



TONI MORRISON: A TRUE REPRESENTATIVE VOICE OF BLACK FEMINISM IN AFRICAN-AMERICAN SOCIETY

Dr Ravinder Kumar, Associate Professor
Mrs Gurpreet Kaur, Research Scholar
NIILM University, Kaithal, Haryana

Abstract

The main focus of this research to show Toni Morrison as a true representative of black feminism in African-American society. Morrison's writings are centred on her own observations and experiences. She has raised awareness of black Americans' challenges and issues through her writings. Morrison explains the misconceptions and injustices faced by African American women, as well as their battle due to racial discrimination, and exposes the blacks' explicit and long-running conflict against the whites' exploited inclinations. Morrison offers a fresh perspective on American history and people's quest to recreate ourselves in their respective environments. Writing is a great strategy to restore black people's power of emotion and voice, which has been silenced for a long time, and it promises a loss of momentum and the reconstruction of femininity. Following the American Civil War, women confront dual prejudice, first for being women, and then for being black. The writer of black writing's approach regarding existence and communication is shaped by a diverse combination of sociocultural variables. Morrison wants to draw attention to the obvious and extensive history of black people's struggles against white people's exploiting inclinations. Morrison offers a fresh perspective on American history and people's quest to recreate oneself in their respective environments.

key words: Feminism, discrimination, gender, race, exploitation, struggle, rebellion, power, identity.

Introduction

Toni Morrison was the first African-American woman to win the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1993. She was the eighth writer and the first black woman who achieve this prestigious prize. Her books have won the National Book Critic Circle Award (Song of Solomon, 1977) and the Pulitzer Prize (Beloved, 1978). The Condorcet Medal, the National Humanities Medal, the



Coretta Scott King Award, and the Enoch Pratt Free Library Lifetime Literary Achievement Award have all been bestowed upon her. Toni's parents were slaves, and she experienced racial discrimination herself. Morrison depicts black people and their struggles in America through her writings. Morrison's writing is steeped in African-American culture. Afro-Americans have traditionally been treated as second-class citizens and have been pushed to the margins. Morrison depicts the anguish of being black, as seen through the eyes of a black female writer, as well as the rebellion against patriarchal conventions of domestic sphere, subjection, mutual support, and sensuality. While tackling the difficulty of sustaining a sense of black cultural identity in a white environment, her fiction was praised by the Swedish Academy for its "epic power" and "unerring ear for conversations and profoundly emotive picture of black America". Morrison's identity as a female writer has been affected by gender and race issues. Morrison being a writer of second wave of feminism i.e., after Civil Right Movement 1960's who fought for the issues of race and gender and shares her experiences through her writing. Morrison's work focuses on racial discrimination and its severe and terrifying implications, as well as how African-Americans use their ideas, courage, and resolve to build a new civilization. Morrison's works are focused on her real-life experiences growing up in a poorer area of the African-American community, as well as her own childhood experiences and perceptions, she tried her best to depict it in her writings. Morrison Said in her one of interview, "I've spent my entire writing life trying to make sure that the white gaze was not the dominant one in any of my books".

All of Morrison's characters live in enclaves characterised by the racial barriers erected by the encircling white civilization. These are both physical and mental constraints. The dominant white civilization abuses, rejects, and establishes the rules for these borders, producing anxiety and frustration in minority communities. On the one hand, Morrison's characters have physically and psychologically characteristics that increase their prospects of existence and fulfilment, resulting in the black community's survival. However, in her novels, simply "being black" does not produce community togetherness because there are racial and class inequalities inside the black community. In her writing Morrison has underlined the concerns and issues had been faced by Black Americans. The novel *The Bluest Eye*(1970) is about the black American idea of beauty and how it impacts the human mind, as well as the stereotypes and racism that Afro-American women endure. It is based on race, with the belief that white people are superior and that black people came to America as slaves. The narrative concentrates



around blonde hair and blue eyes, which is a symbol of beauty. Blonde hair and blue eyes represented white beauty standards. The novel is based in part on Morrison's childhood, in which she talks of a girl's powerlessness as a result of gender discrimination, and how she progressively establishes an exclusive white culture. The book compares and contrasts the feminine side and attractiveness of black and white Americans. Morrison portrays the tragic effects of racial discrimination via her female characters. Pecola, and Claudia are the female characters that play crucial roles in the narrative. As the novel begins, the first person narrator Claudia says something telling: "we had dropped our seeds in her own plot of black mud. Our devotion and virginity were no more fruitful than her lust or despair"(190). Cholly decides to subjugate and dominate his own daughter because no other manifestation of his dominance is within his reach, according to the feminist perspective on interpersonal aggression against Pecola. Pecola Breedlove, the protagonist of the novel, was shunned by his own parents as well as the rest of society. She desires to be appreciated and accepted in her own group as well as in a world that dismisses and devalues individuals of her own ethnicity and judges beauty according to an Anglo-Saxon rules. Pecola rejects herself due to social biases, and in order to have the bluest eye, she kills a doll. Her father sexually abuses her and eventually gets her pregnant. Pecola gives birth to a stillborn child as a result of the rape, loses her mind, and her life becomes a wasteland. Pecola's view of physical attractiveness was influenced by her upbringing. Pecola is viewed as a symbol of ugliness and is a sufferer of brutality. Geraldine calls her a "a nasty black bitch"(93). Morrison addresses aesthetic value from the standpoint of the black community in *The Bluest Eye* well as how black society enforces an incompatible white ideal on its members. Pecola's longing is tragically expressed in her desire for blue eyes. Claudia MacTeer, a neighbour, tells the story from a third-person omniscient point of view, relating the painful account of Pecola's childhood as well as the community's obligations for her. The reader is thus prompted to consider their membership in the black community, as well as the implications of any departures from the black society's defined integrity.

The feministic reading of *The Bluest Eye* tries to see the writings as an ethical, cultural, and political response to black oppression and dominance by racism, sexist authoritarian, and capitalist forces. She expresses her thoughts on how black women desire to be represented in literature. They stayed distinct; they are not of a lower category or a subordinate thing. Women do not want to be stripped of their dignity or lose their identities. They want for independence and basic rights, as well as full participation in social, political, and economic life. Tony



Morrison has earned a prestigious place in American writing for her effort to supporting black culture, which should be commended. She continues to fight for the plight of women in a genderized and racially biased dominant tradition for its injustice subjugation of African-Americans by promoting awareness about the values of black cultural history through linguistic interpretation in which blacks were rejected independence and justice by the white American culture.

Toni Morrison helped to raise awareness of black feminism through her novels and the female characters she created. This is also true of her fifth novel, *Beloved*(1987), which, in relation to key theme of slavery, has additional themes such as pain and recollection, as well as black feminism and femininity. Sethe lives with her daughter Denver and the spirit *Beloved*, who is the ghost of her murdered daughter. The novel explains what the protagonist encounters as an enslaved woman, among several other things, how she is able to emancipate herself from slavery, what happens after her emancipation, and how she deals with her memories and her history, using memories, flashbacks, and dreams. In this process, the novel depicts sexual abuse, exploitation of enslaved women, and the hardships of parenthood - all in addition to the horrors of slavery and colonialism. Morrison offers a far more in-depth look at the psychological dimensions of brutality. She directly confronts the issues of sexual violation in *Beloved*, an unspeakable subject for the slave narratives, but does so in a way which refuses to encourage the salacious attention courted by description of rape in Alex Haley's *Roots*.”(Haley 396). Men in the Afro-American community look forward to her sexual reproduction options, and women are revered as symbols of fertility and creation. Sethe is similar to Mother Earth, who has experienced disaster and emerged from it: the earlier from slaver anarchy, and the latter from the unpredictability of the world. Sethe is portrayed as a former slave woman who chooses to murder her young daughter. She kills her baby girl rather than exposing her to the physically, mentally, and psychologically repressive brutality of slavery. The decision to kill the beloved, means to end the slavery, “It is the ultimate gesture of a loving mother. It is the outrageous claim of a slave”(Morrison 1987). “Slavery splits a person into a fragmented figure” (Fulton 1997). Sethe had lost her mother as a child to meet the white child's nutritional needs. After that, when she becomes a mother, she remains deprived and depleted owing to her own narcissism trauma, unable to fulfill her daughters' desire for attention, their loved and cared ambition.



Seth tries to create her own universe with her two daughters, Beloved and Denver; she attempts to make a new world where they can interact unimaginable sentiments around each other, to create a new notion of memory enriched by a sense of individual responsibility, in order to pass down the black culture tradition that was taken away from them. Seth is striving to pass on her inherited beliefs to her children as a means of developing their distinct black identity, by connecting their roots back to their culture, and helping them understand of who they are, who their people are. Seth strives to offer her children a sense of stability, to reestablish her matriarchal dominance by regulating their lives, to give them emancipation from the horrors of servitude, which she has sought her entire life. They fight to plant a seed of rebellion against the system within the sociocultural concept of motherhood. She says;” And no one, nobody on this earth, would list her daughters characteristics on the animal side of the paper”(296).

Tony Morrison presents the changing role of women in the 20th century. “It allows the readers to see how people react to obstacles and events, showing a vision of American womanhood that might not be evident to people of other ethnic background and experience”. (123 Help Me.com). Morrison’s writings are incredibly powerful and fascinating literary masterpieces that transform our perceptions of American literature. Her writings change the face in the intellectual conversation about race.

Conclusion

To sum up the issue, gender plays an important part in the development of self. Women are doubly oppressed as a result of gender politics, and in order to oppose this injustice, they must first identify the source of the subjugation and then devise a strategy to address it. They are subjected to two types of oppression: patriarchal society and traditional limitations, and the terrible institution of slavery, which deprives women of all rights to motherhood and womanhood. The gynocentric perspective is particularly useful for gaining insight into the lives of women and tracing the paths of tyranny. Women certainly exist, and they have played an important part in dividing family and societal tasks when males have often diminished their obligations. Women have battled to fully realise themselves, particularly under the institution of slavery, where their function as mothers or some internal force catalyses their journey toward self-construction. Feminists yearn for this revelation of identity, and it becomes their fundamental dilemma in countries where women are trivialised as commodities, property with



a price tag. Black women are battling for their rights as human beings and valued members of Black society in order to come to terms with themselves.

References

Morrison, Toni. *The Bluest Eye*. 1970. Great Britain: Vintage, Random, 1999. Print.

Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*. 1978. Great Britain: Vintage, Random, 2000. Print.

Barnett, P. (1998). *Figurations of Rape and the Supernatural in Beloved*. Toni Morrison: *Beloved*. Ed. Carl Plasa. New York: Columbia UP.

Jone, J. S. (1998). *Contemporary Feminist Theories*. New York: New York university Press.

Kolchin, P. (1995). *American Slavery*. Canada: Harper Collins.

Mathieson. (1990). *Memory and Mother Love in Morrison's Beloved*. London: Greenwood press.

Dill, Bonnie Thornton. Race, Class, and Gender: Prospects for an All-inclusive Sisterhood. U.S. *Women in Struggle: A Feminist Studies Anthology*. Ed. Claire Goldberg Moses and Heidi Hartmann. Urbana: U. of Illinois P, 1995. 215-95. Print.

Hernton, Calvin. 1965. *Sex and Racism in America*. Grove Press, New York.

O'Reilly, Andrea. *Toni Morrison and Motherhood: A Politics of the Heart*.

Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004. Print.

Wade-Gayles, Gloria. 1984. *No Crystal Stair: Visions of Race and Sex in Black Women's Fiction*. The Pilgrim Press, New York.