

Decoding the Construction of Identity and Struggle for Self-Assertion in Toni Morrison and Selected Indian Authors

Madhuri Goswami

Abstract—The matrix of power establishes the hegemonic dominance and supremacy of one group through exercising repression and relegation upon the other. However, the injustice done to any race, ethnicity or caste has instigated the protest and resistance through various modes- social campaigns, political movements, literary expression and so on. Consequently, the search for identity, the means of claiming it and strive for recognition have evolved as the persistent phenomena all through the world. In the discourse of protest and minority literature, these two discourses- African American and Indian Dalit- surprisingly, share wrath and anger, hope and aspiration, and quest for identity and struggle for self-assertion. African American and Indian Dalit are two geographically and culturally apart communities that stand together on a single platform. This paper has sought to comprehend the form and investigate the formation of identity in general and in the literary work of Toni Morrison and Indian *Dalit* writing, particularly i.e. Black identity and Dalit identity. The study has speculated two types of identity namely, individual, or self and social or collective identity in the literary province of this marginalized literature. Morrison's work outsources that self-identity is not merely a reflection of an inner essence; it is constructed through social circumstances and relations. Likewise, Dalit writings too have a fair record of the discovery of self-hood and formation of identity which connects to the realization of self-assertion and worthiness of their culture among Dalit writers. Bama, Pawar, Limbale, Pawde, and Kamble investigate their true self concealed amid societal alienation. The study has found that the struggle for recognition is, in fact, the striving to become the definer, instead of just being defined; and, this striving eventually, leads to the introspection among them. To conclude, Morrison as well as Indian marginalized authors, despite being set quite distant, communicate the relation between individual and community in the context of self-consciousness, self-identification, and (self) introspection. This research opens a scope for further research to find out similar phenomena and trace an analogy in other world literature.

Keywords—Identity, introspection, self-access, struggle for recognition.

I. INTRODUCTION

Power along with the means to earn and perpetuate it has been a persistent phenomenon right from the inception of human society on this planet. Equally persistent have been the various manners of resisting and defying it. With the growth of culture and civilization, the struggle for and against power has assumed cultural, political, religious, economic, and artistic forms shaping human history. The making of power, the modes of earning it and the means of

resisting it are more or less uniform all through the world. Seeking justice, which is one of the reasons behind resistance to 'power', more or less puts on the same platform the communities of the world at the receiving end of the victimization unleashed by 'power'. 'Seeking justice', therefore, is the common ideological 'forte' of the communities of victims. One of the modes of redemption, what these oppressed communities use, is vocalizing their suppressed soul, panic-stricken heart, and resistant mind through literary expression espoused by social and political movements, and rejuvenation of culture.

Blacks in America and Dalits in India are two distinct identities of two countries celebrating democracy as the guiding principle for political, economic, social, legal and cultural sphere of life. However, there exists a 'domestic colonialism' which demarks the Blacks and Dalits as 'Others' in their own countries. Thus, the issues of marginalization, subjugation, oppression, and exploitation connect these two. The trade of slavery and practice of untouchability are two perennial connecting elements in the history of these two geographically distant and culturally different identities respectively, African American and Dalit. An effort to make historic suffering, humiliation and the traumatic experience of being 'ground down' and 'broken'—central to the identity of Dalit and African American is also palpable in the evolution of the literatures written by the African American and Dalit writers. The plight of Blacks and Dalits are culturally divergent, yet same in essence and attitude; the threads of race and caste weave the structure of the respective societies and deform the identities of the *others* or marginalized along the border of gender and class.

The reading of their history(ies) informs that both Blacks and Dalits have been marginalized and denied dignified status in their respective societies. Blacks confronted slavery in America as they were brought to the USA to work as slaves in a situation of oppression. Dalits have been weighed upon by untouchability despite being native in their own country. In both cases, a person's ancestry and appearance manipulated his/her position in society. People are judged solely on external biological aspects of race and (by) birth in a particular segment of the social structure. Moreover, these have determined their destiny and life. Such an oppressive structure of society not only hinders their economic growth but also leaves them in emotional and psychological trauma. In both cases, one group is denied access to the resources of society and places them as 'others'. The intimidating and brutal attitude of 'the other' is incorporated into each facet

Dr Madhuri Goswami is with the Department of English of Government Postgraduate College, Chomu, (303702), Jaipur Rajasthan, India (phone: +919828414525; e-mail: madhurigoswami@gmail.com).

of the life of Blacks and Dalits. This attitude results in the mistreatment, oppression, and abuse of women by the men in their respective societies.

The narration of the slave hood and untouchability by Toni Morrison, the African American author, and Indian Dalit writers, respectively, speak of dejection, desolation, and exploitation. Morrison depicts the corrosive effects of slavery, and racial segregation in her work. She does not merely depict the doleful status of Blacks and the pain of being Black but rather portrays striving for self-affirmation and this portrayal, according to Cornel West, is “for identity, meaning, and self-worth” [1]. The element of self-evaluation and criticism in Morrison’s as well as Dalit writings runs along the construction or discovery of identities.

The study has, extensively, analyzed Toni Morrison’s literary corpus and selected Indian Dalit writings to perceive and comprehend the construction of identity amid the trauma of slavery and repression inflicted by unjust social oppression in the marginalized section of society. It has taken up the texts by prominent Indian Dalit authors such as Bama, Sharan Kumar Limbale, Kumud Pawde, and Baby Kamble into consideration. To comprehend the form and formation of the identity and its types, the study has focused on the characters portrayed by Morrison and Indian authors. These protagonists and characters emerged from real life, have no access to a dignified life, and have been relegated to the fringes of existence. Their experience of crippled identity has been generated by race, class, and gender discrimination, and this current of oppression exercise corporeal as well as psychological effect on the victims in the form of identity crisis and emotional turmoil in both the characters of Toni Morrison and Dalit writers.

II. INTROSPECTING IDENTITY

In order to understand how slavery and the caste discrimination of Black Americans and Dalits respectively influence their sense of identity and self, it should be known what ‘identity’ means. In general, the concept of identity refers to personal characteristics or attributes that are peculiarly relative to an individual. Kelman defines identity as “the enduring aspects of a person’s definition of her or himself...” [2]. Deng defines identity as “the way individuals and groups define themselves and are defined by others on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, language, and culture” [3].

Basically, the term ‘identity’ characterizes an individual person in distinguishing his or her characteristics from the characteristics of other people. Identity formation starts early in life and depends on cultural demands and personal capacity. In this process, two types of identity are speculated- social or community identity and self or individual identity. Social identity is a self-definition that helps to evaluate oneself. Baron et al. define it as, “A person’s definition of who he or she is, including personal attributes and attributes shared with others, such as gender and race” [4]. Whereas self-identity or self-concept is

basically the result of what we have learned from other people. It can be said in the words of Baron et al. that, “one’s self-identity is a basic schema consisting of an organized collection of beliefs and attitudes about oneself” [4].

III. IDENTITY AND SELF REFLECTION IN TONI MORRISON

Morrison creates a wonderful string of characters that, consciously or subconsciously, embellish themselves with self-awareness and individuality/subjectivity punctuated with collective identity. Although White racist approach affected the identity of all Black people, Black women, however, had to face its biting and cruel torments more. Cornel West traces the reason of Black women’s trauma in Morrison’s novels as connected with the effect of “the suppression of Black race... reinforces the black obsession with the psychic scars, ontological wounds, and existential bruises” [5]. West finds these ‘obsessions’ activates the agency for ‘self-making’, ‘self-inventing’ [5] or discovery of self which are core components of the “human struggle for black space (home), black place (roots), and black face (name)” [6]. Making Blacks believe that their black bodies are ugly [1], racism aimed first and foremost at Black women. Placed at the lowest rung of Black society, Black women became the subject of sexual abuse by White oppressors. Grewal gives the view that Toni Morrison indeed delineates the harsh reality of the doleful situation of women being the “subjects of rape, enforced childbirth, and natal alienation from their children” [7].

IV. INDIVIDUAL IDENTITY IN MORRISON’S FICTION

Morrison’s novel *Beloved* focuses on the individual aspect of the spiritual quest for self-valuation. Sethe, the protagonist and her daughter, Denver are important characters in the novel. Morrison delineates the struggle for self-affirmation through these characters and this struggle is not only against the slavery and racial approach of Whites but also against the Black community as it rejects Sethe for her act of murdering her baby. The formulation of Sethe’s and Denver’s identity concretizes with the arrival of Beloved, the ghost. The appearance of the ghost reminds Sethe of her past. In fact, she re-experiences the pangs of slavery. For Denver, it is a realization of her responsibility to her family, and it brings forth her subsequent transformation from being a girl to becoming a woman. Baby Suggs is another important character who represents the communal struggle for self-redefinition. Thus, the novel accentuates both individual quest and collective search for identity. It investigates the ways of self-affirmation; the institution of slavery has marred the ‘self’. Therefore, the characters of the novel are in quest of self-recognition which is an impetus traced back to the terrifying memory of past experiences:

“Worse than that-far worse-was what Baby Suggs

died of what Ella knew, what stamp saw, what made Paul D tremble. That anybody White could take your whole self for anything that came to mind. Not just work, kill or main but dirty you. Dirty you so had you couldn't like yourself anymore. Dirty you so bad you forget who you were and couldn't think it up." [8].

Morrison's Sethe, in *Beloved*, lacks self-valuation and needs to assert her individuality to continue her existence. It is quite later that she overcomes the danger of losing self-recognition, when Paul D stimulates her awareness of a true "self". During a conversation Paul D affirms: "You your best thing, Sethe. You are." [8] Sethe's subsequent reply: "Me? Me?" though timid, is nevertheless one step further to affirming her individual identity. This realization by Sethe finds an affinity to Baby Suggs' "maturing from the phase of not knowing what she looked like and not being curious" to the moment of "suddenly seeing her [Baby Suggs] hands and thinking with clarity: 'These hands belong to me. These my hands'" [8]. Through *Beloved*, Morrison portrays the successful and bodacious act of tracing the Black identity in times of slavery when such a thing was quite alien to a Black person. Through the striving for self-definition of Sethe and Denver emerges the collective self-recognition. Sethe stands on behalf of those Black Women who have strived for a sense of self amid the traumatic experience of being Black women.

Morrison's *Sula* narrates the life of Sula Peace and Nel Wrights from childhood to adulthood and illustrates the formation of women's identities. Sula and Nel represent two different identities. While Nel is presented as unimaginative and conservative, Sula is given an image of a person void of any sense of responsibility to herself and to the community. The reader travels with both women as Morrison asks her readers to decide for themselves which women has successfully found her 'self'. She introspects various issues such as quest for self, cultural identity, the dynamics of Black women's life, their familial and societal oppression and most importantly the course of actions of Blacks in dealing with these issues. She highlights the need to "choose whether to exist in the shadows, submerging their identities, or to fight back to prove that they have a self-worth respecting" [9].

Morrison's *Song of Solomon* addresses the question of self and identity of Black women within Black community. In this novel, Morrison has delineated the characters of Pilate, Hagar, Ruth and Lena. Pilate is an exemplary character of Black woman who denies being a victim of male or societal oppression and sustains a strong individual identity. The action of wearing her name in her ear by Pilate is a symbolic act of cherishing her identity. Likewise, she "had taken a rock from every state she had lived in—because she *had* lived there" [10]. This act indicates a sense of belonging of Pilate to her Black culture and land. Pilate accepts, though later, her mysterious biological fact of missing navel, "After a while she stopped worrying about her stomach and stopped trying to hide it...Then she tacked the wanted of live and what was valuable to her" [10]. She

has a sense of self-reflection through her songs and realizes her own worth, repudiating servitude designed for Black women by racially structured society. Ruth and Hagar, meagerly, share Pilate's strength to some extent. Ruth feels for herself a "small woman...pressed small" by living conditions [10]. Throughout her life, her marriage acts like a restrain or repression: "(she) began her days stunned into stillness by her husband's contempt and ended them wholly animated by it" [10]. Quite contrary to Pilate, Ruth has not any realization of self-identity and no communication with self rather she assimilates it into her husband and son. Hagar also shares this mute identity with Ruth leading to self-destruction. Hagar, Ruth, and Lena face the patriarchal approach from their father, who "mangle(s) their grace, wit, and self-esteem" [10]. Lena, somehow, amid these muffled and hushed identities, is able to recover her individuality. She contends the repression and patriarchal domination in a heated argument with her brother, "You've been laughing at us all your life...Mama. Me using us, ordering us, and judging us...Where do you get the right to decide our lives?...I'll tell you where...Now get out of my room" [10].

As the novel progresses, Morrison develops Lena's character embellished with self-consciousness or awareness. She emerges as a strong, self-aware individual demanding autonomy. Lena and Pilate carry a message for African American woman to restore their individual identity amid oppression. Pilate, as a singer both literally and symbolically, expresses the outcome of Morrison's examination of her society in the form of a cautionary tale to empower the collective cultural identity of Blacks. As Alice Walker writes in *Meridian*, "It is the song of people, transformed by the experience of each generation, that holds them together" [10]. In the novel *Love*, Romen efforts constantly to seek his genuine self and finds, "What made him do it? Or rather, who? . . . But he knew who it was. It was the real Romen who had sabotaged the newly chiseled one" [11].

In *Tar Baby* a young Black woman, Jadine Childs has light skin colour which alienates her from Black culture. Although she gets good exposure and has been educated at the Sorbonne in Paris, she is in search of the self. Jadine is perplexed between the Black and White worlds. She does not know how to be "just me" and quests, for "me" in her relationship with Son [12].

V. COLLECTIVE OR SOCIAL IDENTITY IN TONI MORRISON

The importance of an individual relationship with social reality/social circumstances/ community can be traced from the view of cultural ideologies. Examining the social awakening of the self with outer selves is a significant step to understanding how these writers, Morrison as well as Dalits, communicate the relation between individual and community in the context of self-consciousness, self-examination, and self-identification. Stephen Butterfield's view is very pertinent here, "The self belongs to the people, and the people find a voice in the self" [13]. Throughout her

fiction, Morrison emphasizes that the construction of individual identity is inseparable from the community. Her work outsources that self-identity is not just a reflection of an inner essence rather it is constructed through social circumstances and relations. In her novels, the characters, generally, discover themselves who are close to the community for example Son in *Tar Baby*, Milkman Dead in *Song of Soloman*, and Claudia in *The Bluest Eye*. Whereas, the characters who fail to internalize community or reject it, confront tragedy. Pauline Breedlove in *The Bluest Eye* and Sula in *Sula* are such examples. Morrison herself has described the community as “both a support system and a hammer at the same time” [14].

When Claudia, the narrator, uses the term “we” in *The Bluest Eye*, she is not just referring to herself and her sister, Frieda. Rather, she is connecting herself to her community. Milkman Dead’s character italicizes or gives emphasis on the community’s influence on creating an individual character. The sense of discovering self comes to Milkman Dead as he gets to know the legend of his great grandfather, Soloman, who could fly, and this self is realized through the selves of his African American community only. Through this relationship between individual and community, Morrison dissects not only individuals in their journey of self-realization and self-examination, but she evaluates and introspects her Black community as well. Sometimes, the community fails the main characters as Pecola in *The Bluest Eye* and Sula in *Sula*; sometimes help to find their roots as Milkman in *Song of Soloman*; sometimes initially betrays the individual and later rescue as Sethe in *Beloved*. Morrison portrays Black community with dissecting pen which writes the voyage of self-exploration and self-introspection of the characters.

Thus, Morrison’s writing is not a document to lament or exaggerate the desolation of the past or haunting memories of slavery, rather, it efforts to bring recognition to self be it individual or collective through seeking relief to “the broken heartstrings” [8]; it strives to portray the process of the individual and collective battle against the mortifying ramifications of racial apartheid. This battle is in fact the struggle for self-acceptance which also implies the effort to become the definer or the describer instead of just being the defined or the described. The idea of self-valuation is reflected through the characters of Baby Suggs, Paul D and Sethe who find the definition of freedom, which becomes a practical instrument to eliminate the suffering caused by repression [6].

VI. INDIVIDUAL IDENTITY IN INDIAN DALIT WRITING

Like Morrison, the Dalit writers address all forms of subjugation and oppression, be it caste system-untouchability, patriarchy- gender discrimination, or subalternity in general in order to empower their own self or identity. In the case of Dalits, the issue of identity has been negated by ‘othering’, caste-based hierarchy, and untouchability. However, Dalit women’s case is all the more

problematic as the kind of oppression faced by them is multilayered and complex. The layers of being low caste and being a woman have suppressed their self-identity and this agonizing suppression finds a representation in Dalit writings particularly in Dalit women’s writings in the form of an act of assertion for a self which is unburdened.

Sharan Kumar Limbale, one of the prominent Indian Dalit writers, explores his identity of being *aakarmashi* i.e. outcaste or half-caste which has been attributed to him by the social system. While examining this unjustified social system, Limbale searches for his self and finds it crushed, trampled, and injured in the hands of exploiting and humiliating the community. He describes the pathetic condition of caste-based oppression and struggles of a *Mahar* caste person in the state of Maharashtra. Limbale acknowledges it in his work, “High caste people look upon my community as untouchable, while my own community humiliated me calling ‘*akkarmashi*’. This humiliation was like being stabbed over and over again” [15]. Limbale, in *The Outcaste*, highlights how the identity of women fades away amid these too-hard realities to exist and in the patriarchal setup and mindset of society. Through narrating the account of their exploited existence, Limbale asserts the need to erase the faded identity marking their life with self-respect, self-dignity, and self-assertion.

Bama, writing as an act of empowerment, delineates the individual as well as a community struggle to build up their identity and explore their own culture as she admits, “My book talks about the condition of Dalit women and Dalit culture...the need to get self-confidence, to own up to their identity and be proud of their own culture” [16]. Holmstrom defines the main argument of the book as “the narrator’s spiritual development both through the nurturing of her belief as a Catholic, and her gradual realization of herself as a Dalit” [17]. This formulation of individual identity and the process of self-discovery move on to the collective struggle for self-making, and self-identity as Bama points out the gradually growing awareness among Dalits of their exploitation. Bama herself describes *Karukku* in an interview as ‘the depiction of a collective trauma’ of her community. It investigates the ways of self-affirmation by depicting a very powerful sense of the self and the community as Dalit. This realization rejects the long-established cultural hegemony of caste structure and puts forth the reconstruction of the self in the form of the process of self-making. Prasad confirms this process of construction of self as he analyzes the representation of Dalit women in literature, “The female characters in Dalit Literature are dynamic and not static...(They) end the journey of deep darkness and behold dreams of sunrise...They fight for truth and for themselves. They revolt to protect their self-respect...The revolt of Dalit women is not person-centered but society-centered...” [17]. Labeled as memoir, *Aaydan* by Urmila Pawar narrates the tale of the transformation and growth of a woman to establish her individual identity in society. The word ‘*Aaydan*’ means weaving of cane baskets and Pawar herself reveals the importance of this activity by *Mahar* community to which she belongs and establishes the

connection between this activity and self-making and self-realization, "My mother used to weave Aaydan and I was writing this book, both were activities of creation of thought and practical reality of life" [18]. Her work records a Dalit woman's discovery of selfhood and claim of identity.

Kumud Pawde takes up her steps to the journey of her enlightenment through education. She proceeds on this journey of discovery of self-struggling against caste barriers and Dalit patriarchy. She receives the treatment of being 'other' and marginalized in mainstream society. Along with this, her writing is about the reconstruction of the self after the traumatic event as in other Dalit writings. Pawde narrates an incident outraging her "self-respect" [19]. She is dreadfully scolded for being present at the thread ceremony and enchanted by the chanting of Sanskrit. This insult brings several thoughts to her mind, "Why should that woman behave so badly with me?...Is Sanskrit very difficult? Can't we learn it?" [20]. These experiences make her "as firm as a rock" [20]. Prasad confirms this process of construction of self as he analyzes the representation of Dalit women in literature, "The female characters in Dalit Literature are dynamic and not static...(They) end the journey of deep darkness and behold dreams of sunrise...They fight for truth and for themselves. They revolt to protect their self-respect...The revolt of Dalit women is not person-centered but society-centered..." [21].

VII. COLLECTIVE IDENTITY IN INDIAN DALIT WRITING

Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke*, Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life: A Dalit Woman's Memoirs*, Bama's *Karukku* and Kumud Pawde's *The Story of My 'Sanskrit'* are retrospective narratives showing their journeys from the condition of victims to the realization of personal autonomy or even creativity. However, the depiction of the narrators' experiences becomes the mouthpiece of the community, and the depiction of the self-connects to the image of his/her community. In these texts, the protagonist/narrator moves back and forth between the individual 'I' and collective 'We' as in *Joothan* by Valmiki, *Akkarmashi* by Limbale, *Antasphot* by Kumud Pawde, and *The Prisons We Broke* by Baby Kamble. *Joothan*, originally written in Hindi, was first published in 1997. The title has connotations of 'polluted' attached to it. *Akkarmashi*, published in 1984, carries the meaning of being an outcast or excluded. 'Antasphot' word literally means outburst of inner pain.

The focus of Urmila Pawar's work is on the self as she talks about her personal life and her life experiences. Nevertheless, the community always becomes imminent in her autobiography as well as in her fiction. She admits, "What the writer writes about is a social reality and not his/her individual life" [18]. She undergoes adverse circumstances and suffers perpetually because of her caste. The touching experiences of the deprived of identity portray the collective trauma of Marathi Dalit women of her time yet can be applied to Dalit women in general. Bama labels her work *Karukku* as the depiction of a collective trauma of

her community. The narrative focuses on three essential forces that cut across and sear the narrator's life, namely: caste, gender, and religion [22]. It broadcasts the reality of the social ills confronted by a Dalit woman and the double discrimination which makes them victims of intra-casteism and singles Dalit women out for suppression, caste, untouchability and gender inequality.

Baby Kamble very explicitly pronounces, "The suffering of my people became my own suffering. Their experiences became mine. So I really find it difficult to think of myself outside of my community" [23]. In Sharan Kumar Limbale also, the individual identity gets assimilated into the larger social milieu. In *The Outcast*, the narrator, his mother, grandmother, and sisters do struggle for their distinct identities as human beings. They have to face persistent torture in the form of being considered a privileged space for all types of control and oppression to exercise on. Social and cultural systems amalgamate to crush their psyche (existence), and in the case of women their minds, body, and soul. The title of his work, *The Outcaste*, refers to a person who is void of any identity be it, individual or collective. Limbale is sought after to find out his identity in the mainstream as well as in his subaltern community.

These narratives sketch detailed annals of daily life, everyday routine, incidents, traditions, conventions and beliefs of the communities and social practices by constantly shuffling between 'I' and 'We'. The documentation of the instances of personal ordeal and communal resistance generates or provokes self-exploration, self-analysis, and quest for self. Yet this self can't be kept excluded from the whole or community. And this experience is used to "create testimonies of caste-based oppression, anti-caste struggles and resistance" [24]. In accordance with Cornel West's observation, Dalit writings like Morrison's give shape to the process of individual and collective struggle against the betraying effects of untouchability and slavery.

VIII. INTERDEPENDENCE OF INDIVIDUAL AND COMMUNITY

The underlying thread which connects Indian Dalit writings and Morrison's work is that the narrators consider their suffering as the suffering of their people. Thus, their sufferings are always related to "self" and "selves". These writers converted their personal sufferings into words. Their personal experiences of poverty, hunger and discrimination are obtrusively/undesirably prominent experiences that form the core of their writings. What Stephen Butterfield writes in *Black Autobiography in America* can be applied to the Indian Dalit writings: "The 'self' of black autobiography...is not an individual with a private career...The self is conceived as a member of an oppressed social group with ties and responsibilities to the other members" [13]. In the words of Baby Kamble who views 'self' as identifying with the community, "The suffering of my community has always been more important than my own individual suffering. I have identified myself completely with my people and therefore, *Jina Amucha* (*The*

Prisons We Broke) was the autobiography of my own community” [25].

Dalit writing when explored from the point of view of the relation between self and community establishes an interactive connection between these two. In *The Outcaste*, Sharan Kumar Limbale transposes between the individual (I) and the community (We) depicting the pangs faced by him. In an interview, Limbale says, “I want to write about my pain and pangs. I want to write about the suffering of my community...I am writing for a social cause” [26]. This identification of self with community leads to the individual to self-conscious approach from a voiceless and passive attitude. And Limbale, here, passes through the stage of self-identification and further moves to self-affirmation. As Limbale adds, further, “My autobiography is a statement of my war against injustice” [26].

The striving to become the definer instead of just being the defined, like Black writing, exists in Indian Dalit writings too. The portrayal of Dalit experiences, in Dalit narratives, is evidential of the adverse situation (bestowed in a greater degree of self-awareness). Their voyage is doleful, the encounters are full of agony and the experiences reveal pathos. Nevertheless, this traumatic experience fetches a process of recovery by provoking the reconstruction of the crushed self, and the process of self-exploration, recognition, and strengthening is seen in these writings as a necessary ordeal/trial. Dalit writers have fought and survived through lived experiences of hardships and sufferings and this act of writing autobiographical narratives is not a reminiscent act rather, it “is a privileged means of repair” [27], a means to recover, and a way to heal the bruised self. Bama in *Karukku*, Urmila Pawar in *The Weave of My Life*, Baby Kamble in *The Prisons We Broke*, Limbale in *The Outcaste*, and Gunasekaran in *The Scar* speaks of their traumatic individual experience, And this individual experience does not stand in seclusion but connects to the community.

IX. SELF CRITIQUE OR (SELF) INTROSPECTION IN MORRISON

Going back to the basics of creative writing, the idea that it grows from lived and conceived experiences still holds ground in spite of all the conceptual upheavals created by structural and post-structural theory. Again, going back to the basics, so much of writing- creative or otherwise, grow from extroverted thinking and introverted introspection. In some ways, these basics serve well to define and explain the works of social protest like those of Toni Morrison in the US and Dalit writers in India. Introspection, thus, constitutes a strong thematic component in their writings. The issues of self-identity and reflection on community lurk throughout Morrison’s work, whether fiction or non-fiction. The search for true identity recurs as the main theme in her fiction like *The Bluest Eye*, *Beloved*, *Sula*, and *Tar Baby* and as a chief idea in her non-fiction like ‘Playing in the Dark’ and ‘Remember: The Journey to School Integration’. This search for true identity serves as a channel for self-consciousness.

Self-consciousness as a tendency to introspect and examine one’s inner self and feelings is imprinted in Morrison’s several novels. This kind of self-consciousness leads to self-monitoring and self-introspection. Toni Morrison, as a writer or thinker, does not hold Whites the sole responsible for the plight of Blacks, rather she looks into Blacks and introspects her own community. Dalit writings too have a fair record of the discovery of self-hood and formation of identity which has been suppressed for a long time. This discovery reaches to the realization of self-respect and worthiness of their culture among Dalit writers. Bama, Pawar, Limbale, Valmiki, Pawde, Shanta Roa, Kamble, and Sivakami ransack and scour their true self concealed amid societal alienation.

Morrison’s work and Dalit writings stress the need for self-discovery and self-identity leading to self-actualization or analysis. But at the stage of self-actualization, Morrison deviates or rather proceeds further to self-introspection of her own community. The element of self-consciousness underlines both the literatures as Dalits writings redefine the Dalithood with the aim of producing self-consciousness likewise Morrison’s work. However, in Morrison, self-consciousness is a tendency that goes beyond the issues of race and gender introspecting and examining Black individual’s inner self and Black community’s form as exemplified through her fiction from *The Bluest Eye* to *Home* and her non-fiction.

X.CONCLUSION

To conclude, the continued agony and pain have generated a conscious thought of self-realization, self-assertion and self-consciousness leading to self-introspection among both discourses. In both literature, introspection, and self-criticism come only after the spread of education. The silent being of a Dalit resists the state of being crushed and discovers his/her own identity and self-esteem. And this discovery of self-identity leads to self-realization in the autobiographical narratives by Dalit writers as well as fiction by Morrison. At the stage of self-realization, Dalit writers and Toni Morrison move further to the dissection or introspection of self and their community. Bama, Kamble, Pawar, Pawde, Limbale, and many Dalit writers have examined their community and indicated the problems like internal clashes, superstitions, illiteracy, and lack of awareness with the purpose to demolish them. Morrison also unveils and critiques the surrender of Blacks to the feeling of inferiority. She does not merely depict the relationship between Whites and Blacks but examines the Black society or community which leads to analyzing and introspecting their ‘self’. It adds timeless significance and universal charm to her work as it seeks to redefine all human-to-human relations. Unlike Dalit writers, she does not label the White community solely responsible for the devastating condition of her own community. Rather her artistic vision pierces the Black community and reveals the drawbacks of it and somehow finds Black people also responsible for their devastating condition. In her works,

Morrison raises the scope of consciousness which ranges beyond race/caste/class or gender to all human-to-human relations.

II.1. 1-3. (Apr. 2011): Web. 05 Aug. 2013. /http://www.the-criterion.com/V2/n1/Siva.pdf/
[27] Becker, G. *Disrupted Lives: How people create meaning in a chaotic world*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997, pp.166.

REFERENCES

- [1] West, Cornel. *Race Matters*, New York: Vintage Books, 2001, pp. 13-122.
- [2] Kelman, Herbert C. "The Place of Ethnic Identity in the Development of Personal Identity: A Challenge for the Jewish Family." *Coping with Life and Death: Jewish Families in the Twentieth Century*. Ed. Peter Y. Medding. Vol. XIV. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, pp. 3-26.
- [3] Deng, Francis M. *War of Visions: Conflict of Identities in the Sudan*. Washington, DC: Brookings. 1995.
- [4] Baron, Robert A., Donn Erwin Byrne, and Nyla R. Branscombe. *Social Psychology*, Pearson/Allyn & Bacon: Pennsylvania State University, 2006, pp. 161-162.
- [5] Gates, Henry Louis, Jr., and Cornel West. *The Future of the Race*. New York: Vintage. 1997, pp. 81-92.
- [6] Kella, Elizabeth. *Beloved Communities: Solidarity and Difference in fiction by Michael Ondaatje, Toni Morrison, and Joy Kogawa*. Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 2000, pp.142-145.
- [7] Grewal, Gurleen. *Circles of Pain, Lines of struggle: The Novels of Toni Morrison*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998, pp. 100.
- [8] Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*. London: Vintage Books, 2005, pp. 141-273.
- [9] Beaulieu, Elizabeth Ann, ed. *The Toni Morrison Encyclopedia*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2003, pp. 171.
- [10] Morrison, Toni. *Song of Solomon*. London: Vintage Books, 2005, pp.123- 329.
- [11] Morrison, Toni. *Love*. New York: Vintage Books, 2005, pp. 49.
- [12] Morrison, Toni. *Tar Baby*. London: Vintage Books, 2004, pp. 45.
- [13] Butterfield, Stephen. *Black Autobiography in America*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1974, pp.3- 5.
- [14] Smith, Valerie A. *Self-Discovery and Authority in Afro-American Narrative*. Cambridge, MS: Harvard University Press, 1987.
- [15] Limbale, Sharan Kumar. *The Outcaste: Akkarmashi*. Trans. Santosh Bhoomkar. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- [16] Bama. "Labouring for the Cause of Dalits." Interview by Suchitra Behal. *The Hindu* [Delhi] 06 Mar. 2003 Web. 07 Sept. 2011. /http://www.thehindu.com/thehindu/mp/2003/03/06/stories/20030600570300.htm.
- [17] Bama. *Sangati: Events*. Trans. Lakshmi Holmstrom. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- [18] Pawar, Urmila. *Aayadan: The Weave of My Life: A Dalit Woman's Memoir*. Trans. Maya Pandit. Kolkata: Street, 2008.
- [19] Dangle, Arjun, ed. *Poisoned Bread: Translations from Modern Marathi Dalit Literature*. New Delhi: Orient BlackSwan, 2009, pp.115.
- [20] Pawde, Kumud. *The Story of My 'Sanskrit'*. Trans. Priya Aadarkar. *Poisoned Bread: Translations from Modern Marathi Dalit Literature*. Ed. Arjun Dangle. New Delhi: Orient BlackSwan, 2009.
- [21] Prasad, Amar Nath, and M. B. Gaijan, eds. *Dalit Literature: A Critical Exploration*. New Delhi: Sarup and Sons, 2007, pp. 45-51.
- [22] Geetha, K. A. *Contesting Categories, Remapping Boundaries: Literary Interventions by Tamil*. UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014, pp. 77.
- [23] Kamble, Baby. Interview with Maya Pandit, *The Prisons We Broke*, Trans. Maya Pandit, New Delhi: Orient BlackSwan, 2009, pp. 136-157.
- [24] Rege, Sharmila. "Antasphot." *Writing Caste/Writing Gender: Reading Dalit Women's Testimonies*. Sharmila Rege. New Delhi: Zubaan, 2006, pp. 14.
- [25] Kamble, Baby. *The Prisons We Broke*. Trans. Maya Pandit. New Delhi: Orient BlackSwan, 2008, pp.130-138.
- [26] Bolleddu, Siva Nagaiah. "An Interview with Sharan Kumar Limbale." *The Criterion: An International Journal in English*

Dr. Madhuri Goswami, (Ph.D, CELTA) is an Associate Professor of English and has been teaching English Literature and Language at government colleges in India for 17 years. Her research and publications deal with American Literature, Black writings, and Contemporary Indian Writings. She has to her credit ten research articles published in international refereed research journals. She has presented papers at various international and national conferences and seminars. Her research interest includes new techniques and strategies to teach ESL, Computer Assisted Language Learning, and comparative literature.