

Chapter Seven

Summation

For those of us who read and write books and plays and poetry, the Black Aesthetic has to do with both love and killing, and learning to live, and survive, in a nation of killers, so that our children may breathe a purer and freer air.

- Julian Mayfield

Toni Morrison has won the Nobel Prize as a novelist. Morrison is a remarkable genius and her resourcefulness has established itself in different genres of literature. She is a novelist, short story writer, essayist and a poet. She is an educationist, social reformer and a humanist. She is an advocate of freedom and individuality. She defends the cause of women's liberation from slavery, racism and patriarchy.

Toni Morrison deals with social problems of fundamental nature, the woeful conditions of slaves, in her novels and short stories. The white society divided the people into a hierarchy of races. The freedom of blacks was severely restricted by the Jim Crow laws that existed then. Blacks were not given any rights. They were denied the right to vote, right to claim justice and so on. In her novels, Morrison focuses on the experience of black Americans, particularly highlighting black women's experience in an unjust society and the search for cultural identity. She uses imaginary and mythic elements along with realistic portrayal of racial, gender and class conflict. Her family talked about their dreams in the same way as they talked about things that really happened and they accepted visitations as real.

Morrison has explored and presented the experience and roles of black women in a racist and male dominated society in her works. In the center of her complex and multilayered narratives, there is unique cultural inheritance of Afro-Americans. Her writings reflect the ancestral African values. Her works also show the influence of Afro-American folklore, songs and women's gossip. Morrison attempts to map these oral art forms onto literary modes of representation. Morrison has successfully created a body of work that could be learned easily by going through a process of "black awareness." However, her works do not fail to draw reading audiences from across racial boundaries. In her Nobel Lecture, which was delivered in Stockholm, Morrison dramatically revealed how the visionary force and poetic import of her novels reflect her worldview and understanding of how language shapes human reality. She says, "Tell us what it is to be a woman so that we may know what it is to be a man. What moves at the margin [?] What it is to have no home in this place. To be set adrift from the one you knew. What it is to live at the edge of towns that cannot bear your company" (Morrison n.p.). Through her own use of the spoken and written word, Morrison has generated new spaces for readers, to bring their imagination and their intellect to the complex, cultural, political, social and historical issues of time. Moreover, through her work as an editor and novelist, Morrison has made it likely for the texts of both Afro-American and black feminist writers to redesign the contours of what one calls American literature.

The Afro-American novel is the product of social and cultural forces that shape the author's attitude toward life and fuel the dialectical process between romantic and mimetic narrative impulses. In contrast to the European American novel, the Afro-American novel has its roots in the combined oral and literary traditions of Afro-American culture. Gates reminds us in *The Signifying Monkey*, "the writing of black

people in Western languages has, at all points, remained political, implicitly or explicitly, regardless of its intent or its subject” (Gates 144).

The search for virtue and the Adamic vision are particularly the main quest that is seen in the European American novels. In contrast, the apocalyptic vision of a new world order and the expedition to settle the double consciousness of Afro-American identity are engraved in the texts of nineteenth and twentieth century Afro-American novels. Thematically and structurally, the tradition of the Afro-American novel is dominated by the struggle for freedom from all forms of oppression and by the personal flight to realize the full potential of one’s complex bicultural identity as an Afro-American. Toni Morrison’s works very well conforms to such rules and norms.

The history of Afro-Americans is depicted vividly in Toni Morrison’s novels. The suffering of black women is highlighted in her novels. Slavery started with the Atlantic slave trade that started as early as the sixteenth century. Several characters of Morrison are found to have taken the voyage through the Middle Passage. The novel *A Mercy* has the setting in the time when Atlantic slave trade took place. Minha mae, mother of Florens in *A Mercy*, Baby Suggs and the mother of Sethe are traded in this way. Sorrow, a poor girl character in *A Mercy* escapes from such a trade due to shipwreck. The suffering of the slaves, both men and women and their children is clearly depicted in *Beloved*. In *A Mercy* and *Beloved*, there are instances where different owners trade the slaves within plantations. The children of the slaves are traded likewise. Florens is traded in a similar way. Vaark from the D’Ortega plantation buys her. Then for two centuries, the blacks suffered at the hands of whites. There was inhuman slavery that victimized many black women.

In the nineteenth century, the blacks started protesting by showing different forms of resistance to bondage. This was the period of American Civil War. The brutality of slave owners, overseers and supervisors to the slaves is depicted in *Beloved*. Practices such as whipping, branding and sexual molestation were elements of such brutality of the white slave owners. The protagonist of *Beloved* is one such victim to slavery. She is whipped, raped and psychically shattered. Then, after slavery was abolished in the north, slaves from south started running away and they were known as fugitive slaves in the south. Rules were passed in the constitution to recover such slaves, if they were caught on their way of escaping. The Fugitive Slave Law or the Fugitive Slave Act was passed by the United States Congress on September 18, 1850. Sethe's infanticide is one form of opposition to the recapturing of the run-away slaves. The slave mother decides death is much better than to live in slavery.

The Civil War ended with the abolition of slavery in 1855. As a result of the Emancipation, Proclamation, the legal status of the slaves was changed all of a sudden. As documented by the United States federal government, there were three million slaves in the designated areas of the South who were let to be "free." The proclamation had the practical effect, that as soon as a slave escaped the control of the Confederate government either by running away or through advances of federal troops, then the slave became legally free. Ultimately, the law reached everywhere and liberated all of the designated slaves.

After the 1900s, though blacks were free, they were economically disadvantaged. Most of the families of the blacks were already broken and the values forgotten. They were working for the rich whites as mere servants. Though "slavery" is dead, "racism" and "white idealism," the heir of "slavery" is newly born now. This is

the time, Morrison brings in Pecola. She is a victim of racism, white idealism and patriarchal ideology. Though her mother and other women in the novel are affected, Pecola is the real sufferer. Morrison draws a lucid picture of the evils of white idealism. Morrison points out that the root causes of racism is slavery, where there is no mercy for blacks. Pecola succumbs to white idealism and patriarchal domination.

Then Toni Morrison brings in two other black girls, Sula and Jadine. They are emancipated and free girls. They come to live in Morrison's world a little later from the time when Pecola has lived. Both the girls are portrayed to be a little older than the previous victim of Morrison, Pecola. The novels *Sula* and *Tar Baby* have setting in the twentieth century around 1930's. These two girls are bold, have good insight about themselves and the environment in which they live. They know what is happening around them. They are not as bad as Pecola to become an absolute prey to lose their sanity. But they are not free from problems. They are in continual search of their identity. This time white-idealism has worked in a different way in bringing in a bit of self-hatred in the lives of Sula and Jadine. They forget their heritage and want to flee from blackness. They are not ready to give room for their African values. They try to assimilate all the values of the whites. And hence, there is no empowerment of these women. In the real world, many famous black persons want to hide their heritage. They go on to change their skin color, straighten their hair and simply become more pathetic from Morrison's point of view. These people want to change their phenotype and the way they look to please the world. They irrevocably lose their inner identity in the process. The self-hatred the blacks possessed indicates their immature mind that fails to perceive reality in a broader sense.

Very few black personalities took steps to proclaim their identity and heritage. Morrison is one of them. Barbara Smith, Zora Neale Hurston, Alice Walker were few among the many contemporary writers who advocated black heritage. Tommie Smith and John Carlos were two black American sprinters who stood by their culture and heritage. Both these men by wearing black socks and black gloves, took their places, bowed their heads and triumphantly raised their fists in a show of black unity in the medal receiving ceremony in the 1968 Olympic Games. The Montgomery bus boycott by Rosa Parks was one such event in history, where a black woman gave importance to dignity and self-respect.

The way in which the writings of women of color differ from white writers is explored in this thesis through the analyses of Toni Morrison's select novels. Afro-American literature easily lends itself to the interpretation by the critics who are well-versed in the behavioral style and tone of the people, the blacks who created it. Morrison is politically correct to emphasize the contention that the novel is written for the audience from the group, which created it. Among black writers, many women have also explored the meaning and importance of culture in the writings of black women. Many black writers have struggled to redefine black womanhood. Morrison is one among them. Morrison's novels focus mainly on the struggles and issues of black women in their own communities as well as white communities. The diverse subjects of her novels include love and hate, friendship, beauty and ugliness, good and evil, death, magic, supernatural, marriage, poverty, violence and hope. This pervasive crisis of race is the powerful drive for Morrison's writings.

Morrison has also addressed the issues of racism outside her own fiction. To honor Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr, the first celebration of his birthday after his

death was announced as a national holiday. Morrison produced a play *Dreaming Emmett* in 1985 at that time, which was not published. She wrote the story in reaction to the 1955 racist killing in Mississippi of a fourteen-year-old black boy named Emmett Till. Kathryn Bond Stockton in her book *Beautiful Bottom, Beautiful Shame: Where Black Meets Queer*, says that the play was “intended to symbolize the plight of contemporary black urban youth, their disproportionately high rate of death by violence” (178). *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, is a work of literary criticism by Morrison. In that criticism she mentions that “Africanism is inextricable from the definition of Americanness—from its origins on through its integrated or disintegrated twentieth-century self.” In the national canonical literature, Morrison discovers “a sometimes allegorical, sometimes metaphorical, but always choked representation of an Africanist presence” (PD 17). Morrison says that the black literature is thunderous and theatrically present and is the surrogate mother in the construction of the nation’s literature as well as an informing, stabilizing and disturbing element in the literature (PD 13).

The political economy of the writings of Morrison depended on the stress and limits of the social relationships she had. The demand and the response for the writings by black women following the Civil Rights Movement were huge. In 1965, the contemporary literary renaissance was started. Margaret Walker’s *Jubilee*, Paule Marshall’s *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People*, Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*, Toni Cade’s edition of *The Black Woman*, Alice Walker’s *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, and Maya Angelou’s *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* were some of the components the renaissance produced. Since 1970, there has been an incredible development. Morrison actively has played a role in promoting black voices. When she was an editor at the Random House, she made sure that black writers find an amenable

liberty in publishing. She also insisted that the integrity of their voices would not be compromised by the imposition of foreign values. A lot of important black publications by authors such as Mohammed Ali, Toni Cade Bambara, Angela Davis, and Gayl Jones, all received Morrison's support. The abundance of the creative work belongs to the community of cultural workers including black feminist critics and the teachers of literature. Their works are evidences for the statement made by Hortense Spillers. Hortense says, "Traditions are not born. They are made. A tradition arises not only because there are writers there to make it, but also because there is a strategic audience of heightened consciousness prepared to read and interpret the work as such" (250). Morrison and Alice Walker have strong black bridges already made for them. It was their literary foremothers and other activists who toiled to make those supportive bridges. The works of Morrison actually paralleled the command created by the black cultural and political mobilization of the 1960s and 1970s and the black feminist resurgence of the 1980s.

Morrison's novels stress the importance of preservation of ancestry. Almost all novels directly or indirectly, direct the black women and people to stick on to the African values and culture. It is the neglect of these values that bring discontent and failure in the lives of the blacks. In an article, Satya Mohanty comments about how Morrison's *Beloved* is a project that discovers about ancestry: *Beloved* is one of the most challenging of postcolonial texts. It indicates the extent to which the search for a genuinely non-colonial identity depends on a revisionary historiography. Moreover, one should understand that cultural meanings do not just sustain themselves through history but are in fact materially embodied and fought for. (Mohanty 41)

In the book, *Recasting Women* by Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid insists that “Feminist Historiography” must acknowledge the fact that each aspect of reality should be gendered. And they say that historiography may be feminist without being exclusively, women’s history (Sangari 2). In Morrison’s novels, the reader understands that a revisionary postcolonial historiography must also be a black feministic reading.

Morrison focuses on the experience of Afro-Americans, especially emphasizing on black women’s search for cultural identity in an unjust society, through her novels. Morrison stresses the importance of independence for women, rather than they being controlled by men. Morrison also emphasizes the importance of sisterhood by developing a good relationship with other women. Morrison establishes a model of familial continuity and points out the causes of some broken Afro-American families found in some of her novels. The black women search for a voice and they want an equal status with men in society. Morrison has had good experience in searching for an identity. She has succeeded in her effort by securing herself an identity and she is proud about it. She takes pride in being “black” and being “herself.” This paved the way for her to focus on the issues of racism, gender discrimination and class conflict.

The black women are simply the victims of violence and oppression. Many a time, they are treated as property or as sources of pleasure for men. They had experienced not just racism, but sexism and other forms of oppression. Black women’s prettiness and womanliness often led to sexual abuse by slave owners and male slaves. Even the children of enslaved mothers were also enslaved and were treated as the property of their mother’s owner. Thus, an enslaved woman preferred to end the life of her newborn rather than raise her child under slavery as it is shown in *Beloved*. In

addition, the infanticide brought huge spiritual and psychological outlay for enslaved mothers.

Missy Dehn Kubitschek has also noted that in the novels of black women writers, the protagonist is often on an expedition. The quest or expedition may be physical or an inner journey that leads to “the development of identity, particularly in relationship to community” (Kubitschek 9). These expeditions are often motivated either by an ancestral figure with supernatural gifts or by a supernatural event. The spiritual expedition towards identity and community certainly leads back to Africa and African traditions and values. The protagonist is guided and directed in this journey into the past by an ancestral, usually female figure. The ancestral figure is clearly a symbol of Africa and blackness.

Morrison’s family history, the environment in which she matured and the problems she faced and other inspirations forms the key for success of these five novels. As the author matures in her writings one could see a similar change in the presentation of issues in the subsequent writings. In *The Bluest Eye* Morrison is intensely disturbed with discrimination and the victim of such discrimination as she could see is one who can potentially lose self. This is the psychic loss one could see in the life of Pecola. *Sula* is the next novel where Morrison portrays a woman who is matured and independent. Even in *Sula*, there is overt racism between the whites and blacks. In *A Mercy*, the root of racism in the new world is traced back to the seventeenth century. Slavery as depicted was against the poor in the post-colonial world. Later the situation changed and slavery was directed against only on the blacks. Capitalism, colonialism and materialism coupled with imperialism were the forerunners of Slavery. These giants were the root cause of the African slave trade that started the

demolition of the particular race, later in America. In *Tar baby*, Sula becomes Jadine, an even more confident and aggressive character. She is confused in choosing between her own heritage and the western world of life. The fifth novel *Beloved* dates back to the age of slavery. Sethe struggles because of slavery again due to a loss of self-confidence and self-realization. Slavery makes people lose their inner self and this could be observed in *Beloved*. Though Sethe is not as powerful as Jadine, *Beloved* is written about a real incident with has a setting that dates back before the setting of *The Bluest Eye*. One could make out Morrison is so disturbed and distressed by the very fact of the mere presence of “Slavery” and “Racism” causing huge mental, economic, social, personal and physical downfall of the blacks. Being a female, the author revolts against the system through her writings. Morrison has chosen a non-violent way in which she beats one’s thought from deep through her writings.

All major characters in the novels of Morrison long to be free of the restrictions they relate with black self, family allegiance, and community prospects. They relate freedom with white culture, material gain, and travel. However, the accounts of these characters reveal the fact that individual freedom is feasible only through human relationships. Pecola is caught up by her longing to escape black identity. Claudia’s independence is completed through her protected and often confining attachment to her family and neighborhood and as well as her relationship with Pecola. Sula departs from the community and Nel surrenders to live in the community. Both of them are incomplete without each other. Son is the man who prized fraternity and he is forever free. Jadine protects her freedom, but she returns to the life, which she knows is a trap.

Morrison’s remark on the “1960s concept of black community” is played in the ultimate destructiveness of the black character Guitar and the organization Seven Days

in the novel *Song of Solomon*. In a number of ways the scope of Morrison's fiction has expanded with each novel. The setting of her stories has extended from the small Midwestern town, Ohio in which Morrison herself grew up into an interregional, and then an international, nexus of places. The challenge of categorization is amplified as the focus has broadened from girls to women, to men as well as women and then to whites as well as blacks. However, Morrison's concern about the scope of relationships has in fact lessened. In *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola and Claudia have to define themselves in front of the white world. The white world's values are impressed upon them by their family and neighbors. In *Sula*, both Sula and Nel have to just address the expectations of the town. In *Song of Solomon*, Milkman tries only to find out his bond towards his family in the present and past. In *Tar Baby*, Jadine is subsumed amidst the very personal disagreement between self and sexuality.

The thesis consists of seven chapters. It utilizes the comparative method to analyze the select novels of Toni Morrison. A sociological approach has been used to collectively analyze the essence of all the five novels. The researcher has examined the five novels in the cultural, economic and political contexts in which they are written. This approach explores the relationships between the artist and society. The artist's society is explored to understand the author's literary works. The representation of societal elements within the novels itself is also analyzed. A specific theme or concept has been explored in each chapter. The first chapter is an "Introduction," to literary and biographical notes on Morrison. The issues of feminism in general and particularly black feminism from Afro-American writers' points of view are also discussed in this chapter.

The second chapter, “Black Trade,” talks about an era before slavery was set in America. The chapter explores the novel *A Mercy* set in this time and covers the issues with the trade and selling of African people as commodity. The chapter is named “Black Trade” as the blacks are traded and “black” signifies the negative effect it brings to the entire world. The chapter examines the impact of slavery, race, class and gender on the black women’s survival. Colonialism and capitalism were the predecessors of slave trade and slavery. The novel emphasizes how black women, white indentured servants and Native Americans faced the challenges in a capitalist society. In America, the victims of slavery included all people who were poor and disadvantaged, which later was turned down only against Africans based on skin color. Hence, the chapter analyzes the way in which Morrison has tried to investigate into the conditions that determined the status and situations of each form and category of subalternity through the novel *A Mercy*. The chapter gives a good account of Florens, Minha mae, Baby Suggs, mother of Sethe and Nan. These are the traded women of Morrison. Hence, the second chapter in general talks about the “Traded Women” of Morrison.

In the third chapter, “Black Victims,” the main concept discussed is of the victimization of black females through brutal slavery and the white idealism. The chapter talks about the ways in which these victims are exploited by slavery, racism, white idealism and patriarchal creed. The concepts of black motherhood and black sisterhood are also discussed in this chapter. The issue of rape, either by black or white men, can be referred to the conspiracy of men against women. This point reflects the fact that women in a colored society are doubly oppressed. Accordingly, black feminism is different from white feminism, which lacks the question of race. This chapter shows how Morrison in her different ways responds to this tension through her

characters. *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved* are the works discussed in this chapter. The chapter talks about the “Victimized Women” of Morrison.

Morrison marks her character’s black girlhood as a pivotal point wherein each woman’s inherent value is either denied or affirmed. The implication of slavery eliminates the culture of the victim in favor of the mainstream society. The sufferings are terrible for blacks, and for women it is even worse. The psychological and emotional insult of the members of the oppressed group have been historically dismissed or denied in white literature.

Morrison’s novels focus on black females in constructing their identities in a racist society. In these novels, Morrison discusses the threat of gendered violence in the society. Black women are doubly oppressed. The question of race is the issue, which distinguishes black feminism from white feminism. Morrison creates an atmosphere that exposes the contingency of black women’s position. Many black girls are not protected from the harsh realities of black womanhood, but are left to experience the politics of race, gender, sexuality and class with no viable coping strategies. Morrison uses language to suggest patterns of silence, self-negation as well as agency to express how black women internalize cultural assumptions about black female sexuality.

Pecola Breedlove is the central character of Morrison’s novel, *The Bluest Eye*. She wishes for the bluest eyes because she needs to break away not only from her ugliness, but also from the ugliness of the world in which she is raped by her father, neglected by her mother and ostracized by almost everyone in her community. She firmly believes that if she has beautiful blue eyes, everything would become all right. The rape destroys Pecola and her hopes for self-reconciliation. She attempts to disappear to ease her own pain as well as that of her parents. Morrison’s stories

resonate with the live experiences of black women and their families. They demonstrate the real presence of evil in the world in the forms of sexism, racism, child abuse, domestic violence, alienation and homophobia. The black women's silence allows the horrific abuses to continue and persist.

Morrison depicts Pecola as virtually a universal scorn and only contempt is left for her in the entire novel. Morrison eventually urges the readers to find compassion for the raped girl. The readers are urged by Claudia and Frieda's dismay over the adult reaction to the sexual assault to evaluate their own beliefs about the sexual assault. The adult reaction to the incident is one of severe negligence. When Pecola says about the incident to Pauline, her mother, she gets beaten-up by her mother. The readers get an impression whether they are also biased against the victim, who could be an eleven-year-old girl standing in her kitchen, washing dishes. These black women are powerless and abandoned and they are the victims of oppression and domination in the society. These victims are too often silent and they are the sufferers. *The Bluest Eye* has multiple imperatives to draw upon. The novel delineates the devastating effects of racism upon the black community. The novel demands concern for the violated female. Morrison has made the destruction of life of a little black girl significant and she affirms that the trauma of incest or any kind of rape needs consideration. None can escape mental contamination and colonization as long as minority people see through the "eye" of mainstream ideology. As Morrison states in *The Bluest Eye*, that "such soil cannot engender flowers such as marigolds," black victims could not survive in a land that downplays their value as humans.

The other novel explored in the third chapter is *Beloved*. In this novel, the presence of the baby ghost may be considered as a connection between the past and the

present. *Beloved* vividly shows what slavery did to black people's bodies and minds. In truth, virtually all enslaved Afro-Americans were treated worse than animals. This kind of dehumanization eventually makes them to lose their sense of self-worth and leaves them probing their existence as humans. *Beloved* revives the past in the modes of haunting, memory and storytelling. The novel expresses history as a construction of the dominant culture. *Beloved* paves a way to reclaim the absent voices and lost truths.

The novel *Beloved* is based on a published story about a fugitive slave, Margaret Garner. Margaret tried to kill her children in order to offer them death rather than return them to a life of slavery. For her, death is better than returning to and being in slavery. The character Beloved simultaneously embodies and confronts Sethe with both of the central traumas of her past, the distance slavery imposed between her and her mother, and the murder of her baby girl. This is the main misery of the novel. Morrison draws that the cadence in Beloved's voice should be that of an African rather than an Afro-American.

Most of the novel's narrative is in the form of memories. They are not simply the memories of one character, but the memories of all including the most minor characters. Hence, *Beloved* is the story not just of Sethe and her family, but also of an entire community. Throughout the novel, characters speak out their painful memories and stories down. Sethe, tries not to remember anything, like the rest of the former enslaved Afro-American characters in the novel. Morrison has characterized the experience of white racism as trauma and psychosis. Psychosis, the unsolved conflict is seen to occur at two levels. The first level is between the self and the other who is an oppressive character. The second level is the conflict between the external interactive force and internal psychological force. Morrison's novels have described the conflict or

trauma of the Afro-Americans as “fragmentation.” This fragmentation of Afro-Americans is seen in her narrations.

The fourth chapter, “Black Identity,” is a comparative analysis of Toni Morrison’s *Sula* and *Tar Baby*. This chapter talks about the “Emancipated Women” of Morrison. The issue of race and its influence on women’s identity is a diverging point between women of color and the white system of thought. It addresses the essential feminist debates of the body, which covers themes of sex, sexuality, prostitution and gender. The chapter mainly focuses on two emancipated women, Sula and Jadine. These women are portrayed bold and not submissive as the black victims of the previous chapter. Though they are emancipated, Morrison regrets in them in not holding on to and preserving the African heritage in their life. These characters are found to give no importance to the value of black culture and ancestral values. This is the reason why they are not empowered, though emancipated.

This study foregrounds the restorative powers of female bonding, which allows women to overcome prejudice and survive, to enjoy empowerment and to extend female friendship into female solidarity that participates in nation building. Both these women belong to the era of “Emancipation.” They are the liberated women. Morrison points out the lack of empowerment in them as these women have forgotten to carry on the African heritage and its importance along with them. They long to get an identity in the society where racism is profound. They are not able to attain empowerment as they simply neglect the value of blackness. This empowerment, which Morrison aims at inculcating in the lives of black women, can only be achieved with self-realization and remembrance of ancestral values. The black womanhood and motherhood should play a

vital role in understanding the perils of not achieving empowerment in black women's life.

In the novel *Sula*, Morrison focuses primarily on the social relationships between genders and the complex interpersonal relations between women. In *Sula*, Morrison brings out the fact that all black people are in a constant battle with the dominant culture to discover their innate value and to take hold of their right to live and prosper. Black women incessantly try to construct their own identity. The novel *Sula*, places black women at the center of analysis of race and racism to reveal how gender and race form a fatal combination to alter the lives of these women.

Black women live together with sisterly support as they struggle to negotiate their way through the problems of race, class, and gender prejudices. Many a time black women are isolated and vulnerable. Hence, they are left to act singly without the advantage of collaboration or a council. In *Sula*, Morrison drastically refigures the black women as subjects in order to deconstruct the voiceless and victimized representations of black women into emancipated and transformed women. Morrison tries to make the society hear the voice of the voiceless. The lives of these emancipated black women have been disfigured by their terrible encounters with racial and gender discrimination. Pitifully, they are products of the worst marriages and male-female relationships, either their parents' or their own.

Sula is found to resist the very real consequences of patriarchy in her life, alienation and heterosexism. As a result of racism and sexism, black women have come to represent as the embodiment of female evil which could be either sexual or nonsexual, in the sex and gender construction. Evelyn Hammonds explains that historically, black women mainly chose to remain silent about their sexuality in order

to safeguard the sanctity of their lives and as well as to defend against the negative stereotyping regarding the construction of the black female as the embodiment of sex during slavery (483). This politics of sexuality of the black women during slavery is the self-imposed silence that creates a vacuum, and results in holding no ability to articulate any conception of their sexuality. These silent black women are the real sufferers and they sacrifice their self and remain silent to prevent negative stereotyping of the black women's image. However, Sula is the emancipated black woman and she is no more silent about her life and sufferings. She does not belong to the era of slavery. She lives much later when slavery has gone and has left the trails of racism. She has a voice and mind that articulates with both the dominant and black society. She is emancipated literally and liberated in her mind too. But her black great grandmothers and mothers may have remained silent about their sexuality. Evelyn Hammonds argues that these black women during slavery have not passed down a language that their daughters can use to reflect the truth of their lives.

Morrison presents racial and patriarchal institutions in her novels as definite threats to women's relationships. *Sula* describes the troubles of women who suffer different forms of oppression and it portrays female bonding as a necessary strategy for fighting back against prejudice. Though, *Sula* portrays failed female friendship in order to foreground the authority of patriarchy, the message it leaves is that women can fight the forces that subjugate them and can succeed into overcoming and surviving.

In *Sula*, both the black girls help each other in difficult times. Because they go through analogous experiences, they understand each other very well. The relationship of Nel Wright and Sula Peace is a very vital part of the novel. Both the black girls make a deep friendship that allows them to develop their identities. They support each other

by sharing their stories and experiences. Morrison brings out the idea that, black women must realize that they have to work in unity, peace and harmony in order to achieve their vision. The vision should unite black women and provide a context of sharing and connection. Sula is unique in her character and is not submissive to traditional values. She protests against the power of men over women and against the barriers of racist and class oppression.

In *Sula* after Sula's death, later in life, Nel comes to realize that she has really missed Sula. She also realizes that their youthful friendship has been the most important relationship in her life. Good friends bring out something from each that the other does not have. Douglass Century, in his book, *Toni Morrison*, says that Sula and Nel are almost two halves of the same person. Each one lacks something the other does not have. Nel's ultimate understanding of the importance of her relationship with Sula alludes at the possibility of change. Nel gets a glimpse of what it may be like to see her as a whole being on its own.

According to Morrison, black sisterhood is essential for the survival of the black woman and black motherhood is essential for progressing to black women empowerment. The message she infers is that, the black women must turn to her gender, in a devoted manner to help, guide and care for one another. Black women must come together in a common bond of sisterhood for strength and support. Pauline in *The Bluest Eye* has no bonding with the Mac Teers' family. She does not live in harmony with other black women and black families. Hence, her family is destroyed. Though Pecola is friendly with Claudia and Frieda, she could not draw upon them to gain a successful life. Sula foregrounds the healing powers of female friendship that relieves pain and makes it possible for women to survive prejudice and discrimination.

It also highlights how female bonding can extend to female solidarity. The concept of female solidarity is lost later in the novel *Sula*. Though Nel and Sula are as close as the mirror images of one another, they have a brief period of discontentment in their lives. However, after the death of Sula, Morrison once again binds the minds of these two women and claims back the black women solidarity. In Morrison's *Sula*, the discontentment and non-acceptance of Sula's unconventionality initiates the attempts at solidarity in the community. However, this too fades away as soon after Sula's death.

Morrison writes about female bonding and sisterhood relationships in many of her novels. *Recitatif* is the only short story by Morrison, which was published in the year 1983. It appeared in 1983, as an anthology of writing by Afro-American women entitled "Confirmation", edited by Amiri and Amina Baraka. *Recitatif* is similar to *Sula* and tells the story of the conflicted friendship between two girls. One of them is black and one is white. They meet and bond at age eight while staying at an orphanage. The story goes on till their re-acquaintance as mothers on different sides of economic, political, and racial divides in a recently gentrified town in upstate New York.

Despite the fact that Morrison characteristically writes about black communities from an intimate standpoint, in the story *Recitatif* she takes a different approach. In this story, Morrison explores how the bond between the two main characters is molded by their racial difference. However, Morrison does not disclose which character is white and which is black. Rather than probing into the unique culture of Afro-Americans, she demonstrates how the division among the races in American culture in general is dependent on blacks and whites defining themselves in opposition to one another. Her use of narrative and description in the story accentuates the readers' participation in this process. Morrison has considered analogous matters in her book of criticism, *Playing in*

the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination, which explores how language enforces stereotypes in the work of classic American authors such as Melville, Poe, and Hemingway. Hence, *Recitatif* may be assumed as part of Morrison's continuing response to the mostly white and male classic literary tradition of the United States.

Like Walker, Morrison criticizes the black community because its members do not support each other. The members of the black community have forgotten the communal value of each individual as a means of reducing self-destructive action. Through her criticism, Morrison demonstrates the need for redefining the values within the Afro-American community so that Afro-Americans can live completely safe.

The problem the black women face in each novel is described in different forms. These problems signify black women's suffering which again indicates the different forms of women's oppression. These different forms of oppression should urge women to form bonds in order to fight back. Though, it is slavery and racism that has laid the foundation for the final awful destination of the poor girl (Pecola), patriarchal domination and destruction has completed the annihilation of the innocent mind. This reflects the strong feminism and eventually black feminism in the thought and ideas of Morrison. Black women, black children and black community need to fight slavery, racism, white idealism and as well as the patriarchal ideology. The importance of ideas and strength of black feminism need no more justification. Black feminism also stresses the importance of black motherhood and black sisterhood. Both black motherhood and sisterhood are vital elements of black feminism. They are important in giving a definite shape and worth to black womanhood. The successful girlhood relationships, she portrays, reflect her stand on female bonding even though they become weak afterwards. This type of female bonding is very well written by

Alice Walker in her novel *Color Purple*. The novel also demonstrates the strength of female friendship that liberates women from the burden of oppression and a chance to empower each other. This survival over patriarchy is indeed vital and highlights the nurturing and caring qualities of female bonding that makes this liberation possible and allows women to heal the wounds contracted through the process.

Morrison prefers to choose failed female friendships and portrays it as a warning in order to show the disorder that a lack of female bonding is likely to cause in women's lives. She in fact encourages them to cultivate successful sisterhood. Through Morrison's novel, one can understand the fact that, in a black women's journey towards empowerment, the ultimate responsibility of self-definition and self-valuation lies within the individual itself. Other black women may just provide assistance for a black woman to complete her journey. The oppression Morrison describes in *Beloved* is not different from the suffering of the women that Alice Walker depicts in *Color Purple*. This similarity in women's experiences of oppression reveals the universality of female subjugation, a predicament that women have to combat everywhere.

Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Angela Davis and Zora Neale Hurston are pioneers of black feminism in their writings. The main objective of their writing is to inspire black women to love themselves, their race, and their culture and not to get trapped in white superiority or white beauty ideals. Morrison believes that survival of black women in a white racist society greatly depends upon their emphasis on loving their own race, their own culture, and loving themselves and not on engrossing themselves in white culture or white beauty standards.

The fifth chapter deals with "Black Motherhood," as this is vital in the journey of black women's liberation and empowerment in America. This chapter analyses the

female characters in the novels that play a motherly role. This chapter talks about the “Morrison’s Mothers.” The weakness and the strength of these characters are evaluated in detail. Since black motherhood is so vital in empowering black women and children, the chapter emphasizes on good black motherhood that is needed for shaping the emancipated black community in America. The chapter also analyses about what went wrong in the lives of some of the mothers who failed to prevent their black children from destruction. The differences and the uniqueness of African practice of mothering have been discussed in detail. The characters Eva, Sethe, Hannah, Pauline, Minha mae and Ondine are studied in detail. Some of Morrison’s novels portray alienated mother-daughter relationships. The novel *Sula* reveals how Nel’s and Sula’s bond allows them to care and nurture each other, thereby filling in the gap of their mothers’ neglect. Though Eva is a good example of “Black Motherhood,” Sula’s mother Hannah is not so in the novel. She seems to care less for Sula and unlike her mother; she does not have a strong role in the upbringing of Sula. Hence, in *Sula*, the estranged mother-daughter relationship between Sula and Hannah makes Sula to compensate the lack of mother-love and heal her wounds with the help of Nel. Julie Tharp in her criticism about a novel by Naylor, emphasizes the importance of “black mothering... to gender and ethnic identity which undermines the destructive fragmentation of capitalism, racism and patriarchy” (123).

In Afro-American society, the motherline represents the ancestral memory and the traditional values of Afro-American culture. African mothers pass on the experiences of the motherline to each succeeding generations through the maternal purpose of cultural bearing. Many Afro-American writers argue that the very survival of Afro-Americans depends upon the protection of black culture and history. Naomi Lowinsky argues that many women today are disconnected from their motherline and

have lost the legitimacy and power of their womanhood. According to Lowinsky, female empowerment becomes possible only in and through reconnecting to the motherline. For black children to survive, it is imperative for them to know the stories, legends, and myths of their ancestors. In Afro-American culture, women are the guards of the tradition. They form the culture bearers, who mentor and model the Afro-American values that is essential for the empowerment of black children and culture.

Morrison's women as "mothers," teach everyone the lessons to learn that are so vital and cannot be just neglected. Motherhood deserves a good mention as it fosters the child towards empowerment and thereby helping the community in general. There are good and as well as bad examples from Morrison's motherhood. In her novel that was released in April 2015, *God Help the Child*, Morrison stresses mainly on motherhood and its importance. The novel is the story about a neglected black child Bride by her mother Sweetness just because she is black. The novel talks about suffering that follows after this disgraceful negligence. Similarly, Pauline in *The Bluest Eye* is to be blamed for the insanity that creeps into her daughter's mind. As Morrison gives a warning by portraying bad examples, she also portrays strong black mothers in her novels such as Eva of *Sula*, Minha mae of *A Mercy* and Sethe of *Beloved*. Morrison's motherhood mainly focuses on nurturing, caring and giving counsel to the black community.

Black sisterhood is an element of community mothering that was practiced in West Africa and in America that followed the Slave trade. Slave mothers depended on their black sisters and elders and other younger women to care for their children as they were given no time to look after their babies. Community mothering is very well depicted in the novels *Tar Baby* and *Beloved*. In the novel *Beloved*, the character Nan

takes charge of Sethe. She is one-armed and works as the plantation wet-nurse. She has travelled with Baby Suggs and crossed the ocean in the same ship that brought Sethe's mother. Nan is kind of a surrogate mother to Sethe, breastfeeding her after all the "whitebabies" are fed.

Certainly, black women solidarity may not only involve more women, which may impact the community but also participate in nation building. However, the research reveals that there is no sign of existence of any form of empowerment in the lives of the female protagonists of Morrison's novels. The main reason for this is the magnitude of subjugation and torments during and after slavery in America. Emancipated women are threatened by racism and white idealism. Emancipated black women then forget the values of African heritage. They neglect the importance of ancestral values and black culture. People like Jadine and Sula are emancipated, yet they have not attained empowerment as they give little or no importance to black culture and the heritage of Africa. Black women should empower each other through female friendship and those who empower themselves at the expense of other women should be discouraged. Empowerment should be achieved through self-realization and preserving the value of African heritage. Empowering black womanhood also requires the presence of good black motherhood. These two elements are the pre-requisites that are essential for "Black Woman Empowerment." Therefore, preserving and absorbing "African Heritage" and accepting the African values in mothering is required to empower black children, women and thereby the community.

The Sixth Chapter gives a brief account of the "style and techniques" of the author Toni Morrison. Morrison's novel summarizes her concern in accepting familial heritage by Afro-Americans, as this theme is first proclaimed in *The Bluest Eye*.

Morrison works with a variety of perspectives, moving boldly and ingeniously around her focus and never falls into the trap of direct polemic. Morrison's novel has lots of challenging responses to the pressure to remain conventional. Her novels also depict many reactions to the pressure to assimilate European-American culture by the descendants of slaves. This is illustrated very well in her novel *Sula*. The novels of Morrison feature characters that the reader both admires and mistrusts. However, Morrison insists on her readers to appreciate the independent state of her characters and the extent to which their obstinacy creates negative criticism of the compromises that other characters make. Morrison also emphasizes on spirits, animated nature, the marsh women, and the ghosts of blind slaves. In *Song of Solomon*, one can see the presence of ghosts and persons possessing magical powers. *Beloved* is the great ghost novel of the twentieth century. Ultimately, the village of Eloë in *Tar Baby* prepared her readers for Morrison's grand novel of intended walling-out of the influence of mainstream culture, *Paradise*.

Through her novels, Morrison wants to tell another vital message to her fellow blacks. In the beginning, the problem was between two different races. But as time went by and people adopted any culture they liked, later it was a sad state where there was racism among blacks itself separating them into many classes. There was racism between the rich and the poor, the educated and the non-educated and so on. This separation is definitely counterproductive in the larger sense. The society, if it is not united would not prosper in the long run, will not achieve anything beneficial for its growth. This discrimination found within the blacks is the mere result of the forgotten ancestral values. The emancipated black community has never given any importance to remember and proclaim how their predecessors struggled to bring up the life of blacks tied up in a hostile environment.

Morrison herself in her novels always tries to link the past with the present. In the select novels studied in this thesis, one can find this link between the past and the present through the events and expressions in the plots. In *Beloved* through the baby ghost Sethe never gets to forget her past. The presence of the ghost character Beloved is symbolic of the way in which past sufferings and losses impede the progress of African community in America. In *Tar Baby*, the past is shown through Son, a wild genuine African who endeavors to waken Jadine to her origin. The night women and other aspects of African culture, such as the folk song, also demonstrate this link with the past. The spitefulness and sublimity of aesthetics are displayed in the actions and events in *The Bluest Eye*. So far beauty is examined as it has been made “radicalized” by the white racist society which created it. Pecola’s idea of beauty is indicative of the domination over the blacks of the white aesthetic. Pecola considers that this new image, if she could acquire it, will eventually change her life. By connecting the past with the present Morrison stresses the importance that has to be given to ancestral values. Only by doing this black womanhood would empower themselves and thereby empowering the community as such.

Morrison’s life is a good example for the Afro-Americans to change their attitude towards their race. Her life and writings teach us to be proud of one’s own race and then to preserve the integrity by remembering the roots. Morrison’s father was a strong inspiration for her. Morrison parents’ emphasis on the value of Afro-Americans as people, of their family as an inviolable unit, and of themselves as individuals helped her to build a strong psychological foundation that sustained and nurtured her. Her father was strongly convinced that blacks were superior to whites, a belief that deeply influenced Morrison. At the age of thirteen, when Toni Morrison complained about the mean white family whose house she cleaned, her father told her that she did not live

with them, but that it was merely the work place. Morrison remarked in an interview with Charlie Rose, “I had the moral high ground all my life” (n.p.). That is the kind of strength, courage and independence she was fostered with in her childhood days and definitely her parents were the keystones to her empowered life.

Toni Morrison feels intensely the losses, which Afro-Americans experienced in their exodus from the rural South to the urban North, from 1930 to 1950. They lost their sense of community, their connection to their past and their culture. To have roots is to have a shared history. The individual who does not belong to any community is generally lost. The lack of roots and the disconnection from the community and the past, make individuals to become alienated. It is seen that often her characters struggle unsuccessfully to identify, let alone fulfill an essential self. Toni Morrison believes that the presence of the ancestors is one of the characteristics of black writing. Ancestors are necessary for they provide cultural information, connection with the past they protect and instruct. She strongly believes that ancestors are the ones who can work on empowering the community by teaching the un-matched African values to their family members.

This thesis concludes by stressing the datum of “Incomplete Transformation” and “Fragmentary Metamorphosis” of female protagonists in the novels of Toni Morrison. Some of Morrison’s women are traded. Some are exploited. Some women are emancipated. But, there is lack of empowered black women in her fiction. There are two important reasons that have caused the “Metamorphosis” of the “Black Woman” “Fragmentary” and the “Transformation” to be “Incomplete.” One is the neglect of African heritage and culture as the evolution of Africans in America took place. The other reason is the inadequacy and non-availability of a good mother or a sister in the

life of a black woman who may have needed assistance and some sort of support in her life. Hence, to attain empowerment, black women should go through the process of remembering their ancestors and their sufferings. Moreover, they should give importance to the African tradition and cultural values in their day-to-day life. This would in-turn make them compatible enough to become a good mother and as well as a good sister for another black woman who may need assistance.

There is a lot of scope for further studies with regard to Toni Morrison and her novels. Studies can be done in a comparative manner, analyzing Morrison's work and works of various authors of other cultures. For instance, analytical studies such as, "Comparative Study of Afro-American Women and Indian Tribal Women," "Existence of Color Discrimination in India and its Impact" and "Women Empowerment through Education" can be done on similar grounds.