Chapter-II
Toni Morrison’s Select Fiction

2.1 Toni Morrison-A Literary Survey

Toni Morrison both as a woman and writer stands as an epitome of success and inspiration. In spite of having an early dream of becoming a dancer she proved herself to be the best in the field of writing. It was her destiny that took her to opt for writing not only as pleasure activity but also out of necessity. She realized her inherent art of writing when she started writing her first novel *The Bluest Eye* during her thirties. She poured her imagination into her story and the characters took life through it. She became aware of her creative act. She discovered that writing “was a way of knowing, a way of thinking” that she found it “really necessary” (Bakerman 56). With her creative art of writing and enthusiasm Morrison started writing as a hobby and later it became her part of life. She never looked back in producing her fantastic writings. Writing gave her the honour of owing a crown of the Nobel Prize for literature in 1993. She stood as the first black woman and the eighth woman in the world winning this award. The honour not only brought her a personal triumph but also the recognition of the Afro-American fiction and the validity for black woman’s voice.

It is said that ‘Home is the first school”. It is home that shapes one’s personality as well as life. This again proved right in the life of Morrison. It is her home and her family that paved strong roots by that she could later build an emancipated life. Her commitment has inspired most of her fellow beings. Morrison was born on February 18, 1931 as a second of four children by her parents George Wofford and Ramah Wofford. When she was born, her parents named her Chloe Anthony Wofford. Her birth place was in the windy little steel-mill town Lorain, Ohio. Her father George was a shipyard welder from Georgia. Her mother Ramah was from Alabama. Morrison’s parents and their ideologies
towards racial situation are responsible for her living as a successful human being. “Her father had a pessimistic outlook and by contrast her mother had optimistic views about racial situations in America” (Carmean 4). Her father though believed that black people are superior to white people, he had negative views that no man could get developed in America. On the other hand, her mother had a strong faith that individual efforts could definitely change the future of the blacks in America. This split between pessimism and optimism had reflected from her maternal grandparents. Likewise the same views were passed on to Morrison. Like her father she believes that “racist is a one who feels his race is superior to another race. All black people were better than all white people because their position was moral one” (David 8).

Morrison’s family ambiance was full of black culture. That influenced and encouraged Morrison’s imagination to grow. Folk music suffused the house as her mother’s family had good musicians. Her grandmother was a musician, her grandfather was a violinist and even her mother was a famous violist. Her family had the richness of black culture, folklore and myths. Morrison’s grandmother wrote and stored her dream in a book. The awesome gift of storytelling was there with her parents. The very art of storytelling impressed their children by throwing lighter mood on their mind about their language, culture and family history. Morrison even enjoyed the thrilling scary ghost stories. As a result when she finally started writing, her rich family heritage played an inspiring role in her fiction. She feels proud to hail from the Wofford family.

Having with such a rich family background Morrison entered the Lorain High School. She proved herself an excellent student during her school days. Lorain had some fantasy of the concept of American melting pot which was completely devoid of racism because the blacks in Lorain could live as the neighbours of white people. Morrison was doubly fortunate of not facing the heat
of cruel racism and of being lucky to get an education with white students. Morrison shares her experience:

I went to school with white children – they were my friends. There was no awe, no fear. Only later, when things got . . . sexual . . . did I see how clear the lines really were. But I was in first grade nobody thought I was inferior. I was the only black in the class and the only child who could read! (David 9).

Morrison maintained her studies throughout her school years and her academic accomplishment grew. Lorain high school produced a graduate Morrison with honours in 1949. Her determination, especially her love for literature took her to step into a college. In her family, she was the second who had attended a college. She applied to Howard University, one of the nation’s most prestigious black colleges. Howard University, founded in 1869 by a herd of white clergymen, started a school for black preachers and evolved into one of the best colleges in the country as “The Capstone of Negro Education”. It was at Howard, Chloe changed her name to Toni (from the father’s name An’thony’). She chose English as her major subject. She received her B. A. in 1953. After that she went on to Cornell University for post graduation. There she graduated in M. A. in 1955, having written a thesis which explored the theme of suicide in William Faulkner and Virginia Woolf’s works.

It was after Cornell University Morrison chose teaching as her profession at Texas Southern University in Houston. It was the unpredictable young Morrison first began to think about black culture in more than personal terms. She began to see it as a subject for formal study, as an academic discipline. In 1957 she got an opportunity to return to Howard and there she worked as an instructor in English and Humanities and had a variety of professional responsibilities.

While working in Howard Chloe Wofford met and fell in love with Harold Morrison, a young architect from Jamaica. They got married in 1958 and their son
Harold Ford was born in 1961. Morrison continued to teach at Howard after the birth of her son. Though her profession kept her busy, the enthusiastic Morrison felt somehow unfulfilled. So she joined a group of writers and poets who held monthly meetings. All participants were encouraged to share their latest writings. For a while, Morrison could bring herself only to share some items she had produced in high school. Finally, though she found herself without her old material she quickly wrote a story about a little black girl’s wish for blue eyes. She knew this story would eventually serve as the germ of her first novel and that this was actually the beginning of her writing career.

Morrison’s married life was blooming by carrying a second child in womb. She resigned her profession in the English Department of Howard University and she went on a trip to Europe with her husband. The trip completely changed her life. Her married life ended and the couples got divorced in 1965. She was then 34 years old, depressed, single mother, confused but still guided by her inner strength. She returned to her parent’s home in Lorain, Ohio for the birth of her second baby. From there she went to Syracuse, New York, where she was taken as an editor at I. W. Singer Publishing House, a subsidiary of Random House. Within two years Morrison’s excellence in work made the press to move her from editing text books to editing trade books and by 1967 she became a senior editor at Random House in New York City. She helped and encouraged the careers of today’s most promising writers like Toni Cade Bambara and Gayl Jones. “Toni has done more to encourage and publish other black writers than anyone I know” (David 14). As an editor she worked all the day. Although she lived in Syracuse for two years, she avoided making any friends. The reason she gave was that she was hoping to be transferred to Random House. As a divorced single mother having sole responsibility of raising two children along with maintaining her profession above all having no friends and no social life Morrison met with utter state of depression.
At this state of mind she picked up pen and began to write a story thinking that writing might help her to escape from depression. In conversation with Jake Bakerman, Morrison shared her journey “I never planned to be a writer. I was in a place where there was nobody I could talk to and have real conversation with. And I think I was also very unhappy. So I wrote then, for that reason” (David 13). Each night after her family and professional responsibilities, Morrison sometimes would go back to her childhood at Ohio and often give wing for her imagination and thus she gave a life for her writing, a story of a young black girl by name Pecola Breedlove who wished to have the ‘bluest eyes’. She herself said that she did not really care if the story was published or not. She certainly faced the rejection from many publishers but finally Publishing House by Holt, Rinehart and Winston published in 1970. The story came out in the form of a novel entitling The Bluest Eye.

Morrison adopted writing as a habit. Within three years her second novel Sula got published in 1973. It got favourable reviews and won the National Book Award. Morrison had another credit in the very next year by editing the most acclaimed anthology The Black Book at Random House in 1974. The Black Book is a ‘scrapbook’ compiling newspaper clippings, photos, patents recipes and advertisements etc. The book was the saga of 300 years of Afro-American life. Morrison says The Black Book reminds us of the stories of black achievement that her parents had told her when she was growing up in Ohio. Among many scrapes Morrison found the story of Margaret Garner, an escaped slave woman who cuts the throats of her children in 1850 instead of seeing them as enslaved. This story of Margaret Garner influenced her to write the fifth novel Beloved. Even Morrison has produced a libretto based upon this work.

Soon after the publication of Sula, Morrison was facing a critical situation economically and emotionally. One side her elder son was entering into manhood
and on another side she lost her father. Morrison invited another responsibility as a lecturer at Yale University, New York. Since she was influenced more by the slave narratives and black history, she decided to write her third novel on black men. So she published *Song of Solomon* in 1977. In 1978 she resigned her teaching profession as the novel made her economically much secure. It was accepted both by the public and the critics. *Song of Solomon* was the first novel by a black writer to become a Book-of-the-Month Club selection since Richard Wright’s *Native Son* in 1940. *Song of Solomon* became a paperback bestseller with 570,000 copies in print. Morrison received National Book Critic Award. She was acclaimed by the critics as a literary giant and President Jimmy Carter appointed her to the National Council for Arts.

With the success Morrison was invited for many speeches and lectures at colleges and universities. She published her fourth novel *Tar Baby* in 1981. She could never look back. It provided her wider attention than earlier and became the best seller. Morrison finally achieved the ultimate success in America. She is no lesser than a ‘Superwoman’ (David 21). *Newsweek Magazine* celebrated her richness of fiction by publishing the cover page of hers. Nearly after 20 years of her service as an editor, Morrison resigned editorship at Random House in 1983. In 1984 she accepted an offer by the State University of New York at Albany as the Albert Schweitzer Professor of Humanities. There at Albany, she wrote her first play *Dreaming Emmet*, a story of a teenager who is victimized by racism. It was published in 1955.

Morrison’s fifth novel was the milestone of her writing career. “The real and heart-rending story of Margaret Garner, an escaped slave of Kentucky, which she had found during the research of *The Black Book*, had inspired Morrison to write her fifth novel” (David 111). She named the novel as *Beloved*. With lots of contradictions, *Beloved* won the Pulitzer Award on March 31, 1988. By now at the
age of fifty-seven she had become one of the leading writers of America. In 1989 she was the first Afro-American lady to be appointed at the Robert F. Goheen Professor in the Council of Humanities at an Ivy League University, Princeton.

Morrison’s sixth novel *Jazz* and an anthology of essays *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and Literary Imagination* got published in 1992. Since *Beloved* had already created the best impression, critics found *Jazz* with little disappointment. Both the literary projects received responses. It is true that some of the good reviews overlapped the bad ones. At the end of 1992 Morrison wrote and edited an introduction to a collection of essays entitled *Race-ing Justice, En-gendering Power: Essays on Anita Hill, Clarence Thomas and the Construction of Social Reality*.

In 1993 Morrison did a TV interview on ‘Charlie Rose Show’, a nationally released TV show. Charlie Rose asked her about her work at Princeton, Morrison replied: “If you study the culture and art of Afro-Americans, you are not studying a regional or minor culture”. Deservingly on October 7, 1993 Morrison was announced as the winner of 1993 Nobel Prize for Literature by the Nobel Committee of Swedish Academy. She has the credit of being the eighth woman and the first Afro-American woman to win the Nobel Prize for Literature. Her service as a Professor of Humanities at Princeton rewarded her with the National Humanities Medal in 2000.

On 25th December 1993, within two weeks she received the Nobel Prize her house caught fire and burnt into ashes. Even she was hurt and her original scripts were destroyed. She was guided by the indomitable courage and inner strength to live which was gifted by her family. In such a condition she took up another project to write her seventh novel *Paradise*, which got published in 1998. Along with her second son Slade Morrison she published a series of children’s books *The Big Box* and *The Book of Mean People* in 1999 and 2002 respectively. Morrison’s
journey of writing novels was spontaneous. She published her eighth novel Love in 2003. In spite of receiving several negative reviews Morrison defends it as the best novel that she has ever written. She retired from Princeton in 2006. She had served there for seventeen years. Morrison did not take retirement from her creative writing. She published her ninth novel Mercy in 2008. Morrison’s recent novels are Home and God Help the Child in 2012 and 2015 respectively. Both the novels received mixed reviews. Morrison also has the Presidential Medal of Freedom to her credit awarded to her in 2012.

Morrison’s novels are written with various perspectives that have the concern for her black people. Her achievements are not just restricted to her own emancipation but also honest attempts to portray the complete and successful image of black woman who can prove herself that she is no more ghettoized in America. Morrison, 84 years old is at present comfortably sitting as one of the legendary writers of American literature. If there is anyone who can beat her achievements it is Morrison herself by her forth-coming literary contributions.

2.2 Toni Morrison’s Fiction

I am not like James Joyce; I am not like Thomas Hardy; I am not like Faulkner. I am not like in that sense . . . My effort is to be like something that has probably only been fully expressed in [black] music . . . Writing novels is a way to encompass this – this something.

Toni Morrison (Macky 426)

This ‘something’ that Morrison talks about is the aspect of being marginalized and the predicament of black people through various elements of black music (culture) like spirituals, blues and jazz. Unlike other Afro-American writers, she writes not for the white readers rather for her black people. The themes that she deals with in her novels include racism, classism, sexism, black woman,
black community, black life and black culture. She writes her works to be political rather than merely of art. Her concern for the black community is not only broader but also universal. Her novels demonstrate the universality of black exploitation.

Denard Carolyn writes,

Morrison’s concern for the issues of black woman occupies the central stage of her novels. Denard states, “For black women, their concern with feminism is usually more group-centered than self-centered, more cultural than political. As a result, they tend to be concerned more with the particular female culture values of their own ethnic group rather than with those of women in general. They advocate what may be called ethnic cultural feminism” (Carolyn 171).

As a ‘black’ and as a ‘woman’ Morrison has a close relationship with black women who are more and triply marginalised in America. She projects the ‘feminist consciousness’ in her novels. Ranveer defines feminist consciousness as “a feminist who is awakened and conscious about women’s life and problems and feminist consciousness is the experience in a certain way of certain specific contradictions in social order” (Ranveer 104). Being born and brought up under a secure and self-pride environment, Morrison not only focuses on the weak and marginalized black women but also on the very tough and aggressive black women who can do anything to rear their children and toil harder than men to lead their family. Morrison portrays her women characters as more responsible than their counterparts. About black woman Morrison says: “She has nothing to fall back on, not maleness, not whiteness, not ladyhood, not anything. And out of the profound dissolution of her reality she may very well have invented herself” (Love 325). She explores the realities of black women’s life. Morrison advocates that black women are born strong and tough enough for themselves, for their children and for their home. For them their work is the ultimate, but when they meet with psychological,
emotional, physical and moral problems they feel oppressed. Morrison says, “Black women are ship and ship harbor” (Lester 47-54).


Morrison started her writing career with the novel *The Bluest Eye* based on a real story of eleven years old black girl. The title of the novel indicates the superlative form of color (blue+est) which symbolises the superior white beauty ideals. The golden and straight hair, pink skin and the blue eyes as the superior beauty ideals ruled the American world for centuries. Morrison aims at demonstrating the adverse effects of those white beauty ideals on the minds of a black girl who is humiliated as the ugliest. The protagonist of the novel, Pecola Breedlove, being a girl urges for the blue eyes because she has known that only by having blue eyes she can look beautiful and she can love and ‘be loved.’

The novel depicts two black families with two different backgrounds – the McTeers and the Breedlove. The McTeer family is depicted as an independent, having inner strength of facing the odds of racist society and capable of bringing their children as strong enough to survive without any hindrance. The Breedlove family is utterly opposite to McTeers who are victimized under the clutches of intersectionality (racism, classism and sexism). They are even unable to provide a good environment to their children.

In Morrison’s novels, the community and family play a major role in the lives of black women. The major female characters of the novel are two sisters, Claudia and Frieda from McTeers family and the protagonist, Pecola Breedlove from Breedlove. These characters represent their families. The parents’ inner strength enables Claudia and Frieda to survive as normal human beings without the feeling of inferiority, sense of humiliation and hindrance. In contrast Pecola is rejected by all – her family, schoolmates, teachers and neighbors. This rejection leads to self-
rejection finally. Pecola is craving for such a thing (the bluest eyes) which can’t be possible and her eyes to be replaced. She cannot be Maureen Peal, her classmate, “high yellow dream girl” with white beauty features and who is admired and recognized by all. Finally, Pecola’s wish takes her to the world of madness. She loses her mind to get the bluest eyes. She achieves the blue eyes in her state of insanity but for the world she is the same Pecola without blue eyes. She just stands as a self-victimised black girl.

On the contrary Claudia rejects and shows anger to those beauty ideals by dismantling the white doll which the black children receive for Christmas. It is because her parents have instilled in her the positive self-consciousness. She rejects that which is alien and threatens her. “The awareness of Claudia’s rejection for the alien things develops an acute anger towards who rejects her” (Ranveer 106). Morrison shows how the families and their cultures affect the mind of black girl children. Pecola’s family produced her as self-victimised girl and Claudia’s family produced her as a self-conscious girl.

Even as a child Claudia behaves matured and her sister, Fried prays for the survival of Pecola’s baby who was impregnated by her father Cholly. Claudia is so conscious that she even analyses the tragic end of Pecola. She says, “It never occurred to either of us that the earth itself might have been unyielding” (BE 9). With her words it is clear that she makes society as responsible for the condition of Pecola.

The mother of Pecola, Pauline Breedlove is another black female character in the novel. When a white woman asks to choose any one between Cholly, her husband and job at home, Pauline chooses Cholly. By this she rejects the norms and dominance of white culture. For her, Cholly was everything. Later when she becomes lame and tired of handling the responsibilities she fails to encourage and support and love her husband and nurture her children Pecola and Sammy. Even
Cholly drowns in his own mistakes and sins every day. As a result, Sammy and Pecola become defenseless to fight the powerful images that seek to enslave their minds. Hence, though their surname is Breedlove, nowhere in the novel the love can be found in among the members. They all believe themselves to be ugly that leads to the self-rejection and unconsciously they try to perceive which is standard. As the matter of fact neither they can fit into black nor white culture.

Thus, through the story of Pecola, Morrison portrays how self-consciousness in black woman helps her to keep herself away from the white beauty ideals and culture, and to survive and how the unawareness and denial of self leads to madness. Through the story of Pecola, Morrison encourages the political awareness in black community.

Sula, Morrison’s second novel is set in a place called Bottom in Medallion city, Ohio. Since both The Bluest Eye and Sula are set in Ohio where Morrison was born and brought up they seem to be the recollected memories of her childhood. Superficially, Sula is the continuation of themes and structure of The Bluest Eye because like The Bluest Eye, Sula introduces two similar black girls Sula Peace and Nel Wright who quest for identity. Though they have similar mindset and interest, their attitude towards love and life differ as they are from different backgrounds. One difference between both the novels is that in Sula Morrison deals with the good as well as evil nature in black women’s friendship which The Bluest Eye does not.

The title of the novel is named after the protagonist Sula, a vibrant, self-centered black girl who is able to declare her freedom for herself. Morrison’s Sula is purely a black woman’s novel. It has most of the black women as major characters. Sula is born and bought up in a typical woman-centered matriarchal family. The character of Sula is deeply influenced by her grandmother Eva Peace and mother Hannah Peace who led their life without the name of their husbands.
Boy Boy and Rekhu respectively. When Eva and Hannah learnt that in the alien land freedom of blacks is only meant for black men not for women, so they set the rules for themselves which were in favour of women. In doing so they break out of the customs, norms and conditions of the community in which they were living.

Eva Peace like the Eve of Milton’s *Paradise Lost* is both the giver and taker of life. As a mother she sacrifices anything and everything for the sake of her children. She goes to such an extent of sacrificing her leg by placing it under the moving train so that she could claim for insurance to support her children. On the other hand, she proves herself as a bad mother who kills her son when she comes to know that he is physically damaged and can never become normal. Hannah, a widow did not like to remarry but “she takes a steady sequence of lovers, mostly the husbands of her friends and neighbours (*Sula* 42). For her it was a measure of trust and a definite commitment. She was a “daylight lover” (*Sula* 44). She could not maintain her friendship with other women of the community because of her act of love-making with their men. She neither wants to be a wife nor a lover or a prostitute. She just wants to be alone but touched by a male every day.

Sula being brought up in such a family, bothers about herself. She says, “I don’t want to make somebody else, I want to make myself” (*Sula* 92). She is in quest of selfhood. In the process of finding for herself she meets a black female friend Nel Wright. Nel Wright brought up in a conventional family considers herself as part of the community. She obliges the norms and customs of community. Nel’s mother Helene Wright brings her up as overly-strict. Nel is brought up to follow the rules and orders as an adult. When Nel sees her mother being insulted by the white conductor in the train, she declares her self-identity. The same night she murmurs in the discovery of herself. She whispers, “I’m me. I’m not their daughter. I’m not Nel. I’m me Me” (*Sula* 28). Though there is a difference in the nurturing of Sula and Nel, the sense of ‘me-ness’ in them brings
them so closer that “they appear to complement to each other” (Ranveer 109). Each fills the empty space of other’s life. The friendship cannot last for long however. Sula leaves both the town and Nel when she comes to know that Nel is married. Later Nel and Jude, her husband, love each other and find security in each other’s company. Sula comes back after ten years in order to attain self-fulfillment. She seduces Jude and Jude leaves Nel. Sula defines love as freedom but for Nel, love is security. For Sula Nel’s friendship is more important than Jude. But Nel as a typical wife feels failure when her husband betrays her. She starts hating Sula and rejects her. She stops contact with Sula for three more years. Though the seduction of Jude is not a serious issue for Sula, she could not bear when Nel starts going away. Nel goes to Sula when she finds that Sula is on the death bed. Sula tells Nel that if Sula had truly loved her she would have forgiven her. But Nel could not. She continues to ask Sula why she behaved like that. It is only after Sula’s death and burial Nel realises that these years she missed Sula not Jude. Nel utterly feels alone. This is the strong feeling of black female bonding which Morrison analyses through the friendship of Sula and Nel. Like Sula and Nel’s friendship black women’s’ bonding are equal to the soul relationship. Such bonging will add more to their strength.

Through the story of Sula, Morrison explores the fact that in patriarchal society, there is no freedom, no love and no respect for the black woman. Consequently when feminine consciousness arises in the mind of a black woman she rejects the stereotypical images of being wife and mother, rearing children and other institutional restrictions and she frees herself by living in such a way which is beneficial to her. She becomes selfish and loves herself. Barbar Christia comments that,

Pecola and Sula are women who become scapegoats in their communities because they look at the truth of things and will not or cannot disguise it by
becoming the dumping ground for those feelings of helplessness and horror that people have about their own lives. Pecola’s madness makes everyone feel sane. Sula’s evilness highlights everyone’s goodness (Christian 26).

_Beloved_ (1987) is quite different from _The Bluest Eye_ and _Sula_. It is a heart-rending real story of the enslaved woman by name Margaret Garner at Kentucky plantation in 1851. Morrison was stuck with the story when she came across the article while she was working for _The Black Book_ in the early 1970s, entitling _A Visit to the Slave Mother Who Killed Her Child_. The fugitive slave Margaret Garner escapes with her four children to a town Cincinnati, Ohio. When her master follows her there too, she goes to the extent of killing her children instead of seeing them as enslaved like her. She could succeed in killing only one of her children by cutting its throat. Though she was imprisoned by the act she still believes that she did the right thing that she saved her children from the horrors of slavery. The story of Margaret Garner reminds the story of _Medea_ by Greek playwright Euripides. Medea too kills her children to save them from their father’s indifference and his second marriage. Women like Margaret and Medea when it comes to their children, they can go to the extent of killing them in order to save them from the man-made horrors.

The motherly attitude of Margaret Garner caught the mind of Morrison. “Although she did not include the story in _The Black Book_, it gradually grew into an obsessive memory that became the germ for _Beloved_” (Naylor 579). Ron David states:

For years, Toni Morrison wanted to write Margaret Garner’s story but it refused to happen. She had almost decided that the story could not be written: but ultimately, she found her power by surrendering to theirs – She says “In the end, I had to rely on the resilience and power of the characters – if they could live it all their lives, I could write it. (David 112).
Finally, she puts the story into the form of a novel. She dedicates the novel for the sixty million or more slaves of America who dared to resist against slavery. She names the character as Sethe in the place of Margaret Garner. The title of the novel *Beloved* bears the name of murdered daughter by her mother Sethe at the age of two. Sethe’s act is not a crime rather it is of mercy killing out of concern for her children.

Sethe is depicted as the symbol of awakened and self-conscious black woman. She is no more ready to be exploited as a slave and see her children the same in future at Sweet Home, a slave plantation at Kentucky. That was the hateful place for Sethe which made her wonder if hell was pretty too. She faced the utter form of horrors and the brutality in the hands of her slave master, Mrs Garner’s nephew, a schoolteacher. This develops in her awareness and her ‘thick love’ and concern for her children forces to free herself and her children. Though she escapes from Sweet Home to Cincinnati, a place of her mother-in-law her master attacks there too, to find her out, in that case finding no way out for her four children, with a handsaw, she could cut the throat of her baby girl by name Beloved. Sethe defends her act by saying, “No more powerful than the way I loved her” (*B 5*).

When the novel opens in 1973, the Civil War has been over for eight years and all the characters are trying to forget each and every experience of slavery. But it is the devious mind of Sethe that goes back to the memory of 30 years ago. Since the age of 13, Sethe suffered as a slave. She is brought to Sweet Home to replace another slave Baby Suggs, an old black woman who later becomes her mother-in-law. Sethe was the only woman slave among the six slaves who belonged to the farm. Among the five slave men there was Halle whom Sethe loved and married and by the time she is nineteen, Sethe is pregnant for the fourth time. She is the mother of four children – two sons, Howard and Buglar and two daughters
Beloved and Denver. The treatment of the slaves was bearable when Garner couples looked after it. But unfortunately when Mr. Garner dies, Mrs Garner requests her brother-in-law to run the Sweet Home. From then the worst life of Sethe as a slave and also as a black woman begins.

The schoolteacher beats the slaves, measures their body parts to gather scientific evidence to support his eugenic racist garbage and scholarly lists of their human and animal characteristics. During the first reign of the schoolteacher Sethe gave birth to her third child Beloved. Sethe and the men cannot bear the cruelty of schoolteacher and talk about escape. Sethe, with her three children and pregnant with the fourth one cannot digest the thought that her children might be sold, so she runs away to Baby Suggs, mother of Halle and her mother-in-law at 124 Bluestone, Cincinnati. When she is planning for the safety and security of her children at 124, the schoolteacher arrives there too. Then inevitably Sethe places her children “safe with a handsaw” and says, “They ain’t at Sweet Home and Schoolteacher ain’t got em” (B 194) and she feels relaxed. Thr story of Sethe is told in the flashback. After 18 years of this act Sethe is now with no husband and, her sons had run away from home and Baby Suggs also has passed away. She has only Paul D as more than a friend and her daughter Denver. One day a girl of 20 years comes to Sethe’s home who calls herself Beloved. Sethe’s baby would have been of the same age if she had been alive.

Morrison thinks Sethe’s act of infanticide retains her dignity as a human being. To achieve the freedom Sethe finds the only way of self destruction. No doubt, Sethe achieves awareness but at the painful cost. Through the story, Morrison intends to cast light on the ‘inner’ truth of several victims of slavery. Her inner truth is complicated by the sense of guilt. Morrison knew that her act had to be judged. Since Morrison was not there at the time of the real incident she felt only the person who knew Sethe could better judge her. Since Sethe’s
contemporaries were dead, Morrison found the dead child Beloved as a perfect person to judge her mother.

Beloved reappears as a haunting ghost when the people relating to her are driven by guilt and desires. That’s why Sethe comes to the conclusion that her dead daughter has returned to haunt her guilty conscience. Denver, Beloved’s sister comes to believe that her dead sister has reappeared in response to her own yearning for reunion. Carmean analyses the reappearance of Beloved from two point of views that

Morrison meant Beloved to be a ‘mirror character’ who would reflect her mother Sethe’s fear and hopes surrounding the killing of her infant daughter and the other view that Beloved serves the responsibility of Morrison in telling the story of her people’s slavery as fully and honestly as possible. (Carmean 85).

Baby Suggs is another black slave woman. She is the mother of Halle Suggs and mother-in-law of Sethe. Her freedom was purchased by her son Halle, with his five years working on Sundays in place of her at the slave master. She served as a breeding slave woman and attended to Garner couples. By her freedom she became a spiritual leader whose passionate love of life and the whole blessed world, transforms. Under her care Sethe’s children grow up healthy and happy. She is one of the glories of the novel. Morrison portrays her as an emancipated black woman.

Though Sethe succeeds in her journey from the state of being ignorant to awareness, she becomes the loser of her own flesh. Her fate is ended in self-destruction. Probably this ill-fate of the black women in America was what Morrison wanted to put before the world. However the way and whatever the act might be, Sethe’s indomitable courage to liberate herself and her children is certainly praise-worthy.
Jazz the second volume of the projected trilogy follows Beloved in projecting the experiences of black people as the most affected by slavery. Compared to Beloved, Jazz has a different story with new characters, new location and different style of narration. It is said,

Like Beloved the story of Jazz unfolds chunk by chunk towards both future and past. In terms of chronology Jazz does pick up roughly where Beloved left off (Carmean 100).

Jazz is the saga of black relationships – couple relationship, man-woman relationship, and ‘reconfiguration of self’ in such relationships. Morrison says, “I was interested in rendering a period in African American life through a specific lens – one that would reflect the content and characteristics of its music (romance, freedom of choice, doom, seduction and anger) and the manner of its expression” (IX). She explores different themes like violence, jealousy, insecurity, love and feminine feelings. Jazz is a story of black couple Joe and Violet and also a love story of Joe and Dorcas. Joe, a black salesman of cosmetics, in his fifties infatuates with eighteen year old girl Dorcas. Their relationship lasts a few months. When Joe learns that Dorcas has betrayed him, he shoots her. Violet is unaware of the affair, and she gets to know about it after Dorcas’ murder. Out of anger and anguish Violet disfigures the face of dead Dorcas.

The Jazz situates at Harlem in the mid of 1920. The place Harlem is identified as only city in the novel. Harlem is the city in the history of America. 1920s renaissance at Harem is known in the history as the era of renaissance. The novel is set during the period of renaissance. The invisible black people, their unheard songs/folklore, underestimated literature and art especially the music of Jazz, during the 1920s at Harlem started breathing a fresh air. They rushed out towards the mainstream. It is said,
The music, the City, the energy creates an “appetite”, a communal longing and dropping of restraint – DO IT! – whatever it is. Joe Trace meets Dorcas Manfred, a teenager whose parents were killed in the 1919 East St. Louise race riots and falls crazy in love” (David 142).

The major characters are not only the parts of story rather they have their own story of the past. Almost every character represents the victimisation under the brutal racism and sexism. In particular, the novel demonstrates the complexity in black women’s lives. The action of every character is based on their mind which is obsessed with their painful past with its racial prejudice.

Violet having no father, seeing her mother committing suicide, has grown up with insecure feelings. Her grandmother, True Bell brought up an orphan Violet. With lots of expectations of good lifestyle she marries Joe Trace. They could not maintain the relationship for long. Willingly or unwillingly the couples could not have children. But after a long time Violet longs for children and that affects their marital relationship. As a result, Violet goes into depression. On the other hand, Joe’s act of betrayal converts the depressed Violet into ‘violent’ woman who cuts the face of her husband’s concubine Dorcas in coffin. Like the other black women, there is no support by her father and husband in her life. In fact, Violet has been deserted by her husband. Violet stands as a symbol of helplessness when she is left alone. Since the power of resistance is inbuilt in black women. Violet refuses to be a victim under her unbalanced married life. In search of peace she realizes that it is only she who has to have the ownership of her happiness and keep her life in order. She finally achieves it. Morrison portrays the image of a strong black woman through the character of Violet.

Morrison’s Dorcas is another interesting female character. She is the lover of Joe Trace. Though she is shown as sympathetic and orphan, Dorcas stands as the triumph of freedom. She rejects the old fashioned life style advised by her aunt.
Alice Manfred and leads her life as she wants. Her young age and insecure life made her to get attracted towards the rich as well as smart lovers. According to moralists, though her act of neglecting Joe may seem wrong, nobody can say that their relationship is legitimate. Moreover Dorcas was in search of identity and to achieve that she selects Acton as her new boyfriend. Joe’s act of murdering signifies the blacks’ reality of life that they too are divided. Though Joe is not faithful to his wife Violet, he expects the same from his lover Dorcas. He kills Dorcas for her betrayal but the question arises what punishment he has for his betrayal towards his wife Violet. Selfish Joe kills Dorcas for his satisfaction. This speaks of gender-differences in the blacks.

Morrison portrays the other black women characters Alice Manfred, Felice and True Bell as responsible. Alice Manfred is the aunt of Dorcas. As a good caretaker of Dorcas, she brings her up very strictly and does everything to give a good life. True Bell is Violet’s grandmother and a black caretaker of white Golden Gray. She is the triumph of the novel. She is a responsible black woman. When she learns that her family is in trouble she moves back to her family from her service at her white mistress. She serves her granddaughter Violet gives her parental care. Felice is the best friend of Dorcas. She is a girl of self-respect. It is because of her, Joe and Violet could reunite. True Belle and Alice are the ideals for their youngsters and Felice becomes a bridge between Joe and Violet who made the couples to forget the past and lead a happy family life. Morrison’s *Jazz* is an expression of various layers of black life.

To sum up, Morrison portrays the sexual, racial and marital problems of her black woman characters. Her women characters like Pecola, Pauline, Sula, Nel, Sethe, Beloved, Violet, Ruby, Heed and Christian face the same problem. Morrison celebrates the triumph of optimism through some of her black women like Claudia, Frieda, Baby Suggs, Alice Manfred, and True Bell. A point can be
noted in most of her novels that she depicts black men as weak compared to black women. She portrays the image of black man as irresponsible and incapable of living with dignity. The examples of such characters are Cholly Breedlove in *The Bluest Eye*, Boy Boy and Rakhus in *Sula*, Halle Suggs in *Beloved* and Joe Trace in *Jazz*. Some of these male characters are portrayed as cruel and unable to protect their families.

It is true that Morrison has not proclaimed herself to be a black feminist like Gloria Naylor, Alice Walker, Deborah McDowell, and Barbara Smith. Yet all her novels and the other works reveal racism, classism, sexism and the effects of all these on the minds of black women from the days of slavery till the present day. As a dynamic writer, Morrison uses different themes to present the black world. Above all, her concern for black women highlights feminist consciousness.

2.3. Race, Ethnicity, Gender and Sexuality in Toni Morrison’s Works

Race and Ethnicity

Race and ethnicity are related to biological and sociological factors respectively. Race refers to a person's physical appearance such as skin color, eye color, *hair* color, *bone* and jaw structure etc. Ethnicity, on the other hand, relates to cultural factor such as nationality, culture, ancestry, language and beliefs. Race and ethnicity are the inherited factors. Both are associated with diversity. A country may have different variety of races as well as ethnicities. This diversity based on race and ethnicity creates an inequality and injustice among the people. This diversity leads to the division of race as superior and inferior. The superior race commits crime, hating and subordinating the inferior.

A group of people is identified by its particular race and culture of its own. The superior and inferior, master and slave, dominant and subordinate create real
conflagration between them. America has witnessed such conflagrations on the basis of the color of black and white. The system of slavery for blacks under this distinction created a history of its own and the black writers speak of this with anguish.

Race and ethnicity stand as the basic layer of writings written by the early Afro-American writers to the contemporary ones. Though these writers could not explore the glory of their race and culture at the beginning, there was a resisting voice against the dominant culture. Writers like Phillis Wheatley, Fredric Douglas, Ralph Ellison, Zora Neale Hurston, Alice Walker, Maya Angelou, Toni Morrison and others have vividly depicted racism and ethnicity in their work.

Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* acknowledges that most of the black people are unaware of racism. Morrison does cultural divisions between middle class black society and low class black society and she encounters with the racism that exists there. She shows Maureen Peal, Geraldine and Junior as the representatives of wealthy and stylish lighter skinned characters whereas Breedlove’s family as the poor and “relentlessly and aggressively ugly.”. Maureen being a black but having little lighter shade feels herself nearing the white color and she humiliates the darker black girls like whites saying “I am cute! And you ugly! Black and ugly.” This of her attitude shows that she feels herself as if she is not a black. Another lighter skinned character Geraldine refuses her son Junior to mingle with the other children of black community.

She had explained him the difference between colored people and niggers. They were easily identifiable. Colored people were neat and quite; niggers were dirty and loud (*BE* 85).

Morrison’s intention behind the creation of these characters makes it clear that the complexity of racism is not only between superior whites and inferior
blacks but also between the different shades of black people. The wealthy characters like Geraldine and Maureen Paul have beliefs that are most likely influenced by the white people whom they try so hard to impress. Poor characters like the MacTeers and Breedlove search for any reason that can substantiate why they have separated from their once unified culture.

The Breedlove’s family – Cholly, Pauline, Sammy and Pecola utterly suffer from homelessness, poverty, rejection by society and emotional abuse. All these characters become destructive under racism and sexism from their childhood. That affects them in not expressing their love and affection to their children and acts like racial oppressors. Cholly is caught out by the two white men while for the first time having physical contact with his girlfriend Darlene and screamed to continue it. They threaten him and say “get on wid it. An’ make it good, nigger, make it good” (BE 146). It was his anger that expressed through the rape. He even expresses his frustration at family by being humiliated as a racial being. This goes to certain extent that he even rapes his own daughter Pecola.

Pecola becomes scapegoat under racism as well as sexism in the novel. Her wish to be pretty, white and blue eyed takes her to the world of madness. Pecola’s humiliation by her schoolmates, by Junior and negligence by her parents forced her to encounter with the damaging forces of craving for an unattainable thing. Pecola, Pauline and Cholly are the examples to show how racist society damages both black women and men. Racism damages people’s self-esteem, personality and emotions. It ultimately leads to self-hatred that ultimately makes them to perish themselves. Black woman still suffers more under racism and patriarchal system. The men and racist society has made this life miserable.

Morrison silently gave a message to the women to rebel against the exploitation unlike Pecola and Pauline. Sula and Tar Baby explore the self-conscious women who resist oppressions. Sula meets with quite different problem
compared to Pecola. The traditional black community expects black women as submissive and their role in a very limited space. The black community expects black woman to restrict herself to the domestic works and do things for others (her men, children and whites). Sula says on her deathbed to Nel that “I know what every colored woman in this country is doing” “dying just like me” (Sula 143). Though Sula accepts the submissive role of black woman at the time of her death, she never allowed herself to be one among them. She says, “The difference is they dying like a stump. Me, I’ am going down like one of those redwoods. I sure did live in this world” (Sula 143). Even Jadine in Tar Baby admits to her aunt that “Your way is one but it’s not my way”, “I don’t want to be like you. I don’t want to be that kind of woman”.

In Sula, Morrison allows her characters to voice against that limiting role of black women in the community. Sula rejects the definition of self that is defined by the ethnic community. “She is experimental with herself. She knows to think the unthinkable. But she has trouble making a connection with other people and just feeling that lovely sense of accomplishment of being close in a very strong way” (Parker 65). Like Sula, the other black women Hannah, Eva, Nel in the novel have the same kind of attitude. bell hooks defines feminism as “a movement to end sexist oppression.” Likewise Morrison opines that “Female freedom always means sexual freedom” and she says,

The sexual freedom of Hannah Peace was my entrance into the story, constructed from the shreds of memory about the way local women regarded a certain kind of female – envy coupled with amused approbation. Against her fairly modest claims to personal liberty are placed conventional and anarchic ones: Eva’s physical sacrifice for economic freedom; Nel’s accommodation to the protection marriage promises; Sula’s resistance to neither sacrifice nor accommodation. Hannah’s claims are acceptable in her
neighbourhood because they are nonfinancial and non-threatening; she does not disturb or deplete family resources, because her dependence is on another woman, Eva, who was both money and authority, and uncompetitive. Sula, although she does nothing horrendous as what Eva does, is seen by the townsmen as not just competitive, but devouring evil. Nel, with the most minimal demands, is seen as the muted standards” (Morrison XI).

Despite considering Sula as the curse for the community, the community members come collectively at the graveside of Sula to sing one of their loving benedictions. This indicates that Morrison wants her black women always to maintain their relationship with the community. Even at her deathbed Sula expects her community folk to love her. She wishes, “They’ll love me all right. It will take time, but they’ll love me” (Sula 145). This shows her willingness to be one among all in the community but where she exactly forces herself to be alienated from the society is when her communal norms restrict her freedom.

The novel Sula is set during the modern era of 20th century. The community and characters are the part of modern era. She has more advanced thoughts than the community regarding the concept of freedom for black women and the sense and identity of the self. Sula reflects the image of the ‘New Woman’ of postmodern era who wants to live a free life. Morrison says, “While creating Sula, I had in mind a woman of force. In a way she is distilled. She does not stop existing even after she dies. In fact, what she left behind is more powerful after is dead than when she was alive” (Parker 63).

Hence, the lives of Sula, Nel, Eva and Hannah are defined and determined by the boundaries of gender and race.

Like most of her novels Morrison in her Beloved highlights the importance of identity, the formation of self and the influence of society and the community on
the development of personality. Ron Everyman says that “Cultural trauma refers to a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, affecting a group of people that has achieved some degree of cohesion” (Everyman 2). The black slaves were unified by their environment and society’s racial oppression. In the case of Beloved, “The trauma in question is slavery, not as an institution or even an experience, but as a collective memory, a form of remembrance that grounded the identity-formation of people” (Everymen 1).

In the eyes of racial society, slaves are others. The very treatment affects individual personality because they have internalized society’s racism. Paul D, one of the main characters as a slave internalizes the mistreatment by his masters for years at Kentucky plantation. Despite his inner strength, that mistreatment transforms him into an unemotional man with paralysed identity. He is even sent to a place like prison after he tried to murder his master. Morrison describes the place “The ditches; the one thousand feet of earth, five feet deep, five feet wide into which wooden boxes have been fitted. A door of bars that you could lift on hinges like a cage opened into three walls and a roof of scarp lumber and red dirt” (Morrison 125).

Paul D and forty five members that were forced to work on the chain gang alongside of him were subjected to humiliating treatment along with physical and sexual abuse. As a result of such treatments Paul D started believing himself as an unworthy human being.

It is because of slavery, Sethe, the protagonist stands as the symbol of dehumanization of female slave depriving her femininity by denying her motherhood. Comparing to Pecola and Sula, Sethe’s predicament in a racist society is quite different. Through these characters she provides a variety of perspectives of racism and the different and complex experiences of black women in racist society.
Morrison admits *Beloved* as the saga of “Slavery but not with capital S. It was about these anonymous people called slaves. What they do to keep on, how they make a life, what they are willing to risk, however long it lasts in order to relate to one another – it was ineradicable for me”. And she says “it is about something that the characters don’t want to remember, I don’t want to remember, black people don’t want to remember, white people won’t want to remember. I mean its national amnesia” (Guthrie 257).

Morrison’s characters face the inability to form intimate relationships which make impossible to form a sense of self, which only worsens their lack of self identity.

*Jazz* is set out at Harlem city, a cultural and artistic center for blacks during 1920. It was the era of Harlem renaissance; it was the renaissance of blacks. The triangular story of Joe, Violet and Dorcas mirror their psyche and history of racist America. It is about their concern for the community and the roots of their collective search for identity. Golden Gray is the inter-racial son of Vera Louise Gray and Henry LesTroy is the result of a forbidden love between a white woman and a black man. With his golden curls and light skin, Golden Gray looks completely white and he is so. His mother does not claim him as her own son but says that he was adopted. When his nurse, True Belle, tells him the truth of his parentage, Golden’s sense of his own identity is destroyed. He searches for his father, because he believes that the black man violated his mother. He holds a racial stereotype of black deviance that is deeply set in white male consciousness.

Joe, Violet and Dorcas’s characters are unconsciously based on their respective mothers who are the victims of racist and sexist society. Joe Trace, having no knowledge of his parentage is grown up with the feeling of abandonment. He is just told that his mother has adopted him and left him without any trace. Joe confesses that, at the age of three, he learned from his foster parents
that his biological parents had “disappeared without a trace” and it is then that he names himself Joe Trace. Later, he reaches the age of fourteen, Joe leaves his foster parents to be “trained to be a man to live independent” by Hunter’s Hunter, a man who Joe learns, had years earlier helped to rescue Joe’s mother, who had been raped, beaten, made pregnant and left to die in a ditch.

Dorcas is the “hard headed girl, alive and very bold” who lived with her aunt Alice Manfred. She was Joe’s lover. He shot her for her betrayal. When she was ten years old, she lost her parents within five days of each other in the race riots in St. Louis in 1917. Her father “Had been pulled off a streetcar and stomped to death” and her mother who “had gone home to try and forget the color of his entrails burned crispy when her house was torched” (Jazz 57). Dorcas recalls that because they were blacks the fire engine did not come when called. Alice feared that the fire of desire had been ignited in her niece from the time the girl’s mother was burned in their house.

Such feelings of abandonment and insecurity are the part and parcel of the life of black race. When it comes to the black woman she suffers at the core, as she belongs to both inferior race and gender. Morrison delineates that such feelings push them under the earth where they become the strangers of their own real self.

**Gender and Sexuality**

“Feminism is to be the movement to end sexual oppression”  
bell hooks (*Feminist Theory* 153)

Sex refers to the biological and psychological aspects with which man and woman are born. Gender refers to the socially constructed concepts of masculinity and femininity and behaviour roles, expectations and activities in society. Gender refers to the socially accepted relationships between man and woman. The differences in sex do not vary throughout the world. But there can be differences in gender. Gender identity depends on how one acts whether masculine, feminine,
neither or both. There can be transgender like male having female kind of behavior, voice and nature and vice versa. In most of the cases sexual orientation may differ like bisexual, gay, lesbian or straight. Though the terms sex and gender are used interchangeably in ordinary usage, in recent days there have been many feminist debates on the unequal distribution of power relations of gender.

Two different sexes as male and female are God’s creation and the inequality and difference between genders are man-made. The difference in gender between man and woman leads to inequality. The difference between genders is analysed in relation with feminism. The socialisation of gender creates huge indifference between male and female. Kate Millet takes gender differences to have “essentially cultural rather than biological bases” (FT 28) that result from differential treatment. According to her,

Feminine and masculine gender-norms, however, are problematic in that gendered behavior conveniently fits with and reinforces women’s subordination so that women are socialised into subordinate social roles: they learn to be passive, ignorant, docile, emotional helpmeets for men. (FT 26).

Even parents unconsciously treat their female and male children differently. They use gender-stereotypic language to describe their boys as strong, alert and intelligent whereas girls as sober, soft, tiny and delicate. As Simone de Beauvoir in The Second Sex claims about gender socialization, “One is not born, but rather becomes woman and that social discrimination produces in women moral and intellectual effects so profound that they appear to be caused by nature” (Beauvoir 18). Born as a female sex, female become woman through process whereby they acquire feminine traits and learn feminine behaviour.

Sexuality is an important arena on which these conflicts are played out, both as a result and as a symbolic expression of social ills and inequality. Catherine
MacKinnon develops her theory of gender as a theory of sexuality. She thinks, “the social meaning of sex (gender) is created by sexual objectification of women whereby women are viewed and treated as objects for satisfying men’s desires. She adds, “Masculinity is defined as sexual dominance, femininity as sexual submissiveness: genders are created through the eroticization of dominance and submission. The man/woman difference and the dominance/submission dynamic define each other” (MacKinnon 113). The roles of gender of male and female are socially conditioned-male as dominant and female as submissive creature. There are many men who can understand the sufferings of women as sexual and submissive creature in society. But they fail to feel their experience as the gendered abuse that disqualifies them from telling how they ought to respond. It is only woman can express the experience of oppressed woman effectively. Morrison being a black woman has vividly depicted the gender and sexual issues in her novels.

Gender disparity is the dominant theme in Morrison’s novels. The discrimination between men and women in her characters’ social environment is predominant in her novels and when her characters internalize the imbalance, it becomes part of the psychological conflicts of her characters’ experience. Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula*, *Beloved* and *Jazz* evoke much discussion on sexuality and gender. In *The Bluest Eye*, the concept of sexuality and the act of sex shapes the characters in various ways. The novel deals with both the pleasure and danger of sexual initiations. Early in the novel, Pecola has her first menstrual period and toward the novel’s end she has first sexual experience by her own father, which is violent and this was hidden for the reader at the beginning. Pecola’s first menstruation signals curiosity about her sense as a woman. Pecola has a conversation with her friends Claudia and Frieda that night in the bed:

“Is it true that I can have a baby now?”
“Sure”, said Frieda drowsily. “Sure you can”.
“But . . . how? Her voice was hollow with wonder”.
“Oh,” said Frieda, “Somebody has to love you” (BE 32).

Pecola’s sense of love at the very young age was misinformation on the basis of what the love she knows of her parents:

What did love feel like? She wondered. How do grown-ups act when they love each other? Eat fish together? Into her eyes came the picture of Cholly and Mrs Breedlove in bed. He is making sounds as though he were in pain, as though something had him by the throat and wouldn’t let go. Terrible as his noises were, they were not nearly as bad as the no noises at all from her mother. It was as though she was not even there. Maybe that was love. Choking sounds and silence (BE 55).

Frieda is a sister of Cludia and a friend of Pecola. She anticipates about menstruating and as an innocent black young girl she is initiated into sexual experience when she is fondled by Henry Washington who proves dangerous to the young girls. Henry had taken the house of MacTeers for rent. He seems harmless, is guilty of, first, failing to see the girls’ beauty in relationship to their blackness and then, later in the story of fondling Frieda’s breasts, thinking of the girls’ bodies as commodities for his consumption, use and pleasure. He misuses her and molests her. Frieda testifies to Cluadia for being molested by Henry but her fact was different from that of Pecola. She says:

“He . . . Picked at me”.
“Picked at you? You mean like Soaphead church?”
“Sort of”.
“He showed his Private parts at you”
“Noooo. He touched me” (BE 97).
Mr. Henry’s inability to see the value of little black girls and possibly black women, leads to his capacity to objectify them and treat them as commodity. The episode where Frieda is molested by Henry Washington parallels the rape of Pecola by her father. It offers proof that, though Claudia’s and Frieda’s home life is filled with the affection and care of their parents both girls are still vulnerable to sexual exploitation and oppression.

The act of sex shapes the personality of Cholly. He recalls a situation from his youth in which he is caught in the woods by the police while he is having sex with his first girl. The police berate him and Cholly feels emasculated by the event. His negative experience with sex follows him throughout life and challenges perception of what it means to be a man. Even Mrs Breedlove suffers so much at the time of giving birth to Pecola. For being black and woman in the racist land, she suffered with no doctor, no care and humanity from anybody. Pauline’s frustration starts showing her anger upon her new born baby Pecola and calls her ‘ugly’.

The Breedlove couple could not be good parents to their children. In fact, Cholly proved himself the worst father by raping his daughter Pecola, impregnated her and left her. Even Pauline could not understand the trauma that Pecola was undergoing after her rape. She consciously ignores the condition of her daughter. Morrison writes: “the child regained consciousness, she was lying on the kitchen floor under a heavy quilt, trying to connect the pain between her legs with the face of mother looming over her” (BE 161). Pauline ignored her daughter and did not show any humanity at least in helping to get her up. Morrison seems to intend that both of them are internalizing the pain that they have suffered like Cholly’s humiliation by the two white men at the time of his sex with Darlene.

Pauline as a mother could not acknowledge the pain of her daughter like how she was not being acknowledged by anybody at the painful time of her
delivery of Pecola. This attitude is the result of the psychological effects by racism in American. When Pecola fails to respond to her condition, her longing for blue eyes becomes more because she wants to be loved and change the hateful attitude of others towards her. The most tragic part of Pecola is when she is unable to understand the act of rape upon her. Pecola understands the act of rape on her as love because she has learnt love means pain and silence which she has experienced in the act of rape. Cholly repeatedly rapes her for the second time. Even then Pauline as a mother could not help her. Like a subordinate woman Pauline seems to support Cholly even in his act of rape. Pecola’s attempt of understanding the rape and about her mother can be seen in her conversation with a friend (mirror image of Pecola with blue eyes in the imaginary world):

“I wonder what it would be like”.

“Horrible”.

“Really”?  

“Yes, Horrible”

“Then why didn’t you tell Mrs Breedlove?”

“I did tell her”!

“I don’t mean about the first time. I mean about the second time, when you were sleeping on the couch”.

“I wasn’t sleeping! I was reading”!

“You don’t have to shout”.

“You don’t understand anything, do you? She didn’t even believe me when I told her”.

“So that’s why you didn’t tell her about the second time”? 

“You’re right. No use telling her when she wouldn’t believe you” (BE 198).

Pecola loses her sense to such an extent that “Pecola attempts to justify the rape in terms of jealousy rather than acknowledging something awful happened to
her. She would rather think people, even her mother, are jealous of her blue eyes than admit she was sexually abused, despised and hated” (Frantz 9).

“Why don’t you look at me when you say that? You’re looking drop-eyed like Mrs. Breedlove”.

“Mrs. Breedlove look drop-eyed at you”?

“Yes. Now she does. Ever since I got my blue eyes, she look away from me all the time. Do you suppose she is jealous too?” (BE 193).

Nobody could love, support and understand Pecola. When family fails to play to provide the healthy environment for the development of children, it is the responsibility of society in providing the healthy atmosphere. Pecola as an “ugly” black girl is so unfortunate that she faces humiliation since her childhood, at school, from her friends, teachers and neighbours. Unfortunately, the ghost of racism resides even in the mind of children. Pecola is victimized by the school children of her community. The children mock at her for her ugliness. It is heart rending when the girls at school use her name to insult a boy or wanted to get an immediate response from him. They would say, “Bobby loves Pecola Breedlove! Bobby loves Pecola Breedlove!” and never fail to get peals of laughter from those in earshot and mock anger from the accused” (BE 34). Another act of humiliation is by Geraldine, the cruel black lady who puts Pecola in the world of hell. She attacks Pecola with an abusive language. She scolds Pecola by believing in the false statement of her son Junior at the issue of cat. “Get out,” she said, her voice quite. “You nasty little black bitch. Get out of my house” (BE 72). The harassment by the group of boys on the road is still terrible. They mock, “Black e mo. Black e mo. Yadaddsleepsnekked. Black e mo black e mo ya dadd sleeps nekked. Black e mo. . . . (BE 50)” . There is no day for Pecola without being victimized. Ultimately, Pecola becomes scapegoat by her own community.
Along with sexuality, the gender discrimination is yet another focus in the novel. The masculine oriented society always tries to oppress the feminine group. Cholly the superior male as a husband and as a father exploits his daughter and wife both sexually and physically. He shows his frustration on an innocent girl Pecola. “His revulsion was a reaction to her young, helpless, hopeless presence”. “Surrounding all of this lust a border of politeness. He wanted to fuck her—tenderly” (BE 128).

Cholly’s physical harassment over his wife Pauline is another instance of gender exploitation. “Their marriage was shredded with conflicts. She was still no more than a girl, and still waiting for that plateau of happiness, that hand precious Lord who, when her way grew drear, would always linger near” (BE 92). Pauline Breedlove gives a clear picture that black woman is victimized more by black man than by white man. Pauline says, “Cholly commenced to getting meaner and meaner and wanted to fight with me all the time. I give him as good as I got. Had to. Look like working for that woman and fighting Cholly was all I did, Tiresome” (BE 92).

Frieda’s molestation that represents a loss of girlhood innocence, raises issues about the ways in which women’s bodies are seen but not valued. Pecola’s rape is not only physically violent and repulsive, it leads largely to her psychic break. Frieda however is supported by her family; she is treated as the injured party and not as someone who is somehow responsible for the wrong committed against her. Mrs Breedlove beats Pecola and blames her for Cholly’s disdainful behavior and mourns the loss of her husband who has violated his daughter Pecola twice. Hence, Morison through the life of Pecola, Frieda and Claudia underscores difficulties of girls and their experience on their path towards womanhood and demands that the reader to think about how the men are closest and sometimes
pose the great threat to the physical, psychological and emotional well-being of the women of their surroundings.

Morrison’s *Sula* is a women-centered novel. Though it is a matriarchal novel, it probes how the dominant men left women lonely. In fact, the men characters are used to highlight the strength of women characters. Sula and Nel are born in two different family backgrounds. Still they are two best friends having similar ways of thinking. Sula is grown up with much modernistic attitudes and in contrast Nel is brought up in conventional way. Still their friendship is so strong.

In *Sula* three generations of women Eva, Hannah and Sula are portrayed as economically and sexually independent characters. Eva being the eldest female in the house became a role model to lead the life for Hannah and Sula. Unfortunately Eva and Hannah could not become good role models to Sula. Sula has grown up freely and like her mother, she goes against the norms of society and gets considered as the evil of society.

“With the exception of Boy Boy, those Peace women loved all men. It was only man’s love that Eva bequeathed to her daughters. Probably people said, there were no men in the house, no men to run it. But actually it was not true. The Peace women (Eva and Hannah) simply loved maleness for its own sake. Eva as old as she was. . . has a regular flock of gentlemen caller and although she did not participate in the act of love, there was a good deal of teasing and pecking and laughter” (41). Bequeathing. . .this kind of ‘manlove’ to the daughters, Eva also bequeaths a capacity for emotional distance that allows for the creation of female self” (*Sula* 76).

Hannah used to enjoy frequent sex with any man who comes to visit the house – even the newlywed husbands who rented a room in the Peace house for their honeymoon. She likes casual love. As she was influenced by her mother Eva, she influences Sula. By Eva both Hannah and Sula were thwarted by the love of
men, leaving them incapable of committing themselves to any healthy relationships. Hannah and Sula thus come into conflict with society. Their promiscuity is perceived as a threat to marital harmony in the town. Hannah’s behavior is perhaps engendered by Eva’s lack of love for her children when small, which in turn is reflected in Hannah’s neglecting Sula. Hannah’s priorities have to do with sex:

Hannah simply refused to live without the attention of a man, and after Rekus’ death, Hannah had a steady sequence of lovers, mostly the husbands and friends of neighbours. Her flirting was sweet . . . she rippled with sex . . . she made men aware of her behind, her slim ankles, the dew – smith skin and the incredible neck. (Sula 42).

Morrison explains,

Hannah makes a statement of lust about their husbands. Even though they may not want their men to be sleeping with her, it was a compliment to know that somebody else wanted them. It was this quality that made her perfectly charming person. (Parker 63).

Even Nel’s mother has promiscuous background because her mother was a prostitute in New Orleans. Yet she brings up Nel in a strict and orderly house and as a mother that her daughter to be properly wed. Sula and Nel’s sexual awakening culminates during the summer of the beautiful boys, the summer they turn twelve, where in a fit of relentlessness they know themselves on the ground digging holes into the earth. Morrison writes,

Underneath their dresses flesh tightened and shivered in the high coolness, their small breasts just now beginning to create some pleasant discomfort when they were lying on their stomachs . . . Nel found a thick twig and with her thumbnail, pulled away its bark until it was stripped to a stomach, creamy innocence. Sula impatient and poked her twig rhythmically and
intensely into the earth . . . Together they worked until the two were one and
the same (Sula 58).

Their physical and sensual experience of flesh, tightening and shivering and
their small breasts creating discomfort and pleasure at the same time, illustrates
how the girls were becoming aware of their sexuality. Nel and Sula do not overtly
engage each other sexually, but black feminist scholars like Barbara Smith have
argued emphatically that Nel and Sula’s relationship is blatant lesbianism.
Morrison instead of portraying them as lesbians presents them polemically
opposite women: on the one end of the spectrum is Nel – submissive, traditional
and subservient, on the other end is Sula – controlling, anomalous and
domineering.

Nel feels disappointed when Sula decides to leave the Bottom. When Sula
returns after ten years Nel feels as if she has got her eye back. Despite many years
of gap their friendship seems stronger as it was. But when Nel witnesses Sula and
Jude having sex, she feels destroyed.

But they had been down all the fours naked, not touching except their lips
right down there on the floor on all fours like (uh huh, go on, say it) like
dogs. Nibbling at each other, not even touching, not even looking at each
other (Sula 105).

The aftermath of this sexual act ruins their friendship. Sula like her mother has sex
with any other person. For that reason Sula becomes unable to foresee the reaction
from Nel. Of course that Sula is unable to relate sex to love. This can be witnessed
in a talk with Jude. She says to Jude,

‘I mean, everything in the world loves you. White men love you. They spend
so much time worrying about your penis, they forget their own. The only
thing they want to do is cut off a nigger’s privates. And if that ain’t love and
respect I don’t know what it is. And white women? They chase you all too
every corner of the earth, feels for you under every bed, I knew a white woman would not leave the house after 6 o’clock for fear one of you would snatch her. Now ain’t that love?’ (Sula 103).

Though Nel is Sula’s best friend, for her sex is something that belongs to marriage and that has to take place within the conventions of society and she feels lonely when Jude leaves the town by breaking her heart. Nel feels,

‘What I am supposed to do with these old things now. Just walk up and down these rooms? What good are they, Jesus? They will never give me the peace . . .’ “O Jesus, I could be a mule or plow the furrows with my hands if need to be or hold these rickety walls up with my back is need be if I knew that somewhere in this world in the pocket of some night I could open my legs to some cowboy lean hips but you are trying to tell me no and O my sweet Jesus what kind of cross is that?’ (Sula 111).

In Sula Morrison demonstrates the changed gender roles and sexuality through the characters. She highlights that such changes are not at all accepted by society. That is how Sula has been rejected and considered the bad omen and the evil of society.

The identity of gender is nothing but the identity of self. Morrison challenges the cultural construction of gender roles through the characters of Peace women (Eva, Hannah and Sula) in Sula, and Sethe and Paul D in Beloved. Morrison in both novels highlights that black mothers can both save and destroy life. For instance, Eva sacrifices her one leg to get insurance money for her children and also kills her son. At the same time Sethe exchanges ten minutes of sex for imprinting ‘Beloved’ on the gravestone of her child, whom she had murdered.

Sethe as a slave suffers a lot at Sweet Home. She is treated brutally and raped. She escapes with her two children but loses her husband during the escape.
Halle turns mad by seeing the rape of his wife. In order to save her children from slavery Sethe kills her daughter and settles at 124. After many years the physical relationship between Sethe and Paul D brings a better life for them. Even Sethe has introduced him as fatherly figure to her second daughter Denver. But Paul D becomes intoxicated by the unnatural ghostly figure of Beloved, without knowing why, he stops sleeping in Sethe’s bed - moving first to a rocking chair for a few nights, then to Baby Suggs’ double bed and then to the storeroom. Finally he stops sleeping in the house completely and creates a meager nest for himself in the cold house behind the main house. During this time, he and Sethe continue to have sex and maintain their relationship still deeper. Paul D believes that they prevent him from being able to sleep in Sethe’s bed. One autumn night, Beloved seeks him out and demands that he “touch (her) on the inside part and call me my name”. Although she promises to leave after he repeats her name, she instead forces herself on him.

The ghostly appearance of Beloved forces Paul D to have sex with her, which not only undercuts his relationship with Sethe but destroys the emotional safeguards he had established to protect himself from further suffering.

*Jazz* discloses the human nature of both the genders that have similar motivation and potential to experience love. This capacity is complicated by a difference in gender and that is further consolidated by culture and socialization. Joe’s adultery created lots of disappointment and anger in Violet by that she disfigured the face of Dorcas, his lover at her funeral. Within the romantic love and adultery Morrison analyses the man-woman relationship. The foundation of these sexual love and romantic love grows up by the influence of culture in which one is born and brought up. When a mother fails to give love and affection and if she becomes unable to support her child, the child, as a result during his young age, will certainly fail to recognize his self and in adult stage he tries to find that
affection in another and expects to find mutual affection. Joe Trace was in search of mutual affection so having no ‘Trace’ of his mother becomes close with Dorcas, a young girl out of his marriage with Violet.

Morrison portrays how the dominant male gender fails to perform his responsibility as a husband and father. Violet recalls how racial hatred, violence and poverty killed her mother, Rose Dear, when Violet was just about fourteen. Rose defeated and in despair, threw herself into a well and died. Violet recalls too that her ‘phantom father,’ who was constantly away on “bold, fabulously dangerous and wonderful trips” arrived two weeks after the mother’s suicide, his arms “laden with gifts, gold and stories of where he had been” (Jazz 100).

Dorcas learns about woman’s lost love and lost self through the stories by Neola. Dorcas’s “mother’s coffin makes her bold” but her desire for self recognition is undermined by her “love hunger”. She seeks such recognition by having sexual relationship with Joe, her fatherly figure. Joe becomes a desire for freedom, recognition, self-identity but when she realizes that it is not possible by being with Joe, she leaves him and tries to find the same with her new lover Acton. Ethel Person explains that in the patriarchal oedipal structure, “for the female, the romantic quest leads to the female being singled out among all other women by a male – the man’s singling her out then becomes proof of her value” He further explains that “in the oedipal structure the ultimate goal of the adult female is to surrender and lose herself in romantic love union with the male” (Person 270).

Dorcas though seeking self-recognition in Acton succumbs to domination. Dorcas liked “that other girls were jealous of her that Acton had singled her out over them. That she had won”. She said to herself, “I won I won”. But Acton “hawk eyed and little cruel”, sometimes he is where he says “he will be sometimes not” (Jazz 181). Through such relationships Morrison shows in this male
dominated romantic structure, Dorcas represents how the female loses herself and is ultimately destroyed.

Joe’s act of killing Dorcas for her betrayal is the central object of the novel. Alice says, “He killed her because he could”. (73). Likewise there are many men who kill the black women only to show that they can. The gender biased society make Joe defend himself for his act of killing Dorcas, because he could easily defend that he punished her because of her betrayal but the question arises who should punish Joe for his betrayal towards his wife Violet.

This is the condition of black women. Violet as well as Dorcas becomes the victims of racist and sexist society. The endless sexist oppressions on black women make their lives hell. The black women characters like Pecola Breedlove, Pauline Breedlove, Frieda, Sula, Nel, Sethe, Beloved, Violet and Dorcas become the strangers for their own self’. The black men become the owners of their body and mind. Yet their inner strength to fight back makes them stronger than white women.

2.4 The Techniques of Toni Morrison’s Writing – Language, Narration and Symbolism

Language and Narration

Black women are searching for a specific language, specific, specific symbols, and specific images with which to record their lives and, even though they can claim a rightful place in the Afro-America tradition and the feminist tradition of women writers, it is also clear that. For the purpose of liberation, black women writers will first insist on their own name, their own place

- Mary Helen Washington (New Directions for Black Feminist Criticism 167).
Toni Morrison is admired for the use of language and her interesting narrative techniques. Morrison’s artistic vision, her political insights and her reconstruction of the racial and sexual ideas are expressed through her language which is unpolished, seditious, confrontational, manipulative and disruptive. Morrison says,

The most valuable point of entry into the question of cultural (or racial) distinction, the one is most fraught, is its language – its unpolished, seditious, confrontational, manipulative, inventive, disruptive, masked and unmasking language (Rigney 22).

Morrison observes, “My effort is to be like something that has probably only been fully expressed in [black] music” (McKay 426). So like a musician she goes beyond the denotations of the words. She incorporates that freedom of worlds to render the expression and feelings through her characters. “Like the blues – singing women who populate her fiction, like the prostitute Poland in her “sweet strawberry voice” or like Claudia’s mother who can sing “misery colored by greens and blues” and make pain sweet, so “Morrison also sings her novels. Images of music pervade her work, but so also does a musical quality of language a sound and rhythm that permeate and radiate in every novel” (Rigney 8).

For Morrison writing is the heart-beat of the spoken language. In The Bluest Eye she uses her ability with language to take her readers into the black community in Loraine, Ohio. Morrison’s powerful language lends depth and details to every scene.

My choices of language (speaker, aural, colloquial), my reliance for full comprehension on codes embedded in black culture, my effort to effect an immediate conspiracy and intimacy (without any distancing, explanatory fabric), as well as my attempt to shape a silence while breaking it are
attempts to transfigure the complexity and wealth of Black American culture into a language worthy of the culture” (BE XI).

Morrison shows the suffering and bewilderment of Claudia, Frieda and Pecola over the blue-eyed, golden and silky hair, blond ideal of beauty that is even perpetuated by their parents when they are given dolls that fit this mould. She conveys the hopelessness and anger of taunting children with fierce, biting language. “They seem to have taken all their smoothly cultivated ignorance, their exquisitely learned self-hatred . . . and sucked it all up into a fiery cone of scorn that had burned for ages . . .” (BE 55). She takes the reader into the mind of a helpless little black girl who looks into the mirror “trying to discover the secret of the ugliness . . . that made her ignored or despised” who tragically withdraws into her own reality where she sees herself with ideal blue eyes, but is concerned that someone else may have “the bluest eyes in the whole world” (BE 157).

Critics are of the opinion that Morrison uses language to draw “imagined and possible lives” and lives that should be unimaginable. Her contribution to the American novel is the power of her language and the image that the language instills in the hearts and minds of her readers.

_Sula_ carries both the simple and stylistic language. Morrison is gifted with the use of such a language which mirrors the hidden and unhidden objects of entire universe that she is dealing with. Ron David explains,

After the first of the Sula, my feelings about Toni Morrison’s language were plain and simple: the woman is the greatest line-to-line writer in English since Shakespeare. Most great line-to-line writers are great at either the fancy stuff or the simple stuff, Morrison is magnificent at both (David 72).

Morrison has cast light on the clear difference between the white and the black women’s languages. As their attitudes differ, their way of thinking differs. Since language is the outcome of thoughts they omit different modes of language
and different tone of language. Geraldine, in *The Bluest Eye* who assumes herself as white woman speaks very roughly with the black girl Pecola. Geraldine misunderstands Pecola that she had killed a cat so she scolds Pecola as if she is white. She humiliates Pecola not just for killing her cat but also for her ugliness. Her superior attitude as a white is indicating in her language, and she screams at Pecola, “Get out”, “You nasty black bitch. Get out my house” (*BE* 90). White woman as a mistress and black woman as a servant differ in delivering their language. Pauline Breedlove’s white mistress shows the dominance and denies giving payment to her black servant Pecola. The white mistress’s dominance as a master of Pauline and Pauline’s subservient language is evidenced in the following conversation:

“Are you going to leave him, Pauline?”

“Yes ma’am”, “can I have my money today?”

“Only when you leave him. I’m only thinking of you and your future”

“No good ma’am”. (*BE* 92)

This is the difference between white and black women’s language in America. White woman as a mistress dominates and the black woman as a servant addresses her as ma’am and appeals her for her wages. Morrison’s black woman language is not only submissive but also aggressive against the racist and sexist society. Sula’s verdict, “I don’t want to make somebody else, I want to make myself.’ Nel’s proclamation of “I’ m me. I’m not their daughter. I’m not Nel. I’m me Me”. Sethe defends about her infanticide, “No more powerful than the way I loved her”. The way these black women express their frustration through their aggressive language signifies that they are no more marginalized.

Among all the characters in *The Bluest Eye* Morrison selects Claudia, as the first person and the central narrator of the novel. Claudia seems as ‘normal’. At the same time Pecola’s character is in contrast with Claudias’. The stable girl of the
novel Claudia narrates the story effectively. She narrates the story from two different perspectives. In the Prologue and the final chapter she describes the things in the story as an adult. Claudia uses past tense to describe the story. Most of the times she uses the present tense to describe those events, which have the effect of showing things through her nine year old eyes. Claudia proves herself as an empathetic narrator and somewhere she seems unable to describe the mind of the some of characters. She does her best to try to understand them especially Pecola.

While describing the Breedlove family and the Soaphead Church, Morrison excludes Claudia from the narration by using the third person narration. This narrator is capable of moving through extreme distances of space and time. This is the voice that tells the long history of the Breedlove’s store front, Cholly’s sexual humiliation and Soaphead’s journey from the West Indies to America.

The beginning lines of the novel “Here is the house. It has a red door. It is very pretty . . .” Morrison writes the same paragraph in three different structures. First, the paragraphs having quite free space in between the words and line signify the white people who are ever free. The second paragraph with the same line but the space between the words and line and without punctuations denotes the upper middle class black people which has so many disorders and the third paragraph with no space like– “Hereisthehouseithasareddooritisverypretty”(1-2) symbolizes the poor black people, their mind which is confused and their wish to become like the whites. It demonstrates the utter breakdown of order among the Breedloves. Morrison uses it to denote that every child in America grows upon Dick and Jane and they aspire to be like Dick and Jane, and when they fail, they lose their self-esteem and their consciousness.

The second beginning of the story is narrated by Claudia who gives curious information by which the reader becomes curious to read the story further. The
third beginning of the story reveals the story of the novel which is divided into sections that correspond with the seasons like autumn, spring and summer. Morrison’s novels have a relationship with the nature and the season. Barbara Christine says, “Her novels are rich not only with characters but also with signs, symbols, omens sent by nature. Wind and fire, robins in the spring, marigolds that won’t as much characterizations in her novels as the human beings who people them” (Christine 25).

*Sula* runs by the third person omniscient narrator. Since *Sula* is a feminine work, Morrison provides a special voice of a black and a female to the character Sula. Rather than the narrator Sula represents most of the symbolic voices in the novel. There are two parts in the novel *Sula* and every chapter in each part is structured around chronological order like (1919, 1921, 1922, 1923, 1927, 1937, 1939, 1940, 1941 and 1965). It does not give the linear story of each new plot and event clearly visible in the preceding chapter. The narrator never reveals the thoughts of the characters at one time. Instead, from chapter to chapter, she chooses a different point-of-view, so that a different person’s experience can dominate each section. Sometimes the narrator moves beyond the consciousness of a single individual character, to reveal what the groups in the community think and feel.

There are 28 chapters in *Beloved* which are divided into three parts. Each part begins with the long chapter describing the state of the house ‘124’ on Blueston Road from ‘spiteful’(3) to ‘loud’(199) to ‘quite’(281). Many of the chapters are quite short from 2-7 pages each. The language of the first part is much restrained whereas in the climatic scenes the language gets more expansive. In the second part, from chapter 20-23 there are four stream-of-consciousness or interior monologues wherein Morrison attempts to process the thinking of her women characters.
For example, Chapter 20: “Beloved, she my daughter” (236-241) is Sethe’s stream-of-consciousness.

Chapter 21: “Beloved is my sister” (242-247) is Denver’s stream-of-consciousness.

Chapter 22: “I am Beloved and she is mine. I see . . .” (248-252) is Beloved’s “middle passage”, stream-of-consciousness.

Chapter 23: “I am Beloved and she is mine . . .” (253-256) is Beloved’s stream-of-consciousness and poetic language.

The novel is told in the tree narrative perspectives – the third person omniscient, the third person limited omniscient and the first person narrative. There is often a shift between third person omniscient and third person limited omniscient. For instance; the third person omniscient narrator begins with the description of 124. “124 was spiteful. Full of baby’s venom. The women in the house knew it and so did the children. For years each put up with the spite in his own way, but by 1873 Sethe and her daughter Denver were only victims” (BE 3). The omniscient narrator fulfills the characteristics of knowing everything and about everyone in the novel. Hence, this omniscient narrator explains so much about the house 124, Sethe and Denver by which the reader easily gets well introduced with them. Moreover, this narrator speaks behind the screen which adds much clarity.

No longer is there a shift of narration to the third person limited perspective which explains about Baby Suggs. “Baby Suggs did not even raise her head. From her sickbed she heard them go but that was’t the reason she lay still. It was a wonder to her that her grandsons had taken so long to realize that every house wasn’t like one on Blueston Road” (BE 4). This narrator seems to know everything about Baby Suggs. Then immediately the narration gets shifts to the individual perspective, speaking from every character which makes the reader to have an
insight into the individual consciousness. Denver says, “Grandma Baby must be stopping it”. This kind of first person narrative helps the reader to identify the real voice of the characters. Much of the book goes back and forth between third person and omniscient and the third person limited omniscient.

*Jazz* is divided into ten parts having very less correspondence with each other. Ron David explains “The two things that make *Jazz* different than Morrison’s other books are that strong feeling of structure with nothing exact to hang to it on . . . and the narrator” (David 148). The novel has two narrative voices – the third person omniscient and the first person. The omniscient narrator tells about the other characters, their feelings and thinking. Though there is no more information about this narrator by Morrison, it is true that the narrator is looking for love in the wrong places. Along with this the reader often meets with the first person narration by Joe, Dorcas, Felice, Alice and Violet. Like *Beloved*, much of *Jazz* is told by the omniscient narrator. But these characters surprise the narrator by not doing what the narrator is going to tell. “The characters seem expressing the essence of Jazz: Freedom!” Many critics opine that Morrison disappointed the reader in terms of providing an unauthentic narrator.

Henry Louis Gates Jr. writes, “A final word about Morrison’s narrator: despite its revelation of a full and lyrical consciousness, despite its extensive ruminations about its character’s consciousness, it remains indeterminate: it is neither male nor female; neither young nor old; neither rich nor poor. It is both and neither” (qt David 150).

Morrison’s art of naming her characters, houses, streets, places and roads are impossible to neglect. Her wit behind naming the objects, the characters’ names she puts always will not mean as they seem to be. Morrison is born and brought up in an alien land whose people were forcefully taken from their home land and made slave. These slaves along with their self-identity lost their family
names and their own names. In fact, they were forcefully made to forget them all in order to paralyse them. Though they got freedom, they could not recover the lost names. So Morrison’s naming seems somewhat unusual.

Morrison names the neighborhoods as ‘The Bottom’ (*Sula*), streets ‘Not Doctor Street’ (*Song of Solomon*) and Houses ‘124’ (*BE*). Some of her characters bear the names from the Bible like ‘First Corinthians’ (*Song of Solomon*), generic names like ‘Son Old Man’ (*Tar Baby*), cartoon name ‘Chicken Little’ (*Sula*), ironic names like ‘Tar Baby’ and ‘President Lincoln’ for a horse (*Sula* and *Song of Solomon* respectively), name out of Roman history ‘Seneca’(*Paradise*) and names out of Greek mythology ‘Circe, Pallus’(*Song of Solomon* and *Paradise* respectively). These names do not mean as they seem to be. For example, though Pallus in Greek mythology means the Goddess of knowledge Morriosn does not mean the same in the novel *Paradise*. Morrison’s Phallus means one of the breeds of cat. The name of the house ‘124’ does not mean the address or house number rather that it is the name of a house. Keeping the name of the house in numerical seems unusual and ‘Sweet Home’ (*Beloved*) plantation has sweetness only in its name but the place is not lesser than hell for the slaves. Cholly, Pauline, Pecola and Sammy belonging to one family carry the surname ‘Breedlove’ (*The Bluest Eye*) but there is no love and affection in their breed/blood. There is a notable exception to this where Morrison names aptly the name for Milkman who is the protagonist of the *Song of Solomon* because Milkman like a baby is in search of his identity. Such kind of extraordinary art of naming makes Morrison different from other writers.

**Symbolism**

Since Morrison deals with the abstract themes such as racism, sexism, double consciousness, condition of black classism, etc, she finds it inevitable to use symbols to well express the hidden truths.
Some of the symbols in *The Bluest Eye*: House, Marigold, Blue Eyes, White Baby Dolls, Shirley Temple and Mary Jane candies. Blue eyes, Blue-eyed Baby Dolls, Shirley Temple and Mary Jane candies are the white dominated symbols of human perfection especially that of beauty symbols.

The Bluest Eye also is the title of the book. It is the best symbol used by Morrison in the better understanding of the novel. The novel was written in 1941 long before the 1960s Civil Rights Movements. Then the blackness was the ugliest and the blacks internalized the white beauty standards to become one among the whites. Pecola the protagonist of the novel longs for the blue eyes just to love and to be loved.

The blue-eyed dolls are the dolls with blue eyes, pink skin and curly golden hair, which are dominating the store toy shelves. Shirley Temple is one of the artistic figures with golden hair, pink skin, dimple cheeks and blue eyes in the entertainment industry of film and whose image bears on milk cup and Mary Jane candies are the candies with an image of the white girl Mary Jane.

Claudia, the black girl with self-respect and awareness shows her disdain by destroying the baby dolls which are given as Christmas gifts to her. She admits “I did not know why I destroyed those dolls. But I did know that nobody ever asked me what I wanted for Christmas.” Claudia is aware of the negative influence of these dolls on the black little girls. She says, “I was secretly frightened of those round moronic eyes, the pancake face and orangeworms hair” (*BE* 18). She even does not like Shirley Temple cup “but in contrast Frieda and Pecola love to have milk for long in Shirley Temple cup. This symbolizes Frieda and Pecola’s love to possess the beauty of Shirley Temple. Mary Jane candies have the wrapper of the white girl Mary Jane. So Pecola wants to spend her money to buy them at Mr Yacobowski’s store. Another symbolic imagery that Morrison uses here is Pecola’s inability to communicate with Yacobowski which indicates the divide between her
as a black girl and him as a white man and even Yacobowski as looks at her with the white dominant lenses. He sees her ugly. Yacobowski’s racism creates inferiority more than anger in Pecola. Mary Jane candies at her hands gave salve to Pecola’s anger. By consuming them Pecola feels connected to the white culture which makes her more inferior. “To eat the candy is somehow to eat the eyes, eat Mary Jane. Love Mary Jane. Be Mary Jane” \( (BE \ 48) \). The candies become the strength of Pecola which is not her own. It means she is dependent on the white culture to sooth her pain that it instills in her a vicious cycle.

Morrison provides a contrast of symbolism of the ‘House’ in the Dick – Jane Primer at the beginning of the novel \textit{The Bluest Eye}. The house is generally the symbol of domestic harmony. The house of Dick and Jane seems to have these qualities with lots of comfort, happiness, perfection and safety but the house Morrison is going to introduce (Breedlove’s) “Here is the house” which is completely in contrast to this where there is no comfort, safety and affection. At the same time, the narrator Claudia MacTeer explains her own house as “old, cold and green”. She says that the love of her family provides warmth, if only the Breedloves were lucky. For the black and ugly girl Pecola the house becomes hell where she loses her virginity. For a black woman neither the society nor her own house is the place of safety.

The flower of arigold represents the constant renewal of nature. Morrison uses marigolds in association with the MacTeers sisters Claudia and Frieda who grow marigold plants with the safety of Pecola’s baby at their house. By growing the marigold Claudia and Frieda hope that if marigolds grew, the baby would be fine. The flower took a role of constant renewal of nature, but to Pecola, it is perverted by her father’s rape. Unluckily the marigolds did not grow up in the summer. Claudia compares planting marigold seeds and Cholly’s action of rape denotes how the earth itself hates the dark marigold seeds (Pecola’s baby).
this Morrison intensifies the depth of hatred for the ‘ugly’ blacks. The unyielding of marigold symbolizes the cruel white society which would never allow the black children to live a normal life. The marigolds convey Claudia and Frieda’s innocence which would never get any fruitful result.

The symbols in *Sula* are Robins, Legs, Phallic symbols, Flowers, Fire and Water. Robins are the birds that are symbolically used with Sula when she enters the town. Like Sula, the birds were not welcomed by the town people. The people think and feel the entrance of these two would result in some disaster. They are hated and rejected.

Accompanied by a plague of robins, Sula came back to Medallion. Sula and the robins brought with them annoyance and remembrance of years passed that were not always filled with happiness. The return of both of these pests reminded the people how glad they were the last time they left. The little yam-breasted shuddering birds were everywhere, exciting every small children away from their usual welcome into a vicious stoning” (*Sula* 89).

Sula though fights for her freedom, the evil society calls her evil. The male dominated racist society does not allow black woman to live the life she wants. Sula is the best example for it. She is only expected to be according to the racist and patriarchal society. She denies it and for the reason she is rejected.

Legs in the novel represent as the weapons for sexual encounters. Eva, with her “one glamorous leg was always in view as well as the long fall of space below her thigh” (*Sula* 31). Shadrack is associated with the phallic symbols. He walks around the town with his genitals hanging out of the pants declaring to the world his sexual strength and urge. Through this he wants to earn respect for his manhood and tries to portray himself as a dominant male in society. Sula’s rose like birth mark near her eye, makes her different from others in the community. Shadrack feels that her birth mark made her different from others and that is not
accepted by the community. Seeing that birthmark in Sula the community people point out her as an evil and justify themselves by citing Sula’s unconventional behavior.

Gardenias and rose are the two symbolic flowers associated with Rochelle and Sula respectively. Nel says when she meets Rochelle, her grandmother who is prostitute smells like gardenias flower and Sula has rose like birthmark on her face. Morrison uses fire as the dangerous symbol which causes the death of Plum as well as Hannah. The death of these by fire left peace in somebody’s heart. Eva intentionally fires her son Plum because of his inability to be a man. When Hannah dies the same time her daughter Sula feels relaxed. Water is associated with death. Chicken Little badly drowns in the water and dies. The very incident changes the life path of Sula and Nel.

Symbolism in Beloved is rich enough. Some of the symbols are the Hat, Trees, Houses and Water. The symbolic representation of hat is associated with schoolteacher and Mr. Bodwin. It signifies their dominance, power and superiority as the slave master. “Yeah, that’s right, a hat is making us go ick”, specially, “the black hat white-brimmed” (B 145). The hat plays vital role for Sethe because Sethe sees the hat of the schoolteacher first entering into Baby Sugg’s yard. Trees signify different thoughts with different people like Sethe, Denver and Paul D. For Sethe trees are the symbols of the past and unpleasant feelings. “Oh! is that Paul A? – hanging-from-a-tree thing.” The tree not only symbolises Sethe’s suffering victimized slaves, but that being “dead” suggests Sethe’s individual efforts to transcend slavery for selfhood. For Denver trees are the symbol of safe place. She says, a place where “her imagination produced its own hunger and its own food, which she badly needed because loneliness wore out. Wore her out. Veiled and protected by the live green walls, she felt ripe and clear and salvation was as easy as wish” (B 35).
Houses are the symbols of responsibility and memory for the slave master (school teacher) and for ex-slaves respectively. This school teacher could not handle his responsibility like Mr. Graner at Sweet Home plantation. The ghost of Beloved rises from the water. The water symbolises the womb of Sethe in which she was created and also the darkness of the grave in which Sethe placed her. Beloved’s emergence from the water is at first destructive for Sethe, because Beloved literally takes the life out of her. But, once Beloved has returned to the water her appearance proves creative for Sethe. Sethe has been empowered by her opportunity to confess to Beloved and love her as she dreamt about.

The symbolism in Jazz is adequate. Some of the symbols are Birds, Food and Green Dress. Birds are the very popular symbolic images. Morrison uses birds to show two things symbolically. First Violet’s care and nourishment for the caged birds give the maternal feeling for the childless Violet. Second the same birds symbolize the mental plight of Violet when she comes to know Joe’s betrayal for her. The latter one is referred in the beginning paragraph. When she learns about the relationship of Joe and Dorcas, she disfigures the face of Dorcas at her coffin and soon after that “She ran, then, through all that snow and when she got back her apartment she took the birds from their cages and set them out of the windows to freeze or fly, including the parrot that said, “I Love You” (Jazz 5). Towards the climax of the novel when Joe and Violet unite again, they decide to bring another birdie to home. As Morrison never fails to provide the necessary and delicious stuff for the readers she uses the birdie to symbolically describe the plight of Violet. The birds that they brought “was not well […] until they took the cage to the roof one Saturday, where the wind blew and so did the musicians in shirts billowing out behind them. From then on the bird was a pleasure to itself and to them”. (Jazz 224). This symbolizes the freedom and happiness given to the birds. This symbolizes the normal state of mind of Violet at the end.
Morrison’s nature symbols such as trees, birds, and others play an important role in her novels. They give depth and meaning to the black women characters’ life and death struggle as they face devastating and long term effects of the intersectionality.

2.5 The Existing Critical reviews on the Select Novels of Toni Morrison

The feministic and socio-political approach of Toni Morrison has attracted the readers to interpret it from different points of view. Many critics have read her novels and written their reviews in a spectrum of opinions. Here is an attempt to brief some of the critical reviews on her fiction.

John Leonard, the New York Times columnist and critic reviews Morrison’s The Bluest Eye with a tragic or negative stand. He opines that Morrison exposes the negative of the Dick-and-Jane-and-Mother-and-Father-and-Dog-and-Cat photograph that appears in our reading primers, and she does it with a prose so precise, so faithful to speech and so charged with pain and wonder that the novel becomes poetry. I have said “poetry”. But “The Bluest Eye” is also history, sociology, folklore, nightmare and music. It is one thing to state that we have institutionalised waste that children suffocate under mountains of merchandised lies. It is another thing to demonstrate that waste, to re-create those children, to live and die by it. Miss Morrison’s angry sadness overwhelms. (Leonard 23)

Hortense J. Spiller quotes,

Toni Morrison’s Sula is a rebel idea both for her creator and for Morrison’s audiences. To read Sula is to encounter a sentimental education so sharply discontinuous from the dominant traditions of Afro-American literature in the way that it compels and/or deadlocks the response that the novel . . . is, to my mind, the single most important eruption of black Women’s writing in our era (Spiller 63).
Margaret Atwood’s review on *Beloved* in *New York Times Book Review* states:  

*Beloved* is Toni Morrison’s fifth novel and another triumph. Indeed, Ms Morrison’s versatility and technical and emotional range appear to know no bounds. If there were any doubts about her stature as a preeminent American novelist, of her own or any other generation, *Beloved* will put them to rest. (Atwood 25)

Critics argues that Morrison composed *Jazz* - the novel in precisely the way Ellington composed music for each player’s unique sound. Ron David quotes, Lie William Faulkner, whose work was the subject of Toni Morrison’s master’s thesis at Cornell and whose finest work comes to mind again and again as we read through *Jazz*, Morrison’s new novel serves to redefine the very possibilities of narrative point of view. Like Duke Ellington, Morrison has found a way, paradoxically to create an ensemble of improvised sound out of a composed music. Riffling on these two great geniuses of American literature and music, Toni Morrison has established herself as one of the truly original novelists at work in the world today (David 147).

**References:**


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