CHAPTER - V

CONCLUSION
When we acknowledge the kingdom of the self, we will no longer accept slavery either for ourselves or for others, no matter how it is disguised.

GERRY L. SPENCE, From Freedom to Slavery
It is a mammoth task, almost impossible, to appreciate the depth and complexity of Toni Morrison’s work without some knowledge of the depth and complexity of African American history and traditions. While Morrison’s fiction is absolutely rooted in black traditions, it is of course never simply a mouthpiece or vehicle of propaganda promoting some vague notion of black worth. Morrison “looks behind and beyond the prevailing myths of black history” (Roynon 100). African Americans also referred to as Blacks or Afro-Americans, form the single largest racial minority in the United States. The African American history begins in the sixteenth century till the present day.

Since the beginning of the seventeenth-century, Europeans had wondered aloud whether or not the African “species of men,” as they most commonly put it, could ever create formal literature, could ever master “the arts and sciences.” If they could, the argument ran, than the African variety of humanity and the European variety were fundamentally related. If not, then it seemed clear that the African was destined by nature to be a slave. (Gates Jr. 08)

The blacks faced the hard and oppressing times with the reigning evils of racism, slavery at its worst, sexual exploitation, horrifying oppressions and annihilating subjugations. Thus began the saga of racism with following events of reconstruction, development of African American community, participation in the military conflicts of the U.S., racial segregation, the Civil Rights Movement, the Black Movement and so on. Today the African Americans are neither like the rest of their race in Africa where their ancestral past lies, nor like the whites in America with whom they had about four hundred years of social interaction. Time and again they had to prove that they indeed belong to the
human species and not to the lower orders. The renowned African American novelist Richard Wright comments on the black American as “something not racial or biological, something made in the United States” (Wright 63). Toni Morrison and her extensive writings focus on such issues. She is mainly concerned with the lives of African Americans. She probes the heart of the dilemma facing many of her races struggling to obtain prosperity and independence without serving the ancestral ties that nourish their African American identities. But most importantly Morrison’s fiction tells us a story of the human spirit: its strength, its endurance, and its ability to soar high. Morrison has a knack for portraying the untold, unpenned picture of history with multiple issues and events. Morrison “succeeds in taking her readers into fantastic worlds where fantasy diminishes in direct proportion to our recognition of suffering humanity” (Trudier 09). Toni Morrison, through her novels, shows how much race has mattered historically to African Americans as she explores the cultural “roots” of black Americans in slavery. As Morrison examines the white supremacist ideology and essential discursive repertoires that defined the African American slave as the racial ‘Other’- as biologically inferior, morally degenerate, and animalistic – she focuses attention on the formative and “dirtying” power of racist representations. She dramatizes the social and political consequences of racist thinking and practises, as in Beloved, and describes not only the humiliations and traumas the slaves were forced to endure at the hands of their white oppressors but also the insidious effects of internalized racism – that is, socially produced feelings of self-contempt and self-hatred – on the construction of African American identities.

For Morrison this is … a journey to a site to see what remains has been left behind and to reconstruct the world that these remains imply… What Morrison also unearths at the excavation site is the
silenced voice of the black woman, … For through them the horrors of slavery are unravelled, what is generally told is his/tory rather than her/story; her dimmed voice left her to live a life of quiet desperation… (Samuels 128-9)

The main argument in the present thesis has been to understand and study the black female characters in select novels of Toni Morrison as they survive through the gruesome effects of slavery in order to achieve some kind of self-realization. The characters, especially the black females, become the protagonists around which the issues like racism, sexism, classism, multiple oppressions, gender-bias, communal ties, etc. revolve. Morrison’s black female characters are not easily dismissed. They rule the mind of the reader and journey through with indomitable spirit. In every Morrison’s text, the particular concept that is foremost in her mind is divided into different aspects that her characters embody. Her characters are usually in transition, journeying through mysterious circumstances and personal histories to the innermost psyche, often to a triumphant discovery of self-realization. People are varied as the colours in a box of crayons or a painter’s palette. They are young and old, rich and poor, sane and insane, good and evil, alive and dead. Morrison never clones her characters. They often struggle with some of the same issues but handle them in a variety of ways. Her body of work contains several contrasting characters. Barbara Christian notes:

[At] first glance, each of her novels may seem to be primarily about one character: Pecola in *The Bluest Eye*, Sula in *Sula*, and Milkman Dead in *Song of Solomon*. But as we read the novels, what impress us are not only these characters, but their blood relations. The people
whom the major characters derive their sense of themselves are as memorable, as finely drawn, as the focal characters. (Christian 47)

Toni Morrison’s novels transcend the issues that make her writings stand out from the marginalized group. At the outset she weaves the issues and challenges of African American struggles, physical and psychological traumas that are the residue of slavery, racism, low-status in history etc., into the telling of her magnificent stories. On a deeper level her novels transcend these issues to envelop truths about the human condition, the problems we all face, e.g. the search for self-realization or struggle for identity. And in the process Morrison also shows how her black female characters can lose their sense of who they are in extreme situation. Sometimes the quest in search for self identity becomes successful as in case with Sethe in *Beloved*. Though it is with the community help that Sethe gets back her own self and the ghost of Beloved is drawn away by the village women. But characters like Pecola or Florens lose their sense of self and take refuge in make believe world of their own. Morrison portrays that blacks must search for a self-realization amidst cultural confusion and attempt to preserve self-esteem in the process. If black and female, then additional challenges to self-esteem and fulfilment exist. Morrison’s novels clearly propose “that authentic existence emerges from self-affirmation, from making choices that lead to self-ownership, rather than from a life being – for – others” (Samuels 53). Thematically the novels of Toni Morrison resemble the works of her predecessors. The problems faced by the black women with their racial identities are explored. Along with Morrison, Alice Walker, Nella Larsen, Petry, Hurston, Marshall, etc. explore the racist atmosphere where the black women pat a heavy price characterised by physical and psychological abuse. Perhaps Zora Neale Hurston has had direct influence on Toni Morrison. Her use of the novel as a vehicle for the transmission of the black woman’s folk culture is
reflected in Morrison’s works too. Morrison and Hurston devote themselves to the depiction of black woman in her unique position rather than attempting to use their identities for the communication of political statements to a white and black public reading. Morrison creates powerful fiction with a focus on the black woman’s relationship to her community. The black female protagonists face the dilemma of the restrictions placed on their freedom stemming from the source of their existence. They raise universal questions regarding individual’s role in the community and her/his identity in the community. Morrison’s message is unmistakable: the individual’s and community’s fates are inextricably bound, as are the past, present and future, as it gets clearly conveyed through her novel *Beloved*. Morrison is among such black female writers who are conscious of their self and identity. They project their female characters struggling to establish themselves. It’s a journey from the infantile stage of visibility to self-definition and assertion. They have a concern for African American roots and struggle and efforts to discover their own self. Morrison, Walker, Naylor, etc. are trying to free themselves from the pattern which is set by the white society for the dual exploitation of black woman. Morrison looks at personal relationships between men and women from a black feminine perspective and at the same time try to comprehend fury, frustration, anger of the blacks. Their literature is a saga of their discovery of self. This journey of discovering one’s self is in order to redefine themselves and recognize the inherent power in them. So “African American women writers have necessarily had to confront the interaction between restrictions of racism, sexism and class [and colorism] that characterize our existence, whatever our individual personalities, backgrounds, talents” (Christian 88). Black women writers have studied the black woman from an insider’s point of view. Writers like Morrison have tried to depict their perspectives of the world, society, and community through the female protagonists of her novels. She urges her black women to search her ‘self’ and identity and become freer. Though the black
female characters struggle for their existence, they want to become free from the humiliations attributed upon them by the white society. There is a need for self-actualization. Morrison creates such characters that stick in reader’s mind. Her characters usually are “characters in transition, journeying through mysterious circumstances and personal histories to the innermost psyche” (Crayton 18). Morrison’s black women struggle through same problems but handle them in a variety of ways. Racism, for example, is projected in the form of dominant white ideologies of beauty in *The Bluest Eye* is looked at in terms of its impact on the black girls and women along class lines and skin shade. In *Sula*, the idea of woman is represented by the many female archetypes that the world has invented. *Beloved* addresses the ultimate question of human dignity and a mother’s right. The community strength is also focused upon along with woman bonding or sharing. *A Mercy* reflects Morrison’s search for the origin of black racial identity. She goes back in the period of history to question the issues of racism in its infancy. She focuses on how racism evolved. In fact all of Morrison’s novels revolve around defining black woman in all her strengths and weakness. In the atmosphere of racial issues Morrison writes and probes her black character’s lives and culture. The legacy of slavery is looked upon with new insights and the undocumented history. Morrison’s black women go through the traumas and horrors of slavery in order to find their selves either constructively or destructively. The black female characters try and discover who they are amidst the slavery system. Morrison also shows how her characters can lose their sense of who they are. Therefore, in her novels Morrison address incest, rape, adultery and other sensitive sexual topics as well.

The development of Afro-American women’s fiction is, in many instances, a mirror image of the intensity of the relationship between sexism and racism in this country. And while many of us may grasp
this fact in terms of economic or social status, we often forget the toll it takes in terms of self-expression and therefore self-empowerment. To be able to use the range of one’s voice, to attempt to express the totality of self, is a recurring struggle in the tradition of … writers from the nineteenth century to present. (Christina 172)

Racism and sexism co-exist in a traumatic alliance with the lives of black women in Morrison’s novels. For the black woman racial discrimination along with gender discrimination proves to be a lethal combination. The African American woman bore a double edged persecution: one, as a worker, both in house as well as in the fields; two, as an object of sexual exploitation. She was seen as an oversexed, immoral, loose woman who was always available for instant sexual gratification, as well as for the procreation of the race, thereby ensuring an unfailing supply of human beings for the ever increasing needs of capitalist machinery. Black woman was seen as white man’s property and he could do whatever he pleased with them; rape became an entrenched aspect of plantation life. The black woman belonged to the animal species and therefore need not be accorded the courtesies due to human beings. Black woman had to accept “racial polarity in the form of white supremacy and sexual polarity in the form of male dominance” (Hooks 120). The quest of black female character is not only external but internal. The characters strive to unfold the complexities of their racial identity and gender issues. The brutal racist system shapes their individuality and life. The imposing patriarchal system is also emphasised in Morrison’s novels. She wants her characters to emerge out of the traditional role assigned to them and become aware of their self and identity. She believes that a black woman can change the world by redefining herself and rewriting her blackness. There by show the beauty of being black. Surrounded by poverty, oppression, abuse and struggles for liberation, the black woman face...
innumerable and significant challenges at personal level and in the socio-economic status too. In all Morrison’s novels the black female protagonist faces the internal journey to discover the authentic black female self. The deep rooted African American issue of “colour” has left its impact on black women writers such as Morrison. In an environment filled by centuries of violent oppression, inequality, and injustice, Morrison believes that continuity between past and present is very crucial because it creates bonds, mutual obligations and a shared communal history of struggle. Though black women’s lives as slaves robbed them of their awareness of their homeland, culture and language, residues of them preserved in the memories and their indomitable pride, in their race, got expressed consciously or unconsciously through subdued or subtle voices. The black female characters by and large attempt to discover their own self in the course of their life. The novels are contextualised in the history of African American past, present and take a tentative leap towards the future. They operate from within the frame work of slavery, reconstruction, world war, depression, feminist movements, capitalist America, etc. For Morrison black American history is not only a means for reclaiming their black cultural past, for forging an identity, but also re-examines it for providing a corrective as against the distortion of it by the whites. And as a black and as a woman, it becomes imperative for her, to rewrite American history from a black woman’s perspective, forging a voice and identity out of a confrontation with mainstream cultural discourses. Morrison believes that the reclamation of history of black people is of paramount importance and debate the documented history is what is called for. Being a woman she looks minutely upon the black women’s issues and their roles. It is one of the reasons that her novels are woman centred and the self becomes central to Morrison’s concern. She endeavours to create a concordant African American female identity. Therefore, the black female characters in her novels evolve out of a black culture, even as they question it for their own marginalization and exploitation. The characters subvert the racist
white cultural domination and the stereotypes for forging an independent self-identity. Morrison has “consistently articulated her sensitivity to the interiority of the complexity of diverse black women’s lives” (Rani 34). Her commitment to black culture and black community emanates from her awareness that she must explore her cultural past and establish a connection to her cultural present, for understanding racism that has been the reality from slavery to the present. It is the rootedness that imparts a special quality to her work along with exquisitely crafted dialogues. She tries to capture the orality of black culture so that the reader may not simply see the words on the page but also hear the changing tones and see the gestures specific to those who people her fictional world. Her language is to be savoured, nuances to be perceived, and images to be cherished. All this is more beautified through application of sophisticated techniques such as re-memory, flashbacks, dramatic voice in narration, stream of consciousness, oral tradition, and continuum. But the centre stage is what everything revolves around. That is significantly occupied by the black woman. The black female characters go through the inward passage of self-awareness. The novels are glaring examples of this. Most of the black female characters “defy the prescriptive roles thrust upon them by the society and in this attempt whether they emerge triumphant or not is another trajectory of discussion” (Singh 154). The pulls and pressures, the stress and strains, the onslaughts and buffets of misfortune of black women treated as underdog in a social structure afflicted with exploitation in all its nakedness, abuses and crimes find due place in Morrison’s novels. She retraces the past and speaks vehemently of race, class and gender.

In a role of womanist Morrison not only writes about black females who are proud of their vigour and ability to survive but also understands the frustrated fury of black men, whose identities are falsified and torn apart because the masculine ideal of power and control is both presented to them and
denied. She does not excuse but she comprehends the inverted, desperate, rejected search for affection and closeness that produce violence, even violence as extreme as the rape of a man’s own daughter. Morrison’s overarching concern throughout her oeuvre is with African American female realization of self. Her novels explore power dynamics between men and women, complexities within the community but primarily it deals with experiences of black women. These are integrated with cultural history. The black women faced the reality of double discrimination. They go through multiple oppressions from slavery up to capitalism that has persistently thwarted the black female sensibility. The black women’s concerted efforts to foster an authentic independent identity which for Morrison is, evolved out of coming together of the black and white culture in America. In all novels, the black female protagonist is posited within the black culture and their marginalization, exploitation and subjugation occur from the outside racist white culture and also within their own black community. They are vulnerable and their vulnerability is made apparent from their awareness that they are black and female and hence are aware of the intensity of their victimization. Paradoxically, this consciousness enables them to fortify their search for selfhood, resisting and refusing the racist and sexual dictates. Thus, a consistent pattern in the exploration of a black female, in Morrison’s novels, and the development of a self-realization takes place. The black female characters evolve from the initial phase of her search for a black authentic self in Pecola, searching and trying to establish her own self in black community in Sula, towards a positive growth and creating self identity is fostered in Sethe, and culminating yet again in self-realization in Florens. In all the four studied novels – *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula*, *Beloved*, and *A Mercy*, Toni Morrison has used blackness consciously as a symbol of racial identity that her female characters reclaim against white imperialism for an integrated black American identity. The novelist gives authenticity and voice to the interior life of the most complex black and female
experience in America. The center of her complex and multi-layered narrative is the unique cultural inheritance of African American. Morrison has attempted to retrieve or capture black experience which history has not documented.

…the reclamation of the history of black people in this country is of paramount importance because while you can’t really blame the conqueror for writing history his own way, you can certainly debate it. There is great deal of obfuscation and distortion and erasure, so that the presence and the heartbeat of black people have been systematically annihilated in many, many ways and the job of recovery is ours. (Davis 413)

The critics consider Toni Morrison as one of the most prolific women writers of the twentieth century. Her fiction has been dissected from different points of views. Critics and research scholars have treated her narrative in the light of racism and sexism. Some focus has been on the language and mythic structure of her narrative. The music therein has received some attention. Her black female characters have very often been compared with the characters inhabiting the narrative world of Alice Walker, Gloria Naylor and Zora Neale Hurston. Nellie Mckay, Barbara Christian, Trudier Harris, Karen Carmean, Marilyn Mobley and others in the 80s and 90s have dealt with the issues of racism, sexism, classism prevalent in Toni Morrison’s fiction. Recent criticism in these contemporary times is taking different turns. Scholars are focusing more on how Morrison tries to cope with the complexities of African American experiences in changing times and yet rooted in the traumatic past. She is raising questions that women still face – establishing one’s individuality, accepting the black past, the history, and acknowledging one’s self in the contemporary world. Perhaps this is
the reason that critics try to label Morrison. But she has clearly rejected to be addressed as feminist. At times she has been called black feminist, magical realist, mythical symbolist or black classicist. But the term more appropriately associated is womanist. And yet she has not entered the zone where her writings can be labelled simply because she writes the novels as a medium to express the black culture, black experience, the untold history, the gruesome reality of slavery period and the doubly oppressed black women. Her narrative style in her fictions is multi-dimensional. There is presence of multiple narrators voicing different aspects of the same reality. At times their narration merges. She hands over narration to characters frequently as in *The Bluest Eye*, Claudia MacTeer and the author share the narration burden. Morrison also presents a notion a reality that measures all other realities, situations and characters are viewed in relation to this reality. For instance, the concept of evil is relative and is transformed with shifts in cultural fears and values. An apparently fixed order, maintained over a length of time, is the basis of culture. This order tends to exclude as evil anything radically different from itself or that which threatens its existence. This concept of evil is a significant ideological gesture that poses a threat to peaceful existence.

A stranger, a foreigner, an outsider, a social deviant, anyone speaking in an unfamiliar language or acting in unfamiliar ways, anyone whose origins are unknown or who has extraordinary powers, tends to be set apart as other, as evil. (Jackson 52)

Structurally Morrison’s narrative never contains linear plot with a sense of finality. Her novels are “rhythmic and open-ended, aspiring towards the perfection of music – not of classical music that “signifies and closes,” but of
black music or jazz that always “keeps you on edge…agitates you” (Singh 27-8). Her novels do not have a traditional closure. It is a non-requirement for her. She works on creating a fantastic world where ambiguities arise. The concept of western time is done away with. Time for Morrison is not linear; history is only recovered time, stratified and circular. The novels are episodic in structure. The apparently unconnected episodes are internally structured and sound like a single tune. The chronology of events explodes in the sense that the narration does not conform to historical sequentiality. Most of all her novels start with protagonist’s childhood but is interrupted by the narration of the other facts apparently unconnected with that phase in the life of the protagonist. Chronological time is done away with as the past, present and future are not distinguished but realized in an eternal present through flashbacks. Morrison’s narrative model participates not only in a historical struggle among sub-altern communities but also in forging a new non-hegemonic realm of being and meaning. She presents African American experience not simply as it has been measured by dominant norms but as it has emerged in terms of a multi-level and differential struggle over meaning and subjectivity since slavery. Toni Morrison takes her readers on a “journey into black history” (Das 22). The themes of her novels cover wide range of struggles with alienation, fragmentation, self and identity, community life, race relations, supernatural, sexuality, etc. She develops and explores these themes in the light of the unfulfilled promises of the black migrant urban experience. According to Felski, her concern with the past “can throw critical light on the present, allowing us to question the smugness of the now and the sovereignty of the new” (Felski 21). Her words brings out the novel’s setting to life, be it a field, back porch, or a posh resort. There is an element of unexpected – including slang and even profanity – as characters speak from their hearts. Morrison utilizes language to show a character’s change of heart. She likes to throw in plot twists which add depth to her fiction. There is no one language pattern. Despite the complexity of language and plots, the
novels of Toni Morrison, stretches imagination and versatility becomes a hallmark of her style.

The first chapter titled ‘Introduction’ brings into focus the literary history of African American writers. Along with a brief introduction of Toni Morrison’s life and her career as a writer, an attempt is made to highlight the historical context of the slavery and slave narratives. The slave narratives are looked at so as to give an insight to the racial emergence and impact. The slave narratives focus upon the leading writers and form the base of traumatic slave sufferings and the depiction of inhuman conditions or aspects. Important events as Harlem Renaissance, Civil Rights movement, etc. are also looked at, though cursorily. With a brief introduction to the novels of Morrison that has been taken up for the research, the perspective of racist society is also presented. History as looked at and as the documented differs. There is an attempt to show how Morrison presents the “alternate” history. For Morrison history is something with an ongoing process with effects on the present and which shapes the future. In this introductory chapter contribution of Toni Morrison as a prominent contemporary black woman writer is discussed along with her visionary power to see the plight of the black women and their sufferings. Briefly Morrison’s writings are discussed in terms of exploring the black woman and her quest for self-realization.

The second chapter entitled ‘Effects of Internalized Racism’ attempts a study of *The Bluest Eye* (1970) as a documentation of internal racism and its effects on the black female characters. It explores the devastating effects that the western ideas of beauty have on a vulnerable black girl. This chapter shows the racial oppression in the form of the dominant white ideologies of beauty. Pecola Breedlove’s world is full of messages that are superior. This internalized racism damages Pecola who is in search for blue eyes because she believes that this would give her the epitome of beauty and make her acceptable in her home, and
black community at large. She hopes that after fulfilling this desire she will be lovable and will be able to alleviate the manifold miseries of her hate-filled, quarrelsome, violent family, ironically named Breedlove. The objective symbolically represented by the quest of blue eyes, forms the central plot of the novel. Other black female characters are looked upon and studied to reflect the sufferings and anguish of the black women as they too pass the circumstances in the society dominated by white supremacy. *The Bluest Eye* attempts to reveal these terrible consequences when African American adopts white values directly and indirectly. Pecola becomes the victim of a chain of African American people, including her own mother and father who have been twisted and perverted by the false and often vicious standards of the white world. She is not only the victim of racism but also of sexism. This chapter shows how Morrison weaves together the scenes in which the black female characters suffer as much from confused social directives as they do from abysmal poverty. As an African American Pecola is compelled to relinquish her individual cultural ways; as a female she is made inferior to her female attributes and remains trapped in the orbit of patriarchy. Morrison attacks the white cultural imposition on the vulnerable black culture. The chapter focuses upon the causes and devastating effects of racism, of the ways in which some Americans of African descent grow to look down on and despise others in accordance with an insidious, destructive value system in which categorization and discrimination are the key weapons. Morrison depicts racist narrative while at the same time depriving them of their power. At the heart of Pecola’s story though there is a search for identity and a desire to be seen. She becomes symbol of racial identity crisis. The chapter aside from depicting and analysing the experiences of the central victim creates a picture of a threatening world which is true even in the modern times.

The third chapter ‘Assertion of Black Female Identity’ studies the novel *Sula* as a progress towards assertion of one’s identity. Morrison celebrates
sisterhood, female bonding, racial issues and communal ties. Sula’s search for identity reflects female individuation. Morrison probes the black female stereotype that is detrimental to Sula’s definition of her ‘self’ that is persistently threatened by the predominant patriarchy in Bottom. The chapter highlights the black female protagonist’s struggle to create her own identity and values in a community set with traditional values and upholding the correct norms for living. Sula and Nel are not only symbolic of the women bonding but they are also presented as the new generation of black women. Eva Peace, Hannah and Sula are represented as three generation of black women. Sula is looked upon in this chapter as an emblem of black woman’s strength that provides definition to a total black female self. She prefers to make her own way of life in order to assert her individuality while experiencing the complexity of relationships. Her sufferance, her isolation from the black community, makes Sula the iconoclast. And yet Morrison sets the ball rolling, so as to say, by her black female characterization, thrusting them towards self-realization. Sula quests for self-identity by rejecting traditional expectations of behaviour and sets her own rules in her relationship with men. Morrison displays the idea of woman by many female archetypes. This novel focuses on the raising questions of traditional set of values as well as role of communal strength. An individual’s survival on her own terms as against the traditional roles assigned to women by the patriarchy. At the vortex of conflicting male culture and racial white culture, Sula’s search for a viable ‘self’ makes this novel a prominent one.

The fourth chapter entitled ‘Journey towards Self-Realization’ constitutes of two novels: *Beloved* and *A Mercy*. The focus of this chapter has been on the black females suffering in the black era of slavery. Morrison’s message is unmistakable. The individual’s and communities’ fates are bound with each other. Black women’s issues of self-recognition as a human being, is questioned. The female characters pass through en numbers of traumatic phases and
experiences of dehumanization. *Beloved* demonstrates how history is not over and done with. By giving voice to previously silenced stories told by women who have little power over their lives’ destinies, Morrison allows us to re-vision history. This novel is Morrison’s attempt as a writer to analyse the devastation of slavery on vulnerable blacks. Morrison re-tells history through the lives of ordinary people with women characters who struggle in a world created for the convenience of others. This novel explores the emotional legacy of slavery among black people in the United States. Set in the years before, during and after the American Civil War, it centres on three generations of black women: Baby Suggs, Sethe and Denver. The novel weaves their memories as they come to terms with their personal and collective past. Sethe the protagonist commits infanticide to save her daughter from a fate worse than death. Toni Morrison’s concern bear witness to the forgotten or erased past of African American. In her narrative, Morrison calls attention to the way she engenders her characters in order to dramatize what she perceives as perhaps the cruellest legacy of slavery: an alienation even from the self. Sethe’s search for meaning and wholeness in slavery and in liberty is looked upon in this chapter. It is through means of flashbacks to past tragedies and the deeply symbolic delineation of her continued emotional and psychological suffering, this novel explores the hardships endured by the black female protagonist. Also the collectivism as the first step in eradicating the racial oppression and class exploitation of African American is studied. Morrison uses *Beloved* as a vehicle to propose solidarity as the remedy for African American people. Also the chapter concludes that at the end Sethe not only subvert the stereotype image forced on her nut constructs self-realization.

*A Mercy* reveals what lies under the surface of slavery. The central action of the novel is the journey undertaken by a young black enslaved woman, Florens, to find the blacksmith whom she loves and who can cure her dying
mistress, Rebekka. This chapter explores how novel bridge the historical facts of patriarchy with the emotional resonance of marginalized women’s experiences. It shows colonial America in a dramatically new light. Above all, it is to hear different voices: to listen to what slaves of both African descent and Native identity have to say, to confront the experiences of a working – class English woman who emigrated to marry an unknown homesteader, of a free African economically self-sufficient blacksmith, or of white indentured labourers. Through the character of Florens and other females, Lina and Rebekka, Morrison shows that early America was especially dangerous, tenuous and brutal for women and girls. The chapter projects Morrison’s portrayal of the marginalised women’s emotional understanding, who appear in history only incidentally as a slave holder’s inventory. It is through such female characters that Morrison’s Florens survive the traumas of being other, being orphan, and being vulnerable and echoes the search for a safe community as well as identity. Florens and her journey to find blacksmith signify her physical as well as her inward journey. She undergoes such trials that she could not have possibly foreseen. Morrison asks questions that are as much about the present as they are about the past. In exploring Rebekka’s relationship with Lina, the Native, Morrison demonstrates that despite all they have in common through womanhood, there is a micro hierarchy within the homestead in which Mistress Rebekka (because of her Whiteness and Englishness) enjoys superior status. It presents a challenge to societal stereotypes. There has been an effort in this chapter to understand various issues like multiculturalism, motherhood, self-identity, slavery, biblical connotations, etc. The chapter shows the female characters in transition. Florens, the black female protagonist journey through mysterious circumstances with her personal history to the innermost psyche. The journey becomes her personal history to the innermost psyche. The journey becomes her discovery of selfhood in a manner. Here Morrison, in a way,
transcends the issues of racism and sexism which are central to her body of works, towards enveloping truth about human condition.

Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula*, *Beloved*, and *A Mercy* are a black woman writer’s progressive search for a space which will accept and acknowledge the black female’s self-definition. Toni Morrison’s novels are not just works valuable to her own people but also to the whole culture. She gives both voice and authority through the construction of community, to her black female characters. They face challenges of dominant ideologies, existing values and ideals, and yet simultaneously pass through the process of reclaiming their own self, their own community and their own culture. They struggle out of these conditions in which they are forced by slavery causing the issues of racial identities. Morrison believes strongly that the depiction of these black female characters also narrate the history which is untold. The history presented is “alternate” one. The documented history has left out many crucial slave histories and especially that of suffering black women. She believes that though the black women have paid heavily for being black and a woman during slave era, there have been many who have managed to define themselves. That which has not been stated is what Morrison is interested in. Having a womanist approach she shows how her characters, men and women, undergo sheer tortures, inhuman and bestial treatments. For her every individual needs to be accepted, recognized and be related to the community that one lives in. It can be said that Morrison becomes a spokesperson of the blacks as to be considered as human race. It is Morrison’s attention to the voices of the marginalized, of those unaccounted and disremembered, that gives rise to the narrative structures of her novels. The novel has provided a medium for her to articulate her ideological stance as a black woman writer and also realize her commitment to her people, in portraying a very complex black and female life. Morrison has taken concentrated efforts to probe the interiority of the most complex black and
female experience in white America. She has delved into multiple oppressions that the black woman has been subjected to, from slavery up to capitalism that has persistently thwarted the black female sensibility. And the women’s concentrated efforts to foster an authentic independent identity which for Morrison is, evolved out of coming together of the black and white racial imperialism and black sexism. As a woman writer she is able to understand the black female’s complex life of multifarious and multifaceted experiences. And that is why, for her, the novels she has striven to write about, are women centred and her commitment has been towards articulating the nuances of black women’s lives. She strongly believes and therefore portrays her black female characters having an African origin inherently creative and that creativity has been nurtured and has survived through several generations of black women in America, despite slavery and in spite of racism of the twentieth century. And that according to her has been the most enduring form of self – expression, which is arguably one aspect of self-definition or realization among black women. Since for Morrison a black woman is of primary concern and a black woman’s life and experiences are crucial for fostering and identity, she has focused on the psychological, emotional, social, cultural, political and historical aspects of a black woman’s experience, which help generate a self in a black woman. Morrison has delineated the various female stereotypes imposed on a black woman since slavery and the variations of such stereotypes that are realistic and functional even in the present day American context in which her novels are structured. She has attempted to analyse the characters of black females, their reasons for their internalisation and their eventual refutation of them, following their awareness of such negative definitions of black womanhood imposed on them by hegemonic culture. This Morrison has shown through the black female protagonist’s awareness of personal freedom, political and psychological and cultural independence that describe the individual protagonist’s self-identity. This awareness of the self in black female characters
and the attendant self-definition are effected stage – by – stage growth and development of Morrison’s black women characters.

Thus, a consistent pattern in the artistic exploration of black female characters in Morrison’s novels, and the development of an integrated self-identity is realized. In fact, the image of the black woman has progressed and evolved from the initial phase of her search for a black authentic self in Pecola and Sula towards a positive growth in Sethe and to complete the circle by going back to the roots of early slavery and survival as well as self-acceptance in Florens. In all these novels keeping the history as base Morrison uses blackness consciously as a symbol of racial identity that her female characters must rename and re-own by reclaiming their history rooted in slavery and white sovereignty for a whole black American identity. She has beautifully fused western literary models with her black oral traditions, to argue for evolving African American consciousness in her black female characters. And finally Morrison has, as a writer, consistently given authenticity and voice to the interior life of the most complex black and female experience in America. Hence, as a writer, she has realized her commitment to her people and as such has attempted at refiguring the nature of African American literary canon. As a key player in the creation of a black literary aesthetic she has sought, over the course of her literary career, to create an alternative to dominant assumptions about how one reads and writes about the black people. As a member of the oppressed social group and as a woman, she is interested in what it means to be subordinated and made invisible. Toni Morrison is a part of the continuous traditions – the writing of black women – a tradition that exposes, through the novel form, not only the lives of black people but also the multifarious dimensions of their inner psyche. It comes as no surprise that Morrison has been the recipient of major American literary awards and the most coveted Nobel Prize for literature. She stands out as the first black woman writer to win this
highest acclaim. Her ability to depict the uniqueness of the black women, while at the same time illustrating universal truths, has resulted in both popular and critical acclaim. American literature and the body of literature written by black women novelists in particular, are richer as a result of her contribution. Hers is a story to pass on – to all individuals exploring the African American literature, the role of black female characters, racial issues, the search for self, and the black community.
REFERENCES


