



RACIAL DISCRIMINATION IN *LIGHT IN* *AUGUST* BY WILLIAM FAULKNER

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ABSTRACT

This paper deals with the plight of the Blacks in American society. The treatment of intersection goes against the conventions prevalent in the society of western countries reference to the American society is symbolic representation of impact of race on international community. The aim of this paper is to conduct a critical study of fictional world of William Faulkner, one of the leading novelists of American literature in English, in the light of racism in the literature of international community. .

INTRODUCTION

William Faulkner has created a revolutionary change in the literary scene of American tradition of English Literature. He has always been daunting unlike to his predecessors, who felt afraid to deal with controversial and shameful realities, the dark issues like racism, miscegenation, slavery, discrimination and exploitation. In Faulkner we find the literary treatment that has given wider space to the social and psychological aspects of the American society. He did not deterred to bring the most tabooed issue like racism to the forefront. In his most acclaimed novels like *Sartoris*, *The Sound and the Fury*, *Absalom, Absalom!*, *The Unvanquished* and *Intruder in the Dust* Faulkner has given a type of jolt to all including his white readers by making them witness of the harsh realities of racism and racial segregation, racial exploitation prevalent in the society that has been boasting of human values on world canvas. Nonetheless, they have instanced so called progressive society, putting at the place of

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a model society for the entire world. At this backdrop of the political face of the country, it is an extraordinary courage, the true artist, novelist like Faulkner has shown in the exposition of the racial misdeeds of his white brethren.

However, though, at the initial stage, Faulkner faced opposition from racist critics and readers who believed in the doctrine of white supremacy, Faulkner succeeded in his noble task of drawing sympathy from his readers towards the sorry plight of the blacks in the predominantly white American society. Through the medium of his fictional works, Faulkner has made his readers conscious of the fact. Although, after the civil war, the Blacks had gained official recognition as equal citizens, yet they were subjected to racial abuses and exploitation in the field of education and employment. In this regard Faulkner's work is important not only from the literary point of view but also from the social and racial point of view. It has succeeded to a large extent in creating awareness for the urgent issue and need of measures to create an integrated society without any caste or racial differentiation.

William Faulkner's novels are replete with the treatments of his obsessive themes which are a byproduct of his art of literary creations. His works involve something new that the author has intended to express what he already knows. The reader finds complete grasp of his subject, especially his favorite subject of racism and racial segregation, reflected in the theme and technique. In the opinion of Richard H. Brodhead:

"In embellishing a history for Joe Christmas, then also for Joanna Burden, in his later draft, Faulkner is composing into being the past itself as Light knows it... In reimagining Christmas, Faulkner also for the first time moves the race to the center of a novel and discovers how action draws its deeper energies from the opposition of Black and White. The race itself gets crucially reconceived in this process. In the early draft of Light, the race is a given, something you are, by birth. (Joe is a Negro) in the revision, Faulkner transforms it from a genetic attribute to a structure of Consciousness a violently charged field of psychic conflict that is yours regardless of genetic facts. Then in another brilliant new imagining, Faulkner further redefines race as taking within the whole fabric of a culture. In telling the new Christmas story, Faulkner plots how racial terms as they enter Joe's mind, become fatally aligned with the other fierce polarities of Southern Protestant culture: Black/ White, Female/ Male, Nature/ transcendence, mercy/ justice and so on". (Richard, 1)

His novel *Light in August* deals with the dehumanizing impact of the racism in society. and tragic results of racism.

The narrative begins with a country girl Lena Grove who has undertaken a Journey out in search of her forsaken lover, from her home, at Alabama. She desires to find out her lover,

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Lucas Burch. The story in the flash goes by stating the affair between the two and the lover has left her alone some months back, who is now pregnant on the false promise of returning soon. The female protagonist Lena has arrived at Jefferson where she meets a man named Byron Bunch. He informs her about her lover Lucas Burch who is using a false name Joe Brown and is working in a factory in Jefferson. Byron leaves Lena safe at his boarding house and then goes to another gentleman Hightower whom he informs about Lena's tragic plight.

In the event of killing of the white woman named Joanna Burden, Brown, the suspect of Joanna's murder, is arrested. The narrative moves on to reveals that Joanna Burden was carrying on an affair with Joe Christmas who had Negro blood and might have killed her. To ensure the effect of racism at the backdrop of the story, it is turned back, as in flashback technique, and the following few chapters tell us about the childhood and youth of Joe Christmas. He was raised in an orphanage. He is informed of his black origin, the sign of inferiority. He was told by many about his Negro blood, which developed an inferiority complex. From the orphanage, Joe is adopted by a harsh disciplinarian and a rigid Calvinist Mr. McEachern and his gentle wife.

later on, very soon within a few days, Lena give birth to a child. Knowing about his own child and Lena, his beloved, Brown flees from the Jefferson before the hearing of his punishment for the crime of killing white woman. Out in street, Brown is killed through mob lynching, by the white mob. The narrative ends with Lena Grove's undertaking journey, again, now with her baby, in search of her lover Lucas Burch, the Negro, the Black.

William Faulkner has used the history, in the fiction to tell the story of Negro who are victim of race hatred. The novel depicts the event of 1908 Springfield riot. The turning point in the life of Negroes in America. It was the cause of their migration from south to North in search of both peace and security, in a sense freedom from racial discrimination. The narrative of the story is circular, symptomatic of the life of Negroes in America who had experience of the despair of the failure of civil right project.

Light in August represents the cycle of Negroes' fate, it is circular in concept beginning and ending with the journey of Lena Grove in search of her lover and symbolically focusing on the circular route traveled for thirty years by Joe Christmas in search of his identity, which he fails to find and ultimately meets his nemesis at the hands of a white mob. To put in the words of Edmond H. Volpe, who writes: The supreme example of the light negating the force of mental abstractions, taboos, and conventions in the novel is racial prejudice...by it; individuals are transformed into a robot-like lynch-mob. (Edmond 194)



Actually, the story of Joe Christmas, capture the real event in American society due racial hatred. It is parallel to the story of Nelse Patton, happened on September 8, 1908. who was allegedly accused of the murder of a white woman and before punishment by the law he was killed by the White mob, the event of mob lynching.

William Faulkner modeled Joe Christmas, to a certain extent, on Nelse Patton whose lynching had made the headlines in newspapers, and the aftermath of Springfield riot. Faulkner's imagination has given a superb imaginative and innovative dimensions to Joe's character. The historian, Louis D. Rubin points out:

Joe Christmas is not the average southern Negro or even the portrait of a typical victim of a lynch mob... he is an exaggeration, a tragic hero... by pursuing Joe Christmas's human dimensions to their ultimate proportions, Faulkner can dramatize that humanness, to show it to us clean, unflawed by compromise or qualification. He shows us... what it means to be a human being and we recognize in this poverty, this murderer, and this criminal, what is also present in ourselves. (Louis 36)

CONCLUSION;

William Faulkner is one of the leading novelists of American literature. Despite being a writer of white class, he dealt with the subject of taboo, social realism in the America. His character of Joe Christmas represents the suffering of the Blacks in American society. It depicts racial discrimination and the tragedy of the Black protagonist who is destined to live a life of destitute. In this way, *Light in August* consists of several moving scenes of racial discrimination and blatant racism.

REFERENCE:

1. Richard H. Brodhead, *Faulkner, New Perspectives*, New Jersey; Prentice Hall, Inc. 1983, P-9
2. Edmond H. Volpe, *A Reader's Guide to William Faulkner*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1964, P-194.
3. Louis D. Rubin *Notes on a Rear Guard Action*, New York, Random House, 1965, P-36.