The Study of Gender in Toni Morrison’s Beloved

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Abstract

This study examines gender in Toni Morrison’s novel *Beloved*. Gender defines the behavior of the individual, how he/she walks, talks, eats, socializes and nearly all other features of everyday life. Gender is significant in the definition of the self. The researcher has selected a novel, written by a black woman to explore the specific ways in which the black women suffer. The study locates the instances of the suppression of the black women by patriarchal institutions and the constraints of tradition. The study further demonstrates the ways in which Women form bonds in order to tackle this oppression. The conceptual framework for this analysis is feminist theory. Feminism, as a social philosophy, is in the support of the notion that women should share equal opportunities of career building and self growth. Feminism is a broad area dealing with the concerns of women; however the researcher has focused on Elaine Showalter’s model of Gynocriticism. It is a literary analysis from a gynocentric viewpoint that places woman at center. The methodology for this work is hermeneutics. This study is significant for its special focus on the works written by a black woman, her own cultural background, her presentation of female characters and their relation with one another and with male characters. It is also significant for adopting a female framework for the interpretation of literature written by woman, rather than adopting a male perspective.

Key words: Gynocriticism; Gender; Self; Afro American; oppression

1. Introduction:

Gender is significant in the construction of self. Gender is the condition of being male and female. The term gender denotes those socially approved roles, behaviors, actions and features that are considered by a society fit for men and women. These specific roles result in gender inequalities i.e. those differences between men and women that deliberately give favour to one group by disfavoring the other. Gender will be examined with special reference to feminism. Feminism, as a social movement recognizes and at the same time criticizes male supremacy and implies strategies to change it. Feminists claim for the equal rights for women and argue about women’s equal share in society’s prospects. Feminist theory attempts to recognize the nature of inequality by centering its focus on gender politics, gender relations, power issues and sexuality. Inequality comes from the refutation of equal rights. The main obstacle to equality is sexism. Women are considered the first suppressed group, facing this sexism; women’s suppression is
most pervasive and deepest. No man will relinquish gender advantage as no white relinquishes racist advantage. Social theory should be framed by women, keeping in view issues related to women. Knowledge created from a male’s viewpoint is biased; therefore chauvinist misrepresentations must be rooted out if an accurate episteme of knowledge is to exist. History should be her story to reflect ignored and trivialized women’s contributions to literature. Due to this reason the researcher has chosen Elaine Showalter’s gynocritic model to evaluate the gender roles. Gynocriticism is a socio historical investigation that explores literature by focusing on the historical background, subject matter, genres, and structure of literature by women in order to frame a method of analyzing literature written by women and to create models of interpretation fashioned on female experience, rather than adopting male interpretive theoretical models.

Gerda Lerner talks about the significance of investigating women’s experience: “Woman have been left out of history not because of the evil conspiracies of men in general or male historians in particular, but because we have considered history only in male-centred terms” (Lerner, 1979, p. 39). JaksonStevi and Jakie Jones criticise the very term Knowledge as it is produced by men keeping in view only their own position in society i.e. white, middle class and heterosexual men. Therefore they reject this knowledge and stress that “Feminist theory is about thinking for ourselves – women generating knowledge about women and gender for women” (Stevi, Jones, 1998, p.1). Elaine Showalter finds a number of problems with the literature and theory produced by men as it is biased: focusing only on what men think women should be like rather than giving importance to women’s thoughts and subjective consciousness. Elaine Showalter argues about the construction of knowledge based on distinctive female experience. Women should be the creator and consumer of this knowledge. She uses the term Gynocriticism to name this knowledge. While giving its features she explains: “Its subjects are the history, styles, themes, genres, and structures of writing by women; the psychodynamics of female creativity; the trajectory of the individual or collective female career; and the evolution and laws of a female literary tradition” (Showalter, 1986, p.310).

In FeministCriticismintheWilderness, Showalter exclaims: “the program of gynocritics is to construct a female framework for the analysis of women’s literature, to develop new models based on the study of female experience, rather than to adapt male models and theories” (Showalter, 1986, p. 131).
This research work is qualitative. A qualitative research suggests to “the meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols and description of things” (Berg, 1993, p.3) being flexible, rational and contextual “It has been argued that qualitative methods are more appropriate for feminist research by allowing subjective knowledge” (Depner&Klein,1981,p.88). Qualitative methods allow intimacy and “more equal relationship between the researcher and the researched” (Stanley & Wise, 1990). Feminists detest the empirical figures and hard data and believe in the multiplicity of definitions. It is also believed that “feminist research is based on the assumption that the world is socially constructed, displays a relative aversion to empirical positivistic methodology, and rejects the value-free nature of research” (Crotty,1998, p.54). Feminist research “Is contextual, inclusive, experiential, involved, socially relevant, complete but not necessarily replicable, open to the environment and inclusive of emotions and events as experienced” (Nielsen,1990, p.6).

Elaine Showalter’s model of Gynocriticism has been taken as conceptual framework that provides insight for the study of gender.Gynocriticism is anthropological model with four aspects of critical inquiry i.e. biological perspective, cultural perspective, linguistic perspective and psychological perspective. The researcher has used hermeneutics as methodology to relate the text with context and part with the whole. Hermeneutics is the art of interpretation that places the researcher at freedom to recount the text with the context and part with the whole in the process of analyses, for coherent explanation. In order to better understand and explain a text its context is necessary, for the purpose of interpretation of the text of Morrison, Beloved the researcher goes back to the historical background of the novel to make understand better the social situation in which the novel was written. Slavery was the rampant institution that made the lives of the people miserable at that time. To get a better insight into the psyche of the character it is obligatory to have knowledge of the circumstances in which the writer is creating those texts. So to interpret the text of gender identity the context of slavery will be explored. At the same time the researcher will take a part of one text and correlate it with that of the other text through comparison and contrast. Feminism as conceptual framework and hermeneutics as methodology will allow her to enable her insights and subjective consciousness enter into the research. During the writing process the researcher seeks help from literary texts, critical books, journals and electronic resources.
2. **Historical background of study:**

The literary work concentrated in this research work is a novel by Toni Morrison i.e. *Beloved*. In her work she explores the plights of women in a male dominated and biased society. *Beloved* documents the lives of African American women who are struggling hard to put their lives back together again, to claim a sense of self that they lost or that they never had to begin with. She presents the unique heritage of African American culture at the center of her intricate and multidimensional narrative. The author uses historical facts and details concerning the past to make her reader aware of the rich and complex heritage of the African American culture and place of women in it. She “reminds” her readers of the past through fragmented images of black identity, ancestral culture, and the African family unit. Morrison’s purposeful descriptions, while not letting the reader forget the horror and humiliation of slavery, often revert back to an earlier time of identity, closeness, and order. Morrison combines the psychological and cultural aspects of the black community and explores the issues of identity, family, and self-possession in a world where slavery has apparently become an unfortunate issue of the past, but emerges, throughout, as a haunting presence. Nonetheless, there are other forms of slavery that still subject and enslave women.

The novel presents the issue of gender identity and the double oppression, faced by Black women and the ways in which they can break free of this oppression, because not only they are women but they are also black. African American black women struggle hard to secure freedom and to understand what such freedom means. Written in the context of cultural identity, the novel is the historical and psychological study of black people to establish an independent and free self. To claim for this free self the black women have to cope with patriarchy, slavery, poverty, racism, social isolation, and numerous other forms of oppression. In the journey of self-exploration the characters are fighting back to this alien world, claiming for a self that is worth respecting instead of existing in the shadows, by submerging their identities. Toni Morrison probes deep into the lives of the black people to trace back the emotional and psychic scares of slavery on their subconscious. The condition of being enslaved, the agony of the incompatibility of establishing one’s status as human being, have deep effects on the inner mind of the individual. These repercussions of the past are so intense and so profound that though one gets
freedom in the external world but the subconscious is still trapped in the past traumatic world that prevents the realization and true expression of the free self. As Seth puts it, “Freeing yourself was one thing; claiming ownership of that freed self was another” (Morrison, 2004, p. 95).

3. **Struggle for identity:**

In a slave society the recognition of the self is an intricate issue and is not possible without communal help. In a society where black people had been objectified as mere commodities and denied any chance to develop a self whom they can claim their own. Where they have been treated as other, the mere shadow of the white, the nonexistent, and one has to indulge in continuous struggle to fragmentcrumbled identity back into the self and to realize that it cannot be done without the true realization of oppression , In such a society to be a female is a precarious business.

To claim for a self, one requires an other as Benjamin states “In order to exist for one self, one has to exist for an other” (Benjamin, 1988, p.53). To do so, it requires the intricate inter-relationship of social and psychic world. For a Child the figure of mother is his first vital other. But in slave society the children have been denied of this basic right as the mothers are detached from the children at very early stage of life and children are sold for economic needs as Schapiro puts it:

For, Morrison’s characters African-Americans in a racist, slave society, there is no reliable other to recognize and affirm their existence. The mother, the child’s first vital other, is made unreliable or unavailable by a slave system which either separates her from her child or so enervates and depletes her that she has no self with which confer recognition. (Schapiro, 1991, p. 194)

in a black slave society the construction of the self of the woman is correlated with the construction of the self as mother. As an early stage the child is denied to provide with her first vital other to facilitate her journey into the self that’s why she becomes the only extension of the mother not as an independent self. It is later in life when she herself bears the fruit of the motherhood that she undergoes the process of the self realization that is a newer self as the mother. Now this self gets some recognition in the society. As at an early stage, the child is treated by his/her mother as an interchangeable part of herself. As a result, she keeps her child from entering into an independent self; “The child is […] not nameable, not signifiable, not other” (Schapiro, 1991, p. 75). This early experience of denial of the other renders child unable to
recognize as self. As Michele Bonnet asserts: “because the children have been deprived of proper nurturing, they have been unable to develop into real persons—it accounts not only for Beloved’s crippled and ultimately evil character but also for Denver’s unnatural childishness and inner emptiness” (Bonnet, 1997, p. 49).

For the recognition of the self a child cannot see mother as the subject as the society denies him that position. Along with many other rational roles the motherhood is one that was denied to the black women. The mother is so much trapped that she is unable to recognize the child and the child is unable to do so either. In her childhood Seth had to sacrifice her mother to fulfill the feeding needs of the white child. and afterwards when she herself becomes a mother she ,due to her own narcissist wound, has remained so destitute and drained that she is unable to satisfy her daughters’ hunger for recognition, their longed for desire. Seth, whose “best thing was her children” (Morrison, p. 308) acquires a severe maternal impulse; she views her children as an essential part of herself in an insinuation of ownership. Her children are a part of her self and rightfully belong to her. “Yet this essential maternal instinct is corrupted when viewed in the context of slavery. For a slave cannot own. Not her individuality. Not her children. Not her milk. Nothing is sacred for those enslaved”. (Mock, 1996, p. 117), slavery has given each of them a feeling of personal loss. Love is forbidden to them because it could precarious to have affiliation with anybody, as slavery has ripped them off any sense of ownership. Almost all the characters of the novels are suffering from the loss of the self, that dread and lasting narcissist wound that is a result of the earlier breakdown and deformation of initial relationship between self and other .i.e. child and the mother.

The development of the self is reliant on the interaction and acknowledgement from the other. “The experience of one’s coherence and reality as a ‘self’ is dependent on this primary relationship, on the loving response and recognition from an ‘other’ ” (Schapiro, 1992, p.195).

The telling of Beloved is subjugated by Seth Suggs’s act of infanticide and Morrison’s desire to know what causes a woman to give up her former self for the construction of a self as a mother, who finds her compliment in the self of her children. Throughout the novel, Seth lacks a clearly defined self. For example, she continually refers to herself in the third person when narrating the story of Denver Suggs’s birth. More important, she views her children as her finest thing, the one part of herself that slavery has not damaged. Yet, this identification becomes more and more troubling as Seth allows Beloved’s access to herself, to emotionally and physically
exhaust Seth of her individuality. It is up to Denver to liberate her mother from self-degeneration. She comes to realize that it is she who has to do something to rescue her mother and to keep her family integrated, so she leaves the house to get a job, and at this point she seeks help from community and this binding back to community helps Denver to grow into a self, independent and free. Here 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” (Mathieson, p. 15). Now Denver comes to realize her self different from Seth’s. Denver’s maturation elucidates the lack of demarcation between Seth and Beloved. Beloved’s childishness and Seth’s failure to set limits results in Seth’s self-destruction. Beloved’s childish demands cause Seth’s dissolution as well as Seth’s guilt thwarts either woman from distinguishing herself as a separate being. The devastating consequence of Seth’s actions is her loss of independent identity. The return of the community into Seth’s life is catalyzed by Denver’s discovery of self-identity. The women of the Black community drive Beloved out through a symphony of voices. The Black women’s voices urge Seth to return attention to her self. With the added strength of these women, Beloved is expelled and Seth returns to the living. Seth’s selfish love denies Beloved’s life and her own life as well. Through Denver’s surfacing as a self-ruling adult, the eviction of Beloved, and the return of Paul D and the Black community, Seth’s chance for selfhood emerges. As Barbara Schapiro puts, “the free, autonomous self, Beloved teaches, is an inherently social self, rooted in relationship and dependent at its core on the vital bond of mutual recognition” (Schapiro, 1991, p. 209). Beloved illustrates the need of human beings to differentiate self from other and to claim that self; after all, as Denver learns, there is a self to defend if one is to survive in this world.

4. Role of motherhood:

Inspite of the lack of control of black mothers over their children the task of motherhood is still significant, as the only prospect of lasting ties back to Black heritage lies entirely in the hands of the mother: They pass on their inherited values to make their children aware of their lost heritage, to inspire in them their lost values, to make them realize who they are. Who their people are. In the patriarchal societies though the role of the motherhood is restricted but is still significant. As Mothers play an active role to instill in the child the cultural and social values that guarantee the formation of the identity of the whole community.
While on examining the effects of slavery on black mothers and the struggles they face in raising their children, both the positive and negative aspects of motherhood take another dimension. Mother is the pivotal and most dominating figure in the novel, and its main reason is that as a result of the heritage of slavery the fathers are frequently absent from the houses, in the rare cases where men are still present and are a part of domestic household they do not acquire the main role as they have no legal right on their children as their wives and also because they can at any time leave. The history of slavery has left deep scars on the psyche of women when the men were either sold or taken away by this cruel institution.

As the result of the absence of the man, Seth has to experience the pressure that results in humiliation and disgrace. The task of mothering becomes more difficult for those mothers who are trying to bring up their children with a sense of African heritage, who want to make their children realize who they are, who their people are, as the memory of their inheritance is distorted by the feelings of humiliation and disgrace they suffered, when they were sold by the white men, when they were used as a mere piece of flush, when they were mutilated and degraded. With such memories how they can teach their children to be proud of themselves so the role of motherhood in Beloved is important as the only hope of continuing ties back to the African-American culture, and it lies in the hands of the mothers. Mother plays an active role to instill in the child the cultural and social values that guarantee the formation of the identity of the whole community. The prospect of the survival of the Black community depends on the motherhood. “There needs to be the continual passage of traditional black values from one generation to the text. The successful transfer of these principles falls squarely on the shoulders of mothers” (Valdes, 2005, p. 259).

To prepare one’s children for a life in a society that does not allow them the status of human being and does not acknowledge their cultural heritage. White masters do not give them any right to influence their children. “slavery, more than any historical event, fractured the mother line by denying blacks their humanity and causing the permanent fragmentations of families”(Valdes, p. 261). In order to perform a positive role to form the identity of the children to bring them up away from the influence of the dominant culture, mother can play an active role. “In accepting patriarchal values of the prevailing culture, the community moves away from one that validates the work of women. Mothers who conform to dominant culture therefore cannot adequately inform their children of the teachings of the black community” (Valdes, 2005, p. 261).
Seth attempts to make her own world with her two daughters Beloved and Denver, she wants to establish a new vocabulary where they can speak unspeakable thoughts together, to form a new concept of memory relished by an individual sense of ownership, in order to give her children that tradition of black culture that was robbed from them. Seth is attempting to pass on her children her inherited values as a way of establishing their specific black identity, by knitting their ties back to their culture, to make them aware who they are, who their people are. Seth tries to give her children a feeling of security, to reassert her matriarchal power by controlling their lives by herself, to give them a freedom from the horrors of slavery that she herself has craved for during her whole life. They struggle within the socio political paradigm of motherhood to plant a seed of disruption against the system.

5. Psychological trauma of slavery:

The emotional hunger of the child constitutes the essential psychological drama of the novel. An injured, enraged baby is the central figure of the book. Literally it is present in the title character of Beloved and symbolically it is in the unconscious of all the characters of the novel. The viciousness of the baby’s unsatisfied needs colours the mother daughter relationship in Beloved. A baby’s unsatisfied needs not only refer to physical needs but also psychic and emotional ones. In Beloved, the worst atrocity of slavery and the grimmest dilemma the novel presents is not the physical death only but the psychic death also. The children have been denied to their basic need and their birth right, which is the lap of the mother that is essential for the psychic growth of the child. This unfulfilled desire leaves such holes in the sub-conscious as are not filled throughout the life. Seth unable to have the love and care of her mother develops into an overprotective mother whose selfish love takes away the life of her own daughter. The predicament, of the novel is Seth’s murder of her baby daughter Beloved. But a deep study exposes the paradoxical nature of the murder. Seth, having passed the life of slavery and then able to run away from the cruel master is on the threshold of being captured again. Her experience of slavery is so worse that she prefers to kill her daughter instead of leaving her to the cruel institution of slavery. So she decides physical death for her daughter instead of psychic death: “if I hadn’t killed her she would have died and that is some-thing I could not bear to happen to her” (Morrison, 1988, p. 200)
6. The narrative structure:

The narrative structure of the novel is correlated with the character’s continuous struggle to delineate a path of self-discovery. The complex narrative of the novel is emblem of the intricate lives of the characters. Afro American’s overall fragmented state sets a constant dialogue between past scraps and present bits of their texts and selves in an array to sustain a loose textual and cultural continuity, a week sense of belonging and self-identity. Afro American’s overall fragmented state stipulated an invariable. Morrison’s story telling characterizes shifting and mutability in perspectives, in time and space, character, procedure, and composition. Her writing is characterized by the “constantly though unexpectedly shifting point of views, an unpredictable choir of narrative voices, and juxtaposed fragments of events and images that are in dialogue with one another but could hardly form, a straightforward linear cause-and-effect plot that is a monologue” (Gyetvai, 2006, p. 2). Beloved’s narrative structure is comprised of the constantly shifting perspectives that slithers inward and outward of the character’s mind, that is mutable and non sequential, and there is a no conventional line between fact and fantasy, and is characterized by the mutability of boundaries, constitutive of the dialogue between self and other. Such fluidity, as Nancy Chodorow, is “distinctive of female, as opposed to male, modes of perception and expression. It derives from the preservation of an original identity and pre oedipal bondage between self and mother”. The monologues of Beloved, Seth, and Denver present something more serious than the mere flexibility between the boundaries the complete breakdown of borders, between the self and the other. As Seth’s segment starts, “Beloved, She my daughter, She mine” (ibid, p. 200).

Denver’s begins, “Beloved is my sister. I swallowed her blood Right along with my mother’s milk” (ibid, p. 205).

And Beloved’s with the line, “I am Beloved and she is mine” (p, 210).

After this Beloved’s speech is without punctuation presenting the fantasy of fluidity between the self and the other. The merging of the self with the other. As Beloved claims: “I am not separate from her there is no place where I stop her face is my own”. Her words show her craving for the other, to be a part of the other. Her words reveal the psychic loss-the denial of recognition-at the core of the fantasy:

There is no one to want me to say me my name…She chews and swallows me I am
Gone now I am her face my own face has left me…Seth sees me see her and I see the smile her smiling face is the Place for me it is the face I lostShe is my face smiling at me doing it at lastHot thing now we can join a hot thing. (ibid, p. 212-13)

Her words reveal the spiritual loss- the refusal of acknowledgment- at the heart of the fantasy.

Mine is the lingering word heard by Stamp Paid in indistinct whispers while living at the house. And it is used again and again by Beloved in her unpunctuated monologue. In this section the voices of the three characters joined and are indistinct and at the same time are segregated, the voices speak to but not with each other, are significant of the intense desire of the one to submerge into the identity of the other: “Beloved you are my sister You are my daughter You are my face; You are me I have found you again; You have come back to me You are my BelovedYou are mineYou are mineYou are mine” (ibid, p. 216).

This form of holding and objectifying the other imprisons the self within its own overwhelming omnipotence, its own narcissism, it cannot satisfy – only the shared recognition between self and other can result in True satisfaction or joy, that is between two subjects or selves. In the relationship between Seth and Beloved, One surrenders to the incorporation of the other, of both sides of the power relations one becomes subservient to the other, at the end of the novel, Seth presents herself completely to the power and desire of Beloved. She becomes emotionally depleted and physically drained as she abandons to feed or care for herself while Beloved literally expands and bulges Seth starts to shrivel down; both are caught up in a mutually destructive, frighteningly ceaseless narcissism. Seth’s decline starts from an incident that again stresses lack of acknowledgment at the source of this narcissistic condition. Seth has been deserted once again she takes Denver and Beloved to a trip of ice-skating on the frozen steam. The three enjoyed themselves, they played there, they skated there and enjoyed there a lot. But at the same time they yelled with joy and pain. The scene is an amalgamation of childlike pleasure and childlike helplessness. Seth’s laughter turns into unmanageable tears, and her weeping in the background of the scene suggests a child’s aching sense of pain or loss, specifically the absence of the verifying legitimizing attention of the other. as each is implying to the other for the completion of the self such blurring of boundaries leads to the denomination and compliance of the self that yields totally to the will and desire of the other. Or the self appropriates the other as a part of itself. In the monologues of Seth, Denver and Beloved the repetition of the word mine represents this form of possession and integration of the other as an object.
In *Beloved* the narrative technique of defragmentation endorses the character’s voyage towards the realization of self by presenting the Black women’s struggle to survive in a hostile society. In terms of fiction it is a narrative mode that is both linked and fragmented. “The narrative evolves along broken lines out of restless processes of rhythmic dispersion and recollection of fragmented images” (Gyetvai, 2006, p. n.d), moving backward and forward making the process of the exploration of the self, possible.

7. **Language as a tool for identity:**

Language is a significant medium to make one’s mark in the world of slavery. If it is a tool in the hands of the whites, why should it not be used otherwise? By commanding the language of dominant culture the slaves can use it as a tool to disrupt foreign dominance. It can become “the reversal of a relationship of forces, the usurpation of power, the appropriation of a vocabulary turned against those who had once used it” (Cummings, p, 533). But on the other hand, To African culture, English language is inherently foreign and hostile, and intrinsically representative of dominant culture and white oppression. The admittance of English language as a mean of communication is a cause of internalization of culture and ideology of slaveholders. Language, as a means of expression has always become a tool in the hands of slave owners and slaves have been denied of this privilege their access to language has been denied. It is highly visible and disruptive phenomenon in slave societies. As Cummings states: “At one end of the pedagogical process stands the master teacher\disciplinarian to whom belongs the power of defining; he reproduces the relations of domination and subordination particular to the ruling order” (Cummings, 1990, p. 561). And further he exclaims: “ At the other end lies that student\subject who, in internalizing the masters lessons, finds herself\himself a captive of the dominant ideology specific to his or her (e)state”(ibid).

Language of the Whites is a contrivance of slaveholders. And as masters they do not allow slaves to have ownership of it. Language, particularly the language of the whites, is a contraption of white men and they don’t allow slaves to have mastery of it and they don’t let them to own it. Sixo, after stealing a shoat, tries to impose his own logic by claiming to the school teacher that he did not steal it. Though he caught it, killed it, slaughtered it, backed it, and ate it, but claimed to school teacher that it was not stealing, but rather:

Improving your property, sir.‘What?’“Sixo plant rye to give the high piece a better chance.Sixo take and feed the soil, give you more crop.Sixo take and feed Sixo give you
more work’. ‘Clever, but school teacher beat him anyway to show him that definitions belonged to the definers, not the defined’ (Morrison, 1988, p. 190).

Sixo is trying to take control of the language that do not belong to him and in this way he is trying to step out of his boundaries and that’s why he is punished by the school teacher. The slave has no authority to manipulate the language of School Teacher. By beating Sixo for using language and logic, School Teacher asserts his ownership of definitions; and he brings it to conformation and demonstrates the social and linguistic construction of meaning, and the absence of absolute meaning. Declaring ownership of definitions, of meaning, destabilizes its transcendent quality. Again the ownership of language is further emphasized as Sixo rejects the language of the master because “there was no future in it” (ibid, p. 25), as it is governed by School Teacher he cannot command it. And its use will render him voice less instead of giving him any voice. The slaves have lost their voice as they have lost their language along with their culture a long time ago. For the most part, the language of Africa, of their inheritance, no longer exists in the generations of American slaves who have fewer direct ties left to their motherland. The language of the masters which silenced the slaves exercised a great penalty on slaves during the middle passage. Who had been erased so easily from the cultural texts as most of the stories of Blacks have not been preserved due to the fact that a few of them knew how to read or write: “When offering them a voice through Beloved, Morrison must face their utter lack of a comprehensible language that could create a cultural presence. Not only have tradition and history all but ignored them, language has been denied them” (Fuston, 2002, p. 461).

The English language itself cannot satisfy the slaves as it denies providing the slaves that level of expression they desire for, and according to the white masters, slaves have no right to possess English language. To reclaim their identity, Seth and other runaway slaves, have to fight the battle of language, to reclaim a sense of identity outside the construct of slavery, is to retrieve a command on their own language, their own means of communication, split from and distant to the white world they have inhabited: the characters in Beloved, as in “other narratives of origin, [attempt to] reconstruct, restore, and rename” (Cummings, 1990, p. 552).

The fundamental expression of the authority of self is that of naming. To give name is a gesture of personalizing something, have liking, have affiliation, have bondage. In Beloved, naming provides an opportunity to claim an independent identity outside the shekels of slavery. According to Hayes “Naming is an act of creation. The named- whether person, place, or object –
is identified or marked by the namer as distinctive, unique, the occupant of a discrete space in the universe” (Hayes, 2004, p. 669), he further claims “To name is also to claim dominion: naming children, slaves, domestic animals, or real estate is an announcement of figurative, if not literal, ownership of the named, as well as an indication of the namer’s relationship to or sentiments about the named” (ibid).

“Beloved’s lack of name signifies that she is everybody” (Koolish, 2000, p. 177). Beloved represents the pain of slavery they all suffer in some way. Baby Suggs chooses her own name by rejecting the white given name of Jenny. “Just as Seth retains Beloved as the name of her slaughtered child, Baby holds on to her name as an exteriorized affect and the foundation of a self one can love” (Cummings, p. 566). Seth was the only child who was given the name of black man by her mother, as she was conceived through love not through rape. Whereas all other children were thrown by her mother (Seth’s mother) without giving any name, it was only Seth whom her mother owned by giving a name. On the other hand Paul D finds it difficult to get rid of the white given name. As the only name he knows is one given to him by Garners and about the other name ‘man’ he even does not know whether this name is assigned to him due to his merits of it is a vague, empty term that Garner has thrown on him. “Garner called and announced them men, but only on Sweet Home, and by his leave. Was he naming what he saw or creating what he did not?” (Morrison, p. 220). If that white given name is vague and meaningless compare to the self selected personal name given to Baby Suggs, does that mean that Paul D.s manhood depends only on the whim of his master? “What would he have been anyway, before Sweet Home, without Garner? In Sixo,s country, or his mother’s? Or, God help him, on the boat? Did a white man saying it make it so?” (Morrison, 1988, pp. 220-221). If his manhood is only related to the white given name “Suppose Garner woke up one morning and changed his mind? Took the word away” (ibid). Paul D feels difficulty in understanding the fact if anything exists beyond the word, and consequently has difficulty relating the proper name to the meaning it implies.

Language has become a tool in the hands of the whites to suppress and subjugate the black. By internalizing their culture through language the whites want blacks strip off their heritage and identity and trying to make them the other, the mere shadow. But Morrison’s characters fight back this oppression. Sixo, Stamp Paid, Eva refuse to use white vocabulary and stress upon forming their own definitions. Both Seth and Eva provide their children their own vocabulary to interpret unspeakable dreams freely, in order to donate their children a concept of
culture that was robbed from them. They implored a new perception of memory relished by a sense of personal ownership.

8. Conclusion:

Thus concluding the discussion it could be said that gender plays a significant role in the construction of self. Due to gender politics women are doubly oppressed and to combat this oppression first they have to locate the cause of this oppression and then employ a strategy to deal with it. They have to suffer double oppression, one of patriarchal society and constraints of tradition and the other of cruel institution of slavery that strips them of every right of motherhood as well as of womanhood. Gynocentric perspective renders a special help to give insight into the lives of the women and trace the prospects that intersect the ways of oppression. Women do exist and they have played their role in sharing the responsibilities of family and society where men have often shrunk their responsibilities. Especially under the institution of slavery women have struggled hard to realize their selves fully where either their role as mother or some internal agency catalyze their journey towards the construction of self. This realization of identity is the goal, the feminists crave for, and it becomes their main predicament in societies where women are being trivialized as mere commodities, a property with a price tag. Black women in order to come to terms with themselves are fighting for their rights as human beings and as cherished members of the Black society.
References


