

## Chapter Five

### Summation

Toni Morrison visualizes the connection of women with nature and writes about nature's influence on her characters. Both nature and women are vulnerable to the patriarchal domination. Nature is destroyed for the purpose of urbanization and other developments mainly by men, who are considered the agents of deforestation. Women are often considered the saviours of the environment, because of their biological semblance with nature. The link between women and nature strengthens them and protects them mutually. When they stand apart from each other, they are prone to the oppressive factors. Morrison has insisted the eco-feministic view that stresses mutual men-women relationship and their harmonious relation with the environment.

Alienation from nature makes both men and women characters detach from their native culture and suffer a lot due to the intrusion of alien culture and alien people. Mostly this detachment happens due to migration to the northern cities like Chicago in search of jobs. In the novel *The Bluest Eye*, Cholly Breedlove and his wife Pauline Breedlove leave the rural background of the South, surrounded by the pristine beauty of nature for Lorain, the industrial northern town. Their movement towards the urban set up makes them forget their native culture and the happy and contented life that they had in their native land.

Having alienated from nature and native culture, some characters of Morrison have experienced a sense of loss of identity and individuality. They

often mimic an alien culture, which is more materialistic and leads them to a state of amnesia. Such characters, who mimic and assimilate with the Eurocentric culture are caught in a state of liminality or in-betweenness. Their alienation from native land as well as native culture has not ended up in a peaceful state of affairs rather it places them in a terrible state and makes them oppressors. Such characters develop an ego due to the lack of knowledge about their real self and eventually they become ego-conscious.

Victimization of the ego-conscious characters is due to parental negligence, and negligence from the community. Ego-conscious mothers fail to develop the self-worth of their children, as they are haunted by their past traumas. Such neglected children become vulnerable to oppression. Women suffer because of male-domination, sexual harassment, abandonment, physical assault and desperate loneliness due to shattered married life. Ego-conscious men are also subjected to physical and psychological assault in the racist society. Economic disparity is the outcome of racism and it becomes the major cause for all the sufferings of the characters. Lack of proper house for Breedlove family in *The Bluest Eye* and lack of proper job for Jude Green, the husband of Nel in the novel *Sula* in the white dominant society makes them suffer with a deplorable living status.

The study has unearthed the outlets adopted by the victims of oppressions and the negative impacts caused to their near ones. In the novel *The Bluest Eye*, Cholly Breedlove is the victim of racial oppression and he finds an outlet to his inherent oppression by causing sexual assault to his daughter, Pecola. The murder of the father of Macon Dead II for wealth by the Whites in *Song of Solomon* turns Macon Dead II ego-conscious and materialistic. He becomes an oppressor to the

people of his own race and oppresses his wife, Ruth Foster. Cholly Breedlove in the novel *The Bluest Eye* and Macon Dead II in the novel *Song of Solomon* turn in to oppressors, when they are alienated from nature and their native culture. The victims of oppression are also ego-conscious and alienated characters, devoid of self-worth.

Morrison has linked the incidents in the life of the women characters with the natural and man-made disasters in her novels to substantiate the connection between women and nature. She portrays the incidents in the life of Pecola and brilliantly connects them with the four seasons of nature in the novel *The Bluest Eye*. In *Tar Baby*, Morrison pictures the destruction of the swampy region for the construction of the winter houses and its effect is visible in the lives of the inmates of the house, who suffer due to lack of happiness and experience problems because of ego-consciousness.

On the contrary, association with nature transforms the life of an ego-conscious person into eco-conscious and enables him to overcome the oppressions in his life. Eco-conscious characters are saved from getting alienated completely, when they are associated with nature or eco-conscious people. Eco-conscious mothers develop a strong familial bonding with their family members and impart mental strength to their children. Through their love and care, they provide a sense of self-identity to their children. The children become eco-conscious and are capable of overcoming the problems confronted by them, related to gender and economic disparities in the racist society.

Nature acts as a source of guidance and helps the oppressed people to find a safer abode for a peaceful life. It helps them lead an authentic life, embedded with native culture. Nature rescues the oppressed people, who have gone astray and alienated themselves from nature. In the novel *Song of Solomon*, Milkman is transformed from ego-consciousness to eco-consciousness, when he is associated with nature. Milkman is relieved from cultural alienation and he becomes aware of his heritage in association with nature and his eco-conscious aunt, Pilate. In the world of the novel *Beloved*, trees serve as sources of comfort, and provide new life to the slave victims. In the novel *Tar Baby*, Jadine leans on to nature and holds it when she is about to fall in the swampy region. Morrison pictures it as dancing with the trees that shows nature's involvement in rescuing Jadine from cultural alienation.

The presence of colours in the life of the black people is pictured by Morrison in her novels and she writes that the characters in access with it, overcome oppression in their life. Nature provides colour to the life of the people, who attach with it and fill their lives with happiness. The presence of colours in the lives of the eco-conscious characters and the absence of colours in the lives of the alienated characters are depicted in the novels. Cholly and Pauline in the novel *The Bluest Eye* feel the floating of colours during their lovemaking, when they are in contact with nature in the South. Later in the North they are devoid of colours in their life and face all sorts of oppression. Baby Suggs in the novel *Beloved* enjoyed the presence of the colours in her life and later after the infanticide committed by her daughter-in-law, she experiences the vacuum and loneliness and

feels the absence of the colours. Pauline misses the colours due to alienation from nature and Suggs loses it, when alienated from the community.

Nature equips the persons, who have developed an intimacy with it, with the knowledge of native culture and traditional practices and moulds them with strong sense of self. The culture and tradition of the native land strengthens the characters, who are closely associated with those values. African-American culture and tradition is embedded with music that includes blues. The songs act as an outlet of emotions to the grieved hearts. The eco-conscious characters cherish the songs loaded with ancestral knowledge in their lives and they lead a contented life. They use it as a tool to lessen the tensions and pressure in the racist society. The songs sung by the eco-conscious people have the capacity to draw the ego-conscious mind towards them and to provide relief to their oppressed situations.

Eco-conscious people maintain a strong connection with the ancestors in living and supernatural forms. As African-Americans give much importance for the ancestral tie-ups, Morrison uses them as pilot of their progeny, which is substantiated by Pilate, the eco-conscious ancestor, who guides Milkman in *Song of Solomon*. The spirits of the ancestors have made their appearance to their living progeny and communicate with them. This communication guides them towards a proper destination in their lives and relieves them from their tensions. Folk lore and storytelling occupy a prominent place in African-American tradition and so Morrison has included them in most of her novels. Ancestors are used as narrators to communicate the ancestral history to the future generations through folk stories. The characters who are caught up in the psychological traumas of cultural

detachment are retrieved to their native culture due to the stories impregnated with the knowledge of their heritage and culture.

The main concept of eco-feminism, stressing on the mutual love between men and women, for a harmonious living on earth, is adopted by Morrison and she has moulded her eco-conscious characters to have mutual love between their partners. Their love and intimacy enables them to overcome their problems and to lead a contented life. In the novel *Tar Baby*, when Jadine strives with the problem of cultural alienation, the eco-conscious man Son, makes love with her and enriches her psychologically and instills in her the love for native culture. The families in the novels with mutual love and care between the partners are able to recognise their self-worth and allow their children to identify themselves.

The eco-conscious beings thus overcome their oppression and later with their deep connection with nature and native culture raises to the next level as healers in the novels. The healers help to lesson or relieve the traumas of the ego-conscious characters. They help to lift the depressed minds of the oppressed people and eliminate their problems to an extent and help them lead a contented life. Morrison displays both psychological and physical healing. For psychological healing, the healers in the novels adhere to spirituality and heal the weak through sermons. The healers are well versed in the verses and chapters of the Bible and they use them frequently to soothen the grieving minds. The ancestral songs sung by the eco-conscious lady, Pilate in *Song of Solomon* and the stories told by Therese in the novel *Tar Baby* are able to uplift the oppressed people. The preaching of Baby Suggs in the novel *Beloved* helps thousands of slaves to forget their tortures of slavery and live a happy life in the post-slavery period.

All the healers in the novels of Morrison are with dominating physical appearance. They possess strong healing hands and mental strength and they try to impart that strength to the oppressed through their guidance. All the native healers have a peculiar body odour as that of natural products like ginger, green leaves or bark of the trees. The healers rely on nature for the purpose of healing physical ailments. They cure the sores of the body of the affected with cobwebs and decoction of various medicinal plants. The healers collect leaves and fruits from nature and use them as food to strengthen the affected ones physically. All the healers live in the woods and are deeply attached to nature. Amy Denver, the healer in the novel *Beloved* emerges from the wood as a saviour to the ex-slave, Sethe. Morrison pictures the healers as midwives and they help the abandoned ones to deliver their babies. They help the affected to cure various ailments and mostly suggest pot liquor, a medicine prepared in the form of a soup with various herbs. They also have the power to conjure and along with plants, they use various other elements of nature like camphor, floor dust, nail and so on to cure the sickness.

Morrison pictures nature as a benevolent mother, who guides its refugees. It expresses its pain through various signs like storms and heavy rain, on seeing the traumas of the oppressed women. In the novel *Beloved*, a lightning that tore the sky is shown and Morrison relates it with the unbearable labour pain of the ex-slave, Sethe. The mothers in the novels are extolled by Morrison as healers as they express their perseverance and forbearance in protecting their children. They are sacrificial and are ready to sacrifice their lives for their children. Eva Peace, a mother in the novel *Sula* amputates herself for the insurance money to take care of

her children. The mothers provide eternal healing to their children in the form of death if there is no other alternative. In *Sula*, Eva Peace burns her drug – addicted son, Plum and in the novel *Beloved*, Sethe slashes the throat of her child to protect her from the terrific hands of slavery.

The main aim of Morrison is to make her characters love their fellow beings and stretch their hands to help one another during crisis. She expresses that most of the problems are due to the communal negligence on the oppression of the individuals of the society. Morrison stresses the importance of women to join their hands and conduct rituals during all ceremonies. Through their communion, she imparts strength to the grieved people in order to drive away the evil forces which are the outcome of slavery. Gathering of the community women is an African traditional practice and it is pictured in the novel *The Bluest Eye*. A group of women join together for Aunt Jimmy's funeral. They conduct the rituals together and give moral support to the mourning family. Morrison equips her women with the power to resist white domination and slavery through the influence of the community as in the novel *Beloved*. When Denver's white employer Baldwin arrives, Sethe launches an attack upon him thinking him as the school master. When she is surrounded by the group of her peers, she turns fiercely towards the white man instead of turning towards her children.

This study pointed out that all ego-conscious characters, who are detached from nature are oppressed eternally. Ego-conscious characters are alienated not only from nature but also from their native culture, which leads to cultural impoverishment of their near ones. The theme of survival is visible in Morrison's novel, and the characters survive due to the mental strength, gained by them in



association with nature. The characters who are deprived of nature's access in their lives, get empowered through the guidance of the eco-conscious characters. Music, spirituality, recognition of self-identity and ancestral bonding exalt the depressed mind to overcome the problems. Eco-conscious characters act as healers to the oppressed people. The healers are of dominant nature and adopt various healing practices.

The healing practices of the eco-conscious women and men in the novels of Morrison aim at conserving the African-American culture from getting destructed. Morrison wants to increase the involvement of women in protecting nature and black culture. She expects the humanity to maintain mutual relationship with nature and adhere to natural healing systems and protect the native culture. Due to civilization, patriarchal forces try to subdue the weaker section of the society and Morrison insists that women in connection with nature must gain courage to withstand all kinds of oppressions.

This study highlights that nature, native culture and ancestral roots are the essentials for a healthy men-women bonding to lead a life of fulfilment. The knowledge and benefits of this bonding must be imparted by the parents to the younger generation which is under the fetters of civilization and globalisation. Morrison believes that eco-conscious people will become the saviours of the Mother Earth and they can steer the younger generation towards nature to experience its rejuvenative power.

Since this study limits itself with the analysis of the first five novels of Morrison, an extensive study may be conducted to analyse the other novels of

Morrison through the lens of ecofeminism. It would be a rewarding experience to compare Morrison's novels with that of Alice Walker or Native Canadian writers like Beatrice Culleton and Jennett Armstrong to explore the journey of the marginalized women characters towards liberation.