CHAPTER – II
THE BACKGROUND OF THEIR CREATION-
SOCIAL, POLITICAL & ECONOMICAL
CONDITIONS

Toni Morrison admits that she reads reviews of her books, but they do not determine the direction of her works. It is improved only by her experience as a woman and as an African-American and by the ancient stories of the African-American Community:

I am very much concerned about what is happening to my people and what we are doing with our precious tradition.

(Interview with Nellie Y. Mckay, 407)

Morrison measures success not by the estimate of her critics but rather by how well her books evoke the rhythm and cosmology of the people. She writes:

If anything I do, in the way of writing novels (or whatever I write) isn’t about the village or the community or about you, then it is not about anything. (339-45)

Toni Morrison analyses the relationship between race, gender and class assumptions. In each of her novels she explores some aspect of the oppression afflicting black people.

A number of factors contributed to Toni Morrison’s developing social, political, economical and aesthetic
consciousness. Familial background, community, African-American folklore, her educational background and early professional life, her Random House experience and literary works by great writers, these factors helped her become more conscious of the nature of the black people’s dilemma, the crisis of their personality, the cause and effect of it, and her increasing commitment to help solve it in terms of fictional art, thereby combining her political consciousness with aesthetic sensibility.

Morrison’s novels have a vital role to play in this process of acculturation. They cannot replace the village but they can summon its spirit. Folk culture, as revealed in maxims, beliefs, attitudes, and ways of speaking, walking and thinking permeates Morrison’s fiction and inspires its identifiably lyrical style. In her work mythic truths are revived, examined and passed on, keeping the individual in touch with black American and African tradition.

A black American is a Negro and an American as well. A product of Unique American situation, he is incomparable, culturally he is rooted in his community, living in one place, subject to variety of outside influences. Being a Negro American he has to do with his past history hence is historically conditioned
and is based on empirical experience of both the individual author and the community as a whole.

The culture and geography (social, political and economical conditions) of Toni Morrison’s childhood figure centrally in her work. The first novel, *The Bluest-Eye* is a classical example of her cultural consciousness. In an interview with Claudia Tate, Morrison remarks:

*The Bluest-Eye* my first book is set in Lorain Ohio..... I am from the Midwest, so I have a special affection for it. My beginnings are always there, no matter what I write, I begin there. (An interview with Claudia Tate, 117-18)

*The Bluest Eye* is Toni Morrison’s first published novel. The novel takes place in the 1940s in the industrial northeast of Lorain, Ohio and tells the story of Pecola Breedlove, a young African-American woman who is marginalized by her community and the larger society. Individually and collectively people mark Pecola and her dysfunctional family as falling outside the boundaries of what is normal and, thus, as undesirable. Pecola’s story intersects with and contrasts with that of the novel’s primary narrator, Claudia MacTeer, whose coming of age, while challenging, is not the alienating, ultimately impossible situation experienced by Pecola.
The novel addresses the social forces that drive understanding and definition of cultural constructs such as family, beauty and sexuality. These constructs are a particular issue for African-American communities that often are excluded from representation. The novel demonstrates the difficulties of growing up and of surviving for African-American young women. Morrison examines the impact of this exclusion on individuals and on the community as a whole using Pecola’s story as a focal point. *The Bluest Eye* reveals the destructive impact of social hierarchies and of social invisibility.

The novel is a tragic tale of Black Pecola’s desire for blue eyes. It is a symbol of beauty for her by whom she can be accepted in white society as Morrison talks to Charles Raus about her childhood friend who wanted blue eyes. Morrison clearly questions her strange desire against her cultural background.

What I later recollected was that I looked at her and imagined her having them and thought how awful that would be if she had gotten her prayers answered. *I always thought she was beautiful*. I began to write about a girl who wanted blue eyes and the horror of having that wish fulfilled and also about the whole business of what in physical beauty and the pain of that yearning and wanting to be somebody else,
and how devastating that was and yet part of all females who
were peripheral in other people’s lives. (218)

*The Bluest Eye* was well received and established an early
following for her, particularly among black people who understood
so poignantly the issues addressed in the novel. The novel begins
with a passage from Dick-Jane family by means of which many of
us learn to read. The first well punctuated version shows the life of
white people. The second represents the life of Black MacTeer
family which survives all the evils of poverty and racism. Another
third disorder version stands for Breedlove family. Klotman
Comments that:

It also serves as an ironic comment on a society which
educated and unconsciously socializes its children like
Pecola with callous regard for the cultural richness and
diversity of the people, (124)

This observation illuminates the socio-political implications
behind Morrison’s first novel.

The novel makes a powerful attack on the western standard
of female beauty and psychological oppression of black woman.
Pecola comes from a poor family- that is virtually cut off from the
normal life of the black community. Pecola’s parents-Cholly
Breedlove and Pauline Breedlove discarded their daughter- their
indifferent attitude towards Pecola, is one of the major factors for self-hatred. Pecola’s fourteen years old elder brother-Sammy, too has no considerations for her, he ran away from home twenty-seven times and has never included her in his escape plans. When Cholly tries to burn down their house, they are placed “outdoor” and it is then the County Agency has sent Pecola to MacTeer’s family for several days. In MacTeer’s family she befriends with Claudia MacTeer and Frieda MacTeer and with them she starts her schooling. In school too, she experiences indifferent attitudes of her teachers and classmates:

Long hours she sat looking in the mirror, trying to discover
the secret of the ugliness, the ugliness that made her ignored
and despised at school, by teachers and classmates alike. She
was the only member of her class who sat alone at a double
desk. (45)

The storekeeper who sales Mary Jane Candies to Pecola
avoids touching her hand when she pays and barely disguises his contempt for her. She looks up at him and sees the vacuum where curiosity ought to lodge. It has an edge, somewhere in the bottom lid is the distaste.
The distaste must be for her, her blackness and it is the blackness that accounts for that creates the vacuum edged with distaste in white eyes. (36)

In *The Bluest Eye*, there are three “minor” African families who, for their social status and economic and political advancement, exploit their own brethren in order to become close to the ruling class. One such family is the Peals. By dissociating itself from the African community, the second family, Geraldine Louis and Louis Junior also nurture the aspirations of the ruling class. They consider themselves to be colored signifying some nebulous group of neither Africans who are neither European nor African. The third family, the Elihue Micah Whitcombs, is so obsessed with the physical appearances of Europeans that they jeopardize their mental stability by intermarrying, only to maintain some semblance of whiteness.

Maureen Peals, “a high yellow dream child ……Black boys did not trip her in the halls; white boys did not stone her, white girls did not suck their teeth when she was assigned to be their work partners; black girls stepped aside when she wanted to use the sink in the girl’s toilet ……She never had to search for anybody to eat with in the cafeteria-they flocked to the table of her choice.” (63)
Maureen Peals enchanted the entire school. In contrast to it, Pecola’s classmate insulted and teased her by saying:

“Black emo Black emo ya deadly sleeps naked / such tat at / such at tat at ta”. (65)

Even her teachers made Pecola to sit on the double desk the only student to be so. White boys and girls have no admiration for her.

On the other hand Geraldine Louis’ family dissociated itself from the African community and nurtures the aspirations of the ruling class. They consider themselves to be “colored” and believe “colored people were neat and quiet, niggers were dirty and loud.” (87) Geraldine has raised a monster son, Louis Junior, who lures the love-starved Pecola into his “Clean” and “Christian” house with the promise to show kittens. He beat her with his mother’s cat. Geraldine held Pecola guilty of killing her cat and harassed her “Get out. You nasty little black bitch. Get out of my house.” (92) Once again she is embarrassed and engulfed by immense shame inflicted on her by so called “colored people” of black community.

Even the Elihue Micah Whitcombs, proud of their mixed blood and their academic achievements, Soap head Church cultivated Anglo-philia and moved away from undefined African
traditions. So within the Afro-American society “colored” Americans consider themselves more privileged than “niggers”. Here Morrison seems to be more interested in developing intraracism i.e. the skin-color conflict even within the black community.

The economic system of slavery is an early form of capitalism and racism and sexism are the causes rather than the results of it. As Kwame Nkrumah asserts:

It is only with capitalist economic penetration that the master servant relationship emerged and with it racism, color prejudice and apartheid. (29)

In the novels, the economic conditions of the inhabitants are reflected through their living conditions, and occupations. The economic conditions of the Afro-Americans could be easily perceived in the household of Breed loves’ family. Breed loves’ house is situated in:

An abandoned store on the southeast corner of Broadway,

Thirty Fifth Street in Lorain, Ohio, (33)

It does not recede into its background of leaden sky, nor harmonize with the gray frame houses and black telephone poles around it. Rather, it foists itself on the eyes of the passerby in a manner that is both irritating and melancholy. Visitors who drive
to this tiny town wonder why it has not been torn down, while pedestrians, who are residents of the neighborhood, simply look away when they pass it.

Breed loves; have partitioned the store into two rooms-the front room and the bedroom, where all the living is done. Their small belongings include torn sofas, narrow iron beds, trunks, chairs, cardboard wardrobe closet, a coal stove. At the back of the apartment there is a kitchen and there is a toilet bowl, and no bath facilities. Thus the White Fisher’s family is in contrast to the Breed loves’ and their living conditions, categories them into white Bourgeois class and proletariats.

Cholly Breedlove married Pauline living in Kentucky but afterward they moved to north-full of enthusiasm, hopes and dreams. In Lorain, Ohio, Cholly found a menial job in the steel mills and Pauline carried on as a housewife. After sometimes they realized that their income is not enough as: “Cholly began to quarrel about the money she wanted, she decided to go to work. Taking jobs as a day worker helped with the clothes, and even a few things for the apartment, but it did not help, Cholly. He was not pleased…..”(118) and gradually “money became the focus of their discussions, hers for clothes, and his for drinks.” (118)
Thus, financial crisis thwarts their married life, consequently Cholly draw himself away from the responsibilities as the head of the family. Now Pauline has to back to work as a breadwinner for her children-Sammy and Pecola. She is employed as a maid in a prosperous lakeshore home, and there in order to keep her employer’s house clean and beautiful she neglected her home and children. As a mother: “Into her son she beat a loud desire to run away, and into her daughter she beat a fear of growing up, fear of other people, fear of life.” (128)

Thus, Breed loves have fallen into the trap of a vicious capitalist system that denies them their sexual roles, Pauline and Cholly find themselves in an inverted position where the woman is the inadvertent breadwinner and where the male is a liability, a drain on the family’s resources. Pauline and Cholly failed to provide economic strength and stability to their family. Thus the tragedy of Breed loves’ family is not only that they are “ugliest” but they are poor too.

Morrison’s second novel ‘Sula’ published in 1973 brought her national recognition. Sula was excerpted in Redbook and nominated for the 1975 National Book Award in fiction. The organization of the novel Sula over a span of forty five years
allows determining the factors that produce the poignantly hollow Sula. In the novel, Morrison through periphery of characters mirrors her recurrent themes: the impact of community on the individual’s quest for self, the particular problems of black women, and the laughter and pain which characterize the survival struggle of Black in the racist American society.

Morrison observes the problem of individual right as the primary of the oppression of Africans. In the novel Sula, Sula suffers not only at the hands of whites but also at the hand of blacks. Morrison’s characters discover that they escape the black community’s socio-economic disorder only to face, later, all the encompassing psychological chaos, characteristic of life in a society polarized on racial lives.

She represents the history of the most segregated blacks of the ‘Bottom’, the Negro neighborhood of the town Medallion, Ohio. The neighborhood is called “the Bottom” because it originated in the tricky economics of Afro-American slavery. Thus the place naming inscribes the fact of capitalism prevailing in the American society, as the Bottom was white man’s gift of land to a slave who had performed some heavy duties for him. Although the Bottom was really hilly land where planting was backbreaking and
the weather harsh, the master had persuaded the slave that this land was more desirable than valley land, that it was called the Bottom because it was the bottom of Heaven “best land there is”. (5) The bottom is the deprivation of the “means of production” that characterized capitalistic American society’s relation to former slaves. The Bottom symbolizes the condition of Afro-Americans in the larger American social circle, as they are deprived of agriculture production and productive industrial labor associated with construction and running of a “modern” world.

The nigger got the hilly land, where planting was backbreaking, where the soil slid down and washed away the seeds, and where the wind lingered all through the winter.

(5)

The novel certainly helps to set a new agenda for black women’s social and narrative possibilities. In ‘Sula’ Morrison complicates and questions that assumption, evoking the very oppositions on which it has tended to rest. What is more, she transgresses the boundaries separating black women from others, and rendering them.

In ‘Sula’ Morrison ventures to create a black woman heroine, who consciously embraces the role of the pariah, shattering the image of the conventional black woman who conforms to the
norms of black community and lives within it, having nothing to do with the white world, its people and way of life. Morrison sketches a very daring and adventurous character in Sula who breaks all bonds of blood, ties of the community and human relationship in her quest for self, but is doomed, for life and experience so desensitize and harden her that she loses the capacity to feel. She is depicted as a failure in her attempts to create ‘herself’, living according to the dictates of her mind, but she is a triumphant personality in the end, when the realizations dawns on Nel and the black community; the black community unconsciously accepts her ways and Nel realizes that she had been missing Sula.

The story of oppression and suppression of the Black by the white Masters in Bottom land in Medallion forms the background setting of the novel, which is inhabited by its characters Eva Peace, Shadrack, Hannah, Helene, Plum, Nel and Sula. The unconventional daring and experimental nature of Sula is an unusual trait for a black woman of the 1930’s and 40’s. Born into a family known for its tradition of violence and lack of ethics, her family history is responsible for shaping her character. She inherits the quality of violent bravery from her grandmother Eva Peace, who when deserted by her husband Boy-Boy? Does not sit back
and moan, rather rises up determined to survive. Left alone with her children with no means of survival, Eva leaves those in the hands of her neighbors, when the pangs of suffering from hunger and starvation become unbearable. She comes back with enough money to take care of her children but without a leg. The rumor goes that Eva deliberately placed her leg on the railway track to claim the insurance money. Eva exhibits violent bravery and takes the role of a man, acting against the traditional mode where a woman was supposed to exhibit weakness of mind and soul. From her mother Hannah, Sula inherits an unloving and uncaring attitude.

Hannah simply refused to live without the attention of a man and after Rekus’s death, had a steady sequence of lovers mostly the husband of her friends and neighbors. Her flirting was sweet, low and guileless. (44)

This topped with the pain of maternal neglect when she overhears her mother saving .... “I love Sula. I just don’t like her”, (57) teaches her that she has no one to count on. This is a determining factor in her life. Violent bravery in her blood, set off by the reality of neglect and indifference, Sula grows through childhood creating within her a “void” desensitized person which is the cause of her failure in her venture of self discovery.
Nel and Sula also radically differ from each other in their attitude to society. Whereas Nel listlessly observes the conventions of the society, Sula flouts them. She breaks all the rules that reflect the community’s traditional values and becomes a pariah living outside the laws and rules of the community. She remains a social outsider as she defies the role she is supposed to play in society. Freeing herself from narrow confines of traditional woman, she rebels against the set norms for woman’s behavior in the black community. She defies the traditional gender system than restricts female autonomy. What is more, by appropriating male prerogatives, she, in effect, abandons her sex and become a monstrous perversion of the passive nature that has been socially constructed for women. She summarily rejects the advice of settling down and having babies saying: “I don’t want to make somebody else, I want to make myself.” (132)

Helene Wright, on her journey to south, to see her dying grandmother, gets into an exclusive white compartment by mistake. Immediately a conductor calls her:

What you think you do in gal? (Bently, 24)

Note the use of word “gal”? Helene is instantly made aware of her color status, her inferior position as a black. All her beauty,
her elegance, and her heavy wool and velvet brown dress vanish under her colored skin. Further she is forced to use the toilets for colored women in the open fields. But there is a need to understand the pain and oppression that is experienced before the violence springs forth. This seems to be an attempt to project the novel as a chronicle, and authentic history of the black people so often hidden behind the supposedly “Major” events that took place in those years. It also aims at illustrating how the outside world impinges influences and indeed shapes the lives of Black in a small neighborhood: tucked up in the bottom. (Walker, 261-62)

In a capitalist American economy, the experiences of World War I result in tremendous amount of frustration and mental violence to Shadrack and Plum. This is manifested in the ravaged condition in which both return to Bottom, Plum’s inadequacy as an adult male ruined by the war, turned him towards drug addiction. Shadrack’s whole life is changed. The frustration and trauma that such experiences inflict, induces him to institute a National Suicide Day:

It was not death or dying that frightened him, but the unexpectedness of both. (14)
Jude, Nel’s husband, is another example of male suffering through the demands of a white economy. Jude desperately wanted to work in the building of the River Road as he desires to do meaningful work. So desperate is he to participate in the white economic domain that his thoughts grow quite violent, that he wouldn’t mind injuring himself:

Perhaps a sledge hammer would come crashing down on his foot, and when people asked him how come he limped, he could say, got that building the New Road. (82)

Thus, for Nel, the marriage to Jude has been frustrating in large part because of his inability to find rewarding work in a white dominated economic system.

Flight, free fall, consistently means freedom, independence, unconventionality, self knowledge for Morrison. In Song of Solomon flight also evokes the American folk tradition. Solomon’s song is Morrison’s version of the flying African myth about enslaved Africans who escaped slavery in the South by rising up and flying back to Africa and to freedom. Morrison improves upon the story to a new generation and her novels serve an essential function as cultural artifact. Myths are forgotten and misunderstood because people in transit move away from the places where they were born and from the culture bearers who
remain in those places. The flying myth is the example of one that is misunderstood by those who can relate to it in Western classical terms only. But Morrison wishes to restore its tutorial power for black people. She says:

If it means Circe to some readers, fine I want to take credit for that. But my meaning is specific; it is about black people who would fly. That was always part of the folk love of my life flying was one of our gifts. I don’t care how silly it may seem. It is everywhere-people used to talk about it, it’s in the spirituals and gospels. Perhaps it was wishful thinking-escape, death and all that…. (Leclair, 26-27)

*Song of Solomon* the title of Toni Morrison’s third novel is a variant of a well-known Gullah folktale about a group of African born slaves who rose up one day from the field where they were working and flew back to Africa. In the novel, this tale becomes both end of, and a metaphor for, the protagonist’s identity ……. In basing Milkman’s identity quest on a folktale, Morrison calls attention to one of the central themes in all her fiction, the relationship between individual identity and communities, for folklore is by definition the expression of community of the common experiences, beliefs, and values that identify a folk as a group.
The ultimate quest for self and its realization is found in Morrison’s third, National Book Critics Circle Award-winning novel *Song of Solomon* in 1977. It tells the story of the quest for cultural identity by its hero, Macon (Milkman) Dead III. Like Sula’s, Milkman’s story focuses on his turbulent rite of passage into adulthood, into manhood. But more important, like Shadrack’s journey, his journey also reveals the significance of the historical and cultural self. Milkman cannot become complete until he connects the loose historical cords of his memory.

When Milkman realizes the children’s song, “Solomon done fly, Solomon done gone/Solomon cut across the sky, Solomon gone home,” is about his great grandfather Solomon who had such powers, he rejoices. Solomon: “did not need an aero plane. He just took off, got fed up. All the way up! No more cotton! No more bales! No more orders! No more shift. He flew baby. Lifted his beautiful black ass up in the sky and flew on home”. (332)

Milkman is excited but Morrison is alert. African myth is not less vulnerable to contamination than Western fable. Solomon flies off and Morrison questions about the people that were left by him. What about the wife and twenty one children that he left here on the ground?
Solomon flies leaving Ryna, his wife to take care of the children. Her cries of protest and anguish are still carried on the wind more than a century later for Milkman to hear. In the third generation Milkman and Hagar reenact this tragedy of abandonment. When Milkman goes away, Hagar loses all capacity to think rationally and she dies of a broken heart, when Hagar is facing death, Milkman is flying in dream. Taking the story from black myth, Morrison repeats and recreates the story according to the present need. Hagar like Pecola becomes a prey of white standard of beauty. When her cosmetic beauty is washed away by rain Morrison warns the people like her who are the victim of American white world.

Pilate is another torch bearer in the black picture gallery of Morrison. She is one of timeless people who dispatch their wisdom to others. She can initiate others to the ways of African American culture that gives life continuity and intent. Out of place in big northern city Pilate embraces more natural rhythms like those of women of Shalimar. She does not believe in the modern materialistic ways of her brother. She gives up all her desires for such things and acquires a deep concern for humanity at large. She embodies memorable traits of character that personify black
culture and tradition. Born without a navel, Pilate seems ageless, immortal. As a natural healer her qualifications are her compassion for troubled people and respect for other’s views and vision. Like a mystical character, she has a communication with her dead parents. As ancestor Pilate bears a mega share to the novel’s work in passing on cultural knowledge to Milkman and to the readers.

The black man is the subject of *Song of Solomon*. Milkman journeys to the home place of his father and aunt to rescue the gold, he believes, is there. Instead of finding gold, in the caves of Virginia, Milkman finds the myths, the song and the richness of black culture. Every phase of his journey brings him closer to self and community. In Dan Ville, Pennsylvania Fred Garnet, a passing motorist teaches Milkman that everyone is not motivated by capital gain. Reverend Cooper’s stories about old Macon Dead, Milkman’s grandfather, about Lincoln’s Heaven, the farm where he worked right alongside his father, reveal for the first time to Milkman the powerful bomb in the phrase, “I know your people.” As he listens to the old man’s recollections of the past, he glitters in to the life of their adoration and grows fierce with pride. Their primordial link to earth, to animals and to each other inspires
Milkman’s respect for them. He understands his own glaring limitations in the place.

There was nothing to help him—not his money, his car his father’s reputation, his suit or his shoes. In fact they hampered him. His watch and two hundred dollars would be of no help there, where all the man had was what he was born with, or had learned to use... They hooted and laughed all the way back to car, teasing Milkman, engaging him to tell more about how scared he was. And he told them laughing too, hard loud and long, really laughing. (277-81)

Pilate’s role should not be underestimated. She provides a marked contrast to her brother and his family. While Macon’s love for property and money, determines the nature of his relationship, Pilate’s disregard of status, occupation hygiene and manners enable her to affirm spiritual values such as compassion, love, loyalty and generosity. She is modern as well as ageless and teaches Milkman that relation with culture, history and the community is more important than money. Milkman largely resolves the conflict between freedom and relation. Showing the myth coming from the black culture is not enough. Circe tale offers a tempting pattern for a black writer interested in myth and folklore since it relates to the folk tales of blacks flying back to
homeland. Morrison plays variations on the story to correct the perspective. One version of it has Shalimar flying away and trying to take his son. But the baby is unable to soar with him. This version emphasizes that son’s fall is the result of the situation beyond his control and secondly his father’s desire for freedom and his family ties are in conflict. The second aspect is central to Morrison’s analysis and reconstruction of the myth. The Freedom to fly with children involves denial of social and personal bonds. He does not destroy himself by soaring but he wounds others because he does not feel the responsibility. Milkman comes to ask the cost of heroic quest:

Who he leaves? Believe? His great grandfather Shalimar left the children. Milkman has the example of Pilate before him that she could fly without leaving the ground. Pilate has the bond of relationship without being a part of society. By conceiving himself both free and individual, best member of the social group, Milkman unites the freedom and relationship. Milkman resolves the conflict when he leaps. He does not fly away. He flies towards his wounded brother – Finding freedom in surrender, he recreates the Myth. (Davis, 338-42)

Like Song of Solomon, next novel Tar Baby also invokes the African American tale that once again shows the richness of
race and culture. Recognizing that the people of African descent, no matter where they are, share a common identity, a common history and a common pattern of oppression, Morrison uses the Caribbean island as an island that presents conflicting myths. Morrison feels:

Black Culture survives everywhere pretty much the same and that black people take their culture wherever they go.

(Wilson, 86)

Son in the context of the myth can be treated as a tar baby to the extent that the characters cannot escape his touch and are transformed by it. But Jadine fits more suitably in to the context as she is a figure created by white man’s institution to trap black man. While talking about the black culture and topics of her works, Morrison says that she does not hesitate to show the reality:

There is a mask that sometime exists when black people talk to white people. Somehow it seems to me that it skilled ones in to fiction. I never thought that when I was reading black poetry, but when I began to write... I knew there was something I wanted to clear away in writing. (Raus, 218-19)

By setting her novel in Caribbean island, Morrison is able to incorporate several different cultures, including the island natives, Philadelphian Negroes and white imperialist who are
mutually dependent on each other for basic needs but are alienated from any sense of community. Ironically Jadine and Son belong to one community but to two different cultures. Jadine, “The Copper Venus” is the epitome of white culture and Son represents the prime time black culture. But Tar Baby is not a protest novel like the next Beloved. Here Morrison does not look for someone to blame for the white oppression of blacks.

For thirty years at Kitchen in Larder Sydney and Ondine has performed their duties with elegant style and attention to detail. And they don’t feel exploited. They are clearly more than servants but how much more. Their position is further complicated by the presence of Jadine, their twenty four year old niece. Jadine is educated, beautiful, sophisticated, having more in common with Margaret, than with Ondine and Sydney. Sydney and Ondine are those unconscious servants who identify themselves more with their employer’s culture.

They are Philadelphia Negroes with a special status that sets them apart and above blacks from the South or from the Caribbean. The other blacks are not Negroes with capital ‘N’ but strangers, people whose ancestors had not successfully emulated white enterprise and industry as Sydney and Ondine’s people had done in Philadelphia. (Furman, 55)
They have proudly removed themselves from the category of ‘nigger’, synonymous to them with uncultivated therefore unworthy. They have no relationship with other workers. There are other people who do the laundry and handle yards chores, but they are Faceless bodies to Sydney and Ondine. To them all the island women look alike. They show the racial ideology of their employers. Not only this, they have used the negative jargon to refer to the people who are like them. The poor African masses are naggers who steal. In contrast the ‘Childs’ are Negroes respectable Africans. Sydney openly disassociates himself from Son:

I am a Phil-a-Delphi Negro mentioned in the book of the very same name. My People owned drugstore and taught schools while yours were still cutting their face open so as to able to tell one of you from the other. (164)

The place which the characters inhabit, the land of community, plays an important role in Morrison’s novels as much as land and community are the part of black American heritage. This is endorsed by Barbara Christian when she says:

As in the ancestral African tradition place is as important as the human actors. For the land is the participant in the maintenance of folk tradition. It is one of the necessary constants through which the folk dramatize the meaning of
life, as it is passed on from one generation to next. Setting them is organic to the character's view of themselves. As change in place drastically alters the traditional values that give their life coherence. (65)

Furthermore it reflects Morrison’s own maturing consciousness of the fact that African people must struggle and seek a common solution to their plight. However this solution is not attained by Son who himself at last becomes a prey to Tar Baby. In *Tar Baby*, Jadine is an antithesis of the black folk and community values. Not only does she think like a European but she feels also that she is a European. The son of Valerian is quite correct when he says that she was abandoning her history, her people. Morrison tells to Charles Raus about the deculturing process for Jadine:

She is an orphan in true sense. She does not make connections unless they serve her in some way. Valerian she speaks of because he did a concrete thing for her... She is cut off. She does not have, as Therese (a spiritualist) says her ancient properties. She does not have what Ondine has... but she needs a little bit of Ondine to be complete Woman... The race may need it, human beings may need it, and she may need it. (228-29)
Unlike Jadine, who internalizes white values, Son reflects people class mentality. He becomes Christ like figure on the island that saves his people. He is a revolutionary who politically educates his people. He seems to be the representative of everyone’s son devoid of selfish individualism and conscious of himself as an African. Son has a sincere love for living things in general, African people in particular. It is because Jadine so blindly accepts the white life style that she becomes Son’s main target for political education. But he fails to do that. She feels more of home in New York. She feels it with an orphan delight. She rejects the black community and culture completely. The home town of Son, Elope is the blackest thing she has ever seen. And it is suffocating. As they cannot resolve their cultural differences their relationship becomes violent which is the manifestation of the psychic fragmentation of the culture as a whole. The novel identifies the cultural pitfalls of modern life for those who are running away from their culture.

After *Tar Baby* was finished, Morrison expected to stop writing novels. After four successful performances, she was for a time without the urgent need to say something that had not been said before. She no longer had the messianic will to tell about
people that she only knew, in a way that only she could. Without going through the works of Zora Neale Hurston and Paul Marshall, she had perceived the gap between the black experience and the representation of that experience in the literature. She looked at her own work and found herself properly spoken of in it. But her hiatus from writing was short lived. Once more she felt responsible for delineating the people that only she knew, as if she had the direct line and was the receiver of all this information. Morrison found a story of a black slave woman in Ohio. She killed her own infant rather than see her return to bondage in the South. Morrison found this news clipping in *The Black Book* which chronicles the life of the African people in the United States from the slavery to the civil rights movements.

Based upon the horrible real event of infanticide, *Beloved* reflects Morrison’s interest in recovering the history of blacks and their slave experience. She is deeply moved by the symbolic nature of the story-how slavery affected the life of an individual and how this one woman was fighting against it individually. The novel moves from the specific theme of mother love to a more symbolic representation of the memories of more than sixty million men and women and children who lost their life to slavery and were
forgotten. The ghost of the daughter who comes to life in this novel provides a way for Morrison to use the supernatural to give voice to those who died at the hand of slavery. They must be remembered and mourned Morrison believes, by those who have not known the horrors of their lives. Set in Cincinnati in 1873, eight years after the end of civil war, *Beloved* is nevertheless a novel about the history of black slavery. The characters have been so profoundly affected by the experiences of slavery that time cannot separate them from its horror or undo its effects. Unveiling the interior lives of her characters, Morrison carried with it the titanic responsibility for depth. She resumes an unfinished script of slavery begun over two centuries ago; by the first black slave narration and she must do it truthfully and with integrity. Morrison’s characters stand in for all those slaves and former slaves who were unceremoniously buried without tribute and recognition. She feels chosen by to attend their burial properly and artistically. *Beloved* is her effort to do that. It is an act of recovering the past in narrative to insert the memory that was unbearable and unspeakable in literature. Only than it is possible, Morrison believes for Black people, for society to move on. This need to remember before moving on is reflected in the epilogue
where after having passed on *Beloved’s* story Morrison writes that to protect itself, the community forgets *Beloved*:

Disremembered and unaccounted for, she cannot be lost because no one is looking for her and even if they were how can they call her if they do not know her name. Although she has claims, she is not claimed.... This is not a story to pass on. (274-75)

Morrison believes that only by remembering the past there can be liberation from its burden. Brief images of Sethe in a place where she takes flowers away from the leaves and puts them in a round basket suggest an Africa of beauty and freedom before white violence and involvement. Morrison captures the heartbreak of the middle passage, the slave route from Africa to West Indies, during which many perished in Cargo holds or jumped from ships to death in the sea. This, Morrison thinks, is the least examined aspect of black history in America. No one praises them; nobody remembers them neither in the United States nor in Africa. Millions of people disappeared without a trace and there is no monument anywhere to pay homage to them, because they never arrived safely on the shore:

The book was not about the institution slavery with capital S.

It was about those anonymous people called slaves. What
they do to keep on, how they make a life, what they are willing to risk, how long it lasts in order to relate to one another- that was incredible to me. (Interview with Bonnie Angels, 120-22)

Morrison seems at her best in documenting the slavery of Blacks and its aftermath. The treatment of blacks as slaves, as the beasts of burden is driven home to the reader. Seehe’s reaction places her outside the Ohio Community of farmer slaves. She becomes one of outlaw characters in conflict with community values. The people had not responded to their own unspeakable and unforgivable insults so outrageously. They understand her rage but not her reaction. Ella had survived the sexual sadism of her master. Stamp Paid had steeled him to the rage he felt when he had handed over his wife to his master’s son. But Seehe reacts against all this and to save her daughter from slavery she kills her. Seethe’s exercise of power, is in fact a declaration of independence from an unsympathetic community. As a repository to cultural traditions, the community is usually necessary to the individuals’ wholeness and identity and those who do not embrace it, are incomplete as is Jadine in Tar Baby. But sometimes the role of community is not so easily justified. In Beloved the community abridges its natural function, through spite, jealousy and manners.
Before Seethe arrives in Ohio, the black community maintains the integrity of its purpose with Baby Suggs at its moral core. Her house, 124 Bluestone, was the gathering place, the community center. In the clearing behind the house, Baby Suggs taught the people to dance, to laugh and to love themselves. In this setting for twenty eight days Seethe has women friends, a mother in law and all her children together. But these people betray Baby Suggs and her family by failing to warn them about the arrival of School Master and his nephews. They do not raise their voices when Seethe is taken to jail. Despite their coldness the community does not expel Seethe. Seethe is not in danger in losing her identity as black woman. Seethe continues in the community and reconnected with it when the women save her from the child ghost’, her fight is not with these people with whom she has so much suffering in common. The women in community respond gradually but deliberately. Forgiving Seethe both for her deed and pride them came to aid in exercising the destructive presence of ghost:

They grouped, murmuring and whispering, but did not step foot in the yard. Denver waved. A two waved back but came no closer. Denver sat back down wondering what was going on. A woman dropped to her knees. Half of the others did likewise. Denver saw lowered heads but could not hear the
lead prayer-only the earnest syllables of agreement that
booked it, yes, yes, yes, yes oh yes. (Beloved, 258)

How exquisitely human was the wish for permanent
happiness, (Curt, 145)

This is the expression by one of characters in Paradise
(1998). Like Beloved this novel deals with the history of struggle
made by former black slaves in establishing an idyllic black
Oklahoma town Ruby. Whole sections of the black population
were cut out from the society. It gives rise to a lot of trouble.
Paradise deals with the hostile behavior which develops among
Blacks and Whites for each other. They scorn each other action
and achievement. Blacks were separated through Oklahoma’s all
black towns and it is how Ruby, a small western American
community came into being. Their members are believed to be the
descendants of a group of wandering ex-slaves who after been
rejected by already established black as well as white—eventually
succeeded in establishing, all black community in a place in
Oklahoma. It now appears “the one all-black town worth the pain.”

No one should go hungry from the town—this was the motto
of the people who remembered their past and their culture. People
of Ruby, much like their predecessors, are much dependent on
agriculture. Much of the finance has been looking after by the
Morgan Twins; they are the wealthiest brothers in town and are the good old capitalists. Morgan’s have the biggest house in Ruby. Earlier they were in army but afterward they become the administrators and financers for the people of Ruby. Just like their father, they have full control over the honey transaction held in the bank of Ruby. Morgan’s have acquired by the sale of herds and “the natural gas (was) drilled to ten thousand feet on the ranch filled (their) pockets.” (82) Ruby in 1950 was not as much thriving as it is in the present. When ruby was founded no soft toilet papers, were used, rags were used instead of washcloths, but now in every Ruby household appliances are present, as the stores changes from a necessary service providers to a business. So Ruby is a ‘self sufficient’ black town, there is no crime and freedom is a boon given by God. While the novel shows the strength of the people in unity and co-operation, it also exhibits the pits and falls of modern generation that does not believe in the cultural values. For example ‘the oven’ which is the symbol of their love and struggle, becomes the place for picnic and dance for modern generation. Once again the novel shows that the strength of any community lies in remembering the past and believing in its own cultural values.
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