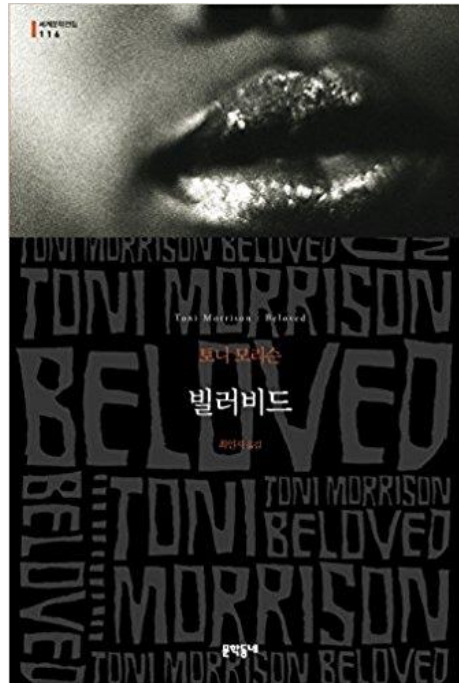


Expression of Sisterhood between Black and White Women in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*

Dr. M. Alagesan



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Beloved

Beloved, the master piece of Toni Morrison, is based on a real incident which the author came to know from a newspaper: it was a woman who killed her own child out of an extreme depression. Morrison added colours of tragic-sympathy through her word power. It attracts readers' attention and makes them plunge into the story. The protagonist Sethe wins the hearts of the readers. Though she is a tragic figure in this novel, she inspires the readers by being a very strong personality who bears all her hurdles and stands like a rock even at the face of danger. *Beloved* cannot merely be treated as a story which is born out of an individual's imagination; rather it is one of the great stories that have found a powerful medium to express the suppressed feelings of black people, especially black women under the clutches of slavery.

Sweet Home and School Teacher are the terms used with a paradoxical connotation. Sweet Home is the slave house in this novel where the slaves are bereaved of all their feelings. School Teacher is the person who plucks all their feelings. Normally, a teacher is the person who makes the students know, observe, and introspect the things in and out, with which they can make their home sweet, whereas here it is quite opposite. They suffer like anything; they are tied, chained, 'iron-mouthed' and used. As Baby Shuggs, one of the significant characters of this novel, says,

“Here,” she said, “in this here place, we flesh; flesh that weeps; laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in grass. Love it. Love it hard. Yonder they do not love your flesh. They despise it. They don’t love your eyes; they’d just as soon pick em out. No more do they love the skin on your back. Yonder they flay it. And O my people they don’t love your hands. Those they only use, tie, bind, chop off and leave empty. Love your hands! Love them. Raise them up and kiss them. (BL 88)

Killing Is Not More Painful Than Living

This is what makes Sethe think even killing is not more painful than living in Sweet Home. The slave masters do not treat them even to the level of a domestic animal. Under this ill circumstance, it is very difficult to develop and maintain a good relationship. Sexual relationship is the only relationship allowed in Sweet Home. It is not for making them happy but for producing future slaves.

Encompasses Various Aspects of African American Life

Beloved encompasses various aspects of African American’s life during and after slavery; slavery, racial discrimination, gender abuse, sexual harassment, search for identity, longing for freedom, deprivation of love and affection are some of the various aspects of *Beloved*. Of which, relationship seems to be an important aspect. As Nancy Kang says, “Familial ties are difficult to maintain” (846). Despite their hardships, there are relationships, how they are realised and how they have to be viewed is the intention of this essay. The story is about a woman called Sethe who escapes along with her children from Sweet Home, the slave house, and tries to find a better place and better life for her children. As Teresa N. Washington says, “As a runaway, Sethe does not even own herself, let alone her children, by American standards. However, she dares to love and protect them with the only means at her disposal.”(60). She does not want her sons working like machines, and her daughters to be the manufacturers of future slaves. In her attempt to free them, she encounters countless problems, both physically and mentally, which sometimes find no words or language to express them clearly.

Amy Denver and Sethe

Amy Denver and Sethe’s relationship is a unique one. It is an affection developed on the basis of ‘A friend in need is a friend indeed’. Friendship and love are the two relationships that come out by breaking the boundaries. They come past the boundaries such as religion, community, gender, colour, region, language and so many others, in fact, because of these two axes, the world roles on. Morrison’s attempt to project the life style of slaves is quite common aspect found in most of the black writers, in addition to this, she portrays two opposite

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extremities of two white characters in this novel: one is the School Teacher who is depicted as an extremity of brutality and the other is Amy Denver, depicted as an extremity of humanity. School Teacher stretches his hands to pluck the happiness of black people, whereas Amy Denver soothes the wounds caused by him. Morrison imagines how the life of the black people would be in the presence of the white people like Amy Denver in this world.

Good One Always Remains Good

There is no wonder if the good one always remains good. It would be a surprise if the poor becomes rich in a sudden sweep, if the below average turns out to be excellent, and if the hatred turns out to be love. The happiness of such a change is always doubled and there will be a new hope to live on. Such is the surprise Morrison tries to give to the readers while depicting the relationship of Amy Denver and Sethe. Apart from this, she pinpoints the feminism; women are, irrespective of their background, blessed with kindness and motherly care towards others. As the proverb says 'God cannot be present everywhere, so He created mothers'. Morrison says through the characterization of Amy and Sethe that women across the world are slaved once, whereas the black women are twice. In this novel, Morrison depicts two white females with kind heart but helpless due to the boundaries of their social system. Though they could not show publicly their love of humanity on the black people, privately they show it.

On a riverbank in the cool of a summer-evening, two women struggled under a shower of silvery blue. They never expected to see each other again in this world and at the moment couldn't care less...two lawless outlaws—a slave and a barefoot white woman with unpinned hair—wrapping a ten-minute-old baby in the rags they wore. But no pateroller came and no preacher. The water sucked and swallowed itself beneath them. There was nothing to disturb them at their work. So they did it appropriately and well. (BL 85)

Friendship Expressed Through Hands

The friendship of Amy and Sethe is not expressed in speech but through hands; Amy uses no kind words but stretches her helping hands. The scolding should be viewed from different angle. It originates not from the heart but from the mouth. It is quite common that people do not like seeing people lying in a pathetic condition; it does not mean that they hate them, but they feel empathized, they regret for them, at the same time their commitments and helplessness make them discomfit. They struggle between their kindness and helplessness; it hurts them, so they feel that it is better to avoid seeing them. Amy Denver does not have any personal hatred on Sethe, but due to her commitment and personal depression, she tries to go away from the problem. When she sees Sethe in a very pathetic condition, she feels that her journey to get away from problems has been disturbed by another problem. She could not go on with her job. Her conscience obstructs her from leaving Sethe and her personal feelings urge her to move out of the place as early as possible. So, she is in the fit of conflict with her kindness and helplessness. Her kindness comes out through her arms and her helplessness through her mouth. She accepts the help from her good arms and understands the words from bad mouth, and that is why Sethe is unique among all other characters of this novel.

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Scolding and Consoling

Sethe does not want to carry all her burden even though she is in a very pathetic condition. She cooperates with Amy by putting in all her remaining strength. Though Amy scolds and de-motivates Sethe in the beginning, later she soothes her by giving her helping hands. By the helpful nature of Amy and the cooperation of Sethe, an undefined friendship is formed between them. After delivering the baby, Amy's scolding is converted in to consoling. She feels that her help to deliver the baby will not be recognized and it will go unnoticed. In reality, the feeling of importance, hunger for honour and respect for emotions of human being pave way for unconditional love and relationship. ““She’s never gonna know who I am. You gonna tell her? Who brought her into this here world?” She lifted her chin, looked off into the place where the sun used to be. “You better tell her. You hear? Say Miss Amy Denver. Of Boston.”” (BL 85). Sethe, as a mark of respect for Amy Denver’s help, names her baby as Amy Denver.

Ideology of Sisterhood

Through the unison of Sethe and Amy Denver, Morrison expresses her ideology of sisterhood between black and white women. She also expresses the kindness of women that cannot be stopped by any colour race or creed. Amy uses scornful words but stretches her helpful hands for Sethe. “Don’t up and die on me in the night, you hear? I don’t want to see your ugly black face hankering over me. If you do die, just go on off somewhere where I can’t see you, hear?” (BL 82) She could not make a move from the spot after knowing the condition of Sethe. Amy’s helping tendency and Sethe’s cooperation not only give birth to Denver but also for sisterhood which is developed not through words but through actions.

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