Abstract of thesis entitled, *The Ancestor in the Novels of Toni Morrison*, submitted by Mrs. Arundhati Roy, for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English in Assam University:

The dissertation analyses the seven novels of Toni Morrison, from *The Bluest Eye* (1970) to *Paradise* (1998) to trace the presence of the ancestor as figure and as metaphor in the textual space of the novels. The analysis is based on an eclectic approach formulated on the basis of Morrison’s own statements, and the propositions for the study of African American literary texts, proposed by Karla F. C. Holloway and Henry Louis Gates, Jr.

The first chapter presents a brief survey of Morrison’s life, her fictional and non-fictional works, and the received critical opinion, particularly with reference to the use of history and memory in her narrative art. The chapter also deals with the critical paradigm used for the study, with references in some detail to the arguments of the two critics mentioned above.

The second chapter presents a study of the cultural significance of the figure of the ancestor and the idea of the ancestral in the African and the African American worldview. This is followed in the third chapter by an analysis of some novels written by African American Women novelists, who may be regarded as literary ancestors of Toni Morrison, or who were her contemporaries. This is in response to Morrison’s own statement that the achievement of an African American writer needs to be measured in the context of the use of the ancestor in the narrative space.

The fourth chapter studies Toni Morrison’s narrative space that is full of ancestor figures who function as characters, who are either male or female, alive or dead. These figures reside both in the real and the dream world of the protagonists in their movements back in time to the old world as well as to the projection of the future. Some such characters are M’Dear in *The Bluest Eye*, Eva Peace in *Sula*, Pilate in *Song of Solomon*, Ondine and the shadowy female figures in *Tar Baby*, Baby Suggs in *Beloved*, as well as the group whose stories make up the central narrative in *Jazz* and *Paradise*.

Chapter five studies the metaphor evoking the idea of the ancestor and the ancestral. The presence of the ancestor as figure is reinforced in the novels of Morrison by a series of metaphors with roots in the historical experience and cultural memory of the African Americans in connection with their home in Africa. A close reading of the texts traces a recurrence of such metaphors as home, bones, caves, the calabash, and flight, all loaded with symbolic meaning.

Chapter six follows the statement of Henry Louis Gates, Jr. that African American texts signify on each other, and makes an intertextual study of the novels of Toni Morrison reading them along with one of the seminal fictional texts of African American literature, Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*. 
In the concluding chapter, the work presents a summary of the findings of the analysis of Morrison’s novels, and also makes an assessment of her achievement as a novelist in constructing a narrative space that makes use of the ancestor and the ancestral in fulfilling her avowed political and cultural agenda that motivates her writings.

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