



## Study of quest for self-identity and journey of struggle of a Black Women for self fulfillment

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**Abstract :** Tar Baby is the journey of a black woman who struggles to come to terms with her aspirations as a modern materialistic black woman as the metaphor of "tar" indicates. It is the struggle of a modern black woman for self-fulfilment. Jadine is a black woman who ultimately loses her roots from both the worlds, and becomes a double orphan, a pariah figure. At a very early age she has lost her father and mother, and is adopted by her uncle Sidney and aunt Ondine. As Sidney and Ondine work for a white family called the Streets, she is under the care and protection of Valerian and Margaret Streets. As a result, she loses her touch with the worlds of both the Streets and of the Childs. In Jadine Child, Morrison depicts the problems of a contemporary black woman.

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Something else has also changed. The laboring poor of *The Bluest Eye* , the self-sufficient women and drifting men of *Sula*, the avaricious middle class and defiantly marginal citizens of *Song of Solomon* —they are gone, replaced, in *Tar Baby* , by the rich, their servants, their dependents, and the sans culottes who threaten their security. Though much is made of money, fashion, commodities as consciousness, and the experiences open to the privileged, the cultured, and those clever enough to hustle a piece of the action, the people living on *Isle des Chevaliers*, “voluntary exiles all, seem to inhabit a world that is oppressively parochial and provincial.

Each character, in one way or another, remains disconnected from identity and place, from community and memory; and whatever past they retain remains inaccessible, held separate by dreams and dream visions. Yet, like her earlier novels, even these fixed and complex images of lack continue to reflect and express the urgency, difficulty, and, in this novel perhaps, the



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impossibility of preserving a generational continuity and a collective (un)consciousness within an increasingly individual, fragmented Western culture

**Introduction :** The title of the novel, *Tar Baby* takes its point of departure from the old folk tale of briar rabbit: A farmer sets out a Tar Baby dressed in bonnet and skirt to trap a troublesome rabbit. The rabbit hits the Tar Baby when it does not answer 'Good morning.' He gets stuck and when caught he begs the farmer, "boil me in oil, skin me alive but please don't throw me in the briar patch." The

farmer falls for the trick and throws him in the briar patch and the clever rabbit escapes. In the context of this folktale, Jadine Child is a tar baby who traps Son, the black man who stands for Afrocentric values but falls a prey to the white materialistic values and the world order that is represented by Jadine. In addition to this, Morrison also suggests another meaning of the word Tar Baby:

I found that there is a tar lady in African mythology. I started thinking about her. At one time, a tar pit was a holy place, at least as important, because tar was used to build things....it held things together. For, the tar baby comes to mean the black woman who can hold things together.

### **Quest For Self-Identity**

*Tar Baby* traces the quest for self-identity of Jadine Childs, the protagonist. Jadine does not seem to have rebelled against the constructs of the white society in which she is enmeshed; in fact, she has accepted and embraced the white culture without question. Because she was orphaned at the age of twelve, a break with her African American heritage occurred. Ondine and Sydney, the aunt and uncle who assumed responsibility for the orphan, unwittingly enlarged this gap by sending her to exclusive private schools and later to the Sorbonne. The adult Jadine feels equipped to deal successfully with the white world; she is a part of it. It is the African American world, represented by her nightmares, her disagreements with Son, and the feelings of otherness that overwhelm her in his hometown of Eloe, Florida, that disturbs her. Set in the late 1970's, Toni Morrison's *Tar Baby* explores the sexual, racial, familial, and social tensions associated with the individual's journey to self-autonomy and self-actualization.



The novel begins with Son (William Green) escaping from a merchant ship to a yacht that Margaret Street and Jadine have borrowed. He hides in the Streets' home for days until Margaret Street discovers him in her closet a few evenings before Christmas. This discovery initiates the crumbling of Valerian Street's world.

Valerian, a wealthy, retired businessman, has created and ordered his own world on his Caribbean island. He controls his wife Margaret, his servants, Sydney and Ondine, the natives who work for him, and even Jadine, quietly manipulating her choices. A godlike figure, he is relatively beneficent to but also distant from his subjects; he is comfortable in the artificially natural world of his greenhouse.

### **The Shackles of Femininity**

Tar Baby explores how being a woman imprisons the female characters. The novel's male characters tend to see the women as stupid or inferior, simply because they are women. Gideon constantly criticizes There is for her ignorance, while Valerian ignores Margaret's desire to leave the island. Son insults Jadine by asking her how many sexual favors she had to perform to be given expensive presents and modeling jobs. The men do not see the women as individuals.

With the exception of Jadine, the women in the novel are associated with motherhood and fertility, sometimes positively and sometimes negatively. Ondine mothers Jadine, Therese mothers Alma Estée and Son, and Therese once worked as a wet nurse. Margaret longs to see her son, Michael, but it turns out that she abused him when he was a child. Therese believes that white women kill their babies, in part because Valerian's first wife had a series of abortions. Margaret's actions and Therese's beliefs show that being a mother does not always bring fulfillment to women and can sometimes imprison them as well. Margaret's unhappiness as a wife and mother led her to abuse her child. Over the course of the novel, Jadine tries on the different options available to women: a career woman in Paris, a daughter on Isle des Chevaliers, and a mother figure to Son in New York. But none of these roles leads to satisfaction, and the constraints of her gender continue to bind and frustrate her..

### **Conclusion :**



Tar Baby tells of characters who find themselves caught between the diverging and increasingly incompatible agendas of the two movements working for similar end results. The protagonist Jadine Childs is a fashion model who has an education, but Son was raised in an all-black community in Florida. Childs is almost completely assimilated, while Son is capable of pleasing almost everyone but feels most connected to his black community. The tension between these two characters who live with ideals on completely opposite sides of the spectrum create a moving force in the plot. Morrison completely abandons social realism when she writes about a colored woman, writing about race and women in a realistic and symbolic way.

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