



## Indelible Scars Delineated in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*

Gowher Ahmad Naik<sup>1</sup>, Dr Sanjay Prasad Pandey<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar Of Phd(Lovely Professional University)

<sup>2</sup>Lovely Professional University Department Of English

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**Abstract:** Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* depicts the problems of demoralization, dehumanization, marginalization and slavery of the Afro-American race. Besides this, she had explored racism, sexism, pathological mourning and ethnic cleansing of Afro-American race in her novel *Beloved*. The author spoke the unspoken and intolerable truths of Afro-Americans as they had been victimized and had been the worst sufferers in the history of humanity. Moreover, Afro-Americans had been demeaned, exploited, subjugated, and devastated on the grounds of race, colour, caste and sex. As, people of Afro-American race had been torn physically, emotionally and psychologically throughout the ages. The present paper is an attempt to explore dehumanizing conditions suffered by the Afro-Americans and how these people had been humiliated and forced to live cannibal lives.

**Keywords:** slavery, racism, ethnic cleansing, marginalization, Subjugation,

In the present globalized, liberalized, and privatized world concepts such as modernism, post-modernism, post-colonialism, subaltern, hegemony, and hybridity are the current issues of debates and discussions. These terms have a great impact on today's literature. Moreover, the theories like deconstruction, feminism, Marxism have brought revolution in the field of literature especially in Afro-American literature and Dalit literature. These theories depict the pain of suppressed, marginalized, oppressed, neglected, and butchered people who were never a part of literature. The ideologies of Facult, Derrida, Gayatri Spivak and Edward Said gave a life line to these unknown and downtrodden people. These people of Afro-Americans were colonized, oppressed, victimized, dominated and subjugated. Furthermore, the above theorists rebutted against the superior ideology and powerful culture. The twentieth century writers portrayed the issues of these distressed souls and explored the hidden scars of these people. Amongst them is the prominent Nobel Prize Laureate Toni Morrison who is considered the representative of the Afro-American race. In her writings, especially in her novel *Beloved*, she depicted the extreme agony suffered by the Afro-American race throughout their lives. Even today, the Afro-American people has not forgotten the torture done to them by white racist under slavery, colonialism and imperialism. So, Afro-American race is one of the worst sufferers in the history of humanity.

These Afro-Americans were belittled, exploited, subjugated, dehumanized and ravaged on behalf of race, colour, class, language, and gender. Slavery haunted their lives so had left indelible scars on their consciousness. These were forced to hold the worthless positions in white race, isolated from their existence, incarcerated, deprived from everything like education, jobs, etc. these collectively brought them towards psychic abnormality and disorders. Maxine Lavon Montgomeran expert in Afro-American studies and professor of English explained the Eurocentric experiences which entails, "a gradual decline in social, economic, and moral conditions, a major catastrophe, then a new beginning—an unreliable model when imposed upon the Black American experience" (Teresa Heffernan 3). The effects of lynching's, holocaust could still be seen in their traumatic psyches. Slavery had great effect on their latter generations as it had severely damaged their lives. As Morrison states that "nobody knows their names, and nobody thinks about them. In addition to that they never survived in the lore; there are no songs or dances or tales of these people" (qtd. by Heffernan 2). It was in no way possible for these Afro-American people to have normal mourning due to psychological ghastliness of slavery. The Africans were deprived from their genealogy, culture and language by the white masters so that they could not forward their stories and claim for their identification.

The agony of slavery portrayed in *Beloved* is meant to make readers see how the survivors of slavery live in day to day life. Morrison's novel provides a message to black people. The message is that the black people have to deal with slavery as part of their past. The message is also given to white people that they have potential to take

part in healing the pain of slavery as they do not come out of it easily. In the eyes of slave masters, slave women were not mothers at all. Frantz Fanon states that "Dirty nigger!" Or simply, "Look, a Negro!" burst apart. Now the fragments have been put together again by another self" (*Black Skin White Masks* 82). These had been simply instruments to improve their master's economy. Therefore, they had been treated as breeders, wild animals and had been calculated on the basis of their children producing capacity. Rape for the slaveholders was not simply the fulfillment of their sexual urges, it was a mechanism of domination, repression and demoralization of their male slaves. Toni Morrison states that "nobody knows their names, and nobody thinks about them. In addition to that they never survived in the lore; there are no songs or dances or tales of these people" (qtd. By Heffernan 3). The main objective of it was to extinguish slave women's will and power to resist and in the process to demoralize and dehumanize their men. Despite this, there had been no archives about these Afro-Americans. Their records had been demolished by the whites so that they did not claim for their subjectivity and rights. Susan Bowers writes that for the African in American "the good life lay not before them but behind them; yet, every attempt was made to crush their memories of the past" (qtd. by Heffernan 2). Hence, in this way, they had been traumatized, uprooted, dislocated, displaced and torn from their roots. Therefore, they had not been able to identify with their lost one's.

Toni Morrison had illustrated to the readers that the acute pain of slavery did not heal completely. This she had mentioned at the end of the novel *Beloved*. Even though *Beloved* had gone but her footprints had remained. These prints had been deeply rooted in the psyches of Afro-Americans. So, they had suffered from post-traumatic syndromes. The brutality and torture of slavery had deeply injured and inflicted their blood and bones. Zadie Smith an English novelist wrote in her novella *The Embassy of Cambodia* that "but more people died in Rwanda, but, yes, millions and millions. And nobody speaks about that! Nobody! Are we suffer to born (Zadie Smith 26)? Therefore, these Afro-Americans had trapped, ostracized and massacred so these had not been able to detach their ego from their dead ones. Due to fear of their memories, these Afro-Americans had been in a position to confront them. They had not only the threat of personal memories but also the horror of racial memories. Carl Jung states that these memories of ancient fears had appeared to them in various folktales and cultures. These had been stored in their 'Collective Unconscious'. From time to time, they had been haunted by them and in this regard, it was hardly feasible for them to have normal mourning. Toni Morrison had presented in the novel *Beloved* that black people in the present still experience the pain of slavery even though it had happened a long time ago. It had been this pain of slavery that broke the psyche of Sethe. The pain of Afro-American race expressed in the novel by Morrison as "it was not a story to pass on" (*Beloved* 324). It means that black people have overcome the pain of slavery and they do not care about it anymore. Secondly, it means the story of one generation of Africans is passed on to the next so that the pain of slavery will never be forgotten. Blacks will always feel it, no matter how many generations have passed. As, they had been victimized, oppressed, molested and ruined physically and psychologically due to this they had suffered from drastic psychic problems such as anxiety, trauma, uncanny and pathological mourning.

In *Beloved*, Sethe had remained under the viciousness and brutal treatment of her masters. As a slave, she had been bedeviled by her master. She tried her best to go on with her life but life in the present could not be separated from heinous molestation and cruelty. She tried to forget the past but it still haunted her. She had no other alternative but to live with this in rest of her life. Escapism had not been not a remedy to her problem rather it aroused problems for her. Sethe's not confronting and passing through the 'reality testing' led her towards abnormal mourning. From Freudian perspective 'confrontation' and 'reality testing' are the two outlets for normal mourning but Sethe had become unsuccessfully in the process of normal mooring. The ghost of the dead baby in the house was the representation of Sethe's past life that she could not forget. It was the ghost of slavery that brought tumult in the life of Sethe. It was this dead baby ghost who made her suffer throughout the life.

The uncanny conditions constructed by the dead baby ghost tore her life. This was basically the ghost of slavery that brought dilemmas in her life. According to Freud, the uncanny is the mark of the return of the repressed. Her children were part of herself without them she hardly could survive. When she lost her children especially her daughter *Beloved*, she had lost her interest in the living. It displayed she was the victim of pathological mourning in which an individual felt painful dejection, cessation from the external world so was not able to love the outside world. All these traits were present in the character of Sethe. This all was the output of her murderous act and the death of *Beloved* that shattered her mental faculty. The act of infanticide did not allow her to mourn. Its guilt was clinging with Sethe so this grief of her guilt broke her down. As a result, she could not resign from this pathetic sadness. Physically, Sethe was in the present of her life but physiologically, she was still living in the past. Her dreams which she had dreamt for her children were crushed as she reached '124 Bluestone Road'. All the circumstances which she came across whether it was the killing of

her daughter, the stolen milk from her breasts, the whipping at the hands of Schoolteacher's nephews collectively turned her into a neurotic patient. There was no way for her to come out of this grief-stricken jolt; however, she succumbed due to its intense agony. Sethe could not attach her libido to a new object, the reason was that her mentality was devastated therefore, there was doubling in the mind of Sethe between remembering and forgetting out of which she could not think, imagine, perceive, and conceive properly. This was the result of dehumanization and demoralization she along with her children confronted under slavery by the hands of her masters. Fanon writes that "what it means to be only a nigger but a member of the marginalized, the displaced and diasporic. To be amongst those whose very presence is both 'overlooked' - in the double sense of surveillance and psychical disavowal" (*The Location of Culture* 236). So, Sethe was marginalized, ridiculed and depressed by her master's treatment under the colonial and slavery rule by her owner.

Her psychic energy (libido) was completely absorbed in the Beloved when she appeared as a grownup woman. She hardly could detach herself from her daughter's self. From Cixous view not resigning from the lost object brought worries and troubles to Sethe. The loss of Beloved took away Sethe's and Baby Sugg's energies. Her world was with her children. Sethe could not give up the severe pain of her lost children more importantly of Beloved. Actually, Sethe made her choice by killing her daughter to save her from slavery. It had dragged her in a taxing situation out of which she could not return. Even black community expelled her from their group. There was no one who could console her. Julia Kristeva said that women turned into failed mourners due to negligence of society (Clewell). Sethe's impaired narcissism was due to her inability of releasing her inner anxiety and confusion. The inhuman and wretched behavior with Sethe had created emptiness, void and identity crisis in her life.

In *Beloved*, Toni Morrison had not written only about the incident of Sethe's rape by her master. Also, Morrison described Sethe's humiliation and sorrow in a scene when two of her master's nephews sucked the milk from Sethe's breasts. Toni Morrison verbalized "their bodies not supposed to be like that, but they have to have as many children as they can to please whoever owned them" (Toni Morrison 5). It was this excruciating emotional distress in the mind of Sethe that always haunted her. Freud insisted that libido should be detached from the lost object, but Sethe was not detaching her psychical energy from the lost object. It made her a victim of pathological mourning. Sethe's experience at 'Sweet Home' and the inhuman treatment in the hands of 'Schoolteacher's nephews,' forced her to escape from the place. She promised herself that no matter what her situation was she would give her milk to her babies. Milk was not simply food for Sethe's babies, it also symbolized love that flowed from Sethe's body to her children. Further, Sethe lost her mother at very young age. Thousands of African children could never see who gave them birth. As a result, objectification, "subordination" and marginalization are "mode[s] of oppression" on African race that had psychologically traumatized and undermined Sethe under the bond of slavery (Modood 34). Morrison through Sethe's memories of her mother had demonstrated that under slavery mothers had struggled for their children and their self-identity. Sethe's motherly loss had created a void inside her. She did not want to pass it on to her children and wanted to keep them away from this horrible life. However, she desired to claim that her children as her own. Although, she knew that a female slave did not have any legal rights over her children. Sethe knew well the way she was molested, fractured, and raped by white masters. She did not wish her children to suffer like her.

By killing her daughter, Sethe claimed the fate of her child. Most of the slave women during slavery suffocated their babies rather than granted them to become the victim of slavery. Robert Jay Lifton an American psychiatrist made a statement about "designated victims" (Kyeong Hwangbo 4) of Afro-American race who had been forced to "live off" (Kyeong Hwangbo 4) economically, socially and psychologically and had been looked up on as outcasts, 'Others' and malignant by the white owners. Such deliberate attempts in most of the cases did not provide solace to an individual, the protagonist Sethe was dwelling in the thoughts of her past life and lost her mental status in such conditions one needs sympathy, consolation, condolence, and compassion of others but rarely she got it from anyone. She could not relieve herself from the horrible incidents happened with her. In a similar manner, the same loss happened to her mother-in-law, Baby Suggs. Both of them lost their children and then lost their interest in living. Their wounded psyches could not link with the outside world.

In slavery trade, Baby Suggs lost her son Halle who disappeared and never returned back to her. She also lost her grandson's as they ran away from the house. They were frightened by the ghost of their dead baby sister. The wretched and inhuman conditions of the Afro-American race were the cause of imprisonment, poverty, homelessness, jobless, etc. Morrison conveyed her message through the character of Baby Suggs that, "[n]ot a house in the country ain't packed to its rafters with some dead Negro's grief" (Toni Morrison 5). She had been on her bed waiting for her death to come. For Baby Suggs, all her eight children were taken away from her by the slave holders. There was no new object and substitution for which she could attach her psychical

energy. Her torn memory could not accomplish the normal mourning because her inner self was not releasing the anguish out.

In brief, African American race had been subjugated, oppressed, marginalized and brutalized by the white racists under slavery through draconian laws and policies. They had confronted extreme and horrible tortures such as rapes, molestation, lynching's and massacres. Due to this, they had suffered from trauma, depression, anxieties, emptiness, and post-traumatic syndromes. Slavery was the curse wrought upon them that left such scars on their psyches which could not heal till death. Due to this slavery treatment, Seth the protagonist of the novel *Beloved* had confronted rape, molestation, physical and psychological violence from her owner. In this way, this African-American race had received human rights violence at its highest. Eventually, this had aroused serious mental disorders, fractures, and wounds in their lives. Worse than this, their culture and history had been uprooted that had left them to suffer irrecoverably. As they had been uprooted and dislocated from their places. This book is a representation of the dehumanized and demoralized identities of Afro-American people. As this, race had confronted the vicious treatment of the White race under the slavery. So, they had been traumatized and oppressed by the brutal laws and policies of their owners. Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* had dealt the agony of African race during the time of slavery very vividly and accurately.

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