

Agony of Women in *Song of Solomon*

Geetha Ravi¹, L. N. Sheshagiri²

Abstract: Toni Morrison is popularly known as prolific writer and a great Novelist. Her novels prominently throw light on the perils of women characters. This paper is one of the chapters of thesis which focuses on the heart wrenching narratives of women characters in Morrison's novel *Song of Solomon*. The distress and the suffering of the individuals are very realistic in the novel and call for the ritualistic change in the approach of fellow beings. The concept of oppression takes a lead in the social structure of Morrison's writings and the characters, in particular. Morrison is successful in presenting the torment of black women and their search for identity to build their free and peaceful community.

Keywords: Prolific, perils, oppression, torment

1. Introduction

In the novels, *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula* Morrison defines the racial barriers and explains how the black women struggle to gain individual consciousness and make efforts to identify themselves in a society that is dominated by the whites. Sula tries to overcome the social problems by portraying herself as an individual who is bold enough to ignore the marginalized roles of black women in the community. Just as Sula in *Sula* appears to have established her identity in the black community by sidelining all the other oppressions. The characters in *Song of Solomon* are also in pursuit of identity and the novel discusses the inner struggles of the women characters.

Morrison presents the essentials of women's endurance in the community of the blacks in a very effective manner in this novel. As a thoughtful writer she inflicts the idea through the conversation built between two characters, Guitar and Hagar in the novel. "You can't own a human being. You can't lose what you don't own. Suppose you did own him. Could you really love somebody who was absolutely nobody without you? You really want somebody like that? Somebody who falls apart when you walk out the door? You don't, do you? And neither does he. You're turning over your whole life to him. Your whole life, girl. And if it means so little to you that you can just give it away, hand it to him, then why should it mean any more to him? He can't value you more than you value yourself."(306) precisely these lines enunciate the state of women which is at stake in the patriarchal society.

All the novels of Toni Morrison are historical in varying degrees. However, her novels do not limit themselves to history even by realism, but become a reality in terms of character and plot. This is brought to the readers through different sources like images, magic, spectres, folktales, gossip, presence of spirits of the dead, superstitious beliefs, oral narration with unique identities and metaphoric understanding of communities.

Morrison's creative mind gives way to what the characters and their afflictions perfectly as the ones which relate the hardships of the blacks in the community of oppressors. The impoverishment of the blacks pronounces the failure with susceptibility to the crisis of identity and socio economic problems.

It is interesting to note that the characters in most of Morrison's novels fall prey to the situations created by the oppressors. "The Black characters in Morrison's early novels are especially vulnerable to the defeats that accompany isolation; in *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula*, she examines the complex economic, historical, cultural and geographic factors that problematize their relations within their black community and with the world beyond."(Valerie Smith 28) The characters in these novels undoubtedly venture on the path of self identification, but they seem to have reached the pinnacle of success at the cost of experiencing a tragic end. Pecola assumes to get her blue eyes and loses her mind for the eyes of her dream. The taste of tragedy in Sula's life too turns very costly to her. Her advent on gaining freedom by intentionally ignoring the rules of the society pushes her to be a victim of disgrace.

A Black woman according to Lisa Jones is like bullet proof diva, "whose sense of dignity and self cannot be denied; who though she may live in a war zone, goes out everyday greased, pressed and dressed... she has the lip and nerve and she uses that lip and nerve to raise herself and the world."(Lisa Jones 3) The defeat and the agony of failure in the minds of the Black characters reflect the state of oppression. Sula unlike Pecola chooses isolation, her non-acceptance of community and acceptance of self centered world leaves her in the state of tragedy.

Sula believes that she can create her own world and identity that lies beyond community and the society. She is recognized as "An artist with no art form." (Valerie Smith 30) The self making attributes of Sula is noticed in the character of Milkman, the protagonist of the novel, *Song of Solomon*, who believes in his own form of accepting life and strives to identify his roots. He is extremely rigid, materialistic and has no value for time and eventually becomes strongly responsible for all the traumatic incidents associated with the women characters in the novel.

The novel, *Song of Solomon*, throws light on the intertwined themes of the black individuals. The concept of finding, revival, and restoration of identities is the focal point. The readers are exposed to the woes of the black people. The separation within families, the chronicle of personal quests to reconstruct splintered identity is a specific theme that abounds the novel. Morrison weaves the experiences connecting the personal, familial and communal consciousness in a "dense web of memory the association of ideas in the mind, the causes of emotion and the

individual's sense of self." (Valerie Smith 30) A prime place is set for Black consciousness in Morrison's novels; it is understood as the loss of black identity when they intend to imitate the whites. Naturally they are bound by double consciousness, one led as a black to follow the culture, the other as an American who emulates the whites. This double consciousness is displayed by Morrison through Pecola's belief and desire to have the Blue eyes. In the same way the other novels of Morrison successfully depict the black consciousness. Circumstances lead the blacks to face intolerable ordeal for being black.

The story is about a man who is engrossed in gathering wealth and finding his roots. Milkman Dead is the son of Ruth Foster Dead and Macon Dead. Milkman resembles his father in his manners and conduct. He craves to accumulating wealth and wishes to lead a luxurious life. His grandparents are Solomon and Ryna, Solomon elopes fearing for slavery leaving behind his wife and twenty one children. Milkman is nurtured and looked after by his mother and Aunt Pilate. His sisters, First Corinthian and Magdalene (Lena) take care of him and Hagar adored and loved him more than her life. He fails to respond to the love and affection of all the women of his life. Milkman grows as a privileged human being and was busy accumulating wealth and determining his origin.

Song of Solomon constitutes and relates the incidents to the quest of searching for one's roots. A man who is in search of his own identity eventually grows with the search for his family history, which culminates in solving a puzzle. It rather defines the growth into manhood of a Black man, the protagonist, in Midwestern town, who is the living son of Macon Dead, the richest man in the black community. Macon Dead III was born in a home that is recognized and received as dead. The family name symbolizes the Dead family's lack of identity and its spiritual death.

The family Dead is well-to-do, who ascended the social ladder, accepted by whites on economical grounds but, the low class African Americans are not associated with them (the Dead). This complete detachment has led them to isolation, which is also reflected in Dead's home – cold, non-vibrant and lack of human values, where more importance is placed on materialistic views and pride.

Macon's only son, Milkman's state of affairs reflects the education he had received from his parents (Macon Dead & Ruth), and also gives a strong clue of his confusion, lack of identity and connectivity with his ancestors.

The materialistic 'approach' and the progress is the only inherited legacy Milkman has along with his name, Macon Dead. The name itself is symbolic and narrates the story of a white man who 'mistakenly assigned' it to Milkman's grandfather in his inebriated state during the reconstruction. White man asked him the details of his birthplace and his father's name, the officer recorded it as Macon and Dead. The name reveals the state of dispossession of an identity. The intention of the oppressor to suppress the blacks is instrumental in this incident. Similar examples of histories written by the white officer who wrongly writes the name of

a black worker evidently throws light on the inner drive of the white men to demean the blacks.

Morrison aims at giving a message to the readers in a distinct way by introducing the concept of magic realism. The absorption of fantasy in the daily lives of the people while presenting a piece of work is magic realism. The aura of Magic realism began to spread in 1950s and 1960s, it was basically found in the writings of Latin American writers like Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Alejo Carpentier, Julio Cartazas and Jorge Luis Borges. These writers were successful in merging reality and fantasy. With the aid of metaphor and symbols of imagery the writers present their magic realistic views and leave the readers in a state of indecision, oscillating between believing in the magical interpretations or the realistic. The concept of magic realism in Morrison's writings is viewed by Bowers as "... influenced by African American oral culture and mythology adapted from West African culture" (Bowers 58). Furthermore, Bowers states that Morrison uses elements in *Song of Solomon* that includes women with magical powers born without navels, as well as men that can fly, which gives her novel a touch of African culture" (Bowers 58). (J. Ahrling) By adopting the notion of magic realism in her novels Morrison seems to have found solace for the black sufferers. The characters find refuge in the special qualities associated with myth and African culture.

Critics justify the character of Macon Dead in comparison with the patriarch Jose Arcadia Buiendia in Garcia Marquez's novel, *One hundred years of Solitude*. Both show similarity in having resemblance with their excessive thirst for material progress which leads both of them towards a futile search for gold.

Susana while presenting the milieu of magic realism says: "Morrison like Garcia Marquez dismantles traditional oppositions such as Life/ death, material/ spiritual, reality/fantasy, good/evil in what can be described as a synthetic fusion of binary oppositions. Magic realism denotes the harmonious synthesis of opposites: as Enrique Andreson Imbut suggests, magic realism is the synthesis between the real and supernatural (9)" (Susana Vega-González). As it is found in combination of thesis and antithesis in other novels of Morrison, *The Song of Solomon* is equally rich in the intermingling of dead and live characters with the world of myth, folklore and the supernatural touch. Certain rudiments of the novel such as introducing characters like Pilate, a girl without a navel; the spirits of the dead like Solomon directing his daughter Pilate to perform the duties which he could not accomplish, support the idea fittingly.

The technique of magic realism is adopted in the novel by means of flashback. The baton of legacy is handed over to Pilate by her father, who inspires her to perform her duties. The instances of the conversation between the daughter and the father are presented prominently in the novel. As Susan Vega points out, "The characters' journey into the past through memory reconstructs their personal and collective histories. Pilate Dead stands out as the bearer of ethnic and cultural values as well as the preserver of memory and storytelling; in fact she is the link between past and present,

the one who recounts her personal life to Milkman and who instils in him the nourishing seeds of ancestral connection.” The character of Pilate is moulded in such a way that she bears the pain and still remains as a link to the protagonist and helps him to gain his lost identity.

In the novel, Pilate (Macon’s sister) and Ruth (wife of Macon) are seen with active connections to their pasts in their own way but Milkman seems lost in search of his roots and anxious to be on familiar terms with the whereabouts of his predecessors. Such visionary approach is apparent in the works of Morrison which reflects a deep-rooted concern for the need of an acknowledgement and enrichment of an African American culture that has been exploited by both external and internal forces. The character’s surname ‘Dead’ indicates the detached cord of family connection with the ancestors. Morrison expresses: “If you come from Africa your name is gone. It is particularly problematic. Because it is not just your name but your family, your tribe. When you die, how can you connect with your ancestors if you have lost your name? That’s a huge psychological scar.” (Conversation with Toni Morrison 126) Morrison is very clear and loud in her words that all the blacks suffer with the similar traumatic feeling of losing one’s root and identity. Authentically Africans are known by their tribe which is at stake in the hand of the whites. It also illustrates Morrison’s deep concern for African culture and their identity.

The versatility of the writer is seen in the way how the unique qualities are incorporated in a piece of work. Morrison has not left any stone unturned to gift the novel with special features. In an interview Morrison explains the flying myth that it is purely associated with black people who could fly. She affirms that flying was always a folk lore of her life and recognizes it as one of the gifts she presents to her readers. “It is everywhere people used to talk about it, it’s in the spirituals and gospels. Perhaps it was wishful thinking of escape, death and all that. But support it wasn’t what it might mean? I tried to find out in *Song of Solomon*.” (Conversation with Toni Morrison 122) Pilate’s song refreshes the ideas of past

“O Sugar man done fly away
Sugar man done gone
Sugar man cut across the sky
Sugar man gone home...” (Song of Solomon 23)

The usage of flying myth in her novels reaffirms her views and approach on mythical symbolism. Thus such references hint at the conventional belief of Africans on myth, folklore, culture, tradition, songs, poetry, fable, superstition and music. These lines are symbolic and refer to the roots that the family is trying to trace. The urge of Pilate to map out their roots reveals the agony of her displacement and their ancestor’s trauma.

The novel, *Song of Solomon*, provides a clear expression of Morrison’s belief that understanding self and past is always a project of community through Milkman Dead’s extraordinary journey of awakening. In this flight of materialistic love, in search of wealth and identity, the male character serves as a cause for the immeasurable pain of desertion felt by female characters like Hagar, and Ryna,

whose agony at the loss of Solomon “like to kill the woman” (Song of Solomon 326) and the intensity was so very deep that “she screamed and screamed and lost her mind completely” (Song of Solomon 327). It is understood that Milkman has no room for empathy in his life. In the milieu of accumulating wealth and tracing his origin, he fails to reciprocate to the feelings of his aunt, sisters and Hagar. His uncaring and ignorant attitude is a direct cause for the oppression.

The observation divulges in putting forth the opinion that men are active and the women are depressed, deserted and completely ignored with the influence of culture. All the three women characters found in the novel disclose the fact that they bear a heavy burden of survival. “Ruth, began her days stunned into stillness by her husband’s contempt and ended them wholly animated by it.” (Song of Solomon 11) Ryna, Hagar and Pilate are completely exploited by men. Ryna was left behind with her children by Solomon to escape from slavery. Both Hagar and Pilate were used by Milkman to fulfill his needs and completely pay no heed to their existence.

Ruth is characterized as a small and pressed woman, “I am not a strange woman. I am a small one.” (Song of Solomon 124) Her husband’s disrespect and coldness gives an indistinct sense of purpose and antipathy to her, increasingly leading to oppression. Hagar too is exploited and silenced by men but she reacts and expresses her anguish through violence.

The novel *Song of Solomon* clearly depicts the patriarchal influence on the society and the cause of suppression on women. “Through her characters Morrison shows the patriarchal upbringing and absolute conformity to patriarchal norms deprive a woman of a meaningful existence.” (K. Qasim and Uzma Asmat) The dominance of Milkman on all other women characters in the novel pronounce and echo the patriarchal culture followed in the community. It rather supports the view of freedom sought by women. The wings of freedom which are ready to soar high are clipped with the patriarchal standard. The extreme exploitation by men with their male perspective of life is showcased very well by the novelist.

On her realization of being muted in life Lena (Milkman’s sister Magdalene Dead) retaliates on her brother for his domination. “You’ve been laughing at us all your life. Corinthians. Mama. Me. Using us, ordering us, and judging us. . . . Where do you get the right to decide our lives? . . . I’ll tell you where. From that hog’s gut that hangs down between your legs. Well, let me tell you something, baby brother: you will need more than that. . . . I don’t make roses anymore, and you have pissed your last in this house. . . . Now . . . get out of my room.” (Song of Solomon 215-216) The reprisal of a sister reveals the behaviour of a male member in the society and at the same time she expresses her contempt on his ascendancy.

Lena finally opines that Milkman is found with all the qualities of his father as a preservation of patriarchal legacy. The same pride exposes the qualities of an oppressor towards women in his circle. The story of Hagar appends to his

behavioral analysis to coin him as a man with patriarchal ideologies.

Pilate's granddaughter, Hagar is the sister of Macon. She falls in love with Milkman, the son of Macon Dead, and enters into a relationship with him for three years. Hagar waits for Milkman to marry her. Milkman views her as a "private honest pot not a real or legitimate girl friend not someone he might marry." (K.Qasim and Uzma Asmat) Milk man was bored and planned to end their relationship. His decision to end his relationship with Hagar heavily disappoints her. The commitment towards him would not let her think of a life without him. The shock of losing him made her revengeful and jealous. To add on to her emotions she sights him with another woman, this makes her more anxious and tries to kill Milkman. "As regularly as the new moon searched for the tide, Hagar looked for a weapon and then slipped out of her house and went to find the man for whom she believed she had been born into world." (Malin Pereira 129) The act of using Hagar for his own advantage then rebuffing her reveals the attitude of Milkman. He affirms by doing so since he is a self centered man and he is responsible for the traumatic state of Hagar. She fails to kill him – many of her attempts to kill Milkman never succeed and she starts believing that if she were more beautiful it would change the feelings of the man she loves.

Hagar then attributes the end of their relationship to her ugliness. She invested all her savings including her mother's diamond to be a new beautiful woman who cannot be ignored. She goes shopping and purchases new clothes, accessories, makeup and perfume to make her look more appealing to her loved person. (Milkman) "From the moment she looked into the mirror in the little pink compact she could not stop. It was as though she held her breath and could not let it go until the energy and busyness culminated in a beauty that would dazzle him." (*Song of Solomon* 313) The long wait to join her loved one seems imminent. Hagar tries her best to look beautiful to appease Milkman.

She equips herself with beautifying things and absolutely fails to relate to reality; the urge and the urgency to be accepted by her beloved results in tragedy. She was completely amazed by her beauty and neglects the heavy rain. She gets wet and dirty and was seriously affected by the rain and dies, her efforts to look beautiful drove her to the deathbed. Milkman failed to show concern to the lady who was shattered and rejected.

All her effort to attract Milkman turns futile; he pays no attention to her after. His focus was more towards accumulating wealth and thus loses on the human warmth. He is busy in the chase and finds no time to reciprocate Hagar's love. As is found in *The Bluest Eye*, crave for beauty is ultimate, Pecola falls prey for the concept of beauty and the blue eyes. Similarly in this novel Hagar tries to grab the attention with the concept of beauty and plans to entice a man whom she had loved. Unfortunately in both the novels the women are victimized due to the concept of beauty and lose their life.

Among the women characters moulded to tolerate the power of discrimination Ruth is one of them. She endures the

suppression; she is mistaken by Macon Dead for her close relationship with her father, Dr Foster. As it is suspected by the people, some critics also term the relationship as incestuous. The wretched behavior of a father is prominent in *The Bluest Eye* – Cholly's relationship with daughter Pecola. This act of suspicion and perceiving it as adultery reveals the patriarchal instinct.

The best example of Macon's meanest way of thinking is seen while he mentions and comments on the fact of Dr. Foster attending the two sisters of Milkman on professional grounds. He gets very disturbed and expresses his feeling of suspicion. He says "I didn't like the notion of his being his own daughter's doctor, especially since she was also my wife [...] Anyway, Ruth wouldn't go to any other doctor. I tried to get a mid wife...." (*Song of Solomon* 71) this allegation of Macon shows how women in the black society suffer under their own counterparts. Dr Foster, being a well known doctor in the town, ensures that his daughter Ruth is in safe hands; which Macon does not accept and is not convinced. He states, "she had her legs wide open and he was there, I know he was a doctor and doctors not supposed to be bothered by things like that but he was a man before he was a doctor." (Valerie Loichol 228) Macon strongly doubted that Ruth and Dr Foster had something beyond their daughter and father relationship. Ruth's disturbed state was understood in a malicious interpretation by Ruth's husband. By analyzing the behavior of Macon Rolland Murray expresses in '*The Long Strut: Song Of Solomon and the emancipating limits of Black patriarchy*' that Ruth's mourning is the best evidence of her investment in her father's symbolic authority; because his finger is taken as phallic symbol from which she garners her mode of being. Her demonstration of regression is completely mistaken.

The act of sucking the fingers of her father seeking nourishment seems to be a symbolic attachment shared between father and a daughter. Macon's possessiveness does not permit him to believe and understand the relationship between Dr Foster and his daughter. The deep complex in Macon defuses him to understand and value his wife's warmth towards her father.

The reasons to justify the proximity of a father and daughter can be listed at ease. Macon being a believer of patriarchy finds delight in abusing Ruth especially when she was in need of his warmth. "But Macon came out of his few days of sexual hypnosis in a rage and later when he discovered her pregnancy, tried to get her to abort. Then the baby became the nausea caused by the half ounce of castor oil Macon made her drink, then a hot pot recently emptied of scalding water on which she sat, then a soapy enema, a knitting needle (she inserted only the tip, squatting in the bathroom, crying afraid of the man who paced outside the door), and finally, when he punched her stomach, she ran to Southside looking for Pilate." (*Song of Solomon* 223) Neither husband nor her son had time for her and she was never treated as an individual with her priorities. The traits of Macon and Milkman unambiguously pronounce the height of oppression towards women in the black community.

Morrison's creativity is valued; her works are known for diversity in love and oppression. Thus the violence in the

character becomes easier to understand. African American slaves' endured racism and the objectification of women made easier by patriarchy, poverty and lack of opportunities." (A. R. Baker) Love and agony correspond well with the bizarre in women's lives depicted in all the novels of Morrison. The love is defined as an existential peril in the lives of women characters. Mother's love becomes an epitome of protection; father's love is misunderstood and man's love to a woman is to fulfill ones patriarchal pleasures in life. The varieties of love are a sheer agony in the lives of women characters. Reba, daughter of Pilate Dead and mother of Hagar, is not a famous character in the novel. Due to distrust and ignorance she experiences the separation and loss of the family which led her to enter the state of confusion in life. Pilate is considered as peculiar and an exceptional woman whose rule of life is different. It appears as though Morrison has made an attempt to convey the message that Reba was nurtured by a daring person like Pilate.

Pilate is compared to a majestic tree which shelters many and recognized as an eccentric and unconventional woman. She is a unique character in the novel, known for her strength and will power. It is interesting to note that "she is considered as poor, ignorant, oppressed black woman. Her physical disability (navel less) creates a curiosity in people's mind" (Elizabeth Ann Beaulieu) When a man vocalized that he was not aware that there are people without a navel, it prompted an extreme reaction among the people as they connected her to the otherworld of supernatural elements and inspected her for the marks made by the witch.

"Nothin'," the woman said.

Then, 'Child, where's your navel?

'What's it for?' she asked. The woman swallowed.

'It's for ... it's for people who were born natural.'

Pilate didn't understand that, but she did understand the conversation she had later with the root worker and some other women in the camp. She was to leave. They were very sorry" (Song of Solomon 242-43)

Such queries and conversations put Pilate in a pathetic situation and become traumatic for her to realize about her physical lacuna. It is evident through the study of the novel that people were mystified to understand that a girl without a navel cannot be treated as normal human being. This bewildered reaction of people disappointed her and realized that she needs to hide the fact of not having a navel.

Pilate was self sufficient due to her hard work. Being very close to nature she was busy with fruits picking, hauling and fermenting fruit for her living she used to make wine and market it. Her smartness is gauged by the way she looks at the Sun's position and tells the time and is also knowledgeable about animals, gardening and cooking. She is always chewing twigs, seeds, hay or something or the other. It is fascinating to know that Pilate's physical description is detailed in terms of nature. Her style represents the place she belongs to. She has berry stained lips, a gravelly sounding voice and looks like "tall black tree" (*Song of Solomon* 39). Her abilities are not considered by people but her inabilities are counted which is understood as a means of suppression in the society.

It is worthy to note that Pilate is unique and very humane towards others. This is very much evident in her interaction with other characters, for instance her dealings with Ruth. Macon mistakes Ruth for being very close to her father and suspects his wife for her intimacy. Pilate finds solace and helps Ruth to overcome her problem by keeping her engaged in many things. She teaches Ruth a lesson of life to beat the situation with one's own strength and inflicts superstitious beliefs to be a stable woman.

A close observation of the narrative reveals Pilate's natural attribute; of not having a navel was a cause for people to reject her. They believed and considered her to be an evil conjuring woman and forced her to work and live elsewhere. However, she is an equally strong character who moves on and joins a new group, till the same things happen again and she is kicked out which speaks of her resilience. Pilate's harsh confrontations in life and repeated rejections by the public encourage her to gain self consciousness. It also persuades her to avoid being in the lime light and marrying Reba's father for the only fear of her stomach being noticed. With all these circumstances Pilate grows offensive and realizes "what her situation in the world was and would probably always be." (Song of Solomon 149)

For the reader it would appear absolutely acceptable that at a young age Pilate defends herself after her father's murder. She was different from her brother Macon in dealing with her past. It would have been suitable if she was portrayed as a protagonist in the novel for the fact of her endurance and stability to withstand all her sufferings. Pilate is responsible to have recreated the past, her ancestors have set an example of suffering and she carried forward the legacy of oppression. It is her nature to be good; her deeds go unnoticed in the patriarchal setting. People's rejection due to the supernatural association drives her to the state of disgust and checks her tolerance.

It is interesting to note that most of Morrison's characters suffer from alienation. Sula, Pecola and Pilate are all alienated from the black community. In *Song of Solomon* the sense of alienation is felt by the women characters that were looked down upon. Pilate is a selfless and fearless woman; she finds satisfaction in embracing the concept of generosity. With all her good qualities, she seems to be exploited by the society and she receives sheer perils in return. Milkman is continuously protected by her and proves to be a strong lady by spreading her wings on other women in her surrounding like Reba and Hagar. The troubles encountered lay bare the state of Hagar and her subjugated state seems to be a supporting fact to the central theme of the novel *Song of Solomon*; the abandonment of women who love men.

"No wonder", she said at last.

'Look at that. No wonder. No wonder...'

Look at how I look. I look awful. No wonder he didn't want me.

I look terrible.' Her voice was calm and reasonable, as though the

last few days hadn't been lived through at all.

'I need to get up from here and fix myself up. No wonder.'

Hagar threw back the bed cover and stood up. 'Ohhh. I smell too.'

Mama, heat me water. I need bath... oh Lord, my head.
Look at that.'

She peered into the compact mirror again.
'I look like a ground hog where is the comb?'" (Song of Solomon 312)

Milkman promised and pretended to love Hagar however fails to marry her. This incident of deception drives her to a restless state nevertheless she doesn't give up easily and attempts to style her in a better form, but in vain.

The study discloses that the commonly experienced feature in the novel is abandonment of women. The story line is based on the specifics of the oppression of women. More importantly it shows that Pilate not having a navel is a symbol of alienation. A critic observes that Pilate's alienation at the physical level from the class of black society is the crucial outcome of her radical change which also justifies the fact of not having a sustaining relationship with her mother. Her mother had died even before she was born and was deprived of intimacy as a child. Pilate's affliction is seen through her disillusioned reminiscences of her younger days; orphaned child, without mother from birth, lost her father at twelve.

"Pilate recollects disenchanted of her early childhood:
mother less
from birth and bereft of loving father since twelve.
Pilate's agony
of an alienated being marks deep furrows on her psyche
one can
well imagine Pilate's isolation as she was almost an
orphan since
her adolescent days." (Song of Solomon)

It is worth mentioning that her name signifies that she is a pilot, she acts as a guide with an appreciable caliber; she speaks of being truthful and disconnects with Macon by abandoning gold near the cave. The trauma of alienation leads her to introspect about life and its needs. She goes forward with empathy towards distressed people to give support and help them.

The clear depiction of women repeatedly abandoned by men acknowledges the verity of female characters who suffer intensely in different circumstances as depicted in the novel. Morrison attempts to unfurl the tales and types of women's oppression done in many folds. Racism and women are deflated to pay the price for men's freedom. The instance of Guitar's grandmother supports the point; she had to raise Guitar and his siblings. In spite of her old age and being sick she supports them and makes them financially, intellectually, and emotionally strong in the society.

Though the novel pivots around the male protagonist, the women characters have their own roles to be presented with their heavy share of being oppressed. It is their suppressed situation which makes the readers empathetic towards experiencing the serious misery in the lives of the women characters.

The sufferings are shown and can be understood as double through the repeated restraints of women by men in the novel. The black men are considered as work horses because

of their hard work, they serve as a main support to the family. Women bear everything in life and take the stride in being responsible for themselves, their children, family and community unlike men who bear responsibility for themselves but for the physical strength they show. It is noticed very well that men run away from the place leaving the women at their mercy to bear the brunt, like Solomon in the novel.

"O Solomon don't leave me here
Cotton balls to choke me
O Solomon don't leave me here
Solomon cut across the sky, Solomon gone home.
Milkman hears Shalimar children singing these lyrics,
a part of Solomon's song." (Song of Solomon 493)

The song connects Milkman to his family's past and provides him with crucial stories about his grandfather, Jake, and his great-grandparents, Solomon and Ryna.

Solomon's song implies that when men free themselves from oppression they often leave women behind. The phrase "O Solomon don't leave me here" (Song of Solomon 488) describes Ryna's descent into desperation and madness as Solomon prepares for his flight. Although Solomon escapes slavery, his flight leaves Ryna to take care of their children while working in the cotton fields.

The theme of male liberation coming at the expense of female oppression is reflected in Milkman's relationship with Hagar, and recurs throughout Morrison's novel. Even though Solomon's flight dooms Ryna to abandonment and his children to be orphans, the song suggests that his flight is still a magnificent achievement. Solomon's song ends with a description of Solomon's flight rather than with a description of Ryna's deprivation.

This ending shows the ultimate triumph of liberation. As a result, when Milkman learns that the song is actually about his family, he is not saddened, but inspired. Though tainted by the pain of abandonment, Solomon's flight serves as an important part of Milkman's inheritance. After Solomon's story joins the cord of heritage, Milkman connects to his origin and is finally set to 'fly free', Morrison seems to be referring to it as a metaphorical and literal implication.

The focus of the study moves towards Solomon who cares about himself in the novel, he flew to Africa fearing to suffer from slavery without informing his wife Ryna, who was also a slave. She was left alone with her twenty one children to remain in Virginia and bear the rest of her sufferings while struggling to bring up her children.

Guitar's Grandmother is another strong character who was a victim of suffering in the novel. After the death of Guitar's father in a factory accident, she raises Guitar and his siblings and despite her ill health, she extends her support completely with finance, intellect and also at emotional level.

It is interesting to observe that the novel of Morrison glaringly isolates the young black girls and vividly presents the disruption of black's culture. Like Sula, Pilate leads a very unconventional life as a pariah. As an independent

strong woman she finds her way to collective consciousness of her family. Pilate undergoes the trauma of alienation and overcomes the crisis with her strength and develops a compassion for troubled people.

The study of women characters in the novel reveals their foremost share of oppression and sufferings which reflect the existential peril. The *Song of Solomon* transmits a strong message that the entire world is a product of wreck and cinders of unimaginable waste and loss, the enslavement of blacks and untold suffering.

The agony of the blacks directly or indirectly reveals the idea of black existentialism. Morrison's creative presentation of the characters like Milkman as a perverse man and his attitude towards women mirror the existential authenticity. His behavior of using women for his identity search involves and reveals the existential perils faced by women.

Morrison seems to be triumphant by creating a character like Pilate with unique traits. She is seen as a strong black woman who gives life to Milkman in the beginning by protecting him from his father's ire and the story successfully ends with the protection of Pilate who becomes a life giver to Milkman.

In spite of bearing all oppressions in her life, Pilate displays the persona of a superwoman. She is characterized as a woman of might, who endures the perils of life. A determined black lady with the quintessence of love she caters to different people in the family and the community. Pilate's adoration towards the family and the people sets an example of different roles played by woman to endorse ones family and the bond shared by them. It is enthralling to conclude that Morrison is successful in creating a character like Pilate in the novel, which reflects Pilate as a pathfinder for many.

She religiously performs her duty entrusted by her father Solomon by withstanding the agony of life. Through the display of such qualities of woman Morrison might have attempted to pass a message to the society to respect women and not to demean and lead woman to face horrendous situations in life.

This forbearance turns to be a sign of existential woes of women in the community and the society of the blacks. Morrison presents this novel with different perspectives. One can see it as a story of a black man who desperately attempts to know his past. It is interesting to note that, in the struggle to locate his roots, he ventures with the present which eventually helps him to redefine his future.

The well known critics and analysts look at the novel *Song of Solomon* as a novel which is eulogized for its rich texture and its functionalities. The novel functions on different manifolds, revolving round many myths and beliefs, for instance the theme of flights, which is used all through the novel in specific contexts. One may find the idea of flight spread through the novel in diverse contexts. For instance the flight of Mr. Smith contributes greatly to the intended effect:

"When the dead doctor's daughter saw Mr Smith emerge as promptly as he had promised from behind the cupola, his wide blue silk wings curved forward around his chest, she dropped her covered peck basket, spilling red velvet rose petals. The wind blew them about, up, down, and into small mounds of snow." (Song of Solomon 5)

This flight connects with the mythical flight of Solomon,

"O Sugarman done fly away

Sugarman done one

Sugarman cut across the sky

Sugarman gone home...." (Song of Solomon 6)

The people's reactions were strange and they were filled with apprehensions and came out with different conclusions. Some brought in spiritual connectivity; whereas a few considered it as a dream and a few more thought it as a way of life.

Morrison's intentions of introducing the flying myth of Africa and its impact on the society to the readers are clear in this initiation. It is well received in two-fold, one as fantasy and the other as myth. Further it is interesting to note that the people take their own time to relate it to reality in the novel. The flight of Mr Smith were received with apprehension, People mistook it for a racial uplift and some thought it is a worship, but the golden tooth of a man brought them to reality and reacted and gave orders to protect him. Apart from these flights Morrison throws light on literal flights such as birds, pilot and its references. More so with the flight of black people's history, flight from slavery, poverty and violence to the refined status after eradication of slavery, poverty and an oppression free life.

The characterization of Pilate as a lady with special feature of not having a navel (clear stomach) is a metaphorical flight introduced by the author. Morrison as a note worthy writer attempts to present the novel with rich texture and varied functions at diverse levels.

The novel boasts of the role played by the language. Interestingly, the song discloses the secret of the Milkman's past.

"Jake the only son of Solomon

Come booba yalle, come booba tambee

Whirled about and touched the sun

Come konka yalle, come konka tambee

Left that baby in a white man's house ...

Twenty one children, the last one Jake!

...

Solomon cut across the sky, Solomon gone home." (Song of Solomon 303)

Solomon in his search of his identity tries to understand the language and gets to his roots. At the same time he contemplates on the meaning of the song and finds his inheritance. More importantly the song reflects the blues of the Africans and the struggle towards existential issues. The blues in the form of song connects to the spiritual mode and emanates the African American Culture.

This cultural connectivity to the character carries a message of the writer to the readers and the African American

oppressed community. It can be considered as a call for the blacks to be more humane, unlike Milkman if their focus is refinement and manifestation towards growth and freedom. Milkman deciphers the song and reaches the meaning and finds his mission accomplished. His ability to overcome the challenges reflects the drive of a determined black who represents the entire race.

Interestingly, Milkman is able to reach his destiny only with the great support of the people around him. Through his dependability on the circumstances and the community, Morrison tries to throw light and educates the readers on the importance of the community in an individual's development. During his struggle of identity, he shows his callousness towards women and their relationship and also uses them to meet his pleasures. Towards the end of the novel, he seems to have enlightened with wisdom and refines himself and treats everyone good, He also expresses his repentance and incorporates changes in his behavior, it is judged with the instance of the preference he gives to meet Pilate first.

“Should I go home or go to Pilate's first?”

Out in the street, late at night with autumn air blowing cold off the lake, he tried to make up his mind. He was so eager for the sight of Pilate's face when he told her what he knew, he decided to see her first....

‘Pilate! He shouted, Have I got stuff to tell you!’

She turned around. Milkman opened his arms wide so he could hold all of her in a warm embrace. ‘Come here, sweetheart,’ he said grinning.” (Song of Solomon 331)

This behavior of Milkman comes as a rude shock to her and she encounters his changed behavior and responses in a cold and uncanny way. -Here Pilate's reaction of hitting him on his head with a wine bottle can be seen as a resistance and torment for his misdeeds. She knew very little about his changes.

Morrison encapsulates the novel, Song of Solomon as a souvenir to the readers with a blend of music, culture, myth, fantasy and reality. In the heterogeneous background of the present world, Morrison persistently gives some tips to be a human being with compassion. The importance to the ancestors, love for other fellow beings, tolerance, truthfulness are the qualities one should possess to be more refined and sought after human being in the community.

References

- [1] Ahrling, J. : Latin American Women's writing: Feminist Reading in Theory and Crisis. 8. < www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:419360/FULLTEXT01.pdf >.
- [2] Ann Beaulieu, Elizabeth: The Toni Morrison Encyclopaedia (Connecticut: Greenwood, 2003)15 June 2012 <https://archive.org/stream/.../TheToniMorrisonEncyclpedia_djvu.txt>.
- [3] Baker, A. R. : online dissertation “The Presence, Roles and Function of Grotesque in Toni Morrison's Novels,” may 2009, 24 Nov 2014
- [4] < dspace.lib.iup.edu:8080/dspace/bitstream/2069/.../Alyce+Baker-Putt.pdf>.
- [5] Loichol, Valerie, Orphan Narratives: The post Plantation Literature of Faulkner, Gilssant; Morrison and saint John Perse(Virginia: U of Virginia P, 2007) 228.
- [6] Morrison, Toni :Song of Solomon ,New York: vintage, 2004.
- [7] Morrison, Toni :Conversation with Toni Morrison (Mississippi: U p of Mississippi, 1994)
- [8] Pendery , David :“Conscious Experience and Representation in Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon,” 7.3(2006) 16 Nov.2014 <<https://blackboard.lincoln.ac.uk/bbcswebdav/users/.../pendery.html>>.
- [9] Pereira, Malin :Embodying Beauty: Twentieth Century American Women Writers' Aesthetics,(New York:Garland,2000)129.
- [10]Qasim. K. and Uzma Asmat, Morrison's Black Women's Quest for love: Politics of Heart in Song of Solomon 3.1(2012) 18 Nov. 2014 <<http://ijsse.com/sites/default/files/issues/2012./Papers/Paper-21.pdf>>.
- [11]Smith, Valerie :Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon: A Case book, ed. Jan Furman. (New York: Oxford U.P, 2003)
- [12]Susana Vega-González, "Memory and the Quest for Family History in One Hundred Years of Solitude and Song of Solomon" CLC Web: Comparative Literature and Culture 3.1 (2001)17 Nov 2014 <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol3/iss1/4>>.