

## Exploitation of Black Women in Toni Morrison's 'Beloved'

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The most dangerous time in African history is the slavery of black people by the whites. The novel 'Beloved' delineates the forgotten period of slavery and the condolence of black slave women. The story of the novel is set before and afterwards slavery that –

“penetrates perhaps more deeply than any historical or psychological study could, the unconscious emotional and psychic consequences of slavery” (Schapiro, 194)

During slavery, black men were forced to menial work and black women to house working. Education was not illegal but forbidden to blacks. Black men were treated as mule and black women were treated as mare and cow. They were kept alive for their breeding and milk giving capabilities. Black women's exploitation as animal by the whites and their reaction against it are shown in 'Beloved'.

The novel reveals the heart touching story of a black female slave, Sethe who murders her own daughter to protect her from the troublesome life of slavery. Sethe suffers a lot of victimization in her life from childhood to womanhood. She is deprived of love of her mother in her childhood that is essential for a growing child. O' Reilly asserts –

“In all of her writings Morrison emphasizes how essential mothering is for the well-being of children, because it is the mother who first loves the child and gives that child a love sense of self. Children who are orphaned, abandoned or denied nurturant mothering are psychologically wounded as adults.” (367).

During slavery, black slave mother were separated from their children. They had no right to look after their children. Black women were

valuable for their breeding capability as well as to fulfill the lust of white masters. Their children were sold like animals to increase wealth of the whites.

The cruelty of slavery is revealed when Sethe's mother shows her daughter the covered scars on her body, a proof of her identity so that her daughter could recognize her. The scars in slave women's body show the heinousness of the whites and the wretched state of black women in white America. It was impossible for slave mother to come out of this situation but consciousness of a woman is demonstrated in Sethe's mother. She shows her daughter "the mark of the white man into the sign of the mother" (Doll, 39) when little Sethe desires to make the same scars on her body, she slaps her daughter. Sethe never understands this before, but when she gets the same scars on her body she realizes the intention of her mother's act. These scars make an indelible impact on the soul of black woman than her body.

A black female slave, Ella is sexually depraved by both a father and his son in a house where she delivers a baby boy. Ella denies to nurse the baby who died after five days. Ella's denial to nurse the rapist's baby demonstrates her anger against her oppressor as well as her opposition to follow the role of a mammy or a sexual object. Ella's act is similar to Sethe's mother who delivers many times but never accepted them because they were the sign of rapist whites. Sethe is the only one whom she kept alive because she is the daughter of a black man, She –

"put her arms around him. The others she did not put her arms around. Never. Never." (62).

Sethe works as a slave at Sweet Home Plantation, where she marries a black slave man Halle, and becomes mother of four children. Sethe forbears humiliation by the school teacher who compares her to an animal and measures her body parts- her height, teeth, feet etc. It manifests the worst position of black women in white America. Sethe supposes danger at plantation and decides to run away to escape from the brutality of whites. For this intention, she is whipped badly by school teacher and milked like a cow by the white boys. During slavery if black women desired of living outside the domination of whites either they were beaten or killed by the whites.

After this incident, Sethe runs away with her children but she is found by the school teacher. She finds no idea for liberty and protection of her children. She takes a very horrendous action of murdering her daughter to show refusal towards bondage. She never wants her daughter suffer like her. It

reveals her reaction against slavery. Sethe thinks better to die rather than living as a slave which is unthinkable to any mother.

Though her act is illegal, Morrison reveals the intrinsic power of a slave woman for freedom, rights against slavery. It is her extreme mother love that forces her to kill her daughter to save her from the curse of slavery. For “The best thing she was, was her children. Whites might dirty her all right, but not her best thing, her beautiful, magical best things- the part of her that was clean”. (296). After her victimization by the school teacher, Sethe entrusts her body to the white carver who in return of sexual pleasure assures to engrave her daughter’s name on the headstone of her grave. It discloses the extremity of the social evils in America, for economic deficiency the sexual oppression of black woman. Margaret avers –

“This act, which is recounted early in the novel, is a keystone for the whole book: in a world of slavery and poverty, where human beings are merchandized, everything has its price and price is tyrannical.” (144)

Sethe is imprisoned for seven years for her act and later, exiled by the community. She lives alone with her daughter Denver who ignores her for infanticide. After some years, the unexpected coming of a strange woman and her attachment with Sethe like a daughter confirms her as the reincarnation of ‘Beloved’. Beloved efforts to strangle Sethe and quickly soothes her injured neck. Her dominant behaviour causes great pain to Sethe. Sethe does everything to make her happy but Beloved denies to forgive Sethe for her past act.

Hence, Denver takes responsibility for her mother and comes within her black community to get help to protect her mother from Beloved. Denver hates her mother for her offence, when she observes that Beloved is trying to wound Sethe, Denver decides to liberate her mother from Beloved. The black community who had outcasted her family now ready to help Sethe. Morrison asserts –

“Nobody could make it alone ... you could be lost forever, if there wasn’t nobody to show you the way.” (159)

The black women of the community oppose exploitation of a woman by a woman. Black women arrive simultaneously outside the house with weapons to protect Sethe with this determination that they will never let it to happen again to Sethe. It reveals – “Black kinship, motherhood, sisterhood, and love.” (Bell, 10). Beloved is frightened to see these women’s power and unity and

she vanishes from the house. Black women's power and unity escape Sethe from being destroyed like before.

The novelist solves out the problem of black women's oppression through collectivity, because solidarity is the best solution to get rid of pain and sufferings. Morrison suggests if community power would have been with Sethe, Sethe would never have done this horrific crime. Women should be given priority on the power and unity of the community so that they can oppose all the problems bravely.

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