

# Research Innovator

International Multidisciplinary Research Journal



**Vol II Issue II : April 2015**

**Editor-In-Chief**

**Prof. K.N. Shelke**

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A Peer-Reviewed Refereed and Indexed International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

**Volume II Issue II: April – 2015**

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## Male Sufferers in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula* and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*

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### Abstract

Toni Morrison, the first African American woman to win the Nobel Prize for literature delineates the pains, sufferings and humiliation of the blacks in general and black women in particular. Whereas Arundhati Roy one of the most prestigious woman novelist on the map of Indian writing in English highlights the oppression and marginalization of the Dalits as well as women in India. Morrison has exposed the race, gender and class exploitation in her novels whereas Roy discusses the issues of male patriarchy as well as casteism. The objective of this research paper is to show the male characters as 'sufferers' The paper particularly studies the male characters in Toni Morrison's **The Bluest Eye**, **Sula** and Roy's **The God of Small Things** with the purpose to expose the ill effects of racism, classism and casteism upon their lives. The heavy burden of racism, classism and casteism has humiliated and traumatized them socially as well as mentally. They are 'sufferers' and lead a marginal existence throughout their lives.

**Key Words:** sufferers, exploited, racism, classism, humiliation casteism

Toni Morrison being true supporters of the African American women's tradition as well as a pioneer of the ideology of womanhood discusses the oppression, sufferings and marginalization of the blacks in general and black women in particular in her novels. As Dr. Sayed Mujahid observes about her writing: "Through her writing she offers the readers a fresh look at American history and the issue of cultural conflict, the outcome of cultural domination and the horrors and terrible repercussions of slavery without apology, without comment and without resolution." (29) On the other hand, Arundhati Roy the Booker Prize winning woman novelist in Indian writing in English delineates the sufferings and humiliation of the Dalits and downtrodden in her novels. As Bharatender Sheoran observes about

Roy's writing: "Her novel explores the caste system, gender difference and the police-politician relation that have existence in the country." (182)

As Bharatender Sheoran observes about Roy's writing: "Her novel explores the caste system, gender difference and the police-politician relation that have existence in the country." (182) Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970) primarily talks about the horrible effects of racism upon the lives of black's. The class factor has got a secondary concern in this novel. Whereas *Sula* (1973) is a woman's novel and speaks for women's freedom. Though in both of these novels the protagonists are females, Morrison delineates some of the male characters with the purpose to expose the helplessness of males in the atmosphere of racially

discriminated society. The society which is divided into two classes' i.e. blacks and whites. The whites are considered superior and the blacks are treated badly. The blacks are considered inferior in front of the whites. On the other hand in *The God of Small Things* (1997) Roy expose the hypocrisy of the Indian caste system which oppress and humiliate the poor Dalits in India.

In both of the respected Morrison's novels the black males live a very poor and secondary life. They are exploited and humiliated at the hands of the whites. They think themselves as ugly. . The Breed loves family in *The Bluest Eye* is such a family and Cholly Breedlove is portrayed as one of the sufferers in the novel .Since he is black he is seen as an unemployed youth. He is unable to get a stable job. The past of his life is very pathetic. As the narrator writes: "When Cholly was four days old, his mother wrapped him in two blankets and one newspaper and placed him on a junk heap by the railroad." (103) it shows his marginal existence in the African American society. He did not get parental care and nourishment. Therefore he too finds himself unable to provide love and shelter to his wife as well as his children Sammy and Pecola. After marriage with Pauline he could not live a happy life because of his poverty. Therefore, domestic violence becomes a daily issue of the house. The novelist portrays the family life of the blacks in 1920s where the black youth like Cholly becomes violent not against the whites but against their family members. The reason behind it was that they have conviction in their mind that they are poor and inferior. So being black, they don't dare to protest

against the oppression. They lived in a mental slavery. As the narrator writes: "The master had said, "You are ugly people". They had looked about themselves and saw nothing to contradict the statement; saw, in fact, support for it leaning at them from every billboard, every movie, every glances. 'Yes', they had said. "You are right." And they took the ugliness in their hands, threw it as a mantle over them, and went about the world over it." (28) It shows how the blacks were subjugated due to their color. Being black Cholly too went through various traumatic experiences in his life. The minute study of his past life clearly shows that it is only racism in America made him so insensitive and careless. He was humiliated by two white people when he was doing sex with country girl .The white men humiliated him and condemned his act. As the narrator writes: "I said, get on wid it .An' make it good nigger, make it good...with a violence born of total helplessness, he pulled her dress up, lowered his trouser and underwear." (116) the humiliation did a long impact on his mind. He felt very inferior in the society. So in order to show his supremacy as a male he oppresses his wife as well his daughter Pecola. Cholly is portrayed as a man who is goalless. He represents those who on the account of racism and classism are exploited and marginalized in the African American society.

Similarly like Cholly in *The Bluest Eye* there are other male characters like Shadrack, Jude, Plum and Ajax are the sufferers in *Sula* .All these male characters in *Sula* lead a miserable life. They are seen as victims of racism in America. Besides racism Morrison

deals with class exploitation in this novel. The class factor is essentially highlighted in the beginning of the novel. As the narrator writes: "In *Sula* Morrison shows the craftiness of the white masters and how they exploit the slaves. She gives detailed information of the humiliation of blacks under slavery. The blacks didn't have freedom but to follow the orders of the masters. As the narrator writes: "A good white farmer promised freedom and a piece of Bottom land to his slaves. He would perform some very difficult chores. When the slave completed the work, He asked the farmer to keep his end of the bargain...the objection of the slave was ruled out by the master with logic..." (14) The white masters fooled the blacks and compelled them to live as slaves. They considered themselves as superior than the blacks. The blacks too remain slaves for ages and didn't protest against their white master's. Thus in *Sula* the blacks just like in *The Bluest Eye* are seen victims of slavery. Through the characters of Shadrack, Jude and Plum Morrison shows the slavery and its ill effects upon the psyche of the blacks. Throughout the novel Cholly's character is not developed. His character symbolizes the black youth of 20s who does not have any hope to do something better in their life. The same thing is observed with Shadrak, Jude, Ajax and Plum in *Sula*. They too represent the failure of the black youth under the yoke of race and class exploitation and observed as 'sufferers'. Shadrack, Jude, Ajax and Plum of *Sula* resemble Cholly of *The Bluest Eye*. They are also frustrated due to the race and class exploitation. Ajax and Jude are the unemployed youth and like Cholly they

can't fulfill the requirements of the family. So Ajax does not like to settle with Sula and Jude who is already married with Nel betrays her due to the frustration he goes through. Jude is seen as a victim in the aftermath of world war I. he was one of those, "young black men who could tear that road up. The men like Jude who could do real work...his feet wanted the heavy work shoes ... I built that road, he could say." (81- 82) Jude is a man who faced the unemployment at the earlier stage of his life. His dream of doing something worthy was shattered and it made a terrible impact on him. He too like Cholly in *The Bluest Eye* became the victim of racism "It was after he stood in line for six days running and saw the gang boss pick out thin armed white boys...and heard over and over' nothing else today, come back tomorrow, he got the message." (82-82) Here he is the victim of racism in America which did not provide the blacks any opportunity in the work. Jude and Ajax are seen as victims of the power structures in white American society which don't provide proper place to the black men in jobs. As Abha Jain observes: "They are trapped by society's restrictions that thwart their dreams of achieving a meaningful existence." (15)

Both Shadrack and Plum in *Sula*, the war veterans are shown as victims of racial discrimination and helpless before the rigidity of social laws of white hegemony. After returning from war they are not recognized and live a solitary life. Morrison introduces Shadrack in the very early pages of the novel in order to expose the ugly reality in the lives of the black men in general and the black soldiers in particular.

As a soldier he fought for the country but when he returns from the war his service is considered as private. Fredric Jameson labels this experience in his book as follows: "...that structural, experimental and conceptual gap between the public and the private between history and society, and the individual, which the tangential law of social life under capitalism maims our existence as individual subjects and paralyses our thinking about time and change just as surely as it alienates us from the speech itself." (20) Shadrack's character is very ambiguous in the novel. He is not observed as a normal human being. As the narrator writes about him: "his eyes were so wild his hair so long, his voice so full of authority and thunder that he caused panic on the first or charter, National Suicide Day in 1920...on Tuesday and Friday he sold the fish he had caught that morning and the rest of the week he was drunk, loud, obscene, funny, outrageous." (151) Morrison has depicted him as a youth who affected terribly by the experiences of war. His character is of round type and it undergoes no development. Willis Susan observes about his character: "To be more explicit, Shadrack represents the impinging of the outside world on the black people of Medallion through war, the army being the first of capitalism's modern industrial machine to incorporate black men." (276) Shadrack .a war veteran lives a life of a neglected individual. He is portrayed as a man who fought for the nation in a war but still did not get any recognition. He tries to find out his roots in The African American Society .But the racism in America did not care about his sacrifice. As the narrator

writes : " Blasted and astonished by the events of 1917,he had returned to Medallion handsome but ravaged and even the most fastidious people in the town sometimes caught themselves dreaming of what he must have been like a few years back before he went off to war. A young man of twenty, his head full of nothing and his mouth, recalling the taste of lipstick..." (07) The war experiences were very torturous for the blacks .After war too they were not properly treated. In the novel *Sula* Shadrack is harassed and humiliated at the hands of police who "took him to jail, booked him for vagrancy and intoxication, and locked him in a cell." (13)

Plum too is affected due to his experiences of war. Her mother Eva burns him to death in order to make him free from all the anxieties in the novel. About the death of Plum Maureen Reddy writes : " The death of the nameless soldier and of Plum Peace are results of world war I, as the blame for Plum's death on Eva who soaks him with Kerosene and lights the match but on those horrors he experienced in war that drove him to see oblivion through heroin." (31) Thus Shadrack and Plum are the sufferers in the novel on the account of race. Their characters stand for the falsehood of racist ideology of the military, which is failed to provide human status to the black soldiers. Thus, Cholly in *The Bluest Eye* and Shadrack, Jude, Plum and Ajax in *Sula* are the male characters who suffer due to the race and class exploitation .They remain neglected and inferior in their life. They don't have any hope to live a meaningful life. Morrison shows the sufferings and humiliation of the black males in these two

respected novels which reflect them as 'sufferers'. Similarly like *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula* the male characters Velutha and his father Vellya Pappen in *The God of Small Things* who are Dalits lead a marginal existence. They are helpless before the rigid laws of the society. Just like racism in America the caste system in India made them vulnerable and they did not find any solution to tackle it.

Velutha, the untouchable, the male character of *The God of Small Things* did what he was not socially supposed to do that is to love Ammu, an upper caste, a Syrian Christian, as well as a divorcee, mother of two children. The society does not sanction their love. They are condemned on the account of breaking the social code of behavior or love laws. Velutha, being an untouchable is exploited and humiliated at the hands of high-caste people. Neglected and unwanted individuals, both they begin to love each other and enjoy a short happy life. But their relationship is bound to be broken and this happens eventually. Velutha's father is terror stricken to see "what his Untouchable son had touched. More than touched." (78) The past of the untouchables is very well reflected in the novel. It is Christianity, they have been treated as untouchables or Dalits. About the word

'Dalit' R.G. Jadhav writes: "Dalit is a Sanskrit word and means downtrodden, or oppressed or exploited or condemned to peripheral leavings." (39) After conversion into Christianity also their condition is the same as an outcaste. They were called as Rice Christians. Officially on paper they were Christians and therefore casteless.

Oppression and humiliation for ages makes Velutha's father, Vellya Pappen too timid to stand against the high castes. He is humiliated, oppressed and exploited by his high-caste masters. In spite of his superior skills in carpentry, Veutha is paid less than the touchable carpenters. He is not entertained and accepted as a fellow worker by the touchable workers. It throws light upon the shabby nature of Mammachi and the touchable workers.

Thus, Cholly of *the Bluest Eye*; Shadrack, Plum, and Jude of *Sula* and Velutha and his father, Vellya Pappen in *The God of Small Things* are the 'sufferers' in the novel. They are similarly the victims and have been considered inferior due to the falsehood and rigidity of the social norms of racism. Classism and casteism.

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