

ISSN 2348 - 7674

Research Innovator

International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

Vol II Issue V : October - 2015

Editor-In-Chief
Prof. K.N. Shelke

www.research-chronicler.com

A detailed still-life composition featuring a quill pen as the central element. The quill is positioned diagonally, with its tip resting on a scroll of aged parchment. The scroll is secured with a red wax seal and a red ribbon. In the background, a lit candle in a brass holder provides a warm, ambient light. In the foreground, a glass inkwell with a quill inside sits on a wooden surface, alongside a red wax seal and a small wooden object. The overall scene evokes a sense of traditional scholarship and research.

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ISSN 2395 – 4744 (Print); 2348 – 7674 (Online)

**A Peer-Reviewed Refereed and Indexed
Multidisciplinary International Research Journal**

Volume II Issue V: October – 2015

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Treatment of Slavery in Toni Morrison's Novel *Beloved***Dr. G. Vasuki***Research Advisor & Asst. Professor, Dept. of English, AVVM Sri Pushpam College (Autonomous) Poondi, Thanjavur, (T.N.) India***R. Velmurugan***Research Scholar & Assistant Professor, Aries College of Arts and Science, Vadalur, (T.N.) India***Abstract**

History of Afro-American black literature showed true stories of slaves. Slavery is the system by which people are owned by the other people as slaves. African those who are in America have survived 400 years of slavery. Most of the Afro-American slaves in America escapes to Ohio a free state or countries. In "Beloved" Morrison shows physical and psychological effects of slavery on Afro-American women. She takes the real life events and horrors, tortures of the slavery. This novel is based on the real life story of the slave MARGARET GARNER. Morrison thought about the horrible issues related to the slavery and need to avoid the traditional slaves. So she wanted to emphasize the painful and forgotten aspects of slavery. Morrison focuses on the brutal treatment of slavery and it recognize existing conditions of slavery in America.

Key Words: Ohio, slavery, beloved, horrible**Introduction:**

During 20th century, Toni Morrison an Afro-American novelist, who wrote mainly about the evils of slavery and published by white abolitionist to impose whites about discrimination. The novel *Beloved* deals with the ailment of slavery.

The works of Toni Morrison astutely describe aspects of the black lives. The basic idea embedded in the narrative of Toni Morrison's fiction is delineation of psychological and treatment of slavery. Her major themes include violence, racialism, sexism, capitalism and the victimization and subjugation of black female slaves.

The central theme of the novel deals with the collective class struggle against capitalism. This paper is a modest attempt to explore the haunting legacy of slavery through Sethe, our protagonist.

Toni Morrison stands as a powerful figure on international literary scene. Her place in

American letters leaves her standing next to such eminent writers as Thoreau, Sherwood Anderson, Sinclair Lewis, and William Faulkner. She ranks worldwide with great masters - Dostoevsky and Gabriel Garcia Marquez. She has, indeed become the icon of African-American, of human struggle against various kinds of oppression and above all, of the global longing for liberation. As a Black Cultural Nationalist, she "validates black culture, and reaffirms its adaptive survival power, its creativity amidst oppression, life affirming qualities, as well as its ancient wisdom humanity and its capacity for survival."¹

Toni Morrison's Fifth novel *Beloved* is an epoch making work recounting the painful history of black slaves. Winning her Pulitzer Prize, this novel focuses on the issue of slavery by the historical fact that Slave mothers sometimes killed their children to prevent them from leading a shameful life of slavery and suffering. Morrison's novel is the

story of a black female slave Sethe who suffers racialism, violence, and rape. This novel is based on a story of Margaret Garner and the account of her story in *The Black Book*. Morrison has used this story of Garner as the base material for *Beloved*. Like Garner, Sethe also kills her daughter and attempts to destroy her other children to prevent them from being recaptured as fugitives.

Henderson said that Morrison tried to show what happened to African Americans in the past and tries to show what has been forgotten or is being silenced:

Yet, in many respects, these writers were limited in their efforts to fully depict the physical and psychological suffering of African American people...Toni Morrison seeks to signify on those silences imposed by publishers and editors of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In particular, Williams and Morrison extend the efforts of their predecessors by developing creative responses to those calls centered on the wounds of the African American body.²

Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* shows the working condition in an institutionalized slave system. In *Beloved* the slaves working on Sweet Home experience violence, brutality, and are treated like animals. In the novel, the main protagonist Sethe is severely affected by the conditions of slavery. Sethe gets tortured, raped and mistreated. As a result, Sethe attempts to run away from Sweet Home and later she is driven to kill her two-year-old baby.

In *Beloved*, Morrison sheds light the painful past of African Americans and reveals the buried experiences for a better understanding of African American history. *Beloved* is a real life story, an event from African American

history where special importance has been given to the horrors and tortures of slavery has been given in order to remind the reader about the past.

Kubitschek notes that:

Morrison's critically acclaimed novel *Beloved* probes the most painful part of the African American heritage, slavery, by way of what she has called "rememory" – deliberately reconstructing what has been forgotten.³

Morrison tries to represent in her own perspectives of individuals in attention of slavery.

Beloved represents a working out of subjectivity through the representation of history, a history so brutal and slavery treatment that it is unrepresentable, a depiction of community, which is often torn apart by the circumstances of slavery, and a construction of identity.⁴

Holden-Kirwan's article stated that Toni Morrison discussed the desire of the American nation to repress the memory of slavery. According to Morrison, the enslavement of Africans and African Americans in the United States is something that the characters in *Beloved* don't want to remember. In the article Morrison notes that, "I [Morrison] don't want to remember, black people don't want to remember, white people don't want to remember"⁵. Because of this unwillingness to remember, Morrison's novels proclaims to its reader to remember the conditions of slavery in a nation preferring to forget that a crime like slavery was ever committed.

This novel analysed the life of nine slaves were work on Sweet Home: Sethe, Paul D, Baby Suggs and her grown son Halle, and other five slaves. Although all the slaves on Sweet Home are affected by slavery. Sethe

suffered the most pain. Due to schoolteacher's nephews, Sethe was treated in such a cruel way.

Sethe's story is based on the real life story of the slave *Margaret Garner*. On Jan. 28, 1856, Garner killed her two-year-old daughter rather than have her sent back to slavery due to the fugitive slave law. Garner was later found guilty and sent back to the plantation she fled in Mississippi. Since the event is a real life event, it provides good to her novel.

Paul D is a former slave in sweet home, he met seethe after 18 years and they tried to bury their memories of enslavement and also talk about their commonly shared past on sweet home.

The owners of Sweet Home are Mr. and Mrs. Garner. In general the Garners represent a milder form of white supremacy. The Garners treated their slaves with respect. They asked their slaves for their ideas and allowed them to use rifles for hunting. The slaves on Sweet Home did not have legal or social rights, but the Garners allow them many privileges, "Everything rested on Garner being alive. Without his life each of theirs fell to pieces"⁶. Sweet Home was a good place for the slaves when the plantation was run by Mr. and Mrs. Garner. However after Mr. Garner's death, Mrs. Garner invites the schoolteacher and his two nephews to live with her and manage the farm.

Schoolteacher is an educated person but he is very cruel. Schoolteacher uses all the means of conventional slavery on the slaves of the plantation. He introduces whipping, torture, humiliation and he dehumanizes slaves. In *Beloved* schoolteacher is a representative of white supremacy. Changes made by schoolteacher's in sweet home specially rejecting slaves ate and the way they took rest. He complained they ate too much, rested too

much, talked too much, which was certainly true compared to him, because schoolteacher ate little, spoke less and rested not at all. Schoolteacher's attitude on the slaves is going to have incalculable effects on Sethe as the story in the novel unfolds. His violence in Sweet Home leads to rebellion, madness, and to death of slaves.

In *Beloved*, Schoolteacher is clearly the primary representative and agent of the system of white-supremacist, capitalist patriarchy in the era of slavery. His interpellations of Sethe, Paul D, Sixo, and Halle lead to rebellion, madness, and death.⁷

As the result of schoolteacher's cruel attitude, the slaves on Sweet Home decide to run away. Sethe is pregnant and she had sent her two-year-old daughter and her two older sons ahead with some of the other slaves, when her husband Halle does not arrive to meet them at the place where they decided to meet. Sethe decides to stay behind to look for Halle, but she was caught by schoolteacher's nephews who held her down and raped her and sucked milk from her breasts.

This impact of slavery is so tortuous that Sethe chops off *Beloved's* neck with the handsaw only to prevent her daughter from a living hell. The anguish of slaves is endless. In *Beloved*, Morrison probes deeper into the psychological effects of missing mother-infant bond and unearths the psychological damage of slavery to the mother-child relationship.

The most harrowing impact of slavery is delineated in the novel when Sethe, a black mother is denied the right to suckle her children. She is rather treated only as a machine for work, breeding more blacks and suckling the white women's children. She has no right even upon her milk and breasts. Thus, Sethe is shocked when the nephews of the

school master brutally abuse her, suck milk from her breasts and whip her back mercilessly. Thus, another issue that is raised here is of the basic right of a woman to offer her breast and milk to her children, which is cruelly denied by the crushing bulldozer of slavery.

Later schoolteacher discovers that Sethe told Mrs. Garner about this incident. He orders his nephews to whip Sethe. The whipping of Sethe opens the skin of her back. "Schoolteacher's nephew represents a dismissal by whites of the dehumanizing qualities of slavery"⁹. When Sethe is raped, schoolteacher observed how her body is exploited. His misuse of slaves will lead to the tragedy of Sethe and her family. Suero Elliott notes that the abuse and the cruel treatment of Sethe's body are definitely used not only to show the cruelty of schoolteacher, but also his pervasive inclinations:

For Sethe, the fetishization of her body by the white schoolteacher and his nephews causes psychic fragmentation that continues to thwart the development of her subjectivity after she leaves slavery. Sethe's personhood, as it has been allowed to exist under slavery, is reduced further to animality.⁸

The scars on Sethe's back are so many that they resemble the trunk of a tree with its branches. Sethe bear scars on her back because she was whipped due to her try of escape. Amy Denver, a white girl that helped Sethe when she was running away from Sweet Home, calls the tree a chokecherry tree. The tree image indicates that she has been wiped so much that the scar looks like a tree with its crowded branches. However when Sethe talks with Paul D, she mentions the scars on her back, but she does not talk about the pain she had to endure." But that's what she said it looked like. A chokecherry tree. Trunk,

branches, and even leaves. Tiny little chokecherry leaves".⁹

Sethe's milk has become a symbol of love and devotion she has for her children. Then, sacrificing one of her children signifies a tragic twist in her disposition, so much so that she loses her ties with her natural self and becomes emptied of her vitality, like the tree shape on her back she will be drained off her life-force. The following description of Sethe show that because of her mistreatment Sethe has physically and spiritually come on the brink of exhaustion. Sethe's vitality as a result of rape and wiping has gradually disappeared:

The schoolteacher arrived to put things in order. But what he did broke three more Sweet Home men and punched the glittering iron out of Sethe's eyes, leaving two open wells that did not reflect firelight.¹⁰

After Sethe is mistreated, she runs away from Sweet Home. On the way she gives birth to her daughter Denver. Sethe reached her mother in law's home with her newborn infant and is relived to be reunited with her other three children. After a short period, Schoolteacher, one of his nephews, the sheriff, and a slave catcher arrive to bring Sethe and her children back to Sweet Home.

When schoolteacher arrives to take Sethe back, Sethe takes her children quickly into a shed and attempts to murder them, rather than allowing them to live their lives in slavery like her. Both her mother in law and Stamp Paid stood in the yard behind the house, frozen in terror. She killed her two-year -old daughter. She would have cut her daughter's throat, and also attempted to kill Denver, if Stamp Paid had not caught the baby as Sethe swung her against the wall. The two boys were also severely beaten on their heads with a shovel. The last scene of this horrible incident is

depicted as follows: “Two were lying open-eyed in saw dust; a third pumped blood down the dress of the main one.

Beloved provides an insight into the structure and working of the African-American culture that denies a woman her basic human and political rights. In committing her brutal act of killing her daughter Beloved, Sethe believed she was sparing the child from the unspeakable fate to which most female slaves were heiress. The slave women were not recognized as mothers having bonds with their children but considered only breeders and workers. Their slave owners had no scruples about selling children away from their mothers. The infant children could be sold like calves and cows.

The act of killing her own child is at first not easy to understand and to be justified; however, the circumstances in which Sethe had to live and the brutality that she had endured as a slave on Sweet Home have driven her to commit infanticide which is perhaps one of the worst things a mother can do to her child. However, Sethe’s fear of slavery and its effect was so terrible that she did not want her children to experience the same difficulties. Fuston-White stated that it was not Sethe that killed her child, but it was the effect of slavery that caused Sethe to commit the crime: “It was not madness, but the reality of slavery, that drove Sethe to kill her child, fully aware of the act and its brutality, as well as its compassion”.

After this horrible event, Howard and Buglar were nursed back to health by their grandmother. Sethe was sent to jail to await her trial for the murder. Since Denver was still a suckling infant, she went to jail with her mother. The Bodwins, a family in the novel who support the abolition of slavery, used their influence they had in Cincinnati to ensure Sethe’s imprisonment, rather than the

death sentence and they were successful.

After her imprisonment, Sethe and Denver return to Baby Suggs’ home, on 124 Bluestone Road. Life after Sethe’s imprisonment is also difficult for her. Because she has to confront social isolation, her past memories make life harder for her, and she feels guilty. In Sethe’s new environment, because they don’t approve of Sethe’s infanticide. For them Sethe’s act was wrong. Later when Paul D comes to live with them, Sethe mentions “For twelve years, long before Grandma Baby died there had been no visitors of any sort and certainly no friends”.

In 124 Bluestone Road, Sethe finds that the spirit of her killed daughter moves around in the house. However, when Paul D comes to stay with Sethe and Denver, he manages to send the spirit out of the house. After some time, when Sethe, Paul D, and Denver come home they see a girl in front of their house. She looks very young and behaves like a baby. She does not walk like a person of her age, but much younger. Her speech is impaired, and she does not full control over her bodily functions. This young girl seems to represent an infant. She says that her name is Beloved. This girl symbolically represents Sethe’s dead daughter.

Her feelings as a mother are so intense that she even desired to get together with her daughter into the grave, but she mentions that she could not do this, because she had to look after her remaining children Buglar and Howard and also because of her husband Halle. She was separated by her only daughter:

When I put that headstone up I wanted to lay in there with you, put your head on my shoulder and keep you warm, and I would have if Buglar and Howard and Denver didn’t need me, because my

mind was homeless then. I couldn't lay down with you then.¹²

Sethe states also that to live in peace is impossible after killing her daughter. The memories of killing her daughter has ever since haunted her: "No matter how much I wanted to. I couldn't lay down nowhere in peace, back then"¹³.

She says that by killing her daughter she has put her in a safe and secure place. "I stopped him, she said, staring at the place where the fence used to be. I took and put my babies where they'd be safe"¹⁴.

In this novel, the pain and suffering of her killed child and of her own physical mistreatment, Sethe also has bad memories with her mother. "Sethe is haunted by the knowledge that her mother was hanged"²⁷. When Sethe and Denver talk, Denver asks about Sethe's mother, but Sethe does not know much to say to Denver about her mother.

Sethe's husband Halle also got ruined as a result of slavery. In the novel it is implied that Halle went mad after had had seen what happened to his wife Sethe. The helplessness of Halle over the situation of Sethe has had such an effect on him that he lost his mind. Paul D describes Halle's situation as follows when he saw him with butter all over his face:

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I broke him, Sethe. Paul D looked up at her and sighed. You may as well know it all. Last time I saw him he was sitting by the churn. He had butter all over his face¹⁵.

In *Beloved*, Morrison intends to show the reader what happens to individuals in an institutionalized slave system in which African Americans had to live in the past. Narrating the story of Sethe, Morrison focuses on the dehumanizing effect of slavery by emphasizing sufferings of slaves. The novel shows us what happened to Sethe, her family and other slaves working on the plantation. Sethe was mistreated and raped. After she tried to escape from the plantation, she killed her baby and attempted to kill the rest of her children. Her husband went mad and other slaves had unfortunate lives. After killing her baby, Sethe continued to suffer. She felt regretful and pain had to live an isolated life for a long time in the black community. At the end of the novel Sethe became mentally and spiritually exhausted and had no energy left to live a meaningful life. As a conclusion, it is very obvious in the novel that slavery threatens the psychology and spiritual world of individuals and causes horrific and brutal consequences.

Conclusion:

Morrison is one of the best in documenting the practice of slavery. In *beloved* Morrison portrayed the issues of racism, treatment of slavery and victims of sexual crimes which strongly abuses the Afro-American women. And it highlights how an Afro-American woman suffers a lot and they are longing for self-identity.

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