

**Experience of Enslavement voices out the Black identity in Toni Morrison's *Beloved***

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**Abstract**

*Beloved* by Toni Morrison's discussion on slavery. Morrison primarily illustrates the African American experience in her book by highlighting slavery within a historical framework. Morrison, meantime, sheds light on several troubling facets of this problem and shows how it has terrible effects on those who are enslaved via the representation of the struggles and suffering encountered. In *Beloved*, Morrison illustrates how slavery destroys family relationships and the whole parental system by creating a deformed mother, Sethe, who is tormented by her guilt and the cruel enslavement she has endured in the past. Men's masculinity is likewise distorted by slavery, which turns them into helpless victims of their owners' degradation. Such a degrading, humiliating environment under slavery ultimately results in the horrific experience that the people who underwent it both while and after being enslaved can neither forget nor forgive. To demonstrate the terrible aspects of slavery and its dark historical actuality within the African-American Experience, the current research paper investigates how Morrison expresses these many historical components in this literary piece. *Beloved* by Toni Morrison depicts the practical emergence of the "black identity" during a period when black people were denied it. Morrison elaborates on the verbal and physical torture that Sethe, Paul D, and the other Sweet Home slaves experienced to further illustrate the agony of slavery. *Beloved* contributes to Morrison's critique of the aesthetics that have dominated American society and its canon of literature in, addition to speaking for the slaves whose voices were stifled.

**Keywords:** Enslavement, Black people, endurance, discrimination

The volatile social experiences in white society led to the awakening of Black Americans in the early 20th century. The migrating and established Negroes in America began to experience different sorts of stress and strain from living in a hostile setting, including social, political, and economic burdens, in addition to being tortured by racial discrimination. Morrison is noteworthy for the way she handles the black experience in American society. She brings to light significant issues like identity, racism, women's rights, and slavery by presenting individuals who struggle to establish themselves and exercise their free will in a society that often treats them unfairly. According to Richard Roland and

Malcolm Bradbury (1991), authors like Toni Morrison are important because they prominently address important issues that are primarily connected to the present and the history that they discuss. Bradbury and Roland explain this,

Some of the striking writing comes from black women- Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, Maya Angelou- and shows the novel's complex involvement in the most serious issues of the time. The next generation of American storytelling is on the scene and at present in a state of its becoming, as it too tries to deal with the present and rewrite the meanings of the recent past (393).

The renowned book *Beloved* is one of Morrison's most notable works. Morrison wants to emphasize the suffering of the black community in this book as well as its desire for self-fulfillment and search for identity. To accomplish this, she examines the historical backdrop of slavery and racism as well as how they affected African Americans. According to Jonathan Culler (1997), Toni Morrison thinks that,

American literature has been deeply marked by the often acknowledged historical presence of slavery, and this literature's engagements with freedom, the freedom of the frontier, of the open road, of the unfettered imagination- should be read in the context of enslavement, from which they take significance (67-68).

Morrison's primary goal in most of her writings, and particularly in *Beloved*, is to bring attention to the problem of slavery by placing it in its historical context. By doing this, she hopes that readers will remember this issue, understand the suffering that African Americans experienced, and recognize how it distorted their lives and identities. *Beloved* is a modern book that has elements of a ghost story, a mystery, and a historical fiction piece. It is a sophisticated literary work that also aims to comprehend how slavery affected people's mentality as well as more general cultural and historical trends. The historical story intrigued Morrison because it raised issues about what it meant to love and be a mother in a setting and era where life was frequently undervalued. Morrison then speaks out to condemn slavery and express the desire for liberation on behalf of all slaves. Morrison wrote the historical novel *Beloved*, which examines the most oppressive time of slavery in the history of African people, to demonstrate the historical fact that collective resistance is the only realistic answer for African people. The book shows how the "black identity" developed successfully during a time when black people were denied it.

Morrison tells the tale of Sethe, a former female slave, in *Beloved*. Sethe and her family are plagued by the spirit of the child she was forced to kill to flee slavery. Until it is exorcised by the village women, Sethe is plagued by the recurring ghost of her kid throughout the whole book. She is plagued by the dreadful memories of this event. According to Bran Nicol (2009), Morrison's *Beloved* also greatly emphasizes the problem of "cultural memory." To stress and denounce the terrible legacy of slavery that the African-Americans experienced, Morrison provides in this novel a full picture of trauma conflict related mostly to daughter-mother relationships. Despite the difficulties and limitations she encounters, Sethe does her

best to be a good mother to her kids. She is determined to sacrifice her young daughter rather than allow her to be sold into slavery because she feels compelled to do so as a mother and because she despises slavery. Thus, we can observe the extent to which the slavery system harms Sethe and her children. Min Pun (2017) comments on this facet of Morrison's writings and says:

In the context of *Beloved*, the memory of slavery, in particular, not only probes its effects on the individual psyche of black and white people but also the repressed memory of slavery in the make-up of the American nation. In this way, Morrison reworks African American history, telling about racism and slavery, to recreate the moving texture of memory (13-14).

Sethe's plight as a slave historically represents that of all black people whose lives were influenced by the fight against slavery and its cruel system. As a result, the impact of slavery on people includes how the internationalization of the oppressor's values may corrupt all close interpersonal bonds and even pervert the self. *Beloved* deals with both deconstructed history and "reconstructed memory." This chilling tale of slavery and its repercussions, which is set in post-Civil War Ohio, follows the life of a young lady named Sethe who has managed to keep a dreadful memory at bay only by closing off a portion of her mind. The story centers on Sethe's time as a slave on Sweet Home Farm and her escape with her children to what appears to be a secure place. Despite her physical survival, Sethe is still emotionally enslaved, and her hunger for both giving and receiving love turns into a terrible force.

A classic book is no longer a sufficient tool when slavery has torn apart one's history, when the past is more real than the present, and when the anger of a slain infant may practically rock a house. And *Beloved* is written in fragments and visions that the readers must piece together after being shattered like a mirror on the ground. Morrison describes the lives of Sethe, an escaped slave and mother, and others around her in a book that is fascinating, lovely, and enigmatic. Morrison elaborates on the verbal and physical torture that Sethe, Paul D, and the other Sweet Home slaves experienced to further illustrate the agony of slavery. *Beloved* contributes to Morrison's critique of the aesthetics that have dominated American society and its canon of literature in addition to speaking for the slaves whose voices were stifled. *Beloved* is a modern book that has elements of a ghost story, a mystery, and a historical fiction piece. It is a sophisticated literary work that also aims to comprehend the effects of slavery on people's psychology as well as on wider cultural and historical trends.

White supremacy is essentially the result of devaluing black bodies to exert control over them, which is best accomplished by convincing them that their black bodies are undesirable. Slavery therefore targeted women in particular, employing the mechanism of dehumanising the body. Morrison speaks next, condemning slavery and pleading with all slaves to be released. The horrible dehumanization compelled Sethe to kill children subtly. She is used like an animal to feed a human, stripped of her motherly responsibilities, and reduced to the status of a "breeder." When Sethe discovers that her husband Halle is a witness to the incident, the humiliation reaches a new high. He feels emasculated since he can't

defend her, so he leaves her. Eighteen years after the incident that resulted in the death of her kid, Paul D enters Sethe's life and exhibits a willingness to get to know her. In fact, if not for them both, then at least for Denver, this may serve as the foundation for a traditional family's replacement. However, to Sethe's dismay, Paul D finds it difficult to accept the information that Sethe committed such a heinous crime as murder and adhered to the white masters. Given that Paul D aligns with the white oppressors, he is unable to comprehend the depth of Sethe's actions, making it all the more painful and humiliating for her. Sethe, who had hoped for Paul D's comfort in her suffering, doesn't get it from either Paul D or the black community.

After being turned down, Sethe isolates herself within the confines of 124 Bluestone House, finding a place of desolation there. Sethe can see a path to discover her actual identity since she confines her existence to the house. Sethe has also barricaded herself inside the house so that Beloved can force her out. The ghost of Sethe's dead kid manifests as a result of her unconscious need for forgiveness and answers about the past. Beloved, Sethe's dead daughter, takes eighteen years to return to the flesh and demand the love she was never given. Although *Beloved* has a young appearance, she acts childlike. Her growth was stopped when she was a "crawling-already baby" since she was murdered by her mother and never had a chance to grow up. Because of this, she has a childlike mindset and is egotistical and demanding. The nature of her return, the fact that she is returning to reclaim what was taken from her displays her immature ego centrism. To use a Freudian metaphor, Beloved's "return of the repressed" refers to the soul's return to 'possessing' itself after suffering. The primary characters first infer from Beloved's looks that she came to "love and be loved." As time passes, Sethe and Denver work tirelessly to show the reclaimed family member all the affection they had previously saved for each other.

*Beloved's* actions are frequently seen through the prism of an Oedipal complex that transforms into a demonic power and ultimately causes Sethe's mental and bodily demise. By doing this, she gradually loses control over her life and stops acting in the capacity of a mother. As a matter of truth, *Beloved* is looking for payment for previous abandonment. Sethe is only capable of existing as the ghost's possession since it is unable to understand the underlying motivations behind *Beloved's* acts. The ghost seems to be her mother's major threat at this point in the story. Additionally, the haunted house's asylum strengthens *Beloved's* desire to "suck the life out of Sethe." Paul D., who discovers Sethe residing in a haunted home with Denver and an irate ghost, offers her solace. When she refuses to leave the house, despite Paul's requests for her to do so, he decides to stay with her. The Beloved coerces Paul D into giving birth to her child while doing so. Paul departs because he is unable to handle his guilt. Sethe gives her whole attention to the spirit of her deceased kid who is still alive. Denver becomes envious and notices how Beloved is controlling her mother. Sethe feels ill as the spirit starts to eat off of her health.

Sethe's black feminist sense of self-sufficiency is combined with her black awareness of and rejection of white conceptions and inscriptions of herself, her children, and other slaves as non-humans. In a heterosexual, endogenous relationship, Sethe reconciles gender

inequalities first with her spouse Halle Suggs, and then with Paul D. Although the author implicitly combines racial and sexual consciousness, the text's structure and style highlight how slave women's ambivalence over parenting compromises both their own and their family's sense of self. Memories are a haunting power that holds beloveds who have experienced prior trauma under its influence and reoccurring in their lives. Even though they want to let go of these upsetting memories, they struggle mightily to do so. As a result, they may also be considered slaves for their memories, just as they were in the past to the white people, who oppressed them. Morrison's *Beloved* mimics the format of trauma, particularly the traumatic event, which takes place in the scene in the woodshed and involves Sethe killing her kid. Sethe is genuinely suffering since she is powerless to stop memories from resurfacing and, despite her efforts, she is unable to bring the gruesome incident itself back to mind. The ghost of Sethe's dead daughter serves as a sort of allegory for the painful memories that Sethe is unable to escape, as well as for the misery and suffering that several African-American women endured in the past.

Toni Morrison illuminates several topics about African-Americans in *Beloved*, which helps to illuminate the African-American experience. The main topic she focuses on in this book and which this essay has sought to investigate is the problem of slavery. *Beloved* primarily concentrates on characterizing the tale of Sethe, a female slave who takes the initiative to escape the injustice of slavery and obtain her freedom. It does this by portraying the lives of various African-American slaves both during and after the time of slavery. In addition to this, the book depicts several aspects of slavery that Morrison explores to demonstrate both its horrifying actuality and its blatantly terrible characteristics.

The anguish that these African Americans feel after having suffered slavery and escaped it to regain their dignity and self-esteem is most profoundly depicted by Morrison in *Beloved*. Sethe, Paul D., and several other characters in the book are represented by Morrison as tortured souls who struggle mightily to heal from the deep psychological scars caused by the horrific experience of being enslaved. Morrison personifies the historical aspect of slavery since she bases the plot of *Beloved* on the true account of an escaped female slave. Through this, she demonstrates fundamentally how horrible slavery is for the enslaved individual, whose traumatized experience of suffering not only lasts during the enslavement time but also profoundly and cruelly even after leaving it.

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