

## **I. Introduction to Multiple Narrative Techniques in Toni Morrison's *A Mercy***

*A Mercy*, a novel written by African American novel laureate, Chloe Anthony Wofford, later known as Toni Morrison, shifts in narrative viewpoint chapter by chapter from first person point of view to third person to show the alienated situation of all characters whether they are blacks or whites. As the narrative begins with the first person, main character Florens's alienated story, often repeating, then she loses her narrative and switches to the third person heterodiegetic narrator (Omniscient or limited unknown narrator in the third person narrative where s/he is not a character and remains outside the story without explicitly identified narrator's gender, s/he is implied voice) who being outside the story, narrates the story of Jacob Vaarks, Lina, Rebekka, Sorrow, Willard and Scully and finally Florens's mother, from the several characters' perspectives as in Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, who are bereft of their roots struggling to survive in an alienated environment filled with danger and diseases. The novel incorporates with the shifting of multiple voices through its various characters in order to portray the shifts in the life of the different characters, as the narrative changes and that shifting corresponds to the shift of their alienated condition to give them solace and make them able to confront against their problems.

Toni Morrison's *A Mercy* is not exceptional to historicist and stylistic analysis. All the characters in the novel are endowed with history that is told through the style at the same time. Through her style she tries to explore the condition of the slavery and racism faced by the different characters that causes alienation among them in pre-slavery era during the 1680s and the 1690s. Most of the story has been narrated by the heterodiegetic narrator in third person narrative about the different characters whose voices tend to explore the history and alienated situation of the both blacks and

whites. Florens, the main character in the novel whose voice often repeats in the first person narrative, is sold by her mother to the Anglo-Dutch trader Jacob Vaarks, seeing her future better in his hand rather than in the plantation. In other words, Morrison creates her story through polyphonic narrative, several point of views emerged throughout the novel while moving back and forth in time, creating unique multiple voices and an impressionistic mood which keeps the suspense high. The main speaker is Florens, a young black girl, aged sixteen at the outset of the novel who keeps on telling the reader that her narrative is “full of curiosities” and that she has committed a violent, bloody, once in a life time crime which she will never repeats (1).

Morrison published *A Mercy* in the latter part of her life handling the multifaceted issues including the alienation in the beginning of slavery in America, in the late seventeenth century, the period during which America was far more diverse and complex than generally imagined today. In this work, she narrates how the African American slaves were forced by unfavorable circumstances to pass alienated and fragmented life in American scenario, set in the Atlantic colonies between 1682 to 1690. Her impressionistic story traces slavery from its early roots, using unique voices African, Native American, Portuguese, Dutch, English and mixed race while moving back and forth in time. *A Mercy* employs a main character as well as narrator Florens, sixteen years old slave born in America of an African mother, originally owned by Portuguese plantation owner. Through the act of mercy she becomes part of the household of Vaarks who are farming and trading couple. As the narrative develops further, the narrative switches to the third person heterodiegetic narrator who reveals Jacob Vaark’s alienated story as an orphan and beneficiary of one hundred

twenty acres land in New World. Vaarks, a trader and businessman, has a soft spot for “orphan and strays” (31). He owns Lina, a Native American slave acquired after her tribe is nearly decimated by an epidemic of measles, and has taken in Sorrow, a half drowned foundling girl, in another business deal.

Florens lives and works for the next eight years on Vaarks rural New York farm. She now sixteen is sent to find a black freedom, Blacksmith, who has some knowledge of herbal medicines. Her journey is dangerous, ultimately proving to be the turning point in her life. Lina, a Native American who works with her, tells in a parallel narrative how she becomes one of a handful of survivor of a plague that killed her tribe. Vaark’s wife, Rebekkah, is described; leaving England for New York to be married to a man she has never seen. The death of their subsequent children are devastating and Vaarks is hoping that eight years old Florens will help to alleviate Rebekkah’s loneliness. Vaarks, himself an orphan and poor house survivor, describes his journey from New York to Maryland and Virginia, commenting on the different colonies along with their attitudes toward slavery. Thus, all the characters are forced to abandon their own places and obliged to live in the alien environment that causes a sense of alienation.

This research is an inquiry into Toni Morrison’s *A Mercy*. The present research will prove how the shifting of focalization corresponds to the shifting of the characters’ alienated condition. While going through the novel, it is found out that the several focalizers through whose perspectives or positions, events and other characters are introduced in terms of gender, race and sexuality and they are suffering from the diseases and dangers. The implication of variable internal focalization highlights the different thoughts, feelings or perceptions of different characters that

shifts from a character to another. Morrison's novel *A Mercy* presents a heterodiegetic narrator, an agent who narrates the stories of several characters and, focalizer, an agent who perceives within the story obvious in third person narrative because the heterodiegetic narrator who is anonymous, remains outside the story and only tells the story but cannot perceive or see, whereas the focalizers such as Jacob Vaarks, Lina, Rebekkah, Sorrow, Willard and Scully and finally Florens's mother are within the story, who can only perceive the action or events as the participant of the story and as the result they cannot narrate the story. Therefore, the heterodiegetic narrator narrates the alienated stories of characters and at the same time the focalizer is concerned with their own stories that cause alienation among them.

On the other hands, Morrison presents the first person narrator as a major character who plays the role of both the center of narration and center of perception. In such situation when narrating and focalizing are taken up by same agent there is a gap between two identities. As the center of narration Florens narrates her story and as the center of perception or focalization she focalizes what she sees or perceives. In this sense Florens, in the novel, is presented as homodiegetic narrator who has the status of character in the novel as Magda and the Magistrate in Coetzee's *In the Heart of the Country* and *Waiting for the Barbarians* respectively and Salem in Rushdie's *The Midnight's Children*.

This research focuses on the Toni Morrison's *A Mercy* as the polyphonic novel which can be viewed from heteroglossic perspective. This novel incorporates multiple voices through its various characters in order to depict the alienated condition of all the people living in American society during the 1680s-90s. In other words, this novel is inherent of multiple voices coming from the diversified background of the

plot of the story. The presence of varied tunes in the novel often enacts the embodiment of different worldviews. A language is never a unitary system of norms: rather it is always social cultural phenomenon. Therefore, within a language there are several perspectives it has incorporated. There are always many different ways of speaking and such different language reflects the diversity of social experiences, conceptualization and values. In this sense, *A Mercy* depicts the varying trends and cults that have been incorporated in the American society. The living pattern of blacks and, especially black women in the then era of the 1680s and the 1690s, was traumatic due to the social exploitation, harassment, brutality of society and family disintegration, where each member is obliged to be detached from other that in turn results into the sense of alienation.

The exploitation of the narrative technique along with rhetorical device, Black English, foregrounding, cohesion and context helps the text to dramatize the condition of slaves especially black women when the slavery was at its nascent state. The Narrativization of the text leaves the emphatic and realistic situation of women. Morrison examines the roots of racism going back to the slavery's earliest days, providing glimpse of various practices of the time showing the relationship between men and women in early America that often ended in female victimization. They are of and for men, "people who never shape the world, the world shape us" (31). All the women characters ranging from black slaves to the white master's wife are forced to live in a complete alien environment which takes place not because of their own will rather their own helpless condition. Florens, a black girl; Lina, a Native American; Rebekka, wife of Vaark and Sorrow all are female who are forced to abandon their own place and are obliged to live in the alien environment which is full of danger

and disease. On the surface, all women characters are converged into house of Jacob Vaark due to their fragile and dilapidated condition. Florens's mother does not want to make her daughter's future spoilt by keeping her with herself since the plantation owner does not behave with them even like animal. Therefore, she wants to make her daughter away from such inhumanity.

The novel *A Mercy* by Morrison was published in 2008. It has been discussed in manifold ways by multiple scholars so far. In other word, many critics have come up with the criticism to the fore to criticize the novel nevertheless many book reviewers put their perspectives on it differently. The reviewer Kevin Nance calls the novel as history of slavery and liberation and evaluates:

*A Mercy* brims with the omnipresence of the author's questing, sifting brain, which the reader can feel inspecting each strand of the story, subjecting it to the closest scrutiny before weaving into the whole. The result is both a compelling yarn and a meditation on the verities and degrees of enslavement and liberation; it is as precise, taut and thought-minded as Morrison herself. (48)

In this extract the primary thrust of Kevin Nance is to project Morrison's *A Mercy* as a novel of slavery and liberation. Rather the physical violence, the memory and the quest of cultural identity are dominant factors in the novel. The quest of cultural and racial identity is depicted in the novel through the characters. Each and every character revolves around the politic of cultural identity and their liberation. Therefore, the quest for their identity results into the sense of alienation.

Similarly, Sander and Mobley opine that race, gender, and class color the slavery system:

In *A Mercy* she probes the machine of slavery itself –the routine acts of closing deals and setting debts by buying or selling human being, in this instance by an Anglo-Dutch trader named Jacob Vaarks, who had promised himself he would never trade in human flesh. *A Mercy* seems to confirm the author’s belief that the past is actually more infinite than the future –the reader is hard –pressed to find footing in time and space. What we do know is that the vagaries of a slave economy force a mother to make a difficult choice for her daughter, Florens and that Jacob Vaark’s death leaves his plantation in disarray [. . .]. Deftly rising above cliché, Morrison narrates the ways in which race gender and class continue to color our reading of history of slavery. (73-74)

Here, the past is full of memories that cannot be easily forgotten which is created through slavery caused by race, gender and class. On the other hand, slavery is entwined with race, gender and class. All of these issues play the vital role to relegate the black especially black women into the margin making them fragile submissive, subservient. Although masters are in debt, they should not lose their own property because black are used to pay their debt which suggests that blacks are treated not even like animal. Vaark who promised not to trade in human flesh but he is obliged to take a girl as the payment of bad debt of white master.

On the other hands, Rosemary Goring absorbs the novel as full of linguistic complexity which provides complex network of slavery as she says:

Morrison doesn’t hand her fiction to us on a plate. While it is absorbing from the very first, this is a novel that requires several reading for every nuance to be teased out, each inference or detail to be

acknowledged and named. This complexity gives it a muscular tension of the sort found in a coiled spring. It makes at times for language so compact and claustrophobic it can feel dense and elliptical. Yet, when allowed to sink in at its own pace and in its own rhythm, this economy and distillation render it unforgettable. (10)

In addition to this above mentioned criticism about slavery Rosemary Goring absorbs the language that is the place of struggle through which the blacks can go against the complex network of slavery that makes them alienated. From the aforementioned reviews it becomes clear that the text has not been analyzed through the perspective of narrative style to show the alienated condition of all characters despite viewing it through different ways. Therefore, there is a need to carry out research on this text from this perspective.

Caroline Moore points out that this novel tries to rewrite the history of the black females as the history of ‘her-story’ rather than ‘his –story’ and she further states:-

Morrison’s cleaver attitude to historical nuance may be forged on the anvils of ideology. She found her literary voice in an era that proclaimed that all history as ‘his-story’ (written by white men); and that the English language was ‘smitheryed’ (Morrison term) into an instrument of patriarchal and racial oppression. (7)

According to Moore, from the perspective of African American critical theory, *A Mercy* could be interpreted as novel written solely toward the African-American female, with a moderately strong bias against the African-American male. While the women in *A Mercy* are generally depicted in a victimized and sympathetic manner,



African American and non African American men are often depicted as being docile, subservient or villainous. While women may find their own sense of empowerment through something each female character seems to represent, such as Florens' abandonment issues and Sorrow's overcoming the crisis of rape, male reader especially African-American may fail to identify with the struggle of the male character because these struggle barely depicted.

On the other hand, Poetess Nikky Finney points out that Morrison is in problematic situation while writing American history as she further articulates, "There is no writing today about the history of this country like Morrison does, yet she too often gets to questions about race. Her narratives are the whole American experience, and yet they get slotted into questions about black people. That's really narrow view."(qtd. in Nance 50) despite her attempt to write of American history of slavery, she could not stay away from the question regarding racism. She herself seems to be in confusion. However, she has paved the way to write the history inclusively.

David Gates analyzes the novel from religious perspective:

In this American Eden, you get two originals sins for the price of one the near extermination of the native population and the importation of the slaves from Africa- and it's not hard to spot the real serpents: those creatures Lina calls 'Europe's, men whose 'whitened' skins make them appear on first sight to be 'ill or dead', and whose great gifts to the heathens seem to be smallpox and a harsh version of Christianity with a dull, unimaginative god [...] her only compensation for the loss of her mother and her lover is that she comes to write her own story,

carving the letters with a nail into the walls of her dead master's unfinished and abandoned house.(10)

This extract of David Gates compares white males with devils or serpents because of their imposition of slavery. By intentional design, most of the novel's prominent heterosexual white males are responsible for the majority of the villainous acts. Jacob Vaark and D'ortega are responsible for taking Florens away instead of her brother, white men have raped and impregnated Sorrow, and Blacksmith beats and rejects Florens.

Although this novel has been analyzed from different perspectives, it would be appropriate to analyze the novel from the perspective of narrative technique that shows the sense of alienation among the different characters as the distinctive polyphonic narrative develops. In other words, many critics, scholars, novelists along with philosophers have analyzed this novel from ethical, anti-racist, historicist, feminist, linguistic and religious perspectives. The approach of the present research differs from those previous approaches in the sense that the present research analyzes narrative techniques and its correspondence toward the alienation of the each and every character in the novel, its limitation, requirement and implication. Toni Morrison's *A Mercy* shifts in different narrative viewpoints chapter by chapter from first person omniscient narrator (focalizer or character) to third person limited as well as unknown narrator (heterodiegetic narrator) to show the alienated condition and situation of all the characters whether they are black or white. As the narrative begins with first person, the main character, Florens's loses her narrative and switches to the third person heterodiegetic narrator who presents the stories of Jacob Vaarks, Lina, Rebekka, Sorrow, Willard and Scully and finally Florens's mother who are bereft of

their roots struggling to survive in an alienated environment filled with danger and diseases. Almost all the characters in *A Mercy* are emotionally and physically abandoned, orphans and the storm is the clashing of culture in pre-revolutionary war, America where the laws are not yet defined, everyone and everything is for sale and are threaten with annihilation by god, the environment or each other. The novel shows the shift in narrative viewpoint that portrays the shift in the life of the different character, as the narrative changes, to trace the tremendous burden, full of prejudice and hatred, the bundle of contradiction that causes alienation among them. The shifts in the narrative viewpoint correspond to the shift of their alienated condition that gives them solace and makes them able to confront against problems.

As the issue of hypothesis at hand demands, it will be authenticated by dealing with analysis as shifts in narrative view point drawing upon the concepts of narratologists such as Gerard Genette, Mieke Bal, Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan and H. Porter Abbott and Bakhtin's theory of Dialogic criticism, polyphonic narrative, diversity and multiplicity of language, heteroglossia and novelistic discourse. The term narrative is derived from French word "Narrative" which refers to the recounting of one or more real or factious events. Simply put, narrative is the representation of event or a series of events. Thus, in wider sense all types of writing provide a sense of narrative. It is a retelling of past event or series of events that often seem to have seen or heard before but when a narrator narrates the story in a chronological order, it creates a new sense of enthusiasm in the listener or reader.

Regarding narrative, M.H. Abrams in his *A Glossary of Literary Terms* remarks that "a narrative is a story, whether told in prose or verse, involving events, characters and what the characters say and do. Some literary forms such as the novel

and short story in prose, and the epic and romance in verse, are explicit narratives that are told by a narrator” (173). This is the area of literature where narrative technique is implemented in its wide sense and form. Thus, these definitions depict the relationship of the story to the events, narrator and focalizer.

The written form of narrative in literature emerged in almost over the entire world from an oral tradition. Latter on, oral narrative took the form of epic. Epic is a long narrative poem in grand style that often praises heroic adventures. The prime concern of epic-story teller is to tell a traditional story. The two different types of narrative developed from the epic narrative are empirical and fictional. The empirical narrative is closer to reality that deals with the truth whereas the fictional narrative deals with the ideal world. Thus the genre of novel is reunion of the empirical and fictional narrative literature. The literary artist creates different types of narrative device in his or her work who narrates the story becomes the major focus in any literary works.

First person narrative, a narrative or mode of story-telling in which the narrator appears as the “I” (referred as first person singular) or “We” (the first person plural) recollecting his or her or their own parting the events related, either as a witness of an action or as an important participant in it. In this type of narrative, we can distinguish between the first person narrator Observer and first person narrator Participant. The first person observer is only a witness to the action what he or she has seen or observed but has no access to the inner thought of the other character. The narrator may assume but, is restricted to explore the character’s mind. In the first person narration, the participant’s thoughts involve in the action but confines to his or her own thoughts and feelings. For example, in Toni Morrison’s *Love*, the character

named only as L narrates large chunks of the novel in the first- person, the voice of longing and nostalgia. In the third person narrative technique, the narrator is someone who stands outside the story and describes the character and action. The narrator refers to all the character in the story by names or as “He”, “she” and “They”. Toni Morrison’s *A Mercy* also reflects this technique. In a story told from the Third person narrative, the narrator is not a character in the story. The Third person narrator usually is more distanced from the story than first person narrator because he stands outside of the story. The narrator in the story can move from one place to another and make a shift from character to character in order to reveal the events and attitudes of each character.

Gerard Genette, one of the most influential French Narratologist distinguishes narrator from focalizer or in other words narration from focalization, in his *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (1972) which states, “The two instance of the focalization and the narrating which remain distinct even in first person narrative, i.e. even when the two instances are taken up by the same person” (Narrative Discourse 194). For Genette, narration and focalization are quite distinct processes because the distinction between narrator, an agent who narrates or speaks and focalizer, an agent who perceives within fictional world is identified not only in the third person narrative but also in the first person in which the narrator remains outside the fictional world whereas the focalizer is within the fictional world. In this sense, the narrator who is unknown tells the story but cannot perceive or see, whereas the focalizer only as the participant within fictional world can only perceive the action or event but cannot narrate the story. Such narrator obvious in third person narrative who is

anonymous and remains outside of the story is called heterodiegetic narrator as in James's *The Ambassador* and *what Maisie Knew*.

The heterodiegetic narrator narrates the story either from his perspective as in Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace* or from one character's perspective as in *The Ambassadors* or *what Maisie Knew* or from multiple characters' perspectives as in Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*. The gender of heterodiegetic narrator is not explicitly identified and he/she as an implied voice is not responsible for the images created in the novel because he/she is not the member of the fictional world.

Gerard Genette divides focalization into major three types: Zero/ Non focalization, Internal focalization and External focalization (*Narrative Discourse* 189). The internal focalization lies with the character (s) who is participant in the story. In another word, the presentation of the event or situations restricted to the perspectives of one or more focal character is termed as internal focalization. Internal focalization is concerned with the character(s) thoughts, feelings and perceptions that remain(s) within the story. The internal focalization has been divided into three sub-types: Fixed Variable and Multiple internal focalizations (*Narrative Discourse* 189).

Fixed focalization or character bound focalization can be termed as monofocalization in which everything is narrated through the single character's perspective as the only focalizer whose perspective determines the whole events and situations of the complete story. When the focalization or perspective alternates between several focal characters, it is called variable internal focalization. Similarly, multiple internal focalizations present the same event through the several characters' perspectives as in Robert Browning's narrative poem *The Ring and the Book* where several events are evoked several times according to the perspectives of the several

focal characters. Browning's narrative poem *The Ring and the Book* which relates a criminal case as perceived successively by the murderer, the victims, the defense and the prosecution was for several years the canonical example of this type of narrative before being supplanted for us by the film *Rashoman*. In Mieke Bal's view internal focalization can be termed as character bound focalization or CF in short.

Mieke Bal, one of the most influential post- Genettian narratologist , who clarifies Genettian concept of focalization, defines focalization as the relationship between the focalizer and focalized the 'subject' and the 'object' of focalization:

Focalization is the relationship between the vision, the agent that sees and that which is seen. This relationship is component of the story part. Because the definition of the focalization refers to a relationship, each pole of relationship, the subject and the object of focalization must be studied separately. The subject of focalization, the focalizer, is the point from which the elements are viewed. That point can lie with a character (...) s/he will have an advantage over the other character.

The reader watches with (his\her) eyes. (*Narratology* 146)

From aforementioned extract, Bal views that the focalizer, s/he, who perceive and the focalized s/he who is perceived by the focalizer should be studied separately.

Genettian internal focalization is termed as "Character-bound focalization by Bal in which focalization can shift from one character to another, even if the narrator remains constant. When focalization lies with one character which participates in the fibula as an actor, we could refer to internal focalization. We can then indicate by means of the term external focalization that an anonymous agent, situated outside the

fabula, is functioning as focalizer. Such an external, non –character-bound focalizer is abbreviated EF.

Another post Genettian narratologist, Rimmon- Kenan does attempt the typology of what she calls” the facets of focalization variation – perceptual, psychological and ideological (*Narrative Fiction*, 77-82). As per perceptual dimension of focalization, when the focalizer is narrator himself, he can portray the holistic description of large scene whereas if he is a character within the narrative.

Genettian concept of multiple narrators and their focalization is relevant to Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of Dialogism, a technique of analyzing and studying a text from various perspectives. For Bakhtin, the novel is inherent of multiple voices coming from the diversified background of the plot of the story. The presence of the varied tunes in the novel often enacts the embodiment of the different world views. There are always many different ways of speaking and such different languages reflect the diversity of social experiences, conceptualization and values. So attitudes and views of the world identify language. Bakhtin in *Discourse in the Novel* explain it as:

Languages are not merely for scientific and descriptive activities; rather they are always polemical or political one. They are the consequences of the whole activity of living in particular ways. They embody the specific point of the view on the world, forms for conceptualizing the world in words, specific world views, each characterized by its own objects, meanings and values. (292)

Thus, heteroglossia in the novel should not be considered as the author’s artistic exploitation of the languages instead they should be acknowledged as a novel’s



fundamental attempt to correspond the reality of the world itself which is multifarious and prosaic. Heteroglossia, the language of speech styles that conceptualizes the world in words, is the first and foremost the organ of the polyphonic novel. Any novel that is to be weighed from the polyphonic angle must be studied from its speech diversity. The various voices that embody different beliefs systems need to be analyzed considerably. It is because a novel, for Bakhtin, is always teamed with polyglots

The concept for which Bakhtin is perhaps most famous and resemblances with Genettian multiple narrators is that of polyphony. Bakhtin discusses polyphony in terms of dialogues and states that it is not an attribute of all novels but of some. For Bakhtin, Dostoevsky was the first and foremost polyphonic writer who presents dialogue of his characters from different perspectives. Commenting on polyphony, he writes in *Dostoevsky's Poetics*:

*Dostoevsky's Poetics* is constructed not as the whole of a single consciousness, absorbing other consciousness as objects into itself, but as whole formed by the interaction of several consciousnesses, none of which entirely becomes an object for the other. They are separate entity to each other. (18)

Unfortunately, most critics believe polyphony as an equivalent of heteroglossia but Bakhtin clarifies that the latter term describes the diversity of speech in language, whereas the former has to do with the position of the author in a text. Therefore, many literary works are heteroglot but very few are polyphonic or dialogic. For this Bakhtin vindicates that the polyphonic author neither lacks nor fails to express his ideas and values. He explicitly maintains that a work without “an authorial position is in general

impossible. The issue here is not an absence of but a radical change in the author's position" (67), besides in the polyphonic work, authorial point of view differs in kind and method of expression from its monologic counterpart. Polyphonic work does have unity but it is what Bakhtin calls "a unity of higher order" (*Toward a Reworking of the Dostoevsky Book* 298)

Though the characters in the polyphonic work have been created by the author, once they came on to existence, they will escape his control and prevent him from knowing as advance how they will answer him. The polyphonic novel is therefore characterized by a "plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousness, a genuine polyphonic of full void voices" (*Problems of Dostoevsky's poetics*, 6). Thus, to analyze this novel from multiple narrative perspectives, the narratologist as Gerard Genette, Mieke Bal and Rimmon- Kenan and the Russian literary theorist and philosopher as well as the founder of the school of literary criticism known as Dialogism Mikhail Bakhtin will be critically analyzed in the succeeding chapters.

## **II. Shifts in Narrative Viewpoints: Dramatization of a Sense of Alienation in Morrison's *A Mercy***

The Atlantic colonies between the 1680s and the 1690s in the American society and the condition of the African American people and their experiences of slavery in the then period have been depicted in Toni Morrison's *A Mercy*. Morrison, through her distinctive narrative, alarms the readers that the condition of African American, Portuguese, Dutch, English, Native American and even mixed race people is very problematic as they are considered as mere animals. Neither social nor personal freedom is given, and while the southern colonies are clearly strongholds of slavery, the north is by no means an innocent bystander. Diseases such as measles and smallpox run rampant; nevertheless, there is an Eden-like quality in the beauty and richness of this New World, along with many decencies that transcend the evil elements. Morrison portrays many characters with their multiple voices who are the victims of the domination, exploitation, social and racial injustice, violence, gender discrimination and loss of identity that causes a sense of alienation among them.

A writer's choice of narrator is crucial for the way a work of fiction is perceived by the readers. Toni Morrison presents the story from Genettean concept of both first person focalizer and then third person heterodiegetic narrative mode in which first person narrator, generally, brings greater focus on the feeling, opinions, and perceptions of a particular character such as Florens and on how she views the world and the views of the other characters in the novel. By contrast, a third person omniscient heterodiegetic narrator gives a panoramic view in the novel, looking into many characters such as Jacob, Lina, Rebekka, Sorrow, and Florens's mother and into the broader background of their stories. Morrison embraces such focalizer and

heterodiegetic narrator which is relevant to the ideas of Genette that he states: “The two instance of the focalizing and the narrating which remain distinct even in first person narrative, i.e. even when the two instances are taken up by the same person” (*Narrative Discourse* 194). Morrison’s use of the third person omniscient narrator in the novel can express the inner thoughts and action of all the characters equally, in which the narrator refers to character as ‘he’ or ‘she’ or ‘they’ as in the epic stories such as J.R.R. Tolkien’s *Lord of the Ring* or George Eliot’s *Middlemarch*.

In the same manner, Morrison’s *A Mercy* incorporates multiple narrators with their distinctive voices. Morrison dramatizes the shifting in narrative mode of the novel from first person to the third person narrator in order to reveal to several characters’ perceptions and behaviors by which they are alienated. She begins the novel from first person narrator as well as focalizer, Florens as she narrates:

Don’t be afraid. My telling can’t hurt you in spite of what I have done  
and I promise to lie quietly in the dark—weeping perhaps or  
occasionally seeing the blood once more –but I will never again unfold  
my limbs to rise up and bare teeth. I explain. (1)

And the narrative shifts to the third person narrator who narrates the story of Jacob Vaark as “he could see his boots sloshing but not his satchel nor his hands” (7).

*A Mercy* begins with the alienated narration of Florens, an enslaved girl in Jacob’s house, who is departed from her mother and brother. Florens is the narrator as well as character of the novel but time and again she fails to do so as she herself is losing control over her self due to the departure from her mother and brother and racial injustice. As the narrative develops, she again regains her narrative to portray her condition in a white dominated, even more in deeper level, male dominated

society, which was filled with white ideologies where blacks especially black women had no right over their own body and self. They had lost their identities as the characters and narrators of the Morrison's *A Mercy* lose their narratives. When the Florens loses her narrative than the narrative switches to the heterodiegetic narrator or unknown narrator in the third person narrative who tells the different stories of several characters such as Jacob Vaark, Lina, Rebekka, Sorrow, Willard and Scully and finally Florens's mother in which almost all the characters, even whites, are suffering either from racial injustice or from diseases such as Measles and smallpox.

Morrison uses Florens both as narrator and character to support the Genettian concept of homodiegetic narrator who has the status of character (248). Florens, the protagonist as well as the first person narrator in the novel who appears as 'I' or 'Me', recollecting her own condition of being slave in the time when she was seven. In her first person narration, Florens as a narrator even involves in the story (the narrator is the character in the story told through the first person narrative) in order to reveal thought and feeling of Morrison herself because the author's main intention in using the first person narrative is to reveal his or her experiences. Florens in the beginning of her narrative says:

If a pea hen refuses to brood I read it quickly and sure enough that night I see a 'Minha Mae' standing hand in hand with her little boy, my shoes jamming the pocket of her apron often there are too many signs, or a bright omen cloud up too fast. I sort them and try to recall, yet I know I am missing much [...] when a child I am never able to abide being barefoot and always beg for shoes. My mother, a Minha

Mae, is frowning, is angry at what she says are my prettify ways. Only bad women wear high heels. (1-2)

Florens works in Jacob Vaark's house with Lina, Sorrow, Willard and Scully. Although Florens seems to be happy in Jacob's house where she is treated with kindness by the trader's wife, Rebekka and by a slave Lina, the memory of her mother's rejection will always torture:

I know it is true because I see it forever and ever. Me watching, my mother listening, her baby boy on her hip. Senhor is not paying the whole amount he owes to sir. Sir saying he will take instead the woman and the girl, not the baby boy and the debt is gone. A minha mae begs no. her baby boy is still at her breast. Take the girl, she says, my daughter, she says. Me. Me. Sir agrees and changes the balance due. (5)

In this extract Morrison uses first person narrative of the Florens in which the expression of the denial is clearly seen, in order to depict the treatment that she had faced. Florens, about seven years old when she is taken, recounts her shocks pains and bitterness at this abandonment by her 'minha mae', my mother in Portuguese.

The heterodiegetic narrator, for Genette, is an agent who narrates or speaks obvious in third person narrative where he/she is not the character and remains outside of the story as in James *The Ambassador* and *What Maisie Knew* because the narrator who is unknown or anonymous. If we analyzed the novel *A Mercy*, the third person as well as unknown narrator, who is also termed as heterodiegetic narrator, appears and portrays the different stories of the several characters from the several characters perspective, using the pronoun or names as 'He' or 'She' or 'They' to refer

to each of them. The third person narrator usually is more distance from the story than first person narrator because he or she stands outside as he or she is not the character of the story. The narrator in the story moves from one place to another and makes the shifts from character to character in order to reveal the events and attitudes of each character. When Florens loses her narrative then it switches to the third person narrator who remain outside the story and retell the voice of Jacob Vaark who is morally repelled by slavery and mostly refuses to take part in it, "Flesh was not his commodity"(20). The narrator reveals Jacob's thought and feeling, recounts his journey to meet with D'ortega and something in his story as an orphan and beneficiary of one hundreds twenty acres in New World. It is revealed that Vaark, a trader and businessman, has a soft spot for "orphan and strays" (31). Yes he has accumulated a couple of slaves, but he thinks of them as Rebekka's 'helpers' rather than as property. One of them called Lina, a Native American slaves women whose tribe has been destroyed by white settlers and smallpox, he purchased her "outright and deliberately but she was a women not a child"(20), the other, Sorrow, a white orphan who he more or less adopted after she washed up on a nearby shore. Jacob's wife Rebakka, a white woman who arrived in New World from the brutal slums of London after Jacob sent her father supplies as barter for a young woman he had never seen. Lina and Rebekka, left to fend for themselves on the farm while Jacob travels, soon developed a relations almost equal:

Besides they were company for each other and by and by discovered something much more interesting than status. They become friend. Not only because some body had to pull the wasp sting from the other's arm. Not only because it took two to push the cow away from the

fence. Not only because one had to hold the head while the other had one tied the trotters. Mostly because neither knew precisely what they were doing or how. (51)

Similarly, the third person narrator loses his or her narrative and it switches to the first person narrator Florens who again recounts her journey, telling her lover of the events of her household and of her desire for him, watching him in his sleep like a seventh century Psyche watching her Cupid:

Night comes and I steal a candle. I carry an ember in a pot to light it. To see more of you. When it is lit I shield to the flame with my hand. I watch you sleeping. I watch too long. Am careless. The flame burns my palm. I think if you wake and see me seeing you I will die. I run away not knowing then you are seeing me seeing you. And when at last our eyes hit I am not dead. For the first time I am live. (36)

He is revealed in the Florens narrative to be the African Blacksmith, never enslaved, who has fashioned Iron gates with kissing cobras for Vaark's New house." I can tell you that even yet it is not complete though your ironwork is wondrous to see. The glittering cobras still kiss at the gates crown, the house is mighty, waiting for a glazier" (34). Vaark contracts smallpox and dies after which Rebekka finds two small sore inside her mouth. The household is guaranteed and Rebekka has sent Florens to bring back the Blacksmith, who has medical knowledge. Her journey is so dangerous ultimately proving to be the turning point of her life, "my journey to you is hard and ling and the hurt of it are gone as soon as I see the yard the forged, the little cabin where you are" (133). Florens will discover this when she falls in love with a Blacksmith, a freeman who comes to work on a now house that Jacob, envying the



grand mission of the planter he visited, decides to build. Their relationship is unconstrained erotic as Florens watches him at work sweat runs down his back and “ I have shocked at myself for wanting to lick there[...] my mouth is open, my leg go softly and the heart is stretching to break” (50). Florens’s attraction to the man (he is never named) is depicted as a force of nature.” I wit when you go and straight when Mistress sends me to you she says at one point (The portion of the book that she narrates are all addressed to him) (50). Lina tries again to caution her “you are one leaf on his tree “No” Florens replies “I am his tree” (59).

After she reaches the Blacksmith, she discovers that he has taken in a child, a foundling discovered in a cart with his father dead on the horses. He leaves her to mind the boy while he goes to heal Rebekka fearing that the Blacksmith has already transferred his affection to the child, Florens becomes mad with jealousy. “ I con never not have you have me and in her rage she lashes out against him.(103) When the Blacksmith returns and finds them, he hits her and send her away:

“Because you are a slave”

Sir makes me that ...”

“No you have become one”

“How”

“Your head is empty and your body is wild”

“I am adoring you”

“And a slave to that too”

“You alone own me”

Own yourself, women, and leave us be”. (139)

The above lines of blacksmith as narrated by Florens portray the situation of slaves on the then society. The society assumes slaves as wild and empty headed that do not have rationality. Thus they lose their identity in society and result to social alienation.

Florens, the Anglo born slave narrator in *A Mercy*, has been brought by Jacob with the exchange on debt owned by D'ortega, a cruel slave trader who thinks African American people as commodity. Firstly, when Jacob refuses to take her in exchange he coated "Ridiculous", said D'ortega "you sell them. Do you know the price they garner? (20) In response to this answer Jacob thinks that "flesh was not his commodity". (20) Although he says so Florens was bought by him in exchange of the debt by which she has been traumatized due to the separation of her mother and brother. The separation finally results in the social alienation:

You don't seem to comprehend my offer. I not for -feting my debt. I am honoring it. The value of a seasoned slave is beyond adequate.

"Not if I can't use her"

"Use her? Sell her?".(23)

The above lines show the nature of cruel masters in *A Mercy*. The cultural identity of the African has been considered as 'nothing '.they are mere goods.

Morrison's implication of Genettian multiple focalizers that always shift in narrative technique, from the first person to the third person and again from the third person to the first person, dramatizes the helpless condition of women in society where their prospects are Servants, prostitutes, submissive wife, and demon as they suffer torment upon torment- rape, abuse, hatred and abandonment. Florens, Lina, Rebekka and Sorrow are women presented in her narrativization that they are forced to abandon their own place and obliged to live in the environment where they are not

safe. In one of the most painful episode in the novel, Florens, midway through her journey to the Blacksmith, seeks refuge for the night in a cottage inhabited by a widow and her daughter. The girl, she startled to notice, is covered with fresh wounds, “dark blood beetling down her legs (132). The local men have accused her of being demon. Likewise, Rebekka, where she might have children and therefore, be guaranteed some affection. As hard as her married life turns out to be- she loses all four of her children in quick succession, followed by her husband- she is almost certainly right. After all there is ‘restriction on wife beating “not after nine at night, with causes and not anger” (Presumably slaves and unmarried women can be beaten at any hour of the day, for any reason, in any mood) (104).

In the last part of the novel, the heterodiegetic narrator in the third person narrative, narrates the story of Florens’s mother from her own perspective whose life story is, again, one of the violent, vicious treatment by men: first she is bought from Africa to Barbados and gang-raped, then she is sold to the Portuguese trader, who, she worries, has already begun to show an interest in Florens. When she sees Jacob, she trusts him immediately: “there was no animal in his heart [...] he did not want” (160). She begged him to take her daughter and says: “I saw the tall man see you as a human child, not pieces of eight. I knelt before him. Hopping for a miracle. He said yes” (161). In this way, an act that seemed horrible is redeemed. Like Sethe’s murder of Boloved, it was a terrible demonstration of maternal love. The tragedy is not that it happened to Florens, but that she will never understand the reason:

Spores of blue fern growing in the hollows along the riverbank float toward the water in sliver- blue lines hard to see unless you are in or near them, lying right at the river’s edge when the sun shots are low

and drained. Often they are mistaken for insects –but they are seeds in which the whole generation sleeps confident of a future. And for a moment it is easy to believe each one has one –will become all of what is contained in the spore: will live out its days as planned. This moment of certainty lasts no longer than that; longer, perhaps, than the spore itself. (157)

This is mother's dream, and perhaps the primary cruelty of slavery was the near-certainty that it would be thwarted. The children of slaves, needless to say, had little chance of fulfilling any kind of a future; and slave mothers could have no confidence that the babies to whom they gave birth would become all of what is contained in the spore or would live out (their) days as planned. The moment of certainty, if it ever exists at all, is just a flicker. Sethe's mother-in-law, Baby Suggs, is able to keep only one of her eight children. Her two girls, neither of whom had their adult teeth; were sold and taken away before she could even wave goodbye. "In all of Baby's life [...] men and women were moved around like checkers" (*Beloved* 151). Similarly, in *A Mercy* Morrison portrays 'Minha mae', Floren's mother, as similar to Sethe and Baby Suggs in *Beloved* who long for the quest of their lost daughter.

### **III. Implication of Focalization: A Study of the Focalizer and Narrator in *A Mercy***

The narrative of *A Mercy* is the narrative of Florens who is presented as the narrator as well as focalizer and the heterodiegetic narrator's understanding in which she narrates her own stories and similarly, the heterodiegetic narrator narrates several characters' different stories respectively. In other words, as the multiple character focalizers of the entire novel, the narrative of *A Mercy* is presented through the perspective of Florens in the first person narrative and from the perspective of multiple characters such as Jacob Vaark, Lina, Rebekka, Sorrow, Willard and Scully and finally Florens's mother in the third person narrative narrated by the heterodiegetic narrator. Similarly, other characters such as Blacksmith and D'ortega, presented through the multiple characters' perspective, are focalized because they have less access to their own representation.

As Florens, Jacob Vaark, Lina, Rebekka, Sorrow, Willard and Scully and finally Florens's mother are focalizers, the persons whose perspective the events and the characters of the story are witnessed or perceived; everything in the narrative is filtered through their perception. The entire focalized are brought in the light not by the author but by the focalizers. The readers know about both the focalizers and focalized as they have been evaluated or understood by the focalizers. So the heterodiegetic narrator narrates whatever gets filtered through the consciousness of the multiple focalizers Jacob Vaark, Lina, Rebekka, Sorrow, Willard and Scully and finally Florens's mother except Florens without his or her intervention. Therefore, it is their understanding which the readers has access in the novel. Nevertheless whatever images of (their) self and other(s) are created in the novel; it is they as the characters –

focalizers who are responsible. Thus, it is Florens as the character and focalizer and on the other hands, the multiple internal focalizers such as JacobVaark, Lina, Rebekka, Sorrow, Willard and Scully and finally Florens's mother are responsible for the reliability or unreliability of the narrative because of the absence of the authorial judgment.

The novel *A Mercy*, written in the third person narrative without narratorial judgments and identity, the narrator (heterodiegetic narrator) cannot be expected to perceive the inner fictional world created in the novel. Therefore, he or she only narrates the story as a heterodiegetic narrator narrates in the third person narrative. Then the question arises who is /are responsible to perceive the alienated and fragmented situation of the people in the pre-slavery era? Now it become clear that it is either single character or characters who is / are the member of the novel can perceive this situation. When we go through the novel deeply, we will realize at first that the narrative has been presented from the several characters with their multiple voices.

Morrison lets each of her key characters central the narrative at some point in *A Mercy*. It is to Morrison's credit that she creates a strongly unified work out of the juxtaposition of such dramatically different perspective, frequent shifting, even more striking; she retains her own distinctive style with her characteristically potent imagery and overtones of the biblical language while also allowing each of her characters to develop an identifiable world view.

As the narrative of *A Mercy* begins with the perspective of Florens (the protagonist or central character as her perspective often repeating one after another chapter), an enslaved girl in Jacob's plantation, immediately she loses her perspective

than the omniscient heterodiegetic narrator is employed who narrates different stories of the several characters from their own perspectives as in Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*. Such heterodiegetic narrator's gender, according to Genette, is not explicitly identified; he or she is an implied voice. This heterodiegetic narrator is not the member of the present novel; therefore, he or she is not responsible for the images of alienation of the characters created in the novel *A Mercy*. So the heterodiegetic narrator in the third person narrative narrates whatever gets through consciousness of the multiple characters' perspectives. The intrusion of the heterodiegetic narrator in the rest of the book is frequent. For instance, it is heterodiegetic that comments:

He thoughts, a case against D' Ortega would succeed and he wouldn't be forced to settle for a child as a percentage of what was due him. He knew he had excused the bargain by thinking Rebekka would be eager to have her, but what was truer then that was another thing. From his own childhood he knew that there was no good place in the world for waifs and whelps. [...] he refused to be sentimental about his own orphan states, the year spend with children of all shade, stealing food and cadging gratuities for errands[...]his father, who hailed from Amsterdam, left him with a name easily punned and a cause of deep suspicion. The shame the Dutch had visited on the English was everywhere, especially during his stint in the poor house before the luck of being taken on as a runner for a law firm. (30-31)

The heterodiegetic narrator in the above extract narrates the story of Jacob from the perspectives of Jacob himself that he is against D' Ortega who thinks slaves as his commodity. These are the words of the intrusive commenter who wants to enlighten

the readers about some aspects of Jacob's life and personality. The readers' knowledge and appreciation of the characters should be built up impression by the impression of the action, dialogue and monologue by a subtle manipulation of the focalization. The heterodiegetic narrator, whose gender is not identified, in the above lines is not responsible for the condition of Jacob who became orphan and trader of human body as like animal. In other words, the narrator is not responsible for the exchange of Florens with debt but they are slave owner such as Jacob and D Ortega and her mother who is responsible.

On the other hands, the novel *A mercy*, begins with the first person narrative, the narrator, Florens who appears as 'I' as a main character in the novel. In such mode of narrative there is the possibility for the narrator to be both center of the narration and the center of the perception. As the center of narration she narrates her story in the first person narrative point of view from the first world of the story to the last for being narrator but as the center of the perception she can focalize only what she receives or perceives or sees in the slavery era: "I am just come from you aching with sin and looking forward to more. I ask her meaning. She says there is only one fool in this place and she is not it so be ware" (101). In this sense, the narrator, Florens, has the status of the character in the story is called homodiegetic narrator who is responsible for the images reliable or unreliable created in the story. Even in such situation when narrating and focalizing are taken by the same agent, Florens, there is the gap between these two identities thus results in alienation.

Toni Morrison's *A Mercy* incorporates with the variable or multiple internal focalizations in which many distinctive alternative voices of several focal characters such as JacobVaark, Lina, Rebekka, Sorrow, Willard and Scully and finally



Florens's mother take turn narrating their different stories concern with the slavery that causes a sense of alienation. As the result, the thoughts, feelings and perceptions of them can be known by using various eyes of those characters so that it is supposed to be more neutrality toward all the characters and reliable as in Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* and Robert Browning's *The Ring and the Book*. In the novel Morrison employs first focal character, Florens than Jacob then again Florens and finally Florens's mother, Florens's focalization often repeating, alternatively with the voices of JacobVaark, Lina, Rebekka, Sorrow, Willard and Scully and Florens's mother. In the opening chapter, in which the perception of *A Mercy's* story world is filtered through Florens's first person narrative, she recalls her first encounter with Sorrow as follows: "nor is Sorrow is happy to see me. She flaps her hand in the front of her face as though bees are bothering her" (9).

The focalizers as JacobVaark, Lina, Rebekka, Sorrow, Willard and Scully and finally Florens's mother are the center or origin through whom the focalized(s) such as Blacksmith and D'ortega are focalized or perceived. They are responsible for the images reliable or unreliable created in the novel *A Mercy*. The focalized do not have access to focalization and narrator is not the character, it is neither narrator nor the focalized(s) who can be responsible for the conditions they black are facing in the time. Readers of this novel are destined to see through the focalizers eyes. We get the images of the Blacksmith and D'ortega through Florens's perspective as the narratologist Bal further writes "the images we receive of the object is determined by the focalizer conversely, the images a focalizer presents of an object says something about the focalizer" (*Narratology* 50). With the implication of Bal's ideas in the novel, we can say that JacobVaark, Lina, Rebekka, Sorrow, Willard and Scully and

finally Florens's mother are focalizers through whose perspectives the narrative is told, whereas the agent –Blacksmith and D'ortega, who are filtered through the consciousness of the focalizers, are focalized. So the story of *A Mercy* is focalized through the perception of the narrator or multiple characters. For instance, Blacksmith, a freeman, is focalized through the consciousness of Florens:

You can think what I tell you a confession, if you like but one full of curiosities familiar only in the dream and during those moments when a dog's profile plays in the steam of cattle. Or when a corn- husk doll sitting on a self is soon applying in the corner of a room and the wicked of how it gets stranger things happen all the time everywhere.

You know I know you know. (1)

In the beginning of her narration Florens's devotes her narrative to her lover Blacksmith, one of the most prominent African-American male who being an African, gained freedom and even learned his own trade. As a result of his pride, strength and intelligence, he has Florens's everlasting affection and devotion; it is likely that she would die to have even the tiniest amount of that affection returned to her.

Blacksmith, as the focalized, is filtered through the consciousness of focalizer

Florens, who in the end, crushed by the Blacksmith's rejection, concludes: "See? You are correct. I am become wilderness but I am also Florens. In full. unforgiven.

Unforgiving. No ruth , my love. None. Here me? Slave. Free. I last" (159). Here, her emerging sense of herself derives first from her utter willingness to transfer ownership of herself to the Blacksmith, second, from her travels through the wilderness to locate the Blacksmith, and finally from her wild and violent outburst in the confrontation with the Blacksmith.

#### **IV. A Study of Dialogism: An Exposition of Multiple Voices in *A Mercy***

Morison's *A Mercy* incorporates multiple voices through its various characters in order to depict the multiple problems such as exploitation, domination, gender discrimination, racial injustice, violence, disintegration and identity crisis of African American, Portuguese, Dutch, English, Native American mixed race people and even white American that causes a sense of alienation in the Atlantic colonies between the 1680s and the 1690s. In other words, the novel is inherent of multiple voices, coming from the diversified background of the plot of the story. The presence of the varied tunes of the different characters such as Jacob Vaarks, Lina, Rebekka, Sorrow, Willard and Scully and finally Florens's mother in the novel often enact the embodiment of the different world views. The exploitation of languages and styles with rhetorical devices such as Black English, foregrounding, and cohesion in the novel is never unitary systems of norms; rather it is always social cultural phenomenon. Therefore, within the language there are always several perspectives it has incorporated. There are always many ways of speaking and such different languages, spoken by several characters of the different backgrounds, reflect the diversity of social experiences, conceptualizations and values. Here in the novel, Florens is gifted with words. Language is vital to her as food, filling her emptiness, and she recounts memories of learning to read and write, shaping words with pebbles into smooth flat rock and the memories of the departure from her mother and brother:

We have sticks to draw through sand, pebbles to shapes words on smooth flats rocks. When the letters are memory we make whole words. I am faster than my mother and her baby boy is no good at all [...]. I like talk, Lina talk, stone talk, even Sorrow talk. At first when I

am brought here I don't talk any word. All of what I here is different  
from what words mean to a Minha Mae and me. (4)

The above lines represent the memories of Florens, a black slave girl in white male dominated society where she is obliged to be quiet. Florens, about eight years old when she was taken, recounts her shock, pain and bitterness at this abandonment by her Minha Mae who says: "Please, Senhor. Not me. Take her. My daughter" (24). Florens remembers this scene time and again that causes a sense of alienation.

Here it is essential to view how *A Mercy* can be analyzed from Heteroglossia perspective. Heteroglossia, for Bakhtin, is the organ of polyphonic novel including the languages of speech styles that conceptualized the world in words. The various voices of the characters embody different belief system need to be analyzed considerably. The novel embody a large number of distinct speech styles, cult of people and the land and the employment of the multiple voices represent the different choices and desires of the slaves such as Lina, Sorrow, Willard and Scully and Florens's mother. The novel is the accumulation of the multiple and distinct discordant voices, ways of living, ideologies and consciousness of the people of the 1680s and the 1690s in the American society. These heteroglossic voices happen to appear in the novel because of different characters' different social backgrounds, professions and ways of living as well as problems created by extreme cruelty of slavery. Among the multiple voices and language in *A Mercy*, the speech styles of Florens, a literate slave girl; Lina, a Native American whose tribe has been decimated by Smallpox; Sorrow, a daughter of a sea captain killed in a storm off the coast of the Carolinas, Willard and Scully, indentured gay servants; Jacob Vaark and Rebekka, trading and farming couple; D'ortega, a cruel slave master and trader and Blacksmith, a freeman have distinct

places in the novel. They are living despite all the disagreements and differences in vision and attitudes. Florens in the beginning of the chapter narrates:

He rushes all about asking where and who but can find no answer.  
 Finally, he takes rags, strips of sailcloth lying about and wraps my feet.  
 Now I am knowing that unlike with senhor, priests are unlove here.[...]  
 when I arrive here I believe it is the place he warns against. The  
 freezing in hell that comes before the everlasting fire where sinners  
 bubble and singe forever. But the ice comes first, he says. And when I  
 see knives of it hanging from the houses and trees and feel the white air  
 burn my face I am certain the fire is coming. (5-6)

The views and the opinions of Florens have been clearly presented in the above lines. The violence, exploitation and torture is clearly seen. Although Florens seems to be happy in Jacob's house where she is treated with kindness by the trader's wife Rebekka and by the slaves names Lina, the memories of her mother and brother and the cruelty done upon her and her family by D'ortega always torture her. The African American characters in Morison's narrative has been presented as object like "which did not mean you could do business with them and he had out dealt them often enough, especially here where tobacco and slaves were married, each currency clutching its parents elbow" (12). Here we come one of the most notable presence of multiple voices in the novel. Florens through her narrative, tries to stumble down the hitherto, ideology of white male toward black especially black female. This given narrativization or voices highlight the conflicts of two distant trends of thought patterns, ideologies and conceptualizations of the society. So *A Mercy* is extremely brimming with the element of Heteroglossia as the characters represent different

facets of life and the world, characters do speak in their own pattern embodying divergent attitudes and beliefs towards life. As a result, the novel is the play of multiple voices. Florens, Jacob Vaarks, Lina, Rebekkah, Sorrow, Willard and Scully, Florens's mother and Blacksmith do have different ideologies which are totally distinct from other. Likewise, all the characters of the novel voice their ideas in their own styles. It is, therefore, sufficient to embrace the assertion of Bakhtin "the style of the (text) is to be found in the combination of its styles: the languages of the (text) are the system of the language (*The Dialogic Imagination* 262).

Toni Morrison's *A Mercy* draws Bakhtinian perspective in order to raise the issues of the uncompromisable conflicts as the expression of the multiplicity while analyzing the novel from Bakhtinian principle; it needs to consider the concept of multiplicity, countering perspectives, flexibility of the truth or opinion when we come to the close analysis of the novel it itself reveal the inherent contradiction while showing the seeds of polyphonic convention what Bakhtin argues. The inherent contradictions and the conflicts of the novel portrays through the explicit differentiation of ideologies, perspectives and values among the characters: Florens, Jacob Vaarks, Lina, Rebekkah, Sorrow, Willard and Scully, Florens's mother and Blacksmith. These deep running conflicts, based on the beliefs or perspectives run to the core of the respective characters, eventually results in contradiction. Because in these contradictions, a slave can be more free than her owner or a mother can love her daughter by giving her away.

Bakhtin is concerned with the discourse of characters in the novel which may challenge and disrupt the overriding ideologies as expressed in a single voice of a narrator. Instead of the subordinating the voices of characters to a domineering

authorial voices, Bakhtin argues, a writer like Dostoevsky has created a polyphonic discourse in which the author's voices is only one among many. Commenting on polyphony, he writes “*Dostoevsky's Poetics* is constructed not as the whole of a single consciousness, absorbing other consciousness as objects into itself, but as whole formed by the interaction of several consciousnesses, none of which entirely becomes an object for the other. They are separate entity to each other” (18). It means the polyphonic discourse has to be understood with the exposure of multiple consciousness and differentiations. Therefore, polyphonic demands a work in which several voices meet an equal and engaging in dialogue that is the principle unfinalizable. The characters are presented not only objects of authorial discourse but also subject of their own directly signifying discourse. The direct power belongs to several voices the polyphonic works whereas monologic works concerned to the author alone.

The polyphonic convention is the outcome of the twentieth century literary criticism with the introduction of Bakhtin's dialogic theory, Toni Morrison also seems a supporter of Bakhtin, Foucault, and Derrida with her portrayal of the multiplicity and variable perspectives inherence of truth in her text, *A Mercy*. From this perspective the novel *A Mercy* turn out to be polyphonic novel with the advocacy for multiple voices and the dialogicality of the truth. Morrison presents multiple characters such as Florens, Jacob Vaarks, Lina, Rebekkah, Sorrow, Willard and Scully and finally Florens's mother with their multiple voices as narrated by the heterodiegetic narrator, meandering from characters to characters and from past to present as it punctuates Florens 's journey with the back stories of her compatriots. Florens tells her story in the first person, but a heterodiegetic narrator tells the stories of her

fellows. We see how Jacob vaark becomes a reluctant participant in the slave trade, “Her that one. I will take her. She is our main cook, the best one” (22). We see how Rebekka traveled to America specifically to marry Jacob, a man she had never met. We meet Jacob’s other slaves; Lina, a Native American whose family and village were destroyed by Smallpox, and Sorrow, a crazed and outcast orphan who survived the shipwreck that killed her father. We meet Willard and Scully, indentured servants who work on Jacob’s plantation and we the freeman Blacksmith whom Florens is sent to find, hopping his mastery of medical herbs will save Rebekka. In this sense, the portrayal of several stories of different characters in their own voices turns out to be polyphonic text with the advocacy for countering multiple voices and the dialogicality of the truth.

The concept of multiplicity rejects the logo-centric tradition inherited from Aristotle to Saussure. This tradition was repudiated by Bakhtin’s polyphonic convention with the emphasis on the multiple or plurality of consciousness. This multiplicity or plurality gets shapes in Morison’s novel *A Mercy*. Through the portrayal of different perspectives regarding the slavery the conflicts that occurs between two white traders Jacob Vaark and D’ortega and two black, Florens and Blacksmith, is infact the outcome of differing ideologies. Jacob Vaark as kind master thinks his slaves: Florens, Lina, Willard, Scully and sorrow as his ‘helpers’ whereas D’ortega as a cruel master thinks them as commodity. In the same manner, Florens, a slave girl works and lives in Jacob’s house as slave whereas her lover Blacksmith, a freeman is free from and cruelty and brutality of the slavery. Morison’s portrayal of these dominant countering perspectives to an equal footing rather than dominant of one makes us believe that she, like Bakhtin, advocates reality as the representation of



the multiplicity instead of domination of one single perspective. Indeed, these differing voices or perspectives in concerning for the slavery in the novel meet equals and engage in dialogue that is the principle unfinalizability thereby making it with the side of the novel of the polyphonic or Heteroglossic convention. Thus, such flexibility in their opinions and ideas make us assure that the novel *A Mercy* really asserts the individual within the context that is actually the celebration of the multiplicity.

According to Bakhtin the term ‘unfinalizability’ requires the possibility for multiple expressions or perspectives. The multiple expressions mean the lack of determinacy or universal truth. It shows that Bakhtin is in favors of unfinalizability to make the beginning of the postmodernism as it grants the indeterminacy and unfinalizability as the ultimate reality with the consideration of this postmodern reality of Bakhtin. We can even explore this phenomenon in Morison’s *A Mercy*. In this sense, our research for multiple narrative voices or perspectives in this novel seems reasonable as the novel marks the seed of unfinalizability with the portrayal of multiple expression and multiple perspectives in order to highlight multiple problems such as exploitation, violence, gender discriminations racial and social injustice, disintegrations and identity crisis faced by African American, Portuguese, Dutch, English, Native American and even mixed race people in the Atlantic colonies between the 1680s and the 1690s in the American society.

When we come to the closer analysis of the novel the existing conflicts between dominant voices and individual voice, disrupts the traditional monologic tradition. It is because of this, expressed conflict between two characters: Jacob Vaark and D’ortega regarding the slaves are best represented in the following dialogue where they are engaged:

He said “Her. That one. I will take her.”

As, no. Impossible. My wife won’t allow she cannot live without her.

“She is our main cook, the best one.”

“Perhaps another lender would be more to your liking.”

“You don’t seem to comprehend my offer. I not for feiting my debt.”

“I honoring it the value of a seasoned slave is beyond adequate.”

“Not if I can’t use her. ”

“Use her? Sell her.”

“My trade is goods and gold sin”. (22)

The above dialogue between Jacob and D’ortega helps to understand their point of view toward the slave and slavery. We hear the story in the voice of Jacob who is morally repelled by slavery and mostly refuses to take part in it: “Flesh was not his commodity” (20). He has accumulated a couple of slaves, but he thinks them as Rebekka’s helpers or rather than the property. Jacob decides to buy Florens not primarily because of her use values but because she is the same age as his daughter, recently killed by a horse and he hopes her presence might help to console Rebekka “Rebekka would welcome a child around the place. This one here, swimming in horrible shoes, appeared to be about the same age as patrician, and if she got kicked in the head by a mere, the loss would not rock Rebekka so” (24). Jacob, unlike D’ortega, does not wish to take slaves as payment for a bad debt but he feels it is the best option available. Nor does he wishes to traffic in slavery, he pride himself on his honest work although he is willing to make huge profits off the slaves labor of sugar plantation in Barbados. But on the other hands D’ortega wants to sell Florens in better price.

The novel's portrayal of perspectival differences and also the freeing play of ideologies to see its own unique identity make it what Bakhtin calls polyphonic novel. According to Bakhtin, a polyphonic work is constructed not as the whole of a single consciousness, absorbing other consciousness as objects into itself, but as whole formed by the interaction of several consciousnesses, none of which entirely becomes an object for the other" (18). As a monologic text, we find the resolvable conflict, finalized plot and characters but quite different from it, polyphonic text bear the tenant of unfinalizability and indeterminacy as the core point. The conflicts between two whites: Jacob and D'ortega and two blacks: Florens and Blacksmith do not come to be resolved at the end of the novel.

## **V. Conclusion: Presentation of Sense of Alienation with Multiple Narratives and Dialogism**

Toni Morrison's *A Mercy* when analyzed from Genettian multiple internal focalizers' perspective and Bakhtinian dialogism, shifts in narrative viewpoints, meandering from characters to characters, chapter by chapter and from present to the past in order to highlight the multiple voices of its characters. As the narrative begins with first person main character Florens's alienated story then it switches to the third person heterodiegetic narrator who being outside the story narrates the story of Jacob Vaarks, Lina, Rebekkah, Sorrow, Willard and Scully and finally Florens's mother, from the several characters' perspectives. The portrayal of African American, Portuguese, Dutch, English, Native American mixed race with their multiple voices of exploitation, domination, violence, social and racial injustice, gender discrimination inflicted upon them and their shifting voices corresponds to their alienated condition to give them solace and make them able to confront against their problems

Set in the Atlantic colonies between the 1680s and the 1690s in the American society in the early stages of the slave trade, *A Mercy* gives the multiple voices to the remarkable group of the characters: Jacob, an Anglo-Dutch farmer trader and lender; his wife Rebekka, newly arrived from England; their servants, the Native American Lina, whose tribe has been wiped out by smallpox; Florens, the slave girl he reluctantly accepts as payment for a bad loans; and the permanently shipwrecked Sorrow, the daughter of a sea captain killed in a storm off the coast of the Carolinas; Willard and Scully, indentured gay servants; Blacksmith, a freeman who has the medical knowledge and finally Florens's mother. These characters take turn narrating the story from their own perspectives and their voices carry the physical and

emotional scares of the struggle to their lives that causes a sense of alienation. The novel revolves around the multiple characters such as Florens, Jacob Vaarks, Lina, Rebekkah, Sorrow, Willard and Scully Blacksmith and finally Florens's mother who hold different perspectives regarding the issues of the slavery. Most of the story has been narrated by the heterodiegetic narrator in the third person narrative about the several characters except Florens whose multiple voices explore the history of both blacks and whites. Thus, in *A Mercy* all the characters are bereft of their roots struggling to survive in an alienated environment filled with dangers and diseases whether they are whites or blacks.

The implication of the multiple narrative techniques along with rhetorical devices, black English, foregrounding, cohesion and context dramatizes the condition of women such as Florens, Lina, Rebekkah and Sorrow ranging from black slaves to the white master's wife who are forced to live in complete alien environment which takes place not because of their own will rather their own helpless condition. While women may find their own sense of empowerment through something each female character seems to represent such as Florens's abandonment issue and Sorrow's overcoming the crisis of rape, male readers, especially African American may fail to identify with the struggle of the male characters because these struggles are barely depicted.

As the narrative in *A Mercy* is presented through the perspectives of multiple focalizers such as Florens, Jacob Vaarks, Lina, Rebekkah, Sorrow, Willard and Scully and finally Florens's mother in which Florens, as focalizer as well as narrator in the first person narrative and other in the third person narrative as narrated by heterodiegetic narrator are responsible for the images created in the novel. Other

characters such as Blacksmith and D' Ortega, presented through the multiple characters' perspectives are focalized who do not have access to the focalization and are not responsible for the images created in the novel. The readers know about both focalizers and focalized not by author or narrator but by focalizers. So the heterodiegetic narrator narrates whatever get filtered through the consciousness of the multiple focalizers without his or her intervention.

Morrison's *A Mercy* incorporates multiple voices through its various characters in order to represent the multiplicity, unfinazability and indeterminacy as the ultimate reality which is the phenomenon of Bakhtinian Dialogism. The representation of the multiple narrative voices of the characters as Florens, Jacob Vaarks, Lina, Rebekkah, Sorrow, Willard and Scully and finally Florens's mother with polyphonic discourse created Heteroglossia in the novel instead of subordinating the voices of characters to a domineering authorial voices as Dostoevsky that the author's voices is only one among many. Thus, such flexibility in their opinions and ideas is actually the celebration of the multiplicity. The novel is, indeed, inherent of the multiple voices, coming from the diversified background of the plot in order to reflect the diversity of the social experiences, ways of speaking, multiple consciousness conceptualizations and values. These Heteroglossia voices happen to appear in the novel because of the characters different social backgrounds as well as problem created by the extreme cruelty of the slavery. Among the multiple voices and language in *A Mercy*, the speech style of Florens, a literate slave girl; Lina, a Native American whose tribe has been decimated by Smallpox; Sorrow, a daughter of a sea captain killed in a storm off the coast of the Carolinas, Willard and Scully, indentured gay servants; Jacob Vaark and Rebekka, trading and farming couple; D'ortega, a cruel slave master and trader and Blacksmith, a freeman have distinct places in the novel.

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