

Rethinking South Literatures And Cultures With Special Reference To The Role Of The Diasporic Writers Keeping In Light The Growing Acculturation

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Abstract

This research paper is focusing on the prominent Diasporaic literatures and cultures that have been born from the pen of the South American aboriginals who were the writers who basically belonged to the region of the Southern United States. Topic of the paper presentation is “Rethinking South Literatures and Cultures with special reference to the role of the Diasporic writers keeping in light the growing acculturation”. The literature of the South is filled with issues and questions pertaining to race, class and gender. South always has had a hierarchical structure if we view it historically. On the grounds of race and class, followed by gender, there existed discrimination and this is what that those writers felt should come into the limelight of the global humanistic society. The awareness and arousal of the masses across the globe was very much required. Had these writers not written on these issues, the world probably would have remained in darkness for ages. Their role cannot simply be overlooked, not only from the literary angles, but also psychologically and socially.

This research paper tries to re-think the South Literatures and cultures in the light of the prominent American writer Toni Morrison’s novel, “Song of Solomon” as my research methodology to analyze and rethink in detailed light the condition of the Southern society in the then contemporary times when this novel was written back in 1977.

Introduction

Literature

Literature is a form of human expression. A body of written works. The name has traditionally been applied to those imaginative works of poetry and prose distinguished by the intentions of the authors and the perceived aesthetic excellence of their execution. Literature may be classified

according to a variety of systems, including language, national origin, historic period, genre and subject matter.

Nineteenth-Century South Literature

The 19th century can be classified as a period of “foundational fictions” according to critic Doris Sommer. The literary movements of the nineteenth century in Latin America range from Neoclassicism at the beginning of the century to Romanticism in the middle of the century, to Realism and Naturalism in the final third of the century, and finally to the invention of Modernismo, a distinctly Latin literary movement, at the end of the nineteenth century. In the late 19th century, modernism emerged, a poetic movement which was founded by Nicaraguan Ruben Dario through his foundation text *Azul*(1888). This was the first Latin American literary movement to influence literary culture outside of the region, and was also the first truly Latin American literature.

Southern Literatures and its growth

South Literature or Latin American Literature consists of the oral and written literature of Southern America in several languages, to be particular we can consider Spanish, Portuguese and indigenous languages of the Americans, the most widely spoken being Southern Quechua, with about 6 to 7 million speakers, primarily in South America.

Southern culture and literature rose to global prominence in the later half of the 20th century, when both the World Wars (WWI – 1914-1918 and WWII -1939-1945) were over. This happened largely due to the extraordinary spread and success on an international scale of Magic Realism. Nowadays, magical realism can be found in most of the prominent art forms across the globe, however this literary movement was first spread by Latin American authors. In particular from these South American writers only, the literary movement of Magic realism is often emphasized as a genre of political subversion. In the light of continued exploitation and the wake of struggle, this literary form had once started taking shape. Magic realism is defined by contradiction. On either hands it held reality with the extraordinary and supernatural. It is such a kind of literary movement, that mingled mundane and fantastic things altogether and reflected the very fact that how even if life is trivial, it can get pretty fantastic quickly. While Magic Realism has its roots in older literary movements such as to name Realism, it only exploded on a worldwide scale in the period of 1960's, when numbers of Latin American writers began pushing the boundaries of reality, often with artistic and political aims behind. Before, magical realism, we cannot think fantasy to be of political nature. But, with the advent of Magic realism, the conceptions started to change, as we could see a genre of political subversion mixed with elements of fantasy and supernatural, extraordinary things in Southern Literature Culture. As such the region's literature is often associated solely with this style, with the 20th Century literary movement known as Latin American Boom, and with its most famous exponent, Gabriel Garcia Marquez. Latin American literature has a rich and complex tradition of literary production that dates back many centuries.

Review of Literature

According to **Gerry Venstra (2011)**, Sizeable health inequalities by race, gender, and class have been recorded in Canada. Consistent with traditional sociological understandings of social inequality, these axes of inequality have for the most part been considered individually, with researchers only considering potential interconnectedness when investigating whether class mediates associations between race and health or gender and health. Whether class influences health differently for visible minority Canadians and White Canadians or race influences health differently for men and women, for example, has not been investigated. Intersectionality theory presents a new way of understanding social inequalities that possess potential to uncover and explicate previously unknown health inequalities.

In the forward to a recent book on new theories and methods of studying race, class and gender, Lynn Weber describes the American women of colour in the 1970s and early 1980s, many from working class backgrounds, came to critique the patriarchy tradition within gender studies for privileging gender over race and class (and subsequently critiqued the stratification for privileging class over gender and race etc.) Power relationships along the lines of gender, race and class were thought to be mutually defining and mutually reinforcing rather than analytically distinct systems of oppression, together forming a “matrix of domination.” “Race, class, gender and sexuality are not reducible to individual attributes to be measured and assessed for their separate contribution in explaining social outcomes, an approach that Elizabeth Spelman calls “pop-bead metaphysics” where a women’s identity consists of the sum of the parts neatly divisible from one another. The matrix of domination seeks to account for the multiple ways that women experience themselves as gendered, raced, classed and sexualized.”

Objective/Purpose of My Research

The research aims to purposively bring forth the brutalities and triple exploitation that has had to be faced by the people living in the southern regions of the United States during the period after the Second World War, i.e. in the second half of the 20th century, by utilizing prominent diasporic Afro-American writer Toni Morrison’s novel *Song of Solomon*, which was published in the year 1977.

Justification

Unlike others, by utilizing one of the prominent works in South literature by Toni Morrison, namely the novel *Song of Solomon*, in context to the significance of telling the diasporic tales impacting, the growth of acculturation and enlightened awareness amongst the masses living worldwide, this research paper is aimed at systematically analyzing the injustice meted out to the South American people on the basis of race, gender and class identities as such in the decades of 60’s and 70’s prominently.

Research Methodology: Song of Solomon

Song of Solomon is a novel of 1977 penned by prominent American author Toni Morrison. The book follows the life of Macon “Milkman” Dead III, an African American man living in Michigan, since birth till adulthood.

The novel has won many acclaims. To prominently name one, it won National Books Critics Award and this book only rewarded Toni Morrison with a Nobel Prize in literature in the year 1993. In 1998, the novel *Song of Solomon* was named as the 25th best English language novel of the 20th century by Radcliffe Publishing Course. *Song of Solomon* focuses on the African-American experience in the United States over four generations. The novel examines the legends and folklore that tell the story of slaves who flew off to Africa. It also deals with the Great Migration (the movement of Southern Blacks into other parts of the country) that took place following the Civil War and the urban individualistic mindset that was beginning to characterize the urban America in the 1960s.

The novel has been popular for being able to zoom in telescopically on the black experience in America, but to also embrace and discuss universal or globally relevant themes, ideas and concepts that affect every human till date. Themes like love, loss, friendship, and the search for identity. The writer of the novel *Song of Solomon*, Toni Morrison herself says, "I want the reader to respond on the same plane as an illiterate or preliterate reader would. I want to subvert his traditional comfort so that he may experience an unorthodox one: that of being in the company of his own solitary imagination."

Song of Solomon is about the search for the I, and when Milkman finds it, or comes close to it at the end of the novel, the shoulds, the caring, and the whys follow. In pursuing the I, the world opens up for Milkman. What begins as a quest for one thing (gold) leads to the revelation of much more (his family, his people, his values). At the end of the novel, we can ask ourselves why Milkman jumps, why Guitar shoots Pilate, why the novel ends where it does, but, dang it all, we don't get an answer, because there is no one answer.

Analysis

In *Song of Solomon*, we find Mercy Hospital as No Mercy hospital amongst locals as it did not admit black people; we also do find Mains avenue commonly labeled as Not Doctor Street as a Black Physician Dr.Foster once lived and practiced there. A complete racial discrimination is observed.

Central elements of the *Song of Solomon* are the theme of flight: the complex interplay of class, race and gender; and the significance of names. Mercy Hospital's unmerciful rejection of black patients and the white nurse's haughty attitude toward Guitar show that in addition to their individual problems, all the characters face racism every day. This reflects the exact scenario that ran in the decades of the 60's and 70's with the blacks living in South America. We also do find the concept of slavery for the blacks, black slaves as bonded human labour. The conceptual idea behind a character in the novel, named Robert Smith, a North Carolina Mutual Life insurance agent and his eventual disastrous death being unable to fly with blue silk wings off a hospital roof, represents, how the black slaves were transported to Africa, actually deported, because they were treated or seen as foreigners in the eyes of the law of their very country, the United States and how they eventually ended up dying, working as bonded labourers, slaves, away from their motherland, their family, friends and all the other loved, near and dear ones. A second-hand

treatment was given to them, unlike the whites. A very prominent common theme in the Southern literature is slavery, which has been found in the writings from the states of South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, North Carolina, Virginia, Tennessee, Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas, Oklahoma, Kentucky, West Virginia and Arkansas. Other such common main themes include the American Civil War, and Reconstruction. South's troubled history with racial issues has also been a major theme in its literature. In many parts of the world still, the issue of race and racial discrimination has still not been overcome; and in this era of growing acculturation, we need to look back on the significance of south literatures that talks about the equality of all human beings, treatment of all humans as equals, as the children of God.

Song of Solomon reflects an unlearning and learning process. It portrays an escape from a cultural prison, a psychology, a mindset. The novel talks about flight. Not the flight, that is from any geographical location, or any particular place, but from within; transporting oneself into a different realm, having a different opinion, a mindset that would lead doors into spirituality. A thoughtful mind would transcend one onto a higher realm of thought knowing what actually humanity is. Through the protagonist of the novel *Milkman Dead*, also known by the name of Macon Dead III, writer Toni Morrison has beautifully brought into the limelight, what goes within one's own self. An individual's circumstances forces him, restrains or chains him, or even gives him courage for that extra push required for a happy, healthy and mentally and socially peaceful life. After all, an individual's well-being is the most necessary thing. Ups and downs are a part and parcel of life. Such a cycle, will continue, no matter what and whatever does anyone do in regard to improve his social and familial or personal condition and relations.

Almost all the characters in *Song of Solomon* are black. The few white characters represent violence and wrongdoings. For instance, after Guitar's father is cut in half during a saw mill accident, the mill's white foreman offers almost neither sympathy, nor does he provide them with any kind of financial support. Likewise, Circle's wealthy white employers, the Butlers, are murderers. When they take Macon Dead I's land, they end his children's innocence. We can even see the heightened level of white's oppression in *Song of Solomon*. Even white animals were used as white characters carrying negative connotations. A white bull causes Freddie's mother to go into labor and die. The bull's interference with Freddie's birth represents white people's devastating interference with the African-American world. The white peacock in *Song of Solomon* that causes Guitar and Milkman to become infatuated with the pursuit of wealth represents the corrupting influence of greed that the white's possessed and to meet their ends, or to fulfill their lust for wealth, they could reach any heights of injustice, subjugation and oppression.

We find novelist Toni Morrison, is an Afro-American herself and that might be a major reason for her close observance of that world of experience, which the others, might have not to face. The blacks were even unaware of their fundamental rights. Morrison brought awareness amongst the blacks that they were being oppressed, subjugated and exploited and it's high time to raise their voice against this injustice meted out to them by the white Americans since decades and also brought in the limelight of the global world, the true face of the White Americans of the decades 1960's and 70's, which might have remained unnoticed, had she not penned down this

novel *Song of Solomon* and the issue is still very much relevant in the contemporary times in many regions, many parts across the globe.

Conclusion

Song of Solomon takes off, and finally comes back to earth, with an exhilarating leap of danger. The idea of 'fly' and 'flight' (as an escape or challenge) runs through the story of Macon Dead III, popular as Milkman who gets his nickname from being breastfed into childhood by his dominant mother.

From the arresting first scene of an insurance agent's suicidal leap, to the closing pages, when Milkman hurls himself into the air against his best friend and nemesis, Guitar, the novel traces Milkman's coming of age as an African-American in search of a better understanding of his heritage. To achieve this, in a telling reversal of traditional black migration, Milkman makes his way to the warm and nurturing south from the frozen and alienating north.

The novel is partly set in an unspecified Michigan town, and the unfolding story, replete with buried treasure, violent deaths and slavery tales, moves steadily south to Pennsylvania, where Milkman's grandfather had died, and finally to Shalimar in Virginia, the home of his slave ancestors.

Where, in the first and northern half of the novel, Milkman battles his origins, in the south he embraces them, and by the end is at one with his roots.

Song of Solomon, is full of characters, especially Milkman's mysterious sister, Pilate, whose symbolic lives play an important role in the weaving of Morrison's narrative. The story loops and swoops, in its evocation of the black American experience in the 20th century, expressing a complex literary surface in a musical and often poetic language that's infused with the rhythms of African American speech and song. Morrison has acknowledged that *Song of Solomon* liberated her from traditional models in her writing. In a style she would perfect in novels such as *Beloved*, Morrison conjures her tale from many voices and stories. The overall effect is a kaleidoscope of many gorgeous colours and patterns, evocative of memory and history, and actualized through the compelling figure of Macon Dead, one of the great characters of contemporary American fiction.

For novelist Morrison, American literature has become "totalized – as though there is only one version. We are not one indistinguishable block of people who always behave the same way... She tries to give some credibility to all sorts of voices, each of which is profoundly different because what strikes her about African-American culture is its variety."

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