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**Abstract:** This abstract contemplates on literature as activism which promotes the writer to think critically how this literature made known to be as an activism through the writings of Toni Morrison. She is one of the outstanding writers who contributed much on African American Literature. Her contribution to literature is highly appreciated, brought out the changes in the socio-political issues. African Americans were discriminated against and subject to racist attitudes. It explores the issues of freedom and equality long denied to Blacks in the United States. They often tried to exercise their political and social autonomy in the face of resistance from the white public. Throughout American history, African American has been discriminated against and subject to racist attitudes. This experience inspired some black writers, like Toni Morrison at least during the early years of African American literature to prove that they were the equals of European-American authors. The core focus of black feminist writing was based on racism, sexism, heterosexism, and classism in their lives.

**Key word:-** Afro-American Literature, Black Feminism, Racism, Sexism



African American Literature is the body of literature produced in the United States by writers of African descent. It has generally focused on the role of African-Americans within the larger American society and what it means to be an American. It explores the issues of freedom and equality long denied to Blacks in the United States. They often tried to exercise their political and social autonomy in the face of resistance from the white public. Throughout American history, African American has been discriminated against and subject to racist attitudes. This experience inspired some black writers, at least during the early years of African American literature to prove they were the equals of European-American authors. The Harlem Renaissance from 1920 to 1940 was a flowering of African-American literature and art. It has marked the beginning of another milestone in black women's writings. Such unique characteristics were vividly evident in the works of Zora Neil. After the 1970s, several African American female writers appeared at the forefront of American African Literature. Responding to the heady intellectual atmosphere of the time and place, writers and artists, many of whom lived in Harlem, began to produce a wide variety of fine and highly original works dealing with African-American life. These works attracted many black readers (IGNOU, 2003).

According to Oxford English dictionary, Identity means "the fact of being whom or what a person or thing is". Who are you? It is the best question that targets one's self-identity. It is an open ended question. But when it comes in the place of a woman, she is entitled to write her Father's name or husband's name. The first question can arise among the women are, "Is a woman always a minor? Why the mothers' place is invisible in personal details? The term identity means both black and female. Here the identity of a black is ethnic identity while female is for the gender identity. Black woman's quest for identity is absolutely a long journey of self awareness and realization of her presence in a patriarchal society where her position is second class whether being a female or a black.

Identity as a term derived from the Latin word 'Idem' meaning the 'same'. It is defined in two ways, the first refers to the quality or condition of being a specified person or thing, to individuality, personality, and the second relates to identification to the state of being identical, of being the same in substance, nature, qualities etc. Feminism cannot stand on its own; it has to be related to one's sense of culture and community. The rise of feminist literature hence an oppositional stance to male dominion and male centric literature all over the world is resistance literature. Women have always been disinherited, dispossessed in literary history. Feminist criticism and literature then articulates the dialogic of the oppressed and the subaltern, the woman. Gender has been defined by the patriarchal fathers as a social construct. While sex is a biological

phenomenon, the attribute of the masculine and feminine are constituted through gender paradigms which is to give a sense of identity to the individual in a society. (Sengupta, 2006) The core focus of black feminist writing was based on racism, sexism, heterosexism, and classism in their lives. In fact these writings were a part of black women's consciousness. As a whole the black feminist movement's significant impact upon feminist theory is that now the latter includes an analysis of the way race, gender and class as well as sexuality influence women's lives. African feminism nurtures the most crucial objective of developing an individual identity of African woman.

There have always been Black women activists- some known, like Sojourner truth, Harriet Tubman, Frances E. W. Harper, Ida B. Wells Barnett and Mary Church Terrell, and thousands unknown- who have a shared awareness of how their sexual identity combined with their racial identity to make their whole life situation and the focus of their political struggles unique.

As a novelist, Toni Morrison explores all the dimensions and dynamics of relationship to ponder over it comparatively to the western parameters of women's beauty and the socio-psychological suppression of Black community particularly the women. Traditionally the Afro-American society has been witnessing excesses and atrocities perpetrated against them by the whites and Morrison makes a thorough inquiry of this peculiar state. The common theme Toni Morrison uses in society's view on the difference between men and women or put it simply sexism. She includes this theme of sexism to point out the unnecessary assumptions made by society and the effects of these generalizations have on the community and its members. The presence of lust and desire appears many times in her novels to present the cultural aspects of the characters and to inflict aspects of the characters and to inflict emotion upon the readers. Some of the most prevalent are racism, sexism and desire. She effectively ties her themes into the plots of her stories so that the reader can actually obtain an overall message that teaches a lesson or makes a comment about society. The themes in Morrison's works can connect and relate to more people lives than she probably ever intended and that is what makes her literature strong. (Bala, 2012)

Sociologically as well as artistically Toni Morrison offers the documentation related to the living and burning condition of African people in America not merely that she has highlighted their consciousness in terms of race, gender and class. It is an exemplary fact that Morrison throws light on all these issues almost in all the novels but the focus varies from novel to novel.

In her first novel, *The Bluest eye*(1970), the thrust area of interpretation is racism. Pecola Breedlove, the protagonist, suffers from beginning to end mainly because she is black. She becomes a scapegoat of western standards of beauty and love. The novel examines the tragic lot of a poor black girl yearning not only for blue eyes but for the bluest of all. Pecola believes that her dark eyes have magically become blue, and that they will make her lovable. Morrison has said that she was creating her own sense of identity as a writer through this novel: " I was Pecola, Claudia everybody."

Her second novel *Sula* (1973) focuses on two women and their friendship, Sula and Nel's relationship do not degenerate to a lesbian relationship. Unlike Gloria Naylor and Alice Walker, Toni Morrison considers friendship as the spiritual and emotional bond based on sincere and sensible grounding. Nel is a traditional woman where as Sula represents the concept of a new woman. It is nominated for the National Book Award. Morrison paints African American women as unique, fully individual characters rather than as stereotypes.

In 1977, she publishes the third novel, *Song of Solomon* told from the perspective of a man. Class plays a key and crucial role in relation to race and gender. The story revolves around the male protagonist who has unique and symbolic name like Milkman Dead. *Song of Solomon* is primarily based on the African-American folktale about the oppressed African who flew back to Africa to escape the stigma of slavery.

Morrison's fourth novel, *Tar Baby* (1981) is based on a folktale which decentred the prevalent Euro-American mythology. It deals with black and white relations. It explores the sexual, racial, familial and social tensions associated with the individual's journey to self-autonomy and self-actualization. It explores the quest for wholeness. The principal character Son wants to politicize his community people as well as to provide the real political education to Jadine so that they may come to realize their actual and everyday condition. *Tar Baby* is a socio-political documentation and the cause of the African oppression can be discerned and discussed.

Morrison's Pulitzer Prize winning novel *Beloved* (1987) focuses on the historical truth that the collective struggle is the only solution for African people to wipe out the evils of slavery. It is the wrenching story of a woman who murders her children rather than allows them to live as slaves. On a socio-psychological plane, *Beloved* is a story of Sethe's struggles for social freedom and psychological wholeness.

Her next novel *Jazz* (1992), a story about a Southern black couple living in Harlem. It concerns a romantic triangle between a woman named Violet, her husband Joe, and an eighteen year old girl named Dorcas, whom Joe falls in love with. Joe's passion for Dorcas ultimately results in his shooting and killing her. Enraged by her husband's betrayal, Violet goes to the girl's funeral and cuts the face of the corpse with a knife. In *Jazz*, the emphasis is on the unity of women as a solution to gender oppression.

In 1998, she publishes the seventh novel, *Paradise*. It explores the tensions between the all black town of Ruby and an all-women convent located on the outskirts of the town. Threatened by the empowerment of women within the convent community, the men of Ruby invade it and massacre the women living there.

In 2003, she publishes her eighth novel *Love*. *Love* is the story of a hotel owner, now dead, and the power he still holds—both good and bad.....on the people whose lives he touched. It is told in a split narrative, similar to the *Bluest Eye*.

In 2008, she publishes her ninth novel *Mercy*. *A mercy* is a powerful tragedy distilled into a jewel of a master piece by the Nobel Prize winning author of *Beloved*. *A Mercy* reveals what lies beneath the surface of slavery. But at its heart it is ambivalent, disturbing story of a mother who casts off her daughter in order to sure her, and of a daughter who may never exercise that abandonment.

In 2012, she publishes her tenth novel, *Home*. The most popular general quotes related to Home are-----“Home, Sweet Home and a Home are where the heart is. “ In fact, this novel reveals the dilemma submerged within the sub-conscious mind of a brother –sister due, of Frank and Cee, when they try to relate to the term Home.

In 2015, she publishes her latest novel, *God Help the Child*. Luke18:16 “Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not.” ‘What you do to children matters, and they might never forget’.

Although primarily a Novelist, Toni Morrison has published some short fiction, a few works of nonfiction, some edited volumes, and some children's books. Toni Morrison is widely regarded as one of the most significant African American novelists to have emerged in the 1970's. Her novel *Sula* was nominated for the National Book Award in 1975, and 1977, *Song of Solomon* won the National Book Critics Circle Award. In 1988, *Beloved* was awarded the Pulitzer Prize, and in 1993, Morrison became the first black woman to be honored with the Nobel Prize in Literature.

Toni Morrison is known for her talent as a literary activist. Through her novels, Morrison embraces the ability to encourage a much needed change within the society. She feels the need to accept the struggles of our ancestors. Most of her novels, she tries to show the struggles and culture of her ancestors and directs it toward the need for a change. She exposes numerous issues that haunt many African Americans. Morrison evaluates the position of the black woman in America as having been for years a scapegoat for black male frustration and rage. She wants her readers to realize that when a person gets stripped of their culture and belongings, it is traumatizing. The success of Morrison's novel depends on the depth and quality of the messages that the author implies. She uses many themes in her works to create deeper meaning as well as dynamic plots. Some of the most prevalent themes are racism, sexism and desire. Morrison's works can connect and relate to more people's lives than she probably ever intended, and that is what makes her literature strong.

The Afro- American woman's fictional tale is often her own story-distanced and distorted to avoid too close or embarrassing recognition of her own uncertainties. Within the large projects of Gynocriticism and social activism, literature has a legitimate role. The Afro-American writers are often attached to their taboo, their separateness from the distressing realities of white dominating values.

Morrison focuses on the double dimensions like the question of racism upon the identity---search of the black woman. *Sula* may be a case of fractured and tortured personality owing to the racist and sexist socio-cultural structure. In white dominated society, blacks are considered to be subhuman and subdued not only on account of their social and academic background but also because of their geographical locality. In black community, women are assigned to play certain roles for the running of the society. They are committed to bear and rear the children and support the men sexually, emotionally or financially. Morrison's work proceeds from her belief in the human potential and desire for change, in which she is essentially optimistic. Identity as a term derives from the Latin word *idem* meaning the 'same.' It is defined in two ways, the first refers to the quality or condition of being a specified person or thing, to individuality, personality and the second relates to identification, to the state of being identical, of being the same in substance, nature, qualities etc.

According to the well known African American scholar W. E. B. Du Bois, American historians were trying to exclude African Americans from American history. But, as Du Bois claimed, "the black experience stood at the centre of national history." Retrieving the history of this black experience, 'the presence and the heart beat of black people were according to Toni Morrison, of the utmost importance for establishing the identity of African American people. Her novels could be seen as part of this process of recovering the past. This process involves not only recovering but also reconstructing and re-visioning the past with the help of creative imagination (IGNOU Text book). Morrison's literary talks are the real inquiry of the actual socio-economic and

political condition. In a globalised context, she has a concept that invites a lot of responses on the nature and direction of the present – day society.

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