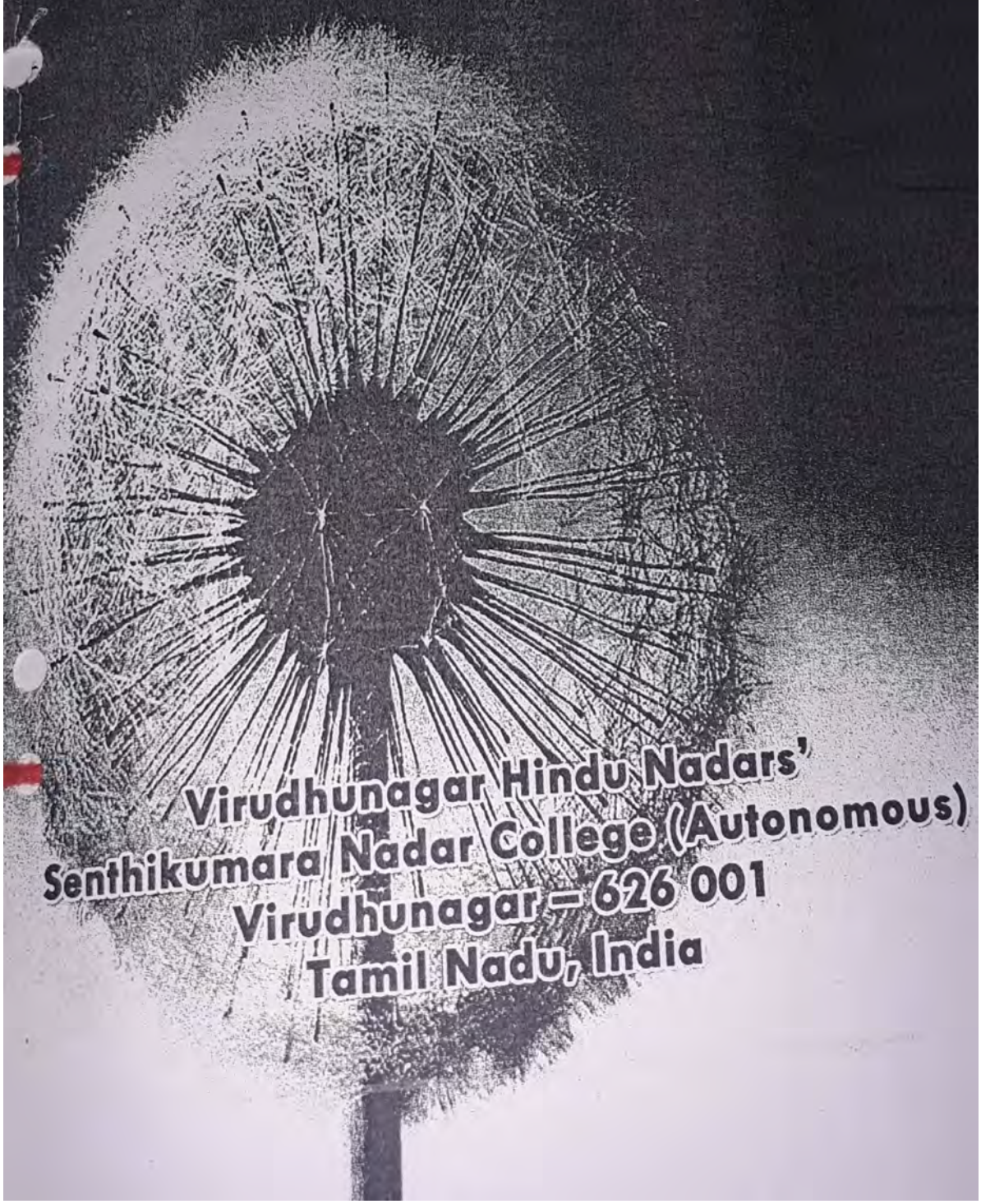
DIASPORIC LITERATURE: A CRITICAL SPECTRUM

J. SAMUEL KIRUBAHAR
A. K. MUTHUSAMY



Virudhunagar Hindu Nadars'
Senthikumara Nadar College (Autonomous)
Virudhunagar – 626 001
Tamil Nadu, India

Scanned by CamScanner

CONTENTS

Preface

1 Diasporic Sensibility and Acculturation in JhumpaLahiri's *The Namesake*
Dr. R. Dhayala Krishnan 1

2 The Female Protagonists as Alienates in the Works of Toni Morrison
Dr. S. Kanakaraj 6

3 Broadcasting The Pretensions of Multiculturalism in ManjuKapur's *The Immigrant*
Dr.P.Jeyappriya
S. Sobana 9

4 Nostalagia in Anita Rau Badami's *Tamarind Mem*
Dr. P. Padmini
M. V. Arumugam 13

5 Quest for Identity in Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe*
Dr. S. Thirunavukkarasu
S. LekshmiThangam 17

6 Afro – American Theatre and Drama
Dr. Keyur K. Parekh 23

7 Diasporic Sensibility in Anne Frank's Diary
Dr. S. Anita Evelyn 42

8 Extrinsic Use of Narrative Devises to Support Disaporic Impulses in Naipaul's *Half A Life*
Dr.C.GangaLakshmi 47

9 Diasporic Literature in English: An Overview
Dr. M. Devi Chandra 52

10 Displacement as A Foreshadow of Women's Defilement in BapsiSidhwa's *Ice Candy Man*
Dr. K. Mohamed Umar Farooq
Ms. RasheedaMadani 57

11 Female infringement the constraints in Anita Nair's *The Better Man*
Dr. K. Mangayarkarasi 66

12 Female Alienation In Toni Morrison's Novel *Beloved*
Dr. Gomez Sophia 72

Scanned by CamScanner

FEMALE ALIENATION IN TONI MORRISON'S NOVEL *BELOVED*

Dr.GOMEZ SOPHIA

Female Alienation is an existential experience and condition that has frequently been encountered in women's literature, but it happens to be an area that has either been ignored or neglected as much as women, as a race have remained subordinated, marginalized and suppressed as a voice. In Sociological terms 'Alienation' means loneliness, the absence of relationships, the feeling of disassociation from others or the explicit rejection of social values and norms, the sense of both powerlessness in the face of existing social structures as well as the sense of their meaninglessness. .

Alienation suffered by women, is a much neglected area, with the women being marginalized and oppressed in all public spheres. Alienation is an attribute and a tendency not usually associated with a woman. Alienation is, as it is depicted in literature either as personality trait or a trope appears to be man centered and male specific while women were never ever considered to be within the realm of being affected by the same affliction and a tendency not associated with the women. Considered almost as sub-human, she is "a womb, an ovary; she is a female" (Beauvoir 35), and "this enslavement of the female to the species" (69), has reduced her to an anomie and a depersonalized entity, who has no 'self' or identity of her own.

Unlike male alienation, female alienation requires a specific definition and understanding. Alienation as a concept, theory, philosophy, experience, epistemology, thought and perception is nothing new to women in general. Women have always been viewed as alienated figures, embedded in "otherness". Simone De Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* is a seminal text of the 20thcentury which projects that woman is defined and established as the 'other' simply because she is not a male Dc Beauvoir says :

> The 'Other' is particularly defined according to the particular manner in which the one chooses to set himself up. Every man asserts his freedom and transcendence-but they do not all give these words the same sense. For Man on the other hand, transcendence is a situation: he is the transcendent, he soars in the sky of heroes; woman crouches on earth, beneath his feet; it amuses him to measure the distance that separates him from her; from time to time he raises her up to him, takes her, and then throws her back;never does he lower himself down to her realm of slimy shadows.(279).

Scanned by CamScanner

Most of the writers who chose to migrate and domiciled themselves in other countries, become eventually people who were misfits in both the cultures trapped between two worlds, two cultures. They were the most 'alienated' lot, having two homes, but no real home, belonging to two cultures, but unable to belong to either, they resented the country they had left behind, but hated the country they had arrived at. The alien culture, customs and lifestyle rendering them homeless and baffling, their senses with one foot in the native culture and another in an alien soil, most writers were looking in hindsight, over the shoulders at times with longing nostalgia at the homeland they have left behind, yet there was no home to return.

As individuals and writers uprooted from their native grounds, either by chance or choice, these women writers, who infuse their characters with notions of powerlessness, helplessness and as victims of estrangement, isolation and alienation, may have probably frequently experienced these emotions themselves. Residing in an alien country, living amidst unacquainted culture, staring into unknown faces, the sense of not belonging follows the sense of being, rudderless and anchorless, totally reflective of the psychological predicament of the writers and their perceived characters, who become receptacles for their emotional saga of separation and aloneness.

The women writers were determined to create a 'literature of their own', "a canon of works", one that was not an equal or alternative to male canon of masterpieces, but one that would air their voices, their experiences, point of view, values, originality, diversity and creativity. The theme of alienation became one of the powerful devices in women's hands, to exclusively focus on women's problems and dilemmas in coping up with this modernist malaise. Scores of women writers have adopted this theme of alienation which has become an umbrella term encompassing a multitude of perspectives that reflects the women's 'real' and authentic presence.

Among these brilliant galaxy of writers, who have explored the theme of female alienation, is the Afro-American, Toni Morrison, the Noble Prize Winner of 1993, writing on issues that cut across all human structured barriers. As a leading woman writer of her era Toni Morrison (18thFebruary 1931) deals extensively with the existential dilemma which a black woman suffers due to her marginalization and secondary position. 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

Scanned by CamScanner

core of the African American reality particularly that of an African female and female alienation, feminist issues in most of her novels.

This study focusses on the issues of alienation of African American women who were transported as slaves to The United States. It focuses on their physical and mental tortures from the white men and women because of their Blackness. The inhuman treatment to the Black women from men, both Black and white is explored. It investigates the struggles of Black women in their search for identity and their failures in achieving their identity. Toni Morrison has distinguished herself as an author, editor and critic who has transformed the American literary landscape with her presence in the African American literary tradition. 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 Schoolteacher'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

Scanned by CamScanner

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).

Beloved takes place in 1873, in a house in Cincinnati, Ohio. Sethe, a former slave, and her daughter Denver are the only women living in the house, besides the ghost that haunts them. It has been many years since Sethe escaped from the farm 'Sweet Home' in Kentucky, where she had lived as a slave. While pregnant, Sethe had made plans to run away from the farm with her husband Halle, with the intention of fleeing across the Ohio River to Halle's mother, Baby Suggs, in Cincinnati. Their three children were already living with Baby Suggs. 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 Seethe's head is a strange type of love.

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

Scanned by CamScanner

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 .

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" (Sinha46).

One of the factors which perpetuates this alienation happens to be racial, the Blacks when they entered the white world of supremacy and racial superiority had to wage one of the bitter battles, that has gone down in history as a struggle for achieving equality as equal citizens in a white country. As victims of racial discrimination and slavery for the American Black, the march from slavery to freedom has been a transforming experience. Alienation stemmed from belonging to another race, a race which was brought to America to bear the white man's burden.

Much, as Morrison is concerned about the Black man's oppression, she is equally concerned with the Black woman's struggle for freedom, from racial oppression and the oppression of the black man. The sense of alienation rises as the very cause of race discrimination; this is best illustrated in the novel *Beloved.* Sethe's story is the story of American black woman fighting against both the racial and sexual prejudices. The prevailing situation of the Kentucky plantations is a representation of other parts of the country. Sethe's position is a representative life of the other slave women. The very alienated state of Sethe resembles the alienation of all slave women. Breaking all the stereotype of motherhood, Seth is set to save her children from slavery even if it means by killing them, she manages to save 'one' before she is restrained. To this extent, race continues to act as a strong force, as Kwame Anthony Appiah points out,"Races are like witches. However unreal witches are, belief in witches, like belief in races has had and in many communities continues to have profound Consequences for human social life" (28).

Beloved (1987) is the masterpiece produced by Toni Morrison. She narrates a real story of the runaway slave Margaret Garner in 1856, who killed her daughter, tried to kill her other children and herself at last rather than coming back to slavery. The novel describes the story of Sethe, who killed her young daughter, Beloved, when faced with a similar threat of enslavement. The novel unfolds the struggles of many characters that are forgotten. They rememorize to live the present life free of guilt. The [illegible]

Scanned by CamScanner

history by the Blacks on one hand and the need to remember them, tell them aloud, rather than to forget, on the other hand. The genuine aim of both the story and it's protagonist is to name the unnamable person.

A Sense of alienation and race discrimination give the constitutive formation to the novel *Beloved*. Racial discrimination results in a sense of alienation of all Blacks, Sethe's life is one of the representative lives of slave woman, the inhuman effect of slavery and the subjection of woman to functioning as potential breeder, for breeding more children to work as slaves in the plantations and the laborious work to which they were subjected. The black woman is a dual victim, on the one hand she is a handy victim for the black man who heaps, vents his individual frustration and defeat on the hopeless woman, on the other hand, she is sexually exploited by her master, and as a slave mother, she has little control over either her children or the destiny of her family. The master or the owner decides when a slave woman can marry and for how long. Taking the slaves circumstances, some marriages are declared invalid or they were parted, to go in different directions. Baby suggs, Sethe's mother-in-law is shown to have endured the pain of such separations, the physical wretchedness which Sethe undergoes, makes her determined that her children should not suffer the similar harassment. She chose rather to kill them than see them be caught in another vicious circle of slavery. She decides to secure their liberation by killing them.In death they would be free, and eternally escape victimization.

Toni Morrison in *Beloved* produces a world full of dread, disorder and irrationality. The novel contains a rich matrix of magic realism with the ghost of Beloved coming to haunt Sethe for her ruthless murder of her child, but it also packs up crude realism of the human infliction of cruelty on another. *Beloved* presents a very realistic and cruel picture of the practice of American slavery in the 19thcentury.

In the contemporary period, black women writers have systematically analyzed the relationship among class, race and gender. The novels of black women from1892 to the recent times have been a loud vociferous and articulate voice against the aspects of oppression of race, class sex and color, the factor upon which the societal definition of the black women is based. The concept of women in society is not only sexist, racist but is also classist. Black women were considered as belonging to a lower class. Critics have rightly pointed out that elements of sexism and racism as political social system inadvertently affected the physiological and psychological functioning of the lives of Afro-American women.

As a slave, Sethe is treated as sub-human. She even seems to be alienated from herself.Even Paul. D thinks that she is inferior to a cock. Sethe sees her entire existence as a slave as futile. Most often she is

Scanned by CamScanner

isolated and desperate. Hence she chooses to free herself from the slavery and even decides to kill her children to protect them, from the utter humiliation and racial suffering from the whites and she decides to live in isolation with her daughter Denver.

Among Black women race and gender are two equal and simultaneous concerns. As much as they abhorred both sexist and racist oppression, because they were a minority ethnic sect, there was much they could do to actively formulate a political agenda to end this bias. However scores of Black women took up these issues by writing about them. Toni Morrison was one who wrote almost all her novels centering about these concerns

Toni Morrison's fiction on the other hand, deals with macroscopic issues, such as racial identity, obsession with colour the pain of blackness the low class morality and sense of inferiority the marginalization of the black women and the sexual abuse and harassment meted out on them.Toni Morrison's characters occupy a large canvas, where racial tensions simmer to a hating point and impact the characters. As a victim of racism herself, Toni Morrison's novels focus on race relations and the effects of racism the explorative nature of relationships living in a white society. When Toni Morrison, was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for her novel *'Beloved'*, she was asked why she portrayed harsh confrontation between black and white she said :

> I feel personally sorrowful about black-white relations- a lot of the time because Black people have always been used as a buffer in this country between powers to prevent class war, to prevent other kinds of real conflagrations.... But in becoming an American from Europe, what one has in common with that other immigrant is contempt for me...it's nothing else but colour. Wherever they were from they would be together. They could all say, 'I am not that. So in that sense, becoming an American is based on an attitude; an exclusion of me and cultural isolation. (Interview with Bonnie Angelo 124)

The social exclusion and cultural isolation from the white community was something the blacks found hard to bear. The physiological and psychological alienation that shrouds them is complete.

Toni Morrison became the first black woman writer to hold a named Chair at an Ivy League University. She received the Noble Prize for Literature in 1993. She was the eighth woman and the first Black woman writer to receive the prize. The Black American Women's struggle for survival and liberation has been won against the dual

Scanned by CamScanner

black American Congre..woman, while recognizing the power of both tradition asserts that "of my two handicaps" being female put many more obstacles in my path than being black".(Unbought and unbossed12)

Toni Morrison sets here novel *Beloved* in an alienated world of slavery. Here again the characters share alienation and exile either psychologically or physically amidst a race of whites who secure or enjoy a sense of belonging. Sethe is isolated by her own community who cannot comprehend her committing the act of infanticide. Sethe is forced to endure the hostility of the Black community which completely ostracizes her. Like Sethe, Paul D undergoes torturous experiences, the oppression and torment from the whites which lead to his alienation from his community. However in their state of oppressed alienation Sethe and Paul D launch on several mechanisms to deal with their alienated state. Sethe does her utmost to bury her past into the deep unconsciousness, while Paul D locks away his memories and seared emotions in his imagined "tobacco tin" and both find in each other, a comradeship and a togetherness which help them to sustain and support each other in a kind of unique kinship.

Denver for her part attempts to rescue her mother from self-disintegration. She understands that she has to leave the house and get a job, to save her mother from death. Her establishment in the community helps Denver mature into an independent adult and she rediscovers what is perhaps the most successful strategy for adult development. She replaces the solitary maternal bond with a larger community of adults and opens herself to an empathetic network of fellows. Denver is eventually a survivor as she learns to differentiate herself from her mother and to counteract sethe's disintegration.

Toni Morrison's novels emerge from a larger canvas of experiential dilemma, first of all her Black characters are primarily victims of race, the Black vers the whites, while the whites remain the dominant ones, the Blacks were subject to untold cruelties and violence which prevented them from aligning with the mainstream of American socio-cultural mores. Their colour being Black has further alienated them from the western standards of lifestyle. Being a dormant class, the Blacks were the 'mules' of the white world, subject to sexual abuse and exploitation. Hence Morrison's novels deal with authenticating the history of the blacks, particularly the Black women thrice victims of a social system.

Toni Morrison working on Black Book was obsessed with the brutality faced by Black Americans under slavery. She was found seated in Spike Harris' apartment, with a heavy and melting heart, reading newspaper stories two or three hundred years old. It is said that

Scanned by CamScanner

Morrison found in an article of 1856 the story of a runaway slave Margaret Garner, who cut the throat of her own daughter rather than see her go into the caverns of slavery. This true life episode inspired Toni Morrison pour out her heart which was filled with sorrow for her enslaved race. Toni Morrison throws light on the brutality and injustice of the white masters.

While doing research for the Black Book, Toni Morrison was very much drawn towards Margaret Garner who escaped with her four children from her master in Kentucky to Cincinnati, Ohio.

But when she was tracked down by the slave catchers sent by her masters, Margaret Garner tried to kill her children whom she believed could escape the humiliating chains of slavery. Brooding over this true story,Toni Morrison decided to write a novel of life. Her heroine Sethe reflects Margaret Garner. She runs away from her cruel masters. She kills her baby, she does not want her child to become a slave in future. She tries to hit Denver against a wall when Stamp Paid runs in and saves the infant from Death.

As a graduate student at Cornell in 1955, Chloe Wofford who later became Toni Morrsion had worked for her master's thesis, on exploring manifestations of alienation in the works of William Faulker and Virginia Woolf, Morrison defines alienation with its attendant isolation as the defining literary theme of the twentieth century and explores the two authors' differing treatments of it. Morrison, writes that Alienation is not Faulkner's answer to the problems of modern life and it hardly seems to be hers either. Toni Morrison has doubtlessly expressed many opinions in her thesis.She continues to focus the dangers of isolation. However Toni Morrison challenged the inevitability of alienation in several ways, but She defies it most dramatically through her revision of the figure of the veteran suffering from post – traumatic stress. With reference to one of Morrison's alienated character Sula, Patricia argues that the people of Medallion do not ostracize her because of her difference, but rather integrate her as a necessary communal figure, one that "occupies the place of absences people cannot afford to miss" (40)

As the old adage goes, literature is a reflection of life and women writers strive to create characters whom to emulate and whom not to. Motherhood has been projected as a very important part of the race image of many Black women. They grow up with models of mothers, grandmothers and aunts who have played this role. It is said that the Black mother's knowledge and endurance of America's racial hostility and violence are envisioned as strengthening and motivating tools with which she prepares others in her race for self-sufficient and productive lives. Toni Morrison gives two sides of the 'mothering' aspects.

Scanned by CamScanner

In contrast, Toni Morrison's characters confront an alienation which is racial and sexual, aspects like class, color and gender also criss-cross paving the way for individuals to segregate and remain isolated. However while on one hand Morrison has created characters like Pecola, whose alienation leads to her ultimate madness, Sula who simply dies in exile and isolation, Sethe and her daughter Beloved separated due to the on slaughter of slavery and its repercussions, she has, on the other hand, produced women with the 'tar quality' who are able to sustain and support and guard their family fiercely, for these women, alienation as an issue is almost nonexistent. Female alienation is more crucial, severe and sharp and more oppressive on women. Women particularly are emerging from years of subordination and repression and they are equipped to confront situations and conditions alien to their mental makeup.

WORKS CITED

Morrison, Toni. ***Beloved.*** London : Vintage 2005. Print.

Angelo, Bonnie. "The Pain of Being Black: an Interview with Toni Morrison." ***Conversations with Toni Morrison***. Ed. Danielle Taylor-Guthrie. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1994. 255-61. Print.

Ashraf H.A, Rushdy. ***Daughters Signifying History : The Example of Toni Morrison's Beloved,*** Vol.64, 372-401. UK : Duke University. Print

Berger, Peter L. ***The Concept of Alienation in Modern Sociology.*** Article Published 1967, Newyork Vol.34. Pg 89.

De Beauvoir, Simone. ***The Second Sex.*** Trans. and ed. H. M. Parshley. London: Penguin, 1974. Print.

Fromm, Erich. ***Escape From Freedom.*** New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1949. Print.

Fromm, Erich. ***The Sane Society.*** New York: Henry Hold and Company, 1955. Print.

Horvitz, Deborah. "Nameless Ghosts: Possession and Dispossession in ***Beloved***." ***Studies in American Fiction*** 17 (1989): 157-67. Print.

Hubbard,Dolan. ***Black Thought and Culture*** :University of Missouri Press .2003.Print.

Prince, Joseph. ***Unmerited Favor*** : USA : Casa Creation, a Charisma Media Co. 2012 Print.

Sherry, Ruth. ***Studying Women's Writing: An Introduction.*** London: Edward Arnold, 1988. Print.

Sinha, Sunita. ***Post colonial women writers: New perspectives***. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and distributors, 2008. Print.

Scanned by CamScanner