Revival and reconstruction of the Afro-American culture is the guiding principal of Toni Morrison’s works. The reason for choosing the genre of novel for Toni Morrison is historical. The reading public whom she writes for, is bourgeois class and the novel is bourgeois literature. For Toni Morrison, the novel is a beautiful vehicle of thoughts and processes linking the present with the past. The loss that Toni Morrison experienced is the identity crisis experienced by the entire tribe. Morrison feels that it is her responsibility to pass on the kind of information which is vital for the recovery of the black self which is either mutilated or fragmented or erased. Hence, the evolution of black consciousness is of paramount significance in Toni Morrison’s works.

The black self experience a great existential crisis. Since the Black Africans were subjected to racial discrimination, they underwent the problem of survival in an alien soil. They are made to feel that they are different from others.

*The Bluest Eye* portrays the tragic, torn lives of a poor black family in 1940's Ohio: Pauline, Cholly, Sam and Pecola. Pecola unlovely and unloved, prays each night for blue eyes like those of her privileged blonde, white schoolfellows. She becomes the focus of the hatred engendered by her family's frailty and the world’s cruelty. This novel indicates a black girl's quest for white values. Pecola,
the black girl, wants to have blue eyes, which is the symbol of white beauty. She believes that such eyes would turn her extremely beautiful. Toni Morrison expresses this beautifully in her novel *Bluest Eyes*:

Pretty eyes Pretty blue eyes Big blue pretty eyes

Run, Jip, run. Jip runs, Alice runs. Alice has blue eyes.

Jerry has blue eyes Jerry runs. Alice runs. They run

with their blue eyes. Four blue eyes. Four pretty blue eyes. Blue-sky eyes. Blue –like Mrs. Forest’s blue blouse eyes. Morning-glory-blue-eyes.

Alice-and-Jerry-blue-storybook-eyes. (BE 46)

It is quite pitiable that she is ignorant of the fact that it is impossible to realise this belief in reality. That is why her quest for blue eyes ends in madness.

In the novel, a small mid-western community is depicted through the eyes of a little girl called Claudia during a cycle of four seasons. Pecola is her best friend who prays for blue eyes just as her mother finds refuge in the kitchen where she can forget Pecola and Cholly. In a drunken moment, Cholly assaults his daughter. Claudia's answered prayer has the effect of an implosion destroying her family and by extension heralds the eventual disappearance of the community.

Being a minority in both caste and class, Pecola has been convinced of the superiority of white standards and its values. She seems to know that the members of the Breedlove family are damaged people, undervalued by both whites and
blacks. The sense of inferiority has come to the blacks from their being carried away by what is dictated by white people. Their sense of ugliness is also a part of it. Claudia, the narrator of *The Bluest Eyes*, recognizes this situation:

The eyes, the small eyes set closely together under narrow foreheads. The low, irregular hairlines, which seemed even more irregular in contrast to the straight, heavy eyebrows which nearly met. Keen but crooked noses, with insolent nostrils. They had high cheekbones, and their ears turned forward. Shapely lips which called attention not to themselves but to the rest of the face. You looked at them and wondered why they were so ugly; you looked closely and could find the source. Then you realised that it came from conviction, their conviction. It was as though some mysterious all-knowing master had given each one a cloak of ugliness to wear, and they had each accepted it without question. The master had said, "You are ugly people." They had looked about themselves and saw nothing to contradict the statement; saw, in fact, support for it learning at them from every billboard, every movie, every glance. (BE 38-39)

It is this condition which is responsible for Pecola's acknowledgement of her ugliness. Suffering from this sense of ugliness, the ugliness that made her ignored at school, by teachers and classmates alike, she had realized the need to get blue eyes. This is the starting point of her psychic disorder. She begins to pray for
blue eyes.

All she experienced is repeated rejection and brutalization. In addition to this, her parents, never having experienced nurturing love, do not know how to love; they cannot give their children a sense of worth, for they have none of their own. This predicament of her parents is also the outcome of racial injustice. There are many incidents which made her relapse into a feeling of isolation experience and pain. Her encounter with a fifty-two-year old white storekeeper makes aware that for many people she does not really exist. It is her blackness that accounts for, that creates, the vacuum in the white eyes.

White standards have corrupted the minds of black people in such a way that the black people feel frustrated to live. She is the scapegoat for their own humiliation and pain. It is their contempt for their own blackness that gives rise to this situation. Maureen's treatment of Pecola and Geraldine's shouting are to be understood in the light of the damaging influence of white domination.

She looked at Pecola. Saw the dirty torn dress, the plaits sticking out on her head, her matted where the plaits had come undone, the muddy shoes where the wad of gum peeping out from between the cheap soles, the soiled socks, one of which had been walked down into the heel of the shoe. She saw the safety pin holding the hem of the dress up. (BE 91)

Pecola's mother works as a housekeeper in a white family where she lavishes
all her love and affection on her employer's children, reserving her scolds and slaps for her black and poor daughter. The ultimate act of brutalization comes when her father rapes her. Cholly's brutal, irresponsible behaviour is also the result of white domination. He is humiliated and taunted by white men during his first sexual encounter. So he does not know about nurturing love and feeling love, and he is incapable of expressing it in a healthy fashion. His rape of Pecola is the distortion of his love for Pecola. There is every possibility for distortion and anarchy in a society which is sick and power-obsessed.

Since Pecola has undergone all these traumatic experiences, she has lost her balance of mind, and eventually experiences the existential crisis. Excluded from reality by racial discrimination and inequality, she goes mad, fantasizing that her eyes have turned blue and making her fit for the world. Morrison has brilliantly summed up Pecola's psychic state and the resultant behaviour:

The damage done was total. She spent her days, her tendril, sap-green days, walking up and down - up and down, her head jerking to the beat of a drummer so distant only she could hear. Elbows bent, hands on shoulders, she frailed her arms like a bird in an external, grotesquely futile effort to fly. Beating the air, a winged but grounded bird, intent on the blue void it could not reach -- could not even see -- but which filled the valleys of the mind. (BE 204)
The novel shows the psychic state and the resultant behaviour of Pecola under the pressure of white domination. Morrison's interest is in exposing the vicious genocidal effects of racism on the black girl, Pecola. One feels the pinch of pain and a lump in the throat on reading the following lines.

All of our waste which we dumped on her and which she absorbed.
And all of our beauty, which was hers first and which she gave to us.
All of us - all who knew her - felt so wholesome after we cleaned ourselves on her. We were so beautiful when we stood astride her ugliness. Her simplicity decorated us, her guilt sanctified us, her pain made us glow with health, her awkwardness made us think we and a sense of humor. Her inarticulateness made us believe we were eloquent. Her poverty kept us generous. Even her waking dreams we used-to silence our own nightmares. And she let us, and thereby deserved or contempt. We honed our egos on her, padded our characters with her frailty and yawned in the fantasy of our strength.

(BE 205)

Besides the psychic state, the differences between the white and the black cultures and the socio-political contexts are also portrayed throughout the novel. The Dick-Jane mythology of the primer is contrasted with the Breedlove family.

*Sula* presents a tale of courage in the face of limitation and powerlessness, of self-knowledge wrested from loss and suffering, of social amelioration eked out.
of fear. It traces the development of the title character, Sula, her relationship with her childhood friend Nel and their very different lives within the community of Medallion.

_Sula_ deals with sexuality, evil, power, love and primarily, about the prospects and limits of their lives, the difficulties of survival in an inimical world. Sula Peace and Nel Wright represent opposite approaches to the tasks of self-discovery and integration into the society. Nel is too conventional to undertake a journey, and the adventurous Sula appears to be the antithesis of her society's codes.

_Sula_ is the tale of friendship between Nel Wright and Sula Peace. When the novel begins, they are in their adolescence and as they mature, the friendship changes in nature, but remains the deepest attachment and most profound influence on both of their lives, Nel first experiences herself as an individual apart from her family when she gazes in a mirror and dreams of travelling in the world beyond the Bottom. The introduction of Sula at this crucial birth of Nel's self-awareness highlights the link between the two girls. _Sula_ depicts really frustrating expectation. Instead of enlarging their worlds and achieving contentment, Nel and Sula repeatedly find experience constricting their lives and bringing the bitterness of death and betrayal.

The sense of complacent well-being is shattered by two events which occur in rapid succession and blight the promise of Sula's life. The first crisis is Sula's
overhearing her mother comment casually that she does not like her. The second is her accidental drowning of the young boy Chicken Little while playing with him near the river. This double disillusionment determines the subsequent course of Sula's life. The mysteries of life confound her. She learns too soon the lessons of death and of the essential untrustworthiness and isolation of human beings.

The incidents of the chapter "1922" reflect a recurring pattern in the book. Repeatedly, an individual at the height of his or her powers witnesses a traumatizing death. Sula is destroyed by her involvement in Chicken Little's drowning. Directionless, without a foundation of human trust, she is isolated.

Presented in the first part of the novel mainly through sporadic scenes of violence, Sula’s growth reflects a process of inner disengagement, a gradual decentring from the role of active participant to that of passive observer, and from there to conscious self-exclusion.

In the novel Sula learns what she does of the meaning of human relatedness and of the human admixture of good and evil in her link to Nel. As the second self, Sula experiments with freedom and honesty beyond the limits allowable within the social order, and lives the life of adventure Nel dreamed of but denied herself. On the other hand Nel, expands her imaginative and emotional capacity through her association with Sula. It is her continuing love for Sula that makes possible her most cogent insight into her own motivation and her deepest emotional response. When she weeps for Sula, she is freed from old constraints and misconceptions.
stippled of her false moral pride and smugness through this mourning for her dead friend/self at Sula's graveside. Nel is symbolically reborn as the surviving self, continuing the process of growth and self-awareness that Sula began.

*Beloved* deals with the life of a female slave, Sethe, who kills her own daughter to prevent her from slavish suffering. Sethe's is an act of mercy killing, an act performed by a mother out of concern for her daughter and her community. Though *Beloved* in general is a story about slavery, it is a story narrated to a twentieth century audience. It is mainly a story of black female slave who develops an awareness about her own subhuman status on Sweet Home Plantation which ultimately awakens and forces her to develop a quest for freedom. It records the cruelty, violence and degradation which make a female slave, Sethe, understand her situation and awaken from a deep slumber. Barbara Schapiro remarks:

> Toni Morrison's *Beloved* penetrates, perhaps, more deeply than any historical or psychological study could, the unconscious emotional and psychic consequences of slavery. (Barbara -194)

*Beloved* is based on the true story of Margaret Garner, a fugitive from Kentucky who attempted to kill her children rather than have them enslaved when they were all captured in Ohio in 1850. Like Beloved's Sethe she succeeded in killing only one. Morrison focuses on the 1860s and Seventies and how an Afro-American heritage was maintained during the period of dramatic social changes.
before and after the civil war.

Sethe, as a slave, has undergone many inhuman insults and humiliations. In the beginning she is brought to the Sweet Home Plantation to replace Baby Suggs, another slave woman who is very old. Baby Suggs has given birth to eight children. Her freedom is purchased by her own son, Halle Suggs, with his five years of working on Sundays. Baby Suggs has served as a breeding slave woman and has attended to Mr. and Mrs. Garners.

The atmosphere in Sweet Home was tolerable when Mr. Garner looked after the plantation. However, once he dies, Mrs. Garner is the only white woman on the plantation. So she requests her brother-in-law, a school teacher, to come. It is after his arrival that Sethe is forced to undergo inhuman experiences and brutality of the evils of slavery.

In due course of time, Sethe realizes that the school teacher represents the most treacherous kind of institutional evil. Therefore she plans for the safety of her kids. Sethe decides to run away from the plantation. It is only after arriving at 124 Bluestone, Cincinnati, where Baby Suggs is waiting for Sethe, that she understands the power of the master of the slaves, who arrives in 124 Bluestone too.

As Sethe cannot give safety and security for her children, she decides to kill her children. By killing her own daughter, Sethe commits infanticide. This kind of social situation has caused psychological injury to her and her behaviour is shaped accordingly. Sethe’s troubled psyche is visible in her physical appearance. Her eyes
are described as "empty". Her eyes reflect the psychic loss and denial of self she
has experienced at all levels in her life.

_Beloved_ serves as symbol of the psychic loss of many innocent African
children who suffered from the tragic consequences of slavery. As Schapiro
remarks:

> The major characters in the novel are all working out
> of a deep loss to the self, a profound narcissistic wound
> that results from a breakdown and distortion of the
> earliest relations between self and other. In the case of
> _Beloved_, the intense desire for recognition evolves into
> enraged narcissistic omnipotence and a terrifying,
> tyrannical domination. (Schapiro 197)

The slavery experience in the United States has some relevance to the
system of bonded labour in India, more particularly in Andhra rural areas. So there
is a possibility of looking for a comparison between American literature based on
slavery and Telugu literature based on bonded labour. In this connection,
Kalipatnam Rama Rao's _Yajnam_ bears an apt comparison with Morrison's
_Beloved_.

In Rama Rao's Novel almost all the important characters come from the
Dalits of Andhra. The fact that the Dalits are treated in Andhra as 'sub-men' and
are given the most humiliating jobs coincides with the black predicament of
America to a certain extent. One can discern that the system of untouchability and the low social status given to Dalits impose a double burden on them through severe social and economic inequalities and through the heavy psychological consequences suffered by the Dalit who is forced to play an inferior role. Like the blacks in Modern America, Dalits are presently trying to assert their individuality, resisting the upper caste domination in various fields of life. Though concentrating exclusively on the voicing out of African American experience in her fiction, Morrison reaches out to the entire world, but more specifically to the third world countries like India. Besides the commonality of the third world consciousness, there is another factor that brings Morrison’s writing close to Indian experience—the issue of double oppression raised by the dalit women. The problem of double marginalization caused by the systems of caste and gender oppression in India is closely akin to the race and gender oppression in America. Like the African Americans, the Indian dalits—the scheduled caste, the scheduled tribe as well as the other socially and economically oppressed sections of Indian society, including women, irrespective of their caste, and economic status—are a marginalized group, a segregated sect of the society.

The fact that Dalits are treated in India as sub-human beings and are given the most humiliating jobs coincides to a considerable degree with the dehumanizing treatment given to blacks in America. Thus, the novel *Karukku* by Bama, bears ample testimony to the inhuman treatment given to the Dalits. Both
Toni Morrison and Bama seem to be dealing with socio-psychic interaction with reference to their specific problems of social situation. Although Toni Morrison takes great pride in her black identity, values her ethnic heritage and inscribes her community, her artistic genius enables her to reach out to the entire world.

The novel *Karukku* is a sincere attempt to tell a story that is so furious about the ill-treatment given to the oppressed in the name of class and caste. It seeks to expose the plight of thousands of Dalits. The author also finds that several of her own people have internalized the inferiority that is imposed on them by the upper class. She wants her novel to be a two-edged sword, while on the one hand, it challenges the oppressors who have enslaved and disempowered the Dalits, while on the other hand, it reiterates the need for a new society with ideals such as justice, equality and love. The author believes that a lack of unity among the Dalits will make it easier for the upper castes to subjugate them.

Thus the novel, *Karukku*, is not merely a militant voice seeking to liberate the Dalits from oppression, but the language used in the book is that of the Dalits. This, in itself is a form of overthrowing of established conventions for writing, as dictated by the upper castes. The novel gives an identity to the Dalits by proudly recollecting the cultural significance of being a Dalit in the remnants of memories. The book therefore becomes the harbinger of an awakening and reiteration of the Dalit’s freedom to question rebel and re-interpret.
In this regard, Morrison's novels acquire greater relevance. The day is not too far, when the blacks in America come out of their existential crisis and psychological turmoil, achieve their black solidarity and live in the "Paradised-America"

W.E.B. Du Bois in his work, ‘The Souls of Black Folk’ identified the problem of the twentieth century as the "problem of colour-line - the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, America and the Islands of the Sea". (W.E.B. Du Bois 54)

Morrison's novels constitute a long search for a representative African-American voice. She achieves the unique authentic voice by means of certain basic types of discourse as well as linguistic codes related to residually oral culture. She also makes use of racial stereotypes, history, myths, rituals, magic-realism, re-memory/etc., in her novels which contribute to the unique authentic voice.

Due to the evolution of black consciousness, the blacks started finding their unique voice. Through her novels Toni Morrison is voicing the feelings of unnamed millions. She creates racial stereotypes in her works which may account for the search for self-consciousness. These stereotypes define black women in many roles and, simultaneously, create the monolithic "black woman". When black women make one of their rare appearances in white male fiction, it is almost invariably as one of these stereotypes.

Black male writers too have been drawn guilty of perpetuating the myth of
the monolithic black women, though the images have been drawn with more sympathy. Thus while Southern white literature focuses on the strong, nurturing, uncomplaining mammy as the dominant black female image, black male literature of the period centres on the tragic "mulatto or the victim of sexual exploitation". In the works of major black novelists such as Richard Wright, James Baldwin or Ralph Ellison, black women appear as slightly outlined mamas or victims or, as in the work of Charles William or Claude Mckay.

Black women's writing on the other hand presents a completely different picture. The focus here shifts to the black woman as an individual, struggling towards freedom and selfhood. The black women writers document the trauma and grief of sexual exploitation and physical abuse, portray themselves as far more than mere victims of rape and seduction and write to celebrate their hard-won escape from the system and their fitness for freedom's potential blessings. As Whneema Lubiano remarks in his work "Toni Morrison," African-American Writers:

… the fiction of black women writers in particular demonstrates especially convincingly that free from these racist and sexist images to embrace her black heritage and her woman's heritage, the black woman also flourishes very much as herself (321)

Morrison then makes use of history in her novels. Morrison's novels pinpoint strategic moments in black American history, during which social and
cultural forms underwent disruption and transformation.

Both *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula* focus on the forties, a period of heavy black migration to cities when particularly in the Midwest, black 'neighbourhoods' came into being in relation to towns that had never before had a sizeable black population. *Sula* expands the period of the forties by looking back to the modern capitalist system as soldiers, and it looks ahead to the sixties, when cultural identity seems to flatten out and all people tend to look like the 'Deveys'. *Beloved* is based on the true story of Margaret Garner, a fugitive from Kentucky who attempted to kill her children rather than have them enslaved when they were all captured in Ohio in 1850. The late nineteenth century is pictured in 'Beloved'.

In *The Bluest Eye*, Claudia Mac Teer provides a child's point of view - sometimes from an adult perspective - while an omniscient voice relates information unknown by Claudia Morrison's title, like her point of view, has multiple significance. Most obviously, the title, refers to Pecola's only desire in life to have the bluest eyes. It also indicates the gloomy ego of Pecola. Blue, simply doesn't mean "gloomy", it suggests the blues, those sweetly sad songs of loss and reconciliation sung by Claudia's mother and Miss Marie in the novel.

Morrison's vision is not merely limited to the black community, though Pecola clearly represents the social, economic, and political position of African-Americans. Though, Pecola might be seen as the innocent set upon the world, not only about the local human soil but also that of the entire country, and, in 1941, of
the world at war.

Sula's mother and grandmother belong to the old generation, Sula and Nel belong to the transitional period. As Eva and Hannah belong to the old generation they vulnerable to withstand the troubles and are capable of survival. But Sula who is not used to that situation suffers existential crisis and at last attains her self-consciousness and finds a new voice. Toni Morrison historicizes the past in Sula. For Morrison the future in nothing but the outcome of the past. So she makes use of history.

In Beloved too, she portrayed the past in a life-like manner. It is deeply a historical novel, in which she makes use of the supernatural which is also the manifestation of history. When Paul D first touches the scars left on Sethe's back from her beating the house explodes with the baby ghost's disturbance, and the readers witness the force of Beloved's jealousy, her will to obstruct any living person from appropriating Sethe's past, her guilt or her 'responsibility'.

Her novels, especially the Beloved's narrative style falls more easily into what has become known as "Magic Realism". A text that is called magic realism is one which disregards the 'natural' or physical laws and appears to be normal. It is often a commentary on the inexplicability of the world - physical, political, cultural, interpersonal - in which people live.

Morrison employs a multivocal text and a highly figurative language to probe her characters’ double consciousness of their terribly paradoxical
circumstances as people and 'non-people' in a social arena of white male hegemony.

Rememory, circularity of the text, are part of the oral tradition. More significantly, the circling, spiraling and digressive narrative patterns of her novels constitute the search for authentic voice. Re memory is a combination of memory and remembrance which in itself doubles the process. Her memory is both an actual repetition of real events and a repetition of memory, a re-memory, a circling back in one's mind to what was previously there, both in reality and in its recall.

In Sula/obedient, quiet, and repressed, Nel first experiences herself as an individual apart from her family when she gazes in a mirror and dreams of travelling in the world beyond the Bottom, the introduction of Sula at this crucial birth of Nel's self-awareness highlights the link between the two girls. In fact, it is her sense of her nascent identity which gives Nel the strength to defy her mother's prohibition and establish a friendship with Sula. Yet it is to be Sula, rather than Nel, who eventually realizes Nel's dreams of a journey and of independent selfhood.

In the novel, Sula learns what she does of the meaning of the human relatedness and of the human admixture of good and evil in her link to Nel. Sula experiments with freedom and honesty beyond the limits allowable within the social order, and lives the life of adventure. When she weeps for Sula, she is freed from old constraints' and misconceptions, stripped of her false moral pride and she
cries. Nel is symbolically reborn as the surviving self, continuing the process of growth and self-awareness that Sula began.

The book ends with the lamentation of Nel: "It was a fine cry - loud and long - but it had no bottom and it had no top, just circles and circles of sorrow" (SL 174). It gives the vision of the ability to survive in the face of a hostile world and to accept one's fate in full self-knowledge. The real nobility lies not in the external war but in the internal war, that is, in confrontation with the self and hence achieving the authentic voice.

In Beloved the voice of a heavy impact on the reader is that of Sethe whose profound love results in infanticide. She holds on to her intense love and reacts in reverie to Paul D's reprimand that she has only two «feet, not four. As Sethe dramatizes the several complexities - moral, sexual and -, she becomes the implied author, the version of Morrison herself. Sethe, like other characters in the novel, slips back into memories which suddenly replace her present moments as when she notes how much she loved her murdered daughter remembering that there it was again, welcoming the cool headstones.

Balancing the racial, and sexual, that is at the back of every personal outrage suffered by Sethe, is the brilliant poetics of the long black song of the many thousands gone and the chokecherry tree on the back of Sethe, which are voiced by the implied author, the version of herself that Morrison creates in the course of the narrative.
In *Beloved*, the multiplicity of voices is also characterized by various kinds of language and discourse - the standard American English and the feminist discourse of the implied author and the dramatized narrator respectively. The language of Baby Suggs transcends the Gothic and surrealistic expressions of Beloved, and the collective healing language of the women's voices during the ritual of exorcism.

Morrison invents a new voice out of a ghost and a dead past. At the end of this section, in a poetic chant, the memories and minds of Sethe, Denver and Beloved combine to mutual song of possession:

```
Beloved
You are my sister
You are my daughter
You are my face; you are me
I have found you again; you have come back to me
You are my Beloved
You are mine
You are mine
You are mine
You are mine
I have your milk
I have your smile
I will take care of you
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You are my face; I am you. Why did you leave me who am you?

I will never leave you again

Don't ever leave me again

You will never leave me again

You went in the water

I drank your blood. (BL 114)

More so, the statement "It was not a story to pass on / This is not a story to pass on" (145) rings three times through the epilogue or code to Beloved. It suggests that Beloved is not just a story to omit or it should not be allowed to occur again. As the characters want to achieve their authenticity they do not want this event to be continued again.

In Toni Morrison's novels, the fictional characters and communities - as objects of exploitation in both slave and free-market societies - transform an essential absence into a powerful presence. A sense of self emerges from experiences of exploitation, marginalization and denial. Morrison's narrative, confronting a facelessness that the dominant culture in America threatens to impose on black expression, forges out of cultural and social absence a voice and identity.

Blacks are 'nameless' because given names cannot recover a pre-slave past. The community bestows names upon people, constructing through a communal act of rechristening a self meant to counteract the disempowerment of a slave past.
Robert Stepto, in his work, ‘From behind the Veil : A study of Afro – American Narrative’ explains this practice of renaming as a way of creating a historical self-identity. For the African-American he says:

Self-creation and reformation of a fragmented familial past are endlessly interwoven: naming is inevitably genealogical revisionism. All of African American literature may be seen as one vast genealogical poem that attempts to restore continuity to the ruptures or discontinuities imposed by the history of black presence in America. (152).

In an interview with Nellie Mckay, Morrison talks about the evocation of a community voice in her novel:

The fact is that the stories look as though they come from people who are not even authors. No author tells these stories. They are just told - meanderingly - as though they are going in several directions at the same time... I am not experimental, I am simply trying to re-create something out of an old art form in my books – the something that defines what makes a book "black". And has nothing to do with whether the people in the books are black or not. The open ended quality that is sometimes problematic in the novel form reminds me of the
uses to which stories are put in the black community.

The stories are constantly being retold, constantly being

Barabara Christian has written of Morrison novels as, giving voice to the
"unspeakable event of the Middle Passage, an event almost erased from American
cultural memory" .(6). By employing various techniques, devices and mainly due
to the evolution of black consciousness, the characters in Morrison's novels
constitute the search for an authentic voice'.

"Anyone who analyses black literature", writes Henry Louis Gates, Jr.,
"must do so as a comparativist ... because our canonical texts have complex double
formal antecedents, the Western and the black" .(24).This has long been the
considered judgement and is now the prevailing wisdom of most African-
Americans. Because of the distinctive history and acculturation of Africans in
America, the literary tradition of African Americans is not most meaningfully
assessed in the context of the tension between their attitudes towards their dual
African and American cultural heritages on one hand, and their oral and literary
heritages on the other.

Every Afro-American writer works within and against the dual tradition -
oral and literary, African and American, male and female, and each participates in
the elusive quest for status, power and identity. Each writer's contribution and
significance are therefore influenced by the relationship of his or her texts to others
in the tradition both in the narrow Eurocentric sense and in the broader Afrocentric sense. But the black literary texts are sign systems whose reference are nonliterary as well as literary texts that illuminate the meaning of the shared experience of black Americans and the complex double consciousness which, as turn of the century W.E.B. Du Bois explains in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), ‘is the special burden and blessing of the African-American identity’.

Afro-American culture is the symbolic and material expression by black Americans of their relationship to Nature, to their ethnic community, and to whites as they seek to adapt to their environment in order to survive and thrive, both individually and collectively. Culture thus signifies the constitutive social process by which people create specific, different ways of life as they adapt to environmental conditions and historical circumstances. For black Americans this process of acculturation has been shaped by a distinctive history: Africa, slavery, the Middle Passage, the Southern plantation, Emancipation, Reconstruction, post-Reconstruction, Northern migration and urbanization and, most importantly, racism. The unique configuration of these historical experiences generated the interrelated processes of double consciousness, socialized ambivalence, and double vision that best the complex, creative dynamics of African-American ethnic culture and character.

Du Bois defined the African-American experience of double consciousness as "the complex socio-cultural and socio-psychological duality of Americans of
African descent whose humanity and culture were institutionally devalued and marginalized by people of European descent" (1961:16-17). Socialized ambivalence signified a shifting identification between the values of the superordinate white and subordinate black cultural systems as result of institutionalized racism.

Institutionalized racism and sexism, frustrated the individual's efforts to realize his or her potential wholeness as an Afro-American. Impelled by the resiliency of African cultural survivals and by personal resistance to class, racial, or sexual domination, these individuals turned primarily to their kinship network or ethnic community for survival strategies. Over a long period of time this process of acculturation has settled in the deep consciousness of the individuals who directly experienced it as both self-protective and compensatory cultural behaviour, the double consciousness that African-American writers, especially Toni Morrison, sometimes self-consciously but often unconsciously, illumine for readers.

The Afro-American novel is a hybrid form. It is the product of social and cultural forces that shape the author's attitude toward life and that fuel the dialectical process between romantic and mimetic narrative impulses. In contrast to the Euro-American novel, the Afro-American novel, has its roots in the combined oral and literary traditions of Afro-American culture. It is one of the symbolic literary forms of discourse that black Americans have borrowed from Western Culture and adapted in their quest for identity in a racist, white, patriarchal
American social arena. The Afro-American novel, is not a solipsistic, self-referential linguistic system, but a symbolic socio-cultural act. Best interpreted on its own bicultural terms, African-American literature revitalizes the language and challenges people to realize their human potential.

By any standard of literary evaluation, Toni Morrison is a phenomenon, in the classic sense of a once-in-a-lifetime rarity. The indelible word-portraits she has created, the unforgettable mythical and imaginary places, the exploration of the psychic trauma of slavery, racism, and war, and the sheer beauty of prose that frequently reads like poetry have assured and secured Morrison a place in the canon of world literature.

Morrison's impact upon our world and the recognition of her as one of America's greatest writers have exceeded the sum total of seven novels, a play, a short story, a collection of critical essays, and several edited volumes. Around the world, she has offered a new lens through which to view the African American experience. Morrison's is the rare case in which popularity and quality are commensurate. Morrison has written her novels with a twist, firmly rooting black people in the polluted American soil of their slave heritage and transforming that soil to a garden of possibility through the tremendous force of the human will to survive and to thrive.

It is her power of language that has enabled Morrison to reach out across races, cultures, and national boundaries. In the worlds she has travelled and in the
worlds she has created, Toni Morrison has left her imprint upon our imagination. Toni Morrison is the water that has worn away the stone of resistance to almost every category of literary achievement: Pulitzer Prize Winner, National Book Award Winner, favourite author of thousands of Americans and readers throughout the world, and above all the phenomenal winner of the 1993 Nobel Prize in literature. She has therefore chosen to remain attached and committed in a world where she could easily disappear into the vast expanse of her own reputation.

Morrison's novels stand for all those who suffered under slavery and did not survive. There are two groups of characters in Morrison's novels. The first group consists of characters like Pecola, Cholly, Sethe, Beloved, and some others. These characters represent the mad, anarchic and destructive tendencies affected by the psychological wounds caused by racial discrimination. The second group comprises people like Son, Baby Suggs, and Paul D Whose wounded psyche breeds sanity, balance and constructive behaviour in them. That the same psychic state formed by the same wretchedness of society gives rise to different qualities in different individuals is thus proved in Morrison's novels. As Jerry Bryant observes in his work, "Victims and Heroes",

Society can have both functions: it can further man's healthy development, and it can hinder it; in fact most societies do both, and the question is only to what degree and in what directions their positive and
negative influence is exercised. (1997 12).

Toni Morrison is certainly aware of her characters' consciousness of the two-ness, but more after than not her characters transcend the limitations of the two-ness consciousness. Steeped in African cultural nuances, especially the blues, Jazz and community life mores, the Morrison characters denigrate the bourgeois values of the white culture in favour of the African folk values, the Morrison characters combine Americaness and Africanism, thus creating a syncretic world view for the readers.

Morrison makes us aware of the history of the African Slavery. All the history that the reader has learnt about slavery is sketched out on a giant canvas: the separation of women and children from men, the treatment of slaves - both male and female, children and adult - as beats of burden; the sexual exploitation of African women by white men. The most important events of the novels are Pecola's madness, Sula's breaking of the marital bond between Nel and Jude, Sethe's murder of her baby daughter, Beloved. The series of mental shocks which must have accompanied by the principal events of enslavement would have caused these behaviours.

Pecola hungers for love and admiration, but fails to find it at home, at school and in the community, gradually lapses into a world of fantasy. Then she is the girl with the bluest eyes, the most beautiful girl. She converses with her 'other' self. This 'other' becomes her best friend, who assures her that in her town Lorain,
Ohio, none has such blue eyes. The pathos of this young girl's destiny is in fact very choking.

As Morrison is an artist with commitment to her people, she feels the tragedy of the black people. They have endured the most vicious form of racism and sexism which results in their evolution of black consciousness. Like Pecola, Sula is also alienated from the community. Although the Bottom community proclaims Sula a pariah, after her death that very community changes like a chameleon. Ironically Sula's alienation sets the pace for reversal in the life of the Bottom community. The compassion and warmth of the neighbourhood no longer sustains Bottom. In the sixties after the war, a new order in the society was established. Apt are the descriptions of the Bottom which Morrison writes:

…Bottom had collapsed. Everybody who had made money during the war moved as close as they could to the valley, and the white people were buying down river, cross river, stretching Medallion like two strings on the banks. Nobody colored lived much up in the Bottom any more. … hill land was more valuable now, and those black people who had moved down right after the war and in the fifties couldn't afford to come back even if they wanted to. …The black people, for all their new look, seemed awfully anxious to get to the valley, or leave town, and abandon the hills to whoever
was interested. It was sad, because the Bottom had been a real place... Maybe it hadn't been a community, but it had been a place. Now there weren't any places left, just separate houses with separate televisions and separate telephones and less and less dropping by. (2005, 165-166)

The alienated human beings reflect the sickness in all societies. Sethe kills her daughter to save her from the psychological scar of childhood. She wants to avoid psychic death for her daughter. The psychic consequences of slavery make her behave like that. If one looks at the moral value of Sethe's murder one will not be able to know the complexity of her agitated psyche under the manifestation of the cruelty of slavery. As William Van Deburg points out,

We may suppose that every African who became a slave underwent an experience whose crude psychic impact must have been staggering and whose consequences superceded anything that had even previously happened to him. (1984: 59).

By using the kind of narrative pattern in which each character becomes part of his or her own history and must be put together in quilt fashion. The reality and fantasy of their lives creates history.

The feminist qualities that Morrison advocates, through the portrayal of Pecola, Sula, Sethe are the traditional beauty, strength, resistance and integrity of
black women. She is highly sensitive to feminist concerns and includes all hose elements of black female experience in her text which are of compelling significance to a women. In her interview with Rose Marie K. Lester, Morrison expresses her views as follows:

an extremely painful and unattractive history of black women in the states where black women have always been both mother and labourer, mother and worker, and have worked in the fields along with men. (1988 : 47-54).

Morrison uses the beautiful metaphor to emphasis that black women are much more suited to aggressiveness in the mode that feminists are recommending.

The focus of each of Morrison's novels pinpoints strategic moments in black American history, during which social and cultural forms underwent disruption and transformation. Her novels provide the leader with a model for a new pedagogy for the reconstruction of slave history from the black people's perspective.

Toni Morrison's novels thus demonstrate the socio-psychic interaction in the lives of black people in America. She shows the various responses of black people to their specific situation in America. As *Jazz* always leaves our mind agitated Morrison's work also keeps us emotionally agitated, by showing us the psychological turmoil which effect the evolution of black consciousness.