

Chapter One

Introduction

The African race is a rubber ball. The harder you dash it to the ground,
the higher it will rise - African Proverb

African American Literature is the Literature produced in English by the marginalised African slaves and their progeny in the United States of America. It has travelled many miles to attain the status of a separate genre of English Literature. It has evolved from humble diary narratives of the slaves into this magnificent form of Literature. It includes all the forms of Literatures like novels, poems, essays, short stories etc. When the journey to attain such a position in the American literary canon was a herculean task for African American men, it is obvious that the African American women writers had to strive harder.

African American Literature proceeds to prosper to this day with the help of authors like Alice Walker and Toni Morrison who have been rated among the top writers in the United States of America. Nowadays it has been accepted as an essential component of American Literature, with the top-selling novels of many African American writers including those of Toni Morrison and Alice Walker.

African American women novelists offer a glimpse into the interpretation of African American experience and the exposition of that reality. Both authors use their native language and their literary convention to give different perceptions of the African experience. These women novelists explore the issues of freedom and equality which were denied to Blacks in the United States for a long time. Their text consists of the native accent present in the Black speech. This takes the reader

accurately into experiences of the Blacks. Most of the themes in their novels include the examination of the subjects related to African American culture, racism, religion, feminism, poverty, slavery, etc. They expressed the feeble voices of the Black women in particular, in their novels. The authors of interest had double advantage of being a Black and a woman in a racially discriminated society. Hence their writings were authentic in delineating the lives of the African American people especially that of women.

An insight into the history and evolution of the African American Literature will be an appropriate subject to begin the study. African American Literature is a body of Literature written by Americans of African lineage, beginning in the pre-Revolutionary War period, continuing through Civil War, Reconstruction period, Harlem Renaissance, to the contemporary Literature. To comprehend the genre of African American Literature, it is essential to explore the chronological order in which this Literature had developed.

Afro-American Literature begins with the creations of writers such as Phillis Wheatly and Olaudah Equiano during late eighteenth century. Then it was succeeded by the slave narratives of the nineteenth century. Further it was succeeded by the Harlem Renaissance in 1920 which was a time of great development of this Literature and the Black arts. African American Writers have been well-known, by the highest awards, including the Nobel Prize to Toni Morrison and Pulitzer Prize for Alice Walker.

In *Teaching African American Literature*, Jerry W. Ward, Jr. talks about the style and themes of African American writings that:

Among the themes and issues explored in this Literature are the role of African Americans within the larger American society, African American culture, racism, slavery, feminism and equality. African American writing has inclined to assimilate oral forms, such as spirituals, sermons, gospel music, blues and rap. (146)

In *The Columbia Guide to Contemporary African American Fiction*, Darryl Dickson-Carr gives the function of this Literature as, “African American Literature has generally focused on the role of African Americans within the larger American society and what it means to be an American” (10).

The genre of slave narratives gave the true picture of the life under slavery, the way to attain justice and to attain freedom. The works of authors like Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs are the famous slave narratives. W. E. B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington are outstanding writers of the post slavery era. The authors like Richard Wright and Gwendolyn Brookes wrote about racial isolation and Black Nationalism during the period of American Civil Rights Movements. African American Literature became a primary part of American Literature at this juncture.

The African American Literature depicts the real meaning of democracy in the United States of America in the presence of suppressed Afro-American population. The Literature becomes a standard for testing the freedom.

In Katherine Driscoll Coon's, *Teaching African American Literature*, Albert J. Raboteau, the Professor in Princeton University on African American study states that:

The African American Literature speaks to the deeper meaning of the African American presence in this nation. This presence has always been a test case of the nation's claims to freedom, democracy, equality, the inclusiveness of all. (32)

Thus the African American Literature examines the issues of freedom and equality that has been refused to the Blacks in the United States.

Darryl Dickson Carr further adds in *The Columbia Guide to Contemporary African American Fiction*, "African American Literature has both been influenced by the great African Diaspora's heritage and shaped it in many countries" (73). In *English Postcoloniality: Literatures from Around the World*, Radhika Mohanram and Gita Rajan differentiates between Post-colonial Literature and African American Literature by saying that, "African American Literature differs from most post-colonial Literature in that it is written by members of a minority community who reside within a nation of vast wealth and economic power" (135). The verbal form of storytelling is seen in many of these African American writings. African American oral culture is rich in poetry including spirituals, gospel music, blues and rap. Jerry W. Ward, Jr., in *Teaching African American Literature* supports the above statement by expressing that, "African American Literature has a strong tradition of incorporating all of these forms of oral poetry" (146).

Early African American Literature was produced by Lucy Terry who was the author of one of the oldest known poems of African American Literature called "Bars

Fight” which was written in 1746, and published in *History of Western Massachusetts* authored by Josiah Gilbert Holland in 1855. Then poet Phillis Wheatley (1753–84) published her book, *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* in 1773. Wheatley born in Senegal was sold as a slave girl at the age of seven and was brought to America by a Boston merchant. Her poetry was appreciated by George Washington who specially thanked her for a poem written in his tribute. The credibility of her poems was doubted. Wheatley’s successful justification in the court to prove the authenticity of her poems was one of the first acknowledgements for the African American Literature. Olaudah Equiano is considered as Wheatley’s Black literary contemporary who published his autobiography, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano; or, Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself* in 1789. Along with Wheatley he has been regarded as the founder of African Literature in English for having introduced the slave narrative. He is a British citizen who had experienced enslavement in America, and who got a good reaction from the readers for his writings.

Jupiter Hammon (1711–1806) was regarded to be the first Black writer to get published in America. His poem, “An Evening Thought: Salvation Christ with Penitential Cries” was published in early 1761. He has also written an *Ode to Phillis Wheatley* and *Address to the Negroes of the State of New York* after spending a full life span of slavery. after an entire life of slavery Jupiter Hammon said, “If we should ever get to Heaven, we shall find nobody to reproach us for being black, or for being slaves” (18). He also agreed with the idea of a gradual liberation as a means to end slavery.

The age of Victor Séjour and William Wells Brown began to blossom. Victor Séjour was born as a free man in New Orleans. Then he shifted to France at the age of nineteen where his short stories *Le Mulatre* (The Mulatto) were published in 1837. Brown was a well-known abolitionist, lecturer, novelist, playwright, and historian. Brown was born as a slave in the South, then he ran away to the North and wrote *Clotel: The President's Daughter* in 1853 which was the first novel written by an African American in English and published in England. The design of this fiction was based on the gossip that President Thomas Jefferson had fathered a daughter with his slave Sally Hemings. The first African American novel to be published in United States of America was Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig* in 1859. It articulated the difficulties in the lives of northern free Blacks.

Then a new genre of African American Literature developed. It is defined as the slave narratives which are the recordings that are written by the fleeing slaves about their lives in the South after escaping enslavement. These narratives described the savageness of life under slavery, as well as they derived sympathy for the slaves. The slaves were recognised as individuals in these narratives. The novels such as *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), written by Harriet Beecher Stowe expressed the views of the abolitionist regarding slavery. To counter this type of attack on the Whites the southern White writers created the 'Anti-Tom' novels, describing the true life under enslavement, as well as the more severe barbaric life suffered by free labours in the North. The examples for these are *Aunt Phillis Cabin* (1852) produced by Mary Henderson Eastman and *The Sword and the Distaff* (1853) by William Gilmore Simms. Thus the slave narratives became elemental issues of African American Literature.

The two slave narratives of great literary values are the autobiographies, the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (1845), provided by Frederick Douglass and *Incidents in the Life of the Slave Girl* (1861) by Harriet Jacobs. Frederick Douglass (1818–95) was a speaker for abolition and an author of a heartbreaking slave narrative. He eventually became the most well-known African American of his time, one among the most influential lecturers and authors in African American history. Some critics criticised the book and did not accept that a Black man could have written such a touching work, a similar situation like what Phillis Wheatley had encountered. Despite all this hurdles the book was an instantaneous bestseller. He later on improved and expanded his autobiography, which was republished as *My Bondage and My Freedom* in 1855. He has also written numerous significant articles and essays.

In the Post Slavery Era a number of African American authors wrote nonfiction works about the condition of African Americans in the United States. Among them was the most outstanding is W. E. B. Du Bois (1868–1963) who had published a highly influential collection of essays titled *The Souls of Black Folk*. The essays on race issues were innovative and probably said to have been taken from the personal experiences of Du Bois about the life in rural Georgia. W. E. B. Du Bois stated that “The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the colour-line” (10). He was one of the establishers of the “National Association of Advancement of Colored People” (NAACP) in the year 1910. He also thought that African Americans should work united to encounter prejudice and inequity for their common wellbeing.

One more well-known author of this period is Booker T. Washington (1856–1915) who had differing opinions from that of Du Bois regarding the problems of the

African Americans. Washington was the establisher of a Black college called the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. *Up From Slavery* (1901), *The Future of the American Negro* (1899), *Tuskegee & Its People: Their Ideals and Achievements* (1905) and *My Larger Education* (1911) are some of the works to his credit. In contrast to Du Bois who adapted a more hostile attitude toward ending racial friction in America, Washington believed that Blacks should first strengthen themselves and establish themselves as equivalents to Whites to put an end to racism.

Marcus Mosiah Garvey, Jr. (1887–1940) was a Jamaican, a newspaper publisher, a journalist and an activist who defended for the cause of Pan Africanism. He was the establisher of the “Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League” (UNIA). He encouraged the concept of Black Nationalism and the knowledge of their African pedigree for the Blacks to think positively of their lineage. He wrote a number of essays which were published as write-ups in the *Negro World*, the indigenous newspaper of UNIA. Some of his lecture materials and other writings were consolidated and published as nonfiction books namely, *Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey, Africa for the Africans* (1924) and *More Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey* (1977).

Paul Laurence Dunbar was one among the first African American poets to gain national reputation. *Oak and Ivy*, his first book of poetry was published in 1893. The works of Dunbar such as *When Malindy Sings* (1906) and *Joggin’ Erlong* (1906) introduce us the life of the rural African Americans. Dunbar was a creative poet, an essayist, a novelist and a short story writer. The novels to his credit are *The Uncalled* (1898) and *The Fanatics* (1901).

The period of Harlem Renaissance was from the year 1920 to 1940. It was a budding stage of African American Literature and Black Arts. The African American community which lived in Harlem of New York City was the inspiration of this social movement and culture. Many Black artists and musicians had created characteristic works in the fields from jazz to the stage plays during this period. This period also included the regeneration of the African American Literature. One among the most famous poets of this Harlem Renaissance period is Langston Hughes. Hughes had provided the collections of poetry called *The Book of American Negro Poetry* in 1922 and *The Negro Speaks of Rivers* and *The Weary Blues* in 1926. The only novel to his credit is *Not Without Laughter* (1930). His famous character is Jesse B. Simple who is a straightforward and a realistic Harlemiter whose humorous comments appeared in Hughes' columns for the *Chicago Defender* and the *New York Post*. *Simple Speaks His Mind* (1950) is the best-known collection of Simple's stories published in a book form. The famous female writer of the Renaissance period is novelist Zora Neale Hurston, the author of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937). Hurston's writings included short stories and fiction. Her writings were anonymous for decades because of the reason of her female gender and because of the irrelevant themes of her times. Hurston's work was rediscovered in the 1970s by Alice Walker through her famous essay. Moreover Walker established Hurston to be an inspirational model for her and all the other female African American writers.

Jean Toomer, Dorothy West, Frank Marshall Davis, Author Wallace Thurman and Countee Cullen are some of the other writers who became well known during the Renaissance period. Earlier books by the African Americans were primarily read by Black people only. During the renaissance, the African American

Literature, as well as Black fine arts and performance arts were accepted well into the American culture enjoyed by all the Americans irrespective of colour differences.

The migration of the Blacks to the North produced a new sensation of independence in the Black community which is attributed to a refreshing Black urban culture of the Harlem Renaissance. This also endorsed the growing American Civil Rights Movement and Black writer's works during the 1940-60. The writers talked about segregation and racism in their writings when the Black activists simultaneously fought to end racism and create a new feeling of Black Nationalism.

During the Civil Rights Movement Era, in "Chicago and the 'Great Migration,'" James Grossman has expressed his views on migration as follows:

A large migration of African Americans began during World War I, reaching its peak during World War II. During this Great Migration, Black people left the racism and lack of opportunities in the American South and settled in northern cities like Chicago, where they found work in factories and other sectors of the economy. (2)

James Baldwin was one of the first writers to work against the issues of both race matters and sexual desires. In *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, he wrote confidential stories and essays while probing the feeling of being both a Black man and a homosexual in unison. That was the time when both these stances were not approved by the American society. He wrote approximately twenty books, which include time-honoured work such as *Another Country* and *The Fire Next Time*. Baldwin's great friend was author Richard Wright, who was named as the greatest Black writer in the world by Baldwin. Wright is renowned for his novel *Native Son*, written in 1940. Baldwin was very much amazed by this fiction that he wrote his succeeding collection

of essays in the name of *Notes of a Native Son*. But, their friendship was ruined due to an essay by Baldwin named *Everybody's Protest Novel*. It criticised *Native Son* for enacting unrealistic characters and emotionally complex characterisation. The autobiographical novel *Black Boy* (1945), *The Outsider* (1953), and *White Man, Listen!* (1957) are some of the other books written by Wright.

The next great author of this period is Ralph Ellison who is the creator of the *Invisible Man* (1952). It won the National Book Award in 1953 and secured him a position in the African American literary forum. The second novel, *Juneteenth* was compiled together in 1999, after his death, from the approximate two thousand pages which he had written over forty years. A more complete version of the hand written document of *Juneteenth* was published as the *Three Days Before the Shooting* in the year 2008.

This period also experienced the ascent of female Black poets, the most marked being Gwendolyn Brooks, who became the first African American to win the Pulitzer Prize in 1949 for her book of poetry, *Annie Allen*. The other female poets who became eminent during this time are Nikki Giovanni and Sonia Sanchez. The contemporary writers are playwrights like Lorraine Hansberry, who is famous for the play, *A Raisin in the Sun* and Amiri Baraka. Baraka is also acknowledged for his poetry and criticism of music in the modern times. *The Letter from the Birmingham Jail* by Martin Luther King Jr. which was written during this time is one of the important and famous essay books about the Human Rights and the Civil Rights Movement.

During the 1970s, African American Literature was accepted by the mainstream readers. The books written by many Black writers regularly topped the

sales and won many awards. For example, the books like *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker and *Beloved* by Toni Morrison have topped the sales and have won many awards at the same time. The work of African American writers began to be accepted by the academic world as a genre of American Literature. A number of scholars and writers like Toni Morrison and Alice Walker and poet James Emanuel are importantly recognised in their effort to classify African American Literature into a separate genre during this time period.

James A. Emanuel also carried out a major attempt in the defining of African American Literature in his edited book *Dark Symphony: Negro Literature in America* (1968), which is an exclusive collection of Black writings. Emanuel is also recognised as the introducer of the study of Black African American Poetry at the City College of New York and considered as one of the influences for the birth of the genre. Many other African American anthologies of this time consists of *Black Fire: An Anthology of Afro-American* (1968), edited by Amiri Baraka and Larry Neal; *The Negro Caravan*(1969), edited by Sterling Brown, Arthur P. Davis and Ulysses Lee and *We Speak As Liberators: Young Black Poets - An Anthology* in 1970, edited by Oorde Coombs.

Toni Morrison worked as an editor for Random House during the years 1960-70. During that tenure she popularised Black Literature and the Black authors and edited books of writers like Toni Cade Bambara and Gayl Jones. Then Morrison evolved as one of the most important African American writers of the twentieth century.

Alice Walker wrote a famous essay that brought Zora Neale Hurston and her characteristic novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, back into the lime light of the

literary sphere and the common readers. Walker won both the Pulitzer Prize and the American Book Award for her novel *The Color Purple* in the year 1982. The novel was also later adopted into a film by Steven Spielberg.

One among the first books of the Afro-American authors to achieve top-selling status was *Roots: The Saga of an American Family* by Alex Haley. It won the Pulitzer Prize and became a well-liked small screen mini serial. Then Haley wrote *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* in the year 1965. Other significant writers in the recent years include fiction writers like Gayl Jones, Rasheed Clark, Ismael Reed, Jamaica Kincaid, Randall Kenan, and John Edgar Wideman.

African American poets like Maya Angelou were in vogue and she had a privilege of reciting a poem at Bill Clinton's swearing in ceremony. Poets like Rita Dove won a Pulitzer Prize and served the prestigious post of the Poet Laureate of the United States of America during 1993-95. The book of poetry, *Soul Make a Path through Shouting* by Cyrus Cassell won a nomination for a Pulitzer Prize in 1994. Cassell has also got the William Carlos Williams Awards. Natasha Trethewey was the recipient of Pulitzer Prize for her poetry book, *Native Guard* in 2007. Edward P Jones also won Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, for his novel called *The Known World* in the 2004.

Some of the youthful African American novelists are David Anthony Durham, Tayari Jones, Kalisha Buckhanon, Mat Johnson, Z. Z. Parker and Colson Whitehead. African American Literature also embarked into the genre of detective fiction in the years 1950-60. A pioneer in this area is Chester Himes, who wrote a series of detective novels. Their novels featured famous characters like 'Coffin' Ed. Johnson and 'Gravedigger' Jones, who are two fictitious, famous New York City

police detectives. Himes also led the path for the creation of the later crime novels by Walter Mosey and Hugh Holton.

Recently the African Americans have entered into the genres of science fiction, fantasy and horror. Samuel R. Delany, Octavia E. Butler, Steven Barnes, Tananarive Due, Robert Fleming, Brandon Massey, Charles R. Saunders, John Ridley Faucette, Sheree Thomas and Nalo Hopkinson are one among the few of the eminent authors.

Finally, coming to a fair conclusion of the history of African American Literature and its contributors, this Literature has also gained an added recognition through the famous talk show of the host Oprah Winfrey. She has used her recognition in the media to promote Literature through her Oprah's Book Club. She has also brought a wider base of readers for the African American writers than they might have normally received. After having discussed in brief about the evolution of the African American Literature and its contributors, it is apt to discuss in detail about Toni Morrison and Alice Walker and their contribution to the African American Literature.

Toni Morrison is a novelist and an editor. Morrison was born in Lorain, in Ohio, in the year 1931. She received a B.A. degree from Howard University in 1953 and an M.A. degree from Cornell University in 1955. Later she worked as an instructor in English and the Humanities at Texas Southern University and Howard University. Morrison became a senior editor at Random House in New York City and was responsible for the publication of many books by Blacks at Random House. She was also an Associate Professor at the State University of New York from 1971-72. She is officially married and she has two sons.

The Bluest Eye was her first novel published in 1970. Her second novel, *Sula* (1974) won a 1975 Ohioana Book Award. Morrison's third novel, *Song of Solomon* (1977) received a 1978 Literature Award which consisted of a cash award of \$3,000 presented by the American Academy and the Institute of Arts and Letters. Her fourth novel, *Tar Baby* was written in 1981. In 1981 she was also elected to Chair the American Institute of Arts and Letters. She also gave an important speech at the American Writer's Congress in New York City in the same year. She is credited with other novels like *Beloved* (1987), *Jazz* (1992), *Paradise* (1998), *Love* (2003), *A Mercy* (2008), and *Home* (2012).

Black Women Novelists (1980) by Barbara Christian consists of valuable discussions on Morrison's first three novels. In *Chant of Saints; A Gathering of Afro-American Literature, Art and Scholarship* (1979), Michael S. Harper and Robert B. Stepto give an informative interview with Morrison. She gives her views of her writings. She has also given many other interviews which have been subsequently printed. She has also written the story for the musical which is about jazz music that developed in the brothels of Storyville District of New Orleans. Morrison was one of the seven artists to receive the New York City Mayor's Award of Honour for Art and Culture in the year 1988. Since 1989, she has been a full time professor adored with an outstanding position at Princeton University. There she instructs for the Creative Writing, African Studies and Women's Studies. Morrison is the first African American to win the Nobel Prize for Literature.

Toni Morrison always stresses to know the distinction between the fact and the truth because the truth needs a human understanding, whereas the fact does not need a human understanding. She wants the reader to work jointly with the writer in

formulating the meaning of her novels. Her novels often use an assortment of narrative approaches in delivering the concerned message. She puts forward the characters, which are evacuated to the margins of the society, in the name of their race or gender. She also brings them out of the anonymity and narrates their own history in their own words. She also addresses the core of the African American reality particularly that of an African American female and racial, feministic issues in most of her novels.

Toni Morrison also focuses on the psychological and social consequences of racism and internalised racism on the psyche of the coloured people. Internalised racism is like creating their own handcuffs to restrict their freedom. She has tried to write the histories of the American experience from a specifically African American perspective. Morrison brings the Black people from the margins of their lives into the centre of American life, culture, history and Literature. She disagrees with the situation in the United States of America which claims giving ultimate freedom for its citizen without giving the full freedom for the African Americans. So her works are appropriate to be taken for the analysis of feminism and racism because it focuses on the lives of African Americans in general and the Black women in particular.

In *The Bluest Eye* (1970) the narrator, Claudia MacTeer, tells the story of Pecola Breedlove, a little Black girl whose irresistible hunger for love is established as a desire for blue eyes and beauty. In the end this desire drives her to insanity. She perceives the image of the White community to be perfect and her own image to be abnormal. Pecola exposes the realities of life of a girl in a bankrupt African American community. The novel opens with an ironic passage from a Dick and Jane school primer, presenting it as an ideal family to be followed by the Black children. This

idealism seems to be the standard for the Black girls who start reading with that book. Pecola is emotionally driven inward by the humiliation done by White society. This results in the destruction and splitting up of her psyche into a mental illness of schizophrenia. But Claudia who is emotionally driven outward by showing her anger against the suppressive White society remains sane.

Sula (1974) shows how a Black community develops and shapes itself within its own cultural resources. It is about the friendship of two Afro-American girls Nel and Sula, from their childhood to adulthood. It describes how their deep bond is battered by societal pressures. Sula and Nel are together in every act they do in their adolescent age. The girls also have a mysterious secret because they play a part in the accidental death of a young boy named Chicken Little. Their friendship continues even after this incident. The novel describes the different ways present in front of the Black females to follow. One choice is to live traditionally as part of the society or the other choice is to live a revolting life, isolated from the African community. It is also a story of motherliness, friendship, sisterhood and love. After Sula has an affair with Nel's husband, she is unable to speak to Nel, and she spends her life of seclusion in Medallion. She is hated and shun by the people of Medallion as a devil who would sexually seduce their males. Then Sula's illness brings the two women closer again. They argue further upon the unconventional life style of Sula. Nel becomes further frustrated by Sula's attitude toward conventionality and tradition. Sula dies alone in her home after Nel leaves out. After Sula's death, the people of Medallion are pleased. They abandon their righteousness and become relaxed in performing their duties as mothers and daughters.

Song of Solomon (1977) concentrates on the growth of a distinctive Black identity and community. The novel tells the story of a young man, Milkman, Macon Dead III, who comes to know himself through going back to his origins. The narration consists of complex embroidery of memory and myth in the slave legends of the protagonist's family. The protagonist learns life through the stories of men who ran away to freedom and women who remained to promote freedom. The novel takes the protagonist back to history and makes him learn through the past, and how to live in the present. This is a story about materialism and brotherhood.

Tar Baby (1981) deals with the themes of heritage and self identity, mainly through two contrasting characters. Jadine Childs is a black model, who has been brought up with the help of White patrons and then she likes to live White culture's life. William Son Green, who is an outcast and vagrant, remains intentionally outside the White culture. The characters are drawn towards each other and they try to liberate each other from mixing and leaving the White society respectively. Their love affair is eventually terminated and neither of them change fundamentally. In the end, Jadine returns to Paris and bears a rich White man's child, while Son searches for her on Isle des Chevaliers, Caribbean Islands, losing him in a powerful superstitious island culture.

Beloved (1987) is the masterpiece produced by Toni Morrison. She narrates a real story of the runaway slave Margaret Garner in 1856, who killed her daughter, tried to kill her other children and herself at last rather than coming back to slavery. The novel describes the story of Sethe, who killed her young daughter, Beloved, when faced with a similar threat of enslavement. The novel unfolds the struggles of many characters with a forgotten past. They remember to live the present life free of guilt.

The scheme of the novel circles around the disliking of the history by the Blacks on one hand and the need to remember them, tell them aloud, rather than to forget, on the other hand. The genuine aim of both the story and its protagonist is to name the unnameable person.

Jazz (1992) is a novel motivated by the funeral photographs found in the book edited by Morrison, *The Harlem Book of the Dead* in the 1920s. The story tells about a young woman Dorcas who, even in her death bed, refuses to identify her lover Joe Trace who has murdered her by shooting. The novel presents the past lives of Joe Trace, Violet Trace, Rose Dear, True Belle, Golden Gray etc. The narration copies the jazz techniques by exhibiting the history as a process of constant telling and retelling the story repeatedly. Morrison employs a narrator who constantly returns and re-examines the events in the story. The narration gives incidences of racial tensions intermixed with love in almost all the characters. Even the busy city life in Harlem is segregation for poor Blacks from South. They feel lonely and are not included in the busy, vibrant life of Harlem.

Paradise (1998) set in 1976 was the centenary of American democracy, circles as back as to the mid-eighteenth century. The novel describes the intimate contact between two communities, one a Black township called Ruby, the other a safe haven for women. The central event of the novel is shooting of the women at the safe haven by the young men from the town. The novel ends with an unresolved puzzle of the disappearance of all the bodies. The novel speaks about feminism and the cruelties of excessive conservatism.

Love (2003) is about all types of love, like familial, romantic, love of self etc. Morrison gives a vivid explanation of the confusion that takes place when young

women are deprived of parental love and guidance. In *Love*, Morrison targets her female and Black audience depicting the African-American characters and the flashbacks of the Civil Rights Movement. She gives the importance of communication, self-esteem, education, soul-searching relationship among the Black females and good nature of the humans.

A Mercy (2008) is set in 1680s during the early periods of the Atlantic slave trade. In America the religious and class divisions were widespread, during that time providing the fertile soil for enslavement and racism. Jacob is an Anglo-Dutch trader and adventurer. Despite his aversion for enslavement he takes a small slave girl Florens for a bad debt from a plantation owner. The novel presents the life of the tribe Lina and the mistress Rebekka. It also speaks about a strange girl called Sorrow, who has spent her childhood at the sea and finally speaks about the distressing voice of Florens' mother. This novel reveals what lies underneath the surface of slavery. But at its core it is the distressing story of a timid mother who abandons her daughter to save her from slavery and a daughter who may never get out of that rejection.

Home (2012) gives a narration on the African American history with a twentieth-century tale of liberation. It is a story about one man's desperate search for himself in a world tainted by war. Frank Money is an angry, self-hating expert of the Korean War who settles back in racist America after shocking war experiences. He seems to be neurotic in his home and disabled due to boredom. He takes his medically abused younger sister back to Georgia where they had come from in childhood which he hates. Frank revisits his memories from childhood to attain a sense of identity and intense courage which he had never possessed in his lifetime. It is an intensely touching novel about an outwardly defeated man who finds his manhood and his

homeland. Morrison is praised by the *Newsweek* magazine's cover story for all these qualifications calling her one of the best of the Black writers today.

Alice Walker is one of the most productive Black women writers in America who rose to eminence by means of her creative output as a poet, novelist, short story writer, essayist, biographer and lecturer dealing with very relevant familial and societal topics in a bold and overt manner that constantly engages the attention of the reader. Her works consistently reflect her apprehension with fundamental sexual and the racial issues particularly of the Black woman. Her females struggle for an emotional survival. Her novels are known to be boldly feminist and she is considered to depict the male characters in a very low reputation. Walker's novels also have the messages of the general racism in it, her writings are also appropriate to be analysed for the aforementioned study.

Alice Walker was born in Easton, Georgia, in 1944, lived in Mississippi and moved to New York City in 1974. She was educated at Spelman College, Atlanta, Georgia and at Sarah Lawrence College, Bronxville, New York. Her short stories and poems have been published in *Freedomways*, *Essence* and other magazines. She was a teacher at Jackson State College and Tougaloo College in Mississippi. She is an extraordinary creative writer.

Alice Walker's first book is on poetry entitled, *Once* (1968) and second book is a novel called *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* (1970). *Revolutionary Petunias and Other Poems* (1973) is a book of poetry. It was followed by *In Love and Trouble: Stories of Black Women* (1973), *Langston Hughes: American Poet* (1974) and *To Hell With Dying* (1988) for the children. *Meridian* (1976) is a novel. Her other poetry collections *Good Night, Willie Lee, and I'll See You in the Morning* were published in

1979. The other novels to her credit are *The Color Purple* (1982), *The Temple of My Familiar* (1989), *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992), and *By the Light of My Father's Smile* (1998). Thus Alice Walker's reputation lies not only on her novels, but also on her poetry, short stories, essays and children's books.

Majority of her work in all the genres is devoted to what she calls 'womanism' or else Black feminism. Walker's fiction focuses on the progression of female wholeness, the development of female identity and a community in the background of the racial environment. Her non-fiction writings celebrates her connection with other African American women writers. She helped to promote the work of African American women writers by co-founding a publishing outlet, 'Wild Tree Press'. Walker has also edited an influential selection of the prose by Zora Neale Hurston, *I Love Myself When I Am Laughing* in 1979.

In Search of Our Mother's Gardens: The Creativity of the Black Women in the South published in 1974 is a journal and a series of studies on the African American women's culture and especially African American Literature. Walker sets up a series of role models from the most anonymous and shows the great art form of the Black mothers in their gardens and the hand-crafted quilts. *In Search of Our Mother's Garden: Womanist Prose*, in 1984 and *Living by the Word: Selected Writings* (1988) are collections of essays produced through the years 1973 and 1987. The essays are based on varied topics. The African American writer, Zora Neale Hurston has been the 'queen bee' and a source of inspiration for Walker throughout her literary career.

The Third Life of Grange Copeland (1970) by Alice Walker is the realistic novel describing three generations of a family spoiled by racial oppression and sexual violence. The scheme shows a harsh account of a repetitive cycle of female abuse

wife beating and sexual exploitation in the history of the family of Grange Copeland. The patriarchal suppression of Grange over his wife and son Brownfield is followed by the same legacy of Brownfield oppressing his wife Mem and his three daughters. Grange leaves and then returns to Georgia in his third life from North as a transformed man and takes charge of his third granddaughter Ruth. He tells her the oppressive stories of the North and prepares the young Black girl to face the racist world in front of her.

Meridian (1976) is a novel that concentrates on the Civil Rights Movement and the fight for a social change, but the central theme is the experience of Black women. The protagonist, Meridian Hill lives in the North but returns to the South to help in the voter registration drive. She feels troubled by her past life. She also feels guilty for leaving behind her child with her mother called Church, refusing the maternal responsibility and her involvement in politics. Meridian does not come to good terms with her mother but succeeds in experiencing a symbolic agreement with her mother in her dreams. She pleads to the figure of her mother, to allow her in pursuing her ideals. The transformed church after the Civil Rights War offers, a new and promising structure for a personal, social and political revolution. The protagonist finally tells her own history and successfully becomes a whole woman.

The Color Purple (1982) is a novel that deals with the recovery of Celie's self identity and the identification of her family. Walker shows Celie as a victim of racial and sexual oppression, raped by her father and abused by her husband in an unloved marriage. Celie learns how to grow into a human being through the companionship of three women mentors. Her first mentor Sofia, Celie's daughter-in-law, teaches Celie, the lesson of showing resistance to the oppression of Whites and the Black males.

Nettie is her sister and the next mentor who gives Celie a live relationship. She gives Celie a worldly knowledge and moreover takes care of her children. The third mentor is Shug, a mistress of Celie's husband and a friend of Celie, fetches back the life, soul and the body of Celie by being an inspiration to Celie both emotionally and mentally. Through Nettie, a missionary working in Africa, Walker discloses the proud inheritance of the ancient Black cultural and spiritual tradition. The 'blues' singer Shug Avery seeks the possibility of sexual pleasure in any man she meets. Walker breaks the stereotypic female characterisation in this novel.

The novel has both the promise of the jazz music and the melancholy of the blues music. Shug insists that everything is holy, worthy of respect, even the colour purple, a colour of melancholy. Celie evolves simultaneously in the process of becoming herself and in the process of learning a language. Celie learns to say the story in the form of an epistolary novel which also shows how Celie develops a language as a medium of attaining selfhood. The novel exists as the author's most influential work. Her later novels develop their themes and revisit the characters from *The Color Purple*.

The Temple of My Familiar (1989) explores a variety of subjects from a womanist perspective, which features Shug Avery's and Celie's granddaughter. The novel is a collection of loosely related tales, sermons, dreams and autobiographies. It is a multi-narrative novel which contains the incomplete stories of a musician, Arvada who searches his past and his Latin American wife Carlotta, who lives in a state of exile from herself. It also has a Black professor of American History, Soweto who realises that his generation of men have been abortive towards women and his ex-wife, Fanny who is to meet her father for the first time. Lassie is a lively individual

with thousand pasts. *The Temple of My Familiar* is a novel recording more than five hundred thousand years of human history.

Possessing the Secret of Joy (1992) develops the issues of female circumcision as a symbol of male's traditional brutality in the suppression of women. It is a form of suppression of women. The central theme in this novel is on the ceremonies related to female circumcision and the consequence they have on little girls and women. The protagonist, Tashi observes the mutilation and the consequent death of her sister Dura. The novel brings out the physical and mental side effects of circumcision on Tashi. The impact of this ritual for the victim includes painful urination, retained menstrual blood, unfulfilling sexual experience and miscarriages. Tashi observes how the custom strengthens the patriarchal dominance in tribal traditions and fights against it.

By the Light of My Father's Smile (1998) explains the thin boundaries between the different ethnic traditions and between life and death. An angel, called Senor Robinson, who is the father of Susannah and Magdalena, speaks in this novel. Robinson and his wife Langely had two strikingly different daughters. Susannah, who is strong inward, is in a false impression of vulnerability and Magdalena, who is weak inward, is in a false impression of strength. After his death, Robinson enters neither heaven nor hell of Christianity. Instead, his soul comes out in the afterlife world of the Mundo, a society consisting of a mixture of Indians and Blacks.

Robinson observes the heterosexual life of Susannah with Petros, a Greek, to whom she is married and her lesbian life with Pauline, her passionate friend. In witnessing his daughter's adult pleasures with both men and women, Robinson's false notion that orgasmic freedom is only a male right, is crushed. The reunion of the spirit and human takes place moments before Magdalena makes her first love with her boy

friend Manuelito, Robinson whips of his daughter for her promiscuous behaviour and this kills her. Father and daughter do not get along with each other when alive or after death. Through this novel Walker demands the liberation of women from all forms of oppression and sexuality in a magical way. Further, Walker questions the prominent role of fathers in the development of their daughter's knowledge about their sexuality.

The discussion about the writings of Toni Morrison and Alice Walker in a sequential order has been recorded in the preceding paragraphs. The main objective of this research work is to study the discourses of racism and feminism in the novels of Alice Walker and Toni Morrison. The comparative and contrasting analyses of these matters in the novels of both the authors are to be explored. The analyses of feminism and racism in these novels are to be carried out mainly as a thematic analysis.

Feminism is an economic movement intended to establish equality in a political, cultural, legal rights and security for women. It supports gender equality for women, in their rights and in their welfare. Feminism in Literature aims at exposing the system of patriarchy, the cultural mind-set in both men and women which maintains sexual inequality. The thoughts of feminism are expressed in *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory* by Peter Barry. He states that "It explores the nature of female world and outlook, and restructures the lost or suppressed records of female experience" (122).

This research investigates the areas of feminism like portrayal of women, role of patriarchy, racism in women, gender roles, rape as a tool of oppression, etc. The women are portrayed variously as grand-mother, mother, daughter, wife, friend, etc. The role of patriarchy comes from husbands, White masters, fathers, sons etc.

In Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola is raped by her father, Cholly. But Claudia and Frieda support her throughout the novel and stand up against the unjust treatment they receive at the hands of society. Sethe, the protagonist of *Beloved* is raped and beaten by the Whites. But in contrast she endures these painful circumstances better than all the other male characters in this fiction. She even kills her own infant daughter to save her from the life of slavery. Baby Suggs even preaches her people as an unchurched preacher in the clearings. In Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, Celie is cruelly exploited by her step father Pa, and Mr___, the husband who force her self-esteem to a very low level. Subsequently she is physically and mentally damaged. However, the frustrated Celie wishes to be a part of mainstream American life or dream. She becomes the modern woman who exhibits all the qualities of a developing model of a successful woman. In *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, also Mem is portrayed as an educated and enterprising woman. Even though she meets her death she tries to lead a dignified life, fighting for the basic rights of her children.

In *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* of Alice Walker, role of patriarchy of Grange Copeland and Brownfield has been exposed and their patriarchal rights are indirectly demolished in this novel. They want to control and rule the lives of their women Margaret, Mem, Josie and Lorene. In *Beloved* Schoolteacher and his nephews exhort their supremacy in a patriarchal society. Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* also shows the teaching of patriarchal practices of Cholly Breedlove. The Black girls and women are diminished to a role of passive sexual objects. Morrison expresses this through Pauline by saying "She was never able, after her education in the movies, to look at a face and not assign it some category in the scale of absolute beauty, and the scale was one she absorbed in full from the silver screen" (95).

In Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Sethe throws out patriarchy and enslavement and leaves her husband, Halle. She even finds a job and raises three of her children without the help of a male. Thus, she leads a strong-minded, independent life. In *The Color Purple*, patriarchy establishes itself in Celie's acts of submission to all the males, recognising the male law. Ironically, Celie had to get remedy from this patriarchal suppression only from a male God.

While taking into account the importance of gender roles in the novels of both the authors it might be noted that they present a modified will power of women against both Black and White men. They also present the strength and faith that women can give themselves mutually. The happiness of women in being content with their lives is also presented. Black women are treated worse than animals both domestically and in fields. Black women are subjected to the tyranny of both the Black and the White males.

In *The Bluest Eye*, Toni Morrison has described the universal gender difference through her young female characters Pecola, Frieda, Pauline and the narrator Claudia. Morrison has once mentioned in the novel that three things have greatly influenced her life. Those are of being a child, of being a Black, and of being a girl. All these female characters are abused by both White women, White men, over and above by Black men. Unfortunately Cholly Breedlove rapes his daughter, Pecola in an act of confusion entwined with affection. He realises that he loves her, but the only way he can express his love, is to rape her. In *Beloved*, Sethe's fearlessness depicts her as a character different from the expected. She is physically very strong in addition to her mental strength. She even leads an independent life after her escape from 'Sweet Home' plantation. *The Color Purple* destroys and defies the traditional

ways of women and men. Many characters in the novel break the boundaries of traditional male or female gender roles. Sofia's strength, Shug's sexual ferociousness and Harpo's timidity are the major examples of such differences between a character's gender and traits they display. This is a bold feminist novel which contains the message of feministic uprising and self discovery of the women.

Toni Morrison thought about writing *Sula* in the late 1960s, when she was surrounded by an environment of feminist discourses that encouraged women to come together instead of having hostile attitudes among them. She wanted to show an example of this new form of sisterhood in her characters Sula, Nel and also among the other Black women. Morrison remembers these types of relationships in a Black neighbourhood from which she grew up and shows the external forces that strain this sisterhood.

The African American Literature portrays the sufferings of its characters based upon their temperament, their deeds and their intellect. For example, it is Pecola's suffering and self-hatred that lead to her insanity in Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. Brownfield's demise is also due to his fear, inferiority complex and self-hatred in Walker's *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*. Although Sethe in Morrison's *Beloved*, Celie in Walker's *The Color Purple*, Grange in *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* and many other characters suffer along the course of the novel, due to their unending quest to realise their identity, they finally attain betterment.

Racism is also another issue which has been strongly opposed by these novelists. Their novels show how even Black people become racists and do not disagree with it. In these novels, some characters experience discrimination from both Blacks and Whites. Racism is a factor that challenges them in achieving agreement

with the surrounding world. In Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola is insulted throughout the novel for being Black. For example, her fellow Black boys call her "Black e mo-Black e mo. Ya daddy sleeps nekked" (50) which is a great racist abuse. So, a light skin complexion is liked by Pecola as it is considered as a fundamental quality of physical attractiveness.

Beloved focuses on a community of ex-slaves and how they struggle to get a way for leading a life of their own. It shows how a coloured man is also like any other ordinary man. It also discusses the apprehension of the Blacks either to tolerate the injustices of the Whites or to struggle against them. In *The Colour Purple*, Walker questions the racial borders that have been formed, portraying new traditions for Blacks and Whites to create a sense of a shared community. For instance Eleanor Jane, the daughter of the White woman who had got Sofia into trouble, even takes a bold step in compensating the injustice by agreeing to work for her. Furthermore Celie hires Sofia as a clerk and a White man, so that everyone lives a harmonious life in her store.

In Toni Morrison's *Sula*, Helene and her daughter Nel travel to New Orleans to visit a relative on his last legs. The racial insults of the separation and discriminatory South are experienced by them, while travelling in a train. Helene and Nel meet Helene's mother in New Orleans, who did not bring up Helene on her own because she was a prostitute. When the two return, Helene is glad to be isolated from her shameful past and her mother. The painful past always dominates in the memories of Blacks. In *Paradise*, Morrison gives the themes of racism, fear, guilt, religion, feminism, ageism, mysticism, and misogynistic thoughts to create a vision and to view the reality that exists in the middle of these confused times.

The Bluest Eye also boldly portrays problems such as child molestation, internal racism and racism. *Beloved* has been praised for its realistic, exploration of gender differences and the experiences of the Blacks. *The Color Purple* has been praised for the portrayal of the African American woman and for the skilful recreation of Black folk's tradition. Therefore, all these novels deal with the oppression of women, discovery of women's self-consciousness, and racism. The Black women novelists, especially Toni Morrison and Alice Walker have tried in every possible manner to examine women's social roles and experiences in the American society. In their writings, they have strongly resisted the patriarchal and racial suppression of Black women and have also taken an effort in the field of women emancipation and development. Thus the above passages have enlightened the motives of the authors of this study. Moreover the study explores into their writings and their contributions to the Literature in general. The passages have also discussed the relevance in choosing these authors and their select novels to argue the cause about racism and feminism.

The following chapter describes that the slave trade began from Africa to America purely due to the capitalistic ambition of the plantation owners and the Europeans. Racism, a new concept was nurtured to meet the capitalistic needs of the plantation owners. It also deals with the definitions, the origin, the necessity, the various types of feminism like the multicultural feminism and the ethnic feminism. The development and the need of ethnic feminism like that of Alice Walker's 'womanism' or the Black feminism is to be examined in detail in the following chapter.