

Gender Identity in Toni Morrison's Beloved

C.Lavanya^{1*}

Abstract

This paper aims to explore the search for Gender Identity in Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved*. The novel focuses on the African American woman to achieve and reconstruct their Identities in the community of slavery. The book "Beloved" delves into the topic of slavery and struggles faced by women in society. This novel explains two important identifications of women's existence of slavery and freedom as the main approaches of the ages. The protagonist Sethe's life is entangled with slavery. The novel's main theme is Sethe's efforts to liberate her offspring from slavery. She struggles with the haunting memory of her slavery and the retribution *Beloved*, the ghost of her dead daughter whom she has murdered in order to protect her from the living death of slavery.

Keywords

Gender, Community, *Beloved*, Retribution, Slavery

¹ *Nehru Memorial college, Puthanampatti, Trichy - 621007*

1. Introduction

The present article aims to examine the issue of gender identity faced by women. Toni Morrison's fifth novel, *Beloved* (1987), is often viewed as a pivotal text about gender discrimination. My reading of Toni Morrison for this article, examines the representation of Female sufferings through *Beloved's* oppression of Sethe. In an unjust society, her character struggles to find themselves and their identity.

In 2010 Morrison was made an officer of the French Legion of Honor. Later after 2 years, she was awarded the US Presidential Medal of Freedom. Morrison was very intelligent and has powerful while proving her points in her novels. Morrison first book *Bluest eye* in 1970, It is a novel of initiation concerning a victimized adolescent black girl who is boosted by white standards of beauty and longs to have blue eyes.

In 1973 a second novel *Sula* was published. It examines the dynamics of friendship and the expectations of conformity. The great work *Song of Solomon* in 1977 is told by a male narrator in search of his identity. It brought Morrison to national attention. *Tar baby* (1981) set on a Caribbean island, explores conflicts of race class, and sex. *Tar baby* is a beautiful novel which draws our attention to feminism, racism and classism. Morrison's delicate and powerful character through the setting describes the relation between the black and white, it discloses all the shades of infidelity within black society. She won a Pulitzer Prize award for fiction her work *Beloved* is based on the true story of runaway slave, who at the point of recapture, kills her infant daughter in order to spare her a life of slavery. A film adaptation of the novel was released in 1998. Finally this study makes the dual claim that African American woman's struggle for identity and authority is both represented and represented by Morrison's *Beloved*. Through her continuation and revision of the African-American slave narrative tradition, Morrison reclaims the self, text and history of African-American woman.

2. Gender Identity in Toni Morrison's Beloved

The character Sethe's underline the fact that slave women were constantly experiencing themselves as female, and that black female could be exploited sexually and economically without protection of law of public opinion. Sethe is a major character who interlinks the past with present. Life of free slaves is presented to be haunted by the traumatic experiences of the past.

Sethe works in a sweet home but being a slave woman. She is treated brutally and raped. She escapes with her two children but lost her husband during this escape. Halle turns mad on a witnessing the rape of his wife. Sethe, delivers a daughter on her escape. Amy Denver is a white character and she nurses Sethe and her daughter. Sethe loses her identity. Sethe plans to kill her children but she could take life of her elder daughter because she loved her most and called her as *Beloved*. In this novel, Sethe tried to kill her children from love and not hatred. Ghost of *Beloved* makes life of Sethe miserable. And later Sethe realizes that children are integral part of her. *Beloved* represents the era of civil war that is the time before and later the abolishment, of slavery. In this novel, woman is under the burden of patriarchy and slavery. They are trying to manifest the subjective effects of consciousness by struggling hard to cope with their free self. Issues of family, identity and possession are explored by Morrison in world where slavery is apparent. It describes the struggle in lives of character; and Morrison explains the society's view on the difference between men and women or to put it more simply, sexism. The life history of Sethe was not less crucial and frightfully horrifying. She was a helpless victim of the slavery system.

3. Conclusion

In beloved gender issues play a major role in the definition of self. Women are oppressed on multitudes level due to the reason of gender. Firstly, women are oppressed by the matriarchal institution of the social world. Secondly, being a black woman is a double burden. Thirdly, the brutal institute of slavery robs them from the right of motherhood as well as womanhood. Morrison is a good writer because she openly wrote the black people sufferings and problems in front of the world.

References

- [1] Boudreau, Kristin. Pain and the Unmaking of Self in Toni Morrison's Beloved. *Contemporary Literature*, vol. 36, no. 3, 1995, pp. 447–465.
- [2] Cullinan, Colleen Carpenter. A Maternal Discourse of Redemption: Speech and Suffering in Morrison's Beloved. *Religion & Literature*, vol. 34, no. 2, 2002, pp. 77–104.
- [3] Morrison, Toni, *Beloved*, London: Picador, 1988.
- [4] Toni Morrison Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Toni_Morrison