Chapter II

Tracing the Format of Oppressive Structures: ‘Race’ in Morrison and ‘Caste’ in Dalit Writings
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In American history, the nature of relationship between Whites and Blacks has been a deciding factor in constructing American civil society. “The convergence of race, class, and gender oppression characteristic of U.S. slavery shaped all subsequent relationships between Whites and Blacks” (Collins 4). The relation between them connotes the exploitation, inhuman treatment, inequality and discrimination. Their approach to and value of life are distinctively different as these are affected with the social, economic and political conditions. The documentation of the experience of being relegated is true to the core and authentic in the writings of the authors in the context. The cause is traced as the fact that these authors, Toni Morrison and select Dalit writers, have suffered the agony and endured the pain of being Black and Dalit respectively as insiders. This first-hand experience of being marginalized and the ‘other’ stamps the authenticity on their works.

An analysis of the conditions of Dalits in India and Blacks in America is crucial to an understanding of the consciousness of being Dalit and Black (which would be explored in the next chapter of the study) in the works by Dalit writers and Black writers with special reference to Toni Morrison respectively. It is important to trace how they were ghettoized, excluded and reprehensibly prohibited to the access of dignified life. Dalit writers and Black writers of both sexes have dealt with this theme extensively. Racial exploitation has been an apparent phenomenon of the American social and political scene. Toni Morrison has dealt with this aspect in literary and academic vista. Dalits in India confront similar tragedy. Segregation
based on caste in India replaces the racial exploitation in America. Many Dalit writers like Baburoa Bagul, Om Prakash Valmiki, Sharan Kumar Limbale, Daya Pawar, Bama, Sivakami, Urmila Pawar, Shanta Rameshwar Roa, Geeta Nagbhushan, K. A. Gunasekaran, Daxa Damodara, Kumud Pawde, and Baby Kamble have discussed segregation and discrimination (caste based and gender discrimination) in their opus writing in various parts of India. Their writings unfold how Dalits are forced into ghetto and also reveal the rigidity and narrow mindedness born out of casteism in India which is extant even today.

Part I: Authors in Context

A. Toni Morrison

Toni Morrison was born in Lorain, Ohio on February 18, 1931, named as Chloe Anthony Wofford. Her upbringing in a family that had a deep sense of belonging, in an environment that was enriched by the African American traditions of storytelling, spirituality, folklore and through the experiences of racial segregation, all culminate into the consciousness of being ‘Black’ reflected in her writings. Morrison grew up in a fully integrated community. Her neighbours were Irish, Italian, Greek and German. The one common factor between Blacks and Whites in town was their economic class. Most of the families were working class, and this circumstance seemed to bond everyone together. “We were all in one economic class and therefore mutually dependent upon one another”, Morrison explains years later, “There was a great deal of sharing of food and services, and caring. If someone was ill, People might come and take care of him or her, regardless of race” (qtd. in McKay 52). She went to school with White children. “They were my friends …There was no awe, no fear”, Morrison told a journalist years later, noting that only when she became a teenager did she notice “how clear the lines really were”. Morrison says, “But when I
was in first grade, nobody thought I was inferior. I was the only black in class and the only child who could read!” (qtd. in Century 24). Here comes the foundation of Morrison’s pessimism produced by racism and optimism that has empowered African American people to fight the inhuman treatment.

Her paternal and maternal grandparents- the Woffords and Willis families- had moved to the North hoping to find employment and a better life during the great Depression, 21 years before her birth. Morrison told the story of her grandparents’ migration in a 1981 Newsweek interview: “They had lost their land, like a lot of black people at the turn of the century, and they were sharecroppers, which meant they were never able to get out of debt” (qtd. in Strouse 53). Morrison, as she grew up, confronted the harsh realities of the discrimination and inhuman treatment given to the African Americans. At thirteen, Morrison worked part-time after school cleaning a White family’s house. It was one experience, in addition to being barred from Lake Erie, which taught Chloe the harsh inequities between African Americans and Whites. After her graduate studies, Toni Morrison pursued the career of teaching at Texas Southern University in Houston, Texas where she “began to think about black culture as a subject, as an idea, as a discipline”. Morrison recalls years later. “Before it had only been on a very personal level – my family” (qtd. in Century 35).

The family influences helped to make Morrison an advanced student. The Wofford family’s link to Africa helped Morrison to appreciate her own heritage and the fine cultural works of other ethnic groups. But for many years she yearned to read books about the deep psychological and spiritual complexities of African American life books by African Americans. Before the publication of her first novel, The Bluest Eye, Morrison believed something important was missing from African American literature – the voice of the African American female. Writers such as James Baldwin
(Go Tell It on the Mountain), Richard Wright (Native Son), and Ralph Ellison (Invisible Man) were well received and read by Blacks and Whites. But “there were no books about me, I didn’t exist in all the literature I had read…this person, this female, this black I didn’t exist”, Morrison says in an interview (qtd. in McKay 45).

Morrison, 1993 Nobel Laureate, has written nine novels, a play, a short story, reviews and critical essays; she has won international acclaim. Morrison describes herself as a "black woman novelist" (qtd. in Taylor-Guthrie 243) but also as "midwestern" (qtd. in Taylor-Guthrie 191). She sees herself, then, as a writer with a racial/cultural identity, a gender identity, and a national/regional identity. Her career is punctuated with honorary degrees from various universities like Harvard, Yale and Columbia. She has been awarded National Book Critics' Circle Award and Pulitzer Prize. The publication of The Bluest Eye initiates the beginning of her literary corpus that includes Sula (1973), Song of Solomon (1977), Tar Baby (1981), Beloved (1987), Jazz (1992), Paradise (1998), Love (2003), A Mercy (2008) and Home (2012). Along the way, Morrison has established herself as a thoughtful critic in such lectures as ‘Playing in the Dark’ and ‘The Dancing Mind’. Along with Morrison’s provocative fiction on race, culture and identity, the commanding voice of her non-fiction offers her influential insights into family, history, other writers, politics and African American world. Morrison has been persistently engaged as a writer not only inside but also outside the arena of her fiction. Among Morrison’s literary corpus, her non-fiction adds a unique glimpse into her viewpoints as an observer of the world, the arts and the dynamic panorama of American culture. In addition to fiction, Morrison has written numerous texts which elaborate her political arguments about racial aversion. Her first non-fiction, ‘The Black Book’ (1974) is the articulation of the author’s ardent concern for the history and culture of African American. Others are ‘Playing in
the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination’ (1992) and ‘Race-ing Justice, En-
gendering Power: Essays on Anita Hill, Clarence Thomas, and the Construction of Social Reality’ (1992), both of which address the social and political plight of African Americans in America. Morrison continued to speak her mind to political and cultural liability in ‘Birth of a Nation’ hood: Gaze, Script, and Spectacle in the O. J. Simpson Case’ (1997), a collection of scholarly and provoking essays and in ‘Remember: The Journey to School Integration’ (2004), a valuable collection of chronicled and actual photographs that illustrate the historical events around school desegregation. Her latest non-fiction, ‘What Moves at the Margin: Selected Nonfiction’ (2008), stands as a self-defining discourse on Morrison’s cultural and literary vision. As in her novels, Morrison retains to the same high standards in her significant and thoughtful nonfiction and it (non-fiction) brings us the Toni Morrison who exits and acts outside the fictional frame established by her novels. Through her work as an editor, novelist and writer, she has made it latent for the text of both African American and feminist writers to rewrite the outline of American literature.

Morrison’s fiction and non-fiction can be seen and studied in the context of the women’s movement that was beginning to capture the attention in the early 1970s. While the Women’s Movements worked to solve the problems of mostly White middle-class women who were raised to take care of their husband and family rather than pursue a profession, Toni Morrison could speak to the problems of working-class Black women, like her mother Ramah, and other members of her family. These women struggled against racism and low wages in an effort to support their families. As a result of her background, Morrison was eager to respond. As an African American woman, she brought a unique perspective to many of the social, political and literary debates of the time.
B. Select Dalit writers

(i) **Bama**

Bama is a prominent author in Dalit writing, not just because of the candid and authentic portrayal of atrocities on Dalits, but also for writing as an act of empowerment. Born in 1958 as Faustina Mary Fatima Rani in a small village called Puthupatti in Tamil Nadu, southern India, Bama is the noted and one of the prominent Tamil writers. Her acclaimed novels and short stories - *Karukku* (1992), the first autobiography by a Dalit woman, *Sangati* (1994), *Kusumbukkaran* (1996), *Vanmam* (2002), *Oru Tattvum Erumaiyum* (2003), have paved new paths in literature in terms of raising Dalit consciousness. Lakshmi Holmstrom traces the shades of consciousness of being Dalit, being woman, being Christian in her autobiographic novel *Karukku*. “It is…in many ways an unusual autobiography. It grows out of a particular moment: a personal crisis and watershed in the author’s life which drives her to make sense of her life as woman, a Christian, and a Dalit” (xvi). She further adds, “The argument of the book is to do with the arc of the narrator’s spiritual development both through the nurturing of her belief as a Catholic, and her gradual realization of herself as a Dalit” (Bama, *Karukku* xvi). Bama’s use of the local dialect in her writings in place of the prevalent formal academic styles connects her work to the people she talks about. Bama’s work envisions a powerful motive of change and gives courage and inspiration to her community to organize themselves under the force of Dalit consciousness.

(ii) **Palanimuthu Sivakami**

Palanimuthu Sivakami, an acclaimed Tamil writer, enlivens the atrocities faced by Dalits in her novels, *The Grip of Change, Anandhayi: The Taming of Women* and *Kurukkuvettu*. She has served the country as an IAS officer for 29 years which
has strengthened her concern to social issues. Her anxiety about social irregularities and injustices is quite vocal in her writings as well as life. Her novels *The Grip of Change* and *Anandhayi: The Taming of Women* unveil the unedited Dalit patriarchy and social discrimination.

(iii) **Kumud Pawde**

Another important Dalit writer, Kumud Pawde belonged to a Mahar (Dalit) family in Nagpur and married Motiram Pawde, a social worker of the Kunbi Maratha caste. By profession a Lecturer in Sanskrit, Pawde has penned a number of articles on various issues—culture, social education and women’s problems. She has got the honour of being the president of the All India Progressive Women’s Organisation which was established in Nagpur in 1974. She has a book *Antasphot (Inner Outburst)* (1981) to her credit which deals with sufferings of Dalit women and the outlook of educated and so called advanced Dalit women towards non-educated women as its main subjects. The double jeopardized condition and a constant awareness of being Dalit characterize the women characters in her work.

(iv) **Urmila Pawar**

An important Dalit female voice, Urmila Pawar was born in a Mahar family in the Konkan region of the Indian state of Maharashtra. Her autobiography *Aaydan* has been translated into English as *The Weave of My Life: A Dalit Woman’s Memoirs*. Pawar eventually left Konkan for Mumbai, where she fought for Dalit rights and became a major figure in the Dalit literary movement. Though she writes in Marathi, she has found fame in all of India. Urmila Pawar puts focus on the issues of the life of Dalit community and in particular of Dalit women, in a society constantly changing after independence.
(v) **Baby Kamble**

Baby Kamble, a social activist and writer, has lived the sufferings and atrocities meted out by Dalits. All the more, she has penned this authentic experience with efficacy, frankness and insightful observation. Her narrative, *Jina Amucha* (translated by Maya Pandit as *The Prisons We Broke*) depicts the two-edged injuries inflicted upon Dalit women—physical assault and psychological trauma. Her narration of Dalit women’s suffering draws out the worst form of exploitation that Dalit male hegemony imposes upon Dalit women.

(vi) **Sharan Kumar Limbale**

Sharan Kumar Limbale, a prominent Dali writer-activist, has written a revolutionary autobiographical work, *Akkarmashi* translated in English as *The Outcaste*. Hailed from Maharashtra, Limbale is the author of novels, story collections, and the editor of anthologies of Dalit literary criticism. He has won numerous awards and honours for his contribution to Dalit literature as a writer as well as a critic. His deep insight has extensively helped to reshape the contour of Dalit literature in the present time.

(vii) **Om Prakash Valmiki**

Om Prakasn Valmiki, a Hindi Dalit writer, has expressed the authentic experience of a Dalit life in his work, particularly in *Joothan*, a memoir. Originally published in Hindi in 1997, *Joothan* has been translated into English. He has penned other autobiographical works too. His work narrates the rising of the Dalits in spite of facing heavy odds in the form of deprived childhood, caste discriminations and unequal opportunities.
(viii) K. A. Gunasekaran

K. A. Gunasekaran, another Tamil Dalit writer born in the Parayar caste, grew up in the terrain of Christian, Hindu and Muslim communities. His upbringing made him familiar with caste oppression and discriminatory practices and compelled the author inside him to pen them in his work, *Vadu: The Scar*. His work is a documentation of his experiences in his life up to his graduation revealing the circumscribed identity of Dalits.

(ix) Others

Gogu Shyamala, Geeta Nagbhushan, Daxa Damodara, Daya Pawar and Shanta Rameshwar Roa are other names in the series. Facing the hostile circumstances, Shyamla moved towards the knowledge like Kumud Pawde. While the rest of her family worked, sometimes as bonded agricultural labourers. In her stories/work the real and stark realities of her village communities are unfolded. The similarity which Shyamala shares with Toni Morrison is that her language is straightforward yet lyrical. Daya Pawar and Daxa Damodara have articulated the suffocating air of Dalit life. Shanta R. Roa, in *Children of God* and other works, voices the pain of being Dalit and describes the endless series of pangs in a Dalit’s life.

**Part II: Defining and Conceptualizing the ‘Race’ and the ‘Caste’**

1. Introduction

The documented abolition of slavery and the caste system took place in 1865 and 1950, respectively in America and India, the inherent flux of supremacy has not been extinguished in the respective dimensions. In fact, the legal denial of caste system in the Indian society has not proved effective as it has not been erased from the cultural and social scenario of the country. Even today, despite the affirmative
action and regulations in both America and India, Black Americans and Dalits, more or less, have been given “less education, lower-status jobs, and lower income than the ‘dominant’ groups – whites and caste-Hindus” (Verba et al. 19). The right to vote was given to all citizens of India regardless of caste, class and gender at the time of independence in 1947. But the political rights could not transform the social status of downtrodden completely as was expected. However, their status has been determined by birth, endogamy, sexual taboos, and exploitation” (Verba et al. 17) as has been the case of Blacks in America. The Declaration of Independence of America was marked by equality for all; it could not become feasible in practice. Thus, in both the contexts, a disparity persists between the ideologies and realities. As the authors state, in both India and America there exist “a gap between the dominant political ideology which is equalitarian and the reality of caste or race relations” (Verba et al. 22).

2. Defining Race

It is important to analyze in brief what is race and how it influences the growth of society. Throughout history, race has been affecting people’s lives. Whether that is in the form of employment, education, or economic status, race is a prime factor. Along with it, class, gender, nation, age and ethnicity constitute major forms of oppression in any society, here in case of the United States.

Oxford dictionary defines the term ‘race’ as “each of the major divisions of humankind, having distinct physical characteristics, a group of people sharing the same culture, history, language, etc” (“Race”). Race theorist Ian F. Lopez notes that race is “neither an essence nor an illusion, but rather an ongoing, contradictory, self-reinforcing, plastic process subject to the macro forces of social and political struggle and the micro effects of daily decisions” (165).
Racial prejudice and discrimination have been significant facts of Black American life. Derrick Bell writes that racism is “an integral, permanent, and indestructible component” of American society (ix) and African Americans are perceived as “a dark and foreign presence, always the designated “other” and are scapegoated and sacrificed as distraction or catalyst…” (10). Race is considered as one of the significant differentiating elements. Andersen and Collins find racism as one of the many factors of discrimination: “Race is far from being the only significant marker of group difference—class, gender, sexuality, religion, and citizenship status all matter greatly in the United States” (qtd. in Collins 23). Yet, Patricia Hill Collins considers racism “quite visible” and “deeply entrenched in housing, schooling, and employment” (Collins 23).

3. Theorizing Race: Critical Race Theory

The racism in American society and the casteism in Indian society can be analyzed in the context of Critical Race Theory. Derrik Bell is considered the progenitor of this theory. He focuses on the legal dimension of the theory. Critical Race Theory is an attempt to theorize the concepts on and about race by social thinkers and critics. It emphasizes the fact that race and differential racism are considered to be products of social thought, eliminating the conception that races result from biological or genetic differences (Delgado and Stefancic 7). An individual’s genetic composition has no influence on the distinctions between races; instead, individuals in society create these differences. The dominant group in society constructs the differentiation in race in order to produce a suitable workforce from the less powerful and racially different people in society. This particular way of organizing society then results in racism; Critical Race Theory, further, provides an account of how stereotypes can change over time (Delgado and Stenfancic 7).
Initially, Blacks became complacent with their slave–like role in the American society. However, later in instances of resistance there was a transformation in this stereotype. The Afro–Americans revealed a spirit of independence and refused to surrender to their unjust situation in society. The same can be applied to the Dalits as after a long stage of silent surrender they have started to voice their resistance.

Ian Lopez, in his Critical Race Theory, ponders on the social construction of race. He argues that, “race is a social construct rather than a biological reality” (165). He postulates that race is an ongoing process with social, economic, political and legal character. Another significant point, he adds that, “races, differentiated through human constructs, constitute an integral part of the whole social fabric that includes gender and class relations” (Lopez 168). Another theorist Teun Van Dijk adds on to the theory which might be helpful to comprehend the dynamics of racism in Morrison’s work. He discusses, “Dominance is defined here as the exercise of social power by elites, institutions or groups, that results in social inequality including political, cultural, class ethnic, racial and gender inequality” (Dijk 300).

And, this idea of inequality infuses the feeling of inferiority among the victims. Gradually the victims, consciously or subconsciously are found engrossed in various modes of discourse, as Dijk implies, “power relations as the more or less overt support, enactment, representation, legitimation, denial, mitigation or concealment of dominance, among others” (300).

The racial oppression, manifested in the writing of Morrison and particular texts by Dalit writers, can be seen as responding to this theory, as it suggests that Blacks and Dalits had accepted the unjust social norms inflicted upon them through social and political institutions in the fractioned society. With the social norms
brought into favour of the hegemonic group, the Blacks or Dalits had to assimilate these racialised norms into their life/lives and they were forced to live under the oppressive structure of the society. But now, as the dynamics of racism change, the exploited people start resisting and refusing the hegemony of the oppressors in both the cases.

4. Manifestations of Racism in Morrison’s Fiction

Morrison’s fiction and non-fiction deal with the interface of racism and ‘Black’ identity inside ‘White’ dominated America. An examination of her novels reveal that she has dealt with the formation of Black identities and this process of identity formation is hindered by the oppressive environments they inhabit. It seems quite interesting to investigate how Morrison deals with the subtle to blatant, invisible to visible, disguised to most prominent forms of racism in her works.

Toni Morrison supports the view that race matters in literature. In a lecture at the University of Michigan she said that it was a great relief to her that terms like “white” and “race” were being discussed in literature. In response to a question by Bill Moyers in the course of an interview, Morrison says, “It’s difficult even to understand the literature of the country (the USA) if you can’t say white and you can’t say black and you can’t say race” (Morrison, Interview) In the interview she further says that “race” and “class” have been “the subject of practically all of the political discourse” but have been “kept out of the art world” (Morrison, Interview).

4.1 Forms of Inter Racism

Racial discrimination in its worst form is a matter of past for some of people. However, many African American women and critics find that racism is not something that exists in the temporal distance. They encounter racism in everyday
routine at workplaces, public places, schools, social institutes, houses, even and daily social interaction. Morrison argues in her theoretical work *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992) that racism “has assumed a metaphorical life so completely embedded in daily discourse that it is perhaps more necessary and more on display than ever before” (63).

This need to talk about racism is inherent in her fiction. The cosmos of her Black characters is clearly divided by racism and segregation and they are forced to accommodate their place in the society and their existence in the adverse situations. An examination of the impact of class differences within Black society, the elevated status of light-skinned Blacks (both within the Black community and within society as a whole) in her novels would be a helpful step to explore the depiction of racism in her work. Her literary repertoire depicts that the Black characters as *others* in the social as well as the literary domain of American society. Her writings also show Black women as the lowest members of the patriarchal society they inhabit. Black women, thus, are twofold *Others*, and become the prey of anger and frustration of Black men. The assailable and hapless condition of Black women in their society is one of the main issues of her writing.

4.1.1 Subtle Forms of Racism

The study of Morrison’s work reveals race as an important matter/issue that pervades her novels. Though Morrison’s characters and their world reveal blatant forms of racism, they also present the subtleties and complexities of racism that one might miss if taking a cursory look at her works. As in *Sula*, the Sheriff’s shocking comment to the bargeman, who finds the corpse of Chicken Little, to throw the body back into the river (Morrison, *Sula* 64), the difficulties the Medallion men have in
securing work (53), and the townspeople’s rage which leads to several of them drowning in the tunnel on National Suicide Day in 1920 (15-16) are examples of blatant form of racism. In the same novel, a very subtle or complex example can be the way Nel’s mother Helene Wright makes her pull her nose so that she can “have a nice nose” and be beautiful (Morrison, *Sula* 55).

*The Bluest Eye* is marked with a different aspect of the traditional racism. Morrison accepts that most people are unaware of the subtle forms of racism that exists in the American society. In this novel, she caricatures the ideal American family through the Dick and Jane chapter headings and manifests the victims of exclusion by their own society leading to self-loathing, surrender of their identity, death of self-esteem ultimately collapsing of the self as is the case of Pecola. The novel opens with a preface from a school kids’ reading assignment, called Dick and Jane reader: “Here is the house. It is green and white. It has a red door. It is very pretty. Here is the happy family. Mother, Father, Dick and Jane live in the green – and-white-house: They are very happy” (Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 1). Here, the happiness can get representation in the society. There are no reading assignments about Black children who live in poverty. The novel gives voice to the daily plight of the community of African Americans whose race hinders their full education and development. The symbolism surrounding various characters presents some subtle forms of racism. For instance, Claudia hates objects like white baby dolls and Shirley Temple, which establish the notion and acceptance of White superiority in the mindset of Black society. Claudia (a black) wants to break the doll (a representation of the white) as a dissecting act of univocal criteria of beauty and discovers “gauze”, metal”, and “disks”, nothing of significant beauty (Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 20).
Her work portrays the devastated condition of Blacks in the American society. It examines how the Eurocentric beauty concept influences the psyche and identity of Black women. They are enchanted, though worthlessly, with White standards of beauty. They frantically wish to be accepted by mainstream society and this internalized racism becomes the chief reason of the central conflict in *The Bluest Eye*. “The concept of physical beauty as a virtue”, Toni Morrison writes, “is one of the dumbest, most pernicious and destructive ideas of the western world and we should have nothing to do with it” (Morrison, “Behind the making” 89). She further adds that it is “a white idea turned inside out” and thereby still a white idea” (89).

The examples of subtle racism in the form of personal prejudice are permeated in Morrison’s opus. The supremacy of white culture has instilled the feeling of being inferior among Blacks. Their surrender to it void of any resistance and internalizing of White view of good looks and attractiveness produces personal prejudice among Blacks. Being not fit in this frame of desirability, Pecola faces the personal prejudice from the majority of the characters in *The Bluest Eye*. Claudia reacts to this prejudice shown by Maureen, “We were sinking under the wisdom, accuracy, and relevance of Maureen’s last words. If she was cute—and if anything could be believed, she was—then we were not. And what did that mean? We were lesser. Nicer, brighter, but still lesser…What did we lack? Why was it important? And so what? (Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 57). In *Beloved*, Mr. Bodwin, the White employer of Denver, plays the role of an abolitionist in the case of Sethe when she is charged with the murder of her crawling daughter. He helps Sethe in that distressed state. But what Denver notices at his house, he infers the instinct of subtle racism among the liberal whites. Denver beholds that the shape of a money bank is molded in the shape of a traditional Black slave knelt down, “a blackboy’s mouth full of money…His mouth as wide as a cup,
held the coins needed to pay for a delivery or some other small service…Painted across the pedestal he knelt on were the words ‘At Yo Service’” (Morrison, *Beloved* 300). In *Tar Baby*, the subtle form of racism is introduced through personal prejudices. Margaret abuses her maid, Ondine, and calls Son in the first encounter “black-man-as-rapist” (Morrison, *Tar Baby* 85). Son is addressed as a “swamp nigger” by not only White characters but by Sydney also in the novel (159). At the same time, Sydney, a Black servant to a White, Valerian Street, talks of personal prejudice of Whites flashing the example of subtle form of racism, “White folks play with Negroes. It entertained *him*, that’s all, inviting you to dinner” (Morrison, *Tar Baby* 162). Even Jadine, light skinned Black and “city girl” (173) is taken over by White perception of Blackness and she discerns Black men as “either creeps or so rare and desirable they had every girl in a 150-mile radius at their feet’” (Morrison, *Tar Baby* 126).

**4.1.2 Blatant Forms of Racism**

In her novels, Morrison unveils the tragic and traumatic existence and conditions of Blacks as a result of racism and its ramifications. Persistent demand for freedom has been reflected in the literary writings of African American writers. As Morrison observes, the dominating theme since the beginning of her country is that of “not being free” (Morrison qtd. in Taylor-Guthrie 8). According to Lucille P. Fultz, “The imperatives of difference – such as race class, gender and physicality, with all their concomitant baggage- are central issues in Morrison’s fiction”. He finds out an inherent tragic current in her fiction, “Morrison’s fiction” carries the “serious content and self-conscious engagement with the pathos and tragedy of black life” (10-11). The struggle of Black males to provide the need of their family becomes difficult because of harsh and exploitative treatment received from White society. This would
make them feel dejected, desolate and inferior, and would lead to alcohol and drug addiction, and abandoning of their family. The mutilation of Blacks by Whites is exemplified through characters in *Sula* like Plum, Boyboy and Shadrack. Plum in *Sula* gets addicted to heroin to cope with the pressures from society. We are shown the effects of addiction through the character Plum. When Eva, his mother, happens to know about his addiction, she burns him to death with a purpose of purgation. The symbolism of burning something is to purify it. By burning Plum, she feels that she is helping him as a form of rebirth or a new start. Boyboy also undergoes the same hardships working for a White man. It generates the feeling of being inferior. His frustration mars the life of Eva, his wife, and his life as well: “He did whatever he could that he liked, and he liked womanizing best, drinking second, and abusing Eva third” (Morrison, *Sula* 32). By having power over someone in his life, he does not feel completely useless. Shadrack becomes the victim of the feeling of loss and alienation. He is alienated “with no past, no language, no tribe, no source, no address book” (Morrison, *Sula* 12). In spite of being empathetic to crazy Shadrack, his community treats him as the ‘other’.

Morrison’s *Beloved*, based on factually documented events in the life of Margaret Garner, takes us to the period of enslavement and accentuates slavery and segregation which are both problems that revolve around race revealing the relations between Black and White races in the American society through Black and White characters- Sethe and the school teacher. The reader is able to see the most prominent forms of racism and the racial issues at deeper level - issues which are connected to slavery and its consequences. Morrison concretizes the racist attitude the schoolteacher and the sheriff. They jointly symbolize the acme of racist oppression. When the school teacher and the sheriff come to Baby Suggs’ home to reclaim Sethe
as their slave, the revelation of Baby Suggs indicates Blacks can never be perceived as free. She says, “they came in my yard” (Morrison, *Beloved* 211). This trespass snatches the right of African Americans, whether slave or free, to own property or live as an individual entity in a society. In *Beloved*, the bitter experience of slavery and race discrimination has been defining the lives of Blacks throughout the novel. The treatment given by the White owners to the Blacks shows the cruel and heinous impact of racial attitude prevalent in the contemporary American society.

Her *Song of Solomon*, propounding her political philosophy on racial and gender problems, revolves around the theme of race. During her formative years of life i.e. 1940s, 50s, and 60s, Morrison closely watched the harshness of racism and segregation. In the opening chapter of *Song of Solomon*, she describes how the hospital had never admitted a Black patient until Ruth Dead, mother of the protagonist, Milkman (Morrison, *Song of Solomon* 4-5). From his childhood, racism affects Milkman’s life. Guitar, one of Milkman's closest friends gets infuriated by the unjust treatment done to Blacks, and this condition nurtures violent thoughts in him. As Milkman delves deep in a longing to know his family's history, he learns how his family confronted racism in the past, how his grandfather was killed by a White man, and how his great-grandfather escaped from bondage of slavery. In this novel, Guitar also lost his father in a factory incident and has been leading a life of poverty. However, he appears to be more affected and concerned with ramifications of race and he reacts with violent aggression to these. The novel illustrates how America’s history of racism has affected the author- Morrison and how she perceives it.

A few instances of blatant forms of racism are seen in 'Recitatif' by Morrison, a story of two girls, Twyla and Roberta, both discarded by their caretakers. They first
meet in an orphanage where they spend four months together, and then meet four times as adults in different places and situations in life. This short story is typical of Morrison’s writing in that it searches for ways to both depict and demolish racial discrimination and its consequences. In this short story, Morrison makes an effort to raise consciousness about the functioning of racial system and racism inherent in society through depicting conflict as well as concord between Roberta and Twyla. Twyla and Roberta quarrel about whether Maggie, a disabled character (representative of silence and absence) was Black or White. Here Roberta insists on Maggie’s being Black by stating that Twyla is still “the same little state kid who kicked a poor old black lady when she was down on the ground” (222). Twyla opposes the blame as what she can recall is just sitting and watching other girls at orphanage betraying the old lady, Maggie. The betrayal of Maggie symbolizes that the victimization of individual is a part of racial construction of society.

Morrison’s novels figure out discourse about the damaging impact of racially divided society. She points out the racist approach of Whites as affecting African American identities as racially inferior and stigmatized. As in *Beloved*, Morrison depicts the horrifying picture of slavery and racism in the novel *A Mercy*. The novel takes the reader back in late seventeenth century (1680s) which witnessed Atlantic slave trade at its peak, “A trade for lifetimes to come…a degraded business” (Morrison, *Mercy* 29). The huge number of slaves of various races was flooded like objects for sugar or tobacco plantations in the North of the country, “They ship in more. Like firewood, what burns to ash is refueled. And…there are births. The place is a stew of mulattoes, creoles, zambos, mestizos, lobos, chinos, coyotes” (Morrison, *Mercy* 28). The slavery nullifies their status “less than a milch cow…to freeze to death on stone steps, float facedown in canals, or wash up on banks and shoals”
(Morrison, *Mercy* 30). Her latest novel *Home* begins with a horrifying incident of murdering of a Black person by Whites seen by the child Frank Money and his sister Cee. Frank narrates, “We saw them pull a body from wheelbarrow and throw it into a hole already waiting…that black foot with its creamy pink and mud-streaked sole being whacked into the grave.” (Morrison, *Home* 4). Frank faces several violent dispositions of racist behavior to Blacks in his journey to home. One of his fellow passengers has been injured merely for trying to buy a coffee from the shop for Whites. Another small boy loses his one arm as a punishment by a policeman while playing with a cap gun. Thus, Morrison’s fiction depicts the various examples of blatant form of racism.

### 4.2 Forms of Intra Racism

Morrison dissects the African American community and reveals the class-tensions and divisions within it. She highlights the internal racism and brings together dark-skinned lower class and light-skinned middle-class characters such as Pecola and Geraldine in *The Bluest Eye*, Son and Jadine in *Tar Baby*, and Pilate and Ruth in *Song of Solomon*. In *The Bluest Eye*, racism relegates the central character towards the verge of existence and ultimately to extinct. The novel unfolds inter as well as intra-racial problems of Black community. This perspective of the novel supports the view that Morrison works as an objective and neutral in creating the world of her oeuvre. Although she sings Black culture, Black tradition folklore, she very subtly probes into the psyche of her society that constitutes of Blacks as well as Whites. She sympathizes with the sufferer without any prejudice. In *The Bluest Eye*, the protagonist Pecola belongs to a poor lower class family hence driven to a marginal state due to internal class tension in Black community. Her encounter with the shopkeeper compels her to believe that she does not really exist. Black boys humiliate
her at school; she is humiliated and attacked by Maureen Peal, a light skinned Black as she says. “I am cute and you are ugly and Black Ugly” (Morrison, *Bluest Eye* 31). The rejection by Geraldine, the middle class woman, breaks Pecola. Her last encounter is with soap head Church in which she prays for blue eyes and is victimized here also with no hope for recovery. Claudia observes towards the end of the novel, “It’s much, much, much too late” (164). Rejection by the opulent section of society is quite frustrating for her, but her case is more pathetic as she is deserted even by her own family. Pecola’s mother, Pauline, a dupe of internalized racism, is tormented and haunted by devastating and staggering self-hatred. The critical act of brutalization, and heinous cruelty inflicted on Pecola by her father in the form of rape ruins her life. As a result she loses her sanity and falls as a prey of the paralyzing human cruelty. All Black women characters in the novel undergo apartheid, internal racism and social alienation. On account of their race and gender, they are ghettoized “moving at the helm of life”. Claudia’s remark gives the clear picture of the women of her community, “Being a minority in both caste and class we moved about on the helm of life” (Morrison, *Bluest Eye* 11). The novel evinces the racism within the African American community that is intra-racism as the consequence of segregation reflected by racial codes of the society on the Blacks. The racism creates the diminishing effect on self respect and sense of self worth of victims, Blacks in this case.

Morrison depicts two African American communities, Lorain, Ohio in *The Bluest Eye* and Ruby, Oklahoma in *Paradise*, both communities marred by racism but in a different manner. These communities share both differences as well as similarities. The racism affects the communities not only externally but internally as well. In Ohio, the darkest skinned people have the lowest place and feel quite unsafe, whereas in Ruby in *Paradise* the darkest skinned have the authority and feel
superiority to the surrounding. Ruby, Oklahoma is “one all black town worth the pain” (Morrison, Paradise 5) and has been built by freed slaves who had been abandoned as “too poor and too bedraggled looking” (Morrison, Paradise 14). These rejected Blacks build a town with their hard work carrying the thought of rejection and hatred of lighter skinned Blacks in their psyche, “For ten generations they had believed the division they fought to close was, free against slave and rich against poor. Usually, but not always white against black. Now they saw a new separation: light skinned against black. Oh, they knew there was a difference in the minds of whites, but it had not struck them before that it was of consequences serious consequence, to Negroes themselves” (Morrison, Paradise 194).

The paradise aimed to provide protection from racial assaults turns to be hell due to intra-racism among darker skinned Blacks. Initially, however, through sharing and spirit of team work, they managed to make it a safe place even for women. A Black woman stays there protected and “nothing for 90 miles through she was prey” (Morrison, Paradise 8). There is peace established with the unwritten rules of the community. The men who decide the unwritten rules are the heads of the families i.e. the dark skinned Blacks and are called the 8-rock families. With the arrival of light skinned Black Pat Best, wife of Roger Best (a dark skinned Black), intra-racism enters the community. Pat and her family are shunned in Ruby as lighter skinned Blacks are not accepted there. “They hate us because she looked like a cracker and was bound to have cracker-looking children like me, and although I married Billy Cato, who was an 8-rock like you [her father], like them, I passed the skin on to my daughter, as you and everybody knew I would” (Morrison, Paradise 196).
Roger’s granddaughter Billie Delia faces the worse situation as she is treated as castaway. On the other hand, Arnett, an 8-rock, is guilty but not subjected to this treatment. The unity of Ruby breaks as the young people start to rebel and question the blood rule. Their case is supported by new minister. The 8-rock feels that young people (men in particular) have neither embraced the founding Fathers’ values, nor lived up to their ideals. The accusation for Ruby’s deterioration is quickly removed from the young and put on the women of the convent. Although women had little to do with any deterioration, more and more people throw the blame at the women. This leads to a massacre of the women at the house called the convents.

Pat Best gives an account of it; “8-rocks murdered five harmless women (a) because the women were impure (not 8-rock); (b) because the women where unholy fornicators at the least, abortionist at the most; and (c) because they could-which was what being an 8-rock meant” (Paradise 297). Consequently a paradise deteriorates into a racist regime similar to the one they try to escape. Throughout the novel, Morrison seems to emphasize that the counter racism is not an option. The 8-rock creates the same type of oppression in an unsuccessful effort to escape it. Likewise in The Bluest Eye, the conflict between light skinned and dark skinned is highlighted through various characters and incidents, though light skinned hail the higher position in the African American society. Light skinned African Americans like Maureen and Geraldine are given a better treatment and exercise the authority over the dark skinned fellows of their community as a reflex action. These illustrations of intra racism in Morrison leave a message for the Black community to fight it back. Heinz claims that “Morrison detests this manifestation of colourism in the Black community to the extent of being convinced it prevents the healthy development of African-American community” (21-22). Morrison’s concern of colourism causing racial self-repugnance
is highlighted in her several narratives. She creates numerous characters that are totally willing to abandon their “blackness” to be accepted in the larger society. Jadine in *Tar Baby*, Mr. Dead in *Song of Solomon* and Sula in *Sula* all feel upgraded when they place themselves superior to their Black cultural heritage.

5. Tracing the Ideas about Racism in Non-fiction by Toni Morrison

Morrison’s non-fiction gives a deep understanding of her thoughts and treatment of race. In her essay ‘Home’, she encapsulates ideas about the treatment of race in her fiction. She writes;

“In writing novels the adventure for me has been explorations of seemingly impenetrable, race-inflected, race-clothed topics. In the first book (*The Bluest Eye*) I was interested in racism as a cause, consequence, and manifestation of individual and social psychosis. In the second (*Sula*) I was preoccupied with the culture of gender and the invention of identity, both of which acquired astonishing meaning when placed in a racial context. In *Song of Solomon* and *Tar Baby*, I was interested in the impact of race on the romance of community and individuality. In *Beloved* I wanted to explore the revelatory possibilities of historical narration when the body-mind, subject-object, past-present oppositions, viewed through the lens of race, collapse in *Jazz* I tried to locate American modernity as a response to the race house. It was an attempt to blow up its all-encompassing shelter, its all knowingness, and its assumptions of control” (Morrison, ‘Home’ 9).

Morrison emphasizes the consistent presence of the element of ‘race’ in her imagination as well as her work. She writes in the essay, “Whatever the forays of my imagination, the keeper, whose keys tinkled always within earshot, was race”
(“Home” 3). She extends her view, “I have never lived, nor has any of us, in a world in which race did not matter” (3). Morrison describes a world free of racial hierarchy as “dreamscape” and unrealistic. She prints the divisions of the society—division of the definer (Whites) and the defined (Blacks) and the inter-division of the defined, also instead of dreaming for such an imaginary place void of race and racism. The inter division of the Black Americans exposes the middle class Black society and the lower class Black society, constantly conflicting.

Morrison’s role as a critic is very significant in her effort to bring ‘race’ into the center from the hem of literary talk. ‘In Playing in the Dark’ Morrison analyses, “Deep within the word ‘America’ is its association with race…American means white, and Africanist people struggle to make the term applicable to themselves with ethnicity and hyphen after hyphen after hyphen” (Morrison, Playing 47). She finds racism very much relevant and “declarations that racism is irrelevant, over or confined to the past are premature fantasies” (Morrison, “Official” xx). In her nonfiction, she focuses on “the historical and continuing plight of black Americans” (Bouson ix). In “Playing in the Dark”, Morrison explores racism in the field of literature and its effect or stamp on the executioners of racism. As she writes, “What I propose here is to examine the impact of notions of racial hierarchy, racial exclusion and racial vulnerability and availability on non blacks who held, resisted, explored, or altered those notions” (11). She analyses the terms between slave and master and emphasizes on the study of psyche of slaves as well as the psyche and behavior of masters and concludes that racist actions affect or damage not only victims but the executioners, also. "I was always interested in the consequences of racism”, Morrison has stated, “in the self-loathing that is involved in it. A self-loathing that is frequently lethal. But, before we as a society can get through racism we need to understand it, so,
(with The Bluest Eye,) I decided to look at it through the eyes of an innocent figure, which I thought was a female child” (Crowder, chicagotribune).

Morrison talks about the depiction of racism in fiction in her lecture in Rockefeller Chapel. She said that American Studies and African American Studies share a common ground in "charting the realmless realm of difference... in spite of those who say that difference makes no difference” (O’Neil, “Toni Morrison”). Morrison then suggested that words, acting like keys, allowed her a glimpse beyond racial difference. She described the stubbornness of racial difference as "born of ages of political insistence and social habit." She called this racial difference an "almost unmitigated force" (O’Neil). In this lecture, Morrison emphasizes on the role of the fiction writers to undermine the persistence of racial differences. She said that her own "fictional excursions" into the realm of difference were enormously instructive and exciting.

The style and technique applied in the novels correspond to the theme of race. Another race from a different place comes and captures the rule of the country and be seen as linked to their whiteness. Immediately, a conflict raises, In The Bluest Eye, between the White children and Pecola, Claudia and Frieda, poor Black children Morrison presents this contrast with an innovative technique. The school assignment of the preface is repeated without spacing between the words. This technique used by Morrison indicates the increasing confusion experienced by the characters as they are confronted with racial oppression.

Her work, fiction and non-fiction, is driven by the motive “to avert the critical gaze from the racial object to the racial subject; from the described and imagined to the describers and imaginers; from the serving to the served” (Morrison, Playing
90). Likewise, the works of Dalit female writers carry the persistent indicators of caste-discrimination that coexist with its various spectacular manifestations—caste’s relentless “otherness” through segregated housing, the different access to resources, the persistent correlation between low caste status and poverty and anti-Dalit voices. Bearing the burden of caste, Dalits respond to the caste privilege through submissive silence in a typical way. But this silence assumes voice as the time passes and the muteness is given a sound of fury, indignation and anger against caste ridden oppressive structure of society. Valerie Mason-John connects the experience of slavery of Blacks and the experience of untouchability when she defines caste as “a form of slavery that has throughout history systematically organized many races of people in the world, having been used as a system to discriminate between different tribes and races of people living in the same geographical area” (1).

6. Caste and Caste Structure in India

6.1 Defining Caste

It is difficult to define what the term ‘caste’ precisely connotes. The word caste in English is used to describe both the varna and jati systems (Deshpande 329). It traces its origin in the Portuguese and Spanish word ‘casta’, meaning ‘breed, race or kind’. Risley defines it as “a collection of families or groups of families bearing a common name; claiming a common descent from a mythical ancestor, human or divine; professing to follow the same hereditary calling; and regarded by those who are competent to give an opinion as forming a single homogeneous community” (qtd. in Hutton 47). Partha Chatterjee sums up caste as “the biological reproduction of the human species through procreation within endogamous caste groups that ensures the permanence of ascribed marks of caste purity or pollution” (194). The caste system in India is, generally, perceived as the unique phenomenon of Indian society. However,
it is not difficult to find its analogue. As Arthur Maurice Hocart shows that the Indian caste system is not an isolated phenomenon as it is often thought to be, but a species of a very widespread genus (vi-vii).

6.2 Genesis of Caste structure

In India during the Vedic times, the four *varnas* (literally meaning ‘colour’) were supposed to have originated from the four parts of the Cosmic Man: the priestly class, Brahmans, the warrior class, Kshatriyas, the business class, Vaishyas, and the menial class, Shudras. Initially the occupational division was aimed to maintain the systematic and organized functioning of the society. However, with the passage of time, the classification took the base of birth and one’s identity got exclusively determined by one’s birth resulting in discrimination. The society got divided into mainly two races. And this division was based on the colour of the skin—light-skinned and dark-skinned. The Aryans, possessing light-skin, formed the first three *varnas* (teirs) of the caste system. These three levels represented class and social distinctions within the Aryan race. For example, the members of society considered as the highest as per their service to the society formed the Brahman caste, the next highest were part of the Kshatriya caste, and so on. It is inferred that partial Aryan descendants, known as the Shudras, were kept at the lowest rung of the caste system in an extremely restricted sense. These dynamics brought the discriminating caste system into existence in India around 2000 B.C.

Anarya or Dravid were tagged as Dasyus being contrary to the Aryan population in regard of skin colour and functioned as a class to do menial jobs. Because of their low status in the Indian social structure, this class was shifted to the outskirts of the Aryan houses and living areas. Consequently, they were separated not
only physically but also socially from the community. Antya, Antyaja and Antyavasin, are the titles given to them meaning untouchable, isolated, and non-caste and decide their place in the social structure. Here comes the practice of untouchability in Indian social structure. To understand the caste system, it is important to understand the following terms- ‘varna’, ‘pollution’, ‘purity’ and ‘untouchability’. Untouchability in India, as the problems born of race and colour line in the West, is based upon the natural human extinct of exercising power on the weaker in either economic or cultural or political context. According to N.M. Aston, untouchability “was a kind of socio-religious slavery imposed upon the Dalit people. It got institutionalized over the centuries in social norms, customs and traditions” (19). The practice of untouchability does not find a place in the Vedic literature. SarDesai notes that “the heinous practice of untouchability crystallized around the second century CE. The first mention of it in a written document was in the Chinese traveler Fa Hsein’s account of the fourth century CE” (107) and has been engrossed in the social structure for centuries bringing in the disparity and inequality and thereby subjugation of the powerless.

6.3 Casteism and Racism

African Americans have been, quite similarly, victim of the discrimination practiced in America in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century. In spite of the legal abolition of the slavery, Blacks have been the subject to segregation, exploitation and inhuman treatment due to congenital factors beyond their control. Dalits in India have experienced the same plight though inhabiting in their native land. Both of them have confronted racism and casteism as the oppressive structures of the societies they inhabit. Their fragile existence has been constructed by the common experience of institutionalized exclusion and powerlessness. Several
attempts have been done in comparing racism in American society and casteism in Indian. However, it is not productive or constructive to decide which system is more oppressive. Each of them affects the identity of the oppressed people in their respective societies. And these two societies are different and therefore, work differently. Rather, it is substantial to focus on the similar ways in which any form of injustice operates within a socio-political context and mars human dignity. Deshpande adds an imperative point to this discussion that, “caste and race are distinct, not mirror images of each other” (329). Yet, the “economic situation of the lower castes in India often resembles that of….blacks in the United States…racism and casteism have similar outcomes for members of these groups” (329).

7. Depiction of Oppressive Social Structure in Dalit Writings

The Dalit writers have sought to eschew the burden of upper caste supremacy, caste based oppression and torments of untouchability through various means- literary output one of them. The output of Dalit writing discloses the desperate struggle of Dalits to survive and secure the most basic rights and equality in hostile or adverse social and economic conditions. The exploration of certain dimensions of Dalit narratives (with special reference to select Dalit women writers- Bama, Sivakami, Kumud Pawde, Baby Kamble, and Urmila Pawar would assist to reveal the squalid picture of oppressive social structure which keeps Dalits at the fringes of existence.

7.1 Humiliation of Untouchability

The oppressive structure of Indian society comes out in the form of the practice of untouchability and its stigma. The issues aroused from this oppressive structure are not only social and economic, but also cultural and political. Presumed to be impure by the so called twice-born castes, Dalits have been pushed to the fringes of
social, cultural, economical, and geographical spheres of life. They are prohibited to enter the so called pure regime of caste bound sphere especially in much of rural India. They have to live in the outskirts, away from the main villages whose temples they are not allowed to enter and are forced to lead the life of castaway. The scanning of select Dalit writings provide a first-hand account of what was and still is, to a large extent, the daily life, the joys and sorrows, beliefs and the psyche of millions who share the life and the views of these characters – as Patti and Vellaiyamma Kizhavi in *Sangati* by Bama; Masamai and Shantabai in *The Outcaste* by Limbale; Anandhayi and Laksmi in *The Taming of Women* by Sivakami; Baby Kamble and Kumud Pawde, themselves. The story of the life of these people/characters sheds light on the dialectics of oppression and emancipation of these who for ages have been subjected to the scourge of untouchability.

Bama’s work engages the idea of social oppression and injustice, “When I was studying in the third class, I hadn’t yet heard people speak openly of untouchability. But I had already seen, felt, experienced and been humiliated by what it is” (*Karukku* 13). Bama’s first acquaintance with caste-related humiliation is while she observes a Dalit person carrying some *vadais* (something edible) for an upper caste man in such a way that amused and perplexed Bama. He holds the thing with a string lest it should not be touched and polluted. Bama’s confusion is resolved as, “Naickers were upper caste, and therefore must not touch Parayas” (Bama, *Karukku* 15). This so called polluting and distancing is reinforced when Bama notices Naicker women giving water to her grandmother, “The Naicker women would pour out the water from a height of four feet, while Paatti and the others received and drank it with cupped hands held to their mouths. I always felt terrible when I watched this” (Bama, *Karukku* 16). She also reads the repugnant looks hurled at Dalits, “How is it that
people consider us too gross even to sit next to when traveling? They look at us with the same look they would cast on someone suffering from a repulsive disease. Wherever we go we suffer blows. And pain” (Bama, *Karukku* 27). Likewise, Kamble’s words carry the strands of destitution, fury, and self esteem together while depicting the plight of Dalits, “Our lives are governed by various calamities. We were imprisoned in dark cells, our hands and feet bound by the chain of slavery. Our reason was gagged. But it is because of us that the world stands. We are the foundation” (*Prisons We Broke* 49).

7.2 Denial of Access to Dignified Life

Sharan Kumar Limbale’s narrative The Outcaste is swarming with incidents of starvation and hunger, of the abandoned entry of Dalits to upper-class localities and being homeless, “to us the bus stand was like home…we lay like discarded bus tickets. We had to get up in the normally or risk annoying the driver and conductor. Once they actually thrum or sheets and rugs out on the road?” (Limbale 42). His work depicts the inhuman practices of society to compel Dalits to carry pots hanging from their necks to avoid polluting the path by their saliva and to tie brooms to them to clean their footprints. The pain of being outcaste is squeezed out in these words of Limbale, “But I too was a human being. What else did I have except a human body? But a man is recognized in this world by his religion, caste, or his father. I had neither a father’s name, nor any religion, nor a caste. I had no inherited identity at all” (59). The narrator experiences the tormenting experiences of being a Dalit and an illegitimate. His status remains still subjugated even when he has been educated; he is not allowed to enter a temple. It infers his no entry in the mainstream of society. It leads him to question this discriminating social order, “Why are we ostracized? Why are we kept away from other human beings? Why are we kept out of our own selves?
Why this discrimination between one human being and another? After all isn’t everybody’s blood red?” (62). He moves back and forth between the individual ‘I’ and the collective ‘We’. The ordeal of relegation and refusal inspired the author to tell the tale of his exclusion. Sharmila Rege finds this first-hand experience of extermination as the source to generate “testimonies of caste-based oppression, anti-caste struggles and resistance” (14). Limbale notes in an interview, “The span of my autobiography is my childhood…I want write about my pain and pangs. I want write about the suffering of my community. So I cannot give importance to my personal life. I am writing for social cause…My autobiography is a statement of my war against injustice” (Limbale, Interview).

In P.I. Sonkamble’s *Athavaninche Pakshi*, the narrator Prahalad, an orphaned boy relates an incident of throwing away a dead dog, “Somehow I controlled my mind and held the tail of the dead dog. As it was completely decomposed, that part of the tail gave way and came into my hand. Though it had a stinking smell, I continued with the job as I had a craving for a small piece of bread which I hoped to get after finishing it” (87). Daya Pawar in *Baluta* delineates, “What a coward I am? Who made me such a coward? My life was similar to that of any crawling object in the street which even cannot hiss at the children who poke at it with a stick. Sometimes I used to feel that I have lost all my self-respect just for a morsel of food” (72).

Baby Kamble depicts the Mahar community’s oppression in *The Prisons We Broke*. The description of customs, rituals, rites, and festivals, describes the upper-caste dominance perpetrated through superstitions, illiteracy, ignorance and oppressive practices. “The condition of the Mahars was no better than that of bullocks, those beasts of burden, who slogged all their life for a handful of dry grass” (80). Bama
admits in the Preface to *Karukku*; “The driving force 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 those taken together” (xxiii). Bama highlights social hierarchy and exploitative system of society making their lives void of esteem, “Because we are born into the *Paraiya jati* (caste), we are never given any honour or dignity or respect, we are stripped of all that” (*Karukku* 17). Her voyage for self-discovery as a nun and the resultant courage speak of the three fold oppressive system of the society. Her individual experience gets imbibed into the larger social experience of other Dalit women who have been the victims of the caste-based patriarchal social construct. She shares the pain, “I share the same difficulties and struggles that all Dalit poor experience. I share to some extent the poverty of Dalit who toil far more painfully through fierce heat and beating rain…” (Bama, *Karukku* 79).

### 7.3 Victimized Dalit Womanhood

The intricate mechanisms of casteism, untouchability and male dominance crush and grind women’s identity in the game of power and oppression. Sharmila Rege in her book, *Writing Caste/ Writing Gender: Reading Dalit women’s Testimonies*, epithets a unique role to Dalit women’s literary production in revealing the reality and affectation of both caste and gender discrimination in Indian society. Urmila Pawar’s *The Weave of My Life* shows different aspects of the everyday life of Dalits, the various ways in which caste asserts itself and humiliates them. Pawar witnesses the instances of caste inequality, patriarchal dominance, and the daily compulsions of poverty from the eye of a girl and critically observes from the insight of a mature woman. Wandana Sonalkar’s introduction to *The Weave of My Life*
locates it in the intertwining social contexts of caste and women’s issues, “It seems that her objective is to document both caste and patriarchy in the lives that enter into the weave of her memoir” (Sonalkar xvi).

Bama’s Sangati prepares a canvas which includes a galaxy of exploited victims belonging to different generations of Dalit Women. The narration of events and experiences opens thrusts on a society built on centuries old norms of domination, exclusion and marginalization. The narrative floats from one incident to another anecdote, from one experience to another event stringing all of them in a common theme of shared experiences of Dalit community especially those of women. Bama endorses it in the introduction of the work, “My mind is crowded with many anecdotes: stories not only about the sorrows and tears of Dalit women, but also about lively, rebellious culture their eagerness not to let life crush or shatter them, but rather to swim vigorously against the tide…about their hard labour. I wanted to shout out these stories” (Sangati xvi). It gives an account of Dalit women’s dual oppression on account of gender and caste as well as other discriminated situations of womanhood in Dalit culture. Sangati explores the female subjugation and subordination in an explicit way. Her Karukku discusses various types of oppression confronted by Dalits at the hands of state (Police), panchayat, and the upper caste people and at the Church. Bama further highlights double layered marginalization of Dalit women—one on the name of caste and another on the name of gender. Bama delineates the hard-working life and agony of female hood that,

“From the moment they wake up, they set to work both in their homes and in the fields. At home they are pestered by their husbands and children; in the fields there is back-breaking work besides the harassment of the landlord. When they come home in the evening, there is no time even to draw breath.
And once they have collected water and firewood, cooked a Kanji and fed their hungry husband and children, even then cannot go to bed in peace and sleep until dawn” (Sangati 22).

Bama, further, gives an appalling picture of the female subaltern and the marginalized. Dalit women’s external as well as internal life is informed with arduous labour. Identity, self and self-esteem become distant abstract notions for Dalit women in the clutch of male patriarchal domination. In Sangati, Bama imparts that the agitation, unrest and desire to be free from this grip generate resistance and defiance in Dalit women. Bama flashes this resistance throughout her narratives, Paakkiaraj says, “Don't try all that here or I will crush you to pieces with a single stamp. Remember that!” Then he dragged her by her hair, pushed her down, and kicked her lower belly” (Sangati 61). Then Bama describes, “Raakkamma got up after kick and wailed out aloud. She shouted obscenities; she scooped out the earth and flung it about. How dare you kick me, you low life? Your hand will get leprosy! How dare you pull my hair? Disgusting man?” (61). This protest reveals the toughness of their suffering and harshness of their life. Dalit women are depicted undergoing the trauma of casteism and patriarchy yet some of them gathering a feeling of revolt against the cruelties. Bama pictures the victimized Dalit womanhood in socio-religious milieu as she reads, “The position of women is both pitiful and humiliating, really. In the fields they have to escape from upper caste men’s molestations. At Church they must lick the priest’s shoes and be his slaves while he threatens them with tales of God, Heaven, and Hell. Even when they go to their own homes, before they have had a chance to cook some kanji or lie down and rest a little, they have to submit themselves to their husbands torment” (Bama, Sangati 35).
Dual oppression of Dalit women on the ground of caste and gender forms an important issue for discussion in writings by Bama, Sivakami, Kamble, Pawar, Valmiki and Gunashekharan also. Sivakami’s novels, The Grip of Change and The Taming of Women, speak of dejection and desolation of Dalit women by their own men, apart from the social exploitation and occupational harassment outside the boundaries of their abode. Sivakami unveils vicious exploitation of women in different spheres of life in The Taming of Women. They are violently repressed as daughters, mothers, wives and sisters. Periyannan is the embodiment of patriarchal authority and tortures. Lakshmi, in this novel, frames an image of a deserted and broken woman becoming, forcibly, a concubine. Periyannan betrays her as a rich childless widower quite contrary to the fact that he is married to Anandhayi and has six issues. He treats Anandhayi as ‘other woman’ and implements physical and psychological violence on her as he says, “She got married to me as a very young girl. She is scared of me and will not even squeak” (Sivakami, Anandhayi 99). He inflicts violence upon his wife, Anandhayi considering this act as a legalized right on her. In case of Lakshmi his concubine, he keeps her imprisoned and wields power and authority over her body through tormenting her physically and sexually. Laksmi laments to Anandhayi, “Last night he was back at his games. He begged me for a while, then locked the door from outside and slipped off somewhere, Akka” (133). Her existence is reduced to a mere body; she finds emancipation only through committing suicide failing the attempts to escape. The plight of Anandhayi is worse than an animal denying her the dignity of a human being. The brutality of Periyannan results in irresponsible, disrespectful, castigating conduct towards her even by her children who fear their father’s authority and look down upon Anandhayi as powerless and therefore indispensable (178-179).
7.4 Denial of Access to Education

Casteism has been present in the various forms in Dalit life. In *The Scar*, Gunasekaran indicates the social institutional casteism especially in educational institute as he shares his experience of being labeled as lower caste student in the school, “How many in this class are Parayars?” the teacher would ask. ‘Put up your hands! How many are Pallars? Stand up, I will count” (5). Kumud Pawde faces the humiliation from the privileged people for studying Sanskrit language. In *The Story of My ‘Sanskrit’*, she deals with the oppressive structure of society in the education institution and shares her bitter experience of being ‘a Sanskrit scholar’, “That a woman from a lower caste that is the lowest of the low should learn Sanskrit, and not only that, also teach it—is a dreadful anomaly to a traditional mind” (Pawde qtd. in Dangle 110). Kumud Pawde in *The Story of My ‘Sanskrit’* brings to the fore the denial of access to basic right of education. Her story is the tale of her struggle to study Sanskrit. Pawde bears the “devastating” effect of casteism on her psyche as she confronts the “hot spears” of sarcastic and ironical remarks hurled down by so called upper class people, “in what former life have I committed a sin that I should learn Sanskrit from you? All our sacred scriptures have been polluted” (111). Originally named as Kumud Somkuwar, Kumud got surname Pawde i.e. upper-caste surname from her marriage to a Maratha. Although this eased her entry into the academy, the hurdles she faced in her job are too hard to crush. Baby Kamble’s depiction of treatment given to Dalit students in the school reveals the blatant form of casteism in the education system, “A majority of girls in our class belonged to the higher castes…they treated us like lepers…The teacher had allotted us a place in a corner near the door from where we could not move…the teacher would hurl insults at us, to hit us with a long ruler, and make us bend down…till school was over.” (Kamble 108-109). This action speaks of the cruelty
exercised upon the hapless section of society in the educational institutions— a place which can nurture the spirit of equality among humanity.

The prejudice and discrimination is deeply enrooted in the educational system as Bama also feels utterly disappointed to observe the scenario where caste determines the destiny of the children aspiring to get education; “Nadar schools only admit Nadars, and Naicker schools only admit Naicker. And then, Aiyar schools will only teach Aiyar children. If it is all like this,…where all the Dalit children can go” (Sangati 119). The teacher in the school accuses Bama and the priest comments, “After all, you are from the cheri. You must have done it. You must have done it” (19). Beside it, she has to bear the stigma of caste-based society guided by the age old patriarchal social setup. “When we girls grew up, there was no more play. We went to work during the day, came home and saw to the household chores; that was it” (58). As a consequence, caste and caste based discrimination becomes an inevitable, embarrassing, and all time pervaded reality of institutions like schools, colleges and churches. Bama flashes a clear snap of the internal oppression within the Catholic Church itself. In an effort to lessen the sufferings of the oppressed, Bama becomes a nun. She reflects over the caste discrimination and corruption prevailing in the Church and speaks of the disappointment and disillusion of the Dalit people who have converted to Christianity as they are “forced to live a life of humiliation and degradation” (Bama, Karukku 26). Most of Dalit texts speak of this devastating experience.

8. Similarities in Morrison’s work and Dalit writings

The portrayal of the marginalized and segregated existence of Blacks in Morrison and Dalits in Dalit writers put forth that the characters, both Black and Dalit, live their lives in the shadow of the rejection through racism and casteism they
have been subjected to. Both past persecution and present day rejection and racism and casteism delimit their lives. Suppression and oppression connect these two experiences.

8. 1 No Access to Equality and Dignity

Morrison’s work engages the hard core of Black life in the form of racism and slavery. The ramifications of the slavery function as a bar/fence between Blacks and access to equality and dignity. Blacks like Sethe, Baby Suggs and Denver in Beloved are seen moving to cross this bar but are withheld by social forces like the Schoolteacher and Sheriff and even by Black community through rejection. The meek submission is overtly seen to White ideology in Pecola and most of Black women. In her work Karruku, Bama portrays a whole lot of family and social rituals while reading the pangs of Dalit community, their providence and submissive acceptance of dominant ideologies. Even the conversion to Christianity (which promises equality) tried out by many Dalits has failed to alleviate their woes. The new religion based on love and tolerance, still was powerless to remove the stains of the practice of untouchability. The church, the school, and the house of the priest continued to be located in the vicinity of the streets occupied by the upper castes. Though Dalits are converted to Christianity, they soon get disillusioned as the concept of equality is not practiced even in it. Bama discloses the hidden tyranny of caste discrimination under the seemingly religious fairness, “Sothipillai shouted angrily, just look at what goes on in our Church as well. It is our (Dalit) women who sweep the Church and keep it clean. Women from other castes stand to one side until we have finished and then march in grandly and sit down before anyone else” (Bama, Karukku 23).
8.2 Outside Location

The description of Black locality and its contrast with White in *The Bluest Eye* situate Blacks as outsiders. The protagonist stays “on the other side of Broadway…that had been a store downstairs” (Morrison, *Bluest Eye* 79). It is contrasted with “That big white house with the wheelbarrow full of flowers” (80). Similarly, Limbale finds the place of Dalits only in the outskirts of the village, “Here, the village becomes the metropolis and the Dalits exist literally on the periphery…This physical segregation signifies other separations Dalits do the work, live the life, eat the food and wear the garment that the upper caste Hindu will not” (*Outcaste* 2). Dalit writings present Dalits bearing the stigma of poverty and in dearth of basic needs. They are mere shadows in comparison with children of the same age from other communities. The same picture of poor Blacks is presented in *The Bluest Eye* where Claudia contrasts the light skinned Black girl Maureen and Pecola.

8.3 Gender Oppression

Dalit literary outputs and Morrison’s work show the gender discrimination in their communities and unfold the *internal oppression* faced by women. The race, class and gender discrimination have constructed some of the major realities of the life of Black community as reflected in Morrison. Morrison depicts the practice of gender inequality and the victims’ awareness of it in *Sula*, “Because each had discovered years before that they were neither white nor male, and that all freedom and triumph was forbidden to them…” (52). In *Beloved* Morrison depicts the horrors of apartheid in the past through Sethe’s life. In *Song of Soloman* and *Jazz*, she makes the reader aware of the persistent trauma of gender inflected racial attitude. No doubt, the idea of racial oppression has been central to Toni Morrison’s fiction and non-fiction. Along with this, gender oppression has been her great concern. Rigney writes, “For
Morrison...gender is not separate from racial identity; while arguments are for liberation from racial and gender oppression, both race and gender themselves are always seen as liberating points from which to construct a language or to create a literature that is political in forms as well as in subject matter” (2). Morrison dissects the American society and perceives that the white exploits the Black and even the White men and Black throw their frustration on their women- Black women. “The meaning of blackness”, Valerie Smith indicates, “shapes profoundly the experience of gender, just as the conditions of womanhood affect inculcable of race” (47). Black feminist consciousness is revealed in Jazz where the patriarchal system proves fatal for women characters. Male characters like Hunters Hunter, Joe, Acton and other nameless ones conform to the stereotyped male viewpoint. “Violet takes better care of her parrot than she does me” (Morrison, Jazz 49) is an excuse with which he becomes disloyal to his wife and goes after a girl named Dorcas. Joe kills his beloved Dorcas symbolically perceiving her as a commodity even before he actually shoots her, “She was Joe’s personal sweet like candy” (120) and “candy’s something you lick, suck on, and then swallow and it’s gone” (122) is such an expression diminishing the identity of Dorcas to an object. Joe claims his possession of Dorcas: “I chose you---No body gave you to me. I picked you out” (133). For Joe, Dorcas is “the reason Adam ate the apple and its core” (Morrison, Jazz 133). This indicates the subservient predicament of women whose existence is reduced to mere an object in a discriminating social system. Other male characters also possess the similar strain of disdain and heedlessness to women. For example, Alice’s husband elopes with a mistress, Neola’s fiancé deserts her and Violet’s greedy father shirks off his liabilities when her mother Rose Dear is in distress.
Likewise, Dalit women writers like Bama, Kumud Pawde, Sivakami, and Urmila Pawar mainly speak about the gender discrimination. Standing amid the caste, gender and class matrix, a Dalit female figure of Bama becomes hopeless, “Whether it is right or wrong, it is better for women not to open their mouths...It is the same throughout world: women are not given that kind of respect”. (Bama, Sangati 29) The Paatti, grandmother of the narrator, however, speaks dejectedly and the narrator Bama herself becomes much more questioning, “Why cannot we be the same as boys? We are not allowed to talk loudly or laugh noisily. We always have to walk with our heads bowed down, gazing at our toes...even when our stomachs are screaming with hunger, we must not eat first we are allowed to eat only after the men in the family have finished and gone” (29). Bama illustrates its various forms which incessantly takes place in Dalit Paraiya’s culture. Paatti says; “We have to labor in the fields as hard as men do, and then on top of that, struggle to bear and raise our children. As for the men, their work ends when they have finished in the fields. If you are born into this world, it is best you were born a man. Born as women what good we get? We only toil in the fields and in the home until our very vagina shrivels” (64). Bama shows the gender discrimination meted out to them throughout the lives of Dalit women. “If a boy baby cries, he is instantly picked up and given milk. It is not so with the girl...With girls, they wean them quietly, making them forget the breast” (69). Apparently, Dalit women are ranked as inferior right from their birth destined to multiple oppression. Even the childhood games for girls are to be scrutinized from the sight of patriarchy, “If they play boys games they will get roundly abused. People will say ‘who does she think she is? She’s just like a donkey, look. Look at the way she plays boys’ games” (Bama, Sangati 19).
8.4 Sustaining Zeal and Claiming Self amid Atrocities

The character of the narrator in *The Bluest Eye*, Claudia, carries an affinity with the characters in Bama’s *Karakku* in respect of self-affirmation and self-appreciation amidst a society which is suffering from self-loathing because of their marginalization. Claudia MacTeer emerges as a young but mature girl who does not agree with the doctrine that whiter is better. She does not find anything fascinating in Shirley Temple or blond dolls rather she appreciates her own community and feels, “a stranger, more frightening thing than hatred for all the Shirley Temples of the world” (Morrison, *Bluest Eye* 13). Likewise in Bama’s *Karakku*, the narrator is full of self-appraisal and feels proud being the part of her community. Bama questions the system of society which denies Dalits honour and self respect, “Are Dalits not human beings? Do they not have common sense? Do they not have such attributes as a sense of honour and self-respect? Are they without any wisdom, beauty, dignity?” (*Karukku* 27). But Bama makes the reader listen the voices of the resistance that emanates in the minds of Dalit women, “See how they fool us in the name of God! Why, don’t those people need God’s blessing too?” (25). This is what Dalit women realize. The same idea of realization is seen in *Tar Baby*, where Jadine enters self-realization phase. But at the same time, Morrison wants Black women holding their roots- Black cultural roots as and she assigning the responsibilities of the culture-bearer. In *Tar Baby*, the dynamics of race, gender and class all come together in Jadine’s inner-conflict whether to choose the Western metropolitan life she has led and the mystical and simple life that is introduced by Son, icon of Blackness nurturing Black heritage. As Malin Walther Pereira suggests *Tar Baby* functions as a “transitional text” reflecting Black identity as in 1960s and 1970s America (72).
9. Conclusion

To conclude, both Morrison’s work and Dalit writings provide an exploration of the abuse and maltreatment of Blacks and Dalits, and subjugation of women in these societies. The investigation of literary constructions by the selected authors and Morrison displays the oppression and inequality permeated in the American and Indian society; the psychological trauma caused by the triple oppression of race, class and gender; and the inner conflict and emotional turmoil experienced by the Blacks and Dalits as victims. As discussed above various similarities have been traced out in Morrison’s work and Dalit texts.

The invisibility, marginalization and exploitation of the Blacks and Dalits as a result of oppressive structure of society cause the devastating effects to the individual causing emotional and psychological trauma. In case of Morrison, she interrogates further the relationship between slave and master to validate her assertion that studying the mind, imagination and behaviour of slaves is valuable in the effort to examine what racial ideology does to the mind, imagination, and behaviour of masters (Morrison, Playing 12). She maintains that the analysis of the perpetrators of racism is just as important as the study of the experiences of victims. It is quite palpable in this quote, “what I propose here is to examine the impact of notions of racial hierarchy, racial exclusion and racial vulnerability and availability on non blacks who held, resisted, explored, or altered those notions” (Morrison, Playing 11). In case of Dalits, they are seen as affected physically, socially and psychologically by the casteist actions, not the non-Dalits in Dalit texts. These actions have a tremendous influence on the people confronting them not on the people actually implementing them. Thus, various manifestations of racism, the plight experienced by the female characters living in a patriarchal society, and the segregation and racial inequality faced by the African Americans and Indian Dalits are explored by analyzing these characters, their influences, pressures and societal manipulations and constraints in the texts.
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