

From Periphery to Centre

Toni Morrison's Self Affirming Fiction

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The racist and sexist structure of American society compartmentalises its various ethnic groups, denigrates the coloured as inferior and characterises female and male as being located at the margin and the centre respectively. Toni Morrison's novels explore a world of inter-locking system of race, class and sex oppression which is seen as a threat to Black women's psychological survival.

"I WRITE for black women. We are not addressing the men, as some white female writers do. We are not attacking each other, as both black and white men do. Black women writers look at things in an un-forgiving loving way. They are writing to repossess, rename, reown,"¹ Toni Morrison told an interviewer. She belongs to a group of writers in America for whom writing is a liberating tool, a subversive strategy and an artistic mode for self expression. Toni Morrison, Maya Angelou, Alice Walker, Toni Cade Bambara, Gloria Naylor and Paule Marshall are exploring how the intersection of race, class and gender in the American society influences the shaping of Black female life. In the manner of Edward Said who exposed orientalism "as a western style for dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient," these writers are exposing the distortion of Black reality by the dominant group for its vested interest. They refute the hierarchical order shaped by the concepts of centre and periphery and question the ideology on which the order is based. They are simultaneously engaged in the project of constructing an Afrocentric perspective and evolving an African-American poetics. In a spirit of self-affirmation they are accentuating their distinctive features and celebrating the difference from the mainstream.

Exploring the complexity of Black female experience in white America, Morrison in her writing attempts to resolve the contradiction inherent in her African-American identity. Conscious of her own marginalisation within the context of the mainstream she started valuing her peripheral existence because, "it was deeper, more complex, it had a tension, it related to the centre but wasn't the centre."² In her novels Morrison explores the interesting possibilities that her position offers. She told Salman Rushdie in a telephone interview:

I am not sure that word 'negro' means, which is why I write books. What is a black child/woman/friend/mother? What is a black person? It seems to me that there are so many things that inform blackness. One of the modern qualities of being an African-

American is the flux, is the fluidity, the contradictions...³

Her novels are an exploration of the meaning of blackness. What does it mean to be Black in white America? To be a Black woman in a white male hegemonic society? To believe in an indigenous African culture in a world that endorses only Eurocentric culture! To strive for visibility in a society in which blackness signifies invisibility! Moreover, she talks of her writing as 'archaeological explorations', one of her major concerns being the rewriting of Afro-American history from a Black female perspective.

What interest does Morrison's work have for the Indian people? What relevance can her writing, emerging out of a specific political, social, cultural and economic experience, have for us? Considering the post-colonial situation of the Indian people, the African-American experience and the post-colonial Indian experience have many similarities. The tendency of the colonised to imitate the colonisers and to evaluate themselves from the colonisers' view point seems to last much after attaining freedom. The inclination to validate our thoughts and ideas with reference to western ideology reveals a need to reassess ourselves and to reclaim our own heritage and culture.

Besides the commonality of the third world consciousness, there is another factor that brings Morrison's writing close to the Indian experience—the issue of double oppression raised by the dalit women. The problem of double marginalisation caused by the system of caste and gender oppression is the same as the race and gender oppression in America. Like the dalits, the African-Americans are a marginalised group, the 'other' of the dominant group and the women hence the 'other' of the 'other'.

Morrison has said, "My work requires me to think about how free I can be as an African-American woman writer in my genderised, sexualised, wholly racialised world."⁴ Questioning the Eurocentric epistemology that canonises all that is white and marginalises the coloured, her concern is with the African-American presence which

she feels is central to any understanding of American literature.

Born Chloe Anthony Wofford, on February 18, 1931 in Lorain, Ohio, to George and Ramah Willis Wofford, Morrison majored in English at Howard and Cornell University. After finishing school she changed her name to Toni. She started her career as a college teacher and later became an editor at Random House. In 1962, she joined a writers' workshop at Howard where she began a short story about a little girl's desire for blue eyes. This became the theme of her first novel *The Bluest Eye* published in 1970.

The Bluest Eye, which exposes the devastation caused by white-cultural domination in the lives of African-Americans, achieved tremendous success. She went on to write *Sula* (1973), *Song of Solomon* (1977), *Tar Baby* (1981), *Beloved* (1987) and *Jazz* (1992)—soaring in popularity with each novel and by 1992 she was hailed as a writer of national level. Besides these novels she has written a short story about inter-racial relationship, called "Recitatif" and a play, *Dreaming Emmett* based on the tragic lynching of Emmett Till. Her critical essays, entitled "Playing in the Dark" (1992), first presented as a series of lectures at Harvard University, are her path-breaking contribution to the area of Black studies and post-colonialism. The numerous awards she has received for her writing, bear testimony to her genius as a writer. With her powerful narratives set against a historical as well as mythical backdrop, she has captivated the hearts of the common reader as well as scholars of literature. She enjoys the unique distinction of both being a popular writer as well as an outstanding literary figure.

The Nobel prize awarded to her in 1993 is a recognition of her singular contribution in the field of literature, to the cause of the downtrodden. It is tribute to a writer who undaunted by her marginalised position, takes great pride in her Black identity, values her ethnic heritage and inscribes her work with the rich cultural traditions of her community. Though concentrating exclusively on the articulation of African-American experience

in her fiction, she reaches out to the entire world, but more specifically to the third world countries.

Louis Gates Jr, a well-known scholar of African-American studies, reacted to the news of her Nobel prize by saying: "Just two centuries ago the African-American literary tradition was born in slave-narratives. Now our greatest writer has won the Nobel Prize."⁵ This statement draws attention to the African-American literary tradition, which started in the form of slave-narratives and has today attained the stature of high literature. Writers like James Baldwin, Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, Langston Hughes, Alice Walker and Toni Morrison have created a body literature that has distinct identity of its own.

Morrison's achievement makes one recall the earliest slave poet Phyllis Wheatley, whose poetic talent was questioned by the whites who believed that Africans, belonging to a sub-human species, could not possibly participate in a cultural activity like writing poetry. The 18th century Eurocentric thought relegated Black people to a lower rung in the Great Chain of Being. The idea that the African "species of men" were "naturally inferior to the whites" prescribed by thinkers like Hume and Kant went a long way in justifying the enslavement of Africans in America. Southern plantation owners wedded to the pursuit of profit exploited Blacks for their own vested interests. Slaves not only worked tirelessly for their masters but were themselves marketable commodities. Young and healthy Black female slaves, prolific in child bearing, were highly valued for their capacity to "make little niggers for Massa".

To assuage their guilt and to veil their brutal exploitative actions, the dominant group perpetuated a number of negative stereotypes of Blacks during slavery. The long-suffering Christ-like Uncle Tom, the child-like Sambo, the loyal Mammy, the emasculating matriarch and the wild seductress were some such stereotyped images which have endured till today and inflicted immense damage on Black people's psyche. Pained by torturous existence of their slave ancestors and enraged by the denigrating stereotypes, many Blacks considered slavery as a dismal past best forgotten. Perhaps the most humiliating myth was that of the acquiescent slave which has been demolished by the numerous slave-narratives that recount the valiant resistance of slave-narrators to the institutions of slavery and their perilous journey to free states. Frederick Douglas, William Brown, William and Ellen Croft and Harriet Jacobs in their autobiographical narratives articulate their experience of psychological and physical bondage and highlight their longing for freedom.

Toni Morrison in her novels records the triumphs and complexities of Black life from the painful past of slavery to the frustrating

racist present. Her very first novel, *The Bluest Eye* a tragic tale about a young Black girl's longing for blue eyes, examines how the ideologies perpetuated by the institutions controlled by the dominant group influence the construction of Black women's self-image. It was WEB Dubois, the noted Afro-American sociologist, who first drew attention to the deeply rooted 'double consciousness' which afflicts African-American existence. He writes:

...the Negro is a sort of 7th son, born with a veil and gifted with second sight in this American world, a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.⁶

This identity conflict caused by the stigma of race can lead to psychic fragmentation. Robbed of ancestral heritage and cut off from roots for several generations, the Black Americans are often deluded into thinking that the dominant ideology is the only valid ideology. The American media sells a white way of life to its multi-ethnic society. Through golden haired dolls, Mary Jane candies and an enormous range of cosmetics promising white skin and blonde hair, the dominant group sells an ideal of beauty that is beyond the access of the minority coloured groups. Parents inadvertently validate this idea as they fondly present blue-eyed dolls to their impressionable children who internalise white values and despise their racial features. Various Black women writers and sociologists like Maya Angelou, Joyce Ladner and Michelle Wallace have poignantly described their first agonising confrontation with their own blackness.

The mass media, the education system and other cultural agencies over which the dominant group has control are the chief means of conveying ideological messages. These institutions perpetuate the values of the dominant white race and reinforce the stereotypes about the minority group. These stereotypes are socially constructed images that are one-dimensional and distorted. Pecola, the young protagonist of *The Bluest Eye*, has internalised the denigrated image of Black women and the idealised concept of white beauty, hence she believes that the absence of white skin and blue eyes is central to her 'ugliness'. The idea of physical beauty is according to Morrison, "probably the most destructive idea in human history and thought".⁷ It does not occur either to Pecola or to her mother Pauline that the scale they used for measuring beauty was not applicable to the African-Americans because of their different racial identity. Collins has pointed out:

From an Afrocentric perspective, women's beauty is not based solely on physical criteria because mind, spirit, and body are not

conceptualised as separate, oppositional spheres. Instead, all are central in aesthetic assessments of individuals and their creations. Beauty is functional in that it has not meaning independent of the group.⁸

Morrison's novels present a world of interlocking system of race, class and sex oppression, which is seen as a threat to Black women's psychological survival. The racist and sexist structure of American society compartmentalises its various ethnic groups, denigrates the coloured as inferior and characterises female and male as margin and centre, respectively.

BLACKS AS 'OTHER'

The structural device of *The Bluest Eye* deftly exhibits the use of the education system as a site for transmitting ideologies that objectify Blacks as the 'other'. Friere has argued that the education system of the oppressor, though ostensibly humanitarian, is used by the oppressor "to preserve a profitable situation". He points out, "Indeed, the interests of the oppressors lie in changing the consciousness of the oppressed, not the situation which oppresses them... for the more the oppressed can be led to adapt to that situation, the more easily they can be dominated".⁹ The education system should aim at awakening the critical faculty which would lead to the obliteration of race and class distinctions. The oppressed, dehumanised by the oppressive system they live in, must learn to see "themselves as men engaged in the ontological and historical vocation of becoming more fully human".¹⁰

The Bluest Eye begins with the text of a school primer reader:

Here is the house. It is green and white. It has a red door. It is very pretty. Here is the family. Mother, Father, Dick and Jane live in the green-and-white house. They are very happy...¹¹

Young Black students confounded with the poverty, racism and consequent chaos in their lives, learn to associate beauty and order with white Americans and ugliness and disorder with the Blacks. Education thus becomes an obstruction in the process of positive self-construction and effects a submerged consciousness. Morrison is contemptuous of those black women who in the process of liberation have erroneously decided to side with the oppressor. Pecola is depicted firmly entrenched in the ugly reality of her surroundings. The whites either look at her with distaste or simply look through her. Derided by her colour conscious schoolmates for her blackness, despised and ignored by her parents, she develops a precarious sense of selfhood. Ontologically insecure, she is doomed to fragmentation. Her eventual retreat into insanity reveals her pathetic inability to cope with her hostile environment.

Exploring the dynamics of racism and sexism, Morrison does not limit herself to an indictment of the dominant white class

only. She turns her gaze to the problems within the Black community, as she relentlessly exposes intra-racism, male brutalities, female sexual abuse and incest.

The threat of cultural imperialism is a factor that seems to have affected Morrison greatly. She continues her exploration of the consequences of culture-conflict in *Sula* (1973) and *Tar Baby* (1982). "Higher education for blacks is a waste of time at best, truly destructive at worst,"¹² Edelberg has argued. *Sula* and *Jadine*, the protagonists of the two novels, alienate themselves from their community after acquiring higher education. Indeed, *Sula* bemoans the loss of neighbourhood ideas as the close knit small town transforms into "separate houses with separate televisions and separate telephones and less and less dropping by".¹³ However, both *Sula* and *Jadine* consciously reject the values of their community as they set out on a quest for self-definition in terms of their dual African and American identity.

In *Tar Baby* Sorbonne educated *Jadine* attempts to identify herself with the whites but she cannot obliterate the fact that her authenticity lies in her African descent and the westernised image she projects is a false image. The episode of her encounter with an African woman who represents "all loveliness and life and breath in the world" reveals her inner contradictions. She is unnerved by the contempt this woman displays towards her and continues to be haunted by this vision. This "woman's woman that mother/sister/she"¹⁴ embodies the African-American aesthetic for beauty which is not based on physical criteria as explained by Collins. By constructing this aesthetic, Morrison provides a point of resistance to the system of domination that denigrates Blacks and indicates a move towards self-empowerment. This self-confident African woman with a majestic gait, is in fact, Morrison's vision of self-defined and self-empowered Black woman, who while endowed with a self-affirming Afrocentric consciousness, is comfortable in the European environment and becomes the cynosure of all eyes. This woman with tremendous self-esteem offers a powerful challenge to the externally defined images of Black women. She represents hence a definite step towards generating an Afrocentric feminist epistemology.

Female presences abound in *Tar Baby*. The 'night' women and the swamp women collectively threaten the westernised identity of *Jadine*. The town of Eloe steeped in Black folk traditions is set as a contrast to the urban life-style of *Jadine*. But Morrison is not making a simplistic statement like Africa is the source of all good and Europe the source of all evil. She is aware that everything in Black culture is not worth hanging on to. There is a need for discarding certain aspects and enriching it with something from the modern American culture.

There is nevertheless the need to know and accept ancestral heritage. For the materialistic and upwardly mobile African-Americans ancestral connections are of supreme significance. Pilate in *Song of Solomon* (1977), a powerful culture bearer who inspires and guides Milkman in his quest for identity is one of the most unforgettable creations of Morrison. An antithesis of her brother Macon whose sole aim in life is material progress, she represents connectedness with family and with the past. The female community that she has made with her daughter Reba and grand-daughter Hagar is spiritually rich and balances freedom with connection. In her commitment towards the survival and wholeness of her community Pilate embodies a 'womanist'¹⁵ vision.

By reclaiming their past African-Americans are learning to come to terms with that painful period in their history which seemed to them best forgotten. Black history is now being re-interpreted from the perspective of African-Americans as subjects rather than as objects. The emphasis is on the subtexts that lie beneath the historical facts which will unravel the 'interior lives' of the slaves. For delving into the subjectivity of figures in history what more suitable mode than literary fiction!

REVISIONIST HISTORIOGRAPHY

Morrison boldly takes up the project of revisionist historiography in writing *Beloved* (1987). This Pulitzer award winning novel is centred around the factual account of Margaret Garner, the fugitive slave mother who killed her infant daughter to save her from "the seething hell of slavery". The incident is widely reported and discussed in February and March issues of *The Liberator* in 1856. Taking just the broad outline of the event, Morrison takes recourse to imagination as she delves into the inner recesses of the minds of the traumatised slaves in order to discover why they acted as they did. She makes an attempt to examine the construction of Black subjectivity in the context of the heinous institution of slavery.

With a strong desire to discover what tragic stories lay underneath the numerous unmarked graves of Black people in America, Morrison resurrects the dead daughter of Margaret Garner and makes her question the order that necessitated her untimely death. Her project is to signify on those ordinary African-Americans who had resisted the inhuman oppression of slavery in ways which could not be deemed heroic in conventional terms but were heroic nevertheless. She writes into Black history those painful stories which have been bypassed by the controllers of history. Refusing to accept existing traditional history written by the whites as absolute and unquestionable, Morrison questions the paradigms on which historical 'facts' were constructed. And perhaps even more significantly, she deliberately forces her

Black American readers to remember those denigrating experiences of their ancestors from which they were suffering a "national amnesia".

"It was not a story to pass on", she writes at the end of *Beloved*, "so they forgot her like an unpleasant dream during a troubling sleep",¹⁶ thus highlighting the dilemma of telling a story that was not meant to be told. The story that begins in acute pain resists remembering. Moreover it is also the story of the nameless. "Disremembered and unaccounted for, she cannot be lost because no one is looking for her and even if they were, how can they call her if they don't know her name? Although she has claim, she is not claimed".¹⁷ Rewriting the history of those who have been invisible in the existing history, to remember the nameless and the forgotten is a difficult task. Yet they have the claim to be a part of history, they need to be accounted for and this is the task of revisionist historiographer. Morrison's reminder at the end of the novel of silence and amnesia hence is as Marilyn Mobley points out, "an ironic reminder that the process of consciously remembering not only empowers us to tell the difficult stories that must be passed on, but it also empowers us to make meaning of our individual and collective lives as well".¹⁸

Morrison once pointed out that she depended heavily on the 'ruse of memory' for two reasons:

One, because it ignites some process of invention, and two, because I cannot trust the literature and the sociology of other people to help me know the truth of my own cultural sources.¹⁹

Through the school teacher's racist anthropology Morrison condemns the representation of Blacks in the dominant discourse. Sethe is enraged when she hears him instructing his nephews to write down the human and animal characteristics of the slaves. Her decision to run away signifies her rejection of the slave holder's epistemology and an assertion of her own humanity. The stories *Sethe*, *Baby Suggs*, *Nan*, *Ella*, *Paul D*, *Stamp Paid* and others tell contribute to the re-writing of history of slavery from the subject position of African-Americans.

The devastating experiences of slaves during the Middle Passage from Africa to America is another period of history that needs to be written. Cruelly snatched from their homeland and dehumanised aboard the slave-ships, the slaves suddenly and unexpectedly were confronted with the agony of displacement and commodification. Morrison likens this trauma to death and makes *Beloved* in one section speak as a survivor from a slave-ship. With the aid of literary aesthetic, she invokes the entire scene of intense suffering in the Middle Passage.

Emphasising that her *metier* is Black Morrison has said:

In the third world cosmology as I perceive it, reality is not constituted by my literary predecessors in western culture. If my work is to confront a reality unlike that received reality of the west, it must centralise and animate information discredited by the west—discredited not because it is not true or useful or even of some racial value, but because it is information held by discredited people, information dismissed as “lore”, or “gossip” or “magic” or “sentiment”.²⁰

Her novels transport us into a world in which there are flying Black men, blind horse men, swamp women, spirits and even a wild woman living naked in the forest. In *Beloved* no one questions the idea of the ghost co-habiting with Sethe and Denver, because her appearance was not a violation of African religion and philosophy. The mode of magic realism facilitates the presentation of an alternate reality, discredited by the west. By effecting “a poetic transfiguration of the object world” the repressed history of slave women is made intelligible. The device is used with great success by Morrison to critique historiography. Magic realism which is a post-modern device takes an unexpected turn in the hands of Morrison to emerge as a component of African-American poetics, since it becomes the means of creating an African world-view. African cultural traditions thus are integrated into contemporary western literary tradition.

In her novels Morrison relocates conceptual agendas and introduces a new consciousness. The context of her writing arises out of her position which provides her the interesting possibilities of “discredited” knowledge intersecting with Eurocentric epistemology. She has problematised the paradigms of knowledge as conceptualised by the west. The fabulous world she presents in her novels postulates a belief in an alternate reality in which spirits can cohabit with human beings. She blurs the boundaries between past and present, between the spirit world and the material world and by doing so she simultaneously revises history and validates a set of assumptions rejected and trivialised by the west. Her position tends to evoke shocked responses from those readers who have internalised a Eurocentric world-view. “Ghosts! Do you mean to say she actually writes about ghosts,” exclaimed an eminent professor. It is not the validity of ghosts that is the important issue but the respect that is given to a set of assumptions that may be different from one’s own.

Feminist concerns like female self-realisation, mother-daughter relationship, friendship between women and community bonding are central to her writing. While the sisterly bond between Claudia and Frieda in *The Bluest Eye* empowers them to fight racial denigration, Pecola’s alienation from family and community results in her psychic fragmentation. *Sula* explores the friendship

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between Nel and Sula, which nurtures them through girlhood. At the end of the novel, Nel needs to realise the value of her friendship with Sula in order to disperse the gray ball of depression that had enveloped her for years. Presence or absence of supportive communities or women friends, acceptance or rejection of these support systems often determine the lives women characters. In *The Bluest Eye* Pecola's ontological 'insecurity' arises out of the absence of nurturing figures around her. Unlike Claudia, who survives unscathed under the same system, Pecola has no sister to share her problems with. Some of the most lyrical scenes in Morrison's novels are those which reflect joyous harmony between mothers and daughters. Pilate, Reba and Hagar singing together as they go through their daily chores in *Song of Solomon* and Sethe, Denver and Beloved skating with gay abandon in *Beloved* reveal an intuitive closeness that bonds the women together. In both the scenes harmony and joy are conveyed through music and rhythm. These women are weighed down by socio-economic problems but at these **Utopian** junctures they seem to transcend all pain as they unite to create a beautiful world of togetherness. Communities of women in Morrison's novels act as support systems facilitating the survival of Black women in a hostile environment. These communities though replete with differences and complexities represent a specific culture and a specific value system. What is refreshing about them is that they are presented from the subject position of Morrison as an African-American woman. Their terms of assertion are determined by a discourse in which they occupy the centre and not the margin.

Morrison's communities of women, through their act of nurturing, help in restoring an off-centre individual to the centre. Thus Sethe, broken by the disappearance of Beloved, needs Denver, Paul D and the female community to heal her and restore her to wholeness and self-affirmation. With the loving care of Denver, the support of the community women and the concern of Paul D, she has to learn that she was her 'best thing'.

Whereas Alice Walker in her recent novels tends to take a radical Afrocentric feminist position, Morrison while advocating African cultural values is also conscious of the complexity of her situation as African and American and therefore explores the dynamics of culture conflict. The strong pull towards the dominant culture's commercial values is a major theme of *Tar Baby*. However, Morrison presents no viable alternative to the urban quest for upward mobility. The ending of the novel depicting Son running "lickety split" indicates his disentanglement from the *Tar Baby* but the composition of his briar patch is not revealed. Likewise, Jadine's destiny remains hidden.

The open endedness of her novels like *Tar Baby* and *Song of Solomon* save her from falling into the trap of moralising or showing idealistic directions, and at the same time leaves the script open for the reader to make his own conclusions.

Questioning the compatibility of African-American self-expression and standard English, Morrison uses Black English for effective race representation. The language had to be true to her experience. To project a world-view that is distinct from the mainstream, she often takes recourse to black dialect. Black folk-speech used by her resonates with experience that is specifically Afro-American. In her hands language becomes a powerful tool in the construction of Black female identity. With the 'etymology of Africanism' she transcends the linguistic barrier arising out of gender and race difference. Hence expressions like "what you know good?", "This here Sethe..." "Don't eat no whites of eggs" place the text in a space that is different from the mainstream American writing. Language has power, and Morrison uses this power to her advantage.

The richness of *Song of Solomon*, *Beloved* and *Jazz* lies in the plurality of stories which together provide strength to the major issues incorporated in the novels. Anticipating a participatory relationship, Morrison endows her work with an oral quality. Hers is a conscious enterprise to sustain and evoke oral traditions which are a part of her cultural heritage. The text hence is not just a written product but a performance act which forcibly elicits response from the reader. Morrison writes into her narratives the "places and spaces so that the reader can participate". The oral mode she uses embodies a dialogic form inviting the reader to respond, to question and sometimes even to add his own script. In *Jazz* one wonders about the mysterious wild woman who was rescued by Golden Gray in a pregnant condition. After delivering the child, whom she refuses to nurse, she disappears again into the woods. Does she represent the agonised traumatised black woman who because of her inhuman degradations has become so psychologically fragmented that she has lost touch with reality? There is also the mysterious narrator of the novel. Is it the voice of the book? Or is it a disembodied griot articulating Black experience after slavery, the experience of moving to the cities which held out infinite possibilities?

Morrison evolves an African-American poetics by integrating oral tradition into the written. She thereby also preserves African oral literary and historical heritage. It is not without significance that Morrison's critique of historiography is presented through "speakerly texts".²¹ The performative aspect of oral narration, which is as crucial as the story-telling itself, is built in through scenes like Baby Suggs' sermon at the clearing or the scene that recalls the murder of Beloved.

Sethe's heart-rendering cry "No, No, Nono, Nonono" typographically evokes orality. One can almost hear the rising crescendo of 'No' as she pathetically tries to assert her agency over her children.

Morrison's tragic stories display the complex dimensions in which Black women's identity is structured and the way they negotiated or subverted their problematic position. She boldly subverts the traditional literary comfort of the reader who relies on Eurocentric literary tradition as she generates an African-American poetics from her specific socio-cultural milieu. Her writing, because of its orality, plurality of stories and the fusion of esoteric and material comes very close to the Indian Literary tradition. Morrison's work hence has an immense appeal to the Indian consciousness.

Notes

- 1 Nellie McKay, *Critical Essays on Tom Morrison*, G K Hall and Co, Boston, Massachusetts, 1988, p 46.
- 2 Salman Rushdie, 'An Interview with Toni Morrison', *Brick*, No 44, Summer 1992, p 36
- 3 Ibid, p 39
- 4 Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark Whiteness and Literary Imagination*, Picador, 1992.
- 5 William Grimes, 'Nobel Prize for Lit Awarded to Toni Morrison', *International Herald Tribune*, 10-8-1993, p 1.
- 6 W E B Bois, *Dark Water, Voices from Within the Veil*, AM S Press, New York, 1969, p 45
- 7 Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*, Pocket Books, New York, 1972.
- 8 Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*, Unwin Hyman, Boston, 1990, p 89.
- 9 Paulo Frierc, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Pelican Books, England, 1972, p 47.
- 10 Ibid, p 41.
- 11 *The Bluest Eye*, p 7.
- 12 Cynthia Edelberg, 'Morrison's Voice: Formal Education. The Work Ethic and The Bible', *American Literature*, 58:2, p 219
- 13 Toni Morrison, *Sula*, New American Library, New York, 1982 edition, p 166
- 14 Toni Morrison, *Tar Baby*, Triad-Granada, Great Britain, 1982, p 42.
- 15 Alice Walker has used the term 'womanism' in place of 'feminism' to mark out a distinct Black feminist perspective which highlights the solidarity of the Black community, Womanist consciousness incorporates racial, sexual, economic and cultural considerations.
- 16 Toni Morrison, *Beloved*, Alfred Knop, New York, 1987, p 275.
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 Marilyn Mobley, 'A Different Remembering: Memory, History, and Meaning in Beloved', *Toni Morrison* edited by Louis Gates and Appah, p 363.
- 19 Toni Morrison, 'Memory, Creation and Writing', *Thought*, 59:235, p 386.
- 20 Ibid, p 388.
- 21 Louis Gates characterises those texts as "speakerly texts" the rhetorical strategy of which is designed to represent an oral literary tradition.