

**GENDER ATROCITIES AND TRIBES: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN AND JAUNSARI MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE WORKS OF TONI MORRISON**

**Dr. Sangeeta Kaintura**

Assistant Professor  
Department of English  
Govt. Degree College Thatyur,  
Tehri Garhwal (Uttarakhand)

**Abstract**

The term ‘Adivasi’ or Tribes are the term ambiguously used as negative connotation for the marginalized but often self sufficient communities preferring seclusion from the so called modernized society. The women fated to doom are the dual victim of the oppression not only racial but also sexual. The women are often projected as the weaker sex and the victim of the frustration of the society in literature. Thus women are the mirror that aptly reflects the predicaments of these marginalized communities.

The present paper aims at bringing out the various atrocities that the fairer sex is subjected to in the male dominated society. The paper also aims at bringing a comparative study of an African American setup with reference to the novels of Toni Morrison and a realistic review of the women of Jaunsari tribes of Uttarakhand. The gender atrocities around the world need a serious speculation and a tender heart with unbiased approach to overcome it.

**Key words:** Racism, gender biasness, slave trade, sexual exploitation, polyandry, polygamy

Gender based violence is a growing issue of concern across the globe nowadays. Even though we have made into the ultra modern civilization where gender on one hand is losing its significance but on the other hand incidents such as rape, domestic violence, sexual harassment, female infanticide, forced marriage, honor killing, dowry violence, human trafficking etc still form the greatest threat to the concept of gender equality. Atrocities cover all such threats to the women which may be physical, sexual or even psychological. Women have been and still are the victim of gender discrimination and still insecure compared to their male counterpart in all strata of the society. The marginalized female population is doubly oppressed and victim to violence of all kind making their condition pathetic and a matter of serious concern even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

African American literature often denoted as Black literature is a set example of what racism can breed apart from hatred and fear. Sometimes also connoted as Literature of Protest, the Black literature is not merely the documentation of slavery record but it also carries the aesthetical beauty that takes the readers to a level of oneness with the oppressed classes. In this entire chain of harassment women become the dual victim of racism and sexism.

Toni Morrison (1931-), a Nobel Laureate, artistically rebuilds the history of slavery especially the pathetic condition of females in the marginalized society. To begin with her debut novel, The Bluest Eye (1970), Morrison choose a miniature Black girl child as an object of insult and torture just for the simple cause of being born with no Blue Eyes. This forms the central theme of the novel that is escaping humiliations by wearing the 'light' skin of oppressors. "It was the first novel to give a black child a centre stage; previously, the black child had not only been peripheral, but doubly marginalized as a comic figure" (Peach 8).

Pecola Breedlove with black eyes attributes the sufferings in her life of fifteen years to the missing blue eyes that make her ugly and lonely in the family. Neglected by her mother and raped by her father Pecola cultivates the idea that the only thing that could put end to her suffering is possession of the blue eyes. These blues eye give the white reflection of the world which seems a paradise to the exploited Negroes. Till one day she crosses the limits between sanity and lunacy and alienates herself from the cruel world believing that she has succeeded in transforming the color of her eyes through some black magic. Her madness is the symbol of indifference of the society towards the pressing needs of the black child especially a girl.

Morrison's second novel Sula(1973) again puts Black female in the centre and directly links ugliness to poverty, oppression and racism. The novel is about the definitions of good and evil revealing Black women friendship, Nel and Sula, which breaks the stereotyping of Black women and presents her as a pariah. One of the most symbolic presentations of Morrison is the name of the place which the Whites have assigned for the Blacks to live. It is a barren hilltop and yet called "Bottom". . The town is paradoxically reversed where the Bottom is on the top of the hill. "It's the bottom of heaven- the best land there is" (Morrison Sula 5). Like the place lacks its importance similarly the Black community inhabiting it led a life of seclusion amidst the evil of racism and capitalism.

Beloved(1987) Pulitzer Prize winning novel most relevant and touching documentation of plight of a mother is based on the real life incident of a Black slave, Margaret Garner, who tried to kill her four children to escape them from slavery. However, she succeeded to kill only one whose throat she slashed with a butcher knife. Sethe, the character inspired by Margaret Garner, suffers the most inhumane treatment by the new white masters. She is physically abused and psychologically battered when the nephews of the schoolteacher steal the milk from her bosom. The fear of enslavement and the similar fate for her children makes her a murderer of her own blood. She becomes a mother who killed her daughter, Beloved, to protect her from evil of slavery by slashing her throat with a handsaw. It is revealed in the story that Halle could not save his wife from the ill- treatment of the schoolteacher who along with his nephews stole milk from her breast. Halle, unfortunately, was a silent witness to this act of brutality and escapes the situation. It is later revealed that Halle had lost his senses after that incident. He left his family probably because he was too sensitive to bear the insult. The status of women was reduced to a breeding animal that too in most pathetic conditions with most filthy tasks assigned. Black women had the darkest part of slavery where her babies were snatched from her breast and sold. Her sons were beaten and killed and the daughters raped before her eyes. On similar theme, Jacob the protagonist of the Morrison's novel The Mercy (2008) accepts Florens, a slave as exchange for bad loan. Here slave trade especially women who were kept for their breeding capacity are again the victims.

Even after the emancipation from the bondage of slavery the position of female hardly improved. Their cries were, ". . . too high for patriarchal hearing mechanism" (Daly 153). The era after slavery and the condition of women during this period is also well expressed through

Morrison novel, *Paradise* (1998). Moving freely between eras, Morrison explores the founding of Ruby, an all-black township and the backgrounds of the Convent women, The exploitation did not bring them any sympathy instead they were categorized as ‘loose’ women without virtues. The story is of an isolated, self-sufficient black community living in grip of their self-founded town, Ruby in Oklahoma that is physically and virtually disconnected from the outside world. The tribe declare themselves to be the purest of Black blood and practice endogamy within the community. Seventeen miles from Ruby stands Convent, a mansion that was once, “embezzler’s folly” (*Paradise* 3) that turned into a school and later converted to a all-female household challenging the idealism proposed by the inhabitants of Ruby. Inhabitant of Ruby a refuge for women with abusive past and the men determined to kill them. Morrison has broadened her view on racial consciousness and has raised her pen not only against external factors of color and gender but she exposes the evils within, “Scary things not always outside. Most scary things is inside” (*Paradise* 39).

The language of pain is common irrespective of all geographical boundaries, color and creed. In Hindi the word ‘Adivasi’ means original settlers however the Indian Constitution uses the term ST, “Anusuchit Jana Jati” that somewhere offends the primitiveness of the class and project them as deliberately rejected group of people for their backwardness. The tribal and secluded classes are often the victim of racial and economic exploitation. The Gender inequality is one such issue that is not only violently growing but also depressing the growth of the fairer sex. One such tribe is the Jaunsari tribes of Jaunsar Bawar valley occupying the Central Himalayas from Chakrata tehsil Dehradun district, parts of Himachal Pradesh and northern part of Uttarkashi, Uttarakhand. The two major tribes are the Jaunsari in the lower half of the valley while the other Bawaris in the snow clad upper region including the Kharamba peak (10,118 ft.). The Jaunsaris are believed to be the descendants of Pandava while the Barawis of the Kaurawas from the Mahabharata. (ref. wikipedia). Jaunsari is one of the few tribes that still follow the practice of polyandry and polygamy. The richest will practice polygamy while the poorer will practice polyandry that is the brothers of a family share a wife. Somewhere resembling the legend of Mahabharata where Draupadi marries the five Pandavas. Jaunsari tribe is also caste stratified with Brahmins and Rajput as landowners and Koltas comprising Dalit, Bajgi and Luhar as low caste.

The Schedule tribe of Jaunsar however is a self-sufficient tribe dependent of farming and dairying. The women like men support the livelihood by working in the fields apart from domestic work. However like all women these tribal Jaunsari women also share a similar fate of exploitation like the African American. The women or the bride is a common bride of the brothers and can be left or divorced easily. However, one positive difference that makes it bearable for the women is that divorce is not considered a taboo neither re-marriage. But the sharing use of women makes their life no better than a commodity. There is no space for their choice. Forced to practice polyandry, this forms the biggest psychological attack on the concept of marital life. However with urbanization and education creeping its roots in the tribal area such practices are declining but one may still find the living examples of polyandry and polygamy in the Jaunsar region.

The question that resonates in the end is that what is the psychological impact of all such atrocities on women? There are girls like Pecola humiliated everyday to the limit of turning the child insane, there are also a pariah like Sula who are not accepted by the society for being different, there are mothers like Sethe who are forced to commit crime such as infanticide and then almost left to die with the burden of guilt, and there are Jaunsari brides who are practicing

polyandry without considering it a social taboo. But we still have hope when girls like Khoudia Diop, said to be darkest skin model in Africa, breaks the norms of beauty and asserts - yes Black is Beautiful.

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