CHAPTER II

SOCIETY

1. Mothering

(a) Mothering and African American women:

The image of the mother is particularly meaningful and recurrent in the writings of Toni Morrison. According to Alice Walker a "mother's life was sacrifice. A blind, enduring, stumbling -- though with dignity - through life" (1976 71).

In every society motherhood is venerated, thus the mother gets respect. In the Indian context mother is equated to God - a life giver. Whereas in U.S. a day is celebrated in remembrance or honour of mother, which is observed annually on the second Sunday in May. In the Black society motherhood is a coveted and honourable position.

The Black women view motherhood as an honour and not as the destruction of woman. For them childbearing and childrearing are not drudgery. They believe that the task of preserving and nourishing the life of human being is not assigned to biological mothers only. Instead, they look beyond their family and community, and become 'other mothers'. The Black mother always dreams that she would "grow up to be a godmother to someone else" (Zelon 10).

African literature depicts the woman as the guardian of traditions, the strong "Earth - Mother" who stands for security and stability. The African Yoruba proverb says "Mother is gold"(Sultana 35). The African American literature presents the Black mother as one who saves her race and transmits in her children, the Black heritage. She is the embodiment of courage, strength, sacrifice and endurance unmatched in the history of human kind. The Black women were
brought to America as captured slaves against their will. They were exploited as labourers and expected to reproduce slaves to add to the work force. As workers, as mothers, as forced sex - parents, they were basic in the perpetuation of the slavery system.

The theme of motherhood was treated in a complex and contrasted manner in the novels of male and female writers. The Black women writers freed themselves from the role assigned to them in the writings of their male counterparts with a special knowledge of their lives and experiences. The Black women novelists do not categorize women as stereotypes but describe them as individuals endowed with strengths and weaknesses.

Socio-historical factors have centred the mother-child bond strongly. Separated from her man, sometimes abandoned by him, the Black woman has struggled and survived alone, supporting her children. She has enormous responsibility for childcare. And for emotional support, the mother can turn only to her child, for she has no alternative.

The mother stands as a symbol of stability and dependability. She is the pivot of all human relationships, who acts as provider, protector, nurturer, life-giver, sustainer and endurer. A mother is a tree, soil, and the earth. Sometimes the mother may not be able to support the family economically, but protects the children from evil and paternal wrath. Along with these, the most important thing is, mother passes on tradition and culture to her children.

(b) Other Mothering:

African American women have often found motherhood to be exhilarating and rewarding. Most of the African American mothers have turned to their children for support, because most of their husbands move out of the home. They
provide education to children in a broader context, and teach them the importance of self-control and self-confidence. By mothering their children with other children, these women become 'other mothers'. In Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* the narrator, Claudia's mother appears as if she is and has always been a mother. She is considerate and caring towards her own children as well as the unfortunate Pecola.

In the African American society from the period of slavery, the older woman has been playing an important role. When the child is separated from his parents, the older woman takes care of him, and teaches him about the techniques of survival. Aunt Jimmy and her friends in *The Bluest Eye* become the preservers of tradition and a morality flexible enough to ensure their survival. These women are identified by their hands and arms, the connectors for them to reach out and bind themselves to the generations following them.

Eva, Hannah, Helene and Nel represent motherhood in *Sula*. Eva plays a dominant role as mother and grand-mother. Eva presides "magisterially" over her family (Dussere 347). Initially, Eva is presented as a sacrificer, who deliberately stuck her leg under a moving train in order to collect insurance money to preserve her family. Soon the stereotype is broken and presented the negative image of Eva, who manipulates her children's lives and the lives of others as well. "She is god-like, she manipulates — all in the best interest" (Stepto 218).

In spite of all the sacrifices she makes, Eva's love does not seem to impress her children. Hannah, her daughter even wonders whether Eva loved them. But Eva makes it clear to her that she does not love them because there is no time for anything except to keep them alive, to survive. She sacrifices love for some sense of order and continuity within their respective household. Eva emerges
as a complex figure, as that of Shelly's *The West Wind*, 'preserver and destroyer'. Eva is a great sacrificer to preserve her family and at the same time a destroyer who can selfishly burn her own son to death for being a drug addict and exhibiting Oedipal characteristic. The same Eva recklessly jumps out of the glass window to save her daughter, Hannah whose dress has caught fire. She is a complex character because and in spite of her motherhood.

Eva embraces the ideal archetypical 'Great Mother' role. As the 'Great Mother', Eva nourishes and protects her family, providing sustenance and life and sacrifices her life for them. Eva's role as Great Mother is further exemplified in her efforts to save Hannah.

Female characters find comfort in the female world and the matriarchal structures. In *Song of Solomon*, the grand-mother, Pilate, along with her daughter and grand-daughter, nurtures the protagonist Milkman. Pilate helps and educates others, particularly Milkman to possess people instead of properties. She also guides Milkman in his search for his ancestors, his roots. She nurtures Milkman's hunger for knowledge.

Pilate looks after her daughter, Reba and grand-daughter, Hagar even when they are grown-ups. When Pilate's grand-daughter, Hagar wants to lead a decent life both the grand-mother, Pilate and the mother, Reba try to fulfil Hagar's wish. Pilate never allows her daughter and grand-daughter to starve. Pilate's family is female-headed and it is her duty to protect and provide her children even after they are grown up. She "gave away everything she had" (94) for them Pilate cannot dismiss her parental role at any circumstances. Like the other Black women, Pilate helps her children till the end of her life. Pilate is also a life-giver to Milkman. She helps Ruth on her delivery as a mid-wife. She
tries to protect Milkman even as he is in his mother's womb. Even when her brother, Macon Dead ill-treats and neglects Pilate for her rustic life, she willingly tries to protect his son, Milkman.

Ondine a Black servant-maid in Tar Baby takes the role of mother first to Michael a White child and then to Jadine a Black girl and later on to Margaret a White woman. Ondine gives love and consolation to the abused child, Michael. Even Margaret, needs motherly affection from Ondine. When Ondine delivers the secret of Margaret's abuse of her own child, Margaret asks why Ondine didn't direct her and stop her violent actions towards the child. Ondine was not in the position of revealing the secret, because she wants to secure her job. If she had told the secret then along with her husband she would be out of job. Ondine has sacrificed her life for Jadine even though this 'child' was Ondine's niece.

Like Michael, Valerian was emotionally abandoned by his parents as a child. The only adult nurturance he received was from a Black washerwoman in his family's employ, who was fired after she allowed Valerian to help her with the laundry on the day that his father died.

Sethe in Beloved herself was nursed by a woman whose task on the plantation was to nurse — the White babies first, and then the Black ones — if there was any milk left; she knows well what it means to be starving for one's mother's milk.

Denver in Beloved becomes a surrogate mother and takes on the mother's role when Beloved a child-woman clings on to Sethe. For the first time Denver decides to go out of her house for seeking help. She gets food from many women in the community, and Denver reaches out for assistance and in the
process she is "inaugurated . . . in the world as a woman" (248). She showers a selfless sacrifice towards her mother and sister.

When Joe in Jazz was born and left alone by his mother, Wild, the White couple, Rhoda and Frank Williams took him in right away and raised him along with their six children. They treated him as their own child. The myth shows that the Black women are taking the role as other mothers by feeding both the children, White and Black, but here Morrison shows the soft corner of White mothers even towards the Black child. By describing the incident Morrison portrays both the White and Black women take care of the abandoned children and she proves that she is unbiased in handling the characters, both Black and White mothers.

(c) Black Mothers as role-models and feacliers:

The Black mothers play an important role in defining the position of the daughter in the context of the hostile world. Like the Black mother, Pilate teaches her grand-daughter the necessity of being alone and strong in this world. Pilate also teaches Hagar, when Milkman leaves her alone and neglects her love. Pilate is aware that the outside world is a hostile racist one, and makes her grand-daughter aware of the support she may need from Milkman. Pilate helps Hagar to define herself and motivates her to take control of her life.

Like Pilate, Eva in Sula tries to teach motherhood to her grand-daughter Sula and sets the tone for the community's attitude toward the prodigal Sula: "'When you gone to get married? You need to have some babies, it'll settle you'" (92). Eva teaches her grand-daughter, the importance of motherhood, which makes her life perfect and complete, but Sula fails to understand this.
Ondine in *Tar Baby* teaches her niece Jadine that apart from motherhood she should know the duty of a daughter. Whether Jadine may accept or not, Ondine passes on the values of the community she considers worthwhile. Ondine urges Jadine never to go away from the duty of a daughter and the importance of motherhood by declaring, "A daughter is a woman that cares about where she come from and takes care of them that took care of her" (242). It is a duty for a mother to teach her daughter about motherhood and her responsibility. When Ondine expects Jadine to look after her foster parents in their old age, Ondine says that it is a duty of a daughter to remember and take care of her parents in their old age.

Some Black mothers fail to understand the meaning of motherhood, which other women feel precious. Sometimes it happens because of the wrong values inculcated by the White society. On account of her lack of self-esteem, Pauline in *The Bluest Eye* is unable to nurture her daughter. It is the mother who takes the daughter's life beyond rescue, beyond salvation. In spite of her bitter dissatisfaction with motherhood the Black women like Pauline, feel that this is the only horrible creative role in which they can reasonably hope to participate. Instead of taking up motherhood as a rescue from the pits of loneliness, Pauline's experience at the labour ward leads her feelings of inadequacy and disappointments in life to vent her anger on her children. She is misguided by the dominant culture to believe that white is beautiful and honourable, and makes her neglect her own children.

In *Sula*, Hannah's independence obscures her acute inability to communicate love. She has no concept of love and possession. She likes to be laid, she likes to be touched but she does not want any confusion of relationship.
She is not interested in nurturing her child with care. Morrison explains, "Her relationship to her daughter is almost one of uninterested. She would do things for her, but she's not particularly interested in her" (Stepto 218). Perhaps, on account of this, Sula does not feel any strong attachment to her mother, and she even watches with indifference when her mother burns to death.

Sula is interested neither in matrimony nor in motherhood. Both Sula and Nel experience a sense of isolation and alienation and in each case the mother's lack of understanding is responsible. The Peace and Wright families are essentially fatherless; thus the girls learn their most important lessons from their mothers, and in each case, the mother fails her daughter. Helene Wright is excessively puritanical in her attitude toward life and passes on this rigid attitude to her daughter.

The historical reality of slavery and its consequences require Morrison to inscribe not just the issues of mothering in her fiction but also the condition of motherlessness and the importance of ancestors. Jadine in *Tar Baby* is twice adopted -- first by her aunt, Ondine and uncle, Sydney, who raise her from the time she becomes an orphan at the age of twelve and second, by Valerian Street, the wealthy White benefactor who pays for her Sorbonne education. Her European education, takes her further from her actual and metaphorical birthplace and contribute to the emotional and spiritual uncertainty that plagues her. This makes Jadine refuse to parent Ondine and Sydney at their old age, they explain Jber, what they expect from her is not payment but love, "Don't you ever leave us, baby. You all we got"(40).

*Jazz* explores further the destructive influence of negligent mothering. Joe Trace's mother, Wild, refuses to nurse him and disappears into the woods right
after his birth. Although he is ashamed of his biological mother's primitive manners, he cannot dismiss the irresistible desire to see his mother. Joe's life in the city intensifies his unfulfilled desire for the search of his lost mother and, consequently, his own identity.

Likewise, Violet, Joe's wife, renounces her own motherhood as if the rejection were a weapon to protect her integrity and transcend her mother's misery; her intention misses the point. Violet abandons maternal responsibility and communal participation without knowing the cost. Violet unconsciously tries to repress her apprehension derived from her lack of intimacy with her own mother, Rose Dear, and its attendant sense of isolation. When she experiences a strong impulse to connect herself to the matriarchal circle, she makes an unsuccessful attempt to kidnap a baby. But Violet insists that she did merely of her goodwill by taking care of the baby while the baby's sister was away.

In Paradise, Mavis, a mulatto, a refined woman by accident kills her child. She is always blamed by her husband and children. She complains about them to her mother that her children are trying to kill her. But her mother tries to remind her responsibility of a mother. Mavis refuses to take on her motherhood duty, as her mother said "you still have children. Children need a mother"(31). At last, Mavis escapes from her responsibilities and moves out of the house.

(d) The Black Girls as Mothers:

The Black girls are forced to take up the role of mothers even when they are very young. Many of them reach adulthood in their lives without experiencing the pleasures of girlhood. The Black girls take up the burdens of their mother and perform the mother's role by keeping their young brothers and sisters. Pauline in The Bluest Eye, is denied the pleasure of childhood. She takes
up the responsibilities of her mother. Early in life she performs the duties of a woman in traditional manner. Thus she has no adolescence and from childhood she directly moves on to womanhood. But soon emptiness arises in her. Pauline is not eager to take the role of motherhood because she has seen how in her mother's life it had brought only more work and no gratification. She realizes that the notion of motherhood brings only loneliness. She, therefore, escapes into the world of fantasy and experiences vicarious pleasure in identification with White women in the movies.

From their tender age the African American girls become surrogate mothers to their siblings. To survive the hostile world, the mother encourages the daughter to have close ties with her siblings and to look to her brothers more as comrades than as protectors. In *Song of Solomon*, at Macon Dead's home, the daughters Lena and Corinthians play the mother's role to Milkman. They serve him and fulfil his needs. Even though Milkman fails to understand their affection, and ill-treats them, they discharge their duties.

When Mavis in *Paradise* abandons her children, her eldest daughter, Sal takes the responsibility of her brother and sister. Soon after Mavis' departure, her husband starts living with another woman. Sal takes upon herself the duty of nurturing her brother and sister. The African American woman often substitutes as a mother to her younger ones, which is common in the Black society during the absence of their mother. The brother-sister bond influences a woman's identity and Self-Definition. She too desires her brother's assistance to face the world. She does not consider him as a patriarch. She looks upon him as a comrade, a friend who will help her confront the problems in society. For the Black woman her brother is an ally against the racist world.
Both history and folklore suggest that African American women welcomed motherhood and saw in their children hope for the future of the race. The slave narratives, especially, stress on the woman's role as nurturer and teacher, the Black mother fought against inhuman conditions, and she herself chose death for her children, just to be able to salvage them from the "incubus of slavery and later debasement of racism" (Bogin and Loewenbery 8). Acknowledging this inner complexity of a Black mother, African American women writers have felt a compelling need to voice her travails in their fiction and poetry. Sethe in *Beloved* does not want to raise her children in a society where children are not particularly valued. She decides to save them but finally she murders her daughter to rebel against slavery and its evils.

Morrison brings out universal motherhood, which is not a tie with a man, a family but it is a communal need. Motherhood for Sethe includes rearing and nurturing of children, and the continuity of life. She sees her existence as inseparable from all Black people. Morrison's creation of Sethe is commended because "She is not just writing the story of the effects of slavery on the rights and responsibilities of the mother - love of one woman, but trying, through the characterisation of Sethe, to understand the full human meanings and implications of the experience" (Krishnan 3). Sethe is portrayed as a sort of endless source of life, as an Earth Mother. For slave mothers, freedom was setting their children free. Sethe's first concern is to make sure that her children are safe; then she can worry about herself. When she was waiting to escape from slavery, as a mother Sethe only worried whether she could carry her milk to her child. Meanwhile, when the milk was stolen from her by the Schoolteacher's nephews, Morrison has
powerfully created a theft against the Black motherhood upon which the institution of slavery depended.

The male attitude brings the idea that female body is for pleasure. But the feminists feel that women should not allow themselves to be degraded as objects of pleasure for men. They believe that female body is not a child-producing machine. Whereas the womanists believe that pleasure is denied to them because they are raped and there is no choice for childbearing to them. They accept men, family, and childrearing and the responsibilities. So, the Black women bloom when they are blamed. *Beloved* is also a novel about mother-love. The slave mother succeeds in creating a personal and family identity by dispersing the idea of motherhood. The nurturing power of Sethe is emphasized to Paul D that she is big and having wide arms to hold her children. Her maternal body gives her a distinct identity and new meanings for herself and her conamunity.

Slavery treats woman as objects. But by embracing motherhood, the Black women become subjects. In order to survive under slavery, the Black people taught themselves to love just a little, but mothers often could not learn the lesson. Sethe suffers because her love is profound, but love this deep ultimately connects with the generative principle at the heart of the universe. A "too—thick love" can result in "unmotherly" acts such as lolling her own child and Paul D characterizes Sethe's love as "too thick" (164).

For Morrison the word mother refers not simply to a biological relationship but to those women who provide the nurturing associated with mothering. The Black woman's role is associated more with nurturing and as nursing with the mother's milk, than with the mere act of giving birth to children.
It is generally assumed that more than the White mother the Black mother is eager for motherhood and is more capable of playing the role well. Wade-Gayles, remarks,

*More than white women, it is assumed, black women look to motherhood as their chief justification in life; and more than white, they are physically and emotionally capable of handling the responsibilities associated with it* (59).

The important qualities of mother are sacrificer, and a survival guide, apart from nurturing. The concept of African American motherhood has become a battleground for racist and sexist ideology. But the experience of motherhood is a mixture of nobility, responsibility, rage and regret.

2. Breast-Feeding

"Breast-feeding is the ultimate expression of maternal love" (Mock 118). Milk is symbolized as mother's love. A woman is never far from mother. The mother is a person who makes everything all right, who nourishes, and who stands up against separation. "The attachment of the infant for the mother's breast is at first an attachment of life in its immediate form, in its generality and its immanence" (Beauvoir 227). The Black women strengthen the ideal figure of the 'Mother' who will be concerned with the welfare of the next generation.

Bonding between people is important in African American society, even from the time of slavery. A mother is bonded with her child through feeding the baby and their relationship becomes thick by breast-feeding. Morrison is of the view that breast-feeding is not a sexual act but which is important to the minds of the mother and child. The Black mothers feel that Breast-feeding encourages
women's self-reliance by increasing their confidence in their ability to meet the needs of their infants. Breast-feeding requires women to have confidence in themselves, and enough self-esteem to protect their rights, including their right to breast-feed.

Breast-feeding is a reference to biological motherhood and maternal identification and nurturing. The Black woman during slavery served as 'wet-nurse'. She fed the White master's baby along with hers. Black women's milk and breasts were particularly appropriated in order to raise healthy White upper-class children and not their own children. The Black women feel that breast-feeding is an expression of responsibility for raising the children.

"Milk is a signifier for motherhood" (Davier 143). Reaching for the complex economic and social meanings of 'milk' and 'breasts', Morrison offers a variety of associations with motherhood in exploitation contexts. The core response of Sethe in Beloved is to the appropriation of her milk, and therefore to her reduction to animal status that is entailed in appropriated motherhood. Sethe's assertion throughout the text is that she was trying to get her milk to her children. The Black women who are interested in fighting for women's rights and human rights "take action to change this situation, and recognize breastfeeding as a woman's right" (http://www.greatstar.com/lois/bfem.html).

The link of milk to blood provides a series of associations that have to do with mothering. The Black motherhood established mother as a strategic response to racist constructs. The Black mother theory suggests that "all African American women want to participate in the activity of motherhood" (Davier 145). The maternal bond presented by Morrison as a dominant theme, which focuses upon a spiritual and sacred union within the mother and child.
Within the theme of the maternal sphere, Morrison stresses breast-feeding as essential to the natural unity of the mother-child bond; she exemplifies more fully the mutilation of this sphere by depicting the enslavement of mother and child "within as they are separately and individually buffeted by the forces of slavery, belonging not to each other, but to their owners.

To nurse a child is to join in a sacred state of communion with the child. The mother is producer and provider of the milk from her body; the child is communicant, eagerly taking nourishment her body provides. The primeval forces of biological nature interact with emotional and psychological bonding. Absence of mother's milk can be viewed as symbolic of maternal abandonment. Nursing iiarbours the mother and child bond. It is a completion of the sphere, one of mutuality - a sanctioned relation of give-and-take. For Sethe, this circle is broken as a child and again as a mother, despite her persistent attempts to fulfill it and keep what rightfully belongs to her. Her enslaved condition prevents participation within this sacred circle. A slave could own neither her mother nor her child.

The bond, physically and emotionally is broken between Sethe and her mother within two to three weeks of her birth. Her mother is forced to work in the rice field in order to get profit for the slave master. Sethe is insufficiently nursed by the White children's nursemaid; who nursed her with a little or no milk, "turn her over to another woman's tit that never had enough for all" (250).

The nursemaid, cannot satisfy the hunger in Sethe's belly or in her heart. For the infant Sethe there would never be enough milk left. Sometimes the nipples would be dry and cracked. Sometimes the breasts, withered and empty, would be unable to replenish themselves in time for Sethe. Deprived of a mother's milk and bond, Sethe wants better for her children. She vows her children will have their
own milk at their own time without sharing and she will be their provider. Sethe considers milk is about nourishment, and her ownership. She feels that as a mother to produce milk is to...therefore own it. She feels the theft of her milk by the two "mossy-teethed" (86) boys is a theft of her prior ownership. "Ownership suggests responsibility, and responsibility leads to power-power to choose" (Mock 120).

Sethe attempts to fulfil the maternal circle, yet the mother-child bond is tenuous and her baby has been sent ahead without her. Sethe's streaming breasts remind her of the void; squandered milk mocks her Jack of purpose and confronts her fear of losing what she owns, the best part of her. She strains to be once again with her child. On the other hand her mother's instinct forces her to secret milk and she feels that her body betrays her, in spite of her revulsion to the white boys' stealing of her milk.

Conflated with nursing and nurturance, breast adopts an operative and functional perspective, one no longer entirely sexual in connotation. Feminists feel that breast is an object for sexual attraction. It is said that "human breasts are not to feed infants but to attract and keep a mate" (Greer 44). The people who are in beauty conscious, give importance to shape and size of breasts, which sometimes cause complex in women's mind. Such women sometimes undergo surgical treatments to get a perfect one, which creates so many problems to them In Morrison's Tar Baby, Margaret neglects to feed her son, Michael, because she feels that her beauty will vanish through breast-feeding, which makes her ill-treat her son by piercing and burning his body. The false idea of female beauty makes her not to accept motherhood, which weakens the nurturing bond between the mother and the child. Whereas, the Black women do not consider breast as an
object to attract men folic. They never give importance to mere beauty, instead value the nurturance.

When Jadine accompanies Son to Eloie, a group of night women appear and show their breasts to Jadine and ask her to embrace motherhood. They try to protect Jadine from her embrace of the White culture. Here the breasts of the night women symbolise motherhood.

Sethe is satisfied that her breasts have served their purpose as preserver and sustainer of life. Sethe allows her breasts to play the sexual role Paul D needs in order to pass the burden of them for a little while - into a man's hands and mouth that she can trust. For "[w]hat she knew the responsibility for her breasts, at last, was in somebody else's hands"(21-22). The phrase "somebody else's hand" has a metaphorical meaning "someone else's responsibility"(Wyatt 478). Morrison describes how the physical contact gives the necessary support for Sethe's full acceptance of her self. Here Morrison describes the mutual understanding between a woman and a man is a kind of therapy, which they need to support and console each other.

Yet the sexual meaning of Sethe's breasts reverts to symbolic nurturing as well. Paul D suckles at Sethe's breast like her children before him, and she finds herself "providing sustenance for him, as she does for her grown children". She makes the transition from "sexual love" to "nurturing love" (Mock 121). As primal nourishment, milk becomes symbolic for the nurturing of all loved ones; it is the higher realm of independence -taking responsibility for what they own. It is the maternal instinct of providing, having something of value as nourishment and choosing to give it as thus.
Nursing serves as a figure for the totality and exclusivity of mother-child fusion: "Nobody will ever get my milk no more except my own children", says Sethe (200). The 'Peculiar Institution' separates mother and child. Thus Sethe's breasts bring out confluence of emotions, guilt, shame, rage, grief, insecurity, terror, and numbness.

Sometimes, the taboo about sexual intercourse during lactation is found so often in human societies may be a tacit recognition that "the mother is involved in a pleasurable interchange with the infant, which precludes her taking, as it were, another lover" (Greer 48). Milkman in *Song of Solomon* is the living evidence to Ruth of the last times her husband made love to her. She nurses her son far beyond infancy for her own satisfaction. Milkman indulges in the act instinctively, because "He was too young to be dazzled by her nipples, but he was old enough to be bored by the flat taste of mother's milk" (113). There is little doubt that Ruth's indulgences provide her with the physical contact her husband denies her, but Morrison shows that her motives are not merely the fulfilment of sexual needs. Her nursing of Milkman also simultaneously meets her maternal need to nurse and nurture. The implication is that woman is more than maker of children. Ruth lives for her children, especially for Milkman, and gains complete personal satisfaction from them.

Breast-feeding challenges the idea of the breast as primarily a sex object. Some feminists have criticized the advocacy of breast-feeding on the ground that "they want to tie women down, and keep them at home to feed babies and change dirty diapers" (http://www.greatstar.com/lois/bfem.html). But the womanists consider that through breast-feeding women are reclaiming their breasts as valued parts of their bodies and refusing to be treated as sex objects. Feeding her baby is
a biological factor and it shows the key role of the mother. The Black mothers realize the duty of a mother to nurture their children. The Black people sometimes lack their mother's milk in their life but the Black mothers always are ready to nurture both the Black and White children to establish their motherhood.

3. Sisterhood

The history of oppression, exclusion and a shared desire to combat racist and sexist domination, through a network of women of colour, unite African American women. This network is known as Sisterhood which, is formed by women of colour in an attempt to overcome the challenging and displacing oppressive dominant ideologies. The Black women do not want to designate on sociological or a biological basis. The Black women include both their men folk and White women to constitute a community based on a common context of struggle rather than colour or racial identification. They also erase class and other differences and these sisterhoods provide a base for an interaction of differences into coalition.

During slavery the Black women attempted to forge a common bond among the Black women to support and to lead slave revolts and escapes. They revolted against discrimination and also provide protection to the needy and educated themselves. When a family suffered, the others helped it. By sharing and caring for others they improved their living condition. These groups offered moral and spiritual education and healthcare to women. They had no hatred towards men. In 1908, the first Black sorority, Alpha Kappa Alpha was founded and in 1913, in Howard University, Washington DC, the Black sorority group, Delta Sigma and Theta was founded. They grew out of racial and feminist ferment.
They are exclusive or closed membership organizations. The experience of
discrimination, exclusion, and the class and colour distinction were the reasons
for the foundation of these sororities. These sorority groups were formed with the
idea of creating social bonds among its members. They emphasized sisterhood on
the basis of belonging to a community, life-long friendship among women,
service to the community and leadership training for the Black women.

The Sisterhood represents a diversity of voices, demonstrating the various
ways that women of colour use for articulating their own experiences. But, many
of their key concerns are shared concerns about identity and community that cross
racial and cultural boundaries. Moreover, the Black women can find strength in
working as a collective, a community sharing their 'otherhood' status, and an
alliance of 'sisterhood'. Through such sisterhoods, women of colour find ways to
create coalitions, to build bridges, and to construct empowered communities. They
are wary of disappearing into, of being co-opted by, the larger White community.
The Black women form sisterhood which is "generally understood, as a nurturant,
supportive feeling of attachment and loyalty to other women which grows out of a
shared experience of oppression" (Ferree, and Hess 164).

The basis of the women's friendship is a concern for the well-being of
the men in their lives. They examine the possibility of friendship between the
Black and White women. The colour of one's soul -- one's capacity for
compassion, generosity and honour, — is the basis for the friendship between the
Black and the White women. The interracial female relationships are based on the
maternal impulse, and they develop in an acknowledgment of common womanhood
and common humanistic values.
They show the generative power of love and devastatingly delineate by contrast the rapacity of a system that tallies human life in profit and loss columns. These women are urged to rise up in the moral power of womanhood; and give utterance to the voice of outraged mercy and to hear the sighs, the groans, the death—like struggles of scourged sisters (Gwin 24),

The novels of the Black women reflect a cultural reality within any given Black neighbourhood. The Black women have played an integral role in perpetuating the bonding process. Traditionally their positions in both the White and Black patriarchy have been relegated to domestic, familial concerns. The sisterhood is a community that blossoms beyond the colour line, Black or White.

Morrison refuses to join the dominant order's plan to lure Black families into prescribed relations. Her refusal leads her to a lamentation different from those who criticize the Black men's feminisation and the devastating outcome of the female-headed home. In her novels, Morrison describes the bond between the Black women and men. Morrison nevertheless renders her female family relationships as powerfully positive agents in the lives of the Black women. Dread of the mother occurs in Morrison, too, but is always mitigated by a love that is virtually erotic, a merging of identities that transcends Western ideas about self. In her novels Morrison brings out the relationship between women, mother, daughter and grand-daughter, friendship between girls, and women in the community and friendship between women and men.

The community helps the needy when they suffer. In The Bluest Eye, the first chapter, "Autumn" itself reflects the abuse of women and the confusion and conflict within the community. When Pecola's father, Cholly Breadlove has burned
up his house, his family is put outdoors. Mrs. Breedlove stays with some other family; while her daughter Pecola is taken in by MacTeers, because she is "a girl who has no place to go" (11). Here Morrison brings out how women in a community protect the sufferers.

Community for Morrison is always a force to be reckoned with character as powerful as any individual. Terry Otten sees this force as prescriptive, and allegiance to community as a prerequisite to survival: "In all Morrison's novels alienation from community, or 'the village', invariably leads to dire consequences, and the preservation of community is necessary for the recovery of order and wholeness" (1989 93).

The importance of community in *Sula* is defined as it establishes the forms of male-female, parent-child, individual-society, good-evil relationships. It creates rituals recognizing the mysteries of birth, sex, and death; whether personal, sexual, or racial. In other words, it makes the conventions that define life in the Bottom, Morrison has written, in an essay, entitled *Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation*, "If anything I do, in the way of writing novels or whatever I write, is not about the village or a community or about you, then it is not about anything" (339). Eva feeds her community members, for example, she adopts the mentally retarded Deweys. When Eva has left her home, her children are under the care of her neighbours until she comes "Eighteen months later ... with one leg." (34). Under Eva's distant eye, and prey to her idiosyncrasies, her own children grow up stealthily.

When a woman suffers, the other women of the community voluntarily come to save the suffering woman. When Denver in *Beloved*, steps out of her house, and seeks help from the townspeople, they willingly offer food and solace
to prove their 'womanist' capacity for healing. Ella, Sethe's neighbour, who condemns Sethe's act of killing her own child, realizes the trouble Sethe faced by Beloved, and gathers the townswomen, pray, sing and protect Sethe from Beloved and drive away the ghost out of the house. Finally Beloved is dismissed by these singing women back to her haunting past when Sethe and Denver run to the group and plead for their help.

In general, feminists believe that women come together when there is danger. But the Black women unite because of internal necessity. Morrison agrees that the real foundation must be a sense of belonging that comes from a community's recognition that its members share a world in common. The community defined only by an opposition ignores its own internal needs; the experience of mutuality is subjected to external definition. The Black citizens who live in the suburban neighbourhood outside the earthly city of Cincinnati will form their own spiritual city, one whose bonds are more permanent than those devised by human laws. Morrison underscores the fact that even a good law (Emancipation proclamation) is not good enough as long as the basic structures of oppression remain intact. Freedom, especially, if it is contingent upon some one else's decision to grant it, is no more than a hollow vessel, an abstraction.

In Morrison's *Paradise*, the Convent itself represents Sisterhood, where women are free from worries. It provides security against the social evils. It is a no man island inhabited by women alone. The destitute women from Ruby and other places find solace in the convent The Convent women lead a new life by working together and sharing their pleasures and sorrows. Morrison comments that "if they stayed together, worked, prayed and defended together, they would" survive as a community (112).
Consolata, the head of the Convent, provides them food and shelter. When Arnette becomes pregnant by K.D., who refuses to marry her, she steps into the Convent and aborts the child with the help of women there. Once Billie Delia, Patricia's daughter, leaves her house and spends a few days with the Convent women. After the riot of the Convent, and during the funeral of the Convent women, Billie Delia remembers the Convent women, how they treated her, embraced her with sympathy and have shown kindness. In the final chapter, when the sisters Dovey and Saane hear about the plot of the nine-men gang, they gather townspeople to protect the Convent women from the cruel hands of those men. But, unfortunately they could not protect the Convent women. Wherever evils take place, the community gathers and fights against those cruelties in the society.

The Black women help one another even though they do not know each other. When a family suffers the other Black family members will automatically come forward to help and share their feelings. When Mavis' neighbour, Peg sheds tears and consoles Mavis in the funeral of her children, Mavis is surprised because both of them do not know each other.

In the Black society friendship among girls blossoms even when they are young and it helps them bond when they grow up. In *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison describes a friendship among three young girls. When Pecola is raped and impregnated by her father, she is neglected by her mother and put out of her house. At that situation, the sisters, Claudia and Frieda are the only persons who wish for both Pecola and her baby to live. Once, Pecola is accompanied by Frieda and Claudia, the boys mock at her and she is protected by the sisters. Frieda shouts, "Leave her alone, or I'm gone tell everybody what you did!"(51).
Pecola gets protection from Claudia and Frieda. She also gets affection from the prostitutes, who console and feed Pecola when she is in despair. With the company of Claudia, Frieda and the prostitutes, Pecola feels happy and they make her come out of her ugliness and loneliness.

*Sula* examines Black female friendship and the close bond of sisterhood between Sula and Nel. They are like two sides of the same coin, two faces turned away from each other, yet their dependence and natural attraction toward each other is strong because, both are fatherless children and they console each other. There is no difference between them and their closeness is described as two bodies with one soul. The recurring image of the single and shared eye reinforces the sense of shared boundaries and incidentally recalls the "communal eye" (Rubenstein 131) of the sisterhood. When Sula returns to the Bottom after a ten-year absence, Nel likens her reappearance to getting the use of an eye back, having "a cataract removed" and Sula enables Nel "to see old tilings with new eyes" (82). Nel's confidence and Sula's insecurity formed the foundation of the reciprocity that characterized their friendship, providing them with the most important relationship in their lives. Their friendship becomes so close that they "themselves had difficulty distinguishing one's thought from the other" (72).

Sula's unconventional standards and life-style, coupled with the fact that as girls she and Nel have never quarrelled, the way some girlfriends did over boys or compete with each other for them, leads Sula to bed with Nel's husband, after she returns to Medallion. But Sula and Nel are no longer adolescents, and Sula's action serves only to destroy the friendship, the most meaningful experience she had known. Although she had considered Nel the closest thing, she discovers that they are not one and the same. In the end, she returns to a
friendship, which, paradoxically, she destroys. And Nel also realizes at the end of
the novel, what she missed for so many years was not Jude, but Sula.

What is important for Sula is the friendship she had nurtured and
developed with Nel in the midst of a world that promised fragmentation. It is the
multifaceted signification of being "giiis together" — and above all its loss — that
is echoed in Nel's excruciating declaration: "We was girls together ...., Sula ..."
(149). Morrison is definite .and calculating in her presentation of the depth of
friendship between Black women. In a conversation with Claudia Tate, she
confesses to wanting to write about such friendship: "When I wrote Sula, I knew
I was going to write a book about good and evil and about friendship" (118).

By providing Sula and Nel with the secret of Chicken Little's accidental
death, and specifically by having Nel provide the strength and support Sula
needed at the moment, Morrison further united them in a manner that would bond
them for eternity. At the end, Sula and Nel seem vital parts of the same
personality. Together they form a whole, in spite of their differences, according to
Morrison, although Nel has limitations and lacks Sula's imagination, they are very
much alike. They complement each other. They support each other.

Morrison also brings out a friendship among women, which starts with
sorrow and anger. After the death of Dorcas and her funeral, a bond arises
between Violet and Alice in Jazz- Violet's frequent visit to Alice's house develops
into a cordial relationship between them. They share their feelings, their past life
and even console each other. One removes the pain of the other. Violet's visits
become so frequent and so intense that she and Alice begin to understand each
other and eventually heal themselves.
In *Sula*, *Song of Solomon* and *Beloved* Morrison brings out the relationship of three generations of women - grand-mother, mother and daughter. They unite together because of lack of male folk at home. These families are female-headed and it is necessary for them to unite together for their living. In *Sula* Eva Peace, her daughter Hannah Peace and her daughter Sula Peace live together and Eva feeds them all.

Similarly Pilate, Reba, and Hagar in *Song of Solomon* though belonging to three generations live together and form a sisterhood. The daughter, Reba, like Hannah in *Sula*, is relatively inconsequential, content to live obscurely in her more powerful and protective mother's shadow; the more intense relationship and more obvious doubling occurs between grand-mother and grand-daughter. Their wine-making and improvised music illustrate their generally creative and fulfilling lives.

A similar complexity can be found among the other significant cluster of women: Ruth and her daughters, First Corinthians and Magdalene, who are quite like the women of Helene Wright's house in *Sula* in that they conform to social conventions.

Morrison brings out the merging of identities in the relationship among the three women: Baby Suggs, Sethe and Denver. After the arrival of Sethe and her children from Sweet Home, Suggs feeds them. She also educates her grand-children by telling stories about slavery. She succeeds by narrating to their daughters the family stories to save the truth of history.

The three hand-holding shadows, Sethe decides, were not Paul D, Denver and herself, but "'us three' - Sethe, Beloved and Denver". After Beloved arrives in the flesh, manifests herself on the tree stump outside 124, the three women
live together, virtually at the end of the world, on the edge of consciousness and experience, sharing identity.

When left alone by Paul D's desertion, the three women can finally allow the waves of their passionate feelings to run freely without interference. Sethe, Denver, and Beloved experience again the communion that is possible "between a mother and the fruits she carries in her womb"(175). After Sethe's awareness of Beloved's identity, Sethe is re-energized. Because Beloved has come back, time which had previously stopped at the woodshed, can flow again through Sethe's life. She feels free. They break their inner silence through the experience, from the spoken word, from difficult explanations, from memories they do not want to remember. It shows the absolute communion of the three women

When Violet's grand-mother, True Belle in Jazz hears about the betrayal of Violet's father, she returns to her daughter and protects her grand-children. Violet has learned about Baltimore stories from her grand-mother. The grand-mother passes tradition to grand children. There is always a harmonious relationship among women belonging to two or three generations in Black families.

The relationship between the White and Black women is set in the security of kitchen, where discussion and contemplation, laughter and love can occur without interruption. The Black and White women often shared kitchen, and Big House. Morrison describes the White and Black people in sustained interrelationship that cannot go unchallenged. If the White and Black women in Tar Baby move toward a friendship in the novel's conclusion, it is because they have confronted the stereotypes and emotions generated by racism "An invisible, powerful yet unspoken thread runs from kitchen to table and back"(Gwin 29); both women
work desperately within their own spheres, yet their efforts blend and merge into a wonderful, peculiarly female bond which helps them overcome their sorrows.

Margaret Street, is young and White, uncultured and from lower class, who marries an elderly, wealthy businessman. But Ondine is a middle-class Black housekeeper, who has long maintained order in Mr. Street's estate. Margaret's insecurity and loneliness in the upper-class world represents a psychological abuse which is paralleling her physical abuse of her only son, reflect the way in which a sexist and racist society may result in a White woman's abusing those weaker than a Black woman and a child. Margaret realizes that Ondine has been able to hold moral authority over her. When Ondine reveals the secret about Margaret's ill-treatment of her own child, the quarrel burst between them but their relationship ends with friendship. Margaret and Ondine are both middle-aged, both bereft of children, both vulnerable as they confront the terrors of the known past and the terrors of the unknown future. Like Brer Rabbit and Tar Baby, they are entangled in one another's lives; yet Morrison suggests that knowledge and forgiveness can redeem them, can change bondage to friendship. Friendship between the White and Black women and between servant and owner is possible.

Sisterhood is not restricted to Black women. Sisterhood includes women of all colour, race and class. Morrison describes the idea of sisterhood — beyond race and class — in her works. In Beloved, a White girl, Amy Denver helps Sethe at her escape from the Schoolteacher's nephews and also helps her during her delivery. Sethe named her second daughter after the White girl who helped her in the critical situation. By showing this incident Morrison brings out the
relationship of two women, who are far away from class and colour discrimination and how Sisterhood flourished among the Black and White women.

Men are also involved in sisterhood. In Suia, when Eva Peace leaves the town with two legs and returns one day with a leg cut off, "one of her men friends had fashioned a kind of wheelchair for her"(31), which helps her move from one place to another at her house. Along with the women in the community, the Black men also participate in sisterhood and help the victims in one way or another.

Morrison maintains that one person cannot raise a child: "Two people should or either a whole community. And a community is not simply made up of women. It is made up with men in it and the men are as important as the women" (Samuel, and Weems 56—57).

4. Lesbianism

"Lesbians are women who survive without men financially and emotionally, representing the ultimate in an independent life style. Lesbians are the women who battle day by day to show that women are valid human beings, not just appendages of men" (http://www.msn.edu/~greenm 14/outil/gaybib-html). In many ways, the lesbians have freed themselves from male domination.

Anatomic destiny is different in man and woman and no less different is their moral and social situation. Patriarchal civilization dedicated woman to chastity. The male had absolute right in sexual freedom, while woman was restricted. She should defend her virtue, her honour; when she yields; she falls and she is scorned. Woman gives herself, and man takes her and there is no reciprocity in this relation.
Woman is overpowered, forced to compliance, conquered. Man decides the position in love-making, and she is an instrument: liberty rests wholly with the man. This is poetically expressed as "woman is the violin, man the bow that makes her vibrate. Woman is like a lyre which gives up its secret only to him who knows how to play on it" (Beauvoir 406).

There are two types of lesbians often distinguished: the 'masculine', who wish to imitate the male, and the 'feminine', who are afraid of the male. Certain women decline passivity, whereas others choose feminine arms in which to abandon themselves passively. To define the 'masculine' lesbian by her will to imitate the male is to stamp her as inauthentic. Man today represents the positive and the neutral — that is, the male and the human being — whereas woman is only the negative, the female. Whenever she behaves as a human being, she is declared to be identifying herself with the male. Her sexual desire for other woman, are all interpreted as a masculine protest. She is, as subject, making an inauthentic choice. Their sexuality is in no way determined by any anatomical fete. In Morrison's *Sula*, the protagonist Sula asserts herself by deciding the position in love-making. She represents the positive and the neutral role of men by looking after the orphans, Deweys. The women in the town are afraid on seeing Sula, because she steals other woman's husband. In general the Peace women are called "man-eaters" (41). In *Tar Baby* and *Paradise*, the women Jadine and Gigi respectively, behave outwardly like men but they never steal other's husbands.

Morrison's *Tar Baby* describes Margaret Street, the mistress of the household, has turned into lesbian because her husband never considers her as a woman or a human being. In her early days she is used by Mr. Street to get a son to look after his chocolate company. She feels that the duty as a mother is
imposed on her. When she understands herself and her situation, both her son and husband neglect her and she longs for someone to love her, her interest turns to Jadine, to whom they provide food and education. As a grown up woman Jadine is prettier and having lot of fun which turns Margaret's attention towards her. Margaret admires and loves Jadine's body and even envies it. Margaret feels that "it was prettier than hers" (74).

Man is still imbued with a sense of superiority, that the most wilful and domineering women show little hesitation in confronting the male; the virile woman is often perfectly heterosexual. She is no more willing to be deprived of her femininity. She chooses to join the masculine world, even to make use of it. Her strong sensuality has no fear of male violence. Pilate, a fetish woman in *Song of Solomon* is one among them, who is strong and never afraid of any man. She could manage men folk with her wilful conjuring power. These women do not admit male superiority, they do not wish to make pretence of recognizing it or to weary themselves in contesting it. They do better to avoid a partner who appears in the guise of an adversary; and in this way they rid themselves of the fetters implied in femininity; this leads the active virile woman to make the choice between assuming and repudiating her normal sexuality.

The lesbian will often try to compensate for her virile inferiority by arrogance, exhibitionism, and her inner disequilibrums are betrayed. Denver, in *Beloved*, as a lonely girl, spends her time alone at home and sometimes in the "tree room" to involve in narcissist act (94). She overcomes her loneliness and inferiority complex by admiring herself. Belly Dellia in *Paradise* is a mannish girl who rides horse and without hesitation exhibits her private parts to others. Sula
asserts herself by cutting the tip of the finger. In the novel *Sula* and Sethe in *Beloved* cuts her daughter to show their power.

Some times lesbian think of herself as a man, loving a woman like a man: she loves that woman in a purely dominating, active way, without accepting reciprocal attentions. Beloved has lost her family due to slavery, she longs for her mother's affection and care which makes her behave like a man, but as a man she is fragile and weak. Denver and Beloved sleep together, caress each other, the young girl will later seek the same happiness in Paul D's arms. Then Beloved needs her mother to protect her.

Moreover, it is proved by the Black writers that the lesbian act is not based on sex. Morrison portrays such friendship between the Black women. Morrison brings out such female bonding in some of her novels. In *Sula*, the "blossoming maturity" of Nel and Sula seem to demand some ritual (Rigney 90). But this might also be a defloration ritual, like those performed in connection with some historical matriarchal culture. Nel and Sula sit beside a river, playing with two thick twigs, which they have "undressed", "stripped to a smooth, creamy innocence" (49 - 50). But soon Nel "grew impatient and poked her twig rhythmically and intensely into the earth, ..... carefully they replaced the soil and covered the entire grave with uprooted grass. Neither one had spoken a word" (50).

Nel and Sula experience total harmony when they are together. They affirm their mutual strengths and recreate themselves as one; and thus, as the narrator states, "in the safe harbor of each other's company they can afford to abandon the ways of other people and concentrate on their own perceptions of things" (55). Bjork is of the opinion that "Morrison had approached her subject with the consciousness that a lesbian relationship was at least a possibility for her
characters..."(170). But more importantly, that *Sula* should have been an overtly lesbian text distorts what is the central interpretative attraction between Sula and Nel. The novel reveals a oneness in the girl's mutuality; separately they function poorly. And certainly Nel and Sula, at certain moments in the text, sustain a loving friendship, which has sensual qualities. But their attraction is more specifically, located in their reactionary desire for Nel's "me-ness" or, as Sula says, for "...the closest tiling to both an other and a self..." Nel was the first person who had been real to her, whose name she knew..."(119-20). When the two girls are alienated from their mothers they seek someone for sharing. Thus Sula and Nel become friends. Initially they come close for the identification of same sex attraction but later on they give importance to autonomy. Lack of mother-daughter relationship initiates them to turn into lesbians.

Denver in *Beloved* is alone from childhood. Because of her sister's spirit, the other children are not willing to be with her. When Beloved arrives after eighteen years, both the girls feel happy. They want to share their sufferings and sorrows. They enjoy their life, singing, dancing and telling stories. They even sleep in the same bed. The narrator describes their togetherness as "a duet as they lay down together, Denver nursing Beloved's interest like a lover whose pleasure was to overfeed the loved" (96). The narrator clearly describes that the relationship between the two girls is not an act of sexual gratification but satisfying each other by sharing their feeling, emotions, sufferings and joy.

In Morrison's *Paradise*, some of the women in the Convent are identified as lesbians, others are bisexual "romantic friends", "lesbian-like", or "lapsed lesbians" (http://www.Lesbian History /Project-Notable Lesbians.htm). In 1976, in rural Oklahoma, nine men from the nearby town of Ruby attack a former
Convent now occupied by women fleeing from abusive husbands or lovers, or otherwise unhappy pasts — women who choose themselves for company, whose solidarity and solitude rebuke the male-dominated culture that now exacts its revenge. Men in the town call the convent a 'lesbian den'.

The Convent women in *Paradise* share their problems and get comfort from one another. These women feel happy in the company of the other. "Seneca held Pallas in her arms and watched…. Gigi knew Mavis' touchy parts" (168). These women become lesbians because the antagonism between power structured sex relations disappear and the women involved are recognized as parts of their communities, evaluated not by their sexuality but by their respective places within the community. The lesbian feminism which explicitly values women and is largely unconcerned with men really challenges this valuing. For a woman to love another woman is thus a political and revolutionary act.

According to Morrison's portrayal of women characters associated with the idea of lesbianism, it is clear that lesbianism is not for sexual gratification. It is a coalition of women to assert their rights in a male-dominated society. The womanists have created an awareness of their capability in women. Therefore, the womanists feel that the society's attack on lesbianism is an attack on all women, it comes out of a reactionary response to the description of woman as dependent on men.

5. Sexual **Exploitation** of Black Women

Sexual domination is the natural obsession of men and submission the expected role of women. "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman. Only the intervention of someone else can establish an individual as an Other" (Beauvoir 295). The child is hardly be able to think of himself as sexually differentiated.
When both the girl and boy are young, the little girl is as strong as the boy, and shows the same mental power. But people consider man as superior; and he is himself swollen with pride in his manhood and, the girl envies him and feels frustrated. He projects himself as a symbol of autonomy, of transcendence, of power, to measure his manhood, whereas, girls are projected as an object, a doll. He takes pride of his sex, and projects his own manhood. Contrary to that, woman is being the other, is taught to please men to renounce her autonomy.

Women want to display their power over the world and to protest against the inferior status to which they are condemned. The sphere to which they belong is everywhere enclosed, limited, and dominated, by the male universe. They have always been convinced of male superiority. They are to be a passive prey of men. They are struggling in their cages rather than trying to get out of them. They assert their right to liberty even to the extent of undergoing pain and disgust. And they try to take their future into their own hands instead of entrusting it to a man. All their eagerness for action, whether physical or intellectual, is instantly thwarted.

An African American woman born during the slavery era, living a life of flux, not certain of anything save her need for survival, had to be practical. So, she often appeared strong, self-sufficient, and therefore more than capable of looking after herself. Thus arose the endless tirade against the independent strong Black woman.

The Black woman laces greater problems than the white woman. If the White woman has been considered inferior, the Black woman is even lower in the social order that is dominantly white and male. She has been sexually abused by the White man and often by the Black man. Torn from her family, she has been
sold on the open slave mart. She has worked in the White woman's kitchen and
taken care of the White children while her own home has had to be neglected.
She has frequently been the scapegoat for the Black man's humiliation. Among the
Black women, who have historically suffered oppression because of both race and
gender, there is usually a simultaneous concern for both these issues.

In some cases, the Black woman accepts her subordinate position. Even
though she takes a job and supports the family, she wants to serve the best for
her husband and children and considers her husband the head of the household.
Some times, he beats her and the next moment, he loves her. His incompetence in
dealing with the White world makes him take out his frustration on her.

The White women are characterized by "their delicate constitutions, sexual
purity, and moral superiority to men" while the southern mythology cast the Black
women into roles of "subhuman creatures who, by nature, are strong and sexual"
(Gwin 46). Slavery and exploitation begin early in the lives of the Black women.
Girl children are made aware that they are the dispossessed, the Ihrowaways of
society. The condition of poverty exposes girl - children to the many dimensions of
sex at an early age; as a matter of fact, the threat of rape, is found from both the
dominant group and within then’ own, is experienced by the girl - child early in
life. Pecola, in The Bluest Eye, is seduced and assaulted at the age of twelve, by
her own father. When Pecola's mother conies to know about the rape of her
daughter, she blames and beats Pecola and finally, she becomes a victim of
whatever is around her. Claudia recognizes Pecola's role as a scapegoat.

The first of Cholly's "emasculations" (37) occurs when, during his first
sexual encounter with Darlene, he and the girl are discovered by the White men
who force the pair to continue their sexual act at gunpoint for the latter's
amusement. From that humiliation, his attitude toward female sexuality is tainted with a mixture of flirtiveness, shame, and anger. But, Darlene becomes a scapegoat, when Cholly's hatred is turned towards the girl who had witnessed his humiliation. Similarly, the whores, China, Poland and Marie are used by their customers and condemned by both men. These fallen women become the scapegoats of the society.

Sula, becomes a scapegoat in her community. From the beginning her role as scapegoat is clearly established. Her outrageous behaviour forces the women of Bottom to be truthful to their men. They wish to be different from Sula. But after the death of Sula, once again the women in the Bottom resume their evil ways. They beat their children and they won't respect their elders at home and community. Sula is looked upon as a curse by her own community. Sula's peripheral life makes her a pariah in her own community.

There is no actual community depicted in Tar Baby, rather there is a single house that is "a melting pot" of white and black and an island that isolates and renders this group unique in the world (Rigney 56). But even this small number of people requires its scapegoat, Jadine and Margaret are hostage to male idolatry of female beauty. Margaret was, twenty-five years earlier, the "Principle Beauty of Maine" (29), a distinction that led Valerian to spot and eventually marry her. Initially he adores her, but years later, he turns his anger towards her. Soon their relationship sours and they start living separately as strangers in the same house.

Jadine is another dubious benefactor of male worship of female beauty. She lives under the impression that she is successful because of her beauty and
talent, when in fact her European education and the opportunities to which it has
given her access were subsidized by Valerian.

Morrison’s Paradise is about the story of a small all-Black Oklahoma
town that has been reeling from the racial, generational and political confusions of
the 1960s, and ’70s and finds a scapegoat in an all-female household occupying
the convent on the edge of the town. Almost all the women in this novel are
victims: they have spent years facing economic hardship, romantic disappointment,
social inequity and the cruel treatment. The men, on the other hand, are almost
uniformly controlled freaks or hotheads, eager to dismiss independent women as
sluts or witches, and determined to make everyone submit to their will. The real
battles in Ruby, a character observes, were "about disobedience, which meant, of
course, the stallions were fighting about who controlled the mares and their foals"
(Kakutani 8).

Like Pecola in The Bluest Eye, Seneca in Paradise is raped at her foster
home and she is sent away for revealing the fact that she is raped. Her
vulnerability has made her an easy target for people who want to use her. Women
like Seneca are exploited by men, wherever they go. Pallas is chased by men
who may have raped her, but she escapes by hiding in a safe place at night.
Connie, who is devoted to Mother at the Convent and to Christ for thirty years is
raped as a child, and she has no interest in men until she meets Deacon at Ruby
and falls in love.

The men in the Ruby exploit women. For example, K.D. takes no
responsibility for Arnette’s pregnancy. To the men who invade the Convent, the
women in it are ". . . detritus: throwaway people that sometimes blow back into
the room after being swept out the door"(4). The women’s blatant sexuality
scandalizes the men and stirs their imaginations. To Deek, the Convent is akin to a "brothel . . . where the entrance to hell is wide" (114). The men consider the Convent women an affront to their image of what a decent woman should be.

The Convent functions as a sisterhood. So men in the town try to demolish the sisterhood neither for money, nor religion. They want to destroy it because those men could not tolerate such a group of independent women who assert their rights.

Men exploit women whenever they find opportunity. In *The Bluest Eye*, Soaphead Church humiliates young girls. He tells that he is not hurting the little girls, that they like what he is doing because they come back not only for the ice-cream and mints he gives them, but for his touch.

The Black women experience ill-treatment by men everywhere, both at home and outside. Boy Boy, Eva's husband in *Sula*, is fond of women. He never supports his family. When he deserts Eva and their children, Eva is forced to provide for their children. After several years, Boy Boy visits Eva with a woman. Eva never shows her anger towards him, instead she cooks and serves him. Morrison brings out how the Black women forgive the shortcomings of their men, even when they are ill-treated by them.

In *Song of Solomon*, Macon Dead Jr. never considers his wife, Ruth as a human being. He marries her for her property and to become an important and respectable person in the community. He suspects his wife on the ground that she has incestuous liaison with her father. Macon Jr. considers his wife and daughters as dolls for his Sunday trip to show off his wealth and power to others. He also does not want to accept Pilate as his sister, because of her low status in the community. Another incident is witnessed in Macon Jr.'s office when one of her
tenants, a woman asks him to give time to settle the rent, he refuses and he evacuates the woman from the house. In each and every act Macon Jr. asserts his superiority as a male, especially towards women. Morrison's *Jazz* presents, Joe ill-treating his wife Violet and his teen-age girl friend Dorcas.

African American girls are viewed as sex objects without any compunction on the part of the males of the dominant culture. In *Sula*, and *The Bluest Eye*, school-going girls have to devise roundabout ways of returning home from school, because the male gang is ready to molest them at every step. The Black women cannot escape the fate of being viewed as sexual objects. The irony is that these women are treated as socially unacceptable but at the same time they are viewed as sexually desirable.

6. Race and Womanist Thought

With the rise of racial slavery in the United States, the colour line became the fundamental division of U.S. Society. Whiteness is able to marginalize other identities, discourse, and voices.

In her powerfully compressed first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison scrutinizes the influence of the White-dominated cultural industry on the lives and identities of the Black Americans. The book's setting is a working-class urban Black neighbourhood during the 1930s and 40s, a time when it is already clear that American culture means White culture, and this in turn is synonymous with mass media culture. Morison signals out the apparently innocuous ~ or as Frieda and Pecola ~ put it, "cu -ute" Shirley Temple -- her dimpled face reproduced on cups and saucers, show how the icons of mass culture subtly and insidiously intervene in the daily lives of African Americans (13).
When the White society teaches that black is ugly; the Black people also try to assimilate the idea blindly. The White culture causes wounds in the minds of children as well as the adults. Pecola's mother Pauline neglects her own daughter because of her colour. She is misled by the White standard of beauty. The White standard of beauty changes the life of the Blacks and makes them live out of reality. Morrison explains, how the world sees a young Black girl and how a young Black girl sees the world. She provides several examples of the ways race has prompted a dangerous distortion of this visual balance.

The White society continues to function within the rigid framework of class and has kept alive the image of the Black as untouchable, ugly and unclean. In Pecola's case, she faces a tragic experience because of the tradition in the new land and also becomes unworthy because of her family and the community. She has a great faith that if she attains blue eyes she will be respected and loved by others. She eats Mary Jane Candy, drinks milk in Shirley Temple Cup to attain beauty like the White models. But, she is too young and innocent to understand the truth. All she experiences is repeated rejection, brutalisation, and exploitation. The other characters like the schoolboys, Maurine, Geraldine, and the shopkeeper have treated her badly. By giving such examples, Morrison tries to educate the Black women to accept what they had and motivate them to love themselves, instead of aping the White people.

In *Sula*, Nel's mother Helene is a repressive mother, who follows the White standard of living, and expects perfection at home. She maintains her home neatly and teaches her daughter to behave obediently and to give respect to the elders.
The idea 'Black is beautiful' is brought home so that the Blacks must love and desire racially authentic beauty, rather than imitating other races' forms of beauty. To do anything less is to deny oneself. *Song of Solomon* demonstrates that for Milkman to love Hagar's hair is to love himself and his racial heritage. Thus one of the central marks of the success of Milkman's quest is that he returns to the house on Not Doctor Street with the box of Hagar's hair that Pilate has given him.

Pilate's grand-daughter, Hagar embodies all the pain and anxiety produced when racism permeates an intimate relationship; she is the living articulation of consumer society's solution to racism. Morrison reveals her sensitive understanding of how commodity consumption distorts the Black personhood when Hagar appears to achieve the look she so desperately sought, she would only have been "a black mimicry of a white cultural model" (Wall 3). Instead, the imitation of the White model results in frustration and Morrison's condemnation of commodity consumption as a solution to the problems of race, class, gender is as final and absolute as are Hagar's subsequent delirium and death. Morrison proves that the blind imitation of the White culture is totally unacceptable.

The White culture educates the Blacks in New York to become White persons and the Blacks in the City are willing to turn to cosmetics to beautify themselves. Both the husband and wife in *Jazz*, Joe and Violet become cosmetic product sellers; Joe travels from place to place to sell his beauty products and Violet moves from home to home to straighten and decorate the Black women's hair. The Black people are not satisfied with what they have. They want to survive in the city along with the Whites and follow their living pattern.
The exploitation of the dominant race is shown in the novels of the Black writers to tell their people to face all the problems in the society. In the novel, *The Bluest Eye*, instead of directing Cholly's anger towards the large White social structure, his anger becomes "implosive, impacting" all those closest to him (Yancy 317). In his adolescence, when he is forced by two White men to have sexual intercourse with the young Black girl Darlene with gun and flash light Cholly, performs the act and directs his hatred by blaming her and not to those who humiliate him. Through Cholly, Morrison shows how racism can destroy a life.

Eventually, his anarchy, born of degradation, ran its chaotic course through joblessness, drunkenness and finally his assault of his daughter Pecola. All of the foregoing instances of anarchy, spawned by racial debasement, illustrate the frustrations experienced by those who must impotently submit to the ruling power.

On a trip to South by train, Helene and Nel in *Sulci*, are visually assaulted by the denigrating gaze of Black soldiers. They next bear the affront to their manners by using the "toilets" for "COLORED WOMEN", in the field beyond the stationhouse (24). The novel seems to say that the Black women have no equal access to White bourgeois manners, if they are defined by having to void themselves in the open, hiding behind the high grass.

Resembling her mother, Nel also prefers her husband to accept White menial jobs. Jude feels that nothing is helpful in working under White men. He has told Nel and Sula, a brief tale of some personal insults done on him by his customer and his boss and how "a Negro man had a hard row to hoe in this world" (103). By Jude's observation, it is made clear that the Black labour forces are always ill-treated and exploited by the Whites.
The history of Bottom in *Sula* tells the betrayal of the White master. The White master has awarded his loyal slave, a land at the top of the hill for his sincerity and hard work, which is called Bottom, and convinced the slave that it is "the bottom of heaven" (5).

Racial injustice is the underlying force in *Song of Solomon* from which the violent tendencies of Guitar Bains evolves. The injustice inflicted by the ruling power is treated in addition to the more personal victimizations, which results in lawlessness. Whether the impelling force is more broadly social or immediately personal, the characters react, both rationally and irrationally, from awareness, at some point, of their own power. Such awareness is accompanied by a paradoxical freedom to act against the ruling authority. Any course of action chosen by the victim is deemed by him to be right.

Guitar's father was sliced up in a sawmill and his White boss gave the kids some candy and money to the mother as compensation. Degraded and permanently angered, Guitar was qualified by temperament to join the anarchists who called themselves The Seven Days and who avenged violent crimes committed by the Whites against the Blacks.

Morrison shows that the Whites kill the Blacks, but sometimes they give compensations, not a real compensation but a substitute. The Blacks become violent as a consequence of the Whites' violence. When the Blacks want to react against White's violence, some of them like Guitar believe in 'violence begets violence', which also does not give a permanent solution to the problem.

Morrison values racial connection, and racial memory over individual fulfilment in *Tat Baby*. Dislocation and cross-cultural relationships figure strongly in the novel. Morrison wants to affirm the self-reliance and freedom of a Black
woman who makes choices for her life on her own terms. On the other hand, she also seeks to point out the dangers of racial isolation, if there is no historical connection.

The inter-relation between the White and Black, master and servant and male and female is described in Morrison's *Tar Baby*. Ondine and Sydney suffer from the double consciousness. Jadine’s light skin and her Sorbonne education makes her alienate herself from her own culture. Jadine accepts White culture and she also wants to be an accepted person like her masters in the dominant society. However, when Son taunts her by calling her a White girl, Jadine forcibly denies this image, “I'm not . . . you know I'm not white!” (103). Ondine and Sydney are servants at Valerian's home, work hard, at the same time they are treated as human beings. Both of them borrow the White man's stereotypes and languages but fail to have cordial relationship with the other Black servants at home, because of their pride as Philadelphian Negroes. When Son enters the house and becomes friendly with Valerian, Margaret, Sydney and Ondine do not want Jadine to have a close relationship with the Black man, Son. At the same time they expect Jadine to protect them at their old age like a Black girl.

While describing the racial discrimination among the Blacks and Whites in her novels, Morrison does not forget to mention a cordial racial relationship is possible in America. Mr. Valerian invites the intruder Son to dine with him, and exchanges jokes with him and helps Son to get a passport to escape for U.S. Besides Son, Sydney, the Black servant is the only companion at his house. Both the master and the servant enjoy the friendship of the other. Even Valerian who treats his servants humanely, fires them for their faults and acts like a White master. He asks Ondine to leave the house, when she reveals the truth of
Margaret. He also dismisses his Black labourers Gideon and Therese for their theft. Through the combination of Black and White characters, Morrison brings out inter-racial relationship is possible at a certain level.

Morrison also portrays the inter-racial relationship in the Southern countries, which is described by the story of Joe's childhood in *Jazz*. Rhoda, a White woman treats Joe as one of her own children. Until he marries Violet and moves to the City, he receives true affection from the White master's family. Here race is not a problem for Joe.

*Beloved* describes the cruelty of racism and slavery, and its effects on the individual. Morrison has said in a BBC interview that Sethe's crime not only challenged "the peculiar institution" but offended the Black community as well. The act of killing her own children was an expression of "you may enslave me but not the best part of me, my children" (Morrison. 1990 2). But it also shocked the Black community by its violation of that community's natural laws even those of kin and tribe.

Morrison in her *Behind the Making of The Black Book*, calls "a romanticization of both the African past and the American past that threatened to devalue three-hundred years of black life... as 'lived' experience" (190). The disintegration of family, the denial of a mother's right to love her daughter, Morrison reiterates, is perhaps the greatest horror of the Black experience under slavery. The final insult, the ultimate cruelty that causes Sethe to flee Sweet Home, is the act of Schoolteacher's nephews taking her milk. Thus the White masters violate Sethe in an act comparable to rape and also violate her motherhood. The choke-cherry tree scars at her back describe the cruelty of
slavery, and making notes about size and shape of the body parts the slaves shows how the enslaved people were treated like animals.

The "experience of missing is a particular component of African American life and, more particularly, of African American women's life" (McKee 5). It is a cruelty that marks Baby Suggs's life that her eight children from seven fathers, were sold or killed by the White masters except Halle. Suggs believes that "the sold one never returned, the lost one never found" (154). She believes that slaves do not have pleasurable feelings on their own; "their bodies not supposed to be like that, but they have to have as many children as they can to please whoever owned them" (257). Sethe too is forced to separate from her children by the Schoolmaster. Slavery does not allow family relationship among the Blacks and as there is no end of children and no beginning of husband.

The murder of Dorcas' parents in a riot describes the cruelty of Whites in Jazz. Like Dorcas, so many people lose their houses and their relatives. The racial riot affects the life of ordinary Black people. After war, the Blacks are homeless and without people, moving, walking, running, hiding, stealing and moving on; Paul D in Beloved has found "after the war . . . Negroes so stunned, or hungry, or. . . slept in trees in the day and walked by night" (66).

Racial animosities should be removed. In its place racial integration should be created. Morrison concurs with the view of Dr. King that the destiny of the Whites is tied up with the destiny of the Blacks. The Whites must realize that their freedom is inextricably bound to the freedom of the Blacks .
7. History and Womanist Thought

Women are invisible in the history, throughout the world. There is a lack of representation of women in it. There is also a misrepresentation of African American women in the history. African American women have been playing an integral part in the building of America, but their participation and contribution have not been properly represented in the history of America. All of Morrison's novels are, in a real sense, historical novels, which are based on slavery, reconstruction, depression, and war, and Civil Rights Movement and the experience of personal history. It is commented that "[Morrison's writing is] richly revelatory not only of human nature but of the troubled history of black America." (www.Salon.com/Audio/Toni Morrison: Paradise).

Morrison's novels reveal the role of the Black women in the history of America. Her first novel, The Bluest Eye is on the historical settings of World War II. It was written at the time when the phrase 'black is beautiful' was heard throughout America. Morrison seeks, to get underneath the phrase, to explore the difficult context that made it such a necessary refrain.

The prologue of the novel Sula recalls the Civil War and its distraction in the Black society. In its legends about the "Nigger joke" of the freed slave whose master has given him "bottom" land at the top of the rocky hills surrounding the mythical Medallion, Ohio (5 & 6). The next section, 1919, recounts the terrors of World War I as perceived through the consciousness of a single - soldier, Shadrack. He is driven mad by the carnage he witnesses in the war field. Another section is titled 1941, suggesting but not documenting yet another war; and the mere mention of the year 1965 in the epilogue implies the reality of Vietnam War
*Song of Solomon* is the quest for gold and for a personal history which the protagonist, Milkman believes will be realized only in the context of the ancestral fathers. It is about the first half of the twentieth century, ranging back to the days immediately after the Civil War and concentrating particularly on the late 1950's and early 1960's. This novel is published in 1977, a period of intense activism and Black nationalistic fervour. It explores the various versions of the past, that the African American women tell to others and themselves.

The novel also deals with slavery and the period immediately after slavery. Pilate like a 'Pilot' guides Milkman to know himself and his roots. She directs him to meet the ancient Circe, who finally reveals the real history of Milkman's ancestors. Through those two women, Morrison avers that the Black women are historians and the transmitters of history that transcends recorded fact, and the keepers of racial memory.

Jadine in *Tar Baby* is an orphan -- biologically, culturally and historically. Morrison persists that women must know their roots, if they want to survive and to avoid the isolation. Women should have connection with their historical past.

For Morrison, historical changes such as Black migration to urban areas, assimilation into the middle class and acculturation to Western values have threatened the old values that once gave cultural coherence to the Black people's lives. Morrison's fictions deals with the loss of tradition, ways of knowing, and ways of perceiving oneself and the world. Milkman discovers, understands, and respects these traditions. He discovers the meaning of his name, his own life and his familial past. However, Jadine lost everything and alienated herself by neglecting everything. She fails to discover herself and her community.
Morrison's *Beloved* is a novel that examines the social deconstruction of African American history and family life in the years before, during, and after the Civil War when the United States became engaged in the project of Reconstruction.

In the beginning of Chapter One, the year 1873 gives the description of a particular slave Family - Baby Suggs, - takes the story back to the pre-civil war Period. *Beloved* opens with the historical present of 1873, ten years after the emancipation of the slaves, and into the home of a former slave, Sethe, and her daughter Denver. The ugly aspect of the Black life reveals the evils of slavery. aby Suggs is crippled for life, Halle is captured, humiliated, and presumed dead,ixo is lynched and burned and Paul D is brutally imprisoned in a Georgia chain gang. Among them a frantic mother who does not allow her children to be turned to slavery is Sethe, who kills one of her four children.

The very first epigraph of the novel says "Sixty Million and more", Corrison explains that this is the approximate number of Africans who died in the Middle Passage (50). As a ghost, Beloved, the murdered baby, is considered as the of the "Sixty Million", since she has memories of the Middle passage. She scribes the conditions of the slaveships in fragmented images and the space between cultural identities, between Africa and an unknown destination. The irriative of *Beloved* is between the decade before the Emancipation proclamation and the decade that followed it, but the earlier date also marks the passage of another crucial law, the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850.

Morrison is committed to reconstructing the history of African Americans to have been excluded from mainstream discourse. *Jazz*, shows Morrison's tention of rewriting the Harlem Renaissance, which is the highpoint of Black
literature, culture and art. Harlem in 1926 was a period in which the Black people drew on their African American roots. It also reveals the migration of Blacks from South to North and subsequently urbanization.

During 1870-90s the successive waves of northern migration is described by Joe and Violet's migration from South to North. With lots of hope and expectations the Blacks have arrived the city. When Migrating to the City from the rural South, the Black people relinquish their old - folk, family values. Trying to fit into urban life, they deceive themselves that in the glaring city lights appear their loneliness and they unconsciously repress their sense of displacement. In this milieu, only the Black maternal figures could serve as communal caretakers. The lack of supportive mothers in *Jazz* emanates from a feeling of urban insecurity and rootlessness.

The 1917 riots in East St. Louis, and its cruelty are described by Morrison through the death of Dorcas' parents. These riots in East St. Louis is triggered by the anger and dissatisfaction of African Americans, who confront economic and social exploitations. These riots, expose women to warlike conditions and inevitably forced to arm themselves as they do not wish to remain vulnerable and exploited. Because of these riots, many Black people have lost their house and their lives become miserable.

Morrison in *Paradise* travels easily between eras, taking the reader back in time to the founding of Ruby, an all - Black township in Oklahoma, at the end of World War II, then further back to the establishment of its predecessor, Haven, which describes when the freed Black men with their family have started moving towards North. The history of Haven tells the history of freed slaves in America, who struggled to live even after their emancipation.
The Black people compare war with White people. Soane feels that comparing to the White people, war is far better to her. She feels that there is no safer place to bring up her sons alive in U.S.. Her son's were also killed in Vietnam War. Mavis' two brothers were killed in the Vietnam War.

Juneteenth revolution is portrayed by Morrison in *Paradise*. On her way to home from the meeting at Calvary, Dovey saw lanterns from the Juneteenth picnic hanging near the Oven. On June eighteenth the Black people started a revolutionary movement against the Whites. It is called Juneteenth. The parade, which Dovey has met, tells a portion of the history of Blacks.

Morrison's subjects are often violent, always disquieting, and sometimes unbearable to consider, because her subjects are based on historical facts and have their origins in *reality*. Hers is a voice of political conscience, making poverty, slavery, and oppression immediate even to those readers who have never experienced them, even to those readers who would choose to forget. Morrison does this, imagining the realm, she brings us to an awareness of truth beyond *reality* and to an experience beyond *history*. Morrison's racial consciousness might well prove a model for all women writers to conceive of history in terms that are different and evolutionary. In woman, personal history blends together "with the history of all women, as well as national and world history" (Rigney 80).

8. Men in Morrison's Novels

African American men writers describe male characters as brave and responsible persons, who fight against social injustices. But in the Black women’s writing the role of men is different, because almost in every house male characters disappear and run away from their family responsibilities. Economic
hardships have always had a disproportionately greater negative impact on Black male household heads. The problems of absentee father are dealt with in African American literature, particularly by African American Women writers.

In Morrison's fiction frequently her male characters are "depicted as infantilised by their position on the fringes of white culture"(Rubenstein 142). But some of the male characters in Morrison's works play the role of protectors, and educators. Thus both the negative and positive male characters are portrayed by Morrison in a pessimistic and optimistic way.

African American men have fostered negative aspects — sexism, violence, and sexual aggression. The symbol of flight is central to the portrayal of the African American experience. In American literature, men are portrayed as adventure-seekers who always involve themselves in adventures and travelling and escape from family responsibility. Flight is a survival technique, which is also encouraged by female members because they are interested in their folk's survival. Leaving one's house is a growing - up process and men are exposed to the realities of the outside world and receive wide experience and attain maturity. Morrison's male characters opt for flight from familial responsibilities and painful truths. "Husbands are liminal presences and need feminine morale boosters to maintain their stylized identities" (Mcleod 166).

In Sula, most of the men are shown as escaping from their responsibilities. Sula tells Nel that "Every man I ever knew left his children" (143). Eva's husband Boy Boy abandons his family. His desertion of his wife and children and his visit after several years, with a woman, reveals his immaturity and callousness. The protagonist Sula and her friend Nel live in a home without a male member. Sula's father is dead; Nel's father abandons his family.
Jude Green, Nel's husband, is forced by White exploitation to suppress his strength, he finds marriage the only visible solution. He gets the power, authority, and self-actualisation he craves for by merging his personality with another's. Finally Jude leaves Nel and their children, escapes from his responsibility after his sexual encounter with Sula.

Violet's father in Jazz often leaves his wife and children in the lurch and visits them occasionally. He does not bother about his family. He feels that by giving them new dresses and sweets, he can satisfy them. He does not discharge his responsibility as a father or as a husband. His action is the main cause for the suicide of Violet's mother, which hurt's Violet's psyche and forces her to refuse to have children in her life.

Morrison portrays her male characters as protectors as well as irresponsible persons. In her first novel The Bluest Eye, Mr. MacTeer, Claudia's father takes the role of a responsible father who is the provider and protector of his family. He also educates his daughters to live with self-respect. When one of his tenants, Mr. Henry misbehaves with his daughter Frieda, Mr. MacTeer beats him and drives him out of the house.

Some men always abuse girls and Soaphead Church is one among them. He is a negative character as described in The Bluest Eye, by Morrison. Soaphead Church, an odd old man is a psychic reader or spiritual adviser and healer. He uses the little girls in the town as his sexual objects.

The protagonist Pecola's father, Cholly is described as an irresponsible man, who ill-treats his family members at every point and abuses his own daughter. His first sin is putting his family "outdoors"; and his worst sin is the "tender" rape of his daughter (12 & 7). Morrison opines that the social condition makes
Cholly an irresponsible person. The father figures in both families, MacTeer and Breedlove are different. Mr. MacTeer showers love on his children and also provides security for them, whereas Choley molests his own daughter, Pecola.

The only man in Sula's life is Ajax, the one man Sula loves, seems to diverge from this pattern, however, as soon as he feels the tug toward permanence, he flees, afraid of relinquishing his maternally cushioned boyhood. At first he enjoys the sexual act with Sula, and he is impressed with Sula's power over him. He is proud to be with her because Sula "reminds him of his mother" through her power (127). He is the only person who makes Sula realize her womanhood. He respects her self-reliance, and thinks of her as a self-sustaining individual "both tough and wise..." (128). When recognizing a new possessiveness in Sula's love, Ajax leaves her permanently and escapes from responsibility. He who teaches Sula about possession, at the same time resembles other Black men, and escapes from responsibility.

Macon Dead Jr. and Milkman are two opposite characters in the same family in Song of Sotomon. Macon is interested in owning property, but Milkman even though at the beginning resembles his father, later on through the women like, Pilate, Lena and the Prostitute Sweet understands his responsibility and the importance of human relationship. When Milkman tries to escape from Hager's "anaconda love" (137), Pilate at the end makes him realize his fault and he too accepts that he is responsible for Hager's death. At the end, Milkman understands his self and responsibility towards his family and society by undertaking a journey towards his ancestral roots.

Guitar Baines is a young Black man and a friend of Milkman from his childhood becomes a member of a racial consciousness group that takes revenge
for the unjust murder of the Blacks by killing White people. He is a personal adviser to Milkman, shares everything with him and advises Milkman to accept Black race. He becomes a terrorist to fight against the deception of White masters. At the end of the novel, Guitar tries to murder Milkman. Guitar is affected like Macon Jr. by White people, but he is concerned about the Black people and not about acquiring property. In *Song of Solomon*, different types of male characters are introduced by Morrison, none of them tries to escape from family responsibilities.

Morrison has brought male chauvinistic characters like Macon Dead in *Song of Solomon*, who is materialistic and unsympathetic. He rules his household autocratically and cares nothing for people in general, including his wife, daughters and sister. As a middle-class Black father, he follows the White men as "provider, decision-maker, nurturer, husband, and father" (McAdoo 258). He becomes a property-minded person, and Morrison gives the reason for his act by stating that he is affected by his father's death — because of White men — who cheat Macon Sr. and take away his property and shoot him dead. His aggressive actions as an adult are intended to establish himself as a replication of his own father. "Macon was a "nice" and "good" person, a devoted son and brother" (Storhoff 292). In fact, he thought of his sister as "his own child" (27). As Pilate tells Milkman, "Macon was a nice boy and awful good to me. Be nice if you could have known him then. He would have been a good friend to you too, like he was to me" (40). But his domineering sexism, and his acceptance of White middle-class values change him into a violent man. His futile attempt to imitate the White oppressor leaves him with three distinct emotions - "avarice, hatred of his wife, and contempt for his daughters and Pilate" (Mcleod 168).
In *Tar Baby*, Valerian Street is a rich, retired White industrialist from Philadelphia. He does not want to interact with other people, instead he prefers to be with plants. He is always kind and generous to his employees. At the same time, he ill-treats his wife. He helps Jadine through school and college at the request of his servants Sydney and Ondine. He values loyalty, honesty, truthfulness and hard work, and hates people who steal and lie. He likes people to be obedient and likes them to do what he tells them to do, which may also be taken as defect of character. Being the master of the household he sometimes "acts like a god and takes decisions" ignoring the feelings of others (Aithal 81), as when he dismisses two servants who work under Sydney and Ondine and also invites and dines with Son even though every one at his house hates his act. He has also done a lot for Sydney and Ondine and helps them lead an independent life.

Son is an African American wanderer from Eloé, Florida. He seems to have the qualities of the stereotypical Black male. He is shiftless, wild, and unrefined. Yet, he reveals an honest, direct way of looking at the world. Son, unlike Jadine seems too nostalgic for the past.

Son cannot break free from his cultural roots as he has adopted and surrendered to it. Morrison advocates the movement beyond traditional Black values to reconcile the needs of the modern world. Son urges Jadine to take up the conventional mother's role, and at the same time, he dislikes her accepting the stereotypical mammy role. Son says that "if you have a white man's baby, you have chosen to be just another mammy only you are the real mammy 'cause you had it in your womb and you are still taking care of white folk's children"(232). Son educates Jadine to respect her race and tries to make her understand the importance of blackness; that until Jadine knows about Son, until she knows about
her people, she cannot know herself. Morrison brings out the idea that knowing one's own culture and people is important to the Blacks through the character of Son. Son is taking Black heritage on his own and he becomes a role model to the Blacks.

Sydney, a Black servant at Valerian's house is proud of the fact that he is a Philadelphia Black. He is a caretaker of Valerian and has friendly relationship with his employer. Sydney is the guardian of Jadine and treats her as his own daughter. He also looks after his wife Ondine when she feels that her feet are tired after working day and night for Jadine. He also takes care of her legs; asking her to put her legs "up on this pillow. Rest yourself and don't worry about nothing" (166). Morrison brings out how a Black man is willing to take care of his family and discharge his responsibilities properly. Milkman in *Song of Solomon*, is shown as repaying Sweet's kindness by rubbing her back and cleaning her tub.

Paul D in *Beloved* rubs Sethe's feet, and bathes her in sections. He assumes a maternal, nurturing role. At the end, they come closely to the state of mutual recognition and their relationship is not one of "merging or of domination but of resonating "likeness" and empathic understanding" (Schapiro 207). As the novel ends, Sethe is left homeless; when Mr. Bodwin has decided to sell the haunted house, once again alone, muted, and waiting for death, Paul D tries to comfort and reassure Sethe and "He wants to put his story next to hers", to be joined with her in a struggle for survival and for, as he says, "some kind of tomorrow" (273).

The degeneration of the male began with slavery. It is an individual and a collective tragedy. The Black men were fathers merely in name, but they found
the life of denied opportunities and deferred hopes unbearable. They found easy solutions in drugs and alcohol. Aggression and sadism, narcissism and acquisitiveness were their survival strategies to preserve their fragile identities. *Beloved,* depicts the evil of slavery and its impact on male identity. It portrays the lives of the slaves in Garner's Sweet Home, where the men were treated as men and encouraged to think for themselves. Under Garner's benevolent tutelage the slaves developed qualities like sensitivity, assertiveness, and familial loyalties that had no place in a life of bondage; and they were left unprepared to face the cruelty of the Schoolteacher and his nephews. The Black slaves think Sweet Home is really a Sweet Home under the ownership of Mr. Garner. Mr. Garner prides himself on the treatment of his male slaves, he nevertheless has the slave master's agenda of using slave women for the purpose of childbearing.

In *Beloved,* Morrison describes all the male characters except the Schoolteacher and his nephews, in a positive way. She brings out both the White and Black male characters in a balanced way. Even when they are affected by slavery, those Black men like, Paul D try to perform their role perfectly and realize their family responsibility.

The hero of the novel, *Jazz,* Joe, is a hard working wild man. He is an orphan, brought up by his owners, from the childhood searching for his mother and her affection. His hands are strong, and he never feels lazy to work. When he marries Violet, and moves towards North, he has started his life as a cosmetic sales man. Wherever he goes, he is respected by women. He respects his wife, and allows her to show her talent as a hairdresser. At first, he finds motherly affection from Violet, and when her attention turns towards the birds, he discovers the same affection from Dorcas, a teen-age girl. He does not want to reveal his affair
with a young girl to Violet, because he does not want his wife to be miserable. When he has rented a room for afternoons with Dorcas in Malvonne's home, he says that, "I'm not going to disturb (Violet) her with this" (60). Morrison brings out the good as well as bad qualities of Joe, but everything he has clone is out of failure. Both, Joe and Violet's father are varied in their views. One respects women, and the other neglects them.

In *Paradise*, almost all men ill-treat their women as well as the women in the Convent. The first scene of the novel itself brings out the clear picture of men's cruelty towards women. They try to destroy the Convent women to hide their sin by stating that the Convent women are ruining the town. Ruby.

Morrison presents both the Black and White male characters without any partiality. Morrison's men are often responsible for their own condition and a few others are misogynists who mistreat women.

9. Food and Womaitist Thought

Food is a womanist issue. It is a survival need. Without food human beings cannot survive. In the initial stages, mother satisfies the survival need of the child. Food links the bond between mother and the child. Mother is the provider who becomes a divine creature and the child sees God through her. Mother gathers, prepares and feeds her children and she becomes a provider throughout her life.

In *The Bluest Eye*, Pauline hates her family, wants to escape from her ugly house. She works hard in White man's house with pleasure but never fails to gather some leftover food for her children. The Black Mothers have to work
hard to feed their children when their irresponsible husbands fail to provide for their family.

The Black mothers feed other children along with their own. When Pecoia is being put out of her house, the MacTeers adopt her and feed her. Even though the Black woman is poor, she is willing to feed other starving children.

Kitchen becomes not only an eating place but also a meeting place for the Black women and in *The Bluest Eye*, Mrs. MacTeer and her neighbours share messages about the townspeople in the kitchen. Eating place sometimes becomes a place for exchange of views and arguments and in *Song of Solomon*, whenever Pilate, Reba and Hager sit for their food, they have arguments. Sometimes the eating place is turned into a fighting place.

Eating place becomes a quarrel place in *Tar Baby* when Ondine tries to assert herself by asking the reason for the dismissal of the Black servants. In Valerian's house, the quarrel between Mrs. and Mr. Street takes place at the dining table.

The fore-fathers of the Haven and Ruby in *Paradise* were freed slaves. They knew the importance of life, so that, they worked together, lived together and created an oven at the centre of the town, to cook and eat together. Thus, the oven becomes a communal sharing place. But later on it becomes a place for undoing things, where the nine men gang carries out the plot of attacking the convent.

The Black people call others with the names of delicious dishes. The prostitutes in *The Bluest Eye*, call Pecoia Chittlin', Pudding, Chicken, and Honey, which signifies their tenderness towards Pecoia. The three whores are called "sugar
coated whores" (43). Frieda and Claudia call the mulatto girl Maureen, "Meringue Pie" (48). In Tar Baby, Son is called "the chocolate eating man" (95).

Food is used as an object to beautify and in The Bluest Eye chocolate, milk are used as beautifying objects and Pecola is attracted towards cups containing Shirley Temple image and Mary Jane candy, whereas Claudia rejects these White artefacts, Pecola, the victim of Western culture, is fascinated and intoxicated by them, "To eat candy is some how to eat the eyes, eat Mary Jane. .. Lovely Mary Jane, for whom a candy is named" (43).

While the candy is associated with the White standard of beauty which Pecola admires and longs to get it in The Bluest Eye, the same candy is shown as causing revulsion in Guitar in Song of Solomon. Guitar grows ill even at the smell of sweets, which makes him "think of dead people" (61). Guitar is unable to protect his mother from the White boss at the funeral of his father and he is given candies as a compensation for the death of his father. He discards candy, and equates it to death and funeral. Similarly, Milkman associates the 'faintly sweet' taste of his mother's milk with both shame and impotence, while his mother nursed him until he is grown enough to have her milk.

For Joe in Jazz, food makes him fall in love with Dorcas, but at the same time it makes him hate Violet. Joe has first met Dorcas, in the drugstore buying candy "I saw her buying candy and the whole tiling was sweet"(146). Whereas Violet's preparation of "pork that he cannot eat" (65) is also one of the reasons for Joe to hate her.

After eighteen - years when the ghost - child arrives Sethe's house as a young girl, Beloved, she wants to be with Sethe, the whole day. Beloved could
not take her eyes off Sethe and this is expressed by the author that "Sethe was licked, tasted, eaten by Beloved's eyes" (71).

Anatomy is associated with food items in *Tar Baby*, when Margaret is lying in a canvas-back chair, sunning herself in bathing suit, Son comments that "she was like a marshmallow warming but not toasting itself. That inside the white smooth skin was liquid sugar, no bones, no cartilage-just liquid sugar, soft and a little pully" (169). In *The Bluest Eye*, face is compared to cauliflower, "angry faces knotted like dark cauliflowers" (57).

Food sometimes has sexual connotation. Ice-cream, Strawberry, Watermelon, are used as objects in association with erotic feelings in Morrison's novels. Cholly considers watermelon as an emblem for female sexuality in *The Bluest Eye*, whereas, in *Sula*, the ice-cream imagery is explicitly sexual.

'Soul Food', the food particularly prepared by African Americans is important for the Blacks, which is described in some of Morrison's novels. And, in *Beloved*, Sethe prepares soul food, "... corn cut from the cob and fried with green onions and butter. Raised bread" (99-100).

The Black women always work hard for the welfare of their family, and this is indicated by the munching mouth of Pilate in *Song of Solomon*. She always eats something or other, while preparing liquor or doing work at home. If she does not have found anything to eat, "Pilate (J ust) P ut a fresh piece of twig in her mouth" (48).

In *Paradise*, from the opening chapter itself, we find the preparation of food by the convent women. When Mavis arrives, Connie refers to the preparation of potato. The Convent women are always munching something. At the end, when the nine men enter the convent to murder the women there, we notice a
few women are engaged in cooking. Those women enjoy their life by cooking, and eating.

Whenever the Black people come together, they provide feasts. In *Beloved* when Sethe escapes from the cruel hands of Schoolteacher and arrives Baby Suggs' home, Suggs gives a sumptuous meal to the whole townspeople. There is a grand feast arranged for the townspeople at the wedding of Amette and K.D in *Paradise*. Soane invites the Convent women when the other guests are not interested in them. The Convent women attend the feast and join with some young people who have wandered near the Oven, arouse tension. Feasting time is a sharing time and a caring time.

Food is a weapon and also power for women. Recently wrong ideas are observed and imposed on women's mind and feminists give importance to the shape of the bodies rather than people or their health. So they eat less to seek attention from others, but, the womanists always think about bodily health. So they never bother about their "flat - footed, broad - hipped figure". The feminists feel that preparing food for her husband and children itself is a burden, but the womanists consider it as their proud privilege to feed their people.

The next step in the analysis of Toni Morrison's Womanist Thought is the relationship between the society and the self of a woman whether it is contradictory or complementary.