



A Novel study about Sensibilities of Culture on Toni Morrison's Tar Baby

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Abstract

Tar Baby holds strong witty lines with majestically woven characters. Morrison's style of emotional writing has kindled the readers mind to certain facts like cultural conflicts, racism and so on. Lack of self identity and life between the white and black culture portrayed through Jadine Childs, the central character has created a kind of confused uncertainty among Morrison's readers. Like all her novels Tar Baby is suffused with Morrison's racial quest enriched with psychological and emotional move.

Keywords : Sensibilities, Culture, Tar Baby

The Girl who belong nowhere

Jadine Childs or Jade as she is known, a twenty five years old young black lady is the protagonist whom the whole novel centers around. An orphan, who claims herself to be from 'Baltimore Philadelphia Paris', is a native African cultured under the white modern society. Fostered by her aunt and uncle, Sydney and Ondine, Jadine is luxuriously fed by a rich native American candy man, Valerian Street.

An art historian student, Jadine is immensely enriched with the cultural attributes of modern American society. Morrison has embellished Jadine as a character with confusion and chaos in the beginning. As the novel progresses Jadine is often interrupted by the thought as to what culture she belongs to. At one point, Jadine is confused with her relation to Ryk, a white man and wanted herself neither to be an American or African but to be herself.

When the entire character of Jadine is analysed the outburst of the writers emotion is seen spreading like tongues of fire throughout the novel. Morrison's extravagant power of bringing up myriads of emotions determine the quintessence of Tar Baby. The character of Jadine is chiseled with modern beauty, positivity and with all mannerisms of an English society. The Christmas eve which is the turning point of the novel where Morrison has tried to mirror out the real face of the Americans towards the native African. Ondine and Sydney, Jade's uncle and aunt were humiliated by the Streets. Despite their annoying dialogues Jadine is not offended because she is succumbed to believe that she belong to the white society.

Jadine's matter of home or identity is first questioned by Son, another life-giver of the novel. Though Jadine is African by native Valerian's home is her sole family. She is preoccupied with the modern comforts and culture of life provided by Valerian, the rich American candy man. 'But you...you're not a member of the family. I mean you don't belong to anybody here, do you?'(118). Jadine is perplexed by this sturdy question and she was helpless to choose the answer between her cracked culture.' Jadine represents a colonized person who longs for authenticity and is plagued with insecurity and self- doubt about her character and worth', says Carmen Gillespie.

When Morrison had colored Jadine as a 'tarred baby' in the hands of Valerian, she also had brought Son as a reminder of her confused identity. 'And you? Where have you lived? Anybody ask you where you from, you give them five towns'(266).

The real tar baby

The metaphor of a real tar baby suits aptly to Jadine who is a typical example of American African woman who is civilized in the modern American way of lifestyle. The stickiness of tar is ironically shadowed to represent the cultural stickiness of Jadine. Morrison has inculcated the devices of dream and certain powerful incidents to indicate this nature of Jadine. It is through Son, the hero of the novel Morrison has waxed out the tar quality grown up along with her. "And a rabbit...So he got this idea about how to get him. How to trap...this rabbit. And you know what he did? He made him a tar baby. He made it, you hear me? He made it !".(270). Son mentions a white farmer using his cunning trap of a tar baby to trap a rabbit. Through this short story Son brought out the fact that the white man uses his money and created a fake identity to capture Jadine. Upon shaping Jadine as a character who is a by product of modern American culture, Morrison fills the brim of her racial thirst through Son's powerful dialogues. Morrison has revolutionized the autocracy of the whites over the native blacks through her willful lines. Perhaps the reader could often sense Morrison herself who is born in New York depicted through Jadine.

Son, the native of Eloë escapes from his vulgar past and adventurously enters into the green house of Valerian Street. With his body full of wetness and dirt, Son hides under the closet if Margaret Street a week or too. While Jadine and Margaret talk about the suspectful Son, the later scorns him as 'Nigger'. Unaware of her own skin being humiliated Jadine scorns him same word. This ignorant quality of Jadine is a visible example of her being psychologically moulded a modern doll ignoring whom she really is.

On observing Jadine we often feel pity that she is parent less. At times we feel that she had some rich people around her to satisfy her with all modern comforts required. Other times the reader could feel that she is woven as a characterless, confused and unsecured woman who knows nothing of herself and the one who is stuck in between two cultures. "It is true of Tar Baby, where notions of bourgeois morality and attitudes concerning the proper education and role of women have creates a contemporary "tar baby": a black woman in cultural limbo", says Susan Willis.

Fragmented culture

The arrival of Son began to gradually echo like a clarion call to wake up Jadine's identity. As their love began to progress Morrison uses certain powerful images to wake up the sleeping identity of Jadine. The incident happened on a scorching sunny day when the jeep went out of gas. Son went out to get gas for the jeep and Jadine was attracted by the scenic beauty of the forest with its rotten odour. Walking towards the lawn she felt her feet sinking into some moss- covered jelly like substance. Gradually into the grease like substance she sank and it covered up to her knees and she struggled to come out of it. She saw the dark tar like substance never allowing to come out of it.

Ray of hope began to hover upon Jadine's life after the entry of Son. She began to enjoy the parent in him. But Son's strong adherence to his native culture made her sick between both the black and white culture. Driven by Son's eloquent dialogues on black people sticking to white culture and the humiliating dreams she had envisioned troubles her literally. When both Son and Jadine went to Eloë, Son's village Jadine is taken aback with a dozens of relatives and traditions which Son has. Like her award winning novel 'Beloved', Morrison has observed to add Gothic elements with questioning sequences in Tar baby. One of such supernatural element which Jadine had witnessed is at Eloë is a deliberate warning to her to wake up from her fragmented piece of culture. Jadine for the first time saw the dead women who belong to black society along with her mother staring with their bare breasts.

Jadine is desperate again with her loneliness. Her continuous persisting of Son to have education on the money of Valerian ended in failure. Son's persistence on Jadine to leave New York and white kind of lifestyle also ended in vain "...the black people in white face playing black people in black face" (217). The characters of Son and Jadine can be taken as examples of two cultural extremes. Morrison's outburst of idealized emotion against American supremacy is powerfully emphasized through Son's matchless group of words. Jadine is presented a typical bridge between confused culture. "Jadine represents the embodiment of a possible bridge between the worlds, though ultimately she cannot reach and connect all the different sides" claims June Jordan.

Conclusion

The kind of education, the kind of sophisticated habitat has carved out Jadine Childs with self esteem and great dreams with positive admirations of life but also with sprinted culture. Her oblivious tendency towards self identity and authenticity is quite a natural blindness nourished within her. Her strong decision to leave for Paris towards the end is the result of Jadine's adherence to white culture. Bien an African American Toni Morrison psychologically conveys Jadine's inability to acclimatize with her real culture. For Son's sake Jadine is never ready to leave her urbanity which Paris could offer towards the end. The complex education and contentment provided by the white culture had constructed in such a fashion that she is ready to forget her real home and swim with her white dreams. The study of sensibilities of culture through white modernization is apparently thoughtful through Tar Baby.

Reference

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