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MOTHERHOOD TAKEN AWAY: THE TRAUMA OF SUBORDINATION IN *THE COLOUR PURPLE* AND *SEA OF POPPIES* WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO *BELOVED*

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ABSTRACT

Slavery in America created an upsurge of racial discrimination. This demoralizing practice forced many generations of black “slave” Americans to endure, or more specifically suffer the extortions of white people. They were dehumanized as the very essential criteria for survival in society was eliminated from their lives or even from their dreams. Their identity, their self respect suffered for they were viewed as the “properties” of white people. America gradually became a powerful country but they forgot to thank the black hands whose excessive toil had built the country. In *The Color Purple*, the touchy as well as realistic magnum opus of Alice Walker various shades of black life have been brought into the forefront. The subordination of a black female in that suffocating racist and patriarchal society is one of them. The main aspect of this paper is the similarity of Celie of *The Color Purple* and Deeti of the novel *Sea of Poppies* by Amitav Ghosh. Indian history is different in a way from the black Americans not just because of the British colonialism but also because of the age old caste system which divides the basic qualities of humanity. In India caste system has declared many people as low standard and only having the right to serve higher caste people as slaves. Though Deeti is not a lower caste in the novel but her unplanned elopement with the “untouchable” Kalua established their position as the same. In both the cases woman is the category who suffers the most as they are believed to be physically and financially dependent on men. How both Celie and Deeti lose their claim on motherhood under this circumstance and social atmosphere will be the basic topic of the paper.

KEY WORDS: discrimination, subordination, denial, motherhood, identity.

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INTRODUCTION:

In *Beloved* (1987), the outstanding novel of eminent American writer Toni Morrison, the protagonist Sethe preferred freedom of her daughter to the life of her daughter. This very precious and unmatchable,

unparalleled novel *Beloved* depicts the psychological trauma of a black female slave who feels it safer to eliminate her daughter than to lead a slave life. History took time to decide the fate of the black people but Sethe took an instant to free her daughter though she became doubly bound by guilt and horrible traumatic situations. Celie and Deeti are not slaves like Sethe but they also have to suffer detachment from their children. The reasons behind this painful situation will be unraveled gradually in this thesis.

SEPARATION OF THE MOTHER FROM CHILD:

For long the black Americans faced unendurable torture, both physical and psychological. Their basic human value, dignity is neglected. American law could only understand the prosperity of America as well of the white people. The black peoples' labour built and brought prosperity to America but they got only negligence. They were denied of any kind of need, comfort and luxury as they did not have any right to property, education or even marriage. With time the black people took the shelter of rebellion and through the civil war they succeeded a little to earn some respect with bloodshed but even it was far too long to get the proper reverence as whites did not want to share their neighborhood with black people as can be noticed well portrayed in the drama *A Raisin in the Sun* of Lorraine Hansberry. They were envious, jealous of the properties owned by the colored people as in *The Color Purple* we can see that the mayor's wife wanted a car as the black people were also emerging financially and having cars. If this is the picture after the rebellion then what the picture before the rebellion of the chained slaves could be!

Though postcolonialism is a phenomenon whose academic journey started with the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* in 1978, its psychological journey is deeply and firmly rooted in the consciousness of the colonized people over the ages. Deeti condition was more or less formed by British colonization of India. In order to prevent her child from entering into physical and mental violence of slavery which is an offshoot of colonialism Sethe found it easier to exclude the child from her familiar world. Celie also could not find her voice in the suppressive circumstances of racism and patriarchy. So the power struggle of the "Self" enters the psychological crisis of the "Other".

Here, class, racism and gender become prominent. In the book *Postcolonial Literature An Introduction* (2008) by Pramod K. Nayar, it is narrated that "race, once considered in essential terms, is now seen as socially and ideologically constructed to meet specific needs during slavery. Race was used as a mode of social organization and identity formation in the West (especially the USA in the era of slavery), just as caste has been used in India" (Nayar, 9).

So these very words "identity formation" become baseless and ironically satirical for the black American woman or the native Indian woman as they were only used forcefully to construct the identities of the powerful. Even the very basic identity of motherhood was taken away from them as they are the victim of slavery, racism, colonialism, castism and most importantly of patriarchy. Patriarchy is a vital issue of the whole world. With the rise of feminism the restrictions and misery of being a woman has also become prominent.

In *The Color Purple*, Celie, the black, female protagonist is used by her Pa to fulfill his amorous intentions. He beats her, rapes her and even impregnates her when she is only fourteen. This incident is cruel enough to shatter all joys of a girl's life. But along with the physical torture the emotional torture was yet to come. She gives birth to a baby girl, and next a baby boy. But Pa snatches both her children and sells them. Celie did not even know that her daughter is alive. She thinks "He took it. He took it while I was sleeping. Kilt it out there in the woods." (Walker 4). And the baby boy is sold by her Pa. Thus the mother is separated from her child unintentionally and unknowingly, with her breasts full of milk without anybody to feed.

Celie embraces an unhappy marriage with Mr. __. But once with him in the town she met her baby girl. She knew it was her child but she could not pronounce. Celie thought - "I think she mine. My heart say she mine" (Walker, 15). But she could not embrace her child for once at that time and at that moment she thought, "I don't have nothing to offer and I feels poor" (Walker, 16). So, patriarchal society along with her poverty becomes the hindrance for the union of the mother and the child. It is only at the end of the novel when Celie gains a little economic independence she is united with her biological children and her child-like sister Nettie. Here Marxist feminism takes entry and demonstrates that women cannot be fulfilled without economic self-dependence.

Along with Celie Sophie the “amazon” of the story is also made to stay away from her children. Sophie is untenable even by her husband Harpo. Harpo wants to dominate his wife and wants a wife who is timid like Celie. But he becomes unable to subdue the independent spirit of Sophie. As a result he brings a counterpart of Sophie in the form of Squeak. But Sophie is dominated and ostracized by the white mayor and his wife. She says “Hell no” to the mayor’s wife when she wants Sophie’s servitude for them. As Sophie did not accept their proposal she was put to imprisonment and thus separated from the rest of her family. Sophie says to Celie about her feeling of being imprisoned, “Every time they ask me to do something, Miss Celie, I act like I’m you. I jump right up and do just what they say” (Walker, 83). Thus even indomitable spirit of Sophie is suppressed by the ruling demand of racism and patriarchy.

In *Sea of Poppies* Deeti’s whole identity in the village is established as *Kabutri-ki-ma*. Even though a little self-assertive she is made to leave her joys of motherhood. Behind the apparently wilful separation, Deeti is actually forced by her contemporary social, economical and political conditions. With the death of her opium addicted husband she is left with two probabilities. One, she can die like “sati” and two, she can subjugate herself to the amorous brother of her husband, the biological father of Kabutri, whose only interest lies in Deeti’s body. But she is unwilling to this violation and subordination and chooses the first option. But when she flings herself into the fire she is rescued by Kalua. At that moment with the birth of a lover, the death of a mother was also ensured. Kabutri was everything to Deeti. But she is compelled to sail away her daughter and she felt as if her life is shattered- “When the boat sailed away, with Kabutri in it, it was as if Deeti’s last connection with life had been severed. From that moment she knew no further hesitation: with her habitual care, she set about making plans for her own end” (Ghosh, 159).

When Kalua and Deeti were escaping on the Ganga downriver Deeti saw her daughter’s dwelling. But she knew that if she had to meet her own daughter she will have to accomplish it stealthily, without being noticed and captured by others. Thus, a situation has arrived when the natural connection of mother and daughter are being severed. Initially Deeti could not tolerate Kalua’s proposal of going to Mareech as girmityas as they had to escape all the searching, hunting eyes of their relatives. She becomes extremely angry and agitated and rebukes Kalua. She thinks, “How could he imagine that she would agree to abandon her daughter forever?” (Ghosh, 205). But with some further progression Deeti understands that it was not possible to dupe her hunting relatives and she takes the grim decision to really go away from her daughter’s life. Though she knew she could never come back to her familiar place once sailed away, she ironically urges to Kalua, “Is there any time to stand there like a tree? Come! Let’s go – chal, na . . .” (Ghosh, 225).

Celie could only write to God about her tormented condition. But does a “male” God who is made acceptable by the “white” people listen to a “black female”? No. It is only when she is economically independent that her prayer was granted. Deeti’s situation is a little different as who is there in the world to listen to a “subaltern”? They even did not have the voice to speak. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak says’ “The subaltern cannot speak. There is no virtue in global laundry lists with ‘woman’ as a pious item” (Das, 145). So, the facts which have compelled their motherhood to remain unacknowledged in the society are apparent now. One is the fault of being subalterns and the other is to be a “wo-man”. “Wo-men” were supposed to be always dependent on “men” for their identity. And thus, because of the oppression of the patriarchal society their basic identities of motherhood could not be established. Is this not enough punishment for being “doubly marginalized” or “doubly colonized”? They are “doubly marginalized” as a white woman who only claims “a room of one’s own” cannot understand the pain and sufferings of such a situation where even the emotional bond of the umbilical cord has also been taken away.

In recent feminist criticism there are many critics who cannot find any “joys of motherhood”. They treat motherhood to be the physical obstacle to female evolution. According to the critic Simone de Beauvoir, motherhood kills woman’s energy and joys. But critics like Luce Irigaray have always celebrated motherhood as childbearing is a vital gift for them which the patriarchy does not possess. Celie, Deeti, Sophie are mothers whose motherhood is taken away from them.

CONCLUSION

For Celie, Sophie and Deeti the face of their children could only bring joy in their hearts. But still they could not be emotionally fulfilled with their children's company. It is the customary and conventional patriarchal society along with racism and historical colonization - which has prevented these women from all kind of identity formation. So the elimination of these diminishing exercises along with the incorporative and respectful association of all classes, races and gender of society can only herald true progress of our earth.

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