

A Study on the Theme of Motherhood in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*

M. MIRACLIN NIVESHA

*PG Scholar, Department of English, Holy Cross College, Tiruchirapalli
Affiliated to Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirapalli*

Abstract

*Toni Morrison was an American novelist, essayist, book editor and college professor. She is noted for her examination of Black experience particularly Black Female within the Black Community. One of her famous works *Beloved* is based on the true story of a runaway slave. This paper is all about analyzing the theme of motherhood in the novel *Beloved*. The theme is explored by Morrison from the beginning of the novel through the characters like Sethe, Sethe's Mother and Baby Suggs. These characters throw a spark to the theme of motherhood within their walls of slavery. Slavery is seen as a major factor that breaks family and which in turn breaks motherhood also. It also analyses the portrait of the Black slave women.*

Keywords: *Slavery, Motherhood, Family, Maternal Love, Passing, Rememory.*

Literature is always been a broadest sense of art form which describes itself as a virtuoso reflection of civilization and its culture. Literature elevates to a new level of connotation and apprehension in the process of institutional sanity and equity in a insane and discriminatory world. Indian literature is fabricated by the Indian Subcontinent, which adjoin a diversity of vernacular language such as Hindi, Sanskrit, Tamil etc. Indian Literature marks its ancient peak with Sanskrit comprising literary works. Indian Literature marks its great antiquity with oral literature in the Vernacular Indian Languages.

This paper presents the theme of motherhood in the novel *Beloved* through the characters of Sethe, Sethe's Mother and Baby Suggs. It brings out the conflict between motherhood and slavery. Slavery becomes the major issue that makes the theme of motherhood highlighted in the novel. Toni Morrison was an American novelist, essayist, book editor and college professor. Toni Morrison is considered as the most celebrated author in the world. Her novels have earned many prestigious awards like Pulitzer Prize and the Presidential Medal of Freedom from President Barack Obama. She was noted for the black experience of black female in the black community.

The central themes of her novels are the The Black Americans experience in the unjust society, her characters struggle to find their self identity. Her use of fantasy and sintous poetic style gave her the strength and texture. Her

novels mainly revolve around African- Americans history and own time situations. Her other works are *The Bluest Eye* (1970), *The Song of Solomon* (1977), *Sula* (1973), *Home* (2012) etc. Her famous novel *Beloved* explores the physical, emotional and spiritual devastation wrought by slavery which continues to haunt them to freedom.

The novel *Beloved* is a conversation between oneself idea of the Americans and the sin of slavery. Rememory is seen as the key word of the novel which is seem to be a response to the lost of past, memory, culture, people, language of Africa. There is a constant struggle seen to beat up the past. The novel *Beloved* is mainly focused on the theme of motherhood and how the aspect of slavery crushed the natural instincts of women. The word mother holds a lot of impression since it is from the mother a child holds its life. The life of child blooms when a mother nurtures, loves, cares, scolds his children. The theme of motherhood has been given a splendid justification in the novel *Beloved* by Toni Morrison.

The concept of motherhood has been justified through three characters like Sethe, Sethe's Mother and Baby Suggs. *Beloved* is a story of Sethe a slave mother who escaped from Kentucky to Ohio with her youngest daughter in womb. Her three children are already send away from her. And on the way her fourth child has been delivered and see named her Denver. The most Tragic part is where Sethe goes to the extend of killing her own daughter to save her

from slavery. After her life at jail she started to live at 124 Bluestone house where the sad ghost of the baby is present. The arrival of *Beloved* has brought a different dimension to Sethe's Motherhood.

Beloved is considered to be story of trauma experience in motherhood, womanhood and how slavery has been a great cause that makes family and motherhood get broken down. Toni Morrison has a great imaginative power in exploring the struggles and complexities of a slave mother. The relationship between a mother and a child is been portrayed as an important aspect between humans and others also. But in the aspect of slavery its in the opposite way of relationships being disrupted and clearly stated by Morrison in the novel through the line

"Unless carefree, motherlove was a killer" (Morrison, p. 66)

Sethe was raised in a society where the system of slavery has corrupted the relationship of Sethe and her mother. Sethe when she was a baby she did not had the chance of drinking her own mother's milk she was fed with another women's milk. Her mother was hung by her masters. And she came to know the torture of rape done to her mother and the woman who nursed her. Sethe was the only offspring she did not destroy.

"She threw them all away but you. The one crew she threw away from the island. The others from more whites she also threw away. Without names she threw them. You she gave the name of a black man. She put her arms around him. Never. Never. Telling you. I am telling you, small girl Sethe" (Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*.1987. Page 74).

She compares this act with the incident when the white people who abuse her steal her breast milk which makes her get frightened. During slavery children where separated from their mothers and kept away and marriages where not that much recognized by them even after freedom. And the children were only claimed to be a property and not more than that. And the same was applied to Sethe's children they were just considered as property and so seethe does not want her children to face the struggle that she has got in her life.

Sethe's mother-in-law is the main mentor for her mothering. Her life was also corrupted by slavery. Sethe tries to break the resisting cycle of breaking mother and child from the family. She so how manages to bring her children

to Ohio river from the slave sweet home. But still when the slave owners came to Ohio to claim the children she threwed them to the woodshed to kill them rather than giving the children to them.

"If I hadn't killed her, she would have died" (Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*. 1987. Page 100).

Sethe explains to Beloved who came to her life later about the line of slavery that made her to do so. She has become a mother on her own and yet she had the chance of children being stolen to her. The intensity that she had was incomprehensible to her daughter Denver and her lover Paul D. Paul D says that

"Your love is too thick" (Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*. 1987. Page 82).

He says that she does not have any right to decide the future of her childrens. In another point they need to survive for themselves from the world and love for small. But in fact Sethe replys to Paul D stating

"Thin love ain't love at all" (Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*. 1987. Page 82).

Beloved and Sethe develops a mutual obsession between them. They both have lost each of them in themselves.

At the end of the novel we find Denver who has learnt a lot from her mother's struggles and triumphs. Beloved moves away from the home once the community accepts sethe. Thirty women come from the community to exorcise the ghost.

Morrison's novel gives us both pain and healing. Here beloved is seemed to be the embodiment of pain. The appearance of Beloved made Seth to remember, forget and forgive. Toni Morrison has presented motherhood in a realistic manner. Seethe is a person who in her motherhood forgets her identity. Her whole world revolved around her children. Her love as a mother is seemed to be a love with so much of pain and trauma. And this novel seems to a supreme factor in the aspect of Motherhood.

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