

## PATHOS OF A SLAVE MOTHER IN TONI MORRISON'S *BELOVED*

*K. P. Bakhya Seema, Ph.D Scholar (Part-Time) in English, Department of English and Research Centre, Seethalakshmi Achi College for Women*

*Dr. R. C. Shiela Royappa, Research Supervisor & Associate Professor of English, Department of English and Research Centre, Seethalakshmi Achi College for Women*

**Abstract:** *Mother is an enigmatic figure in the novels of Toni Morrison. The maternal love of a mother is immortal in any country devoid of any culture. The study of this paper is to enlarge the vision of a Slave mother in Toni Morrison's "Beloved". It also aims to bring forth the struggle of slave mother, Sethe, who is a departed soul, separated from her child due to slavery. The effects of slavery, culture, custom on a slave mother and her daughter expose innumerable pathos. It has deep inter connection with destruction of humankind. The Annals of "Beloved" encompass the soul that is inseparable from the mother, though departed and deprived by its own mother. The paper hopes to insist the values and importance of mother during slavery period. The survival nature of mother even after many slavery bound customs is brought to focus in the paper.*

**Key words:** *Pathos, slavery, physical abuse, emotional, seclusion, infanticide and matriarch mammals.*

### Introduction

Toni Morrison sees her writing as an effective tool for liberation of mothers from various exploitations of slavery. In Free Speech Leadership programme, she states that "a writer's life and work are not the gift to mankind, they are its necessity". By these words she sees her own marginalization from the mainstream literature that is dominated by white idealism. By writing the novel "Beloved", Toni Morrison wants to reflect the Pathos of Mothers during Slavery. The exploitation of rights of mothers and slaves, injustice done to mothers, slaves, and confined freedom of Afro-Americans by distorting the preconceived image of Blacks as oriented by whites are also intimated by Toni Morrison.

### Exploration of Slavery in *Beloved*

"Arrest of Fugitive slave" with the subheading, "A slave mother murders her child rather than see it returned to slavery" in Cincinnati Gazette, On January 29, 1856, becomes the crux of the novel "Beloved". The Novel is set in 1853 at 124, Bluestone Road, in Cincinnati, Ohio, where Sethe, the slave mother (Margaret Garner in the News) and Denver are living along with the haunting appearance of ghost of Beloved, the two year daughter of Sethe. Sethe kills Beloved to save her from slavery. When Paul D appears, the novel journeys back to 1850, focussing on Sethe, Halley, baby Sugg and others are the captive slave of the sweet home plantation.

Journey from their exploitation in plantation to their escape and after life is captured in the captured in the Novel. Even after the escape from the plantation Paul D and Sethe felt that they are still surrounded by clouds of memory of "which dissolved[s] in shifting daylights" Morrison (311). What compelled a mother to kill a daughter of her own? Sethe born in slavery and lived in slavery has first-hand experience with slavery and its exploitative nature. Morrison describes it as "Chokecherry tree" (Morrison 18). That is a metaphor for "revolting clump of scars" (Morrison 25) on Sethe's back.

Sethe was sexually molested by the school teacher's nephews as represented by the words "took my milk" (Morrison 119). The reminiscence of past experience haunts slave Sethe's present and threatens the

future. How Sethe as a mother make her child Beloved fall in the same furnace in which she has been burnt. The anti-slavery activist Lucy Stone claims to confirm this argument in the court on the trial day that if Margaret (Sethe) wants her child to be free from “coming woe” then who says that “she has no right to do so?” Sethe and other slaves are marginalized from euro-centric sphere and thus are devoid of each and every Human right as they are treated as animals not humans. In context of this debate, concerning freedom of slaves Helen Moglen says that “material project of slavery... is commodification of black body and body's sexualisation”. School teacher's claim in the Novel that he has all rights on his slaves shows black slaves as his property. It goes in tune with the fugitive slave law that has been practised in 1790s in Cincinnati. Slave as Paul D are sold to Garner in the “dollar value of his weight, his strength, his heart, his brain, his Penis, his future” (Morrison267). A critic Rafael Peroz-Terres says “Commodity and exchange serve as the only form of interaction between blacks and whites in *Beloved*. Commercial terms like Marketing, trading, property define objectification aspects of slavery which treats slaves as objects.

### **Freedom**

Freedom even though a common word has different meaning for different people in different Eras. In 21<sup>st</sup> Century, freedom is to talk freely, walk freely and do anything one desires to without harming anyone's dignity and stature. But freedom to slaves of Cincinnati in post-Civil War Era was to claim their basic human rights which were exploited. Freedom in post-Civil War Era counts sacrifice. It is not a birth right of all citizens rather slaves have to make abundant sacrifices to claim freedom from American forefathers. Sethe flies from plantation to own freedom as she escapes, however after one month of her escape; the fugitive slave law falls upon her in manifestation of the school teacher. She, instead of putting her daughter in the hell of slavery, kills her. The depiction of clearing, a place where Baby Suggs preaches as a preacher actually provides an outlet for emotions of these slaves which are suppressed by their masters. She says, “Let the children come... Let your mothers hear you laugh.... Let the grown men come... Let your wives and children see you dance... finally she called women to her. Cry she told them. For living and dead, Just Cry” (Morrison103). Thus, the minor beads of slavery are ornamented together in the novel.

### **Infanticide**

The novel is narrated from the feminine perspective. Infanticide as an act against human rights according to legislature plays a vital role in defining exploitation. Slavery and racism are seen as a stimulator of this exploitative act. Sethe's act of butchering her infant is an act to free the infant from the shackles of slavery. The slave children born into the slavery become property of their parents' masters. Sethe does not want her daughter to face the evils of slavery, sexual exploitation which she herself faced. Women like Sethe and Linda has to face these stages of molestation and infanticides that actually marks the slave age. These infanticides are benchmark of infants' freedom from future threats. The novel brings in the conflict between motherhood and slavery. Slavery Acts as an obstacle in the role of a mother because it does not leave for female slaves to perform the duties as a mother.

### **Conclusion**

Each and every slave character, be it Paul D, Sethe or Baby Suggs all are haunted by their by their past which comes as a ghost in the novel. This haunting past spoils their present and threatens their future. This is what compelled Toni Morrison to create the Nobel prize Novel, “*Beloved*”, in which she shows that the issues of slavery has not yet resolved for Afro-Americans in US. If it is resolved then in 2016, Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump would not have addressed these issues in their Presidential Speeches.

Toni Morrison is the voice for the voiceless. And Sethe is the mouthpiece of Toni Morrison who wants to talk about the never ending exploitation in her argument that “Even though it is all over- over and done with it is going to be always there for you” (Morrison44). This is why I chose such a title for this paper that this terminology *Pathos* becomes microcosm for the Macrocosmic depiction of haunting past memories of dehumanization and exploitation of Human rights.

**Work Cited**

1. "Black & Poor: Bill Wilson's Theoretical Muddle - ." Black & Poor: Bill Wilson's Theoretical Muddle - . N. p., 15 May 2009. Web 11 Nov 2016.
2. "Cincinnati Gazette" (1856 January 29) Cincinnati History Library and Archives, Cincinnati Museum Centre. Web 11 Nov 2016.
3. Coonradt, Nicole M. "To Be Loved: Amy Denver and Human Need: Bridges to Understanding in Toni Morrison's 'Beloved.'" *College Literature*, vol. 32, no. 4, 2005, pp. 168187. JSTOR. Web. 08 Nov 2016.
4. Katie Reilly. (2016 July 13) "Read Hillary Clinton's Speech on Unity in Divided U.S." *Time*. Web. 14 Nov. 2016.
5. Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*. Vintage Classics, 2004 Print.
6. "Nobel Prize for Literature 1993 - Press Release". Nobelprize.org. Nobel Media AB 2014. Web. 14 Nov 2016. < [http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/literature/laureates/1993/press.html](http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1993/press.html)> 10 Nov 2016.
7. Penn State Press. *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies, Racism and Hegemony* 2004. N.p. Web.
8. Wikipedia contributors. "Devah Pager." *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopaedia*, 1 Oct. 2016. Web. 1 Oct. 2016.
9. Yanuck, Julius. "The Garner Fugitive Slave Case." *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, vol. 40, no. 1, 1953, pp. 4766. JSTOR. Web 10 Nov 2016.