

SOUTHERN MYTH IN THE SOUND AND THE FURY BY WILLIAM FAULKNER

Dr. Meena Gupta

Asst. Prof. in English, GCW, Udhampur J&K

Abstract: William Faulkner is by any reckoning foremost an American novelist of the 20th century. His place in the world literature is equally well established. He earned his reputation by consistently projecting his vision of the human predicament with utmost sincerity. This is the reason that his scope includes the whole of life, primarily as a 20th century sensitive writer, but ultimately includes the existential paradigm of the human condition. The present paper focuses on the vision of South in *The Sound and the Fury*. The vitality and even perhaps the grandeur of Pre-civil war days are contrasted with the impotence and sterility of the present in the lives of Compsons family. Faulkner uses this family to illustrate the traditions of southern culture and how time was corrupting the morals of the entire world.

Keywords: Morals, Predicament, Paradigm, South, Southern Culture.

Introduction: *The Sound and the Fury* is a lament for the passing of the world not merely the world of Yoknapatawpa and not merely South. The disorder, disintegration and absence of perspective in the lives of Compsons is intended to be symbolic and representative of a whole Social order or perhaps it would be better to say a whole social disorder.

The setting of the novel is post civil war American South. It opens with an idiot Benjy playing in the restricted courtyard in the Compsons family. The great pasture of the family was sold to meet the expenses of Quentins study at Harvard University. Mr. Compson in order to avoid responsibility took refuge in alcohol and drowned himself in the vague philosophies of the crushed aristocratic era. Mrs. Compson retains her egoistical pretensions of being a Lady of the plantation period. Their daughter is probably living as a prostitute after giving birth to an illegitimate daughter.

Faulkners art seeks to understand the present through the past. This is the root of the present evil i.e the degeneration of Compsons lies in the evils of the past. "The early settlers and Founding Fathers as well as those who won the west and built up cattle, mining, and other fortunes, often did so by shady speculations[...]. So with this background of "The shady speculations", corruption, and cheating, the Compsons established their rich plantations and a line of pure blood. The first Compson was a bold ruthless man who came into Mississippi as a free forester to grasp where and when he could and wanted to, and established, what should have been, a princely line, and that princely line decayed". The reason for this decay lies in the inherent contradictions of American culture. The contradictions were between the American Dream and the grim reality between the scientific and the feudal society and between the forces and the relations of production.

The contradiction at the bottom of the Southern society sprang from the reality of the status of Southern farmers and their pretensions. The Pioneers, who colonized the Southern state were Capitalists who were bent upon making a fast buck through investment in land but once having set up the plantations they thought of themselves as feudal aristocrat in a patriarchal society. The Northern State on the other hand, due to comparative lightness and infertility of land were more suitable for Industrial development. Consequently, the interests of the Industrialized North diverged from those of the South.

The South being a part and parcel of American culture, suffered from the contradictions between agrarian and industrial policies of the union. The South was an agrarian society which was against Industrialization. On the other hand the Northern America was rapidly following the ideals of feudal aristocracy of Europe but in reality the European fashion was lacking. They lack the serf master relationship which encouraged natural obedience. The conflict between Northern America and Southern culminated in the civil war. The North won the war because of its superiority in standing the pressure of the war and the comparatively more efficient organization of economy in industry as compared with agriculture. Southern psyche suffered a shock of having been uprooted by the upstarts. They felt to have lost a superior culture. They forgot the inhumanity and exploitation of the lost culture. Instead, they devoted their energies to the glorification of the past. It is this very lost culture

that is cherished by Mr. & Mrs. Compson. Characteristically, they are incapable of facing the realities of the world and prefer to find a sanctuary of their own in the mythical past. Faulkner himself said that the trouble with the Compsons is "they are still living in the attitude of 1869 or '60". Thus, as the novel begins the Compsons, whom Faulkner called, "tragic", are shown on the way to decay. They fret under the stress of commercial and business like relations of the northern culture. But their pretensions of southern gentlemanly cold chivalry, bravery, generosity, purity of women etc, that Faulkner has meticulously juxtaposed with other side of glorified American dream- incapacitates them to act as normal human beings. Mrs. Vickery suggests that *The Sound and the Fury* is about "The relations between the act and man's apprehension of the act, between the event and the interpretation".

Mr. Compson is self-centred. Mrs. Compson is only concerned about the social status of her own family. She feels the birth of an idiot son is a kind of personal affront.

Mrs. Compson lives in her great Plantations era when the ladies were not supposed to address anyone by nickname. She chides Caddy for this habit of hers. She says, "Nicknames are vulgar. Only common people use them". She doesn't realize that with the decline in the fortunes of the family, their own capitalist culture in the period of the growth of capitalism all virtues were evaluated afresh.

It is heartening to know that though Mrs. Compson fails to instill in her daughter the code of chastity, yet she has the courage to carry and cherish it with firm and clear conviction. Her attitude is in direct contrast to that of Caddy who regards the code of chastity as a disposable tenet. She throws to the winds the ideas of her mother about a perfect lady, and finds an outlet to assert her individuality from the family repression in sexual activity. Her daughter Caddy is represented as mothering an idiot Benjy, even mothering her self pitying mother. Quentin Compson is a typical Faulknerian hero- a man who is just a sum of his experiences and misfortunes. Before finishing the despairing drama of his life, Quentin broods about the downfall of his once great aristocratic family. Quentin's imaginative world of pure existence in southern gentlemanly culture is shattered in his ideal world, there are no fallen southern women and no fallen ungentlemanly people who would expect to make money even out of the sacred marriage. He goes back to Harvard, "tortured by his thoughts about his father's futility, his mother's recklessness, and his sister's Caddy's promiscuity". Quentin is sick of time because "it is a testimony and a measurement of human decay". Time acts like an acid, corroding the very basis of human happiness. The only possible means of victory over time is through death. Quentin sees the ruins of his world and a futility of law and morality in the modern world. Jason belongs to the class of people for whom a man becomes a mere cash register devoid of any human concern. As a contrast to Jason's madness for money and Mrs. Compson's invalidity, Dilsey, the Negro maid remains stern in the face of difficulties from the beginning till the end. She is the one who witnesses the complete disintegration of the family. Dilsey is the only person who is able to create order out of chaos whereas the Compsons penetrate disorder and confusion. They have neither the understanding nor the capacity for courage, dignity, and endurance which Dilsey possesses in such an abundant measure. Through *The Sound and the Fury* Faulkner has shown how the past had the curse of exploitation of land and the present was cursed by the blindness of money.

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