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## **Demoralization and Dehumanization: A Study of Afro-American Race Narrated in Toni Morrison's *Beloved***

**GowherAhamd Naik**

Research Scholar.

**&**

**Dr Sanjay Prasad Pandey**

Supervisor,

Lovely Professional University,

Department of English.

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### **Abstract:**

Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* delineates the problems of demoralization, dehumanization, marginalization, slavery, racism, sexism, classicism, pathological mourning, ethnic cleansing of Afro-American race. The author spoke the unspoken and unbearable truths of Afro-Americans who were victimized and had been the worst sufferers in the history of humanity. Moreover, Afro-Americans had been belittled, exploited, subjugated, and ravaged on the grounds of race, colour, caste, class and sex. People of Afro-American race had been torn physically, emotionally and psychologically throughout the ages. The present paper is an attempt to analyze all these dehumanizing conditions suffered by the Afro-Americans and how these people had been degraded and forced to live cannibal life.

**Keywords: Mourning, haunting, slavery, racism, ethnic cleansing, marginalization**

Dehumanization is the act of treating the humans inhumanly, barbarically and cruelly. This has undermined the individualities of the people and their identities. Anthropologists describe this as a marginalization of the people who don't have any voice by vicious behavior and treatment. Edward Said writes that West has used "the varying degrees of projected inferiority" and otherness on oriental people (Said 201). As a result, people are dehumanized and deprived from their rights, cultural values, human laws and freedom. So, dehumanization has been launched on people from different ways such as slavery, racism, sexual objectification, ethnicity, human rights violation, gender and class. The dehumanized people are morally excluded from the society through violence, oppression and tyranny. Herbert Kelman avers that dehumanization happens to people when they are denied from their identities and community values. Through animalistic behavior, lynching's and genocide people have been dehumanized and ridiculed. This has horribly impacted on their psyches and identities. In this way, these people have suffered from traumas, depression, and psychotic turmoil's. Edward Said opines that Western "advanced cultures, have rarely offered the individual anything but imperialism, racism, and ethnocentrism for dealing with "other" cultures" (*Orientalism* 204). In this way, Afro-

American race has suffered brutality, suppression, oppression and despotism of the White race. As, they have been forcefully undermined and demeaned by the White owners under the slavery.

On another side, demoralization is to corrupt or destroy the moral values and qualities of people. This occurs people due to violence, psychological disorders and traumatization. In demoralization, people experience dilemmas, anxieties and frustrations in their lives. As, people are hopeless and victimized as they do not find any space for their existence. Rather, they become dejected and disappointed upon their destinies. This hopelessness and loss of faith in black people is due to bad and horrible treatment with them by White race. Homi Bhabha, claims that “the Negro enslaved by his inferiority in accordance with a neurotic orientation” (*The Location of Culture* 43). This is due to this; these African people feel dislocated and traumatized in their psyches as they have been considered as other and cannibals. Demoralization has resulted guilty consciousness in the lives of people especially to these Afro-Americans as they have confronted discrimination in terms of their color and race. So, Afro-Americans had become one of the worst sufferers in the history of mankind. As, these people had been exploited, belittled, subjugated and ravaged on behalf of race, colour, caste, class and sex. Further, people of this race had been torn physically, emotionally and psychologically throughout the ages. In this way, they had suffered from traumas, anxieties, schizophrenia and neurotic disorders. Maxine Lavon Montgomeran expert in Afro-American studies and professor of English explained that the Eurocentric experiences forced on these people had “a gradual decline in social, economic, and moral conditions, a major catastrophe, then a new beginning—an unreliable model when imposed upon the Black American experience” (Teresa Heffernan 3). In this way, slavery haunted their lives so had left unforgettable scars on their consciousness that remained there for ages and ages and later transplanted from one generation to the next. These had been clutched to retain the worthless positions in a white dominated governance, isolated from their existence, imprisoned, deprived of educational, social, political and economic rights. Due to this, Africans had felt rootless, identity crisis and shattered. The effects of lynching's and holocaust could still be investigated in their traumatic psyches. As, they had suffered from post-traumatic syndromes. A prominent writer of Nigerian origin Chinua Achebe wrote regarding the tension among the people of the Igbo community and their culture that was ridiculed and wiped by the colonizers. His book *Things Fall Apart* delineated the situations of Nigerian people vividly.

Toni Morrison states that these Africa race in the novel *Beloved* as “nobody knows their names, and nobody thinks about them. In addition to that they never survived in the lore; there are no songs or dances or tales of these people” (Teresa Heffernan 3). It was in no way conceivable for these Afro-Americans to had normal mourning because of psychological horrors of slavery. Afro-Americans had been dislodged from their genealogy, culture and language by the white masters who owned them so that they could not forward their stories and claim for their recognition and stability. Zadie Smith, an English novelist, cultural critic wrote in her

novella *The Embassy of Cambodia* that “but more people died in Rwanda, but, yes, millions and millions” (Zadie Smith 7). This violence on these African people had demoralized them so they had become hopeless and tortured. Furthermore, Afro-American race lived a guttural life under the white apartheid race who under their draconian laws and policies molested their wives and children so voids had developed in their selves and consciousness.

The agony of slavery, lynching’s, genocide, and sexuality portrayed in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* accentuate the lives of survivors and dead ones during and after the slavery. In this regard, Paul D, an Afro-American who went through “a wave of grief soaked him so thoroughly he wanted to cry” (Toni Morrison 5). So, these Africans had been demoralized and reduced by these methods and ways. Hardly, the people of this race came out of this trauma of slavery inflicted to them by white masters from time to time. In the eyes of slave masters, slave women were not mothers at all and were candidly instruments to improve their master’s economy. Moreover, the wives of African men had been premeditated as breeders, worthless than animals and accounted on the basis of their child producing capacity. Rape for the slaveholders was not simply the fulfillment of their sexual urges; it was a mechanism of domination, hegemony, repression and subjugation of their male slaves to keep them sabotaged. Toni Morrison verbalized that “their bodies not supposed to be like that, but they have to have as many children as they can to please whoever owned them” (Toni Morrison 5). This way their identities, psyches had been damaged by the White owners. They had crushed their spaces and had used sexual, physical violence against them.

Robert Jay Lifton, an American psychiatrist stated that these “designated victims” (KyeongHwangbo 4) of Afro-Americans had been forced to “live off” (KyeongHwangbo 4) economically, socially and psychologically and had been looked up on as outcastes, ‘Others’ and malignant for the white dominated society. As a result, they had felt marginalized and demeaned in their own eyes. On the other side, these Afro-Americans in terms of their blackish nature and ethnic origin suffered from discrimination and exploitation. The effect of this had so much on the individualities of the people of African race as discrimination and violence had aroused indelible scars in their lives. Laura S. Brown, a clinical and forensic psychologist of Washington studied the psychic scars of the socially neglected Afro-Americans in an American clinical psychologist Maria P. P. Root’s concept of “insidious trauma” (Christine Grogan 2) and she came out with the statement that “traumatogenic effects of oppression that are not necessarily overtly violent or threatening to bodily well-being at the given moment but that do violence to the soul and spirit” (KyeongHwangbo 4). In this way, these Africans had experienced post-traumatic syndromes as they had been torn by the wounds and scars inflicted on them by White people. Being acknowledged as marginalized race, Afro-Americans were more prone to vulnerability, instability and had been disorganized. For these people, there was no locus to claim about and thus, felt isolated. Their self-skepticism about their lives had given birth to ‘double

consciousnesses' fragmented psyches and identity crisis. Their race, ethnicity had turned a challenge to their integrity and safety.

Despite this, anxiety, depression, trauma and post-traumatic signs had remained part and parcel of the Afro-Americans lives. A research at Howard School of Psychiatry figured about 65% of people got affected by post-traumatic stress most of them belonged to Afro-American race. Sigmund Freud an Australian neurologist and father of psychoanalysis defined anxiety as "a response to perceived danger or stress" (Sarason G. Irving, Barabara R. Sarason 6). The unexpected death of a close relative, physical violation, execution with a weapon, sexual molestation, gang rape, etc. had remained a daily routine of Africans. Due to this, they had been felt vacuum, alienated, subjugated and lost people. Racial discrimination left their lives crippled and so their lives meted out an inexhaustible pain. Ralph Ellison an American novelist and literary critic viewed regarding the African community that these people accepted the world that was even cannibalistic, it was by compulsion and forced on them by the white masters. The end product of these vicious and brutal tortures made Afro-Americans animalistic, wounded, ghastly, monstrous, horrible and schizophrenic. This was the result of wretched and inhuman conditions of Afro-American race as they had suffered imprisonment poverty, homelessness, jobless, etc. Due to this, they had been traumatized by the people of White race. Morrison conveyed her message through the character of Baby Suggs that, "[n]ot a house in the country ain't packed to its rafters with some dead Negro's grief" (Toni Morrison 5). No race in the world had been imprisoned, disregarded and executed more than the Afro-Americans alone in the world. In this way, African had been dislocated, disconnected and executed from their families and roots.

In addition to this, suicide was a way to elude from racism, sexual molestation, marginalization, brutality, inhumanity, atrocities and dehumanization from the White masters. It alleviated them to move from the clutches and cages of their masters. As, they felt no any other way to get rid of this oppression. Females had been more subjugated as compared to males so they excelled in the suicide rate and faced abject cruelty such as Sethe and Baby Suggs suffered in the novel *Beloved*. Sethe's mother pronounced that Sethe "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" (Toni Morrison 5). This brutality and rape with their bodies had psychologically and physically had torn them. Further, Afro-Americans culture and history had been decimated by the White racists. Rifts were created in their traditions, beliefs, culture, institutions and relationships. A hegemonic war was fought against them through culturally, politically, ideologically and socially. Toni Morrison in her novel *Beloved* raised the issues about the nameless and the lost Afro-Americans, Sethe was made conscious by Nan about her mother that, "which would never come back," of the other babies she bore in the Middle Passage, the product of rapes by the crew, whom she threw away "without names" (Teresa Heffernan 3). This demonstrates, the way these Africans people had been sexually ripped by the White people. In this way, they had confronted demoralization and dehumanization in their own personalities. Though, it had not been predicted the overall deaths in the 'Middle Passage'. Toni Morrison had used the words "Sixty Million and

more” (Toni Morrison 5). It indicated the countless lives lost in the Afro-American trade of slavery. Historians had no appropriate records and documents about these lost Afro-Americans, hence, it reflected these were “disremembered and unaccounted” people (Toni Morrison 5). Toni Morrison wrote this novel *Beloved* a document to this “untranslatable” (Teresa Heffernan 3) loss. A loss that had created breaches, demarcations and anxieties in the relationships. Beloved the daughter of Sethe, a testimony of millions who had been disconnected and murdered from their culture, language, family, and tradition so she symbolizes the entire Afro-American race. Morrison wrote that, “Everybody knew what she was called, but nobody anywhere knew her name. Disremembered and unaccounted for, she cannot be lost because no one is looking for her, and even if they were, how can they call her if they don’t know her name” (Toni Morrison 5)? This destruction to these people had fractured and decimated their psyches. In this way, these people could not relate and integrate to anything as they their archives and heritage had been destroyed. So, these Africans had dwelled in this pain throughout their lives.

Despite this, Afro-Americans mental anguish could not be studied easily so experts had examined their imperishable scars of slavery through modern techniques of psychotherapy and psychoanalysis as the whole race endured drastic psychic problems such as anxiety, trauma, uncanny, pathological mourning, etc. In the novel *Beloved*, it was expounded by Toni Morrison that White masters had treated the Afro-American people as uncivilized, uncultured, and beasts. Schoolteacher the owner of Sethe understood from the brutal act of Sethe that, “[a]ll testimony to the results of a little so called freedom imposed on people who needed every care and guidance in the world to keep them from the cannibal life they preferred” (Toni Morrison 5). As, these Africans had been regarded as cannibals and blood suckers Morrison had presented their anguish during the slavery trade. This she mentioned at the end of the novel *Beloved* that though Beloved daughter of Sethe had gone but her footprints remained. These were deeply drenched in the psyches of Afro-Americans. As, they had been denied any freedom and rights to live an independent and peaceful life.

The ending of the novel *Beloved* demonstrates that the Afro-Americans could never left slavery altogether because slavery was part of their past lives. It had formed troublesome distress in their hearts and psyches so these Afro-Americans got trapped in their past and found almost impossible to move out of this tormenting pain that finally led them to death. Helene Cixous, a French feminist, literary critic and philosopher declared that “Man cannot live without resigning himself to loss. He has to mourn. It’s his way of withstanding castration. He goes through castration, that is, and by sublimation incorporates the lost object” (Teresa Heffernan 3). The Afro-Americans were not capable to do so. Their ‘libido’ energy could not detach from these heinous acts imposed on them in the past. Due to the fear of their memories, these Afro-Americans were not able to confront them. They had not only the phobia of personal memories but also the horror of racial memories. In this way, they had confronted mourning and psychotic problems. Carl Jung, a Swiss psychiatrist and psychotherapist enunciated that these memories of

ancient fears appeared to them in various folktales and cultures. These were stored in their 'Collective Unconscious'. From time to time, they were haunted by them and in this regard, it was hardly feasible for them to had normal mourning for the disappeared and massacred ones.

Morrison in her novel *Beloved* had articulated the unarticulated and unendurable truths of the Afro-American people who had been victimized and were worst languishers' in the history of humanity. In the novel, she had emphasized the masters raping incident with Sethe during slavery. She also had described Sethe's humiliation and sorrow in a scene when two of her master's nephews sucked the milk from Sethe's breasts. It was this intolerable pain in the mind of Sethe that always obsessed her. Sigmund Freud, a renowned psychologist expressed that 'libido' need to be detached from the lost object, but Sethe had not been able to detach her psychical energy from the lost object her daughter as a result she became victim of pathological mourning which became a serious psychic disorder for her. Sethe experienced ruthless torture at "Sweet Home" and the savage treatment she received by the hands of Schoolteacher's nephews, forced her to kill her own daughter with a spade. Due to this dehumanization and demoralization, she had become a murderer as she did not want that her daughter should experience the same cruelty and wrath from the slave owner's. This demonstrates the victimization and oppression of slaves during slavery.

Moreover, Sethe lost her mother at a very young age. Thousands of Afro-African children could never saw who gave them birth because in their early childhood they had been separated from their mothers. Sethe herself acknowledged that after "her husband had disappeared: that after her milk had been stolen, her back pulped, her children orphaned, she was not to have an easeful death. No" (Toni Morrison 5). Due to this, Sethe has lost the balance of her psyche as she is traumatized by the regular acts and violation of her body by her masters. Toni Morrison through Sethe's memories of her mother illustrated that under slavery mothers were struggling for their children, recognition, voice, rights and their self- identity. Sethe's motherly loss had created a void inside her. She did not want to pass it on to her children. She preferred to keep them away from this unimaginable master-slave relationship. As, in this relationship, she had been subjected the immeasurable torture and pain. She killed her two years old daughter rather to be racked like her in the trade of slavery. Julia Kristeva a female psychoanalyst, linguist and philosopher recounted that women were not as 'culturally prone' but in fact 'constitutionally' brought up to become failed mourners, capitulated to depression. By execution, Sethe claimed that her child belonged to her. Although, she knew that a female slave did not have any legal rights over her children. Sethe was molested, fractured, dehumanized and demoralized by White masters. So, Sethe says "After they handled me like I was the cow, no the goat, back behind the stable because it was too nasty to stay in with the horses" (Toni Morrison 5). Most of the slave women during slavery suffocated their babies rather granted them to become the victim of slavery such deliberate attempts did not provide solace to an individual. This was the case of Sethe who dwelled in the thoughts of her past life and lost her ease. As, she had been torn by the rapes and tortures she had confronted from her slave owner. Ramazanian

American professor of University of Virginia and expert in mourning described the melancholic nature of mourning that “a work of grieving less idealistic and more ambivalent, enraged, and aggressive” (Tammy Clewell 1). In this case, Sethe could not relieved herself from the horrible episodes happened with her. She turned into a living ghost and became more ambivalent, ferocious, despising and finally unable to mourn. In a similar vein, the same loss happened to her mother-in-law, Baby Suggs. Both of them had lost their children and then had lost their interest in living. Baby Suggs made a statement that “not a house in the country ain’t packed to its rafters with some dead Negroes grief” (Toni Morrison 5). These incidents and the death of her loved once had busted her lives so the impaired psyches of Africans could not link with the outside world. In slavery trade, Baby Suggs lost her son Halle who disappeared and never reappeared back to her. For Baby Suggs, all her eight children had been seized from her by White masters in the trade of slavery. Due to this, she is mentally disturbed and fragmented as death even could not soothe her soul such was the intensity of her pain.

### **Conclusion:**

The above study reveals that Afro-American race had been deeply wounded by the tortures and oppression under slavery. Through racism, brutality, barbarity, demeaning and defaming these Afro-Americans had suffered from traumatic disorders. No doubt, many generations had departed but these people are still suffering from the post-traumatic syndromes. As, they had borne the brunt of severe mental disorders such as depression, hysteria, nervous disorders, the problem of mourning, anxiety, trauma, schizophrenia, etc. Their culture had been mocked, falsified, denounced and considered as worthless. In this way, they live had experienced pathetic plight. Due to heinous torments, they raised questions about their identities, roots and culture. As, these people had been marginalized and crushed by the White owners. Toni Morrison had deconstructed this dehumanization and demoralized of these Afro-American people in her novel *Beloved*. As, these Africans male and female had confronted the rapes, molestation and viciousness of the White people. Slavery had busted their lives so had created voids and wounds in their lives. Seth is the representation of those women who has been uprooted, raped, victimized and displaced from her roots. The effect of slavery had so deep effect on her psyche that she had assassinated her daughter Beloved. This was basically the effect of imperialistic and colonial policies on the Africans. In this way, they had been ruined and damaged from their relationships and roots. In short, Toni Morrison’s novel *Beloved* represents the pain of the black people from their masters during slavery. As, this book is the voice of the voiceless and subaltern Afro-American people.

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