Chapter V
Conclusion

This thesis makes a study of the treatment of the subalterns in the work of Toni Morrison, going into the various categories of the subaltern as also the various forms of subalternity Morrison depicts in her novels. This thesis has tried to investigate into the conditions that determined the status and situations of each form and category of subalternity. As it comes out into Morrison’s work subalterns can be divided into African American men, African-American women, African-American children, and white women.

In the interest of making a detailed study of each category a separate chapter has been devoted to each category. The second chapter has studied the first three novels of Morrison viz. *The Bluest Eye, Sula,* and *Song of Solomon* in order to focus on the divergent facets of subalternity. The third chapter has highlighted Morrison’s representation of subalternity in her next three novels, *viz. Tar Baby, Beloved,* and *Jazz.* The next chapter has investigated *Paradise,* *Love,* and *A Mercy* in an attempt to foreground the subalterns and their representation by the novelist.

In *The Bluest Eye, Sula,* and *Song of Solomon,* we have found that the social, economic, political and psychological background of the characters determines the degree to which an individual suffers in society and is made an ‘other.’ How the process of *othering* takes place and to what extent it torments and bewilders the subjugated characters reveals a lot about the forces responsible for that. The subalterns in Morrison’s first three novels can broadly
be distinguished into those who are turned subalterns on the basis of the sex, age, education, and profession.

In *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison challenges America's complacent belief in its benevolent self-image through representations of children who experience race, class, and gender oppressions. Through Pecola and her two friends who witness her exploitation—both psychological and sexual—the novel implicitly emphasizes the connection between the thematics of childhood innocence in American culture and an ideology of national innocence. *Sula* also examines female identity, but with less vulnerable heroines. Whereas Pecola's isolation leads to her doom, Sula Peace and Nel Wright live in stable families and form a friendship that supports their growth into womanhood. The unorthodox sexual behaviour of Sula is an attempt at 'becoming' and unbinding herself from the shackles of a community that has continually hindered her self-assertion. In *Song of Solomon*, the protagonist becomes intimately connected to a communal and historical knowledge and grows through that relationship, however, remaining a psychologically oppressed man who is turned into an other by his historical background.

In the third chapter, we find the earlier shades of subalternity where children are in the background and the grown ups are foregrounded. Like her earlier novels, Morrison's *Tar Baby, Be loved* and *Jazz* portray how African-American women, under the white duress, suffer at many levels. *Tar Baby*, for instance, is a journey of a black woman who struggles to come to terms with her aspirations as a modern materialistic black woman. It is the struggle of a
modern black woman for self-fulfilment and her attempt to make a niche for herself against a background of white racism. Jadine is a black woman who ultimately loses her roots from both the worlds, and becomes a double orphan, a pariah figure. Morrison describes Jadine as a person who loses her identity as a black woman, internalizes the white values and forces Son, a criminal turned lover and later her husband, to abandon his identity as a black man.

Beloved, unlike Jadine, is an oppressed woman who was killed by her subaltern mother. Even when the ghost of Beloved attempts to break the shackles of subalternity and strives to assert itself within the gamut of its family, the familial forces reduce it to a nullity. Beloved is an instance of subaltern consciousness where a female is unable to rise against that consciousness. Jazz is a product of slavery, segregation, poverty, and disenfranchisement. It narrates how a culturally oppressed community links its assertion through its atavistic music. It is also the affirmation of individual and group worth: the soul's manifestation of its love for its complement, the rejected flesh. The novel is also a tribute to the soul's resilience; it is ultimately one process through which it may heal itself. Through Violet and Dorcas, the novelist has given impetus to the smouldering crisis of their inner and outward life which throws them on the periphery of capitalistic society thus making them others.

The fourth chapter has highlighted how various people are subjugated in the American society by forces arising from its own set-up. Paradise is a study of both —inter-racial and intra-racial conflict where both, blacks and whites,
face oppressive forces and become subalterns. It is interesting to note how the already oppressed black class erases psychological forces menacing their existence thus becoming a threat for other ethnicity. *Paradise* exposes this oppression of the whites when nine black Americans kill five women who were not blacks. The blacks of Haven in the same novel refuse to accommodate the pure blacks on account of the difference of their colour. In this novel Morrison has presented a community splintered not by white racism but by intra-racial caste based on colour and gender, and a community further diminished by intolerance based on fear of a women-centered enclave.

*Love* not only reformulates some of the crucial issues that impinge on African-American interests within American politics, but also departs significantly from the normative triumphalist discourses of the Civil Rights movement. Through Cosey, May and L., Morrison has shown the *othering* process with its nullifying impact on the characters. *A Mercy* is less a piece of historical fiction than it is a psychological case study of the personality types that violently came together in the New World. Florence and other women in the novel represent subalternity as they suffer in one way or the other either from the mean and selfish men they confront or the society they live in. *A Mercy* is not so much a novel about race, but a meditation on ownership and the ways in which the enslaved internalize their subordination; it is nothing less than the colonization of the self.

The subaltern in her novels are not only the African Americans who suffer pangs of being African by origin and American by virtue of living, they
are also the whites who are made marginalized for one reason or the other. Moreover, there are categories of the subaltern within African-American community and those who are not blacks.

The journey of the fictional world of Toni Morrison from *The Bluest Eye* to *A Mercy* is circular. She emphasizes the subjugated experiences of the black women in her first novel and returns to them finally. From Pecola to Florence through Beloved, Morrison has highlighted how different characters have been turned into nullities or ‘others’ in the American setup where white is usually right. Her focus remains as to how and to what extent the institution of racism and slavery have affected the lives of her major characters who happen to be black Americans.

The study has also revealed that in the fictional world of Morrison the African Americans suffer from a triple oppression in America. African females, she exposes, are the most exploited and oppressed, abused and used human beings on the American continent and their friendship is what saves them and cushions the blows of oppression. And of that sector, she asserts, the African girl is the most vulnerable.

The literary world of Morrison also points out how conscious and interested the novelist has been in the vulnerable sector of the African population in America. Pecola and Claudia/Frieda in *The Bluest Eye*, Nel and Sula in *Sula*, Hagar in *Song of Solomon*, Denvar in *Beloved*, Dorcas and Felice in *Jazz*, Billie Delia and Pallas in *Paradise*, Heed and Christine in *Love*, and Florence in *A Mercy*—all exemplify the plight of the African female child. They suffer either because of their family or because of the society where
racism is rampant which forces the black Americans to lead a life of subalternity.

Her appeal and her power go beyond the stories she tells in her books and even beyond the way she tells them. In a way, she has used her stature as a platform to draw attention to the black conditions in the American continent. She pulls those things from the past that will help to guide us now. She nourishes our minds and our souls, and, some feel, she has helped to redefine black womanhood. So she is more than just a great writer. She is a great black woman, a living, breathing example of all that makes black women great — strength, determination, accomplishment and the ability to balance a personal life with professional obligations.

Morrison herself belongs to a class that has been designated psychologically a second-rate citizenship in America. She therefore can feel and share the anguish of the people whose life she describes in her work. There is, hence, a ring of authenticity in her fiction related to the representation of the subaltern. At the same time being one of the subalterns in American society, she is not able to detach herself from her subject thereby lacking the artistic objectivity a great writer generally displays.

Morrison speaks what is unspeakable for mainstream discourse — the juxtaposition of women and collective history, the dissolution of boundaries between sign and historical event, the unification of myth and cultural codes, the reinscription of meaning itself through a rendering of identification and desire. She writes in the difference, in the spaces and the margins, from the vantage of otherness which then becomes the familiar.
Through her novels and the subalternity represented in them, Morrison has come to terms with the dual consciousness confronting African Americans and also a part of the solution which must be embraced by them. The novels make clear the facts that African people in America suffer from a crisis of their African personality, stemming from America’s nation-class oppression. This also carries a political dimension where in capitalism seems to be a big enemy in all its forms and disguises. The solution, she suggests indirectly, lies in a collective, not individual, struggle against this enemy. Further, Morrison crystallizes the strategy —political education through communication —that ushers in the solution —for it is the lack of communication that causes the major disasters in her novels.