



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Vol.2. 2.,2015

ISSN
INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA
2395-2628(Print):2349-9451(online)

SELF-REALIZATION AND INDIVIDUALIZATION IN THE NOVELS OF TONI MORISSON
WITH SPECIAL FOCUS ON SLAVERY

SUBHASH SINGH

Assistant Professor, Department of English,
Dyal Singh College, Karnal, Haryana (India)



SUBHASH SINGH

ABSTRACT

Memories become the collective memory of a community as with the Jewish holocaust, Russian revolution or the partition of the Indian subcontinent. Slavery as a part of pain is one of the most revolting tragic chapters of history. It is not mere subjugation that makes slavery the worst form of human degradation but the denial of human characteristics to the enslaved, which subsequently leads to a gradual dehumanization in both the slave and the master. Toni Morrison's *Beloved* remembers the horror and pathos of the Black Slaves prior to their emancipation and their emotional status after their legally won freedom. The novel brilliantly displays the emotional response of each character to unimaginable loss and suffering. The views of black man's history, at least till the 1920s present a different picture altogether. This black man's history would tell that the white Americans enslaved human beings on a larger and most profitable scale than any other people. A slave had no rights. He had no law to protect him. His marriage had no legal standing and he had no legal claim upon his children. There is no legal marriage among the Slaves. Through of the slave states a slave marrying according to law is a thing unknown in the history of American slavery. The slave was not allowed to become literate because literacy brings power Then the United States laws granted the right to franchise only to the literates. No opportunities existed or were created to improve. Morrison discusses the concept of self realization and individualization which has been frustrated by the absence of opportunities.

Key Words: Individualization, Revolution, Civilization, Monumental Inhumanity, Slavery

©KY Publications

INTRODUCTION

The novel *Song of Solomon* is fascinatingly Morrison's only novel with a male protagonist, Milkman Dead. Milkman Dead journeys to find his heritage, which he searches is quite rich. His struggle entails a process of self-discovery *Tar Baby* has its protagonist Jadine Child, a black woman, lost in the cultural confusion resulting from Europeanization and who ultimately fails to find any solace even in her relationship with son, an African.

Beloved reveals the continuous searing, emotional conflict in the psyche of its Protagonist, Sethe, and a representative of the holocaust of black slavery. Not only has her body been violated, but her Memories have been treated as saleable goods by the people.

Memories become the collective memory of a community as with the Jewish holocaust, Russian revolution, or the partition of the Indian subcontinent. Slavery as a part of pain is one of the most disgusting tragic chapters of history. By the advantage of power, man has often tried to subdue and suppress lesser beings. But slavery is ironically the worst and most abominable form of subjugation of human beings by other human beings.

It is not mere subjugation that makes slavery the worst form of human degradation but the denial of human features to the enslaved, which subsequently leads to a gradual dehumanization in both the slave and the master. "No, no. That's not the way, to put her human characteristics on the left; her animal one's on the right."

The horrors of history and the idea of atrocity did not begin with World War history, has been a mute and impassive witness to man's inhumanity in various world and his fellow beings. Nationalist jingoism, religious persecution, in a police state, grandiose imperialist politics have caused untold violence.

"Speech is a desecration of silence" says Samuel Beckett. Yet the survivor/writer refuses to seek refuge in silence. The need to remember overcomes the seduction of silence. When the survivor/writer is confronted with atrocities of monumental inhumanity, silence can be a triumph of cynicism over the indignities suffered by the victims. The survivor writer feels compelled to remember and overcome silence and speak in order to bear witness. Speaking about the atrocities is a sacred memorial tribute to the sufferers. There are times when one feels that a gesture other than a verbal one is more effective as an expression of solidarity with the victims. However, we have to speak because we cannot offer a "blanket tablet of history and require future generations to inscribe it with the unreliable details of fading recollections." Memory and insight work in tandem to at least recall a painful past that cannot be revoked.

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* remembers the horror and pathos of the Black Slaves prior to their emancipation and their emotional status after their legally won freedom. The novel brilliantly displays the emotional response of each character to unimaginable loss and suffering. The narratives by the main characters are actually documented thus making only a document of historical and emotional evolution of the Blacks, but Morrison's eloquent tribute to "Sixty Million and more". This tribute is Morrison's sacred obligation both to the history of her nation, race and the memory of all who suffered only because they were different - black and heathen by the standards of their enslavers.

Through nearly all the years since slavery officially ended, Americans have been taught a form of history that bears many characteristics of a fable. It has been inaccurate, incomplete, misleading and filled with myths uttered as truths. First Americans were taught a white man's view of history. This history speaks of the compromise at the constitutional convention that declared a black man to be three-fifths of a white man, and about the efforts of die white man to eradicate slavery and to preserve the union. Author's and teacher's emphasized the Missouri Compromise of 1820, the Compromise of 1850, the Kansas - Nebraska Act, the Dred Scott Decision, the role of the Abolitionists, and finally secession and War.

But the views of black man's history, at least till the 1920s present a different picture altogether. This black man's history would tell that the white Americans enslaved human beings on a larger and most profitable scale than any other people. It was the most brutal, horrifying dehumanizing and culturally destructive form of slavery. Perhaps as many as sixty million African natives were dragged into slavery in the New World. The Blacks had no choice, either they gave into the enslaver or perished white trying to resist.

The blacks were forcibly removed from their own highly organized culture, brought to America, and then denied and stripped of their ethnicity. The black view of literacy of slavery abounds with tales of the slaves' unrelenting and continuous resistance of slavery. Their history speaks of black heroes and heroines such as Denmark Vesey, Nat Turun, Fredrick Douglass and Harriet Tubman, all of whom tried to end slavery.

Many Europeans, considered the African people uncivilized, because the Africans were unchristian and black. But the Africans were not savages or a disorganized set of people. Increasingly, the judgment of history

is that the African civilization was as advanced as the European civilization at that time. But the African civilization died a gradual death due to slavery and the colonization of Africa by the European power. It has been estimated that at least five million and perhaps twenty million Africans were brought to the New World between 1519 and 1860. It is believed that for every slave sold in North and South America, one other was either killed resisting capture or committed suicide to escape slavery or died enroute to bondage. On a rough estimate, that would mean that perhaps as many as four million men and women were removed from Africa in four centuries.

John Hope Franklin describes the effect of the trade upon Africa in the most lucid and moving terms: The removal of the flower of African manhood left the continent impotent, stultified and dazed. The encouragement which Europeans gave them to fight among themselves, with explosive weapons donated by the Europeans, further debilitated them. Africa, which culturally was within measurable distance from Europe at the beginning of the 15th century, received the worst possible influence from her Christian neighbors to the north, and under these adverse circumstances she began a recession that in time was to be accelerated by the unrealistic enslavement that was to be thrust upon her in the nineteenth century. Africans were the "ideal" solution to labor problem of the New World settlers. Africans were big and strong and were accustomed to heat, since they came from hot, tropical climates. They had greater resistance to diseases. Their complexion did not allow them to run away and melt into the population by 1540. An estimated 10,000 a year were arriving in the West Indies when the slave trade was only getting started. It continued to grow for the next 250 years, reaching the zenith in the 1790's, this trafficking in human beings went on for due to one reason money.

The Africans resisted slave trade by all means They fought, killed or were killed trying to avoid capture Suicide was a common means of avoiding slavery There are records of slaves, who chained together, sat down, refused to move and embraced death collectively Slave ships were usually outfitted with nets to prevent slaves from jumping overboard There are accounts of the waters near the ships running red from the blood of slaves eaten by sharks, as well as stories of sharks following slave ships across the Atlantic to feast on the bodies of slaves who jumped or were thrown overboard. The captain of the ship in 1784, threw 132 sick slaves overboard The voyage across the seas earned a special name, the dreadful middle passage. The middle passage, foil of misery, torture, sickness and death for the slaves, lasted from six to twenty weeks depending upon the weather during the voyage; the death rate was at least 50%. Any illness because an epidemic because the slaves were crammed below decks in airless compartments They lay in their own excrement and vomit, and the stench was unbearable Only the strongest and fittest ever made it to the New World and life-long slavery. Thus slavery took roots in the America "... the status of the Negro in the English colonies was worked out within a framework of discrimination that from the outset as, far as the available evidence tells us, the Negro was treated as an inferior to the white man."

The African slaves numbering about four million were spread over an area of more than 70,000 square miles from Delaware to Florida, the Atlantic coast to Missouri, Arkansas and Texas. The dominant work of the slaves was in the tobacco fields of Virginia, and the Carolinas, the rice swamps of Georgia and South Carolina, the cane fields of Louisiana, the hemp growing section of Kentucky, and the cotton plantations from the seacoast of Arkansas and Texas. An estimated 1,815,000 slaves worked in cotton fields. Thirty or more slaves worked as a unit, each supervised by an overseer or driver. The overseer's job was to extract as much work as possible. The whip was the symbol of authority of the overseer.

Most of the slaves died early deaths. The slave was not even sure of staying on one single plantation in his lifetime. He could be bartered or auctioned. Due to this uncertainty, they could not forge strong family ties either through marriage or parenthood. John Blassingame records:

Many slaves vowed early in life never to marry and face separation from loved ones. If they had to marry, the slave men were practically unanimous in their desire to marry women from another plantation. They did not want to marry a woman from their own and be forced to watch as she was beaten, insulted, raped, overworked or starved, without being able to protect her.

A slave had no rights. He had no law to protect him. His marriage had no legal standing and he had no legal claim upon his children. There is no legal marriage among the Slaves.Through of the slave states a slave

marrying according to law is a thing unknown in the history of American slavery. The slave was not allowed to become literate because literacy brings power. Then the United States laws granted the right to franchise only to the literates. No opportunities existed or were created to improve.

Lerone Bennett puts it:

The slave trade left a bloodstained legacy during the four centuries the trade was pursued; it wrecked the social and economic life in Africa, set nation against nation and village against village. The trade was a disaster in America where it left a legacy of ill will and guilt.....

William James coined the term "Stream of Consciousness. Within the temporal scope of a single day or a few days, the stream of consciousness novel depicts the associations and memories over a longer period of time in the consciousness of a character. "Three factors control the association, first, the memory, which is its basis, second* the senses, which guide it; and third the imagination, which determines its elasticity." The novelist relies heavily on free association and memory or free recall to authentically portray the past in the consciousness of a character. Own temporal progression to a degree unlike what is found in any previous narrative genre, spending long chapters on mere minutes, or he can collapse half a lifetime into a sentence. He can assume at length the character's outer or inner voice; he can hear his own voice together with that of the characters in style indirect libber; he can plunge into the subliminality, the unconscious, the dream world of the character; he can vigorously exclude himself from figured consciousness more from close-up focus to cosmic distance in the perspective he chooses for the representation of character, scene and event.

There are two major areas of attention in narrative grammar and narrative aesthetics. The study of narrative grammar or narratology is concerned with uncovering the narrative "langue" or deep structure. The Russian Formalists have distinguished between "fibula" and "suzette". The "fibula" is the unshaped, undrafted story and "suzette" is the shaped narrative discourse. The fibula is the story in chronological and causal order while Suzette is the aesthetically motivated narrative discourse. Sternberg states that the narrator wins the readers interest by adopting narrative techniques which maximize and exploit the temporal potentialities of narration. Robert Scholes speaks of a novel which reveals an extraordinary manipulation, a narrative shape to be admired for its own sake as "Tabulation." Seymour Chatman designates "fibula" as what of the narrative, while "suzette" is the "how" of the narrative.

Gerard Genette has classified and named almost the entire range of techniques and strategies which are used in the composition of any narrative. Genette differentiates between the "histoire", the narrative raw material context and the "recit" the narrative text (which is equivalent to the Russian Formalist distinction between fibula and suzette). "Histoire" is the basic story aesthetically manipulated and shaped into 'recite'. He examines the relations of chronology between the text and the story in terms of order, duration and frequency.

Order refers to the "connections between the temporal orders of their arrangement in the narrative". Discrepancies between the order of the story and the order of the text result in what Genette labels as "anachronism." The chief anachronism is flashback or flash forward. He calls this anachronism as "analeptics" and prolepsis respectively. An analepsis is the narration of a story event at a point in the text after later events have been told. A prolepsis is the narration of a story event in the text at a point before earlier events have been mentioned. Under "duration" Genette examines the relations between the time the events are supposed to have taken to occur and the amount of text devoted to their narration. Duration has been branched into acceleration, a technique of devoting a short segment of the text to represent a long period of the story and deceleration which conversely is a method of devoting a long segment of the text to represent a short period of the story. Under frequency, Genette refers to the relations between the number of times event appears in the story and the number of times it is narrated in the text.

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* amply uses "repetitive frequency" i.e., narration of the "same" event several times, but with difference in "duration", (the narrative length of representation of the event) and "focalization", (the angle or perspective from which the event is represented). Nearly every important event of the past in *Beloved* is remembered or narrated more than once. *Beloved* is marked by repetitive narrative memory. Memory in *Beloved* entails the narrative aesthetics of a quaint interaction of order, duration and

frequency.

Thus it can be concluded that Toni Morrison has presented individual characters and a community of characters whose concept of self realization and individualization has been frustrate by the absence of opportunities.

WORKS CITED

1. Christian, Barbara (1980), "Black Women Novelists: The Development of a Tradition, 1892-1976", Westport: Greenwood Press.
 2. Duvall, John N. (2000), "The Identifying Fictions of Toni Morrison: Modernist Authenticity and Postmodern Blackness", Palgrave, New York.
 3. Feng, Pin-Chia, (2007), "We Were Girls Together: The Double Female Bildungsroman in Toni Morrison's *Love*", *Feminist Studies in English Literature*, Vol. 15(2), pp. 37-63.
 4. Gallego, Mar, (2007, "Love and the Survival of the Black Community", *The Cambridge Companion to Toni Morrison*, Cambridge University Press, pp. 92-100, Cambridge.
 5. Gillespie, Diane and Kubitschek, Missy Dehn (1997), "Who Cares? Women-Centered Psychology in *Sula*", *Toni Morrison's Fiction: Contemporary Criticis*, Ed. David L. Middleton, New York, Garland, pp. 61-94.
 6. Ludwig, Sami (2007), "Toni Morrison's Social Criticism", *The Cambridge Companion to Toni Morrison*, Ed. Justine Tally, Cambridge University Press, pp.125-138, Cambridge.
 7. Marie, N. (1998), "In Search of Self Frustration and Denial in Toni Morrison's *Sula*", *Journal of Black Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 6, Sage Publications Inc., pp. 724-737.
 8. Page, Philips, (1995), "Dangerous Freedom, Fusion and Fragmentation in Toni Morrison's Novels", Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.
 9. Peterson, Nancy J., (1997), "Toni Morrison, Critical and Theoretical Approaches Baltimore and London : The Johns Hopkins University Press
-