The Dead Family: Familial Dysfunction in Toni Morrison's Bildungsroman novel, Song of Solomon

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***Abstract*—Toni Morrison became the first Black woman to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature. Her works have been a source of transformation in its writing and rewriting of black life, its history and culture. Toni Morrison's novels touch and explain deeply on the domestic ideas like family, culture and relationships. The author develops on the serious matter of familial dysfunction of the African- American community in her works, especially *Song of Solomon* and *Sula*. This paper focuses on the deterioration of family relations in *Song of Solomon*. *Song of Solomon* explains Morrison's attachment to black life, culture and relationships and scrutinizes the role of African Americans in relation to white society, the slavery and the experience of blacks in America. Hence this paper which follows the psychoanalytic method unwinds the plight of people who struggle in dysfunctional social set-up and the trauma and pain of the characters, both physically and psychologically.**

***Index Terms*—Familial Dysfunction, Isolation, domestic violence, Psychological and personality disorder.**

I. INTRODUCTION

*Song of Solomon*begins in 1930s America where the story revolves around Macon Dead Junior, the son of Macon Dead II, the wealthy black property owner. This novel presents dysfunctionality and one can take this theme as one of the primary themes as the concept of family is important for any social set-up. This dysfunction also leads to the poor development of schizophrenia. All the characters grow up in the dysfunctional milieu. The protagonist Milkman, otherwise called Macon Dead III suffers surrounded by an improper unloving family and gets into realisation at the end through his familial tyranny.

In *Song of Solomon*, the characters of the Dead family, including the parents, Macon and Ruth, and their children, are severely affected by the aftermath(s) of domestic violence and personal conflicts which make them feel constrained and complicated to even settle intheir own place and keep them aloof from being in a good relationship with the society. Because of this stressed set-up, the Dead family members become isolated. This makes the readers feel that they are removed from the society. Problems occur when there are differences in opinions, violence, disrespect, personal disorders, favouritism and anything that affects a person. Undeniably, one can see the problems and conflicts everywhere in the novel. Each and every character in the novel is connected figuratively by the problems i.e., there is no lack in hatred. Problems are progressive and permanent in the family of Dead.

A good family is made and not given. Its up to the parents when it comes to the upbringing. But the problems become many step worser if the parents themselves are already spoiled. Macon and Ruth are dysfunctional parents. Macon lost his mother when she was giving birth to his sister, Pilate. This suffering is too early to undergo. To Psychologically analyse, even at the beginning of Macon's life, the set-up is ruptured. He might not have known the importance of family or the 'family's love' without his mother teaching him or to be exact, showing him. But as and when growing, he would have witnessed love and that should have changed him a good man. But because of the destruction of the base, he, unfortunately, is unaware of the familial relationships. The character might have undergone severe loneliness, abuse from the society,

abashments, failures and so on. Even here, the character is not to be blamed. But at the same time, humans have to grow knowing about things and learning about things. Macon makes the reader feel inefficient in claiming the humanity. Ruth, who lost his caring father, feels bereaved and gets an unhappy husband. Her only affectionate person was her father and thereby the concept of love ends there and the concept of hatred begins with her life partner, Macon. A husband should pay respect, love and has to understand her in order to make a fruitful family. Macon fails in it. Ruth, being delicate could not voice out as she feels tied up in his family. She is a subaltern in her husband's house. As a dysfunctional husband, he uses obscene language, threatens her, smashes her and puts her to domestic violence every day. He makes himself powerful by dominating her and excelling in punishing her. Generally, this sadistic thought prevails in every male chauvinistic individual which makes the familial institution and the society destructive.

Another inherent trait obvious in most of the people like Macon is to be rich. The man who lacks his interest in showing love and affection toward his family shows affection towards amassing wealth. He even marries Ruth not out of interest towards her but out of interest towards the wealth of her father, Dr. Foster. Traumatized by seeing his father murdered, Macon Dead II has developed an obsession with becoming wealthy. Again, the psychological balance is suppressed.

Tracking the Milkman's life, who is the protagonist of the novel, he is no any different from the so-called men. He is a selfish young man in the beginning. Although he has a good family background and a wealthy family, he feels alienated from the African-American society and the humanity, in general. He is different from others. As he has undersized leg, he has been treated differently. But he manages this dysfunction by securing interests in other things. Even when his family shows affection, he refuses to do so in return. He remains a selfish adamant young man in the society. Milkman is a loveless product of his parents' estrangement and self-serving atmosphere. This distorted personality is not because of the family but may be because of the abuses and slavery, generations after generations. But Milkman realises his self when he gets to learn the past happenings of his family.

Family is an important institution that forms a whole world. It is the building block of the society. Being together is better than being aloof. Family, primarily, is a fundamental unit of the society without which the world is nothing. Through persons, family is made, with family, a society is formed and with society, the world is united. So, the living or the base of living is the familial structure, a beautiful creation and God's one of the greatest blessings. Not only in African-American community could one see the lack of proper familial connection but as of today, the entire world is in the list now. The importance of family has taken flight completely. In general, from the family, all other relationshipsstem. But in today's world, the essence is effacing. All other relationships are seen predominantly except for the family.

Even though there are complexities in the characters, mainly in Macon, his life can be considered to be a bildungsroman- a novel that talks about the hero's formative years. Moreover, the names of the characters function synonymous to their actions. The lifelessness in the family's name 'Dead' is seen apparently in their lives. They are dead in thoughts, actions, love and affection in significant areas. Hence, Toni Morrison clearly shows how dysfunction within the domestic construction destructs the outside communityand demolishes psychological development through her novel.

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