



GENDER IDENTITY IN THE NOVELS OF TONI MORRISON: AN OVERVIEW

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ABSTRACT

*This research paper centers on the works of Toni Morrison (also known as Chloe Antony Wofford) in general and Gender Study in particular. Toni Morrison's writing include: **Sula, Song of Solomon, Bluest Eye, Beloved and Tar Baby**. Her writing deals with the themes of feminism, gender identity, racism, violence, oppression, lust, desire, sacrifice and sexism. Gender identity and slavery were the peak and dominant issues of the past and still haunts the present like a shadow. The big issue of suppression in that culture is being black human being. Whites or any man could not relinquish the racist opportunity or the gender rights. The conflict between the black and the white societies, the violence and bloodshed between the black societies have been presented nowhere so effectively in the entire American fiction. Morrison having been born and brought up in the North, a free state where neither slavery nor racism flourished in its full form was left untouched with the truth of racial segregation. When Morrison came to the South for higher education was a surprise to see separate water fountains for blacks and whites; separation of seats in buses and trains by using bars. Though all her works are suffered with violence, Morrison has portrayed the violence through her novels in a very unique way.*

Keywords: *gender, race, sexism, lust, violence, oppression, community, culture, feminism etc.*

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The main theme of Morrison's novels is the Black racial American experience; in an unjust society, her characters struggle to find themselves and their cultural identity. Her use of fantasy, her sinuous poetic style, made her stories great texture and structure. In 2010 Morrison was made an officer of the French Legion of Honor. Later after 2 years later she was awarded the U.S. Presidential Medal of Freedom. She was very intelligent and has powerful while proving her points in her novels. Morrison's first book, *The Bluest Eye* in 1970, is a novel of initiation concerning a victimized adolescent Black girl who is obsessed 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 for conformity within the community. The great work *Song of Solomon* in 1977 is told by a male narrator in search of his identity; its publication brought Morrison to national attention. The third fictional novel *Song of Solomon* (1974) is a very genuine piece of work which is considered Morrison's first classic and lyrical novel. It is more different from her other novels as the protagonist is a male and the motif of music is heard and felt throughout the novel. Morrison's imagination and love for her dynamic character is reflected in the names, as the Mercy Hospital is called 'No Mercy' and the first black baby born in it, is Milkman Dead. The folktale is all about unconventional name Milkman Dead whose quest for identity takes him to his ancestral place from where he learns about his great-grandfather Solomon. And, the bequest of slavery and racism that has created economic, political and cultural ugliness in the American society. He discovers his familial heritage and gains awareness about the pain and agony; brutalities to his ancestors have to survive and be a part of the world.

Tar Baby (1981), set on a Caribbean island, explores conflicts of race, class, and sex. *Tar Baby* (1981) is the 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. It's an attempt of Morrison to break the myths that the whites putted about the blacks and present the black world. As John Irving says that Morrison through her writings has triumphed over all the societal pragmatism where many black stories are entrapped in race and sex prejudice. Here, it is a story about a woman, her rage, her dreams and her freedom to lead a life of her own choice.

Like any ambitious writer, she's unafraid to employ these stereotypes and she embraces the representative quality of her characters without embarrassment, and then proceeds to make them individuals too." *Tar Baby* challenging book reflects the disagreement and quarrel based on cultural partiality and intolerance which shows the blacks alienation from their root. It shows the shades of the inconsistency of a woman who has rejected her real heritage and cultural background to a foreign standard of living. She won a 'Pulitzer Prize'

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for fiction for her work "Beloved" is based on the true story of a 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.

In *Beloved*, Sethe is a major character who interlinks the past with the 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 witnessing the rape of his wife. Sethe, delivers a daughter on her escape. Amy Denvar, is a white character and she nurses Sethe and her daughter. Sethe resigns to back into slavery and plans to kill her children but she could take life of her elder daughter because she loved her most and called her as Beloved. Sethe's attempt to infanticide is similar to the killing of Plum in *Sula*.

If we see in both the novel, mothers try to kill their children from love and not hatred. Ghost of Beloved makes life of Sethe miserable. Afterwards, Sethe realizes that Children are integral part of herself. *Beloved* and *Sula* embodies the gender relations of black people. Historical experiences of black African American are used as a background in both the novels. Beloved represents the era of civil war that is the time before and after the abolishment of slavery. Whereas, in *Sula* characters tend to cope with the haunted pasts and troubled present. In Beloved woman is under the burden of patriarchy and slavery while in *Sula* characters have a disparity in their personality. They are trying to manifest the subjective effects consciousness by struggling hard to cope with their free self. Issues of family, identity and possession are explored by Morrison in a world where slavery is apparent. The narrative structure of these novels is related to the character's struggle for the path of discovery. It portrays the struggle in lives of characters. Another common theme Morrison uses is society's view on the difference between men and women, or, to put it more simply, sexism. She openly displays the sexism present in the communities in which the characters of her novels reside. For instance, in *Song of Solomon*.

Toni Morrison has put the great impact on society through her writing on "black African American". In today's world it has protected many black lives from slavery and racism, feminism, etc. because toni Morrison has put this problems in front of world. She is such a good and fearless writer that she openly said and shows the black people problems in front of word.



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