

Chapter – IV

Morrison in 1980s: An Ecocritical Study of *Beloved*

Beloved, an immediate literary thunderbolt and the most significant creative output from the pen of Toni Morrison, appeared on the literary scene in 1987 and won the Pulitzer Prize for Morrison in 1988. The novel unearths a pricking story of Sethe who worked as a slave in Sweet Home plantation in Kentucky where she lived along with her husband Halle and their children. Their first master Garner allowed them to live a stable life. But when School Teacher owned the plantations after the death of Garner, the exploitation of Sethe's family reached to heroic proportions. He subjected them to innumerable tortures and merciless exploitation. Due to this, all slaves decided to escape but Paul D and Sethe were the only one who could manage to do so. Sethe was pregnant with her fourth child. She had already sent her three children to her mother-in-law. Then she ran away and managed to escape with the help of a white girl who even helped her in the delivery of her fourth child, Denver. Sethe then arrived at Baby Suggs's house, i.e. her mother- in- law's house as a free person. But she could only enjoy this liberty for twenty-eight days as School Teacher came to retrieve Sethe and her children. In her frenzy to protect her children from the curse of slavery, she started killing all of them. Though others managed to survive, she slit the throat of her eldest daughter, Beloved. Sethe was thus sent to prison but was prevented from hanging by Bodwins.

When the narrative opens, twenty-years have passed after all these events and we find that Sethe is haunted by the baby ghost of her daughter Beloved. Moreover, both Denver and Sethe are ostracised by their community. Then comes Paul D who

comes as a hope in the depressed life of Sethe. He tries to move the ghost out of the house. But when he learns about Sethe's act of murder from Stamp Paid, he too departs. After his departure, the ghost of Beloved becomes more dominating over Sethe. The whole community then comes to rescue Sethe on the request of her daughter. The ghost of Beloved is then exorcised out of the house. Later Paul D comes to visit Sethe and asks her to overcome her horrible past. The novel ends with a hope for a better life for Sethe and Denver in future.

Variegated and innumerable critical stances immediately have sprung up after the publication of the novel. The novel has been dissected through various angles, viz. psychoanalytical, postmodern and feminist. The novel is also studied from historical and racial perspectives. Barbara Christian, H.L.Gates, M.S. Mobley and T. Harris have studied *Beloved* in context of Afro-American historical writings. Then, we have some significant psychoanalytical studies from critics like J. Fitzgerald, D. Heinze, P. Nicholls and J. Wyatt. Jennifer Fitzgerald has highlighted how the novel explores the psychic damage done by slavery and offers a solution in the form of community healing to remove these scars of slavery. Shail Bala too makes a psychoanalytic study as she delves deep into the issues of identity as discussed in the novel. Then there are critics like C. Tate, A. Lidinsky, M. Rubins, Rafael Prez Torres who studied *Beloved* as a postmodernist text. In his essay, Rafael Prez Torres studies how postmodernism expresses itself in the linguistic expression and aesthetic qualities of the novel. The concepts of motherhood and sisterhood are also dwelled upon by many critics. K. Sumana too makes an interesting and thought provoking study from Marxist perspective.

Then there are some critics who made an ecocritical study of the novel. Andrea Kate Campbell discusses various ecocritical inclinations of the novel. She has

done in depth study of the image of trees in the novel. The issue of ownership of land and consequent domination of blacks is mediated through the forces of nature. The importance of various places which are shown in the novel is widely discussed by Campbell. Another significant study from ecological perspective is done by Molly Hall. He examines the significance of 'place' in the true comprehension of the saga of slavery. William J. Terril discusses the role of trees in the thematic networking of the novel. The significance of tree imagery is also discussed by Moa Tjerngren in his article which got a lot of acclaim across literary circles.

Despite all these important ecocritical observations from various critics, much is needed to be explored from ecocritical focal point as the novel carries several ecocritical inclinations which are still untouched by all these afore stated critics. The present study is an attempt to look at all those areas which have not been discussed as yet by eco-critics thereby making an endeavour to offer comprehensive ecocritical analyses of the novel. Moreover, efforts will be made to show the growth of Morrison as a literary environmentalist from her very first novel *The Bluest Eye* (1970) to the period of 1980s when *Beloved* got published.

In fact the very beginning of the novel hints at the close relationship between man and nature which can be studied ecocritically in order to add more insights to the novel. *The Bluest Eye*, Toni Morrison's first novel was chapterized in the name of seasons. Seasons have always been an integral part of Morrison's thematic structure around which she spins her story. The depiction and narration of events with seasons as background not only establishes a close relationship between literature and nature but also highlights the fragmentation and distortion of the lives of characters through the variegated use of different symbolic meanings associated with seasons. The same happens in her novel *Beloved*. The text of the *Beloved* begins with a very somber

picture which represents death and suffering, “124 was spiteful, Full of a baby’s venom” (3). Few lines later, after this terrible statement, Morrison talks about winter which correlates with the deadly atmosphere of the main story. Winter season conventionally stands for death, decay and passivity. By associating the course of events with the winter season, the novelist wants to state and make it clear at the very beginning that the characters in the novel are not in a happy state. They are suffering and are unable to act just like the passivity of winter.

In fact, if one closely relates the first sentence of the novel with these lines, then one sees that it is winter which completes the complete address of Sethe’s house, i.e, 124 Bluestone Road. The novelist introduced the word ‘winter’ deliberately to mark the death and decay that permeates in the lives of those who stay in that house of Bluestone Road. The symbolic implications of winter reside in the house of Sethe and Denver who have waged a war in their house with an unknown spirit who seems to be Sethe’s murdered daughter Beloved.

And, it is not just winter which hints at the relationship between the text and nature. The whipping of horse by local people whenever they pass 124 Bluestone Road is another instance which establishes that link. Whipping of a horse is cruelty to animals. And every time local people pass this house, they whip this animal. Now this cruelty to animals is symbolic of the cruelty to which the inmates of the house at 124 Bluestone Road are subjected to. All the members of the house are whipped by the society in one way or the other. Mentioning one such instance of exploitation where Sethe was subjected to abject cruelty and treated like an animal was the one when she was asked by the engraver to have sex for ten minutes because Sethe didn’t have any money to pay for the epitaph of the tombstone of her daughter Beloved. When the engraver learns that Sethe has no money to pay, he took advantage of the situation to

exploit her. He bargains that he will do the job for free and will engrave seven letters on the headstone if she will do sex with him for ten minutes. This is a horrible picture of exploitation where a human being is treated like an animal devoid of emotions and feelings.

Not only seasons, if observed carefully the pattern of “green and white” (1) house which is there in *The Bluest Eye* is also repeated in these lines. But here it is replaced by “gray and white house” (3). This pattern is also significant for two reasons. Firstly, it shows the recurrence of events, that what happened in *The Bluest Eye* gets repeated in *Beloved*. Moreover, the replacement of green with gray reflects what readers are going to witness in *Beloved* is far graver than *The Bluest Eye*. Thus the very first page of the novel clears the thematic construct of the novel symbolically and also establishes the close relationship between the literature and environment which seeps in through the novel.

On the one hand, one tends to draw parallel between *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved* whereas on the other, one figures out that in the novel *Beloved*, Morrison trods a completely different path in the depiction of nature. In *The Bluest Eye*, while depicting the trauma of a black girl who yearns to be beautiful by having blue eyes, Morrison shows the distorted and fragmented relationship between the Africans and nature. She explains how due to influence and exploitation of the whites, nature can be equated to the African slaves. The novel thus portrays pictures of exploitation of nature and animals at the hands of whites who make black people their puppets to commit that exploitation. *Beloved* goes a step ahead as it questions what happens when the same nature which is considered equivalent to black slaves itself becomes the site of brutality.

Nature is always touted as beautiful, spectacular, serene, placid, tranquil and what not. All sorts of adjectives which signify enchantment and beauty befit its description in any state, in any country or for that matter in any part of the world. Nature always generates positive elements in those people who either behold it or stay in communion with this beautiful ‘Mother Nature’. But this relationship between man and nature cannot be described in simplistic terms as the relationship between the two is a complex one. When ecocritics claim that nature and society in which man resides are closely knit, the role of societal patterns in which man lives with nature either as background or active part in it cannot be undermined in man’s bonding with nature. There are innumerable instances both in society and literature which show how the same nature which becomes muse for the one, evokes fear, horror, hatred and violence in someone else. The experience of a man enjoying the sight of wild animals in a safari or in a zoo cannot be similar to the experience of a man whose son has been gulped down by a lion in the forest. But the argument is not just based on the beautiful versus dangerous aspects of nature. Rather, it dwells somewhere which talks about the complexity of man’s social moldings like his class, gender, caste, creed, religion, race which determine his overall relationship with nature.

Toni Morrison’s works often offer themselves for ecocritical evaluations as nature and environmental concerns always hold a special prominence whenever she takes pen to put her thoughts into words. But, there is one novel *Beloved* which specifically helps in elucidating this afore stated argument because in this novel the protagonist and other characters’ relation to nature is fragmented, conflicting because it gets conditioned by myriad factors like race, gender, class, history geography, etc. Sethe recalls her memory of Sweet Home in the following lines when Paul D comes, “Although there was not a leaf on that farm that did not make her want to scream” (7).

It is clear from the above line that image of leaves and trees from Sweet Home don't evoke beautiful and soothing memories for Sethe which conventionally these images carry. Rather images and memories of leaves and trees brought back the horrifying memories of brutal exploitation faced by Sethe and other blacks at the hands of their white owners. Thus it can be easily made out how the issues of race and slavery have moulded and twisted the relationship between man and nature. As Smith writes, "Slavery and racism have shaped the meaning of the American landscape, its physical features, its pattern of possession and dispossession" (1).

Trees, however, play a crucial symbolic strand in the thematic networking of the novel. When Paul D comes to meet Sethe after so many years, Sethe tells her that there is a tree on her back. Now this tree is not a biological tree which grows on the back of Sethe. Rather, it is the tree of her terrible memories of exploitation of the past. Though Sethe has come out of Sweet Home where she was a slave and treated like animals, the exploitation was so barbarous and deep that they are still intact with Sethe and she could not escape from them. The memories of Sweet Home are compared to a tree because as a biological tree grows its branches and leaves with time, so Sethe's memories of the tormented past haunt more and more with the passage of time. Moreover, this tree grew on her 'back' only because the memories belong to the back part of Sethe's life, i.e. her past.

That tree exists because she is ransacked of her feeling of motherhood and of being a woman which nature has given her. A mother's milk is the gift of nature bestowed upon a mother. This milk of Sethe was exclusively for her daughter. But, Sethe then relates to Paul D how this milk which is symbolic of her natural motherhood was stolen by the boys at Sweet Home. She remembers the story so clearly when she tells Paul D about how she sent her first daughter away, while she

was nursing that baby girl. At that time, she was also pregnant with Denver. When she was at Sweet Home, her milk was nursed by the grown nephews of School Teacher who was the owner of Sweet Home. When she reported the matter to Mrs. Garner, the wife of the original owner of plantations, she was brutally beaten by the School Teacher before she escaped the Sweet Home. Sethe was beaten so brutally that the scars of that beating left a mark of Chokecherry tree on her back that she has been carrying it with her for eighteen years.

Once again, the tree surfaces in her statement which is symbolic of her fearful past of exploitation. Sethe was exploited both because of gender and her belongingness to black race. The result of this exploitation, however, does not end here. This violence on blacks by whites have distorted and fragmented blacks' relationship with nature. When blacks see that nature is a mute witness to the horrible treatment they are subjected to, they become terrified with nature and here comes a confused state in their relationship with nature. The original love of blacks towards nature gets converted into the state of bewilderment. Sethe's act of knocking down of the dog in order to take out his savageness shows this confused state,

And to take Sethe out of this bewilderment stage, Paul D comes close to Sethe so that in that act of communion, she may shed all her emotions of the past by revealing all her heart to him. He was aware that the anger which has persisted in her since her stay at Sweet Home is somehow killing her. She needs to vent out all that so that she might get relieved of the scar of that Chokecherry tree. Not only Sethe, even her daughter Denver who has just heard about the stories of exploitation at Sweet Home carries forward this image of tree, "She smelled like bark in the day and leaves at night" (23).

Paul D comes to heal the tree of Sethe's haunted memories. But after the sexual union of the two, when Paul D once again witnesses that tree, he finds the same tree repulsive. The image of tree on the back seems to him ugly repulsive scars. The reason for this is that Paul D's memories and conception of the trees at Sweet Home is completely different from the memories of Sethe. Sethe's memories of Sweet Home are filled with violence and abhorrence whereas Paul D has good memories of trees at Sweet Home because for him trees are beautiful, welcoming and adorable. And that's why he is unable to relate with Sethe's conception of tree and finds it just a scar. For Paul D, "trees were inviting things" (26).

It is not like Sethe doesn't admire the natural beauty of plantations at Sweet Home. She misses certain things which brought happiness to her in Sweet Home. It was a place where she lived all her life, got married and gave birth to her children. So, she has a lot of fond memories at Sweet Home but her admiration and enjoyment of natural beauty of plantations is often accompanied by horrifying images like "Boys hanging from the most beautiful sycamores in the world" (6). Sethe oscillates between the aesthetic beauty of Sweet Home and her remembrances of the violent tortures she suffered there, the violence and the endurance which marked her body and heart forever.

For Paul D, nature is a comforter, a soothing agent. He believes that Sweet Home has the prettiest trees in the world. He has also befriended a tree and named him Brother. He, Halle, other Pauls and Sino gather around that tree, cook food, talk and enjoy a lot. Under this tree, they forget all the sufferings at Sweet Home. Brother, a tree, hence becomes a symbol of happiness, love, friendship, bonding, brotherhood and solace. Paul D remembers how Sino, once had to travel seventeen kilometers both ways to meet his lady friend. And on his return, he was too tired to work. So, his

friends co-operated him and did his part of work without any food so that their master but might not reprimand him. This episode clearly reflects the harmony and love that this tree Brother brings in Paul D. And, this is the reason he cannot relate with Sethe's tree at her back and takes it as a clump of scars because Sethe and Paul D's experience are altogether different in relation to nature and trees in particular at Sweet Home.

Not only because of his experiences at Sweet Home and his relationship with Brother but also because of his later experiences in life with nature and trees, he can never develop the attitude of Sethe towards tree. Sethe's memories of Sweet Home and the abuse and exploitation she endured there have affected and plagued her mind and have a deep impact on her bonding with nature. But this is not the case with Paul D. When Paul D escapes from a chain gang in Georgia, he runs to freedom in the North by following the "blooming trees along the way" (112).

In fact, if studied carefully, throughout the novel the symbol and imagery of trees offer various manifestations and variegated interpretations. The first and foremost interpretation is the idea that in the novel trees acts as a shield against the exploitation and violence perpetrated in the story. Sethe has a traumatized past which is full of all sorts of cruelties. Memories of all these barbarities keep on haunting her all the time. Though she tries her best to suppress them, they keep on hovering over her life like a black cloud. She herself becomes a slave of these memories of traumatic past. In order to protect herself from all these ugly memories, Sethe has always conflated them with the image of the trees so that her minds stick to the beauty of trees rather than the ugliness of her past sufferings. Thus trees act as a shield against that exploitation memoir. Here, she gives more importance to the beauty of the sycamore tree rather than the brutal loss of her fellow inmates at Sweet Home. Her

brain effectively makes use of the beauty of tree to divert her mind from the terror of the situation which that memory brings whenever she recalls this situation.

And, this is just one instance. All other experiences which Sethe faced or witnessed which come along with the curse of slavery are confronted well by Sethe through the aid of ‘trees’. Trees act as a tool of survival for Sethe. Tree imagery offers a resistance to all her memories which white people have thrusted upon blacks with their brutal handling of blacks. Most of the Sweet Home slaves died in the vicinity of tree. Sino was tied to a tree and burned, Paul D hanging also happens on a tree, and even Halle whose death remained a mystery appeared to be the same dead body which was hanged along with Paul D. For some men who could not escape from Sweet Home, trees become a symbol of despair. But for Sethe, the same trees become a symbol of hope and happiness because the same trees bear witness to the Sethe’s miraculous escape from the age old clutches of slavery. For Sethe, trees mark a desire to live, a hope to sustain.

However, the story which weaves trees and positivity doesn’t culminate here. When Sethe escaped from Sweet Home to forest, she was pregnant with her daughter. Her situation was very pathetic as her health was deteriorating rapidly. But, once again tree comes to her rescue and bring relief in the form of Amy Denver who in order to help her “comes out of the trees” (220). Had Amy not come at the appropriate time, both the mother and the child couldn’t have survived. Amy’s breath is also shown by Morrison, “like burning wood” (220). Now Amy is also burning, i.e. struggling along with trees to bring both the mother and daughter in a healthy state. Trees become healer like Amy Denver. Amy prepared a bed of leaves so that Sethe’s injured body could find some relief after this tumultuous journey. And, when she saw Sethe’s feet, she found them so swollen because of journey that she could not bear the

painful sight. She immediately prepared shoes and stuffed them with leaves which will protect Sethe. And, it is only because of her help that Sethe survived and after breaking the fetters of slavery achieved freedom for herself and her daughter.

Not only Sethe, her daughter's relationship with trees is also a special one which can be equated to a spiritual relationship. Denver's mindset is also conditioned by white domination and slavery. She is always conscious about her status in the society and is scared of roaming outside. Though she is completely free at 124 Bluestone Road, her mind is chained with the thoughts of exploitation meted out to slaves. So, she doesn't prefer going outside. And, to gain spiritual peace from the terrifying atmosphere of slavery, she has formed her own emerald closet which is 'boxwood of bushes' in her garden. Denver comes here often whenever she feels disturbed.

This house play of Denver which is made of leaves and surrounded by trees gives her a big relief from the outside world. Denver's loneliness also gets recovered in this closet where she feels elated, safe and in love with her own existence. The place thus becomes a site where her imagination gets satiated which pulls her out of the lonely world she resides in. For her, this house is not merely a structure. Rather she personifies this house. For Denver, trees become a tool to assert her freedom and as a mode of escape mechanism from the oddities of life.

Ever for Paul D, as discussed earlier, trees are welcoming things. He was mesmerized by the beauty of trees at Sweet Home and had also forged a bond with a tree whom he had named "Brother". Not only during his stay at Sweet Home but also during his journey of escape, trees helped him and bore a witness to his freedom from slavery. When he escaped from the prison in Alfred, Georgia, he was accompanied by

the blossoming tree flowers. Without the aid of these blossoming flowers of various kinds, he could never have achieved his long cherished desire of liberty. Trees directed him for a journey which moved from life to death. His resurrection happened in the presence of trees. When he asked Cherokee about the way to escape, Cherokee with a smile on his face told him that floods had turned everything in this area into streams and blossoms and asked him to “follow the...flowers...As they go, you go” (133). Thus trees become a guide in Paul D’s life to achieve his destination of free world.

But, this is just one side of the story. Trees not only carry with themselves positive memories. The image of tree also collaborates with negative and terrible events which complete the use of the imagery of trees in the novel. In fact, if trees and nature have rendered healing powers to its lovers, they have also been an area which welcomes fear, terror and violence. Weather conditions themselves are an obstacle to the people who depend upon nature. Same threat is posed by wild animals. Natural elements brings with them both help and hindrance. If we look at the Paul D’s escape, we see how the blossoming flowers and trees help him during his escape and give him directions so that he can reach his desired land of liberty. But in the initial stages of escape, these trees were a huge obstacle along with weather conditions. Paul D was escaping with other men. The total count was forty six and all of them were chained. Nature played havoc in the form of a heavy rain which created a muddy swamp and made it even harder for the men to escape. The ditch in which they were made to live in by their owner was getting flooded with muddy water. They were trying hard to escape but the trees came in between because all of them were chained and the forest was so dense that it was very difficult for all the chained men to cross the trees in one go. And since all are tied with a single chain, it means that if one was lost in the

muddy forest, all would get lost in this dense forest. Trees became an obstacle and delayed their whole journey of escape.

Even for Sethe, nature calls for certain negative elements which have a deep impact on her life. Be it the death of her fellow inmates Paul A and Sino, be it the separation from her husband Halle and be it the inhumane conditions at Sweet Home, the trees of the Sweet Home bring back the horrifying pictures of humanity being killed by the humans only. Trees bore a witness to all this barbarity, tortures, beating, etc. Women in particular were deeply impacted by these trees as they were the silent observers when they were brutally raped by their white masters. As Blum too writes, "Just as the wilderness could serve as a hiding place for beneficial aspects of black culture, it could also hide violence against women" (253). And it is for this reason that Sethe still carries that Chokocherry tree scar on her back after several years of escape. When School Teacher's nephews stole her milk, she reported the matter to School Teacher who beat her so brutally that it left a permanent mark on her body. And that scar resembles a tree because just like nature and trees, Sethe is also a silent victim of their exploitation.

Another episode where Sethe located trees as a site of violence is the one where School Teacher at Sweet Home enlisted all the slaves of Sweet Home with animalistic characteristics. He took the measurement of their bodies, counted their teeth as if they are animals. This disturbed Sethe a lot because while making this list the school teacher was using the ink which Sethe had prepared for them from cherry gum and oak bark. Sethe felt disturbed because with the help of her ink, he had converted the human beings into animals forever. She is full of guilt. Had she not prepared this ink, the school teacher would never have been able to put all her fellow mates in the category of animals. As Lorie Fulton puts, "She cannot help but feel that

she facilitates her abuse by making the ink he used to record these characteristics. Trees, thus become a source of guilt for Sethe"(192).

Moreover, when Sethe was a kid, she remembers how her mother was beaten so many times that her face got completely disfigured. Her face turned into a face of animal. And this happens because slaves are always linked by whites to the ‘wildness’ of nature. And they know only one way to curb that wildness and that one way is violence. And Sweet Home’s natural beauty was a mute spectator of all this. Even Paul D, who was deeply attached to trees realized that his attachment to these trees was only going to put him into danger. When we love something, we consider that object as our own. But whites had considered ‘nature’ as their exclusive site of possession. They didn’t like the intrusion of blacks in owning anything which they owned. Paul D had to keep himself a bit detached because he knew that this sense of love was only going to welcome violence for both nature and him. Though he was captivated by the grandeur of Sweet Home, he collected all his emotions in his little tobacco tin box.

It is because of this relationship with the trees that when Paul D and Sethe have conversation about Sweet Home, both of them can’t help praising the beauty of Sweet Home despite various barbarities they had witnessed there. Even the name Sweet Home here becomes symbolic and ironical at the same time. It becomes ironical because Sweet Home was not Sweet because of the cruel treatment given to slaves. Hence, they all escaped that land because they could no longer trace sweetness there in the behaviour of plantation owners. And the Sweet Home name is also symbolic because its inhabitants like Sethe and Paul D can’t stop praising and reviving their memories of Sweet Home. Denver is so perplexed at this ambiguity that she often asks them why they escaped Sweet Home if the place is so close to their

hearts. Paul D and Sethe are so much in awe of the place that they want to revisit that place again and again through their memories because it is the only place on this earth where their whole family was together. The place thus despite its horrors of slavery is dear to them and they miss it a lot.

Morrison through this love and hate relationship wants to demonstrate that though Afro- Americans are closely attached to the Southern landscape and consider it as their home, white domination and perpetual violence showered on them in this land have fractured their relationship with this land which is the home to all their memories of marriage, birth of their children and time spent together with all of them. And that's why they hesitate in considering this land as their own and escape to other places where they can at least assert their independence. As Rachel Stein remarks, "Social geography of racial segregation and white supremacy dispossesses black of any secure relationship to homeland" (89).

It is these memories which oscillate between happiness and sorrows and penetrate the mind of Sethe through the image of tree. In fact, if one looks at the character of Beloved, one finds that she is symbolic of tree. Just as trees aid and obstruct Sethe in getting over her haunted past, in the same way, Beloved helps and hinders Sethe in getting over his struggling days of slavery which she faced at Sweet Home and after.

Beloved's presence reawakens that past in front of her and she has no other option left but to face her buried past with all its horrors. Sethe and Denver's lives have come to a standstill. However, Beloved who is associated with trees brings back a fresh lease of life in the otherwise deadly state of their lives which they have been living after Beloved's death. Beloved's arrival is the resurrection of the life of both

Sethe and Denver. Before the arrival of Beloved, Sethe was deliberately trying hard to bury her past which was dominated by whites. And this fear that the past might not come back to her had stifled Sethe to a large extent that she had lost her identity. She neither remained a Sweet Home slave nor free women at Cincinnati. Her distorted identity was killing her day by day. Beloved's entry into her life is the only reason that she comes to terms with her past and revives her true identity. Thus, Beloved comes as 'a tree of life' in their lives because it forces Denver to go out to find job and also allows Sethe to pick fragmented parts of her past to create a true identity of her own. Anne Snitow too puts that the survivors of slavery, "those who remain must exorcise the deadly past from their hearts or die themselves" (47).

Some critics have also argued that Beloved is a 'dead tree' rather than 'a living tree' because after sometime her existence looms so large on Sethe that she cannot handle that pressure and succumbs to it. As the story unfolds, one sees how Beloved has to leave so that Sethe can survive. Many critics have debated that rather than dead, Beloved is a 'felled tree. Morrison's words in the novel too support this opinion. She writes, "The sawyer who had planted them twelve years ago to take the sin out of slicing trees for a living." (57). Now if one closely observes this statement, it refers to the slicing of trees whose seeds were sown twelve years ago by the sawyer. Twelve years after the trees he planted had grown up and were full of sin. So, it became necessary to slice these trees for their own welfare.

Now, this slicing of tree could be equated to the slicing of Beloved's throat by Sethe. Sethe herself bore this baby and was deeply attached to it. But when the School Teacher comes back to take her children, in a fit to prevent Beloved from the sin of slavery, she herself despite being a mother slit the throat of her own daughter. Thus Beloved here assumes the picture of a felled tree. Another logic which supports her

equation to a felled tree is the one when after carnival Paul D, Sethe and Denver locate her in front of a tree stump which means that in front of a felled tree.

However, even in her image of a felled tree, Beloved symbolizes resurrection as it is only after a tree is felled that a new sapling will grow after it. Beloved is thus symbolic of a new life that will emerge out of the dead. The stump, where Sethe and Beloved first meet is a place of hope as it is hoped that it will resurrect the life of Sethe which is haunted by the dark past. She is thus a fresh sapling which will come out of the dead stump of a tree. When Sethe sees Beloved for the first time near the stump, the event is associated with the water breaking of Sethe. Water breaking is symbolic of birth. Thus Beloved is not a felled tree but a fresh sapling that will sprout if Sethe will water it through her love and affection Sethe's water-breaking is symbolic of the fact that Beloved is thirsty of water, i.e. motherly love and that's why her water breaks on seeing Beloved. In fact, when Sethe takes Beloved home, she was so thirsty that she gulped down all water. Beloved here is like a dry sapling which needs water to grow up. Denver took so much care of Beloved that she forgets to visit her emerald closet of trees. And, all this happened because a fresh sapling has now arrived which has infused lots of hope in the life of Sethe and Denver. Thus Beloved can't be compared just to a living, dead or felled tree because she is representative of all these stages, viz. she gets birth, is made to fell and die by her mother and ultimately resurrects as a fresh sapling in the lives of her family members.

Thus it can be asserted that in relation to Beloved and all other characters in the novel, trees are representative of the contradictory images of both life and death. In some instances, trees signal life and bring home the idea of peace whereas sometimes they bring so disastrous tales back to mind that it becomes an imagery of death. The whole story revolves around this duality offered by trees. And the

resurrection implications which are drawn from the fresh sapling of a tree perhaps hints at the possible solution to this problem. However, what needs to be identified is the fact that this dual representation of trees imagery surfaces because of the struggle of life and death which the blacks faced during enslavement. Whites sometimes identify slaves with nature and sometimes exploit them like nature as it suits their means. Despite being ardent nature lovers historically, blacks cannot claim nature as their own. And this has led to a fractured and hazy relationship with nature as has been described in relation to the imagery of tree.

Nevertheless, if studied from the angle of ownership or possession, the novel illustrates how the entire history of slavery has conflated Afro-Americans with non-human elements of the nature by whites. And this fusion between Africans and non-human nature has in fact helped the whites in offering a justification of why blacks are made slaves by the whites. These slaves are not given any rights of ownership because of their non-human status. They are not even considered as American citizens. Thus, by giving to blacks the status equal to animals, whites have politicized the whole identity of Americans by denying them the rights to property and citizenship. This point becomes even clearer in the episode where Sethe saw in one of School Teacher's lessons where slaves were equated to animals. As a part of the project, the school teacher asked a student to study Sethe and enumerate Sethe's human characteristics on the left and animal characteristics on the right. When Sethe further enquired what this word 'characteristics' actually referred to, to this School Teacher replied that characteristics "is a feature. A thing that's natural to a thing (195)." This came as a surprise to Sethe as she could not believe how despite being a human being, she could be seen as having animalistic feature and that too which came natural to her.

Not only this, in conversation with Paul D, she narrates how her milk was stolen by School Teacher's nephews. She was hence treated like an animal. The torture aggravated when School Teacher, who was witnessing the whole episode started taking notes and studying her like an animal. This bifurcation of humans into more-human and less-human had been reinforced by whites so that they rendered the blacks equivalent to animals so that they could not claim their human rights. Whites wanted to have this prerogative of ownership and by putting blacks in the category of animals, they devoid them of both citizenship and their natural rights of belongingness and possession.

Paul D too came to know of this animal status when he felt that his existence is much lower than "a chicken sitting in the sun on a tub"(p.47). At least the chicken had the freedom to sit in the sun and enjoy it Paul D was denied even this liberty. Thus both nature and slaves were placed on the same pedestal by white Americans. Just as they could own and exploit nature, in the same way they considered their slaves as their property and as per their own will could subjugate them to innumerable tortures. The blacks could never be owners. Ownership and right to property was the sole right of whites. Though blacks had traditional inclination to nature and they were the one who had made the land productive by their hard work. But, their non-human status denied them to own this land. The whites who owned the fields and the forest, in turn dictated, the blacks how to use this land.

In the novel Sethe and Paul D wanted to assert their ownership by being close to nature in the white space. But, whites in one way or the other denied them this right. By virtue of being slaves, these blacks had lost their claim to property. Paul D was a nature lover. He had befriended a tree at Sweet Home whom he named Brother. Even in the prison at Georgia, he enjoyed the beautiful music of doves. However, he

immediately realized that he had no right even to enjoy this melodious music because this land didn't belong to him. Only those who were the owners of this land had the prerogative to enjoy anything beautiful on this land. Whites by labeling blacks as animals and exploiting them took away their sense of attachment and belongingness to American land. Sethe like Paul D tried to assert her ownership when she planted some flowers and plants in the kitchen where she worked. Sethe's attempt to plant flowers was her way of asserting her ownership around Sweet Home. She wanted to hide the ugliness of exploitation around her by the beauty of these flowers. But the control she wished to hold could not be achieved as it was not in the domain of the blacks to acquire ownership of what was being considered as the territory of whites.

She was just living in a fantasy world when she thought that flowers could bring back security into her life which was otherwise missing. The realization of this dispossession of ownership came later on when she figures out that she was merely an agent in this overall game of ownership between Mr. Garner and their land. Later on, when she escaped from Sweet Home, she realized that the flowers which she planted in the kitchen were still growing at Mrs. Garner's place because they belonged to them. Had they belonged to her, she would have carried them with her. This was not possible. There was nothing in the Sweet Home which she could be claimed as her own. Though she used to consider the nature to be her saviour, the relationship between slaves, ownership and nature was so complex that she failed to assert her ownership both on the nature and the land. They belonged to whites and she had to adjust herself to this fact in the end.

Nature and wilderness were associated with the have-nots or in other words with the subalterns. It was considered outside the domain of dominant cultural heritage. With time, nature and wilderness was considered a place or region. And this

place further became a site of power. That's why to acquire more and more power; the dominant whites started occupying free land of nature. They saw any isolated place as a challenge. For them wilderness was all wastage. Wilderness must be converted into something productive. And it was the duty of the dominant whites to enter into that sphere and turn that wilderness into a productive piece of land. And 'productive' was also on the terms of dominant whites, not on the terms of the productivity or utility of nature. Thus nature and wilderness have separate definitions for blacks and whites, for the masters and the slaves and for the subalterns in the respective categories. For instance, women from both blacks and whites are certainly going to share something in their definition of nature by virtue of being a woman. But, at the same time there has to be dissimilarity too as one is the exploiter and the other one is exploited. Amy Denver met Sethe in the forest of Ohio. The conversation between both of them speaks volumes about this concept of wilderness, first for woman and then for a white woman and a black woman. When Sethe saw that Amy is all alone in the dark and dangerous forest, she said, "You ain't got no business walking round these hills, miss" (78).

Sethe felt it unsafe for a woman be it black or white because forest was a male dominated as well as male defined territory. But Amy held a totally different view to Sethe's idea. According to Amy Denver, being a white woman she held a privileged position over Sethe because if there came a situation where both of them would be traced and caught for intrusion in the white dominated space, Sethe would definitely meet death by whites. Amy Denver would escape the situation because of her status quo of being a part of white culture. When Sethe warns, she retaliated by saying that, "Ain't nobody after me but I know somebody after you" (78).

Thus nature's role got shaped by various factors which changed its meaning under various circumstances. Amy being a low class white had endured exploitation by their high class white masters. That's why she identified with Sethe and helped her in her escape. Morrison adroitly describes both the women as "throw-away people, two lawless outlaws" (84). Both of them were aware of their racial status when they stood in the forest in front of each other. Amy could freely enter the forest and do whatever she wished. When Sethe did the same thing, she became a trespasser who had broken the laws made by whites. She deserved punishment because she has entered a space which was completely controlled and dominated by the whites. For Morrison, natural spaces are politicized and become dictators for blacks. Nature is so much conditioned by the social factors like gender, race, class, region, nation, etc. that it becomes really difficult for human beings, especially slaves to identify their existence in that natural space. What appears from the above discussion is the fact that Africans are completely bereft of the natural spaces as these spaces are occupied, exploited and defined by the dominant whites. But, Morrison drops a word of hope in the novel as she describes how the same natural space can be used by the Africans as a source of power. Morrison is hopeful that even blacks can forge a bond with the nature by creating their own space within that territory.

The first thing that is important for the blacks is that they should realize themselves that their relationship with nature is not completely destroyed. It has just fractured and distorted because of some reasons. Their inherent and traditional connection is a big strength of Africans which gives a hope that the connection and healing power of the nature can be again restored within this ambit of fragmentation. Through the character of Baby Suggs, Morrison has offered a hope for the Afro-Americans that they can still derive power from the Nature. Baby Suggs had prepared

a Clearing in the forest which was used by her to assert black identity and reinvent and reinforce her relationship with Nature. Through this space, Baby Suggs spread the message of hope, love, healing and resurrection to the black community and urged them to create their own positive harmony and bonding with nature. While women, men, children waited among the trees, she called on all of them to come to the Clearing and after shedding all their inhibitions asked them to laugh, sing, dance, cry, in short whatever they wished to do. When all of them got exhausted after this exercise of the Clearing, Baby Suggs opened up her heart and gave the message of self love and appreciation to blacks which would help them in restoring their lost identity.

She did not behave like a church priest, redeemer or preacher. She simply asked them to love themselves, because until and unless they were not going to see beauty in themselves, no one else was going to see it. She asked them to reclaim their own bodies because this was the only way to regain their strength and identity. Blacks had to celebrate themselves and remove all that stupid which had been defined by the white culture. They had to create their own definition and give value to their own culture, traditions, value system and religious inclinations. As Baby Suggs Said to them, “They despise it... Love your hands! Love them” (104). Sethe too acknowledged the healing power of the Clearing. That’s why even after Suggs death, she visits Clearing often whenever she wants to regain her identity. The ways and methods which Baby Suggs employed in the clearly truly helps Sethe in claiming herself.

Morrison also points that this revival and reclaiming of her own self and reestablishing the past harmony and identification with the nature and natural spaces should be taken on a community level rather than on individual level. Afro-American

women as well as men have to realize that their relationship with Nature was not established when they landed in America and became slaves. African's history and their bonding with nature and culture go a way back before slavery. What Afro-Americans need to do is to revive their own culture, customs, traditions and values if they truly want to heal the fractured state in which their relationship with nature has reached. Not only will this help in healing the relationship but also when done at community level it will be a strong weapon of resistance against the dominant white culture which has exploited them and suppressed the value system of Africans. Through the attempts like Clearing, Morrison wants to uproot American history which has created a completely false notion of national identity.

For Morrison, this path of claiming self is not a bed of roses as there were lots of hurdles in this process. The first hurdle was that although slaves were connected to natural world, yet, in reclaiming themselves they might not become exploiters of nature. It was a general belief in slaves that because of their identification with nature, the whites dominated them. So, it is a possibility that they might adopt the same white discourse of domination to assert their identity. Toni Morrison has totally rejected this stand because clearing was a resistance to white discourse and not identification to that. The second challenge was to unite community as a whole because she believed that the fractured status could be recovered only if the whole community would put efforts in this direction.

The purpose of Clearing failed in the novel *Beloved* because of the lack of the commitment of community which was bred by jealousy. Initially, community was supportive of Clearing and Baby Suggs house was always full of visitors. But after Sethe's arrival when Baby Suggs host a big feast, the community became jealous of her as they found it too extravagant. The feast also dug out their jealousy of a

previous event when Baby Suggs got freedom because of her doting son. And this envy ultimately turned into anger and revenge. When School Teacher arrived to take Sethe and her children, no one came to inform Baby Suggs or Sethe about it. The effect of this episode left a lasting impact on both Suggs and Sethe's life because it ultimately culminated into the death of Sethe's daughter. Baby Suggs was so much disillusioned by her Clearing and preaching that she stopped going to clearing and stucked to bed. Baby Suggs wanted to keep the dominant white discourse outside their lives but despite her teachings, "they came in her yard anyway" (209). And it is not just the entry of School Teacher, but the intrusion of whites' divisive tendencies to divide blacks which Suggs lamented the most.

Later on, the community realized their mistake. When Beloved's control over Sethe crossed its limits, the women of the community got united to save Sethe. They recalled their own memories which were still haunting them and saved Sethe from Beloved. Healing which kick started in the clearing now reached each and every home as now every women came to face their traumatic past horrors. As Morrison states, "for Sethe it was as though the Clearing had come to her with all its heat and simmering leaves" (261) to drag the ghost of Beloved out of Sethe's house. The message which commenced with Baby Suggs establishment of Clearing had finally achieved its aim.

The crux of the message was that in order to revert back the white dominant discourse and haunted memories of their deadly past of slavery, blacks had to come together as a unit to fight with these twin problems with which they were still grappling with after so many years of freedom from slavery. White dominance would again and again use fissiparous methods to prevent the blacks from coming together as a uniform group fighting for their identities; blacks had to understand these tricks

of whites. Moreover, they had to revive their own culture, values and traditions rather than assimilating themselves with the white culture because if blacks would do so, they would neither remain black nor white and would lose their identity eventually. So, in order to safeguard their existence and own identity, they had to accept and love their blackness. And with this acceptance would come a regard and respect for themselves which was completely annihilated by white owners during those tormenting years of slavery. If they were not going to love themselves, no one else was going to love them.

The scar on the back of Sethe resembled a tree, which symbolized that black slaves were exploited by whites in the same way as nature. Sethe's identity was thus recognized by her scars which resembled a tree signifying death, degeneration and exploitation. But one cannot forget that trees are a source of regeneration also. So, the 'tree scar' on Sethe's back also hints at the hope of resurrection. The same scars of exploitation can be used as a healer if all the blacks come together with their scars and use these scars for their own resurrection by loving and adoring themselves.

On the one hand, *The Bluest Eye* represents the exploitation faced by nature and blacks at the hands of whites whereas on the other hand, in *Beloved*, Morrison gives a voice to non-human nature and asks them to raise their voice against the definitions which whites have framed for them. Morrison in this novel focuses not only on the catastrophe of the ecosystem but also discusses in detail how relationship between Afro-American and nature that has ruptured to a great extent because of this archaic curse of slavery. But, the novelist doesn't restrict herself merely to the representation, castigation and challenging of this fractured state. Rather, she also offers a solution which from her perspective could be the right path for the blacks, by

following which they can regain their lost power and identity which was stolen years back when their forefathers crossed the Middle Passage.

Apart from the exploitation of blacks and nature, another thing which the writer strongly puts forth in the novel is the one which talks about the disruption and slicing of family trees because of this jolt of slavery. Family is a very special unit for every human being which defines and shapes its existence. Every family is just like a tree which has a trunk as on the head of the family and this trunk further grows in through the various branches and trees. This whole family tree has its roots in its ancestors which give it minerals and water from soil through the values, culture, customs and traditions. But, slavery disrupted and completely chewed up this family tree because children were separated from their parents. Marriages were not considered legal for slaves. Even if they were married they could not lay claim on that. A woman often had children from multiple fathers. Further, slaves were bought and sold frequently and sent to unknown places which completely snapped their ties from their family. Children didn't even know who their real parents were. Not only this, if a father or mother was a slave, even if they couldn't claim that marriage, their children automatically became slaves because of the virtue of being connected to the same family. This highlights the double standards which whites kept in making their own definition of the family tree of blacks. Concept of family ties is thus snatched away from the blacks as they were sold off just like animals for minting money. The name family became equivalent to uncertainly in the lexis of blacks, as they were always under the fear of separation.

Paul D and his brothers didn't know the existence of their family. They were also named as Paul A, Paul D, Paul F, because they didn't have parents who could name them and their masters just considered them as commodities of same type which

could be named as A, B, C, D. Not only this, one of the brothers, Paul A was also hanged by their masters and hence Paul D who was surviving on a small bonding of family through his brother ultimately lost that one thread which was at least giving him an idea of family. Now, Paul D looked for a brother in a speechless tree which showed his yearning to have a family. But the shackles of slavery made him bereft of this pleasure and happiness of a family. Moreover, he identified the tree as a human because he understood how trees and humans belonged to the same family as both of them were mercilessly trampled down by whites. Trees became an extended family for Paul D because just like family he could uninhibitedly share his feelings with tree and find solace in the lap of tree just as a child finds solace in the lap of her mother. That's why when Sethe says that trees for her are a site of violence, he interrupts her and rejects her notion by saying that trees are "inviting things" (21). Now this feeling of nearness shows Paul D's yearning for a family tree which was cut off by slavery and how he fulfilled this desire by creating his own extending family in the form of a tree by naming him Brother.

In fact, if studied closely, Sethe's act of killing her own children was an act of protecting the family tree which had already lost its trunk in the form of Halle who was Sethe's husband at Sweet Home plantation. Sethe had now assumed the role of trunk in the family tree owned the responsibility of nourishing and holding intact her family tree. So, when School Teacher reaches their house at Cincinnati, she was completely baffled on seeing him because she was aware of the impending danger waiting upon her family tree. So, the trunk prevented its branches by cutting them off. Though she could have adopted the method of hiding, but she was caught unawares and had a face-off with School Teacher suddenly. And now the only option left with her to protect her family tree was to completely rip off the branches of that tree so that

these branches i.e. her children might not once again became the slaves of white masters, a curse which Sethe knew was very tormenting and merciless. In fact Morrison has dexterously chosen the instrument and place of murder. The instrument of murder was a saw which is used to rip off branches and the place of murder or we can say infanticide is a woodshed which clearly shows how she was forced by her own self to cut her own branches to prevent her family tree from the iron-axe of slavery. These words like saw, woodshed, saw dust establish the deliberate link of Sethe's family with trees which the writer has established in her novel.

Besides all this, the use of the word 'split' in the novel also establishes how the family of Sethe is related to the image of tree. Stamp Paid was the first one who used this word in relation to Sethe's killing of her children. Now, Sethe split into the woodshed in order to split her family in two ways. In one way she split her family tree by killing her own children and her family tree got split into branches and leaves. If looked from another angle, by this act of splitting, she prevented the splitting of her family tree at different places because she knew that if her children once again became slaves, they would be sold off to distant places, and the family would eventually split into many halves. And this word 'split' also refers to the split into her emotional and mental state of mind because at the nick of time, she was unable to decide what would be the right thing to do. Even her own confused mind got split into two. So, the trunk split into two. Even Beloved's arrival into Sethe's life was denoted by this split into the trunk of this family tree which was represented by Sethe. As the author puts, "Axe the trunk, the limb will die (285)." Even earlier when Sethe was about to escape from Sweet Home, her mind was split into two because she couldn't locate her husband Halle. So, she was divided into two selves. She was split in her choice of family tree, i.e. whether she should wait for Halle or escape the plantation

with her children sans Halle. Even Sino who worked as a slave at Sweet Home is also used by the novelist to delineate this concept of family tree which is weaved in the fabric of the novel along with various threads. This link gets established by the fact that Sino was tied to tree and burnt to death. Sino loved a woman who had somehow managed to escape the plantation. But, that woman carried the baby of Sino in her womb. Sino had named that baby Seven-O. But, now, Sino was missing that baby. The branch that was going to make her family tree complete. So, in this mental state where Sino was missing his family, he was shot down by white masters thereby completely rooting out Sino's family tree.

Apart from that the scar on the back of Sethe which resembles a tree is also related to the image of family tree. After the brutal treatment meted out to Sethe by whites, she managed to escape. Sethe was the one who had to take care of her family. Though she waited a lot for the Halle, Halle went missing on the day of escape. Now, Sethe realized that the whole responsibility of the branches and leaves of her family tree lied on her back. The scar at her back refers to the responsibility of her family tree which Sethe had to carry on her back after the escape from Sweet Home plantations.

If the family tree in the novel gets disrupted at small levels, the author also depicts how a bigger family tree comes to the rescue of smaller family tree. When Sethe reached at her Cincinnati house where her mother-in-law Baby Suggs stayed even though the family tree was intact, it had lost all hopes of life and rejuvenation. And at this point the bigger family tree of community extended all its branches to Sethe's family to support them and take them out of their haunted past and heal them off their tormenting memories. The Clearing which the Baby Suggs formed for the black community too became a family tree of which Baby Suggs became the

undisputable mother. And this Clearing not only completes their family tree on the surface level, but carries it deep down to roots, because in this Clearing Baby Suggs taught them to get back to their black roots, love them and cherish them to further nourish their future family trees, branches and leaves. Thus by linking them with their ancestors, people at Clearing including Sethe were able to reconnect with their roots which served as a medium of empowerment for the black community.

Beloved's arrival at 124 BlueStone Road also gave a severe jolt to the family tree. The tree which Sethe was trying to save since her arrival from Sweet Home and then from School Teacher's attempt to recapture them as slaves eventually got scattered as its branches could not endure the hovering presence of Beloved's ghost in their house. It was Sethe's two sons who left the house thereby marking the first cut on this family tree. Even Baby Suggs who was the mother and trunk not just of Sethe's house but of the whole clearing could not sustain herself when her community family ditched her by not informing about School Teacher due to jealousy. And her individual family tree also gets sliced when Sethe slit the throat of Beloved on the arrival of School Teacher. Thus Beloved's presence further devastated the existence of the concept of family tree throughout the novel. Then Paul D who loves Sethe once again brings back the hope in Sethe to construct another family tree departs because of the presence of Beloved.

Towards the end the community realized the devastation that haunted past given by whites could bring in the lives of blacks as happened with Sethe. They realized their mistake and united themselves again in the form of a bigger family tree to exorcise the ghost of Beloved out of Sethe's house. Thus, the bigger family tree of community comes to the rescue of the smaller family tree.

Moreover, this fragmented and distorted family tree bereft the blacks of any kind of genuine and legal lineage which took away any kind of rights to citizenship on the land of whites. If one goes by the laws of citizenship, a natural citizen is one whose ancestors belong to a particular place or have inhabited a particular land for many years. Blacks didn't fall in either category. Their original ancestors belonged to Africa. Going by the second norm, these Afro-Americans were bought and sold so many times. Their children didn't know where their parents were. Husbands were not aware of where their wives were. The family tree was thus completely destroyed by the slavery system thrust upon blacks by whites. As a result, no official record of their family history was ever written nor any kinds of document verifying their family traces could even be located. Ultimately, this lack of record of family history prevented them from having any claim to the citizenship on this white land. In fact this ripping off the branches and leaves of the family tree could be a deliberate attempt of the whites to exclude blacks out of the cultural, social, political, framework of America by depriving them any citizenship rights.

Thus the image of tree offers myriad interpretations. In fact in every culture, religion and country, the image of tree fetches various meanings. In some cultures trees are worshipped, in some cultures they are not. Some find soul in trees and consider them alive. There are some who find them totally inanimate. So, depending upon the cultural context and the life and mental state of the characters involved thereby, the image of trees delineates its meanings to the readers. Being an environmentalist as well as novelist, Morrison has dexterously employed the image of trees to picture the emotional, physical and mental state of the characters in the story. And that's the reason why sometimes the image of trees bring good memories and sometimes they fetch bad memories for the characters.

Undoubtedly, sometimes trees symbolized the slaves themselves and sometimes they became a site of fear and violence for the slaves as these trees bore a witness to their exploitation. Trees reminded them of the mental and physical oppression they faced at the hands of whites. Then, there were instances, where trees recalled positive memories because they gave them comfort and solace during their days of tortures. Moreover, if trees bore witness to the evil events, the same trees bore witness to their marriages and the birth of their children as well. That's why for some blacks like Paul D, trees even became 'Brother' to share his experiences and love. As novel moves ahead, the imagery of trees only helped and supported the blacks to regain their lost identity, their lost roots and family lineage as exemplified through clearing. Though physically all the characters had escaped the clutches of slavery, the mental fetters of the haunted past of slavery could only be unchained through the image of trees. And therein lies the success of Morrison's art as by using the image of trees she has fabricated all the threads of her story, viz., nature, slavery, blacks, family history, etc. in such a way that it has added a lot of novelty and depth to the saga of black suffering.

Place is yet another important concept in the novel which needs to be evaluated from an ecocritical angle. Traditionally, most of the critics have dwelled on the relationship between exploitation and nature, slaves and nature in Morrison's novels. Nature has always dominated the ecocritical study of Morrison's novels. But, place has never been considered important in respect to Morrison's works, But, place in her works is not just a representation of nature. It has a separate entity of its own. In fact, the use of the term 'place' rather than 'nature' obliterates all the boundaries between nature and culture and thus offers an interesting study from the ecological point of view. If one takes a close view of Morrison's novel *Beloved*, it becomes clear

how the experiences of characters are closely linked to the place they inhabit. With the place are associated their ideas and with the change of places, changes their perceptions and outlook to the whole world of exploitation, slavery and the freedom they cherish. Though there are some who argued that place does not hold much importance in fiction. It is a thing which is important for the books of history. The experience associated with a particular place and its further implications can never be traced in the history books. *Beloved* also locates various places within its thematic network which evoke several experiences of trauma and slavery and dig something deeper than the historical books or data can provide.

Middle Passage is an important place which gets an indirect reference at various places in the novel. Middle Passage was the route through which millions of Africans are transported from Africa to America under squalid sub-human condition to become slaves of white Americans. The very sentence with which Morrison opens her novel “Sixty Million and more” refers to all those Africans who crossed the Middle Passage to meet a brutal fate. They were unable to make out that it would grapple them for generations. The Middle Passage has become an integral part of the haunted memories of blacks which they cannot erase. Middle Passage is haunting not just for those who crossed it but also for those who have heard the stories of that voyage from their ancestors and parents. The imprints of voyage are very deadly and deep because they made a complete U-turn in the life of Africans who had to completely shun their culture and land to be non-entities on a foreign land where they were treated less than animals. The succeeding generation, thus holds a grudge and feeling of terror against this Middle Passage which changed their lives for the worst.

In her monologue during the middle of the novel, Beloved refers to this Middle Passage as a cramped dark place with a slave ship crossing the Middle

passage and transporting Africans to America. Beloved doesn't cross the Middle Passage herself. She still describes those images of the Middle Passage as this poison of slavery have penetrated deep into the blood of Afro-Americans.

Through the Beloved's voice, Morrison has described the horrors of slave ship which crossed the Middle Passage. These slaves had to live in dark and cramped quarters. In these overcrowded ships, conditions were so filthy and squalid that many Africans died of disease and starvation during the journey to America. There was too much shortage of food and drinking water. The bread is called sea-coloured because it was rotten, stinky, and moldy which described the food provisions on the ship. Those who died during the tragic voyage were piled one upon the other making heaps of corpses.

Beloved also mentioned men without skin, i.e. whites who were creating havoc and tormenting the slaves with their loud noises and beatings. Women's state was also very pathetic. When the corpses of man and women were thrown into the sea, all gender differentiation got mixed up as they no longer remained men or women but only dead bodies which were thrown into the sea. Women also had to face the brutality of rape. These references of rape remind the experiences of Sethe's mother who was raped several times by crew members during the tragic voyage of Middle Passage. The 'hot iron thing' which was repeated several times seemed to be the branding iron which was used to mark the slaves just as Sethe's mother who was branded as slave with a hot iron. Beloved reminds Sethe the memories of the history of slavery. Slaves were tied in the slave ship with iron chains and made to sit in crouching position for days and ultimately when they lost all their strength to sustain and die in the ship, their dead bodies were thrown into water. Rather than crouching, these dead bodies now floated on the water of the ocean.

The monologue of Beloved where she narrates these horrors is the embodiment of the horrors of the tragic sojourn of Middle Passage. Beloved was not the direct sufferer, but the effect of that voyage was so vast that it engulfed and entrapped even the young children of succeeding generations like Beloved. The lack of punctuation marks in the monologue of Beloved reflect the continuity of the haunted memories of Middle Passage which has not only affected Sethe's mother, but also her own daughter and even her daughter's children and so on.

Similar is the case of Denver, Sethe's daughter. Just like Beloved, she hasn't gone through the trauma of Middle Passage. Moreover, since she has taken birth in the lap of freedom she is completely oblivious of the history of enslavement which blacks have suffered due to the dominance of white Americans. But place occupies an important role in her mental and emotional framework. Being a shy girl, she is only restricted to just one place, i.e. 124 Bluestone Road. She feels completely isolated in this house. And the void is filled by the baby ghost of Beloved. Later when Paul D arrives, he throws out the ghost of Beloved and creates a huge empty space in her life. This empty space somehow relates with the emptiness in the lives of blacks which has come even after attaining freedom.

And this emptiness leads to the dislocation from place which Denver has genetically gained being the descendants of slavery which blacks have suffered for so many years. Denver finally dislocates herself to the 'boxwood bushes' a secret place of her happiness which the writer often refers to as emerald closet. Describing the location of this place, Morrison pens that the emerald closet of boxwood bushes lies, "between the field and the stream" (34).

Now these two words which defines the boundaries of this place, i.e. field and stream carry many implications. As far as the field is concerned, it refers to the grass which in one way can be interpreted as the plantations of Sweet Home where blacks faced numerous tortures at the hands of whites. The brutality was of such a level that it had left a lasting negative imprint on the minds of slaves. The second interpretation says that the field can also be representative of the Clearing which Baby Suggs formed so that the blacks could come here and love themselves, their culture and tradition and in this way could regain their lost power and identity. Similarly the stream which exemplifies water can be interpreted in two ways. First, this stream is evocative of the Atlantic Ocean water which witnessed how Africans were mercilessly transferred to America through slave ships and which in its water absorbed the dead bodies of Africans. On the other hand, it can also be the Ohio River after crossing which many slaves like Sethe and Baby Suggs attained freedom.

Thus, on the one hand, the field and stream are symbolic of the dark memories of slavery; on the other hand, they symbolize the strength and freedom of blacks. And therein between these two, i.e. slavery and freedom lays the emerald closet of Denver which is a special place for Denver. In fact, with this emerald closet, Denver wants to create a place of her own. Denver has no understanding of the traumatic past which her ancestors have faced. So, “the place became the point” (34) from where she can develop her own understanding of the horrors of the past which help her in recreating her identity which is fragmented till now. The emerald closet of boxwood bushes becomes a place which goes beyond its geographical connotations and helps Denver in recreating her personality and identity by linking her with her historical roots. Thus, place goes beyond being a geographical identity in *Beloved* thereby making it a tool of ecological narrative because in the novel place is interlinked with the psyche,

space and time of the narrative. The role of these ecological spaces is to narrate the history of slavery and its trauma which bear its imprints on the minds of those who have endured it.

Alfred, Georgia prison of Virginia is another place which defines the meaning of slavery in the text. It is a place where Paul D was imprisoned when he tried to kill Brandy Wine. The cells where prisoners were kept were dug into the form of trenches. Almost 46 prisoners were put in fetters and were forced to stay in these dug outs. And within these chains they had to work tirelessly all through the day. The guards used to give a gunshot and all of them had to get up and offer themselves to guards for oral sex. But, then came a mudslide and all these forty six prisoners managed to escape this hellish prison. Georgia's prison became a place which would become a focal point of tortures and exploited self of blacks. At the same time, it was also the place which took them towards liberty. Here place evoked mixed responses for a single individual who had inhabited it for long. In fact, sometimes the place also loses its significance for the inhabitant if the frenzy is to escape this place for good. Paul D accepted this when he was under the frenzy to escape. During the time of escape it didn't matter to him which place was coming and going, in reality the place was very significant for Paul D's memories and that's why he narrated these memories associated with the place to Sethe.

Sweet Home and Clearing are other two significant places which carry several ecological layers underneath its geographical surface. Sometimes the place brings good memories, sometimes bad, and sometimes even mixed responses. But, what is important is the fact that every place carries a memory and that memory gets so intact and indispensable for any human being that without it, that person fails to describe his true identity. Sethe refers to these memories and very skillfully sums up how the

memories of a particular place continue to live in the places where they actually happened.

Besides that, the symbolism of pollution also flows underneath the chronological saga of slavery in the novel. Pollution refers to the contamination of something or somebody in one way or the other. It challenges the sanctity of the one that is polluted and defiles the existence of the same. Pollution concerns with the sense of environment which pervades around the characters and situation when we discuss this term in context of a literary work. And when it is about literature, language is undoubtedly significant in communicating this concept of pollution. For instance, in the novel, the use of words like dirtying, filthy, messy, desecrating, demeaning all refer to the pollution in the lives of the characters and how this pollution alters the situations in the lives of these characters. As Ignatieve Chukwumah wries, "Pollution is the issue which exercises the characters as they are tethered to activities which demean, debase, humiliate...different personages" (102).

As one goes through the novel, it can be easily traced that white men are the source of pollution who are defiling and dirtying the blacks in many ways. Though the colour of their skin claims purity for them, they act antagonistic to their superficial appearance and tend to indulge in activities which pollute others. Rape of the women in the novel is the prime way of engendering this pollution. Ella, a character was abducted by a father and son duo and they molested her for a long time. Consequently, she got pregnant and gave birth to a child. Elle finds this child so repulsive because it was the outcome of a dirty act where she was forcibly polluted by two white men. She threw away the child because the face of the child would continuously remind her of the pollution of those days and nights when she was brutally assaulted by these two men.

Even Sethe was defiled by the whites at Sweet Home. Not only whites, blacks also had liking for her and when under their sexual craving they were impatient of waiting for Sethe, they turned to cows to satiate their sexual urges. Now, this instance where black men indulged with cows reflects how much the pollution of appetite of sex and exploitation had entered through the virtual hierarchy. Sethe's exploitation when her milk was snatched from her by School Teacher's nephews also highlights this pollution.

Sethe's mother's continuous sexual exploitation on slave ships and the throwing away of her children into the oceans is synonymous to the Ella's act of considering her children as an outcome of pollution. Sethe's mother became a victim of sexual tormentation when she was made to travel on a slave ship which was carrying slaves from Africa to America. She got pregnant many a times. But she threw away all her children from such sexual unions as they were an outcome of a polluting unholy relation.

Sethe's mother didn't throw Sethe because she was the outcome of her genuine love for her father. She was not the fruit of a pollution which was injected into her by the whites. Even Sethe's killing of her children was a way to protect her children from this pollution which would dirty them completely and forever. Her action was symbolic of her true love for Beloved. She even tried to justify this to Beloved that her act of infanticide was just a way to prevent the "visitation of her experience of pollution and stain" (2) on her daughter.

The symbol of pollution becomes significant from the perspective of eco-critical study because it shows how the biological and scientific concepts of pollution penetrate deep into the psyche of the sufferers. Anything which dirties or debases

them becomes a polluter and the outcomes are considered so filthy that they are not accepted by those who gets polluted because retaining of that fruit means to keep the harrowing memory of that pollution intact forever in their hearts. Stamp Paid's act of killing his wife was also an act of putting an end to this ceaseless pollution. Stamp Paid's master had a liking for his wife Vashti and Stamp Paid unwillingly had to surrender his wife to his master's bed. Vashti after sometime came back. In an emotional fury, Stamp Paid snapped the neck of his wife thereby putting an end to her misery which had been instilled by the pollution of his master Stamp Paid who had been dirtying his wife for a long time.

Apart from the symbolism of pollution, the image of water also plays a key role in the textual narrative of the novel *Beloved*. In fact the image of water is used as a metaphor to unleash various meanings and layers of the concept of slavery which is all pervasive throughout the novel. Water is an integral and indispensable part of nature and has close connections with the life of black people. Even in African religion and culture, water holds a reverend position. If water is the symbol of life, it simultaneously evokes the pictures of destruction following regeneration. And that's why the image of water carries several psychological associations along with it which have delved deep down in the psyche of characters and as these associations get intertwined with main theme of the novel, it creates an altogether different world for the readers. And that is what exactly happens in *Beloved* because the psychological metaphor of the image of the water is so beautifully intertwined with the story that even those readers who are well aware of the history of slavery get spellbound at the narrative power of Morrison in *Beloved*.

In the novel, the life of many characters is linked to water which surfaces in the novel in various forms, viz. water, rain, river, etc. and makes a dig into the

individual exploitation of blacks as well as the history of enslavement. As Gengqing Chen and Wei Wei Wang put, “Toni Morrison employs the image of water and the power it possesses to explore the mental process and personal experience of black people as well as unfold the black’s history” (95). Water has many characteristics like its flow, fluidity, ups and downs, lack of control, powers to create as well as destruct, flexibility and many more. If one makes a close study, one can easily figure out that these characteristics can be easily traced in human beings as well. So, in a work of literature where these two, i.e. human nature and the image of water overlap as in *Beloved*, these non-living images of water cease to become lifeless objects. The image of water then becomes a living character which speaks for itself and conveys to readers what it wants to communicate.

The image of water is first of all associated with memory in the novel. Fluidity and flow are major characteristics of water. So, the exact shape of water is not known to anyone. None can tell the source of water and where that source culminates. This fluidity and ambiguity associated with water gives it the feature of liberty because water can go anywhere and can assume any shape as per its will. None has restrain over it. It is free-willed to do everything. And this free-will, however, brings some destructive quality to it as well because unrestrained freedom is bound to yield disastrous and negative results. As per the observations of certain people from psychology water is also a symbol of our unconsciousness. Unconscious thoughts from many directions and unknown areas of our mind come and collide with each other to create a single stream of thought. Toni Morrison employs all these characteristics of the water to unleash the bewildered state of her black characters and also relates the image of water with the memory which always resides in the unconscious minds of the blacks.

At the very outset of the novel, one sees image of water when Sethe is shown rushing towards the water. Now, here the image of water brings back all her memories of Sweet Home which are till now lying buried somewhere in her unconscious mind. When the image of water comes before Sethe's eyes, the fluidity and flow of water enters into her unconscious and brings back the memories of the ruthless past at Sweet Home where blacks including Sethe had to face a life no less than hell. And the water not only brings the haunted past along with its flow but the perpetual flow makes that past even clearer. Though Sethe has attained freedom, the ruthless memories still haunt her unconscious mind and whenever something happens related to those memories, they gush out from the unconscious mind to the conscious mind like a full flown stream.

Even the memories of Sethe's act of killing her own daughter out of the fear of School Teacher are also associated with the image of water. Sethe feels a lot of pain and guilt because of her act. Time and again this guilt resurfaces and like a flooding water all the emotions attached with her daughter and the pain associated with infanticide comes back to ache her heart. Even the entry of Beloved is marked by the image of water, "A fully dressed woman walked out of the water." (60). Not only this, when Sethe after coming back from the carnival along with Paul D and Denver meets Beloved for the first time, her water breaks. The water from the womb symbolizes the birth of a child. And in the novel this breaking out of water is symbolic of Beloved's second birth in the form of ghost who brings back the pain, guilt and the ruthless memories of Sethe related to enslavement and infanticide.

And there was no stopping of water because the water brings with its flow all the buried memories of slavery and the birth of her two daughters back to Sethe's mind. Not only this, Beloved is so thirsty that she keeps on drinking water cup after

cup. This thirst is actually the thirst of memories which has still not satiated the minds of blacks and kept on hunting them again and again. It is, however, noteworthy that the image of water is related to both memories and birth. The novelist, perhaps, here wants to convey that though the image of water brings back the terrible imprints of past lying in the unconscious mind to the conscious mind, it gives the hope of birth and regeneration which can only happen when black are ready to face this water of memories rather than keeping them buried in their unconscious mind.

Rain is another form in which the image of water comes before the readers in the novel. The image of rain can be interpreted in different ways in relation to *Beloved*. Rain is a natural force which according to its intensity becomes both a force of destruction and restoration. In *Beloved*, rain is very crucial as it shatters the age old conventions and social fabric of society and brings freedom for the black slaves. Rain is often used as a symbol of purification in religious text which will wash away the sins of the world. Bible also makes mention of such a rain. But rain is associated with twin concepts of catastrophe and creation. When rain comes it washes away everything that comes in between. But along with its washing and destruction, it gives a hope of regeneration and resurrection of what has been degenerated.

In *Beloved*, the image of rain is employed where out of the dark order comes the bright ray of sunlight in the life of blacks. In *Beloved*, Morrison pours rain in relation to the destruction and regeneration witnessed by Paul D at the Georgia. Alfred, Georgia was a place of ruthless and hellish tortures for prisoners. But one day rain came and changed the whole existence of the place thereby wiping off its sin. The whole place got converted into a dead land and the whites could not even enter the marshy place, “Cypress, yellow, poplar, ash and palmetto drooped under five days of rain without wind” (131). But, this gave the opportunity to the prisoners to escape

from this hellish place where they were treated like animals and suffered beatings, whipping and lynching. But, the terror of rain swept away everything and ended the misery of prisoners. And ultimately all of them – including Paul D reached the land of liberty. Moreover it shows how in order to attain freedom, blacks had to take the form of deadly rain and face their opponents. Only then they could hope to attain their desire of breathing in a free space.

Since ancient times, rivers are the source of nourishment for human beings and it is therefore reverend in many religions. Moreover, the biggest characteristic which holds prominence in *Beloved* is its quality to flow at different paces, i.e. sometimes slow and sometimes fast. Now this fluctuation of the flow of river is similar to the fluctuating behaviour and temperament of people. Sometimes they are full of happy emotions and sometimes get angry. Moreover, the historical background of river is generated by the masses who are associated with it. And thus river projects the emotions, ups and downs and challenges of the people around it. This could be easily marked in *Beloved* because rivers are an integral part of the history of slavery with which all the characters are closely related.

Ohio River is so important for the blacks both in the novel and in relation to the history of slavery that one cannot imagine any story of blacks which could be weaved without Ohio River in its background. Ohio River is that river by crossing which blacks attained freedom in America. Sethe, Baby Suggs and many more got their independence only by crossing this river. Thus, Ohio has become a symbol of hope, liberty and security for blacks. Ohio became a turning point in the history of slavery as it offered blacks a hope of life which they always wanted. Ohio became what blacks were not and what they wanted to be. Sethe's crossing the Ohio River is an example which shows how blacks got a hope of life in this Ohio River. In fact,

during the delivery of Denver when her water broke in the middle of the river and got mixed up with the water of Ohio, it shows how the history of Ohio is closely interlinked with the history of slavery. Morrison portrays the importance of Ohio River in following words, "As soon as Sethe got close to the river her own water broke loose to join it" (98).

Describing the inner meaning of the river for blacks, Sethe further tells that seeds in the Ohio river hold a promise for a hopeful future for blacks as the mere sight of it gives them a spark of hope to reach their dreamland of freedom. Seeds are symbolic of birth and resurrection. Seeds in the river bed of Ohio river had not only given birth to Denver but also resurrected Sethe's own life as it led her to the land which gave freedom to her other children as well.

Not only Sethe, Baby Suggs, Denver, Paul D, Sethe's children owe a lot to Ohio River. If Middle Passage for blacks was a road to hell, Ohio became a path which led to the territory of heaven. Even the character of Beloved is related to water. Beloved represents the cycle of life, death and rebirth. Even her re-entry to this world is marked by water. By relating her with water Morrison has tried to establish a link between what has happened and what will happen. Beloved who comes in the novel as the haunted memory of the past is therefore linked to the river because both memories and river narrate the history of slavery and both these things; viz. dark memories of slavery and Ohio River had to be crossed by blacks if they wished to attain freedom in real terms.

From the above analysis and dissection, it becomes crystal clear that *Beloved* offers itself to a deep and interesting study from the ecocritical point of view. All the objects of nature, viz. trees, water, animals, river, rain, oceans, colours or pollution

are closely intertwined within the thematic network of the novel. Like *The Bluest Eye*, this novel of Morrison does not merely focus on the exploitations of blacks and nature. By placing black and nature on an equal pedestal, Morrison has portrayed both of them as victims of exploitation. But in *Beloved*, the role of nature is altogether different. Here nature is not likened to blacks. It either becomes a source of horror or respite for the blacks. Not only this, the nature also becomes their strength as it keeps them rooted to their history of slavery.

Many authors have projected nature as if it has no relationship with social issues. But in *Beloved*, Morrison has made an endeavour to show that both these aspects are correlated to each other and how this fusion takes away all the rights away from the blacks. She further makes a case how this fusion of Africans and non-human nature has completely distorted blacks' relationship with environment. By linking African history with nature and how this fusion has denominated the status of blacks is the prime concern of Morrison. But a great author with her great work does not merely restrict herself to just posing the problem. She has castigated this standpoint and exploitation of whites and whole heartedly challenges their act. In a fictional work, working through logic by logic, she has shown how despite being linked to the American land for several years, Africans have been devoid of their rights to be called an American citizen. According to whites, blacks don't belong to the human category and are equivalent to non-human nature. Besides this challenging, Morrison has also offered a solution to the blacks. By facing their horrifying past boldly and collectively, by getting themselves attached to their historical roots and by loving themselves, these blacks can come out of this bane of slavery.

Nature for Morrison is an important tool in this solution because nature has borne witness to the past, present and future events of blacks. Nature has existed in

the past and will continue to exist in the future. By linking the history of slavery with nature and by changing its connotations for their own self, they can come out of this horror of enslavement. And that's the reason why the trees and rain which brought horrors for black characters in the novel ultimately became a source of regeneration and took the form of Paul D's 'Brother' and Denver's 'emerald closet' of box wood bushes in the novel thereby offering relief and respite to the blacks. Morrison thus takes a big leap in the novel by presenting a bold nexus between nature and slavery which has not been shown ever in the fiction related to slavery. The hunger which she generated for the eco-critics in *The Bluest Eye* gets ripened and satiated in this interesting work written from an ecocritical angle. Though it cannot be validated that inclusion of nature as a symbol and metaphors is a deliberate attempt on her part, it has certainly opened new vistas of research for the ecocritics.

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