



**ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER**

**English**

**RACE, SLAVERY AND SEXUAL ABUSE IN THE SELECT NOVELS OF AFRO-AMERICAN WOMEN WRITER - TONI MORRISON**

**KEY WORDS:** Discrimination, Enslavement, Afro - American,, Community, Sexual abuse.

**N. Velvizhi**

Research scholar in English, 13, Kudai Company Street, Muthaialpet, Puducherry - 03

**Dr. G.Ruby Davaseeli**

M.A., M. Phil., Ph.D., Associate Professor of English /Research Guide, Govt. Tagore Arts College, Puducherry.

**ABSTRACT**

Racial protest was the dominant impulse of the black women novelist who wrote during the thirties and the early forties. Toni Morrison, a path-breaking Afro-American creative artist, the voice of downtrodden black women, a woman of many talents, comes from a long line of hard working, industries black people who actively fought racial oppression and inferior social and economic status. Her novels *Beloved*, *The Bluest Eye*, *Tar Baby* voice the problems of racial, slavery and sexual abuse in Afro - American society from different angles.

The present study analyses the selected novels of author Toni Morrison, who rose to eminence by means of their creative output as novelist, the most productive black women writer in the United States of America. Black women writers have reacted differently to the issues related to basic personal relationship, love marriage and man women relationship after their emancipation. Her writings engage a wide variety of readers in compelling themes that turns around community, racial discrepancy, sexual harassment, love, equality, incest etc. She does not take issues and themes from all over the world, but she writes on the crucial issues of her people and has universalized them. Morrison insists to re-write the history, re- assess the culture and erase the stereotypes of racism, sexism and Slavery. The main focuses of her works are universality, re-search, re-reading and re-writes of Afro-American history.

*Beloved* is a beautiful narrative about the survival of the heritage of slavery, on the power of memorize, and the collective memories kept alive through oral tradition. It is also the story of the genesis of a culture and of a people who, living on the edge of life and death, have managed to create that culture and to keep their history alive. Morrison's self conscious interest in the celebration of black women's strength, their values and beliefs, stems from a desire to correct the wrongs that have been historically leveled against black women. She seeks to celebrate the legends of black women like baby suggest and seethe, and weave their dreams into myths that allow us to recover their past.

The character of *Beloved* embodies three generations of slavery and is a symbol of the ghost of the more general historical past of slavery just as she haunts the lives of her mother, Denver, and anyone else who comes in contact with family on Bluestone Road. She forces the characters in the novel, most notably her mother, to first recognize the pain from her past before she can begin to work through it and her presence causes all of the characters to come to terms with themselves before she leaves. Not only does this storytelling offer the possibility of reconciliation with the past or a better understanding of it on a symbolic level with the character *Beloved* serving as a symbol, it serves some important functions for the reader as well. *Beloved*, when viewed symbolically is more than merely a character in "*Beloved*" but holds great importance as a symbol in the novel as well. These stories that are contained within the complex character of *beloved* the novel by Toni Morrison, many of which are mere fragments that cannot be truly pieced together until the end of the novel, relate a vivid, stark and relentless portrait of some of the worst horrors of slavery.

Besides racial discrimination and several illegal foundations there was gender biased intellectual politics. Black women have been scholarly ignored, though they have tried immensely to express their own point of view and outlook regarding life and freedom through literature and scholarly articles. There are some important authors of 20th century like Zora Neal Hurston, Anne Petry, Paule Marshall, Gloria Naylor and Alice Walker who have exhibited great creative intellect but they were not considered up to the mark. Black Feminism was the result of such neglect, the slogan that was popularized was *Black is Beautiful*.

Toni Morrison, a creative activist; stands for the right of her people and specially women. A piece of writing is not just a collection of words, but it talks and reflects the reality of specific province through events and characters. It has universal appeal. That is the reason behind Morrison's creative writing. She reveals that she got the creative inspiration for the novel *The Bluest Eye* from a

classmate, she had in elementary school. And further she wrote a short story entitled *Little Black Girl*. Allen Rancier an editor of Macmillan inspired her to expand her story. So it came in the form of this novel as a voice of Afro-American Black people, to form better characters and to show conditions of Black woman than Pecola Breedlove.

Morrison, in *The Bluest Eye* (1970) has shown inter and intra-racial discrimination. Light- colored people in the Black community thought themselves superior to Black people and akin to White race. And they treated them as savage and substandard. From the novel *The bluest eye*, pecola is "liberated" when she loses her mind- her prayers are answered and she has her blue eyes. The response of the black community to the "ugliness" responsible for pecola's madness, however, indicates that the white ideal continues to imprison them. Thus, the black community is never liberated, and pecola becomes a symbolic catharsis. Those traits that white values take from them- identity, individuality, humanity- pecola restores. The following passage explains how the black community uses pecola's "ugliness":

All of us- all who knew her -felt so wholesome after we cleaned ourselves on her. we were so beautiful when we stood astride her ugliness. Her simplicity decorated us, her guilt sanctified us, her pain made us, glow with health, her awkwardness made us think we had a sense of humor. Her inarticulateness made us believe we were eloquent (the bluest eye,424)

In her novels, Morrison challenges Western standards of beauty and demonstrates that the concept of beauty is socially constructed. Morrison also recognises that if whiteness is used as a standard of beauty or anything else, then the value of blackness is diminished and this novel works to subvert that tendency. In demonstrating pride in being black, this writer does not simply portray *The Bluest Eye* (1970)tells the story of an eleven year old black girl, Pecola Breedlove, who wants to have blue eyes, because she sees herself, and is regarded by most of the characters in the novel, as ugly. The standard of beauty that her peers subscribe to is represented by the white child actress, Shirley Temple, who has the desired blue eyes. Positive images of blackness.

In *Beloved* (1987) when baby sugge's son buys her freedom from Mr. garner, she becomes an itinerant preacher who preaches the opposite of what the preachers who come to the plantations preached. "More than your life-holding womb and your life giving private parts hear me now, love your heart. For this is the prize" (*Beloved*, 89).As black women struggle to live in America's oppressive society, their decisions are usually motivated and

instigated by forces beyond their control. From this, paper that black women are socially and economically disadvantaged and controlled by a patriarchal society, their options are virtually few or they have no choices as they attempt to negotiate their lives.

There are many incidents in the novel, when Morrison's narrator sums up how baby sugs, sethe's mother-in-law, found her life controlled by slavery:

in all of baby's as well as sethe's own, men and women were moved around like checkers. Anybody baby sugs knew, let alone loved, who hadn't run off or been hanged, got rented out, loaned out, bought out, brought back, stored up, mortgaged, won, stolen or seized.(Morrison's, 23).

The system of slavery made personal relationship arbitrary due to what baby sugs called the "nastiness of life." Sethe's case choice as to who her sexual partner would be (hooks, Ain't I...25). However, sethe is fathered every one of her children. A blessing she was reckless enough to take for granted" (Morrison,23).

The paper reveals that these methods are the key factors impacting the mental state of black women and the ideas perpetuated about them today. The most effective methods, used on the slave ships Afro - Africa to America, were rape and sexual abuse that terrorized African women. Tar Baby reveals Morrison's serious concern about black male and black female relationship in the twentieth century. Morrison believes that "the conflict of genders is a culture illness". The structure of courtly love in Toni Morrison's tar baby the imaginary and actions of the people in Morrison's novel reflect the themes and modifies of courtly love in which both valerian and son are to appear honorable. Jadine is faced with a quandary both men are genuinely sincere; and as stated earlier, both men offer her knowledge. But both men are corrupted by their own interpretations of racial, class, and gender roles. Valerian and son each want Jadine to act and look a certain way, but their insight is incomplete and inaccurate.

Thus, we notice from her novels *Beloved*, *The Bluest Eye*, and *Tar Baby*, voices the problems of Racial, Gender, Slavery and sexual abuse in Afro-American society from different angles. There are inter and intra-discrepancies, fascination for White Aesthetics of beauty as well as White economy of life. Morrison has shown that Black women are victims at the shocking and unforgettable close of the novels, the past and present coincide almost absolutely. Morrison includes in most of her novels the repetition of "We" in order to emphasize the bond of black slave women in such a society, and challenges societal stereotypes, by forcing the readers to consider all angles when judging someone, as in the case of sorrow, she opens the reader's eyes to the bounty of perspectives in the world.

#### References:

1. Atwood, Margaret. "Review of *Beloved*". New York Times book Review, (Sep- 13), 1987: Print.
2. Blassingame, J. *The slave community: plantation life in the Antebellum South*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1972. Print.
3. Christian, Barbara. *Black feminist criticism: perspective on black women writers*. New York: pergamon Press, 1958. Print.
4. McKay, Patricia. *Producing American Races: Henry James, William Faulkner, Toni Morrison*, Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 1999. Print.
5. Morrison, Toni. *The Bluest Eye*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1979. Print.
6. Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*, New York: Alfred knot, 1987. Print
7. Tar Baby. "Critique: studies in contemporary fiction 46.1 (2004):12-26. Print.