CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

1. Various Streams Of Feminism

The twenty-first century is likely to witness the richest vein of women's literature. It will be based on the richness of female experience. The copious outpouring of contemporary women has shown the frustrations, struggles, sufferings and also their successful experiences. Women throughout the world have been suffering a lot because of lack of experience. The experiences and the sufferings of women spurred them and enabled them to pick up their pens, so that women in future might suffer less.

Feminism and feminist writers have made remarkable strides in the field of literature. Initially, the basic urge of the feminist writers was to represent their points of view on different aspects of life in general, and more particularly those directly or indirectly affected women. There are a number of social issues that discriminate women depriving them of their rights. In a male dominated society, even laws are dictated by men; hence it is natural that women are neglected and ignored. Feminism provides multi-dimensional vision about women who are treated as 'the other sex' or 'weaker sex' by men in all avenues of life — political, cultural, racial and social -- and suggests awareness and awakening in ameliorating their condition.

The term feminism was derived from the Latin word 'femina' meaning 'woman' and was first used in connection with the issues of equality and Woman's Rights Movement. Feminism perceives that women suffer from social injustice because of their gender. It attempts to eliminate their sufferings and enable them to achieve the freedom to order their own lives and to be recognized as
individuals *per se*. The idea of an egalitarian society must prevail. The dialectics of male dominance and female passivity must be erased. Feminism is a specific kind of discourse: "a critical and theoretical practice committed to the struggle against patriarchy and sexism" (Belsey and Moore 122).

In the *Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, Catherine McKeen describes feminism in its broadest sense, "it refers to any theory which sees the relationship between the sexes as one of inequality, subordination, or oppression, and which aims to identify and remedy the sources of that oppression". Feminism focuses on the values of "equality, self-development, individual achievement, and freedom from restraint on the one hand, and the actual norms of male preference, discriminatory treatment, and restriction of women's development, self-expression, and activity on the other"( Ferree and Hess 172). According to Germaine Greer feminism "struggles not about assimilation but about asserting difference, endowing that difference with dignity and prestige, and insisting on it as a condition of self-definition and self-determination" (1). Therefore, the aim of feminism is to wrench power from the male oppressors and establish an egalitarian society in which sexual difference and sexual hierarchy will no longer exist. *The Columbia Encyclopaedia* defines "feminism" as a: "movement for the political, social, and educational equality of women with men".

The feminist movement occurred in two phases: the first phase appeared with the publication of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) by Mary Woolstonecraft. She describes how women were incarcerated and how they were incapacitated by the androcentric culture. She had been in revolt all her life against tyranny, against law, against convention. During French Revolution, Rousseau had written a book about the rights of Man and he did not talk about woman's
rights. So, Mary Woolstonecraft wrote the book for the excluded members in the society. This phase included *The Declaration of Sentiments of the Seneca Falls Conventions*, which appeared in Europe and the U.S.

The next phase of the movement appeared with the publication of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) and Betty Friedan's *The Feminist Mystique* (1963). This phase shifted the concept of feminism from equality to freedom. Beauvoir argued against femininity as traditionally constructed and she postulated that women must assert their rights. When this happens, a woman becomes an autonomous; independent being and she is free, active and capable of making her own decisions.

This phase of the feminist movement brought forth thousands and thousands of women to participate in at least one of its groups. There have been mass demonstrations for women's rights. A flood of books has dealt with woman's position in society, and several new feminist magazines have been launched. Various women's groups have arisen, not for political or charitable purpose, but solely to advance the cause of women; to attack special problems of social dependence, discrimination and limited life alternatives that women face because they are women. Therefore, women gathered in groups and raised each other's level of consciousness about sex discrimination by giving personal examples of abuses perpetrated upon them by the opposite sex.

The patriarchal society considered women as imitative, decorative, procreative and destructive. They looked women as an object. The long history of patriarchal theory proved the inferiority of women. The feminists started to argue about the theory, which is impersonal and public, and which is related to male's perspective. Because of the abuse of material support like education and money, women were
considered to be dependent. Through emotional and moral values, women were placed in the secondary position. They had no legal and public existences. Men considered themselves to be superior to women because men looked upon themselves as rational beings and women as non-rational. So, the rational must control the non-rational and the order must control the disorder. Through marriage, a woman gets protection from her husband. Men are considered as the abler and stronger persons, so the husbands inherited the property and had authority over wives and children. The person who got the property rights can alone get the public rights. So, the property should be handed over to the husband. The woman who does not have property rights, has no control over inheritance, and no rights to bring civil suit. So, those men who had rights to participate in the public affairs became citizens and women were excluded from the role of citizens.

(a) Liberal Feminism:

Women who fight for their equality were known as the Liberal feminists. They fought to get economic rights, legal rights, public rights and social rights. "Liberal feminism was organized on the concept of the social contract, individualism, independence, democracy, and equality of opportunity" (http://www.saint-milce.org/ LiberalismVFeminism.html). When the Declaration of Independence was transcripted, a new meaning was applied to women. Even though women got the natural rights, their voice in public affair was not recognised. After marriage women lost all their property rights to their husbands, and women also gave their wages to them. Their husbands became their masters, so their husbands had all the power to deprive women's liberty. Women fought for their rights because they did not receive equal pay. They were also excluded from
the professions of theology, medicine and law. They were never allowed the leadership positions in the church.

Women remained enslaved and they were taught by men to strengthen their body and mind to be beautiful and to serve men. Without knowing that they were in the cage they beautified themselves. They were "created to be the toy of man" (Donovan 9) and whenever men had chance, they ill-treated women. Liberal feminists believed that it was women's responsibility to preach that whatever was morally right for a man to do, was morally right for a woman. Liberal feminists felt that proper education and proper training in critical thinking would make women realize their rights. It would enable women to think clearly and sensibly about their own situation. Liberal feminists believed that keeping half the human race in a state of ignorance retarded the progress of the entire race. When women thought differently or incorrectly, it was due to lack of training. Critical thinking generated faith in individualism and helped their self-determination. It would enable them to think for themselves and they could control their lives. Liberal feminists believed that critical thinking could liberate the individual from the mindless repetition of mere physical existence and proper education could liberate women from subjugation to their conditioned role of serving men. Only when a woman became independent, such self-empowerment could happen.

Liberal feminists also felt that marriage was the field which was created to manipulate the emotions of women. So, the Liberal feminists projected the idea, "a woman must learn to take responsibility for herself, she is in a world of her own, the arbiter of her own destiny to function freely, to enjoy her natural rights" (Stanton 1:815). They urged women to educate their daughter's in 'courage' and 'self-dependence' to function freely and to enjoy her natural rights. Mary
Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and Sarah Grimke’s *Letters on Equality* present the idea against women’s subordination developed in the liberal tradition.

Liberal Feminism affirms "merit based on individual achievement, equality of rights as citizens, a social order based on contract and a minimum of social restraint on individual action" (Ferree and Hess 30). Liberal Feminism typically demanded social and political change that would eliminate the unjust advantages of men and guarantee equal rights. It stressed the importance and the autonomy of the individual. Liberal Feminism claims that women and men are equally entitled to be treated as individual people. Liberal feminists see social policy as an important force in establishing access to economic opportunity and civil rights. They also stress the need for changing division of labour in the household, eliminating stereotypes in education, and increase personal choice in childbearing and childrearing. Liberal Feminism advocates that the sexes are alike, and therefore deserve equal rights. Liberal Feminism emphasizes the absolute equality of men and women. It aims at securing women's rights through lobbying and legislation. It believes in affirmative action and promotes equal opportunity for women as individuals by providing ameliorative measures for women.

(b) Cultural Feminism:

The second stream of feminism taken into account is Cultural Feminism which emphasizes the difference between men and women. Liberal feminists were of the view that men and women were equal and therefore, they should be given equal treatment in all avenues of life. Whereas the Cultural Feminism viewed that there are fundamental personality differences between men and women, and that differences of women are special and should be celebrated. Cultural feminists
accepted the notion of biological differences between men and women. Cultural Feminism is defined as "a theory that wants to overcome sexism by celebrating women's special qualities, women's ways, and women's experiences, often believing that the "woman's way" is the better way" (http//www.amazoncastle.com/femsm/ecocult.html).

Instead of emphasizing the similarities between men and women, Cultural feminists often stress the differences. They go beyond the fundamental rationalist and legalistic thrust of liberal theory. They affirm that feminine qualities might be a source of personal strength and pride and a fount of public regeneration for the harmonious regulation of public life, Cultural feminists assume that women should involve in politics and must enter the public sphere. They believe that "we would have every arbitrary barrier thrown down. We would have every path laid open to woman as freely as to Man" (Fuller 37). They believe in matriarchal vision: the idea of a society of strong women guided by essentially female concerns and values.

Cultural feminists believe that women have an intuitive perception that goes beyond reason to understand the subtle connections among people and among all life forms; so that, women's vision is holistic. And, they try to establish the reign of love and peace. Cultural feminists also analysed that the root of woman's oppression was their economic and moral dependence on men. They also advocated dress reform and proper physical training for women. They refused to accept any code or creed that uniformly defrauds woman of all her natural rights. They also did not accept the validity of biblical ethics and its doctrine that women's inferiority was the central force in perpetuating an ideology of women's
subjugation. They implied that political rights would not be enough to change women's status, and a revolution in social and religious attitudes was necessary.

The Cultural feminists also condemned the creeds and codes in the Bible, which were based on the patriarchal idea that woman was made after man, of man, and for man, an inferior being, subject to man. They commented that the New Testament posits the ideology that "God made Eve out of Adam's rib" (Genesis 2:21-23), which stresses female inferiority and they urged to return to the Old Testament, where God created "man and woman as equals in his image" (Genesis 1:26-27). They implied that the masculine and feminine elements were equally represented in the deity. They believed that the oppression of women was rooted in Christian doctrine and in particular the idea derived from Genesis of women's inferiority and wickedness. They included that through reorganisation of the divine element of motherhood, the evil will cease - especially toward women. "When the femininity of the divine is once again acknowledged, the holiness of the divinity will be manifested" (Gage 32).

Cultural feminists believed that until each individual asserted her own freedom and powers, the powers of maternal energy, of mother-love, she would never be free. They were seeking ways to utilize their talents and what they saw was their heritage of women's values to reform the masculine and corrupt public sector. They believed in collective kinship, which would help them come out of social evils - war, poverty, and economic exploitation. To establish new values, to create an overpowering sense of the sacredness of life, especially mother's nurturing care about life is necessary.
(c) Radical Feminism:

Radical Feminism strives towards freedom of women. Both Cultural and Radical feminists accept the difference between men and women biologically, but Cultural feminists assert the fundamental personality of women. Radical feminists were of the view that men and women were biologically different and this factor must be taken into account by women while fighting for equality and freedom.

Radical Feminism views the oppression of women as the most fundamental form of oppression, one that cuts across boundaries of race, culture, and economic class. This is a movement intent on social change, change of rather revolutionary proportions, in fact. Radical Feminism is called 'radical' because it is struggling to bring about really 'fundamental changes in society'. Women who were interested in getting to the roots of the problems in society became Radical feminists. Radical Feminism is concerned with the analysis of the oppression of women as women. Its basic aim stated that there shall be no characteristics, behaviour, or roles ascribed to any human being on the basis of sex.

The male-dominated society always viewed women as basically weak, emotional, sensitive, and always longing for love and nurturance and, therefore, they need security. Women continue to depend on men for emotional security in a way that is not reciprocated. The Radical Feminists believe that women are different from men; they are humane, caring for others, flexible, non-competitive and co-operative. So, they want spiritual freedom and intellectual freedom from inversions of privacy and the insults of degrading stereotypes.

Radical feminists accept their difference from men, but they seek equality. They also seek freedom which is their principal motto, but some Radical feminists emphasise uncharted freedom for all women. Oppression is common for all
women -- race, colour and class. So are the privileges. "Feminism is the political theory of all women — working-class women, poor women, physically challenged women, lesbian, old women, as well as white economically privileged heterosexual women. Anything less is not feminism, but merely female self—aggrandizement" (http://free.freespeech.org/feminism/x/rdfemquotes.html).

All civilizations are patriarchal and their ideology is male supremacy, which requires women to exhibit male-serving behaviour and to accept male-serving roles. Family is the main source of patriarchal ideology, which reclaims women's oppression both in economics and in biology. Thus women were put between the material biological base and the ideology of female subjugation. The social structure also contributed its role to women's oppression. When women were restricted to talk about sex openly, women could not project their sexual and emotional responses. Female sexuality was one of the earliest radical feminist issues and the different psychosexual makeup of men and women contributed to women's oppression. The normal male and female heterosexual relationship was the product of patriarchal culture.

Because of this, the Radical Feminists fought against the oppression of women — especially the institution of marriage. In a nuclear family, if there was a child, and the father was working, the mother automatically should be a full-time house maker. If the mother divorced the father, and the father was unwilling to support his children, the mother had to look after them and the low earnings of mother resulted in the 'feminization of poverty'. So, the feminist movement furthered a new sense of woman's possibilities outside marriage and motherhood. Most feminists agreed that women's unpaid work within the home or reproductive function hindered her in obtaining education and paid work.
The Radical Feminists criticised love because it affected both women's mind and body. The love between the heterosexual man and woman should be really reciprocal. But, women surrender their autonomy to men because of social and economic reasons, which have little to do with love. Since, men are more powerful in economic and social conditions, they are in better position in relationship. Women, therefore, continue to depend on men for emotional sustenance in a way that is not reciprocated. Radical Feminists found that "women's oppression is rooted primarily in psychological", more than "economic factors" (Donovan 143).

Therefore, the women's movements have provided shelters and supported the victims and analyzed the causes for their problem. Most battered women had children and it was very difficult for unemployed or underemployed mothers to find affordable housing and child care. Sex, whether willing or forced, affects woman and leads to child bearing; child rearing; nurturance and affection. Activists in the women's movement have formed 'Active kinship' networks to overcome these oppressions. They believe that the mother-daughter relationship and network of women might transform patriarchy.

Radical Feminism emphasises the power that women already have in themselves and the need for mental transformation that would free women to act powerfully. Women who define and care for themselves create a community that does not need men to function. Radical Feminism provides an image of female freedom and possibility that is healing and transforming for women.

Radical Feminism also accepts the difference between men and women biologically, and believes that the origin of women's oppression is the patent sexual or procreative function of women. It attempts to raise women's
consciousness of their oppression with an intention of putting an end to the domination of men.

(d) Lesbian Feminism:

Lesbian Feminism is an offshoot of Radical Feminism. The new female-centered radical thought provided new definitions for sex. It believed that the female honour does not mean virginity, chastity and fidelity to a husband, but honesty among women. Lesbian is "a woman who devotes her energies to other women, who refuses to be identified in terms of a man" (Donovan 161).

Lesbian Feminism advocated that women should refuse to accept male-identification, to be a woman who belongs to a man is to be invisible, pathetic, inauthentic, and unreal. They urged women to forge their identities in terms of one another, in terms of their own need, and they call for female separation. They insisted that only women could give new sense of self to each other, and not in relation to men. According to Blanche Wiesen Cook "women who love women, who choose women to nurture and support and to create a living environment in which to work creatively and independently, are lesbians" (718-39). Lesbian Feminists, according to Martha Shelley, believe that women must unite and "we must learn to love ourselves and each other, we must grow strong and independent of men so that we can deal with them from a position of strength" (127).

Lesbian is not simply a matter of total sexual union, the woman— to —woman relationships need not involve sex roles. In a heterosexual institution women are tied socially, economically to men, and their body, their services, their children belong to men -- property of men. To break the heterosexual bonds and to put an end to male supremacy, the Lesbian Feminists urge women to develop an
alternative life-style, ally with other women. Between women, the Lesbian Feminists believe, love is contemplative; caresses are intended less to gain possession to recreate the self through them; separateness is abolished, there is no struggle, no victory, no defeat; in exact reciprocity each is at once subject and object, sovereign and slave; duality becomes mutuality.

(e) Freudian Feminism:

When women's movements were insisted upon women's rights, Freud was the first to analyze the relations within the family, the role of men and women in the family. In his theory, he says that all human beings are basically good when they are children, but they become bad because of the influence of the society. Freudian psychoanalysis is a source of truly feminist analysis of sexual difference and the construction of gender in patriarchal society.

Freud suggested in his *Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex* (1905) that there is no pure masculinity or femininity. Every individual has the union of both the masculine and feminine qualities. This is based on time and situation. Some times the masculine qualities have the sense of feminine and feminine qualities have the masculine behaviour. So there is a 'bi-sexual disposition' in all people.

Freud had developed the child's psychosexual development in three stages - pre-genital, genital, and puberty. In the pre-genital period, boys and girls are equal. There is no difference between them. At this period, the child feels warmth and care and also gets food from the mother. So, the child is automatically attracted towards mother whether it is a boy or girl. At this period, child's sexual object turns towards the person who loves him or her since childhood.
In the genital phase, the boy's attraction moves to the mother and hostility to the father. In the Oedipal relationship, woman becomes rival to the father and Freud did not clearly discuss "what happens to the girl during this period" (Donovan 93). In this period woman sacrifices her life to man and acts as a mediator between father and son. But in the puberty stage, the sharp differentiation of male and female character originates. The psychic forces developed in woman hinder her sexual life. In this period, she feels shame and also because of the demands of moral and aesthetic ideals, she is unwilling to involve in sex. It is a period of repression and of sublimation. So, woman could not exhibit her demands and desires because of social and moral problems.

Freud also discussed 'Narcissism' in women, especially in the puberty stage. Literally, Narcissistic love means loving one's own self. Producing one's self, one's own image is narcissistic. In Freud's theory, all love might turn out, at the bottom, to be narcissistic. He referred to the female type as the purest and truest one of narcissism. In the puberty stage, woman expects others to love her, especially man to love her and adore her beauty. The self-adoration is caused by society also. She is also attracted towards man because of economic survival. Parental narcissism is also seen when the mother loves her child, because she considers that the child carries her own image. The narcissistic woman shows indifference to man's desire, her self-sufficiency makes her enigmatic, inaccessible and impenetrable, which threatens patriarchal society. She may reveal the primacy of narcissism, undercutting object love and desire alike. Feminists have borrowed the analysis of Freud to arrive at the correct conclusions of their role in society dominated by men.
(f) Marxist and Socialist Feminism:

Like Freud, Marxism is also relevant to feminist ideology. "Marxist Feminism" is more appropriately called "Socialist Feminism" (Ferree and Hess 30). Socialist Feminism postulates that men determine their being and it exists on class consciousness, where the ruling class (man) saw the world from the perspective of their own class and not from the oppressed class (woman). In general men came under the ruling class and they never considered women, the oppressed class. In the family circumstances, the Socialist Feminism indicated that the "natural division of labour in the family created the first form of ownership, of one person by another; who saw the enslavement of the wife and children by the husband as the first form of private property" (McLellan 476). They believed that through revolutionary activity and by realizing their oppressed condition, they could change the political and familial circumstances.

Socialist Feminism seeks an end to the exploitation of the weak by the strong and it sees patriarchy as another force that distorts and limits human possibilities. It argues that all social structures permitting men to control and benefit from women must be eliminated. Socialist Feminism emphasizes on changing the system, which exploited and oppressed women both in workplace and at home. The Socialist Feminism does not focus on the idea of women as a sex class. It is concerned with the fight against patriarchy and views that task as being inseparable from the struggle against capitalism and racism.

(g) Andro - Feminism:

Men who are involved in feminism are called Andro - feminists. Along with women, a few men also participated in women's independence movement. Men in feminism sound supportive and equal, but could also imply fellow - travelling,
because, women are the subjects of feminism. Women are the initiators, makers, and its force. The feminists believe that men can be feminists but they cannot be women. It is true that a male who supports feminism ought to question himself "whether he as a male is really doing feminism a service in women's present situation by muscling in on the one cultural and intellectual space women have created for themselves within 'his' male-dominated discipline" (Belsey and Moore 122). The Andro-Feminists want to create an organic, harmonious whole, "male and female represent the two sides of the great radical dualism . . . they are perpetually passing into one another" (Fuller 115-116). Ibsen is an andro-feminist. He opines that in practical life woman is judged by Man's law, and she cannot be herself in the society. The laws are framed by men and with a judicial system that judges feminine conduct from a masculine point of view. He also insists that woman should be an individual person both at home and out of her home.

(Si) Amazon Feminism:

Amazon Feminism is dedicated to the image of the female hero in Greek mythology and in fact, as it is expressed in art and literature, in the feats of female athletes, and in sexual values and practices. Amazon Feminism focuses on "physical equality and is opposed to gender role stereotypes and discrimination against women based on assumptions that women are supposed to be, look or behave as if they are passive, weak and physically helpless. Amazon Feminism rejects the idea that certain characteristics or interests are inherently masculine or feminine, and upholds and explores a vision of heroic womanhood" (http//www.amazoncastle.com/femsm/ecocult.html). Amazon Feminists tend to view that indeed, all women are as physically capable as all men, and those who are physically capable for such job, should pursue such jobs regardless of gender.
(i) Ecofeminism:

Ecofeminism looks at nature, politics, and spirituality in a new way. Ecofeminists believe that the domination of women is directly connected to the environmental misuse and pillage of our earth. From this core tenet, a philosophy flourished based on the interconnected web of life. Ecofeminism is "a theory that rests on the basic principle that the patriarchal philosophies are harmful to women, children, and other living things" (http://www.ainazoncastle.com/±emsm/ecocult.html).

The issues of power, domination and subordination are important to Ecofeminism. High on the list is toppling patriarchy. The Ecofeminists also struggle against oppression like racism, heterosexism, classism, and imperialism. This broad-based support for social justice is one of the Ecofeminism's greatest strengths.

Ecofeminism is infused with a deep affinity for the non-rational, and emotional realm. All spirituality was originally earth-based and centered on an oneness with nature. Women as the givers of food, health, wealth, wisdom, and courage have been upheld as female goddesses. Ecofeminists expanded the analysis of traditional, political issues like, race, class, and gender. Ecofeminism is contrary to male values such as aggression, and it is compassionate to feminine values like, kindness, affection, and sympathy that would ultimately save the future of mankind. Ecofeminism offers a singularly powerful and comprehensive vision for attaining earthly peace and harmony.

(j) Spiritual Feminism:

The idea of Spiritual Feminism has universal appeal because it excludes no woman. The word 'spiritual' itself has wide-ranging meanings within many communities, including the community of women. These feminists recognise the
spiritual needs that had frequently motivated social movements and the desire for social transformation.

Many of these feminists are seeking the aid of ancient female idols to advance their feminist goals: "Recognition of a 'divine feminine' would remove an enduring justification for sexist oppression" (http://bibleblast.net/pagan_fem.htm). They think that reviving the worship of "goddesses" will somehow help women gain respect. Indeed, throughout history, people have included female deities in their pagan worship, and yet the feminist world-view has not predominated among the pagans. On the contrary, pagan men on the whole have tended to treat women very badly. According to the Bible, "man is not complete without woman" (Genesis 2:18-24). The Bible teaches men "to love and cherish" their wives (Ephesians 5:25-33). Moreover, the Bible teaches that "women are uniquely suited to not only bear but to nurture human beings" (Proverbs 31:10-31; I Timothy 5:9-10). Human beings (male and female) are the only creatures in the universe that are made in the image of the Creator Himself. There could be no higher calling than to care for human beings - and caring for human beings is something the Bible teaches that women are especially well-suited to do.

Spiritual Feminism remains a powerful idea that lends itself to a feminist philosophy that is more inclusive. Spiritual feminism could provide a means for White women to bond with women of colour, and for women of colour to bond with poor women of all races. Spiritual feminism is based on the idea: "Love is the plus of spirituality and bonding. No race of people has ever succeeded without it" (McAdoo 199). Feminist movements are concentrated in women's problems and privileges. They are against sexism Male and female sexuality should be based on harmony.
On the whole, women are considered as sex object, or as means or agent of reproduction or as imitators of men. Therefore, feminists have to find out whether there is coherence in the various streams of feminist thought or not.

Women are not feminists by virtue of the facts alone of being women. Feminism is a social-political reality, a struggle, and a commitment. Women are eternal victims of male ploys. Many women have been victimized intellectually, emotionally and physically by men; it is also true that some have managed efficiently to counter male power. The experience of women directs them to prevent male oppression.

But one of the things men learn from feminism is that women have had enough of being marginal, marginalized: patriarchal society is about marginalization, keeping women out or on the edges of its economy, its institutions and its decisions. Some feminists dream of a world without men, of the perfect friendship of women unalloyed by baser and coarser nature. The concept of feminism placed women's freedom in opposition to women's duties and rights, and polarized woman's need for dependence and independence. Finally, women achieved legal emancipation with respect to equal rights in the matter of property, education, and employment. The feminist movement has made a woman visible and offered her the freedom to choose, in the path of self-direction and determination that is in agreement with; others, rather than the competition against them. So, the patriarchy should be changed, and the change should be treated as individual. The writing of woman in the present world has been recording their experiences and invariably each experience is based on a particular culture, political religion and social milieu.
The next step in the evolution of Feminist Thought is broadly known as Womanist Thought. The following chapter deals with the drawbacks of the Feminist Thought as it was practiced and how the criticism leveled against it was met by the Womanist Thought.

2. Womanist Thought

Feminism has become a controversial topic. Feminists wished to challenge the whole existing order of things to create women's collectives to take the major decisions for women's well-being out of the hands of men, and to raise the consciousness of women to the cultural bondage of being categorized as a sex object. Some of its members wished to abolish gender roles altogether. The radical nature of these proposals did not appeal to many women, particularly, women of African origin in America.

Feminist Movement has lost its fervour because of feminists who have been demanding freedom including absolute sexual freedom. This sexual revolution has created so many problems for women. They are demanding nothing and expecting nothing from men. The sexual freedom denies women a stable marriage to a faithful husband who will abandon them or their children. Their life becomes a burden because of this fruitless relationship with men who decline to commit.

Feminism 'back fired' on women, leaving them to struggle alone with work and children while men enjoyed a new freedom from family responsibilities. Feminism freed men, not women. Feminism made women disposable. It gave men all the financial and personal advantages over women. So women bore the burdens of raising children without the help of their men. The truth is that a woman
cannot live the true feminist life unless she denies her child-bearing biology. As long as that biology is there, women cannot compete equally with men.

A backlash against feminism is for promoting female beauty. Women's material opportunities have expanded, a psychological force has begun working insidiously to undermine their sense of self-worth. After years of much struggle and little recognition, many older women feel burned out and many younger women show little interest in the ideas portrayed by feminists. The female beauty consciousness is endangering female freedom; infused with notions of beauty, it is a dark vein of self-hatred, physical obsession, terror of aging, and dread of lost control.

The beauty concept has changed every thing in its path and young women are trapped. It once again witnesses women as 'dolls'. The beauty myth of the present is more insidious than any mystique of femininity yet. The contemporary ravages of the beauty backlash are destroying women physically and psychologically.

In earlier days feminists were against the limits imposed on them as women, and they struggled to achieve certain crucial structural changes. Later on, they lived in the new set of social relationships and created new opportunities, experiencing the freedom as well as the limits of this restructured world. They took the freedom for granted and experienced the limits most acutely. Thus, once again, they resemble the earlier generation of feminists, struggling to remove these restraints. It is not enough for changes to be made on a structural level but they must be assimilated into women's everyday life.

The African American women are dissatisfied with feminist movements and they do not want to call themselves feminists. They want women to stop trying
to be like men and to accept their own feminine nature, which can find fulfilment only in nurturing maternal love. They accept that "biology is destiny" and women cannot escape from their biological destiny, whether they like it or not. As long as their biology is there, women are different (Ferree and Hess 40). Instead of seeking independence, the Black women believe in interdependence. They consider the problems of ordinary women and also pay attention to family relationship — husband, wife and children. They analyse global problems faced by human beings, men, women and children including environmental concerns.

During the pre-emancipation, the Blacks were illiterate. They were not allowed to read and write. But the Blacks were interested in expressing their experiences to other Black people. Due to their illiteracy, they depended on their White masters and the White abolitionists to publish their narratives. When the Blacks' narratives were published, they were changed to the needs of the White audience, because they were narrated by the Whites to White audience and not for Black audience. So, the Black people realized that their narratives were distorted and twisted. They did not reflect the reality about the Blacks. After emancipation, a few Black people were given educational opportunities, which enabled them to share their own experiences with their own people. Phillis Wheatley (1754 - 1784), was one of the Blades who received education, became well versed in the Bible and in English classics. Her Poems on Various Subjects, Religious, and Moral was the first Black work written and published by the Black in 1773. But her work missed the reality of life ~ the real grief she experienced herself or witnessed. Later on, the Blacks used their literature as a powerful weapon for protest and liberation.
The Harlem Renaissance in 1920's gave voice to the new spirit awakening in the Blacks in literature. The Black writers found new strength in their own folk culture. The new spirit arose and inspired self-assertiveness in their people. This movement resulted in mass migration of the Blacks to the north and created new hopes and new problems. The New Negro Movement inspired the idea 'black is beautiful' in literature and society. The writers of The Harlem Renaissance produced a flood of Black literary works, which highlighted the low life of the African Americans. Their works were based on the feelings of revenge, despair, aspiration, and hatred. They struggled and fought for their way upward in the society. Therefore, their literature became an instrument for their social and ethical betterment. They dreamed of an eventual Utopian world where the Blacks would overcome their oppression and repression. In general, literature should be created for pleasure and for ennobling. But, the Black literature was used as a weapon to protest against racial oppression and to propagate their vision of life in American society.

The Black women writers have reshaped and redefined the Black text; which shaped their narratives and their world views. The Black women suffer from the "twin burden" of being Black and female (Bjork 17). It is a double jeopardy, which has haunted, tormented and also paradoxically, liberated the Black women. They were able to develop as individuals even under the most trying circumstances. Both the male and female slaves were treated as beasts of burden, seen as sub-human by their White masters, relegated to drudgery in an exploitative economic system. But the double jeopardy of female slavery involved more than the unenviable status of working animal; she was also the object of brutal and perverse desire. The Black women, in the midst of both racism and
sexism survived, and their ability to do so was the force that bound together Black communities both during and after slavery.

The Black women continued their dual roles of both nurturer and worker, since the Black male could neither actively nor aggressively compete with his White counterparts. The Black women had no alternative but to support their families in such positions as lowly cooks and housemaids to White employers. They were able to overcome difficult situations to provide a stabilising force for their families. They were seen as non-entities in spite of their active role in family and community. The Black males, unable to assert themselves as productive members of society, felt their masculinity debased by the White males and also ironically by the Black females who were often the sole breadwinners in the White-dominated society. At the same time, the White society saw the Black women as mere chattel performing what were considered neither lady-like tasks nor significant economic contributions to society.

Domesticity and sexuality have been the common burdens of feminine writings. Literary critics believe that women cannot write like men, because they lack opportunities for wider experiences. The White women writers also have been mostly concerned with the sheltered world of the self. However, the Black women writers have access to a larger world of social degradation, suffering, poverty and hopelessness. Their personal experience, by its very racial nature, raises larger issues of human rights and social responsibilities. As the Black women writers reflect on the travails of a whole community, their writings partake of a social and cultural context, which partly explains their universal appeal,

Violence is implicit in the social setting of the Blacks. It is to the credit of the Black women writers that they do not glorify violence. They are more
concerned with the invisible violence of poverty and a subhuman existence. Their Black characters often affirm their dignity and survival in the face of a hostile society. Even when violence erupts in the form of dramatic episodes in then-works, the emphasis is always on the circumstancing of the event. Their ability to express the painful facts of their existence without any trace of bitterness or anger speaks of their self-assurance born of strong convictions. Instead of being nagged by feelings of inadequacy and frustration at being Black, the Black woman writers attempt to chart out their destiny in defiance of the ruthless social order.

A devaluation of the Black womanhood occurred as a result of the sexual exploitation of the Black women during slavery that has not altered even after emancipation. During nineteenth century, the patriarchal America considered, a 'good' woman was a pure, sexually repressed and physically fragile person; she was married, a mother, or a spinster who was dependent on and, therefore, non-threatening to men. And the 'bad' woman was dirty, promiscuous, and physically and mentally strong; she was a prostitute, a labourer, and a single mother who paid her own way in spite of her social and political invisibility. The Black women were often subjected to such degrading positions. As a continuation of slavery's institutional rape, a myth was created that "all the Black women were eager for sexual exploits, voluntarily loose in their morals and therefore, deserving none of the consideration and respect granted white women" (Bjork 19). In attempting to dispel this myth, middle-class Black women would internalise White values of feminine decorum; they tried to become 'ladies'. But both the White men and women resisted such change and in this social order the Black women remained at the bottom. They had to enact the stereotypes of the mammy, the concubine, etc. They were subordinated by a patriarchy in both the White and Black society.
Within this context of violence, poverty and oppression, the Black women began to write.

There are three groups of people in American society, which reflect the degrees of power and powerlessness. The first group is a larger one, which includes the White people, both the male and female. They are powerful in the society. But there itself is a small division that is, the White women who are considered subordinate to the White men. But they have power over the Black people, both men and women. The second group is a smaller one, which is about the Black people. They do not have power. They are subordinate to the White people, so that they experience exploitation and powerlessness. But the third group is a hidden one which includes only the Black women. They experience pain and oppression by the White men and women and also by the Black men. Because of these experiences the Black women are isolated in their society. In the social status the Black women experience more vulnerability than the Black men.

In the literary field, the Black men are included by the White men while creating literature. Whereas, when the White women have got the chance to create literature, they neglected the Black women. So that African American women tried to prove to themselves that they could equally create literature like men and the White women. The Black women have proved that they indeed belong to the human species and not to the lower order, such as a life-threatening, non-nurturing force. Both racism and sexism are equally loaded propositions for the Black women writers, they have faced the reality of double discrimination, of both sex and race and become a doubly burdened persons.

The basic myth of racism is that the White skin colour is superior - that the White is more intelligent, more virtuous, more sexually controlled. Being White
in colour implied a whole series of connotations: "of being attractive — both physically and culturally -- desirable, intelligent, reasonable and above all, worthy of love. Blackness was seen as a negative sign, a symbol of ugliness, uncontrolled irrational behaviour, violent sexuality and so on" (Plakkoottam 12). Having allotted such a burden of evil, fear and disdain to the Black colour, western philosophy, society, and culture finally found the perfect personification of this misalliance in the Black man. Thus cruelty, torture, lynching, and rape are the marks of traditional racism, which are highlighted in the writings of the Black women.

Despite the inhuman conditions of his existence, the Black man's condition was still much better than that of the Black woman. Racism and sexism co-exist in a traumatic alliance within the life of the Black women. The Black woman, bore a double-edged persecution: as a worker, both in the field and in the house; and as an object of sexual exploitation. She was seen as an over-sexed, immoral, loose woman who was always available for instant sexual gratification, as well as for the procreation of the race. Thus, the Black woman was valued for her reproductive capacity. The Black woman was seen as the White man's property and he could use her the way he pleased with her. She belonged more to the animal species, and therefore need not be accorded the courtesies due to a human being. The Black woman had to accept racial polarity in the form of White supremacy and sexual polarity in the form of male dominance.

From her White owners, both male and female, various burdens were laid upon the Black woman. The creation of the loose woman image corroded the Black man-woman bond; it led to the feeling that the Black woman was a wanton who enjoyed the sexual dalliance rather than martial permanence. To the Black man, his woman appeared to prefer the White man, and this was the basis
for the earliest misunderstanding in their relationship. The Black woman was sexually degraded and more profoundly, by being deprived of a strong Black man on whom she could depend upon.

Keeping sexual and racial discrimination in mind, the Black women of all professions and persuasions have tried to improve the conditions of their oppressive lives. In the White writings the Black women characters are extremely derogatory. So, the Black women writers like Zora Neale Hurston, Alice Walker, Maya Angelou and Toni Morrison, to cite a few, have portrayed the plight of the Black women’s life. These women writers highlight the plight of the Black men and women in America. In their writings, they include their Black counterparts to establish their rights in the White dominated society.

When the Black writers have looked and brooded so hard and long upon the harsh lot of their race and compared it with the hopes and struggles of marginalized people everywhere, the cold facts have begun to tell them something. All along, the Black writers had insisted that theirs was a literature solely based on the human condition and not parochial forays into protest literature.

The Black writers stalled identifying themselves with their African roots. By identifying with the African roots, the Black writers believed that they would merge with their ancestral roots when they felt the real meaning of the history of their race. They take from Africa a reinforcement of the value already placed on oral culture, the organizing energies of rituals, magic, fantasy, spirits, legends, myth, dreams in contemporary Black writing as acknowledged presences in the lives of its characters.
Building on the male-directed initiatives of the sixties, the Black women writers posed a challenge to the false male consciousness in that movement. They exposed the manhood militancy in Black writing as convenient self-service. When the Black male writers tried to escape from children and family life, the Black women believed that a longer view of history was needed for instant social change. When the Black consciousness focuses on the goal of socio-political freedom, that freedom becomes one among many pursued in the Black Womanist Thought. Here, the Black womanism means "humanism oriented by black people, not confined to them but restored the place of love, growth and healing as satisfactory resolutions in both life and literature" (01ney 208). Thus, the Black women writers have played a significantly dominant role as intellectual and spiritual leaders in Womanist Thought. The notable situation in the Black writing today is the flexible sharing of progressive, liberating values. These writers can be labelled as 'Black Womanist Writers' in line with Alice Walker who has used the term 'womanist' in her work In Search of Our Mother's Gardens: A womanist is

A Black feminist or feminist of colour. . . . Also: A woman who loves other women, sexually and / or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility . . . and women's strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and / or nonsexually. Committed to survived and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Loves music, Loves the moon. Loves the Spirit. Loves Love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. Loves the Folk. Loves herself Regardless. Womanist is to feminist as purple to lavender (xi - xii).

Black Womanism celebrates blackness, and Black roots, the aspirations of the Black people, and presents a balanced picture of Black womanhood. The Black
womanist will recognize along with her consciousness of sexual issues, she must incorporate racial, cultural, national, economic, and political considerations. The Black women believe in the wholeness of community. They believe that "without community, there is no liberation" and they unite with the Black men on the issues of race, and they reject a separatist feminist position (Donovan 158). The Black women start learning how to take their differences and make them strengths.

Black Womanism does not believe "in dividing the Black society on sex lines, but stands for integration and has faith in the wholeness of the Black society" (Ranveer 45). Black Womanism also indicates a notion of sisterhood. Since times of slavery, the Black womanhood has been destroyed, distorted, dismantled and denigrated with racial, sexual and inhuman practices by the Black men and White men and also White women. In the process, they have lost their genuine 'self and have developed a triple consciousness of white, black, and female. They see themselves with the eyes of the White men and women and the Black men. This has ultimately been responsible for the destruction of their self-confidence and the feeling of being human. The task of the Black womanist writers, therefore, is to give back to the Black women their own Black woman self, their beauty, physical and sexual strength, motherhood, sisterhood, wifehood, etc. At the same time, they need to be educated and made aware of the need to recover from psychological and mental traumas of inferiority. This is possible only if their wholeness as women is restored.

In Hurston's words,

*The basis of Black feminism and feminist literary criticism is most simply the idea of Black women seeking their own identity and defining*
themselves through bonding on various levels - psychic, intellectual and emotional, as well as physical - with other Black women. Black women identification is Black women not accepting male, including Black male, definitions of femaleness or Black womanhood (184).

They record the importance of female bonding and of the supportive nature of communities of women in a racist and gender - oriented world.

Margaret Walker's definition of humanism synthesizes natural, religious, historical, and moral elements. Hers is an organic philosophy of human life which embodies

A recognition that we are part of nature and the historical process, that we are implicit in the dynamic evolving of mankind to ever-higher planes of being, that all life must be richly developed in spite rather than mere matter, and that one must regard the sacred nature of a brother as one values his own privacy and his own inner sanctity (1353).

She calls her "new humanism" as "a new respect for the quality of all human life" and rather it must be opposed to racism. The Black literature "is a reservoir of the Black humanism". It is the standard - bearer of the values of "freedom, peace, and human dignity". It is what in America, the White and Black, needs. It is about "freedom of self through the acknowledgment of a self-imposed bondage to the human duty of nurturance of others. And it celebrates that freedom in women and men of all races who bind themselves to one another in such a way" (Pryse and Spiller 133).

Womanists engage the issues that affect the Black women's lives. But at the same time, the freedom of the Black women entails the liberation of all
peoples, since womanist theory concerns "notions of gender, race, class, heterosexism, and ecology" (http://www.religion.org/agi-bin/relsearched.dl I/showarticle). Thus the tasks of womanists are to claim history, to declare authority for themselves, their men, and their children, to improve their quality of life.

Womanists' goals are to interrogate the social construction of African American womanhood in relation to the African American community. The African American women create an energetic claiming of the life stories of the Black women and their contribution to the history of the U.S. Another goal of womanists is to expose the African American culture in order to reconstruct knowledge and overcome subordination. And finally, womanists seek to de-colonize the African mind and to affirm their human heritage.

The method of womanist theory validates the past lives of enslaved African women by remembering, affirming, and glorifying their contributions. After excavating analytically and reflecting critically on the life stories of their fore-parents, the methodology entails a construction and creation of a novel paradigm. Womanists concoct something new that makes sense for how they are living in complex gender, racial, class and social configurations. They use their fore-parents' rituals and survival tools to live in hostile environments. Moreover, they gather data from a reservoir of bold ideas and actions from past centuries to reconstruct knowledge for an enhanced and liberating quality of life for African American women today.

Womanists bring to the centre "the experience and knowledge of those marginalized by a complex layering and overlapping by race, gender, and class experiences of all groups, inclusive of those with privilege and power" (http://www.religion.org/agi-bin/relsearched.dl I/showarticle). The womanists retrieve sources from
the past, sort and evaluate materials, and thereby construct a society that effect change in the space and time occupied by the Black women.

In contemporary novels, the Black female characters look to themselves, to their communities for strength and growth; along with the traditions and familial ties, the Black women writers present the ideal for Black unity where every Black person has a degree of power and so can be "a 'brother' or a 'sister' or a 'father' or a 'mother' to the other" (Bjork 28). Simplicity, intimacy, communal harmony are the hallmarks of Womanist Thought. Thus, the Black women try to create meaning for their lives without demeaning the lives of others.

The Black women are "the best helpers of one another" (Donovan 34). These women laugh together and bear their sorrows. They learn that life without each other's support and understanding will be hard to bear. These women collectively share their experiences. This is reflected in the form and content of the novels, and in the use of language as well as through images, metaphors, mood, and tone.

The mother-daughter tie is a testimony of womanhood. The Black women survive together although alienated from the mainstream of a racist, sexist society. They are minority living on the fringes of the society. The Black woman's spirit does not get crushed under the patriarchal authority. The Black woman, who loves her man, has also to struggle for her survival. A song from Gloria Naylor reflects this sentiment "I love my man/I'm a lie if I say I won't" (55). The Black woman has to struggle constantly in an oppressive society, facing ill treatment at the hands of her own man too. These women want to bring a change in their lives and struggle to gain better life from the White society. Thus the womanhood has its strength and weakness of its own.
The Black womanists believe that the sexist oppression of the Black women must be explored in literature not through inflicting too many wounds upon the Black brothers but through a process of understanding, healing up, and through positive affirmation. This idea of harmonious gender relationships takes expression in all their works. The Black womanists assert that they cannot create a world of polarization, antagonism, gender—warfare and fragmentation. There cannot be only womanhood or only manhood and the Black womanist believe in a world of univocal discourse between them.

The Blacks need to recognize that they still have choices. They need to challenge the awful myth that they can't get along. The Blacks must strive toward empowerment, making decisions that are based upon what's real in America, rather than what they would like to experience through false expectations from material gains. The Blacks must also realize that "they will survive more effectively if they have each other--Black men and women" (McAdoo 199).

The Black men and women must realize their joint responsibility for today's tensions in relationships and, therefore, strive to join together to create healthy connections. Values and ethics have been challenged in the past few years. So, if the Blacks want successful relationships, they must be willing to take some risks. The Blacks have always got through difficult times through strong efforts of 'brotherhood' and 'sisterhood'. Once the Blacks accept total responsibility together, women can be relieved of bearing alone the burdens of family and society and men can stop feeling undervalued and threatened. Thus, the Black men and women must decide to structure their personal lives in more respectful and loving ways for the future of the race. The next generation's very existence depends upon this premise.
The womanists learn to survive by protecting themselves and others from disabling suffering; prevent it when possible; walk with sufferers when they are powerless to protect or prevent. They "look upon all that lives, all that is, with a worshipful gaze. That is, live, and let live" (http://www.crosscurrents.org/walkereco.htm). They express with the revolutionary tenderness of non-violence and respect for all of life; justice and solidarity; truthfulness and tolerance; equality and partnership between men and women.

Moreover, the Black women are in a group, they are unwilling to ally themselves with White women in opposition to the Black men who, in spite of their sexist behaviours, found that class differences are greater than differences between the sexes within the same class. They struggle for a new society based on new values of mutual respect, co-operation and social responsibilities. The Black woman's writings are one of the tools for helping to achieve that.

The Black women writers have a great responsibility for "giving kindness and sustaining love to a compassion for the earth", truth in humanity beyond their knowledge of evil, and an abiding love of justice (Prenshaw 42). Womanist theory is define as "committed to the survival and wholeness of entire people, female and male, as well as to a valorization of women's works in all their varieties and multitudes" (Gates Jr. 70).

The Black woman writers, present not a dismissal of the male but an affirmation of the female. Toni Morrison brings out the idea of wholeness and totality of experience through past in terms of individual as well as collective existence. Morrison is frankly looking for new values, new modes of thought which would unite the Black community and obliterate the artificial, egocentric,
sexual distinctions alienating the Black man from the Black woman. In the context of this Womanist Thought, an analysis of Toni Morrison’s writings is appropriated.

3. Life And Works Of Toni Morrison

To the question "Has the feminist movement influenced your treatment of characters"? Toni Morrison replies that "Not yet. Not yet. Because I usually don't write books about feminist movement" (Jones and Vinson 146). Her writings are not closed to new ideas, instead hers is an expanded articulation, "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"(http://www.salon.com/books/int/1998/02/cov-Si-02int.htm).

Toni Morrison, by birth as Chloe Anthony Wofford, was born in February 18, 1931 in Lorain, Ohio, a small steel town on the shores of Lake Erie. She was the second of the four children of George Wofford, a ship welder, and his wife, Ramah, a homemaker. They were the southern migrants who left the Deep South in search of improved social, political, educational, and economic opportunities for their family. Morrison learned many lasting lessons, paramount among which is the importance of one's personal identity and privacy -- a lesson that Morrison has passed on - to her children, from her parents. She learned self-respect from her fiercely proud father and immersed herself in the rich oral culture of Black American, in the form of the many family stories, folk tales, and songs that her mother knew.

Morrison heard about the violent racism from her family stories. Years later, Morrison labels her father as a "racist". She says that "people assume that a racist is a white person who doesn't like the Black people," she would say, "but
the term simply means a person who believes that his race is superior to another race. My father in that sense really felt that his all Black people were better than all White people because their position was (inherently) a moral one" (Dolan 23). When Morrison started writing she wanted to write about the true devastation of racism on the most vulnerable, the most helpless unit in the society, namely, women. She said that "I wanted to write about what it was like, to be the subject of racism"(Blashfield 45).

In Black society, the Black women have been community builders; they formed voluntary associations to help those in need; they have assumed the major responsibility for rearing children, passing on from one generation to the next the values that keep a culture alive. When talking about the Black Culture, Morrison says that the grand-children have to read the Bible of her grand-mother when she is dying. Morrison also did for her grand-mother and "somebody assigned her to do that. They were caring for her, and she was involved in the death and decay of her grand-mother" (Ruas. 1985 228). Obviously her mother cared for her and she would do that for her; that is the cycle. That is part of knowing who they are and where they come from. She believes that quality of nurturing is to be essential.

Morrison belongs to a musical family. Her mother regularly sang solos and played piano at a movie theatre. Her grandfather was a violinist. Many of her family members were highly talented musicians who could play by ear. They could sing or play just about anything. Morrison also found solace and pleasure in listening and singing music. She later described the singing her family did as a "kind of talking to oneself musically" (Blashfield 28). Morrison was inspired by them and it helped her create such characters as Poland and Mrs, MacTeer in her
novel *The Bluest Eye* and Pilate, Reba and Hagar in *Song of Solomon*. In addition to music, Morrison's upbringing was filled with story telling, though the best ones came from her father. Stories have always been an integral part of African American history and folklore. This family background enabled Morrison to incorporate many of the mythical and supernatural elements in her works. She says, "As a child I was brought up on ghost stories — part of the entertainment was story telling" (Ruas. 1994 99-100).

When the Blacks in the South had often been prevented from going to school, Morrison's grand-parents found pleasure in reading. As Morrison grew up, she absorbed two languages, one was the language of her larger community — standard English, and the other was the language of African Americans — Black Vernacular English. She was inspired by her parents' use of English in different ways — highly sermonic, highly formalised, and biblical in a sense. She remembers that her parents "could move easily into the language of the King James Bible and then back to standard English, and then segue into language that we would call street" (Blashfield 27).

After graduating from high school with honours, Toni Morrison enrolled at the All-Black Howard University in Washington, D.C., where she was nicknamed Toni. She graduated with a B.A. degree from Howard and M.A. from Cornell University in English. There, she completed a thesis on the theme of suicide in the works of Faulkner and Virginia Woolf. She taught at Texas Southern University, Howard University, the University of New York at Purchase, Yale University, Bard College, the State University of New York at Albany, the University of California, Berkeley and Morrison became the Robert F. Goheen Professor in the Council of Humanities at Princeton University.
While Morrison was studying at Howard University she was interested both in academic and extra-curricular activities. She joined the Black sorority Alpha Kappa Alpha, the first Greek-letter society for African American women. It helped her while she created her own works and Morrison has described the importance of sisterhood in her novels.

Morrison met and married a Jamaican architect Harold Morrison when she was working at Howard University. The couple had two sons before their marriage crumbled. Morrison realized that as a single mother life became tough to her. But she never gave up her two goals at any circumstances -- "two things without which I couldn't live: mother my children and write books" (Blashfield 48). She joined a writing group. She wanted to do something constructive that brought her solace. A short story she wrote about a little Black girl who wanted blue eyes would be her first completed literary work, and the seed of her first novel, *The Bluest Eye*.

Morrison became the first Black senior editor at Random House. There, she encouraged many young Black writers such as Toni Cade Bambara, Gayle Jones and so on. She demonstrated that a Black presence in high place -- at least in publishing -- could make a distinct difference.

Meanwhile, Morrison's own literary career was taking shape. She made her debut as a novelist with the publication of *The Bluest Eye* in 1970. In 1973, *Sula* was published. *Sula* is an examination of the intense, forty-year friendship between two women. The novel received a great deal of critical acclaim, and was nominated for the *National Book Award*. Further accolades followed with the publication of *Song of Solomon* in 1977, an enormous popular success that won her the *National Book Critic's Circle Award*. Morrison continued to produce
powerful literary works: *Tar Baby* in 1981, *Beloved* in 1988 - for which she received the Pulitzer Prize, *Jazz* in 1992, and in 1993, Morrison received Nobel Prize for literature, the first African American woman who had been honoured and her latest *Paradise* was published in 1998. Morrison conceived of a trilogy of novels united by a common theme — excessive or obsessive love - that leads to violence. *Beloved* explores maternal, love, *Jazz*, romantic love and *Paradise*. Morrison also published *Playing in the Dark* in 1992, a non-fiction dealing with race and gender issues. She gained the attention of both critics and a wider audience for her epic power, unerring ear for dialogue, and her poetically-charged and expressive depictions of African American life. Earning consistently high praise and enthusiastic comparisons to writers such as Ralph Ellison, and Richard Wright, Morrison told in an interview:

... I always missed some intimacy, some direction, some voice. Ralph Ellison and Richard Wright - all of whose books I admire enormously I didn't feel were telling me something. I thought they were saying something about it or us that revealed something us to you, to others, to white people, to men (Ruas. 1985 219).

Ellison and Wright addressed themselves to others — White people and Men. They spoke to the majority or to the elite groups of the society; that was their chosen forum and their milieu, but Morrison has always set her fiction in the common life, with the same concentration on domestic space, and domestic relations, and she shares the themes of love, family relations, the extension of these concerns into the larger world - revolve around the house. It is commented that "Morrison's novels would not simply draw on a pack of stereotypical stock characters, rather depicts a complex working of the character's psychological and
behavioural patterns” (Kim 126). Morrison has drawn upon important elements of her own life for novel, sometimes paralleling them, sometimes inverting them. Even before she published *The Bluest Eye*, she began her commentary on American life and letters by ushering in African American voices that had not been heard before.

Morrison became an outspoken critic on social issues. She was also asserting her role as one of the country's most articulate spokespersons on African American cultural affairs vocally criticizing the double standard applied by well-meaning Whites to the Black writers. Through her novels she hoped that it might enable African Americans to recognize and re-secure those qualities of resistance, excellence, and integrity that were so much a part of their past and so useful to the people who are living today and to the generations of the Blacks now growing up.

Morrison is a sophisticated novelist in the history of African American literature. Her themes are often expected of naturalist fiction, the burdens of history, the determining social effects of race, gender, or class, but they are also the great themes of lyrical modernism: love, death, betrayal, and the burden of the individual's responsibility for her or his own fate. Her novel consists of quest theme, sisterhood, mothering and so on. Her female characters are frequently made to explore the struggles of the Black women.

Morrison believes that there is a mask that sometimes exists when the Black people talk to White people. She said that when she wrote she does not want to explain. Somehow, when the Black writers wrote for themselves she could understand it better. She believes that when the locality is clear, folly realized, then it becomes universal.
Speaking courageously for the African American Women, Morrison discusses racism, but she also focuses on a persistent sexism within her own community. Still, she persistently delivers her strong messages and even though she is determined to tell of the injustices that have been and remain in the society, she nonetheless strives to rise above them. She offers inspiration and hope as well as lamentation. It is just this approach to writing and to issues of race and gender that associates Morrison with the Womanist Thought. Thus Morrison's literature and life have been an expression of splendor and love of Black life.

As a cultural icon, Morrison possesses a unique perspective. Within the world of literature, Morrison has been a major one for decades. Her novels have been praised and prized. She explores positive and negative options available to the Black women in their continuing struggle for equality, self-assertion and self-actualization. Morrison's novels move from stage by stage, first about young girl, then to adult woman in the second book, then a man in the third and man and woman in the fourth. Her fifth novel is about the mother-daughter relationship and the sixth one deals with the relationship between a young girl and an elderly man and the seventh novel describes a group of women.

*The Bluest Eye* (1970) is written in memory of Morrison's childhood friend who spends foil two years of life to get blue eyes and it is from the children's point of view, the subject matter touches on some very adult themes. She analyses the destruction caused by the perpetuation of the glorification of a physical white standard of female beauty and virtue. Morrison also explains how the people hurt each other when they are chained to circumstances of poverty and low social status. *The Bluest Eye* is about the haunting story of an abused eleven-year-old girl in a town, Lorain. The sisters Claudia and Frieda live in the
home of strict, protective parents, whereas, Pecola the central character is a very unhappy child, ignored by her mother and abused by her father.

The events in *The Bluest Eye* are seen from the point of view of Claudia MacTeer. When the novel begins she is looking back at the year when she was nine and when her friend Pecola Breedlove, then eleven, became pregnant, having been raped by her father, Cholly Breedlove. In the summer, Claudia and her sister, Frieda, planted marigold seeds and they believed if the seeds survived, so would Pecola's baby. They are the only people who wish for the baby to live and to love the baby. But the seeds never germinated and that the baby also died. Here the author shows the incident through two little girl's perspective.

Claudia is a strong-willed nine-year-old Black girl and she cannot accept that little Black girls are somehow lesser beings because of their colour. She hates White baby dolls and the little white girls including Shirley Temple whom everyone adored. She likes to find out the secret behind the fact, that all adults, the Black and White price White girls so much and Black girls so little. But, on the other hand, the eleven-year-old Pecola is very much in love with Shirley Temple and likes to drink milk in the blue and white Shirley Temple cup. Pecola is very much affected by the White values and her longing to get the bluest eyes is not satisfied till she becomes mad.

The author gives a contrasting picture of the families of White and Black. She picturises the perfect White family-Mother and Father, Dick and Jane, the Dog and the Cat, all living happily in their pretty green-and-white house and contrasts it with the world of the Breedloves, the world of poor blacks. The mother of Dick and Jane are laughing and playful, but Pecola's mother, Pauline Breedlove, has
seen her dreams fade into nothingness. She finds escape from the ugliness of her house and likes to spend her time as a maid in a White family's home.

But the character of Cholly Breedlove is opposite to Pauline. In the early life of Breedlove's marriage, Cholly makes Pauline feel happy for a time, but later, when Pauline believes in White values that white is beautiful and black is ugly, Cholly shows his ugliness through his actions. The author strongly shows that Cholly's wickedness is not only because of the values and treatment of White but also the treatment of his wife, a Black woman.

Cholly, in an inebriate mood, mistakes Pecola as his wife and seduces her and Pecola becomes pregnant with his child. Pecola's pregnancy is found out by her mother Pauline. Pauline beats Pecola terribly and stops Pecola from going to school. The baby is born prematurely and dies. She feels sad because she is despised by everybody. She goes to Lorain's Spiritual and Psychic Reader, Soaphead Church to ask him to give her blue eyes. But, at the end of the novel, Pecola, in her madness, is shown talking to an imaginary friend that her eyes are indeed the bluest in the world.

Although the eleven-year-old Pecola is the most obvious victim in this novel, most of the Black characters are presented as victims of the White society. In her childish innocence, Pecola believes that the world would be better if she viewed it through the blue eyes, which is highly valued by the White standard of beauty. The author deliberately shows the separate but unequal world of the Blacks from the point of view of a child focusing on the child as victim. The author gave the literary world a new look at a world of injustice and oppression of the Black people. By focusing the experiences of three little Black girls growing up in an environment of racist discrimination, Morrison portrays the tragic condition of
the Blacks in the racist America. The problems of young girls who will become adults are taken up in this novel. This is probably the first step in the evolution of Womanist Thought.

Morrison's second novel *Sula* (1973), is about the friendship between two women, Sula and Nel and the meaning of which becomes illuminated when the friendship falls apart. Nel is a fairly conventional person, wanting to get married, have children, and fit into society. But, Sula is a social outcast and rebel, who wanted to break all the rules. When talking about these two women's friendship Morrison remembers how her family members help one another and their friends in the community. That friendship is powerful and it is not about men. Morrison trusts that "we had to start loving one another, begin being sisters" (Dolan 47). Morrison herself has rejected the suggestion that *Sula* is a lesbian novel, but identifies its theme as what happens when a relationship between women is not taken seriously: "In *Sula*, I wanted to throw that relationship into relife. There is such a thing as 'the other' — the friend that is the other, and women must hang on to that" (McKay. 1983 45). *Sula* is created out of the feeling that the way Black women related to one another is different from the way white women related.

*Sula* is one of the most remarkable and challenging of Morrison's literary creations. It takes place in a town called Medallion, Ohio, between 1919 and 1965. The relationship between Sula and Nel is anything but conventional. Even as little girls, they are bound together by a powerful secret. One day they are laying down by the river, Sula begins swinging a young boy named Chicken little around in a circle; suddenly, he slips from her hands and drowns. Though both of them know that they are responsible for Chicken Little's murder, the two
girls never tell anyone their terrible secret. At the boy's funeral, Nel stands expressionless while Sula cries uncontrollably. Standing over Chicken Little's grave, they hold hands in a tight clench, then relax slowly, walking home with their fingers laced together.

While Nel grows up to be a fairly traditional woman, marrying a man named Jude and settling into the life of a house - wife, in Medallion, Sula takes off for the larger world, ready for the adventurous life. Sula is an unconventional character and Morrison wants to take risk. She declares, "I wanted to throw her relationship with another woman into relief (Dolan 48). Morrison also wanted to explore in Sula what would happen if one of the friends was to do the unforgivable thing — to see what that friendship was really made out of.

The unforgivable thing that Sula does is to return to Medallion and steal Nel's husband from her. Although she does not really love Jude, she seduces him - and then becomes the town's pariah, hated by everyone because she seems to have no feelings, no feelings for her old friend Nel, or for Jude, or even for her own mother when she dies in a fire. But in a strange way, the townspeople also welcome Sula's rebelliousness, her flagrant violations of the social codes of their community. Sula's evil makes the townspeople change in a mysterious way. Defining their own lives in contrast to Sula's, they begin to cherish their husbands and wives, protect their children, and in general band together against the devil in their midst. Sula, a rebel as outcast, becomes the role model to the Black people in a negative way.

The bond between Sula and Nel transcends their many years of separation, transcends even Sula's act of betrayal. At the end of the book, after Sula's death, Nel finds herself hearing her old friend's voice in the wind blowing
through the treetops down by the old cemetry. Then, she realizes that all the year she thought she was missing her husband, she was really missing her old childhood friend.

Thus Morrison was interested in portraying Sula and Nel as two halves of one person, that was a little bit of both in each of those two women, and that if they had been one person, they would have been a rather marvellous persons. But each one lacked something that the other had.

Morrison also emphasises sisterhood among three generation of women in a family — grand-mother, mother and daughter. The bond of sisterhood provides relief from their pains and problems. Eva Peace, Helene and Sula belong to three different age groups of women and they bond together.

In *Song of Solomon*, she shows the fictive world shifting from the Black women in their peculiar oppression to that of a young Black man in search of his identity. Writing *Song of Solomon* represents a new kind of challenge for Morrison. In her earlier books, she had written "vignettes of men", but she had never focused an entire novel on their lives, on their "attraction of violence", on "the driving forces behind them" (Dolan 57). She has chosen both women and men and there is no division in dealing characters in her novels. When feminists create literature for women and deal about women characters and their target audience is woman, Morrison has created both men and women characters for the universal audience. Thus she proves herself a 'womanist'.

Morrison centered the novel on a character named Macon Dead III, known to every one as Milkman, who leaves his house in Michigan and travels to the South in search of the fabled family fortune, a hidden treasure of gold. Although he never finds the gold, Milkman finds something much more precious
along the way - an understanding of the spiritual treasure which is his rich family history. When he was a boy, his aunt Pilate Dead sang a song, which is sung by the children who are playing a game in Virginia. They sing a song about Solomon instead of Sugerman. Then Milkman realizes that the children are singing about is his great-grand-daddy, a slave who according to the legend, was able to escape his bondage by flying back to Africa.

_Song of Solomon_ is a sweeping epic of a novel, and Morrison relates much more than the story of Milkman's quest for his family heritage. She also gives us one of her greatest characters in the fiery Pilate, a strange and magical woman, born without a navel. And there is a remarkable sub-plot involving Milkman's friend Guitar, who joins a secret society called the Seven Days, a vigilant group that kills White people at random in revenge for the murder of the Blacks. The novel ends with Milkman, having discovered the secrets of his family history, leaping fearlessly from a cliff, convinced that he now knows that his ancestors knew: if you surrendered to the air, you could ride it. The myth of 'flying' was something Morrison had heard about throughout her childhood. The Black men usually adored the image of flight for various reasons, whereas the Black women were always rooted in a place for family coherence and continuity. But Morrison creates Pilate with the qualities of men, who always wandered and migrated from place to place, but at the same time, Morrison portrays her as a preserver, who preserves and passes her family tradition to Milkman.

_Song of Solomon_ is a triumph by Morrison and she proves that as a responsible woman, she could bring out the repository of tradition and pass it to the future generation. It is said that "the women that Morrison celebrates in her
fiction are those who exhibit the traditional values of black womanhood” (McKay. 1988: 93).

In Morrison's fourth novel *Tar Baby* (1981), she examines the relationship between men and women, as well as between the Blacks and Whites that is possible in the conditions of contemporary society. Morrison would use the tar baby legend to construct a modem day allegory. *Tar Baby* is the first novel to depict fully developed White characters interacting with blacks. It is her first novel not set in the Black communities of the American Midwest and South. It is set in the Caribbean.

The story takes place in a small fictitious island in the Caribbean, Isle des Chevaliers, named after a group of mythical African horsemen. It is a modern love story. It updates the folktale of the tar baby and Brier Rabbit. It also traces the quest for self-identity of Jadine Childs, the protagonist. Jadine is not a rebellious person against the White society, instead, she has accepted and embraced the White culture without question. As an orphan, Jadine is adopted by her uncle and aunt, Sydney and Ondine Childs, the butler and cook to a retired White millionaire Valerian and Margaret Street. Mr. Street is a wealthy, retired businessman, who has created and ordered his own world on his Caribbean island. Valerian has paid for Jadine's education at Sorbonne, and she is treated like an elegant houseguest at Street's house.

When Son, an outlaw arrives on the island uninvited, his presence in the Street's house brings out all of the family's ugliest secrets. Soon, Son and Jadine eventually fall in love and run away to America. From there, they visit Eloie, Son's hometown. But Jadine feels like an outsider during their entire stay and feels especially threatened by the women at Eloie. When they return to New York,
Jadine looks toward the future, wanting Son to make something of himself in the real world. Son looks toward the past, wanting Jadine to imbibe the traits of the women in his community who mothered him. Both want to rescue the other from misguided worldviews. But in the end neither one can adapt to the other's way of life. Jadine leaves for Paris alone, determined to face her future on her own, and Son leaves to join the mythical blind horsemen rumored to haunt the island. Thus *Tar Baby* explores the sexual, racial, familial, and social tensions associated with a woman's journey to self-autonomy and self-actualization which is an essential ingredient in the Womanist Thought.

Morrison is a staunch believer in the concept of African American motherhood and mother-daughter relationship. *Beloved* (1987) is a captivating work that draws readers to the core of the most chaotic occurrence of the American slave trade. Her novel shows the concept of mother—daughter relationship evolving from the life-denying forces of Western culture's patriarchy created by slavery to the life-sustaining recognition of the African American mother who is the inheritor of both the Western and African American elements of motherhood.

When commenting on *Beloved*, James Baldwin said that it "could be about the story of truth", and he described Morrison as "this rather elegant matron, whose intentions really are serious, and according to some people, iethal"(Dolan 17). When Morrison had learned about the story of a slave woman, Margaret Garner, while compiling the materials for *The Black Booh* with Middleton Harris, she wanted to write it. If she could not do it, she said that "I felt really sold" (Dolan 74).

The story takes place in Cincinnati between 1873 and 1874, ten years after Emancipation, and eighteen years after the protagonist, Sethe, has cut her baby
girl's throat in the woodshed where she meant to slaughter all her little ones to protect them from their owner who had come to claim them. After the death of Baby Suggs, her mother-in-law, Sethe stays in the house with her only remaining daughter, Denver. The house is haunted by Sethe's baby girl, ghost, who has driven away her two sons forever.

When, Paul D, a former fellow-slave at the Kentucky plantation called "Sweet Home", knocks on the door and begins changing Sethe's and Denver's lives by running the baby's ghost out of the house. Paid D brings back to Sethe the memories she has been trying to forget and the hopes she had stopped nourishing long ago. Their attempt to live together is abruptly interrupted by the arrival of a mysterious young woman who has raised from the river and calls herself Beloved. It is her turn now to progressively take possession of the house and Sethe apparently, and run Paul D out of the house.

The three women, Sethe, Denver and the ghost Beloved form a 'sisterhood', and start a life of self-absorption in which they fill the empty spaces left in each by slaughter, denial, desertion, and oblivion. Sethe thinks that her daughter has come back to her forever, and convinced Beloved that she is the most lovable person in her life. Sethe quits her job and tries to satisfy Beloved's demands. At first, Denver too feels happy for her sister's arrival, but later, when Sethe is deteriorated physically and mentally Denver asks for her neighbor's help. Those who had once rejected Sethe because of the pride she had taken in her murder, gather together in prayer to rescue her from the baby ghost who has come back to destroy her. And, at the end of the novel PaulD who is aware of Sethe's past has once again come back to help her and put her life in a new context.
Morrison's *Jazz* (1992), is a story of a woman who has placed all of the values of her life in something outside herself. The title derives from African American folk tradition, and the story powerfully evokes the African American ambience of the Harlem of the 1920s. Morrison has constructed the theme of *Jazz* as a romantic triangle, the story of Joe Trace, a middle-aged door-to-door cosmetic salesman; his wife, Violet, a beautician, and Joe's lover, Dorcas, a teenager whose parents had been murdered in the notorious East St. Louis race riot of 1919.

The photograph from James Van Der Zee's *The Harlem Book of the Dead* was Morrison's initial inspiration for *Jazz*. *Jazz* was the music of Harlem in the 1920s. Morrison also received musical background from her mother and aunt and that influenced and helped her while creating *Jazz*.

Morrison lays out the entire drama of *Jazz* in the first paragraph of the very first page. She too offers some scenes of the brutal Virginia country life the Blacks endured as sharecroppers at the end of the nineteenth century. By contrast, Joe and Violet are initially dazzled by the prospect of life in New York. But later, Joe and Violet, in their different ways lose themselves in the City's enchantments. Their happiness trickles away into aging, they scarcely speak to each other. Violet begins to think of the children she hasn't had, and the meanings of her mother's long-ago suicide. And Joe, more traditionally, has a male mid-life crisis, looks for his romance in Dorcas, a young girl; but then also, he seems to see in the girl a substitute for the mother he never knew. But soon, Dorcas finds a handsome, arrogant boyfriend of her own age, clumsily dismisses Joe, and Joe kills her without knowing which piece of his life he is trying to erase or rearrange. But Violet becomes so obsessed with her husband's young lover that she even
crashes the funeral and tries to disfigure Dorcas' face with a butcher knife. Still Joe and Violet go on living together, miserable, silent, baffled and later on, Violet establishes a tender relationship with Dorcas' aunt, Alice Manfred. Morrison brings out the grasp of wrath happening in Black's daily life. Violet is a woman who treats all human beings as her children and Joe treats any woman as his mother. But Dorcas is a rebel who loves without commitment. For Morrison, the young girl's actions represented the epitome of romantic teenage passion, of loving someone so much that you feel you can't live without them.

Morrison's latest novel, *Paradise* (1998) explores the eternal struggle between men and women. She focuses on the tensions that bubbled up during the nineteen sixties and seventies, when women's roles were changing radically. *Paradise* is the only overtly religious novel, Morrison has ever written. In *Paradise*, she wanted to understand "the love of God and love for fellow human beings" (http://www.usnews/Par/Morrison/html). Religion has always been profoundly important to black Americans and in *Paradise*, she juxtaposes organized religion and unorganized magic as two systems. It also explores the struggle between men and women. In the past, the pioneer men and women worked together, but by mid-century, women had become possessions within a rigid hierarchy dominated by men.

*Paradise* examines the Black separatism through the historical prism of Oklahoma's all-black towns that were founded at the turn of the century. Morrison places her characters under tremendous stress. The Black men must project their women and children from hostile Whites and from an unforgiving world where Black death is rarely mourned. These circumstances turn the men hard, strong and merciless toward outsiders of every colour.
It brilliantly parallels the lives of two isolated communities—the Utopian town of Ruby and the crumbling Convent that exists alongside it in the middle of Oklahoma's vast, empty plains. The people of Ruby, Oklahoma have dedicated their lives to making their town safe and respectable. Founded by men and women who bear the ancestral scars of history's worst oppression, and who themselves have endured persecution by members of their own race. Ruby is a monument to courage, strength, and the will to overcome. With its tidy homes, flower-filled yards, and prosperous, self-sufficient economy, the town appears Utopian and dreamlike. But there are cracks in the surface. Outsiders are tacitly unwelcome; adultery, alcohol, and rebellious behavior are explicitly rejected. The town's founding fathers aim to preserve the purity of their line. But the inhabitants of the Convent—a rehabilitated mansion on the outskirts of town—appear suspicious in Ruby's scrutinizing eyes. Five women, unmarried, and of unknown origin and questionable character, are living a free-for-all existence in the increasingly decrepit house. Most of these broken women drifted into the Convent, which is presided over by Consolata, the former head nun's assistant. The Convent becomes the area's true haven and, despite Ruby's prosperity, the community's vital center for all the reverence shown the original oven. Townspeople go to the nunnery for their bread.

Like Ruby, the Convent was founded as a haven to those in need. Unlike the town, its doors are not only unlocked but also open. Where Ruby is orderly and predictable, the Convent is dark, mysterious, messy, filled with ghostlike sounds, and redolent of a potpourri of worship: hedonism, Catholicism, witchcraft practices. Where Ruby proudly traces its ancestry in a single line, the women of the Convent hail from all over the country. The abandoned mission was not their destination, but another arbitrary stop in their fragmented, haphazard lives. Nine
male descendants of the nine founding families storm the Convent and, shoot the handful of women hiding there.

In *Playing in the Dark* (1993), Morrison brings out how language can "powerfully evoke and enforce hidden signs of racial superiority, cultural hegemony, and dismissive 'othering' of people and language which are by no means marginal or already and completely known and knowable" (Mobley 625). In *Playing in The Dark*, Morrison studies the ways in which whiteness has been developed in contrast to what she calls an "Africanist" presence in canonical American Literature (6). In this work, Morrison argues that the concept of racial difference is central to American literature and culture, though that centrality has been denied. She also discusses the way that White characters and authors use Black characters to define White identity. She analyses canonical works in American literature by authors such as Willa Gather, Ernest Hemingway, Edgar Allan Poe, Mark Twain and William Faulkner.

With the vivid portrayals of Black American experiences, Morrison ponders the effect that living in a historically racialized society has had on American writing in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. She argues that race has become a metaphor, a way, referring to forces, events and forms of social decay, economic division, and human panic.

Morrison wants to bring our the reality of the U.S. fruitfully in American literature. Without the Blacks, there won’t be prosperity in their land. The American literature is uninformed, and unshaped by the four hundred year old presence of, first Africans and then African Americans in the U.S. They never give importance to these cultures and thought that they do not have the origin in the development of American culture and literature. The characteristics of
American literature emanate from a particular "Americanness" that is separate from and unaccountable to this presence (5). American literature becomes the preserver of White male views, genius, and power, which are removed from the overwhelming presence of the Black people in the U.S. So, Morrison declares in this book, that "the contemplation of this black presence is central to any understanding of our national literature and should not be permitted to hover at the margins of the literary imagination" (5).

The major theme in the American literature is the violently silenced Blacks. The organising principle upon the nation which is founded is inevitably yoked to Africanism. Its history, its origin is permanently allied with the hierarchy of race. In American literature the images of Blacks are suppressed and repressed as an Africanist persona. Morrison demands to display the characteristic of Blacks in American literature. Emerson's *The American Scholar* indicates the conscious necessity for establishing difference. The writers who accept the idea to establish their identity from the European ideology also seek difference from the identity of African Americans.

The investigation of the Black characters, narrative strategies, and idiom in the fiction of White American authors, Morrison provides a daring perspective that is sure to alter conventional notions about American literature. Morrison believes that the themes about the Blacks are not major in American literature but shaped by a complex awareness of a constituted Africanism. This awareness provides the staging ground and arena for the elaboration of the quintessential American identity.

Morrison thinks that the implicit and explicit presence of Africans informs the inescapable ways the texture of American literature. But to identify some one
as American, it refers to the Whites, and not the Africanist. So the Black people struggle to make the term applicable to themselves "with ethnicity and hyphen after hyphen after hyphen" (47). Morrison tells, in *Playing in the Dark*, that the African!im is the vehicle by which the American self knows itself as "not enslaved, but free; not repulsive, but desirable; not helpless, but powerful; ... but a progressive fulfillment of destiny" (52). Thus, Morrison expresses the impact of race on concept and plot; turns to Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville to examine the Black force that figures so significantly in the literature of early American; and discusses the implication of the African presence at the heart of Huckleberry Finn.

In Toni Morrison's works female characters are frequently made to explore the struggles of the Black women. In the Black women's life, there is joy and pain, there are successes and failures but always there is tension, a tension that is the struggle for integrity. Morrison is the first to combine the aims of the Black Freedom Movement and women's liberation. Through Sula and Jadine's character, Morrison brings out how the Black woman in a small circle of life, educated herself and became a liberated woman. Morrison's major characters struggle towards womanhood. In her first novel, for Pecola womanhood means being loved and in her second novel, for Sula it means self-fulfillment. The pursuit of womanhood, as it affects their wholeness, begins in earnest at the vulnerable age when Pecola and Sula are caught between the physical stages of girlhood and womanhood. Through her novels, Morrison teaches us a lesson about the integral relationship between the destructive limits imposed on the Black woman and the inversions of truth in the history and society.

The other works of Morrison are *Recitatif* (1983), the only short story she has written. Her only unpublished play is *Dreaming Emmett* which was
performed in Albany, New York in 1986. Morrison's novel *Beloved* was adapted to film in 1998. I was directed by Jonathan Demme. Oprah Winfrey, a Black American television personality has taken up the role of Sethe. Morrison's contribution includes her song cycle, *Honey and Rue*, which was set to music by Andre Previn in 1993. And in, 1999, she published with her son Slade, *The Big Box*, a children's book.

In addition to her fiction, Morrison has examined the role of race in American literature in her essay, *Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro — American Presence in American Literature* in 1988. She also edited a few important books of essays on social problems in America — *Rac-ing Justice, En-gendering Power: Essays on Anita Hill, Clarence Thomas, and the Construction of Social Reality* in 1992 and in 1997 she edited *Birth of a Nation'hood: Gage, Script, and Spectacle in the O.J.Simpson Case*.

Morrison thus belongs to 'wornanism', which has great admiration for the Black women's accomplishments and struggles against overwhelming odds. She values their indomitable will to rise above their degradation regardless of their life and status in the American society. In her writings she attempts to destroy the dehumanizing and unfair definitions imposed on Blacks and promotes an understanding of their life and culture which is viewed as an integral part of human experience.

The problems that African American women face in the American *society* and the way in which they overcome their problems as presented by Toni Morrison in her writings need special attention in order to understand her Womanist Thought.