CHAPTER III

SELF

1. The Search for Self

Self is a dynamic phenomenon acquired in the process of evolution by an individual from his birth till his death. It is subjective as well objective. A person can know about himself by reflective things and by his relationship with others. There are positive as well as negative selves. False or negative self leads even to loss of self. African American's personal, psychological, historical, political, and social factors are involved in the loss of self.

To understand the viciousness of racism and sexism, contemporary writers may create female characters who, in striving for some sense of identity and autonomy, become isolated by community members who wish to uphold a standard of normality which serves to keep the Black women in a secondary and thus an invisible position.

Contemporary Black women writers such as Alice Walker and Toni Morrison redefined the African American text in ways, which reflects the "women - identification" (Bjork 25). This is done by depicting women not as traditional Black outsiders. Women's quest for self becomes an internal one, which also encompasses her family and community surrounding her.

The search for self is an on-going phenomenon in African American discourse. The search for self is centred on "Who am I?" and "Where do I belong?" (Bjork vii). Yet, Morrison's work consistently shows that identity and place are found in the community and in the communal experience, and not in the search for a single, private self. Each communal variation, the community, the
clan, the ancestor, is an intrinsic part of the self, and exists not merely as an altruistic concern.

The complex vision of herself and of her world demonstrates the kind of solidarity and bonding that has been essential in maintaining the Black woman's identity and survival. Her self-affirming ritual becomes a source of inspiration and strength to others in the community.

(a) Slavery and Self:

The experience of slavery and discrimination impressed on the Blacks the necessity for self-definition. Slavery was built on a denial and negation of the African identity. The Blacks were enslaved, according to proslavery ideology, because they were primitive and inferior. Slavery thus assumed the characters of a civilizing process. Slavery muted in Blacks "a tragic conception of history", contrived to destroy any desire for self-fulfillment (Adeleke 56). Blacks were denied identity in the Constitution and in practice. They were either slaves or free Blacks, but not citizens, not Americans. In order to become fully American, the Blacks must first begin with acknowledging racial and cultural distinctiveness.

Because of the image of the dominant White society, the negative effects of the Black identification implied on the Blacks which promoting the view that "black identity implied self-hatred" (McAdoo 245). The projection of a negative identity and a negative self-image is almost consequences of a powerless minority status. It neglects the role of family and community in mitigating the influence of the wider society on the developing child. "For group identification, personal functioning and most often self-identity or self-esteem is necessary" (McAdoo 246).
Morrison's *Beloved* penetrates more deeply than any historical or psychological study could, the unconscious emotional and psychic consequences of slavery. The novel reveals how the condition of enslavement in the external world, particularly the denial of one's status in the external world, as a human subject has its impact on the individual's internal bondage, the self will still be trapped in an inner world that prevents a genuine experience of freedom. As Sethe succinctly puts it, "Freeing your self was one thing claiming ownership of that freed self was another" (95). The novel wrestles with this central problem of recognizing and claiming one's own subjectivity, and it shows how this cannot be achieved independently of the social environment.

A free autonomous self is still an essentially relational self and is dependent on the recognizing response of the other. *Beloved* powerfully dramatizes the fact that, "in order to exist for oneself, one has to exist for an other" (Schapiro 194); in so doing, it enacts the complicated inter relationship of social and intra-psychic reality. For Morrison's characters, African Americans in a racist, slave society, there is no reliable other to recognize and affirm their existence. The mother, the child's first vital other, is made unreliable or unavailable by a slave system which either separates her from child or so enervates and depletes her that she has no self with which to confer recognition.

(b) Self-respect:

In *Beloved*, the White farmer Mr. Garner, while still sharing in the cultural objectification of the Blacks, nevertheless boasts that his "niggers is men every one of 'em". When another farmer argues that there "Ain't no nigger men", Garner replies, "Not if you scared, they ain't.... But if you a man yourself, you'll want your nigger to be men too" (13). A self wants the recognition of another
self; this form of mutuality is more desirable, and Garner understands the 'give and take policy' of giving respect and getting respect of self.

Morrison's novels, *Tar Baby* and *Song of Solomon* focus on the struggle of young African Americans -- Jadine Childs and Milkman Dead - whose subjectivities are split between a desire to assimilate the values of the White middle class and the voices that urge them to acknowledge a Black racial identity. In both novels, Morrison seems engaged in a form of self-fashioning, using these two characters to figure her own struggle to construct an authentic identity as an African American woman.

Morrison's women characters are typical examples of the emergent woman who consider self-respect and self-determination as the goals of their lives. Jadine's sense of self-respect is high. Her idea of freedom was challenged by the Whites when she was just being herself. She rebels against the subservient position of the Black woman of the south. Sula's behaviour becomes the talk of the town. She is free to live her life in her own way. Sethe determines to leave this gruesome system of slavery where the Blacks are punished severely by lynching.

( c ) Self-worth:

Sula seeks an alternative self in Morrison's novel *Sula* that is, as the narrator says, "... completely free of ambition, with no affection for money, property or things, no greed, no desire to command attention or compliments - no ego. For that reason she (feels) no compulsion to verify herself - be consistent with herself"(119). Sula has indifferent attitude towards others. She breaks their social norms and wishes to create her own reality. She takes up the role of men, seeking a physical as well as emotional freedom from the order and control of
society. Separate and distinct roles for men and women are based on the biology, but Sula goes against the expected role. Sula, like other men folk, uses and discards them and the narrator later comments, "hers was an experimental life" (118).

Eva is a self-worthy woman, who takes up the role of a womanist by living with communal bond, whereas her grand-daughter, Sula is a feminist, a radical feminist who creates her own form of living. Her attempts to lead an experimental life make her live out of the community. The community identifies her experimental life with an ultimate sense of solitude and isolation. Finally, she learns the truth that an experimental life, especially for a woman, leads only to ostracism and loneliness. Nel admonishes Sula by telling her that "You can't do it all. You a woman and a colored woman at that. You can't act like a man, you can't be walking around all independent — like, doing what you like, taking what you want, leaving what you don't" (142). When Sula proves to live out of the community's code she can't sustain an imaginative self within her community.

Jadine in *Tar Baby* resists his dreams and insults because, as she thinks, she is determined "never to be broken in the hands of any man" (106). Yet, Son too is curious about and impressed with her work, her life-style, her intellectual and practical knowledge and admired and accepted Jadine as a self-worthy person.

Jadine thinks that city is a perfect place for the Black woman to manifest self-confidence and self-assertion, where a part of traditional roles and ways does not intrude. In the same urban setting, Son finds no traces of identity. At Eloé, where Son is in his elements, Jadine feels constricted by the community's
gender divisions into rigid male and female role. She cannot understand or accept the Southern culture.

Through Connie's gaze in *Paradise*, Mavis sees a different self, one deemed worthy. Mavis finds hope in Connie's eyes. She stays at the Convent and grows into an independent, nurturing person. No longer a pathetic, incompetent fool, Mavis' new self reflects how those around her perceive her and what they need from her. She rises to these expectations, blossoming under Connie's nurturing soul and the light from Mother Superior's dying eyes. Mavis finds that life without men at the Convent has given her a new, competent self.

(d) Self-assertion:

Some of the Morrison's characters try to discover their authentic self and assert them as persons and expect others to respect them as persons and not for the gender, race or class in the social status. Nel's trip to South in *Suia*, with her mother Helene, awakens in her new possibilities for awareness and growth. Her idealism is kindled by her exposure to Southern segregation, but more importantly, she senses the distortion and alienation of her mother's life. She declares, "I'm me. I'm not their daughter. I'm not Nel. I'm me. Me" (28). Nel's experiences prompt her to look outside of herself, outside of her mother's system of 'self-denial'.

In *Tar Baby*, when Ryk a White man wants to marry a 'black' girl, Jadine sees herself as 'me' and not as Black. The Western concept of self is self-centered - I or Me, whereas the Black concept is collective - self - We. Here the White man Ryk sees her as the very self and devalues all Blacks, whereas the Black woman Jadine tries to escape from it. But, her devaluation of her own blackness contradicts her self-definition.
Jadine is a cultural orphan who is alienated from her tradition wants to be away from stereotypical roles. Instead she wants "to be only the person inside — not American ~ not black. — just. me"(40). On the other hand, the Philadelphia proud Negro, Ondine has further distanced herself from any kind of distinct community. She also expresses her class-consciousness to other native Blacks, but when Mr. Valerian hurts her as a cook, Ondine protests, "I may be a cook, Mr. Street, but I'm a person too"(208). In the same way when Son, contemptuously alludes to Mr. Street, her patron, as a White man, Jadine retorts, "He is a person, not a white man" (265).

This shows an important aspect of Morrison's outlook. When the existence of a person apart from ideologies of race, gender, and class has become almost inconceivable today, one finds Morrison opening up an altogether new way of looking at divergent classes of men and women, and thinking about them, past ideologies. In her scheme of things, an American, Black or White, a cook, or a mother, is in the first place, "a person, a human being" (Aithal 80). Though Morrison accepts a Black self-identity, she is very much aware that this racial, political, and ideological self-definition is not all that she is. She is also a person. This awareness, combined with the awareness that this is also the case with others, whatever their race or colour, helps her connect people.

Beloved teaches "the free autonomous self, is an inherently social self, rooted in relationship and dependent as its core on the vital bond of mutual recognition" (Schapiro 209). The self cannot experience freedom without first experiencing its own agency or, in Sethe's words 'claiming ownership' of itself.

When Sethe's milk is stolen by the boys of Schoolteacher, she is hurt and feels that her self is affected because the boys are the same age group to her own
son. The other incident, the action of schoolteacher that he noted down the parts of Sethe, she feels that she is treated less than the animal. So, she does not want her children to suffer in the slavery. Sethe tries to assert her self by escaping from Sweet Home.

In slavery, the concept "My Children" is meaningless because they are the property of their master (200). But Sethe kills her own child to assert that she is the owner of her child. Sethe also believes in the concept "my milk", that her milk is only for her children or she will decide who will have her milk (200). So, she claims that her milk is stolen by the nephews of Schoolteacher. Through the murder of her two-year-old child, Sethe indulges in the activity of owning, owning with a vengeance. One can own a self, other people in fact, whole communities, might be possible. All three women, Sethe, Beloved and Denver dwell on owning one another. Sethe tells that Beloved, is "my daughter" (200). Denver says "Beloved is my sister" (205) and Beloved asserts "(Sethe) is mine" (210).

Morrison's novels examine the strategies employed to limit the damage caused by the internalisation of ideologies promoting subservience and inferiority as the essence of identity. Sethe's confident identity is beyond the reach of androgenic manipulations. Sethe decides to face the storm all by herself, though this act estranges her from her own community. Sethe learns that no price is too dear to pay for freedom. This urge for freedom makes her confidently bears the moral responsibility of her desperate deed of killing her own child.

The act of infanticide may be shocking to community, but for Sethe, again, it is a matter of putting her in the subject position by following her own code. Born of desperation, she translates her code to say 'no' to what is not acceptable to her individually and communally.
Despite their racial power, the Whites can neither break nor make Sethe feel inferior to them. In fact, she never permits a male to dominate her. Sethe had selected her husband and when it becomes necessary, she rejects the impotent man who had lost the power to protect her milk; her White masters are defeated by her; and Paul D is also ignored as he attempts to regulate her morality. Sethe, very seriously and sincerely protects her freedom and her self-awareness leads her towards wholeness.

Possessing, belonging, and owning refer to selfhood and *Beloved* shows an important link between owning and developing a self. All of these activities are influenced by the character's experiences as slaves, and as a result such experiences inhibit and threaten to prevent the full development of an autonomous self. *Beloved* is preoccupied with several kinds of identity. Paul D is seduced by Beloved against his will. He has doubted about his manhood, in spite of the fact that Garner calls him 'Man'. He is not able to act as a man, when he has sex with Beloved. Me doubts whether he is a man, because Gamer calls him so. Suppose any other slave-master tells him that he is not a man, will that alter his manhood. The self, he comes to understand, is located in the word, used by the master, so that when that word changes, so, and too does identity. Recalling his life in slavery, Paul D, considers his own manhood: "he did manly things"(220). When Sethe laments for her loss of Beloved, Paul D hopes she is "her best thing", but the only reply Sethe can manage is, "Me? Me?", which clearly gives the hope, a new sense of her identity (273).

The concept that woman can assert herself through economic independence is central to the Womanist Thought. And, Violet in *Jazz* proves by standing on her own feet. When her father deserts the family, Violet starts earning for their
living. From childhood, because of responsibilities, Violet starts earning and tries to prove her 'self, which also enables her to choose her husband. Violet starts a beauty parlour and runs it profitably using her talent. She starts living with her routine work and stands on her own even when Joe leaves her in favour of Dorcas. After the death of Dorcas, when she has no customers, Violet starts moving to their houses to do her job. Violet does not want to lose her self and through economic independence she asserts it.

Morrison's Paradise is about women's power towards men and the gender struggle in the place called Ruby. Women in the Convent assert themselves as human beings. Each one helps the other in one way or other to protect from the evils outside the convent, particularly from men folk. "They also provide occasional aid or temporary refuge to women from the town" (Reames 24). When a woman does her work honestly with self-confidence, she need not be scared of anything. The women in the Convent become self-worthy persons because of Connie. They solve the problems by retaining their self in a collective society and they work together. So, they prove that through communal bond they can assert their self and power.

(e) Self- Confidence:

Like Sula, Pilate's story indicates that she possesses the essence of the existential 'male hero'. She is a woman with self-confidence. It shows from her child- hood incident. When her father was murdered, she and her brother Macon Jr. were adopted by Circe and soon both the sister and brother were separated in a cave, she embarked on her journey of self-discovery, with only her geography book as her guide. She lives with a man on an isolated island off the coast of Virginia, and with him conceives her daughter Reba. But she refuses to marry the
man and sets out again for Pennsylvania. She has overcome great odds and obstacles; she has been a woman alone who raises and provides for a family, and all the while, she lives the life of an archetypal "running man" whose vision of progress is encompassed in the physical actualisations of her geography book (ISO). But unlike the "running man" of history, Pilate does not fly away from responsibility; hers is a needed flight toward a communal consciousness, toward, as the narrator says, an "alien's compassion for troubled people", which itself transcends the world's meanness and selfishness (150). After being initiated into the cruelties of the White world and into the insensitivities of her own Black world, Pilate chooses to build a world of her own: "she tackled the problem of trying to decide how she wanted to live and what was valuable to her" (149).

Pilate, born posthumously to her mother and orphaned in early childhood, feels 'cut off' from other people by her circumstances. Yet, unlike Pecola, or Sula, her very separateness has led her to acquire a strong sense of her own self.

Pilate's smooth stomach isolates her from society. But it helps her become an independent person. Her isolation and self-sufficiency enable her to "throw away every assumption she had learned and (begin) at zero" (149). She is, therefore, neither trapped nor destroyed by decaying values as her brother's family is.

Self-definition:

Connie in *Paradise* is a self-defining person. As an orphan Connie is rescued by the Mother. From the beginning she is bold. With the help of the Mother, Connie converts a mansion into a Convent. Connie helps the poor and the needy in the town. When Connie takes care of the Convent after the death of the Mother Superior she adopts both the Black and White women who lose their
path in life. As a self-determined person, Connie motivates other women through education. She educates them and helps them by providing them jobs in the Convent. She is even bold enough to attract Deek and have sex with him. With her self-confidence, Connie protects the Convent women from the evil hands of men folk by using magic. Till the end of her life, she asserts her self by using her power.

The mid - wife Lone DuPres is a wilful person from her birth. When she is found in front of the liquor shop as a baby by Fairy DuPres, she looks stubborn. Her name indicates that she is alone but Lone never finds herself alone. Instead of finding answer to her name, she always engages herself helping others in her community. She is the person who first reveals the secret plot of the nine men to the other people in the town.

Through the articulation of cultural difference, Morrison enables her characters to move from object to subject and claim a sense of self. The all-black community presents the effects of dominant culture on Black identity. The "eight-rock" men of Haven attempt to insulate themselves from outside influences in order to preserve their sense of self. Although they have been rejected by the White society, and are disallowed by lighter-skinned Black communities, the dark-skinned men of Ruby recreate a system of exclusion. Ruby's townsmen maintain their subjectivity "by preserving a hierarchy, they repress the encounter with the real — a confrontation with what is lacking in the self— by projecting lack of worth or low status outward onto others, thereby protecting the integrity of themselves as subject" (Schreiber 134). They choose to erase their comprehension of their object status in the eyes of White society - by isolating themselves from that gaze. Although the will to reject object status allows the founders of Ruby to
rebuild their lives as subjects, their flawed vision destroys their attempt. But their subjectivity relies on isolation.

A universal characteristic of Morrison's published novels has been her depiction of male and female protagonists failing or succeeding on the difficult journey to freedom through self-awareness. Of course, the struggle to realize one's identity has surfaced repeatedly in literature; however, Morrison's firm concentration on the importance of the past indicates that for her, "self-realization for African Americans can only be achieved through an active acknowledgement of one's cultural past" (Hamilton 110). Only by understanding and accepting the past can they achieve a psychological wholeness in the present and strengthen their power as a race in the future.

(g) Self—realization and Self-reliance:

In Beloved, Denver for the first time begins to experience the contours of her own separate self when Nelson Lord, an old school acquaintance, affectionately says, "Take care of yourself Denver", and Denver realizes that "It was a new thought, having a self to look out for and preserve" (252).

Baby Suggs in Beloved advocates self-reliance through freedom. Just released from slavery and become a self-ordained preacher, she advocates a belief in the self. Suggs laments that she "never had the map to discover what she was like" (140). Thus a sixty-year-old even freed woman does not have a self on her own. Soon after attaining freedom, as a preacher to the freed Blacks, Suggs' most impassioned sermon is an exhortation to love themselves, to love their bodies, as if this was a necessary condition for other kinds of relationship, for being a friend, loving mother, and so on.
(h) Self-Sacrifice:

Morrison's women characters are shown as altruistic persons who are ready for self-sacrifice in a world of selfishness and exploitation. Ruth in Song of Solomon, has lived a "baby doll" existence (197), she has been made weak and passive by the "affectionate elegance" (12) of her father's class-conscious upbringing, and she has been rendered "invisible and inconsequential" by her rude and dominating husband (Bjork 88). She has, in short, lived her life in service to the patriarchal order. Eva's sacrifice in Sula, results in her amputation with her lost leg, for the welfare of her family members and Ondine works hard, the whole day in the White master's kitchen to provide Jadine better life.

(i) Self and Community:

Balance between self and community is found in the Black society and Sula contains a family of self-sustaining Black female characters: the matriarch, Eva Peace, her daughter, Hannah, and her grand-daughter, the novel's protagonist, Sula Peace, who combines both selfhood and Black womanhood to redefine herself.

Womanists believe that selfhood is possible only when one identifies with the community, for Nel, the mirror reflects, not a concept called Nel, but something other. "Each time she said the word me there was a gathering in her like power, like joy, like fear" (24-25). Nel's assertion of self-hood, whether an indication of false pride or merely an adolescent delusion, ends in the reality of her common identity with other women of the community.

Sula is not strictly a protagonist, for she shares the novel's focus as well as a Black identity, multiple as it is, is a reflection of community identity; when she absents herself from that community for ten years, Sula asserts, "I don't want
to make somebody else. I want to make myself (80). Morrison indicates that to make one's self, or at least to make of one's self a single entity, is impossible, for all selves are multiple, divided, fragmented, and a part of a greater whole.

Eva had been abandoned and deserted by her husband, Boy Boy, "after five years of sad and disgruntled marriage . . ." (29). With three children, she valiantly struggles to survive while living a hand-to-mouth existence. Faced with this futile future, she leaves her children with neighbours and sets out like the traditional Black male runner. Eighteen months later, Eva returns to Medallion with ten thousand dollars and without a leg; she thereafter "reclaims her children" and starts "building a house on Carpenter's Road . . ." (34-35). Her self-determination allows her to fight against odds.

Morrison clearly indicates that in spite of their strength, courage, intuition, and knowledge, women like Pilate or Sula, have been throughout history, locked out of a fully integrated myth in which they are central and in which they can connect to and transmit a regenerative legacy, and therefore make themselves, and those around them, whole.

The real life of Guitar and of Milkman's family are mirrors to Milkman in the novel Song of Solomon, and in spite of his resistance, they reveal to him his true identity. Guitar provides an antithetically connective energy in Milkman's search for self. Guitar accurately identifies Milkman's disconnection, his lack of cultural heritage. He also makes Milkman recognize that he accepts only limited responsibilities for his life and for the lives around him. Milkman's Sister Lena very clearly identifies his disconnection from self. Later in the novel, Milkman's conversion occurs on multiple levels: He senses his connection with his ancestry, he learns domestic harmony with Sweet, he commits himself to the community at
Danville, and he feels guilty over his treatment of Hagar. He learns to love Pilate. Antecedent to all these profound changes, however, is his differentiations from his parent's lives, an emotional surrendering that occurs on his trip to South. Milkman knows that he must "go solo", in order to learn to establish his own emotional boundaries (220).

Son in *Tar Baby* becomes all things to all people in the island household. To Valerian, Son is a practical and comfortable presence; with mirrors, he drives the ants from the green house, he shakes flowers into full bloom, and he tells Valerian jokes. Ondine and Sydney are pleased by his "quiet and respectful" (141) nature. But Son appears more 'himself', to Therese and Gideon, as the narrator tells, "he stretch(es) his legs and permit(s) himself a hearthside feeling, comfortable and free of posture and phony accents" (129). Son appears confidently son - like to the others, dutiful and congenial; except to Jadine. He is insulted by her and he too criticizes her career and actions.

Morrison offers the possibility of recuperating the sell" when, at the end of the novel *Beloved*, Denver discovers herself in her family's dependence on her. Denver fails to recognize the real presence of selfhood at the beginning. But later on when she recognizes her duty towards others, she recognizes her self too.

Beloved laments her battle to establish her identity: "there is no one to want me to say me to say my name ... I have to have my face I have to have it I am looking for the join I am loving my face so much my dark face is close to me I want to join"(262 - 63). Beloved verbalizes the struggle to avoid black erasure in the White society by stating her need for recognition as accepted subject rather than as a marginalized other. Beloved's identity comes from the outside, from someone who will desire her, name her,
and allow her to love her dark face. Here, her "desire becomes bound up with the
desire of the Other" (Schreiber 2).

Sethe believes, as she now immerses her self in the place of the many
millions of slavery's victims and agents. Without her stories and others like them,
her people can never hope to sustain themselves with dignity and imagination. It
clearly tells that "who (is) who" and who is to whom (241). Sethe remains frozen
in a personal and historically collective tragedy that affirms life.

Morrison's narrators are most often unidentifiable, anonymous vehicles to
transmit information and convey emotion rather than to provide moral
interpretations or represent a personality. Often these narrators disappear completely
as one character or another steps forward to tell the story from a different point
of view. But these speaking characters reflect multiple and fragmented selves,
which are sometimes undefined, inevitably amorphous, always merging with the
identity of a community as a whole or with the very concept of blackness.

(j ) Patriarchy and Self:

The male domination is found within the family. It is one of the reasons
for woman losing her self. In short, she has lived her life in service to the
patriarchal order. Ruth in Song of Solomon lost her self by choosing Macon as
her husband. She outwardly conforms to the stereotypical image of a devout
housewife, and she adheres to the 'separate spheres' doctrine deriving from gender
definition, occupying herself with the duties of the household, while her husband
manoeuvres in the larger world outside the family. Although she decides herself as
"pressed small" by Macon, beneath her placid exterior, Ruth struggles to wrest
power from him (124). Her strength lies in her weakness, her "smallness". Ruth
learned her strategy for gaining power through a weakness in her childhood's
family, a family legacy of her enmeshment with her father, Dr. Foster. He is consumed - like Macon - with acquiring property and wealth, and he treats Ruth as a servant, "useful" for housework and for his care taking after his wife's death (23). Dr. Foster positions her as his child just as Macon will as his wife: a 'thing' possessed.

Ruth becomes victim to both her husband and father. When she is very proud to introduce herself as Dr. Foster's daughter, Macon feels that his self-respect and masculinity is eroded by her and he ill-treats her. Ruth does not have self on her own. She never introduces herself as 'Ruth' to others; instead, she is proud to call her daddy's daughter that Ruth can continue in her role as suffering, self-debasing victim.

Ruth finds subtle methods of objectifying the members of her family as well as she is pathetic and weak. She retaliates against her husband's cruelty by manipulating him. Since, she cannot attract his attention in any other way, she demeans herself until, out of disgust, and he lashes out at her.

The Dead family achieves emotional stability through the suppression of the son, Milkman. From childhood, Milkman does not have his own self. He could not control himself. Ruth and Macon use Milkman as a weapon for dominance and control of others. Through her prolonged breast-feeding of Milkman, Ruth proves her victory over her husband. Like Ruth, Macon too infantilises his son; Macon does not allow Milkman to attend college, instead he compels him to work as a real estate agent, a job providing evidence of Macon's victory over Ruth: "His son belonged to him now and not to Ruth" (63). He forces Milkman to adopt his values. But later on, when Milkman strikes Macon in defence of his mother, Milkman tries to prove his manhood towards his father by protecting his mother.
Milkman's blow precipitates in Macon a guarding feeling of pride in his son. He can no longer exist as "a garbage pail for the actions and hatred of other people" (120). Milkman's task is to allow "a self inside himself (to) emerge, a clean-lined definite self (184), an identity differentiated from the image imposed upon him by his parents for their emotional needs.

Even, the self-centered Sula destroys her own self when she commits herself to Ajax. Sula's temporary surrender of her own life-giving eroticism in her attempt to possess Ajax, her lapse into domesticity signified by the green hair ribbon and the sparkling bathroom, not only alienate Ajax but represent her own death-knell.

In Paradise, the Ruby men gain their sense of self through the adulation of others, particularly women. But women try to establish themselves after a long struggle. In response to the fixed ideology of the townsmen, the overt and subtle subversion of patriarchal structures by the women in the novel allows them to move toward a genuine subjectivity. Having seen themselves as objects, the Convent women alter their status by breaking into a new subjectivity. For example, Mavis takes her identity from her husband Frank, who sees her as "the dumbest bitch on the planet" (37). Frank also prevents her having friendships with other women, isolating her so that her only sense of self comes from him, and she is "frightened by how dumb she was" (28). Away from Frank's gaze, Mavis can detect her object status.

Arnette, on the other hand lacks a sense of self in Paradise. Her identity has been based solely on her love for K.D.: "She believed she loved him absolutely because he was all she knew about her self -- which was to say, everything she knew of her body was connected to him" (148). She lost her self
and feels empty when K.D. refuses to marry her and leaves her alone. But after several years, when K.D. accepts to marry Arnette, she feels that once again she gains her sense of identity. Thus Arnette fails to be a self-defining person and relates her self with K.D.

(k) Self-hatred and Loss of Self:

Morrison's rejection of White - defined female beauty is reflected in her first novel, *The Bluest Eye*. It reveals the crippling effects of the White standards of female beauty on a young Black girl, Pecola Breedlove and her mother Pauline Breedlove. When the neighbourhood boys criticize Pecola as "Black emo", Claudia remarks that it is the contempt for their own blackness (55). Morrison demonstrates, that criticizing Pecola as Black inverts the natural order of an entire culture, creating young men who feel an awful contempt for the colour of their skin and, by implication, their culture. By subscribing to a false White standard of beauty, African Americans try to praise White culture and show aversion to their own culture.

Morrison also demonstrates the forces in the White society that eat away at Pecola's self-esteem and sense of self-worth with her encounter with Mr. Yacobowski. When Pecola goes to Mr. Yacobowski's store eagerly willing to have handful of Mary Jane candies Pecola's self, her presence as a subject, remains unrecognised by the storekeeper who has absorbed White standards of visual attractiveness. When Pecola goes to Mr. Yacobowski's store, he cannot look at her and acknowledge her presence as a subject because he cannot look at her: "... his eyes draw back, hesitate, and hover.... He does not see her, because for him there is nothing to see" (36). Because Pecola is not fit for the White standards of physical beauty, people such as Mr. Yacobowski do not recognize existence.
Although Pecola is a paying customer, the shopkeeper's glazed eyes betray a "total absence of human recognition" while his hand gingerly takes the pennies from the little girl, careful not to brush her black skin (43). Morrison also points out that Pecola's ugliness, defined visually by the White standards, forces her into a position of invisibility and absence, which in turn becomes her only mode of presence. While she tries to live in the real world, there is no place for her. She never sees anything positive in herself as she is.

In an article, Anne Anlin Chang describes that one has to develop self respect because "the face of beauty is that we may not be able to own it, buy it, give it, or refuse it, even as we are profoundly moved by it" (210). Like Pecola, her mother Pauline begins to hate herself, unconsciously believing the advertisements shown on the silver screen - that, only beautiful women like Jean Harlow and Norman Shearer deserve love and happiness. When her daughter is born, she sees Pecola as ugly too. Having absorbed these silver-screen values, Pauline conjures up "a mind's view" that her soon-to-be-born child more in keeping with the White fantasy than the Black reality. Upon birth, Pecola gives the lie to this view, and Pauline expresses her disappointment: "... Lord she was ugly" (98). The mother's gaze is of primary importance in generating a child's sense of self, but here, Pauline looks at her infant daughter and then looks away. Pauline's awfulness of self-worth is passed on to her child with her impossible dream of blue-eyed beauty is passed on as well.

Pecola becomes a victim from the moment of her birth to the majority White society, the Black community, and later herself. The scene in which Pauline chooses a little White girl over Pecola, her own daughter, when Claudia and Frieda follow Pecola to her mother's workplace in a home in a White
neighbourhood, Pecola accidentally smashes fresh-baked berry cobbler on to the
kitchen floor and splatters the White child's new pink dress. Pauline knocks
Pecola to the floor, and consoles the White child as if she were her own. Pauline
also treats Pecola as a pariah. Pauline's negation of her daughter from her birth
develops Pecola's subsequent fear of life and on the whole, she loses faith in
herself.

Pauline too remains as pariah in her own childhood days. Pauline from her
beginning in Alabama and later in Kentucky, has been plagued by a "crooked,
archless foot" (96). Pauline's physical deformity leaves her with a sense of
separateness and unworthiness, and she longs for consistency and purpose in her
life. Her cracked feet make her feel inferior in her family. She is a lonely child,
and is neglected by others while playing. But for the first time in her life, when
Cholly makes her feel beautiful, she realizes her 'self and values her worthiness.
But when they move to Ohio, Pauline tries to follow the White culture inspired
by the movies. She equates "beauty with virtue" (96) which attempts an individual
to control the potential self, while at the same time relying upon the other's look
to confirm one's identity. Pauline's self-contempt rests between this vacillation of
self and other. She can neither realize the potentialities of self nor adequately
confirm her identity in a conscious appropriation of the other. Thus, she tries
consciously to reject her potential self as well as "the look of the Other"(97).

The scene in which Cholly Breedlove fumbles through his first sexual
encounter and the appearance of the White hunters grounded in cultural,
stereotypical responses between the Blacks and Whites that have as their basis; a
manipulation or hatred of blackness. The belief that the Blacks are inferior leads
the White men to treat Cholly as "an object, as if he were mere a brute,
conjured up before their eyes for their pleasure" (Bjork 69) that Cholly has been designated 'nigger', and he is defined by the Whites into a reality that stunts his imagination as well as his moral growth.

The Breedloves lack selfhood. They are victims of a racist and a class-conscious society that has forced them to live unnatural lives. Claudia explains that the Breedloves are unique by accepting their ugliness. She remarks that "it was as though some mysterious all-knowing master had given each one a cloak of ugliness to wear, and they had each accepted it without question". Their "all-knowing master" is, of course, a dominant culture that has pervasively imposed their White, male-engendered stereotypes upon them; as Claudia continues: " . . . . And they took the ugliness in their hands, threw it as a mantle over them, and went about the world with it" (33).

The absence of individuality in the pattern becomes its own land of inertia and infertility; the mould resists reshaping; those who would aspire to it must reshape themselves to fit the already established pattern. It is unfortunate when that straitjacketing pattern has been presented to them as normal and desirable. For the Black people to attain such status, to escape the blackness, as well as the spontaneity of Black culture, reflects a self-hatred that manifests itself in Pecola’s desire for the bluest eyes of all. Timothy B. Powell states that the challenge for Morrison is

_to create a universe of critical and fictional meanings where blackness will no longer connote absence, negation, and evil but will come to stand instead for affirmation, presence, and good. . . . It is a quest not only to de-center the white logos but finally to rebuild_
the center, to discover the powers which lie hidden in the black logos.... (748-49).

By presenting Black consciousness as the gaze of the Other, Morrison's novel illustrates the threat to subjectivity by objectification.

In *Sula*, Shadrack's exposure to mindless killing in war results in his being a self-less person. Shadrack returns to Medallion mentally disturbed, "not daring to acknowledge the fact that he didn't even know who or what he was . . . with no past, no language, no tribe, no source . . ."(12). In the brutalities of war, Shadrack senses his own nothingness; and he seeks refuge in National Suicide Day as a way of restraining his fear of death. He went off to war normal and came back abnormal; the reasons for that change do not prevent the townspeople from defining Shadrack as one of the weirdoes, however formed, who demands a special psychological and physical space in their worlds.

In Morrison's fictions, identity is always tentative and tenuous; there can be no isolated attempts to define itself as separate from community, no matter how tragic or futile the operations of that community might be. Individual characters are invariably formed by social constructions of both race and gender, and they are inseparable from those origins.

The White standard cultivates the idea that the Black is absence and invisible. When Shadrack sees his reflection in the water in a toilet, his definite identity as a Black man is proved and the sense of presence relieved Shadrack from his fear of non-existence, This experience of reflection defines the self as other.

Macon Jr. in *Song of Solomon* is a selfish person at the same time there is a lack of self in him. His class-consciousness makes him live without self. He
is very much interested in possession of things and not persons. He marries Ruth to become a respectable person in the society. He and his family exemplify the patriarchal, nuclear family, which traditionally had been a critical and stable feature in Western societies. The destructive undercurrents of manipulation and objectification within the Dead family symbolize the degeneration of western values, particularly in light of the disjunctive social and economic realities within African American communities.

Macon's manipulation of power and of people as objects inhibits him from establishing loving, sensitive relationships, and enables him to escape his own identity and history and, in turn, to not pass on any heritage to his own children save for his materialistic outlook and achievements. Consequently, for the Macon Dead family, the American dream has replaced the memory of a Black cultural heritage. The most interesting scene is the entire family's torpid position is made analogues to their touring car. Each Sunday, Macon takes his family for a Sunday drive to display his family. For Macon, this ritual is "much too important for (him) to enjoy" (31). Instead of teaching his son self-awareness, Macon teaches Milkman how to display wealth and power. He teaches that identity can only be found in the future, in his linear vision to "own things", own people; and therefore "own yourse!f"(55).

Morrison reveals that the struggle for self is indeed complex. The quest for authentic self inevitably involves the quest for truth, love, survival, and even power and forgiveness. For most of the characters, the search for external fulfilment proves unrewarding. Macon is materially rich, but he remains empty. Morrison also suggests through her characters that to achieve some equilibrium, love is the be all and end all ~ love of oneself and of one's fellowmen.
Joe Trace in *Jazz* tries to find his self through the identity of his mother. From his childhood, Joe is searching for his self. Joe has given his second name as Trace to indicate his hunt for identity. Joe searches for his mother and his identity with her ends when he finds Violet. But the mechanized city life once again makes him search his identity. He is finding his roots, but to climb it "you risked treachery by the very ground you walked on" otherwise "the ground was as porous as a sieve. A step could swallow your foot or your whole self" (215). Joe’s self is not an individual. At first he traces his identity with his mother, then with his wife, Violet, and later on with his lover, Dorcas.

1) Beauty and Self:

The Black women believe that beauty without utility is a waste. Beauty should be useful and real. It should not be objectified, or appropriated. The Black women also believe that female creation is for procreation and beauty is sterile while it does not create useful things. Margaret represents the mainstream culture of White standards of female beauty. Morrison suggests that, "for black woman it is perhaps just as well to remain useful women, implies that white female beauty is inherently useless" (Walther 783). In addition to this, Morrison identifies as central to the Black female beauty: usefulness and a connection to reality. In fact, Morrison's definition of beauty extends to paralleling Margaret to a waste product. In fact, Morrison here makes a direct link between the White female beauty in mainstream culture and waste.

Margaret is twenty years junior to Valerian. He treats her like a seventeen year old beauty queen, because, "she was all red and white", like the candy he manufactured (51). She is an object of beauty, to be admired and savoured, and in the main, her purpose in life for the Street family has been to produce a male
their to the candy kingdom and she too functions appropriately; she produces a pop, Michael, but as a young woman from modest means, she is completely unprepared for the life of a wife who belongs to the high society, and thus she is in solitude. By her husband she is an object of beauty, (doll). She is always insulted by her husband and never respected by him. Thus, Margaret does not have self on her own.

But the White beauty Margaret also takes a new position of integrity by the end of the novel. After the revelation of her child abuse, Valerian is ignored by her and Margaret takes over the control of the household. Her move from useless object of beauty to useful household manager and real person gives her the redefined beauty Morrison has outlined: "She was even lovelier now that her hand had no spray in it, . . . , and the thin top lip was much nicer than the full one she ritually painted (204).

The Black women writers may also show that a reversal can occur when the Black female characters create their own sense of alienation by succumbing to what soon becomes a distorted reality. It is their desire to conform to the White, middle class social and economic values. They internalise what it means to be beautiful and therefore, worthy in the White society. It frustrates and eventually incapacitates them to the degree that their sense of identification becomes distorted. This distortion is central to Morrison's The Bluest Eye and Song of Solomon. Bombarded and frustrated by images of the White beauty Pecola, Pauline and Hagar lose themselves to self-hatred and self-denial until their lives cease to have any meaning beyond seeking the unattainable - to be White. They become alienated from their roots and from the White community. As Morrison explains in an interview with Jane Bakesman, "I want, here, to talk about how painful
consequences are of distortion, of love that is not fructified, is held in, not expressed" (60). It is this absence of self-love, and self-worth, which separates Morrison's characters from their tradition; and in the absence of such communal coherence and kinship ties, her characters find it difficult to survive and triumph.

In *Song of Solomon*, Morrison focuses on Hagar's attempt to kill Milkman, after he has broken off their relationship, and her subsequent madness and death. Hagar is enraged on Milkman not because of her relationship ended with him but when she has found that Milkman has accepted a White girl with copper-coloured hair; her anger turns towards his acceptance of White standard of beauty, and the difference between the White girl and herself in physical features is the real reason for her madness, Milkman as well as Hagar is also the victim of this blind acceptance of White standard of beauty. Here Morrison criticizes "not only white standards of female beauty but also the visual system itself for its objectification of the self" (Walther 781). The idea of black is evil and white is divine makes Hagar to represent the system where outward appearances are more important than character.

(m) Self and History:

The social code of mask, which Milkman wears, is insecure to his self. But the journey towards his ancestral roots slowly makes him realize his self. At Danville, Milkman comes to know about the story of the life and death of Macon Sr. At this point, Milkman feels the surge of self-righteousness. He wishes to avenge his grand-father's death by finding the gold, as he prepares for his search. The freedom he seeks in the gold has been replaced by a sudden 'heroic' urge. When Milkman discovers the ancient Circe, who is waiting especially for him, and guides Milkman to the entrance of his ancestral past, 5 he
tells the real names of his grandparents -- Jake and Sing -- and their original birthplaces -- Shalimar, and Virginia, respectively. By learning their true names and origin, Milkman has unconsciously begun his quest for self.

Milkman's presence creates hostility in the minds of the people of Shalimar. This "city Negro", with his fancy clothes and brusque manner, appears to them as just another arrogant White man (269). Milkman's White appearance underscores his racial rootlessness, and the contrast between him and the townspeople also suggest the different values associated with the Black urban and rural culture.

The basic humanness of Shalimar, of Pilate, and even of Guitar, their unpretentious emotions, their struggles for survival, are completely alien to Milkman and his material, emotional isolation. He has measured self-esteem in gold and in the "hero worship" associated with material success (273). In Shalimar, however, the skills to measure self-worth involve those raw emotions and survival strategies.

Finally, Milkman hunts for a self free from personal inhibition and social pretension. In the solitary wilderness of the wood, Milkman feels compelled to confront his essential identity, and his epiphany is the impetus for personal change and transcendence.

Pilate advises Milkman on the importance of his search of his ancestors. When Milkman and Pilate return to Shalimar to inter her father's bones at the burial site, Pilate is shot and killed by Guitar; whose aim is Milkman. She is the one who has been able to strike a balance and resolve the conflict between a personal and a collective consciousness. Deeply believing that "you can't fly off
and leave a body", she alone and for ever has lived a life of "honesty and equilibrium" which has combined the best aspect of self and place (136).

Morrison thereby dramatizes her conviction that the individual self, as well as the family, is an agent of change; that the individual does not simply undergo the family's masked negotiations and transactions passively, but also to a certain extent shapes and chooses these processes, initiates and develops them. Milkman's life implies that the self's value inheres in its ability to change itself and thus become at least partially self-creating. Thus, Morrison shows the interaction between self and family; and proves that self modifies family and family develops the self.

Finally Milkman discovers his identity from understanding his own past — to understand and to sing — his family song. Milkman comes to know fully who he is when he can supply the lyrics to the song Pilate has only partially known. Indeed, the ultimate mark of his achievement of identity is his ability to take flight in the way his grand-father did.

Milkman, thus acquires a sense of identity when he immerses himself in his extended past. He comes full round from the individualism his father represents and advocates. From learning to reach back into history and horizontally in sympathetic relationship to others, Milkman bursts "the bonds of the Western, individualistic conception of self, accepting in its place the richness and complexity of a collective sense of identity" (Olney 145).

(n) Self and Cultural Heritage:

The Black women believe that self-determination is needed. This self-determination is good for self, family, community, gender, and race. It should be embraced. The characters in Morrison's Tar Baby identify themselves or others as
being basically 'persons', whatever they may be in terms of their colour, nationality, race, profession, or family role. Here Son's quest for self is male- oriented, adherent to tradition and marked by Afro - centric, whereas Jadine's quest for self is guided by female authenticity, with a slant on modernity and Euro - centricity. The White education to the Blacks has its negative aspects. Such wrong education forces the Blacks like Jadine to give up their authenticity and their class - consciousness. Such people tend to look down upon other Blacks. Thus, Morrison strongly believes that education should not alienate one from one's own community.

*Tar Baby* is about the quest of a contemporary African American woman who happens to be a cultural orphan, one whose sense of self is based on a denial of her own cultural heritage and an identification with one other than her own. Jadine faces so many problems in her quest for her identity. She feels that the swamp women make her feel lonely and inauthentic. Morrison reveals the dilemma faced in trying to depict the potential consequences of success predicated upon disconnection from one's racial identity and cultural heritage through the character of Jadine. Morrison sees the disparity between the women of her remembered past and the women of the present represented in the character, Jadine.

Jadine's trip to Eloè is a quest to discover her 'authentic self. Yet her seeking to deny those aspects of her identity that contribute to the sum total of that authentic self shows how impoverished her sense of self is. Because she seems irrevocably separated from her cultural heritage and her adopted one, she is a Cultural orphan. Because her sense of self is based on the rejection of blackness inherent in Western values, her consciousness can never be folly transformed.
Morrison argues that the modern notion of alienation is not the same for the Black and White people. Whereas alienation from one's cultural milieu may be heroic in the work of White authors, for Black authors, it signals a form of loss that is less than heroic. Jadine's alienation from Black people is a consequence of the other culture that produced her. She is "a rebellion against the imposed female image", a denial that results in a tragic "splitting of the self" (Mobley 164). The image of Tar Baby warns that the absence of cultural roots destroys the self and the most important connection between self and others.

Throughout the text, Son appears as a unitary self. Son believes that one cannot come from anywhere and one should have known where one comes from. He advises Jadine that she should not tell that she has come from five towns, he insisted that "you are not from any where", but from a particular place, like he "from Elo" (229). Son, nonetheless, appears most personally detached from culture and community.

Son's final decision about which style of living to pursue comes as he leaves the boat in which Theresa, an old blind woman who sees his dilemma clearly, has taken him to the wild side of Isle Des Chevaliers. Son's purpose for the trip had been to seek Jadine, but Theresa says that by taking him to the island's wild side she has given him a choice: he can either walk the ten miles to Valerian's home and the possibility of finding Jadine, or he can join the mythical wild horseman who Theresa believes inhabit the island. Here Therese's role is a nurturer who guides Son to follow their Black culture and tradition to live with a self.

Morrison's novels emphasise the need to resist forces stemming from society which may serve to destroy continuity of the Black cultural heritage by a
conscious embracing of the past combined with a concurrent quest for identity. Morrison's protagonists face a world that is "more complex, oppressive, and destructive because they must battle against intra racism and inter racism as well as poverty and sexism" (Hamilton 111).

The Black women's self is denied to them due to race and gender. Morrison brings out this idea in her novels. Like Claudia in *The Bluest Eye* sees that "(b)eing a minority in both caste and class, we moved about … on the hem of life, struggle to consolidate our weakness and hang on, or to creep singly up into the major folds of the garment" (18). And, in *Sula*, Sula Peace discovers, the fact that she and her friend Nel Wright are "neither white nor male" means that "all freedom and triumph was forbidden to them"(44).

The Black writers try to impose maturity and awareness in growing up Black female. They make Black women feel unworthy of White elegance and refinement, and try to judge their self-worth. They believe that this awareness gives sustenance and power for the future generation. So, they believe that a person has to go back, really back — to have a sense, an understanding of all that has gone to make them, before they can go forward. Milkman, for instance, breaks the cocoon of his jaded personality and comes to terms with their lives only through the journey into the past. Morrison believes that the present self must seek a communion with the historical self in order to attain the state of wholeness. In the context of Black cultural experiences, this becomes all the more a necessity and a prerequisite for meaningful existence. Thus, Morrison establishes that "in order for black characters to achieve subject status, they must reject white desire and discover their own through African American values" (Schreiber 95).
2. Self-awareness

In America, the Black woman's life was hidden from the public gaze. This is said as 'the buried life of African American women'. Until 1940s, the Black women in both the Anglo and American literature have been assigned stereotyped roles. They have been viewed solely as beasts of burden, as sexual toys, and as outlets for man's lascivious passions. Such stereotypical images are (i) mammy, (ii) conjure woman, (iii) concubine and (iv) mulatto. They feel that it is better to have an image than having zero images. These are the important images imposed on Black women by both White male and female writers, and sometimes her Black male writers too. So the Black women writers have started describing the female Black images in a positive light to reveal their true selves to the society.

The mammy figure is the most prominent Black female figure in southern white literature. "Mammy is black in colour, fat, nurturing, religious, kind, strong and enduring. Her identity derived mainly from a nurturing service. She must be plump, and have big breasts, and arms"(Christian-I&l8k$She is needed since ideal White women would have to debase themselves in order to be a mother. She is always nurturing both the Black and White children. She is meek, and malleable, supple and docile. She is self-effacing, and caring for others, particularly for her folks. Only mammy fought to protect her own children or who rose up against slavery. Thus mammy saw herself as a mother and she carries over the African view that every mother is a symbol of the marvellous creativity of the earth. Mammy or the mother figure is an important image in the mythology of Africa. There is a difference between the White narrative and the Black narrative about mammy. The White writers view her as an "obedient surrogate mother", but the Black writers view that mammy as one who "kicked, fought, connived, plotted,
most often covertly, to throw off the chains of bondage and to protect her children who were bought and sold at will"(Bjork 18).

The Black women images created by the Black women writers did not play a particular single role. They also merge with other images. Almost in her every novel, Morrison describes *mammy* characters with their fruitful activities. A minor character, Aunt Jimmy in *The Bluest Eye* takes the role of mammy. She adopts Cholly. She is a preacher among her community. By curing the disease of the people, Aunt Jimmy becomes a herbal woman. Along with the mammy role, Aunt Jimmy plays the role of herbal woman and a preacher. Eva in *Sula* and Baby Suggs in *Beloved* are the major mammy characters created by Morrison. When Eva's husband deserts her and her three children, it becomes her duty to take the role of a breadwinner. Eva stuck her leg in front of an oncoming rail purposely to collect the insurance money to feed her children. After getting the money, she could provide a decent life to her children, and grand-daughter. She also gives shelter to the immature children and the destitutes. By supporting the poor people, Eva becomes one of the lovable persons in the town.

Baby Suggs has suffered a lot during slavery in *Beloved*. She is abused by several men, both White and Black. She is treated as a sex object by men. Suggs becomes mother to eight children from seven different fathers, and lost all of her children except Halle. Her milk is used for the White master's children and the other Black children and not only for her own. But after getting freedom with the help of her son, Suggs becomes a protector by securing and feeding her daughter-in-law and her grand-children. Suggs becomes a preacher by conducting prayers, by singing, dancing and crying. By telling stories about the atrocities caused by the White masters to her grand-children, Suggs becomes an educator
and passes the Black tradition to her grand-children. By using folk medicines to cure the diseases, she becomes a physician.

By describing such mammy characters, Morrison displays her difference of approach towards these characters portrayed by the White writers. Morrison's portrayal of the mammy's role does not end with sex. They become guardians, educators, and preachers to the younger generation. In *Tar Baby*, Theresa is a mammy, who breast-feeds children even when she is old. Gideon comments on Theresa that she is a wet-nurse, and make her living from the White babies. Theresa also accepts that "my breasts go on giving," she said, "I got milk to this day!" (132). Theresa, a mammy also becomes a guide to Son, urges him to go back to his Black roots to embrace his ancestors. Theresa acts as a guide to protect Black man and to preserve Black culture from the evils of White society.

In the same novel Morrison describes how a Black man condemns the traditional role of mammy. When Jadine refuses to take on the role of a Black woman and likes to embrace White culture, Son admonishes her not to carry the role of mammy which their ancestors have accepted throughout their life. Son rebukes her by saying that "Feed, love and care for white people's children. That's what you were born for; that's what you have waited for all your life .... You have been doing it for two hundred years, you can do it for two hundred more" day(232). He also tries to make Jadine understand how the Blacks become prey to the White society. Morrison brings out how the Black women support the society by their selfless service and at the same time how they are misused and Exploited.

Alice Manfred in *Jazz* becomes a surrogate mother for Dorcas when her parents were shot dead in a race riot. Alice is strict towards Dorcas to protect her
from the dangers of the dominant society. Of course, Alice takes the role of a kind of mammy, but she cannot fulfil the role perfectly. Thus, Morrison's mammy characters are performing positive role towards their own Black people and there might be some faults in them which Morrison brings out without fail and without bias.

The other important image given to the Black women is the *conjure* woman. She is a hyena - in - petticoats, "evil - minded", and "religious fanatic" who employs her charm and medicines to seduce men and reduce them to spiritual and psychological wrecks (Christian).'lib it). Both the White and the Black men respect her and fear her. The conjure woman often becomes the practitioner of voodoo. Morrison's conjure women live always on the fringe of both Black and White cultures, relegated and sometimes confined to the wild zone, their magical powers thus contained but never completely self-indulgent.

The minor character, Ajax's mother in *Sula*, Morrison describes as an evil conjure woman. She has seven adoring children whose joy is "to bring her the plants, hair, . . . and footstep dust that she needed . . . . She knew about weather, omens, the living, the dead, dreams and all illness" (126). Ajax's mother does not have a major role in the novel but her extraordinary power makes her distinct among the townspeople. She is respected by the people and at the same time her magical power scars the townspeople.

The herbal priestess in folklore is associated with her garden; with a forgotten past; which links her folk practices to magic and the spiritual; and it connects her through folk medicine, with the people of her community. Past, magic and the community are interconnected. Morrison symbolizes the ancient negative stereotype of a witch as an evil, into a positive woman whose nurturance and
wisdom sustain others. Morrison shows the conjure woman as a mirror to the society.

Pilate in *Song of Solomon* is a conjure woman. From her birth she shows her supernatural powers. Pilate crawls her own way out of her dead mother's womb and once her umbilical cord was cut, it fell off leaving no trace of its existence. Born with the missing navel, Pilate initially becomes a "freak" woman. She is free from the emotional dependences (Rubenstein 137). It makes people believe that Pilate has supernatural, perhaps even demonic powers. In fact, her arcane knowledge of midwifery, her natural healing powers, her ability to distil wine from plants, her anomalous physical sign, her reputed capacity to "step out of her skin" (94), and her ability to fly "without ever leaving the ground" suggest that she is a kind of benign witch (340).

Pilate protects her daughter, grand-daughter, other family members and other Black people from danger. She is kind and generous. Through her magical power, she uses herbs to protect Milkman and his mother Ruth from Macon Dead. Pilate mixes a powder into food, which increased Macon's sexual desire and thus enables Ruth to have her third child, Milkman. Pilate also puts "A male doll with a small painted chicken bone stuck between its legs and a round red circle painted on its belly" (132).

Robert Smith's flight in the opening scene of *Song of Solomon*, serves as the mechanism for introducing the conjurative power of Pilate. Pilate foretold the time of Ruth's delivery. In addition to her seeing into the future, Pilate confirms with her song, the Tightness of Smith's flight. Pilate signifies as conjurers and more significantly as the supernatural aid in Milkman's heroic quest. As a musician, priestess, magician, folk historian, prophetess, Pilate symbolises the
creative imagination. Pilate, the conjure woman, will long evoke fresh insights into her unfathomable, inscrutable personality.

Circe in *Song of Solomon* is also a healer like Pilate. As a midwife she takes care of Macon Dead Jr. and his sister, Pilate after the death of their father. She also directs Milkman to the cave where his grand-father's body remained and tells Milkman about his grand-parents' real names. Circe becomes a "spiritual midwife" to Milkman, helping him give birth to himself (Mobley 121). Milkman's meeting with Circe becomes the revelation, which is needed for the completion of his journey.

In *Paradise*, Consolata, the head of the Convent is a voodoo practitioner. For thirty years, Consolata has offered her body and soul to God's Son. When Soan's drunk fifteen-year-old son Scout crashes the truck which he drives, Connie enters the dead boy's body with the directions of Lone DuPres and leads him back to life.

With the power of witchcraft, Consolata saves and extends the life of the Convent Mother, Mary Magna. Consolata is a healer and also acts as a midwife and has done abortion to Arnett, when K.D. refused to have the responsibility for his child in her womb. Consolata also helps the destitute women by using her magic. Because of this, the men in the town are frightened and want to destroy the Convent for practicing witchcraft. Morrison's Conjure women help other men and women in their society in several ways but, at the same time, they become a threat to evil-men.

Another woman in *Paradise* who is shown as a conjure woman is Lone DuPres. She acts as a mid-wife and has delivered several children in the town. The mid-wives know the secrets of every one in the town and normally men are
afraid of them. But here, Lone has another talent that she could read the minds of people. When Lone hears the plan of the nine men of the town to destroy the Convent, she tries to save the Convent women with the help of other people. She is also a medicine - woman who spends her time by gathering herbs.

The next prominent Black female image in White southern literature is the *concubine*. She is "a sex - kitten" (Christian). She is attractive and violent. She is flexible in her morals and poses a threat to other women both Black and White, stealing men through her wiles and guiles. Mostly, she is exploited by the White masters. In Morrison’s novels, these women are a threat to the society outwardly, but they are really helpful to the poor and isolated women. The three prostitutes in *The Bluest Eye*, China, Poland, and Miss Marie are middle - aged women whose "forte is their spirit of non-compliance. They are self-employed people who control their business; they are independent and self-reliant" (Samuel 20). They are charming and seductive. They steal Black as well as White men through their charm and cunning tricks. They are social pariahs, yet they are not devoid of self-confidence. They love and help Pecola when everyone hates her. They feed and make Pecola happy. They advise Pecola to live with self - confidence. When Pauline ignores Pecola and shows preference for her little White child, Marie, one of the prostitutes takes almost maternal interest in the exiled child, Pecola. Pecola finds genuine love in the house of these concubines and the concubines become mammies indirectly.

In *Sula*, Hanna Peace, mother of Sula, is shown as a concubine. She is a pretty and self-indulgent woman. She takes a series of lovers after the death of her husband because she needs "some touching every day" (44). She has a steady sequence of lovers, mostly the husbands of her friends and neighbours. So, Hannah
is hated by other women in the town and her acts create jealousy in the minds of other women. Hannah is a consummate lover who "rippled with sex" (42) and teaches her daughter, Sula that sex is pleasant. Hannah's friendship with women is, of course, short-lived. But among men, she is a generous woman and that, coupled with her extraordinary beauty and elegance of manner, she becomes the sex-siren of the locality.

Pilate's daughter Reba in *Song of Solomon* is a character who represents the image of a concubine. Reba has several men in her life. She never lives with a single man. So Reba does not know the father of her daughter, Hagar. She always gives gifts to her male friends, though she does not expect anything from them in return. Sometimes, she is exploited by men folk. But Reba loves her daughter and mother and is helpful to them. She always tries to fulfil the role of a mother by satisfying her daughter's needs and wishes.

*Mulatto* is the fourth dominant Black female image in literature. The mulatto is the illicit crossing between races. She is the product of the sexual connection between a Black woman and a White master. The mulatto is combined with the physical characteristic of both races. The mulatto becomes the vehicle for cultural transference. She represents the Black man's powerlessness to prevent the union between his wife and the White master. She imitates the manners of Whites and passes for White. The mulatto is a worthy person to be free because she is beautiful, courageous and refined. She is beautiful because she represents those qualities of White and Black races. She is refined because she has learned the manners and customs of the Big House. She is courageous because she knows how to defy the code of conduct defined by the South.
The tragedy of the mulattoes is that while they see the power and pleasure of the master's house, they cannot share in those advantages of the dominant culture. Barbara Christian in her work, *Black Feminist Criticism*, is of the view that "The existence of the mulatto, who combined the physical characteristic of both races, denied their claim that blacks were not human, while allowing them the argument that they were lifting up the race by lightening it" (3). The mulatto woman rather than the man was chosen to project this image. These women encounter the evils of the double-edged sword — racism coupled with sexism.

Morrison illustrates the debilitating effects of the infiltration of Western ideas on the attitude of the mulattos. When Pecola is expelled from the neat, orderly, and sterile house of Geraldine, a mulatto, Geraldine calls Pecola a "nasty little bitch" because of Pecola's ugliness and the poverty which Geraldine has so stridently avoided (18). Geraldine accepts and follows the manners of White people. She believes that White is beautiful and Black is ugly. She never allows her son to play with the Black boys. Young women like Geraldine, who forever strive to expunge their blackness and "creep singly up into the major folds" (18) of mainstream of White society continue the corruption of the White community by spawning a brown race that reveres White standards indiscriminately, denying their ancestral heritage and denying their passionate natures. Such women believe in the myth broadcast by White society that black skin represents inferiority and bestiality. The young girl, Maureen Peel, is a high yellow child. She is treated with respect and awe by students and teachers alike because of her economical superiority and because of her light skin, her brown hair, her green eyes, and her "whiteness" (52).
Helene Wright in *Sula* is a brown woman who is proud of her beauty. Helene has turned herself into a conventional womanhood. She has spent her life trying to separate herself from the identity of her mother, a Creole whore. She is a very respected, impressive woman to the townspeople. She is proud to maintain the stereotype image of middle-class, domesticated housewife and mother. The same attitude of propriety and orderliness she attempts to inculcate into Nel. Helene asks her daughter Nel to pull her nose to change its shape to look like the Whites.

Jadine in *Tar Baby* is a light-skinned woman. She is proud to be a Sorbonne educated and also one of the famous models in France. From her childhood, she is taught to imitate White culture by the Streets. This makes her lose her own Black roots. The efforts of the night-women of Eloe and Son to make Jadine realize her responsibility towards her own community and culture ends in failure. She wears, eats and speaks like the White woman. At the end, Jadine fails to understand Son and Black culture. Thus, Jadine becomes an orphan both by missing her parents and her own roots.

Like Jadine, Dorcas in *Jazz* is also a mulatto. She fails to understand her roots. As a consequence, she faces so many problems in her life. Dorcas always escapes from her aunt's strict, protective life and fails to understand about South where her parents and grand-parents have come from. The city-life has changed her attitude, but she could not survive in it. Most of the mulatto characters try to go away from the Black tradition and want to identify with the White people. This isolates them from their own culture and their people. The White society also does not accept them easily. So they are living in between the two. It makes them face so many unwanted problems. So, Morrison gives such examples to motivate
the Black people not to follow the White culture blindly; instead they have to realize how they are cut off from their roots and also themselves from both cultures.

For centuries, the African American women are identified in society as the mule of the world, because the Blacks have handled the burdens that everyone else refused to carry. The African American women have also been called 'Matriarchs', and 'Mean and Evil Bitches'. When they have pleaded for simple caring or for understanding, they are stuck in the farthest corner. When they have asked for love, they have been given children. In short, even their labour, fidelity and love, have been knocked down their throats. So self-awareness is considered to be an important requirement to succeed in this world of prejudices and phobias. By using these traditional images Morrison brings out the reality of the Black women in society, which is radically different from the reality presented by the White writers and the Black male writers.

3. Mutilation as a Survival Technique

Some feminists mutilate their bodies as a mark of protest and also to show that they have power over that bodies. By mutilating or piercing their body, they think that they are claiming control over their own body. A few women mutilate their body parts to go against the standard of beauty imposed on them by men. They also disfigure themselves to escape from the male gaze. Mutilation is viewed as a process of inflicting pain on one's own body to derive pleasure. Some women take up tattooing, body-painting, and piercing to disfigure themselves. But in Morrison's novels mutilation is used as a survival technique, especially by
woman characters for helping their family. It is also used for asserting oneself or intimidating others.

The young Claudia in *The Bluest Eye* registers the knowledge of exclusion through the objects of Shirley Temple's milk mugs and white barbae dolls. Through these emblems, she slowly recognizes the fact that she is treated as an outsider by the dominant society. Sensitive to the insult in the presumption that whatever girl-child desired was "a blue-eyed, yellow-haired, pink-skinned doll", she mutilates her dolls and feels with horror — the same impulse toward the little White girls (20). Instead of mutilating herself Claudia mutilates her dolls to show her anger towards the White standard of beauty, which shows that Claudia has accommodated the reality and recognizes the necessity of mutilation as a survival technique. Her recognition that such gestures are adjustments "without improvement" spares her from total acquiescence to oppression (22).

Eva in *Sula* exhibits a kind of abnormality in laying her leg on the railroad track for the train to run over in order to get insurance money to take care of her family, when her husband, Boy Boy deserts her and her children. When one considers the horrors of that act and the accompanying pain that Eva underwent in order that she and her family could survive, it is highly conceivable that she could do anything else that she felt necessary.

Eva's act of self-mutilation is motivated by a will to survive, but the effect is also a statement indicting poverty and the condition of life for the Black women. As Eva endures the amputation of her leg, so Sula's difference was recognized by others when she was only twelve-year-old, when she slashed off the tip of her finger to prove to four teen-aged White boys, what punishment she could inflict on them, if they did not stop harassing her and her friend Nel: "If I can do that
to myself, what you suppose I'll do to you?" (55). In her effort to protect Nel, Sula assumes the role of active victim while appearing recklessly indifferent. For the Blacks, Morrison strongly implies that playing crazy or strange is a way to address the problem of survival.

In her novel, *Paradise* Morrison brings out how mentally disturbed persons hurt themselves. Seneca cuts her skin to manifest and control pain. Her first cut is accidental and happened when a boy in her foster home raped her. When the peace she finds at the Convent is disturbed by Pallas' constant crying, she cannot bear the sound and she turns again to the comfort of cutting herself.

Morrison also describes the affected psyche in the White family in *Tar Baby*. Margaret Street is a beautiful woman. She marries a man who is much older to her. He always ill-treats her. When she does not know how to satisfy her son's need. She loses emotional stability and often pierces pin in her son's back and burns him with cigarette.

In *Beloved*, the child-woman Beloved threatens Sethe and Paul D by pulling her tooth out. She feels that "it was starting"(164) and if their relationship continues the other odd things will happen at their house. Her action shows that if she harms herself, she will definitely do the same thing to others. Beloved does not want her mother Sethe to share her love with others. She has come back to get her share of motherly affection, and so she is not ready to share that love with anyone else.

When Sethe was an infant, she was separated from her mother. This affects her very much. She is deprived of the experience of a normal childhood. Sethe's motivation for murdering her child is, obviously, a desperate attempt to protect that child from what she considers a fate far worse than death. Slavery affects a
woman's psyche and turns even a mother into a monster. Whereas in *Sula*, Eva kills her son, Plum to protect him from his mental trauma. She feels that if Plum is not able to fit the role of a man, let him die. But Guitar in *Song of Solomon*, starts killing others, especially the White men, because of his father's death. Thus Guitar tries to order the chaos in his life by controlling all facts of his environment, even the lives and death of others. For example, he relives "his agitation by straightening up the room" (117) and becomes part of a group that kills a White person each time a Black person’s death goes unpunished by the legal system.

The Whites derive pleasure by mutilating the Black bodies. Flogging of Sethe's back and lynching of Sixo are some of the instances of mutilation shown by Morrison in her novel *Beloved*. The Schoolteacher tied up Sixo in a tree and lynched him for his mischievous behaviour. The scar in Sethe's back tells the brutality of slavery. Thus, Morrison portrays the affected psyche of the Blacks, which make them mutilate themselves or others.

4. Self-distraction

Insanity, a mental disorder of severity renders its victim incapable of managing his affairs or of conforming to social standards. The term insanity denotes mental aberrations or defects that may relieve a person from his or her own activities. Insanity is a better option than suicide. In Morrison's novels, madness itself is a survival strategy that empowers individuals with the means to order chaos in unusual ways.

Pecola, in *The Bluest Eye*, is forced to long for blue eyes like those of White children, so that she would be loved and accepted by both Whites and
Blacks. Spoiled by the seductive pull of White standards and humiliated by the reality of the Black society, she finally becomes mad.

Being a minority in both class and race, Pecola has been convinced of the superiority of the White standards. Suffering from her sense of ugliness, the ugliness that made her ignored or despised at school, by teachers and classmates alike, she has realized the need to get blue eyes. This is the starting point of her psychic disorder. She begins to pray for blue eyes. "A little black girl yearns for the blue eyes of a little white girl, and the horror at the heart of her yearning is exceeded by the evil of fulfillment" (158).

Excluded from reality by racial discrimination and inequality, Pecola goes mad, fantasizing that her eyes have turned blue. Morrison has brilliantly summed up Pecola's psychic state and the resultant behaviour. Pecola's division into two selves at the end of the novel represents her inability to see herself as a whole person or, in fact, as a person at all. Her yearning for the most basic confirmation of self in the eyes of others drives her mad.

Cholly, her father, loves her but he expresses his love for her in a deviant way by raping her. But the result is ironic because it is only by descent into madness can she be convinced that her eyes are the bluest of all. Pecola does get what she had set out to, but at the expense of her sanity. She is a winner who is also a loser.

When referring to Shadrack in *Sula*, the authorial narrator suggests: "They knew Shadrack was crazy but that did not mean that he didn't have any sense or, even more important, that he had no power"(15). Shadrack’s madness involves only a different way of structuring the community's sense of time and ritual, rather than an actual disruption of order, he is integrated more easily into the
community's life. Shadrack has found a survival strategy by conducting National Suicide Day.

Hagar, in Song of Solomon, looks to Milkman for a definitive commitment. Later Milkman runs away from her, she responds with a stalking desire to kill Milkman. Milkman's mixture of frustration, isolation, and alienation makes Hagar "spinning into a bright place where the air (is) thin" (99). Her identity has become folly subsumed in Milkman's gaze. Later in the novel, she worries, as she lays dying that she has been spumed by Milkman because she does not have the "'penny-colored hair, 'Lemon-colored skin', and 'gray-blue eyes'" that he likes(319).

Sethe's husband Halle, in Beloved, is another character who suffers mental aberration. He is a perfect husband to his wife Sethe, a good father and son to his children and mother, Baby Suggs. When he witnesses the assault of the nephews of Schoolteacher on Sethe, he is mentally disturbed. His inability to protect his wife from such cruelty affects his psyche. Thus the cruelties of the slavery system and brutalities of the slave owners make the innocent and helpless people mentally deranged.

Racial discrimination and social exploitation of the Blacks in America distorts the lives of the Blacks. Morrison is of the view that insanity is one of the manifestations of the consequences of the evils in American society. Black American women, as womanists, try to restore sanity and dignity in the lives of all people irrespective of race, gender or class.

S. Suicide or Self-annihilation

The word suicide generally proceeds from a reluctance to identify oneself or one's community with victimization, powerlessness, and hopelessness. Sometimes
suicide does signify precisely these realities; it can also indict a brutal, dehumanising culture that makes life unbearable. Suicide is now the leading cause of death among the young Blacks.

When a person fails to face the struggles and sufferings in her life she commits suicide. When a person fails to confront oppressive forces, she resolutely takes her life in order to end untold miseries. Women must have a strong desire to live with hope and human dignity and without that existence it is impossible for them. The Blacks were brought to America in slaveships. They fought for survival in more covert ways; still some of them jumped overboard. On several ships, there was an epidemic of suicide at the last minute.

In *Beloved*, when an unnamed woman jumps into the Atlantic Ocean, suicide becomes an act of staggering communal significance. The woman jumped overboard because of the ill-treatment of the slaveholders in the ship. The slave men and women in the ship did not have any privacy and they were ill-treated in front of the other. Because of the sexual violence and the repeated rapes on the ship, the Black women could not survive. So they committed suicide. *Beloved*’s lyrical monologues coalesce with the ongoing experience of a girl crushed in a slaveship.

When a woman fails to bear her agonies, she takes her life. In *Jazz* Violet's mother, Rose Dear, jumps into a well, and drowns herself. Rose's husband leaves Rose and her children in poverty and disappears now and then. Rose finds it difficult to live in hunger, one day she jumps into the well.

In *Sula*, the shell-shocked war veteran Shadrack institutes National Suicide Day on 3rd January 1920. When he is disappointed in life, he starts National Suicide Day and asks the townspeople to participate in it. At first, Shadrack alone
takes part in it and the narrator comments that the Black people of the Bottom feel that suicide is "beneath them" (489). But at the end of the novel, soon after the death of Sula, when the life of the Bottom people becomes worse, they voluntarily involve themselves in Shadrack's National Suicide Day. They follow Shadrack and drown themselves.

The hopelessness of many young Black people drives them to commit suicide. Morrison is of the view that if the Blacks join together then there will be no suicide. Through a chain gang, Beloved dramatizes this ethic of responsibility and the connectedness of bodies. One man's sudden action would threaten the entire group: "A man could risk his own life, but not his brother's" (109). Morrison, as a womanist, insists on the fact that life is precious and the act of suicide cannot be the solution for the ills of the society. The will to stand and suffer and ultimately to triumph over the predicaments of life should be the guiding force for all the oppressed masses.

In order to tell the stories that never got told about the horrors of the 'peculiar institution' in America, about the history of the colonizing of the body, both male and female, about the oppressed people's struggle to put some meaning into their lives and to urge the readers on to the goal of the affirmation and celebration of life, Morrison employs her own distinct style. The next chapter takes up the analysis of the style of Morrison's works.