai remains a victim of one man or the other throughout her life. This is Santamai her mother, who supports during her deserted condition as Limbale writes, “Only a mother and the earth can accommodate and stomach everything” (37). Shantamai represents the image of a Dalit woman who sacrifices her comforts, pleasures and most importantly her identity at every being conscious of the vicious circle that has forced her to suffer. The forfeit and sacrifice of Dalit women is recalled through Santamai’s character. Like most of other Dalit women in the vicinity, Santamai used to collect dung for making cakes of dung to sell them. She feeds her grandson first and merely survives with leftover food. The Dalit women are not only a prey of the lechery of so called upper caste men, but their own men are equally responsible for their humiliation in social life. Even after being treated as ‘others’, these women carry the strong sense of commitment sacrifice and
dutifulness. Like Santamai has always been denied love, affection, care or graceful treatment in a patriarchal social set up but at the news of her husband’s death, she bursts into tears and is grieved for the person who is the cause of her suffering. This subjugated situation leaves women devoid of essential human dignity, freedom, human rights, realization of the self, opportunities to assert her identity and the consciousness about her rights. Thus, Limbale, in *The Outcaste*, highlights how the identity of women fades away amid these too hard realities to exist and in the patriarchal setup and mindset of society. Through narrating the account of their exploited existence, Limbale asserts the need to erase the faded identity marking their life with self-respect, self-dignity and self-assertion.

Gunasekaran’s account of experiences of atrocities, narrated in *The Scar* is quite similar to the experience of other Dalit writers. Gunasekaran is also voicing for self-respect, identity and tradition. Quite like Gunasekaran, Urmila Pawar records a woman’s sensing or authentication of identity and identification of selfhood while she also captures the picture of culture and beliefs in her work along with inter-societal connection, congruity, and conflicts. In Pawar’s *The Weave of My Life*, the case of Parvati and daughter-in-laws reveals the patriarchal approach and double-edged exploitation. Urmila rejects certain changes in her sister’s language and manners as she follows the so called upper caste culture. Urmila Panwar’s rejection of this type of approach seems to carry two reasons; first, deviating away from the community language, and second, from feminist point of view, paying unnecessary respect to others means degrading oneself. Pawar moves towards self-awareness in her narrative. Like Lena in *Song of Solomon*, she questions the dependency of women in the social structure, “Before my marriage, I used to hand over my salary to my mother; now I started handing over to my husband. If this is not like deliberately
offering head for the butcher’s knife, what else is it?’” (Pawar 208). Sketching three generations of Dalit women, Pawar feels strongly that man can receive self-respect but it is very difficult for woman. She speaks, quite candidly, of the patriarchal mindset of society through depicting husband-wife relationship, when her husband denies her to take higher education as it would give him a higher qualified wife than him.

P. Sivakami focuses on the patriarchy of the common society along with exposing the Dalit patriarchy in her novel, *The Grip of Change*. Through the character of Thangam and Gowri, Sivakami focuses on the marginalized and exploited Dalit women. The novelist depicts the marginalized Dalit women as the victims of the patriarchal system of society. Thangam, the lady whose poor and pathetic situation creates havoc in both the areas of society – Cheri as well as the *gramam*, is a victim on both the sides. (Cheri is a ghetto located at the margin of the village and the Dalit communities are confined to it. The village or *gramam* is that part where the caste Hindus lives.) Thangam, a childless widow and tormented throughout her life, is misused and she falls as a victim of the misdeeds and lust of the people. Gowri – the narrator of the part of the novel -becomes a protest also against the other patriarchal forces, i.e., her father – Kathamuthu – a Dalit leader, and some other upper caste persons. Thus, Sivakami traces the major events and incidents in the lives of the Dalit in her work and the women are portrayed as victimized beings kept silent and crushed except muffled voice of Gowri.

Exploring inter-caste relations, Sivakami delineates how hegemony of machismo makes an agreement with casteism to subjugate and oppress women/femininity. In the case of Dalit Kathamuthu and the caste Hindu widow Nagamani, Kathamuthu assigns Nagamani a place in his home, though an injustice to
Kanagavalli, Kathamuthu’s wife. On the other hand, Paranjothi Udayar forces himself on Thangam, just keeps her as a mistress. She is not treated well and given socially approved relationship because of her being outcast. Through the character of Thangam, Sivakami exposes the truths of Dalit patriarchy and the shocking realities of Dalit Movement as a whole. Gowri, Kathamuthu’s daughter has been portrayed in The Grip of Change as a victim of her mother’s experiences and she has that courage to move on from the victimhood of her mother. She is completely against the theory of her father’s politics and patriarchal approach. Being educated and self-reliant, she thinks that even women should have the right to live according to their own thoughts and they should get their own freedom. In her voice, Sivakami infuses the signs of self-awakening of Dalit women. A sense of self-realization in the character of Gowri emerges as she turns to be a protest to the cruel clutches of patriarchy and blatant injustice done to the women. Her subversive act of resistance is born out of her capability to critically examine the plight of her mother and other women in her house, thereby initializing the process of self-making and self-acclamation.

Baby Kamble’s narrative The Prisons we Broke unfolds how Dalit women construct their own identity and represent their community. Patriarchal domination is a matter to be talked about here. To quote Maya Pandit, “A singularly important aspect of Jina Amucha is Baby Kamble’s Dalit feminist critique of patriarchy” (xv).

2. Collective Identity in Dalit Writings

The focus of Urmila Pawar’s work is on the self as she talks about her personal life and her life experiences. Nevertheless, the community always becomes imminent in her autobiography as well as in her fiction. She admits, “What the writer writes about is social reality and not his/her individual life” (Pawar 342). She undergoes
adverse circumstances and suffers perpetually because of her caste. The touching experiences of the deprival of identity portray the collective trauma of Marathi Dalit women of her time yet can be applied to Dalit women in general. Bama labels her work *Karukku* as the depiction of a collective trauma of her community. The narrative focuses on three essential forces that cut across and sear the narrator’s life, namely: caste, gender and religion (Geetha 77). It broadcasts the reality of the social ills confronted by a Dalit woman and the double discrimination which makes them victim of intra-casteism and singles Dalit women out for suppression, caste, untouchability and gender inequality.

Baby Kamble very explicitly pronounces, “The suffering of my people became my own suffering. Their experiences became mine. So I really find it difficult to think of myself outside of my community” (136). In Sharan Kumar Limbale also, the individual identity gets assimilated into the larger social milieu. In *The Outcast*, the narrator, his mother, grandmother and sisters do struggle for their distinct identity as a human being. They have to face persistent torture in the form of being considered as a privileged space for all types of control and oppression to exercise on. Social and cultural systems amalgamate to crush their psyche (existence), and in the case of women their mind, body and soul. The title of his work, *The Outcaste*, refers to a person who is void of any identity be it, individual or collective. Limbale is sought after to find out his identity in the mainstream as well as in his subaltern community.

3. Autobiographical Elements in Dalit Writings

Dalit writings also provide autobiographical references in abundance. Dalit writers like Omprakash Valmiki, Sharan Kumar Limbale, Kumud Pawde, Bama, Urmila Pawar and Baby Kamble have written autobiographies which are reckoned as
writing about the self. Their writings can be labeled as a retrospective narrative, where the primary focuses of the authors are upon their own life as an individual, whereby they trace out the voyage of the self. Baby Kamble’s *The Prisons We Broke*, Urmila Pawar’s *The Weave of My Life: A Dalit Woman’s Memoirs*, Bama’s *Karukku* and Kumud Pawde’s *The Story of My ‘Sanskrit’* are autobiographical narratives showing their journeys from the condition of victims to the realization of personal autonomy or even creativity. Here the depiction of the narrators’ experiences becomes the mouthpiece of the community and depiction of the self connects to the image of his/her community. In these texts, the subjects/narrator moves back and forth between the individual ‘I’ and collective ‘We’ as in *Joothan* by Valmiki, *Akkarmashi* by Limbale, *Antasphot* by Kumud Pawde, and *The Prisons We Broke* by Baby Kamble.

*Joothan*, originally written in Hindi, was first published in 1997. The title has connotations of ‘polluted’ attached to it. *Akkarmashi*, published in 1984, carries the meaning of being outcast or excluded. *Antasphot* word literally means outburst of inner pain.

These narratives sketch detailed annals of daily life, everyday routine, incidents, traditions, conventions and beliefs of the communities and social practices by constantly shuffling between ‘I’ and ‘We’. The documentation of the instances of personal ordeal and communal resistance generates or provokes the self-exploration, self-analysis, and quest for self. Yet this self can’t be kept excluded from the whole or community. And this experience is used to “create testimonios of caste-based oppression, anti-caste struggles and resistance” (Rege 14). In accordance with Cornel West’s observation, Dalit writings like Morrison’s give a shape to the process of individual and collective struggle against the betraying effects of untouchability and slavery.
C: Comparing Similarities and Contrasting Dissimilarities

(I) Similarities

1. **Interdependence of Individual and Community**

   The underlying thread which connects Indian Dalit writings and Morrison’s work is that the narrators consider their suffering as the suffering of their people. Thus, their sufferings are always related to “self” and “selves”. These writers converted their personal sufferings into words. Their personal experiences of poverty, hunger and discrimination are obtrusively/undesirably prominent experiences that form the core of their writings. What Stephen Butterfield writes in *Black Autobiography in America* can be applied to the Indian Dalit writings: “The ‘self’ of black autobiography…is not an individual with a private career…The self is conceived as a member of an oppressed social group with ties and responsibilities to the other members” (5). In the words of Baby Kamble who views ‘self’ as identifying with the community, “The suffering of my community has always been more important than my own individual suffering. I have identified myself completely with my people and therefore, *Jina Amucha (The Prisons We Broke)* was the autobiography of my own community” (136).

   Dalit writing when explored from the point of view of the relation between self and community establishes an interactive connection between these two. In *The Outcaste*, Sharan Kumar Limbale transposes between the individual (I) and the community (We) depicting the pangs faced by him. In an interview, Limbale says, “I want write about my pain and pangs. I want write about the suffering of my community…I am writing for a social cause” (Bolleyedu 2). This identification of self with community leads to the individual to self-conscious approach from voiceless and
passive attitude. And Limbale, here, passes through the stage of self-identification and further moves to the self-affirmation. As Limbale adds, further, “My autobiography is a statement of my war against injustice” (Bolleddu 2).

The striving to become the definer instead of just being the defined, like Black writing, exists in Indian Dalit writings too. The portrayal of Dalit experiences, in Dalit narratives, is evidential of the adverse situation (bestowed in a greater degree of self-awareness). Their voyage is doleful, the encounters are full of agony and the experiences reveal pathos. Nevertheless, this traumatic experience fetches a process of recovery through provoking the reconstruction of the crushed self and the process of self exploration, recognition and strengthening is seen in these writings as a necessary ordeal/trial. Dalit writers have fought and survived through lived experience of hardships and sufferings and this act of writing autobiographical narratives is not a reminiscent act rather, it “is a privileged means of repair” (Becker 166), a means to recover, and a way to heal the bruised self. Bama in Karukku, Urmila Pawar in The Weave of My Life, Baby Kamble in The Prisons We Broke, Limbale in The Outcaste, and Gunasekaran in The Scar speaks of their traumatic individual experience, And this individual experience does not stand in seclusion but connects to the community.

2. Self-reliant and Self-invented Women in Morrison and Dalit Writers

As in Morrison’s Song of Soloman, the issue of patriarchy has been taken up; Kamble and Sivakami challenge the grip of patriarchy in their narratives. Lena, Jadine, Gowri and Kamble try to get free from the net of patriarchy and consequently, discover the ‘self’. The picture of community presented by Baby Kamble emerges as a community in flux—with changing gender roles, resistance of change and a diversity of female figures, some still caught in the net of patriarchy, while, others are half way
out some, and some, like Kamble’s exemplary grandmother who participated in bringing about social progress (Kamble 65). These three categories find their parallel in Morrison’s Ruth, Lena and Pilate who seek after to get rid of patriarchal domination. These black characters find an affinity in various Dalit female figures as they all challenge those conventional symbols of religion and superstitions that persuade women into submission and justify patriarchal approach in their household as well as society.

Gowri, more or less, shares an affinity with Lena in *Song of Soloman*. Gowri is a narrator of the part of the novel and becomes a protest against the other patriarchal forces, i.e her father- Kathamuthu -a Dalit leader, and some other upper caste people. Through her character, P. Sivakami focuses on the major events and incidents in the lives of the Dalit and the women are portrayed with that true and vivid picture of victimized society. After the incident of Kathamuthu’s sexual assault on Thangam, Gowri shouts, “Dogs! Dogs in this house! Shameless as dogs!” (Sivakami, *Grip of Change* 93). Gowri refuses the silent acceptance of this injustice done on part of his father and hates him. Like Black women of Morrison’s work, Dalit women have no escape from the devastating effect of castiesm burden of gender.

Marypillai, in *Sangati*, is a character who is happy to be born in paraiya- a Dalit community like Claudia in *The Bluest Eye* the reason can be traced in finding better life in their community in some respect, “It’s only on the surface that they look so good, really. It isn’t that easy for them to get their daughters settled” (Bama, *Sangati* 112). Bama shows a positive approach of Dalit women to their physical appearance too rejecting to feel being inferior. Bama’s women do not surrender to the beauty standards set by the mainstream society instead they appreciate their own,
“Even if our children are dark-skinned, their features are good and there’s a liveliness about them. Black is strongest and best, like a diamond” (Sangati 114). The novel Karukku expresses the sense of pride in Dalit culture felt by the author representing the community. To quote Bama, “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).

3. Introspection in Morrison and Dalit Writers

Morrison’s work and Dalit writings stress the need for self discovery and self-identity leading to self-actualization or analysis. But at the stage of self-actualization, Morrison deviates or rather proceeds further to self-introspection of her own community. The element of self consciousness underlines both the literatures as Dalits writings redefine the Dalithood with the aim of producing self-consciousness likewise Morrison’s work. However in Morrison, self-consciousness is a tendency which goes beyond the issues of race and gender introspecting and examining Black individual’s inner self and Black community’s form as exemplified through her fiction from The Bluest Eye to Home and her non-fiction.

Sivakami, Bama, Kamble and Pawde find the need for introspection among Dalits. Sivakami condemns the self devastating characteristic of Dalit community by revealing caste hierarchical array of Tamil Dalit society, by giving an elaborated description of hierarchy. She critiques in The Grip of Change,

“Even amongst the lower castes, hierarchy existed- pallars were agricultural labourers, Parayars were drummers and menials, and the Chakkiliyars were cobblers. The first grade -the Pallars-were absent in Puliyur. The Pallars
considered themselves superior to the rest. The Parayars considered
themselves higher than the Chakkiliyars, who in turn considered themselves
superior to the Para-vannars, the washer community. The para-vannar men
washed clothes for the lower castes and the women worked as midwives for
them. Similar to all other human communities, the women were considered to
be lower than the men. Everyone established their worth by pointing to those
beneath them” (63).

Kumud Pawde also questions the air of Dalit elite class and exhorts them to be
sensitive to the cause and welfare of poor Dalits. In a convention of Dalits, Pawde is
made realized by elite class of her community, “as if I am a cockroach; because I am
simple and undecorated” (qtd. in Rege 234). Pawde criticizes this attitude of so called
elites of her community and demands to keep connected to their roots. She argues that
even Dalits forget what they owe to their community where they are born, “We sell
ourselves for comfort and convenience. That is our tragedy” (qtd. in Rege 235).
Bama carefully examines nuns’ thoughts, feelings and behaviour in a particular way
in Karukku. The need for introspection becomes very important to Bama. She looks
back on her own attitude towards Christianity and religious faith and concludes that
religion is forced on the Dalit communities. She presents the picture of Christianity
crippled with caste differences, “And this convent too was not without its caste
divisions” (Karukku 25). Along with this Bama critically examines her community
and questions the attitude of copying the upper caste, “…whatever we do, whatever
rituals we copy from other castes they, for their part, always rate us as beneath them.
So what is the point of trying to copy them? Why should we lose all the better
customs that are ours and end up as neither one thing nor the other? It’s like forgetting
the butter in one’s hands and going in search of ghee” (Sangati 89). In Karukku, one
can listen Bama’s justified criticism of Dalit community, “Suddenly, and for no reason at all they’ll be fighting and wrestling with each other...Shameless fellows...Instead of uniting together in a village of many castes, if they keep challenging each other to fights, what will happen to all these men in the end?” (47). Baby Kamble in The Prisons We Broke reveals the depressing components of social environment like superstitious beliefs, eating dead animals, lack of rationality, and unhygienic life-style. Kamble writes, “They used all kinds of superstitious remedies...The spirits would declare that the patient was actually possessed by a ghost (80). She also depicts the pitiable and hapless condition of women caused by the ignorance and lack of awareness in her community, “Women led the most miserable existence. The entire day, the poor daughter-in-law would serve the entire household like a slave...she was not a human being for her in-laws (98-99). Thus, Kamble dissects her community and gives a true picture of it with an aim to reform her community.

(II) Dissimilarities

1. Differences between Blacks and Dalits as Denoted in Morrison and Dalit Writers

As Morrison explores and dissects the social, cultural and political aspects of Black community, she unravels the disillusionment, failures and negativities of her people alike their triumphs. In this course, she unfolds that many among Blacks, fascinated by American White myth of dream and beauty, do not like and live Black culture and beliefs. But Dalit writing seems to present that Dalits, irrespective of other culture, love their own. Dalits, in most of cases, are seen holding firmly their roots, cherishing, and believing in their traditions, customs, and rituals. Morrison stresses the need for love for their culture, folklore, and history as there seems a lack
of attachment to their roots and culture among many of Blacks. Therefore, “Morrison’s narratives sing the praise of Black art, music, folklore in order to celebrate black identity with the intention to rescue the qualities of resistance, excellence and integrity which helped them to survive slavery and could now be useful to the next growing up generation of Blacks” (Hatmi 113).

Another difference marks the status of Blacks and Dalits in case of their ethnicity in their respective communities. Blacks have different ethnicity and different sets of values, beliefs, and culture from Whites. The culture of Blacks and Whites are two distinct realities being originated from two distinct sources and roots. As far as the Dalits and non-Dalits are concerned, they share the same culture, ethnicity, and sets of values. As discussed earlier, the exclusion of Dalits from the mainstream is the consequence of deformity in the casteist structure of India. The society was, initially, divided into four tiers according to the profession of people which got, somehow, determined by birth. And a huge gap from mainstream to periphery ensues. Limbale writes in this context, “Dalits are the upper-caste Hindu’s Other. But this Other is not only separate and different, like the member of another ethno-cultural, religious or linguistic group. This Other is a part of Hindu society, and yet apart from it” (Towards Aesthetics 2). The cleft or divergence between Blacks and Whites in American society finds its genesis in colonial framework or structure, whereas Dalit subalternity is established in the caste-based social, cultural, economic and psychological framework.

2. **Difference between Dalit Autobiographical Narratives and Morrison’s Work**

Morrison’s work varies from the Dalit narratives as they are not replica of her life or she does not narrate or describe her life incidents in that way. Although she
revisits her childhood home by locating many of her stories in Ohio and other parts of
the Midwest, her novels are not labeled as autobiographical. In her fiction, Morrison
takes up the issues from the Black world, their struggle against White oppression,
their agency of survival, and their culture, music and folk. On the other hand, Dalit
writings are, primarily, narratives of their lives and purely autobiographical. Dalit
writers present the sketch of their life and real incidents with the consequences.

D: Conclusion

The silent being of a Dalit resists to this state of being crushed and discovers
his/her own identity and self-esteem. And this discovery of self-identity leads to self
realization in the autobiographical works/narratives by Dalit writers as well as fiction
by Morrison. At the stage of self realization, Dalit writers and Morrison move further
to the dissection or introspection of self and community. Bama, Kamble, Pawar,
Pawde, Limbale and many Dalit writers have examined their community and indicated
to the problems like internal clashes, superstitions, illiteracy, and lack of awareness
with a purpose to demolish them. Morrison also unveils and critiques the surrender of
Blacks to the feeling of inferiority. She does not merely depict the relationship
between Whites and Blacks but examines the Black society or community which
leads to analyze and introspect their ‘self’. It adds the timeless significance and
universal charm to her work as it seeks to redefine all human to human relations.
Unlike Dalit writers, she does not label White community the sole responsible for the
devastating condition of her own community. Rather her artistic vision pierces the
Black community and reveals the drawbacks of it and somehow finds Black people
also responsible for their devastating condition. In her works, more specifically in
Paradise, Morrison raises the scope of consciousness which ranges beyond
race/caste/class or gender to all human to human relations.
Works Cited


