

Vol 2 Issue 11 May 2013

Impact Factor : 1.2018 (GISI)

ISSN No :2231-5063

Monthly Multidisciplinary
Research Journal

*Golden Research
Thoughts*

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IMPACT FACTOR : 0.2105

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RNI MAHMUL/2011/38595

ISSN No.2230-7850

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SONG OF SOLOMON : THE REJUVENATION OF LEGACY

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Abstract:

The eventual pursuit for self and its accomplishment is found in Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon (1977) an award winning novel. It narrates the hero's search for cultural identity. Milkman's journey explains the importance of the historical and cultural self and his responsibility to reconnect the loose historical cords of his memory. The quest of the hero built in bildungsroman is combined with the identity theme. Sexism is subservient to racism and capitalism in Song of Solomon because Toni Morrison realizes the fact, that the exploitation of African woman is the result of black man's national and class oppression. National and class oppression is experienced by the African in the United States. The African female is exploited by the African male due to this oppression. Toni Morrison's awareness enables her to create Pilate, a female protagonist, who takes pride and dignity in her Africanness. It is Pilate who teaches Milkman the first lesson in race and class consciousness. Mentors are 'the secondary characters who help the protagonist as lovers, educators and friends.

KEYWORDS:

legacy, oppression, consciousness, survival, myth, quest, flight, compassion, steers.

INTRODUCTION

Toni Morrison creates a protagonist whose survival depends on his improvement of people's consciousness. "Song of Solomon offers names, riddles or clues to legacy as song, Shalimar, Sugar man" (Genevieve Fabre, *The Quest for Legacy in Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon*, p.109). When the protagonist gains this knowledge he changes his view of women permanently and respects them. For better understanding of the protagonists, their growth is to be observed through three interconnected developmental stages. Milkman's ignorance of his people's race and class oppression is shown in his nickname 'Milkman'.

Toni Morrison expresses her purpose in creating Pilate without a navel because she wishes Pilate to be self-invented as revealed in her conversation with Claudia Tate: "I was trying to draw the character of a sister to a man, a sister who was different, and part of my visualization of her included that she had no navel. Then it became an enormous thing for her. It also had to come at the beginning of the book so the reader would know to expect anything of her. It had to be a thing that was very powerful in its absence but of no consequence in its presence. It couldn't be anything grotesque, but something to set her apart, to make her literally invent herself." (Claudia Tate, "Toni Morrison," *Black Women Writers at Work*, p.128).

Pilate steers Milkman in a conscious direction. Considering Pilate as a model, he must realize that happiness cannot be ensured by money alone and learn to respect his African self. Like a savior dead, Pilate breathes life into Milkman. His embarrassment is represented by his fascination for flying. He lives the

limbo life in a confused state whether to go forward, to find out the roots of his ancestors or to turn back to his past life. "Pilate's close connection with the elements of nature like earth and the sky, teaches Milkman in new ways of seeing" (Karen Carmean, Toni Morrison's World of Fiction, p.51) His short limb is symbolic of his confusion, which clearly indicates it is shortness of his mind than the actual fact.

Macon Dead's capitalist philosophy to "own things" (Song of Solomon, 55) becomes the essence of Milkman's life in initial stages. Milkman's death wish is a phase which is necessary for his development. His race and class consciousness develops along with his development, because he believes that his short limb was 'mostly in his mind.' He sees more life and dignity in his aunt Pilate than in his father. His language develops like his race and class consciousness. When he gains the ability to laugh at himself, he prefers natural world to material world and becomes a balanced individual psychologically.

His physical descent into a cave signifies baptism and an impending rebirth, both are experienced by Milkman. As he has revolutionized his consciousness, he leaves his past sexist views of women. He realizes that his pissing on Lena is just pissing on himself. His sexual exploitation and murder of Hagar are considered Milkman murdering and exploiting himself. "He finds that his quest is his culture "he can only discover what he is by discovering what his family is" (Cynthia A. Davis, "Self, Society and Myth in Toni Morrison's Fiction", p.221). With this new consciousness acquired through humanism and egalitarianism he becomes the pilot, the source of life. Thus he becomes a person who carries the source of life for the people who are in need.

Flight :

Flight is used as a structure for the total text. Song of Solomon begins and ends with unsuccessful flights. It begins with Robert Smith's flight and ends with Milkman's flight. The African flight suggests 'the ability to fly without ever leaving the ground.' Death of Smith and Milkman's birth occur simultaneously to magnify the concept of flight and structural relationships between the two characters.

The first part of novel records Milkman's lack of consciousness in race and class. Second part exposes his developing consciousness regarding race and class. Third part deals with the participation in ritual reciprocity with Sweet, his bosom friend. Equal relations and equal actions occur in this part. Toni Morrison's theme that "you can never go off and leave a body" (Song of Solomon, 147) is exposed clearly in Milkman's understanding the concept of flight.

Theme: Milkman's unintentional search for identity is the main theme of Song of Solomon. According to Philip Royster, "Milkman's identity is depicted by a series of episodes during which he discovers his relationship to his family" (Philip M. Royster, "Milkman's flying: The Scape goat Transcended in Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon," p.419). The irreconcilability of the assumptions and the demands of the life in African-American communities are clearly demonstrated in the depiction of Macon Dead's family.

Pilate Dead's, household is predominantly female. Macon's family relationships are determined by his love of property and money, while Pilate's relations are filled with compassion, respect and generosity among her family members. Pilate disregards status, hygiene conditions and manners of American society. Contrasting Macon Dead's 'barren' family, Pilate's family flurries with 'energy and sensuality.' As Macon Jr. hears the song of Pilate he is comforted by the soothing motion of the song.

Pilate, the Janitor of Culture:

Pilate's character has transcended the boundaries of her historical milieu. Pilate is born without a navel. Lack of her navel isolates her from society, who shuns her. Pilate tackled the problem of trying to decide how she wanted to live and what was valuable to her. "When am I happy and when am I sad what is the difference? What do I need to stay alive? What is true in the world?" (Song of Solomon, 149) Her independence of others is symbolized by her physical condition. Even as a fetus she did not depend on another person for her survival. She too is self-made like Macon Dead, her self-creations withdraws her from the American myth. Pilate's self-reliance empowers her to, "throw away every assumption she had learned and begin at zero" (Song of Solomon, 149). Macon considers only the financial profits excusing his own corruption. Contrastingly Pilate has a cyclical and expansive vision of time. She carries her past in the form of songs, stories and a bag of bones. Barbara Christian argues that, Toni Morrison's novels are not just about "how a character's life is connected to their communities value system" (Barbara Christiana, "Community and Nature: The Novels of Toni Morrison", p.65).

Pilate always believes that a person's identity is grounded in the capacity to look back to the past and assimilate the past with the present. The similarity between Macon's idea of the world and his own idea are indicated in his (Milkman's) search for gold. With his new awareness of past he realizes his insensitivity

to Hagar and he tries to understand Hagar posthumously. He learns that his letter is not appropriate and accepts the burden of her death. Milkman carrying Hagar's hair in a box is a symbol of his cyclical vision of past which he does not want to escape. With his gradual growth in self-awareness he becomes accustomed to nature's rhythms. On his return to the town he becomes part of the "rock and soil." As he becomes a part of the soil, his limp disappears (Song of Solomon, p.281).

Milkman's discovery of identity lies in the fact that he is able to learn the family song completely, understand it and sing it totally. In his achieving flight he discovers he is able to attain his dreams. Thus, the American concept of self is exploded by Milkman as he replaces the past concept with the richness and complexity of accumulative sense of identity.

Ruth Dead starves for affection because she cannot find affection in the sexually unavailable Macon. Milkman's perverted view of woman is the result of his aggressive attitude towards his father, along with his adhering to his mother's and jealous sister's behavior. Milkman has never deemed Ruth as an individual woman. Milkman is attracted to Hagar, Pilate's granddaughter, because he feels the replacement of same symbolic bond which originated in his early attachment to his possessive mother. Both Ruth and Hagar starve for a sense of being needed by Milkman to prove their existence. As their love is not reciprocated, it becomes a prison. Hagar claims that Milkman "I am his" (Song of Solomon, p.137) in this world, whereas Ruth Dead counters "He is my home" (Song of Solomon, p. 137).

The predicament of Hagar is that Milkman leaves her after a relationship of twelve years. Unable to face the predicament she dies of grief. The presence of psychological void within Hagar is confirmed with her death. Hagar's predicament is the result of her obsessive attachment with Milkman. Contrarily, Pilate is neither dependent nor attached to anyone.

Pilate, The Numinous Woman (The Spiritual Woman):

The emotional dependencies, which are the characteristics of Dead women, are not found in Pilate. Lack of navel represents a unique freedom to her. Because of this unique feature, people believe her to be supernatural woman with evil power. "Her natural healing powers, her reputed capability to "step out of her skin", and her ability to fly "without ever leaving the ground" indicates that she is a witch" (Thomas Rogers Forbes, *The Midwife and the Witch*, p.118). Though Pilate is orphaned in early childhood, she feels totally separated from other people because of her circumstances. Her separatedness has developed in her a strong sense of her own self. "Her alien's compassion for troubled people ripened her and the consequence of the knowledge she had acquired kept her just barley within the boundaries of the elaborately socialized world of black people." (Song of Solomon, 140) Though Pilate becomes Toni Morrison's spiritual midwife, her daughter and Hagar are not benefited by her nurturance.

Pilate, Milkman's spiritual mother, is responsible for his physical and spiritual existence. It is Pilate who is responsible for "Milkman's birth as she helps Ruth to conceive through her concoction and preventing Macon from killing the baby before the birth." (Roberta Rubenstein, "Pariahs and Community", p.136) Though she lives in present, she is always in contact with the past. Milkman is freed from his narcissism as a result of Pilate's guidance. Circe, like Pilate, is a natural healer. His cultural heritage is bestowed by Circe. Pilate's name in her father's handwriting is worn by her as a material proof of her origin. The spiritual sluggishness which Milkman has to overcome to live as an independent man is suggested in his family name "Dead".

The recreation of Milkman's memory relates his great grandfather Shalimar, who flew back to Africa to escape slavery, leaving behind his sorrowful wife and twenty-one children conserving the dream to rise above the brutal conditions of slavery by escaping to Africa to become superior to the boundaries of slavery. His escape or flight from responsibilities created great suffering to the members of family who are left behind. Thus both in "their pursuit of their own desires left a legacy of misery to their loved ones," (Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*, p.46). His learning from Pilate that one must take responsibility for one's acts, forces him to understand that her death is the price he must pay in return for that knowledge acquired. Two women die to overcome the deadness in Milkman. The sacrifice done by Pilate and others produce his new sense of self and is able to cure the split in himself.

Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon thus enunciates a history of separations and re-connections. Her father's ghost tells her that "she cannot fly off and leave a physical body" (Song of Solomon, p.147). Toni Morrison reverses the age old escape route. She sends her hero Milkman by stages into a heritage which is common to all black families in America. Installation of herself into other's consciousness is clearly visible in her depiction of male of the species. A specific journey across ancestral territory is dramatized by Toni Morrison in Song of Solomon.

Ancestral African Legacy:

The invasions into mystery, poetry and prophecy are present in Song of Solomon. Many ironic overtones are used in treating the experience of legacy and fundamental complexities of the quest are treated elaborately. The linear structure and chronological development is avoided in Song of Solomon. Its wandering hero is caught in the puzzles of a quest which portrays itself in the form of successive riddles. The legacy is presented in many trivial forms. An interesting structure is created by the call and response style, and different stories accumulated and the gradual amalgamation of all these stories into a single story of hero's ancestry. All the stories congregate towards, "Pilate, the depository, she who heard the voice and sang the song" (Genevieve Fabre, "The Quest for Legacy in Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon," p.108).

Techniques of Narration: Toni Morrison's task is putting the bits and pieces together and reconstructing chronology. Toni Morrison admits that she is indebted to the black oral tradition which is the true legacy of black people. She reminds that story telling, though an old tradition is so strong and still alive in black culture. Naming, and misnaming, birth and death all become part of the stories in Song of Solomon. Thus, it is Milkman's task to find out the history of each name and to search for the real ancestral name. Milkman's name becomes his fate, not just a joke. The former legacy is under the supervision of unconventional feminine world, and the latter is controlled by men.

Significance of Names: Pilate has been given the worst possible name, that of 'Christ killing Pilate.' Pilate's name becomes her sole legacy and must be saved from obscurity. With her respect for legacy, Pilate becomes his pedagogue who has introduced him to the mysteries of life and death, and his blackness. Being possessed with many natural gifts, she becomes the witness of the legacy of black womanhood. "You think dark is just one colour, but it ain't...there are five or six kinds of black. Some silky, some wooly..." (Song of Solomon, 41) The secrets of the world are disclosed by Pilate. "Milkman progresses from his father's values to Pilate's. He sets out seeking gold, his father's concern, but ends up seeking family, Pilate's concern." (Wilfred D. Samuels, p. 64) Thus it can be assumed that flight is associated with a spiritual triumph. Milkman is introduced to the beliefs and souls of his people, to their wisdom and he is also challenged for his ignorance and indifference to his culture. Thus Pilate gives Milkman, a sense of purpose.

The African Flight: Pilate's house and Pilate are in sharp contrast to his house of death, where as theirs bring a promise and he is suggested a possibility of flight in Pilate's house. Pilate is the embodiment of the image that black women can fly. Flying in black culture is routed in ancient belief and folklore. Pilate is bestowed with the gift to fly. Her absence of navel makes her intimate to her flying ancestor. Pilate is considered like a sort of 'messiah'.

In Song of Solomon each character acts like both a predator and a potential prey. The real goal of Milkman's journey is not revealed even to him. In his last stages of quest he feels that he is totally separate from material world, contrarily he becomes involved and caring. The country people find a 'white heart in a black man' and he has to undergo several tests in the form of rites. Toni Morrison uses epic story which is a quest story, and the motifs that are taken from the African-American history and myth are combined.

The Song: The song remains as a 'repository of secrets,' a perfect metaphor for the secret and perilous act of writing which is an act of faith and communion, which turns out to be the fulfillment of a promise. Through the use of Rank's mono myth, Toni Morrison adeptly mocks Milkman and other men in the novel. As Pilate "creates her own world by rejecting sexism, acquires heroic stature. Marvelous details circle her with a mythic nimbus that combined with the humane values by which she conducts her life." (Gerry Brenner, "Song of Solomon: Rejecting Rank's Monomyth and Feminism," p.115)

Portrayal of Women: In Song of Solomon women are portrayed from pathetic beings to praise worthy people. Among all the women characters the most pathetic character is Hagar, deserted by Milkman, she becomes spiteful, jealous and she is misleading with the idea that she can repossess Milkman by acquiring all the beautifying commodities. Milkman in abandoning Hagar honors the tradition of the man's privilege to escape domestic life, to run away from responsibilities in the shield of self-discovery. Ruth Foster Dead appears to be a weak model of her biblical name sake. She nurtures, "small life that would not hurt her if it died --- geraniums dahlias, and tulips" (Song of Solomon, 64).

Pilate, The Mystical Mother:

Toni Morrison celebrates Pilate in her novel. In spite of the social disgrace caused by her name and her popularity and appearance as a "raggedly boot-legger," She allocates uncanny powers to Pilate. Pilate is born miraculously and comes to life from the womb of her dead mother 'Sing.' As she does not have a navel, frightens all who later detects her scarlessness. Deprived of the father and deserted by her brother and excluded by blacks who comes to know that she lacks a navel, her long eventless journey of twenty three years before arriving in Michigan, makes a child's play of Milkman's journeys. Many believe that, she has

“the power to step out of her skin set a bush a fire from fifty yards, and turn a man into a ripe rutabaga.” (Song of Solomon, 94) It is also felt that with some super natural sense, she returns to Danville three years after her father's murder and unconsciously gathers his bones and carries them with her, which she buries later with Milkman's assistance, just before she is killed she is possessed with an undeniable nurturing power. This power is found in several women like Circe, Susan Bryd, and Sweet.

Toni Morrison in Song of Solomon uses a song with the commentary on the characters actions combined with the ritual elements of traditional African dance. The starting point of Milkman's race's history which is slavery, is the end point of his journey. Pilate's life becomes the basis for social form of freedom, full of human understanding and love, this love is neither sexual nor familial. Lack of navel functions as a metaphor which suggests a unique personal relationship Pilate has with the society as a whole. Pilate is created by Toni Morrison to act as a figure for the experience of racial otherness. Pilate also undergoes a moment of visualizing herself, and she realizes and accepts her lack. She determines to set certain values for her life and live according to those and her self-recognition is not expressed in terms of race. Hagar and Reba are unable to possess Pilate's resourcefulness and strength because both of them are very distant from the rural society where Pilate is brought up. The extreme difficulty experienced by the black women in their search for self- determination is successfully exposed. Pilate during the main action of Song of Solomon has no real identity at all. The reasons for Pilate's lack of identity are revealed by Toni Morrison in a long flash back. “After their mother died, she had come struggling out of the womb without help from throbbing muscles of the pressure of womb water...her stomach was as smooth and sturdy as her back, at no place interrupted by a navel” (Song of Solomon, p 27).

Pilate's predicament is, she does not know her mother and her name. Even her father's name was given by a careless white official. The source of her wisdom comes to her from father's spirit. Pilate constructs her life around this sagacity and sings very often. She has failed in her initiation because she is not provided by her family for success. Her singularity also influences and controls the lives of her daughter and granddaughter.

Predicament of Hagar :

Hagar's tragedy is indicated beforehand by the failure of Pilate's way of life. Pilate and Reba “did their best to satisfy every whim Hagar had” (Song of Solomon, 92). Left with nothing except herself as Milkman's lover, Hagar fails the initiation test. As she sees herself through the eyes of Milkman, she doubts her beauty when she comes to know Milkman is fond of another kind of beauty, decides to kill him. “Hagar killing, ice-pick wielding Hagar, who, shortly after a Christmas thank-you note” (Song of Solomon, p126-127). The problem of Hagar is clearly identified as isolation by Guitar. Pilate and Reba fail to understand her need that she needs a big family surrounded by all and she wants to live a humorous life of the colored girls. Hagar's predicament lies in the fact that she is unable to succeed because she is not prepared by anything in her life to define herself.

The story of first Corinthians seems to be contrasting to Hagar's story. Till late in her life Corinthian does not have an identity of her own. Corinthians always has contempt for her father's false values of whites. Song of Solomon not only deals with the woman who creates her own world in an individualistic way breaking the norms of the society, but with a black man who wishes to fly since a child, by breaking the restricting life into the domain of possibility. Whether Milkman will continue to ride the air or die at the hands of a friend is not determined in the novel.

Pilate is the most powerful character in the novel who calmly accepts the existing world and also the other world which is not fixed as reality. She possesses great sensibility which cannot be disturbed by her experience as she is thoroughly at home with herself. We find something heathen and primeval about Pilate. She is represented as a person who is able to summon from others various contemplations of her own class and understanding. Thus Pilate's capability to be in harmony with the laws of the earth and nature is established. These natural laws are necessary to reveal the truth within the human heart. “They are necessary for a person to demonstrate endurance, courage which is needed to survive with dignity.” (Song of Solomon, p.136) Through Pilate's story many lives are traced with a special enrichment. It is a story of black family history which extends almost a century of American history. It is also a captivating co-relation with the odyssey of Milkman, her nephew.

Renewal of Past:

An ironic twist of the Faulknerian theme is embodied in the novel, the fall of proud white family and black person who serves the white family with meekness and devotion. The dominant theme is the realization of their ancestral roots by the black family. Milkman celebrates the past as characters go back to

their past to find the source of the knowledge which they believe gives them a sense of renewal. Even Macon experiences this renewal. Pilate depends only on her resources and assesses her situation in the social scenario and the personal liberation available to her is always contended. She decides to live in a different way to take 'free fall like Sula'. By cutting off her hair and binding it into a turban and wearing only casual clothes which are appropriate to her way of life, she exhibits her rejection of the traditional image of woman. Humanity is never lost by Pilate in any circumstance, and she never lowers her values of herself and other women by accepting woman trafficking. She only sells wine and whiskey. Being economically independent she is able to work outside patriarchal values and overcome the social forces which are a permanent threat to the black woman. Pilate's daughter and granddaughter are depicted as weak women when compared to Pilate. Though she is able to break conventional lifestyle and lives a happy and brave life, she fails to inspire the women in the house, to follow her example and face life bravely.

In her portrayal of Pilate, Toni Morrison seems to stress that, Pilate always being a humanist does not show interest to follow the achievement pattern that collaborates with successful men. Life and death do not terrorize Pilate, because she maintains a natural contact with this world and the other world. Though she is denied partnership in marriage, communal religion, she is able to survive alone in the society. For sixty-eight years she remains stubborn and has shed no tears. Her worry for people in troubles ripens with the years and she expands politeness for rudeness. Pilate is provided with such details that makes her lovable. Her death comes as a shock to reader when she is shot by a black killer. Toni Morrison portrays Pilate with a powerful voice and strong determination for humanity who fulfills the promise, and who has settled the conflict between the claims of nature and the claims of culture. "Apparently without a past and a place, a mythic hero is personified in Pilate." (Susan, Willis, p.319) The journeys of Milkman and Pilate are depicted equally in the Song of Solomon. Both of them follow the mythological formula beginning with separation, initiation and return to the roots. Toni Morrison uses symbolical language particularly regarding names. The journey undertaken by the protagonists to free one-self is the main theme along with Milkman's story. He leaves the Dead house "to free himself from the wings of other people's nightmares.

Toni Morrison's fictions always try to analyze American society by mixing the existential concerns that are agreeable with a mythic presentation. Excluding the white characters totally from her books gives her a chance to make white culture "a necessity." There arises a conflict between absolute freedom and social responsibility because every human is a social animal and he cannot overlook society because he is a part of that society. The conflict is settled by Milkman when he leaps towards his 'brother Guitar.' Milkman finds freedom in "surrender" to the air. He accepts his situation as real and not as a right or as eternal.

Coalesce of Myths:

Toni Morrison skillfully tailors the Icarus myth, to the Black historical context by arranging freedom on both individual and collective levels. Toni Morrison in using multiple perspectives is able to show a number of subjects as comments and variations on the main character. Commentaries which are of explicit nature are offered on Milkman's sexism from Lena and correlates to women characters who makes his search a substitute for theirs. Thus Milkman becomes everyone's substitute. From the beginning to the end, women exist for Milkman, functioning as mother, sister, wife, lover and guide etc.

The free commitment of Pilate to others is expressed in her last words which Milkman necessitates to learn, "I wish I'd a knower more people, I would have loved 'em all. If I'd a knowed more, I would a loved more" (Song of Solomon, 340). Understanding her free commitment he wishes for a mate like Pilate, saying, 'There's got to be at least one more woman like you.' Contrasting Milkman's final state, she seems intuitive, and personal. It is quite appropriate that Pilate dies in the end and Milkman is left only with his imagination of a woman like Pilate. Being a woman, Pilate cannot frame herself on the male line, she is not given any true definition on female line. Only unclear references are given to women by their husbands. "Thus while she embodies Toni Morrison's values, she is not the complete hero that Milkman is, for he lacks his recognition of meaning. By contrast to his final state, she seems intuitive, personal and rather passive" (Cynthia A. Davis, p.223).

Song of Solomon as a bildungsroman portrays the life of a young man from youth to adulthood. The story of Milkman is an example of African- American experience. All his life he hears the song about "sugar man"... Whenever Milkman turns to the song as a source, "he adds some meaning, subtracts and finally changes" the source itself. (Catherine Rain Water, "Worthy Messengers: Narrative Voices in Toni Morrison's Novels," p.236). Song of Solomon is an allegory of god's love for people. "Song of Solomon resides in its information-an oral family history –and not in its Biblical meaning which is rejected if only on the basis of a key condescending line: "I am black, but comely" (Cynthia Dublin Edelberg, "Toni Morrison's Voices: Formal Education, the Work Ethic, and the Bible," p.230).

It is Pilate who awakens Milkman to his family history. The best stories in the novel are told by Pilate, the 'Janitor of Culture'. Macon when he listens to Pilate's song, standing outside her house he recalls, "Fields and wild turkey calico" (Song of Solomon, 29). Milkman's education is not completed because he fails to recognize the importance of the role played by women in his life.

The theme of education is given a new aspect, when the other female characters in the novel are observed in contrast to Pilate. Pilate plays a conventional supporting role and has proven her identity by carrying it in an ear ring, which she designs from her mother's brass snuff box. She is a self-sustaining and self-delivered character with her perfect specimen like qualities. Her continuous experimentation with life directly resulted in her specific self-awareness and self-confidence. Right from her childhood Pilate has intense contact with natural life. Macon remembers that, "she smelled like forest" and that she was "born wild" (Song of Solomon, p. 166).

Pilate is a representation of a natural woman who is not perverted by conventions, deceptions or anger. As she does not want to cast the blame on either cultural or personal forces, she accepts her life as it comes. Some female characters like Ruth, Lena, First Corinthians and Hagar fear a form of rejection in the novel, whereas Pilate is not afraid of either isolation or death. Pilate is convinced that death is not an unconquerable obstacle by her active and sustaining relation with her father's spirit. Milkman follows Pilate's example and is able to achieve his goal. The potential richness of life is illustrated in her simplicity. Milkman's sense of responsibility is waked by her insistence on openness. When Milkman risks his life to save Pilate's life, in his risk he learns that the courage to sacrifice gives him wings.

The conventional weakness of other female characters is contrasted with Pilate's individual strength. The difference between the effects of Pilate's altruistic love is contrasted with the destructive results brought by the possessive blinding obsession of Hagar. The life of Hagar becomes mere waste because she does not have any other aim, other than to be loved, which resulted from spoiled parentage. For Pilate and Reba, Hagar is always "a baby doll" (Song of Solomon, p 319). The "hollowness" (Song of Solomon, 130) of her eyes is an indication that she is not encouraged or guided to develop an independent sense of self. Ruth is a hazy character who feels satisfied in establishing her in seemingly unimportant ways in contrast to Pilate's huge presence of individuality. Though their growth is emotionally delayed, all women Hagar, Lena, Corinthians and Ruth function as important guides and support to Milkman. Milkman in his education balances women-centered stories, gives a widening perspective to male-centered stories and takes into account a different point of reference, by balancing the male-centered stories.

Milkman in his quest leaves behind the women who cared about him. Initially, he wants to escape from all these women as he feels frustrated of their presence. "Lena's anger, Corinthians loose and uncombed hair matching her slack lips, Ruth's stepped up surveillance, Hagar's hollow eyes" (Song of Solomon, 220-21).

Pilate is African centric in her approach whereas Macon Dead is Eurocentric. She is the source of the knowledge which is primal in nature. She always comforts people who are in the same situation of being isolated. She gives highest importance to family and communal ties. As Pilate is always odd, murky, she becomes a regular source of embarrassment to Macon Dead. Her compassion is expanded even beyond her immediate family.

All the women struggle in their quest of fulfillment. Among all the women in the novel, only Pilate is able to observe and comprehend her position in black American society. Pilate in creating her own empire creates a matriarchal social order at least in her place. Pilate in "the middle of her toughness conceals sorrow" (Kasinath Ranveer, "African-American Feminist Consciousness in the Novels of Toni Morrison", p.44) It can be assumed that Toni Morrison fiddles with the idea of interrupting the biological order in men and women. In the words of Susan Willis, "Pilate's lack becomes the basics for her liberation from narrowly defined "human relationships based on sexuality" and "the expansion of her social world to one based on human sensitivity." (Susan Willis, p.319)

Song of Solomon is a critical commentary on male dominance. Though Lena and first Corinthians act as baby dolls, Pilate is capable of creating her world, avoiding interference of any male. As an abandoned woman, Pilate is conscious of her position as a black woman in this larger world. "A vicarious depiction of journey towards self-discovery exists in Song of Solomon." (Sherine Upot, "Cultural Politics in Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon" Indian Journal of American Studies, p.76) Hagar stands as the best example of how it is not possible for a woman who does not have any interaction of a community and has no memories of such a community that nurtures human existence. Hagar is unable to understand what is lacking in her when Milkman leaves her. "Look at how I look. I look awful. No wonder he didn't want me. I look terrible" (Song of Solomon, p.312). She dies when her fancies are ruined.

Pilate towers the rest of the women in the novel with her inner grace and strength. The members in alternative communities like Pilate are brought together by essential bonds of affection. Sometimes they are doomed when they are overcome by the dominant culture and try to model themselves on it. The

oppression faced by black women as a double sufferer at the hands of both white and black men is explored by Toni Morrison in *Song of Solomon*. The nursery rhyme chanted by children suggests how flying is used as a way to rise above slavery and oppression “O sugar man don't leave me here”

Pilate wishes to offer her philosophy to Milkman. Milkman wonders at her difference but he is unable to contemplate upon its inherent healthy qualities. Pilate is a walking metaphor. Hagar unconditionally gives all her love with a hope that he would marry her someday. But Milkman treats her scornfully and throws at her a 'thank you' note. His treatment of Hagar makes him an evil character that breaks her heart. Milkman treats Hagar as, “The third beer. After more than a dozen years, he was getting tired of her. Her eccentricities were no longer provocative...there was no excitement, no galloping of blood in his neck or his heart at the thought of her” (*Song of Solomon*, p. 91). Hagar is treated in a virile manner which suggests use and rejection. As Milkman got so habituated to use his mother, sisters and all as maids, he uses Hagar too as a sexual outlet. He is so materialistic that he fails to see the tragedy that is implied in Hagar's death. It is only in the rural South in the middle of failure and despoil he comes to confront with his own lack of courage and Hagar's selflessness. The women in the novel emotionally and spiritually work for their welfare. The men in the novel treat women as items made for their use; they behave cruelly with women, and treat them oppressively and violently. Pilate's household is without men and is therefore full of peace and love.

Though man and woman relationships occur in an uneasy environment in *Song of Solomon*, in Milkman's case there is a ray of hope for every chance for salvation and understanding. With Pilate's death, Milkman has acquired her cloak of honesty, her inspiring wisdom and wondering clear sightedness. For Milkman there is always hope for future which makes Pilate's prophecy true. “He don't know what he loves, but he'll come around one of these days” (*Song of Solomon*, 319). *Song of Solomon* ends on a hopeful note of Milkman willing to make amends.

The basic bond of mother and daughter relation which is primary in Toni Morrison's work is not found here. The reason for Ruth's confusion in her father's love is born out of fear that her father might abandon or leave her like her mother. The name Ruth Foster Dead indicates dependence and absence. Toni Morrison wants to expand her treatment and characterization of Ruth through the intricate theme of motherhood, of woman as mother and nurturer. Ruth as a perfect mother makes it possible for Milkman to become a man through her nourishment which helps him to sustain in his life.

Pilate's life from birth has been a continuous series of self-actualization, as she accepts her puzzling characteristics, her living itself is made an art. She shows compassion and love for Macon Dead, who in the past is a compassionate sibling, hates her. Pilate “as a spiritual healer shows deep interest for and about human relationships.” (*Song of Solomon*, p. 150) Milkman's journey to self-began at the age of twelve, when he first met his aunt, Pilate, who provides him the necessary information with a sense of self in history.

If flight is seen as a symbol of selfhood that is achieved, then it is not problematic. The other meaning is abandonment of other people who are left behind. Here flight coincides with tragedy and triumph. To love one's fellowmen unselfishly without expecting anything reciprocal from others, is visible through Porter's behavior. Porter with his unselfish love is responsible for Corinthian's resurrection from the “Dead” which is the meaningless materialistic world of her father's home. Guitar, who seems to be a surrogate father to Milkman in leading him in the right direction, lacks Pilate's spirit of forgiveness and love for humanity. Pilate is the creator of her life's principles and has solved the problem of manner of living by creating her lifestyle.

Through Milkman and Hagar's relationship, Milkman becomes the intruder and Hagar the reluctant prize. The moment Milkman stands at the threshold of his achieving manhood, Hagar dies, her death is inevitable. Even Hagar and Reba do not seem to learn self-actualization. From the example of Pilate, Hagar seems to be the weakest of the two in all aspects because she is not “strong enough like Pilate, nor simple enough like Reba, to make up her life as they had.” (*Song of Solomon*, p.311)

CONCLUSION:

It is understood that, the strength for Pilate is derived from the twelve years that she has spent in a meaningful relationship with her brother and father made her fierce and loving which is not visible in Reba partially and Hagar completely. Thus parenting is a shared responsibility for the child to take initiation and to approach wholeness. Milkman is set in the correct path by Circe. Pilate takes the responsibility of a griot, so she loves people. Through her blues song about Sugarman she wants to celebrate Solomon and not to lament about the ancestor who escaped slavery, leaving behind his family to their fate. She is the only person who can pass on the family history and heritage to Milkman and permits him to understand and accept it with ease. Only by tracing ancestral roots, through the myth of flying African, Milkman realizes

that he too, can fly. His flight is symbolic of death that leads to rebirth and transformation. Margo Jefferson states that, "Toni Morrison's earlier novels have received high praise, Song of Solomon has been trumpeted as her major achievement" (Margo Jefferson, "Black Gold", 93. Print).

Pilate, as the pilot of the text in her magical creation transforms people and their problems into the sphere of better understanding and peace, is a rainbow of personalities. Her collection of stones from various places and geography book compensates her alienation. Toni Morrison suggests that with self-knowledge and self-love one can experience true transformation; one will be able to ride the air, "fly" like Pilate and Milkman. Toni Morrison in Song of Solomon through the flight of Solomon exposes the central issue of existential freedom which suggests that it is the individual's responsibility to design his life's direction and be a pilot of his life. Pilate seems to have understood and has taken the responsibility of creating her own life. This responsibility is realized by Milkman at the moment of Pilate's death. "For now he knew what Shalimar knew: if you surrendered to the air, you'd ride it" (Song of Solomon, p.341).

It is possible for an individual to achieve personal freedom and self-actualization through their properly directed actions. Milkman's final embrace of Pilate on the Solomon's leap suggests his acknowledgement of self in a woman. The ultimate compliment Milkman pays to Pilate is calling her "Sugar girl" in a choked voice filled with love, suggests his surrender of patriarchy and safeguarding woman's key role in the conservation and dissemination of cultural codes because she is a woman who can fly without leaving the ground. "Now he knew why he loved her. Without ever leaving the ground, she could fly" (Song of Solomon, p. 340).

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