

DEPICTION OF BLACK SENSIBILITY IN THE NOVELS OF TONI MORRISON



**A
SUMMARY**
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Afro-American literature, in the hands of black writers, becomes a powerful tool to protest against the dehumanizing oppression of black people and the secondary status provided to them in a society, that talks of democracy and universal equality. These protests texts articulated the plight of enslaved or discriminated person and challenged the larger white community to transform its attitude towards the Afro-American people. The common thrust ubiquitously present in this body of literature is to show inequalities between races, sexes and socio-economic groups in America and to interrogate the structures in a society which engenders such inequalities. The creative writers realized that the protests also need to be directed inwards towards the negative attitudes and structures within the black community.

Afro-American literature explores the world of black men the women, who are most powerless and in the words of Ralph Ellison, been cut off from the "instrumentalities of power" (Bridge 131). This was further reinforced in 1960's with the rise of Black Nationalism, which was concerned with control African Americans should have over their economic, political cultural and social lives. Carr talking about the fervor of this moment writes : "To the participants in these debates, the question of black control were not simply matters of rhetorical or ideological posturing; the answers were inextricably linked to the well being of the most African- Americans." such debates centred not only on political and

economic issues but also on questions of images, social value and aesthetics. This nationalistic movement sought to destroy those images and myths that had crippled and degraded black people, and sought the creation of new images and myths that will liberate them

Along with Alice Walker, Alex Haley, Garly Jones, Jamaca Kincaid and many other novelists stormed the world of Afro-American fiction. But the most prominent one of them is Toni Morrison, who emerged as the most Important African American writer of the twentieth century and won many prestigious awards for literature and fiction.

This thesis deals with the African American literature, but more specifically, it deals with the slave narratives penned by Toni Morrison. The aim of the thesis is to explore the African American literature but, more specifically, it focuses on the lives portrayed by Morrison in all of her canonical works, which present an important part of the African American literary tradition. The thesis is organized in five sections: the introduction which consists of an overview of the history events and circumstances, second chapter consults the life and achievements of Morrison, the third chapter covers the characters' sufferings, journey and solace, fourth chapter of this thesis focuses on all the social evils covered by Morrison's pen and the final chapter is Conclusion. The sources of the data used are mainly the primary works, but also history books, encyclopedia and biography sites. In general, the literature on the topic is

not hard to find, but there are very few critical analyses of the works chosen.

In the Introduction section, I have presented and overviewed the African American literature during the years, and the main focus is on the slave narratives. The autobiographies written by the former slave have had an enormous significance for the African American literature, but also for the understanding of the system of slavery as a whole. What I hope to achieve is to present the narratives in a more detailed way, in order to show how big of a picture about the period they can create.

The first section deals with the historical facts which are needed to fully understand the literature, and to have a clearer image about the political and social circumstances that were crucial for that time. Historical background is crucial for understanding this part of the literary tradition, especially because this one was highly influenced by the political scene.

In my opinion, the period of slavery is one of the most horrifying periods in the history of humankind, and pertaining literature is important because the works written work as a reminder that the society should never let it repeat again. They are also a proof that each person matters and that the fight against social injustices is still in process. The African Americans have struggled a lot in the history, and these are their accounts of all the awful events they suffered through but yet managed to raise above them, with their faith and actions.

There is a famous quote by Robert Penn Warren: “History cannot give us a program for the future, but it can give us a fuller understanding of ourselves, and of our common humanity, so that we can better face the future.” As already said in the Introduction section, history is crucial for understanding this period in literature, because it greatly affected the work of African Americans. They struggled for freedom until they managed to influence the political scene and their lives were able to escape the evils of slavery.

Toni Morrison is one of the most celebrated authors of the second half of twentieth century America who depict the consciousness of contemporary man entangled in the web of life. She describes, in particular, the consciousness of African Americans who had to bear affronts on various levels —physical, mental, psychological and, more important than these, on the racial level. Further, she eloquently speaks about an African -American woman who has been suffering indignities in the US on account of her being doubly oppressed—as a black in America and also as a woman in a patriarchic social set up. Her writings are filled with her concern over the sad plight of her ethnicity in America that it had to suffer since its forced import from atavistic Africa—its spiritual homeland. She writes about, what Lisa Williams argues, “the destructive consequences of internalizing whiteness.”

The second chapter of this thesis gives an account of her life and works. To understand an author's' psyche and age is very important to analyse his/her work hence I have incorporated a separate chapter for this purpose.

Morrison is an author who has combined literary aesthetics and moral, social, spiritual and psychological aspects in her narratives. She narrates what she has witnessed in the US as its citizen and also as a part of her ethnicity. The first black woman to receive the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1993, Morrison has proved her love, ability and loyalty toward her writing and her people. Growing up in a black community, she has witnessed and felt its problems, sufferings, pain, anguish, and the trauma that goes with all this. Through her writings, she seems to suggest who the outlaws were, who survived under what circumstances and why, what was legal in the community as opposed to what was legal outside it.

Listening to the varied experiences of her African Americans ancestors, Morrison formed an attachment with her ethnicity and, with pride and enthusiasm, celebrates that in her literary output. She celebrates her ethnicity dreams—broken, unfulfilled and even deferred ones that provided them strength to fight against the Jim Crow America. She mingles the unrealistic constituents of her race with a realistic presentation of life and characters giving them authenticity in certain ways.

Recurring themes in the fiction of Morrison are the failure of love; the quest for an authentic identity, or, conversely the failure to achieve such an identity; the clash between material and spiritual values, between the belief that the physical world is all there is , and the belief that beyond the physical world there exists a spiritual world. Moreover, on some level Morrison always deals with the role of women in African-American society.

The fictional world of Toni Morrison is the rainbow of African - American life and its various contours. It is not only beleaguered with racial concerns but also about the black woman in contemporary America that is why it becomes even more important to study her. Moreover, there are white female characters who, though they stand on the upper rung of the ladder of American society, find themselves tormented and troubled with several issues which foreground their feminist issues. Her characters are, as a matter of fact, contemporary human beings who are torn between varied worlds of sense and sensibility. They are also lampoons in the general drama of life and suffer from existential dilemma. Her brilliant portrayal of realistic characters in her works makes it easier to understand the problems generated by certain social evils and thesis deals with how the social evils we talked about in previous chapter affected women more. Sufferings of men and women were never equal hence a separate section is to be devoted to this major problem.

Morrison is an African-American woman. The inscription of looking relations in her novels *the Bluest Eye*, *Sula*, *Song of Solomon*, *Tar Baby* and *Beloved* assumes boundaries that encompasses several objectifications of women. Understood from the perspective of a black woman, the dominant society's gaze, construed as white and male, is driven by a layering of motivations that express not only sexual objectification but also racism and classism in its operations.

Morrison's first book, *The Bluest Eye* (1970) is a novel of initiation concerning a victimized adolescent black girl who is obsessed by white standards of beauty and longs to have blue eyes.

Her second novel *sula* (1973) examines the dynamics of friendship and the expectations for conformity within the community. *Song of Solomon* (1977) brought Morrison to national attention. *Tar Baby* (1981) set on a Caribbean island, explores conflicts of race, class and sex.

The Bluest Eye holds, its central concern, as a critique of Western Beauty and its special destructiveness when imposed upon people of color in general and women of color in particular. A twelve year old black girl is the poignant victim named Pecola Breedlove.

In *Sula* Morrison shifts her focus on "the look" to exploring the actions of her characters the ethical difference between the very "to see" and "to watch". In *Sula* black folk community interrogate modes of "the look"

within their system of valves. In this novel Morrison asserts the pattern of self discovery.

Morrison's *Song of Solomon* recognizes that under patriarchy the female gaze into the mirror confirms a sense of lack or self-negation.

Toni's paradise (1998) according to her completes a trilogy that begins with *beloved* and includes *Jazz*. It addresses the same great themes of her masterpiece *beloved* - the loss of innocence, the paralyzing power of ancient memories and the difficulty of accepting loss and change and pain. And all these emotions severely impacted the women or the female characters more. This chapter deals with all discussed issues.

A protest is an expression of objection, by words or by actions, to particular events, socio-political order, policies or situations. It can take many different forms, from individual statements to mass demonstrations. Morrison's novels embody the protest against the traumatic conditions under which African- Americans lived in the white America. There are societal and psychological restrictions that have critically affected the lives of the blacks in general and the African-American women in particular. Right from the days of slavery, the blacks, irrespective of sex, had realized the bitter reality of racism judged from the white man's standards of life and beauty. The black man's life had become unbearable. Sexism, more oppressive both physically and mentally, was the cause of grievance to the black women who were sexually exploited

by both the black and the white men. Just as blacks as a group were relegated to an underclass by virtue of their race, so were women relegated to a separate caste on account of their sex.

It is natural that Toni Morrison, with her political commitment to her people and her aesthetic responsibility to her art of writing fiction, and also being a sufferer of racism, protested against the notion of race, gender and class, the three major forms of oppression of the blacks in America. Morrison's novels document the author's awareness and concern for the historical conditions that sparked the national struggle of the African people against oppression and exploitation, thereby revealing her heightened consciousness of the inter – relationship of race, gender, and class. Though all these three elements race, gender, and class are present in the novels of Toni Morrison, the emphasis on them varies from novel to novel. To be black and that too a female was to suffer from the twin disadvantages of racial discrimination and pronounced gender bias. Being black, the African women suffered from racism; being females they were the victims of sexual atrocities at the hands of the white masters as well as the blacks, and being former slaves, the white establishment forced them to live on meager resources and were compelled to remain poor. In short, the black women in America were made victims of triple jeopardy- racism, sexism and classism. To lodge

the protest of the black women against the triple jeopardy writers like Morrison stood up and wrote.

Toni Morrison marks a deep insight into the racial problems that are being confronted by the Blacks since their existence. Being African American woman, Morrison boldly presents Afro-American feminist consciousness through her literary endeavor as she strongly expresses her philosophy as a feminist. She is awakened and conscious about women's life and problems and believes that feminist consciousness is the experience in a certain way of specific contradiction in the existing social order. As a result, her novels manifest and highlight Black women who are doubly differentiated in the form of male standard and poverty as well as Euro-American women's standard. In her works, Morrison has explored the experiences and roles of black women in a racist and male-dominated society. The unique cultural inheritance of African Americans is the center of her complex and multi-layered narratives.

The present thesis has aimed to study and critically explore the majority of the novels by Toni Morrison in the light of above mentioned facts. The scholars around the globe have attempted to study and scrutinize Morrison from different points of view such as social realism, male domination and double harassment by the Black as well as White. However, accepting the limitations of the earlier studies, the researcher has put the endeavor about exhaustive study of the novels of Morrison as

he has dealt with the problems pertaining to the complex social relationships and evils.

As the final chapter is Conclusion. It puts systematically and analytically the brief information about the critical endeavor. In sum, Morrison's novels replicate her yearning to illustrate on the people, places, language, values, cultural traditions, and politics that have formed her own life and that of African American people. While putting her creative endeavor, she does not suggest any solutions to concerned problems, or she abridges the multifaceted authenticity of the past or present. She employs the supremacy and magnificence of her mind's eye to deal with them. Consequently, this study has analyzed her fictional world in terms of reality and examines the impact of race, class and gender on the individuals. Morrison's novels are the testimony of how women confront the challenges and threats of patriarchal institutions. This endeavor uses characterization and plot analysis to explore the different multilayered stories. As findings this study unearths the deep down emotions and struggles.

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