



Devastation Wrought by Slavery in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*

Divya Bansal, Assistant Professor, Hindu Kanya Mahavidyalaya, Jind, Haryana

Abstract

Toni Morrison (1931-2019) was a major figure in contemporary American literature, particularly in the work of women writers. Toni Morrison communicates her concerns about the black female group to women of all colours and races in reaction to the physical and spiritual trauma caused by slavery. J. Hillis Miller's deconstruction approaches will be used in this study to examine the relationship between parental love and female subjectivity under slavery. One of the most powerful novels ever written, *Beloved*, exposes the damage slavery inflicts on its character's even after they are released. Margaret Garner, an abolitionist and former slave, was the inspiration for the film *Beloved*, which tells her tale. Because she did not want her children to be relocated to the plantation where they worked, Garner killed her two-year-old daughter on January 28, 1856, and attempted to kill her other two children as well. As a result of slavery, former slaves lose their self-esteem, and the story is full of examples of this.

Keywords:

Toni Morrison, Black Females, Slavery, Black Literature.

Introduction

A large majority of the black literature produced in the United States during the nineteenth century was composed of slave narratives. Real-life slavery escapes were depicted in these stories. These stories were mostly published by white abolitionists to educate whites about the evils of slavery. Toni Morrison, a 20th century black African American novelist, has written about the history of African-Americans from the beginning of the 19th century to the present in her novels. In terms of diaries with such a goal, Harriet Jacobson and Frederick Turner may be the most notable examples.

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* is one of her best-known historical novels (*Jazz* and *Paradise*). Atrocities of slavery are examined in *Beloved*; jazz takes the examination into 1920s; and *paradise* takes the investigation into the 1970s. In this way, Morrison's writings have had a lasting impact on black literature.

Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* centers on a family of African-Americans in the mid-1800s. Prior to the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, this text covers slavery, the status of slave owners, and their ability to recapture escaped slaves. People's innate goodness is recognised in the midst of slavery's incomprehensible brutality. One of the ways in which slaves are treated as property and animals in *Beloved* is through the institution of slavery.

When the novel begins, it has been twelve years since the end of the American Civil War. All of Sweet Home is run by nine slaves, including Sethe and Paul D, as well as Baby Suggs and her grown son Halle. Even while slavery has an effect on everyone of Sweet Home's enslaved population, Sethe is the most affected. Her two-year-old daughter was murdered as a retribution for the horrible treatment she received at the hands of the teacher's nephews who raped and tormented Sethe.

Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* was published in 1987. Inspired on an African-American slave who escaped slavery in Kentucky in 1856 by travelling to Ohio, this novel takes place during post-Civil War America (1861–65). (a free state). Morrison came upon the story "A Visit to the Slave Mother Who Killed Her Child" from an 1856 newspaper article published in the *American Advocate* while researching for *The Black Book*, a 1974 anthology of black history and culture.

As a former slave, Sethe lives in Cincinnati with her 18-year-old daughter, Denver. *Beloved* gets its start in 1873 with the publication of *Beloved: A Novel*. The mother-in-law of Sethe's husband, Baby Suggs, lived with the family for eight years before she died. Two of Sethe's boys, Howard and Buglar, escaped moments before Baby Suggs died. Because of an abusive spirit, Sethe alleges they had to leave their home at 124 Bluestone Road. Introduction: "124 was spiteful," says the ghost's ghost. It's as venomous as a baby's.

Toni Morrison's work integrates modernist and postmodern aspects into her work (Torres 180). Instead of relying on a traditional narrative structure, she uses a style known as "stream-of-consciousness" to tell her tale. Multi-point of view narratives provide the reader with more information on events that have already transpired in the past. With *Beloved*, BLM tells a story of African-American history and memory that is portrayed in the movie. African-American trauma and police brutality are not new issues according to BLM's narrative strategy. They are part of a long history that African-Americans have faced throughout history, according to BLM's narrative plan. To what extent may the Black Lives Matter movement and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* have an impact on the audience and assist bring about societal change in respect to the underlying issues of African-Americans? This article will attempt to answer that question.

Sethe, the protagonist of the story, was sold to the Garners at the age of thirteen and sent to Sweet Home. After being mistreated by the Schoolteacher, Sethe made an attempt to flee. Denver was born during Sethe's trip to Cincinnati to visit her mother-in-law, Baby Suggs. When an African-American helped Sethe get into Baby Suggs at 124 Bluestone Road, she was free for 28 days. On the final day, though, the Schoolteacher turned up and tried to take her and her children away from her and her husband. She killed her newborn daughter with a handsaw because she didn't want to condemn her to a life of servitude. Once the ghost of the girl had taken up home in the house, it never departed. When Paul D entered the house, the ghost was chased away for a short time, but after Paul D left, the spirit reincarnated as a little girl and emerged in the yard again. When she called herself "Sethe's Beloved," she soaked up all of his affections and care. Denver, the daughter of Sethe, was able to exorcise *Beloved* with the help of the community.

Torture and agony are inflicted on slaves. Some people use physical methods to cope with discomfort, while others use mental ones. In "*Beloved*," slavery's effects on its ex-slaves are examined, even after they have escaped and achieved their freedom. They have made it a way of life to carry with them the memory of their efforts for freedom and equality.

That Morrison is one of the writers who have tried to show what has been ignored or concealed about African American history is a point made by Henderson.

These authors failed miserably to convey the physical and emotional suffering of African Americans in their work.

The American people... During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, publishing houses and editors tried to impose silences, which Toni Morrison aspires to depict in her work today. By reacting creatively to those calls that centre with African American body scarring, Williams and Morrison in especially continue their predecessors' work. Both Williams and Morrison are included in this group.

Morrison reinterprets African American history throughout *Beloved* in order to instill in the reader a sense of awe:

Beloved, Morrison's critically acclaimed novel about slavery, addresses enslavement through this "remembrance" of the past.

Morrison believes that the media has distorted and idealised African American history. Spargo draws on some of Morrison's writings on African-American history, including the following passages:

In a country where the past has been erased and America is the future, where newcomers can come and start again, we can take pride in a nation like that. The past is either non-existent or glorified. This society does not promote facing one's personal past, not even in the sense of accepting it.

The teacher, despite being well-educated, is a cruel individual. The schoolteacher of the plantation slaves uses all of the ways of conventional slavery on them. There is a lot of dehumanisation, whippings, torture, and humiliation in this equation. In *Beloved*, a white supremacist teacher makes an appearance. In response to the schoolteacher's complaints about how the slaves ate and rested: "He complained they ate and rested excessively and talked, which was certainly true when compared to him, because schoolteacher ate little, spoke less, and rested absolutely no." 7. Slavery on Sweet Home was changed as a result. The schoolteacher's attitude toward slaves will profoundly alter Sethe's life. Slave rebellions, madness, and even fatalities are all too common as a result of Sweet Home's brutal actions.

It was the character Schoolteacher, who represents white supremacy and capitalist patriarchy in *Beloved* during slavery's time, who served as a symbol and an agent of this system. Rebellion and lunacy are sparked by his interrogations of Sethe, Paul D. Sixo (and Halle)

At 124, Bluestone Road, Sethe and Denver live in a lonely house haunted by the ghost of her deceased daughter, who was murdered eighteen years ago. She was murdered by Sethe. When it comes to Sethe, he appears to be completely insane. I believe that a mother's emotional pain after injuring her children may be a type of mental torture. Being sentenced to death adds an extra layer of bitterness to an offence of this magnitude. Doreen Fowler quotes Barbara Schapiro as suggesting that Sethe and Denver are experiencing "psychic death, the denial of one's being as a human being."

Having a child while enslaved was a traumatic experience for many slave moms. Carrying a child while doing physically strenuous chores and being mistreated practically every day was a stressful and dreadful experience. These conditions led to a large number of birth abnormalities as a result of the lack of prenatal treatment. At best, this made the lives of new mothers 10 times more miserable. Slave owners showed even less care for their employees by forcing them to return to work just days after giving birth, thus compounding the hardship. There were therefore even larger difficulties for their mother's to satisfy their crippled children's needs and shield them from an institution that objectified and devalued them, despite their already burdened work duties and parenting role being subordinated to the economic interests of slaveholders. As a result, this,

Sethe's biggest concern in the story is the milk that was stolen. Because she was pregnant at the time of her whipping, Sethe had milk in her breasts. Instead of talking about the pain she was feeling, she focused on the milk that had been taken away from her:

What was the cowhide they used to cover you with?

My breast milk was also stolen.

Is it possible that you were pregnant at the time of the beating?

My milk, too, was taken! 12

She utters these words to express her deep sorrow:

My milk will only be consumed by my own children from now on. There have only been a handful of times I've had to hand it over, and each time they grabbed it from my grasp. milk from my daughter, 13, when she was a baby.

Drinking Sethe's milk is a frequent topic of conversation. How removing Sethe's milk breaks the mother-daughter bond is demonstrated in this video. Besides harming Sethe's health, enslavement also violates the feelings of her children.

The theft of Sethe's milk, which is referred to as both her property and the lives of her children throughout the story, demonstrates the ultimate depravity of slavery. By severing their ties to their mothers and children, slavery is able to eviscerate its victims.

Suggs, Sethe's daughter, has a unique viewpoint on parenthood because she was raised by her mother. Unlike Sethe, who refuses to let go of her dead kid, Sethe is aware and accepts that she will never see her children again. Still, she's an asset to the plot because of her standing in the community. As a mother figure to Sethe, Baby Suggs provides the nurturing and love she needs from her own mother. Suggs is a mother to all of her children, regardless of their father, unlike Sethe's mother. Denver appears to receive some of Baby Suggs' wisdom before she dies. "A progressive step beyond the horrific indignities her mother, grandmother, and other black moms had to suffer makes Denver a beacon of hope. Throughout the book, it becomes clear that Denver's body will not be polluted by the phallus of white or black society."

Even though slavery affected the mother-child tie, it was unable to dissolve it because of their mutual love. There are many ways mothers show their love for their children in *Beloved*, whether it's breaking the rules to protect them or severing ties with their own sentiments. Due to the cruel slavery system, Sethe's mother, for example, is forced to give up all of her children save for Sethe; Baby Suggs is separated from all of her children; and Sethe's mother is forced to give up all of her children except for Sethe. Emotional estrangement, immorality, and escaping from her are all ways that Sethe and her children cope with the agony of their mother's death. Morrison's *Beloved* depicts a parental love that enslavement could not destroy, no matter what.

The Importance of Community Solidarity

As *Beloved* shows, it is impossible to make it in life without the help of others. Sethe initially begins to acquire a sense of self during her 28 days of independence as a member of the Cincinnati community. When Denver leaves 124 and enters the real world, she realises who she is and grows up. By working together, Paul D and his fellow inmates in Georgia were able to evade capture. Paul D recalls that "if one lost, all lost" because they are interconnected. Keeping Sethe from accidentally killing Mr. Bodwin also prevents her from committing another sin and tainting her and her family's reputations, which is a win-win for everyone. There is a strong connection between the events of 124 and the city's black population. The community failed to warn Sethe's daughter about an oncoming educator, and as a result, she perished. The snub appears to be a betrayal to Baby Suggs. As a way of atoning for their past wrongdoings, the black community exorcises *Beloved* on page 124 of the novel. *Beloved*'s departure from the neighbourhood frees Sethe and the community from the past.

The Powers and Limits of Language

By whipping Sixo, the schoolteacher demonstrates that "definitions" belong to those who define them rather than those who are defined. Many of the white classifications are bogus, according to the slaves. Paul D questions Mr. Garner's claim that he permitted his slaves to live as "genuine men." Paul D, on the other hand, is horrified to discover that the name "Sweet Home" is deceptive. Others in the narrative, despite Sixo's eventual determination to cease speaking English, nonetheless do so in their own unique ways. In the case of Stamp Paid, "Baby Suggs" is their moniker. People who have always been defined by others are now trying to define themselves, according to Morrison's interpretation of *Beloved*. The characters' language is twisted and transcended while they are in servitude. Because of their advanced linguistic skills, the slaves can make themselves illegible to the white slave masters who are keeping an eye out for them. With the help of "garbling... [and] misleading the words," Paul D and the Georgia detainees sing a duet about their hopes and recollections. A grammatical blunder is implied by the book's title as the cause of the protagonist's demise. During her daughter's funeral, Sethe misunderstood the minister's reference to the "Dearly Beloved" as a reference to the deceased, not the living. It is because of this flexibility of words to attach and remove

themselves from many alternative meanings that metaphors, similes, metonymies, irony, and wordplay are born. This "slippery," shifting quality of language is credited to all of literature.

The Female Subjectivity of Sethe

Black female heroines in this story endure oppression not just as women, but also as members of a marginalised group. The Garners and the Schoolteacher were Sethe's masters in this novel. They may have used different approaches to managing the slaves, but their underlying motives were the same. To thank Halle for helping her mother get her freedom, Mrs. Garner gave Sethe jewellery as a wedding gift, and the Garner family was more tolerant of its slaves. The Schoolteacher's racial prejudices are only tempered when it comes to the Garner family. Since slaves aren't seen as people in this story, Sethe can't marry Halle because she's not regarded a human being by the hypocritical benevolence theory. After Mr. Garner's death, Schoolteacher took over, and the Sweet Home's status as a female slave got worse. Halle's sanity was put in peril during the rape scenario with the Schoolteacher's nephews.

Even though Sethe is humiliated by the physical torture, the added mental pain breaks her heart. She had no legal right to wed and was habitually treated like an animal by the Schoolteacher, which made her question her own humanity. It wasn't until after she was raped that she realised how much she hated having her body milk stolen. When Sethe realised she would never be able to free herself from the clutches of her captors, she became dejected. A handsaw was used instead of fleeing the slave catchers to kill her infant daughter. Her decision may have been the finest one she could have made at the moment to keep her children safe from slavery.

Seeing a mother's wish to kill her own child is horrible, but in this case, it is the slavery system that kills Sethe's newborn girl, not Sethe herself. Even if Sethe did nothing, Schoolteacher would take her and her four children back to the Sweet Home. Abuse, rape, and selling out would then begin again. She made a promise to herself as a child and a mother that she would do everything she could to ensure the safety of her own children. The tension between Sethe's twin mother identities led to her infanticide, as a result of the conflict.

Beloved is exorcised by a group of women in the final chapter of the novel.

"Sethe's hand is empty as she flees from her, and the emptiness is apparent. As she jumps into the crowd and joins them, Beloved is nowhere in sight. Alone. Again. In addition, there's Denver. I need to get away from a large group of individuals that is gathering nearby " (309).

Slaves like Sethe and her children, as well as Paul D, a man strapped to an iron brace, are trying to find their way out of slavery and back into society. As a result, they're on a mission to discover their own, wholly original self. According to Lauretis' definition, "social identification is a process by which a social representation is recognised and accepted as a person's own representation." For the sake of clarity, I'm going to quote Fowler (13). In order to grow as a person socially, it is necessary to build relationships with others, which has always been a challenge for slaves. One example is the city of "Denver."

Conclusion

Slavery was a way of life for Morrison's characters, and the book *Beloved* is an attempt to bring this experience to the reader's perspective. Sethe's story emphasises slavery's dehumanising effect on slaves, as Morrison describes it. This book tells the story of Sethe and her family, as well as the other slaves that live and work on the farm. Sethe was raped and degraded in front of us. After she failed in her escape from the plantation, she killed her newborn and then went on a murdering spree with the rest of her family. Several of her loved ones died as a result of her husband's crazy behaviour. After the death of her kid, Sethe underwent a long period of grief. Having spent so much time alone in the black community, she now feels remorseful and betrayed. At the end of the novel, she was emotionally and psychologically exhausted, having no more energy to pursue a meaningful life. People's mental health and spiritual well-being suffer as a result of slavery, and the story amply illustrates this.

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