

**EMPOWERMENT OF THE AFRICAN AMERICAN  
WOMAN THROUGH THE USE OF MYTH IN TONI  
MORRISON'S FICTION**

by

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**Submitted**

**in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**to the**



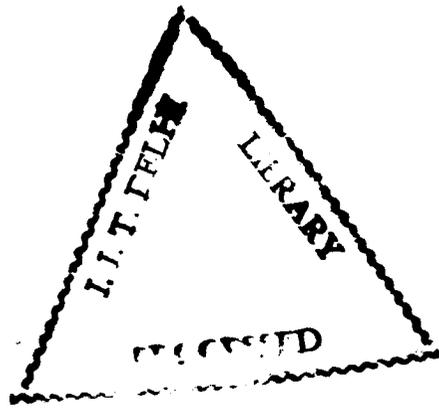
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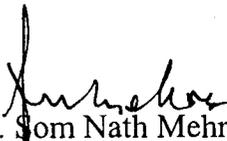
This is to certify that the thesis entitled "Empowerment of the African American Woman Through the Use of Myth in Toni Morrison's Fiction" presented by Ms. Abha Sood is worthy of consideration for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi, and is a record of bona fide research work carried out by her under my guidance and supervision.

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Abha Sood', with a long horizontal line extending to the right from the end of the signature.

**Abha Sood.**

## ABSTRACT

This thesis deals with the issues of empowerment in Morrison's fiction seen through the perspective of myth and folklore. The emphasis is on exploring Morrison's use of mythic forms for embellishment, explanation of character and circumstance, inversion of prevalent stereotypes, and the examination of the narrative structure.

The introduction looks at the forms of myth and the way it has been examined in this thesis. The chapters one to seven look at the various myths that support the structure of each novel, and examine each myth to show its inefficacy in defining the lives of black women. The common element in all the chapters is the discrediting of the myths about black women's sexuality, motherhood and the myths of beauty. The first chapter on *The Bluest Eye* examines the structure of the novel in terms of seasonal cycles, ritualistic images, legends of the grail, fertility myths, and classical and biblical myths. The chapter on *Sula* explores the signs and symbols associated with the main characters and the myths of black women's sexuality and culture, and examines the mythic structure of the novel. The chapter on *Song of Solomon* looks at the biblical song of the same name, the legends and metaphors of flying and the significance of biblical, classical and black naming, besides looking at the myths of beauty and progress. The fourth chapter *Tar Baby* deals with the central legend of the tar baby and the associations with classical myth and culture thrown up by the narrative. The fifth chapter *Beloved* deals with the central motif of the Medea myth and Morrison's working on a single incident to explore the period of slavery and its impact. The myths of black motherhood and animalism are also explored. The sixth chapter *Jazz* looks at the central theme of hunting, the metaphor of music, and the

importance of sisterhoods. The seventh chapter looks very briefly at *Paradise* where the migration narratives parallel that of the Jewish Diaspora and black women's feminist movement. The chapter also looks at the significance of naming in this novel. The conclusion winds up the major themes explored in the first seven chapters, and suggests some new angles to look at and interpret Morrison's fiction.

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