Beloved: How Social Instability May Cause Mental Trauma

Beloved is a masterpiece written by the American writer Toni Morrison. This book was published on September 13, 1987. It won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1988. The book is set after end of slavery and it is based on slavery, racism and the love of mother.

Beloved is the story of Sethe, a black woman around her 30s, who was once a slave. She lives in 124 bluestone road with her youngest daughter Denver. The book describes her struggles as a slave and a mother. The story is not written in chronological order; it contains frequent flashbacks of the characters.

The book opens describing the haunted house that everyone avoids. The paranormal activity drives two sons of Sethe away. As the story unfolds it is said that the ghost is actually Sethe's older daughter. In the beginning of the story, Paul D. one of sweet homes men returns to 124. He is offered to stay with Sethe for the night. As he tries to make Sethe forget about her terrible past, the ghost awakens. Paul D. is however able to exorcise it with his strong will.

Eighteen year ago Sethe, Paul D., Halle and few other men were slaves in Sweet home. When the owner, mr. Garner, of Sweet home died, it was handed over to his brother in law, who treated the slaves inhumanly. The slaves plan to run for freedom but instead gets caught and tortured. White men forcefully nurse Sethe. When she complains about this to mrs. Garner, she is brutally whipped even though she was pregnant. This leaves a scar on her back which she refers as "tree on the back". Injured and pregnant Sethe leaves the farm desperate to see her children again. On her journey, she meets a white lady named Amy Denver. Amy looks after Sethe nurturing her back to health and helps her deliver. With the help of few other people Sethe successfully escapes to Ohio where her mother in law and children were waiting. Unfortunately though her freedom did not last very long, the white men tracked her. To save her children from physical, mental and sexual harassments, Sethe commits an unbelievable act of motherly love. She tries to murder her own children, two sons and two daughters but only her older daughter dies. The white man witnesses this and he decides not to take Sethe and her little ones. On the headstone of her daughter's grave, she wrote a single word; "BELOVED".

In present, Paul D. is trying to create a normal family with Sethe and Denver. One day when they return from a carnival, a mysterious young lady is sleeping on their porch. They bring her in and ask for her name, she then calls herself "Beloved". Denver eagerly attends her needs and nurses her back to health. Paul D. on the other hand thought there was "something funny" about Beloved. As the story progresses, the writer reviles that beloved is the reincarnation of Sethe's older daughter. Sethe tried to make up for killing Beloved while Beloved made her pay for it. Slowly Beloved dogs Sethe due to which Sethe loses her mental stability. In the end of the novel Beloved is dragged down with the help of the neighbors, and they forget Beloved as a bad dream.

The touch of horror has made the novel even more intriguing and has managed to keep the readers at the edge of their seat throughout the book. This book is written in third person pov omniscient enabling the readers to understand the personal thoughts of the characters. Use of anaphora and alliteration has made the text more serious and dramatic.

This book has shown the mental trauma caused due to social instability. For me Sethe’s character was the most interesting part of the story. Her bravery and motherly instinct really moved me. I absolutely loved this book.