

# A Study on Feminine Consciousness in Toni Morrison's Novels

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## Abstract

Morrison is a fierce critic of cultural appropriation and minorities especial females, are at center. She also speaks of female friendship, biological and non-biological sisterhood, mothers and daughters. Her outlooks on life differ and they shed light on the complexities of the female psyche in society. Her women's issue revert to history and mythology in the attempt to find roots of oppression of the female sex. So, her novels have female protagonists to comply with strictly defined gender roles. She also sympathizes blacks and claims that they are not 'other'.

**Keywords:** Mythology, Civilization, Struck, Roots, Women, Female, Critic

Our modern civilization with all its blisses and curses offers struck at the very roots of human sociability. So, Feminism challenges the traditional view of woman as the weaker sex in the society. It can be identified as the liberation of women from social taboos and male dominance. As regards, man and women are facets two of the same coin. In spite of being made up of flesh and blood, the nature and abilities of one are different from those of another. Man is physically stronger than woman. Woman is more sensitive than man by nature. These differences forbid their relationship to attain maturity. In recent years, Feminism has emerged as a popular medium for discussion on man-woman relationship. In this connection, Feminism started as an attempt at empowerment of women. It is now-a-days on the verge of its over-ripening with women asking for empowerment, which is a sense, a denial of 'Essentialism' may bestow short term satisfaction on women, but is, indeed, a step towards failure of man-woman relationship. As two different types of fruit differ in colour, taste,

shape and texture, without one being superior to the other, so also men and women have different qualities which distinguish them without being any question to superiority or inferiority. However with respect to innate talents, men or women, differ from one another. Yet their need for each other is equal. But, we find the irony with the women is that they achieve what they wish to, still they are suffering from many kinds of violence sexual, psychological and physical against them. Women, being extremely vulnerable are easy targets of any form of oppression, humiliation, deprivation and discrimination. So many issues of violence, gender discrimination and segregation exist in all aspects of life, ranging from cultural, political to economic and specially religious campus. Owing to race and gender sufferings and painful experiences of women were experienced in America and South Africa.

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They were raped, sometimes tortured gang raped and also murdered there. Therefore, a number of novelists represented of victimization of women during the catastrophic events due to race and gender. Concerning gender discrimination many writers like Kamla Markandaya, Bharati Mukherji, Anita Desai, Virginia Woolf, Alice walker, Khaled Hosseini, Arundhanti Roy etc have contributed a lot to the world of women literature Toni Morrison and Nadine Gordimer both have presented women characters as refusing to accept passively an imposition of suffering as destiny in their novels. These novelists have portrayed women characters not only as victims but also as saviours thereby highlighting their contributions in redeeming the distressed of race and gender of America and South Africa. They deal with the subject of the female experience. Their themes are related to the peculiarities of living as a woman and primarily focus on the female sexuality that proves to be burdensome for their marriage, family relations, relationships with other women and status in society. Their racism also reveals national and social identities.

## DISCUSSION

Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, *Song of Solomon*, *Beloved* and *A Mercy* deal with women characters who suffer due to race and slave. These women characters want to forge their independent identity in novels. Here Morrison challenges preconceived ideas and depicts the implications of being a black woman during and after slavery. Her narratives suggest the opportunity for theorizing a way of freeing black women theorist from relying exclusively upon Eurocentric assumption. Of course, her suggestions represent the ability of black women to define the beauty in them rather than accept often destructive images imposed by the psychological limitations of slavery and of post-slavery constructs. Likewise Nadine Gordimer has also examined the moral and psychological effects of apartheid upon women in her novels like *The Lying Days*, *Occasion for Loving*, *A World of Strangers*, *The Conservationist*, *Burger's Daughter*, *July's People*, *The House Gun* and *My Son's Story*. Having read these novels we have to remember about humanism, which is an attitude of mind based on human values, in which philosophy and ethics, rather

than revealed religion, are the ultimate sanction. And there is nothing wrong to say that whatever a man does is the result of his thoughts, his psyche. Human mind is in fact an abode of goodness and evil both. It is up to men or women however, which quality they let reign over their personalities. After following there manners she has presented the oppressive and dehumanizing racist ideology in there novels. So, her career covers over more than sixty years, from the beginning of apartheid. Her fiction and non-fiction have a history of the problems of the South-African nation. In this way, she always puts the theme of identity. Her Women characters play out their existence in her novels. Her *The Lying Days* and *A world of Strangers* represent the characters' lack of social commitment to the issue of race in South African Life. Her *Occasion for Loving* deals with the inescapable process of alienation and social distancing. It has political metaphor and collective trauma investigating liberal commitment. Her works are significant in making the society aware of women's need and demands in providing a medium for 'self' expression' and 'self assertion'. Her feminism grants the same sights to women as those enjoyed by men. It does not talk equality and rights of women but it is more about compassion respect and understanding from the male counterparts in society. Owing to race and gender they are molested physically and mentally by men dominating society. In this way, her novels are set at the backdrops and follies of South Africa Society. Gordimer has effortlessly and successful portrait emotions and inner feelings of women here.

Morrison is a fierce critic of cultural appropriation and minorities especial females, are at center. She also speaks of female friendship, biological and non-biological sisterhood, mothers and daughters. Her outlooks on life differ and they shed light on the complexities of the female psyche in society. Her women's issue revert to history and mythology in the attempt to find roots of oppression of the female sex. So, her novels have female protagonists to comply with strictly defined gender roles. She also sympathizes blacks and claims that they are not 'other'.

Now that Afro-American artistic presence has been she taunts and berates him for being so complacent and so obsessed with his money. She behaves herself

like his girlfriend and the novelist has presented a sketch in the novel;

*“discovered” actually to exist, now that serious scholarship has moved from silencing the witness and easing their meaningful place in and contribution to American Culture. It is no longer acceptable merely to imagine us and imagine for us. We have always been imagining ourselves. We are not Isak Dineren’s “aspects of nature”, nor Conrad’s unspeaking. We are the subject of our own narrative, witness to and participants in our own experience, and in no way coincidentally in the experience of those with whom we have come in contact. We are not, in fact, “other”. We are choices.*

To illustrate the above extract, Pecola yearns to have blue eyes to achieve an acceptable position in the community. She is the Central Character of Morrison's novel. The Bluest Eye, Her tragic story has symbols related to the silenced voices of black women oppressed by means of violence. She is constructed from memory and assumptions of the community of America. She has desire for superficial criteria such as beauty.

Pecola is traumatized by a boy at her school. He accuses her of killing his cat. In this connection she is also abused and humiliated by his mother. To her, Pecola is different from white kids. White kids have social status and they are easily identified. She is also blamed on the inadequacy by her father, Cholly and her mother, Pauline. She has to feel all the striking experiences of life. So she dreams to observe the world face destructive with blue eyes. Hence, she has to face destructive events. She, belongs to a poor family and her mother, Pauline works as a domestic in a nice palace. Thus, her mother belongs to a black mammy to the wealthy blonde girl-doll. Her parents fight over money and they neglect their children's upbringing at home. Therefore, Pecola and her brother have to find ways of coping with reality. In this circumstance, her brother runs away and she tries to disappear.

Morrison has explored the making of a self in her *Song of Solomon*. She tries to link the theme of memory, the search for personal identity, family and community bonds, friendship and interpersonal relationships in it. Of course, interpersonal relationships have always been linked with women,

as they are usually attributed qualities related to communication, nurturing, compassion, etc. The novelist devotes the whole novel to the portrayal of women victimization due to race and gender. Magdalene Dead, the Milkman's sister (Lena) makes her one of the submissive women and tries to populate *Song of Solomon*. She is rebuked by Milkman. Thus, several female characters of the novel suffer. Hagar's separation from Milkman also pains her that it kills her. In this way, we find that women take extreme measures to deal with their brutal circumstances in the novel. As we find that Macon's ignorance of Ruth is driven her to breastfeed Milkman into his youth. Therefore, we find a picture of racial imbalance:

*American systems of racial imbalance, segregation and disenfranchisement are very bit as ‘post colonial’ (perhaps even as colonial’) as the legacies of imperial rule in developing countries. What's more because of its racial, religious and cultural heterogeneity, the united states becomes a particularly volatile site of colonial contestation for political visibility and dominance (Edwards 24)*

It shows that racial imbalance is occurred in America and women is not happy in their community. Therefore, Morrison shares the facts that the violence and oppression within the black communities. In one hand, the dominant whites victimize but on the other, the blacks give response. In this way, women have to suffer and the pathetic incidents are seen. Women scream for help. Shashi Deshpande, a female novelist, suggests that women should be given enough space to realize their true personality. Hence, she points out in an interview to Geeta Gangadhara.

Sethe is a central character of Morrison's novel, *Beloved*. She is a black woman and slave. She lives at Ohio in Kentucky because she is endured as a slave at Sweet Home. She works for Mrs. Garner. When she is married to Halle Suggs and she receives a pair of earrings, she has a nice dream. She has four children like Howard, Buglar a baby girl, and Denver. She gives the image of an ideal mother. She is ready to do anything for the benefits of her children. She is exploited and punished in the society. The school teacher tries to crack down on the slaves and she has to save her children. She

becomes gentler but conscious of her subhuman position. She only offers interest in plantation that forces her enlarge a pursuit for sovereignty. The all this to Beloved. Thus, sethe saves her children to save from becoming slaves. She is full of expression of motherly love. As Atwood has stated:

*Ordinary women were supposed to get married, but not women artists. A male artist could have marriage and children on the side as long as he didn't let them get in the way-a faint hope, according to James Connolly... but for women, such things were supposed to be the way. And so this particular way must be renounced altogether by the female artist, in order to clear the way for the other way way of Art. (Atwood 73) the*

From the above discussion, we find that the limitations imposed on women are not just women artists, but women who want to pursue any other career. To Atwood, male artists can pursue their art careers and children are thought to be a mother's responsibility. In this way, Sethe has to suffer due to slavery and lives in traumatic conditions. Her System belong to societal and psychological oppression that have affected her life. Morrison has tried to reveal Black Authority and power through Sethe on the scriptures of the world.

Beloved is a ghost of Sethe's old daughter. She wants to know what happened with her in the past. She has also experience of Sethe's mother. In this way she is a super natural woman. She investigates Sethe's force that is losing slowly in confusion. She acts like a child in the novel but her appearance plays a crucial role with Sethe, her mother. She is a powerful symbol of the link between the present and the past. In this way, she takes every opportunity to ask questions. Like a human she tries to response of all questions. Thus, her identity seems mysterious. She also represents herself parasitic as the novel develops. She is like a catalyst for Sethe's, Paul D's and Denver's respective process. She conveys a wide range of feelings and everyone respects her. She becomes a symbol of the victims of slavery. By the dint of her particularly gruesome the plot of the novel is developed. Sethe's loneliness is outcome of her excessive love for her mother. Sometimes, her mother's indifferent response makes her agonizing,

who starts looking for Companionship in nature. She is not the victim of a suffocated and insensitive being of the society. Her role is artistically described by Morrison. In this way, the novelist has portrayed Beloved as a dual personality which makes us sensitive, repressed and irritated in this new era. She is a so much engrossed in her own responsibility with the present reality. However, Beloved appears somewhat an obscure and mysterios creation of the novelist. She wants to have full control over Sethe. She offers her help to her mother who is in tears attempting due to slavery.

Thus, Antonia comes from a different social world to Mehring and she also uses to hang around revolutionaries. She also invites some of them to her drinks parties at her home. In this way, we find that Antonia is one of the White liberals in Johannesburg, Mehring is also convinced that she is a gipsy. Unlike Mehring, Antonia is very aware in political situation. She ever takes past demonstration against apartheid. She is insightful enough as the novelist states:

*She tapped her foot a few moments, her thigh moving in her skin,  
smiled, summing herself up in the way she prided.-  
same sort of  
thing, I suppose  
She looked at him,  
Grow chickens.  
Raise chickens  
Well, whatever. Bea-a-a  
She moved her head attractively, her lips, ready for the words,  
searching as if for a fruit being dangled at her mouth.  
A brave revolutionary. Trouble, you said - you were proud, you had resisted all temptations. (Gordimer 99-100)*

As a revolutionary activist, Antonia expects to change South Africa. She challenges beliefs of Mehring. She is a wife of a professor but she offers close ties to her friends. When Mehring calls her to the farm on the weekends. She taunts and berates him for being so complacent and so obsessed with his money. She behaves herself like his girlfriend and the novelist has presented a sketch in the novel:



*She catches him, suddenly full into his glance. Really not bad; large brown eyes of the kind that seem to have no whites, all painted up, of course, coated eyelashes and lids, a brown oval face with a mole between upper lip and nose, a high shiny forehead under a rather tortured mop of dull dark hair. A cheap mass production of the original base tanned face he likes in a woman. (Gordimer 240)*

In the end, Mehri disagrees Antonia and their relationship becomes fractured. To this incident, we find that Mehri only wants to continue his status and race powered by preying on young girls. He is involved in the outside world. Thus, he becomes the conservationist, a symbol of the fortress mentality of South African white society. In the relation of Antonia and Mehri, the novelist appears as a master of voice, and she has depicted this relation to show with shocking clarity how appalling the attitudes of white South African are. After seeing her life in danger Antonia leaves Africa. Claudia is one of the greatest sentimental characters of Gordimer's *The House Gun*. She has been a wife and mother but she desires for a change of her life-style. She is an independent professional woman in the novel. Her father, Guy is a newspaper reporter and writes articles exposing Harry Lavender's Corruption. She family matters does not satisfy him. He betrays her trust and supports Hannah, the white woman whose love affair is with him. Thus, Aila's life turns on an even pace as Sonny's passionate involvement with Hannah. Aila is not a demanding character sexually but Sonny feels nothing. She also becomes an irritant for him. After that Sonny retains his patronizing stance. Aila's also accused for being a member of Transvaal Implementation Machinery. She becomes very busy for trial but she is a revolutionary responsible for her acts. In this way, the novelist lands through the character of Alia. She takes up an very active part in the society. Of course she ever remains as the dignified wife and loving mother in *My Son's Story*.

Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, *Song of Solomon*, *Beloved* and *A Mercy* challenge preconceived ideas and depict the implications of being black woman during and after slavery. They inquire into the conditions of people through characters of the novels. Similarly Nadine Gordimer has also examined the moral and psychological effects

of apartheid upon the countrymen. With the establishment of British rule in 1806, British law makers replaced the Dutch legislature in Cape Town, British style education replaced Dutch traditions of schooling and English became the official language. The most crippling blow to the Africans way of life came when the British abolished slavery in 1834. Here, the 'whites only' policy prohibited blacks from holding many jobs. So, they were not allowed to run business or professional practices in any areas designated for whites only. Police vans came the 'white area' to round up illegal blacks. In this way, schools, hospitals, beaches, trains and buses were segregated. Thus, there were no public swimming pools, libraries, parks except police stations in black areas. The policy was implemented and a grown black man would be referred to as 'boy' to his face by whites. Gordimer's novels *The Lying Days*, *Occasion For Loving*, *The Conservationist*, *July's People*, *The House Gun* and *My Son's Story* portrait of her strange and troubled homeland. Owing to Apartheid, all female characters these novels have to suffer. Their society's image of femininity have been disturbed and unnatural. What we need today is the change in our mindset.

## CONCLUSION

To conclude, we can say that racism began to shape the country's past with the arrival of Europeans. Race is related to culture and it an index of culture and vice-versa. So, Black women writers have exposed how oppressive is the impact of racial ideologies on their sexuality. Self, the result of human's awareness of the individual as a separate entity in the social environment, enables humans to regard their emotional experience and their own integrity and identity in relation to their past, present and future. So, Morrison and Gordimer have reconstructed the socio-cultural values from a woman's view point. Her dreams and desires take a back seat when it comes to her family. All female characters of Toni Morrison and Nadine Gordimer have got interrogative structures in novels due to race. They suffer within the women's movement. In this connection, the white people of the house feel superior than black people. Most of women live mundane life and talk about their everyday readily, which doesn't seem to require much subtlety. Their understanding gets deflated or inflated because

of race. This is so because the evolution of the human body has arranged the brain, through the intervention of the spine, for the brain to lie very far from the surface of the earth. Apartheid provides an ideological justification for massive ongoing population relocations. Both novelists like Toni Morrison and Nadine Gordimer have examined the impact of race in their novels but their novels expose the slew of contradictions that make up any life, not just a life shaped by racial discrimination

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