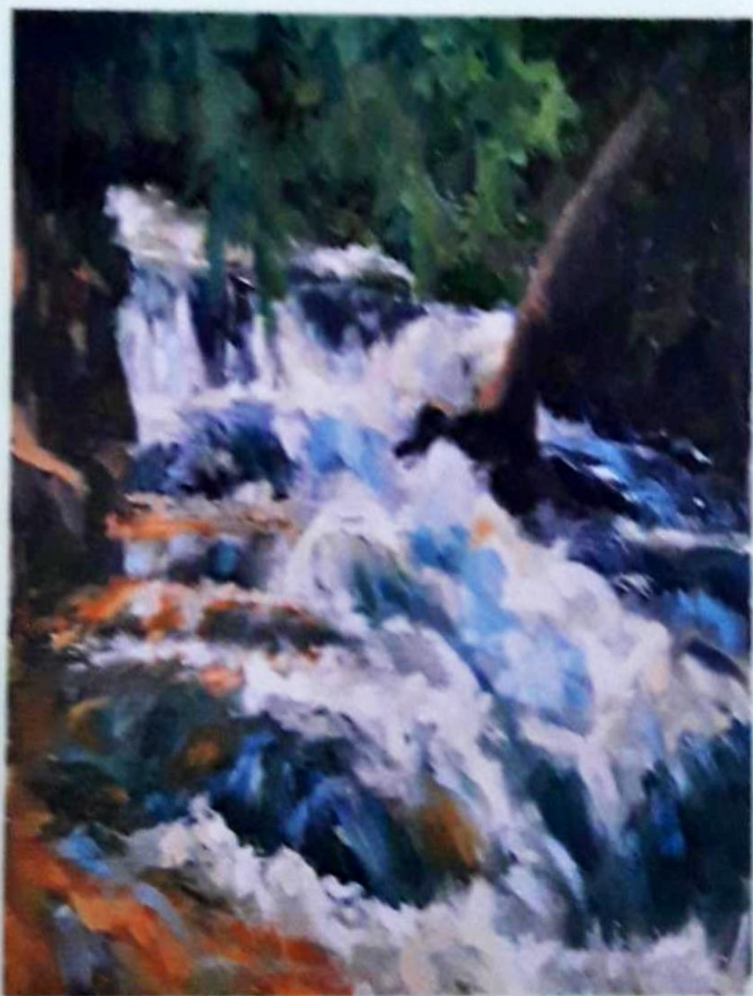


ECHOING CASCADES

GOMEZ SOPHIA
U. ANAMICA



DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
Jayaraj Annapackiam College for Women
(Autonomous)
Periyakulam, Tamilnadu, India

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TONI MORRISON'S GENUINE PORTRAYAL OF AFRICAN AMERICAN VOICE IN *BELOVED*

Dr.GOMEZ SOPHIA

"Black People have a story, and that story has to be heard"

– Toni Morrison

African – American Women Writers have always emphasized the importance of Slave experience and voice. In Toni Morrison's Novels, the Voice of the oppressed, those of race and gender, echoes and throbs with life. Her famous novel *Beloved* won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction. Toni Morrison is the first African American woman to win the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1993. Her Novel '*Beloved*' is based on a sensational incident and is a sure indication of the impact of racial and cultural pressure on a black mother Sethe whose thick love results in infanticide.

Toni Morrison's emergence as an African – American writer, pictures her art of plumbing deep into women's life, she realistically interprets the black experience in a white world. *Beloved* (1987) is the masterpiece produced by Toni Morrison. She narrates the real story of a runaway slave Margaret Garner who in 1856, killed her daughter, tried to kill her other children and herself at last, rather coming back to slavery. Morrison's *Beloved* deals with a life of a female slave Sethe who is forced to undergo in-human insults, experiences and brutality of the evils of slavery. As Pulitzer Prize winning novel *Beloved* reflects feminist consciousness effectively.

Toni Morrison's novels aim to critique the myth of black inferiority and subordination which prevails in largely white culture. Her novels investigate the devastating effects of the beauty standards of the dominant culture on the self image of the African – female adolescent. Toni Morrison's novles are, quest tales in which key characters search for the hidden sign, capable of giving them strength and identity Toni Morrison shows the exploitative nature of logo centric orders. Her novels are exploration of the meaning of Blackness. She wants the reader to work

jointly with the writer in formulating the meaning of her novels. She puts forward the characters, which are evacuated to the margins of the society, in the name of their race and gender alienation. She also brings them out of the anonymity and narrates their own history in their own words. She also assesses the core of the African American reality, particularly that of an African female and female alienation, feminist issues in most of her novels.

Toni Morrison helped to promote Black Literature and authors when she worked as an editor for Random House in the 1960's and 1970's. Morrison herself emerged as one of the most renowned African American writer in the twentieth century. She has written ten novels. Toni Morrison's works have taken her to the skies. She had genuinely portrayed the true voice of African - American slave life. She keeps her people in touch with myths, which enable them to act out their potential recuperate and portray their inner spiritual imaginative lives hidden beneath historical facts. Toni Morrison asserts the importance of identity, speaking out against racism, sexism and silencing. She explores the deep layers of everyday texture of people's lives, emphasizing the lives of victims and strong imaginative energetic women and men. She creates historical reality when she reveals the energies, hardships and experiences of Black men and women.

Toni Morrison deals with the themes of love and friendship, search for identity, concept of beauty and ugliness, and life and death in her novels. Her heroines and heroes struggle to understand all the better aspects of the human conditions. Being away from their own land, they are tied with the chains of slavery. The Black women are portrayed as breeding women, maids and domestic workers. Black women are viewed and treated just as the commodities to be handled by the white masters. They were not allowed to have any human rights whatsoever. But their white masters have all rights over them. They are forced to live in a set-up which is full of racism and sexism, which result in alienation.

Slave women were wretchedly abused. The Black Women Writers have documented how the black women were made 'Breeders'. Their

masters use them for their sexual hunger and they are subjected to public fondling and exposed naked on the auction block W.E.B. Du Bois says:

A slave woman is treated as an unwed mother so few women are born free and some amid insult and scarlet letters achieved freedom; but our Women in Black had freedom thrust contemptuously upon them. With that freedom they are buying an untrammelled independence, and dear as the price they pay for it, it will in the end be worth every taunt and groan. (234)

Toni Morrison has vividly portrayed the condition of Sethe in *Beloved*. The cruel situations of the plantations at Kentucky is painfully narrated in her novel. The slave women are immersed in physical and emotional fetters of life. The position of sethe is very pathetic. Even her escape from slavery was not really for herself. Her swollen breasts and the baby kicking within pressed her onward to the baby waiting for her milk. Biological necessity made her create a life that would allow her children to grow up. Sethe carries *Beloved* on her conscience and in her heart. For the mother, the dead child is maternity in potentia, the mother truncated.

Sethe curses her own future by bitterly remembering her past until she conjures the past; the baby ghost haunts her sons and they run away, right out of the house unable to bear the fear and uncertainty, isolating her into a totally female realm. Sethe further fixates on the past by never mingling with the Black community, by protecting the only child who stays with her, her daughter Denver, from the past without seeming ever to think of the girl's future or need for community. When we first enter the home, only Sethe and Denver inhabit it, and it is claustrophobic indeed. More pathetic is the state when the infant dies, Sethe trades her body in a sexual exchange with the engraver to have the letters engraved on her dead daughter's tombstone.

Toni Morrison's women are linked by a three generation chain of scars, marking both bond and breach. Sethe's mother urges her daughter to recognize her body in death by the scar under her breast, and Sethe's

resurrected daughter bears on her neck the mark of her mother's handsaw. Between them, Sethe has "a chokecherry tree" on her back, the scar of a brutal whipping. The School teacher's nephews whip Sethe for reporting their first act of violence against her—the one which looms much larger in her memory, forcibly 'nursing' her breast milk. The tree is thus associated with Sethe's violated motherhood, the visible sign of the crime she repeatedly laments. She remembers with depressed heart when the school teacher and his nephew tied Sethe down, beat her and suckled her breast "they took my milk!" (B 17). Sethe's life thought and feelings go un-strengthened. Her meaningless life unanimated makes her feel dry, fatigued and frail in spirit. Sethe represents the slave women world which always bears the seeds of oppression from their birth, even though they give birth to mankind they are treated as only 'Breeders'. They are discarded and degraded. They seem to have been framed for men and work in the field.

In a very emphatic way, Morrison uses *Beloved* to show in painful detail one of the ways Black women's bodies were "scarred and dismembered by slavery and then salvaged and remembered in the acts of free love." (Ashraf Rushdy 102). The novel is about a love relationship gone awry between mother and daughter. Women as mothers had the greatest psychological blow within the American slave culture. The practice, which denied the women the opportunity and privilege of loving their children, only served to alienate them from their children. Susan Willis avers, "The tragedy of a woman's alienation is its effect on her as mother. Her emotions split, she showers tenderness and love on her employer's child, and rains violence and disdain on her own" (265). The type of love relationship between mother and daughter in this novel is also suggestive of the unusualness and complexity of Toni Morrison's art. She has been credited with creating characters with dual and moral uncertainties. In an interview, she calls her fictional characters:

The combination of virtue and flaw, of good intentions gone awry, of wickedness cleansed and people made whole again. If you judge them all by the best that they have done, they are wonderful. If you judge them by the worst that they have done, they are terrible. (McKay 423)

It becomes clear that Sethe's decision to kill her children rather than allow them to be slaves is influenced by the traumas she endured at Sweet Home, including rape at the hands of the overseer, called "School teacher" by the slaves. It also becomes clear that Sethe and Denver are the only ones left in the house, because Baby Suggs has died and soon after Howard and Buglar, Sethe's two sons, have long fled the house. Later on, it turns out that her boys vanished because they were afraid Sethe would kill one of her children again. Even though Sethe killed her daughter a long time ago, she is still troubled by her spirit. Eventually the ghost of her daughter comes back as a real person, a girl named Beloved, who comes to live with Sethe and Denver. When it becomes clear that Beloved is obsessed with Sethe and that she tries to destroy her because of what Sethe did to her, Denver and the people from their community rally to help Sethe purify the house by driving Beloved out of it, which works, giving resolution to the story.

According to Dolan Hubbard, the novel *Beloved* is centred on "the historical fact that there were Black women during slavery who terminated their babies' lives rather than allow them to be offered up to the destruction of slavery" (137). Through the flashback technique "with a sympathetic omniscient narrator", we are presented with the tragic story of Sethe who escapes from slavery in Kentucky, "but is haunted by profound guilt over killing of her daughter, whose ghost traumatizes the family" (B 138). Sethe kills her daughter because she loves her so much that she does not want her daughter Beloved to 'die' - undergo slavery as she has. This death kills both body and soul. However, the love that imputes this kind of logic in Sethe's head is a strange type of love.

Toni Morrison, has a singular goal and ambition that of creating a new consciousness about the Black experience. Though one of Morrison's concern is to "define the beauty and brutality of human condition and evoke the pathos and tragedy of human life, she wrote to make "the black history, contemporary and brought black literary experience into the American mainstream" (Sinha 46). Through the novel *Beloved* Toni Morrison argues that overcoming the trauma of slavery entails remembering rather than forgetting. In contemporary

American culture the institution of slavery has been largely forgotten. But Morrison tries to show that the past never ends. She wants the readers to re-vision and understand African-American history through non-western eyes by re-telling history through the lives of former African slaves.

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