CHAPTER 4
THE UNCONSCIOUS SELF
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4.1 PSYCHOANALYSIS AND SELF

Psychoanalysis stresses on the role of the unconscious as its central organizing concept. It offers an insight into the unconscious construction of men and women or gendered identities. The unconscious is something that is largely inaccessible to us. The unique feature about the unconscious, as Freud defined it, is that, although it evolves out of our desires and losses in early childhood, its system of frozen meanings impacts everything that we do, without our awareness, whatever be our age. Pecola, Sula, Beloved and Celie—all are seen going through the traumas inflicted by slavery, consciously and unconsciously. Psychoanalytic theory helps in analyzing the unconscious as well as conscious meanings, which contribute to the complexities of our ‘selves’ and the world in which we live, by focusing on the unconscious processes and states of mind.

As psychoanalysis provides a structural theory for the construction of identity, feminists have increasingly used it to expose and probe the unconscious dimensions of contemporary culture and history. It is in Lacan’s post-Structuralist development of Freud that the “unconscious” begins to have an integral role in the construction of “consciousness” and culture. Psychoanalytical theory is a form of knowledge and practice, which works best through the integration of both the intellectual and emotional levels of our existence. It sets out to find, what obstructs the development of self in an individual, their meaning and how to overcome them. Psychoanalytic theory attempts to provide answers to the questions, as to how the
dimension of identity which is outside our conscious knowledge, came into being and the events that constitute an individual’s hidden, unrecorded history of the unconscious. This evolves in the wider social or cultural context, but traces how the individual has reacted to the strong upsurge of emotions in his/ her own family.

Feminists have often turned to Lacan’s psychoanalytic discourse to reassert the kind of symbolic constraints that women are subject to. Lacan was of the opinion that sex is just a symbolic position one is constrained to assume and those constraints function even in the structure of language. Feminists have often intervened into psychoanalytic studies, either to challenge or reframe Freud’s ideas on the same, which they felt had biases that were phallocentric. Controversy over female sexuality has never ceased, ever since Freud put forward his phallocentric account of psychosexuality. Psychoanalysis primarily focuses on unconscious motivation, human emotional attachments and desires, how these are organized in the mind and the ability of the ego to split and get into conflict with itself. Feminists felt that his theories were seriously flawed, because of the diminishing representation of women and that Freud was analyzing women from a patriarchal perspective. It is here that Klein’s concept of psychoanalysis attempts at possibilities of increasing women’s abilities to take charge of their lives, freedom of thought and personal happiness. Juliet Mitchell too, turns to Psychoanalysis when she finds that non-psychoanalytic accounts are deficient in explaining the predicament of women.

**4.2 OBJECT-RELATIONS THEORY**

Feminist psychoanalysis is a reaction to Freud’s idea on the mother-child bonding. Freud’s contention is that, in the pre-Oedipal stage, the child stays psychologically merged with the mother and gender identity is acquired by the child in the Oedipal
stage, as a result of enacting the desires expressed in the Oedipus myth. In this stage, the child identifies with the father – a process by which the female accepts castration as she is unable to fully identify with the father, and the male child, fears castration, having identified with the father. According to feminist psychoanalysis, mother-daughter relationship within the pre-Oedipal phase is when the identity of a female evolves, the importance of which Freud neglected. It was Melanie Klein, the psychoanalyst, who first argued for greater understanding of the mother-daughter relationship, through her object-relations theory. As per this theory, “an infant’s identity is constructed through a process of projection and introjections learned at the mother’s breast. Emotions are projected on to the breasts which are then introjected back into the infant’s psyche. i.e. different emotions are associated with the offered and the withdrawn breast” (Peach 20). The infant thus, learns to project emotions onto external ‘objects’, which also includes people, with whom it comes into contact. They then become fantasy objects. These ‘imagos’ as they are called, are then introjected back into the infant’s psyche.

Psychoanalysis not only diagnoses the dilemmas that human beings undergo, but also assures them a remedy for it. As Freud states:

…human megalomania will have suffered its third and most wounding blow from the psychological research of the present time, which seeks to prove to the ego that it is not even master in its own house, but must content itself with scanty information of what is going on unconsciously in its mind. (Introductory lectures 285)

Although, it is possible for an individual to become more conscious of hidden intentions and impulses, it is extremely difficult to become fully transparent and controlled. Irrational desires and fears are definitely bound to be there in every
individual, however rational one might be. According to Freud, true self-knowledge is to know one’s own limitations. Thus,

Freud’s discourse is marked by an irresolvable tension - on the one hand psychoanalysis aims at self-mastery and self-knowledge; on the other, it points to the mind’s uncontrollable and unknowable core, the unconscious, and thus to the inevitable limits of self-mastery and self-knowledge. (The Psychoanalytic Movement 17)

In this context one has to understand the difference between the terms ‘gender’ and ‘sex’. According to John Money, gender refers to the psychological, behavioral and social variables associated with the identities that constitute a male and female and sex refers to the variables that are based on the biological make of a male/female. Gender is something that is produced and is context-dependent. The 1970’s and 80’s were a period of social change that brought greater legal, socio-political, and economic equalities for women. Nevertheless, marginalization and discrimination seem to be the plight of majority of women even today. Feminist theorists make an attempt to understand this lived experience by relying on psychoanalytical theories. They argue that there are fundamental differences between men and women and an analysis of this difference will help in transforming women’s unequal position in society. It is with the publication of Juliet Mitchell’s book Psychoanalysis and Feminism (1974) that psychoanalysis began to be used as a tool to investigate women’s social inequality. Following Mitchell, Nancy Chodorow (1978), by employing a different strategy, continued to rely on psychoanalysis for developing ideas on feminism. She attempts to re-evaluate the feminine and the mother-infant relationship. Mitchell’s Lacan-inspired and Nancy Chodorow’s object-relations-inspired feminist appropriations are not
considered directly comparable, as they reflect two different domains of investigation. For Chodorow, identifications and identities are constructed via the dynamics of formative attachment relationships. Her work therefore, introduces two important claims – first, men and women are formed differently via social relations and second, neither nature nor nurture can fully explain the differences. As women’s oppression is linked to the nature of their mothering experiences,[as is very evident in *Sula*] transformation of the parenting arrangements, with men too sharing responsibilities, would help in ameliorating her plight. For Chodorow, dual parenting arrangements themselves provide the vehicle for women’s gender equality. While the theories of Freud and Erikson suggest that the successful completion of specific developmental tasks that differentiate the adult from the child and adolescent marks a mature person, Chodorow and Gilligan differ in their views on this. According to them, taking these tasks as indicators, girls and women are not going to achieve that status and allege that the male experience has been generalized to women and that this is biased, inaccurate and fails to capture the essence of female experience.

Whenever we feel guilty, anxious or vulnerable, we hit out at other people, often the people closest to us and behave as though they were attacking us. This is clearly demonstrated by Cholly, Pecola’s father, who takes out his anger and frustration onto his wife. In psychoanalysis, this mechanism is known as ‘projection’. The concept of projection is important as it explains the unconscious defensive behaviors that individuals employ, so as to protect themselves from becoming aware about the contents of their inner world.

Unacceptable feelings which, if we allow ourselves to feel them consciously, are potentially very painful, may be projected into the world
and onto other people where we mistakenly imagine ourselves rid of them. Unfortunately we are not, and we subsequently experience paranoia to a greater or lesser extent. We feel under attack from these alienated parts of our self over which we no longer have any control...Feelings of anxiety or inferiority are projected or externalized onto others so that these hated parts of the self are experienced as hostile elements contained in the external rather than internal world, which therefore have to be controlled. (Rosalind 5)

According to Freud, the unconscious sense of guilt is the most crucial factor that isolates the individual, in modern times. In the conflict between the ego and the superego, if the ego gets drawn away from its surrounding world, the subject cannot separate and hence has difficulty in connecting with others. Freud further adds that the primary function of the super ego is to watch, in order to judge. While the ego designates the psychic experience of being seen, the super ego exposes the ego. The sense of guilt is so strong in Sethe, for having murdered her own child and Pecola, for being a Black that they are completely devoid of any sense of self. The super ego is not only the measure of the ego, but also the psychic agency of regulation, which is referred to as conscience, by Freud. He saw literature as a medium for authors to express their unconscious desires. The assumptions are that, repressed wish fulfillment, psychic conflict, dream and fantasy, are sufficiently universal, that they can be written into the text in such a way, that we will be aroused by them, will identify with them or at the very least, become interested in them. Thus, the writings of Afro-American women writers are in a way, a kind of wish fulfillment, giving them a kind of liberated feeling. “As a physical reality, the Oedipus complex does not allow for adequate separateness and connectedness. It is therefore at odds with the possibility of the social bond”. (Sara 60) Freud
emphasized on the fact that man is tied to the emotional baggage of his own past and some of the unpleasant images that he found in the darkest interiors of the human psyche, are bound to stay for a long time. Psychoanalysis opens up and explores techniques that would help the self, to sustain on its own, with respect to specific space and time. Freud found that the unconscious sense of guilt in an individual could be so strong, that the psychic tension that it generates could affect psychic autonomy and thus bonding with others.

Although the concept of projection was first used by Freud, the ideas of projective identification and projection are associated with the works of Melanie Klein, who in her analysis of young children, took a view that was radically different from that of Freud. According to her, the unconscious is structured in the pre-Oedipal stage, when the baby bonds with its mother and not between the age of three and five, when the child goes through the Oedipal crisis. Sometimes whole relationships are perceived to be based on what is known as ‘projective identification’. Individuals often marry or live together in a symbiotic relationship of mutual dependency, where one person seems to express all the anger for both partners and the other, all the vulnerability. The feeling of oneness and completion, from a psychoanalytical perspective, can be seen as meeting someone through whom we can express, using the mechanism of projection, that part of ourself that we do not want to consciously acknowledge. Both parties unconsciously recognize that they can complete each other and increase each other’s sense of identity and self-worth. Often, this becomes clear only when one of the partners starts exhibiting behaviors that were not part of the original ‘unconscious deal’ - which belonged to the terrain of the other. The fragile equilibrium may be disturbed, for example, when a woman stops being the person in the relationship ‘in charge’ of the vulnerability and starts to break out of this role by becoming strong and active.
Very often the husband may feel a sense of betrayal and doesn’t understand why. Of course, it can happen the other way also. When a relationship of very powerful mutual dependency, based on projective identification, breaks up, it often feels as if the leaver has literally gone off with a part of the self of the person, who has been left. This is because the leaver has actually made him/herself absent, still carrying a substantial part of the projected self of the other partner, who is left feeling, fragile, empty and incomplete. This is clearly seen in the bonding between the infant Beloved and her mother, Sethe. The fact that the infant gets weaned away from the mother in the pre-Oedipal stage itself, has serious impact on the psyche of both the mother and the child.

The psychoanalytic concepts of projection and projective identification allow us to see the proof for unconscious feelings or fantasies. Fantasies are defense mechanisms against the emergence of feelings (that we dislike in ourselves) into consciousness, which enable us to ignore and disown them. The ghost of Beloved that hovers around Sethe, is thus the external manifestation of guilt within herself, for having murdered her own child. Psychoanalysis suggests that these may be seen at work, not just during crises, but in the smallest details of our day-to-day existence. Most often, attempts at controlling our inner reality is made functional, by controlling the world outside. If this behaviour tends to continue, we may experience a kind of vacuum within, as so much of who we are, has been disowned, that we feel deprived of worth and self-esteem, which, in turn, could lead to depression.

Psychoanalytic theory has given rise to two distinct kinds of discourse – one is the clinical practice and is centered on the fundamentals of family life and ordinary human events. The other is a structural theory, which looks into the causes which
determine the construction of human identity. The therapeutic practice of psychoanalysis enables patients to grasp the reality, that there is the possibility that human beings can construct their own lives personally, socially and politically. It puts them in touch with their unconscious desire, which can then effectively empower their language and subjectivity. Thus, psychoanalysis provides ample scope for empowerment and political as well as personal change. Psychoanalytic theory, on the other hand, provides a powerful tool for the analysis of identity, culture and language. It is almost impossible to use it creatively and productively without, at the same time developing a considerable degree of emotional insight. Resonances and reverberations within us, eventually provide the basis for this insight. For instance, the idea of projection, which is central to the study of women’s subordination, is difficult to understand and use in academic analysis, unless one has conscious awareness of the experience of it. It is because of these reasons that, many academic psychoanalytic theorists like Juliet Mitchell, Nancy Chodorow, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva have become psychoanalysts or psychoanalytic therapists.

Interest in psychoanalytic theory has grown among feminists, since the mid 1970’s and they have realized that they share with psychoanalysts, a common concern about issues related to women. This can have a direct impact on women’s position in society.

Psychoanalytic theory and practice suggest that political and personal violence frequently springs from unconscious anxieties and desires which may nevertheless masquerade as the language of consciousness and reason. It suggests that if we want to understand the subordination of women on the basis of class, sexual orientation, race and ethnicity, we
need to attend to the unconscious formations, (such as projection) behind these responses to difference. *(Ibid 18)*

The two main strands of psychoanalytic theory – the Freudean and Object – Relations Theory - differ in how they conceptualize the unconscious and the degree to which the role of the unconscious is emphasized. Their differences crucially affect their views on identity. Freudian theory sees identity as always divided, unstable and made precarious by a potentially subversive unconscious. Object-Relations theory, on the other hand, sees identity as capable of becoming unified, authentic and stable. The two schools also differ on the degree of emphasis they give to biology. Freudian theory emphasizes on the unconscious construction of gendered subjectivity, whereas Object-Relations theory considers gender to be determined at birth, biologically. Freud focuses on the father, while the latter emphasized on the mother. Also, according to Klein, anxiety and emotional upsurges would be the problems that the small baby, and later the adult, will have to cope and not desire or sexuality. As the baby goes through fluctuating emotions of love and hate, right from birth, this could trigger acute anxiety. Through fantasy, these instinctual emotions could be directed towards both the mother and the self.

Klein’s approach to the construction of identity is sometimes seen as developmental, that happens stage by stage, in the baby or individual’s life. The baby is extremely helpless and is dependent on the mother, in the beginning stages of its life. Thus, its first fragile identity is formed from its anxiety. Although, the struggle between these conflicting emotions produces huge energy, Klein sees this as the crucial and eventually humanizing trigger for the child’s potential to develop an identity of its own. However, both schools of thought agree to the fact that thinking alone cannot make one ‘be’. Klein’s primary interest was in the struggle
that the baby undergoes, in its attempts to relate to other people, or what she calls ‘objects’ (at first the mother) by taking them into its inner world as objects of fantasy and then creating an identity out of them. By fantasy, Klein refers to what the baby understands about its internal and external experiences, based on which it communicates with itself. Such fantasies of love and hate developed by the child, is the basis of an elementary sense of identity that comprises of impulses, relationships and defenses. Her primitive fantasies are based on the baby’s early instincts and this partial reliance on biology is reflected in her assumption that ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’ are ideas that get reinforced during early childhood, although determined biologically.

Klein’s work mainly focuses on how the child copes with the mother’s absence, which it assumes as the loss of the care giver. Significantly, for her, the breast and not the phallus, as pointed out by Freud, becomes the most important object on which the child’s sexual identity is formed. In Klein’s theory, the mother is the object of relatedness rather than desire and the father, at best, exists as part of the mother or a combined parent figure. The object is the mother, and the baby’s relatedness to her through fantasy, and not the object of desire which is incorporated by Freud’s baby. As per Klein’s theory, a positive, pleasing identity is formed in the baby when it feels full, is in a state of bliss and has introjected the idea of a good breast. On the other hand, the baby concludes an experience as bad, when it feels hungry, insecure and has introjected the idea of a bad breast. For Nancy Chodorow, another Object-Relations theorist, readings of Freud, redirect attention from the anatomy and drives of the body, to notions about the self with respect to other selves. Chodorow felt that Freud’s theory on how the social milieu can have a bearing on the psyche of an individual, had implications for social change.
According to Lacan, in the ‘mirror stage’, the child moves from object-relations identification (primarily mother) to identification with its own image in the mirror. But, according to Kevin, “this image and the experience, is imaginary as it suggests a unity which the child itself does not experience. Thus, the child’s development into adulthood coincides with the recognition that the bliss of unity between self and image is false”(198). But the Lacanian mirror lays strong emphasis on the relationship between the subject (child) and the object (mirror), based on the assumption that the subject’s image is the primary characteristic that creates the sense of self in an individual. It needs to be noted that visual image is not just one factor or feature possessed by individuals. However,

…the visual image is prominent in Western knowledge systems and is a key counterpart to the propagation of violence (via notions of beauty) against women, people of color, and especially those who fall in both broad categories. Consequently, the mirror in Lacanian discourse, with its emphasis on image, is at least symbolically an icon of Western society’s beauty narratives and an imposition of selflessness on Black women. (Kevin 198)

Pecola is a classic example of what the mirror image can do to destroy the ‘self ‘of an individual. The mirror’s function on Lacanian psychoanalysis is performed, in a different way, by the girlfriend’s in Walker’s and Morrison’s narrations of selfhood. The only difference is that, instead of a mirror that is cold and reflects inaccurately, there is another woman who has the ability to reflect the girlfriend’s self, whose presence is a subject, not an image or an object. In this model of selfhood, it is not the image that is reflected in the mirror that holds the attention of the self, but another being, whose image, the subject sees reflected in the mirror.
Thus a model of identity negotiated through two selves by their volatility, is far more profound than one negotiated through, two selves. The bonding between the various female characters in these novels, clearly demonstrate that.

4.3 THEORY OF ABJECTION

Julia Kristeva, on the other hand, found Lacan’s ideas on psychoanalysis as liberating. She attempts to redefine the concept of ‘femininity’ as marginality, as that which is unconscious, repressed, unspoken and which perpetually challenges, refuses and disrupts any one meaning. She also brings in the concept of ‘abject’, which is an unconscious sense of disgust that takes the baby back to the pre-Oedipal experience of the bodily products of its mother and itself. For Kristeva, the ‘abject’ denotes what is marginalized and repressed in society, which, she refers to as ‘semiotic’ in the pre-Oedipal stage. Abjection, in a way, is doing away with the narcissistic identification that the child develops with the mother. In order to become an individual, having an identity of one’s own, the child must give up its identification with the mother. Kristeva’s idea of abject differs from the idea of ‘repressed’ put forward by Freud. He felt that many desires of the subject had to be submerged in the unconscious, for the development of subjectivity. Freud also highlighted the possibility of the re-emergence of feelings that were repressed. But Kristeva’s ‘abject’, on the other hand, remains at the border of consciousness, as an alarming presence, just as filth or death. Kristeva also describes abjection, as not a passing stage in the life of a person’s development, but as a companion through the whole of one’s life.
According to Kristeva, the infant gradually separates from the mother, by mentally and physically expelling, what is not part of its clean and proper self. However, what the child expels does not vanish once and for all. Remaining on the margin of awareness, it continues to haunt the consciousness of the subject. The subject finds the abject as both repulsive and alluring, which continues to maintain and threaten the borders of the self. They are threatening as the abject is tempting enough to destroy the borders of the self and are maintained as the fear of such a collapse keeps the subject fully alert. According to Kristeva, literature gives the author and the reader an outlet for working on some of the problems that affect their souls. Through their writings, the author gets an opportunity to expel what is alien and impure.

Kristeva and the others, who subscribed to her theory, offer the term ‘subjectivity’ to represent a being who is completely aware of one’s intentions and guided by reason and intellect, is able to function as an autonomous being. A self that is formed so, is not subject to anyone and becomes one’s own master. The term ‘subjectivity’, for Kristeva, suggests something altogether different. According to her, people are shaped by their history, socio-political contexts, the language that they speak and the relationships that they build. Thus, individuals are better understood as subjects and not as selves. At the same time, there is a dimension of their own being, that is inaccessible to the self, which is the ‘unconscious’.

The unconscious is the domain of desires, tensions, energy and repressions that is not present in consciousness. Therefore, the experience of subjectivity is wrought in ways often unknown to the subject herself. And finally, the term ‘subjectivity’ better explains people’s relationship to language. Instead of seeing language as a tool used by selves, those who
use the term subjectivity understand that language helps produce subjects. (Ibid 2)

For Kristeva, the self, is always in process and heterogeneous and is not something that is unified and stable. Moreover, individuals are also impacted by people around them, especially people whom they love. Pecola rightly fits into Kristeva’s description of an individual as ‘abject’, as she goes against herself, experiencing ‘a violent dark revolt of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside’. (Powers of Horror 10) Pecola, is the abject, as she is defined by the White community around her and seeks her identity based on the standards set by that community. She yearns for the unattainable blue eyes, as she feels that it will automatically gift her with happiness. Unfortunately, in her yearning to achieve the impossible, she loses her sanity. There is no way that her ego can develop. “She is Morrison’s grim representative of those Black girls whose potential for authentic womanhood and identity is ruthlessly curtailed by the effects of imposing White ascribed identity”. (Setefanus 13)

The reasons and effective solutions for women’s oppression in western culture can be found in Kristeva’s theory. She is against feminism as she wants women’s movements to focus on individual differences, rather than a collective approach, as all individuals have their own unique sexuality. Maternity, for her, is not just a biological fact, and reproduction is not the basis on which a woman is defined. She argues that real female innovation (in whatever field) can be achieved when there is a better understanding about the link between female creation and maternity. Feminine issues can be discussed without discarding motherhood. According to Kristeva, reproduction should be a unique experience that women should be able to enjoy, rather than reducing it to just another aspect of survival.
Kristeva uses the analogy of bodily constructions to explain the functions of the psyche. The body is involved in a dynamic process of exchanging things it takes in (food, air, water) for things it throws out (excrement, menstrual blood, vomit, pus etc.), to remain healthy. Things taken in are either assimilated or expelled. When something enters the body which can neither be assimilated nor expelled, the body collapses. This is the condition of physical abjection. The psychic condition too, is similar to this. This bodily process is similar to the psyche’s construction of identity. A healthy identity is constituted by taking in positive ideas and expelling negative ideas or views about ourselves. If this dynamic exchange mechanism breaks down, we introject inassimilable, yet concepts that cannot be rejected, like Pecola’s yearning for blue eyes, and this is termed ‘the abject’ by Kristeva – we experience psychological abjection and suffer a breakdown of identity. An important mechanism involved in generating abjection, involves both the process of imagining and the logic of the equations, by which we determine what is abject. For these reasons, things which we perceive to be abject, causes confusing emotional responses, not knowing which way to turn in our responses. This is the condition of psychological abjection.

In this chapter, the researcher tries to apply the ideas put forward by various psychoanalysts – Klein’s and Winnicott’s ideas on the mother-daughter relationship, Chodorow’s emphasis on the role of family and society in identity formation, Mirror image of Lacan, Freud’s ideas on the Oedipal relationship and repressed feelings and how they affect the psyche and Kristeva’s theory of abjection - to explore the various factors in the unconscious of the characters in the novels of Morrison and Walker, that contribute to the making or disintegration of their ‘self’. Consciousness about these hidden feelings and emotions and the reasons for them to be so, can go a long way in helping individuals to overcome
their mental blocks and thus making their own lives and the lives of the people around them, peaceful and harmonious. The most remarkable outcome of this consciousness of the unconscious, would be a better understanding of the workings of one’s own psyche and coming to terms with the realities, an acceptance of oneself with all its flaws, which in turn would help one in strengthening one’s identity, thus enabling one to progress towards an empowered self.

4.4 THE COLOR PURPLE

Through the character of the protagonist, Celie, Walker depicts the life of an impoverished, ugly, uneducated girl from the rural side of Georgia and “touches upon the themes of redemptive love, strength in adversity, independence and self-assertion, through the values of community”. (Proudfit 12) Critics have widely accepted the fact that the formation of a mature identity in Celie, is the result of the bonding that she develops with other women around her. Charles Proudfit, in his article, *Celie’s search for identity: A Psychoanalytic developmental reading of Alice Walker’s The Color Purple*, examines the development of Celie’s character from the perspective of contemporary psychoanalytic developmental psychology. This would help in understanding, how important the role of the mother is, in the life of the female infant, child and adult as she tries hard to develop her own identity. The current psychoanalytic theory on female development lays stress on the bonding between the mother and the child, which must be constantly worked upon, during the life of a woman. Celie’s bonding as an infant, with her biological mother, and later in life, with mother surrogates, like Nettie, Kate, Sofia and finally to Shug Avery, gives her insight regarding the importance of adult female sexuality and the need for a healthy emotional life. Although, in the initial phase of her life, Celie goes through emotional conflicts, physical and sexual abuse, over
a period of time, she is able to bounce back to normal life with a strong sense of identity, through appropriate ‘female bonding’.

Object relations theory focuses on the fact, that at birth, the infant and the mother are merged psychologically. \textit{Maturational Processes}\ 40] A healthy, creative self evolves, if the developmental processes are completed successfully. It is also agreed, that development is not a succession of events, but is a continuing process, constantly updated. The progression of Celie’s self, is in agreement with this view. Proudfit, relies on the English analyst and Pediatrician, D.W.Winnicott’s concepts and theories, to gain insight into how Walker uses ‘female bonding’ as a means by which Celie progresses in life. Winnicott’s views on the origins of ‘true self’ and ‘false self’, helps the reader in understanding how Walker uses the various aspects of language, in the letters exchanged between Celie and Nettie, to create ‘authentic’ and ‘unauthentic’ voices. Also, Celie’s lengthy development process as portrayed by Walker, is made credible by Winnicott’s assertion that “developmental issues of infancy are never fully established, and continue to be strengthened by the growth that continues in later childhood, into adult life and even at times in old age.” (Ibid 74)

According to Winnicott, women who are pregnant, go through a specific psychological state, during the latter part of their pregnancies, which could continue for several weeks after child birth too. During this period, they turn their attention inward and focus on the needs of the unborn or the newly born, as the case may be. He refers to this state as ‘primary maternal preoccupation’ and believes that this can be experienced by mothers who are most successful. He also uses the phrase ‘good enough mother’ to indicate an un-idealized view of the maternal function and asserts that such a mother is emotionally in touch with the
needs of her infant. The infant begins to develop an authentic self, as she gives it positive reflections of the same. However, if the mother transfers her own mood, then the infant begins to see a compliant ‘false self’. This process is initiated roughly prior to the sixth month. “The infant goes through several stages, in its journey towards the development of a self. In the first phase of absolute dependence (womb), the mother provides a facilitating environment for the totally helpless infant. In the next stage the infant comes to differentiate between the ‘not me’ and ‘me’, and then from about six months to twenty four months, the infant becomes aware of dependence and gradually the need for the actual mother becomes fierce and terrible.” (Ibid 87,88) By the second year, the infant begins to develop mechanisms that will equip him or her to deal with loss, more effectively. Loss of the mother or mothering agent, prior to three years of age, can adversely impact a child. Moreover, the biggest challenge in this whole process of infant care, is a steady presentation of the world, to the infant. This has to be done by someone (could even be the father) who is consistent and is continuously managing the child. These concepts and theories on development are what lie behind Walker’s ideas about ‘female bonding’ and *The Color Purple* demonstrates how Celie is able to achieve a strong identity, through this process.

As children, Celie and her sister, Nettie, experiences devastating losses and deprivations, in a single evening. Alphonso appears on the scene and lavishes Celie’s mother and her children with attention. Although their physical needs were met, their ailing mother is not able to give them any kind of emotional well-being. And Alphonso does not suit to serve as a mother substitute. Under such circumstances, Celie becomes mother surrogate to all her siblings. Walker’s portrayal of Celie as a victim of parental loss, rape, incest and physical abuse is similar to what Leonard Shengold describes as ‘soul murder’ – a state which
threatens the child’s sense of identity, because of trauma imposed from the world outside and not being able to cope with this, the child almost goes numb. The abused child, thus, changes into a mechanical, obedient automation. When Celie’s husband Albert, beats her with his belt, she isolates her feelings: “It all I can do not to cry. I make myself wood. I say to myself, Celie, you a tree”. (30) Like other victims of ‘soul murder’, Celie’s murderous rage resurfaces when Albert’s father insults Shug and also when she learns that Albert had hidden the letters that were sent to her, by Nettie.

Celie’s progress from this state of ‘soul murder’ to redefining her ‘self’ can be traced by examining psychoanalytic development psychology. According to this theory, a successful survivor does not emerge ‘out of nothing’. It has happened to her because of the good parental care that she received in the first two years of her life, through the figures of several nurturing surrogate mothers and by using adaptive powers and talents. Having successfully bonded with her mother and received ‘good enough mothering’, in several instances in the text, we find Celie re-experiencing this. When Albert’s father pays them a visit, Celie writes: “This is the closest us ever felt. He (Albert) say, Hand Pa his hat, Celie” (59). On another occasion, Albert’s brother visits them with a box of chocolate and Celie says: “Us three set together gainst Tobias and his fly speck box of chocolate. For the first time in my life, I feel just right.” (61) Finally, in Celie’s last letter, written in her early fifties, Celie states that … “sitting on the porch with Albert and Shug feel real pleasant.” (249) These become pleasurable experiences for Celie, as they are unconsciously experienced, as the bonding that she had with her father and mother, during the first two years of her life. Moreover, femaleness is the core gender identity of Celie, as her parents valued it. According to Robert Stoller, by the end of the second year of a child, core gender identity gets solidified. The
infant will develop a stable sense of self, if the mother is empathetic and understanding, during this phase. As the first two years of Celie’s life is peaceful and harmonious, a strong foundation for the further development of her ‘self’ has been laid. The ‘good enough mothers’ understand Celie and help her in negotiating through her traumatized life. When Nettie runs away from home to escape the unwanted sexual advances of Alphonso and joins Celie and Albert, she teaches Celie ‘spelling and everything else she think I need to know… to teach me what to go in the world’ (25). Nettie, not only equips Celie with the tools that will emancipate her, but also communicates to her that she is valuable and important. These positive affirmations from Nettie, go a long way, in boosting the self esteem of Celie. Kate, Albert’s sister also tells her once: “You deserve more than this”. (28) And when she is engaged in making quilt pieces with Sofia and Albert’s daughter-in-law, she is able to sleep like a baby.

However, it is Shug Avery, the blues singer, who helps Celie in coping effectively with loss by molding her identity and by developing in her, a strong sense of self. Celie responds positively to the glamorous figure of Shug in the photograph, when she focuses on her ‘serious’ and ‘sad eyes’. Her initial negative encounters with the ill Shug, is similar to the frustrated efforts that she had to make as an infant, in order to break through the deteriorating mental and physical condition of her own mother. “Celie perseveres, as she knows from the expression in the eyes in the photograph, that this woman has the ability to mirror Celie back to herself. Celie’s ability to use Shug’s eyes as a mirror is predicated upon from earlier, positive and unconscious mirror reflections from a good enough mother of happier days”. (Proudfit 24) Shug’s image permeates Celie’s conscious and unconscious mind. On her wedding night, Celie remembers Shug and puts her arm around Albert, knowing that he was Shug’s lover. When she goes to the store to buy clothes for
her dress, she wonders what would be Shug’s favorite color. Similarly, when she hears that Shug’s orchestra is arriving in the town, she wants to go, just to have a look at Shug. Celie, in bonding with Shug, completes her psychological development. Thus, Shug by being consistent and being herself vindicates Winnicott’s views, that these characteristics are required for the development of a self that is strong and stable. Shug also helps Celie in identifying her emotions and tells her that intense emotions such as ‘being mad, grief, wanting to kill somebody’ (136), makes one weak and not strong. She gives her a lesson in transformation, by placing a needle into her hands (for stitching) and not a razor (for killing).

Nettie and Celie represent two contrasting figures, one false self and the other, the true self. Nettie’s educated and intellectual mind is in sharp contrast to the intense emotions displayed by her elder sister. The younger one projects an image by which, one get the feeling that she has been more successful than Celie, in overcoming the traumatic experiences of her childhood. But that is not the truth. Celie, overcoming all obstacles, works towards, and achieves a stable and authentic sense of self, the ‘true self’. It needs to be noted that the first two years of Celie’s life was spent in a loving environment, unlike that of Nettie, who experienced severe physical and emotional deprivation. Thus it is reasonable to conclude, that Nettie developed a ‘false self’ that would suit her immediate environment. The letters that Nettie writes too are like educated people. Although Celie learns to talk, she refrains from changing her speech patterns to suit that of the White folk. Nettie, who appears to have everything, lacks an authentic self. Celie, on the other hand, in spite of her traumatic life, has developed an authentic self.
Chodorow’s idea that family and society play crucial roles in the development of an individual’s self, is clearly evident in the way traumatic experiences in life have impacted Celie. It is not possible to look into Celie’s self by isolating her from the general plight of her community. She is a victim of circumstances, like her mother. Their travails start with the death of Celie’s father, when she was just two years old and the entry of Mr.Alphonso, who initially arrives as a savior, but ends up sexually abusing Celie and impregnating her. Chodorow’s statement, that women’s oppression is linked to the nature of their mothering experience, is evident in Celie’s mother’s case. After the death of her husband, she lives in utter penury and is at the mercy of Mr.Alphonso, who promises to take care of her children. Having become frail and weak, she dies, leaving the children to the care of the fourteen year old Celie. Thus, the prime of Celie’s life is spent in taking care of children and being subject to the physical and sexual abuses of Mr.Alphonso. When Nettie asks her to fight back, Celie’s response is: “I don’t know how to fight. All I know how to do is stay alive”. (18) Subjecting herself to abuse, had become a way of life for Celie.

Lacan’s idea of the mirror image, although at a later stage in her life, works on Celie, through the images of Nettie and Shug, who help in reflecting her true self back to her, through positive affirmations and showing faith in her abilities. It is this strong bonding that helps Celie realize her true worth and with encouragement from Shug, is able to set up her own garment business. She says: “I am so happy. I got love, I got work, I got money, friends and time.”(222) She gets to understand that being happy, is to do what one likes to do and treating oneself as a subject and the awareness that one is not an object. Although the developmental stages in her life were not successfully completed, with appropriate interventions from Nettie, Shug and Sofia, Celie is able to understand and overcome the defects in the earlier
stages, and progress towards the development of a healthy self. This is also in concurrence with Freud and Kristeva’s ideas on the self, as a continuous process, something that evolves, as the life of an individual, progresses. Thus, in spite of abjecting her own body and self, which had been subject to continuous abuse, Celie is able to work her way out, with the help of Shug, who like a therapist, helps her in re-living her suppressed feelings and emotions, enabling her to love everything that she had despised about herself.

4.5 THE BLUEST EYE

This novel looks at the parent-child relationship, in the context of poverty and racism. The world that the children inhabit, is not colorful and bright, but, is bleak and cold. The parents do not smile at the children, nor do they play with them. They are not distressed by the cuts and bruises of their children, sustained during play and their sickness is treated with contempt, instilling shame and guilt in the children. The parents are portrayed to be extremely rough, unreasonable in their reprimands, aloof and uncaring, never expressing or exhibiting love and concern for their children. Claudia expresses this clearly:

    My mother’s anger humiliates me; her words chafe my cheeks, and I am crying. I do not know she is not angry at me, but at my sickness. I believe she despises my weakness for letting the sickness ‘take holt’. By and by I will not get sick; I will refuse to. But for now I am crying.(14)

Parents are completely dissociated from the world of the children, leaving them emotionally starved. Children are thus, left to fend for themselves in a hostile world. When the situation at home itself is so hostile, the children cannot hope for things to be better, in the world outside. Pecola’s identity is constructed around the
perception of others; her self-image is what she sees reflected in the eyes of the other, the image of ugliness; “…she would never know her beauty. She would see only what there was to see, the eyes of other people”(40) The knowledge of her ‘invisibility’ is thrust upon her, quite early in life and the internalized assumptions regarding beauty, influence her notions of acceptability by family, friends and community, so that she seeks self-abnegation in withdrawal and vanishing. Hence the pathetic and futile prayer: “Please God, Please make me disappear…Try as she might, she could never get her eyes to disappear…”(Arpita 33)

Pecola has never experienced love and is repeatedly confronted with the question: “What did love feel like?...How do grownups act when they love each other?”(57) She comes to Claudia’s house as a child, who has been put outdoors, by a violent father, who had burned down their home, brutalized her mother and eventually landed in prison. Pecola has never known the stability and peace of a home. Broken and neglected, at a tender age, she is the emblem of a distorted and mutilated childhood. The Breedlove’s house, ironically, does not breed love, but only animosity and suspicion. Ashamed of their inferiority and obscurity, the members in that household, resemble their reviled pieces of furniture, producing only fretful malaise. Their house is a battleground, where the antagonists are bent upon mutual destruction. The dysfunctional family chooses different ways to deal with their ugliness and worthlessness. Cholly directs his despair in tormenting and destroying the weak. Mrs.Breedlove vents out her frustrations in self-abnegation, Pecola’s brother is aggressive and almost equals the father in inflicting pain on others and Pecola hides away and absorbs the physical injuries and humiliations within herself. The Breedloves internalize the viciousness of their situation, by acting out lives filled with drunkenness, rage and cruelty.
The white house of the Fishers, where Pauline works, is in striking contrast to the ugliness and disharmony of the Breedloves. Pauline finds her space as the ideal servant, in the Fisher household. Her fantasies fuelled by the movies of Jean Harlow and Clark Gable, are sustained by the role she dons in her employer’s house. Internalizing, the commercial fantasies, Pauline devalues herself and imbibes a sense of inadequacy. As a child, the physical deformity in her foot, had given her a feeling of ‘separateness and unworthiness’ (86). This led to an obsessive craving for arranging everything around her, in order. Her marriage with Cholly, and her displacement to the North, disturbed her sense of orderliness. The ugliness of her life, her family and herself, devastates any attempt to put anything in order. The work in the Fisher household is a kind of wish fulfillment of the childhood fantasy of keeping things clean and in perfect symmetry. Ignoring her own children, she heaps love and affection on to the child of the Fisher’s and is repelled by her own children’s ugliness. Her role as a mother is to bear her children as her cross, her burden and liability – they are betrayed and unloved.

The novel also takes us through Cholly’s childhood, in an attempt to communicate to the readers, how the scars acquired by both parents in their formative years are transferred to their children. Cholly was rescued by his aunt, Jimmy, after being abandoned by a mother, who was mentally unstable. He has never known parental love, as his father had deserted them, before he was born. After his aunt’s death, Cholly has to leap to adulthood, passing through a shadow of adolescence. The loneliness and abandonment that he has gone through in childhood, after his aunt’s death, gets compounded with feelings of shame and impotence. The initiation into adulthood was a humiliating and traumatic one. The relationship that had developed with Darlene was contorted by the White hunters, who forced them to copulate, like animals on display, while they were cheered by the jeering laughter
of the White men. This incident impacts Cholly very badly and is filled with self-loathing at his ineffectuality, his impotence pitted against the White man, which is distorted into hatred for Darlene, who had witnessed his weakness. “For now, he hated the one who had created the situation, the one who bore witness to his failure, his impotence. The one whom he had not been able to protect, to spare, to cover from the round moonglow of the flashlight.” (118) Having never known the selfless love of a mother, or that of the father, family and community, coupled with the brutality that he experiences in life, Cholly’s understanding and expression of love is distorted and the only way he can show his love and acceptance for Pecola, despite her ugliness and shortcomings, is by brutalizing her.

In *The Bluest Eye*, childhood is not nurtured or protected by those who are responsible for it – parents, family and community. Pecola disintegrates into insanity after her rape and Cholly is not the only one responsible for this. The whole community has a role in what happens to Pecola. Her yearning for blue eyes, as redemption from her ugliness, her inadequacies and her shame, leads to her disintegration. The futile attempt to extricate herself from the muddle of violence and sordidness, results in the split in her identity. She is even confused about her part in the rape, as we see her wondering whether she was a victim or a seducer. Unlike Celie, there are no healthy interventions at any point of time in Pecola’s life, making her psychic disintegration inevitable. The traumatic experiences in childhood, prevents the successful completion of the various developmental stages identified by Erikson, thus, contributing to Pecola’s identity getting completely pulverized, even before it can sprout.

According to Freud, the child psychologically merges with the mother in the pre-Oedipal stage and its identity evolves in the Oedipal stage. Unfortunately, for
Pecola, there seems to be no bonding with parents and is completely deprived of love and affection. She grows up hating herself and yearning for blue eyes, hoping that it will work magic in her life. Identity for her, is based on the color of her skin. Another important factor that Freud points out, as the reason for the isolation of the soul, is the sense of guilt that develops within oneself. As Pecola grows up associating her identity with the color of her skin, she has an overdose of guilt injected into her and looks upon herself as ugly. The only solution to this problem is to have blue eyes, which will automatically make her beautiful. In spite of being bullied and humiliated in school, by the boys and Maureen Peal, Pecola is incapable of responding or reacting in any way. The friction between the super ego and the ego, in her, also hampers psychic autonomy. The super ego (which comprises of the expectations and norms set by her family and community) always has the upper hand and the ego gets completely annihilated. The fantasies that she has about the blue eyes, is also in keeping with Freud’s idea of how, they are a kind of defense mechanism against the emergence of feelings that we dislike in ourselves (here, her black color) into consciousness, which enable us to ignore and disown the disturbing realities about oneself.

Pecola’s parents too have had traumatic childhoods, having been deprived of love and affection from the primary care givers. Many a time, they transfer their own frustrations and helplessness on to their children, which culminates as violent fights between the spouses. In the Breedlove house, violence and brutality have become a way of life. Pauline too lives in the fantasy of the White world and the actors and actresses that she sees on screen, become her role models. She feels she was born to be the ‘ideal servant’ in the White master’s house. The idea of ‘projection’ that Freud highlighted is exhibited by Pauline and Cholly, in most of their own interactions and with that of their children. Their own inadequacies and
weaknesses are projected onto their children, by constantly subjecting them to verbal and physical abuse, so as to give them (the parents) the comfortable feeling that their threat lies in the external environment and not within themselves. This unconscious defensive behaviour arises out of their own traumatic experiences. Thus, having been deprived of a healthy childhood, Pauline and Cholly are unable to gift their children with a happy and peaceful environment.

There is no scope for the enactment of Chodorow’s idea that identities are constructed via the dynamics of formative attachment relationships, as far as the Breedlove house is concerned. The community around them is also driven by the consumerist norms of the White world. There is no one out there, who can guide them properly and lead them to discover or create their own identities. Lacan’s idea of the mirror stage also is dysfunctional in the context of Pecola and her family. The mirror in their world can only reflect visual images of a suppressed ‘self’, added on to images of ugliness and blackness. As the mother herself is devoid of an identity, she cannot reflect a positive image on to her child, nor does the child develop an affinity towards the object (the mother). Kristeva’s theory of abjection is very much applicable to Pecola, as her blackness is the ‘abject’ which ultimately leads to her becoming insane. As rightly pointed out by Kristeva, abjection is not a passing stage, but a companion through the whole of one’s life, as with Pecola, who unfortunately undergoes psychological abjection and suffers a breakdown of identity. The abject is a looming presence at the periphery of Pecola’s consciousness, which she fails to negotiate and thus threatens her very existence often.

Pecola represents all those women, who are unable to understand and cope with the challenges that life throws upon them. She is so lost and confused in her own
world and terribly deprived of parental love, that she even wonders what love is. Completely devoid of self esteem and confidence, just like her parents, she can only ardently pray and wish for some magic to change the course of her life. At least temporarily, what comforts her, is the hope that she might be blessed with blue eyes- which, for her is the panacea for all her psychological ailments. Unable to digest the harsh realities of the outside world, she starts living in a world created out of her own fantasies and hallucinations. As she lacks the courage to confront realities and not having anyone to depend upon, not even her own family members, she withdraws into her own cocoon, which ultimately makes her a nervous wreck. Unable to comprehend the complexities of the workings of her own psyche and the issues around her, she just withers away. In spite of being adults, Pauline and Cholly too, are unable to manage the mess that their life is, as both of them are busy taking out their own frustrations on to each other. This clearly indicates, how emotional set-backs in childhood, can have its repercussions in adult life too, unless addressed appropriately, with healthy interventions at the appropriate time.

4.6 SULA

*Sula* deals with the dynamics involved within the infant-mother relationship and the exercise of power that moulds this relationship and how it influences self-definition and self construction. The text also presents the lives of the two protagonists, Sula and Nel, as they move from adolescence to adulthood, their bondings with strong mother-figures, who represent a past that revolves around women and their perspectives on motherhood. They are ‘daughters of distant mothers and incomprehensible fathers’, (52) as Sula’s mother was no more and Nel had not seen her father at all. It is quite natural that Sula cannot maintain pre-Oedipal bonding with a mother who admits not liking her daughter. Hence, she is
able to watch her mother burn to death, without any qualms. Similarly, Nel too is incapable of finding a maternal perch for her affections. Thus, the two girls stand up to each other, as more mother than their actual mothers. However, the dominating maternal presence in the novel is that of the matriarch, Eva, who rules over the enormous house in which Sula and Nel spend a great deal of their childhood. Eva’s powerful presence is defined by her amputated leg, which becomes the means of her survival and the mark of her distinction from the other poor and abandoned mothers in Medallion.

In this story, mothers and daughters fail in directly communicating with each other. This pattern of miscommunication begins when Nel and her mother Helene, undertake an exhausting journey south, to attend the funeral of Nel’s great grandmother. As Nel returns home and remembers the painful moments of the trip – her mother’s profound humiliation by the White conductor and by the Black men in the train, the disgust on her great-grandmother’s dead face, and the coldness between her mother and grand-mother, she looks into the mirror and begins a new life: “I’m me. I’m not their daughter. I’m not Nel. I’m me”. (43) This self-assertion necessitates a search for an affirmation outside home, outside family, which she finds in Sula. However, she has already been so deeply conditioned into subservience since her childhood, that she can never assert herself in her relationship with Jude, her husband. Her upbringing has prepared her only for playing secondary roles as wife and mother, resulting in self-abnegation and self-effacement. Nel is not able to appreciate her mother for various reasons- her adoption of middle class values, manipulative control of her daughter’s life, the foolish smile that she flashes at the train conductor who had insulted her, severing connection with her own mother and the fact that she doesn’t even know her mother tongue. These factors make it imperative for Nel that she identify as
separate from her maternal heritage. At this moment of ‘self creation’, she needs a friend to feel complete and that invariably is Sula.

Sula, on the other hand, presents the “outlawed, unpolicing, uncontained, and uncontainable.” (Arpita 46) Her selfhood is undeniably influenced by her childhood spent in the matriarchal social structure, represented by the house of her grandmother. Sula’s upbringing is completely antithetical to Nel’s; she is brought up in a house, where men are completely absent and is run by women. Her character is shaped during her childhood, by the lack of emotional bonding with her mother, who herself feels distanced from her own mother. Sula’s mother, Hannah, has also an unusual influence on her. Sula’s sexual promiscuity in her adulthood, the complete absence of moral standardization in her sexual exploits, even if it destroyed her best friend, Nel’s home, can be looked upon as the legacy of her mother’s unencumbered sexuality. According to Cynthia Davis, Sula’s outright rejection of mother figures in her life, reduces her to a ‘centre less’ being, who just floats around for some time and then drifts away.

Although more communicative than Nel’s, Sula’s family also does not succeed in bridging the wide gap between three generations of women. Eva’s response to her daughter, Hannah, on being asked whether she really loved her children is: “No, I don’t reckon I did. Not the way you thinking”. (58) Eva also admits to Hannah, that she had set fire to her adult son, Plum. Her reasons for doing so are:

He gave me such a time. Such a time…and look like when he came back from that war he wanted to git back in. After all that carryin on, just gettin him out and keepin him alive, he wanted to crawl back in my womb and well…I ain’t got the room no more even if he could do it. There wasn’t space for him in my womb. And he was crawlin back…I done everything
I could to make him leave me and go on and live and be a man and he wouldn’t and I had to keep him out so I just thought of a way he could die like a man not all scrunched up inside my womb, but like a man. (96)

In trying to explain to Hannah an act that is beyond comprehension, Eva dwells on an intense need for self-protection, a clear drawing of her own boundaries, a definitive expression of the limits of what she has to give, and she insists as well, on Plum’s boundaries, which, as a mother, she was forced to violate.

Like Hannah and Eva, Sula and Hannah also share a pivotal moment of indirect confrontation around the subject of maternal love. Sula overhears her mother tell one of the neighborhood ladies that she doesn’t like her daughter. This scene is immediately followed by the drowning of Chicken Little. The fact that Sula and Nel do not make an attempt to save him, could be read as a sign of their rebelliousness. This action of watching Chicken Little drown is later repeated in the novel when Sula watches her mother’s accidental death by burning, thrilled and wanting to keep on jerking and dancing. In another incident, when both Nel and Sula, on their way back from school are threatened by some boys, Sula digs out a knife and cuts her finger and asks them: “If I can do that to myself, what do you suppose I’ll do to you?” (75) In this moment of self-recognition, she becomes aware of the helplessness that she shares with her grandmother, (act of self injury like that of the self amputated leg of Eva for Insurance money) – a vulnerability that she can hide, but cannot alter. It is this awareness that provokes Sula to rebel against the traditional notions of womanhood. She is seen rejecting the maternal role, when she tells Eva, that she doesn’t want to settle down with babies. Her rejection of maternity means an assumption of male freedom. Through Sula, Morrison is trying to go beyond an ideology that identifies women with nurturing
and caretaking. Nel warns her: “You can’t do it all. You a woman and a colored woman at that. You can’t act like a man.”(181) For Nel, having children represents the crucial distinction between the male and the female position. Sula, on the other hand, is haunted by the fears of the destruction that domesticity brings and motherhood constitutes a threat of disintegration. However, the two protagonists are unable to transcend or repeat the fate of their mothers. Morrison seems to say that for women who reject unconditionally the lives and the stories of their mothers, there is nowhere to go. This substantiates Kristeva’s idea that the female identifies with the mother, unlike the male, and by abjecting the mother, she will have to abject her own body.

Chicken Little’s burial is a turning point in the lives of Sula and Nel, as it indicates the end of innocence. The soul-destroying pain that they experienced at the little boy’s funeral was ‘not the pain of childhood, but the remembrance of it’. (88) The image of the girlfriends ‘tottering up the road on a summer day wondering what happened to butterflies in the winter’ (89) is an epigraph to their childhood innocence. Sula’s relationship with Nel, had enhanced the process of self-understanding and self-realization, which is interrupted by Nel’s marriage to Jude. Nel’s definition of self, after marriage, is based on the norms set by the community, the categories of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ to which she progressively adheres to and, thereby gradually becomes alienated from Sula. Unlike Nel, who chooses the narrow domesticity of Bottom, Sula explores the wider world, to find authentication for self hood and in the due process gets labeled as an outcaste by her own community. She has been rejected by her mother, her friend, her lover and even her community. As an outcaste and a witch, Sula purifies the community, as Pecola did with her ugliness.
Sula’s ending has the magnificence of the falling of redwood trees. Her final image, curled in the foetal position in her grandmother’s bed, thumb in her mouth, is symbolic of an embryonic form voyaging towards a new birth. Sula’s craving in childhood for maternal love and care, culminates in her dying desire to return to the mother’s womb:

It was as though for the first time she was completely alone – where she had always wanted to be – free of the possibility of distraction. It would be here, only here, held by this blind window high above the elm tree, that she might draw her legs up to her chest, close her eyes, put her thumb in her mouth and float over and down the tunnels, just missing the dark walls, down, down until she met a rain scent and would know the water was near, and she would curl into its heavy softness and it would envelope her, carry her, and wash her tired flesh always. Always.(189)

In *Sula*, we see the fissures that can occur in the relationship between the mother and daughter. The pre-Oedipal and the Oedipal stages that are crucial for the formation of identity in individuals, appears to be dysfunctional with respect to Sula. The warmth and comfort provided by care givers in the growing stages of an infant, is missing. According to the Kleinian theory, the relationship between the mother and her child forms the basis of all future relationships. This idea rests on an inherent instinct in the baby, which looks upon the mother, not only as someone who gives nourishment, but is the very source of life itself. This is the basis of the life instinct. All experiences for the infant become pleasurable or not, based on the responses from the mother and gets modified accordingly. Winnicott and Chodorow also suggest that, in the context of deprivation and violence, all societies need to pay attention to the well-being of those who mother. They
emphasise the need for creating social circumstances, in which mothers and fathers can feel sufficiently emotionally secure and free of frustration, to be able to share power with their children and help them acknowledge and resolve primitive emotions. Sula and Nel are completely deprived of all this, though in different ways. Eva’s husband deserts her when her children are small and she entrusts the children to the care of a neighbor for two years and comes back with her leg amputated. Sula’s father dies when she is small, after which her mother Hannah, leads a flirtatious life. Nel’s mother, leads a polished life, and tries to impose norms on to her daughter, going against her own roots. Thus the two children have only themselves, to act as father and mother to each other.

Although Sula’s circumstances are not as bad as that of Pecola’s, unlike Pecola, she becomes completely rebellious, showing an urge to flout all norms of her community and thus becomes a pariah. This shuts off all aspects of social interaction for Sula, which could have helped her, to some extend in forming a healthy identity – a compensation for an otherwise deprived childhood. The scars are so deep in her, that at times, she derives a cruel satisfaction, in a very masochistic way, in hurting others and herself. This is evident till the end, when she ruthlessly puts Eva into an old age home, just to avoid her unpleasant questions. She doesn’t believe in the concept of settling down as a family, as she looks at motherhood, as a hindrance to her liberty and as a burden. On the contrary, Nel easily adapts to this role after her marriage with Jude. Not having successfully completed any one of the developmental tasks, in the different stages of her life, she only succeeds in developing negative emotions like distrust, anger and hatred towards people all around her. Although educated and independent, the identity that she creates is one that is built in isolation and not through healthy social interactions. As per Kristeva’s theory, Sula herself is the abject for her mother and
the whole community of Medallion. Nel, on the other hand, becomes the good wife and mother.

Kristeva is of the opinion that motherhood or reproduction is not just a significant aspect of human survival but an exclusive experience that every woman should enjoy. Winnicott and Klein, go one step further to add that societies need to pay attention to the well being of those who mother and create circumstances that give the mother and the father a kind of emotional comfort and security, which in turn can facilitate their sharing love with their children. Situations of unemployment, ill-health, adequate food and lack of other social provisions, inevitably works against the parents’ ability to give their children what they need. This is clearly seen in the circumstances that Eva and Hannah, bring up their children. Eva is forced to amputate her leg for the sake of the Insurance money, so that she can feed her children. Another shattering experience for Eva is the realization that her son, Plum, is impotent and weak and sensing that he is becoming more and more dependent on her, she is forced to kill him. Moreover, for both Hannah and Eva, pregnancy and motherhood are not pleasant experiences and it leads to a splitting of their selves, giving them the feeling that their identity is being lost in their roles as mothers. Kristeva explains this very clearly in *Women’s Time*:

Pregnancy seems to be experienced as the radical ordeal of the splitting of the subject, redoubling up of the body, separation and coexistence of the self and of an ‘other’, of nature and consciousness, of physiology and speech. This fundamental challenge to identity is then accompanied by a fantasy of totality – narcissistic, completeness – a sort of instituted, socialized, natural psychosis. The arrival of the child, on the other hand, leads the mother into the labyrinths of an experience that, without the
child, she would only rarely encounter: love for an ‘other’. Not for herself, nor for an identical being, and still less for another person with whom ‘I’ fuse (love or sexual passion). But the slow, difficult and delightful apprenticeship in attentiveness, gentleness, forgetting oneself. The ability to succeed in this path without masochism and without annihilating one’s affective, intellectual and professional personality – such would be the stakes to be won through guiltless maternity. (Rosalind 283)

Helene Cixous too sees motherhood as the ultimate subversion of male-defined subjectivity. In *The Laugh of the Medusa*, she writes: ‘The mother, too, is a metaphor. It is necessary and sufficient that the best of herself be given to woman by another woman for her to be able to love herself and return in love the body that was “born” to her. Touch me, caress me, you the living no-name, give me my ‘self’ as myself’. (Peach 63) Unfortunately, things are not so harmonious and peaceful in the world of the Afro-American mothers. Their socio-economic situations prevent them from loving their children in a healthy way and most often end up taking out their own frustrations and sufferings onto their children. The impoverishment in the lives of Hannah and Eva gets transferred onto Sula, who can only keep rebelling against everything around her, which does not help her in understanding herself and thus molding her own identity.

Melanie Klein goes on to explain that children who develop without the capacity to experience genuine concern for other people or take responsibility for their feelings and actions, may, as adults, continue to live within the arid and dangerous confinement of the paranoid-schizoid position, which gets unconsciously dominated by primitive oppositions of love and hate, good and bad, power and powerlessness. In situations that provoke feelings of helplessness and anxiety,
without the psychological experience of integration and acceptance of responsibility for those bad feelings, some individuals may act out powerful fantasies of destruction experienced as the only means to ensure their own psychical survival. Such individuals get caught in fantasies of omnipotent control and are unable to experience the world realistically or to think unconsciously in anything other than simplistic, life-denying oppositions. Acceptance of feelings of helplessness is ruled out as a psychological option because reparation in the depressive position, which entails the development of guilt, has never been experienced and blame, in the form of projection, is still the predominant defense against anxiety. In Kleinian terms, emotional development, thus, has been inhibited. Psychologically unable to tolerate feelings of helplessness within the self, individuals who display this kind of behavior, may get caught in a web of primitive attempts at psychic survival which entail the blaming and obsessive control of others, if not their destruction. This idea clearly explains certain actions of Sula, Hannah and Eva to a large extent. Eva and Sula as part of their psychic survival, don’t hesitate to inflict wounds on themselves and clearly exhibit traits of inhibited emotional development.

The anger, fury, hatred and rebelliousness that Sula projects on to others, are actually defense mechanisms to cover up her own weaknesses and yearnings. She tries to project the image of a strong independent woman, who is least bothered about happenings around her, so that her vulnerabilities don’t get exposed. Sula’s rejection of motherhood is another rebellious action, which goes against the idea of constructing an identity in explicit opposition to the mother. Her radical way of redefining herself depends on her denial of her mother. Hence, “her ‘self’ has ‘no centre, no speck around which to grow…no ego. For that reason she felt no compulsion to verify herself – be consistent with herself”.(103) Unable to
understand the contexts and situations in which she grew up and the rationale behind the behaviors of her mother and grandmother, she develops hatred towards them and even rejects them, which in turn becomes detrimental to her own healthy psychic growth. Her final posture as that of a foetus, explains her craving and urge, to once again enter the warmth and comfort of the mother’s womb, which she had not experienced, all her life.

4.7 BELOVED

One of the major tenets of psychoanalysis in recent times, is on the socialization of the newborn baby and its acquisition of autonomous identity, within the context of the nuclear family. Although each of the characters in Beloved has been damaged by slavery, they are not only victims – they are also agents, who are instrumental in transforming the lives of people, close to them. Paul D and Sethe move from the position of object in the discourse of slavery, to the position of subject. As each character confronts a psychic trauma, the pre-Oedipal feelings that are suppressed, get sparked off once again. As the past hurts surface, Denver, Sethe and Paul D work through them and succeed in becoming aware of their self. As per the Kleinian theory, the infant projects conflicting emotions onto objects that are external- usually the mother, who is the primary care giver and transforms those into objects of fantasy. These are then introjected back into the psyche of the infant. The process is completed only when the child develops some basic idea about his or her own identity, based on personal experiences and fantasies. The child then, is also able to recognize other individuals as independent beings, leading their own individual lives. “Thus selfhood is socially constructed through interaction with others, aspects of whom have been internalized by the child as part of itself.” (Peach 113) As the Kleinian concept articulates the psychic struggle
prior to the achievement of subjectivity, it cannot offer a subject position, but neither does it enforce an object status. Instead the repressed feelings resurface, and the characters project feelings onto objects in the external world and introject the ensuing images as part of themselves. This is more evident in the character of Beloved, who is adorned specifically, with respect to the ideas of projection and introjection.

Beloved’s obsession with Sethe can be characterized psychoanalytically as pre-Oedipal. When she appears as the ghost, she also becomes the figure onto whom others can project their fears and desires— a fantasy object for the emotions of others. As Morrison herself has pointed out, “Beloved can be studied at two levels— as a psychologically damaged real-life slave girl and as a ghost”. (Peach 114) In her fragmented monologue in the novel, she describes her abduction and transportation from Africa, in a slave ship. She develops a strong emotional connect with a woman on land and on the ship who, in psychoanalytic terms, plays the role of the mother or the primary care giver. This image suits Klein’s description of the mother, internalized by the child, whose image gets duplicated by the external person, who enacts the role of the care-giver. The double is psychologically created by the infant’s emotions which are not clear— of both love (and dependence) and fear (of dependence) towards the person, who takes care of the child. The care-giver is both idealized and demonized, both all loving and abandoning too. Beloved is seen depending heavily on Sethe, during her presence in the novel:

…Beloved could not take her eyes off Sethe…Sethe was licked, tasted, eaten by Beloved’s eyes. Like a familiar, she hovered, never leaving the room Sethe was in unless required and told so. She rose early in the dark
to be there, waiting, in the kitchen when Sethe came down to make fast bread before she left for work. In lamplight, and over the flames of the cooking stove, their two shadows clashed and crossed on the ceiling like black swords. She was in the window at two when Sethe returned, or the doorway; then the porch, in steps, the path, the road, till finally, surrendering to the habit, Beloved began inching down Bluestone Road further and further each day to meet Sethe and walk her back to 124. It was as though every afternoon she doubted anew the older woman’s return (57).

We also get to see Beloved accusing Sethe ‘of leaving her behind. Of not being nice to her, not smiling at her’.(241) She also projects on to Sethe the image of her internal mother, the woman who was about to smile at her and who left her behind. Beloved’s excessive dependence corresponds to the Kleinian idea of the infant-mother symbiosis – a state in which the child has not yet recognized its separateness from the world, particularly from the primary care-giver. Beloved refers to the woman in the ship as: ‘I am not separate from her’ (210). She shows an excessive urge to help this woman, in order to avoid abandonment. Her insistence that the woman has her face also makes sense in psychoanalytic discourse, which suggests that babies sees themselves reflected back in their mother’s faces, in the loving gaze which assures them of acceptance. Hence, Beloved desires that the lady, in whom she sees images of her own mother, should smile at her. But the woman is preoccupied and ‘she empties out her eyes’ (211). Thus, the first step towards abandonment has been taken and the woman chooses to join the dead man in the sea and not smile at Beloved. Physically, still a pre-Oedipal infant, with no autonomous sense of self, Beloved experiences this loss as an existential crisis. While in Sethe’s house as a ghost, she transfers the role of
‘internal mother’ onto Sethe, who is now the ‘double’ of the woman in the ship. Sethe’s face acts as a mirror to her own and she wants Sethe to gaze into the water with her. Beloved yearns for Sethe, but at the same time is furious towards her. According to Klein, such split projections breed insecurity. They result in the feeling that the ego is breaking down. This is similar to Beloved’s fears:

Among the things she could not remember was when she first knew that she could wake up any day and find herself in pieces. She had two dreams; exploding and being swallowed. When her tooth came out – an odd fragment, last in the row – she thought it was starting (133).

The insecurity also intensifies aggression, resulting in the attack on the mother. Beloved is able to see other people, only as a function of her own needs. Hence, she refuses to accept Sethe’s reasons for leaving her behind. Her aggression is characterized through the fantasy of cannibalism: “The bigger Beloved got, the smaller Sethe became…She sat in the chair licking her lips like a chastised child while Beloved ate up her life, took it, swelled up with it, grew taller on it”(250). The twenty year old Beloved at times, behaves like a two year old, the age in which the baby was killed and as per psychoanalysis, the age in which a child begins to undergo the Oedipal crisis, which should initiate them into a stage of separate selfhood. The Oedipal crisis encourages the child to suppress its immediate desires, so that it can accommodate the societal norms. The care giver normally initiates the child into this process of socialization, by denying its unnecessary demands and making it consider the needs of others. Sethe fails to perform the role of ‘the unquestioned mother whose word was law and who knew what was best’. (242) Beloved is almost exclusively inscribed in the pre-Oedipal practices of Kleinian discourse.
Jennifer Fitzgerald goes one step further, in her criticism of psychoanalytic theory, which according to her, is based on a particular bourgeois model of family life – the nuclear family- that developed in the wake of the Industrial Revolution. She alters object-relations theory to ‘intersubjective theory’ as a complement to intrapsychic theory. She argues that the self develops through relationships with another subject, rather than through their object relations and psychic experience cannot be isolated from the diversities of ethnicity and class. Fitzgerald too in her article, *Selfhood and Community: Psychoanalysis and Discourse in Beloved*, emphasizes on how mothering is not a private act, independent of the economic, political or social conditions which affect the circumstances of parenting. Also, psychoanalysis places a huge responsibility on mothers as motherhood gets defined according to certain restricted norms. Especially while analyzing a work like *Beloved*, it is impossible not to take into account the psychic as well as material damage inflicted by slavery. The merging of identities in the pre-Oedipal bonding of the female triad is seen in the relationship between Baby Suggs, Denver and Beloved, giving way to the inverted trinity of Sethe, Denver and Beloved.

As slavery has denied parental claims, Sethe insists upon her role as mother. Her position as object within the system of slavery, forces her to become the subject in the context of the good mother and reminds her of her own childhood, when the bond with her mother was severed, even before she could develop an identity of her own. Hence, her sense of self is extremely weak and relates her identity with that of her children. She projects ‘all parts of her that were precious and fine and beautiful’ (163) onto external objects, her children. Her excessive love for her children is an impossible attempt to make up for her own loss as a daughter.
The belief that mother and child are inseparable, with identical selfhood and interests, is thus, articulated in the murder of her two-year-old daughter. According to object relations theory, the infant does not see itself separately from the mother, just as the mother looks upon her child as a part of herself, whose interests also are similar. Such a mother will believe that she killed her child for her own good, for which the justification is offered by Sethe too. Sethe tells Paul D: ‘Grown don’t mean nothing to a mother. A child is a child. They get bigger, older, but grown? What’s that supposed to mean? In my heart, it don’t mean a thing’. (45) This idea is highlighted in psychoanalysis too, “For the mother, the child is never grown up, for when grown up, he is no longer her child” [Michael 119] Thus, to a large extent, the institution of slavery is responsible for Sethe not developing a healthy self, as she lost the opportunity to bond with her mother, thus making her overtly concerned as a mother, which in turn prevents her from focusing on her ‘self’. The horrors of slavery that each character has experienced and the resultant psychic trauma undermines their sense of self.

As per Kleinian psychoanalysis, selfhood is shaped based on the relationships that an individual builds, with respect to his/her environment. According to Joan Riviere, an object relations theorist:

There is no such thing as a single human being, pure and simple, unmixed with other human beings. Each personality is a world in himself, a company of many. That self, that life of one’s own...is a composite structure which has been and is being formed and built up since the day of our birth out of countless never-ending influences and exchanges between ourselves and others (Peach 123)
Baby Suggs, helps the community in forging their selves, by treating them as part of an extended family. She tries to foster the self hood, which racism has denied to each of the members in the community. However, community bonding is denied to all these individuals, as long as they were slaves. Deprived of mothers as caregivers, Afro-Americans learn to mother themselves through reciprocal self-love. By the end of the novel, Denver, Sethe and Paul D move forward from a state of isolation to a developed sense of self, through mutual love and care. Beloved is also forgotten like a bad dream.

_Beloved_ presents the unnerving paradox of motherhood that must kill, to nurture. Morrison employs the signifiers of childhood and motherhood, to foreground the act of historical recovery, of re-owning, re-possessing and renaming the discourse from which they had been brutally excluded. The dehumanizing effect of slavery is clearly highlighted in this novel. Baby Suggs had eight children, but she had never known them, except for Halle, Sethe’s husband, who had rented himself out on all Sundays in order to buy her freedom. Baby Suggs says:

> I had eight. Every one of them gone away from me. Four taken, four chased,…My first born. All I can remember of her is how she loved the burned bottom of bread. Can you beat that? Eight children and that’s all I remember.(5)

Sethe refuses to passively accept the exclusion of the mother’s role. Her children are most valuable, a conviction which justifies her trespassing on their subjectivity and deciding their destiny. The rationale behind Sethe killing her child is that, it is better to die in the cradle, than to be a slave for the rest of one’s life. But, the murdered child refuses to be erased from the collective unconsciousness. She comes back as a baby ghost to haunt 124 Bluestone, driving away the brothers and
later being driven out by Paul D, returns re-incarnated as a nineteen year old girl, emerging from the water, hinting at a process of birthing. Beloved returns to seek justification for her mother’s act and to re-establish the symbiotic oneness that was ruptured by her act of murder. With the exteriorization of repressed childhood memories, Sethe is also made aware of the forgotten mother’s language, signifying a rupture from the mother’s womb. The institution of slavery, denies the fact that a child could be precious, wanted, cared for and protected. The mother is prevented from sharing an affirmative relationship with the child. Sethe’s mother was hanged with several other slaves and as a child she was unable to understand the reason behind such an action. But, when Beloved accuses her of having betrayed her, she is able to see things from a larger perspective. “The return of Beloved is not just a psychological projection, but a physical manifestation as well, the uncanny return of the dead to pervade the life and consciousness of the living, the return of the past to shadow the present.”(Arpita 97) Her obsession with sweet things and oral fixation, indicate the yearning for mother’s milk that she had been deprived of. Although a nineteen year old, her gestures and feelings are that of an infant and yearns for her mother’s presence. This is similar to Lacan’s ‘mirror stage’, when there is a fundamental disharmony regarding the ego. Lacan says:

The mirror stage is a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation – and which manufactures for all the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of fantasies that extends from a fragmented body image to a form of its totality…and, lastly, to the assumption of an alienating identity, which will mark with its rigid structure the infants entire mental development.(Lacan 4)
A conflict arises in the child in the Oedipal stage, with respect to its unity with the mother and the development of its own identity. Beloved refuses to be separated from Sethe and comes back to claim the mother’s love that she was deprived of. She has an insatiable desire to devour her mother. Lacan illustrates this clearly when he says:

The infant is absolutely dependent on the mother for nurturance, care and feeding, so that there is a perceived oneness, where needs and desires of the mother and child are mutually fulfilled. Gradually, however, the child starts realizing that the mother is a separate entity and therefore a ‘lacking’ subject as the child itself is a ‘lacking’ subject. The child, therefore, yearns for love that goes beyond the objects that satisfy its needs. (Lacan 287)

For Lacan it is the ‘beyond’ that constitutes desire. Beloved clearly illustrates this. She feeds on her mother’s guilt and refuses to grant autonomous selfhood to herself and her mother. She feeds like a vampire, on her mother.

Denver, Sethe’s other daughter also has an impacted childhood, although, not as bad as that of Beloved’s. She has led a life of isolation, has never known her father, and is abandoned by her brothers. She grows up lonely and alienated. She bonds well with Beloved, guards her and also becomes possessive about her. She becomes an observer of the intense interplay of the past and present in the relationship between Sethe and Beloved. Denver, the daughter of history, who, along with her mother’s milk, had taken her sister’s blood, decides to understand her mother’s story in the wider context of slavery. This understanding is necessary to realize the extent of inhumaness associated with slavery that has forced her mother to kill her own child. As the novel concludes, she decides to bridge the gap
between her own house and the community in which she lives, caused by Sethe’s
sense of betrayal and the community’s righteousness that could not accommodate
her act of self-determination.

Julia Kristeva in her *Stabat Mater* says:

I have brought not a child but suffering in to the world and it, suffering,
refused to leave me, insisted on coming back, on haunting me
permanently. One does not bear children in pain, it’s pain that one bears:
the child is pain’s representative and once it is delivered moves in for
good…(A) mother is …marked by pain, she succumbs to it.

This is clearly portrayed in *Sula*. The blood of the murdered child is not only on
Sethe’s hands, but it smears the conscience of the community itself. Thus, the
exorcism of Beloved, takes on a communal dimension. It is with this act, that Sethe
is able to free herself from feelings of guilt and see herself as an independent
being. The idea of the psychoanalysts like Chodorow, Klein and Winnicott, that
identity is a social construct and not something that is built in isolation, is clearly
highlighted through the characters in this novel. It focuses on the effects of
unconscious desire and loss, originating in early childhood. *Sula* also focuses on
how slavery can rip apart childhood violently and leave scars and wounds in the
psyche of individuals, causing irredeemable damage. The novel demonstrates how
without the protective shield of family and home, relationships between children
and parents and the community, in which one lives, can become mere travesties.

Like *Sula*, *Beloved* too focuses on the importance of the bond between mother and
child and how a healthy nurturing is a crucial factor in the development of the
mother’s and infant’s psychological well-being and healthy self. An understanding
of the ideas put forward by various psychoanalysts clearly highlight the fact that the pre-Oedipal and Oedipal stages are vital stages in the development of an individual’s psyche and how emotional conflicts in this stage can hamper the ‘self’ of the mother as well as that of the child. Object-relations theorists clearly point out, that society too has an important role in ensuring that parents are free from socio-economic deprivations, so as to provide a strong grounding for the healthy, emotional growth of their child. Celie in Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple*, demonstrates how identity-formation is an ongoing process and even if an individual has not succeeded in completing the various developmental stages in one’s life, a healthy intervention at any point of time, by one’s own awareness or with the help of another, can undo/rectify the damages done at any stage in life. Psychoanalysis or the understanding of the workings of one’s unconscious self, can help one in deciphering many of our own internal conflicts and thus help in progressing towards a more rationalized behaviour. Many a time, our external behavior patterns are the consequence of repressed or denied feelings and emotions - an understanding and consciousness of which, can help one in being at peace and harmony with oneself and others around. In the next chapter, the researcher, with an insight and awareness gained from the unconscious workings of one’s psyche, tries to examine, through the various characters, how a woman can progress towards redefining her ‘self’.