CHAPTER - VI

SUMMING UP

An indepth and close scrutiny of the novels of Toni Morrison reveals that her works are primarily concerned with the themes of alienation and affirmation. She reveals the truth of black life in her novels. Hence, her novels deals with the themes of slavery, migration, rootlessness, feeling of home sickness and alienation, search for self identify, feminine sensibility, men-women relationship, the relationship between whites and blacks etc. Her fiction is predominantly focused on Afro-American psyche with special focus on the delineation of black female consciousness. Morrison wanted to capture and narrate the relationship that black women have historically shared with one another. The black women were concerned as much about racial and ethnic discrimination, as about sexism to be 'black and female' is to be in 'double jeopardy'. Her fiction is predominantly characterized by the features of self discovery and self - identify. Morrison, in her novels links the inexplicable and the unknowable with the African-American quest for freedom and self-discovery. In the process, she
evokes the mysterious inner self he people and reveals the power and beauty to prevail beneath the suffering and anguish.

Morrison's novels deal with the premises of alienation and affirmation very effectively. The lack of roots and disconnection from the community and the past cause individual to become alienated. The individual who leaves and internalized the village or community is generally lost and likely to strive a lot. In her first novel *The Bluest Eye* Morrison explores the what can happen to a person alienated from his/her society or from black tradition. Quest for identify and home are the major factors of Morrison's novels. She deals with the complex issues of contentions and conflicts of black Americans. The first of the contention is that of racism. Morrison uncovers all the stereotypical racial fears felt by whites and blacks alike. Prejudices exits between whites and blacks in the community, between blacks of the home and also between men and women on social values. The personal need to re-articulate one's selfhood has its roots in the institution of slavery responsible for the removal of this selfhood in the first place. Therefore, the black individual searches for new self-recognition, an impulse traced back to the trauma of past experience. Only by
affirming personal individuality, one is able to be reborn in the community.

The picture of black life that emerges from Morrison's work is indeed harrowing and heart-rending. Morrison's view of oppression as lasting longer than just one point in time and carrying from generation to generation. These obsessions are of vital significance for the agony of 'Self-making' and 'Self-inventing' which are essential to the human struggle to mature black selfhood. Morrison delineates very impressively the psychological and emotional effects of slavery. Slaves are treated as merchandise and are brought and sold to the high bidder. A freed slave, while physically free, is never freed mentally from the terrible life he/she lived. *Beloved* by Toni Morrison, delves farther into the minds of those affected by the cruel world of slavery which leaves the blacks with no identity of their own. It is hardly an attempt of strengthen and fossilize the distress of past experience of slavery, it strives to bring consolation to the broken heartstrings.

Note of affirmation has been the core perspective of Toni Morrison's fiction. She deals in her novels with the issues of self-identity leading to self-actualization and the integration to the self by assimilating and discarding the social values. By portraying the
struggle for self-affirmation, Morrison most vividly displays the degraded and oppressed people's hunger for identity, meaning and self-worth. Infact, the process of self-valuation or self actualization and affirmation of one's identity is reciprocal. Therefore, much as the communal identity depends on the individual, the self-valuation, the self-valuation of a single owes predominantly to community's agency. Nevertheless, the reconstruction of self-definition - whether it is collective or personal, should be defined as a quest for subjectivity. It is a rejection of being the defined and a claim to be given the right to define. Thus, the role of an individual as well as collective struggle for self-affirmation contributes greatly to historical legacy; what form the very basis of an African-American heritage is the historical burden of slavery and the struggle of black people to gain self-respect. Further more her fiction deals with sexist oppression and to attain equal opportunity of blacks in the community. Morrison in her fictions exposes the damages of that sexist oppression, both inside and outside of the group, has had on black women. She is more concerned with the unique feminine cultural values that black women have developed to attain equal opportunity in spite and often because of their oppression.
Toni Morrison comes from a long line of hard working, industrious black people who actively fought racial oppression and inferior social and economic status. After the many years of suffering and endurance, Morrison argues that blacks can now grasp life and make it their own. But they must be aware of who they are and where they come from. She makes clearly an expose of the ‘ugliness’ of black poverty, powerlessness and loss of positive self-concept in her novels. Toni Morrison in her novels has explored various possibilities for the Afro-Americans. Her lyrical language softly persuades us to accept her camouflaged suggestion. Through her novels she clearly says that multiple oppression is not confined to only one class or community, it is universal and largely due to the individual and community’s lack of response to and participation in its own native culture. This soft but firm voice of Toni Morrison has forced the world to recognize her, not as a marginalized Afro-American woman writer but as an important voice in the mainstream of world literature.

As Toni Morrison’s fiction details the efforts of African Americans to find viable identities in a racialized society, it subtly probes what Ralph Ellison calls the puzzle of the one-and-the-many. This is the idea that any entity is simultaneously unified yet
divided, a whole yet an aggregation of parts. For example, the United States exists as a whole yet as regions, states, subgroups and individual exists in multiplicity of roles, traits and other factors. Similarly, a novel stands as a unified entity but simultaneously exists as a complex configuration of its constituent parts.

The complex range of emotions within which Morrison writes constitutes a tenuous balance between negation and affirmation of selfhood and place within the community. Her characters waver within the contradictions and ambiguities of desire and repression, control and chaos, attraction and repulsion, connection and withdrawal. Within this atmosphere of irresolution, there lingers a measure of despair that seems to negate all hope for renewal. Pecola is victimized into insanity; Sula is ostracized into inertia and death; Pilate must recreate a world apart; Jadine is repulsed by a mythic past; and Sethe is marooned in doubt. In short, each character is unable to find and make a fully realized alienation and affirmation because each has been in some way warped by communal circumstances.

Yet for each circumstance comes a measure of affirmation that points to the potential for cultural regeneration. Through
memory and story, dream and song, each of Morrison’s narratives continually focuses beyond the isolated, dystopian self and toward the potentialities of a desired, collective self. This collective self finds expression in Claudia’s neighborhood retrospection, in Nel’s cognitional cry, and in Pilate’s stories and songs; it attains a hopeful realization in Milkman’s search to embracement, in Son’s utopian retreat, in Paul D’s consolation, and most certainly in Sethe’s rememory of communal joys and sorrows.

These characters acknowledge, however vaguely, that they must search for identity by returning to the neighborhood and to the communal experience. They do so in order, as Morrison has said, “to survive whole in a world where (they) are all ... victims of something”. Thus, the community, for better worse, has the power to become the site of renewal for its members. Their response to the call of communal experience determines forever their course in life, and allows them a significant measure of hope and comfort and wholeness in an otherwise alienating and lonely world of victims and victimizers.

There can indeed be, then, “a joy and protection in the clan”; a joy and protection that exists not only as a release from the vicissitudes of daily living, but more importantly, a joy and
protection that functions as a sustainer and a shaper of identity. In depicting a totality of communal emotions and experience, Morrison’s novels demonstrate that the community is a multiple, refractory space within each self which, as it dispossesses and nurtures, deceives and instructs, assails and comforts, serves as the ultimate touchstone in the search for self and place.

Although alienation and affirmation are operative in many contexts that could be applied to Morrison’s fiction, three contexts seem particularly germane: American culture, African-American culture, and the deconstruction. In both American and African-American cultures, the interplay between a presumed or desired unity and the divided parts with such an entity has been self-fraught with unresolved tensions between the two, and African-American culture, historically the most prominent subdivision within American culture, in turn illustrates the theme of plurality-in-unity, both in its relationships with the mainstream culture and in its own cultural forms and traditions.

Deconstruction reconceptualizes the issues of assimilation and affirmation, for example by calling into question the unitary extension of any entity, by unraveling the pre-supposed relationships between binary oppositions, and by privileging
multiplicity and process of reconciliation. These perspectives provide multiple and overlapping contexts for my readings of Morrison’s novels, as these two develop complex dynamics of alienation and affirmation.

Although every culture, nation, or society can be described in terms both of its wholeness and its internal variations, the United States in particularly characterized by diversity. It embodies the coexistence of multiplicity and unity. This propensity is evident in such institutional structures as the constitutional balance of powers, bicameral legislatures, and the continual tensions between states’ and federal rights. Since its inception American culture has been engaged with divisions and the difficulties of reconciling those divisions. From the very outset, it is a divided one and mobility and diversity are and always have been the controlling factors in forming the American culture identity. American history can be seen as the alternation between periods of relative unity and relative plurality or as a shift from a more holistic culture to a more heterogeneous one.