

Chapter Four

Discourses on Feminism

Feminism is sort of like God. Many people profess to believe in it, but no one seems to be able to define it to everyone's satisfaction.

-Aaron Allston

Discourses on feminism cannot be discussed without talking about female oppression by both Whites and Black males. Feministic concepts are present in many novels of Toni Morrison and Alice Walker. Their female characters have equally suffered racism and hardships of feministic oppression. The major feministic themes in the writings of both the authors are motherhood, womanhood, gender oppression, love, sex, race, etc. In a White, male-dominated, racist society, they focus on the relationships between Blacks and Whites, Blacks and Blacks, women and men and children and adults.

In Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, a young female child, Claudia, narrates the complex and terrible story of another female child Pecola Breedlove. Pecola is silenced into insanity after being raped by her own father. Claudia blames her friend's tragic condition to the whole community, including herself. Pecola's mother, Pauline Breedlove who should have given solace to her daughter and who is to have punished her husband, becomes silent, hurt by her husband's violence. She is not able to overcome the physical dominance of rape of their daughter that too done by her own husband. Due to the depression that results, Pauline constricts her life and attains full satisfaction in working for her White employer. Morrison says:

More and more she neglected her house, her children, her man-they were like the afterthoughts one has just before sleep, the early-morning

and late-evening edges of her day, the dark edges that made the daily life with the Fishers lighter, more delicate, more lovely. (99)

In fact, like Pecola, most of the Black people have ended up considering white coloured skin as the standard of beauty. Pauline can call her employer's daughter by sweet names but she cannot support her own daughter's wishes. Through this character, Morrison has demonstrated the day to day life of Black woman who refuse to play the role as a mother in a racist and chauvinistic American society. Morrison had once heard about a little Black girl praying for blue eyes, she wrote a very short story about it and then she developed it into her first novel. Most of her writing is derived from the real lives of African American women and girls for explaining the feministic issues.

Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* has been acclaimed as one of the greatest literary works of its time showing the lives of Black women. But at the same time, her writings have been criticised for negative depiction of Black men. In his article, "Writing the Subject: Reading the Colour Purple," Bell Hooks describes the work as "it broadens the scope of literary discourse, asserting its primacy in the realm of academic thought while simultaneously stirring the reflective consciousness of a mass audience" (53). Hooks notes that, "Celie's life is presented in reference to her sexual history" (54) in this work. On deeply analysing Walker's novels, they represent the displacement of Black women to the margins of life. Her prominent female characters are the impressions of real women in the society.

In *The Color Purple*, the protagonist, Celie is a young woman who is submissive to all the men around her. She assumes her as a physically unattractive girl and as a nonentity. Celie summons together her own feminine identity within a largely male dominated world due to her relationship with the other women in the novel.

Celie reveals the conflicting ideas associated to Christian descriptions of God that “He big and old and tall and gray bearded and white” (175). Although she exposes the disgusting existence of male chauvinism her God is also a male and she seeks God in everything.

Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* is set in the post Civil War period in rural Ohio. It is based on a historical record of a slave called Margaret Garner in 1851. In fact, it is a historical fact that a Black woman, like Margaret Garner preferred to terminate her children’s life, rather than let them succumb to the cruelty of enslavement. Morrison has revealed this predilection in Guthrie Taylor’s *Conversations with Toni Morrison*:

The Abolitionists made a great deal out of her case because she had escaped from Kentucky with her four children . . . She had been caught as a fugitive. And she made up her mind that they would not suffer the way she had and it was better for them to die. (207-208)

In this novel Morrison attempted a special task to re-write this history, excavating up the hidden Black woman’s story from consciousness of the nation. She announces this in Denise Heinze’s, *The Dilemma of “Double Consciousness” in Toni Morrison’s Novels*:

This had got to be the least read of all the books I’d written because it is about something that the characters don’t want to remember, I don’t want to remember, black people don’t want to remember, white people don’t want to remember. I mean, it’s national amnesia. (180)

Hence, Toni Morrison has created *Beloved* as “. . . not a story to pass on” (324). It is just a normal story of a mother and her incomparable love towards her daughter in an oppressive environment given in a mythical way.

Alice Walker too has shown similar views on the oppressive status of their women characters. In *The Color Purple*, the stubborn character, Sophia is able to withstand the tyranny of racial and feministic oppression. Sophia accepts that she and her sisters were all built like 'Amazons'. Celie describes the strength of Sophia in her letter stating ". . . she still (after having her first baby) a big strong girl. Arms got muscle. Legs, too" (33). Celie represents the crushed woman of the world whereas Sophia is exactly the opposite of Celie. When she wants to declare something, she does it boldly and if she gets an opportunity for a physical action, she uses it easily against the males. The declaration by this character is that, ". . . All my life I had to fight. I had to fight my daddy. I had to fight my brothers. I had to fight my cousins and my uncles. A girl child ain't safe in a family of men" (39). These words, give the complete feministic thought that is necessary for the Black women in a nut shell. Sophia is characterised as tough as the rough territories of the Amazon forest. The women in the world need the power to fight against the tyranny of the world that is shaped by men.

Sophia is not the only the bold character presented in the text. It is the whore Shug Avery who exhibits the free-will not given to women. The other Black women have always tried to confine this free-will. Like Sophia, Shug also speaks out her mind. She enjoys the pleasures of passion and sexual relations. Shug is one of the strong voices of Walker through which she puts forth her feministic ideals.

Celie's sister is an educated woman called Nettie, who ends in a conflict with the African villagers because she wishes to change their social order by educating the females. Although Nettie is hurriedly rebuke and put back in her place, her role in enlightening Celie with the worldly knowledge is impressive.

Alice Walker reveals the comparisons between the fictitious characters in her novels and the real women of colour, regarding the struggle for freedom. Mary Helen Washington reveals in the section “The Darkened Eye Restored” in *Reading Black Reading Feminist*, that the suppressed women are “the woman suspended” (30). The woman suspended is the experiences of women of colour within a postcolonial society. These women are usually placed in an inactive state, in every movement being directed by the society. The man orders and the woman have to obey.

The duty of any writer is to make the reader to understand the ethnicity and gender of the writer. Walker fulfils this duty by making the reader to experience the feelings of the post colonial coloured women through her novels. In this situation the men of colour have found some new freedom but they refuse this freedom to their women. Both the novelists have concentrated their works on the day to day life of the coloured women. They pursue their respective styles to support the victimisation of women in the female oppressive society.

In *Beloved*, Toni Morrison has chosen both the issues of slavery and victimisation of slave women as the themes. S. Gubar and S. Gilbert have defined slavery in *The Mad Woman in the Attic* as “a patriarchal institution in which both slaves and wives-and especially slaves who function as wives and wives who function like slaves-are used and abused” (482). This comparison between wives and slaves clearly shows the coincidence of both feministic oppression and racist oppression.

Generally women seek comfort in motherliness but for the Black slave it is a great source of sorrow. In *Beloved*, Toni Morrison discusses the African American motherhood. Carole Boyce Davies and Anne Adams Graves have described the motherliness as a “beautiful ugliness” (135), in their edited book, *Ngambika: Studies of Women in African Literature*. This oxymoron stresses the fact that although giving

birth is beautiful, for the Black women, it is just an ugly act of bringing an innocent human being into an oppressive world. Giving birth is a great beauty but slave owners do not let this beauty to last for a long time. Toni Morrison has been particular in presenting this motherliness in many situations. Sethe has all the qualities which characterise her as a woman and a mother. Carole Boyce Davies and Anne Adams Graves quote:

One has to read Sethe, as a particular Black woman, as the concentration of female identity, not as its aberration . . . And significantly, while she can flee slavery, she cannot flee motherhood or the body that has been captured by the needs of her children. (138-139)

The responsibility of motherliness is more, Sethe could escape slavery but not from the responsibility of a mother

In *Beloved*, Toni Morrison says that Sethe has developed a great instinct for survival which has led her to put her babies “. . . where they would be safe” (192). She feels so attached to her children that she could not let them go with Schoolteacher. Sethe being an uneducated slave is unable to recognise the boundaries between herself and her children. Sethe loves her children more than herself but her act of murder cannot be considered noble. It could even be a selfish intention to continue a life of freedom. Sethe’s revolt may be even for her own survival. Moreover she does not even recognise the crime in the beginning. Morrison blames the racist institutions instead of blaming Sethe for the murder. Although there are different views on any issues, it is true that Sethe has turned into a distressed victim of violence due to slavery. It has deprived her of youth and normal family life which she wants to give to her children at any cost. Moreover in *Beloved* we find that, Sethe’s devotion to

her children, explains the theme of motherliness, at the same time her devotion to herself explains the theme of self-importance, self-opinion and self-respect.

Later on Sethe's guilt of the murder stops her from loving anybody or being loved by anybody. The real use of this story is the self realisation of Denver who realises that she should not allow herself to be a victim of her conscience. Denver helps her mother from the influence of ghost and helps herself. Thus Sethe defeats her dependency to the past with the help of Denver, Paul D, and the women community of neighbourhood.

According to Trudier Harris, the fundamental theme of *Beloved* may be guilt or love but we have to "understand and even approve of the dynamic that allowed a slave mother to kill rather than have her children remanded to slavery" (160). In *Fiction and Folklore: The Novels of Toni Morrison*, he states this that Sethe's act might have preceding repercussions from the story of her own mother. Sethe's mother killed some of her children to revolt against the humiliation of being sexually abused by the crew members during the Middle Passage. He further confirms that Beloved's characterisation makes her a "Thing . . . unhuman, unfeeling, uncaring except in the perpetuation of what she wants" (160). She is exorcised at the end by a group of women belonging to her community.

According to Trudier Harris, the ghost, Beloved saved Sethe and led her from a stage of irrationality into a stage of clarity. During the second chance Sethe does not attack her child but shows her murderous anger towards the Whiteman. Now, Beloved could also know the fact that her mother's murderous action in the past was only out of love. Beloved gets the evidence that her mother loved her best of all. These discussions about killing one's own child for the cause of stopping them from enslavement, gives the motherliness of Sethe in the perspective of a female.

In Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Sethe acts as the opposite of the routine type of Black mother in two situations, once when killing her baby and the other when removing herself from the community life. Trudier Harris says that, she claims a powerful self determination and "in her wilful commission of violence, she explodes the myth of the accepting, long-suffering black matriarch who trusts her fate and that of those she loves to a . . . distant God" (189). But despite her own strong strength of mind and the power of the community of women, it is Paul D who revives her sense of 'self'. Paul D steadily confirms that Sethe is her "best thing" (322) and not Beloved. Trudier Harris says that, "on the landscape of Morrison's fictive imagination, women stand only with the assistance of men, but men fall over the deranged or dead bodies of women" (190). Although Sethe leads a life separated from the community and her 'self', suffering in the guilt of murder, she looks like a courageous feminist in the beginning of the novel. But her stature is condensed to be reattained in the end of the novel with the help of her man Paul D. As for Bernard W. Bell, *Beloved* is a "Ghost story that frames embedded narratives of the impact of slavery, racism, and sexism on the capacity for love, faith, and community of black families, especially of black women, during the Reconstruction period" (10). In *The Afro-American Novel and Its Tradition*, he has also established the elemental theme of the African American womanhood in the Afro-American novels.

In *Beloved*, Toni Morrison says that often men misunderstand the feministic view of his females. This is seen in one juncture, when Paul D calls Sethe's love to be "too thick", when she answers "Love is or it ain't. Thin love ain't love at all" (194). In another juncture, after knowing the murder that Sethe had committed, Paul D compares her to an animal by commenting, "You got two feet, Sethe, not four" (194). But such love may be only explained after understanding motherhood. As Bernard W.

Bell also supports the motherhood in the novel as, “Foregrounding the theme of motherhood, Morrison divides the text into twenty eight unnumbered mini sections, the usual number of days in a woman’s monthly menstrual cycle, within three larger, disproportionate sections” (10). The poor slave, Sethe has also lived the happiest twenty eight days life cycle of freedom. She has lived the fullest during these days, in the racist or chauvinistic society “. . . having women friends, a mother-in-law, and all her children together; of being part of a neighbourhood. . .” (204).

According to Stephanie Demetrekopoulos, “Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, the first book-length works to examine the dangers of mothering to the individuation of the mother herself” (52). In the article “Maternal Bonds as Devourers of Women’s Individuation” of the *African-American Review*, she finds Morrison’s interest on women’s motherhood as first-time in the literary sphere. In the novel, the women’s maternal feelings and reactions have been analysed in depth. For Demetrekopoulos, Morrison has not only put the stress on the motherliness but also on the fact that mother takes for granted that her children are more than herself. Even her escape from slavery was not for herself but for her children.

Stephanie Demetrekopoulos observes that the sex of the first child to be killed symbolises the fact that “For Sethe . . . to kill her daughter is to kill her own best self; to kill her best and self-gendered fantasy of the future. The act is like killing time itself, especially its redemptive gifts, which the daughter, as a potential mother” (53). He is in unison with Trudier Harris in the fact that Sethe is recovered by the community of mothers and she states that “perhaps only through other women, preferably mothers themselves, can we women traverse the stages of mothering” (57). He also establishes that the Black women are Morrison’s living form of the “tribal

metaphor that confronts and defies the way that American culture so denigrates, so desacralizes motherhood” (58).

Stephanie Demetrekopoulos has found that in putting forward the community of mothers, the writer wants to demonstrate the importance of feminism. In *Beloved*, Morrison had felt the necessity to beautify motherhood once more. And ultimately, Demetrekopoulos has found that “this rich novel examines the death of the maternal in a woman so that her ‘self’ might live” (58). Thus the discussion of motherliness by these critics gives an opportunity to show the greatness of the Black women and indirectly to put forward their feministic thought.

Black womanhood was awkwardly perceived during enslavement in the United States. In *Black Women Novelists: The Development of a Tradition, 1892-1976*, Barbara Christian says that, on one hand Black women “could not achieve the standard of womanhood”, on the other hand “they were biologically females, with all the societal restrictions associated with that state” (71). In *Sula*, Toni Morrison says as far as the Black women are concerned “. . . neither white nor male, and that all freedom and triumph was forbidden to them” (52). Their colour categorises them within the inferior race and their biological sex confines them in the lowest position in the society. As females, they are regarded as brainless by most Black men like the character Joe Starks, in the novel of Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* says:

Somebody got to think for women and chilluns and cows. I god, they she don't think none theirselves [women folks] just think they's thinking. When Ah see one thing Ah understand's ten. You [his wife] see ten things and don't understand one. (110-111)

The Black male needs to have someone under his authority to feel himself reassured of his manliness.

In Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, the Black woman slave experienced the most painful instances, especially during their motherhood. Eight children of Baby Suggs are begot by six different men. Baby Suggs compared the life of a slave with a giant chess-board and ascertains the "nastiness of life" when she learns that "nobody stops playing checkers just because the pieces included her children" (28). She lost all her children in enslavement but one which she has kept with her for twenty years. All her children were sold in early babyhood and so she finds Sethe's act too self-important and self-centred. Baby Suggs thinks "Sethe had the amazing luck of six whole years of marriage to that 'somebody' son who had fathered every one of her children. Toni Morrison in *Beloved* says that "A blessing she was reckless enough to take for granted . . ." (28) Baby Suggs feels that Sethe is fortunate than her. Sethe has her whole family with her and has the opportunity to see her offspring grow up whereas she has had only blurred memories of her own children, sold before their weaning time. Sethe reminisces, "My first-born. All I can remember of her is how she loved the burned bottom of bread. Can you beat that? Eight children and that's all I remember" (6). The oppressive society over the females is depicted clearly in these lines.

In *Beloved*, Toni Morrison says that Sethe who is in an urge to unite her family is caught by her slave holder. She disapproves to let him dishonour them as he has done to her, so she kills her third child, a baby girl and hurts the two elders in an attempt to murder them also. Her strong emotions are different from the slave ethics as it is declared by Paul D:

For a used-to-be-slave woman to love anything that much was dangerous, especially if it was her children she had settled on to love.

The best thing, he knew, was to love just a little bit; everything, just a little bit . . . (54)

But Sethe has made up her mind against the physical dominance of the males. She will not let the White men blemish her children like they have already done with her. Morrison says that they might “. . . dirty her all right, but not her best thing, her beautiful, magical best thing-the part of her that was clean” (296). When she first plans to escape, Schoolteacher finds out her motive and she is whipped without any regard for her pregnancy. She refuses to think about it in her later life on “. . . whether a gang of whites invaded her daughter’s private parts, soiled her daughters thighs and threw her daughter out of the wagon” (296). In fact, Sethe hates herself because she has been ‘dirtied’. So Sethe’s motherly love alone leads her to kill her daughter. At this juncture she appears to be more of a mother than an individual. It is also the reason why she has agreed to let the sculptor use her sexually ten minutes to cut a word ‘Beloved’ on the headstone. Indeed, she:

. . . thought it would be enough, rutting among the headstones with the engraver, his young son looking on, the anger in his face so old; the appetite in it quite new. That should certainly be enough. Enough to answer one more preacher, one more abolitionist and a town full of disgust. (5)

Even the younger son of the sculptor wants Sethe or her body to pacify his own sexual needs. In that carved word ‘Beloved’, Sethe wants her strong maternal affection to come to life.

In reality motherliness during enslavement has been so much underestimated that the whole community was taken aback by Sethe’s reaction. Collins describes that females like Sethe who were, “aggressive, assertive . . . re penalized. They are

abandoned by their men, end up impoverished, and are stigmatized as being unfeminine,” (75) during a new Black male oppression of Reconstruction period.

The new Black male authority associates femininity to softness and obedient nature. They having been denied manliness for centuries need another human being under them to be suppressed. In *Beloved*, Sethe affirms that:

They encouraged you to put some of your weight in their hands and soon as you felt how light and lovely that was, they studied your scars and tribulations, after which they did what he had done: ran her children out and tore up the house. (26)

Sethe is also surprised that Paul D is “. . . the kind of man who could walk into a house and make the women cry” (20). Therefore, when he holds Sethe’s “. . . breast in the palms of his hands” (20), she feels relieved because “. . . the responsibility for her breasts, at last, was in somebody else’s hands.” (21) Here, Sethe’s breast stands as a mark for her womanliness. She has been victimised first and foremost by her exclusive love for her children and her responsibilities as a mother.

Sethe hates her husband, Halle because he has authorised the “two boys with mossy teeth, one sucking on my breasts the other holding me down, their book reading teacher watching and writing it up” while Halle, her “husband . . . watching, above me in the loft-hiding close by . . . looking down on what I couldn’t look at all. And not stopping them looking and letting it happen” (82). Sethe’s womanliness is violated by the rape. Her husband, the father of her children and the owner of the milk, observes this heinous act and does not take any effort to stop it. Hence, Sethe is forced to believe in Baby Sugg’s confirmation that “A man ain’t nothing but a man . . . But a son? Well now, that’s somebody” (27). Sethe is certain that if Halle had not been her husband but instead her son, he would not have let them blemish her. Like

Paul D, he looked at her “. . . not loving or passionate, but interested, as though he were examining an ear of corn for quality” (30). Halle did nothing to resist the atrocities over his wife, in the form of rape which happened in front of him.

The slavery had taken off the femininity of Black women. The Black woman is not only victimised because of her gender but also due to her denied and undefined status. However, Sethe longs for a perfect love which includes all the mankind and gives equality to everyone. In *Beloved*, women’s sufferings from racial segregation and gender objection have shaped their psychological field as one’s psychological profile is generally shaped by the experiences they have gone through. Barbara Christian says, “sexism and racism are systems of societal and psychological restriction that have critically affected the lives of (women)” (71).

In fact the rudeness of Whites and males led women like Sethe, to end up in doing a murder. Instead of letting her children return to Sweet Home and then live the atrocities of slavery, she kills her baby girl and stopped injuring her two sons. Bell says that, there is a “socio-psychological conflict” in the background which results from the “contradictory cultural imperatives of European colonialism and African traditions” (7). Sethe is the kind of woman who cannot even breathe without her children seen around. She wants to take them all out of the Sweet Home to her mother-in-law. She is willing to give up every moment her life for the improvement of her children.

Sethe has conserved some of the traits of her original traditional African culture which highly values motherliness. But the base of enslavement is about the denial of a human status to Black people. When Schoolteacher had come to take back a breeding nigger with her foal and “three pickaninnies” (175), he compares her to a horse, a “. . . property that reproduced itself without cost” (269). Sethe is considered

to be an animal and the baby that she is expecting is called by a term 'foal' which is used for calling the young ones of animals. Thus, her later reaction against White person is really against Schoolteacher, and it then comes due to madness. Bell says that the baby girl, who comes again as a ghost after eighteen years, is the actual depiction of Sethe's psychological tortures. *Beloved* symbolises Sethe's "quest for social freedom and psychological wholeness" (8).

Indeed, after the murder, when she returns from prison, part of the community has avoided her company and the other part found her too arrogant. Thus even years later, she did not integrate with the community. But Sethe longs for pardon and integration. For Trudier Harris, *Beloved* has come in time because she acts as a:

Psychological catalyst for the three central (living) characters. The healing ritual in *Beloved* can be broken down into three stages. The first stage is the repression of memory that occurs from traumas of slavery; the second stage entails painful reconciliation with these memories; and the third is 'the clearing process,' a symbolic rebirth of the sufferers. (397)

Memories are commonly given in a perspective of a female. Hence, for Trudier Harris, *Beloved* is "an emotion of the past and the repressed unconscious" (397). Actually, Sethe wanted freedom, but one daughter is dead and two sons gone, she refuses herself the right to freedom. She feels guilty and refuses either to love or to be loved by anyone. In this psychological situation, Sethe is immersed into an emotional enslavement which is even more hazardous than real slavery. She is slowly engrossed into the influence of the baby ghost to a hopeless level. Truly, *Beloved* represents Sethe's conscience because she needs to penalise herself for having killed her daughter and reveal her animal characteristic as determined by Schoolteacher.

Moreover, while Sethe is “. . . trying to make up for the handsaw”, Beloved is “. . . making her pay for it” (295). Beloved blames Sethe for the act of “. . . leaving her behind. Of not being nice to her, not smiling at her” (284). Sethe says that “. . . they were the same, had the same face, how could she have left her?” (284) Sethe’s conscience is fully devoted towards Beloved, Denver remarks that her mother is no more the strong and “. . . queenly woman . . . The one who never looked away” (14). Instead, she is:

Whispering, muttering some justification, some bit of clarifying information to Beloved to explain what it had been like, and why, and how come. It was as though Sethe didn’t really want forgiveness given; she wanted it refused. And Beloved helped her out. (297)

Sethe has the same difficulty when she had to admit her act of murder to Paul D and tell her difficulty to forget the past. She is also desperate to explain and recall the murder to Beloved, to free her consciousness, and convince her daughter that she was right. All these quotes give the desperate effort of a lovely mother in trying to explain her lost daughter, what it felt like when losing someone lovable. Only the re-embodiment of Beloved helps Sethe to revive her memories, clear her errors and forgive herself.

Two main events have made Sethe to get along with the neighbourhood and relieve her from the influence of Beloved. First, the whole community, informed by Stamp Paid and led by Ella, has helped her to exorcise the ghost and her past guilt. Secondly, Sethe has at last understood that she had misused her ferocity. It was Schoolteacher whom she should have attacked and not her innocent babies.

Meantime Denver in *Beloved* had also discovered her right position in society. Up to eighteen years, Denver is still an infant “. . . pushing out the front” of her

(mother's) dress" (13) and ready to go into the protection of her mother "... provided she can get in it" (14). She only knows 124, Bluestone house and has had the most difficult time in making her way to the nearest house of Lady Jones. She has turned physically into a grown-up woman but still acts like a girl because she does not know the difference because of her isolation. She has "... some sense after all ... stepped out the door, asked for the help" (302). Sethe's psychological oppression forced Denver to come out and seek help from the society and from womanhood.

Sethe is as innocent as Baby Suggs but both of them have psychologically suffered from enslavement and female oppression. After her baby's killing she criticises herself and declines to forget the psychological trauma as a result of both racial and gender oppression. Sethe comes out of the problems as the result of the help set by her daughter, Denver, her friend Ella and her lover Paul D. Thus Morrison has shown that when one is victimised by a system or by other people, one needs the help and love of one's community to survive.

Morrison in an interview, reveals that she has uncovered the fact that in *Beloved*, the actions of the past affect those of the present and only by understanding about one's history we understand the modern life. She has dealt with a three-century old story to re-enact the history and refresh our memories about the most terrible experience of Black people, especially women. Through her writing, Morrison has shown the woman's double oppression. Indeed, both Black men and Black women suffer from racial prejudice but Black women undergo sexist victimisation in addition which is explained through their psychological repression.

This multidimensional repression of women is mostly, made out by their scars that are deeply marked by slavery. For instance, Sethe is psychologically and physically marked by slavery and feels it in her scar on the back as "... a chokecherry

tree. Trunk, branches and even leaves” (18), are symbolisms of the popular belief that the trees have symbolised sufferings of the people. She carries an inheritance of enslavement and gender oppression which she remembers along with the community.

Actually White male’s racist and sexist dominations have seriously undermined Black women’s psychology. Most women, in one way or another, are subject to patriarchal oppression, each woman’s specific needs, desires, and problems are greatly produced by her race, socioeconomic class, sexual orientation, educational experience, religion, and nationality. The experiences shared by white, middle-class, heterosexual feminists, are not the same as those experienced by women of colour, lesbians, poor, and under educated Black women. As a result, various factors need to be taken into account when dealing with African American females.

Alice Walker’s *Meridian* shows a male who dominates the female sexually and emotionally. Meridian as a teenager, unaware about sex, becomes pregnant, marries, and drops out of school to have a son, Eddie Jr. She leaves the responsibility of mothering to her mother, Church and leaves to participate in Civil Rights Movement where she meets Truman. They carry out protest rally together, get beaten up, arrested, and jailed. Meridian tries her best to battle solitude and adjust to Saxon College life where she gets a scholarship. But she moves off the college, actively participating in the Civil Rights protests. She also falls in love with Truman, starts dating him, who volunteers to assist the demonstration and joins the college. This act of the hero is threatened by the arrival of Whites from the North. Truman is attracted to one such new arrival, Lynne, and begins dating with her.

Truman and Meridian restart sexual relations. Meridian becomes pregnant, has an abortion and gets her tubectomy done because Truman continues to chase his relationship with Lynne. “He had gone back to the last of exchange student . . . Lynne

Rabinowitz. It was for this reason . . . that he never knew she was pregnant. On her way to have abortion . . . saw them riding across campus . . . new red car” (118) remarks the disappointed Meridian. Truman attempts to revive his former love with Meridian after Lynne leaves, who in response, hits him with her book bag, wounding his cheek.

Meridian falls ill, losing her vision and becomes unconscious. She stays in bed for a month. A Black instructor of the college Miss Winters, nurses her back to health. Truman and Lynne are married in the mean time and live in Mississippi with their daughter, Camara. Lynne is excluded from the Civil Right marches and meetings when her whiteness begins to put her in danger. Lynne and Truman grow increasingly distant. When Lynne comes to Truman’s apartment to tell him that their daughter Camara has been attacked by a man and hospitalised, she finds him living with another young blonde woman. After the death of Camara, Lynne visits Meridian in search of Truman. Lynne explains to Meridian that her once-romantic life has turned out unpleasant. Lynne calls both the White and Truman, as the representative of Black men, as the oppressors of women:

By nature I’m not cut out to be a member of the oppressors. I don’t like them; they make me feel guilty all the time. They’re ugly . . . poor people laugh at them . . . waiting to drag them out. No, Truman isn’t much, but he’s *instructional* . . . ‘Besides’ . . . ‘nobody’s perfect’ (198).

Tommy Odds, a fellow Civil Rights worker rapes Lynne. He encourages his three friends to do the same act, but they refuse to oblige. Lynne becomes hysterical, tells Truman what had happened, but he does not believe her. Tommy explains Truman that Lynne is with him due to agreement for her sins, out of guilt for the

racism Blacks had suffered for centuries. Tommy Odds further shows his male chauvinism by blaming Lynne for the rape he has committed. In his conversation with Truman, he says, "*Because your women . . . didn't even fight. She was just laying back waiting to give it up. Lynne cried every night . . .*" (177). Lynne eventually surrenders to the sexual advancements of Truman's friends and other Black men. Finally, the men become tired of her after she becomes pregnant.

Newly passionate with his former lover, Meridian, Truman tries to win her back, but Meridian avoids his progress towards her. But they continue their voter-registration drives in a serious manner. Now Truman tells Lynne he loves her and will support her as a friend. Truman once again encourages Meridian to love him. Meridian prepares to move on after getting completely cured of her illness, to continue her work, leaving Truman behind. At last Meridian finally frees herself from all her internal battles.

In this novel the Black males like Truman, Tommy Odds and their friends sexually exploit both the Black and White females. Truman especially is seen to be flirting between Meridian and Lynne making both of them pregnant. The rape which was used as a tool for oppressing the Black women by the White masters is used once again against the White women by the Black males. So the male oppression is seen to be universally same over the females.

The principle of male dominated cultural norms oppressing the native African girls is shown in Alice Walker's *Possessing the secret of Joy*. 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. Alice Walker says that these experiences affect her ability to maintain her sense and she requires psychological counselling. The

patriarchy that organises the practice does not allow its recipients to reveal the details, “. . . but in a culture in which it is mandatory that every single female be systemically desexed . . . some coded, mythological reason given for it, used secretly among the village elders Even today there are villages where an uncircumcised woman is not permitted to live” (217). In the end, due to the sufferings, Tashi begins to realise the importance of taking some feat against the patriarchy.

In the novel *By the Light of My Father's Smile*, Alice Walker, says that the fathers are expected to be the guiding moonlight for their daughters. The patriarchal dominance is questioned in a supernatural way and the fathers are made to understand the support they have to give to their daughters in appreciating this world and its entertainments. The consequences of the dominating fathers, on their daughters are shown in a magical way in this novel. The narrator in this novel is an angel, called Senor Robinson, who is the father of Susannah and Magdalena who speaks about his daughters as:

If you are in love, and going to meet your lover, to make love, you think of the moon as a father, happily looking down on you. For Mundo fathers are happy that their children, the girls as well as the boys, enjoy what your culture calls sex She had been begging me to see, to witness, the light that she had found. To love and bless what she loved. But I had refused But she was, unfortunately the daughter of a fool. I had failed her and without reason destroyed her life. (212-213)

In *Paradise*, Toni Morrison describes the intimate contact between two neighbouring communities. The first is a Black township called Ruby and second, a

safe asylum for the woman nearby called Convent. The plot presents itself as the crucial act of shooting and killing of the women at the safe asylum by the men from the town. The novel closes with the unresolved puzzle of the disappearance of all the bodies and reappearance of some of them. The author discusses the past and present of the town Oklahoma (Ruby), where fifteen former slave families had come from the Mississippi with failed attempt to settle in other towns with Whites, Native Americans and other Black people. This has created hostility and not allowed the people to live in the town. Since the beginning of Haven, now called Ruby, 'Oven' has been the gathering place in the town's central area. When words of the elders were engraved on it, the people of the town had a sort of faith to live by the traditional rules. The younger generation thinks that if the Oven continues the old ways of living it will continue to suppress them and they preferred authorisation of the individual rights and freedom. In order to prevent any unavoidable reformations, the elders never talk about themselves and the present conditions. They had oral traditions of telling stories of their ancestors, but they never discussed the present flaws within their own families. Thus, they made their community into an enclosed community, maintaining only those with the blood of the original fifteen families '8 rock blood' to intermarry and live in Ruby.

In the meantime, every girl and woman who is oppressed absconded both from Ruby and other locations in the country into the Convent. They escape from death, rape, pregnancy, abuse etc., due to men, particularly young men of Ruby. In a place where there has been no death at all, the men of Ruby slaughter a woman of the Convent. They assume that they hold the right to take away innocent lives. This attitude of a revolt and female suppression is revealed in the story of one Elder Morgan in Toni Morrison's *Paradise*:

In 1919. Taking walk around New York City . . . saw two men arguing with a (Negro) woman . . . was a streetwalking women . . . suddenly one of the men smashed the women in her face with his fist. She fell . . . came back to kick her in stomach Elder hit the Whiteman in the jaw and kept hitting until attacked by the second man. Nobody won . . . The woman was still lying Elder ran was buried as he demanded to be: in uniform with his rips on display . . . He didn't excuse himself for running, abandoning the women . . . (94-95)

The people of Ruby analyse their guilt, blame, fear, lies, and finally the transformation required in the town. Immorality combined perfection or ignorance cannot exist in an evolving world. So in reality the women who are depressed and wandering in life are symbolically shown to be peaceful only after death. The *Paradise* shows incidents which again reveal the male dominance over the Black women in a supernatural way.

True Belly of *Jazz*, by Toni Morrison, is shown as a practical confident woman in the oppressive society. *Jazz*, begins in the centre of the love triangle between Violet, Joe and Dorcas. Violet and Joe are unhappily married and living together in an apartment in Harlem when Joe falls in love with a seventeen year old girl named Dorcas. Neither Violet nor Alice Manfred, Dorcas's aunt, has any knowledge of the affair. Dorcas begins to get tired of the older man and starts to date with younger boys, attending parties with her best friend Felice. She cruelly tells Joe that he makes her sick and that he should not further bother her. Dorcas knows that Joe has not forgotten her and will come looking for her, as per expectation Joe comes to see her dancing with Acton. However, Joe shoots Dorcas in the shoulder with a gun and she consequently bleeds to death. Everyone knows that Joe shot Dorcas and

rumour of their affair begins to spread in the community after the young girl's death. Violet visits Dorcas's mourning aunt, Alice Manfred, and the two women begin to develop a friendship as a result of their shared tragedy.

In *Jazz*, during Violet's childhood, her father had deserted the family with a heavy debt. Violet's mother Rose Dear, bewildered, sat the dining table, sipping from an empty cup as the debt collectors emptied the house, took the dining table, sliding Rose Dear out of her chair. Rose Dear's mother, True Belle, left her job in Baltimore and arrived to take care of her daughter and grandchildren. Rose Dear kills herself by jumping into a well after four years, assuming that her children were in the good hands of her mother.

True Belle was a slave when she left Vesper County for Baltimore, but she was a free woman when she moved from Baltimore back to Vesper County, in 1888 to take care of her evicted daughter, Rose Dear. True Belle had no choice to go to Baltimore with, "Maybe she felt bad. Anyway, choiceless, she went, leaving her husband, sister, Rose Dear and May (children) behind, and if she worried, the blonde baby . . . kept her entertained for eighteen years . . ." (142). The words like, 'felt bad', 'choiceless' shows the real situation of a Black slave women who had to leave her family for the whims and fancies of the master's family and had to convince herself with the beauty of the master's blonde son. Even after her years of hard work, True Belle had to influence her employer and former master, Vera Louise Gray that she has become old and she wanted to return to Vesper County to live her final days with her family. These incidents of True Belle's life show her confidence and determination in dealing with the hardships of life.

In the discussion about the ‘Intersectionality’ which is one of their six fundamental concepts of Critical Race Theory. Delgado and Stefancic state that “. . . no one has a simple, uncomplicated identity based on race alone. Race *intersects* with class, sex, sexual orientation, political orientation, and personal history in forming each person’s complex identity” (51-52). They further tell that, “. . . an individual may be a black, underemployed, working-class male or a Mexican American lesbian. Such persons will suffer oppression from more than one source” (51-52). In *The Bluest Eye*, Toni Morrison clearly captures the principle of intersectionality through her narratives concerning the plight of female characters and Black women in America in general:

Then they had grown. Edging into life from the back door . . .
Everybody in the world was in a position to give them orders. White women said, ‘Do this.’ White children said, ‘Give me that.’ White men said, ‘Come here.’ Black men said, ‘Lay down.’ The only people they need not take orders from were black children and each other. (108)

It is now clear that the gender oppression cannot be understood separately from racial oppression. A Black woman is exploited by patriarchy and intersectionality not only because she’s a woman but because she is a socially lesser Black woman. The Black women could not get gender commonality from White women or racial commonality from Black men, the only two groups from which they could seek help. Thus, when dealing with female African American experiences one needs to keep in mind that the feminist principles which were based mainly on the experiences of the White, middle-class, heterosexual feminists are not enough and that like the womanist principles of Alice walker may be necessary.

Although racial issues are predominant in Alice Walker's *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, discussion on feminism is also seen in it. The main plot is set up around Grange Copeland, the sub plots around his son, Brownfield and his granddaughter, Ruth. But the real description revolves around the women in the novel. The women referred in this work speak volumes of the female battle against prejudice. In his article "Speech, After Silence: Alice Walker's *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*," Harold Hellenbrand opens discourse on Walker by noting Walker's earlier statement of two factors that are acting as constraints on Black novels are "the chronicle of a black family and the tale concerned primarily with racial confrontation" (113). Through careful examination, one is able to scrutinise the lives of the Copeland's and understand the difficulties they face while combating the rural South. Walker reveals specifically the stress of racism on Black men, and its greater effects on Black women. The characters Ruth, Margaret, Mem, and Josie indicate a society whereupon the male is the figure of authority and the woman exists below both the White man and her fellow Black man.

On this anti feministic condition prevailing, Seodial F. H. Deena says, "All forms of oppression-slavery, apartheid, colonization, canonization-do have adverse effects on women" (17). Alice Walker's work explains that the execution of the power by Black men of power over their women is due to an inability to exert their own authority elsewhere in the society. Brownfield exerting to give his wife the same treatment the world had given him, out of his despair. Brownfield is described in *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* as man who has given up the resistance against his owner and the world around him and "He felt himself destined to become no more than overseer, on the white man's plantation, of his own children" (72). In retaliation, Brownfield resorts to punishing his wife "His crushed pride, his battered ego, made

him drag Mem away from school teaching . . . into white homes as a domestic . . . his need to bring her down to his level!” (73) Mem who was once the love of Brownfield’s life becomes a whore in the eyes of Brownfield, which he definitely knows is false. He could not behave manly to Mem because of his wife’s “knowledge reflected badly on a husband who could scarcely read and write” (73). The Black man acquires some form of power by suppressing his females when he feels that he is powerless. Therefore the women of Colour were victims of the White oppressors and their own men. So Mem is forced to deal with the problems of her husband as well as her own. The greatest difficulty for Brownfield in dealing with Mem was “. . . her the greater heart . . . her greater knowledge. It put her closer in power, to *them*, than he could ever be” (73). Mem represents the women of colour, who are the potential terror to their fellow Black men with their knowledge as well as generosity.

Alice Walker does not limit her interpretation of the character Mem alone in *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*. Instead, she chooses to use other female characters like Josie and Margaret to explain the real situations of oppression. These characters are also examples of the marginalised females within the society of male domination. Josie lives her whole life waiting for the only man, Grange whom she loved. Her life is spent in trying to gain love from Grange. Josie’s problems arise from her unfortunate relationship with her father who rapes her while she slept, every night. Although Josie is tortured by her father’s oppression it does not stop her loving her father. This shows that the coloured woman has no other solace except her man. She returns to him even when he represses her.

The repression of the females is easily examined by looking at the life of Margaret, who was loyal to her husband Grange until she could not longer bear his physical abuse. Margaret is an ideal marginalised woman, who is ultimately destroyed

by the assault of neglect from her husband. With no other alternative, the depressed Margaret becomes a whore. The situation reveals the effects of negligence of the Black man upon his women. Thus Alice Walker continues to provide us with the opportunity to discuss the realistic situation of Black women. Walker's characters like Shug Avery, Celie, Sophia, Squeak, Margaret, Mem, Joshi etc., play the role of a mule. These characters are loaded with the loads of the male like his frustration, fear, worthlessness, rage, etc.

Toni Morrison, in her essay "Thoughts on the African American Novel" in *Glencoe Literature: American Literature*, by Beverly Ann Chin and Denny Wolfe discusses the role of Afro-American novels within the African American community. Accordingly, Morrison describes that these novels were produced for the middle class who needed something to define themselves in a new society of industrial revolution. Morrison notes that "they [the middle class] had no art form to tell them how to behave in this new situation. So they produced an art form" (31). These Afro-American novels addressed the middle class and the music and oral traditions of the Blacks addressed the lower classes. These novels became a sensation because they taught suitable methods and conveyed new experiences for a budding middle class. Beverly Ann Chin and Denny Wolfe further adds "In the same way that a musician's music is enhanced when there is a response from the audience . . . it's of some importance to me to try to make that connection" (31). Similar experiences of the African American women are also conveyed through the writings of Morrison and Walker.

In *Beloved*, Sethe represents the 'American reality' that has been refused to the African Americans. *Beloved* helps to give the experiences of African and the American community by unfolding a short period of African American history.

Through Sethe the difficulties that are created by slavery and the gender oppression was portrayed. Essentially these torments convert the women into a ferocious human being. Sethe uses the only power that she has the life of her child and takes it away to escape from slavery. Sethe is Morrison's contradictory character who has a lot of love towards her children, loyalty to her White masters and at the same time ferocity towards her oppressors.

In *Beloved*, the life afforded to Sethe in Kentucky on the 'Sweet Home plantation' is not 'sweet'. Sethe strives to get a chance for freedom. She is unsuccessful at first attempt and becomes the casualty of a sexual assault by the power of Schoolteacher and his nephews. Sethe remembers the horrid experience, by saying that "they took my milk," (82) by force. The mother's milk is the only allowance which the poor slave woman can give to her children. This precious bounty cannot be given to their children most of the times because they had to share the milk with children of their owners. She had to be a wet nurse to owner's children. So Sethe makes her way to freedom and ensures that they have the authority to decide their own life, an authority which had been previously denied to her and her children. After the peak destruction Sethe is able to bring herself back to form and begins her free life, with Baby Suggs.

In *Beloved*, the new freedom of Sethe is short-lived when her former master and Schoolteacher's boys find her. Sethe decides that her children will find more satisfaction in the freedom of death rather than a bonded life. It is at this moment that Sethe as a mother takes the womanliness to a new level. Thus, Sethe tries to free her children from the burden of slavery, increasing her own burden of murder is illustrated by the symbolism of the chokecherry tree that now "... could have cherries too . . ." (18). The tree seems to be an imagery of past difficulties and the red cherries

indicating the blood that comes out of murder. The above discussion about Sethe provides image of the Black female taking a dominant role in the family.

In Satya P. Mohanty's research paper, "The Epistemic Status of Cultural Identity: On *Beloved* and the Postcolonial Condition" gives this desire and necessity of Sethe to obtain this form of freedom. Mohanty explains that "For Sethe, freedom-even under slavery-appears as the ineliminable human need for self-determination . . . it is not enough to be free from legally imposed bondage; one must also claim ownership of one's freed self" (59). So the actions she took are those born out of the love towards her children and the true freedom. Paul D replies simply that "Your love is too thick What you did was wrong" (193). Paul D's opinion about the motherly love is knowingly included in the text as is the fundamental in understanding the different perspectives between men and women.

Paul D enters the home on 124 and orders the unruly spirit of Beloved "God damn it! Hush up!" (22) The spirit obliges and quiets down temporarily until the entrance of Beloved in another worldly form. After performing his masculine duty of getting space and dominating it temporarily, Paul D finds that the mere presence of the girl Beloved is affecting his authority. A female, Beloved has occupied a space wherein he had gained control. This psychological destruction is shown in the book entitled *Black Skin, White Masks*, where Frantz Fanon discusses the role of emotional male who is controlled by ethnicity, race, and colour. The case of Paul D also seems quite similar to a situation that Fanon explains in discussing the Black man's achievement of space. Thus he "will not have to experience his being for others" (89). Initially Paul D entered the home at 124 and was free to gain control because nothing was there to disagreement of his dominance or kindle the notion of his inferiority. Paul D's position and stature becomes questionable when Beloved acquires power in

the home. Paul D uses the opportunity by blaming the past actions of Sethe as an inexcusable fault, and exit. The above discussion gives the feeble, unstable nature of the Black male, his insecurity exhibits in the form of blame over his females shaping his identity as a Black man. Thus, the wandering field hand Paul D is lost until he finds a place to control and upon losing that, he himself is lost.

Paul D is a former male slave whose worth is less than nothing. This debate is made as Paul D recollects his past and remembers the day when he learns of his true worth, “The dollar value of his weight, his strength, his heart, his brain, his penis, and his future” (226). Paul D understands the reality of learning his true worth, which was likely less than the worth of Sethe. Sethe was “property that reproduced itself without cost . . . her price was greater than his” (226). Through these thoughts of Paul D a greater perception of the male-female relationship is gained. Although the male holds power over the woman, she is more precious, worth more than him. Thus, psychologically there is a rift created by the racial oppression on the male-female relationship of the African American slaves in *Beloved*. Paul D cannot handle the reality exposed by this traumatic awakening. He says to Stamp Paid with frustration, “How much is a nigger supposed to take?” (235) in this statement, the full understanding of the life of African American male is brought out. Although Paul D is a beast of burden, broken down, whipped, and controlled, but as a male he wants to control his Black women.

Paul D thinks that it is much relevant for the male characters like Halle and Stamp, to become mad after witnessing the rape of their wives. Paul D also has gone mad due to his inability to understand the difficulty of Sethe and her choice of murder. This reveals not only Paul D’s true character, but the views of the Black woman through the eyes of the Black man. There is no room for mistakes or madness

in case of women placing the woman dangerously into a corner of the society and the family. Sethe's love may have been too thick according to Paul D. She could have given one more thought before murdering her daughter, but the question of the whereabouts of her husband, and his responsibility in safe guarding his family arises here. Her husband, Halle's state of insanity might provide him protection but paradoxically the same insanity does not provide Sethe any protection. She must make the difficult decisions under a scrutinizing eye of the whole world. Thus the rule of the society changes for the men and women differently.

The above discussion and comprehension of views of Paul D, helps us to understand Sethe who is the representative of all African American females. Slavery has peeled away the dignity and authority in any form from the slaves. The sense of helplessness and powerlessness creates widespread fear among the slaves, against their oppressors, and turns ultimately over their females.

The rape of Sethe is indicated as one of the rights of the slave masters. The oppressor's authority to control slave men also extends to his slave women. They are his property to be used at his judgment. The roles of the slave female for the owners includes serving in the home, working in the fields, bearing children for sale and even used for the sexual purposes of the master. Such rapes are documented by Henry Louis Gates Jr., chairman of the Department of Afro-American Studies at Harvard University, in the foreword of "Unchained Memories: Readings From the Slave Narratives," the companion book to the HBO documentary. One such account comes from Rev. Ishrael Massie, who explains:

Lord chile, dat wuz common. Marsters an' overseers use to make slaves dat wuz wid deir husbands git up, do as dey say . . . Send husband out . . . Den he gits in bed wid slave himself . . . Some women would

fight. . . Others . . . feared of dat beatin'. What we saw, couldn't do nothing 'bout it (The New York Times, Arts Section, February 09, 2003)

This type of submission of the Black male slave by the system of slavery may be the reason for Halle's dementia and Sethe's later attempt to murder her children. Morrison intends to show the state of mind of Sethe and Halle, and Paul D's struggle to obtain a sense of worthiness. The female oppression, their helplessness and their total unsupportive condition are visible in these writings.

If *Beloved* shows one aspect of feminism, *Sula* shows the evolution of the sisterhood in the Black women during that period when she wrote *Sula* in the late 1960s. Morrison was surrounded by an environment of feminist discourses that encouraged woman to come together instead of developing hostile attitudes between themselves. In *Sula*, Toni Morrison wanted to show an example of this new form of sisterhood through her characters Sula and Nel:

She had clung to Nel as the closest thing She had no thought at all of causing Nel pain when she bedded down with Jude (Nel's husband) . . . They had always shared Marriage, apparently, had changed all that she was ill prepared for the possessiveness of the one person she felt close to. (119)

Sula also lived a life against the stereotypic life of Black females. She was regarded as a devil by the neighbourhood females, who would sexually seduce their husbands. In the fear of Sula, all the Black women in the neighbourhood started to love one another. "They began to cherish their husbands and wives, protect their children, repair their homes and in general band together against the devil in their

midst” (117). Morrison keeps in mind these types of relationships in a Black neighbourhood from which she grew up, at the same time she shows the external forces that could damage this form of sisterhood.

If *Sula* shows necessity of sisterhood among the Black women, the novel *Love*, shows various forms of love that are necessary for women. The novel is set mainly in 1990s East American coast country, is a tale of childhood confusion, miscommunication and its consequences. Bill Cosey is the Black who is the proprietor of the once popular Cosey’s Hotel and Resort and his women are Heed, Christine and May, the wife, granddaughter and daughter-in-law respectively live in a town called Silk. Bill Cosey inherits his wealth from his father and is a courthouse informer and a great fancier of money. An extravagant, romantic, charming and morally doubtful, Bill Cosey marries Heed, an uneducated eleven year old child at an old age. Cosey has suddenly lost his son to ‘walking pneumonia,’ and his mentally unsound daughter-in-law, May, outwardly jealous of Heed, keeps her away from her own daughter, Christine. May fears on Heed Christian friendship is expressed in the thoughts of an unknown narrator as:

. . . a bottlefly let in through the door, already buzzing at the food table... if settled on Christine . . . bound to smear her with the garbage If Heed and Christine had ideas about being friends and behaving like sisters . . . May put a stop to them. If she couldn’t swat the bottlefly, she could tear its wings, Raid-spray the air so it couldn’t breathe . . . 136)

Christine and Heed, similar in age, are already connected and are friends. There are years of misunderstanding between the girls. They compete endlessly for

Cosey's love and affection which continues even after his death, and ultimately develop a deep hatred for one another. There is only a thin line between love and hate and eventually after years of full hatred, their conflicts are finally settled with the help of their errand boy, Romen Gibbons and a young outsider named Junior Viviane.

Heed compares herself to Junior Viviane and becomes closer to her for the reason that both are thrust into the world at the tender age of eleven. Junior is comparatively educated, depends on her brains and common sense for her means of living. On the other hand, Heed, is ignorant and relies on manipulation and cheating for her method of living. Heed a misguided child, mistakenly believes that her marriage to Cosey is her way out of her problems. Romen is an honest soul, in the novel, who saves a girl during a gang rape. Romen's grandparents, Sandler and Vida Gibbons, act as good examples for their communication guiding him for that good behaviour. If *Sula* shows the need for sisterhood among the Black women, *Love* shows the role of envy, selfishness among the new generation of Black girls that are to be conquered by the Black women to maintain the sisterhood which could fetch them freedom from oppression.

The Bluest Eye is also a work which shows the longing of the female to obtain power and a sense of position in the world. In the introduction, the narrator Claudia in her thoughts gives that “. . . *there were no marigolds in the fall of 1941 It was a long time before my sister and I admitted to ourselves that no green was going to spring from our seeds*” (4). This gives us an understanding of the two female children who knew well about the hopeless condition of the Black girls in the world. The meaning behind their revelation means that they are unable to bring forth beauty in a place where the society was unresponsive, like “*the unyielding earth*” (4). They have

exposed the life of minority females within a White dominating society. They know that they are Black and essentially ugly which they do not know why as noted in the introduction: “What did we lack? Why was it important? And so what?” Guileless and without vanity, we still love with ourselves then. We felt comfortable in our skins . . . admired our dirt . . . and could not comprehend this unworthiness” (57). In the article “Representation, Race, and the ‘Language’ of the Ineffable in Toni Morrison’s Narratives,” of the *African American Review*, Abdellatif Khayati explains that “*The Bluest Eye* shows how ‘the epistemic violence’ of the Other is both outside and inside; it operates through the internalization of the self as other” (315). The girls find that their identity is shaped not by their own views, but by the thrusting worldly views. The girls recognise about themselves in a completely negative profile with their identities suppressed.

In *The Bluest Eye* the suppression of the girls begins even at their homes. At home they are children who should be seen and not heard, that is they could not argue on any matters. Claudia explains that the adults never spoke to her. They simply gave them, “. . . directions. They issue orders without providing information” (5). As already mentioned Dick and Jane is the best representative of the ideal family who has been gifted with all these advantages. This idealism is obvious that these children will grow into adulthood with an altered understanding of life. Their dreams and aspirations will be muted even before they grow up. At home no one listens or trusts them because they are children after all. Claudia and Frieda think that they have features of ugliness and are not beautiful as per the society. Pecola shares this internalised conflict, in a better way. The obstacles which present in front of them are their own families, their communities and the whole world. Thus the children are also

suppressed into a state that they turn inward and start to take revenge upon themselves.

Abdellatif Khayati explains that this process begins when individuals of colour begin to enquire “What is black in him, herself, and desires what belongs to the white person” (315). A part of this process is exposed through their liking and disliking of Shirley Temple. Frieda with Pecola adores Shirley Temple while Claudia hates her not because of how she looks, but because of what she represents, the whiteness. Pecola’s delight develops into a desire to have blue eyes due to this adoration. Khayati explains the dilemma of Pecola Breedlove by noting that “Pecola’s fantasy that her life would be worthwhile if only she could have blue eyes is an extreme example of the common delusions of other black women confronted with the dominance of cultural stereotypes” (316). Pecola’s fantasy moves to a higher level than just adoration of Claudia and Frieda which leads to insanity. Pecola desires for the life that the blue eyes will bring her and truly does not desire for the blue eyes. The destruction of Pecola’s psyche is exacerbated by the society and its faulty principles.

Although the female characters such as Pauline in *The Bluest Eye* are old and expected to be matured, the novel reveals that their maturing process has been stopped at some point and they remain as children. It seems that they have come to agreement with their life. As Black women, they find it difficult to refuse or struggle against what has been subconsciously inserted in their minds. Pauline and Geraldine find comfort in having order, organisation and cleanliness in their lives as of the Whites. Pauline also desires a good relationship with her husband like that between a White man and a White woman. She expresses her joy in watching films where, “*White men taking such good care of they women . . . big clean houses . . . Them pictures gave me*

[her] a lot of pleasure” (95). Pauline, as a woman, is basically caught in the same dilemma as her daughter for the beauty of whiteness. Fanon says that Pauline identifies colour in the world as existing at two separate poles that are “in perpetual conflict” (27). This conflict of these poles exists within their psychological makeup. The central theme of *The Bluest Eye* is the psychological destruction of the Black female’s mind by both the majority White community and by the African American community.

The Black women in society are at constant battle with the image that the world has cast upon them. Geraldine in *The Bluest Eye* pretends that she is better than other Black women because she has created a reasonable existence within the White society. This continues to strive hard to set her apart from Black girls like Pecola Breedlove, calling her a “. . . nasty little black bitch” (72). There is also a proof that a part of this psychological destruction is due to the intra racial racism which takes its roots from both the gender based suppression on one hand and the race based oppression of the Black women on the other hand. Such attitudes are also increased by the imperfect males. They force the females to show themselves as perfect human beings, better than their male counterpart.

Toni Morrison relates the experience of the Black female with the Black male. Even as children the little Black boys who hate themselves, express their hatred on Black girls as a method for showing their self dissatisfaction, by calling the girls as ‘ a black e’mo’. It is the sexist attitude of the African American boys that is acquired in their young age which evolves in their adulthood. They tease Pecola with a song, which mocks at the same physical features they share with her. Claudia notes this view accurately in her words and says “They seemed to have taken all of their smoothly cultivated ignorance, their exquisitely learned self-hatred . . . and sucked it

all up into a fiery cone of scorn that had burned for ages . . . their minds. . . .” (50). When the boys grow into men in future their teasing may shift to abuse of their females due to their own worthlessness.

The boys are representative of what one grows into an adult Black man like Cholly Breedlove. He naturally expresses the male practice of self-hate by taking revenge upon the Black woman. At a younger age Cholly is left mentally affected when he is forced to continue sexual intercourse with a Black teen in front of a group of armed White men. In *The Bluest Eye* Morrison explains that the Black male will not hate the oppressor because, “His subconscious knew what his conscious mind did not guess-that hating them would have consumed him . . .” (118). His inability to hate the oppressors surfaces as a hatred upon the woman who was the cause of the situation. The extension of this thought surfaces later in the beatings of his wife and the eventual rape of his daughter. Even the unsupportive condition of the Black women was a cause for the crime on them. Before Cholly rapes his daughter, he comes to terms with himself upon his daughter’s postures such as her hunched back for her moribund state and sadness, Morrison says that “The clear statement of her misery was an accusation” (127). For Cholly, everything is blame and a reminder to protect her. The privilege of mental domination, taken by the Black males develops slowly into a physical violence called the rape. Thus the Black girls also face the hardships due to gender issues which are indirectly influenced by racial issues.

Alice Walker’s female characters essentially act as models for other women in society. Pecola, Claudia, Frieda, and Sethe are excellent figures that help one to understand the age wise and period wise existence of African American women. Morrison’s works show the exact female psyche from slavery period to the period of

depression and afterwards. The Black females were oppressed by both society and Black men in all her novels.

In *The Color Purple*, Celie is under the pressure of having to follow traditional responsibilities of the Black women. She is required to take care of her own family after the death of her mother, caring for her siblings and her stepfather. These thrust responsibilities force Celie out of the school and education. Education was thought to be unnecessary for women during the late eighteenth hundreds and towards the middle of nineteenth hundreds and their roles was expected to be around home. "The first time I got big Pa took me out of school. He never care that I love it You too dumb to keep going to school, Pa say" (11). Black females gain great worldly knowledge even if they are refused formal education. This is seen through the fact that Celie's highly emotional, and uneducated language at the beginning of the novel becomes an improved and matured language at the end. She explores her emotions and even reasons it out on her own with an advanced language in her later entries of letters to her sister Nettie. The Black women had to learn a lot out of their schools in order to attain individuality.

Sethe in *Beloved* did not even have the opportunity to get a glimpse of education. Sethe was only taught the ways of working in the fields and how to care for a family and was not even able to get her guidance in nurturing the child. She was also unable to get her mother's support. Sethe says, "I didn't see her but a few times . . . once when she was working indigo She must of nursed me two or three weeks that's the way the others did" (72). Similarly in *The Color Purple* when Celie is ordered to take care of Albert's children and home. She says, "I spend my wedding day running from the oldest boy He pick up a rock and laid my head open I bandage my head best I can and cook dinner . . ." (14) The Black girls were refused

formal education due to poverty, and they worked in farms and had the responsibility to take care of their siblings when their parents are out for working.

Alice Walker tries to convey that nothing could be kept as a secret in a woman's life. We can easily make judgement on Celie's thoughts through her prayers. She is in a position of complete powerlessness, faces the difficult demands of her father, and the responsibility of caring for Mr__'s family. God is the only person to whom Celie can disclose her mind. This shows how little support she had from the males during difficult times. Celie has been controlled by some male or other and so she is not able to think for herself. As a Black woman, her position was not to have her own opinions, but to keep the house hold together and be ready when her husband desired for sex.

But in contrast, Grandma Suggs in *Beloved*, takes up a position as the powerful unchurched preacher for the Black people. She instructs them to love themselves, as no one else will, especially not the 'white folks', ". . . we flesh; flesh that weeps, laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in grass Love it hard. Yonder they do not love your flesh" (103). This is a very rare example where a Black woman instructs other Black women to take control of their thinking. Baby Suggs remains as a struggling Black woman herself and preaches them the strength to fight towards betterment. Toni Morrison created Baby Suggs as an elderly woman who also takes on the responsibility of caring for run-away children, showing love and affection to the neighbouring Black society. Morrison uses Suggs to give the Black women the hope and power which is much essential in their gloomy life.

In *The Color Purple*, Sofia rejects the typical roles of the Black women. She fights for her own identity and to improve her status in life. Sofia did not bow down to her husband and did not certainly depend on anybody, an attitude extremely

uncommon during the nineteenth century. Black women living during this time were almost beaten to death by their males for refusing to do these unskilled jobs. These kinds of incidences were extremely frequent and we can see such events unfold in *The Color Purple*. Albert beats Celie without any reason, simply to impose his power over her and make sure that she is in control.

Sofia is also arrested for irritating the mayor and then forced into the household as a maid. This condition of enforced slavery can even change a strong minded woman like Sofia into a fearful slave. Sophia says to Celie about working in a prison laundry, “Every time they ast me to do something, Miss Celie, I act like I’m you. I jump right up and do just what they say. She look wild . . .” (83).

Shug Avery, a singer and mistress of Celie’s husband, is another woman who seems to have discarded the traditional roles imposed upon the women during the twentieth century. Shug seems to make her presence known throughout the novel by being beautiful and proud. She is not afraid to show her true nature, exhibits her body and speaks out her mind. She attracts Celie with her every move, “I think my heart gon fly out my mouth when I see one of her foots come poking out” (44). Shug is created as the complete paradox of Celie and Celie envies the freedom she possesses.

Alice Walker was going through a difficult time in her personal life when she wrote *The Color Purple*. She invented up Shug to be the representation of herself, care-free and loving life despite its obstacles and difficulties. Sex was a means of controlling women throughout the nineteenth century and it is a prominent issue in her novels. This is evident in the opening lines of the novel which tells what has happened to an unknown female character, “. . . he grab hold my titties. Then he push his thing inside my pussy . . . I cry” (3). Sex is not a pleasurable experience for Celie, the rape and sexual abuses have changed her into a timid woman. When the rape

further diminishes her position in society and she suffers maltreatment. Celie says, “He never ast me nothing bout myself. He clam on top of me and fuck and fuck, even when my head bandaged. Nobody ever love me . . .” (103).

Beloved also has much of a negative outlook to sex. The pregnant, young Sethe had to struggle so much to assume any position in the society. As a woman, White men assumed they could do whatever they pleased with her, so two young men raped her and stole her milk. “God damn it of two boys with mossy teeth, one sucking on my breast the other holding me down, their book-reading teacher watching and writing it up” (83).

The importance of the breast is discussed earlier, the significance of her milk is that, it is the nourishment a child needs from a women. When a mother feeds her child she is rewarded of a relationship, an attention and bonding from her child. After being raped and her milk stolen, the innocent, uneducated Sethe feels that she can no longer provide her children with the milk although it can be physiologically replenished in the future. The rape has lowered her esteem further, and Sethe feels that she is a very bad mother. Thus the novels of both the authors address the issues of rape as an oppressive instrument on the Black women during the nineteenth and twentieth century.

Both the novelists were provoked into writing feministic literature because of the effects of the past. It was during the Eighteen Hundreds that women were beginning to make a stand for equal rights, and many women organisations were starting to fight for the voices of women all over the world. An influential and popular speaker for this new found feminism was Sarah Grimké. She began her speaking career as an abolitionist and a women's rights activist. Sarah wrote angrily that men were attempting to drive women from almost every sphere of moral action and called

on the women to rise from that degradation and bondage. Male abolitionists thought her public speaking was illegal, irresponsible and tried to silence her. Sarah carried on campaigning for Anti Slavery until her death in the 1800s.

Although the novels portray the struggle women had to face, the inevitable abuse and the violence imposed upon them for years, there is still the existence of many determined women in their novels. In *Beloved*, the women of Sethe's community stand united at the end to drive out the evil spirit of her dead child, Beloved. The women had to exorcise not only ghosts but also exorcise the inheritance of slavery and gender oppression from their minds.

The Color Purple also contains such references to the strength of women. Motivated by the pent up anger towards Albert for hiding her sister's letters, Celie eventually finds the courage to face him and declare her intentions of leaving for Memphis with Shug Avery. This is the first situation where Celie develops courage to go against the wish of a male. Jadine seen in Morrison's *Tar Baby* is also a Black female who breaks the stereotype of both her gender and race. Morrison uncovers all the stereotypical racial fears felt by Whites and Blacks alike in this novel. She employs these stereotypic qualities of many of her characters without discomfort at the end proceeds to make them individualistic.

In Toni Morrison's *Tar Baby*, Son takes Jadine back to his North Florida home, where the real Blacks live, but Jadine is bored and disgusted to live there. In the end she returns to Paris, possibly to have a rich White man's child, while Son searches for her on Isle des Chevaliers as an almost barbaric man returning to the 'Swamp', losing himself in a superstitious island culture. *Tar Baby* is a Black novel which shows the perception of the Blacks' desire to create their own mythology to replace the stereotypic myths the White man has developed for him.

Tar Baby is also a book about a woman's anger, her denial of an unsuitable man and her confidence of getting a man who is unattainable. Leaving Son behind her, Jadine bravely concludes "A grown woman did not need safety or its dreams. She *was* the safety she longed for" (290). Toni Morrison's greatest achievement is that she has raised this novel and her female characters well above the social level. She has succeeded in writing about the modern Black women and her new found freedom of choosing her own partner and if needed ready to change the partner according to her whims.

After reading all these novels, the greatest relief is that the women within these novels manage to resist the inescapable conditions which they had once experienced. However, all the Black women of the early nineteenth century could not have met such a fairy tale ending but they were strongly enduring the ill treatment for years. Even if forced into hopeless marriages or kept working until death, Black women did not runaway their responsibility in society.

The history of the Black Women is regularly one of quarrel and of extreme complexity. Through the centuries there has been a struggle for women to find their self-identity and to remove themselves from the forced identity by both the Black men and the White people. Black women were usually seen as the cook, the cleaner, the mother, the nurse of the family and were often forced into the challenging commands of a White household. In all the novels we see such strong demanding roles taken up by the protagonists. Almost all the novels that are taken in to the study have been claimed to be 'women's novels', following certain ideals associated with the genre of woman's literature. This is not to say that they are centred only on the women and dismissing men altogether, but that they display the struggle of a Black woman to

attain a position in history. Although this type presentation of Black women is not the main focus in these novels, it is an important undercurrent issue.

In the essay, "From an Interview", *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens* Alice Walker summarises the fate of Black women, who are seen as "exquisite butterflies trapped in an evil honey, toiling away their lives in an era, a century that did not acknowledge them, except as 'the mule of the world'" (232). All these novels address the positions of the Black women with such passion and absolute clarity, that one feels that she is also a part of the struggle of the freedom. After reading these novels the readers get the knowledge of the past African American women and their position when they were forced into slavery. The struggle for equality of man and woman should be the message to be passed on for the generations to come.

Having discussed the discourses on feminism to such a deep extent in the novels of Toni Morrison and Alice Walker the next chapter deals with the conclusion of the thesis. Conclusion compiles all the important discussions in the previous chapters especially the racist and feminist issues. The thesis becomes further elaborate during the course of the study so new thoughts and discussions keep on arising. So this chapter also includes other discussions related to the thesis which have been omitted in the previous chapters in a sequential manner. This chapter arrives at a conclusion after an extensive analysis, that the major themes in the novels of Toni Morrison and Alice Walker are racism and feminism.