



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Vol. 4. Issue.3., 2017 (July-Sept.)

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

LIGHT IN AUGUST: SEARCH FOR LIFE

MOUNIKARAJ.K¹, K.S.VIJAYALAKSHMI²

¹M.Phil scholar, ²Assistant Professor

Dept of English, Vels University, Chennai, Tamilnadu

mounikaraj588@gmail.com



ABSTRACT

This article is about Faulkner's racism and tragedy of human prejudice in Light in August one of his most powerful work ever remains. In this novel the author depicts the American South by focusing on characters that are outcasts or marginalized in their community that is the clash between the individual and the prejudiced society. He also one among the writers such as James Joice and Virginia Woolf those who have successively placed stream of consciousness technique in their novels, similarly Light in August also a novel of reminiscence in which Faulkner tries to expose the lives of characters through their past. It is about the marginal characters those who try to find their place in the society within their way.

Key words: racism, human prejudice, outcast, marginalized, reminiscence, stream of consciousness

Light in August is the novel narrated by the point of view of the town through gossiping among the people in Jefferson. It mainly focuses on two strangers who arrive on different times in Jefferson. Lena Grove, a young pregnant woman from Alabama looking for the father of her unborn child and joe Christmas, a man who believes that he has some black ancestry but he passes through as white among the people of Jefferson. Both of them have different past but their problem of searching for destiny is common. Most part of the chapters in the novel is about revealing the past which is the main cause in their present life that leads to their destiny in a tragic way.

The novel begins by telling the story of Lena Grove, twenty year old pregnant lady who has been travelling barefooted from Alabama for four weeks to reach Mississippi in where she expects the existence of the father of her unborn child, Lucas Burch. She reaches the unknown place where she could not expect any person to help her but in the contrast she has been helped by many people throughout her journey. She makes others to feel for her those whom she encounters on her way to Jefferson. She has been offered a ride to the town by a man Armstid who shows her pity and helps her in such a way by offering place to stay at night though he knows that his wife is a sceptic and the next day he drops off at a place near by the interior part of the town where she can able to catch a new wagon to go into the town. His behavior towards her is very modest. Another person she meets is Byron Bunch who is her backbone remains all the while besides of her. In case of Lena, those who have helped her throughout her journey are strangers but they helped because of her innocent and kindness.

She lost her parents at the age of twelve then she continues her life with her eldest brother's family. Even though she has a family for sake, she remains like an orphan as she lost her virginity. Faulkner clearly depicts that how a woman encounters difficulties when she gets a child before getting married. Most of the women who are in the position of Lena will feel that they are unfit to live in the society but she, a brave girl has never fed up with life rather she fights against her faith with the help of Byron Bunch, an honest man who always respects women. Her innocent shows that she does not even know the name of the person who exploited her life exactly. For her, he is Lucas Burch but it is not his name actually. The man she looking for is Joe Brown.

Faulkner's description of characters in the novel starts with the narration of Lena's story through which he reveals another important character Joe Christmas. Joe's introduction is inter connect with Lena's story. A man who looks like a foreigner suddenly appeared one day at the planning mill. He remains as a stranger to everyone who works at the mill until a new comer Joe Brown appears and joins with him as a friend. Both are living in the cabin owned by Miss. Joanna Burden who lives outside of the town since her parents were fought for the freedom of the black people though they belong to white. Though he has been having good relationship with her often he gets haunted by hallucination that makes him unconscious. His character is complicated one. At first Faulkner exposes his identity in the darkness of the night, at the cabin where he is haunted by his past that is the incidents that occurred in his life since he is biracial. Joe knows that he gets angry with Joanna when she forced him to pray and asked him to take up a role as a caretaker of the school which she runs for the black children otherwise he does not know what he has done with her. Here his dilemma constitutes the death of Joanna in the hands of himself. At one point he realizes that he shot Joanna while holding the gun and he gets the thought of Joanna that is the gun has two bullets, one for him and another for her. Then he is able to understand the position in which he is, a murderer of Joanna and he has no idea about his future here after. Here he starts his journey towards his destiny. He could not come out of his bitter history then he moves place to place in order to escape from the police. It might be the reason that the black blood allows him to enter the cabin and the white blood drives him away from the house.

"But his blood would not be quiet, let him save it. It would not be either one or the other and let his body save itself. His black blood drove him first to the negro cabin. And then the white blood drove him out of there, as it was the black blood which snatched up the pistol and the white blood which would not let him fire it." (86)

At this point the character of Joe Christmas is as similar to the character of Tom Jones in the novel Tom Jones written by Henry Fielding. The black blood in him is invisible to him and all he perceives is only the voices of invisible negroes, they encapsulated him like bodiless voices murmuring, talking and laughing at him but not the language of him. His behavior through his instinct is not he want to be. He fears of his own identity when he faces the group of black people on the way while he is roaming on the road in the darkness of the night. He hates black because it reminds him of the inner objection he feels towards himself.

Faulkner further exemplifies Joe's crucial past through stream of consciousness technique. At first he gets the recognition as Joe Christmas while he happens to be leave at an orphanage as a baby on a Christmas day by his own grandfather. He experiences complete loneliness at the orphanage though there are children like him stays there. Race is the only difference between him and other children. Usually there is an emotional bonding between the child and the mother but in case Joe it is the crisis for him. He has no one in the orphanage to shower love towards him rather he is treated very badly by the dietician who hates him completely and makes others also to get angry with him since he is biracial. She often called him 'a little nigger bastard'. So Joe things that the orphanage is the terrifying place where he has no peace of mind and treated brutally by the people who are all white supremacist. Then he is thrown out of an orphanage without any mercy.

Secondly he gets the chance to live with the parents who adopted him. He feels extremely happy when he enters the new house but then he is able to see the real face of his parents Mr. and Mrs. McEachern. As he is at the age of understanding and analyzing the world he learns that his father, a ruler, religious fanatic and a male chauvinist who treats him cruelly by beating him continually when he commits

mistake in learning the catechism, a religious book and makes his wife to be subservient to him always. And the mother who is very much fond of him but her activities such as hiding the money in his room and taking him good care after he was beaten by her husband are really irritates him and he things that she has no trust on him.

Gradually he starts to show disrespect towards his parents and leads his life as he wish. One day he beats his father on his head with the chair when he tries to stop his wrong doings like drinking, gambling and having relationship with the waitress named Bobbie Allen. After that he moves to Bobbie's house where he is insulted by a man who keeps on punching him to know the color of his blood whether it is black or white. Then he moves away from that place and roaming around town to town and finally he reaches the place called Jefferson. During his childhood he experiences only punishment and he never gets the maternal affection since he lost his mother therefore he distrust women and their nurturing function.

Finally Joe's life ends with the hands of Precy Grimm who kills him for his offence of being the murderer of Joanna. At last the white society has succeeded in killing him not only spiritually and psychologically but now also physically.

“ It seemed to him that he could see himself being haunted by white men at last the black abyss which had been waiting, trying for thirty years to drown him and into which now at last he had actually entered” (366)

Faulkner clearly emphasis that the power of race which is white that dominates the black people in the southern region of America through the character of Joe Christmas. Though he passes as white, people those who live around him always teases him as he is biracial. The color of the skin cannot determine the minds of the people because it can be determined only through the character of a person and the society in which he lives.

Joe Christmas faces the cruelty of racism when he was at the womb of his mother. His grandfather, a white supremacist lets his daughter die at her childbirth as she gives birth to a child belongs to the person, a Mexican who is a black and he calls the child as devil's crop. Then the child teases by others continually, at one point he himself is not good enough to face his problems since he has been insulted from his childhood. Every child is given birth to the earth by god has some worth wile meaning to live and has some duty to perform in his lifetime, but this innocent child is condemned by the white supremacist. They are too worried about his blood that his father is from black though he looks as white. These kind of atrocities that occur in the town shows that how they treat the people from black community without humanity. Even they humiliate the blacks by having no kindness with them and they are not even ready to consider them as a human being. On the contrary Joe's grandfather lives along with the blacks and he has been provided food and shelter by the black people.

Joe lost his life due to his unsteadiness towards life. He has no opportunity to live with goodhearted people and he is not willing to take others opinion because for him if anyone shows love he things that he is going to bribe for something. And of course he is very much conscious in not revealing his secret that he is biracial. He is a man of both so he could not stand by anyone but he believes that being white is good.

Lena, a young abandoned woman lost her life. She searches along with Byron continually for the odd man who has no responsibility towards life he is a man will do anything for his livelihood and exploits other's life for money which is his lifetime goal. He leaves her immediately when she turned up pregnant. She has been spending her life in Jefferson until she gives birth to a child. She could not find him anymore then she leaves the town along with her friend Byron Bunch who is a genuine person never reciprocate his love towards her but still they are looking for the mysterious man similarly her life also a mysterious one. Both Joe and Lena are innocent, starts their journey to reach their destiny but both of them could not attain their destiny successfully,

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