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## A POSTCOLONIALISM STUDY IN TONI MORRISON'S 'BELOVED'

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### Abstract

This study examines Toni Morrison's novel "Beloved" through the lens of postcolonial theory, with a focus on the theme of identity formation and the impact of colonialism on the African American community. The novel portrays the experiences of a former slave named Sethe, who escaped from slavery with her children and settled in Cincinnati, Ohio. Sethe's traumatic past, including the murder of her infant daughter, continues to haunt her and her family, disrupting their attempts to rebuild their lives in the aftermath of slavery. Through the analysis of "Beloved," this study explores how Morrison presents a critique of the legacy of slavery and colonialism, emphasizing the importance of reclaiming one's own history and identity in the face of systemic oppression. The study also examines how the novel draws on African American cultural and spiritual traditions, such as storytelling and the concept of the "ghost," to represent the complex ways in which the past continues to influence the present. Overall, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the intersection of postcolonial theory and African American literature, highlighting the ways in which Morrison's work challenges traditional narratives of American history and calls for a re-examination of the impact of colonialism on the lives of marginalized communities.

**KEYWORDS:** Postcolonialism, traumatic, Slavery; community, Historiography

### INTRODUCTION

These postcolonial Indian historians have deployed the term postcolonialism in order to dig out the repressed voices of the marginalized communities or individuals from the traditional historiographies. In short, postcolonialism studies, was an attempt to write history from below. Nowadays the term postcolonialism has made its journey from historiography and postcolonialism to deconstruction and Foucauldian notion of power.

Critics like Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Harish Trivedi and many others have commented much upon it.

According to Guha, the postcolonialism consciousness is autonomous and existed independent of the elite. Spivak has stated that it is because of the autonomous entity of the postcolonialism consciousness that it has always remained beyond the reach of the discursive regimes that produced colonial subjects. Spivak in her famous essay "Can the Postcolonialism Speak?" has answered the title question in the negative and she has also said that the postcolonialism can only

be spoken for. But Harish Trivedi has stated that the postcolonialism can speak and has always spoken in his/her own modes of expression, which was difficult for the elite, Eurocentric, bourgeois intellectual to grasp.

Toni Morrison is considered as one of the most important authors of the African-American literary renaissance, the other notable writers of which are Alice Walker and Toni Cade Bambara. The works of Morrison depict her characters' experiences of being black and marginalised. Toni Morrison truly succeeds in representing the actual condition of the marginalised in her novels, and her attempt to do this is best to be seen in her famous novel *Beloved* (1987). The novel is set during the reconstruction era in 1873, and centres on the powers of history and memory. The past is a burden for the former slaves in the novel which they willfully try to forget. But Sethe, the protagonist of the novel, fails to do so because her past is deeply rooted in her memory. The memory of her slavery haunts her present in the form of her deceased daughter, whom Sethe has murdered eighteen years before in order to save her from the atrocities of slavery. The novel is based on the actual anecdote of Margaret Garner, a former slave, who in 1851 escaped with her children from Kentucky to Ohio. This story of Garner is used by Morrison in the novel for the character of Sethe, but as the novel develops Sethe emerges as a fully-imagined character.

Morrison writes *Beloved* in order to retell the unspoken stories and the horrors of slavery which the traditional slave narratives fail to illustrate. She notices that the discourse of the contemporary black movement, as the conventional slave narratives, does not give sufficient aid to the details of slavery. And in *Beloved* Morrison reminds her people that the construction as well as the development of identity is not possible by ignoring the dark sides of the past. rather it is a heritage which they should remember.

*Beloved* gives us a vivid picture of the dehumanising effects of slavery on the body and mind of the slaves. The most dangerous of the effects of slavery is its negative impact on the former slaves' senses of self, and the novel contains

multiple examples of self-alienation. Consequently, Paul D is very insecure about whether or not he could possibly be a real man, and he frequently wonders about his value as a person. And it is this predicament that is depicted by Morrison through the characters of Sethe, Paul D, Stamp Paid, Halle and others in her novel *Beloved*.

Sethe is subjected to subhuman treatment by Schoolteacher, leading to a sense of alienation and disbelief in self. Denver conflates her identity with *Beloved's*, and *Beloved* feels herself beginning to disintegrate. Baby Suggs has also been a victim of slavery, but unlike Sethe, Paul D has developed a self-defeating coping strategy to fight the emotional pain of slavery. Sethe also fears that she will go mad at the end. Morrison's novel *Beloved* tells the story of Sethe, who kills her own daughter to save her from the dehumanising effects of slavery. The dangerous effects of slavery are not only limited to the black people, but also to the whites who created it and praised it. Morrison suggests that the nation's identity, like the characters in the novel, need to be healed. Sethe secures a future with Paul D and Denver only after confronting her past. A postcolonialism narrative is appropriate in depicting the hidden corners of a society or a history, and Morrison narrates the story from Sethe's, Paul D's, Stamp Paid's and Baby Suggs's point of view.

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* is a novel about the character of Denver, who is the representative figure of the readers of African-American history who are denied of the knowledge of the atrocities of slavery in the past. Denver is a teacher, historian, and author who wants to use the power of the white to define the African-Americans and make their history in a way that steals their past, their souls and their humanity. Denver represents the tragic condition of the slaves of the past, who have been treated as marginalised figures in the traditional history, through the acts and consciousness of Sethe. Schoolteacher represents the voice of the Eurocentric white in the novel, who is a cold, sadistic and vehemently racist kind of fellow. He is a mechanical man who treats the slaves as animals and gives teaching lessons to his pupils on the animal features of the slaves.

**CONCLUSION**

Toni Morrison's "Beloved" is a powerful and complex work that highlights the devastating impact of slavery and colonialism on African American communities. Through her use of postcolonial theory, Morrison exposes the ways in which systemic oppression continues to shape the experiences and identities of those who have been historically marginalized. Throughout the novel, Morrison emphasizes the importance of reclaiming one's own history and identity as a means of resisting the legacy of colonialism. She also draws on African American cultural and spiritual traditions to show how these traditions can provide a source of strength and resilience in the face of trauma and oppression. Overall, this study highlights the relevance of postcolonial theory to the study of African American literature, and demonstrates how Morrison's work continues to challenge and inspire readers to confront the legacies of colonialism and systemic oppression. By drawing attention to these issues, Morrison invites readers to reflect on the ongoing struggle for social justice and the importance of acknowledging and confronting the complex and painful history of colonialism and slavery.

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