CHAPTER-V

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The persistent quest for, and sometimes affirmation of an independent, integrated identity within a sphere that can be called one’s own has been the leitmotif in writings by Afro-Americans both past and present. This search for what James Baldwin’s hero in *Go Tell It On the Mountain*, John Grimes, calls ‘another life’, and what one recognizes as a yearning for a ‘home’ and ‘wholeness’—the two needs so essential to the human spirit and so completely denied to the blacks in America. It is like Ralph Ellison’s hero in *Invisible Man*, whose relentless effort is directed at not merely the specific but the generic, indicative of the yearning of the black community as a whole. Under the ‘double jeopardy’ of racism and sexism, black women in America have often been unrecognizable as individuals. Commenting on this, Gerda Lerner observes:

Belonging as they do to two groups, which have traditionally been treated as inferiors by American society—Blacks and women—they have been doubly invisible. Their records lie buried, unread, infrequently noticed and even more seldom interpreted (*Black Women in White America* xvii-xviii).
Denied individuality in American National mythology, the black women have been entrapped in an intricate web of misconceptions and stereotypes that defines black women in variegated roles and simultaneously, creates the monolithic 'black woman'.

A thorough analysis of fictions written by black women writers, we will find that their sources of literature goes back to times immemorial. Since sex and race have been so interrelated, it is not surprising that when black women novelist have published novels, they have necessarily reflected that relationship. Due to the impact of racism and sexism, the works of the black woman have been studied by literary critics in terms of their history and expression as black and female. From 1945 till today they have been struggling for asserting the rights of women through their literary works. Their writings reflect the accident of their birth being a woman and a black. It is not that they write about black people or for black readers but they are closest to their hearts. Their view of life guides them to observe minutely what White people, particularly men folk hardly see. Their view of the family, society, community and the world are projected through the eyes of women characters especially black. Being well aware of the impact of racism and sexism, which harass the womenfolk, irrespective of race, they open up the central part of
social contradictions and difficult situations, which cause trouble to women.

No doubt the black women writers present a variety of themes in their novels, but their main aim is to portray the plight of female characters, who are victims of capitalism, racism and sexism. The struggle of these female characters is to assert their rights and attain wholeness despite the impact of racism and sexism upon them. It is not surprising that black female writers like Alice Walker, Nella Larsen, Zora Neale Huaston, Redmond Fauset and Toni Morrison have necessarily reflected that relationship.

Black women suffer heavily at the hands of both black and white men in Alice Walker’s novels. Some of our women characters like Mem and Margarate become victims of such cruel physical and mental torture by males. They perish in the end of the novel. Thus Alice Walker makes an attempt to show through her characters that female submission is destined to be self-destructive. She portrays violence in her novels to explore and illustrate the degree of despair, which is due to the unfulfilled longings and aspirations of her women characters. In her novel, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* (1976), Walker makes an attempt to portray before us the negative aspects of the sharecropping system, a system which puts the tenant farmers into a feeling of despair and motivates them to strike out at their near and
close ones, an useless attempt of violent behavior directed against the owner of the land. The illegal practices followed in the sharecropping system becomes the reason for extreme suffering for the black families, which cause them to feel estranged from their work. In *Meridian* (1979), Walker depicts how the heroine of the novel, Meridian undergoes a physical and mental conflict in her effort to cope with the complex allegiances required of any person to be involved in revolutionary movement. The life of the people involved in the civil rights movement of the sixties and the political violence there upon have been beautifully dealt with by Walker in this novel. Walker has pointed out how the impact of the social conditions like lack of understanding on the part of their mother and some of her peers has made the heroine of the novel suffer a lot.

When Meridian's paralysis and numbness moves her to transcendental bliss, she is unable to make physical use of her body. It is her ability to put herself back into her own body proves her as a winner. As a mother, wife, lover, daughter and friend, she undergoes her sufferings and finds her traditional roles such a confined and disappointed one that she gives up all earthly pleasures and accepts the great freedom of an ascetic life. At the time of her parting when Truman tells her, "I hate to think of you always alone" (*Meridian* 220), her reply proves her spiritual strength: "But that is my value... Besides, all the people
who are as alone as I am will one day gather at the river. We will watch the evening sun go down. And in the darkness may be we will know the truth” (220). It is her relationship with the people and society that makes her a winning woman. She is not disconnected from but rather connected with the people and the social process in her decision to work for the liberation of the people. Walker’s *The Color Purple* (1982), a book with black lesbian theme achieved massive critical acclaim, became a best seller, was made into a major Hollywood film, in a world which is still not prepared to accept such relationship. The black woman has her own experiences of exploitations—political, racial, sexual, and emotional; she must openly find them mirrored in literature so as to enable her to be recognized in her own person, and realize that there is nothing shameful or abnormal in these experiences. Interestingly, Alice Walker has not only depicted lesbianism but she also considers it a normal and essential bond for black women. The novel shows Walker’s portrayal of Celie’s experiences of oppression by a male dominated society, her sexual abuse by her father and husband and how she evolves from submission and acceptance of this exploitation to gradual realization of her own feelings towards her pleasure and sense of fulfillment both physical and emotional, thereby attaining total freedom and emotional emancipation.
From the beginning of the novel, Walker unveils a world of oppression and abuse of the black girls and women in a world where men do not hesitate at all in maltreating women. A fourteen-year old Celie describes in a simple language her first experience of sexism, her father sexually exploiting her. Celie’s world is the world of unspoken and unspeakable suffering, dark and dismal with no hope of colours; of spring, of sunshine. She is considered ugly and dumb but useful for housekeeping and childcaring. Celie’s experience of the world at a young age is of fear, loneliness, insecurity and despair. However, she is well aware of the evil designs of her father and becomes protective of her younger sister Nettie. She wants to save her from an unpleasant relationship. She even offers herself like a sacrificial lamb to become the wife of Mr. Albert. Walker here shows the two aspects of Celie’s character—the outer, considered dull, ugly and passive which accepts the dismal world of reality, reconciling with the role-model destined for her in life, and the inner which shows her shrewd comprehension of her plight and her strength to protect Nettie from evil experiences of life. The device of letter writing and diary writing addressed to god reveals the superb skill of novelist in portraying the true self of Celie. Celie addresses her letter, “Dear God, dear stars, dear trees, dear sky, dear peoples. Dear every thing, Dear God” (The Color Purple 279). She writes to God early in the novel as
a 'white haired old gentleman' because she considers him responsible
to some extent for her plight. Finally, she becomes disillusioned with
God thinking that God does not realize her pain and suffering. So she
starts writing to her sister though her letters don’t reach Nettie.
However, it gives her strength to think that at least there is someone
who loves her. She sees no way out of her entrapment except in
recording her experiences. All she knows is to accept the limited and
limiting world of housekeeping and childcaring: “But I don’t know
how to fight. All I know how to do is stay alive” (The Color Purple
17).
Celie has never stepped out of the male-dominated world of the black
community and has no idea of the possibility of a free and fair world
out side. It is Shug who initiates her to the sexual pleasures and draws
her out of the drudgery of routine work and passivity of being beaten
and makes her realize that her body is her own and no one can abuse
it. It is Shug who explains to Celie her right to please herself. It is
Celie’s relationship with Shug that transcends her dislike for her
ownself into her love for her own body, and her ugliness into beauty.
Walker here asserts the affirmation of life forces and physical
fulfil ment, which makes living meaningful. Curiously and satirically
She depicts Celie as a daring woman who never misses any
opportunity to express her dislike for Mr. Albert. Walker points out
that the suffering of women is due to their dependence on men for everything. Once they tryst with woman-to-woman relationship, they no longer need men. The fact that Celie becomes a professional seamstress and designs pants is symbolic of her economic power and moves her up on the higher ladder of class hierarchy. Walker also shows the racial domination of the white man in her portrayal of Sofia and her defiance of the white domination. She prefers going to jail to become a maidservant of the white mayor’s wife. She is stubborn with a will of her own and knows what she wants from life. Celie’s sister Nettle journeys through life on her own. Her journey to Africa matures her into a considerate and enlightened woman.

When all these women come together, they realize that they have nothing to lose except their poverty and slavery. We find towards the later part of the novel that all the three men are frightened of these women explaining their plan for the future in which men have no place at all. They no longer care for the societal approval nor do they need men to provide for them. They can now make their own life not only comfortably possible but also pleasantly enjoyable. Independent of their men, their life takes on a new meaning. With easy and understanding, Celie achieves her liberation, creating all around her a congenial world where men also change for the better and attain total freedom. Her journey is a evolutionary journey moving from
victimization to consciousness of her plight, escaping from the restrictive shabby kind of existence to awareness of new relationship, breaking away from the defined sex-role of the oppressive society to the fresh and free niche in a world of her own.

Nella Larsen in her writings shows her disgust at the Americans who think that blacks must go through all the suffering, pain and frustration because they are black in colour. This feeling or attitude towards the white Americans is shown through her protagonists who have to bear with all these bitter experiences.

In the novel *Quicksand*, Larsen narrates the sufferings of her black protagonist who seeks self-awareness but never tries openly to show her unwillingness to have any connection with the blacks. Miscegenation in the life of her black heroine brings about her disintegration. But Larsen is of the opinion that racialism and mixed ancestry are not the causes of Helga’s tragic life. Her tragedy stems from her indecisiveness, her uncertainty, which seems to have sprung up from her frustrated love or from her pondering over a deserted father, or from her strong sexual desire. She is raunchy. The mistakes she commits in considering sexual urges more important than other possibilities makes her an isolated one and incapable of maintaining her balance in an inhospitable social ambience. If in *Quicksand*, Helga’s problem is her failure to have self-validation in this world
rather than the colour of her skin, in passing Clare, the black heroine makes herself isolated from her community and like Jadine in *Tar Baby* tries to search for a better life in the white world. In Larsen’s novels all her characters either pass into the white world or find their identities in the black world by developing an association with it. Larsen’s heroines who are faced with the problem of asserting themselves suffer a lot. In Larsen’s view the important thing in this world is not ‘happiness’ but ‘survival’.

In Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), we find the novelist’s attempt to depict the struggle of her heroine to achieve emotional fulfilment among her people. While Fauset and Larsen do not give much independence to their female protagonist, Hurston allows personal freedom to her black protagonist who despite the obstruction of the society is able to achieve her self-realization by the force of her own will and spirit. Like Fauset and Larsen, Hurston too deals with the dilemma of black woman but Hurston’s heroine seeks her self-awareness within the black community, not being isolated from it. Hurston’s heroines become the models from which the black women of Alice Walker and Toni Morrison are evolved. Thus, Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is a forerunner of the novels of Seventies and Eighties. Janie stark of Hurston is capable of making a rebellion against the existing system and makes the decision
of moving outside of both black and white images whereas Helga in Quicksand comes nearer to rebellion but lacks the strength and determination to sever ties with her race and people.

In *Plum Bun* (1929) and *The Chinaberry Tree* (1931), Fauset evinces a keen awareness of the negative image of black women which predominated in the minds of white Americans. She presents the plight of her heroines in such a way that it weakens the consciousness of the white people to the restrictions that are inflicted upon black women. She also establishes 'positive' images of black women fighting for their existence in the black society. Through her heroine in *Chinaberry Tree*, she dexterously delineates a new image of black women. Though Fauset did not achieve what she had dreamt to attain in portraying her black women, still she has presented the black community, particularly black womanhood, in a refined way despite the opposition from all corners. She has rectified and polished the distorted stereotyped images of black women. Her black heroines as presented in her works are capable of attaining heights of refinement.

Toni Morrison like Walker, has a broad outlook on life and is of the opinion that a person has to transcend his narrow, nationalistic, divisive, binary vision of life and has to identify his/her self with the universal self in order to achieve success in the quest for authentic self-discovery. Her black heroines suffer mainly because of their
distorted apprehension of beauty and ensuing alienation from the self as well as the society.

In *The Bluest Eye* (1970), Morrison explores the reasons for Pecola’s sense of alienation in the historical, social and cultural functions of the society, which causes and perpetuates such madness in black psyche. Pecola, an eleven years old girl lacks awareness and sensible thinking necessary for the formation of self: Children’s selves are normally fragmented and self-formation demands a certain level of maturation. The distant mother-daughter relationship, frequent fights at home and lack of friends at school and in the neighbourhood make Pecola dream of blue eyes. Her craving for blue eyes is imposed on her as the means to love and happiness. But in reality, her desire for beauty makes her estranged further and further away from her real self: She seeks for an authentic selfhood and self-identity in a place, most unlikely to be found. She is incapable of separating fact from fiction and instead of facing the problems she attempts to fly away from it. She does not possess either the physical characteristics necessary for happiness or the strength to oppose the images that attacked her soul and spirit. The ugliness and futility of the lifestyle of the Breedloves, the total absence of love and care among the family members and without proper outlet for her swelling desire, her ego blocks off and defensively rejects reality, leading to her psychic turmoil and tension.
Her aim is tragic since in her insanity she escapes from her miserable and unrequited love in her life convinced into the delusion that she has the bluest eyes. Her sad fate unfolds the hidden tragedy in the lives of all the black women in the novel.

Her obsession for blue eyes leads her to a state of alienation from self and society. Her vulnerable character in the novel makes it difficult for her to see the reality of existence and instead of looking for inward beauty, she tries to see outward beauty. In terms of white standard and culture she wants to be white. Her desire to be a follower of white ideas and culture makes her suffer. It disturbs her and distorts her abilities to perceive reality. Finally the rape of Pecola by her father leads to her rejection by the society. Claudia, Pecola’s friend blames the American white society and not Pecola the victim for this. Unlike Breedloves, the worshippers of dominant white ideology and white culture, the Mac Teer girls survive because they have been taught to cherish black values and culture.

Sula in Morrison’s *Sula*, tries to establish her supremacy by not giving any importance to notions such as marriage, customs, traditions and culture. She prefers to live by her own standards and the so called patriarchal hegemony or dominant ideology imposed by the whites and internalized by her community do not affect her. The alienation from the society and the urge to create herself becomes the cause of
Sula’s rebellion against the set of norms ascribed to women in a black community. Sula’s narcissism isolated her from self and society. Narcissism is a healthy desire to a certain extent but it develops into a disorder when it crosses all the limits. Her desire to live a liberated life isolates her from the community. She is incapable of realizing the dialectical relationship between the collective and individual interest. The futile life in cities makes her aware of her loneliness and at the age of twenty seven years, her knowledge of herself as a woman is determined by her attitude towards sex. Morrison describes her experience about city life: “All those cities held the same people, sweating the same sweat... They taught her nothing but love tricks, shared nothing but worry, and gave nothing but money” (121). For her sex becomes a means of self-knowledge rather than her intimacy with a man and she chooses to live an experimental life. Her return to Medallion is announced by a ‘plague of robbins’, which shows that she is pictured as a symbol of evil as in old folk tales. Her resolution to be free of all bonds of attachment and her incapacity to understand the value of human relationships makes her betray her family, friends, neighbours and herself. She becomes blind to life and deaf to human emotions in her quest for the self and ranks the particular individualism over and above everything else. Being a complete rebel, she lives by the dictates of her mind and breaks up the marriage of her
best friend by luring Jude away from her, watches her mother burnt to
death and keeps her grandmother in a nursing home. The belief of the
community that, “She went to bed with men as frequently as she
could” (122) becomes the main reason for the black community
turning against her and Sula is scorned for disrespecting the norms of
the society. If Pecola herself is responsible for her own insanity,
Sula’s alienated self ends in a tragic death. However, her death speaks
of her success in uniting people of her community.

In *Song of Solomon*, Morrison’s attention is shifted from male to
female and though the emergent Afro-American woman is a major
concern in her novels, here Morrison reveals how racism and white
cultural hegemony create hurdles for a black man in the path of his
dream. Even if he succeeds in realizing his dream, ultimately the
impact of white culture and racism dehumanizes and degenerates him.
Frequently, Morrison depicts her black male as victims of racial
humiliation. The knowledge that he is never equal with the white
males makes him direct his sense of importance, castration and
dehumanization to their women: “Black men who are themselves
victims of oppression victimize black women with what like the same
oppression” (W.E.B. Dubois 1969: 152). *The Song of Solomon* is a
blackman’s quest for home and wholeness. It is the journey of a
blackman’s life, which begins in alienation, passes through various
levels of quest and eventually results in a fruitful self-realization. To achieve this self-realization, he must go through all facets of truth that makes his discovery possible. To pass from innocence to self-consciousness, he has to make a journey that forces him to wrestle with the significance of the past, makes him realize the meaning of the heritage and the responsibility that come with the recognition of his human obligations. The death of Macon Dead 1 caused by the white family and the subsequent preservations of his dead body, which is an act of racial oppression and disharmony is the cause of Milkman’s quest. His quest is the long saga of a black going back to a hundred of years to know the truth about his family’s past.

Milkman has to pass through a painful process of individualization, which enables him to see the materialistic middle-class values. Macon Dead’s household is certainly a model of black capitalism. His greediness and acquisitiveness are his predominant traits and his desire to further himself totally in tune with the ethos of the technologically advanced capitalist culture makes him the most hated black man in the town. His wife Ruth is psychologically damaged and incomplete. Made to face daily a husband whose jealousy and hatred keeps her awkward with fear, Ruth is devoted and loyal to her father when alive and to his memory after his death. Macon hates her because he suspects her suffering from Oedipus complex towards her
father. Alienated by her husband Ruth's life becomes of uneven waste, interrupted by the birth of her son whom she tries to keep a baby as long as possible. Like a traditional black woman she is a vulnerable character in the novel, she relies first on her father and the doctor had grown tired of her “steady beam of love” (23) and is relieved when Macon joins them. When Macon’s jealousy and hatred keeps her at a distance, she clings to her son, Milkman. If Ruth is a society lady Pilate is totally outside society. Unlike Ruth, she is not at all a dependant and all the other characters in the novel depend on her. Her house is outside of the town, which shows that she is alienated from the society. Unlike Ruth’s house, Pilate’s house is free of men; it is full of peace and love. It is Pilate who saves Ruth from Macon’s anger. It is she who is responsible for Milkman’s birth because she helps Ruth to get pregnant. All the characters including Ruth, Reba, Hagar and even Milkman depended on her. She is also dialectically related to Milkman’s developing class-consciousness. She stands as a glaring example of a black woman asserting her rights in a society, which victimize black women racially and sexually.

In *Tar Baby*, Jadine like Sula is a pariah figure who believes standard norms and values. It is the story of two alienated individuals in search
sensual Son representing the black culture, which makes them alienated from each other. The hostility that is generated in their confrontation is an ironical racial tension. As they find it difficult to resolve their cultural differences, their relationship becomes violent. Jadine being devoted to the white world can never accept the non-material simple lifestyle of Son and Son too can never accept the materialistic lifestyle of Jadine. In the beginning Son attempts to ‘insert’ a culturally conscious dream into Jadine but to the last we find that it becomes almost impossible for Son to take her to a new state of awareness in regard to African people. It is not only Son but also others try to oppose her independent nature. Ondine, her aunt tries to advise her in her own way. But Jadine has an unfeeling attitude towards Ondine as Peter Erikson articulating and holding to a new definition of black female identity is made to depend heavily on an unfeeling attitude towards the ‘parents’ who raised her (Images of Nurturance in Tar Baby 229). She reacts to the emotions of others as she tells Ondine, “You want me to pay you back. You worked for me and put up with me. Now its my turn to do it for you, that’s all you’re saying” (242). When Ondine tells her about what a woman is, Jadine who wants ‘freedom’ stands apart from her tradition. Her escape from the swamp is nothing but her struggle to escape from black ideas and culture. The women were delighted to see her thinking a runaway
child had been restored to them. Hence, they, “wondered at the girl’s desperate struggle down below to be free, to be something other than they were” (Tar Baby 184). Her act of discarding the swamp is nothing but doing away with her blackness and making a desperate attempt to be white, to be fair.

In Beloved, the crisis of the novel is Sethe’s murder of her own baby daughter to save her from psychic death. This ‘brutal’ act of Sethe alienates her from the society and she is condemned by the black community for her action. The central problem of the novel is to recognize and claim one’s own subjectivity and Morrison shows that it cannot be achieved independently. The social milieu plays a vital role in moulding one’s subjectivity. Sethe has been denied the narrative of her being, the subjectivity and continuity of inner experience that should be everyone’s birthright. Beloved’s sorrow is a more extreme version of the same sorrow experienced by all the black characters in a racist society. Beloved’s struggle is Sethe’s struggle; it is also Denver’s, Paul D’s, and Baby Sugg’s.

Beloved depicts the deep psychic reverberations of living in a culture in which domination and objectification of the self have been
freedom without first experiencing its own agency or, in Sethe’s word claiming ownership of itself. The intense hunger, the fantasized fear of either being swallowed or exploding, can tyrannize one’s life despite being free from the external bands of oppression. *Beloved* teaches us that the free, autonomous self, is an inherently social self, rooted in relationship and dependent at its core on the vital bond of mutual recognition.

If *Beloved* projects the devastating and destructive effects of racism on the lives of black people, in *Jazz* (1992) Morrison projects equally the deadly consequences of the dominant ideology of racism and white cultural hegemony on the life of the black people. The destructive impact of racism, sexual exploitation and loss of familial bondage have resulted in making almost all the characters orphans and crazy. Violet’s mother commits suicide, which makes Violet feel estranged. Joe’s mother is an insane woman and dies too, which makes Joe an isolated one. Being orphans Joe, Violet and Dorcas are alienated from their family and community without having any one to form their identity. Joe kills Dorcas because he gets scared and “did not know how to love anybody” (213). Black people who have been orphaned and have been cut off from their original African roots and have been forced to internalize white cultural values find themselves like liberated but one’s caged parrots whose wings have grown stiff.
In almost all the novels, Morrison portrays the inadequacy of love in familial relationships. It is the bond of love and affection in a family that helps its members to achieve wholeness. In the beginning, there was mutual recognition of love and understanding between a man and a woman in Africa. But gradually things begin to take a different shape and there is a lack of love and care among the family members. The lack of understanding between the man and the woman focuses on the disorderliness of the family system in black life. It transforms the material base of the society. Women are considered inferior to men and this ugliness and futile lifestyle of the family affects all black women characters in Morrison's novels.

The atmosphere at home made Pecola, Sula, and Jadine suffer from alienation. The atmosphere of warfare at home forces Pecola to seek solace in daydreaming and fantasizing. Instead of facing the problem she tries to escape from it and is ultimately estranged from the family as well as the society. Never having experienced maternal love, Sula is unaware of an emotional relationship between a man and a woman. She considered the sexual art not an act of love, but as a means of physical release. Her alienation from her family paves the means for her rebellion against the society. But unfortunately she is unable to identify her oppression with the oppression of the entire community. Hence her alienation from family and community. Like Sula, Jadine is
considered as a pariah and her attempts to liberate herself from all the restrictions of the family, isolates herself from others.

Besides the picturisation of women as beautiful, homely and sacred, there are three other groups of women. Sula, Eva, Ondine and Helen belong to the first group. These women are laborious and capable of earning for themselves. Jadine and Pilate belong to the second group. They are educated middle class people with an eagerness to get rid of the restrictions circumscriptions of the society. The third group of women are carefree women like Sula and Hannah enjoying their life and singing the song of life at the end of their journey of life.

Morrison’s writing includes in its ambit the horrors of slavery, memories of painful experiences and their effect on the psyche of Blacks—male and female. Each of her novels, from *The Bluest Eye* (1970) to *Jazz* (1992), is an expression of the suppressed and stifled feelings of pain and bitter experience. The theme of the pain of being black is predominant in *The Bluest Eye* where the little girl, Pecola, yearns for the white standard of beauty and in the end becomes a victim of incest. Sexism is dealt with in *Beloved* (1987), where Sethe becomes a victim of sexual exploitation by the white slave masters. The horrors of slavery is evident in *Beloved* where Sethe, an escaped slave, on confronting the white slave masters, kills her child, rather than passing her into their cruel hands. The theme of quest for identity
is examined in *Song of Solomon* where Milkman’s journey to find gold ends up in finding the story of his ancestors—of his grandfather Solomon who had escaped the bonds of slavery. Sula’s journey in *Sula* is again one of quest for the self. Sula’s journey in *Sula* is again one of quest for the self. As in Alice Walker’s *Meridian*, her journey ends in song. Sula is the child of Eva and Hannah, whose lives, though clearly shaped by race, are more decidedly shaped by sex. It is the story of a black woman who will not be restricted to narrow definitions of themselves as women. She is liberated and hardly bothered with moral precision and circumspection. She has sexual union with unlimited people. She is free. She knows no alienation for she is imbued with more than her share of funkiness. She asserts her ownself by cutting the tip of her finger and allowing her blood to flow into the corners of the slate uninterrupted. She was very conscious of her independence and freedom. She prized and asserted most of all ‘her life’.

Jadine in *Tar Baby* chooses a life of freedom, extricating herself from the black community. Love takes a violent form of expression in *Jazz* when Joe kills his lover Dorcas and in *Beloved*, Sethe kills to save. Thus, all women characters in Morrison novels suffer from the pangs of alienation and desperately fight for genuine womanhood. However, this womanhood has different meanings for different
characters. For Pecola it means being loved, for Sula and Jadine, it means fulfilment of self, for Pilate it is a self-identity, for Sethe it is freedom from slavery and for Violet it means to kill her violent self. A variety of black women’s painful experiences have been portrayed in Morrison’s novels. No doubt, they become the target of the community’s condemnation and sympathy. Perhaps Morrison seems to suggest that this is the fate of those who have lost their ideas and culture and have forgotten to use them. All of them are victimized by the society and are unable to find a place within the community. Pecola becomes insane, Sula becomes a pariah figure, Sethe is held responsible for committing infanticide. Jadine too, like Sula, is treated as a pariah figure in the society, and Violet is disillusioned with life by her insatiable hunger for love.

Morrison characters defy the assumption that a woman should be the ‘tuck and hem of a man’s garment. Fighting tooth and nail against the fragmentation of their selves by the ‘double jeopardy’ of race and sex, they search for and achieve a ‘wholeness’, and a ‘home’ for themselves and metaphorically for their community. The novels of Morrison belong to the tradition of the ‘Bildungsroman’ for they chronicle the various experiences the heroines undergo in an effort to find their identities or their own moral centers and develop a
wholeness of being. Jerome Buckley lists the principal elements of the
'Bildungsroman':

... childhood, the conflict of generations, provinciality, the larger society, self-education, ordeal by love, the search for a vocation and a working philosophy... (The Bildungsroman 18).

However, all Morrison's novels end with a positive note. Pecola's need for the perfect ten images propels her towards insanity but makes her free from torture. Sula, the 'salt taster' becomes a social outcast but finally finds peace in death. All these anguished characters are able to save themselves from an ogre-like society. Sethe is claimed by Paul D, Denver and her community and is able to reclaim her wholeness. Jadine, in spite of her painful memory of Son, survives, and is successful in life. Violet, too, learns to establish a communication with Joe. Hence the Morrison characters' odyssey is an ordeal from negation to affirmation, from self-effacement to self-confidence and from self-alienation to self-assertion.
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