A CRITICAL STUDY OF THE SELECT NOVELS OF
TONI MORRISON

Chapter 1
Introduction

To understand the themes of Toni Morrison’s novels is to search for the pearl in the oyster. Her writings are undoubtedly an offspring of the knowledge that she had received from the adults in her family about the horrifying tales of black slaves, tales dealing with the domination of the white majority, and the frustrated yearnings of the Negroes for their emancipation. Thus she became well acquainted with the myths and folklore which figure prominently in her works.

The Afro-American novels have examined the general socio-psychic interaction with reference to black reality in America. The Africans were plundered and pilfered from their native country and taken to America. The need for cheap labour to work in the plantations of the newly settled New Englanders is the direct and immediate reason for the exploration of the continent of Africa and the transportation of the Africans to the New Settlement and establishment of slavery. The native Africans were hunted, captured, chained and stacked to America.

The Africans thus transported from their native soil were replanted in a strange and hostile soil. The Africans who enjoyed bliss and freedom in their native soil turned into lonely niggers and suffered alienation. Degradation to slavery, abject poverty and dependence upon the ruling class made them experience the psychological turmoil and consequently result in the evolution of
black consciousness in the Afro-Americans. The study of black women writers such as Alice Walker, Maya Angelou, Toni Morrison, Paule Marshall could discover the positive self in women and give a true picture of womanhood in all its density and complexity. The urge to discover one’s self-consciousness and its relation to the world has become the important thrust of these novelists. An apocalyptic vision of a new world order and a quest for Afro-American identity is embedded in the texts of these writers.

Considered one of the foremost literary figures in the contemporary American fiction, Toni Morrison has won international acclaim for works, in which she examines the role of race in the American society. Using unconventional narrative structures, poetic language, myth and folklore, Morrison pen pictures in her novels themes such as black victimization, the emotional and the social effects of racial and sexual oppression, the nightmarish experiences and the unimaginable sufferings, the decolonized African Americans faced, in trying to achieve a sense of identity in a society dominated by white cultural values.

In 1865, Slavery was abolished in the United States. Yet, for the next 100 years and more, African American men and women found themselves still struggling to secure freedom and to understand what such freedom means. Using various settings, Toni Morrison delves deep into the lives of African American women, examining how they cope with poverty, rape, incest, apartheid and
numerous forms of oppression. In exploring these survival techniques, Toni Morrison delves deep into the re memory and tries to find out how African Americans struggle to establish a self - an identity they can call their own and call themselves free.

Toni Morrison is perhaps, the most sophisticated novelist in the history of Afro-American literature. She astutely describes the realistic picture of the Black in America. There are many writers who are willing to describe the ugliness of the world as ugly, but the uniqueness of Toni Morrison lies in revealing the beauty and hope beneath the surface of black America.

Combining the aims of the Black Freedom Movement and Women’s Liberation, she seeks to produce literature which is irrevocably and indisputably black. But the artistic excellence of Morrison’s fiction lies in achieving a balance between writing a truly black literature and writing what is truly universal Literature. Although firmly grounded in the cultural heritage and social concerns of black Americans, her work transcends narrowly prescribed conceptions of ethnic literature, exhibiting universal mythic patterns and overtones.

As a result of her literary and artistic competence, Toni Morrison stands in the vanguard of contemporary writers of fiction, transcending both her racial identity and gender. Her acclaim is international, as her novels are translated into many languages. Scholars and doctoral candidates the world over, critique and
access her works, seeking to unravel the various complexities that Morrison prides herself upon. An astute scholar as well as a uniquely creative writer, Morrison has won the deepest respect and admiration of both her fellow writers and populace at large. In addition to the feature coverage she has received from the popular media, from major national magazines and journals, she has been the recipient of several honorary degrees, literary awards and domestic recognitions. The numerous awards she has received, culminating in the Nobel Prize awarded to her in 1993 for her distinctive writing, bear testimony to her genius as a writer. With her powerful narratives set against a historical as well as mythical backdrop, Morrison has captivated the hearts of the common reader as well as scholars of literature. She enjoys today the unique distinction of being both a popular writer and an outstanding literary figure.

Thus, a number of factors contributed to Toni Morrison’s developing social, political and aesthetic consciousness - environment, family background, community, African American folklore, her educational background and early professional life, her Random House experience and literary works by great writers. These factors helped her become more conscious of the nature of the African’s dilemma, the crisis of the African personality, the cause and effect of it, and her increasing commitment to help solve it in terms of fictional art, thereby combining her political consciousness with aesthetic sensibility.
African American Literature is literature written by, about, and specifically for African Americans. The genre began during the 18th and 19th centuries with writers such as poet Philis Wheatley and Frederick Douglass, reached an early high point with the Harlem Renaissance and continues today with authors such as Toni Morrison, May Angelou and Walter Mosley being ranked among the top writers in the United States. Among the themes and issues explored in African American Literature are the role of African Americans within the larger American society, African American culture, racism, slavery and equality.

As African American’s place in American society has changed over the centuries, so too, the focus of African American Literature. Before the American Civil war, African American Literature primarily focussed on the issues of slavery. At the turn of the 20th century, books by authors such as W.E.B. Dubois and Booker T. Washington debated whether to confront or appease racist attitudes in the United States. During the American Civil Rights Movement, authors like Richard Wright and Gwendolyn Brooks wrote about issues of racial segregation and black nationalism. Today African American Literature has become an integral part of American Literature, with books such as The Color Purple by Alice Walker, and Beloved by Toni Morrison achieving both best-selling and award-winning status.

Toni Morrison has written a series of novels like The Bluest Eye, Sula, Song of Solomon, Tar Baby, Beloved, Jazz, and a number of novels at a time when
the Civil Rights Movement had produced historical advances in the freedom and
dignity granted to African American citizens. But African Americans still found
themselves discriminated against on all spheres--economic, religious, educational,
political and legal. They also began to notice that the culture produced a single
standard image of beauty, and that standard insistently excluded the blacks.

This concept finds expression and lies cradled at the core of her novel The
Bluest Eye. It was the image of white womanhood and also of white girlhood,
blonde, blue-eyed and economically privileged. The Black Movement was born
out of this recognition. Morrison’s novel The Bluest Eye is part of this movement.
She demonstrates in this novel the serious damage caused by internalized racism,
and what happens when African American people begin to believe the stereo types
of themselves, when they, with the idea that white is most lofty and beautiful and
black is most degraded and ugly. Morrison demonstrates this phenomenon in a
most devastating way as it affects children.

The Bluest Eye has been praised as an excellent study of black girlhood in
America. The Bluest Eye covers African American experience in mid-century,
where individuals lived in less fear but still felt the effects of social
marginalization. The Bluest Eye throws open to the world how aesthetic standards
derived from white culture can be detrimental to blacks. The pivotal idea in this
novel is the domination of blacks by the existing American standards of beauty –
blue eyes, blonde-hair, and white skin and how this idea drives the prime character of this novel Pecola to the brink of insanity.

The novel The Bluest Eye is a tragic tale about a young, black girl’s desire for the bluest eyes, the symbol for her of what it means to be beautiful and therefore worthy in society. Since the Breedlove family believe themselves physically ugly, their lives descend into existential ugliness. The mother Pauline rejected her own family in favour of her white employer’s home and children, the father Cholly’s misguided attempts to love his daughter Pecola resulted in rape, while Pecola believed that having blue eyes would deliver her from poverty and abuse. Pecola is a child whom nobody can save; not even the stable Mac Teer family who take her in, even the prostitutes who accept her for herself, or even the character named Soap Head Church, whose attempt to make her believe that she has blue eyes finally drives her over to the fringe of insanity. One feels the pain and experience a lump in the throat on realising the fact that Pecola does not have joy and love to balance the pain and ugliness of her normal everyday experiences. Growing gradually into puberty is a luxury denied to her. So she retreats into madness that includes the blue eyes she has prayed for.

As Anne z. Mickalson in his work ‘Contemporary Literary Criticism’ points out: In her first novel The Bluest Eye, Toni Morrison deals with children and that element of belief of many black people, as she sees it that an ultimate glory is possible. Pecola Breedlove yearns for blue eyes as the next best thing to
being white. Blue eyes become for her a symbol of pride and dignity. She seeks the
glory of blue eyes through prayer… and eventually through madness when,
believing that Blue eyes have finally been granted her, she walks about flapping
her arms like wings convinced that she can fly. Secure in her madness, she has no
knowledge that she has become the town pariah. (315)

Toni Morrison’s next novel Sula explores the moral ambiguity of
individual choices made under unbearable pressure and the simultaneously rich
and the poor culture of a community that develops under pressure.

The principal theme of the novel Sula is the way in which economical and
psychological restrictions affect the raw material of personality. The Bottom’s
enmeshed family structures, which develop in the first generation as a way of
coping with hardship in later generations impose psychological burdens. In order
to maintain a balance, the community must have a Shadrack on whom to project its
fears and a Sula on whom to project its hostility.

Still, Morrison suggests that the evil engendered by oppression has limits,
in both communities and in individuals. The destruction of the neighbourhood to
make way for a golf course and an expensive housing development, though
evidence of white greed, makes it possible for the inhabitants to reconstruct their
community in a different form.
Morrison even suggests that redemption is possible. Sula’s death inspires the community to gather at the river, as one of their favourite hymns says, where many of them are drowned, significantly, in directing their hostility toward proper object - the white construction company that has denied them work.

The novel Sula, tells the story of a friendship between two girls, Sula Peace and Nel Right. This central relationship in the novel develops against a background of Bizarre, enmeshed family ties, the closely knit and judgemental black community of ‘the Bottom’, and finally, the remote and exploitative white power structure of Medallion and beyond.

A white farmer pays his slave for some difficult chores with poor hilltop land. The slave agrees to the bargain, and the Bottom is established, beautiful but unable to nourish the inhabitants. What follows is the story of a community that must direct both creative and destructive energy inward. Since its contributions to Medallion and the rest of the world must be limited and menial, and since it cannot express the resulting frustration, the community becomes enmeshed – intensely nurturing and as intensely restrictive and destructive.

The novel proceeds in a relatively straightforward chronological order with occasional flashbacks. The events are not connected as a casual sequence but resonate as parts of symbolic and psychological patterns.

Part I, tracing the events of 1919, tells the overlapping stories of the citizens
Medallion. In 1919, Shadrack returns to Medallion and, as a way of coping with his uncontrollable fear, establishes “National Suicide Day”, which he celebrates alone every January 3. Nel and Sula meet again in 1922 and establish their friendship that will be the strongest tie of their lifetime. Each confirms and fosters the other’s unique identity, and they share everything. Yet the other events of the year begin to undermine and change that relationship.

Part II tells of the lives of Sula and Nel after Sula returns in 1937. Almost immediately, the town people begin to hate her, seeing her as a personification of evil because her behaviour shows that she has no sense of community. Finally, Sula seduces Jude. The bond between her and Nel changes from love to hatred. Sula succumbs to a painful illness and dies.

The major predicament that Morrison considers in this novel is twofold—the effect of racism upon black identity formation and the effect of racism and sexism upon the identity formation of the black female. Morrison’s focus in this novel is also on gender. The concept of gender with its relation to race and class forms an integral part of the novel. The issue of class is only incidental, the thrust being on sexism.

This switch in thematic emphasis suggests that Morrison sees the lack of individual rights as the primary cause of the oppression of Africans. Despite its periodic inclusion of racial concerns and its incidental incorporation of
class-related issues, the novel begins and ends with an exposition of individual rather than group fulfilment. Sula, the protagonist of the novel, suffers not only at the hands of whites, but also at the hands of blacks. This is precisely the reason why she rejects the traditional role ascribed to women in society. Morrison here is interested in the struggle for individual rights, in general, and women’s right in particular, rather than in the right of African people collectively. On a close reading of the novel, one can deduce the fact that, it is the oppression of African woman in the United States, especially in the first quarter of the twentieth century, that is documented throughout the novel.

Thus in Sula, Morrison’s focus shifts to the black woman as an individual, struggling towards freedom and selfhood. On a close scrutiny, one can very well observe that the quest for self identity runs as a recurrent intertwining streak in almost all the novels of Toni Morrison. Even though a good deal of action of the novel derives from the consequences of male and female relationships, it is the self-perception of woman and her subsequent reactions to self-concept that are central to it.

The male characters undergo no development, play no major roles, and they are important only because of the reactions they might prompt from the females. For the most part of the novel, men are superficial, immature, untrustworthy, and anonymous, as is suggested by their names –Jude (Judas), Green (naïve), Boy-Boy (infantile), Chicken Little( fearful and dimunitive), the
Deweys (anonymous). The negative aspects of their names are most visible when juxtaposed with the empowering names of the women. The men’s behaviour including Ajax’s is less than heroic. Each man leaves a community of abandoned women. This abandonment becomes the impetus for Eva, the paradigmatic woman who rebounds through assertiveness and self-reliance after she and her children are deserted by her husband.

It is however, to be noted that if the African people’s struggle for individual freedom is the primary focus of the novel, Sula, their racial struggle for national freedom is a secondary focus. K. Sumana, a critic on Morrison in her critical essay on Morrison has rightly pointed out:

Morrison is concerned with issues of national importance that affect blacks as Americans and with those of local importance that pertain to them as blacks. The culture in which the black man lives is American, but his status as a black prevents his full participation in white American culture. Racial issues are interwoven into the fabric of the novel throughout. (75)

One can almost conclude on observing the novel Sula that the novel picks up where the novel Bluest Eye ends. It reflects the evolutionary process that is the landmark of Morrison’s canon. Of particular interest is Morrison’s change in thematic emphasis from her first novel to her second. The novel Sula searches for self-identity, not group identity, a change that mirrors the developmental stages of
the consciousness of the African masses. Gloria Wade-gayles, a critic, observes in her work, “Sula’s is not a responsible individualism, but a social disintegrative version of individualism, that possessive individualism or sanctified rapacity which is extolled by capitalist societies.”

With her next novel Tar Baby, Morrison traces the struggle of an African American woman to find and keep her identity and her own individuality despite the efforts of her lover, who would domesticate her like the ladies of his childhood, her mother figure, who would chain her to the past, and her white, wealthy patron, who would subtly bind her to his world-view.

The novel Tar Baby traces the quest for self-identity of Jadine Childs, the protagonist. Jadine does not seem to have rebelled against the constructs of the white society in which she is enmeshed: infact, she has accepted and embraced the white culture without question. Since she was orphaned at the age of twelve, a break with her African American heritage occurred. Ondine and Sydney, the aunt and uncle who assumed responsibility for the orphan, unwittingly enlarged this gap by sending her to exclusive private schools and later to the Sorbonne. Jadine feels equipped to deal successfully with the white world: she is a part of it. It is the African American world represented by her nightmares, her disagreements with her sons and the feelings of otherness that overwhelm her in his home town of Eloë, Florida, that disturbs her.
Set in the late 1970’s, the novel Tar Baby explores the sexual, racial, familial, and social tensions associated with the individual journey to self-autonomy and self-actualization. The novel begins with Son escaping from a merchant ship to a yacht that Margaret Street and Jadine have borrowed. He hides in the Street’s home for days until Margaret Street discovers him in her closet a few evenings before Christmas. This discovery initiates the crumbling of Valerian Street’s world.

Valerian, a wealthy, retired business man, has created and ordered his own world on his Caribbean island. He controls his wife Margaret, his servants, Sydney and Ondine the natives who work for him, and even Jadine, quietly manipulating her choices. The discovery of Son, coupled with Valerian’s calm acceptance of him causes tension in Margaret, who feels Valerian is indifferent to her needs.

All tensions erupt at Christmas dinner after Valerian casually announces that he has fired Gideon and Therese for stealing apples. The climax occurs when Ondine reveals the reason for her bitterness towards Margaret: This revelation renders Valerian virtually helpless and provides redemption for the emotionally disturbed Margaret.

In the resultant numbness, Jadine and Son grew close to each other and close themselves off from the outside world for weeks. Finally, Son persuades Jadine to visit his family and his friends in Eloé. Jadine feels like an outsider.
during their stay. When the two return to Newyork, their differences escalate.
Jadine looks toward the future, wanting Son to make something of himself in the
real world. Son looks towards the past, wanting Jadine to imbibe the traits of the
women in his community who mothered him. Both want to rescue the other from
misguided world views.

The relationship ends after Son emotionally and physically assaults
Jadine. She returns to the Street’s Carribean island for a brief visit and to retrieve
her belongings. Meanwhile, Son, after realising that Jadine is more important to
him than his past flies to the Caribbean to find her. Disoriented and confused, Son
leaves the boat to join mythical blind horsemen rumoured to haunt the island.
Whether he reaches his destination or not remains a mystery.

Morrison’s novels can be said to constitute an imaginative history of
African Americans, blending historical accuracy and realism with supernatural
elements and folklore. In a 1986 interview with Christina Davis, Morrison
describes her fictional project as one that involves recovery. In Morrison’s fiction
recovery has two meanings. The term refers primarily to the reconstruction of an
insufficiently acknowledged African American past and its rich traditions in myth
and story telling.

Historical recovery, in turn, can foster healing. Restoring the presence
leads to restoring the soul by producing narratives that run counter to official
histories and traditional ways of knowing the past. For characters in her novels, however, healing never comes easily. The past may exist as something to recover from more than revisit, or the supernatural may be an insufficient antidote for real problems. Rather than creating panaceas, Morrison invites readers to mourn as well as celebrate and perhaps more importantly, to question our most fundamental notions about the way American history and culture are constructed. As Julie Buckner Armstrong observes in his work, ‘Contemporary American Women Fiction Writers’

In Morrison’s novels, the past is a trauma that characters must recover from, and they rely upon violent, but not fully successful, means of doing so. Morrison’s most poignant work, Beloved, recounts the psychological horrors of slavery that lingers in the mind long after physical freedom has been obtained (254).

*Beloved*, Toni Morrison’s Pulitzer Prize winning fifth novel, fits into the subgenre of African American literature known as the neo-slave narrative and directly deals with slavery in a fictionalized manner. In this novel Morrison combines history, folklore, and a wonderfully creative imagination to tell a story about the challenge of loving under severe oppression, and the trauma it causes.

Set in the free state of Ohio, and the slave state of Kentucky, the story is based on the real life-story of Margaret Garner, an enslaved woman who killed her
daughter rather than have her returned to slavery. Morrison came across the story while editing ‘The Black Book’ a 300 year folk history of African American experience. Modelling her protagonist, Sethe Suggs, on the real-life Margaret Garner, Morrison tried to imagine and then create the scenario by which historical and personal forces could compel an otherwise loving mother to kill her child.

_Beloved_ serves as a symbol of the psychic loss of many innocent African children who suffered from the tragic consequences of slavery. In this context, it is worth recalling the words of Barbara Schapiro when he says,

> 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. (197)

_Beloved_ moves back and forth through time, telling in flashbacks the story of the character’s slave past. Throughout the narrative, the reader learns the background of the characters and the pertinent incidents of their slavery.

Sethe once belonged to Mr. Garner, a humane master who treated his slaves well. He purchases Sethe at the age of thirteen to replace the recently freed Baby Suggs. Sethe marries Halle Suggs, Baby Suggs’s son, who fathers every one
of her four children. With the death of Mr. Garner, and the coming of his brother, the school teacher and his nephews, Sethe and the other slaves experience the full degradation and inhumanity of slavery. The School Teacher beats the male slaves and deprives them of their guns. When Sethe learns that his intentions may also include eventual selling of her children, she resolves to escape North to freedom.

While escaping, she is caught and is violated by the school teacher’s nephew who beats her brutally while she is pregnant with her fourth child. Fortunately she escapes and delivers a baby en route. Since the school teacher values Sethe’s child-bearing capabilities, he decides to capture her. Sethe, rather than allowing her children to be returned to slavery, kills Beloved and attempts to kill her other children as well. The daughter’s ghost continues to haunt Sethe, breaking up her family, driving away the community, and eventually leading Sethe to the brink of death itself. Only when the town people come together to exorcise Beloved’s ghost can Sethe, along with her sweet home friend Paul, begin her recovery process. As the novel ends, he attempts to infuse a will to live into Sethe by endeavouring to make her realise her own self-worth. Thus the novel is an accurate portrayal of the black slave women’s experience.

Morrison places before the reader the environment that created Sethe – economic slavery. This is the source and the context of Sethe’s madness and the impetus for her behaviour. Paul D is able to understand and verbalize Sethe’s dilemma by concluding that it was dangerous for a slave woman to love anything,
especially her children. Paul.D thus points out the tension created by the system of slavery and the instinct of the slave woman to protect and nurture her children. Slavery claimed ownership of all its property and ignored the slave mother’s right to determine the future of, to mould the character of, and to physically nurture her own children. Thus the novel Beloved can be said to be an attempt to understand the forces, historical and personal, that would cause Sethe to murder her daughter rather than allow her to experience the horrors of slavery.

In *Beloved* Morrison creates a complex web of quest for social freedom and psychological wholeness, because essentially almost every character goes on a quest, in short a desperate search for identity. Sethe initiates her literal journey from Kentucky to Ohio not because she desires to attain the white concept of beauty or to escape an African American community’s demand for conformity, but because what she earlier perceives as a non-threatening environment suddenly jeopardizes her children. However, after the school teacher ruptures her journey, Sethe’s quest for freedom ends. However, when Paul D and Beloved end their journey they nurture Sethe’s psychological journey of re memory. Through each character’s struggle to face the past and present, Morrison captures the complex and horrific emotional and psychological journey that these individuals endured to achieve wholeness and empowerment.

Morrison’s novels can be said to constitute an imaginative history of African Americans, blending historical accuracy and realism with supernatural
elements and folklore. As Toni Morrison is deeply concerned with and committed to African people in America, she uses each of her novels as a framework for investigating various solutions to the African’s race and gender oppression and class exploitation, of course in terms of fictional art. After proposing collective class struggle and capitalism, as a viable solution to African’s problem in America, in *Beloved*, Morrison adds a new dimension to the solution arrived at, in her next novel, *Jazz* with its thematic emphasis on the unity of women as a solution to gender oppression.

Set in 1926 Harlem, where Joe and Violet Trace have moved to escape the hardships of segregation in the south. A salesman for the Cleopatra Beauty Products Company, Joe is successful. Violet, an unlicensed beautician, cuts curls out of her kitchen for pocket money. Though their early years were hard, the couple found happiness in their love for each other. But on Lenox street in their comfortable apartment, Joe and Violet have found prosperity and lost each other. Violet no longer speaks to her husband, preferring instead the company of the birds she keeps in the front hall. In her attempts to assuage her intense desire for a child, which she keeps from Joe. Violet sleeps with a doll. Frustrated at the thundering silence of their apartment, and the cessation of their love-making, Joe conspires to find another woman. Thus, Dorcas enters their lives, and the triangle that forms leads to murder, redemption, and reconciliation.
Since the African people are connected by their history and culture, the solution to the problem of exploitation and oppression that women in particular face is unity. And the promotion of gender solidarity to the main theme in *Jazz* suggests how acute the problem of gender oppression is in the African community. As Mbalia aptly describes, in her work, “Trends and Statistics”:

> Conditions make people wild, bring out the Wild in people, make women run wild. What other topic more appropriately expresses the conditions that African people confront today. With over 60% of African families headed by women and nearly 70% of these families living in poverty: with the alarming and increasing rate of teenage pregnancy: with crack and new, deadlier chemical drugs being introduced in the African community every day, with increasing numbers of middle school youth dropping out: inadequate health care, poor nutrition, and increasing number of Africans in their thirties dying from AIDS, cancer and heart attacks (68 )

Thus Morrison succeeds brilliantly in her latest novel, *Jazz*, in arriving at the solution of gender solidarity, in terms of fictional art, for the dilemma of African women. As a committed fictional artist, she drives home to us the need for sisterhood in the African community through which communication, not silence will forge the way toward a healthy, wholesome future for all people of African descent, especially women.
Toni Morrison belongs to a group of writers in America - Maya Angelou, Toni Cade, Bambara, Paule Marshall, Alice Walker, and Gloria Naylor-for whom writing is a liberating tool, a subversive strategy and an artistic mode for self-expression. Toni Morrison explores the distortion of black reality by the dominant group for its vested interest. She refuses the hierarchical order shaped by the concepts of centre and periphery and questions the ideology on which the order is based.

It is apt to remember the words of Jaynes Gerald when he criticises Morrison’s novel Jazz, in his work, ‘ A Common Destiny: Blacks and American Society ’

Jazz examines the myriad ways in which love becomes transfigured within interpersonal relationships, effecting concrete change both within and between individuals. Through the Violet-Joe-Dorcas trio and its reconfigurations, love is posited as an abstract yet powerful force that can permit either chaos or transcendence. It re-creates, from the life of its various characters, the movements of as performance: the reader, as auditor, is witness to the virtuosic display, removed yet bound by the very process of reading. However, while the novel re-creates the rhythm and configurations of Jazz as a creative process, an on going, ever-going endeavour. Through the presence of the narrator, as self-conscious artist, what Morrison captures is the
metaphor of the talking book, the abstract and intangible process, that is, creativity becomes an active manifestation of love. (64)

One of the central concerns throughout Toni Morrison’s novels is Colonization. The first chapter attempts to show the devastating effects of Colonisation. The present research work endeavours to delve deep into an exploration of decolonized African American culture.

The second chapter throws light on and further attempts to bring to limelight the effects of Colonization on African American individuals and the community. Much focus is given on the related themes like racism, culture, and beauty - the various themes which have been interwoven in her novels.

To be black and female is to suffer from the twin disadvantages of racial discrimination and pronounced gender bias. Being black, the African women suffered from racism; being females, they were the victims of sexual atrocities at the hands of the whites and being slaves, compelled to remain poor. Thus, the black women in America were made victims of triple jeopardy—racism, sexism and classism. The third chapter focuses these issues in detail.

The fourth chapter is an attempt to analyse the gradual evolution of black consciousness. By combining political consciousness with aesthetic sensibility, Toni Morrison achieves a delicate balance. Without denouncing white society, she illustrates the demise of blacks who have adopted the corrupting influence of the
white community. While valorizing the black community and igniting both blacks and whites into political action, she wishes to elevate, through art, the beautiful face in the human condition. The concluding chapter is couched with these ideas and briefly sums up the findings. Harry Reed expresses his opinion in his work, ‘Song of Solomon and Black Cultural Nationalism’ that

as a Black Cultural Nationalist, Toni Morrison, validates black culture, and reaffirms its adaptive survival power, its creativity amidst oppression, life-affirming qualities, as well as its ancient wisdom and humanity and its capacity for survival. (50)

It is natural that Toni Morrison, with her political commitment to her people and her aesthetic responsibility to her art of fiction is sensitively concerned with race, gender and class which are the three major forms of oppression of blacks in America. Morrison’s novels document the author’s awareness and concern for the historical conditions that sparked the national struggle of African people against oppression and exploitation.

This research work is an attempt to thematically analyse the above said major forms of oppressions as seen in the select novels taken up for research, and segmenting them into various chapters to finally arrive at a conclusion.