Chapter - IV

BELOVED AND LUST
Discourse, a communication, may begin in the realm of word but is extended to ideas, theme, myths, characters, symbols, images etc. Discourse is the very instrument to unravel the writer's intention about anything and everything. Through women's language, often termed as the power of the weak, Morrison explores and exploits the natal wisdom of her characters, sprouting from the very roots of the African culture. Norms of gender discourse that are taken into consideration in this chapter by Toni Morrison and Elfriede Jelinek are the powerlessness of female sex, sexual slavery, forced submission of a woman against the desires of her so-called master, woman's identity as a sexual object and marital rape. Morrison and Jelinek artistically and metaphorically describe Sethe's and Gerti's attempts, the wretched souls of *Beloved* and *Lust* respectively to rebuild their broken lives.

By insisting on the unity of flesh and spirit, Morrison prepares the readers to accept *Beloved's* double fiction as a living and dead figure. She continues to find her principal focus in external behaviour, no doubt deeply effected by the terribly wounded black psyche influenced by black predicament that erupted in the experience of
slavery in nineteenth-century America. "Physical pain has no voice, but when it at last finds a voice, it begins to tell a story."¹

The genesis of the novel goes back to the time when Morrison was working on black literature projects for Random House. While editing The Black Book, she came across a number of stories of slaves who dared to resist the system. And one was the story of Margaret Garner, a fugitive who had escaped with her children from Kentucky and settled in a neighbourhood. When pursued and threatened with re-enslavement, she resisted by trying to kill her own children. Garner succeeded in taking the life of one, making the point that she would go even to her length to avoid seeing her children forced back into slavery. For Morrison it would have been a remarkable example of how much a woman could love in sacrificial way or how a woman could value anything more important than herself.

If a house burns down, it's gone, but the place- the picture of it- stays, and not just in my memory, but out there, in the world. What I remember is a picture floating around out there outside my head. I mean, even if I don't think it, even if I die, the picture of what I did, or knew, or saw is still out there. Right in the place where it happened.²
Right from the beginning of the novel makes us aware the history of humiliations and pains tolerated by African women. It draws our attention to the psychological turmoil experienced by Sethe in the context of slavery. The separation of women and children from men, the sexual exploitation of African women by men and the effect of psychic state in their behaviour constitute the underlying socio-psychic interaction of the novel.

Sethe's murder of her baby character Beloved is the psychic consequence of slavery. Morrison here question marks the male dominated society for their brutal treatment of women in general. Sethe's womanity and identity is so much violated by her sadistic slave master that she kills her daughter to save her from the psychological scar of childhood. She is not ready to afford a psychic death of her daughter. She does not want her daughter to get the same courtesies like physical violence, rape by countless whites and an open farm to mate with her partner after the permission of her employer, that she had been used to. "If I hadn't killed her she would have died and that is something I could not bear to happen to her" and thus a mother bares her bosom. A considerate mother, a wax hearted woman bares her bosom to exhibit the scars of her breasts, that contain no milk, but nevertheless imbibe an ocean measure of yearnings for her deceased daughter. Sethe’s act is an example of resistance to physical, mental and sexual slavery and thus is not a
senseless crime but a necessity born out of serious contemplation. The tale of Sethe revolves around the grisly culture of continuous dehumanization of the dark skinned people. The rave and rancour that had accrued during the epoch when the continuous overwhelmence of these wretched souls had hit the ceilings, is something of a recurring series of black chapters in our powered civilization. These people were truly despised in god’s eternal regime too, for there was no respite available to them anywhere.

Raising his fingers to the hooks of her dress, he knew without seeing them or hearing any sigh that the tears were coming fast. And when the top of her dress was around her hips and he saw the sculpture her back had become, like the decorative work of an ironsmith too passionate to display, he could think but not say, “Aw, Lord, girl.”

Each thus nailed and subjugated subsistence of that period, who was at the receiving end of such ghastly courtesies of such horrendous proceedings was known as slave and these slaves were put through such inhuman physical and emotional tortures and afflictions that yielded all human ethics torpedoed.

It is quite a task of Herculean measures to depict the sufferings and pains of this poor Sethe, better depicted as slave (worse) and a
woman (worst). It can still be described as branding her, stripping her off her name. The rule of the man over woman again takes its form in her life. The psychopath school teacher gives her minimal food, exhorts her physically to the maximum, whips her skin off even for the slightest mistake; and when it was the sleep time, she was chained so that she may not run away. And the nightmare, which always disfigured Sethe's dreams, was that if she was found absconding, which is merely a polite way of saying that if she ever tried to run away or anything likewise derogatory to what was expected of her, she would be beaten up mercilessly till her breaths sustained it.

Nothing of Sethe's was intact by the time they reached it except the cloth that covered her hair. Below her bloody knees, there was no feeling at all; her chest were two cushions of pins. It was the voice full of velvet and Boston and good things to eat that urged her along and made her think that maybe she wasn't, after all, just a crawling graveyard for a six-month baby's last hours.  

Morrison's exposure of this dehumanized behaviour was true and customary for both the genders of the slaves. But for the female section, being punished was far better than that if they were continuing their services before any of their unfortunate hyperbolic deviation from their requisite trajectories. This was because even if they were
hanged, or beaten up mercilessly or even burned to death, or killed likewise— it would have liberated them of the constant trauma of their physical, mental and emotional slaughter that ceased only with their breaths.

We flesh; flesh that weeps laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet on the grass. Love it hard. Yonder they do not love your flesh. They despise it. They do not love your eyes; they'd would just as soon pick em out. No more do they love the skin on your back. Yonder they flay it. And O my people they do not love your hands. Those they only use, tie, bind, chop off and leave empty.]

The term dehumanization for female slaves here wouldn't quite suffice to designate the same implications as it did for the men slaves. Women slaves were raped, and raped thoroughly. The word 'thoroughly' implies that they were raped till they lost the count of their children, which they delivered as a result of such de-luxe hospitalities. They were paraded without a thread on their most private organs before the visitors. Their daughters too were destined to the same courtesies in front of their eyes. Their sons were sold off and were put on the deathbed. All the Africans who became slave underwent an experience whose psychic impact staggered everything that had even previously happened to them. Morrison as a writer has made a
significant contribution to American literature and the canon of writing by Black woman. Her books contribute not only to the understanding of the specifics of life as a black woman, but also the important issues of survival for the entire black community. Barbara Hill says: "Women's writing is a 'double-voiced discourse' that always embodies the social, literary, and cultural heritages of both the muted and the dominant along with their inner working of mind and soul." 7

It does sound filthy and it does send all human ethics crashing. Today the accounts of such horrendous tales are limited only to old books and thus, this marvel of Toni Morrison was a rampaging cosmopolitan success. It does make one conceive the afflictions on those poor people's physical and spiritual domain. Inhuman and Para human psychologies depicted herein have been a blazing hallmark of this oeuvre itself- thus the author has persisted her literary salts, albeit for a different recipe this time. This novel encapsulates a spine-chilling ambience, right from the world go.

Well, feel this, why don't you? Feel how it feels to have a bed to sleep in and somebody there not worrying you to death about what you got to do each day to deserve each day to deserve it. Feel how that feels. And if that don't get it, feel how it feel to be a colored woman roaming the
roads with anything God made liable to jump on you.

Feel that.⁸

Sex and violence are the part of the grim reality of the human existence. Sex is as old as man and violence is also the part of the creation. Toni Morrison through Beloved approves that writing sex and violence is not the monopoly of male writers. She holds the opinion that women are as vital as, as important as her male counterparts in imagination and description of the speaking realities of the brutal assertiveness of male society. Through her heroines like Sula and Sethe she gives the reply of the statement "I do not care so much about what women feel.... I only care about what the woman is- what she is- inhumanly, psychologically, materially."⁹

Right from the beginning of the novel Morrison makes us to feel trembling due to the psychological turmoil experienced by Sethe in the context of slavery. The worst aspect of Sethe’s rape was that the white boys held her down and took her milk. She was milked like a cow by her slave masters. The most precious substance of a woman- her maternal milk was robbed of her essence. This situation caused psychological injury to her behaviour and psyche. By portraying this irreparable injury in Sethe’s life, Morrison describes that the silent submission and the sacrificial nature of female gender has been taken for undue advantages for ages. She slaps on the patriarchal society by
describing the loss of maternal milk of a woman, if this brutality is power then what is impotency? Morrison highly condemns that powerful society where gender norms barred a woman to give her nursing milk to her offsprings. "I am full God damn if of two boys with mossy teeth, one sucking on my breast the other holding me down, their book-reading teacher watching and writing it up."¹⁰

The slavery experience in the United States has some relevance to the system of bonded labour in India, more particularly in Andhra rural areas. In this connection Kalipatnam Ramarao’s *Yajnam* bears a wonderful comparison with Morrison’s *Beloved*. Morrison deals with the psychic consequences of slavery, while Ramarao’s *Yajnam* treats the mental agitation created by bonded labour, Kambaritanam. *Yajnam* tells the story of Seetaravudu(a dalit) who beheads his son when he is deprived of his land and is about to be thrown into kambaritanam(bonded labour)."I have great love for my son. He should not live like a slave. My son is not a kambri."¹¹

Sethe’s murder of her daughter is the manifestation of her wounded psyche. The traumatic experience of the gender and social injustice prompts Sethe to be so unnatural and drastic in her behaviour. Not only do Sethe’s memories of slavery come to her sensory, through her body but also perhaps more obviously, she wears on her body the signs of her greatest ordeal at the sweet home plantation. The story of the brutal handling she endured under slavery-
the stealing of her breast milk and the beating that ensued— is encoded in the scars on her back. Morrison not only defines the suffering of her female character in utmost horrible language but also makes the same signatures in the humiliation of Paul D. The cage Paul D and others are put into as punishment only externalizes the cage into which their selfhood has been thrust; they can be free only when they know how to break open the cage and enter the world, and not just by running away from Sweet Home. "All oppression creates a state of war." it was something which that happened to the slaves when they were given inhuman tortures.

Sethe, as a slave has undergone many inhuman insults. She was brought to sweet home plantation to replace Baby Suggs, another slave woman, who was old now. Baby Suggs' freedom is purchased by her own son, Halle Suggs with his five years of working on Sundays. Baby Suggs has served as a breeding slave woman and has attended to Mr. And Mrs. Garners. Morrison shows that for the plantation owners Sethe was no way different from their cattle. She describes excellently that a human remains no different from a cattle when body demands profusely. Beautifully she portrays how Sethe and Halle mate on top of a mattress kept in a cabin. For the first two times, they used the cornfield like animals.

And there on top of a mattress on top of a dirt floor of the cabin they coupled for the third time, the first two having been in the tiny corn-field Mr. Garner kept because it was
a crop animals could use as well as humans. Both Halle and Sethe were under impression that they were hidden. Scrunched down among the stalks they couldn’t see anything, including the corn tops waving over their heads and visible to everyone else.¹³

Sethe realizes that the schoolteacher represents the most treacherous kind of institutional evil. At plantation, she experiences the true erosion of her very black female self. Being informed about the atrocities faced by Baby Suggs and her own mother, she thinks the future of her daughters. She understands that everyone Baby Suggs knew and loved ran off or was hanged or was rented out or seized. As a result, Baby Suggs' eight children had six fathers. Definitely what Sethe did with Beloved could be wrong in the eyes of the moralists but she did it because she was surrounded by a most immoral and unjust world where justice and self-respect could be restored only by self-destruction and in justice. "Her pretty eyes looking at me like I was a stranger. Not mean or anything, but like I was somebody she found and felt sorry for. Like she didn’t want to do it but she had to and it wasn’t going to hurt."¹⁴

Morrison’s Beloved moves towards the total black feminist’s consciousness. However this consciousness is achieved at a painful cost, this as Morrison seems to suggest, is somewhat the fate of a black woman. No doubt, Sethe is also destined for the same, but she
tries out to liberate herself and her children from her given fate. Thus Toni Morrison’s feminist consciousness is given a new dimension of meaning through the characterization of Sethe.

For a full understanding of Jelinek’s novel, it is necessary to consider how she goes saying about it. Jelinek’s process of bringing the things into serious concern are usually emotionally inspired first and then intellectually controlled. Jelinek made a deep study of the Nazi history and past and she came to the conclusion that the painful history of women’s humiliation should not be concealed deep into the heart and she started illustrating it in the form of Lust. The identity of a woman as nothing in marital relation, the role of a woman as a passive figure in sexual urges, the destiny of a wife as a mule in a marriage and the use and throw tendency of males is wonderfully depicted in Lust.

Lust is basically about Gerti and her husband, Lust is the picturisation of a woman’s exploitation and man’s dominance. Lust is all about the abuse to female sexuality. Lust is the real picture of Austrian society, where woman is considered as an edible item; she is thrown into the cycle of consumptions and rejections again and again by the patriarchal society. Lust is the calculation of a woman’s surrender towards her so called duty, Lust is the measurement of a woman’s fall due to some unfulfilled desires, Lust is the story of a
woman's infidelity in the search of her identity, Lust is the assassination of a woman's trust and dependence upon a man and Lust is ultimately the marvel chapter of a woman's final submission.

"CURTAIN VIELS THE WOMAN in her house from the rest. Who also have their homes. Their holes. The poor creatures. Their hideaways, abideaways: their fixed abodes."  

Perhaps Jelinek has written Lust in her most oppressive moods. She is in her greatest rebellious temperaments when she raises the question over the women's expected roles. Are women made to serve every body, please every body and concern every body? Why does this happen with women only of all the cultures that they are considered as the synonym of services and sacrifices? Why the society for ages is so hostile to women? Why the men who come at the feet of a woman at night in bed consider them as 'the second sex'? Jelinek's Gerti is the face of every woman who feels burdensome due to the role expected of her every bit of breath. Her husband, the Director is the real patriarch who rules over his wife, as if wife is any territory or any property to be saved from the hands of the strangers. He gives us the confirmation that If possible, a man could rule over the thought process of woman. This annoys Jelinek and she condemns the double standard society where the thought of second man is declared as the fall of the woman but a man is socially authentic for the same. And more than that as he is a man, the might and right and decision-making is already associated with him. "The Director reads
the ads and places an order for his wife so that he can order her to her place, which is in red nylon lace with holes in the silence for the stars to peep through. One woman isn’t enough for Man. 

Jelinek really brought the resolution for holding modern feminist views. Joan Kelly demonstrates in her study *Women, History and Theory* a solid, four-hundred-years old tradition of women thinking about women and sexual politics in European society before the French revolution. Austrian, Indian, Anglo-American criticism presumes that definitely there is a female tradition, buried like hidden treasure in literary history. Search for woman is one major preoccupation for French thinkers. Critics and theorists like Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, Helene Cixous, Jacques Derrida, and Jacques Lacan are at the core of conceptualizing the present day feminist thoughts.

They envision naming the woman by centering and deconstructing femininity as lack, negativity, and absence of meaning, irrationality, chaos, and darkness in the patriarchal symbolic order. Jelinek appears to be deeply impressed by the French feminists and she fights against the concept in which women are biologically oppressed caste. She invented survival for her characters, survival of the body, and survival of the spirit. The latter of which she seemed to understand better than anyone else and around which she centered her energies.
Few other avant grade writers like Indian Writers Shobhaa De, Uma Vasudev, Gita Mehta are trying to convey a different vision of womanhood by violating current codes of conduct. Along with the women subjugation and sexual passivity, Elfriede Jelinek has instilled in her characters an aversion for dependence, vulnerability and self-absorption. She herself hates the way, the duties and the humiliating positions in which a woman is expected to appear. She advocates that these undue duties are one of the major reasons of women's pessimism and subjugation.

'women are planted full of hopes and live off memory, but men live off the moment, which belongs to them and, when carefully tended, can be gathered into a little heap of time which likewise belongs to them. At night they have to sleep and can't fill up. They are afire and warm up in small containers. Surprise, surprise this woman has been secretly rendered infertile through pills; the man's never becalmed heart would not countenance having no life gush forth from his ever brimful tank.'

Being conscious of women's marginalization in a society where males formulate the rules of living, she piles up the forces working towards women's subjugation, male control over every aspect of woman's existence- her productive and reproductive powers, her sexuality, her morality and mobility. Jelinek discovers that apart from
the concept of patriarchy, the other threat is that a woman is at the receiving end of an entire system. The system of tyrannical social structure is hostile to female sex and principal that a man is and should be superior to woman enlarges the debate. In this connection the definition of Adrienne rich says that patriarchy is:

the power of fathers, a financial, social, political system in which men- by force, direct pressure, or through ritual, traditions, law and language, customs, etiquettes, education and the division of labour-determine what part of women shall or shall not play and in which the female is everywhere subsumed under the male.¹⁸

Director rules upon Gerti's every movement. Like a dog she is kept in a strong invigilation by her master. He uses her, dirties her as if she is made for mal-transformation. He practices breath control and hits Gerti for the petty issues like not being well dressed, wearing the tights and being less exotic in the bed. The man is a bureaucrat in his desires, which are unpleasant to Gerti, but Gerti is also at the receiving end and surrenders under the oppressive gender. Kate Miller argues in her excellent work Sexual Politics that this system of domination of one collective group, defined by birth over another collective group, also defined by birth, is a power game, a political maneuvering more universal than any other form of oppression. For Gerti, the institution of marriage is the site of the most insidious form of sexual oppression. She is entrapped in the private hell of her
marriage. She is physically brutalized largely and her marriage looses all the possibilities of mutual love and concern, devouring her sense of self-esteem, identity and self-hood. In this fictional representation of reality, marriage appears as an institutionalized form of the man dominance over woman within the most personal of relationships.

Then he tosses the woman in amongst the other goods to complete the picture, and she is allowed to breathe his air and lick his penis and anus. With a practiced hand he catches his tits as they fall from her dress, they are already sagging and wilting, but he gathers them into bunches like balloon with a firm grip.19

Jelinek has tried to approve the argument of Simone De Beauvior regarding female sex through the misfortunes of Gerti. Simone argued in *The Second Sex* that in a patriarchy, women have been constructed, as man's "other", denied the right of her own subjectivity. "She is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the subject, he is the absolute- she is the other."20 In all her novels Jelinek raises the question over the debased position of women and she applies the language as a tool of criticism against the abusive male society. It may appear strange that at one point she makes a fight to restore women's dignity and at another point she portrays their pornographic sufferings. The answer lies in the efforts of revealing the painful history of the brutality against women in postwar
Austria. The real sufferings are portrayed on paper and compel the readers to feel similar anguish and loss.

Gerti also feels the same rejection as her husband's ignorance serves as a cruel repressive force on her sensitive temperament. Her self-esteem undergoes severe battering, for director sees nothing in her to respect, he knows only one thing- how to derive maximum pleasure of her body. What emerges as a close study of Elfriede Jelinek's novel is an understanding of the sufferings of women, which result from uneven power-division in marriages.

A court of no appeal. she is flooded and shat full him, she has to get up and the last of her clothes fall on the floor and she fetches a sponge to clean the Man, that irreconcilable enemy of her sex, of himself and the slime that she has caused to emit. 21

This mammoth male ego, the desire to own and control, spoils the very base of her marriage and carries her on an extramarital affair. She falls in the same unfertile attempt to be loved and graced by Michael who is more fatal to Gerti because of his dual personality. Outwardly he may appear as a man of clear principles but inwardly he too is merciless examiner. Elfriede Jelinek's exploration of female subjugation in patriarchal family structures takes on a larger dimension than the inner psychological world portrayed by Toni Morrison. She constantly focuses on the network of male dominance, power of male
repressive forces and its effect on woman. The agony of a woman forced to confirm to a socially prescribed image is best conveyed in the words of Indian English poetess Kamla Das, the poetess who has fiercely rejected being fitted into any mould:

Dress in Sarees, be girl,

be wife, they said. Be embroiderers, be cook,

be a quarreler with servants. Fit in. oh,

Belong, cried the categorizers.  

Gerti also falls in the complexity of contemporary existence where she is precariously poised between worlds, one in which she cannot totally reject and the other that she cannot easily accept. Gerti realizes that patriarchal forces are defacing her identity and a sense of refusal to surrender to husband’s superiority and indifferent attitude occurs in her inner self. The painful process of interrogation and introspection reveals Gerti about her gender and class subordination. She gradually comes to know that she is entrapped in a relationship, which denies her freedom, emotional involvement and self-respect she craves for. This hyper sensitive sex has her material desires taken care of but her emotional needs lament pathetically to be acknowledged. With Michael’s entry into the inner portals of her feminine self, new vistas suddenly open out in front of her. It gives her the courage to look into the untidy complexity of her mutilation. He
liberates her from that cocoon and ritual of self imposed martyrdom by making her feel that life is larger than that gallows, than any system, than any bond, larger even than the bond of her dry marriage.

The young man leans across to the woman, who has withdrawn a little to natter with her nearest and dearest, her secret dreams and longings. From her big eyes the tears well up and fall into her lap. Where desires abides, biding its time, clipping its nails. We are not animals, after all. Things don’t always have to happen right away.23

Jelinek expresses the position of woman in the patriarchal society-as someone who has limited sense of purpose, as someone who chooses something for herself as per other’s wish, as someone who doesn’t hold a firm sense of identity. The question that always disturbs Elfriede Jelinek is that why don’t women place themselves at the centre of this universe, why they are always aware of the demands of their lesser halves and why they cater themselves painfully to the needs of their men? She puts up the question mark on the institution of marriage by asking that why success in marriage demands slavish conformity, even at the cost of annihilating one’s self? She portrays the Austrian women in the picture of Gerti as a whole who was almost invisible in her marriage as well as in her extra-marital affair. In both of the cases her very existence didn’t mean anything to her men. Michael too deserves full leisure from Gerti’s body as he opines, what an owner can do with her wife’s body he also is capable to do the same if
he gets the consent. He asserts that a woman is a trinity of pleasures and a man is made to derive maximum pleasure from woman. And Gerti who was fascinated by this whim, shortly finds a gulf between her fantasy and the reality of her situation. She finds no difference in her sexually abused life, as Michael is also the similar emotionless, sex maniac man; who like Director comes close to Gerti with sole aim-to unload himself immediately. Neither the love existed in Gerti's marriage nor does it dwells in her meaningless affair. "Michael scrutinizes Gerti's complicated architecture and yells like a stuck pig. As if her were dissecting a corpse, he sizes her hairy cunt, stinking of secret dissatisfaction and dissatisfied secretions and buries his face in it."^{24}

In this quest of her independence, Gerti develops certain complexes as well. One such complex is to look at the womanly instinct as a sign of dependence. The fact is that a woman is basically a woman as well as a person. As a woman she might need a man for physical and emotional needs but as a person she legitimately can claim to be independent in her desires and decisions. However, in her social set up her two identities have been rolled into one, viz only a woman. A woman, who could be consumed and transformed into required roles, has led to the confusion in Gerti's self and this confusion and heavily loaded role to satisfy the sex hunger of her husband as well as her lover leads her to traumatic decision. In her existential struggle she suffers intensely and refuses to yield and
compromise and prefers death to miserable life. She flutters like a
caged bird seeking freedom and privacy. When she finds that, it is a
choice between meaningless existence and death, her decision
becomes easy.

Through this chapter, I have tried to make a survey of the
fictional depiction of the various repressive forces working on women
in contemporary hostile society. Repressive forces in the form of
paternalism, sexual politics in marital relationships, sexual stereo
typing with its imposed code of female sexuality and its imposed
definition of female roles have been discussed in order to suggest the
universality of these forces. This study aims ultimately to establish the
positive roles of Toni Morrison and Elfriede Jelinek in the vital ongoing
battle of establishing female selfhood.
Works Cited


3. ibid., p.200.

4. ibid., p.21.

5. ibid., p.41-42.

6. ibid., p.103.


16. ibid., p.13.

17. ibid., p.15.


19. Jelinek, p.64.

20. Beauvoir, de Simone, p.16.


23. Jelinek, p.84.