PREFACE

‘Power’ along with the means to earn and perpetuate it has been a persistent phenomenon right from the inception of human society on this planet. Equally persistent have been the various manners of resisting and defying it. With the growth of culture and civilization, the struggle for and against power has assumed cultural, political, religious, economic and artistic forms shaping human history. The matrix of power establishes the hegemonic dominance and supremacy of one group through deploying repression, exploitation and relegation of the other. However, the inhuman treatment and injustice done to any race, ethnicity or caste have instigated the protest and resistance through various modes - social campaigns, political movements, literary expression and so on. The making of power, the modes of earning it and the means of resisting it are more or less uniform all through the world. Seeking justice, which is one of the reasons behind resistance to ‘power’, more or less puts on the same platform the communities of the world at the receiving end of the victimization unleashed by ‘power’. ‘Seeking justice’, therefore, is the common ideological ‘forte’ of the communities of victims however far apart, culturally and geographically. African American and Indian Dalit, thus, are two otherwise apart communities that stand together on a single platform. One of the modes of redemption, what these oppressed communities use, is vocalizing their suppressed soul, panic-stricken heart, and resistant mind through literary expression espoused by social and political movements, and rejuvenation of culture. In the discourse of protest and minority literature, these two discourses, surprisingly, share wrath, anger, hope and aspiration.

The study has sought to investigate the status of African Americans and Indian Dalits, as represented in Toni Morrison and select Dalit writers, to find similarities
and dissimilarities between them to trace a comparative analogy between their plights with an aim of better value addition to the work of Toni Morrison in India. It also seeks to study Morrison’s work in the context of Dalit literary discourse along with a comprehensive reading of Dalit Aesthetics.

The first chapter, ‘African American and Dalit Literatures: Socio-historical Perspectives’, traces the significant milestones in the evolution of African American and Dalit literatures. It examines how long African American and Dalit writers have been striving for relieving from the pangs of racism and casteism in their respective societies. As it opens, it takes a quick look at the entire sweep of African American literature in its various developing phases from slave narratives, Ante-bellum, Post-bellum, Harlem Renaissance, and Civil Rights Era to the present time. The chapter recapitulates the genesis, growth and culmination of Dalit literary tradition in three phases considering its plurality. It searches the location of Dalit women writers in Dalit literary scene. Several striking features of similarity between these two literatures have been discussed in the chapter.

Chapter two, ‘Tracing the Format of Oppressive Structures: ‘Race’ in Toni Morrison and ‘Caste’ in Dalit Writings’, introduces the authors in context in the first part. The second part studies the inter and intra racism and its ramifications revealed in subtle and blatant, invisible and visible, disguised and most prominent forms in Morrison’s fiction and nonfiction. It, further, investigates caste structures in Indian social system and Dalit writers to trace how Dalits confront the humiliation of untouchability; how they have been banished from the scope of decent and dignified life; how Dalit womanhood has been tormented. During this investigation, the chapter
finds the commonalities between the oppression of Black Americans and Dalits inflicted by the supremacist ideology in their respective societies.

Chapter three, ‘Understanding and Analysing Scarred Consciousness: ‘Being Black’ in Morrison and ‘Being Dalit’ in Dalit Writings’, attempts to theorize and mark out Black American consciousness in African American literature and Morrison’s oeuvre. It reads two faceted consciousnesses- being a Black and a woman in Morrison with the display of Black female insight, artistic and political aspect of consciousness and retrieval of Black history and culture. The chapter explores the shaping of Dalit consciousness in Dalit writers and, further, studies how this consciousness infuses the awareness of being exploited, yet at the same time, motivating these writers to feel proud of their culture and history. Chapter four, ‘Probing the Self: Introspection as Thematic Substance in Morrison and Dalit Writings’, reads the issues of identity and self-reflection in Toni Morrison through her characters and settings of her novels. In the course of this reading, the study finds individual and collective identity as inter-dependent for their completion in both Morrison and Dalit writers. The chapter researches the autobiographical elements, introspective approach and differences, too, in Morrison’s and Dalit writers’ works.

In chapter five, ‘Discovering Indigenous Aesthetics: Black and Dalit Aesthetics, and the Applicability of Dalit Aesthetics on Morrison’s Fiction’, the study seeks to find out the concept of Dalit Aesthetics and Black Aesthetics and their commonly shared traits. The chapter also puts other prominent discourses as Feminist discourse and Marxist discourse in the context to determine the perception of Dalit aesthetics. The validity of the application of Dalit aesthetics on Morrison’s writing is, further, researched in this chapter. It accesses the thematic and structural substances in
the writer’s fiction responding to the theory of Dalit aesthetics. Chapter six concludes
the findings of the study and succinctly puts the significance of the study of Morrison
in the Indian context. The study finds that African American spirit to reclaim their
existence as a human being, retrieve their historical legacy and cultivate their culture
in Morrison’s work finds an explicit semblance in Dalit writings. It establishes the
pertinence of the study of Morrison and Dalit writings in the current scenario of
society which has changed for betterment through asserting individual identity and
creating an equal platform for all though at a slow pace.