



DUAL VICTIMIZATION OF BLACK WOMEN IN TONI MORRISON'S "BELOVED"

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ABSTRACT

From the romantic period feminism is a prominent literary and scholarly discourse through out the world. However the definition and conception of feminism is different on class, creed, colour, social status ground. Probably all experts of literature are agreed on that view that it is terrible for a human being if with gender inequality colour and racial oppression in blended. This situation is felt by the African-American black slave women who were victimized on both ground. Contemporary American black writer and Nobel Laureate Toni Morrison had presented the real agony of Black-American women in her outstanding novel "Beloved", 1987. It is the historical and psychological study of slave women where they have lost their total human identity. The intention of this article is to find the cause of that double victimization of those slave women.

Key words : Black, Race, Sex, Victimization, Women.

INTRODUCTION

Slavery is the main obstacle of civilization. It was so horrible that about 12.5 millions of slaves were removed or sold from Africa during 1650-1850. Though slavery in USA was banned in 1860, but this was not totally removed then that was the shame of mankind. Toni Morrison was highly concerned specially on women slave whose picture she portrayed realistically in her novels. The story of "Beloved" is a real one that Morrison found in a newspaper with heading "A visit to the slave mother who killed her child. A strong feminism, also depicted in the text. After the arrival of Second wave of feminism, a dramatic change is notable in the presentation of women characters in English literature in which gendered and

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racial discrimination became prominent. Apart from the only demand of voting the second wave protested against the body humiliation, abortion. Women's identity on the ground of race and sex was a special discourse of literary studies. They are victimized for both being a woman and a slave.

In our prevailing concept gender decide who have masculine or feminine quality. In "Beloved" the White masters were the custodian of 'black' slaves. The novel was written in Civil War background when slave system of America was apparent. The society was under the 'White' control who are the custodian of both male and female black slaves. Basically irrespective of male of female all blacks were deprived from getting independence. But as the society was patriarchal those white masters had different attitude and treatment for male and female slaves. In the text, during staying in 'Sweet Home', all the women including Sethe were treated as 'breeder'. Their value was determined upon their fertility as how many slave child they could give birth. However after giving birth, those children were the 'property' of white masters not those black mothers. However, those White men are the father of those babies who used the slave girls as a 'sex machine' of reproduction. Basically a slave girl had to do sex forcefully with innumerable masters that they could not determine a particular father for a particular child. For example, Baby Suggs gave birth eight children by six men. The condition of Sethe was more pathetic, where she was considered as a 'cow of milk' and her breast will be used only for feeding purpose. Her duty was to feed the master's children and sometimes her own children were deprived from getting mother's breast milk. We witnessed the brutal calamity when the nephews of schoolmasters had stolen and snatched Sethe's milk. Milk is the symbol of pure relationship between mother and child, but here this purity is 'raped'. The most important fact here that the treatment of black men were different. Male slaves had to do work only in plantation, but Black women were compelled to maintain three types of duty-working in plantation, household work and most importantly satisfying the sexual desires of their masters. The is different in the case of punishment also. Where male slaves were beaten, women faced 'dual' punishment, beating and rape. It is clear that on the ground of gender women were mercilessly tortured that men. Even Sethe's mother worked in moonlight. But the 'white minds' were not melt thus and they demeaned sexual gratification. There was no scope of escape, even the Black women were raped in front of their slave husband. Those husband had no right to protest or even they did not attempt to do so. Sethe was raped and her milk was stolen in front of Halle, her husband. It proves that slavery emasculated the masculinity. Sethe remarked in the text, "If he is Alive he saw that, he would not step foot at my door, Not Halle". Baby Suggs was permitted to keep her child to her after satisfying her master's sex. In "Sweet Home" Mr. Garden is just like that master. We saw the most wretched scene of brutality when Ella was kept in a room and raped by both father and son on the same bed. So most mothers like Ella who gave birth by rape did not wish their child's long living or hesitated to take care for them because they belonged to 'white rapist

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father'. We can quote from the novel- "She had delivered, but would not nurse, a hairy white thing."

Along with textual discussion here we may refer to the case of "The Second Sex" of Simone de Beauvoir. She said that from the birth in this patriarchal society women become 'Other', her value is calculated upon the quality of her body, not mind. Society keeps watching keenly the bodily or sexual development of a girl. So her body is the object of lust for others and she had no control upon her own body. She said, "The young girls feel that her body is getting away from her. It frightened her to become flesh and show flesh." So willingly or unwillingly a girl has to give her body to the males. Even while doing sex with husband there is no mercy from sexual male aggression. She had no liberty of having sexual satisfaction that belonged to male only. She had no identity except of being a sexual 'flesh'. When Sethe wished to ****her dead daughter's name on the grave the engraver demanded sex from her- "Ten minutes for seven letters". We can realize the condition of women was how terrible than men in the description on Babby Suggs in the novel- "Slave life had busted her legs, back, head, eyes, hands, kidneys, womb and tongue. She had nothing left to make a living with but her heart.". Basically the black men never did face such brutality. Mary Wollstonecraft was the official inaugurator of feminist movement in romantic period who strongly protested against the abduction and misuse of women. In her most famous text

"A Vindication for the Right of women", she said, "... **their minds are not in a healthy state;** for, **like the flowers** which are **planted** in too rich a soil, strength and usefulness are sacrificed to beauty; and the flaunting leaves, after having pleased a fastidious eye, fade, disregarded on the stalk." Later John Stuart Mill also protested against the violation of women in parliament where he asserted that women had no right upon their children after birth though they carried the baby in their womb for ten months. Here again they are treated as biological reproduction 'machine'. In his "The Subjection" of Women (1869) he said, "Men do not want solely the obedience of women, they want their sentiments. They have therefore put everything in practice to enslave their minds."

Beside gender ground, women in "Beloved" were victimized for race. Their black slave heredity is responsible for their humiliation. So sexual and racial discrimination and violation is the two sides of same coin. Women were alienated from their family, relatives. Their intention was to destroy the family system so that they can use them. Once Toni Morrison remarked, "White women generally define black women's role as the most oppressed because they are black and female and those two categories invite a kind of repression that is pernicious". Those women were detached from husband, family even from herself the masters thought black people don't require family bonding. We may quote from the text that displays the alienated condition of Babby Suggs, "I had eight, every one of them gone away

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from me, four taken, four chased, and all. I expect worrying somebody's house in evil." Often the black children were stolen and sold abroad. So in the text *Beloved* was the haunting symbol of many beloveds—generations of black mothers and daughter—haunted down and stolen from Africa. Beating the blacks were same for male and female. Sethe had a mark of beating on her back that is the symbol of physical and psychological torture. He said to Paul D, "I got a tree on my back and a haint in my house and nothing is between but the daughter I am holding in my arms". Basically those slaves were carried from America. So they suffered from racial obscurity and lost their indigenous cultural identity. In the novel Sethe could remember very few memories of her past. Here the slaves had no surname. For Baby Suggs, Suggs is not her surname, it's only a manner of speaking. The condition of men were same where they are called as Paul A, Paul D, Paul F in which the English alphabet indicate the first letter of the name of their masters. So slaves have no identity, but the property of owner. The situation was more complicated for women who had no sort of chance of contacting with the external world. In order to save her daughter *Beloved* from such oppression, Sethe cut the throat of her daughter. As an argument she said, "It's my job to know what is and to keep away from what I know is terrible. I did that". Morrison had shown the difference between black and white while Sethe intended to marry in a ceremony and Mrs. Gardner mocked because blacks need not marry in festive mood like whites. No ceremony, no preacher, no dancing was required for that. Even Sethe was not given any wedding dress and she stole the same.

There was no arrangement of education for blacks. Here another point is that, besides of being tortured by white masters, those black girls were humiliated by black men also. Sometimes they are abandoned by their men and become unfamiliar. For example, black slave Stamp Paid killed his wife Vasthi by snapping her neck as she was seduced by white master. Even when Sethe came first time in "*Sweet Home*" at the age of fourteen she was the object of lust for the black co-slaves also. Basically, there was a strong similarity between the white and black men that irrespective of their status of master and slave, they were all male. So they were not concerned about the sexual or mental violation of women. So Baby Suggs significantly said that if Halle was the son of Sethe not husband he would protest. A wife is always a sex machine for husband, it may be black or white. So she said, "A man is nothing but a man, but a son? that is somebody." It's notable that though Paul D was sympathetic towards Sethe but she did not gain love or sympathy from him. A black woman could not receive a respect of 'woman' from her beloved. So Paul D treated forty years aged Sethe as a 'girl' that showed his superiority upon her. Once he compared Sethe with an animal saying, "You got two feet Sethe, not four."

Here it is to be noted that during 1980s a conception of socio-gender studies was raised, that is "Subaltern Study" by Professor Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. As Spivak was born in India

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so discussing the condition of women subaltern (lower status) in colonial India she depicted that the poor Indian black women were humiliated both by their black Indian people and their White colonial British masters. They were highly victimized between the two where their voice to speak, protest was snatched by that 'dual' patriarchy (British and native Indian). They had two options, either to die in burning pyre as "Sati" or die after becoming victimized. But they had to die. The patriarchal system irrespective of white or black did not allow them to live. She said in her path breaking text "Can the Subaltern Speak?", "There is no space from which the sexed subaltern subject can speak". The same situation is found in *Beloved* where no one was concerned about the tortured voice or message of black slave Women. So they lost the status of human both on racial-colour and gender ground.

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