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CONCEPT OF MOTHERHOOD IN ALICE WALKER'S "THE COLOR PURPLE" AND TONI MORRISON'S "BELOVED"

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyses the theme of motherhood in the novels *The Color Purple* and *Beloved*. Sethe and Celie are compelled to be separated from their own children. And the source of their separation is slavery. Sethe is the slave of racism and Celie is the slave of Patriarchal society. The paper reveals the psychological damage of slavery to the mother- child relationship. In the 'Forward' of the novel 'Beloved', Toni Morrison comments:

"..... a history in which marriage was discouraged, impossible, or illegal; in which birthing children was required, but 'having' them, being responsible for them—being, in other words, their parent—was as out of the question as freedom. Assertions of parenthood under conditions peculiar to the logic of institutional enslavement were criminal."

There are many situations in the novels where the protagonists Sethe and Celie have to prove their love for their children. The black women are not allowed to love their children. In the two novels it becomes apparent how in a patriarchal society a black woman survives. The paper explores the mother-child bond and terrible events experienced by the mothers.

Keywords: Patriarchal Society, Slavery, Racism, Motherhood.

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INTRODUCTION

A mother dreams through the dreams of her children. This is proved by Sethe as well as by Celie. In Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved*, Sethe shows unconditional love for her children. The novel shows the idea if a mother is separated from her child, it has very bad effects on both sides. Mothers do not know themselves to be anything except a mother. When their children are taken away from, they feel something lost in their self. On the other hand, when a

child is separated from his or her mother, he or she cannot feel the mother-child relationship. Sethe has never seen her mother, so, she was not able to connect with her own mother. Perhaps, this is the reason due to which she cannot form a strong bond between herself and her daughter. Her daughter Denver says,

I spent all of my outside self loving Ma'am so she wouldn't kill me, loving her even when she braided my head at night.

On the other hand, in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* Celie is a different kind of mother. She was not given a chance to love her own children. When she was fourteen, she was pregnant. At that stage, she didn't know what is motherhood and a mother's love for her kids. She thought that her only possibility of survival is to become silent and invisible. She said,

Dear God,

I am fourteen years old, ~~I am~~ I have always been a good girl. Maybe you can give me a sign letting me know what is happening to me.

Both Sethe and Celie are compelled not to show their love for their children. They have no time to nourish their relationship. At Sweet Home, Sethe was forced to deny herself as a wife and a mother. She felt compelled to keep her love for children in check. She later admits to Paul:

I couldn't love em proper in Kentucky because they wasn't mine to love.

Even Baby Suggs felt the agony of separation from her eight children:

I had eight. Everyone of them gone away from me. Four taken, four chased..... My first born. All I can remember of her is how she loved theburned bottom of bread.

Celie is raped by her step father and become mother of his two children. She thinks that either her father has killed the kids or sell them to a married couple:

He took my other little baby, a boy this time. But I don't think he kilt it.

I think he sold it to a man and his wife over Monticello.

Due to slavery, Sethe is separated from her children. She was badly tortured by the schoolteacher and his nephews. They made chokeberry tree, its trunk, branches and even leaves on her back when she tried to escape from Sweet Home. She didn't want that her children ever feel the same agony. Sethe's ambition to provide her children everything she herself never had, does more harm than good. Slavery destroyed Sethe's possibility of having normal relationship with anyone. She missed her sons :

Buglar and Howard would be twenty two and twenty three now.

Sethe is so obsessed with her maternal feeling that she killed her one daughter in order to save her from the misery of slavery that she herself has endured. Her behavior is an outcome of slavery. Sethe thought that in trying to kill her children she is caring for them and saving them from the brutality of slavery. ' What she had done was right because it came from true love'. But no one understands her intention behind it as Paul D says:

What you did was wrong, Sethe.... There could have been a way. Some other way...

Morrison narrates events from the mother's point of view in 'Beloved'. It is brutal to kill your child, but one has to look at the circumstances and reasons for Sethe's decision. Sethe's love for her children is unconditional:

Too thick, he said. My love was too thick. What he know about it ?

I have felt what it felt like and nobody walking or stretched out is going to make you feel it too I wouldn't draw breath, without my children.

When the murdered Beloved 'returns from the dead', Sethe filled with joy and shame at the same time. She tries to give her all love to Beloved. After Beloved, she even hopes the returning of her sons:

If her daughter could come back home from the timeless place – certainly her sons could, and would, come back from wherever they had gone to.

Sethe can be regarded as the symbol of great mother. In *Beloved*, Morrison depicts how a black slave single mother proves her love for her children. The novel presents the idea how slavery affects motherhood; how mother's behavior affects her children's behavior and the realization of mother's true feelings by a daughter like Denver.

Celie is also the slave of her father and husband. Both of them tortured her physically, sexually as well as mentally. Her father separated her from her children. She has lost all hopes of seeing her children again because she thinks that her step father

has killed her children. But soon she finds a ray of hope when she sees a little girl who is similar to her:

I seen my baby girl. I knowed it was her. She look just like me and my daddy.....She got my eyes just like they is today.... I think she is mine. My heart say she mine...

From now she can dream about being once reunited with her children. When Celie discovers the hidden letters written by Nettie, she finds out that her sister takes care of her two children, Olivia and Adam .Nettie finds Celie's resemblance in the children of Samuel and Corrine and realizes that they are her sister's lost children:

And what was my surprise when a little girl opened the door and She had your eyes set in your face.

Finally, Celie meets her children she feels so happy and younger than ever before. After a long struggle, she finally reunites with Nettie and her children. She describes her ecstasy:

When Nettie's foot come down on the porch I almost die. I stand swaying, tween Albert and Shug. Nettie stand swaying tween Samuel and I reckon it must be Adam.....I don't think us feel old At all. And us so happy. Matter of fact, I think this the youngest us ever felt.

The concept of motherhood in 'The Color Purple' and 'Beloved' is presented in different manner. But both Sethe and Celie are the victim of slavery which compelled them not to love their children. The novels show how slavery and its brutality affects them and their relationship with their children and their battle against it.

References

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