



PORTRAYING THEMES AND CHARACTERS USED IN WRITINGS OF TONI MORRISON

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ABSTRACT

When discussing the canon of American literature, Toni Morrison's name always comes up. She was a literary legend in the African-American community and the truest voice of African-American literature. In 1993, she became the first African-American woman to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature. Morrison was dubbed "A literary artist of the first rank" by the Nobel committee. Morrison's works provide a fabulist and realistic literary vision of the Black American experience. Morrison treats storytelling as a kind of history, and in each of her novels, she analyzes the function of story in the reconstruction of identity and community. Many in the literary community, including authors, artists, and readers, look to Morrison as an inspiration. Her books were so popular that they were translated into over twenty tongues. Morrison's works have received widespread acclaim from many respected academics and commentators. Morrison's works, both fictional and nonfictional, explore a broad range of topics, including but not limited to: race, class, gender, the self, the community, and cultural history. Morrison writes with an awareness of both African and African American history in her works. This iconic African-American author has inspired generations of writers and readers, and maybe the next generation of authors will follow in her footsteps.

Keywords: - Story, Destruction, Violence, Writer, Theme

I. INTRODUCTION

In addition to becoming the first African American woman to win the Nobel Prize in literature, the late Toni Morrison (1931-2019) was also a renowned fiction writer. She had already published eleven books. Her general appeal and focus on black concerns both contributed to her widespread renown. Studies of her fiction from a variety of critical and theoretical perspectives, including those on African Americans and racism, Marxism and the underclass, comparative literature, and psychology, have been conducted.

Feminism is more than simply a collection of demands for gender equality. It's a movement that aims to ensure that women have the same legal protections and social and economic benefits as men, including access to the same job and educational possibilities. As a person of African descent, Morrison is a woman. Her books *The Blest Eye*, *Sula*, *Song of Solomon*, *Tar Baby*, and



Beloved all have inscriptions of gaze connections that presuppose bounds that include many objectifications of women. From a black woman's vantage point, the dominant society's gaze—typically assumed to be white and male—is motivated by many layers of bias, including sexual objectification, racism, and classism. The *Bluest Eye* (1970), Morrison's first novel, is a coming-of-age story about a young black woman who is bullied and bullies others because she is fascinated with white beauty standards and wants to have blue eyes. *Sula*, her second book published in 1973, delves with the nature of friendship and social norms. Morrison's breakthrough novel, *Song of Solomon* (1977), received widespread acclaim. Set on a Caribbean island, *Tar Baby* (1981) examines racial, socioeconomic, and sexual tensions.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Kumara Swami, Ollala. (2022)In the historical paradigm of African American narrative art, Toni Morrison commands a distinguished position. On account of her many-faceted personality, craftsmanship and thorough probing into the lives of black women and society especially, she won the prestigious Nobel Prize for Literature in 1993. The creative perspective of Toni Morrison emanates several mind-blowing questions related to race, gender and class. The narratology of the author palpably examines the colour, culture and context against which the different characters stand and struggle. Most of the African American critics and reviewers perused the novels in the light of socio-cultural background. The article precisely examines Toni Morrison's creative credo and creed and it is an outcome of socio-psychological pretext. *Tar Baby* is an exemplary piece of study which shows the ideological and philosophical understanding of Toni Morrison to some extent. It is undeniably acceptable to the world that ideology has affected the form and content, myth of power and resistance to power, and strategies of dislocation have found their way into literature. Toni Morrison made it a subject of discourse regarding the behavioural and cultural action of Jadine.

Sandamali, Sugandika. (2021)It is natural that human beings show an interest to find out matters in others' surroundings. It is reasonable to expel readers since they also represent a category of humans. Readers are also interested in real life stories of authors when they engage with reading, because it provides them a wide space to think and experience than merely referring a book. Therefore, some authors try their maximum to attach something real and true from their lives in their pieces of writing to add a literary value and a depth to the composed text. So with this general understanding when it turns towards *Beloved* written by Toni Morrison, she has employed many incidents and factors in the text that are closely related with Black community which was underestimated by white people for number of decades. In the novel, the writer uses many places, characters and incidents to indicate the degree of violence that her people had to feel and face before white people. Mainly she focuses about the effects of slavery and its' long lasting results upon victims. In this study the main attention goes for identification



of the characterization of the author to represent the theme violence and slavery's destruction of identity.

Ahmad et al., (2020)This paper discusses the theme of alienation and female friendship in black women in Toni Morrison's fiction. The female bonding is a possible way to deal with alienation which is caused by various factors as racial and social discriminations. This female bonding provides black women necessary support for mutual growth and assists them in combating various social pressures. However, it is argued here that this female friendship of black women in Morrison suffers from alienation in the long run. While foregrounding the healing power of female bonding which may allow women to survive under exploitation of various kinds, this paper brings for an argument that this female companionship nevertheless is corrupted by the power of explicit or implicit patriarchal forces working under the umbrella of social institutions of class and marriage. Hence the black women need to be on guard against all those forces which endanger the consistency of their mutual companionship.

Ganesh Kumar, Sri Nidhya. (2020)How a writer should be? Always remembered, a wonderful teller of stories, wholeheartedly in love with her people, creating memorable heroines and heroes and making them breathe. Toni Morrison justifies the above said qualities and she deserves to be called as one of the most prolific contemporary black writers. She has always been concerned about the unique positions of black women in American life and literature. Morrison deals with varied themes and this paper deals with one particular theme; alienation. The heroines are usually alienated from their family, friends, and society and even from their own self. This alienation turns the heroines either to madness or death. Morrison clearly depicts this in all of her novels. This particular paper deals with the two memorable heroines of Morrison: Pecola of *The Bluest Eye* and Sula of *Sula*. This also elucidates how both the heroines travel their journey of life and meet their tragic end after a strong and long struggle from people.

Ahmad et al., (2020) The 20th century African Americans, especially the black females, who had neglectful parents, aftereffects of past slavery, were unable to show any kind of belonging to the contemporary American society. They found their souls and minds fettered in the dark dungeon of alienation which means a sense of detachment from the people around as well as from their inner selves. This sense of alienation created in them the feelings of irreparable loss and everlasting despair which is being discussed in this study of Toni Morrison's fiction. It is an attempt to have deep journey into the alienated and disturbed worlds of the characters that are in constant quest for parental love in Toni Morrison's first novel *The Bluest Eye* (1970). It displays the tragic plight of alienated, motherless/fatherless characters by presenting an irreparable loss in their lives because of parental hunger.



III. Major Themes in Toni Morrison's Fiction

When discussing the canon of American literature, Toni Morrison's name always comes up. She is a true literary icon of Black Literature and the authentic voice of African-American literature. In 1993, she became the first African-American woman to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature. Toni Morrison was hailed as "A literary artist of the first rank" (2016 63) by the Nobel committee. Toni Morrison was lauded by American author Alice Walker: Toni Morrison is the finest living writer. She never stops probing the depths of black American experience, both the dread and the joy. Toni Morrison's novels and essays about race in the United States have had a lasting impact on the creative community. Toni Morrison is a fantastic author. The emotional authority and strength of her words is immediately felt within two pages of reading whatever she has written. ("Village Voice")

The African-American characters in her books are complex and fully realized, and her novels often deal with epic themes and conversation. The books written by Toni Morrison provide a literary vision of the Black American experience that is both fantastical and grounded in reality. In his work, "Multicultural Voices," Amy Higginbotham argued that When discussing the history of American literature, it is impossible to separate the achievements of African-American authors from the larger narrative of the country's educational institutions. Reflecting the country's religious, ethnic, racial, and cultural diversity, American literature embraces a wide variety of viewpoints and writers, broadening the canon to include the most voices possible (2010).

IV. METHODOLOGY

The researcher has employed a qualitative approach in order to achieve the goals of the study. This study's data was gleaned via a careful reading and analysis of the relevant literature. The study identifies all significant and plausible characteristics to show how slavery destroys people spiritually and physically. The researcher has discussed and examined the data based on the researcher's own biases and interpretations of the text. Qualitative research thus becomes an efficient form of data gathering in this context, as it smoothes the way for all persons and reviewers to assess the credibility of the evidences.

V. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Schoolteacher (As the symbolic character of violence)

The term "Schoolteacher" creates extremely positive picture in readers' mind, because the terms "school" and the "teacher" always connect with paving correct paths for the people. So there is no space for misdeeds with such type of characters. However, in the novel, the author selects this character as the symbolic representation of violence by mainly using the actions. Though the title



of the character has a respect with the community, the actions make him violent in novel. First, readers identify Schoolteacher's character in chapter one through his actions.

“Then Schoolteacher arrived to put things in order. But what he did broke three more Sweet Home men and punched the glittering iron out of Sethe's eyes, leaving two open wells that did not reflect firelight.” With the arrival of Schoolteacher, the things begin to change badly in Sweet Home. The obedient men of Mr. Garner were sold by Schoolteacher and he changed the order and the way of working in the farm. This is the way that the writer provides many incidents to depict the violence grabbed within Schoolteacher's character. When all the human beings feel the beauty, the slaves of Sweet Home were treated as animals by its' master. For real human beings who are with humanity that can be difficult even to imagine the comparison of humans with animals. However, Schoolteacher compares Sethe with animals to have the animal characteristics. This shows the cruelty and the violence of his heart. Here the writer presents schoolteacher as a heartless character.

Baby Suggs

The author introduces Baby Suggs as the mother of Halle, a Sweet Home man who was selected by Sethe as her husband. As a female character, she has many roles to play and responsibilities to accomplish. However, the influences of slavery upon Baby Suggs's character deprived her fulfilling her role as a respectable character within the family. This failure of Baby Suggs puts her in to a great depression at the end of her journey of the life. When the consideration is there as a mother, she cannot be satisfied about her role and she regretted about her children. The author provides us sufficient evidences to imagine the gloominess of Baby Suggs from the following quotation to understand the destruction of her identity as an effect of slavery.

Paul D

Paul D is the last Sweet Home man who is alive in the novel. In the text, the author creates a meeting between Sethe and Paul D intentionally, since the writer needs to keep some situations to display the degree of the destruction of identity in his character.

The author uses Paul D's character to exemplify the self-alienation and the emotional devastation of the former slaves while demonstrating the lack of self-identity. In one situation, when Paul D was in Sethe's house, the floor boards began to tremble. This trembling of floor boards makes Paul D confused, because he cannot identify clearly what is going around him.



Beloved.

Beloved is the title of the spirit who comes for Sethe in the text. Sethe kills her baby girl to keep her away from slavery, since she identify well the aftermaths and the influences of slavery lasting for long in one's life. So her limited worldly knowledge allows her to decide death upon her loving and beloved baby girl. In the time of killing, it destroys the identity of baby girl from human to a spirit.

VI. CONCLUSION

Characters take the responsibility of actions in a literary creation. And also this has the ability to grab the mind of the readers. Therefore, the author has taken much attention to build the characters in the novel since she wants to convey different messages through the same text. So purposefully the author uses a few characters in the text to convey different thematic aspects. She has built some characters effectively to give her themes violence and the slavery's destruction of identity with different interpretations. To symbolize violence as a theme in *Beloved*, the author has used Schoolteacher as a character. Slavery's destruction of identity can be seen through the characters Sethe, Beloved, Baby Suggs and Paul D. To conclude, it important to say that Morrison's *Beloved* is magnificent with its' characterization to convey the themes violence and slavery's destruction of identity. Though it is impossible to deal with all the characters, the present study has focused more on the major ones and tried to explain their meanings in order to add an extra meaning to the novel.

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