

Traumatic Speech Acts in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*

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Abstract

This qualitative study aims to scrutinize the traumatic effects of rhetorical and political excitable speech acts in Toni Morrison's most commended novel *Beloved*, which presents haunting situations of slavery in USA. The novel demonstrates that the white masters attempt to interpellate the minds of the black slaves in order to make them recognize that they are sub-human creatures. These interpellative forces consequence in life time enslavement of the victims, since they never come out of the traumatic effects of the verbal abuse, they were victimized with. The data are collected from Toni Morrison's novel, *Beloved*, which presents haunting situations in which the black slaves after their freedom, evoke in their mind traumatic memories of their slavery. In order to examine the traumatic speech acts, relevant excerpts were taken through purposive sampling under the method of content analysis. The applied theoretical model is based on Judith Butler's postulates about burning speech acts presented in her famous book, *Excitable Speech*. The analysis of the selected traumatic speech acts shows that the pricking state of the victims' self and ego traumatize them even after they get freedom. They repeat the injurious speech acts and atrocities of the white masters to further aggravate the situations through traumatic speech acts.

Keywords: excitable speech, traumatic speech acts, wounded psyche, slavery

1. Introduction

By applying Judith Butler's notions of traumatic speech presented in her famous book *Excitable Speech*, published in 1997, this study aims to show that behind torture through humiliating words, there is an attempt to engender the feelings of subordination and self-mortification in the addressees. In this regard the psychological trauma (Note 1), which is an aftermath of abusive discourse and insulting behavior, continues to affect the victim forever. Owing to this particular quality of excitable speech, it can be anticipated that the process of subjugation repeats itself automatically for a prolonged period. Among different traumatic experiences, the most painful act is to humiliate someone. This act, being a performative, tags the addressee by giving him a certain identity and then constitutes him/her in a subordinate position. The abusive remark inhabits the victim's mind in such a way that he/she recollects the same words repeatedly, which were used to call him/her.

Throughout the history of mankind, psychological and physical torture has been practiced on the weak. In both types of injuries: physical and psychological, human mind is affected directly. Van Boheemen (1999, p. 19) states, "in trauma, experience may be stored in the body without mediation of consciousness, and returns as flashbacks, or keep insisting through a compulsion to repeat." Judith Butler in this regard further comments, "The traumatic event is an extended experience that defies and propagates representation at once" (1997a, p. 38). There is a life time humiliation in the form of traumatized memory, which makes the subjects repeat the same words again and again in a mechanical process, which were used to hurt/burn their souls. Judith Butler (1997a), in this regard argued that in burning performatives, both speech and conduct simultaneously perform actions, "This is what I have been called" (p. 40). In *Excitable Speech*, Butler agrees with Felman that a speech act is mostly not aware of its performance. She quotes from Shoshana Felman's book, *The Literary Speech Act: Don Juan with J L Austin, or Seduction in Two Languages* (1983), and explicates, "The speech act says more, or says differently than it means to say" (1997a, p. 10). In this regard, both Felman and Butler believe that speech never remains under speaker's control. Butler's focus is on excitable speech, which is produced when a speaker is under stress, anger and anxiety: It does "not reflect the balanced mental state of the utterer" (1997a, p. 15).

Butler in *The Psychic Life of Power* quotes Foucault, who says that hegemonic cultural standards produce “melancholic; subjects, who are doomed with the fate of subjection consciously as well as unconsciously” (1997b, p. 16).

Toni Morrison played a pivotal role in giving voice to the voiceless folk of her community and made fruitful efforts to make the ruling community revise the laws in favour of equality and freedom for all in America. Lister (2009) remarked that Morrison addressed “issues that have been distorted or denied by the official accounts of history” (2009, p. 21). Toni Morrison and Judith Butler both are of the view that no resistance to oppression is real oppression. Toni Morrison through her novels, tried to portray resistance of black people in various forms; they do not only resist, they protest and they strive for their social acceptance. Toni Morrison (December 8, 1993) in the Ornate Grand Hall of the Swedish Academy presented her views, which were later on published in a book by Morrison, *Mouth Full of Blood*, on the capacity of language to oppress and empower: “Oppressive language does more than represent violence; it is violence; does more than represent the limits of knowledge” (2019, p. 104). Morrison projected distorted images of different archetypes. Sethe, Sixo, Baby Suggs, Stamp Paid and Paul D in *Beloved*, Pauline, Pecola, Claudia and Cholly in *The Bluest Eye* and Sula, Eva, Nel, Helene, Jude and Shadrack in *Sula* are examples of such people, who do not want to be at the margin but try to be at the central positions. Mariangela Pallandino in her essay, *History, Postcolonialism and Postmodernism in Toni Morrison's Beloved* (2008), states that Morrison wrote her novels not only about the practices and the effects of slavery on African black in America but also addressed these issues at broader level, for all such malpractices of oppression and their evasion all over the world. In an interview with Bonnie Angelo, Morrison affirms this fact as follows:

I thought this has got to be the least need of all the books I'd written because it is about something that the characters don't want to remember, I don't want to remember, black people don't want to remember, white people won't want to remember. I mean it's national amnesia. (Angelo, 1989)

Her most applauded novel, *Beloved* is a multi-faceted work that projects the traumatic life of African slaves. The novel represents life accounts of black slaves, who were brutally abused by white slave holders in America. The historical accounts reflect the everlasting sense of loss on the corporeal and psychological selves of the slaves. Toni Morrison dedicates her novel to “Sixty Million and more—[...] to the black people who died in the atrocities of slavery”. She shows that under the brutal treatment, the oppressed slaves are compelled to consider their bodies as the property of their cruel masters. Their traumatized minds, damaged bodies and wounded souls do not let them feel the sense of freedom even after the abolishment of slavery. In her essay, “*Unspeakable Things Unspoken*” (2000), Morrison leads her readers to apprehend the injurious effects of slavery on the black people:

The reader is snatched, yanked, thrown into an environment completely foreign, and I want it as the first stroke of the shared experience that might be possible between the reader and the novel's population. Snatched just as the slaves were from one place to another, without preparation and without defense. No lobby, no door, no entrance—a gangplank, perhaps (but a very short one) (p. 161).

Beloved is presented through evocations and past recalls unravelling to the readers the horrifying sights of slavery in America. There are flashbacks of traumatic memories of black slaves, which are in no manner less horrifying than nightmares. In different situations in the novel, Morrison tries to depict the role of abusive discourse of the dominant white actively engaged in dehumanizing the black. Rushdy (1999, p. 57) underlines Morrison's contribution in projecting slave narratives in order to reconstruct a certain kind of ideology. In the novel, the white masters are presented as powerful agencies, who oppress the weaker subjects, for the black as it is observed in the remarks of a former old slave, Baby Suggs, who preach her community to be aware of the white: “There is no bad luck in the world but white folks” (p. 89).

The plot of this novel is based on a real tragic incident of infanticide by a slave mother, who slaughtered her four children by thinking that they would lead a better life in the world hereafter. Other thematic concerns are related with socio-political conflicts between white masters and black slaves and maternal determinations. The protagonist of the novel is a female black slave, named Sethe, who was born to slave parents. She was brought to a slavery plantation, called Sweet Home, situated in Kentucky, when she was thirteen. This slavery house is operated by Mr. Garner and after his death Schoolteacher, brother in law of Mrs. Garner took its charge. When Sethe was fourteen, she was allowed to select Halle Suggs, another slave to be her life partner. At the age of eighteen, she was expecting the fourth child.

In the context of the novel, the horrors of slavery spoil the life of the black at both levels, individual and collective. Their identity in the present is based on their status in their past. The community of the black in the novel shares a common misfortune. The traumatized victims not only repeat the burning utterances but also

reconstruct them with horrifying effects. In this way a continuous process of subjugation starts, whereby the psychological trauma acquires the role of abusing agency in the society. Such memories continuously remind the victims of their abusive titles, ranks and positions, which they possess currently or which they possessed at some particular point in the history. Morrison was fully conscious of the power mechanism practiced through hate speech as she declares in her “Nobel Lecture” in 1993, “the instrument (language) through which that power is exercised” (p. 268).

In *Beloved* in different situations, insulting speeches by white slave holders are used to dehumanize the black slaves. For instance, the schoolteacher in the novel considers the black slaves like Sethe as subhuman creatures. There is a special type of rhetoric in his remarks about them in considering them animals and commodities, who can be used for different purposes. His illocution by establishing his own superiority over them is only to exploit their body in a more lucrative manner. They are not only considered as subhuman creatures rather they are addressed and treated like animals. Sethe’s trauma is expressed and repeated again and again in different places in the novel: “the men coming to nurse her” (p. 6), “those boys came in there and took my milk” (p. 16), “two boys with mossy teeth, one sucking on my breast the other holding me down” (p. 70), “They handled me like I was the cow, no, the goat,” (p. 200). One of Morrison’s critics, Lawrence remarked, “the question of authority over one’s own body is consistently related to that of authority over discourse” (1997, p. 233).

Furthermore, the whole novel is an account of brutalities and ruthlessness of Schoolteacher in the Sweet Home, which are described by the victims of slavery in the form of recollection of their traumatic experiences, repeated by them even after they get freedom. The physical and mental atrocities afflicted by Schoolteacher over all the slaves, led some of the slaves plan to escape from Sweet Home. Sethe also manages to send her sons named Howard and Buglar and a girl Beloved to some safe place along with their grandmother, Baby Suggs. After some time, Sethe, pregnant with Denver runs through the woods. An American white girl Amy Denver helps her in her escape and in the process of giving birth to her fourth child. After many hardships, Sethe reaches Baby Suggs’s house and starts living with her children and mother-in-law. Just after twenty-eight days, she is approached by the cruel monster: Schoolteacher, who comes in pursuit to re-capture her and her children. Furious as well as traumatized by the agonies of slavery, she makes a horrible decision. She will like to cut the throats of her children but will never let them be fuel in the infernal hell of slave houses. After twenty-eight days, “the travel of one whole moon of unslaved life” (p. 56), she is discovered by the white slave holder, who tries to snatch her freedom again. This time she emerges as a bold and resolute figure because now she is empowered by the passion of motherhood. She would never let anyone burn her children in hellish fire of slave plantations, she slaughters her infant daughter. Apparently, it seems to be a ruthless account, which cannot be overlooked. After eighteen years, Paul D a former slave comes to her and stays in her house. She finds him a blessing and shares with him the memories of her horrible past.

In the novel, all traumatic speech acts are the representations of violent acts. The violence, which affects the body of the victim, eventually affects its mind. Their trauma spreads, when the victims repeat again and again all those events, which are the source of trauma, in order to collect sympathies from the surrounding people. In this sense the wound of the mind is more infectious than the wound of the body. The victims of trauma always like to share their agonies with other people, and hence they suffer this pain repeatedly each time. The pain of trauma in the real life is equally tormenting as the pain of traumatic events, repeated in flashbacks and nightmares as Amy, the white girl, who helps Sethe in her delivery, states: “Anything dead coming back to life hurts” (p. 20). Therefore, the traumatic speech acts are analyzed in the light of ferocious experiences at the hands of white slave masters, because the main cause of trauma is violence. Cathy Caruth in *Unclaimed Experiences: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Note 2) (2016, p. 4) defines trauma as a wound of devastating violent experience that victims suffer through unpredicted and unrestrained situations. The injurious effects of offensive speech are highly destructive, since they cause the victims suffer mental agonies throughout their life: “it is always the story of a wound that cries out”. She further explains that these acts appear again and again in the form of “the repetitions of the traumatic event – which remain unavailable to consciousness but intrude repeatedly on sight” (2016, p. 92).

1.1 Research Questions

- Is there an endeavor to generate the feelings of psychological subjugation and degradation in the minds of the victims using traumatic speech in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*?
- To what extent the traumatic speech acts are repeated again and again by the victims to further extending their trauma in the selected novel?
- Are all the traumatic speech acts the demonstrations of ferocious deeds of the oppressors?

- To what extent the victims have to bear a specific linguistic recognition, a subsequent social rank and pricking cognizance in their life?

2. Method & Methodology

2.1 Research Paradigm

This study applies a qualitative descriptive analysis of the selected contents, which are selected on the basis of purposive sampling. According to Adler and Clark (2014, p. 121), “In purposive sampling, the researcher selects sampling units based on his or her judgement of what units will facilitate an investigation”. The research criterion in selecting this novel and afterwards in selecting relevant texts/excerpts is based on their relevance with the aim and objectives of the study. In this regard, the criteria of the selected excerpts are pre-defined, hence purposive. The data used in this study consist of excerpts taken from Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987). After a close study of the carefully chosen novel, different happenings, circumstances and terminologies are selected to study the traumatic effects of excitable speech on the protagonist of the novel, Sethe. In most of the cases such abusive utterances become a part of Sethe’s psyche in the form of her memories, which continue inflicting her mind throughout her life. These selected excerpts carry traumatic speech acts, and are repeatedly uttered by Sethe to give vent to her distressed feelings as well as in order to intensify the situations by guzzling more people around her.

2.2 Theoretical Underpinning

The applied theoretical model is based on Judith Butler’s notions of excitable speech acts. Butler’s Excitable Speech Acts also termed as ‘fighting words’ are studied in relation to the traumatic effects of abusive language on the victims of slavery. In most of the cases such abusive utterances become a part of one’s psyche in the form of memories, which continue inflicting the listeners’ mind throughout their life. They are repeatedly uttered by the affected people to give vent to their traumatized feelings as well as in order to intensify the situations on by guzzling more people in the society. In this regard both types of relationships: intrapersonal between one’s self and ego and interpersonal between one’s self and the other are studied.

2.3 Applied Model

The effects of traumatic speech acts on the mental states of the characters are studied in the light of Butler’s notions about subjectification, mental disturbance and trauma in addition to other psychological states of mind such as inferiority and superiority complex. It also deals with the study of the characters’ conflicts between their self and ego, which reflect their cognitive modalities; their desires, their beliefs, and psychic tribulations, etc. A model is developed by the researcher by applying different features of traumatic speech acts by Judith Butler resulting into psychological trauma of the victims as shown in the figure below:

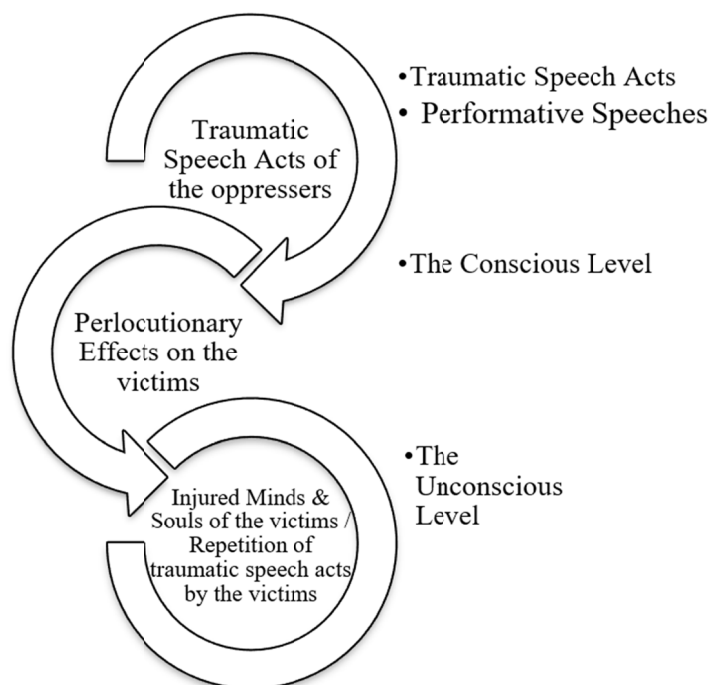


Figure 1. Traumatic speech acts resulting into psychological trauma

3. Data Analysis

In the novel all the black slaves bear wounded psyche, which constantly takes them back to their past in the form of traumatic speech acts. The protagonist of the novel Sethe after her freedom from slavery, repeatedly shares with her daughter, Denver the memories of Schoolteacher's abusive treatment towards her. She shares her traumatic memories with Denver in order to justify the murder of her beloved daughter, whom she still loves.

The white characters in Morrison's novels do not consider the black characters at the level of human beings. Elijah remarked in his article, *The Emerging Philadelphia African American Class Structure*, "along with slavery..... came a white supremacist ideology that defined black people as less than human, as genetically inferior to the country's majority" (Anderson, 2000, p. 12). According to Cynthia Davis, in an essay, *Self, Society and Myth in Morrison's Fiction*, "All of her characters live in a world, which is defined by the ruling class of the White people, which denies their basic rights as humans" (Davis, 1998, p. 10). There are events of rape, atrocities, verbal abuse, physical abuse, identity crisis, victimization, hopelessness and exploitation in almost all the novels penned down by her (Note 3). In the environment of social, economic and political discrimination and injustice, the oppressed black community is portrayed as physically and mentally deformed figures. The black are stereotyped in a very pessimistic manner when they are found indulged in some offence. There are double standards for both the white and the black. The white are mostly overlooked for their cruel deeds and their atrocities over the black. They are presented everywhere as fair, beautiful, noble and civilized. All the titles, showing the dark aspects of humanity are fixed only for the black. In her novels, Morrison presents many such situations in which the white very tactfully label all those evils, which are actually possessed by them. She presents a very ugly picture of the white community behind the veil of their so-called civilization.

Excerpt 1: "I told you to put her human characteristics on the left; her animal ones on the right. And don't forget to line them up". I commenced to walk backward..... I just kept lifting my feet and pushing back. When I bumped up against a tree my scalp was prickly. ... My head itched like the devil. Like somebody was stitching fine needles in my scalp" (p. 109).

Analysis

In this text, Sethe remembers how her status as a human being was lowered down to the level of a subhuman creature. She shows her offence against the act of discovering and then enlisting in a diary the animalistic characteristics found in Sethe. Schoolteacher used to teach his pupils about the physical topographies of her body in order to make her realize that she is a mere commodity. There is an overt denigration of a black female slave by a white master, who is presented as an epitome of knowledge with a diary in his hands to take notes about his scientific research. Ironically, he fails to recognize man's superiority to animals on grounds of their power of

knowledge. When he dictates his nephews to examine Sethe's physical characteristics, his words become instruments of insult to injure her mind, that's why Sethe cannot stand there any longer and goes back. She can never get rid of the burning effects of these excitable words. Her self-esteem does not allow "nobody on this earth, would list her daughter's characteristics on the animal side of the paper" (p. 141).

Although Sethe is a slave, yet her resistance shows that she is not mentally subjugated. She considers her children "clean" and "beautiful" because they are her part: "whites might dirty bet all right, but not her best thing, her beautiful, magical best thing—the part of her that was clean" (p. 141). The retaliative manner she uses the simile "like the devil" shows that she considers the white and the devil belonging to the same group, both pricking her body in different ways to give her pain. In this regard, she is totally different from Cholly in *The Bluest Eye*, who finds himself a reflection of the devil. The metaphorical image of "fine needles" is used for traumatic speech acts of the Schoolteacher, which have injured her mind. The word "stitching" indicates that the burning effects have become permanent part of her "scalp" in the form of psychological trauma.

Furthermore, Schoolteacher's attempts to discover animalistic features in Sethe are in line with the popular notion of the time. These perceptions about the Africans were based on the political rhetoric which enabled the white to establish their own superiority over them. Young (2005, p. 6) in his book *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* goes back to the 18th century, when different races of human beings were categorized under the classification used for the animal kingdom. In this classification, all the white was ranked at the top and all the black were arranged at the bottom just next to ape. In this regard the Negroes were perceived as subhuman creatures. Edward Long, who was a Jamaican slave holder, also favoured the argument that white and Negroes were quite dissimilar species. But this view was rejected by anti-slavery movements in the nineteenth century. The words of Schoolteacher give birth to pricks of conscious in Sethe and she emerges as a resolute figure. She is bold enough to challenge Schoolteacher's authority in her act of revolt, which is quite contrary to her master's expectations. Such situations support Butler's arguments about absolute failure of performatives (1997a, p. 167).

Sethe recollects her traumatic past, when she was treated like animals. It is not only in the sense of physical labour that she is treated like animals but she is also kept with horses in the stables. When Paul D, another slave at Sweet home comes to Sethe to live with her, she repeatedly shares with him the traumatic memories of her past. It is about the time, when she as a slave does not have any right to protect her life sustaining parts in the perspective of her motherhood. The masters do not let the mother-child bond develop because the slave children are considered as mere tools and property owned by the masters.

Excerpt 2: "They handled me like I was the cow, no, the goat, back behind the stable because it was too nasty to stay in with the horses" (p. 110).

Analysis

This text is a glaring representation of traumatic speech acts including both the verbal as well as physical. There is an explicit expression of hatred for the white slave masters. The protagonist of the novel, Sethe is found repeatedly murmuring her agonies. The humiliating discourse of slavery engraves psychosomatic scars on Sethe in form of trauma. In the same manner her master's beating made physical wounds on her back. In the very beginning of the novel, the readers become aware of the picture of the men coming to be nursed by her. It is a matter sheer humiliation for mothers, when their milk is taken by men forcefully. The stealth of her milk brings great psychological disturbance to Sethe. Different types of sinister voices which remind her of rape, of breast feed and of beating her back, etc. traumatize her mind throughout her life. Her ego is choked with pricks of conscious making her realize the right of her children on her milk. She can bear everything as a slave but a nursing mother must have power to resist for the rights of her children. In this regard, her milk cannot be taken as a symbol of maternal love only; in fact, woven around the theme of violated mother-child relationship, it has multiple interpretations. It is a sign and symbol of motherhood, care, purity, love and protection. Her milk evokes the idea of self-formulation and any violation in this sacred bond will surely result in the subversion of archetypal role of a mother. Her worries and concerns about her breast feed represent her as a Jungian mother archetype, "goddess like figure", who is the source of life to her children: "Nobody knew that but me and nobody had her milk but me" (p. 10). The use of the word "nurse" has deeper implications than its simple denotation of breast feeding. It has been used paradoxically to intensify the verbal excitability of the situation. The animals giving milk are not associated with the term "nursing", the better word is feeding. This traumatized memory of stealth of Sethe's milk leaves perennial traces on her mind similar to the permanent signs of the branches of chokecherry tree on her back.

The use of third person plural pronoun "they" for Sethe's masters is used as a generic term. Although specifically, it refers to Schoolteacher and his nephews but the case of other white masters is in no sense

different from them. The savagery of the white masters sees no limits; the status of a female slave as “the cow” and “the goat” projects sheer humiliation of humanity at large. The repetition of Sethe’s narration of the stealth of milk shows that her mind is occupied. Paul D’s queries further inflates her feelings, since to every question raised by Paul D, she utters the same answer:

“They used cowhide on you?”

“And they took my milk.”

“They beat you and you was pregnant?”

“And they took my milk!” (p. 10)

It is assumed that being a slave, they are obliged to obey their masters. The slave holders do not tolerate their slaves to be the masters of their own self, their desires, wishes, their families. There is an absolute denial of their identity by their masters. They are recognized as property of their masters on grounds of the badges and tags stamped on their bodies. In observance of these practices, their masters are recognized in self-relational systems of values and beliefs. They subvert the mother-child relationship revealed through breast feed. They not only assign Sethe physical labour, but they use her body for other purposes, such as for milk and for lustful exploits, etc. In this sense the slaves’ bodies are of no more importance for them than mere “flesh”: “flesh that weeps, laughs;” (p. 52).

In the institution of slavery, slaves have to follow certain rules and regulations, which is not possible for animals because they lack reason and follow their instincts only. Human beings are able to recognize their self in relation to others. They use language to express their thoughts and feelings which are meant for the addressed. Their ability of communication with each other plays a significant role in maintaining their social positions. In the context of the novel, the black’s identities as slaves are constructed by imposition of certain norms, rules and values, etc. by the white masters. Their ability to reason, which makes them good slaves, enables them to think of different things. Sethe’s dignified status of being a human being does not allow her to live with horses in their stable. That is why; she can never overcome this trauma in her life.

Excerpt 3: “I had milk,” she said. “I was pregnant with Denver but I had milk for my baby girl” ... “those boys came in there and took my milk. That’s what they came in there for. Held me down and took it” (p. 10).

Analysis

This communicative event takes place, when Sethe shares her traumatic memories with Paul D when he comes to stay with her after getting freedom from slavery. She is living with her daughter Denver. Due to her cruel act of murdering her infant daughter, Beloved, her two sons run away from home. She was kept in prison for some time. Her own community boycotted her and nobody liked to visit her. Her house is haunted by the ghost of her murdered daughter. Due to all these circumstances, Sethe’s mind remains busy all the time in evaluating the situation. The psychological conflict between her humiliated life as a slave and the guilt of murder hang over her mind constantly. Sometimes she shares her traumatic memories with Denver and sometimes with Paul D.

Judith Butler in *The Psychic Life of Power* (1997b, pp. 38–39) defends Hegel’s views about slaves that they being property of others have to work for them and hence they cannot develop “a sense of self-recognition”. This logic restricts the slaves of being authoritative and confident. The slaves, who are bought and sold in markets are tagged by their masters and are recognized as their commodities. In many situations in the novel, it is examined that human beings cannot be treated as mere objects in spite of the facts that they are bought slaves. The human instincts, which influence the black slaves’ domestic and social roles, must not be controlled by the institution of slavery. As far as physical labour of these slaves is concerned, they can readily bear the tasks without complaints but being human beings, their self, which is combination of their inner and outer personality traits, should be valued. Their psychological, emotional and domestic life must not be affected by savage practices. The sense of self-righteousness makes them resolute figures, who can protest against exploitation and tyranny of the white characters.

In his famous book, *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault establishes a direct link between knowledge and power (1979, p. 27). Schoolteacher’s title associated with the field of knowledge and education is presented in contrast with his brutal actions as a slave owner. Toni Morrison has woven the character of Schoolteacher very carefully keeping in mind the shrewd nature of all power agencies, whose discourse as well as practices is used for political purposes to crush the interests of the weaker communities. Foucault finds that power and knowledge are directly related to each other, since power relations are constituted in the framework of knowledge. Popkewitz and Brennan (1998) scrutinize that Foucault has changed the conventional notion of “knowledge is power” rather he discovers the ways people effect knowledge in their pursuit of power. The feelings of prejudice against the black

slaves are found in Schoolteacher's diplomatic agenda. Being a physically weak person, he takes assistance of knowledge discourse to manage different issues of slaves. It shows that he strongly believes in the strength of man's mental capabilities developed by acquisition of knowledge about different aspects of life. He is a hodgepodge of opposing qualities such as an educationist as well as brutal master, apparently civilized but inwardly a savage, physically weak but stubborn in practice, a Christian but a pseudo scientist, etc. Being a researcher in scientific field he is keen on discovering animalistic features in enslaved human beings at the plantation. He believes in the exercise of power by keeping his slaves starved. He deploys his nephews to do dirty tasks in order to punish his slaves, whenever he smells rebellion in them. He commodifies his slaves reflected in his treatment of Sethe's body, in burning Sixo alive and so on. He is ranked superior to others on grounds of his belongingness to the white community. In the same manner, his investigative approach towards different things, with a diary in his hands, especially in order to discover animalistic features in human beings shows that Morrison desires to unveil the savagery hidden behind civilization. Schoolteacher ranks his slaves at the level of animals: "Watchdogs without teeth; steer bulls without horns; gelded workhorses whose neigh and whinny could not be translated into a language responsible human's spoke" (p. 72). This judgmental opinion about black slaves is mutually agreed upon in society which makes it a discursive practice.

In the mechanism of repetition of wounding words, these slaves get power which allows them to raise questions and complaints by using the first person pronoun "I", which is a sign of self-formulation. The cruel treatment, which is reflected in the use of abusive remarks against Sethe and other slaves shows that they are not considered as individuals with cognitive abilities, capable of acting on their ideologies. The perlocutionary effects of all these excitable speech acts of their masters are manifested in the self-formulation and resistance of the slaves. Sethe emphatically uses the first person pronoun "I" and "my" in this speech. The use of deictic expressions such as "I", "my" and "those", etc. represent psychological and social distance between the black slaves and the white masters. There are silent cries, complaints, protests and moans hidden in these throbbing reflections of her mind. The way she uses her daughter's name projects that she is very well conscious of her daughter's self-identity and hence she desires others to acknowledge her as well. Her self-formulation as a human being and as a mother does not endure her masters to violate her motherhood: "I was pregnant with Denver but I had milk for my baby girl." She shows resistance by raising questions which enable her to think of her role as a mother. She repents her act of murdering her daughter, which is reflected in her efforts to justify it again and again.

Excerpt 4: "But now she'd gone wild, due to the mishandling of the nephew who'd overbeat her and made her cut and run. Schoolteacher had chastised that nephew, telling him to think—just think—what would his own horse do if you beat it beyond the point of education. Or Chipper, or Samson. Suppose you beat the hounds past that point that away" (p. 86).

Analysis

In the course of the novel, Schoolteacher is presented as a ruthless butcher, who will never repent for his vicious follies. To justify his cruelties, he is often engaged in enlisting black's physical properties as subhuman so that he would be able to use them as mere puppets or tools. In this extremely derogative speech act, the Schoolteacher in spite of reading traumatic psyche of a mother uses his "knowledge" to declare Sethe "wild" just in the same manner as when tame animals go mad in adverse circumstances. He rebukes his nephews for their brutal acts due to which he has to bear the loss of a slave. The word "mishandling" also shows that he takes her as a tool that has been disordered by its misuse. The metaphorical representations of Sethe in the form of different animals are reflective of his irrational attitude. On the other hand, Sethe's resistance to slavery declines the Schoolteacher's authority over her. When animals are beaten badly, their response is unpredictable because they lack reason. He compares Sethe's act of murdering her daughter in relation to the animal behavior. For him there is no difference between beating of horses, hounds and female slaves, because all act instinctively. The time, when Morrison wrote this novel, based on a tragic incident of a slave mother murdering her children, the black slaves were considered as savages, since they were perceived by the white as having animalistic features in them and on account of this there was a question whether the mother, a black slave, an animal should be punished or not, since animals are not caught by the legal authorities. However, on the other hand, this incident lies in the collective unconscious of the white that all black are carriers of original sin.

4. Conclusion

Self-knowledge plays a vital role in the realization of identity and social status of people. This self-realization helps people recognize in-group and out-group strategies in a society. Judith Butler believes in the performatory aspects of identity, which is shaped as a resultant force due to the exchange of linguistic discourse among people. In this regard one's identity is defined and re-defined in varied contexts. In the novel, in spite of their terrible life,

all the slaves have a strong sense of self-identity and self-esteem. Although their masters try to interpellate their minds with their violent utterances as well as brutal practices, when they consider them as subhuman creatures and as mere objects of utility in ideological sense of the term, all the slaves emerge as resolute figures in different temporal, socio-political and racial contexts. After the abolishment of slavery, they have no sense of belongingness in the hostile environment but they are able to recreate their identity. However, they can never get rid of the humiliating titles, physical tortures and psychological trauma perpetrated by the white. The expressions they use to give vent to their traumatic memories of humiliating experiences spread poison at the macro level. For instance, the protagonist of the novel, Sethe can never get out of the trauma in her life as a slave, when she had to kill her daughter. At the micro level, there are sufferings of their family members, who are directly or indirectly related with the traumatic acts, while at the macro level, in form of repeated traumatic utterances, there is mushrooming of hatred against the ruling class, the white, who are in power, and who are in the majority.

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Notes

Note 1. Psychological trauma is created by such events and situations, which destroy an individual's ability to manage his/her self in adverse circumstances and leave the person, feel emotionally, psychologically and physically incredulous. The circumstances of the traumatic event may be betrayal of trust, verbal humiliation,

physical torture and emotional breakdowns, etc.

Note 2. Originally published in 1996.

Note 3. *The Bluest Eye* (1970), *Sula* (1973), *Song of Solomon* (1977), *Tar Baby* (1981), *Beloved* (1987), *Jazz* (1992), *Paradise* (1997), *Love* (2003), *A Mercy* (2008), *Home* (2012), *God Help the Child* (2015).

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