

## Chapter One

### Introduction

Literature is the verbal organization of experience into beautiful forms, but what is meant by 'beautiful' and by 'forms' is to a significant degree dependent upon a people's way of life, their needs, their aspirations, their history in short, their culture.

- Stephen E. Henderson

Stephen E. Henderson was instrumental as a voice for a new understanding of Afro-American literature and culture during the 1960s. He took into consideration their way of life, their needs, their aspirations and their culture. Henderson provided the first formal interpretation of Afro-American poetry that he termed "militant," meaning that Afro-American poetry was written by Afro-Americans, for Afro-Americans, and as such, it was a radical retreat from white culture. He encouraged Afro-Americans to claim their selfhood, celebrate their identity, and refuse to give way to those who wanted to impose white standards on black culture.

Afro-American literature came into existence in North America before the Pre-Revolutionary War period in the latter half of the 18th century. To begin with, Afro-American literature focused predominantly on slavery before the American Civil War. Afro-American writers are interested in a creative dialogue with American literary culture. Essentially, slave narratives defined black people's trouble in the days of slavery. Afro- American literature is rich in meaningful intricacy and social intuition. It offers descriptive appraisals of American identifications and history.

Afro-American literature is divided into six main ages as follows:

- 1) Age of Apprenticeship (from the early stages until 1830)
- 2) Age of Abolitionists (from 1830 until 1895)
- 3) Age of Negro Nadir (from 1896 until 1920)
- 4) Age of the Harlem Renaissance (from 1920 until 1930)
- 5) Age of Richard Wright (from 1930 until 1960)
- 6) Age of the Black Militant (from 1960 onwards)

James Baldwin's period started from the 1960s and continued approximately till the 1970s. After 1970, Afro-American literature became a part of mainstream modern literature and literary theory. In fact, a second renaissance occurred in black fiction from the mid-1960s to date. The new generation of black writers is continuing to explore in an influential way the anxieties and images of the past history essentially of the blacks.

Black literature in America developed in similar ways as that of white literature. Black literature began with pedagogic poetry and didactic prose. They mostly consisted of slave narratives, diaries and sermons and were later on followed by lyric poetry and fiction and it also expanded to drama. Literary, social, historical, political and economic conditions of the black people were dealt with in detail in black literature.

Most of the literature by Afro-American writers describes past slavery and their culture. They dealt in detail about, who they were and what the white people did to them. Afro-American literature initially focused on the issue of slavery and the same is

presented in one of its popular subgenres called slave narratives. The history of Afro-American people is the story of their forced journey from one continent to the other. It is a story of their subjugation, slavery and liberation. The Afro-American literature depicts African cultures and the slave trade due to which many Africans lost their liberty. It is also the story of their survival, and their endurance in tolerating misery and trouble during this period and the way they escaped from slavery.

The citizens of America are very much aware of the nation's racial and cultural diversity. It is well known that they came from different parts of the world carrying with them their distinctive cultures. Africans, like other races, came from different parts of Africa. But in America, all of them became part of the same oppressive system run by the whites. Their black color was treated as a sign of inferiority in America and was synonymous with slavery. The word "Negro" came to the English language through the Portuguese who were the first traders in the slave trade. It was the Portuguese, who for the first time took Africans from Africa to Europe and America.

In 1492, Genoan Christopher Columbus discovered America. After the discovery of America, the Atlantic slave trade took a new and a rapid turn. The slave trade was known as triangular trade. In Europe, ships carried goods for African markets and sold them there. After the slave trade came into full swing, these ships, instead of transporting goods, started transporting slaves from African slave markets, sold them to the America and West Indies, and traded with goods for European markets. This circle of trade was known as the Middle Passage. The English had completed their colonization of Africa by 1719. After colonization, trade flourished and colonization further gave a boost to slave trade. The Africans transported to America by force were subjected to all kinds of menial and demeaning jobs without any wages.

In the United States, Afro-American literature, like any literature, was influenced by other literatures and literary theories. Some black writers also were influenced by modern European literature. The novels and short stories of Afro-American literature illustrate the unique experience of the blacks in America. The point to emphasize is not only that there has been conformity between the experiences and the different stories, but that the stories have been similar to each other as well. Amidst a number of literary movements and deviations that were taking place in America over the past eighty years, black fiction has continued to function within its own peculiar patterns. It is the high predominance of existence of the peculiar patterns, not simply of common external experiences, that made the Afro-American writing a realistic one.

The writings of Afro-American authors in the United States form one of the most influential groups in American literature. They vastly expand the black art and culture in a unique way. Their writings have proved to be quite impressive in the American society. Steven Watson in *The Harlem Renaissance* quotes W. E. B. DuBois: “The great mission of the Negro to America and the modern world is the development of Art and the appreciation of the Beautiful” (qtd. in Watson 16). Bernard W. Bell in *The Afro-American Novel and Its Tradition* divides the history of Afro-American novel into three periods. He says, “In tracing the movements of the early Afro-American novel toward social realism and beyond, I have discovered that its history conveniently divides into three periods: Antebellum Novels (1853-65), Post-bellum Novels (1865-1902), and Pre-World War I Novels of the Old Guard (1902-17)” (37).

The Negro’s history in America has merged with the American history. Hence, a new history appeared and it started with the coming together of these two cultures. One of the results of this intermixing was the birth of black literature. Black writers

endeavored to define black identity and black humanity in the unjust society of America. They strongly believed that white people were not in any way superior to black people. They wished that black people also, like other people, should have equal human rights and good life and through their writings they indirectly fought for the same. Black writing today is not new and black writers believe that only blacks themselves could change their situation in areas like social life, art and politics.

It is important to note that the books by Afro-Americans are representative of all the Afro-Americans in the United States. Most of the books written on the life of Afro-Americans are about how America proved to be an unjust society for the Afro-Americans. Generally, black literature is synonymous with literature of protest. They protest against exploitation, limitations, restrictions, discrimination, intolerance, inequality, etc., to which they are subjected by the whites in the United States.

Henderson has quoted the famous black poet Randall in many of his writings. Dudley Randall was an Afro-American poet and poetry publisher from Detroit, Michigan. He established a pioneering publishing company called Broadside Press in 1965. The company published the works of many leading Afro-American writers such as Melvin Tolson, Sonia Sanchez, Audre Lorde, Gwendolyn Brooks, Etheridge Knight, Margaret Walker, and others. Randall's poetry is characterized by simplicity and realism. Julius E. Thompson was Professor of History and Director of the Black Studies Program. He has written a book about Randall entitled, *Dudley Randall, Broadside Press, and the Black Arts Movement in Detroit 1960- 1969*. In that book, he also has quoted Randall's words,

To write black poetry is an act of survival, of regeneration, of love.

Black writers do not write for white people and refuse to be judged by

them. They write for black people and they write about their blackness, and out of their blackness, rejecting anyone and anything that stands in the way of self-knowledge and self-celebration. They know that to assert blackness in America is to be ‘militant,’ to be dangerous, to be subversive, and to be revolutionary... (68)

Randall, thus, affirms the peculiar nature of Afro-American literature and its propensity for being a literature of protest. There are two kinds of black writers in America: 1) Those who were expatriated to Europe like Richard Wright, James Baldwin, Chester Himes, William Gardner Smith and 2) Those who remained in America like Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones), Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Zora Neale Hurston etc. Besides these, some white writers have written about the mythical Negro life, the tragic mulatto, the black misery and so on. Black cultural nationalism is a modern social and political movement that began in America, especially among the Afro-Americans. It had started in the late 1960s and the early 1970s. Ron Karenga is one of the outstanding voices in favor of black cultural nationalism. Against the background of the early 1960s, a period of great racial uproar, Karenga met the foremost activist and Black Power advocate Malcolm X, and became interested in Black Nationalism. He then joined the Black Power Movement after the 1965-Watts riots in Los Angeles. He also adopted the title “Maulana” from the ‘Swahili’, a title of respect for revered community members. During this time, he founded the United Slaves (US) Organization, a Black Nationalist group. The prime aim of the cultural nationalist was to establish the recognition of a black society based on a common origin and language. Black cultural nationalism consists of a group of people who cultivated and developed a particular set of cultural traditions including art, music and philosophy.

The anti-slavery literature in the United States represents the beginning of multicultural literature. In the first half of the nineteenth century, black and white abolitionists fought against racism and slavery. Several white abolitionists like Arthur and Lewis Tappan, Lucretia Coffin Mott, Theodore Weld, and Lydia Maria Child struggled for equal rights for the blacks. They are also known as the early leaders of American Anti- Slavery Society (AASS). Some of the most prominent black abolitionists of the period were people like James Forten and Robert Purvis.

Black literature in America is the literature of reality and of facts. Everything written in the name of black literature refers to the black community in the States. Black literature is a literature of protest against white racism in American society. Henry Louis Gates, Jr.(2012), quotes Richard Wright as follows: “If white racism did not exist, then black literature would not exist, and he predicted the demise of the latter with the cessation of the former” (Gates, 2012, 179).

Slave narratives can be categorized into three specific categories:

1. Histories of religious redemption.
2. Histories of abolitionist efforts.
3. Histories of the progress of the slaves in the American society.

The histories written by the white and the black abolitionists are quite popular in American literature. These abolitionists turn back strongly to autobiographical motif. Amidst the harsh subjugation of slavery, Americans of African descent, and principally the black women, tried to preserve the culture of their ancestry. Many a time, at their own peril they expressed both their struggles and hopes in their own words and images. A lot of black female artists and writers became known throughout the Civil War and

the Reconstruction era. The emergent black art ultimately burst into the mainstream of American culture in the 1920s with the dawn of the Harlem Renaissance. The black literature played a significant role in both the civil rights movement and the women's movement of the 1960s. In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, black literature became widespread. It became known in many parts of the world and had wide audiences and good appreciation.

Harlem Renaissance, otherwise called the New Negro Movement, existed from 1920 to 1940. In general, it represented the flourishing period of Afro-American literature, music, dance, visual arts and culture. The Harlem Renaissance dignified the unique culture of Afro-Americans and redefined their expression. It was a period of remarkable vigor and creativity at the centre of New York's black ghetto.

The New Negro Movement became popular after the art historian Alain Locke published a book titled, *The New Negro*. *The New Negro* was the title of an anthology edited and published in 1925 by sociologist and critic Alain Locke. The book urged black artists to reclaim their ancestral heritage as a means of strengthening their own expression. The term Harlem Renaissance was borrowed from this anthology. The area, namely, Harlem in New York City was the center of black social and cultural movements in the United States. Harlem is well known for its production of plenty of black literature. The most famous writers in the period of the Harlem Renaissance are Countee Cullen, Arna Bontemps, Langston Hughes and Claude McKay, novelists like Rudolph Fisher, Zora Neale Hurston, Nathan Eugene (Jean) Toomer, James Weldon Johnson and Jessie Redmon Fauset. Between 1920 and 1940, many of the black writers and artists, especially those who lived in Harlem, started producing a great variety of

fine and original works dealing with Afro-American life and culture. Black readers were profoundly attracted to and influenced by these works.

The Harlem Renaissance was known as the era of “The New Negro Movement” or “The New Negro Renaissance.” Love, beauty, ugliness, identity, blackness, humiliation, historical phases, changes, music, and cultural phenomena are the major themes of the Black Arts Movement. A theme that runs throughout almost the whole of Afro-American cultural, artistic productions is the theme of the preservation of black culture and black identity. The same extends further to include dealing with guilt, social effects of race, shame, gender, class distinctions, violence, coming to terms with white standards of beauty, etc. Black art relates itself to historical, economic, educational issues as well as to social growth and development of people.

The general renaissance of black woman literature started in the 1850s. The first examples of literature written by Afro-American women appeared around 1859. These included short stories by Frances Ellen Watkins Harper and Harriet E. Wilson’s autobiographical novel, *Our Nig; or, Sketches from the Life of a Free Black*. Both these Afro-Americans were free individuals. Frances Ellen Watkins Harper (1825 - 1911) was an Afro-American abolitionist, poet and author born to free parents in Baltimore, Maryland. Harriet E. Wilson (1825 - 1900) is considered the first female Afro-American novelist. In 1861, Harriet Jacobs’ *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* became the first autobiography published by a female former slave. The book described the sexual exploitation of slaves that was prevalent and destructive to black womanhood. The book represented the oppression of slavery for black women. The book is an early example of black female strength in the face of adversity.

During the times of the Civil War, many autobiographical works by Afro-American women spawned. Charlotte Forten, the daughter of a Philadelphia civil rights activist Robert Bridges Forten, had a habit of recording her thoughts in her diary regularly. Her writings were published in many editions during the 20th century and they were very significant as a rare record of the life of a free black woman in the North in the antebellum years. Another prominent figure of this period was Elizabeth Keckley. Elizabeth Hobbs Keckley was born into slavery in February 1818. Keckley experienced harsh treatment under slavery, including beatings as well as sexual assaults. She purchased her own freedom in 1855 and became a dressmaker for the wives of political elites in Washington, D.C. Keckley soon became the confidante of first lady Mary Todd Lincoln. She served the White House for four years. In 1868, Elizabeth Keckley, published *Behind the Scenes; or, Thirty Years a Slave and Four Years in the White House*. In 1872, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper wrote *Sketches of Southern Life*, a volume of poetry based on her travels among the freed people in the South during the era of Reconstruction that was happening at that time.

In the early decades of the 20th century, there were continuing racial injustice and widespread lynching and other types of violence against the Afro-Americans. The condition inspired a literature of protest, including the short stories, novels and commentary of Pauline E. Hopkins, editor of the *Colored American's Magazine*. After 1920, Afro-American literature thrived in Harlem. It was not only a literary movement. Between the end of World War I and the middle of the 1930s, Harlem was a cultural center that brought in black writers, artists, musicians, photographers, poets, and scholars. Many had come from the South, bolting its oppressive racism with the intention to find a place where they could freely express their talents. Among the most powerful voices of the Harlem Renaissance was that of Nella Larsen, author of the

novels *Quicksand* (1928) and *Passing* (1929). Zora Neale Hurston published early short stories during the Harlem Renaissance. She became famous for her 1937 novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

The period of Great Depression ensued and then the World War II. This was the period of adversity for people all around the world. There was unemployment, poverty and fight for survival. The Afro-American women literature and art around this period was mainly that of Ann Petry and Gwendolyn Brooks. Ann Petry's novel, *The Street*, in 1946 chronicled the struggles of a working class black woman in Harlem. There is social criticism in the novel with the reflections of adversity as a result of the Depression. During the same period, Chicago native Gwendolyn Brooks wrote a lot of poems and stories. Her works mainly dealt with everyday life in black urban communities. She was the first Afro-American poet to win the Pulitzer Prize. Lorraine Hansberry from Chicago scored tremendous critical and popular success with *A Raisin in the Sun*, which opened on Broadway in 1959.

Artists and writers played an active role in the civil rights movement of the late 1950s and 1960s. Gwendolyn Brooks composed *The Last Quatrain of the Ballad of Emmett Till* for a black youth murdered in Mississippi in 1955. She then included more overt social criticism in her volume *The Bean Eaters* (1960). Poetry was also a central form of expression for the Black Arts Movement, the artistic branch of the Black Power Movement of the late 1960s and 1970s. Many important female poets such as Sonia Sanchez, Jayne Cortez, Carolyn M. Rodgers and Nikki Giovanni were part of this movement and stressed the unity of the Afro-American community. Alex Haley wrote the biography of the murdered black activist Malcolm X. The same was published in

1965 and it influenced similar memoirs by black female activists like Anne Moody and Angela Davis, who published her own autobiography in 1974.

The 1980s and 1990s saw a major growth in black feminist writers. They let their voices be heard in published works and in academia. They criticized gender, white male supremacist patriarchy and other structures of domination. The Black Feminist Movement emerged out of and in response to the Black Liberation Movement and the Women's Movement. In order to meet the needs of black women who felt, while they were being racially oppressed in the Women's Movement, sexually oppressed in the Black Liberation Movement, the Black Feminist Movement emerged. Frequently, "black" was merely equated with black men, and "women" was equated with white women. Consequently, black women had been just an imperceptible group whose existence and needs were disregarded. The Feminist Movement focused on the problems faced by white women. Simply earning the power to work outside the home was not an accomplishment for black feminists. Black women had been working all along already. The purpose of the movement was to develop a theory that could adequately address the way in which race, gender and class were unified in their lives. The movement also aimed at taking action to stop racist, sexist and class discrimination.

The growth of women's movement, and its impact on the consciousness of Afro-American women in particular, helped the emergence of a "Black Women's Literary Renaissance." The Black Woman's Literary Renaissance resurged by the 1970s with the publication of *The Bluest Eye* (1970) by Toni Morrison. Then, She went on to publish *Sula* (1973) and *Song of Solomon* (1977). Her fifth novel, the slave narrative *Beloved* (1987) became possibly the most influential work of Afro-American

literature of the late 20th century. The success of writers like Morrison, Maya Angelou and Alice Walker helped to inspire a generation of younger black female novelists, including Toni Cade Bambara and Gloria Naylor. Maya Angelou is the poet and author of the 1970 memoir *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. Alice Walker won the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize in 1982 for *The Color Purple*. Later Afro-American writers include the novelists Paule Marshall, Octavia E. Butler, Gayl Jones, Jamaica Kincaid and Edwidge Danticat. The poets include Audre Lord and Rita Dove and the playwrights include Ntozake Shange and Suzan-Lori Parks. Rita Dove won the Pulitzer Prize for poetry in 1987.

Black feminists have rightly understood the problems of a black woman. The double oppression against them is highlighted in their writings. Because of their double identity, black women are the victims of both sexual discrimination and racial discrimination. Alice Walker, one of the significant black feminists, stresses the importance of black women writers in her collection of essays, *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens* (1984). She says, "It is the black woman's words that have the most meaning for us, her daughters, because she, like us, has experienced life, not only as a black person, but as a woman" (Walker 275). Walker goes on to explain the reasons behind her emphasis on black male and female gender conflicts as, "Of course, the whites oppress us; they oppress the world? The white man, the rich man. But we also oppress each other and we oppress ourselves. I think that one of the traditions we have in Black Women's Literature is a tradition of trying to fight all the oppression" (14).

Postcolonial Feminism is also known as the Third World Feminism or Black Feminism. Black Feminism contends that sexism, class oppression, and racism are inseparably bound together. Black feminist theory further has contended that black

women are positioned within the structures of power in essentially dissimilar ways from white women. Angela Davis, Bell Hooks, and Patricia Hill Collins are a few black feminist theorists who have argued that black women, unlike many white women, are marginalized along lines of race, class, gender, and sexuality. By itself, the mainstream white feminist theory has not methodically accounted for the economic, racial and gender requirements of the black female experience.

The researcher has studied the theoretical considerations of feminism and black feminism as a means to digest the covered layers of Morrison's select novels. The magnitude and extent of the problems of black women's suffering through racism, and sexism in the American society is analyzed. The study also depicts black women's marginalization and oppression. Further, it focuses on the black feminist thought in providing black women, the self-awareness and self-empowerment. By self-awareness, it means that black women needed to recognize their multiple sources of oppression actively. By self-empowerment, it means that black women should depend on themselves.

The researcher has worked through feminist, racist and naturalist concepts to study the novels of Toni Morrison. By analyzing the situations, the characters and themes, the status of women of color in literature based on Morrison's select novels are discussed and studied. Morrison splendidly describes how different women characters react and respond differently to the injustice and the inhumanity that is imposed on them. The contrasting natures of five of her heroines are discussed in detail by the researcher. Other female characters in the five novels are also given importance on the grounds of "Black Sisterhood" and "Black Motherhood", which are found as vital elements of Black Feminism. She aims at empowerment of black women. The analysis

of exploited and emancipated black women of Morrison and the failure of these characters in achieving empowerment in their lives is the keystone of this thesis.

Morrison depicts bravery and courage in Sula and Jadine, self-absorbedness in Pauline, passiveness in Pecola and Sethe and immaturity in Florens and sacrifice in Eva and Minha mae. All of these characters raise powerful questions concerning black-women's self-identity, self-concept, and struggles to achieve freedom as a living being if not a human being. Neeru Tandon says about feminists,

A feminist is one who is awakened and conscious about women's life and problem, and feminist consciousness is the experience in a certain way of certain specific contradictions in the social order. That means the feminist apprehends certain features of social reality as intolerable, and to be rejected if one is to transform the society for a better future. (28)

Morrison is not just a feminist. She is not just an anti-racist. She can easily be considered as a black feminist. She is a writer deeply concerned with issues such as race, gender and sexuality. She is one of the most prominent writers of fiction in contemporary America. The impact of white racism on black communities is undeniable. She addresses the problem of the position of women within black communities, and the way in which their relationships with both men and other women shape their lives. She was influenced by the ideologies of Women's Liberation Movements. Her novels debate the experiences of the oppressed black minorities in isolated communities. The dominant white culture disables the development of healthy Afro-American women's self-image. She stresses that black women can never become fully empowered in a context of social injustice. She illustrates the way in which the struggle in black women's life culminates in the inequality between the blacks and the

whites, as opposed to inequality between men and women. The main concern of the white feminist movement is the inequality between men and women. Morrison pictures the harsh conditions of black women, without separating them from the oppressed situation of the whole minority. When considering their daily interactions, as well as academic and professional experiences, it becomes apparent that it is difficult, or impossible, for black women to separate race from class and sex oppression, because they experience them simultaneously. Kimberle Crenshaw coins the term “Intersectionality” to describe this phenomenon. Kimberle Crenshaw in her article, “Demarginalizing The Intersection of Race and Sex” writes, “black women are sometimes excluded from feminist theory and antiracist policy discourse because both are predicated on a discrete set of experiences that often does not accurately reflect the interaction of race and gender” (209). Crenshaw has used the term “intersectionality” to point out the problems of the color bias of feminist movements. Many black women writers have defied the negative representation of black women in their fiction, but Morrison’s novels not only confront those stereotypes but also destroy them. Her novels give the readers a deeper insight into black women’s minds and souls. She makes all listen to the voice of the suppressed group who are left out of literature. Her work focuses mainly on feminism, naturalism and racism.

Morrison has very well developed her personal and national identity as a black feminist and she has shared ancestral memories that she acquired from the Afro-American culture. She believes that the presence of the ancestors is one of the characteristics of her black writing. The ancestors are a connection with the past. The lack of roots and the disconnections from the community cause an individual’s alienation, such as in the case of Jadine in *Tar Baby*. Carolyn Cooper has rightly stated about black feminist writers that,

In all of these feminist fictions of the African Diaspora the central characters are challenged; however unwillingly, to reappropriate the ‘discredited knowledge’ of their collective history. The need of these women to remember their ‘ancient properties’ forces them, with varying degrees of success, to confront the contradiction of acculturation in societies where ‘the press toward upward social mobility’ represses Afrocentric cultural norms. (84)

Patricia Hill Collins, in her book, *Black Feminist Thought*, explains the importance of the theory of Intersectionality of “Black Feminist Thought.” According to Collins, there are four important elements or themes in black feminism. Firstly, black women empower themselves by creating self-definitions and self-valuations that enable them to establish positive, multiple images and to repel negative, controlling representations of black womanhood. Secondly, black women confront and dismantle the overarching and interlocking structures of domination in terms of race, class and gender oppression. Thirdly, black women intertwine intellectual thought and political activism. Fourthly, black women recognize a distinct cultural heritage that gives them the energy and skills to resist and transform daily discrimination. Collins has summed up all these four themes and she says that Black Feminism is, “a process of self-conscious struggle that empowers women and men to actualize a humanist vision of the community” (20). Though the movement of Black Feminism and theory came much later, authors like Morrison are dynamic elements of this movement. As the author’s thought and works are against the sufferings of blacks and especially the black women, it can be said that the ideology of Black Feminism is clearly evident in her novels.

Ula Taylor in her article “The Historical Evolution of Black Feminist Theory and Praxis” published in the *Journal of Black Studies* says that there were two waves of Black Feminism in America. Kimberly Springer argues the existence of three waves of Black Feminism. Though the term was coined lately in the twentieth century, the first wave had arisen in the minds and lives of the black people even at the time of the Abolitionist Movement (1830-1865) of the early nineteenth century. First-wave feminism refers to a period of feminist activity during the nineteenth century and early twentieth century in the United States. It focused on inequalities, primarily on gaining the rights of women’s suffrage. The end of first-wave feminism is often linked with the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution (1919), granting women the right to vote. This was a major victory of the movement, which also included reforms in higher education, in the workplace and professions and in health care.

Second-wave feminism refers to a period of feminist activity, which began during the early 1960s and lasted through the late 1980s. The movement fortified women to understand the aspects of their own personal lives as deeply debated and reflective of a sexist structure of power. Kimberly Springer says that both the first and second waves are directly related to the struggle initiated by the African Americans for freedom and equality (1060). According to Ula Taylor, “Free and enslaved African women created numerous strategies and tactics to dismantle slavery as a legal institution and resist racially gendered sexual abuse” (Taylor 235). According to Shirley Yee, the collective feminist consciousness of the Afro-American Abolitionists blossomed because, “they campaigned for equal rights within the context of organized Black abolitionism” (151).

The second wave is linked to the modern Civil Rights Movement of America (1954 -1965). Though most of the leaders of this modern Civil Rights Movements were men, Afro-American women also participated at every stage in the struggle for justice and equality. The Montgomery Bus Boycott Movement started after Rosa Parks was an important element of the second wave. If the first-wave black feminism focused upon absolute rights such as suffrage, the second-wave feminism was largely concerned with other issues of equality, such as the end to discrimination and oppression.

The third-wave black feminism deals with issues that seem to limit or oppress women. The roots of the third-wave began in the mid-1980s. Consciousness raising activism and widespread education are often the first steps that feminists take toward social change. Issues of race, class and sexuality are central to third-wave black feminism. The third-wave black feminists work to educate and work with women across political borders, to give them the tools and awareness to make their own decisions.

Afro-American women's experiences with work and family during slavery and after emancipation led them to develop a specific perspective on the relationships between multiple types of oppression. Black women had experienced not just racism, but sexism and other forms of oppression. This struggle promoted a broader, more humanistic view of community that encouraged each person to develop his or her own individual, unique human potential. Such a community is based on notions of fairness, equality and justice for all human beings, not just for Afro-American women. Black feminism encompasses a comprehensive, anti-sexist, anti-racist and anti-elitist perspective on social change.

Hence, the primary expressions of Black Feminism in the United States are marked by three distinct periods or waves that are directly connected to and grew out of key movements in Afro-American history. The Abolitionist Movement, culminated with the suffragists' securing passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, in 1919. Then the Modern Civil Rights and Black Power Movements, peaked with the enforcement, during the 1970s, of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Finally, the Post-Civil Rights Era helped to usher in the professionalization and institutionalization of feminism.

Collins, in *Black Feminist Thought*, points out the logic behind the negative representation of black women by many Black Feminist authors. Stereotypes are formalized images, which are perpetuated through a host of socio-cultural practices, beliefs and notions. The search for voice or the refusal of black women to remain silent constitutes a second core theme of black feminism. With the intention of exploiting black women, dominant groups have developed controlling and stereotyping images by claiming that black women are inferior. This justifies black women's oppression. The four interrelated controlling images of black women are the mammy, the matriarch, the welfare mother and the jezebel. This reflects the dominant group's interest in maintaining black women's subordination. Challenging these stereotypes has been an essential part of the search for the voice. For Afro-American women, the search for voice emerges from the struggle to reject controlling images and embrace knowledge essential for their survival.

The network of socio-cultural notions or prejudices that are constructed about a group of people are a consequence of conceptions and misconceptions, assumptions and presumptions based on prevailing popular interpretations and inferences drawn from the behavioral patterns of that group. Inevitably, these are colored by the social

space occupied by that group in the context of the mainstream and dominant socio-cultural constructs and based on the idea of “other” ness of the marginalized others. Women therefore, as a group, have always been confronted with cultural constructs of their identity, which, as popular generalizations or prejudgments, never take into account the differences of the vibrant complexities of the individual’s personality and are therefore delimiting and debilitating. According to Collins, no system of oppression can work without the “powerful ideological justification” (69). Thus, the portrayal of black women as the breeders, mammies, matriarchs, welfare recipients and the ugly and unfeminine creatures justifies their oppression. The portrayal of black women as others is enough to justify any kind of oppression. The black literature voices oppression against the injustice done to blacks, especially black females through this way.

The theme of the interdependence of thought and action stresses the connections between black women’s ideas and their actions. The interrelationship between thought and action allows black women to see the connections between concrete experiences with oppression. It helps them to develop a self-defined voice concerning those experiences and to enact the resistance that it entails.

Black feminism cannot challenge race, gender and class oppression without empowering black women to become pro-active. Black feminist thought sees black women’s oppression and their resistance to oppression as inextricably linked. Thus, oppression responds to human action. The very existence of black feminism suggests that black women always have a choice and the power to act, no matter how desolate the situation may be. It also shows that although the empowerment of black women is important, only collective action can effectively eradicate long-standing political, social and economic inequalities.

The Third World Women's Alliance published a pamphlet regarding "Black Women Liberation" in May 1970. The pamphlet stresses the importance of remaking the black family life, which is so clearly undermined in the American environment, and not simply imitating American life. The pamphlet starts with the black woman's manifesto as its introduction:

Racism and capitalism have trampled the potential of black people in this country and thwarted their self-determination. Initially, the physical characteristics of those of African descent were used to fit blacks into the lowest niche in the capitalist hierarchy - that of maintenance. Therefore, black women and men of today do not encourage division by extending physical characteristics to serve as a criterion for a social hierarchy. If the potential of the black woman is seen mainly as a supportive role for the black man, then the black woman becomes an object to be utilized by another human being. Her potential stagnates and she cannot begin to think in terms of self-determination for herself and all black people. It is not right that her existence should be validated only by the existence of the black man. The black woman is demanding a new set of female definitions and recognition of herself of a citizen, companion and confidant, not a matriarchal villain or a step stool baby-maker. Role integration advocates the complementary recognition of man and woman, not the competitive recognition of same. (La Rue 42)

Morrison's literary work has actively challenged the stereotypes that have been imposed on Afro-American women throughout history. According to Collins, six areas provide a common ground and a common feminine experience in the "Black Feminist

Thought.” They are work and family, controlling matriarchs, self-definition, sexual politics, love relationships, motherhood and activism. Although these six areas provide a common ground and thus, can form a collective identity of Afro-American womanhood, they also provide the foundation of negative representations.

Dubey has stated “... the black writer must replace negative stereotypes with positive images” (94). The Dubey’s statement gives the impression that negative stereotypes should be ignored rather than examined and developed in order to expel them, ensuring that female characters are allowed to evolve into positive images. Conversely, Collins advocates empowerment via experience and consciousness and that implies expelling negative representations by exploring them thoroughly in order to humanize the black female experience. Morrison subscribes to this particular perspective, as her characters prove the same.

Collins is mainly concerned about the way in which Afro-American women have been portrayed since the 19th Century. She has analyzed the reason and the way in which many black authors, intellectuals and prominent figures have been able to challenge stereotypes over the years. Maria W. Stewart (1803 –1880) was a domestic servant who became an Afro-American journalist, lecturer, abolitionist, and women's rights activist. She was the first American woman to speak to a mixed audience of men and women, whites and blacks, to make public lectures, as well as to lecture about women’s rights and make a public anti-slavery speech. Collins has quoted Maria in her book. According to Maria, “Black women intellectuals have laid a vital analytical foundation for a distinctive standpoint on self, community, and society and, in doing so, created a multifaceted, African-American women's intellectual tradition” (qtd. in Collins 2). Maria Stewart’s statement is certainly correct in that numerous authors have

provided a firm analysis of the race's female self through the eyes of the individual rather than the dominant white perspective.

Morrison's literature embarks mainly upon the national themes of racism and sexism. Her work also resists many of the pervasive liberal beliefs of her time, particularly the black movement's interest in only presenting positive portrayals of black characters and second-wave feminism's tendency to diminish the significance of motherhood.

The Atlantic trade was the beginning of enslavement. After enslavement, there was exploitation of the slaves. The emancipation came much later, after the serious irreversible damage done to the Africans that extended even to their genes. Though there was emancipation, there was failure to achieve empowerment in the lives of the female protagonists of Morrison's novels as many of the emancipated Africans failed to give importance to their African heritage and root values.

The legacy of struggle, the search for the voice, the interdependence of thought and action and the significance of empowerment in everyday life are core themes in black feminism. The legacy of struggle against racism and sexism is a common thread binding Afro-American woman, regardless of historical era, age, social class or sexual orientation. The struggle against racism and its resulting humanistic vision differentiates black feminism from historical expressions of white feminism in the United States. Black feminists' central concern has been the transformation of societal relations based on race, class and gender.

The decade of the 1970 to 1980s was a significant time in which emerging black women writers and literary critics rigorously theorized about gender and black women as subjects in historical and contemporary contexts. Bell Hooks recognized the

significance of black feminists such as Sojourner Truth, whose personal testimonies validated the need for a movement. However, Hooks encouraged black women to develop a theoretical framework to evaluate strategies and to challenge and change structures of domination and supremacy. Many noted black women poets and fiction writers, such as Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, Gloria Naylor, Toni Cade Bambara, June Jordan and Audre Lorde served as political activists in the movement and participated in consciousness-raising emancipation groups. Their work has drafted out new ways of thinking about capitalism, sexism, identity formation and black cultures. Their work has transformed the “individual” and has given black women multiple voices of encouragement as well as multiple visions of how things must be.

The black feminists have overcome the academic binary of theory and practice by making use of all the methods, including speeches, songs, written text and activism. These methods were previously used by black women to re-read and re-interpret the intellectual, social, political, economic, legal and emotional worlds of black people. With their unique perspectives on the intersection of race, sexuality and class within particular historical moments, the varieties of black feminism conform to the many ways black women have found to take a stand against sexism while remaining in critical solidarity with other political discourses. In *Black Women Writers at Work*, Bambara has told the editor Claudia Tate,

What has changed about the women’s movement is the way we perceive it, the way black women define the term, the phenomena and our participation in it... We are more inclined to trust our own traditions, whatever name we gave and now give those impulses, those groups, those agendas and are less inclined to think we have to sound like, build like, non-colored groups that

identify themselves as feminist or as women's rights groups or so it seems to me. (qtd. in Tate 34)

This account reveals the core of the differences that many black women have about the priorities and objectives of the white women's rights movement. It also explains partly why Alice Walker has adapted the term "Womanist" from black folk expression to signify a black feminist or feminist of color, a woman who, among other things, is audaciously dedicated to the survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. More to the point of readings of contemporary Afro-American novels by black women, the above comments provide the necessary context for a better understanding of why black women are primarily concerned with how racism, sexism and class conflict have influenced the nature and function of love, power, autonomy, creativity, manhood and womanhood in the black family and community.

The close identification of "blackness" with masculinity angered some black women writers such that they sought to stake out a literary territory in which issues of gender could be examined. Unlike the "race women" writers of the early twentieth century whose literary job, as they saw it, was to defend the honor of black women and the lives of black men, Afro-American women writers entering the final quarter of the century wanted to redefine black womanhood and had little patience with men, black or white, who got in their way. These women were not "Feminists" in the same way white women of the same generation were using the term in its "second" wave, nor did they lose sight of the centrality of race in their construction of a gendered reality. They can be rightly called as the "Black Feminists."

In the fiction of the black feminist, interviews with *Black Women Writers at Work* and the pioneer essays on *Black Feminist Criticism* by Barbara Smith and

Deborah E. McDowell, many black women novelists deploy many signs and structures to a greater or lesser degree. They are the subjects of interlocking racist, sexist and class oppression, black female protagonists, spiritual journey from victimization to the realization of personal autonomy or creativity, centrality of female bonding or networking, shared focus on personal relationships in the family and community, deeper, more detailed exploration and validation of the epistemological power of the emotions, iconography of women's clothing, and black female language.

As contemporary Afro-American novelists attempt to displace personal ambivalence and social absurdity with a new order of thinking, feeling and sharing based on self-determination, community, human rights, most, such as John Oliver Killens, John A. Williams, Paule Marshall, Gloria Naylor, Terry McMillan and Pulitzer Prize winner Alice Walker, continue the tradition of social and critical realism.

Thematically and structurally, therefore, from Brown and Wilson to Reed, Morrison, Delany and Butler, the dual tradition of Afro-American fiction is dominated by the dialectical tension between oral and literary traditions. There is a struggle for freedom from all forms of oppression and by the personal odyssey to realize the full potential of one's complex biracial and bicultural identity as an Afro-American.

The authors of the above mentioned period have celebrated the multiplicity and complexity of Afro-American identities. Crucial to this effort has been the recovery work being done by historians and social scientists as well as creative and critical writers. The experience of slavery has been of particular interest to today's black writers and it has been used as a means of better understanding the present. Notable examples of literature that draw on the slave's experience include *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* (1971) by Ernest Gaines, *Corregidora* (1975) by Gayl Jones,

*Oxherding Tale* (1982) and *Middle Passage* (1990) by Charles R. Johnson, *Song of Solomon* (1977) and *Beloved* (1987) by Toni Morrison, *Dessa Rose* (1986) by Sherley Anne Williams and *Mama Day* (1988) by Gloria Naylor.

The real explosion of writing by Afro-American women is the most significant development in Afro-American literature since the 1970s. The relative success of three novels published in 1970: *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* by Maya Angelou, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* by Alice Walker and *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison, all have identified the existence of a market for black women writers. Mining their own experience and the experiences of their ancestors, these and other black women writers have changed the direction of Afro-American literature by introducing new themes. The authors' primary focus on the black community rather than on the relationship between blacks and whites has allowed them to make inquiries into the parameters of motherhood, the dynamics of class difference among blacks and the ambiguous expectations of sexuality and love. Although in some respects, these women have used their fiction to respond to the social and political issues, past and present, their common objective seems to have been an age-old one representation. A major change in their fiction from that of their precursors is that black women have been frequently the main characters and they usually are not white phenotypes. These women often have integrity, strength, wisdom and inner beauty, as Pilate has in Morrison's *Song of Solomon*. Early critics of Morrison's book have expressed concern that a man, Milkman Dead, is at the center; but later critics have showed evidence of Pilate's centrality. In fact, Milkman is indebted to more than one woman for his very life and it is evident the women in his family are the ones who taught him about his past so he could be free to fly.

Issues of skin color and standards of beauty did not disappear, but rather were revised, often with a vengeance. Morrison's first novel *The Bluest Eye* has exemplified the trend with its focus on a dysfunctional family, the Breedloves, and the daughter Pecola who wants blue eyes. Indeed, she wants the bluest eyes because she needs to escape not only what she feels is her own ugliness, but also the ugliness of the world. This is the world in which she can be raped by her father, abandoned in favor of a white child by her mother and despised by almost everyone in her community.

Over the years, black women writers began to make their presence felt in literary genres, which was once largely the province of men and white women. *New Directions* as a subtitle might be misleading because black women writers have always been going in new directions or else there would be no tradition to write about. However, the need to be concerned about proscriptions that threaten to stifle creativity is all but a thing of the past. As their literary history shows, black women have long been writing their own lives instead of being written about, in other words, imagining themselves, as Morrison has written. Fortunately, the privileging of the voices of black women continues and not to the detriment or exclusion of other voices. These are the black women writers who have gone in search for and in the process have found their legacy in the preservation of wonderful stories. All that is left to be done is to accept the legacy and, as Toni Cade Bambara has advised, begin "passing it along in the relay." She even asserts about her own way of writing. She says, "That is what I work to do; to produce stories that save our lives" (qtd. in Evans 41).

The significance about the work of the cadre of black authors working in English in North America and the Caribbean today is not only its range and sheer size, but also its difference from Afro-American literature of the previous half century. For

the most part literary realism and naturalism have faded in appeal to black writers and all the literary allusiveness and heightened irony and tension of modernism and the free mixing of genres and sensibilities of magical realism and postmodern aesthetics, carry the day. Gone, too, is the preoccupation with the law and the legal status of the black subject, along with the issue of class. Identity, now, is as likely to be shaped by gender or sexual preference, by personal history, perhaps informed by a racialized past or by one or more addictions of the body or the mind. All of these stories, poems and dramas are played out against the backdrop of white racism and the history of a once subjugated race, but in all of them, the Afro-American subject controls the interrogation of that past. Morrison argues, in her groundbreaking consideration of American literary history, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, that American literature is suffused with the Afro-American presence. By the end of the century, she could have noted that Afro-American literature was, in fact, triumphant. It would no longer be possible to refer to an American literature without meaning the literature on race and the terms of that discussion had been set by black writers over the course of two centuries.

The fundamental distinguishing feature of contemporary black feminism is the self-conscious voicing of black feminist perspectives. Increasing social-class stratification among black women made more women available to think about and work on behalf of black feminist concerns. Black women graduated from high schools and colleges in record numbers and they were no longer placed exclusively in domestic service jobs. Afro-American women perceived that neither black organizations, nor white feminist groups spoke fully for them. Thus, emerged the need to develop a distinctive black feminist agenda that built on the core themes of long guiding black women's actions yet simultaneously spoke to issues specific to Afro-American women.

Morrison is a literary giant of the 1980s and 1990s and she is quite famous for being both a woman and an Afro-American. Morrison's actual name was Chloe Anthony Wofford. She was born as the second of four children to George and Ramah Wofford on February 18, 1931 in Lorain, Ohio, USA. Both her parents came from sharecropping families. They had moved to the North to escape racism and to find better opportunities in the North, in the early 1900s. Morrison's maternal grandparents left a life of sharecropping in Greenville, Alabama, for a better life in Kentucky in 1912. Sharecropping is a structure of farming in which a landowner allows a leaseholder to use the land in return for a share of the crops produced on the land. Because of the poor scope of education for their daughters in Kentucky, they moved on to Lorain, Ohio.

Chloe Anthony (Morrison) grew up during the period of The Great Depression. She had the opportunity to watch her parents work hard to support the family during The Great Depression. The Great Depression was a period of worldwide economic depression that lasted for about 10 years from 1929 until approximately 1939. Driven by The Great Depression, her father, George Wofford usually held three jobs at a time. He was a shipyard welder, construction worker, and car washer. He worked three jobs simultaneously for most of seventeen years. He was a hardworking man. He was proud enough of his workmanship that he wrote his name on the side of the ship whenever he welded a perfect seam. Morrison's mother, Ramah Willis Wofford was a homemaker. She used to sing in the church choir and disciplined in her ways. Morrison inherited all her traits from her mother and father. She was a hard worker like her father and a well-ordered woman like her mother. For instance, when her family was on relief and received bug-ridden meal, she wrote a long letter to the President, Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Morrison grew up in a lively household and she was exposed to a lot of songs, fairy tales, ghost stories, myths, music and the language of their Afro-American heritage. A common practice in her family was storytelling. The custom was that after the adults had shared their stories, the children told their own. The importance of both listening to stories and creating them contributed to Morrison's intense love of reading. Morrison's parents encouraged her passion for reading, learning and culture. They were instrumental in instilling confidence in her own abilities and attributes as a woman. The Woffords were greatly proud of their heritage. They gave importance to the ancestral values and African principles. Morrison was able to lead an influential life all by herself. However, two important people in her life influenced her outlook on the world a great deal. The first was her grandmother, who left her home in the South with seven children at the age of thirty, in fear of sexual violence against her maturing daughters. The second was her mother, who took embarrassing jobs in order to help Morrison go through college and graduate.

In 1949, Morrison entered Howard University to study English. She wanted to become a teacher and hence she majored in English and studied the classics. However, two aspects of life at Howard disappointed her. First, she had little opportunity to read literature by Afro-American writers. "The bulk of the Howard English curriculum consisted of Shakespeare, Melville, and Hawthorne and so on," (qtd. in Waegner 69) Morrison told in an interview. The second problem was the constant socializing culture of the white community, which emphasized parties, finding a marriage partner, and wearing fashionable clothes.

As many people could not pronounce Morrison's first name "Chloe," correctly, she changed it to "Toni", a shortened version of her middle name, "Anthony." She then

joined a repertory company, the Howard University Players. Morrison made several tours to the South with them. This was the time when she got a clear picture about the lives of the blacks there. Later Toni received a BA in English in 1953 and then obtained a Master of Arts in English from Cornell University in 1955. Her thesis for Master of Arts was on *Suicide in the Works of William Faulkner and Virginia Woolf*. Once again finding a lack of black literature in the curriculum, she says to Feitlowitz in an interview, “Perhaps I was attracted to Faulkner because at least in his world there is the presence of blacks.” (qtd. in Waegner 70) After receiving a master’s degree, Morrison began her professional career by teaching undergraduate English courses at Texas Southern University in Houston. In 1957, she returned to Howard University as a member of the faculty. Around this time, the civil rights movement was gaining a good momentum. She was able to meet several people who later became active in the struggle. There she met and influenced such prominent 1960s activists as Amiri Baraka, Andrew Young, and Claude Brown. Stokely Carmichael was a student in one of her classes. Later he became a renowned civil rights activist.

Morrison married a young Jamaican architect, Harold Morrison in 1958 and divorced him in 1964. They had two sons, Harold Ford and Slade. In 1964, after her marriage was dissolved, she went to live with her parents. The marriage was dissolved, but it remained a subject of sensitivity. Though she has explained at times, the difficulties were in part as the result of cultural differences, she refuses to disclose it till date. However, the incident had a lot of positive impact on her way of life. She raised her two sons by herself. In addition, she strongly felt that a family without a father is not a broken family. Morrison then moved on to New York where she went to work as a senior editor at Random House. As a senior editor at Random House, she began to enjoy her work extremely. Her purpose as an editor reflects her purpose as a writer. She

says, “I look very hard for black fiction because I want to participate in developing a canon of black work. We’ve had the first rush of black entertainment, where blacks were writing for whites, and whites were encouraging this kind of self-flagellation. Now we can get down to the craft of writing, where black people are talking to black people” (qtd. in Bell 175).

In New York, at Random House Morrison began to revise the story about the black girl who wanted blue eyes, and it turned into the novel *The Bluest Eye*. She was alone and was in a strange place that was very new to her. Her working hours were restricted by the time she needed to spend with her small children. Amidst this busy schedule, she managed to work on the novel in the evenings after the children were asleep. Then she sent an unfinished version to an editor, who encouraged her to finish it. In 1970 Holt, Rinehart and Winston published *The Bluest Eye*. Pecola Breedlove is the central character of the novel, who considers that everything would be all right only if she had beautiful blue eyes. The narrator, Claudia MacTeer, another character in the novel, tries to understand the reason for the destruction of Pecola. In the year 2000, the novel was chosen as a selection for Oprah’s Book Club.

In the early 1970s, Morrison was very busy and productive. It was an important period for Morrison. Like her father, she was multitasking herself. She was a mother, an editor, a teacher, and a writer. She was inspired by her own editorial work. She was able to edit the works of many Afro-American writers. Among them, the most important were the works of Muhammad Ali, Angela Davis, Henry Dumas, Toni Cade Bambara, and Gayl Jones. At this time, she also compiled a scrapbook, which she called *The Black Book*. The book contained newspaper clippings, records, recipes, portions of slave narratives, and photographs illuminating the lives of Afro-Americans

over three hundred years. *The Black Book* is a scrapbook, such as we would have, says Bill Cosby in the introduction, if “a three-hundred-year-old black man had decided, oh, say, when he was about ten, to keep a record of what it was like for himself and his people in these United States” (qtd. in Harris n.p.). As she explained in two articles that served as birth announcements for the book, Morrison conceived it as a way to recognize the history made by “the anonymous men and women who speak in conventional histories only through their leaders” and to rescue it from the faddism of mass culture and the “mysticism” of the Black Power Movement” (qtd. in Li 27). This work further led Morrison to develop her strategy of literary archeology, in which she combines her own imagination and experience with information from historical documents.

In addition to the scrapbook, Morrison wrote about twenty-eight book reviews for the *New York Times Book Review* as well as an article entitled “What the Black Woman Thinks about Women’s Lib,” for the *New York Times Magazine*. One of Morrison’s foremost concerns is the immediate relevance of black history. In her essays for *The New York Times Book Review* on summer pleasures and in the bicentennial issue of the *New York Times Magazine* on the situation of black Americans—“Slow Walk of Trees (as Grandmother Would Say) Hopeless (As Grandfather Would Say)”- Morrison focused on the relationships among black history, her family’s history, and her own sense of identity. “Being older than a lot of people,” she said in *Black World*, “I remember when soul food was called supper.” That was a time, she added in *The New York Times Magazine*, “When we knew who we were.” For Morrison, black history is the core of black identity, not in “forging new myths” but in “re-discovering the old ones” lies the clue not only to “the way we really were” but to “the way we

really are.” During this time, she got up each morning before the sun rose to write the second novel, *Sula*.

In 1973, Morrison’s second novel *Sula* was published. This novel depicts the story of the life of two black women friends and about the community of Medallion, Ohio. Sula is a free spirit and is considered a threat against the community and her cherished friend, Nel is just the opposite of her. The novel can be called a female Bildungsroman, which runs through the lives of these two women from their childhood to maturity and to death. *Sula* focuses chiefly on the struggles of womanhood as faced by Afro-American women within their own communities and white communities as well. *Sula* was nominated for the National Book Award. Morrison’s third novel, *Song of Solomon* (1977), brought her national attention. The book was a main selection of the Book-of-the-Month Club. In *Song of Solomon*, Morrison’s focus was primarily on strong black male characters. The novel was written from a male point of view and the story dealt with Milkman Dead’s attempts to recover his “ancient properties,” a cache of gold. Morrison’s insight into the male world came from watching her sons. The novel won both the National Book Critics Circle Award and the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters Award. Barnard College at its 1979 inauguration ceremonies awarded Morrison its premier honor, the Barnard Medal of Distinction. In 1981, She published her fourth novel, *Tar Baby*. In this novel, She explored the interaction between black and white societies. In the same year, She became a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

Morrison then started writing her first play, *Dreaming Emmett*. The play was built on a true story of a black teenager, Emmett Till, murdered by racist whites in 1955 after being accused of whistling at a white woman. The play premiered on January 4,

1986 at the Marketplace Theatre in Albany. Morrison's next novel was *Beloved* published in 1987. The novel was influenced by a published story about a slave, Margaret Garner. In 1851, Margaret Garner escaped with her children to Ohio from her master in Kentucky. When Margaret was about to be re-captured, she attempted to kill her children rather than return them to a life of slavery. However, only one of her children died and Margaret was imprisoned for her act. Garner refused to show remorse or guilt. Similarly, the central character of *Beloved*, Sethe, tries to kill her children, but is successful only in killing the unnamed infant, "Beloved." The dead infant is laid to rest and the words "Beloved" is carved out on the child's gravestone. Sethe does not have enough money to pay for the text of "Dearly Beloved." In 1988, Morrison's novel *Beloved* became a critical success. As the novel failed to win the National Book Award as well as the National Book Critics Circle Award, a number of writers objected the inadvertence. Shortly afterward, the novel won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction. *The New York Times Book Review* in May 2006, named *Beloved* the best American novel published in the preceding twenty-five years.

In 1988, Morrison was named "Robert F. Goheen Professor," in the Council of Humanities at Princeton University. Toni Morrison became the first black woman writer to hold a named chair at an Ivy League University. She taught creative writing and took part in the Afro-American studies, American studies and Women's studies programs. While giving a lecture at Princeton, She was asked by a student "who she wrote for." Morrison promptly replied that she wanted to write for people like her. By saying this, she meant to say black people. She went on to describe them as curious people and demanding people. She also said these people cannot be faked, these people do not need to be patronized and they have very, very high criteria.

Morrison also started to write her next novel, *Jazz* that was about life in the 1920's. The book was published in 1992. In *Jazz*, Joe, the treacherous husband of Violet, kills Dorcas in a fit of passion. The fragmented narrative follows the causes and consequences of the murder. The sounds in *Jazz* such as the ticking clock or a hand tapping a leg, all tied the novel to jazz music. Morrison acknowledged her foremothers, as well as white writers such as Virginia Woolf and William Faulkner in the novel. Morrison's work also simulated a constant dialogue with her male counterparts, Ralph Ellison, Albert Murray and others. The narrative's point of view and characterization in *Jazz* work together, so that multiple voices, past and present, tell their individual as well as collective histories and the city itself becomes a character, as the porch does in Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. In 1993, She was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. She was the eighth woman and the first black woman to win it.

Shortly afterwards, Morrison met with a problem. There was fire at Rockland County, Morrison's New York home and the fire destroyed the house. In 1998, Morrison published her next novel, *Paradise*, which takes place in an all-black town called Ruby. The novel describes a violent attack that a group of men makes on a small, all-female community at the edge of town. Morrison has said in an interview to *The New York Times*, "The book coalesced around the idea of where paradise is, who belongs in it. All paradises are described as male enclaves, while the interloper is a woman, defenseless and threatening. When we get ourselves together and get powerful is, when we are assaulted" (Smith n.p.).

After 1999, Morrison also published a number of children's books with her son, Slade Morrison. Slade Morrison worked as a painter and musician, and from 1992, he composed lyrics for music by Andre Previn and Richard Danielpour. *The Big Box* was

published in 2002. In this book, Morrison brings out her opinion on child rearing. She makes a statement that parents should not be strict with their children, but rather that parents should let their children explore sometimes because that is the one way to learn. In 2003, Morrison published another novel, *Love*. The novel describes life and love during the 1940s and 1950s on a black seaside resort. The novel portrays Bill Cosey, a charming hotel owner, dead for many years, but not forgotten, and two women, his widow and his granddaughter, who lived in his manor. Morrison continued to revise the concept of utopia as articulated by Sir Thomas More, the sixteenth-century Catholic martyr and by subsequent American writers. The novels *Paradise* and *Love* depict that Morrison remains attentive to the past and some of her writings assert her belief that the past is infinite without losing sight of the living and the existing communities with which her literature is ultimately concerned.

Oxford University awarded Morrison an honorary Doctor of Letters in June 2005. In November 2006, Morrison visited the Louvre Museum in Paris as the second in its “Grand Invite” program to guest-curate a month-long series of events across the arts on the theme of “The Foreigner’s Home.” The novel, *A Mercy* was published in 2008. In *A Mercy*, Morrison reveals what lies below the surface of slavery in early America. The novel is about the story of mothers and daughters and the story of America in its primeval period. It made in the *New York Times Book Review* list of “10 Best Books of 2008” as chosen by the paper’s editors. Morrison scrutinizes the roots of racism going back to the inception of slavery and provides hints of the various religious practices of the time, and shows the relationship between men and women in primitive America that often ended in female victimization.

After *A Mercy*, Morrison has written two more novels. In 2012, Alfred A. Knopf published the novel *Home*. *Home* tells the story of Frank Money, an Afro-American veteran traumatized by his experiences in the Korean War. Although he is back in America for a year, he feels too violent and dislocated to go home to Georgia, where his younger sister lives. In *Home* Morrison sketches America in the 1950s with striking details. Morrison's latest novel is *God Help the Child*. The novel was published in April 2015. It is the story of a young black girl who is neglected as a child by her parents as she is black. Her own parents victimize her early in life. Her mother fails to take care of her. However, the child, Bride grows up to earn her own living, sort of endows herself in the white world, but later fails to sustain herself as she gets caught up in love and later she goes in search of Brooker after the love relationship breaks. This is akin to Florens going in search of Blacksmith in *A Mercy*. In her latest novel, Morrison concentrates mainly on child abuse and the problems of turbulent childhood days in shaping the personality of the individual. She also stresses the importance of a good black motherhood as essential for empowering black womanhood and then the community as a whole.

Morrison currently holds a place on the editorial board of *The Nation* magazine. She also teaches "Creative Writing" at Princeton University. She is also a member of the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters as well as an active member in the National Council on the Arts. Morrison is known for her inspiring teaching abilities. Although her novels typically concentrate on black women, Morrison does not identify her works as feminist. She has stated that she thinks, "It's off-putting to some readers, who may feel that I'm involved in writing some kind of feminist tract. I don't subscribe to patriarchy and I don't think it should be substituted with matriarchy. I think it's a question of equitable access and opening doors to all sorts of things" (Jaffrey 31).

The novels written by Morrison are, *The Bluest Eye* (1970), *Sula* (1973), *Song of Solomon* (1977), *Tar Baby* (1981), *Beloved* (1987), *Jazz* (1992). *Paradise* (1997), *Love* (2003), *A Mercy* (2008), *Home* (2012), *God Help the Child* (2015) and *The Big Box* (1999), *The Book of Mean People* (2002) and *Peeny Butter Fudge* (2009) are the children's literature by Toni Morrison, along with her son Slade Morrison. *Recitatif* (1983) is her only short fiction. The plays written by her are *Dreaming Emmett* (performed 1986), and *Desdemona* (first performed 15 May 2011 in Vienna).

The non-fiction by Morrison are, *The Black Book* (1974), *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992), *Race-ing Justice, En-gendering Power: Essays on Anita Hill, Clarence Thomas, and the Construction of Social Reality* (editor) (1992), *Birth of a Nation'hood: Gaze, Script, and Spectacle in the O.J. Simpson Case* (co-editor) (1997), *Remember: The Journey to School Integration* (April 2004), *What Moves at the Margin: Selected Nonfiction*, edited by Carolyn C. Denard (April 2008), *Burn This Book: Essay Anthology* (2009) as editor.

The thesis explores and analyzes Toni Morrison's novels in terms of the way the writings of women of color differ from and at times strike back at white feminism. The research also compares other Afro-American novelists to show the variation of black feminism as Morrison responds differently to their common sexist and racist contexts. The argument of the thesis is an analytical reading of the divergences of black female writers from their white counterparts as well as the differences within the described feminism among black writers themselves.

In this thesis "From Exploitation to Emancipation: Transformation of Female Protagonists in Toni Morrison's Select Novels," the researcher endeavors to trace the transition of the heroines of Morrison from the stage of abuse and exploitation to the

stage of emancipation. However, it must be stressed that there is no empowerment that was achieved. The researcher examines five of Toni Morrison's novels *A Mercy*, *The Bluest Eye*, *Beloved*, *Sula* and *Tar Baby* in the light of slave trade, slavery, racism and black feminism. Black feminism in her works is analyzed through the study of black womanhood, sisterhood and motherhood that Morrison depicts in her novels.

The researcher has used the sociological approach to analyze the text in the five novels. Sociological criticism explores the relationships between the author and society. The researcher has analyzed the social content of Morrison's works. The researcher has explored the cultural, economic and political values that are implicitly or explicitly promoted in the writings of Morrison.

*Tar Baby* was published in 1981. The novel is set in the Caribbean on the remote island of Isle des Chevaliers. Linden Peach claims that this story "particularly refocuses attention on the displaced person, the migrant and the stranger, as separated from their history and identity" (21). The whole story circles around vastly different protagonists, Jadine and Son, dealing with their differences as two Afro-Americans. Jadine, a beautiful fashion model, with an Art Master Degree from Sorbonne, overwhelmed by luxury falls in love with Son, a fugitive, a typical representative of Jadine's roots. Jadine feels attracted to Son, and they both leave the island and head to New York, where they enjoy carefree time as lovers. Finally, however, their differences are unbearable and they break up. Jadine leaves for Paris and Son is led by Therese, a onetime laundresse of Afro-American origin who worked in the Streets' mansion, into a mythical existence among the blind horsemen who still live on the Isle des Chevaliers. By contrasting these two characters, Son stays as close to his Afro-American culture, but Jadine does not.

*A Mercy* was published in 2008. *A Mercy* chronicles the journey of an adventurer and Dutch trader, Jacob Vaark, who has moved to the New World in search of land and wealth. The novel spins the tale of a seemingly abandoned daughter, Florens, and her life as one of Jacob's slaves. She joins Lina, a Native American who is once welcomed into the lives of the newcomers only to be relegated to a life of servitude. Sorrow, a pitiful mongrel of a woman without identifiable heritage also joins them. All three of these servants, as well as Jacob and his wife Rebekka, are outcasts. *A Mercy* delineates the plight of these exiles and their struggles to cohere in such a divisive setting. A shifting point of view marks the novel, even though the narrative structure follows a generally linear path. A first person installment by Florens appears in between each third person chapter. A different character tells each third person chapter. Using this shifting, complex narrative structure, Morrison weaves a tale about the Vaark household and forges each of her characters into a memorable force that shapes the meaning of the novel. On the surface, Morrison creates an ancient world in which slaves and free members of the Vaark household attempt to coexist in an unstable, embryonic environment. To accomplish this, Morrison interposes rich sensory imagery, characterization, and conflict into the novel. Thus, *A Mercy* explores the relationships between men and women. The novel also analyzes the importance of identity search and securing a position for the individual in a society. *A Mercy* also explains prominently, what it means to be a mother. Morrison fractures the ubiquitous motherhood motif into multiple perspectives so as to catalyze the characterization of Jacob and Florens and to comment on the provincial outlook of society.

Published in 1987, *Beloved* is Morrison's Nobel Prize winning book. The book was also defined as a masterpiece by the American press and was proclaimed winner of the Pulitzer Prize in 1988. Sethe is the protagonist of the novel, *Beloved*. Sethe, also

murders her unnamed infant, "Beloved." The dead baby daughter haunts her house then. Paul D is a person Sethe knew during slavery in Sweet Home. He comes to visit Sethe and somehow he succeeds in driving the ghost away for a while. After some time, the baby ghost Beloved becomes more violent and aggressive. Denver is Sethe's another daughter and she also faces a lot of issues because of the baby ghost. At one time, she leaves the house in order to save their life. At the end of the novel, the women of the community rescue Sethe. The baby ghost, Beloved, then departs. Then Paul D returns to take care of Sethe. Sethe and Paul D look back to embrace their individual and communal history. They move into the future where love is a real possibility. *Beloved* concludes with an emphasis on the importance of communal participation in the processes of emotional and spiritual healing and stability. The main theme of the story is about the painful experience of slavery, especially about memories of slavery repressed by the ex-slaves. This kind of repression of the past necessarily leads to problems with negotiating individual identity. Sethe, Denver and Paul D, all experience this kind of loss, which can be only remedied by recovering the memory of their original identities.

*The Bluest Eye* is the story of a young black girl Pecola who yearns for blue eyes. The story begins with the two sisters, the nine-year-old Claudia and the ten-year-old Frieda MacTeer. They live in Lorain, Ohio, with their parents. The setting of the novel is at the end of the Great Depression. The MacTeers family is more concerned with making ends meet rather than with bestowing attention upon their daughters. However, there is an undercurrent of love and stability in the MacTeers' home. The MacTeers family takes in a boarder, Henry Washington. The young girl named Pecola is the protagonist of the novel. Pecola's father Cholly Breedlove is a cruel man who has tried to burn down his house. Claudia and Frieda, who are around the same age group

as Pecola, feel sorry for her and give temporary protection and shelter for her. The young girl, Pecola loves Shirley Temple and blindly believes that whiteness is beautiful and black is ugly.

Later, Pecola moves back in with her family, and there her life becomes more difficult. Her father is a drunkard; her mother is never seen to protect her. Both of her parents frequently quarrel and beat one another. Her brother, Sammy, is also of no use to her. He frequently runs away from home. Pecola's immature mind gets trapped in the notion of white idealism and she starts to believe that if she has blue eyes, she will be loved. She believes that her life would be transformed only if she becomes beautiful. Pauline, Pecola's mother, has a lame foot and has at all times felt isolated on account of the same. Instead of playing the role of a good mother, Pauline prefers to lose herself in movies and theatres. This reiterates her conviction that she is ugly and that romantic love is reserved only for the attractive. She feels comfortable only when she is at work. She works as a maid in a white woman's home. She fails to love her own home and hates her own family.

Cholly's parents abandon him right from the time he is born. His great aunt raises him. When Cholly is a young teenager, his aunt also dies. He feels trapped in his marriage and loses interest in life. Cholly returns home one day and finds Pecola washing dishes. He is drunk and with mixed motivations of sympathy and detestation driven by guilt, he rapes his own daughter. Pauline finds Pecola lying unconscious on the floor. However, she disbelieves Pecola's account and beats her. Cholly rapes Pecola a second time and then runs away. Soon he dies in a workhouse. Later, Pecola seeks Soaphead Church, who is a fake magician for help. She asks him for blue eyes. The fake mystic, instead of helping her, makes her kill a dog that he dislikes. Claudia and

Frieda find out that Pecola has been impregnated by her father. Unlike the rest of the community, they want the baby to live. They are saving some money to buy a bicycle and sacrifice that money to plant marigold seeds. They believe that Pecola's baby will live only if the flowers live. However, the flowers do not bloom, and Pecola's baby dies prematurely as soon as it is born. Pecola then goes mad, believing that her revered wish has been achieved and that she has the bluest eyes.

*Sula* is the story of two black women who live in an all-black community named Bottom. The friendship between the two girls and the problems in their lives is what the novel is all about. Helene Sabat, the daughter of a prostitute from New Orleans, marries Wiley Wright, a man from the Bottom, and establishes a reputable home there. Nel is her only daughter and during a journey by train back to New Orleans to visit her unwell, beloved grandmother, she is mortified by a bigoted white conductor. Nel watches this and then vows never to let anyone demean her so nastily.

One-legged Eva Peace, her daughter Hannah, and Hannah's child, Sula, live in a large house filled with friends, extended family, and mixed occupants. The matriarchal Eva runs the household from a rocking chair fitted into a child's wagon. Her son, Plum, returns from World War I badly worn-out and sinks under his gloom into drunkenness and drug addiction. Eva's consecration to Plum does not allow her to watch him deteriorate. Thus, after rocking him to sleep one night, Eva kills him by soaking his bed with kerosene and lighting it.

Sula and Nel begin a friendship and are soon threatened by a band of harassing Irish Catholic white boys. Sula slices off the tip of her finger as a warning to the boys, and neither she nor Nel is bothered by them again. One day, on the bank of a waterway, when Sula is swinging a little boy named Chicken Little around in circles he

inadvertently slips from her hands, lands in the river, and drowns. Sula and Nel do not tell anyone about what has happened. Soon after Chicken Little's death, Hannah catches her dress on fire while she is lighting a cooking fire in the yard. From her second-floor bedroom, Eva sees her daughter burning and throws herself out of the upper-story window, expecting to reach Hannah and oppress the flames. Hannah dies on the way to the hospital. Eva, severely hurt by her fall, recovers in a hospital. Eva remembers seeing Sula standing on the boardinghouse's portico, doing nothing except just watching her mother, burn to death. Nel marries Jude Greene and Sula leaves the Bottom. Ten years later, Sula returns, and puts up a quarrel with Eva. Sula places Eva in a nursing home. Shortly thereafter, Nel discovers Jude to have slept with Sula and splits all ties with her childhood best friend. As a result, Jude leaves Nel and moves to Dayton, Ohio. Then Sula begins a relationship with a man named Ajax, but he ends the issue when Sula begins to behave more like a wife than a lover.

A few years later, when Sula is dying, Nel visits her briefly. When Sula finally dies, she paranormally remains conscious. Sula comes out of her body looking down at it. Sula realizes that death is painless, and this she must tell Nel. Later, Nel is visiting Eva in the nursing home. Eva's mind is unsettled. Eva accuses Nel of involvement with Sula in Chicken Little's death. Nel walks away from the nursing home. She is filled with a nostalgic heartache for her longtime friend, Sula, and she terribly regrets the long, lost years of her own adulthood.

The thesis consists of seven chapters, each of which focuses on a specific theme or concept. The first chapter, "Introduction," discusses the literary and biographical notes on Morrison, in relation to the black feminist perspectives of other theorists. The section also discusses the methodology of the research. The researcher has used a

Sociological Approach to study all the five novels in critically analyzing and arriving at a conclusion. This approach attempts to study Morrison's literature in the cultural, economic and political contexts in which it is written or received. The researcher has explored the relationships between Morrison and society. The researcher has studied and examined Morrison's society to understand the author's literary works. The representation of such societal elements within Morrison's literature itself is also analyzed.

The second chapter, "Black Trade" discusses the disastrous slave trade and slavery as it was before race came into the picture in America with reference to the novel *A Mercy*. The chapter evaluates the perspectives of the novel *A Mercy* on the grounds of sisterhood and motherhood as it existed among a group of women in America before racism came into vogue. The novel is a clear example of how capitalism, industrialism and slavery got institutionalized before the inception of racism in America.

The third chapter, "Black Victims," focuses on two novels, *Beloved* and *The Bluest Eye*. The protagonists in the novels are victims of slavery, racism, white idealism and patriarchy. This chapter explores how Morrison treats gendered violence in their society.

The fourth chapter, "Black Identity," focuses on the dilemma of emancipated female figures in constructing their identities in a racist and sexist society with reference to the novels *Sula* and *Tar Baby*.

The fifth chapter, "Black Motherhood," discusses the roles played by the mothers of the female protagonists of the five select novels of Toni Morrison. Black

motherhood as an element of black feminism is analyzed with the lives of the female characters of the five novels.

The sixth chapter, “Style and Techniques,” speaks about the author’s uniqueness in constructing her novels. The motifs, themes and subjects of building these novels are analyzed in this chapter. The chapter talks about the author’s stream of consciousness (interior monologue) technique, and point of view. The chapter also highlights the various images, symbols, metaphors, irony and other techniques used by the author.

The seventh chapter, “Summation,” sums up all the previous chapters. It points out the general similarities and connection between the chapters. The chapter presents the findings of the interpretation of the selected novels of Morrison in relation to the research topic and the linked themes. The chapter sums up the core points of the study.

The researcher has followed the MLA citation style from the seventh edition of *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*.