



## THE EMERGING CLASS-CONSCIOUSNESS IN TONI MORRISON'S *TAR BABY*

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### ABSTRACT

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.

Key words: identity class-consciousness struggle community race gender culture

*Tar Baby* is based on a folktale which decentred the prevalent Euro-American mythology. Toni Morrison's commitment to *Tar Baby* is to explore the quest for wholeness. This quest is conducted in a setting that is the Caribbean Island which is dominated by the white's presence. Through the Caribbean setting, Morrison is able to suggest the cross-currents of different cultures. The novel *Tar Baby* beautifully depicts the emerging class consciousness of Toni Morrison. Valerian Street is a symbol of American capitalism. He lives with his wife, Margaret, along with their black servants, Sydney and Ondine. Valerian is a typical capitalist who severely exploited the labour of the African people for his pleasure and profit. It is true that the ruling class in the United States controls the means of production as Marxism suggests. But it is also a fact that there are some blacks who show the white ideology and their behavioural patterns. Ideologically, it is apparent that Jadine, a tar baby not only thinks like a European but also feels like a European. Unlike Jadine, Son represents the black culture and consciousness. He deeply thinks that if African people in general are exploited, then he too is exploited. Primarily

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the novel reflects the novelist's growing class consciousness but unfortunately she fails to offer a viable solution for the oppression of blacks in white America.

Morrison's art of characterization more particularly regarding Jadine is unique and interesting. She is so self-centred rather she is narcissistic where there is no room for someone else. Hence she asserts 'belong to me.' Devika Rani suggests, "Jadine initially suffers the conflict of divided loyalty between Valerian who made herself identity, a reality and her own black race that made her existence possible. In fact, the notable critical conflict can be located between the values of the individualistic, materialistic Jadine and roots-oriented Son." She suffers from the complexity of split-personality. At last, she comes to realize the sociological fact which cannot be reshaped or altered and decides to re-identify her blackness.

The protagonist of the novel *Son* offers a negation or a rejection of women particularly when they succumb to the causes of a man. Sometimes he even poses a threat to Jadine's individuality and personality. He gets himself controlled by the man's dominating feeling and fervour and considers black woman simply a handmaiden. Under this baffling circumstance, Jadine faces the crisis of identity. There is a conflicting mode of mind in the relationship of Jadine and Son. In the beginning of the novel, Jadine finds herself a subdued woman and Son receives her as an object of innate sexuality. *Tar Baby* is considered to be a work of dissimulation and advancement at the same time. As a novelist, she makes an honest effort to get her creativity free from the narrow geographical limit. The novel deals with a layer of relationship within Valerian's household between the maid-couple Sydney and Ondine Childes and Valerian and his wife Margaret as well as between the indoors house servant and the outdoor field servants, Gideon and Therese. In this psychologically rich study, the prime light is thrown on the dingdong relationship between European-educated African-American woman Jadine Childes and a Florida-born African man, Son. It is fascinating to review their relationship as "each viewing the others world as impoverished and/or unsafe, sees it as an occasion to 'rescue' the other."

*Tar Baby* seems to be a testimony to the novelist's growing sense of class-understanding. Here, class-consciousness is a blood and bone of thematic paradigm which makes the novel a bit socialistic in touch and treatment. The novel also reveals a kind of difference between the political thinker and the literary philosopher. She does not work like a pamphleteer, so both the characters Jadine and Son amazingly develop like individualists. The independence of the individual is the greatest and glorious thing in the eyes of Morrison. She feels that every individual should have the right to say his/her mind and the minority should not have the right to exploit the majority.

The African American tradition is very strong so far as Morrison's novels are concerned. In *Tar Baby* Valerian Street is not simply a white man but he is a symbol of American capitalism and imperialism. He believes in the exploitation of the underdogs and justifies it by his logic. It is quite clear that he takes wealth from the production of candy and also from Caribbean's sugar and cocoa. There was a time when Caribbean was the seat and centre of such products. The economic factors become more significant and poignant in the case of Valerian. It is argued that Valerian "has been able to dismiss with a flatter of the fingers the people whose sugar and cocoa had allowed him to grow old in regal comfort." No doubt, he is recognized and identified after the man of a plant which has dried roots and containing white and pinkish flower of medicinal use. However, it attracts everybody that Valerian remains in the state of unconscious or asleep throughout his adult life. He is termed as insensitive who stands for non-human values like wealth and social status. He simply wants to control power and uses money to influence other. He demonstrates his power of wealth in purchasing Margaret's cloth and paying Jadine's tuition fee. He does not know at all how to provide safety and psychological security to his wife and child.

The novelist here shows the sensitivity and class-consciousness of the principal character of Son. He wants to politicize his community people as well as to provide the real political education to Jadine so that they may come to realize their actual and everyday condition. Son is of the mind that Capitalism is the responsible factor for the painful and pricking condition of the Black community. Society is sharply divided on both the patterns of class and colour. Son is very honest even in his relationship with Jadine, so he wants to spoil the root of old capitalist ideology, deep-rooted in Jadine's heart and mind.

Structurally, *Tar Baby* is a love story of Jadine and Son but the novelist attaches sociological and cultural problem of class and race to it. In the thematic paradigm Jadine does not come out from the class paradigm and that's why she never desires a lady to be looked after by her husband for social recognition and economic status. She ever craves for equality and parity even in the race of materialistic growth and pomp. She is a typical kind of feminist who only thinks about herself and interest. Son does not think that way, rather he registers her voice of protest like Pilate of Song of Solomon. He never forgets his racial identity though he is alienated from his own social construct. This is a unique kind of love-story where mental framework follows the social and psychological behaviour of both the love-partners. Jadine later on moves to Paris to search out a prosperous and affluent husband. She seems to be self-reliant but she depends on the rich class while Son returns to the Isle de chevaliers to trace Jadine. He has also been advised to get himself detached from Jadine and to pay heed to his community people who are waiting for him. In this intense and passionate love-story, there are elements of decadent and disintegrating black culture and the earthy and monetary growth of white culture. Jadine's struggle is not in right direction as she is divided between the lucrative white culture of Paris and the declining world of her black lover. Comparatively, Son also faces the same situation. Both are extreme and aggressive in their attitude and belief. The novelist aptly focuses the psychological state of the characters and empirically portrays the circumstances. She says, "Each was pulling the other way from the maw of hell its very ridge top. Each knew the world as it was meant or ought to be. One had a past, the other a future and each one bore the culture to save the race in his hands."

There is always a sense of loss hovering on the minds of both the lover and the beloved. Jadine is properly underlined as a 'cultural exile' but she is not at all 'unsexed' like Lady Macbeth. She is not going to be happy and satisfied with the world which is normally is provided by man be it father, brother, lover or husband. On the level of feminist urge and identity, she does not make any compromise which is of course autobiographical. At some point, she seems to be a replica of the author herself, she is a revolutionary of her own type and Son appears to be a revolutionary of modern time. The conflict between pre- and postcolonial understanding is sharp and both of them always march ahead for better and amicable choice.

Morrison concludes the conflicting episode of the love-story of Jadine and Son. Finally, both of them remain in the changing spectrum of the modern age with certain addition and omission neither Jadine comes up as a complete woman and beloved and wife nor Son fully gets his destination albeit he was closer to that. In psychoanalytical framework, both the characters and the love-partners tried their best to be complete and whole. Toni Morrison's *Tar Baby* continues to be a text of great curiosity and inspection. It has many-faceted richness in both engaging and challenging. Although a large body of criticism exists on *Tar Baby* already, the possibilities in the novel still remain unexhausted. This novel makes an honest endeavour to provide a mythology which must be viewed with new vigour and virility. It is a psychological probing of a woman who lives in her own dream world and desires for an impossible man. This is a novel of social resistance as well as realism which deals with the black psyche and idiosyncrasy.

At last, Toni Morrison shows that both Jadine and Son have different worlds to accept and adjust. Moreover, the solution sought by them is typically individualistic and personal which does not conform to the concrete reality acceptable to everyone. Here, there is no Marxist type of class-struggle though the inner psyche is of the same pattern. In fact, they are 'private' because they are wrought out of personal and often unconscious emotion and 'fictional' because the experiences have been transformed into the controlled multi-voiced discourse of art.

The thinkers argued that the nationalist resistance and stress on 'cultural independence' also depended on European consideration like modernization, development and democratic behaviour. Further, developments added issues of ethnicity, displacement, gender and race as categories for analysis. Thus the postcolonial arguments began to focus on how the nationalist project in colonial time and decolonized nation-state extended certain fundamental oppressive structures in class, gender and race. This is essentially the same technique as that of colonialism. Under the rubric of postcolonial studies, we thus have an on-going attempt to retrieve histories that have been silenced by both colonial and nationalist powers. The entire novelistic output of Toni Morrison comes under the matrix of subaltern studies which promotes to write the history of the subaltern as

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against the history of the upper classes and culture. Other 'resistance' struggles like Afro- American now find suitably increasing affinities with the postcolonial theoretical framework. However, the close study of *Tar Baby* suggests understanding how oppression, resistance and adaptation have occurred in the white-dominated cultural construct. If the novel is examined from the postcolonial perspective, it offers specific strategies of power-domination, hegemony and oppression used and experimented by the colonizer. No doubt, the novel fits well in the pipe-line of postcolonial studies which uncovers the ideological sub- texts of differences, othering, discrimination and unequal power relation between the African and the native whites. Hence, the nativists and nationalist resistance or complexities and collaboration with colonizers tremendously influence the literary and artistic creation and product of the African Americans.

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