Chapter V

DOOMED BUT NOT ETERNALLY
Toni Morrison has dedicated her \textit{Magnum Opus Beloved} to the “sixty million and more” who have died or lost their lives (figuratively) as a result of being hauled to alien lands from the fold of their ancient culture and native soil. To be doomed carries a fund of bleakness with it. The curse, if unincurred, becomes very painful. The condition of the Afro-Americans, scorched and burned in the flames of racism and discrimination was ‘death-in-life’ existence. Toni Morrison who grew up hearing the stories of the Blacks who were “enslaved, tortured, maimed, beaten and raped, lynched and worked to death” (Huston, Nancy 719), was filled with reverence for the survivors. Moreover the women of her family, her mother and grandmother were very articulate and authoritative. This led to the conviction that “having the example of authoritative mothers, aunts, grandmothers, great-grandmothers” (Mckay, Nellie 399) the Black women writers have a very distinct role to play. With their racial and artistic heritage they can make contributions not just to the literary world but to the Afro-American community in general.

Disillusioned by the narratives of slavery, Toni Morrison looked into the “psychic subtexts that lie within and beneath the historical facts” (Mobley, Marilyn Sanders 359). She has taken upon her shoulders to articulate and to put in ‘printed words’ the fund of wisdom the Black women of the past
possessed but failed to make the world realize it because of the repression of the society. Toni Morrison expresses her regard for these women “who were the culture bearers and they told us (children) what to do. But in terms of story telling . . .” (Mckay Nellie 398). She is a writer who shows a strong affinity to her ancestors. This affinity has led her to the re-discovery of the African past which was retrievable only through myths, folk beliefs and the retention of the strong bond between the individual and community. In order to retrieve the long-lost ancestors Toni Morrison has created a few very sinewy characters who are the strongholds of the community and race.

They did not believe Nature was ever askew – only inconvenient. Plague and draught were as “natural” as spring-time. If milk could curdle, God knows robins could fall. The purpose of evil was to survive it and they determined (without ever knowing they had made up their minds to do it) to survive floods, White people, tuberculosis, famine and ignorance. They knew anger well but not despair, and they didn’t stone sinners for the same reason they didn’t commit suicide – it was beneath them (Sula).

They propitiate the agony of alienation experienced by the Afro-Americans by the wisdom that they have delved out from their racial consciousness. They act
as 'pedagogues' who instruct and direct the alienated lot to surge the waves of repression. They acknowledge and are proud of their 'Africanness' and through their life and the stories they narrate they impart the spiritual resources of Black folklore and folk beliefs. They have brewed up a magic portent, an abracadabra which will help the Blacks to tide over the trammels imposed on them by the alien culture. Reviving the Black folklore, folk beliefs and the Black music are the steps incorporated into the making of this magic formula for returning to the roots. The panacea accrued from this abracadabra is self realization which leads to complete liberation. Ms. Morrison and other Black writers used their works to inspire the Afro-Americans for the realization of their selves. There is a very strong assertion of this 'self actualization' and self-realization reverberating in Alice Walker's poem Each One, Pull One.

"We who have stood over,
so many graves
Know that no matter what they do
All of us must live
Or none."

This thrust for reclaiming the lost self is well articulated in Toni Morrison's works. She also shows an urgency, which according to Susan Willis is "the realization that a great deal is at stake." The idea of reclaiming the individual self is indebted to the notion of reclaiming the racial self. The Afro-Americans
are orphans cut off from their ancestors and dispossessed of an ‘integrated self’. It is the reclaiming of this ‘integrated self’ by reviving the racial self that Ms. Morrison is narrating and re-narrating through her stories in which characters represent the different aspects of Afro-American sustenance. As Claudia Tate says: “Each act of writing a novel is for her an act of discovering, deep within herself some relationship to a “collective memory” (Tate, Claudia 1983, 118). Ms. Morrison shares with Africans the belief that “the ancestor lives as long as there are those who remember” (Naylor, Gloria 573). Her task is Herculean, like that of the other Afro-American writers who “struggle to reclaim one’s people’s history even while others distort, suppress and deny it” (Broad, I. Robert 195). After reclaiming the history comes the problem of reclaiming the racial self. By analyzing the racial self, the traits and texture and the intricacies of the individual self will appear more tangible. Ms. Morrison adheres to the wisdom of St. Paul that reclaiming an individual also means reclaiming an entire race or communal group. After reclaiming the maimed and mutilated psyche which was brutally distorted through years of subjugation, Ms. Morrison proceeds to the heroic task of instilling in them self realization and self assertion. To achieve this magnificent transformation, she makes use of the triumphant characters who supply the reviving nectar to the vanquished souls. She relies a lot on folklore, folktales, story telling and even the mystical effect of Black music for achieving this.
All ancient cultures serve humanity by nourishing its inspiration, guiding its action and providing consolation and comfort, balance and equanimity in both their joys and sorrows. What the Afro-Americans by being transplanted into alien lands experience is the result of being totally divorced from such a vibrant culture. Morrison, like many other Afro-American writers, is illuminating the lost ancestry and a legacy of beliefs, creeds and customs through their writings. Toni Morrison’s exhortation to the Afro-Americans is to return to their roots and to reclaim their individuality which will enable to absolve them from the agony of alienation. Ms. Morrison remarks: “Anything I have ever learned of any consequence, I have learned from Black people... you see my juices come from a certain place” (Micucci, Dana 251).

Toni Morrison’s deep insight into the Afro-American entity is revealed in her use of the primordial images to evoke the archetypal images in the unconscious of the Afro-Americans. Through this she has achieved what every great artist strives for. In Jung’s theory:

The creative process so far as we are able to follow it at all, consists in the unconscious activation of an archetypal image and in elaborating and shaping this image into the finished work. By giving it shape, the artist translates it into the language of the present, and so makes it possible for us to find our way back to the deepest spring of life.
Therein lies the social significance of art: it is constantly at work educating the spirit of the age, conjuring up the forms in which the age is most lacking (Jung, C.G.; 1953, Para 129-130).

The consolation that "they are not isolated, helpless beings packed in separate bodies", but each endowed with a vibrant self which is able to release itself from chains and shackles is the nectar and manna for this disillusioned world.

The purpose of this study is to look at Morrison's characters as the carriers of an archaic heritage of -- dispositions, disillusions and the traces of the memory of the agonizing experiences of former generations. This approach is based on the Jungian concept of the personal unconscious which is a part of the racial unconscious which in turn rests on the bedrock of the collective unconscious. This collective unconscious contains the psychological heritage of humanity as a whole. The aftermath of the excruciating experiences of alienation as a result of the inhuman system of slavery has scarred the psyche of the Afro-Americans. These psychological scars transmitted to their successors surface as mental distrophies and different types of neuroses. The freaks, the eccentrics, the wicked, the incompetent and the perverted are representatives of this psychological aberration. The 'burnt-out Black man' Cholly, the masochist Sula, the enigmatic Beloved, the cultural orphan Jadine, the mute Violet and the bourgeois Macon Dead and Ruth Forster are victims of alienation. To
revive and retrieve them from the arid zone of alienation. Ms. Morrison is trying to formulate this magic portent. It is not amnesia or oblivion that she proposes but a ‘re-memory of the disremembered’. Toni Morrison who has a very profound insight into the problems confronting the Afro-Americans firmly believes that a culture cannot be completely severed from its roots like how present cannot be divorced from the past. The ‘ancestor’ is not a myth but a personification of the racial and cultural personalities. The inhuman hauling of the Africans to the coasts of America has caused deep fissures in their psyche. These fissures have led to different types of mental disorders which are the natural reactions to the cultural degeneration. Ms. Morrison while telling the "unspoken and unspeakable" agonies of the Afro-Americans, has stressed on these psychic atrophies beneath the historical facts. This distinguishes her from the other writers, who have dealt with the dilemma of the Afro-Americans. The researcher is of the opinion that no serious writer will leave her characters and readers in disillusionment. Though the topic analyzed is "agony of alienation", the analysis has brought forth a recluse which Toni Morrison has very poignantly presented along with her sagas of pain and perils. The solution offered by Ms. Morrison is a return to the roots or ancestors for a revival of the 'actual selves' which will lead to self-realization and liberation. This has been treated in this study on a universal aspect considering the racial conscience as being united with a collective conscience which encompasses all human beings and which is infinitely old and also has a capacity to extend considerably into
future. On the basis of this an antidote offered to one racial group would be effective for the other racial groups also. The researcher has brought in the wisdom imparted by the Indian scriptures—*The Upanishads* and *The Bhagwad Gita* in which the seers of truth have identified the reasons for human disillusionment. An added emphasis has been given in these texts, to self-realization and self-actualization as a remedy for the maladies tormenting the human society. It is with this notion that Toni Morrison is exhorting for reclaiming the “selves” as she has realized that it is the threshold to self-realization and liberation.

It is to cheer this self-realization which the triumphant characters are proud of that the researcher has used quotations from the Oriental texts. The slokas quoted are the teachings of the Indian seers of truth (*The Upanishads*) and the wisdom imparted by *The Bhagavad Gita* which is considered as a Beacon of Light for all lovers of mankind and its destiny. They analyze the personality of the individual and make him capable of facing dynamically the challenges in life. The African culture is not very familiar to the researcher, but its Oriental affinity is very conspicuous and cannot be overlooked. As parts of an old civilization which spread across the continents there might have been a lot of ‘give and take’ between these cultures. Ms Morrison’s triumphant characters (the culture bearers) very strongly uphold certain ideals emphasized in these Oriental texts. The researcher being more familiar with the Oriental
concept has made use of the slokas from the Oriental texts for supporting the charismatic influence exerted by Morrison's 'torchbearers'.

When the globe is shrinking and the branches of knowledge are joining hands, the researcher feels that there is an immense scope and relevance for this topic. This theme can also be analyzed for psychological proximity of an ethnic group or a psychoanalytical study of the racial problems. An analysis of the sociological or anthropological relevance of the aftermath of alienation also has immense potentials. The theme 'agony of alienation' like the sagas of the alienated souls which Ms. Morrison tells is an open ended one which can widen its scope for further studies. There is also ample scope for analyzing this theme in the post-colonial concept and reading these texts as narratives of the doubly-colonized or doubly-marginalized Black women.

The researcher has limited the use of Sanskrit texts to the chapter which deals with the universal remedy for alienation to avoid digression from the theme. But the relevance of the Oriental classical texts and the concepts of Aristotle and Shakespearean dramatic techniques, even though not explicitly stated, cannot be ignored. The analysis of the defeated and thwarted characters has been made elaborate with the purpose of emphasizing the immediacy of the situation and the necessity of a solution. For only if the havoc of the malady is fully realized will there be a longing for a remedy. The well being of a society is directly linked to the well being of its members. In this age of cycadalic changes
a society that has not overcome its falls and misgivings has very little chance of survival. Ms. Morrison and other Black writers have realized this precarious condition of the Afro-Americans and if they do not put up a tough resistance through self assertion they will get disintegrated in the overwhelming assault of the affluent American society. The disintegration of the society may send the Afro-Americans hurling back to a condition similar to that of the pre-emancipation days.

This study has enabled the investigator to realize that Afro-American literature is not just a collection of slave narratives and angry rebuffs of the Afro-American feminists. There is also an immense possibility in it for acknowledging the richness of the Black tradition, which has withstood 300 years of assault in the ‘White desert’. The researcher also expresses infinite gratitude to the solid wisdom imparted by the Indian culture, which has tempered the sensibilities for looking at literatures of alien lands with a sympathetic attitude.