CHAPTER-I
INTRODUCTION

Narrative has never been merely entertainment for me. It is, I believe, one of the principal ways in which we absorb knowledge. I hope you will understand, then, why I begin these remarks with the opening phrase of what must be the oldest sentence in the world, and the earliest one we remember from childhood: “Once upon a time …” (Alfred 7)

This was the first remark of Toni Morrison while addressing the members of the Swedish Academy in her acceptance speech upon receiving the Nobel Prize for Literature. For Morrison, the words we use and the way in which we use them is how we, as human beings, communicate to each other our thoughts, feelings, and actions and therefore our knowledge of the world and its people. For her, language implies agency, an act with consequences. It clearly shows her passion for story telling. There are, however, many more strands in her literary world that need simultaneous attention from the scholars and the readers engaged in the study of her literary works.

Morrison is a well-known writer in the literary corpus of African-American world who has won wide acclaim from the critics not only in America but throughout the world. She was awarded the 1993 Nobel Prize for Literature making her the first African-American to win this honour. Her novels explore issues of African-American female identity and voice the experiences of women living on the margins of white American society by integrating the elements of oral tradition, postmodern literary techniques, and magical realism. The best-selling African-American female author, Morrison represents the breakthrough for other black women novelists to succeed in the mainstream publishing industry. She received the National Book Critics Circle Award for Song of Solomon (1977), the Pulitzer Prize in fiction for Beloved (1987), and the 1996 National Book Foundation Medal for Distinguished
Contribution to American Letters. Four of her novels were chosen for the Oprah Winfrey National Book Club, and *Beloved* was adapted for a major motion picture in 1998. In 2002 scholar Molefi Kete Asante listed Morrison on his list of 100 Greatest African-Americans.

Every writer being the product of his/her age in terms of the forces that impact his/her mind and creativity, it is relevant to highlight the characteristic features of his/her novels and explore the varied factors that shaped his/her literary sensibility. This facilitates the comprehension of the graduating process of the writer’s creative instinct.

Morrison’s original name is Chloe Anthony Wofford. She was born on February 18, 1931, in Lorain, Ohio, where her father worked as a ship welder. She was very close in age to her sister with whom she formed a strong bond that continued throughout her life. She was encouraged by her family to read and spend much of her childhood at the local library. As a child, she constantly read her favorite authors like Jane Austen and Leo Tolstoy. She graduated with a B.A. from Howard University in 1953, and went on to complete her masters in English at Cornell University in 1955, for which she wrote a thesis on suicide in the works of William Faulkner and Virginia Woolf. She was married in 1958 and had two sons, but got divorced in 1964, and became a single mother. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, she worked as an instructor at Texas Southern University in Houston and at Howard University in Washington, D.C. She served as an editor for Random House publishers from 1965 to 1983.

Morrison’s first novel, *The Bluest Eye* (1970), was an expansion of a short story she had written while still in college but *The Bluest Eye* received scant notice. Morrison’s career as a nationally recognized author was launched with the success of *Sula* (1973), her second novel, after which even *The Bluest Eye* was retrospectively renewed as an important work of fiction. Continuing to write, she gave to the readers *Song of Solomon, Tar Baby, Beloved, Jazz, Paradise, Love* and her latest novel *A Mercy* (2008). She has also written children’s books *The Big Box* (2002), *The Book of Mean People* (2002), short story “Recitatir” (1983), a

She has taught as a guest professor in English and humanities at a number of colleges and universities, including the State University of New York at Albany and at Purchase, Yale University, Bard College, Harvard University, and Trinity College at Cambridge University in England. From 1989 until her retirement in 2006, Morrison held the Robert F. Goheen Chair in the Humanities at Princeton University. In the Democratic primary contest for the 2008 presidential race, Morrison endorsed Senator Barack Obama over Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton. She is currently a member of the editorial board of *The Nation*, a magazine devoted for decades, to the cause of African-American community in America.

The narrative strategies Morrison adopts from *The Bluest Eye* (1970) to *A Mercy* (2008) through *Jazz* (1992) show that she writes either within or against the conventions of the Western literary tradition. Her novels offer complex examination of problems within the African-American community, power dynamics between men and women, and issues of racism in relations between black and white America. Her primary interest lies with the experiences of African-American women whose quest for individual identity is intertwined with their community and their cultural history. Her fiction is self-consciously concerned with myth, legend, storytelling, and oral tradition, as well as with memory, history, and historiography, and has thus been recognized as postmodern meta-narrative. Her stories are conscious of African cultural heritage as well as African-American history, thus demonstrating the importance of the past in the struggle of contemporary African-Americans. She employs strong elements of Black English in her dialogue and narration to relate
language to identity. Her novels often employ elements of magic, fantasy, and supernaturalism.

In the first phase of her literary career, Morrison is more concerned with the depiction of African-American community, issues of race and beauty standard. This phase consists of four novels i.e. *The Bluest Eye* (1970), *Sula* (1973), *Song of Solomon*, and *Tar Baby* (1981). *The Bluest Eye*, her first novel, is set in the 1940s and addresses issues of race and beauty standards through the figure of Pecola Breedlove, an eleven-year-old African-American girl who dreams of having blue eyes, and long, blond hair. When Pecola is raped by her own father and becomes pregnant, she plunges into insanity and insists that she has the bluest eyes in the whole world.

Her next three novels, *Sula*, *Song of Solomon*, and *Tar Baby* are generally regarded as a trilogy. *Sula* centers on the powerful bonds of friendship between Sula Peace and Nel Wright, who meet as girls and maintain their friendship into adulthood. However, this bond is ruptured, when Nel finds her husband in bed with Sula. In this novel, Morrison explores the role of female friendship in the formation of individual identity which, she finds, is often superseded by women’s relationship with men. *Song of Solomon* centres on the character of Milkman Dead, who is born in the North but journeys to the South only to discover that he is a descendant of Solomon, a member of a mythical West African tribe whose members could fly. This novel explores issues of African-American history and myth and their role in the formation of individual identity. *Tar Baby* is set on the Isle de Chevaliers in the Caribbean, in contemporary times. With the character of Jadine, a successful fashion model and student of art history, this novel examines the dilemma of assimilation and cultural identity in the middle-class of African-Americans. In this novel, Morrison almost eschews heroes and heroic patterns in order to concentrate on structures in space and on the positioning of characters. The heroic dimension in the western sense of the word appears to be definitively
discarded, a new dichotomy divides the structure of the novel—the opposition between the progressive and retrospective visions.

The second phase in Morrison’s literary career includes *Beloved* (1987), *Jazz* (1992), and *Paradise* (1998), each set in a different period of African-American history and are often loosely grouped as another trilogy. What characterizes the second phase is the author’s working out of the implication that identity may be more of a construct than a biological essence. *Beloved* combines elements of magical realism with the tradition of the African-American slave narrative in the story of Sethe, a former slave struggling to raise her children in the Post-Civil War era. The novel also indictsthe trappings of the black experience by exposing the inefficient historical accounts of slavery and the lives of slaves.

In *Jazz*, Morrison’s narrative structure and voice are based on the structural elements of jazz music. The narrative centres on the bizarre non-events that follow these melodramatic scenes. Morrison’s usual montage of flashbacks, repetitions with variations, and perspectives is designed not so much to enhance and multiply the usual dramatic core of the plot as to produce a kind of emphatic justification for actions that seem to defy understanding. The technique of using an unreliable narrator generally contributes to enhancing the virtualities of the story. This novel concerns a romantic triangle between Violet, her husband Joe and an eighteen-year old girl named Dorcas, whom Joe comes to love. Joe’s passion for Dorcas ultimately results in his shooting her. Enraged by her husband’s betrayal, Violet goes to the girl’s funeral and cuts the face of the corpse with a knife.

*Paradise* explores the tensions between the all-black town of Ruby and an all-women convent located on the outskirts of the town. Threatened by the empowerment of women in the convent, the men of Ruby invade it and massacre the women living there. *Paradise* has a multithreaded beginning that moves to a unified ending, and thus portrays all characters, as narrators. What is remarkable and significant is how the varied sets of stories, initially
narrated by unrelated characters are juxtaposed with careful pertinence to echo a single plot. Third, how a singular omnipresent narrator sounds immensely incompetent and inefficient in leading the narrative to its logical ending.

The third phase, which includes Love (2003) and A Mercy (2008), suggests a more postmodern articulation of identity. This novel sets out with a long section in italics where an unnamed narrator characterizes herself as reticent, reserved and almost speechless. For a narrator, this looks like rather a strange narrative strategy i.e. split narrative technique that divides the plot in different time periods. Only later, the reader finds that the narrative voice belongs to L, a cook, who watches and comments what is going on in the Cosey household. But there are also passages where figurative narration with changing third-person internal localizers seems to prevail. The novel is set in a once-luxurious vacation resort catering to African-American visitors. Narrated by L., the former cook at the closed-down resort, this novel concerns the struggle between two women, Heed and Christine, for the affections of Bill Cosey, the now-deceased owner of the resort. Heed and Christine begin as girlhood friends. Their friendship is destroyed, when Cosey, Christine’s grandfather, purchases the eleven-year old Heed from her parents to take her as his child bride. Heed and Christine, now old women, live in the mansion of the closed-down resort, fiercely battling one another over the ambiguous will Cosey had scribbled on a restaurant menu.

A Mercy (2008) reveals what lies beneath the surface of slavery. Florens lives and works for eight years on Vaark’s rural New York farm. Lina, a Native American, who works with her, tells in a parallel narrative how she became one of a handful of survivors of a plague that killed her tribe. Vaark’s wife Rebekka describes leaving England for New York to be married to a man she has never seen. The death of their subsequent children is devastating, and Vaark is hoping that eight-year old Florens will help alleviate Rebekka’s loneliness. Vaark, an orphan describes his journeys from New York to Maryland and
Virginia, commenting on the role of religion in the culture of the different colonies, along with their attitudes toward slavery. All these characters are uproots, struggling to survive in an alien environment filled with danger and disease. When smallpox threatens Reb ekka’s life in 1692, Florens, now sixteen, is sent to find a black freedman who has some knowledge of herbal medicines. Her journey is dangerous, but proves to be the turning point in her life. Morrison examines the roots of racism by going back to the earliest days of slavery, providing glimpses of the various religious practices of the time, and showing how all the women are victimized. The people believe that they cannot shape the world; it is the world that shapes them. Morrison depicts the journey of women towards self-enlightenment and by the end of this novel, the reader understands what ‘a mercy’ really means.

The shaping influence of the surrounding forces on her is clearly visible in her narrative technique. Her own life that carries the shadows of her race during slavery and even after its emancipation has a direct bearing on her writings. She has become a representative voice of her ethnicity and highlights its pangs of alienation and racism in the United States. A Morrisonian reader has to be simultaneously conscious of the socio-economic status of African-Americans for a fuller understanding of her fiction. Inspite of the contemporary critical enquiries where the author is dead and the text faces threats to its life, one cannot ignore the socio-political and economic pulsating reality beneath. A scrutiny of some of the influencing factors that shaped her literary sensibility would be in place here.

In her childhood, Morrison saw the plight of the Lorain’s people. Her early years in Lorain created within her sensitivity towards the struggling mass, particularly, the African-American people. She was profoundly impressed by her father as he believed that black people were the humans of the globe. Morrison’s years at Random House, where she served as an editor, went a long way in stimulating her literary consciousness. By editing some of the significant works written by Africans, she was exposed to the thoughts of those who were
more conscious than she was of the nature of the plight confronting her ethnicity. One such African, Chinweizu, whose work *The West and the Rest of Us* explores the nature of African suppression and exploitation, had a considerable impact on her. Morrison learned from Alex Haley’s *Roots* the dialectic relationship between discovering one’s ancestral roots and discovering one’s self; from Toni Cade Bambara the concept of the African Spirit, and from Jean Paul Sartre—the French existentialist, the idea that a man is nothing but what he makes of himself.

The narratives produced by the emancipated slaves, particularly by black authors before the 1970s more or less exactly replicated dominant patterns. Morrison tells the readers why she began to write during the winter of 1967 as she was lonely, depressed, and living in a place where she had no friends. But how did she come to choose her particular subject and unique style? Her reasons had much to do with what she perceived as a gaping hole in Western literature.

Morrison was impressed by the black Americans like Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin, whose books she had read eagerly. But they seemed to be depicting black culture for a white audience. Morrison wanted to write a book about black people, in the language of black people, without having to look over her shoulder to explain her world to white people. Claudia Tate writes in this connection, “novels by white women were of no support in her undertaking since the nature and definition of the conflicts reflected in their works are very different from those experienced by black women.” (122) The only firm basis she could rely on was the oral tradition. Hence, she makes a recurrent plea to critics to take into account her ethnic roots and the tradition of the village storyteller. Morrison says, “I write what I have recently begun to call village literature, fiction that is really for the village, for the tribe.”(Bell 289)

At Cornell, Morrison studied the stylistics of modernist memory, Virginia Woolf and William Faulkner, who had cracked open the novel to depict the secular process of
fragmentation and madness more minutely. Morrison herself has played an active role in promoting black voices. At Random House, she ensured that black writers would find a receptive space in publishing their literature and their voices would not be compromised by the imposition of the alien standards. Important publications by authors such as Mohammed Ali, Toni Cade Bambara, Angela Davis, and Gayl Jones received Morrison’s encouragement. These influences must have grounded her narrative talent towards a mature originality.

Slave narratives, emancipatory narrative and neoslave narratives following the tradition set by their predecessors actively engaged in highlighting the complex predicament of their race existed even before Morrison. Slave narrative then was a narrative written by a former African-American slave that typically recounts that individual’s life as a slave and how he managed to escape from the peculiar institution. Although autobiographical, slave narratives mainly aimed to convince the reader that slavery needed to be abolished because of its devastating impact on human lives and human spirit. The first slave narrative was published in 1760, but the genre became prominent in the thirty years leading up to the Civil War (1861-1865), after which slavery was abolished by the thirteenth amendment. Frederick Douglass’s *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845) is an American slave narrative. Bernard W.Bell defines neoslave narrative as “residually oral, modern narratives of escape from bondage to freedom.”(289) Morrison’s narrative is clear departure as it concerns something beyond a state of being. It is a description of the ways to achieve freedom. Such narratives are commonly known as liberatory narratives. These had a plot with a clearly defined beginning and ending, a chronological arrangement of events, and reliable and omniscient narrators. But it was being felt that these were no longer sufficient to portray the perceptions of enslaved blacks and their world. The liberatory narratives imbibed some postmodernist characteristics—fragmentation, non-linearity and discontinuity as well.
While discussing and highlighting her literary craft, Morrison observes that while “no slave society in the history of the world wrote more—or more thoughtfully—about its own enslavement, but the interior lives of the self emancipated narrators remained veiled and unexamined.” (The Site 109) Therefore, her enterprise as an African-American writer involves the desire to extend, fill in and complement slave autobiographical narratives through the use of memory and imagination in order to recover a usable past. “My vulnerability,” Morrison says, “would lie in romanticizing blackness rather than demonizing it; vilifying whiteness rather than reifying it.” (Morrison, Playing x-xi)

The early narratives portray the slave as a wayfarer in need of the protection that only white paternal authority could provide. Most of the middle-period works, published from the 1830s through the 1860s, are claimed to be written by the narrators themselves. The stories are shaped according to the requirements of the abolitionists who published them and arranged readers. William L. Andrews emphasizes that “the relationship between narrator and text was triangulated through the ordering intelligence of a white amanuensis or editor.” (7) Marion Wilson Sterling and Dorothy Sterling acknowledge:

> The narratives transcribed in the twentieth century bear more than their share of the interviewers’ influence. They transcribed the ex-slaves’ speech as they heard it, as they thought they heard it, or as they thought it should have been said, and sometimes, the whiter the interviewer’s skin, the heavier the dialect and the more erratic the spelling. A number of the interviews also went through an editorial process in which dialect was cleaned up or exaggerated, depending on the editors’ judgment. (xvii-xviii)

Morrison is interested in ripping the veil drawn over proceedings too terrible to relate for any black, or from any marginalized category, who were seldom invited to participate in the discourse even when they were its topic. Morrison’s narrative technique also displaces
the term ‘black’ from its position of dismissive ‘othering’ in the dominant concept of Americanness which historically has posited itself as a transparent norm. Morrison states that for her, “a writer who is black and a woman, writing fiction is very different, more than the authors of slave narratives did in the past.” (The Sites 110)

At this point, it is highly relevant to review the existing criticism about Morrison’s work before a fresh perspective is evolved and examined. Many critics applaud Morrison’s artistic talent and her contribution to American literature, more particularly her complex treatment of issues of African-American identity. Numerous books and articles bring forth her multi-dimensional personality as a creative artist dealing with the traumatic experiences of her community that has been facing anxiety of existence in its adopted home–America, the so called land of unbound opportunity.


Since the inception of Morrison’s first novel The Bluest Eye (1970), a huge amount of literary books has been written which demonstrate her ability to dive deep into her characters’ mind and vividly portray their complex sensibility with her own technical expertise. It is not
possible to take all the books into consideration yet some of the critical books are more readable than others.

In *The Freedom to Remember: Narrative, Slavery and Gender in Contemporary Black Women’s Fiction* (1984), Angelyn Mitchell examines contemporary literary revisions of slavery in the United States by black women writers. Mitchell points out that critics have studied *Beloved*, only from the standpoint of racial victimization from and within the purview of liberal cultural forces and thus termed such a work as liberatory narratives. She feels that they have missed “how the liberatory narrative functions to emancipate its readers from the legacies of slavery in American society, by facilitating a deeper discussion of the issues and by making them new through illumination and interrogation.” (5)

Another book *Self-Discovery and Authority in Afro-American Narrative* by Valerie Smith (1987) has grown out of the writer efforts to understand both the influence of the slave narratives on later black writing and the variety of ways in which the idea of literacy is used within the tradition of African-American letters. The writer argues, “Slave narrators and the protagonist-narrators of certain twentieth-century novels by Afro-American writers affirm and legitimize their psychological autonomy by telling the stories of their own lives.” (Smith 3) This book examines autobiography as process rather than genre and is as much about its method as it is about its explicit subject. It consists of five chapters; the fifth chapter is on Morrison’s Narratives of Community. Valerie points out that in Morrison’s first three novels flashbacks abound, when her characters occasionally reminisce in their own voices in mid-conversation.

In *Crime of Innocence in the Fiction of Toni Morrison* (1989), Terry Otten highlights the fortunate fall and its related themes of the nature of good and evil, and argues that Morrison fuses Biblical allusion with African myth and fantasy to depict a world couched at times in seemingly contradictory truths. Otten maintains that Morrison projects a fortunate fall idea through characters that must destroy the false identity ascribed to them as blacks in a
spurious garden. A fortuitous fall then, Otten opines, becomes in Morrison’s world—a return to true community or village consciousness—a world in which not to fall becomes more destructive than to fall. Otten finds his pattern repeated in each of Morrison’s novels: *The Bluest Eye, Sula, Song of Solomon, Tar Baby*, and *Beloved*. He concludes, “In all her works the fall from innocence becomes a necessary gesture of freedom and a profound act of self-awareness.” (15)

The book, *Race, gender, and desire: narrative strategies in the fiction of Toni Cade Bambara, Toni Morrison, and Alice Walker* (1989) by Elliott Butler-Evans draws largely on narratology, feminist cultural theory, semiotics, and Neo-Marxist concepts of ideology. This study explores the relationship between two conflicting discourses—one an inscription of race, the other focused on gender—within the fictional narratives of three African-American women writers. Butler feels that desire is always there at the start of narrative, often in a state of initial arousal, and remarks, “A recurrent theme in Toni Morrison’s statements on Afro-American fiction is its relationship to the viability of Black culture.” (89) She argues that the loss of the Black oral tradition and the appropriation and incorporation of Black music by the dominant culture have necessitated the development and production of fiction discourse.

*Fiction and Folklore: The Novels of Toni Morrison* (1991) of Trudier Harris presents a provocative if incomplete study of Morrison’s mastery of folklore forms, which however suggests the barrier between literature and folklore. Harris calls for a reconsideration of accepted definitions of folklore, asking the question “Can a literary text create materials that will subsequently enter the oral tradition and be passed down by word of mouth as original folk creation?” (65) She asserts that Morrison employs traditional European strategies in her fiction, reconstructing them to create new folklore forms. Harris’s study briefly examines the history of folklore in literature and addresses Morrison’s novels in chronological order of publication. She discusses the novels as a series of reversals, inversions, and subversions of
European folk forms. According to Harris, *The Bluest Eye* inverts “The Ugly Duckling; *Sula* subverts traditional structure; reverses the Odyssean journey; *Tar Baby* subverts “Snow White” and “Sleeping Beauty” and *Beloved* reverses the traditional ghost story. Harris correctly observes that Morrison inverts and subverts Euro-American literary forms and legitimately views her works against such model. Harris’ work fails to bridge the gap between African-American folklore and its literary critics.

Rigney Barbara Hill’s *The Voices of Toni Morrison* (1991), analyses Morrison’s five novels—*Beloved, The Bluest Eye*, *Song of Solomon*, *Sula*, and *Tar Baby* by defining a black feminist aesthetic. “The many voices of Toni Morrison”, Rigney argues, “are manifested in her radical use of language, her reformulations of self and identity, her reinterpretations of history as both fact and mythology, and her images of female desire.” (11) Rigney describes that Morrison’s texts are characterized by deliberate and meaningful silences, by the movement beyond language into music, and by representations of magic realism and a conjured up world. Morrison’s fictions disrupt traditional chronologies and diffuse linearity, but bear historical witness to the realities and brutalities of slavery, reconfliction and depression. Rigney’s study transcends traditional interpretations, maps new territory for postmodern fictions, and cultivates a common ground for a discourse on theory, race, and gender.

Another book *Toni Morrison: Critical Perspectives Past and Present* edited by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and K. A. Appiah, (1993), contains book reviews and critical essays on the work of Morrison, as well as four interviews with the author. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Houston Baker, Jr., Barbara Christian, Valerie Smith, and Marilyn Sanders Maple, among others, treat Morrison’s individual works through *Beloved*. They only map out major themes scattered within her works. This book includes a chronology of the life and works of Morrison and bibliography of the critical works on Morrison. (Gates 34)
In *The Lyrical Dimensions of Spirituality: Music, Voice, and Language in the Novels of Toni Morrison* (1994) Karla K. Holloway examines the ways in which Morrison utilizes a lyrical narrative voice in *The Bluest Eye* and *Song of Solomon* to express African-American experience and construct a sense of cultural identity in the African Diaspora. Holloway asserts: “Morrison’s novels recall a West African version of reality that allows the coexistence of the spiritual and physical worlds within the same narrative spaces. In these spaces, mythic voices reconstruct an African-American universe.” (57)

In *Toni Morrison and the American Tradition: A Rhetorical Reading* (1996), Herbert W. Rice investigates the strategies Morrison adopts from *The Bluest Eye* to *Jazz* to show that she writes exclusively either within or against the conventions of the Western literary tradition. Morrison’s discursive universe, Rice contends is “of and apart from the Western traditions in American literature.” (155) Rice sets out to map the ways in which Morrison both complies with and rebels against the notion that she is like Joyce, Hardy, and Faulkner by exposing an irreconcilable tension at the core of her work that is informed by the multicultural influence. Rice succeeds in recycling the notion that we can differentiate and locate black and white expectations, values, desires, and limitations along with aesthetic and rhetorical strategies.

Patric Bryce Bjorek’s *The Novels of Toni Morrison: The Search for Self and Place within the Community*, (1996) consists of seven chapters which deal with the search for self and place within community, an on-going phenomenon in American discourse. The critic analyses that Toni Morrison’s novels are grounded in the questions–Who am I? Where do I belong? These questions seem to reverberate in the mind of her characters that becomes a determinant in the development of both character and plot. Bryce says, “Morrison’s novels demonstrate a different kind of search than many American readers are accustomed to. Morrison’s work consistently shows that identity and place are found in the community and
in the communal experience, and not in the transcendence of society or in the search for a single, private self.” (24)

Another book, *Toni Morrison: Contemporary Critical Essays* (1998) edited by Linden Peach comprises of eleven critical essays on the novels of Toni Morrison. Linden Peach’s “Introduction” provides an overview of each essay, identifying the theoretical perspectives from which each critic approaches Morrison’s writing. Peach briefly yet clearly explains the origin and layers of sub-theories within each critical school. In addition, he specifies how the writers of these essays have modified traditional critical theories to interpret African-American literature in the body of literature produced in the United States by writers of African descent. The essays of Cynthia Davis, Barbara Rigney, Doreatha Drummond Mbalia and Houston Baker to name a few are included in this book. He says, “I have made the essays accessible to anyone who wants to appreciate the gifts of Toni Morrison even more fully.” (66)

In *Circles of Sorrow, Lines of Struggle* (1998), Gurleen Grewal portrays Nobel laureate Morrison as a historiographer attempting to bridge the gap between emergent black middle-class America and its subaltern origin. She demonstrates how Morrison’s novels perform a political function of recovery. Morrison’s fiction, Grewal posits, is its reevaluation of the individual via the complex sociopolitical heritage. The book invites the reader into the collective struggle of humankind who is living the long sentence of history by repeating, contesting and remaking it. Grewal explains Morrison’s concern with African-American identity and states, “African-Americans must negotiate a place for themselves within a dominant culture; how they situate themselves with respect to their own history and culture is a pervasive theme of Morrison’s novels.” (9)

*Toni Morrison’s The Bluest Eye* (1999) that begins with an “Introduction” by the editor Harold Bloom, is of great importance as it presents the most important 20th century criticism on the novel in the title. The critical essays reflect, Bloom says, “a variety of schools of
criticism with critical biographies, notes on the contributing critics, a chronology of the author’s life.” (29)

John N. Duvall’s *The Identifying Fictions of Toni Morrison: Modernist Authenticity and Postmodern Blackness* (2000), which consists of six chapters, looks at becoming of Toni Morrison as a drama in two phases. Phase one runs from her first novel, *The Bluest Eye* through *Sula* and *Song of Solomon*, and culminates in *Tar Baby*; the second phase consists of her historical trilogy of *Beloved*, *Jazz* and *Paradise*, sharing “a postmodern awareness of the construction of a usable identity.” (8) This book focuses largely on the earlier phase of Morrison’s fiction, but draws upon the later novels as well when relevant to the earlier self-reflexive stage of her writing. Duvall shrewdly assigns to each of Morrison’s novels the precursor writer interrogating: Ellison for *The Bluest Eye*, Woolf for *Sula*, Faulkner for *Song of Solomon* and *Jazz*, Stowe for *Beloved*, and the earlier Morrison herself for *Tar Baby* and *Paradise*. Duvall comments, “whatever the exact motivation for Morrison’s decision to become Toni, one thing is clear: the question of identity is not a given for Morrison because she rejects her given name. Moreover, she repeatedly refers to this act of self-naming in coded, yet fairly overt ways, creating the paradox of the thing that wants simultaneously to be concealed and revealed.” (20)

In *Toni Morrison in Postmodernism: Key Figures* (2002) Thomas B. Howe observes that Morrison’s use of multiple narrative voices in many of her novels is the key element. Howe notes: “Morrison’s fiction repeatedly challenges cultural traditions defined by patriarchal, assimilationist and totalizing standards. Ever since her first novel, she has set herself in opposition to the European-American White mainstream by portraying and celebrating unique, powerful voices of marginalized women from American history and contemporary American life.” (7-8)

Doreatha Drummond Mbalia in her book *Toni Morrison’s Developing Class Consciousness* (2003) observes, the maturing of Morrison’s consciousness from her “early exploration of racism in *The Bluest Eye* through her gradually increasing awareness of the impact of historical and current events in *Sula* and *Song of Solomon*, to her growing understanding of the nature of capitalism and the necessity for collective struggle in *Tar Baby* and *Beloved*.” (37) The second edition brings us up to date by exploring Morrison’s later works. In the ‘Afterward’ of the book, Doreatha also comments on Morrison’s novel *Love*.

Mapping out the distinctive characteristics of Morrison’s art and craft, these critics have focused on the literary and cultural trends of which her novels form a part. Defining the distinctive identity of the African-American community—the plethora of criticism reveals—has been the chief pre-occupation of Morrison. As a novelist she has taken up those issues and problems in response to which this identity is formed and shaped.

Noticeably, no Morrisonian critic or scholar has highlighted the poststructuralist perspective relating to her art of narration. There are stray articles and commentaries on narratology in Morrison, a full length study devoted to this important aspect of her art is missing. The present study aims to investigate and map out different contours of this aspect.
of Morrison. Morrison uses different narrative techniques, and the aim of this study is to discover, beneath the layers of text or stories, the real phenomenon of such narrative techniques that utilizes resources in native languages, and uses non-colonial forms of history-recording, such as myths, folk songs, ballads and stories. The oral quality in her narratives and her desire to manipulate the reader’s interest accounts for the frequent variations in stylistic emphasis. Her narratives at the same time reveal that the storyteller needs to maintain her/his hold on readers and create in their minds the illusion that they hold the key to the mystery. The need for the implied narrator in the completion of the tale accounts not only for the ellipses or omissions, but also for the digressions and the general waywardness of Morrison’s narratives. This entails a fundamentally different approach of narration in the Western tradition. She herself points out that she is “not explaining anything to anybody. Her work bears witness.”(LeClair 26) Trying neither to instruct nor to provoke, she inspires her community with a sense of its own values.

The black oral tradition is far from sufficient for expressing the complexity of Morrison’s fiction. It seems that stressing its ethnic quality she attempts to balance the imbalance created by the critiques of Western commentators. She does not feel to have been misinterpreted or read from the wrong perspective. When one takes a closer look at those familiar narrative patterns, one discovers that they are affected by a disturbing absence of stability, as if they were considered from a perspective unadapted to bring their latent virtualities into existence. Morrison revises and reconsider the tradition of the novel. Experimentally, she introduces asymmetry and obliqueness in order to test the validity. Archetypal patterns and classical references are subverted by the introduction of a parodic slant where lies a difference that questions the credibility of the model. Her fiction seems to express the aspirations of a marginalized community in the face of mainstream domination. Her novels are far from being linearly evolutive.
Although, the creative project Morrison is pursuing is not strikingly different from that of other artists in the black community yet there is a domain in which she is probably unsurpassed—that is the vision she imprints on the reality she has elected to evoke. In order to convey the distinctiveness of that vision, she resorts to two comparisons—she underlines her artistic affinities with painting and the pictorial arts to depict universality. She looks for fragmented images which are the germs from which she develops the fictional scene. Take for instance, the sentences of most of the chapters in *Beloved*, which provide self-sufficient summaries of the chapter’s contents: “124 was spiteful” or “Rainwater held to pine needles for dear life and Beloved could not take her eyes off Sethe.” (Morrison, 57) Still the chapter has to be developed in order to discover further progressions and extensions of the initial impression. Morrison says, “I’ve never written the beginnings of any book first; I didn’t know the beginning. I just start!” (Bakerman 57) On the other hand she always knows the endings before she starts, even the words and the sentences.

Secondly, far from presenting the systematic development of causes into effects, Morrison proceeds from one vision to the next. The finished narrative is an attempt to connect the important scenes in her novels through chains of imagery that weave into one another, recreate the complexity of the original impression. It is the intense shock created by a series of pivotal scenes that constitute the magmatic center of the Morrisonian novel. This makes her distinctive.

In her narratives Morrison rewrites history as a process where the present and the past interact in a dynamic way. The linear and progressive narrative of the Western tradition is replaced by the unfinished, many-voiced story of a community, where interest in the progression of plots is abandoned in favor of the process of accumulating multiple stories. Morrison uses different narrative techniques and devices to interrogate space, time, and persona to overcome the insolubility of persons as well as the distance between spaces and
times. Morrison’s narrator in the novels struggles to be free of the slavery. She has convincingly shown, writers placed in that position confront not so much the pressure of models already in existence as a dearth of precedents, at times, a systematic attempt at negating the very reality they intend to express is to be taken care of. Morrison begins her first novel with the consciousness that “There were no books about me, I didn’t exist in the literature I had read...this person, this female, and this black did not exist.” (Russel 45) The artistic venture of the minority writer does not merely consist in expressing the unexpressed but in giving voice to unspeakable things unspoken.

Morrison aims at capturing something which defines what makes a book, black. And that has nothing to do with whether the people in the books are black or not. Her novels bear witness to the experience of the black community and blacks in that community. In the past, she asserts, music expressed these things and kept us alive. Unfortunately music no longer serves this function and other forms of expression, like the novel, are needed. Morrison wants her prose to recreate black speech, to restore to its original power that black people spoke. For her, language is the thing that black people love so much—the saying of words, holding them on the tongue, experimenting with them, playing with them. Morrison wants readers to participate and be involved actively in her novels. Readers are encouraged to create the novel with her and to help construct meaning. Her writing is meant as a communal experience, a sharing of passion and ideas and responses, with her holding the reader’s hand during the experience. She never uses adverbs like softly or angrily to describe characters’ speeches, it is the reader who feels the speaker’s emotion from the writing. The search to find narrative methods that resist the totalizing impulse of narrative and of readers themselves is the central aspect of Morisson’s fictional technique. This is connected to her investment in an oral, African-American tradition of storytelling; the Griot.
The present study proposes to examine the novels of Toni Morrison from the twin perspectives—the art of story telling i.e. narratology and recall as narrative technique. Recall is a narrative device that a writer uses to remember the past happening. Recall includes memory, interior monologue, stream of consciousness and flashback. Morrison has extensively used all these narrative devices to make her characters pour out their minds. As the novels of Morrison begin *in medias res*, it is obvious that the writer would have to go back to tell the earlier story to the reader in flashback using narrative devices such as recall, interior monologue, memory, stream of consciousness etc. The study will see narratology in relation to theme, in relation to history and in relation to (dis)guised image of slavery in different novels. The assumption is that in almost all her novels; Morrison has taken the stories back to the age of slavery and to understand the novels, it is desirable to go to the narrative technique she uses and the methods she adopts to depict history. An allied area of enquiry will be to analyze the impact of this narrative technique revealing and asserting the central theme of the impact of slavery. Before the plan of the study is discussed, it is imperative to look at the term narratology and its subsequent variants.

Narratology, the term comes from structuralism. Structuralist criticism was influenced initially by Vladimir Propp but gradually took a different direction—that of breaking up the text into its constituent elements to uncover the method by which the text constructs meaning. This other type of literary structuralism, called narratology, focuses not on the underlying structure of the content of stories, but on the structure of narration, the way stories—taken in its widest sense—are told. This aspect of literature had long intrigued the writers, who need to take multiple decisions regarding the way they are going to tell their story.

Though narratology can refer to any systematic study of narrative, in practice the use of the term is rather more restricted. The theoretical roots are traceable to Aristotle (*Poetics*) but modern narratology is agreed to have begun with the Russian Formalists, particularly
with Vladimir Propp. The term narratology, an anglicisation of French *narratologie*, was coined by Tzvetan Todorov (*Grammaire du Decameron*, 1969) for the structuralist analysis of any given narrative into its constituent parts to determine their functions and relationships. Narratology gained ground with the publication of *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961) of Wayne C. Booth. Booth gives some technical strategies which help the study of narratives and distinguishes it from structuralist approach. He stresses the ways how stories are told and to focus on the underlying structures that make stories. The goal of narratology is to discover a form of narration that will cover all the possible ways in which stories can be told and to enable the production of meaning. The most prominent narratologists since Roland Barthes has been Gerard Genette, whose work *Narrative Discourse* (1972) and its translated version in 1980, is one of the most important contributions to narratology. It has its focus, not on the tale itself, but on how it is told; the process of telling itself.

Story telling is an aspect of our environment for shaping our experience. Narratology is the study of story structure. This label refers to the structuralist study of narrative. The aim of the structuralist is to understand how recurrent themes, elements and patterns yield a set of universal values. The goal of such analysis is to move how elements of stories are arranged in actual narratives and fiction. Propp, in his study found that the same types of actions were being performed in one hundred Russian folk tales. Todorov, Genette and Barthes were among those who gave new ways to look at how stories are constructed across dimensions of time and narration. In a story, a speaker relates events according to normal chronology but the plot in effect reveals the story, rearranging the timeline. In narration, it is normally a tale in which a speaker tells the events of the past using first or third-person narrative. But in modern novels, point of view has become a powerful tool to reveal the depth of human psychology. There are narrators who provide an inside view differ in depth. Jane Austen goes relatively deep morally, but remains on the surface psychologically. All authors of the stream
of consciousness narration attempt to go deep psychologically, but some of them remain shallow on the moral dimension.

In a novel the narrator—the second self of the author—who can also be called the implied author, plays a significant role in evolving the fiction experience of the reader. In fiction, narratology, there are only two modes of narration and they are ‘telling’ a fiction and ‘showing’ it and this is not language specific. While ‘telling’ a story a writer often intrudes in the course of narrative and supplies information about the fictional material. Wayne C. Booth says that “in literature, from the very beginning, we have been told motives directly and authoritatively without being forced to rely on those shaky inferences about other men which we cannot avoid in our own lives.” (Booth 3) In ‘showing’ fiction, the narrator minimizes his presence in the text and allows the reader to experience fiction on his own. The present study discusses the word ‘narratology’ in relation to the narrative aspect commonly known as the point of view. As has been discussed earlier, narrative technique or point of view signifies the way a story is told. It is the perspective or perspectives set by an author through which the reader is presented with the characters, actions, setting and events. This constitutes the narrative in a work of fiction. So narrative is a voice outside the action reaching us and shaping our attitude.

A speaker through whom an author presents a narrative is often but not always, a character in the work itself. Every narrative has a narrator; a work may even occasionally have multiple narrators or a main narrator with sub-narrators. An author’s choice of point of view influences the kind of the narrator used. The novelists have been using different techniques for telling different stories. However, a simple and most widely accepted classification of the novelistic technique of story telling is a broad division between third-person and first-person narratives, with further sub-classification of the third-person narrative into omniscient and limited point of view techniques. A work written from the third-person
point of view often has an omniscient narrator. An omniscient narrator may be intrusive or un-intrusive. It (particularly omniscient one) generally has a more authorial -seeming sound and function and is more likely to comment upon the action in addition to recounting it. Third-person omniscient point of view is especially interesting as it can lend a multi-layered tension of narration to the work of fiction. The narrator has an access to one or more character’s thoughts. This access is communicated to readers by various methods; narrative distance is one such method. Narrative distance in fiction is determined through direct discourse, indirect discourse and free indirect discourse. All the three methods by which a narrator reaches the thoughts of the characters are abundantly used in the novels of Morrison. The last method i.e. free indirect representation is almost universally acknowledged and adopted by the post-modern writers.

A work written from the first-person point of view is either narrated by a character and, if autobiographical, the author. Among the first-person narrators some are reliable and some are unreliable. The narrator is reliable when he speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say, the implied author’s norms), unreliable when he does not speak for or act. To say that a story is told in the first person or the third person will tell us nothing of importance unless we become more precise and describe how the particular qualities of the narrators relate to specific effects. The difference in the narrative effect will depend on whether the narrator is dramatized in his own right or his beliefs and characteristics are shared by the author. Percy Lubbock says, “the whole intricate question of method in the craft of fiction, I take to be governed by the point of view, the question of the relation on which the narrator stands to the story.” (Lubbock 25)

The role of implied author and implied reader can not be ignored. In a novel the narrator—the implied author plays a significant role in evolving the fiction experience of the reader. In this regard, W.R.Woodman writes:
Clearly there is a real author, but this is of no interest except to the biographer or where certain elements of the author’s life are transported into the fiction. There is also a real reader, but this could be anybody. The implieds, however, are extrapolations from the text, the implied author being that presence whose voice we feel controlling the choice of characters, narrative mode and carried the reader with him and is very often distinct from the narrator-hence we have adjectives like ‘Dickensian’. (97)

Narratology is, thus the study of narratives. But what are narratives? In a narrative, events must be located in space and time. So, the primary task of the narratologist is to study how events are linked, the degree of motivation among them, and the effect they have on the characters of the story. The crucial distinction between story and plot is also stressed upon. A narrative is a story told verbally by a narrator whom the audience can hear and who adds layers of meaning to the text non-verbally. The narrator also has the opportunity to monitor the audience’s response to the story and modify the manner of the telling to clarify content or enhance listener interest. The text projects a narrative voice, but the narrator belongs to an invented or imaginary world, not the real one. The narrator may be one of the characters in the story. In written forms, the reader hears the narrator’s voice both through the choice of content and the style—the author can encode voices for different emotions and situations, and through clues that reveal the narrator’s beliefs, and ideological stances, as well as the author’s attitude towards people, events and things. Any discussion of the novelistic or narrative technique would be meaningless if it is not related to the subject-matter of the novel. “For, obviously the object of technique is to help realize the artistic intention, and we shall see over and over again how the specific effect sought by the artist determines the technical methods consciously or unconsciously chosen.” (Beach 3) After all, technique is only a means, not an end in itself.
The present study is an attempt to analyze certain aspects pertaining to the study of narratology. The exponents of narratology stress differently; for Aristotle the focus is on theme, for Propp the focus is on plot, and for Genette the focus is on narration. Barthes can be said to focus on the reader. Taken together in a kind of strategic blending, almost all of the aspects of narrative, which may be glossed over in one system receive their due attention from one of the others are touched upon.

From Gerard Genette, Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, Wayne C. Booth, Bal Mieka and Dorrit Cohn one can get a clearer idea of the art of narration. These narratologists cover various aspects of narratology too complex to be examined here, but these do provide a clear introduction to the Leviathan of textual analysis. Genette systemizes time in three modes: order, duration and frequency. He also discusses mimetic and diegetic what others say ‘telling’ and ‘showing’ mode of narration. Genette also explains focalization which is the point-of-view or perspective from which the story is told. He also makes comments on the homodiegetic and the heterodiegetic narrator which others call the first-person and the third-person narrator. Analepsis and prolepsis are commonly used in analyzing a narrative. Frame narrative and embedded narrative are means by which a story is packed. Dorrit Cohn says that speech and thoughts are presented through direct, indirect and free -indirect discourse which is described in the chapter ‘mood’ under the sub-heading ‘Narrative of Words’ of Genette’s Narrative Discourse. The distinction between ‘story’ and ‘plot’ is fundamental to narratology, but the story of narratology itself is that there are many competing groups, each tending to prefer its own terminology; hence, one will find the same distinction made with different terms. For instance, David Lodge prefers the Russian Formalist terms Fabula, instead of ‘story’, and sjuzhet for ‘plot’. Most current North American narratology uses ‘story’, but instead of ‘plot’ the term ‘discourse’ is often preferred. Dorrit Cohn even shows
correspondence between principal variations among narratologists:

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<tr>
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<th><strong>Story</strong></th>
<th><strong>Plot</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>Russian Formalism:</td>
<td>fabula</td>
<td>sjuzhet</td>
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<tr>
<td>Barthes (1977):</td>
<td>functions + actions</td>
<td>narration</td>
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<tr>
<td>Genette (1980):</td>
<td>story</td>
<td>narrative + narrating</td>
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<td>(1972):</td>
<td>histoire</td>
<td>recit + narration</td>
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<td>Chatman (1978):</td>
<td>story</td>
<td>discourse</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prince (1982):</td>
<td>narrated</td>
<td>narrating</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rimmon-Kenan (1983):</td>
<td>story</td>
<td>text + narration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bal Mieka (1985):</td>
<td>fabula</td>
<td>story + text</td>
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The connection between literature, life and narratology should not get lost in the process of analyzing because a story gets its sense of meaning from the world that uses it. The very purpose of analysis a text is to use the story to understand the world.

It would be in place to briefly explain certain terms which are generally used in narratology to avoid repetitions in the forthcoming chapters. The terms that collectively form narratology, overlap each other. An informed reader may decisively overlook such overlappings and discover the real and hidden meanings beneath the structure visible at the surface.

Analepsis and Prolepsis are what is commonly referred to in film as “flashback” and “flashforward”. In other words, these are ways in which a narrative’s discourse re-orders a given story; by “flashing back” to an earlier point in the story (analepsis) or “flashing forward” to a moment later in the chronological sequence of events (prolepsis). The classic example of prolepsis is prophecy, Oedipus being told that he will sleep with his mother and
kill his father. As we learn later in Sophocles’ play, he does both despite his efforts to evade his fate. Flashback refers to scene itself or to its present action that interrupts the action of a narrative to depict some earlier event. Flashback has its origins in the ancient epic tradition of beginning a work in the middle of things and then moving back in time to tell the beginning of the story. (Murfin 36)

Another interesting term is Diegesis that is a narrative’s time-space continuum, its entire created world. Every narrative includes diegesis, whether it is science fiction, fantasy, mimetic realism, or psychological realism. However, each kind of story will render that time-space continuum in a different way. The suspension of disbelief that we all develop before entering into a fictional world entails an acceptance of a story’s diegesis. (Harmon and Holman 157)

‘Story’ or ‘fabula’ refers to the actual chronology of events in a narrative. ‘Discourse’ or ‘sjuzhet’ refers to the manipulation of that story in the presentation of the narrative. These terms refer, then, to the basic structure of all narrative form. Story refers, in most cases, only to what has to be reconstructed from a narrative; the chronological sequence of events as they actually occurred in the time-space (or diegetic) universe of the narrative being read. Discourse refers to all the material an author adds to a story: similes, metaphors, verse or prose, etc. (Harmon and Holman 499)

Focalize is the presentation of a scene through the subjective perception of a character. The term can refer to the person doing the focalizing (the focalizer) or to the object that is being perceived (the focalized object). In literature, one can achieve this effect through first-person narration, free indirect discourse, or what Mikhail Bakhtin refers to as dialogism. (Booth: 1961, 211-266)

A story within a story, within sometimes yet another story is frame narrative. It helps to go beyond the thematic search in the story for something deep, dark, and secret at the heart
of the narrative. The form thus also resembles the psychoanalytic process of uncovering the unconscious behind various levels of repressive, obfuscating narratives put in place by the conscious mind. As is often the case, in each frame, there is a different narrative. This structure, of course, also leads us to question the reasons behind each of the narrations since, unlike an omniscient narrative perspective; the teller of the story becomes an actual character with concomitant shortcomings, limitations, prejudices, and motives. The process of transmission is also highlighted since we often have a sequence of embedded readers or audiences. (Harmon and Holman 228)

*In medias res* refers to a term from Horace, literally meaning “in the midst of things.” It is applied to the literary technique of opening a story in the middle of the action and then supplying information about the beginning of the action through flashbacks and other devices for exposition. (Harmon and Holman 275)

An important aspect of narratology is the point of view, the vantage point from which a narrative is told. A narrative is typically told from a first-person or third-person point of view; the second-person point of view is extremely rare. If the author serves as a seemingly all-knowing maker, the point of view is called omniscient. At the other extreme, a character in the story may tell the story as he/she experienced it. Such a character is usually called a first-person narrator. The author may present material by a process of narrative exposition, in which actions and conversations are presented in summary rather than in detail; this method is called panoramic. On the other hand, the author may present actions and conversations in details, as they occur, and more or less objectively - without authorial comment; such a method is usually called scenic. If the author never speaks in his or her own person and does not obviously intrude, the author is said to be Self-Affacing. (Harmon and Holman 404)

Narration refers to the way a story is told, and so belongs to the level of discourse. The different kinds of narration are categorized by each one’s primary grammatical stance:
the narrator speaks from within the story and, so, uses “I” to refer to him- or herself; in other words, the narrator is a character of some sort in the story itself, even if he is only a passive observer; the narrator who speaks from outside the story never employs the “I”. The first-person narration is the telling of a story in the grammatical first person, i.e. from the perspective of an “I”. Such narrators can be active characters in the story being told or they are mere observers. The first-person narration tends to underline the act of transmission and often includes an embedded listener or reader who serves as the audience for the tale. The first-person narration focalizes the narrative through the perspective of a single character. The question of motivation or psychology is, therefore, often raised: why is this narrator telling us this story in this way and can we trust him? For this reason, unreliable narrators are not uncommon.

Any story told in third person, i.e. without using “I” or “we” is called a third-person narration. In other words, the voice of the teller appears to be akin to that of the author him or herself. This is the most common sort of narration and was particularly popular in the nineteenth-century realist novel. Third person narration is of two types: third-person limited narration and third-person omniscient narration. Both are through the eyes of a single character. Even when an author chooses to tell a narrative through omniscient narration, s/he sometimes (or even for the entire tale) limits the perspective of the narrative to that of a single character, choosing for example, only to narrate the inner thoughts of that one character. In third-person omniscient narration, the teller of the tale, who often appears to speak with the voice of the author hims elf, assumes an omniscient (all-knowing) perspective on the story being told: diving into private thoughts, narrating secret or hidden events, jumping between spaces and times. Of course, the omniscient narrator does not therefore tell the reader or viewer everything, at least not until the moment of greatest effect. In other words, the hermeneutic code is still very much in play throughout such narrations. Such
narrators will also discursively re-order the chronological events of the story. (Booth 211-266)

Morrison has used memory, recall, slave narrative, stream of consciousness, interior monologue, flashback, imagination, dots within dots, gaps, myths, split narrative, parenthesis, multiple narrative voices, Black English, fragmentation, repetition, slant, along with the point of view. ‘Gaps’ for instance, when used by reader-response critics familiar with the theories of Wolfgang, refers to blanks in texts that must be filled in by readers. A gap may be said to exist whenever and wherever an actual reader perceives something to be missing between words, sentences, paragraphs, stanzas or chapters. Readers respond to gaps actively and creatively, explaining apparent inconsistencies in point of view, for jumps in chronology, speculatively supplying information missing from plots, and resolving problems or issues left ambiguous or “indeterminate” in the text. A gap, of course, is to some extent a product of readers’ perceptions. One reader may find a given text to be riddled with gaps while another may view that very text as comparatively consistent and complete; different readers may find different gaps in the same text. Furthermore, they may fill in the gaps they find in different ways, which is why, a reader -response critic might argue, works are interpreted in different ways. For instance, Marxist critics have used the term gap to speak of everything from the gap that open up between economic base and cultural superstructure to two kinds of conflicts or contradictions found in literary texts. (Murfin 136)

Another narrative technique is stream of consciousness which is a literary technique of thoughts, and sensory impressions that pass through the mind each instant. This phrase was used by William James to characterize the unbroken flow of thought and awareness in the waking mind. Works written by authors using this technique frequently appear to be choppy or fragmented–just as our thoughts, emotions, and sensory impressions often are. The author typically presents the associative mental flow of one or more characters, often
emphasizing the nonverbal level at which images express what words by themselves cannot. Great value is placed on the interior mental and emotional processes of individuals, rather than on the external world that their thinking reflects. Although stream of consciousness and interior monologue are often used interchangeably, the former is the more general term. Interior monologue, strictly defined, is a type of stream of consciousness. As such, it presents a character’s thoughts, emotions, and fleeting sensations to the reader. Unlike stream of consciousness, the ebb and flow of the psyche revealed by interior monologue typically exists at a pre- or sublinguistic level, where images and the connotations they evoke supplant the literal meanings of words. This mode intends to reveal to the reader the subjective thoughts, emotions, and fleeting sensations experienced by a character. The internal life is expressed powerfully through images and the connotations they evoke than through straightforward, denotative narrative. Interior monologue functions much as soliloquy does in drama. (Abrams 171)

Different narrative techniques have been used in different novels by Morrison. She uses flashback in *The Bluest Eye*, stream of consciousness in *Beloved* and split narrative in *Love*. She is rather successful in applying these techniques effectively in telling the stories of enslaved Africans, especially their life under slavery.

The following chapters are an attempt at studying the different techniques used by Morrison. An added dimension will be to evaluate her success at it. Accordingly the next chapter takes up the first phase of Morrison’s literary career as a writer which includes *The Bluest Eye, Sula, Song of Solomon* and *Tar Baby*. Through a critical analysis of these novels, an attempt has been made to understand her exact treatment of narrative techniques and as such this chapter encompasses several aspects of narratology and relates them to the theme.

The third chapter examines *Beloved, Jazz* and *Paradise*. The characters in these novels are primarily pre-occupied with their past memories and the impact that the se still
exert on them. The structure of these novels is so fragmented that a writer none other than Morrison could unify it. This chapter studies narratology in relation to the historical background of the novels and its characters.

The fourth chapter proposes to analyze the novels written in 21st century viz. *Love* and *A Mercy*. *Love* is an epic saga about the generation gap and *A Mercy* is a journey towards self-enlightenment. The primary emphasis remains the same—the dominant forces menace the community and the silenced group faces anxiety and dread about their existence. This chapter looks into narratology in relation to (dis)guised image of slavery and characters’ groping for mooring.

The last chapter looks into the main findings related to narratology in the novels of Morrison. It will also present a brief statement of the world-outlook of the novelist that provides coherence to this narrative mode.
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