Chapter-III

The Feminist Trends in Toni Morrison’s Works

Toni Morrison discusses about various feminist trends in which black woman has been ill treated under the complex issues of racism, classism and sexism. Each and every phase and situation of black women push her to be marginalized. The man-woman relationship provides her the secondary place, her colour of skin and her secondary sex make her inevitably lose her identity and her double-consciousness makes her invisible. Amidst all this, the black woman’s indomitable courage, incredible will-power and unaltered confidence add her to recognise herself. The black woman’s female friendship acts as the sole source for her to emerge as a phenomenal black woman.

3.1 Man-Woman Relationship

Under the patriarchal system the ideal man-woman relationship is the one where the woman makes the man feel more like a man and the man makes the woman feel more a woman. In the racist, classist and sexist society the relationship between man and woman represents the ultimate disorder which is more complex and more tragic. This can easily disfigure their psychology and of their fellow beings. It is just a dream for women to expect their husbands to understand their feeling and respond to it patiently by suppressing their male ego. Men have been treated as superior by the society. “Men are socialized into a concept of manhood that is based on the sexual conquest and economic domination of women” (Staples 6). Men never feel it necessary to respect and nurture their marital relationship. They just treat women as their goods to fulfill their necessities. Women are just perceived as the sexual objects in a wifely role. The selfish men even utilise women who are other than their wives to satisfy their erotic thirst. The difference between these two women is as Simone de Beauvoir states, “The great difference .
is that the legal wife, oppressed as a married woman, is respected as human being” (Beauvoir 569). The ego and superiority complex of self-centered male has created a huge vacuum which ultimately creates a bigger obstacle in the marital relationship. Demetrakopoulos observes in relation with the black man-woman relationship,

Men in the world have never really known a woman. Certainly men never know a woman in the way that women know each other: women unconsciously don personas around most men to protect themselves from the contempt and loathing that men so often feel towards women’s deepest selves. Thus men generally live unknowingly cut off from half of humanity” (Demetrakopoulos 86).

Toni Morrison effectively portrays the life of Afro-Americans. She analyses the reasons for happy and unhappy marital lives. With the keen psychological insight, she portrays pre-marital and extra-marital relationships and shows sex as the primary instinct in man-woman relationship. In a way, her dealing with the theme of man-woman relationship may seem indecent, immoral and even sometimes that crosses the lines of sexual abuse. Her themes of eroticism and even perverted aspects of sexuality report the happenings. She does not pass any judgment rather she leaves the judgment to the reasoning of the readers. Morrison’s narratives clearly demonstrate how sexuality is used as a means of domination in man-woman relationships.

Morrison’s couples Pauline and Cholly in The Bluest Eye, Nel and Jude in Sula, Sethe and Halle in Beloved and Joe and Violet in Jazz are interdependent on each other out of necessity and for their emotional security. Morrison uses her talent in depicting the web of racism, classism and sexism in the life of these characters. Reflecting the conditions of their society and conventional norms of the community the blacks decide each of their lives and their relationships with their
counterparts. Since the characters live under the shadows of cruel racism and sexism they fail to establish their own secure and healthy life. The black man-woman relationship in America is not conventional, rather it becomes the core of disappointments. There is more oppression, pain, betrayal, disappointment and insecure feelings and very less emotional bonding and affection in the relationship. Most of the times, being in the racist land it is the frustration and anger that let the characters go beyond the limits to commit filthy and immoral things like extramarital affairs which destroys the relationship as well as the individual personality. The man-woman relationships in the works of Morrison are closely related with sexuality and its controversies, confusions, gender, love and oppression.

The man-woman relationship survives by the beauty of a woman, responsible man, care and affection and more importantly love and commitment between the two. Morrison’s novels delineate these aspects focusing on how people suffer by the lack of these necessary aspects in their relationships. She says, Beauty, love . . . Actually I think, all the time that I write, I’m writing about love or its absence. Although I don’t start out that way. . . . But I think that I still write about the same thing, which is how people relate to one another and miss it or hang on it . . . or the tenacious about love (Bakerman 60).

The relationship between Cholly and Pauline Breedlove, Nel and Jude and Joe Trace and Violet has a similarity. Their relationships are based on the emotional dependency on the other. They marry to fill the empty place in another’s life. Though the beginning of their relationship is like blooming flowers, in course of time they meet unhealthy developments too.

Morrison portrays Cholly as sympathetic rather than dehumanising character. But Cholly himself dehumanises his wife and daughter. Both Cholly and Pauline fail to make their relationship long lasting. Cholly is the most flawed character of the novel whose alcoholic addiction and his emotional, physical and
sexual abuse of his daughter Pecola spoils the entire life of the Breedlove’s family. They admired each other and got married. Of course at the beginning the relationship between the two were healthy and happy as Pauline admits that,

when I first seed Cholly, I want you to know it was like all the bits of color from that time down home when all of us children went berry picking after a funeral and I put some in the pocket of Sunday dress and they messed up and stained my hips. My whole dress was messed with purple and it never wash out. Not the dress not me. I could feel the purple inside me” (BE 113).

Morrison here symbolically tells that when their eyes met Pauline felt Cholly as a gift by the heaven for her who makes her feel special in spite of her lame foot. “For the first time Pauline felt that her bad foot was an asset”. Both marry and settle down in north (Ohio), where Cholly works in a steel mill and Pauline looks after the house.

When Cholly is out for job, Pauline utterly feels lonely with no job and having only two rooms not much household work to do. Moreover she feels alone and strange in the middle of the white folks. As time passes on, Cholly and Pauline start experiencing the gap in their relationship. Their relationship evolves from tender and loving to spiteful, bitter and violent one. Claudia narrates,

Cholly was kindness still, but began to resist her total dependence on him. They were beginning to have less and less to say to each other. He had no problem finding people and other things to occupy him – men were always climbing the stairs asking for him and he was happy to accompany them, leaving her alone (BE 116).

Though Pauline wants to get mingled with the black women, she always feels uncomfortable because they get amused by her hair and ugly face. This indicates how the white women and black men neglect a black woman because of her physical beauty and her submissive gender. The dominant groups like white
women and black men alienate black woman which hinders her in identifying her selfhood.

Since history it has been believed and accepted that “man is for field and woman is for hearth . . . Man to command and woman to obey . . .” (Tennyson 16). Though this logic is just for the convenience of the division of labour between man and woman, man misrepresents his duty to earn for the family. When he starts becoming economically independent, he begins to dominate woman at home whose duty is restricted only inside the four walls. Morrison once again proves that it is the economic dependency of a woman that cripples woman’s identity. Cholly refuses to fulfill her needs of new clothes and necessary things to run the house. This economic dependency makes Pauline a more humiliated woman and that leads to the quarrels. Though Pauline is physically handicapped, she is aware of her responsibility to fulfill the needs of the house as well as herself. So she decides to do a job as a day worker. She starts working outside and earning, but that hurts Cholly’s male ego. “He was not pleased with her purchases and began to tell her so. Their marriage was shredded with quarrel . . . Money becomes the focus of all their discussions, her clothes, his drink” (BE 116). The impact of racism and influence of the white beauty standards on their relationship is noticeable. “The sad thing was that Pauline did not really care for clothes and makeup. She merely wanted other women to cast favourable glances her way” (BE 116). Even Cholly makes all his efforts to take her job off. He drinks and goes at her working place in the white’s house asking for money. For his indecent behaviour white mistress warns Pauline. She says, “She didn’t want me no more if I was going to stay with Cholly” (BE 118). Morrison highlights the commitment of the black women to their marital relationships. When Pauline is put before the choice between her husband and her salary by the white mistress, she straight away rejects money and chooses Cholly who is her future. Pauline here represents the entire black women
who are committed to their lives and their husbands. Cholly as a man is completely opposite to Pauline because he ruins his family, rapes his own daughter, addicts to the drinking habit. He becomes the reason for the decay of Breedlove’s family. This is the difference that can be found in the commitment and emotional attachments between the men and the women. “No good ma’am. He ain’t no good to me. But just the same, I think I’d best stay on” (BE 118). Such a commitment of black woman for her marital life makes her stronger to safeguard her marital relationship.

The arrival of their children Pecola and Sammy to the earth provides them the temporary happiness and relaxation from the hatred and anger over each other. Thinking that Cholly would handle the responsibility of the husband (upcoming father,) Pauline leaves her job but Cholly remains the same and again starts leaving her alone at home. Movies become the best friend for her. She starts to see her relation with Cholly in a way whatever she learns out of the movies. Through movies “she regarded love as possessive mating and romance as the goal of the spirit. It would be for her a well -spring from which she would draw the most destructive emotions, deceiving the lover and seeking to imprison the beloved, curtailing freedom in every way” (BE 118).

The male inside Cholly behaves as the sovereign of Pauline and their children Pecola and Sammy. As a woman despite her humiliations Pauline is faithful and committed to her man Cholly. In contrast Cholly is never good to anybody, neither as father, husband nor as a member in society. Pauline says, “Cholly commenced to getting meaner and meaner and wanting to fight me all of the time. I give him as good as I get” (BE 117). Cholly’s act of raping his daughter, impregnating her and finally his abandonment of his family is the piece of example of his lustful life and irresponsibility.
Like the man-woman relationship of Cholly and Pauline, in *Sula* the man-woman relationship between Nel and Jude seems very happy like flying birds when they get married but it is the interruption of Sula in their life that damages their relationship. Jude’s disappointment in getting a job in building a new bridge make him feel invisible as a black man in white society. His rage by being unrecognised in the society makes him to force Nel to agree to marry him. Because, “He needed some of his appetite filled, some posture of adulthood recognized, but mostly he wanted someone to care his heart, to care very deeply. Deep enough to hold him, deep enough to rock him, deep enough to ask, “How you feel? You all right? Want some coffee?” (*BE* 82). Jude thus marries Nel out of necessity.

Jude is a man who seems to be emotionally dependent on Nel to care and to be cared. Through the character of Jude, Morrison shows the two sides of man, one as a loyal and loving husband, and another as a betrayer. Jude marries Nel with the intention of giving her a good life, “to shelter her, love her, and grow old with her . . . the two of them together would make one Jude” (*Sula* 83). Even like Pauline, Nel feels special in meeting Jude. Her acceptance of relationship with Jude “selected her away from Sula. And greater than her friendship was this new feeling of being needed by someone who saw her singly. She didn’t even know she had a neck until Jude remarked on it, or that her smile was anything but the spreading of her lips until he saw it as a small miracle” (*Sula* 84).

Despite their happy married life Jude often feels the hollow space as a black man. He fails to get that he wanted and that arouses frustration in him. Sula’s soothing words make him to feel special. He sleeps with Sula and betrays his wife Nel. Morrison portrays a loose character through Jude. Perhaps he just needs something to shake his life up. Regardless of the reason, he ruins his marriage, fails
to keep in contact with his kids and destroys the close relationship between Nel and Sula.

Morrison presents extra-marital relationships as natural as marital relationship. She focuses that such relationships are the result of racist treatment. The relationship between Sula and Ajax gives a dimension to see the character of Sula. Though both Sula and Ajax sleep with several men and women respectively, their relationship creates a spark in Sula that stays with her until she is an adult. Though he treats all the women same, Sula feels something more than the relationship. That scares him. He never makes any promises to her of a committed relationship and Sula seems content with this arrangement at first. But the fact that he is unwilling and unable to stick around when a woman starts to care about him raises questions about his character.

Another perspective for the man-woman relationship that Morrison provides to the readers is that of extra-marital the relationship. Morrison shows extra-marital as one of the ways to declare the freedom and also as a tool to fulfill their desire and on the other hand that helps the characters to attain their self-identity. In *Sula* for Eva, Hannah and Sula the sex between man and woman is nothing but freedom. Eva and Hannah being abandoned by their husbands, have sexual relationship with the other men in the neighbourhood. These affairs have complete absence of commitment, feelings and emotions. Though they are as odd in the eye of the moralists, their treatment as black and as women prove to be far more immoral. Sula follows the path of her mother and grandmother. Morrison clearly advocates through these women characters that their extra-marital relationships are the way to achieve their freedom, self-identity and the life that they want which they are deserved to aspire. About the married and unmarried women in *Sula*, Barbara Smith quotes,
The narrower their lives, the wider their hips. Those with husbands had folded themselves into starched coffins, their sides bursting with other people’s skinned dreams and hony regrets. Those without men were like sour-tipped needles featuring one constant empty eye” (qt Christian 27)

The men characters Boy Boy, Rekus, Jude and Ajax leave their women in their lives. The strong women Eva, Hannah and Sula dare to face their life against the conventional norms of society. But an innocent girl like Nel, would certainly feel the detachment from her self and feel insecure in life.

Like *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula*, *Jazz* deals with both marital and extra-marital relationships. The primary theme of the story is a love triangle among Joe Trace, Violet and Dorcas. The marital relationship between Joe, a fifty plus black man and Violet, a fifty six years old lady seems unbalanced. Their journey of married life is not so smooth because both of their hard childhood. Joe at his childhood is left by his parents without any ‘trace’. Violet was abandoned by her father and witnessed her mother throwing herself into well. They got married to each other to get away from the hard lifestyles of their childhood by moving to city. The unspecified narrator of the fairy tale, in an ardent winding up, depicts this stipulation of love as she seems to upon Joe and Violet:

‘I envy them their public love . . . . I have longed, longed to show it, to be able to say out loud what they have no need to say at all: That I have loved only You, surrendered mu whole self reckless to you and nobody else. That I want you to love me back and show it to me” (*Jazz* 46).

As they grow older they start experiencing a feeling of incredibility in love. Violet feels the disparity in their relationship. They have no child to hang on to their relationship. Though Joe takes care of Violet, because of her state of depression Joe could not feel that comfort zone with her any more. Since Joe is in search of that affection and warm love which he has been missing since his
childhood from his mother, Wild and wife Violet, he still looks forward for a woman who would endow him with that love. When Joe meets Dorcas, at his first sight he feels the warmth which he was in need. He strives to acquire her love by admiring her.

Morrison’s minute sense of gender disparity is noteworthy here. In the male dominated society, man can do anything -- can cross the boundaries of the morals and the conventional norms. He can easily break down his marital relationship and have relationship with as many women as he wishes. Neither his act is considered sin nor is he considered evil. Still his position in society as superior and sovereign has never been disturbed. If at all the same is done by the woman she is easily recognised as an evil of society. She is rejected and hated by the community. This is how Joe and Sula are treated as normal and abnormal things respectively only on the basis of their gender. Joe’s maleness does not hesitate to have a love affair with his daughter like a seventeen years old girl, Dorcas.

For Dorcas having relationship with other men is a way to identify her. As a young girl, she is fascinated by the modern life style. Within three months Dorcas gets bored with Joe. In order to form her identity she finds a new boyfriend Acton. Joe could not bear her betrayal towards him so he shoots her; she on her part decides to die in order to be observed, making herself a sacrificial victim by bleeding to death.

Morrison highlights that always woman is the victim in man-woman relationship. In fact it is Joe who created the biggest crack in his marital relationship with Violet who is left alone suffering under depression. An ideal and healthy man-woman relationship demands the care of and concern for the partner in hard times. Morrison’s most male characters fail to perform their duty as husband and even as father. Joe could not try to understand and be with Violet in her hard times. Rather he seeks his happiness in some other girl. Even his
relationship with Dorcas was not genuine because if he had true love for her instead of killing her he would have tried to understand the reason for her going away from her. Neither to Violet nor to Dorcas, he could not prove himself as a good partner. The act of killing Dorcas indicates the male aggressiveness and sovereignty. He can justify his act of killing because he is betrayed by Dorcas. But it is no lesser than any injustice of his betrayal for Violet by having an extra-affair outside his married life.

Interracial relationships are the special focus of Morrison’s novels. The causes and the results of such relationships are elaborately discussed in her novels. In *Jazz* the interracial relationship between Vera Louise Gray, a white woman and Henry Lestroy, a black man has a drastic affect on their son Golden Gray who looks like white having golden hair and light skin. Golden Gray is the result of their forbidden love. Though he is brought up by his mother Vera, he could never feel her as his mother because he is told he is adopted by her. When he comes to know his parentage by his nurse True Bell, his sagacity of his own identity is smashed. Such relations are more common in America. They create so much confusion for the children. By Culture and race they could neither connect themselves to the black nor whites. Throughout their lives they strive for the identity of their self.

*Beloved* is the manifestation of bravery of an ex-slave woman with the sheer focus on man-woman relationship in the history of America. The major storyline gives the details of the incredible love between the mother and the daughter. The incidents in the story have extraordinary meeting point on man-woman relationship. Sethe’s married life with Halle Suggs is very healthy; and their offsprings are the fruitful result of their relationship. But both being slaves could not live longer in their relationship. Halle turns mad by seeing the rape of his wife. And after this no reader comes across the appearance of Halle.
The system of slavery has left dark effects on each character of the novel. Man by nature is dominant and feels it is his sole right to have control over woman’s body, mind and life. When it comes to the slave master he acts as the sovereign, a tyrant. The power as slave adds more for his superiority complex. Morrison portrays how the slave masters use woman and her body as their property. They make the habit of sexual exploitation as one of the means to control slave women. Morrison delineates an extended form of image forced on Sethe in Sethe’s role as a sexual object. This is made obvious when the schoolteacher’s nephews barter on Sethe’s sexuality that was left inviolate by her former slave master. Conveyed through Sethe’s perspective, it unveils a facet of slavery that is barbaric and inhuman, “two boys with mossy teeth, one sucking on my breast the other holding me down, their book reading teacher watching and writing it up . . .” (BE 70). Morrison suggests how a woman’s body becomes the site for sexual urge, mainly as an object for the male’s erotic feelings:

Sethe’s “breasts” as sites of violation . . . also epitomize how “private” body parts become commodified, public and “un- own”-ed by the self. The over-determined meaning of Sethe’s breasts results in part from the lack of appropriate language to speak the outrage of slavery (Lee 578).

Though Paul D is a slave the erotic feelings are ever alert in him for Sethe. Paul D visualises Sethe as a commodified sex object suggested when Sethe enters Sweet Home as a teenager slave. He along with his male counterparts values her for sexual satisfaction. “All in their twenties minus women . . . dreaming of rape . . . and waiting for the new girl . . .” (BE 11). Paul D though presented as a noble man, his maleness always seeks the sex of his lover Sethe. His first sexual encounter with Sethe, eighteen years after her escape in reconstruction “he felt obliged to try again but the appetite was gone . . . Twenty-five years and blip!” (BE 24). Just as a schoolteacher measures up Sethe for the child bearing capacity, Paul
D assesses Sethe’s capacity to appease a male sexually. His relationship with Sethe seems as if he is protecting the family which has no male, but rather it is more self-centred. Another notable aspect is Paul D’s mind which is completely dominated by the white man’s concept of malehood. He denies Sethe’s selfhood as patriarchal representative, he is predetermined by the assumption that any responsibility of the female, lies solely with her man, “Not even trying, he had become the kind of man who could . . . make the woman cry . . . . He held her breasts in the palms of his hands. He rubbed his cheeks on her back and learned that way of her sorrow, the roots of it; it was its wide trunk and intricate branches” (BE 17).

It takes no longer for Paul D to transfer his sexual image from Sula to Beloved. He fails to realise that Beloved is a threat to his masculinity. Since “the girl was homeless and without people,” “he wanted her out”. Though he unconsciously fears that somebody is acquiring his soul, Beloved becomes successful in defeating his malehood. He surrenders himself to Beloved. There are several men who feel it unnecessary to call the names of their women. Beloved makes him call her ‘Beloved’. This is how she makes him to respect a woman.

Even though Beloved is barely a part of Paul D’s memory, she is able to unlock his tobacco tin of repressed memory. Beloved’s search for Paul D is necessitated not so much by her sexual needs, in as much as her need to wean Sethe away from Paul D (qt Rani L 156).

Morrison exemplifies how man takes the advantage of a woman’s body even in her helplessness. At the same time, Sethe is made to exchange ten minutes of sex for imprinting ‘Beloved’ on the gravestone of her child, whom she had murdered. Morrison throws light on sadist men like Cholly, Jude, Joe and Paul D who never leave any chance to molest women for their own purpose irrespective of age, relation and place.

3.2 Mother-Daughter Relationship
It is not my child who tells me: I have no femaleness white women must respect. It is not my child who has purged my face from history and her story and left mystery just that, a my story; my child loved my face and would have it on every page, if she could as I have loved my own parents’ faces above all other . . . . We are together, my child and I. Mother and child, yes but sisters really, against whatever denies us all that we are.

- (Alice Walker, *One Child of One’s Own* 75)

With these words Alice Walker offers an intimate relationship between mother and child. She delineates how black mother influences her child and how black children affirm their mothers and how important that affirmation can be in a society that delineates blackness and womanhood.

The role of the mother for a woman is ultimate. As a mother, a woman can make the impossible things possible. A woman becomes mother when her child enters into the earth from her womb. From that very moment she lives only for the well-being of her children. For a child, mother is goddess. Irrespective of her condition and her oppression as a sexual being, mother takes any risk when the obstacles come to her children. She can be glorious and terrible, benevolent or filled with wrath, but she commands love either way. She is the greatest power in the universe.

The black women as mothers are known as “superstrong black mother”’. The black woman’s role as mother is more intensive than the white mothers. She can cross all the limitations to rear, care and to keep her children safer. At the same time, the motherly role provides black woman a different position in an alien land. The motherly role makes her aware of her strength. As a mother, she strives to be empowered by the consciousness that she should not be ghettoised and let her children be treated as ghettoized like. The whites and black men have imposed
controlling images like mammy, subhuman, and whores on to black woman. This is to suppress her physically and psychologically. In contrast, the image of mother for black woman gives her a power for her self recognition. Patricia Hill Collins defines,

The controlling images of the mammy, the matriarchy and the welfare mother and the practices they justify are designed to oppress. In contrast, motherhood can serve as a site where black women to express and learn the power of self-definition, the importance of valuing and respecting ourselves, the necessity of self-reliance and independence and a belief in black women’s empowerment (Collins 118).

Through years of exploitation as a woman and as black, black woman has to look after her self and her children. For black mother it is a very difficult task to try to “…cope with great tenacity under oppressive conditions . . .” and give her daughter attention. So often “. . . they pass on survival skills to their daughters”. Yet the black woman feels it important to offer “…mutual concern, support and companionship which exists between many mothers and daughters” (Nice 203).

Morrison being a black woman writer feels it necessary to honor black mothers who sacrifice their lot for the betterment of their children. For black women mothering is an empowering experience that is fundamental to the survival of the blacks and black community. In her novels, Morrison celebrates the great role of some of her black women as mothers. On the one end, there is the image of nurturing, protective, culturally rooted, community oriented, mother women, who take of the need of her family and her own desires as well. On the other end, there is the stultifying, oppressive, disconnected caretaker, who moves through life but fails to really be a part of it. As Collins defines,

Some women view motherhood as a truly burdensome condition that stifles their creativity, exploits their labour and makes them partner in their
oppression. Others see motherhood as providing a base for self-actualisation, status for the black community and a catalyst for social activism. These alleged contradictions can exist side by side in African-American communities and families and even within individual women (Collins 118). In Morrison’s novels, these types are embodied in the mother characters, they are Mrs Pauline Breedlove - mother of Pecola and Sammy, Mrs MacTeer – mother of Frieda and Claudia, from The Bluest Eye, Eva Peace – mother of Hannah, Hannah Peace – mother of Sula and Helene Wright – mother of Nel, Rochelle – mother of Helene Wright from Sula, Sethe – mother of Denver and Beloved from Beloved, Rose Dear – mother of Violet and True Bell – mother of Rose Dear from Jazz.

Mrs MacTeer and Mrs Breedlove exhibit two different styles of mothering. Mrs MacTeer is like as Collins -- a mother who provides a base for self-actualisation for her children. Mrs MacTeer’s care and vigilance promote Claudia’s physical and emotional health. Mrs Breedlove’s neglect and disdain for her daughter Pecola, results in her mental, emotional and spiritual breakdown. Mrs MacTeer’s nurturing serves as an interesting counterpoint to Pauline’s breeding as suggested by the irony of her name.

Pauline’s inability to love her daughter Pecola is the result of her self-hatred because Pauline as a daughter of Ada, has never experienced the warm affection of her mother. Pauline Williams was “. . . the ninth of eleven children and loved on ridge of Alabama clay.” She met with “a rusty nail which punched her foot”, this wound “. . . left her with a crooked, archless foot that flopped when she walked – not a limp that would have eventually twisted her spine, but a way of lifting the bad foot as though she were extracting it from little whirlpools that threatened to pull it under” (BE 108). As her mother Ada does not protect Pauline from the “feeling of separateness and unworthiness she blamed on her foot.” Ada’s decision
not to guard or help Pauline through her feelings of separateness may seem as cruel but in reality it is her intelligence. During the 1990s (shortly after slavery has been abolished) the society was still expecting that black women to be mammies and also to manage their own households. Ada’s such behaviour with her daughter Pauline was not to make her cripple rather to prepare her stronger as a black woman to serve in the white families and lead her role as mother like her in future. Like most of the black mothers, Ada makes her daughter self-independent with her rude behaviour which enables daughters to uncritically accept the limited opportunities offered to them in the white world. Collins quotes where a child says, “I can’t remember when I first learned that my family expected me to work, to be able to take care of myself when I grew up . . . . it had been drilled into me that the best and only sure support was self-support” (*BE* 123).

For Ada it was her way to make her daughter stronger to accept the cruelty of society and for Pauline it was merely negligence. Whenever she recalls her childhood memories she remembers herself as an unwanted and odd in the family. Her marriage with Cholly was also unable to give her comfort and make her feel worthy. Without mother in her earlier childhood or adult life to instill self-esteem but one who does project strength against the ills of life, Pauline is alone and develops a jaded attitude not only towards herself but also towards her family. Without support from her husband or friends, Pauline finds solace in movie theatre. Pauline’s daily watching movies at theatre provide her with an outlet and an entrance into white culture. In theatres, “. . . she was introduced to another – physical beauty. Probably the most destructive ideas in the history of human thought. Both originated in envy, thrived in insecurity and ended in disillusion”, “It was really a simple pleasure but she learned all there was to love and all there was to hate” (*BE* 120). Pauline creates the reality of a world that black women had been indoctrinating in for years. Morrison observes that they want and necessity of a
Black woman to be a pawn in the world creates destructive emotions that can never be recreated after once destroyed by slavery and oppression. Visualizing herself in the movies, Pauline yearns to look like the actress. She adapts the vision and perceptions of the accepted standards of white beauty. By debasing her cultural and sexual identity, she never achieves self-acceptance. Her blind beauty and failed dreams are heaped upon her family, especially her daughter. She cannot share genuine love with her daughter. Pauline has neither an attentive mother-daughter relationship with Ada nor a lesson in how to become an ideal mother for her daughter. So as Pauline approaches motherhood, she is lesser than adequately to rear a young black female in a white society. With her model to imitate, Pauline transforms all her awful feelings and the experience of loss of self-worth on her daughter Pecola.

Upon her daughter’s birth, Pauline recollects, “She looked different from what I thought . . . she was ugly. Head full of pretty hair but Lord she was ugly” (BE 123). She immediately denies an emotional connection with her daughter. Throughout her childhood Pecola suffers from humiliation at her school, neighbors and endures the scorns of others and tolerates the violence by others. Along with all these the negligence by her mother and the lack of love and care of her mother Pauline adds more for the reason for her emotional, psychological breakdown. As Pecola grows, she is rejected by a physically abusive family and witnesses fights between her parents. During these fights, Pecola prays for the bluest eyes. Pecola believes “. . . that if her eyes, that eyes that held the pictures and knew the sights – if those eyes of hers were different, that is to say beautiful, she herself would be different, that is to say, beautiful, she herself would be different” (BE 44). Pecola’s desire for the bluest eyes is similar to Pauline’s wish to be looked like Jean Harlow. “By absorbing the white culture’s definition of beauty and seeking
validation from unacceptable sources, both mother and daughter render themselves invisible to others and to one another” (Henry 43).

Pauline like her mother Ada turned to working in the household of a white mistress. Like her mother she neglects her children especially Pecola to care/serve at white homes. Like any other ‘black mammies’ who serve at white houses, Pauline rejects her own blackness and ‘ugly’ Pecola. She tries to find joy in the white family because she unconsciously believes that everything that related to whites is beautiful. Dorothy Sterling says, “Black women who worked with white were caught between two worlds” (BE xvii). When Pecola knocks the door of the white mistress for her mother, she realised that only physically she is the daughter of Pauline but not emotionally. When Pecola knocks the doors, “Mrs Breedlove Yanked her up by the arm, slapped her again and in a voice thin with anger, abused Pecola …”. At the same time, Pauline comforts the young white girl by “. . . hushing and soothing the tears of the little pink and yellow girl” (BE 107). This kind of attachment for the white daughters and detachment from her blood reflects the helplessness of the ‘mammy’. Though every black mother experiences the denial of the self, it is necessary for her to serve her family. Another important reason for this is black men’s minimal role in the financial support for his family.

Pauline’s husband Cholly is drunkard, irresponsible and lustful. Devoid of Pauline’s care and comfort, Pecola is sexually abused by her father, Cholly. Even after Pecola’s rape, Pauline still refuses to comfort her. Instead she beats Pecola. At this time the victimised Pecola begins her real quest for the bluest eyes. She makes believe that she has got blue eyes from Soaphead Church. She becomes insane. It’s true that Pecola suffers from not having an intimate emotional bond through mother-daughter relationship, but it is a stranger thing for most of the black girls in a world where poverty and racism decides the lives of people.
Pecola in a conversation with her self (Pecola with blue eyes), reasons that no one including her mother Pauline comments about her blue eyes because they are jealous of her beauty. Pecola was so much in need of her mother’s care when she is impregnated by her father Cholly, but Pauline always refuses to understand her plight at the very young age. Pecola in conversation with her friend/ mirror image of Pecola herself in an imaginary world, sadly says, “You’re right. No use telling her when she wouldn’t believe you” (198). Having already rejected by her mother and by society and abused by her father, humiliated by Maureen, Geraldine Pecola learns that she she is unattractive and isolated like her mother.

Pecola needs to fit in and feel comfortable with her mother, but Pauline is unable to give and even does not accept her. Pauline’s job to make sure her daughter is alive and to witness the sacrifice made for a family. As a child, Pecola had no choices and unfortunately in order to be loved by all. She accepts the inanity and yearns for the bluest eyes as normal. Most of all in Pauline’s manner, she models as to how to live through her turmoil.

In contrast to Mrs Breedlove, Mrs MacTeer is a very loving and caring mother to her two daughters Frieda and Claudia.

I ain’t good lookin’ and ain’t got waist-long hair
I say I ain’t good lookin’ and I ain’t got waist-long hair
But my mama have me something that’ll take me anywhere. (qt Collins 126)
Black girl is not ‘good looking’ and ‘having waist-long hair’ like white girl.
So she is rejected by everyone in society. It is only black mother who can give her ‘something’, here something means the skill and awareness to live with self Esteem and consciousness in alien land. That something will enable the black girl to survive as normal and as comfortable as a white girl. Mrs. MacTeer is one among those black women who empowers her daughters Frieda and Claudia against the odds of racist society. It is her love and warm affection that forms their personality as conscious, independent and self-respectful girls unlike Pecola Breedlove.
Mrs MacTeer is a highly conscious mother, who is constantly aware of and attentive to “her responsibilities toward Claudia and Frieda, ever vigilant that they might stray from the narrow path of moral decency and cultural acceptability that she believes to keep them safe in life” (Henry 44). Mrs MacTeer’s love though not always understood by her daughters Claudia and Frieda, it is unconditional, unwavering and wholly undeniable. The MacTeers home is filled with a “love, thick and dark as Alaga syrup.”

At the opening chapter of the novel when Claudia catches cold during the chilly days and the nights of autumn, her mother comments, “Great Jesus, Get on in the bed. How many times do I have to tell you to wear something on your head? You must be the biggest fool in this town” (BE 8). As a young girl Claudia then must have felt it as harsh but later she realises it as her mother’s concern for her. Claudia expresses,

Adults do not talk to us – they give us directions. They issue orders without providing information. When we trip and fall down they glance at us; if we cut or bruise ourselves, they ask us are we crazy. When we catch colds, they shake their heads in disgust at our lack of consideration. How they ask us, do you expect anybody to get anything done if you all are sick? We cannot answer them” (BE 8).

This episode between Claudia and Mrs MacTeer indicates the complexity of mother-daughter relationship because initially as a child Claudia misunderstood and misinterpreted her mother’s comments. Mrs MacTeer’s love is action rather than verbal sentiment.

Yet Claudia’s connection with her mother is strong and flexible enough to withstand minor discord as she does come to understand her mother’s concern for her health as a demonstration of love. Collins thinks Mrs MacTeers’ actions are a form of maternal love and nurturance. He argues that, “For a daughter, growing up
means developing a better understanding that even though she may desire more affection and greater freedom, her mother’s physical care and protection are acts as maternal love” (Collins 188).

Mrs MacTeer’s habit of singing symbolises her normal state of mind unlike Mrs Breedlove. Singing even made her daughters to love themselves and their lives.

Through her singing and engaging other black women in dialogue, Mrs MacTeer also provides a positive example of Afro-American womanhood, which produces in her daughter a sense of expectation and hopefulness about her life and love (Henry 47).

Claudia expresses, “Misery colored by the green and blues in her mother’s voice took all of the grief out of the words and let me with a conviction that pain was not only endurable, it was sweet” (BE 47). The lyrics of her mother’s powerful music suggest to Claudia the idea “that there is always somewhere else to go when hard times hit and a way to get there,” and this knowledge sustains Claudia (Moses 626).

Mrs MacTeers’s strong connection with other black women in the community is the key for her to make her daughters aware of the odds of the racist society and enabled them to love themselves. As a result, Claudia is empowered to define herself, create her reality and share the story of Pecola Breedlove and understanding the depth of her agony. Claudia rejects the white beauty standards and that shows she is conscious of her unawareness of her black community in the self-rejection. Unlike Pecola, Claudia knows even black is beautiful. She never adores whiteness and its beauty ideals. Her hating of Shirley Temple and her act of dismantling the white dolls are the evidence of her self-respect as a black girl and the awareness that black is not inferior. The credit for Claudia as the strongest girl
in the novel should go to Mrs MacTeer because ‘Every mother is the first teacher of a child”.

In *Sula*, both mother Hannah and grandmother Eva have greater influence on Sula. They teach Sula every unethical means for survival, including using men. With no cooperation of any men Hannah and Eva rear Sula. Eva was abandoned by her husband Boy Boy and Hannah lost her husband Rekus in young age. Some of the isolated black women like Eva and Hannah take lead and courage to survive without blindly obeying the odds of the society. Viven Nice states that, “Sula’s two-woman environment is unique because growing up as a daughter in a female-headed household must mean that some lessons are learnt at the independence of Womanhood” (Nice 196). The Peace women have stuck to some rules of their own. They reject the patriarchal dominated society’s norms and customs which would curtail their identity. The rules they follow are to beat the odds and satisfying their pleasures. Though Peace women live in the same period that Pauline live, they reject the controlling image of mammy and they decide to live the life on their own without depending upon any man and whites. They declare their own freedom and ensure against the emotional dependence upon any men by taking advantage of their needs. Almost to take a revenge on the men who have left them, they choose the promiscuous lifestyle for survival. The very life style affects Sula’s lifestyle.

It is only the mother who is the guide for the life of a daughter. In the case of Sula, though she has got two guides – mother Hannah and grandmother Eva unfortunately both Hannah and Eva could not nurture Sula in a proper way. Though they were not mammies, their priority was only to fulfill the basic necessities of life - food, shelter and clothes. The poor yet stronger mother and grandmother strive hard to stand on their legs and to lead an independent life.
Hannah, daughter of Eva completely follows the path of her mother in every single minute. Eva lives for her children. Her life is not a bed of roses. When her husband Boy Boy abandons her she is left with “... $1.65, five eggs, three beets...” Instead of focusing on her abandoned life Eva as a strong mother concentrates on “... the demands of feeding her three children that are so acute she had to postpone her anger for two years until she had both the time and energy for it.” (Sula 32). Eva devotes her life to rear her three children Plum, Pearl and Hannah. Later in the novel Hannah asks Eva, “Mamma, did you ever love us?” Eva angrily replies, “What you talkin’ bout did I love you girl I stayed alive for you”. Eva’s style of mothering her children is different. She instead of begging in front of the cruel elites and working under them as slaves, she without any hesitation takes help from her generous neighbours. Eva does her best to provide enough for children to live and give them an independent life. To guarantee the survival of her family, Eva sacrifices all physical and emotional ties for their welfare.

Eva leaves the town for 18 months. Barbara Rigney says, “She leaves her children with her neighbour and goes away to find a better life for herself” (Rigney 59). In order to serve her children, she focuses on pleasing herself first and providing just economically, physically and emotionally secured life for them. Eva comes back with “... wagon with two crutches, a new black pocketbook and one leg”. Many in the Bottom believe that “Eva stuck her leg under the train and made them pay it off... she sold it to a hospital for $10,000...” (Sula 31). This act is the best example of Eva’s unconditional love as a mother for her children. In order to show her hatred for husband Boy Boy, she directs her sights and attention toward a “... regular flock of gentleman callers...” Eva’s daughter Hannah uses her mother as a mirror into adulthood, Eva’s legacy “...was manlove that she bequeathed to her daughters”. Though unlike Eva her second daughter Pearl marries at the age of 14 and is successful in her relationship with her husband she
clings to Eva for validation of herself. It is her third daughter Hannah, who adopts Eva’s sexual behaviour and distant manner of motherhood.

Hannah Peace, much like Eva, begins her early adult life by marrying and being faithful to Sula’s father Rekus. After Rekus’s death, Hannah is penniless and without job. She moves “. . . back into her mother’s big house prepared to take care of it and her mother forever”, following Eva’s example of care. While hoping to make Eva’s life easier, Hannah becomes trapped in her mother’s world of wanting and giving attention to men. “. . . After Rekhu’s death Hannah had a steady sequence of lovers, mostly the husbands of her friends and neighbours” (Sula 42). Hannah’s intimate life is a learned behaviour from Eva whose want for male attention determines her world. Like Eva, Hannah’s goal is also not a committed one rather it is physical relationship, “The Peace women simply loved maleness for its own sake”. Hannah imitates her mother’s desire. Being alone without husband Hannah like her mother follows her style in every step of her life.

Hannah is open with her sexuality and regards every man as a prospect. Hannah makes sex “. . . a part of the ordinary and pleasant things she does everyday, rather than a hidden activity at night” (Christian 80). Eva does not challenge or denigrate Hannah’s lifestyle because it is her lifestyle. Sula grows up by witnessing the sexual tension in her family. She sees her house filled with a number of men who call upon Eva and Hannah. Sula unconsciously learns how to treat men and to live her life. Sula begins to see sex as “. . . pleasant and frequent, but otherwise unremarkable” (Sula 44). Eva and Hannah have experienced life without men. They teach Sula that men are not forever. From childhood Sula just learns that love is not a natural or lasting thing.

Eva succeeds in making Hannah like herself. Much like Eva’s attitude towards motherhood, Hannah cannot give herself the same to Sula. Hannah admits, “I love Sula. But I just don’t like her”. Hannah unconsciously follows her mother’s
style of nurturing wherein Eva never wants to show physical attachments to her children. Likewise, “Hannah’s inability to like her daughter which is linked to her own mother’s inability or failure to give Hannah the feeling of being like. Hannah has no experimental knowledge or maternal role model for this aspect of mother-daughter bond” (Fultz 233). Lacking experience and incapable of liking her daughter, Hannah paves the road to a third generation Peace family in Sula.

Sula enjoyed her childhood with her best companion Nel Wright. Their friendship “. . . was as intense as it was sudden. They found relief in each other’s personality”. Unlike her mother Hannah and her grandmother Eva, Sula has a very intimate relationship with another woman that is Nel. When she enters into womanhood she cannot escape from following the path of her mother and grandmother. Much like Hannah, “. . . Sula went to bed with men as frequently as she could. It was the only place where she could find what she was looking for and misery and the ability to feel deep sorrow” (Sula 122). Eva and Hannah love Sula just enough to keep her alive. As black women they are stronger but they did not utilise it in a proper channel. They are unable to show a proper way to Sula. They could not prepare Sula to face the cruel world. Neither gets married nor has children, Sula lives for herself and for her pleasure by any means.

Sula finds genuine relationship with Ajax, her boy friend. She finds their relationship as, “not love, perhaps, but possession or at least the desire for it”. In her relationship with Ajax she recognises her desire for stability and the satisfaction of nurturing. Unfortunately, Ajax does not recognise the same. When Sula is rejected by Ajax, she is left with “An absence so decorative, so ornate, it was difficult for her to understand how she had endured, without failing dead or being consumed” (Sula 134). Sula certainly feels helpless to handle herself after the breakup of relationship with Ajax. Her mother Hannah has never prepared her daughter to handle such a situation and even Sula is very small to understand how
Hannah handled the same situation after her father’s death. In such a condition, Sula unconsciously reacts to lost love as do Eva and Hannah and continues with her life. Because of being in Peace family Sula believes in the will to survive. Sula follows the cycle “. . . she sleeps with the husbands of her neighbors indiscriminately” (Christian 86). Since sex is a means to survive for Sula, she does not even hesitate to sleep with Jude, the husband of her best friend. Sula’s mother and grandmother teach her not to regard marriage and to please herself. To Sula, “She had no thought at all of causing Nel pain when she bedded Jude” because Sula is never provided with “. . . intimate knowledge of marriage, having lived in a house with women who thought all men available and selected from among them . . .” (Sula 119).

Sula is seen as an evil in society. All curse her because she goes beyond the boundaries of community norms. She does all the possible immoral things for her pleasure. It is neither Sula nor her mother and grandmother should be blamed for her life style. As isolated and poor black mothers, Eva and Hannah irrespective of means of survival devote their life in providing the necessities of life like – food, clothes and shelter, Sula unconsciously goes forming her personality whatever she sees and understands within her family. Along with food, clothes and shelter, the basic need of the Peace women is to be happy. So they do not bother any friendship and marriage to get happiness. It is only racism that has to be blamed for their strange lifestyle. Like many other black women in America, the Peace women strive for their freedom and identity.

Sula’s exclusion from the Bottom leaves Sula to die alone. Without Nel, Ajax, Hannah or Eva, Sula dies alone in her adult years. This is the house where Sula learnt how to live and to become a woman. On her deathbed, Sula thinks as to how Eva tried to save Hannah from fire. Sula relishes her mother’s examples and refuses, “. . . not to be able to see the boarded-up window Eva jumped out of. And
looking at those four wooden planks with the steel rod slanting across them was the only peace she had. The sealed window soothed her with its sturdy termination, its unassailable finality” (Sula 148). The window symbolizes the strife and sacrifices of Eva. It is the primary reason why Sula is alive and can face death in such a strong but defiant manner.

Sula, being a black girl has to be saluted for being a woman who even though alone and an outcast, is neither shamed nor humbled. Because her mother and grandmother have bequeathed on her a strong will to achieve their birth rights such as freedom, self-identity and happiness in life which have always been controlled by the patriarchal society and the elites.

In contrast to Hannah, Helene Wright, Nel’s mother raises her daughter at the base of rigid traditions and repressions. Tough Rochelle, Helene’s mother chose prostitution as her lifestyle. Cecile Helen’s grandmother and mother of Rochelle rescued Helene by growing under the shadow of prostitution. Helene’s reserved and religious “grandmother took her away from the soft lights and flowered carpets of the Sundown Houses and raised her under the dole some eyes of a multicolored Virgin Mary, counseling her to be constantly on guard for any sign of her mother’s wild blood” (Sula 17). Helene’s strict, religious upbringing and her education given by her grandmother prepares Nel for a conventional life. Helene designs her own life giving careful attention to the manners and cultural values. She decides her journey of life on morally and socially accepted paths. Cecile in order to keep Helene away to get damaged by her mother, arranges her marriage with her distant nephew, Wiley Wright, who was a “ship’s cook on one of the Great Lakes Line” and sure to Helene to his home “in a Northern town called Medallion”, far away from the reach of Rochelle’s influence. Thus, Helene is brought up under the motherly protection of Cecile and when she becomes the mother of Nel, “. . . she emerges as mothers like Pauline and Geraldine in The
Bluest Eye, who prefer orderliness and cleanliness to such a degree that it actually limits her existence, represses her sexuality, hinders her ability to cultivate meaningful, mutually beneficial relationships and ultimately causes her to model weakness and fragility for her daughter” (Henry 65).

As her last name suggests Helene Wright always wants to do right things. As a mother she wants to become a model to other mothers in bringing up their daughter in such a way that she should be praised and accepted by the community. Helene always loves to keep her house clean. She is the kind of woman who “loves her house and enjoys manipulating her daughter and her husband”. She sees her “lovely house with a brick porch and real lace curtains at the window” as a reflection of her moral and ethical values and social status. But by her mother Helene’s way of bringing her up, Nel often feels suffocated in that house. She thinks of “her mother’s incredibly orderly house, feeling the neatness pricking her back, as a place of confinement and restriction” (Sula 19). Though there is nothing wrong with Helene’s desire to create a neat and orderly home for her family, it is problematic because unknowingly Helene’s restricted behaviour creates a gap between the mother and daughter that is Helene and Nel.

Like Pauline in The Bluest Eye Helene is very much conscious about white beauty standards. She tries to avoid blackness by trying to mimic whiteness. For example, Helene demands Nel to pull her nose in order to lengthen it and to submit to “the hateful hot comb . . . each Saturday evening” for the benefit of “smooth hair” (Sula 55). Helene’s efforts to change her daughter’s appearance are to make Nel easily accepted in the mainstream society. This shows Helene’s internalisation of white culture and as a mother her concern for Nel to see her not as rejected and hated by the mainstream society.

Nel marries Jude. Being brought up in conventional family Nel takes better care of her husband and family. For Nel love is no lesser than life. It is a means of
survival. But everything gets shattered by the entrance of Sula in between Nel and Jude. Helene has instilled the ethics about marriage and man-woman relationship in Nel. So for Nel sex is something that belongs to marriage and that has to take place within the conventions of society and she feels lonely when Jude leaves the town by breaking her heart. Nel feels,

‘What I am supposed to do with these old things now, just walk up and down these rooms? What good are they, Jesus? They will never give me the peace . . .’ “O Jesus, I could be a mule or plow the furrows with my hands if need to be or hold these rickety walls up with my back is need be if I knew that somewhere in this world in the pocket of some night I could open my legs to some cowboy lean hips but you are trying to tell me no and O my sweet Jesus what kind of cross is that?’ (Sula 111).

Sula and Nel are the best friends though they share similar interest in search of their identity. They are brought up in very different households by the two extremely dissimilar models of motherhood. Nel’s mother is characterized by repression, conventionality, rigidity with a thin frame of sexuality having morals in it. Sula’s is completely opposite that are described by the traits of invention, independence, sexual expression and intrigue with traces of the kind of conventionality and obsessive control that control their life. Collins quotes,

. . . We, the daughters of these Black women will honour their sacrifice by giving then thanks. We will undertake with pride, every transcendent dream of freedom made possible by the humility of their sacrifice” (qt Collins 115).

Sethe in Morrison’s Beloved is such a mother who sacrifices her own child to save its life from slavery. The whole world feels proud of a mother like Sethe whose thick love for her daughter makes her to take a decision that death is the only solution to safeguard her daughter from the cruelty of slavery. Sethe declares her daughter’s freedom by cutting her throat.
There are many instances in Afro-American novel, of slavery where slaves feel death as better than suffering in slavery. In William Wells Brown’s *Clottelle*, the slave mother Isabella would rather commit suicide than face slavery for herself and her children. Hunted by a crowd of dogs and slave catchers, Isabella leaps into the Potomac as an act symbolizing the “Unconquerable love of liberty which the human heart may inherit” (Brown 50-52). The chapter is entitled “Death Is Freedom”. In Zora Neale Hurston’s *Moses, Man of the Mountain*, slavery is described as an institution in which only death can give freedom. Amram tells Cabel, “You are up against a hard game when you got to die to beat it”. And even Harriet Jacob’s Margaret in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself* sees death as a better alternative to slavery. “It seemed to me”. Writes Jacob, “that I would rather see them (her children) killed than have them given up to (the slave owner’s) power . . . . When I lay down beside my child, I felt how much easier it would be to see her die than to see her master beat her about” (qt Rushy 577).

*Beloved* as a novel is about slave women and more about slave mother and motherhood. Since it is based on the real story of Margaret Garner, Morrison’s portrayal of extraordinary mother-daughter relationship arouses “the feelings of fear and pity”. The tragic element in the life of Sethe knocks the door of humility in every reader’s heart. The novel is set in the first half of the nineteenth century when the slave population in America had increased significantly. Sethe was a slave in Kentucky plantation named Sweet Home. In contrast to its name ‘Sweet Home’ proved itself worse than hell for slaves. Sethe tolerated all the physical as well as psychological exploitation of her but she could not accept the reality that even her daughter should tolerate the same in future. The ‘mother’ in Sethe thinks of the safety and freedom from slavery of her daughter and she feels death can free
them. So among four of her children she could kill the third daughter Beloved. Two of her elder sons leave home and the fourth one -- she is carrying in her womb.

Morrison delineates the complexity of motherhood in the context of the ill treatment of black mothers in slavery. Terry Paul Caesar in his *Slavery and Motherhood in Toni Morrison’s Beloved* makes an interesting observation when he says that “slavery and motherhood can actually be intertwined. He talks about how the mother may be enslaved by her daughter as well as vice versa”. In the novel it is always confusion that whether children possess their power over Sethe or Sethe possesses her power over children. When the novel is closely seen, Sethe has to suffer more as a slave women and all her sufferings are closely related to her motherhood. She was beaten and molested when she was pregnant; she had to give birth on a boat and killed her child to save her from slavery. Even when she moves to Ohio, the ghost of Beloved follows her there and continues to torment the family.

Though Sethe suffers the most as a mother, she expects good to happen to her children. She expresses Paul D about her wide maternal love as

“I was big, Paul D and deep and wide and when I stretched out my arms all my children could get in between. I was that wide. Look like I loved em more after I got here. Or maybe I couldn’t love em proper in Kentucky because they wasn’t mine to love. But when I got here, when I jumped down off that wagon - there wasn’t nobody in the world I couldn’t love if I wanted to. You know what I mean” (*BE* 190-191).
Sethe admits that she could not take care of her children at Kentucky because of her exploitation by the slave master, who is named as schoolteacher. Sethe is scared of him for her children.

Sethe again expresses that she did not have enough milk to feed her children. When she was molested as a pregnant woman, she only lamented the loss of her milk. “Anybody could smell me long before he saw me. And when he saw me he’d see the drops of it on the front of my dress. Nothing I could do about that. All I knew was I had to get my milk to my baby girl . . . those boys came in there and took my milk. That’s what they came in there for. Held me down and took it” (BE 19). She loves her children at the core but she is unable to show the same.

In the vicious circle of slavery, many black children were intentionally killed and some died because of their helpless condition. Here in the case of Beloved it is her mother who killed her children. Sethe as a giver of life thinks she can have a right to take the life of her children. Sethe knew about this right from the telling of her own mother’s story. Sethe’s own mother killed all the children fathered by the whites who raped her. As Nan, Sethe’s grandmother tells her, “Sethe threw them all away but you. The one from the crew she threw away on the island. The others from more whites she threw away. Without names, she threw them” (Sula 62). Here Sethe’s mother’s act of killing her children is to avoid them being humiliated in society as mulatto girls. Another important person helping Sethe through the exorcising of her painful memories is Ella, who it is hinted, has committed infanticide. By placing such a frame around the story, Morrison insists on the impossibility of judging an action without reference to the terms of its enactment. Sethe naturally follows the path of her mother by killing her children to avoid the heinous acts of slavery.
The most impressive part of the novel is that of Sethe’s defending of her act of infanticide. She becomes a mother-goddess for children. Towards the end of the novel when Sethe is trying to justify her attempts to kill her children, she wants Beloved to understand why, but because Beloved is already disappeared, Sethe verbalises it to herself in this way,

That anybody white could take your whole self for anything that came to mind. Not just work, kill or maim you, but dirty you. Dirty you so bad you couldn’t like yourself anymore. Dirty you to sad you forgot who you were and couldn’t think it up. And though she and others lived through and got over it, she could never let it happen to her own. The best thing she was, was her children. Whites might dirty her all right, but not her best thing, her beautiful, magical best thing – the part of her was clean . . . “(Sula 251).

Sethe’s defense of her act of infanticide as not a crime rather as a right thing reminds the defense of Euripides’ Medea, where she expresses the reason of her killing of her children as;

I do not care for myself if I am banished

But I am wretched if they (her children) are in trouble (Euripides 350).

Further she defends that it is concern for her children to protect them from her husband’s disobedience. She expresses;

. . . my task is fixed: as quickly as possible
To kill my children and fly this land,
And not by hesitation leave my sons
To die by other hands more merciless (Euripides 835).

Medea tells empathetically to her husband Jason when he accuses her for her murder. She tells, “Your defiance and your second marriage killed the children”
(Euripides 838). Likewise even Sethe became only reason to kill but it is slavery that had actually killed Beloved. This is the strange love that only a mother can have for her children. Sethe clarifies her act, “Why I did it. How if I had not killed her she would have died and that something I could not bear to happen to her” …You cannot protect her every minute. What’s going to happen when you die”. “Nothing I’ll protect her while I’m live and I’ll protect her when I ain’t” (BE 45). Sethe’s decision may seem unreasonable and out of logic but her motherly feelings for her children can never be wrong. Like any mother she saved her children. This act of killing is a kind of resistance against the system of slavery. Patricia Hill Collins writes,

Motherhood – whether bloodmother, othermother, or community othermother – can be invoked by African American women as a symbol of power. Much of black women’s status in African-American communities stems not only from actions as mothers in black family networks but from contributions as community othermothers” (Collins 132).

Baby Suggs in Beloved acts as one of such othermothers for the children of Sethe her daughter-in-law and to Sethe herself in her difficult times. Sethe sees Baby Suggs as near – perfect model of perfect mother. Baby Suggs advices when Sethe needed it and as the other female slave who had almost earned her freedom. Sethe had the opportunity of sharing life and learning wisdom from her mother-in-law.

In the novel, Sethe relies on her mother-in-law Baby Suggs to help her with childcare. Baby Suggs loves and nurtures Sethe’s children as if they were her own. When Baby Suggs is granted her freedom, she takes Howard, Buglar and Beloved with her in the wagon to cross the river into Ohio. She bargains for a house where she and the children can live until Sethe and Halle who plan to escape from the
Garner plantation. Baby Suggs is the sole mother for the children for two months. This is the power of the black mother that she can be the sole mother for any helpless children. Baby Suggs even acts as the sole mother for Sethe who is influenced by the holy orthodox religion of Baby Suggs. Baby Sugg’s conviction that God intended people to love and care for each other had a greater impact on Sethe. As Morrison describes it, “Baby Suggs holy, offered up to them her great big heart”. And she celebrated her body and bodies of all the freed slaves. This is the significant contribution of Baby Suggs to Sethe to make her able to celebrate her slave body and heart.

Baby Suggs filled in Sethe the right way to love her children. When Sethe learns schoolteacher’s sadistic obsession of inspecting his slaves using two categories like human and animal. It denotes for him there is no difference between animal and slaves. These experiences about the way schoolteacher treats slaves arouse in her consciousness and made her aware of the dark future for her children. According to Mayfield,

Sethe’s consciousness became flooded with both horrors and guilt: horror that such a man as schoolteacher would record the movements of all his slaves, and guilt that made Sethe question her own humanity, Sethe was determined to be all that she believed that being a mother entitled her to be – not just a breeder of children for a white slave owner to use as beasts of burden and certainly not a slave woman whose body wore out from debilitating physical labor. Sethe was determined to keep all the children that were hers and love them the way Baby Suggs had taught her to love. She willfully forgot that slaves were property that rights of ownership which white people so posed gave her no right to claim her children as her own (Mayfield 8).
Sethe learnt that she should not be a machine to produce a further slave in the form of her children to make suffer under the heinous act of the schoolteacher. She showed Sethe to dare against the atrocities and do her duty as a loving and caring mother. So Sethe learnt that she has the right to build the future of her own children so she thinks of securing their future by killing all of them but she could kill only her daughter Beloved.

The mother-daughter relationship between Sethe and Denver is beautiful. Like every daughter Denver follows Sethe as an ideal mother at every step. She imitates Sethe all the time. Though she does not express it to Sethe, Denver “dressed in Sethe’s dresses . . . She imitated Sethe, talked the way she did, laughed her laugh and used her body the same way down to the walk, the way Sethe moved her hands . . .” (BE 241). Sethe knows her duty as a mother for Denver. She knows no one can care and nurture her children better than her, Sethe thinks that her milk is the best one. So Sethe devotes only her milk to her daughter. Sethe says, “All I know was had to get milk to my baby girl. Nobody was going to nurse her like me . . . Nobody knew that but me and nobody had her milk but me” (BE 16).

Beloved re-enters the house of Sethe at ‘124’ in the ghostly appearance. Sethe sees her reflection in Beloved. This implies a strong feeling and chemistry between the mother and daughter. The lines go as, “When I went in, I saw her face coming to me and it was my face too . . . she smiles at me and it is my own face smiling” (BE 214). This implies the physical as well as the spiritual connection between Sethe and Beloved.

For a mother a child is always a child however she grows. Mother’s heart always beats and cares for the welfare of her child. Sethe says, “… Grown don’t
mean nothing to a mother. A child is a child. They get bigger, older, but grown? What’s that supposed to mean? In my heart it doesn’t mean a thing” (BE 45). Hence the mother-daughter relationship between Sethe and Denver, Sethe and Beloved is like heart and heart beat where one lies within oneself. It is slavery that tries to separate them but the reappearance of Beloved means that she can erase some of the pain she inflicted upon herself by killing her child. She can at least fantasise what it might have been like to know the growing stages of her lost child:

Beloved, she my daughter. She is mine. She comes back to me of her own free will and I don’t have to explain a thing . . . . My plan was to take us all to the other side where my own ma’am is. They stopped us from getting there, but they didn’t stop from getting here. Ha, ha” (BE 202-203).

Hence the mother-daughter relationship between Sethe and Beloved and Sethe and Denver is endless, flawless and mind-blowing.

The black mothers in Jazz Wild, Rose Dear, True Belle and the mother of Dorcas represent the abused and oppressed black women of a racially-oppressed society. Wild, Joe’s mother leaves him motherless when he was an infant. Wild is the naked woman and lives in the woods. Nothing is explained in the novel about the causes that made her ‘wildness’ and insane, but her terror and madness can be understood as her trauma being a black woman in the alien land. Devoid of the mother’s love, Joe yearns for freedom and love. He marries Violet to escape from pain of his mother’s silent rejection of him. When Violet fails in providing the love to Joe, he turns towards Dorcas. Lewis opines, “Dorcas not only fills his terrible void of loneliness and need for mother-love, but as a young girl like the remembered vision of a mother Dorcas actually symbolizes Wild for him. He sees the little hoofmarks on her face as part of the trail he symbolically and literally followed to find his mother” (Lewis 44). But when he is again rejected by Dorcas he loses his control over his act of violence and shoots Dorcas: “But if the trail
speaks, no matter what’s in the way, you can find yourself a crowded room aiming a bullet at her heart never mind it’s the heart you can’t live without” (Jazz 134). Hence, representing the black mother Wild as the outcome of the racial oppression and as a result of the rejection by Wild Joe develops a distorted idea of love which leads ultimately to his horrific act – his murder of Dorcas, which is as Mabalia puts it, ‘the culmination of Joe’s struggle to touch his mother’s hand” (qt Lewis 35).

Rose Dear, the mother of Violet commits suicide by jumping into a well when in 1988 debt collectors had come to repossess her house and furniture, and she had to take refuse in an abandoned shack. Neighbours helped them, bringing food. Her mother True Belle returns home after hearing the condition. Though she was managing the situation, Rose Dear helplessly commits suicide. She leaves her children’s responsibilities to her mother True Belle and dies. Rose Dear represents the helpless and poor black women in America. When Violet is betrayed by her husband Joe, she faces it courageously rather committing suicide like her mother Rose Dear. She did not follow the path of her mother. Since she is brought up by True Belle, like her she faces it and tries to reunite her married life in the later stage.

True Belle is the grandmother of Violet. More than a slave woman she served as a mammy at white master, Colonel Wordsworth Gray in Baltimore. She is made free and she returns to Vesper Country to spend her final days with her family. After the suicide of her daughter Rose Dear, True Belle takes good care of her granddaughter Violet. Even as a mammy, True Belle considers Golden Gray who is a child of a black slave as father and Vera Louise Gray as a white mother as ‘the light of her child’. As per her mistresses’ order she keeps the birth secret of Golden Gray. Both as a mammy and grandmother True Belle represents the power of a black mother. Unfortunately, both Violet and Golden Gray without love of
their respective mothers suffer and in a state of confusion they search for their identity.

Morrison poignantly expresses the personality of Dorcas as a motherless girl. At her young age Dorcas loses her mother in a burning building during the East St. Louis riots. A homeless and orphaned Dorcas is brought up by her aunt Alice Manfred. Dorcas feels uncomfortable with her aunt too. She rebels against her aunt’s old-fashioned tastes and refashions herself as a sexually-desirable woman. She wants to be looked at and admired. When Joe visits her aunt’s house she successfully captures the older man’s gaze. The morality of sleeping with a married man old enough to be her father does not affect Dorcas’s decision. Like Joe Dorcas devoid of her mother’s love searches for her identity. She wants a boy who would control her and create an identity for her. Apart from Joe when she finds it in her new boyfriend Acton, she becomes victim of Joe’s anger and killed. Through the story one can understand Dorcas as an ultra-modern and flirty girl but Morrison shows her inner suffering. Her inner beauty can be seen when she dies like a martyr. She chooses to die in order to be watched, making herself a martyr by bleeding to death.

Morrison’s novels are characterised with the richness of mother characters and strong and unforgettable bond between mothers and daughters. Morrison delineates the mother’s role in the life of children.

3.3 Female Bonds of Friendship

Morrison highlights the theme of female friendship. Female friendship or female bond creates a new enthusiasm in black women. The black women’s
common experiences urge them to form a strong bond of friendship with their fellow black women. The female bond between two sisters, two friends, mother and daughter and grandmother and granddaughter reveal the source of strength to hit back against patriarchy, the racial and sexual prejudices. Since the relationship between mother and daughter has already been discussed, at present the study focuses on the rest of the bonding like female friendship and sisterhood and their importance in self-assertion.

Female friendship not only helps the black women counteract the effects of patriarchy but also provides them with comfort and security healing their pain. Evelyne Hammond describes the special relationship that black women can have with one another, “I think most of the time you have to be there to experience it. When I am with other black women I always laugh. I think our humor comes from a shared recognition of who we all are in the world” (qt Collins 97). Only black woman can be the best friend for black woman. Commenting on the importance of black women in another black woman’s life, Stephanie Demetrakopoulos says, “It is to other women that we go for the deepest understanding, for the most uncontingent love. Women without female bonds are in my opinion the most lost and alienated of human beings” (Demetrakopoulos 51).

Many Afro-American women writers like Alice Walker, Gloria Naylor, Zora Neale Hurston, Paule Marshall and Toni Morrison have seriously demonstrated the relationship of the black woman with the other black women which is informal and complex but significant compared to the relationship of their male counterparts. Female friendship for black women medicates pain and scarce of life which she has been experiencing by men and whites. Toni Cade Bambara’s short story The Johnson Girls, Alice Walker’s novel The Color Purple,
Zora Neale Hurston’s novel *Their Eyes were Watching God* and Toni Morrison’s novels *The Bluest Eye, Sula, Beloved, Jazz, Paradise, Love* and *Mercy* demonstrate the emphasis of the black woman’s voice in other black woman’s life. The black woman gains so much importance in other black woman’s life because she has the patience to listen and feel the traumatic experiences unlike black men and whites. This sharing and listening experiences among the black women is mutual. This enables them to give a voice to one another. Collins states,

For Afro-American women the listener most able to move beyond the invisibility created by objectification as the other in order to see and hear the fully human black woman is another woman. This process of trusting one another can seem dangerous because only black women know what it means to be black women. But if we will not to one another, then we will? (Collins 98).

Collins highlights the voice of black women for one another. If they will not respond to one another’s feelings the life of the black woman will always be a question mark. She becomes completely isolated and helpless in an alien land. The role of female bond of friendship in Black woman’s life is vital for her emancipation and empowerment.

Female friendship is a non-sexual relationship between women based on giving and receiving emotional and moral support, sharing stories and experiences, caring and nurturing each other. This form of relationship may occur between any women and does not necessarily involve sibling or mother-daughter relationships. Hudson-Weems defines such a bonding,

This particular kind of sisterhood refers specifically to an asexual relationship between women who confide in each other and willingly share their true feelings, their hopes and their dreams. Enjoying, understanding
and supporting each other, women friends of this sort are invaluable to each other. With such love, trust and society, it is difficult to imagine any woman without such a genuine support system as that found in genuine sisterhood (Weems 65-66).

Women friends provide for each other dependability that goes beyond the concern for self and aims at reaching out to sisters in an attempt to help and elevate them. Morrison describes this form of relationships between Claudia, Frieda and Pecola in *The Bluest Eye*, Sula and Nel in *Sula* and Sethe and Amy Denver in *Beloved* and Alice Manfred and Violet in *Jazz*.

Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* has a strong bond of female friendship among Pecola, Claudia and Frieda. The story revolves around the contrast and comparisons of the lives of two black girls by name Pecola Breedlove and Claudia. Pecola, who breaks down into madness, is utterly given an emotional support by the MacTeer’s sisters Claudia and Frieda. On the other hand, the lives of Pecola and Claudia are seen with the lenses of ‘bildungsroman,’ their bond between the two black women. It may be their mothers, friends, and sisters that play a vital role in the formation of their lives. The term ‘bildungsroman’ refers to “the development of the protagonist’s mind and characters, in the passage from childhood through varied experiences and often through a spiritual crisis – into maturity, which usually involves recognition of identity and role in the world” (Abrams 198).

Pecola as a black and ugly girl is born and brought up in Breedlove’s family who experiences racial and spiritual crisis. Claudia and Frieda being brought up in a strong family, have no inferior attitudes towards their selves. Claudia grows up
to tell the story, while Pecola grows down and sinks into insanity as a result of racism, sexism and classism. These ramifications of slavery reflect in the lives of the girls. Morrison portrays Pecola as a weak and Claudia as a strong black girl. For Pecola, the presence of Claudia and Frieda in her life gives her some sort of relaxation. Pecola as a rejected girl by the family and neighbours, she is given shelter at Claudia’s. When Cholly Breedlove, father of Pecola sets fire to his rented property and puts his family outdoors, at this critical condition Claudia’s family shows its generosity to her.

Claudia and her sister Frieda discover how complaisant Pecola is; and they widen their sympathy to friendship. Indeed, theirs is the only friendship Pecola ever enjoys because Claudia and Frieda never assume superiority. Pecola, Claudia and Frieda share much in common – gender, age, race, poverty, ignorance, guilt and awareness of adult anger – most of which they cannot control.

Claudia and Frieda’s support for Pecola rescues her from facing more humiliation in school. This was when Pecola’s classmates were humiliating her by saying, “Black e mo. Black e mo. Yadaddsleepsnecked. Black e mo black e mo ya dadd sleeps nekked. Black emo . . .” (BE 63). In return, Frieda gives her voice on Pecola’s behalf. She yells, “You cut that out, you hear?” further she tells, “Leave her ‘lone, or I’m gone tell everybody what you did!” (BE 64). In this situation the helpless Pecola feels that there is someone for her in the whole world. Only the black woman can give this kind of support and voice to another black woman.

Maureen Peal, a light skinned girl, like Pauline has internalised white standards. Maureen has internalised the traditional white associations of darkness with ugliness. When Pecola denies having seen her naked father, Maureen turns
on her, affirming the taunt and going still further, “I am cute and you ugly. Black and Black e mos”. The innocent and depressed Pecola stood silent, facing all the humiliations. Claudia comes and hits back to Maureen. She swings at her and misses Pecola hitting in the face. She furiously asks Maureen, “You think you so cute!”. Claudia wishes, “I wanted to open her up, crisp her edges, ram a stick down that hunched and curving spine, force her stand erect and spite the misery out on the streets”. (BE 72). This is how the heart of black woman beats for another black woman in the critical and complex situations.

The concern of Claudia and Frieda for Pecola is evident at Pecola’s pregnancy. When Claudia and Frieda learn that instead of being a victim Pecola is again being humiliated for her pregnancy and their sorrow is intensified by the fact that none of the adults seem to understand her. All just want Pecola’s baby to die before it takes birth. It is only Claudia and Frieda pray for Pecola and her baby to survive. To Claudia Pecola’s child with, “clean black eyes . . . . flared nose, kissing thick lips, and the living breathing silk of black skin is infinitely more desirable than a lifeless doll”. Being drawn to Pecola’s baby is also a means which “counteracts the universal love of white baby dolls, Shirley Temple and Maureen Peals”, in other words, a means of affirming the baby’s individual value” (BE 148). They decide to rescue the baby by their prayer. They sacrifice their seed money and plant the rest of marigold seeds. They bury the money by Pecola’s house and bury the seeds in their own yard so that they can tend them. Claudia and Frieda expect the marigolds to sprout in token that the baby will live. It is only the sisters Claudia and Frieda who understand the agony of their friend Pecola. A number of times, it is their bond of friendship that rescues Pecola from heart-breaking humiliations.
Though Claudia and Frieda are not blood-sisters for Pecola, their genuine love, trust and security showed to her, symbolises the black woman’s willing to understand and share the pain of another black woman. Without Claudia and Frieda, Pecola would have met the stage of insanity long before.

Morrison’s *Sula* is based on the fact that female friendship between the two girls helps them to face the challenges of racism, classism and sexism. The friendship heals the wounds of pain being marginalised. The strong bond of friendship between Sula and Nel leads them to achieve unity between the self and the other. The friendship between the two proves beneficial to young girls because it gives them an opportunity to share experiences, provide and receive counseling, protect and defend each other and help to change their view positively about their homes. However, sisterhood stops with childhood in Morrison’s novels and gives way to tensions and conflicts. The same happens with Nel and Sula. Morrison shows very successful childhood friendship between Sula and Nel. Along with their friendship, Morrison delineates how race and gender discrimination affects their self”. They become self-centred for their free life and that creates a gap between their friendships. Yet the climax of the novel signifies the never ending bond between the two friends Sula and Nel.

During childhood of Sula and Nel, their friendship is stronger. Both feel that they are born for each other to share and care. They are like the two faces of the same coin. They are “two throats and one eye”, “Their friendship was so strong, they themselves had difficulty distinguishing one’s thoughts from the others” (*Sula* 83). Their friendship is an example of black women’s solidarity. “Each discovered years before that they were neither white nor male and that all freedom and triumph was forbidden to them, they had set about creating something else to
be. There meeting was fortunate, for it let them use each other to grow on. Daughters of distant mothers and incomprehensible fathers (Sula’s because he was dead; Nel’s because he was not) they found in each other’s eyes the intimacy they were looking for” “Their friendship was as intense as it was sudden. They found relief in each other’s personality”. Along with sharing and caring Sula and Nel sympathise with each other. “In those days a compliment to one was a compliment to the other and cruelty to one was the challenge to other” (Sula 84). Nel was the ‘other I’ of Sula.

However, despite the closeness and intensity of Sula and Nel’s friendship, this relationship cannot simply be labeled homoerotic as critics like Barbara Smith and Adrienne Rich have suggested. As playmates, Sula and Nel share deep and profound moments in their childhood and get involved in very personal and intimate play, which urges the critics to consider their relationship as homoerotic. One such game, which consists of digging holes in the beach, demonstrates the adolescents’ desire to discover sex, but their interest is clearly in boys. They enjoy the company of boys and the comments they make about them too, as when Ajax calls them — “pig meat.” The narrator states, —It was in that summer, the summer of their twelfth year, the summer of the beautiful black boys, that they became skittish, frightened and bold—all at the same time . . . They decided to go down by the river where the boys sometimes swam” (Sula 56).

At twelve, the adolescents experience the beginning of puberty and got interested in sexuality, especially in boys. Barbara Smith opines,

Despite the apparent heterosexuality of the female characters I discovered in rereading Sula that it works as a lesbian novel not only because of the passionate friendship between Sula and Nel, but because of Morrison’s
consistently critical stance towards the heterosexual institutions of male/female relationships, marriage, and the family (Sula 98).

In fact, Smith does not base her lesbian reading of the novel on a sexual relationship between Nel and Sula but on the intensity of their friendship. Morrison herself does not agree with a lesbian reading of Sula but, instead, encourages us to see that women and girls in particular may nurture strong bonding without being sexually involved.

Since both Sula and Nel were not getting the care that they needed by their mothers, they build a strong female bond between each other and that grant them much comfort. Their mutual commitment helps them to survive their mothers’ lack of concern. Nel feels suffocated by the restricted and more conventional life which her mother Helene tries to impose on her whereas Sula feels the abandonment in style of life that her mother Hannah leads which is sexually free and openly challenges moral conventions. Both the mothers fail to provide a healthy personality to their daughters. Their lack of maternal care is ultimately filled by the friendship that develops between Sula and Nel. In order to overcome the unwanted life in their respective families they both find comfort in each other and succeed in building new identities.

Sula and Nel’s friendship is so thick that the voice of one would change the mood of the other. For instance, Nel’s voice awakens Sula from the anger and sadness of Hannah’s comments about her mother’s statement “... I love Sula. I just don’t like her”. As Wilfred D. Samuels and Hudson-Weems note, Nel’s confidence and Sula’s insecurity formed the foundation of the reciprocity that characterises their friendship, providing them with the most important relationship
The care and compassion Nel offers Sula during this difficult time greatly contributes to her recovery. In turn, Sula helps Nel to face her mother's control and unreasonable demands.

The strong friendship bond between Nel and Sula becomes a means of their new sense of identity. For instance, during the trip to South with her mother, Nel becomes aware of herself. In the train which is racially segregated, Helen unknowingly has entered the white’s part of the train. When Helene becomes aware of it, she laughs and that causes the rage of the conductor as well as the anger of black soldiers, who are humiliated by the way her act draws attention of racial boundaries. Nel does not appreciate the laughter of her mother rather for the first time she understands her mother as a weak black woman in a racial society. At the same time, she decides not to become like her mother so she affirms her own identity by declaring ‘I’m me”, ‘Me’ I’m me. I’m not their daughter. I’ not Nel. I’m me. Me” (Sula 28). She disassociates herself from her parents because of the shame her mother causes her. She just wants to be herself, not the daughter of Helene who accepts the discrimination by laughing at that situation. The narrator explains Nel's plan after this experience,

Leaving Medallion would be her goal. But that was before she met Sula, the girl she had seen for five years at Garfield Primary but never played with, never knew, because her mother said that Sula’s mother was sooty. The trip perhaps, or her new found me-ness, gave her the strength to cultivate a friend in spite of her mother” (Sula 29).

Nel’s friendship with Sula liberates her from her mother’s oppressive roles. Helene imposes a conception of beauty defined in terms of the dominant white culture and Caucasian racial characteristics on her daughter. She always tries to
make Nel believe that her nose is too broad and therefore ugly. Helene constantly encourages Nel to pull on and reshape her nose, even giving her a clothespin to use for this purpose. Fortunately, Nel’s meeting with Sula helps her realize that she does not have to follow her mother’s wishes that she keep pulling her nose in order to straighten it. The narrator explains, “After she met Sula, Nel slid the clothespin under the blanket as soon as she got in the bed. And although there was still the hateful hot comb to suffer through each Saturday evening, its consequences—smooth hair—no longer interested her” (Sula 55). The shape of her nose does not matter for Nel after meeting Sula; she finds in Sula someone who understands and accepts her as she is without the need for the painful experience of reshaping her nose.

The friendship enables both to admire each other’s houses and rethink about their own houses. The attraction Nel and Sula find in each other’s home reflects how they complement each other and shows the difference in their family background. Nel is suffocated in her mother’s too orderly house but finds comfort in Eva’s big and disorganized home, whereas Sula is fascinated with the neatness of Helene’s home. The narrator explains,

Nel, who regarded the oppressive neatness of her home with dread, felt comfortable in it with Sula, who loved it and would sit on the red-velvet sofa for ten to twenty minutes at a time . . . As for Nel, she preferred Sula’s woolly house, where a pot of something was always cooking on the stove; where the mother, Hannah, never scolded or gave directions; where all sorts of people dropped in; where newspapers were stacked in the hallway, and dirty dishes left for hours at a time in the sink, and where a one-legged grandmother named Eva handed you goobers from deep inside her pockets or read you a dream (Sula 29).
This mutual admiration of each other’s home makes each look at her home with new eyes.

The drowning incident of Chicken Little is significant in the girls’ bonding because it seals a pact of confidentiality between them – one in which Nel decides to share responsibility for a crime committed by Sula. Even Sula literally sacrifices a piece of herself in order to help Nel. After Hannah’s comments stating that she loves Sula but does not like her, send them to the beach, Sula and Nel first play while digging holes in the sand before getting distracted by the arrival of Chicken Little. The boy draws their attention and they start to play with him by swinging him from a tree. Unfortunately, Chicken loses his balance and gets thrown far into the river. This dramatic event causes panic especially in Sula, who is responsible for the act. After a moment of confusion, both Sula and Nel head home, leaving behind them their playmate that drowns. Without prior discussion or arrangement, they decide to remain silent. Indeed, Nel puts her friendship with Sula ahead of her duties as a citizen to report crimes to the police. She is not worried about an eventual guilty conscience for sharing the secret of the death of a child, but is more concerned about preserving the bond with her friend.

The death tests the strength of their childhood and sisterhood over the course of three day search for Chicken Little and afterward, as they learn that friends share not only good events but bad ones as well. The narrator describes the funeral, Nel and Sula stood some distance away from the grave, the space that had sat between them in the pews had dissolved. They held hands and knew that only the coffin would lie in the earth; the bubbly laughter and the press of fingers in the palm would stay above ground forever. At first as they stood there, their hands were clenched together. They relaxed slowly until during
the walk back home their fingers were laced in as gentle a clasp as that of any two young girlfriends trotting up the road on a summer day wondering what happened to butterflies in the winter. (*Sula* 66).

Chicken Little is dead and buried but the secret of his death secures the friendship between Sula and Nel. The event of Chicken Little's drowning represents one of the strongest moments of their bonding. As the saying goes, the best friends are not those who hang around in happy times, but the ones who stay during difficult periods. Sula and Nel share and keep their secret, thus demonstrating a remarkable sense of solidarity.

There was no threat for their strong bond of friendship. They enjoy the comfort and security of their friendship. Gillespie and Kubitschek argue, “Their friendship empowers them until the end of their adolescence, when caretaking must be extended to the adult world of love and work” (Kubitschek 41). When Sula left the town Nel feels loneliness without her soulmate. Sula’s return again refills Nel’s life with loads of happiness and enthusiasm. Even the happiness in Nel’s heart reflects in her love for Jude. “Even Nel’s love for Jude, which over the years had spun a steady gray web around her heart, became a bright and easy affection, a playfulness that was reflected in their lovemaking” (*Sula* 95).

Sula’s ten years of wandering fails to provide her with a replacement for Nel, the only friend she ever has, and her return fills Nel with a joy she can hardly describe. The narrator explains,

Although it was she alone who saw this magic, she did not wonder at it. She knew it was all due to Sula's return to the Bottom. It was like getting the use of an eye back, having a cataract removed. Her old friend had come home. Sula, who made her laugh, who made her see old things with new eyes, in
whose presence she felt clever, gentle and a little raunchy. Sula, whose past she had lived through and with whom the present was a constant sharing of perceptions. Talking to Sula had always been a conversation with herself” *(Sula 95)*.

These feelings of Sula and Nel, witness the strong bond of their friendship.

Since every relationship has a test of timing on earth, the friendship of Sula and Nel could not escape from it. Though however the strong their bonding was, the racism, classism and the patriarchal structure proved so stronger that they alter their friendship. Through *Sula*, Morrison successfully delineates the negative impact of racism, classism and sexism on women’s relationships, threatening female friendship and ultimately bringing about the estrangement of female characters from each other. In adulthood how the friendship turns into self-centeredness is shown through the friendship of Nel and Sula.

Jude, a racially affected personality, fails to get a job in the New Road by the white employers. This denial causes an emotional imbalance in his personality. Deeply wounded by his failure to secure a job, Jude tries to assume a new role as a husband and head of a household in a desperate attempt to find a form of empowerment. The narrator informs us, “Without that someone he was a waiter hanging around a kitchen like a woman. With her he was head of a household pinned to an unsatisfactory job out of necessity. The two of them together would make one Jude” *(Sula 83)*. Jude came as a form of patriarchal dominance in between Sula and Nel’s friendship. He marries Nel in order sooth his pain and reestablish his self-esteem as a man. Despite the trauma Jude is suffering Nel accepts his proposal and marries him.
Nel provides Jude with much care and support but Jude’s insecurities increase with the burden of becoming a breadwinner. These insecurities eventually lead to Jude’s infidelity with Sula - an act that results in stripping away the illusions created by the marriage between Jude and Nel. Jude’s betrayal under the patriarchal structure has a very damaging effect on Nel. Since childhood though Nel has not faced racism directly, like every black woman she suffers it at her home through her husband. When she witnesses Sula sleeping with her husband Jude, Nel loses her consciousness of self which she had gained by the friendship of Sula, and faces serious problem of identity for Nel which leads to the breakup of her friendship with Sula. As Christian argues, “This wedding seems to mean death, not only for Nel and Sula’s girl friendship but for Jude and Nel’s previous sense of themselves” (Christian 82).

Nel is so used to protecting and defending Jude that she cannot hold him accountable for leaving her. She fails to recognise Jude’s guilt in the affair and instead considers him a victim of Sula’s tricks. She therefore blames Sula and prepares herself to live as a victim for the rest of her life. The narrator reflects,

For now her thighs were truly empty and dead too, and it was Sula who had taken the life from them and Jude who smashed her heart and the both of them who left her with no thighs and no heart just her brain raveling away” (Sula 111).

After the incident Nel rejects Sula and expels her from her life for years. After 24 years of Sula’s death Nel realises the potentiality of her girlhood friendship with Sula. She realises it when Eva, grandmother of Sula reminds her of the incident of Chicken Little. Through the incident of Chicken Little, Eva creates awareness in Nel that she is a mere extention of Sula, which she had failed to realise. Eva says, “You. Sula. What’s the difference? You was there. You watched. . .” Eva’s act of
reinforcing Nel’s guilt in Chicken Little’s death reaches Nel to the better understanding of her and Sula’s friendship. She realises that it is not Sula who had come in between her and Jude rather it is Jude who comes in between their friendship in the form of patriarchy.

Nel, at last, understands that she does not suffer from Jude’s departure but from her estrangement from Sula. Through the epiphany Nel says, “All that time, all that time, I thought I was missing Jude. And the loss pressed down on her chest and came up into her throat.

“We was girls together,’ she said as though explaining something. “O Lord, Sula , she cried, ‘girl, girl, girlgirlgirl’. It was a fine cry—loud and long—but it had no bottom and it had no top, just circles and circles of sorrow” (Sula 174).

Through this cry, Nel mourns the loss of her bonding with Sula, the significance of which she just realises. She regrets the misunderstanding and differences between them that led to their estrangement. She finally becomes conscious that patriarchal structures are mainly responsible for their downfall, and they are victims. She also finds out that her marriage and Jude caused their estrangement. Even the connection of the three words “girlgirlgirl” is a reflection or a remembrance of her girlhood relationship with Sula and the nurturing and comfort it used to provide them with. It takes Nel numerous valuable but lost years to realise the potentiality of their bond. Hence their friendship just faced the testing of time. Finally Nel misses her friend Sula more than her husband Jude.  Jane Bakerman adds,

One of the great attractions of Sula, perhaps particularly for female readers, is its examination of a friendship between two women. On the surface, one is a good woman, Nel, and the other a bad woman, Sula” (Bakerman 41).
Morrison does not categorize them as good or bad, but the community certainly does. Both Sula and Nel stop seeing each other as self. Anger, frustration and the willingness to be perceived as a victim prevent Nel from comprehending how much she needs to reconcile with her friend. Sula does not make any attempt at reconciliation either; her self-centeredness and pride will not allow her to do so. Through the friendship of Sula and Nel Morrison aims at portraying the evils of patriarchy and how it plays a dirty game in the genuine friendship like Nel and Sula. This is how black women are estranged to the extent that racist and sexist society will snatch their pleasure and comfort by making a bond with another black women.

As the saying ‘A friend in need is a friend indeed’, a true friend is the one who helps the other in need. Friendship has no boundaries and any limitations. True friendship does not have the fear of race, class and gender discrimination. Friendship exists where there are common and shared experiences, similar way of thinking, ideas and most importantly the heart of compassion and humanity to respond to other’s feeling and share other’s problems. Such friends are the gifts of God. A friend can get the strength to fight against destiny also if he/she has such a true but rare friend in life. Morrison’s Sethe in Beloved is such a fortunate lady who meets Amy Denver in her life as a true friend. Though, Morrison portrays Sethe as tragic heroine in Beloved, she provides the best friend to her instead of having her own pain who rescues her and children at the time of delivery like God.

Amy Denver is a young white but marginalised girl. Though, the terms white and marginalised are contrasting/opposite, they seem not to go together, yet it proves wrong in the case of Amy Denver. Even based on the class discrimination the poor whites are made indentured slaves by the upper class white masters.
Margaret Atwood opines, “The nineteenth century, with its child labor, wage slavery and widespread accepted domestic violence, was not only for blaks but for all but the most privileged whites as well” (Atwood 7). Morrison offers starving, abused, uneducated Amy Denver as a proof of this. Amy Denver though has a short role to perform in the novel, her presence and help play a significant role in the life of the protagonist, Sethe.

Sethe as a slave and Amy Denver as an indentured slave share common problems and keep them comfort with other for certain period of time. The Thirteenth Amendment of the constitution reads, “Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude . . . shall exist within the United States or place subject to their jurisdiction” (qt Coonradt 172). Hence, Amy Denver is not legally, physically and emotionally in trauma of racism and sexism that she has suffered from the enslavement at the hand of her master Mr. Buddy. Morrison presents Amy Denver as evidence by white exploitation of whites, class discrimination and the marginalisation of women within the white patriarchal system.

Like most of the slave women characters in the black novels, Amy Denver has sexual abuse by her master, Mr. Buddy. Morrison deals with the most shameful act of sexual abuse of women by their sadistic white masters, the most extreme subjugation of women in a white patriarchal culture that historically touched women irrespective of their race and ethnicity. This is how Sethe and Amy Denver share this common experience by being subjugated under the patriarchal system. This keeps them connected. When they meet near the riverbank both find a kind of belongingness and similarities with one another. Sethe describes Amy as “The reggediest-looking trash you ever saw” with “arms like cane stalks and enough hair for four to five heads”. Amy thinks nearly the thing upon beholding Sethe saying,
“You ‘about the scariest looking something I ever seen” (BE 32). This conversation shows the both can see themselves in one another.

Morrison shows Amy Denver as a prophetic healer for Sethe. Amy’s attention to Sethe’s suffering and the ability to relieve it is a pivotal moment in Morrison’s novel. Corey focuses on Amy’s power to heal Sethe, “One of Sethe’s memories is the healing power of physical touch that, Sethe first experienced at the hand of Amy, the mysterious white girl . . . who rubbed her feet . . . dressed the wounds on her back and assisted in the delivery of Denver” (qt Coonradt 176).

Like a true friend Amy offers her heart to Sethe. Amy repeatedly appeals to God and Christ saying, “Come here, Jesus, what God have in mind”. As a mother Amy soothes Sethe and rubs torn and sweeten feet, working her ‘magic’ (BE 35). Through this Morrison celebrates the compassion and humanity of Amy Denver. Morrison portrays Amy as a friend indeed. Amy identifies the horrible wounds on Sethe’s back by the sons of the schoolteacher as a “chokecherry tree” saying “It’s a tree, Lu. A chokecherry tree. See, here’s the trunk – its red and split wide open, full of sap and this here’s the parting for branches. You got a mighty lot of branches. Leaves, too, look like and dern these if ain’t blossoms” (BE 79). In spite of having so much pain Amy shows much concern for Sethe’s sufferings. Her concern for Sethe and her assistance during her delivery are not lesser than the miracle and commitment. It is possible only by love and determination and this is how she undoubtedly becomes ‘a true friend of Sethe’. It is only with the help of Amy Denver, Sethe could attempt to overcome her oppressive tragedy and become able to rename, redefine and reclaim the self. It is because of Amy’s help Sethe could survive. Otherwise there would be an end for her life and her baby. It is because of Amy’s assistance Sethe could regain her self as a mother and could rescue her
child from the clutches of slavery by killing them. Amy’s help for Sethe leads the novel further. As a tribute to her help, Sethe gives the name of her friend Amy Denver to her new born baby as Denver.

Through this relationship between Amy Denver and Sethe, Morrison wants clarify the fact that friendship has nothing to do with race and colour. Black women can also be rescued, protected, shared and made strong by a white friend but only when that white woman is like Amy Denver, a compassionate, helpful and kind hearted to aid another human being in need.

In Morrison’s Jazz, the friendship between Dorcas and Felice is one of the major highlights. As a true and best friend Felice likes Dorcas at the same time she also denies Dorcas’s way of treating men and changing lovers very often. She always reminds Dorcas of her ultra-modern life style. She becomes upset with Dorcas when she is infatuated towards Acton. Felice acts as a co-conspirator to Dorcas who shares in her efforts to evade Alice Manfred’s (Dorcas’s aunt) rules.

When Dorcas is shot by Joe, Felice kneels besides Dorcas’ deathbed. She feels bad for the death of her friend. Interestingly, Felice’s role as a friend in the life of Dorcas is significant after the death of Dorcas. Felice consoles Joe Trace, who is suffering from grief and remorse after killing her. Felice informs him that Dorcas chose to die and rejected all efforts to medical care. In her explicit with Dorcas as well as her conversations with Joe Trace, Felice serves as the role of comforter. As a friend Felice served her role to communicate that her friend’s wish of dying likes a martyr. It is only because of Felice, Joe, Violet and Alice Manfred could realise the real Dorcas who was not bad but rather a sympathetic girl.
The relationship between Violet and Alice is not exactly of friendship but they share common things in their relationship with Dorcas. Violet started liking Dorcas, when she comes to Alice’s home and know more about her after her. Like Alice, Violets think of her as daughter that she might have had.

The strong bond of friendship between black women validates black women’s power as human being. It helps black women to love and to be loved. It makes her stronger by the feeling that she is not alone in the alien land. The friendship of black woman is like backbone to another black woman.

3.3A Journey of Black Women from the Oppressed Self to the Regained Self

- Oppressed Self – *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula*

The black women as the subject of oppression have been suffering under the superior class, race and gender called men, whites and white women. As Pauli Murray remembers,

My own self-esteem was elusive and difficult to sustain. I was not entirely free from the prevalent idea that I must prove myself worthy of the rights that white individuals took for granted. This psychological conditioning along with fear had reduced my capacity for the resistance to racial injustice” (qt Collins 94).

The internalization of white standards made the black women to forget that they too have their unique self. They will be hypnotised by the white ideals and become incapable of recognizing the difference between the self and the other. Most of the times they are unable to recollect their self-consciousness and knowledge to resist against the oppressive factors like color, beauty, gender and class.
As a result of the white’s cultural imposition of the myths on black woman, they become numb to assert their freedom and achieve their self-identity. Morrison comments on such superior cultural imposition in the form of beauty, patriarchy and colour in her first two novels – *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula*. Both novels deal with oppressed self of the blacks especially of black women. The blacks in the alien land face rejection and negligence by the world and that delves them into the self-rejection and self-alienation. In a state of utter ambiguity they reach the tragic end. The black women can neither accept the white ideals completely nor she can reconcile herself in the black culture. Such kind of horrific state of mind detaches black woman from self and meets the tragic end of her life.

Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* is the embodiment of quest for self of the black woman. Black women characters like Pecola Breedlove, Pauline Breedlove, Maureen Peele, Geraldine in the novel are the victims of triple jeopardy. And even Morrison emphases a black major character -- the man Cholly Breedlove whose alienation of ‘self” endangers the life of black women in his life – Pecola, his daughter and Pauline, his wife.

Pecola Breedloves’ quest for self is the major highlight of the novel. The white world has made the young Pecola believe that if she wishes to love and to be loved, she has to look beautiful. For Pecola the synonym of beauty is to look like white girls with pink skin, golden hair and blue eyes. She becomes obsessed with perceiving the blue eyes at any cost. At a very young age she tries to make the impossible into possible – getting the blue eyes. She pays the ultimate cost for her meaningless effort by losing her self-identity forever. She reaches the stage of insanity. As Collins quotes Washington’s words, “Self is not defined as the
increased autonomy gained by separating oneself from others. Instead, self is found in the context of the family and community – as Paule Marshall describes, “The ability to recognize one’s continuity with the larger community” (Washington 124). Family and community play an important role in identifying one’s self. Self is not an independent factor to be described. It has to be recongnized with one’s family and community. Pecola seems the most unlucky girl to be born in a family with bleak storefront. As the ugly and unwanted child both for the family and community, she starts seeking her identity by pursuing blue eyes. She knows that her identity is recognized by all only with blue eyes. She believes that her identity lies in blue eyes so she quests for them in order to gain self-identity.

Morrison uncovers the adverse effects of racism in the story of Pecola Breedlove. She explores how racism represses the blacks’ awareness of their selves and that induces mutual exploitation and alienation. White beauty ideals rule Pecola’s sense of self and on the other hand Pecola is oppressed by the most of black people. She faces both the intraracial as well as interracial encounters. Pecola starts forming her self on the basis of how the people around her treat her. The marginalized treatment negates her self.

Throughout the novel Pecola fantasizes about “What did love feel like” (51). When she is raped by Cholly, she gets a misconception of love which is only limited to the, “Choking sounds and silence”. Her first maturation symbolizes that she is entering into womanhood from childhood. Though she is physically matured, mentally she is a girl. Her age factor does not support her mind to have a matured thinking about marriage, love, sex and pregnancy. Out of curiosity she questions, “Is it true that I can have a baby now?” For which she learns that she has to be loved by a man.
Pecola has never experienced a pinch of pleasure during her childhood. The lack of nurturance during her childhood is the major drawback of Pecola in self-rejection. The first impression of her mother Pauline when she sees her soon after delivery is “Lord, she was ugly”. The rejection by her mother, friends and school teachers, her premature adulthood, and sexual violence by her father Cholly and impregnating at the young age pushes her towards the delineation of self. At the same time, she witnesses white children to be loved both by white and black adults. Hence, she determines to achieve beauty and acceptance by acquiring blue eyes. The narrator explains her aspiration for blue eyes, “Each night, without fail, she prayed for the blue eyes. Fervently, for a year she had prayed. Although somewhat discouraged, she was not without hope. To have something as wonderful as that happen would take a long, long time”. \((BE\ 44)\). Pecola believes that only blue eyes help her in restoring herself. Since her parents Cholly and Pauline have already accepted that they are ugly and instilled the same into the mind of Pecola. They themselves suffer from self-rejection; consequently they fail to love each other in the family. Morrison writes the Breedloves, “fought each other with a darkly brutal formalism”. Similarly Pecola follows her parents in self-hatred.

Pecola’s sense of self went on taking its own formation by the reactions of her surrounding people. Many incidents made her adamant to possess the blue eyes. Maureen Peel, a light skinned girl comments on Pecola, “I am cute and you ugly. Black and Black e mos” and Pecola’s humiliation by her classmate saying, “Black e mo. Black e mo. Yadaddsleepsnecked. Black e mo black e mo ya dadd sleeps nekked. Black emo . . .” \((BE\ 63)\) and making point at her ugliness, her classmates use Pecola’s name to insult a boy or wanted to get an immediate response from him. They would say, “Bobby loves Pecola Breedlove! Bobby loves Pecola
Breedlove!” and never fail to get peals of laughter from those in earshot and mock anger from the accused”. Even her humiliation by Geraldine, another light skinned woman scolding her, “you nasty little black bitch, get out of my house” (BE 72). This kind of negation by her own community enforced her to internalise herself in the mirror. The narrator tells, “Long hours she sat looking at the mirror trying to discover the secret of her ugliness, the ugliness that made her ignored or despised at school, by teachers, classmates alike. She was the only member of her class who sat alone at a double-desk”. Most crucial her denial of self is Mr. Yacobwski, who refuses to look at her. The narrator tells, “For somewhere between the retina and object, between vision and view his eyes draw back, hesitate and hover. At some fixed point in time and space he senses that he need not waste the effort of glance. He does not see her, because for him there is nothing to see” (BE 46). With this episode Morrison explores how racism makes black women feel as non-existent. His rejection to look towards her signifies that he does not degrade himself with an unwanted thing like Pecola. This influences her to neglect her real self unconsciously. This white verdict forces her to access the blue eyes.

In order to acquire a false identity, Pecola tries all possible things to come to the white ideals. She feels the false pleasure in white related things. For example, she “took every opportunity to drink milk out of it and see Shirley Temple’s face”. Another is of Mary Jane candies, in order to dwell in the white society, her psyche creates another world of fantasy. “To eat Mary Jane candy is somewhat to eat the eyes, eat Mary Jane, Love Mary Jane and Be Mary Jane” (BE 48). She believes Shirley Temple and Mary Jane as substitute ways which will take her into the world of acceptance by white society. Morrison lays bare the crucial episodes in Pecola’s young life that echo with a star reality as Lee thinks her sense of self is literally in danger.
Pecola turns towards Soaphead Church for the revival, relief and rebirth of her identity. Soaphead is a “Reader, Adviser and Interpreter of Dreams”. Though he is recognised for the narrowness in acculturate upbringing, he tries to intellectualise the pain and remove himself from it by cultivating the misanthropy. He finds himself in different kind of illusions. “. . . he believed that to name an evil was to neutralize if not annihilate it”. When Pecola comes to him for her requisite of the blue eyes, he vows to annihilate the evil. “For the first time Soaphead honestly wishes he can work miracles” (BE 172). To prove to Pecola that she is indeed to have blue eyes, he uses a dying old dog as catalyst. Like Junior’s helpless cat, Pecola is once again made use of the defenseless animal as scapegoat. Soaphead tells Pecola to feed the dog his food mixed with poison and tells her that “. . . If nothing happens, you know that God has refused you. If the animal behaves strangely, your wish will be granted on the day following this one”. Of course dog convulses and dies and Pecola is left with her illusion of blue eyes forever. Soaphead just uses Pecola as a means to strengthen his male identity as a “Spiritual and Psychic Reader” (BE 171). Like Cholly, he imprisons her identity by permanently paralysing her mind and body and separates her from the world. Pecola is pushed to the world of illusion and insanity. The only difference is Cholly destroys her body and Soaphead her mind and integrity.

Pauline Breedlove, Pecola’s mother is shown as a typical black woman. Throughout her life Pauline has been “crooked, archless foot that flops when she walks”. Pauline’s physical deformity and denial of parental love make her feel with a sense of “. . . separateness and unworthiness”. When she marries Cholly and shifts to North, she felt her identity is being oppressed by lighter skinned black woman. She remembers that “Northern colored folks were different too.
Dicty-like. No better than whites for meanness. They could make you feel just as no-count, 'cept I didn’t expect it from them”. She does her efforts in making her identity to be recognised. She decides to be recognized by wearing good dresses. She knows appearance in the white land decides their life. The narrator recounts that, “Pauline didn’t really care for clothes and makeup. She merely wanted other women to cast favourable glance at her”. Like Pauline who seeks her identity in dresses to be recognised, Pecola seeks her identity in blue eyes. Even Pauline becomes addicted to movies wherein she develops a sense of inferiority. Pauline serves her best as a mammy in a white house more than a mother to her own children Pecola and Sammy. As a mammy she asks by her white mistress to choose between Cholly and her job. This was no lesser than a selection between her self and the other’ (whites). She takes firm decision and selects her self, which means she selects Cholly. She advocates her decision, “. . . it didn’t seem too bright for a black woman to leave black man for a white woman”. Though she could resist a white mistress and select her self, she becomes unable to stick to her self, when the whole world praises the whiteness. She cannot protect herself becoming a slave under the white ideals. For the first time itself she finds her daughter as ugly. In the state of unawareness of her identity, she starts denying her love to her daughter and that result in Pecola’s denigration of her self-identity.

Cholly’s self-alienation endangers the lives of his wife Pauline and his daughter Pecola. Quoting again from Collins, “Self is found in the context of family and community”. The recognition of self for a black woman becomes difficult when she has a husband and a father like Cholly in family. Cholly himself is a tragic figure who could not form any identity of his in the white world. The first hit on his identity is when he is rejected by his father, abandoned by his mother and orphaned by his aunt Jimmy. Since childhood he becomes unable to
connect himself with any other human relationships and runs away from human contacts and emotions. As a young man he is humiliated by two white men while having his first sexual intercourse with his lover, Darlene. This act spills his sense of identity as a black man in the white world. With his oppressed and damaged self he marries Pauline. At the beginning both seek a good companion in each other but the vicious white world wins over them in damaging their self to the certain extent that they even instill the feelings of inferiority in the minds of their children. As a husband of Pauline he dominates over her body, mind and emotions. The male in him suppresses her self. He puts all his anger and frustration over his wife and daughter. He beats them, scolds them and even shamelessly rapes his daughter. As a black man though he is oppressed under the whites, under the patriarchal system; as a dominant male she oppresses the female figures of his family – Pauline and Pecola. Both Pauline and Pecola as black women are oppressed both by the visible and invisible oppressors – Cholly as the visible oppressor and white ideals as the invisible oppressor.

Maureen Peale and Geraldine are the two lighter skinned/half white black women. Though both act major roles in the suppression of Pecola’s self, they are unknowingly thwarted from their self as black women. Because of their lighter skin, they consider themselves as whites. Maureen in spite of being black humiliates Pecola by saying “I am cute! and you are ugly! Black and ugly e mos, I am cute”. Geraldine misunderstands Pecola that it is she who killed her lovely cat, she screams at her, “You nasty little black bitch. Get out of my house” (BE 90). When these two encounters are analyzed it is very clear that both Maureen and Geraldine are humiliating Pecola pointing out at her colour and ugliness. Their obsession of their white ideals is not ready to accept the blackness in Pecola. By insulting Pecola they are escaping from their self-identity as black women and
they are striving hard to become one among the whites. Unlike Claudia and Frieda, they are unable to resist the whites and live in their self. Maureen and Geraldine seek their identity in relation with white standards of life.

Morrison explores the psychic damage of Pecola who delineates the failure of black life and culture in the form of her family and community and members like her classmates, friends, Geraldine, neighbours and teachers fail to mould her into a positive self. She is only used as a dumping ground by the people surrounding her. She is the scapegoat and sacrificial victim. White beauty ideals and white standards of life dominate the self of the black women. They hypnotise them to certain extent that black women could never realise the difference between the self and the other. In order to possess the other (white beauty), they become the other for their real self.

*Sula* is an ode to the attempt of self-identity, self-exploration and self-definition. *Sula* revolves around the search for an identity by black women characters in the novel like Sula, Nel, Eva, Hannah and Helene. Morrison carefully delineates the fact of the American land that black women who are in the process of achieving their self-identity, their self-will is distorted. The same happens with the protagonist of the novel *Sula*. The community in Bottom could not sustain her way of freedom, and as a result she is expelled. Sula is a continuum of self-discovery that Pecola attempted and failed. While Pecola’s search for the ‘self’ forces her into a perennial madness, Sula’s ends in her premature death at the age of thirty.

Having no role models, Sula lives her life without bounding, obligations and explores herself as she pleases. She inherits her grandmother Eva’s arrogance and
her mother Hannah’s self-indulgence. The various experiences in her life made her stable to achieve her self. Especially there are two incidents which add Sula’s sense of achieving the self-identity. She hears her mother saying, “I love Sula. I just don’t like her that is the difference”. By this she learns that there is nobody else that she could count on and the second in which unintentionally when she kills the Chicken Little which teaches her that there is no self to count on either. She believes that she has “no centre, no speck around to count on either” (Sula 119). Hence she sets herself on a mission, which she defines “I don’t want to make somebody else. I want to make myself”. As a result, every activity that she performs is the continuation of her relentless efforts to make herself and to attain her unified black female self. Unfortunately the community in which she lives imposes its stereotypical verdict of woman on her and expects her to follow them. When Sula denies that and continues her efforts of quest for identity, she is faced with the threat to her sense of self.

Sula is portrayed as courageous and bold girl. Her encounter with the white boys at the age of twelve where she cuts the tip of her forefinger and says with the irony that, “If I can do that for myself, what you suppose I’ll do it for you?” (54-55). Though the line symbolically refers to her attempt to forge her self-fighting the male domination, behind that the double edged oppressors – racism and patriarchal domination try to suppress her identity.

Sula seeks her self in Nel and her friendship. For Sula, Nel is her ‘other I’. But when she acknowledges that Nel is getting married to Jude, she feels insecure in achieving her sense of self. As Wilfred Samuel opines, “Nel’s marriage to Jude had given her an identity that requires forfeiting the necessary sense of self that remains salient to Sula”. She openly rejects stereotypical images imposed by the
patriarchy like marriage, children, grandparental care, sexual mores and through all these the restrictions they create. She leaves Bottom in search of her true self. Daine Gillespie argued that, “Sula offers a view of female psychological development that defies traditional male-centered interpretations of female development and calls out for an expansion of woman-centered paradigm” (Gillespie 22). Through the character of Sula Morrison emphasises the vital need of education and awareness for black women. She emphasizes the fact that it is Sula’s college education that provides avenues for her self-expression. Morrison uncovers the cruel facets of racism and sexism that represse the black women’s identity and creativity.

Sula is seen only as the sexual being in every city that she visits. The men who took her to one or another of these places had merged into one large personality . . . whenever she introduced her private thoughts into their rubbings, they hooded their eyes. They taught her nothing but love tricks, shared nothing but worry, gave her nothing but money. This clarifies the fact of evils of sexism prevailing in both black and white community – the same oppressing the self of a black woman. Sula’s returning to Medallion is considered as the return of the evil. Her return is compared with the plague of robins. Her journey towards achieving her self is threatened and defeated by the patriarchal dominance in the community.

Sula’s desire to forge a relationship with Ajax was motivated by her own need to realise her self-identity. Sula’s sexual relationship with Ajax changed her views about sexual relationships as the form of fulfillment and the way of self-expression rather than non-competitive and non-threatening. She feels “during the love making she found and needed to find the cutting edge . . . to assert herself in the act” (Sula 123). Sula’s experimental exploration of her self for a meaningful
identity and Ajax’s own search for a free self forges their relationship which is based on mutual trust, harmony and equality. Ajax misunderstands Sula that she is also like her female counterparts that like them even Sula wants a total surrender of ‘self’ of man through marriage and family. He feels it as the threat to his free self so he abandones her identities. Morrison potrays him as the representators of patriarchy, “. . . the same way the man picks a woman, drops a woman”. Hence Sula’s self has been oppressed by every one that comes in her life. She does not give up her effort of achieving the self, she tries to live up to the standards that she wants to create for herself. Because of this effort she is rejected by the community and she pays the heavy cost for it. Through the life of Sula it is evident that there is no space and freedom given by the community for the black women.

Both Eva and Hannah, the mother figures of Sula undergo oppression by patriarchal society. Eva’s abandonment by her husband signifies the cruelty of male dominance. She is compelled to manage the responsibilities of the home and children. As a supermother she sacrifices her self (amputating her leg) for the economic stability and the survival of her children. Her identity as a woman was so much crushed that she feels happy to hate husband. Morrison says, “It was hating him that kept her alive and happy.” Out of the frustration and anger from her unsuccessful married life, Eva attempts for the solicit pleasure. Eva’s act of mercy killing her son Plum for his failure to formulate his self as a man signifies the helplessness of the black mother. Another instance of Eva puts her in the framework of sacrificial mother when she saves her daughter Hannah. “Eva knew there was no time for anything in this world other than the time it took to get there and cover her daughter’s body with her own. She lifted her heavy frame up on her one leg . . . she threw herself out the window . . . Stunned but still conscious, Eva dragged herself towards her first born . . .” (Sula 75-76). As a strong black mother
Eva sacrifices her self to save her daughter. Hannah just follows the path of her mother. Her husband Rekus dies. Hannah like Eva uses extra-marital relationship with her neighbours as a means of survival. Being the negated selves both Eva and Hannah give priority to man’s wants and needs to the exclusion of their own needs. Both of them accepted the subjugation and exploitation of patriarchy and could see themselves only in the role of men’s lovers.

The negation of self is resulted in the negligence of their daughter Sula. Robert Stepo opines, “Hannah’s relationship to her daughter is almost one of uninterested. She would do things for her, but she is not particularly interested in her” (Stepo 217). Being self-negated Eva and Hannah fail to pass on the motherly love and emotional link to Sula.

Helene is another mother figure. Helene is brought up by her grandmother in a conventional way. Since childhood, the conventional norms are imposed on her personality. Her real self is imprisoned behind the bars of the discipline, morals, marriage, patriarchy, female subjugation and nurturing of children. Helene becomes an impressive woman because she has accepted the patriarchal definition of woman and instills the same in the mind of her daughter Nel. Alienated from her true self Helene attempts to do what is acceptable for the patriarchal community. In one of the incidents, Helene and Nel’s experience with a conductor make them realise their own and different sense of self. Helene denying her self as a black woman, she in eagerness to please . . .” smiled dazzlingly and conquettly . . .” at the conductor. Moreover she expects Nel to do the same. Nel observed her mother’s conscious negligence of her mother’s denial of self and feels bad. The very moment the acute sense of self aroused in the young Nel, she declares her sense of self “I’m me”, ‘Me’ . . . I’m me. I’m not their daughter. I’m not Nel, I’m
me. me” (Sula 28). Out of her mother’s strict and disciplined upbringing, Nel beyond all the limits becomes able to define and recognise her self different and unique from her parents. This new found ‘me-ness’ allows her to have a strong bond of friendship with Sula. The me-ness in Nel faces the test of time. For Nel the marriage becomes more important than her recognition of her self. She thinks “... greater than friendship (with Sula is) this new feeling of being needed by someone who saw her singly” (Sula 84). She surrenders her self to her husband Jude in the role of wife. Unlike Sula, she becomes only what community wants her to be. But when Nel witnesses his betrayal she feels shattered.

After Sula’s death, Nel’s realisation of her self as the ‘other I’ of Sula enables her to restore her lost sense of ‘me-ness’. This sense of realisation is her final rejection of patriarchy. Then forth like Sula, she loves to live her life celebrating the sense of ‘me-ness.’

The novel Sula is the embodiment of the saga of the ‘oppressed self’ of the black women who are rejected in their childhood and neglected by the family and community in their adulthood. Being oppressed, their lives end in the tragic mode yet their will for their freedom is praiseworthy.

- **Regained Self – Beloved and Jazz**

Morrison’s black woman is no more oppressed and ghettoised now. She is both ‘ship and ship harbour’. She is the multi-tasking expert. As a mother she does the ever best things for her children, as a mammy she is more than mother Goddess for the white children, she does her job for the survival of her home, children and most of the time her husband. The most appreciable thing in her is that she is a creative being. She sings, stitches, writes, cooks and retains her black culture and
enriches its fragrance throughout the generations. Morrison places herself at the centre of the world as the most respectable black woman writer winning the Nobel Prize in 1993. She spoke the unspeakable things and became the role model for many other black women who are striving to regain their self. She reveals black women characters who break the barriers of ‘triple jeopardy’ – racism, classism and sexism. Morrison’s black women are now the embodiment of courage, inspiration, determination, independence and ultimately freedom. She celebrates the potentialities of black women.

*Beloved* is the extraordinarily beautiful portrayal of the black woman’s strength and stability. It is the epic on the black woman’s awareness of her self as the most precious thing in the world. Black woman goes beyond the complex and complicated system of slavery and oppression and serves herself as the successful surviour of humankind. Black feminist critic Claudia Tate opines that “woman must assume responsibility for strengthening their self-esteem by learning to love and appreciate themselves” (qt Collins 107). *Beloved*’s Baby Suggs and Sethe are the ideal women for humankind. They become role models because they have learnt to love themselves. Loving themselves for black woman is the most important thing for self-realization.

Baby Suggs is the ancestor and the anchor of the community. She is a former slave of the Sweet Home plantation. She is replaced by another slave woman Sethe, the protagonist and later she becomes the daughter-in-law of Baby Suggs. Baby Suggs’ freedom is purchased by her son Halle Suggs, with his five years of working in the Sweet Home plantation. Baby Suggs has served as a breeding black mother and has attended to Mr. and Mrs. Garner. As a black slave woman Baby Suggs is sexually exploited, as a result she gave birth to eight children for six fathers. Among all the children only with Halle Suggs she could live for the
longest period for twenty years. But unfortunately she lost even Halle after her freedom from the plantation and witnesses her daughter-in-law Sethe killing her baby. Out of all such complexities and traumatic situation Baby Suggs maintains her self as the preacher of community. The very appreciable quality of Baby Suggs’ personality is that she has never let her self face with depression. She is the example of Morrison’s self-emancipated woman. She not only emancipates herself rather she passes her wisdom, awareness, love and sympathy to many of the freed black slave women.

The heinous system of slavery has deprived everything from Baby Suggs, “anybody Baby Suggs knew, let alone loved, who hadn’t run off or been hanged, got rented out, loaned out, bought up, brought back, stored up, mortgaged, won, stolen or seized” (BE 26-27). Yet with the indomitable will of free life she retains the the most valuable holy thoughts and a great big heart. She calls her two assets – thought and holy hearts as the prize. In spite of the oppression of slavery or most probably it is because of the oppression, Baby Suggs decides to empower the hearts of the other black women. She goes regularly to her community Cincinnati in for “clearing damp and gasping the breath” of the people. She sermons of love, “. . . we flesh; flesh that weeps, laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in grass. Love it. Love it hard. Yonder they do not love your flesh. They despise it. They don’t love your eyes; they’d just as soon pick em out. No more do they love the skin on your back. Yonder they flay it. And O my people they do not love your hands. Those they only use, tie, bind, chop of and leave empty. Love your hands! Love them. Raise them up and kiss them. . . .You got to love it, you! . . . .” (BE 104). The preaching of Baby Suggs gave the voice to the most of the people. She thought them the most important essence of every individual that is self-love and
self-respect. She empowers them by giving awareness regarding the self-love. She acts as the reformist for the community people.

The consciousness she endows in them that ‘they and only they can love themselves; is the greatest preaching in the world which acts as the sanjeevini for the marginalised selves. She encourages them by preaching, “. . . the only grace they could have was the grace they could imagine. That if they could not see it, they would not have it. (BE 103). Baby Suggs’ life and her personality is the great inspiration for the other black women. In spite of losing many things physically as well as emotionally Baby Suggs enables herself to love her self and passes on the same love to those who all visit her home at 124. She loved her life and that made her to endure her past as a slave and share her power and imagination with her community. She taught them the pleasure of loving, cooking, singing, dancing and its importance in life to regain self-identity.

In the test of time Baby Suggs faces the rejection by her own people. They neglect her preaching in course of time, to maintain the order in the community. Yet as a matter of fact they could not maintain the order in the community. Baby Suggs’s holy soul is still longing for the betterment of her people. After rejected by everyone, Baby Suggs, “. . . lay in the keeping-room bed roused once in a while by a craving for colour and not for anything else” (BE 104). Baby Suggs might have been a liar but the power that she has instilled in the black woman helped them to walk on the right path. One among such women is her daughter-in-law Sethe. The power in Sethe arouses when the cruel system of slavery tries to gulp her flesh. From Baby Suggs she has learnt to love herself and her flesh. She is aware that it is only she who can protect her children from the evils of slavery.
Sethe is the most ideal black woman character portrayed by Morrison because she fiercely demonstrates her desire for freedom for her best things. She demonstrates the undying need for historical connections, to remember Baby Suggs and her killed daughter Beloved, to remember the bad things of Sweet Home plantation and to tell their stories. The pleasure and pain of these situations and all of these communities enable Sethe to make up her story for herself.

Sethe experiences the true erosion of her very black female self under the animal like treatment by the school teacher. Sethe’s realization of her master’s evil intentions provokes her to think and also about the future of her own kids: Howard, Buglar and Baby girl. She rejects the atrocities and collects her strength and decides to declare freedom for her children. Morrison says, she “took and put my babies where they’d be safe”. What she really wanted for her children was exactly missing in 124 “safety” (201). Going against the strong system of slavery and protecting the children from it signifies Sethe’s feminine consciousness as a black mother. During slavery Sethe’s self was distorted by the cruel slave masters. The arrival of her daughter Beloved in the form of ghost to 124 makes Sethe realise her self-worth and utters “Me? Me?”. Though Paul D initially sees Sethe as a sexual object, later he rejects patriarchal subordination and accepts Sethe as equal. At the end of the novel, Paul D affirm Sethe’s selfhood by touching her face and holding her hands rather unlike touching her breasts for the first time. He “leans over and takes her hand. With the other he touches her face”, and says, “You’re your best thing Sethe, You are . . . .”, “His hands holding fingers are holding hers”. Man’s act of holding a woman’s hand and touching her face signifies his acceptance of her as his equal and giving respect to her selfhood. As a black and woman though injured physically and emotionally, Sethe emerges from slavery carrying her own African-American culture. She survives in reconstruction and bequeaths a legacy
of African culture to her daughter Denver. Sethes in spite of being the utmost exploited being under slavery, proves herself as the epitome of courage, symbol of feminine consciousness and the ideal of inspiration.

Denver is Sethe’s daughter. Through her understanding of her mother’s past, she is able to reclaim the history as a black woman. As she gains awareness about slave history, white domination, she develops greater understanding of Paul D’s pain, Baby Suggs’s eventual death, Beloved’s and Sethe’s mother-daughter attachment, and her mother Sethe’s inevitability of killing her own daughter to escape her from the oppressive life. This understanding signifies Denver’s awareness of the exploitation and gains consciousness to resist it. Her self-awareness enables to take care of her mother. In spite of living in the dominant white culture she becomes able to define black woman’s independence and she not only protects her self but also saves her mother’s identity. Karen Carmean opines, “Denver works to save both. She manages to do this by daring to keep the past in mind, drawing a line under it, and then looking into the future in which she can care of others because she learned to care for herself” (BE 95). By forgetting the past and dreaming for the future, Denver decides to take her self as well as her mother. Morrison demonstrates on the importance of the formal education for the black woman in their self-emancipation. Denver goes beyond all the barriers like – money, slavery, past memories, humiliation and becomes stronger to protect herself and her family. This was possible because of her college education.

When Sethe attacks Mr. Bodwin, a white man, Denver acts to save both her and herself. “She was the first one to wrestle her mother down.” It is Denver who enforces self-awareness in Paul D. In her second encounter, she finally acknowledges her night work at the Bodwin. Denver suggests him that she as a
black woman is attempting her own individuation, primarily through economic stability. She suggests that unlike him, Sethe has not reduced her mother to a mere animal, but helping her mother sustain herself through emotional and psychological support thereby safeguarding the female space. Hence, Denver through the realisation of the self, takes care of her mother. At the end of the novel, Denver emerges as a teacher, otherwise a creative writer. She becomes a spokeswoman of authenticating and upholding her African-American oral tradition through the written medium of white culture. She gives a model of theory to understand the slave history from the black woman’s perspective.

As Morrison tells, “Following Beloved’s focus on mother-love, I intended to examine couple-love – the reconfiguration of ‘self’ in such relationship; the negation between individuality and commitment to another. Romantic love seemed to me one of the fingerprints of the twenties and Jazz its engine” (Jazz XII). The movement in the novel is like Jazz music, Morrison weaving together the past, present and future of Joe, and his mistress, Dorcas. The music blends with and perhaps represents the human passion of the characters in this novel—their sexual passions, their passions for freedom, their passion for authenticity in the city (Harlem) that offers isolation and loneliness. Morrison throws light on the self-valuation and that leads to the reconfiguration of the self. The major black woman character in the novel is Violet. She through her journey of life strives for self-definition and that leads to her towards her reconfiguration of self.

Violet’s act of disfiguring the face of Dorcas at her funeral is a combination of both personal and racial revenge. It is a personal revenge because she as a wife could not sustain her husband Joe to have an affair with another girl. It is a racial revenge because for Violet, “Dorcas represents what she cannot be; White and
Light. Young again”. Since Dorcas is of lighter skin, Violet considered her as a representative of the whites. Hence, her violent rage against Dorcas, according to Heinz, takes the form of attacking what she thinks is the reason for abandonment – Dorcas’s light skin – but in reality living out her own rage against western values of beauty.” Through this act, Violet rejects patriarchal subordination as a woman and affirms her right as a wife which is evident of her self-consciousness. Her violent act on Dorcas is an attempt to reclaim an identity for herself. It is her rebellious act against the instilled need for whiteness and the superior patriarchal dominance.

The unnatural death of Violet’s mother and the abandonment of her father damaged her psyche and it remains a painful riddle all through her adult life. The utter poverty and a feeling of orphan made her to attempt an independent self-identity. From the pain of her mother’s death she learns to resist the stereotypical images of woman and decides to come out of poverty and lead an independent life with self-esteem. For the reason she determines to defeat poverty and abort motherhood. The narrator illustrates, “the important thing, the biggest thing Violet got out of that was to never have children. Whatever happened, no small dark foot would rest on another while a hungry mouth said, Mama?” (Jazz 102). Through this passage, Morrison uncovers the harsh reality of racism and poverty which devastate the vulnerable black woman, Violet. Morrison introduces another black lady True Belle who in the role of her grandmother enables Violet’s first attempt at self-definition through economic independence. Violet as a strong and self-consciousness black woman tries to stand on her own by earning. Violet starts her journey towards self-definition as a hairstylist, which enables her to lead independent life and to meet the white standards of female beauty.
Another black female friend brings Violet out of the traumatised mindset regarding her selfhood. Like Nel who is the ‘other I’ for Sula in *Sula*, Alice Manfred, Dorcas’s aunt is the ‘other I’ for Violet motivating her to reaffirm her own objectification through Dorcas, who threatens her selfhood as Joe’s lover. Though initially Alice Manfred refuses to give space to Violet’s enquiry about Dorcas, gradually welcomes Violet’s invasion as she realises her divided self resulting in the mutual understanding of each other, for regeneration of authentic black selfhood. In Violet’s realisation of Dorcas’s objectification by Joe through Alice, she is able to reject her object side for the recovery of herself. “The more she finds out about the lives of Dorcas and her aunt, the more her inner healing progresses” (Carmean 101). Alice is traumatised like Violet and the similarities make them to accelerate each other’s ‘self’. Violet’s violent act of disfiguring the face of Dorcas is in order to recover her black self. Violet realises she has to reject the involuntary or the violence, and she has unconsciously usurped from the white racists, for “this other self . . . needs . . . to be killed . . . in order for the self to become whole” (Hardack 459).

Morrison links the regained self, self-definition, self-evaluation, self-respect, awareness and feminine consciousness of black women to her survival. Regained self is one of the basic needs for the black woman in alien land. Without self-definition black woman would be crushed like and made invisible. Collins quotes Richardson’s illustration of the importance of self-respect for the black woman, “. . . Possess the spirit of independence. The Americans do and why should not you? Possess the spirit of men, bold and enterprising, fearless and undaunted. Sue for your rights and privileges . . . . You can but make the attempt: and we shall certainly die if you do not” (*Sula* 109). Morrison being a black woman with the
regained self has effectively sketched the feminine spirit in the selves of female characters.

3.5 Double–Consciousness in Black Women

One of the major tragedies in the life of black women lies in their inability to see themselves as both black and American. No other woman like black woman faces both sexual and color based exploitation. The double enslavement of black woman as sexual and racial being is only associated with black woman. In 1904, Mary Church Terrell, the first president of the National Association of Colored Women, wrote, “Not only are colored women . . . handicapped on account of their sex, but they are almost everywhere baffled and mocked because of their race. Not only because they are women, but because they are colored women” (Terrell 292).

The white value structures and superior cultural artifacts have devalued the Afro-American heritage and prepared the mind of Afro-Americans to blindly and inevitably accept the cultural and capitalist values of the whites. Afro-Americans unconsciously devoid of their own culture, heritage, language and home in front of the dominant white society’s value system meet the dilemma between the self and the other. They strive to possess the values and ideals of the other in order to be recognized by the mainstream society.

The dilemma is brought into the general awareness through the Black Power Movement (1968-1980) and is labeled as ‘Double-Consciousness’ by W. E. B. Du Bois in his book The Souls of Black Folks (1903). Du Bois illustrates the problem of double-consciousness, “The Negro . . . in this American world – a world which yields him no true-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness,
this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eye of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body; whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder” (Du Bois 16-17). In 1972, Frances Beale, a founding member of the Women's Liberation Committee of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and, later, a member of the Third World Women’s Alliance, introduced the term ‘double jeopardy’ to describe the dual discriminations of racism and sexism that subjugate black women. Concerning black women, she wrote, “As blacks they suffer all the burdens of prejudice and mistreatment that fall on anyone with dark skin. As women they bear the additional burden of having to cope with white and black men” (Beale 90). Blacks in the alien America face the difficulty of balancing the white culture with their Afro-American heritage. They are endowed with sexual exploitation by both white and black man. Most of the reformation movements were able to find out a solution for racial inequality and white feminism concentrated on sexual inequality but both neglected the unique being of the world who is suffering simultaneously suffering by racial and sexual disparities, that is black woman. Morrison’s novels concentrate on addressing black women’s desire to abandon its value system and adopt Eurocentric values of materialism, capitalist success and beauty and how those desires remain unrealistic, destructive and un-necessary.

*The Bluest Eye* is basically about the internalization of the white standards and white beauty ideals by the marginalized black women. Breedlove’s family embodies the dilemma of double-consciousness by embracing the white ideals and loses their self of their Afro-American heritage. The very storyline illustrates the protagonist Pecola’s urge to have a blue eye which is the white beauty symbol. Her
personality splits between dominant white standards to be recognized and loved and her black heritage where her roots of existence lie. Being unable to make impossible into possible she loses her control on her true self and becomes insane. Pecola attempts to communicate with Mr Yacobwski, a shopkeeper where she feels the complexity of double-consciousness because he rejects to look at her eyes. Every situation in her life is characterized by double-consciousness. Her sexual molestation by her father, humiliation by her classmates and neighbors symbolize sexual exploitation. Humiliation by Geraldine and Maureen Peale illustrate a black women’s exploitation by the lighter skinned women on the basis of her color. Pauline’s internalization of dominant culture is visible in her alien treatment of her daughter Pecola. Her expulsion from the job at white mistress, and negligence by her husband are the instances of double-consciousness.

Sula’s quest for self in the world of double-consciousness is the major concern of the novel *Sula*. The other black women surrounding Sula are Eva, Hannah, Nel and Helene are doubly oppressed creatures. Eva’s sacrifice of her leg for her children and she and Hannah’s acceptance of sex oriented life style, Nel’s subordination under patriarchal system, Helene’s conventional life style are all the outcome of the horrors of double-consciousness.

*Beloved’s* Sethe, like Morrison’s other female protagonists is a victim of both sexist and racist oppression. She is a runaway slave woman, a slave mother, who is brutally treated by white masters, the school teacher and his nephews. Morrison sketches Sethe’s character not as submissive rather as a resistant character who becomes conscious when she feels humiliation of her nurturing abilities as a mother – the stealing of her milk.
The act of infanticide by Sethe represents the damaging effects of the double-consciousness. As a strong black woman, Sethe shows her resistance by keeping her children safer out of the sight of slavery. Killing the baby for a slave mother is symbolic of her mother’s love. Deborah Gray White says, “Infanticide represents one of the avenues of resistance on the part of the slave mother” (qt Sumana 118). Through Sethe Morrison proves the power of the black women to resist and demolish double-consciousness. Sethe’s act of killing her baby is no lesser than a war against the racist and sexist system of society.

Violet in Jazz like Sethe, has the consciousness and the power to resist against patriarchal and white dominated society. That is reflected in her violent act of disfiguring the face of Dorcas at her funeral. Violet as a modern woman resists the patriarchal subordination of her and as the result she could not sustain the fact that her husband Joe is having an extra-marital affair with a young girl Dorcas. On the other hand, she shows her revenge against the white society because Dorcas is the representative of the white society with lighter skin. Through the act of disfiguring the face of Dorcas, Violet hits back at the evils of double-consciousness and proves that she cannot be the oppressed racial and sexual animal.

Rose Dear, Violet’s mother is presented as the victim of the double-consciousness. She is abandoned by her husband. As a ‘black’ and ‘woman’ she becomes unable to carry out her home and the responsibilities of her children in alien land. Hence, she commits suicide. The character of Rose Dear symbolizes the height of the horrors of double-consciousness.

Morrison’s projection of the double-consciousness illustrates the strange and the unique problems faced by black women. At the same time, Morrison does not
forget to celebrate the will and power of the black women to question their double-consciousness and ultimately declare their freedom in their own ways. Along with delineating the brighter side of black women she enriches the richness and solidarity of Afro-American cultural heritage. Through her writing Morrison makes the unspeakable black women to speak and make the world to look at them not as the other/marginalized rather as the ‘other I’ of the whites.
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