



FREEDOM, IDENTITY AND THE SELF: THE EXISTENTIAL CRISIS IN TONI MORRISON'S BELOVED

Km. Reshuka

Research Scholar, Glocal School of Art and Social Science

The Glocal University, Mirzapur Pole, Saharanpur (U.P).

Prof. (Dr.) Avnish Juneja

Research Supervisor, Glocal School of Art and Social Science,

The Glocal University, Mirzapur Pole, Saharanpur (U.P).

ABSTRACT

Toni Morrison uniquely articulates the pain and struggles of a traumatized self and community in her novels. Her works explore the harrowing truth of Black identity, revealing trauma through her characters' self-hatred, self-loathing, and the loss of both personal and cultural identity. Morrison's fiction consistently addresses African American history, the psychological scars of oppression, and the complexities of identity. Additionally, her narratives frequently engage with issues of gender and, to a lesser extent, class. Writing in an era when only a handful of Black authors received mainstream recognition, Morrison has since become one of the most celebrated and critically examined writers of contemporary literature. Over the past fifteen years, scholarly discourse on her body of work has flourished, solidifying her as a central figure in literary studies. In *Beloved* (1987), Morrison portrays the devastating effects of slavery and its lasting psychological trauma, illustrating how its consequences persist across generations. The novel's protagonist, Sethe, a formerly enslaved woman living in post-Civil War Cincinnati, remains shackled to her past despite gaining physical freedom. The trauma of slavery is so pervasive that no one touched by it can fully escape its grip, even long after emancipation. Similarly, *Song of Solomon* (1977) represents a milestone in Morrison's career, showcasing her artistic evolution and the literary strategies she employs to address the profound issues of racial trauma and identity. The novel marks a turning point in her exploration of historical and personal suffering, illustrating the depth of her narrative technique. Both *Beloved* and *Song of Solomon* employ elements of disruption, transgression, and sensuality to depict the traumatic experiences of their Black female protagonists. The intense and often unsettling events in Morrison's novels make them well-suited for psychological and literary analysis, offering a rich landscape for exploring themes of memory, survival, and the inescapable weight of history.

Keywords- Trauma, Slavery, Hatred, Disdain, Existence, Legitimacy

Introduction

Toni Morrison is an African-American novelist, writer, emeritus instructor and professor at Princeton University. She is viewed as quite possibly the most splendid authors in the class of African American Literature. She was granted of the Noble Prize in literature in 1993, and the Pulitzer Prize among numerous

different honors. Large numbers of her novels show the impact of the existentialist reasoning. Be that as it may, *Beloved* unequivocally represents the entirety of the major existential subjects. She was conceived named as Chloe Ardelia Wofford, in February 18, 1931, and the second of four youngsters in dark common family. She has southern roots from the sides of both of her folks, who partook in the extraordinary influx of migration from the south in the mid 1900s. Her mom's folks, searching for superior instruction for their youngsters and dreading white sexual violence from Alabama (Matus 4-5); her grandparents from her dad's side came from Georgia, a state where racial violence was ubiquitous. "The showdown with this prejudice vigorously affected Morrison's dads, and thusly by implication likewise Morrison's vision on white America". Morrison's initial life was luxuriously injected with components of dark culture. Her everyday life blossomed with a long narrating custom, which animated her rich creative mind and which left her, later on, throughout everyday life, with the will to summon an oral quality, legitimate to this tribal practice in her novels. She thinks of her as novels alternative for "those traditional, legendary, model stories that we heard years prior", and which are intended to send a cultural heritage. Morrison's grandma, who escaped from the South to offer her kids more chances and to save her little girls from lewd behavior, and her mom, who gave cash to her girl's schooling by taking "embarrassing positions", framed solid female good examples for Morrison. They were the ones, who sent those antiquated dark stories to her. Doing as such, they give her an "unmistakable and incredible imaginative legacy" (McKay 412-16), that would be unequivocal for and her quality of her writing. Essentially, a professor by profession, she joined a casual gathering of essayists and writers, who held gatherings, where they talked about their work. *Song of Solomon*, was the principal novel to be picked the primary choice of the Book of the Month Club by, a dark essayist, in very nearly forty years. When, she became renowned and won the American Book Award in 1988 for her novel, *Beloved*. This novel took her prominence to more prominent statures. It was enlivened by the existence of the got away from slave Margret Garner. Later on, it was adjusted into a film of a similar name featuring Oprah Winfrey and Danny Glover in 1998.

Existentialism in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*

Morrison's *Beloved* is a cutting edge version of the nineteenth-century class of the slave account. *Beloved* investigates the physical, enthusiastic and profound decimation created by slavery, an obliteration that keeps on frequenting those characters who are previous slaves even in opportunity. It tends to similar incredible topics of her work of art *beloved* - the deficiency of blamelessness, the incapacitating force of antiquated recollections and the trouble of tolerating misfortune and change and torment.

This fictionalized account, in view of the genuine story of Margaret Garner, a slave lady from Kentucky, falls under the rubric of the neo-slave account; a term previously begat by Bernard Bellin his *Afro-American Novel and its Tradition*. He depicted neo-slave stories as excessively oral, current accounts of getaway from servitude to opportunity. Neo-slave story started with the rise of the political developments of the last part of the sixties in America. Ashraf Rushdy contended that the neo-slave account is another collection of verifiable investigations of slavery that viewed appropriately the office and self-portrayal of the slaves, their local area and culture-building energies, and the types of opposition they showed. This new artistic structure is created by the 20th century essayists to draw in their chronicled and scholarly past.

In Morrison's *Developing Class Consciousness* (1991), Doreatha Drummond Mbalia works on a portion of Morrison's novels and accentuate on the battle against race and racial issues. What's more, in "Figuration of Rape and the Supernatural in *Beloved*" (1997), Pamela E. Barnett states that *Beloved* is

spooky by the set of experiences and memory of assault explicitly. Her accentuation falls on the portrayals and implications to assault that, as per her, are of more noteworthy significance than different indications of slavery like beating the slaves, Morrison outlines.

Trauma recounts its story through concealing itself in picture Freud's hypothesis of oblivious work of the protection of constraint includes oblivious information on and impression of an occasion Sethe, her trauma can be uncovered through her back's scars, which Henderson (1999) accepts as "Hints of the past that Sethe quells (yet can neither recollect nor neglect) have been gouged into her back by the expert's whip [...] the scars work as an archeological site or memory follow". (54)

Hence, Stephen Metcalf (2006) attests that Sethe's test for her traumatic stifled past is uncovered through the deadness of her back skin (*Beloved*) that she cannot feel since it had been dead for quite a long time. As to, Sethe addresses the African American people group on the grounds that Her feelings were killed so Sethe could endure regular daily existence, to forestall craziness. This was suggestive all through the local area since all were tormented by the nervousness issue and all were encountering the indications and results of passionate desensitizing. Be that as it may, this stifled past gets back with the arrival of Paul D, a previous slave which addresses "the arrival of the subdued" (Henderson, 1999). In this, on the grounds that Joanna Jeskova (2009), finds that when Paul D goes to Sethe's home, he begins to follow her scars, bear an observer for her sufferings and encourage her to portray her story requesting that she "Go as far inside as ... need to" (*Beloved* 47) to profoundly inspect her torment.

Consequently, Paul D requests that Sethe recall and reveal to her story: "Helps me to remember that headless lady back behind Sweet Home. Recall that, Sethe?" (11). The subdued memory is uncovered in her answer: "How is it possible that I would neglect? ... How come everyone run off from Sweet Home can't quit discussing it? ... All together. Returns if we need it to" (54). Appropriately, and when Sethe is cooking bread rolls, the late reaction of trauma is uncovered when her memory is hauntingly reviewed in a method of carrying on to portray her story as a type of working through or mending from her quelled past. Being this, through a bunch of fast pictures and flashbacks, Sethe irately showcases her traumatic experience when she describes how her back is whipped by one of Schoolteacher's nephews "Teacher made one open up my back, and when it shut it made a tree. It develops there still" (*Beloved* 18)

By the by, the "tree" alludes not exclusively to a significant actual side effect of trauma, yet in addition in the most natural sounding way for Bloom (2004) it is "one of numerous actual tokens of the frightfulness of subjection". Thus, deadness is uncovered as mental reaction for the actual injury of Sethe's back as in Jeskova (2009) attests that deadness is capable through Sethe's powerlessness to feel her back.

This can be showed when Paul D's cheek was squeezing into the parts of her chokecherry tree and Sethe has "fixed up and knew, yet couldn't feel" (*Beloved* 17). That is the reason, Jeskova asserts that Sethe experiences absence of pain, which is shown when she "separates herself from her back" in light of the fact that "the picture of a tree the cruel markings staying from servitude in fittingly separate terms from her normal body, and in light of the fact that she can presently don't feel the scars of her back as a feature of her being, and can hence just guarantee it as something other from which she has separated herself" (2009, 8).

Existential Work of stunning summoning, shocking verse, and be-wildering intricacy

When outlining the plentiful basic literature on Toni Morrison's work (counting a few assertions by the creator herself), one is struck by the occasionally energetic conversation over the inquiry, regardless of whether her craft is of "general legitimacy" or whether it "has a place" to the African-American people

group on the grounds that, purportedly, her subjects, her particular “voice,” and her designated public have a favored connection to that piece of the American populace. This conversation is fairly confounding, on the grounds that it very well might be questioned that a moderately skilled Black young lady in an American secondary school would discover *Beloved* more effectively understandable than a Shakespeare play, regardless of whether she may perceive Morrison's words and sentence structures considerably more effectively than the Bard's. She may feel multiple times more intrigued by the novel for reasons of individual identity, yet that is another story and not an essential one by the same token.

There is a scandalous recorded occasion at the center of *Beloved* (based, as we probably are aware, on a shocking tale including the Garners, a criminal slave group of Kentucky in 1855, much bantered in the press of the time), yet the anecdotal elaboration, the language and the structure of the novel are graceful develops. The last viewpoint and the lucidness of the book is the thing that this examination will zero in on. Other than the investigations gave to specific topical, sociological, or etymological viewpoints, it is telling that the book has been asserted as relating to a lot of artistic sub-classes: trauma-literature, women's activist literature, slave stories, post-expansionism, post-innovation, the phenomenal, the Gothic, the abnormal, the glorious, the lovely, mystical authenticity, the secret novel, and so on. There is no motivation behind why *Beloved* should fit in just one opening. Yet, despite the quantity of noticeable classifications the book may outline or draw upon – deliberately or not – a definitive inquiry is: does the book foster its own interior stylish cognizance and how fulfilling – or traumatizing – is it?

Psychological Trauma in Songs of Solomon

Song of Solomon is separated into two sections. The first is set somewhere in the range of 1931 and 1963 where slavery is not, at this point an issue of legitimate realities however where prejudice involves the outlook. Despite the fact that the post-Depression blast has offered African Americans chances for monetary success, they are still casualties of racial isolation. Milkman lives in a family where the environment is by all accounts odd and eccentric. In spite of the fact that five individuals in the family, they only from time to time address one another. His dad and his mom appear to despise and be antagonized from one another. Milkman's dad, Macon Dead the Second, is heartless, avaricious, and not interested in anything besides of cash. His mom, Ruth Foster Dead, is a singular and slight lady who is substance to do some minuscule things. The two of them endure the excruciating loss of their beloved dads. "In a catastrophic event, seeing the passing of a relative is one of the occasions destined to leave the survivor with a recalcitrant, enduring traumatic disorder" (Herman, 1992, p.53). Therefore, the traumatic parental misfortune welcomes incredible effects on their life. Their person is completely misshaped and their hopeful demeanor towards life changes into an adverse one. That in the interim impacts the life and shapes the personality of their lone child, Milkman Dead.

"Relatives of casualties may have a reason for coming empathically together to manage occasions that separated their parent or progenitors, for they experience a clairvoyant weight with respect to occasions for which they are not dependable however for which they may none the less feel in some sense responsible" (LaCapra, 2004, p.6). Traumatic manifestations of both Ruth and Macon Dead the second engraving into their minds, and become their characters, which shape that of their child, Milkman Dead. Despite the fact that Milkman himself doesn't encounter those traumatic occasions, he feels “like some weight [has] been given to him and that he [doesn't] merit it” (Morrison, 1977, p.120). He needs to endure similar traumatic manifestations as his folks do.

The passing of his dad prompts Macon Dead the Second and Ruth's deficiency of parental love. Since they each experience traumatic parental misfortune, they have gotten numb and apathetic regarding

their life, which brings about Milkman's deficiency of parental love. Rarely does Milkman sense the consideration and love from his folks. At the point when he was as yet a hatchling, his dad proposed to kill him. After he grows up, his dad needs him to acquire his business and work for him. Notwithstanding, not the same as Macon the Second, Ruth imagines that Milkman "should consider going to clinical school," so he can turn into a specialist like his granddad (Morrison, 1977, p.69). The inspiration of their consideration for Milkman is their goal of recuperating the brilliance of their beloved dad in previous days. As Milkman grumbles, "Everyone needs something from me [...]. Something they figure they can't go anyplace else" (Morrison, 1977, p.222). Without adoration from his folks, Milkman is contorted intellectually. As Herman (1992) portrays:

Traumatized individuals feel absolutely deserted, completely alone, cast out of the human and heavenly frameworks of care and assurance that support life. From that point, a feeling of estrangement, of disengagement, invades each relationship, from the most private recognizable securities to the most unique affiliations of local area and religion. (p.51)

Milkman has "never felt [...] he had a place with wherever and anyone," and sees himself as "the pariah" in where he lives (Morrison, 1977, p.293). A large portion of his time, he might want to meander alone on the road randomly, as though he is a destitute drifter. On the day knowing his folks' past from his dad, Milkman strolls alone in the city. "Individuals him attempting to move beyond the lone man hindering them", since every one of them are going toward the path he is coming from. A solid feeling of estrangement surges at him. He feels as though the entire world forsakes him and he is separated from everyone else.

Being distant from everyone else and feeling deserted, Milkman disconnects himself and is not interested in nearly everything. He has no companion, besides of Guitar. In the interim, similarly as cold as his dad, Milkman has never minded the sensations of his family, and has never expressed gratitude toward the penances of his sisters who surrendered their youth to cater him. "Never [has] he considered his mom an individual a different individual, with a day to day existence separated from permitting or meddling with his own" (75). As his senior sister Lena says of him, Milkman has been giggling at them for his entire life and doesn't have a clue about anything about them. In spite of the fact that he assists his with mothering beat his dad, in Lena's eyes, Milkman is simply "precisely like him [his father]" and is assuming control over how their dad deals with them and giving the females access the family realize he has the privilege to guide them (215).

Simultaneously, Milkman generally delivers himself irresistible in misery and feels sad as though "[no] action appeared to merit the doing, no discussion worth having" (90). Losing trust in his life, Milkman dawdles the entire day. At times, he closes "if there was anybody on the planet who loved him [...] for himself alone" (79). What's more, being somewhere down in trouble, he even wishes to bite the dust when he understands his life is simply wrecked, with the goal that he doesn't have to include in the struggles and issues he needs to faces. Life for him is quelled, inane and exhausted. He needs to dispose of such a circumstance however discovers no chance to get out. Particularly, when knowing his folks' trauma story, he feels that he resembles "a trash bucket for the activities and abhorrence's of others" (120). The parts that don't have a place with his life however his folks' become his own memory and fragmentally show up to him. He could encounter the sensations of vulnerability and agony as his folks when his folks saw their dads' demise.

At long last, Milkman misfortunes his self-hood in his inclination a feeling of detachment and being apathetic and discouraged. His fanciful disfigurement simply affirms his deficiency of self. When Milkman is fourteen, he has seen that "one of his legs [is] more limited than the other," in this manner, he

has never stood straight (62). Indeed, “the distortion [is] for the most part to him” (62).

In addition to the fact that Milkman suffers from the impact of Trans-generational transmission of familial trauma, yet additionally he goes through that of racial trauma. In *Song of Solomon*, somewhat, the past of the Dead family mirrors the authentic trauma of the dark race in America brought about by slavery and bigotry. African Americans' difficult history brings the relatives of its anything but a progression of psychological trauma, like feeling of restraint, seclusion, and mediocrity. Furthermore, the indications of racial trauma are communicated generationally, as well.

In spite of the fact that slavery was nullified in excess of 100 years prior, it actually frequents the ages of its casualties and has become the beginning of a wide range of issues standing up to the African Americans these days. In reality, slavery is an establishing trauma for African Americans. For dark slaves, their families are powerfully isolated, their respect is demolished, their bodies are abused, and their subjectivity is obliterated. During many long periods of slavery, dark slaves were generalized and belittled to the most minimal. After the Emancipation, however slavery was nullified, racial separation has kept on being a reality that African Americans need to hold on for, and they actually don't impart the equivalent rights and treatment to the white.

Frequented by the historical backdrop of abuse, mistreatment, and oppression, blacks actually live in its result. They believe they are separated in the land where it guarantees that everybody is equivalent. Life in the country for them is stifling to such an extent that they attempt to dispose of the impact of their precursors' trauma. In any case, rather than discovering an exit plan, they become discouraged, and are numb to their life and to their extraordinary dreams they once held similarly as Macon Dead the Second and Guitar who longed for recuperating the incredible poise of their dad. In any case, Macon nearly fails to remember his unique goal yet gets insane for gathering abundance later; while Guitar addicts himself to fierce and extremist vengeance on the whites. Slavery and racial segregation likewise lead to a feeling of inadequacy among African Americans on a more profound level. Self-mediocrity incites them to surrender the dark practice and forget their difficult past, yet to bargain with the white qualities. At last, they put the white qualities over their own qualities. The more pride they get in such life, the greater mediocrity they feel in their profound brain. As an offspring of its casualties, Milkman normally cannot try not to bear similar traumatic manifestations as his folks. The feeling of inadequacy, restraint, and disengagement would go with him all the time also. What's more, he is oblivious to it.

Milkman's Identity Crisis by His Trauma

Despite the fact that slavery has been annulled numerous years prior, its effect on the individuals of color is lasting. Prejudice, actually existing in the white prevailing society, keeps on impacting the existence of African Americans. As a minimized gathering, African-Americans need to bear the traumatic memory of slavery and prejudice. Despite the fact that Milkman doesn't endure those traumatic occasions without anyone else, he needs to live under the effect of his predecessors' trauma and support the traumatic indications gave to him through his folks, consequently he additionally needs to confront the identity emergency as his folks. Like his folks, taking an absorption position, Milkman has disguised a white identity as a romanticized method of self. In any case, being not acknowledged by the whites, he is likewise not invited by his dark countrymen. Along these lines, he endures a feeling of rootlessness. Without discovering an exit plan, Milkman loses his self or his identity. As he considers himself before his mirror, his entire body needs "rationality, a meeting up of the highlights into an all-out self" (69). The traumatic indications of his licenses are given to Milkman and add to his identity emergency. Milkman has had the option to guarantee his own previous when he meets his precursors in their legendary flight.

The journey is an authentic interaction of characterizing oneself and the local area. Milkman's relationship with the saint of the clan is done through an interaction of examining recollections, that of individual, family, racial, and every one of these are reproduced to characterize the past and reproduce history. Milkman stands up to his own set of experiences and accomplishes a feeling of opportunity, and to the essayist, it permits Morrison to change the past and to portray the untold stories, introducing persuasive ways to deal with the difficulties of dark life. Morrison has been worried about Blacks being anonymous and says, "We have consistently endured being anonymous. We didn't have names on the grounds that our own are those of the experts which were given to us with detachment and don't address anything for us" (Morrison, 697).

Milkman's journey likewise gets one to recuperate the lost names of his precursors with whom the present can't cut off its connections as Morrison says, "on the off chance that we don't stay in contact with the progenitor ... we are, truth be told, lost." (Morrison, 140) Morrison utilizes the image of flying and the oral practice of narrating to resuscitate the previous where the flight illustration is utilized to address African Americans as consistently on the run, be it disappearing to the free North, taking away from the estates or taking off from slavery.

All through the novel the past is described at different focuses by various individuals. Milkman joins the different pieces and bits of history to show up at the genuine story. The disclosure of the story to Milkman is designed flawlessly like a blanket where each piece and part of the accounts joins to give a last shape to frame the story. The novel brings alive the rich custom of narrating – a characteristic of the endurance of African American history and culture.

Milkman dead impacted by his dad Macon Dead starts as a casualty of the attractions of the American dream, his mission toward the start is in a real sense for gold. Morrison's worry with history comes to center in the climatic shift of the mission from gold to an alternate kind of the brilliant, the brilliant history, the previous as yet getting by in Pilate's heart and mind and in her green sack of bones. It is solely after disguise of the meaning of this sack of bones that the past can be changed to characterize the present and transformed into the solid establishment for what's to come. With the past covered, the present is given significance and made secure, and the future provided an unequivocal guidance.

Conclusion

This broadside examines the harrowing experience of alienation within African American communities, exploring how fragmentation and distortion shape individual identities. Toni Morrison delves deeply into the painful experiences of her characters, exposing the weight of suppressed emotions and unspoken feelings that demand an outlet. In her early novels, *Beloved* and *Song of Solomon*, Morrison illustrates how estrangement transforms her Black characters into vulnerable beings, susceptible to defeat and internal conflict. In *Beloved*, Morrison reimagines the lives of enslaved Black individuals by reinterpreting historical narratives through new theoretical frameworks. Unlike Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, which adheres to 19th-century sentimental literary conventions, *Beloved* is devoid of nostalgia, instead confronting the brutal realities of slavery with unflinching detail. Similarly, *Song of Solomon* presents the psychological trauma inflicted upon its protagonist, Milkman Dead. His identity crisis stems from internalized whiteness, as he adopts materialistic values and views the world from a white-centric perspective. The novel explores how this psychological and cultural estrangement manifests as a struggle for self-definition. Morrison's exploration of trauma extends beyond isolated acts of violence; rather, it reflects an ongoing exposure to suffering, oppression, and systemic abuse. The repercussions of trauma are vividly illustrated in *Beloved*, where Sethe's act of infanticide serves as both a desperate

assertion of agency and a tragic consequence of her past. Likewise, in *Song of Solomon*, Guitar's attempted murder of his childhood friend, Milkman, embodies the fragmentation, violence, and moral disintegration that Morrison's characters endure. Through these portrayals, Morrison confronts the complexity of human nature and the devastating impact of historical and personal trauma.

Works Cited

- Song of Solomon. Knopf, 1977.
- Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*. Knopf, 1987.
- Cooper, Barbara E. 1989. "Milkman's Search for Family in Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon." *CLA Journal* XXXIII.2 (Dec. 1989): 145-56.
- Herman, J., 1997. *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*. Basic.
- Jeskova, J., 2009. The Interiority and Communal Integration of Trauma in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. [Online]Available at: <https://bir.brandeis.edu/bitstream/.../thesis%20may%2009.pdf...1>[Accessed 4 March 2014]
- McKay, Nellie. "An Interview with Toni Morrison". *Contemporary Literature*, v. 24, n. 4, p.412-428, 1983.
- "Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations: Toni Morrison's *Beloved*". *Bloom's Literary Criticism*. pp.195-202.
- Matus, J., *Toni Morrison: Contemporary World Writers*. Manchester University Press, 1998.