*Short Review Paper*

# Postcolonial Imagination: History and Narration in Toni Morrison's Beloved

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## Abstract

*Toni Morrison in her novels exploresthe complexities of black women's experience in white- dominated America. She tries to unfold the contradictions in her African - American identity. Conscious of her own marginalization within the context of mainstream she starts valuing her peripheral existence. For this, she uses Magic Realism as a literary device to represent the history of Afro-American slave tradition. Morrison reveals the reality of Eurocentric discourse and its consequences on the black identity.*

**Keywords:** Imagination, Narration, Hegemony, Discourse, Psychological trauma.

## Introduction

Toni Morrison is a today's renowned American writer who received Nobel Prize for Literature in 1993 and is the first black American woman writer who awarded this highly prestigious award. Her literary works and critical writings concentrate on the history of black African-American in which she tries to present the condition of black people who suppressed under American white-dominance. She in her novels point out the white mythology, even she wants to remove the psychological fear and inferiority in the black people's mind and regain self confidence among them. Her novels are deep study and historical records of the master-slave relationship. So to depict the colonial past vividly she deliberately uses imaginative realism narrative technique which also known as magic-realism in her novels just like other postcolonial writers and thinkers such as Franz Fanon, Edward Said, Salman Rushdie, Andre Brink and J.M. Coetzee.

## What is magic realism?

"Magic Realism – when marvelous and impossible events occur in what otherwise purports to be a realistic narrative is an effect especially associated with contemporary Latin American fiction ... but it is also encountered in novels from other countries"[1].

Beloved is a story based on African-American slave Margaret Garner escaped from slavery during 1856 in Kentucky by running to Ohio a freestate. Margaret killed her two- year -old daughter when her owner came to get her back to the Sweet Home. She killed her daughter because she did not want her daughter should grow up as a slave like her. The present novel portraits experiences of 'otherness' during slavery and even post-slavery period. Sethe a mother and major character in the novel reveals her life and struggle for the self identity. Beloved is a combination of both psychological and physical violence. Throughout the novel, we find feeling of alienation and deprivation where Sethe talks about the past and that past was not only thepast of Sethe but of all the black peoples. This past is of two types, one during the time of colonial time where slavery practiced freely in which the black body was property of white masters and a second one is past of the black before slavery where they were free to think and act. They lost their consciousness during the period of slavery and lost the 'self'.

Stephen Slemon in his influential article "Magic Realism as Post-Colonial Discourse", calls on a mixture of postmodernist assumptions to claim that magical realism is able to express a number of postcolonial elements. He draws attention to the production of binarism and dualities operating in settler's culture that foreground the "gaps, absences and silences produced by the colonial encounter. Slemon claims that magical realism's strength is in that it encodes "a concept of resistance to the massive imperial center and its totalizing systems". He inserts that, "magical realism, at least in a literary context, seems most visibly operative in cultures situated at the fringes of mainstream literary traditions"[2].

## Re-memory

The present novel highlights on the re-memory and a technique used to unfold this memory is magic realism which is quite suitable to the theme of the novel. This form became successful to present bitter reality of past in a smooth and wonderful way and avoids many controversies on the particular text. Here Morrison successfully handledthe plot of novel with historical reality. Sethe always speaks about the loss of her past but confused to express neglected identity. She has a quest to

restore the 'self'. Sethe is a symbolic character by Morrison who conveys the feelings of all African -American Black who struggled for their own identity. Sethe says that 'I was talking about time. It's so hard for me to believe in it. Some things just stay. I used to things you forgot. Other things you never do'[3]. Above statement of Sethe resembles to the postmodern concept of 'time and space'where she could not believe on past reality which changes over the time and space also. A reality is always shifting phenomenon, onecannot go in its centrality. It changes in the course of time and space. Here Sethe tries to follow the realities in the past for this she rememberspast which filled with harsh realities of slavery and racial segregation.

## Decolonisation

Postcolonial imagination here I mean to go back in the colonial era where cultural and political ideologies was practiced both willingly and forcefully by the white masters, its consequences leads to slavery. Postcolonial writers and thinkers expose these practices by using imaginative narrative technique. Here Morrison takes Sethe's dead daughter who came back to the life as a birth metaphor. Beloved is a symbol of slavery, her birth also symbolises reoccurring structure of slavery. She conveys how slavery is deeply rooted in society and blacks were denied as a human being. Women were marginalised and even triple binded under white dominance and mythology. This novel is a fine example of imaginative realism in which all historical realities are given boldly and dig out the political, religious and cultural practices in colonial and postcolonial America. Morrison here narrates the story of Sethe and her dead daughter Beloved very skilfully and reveals historical truth to readers. It reflects tension between the coloniser and thecolonised.

The style of the novel unfolds the hegemonic discourse used by the white-dominance to maintain the power over the black people and let them in slavery continuously. Magic realism helps to exposes forgotten aspect of the history and the culture. It decolonises the history of African-American black people. It means Beloved is a reading of African-American history. Imperialism creates dominance over imperial world which affects the several aspects of colonised people. For example; culture, history, politics, language, art and so on. Western values have rooted along with imperialism. Native culture and the history reflected in different discourse is Eurocentric which hides realities of the colonial past, especially injustice, inequality and oppression by the white masters and identity of black was blurred even it is destroyed by meta -narrative of white dominance. Magic realism on the other hand, exposes a reality in the imperial and colonial era. It even gives way to express real emotions, passions, psyche of colonised people. Magic realism became a language of oppressed and marginalised people. Toni Morrison and other postcolonial writer used it to express colonised history. Postmodern historian denies historical truth, even they questions on the historical document and its reality. Stephen Greenblatt exactly quotes, "The historicity of the text and the textuality of history"[4]. This statement clearly suggests that a history is texualised and the text is historicised. Truth in the history is truth created by people who were in power. The power I mean, socio-political, cultural, economical, and intellectual power, and only these people could tell the historical truth which was partial and half truth. Subaltern, black and oppressed was remained unspoken or unwritten. Historical and literary document denied existence and reflection of the black, subaltern, and non -European and created them negatively.

## Conclusion

Then what postcolonial imaginative narrative or magic realism does is that it exposes all evils of white colonisers and even gives outlet, to the black people's emotions and thoughts. Magic realism narrative technique handles a huge responsibility to help postcolonial writers who creates awareness among blacks and subalterns to achieve them, a self-identity. Toni Morrison in her novel Beloved used magicrealism to reflect African –American history in which slavery is practised to control black people generation after generation. She tries to decolonise it andeven she tries to reveal the historical truth but also regains self-essence or self-identity of black African in American.

## References

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