

**COLONIZATION AND OPPRESSION OF WOMEN: A POSTCOLONIAL  
FEMINIST STUDY OF TONI MORRISON'S BELOVED**

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**ABSTRACT**

The aim of this research study was to investigate how African women were mistreated by the foreigners who colonized them and how colonization affected the inter- community female relationships through the analysis of the novel *Beloved* by Toni Morrison. The research study followed qualitative approach exploiting the text of the novel as a source of data collection. The research questions were answered through analysis of the text of the novel. So, the study follows critical textual analysis technique. The textual analysis of the novel revealed that the African women suffered a lot at the hands of colonizers. However, it is found that unlike White men, White women helped Black women in many ways during colonization.

**Key Words:** Colonization, Suffering, Feminism

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## **INTRODUCTION OF THE STUDY**

This study is designed to highlight the facts that African women suffered a lot as a result of colonization. The males and children were also subjected to these sufferings and cruelties but the basic purpose of this research work is to focus on the sufferings of women. The study focuses on African-American Literature and explores the sufferings of women through the analysis of *Beloved* novel written by African-American Novelist Toni Morrison. The study also focuses on the fact that the process of colonization effected the inter- communities' females' relationships. That is to show that in spite of all cruelties by white males, there were some white women who helped the black women in many ways for example in finding jobs, providing them food and shelter etc. The study focuses on a postcolonial feminist analysis of *Beloved*. Postcolonial feminism is one of the forms of feminism which was developed as a response to the reality, that feminism only focused on the experiences of women in western countries. The word 'feminism' was for the first time used by Charles Fourier a utopian, Socialist and a French thinker in 1837. The goal of Feminism is to provide the fair gender the favourable juncture to become the best version of *Arasu* her (Facettt).

Postcolonial feminism emerged as a third wave of feminism as highlighted that there by the postcolonial feminism relates with third wave and states that the females of countries other than the wester are not pictured truly (Arasu1). Chris (2002), opines that postcolonial feminism looks for the ways through which racism, politics, fiscal, and sociological effects of colonialism have impact on the non- white and women other than those of the west in the post-colonial setup (p.1). Postcolonial feminism is different from other feminism movements because it focuses on the sufferings of Black women at the hands of colonizers, while other movements like feminism or western feminism is only concerned with White women sufferings. Postcolonial feminism also deals with gender-based problems to other areas of impact in a society. Postcolonial feminists look after the socio-cultural and religion- economical work for the emancipation of women. Postcolonial feminists' debate that the experiences of females in culture affected by colonialism are often greatly distinct from that of ladies in the west and should be treated likewise.

*Beloved* is written by Toni Morrison. It contains many strong female character. The novel highlights the sufferings of black women as result of colonization. Some of white women are also shown to be good to black women. Toni Morrison though claims that she is not a feminist, she is a black writer who writes for sufferings of black women but we can take her novel in postcolonial feminist perspective. So the purpose of research is to analyze the novel in this perspective.

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

1. How are African women mistreated at the hands of colonizers in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*?
2. How the processes of colonization effected inter community's female relationships in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*?

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This chapter provides a review of available literature on Postcolonial Feminism and about *Beloved* novel. Post colonialism is reasonably a broad term concerned with the lingering effects of colonization, can expand to encompass topics as diverse yet interconnected as religion, anthropology, politics, feminism, literature and so on. Postcolonial feminism is a form of feminism that evolved in reaction to the reality that the feminists seemed to focus solely on the first-hand experiences and conditions of women of the white cultures. Postcolonial feminism is an extension of feminism that developed in 1980's. This theory actually aims to highlights the problems of women of third world. Postcolonial feminism theory is discussed and used by many writers in their works. This research work is based on Postcolonial feminism theory presented by a Postcolonial feminist Chandra Talpade Mohanty. Mohanty (1988) in his work "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses" highlights the significance of Postcolonial Feminism, criticizing what she points to as "Eurocentric" Feminism. In this essay she comments on Western Feminism on the basis that it is ethnocentric and does not discuss the peculiar experiences of ladies living in Postcolonial world.

Postcolonial feminism moves out of the gendered history of colonialism. If we talk about the history of colonialism it is largely the history of exploitation of non-white or rather nonwestern women. Mohanty is speaking of “double colonization” of a woman who lives in colonized and patriarchal societies. These women not only have to go against the power and control of colonizers but also as a female. The moderators of Postcolonial feminism battle misperception by discussing their own tales, approving their presence, and being their own self without regarding what other feminists or must not do.

Postcolonial Feminism rejected “universality” of women; an idea presented by western feminism and introduces the movement of individual experiences and struggles. It focuses on how woman as an individual being suffered.

Postcolonial Feminism theory discusses the problems and issues of women belonging to colonized countries as highlighted that Postcolonial Feminist theory basically deals with the reflection of females in once colonized world and in western countries (Taygi 45). Toni Morrison through her novel highlights the fact that women suffered a lot at hand of colonizers. Her successful 1987 Pulitzer prize winning novel *Beloved* was chosen by a New York Times Survey of prominent writers as the greatest novel of American fiction of the last twenty five years (Rahman, p. 61).

According to Harbard, the novel *Beloved* is based on the fact that there were women belonging to Black ethnicity who during their slavery aborted their babies rather than allowing them to the destruction of slavery (p. 60).

The novel is about a woman Sethe who suffered during colonization. The purpose of the novel is to show how African women suffered during and after colonization. “The women body becomes a thing to be owned by colonizers. Seethe and her family bear the horrifically direct experience of being owned by White (male) slave holders” (Smith, “Postcolonial Feminism”)

Smith has expressed this concern that especially it becomes clear that the human (women) body becomes an article of commerce an item to be possessed, overpowered, or sexually abused by those who are in power. Related to this idea is the concept of double colonization, a term which not only recognizes the racial differences of the colonizers/colonized but focus on the women before, during and after colonization (“Postcolonial Feminism”).

Researchers focus that during colonization Sethe or other women even playing the role of mothers because they need to protect their children from the cruelties of Whites. “It has shown that in their suffering, women share a special status connected with their definition of their slaves, their universal responsibilities (e.g. as a mother) and especially, the specific difficulties the female gender evokes” (Adrine Zullke, “Thesis”).

Furthermore about the sufferings of Black woman as a mother Ali (2013) highlighted that in the lives of black women brutality makes motherhood two folded burden. Firstly, they have to view their children sold off and experiencing the traumas of slavery. Secondly, most of their children are conceived by rape rather than matrimonial relations. For example, *Beloved* is not the product of hatred and she wants to restrain her from slavery (p. 1421).

Like Sethe her mother was also slave and killed and hanged by whites. Sethe mother who is not named in this work but only for the nick name Ma’am, she can also be identified by a halo with cross engraved beneath her bosom to mark her bodily and psychologically. The aim of this mark was not to highlight slaves, but to mark them as commodity of someone else (Joodki, Vajdi, 2014, p. 87). Alice Walker states in her essay that a Black woman is like the mule of the whole world, because we the blacks have been handed the baggage that all others turned down to carry.

To highlight the physical sufferings of the black woman Sethe, it is stated that, Sethe carries on her back the family tree as a mark of the pangs the mothers and daughters bore through the entire history of their bondage or we can say that, Sethe's mark on her back is a generational bond between Sethe, *Beloved*, her mother and all of African women (Joodaki, Vajdi. 2014) As we know that due to colonization Africans were suffered a lot. Men and children also suffered but my research work is different from other works because it focuses on black women sufferings. So this study highlights the fact that how women suffered during colonization and how they were helped by some whites. So the basic aim is to apply the theory of Postcolonial Feminism on *Beloved* novel to prove these realities.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study follows qualitative research method. The approach of qualitative method is inductive and subjective in nature which means to develop a theory that would search for meaning on the basis of the collected data. This research work follows qualitative textual methodology to assess the research questions. Articles, essays, book reviews and text book are the part of this research study. As the research is concerned with the text of *Beloved* novel by Toni Morrison so the research questions will be proved and clarified by taking example from the text. This research work follows postcolonial feminism as a theoretical frame work. The study focuses on how African women suffered during colonization and how the process of colonization affected interscommunity's women relationships. So this will be proved from text.

## **ANALYSIS**

### **SUFFERINGS OF AFRICAN WOMEN AT THE HANDS OF COLONIZERS**

This chapter provides answer to the first research question that is how African women suffered at the hands of colonizers which need to be analyzed with reference to text. So this is textual analysis of the research study.

*Beloved* is a work of American writer Toni Morrison. Its setting is Post American civil war (1861-1865). This novel has as its inspiration the story of an Afro- American slave Margret Garner, who got free of slavery in Kentucky by running to Ohio that was a free state. This fiction focuses on the sufferings of women at the hands of colonizers. Toni Morrison, being a black woman can fully understand the sufferings of women of her community. She clearly portrays those sufferings in the novel.

There are many women characters in the novel whose sufferings are shown by the writer. The novel actually revolves around the sufferings of the main character Sethe. Sethe parents were slaves at Sweet Home in Kentucky run by Garner and his spouse Lillian. Sethe chooses Halle Suggs as her her mate, and when she is 18 years of age, gives birth to three children. After the death of Garner, his mate hands over the authority of plantation to her brother-in-law, who is a school teacher and proves to be a brutal caretaker.

Sethe had fears that her sons will be bargained, therefore, she sends her children Howard, Bulgur and Beloved in a van and off hem with her mother in Cincinnati. In those days Sethe was pregnant. When Schoolteacher discovers he catches her and asks his nephews to hold her down and sucks her milk. It is highlighted in the text that “these boys came in there and took my milk” (Morrison, 1987, p.10). When school teacher came to know that Sethe reported to Mrs. Garner about the happening, so he along with his nephews flogged her, ripping the skin of her back even though knowing of her being in the second trimester. While telling her story to Paul D, her slave fellow at Sweet Home, she identifies this reality by saying that “That’s what they came in there for hold me down and took it. I told Mrs. Garner on em. She had that lump and couldn’t speak but her eyes rolled out tears. Them boys found out. I told on em. Schoolteacher made one upon my back, and when it closed, it made a tree. It grows still there” (Morrison, 1987. p. 10). The whipping makes a tree on her back. Stealing milk from a mother breast that was pregnant was the inhumanity done by the whites which is beyond the limitations.

The significance of this incident of stealing milk is that the African women were treated like animals, by considering them like cows. The cruelties did not stop here. After joining her mother-in-law with her three children and an infant she was living a bit relaxed life when one day the school teacher, one of his nephews, came to fetch Sethe and her offspring back to bondage. By seeing them, Sethe tried to kill her children, instead of allowing them to have the kind of enslaved life as hers. At that spot she put an end to the life of her two years old daughter by cutting her neck as well as would have murdered her small babe Denver had not Stamp paid not saved from her mother. The male children had been brutally hit on heads with an instrument. Sethe though killed her daughter, also tried to kill her other children. Though this act is cruel on a part of mother but she did it out of her love. She never wanted her children to be suffered at the hands of whites. Talking about *Beloved* she said "Why I did it. How if I didn't killed her she would have died and that is something, I could not bear to happen her" (Morrison, 1987, p. 200) she wanted to say that instead of being suffered at the hands of those cruel Whites it's good that she killed her daughter.

From the analysis of novel it is found that Black women were sexually abused. Their bodies were used for sexual gratification. After killing her daughter Sethe wanted her "Dearly Beloved" forms the last rituals, but had only strength enough to give for one word. Payment was in the form of having ten minutes sex with the grave digger. As mentioned in the novel "Not only did she have to live out her eyes in a house palsied by the baby's furry at having its throat cut, but those ten minutes she spent pressed up against dawn-colored stone studded with star chips, her knees wide open as the grave, were longer than life, more alive, more pulsating than the baby blood that soaked her fingers like oil" (Morrison, 1987, p.5). She was jailed for this murder also.

Sethe's sufferings continue. Her house was hunted by her daughter's ghost and because of this reason her two sons leave the house and runaway. Now after 18 years living with her daughter and Paul D, one day the ghost of *Beloved* came in eighteen years old girl shape. The situation was now getting worse as *Beloved* started taking revenge from her mother for killing her. She wanted her mother love of which she is deprived. It is

highlighted in the novel that “she had been so close, then closer. And it was so much better than the anger that ruled when Sethe did or thought anything that exclude herself. She could bear the hours- nine or ten of them each day but one -when Sethe was gone. Bear even the nights when she was close but out of sight, behind walls and doors lying next to him”(Morrison, 1987,p. 100). So it means even after colonization the memories of those cruelties were still haunting the minds of sufferers.

Toni Morrison presents the sufferings of other women as well. Baby Suggs, the mother in law of Sethe was also a slave. Baby Suggs had eight children from six fathers and she used to call it the dirtiest thing. Halle was the only child who she was able to keep for long time say twenty. Further highlighting Baby Suggs suffering it is mentioned in the text that “ A life time , given to her , no doubt to make up for hearing that her two girls , neither of whom had their adult teeth , were sold and gone and she had not been able to wave goodbye”(Morrison,1987,p.14). The sufferings of Baby Suggs continued “To make up for coupling with the straw boss for four months in exchange for keeping her third child , a boy with her- only to have him traded for lumber in the spring of the next year and to find herself pregnant by the man who promised not to and did it. That child she could not love and the rest she would not. “God take what He would”, she said. And He did, and He did and gave her Halle who gave him freedom when it did not mean a thing” (Morrison, 1987, p. 14).

Baby Suggs gave a lesson to Sethe and Denver that she earned from her sixty years of being a slave and ten years of being free and that was that there was no hard luck in the world but only the White supremacists. Shesaid “They did not know when to stop” (Morrison, 1987, p. 104). Denver explains thatgrandma Baby once says that folks scorn her because she bore eight children with different mates. Enslaved people are not meant to have happy emotions and that their bodies not meant to be like this, instead they have to have as many children as they can bear so to make happy whoever produced them. Baby Suggs is freed by her son Halle. He is exempted to hire his labor out so to buy his mother out of slavery. So, at the age of sixty she is a free woman. This fact is mentioned in the novel that “usually he worked Saturdays and Sundays to pay off Baby Suggs freedom” (Morrison, 1987, p. 109).

Sethe's mother is also among the sufferers at the hand of colonizers. Sethe tries to keep her past at the bay. But the arrival of *Beloved* demonstrates the difficulty. So she started narrating her story. Her mother was also among slaves and "hung by the time they cut her down nobody could tell whether she had a circle and a cross or not, least of all me and I did look" (Morrison 61). Sethe's mother according to her used to work in fields from dawn to nightfall and then slept through Sundays. The demands of her toil gave her only a few weeks in which to bond with her daughter, who was then passed on to a wet-nurse so that M'am (Sethe's mother) could return to her field. Telling her mother story Sethe says "If the moon was bright they worked by its light. Sunday she slept like a stick. She must nurse me two or three weeks- that's the way the others did. Then she went back in rice and I sucked from another woman whose job it was"(Morrison, 1987, p. 60).

Once Sethe's mother carried her behind the smoke house and lifted her breast to reveal a circle and cross behind into her flesh so that the child could always identify her mother. After her mother was hanged, Sethe examines her corpus but is unable to locate the symbols on decaying flesh. Sethe is pulled away from dead bodies by a Nun. There are other female's bodies as well. Nan tells her that she along with her mother were on a ship journey from Africa and that Sethe's mother had been sexually molested quite a times by White men and always discarded resulted fetus. She finally let develop Sethe and gave her the name of her black father. Highlighting this reality Nun says "she threw them all away but you. The one from the crew she threw away on the island. The others from more whites she also threw away. Without names, she threw them. You she gave the name of the black man. She put her arms around him. The others she did not put her arms around" (Morrison, 1987, p. 62).

From the analysis of novel it is found that another character Ella also suffers at the hands of Whites. She kills her own baby because she was raped by a White man and does not want to deal with thought of having his baby. She was once held by two white

men and was raped and was locked in a room for more than one year as mentioned in the novel “Something like that happened to Ella except it was two men-a father and son- and Ella remembered every bit of it. For more than a year, they kept her locked in a room for themselves” (Morrison, 1987, p. 119).

Hence through the experiences of African women like Sethe, her mother, Baby Suggs and other women, Toni Morrison showed how the African women suffered through during colonization and even after colonization the memories of past hunted their minds continuously.

### **THE EFFECT OF COLONIZATION ON INTER COMMUNITIES’ FEMALE RELATIONSHIPS**

This chapter provides an answer to the second research question that is how the process of colonization affected inter community’s female’s relationships. The process of colonization in Africa was the worst and crueler than any other place in the world. It affected the African people to great extent specially women and children. Beside the hatred that the White and Africans were having for each other. Still there were some Whites who were helping Blacks. They were not in favor of those cruelties and slavery. In his novel *Beloved*, Toni Morrison has presented this reality. During the analysis of this novel this reality has been explored at different places in the novel that some Whites were having a humane heart.

From the analysis of this novel it is found that African women are helped by Whites. Sethe the major character flees from Sweet Home while she has conceived a baby with Denver. She is in severe pain as her feet and legs are swollen but she is resolute to reunite with her children (who were sent to Baby Suggs). She lays tired on the earth. She hears someone passing by. She fears it would be a man of white skin colour “thathe too had mossy teeth, an appetite”, but it turns out to be an amiable white woman named Amy. Sethe says “It wasn’t no white boy at all. Was a girl. Her name was Amy” (Morrison 31). Amy was a bound servant who tried to reach the city of Boston, where

she would buy velvet. When she finds Sethe in bad condition she tries to help her. She helps Sethe in delivery of her baby, cures her wounds and makes her able to move forward. It is mentioned in the novel that "Than she did the magic, lifted Sethe's feet and legs and massage them until she cried salt tears" (Morrison 39). After delivery she wraps the baby. In the end before leaving Amy asks Sethe that she should tell this baby that she brought her in this world. She says "she's never gonna know who I am. You gonna tell her? Who brought her into this world?". "You better tell her. You hear? Say Miss Amy Denver. Of Boston" (Morrison, 1987, p. 85). In this way Sethe is helped by a White woman.

Mr. and Mrs. Garner, the owner of Sweet Home where Sethe was a slave are also among the Whites who used to treat their slaves in kind manner. Mrs. Garner treated Baby Suggs and Sethe, both kindly and gave Sethe earrings on her wedding and wished her good luck on that occasion. Furthermore from the novel it is found that Mrs. Garner became upset when she heard the incident of milk stealing from Sethe's breast. It means even white women were feeling bad on cruelties of males of their communities that they were doing with black women.

From the analysis of the text it is found that another character Lady Jones, who happened to be a woman of mixed race and a neighbor of Baby Suggs, she used to offer tuition to the neighborhood kids. It is mentioned in the text "Lady Jones did what white people thought unnecessary if not illegal: crowded her little parlor with the colored children who had time for an interest in book learning" (Morrison, 1987, p.102). She also was helpful towards Denver, the daughter of Sethe, in making her drive out of poverty. Once Denver explains that her mother is sick and asks Lady Jones that if there is any suitable work for her to be done that she will happily do in return for some food. Lady Jones does not know about any work, but she informs everyone at church about the troubles of Sethe. Denver starts looking for plates and containers of food on the tree stump near 124. Many of them include a piece of paper with the name of the donor, and as Denver goes out to return the baskets and plates to their original owners, the community becomes known to her. Lady Jones also offers her week-based reading lessons.

The textual analysis of the novel *Beloved* highlights some other characters as well who are shown helping slaves and Black women. Among them are Mr and Miss Bodwin. Siblings. Mr and Miss Bodwin are White by race and are also abolitionists who try to play pivotal in winning Sethe's emancipation. They own 124, which they allowed Baby Suggs and her kinsmen to use. As mentioned in the text "...and rented a house with two floors and a well from Bodwins- the white brother and sister who gave Stamp Paid, Ella and John clothes, goods and gear for runaways because they hated slavery worse than they hated slaves"(Morrison. 1987, p. 137). They were not in favor of slavery as further mentioned in the novel "We don't hold with slavery even of Garner's kind" (Morrison, 1987, p. 145). Sethe highlights that " But the Bodwins got me the cooking at sawyer's and let me able job to smile on my own like now when I think about you"(Morrison, 1987, p. 204).

There are some other lines in the novel which shows different perceptions about this fact that some Whites helped Blacks. At one place in the text, we come to know that Sethe and Baby Suggs have opposite views about this fact. Highlighted in the text that "Grandma Baby said there was no defense-they could prowl at will, change from one mind to another, and even when they thought they were behaving, it was a far cry from what real humans did." "They got me out of jail," Sethe once told Baby Suggs. "They also put you n it," she answered. "They drove you 'cross the river." "On by son's back." "They gave you this house "said Sethe. " Nobody gave me anything." "I got a job from them". "He got a cook from them, girl." "Oh, some of them do all right by us." "And every time it's a surprise, ain't it?" Said Baby Suggs"(Morrison, 1987, p. 244). So these lines highlights that everyone thinks about the Whites according to their own experiences.

So from the analysis of the text of *Beloved* it is found that the Whites besides all their inhuman behaviors with slaves, still there were some Whites who were against slavery. The analysis highlights that on one hand Black women who were suffering at the hands of colonizers on the other hand they were being helped by White women who had soft coroners for them and tried to help them at their best. So from the analysis of text it is

found that the process of colonization affects the Inter community's female relationships.

## **CONCLUSION**

This research study is designed to focus the plight of African women. So, this research work is done on the reality that how African women suffered at the hand of colonizers. Furthermore this research highlights that some of White women helped Black women during colonization. The purpose of this work was to show that colonized women always pass through great sufferings. The process of colonization seems to involve capturing lands, resources and ideas but it has indirect affect on people of that region as well. Colonizers always consider colonized people as animals and treat them like animals. Though African men were also the part of those sufferings and cruelties but the basic aim of this work is to show females sufferings by following the theory of post colonial feminism.

There are two research questions on which whole study is based. First question is that how African women suffered at the hands of colonizers. The focus is on Black women of Africa only. Their sufferings are the main focus of the study. They are treated like animals by beating and raping them and physically and psychologically weaken them and it is proved from the study of the novel *Beloved* as many characters experiences are depicted in the novel. The second important question is that the processes of colonization greatly affect the relationship of women belonging to different communities. Hence an opposite idea or theme that beside all cruelties imposes by White men there are some Women who were helping the Black women in different ways. They also used to become upset by listening and watching the inhumane behaviors or White men with Black women.

Though a lot of writings and literature is available on colonization and effect of colonization on women but this research work concerns with the novel *Beloved* by Toni Morrison. The entire study is based on this novel and has proved the required findings.

Hence to sum up, this whole research study concluded that women always suffer in every aspect of life. As from the study of the novel *Beloved*, I found this reality that women also suffer during colonization process. Black Women were the victims of white colonizer characters for instance Sethe, Baby Suggs etc were been the victim of whites and were raped and tortured many times by whites like animals. But it is also found that women always have soft corner for other women who are suffering even if they are not belonging to same communities, color or religion. Hence an analysis of *Beloved* novel highlights that the White women always tried to help African women.

Further a comparative study of Postcolonial novels written in different parts of the world, where colonization took place can also yield interesting results.

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