

The Conflict between Nature Versus Civilization In Toni Morrison's "*Tar Baby*"

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ABSTRACT

We are identified by our roots and origin in society. In the life of every person his religion, his beliefs, his morals, his way of living and his family have an important role. One's place of birth and its environment plays an important role in building the character of the person. These ideas have been discussed in the present research paper, here the contradiction between nature and civilization, which has been going on since time immemorial, is discussed. In the novel, *Tar Baby* Morrison talks about the capitalist social system and racist Afro American class community differences. We have discussed how the capitalist economic system and racism ruined people's lives through its exploitative process just to expand its vast empire. We have discussed the evil that divides people in the name of class, community and race. The society was divided into different parts. Racism, sexism and class division which are the important product of capitalism hegemonized the Afro American society. In the novel *Tar Baby*, 1981 through the love story of Jadine and Son Morrison has portrayed the development of two different cultural backgrounds in society. Throwing light on the matter Eleanor Traylor comments that : *"It is a story of a man in search of nourishment and of a woman whose nourishing power, cut off from the story of a world where pretentious wars with authenticity and where people who live in the world must choose, for there are guides. And those guides throughout the fabulous fiction of Toni Morrison, are legion. They are, for instance, women who, like those of whom Tar Baby is dedicated, are representative of culture of a time, of a magnificence perpetually preserved in human history."* (149)

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Africans entered America as bonded labour. The slavery system that has been going on since ages, becomes a curse for the blacks and they remained slaves for the rest of their lives. The urge to become rich increased the evil of slavery. The Blacks are confronting the horrific consequences of it even today. The expansion of slavery took place at a very fast pace. The upper elite class of people started thinking that the slaves were their fiedom, and for their personal pleasure and convenience. High aristocrats treated the blacks brutally and the lives of innocent people were put on stake. Mbalia states regarding the same that *"the African's operation in American soil is unique, because it is "(...) oppression grounded in race and class (...)."*

Every person has to make some choices in life to live freely. Morrison has presented both of her characters with some shortcomings and some merits but it is up to the reader's discretion how they accept it. Here the cultural differences are presented in a very beautiful and alive form. The depiction leaves a deep impression on the minds of the readers. She has pictured the cultural complexes and the sensitive ideas with much precision and understanding, that is why Morrison's efforts are commendable.

In the novel *Tar Baby* the initial scenario is as follows: "a kind of laboratory where racial, familial, class and gender expectations (the latter points are here seen as subordinated to the issue of race) can be tested." Characters can be divided into two parts, in part one the people associated with nature are shown, who are deeply attached to their family values, tradition and origin. Son, the main character, is associated with nature and his community. He gives the details of his village to Jadine very eagerly, here is a description of it. *"Eloe." 'Eloe? What on earth is that? A town?' 'A town, yeah. '... 'No shacks in Eloe?' 'Houses. There are ninety houses in Eloe. All black' 'Black houses? 'Black people. No whites. No White people live in Eloe"* (172)

When Son goes to his village to meet his family, everyone hugs him lovingly. Jadine is completely ignorant of such rituals and did not understand how to behave and adjust with the things. She did not know anything about traditional customs because she was raised by her relatives in a modern way. She gets surprised when son's family didn't let them sleep together

because of their conservative views as they are still unmarried. She despised their traditional views and isolated herself from them, and from this the conflict between nature and civilization ensues which never let both of them be together happily.

It depicts the amalgamation of two civilizations and cultures, the group which represents civilization is a group of rich people. Valerian Street, a wealthy Candy manufacturer from Philadelphia is the head of the group. He and his wife Margaret Street, who was a famous beauty queen at a time, now spends their leisure time on the Isle Des chevaliers. These people belong to the white society of America. Gideon and Theresa belong to the community of nature who work as the gardener and washer man of the streets. Son also belongs to the native community, he escapes from a ship because he kills his wife and her lover and starts to live a Nomadic life as an outlaw. We can say he lives everywhere and nowhere. First he hides here and there, then in the house of the streets, after knowing about him Valerian gives him shelter as a guest in the house. Apart from these there are other members in the house as well. Sydney and the Ondine Child, who are their servant and cook, belong to the black community. They were very arrogant Philadelphia Negroes who hold the command of the house in their hands in real sense and keep their place in all the important decision of the house to maintain their dominance. They got so engrossed in the high aristocratic customs of their masters that they considered their own community and its people as disgusting, despicable and disrespectful. They used to feel ashamed of their own black community. Jadine's parents had died in her childhood, so she was brought up by the Streets. Valerian took care of all the expenses of her education and she got her master's degree from Sorbonne. She earned a lot of name and fame in the white society. She became a fashion model and she proved her beauty by appearing on the cover page of a famous fashion magazine of Elie. Despite not having blue eyes she lived up to the beauty dimensions of the white society and became a fashion icon.

On the contrary Son was raised in the black community and had a completely different outlook towards life. His principles, thinking pattern, customs and living habits are completely different from that of the Whites. They give more importance to collective values than to individualism. Although in the novel Son has been called an outlaw still he was attached to his community very deeply and his attachment was stronger than that of the roots of the Whites. Son has always been against casteism, racism and promoted communal harmony and values.

In Isle-des-chevaliers, Son started his business in the name of a fellow black man, to bring their identity to the forefront. Gideon and Theresa were working as servants under the rich Streets but their true identity was lost somewhere. Son made them realise that he too belongs to the same community as theirs and that they should be proud of their identity and existence.

Americans considered black to be brutish, ignorant and treated them like an animal in a barbaric manner. They used to think that the blacks are capable only of doing lowly and despicable odd jobs such as cleaning their toilets. We see a similar scene when Jadine saw Son hidden in her room, she unnecessarily alleges him that he wanted to rape her and calls him a Nigger. On this he gives a befitting reply and says why the girls always think that everyone wants to rape them. On his provocation she flares up and calls him an ape.

We see a complete contradiction in the views of Jadine and Son. Jadine gives importance to Western culture while Son gives paramount importance to the community values that can be understood through an example Wilfred D Samuels presents: *"His dread locked hair is more than chic; he is Africa's son the bearer of its culture and values its black Messiah come to save Jadine from the streets of Babylon."*(85) Jadine considers herself highly educated, sophisticated and despises the views of her own black community and considers them insignificant. She lives only for herself and considers herself self-sufficient. Keeping in mind the Afro American tradition and customs, when Ondine prayed to her to take care of her in old age she flatly refused by saying that *"Please don't need me now, now not. I can't parent now. I can not be needed now. Another time, please I have spent it all. Please don't need me now."* (Morrison, 280) Jadine is very selfish and very narrow-minded, her success and progress is everything for her. She doesn't care about family society or anything else, she considers culture as an obstacle in her development. Once she gets into an argument with son on the same topic and says that if he wants to lock himself in the orthodox views then he can, but he shouldn't expect her to follow the conservative ideas.

Jadine tries to stabilise her complete dominance over Son like a capitalist but he does not bow down before her and refuses to compromise with his community and personal values. Jadine considers money and fame as the purpose of her life at the very moment James Coleman says that she is *"an antithesis of the black folk and community values."*(64) Although Jadine considers herself a very modern and independent woman, she has full faith in her abilities and considers herself to be very beautiful, seductive and confident. She also thinks herself perfectly befitting to the White American society but when she goes to the supermarket to shop, to celebrate her success through a birthday party, a black woman in a yellow dress

humiliates her. The incident leaves her stunned. She does not understand why the women should adore and consider her superior. The yellow women incident kept her intimidated throughout the novel and compels her for self-reflection. At this moment the comment of Barbara Christian is worth mentioning *"Toni Morrison uses the image of the African woman in yellow dress as a symbol for the authenticity that the Jaded Jadine lack. It is this woman's inner strength, beauty that haunts Jadine's dream and throws her into such a state of confusion-cultural confusion."* (244)

Annoyed by Jadine, Son accuses her that she is dedicated only to his white master and is not loyal to him. He asks her to stop taking favours from him and should follow the rules of his black community. When she pressurises him to earn more money he refuses and prefers his simple life. Sun sees Jadine as the capitalists, denying their existence. At the end he finally returns to his people with a horseman on his never ending journey.

Although he loses Jadine in the end, he attains his fullness and lives the life of his choice. He upholds the cultural rules and regulations of his community and celebrates them. The attraction that Jadine and son had towards each other was only physical; both wanted to use each other and take control over each other's life. At the end both go to their own ways, at this juncture the comment of African American political leader Kwame Nkrumah is for worth mentioning which says *"Race is inextricably linked with class exploitation; in a racist-capitalist power structure, capitalist exploitation and race oppression are complementary, the removal of one ensures the removal of other."*

Thus through the novel, Morrison has conveyed the message about the harmful impact it leaves on the social and personal life of a black woman and her personality who tries to copy the middle class white society. The encounter with the lady with yellow dress makes her realise that she is unable to understand her own cultural beauty and its intensity. Through the paradox of nature and civilization, an attempt has been made to explain how the rejection of one's culture and heritage leaves terribly harmful consequences in one's life. . In the end Jadine finds herself all alone, although our personal differences sometimes bring us close, but our cultural differences can separate us completely from one another. Jadine and Son's relation had become a cancer for each other, it was suffocating for both of them. Jadine made an emphasis on son's life which affected their personal life badly. Son considers it an infringement of his personal liberty. Under the pressure of modernity his personal identity had been lost somewhere, that was being imposed on him. Both of them had their own different ideologies, none of which could be underestimated from each other. So in the end they decided that being happy is more important than to be together just to suffocate and suffer. At the end we can say that cultural background, one's family roots and ethics go with the person wherever he goes.

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