

Entangled Desires and Unheard Voices of Slaves: A Comparative Analysis between Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Shaukat Osman's *The Laughter of a Slave*

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Abstract: Toni Morrison's celebrated novel *Beloved* points out a picture of slavery telling us about a strong sense of desire of the slaves to have a life of freedom. The novel also unfolds before us a group of slaves of different age with an African origin representing a history of slavery with all its ugly and gruesome facets. Here the slaves have envisaged a life of freedom in its true sense but achieving that freedom remains a far cry from reality. In a likewise manner, Shaukat Osman, an influential Bangladeshi litterateur, also sketches out a picture of the life of a slave that speaks of the authority's harsh rule in which a slave is not allowed to have even the right to laugh. The slave here too signifies a sense of freedom which is beyond his reach. This research article investigates into the approaches of both the writers about how they look into the lives of slaves and how they yearn for freedom. In both the novels the slaves do not have any voice under the brutality of slavery but they have a sense of desire and they possess a dream which is unheard and unshared. Through the lenses of Subaltern theory along with Bhabha's Third Space theory and trauma this article analyses the slaves denoting how they are suppressed and oppressed and thus, become voiceless.

Keywords: Slavery, Entangled Desires, Voicelessness, Subaltern, Third Space and Trauma

1. Introduction

Slaves being the central characters in the celebrated novel *Beloved* by Toni Morrison reveals before the readers a gruesome picture of slavery in the American setting with an African origin historical record about the slaves through the Middle Passage across the Atlantic Ocean. Here in the novel the

slave characters of both the genders along with the children share a very similar fate of life which defines slavery. One of the dominant aspects of slavery is racism and the slaves of Morrison's novel *Beloved* are direct victims of racism as well. Racism to Audre Lorde in "Age, Race, Class and Sex: Women Redefining Difference" is "the belief in the inherent superiority of one race over the others and thereby the right to dominance" (Lorde, 855) and the sense of superiority and the sense of domination are concretized in the hands of the slave masters. The history of slavery in America in the hands of the white masters tells that the African slaves as laborers are brought in large numbers to work on plantation farms in the early 16th century. Since then, the history of America is shaped and reshaped through the oppressed, suppressed and silenced conditions of these African Americans. These Black American slaves are entangled and trapped in a very inhuman way where their traumatic existence itself is a new history. These Black slaves are put in a dominant white class society where "the black man stops behaving as an actional person. The goal of his behavior will be the other, for the other alone can give him worth" (Fanon, 467)

The plot of the novel entails that the slaves with their unwavering desire of freedom make a good number of attempts but the fate remains unchanged. They are marginalized, abused, harassed, raped and in the very process of dehumanization they tend to show the status of the other, a 'pariah' in the white custody. It is not unusual that a mother figure named Sethe is seen attempting to kill her children so that they need not face the same fate of slavery she experiences. But the fate of a slave is ever determined and they are bound to suffer. Sethe, the protagonist of the novel, redefines the idea of motherhood rather in a deconstructive way where traditionally we know that a mother is the supreme authority to provide shelter of safety to a child but Morrison shows that a mother can be a murderer of her own child and in this way, we are given a different view of motherhood. Morrison's portrayal of slavery gets a special focus if we think of women as a gender and it is very shocking the way a woman slave is treated. In this regard, bell hook is meaningful to relate. Bell hook, in her book *Ain't I a Woman*, writes, "white people established a social hierarchy based on race and sex that ranked white men first, white women second, though sometimes equal to black men, who are ranked third and finally black women last" (hooks 52). But we should not think always of feminine gender in regard to slavery; rather male characters are an example of brutal slavery such as Sethe's husband Halle who is seen purchasing freedom for his mother Baby Suggs. The alphabetical naming of male slaves such as Paul A, Paul D hint to the namelessness of the slaves which unfolds the insignificant status of the slaves. Thus, Morrisonian portrayal of slavery takes a new dimension in this novel *Beloved*.

On the other hand, Shaukat Osman's novel *The Laughter of a Slave* with a setting in the Caliph Harun-al-Rashid's exotic Baghdad records a heart touching tale of a slave named Tatari. In his existence as a slave the indomitable spirit of man is dramatically personified. Here Tatari's struggle is glorious as he possesses a heroic soul which does not surrender to either temptation or to torture. The author shows how Tatari is ready to embrace death but not defeat because he is not made for defeat. This strong sense of determination allows him to voice against the injustice of the Caliph.

Tatari's struggle is against all types of pressures from different corners where he lives. The origin of the pressure springs from his love for clandestine wife Meherjan, an Armenian slave-girl with whom he can laugh. But we know that like others, a slave is not entitled to laugh freely. Thus, the beauty of the slave Tatari's free laughter generates in the heart of the Caliph a kind of jealousy as he, being so powerful, cannot laugh freely.

Thus, in both the novels the slaves are destined to be 'the other' and their existence, identity and life all are determined in the hands of 'the other' meaning the ruler. Therefore, in the institutionalization of slavery they are oppressed, suppressed and subjugated and as a consequence they are marginalized, abused, tortured and harassed by the elitist group or the master.

2. Methodology of the Study

This qualitative study employs both primary and secondary sources. Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Shaukat Osman's *The Laughter of a Slave* serve as the primary source, while secondary sources include the other novels of the authors, relevant literary criticisms, literary theories and research articles to support the original idea and acknowledge the explanations. Besides interpreting the characters through an in-depth analysis of both the novels, a focus is given on two different continents in the light of slavery as a cultural paradigm. Furthermore, the research integrates Subaltern theory, the Third Space theory and trauma to establish the idea of the research. The whole research follows APA Style (7th Edition).

3. Theoretical Framework

Beloved is tale of slave narrative in the post abolition of slavery in America where the slaves are engaged in recollecting their slavish life in its true picture.

They are treated in the hands of the master with utmost brutality showcasing the ultimate nature of master-slave relationship. Thus,

the novel also gives us a picture of the narrative of the master or the ruling class. The slave position can be deemed as the life of the colonized where the rulers are the colonized. On the other side, *The Laughter of a Slave* (1962) also portrays the life of slaves in the palace of Harun-al-Rashid, the Caliph of Baghdad. Through the interactions between the slaves and the ruler it is evident that the slaves are the ruled and the elitist group's chief is the Caliph himself along with his Ministers, courtiers and the Begums of the Caliph. Their relationship can also be explained from the perspective of the colonizers and the colonized, the oppressed and the oppressor, and the master and the subject. Therefore, both the texts provide much insights on subalternity of the characters.

The historiography of the Subaltern has its journey in the 80s of the last century with a view to focusing the history of the downtrodden and oppressed people. With this aim Ranajit Guha and a number of Marxist scholars like Gayatri Spivak, Edward Said, Shahid Amin, Susie Tharu have started to trace the contributions of the subaltern people in the making of independent India.

Thus, it can be remarked that subalternity is a counter narrative to colonial and elitist discourse. In this way, the Eurocentric narrative regarding the colonial people is rectified by the South Asian subaltern group. Guha (1983) opines that a demographic difference exists between the subaltern and the elites. The term subaltern is viewed by the Subaltern Studies Group (SSG) as a general attribute for subordination meaning gender, race, caste and class. Guha (1983) views the term subaltern as “a name for the general attribute of subordination in South Asian society whether in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or any other way” (Preface 35). To Gayatri Spivak, the term subaltern is used for third world women and men, working class people or those disfranchised and marginalized by the western culture. SSG wants to alter ‘suppressed voices’ by throwing challenges to ‘authoritative voices.’ The group aims to give power of voice to the oppressed and marginalized and this idea of empowering the oppressed later influences the intellectual world significantly. Indeed, this unique attempt of SSG can be viewed as an act of deconstructing the Eurocentric narrative about the subaltern people.

Another Marxist scholar Amin (1997) thinks that Subaltern studies have redefined people's idea and understanding of history and society in a different way. The studies encapsulate the complexities of power paradigm. Thus, Antonio Gramsci's (1937) intuitive analysis of power dynamics finds relevance here. Gramsci believes that in order to maintain control over the

ruling class there are two ways. The first one is coercion while the second is cultural hegemony. In the same way, Spivak (2010) in her essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” also points out the essential features of the subaltern as she says that there is “no space from where the subaltern subject can speak” (p. 122) as they are supremely controlled by the elites. But Guha’s interpretation (1982) is far more agreeable as he says that the subalterns possess “autonomous domain, for it neither originated from elite politics nor did its existence depend on the latter” (“Some Aspects of Historiography” p. 4). With the help of this autonomous domain the subalterns can speak and this is the center of power to the subaltern.

4. Discussion and Findings

4.1 Interpretations on Morrison’s *Beloved*

4.1.1 Sethe as a Slave in the Sweet Home

Sethe, who experiences slavery in its cruelest form, is introduced by Morrison in the beginning of the novel in a house named 124. The house itself carries a supernatural touch through a ghostly attribution. To quote-

124 WAS SPITEFUL. Full of a baby’s venom. The women in the house knew it and so did the children. For years each put up with the spite in his own way, but by 1873 Sethe and her daughter Denver were its only victims. The grandmother, Baby Suggs, was dead, and the sons, Howard and Burglar, had ran away by the time they were thirteen years old- (Morrison, *Beloved*, 1997, p. 3).

This is how the house signifies the position of its members who are carrying a legacy of brutality in the practice of slavery. They are now living here not as slaves but as free human beings. Despite their free status they cannot separate themselves from the cruel past of slavery which takes a permanent imprint in their mind in the form of trauma. According to the Oxford English Reference Dictionary (2003), trauma refers to “Emotional shock following a stressful event, sometimes leading to long-term neurosis.” This trauma shapes the attitude toward life which, at times, inspires them to break the boundary of slavery that results into abnormality as shown by Halle or death as punishment. It is narrated by Sethe to her daughter Denver that her daughter Beloved is less than two years old when she has killed her and in her grave she has got the tomb-tone carved with the word ‘Beloved’ by the mason

trading sex for ten minutes. To her, “Ten minutes for seven letters. With another ten could she have gotten “Dearly” too?” (p. 5) Thus, Sethe cannot free herself from the pangs of the act of infanticide. This house welcomes a new guest and it is Paul D, one of the slave members of the Sweet Home who himself carries the living memories of slavery. He happens to be here emphasizing that he has been walking for eighteen years to be here to meet her and Baby Suggs.

Freedom is, to the slaves, the most sought-after goal but it is to them mixed with inalienable past and memories which tells of their historical migration from Africa. To the black women, if we particularize the gender in regard to the experience of slavery, life is more burdensome than anything because they need to give birth to babies not by one man but by as many as possible who will be the future slaves. So, certainly to the slaves, memories are a source of haunt which they never want to recollect. But as life goes on, memories work sometimes overtly and sometimes secretly.

4.1.2 Baby Suggs's Life of Slavery

Morrison presents Baby Suggs in the beginning of the novel not as a slave but a slave who is free for forever and her freedom is a purchased freedom. The author shows that freedom can also be purchased and it is done here through her son Halle. Her freedom of life is disturbed by her daughter-in-law Sethe's attempt to kill her children. According to the narrator, Sethe has killed, out of her four children, one and before doing further harm the two sons Howard and Buglar have been able to run away. This run away for life of her grandchildren has shocked her heavily who says that “Her past had been like her present—intolerable—and since she knew death was anything but forgetfulness, ...” (p. 4). Thus, despite her freedom life is still haunted by slavery in its impactful form. A more gruesome picture of her life comes out when she imbibes positivity in the mind of Sethe who laments over the death of Beloved. She says,

You lucky. You got three left. Three pulling at your skirts and just one raising hell from the other side. Be thankful, why don't you? I had eight. Every one of them gone away from me. Four taken, four chased, and all, I expect... “My first-born. All I can remember of her is how she loved burned bottom of bread. Can you beat that? Eight children and that's all I remember. (p. 5)

Then she recalls her son Halle “who rented himself out all over the country to buy her away from there” (p. 23). To her, Halle is not a ‘man’ but ‘somebody’ as she says, “A man ain’t nothing but a man ... “But a son? Well now, that’s somebody” (p. 23). The word ‘somebody’ has, according to her, is more than a man with whom she has a special relationship. Later, the narrator emphasizes the idea saying, “Anybody Baby Suggs knew, let alone loved, who hadn’t run off or been hanged, got rented out, loaned out, bought up, brought back, stored up, mortgaged, won, stolen or seized. So Baby’s eight children had six fathers” (p. 23). Baby Suggs, in a way, feels lucky herself as she has been able to keep Halle for the longest period of twenty years which she thinks a kind of compensation as “her two girls, neither of whom had their adult teeth, were sold and gone and she had not been able to wave goodbye” (p. 23). Therefore, the memory of the past turns to her as haunting from which she cannot free herself.

4.1.3 Paul D and His Experience of Slavery

The novel *Beloved* starts after twenty years of the abolition of slavery but the slaves are still haunted by their past that tells us that physical slavery is over through freedom but psychological aspect of slavery is still very much alive and that is narrated through the conversation between Paul D and Sethe when they are engaged in sharing their life in the Sweet Home in the house 124 Bluestone Road. It is Paul D from whom she come to know about the condition of Halle. They are absorbed in the thought of the past and recall the day when all the slaves undertake the mission of run away. Sethe is pregnant at that time. Paul D questions, “You had that baby, did you? Never thought you’d make it.” He chuckled. “Running off pregnant” (p. 8). Sethe replies very assertively saying, “Had to. Couldn’t be no waiting” (p. 8). This incredible feat of Sethe produces in the mind of Paul D a kind of masculine ego who reacts saying, “All by yourself too.” He was proud of her and annoyed by her. Proud she had done it; annoyed that she had not needed Halle or him in the doing” (p. 8). An astonishing reply is made by Sethe as she reflects, “Almost by myself. Not all by myself. A whitegirl helped me” (p. 8). The white girl who is by name Denver, is the second example after Mr and Mrs Garner who, being white, have shown tenderness to Sethe or the black slaves.

From Paul D we come to know more about Sethe as he recalls Sethe’s arrival in the Sweet Home. Sethe is “Halle’s woman. Pregnant every year including the year she sat by the fire telling him she was going to run. Her three children

she had already packed into a wagonload of others in a caravan of Negroes crossing the river” (p. 9).

Afterwards, Paul D becomes more nostalgic as he tells that in the Sweet Home they are six in number and Sethe is the only woman. After the death of Mr. Garner, Mrs. Garner has to sell off the home and the slaves with a heavy heart to pay off her debts and since then their sufferings begin which culminate in the attempt of run away. But to Paul D the days in Sweet Home are the best days in his life as well as to the other slaves. Among them the presence of Sethe creates a kind of agitation to own her but Sethe takes a year to choose among them her partner and it is Halle. None of them does any harm to Sethe as Mr. Garner treats them not as a slave. The narrator remarks, “The restraint they had exercised possible only because they were Sweet Home men—the ones Mr. Garner bragged about...” (p. 10) and to Mr. Garner, “Now at Sweet Home, my niggers is men every one of em. Bought the thataway, raised em thataway. Men every one” (p. 10). What Garner believes is “... if you a man yourself, you will want your niggers to be man too” (p. 10). Thus, to the masters the slaves are ‘niggers’ with derogatory meaning reflecting the elitist point of view while to Mr. Garner they are as men.

In the culture of slavery slaves are named not by themselves but by their masters. However, Mr. Garner names the slaves as Paul D Garner, Paul F Garner, Paul A Garner, Halle Suggs and Sixo and adding his own name as title signifies two things—one is ownership and the other is the status of a man. To the narrator, “All in their twenties, minus women, fucking cows, dreaming of rape, thrashing on pallets, rubbing their thighs and waiting for the new girl...” (p. 11). This quotation tells us what the life of the slaves is. However, the happiness the slaves have enjoyed in Sweet Home under the ownership of Mr. and Mrs. Garner fades away as soon as schoolteacher owns the house including the slaves. Life, to the slaves, becomes unlivable and unbearable as they are treated like animals. To overcome the oppressions, the slaves decide to run away for life but of all only two succeed—Paul D and Sethe while the other Pauls are killed and Sixo is shot as he defies to be burnt alive. Halle, who witnesses Sethe to be raped, is tortured heavily and later he dies. Paul D experiences prison life in Georgia as he tries to kill his new master and later, he manages to escape with the other slaves in chain gang. So, life for Paul D is full of escapes and struggles to survive and he gets a ray of hope through meeting with Sethe.

4.1.4 Sethe-Halle Relationship in Sweet Home

The narrator's description of Sethe-Halle relationship reflects a positive but unusual picture of slavery in the dichotomy of marriage which is ungranted in the eyes of the master and unthought of for slaves. Sethe is 'the new girl' who replaces Baby Suggs as Halle "bought her with five years of Sundays" (p. 11). This sacrifice of Halle, according to the narrator, impresses Sethe much to choose Halle as her partner among all. The narrator further asserts saying, "A twenty-year old man so in love with his mother he gave up five years of Sabbaths just to see her sit down for a change was a serious recommendation" (p. 11). But Baby Suggs's life informs us that a woman-slave cannot have a choice of her partner as she is deemed as machine to produce more slaves. That's why she gives birth to eight children by six fathers. In this regard, Sethe is luckier as she gives birth to four children by one father who are allowed to live with her. This mother-child relationship is not the same if we think of Frederick Douglass, a celebrated speechmaker and social activist, who, in his autobiography *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself* (1845), records how harrowing the life of a slave is. About parental identity, like other common slaves, Douglass knows nothing.

To quote, "...the means of knowing was withheld from me. My mother and I were separated when I was but an infant- before I knew her as my mother. (p. 970) He says that it is a common custom and fate for a slave child in Maryland to be separated from its mother at an early age. Even he is not allowed to make any inquiry as it is, according to the master, 'improper and impertinent.' At the age of seventeen he comes to know that he is separated from his mother when he is an infant. To quote, "My mother and I were separated when I was but an infant—before I knew her as my mother" (p. 970). Douglass further says, "Frequently, before the child has reached its twelfth month, its mother is taken from it, and hired out on some farm a considerable distance off, and the child is placed under the care of an old woman, too old for field labor" (p. 970). The reason behind this cruel separation is, as Douglass conceives, not to develop but to 'blunt and destroy' the bond between the child and the mother. To accentuate his relation with his mother Douglass says, "I never saw my mother, to know her as such, more than four or five times in my life; and each of these times was very short in duration, and at night." (p. 970) His mother through separation from his child has been hired by another slave master who lives twelve miles away from his home. This is another gripping story of a slave mother whose motherhood is under extreme situation to withstand. Douglass asserts,

She made her journeys to see me in the right, travelling the whole distance on foot, after the performance of her day's work. She was a field hand, and a whipping is the penalty of not being in the field at sunrise, unless a slave has special permission from his or her master...I do not recollect of ever seeing my mother by the light of the day. She was with me in the night. She would lie down with me, and get me to sleep, but not long before I waked she was gone. Very little communication ever took place between us. Death soon ended what little we could have while she lived, and with it her hardships and sufferings. (p. 970-971)

Like Douglass, Morrison tells that for a son to know even the death of his mother or attending funeral of his mother is never acknowledged. Thus, when Baby Suggs dies, in her funeral her son Halle remains absent. Douglass asserts the matter in the similar manner as to a slave child death of his mother remains unknown to him. Even if he knows, he is not allowed to have a last look of his mother and attending funeral is beyond imagination. In this way, the rights of the slaves as a human being are shockingly denied. To hear from Douglass,

She died when I was seven years old, on one of my master's farm, near Lee's burial. She was gone before I knew any thing about it. Never having enjoyed, to any considerable extent, her soothing presence, her tender and watchful care, I received the tidings of her death with much the same emotions I should have probably felt at the death of a stranger. (p. 971)

Thus, the status of a mother is made equivalent to a stranger emphasizing the abolition of the bond and the universal meaning of a mother is denied to a slave child.

4.1.5 Denver and Sethe vs the Ghost

To the slaves, past is very much powerful and unforgettable and they often take shelter to it. Sethe recalls her escape in pregnant health who is nursed by a white girl named Amy Denver. Later, Sethe remembers how her milk is stolen by the boys of schoolteacher. To quote, "... those boys came in and took my milk" (p. 16). Denver is, in the form of storytelling, narrated by Sethe about her past.

Later, when Denver is introduced with Paul D, she is enthusiastic to know about her father. The shocking fact is that for a slave daughter meeting her father or knowing her father is denied and so she cannot even enjoy the opportunity of passing some moments with her father. As Denver is unable to recall her father, the narrator says, "Only those who knew him ("knew him well") could claim his absence for themselves" (p. 13). Halle is only familiar to Sethe and Baby suggests for which they may feel him but for Denver it not so. Then the narrator introduces us with the ghost when Denver says, "We have a ghost in here" (p. 13). Sethe emphasizes that the ghost is harmless as "Its just a baby" (p. 13). Actually, Sethe cannot anyhow forget her murdered child.

"A FULLY DRESSED woman walked out of the water" (p. 50) is the ghost that takes shelter in the house 124 Bluestone Road. The house has an atmosphere of family life through Paul D. At this moment, the ghost appears to upset that environment. Actually, the house is ostracized by the ghost that has come to have all the affection it is deprived of and the ghost is Beloved, the murdered child. Sethe wishes that if the ghost is her murdered daughter, she can be able to explain her actions to her. As a supernatural being, Beloved's actions are unusual. Beloved enjoys emotional advantage by befriending Denver, takes physical advantage by seducing Paul D. In course of time, she gets a good control over Sethe. She imitates Sethe, laughs the way Sethe laughs and dominates her in such a way that Denver feels alienated from her mother. She is swelling in size while Sethe is getting emaciated. Thus, Beloved turns out to be an embodiment of the spiteful poltergeist whose malignant presence, at one point, strangles Sethe. From the perspective of psychoanalytical reading Beloved's presence can be interpreted as the incarnation of Sethe's sense of guilt and her unforgiving memory. Again, Beloved can be the representation of America's past history of slavery. Beloved's presence purges the guilt-ridden Sethe who thinks that she should be punished to gain redemption.

5. Interpretations on Shaukat Osman's *The Laughter of a Slave*

5.1.1 The Introduction of the Protagonist Tatari

In the beginning of the novel *The Laughter of a Slave* the narrator introduces us with Begum Zubaida, the wife of the Caliph Harun-al-Rashid dealing with her slave-girl Meherjan. Here the nature of conversation is remarkable in the sense that there is no touch of class difference; rather the Caliph's wife is very much intimate with the slave woman in the mood of goodwill which is contrary to the idea of slavery. She treats the slave woman not as a slave as but as a human being. With her support this slave woman marries another slave named Tatari who is the central character of the novel. To quote Begum Zubaida, "Go now, Meherjan. It is such a dark, blacknight! What bliss to be tightly locked in the embrace of your loved one in such a night as this!" (Osman, *The Laughter of a Slave*, 2008, p. 23) This happy scene is replied in the sense of gratitude when Meherjan remarks, "For your kindness to me, Begum Sahiba, "I shall remain grateful to you till the Day of Judgement. I am your slave here on earth. May Allah make me your slave in Heaven, too" (Osman, p. 24). This passionate conversation between the powerful and powerless reveals that the boundaries of class difference is abolished in an unprecedented manner which allows us to recall Mrs. Garner, a compassionate slave owner to her slaves in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1997) who also helps the slaves to get married. From the conversation of Begum Zubaida and Meherjan we also come to know that the Caliph is, as a man, not good enough to recommend. To her, "The Caliph always listens to me, but who knows what might happen some day? It is better not to rely on anything where someone's mere whim is justice and law" (Osman, 25). Following this scene, the narrator takes us in the palace of the Caliph, the ruler of Baghdad, who is engaged in a conversation with Masrur, a loyal servant. Here we get an idea of the master and ruler of the city who, very recently, orders for the death sentence of Jaafar Barmeki, the Chief Minister and Abbasa, his own wife. Though he is in the mood of sadness, he does not feel any sense of guilt because he is the lord of the state. In this moment of late night, all on a sudden, the Caliph hears a sound of laughter which makes him astonished. As an effect of the laughter, he feels jealous and curious. Then he listens to the laughter for a few more moments and remarks,

This laughter is not coming just from the lips. Its source is the deep secret corner of the heavy heart. The way a hilly spring gushes out from some lonely cavern of the mountains, scattering tiny pebbles on all sides, so does this laughter spring from some fountain of the soul. But who is this happy soul? I envy him, Masrur. I, the Emperor of Baghdad, am a beggar hungering for happiness. Compared to me, he

must be poor, and yet he is the king of happiness. Who is he, Masrur? (Osman, p. 32)

The puzzle of laughter is unriddled when Masrur says, "The African slave live there, on the other side of the palace wall, Your Majesty"(p. 32). At this, with a tone of surprise, the Caliph questions, "Can slaves laugh like that?" (p. 32) Masrur, in a thought-provoking gesture, replies, "They can, Amir-ul-Momenin. They enjoy no happiness, that is why they know its meaning.

Living a sub- human existence, they know the taste of humanity. That is why they laugh"(p. 32). From this statement we get a picture of slavery true to the context of American slavery. Actually, Masrur defines slavery in his utterance where a slave is not entitled to have happiness and a slave's life is a sub-human life similar to a subaltern. Then the Caliph, showing his elitist point of view, says, "They will laugh and I can't. No, no, that can never be" (p. 32). This scene ends with the decision of investigating the origin of the laughter.

5.1.2 Jealousy, Investigation, the Discovery and the Fate of the Slave Couple

After a few days of search out the Caliph and his assistant the couple is discovered in a room at the slave quarter. At this critical moment of life, Tatari, with his courage, orders Meherjan to hide. Through Ishaq, the court poet, the Caliph diplomatically and objectively declares that he is in a kind of ecstasy at the laughter and so he wants to reward him. But when Meherjan is discovered, Tatari shows unwillingness to reveal her identity and says, "Kill me, if you please, Your Majesty, but I cannot answer" (p. 50). Here is the beginning of the voice of the subaltern. The Caliph, at this utterance, becomes furious and says, "Masrur, the dog is still not answering me, tear out his tongue. Abu Ishaq, look, the slave is rolling on the ground. He is weeping, Abu Ishaq, and yet he is not answering me" (p. 50). Here the Caliph, representing the elite, uses the language of the superior against the inferior to manifest the ideology of the powerful. Thus, it can be interpreted that in the power paradigm of master-slave relationship language is a tool to subjugate the subaltern. Then the

Caliph dehumanizes Tatari by calling him dog and says, “He is an ungrateful, impudent slave. Kill him. Right now” (p. 50).

Meherjan’s dramatic revelation from the darkness bewilders the Caliph as to him she is a queen of beauty. This tells of the caliph’s Freudic tendency of the pleasure principle as he is pleased to compare her with ‘moon’. But because of his high position and for the reality principle the Caliph cannot reveal his desire to own her. When Meherjan, at this moment, seeks forgiveness from the ruler to save her beloved Tatari, all on a sudden, the bold voice of Tatari proclaims that this lady is his wife. Hearing this statement, the Caliph once again shows his elitism and comments, “You married and didn’t care to inform us? I find that slaves have grown too impertinent these days. Because of this, the other day, we had to crush a few slaves to death in the city of Aleppo” (p. 51). Thus, the Caliph points out that the slaves are, to him, only objects to ‘crush’ to destroy. It also testifies the cruelty of a master towards his slaves. The Caliph further says, “Do you know that a slave can neither marry himself nor give his daughter in marriage to anyone without the permission of his master?” (p. 51) This denial of marriage for the slaves by the authority of the Caliph is very much unlike the Garners in Morrison’s *Beloved* reflecting the idea of the master-slave relationship. Later, as a subaltern, Tatari shows his allegiance to the Caliph saying, “I am ready for any punishment you may impose, Your Majesty. I deserve the punishment due to a disobedient slave” (p. 51). Thus, Tatari is on the way to lose his voice and is ready to embrace any sort of punishment. But at the same time, it can also be interpreted that he wants to have a different identity through Meherjan. An elitist and ruler cannot but be possessive about his subordinates which is revealed here through the Caliph. Thus, the more the consciousness of the Caliph grows, the more he shows his sense of power. Then addressing Tatari he says, “Your impertinence has reached the limit. One should tear out the tongues of dogs like you. That’s the treatment you deserve” (p. 52). Tatari once again apologises to the Caliph.

At this moment poet Ishaq comments, “Those who can speak well and utter good words, can also laugh well” (p. 52) and “Good words are echoes of the soul. They lie in the soul and then gush out from there like a fountain, pure laughter is the physical manifestation of good words...The main source of both laughter and good words is the same” (p. 52).

This comment influences the Caliph so much that without giving punishment of death sentence the Caliph says, “I announce to you all that from today the chains binding these two in slavery are shattered to pieces. They are freed of this moment. From now on they are two free citizens of my kingdom” (p. 52).

In this way of changing the status of Tatari the Caliph desires to hear the laughter at any moment especially when he remains sad. This laughter is, to him, an elixir of life. Now, Tatari is well taken care of by the Caretaker of the Caliph. Therefore, Tatari’s laughter is the saviour for himself. With the new status of a noble chief and under the care of the Caretaker Tatari’s life is radically transformed but without laugh. This change is, as Ishaq interprets, because of the absence of Meherjan who is now “making somebody else happy” (p. 58). At this point, a subtle argument on marriage issue occurs between the Caliph and the poet. While Ishaq says that as a married woman, Meherjan’s making others happy is prohibited, the Caliph opines that without his permission, marriage is not allowed for a slave-woman and her marriage is, therefore, invalid. Once again, the Caliph shows his elitist material perspective to subjugate Meherjan. This attitude of the Caliph reminds us of schoolteacher in Morrison’s *Beloved* (1997) who, after the ownership of slaves from Mr. and Mrs. Garner, starts treating them as animals.

5.1.3 Tatari’s Entanglement of Desires and the Evil Design of the Caliph

Tatari’s life turns into a sea of frustration as he is sure that there is no chance for Meherjan’s return. He is also unhappy as the Caretaker, who is also a slave, treats him as an elite and he reminds the caretaker the fact that though he puts on valuable dresses, he is essentially a slave and says, “Remember that you are what I am” (p. 61) and “Remember that I am the same slave that I was” (p. 62). Therefore, it is difficult for a subaltern to erase his status. At last, on his query he comes to know from the Caretaker that the Caliph has married his beloved Meherjan. This heart-breaking news indicates that a slave is not entitled to marry anyone he likes or she likes.

The Caliph, then, tries his best to hear laughter from Tatari but he is denied. Then he chalks out a new plan to send Busaina, the most renowned dancer of Baghdad, to bring back in Tatari the laughter but this produces no result. Then Busaina informs Tatari that if she fails to bring in him laughter, she is going to be killed. Now, Tatari opines that both of them are suffering from the sickness of the soul and the only remedy of it is to die. Then, Busaina’s sudden committing suicide puts Tatari into a new trouble and the Caliph is determined to punish Tatari as he says in anger, “How can an African slave dare be so

arrogant?" (p. 86) It is the belief of the Caliph that Tatari has murdered Busaina. He sheds his anger once again saying, "...Masrur, ask the son of a bitch, that bloody bastard to be taken away to the prison. Take him to the worst prison of all... He has disgraced me before Nawas. I made him the master of so much of wealth and property, and yet this bloody son of a slave would not laugh. But I'll yet squeeze his laughter out of him. (p. 87) This comment again reflects the master's authoritative attitude mixed with revengeful motive.

5.1.4 The Trial of Tatari

Chapter XIX tells us about the dramatic portrayal of Tatari's trial scene which takes place in the Caliph's Darbar. Tatari is held responsible for the death of Busaina and is given death sentence which is opposed by Nawas. Poet Nawas argues on the lack of proof to support Tatari's involvement in the murder and so he advocates general pardon for Tatari. At this, the Caliph's reactionary comment is, "But the slave did not say a word in self-defence. He never opened his lips. Does that not amount to confessing his own guilt?" (p. 96) In this dramatic scene of the novel Nawas, in support of Tatari, further says, "That black slave is like black stone. Silent, motionless. Black stone cannot be faked. It is only the white stone and glittering stones that can be easily faked" (p. 96). This comment of Nawas makes the Caliph very unhappy and to him Nawas's behaviour is a token of defiance. Thus, within a short span of time, the Caliph has to encounter two rebels in his kingdom and the first one is Tatari while the second is Nawas. At last, the Caliph orders Masrur to kill Nawas.

Very surprisingly Nawas's revolt is opposite to a typical subaltern who is always voiceless against the elite's oppression; rather he is portrayed here with a powerful voice that reminds us of Spivak's theory on subalternity. To quote Nawas, "But please remember that today I am offering my life in order to save Baghdad from being destroyed; for I love Baghdad, Baghdad, my native land. At least in future there will be someone who can say that Baghdad did not bow down before injustice. Your Majesty..." (p. 97). Thus, it can be said that the Caliph becomes an embodiment of injustice whose victim is not only the Tatari but also Nawas. Actually, the Caliph is ready for Tatari's disobedience but not for Nawas's. Again, Nawas voices out saying, Therefore, do I raise my head today, against injustice. The seed you are sowing today will one day devour Baghdad. That is why Abu Nawas is giving his life today... "I am a poet, the voice of Eternity. Neither Masrur's sword nor the Amir-ul-Momenin's frowns

can touch even a hair of the poet. Love of Baghdad has made me a poet. Love for her has turned me into a martyr... The blade of your sword has touched no man so far. Let it be rid of that disgrace at last. Good bye, Amir-ul-Momenin. (p. 98)

Through this courageous voice, Nawas has become a hero to the audience. This voice of resistance has made the ever-unchallenged Caliph very much upset. In the perspective of Foucauldian idea on power and resistance as pointed out in *The History of Sexuality* (1998) it can be said that where there is the exercise of power, there is the birth of resistance. This time resistance against the Caliph comes from Nawas.

With this change in the plot of the novel, in the chapter XX Tatari's trial begins. The narrator says, "Tatari in chains entered. His while body, lacerated by cruel lashes of the whip, looked skinned and raw. There were festering wounds on his forehead and cheeks" (p. 100). Being brutally whipped to death Tatari is ordered to laugh by the Caliph only for once but Tatari remains unresponsive. Then the Caliph says, My promise is genuine... Tatari... and yet you are silent as before! What do you want?...

What are you made of, Tatari? Just answer me... I give you three more days. You can get back all your rights to life if you laugh just once... I give you time to think it over finally. (p. 101)

In the courtyard of the Prison a bruised Tatari is seen who is unable to stand up owing to brutal whipping. A series of threats follows but Tatari remains voiceless. At last, everyone's focuses on his limited but meaningful physical movement. At this moment, Meherjan, his long-loved beloved and wife, enters the scene. Unable to recognize who Tatari is she considers Tatari as an ordinary disobedient slave. Meherjan's questions about his identity finally brings an effect in Tatari who gradually stands up and casts a look at her. As a villain, this scene is enjoyed by the Caliph and finding no answer from Tatari, Meherjan, at one point, gets annoyed. She reacts saying, "Prisoner, who are you? Please answer me" (p. 109). The Caliph replies that it is Tatari.

Still Tatari is unrecognizable to Meherjan. Being ignorant of the entire happening, Meherjan asks the Caliph to put Tatari to death but the ruler declines as he is determined to have a word from Tatari. Again, the Caliph is in laughter when Meherjan earnestly requests Tatari to speak. Now, in a cruel tone, the Caliph's says, "He must be tortured minute by minute, inch by inch of his body" (p. 110). Now, Meherjan, like Aurora in Tennyson's poem

“Tithonus” prays for the death of her beloved Tatari to bring an end to his sufferings. Then she becomes nostalgic to remind Tatari of their romantic moments and extends her two hands towards him which makes the Caliph jealous. On his order, the guards drag away Meherjan from Tatari and she makes lamentations for Tatari which, finally, awakens Tatari’s sense. He once again feels love for Meherjan and with this power of love he speaks out, “Meherjan, Meherjan! (And then immediately) Listen, Harun-al-Rashid” (p. 111). Tatari’s address of the Caliph by name is quite unprecedented which angers the ruler very much. As a reaction he asks Masrur to whip Tatari.

Here comes the final words from Tatari, “Listen, Harun-al-Rashid: Money can buy you a slave. It can buy you a slave-girl, but it cannot buy the laughter of a slave” (p. 111). Then he dies. Therefore, Tatari’s resilience under extreme condition of life recalls Hemingway’s hero Santiago in *The Old Man and the Sea* (2004). Hemingway through Santiago says that man is not made for defeat and he can be destroyed but not be defeated. In the similar manner, Tatari has not embraced defeat by denying the Caliph; rather he is winner and the ruler is the loser. Thus, Tatari’s final words of protest conveys that a subaltern can also speak to dismantle the ruler from his position and in this way, Tatari stands against the views of Spivak on the subaltern.

6. Tatari, Sethe and The Third Space

According to the narrator in Shaukat Osman’s *The Laughter of a Slave*, Tatari is brought from Africa and he is a slave in the palace of the Caliph in Baghdad. In his homeland Africa, he has been a man of freedom but here in Baghdad he is a slave. In his status of slavery, he happens to be in love with a slave woman whom he has married and enjoys a freedom-in-slavery life. When he is caught in laughter with his wife, his life receives another shape with the threat from the ruler. He wants to have a life with his wife which is, to him, a life of freedom and it creates in him an in-between position. Does he deserve, being a slave, freedom? His existence of life is now caught in-between the idea of free life and slavery.

Homi K. Bhabha (2006), a postcolonial theorist, points out this nature of in-between position.

To him, “These ‘in-between’ spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—

singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining of the idea of society itself” (p. 2).

According to Bhabha having in-between space creates a new position for a person by which the person becomes capable of creating new identities and through this process, he can reassess and redefine his nature of relationship with society.

Again, Bhabha’s (1994) theory of the “Third Space of Enunciation” says, “And by exploring this Third Space, we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of ourselves (p. 39).

Therefore, the African origin of Tatari is his first space, arriving in Baghdad and accepting slavery is his second space and finally, through his secret marriage with Armenian slave woman Meherjan followed by becoming a rebel against the ruler is his third space which gives him a different identity. In Morrison’s *Beloved*, Sethe is portrayed as a slave mother who prefers to kill her daughter to free her from the bondage of slavery. When she is in Sweet Home, she has a life of happiness which changes when schoolteacher owns the slaves. The decision of escape in her pregnant position gives a new hope of existence though there is enough risk of death. Thus, she is caught in-between the continuation of slavery and yearning for freedom. After twenty-eight-day freedom she becomes a murderer of her own daughter and is sent to the prison. This is her another dimension of existence. Thus, her identity becomes fluid signifying change again and again. Regarding Sethe life in Sweet Home is her first space, her run away and free status at Baby Sugg’s house is her second space and the murderer of her daughter Beloved is her third space which finally gives her a new identity. Thus, for a subaltern like Tatari or Sethe, search for a new identity through freedom is perilous and life threatening.

7. Conclusion

The novel *The Laughter of a Slave* is a tale of voice of the voiceless against the overwhelming authority of the Caliph who is an embodiment of injustice, jealousy and revenge. Tatari, who is a slave and subaltern, reveals before us the idea that his capacity to produce laughter is his freedom. He speaks the unspeakable voices through this laughter. Besides Tatari, Begum Zubaida is also a voice against her husband the Caliph and Nawas, the court poet who has to be always obedient to the ruler, is also a rebel with the courage to sacrifice his life for freedom.

Thus, contrary to Spivak's concept of subaltern, all these three characters have given a voice to their entangled desires and prove that they are no longer a slave with voicelessness. The pressing fact is that Tatai, in the final scene of the novel, addresses the ruler by his name which, in a seismic manner, destroys the sense of unchallenged sense of superiority of the Caliph. In this way, Tatari commands over the ruler and forms his new identity. Actually, his sense of awareness of the self through the concept of Bhabha's Third Space has reshaped his existence. In this way, Tatari has become a man of heroic attributes to the subaltern.

Again, Toni Morrison's *Beloved* is a novel that picturizes how a slave mother becomes a murderer of her own child in order to attain freedom. Being voiceless and deprived of the fundamental rights of a human being, the slaves of the novel always act like a subaltern but Sethe is with a difference. She is a slave mother whose life turns from love to violence and death. Her mother-in-law is a supreme example of a slave mother figure who signifies slavery and freedom together.

Sethe's act of killing her child Beloved incarnates in the form of ghost Beloved to take revenge on her mother and this idea is conceived by Sethe herself. So, even after twenty years of abolition of slavery, the slaves cannot forget the cruelties of slavery and they cannot but carry the pangs of slavery through trauma and haunting memory. The chapter "Early American Literature (1620-1820)" with the title "The Pursuit of Happiness" in the Norton Anthology of American Literature questions the rights of slaves as a man which records, "... "Certain truths are self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness (p. 84)" Focusing the statement, it can be said that for the black slaves this is a different America which does not give them the due rights that a man should have. These black slaves, according to their masters, cannot be equal to them at all and the liberty of life is not for them, let alone liberty and happiness and so they are, even after the abolition of slavery, cannot free themselves from the horrors of slavery.

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