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Absence of Peace in Toni Morrison's *Sula*

A Dissertation

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CHAPTER -1

Introduction

Toni Morrison is the most sophisticated novelist in the history of African- American literature. She is the first black woman to receive Nobel prizes in literature.

Morrison is different from other novelists because she invents her own way of literary writing. Her themes are always homely and common but because of her immense power and diversity in her subject matters, her works appear complicated. Her matured life has gone through the different social changes. She has seen significant changes in civil right for black people and wider public recognition of Afro-American writers in America.

Morrison's literary career is marked with many honors, including the National Book Critics Circle Award, the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters Award, the Pulitzer Prize, and the Robert F. Kennedy Award. Since 1988, Morrison has held the Robert F. Goheen Professorship of the Humanities at Princeton University and currently is the Chair of their Creative Writing Program. In 1993, Morrison was the first black woman to be awarded the Nobel Prize for literature. Her novels are *The Bluest Eye* (1970), *Sula* (1973), *Song of Solomon* (1977), *Tar Baby* (1981), *Beloved* (1987), *Jazz* (1992), *Paradise* (1999) and *Love* (2003).

She plays with words and narrates pleasingly even though the story she tells is not calculated to please. Her readers are found in every continent, representing sexes, colors, ages and creeds. Morrison wanted to establish the Afro- American art, life and values they attached to as inherent current of the mainstream.

Morrison's novels are crowed with female characters with southern black experiences, though Morrison is not a southerner. For her south is the ancestral home of black Americans or the "nucleus of Black American Culture". *The Bluest Eye* explores the southern black womanhood through the migratory characters of Pauline and Geraldine. *Sula* focuses on Peace family, and moves around it. Eva peace is a southern woman from Virginia. Likewise '*Jazz'* deals with three southern black women who travel to north. Her characters like Eva Peace, True Belle, Rose Dear, struggle in the urbane north to establish their healthy identities, and try to bring everything into their ancestor rural southern pasts by somehow fusing past and present. Past is more important to her and it is unavoidable.

Almost all her characters are destined to live in their respective communities. Those who go outside the communities are destroyed by themselves or by others. Search for psychological autonomy in linguistic community is threatening and almost an impossible act. Pecola is inextricably linked to her community and culture. Her community knows only blue eye is beautiful, and it is recognized as standard physical beauty. Her effort to get the unattainable standard beauty makes her unusual. Her isolation from others leads her psychological disintegration. When Sula tries to create for herself an identity she is despised and abused by the people of her community. Morrison's characters in general are female characters in particular are wounded not only by sexual but also racial and economic division within American culture. Within patriarchal society woman is known as "inferior being", then black woman is defined as "other".

Nature of Morrison's Writing

Black writers in America are in search of a black literary tradition where they can create their own cultural space so that they can talk about the experience of black people in the American society. The major struggle of Afro-American is concerned for their human and social rights, and their writing reflects the effect of white American racial prejudice on the minds of the blacks. Afro-Americans have the long history of slavery, discrimination and oppression. They have the layers of anger piled up in their heart. They were given the words of hopes, but simply withered without realization of it.

Black women writers were primarily concerned with how racism, sexism, and class had influenced the development of love, autonomy, creativity, manhood and womanhood in the black family and community. So in pursuing these themes black women novelists provide a much more neglected perspectives and chorus of voices on the human experiences into a single narrative thread against the absences, silences and misrepresentations of black women in literary and non- literary texts. So, many black women employ to a greater or lesser degree the following signs and structures in their writings. These are:

> The motif of interlocking racist, sexist and class oppressions, black female protagonist, spiritual journey from victimization to the realization of personal autonomy and creativity, a centrality of female bonding, a sharp focus on personal relationship in the family and community, more detailed exploration and validation of the epistemological power of the emotions, iconography of women's clothing and black female language. (McDowell qtd. in Bell 242)

Like all other black writers, Toni Morrison believed that the primary function of black history and art is to reinterpret and rediscover the life of black people. For centuries Afro-American life and art have been defined by the outsiders, Morrison wanted to establish the Afro-

American art, life and every value they attached to as inherent current of the mainstream. Anglo-American conventional narratives have ignored or misrepresented the black people, and failed to acknowledge the Afro-American contribution. The mainstream fictions have distorted the presence of black people and made them alien in their own home. Morrison subverts the conventional discourse by creating Afro-American as well as female subjectivity. According to House:

> In each of her novels, *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula*, *Song of Solomon* and *Tar Baby*, Toni Morrison juxtaposes two categories of people's dreams and aspirations, visions of how life should be lived. The first dream types are idyllic, for their proponents' chief aims are to live in concord with people and nature while remaining true to their own heritage. In contrast, dreams in the second category advocate not brotherhood but the competitive acquisition of power or money. Based on values of an American society which cherishes outward "success," these second category dreams teach that happiness lies in attaining power and that personal worth comes from being number one. (House181)

The intricacies of blacks' lives are beautifully sketched in her fictions. History plays a leading role. "Characters are both subject of and subject to history, events in real time, that succession of antagonist movements that includes slavery, reconstruction, depression and war" (Peach 2). Morrison's stories beautifully present the different places in a very rich cultural framework. Mythical exploration of place and search for the connection of past and present are the dominant aspects of her work. According to Lewis:

> Sula and Shadrack's specialness in reference to African gods is depicted several times before the death of the townspeople in the tunnel. One might even

> conjecture that the African gods are angry because the people of the Bottoms reject the most African of them all- indeed the most secret of them. Everyone whose life Sula directly touches is adversely affected. Her mother, Hannah, who admits she loves but does not like Sula, burns to death. Her grandmother, Eva . . . chooses to burn her son, Plum, alive, spends her last years discarded in a newly integrated old's home. (Lewis 96)

Her novels attempt to capture the reality of the real world despite the vivid mythical exploration of the place. In course of narrating the story she brings the historical facts and connects it to the present. In the process she explores the Black Cultural heritage which is rich in its tradition. Regarding Morrison's issues in her novel, Draper states:

> Using unconventional narrative structures, poetic language, myth and folklore, Morrison addresses such issues as black victimization, the emotional and social effects of racial and sexual oppression, and the difficulties African- Americans face in trying to achieve a sense of identity in a society dominated by white cultural values. (Draper 215)

Evans has stated that commenting on the importance of ancestral presence in contemporary Black literature, Morrison makes the following remarks:

> It seems to me interesting to evaluate Black literature on what the writer does with the presence of an ancestor. Which is to say a grandfather as in Ralph Ellison, or a grandmother as in Toni Cade Bambara, or a healer as in Bambara or Henry Dumas. There is always an elder there. And these ancestors are not just present, they are sort of timeless people whose relationships to the characters are

> benevolent, instructive and protective and they provide a certain kind of wisdom. (343)

Morrison's writings encompass whole of the Afro-American culture from the beginning to the present. Her novels combine and explore the history of African- American, Black Emancipation, and black identity. But, her novels are not merely documentaries. Rather, "They posit history as narrative, sometimes deliberately distorted as half remembered, as fantasy, as brutal nightmare" (Peach 2). She depicts black south as the setting of her fictions. Though Morrison is not a southerner, her novels are full of female characters with southern black experiences. For her south is the ancestral home of Black Americans. *The Bluest Eye* explores the southern black womanhood through the migratory characters of Pauline and Geraldine. In *Sula*, Eva Peace is a southern woman from Virginia. Likewise *Jazz* deals with three southern black women who travel to north. For Morrison the past is both rural life of blacks and their strong bond to south. Past is most important to her and it is unavoidable.

All the Morrison's novels deal with southern subject matters because all the major characters are the descendents of the black people who have migrated from south. In *Sula*, the major characters Eva and Helene have migrated from the south whereas Sula and Nel are the descendents of Eva and Helene respectively. However, Denard, in interview with Morrison argues:

> In *Sula* there is less of a sense of an affective south. *Sula*, however, seems to be the only novel where there is no affective memory of the south. Except perhaps Nel who realizes some sense of herself as separate when she returns from the south when she says "I'm me, I'm me", but it's not an affective memory of being in the south. (5)

Morrison's characters in general are female characters and are wounded not only by sexual but also by racial and economic divisions within American culture. Almost all her characters are destined to live in their respective communities. Those who go outside the communities are destroyed by themselves or by others. Pecola, in *The Bluest eye,* is inextricably linked to her community and culture. Her community knows only blue eye is beautiful, and it is recognized as standard physical beauty. Her effort to get the unattainable standard beauty makes her unusual. Her isolation from her community leads her to psychological disintegration. When Sula tries to create for her an identity she is despised and abused by the people of her community.

Morrison depicts the difficulties in black male and female relationship as a result of white intervention in their private lives. Abusive tendency of males are simply stated. But to this entire situation she blames the institutionalized form of racism that leads to the emotional and psychological breakdown.

In case with male characters in her novels, some are always in motion to fulfill the role of a transcendent character, while others are confined and stable. Some are good, complex, immature, ignorant and comfortable and some are bad, jealous and feminine. But most of them are combination of both. In an interview with McKay, Morrison says, "I write about both kinds, so one should not be more disturbing than the others. There are values in different effects. I don't come off with all good or all bad" (402). In *Sula* they are not heroic or powerful. The names of some like Boy Boy, Tar Baby, Chicken Little and Jude Greene suggest their immaturity. Only Ajax acts with any freedom and maturity. According to Lounsberry and Hovet:

> Morrison seems to be making three points in depicting men as diminished in *Sula*. The first is to startle us and force us to reexamine the traditional perspective of all

> men as dominating presences. Morrison's second point relates specifically to black men and suggests that their development in particular is stymied, stifled by diminished opportunities for adult development offered to Black males by American society. . . . A provocative third point which Morrison seems to be making is that the "diminishment" of the Black male may be caused by excessive "mothering," by both Black wives and mothers, as well as by social discrimination. (128)

Her writings can be viewed as the combination of virtue and sin, good and bad and love and hate. She acknowledges that good and evil are inseparable, but both are inevitable for a healthy society. Morrison provides her characters with a choice or freedom for their destiny. At first we meet them crawling, then standing, then stumbling, then at last walking or running. "There is joy and there is pain, there is success and there are failures but always there is tension that is the struggle for integrity" (McKay 408). In an interview with Claudia Tate, Toni Morrison notes:

> It would be interesting to do a piece of work on the kinds of work women do in novels written by women. What kinds of jobs they do, not just the paying jobs, but how they perceive work. . . It's not just a question of being in the labor force and doing domestic kinds of things; it's about how one perceives work, how it fits into one's life. (123)

In her writing, Morrison beautifully blends the novelistic technique as well as the black folklore. She can't be categorized as an autobiographical writer even though her upbringing in Lorain, Ohio plays vital role in her fictions. Her works are deeply guided to promote black consciousness by countering the negative representation of black people. In this regard, the quest

for identity is the first and foremost issue in her novels. Her novels capture the complexity and diversity of American life that is purely the “American” experience and to capture that focal point black folklore becomes the richest sources for the black writer. Moreover, we can’t find the harmonious relationship between black and white in her novel and it is simply impossible because “that relation is unbalanced by social division of power” (Davis 30).

The language in her fiction is typical, indicative and provocative. “What I was trying to do was to be very provocative without using all the traditional devices of provocation” (Morrison qtd. in Stepto 382). She uses the language that black people love to play with. Morrison herself confesses that “she writes what is recently called village literature” (LeClair 370). Morrison’s novels are mostly structured in a cyclical repetitive frame rather than the linear and progressive. Her novels are much more concerned with the interrelatedness of race, gender and class. Her works present the situation of the oppressed class under the mythic structure at the background.

Sula advocates for the liberation of black women, and explores the minds of women who seek to stay outside the constraining sexual, racial, economical, and cultural condition of the patriarchal society.

Chapter-2

Review of literature

Feminism is a political and social movement that grew out of black women's feelings of discontent with both the Civil Rights Movement and the Feminist Movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Right from the beginning of the publication of this novel, it has become the focal point of critics. Critics like Addison Gayle denied the feminist elements of *Sula* focusing on its nationalist movement but other critics such as Jean Vargas Coley admitted to the feminist reading of *Sula* which is seen as a critic of male principle, and institutions of heterosexuality and reproduction. The character Sula does not exit for race and its behalf, she lives for herself and has no wish to mother anyone, she is a mother for self. Hortense J. Spillers writes about *Sula*:

> The single most important irruption of black women's writing in our era. He is not claiming for this novel any more than it's due, *Sula* is not a stylistic innovation. But in bringing to light dark impulses no longer contraband in the black American female's cultural address the novel inscribes a new dimension of being, moving at last in contradistinction to the tide of virtue and pathos which tends to overwhelm black female characterization in monolith of terms and possibilities. He regards Sula the character as a literal and figurative breakthrough

> toward the assertion of what we may call, in relation to her literary "relatives", new female being. (210)

For Spillier the character Sula is alien in traditional black aesthetics. In fact *Sula* provides spaces to explore the mind of a radical feminist. Black male characters of black aesthetics are not like Jude and Plum who are emasculated not only by racial oppression but also by dominated female characters. Even Ajax, who has integrated personality, is understood, in a very cogent sense, not as his own man but as the offspring of his mother's magic. The drug addicted Plum rejects his own masculinity when he tries to enter up into his mother's womb. In *Sula* the female characters are empowered; Sula rejects the idea that only male is viewed as the prime victim of racism, and women as healer of the black man's damaged masculinity. Jude is frustrated in white dominated economic system and expects Nel to soothe and feed him. When Jude narrates his oppressed position in society Sula does not find this lamentation any worthy to listen and replies: "I mean, I don't know what the fuss is about" (Sula 134). Sula finds his lamentation vain, she rejects any identity created by oppression and restriction of naming system. Both Nel and Jude are contrary to her philosophy. Jude wants to establish his identity in relation to white people and Nel in relation to Jude. For Nel the loss of Jude is loss of identity and life. Sula's disregard for social convention leads her to sleep with Jude feeling no responsibility to her intimate friend Nel.

Toni Morrison has Juxtaposed the world of Nel next to the world of Sula who seeks her own life exploring her emotions and imagination. Her life is her own, she does not care for other's business unless it pleases her. She is not interested in nailing with anybody else, so much so that Nel's warm friendship does not matter her. In Sula's bed Nel askes her, "Did not I count ?" Sula replies arrogantly "It matters, Nel, but only to ou. Not to anybody else" (184). As Sula pursues herself she is estranged from others. Kalerie Smith rightly mentions: "*Sula* centers on a

character who believes that she can create or herself an identity that exists beyond community and social expectations" (276).

Nel does not know anything about herself, Sula, on the other hand, knows all there is to know about herself and can think and examine herself. She is experimental with herself. She is perfectly willing to think the unthinkable thing and so on. Sula is not law-abiding woman like Nel, she is a law-breaker, a lawless women. Nel believes in all the laws of her black community and its values. In short, she is the community. Sula does not believe in any of them and breaks them all or ignores them. So that Sula becomes more interesting. Smith adds:

> She thus defines social restraints with vengeance, she disavows gratuitous social flattery, refusing to complement either the food placed before her or her old friends gone to seed, and using her conversation to experiment with her neighbors responses. As the narrator remarks, in the midst of pleasant conversation with someone she might say, "why do you chew with your mouth open?" not because the answer interested her but because she wanted to see the person's face change rapidly? (276)

She is unpredictable, she is despised by the community and she is aware of it. Her mother and grandmother are also lawbreakers but their mischief are known and categorized, but whatever Sula does is completely shocking, threatening and mysterious. She is defined as "bitch" (145). She sleeps with white man, even with the husband of her intimate friend Nel. All these deeds make her an outsider and also recluse in her own community. She embodies a new black female spirit. Karl illuminates, "Sula, the character, disrupts every expectation the black community has for a women, consciously damning herself in the eyes of others to prove herself what a black woman can do" (579).

Morrison has presented the lives of black people victimized and exploited by white society. They are used in war brutally and punished cruelly without any crime. Black women are moulded in constraining social order and the effort to escape this particular labeling or father's law demands loss. Black people get suffered not only by racism but they are also deceived linguistically (in the naming system of white people). Black community of 'Bottom' is created and named by white man. The white farmer, who kept his promise of freedom and a piece of 'Bottom' land to his black slave, convinced him to accept the infertile land of up in the hills as the bottom of heaven. This legend or "nigger Joke" is the tale of oppression and victimization. Keith E. Byermam rightly observes:

> *Sula* probes more deeply for the origions of oppression, victimization and Social order. In the process it also explores the possibilities for negating such control. Constant with the dialectics of language Morrison finds both control and its negation in naming when a place, person, thing or event is labeled, the name assumes it to be fixed, present and under his/her dominion. By such a practice, experience can be organized and even reified. (106)

But ironically the hill 'Bottom' is perceived as bottom of heaven when the temperature of white community of Medallion goes high, and the city gets covered with dust, "those heavy trees that sheltered the shacks up in the bottom were wonderful to see . . . may be it was the bottom of heaven (6).

The lives and social status of women are very poor. They are more rooted to past and values handed over from centuries. So that the representation of such community and female in particular needs are different strategies. Unlike Alice Walker, whose female characters such as Meridian and Celia function within recognized system, Morrison presented a bold female

character Sula who seeks for sexual liberation, freedom of movement, indifference to social or familial commitments. Fredirick R. Karl remarks: Toni Morrison, In *Sula*, as well as in *The Bluest Eye*, *Song of Solomon*, and *Tar Baby,* works through many of those lower class concerns, but with the added dimension of the black women struggling to assert herself. (579)

Sula is a feminist novel advocating for equality among humanity without discrimination in terms of race and sex. *Sula* deals with some black women who are risky and experimental. Sula and Eva are always trying to figure out how to get something done, that is, how to get escapes. Sula is more risky; she tries to walk on the water. In spite of the fact that she is marginalized in two folds, she goes to college, sleeps with the husbands of her neighbors, kicks her grandmother from her own home, goes to church without underwear, does not marry, and rejects to be mother. She is a certain type of adventurer who has nothing to do with going to war or hunting in Jungle, but with male/white society. In order to get access to power she breaks rules, crosses boundaries

When Sula tries to create for herself an identity she is despised and abused by the people of her community. The black community did not spend their life peacefully. Thus, the peace is absence in the novel.

Black feminism

Black Feminism is a political and social movement that grew out of Black women's feelings of discontent with both the Civil rights Movement and the Feminist Movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Women are victimized by sexist oppression. Though they have occupied the half of the world they do not exist at all in the patriarchal society. The word 'Feminism' always refers to the well educated and privileged class of white women who have ample time and are bored with leisure, with homes, with men. The existences of all the nonwhite women are totally ignored. White women are ignorant of the impact of race and class on their lives. They do not have knowledge of or understand the life and experience of black women. When black women participated in the feminist groups, white women looked at them with condescending attitudes and seemed to suggest that the women's movement was "theirs". Black women were not treated as equals. Their presence in women's movement did not count. They could not criticize the movement, they could introduce new ideas. When they introduce any new idea their voices were tuned out, silenced.

As a Social movement, feminism is made up of different schools of thought. The major ones are liberal feminism, radical feminism, socialist feminism and black feminism. Despite their

divergent strategies they share the common themes of women's liberation. Liberal feminist are likely to work within existing social relations to obtain equal opportunities for women. Radical feminists are likely to emphasize women-centered solutions to inequality, socialist feminist similarly attempt to include class oppression, and black feminists usually focus on the interconnection between race, gender and class.

From the very beginning many black women had been alienated from white women's movement. The white feminists were relatively privileged as far as socio-economic status is concerned. For white liberationists the word "sisterhood" did not include black women. Black women, sometimes, expressed their anger toward feminism. The poet Nikki Gionanni, for example, writes bitterly: And we watch white women really getting into what they are all about with their liberation movement. The white women's actions have been for an equality movement first of all and secondly have been patterned after black men's. (144)

For the same reason Black women did not enthusiastically join the autonomous women's movement, but it does not necessarily mean that they had no interest in the feminist issues. They raised their voices against their double standard of the oppressions. Of those who involved in the women's liberation groups, some chose to make the common cause with white women in the battle against the male domination, but others had different aim and opposed the racial oppression along with those of the gender and class. Black Feminist Gerda Lerner claimed that their liberation is entangled with black man's liberation, since their emancipation depends on the emancipation of black race.

Black feminist founded the "National Black Feminist Organization" in 1973. Combahee River collective published on manifesto *A Black Feminist Statement*:

> The most general statement of our politics at the present time would be that we are actively committed to struggle against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking. The synthesis of these oppressions creates the condition of our lives. (Lauret 68)

In the late 1960s when the right of women attracted to the general people, the publishers became more receptive to the voices of black women writers. And the novels of Margaret Walker, Rosa Guy, Mary Vroman, Louise Meriwether, PauleMarshall, Sarah Wright, Alice Walker, Alice Childress, Toni Morrison, Toni Cade, etc. came in the literary plateform rejecting the Euro-centric model and turning to nonwhite communities, and non-western and Afro-centric model. In their novels they created black autonomous selves and communities. In Euro-centric novels as Toni Cade mentions: There is nothing to indicate that the African women, who ran the market place, who built dams, who engaged in international commerce and diplomacy, who sat on thrones, who donned armer to wage battle against the European invaders, and the corrupt chieftains who engaged in the slave trade, who were consulted as equals in the affairs of the state. (qtd. In Bell 240)

Black women writers like Morrison, Barbara, Marshall do not show stereotype female characters who are submissive, passive and loving in their novels. They displace these Euro-centric qualities with the realistic images.

The writing experience and culture of black women are invisible in the eyes of the critics; they are unknown to them. In America, feminist like Alicer Walker and Barbara Smith realized that they needed to open up the space for the exploration of black women's lives and to redefine the goals and strategies of the white feminist movement. Because of the racism the black

literature is placed outside the mainstream and black women writings are still outside the black literature. The works of black women writers contain stunningly accurate records of the impact of white/male values and practice upon the lives of black women. Even black male critics seem to be unknown about black women's literature in their eyes. Black women's works hardly exist because they lack the ability to comprehend black women's experiences. Both the sexual and racial politics and black and female identity are interlocked in their writings.

Critics on Morrison's *Sula*

Sula, the second novel by Toni Morrison has remained something of an enigma to the literary critics since its publication in 1973. This novel is well received by critics, who particularly praised her vivid imagery, strong characterization, and poetic prose, as well as her terse, realistic dialogue. Yardley states:

> Sula seems most remarkable for its humor, its dialogue, its deftly realized titled character and, in particular, its portrait of the Bottom, the black community of an Ohio town called Medallion where the novel is set. Sula can . . . be read not as a political tract but as a mere novel, a human history, a statement that cannot so easily be made about Morrison's work. (01)

Sula has attracted a number of responses from the critics, not all of them in favor of it; however, *Sula* has caught wide attention because of the interpretation of contemporary society. The problems of literary judgment cannot be viewed by any kind of standard method with Toni Morrison's works. Her prolific styles, diversity and unpredictable nature of literary output rather compound problems. However, her works are surrounded by the plethora of published critical

writings. She has become a focal point in the literary arena right from the time of the publication of her first novel *The Bluest Eye* in the year 1970. Nigro observes:

> Although Morrison may not have intentionally created a novel to celebrate the working class or to explore the consequences of work among African Americans, she has, in *Sula*, celebrated the lives of ordinary people who daily must work and provide. *Sula* celebrates many lives: It is the story of the friendship of two African American women; it is the story of growing up Black and female; but most of all, it is the story of a community. Events that befall the denizens of the Bottom, a segregated community of mythical Medallion, Ohio, can be seen as those that might befall of any Black community in any town during the years of this narrative, 1919 to 1965. (724)

Plumpp in his review wrote "*Sula* is a suitable black edifice that came before critical blueprints for it" (62). He suggests that most critics stress the need for black writers to use black writing as a vehicle for teaching and that they are most comfortable when black writers depict black people positively. He concludes that *Sula* is "written according to none of these recipes, it is too complex and mature a book to be classified" (64). According to Sokoloff, "*Sula* is remarkable for the many nuances of ethnic culture that are present in the novel. However, it is the ancestral tie, an ironic, African relationship, that is most striking in complex web of familial and communal bonds the book portrays" (429). According to Powell, "In *Sula*, Morrison attempts to move her focus outside the sphere of influence of the whites logos by centering her novel around a black community" (753).

Morison's novel is imbedded in the context of black experience in America. In *Sula*, Morrison succeeds in bringing to the reader of any race the joys, the suffering, and the pain of Eva, Hannah, Sula, Jude, and Shadrack. Weems observes:

> In the characters of Sula, Eva, and Hannah, Morrison pays tribute to those women who are doing everything in life what they are supposed to be doing: creative women – like so many of us and our mamas – without outlets for our creativity. An "artist with no art form" is how Sula Peace is described. (97)

Morrison's writings are largely concerned with the Afro-American experience and *Sula* is the best example of it. Lewis argues:

> *Sula* is Morrison's most complex work in reference to traditional African culture . . . because the African presence and cultural rooted-ness is woven into Black-American culture without contrivance and with such extraordinary subtlety that neither the characters nor the reader are immediately aware of it; just as most of us are oblivious to the fact that after some three-hundred plus years in America, African tradition continues to manifest itself in our lives. (91- 92)

CHAPTER- 3

Textual Analysis

Reconfiguration of Traditional Signifier of Loss and Retrieval

Sula begins with two signs: a dedication and an epigraph. In the dedication, Morrison writes, "*It is sheer good fortune to miss somebody long before they leave you. This book is for Ford and Slade, whom I miss although they have not left me*." Morrison dedicates this novel to her sons whom she misses although they have not left her. She places her young sons into a loss situation by writing their future absence into the present. With this dedication, Morrison afflicts the very sense of absence and associates the impossibility of any representation not informed by missing meanings.

Like the dedication, *Sula* illustrates the absences. She is completely different from other women in the Bottom. She is identified as a personification of evil. Her place in the Bottom is a place of absence. She is identified as what others are not. She is seen as having no place there.

She takes the place of evils that are absent from the Bottom, specifically the evils of racism practiced by white people. When she dies, nobody misses her. But instead, without her the Bottom begins to come apart. She occupies the place of absences which people cannot afford to miss. Missing her is to recognize her occupation in and of the Bottom.

Sula challenges us to reconsider how the history within American society become complex into the ironic hierarchies and differences in Afro- American society. *Sula* also reminds us the absence of beautiful black boys before they leave us and to consider any difficulties between black men and women in a cultural as well as racial and sexual context.

The second sign in *Sula,* is the epigraph, a passage extracted from the play *The Rose Tattoo* by Tennessee Williams, *"Nobody knew my rose of the world but me. . . . I had too much glory. They don't want glory like that in nobody's heart."* By selecting this passage to serve as an epigraph for this novel, Morrison provides the reader with a concise statement of the novel's underlying theme. Lee writes, "*The Rose Tattoo* inscribes its sign upon Morrison's novel, not unlike the birthmark destined for Sula's eye. This birth mark remains an ambiguous sign variously esteemed" (572). The birthmark over her eye represents a variety of images. This shows not only a reflection of the characters of those interpretings but also Sula's own multiplicity. In fact, when she is a small girl, the birth mark is read as a rose bud. Jude, believing her both threatening and tempting, sees it as a snake. Shadrack sees the birthmark as a tadpole. The whole community reads it as ashes from her burnt mother.

This epigraph ascribes to the protagonist an excess of self-centeredness. The words *"I had too much glory"* find a near correlative in Sula's later assertion "I can do it all, why can't I have it all?" (142). Both Rose Tattoos, the birthmark and the epigraph, become for Sula / *Sula* symbols of contradictory meanings.

The missed meanings start flourishing as we enter into the narrative body of the novel. When Sula comes back to Medallion after ten years of absence, she and Nel engage in familiar yet unfamiliar wit. When Nel asks Sula why she has been away for so long, Sula replies that she has not been away for too long but may be too far. Nel doesn't understand what she means to say, and Sula either unable or unwilling to explain herself further, diverts the conversation by asking Nel if she wants tea. Nel's confusion over what Sula means is, in itself, strange. Both Nel's and Sula's history has been marked by a strange unison of thinking and movement that does not require words.

The unforgettable of that synchronicity is just before Chicken Little's death, where two girls in the grass play dig two holes in the ground until they are one and the same and then they replace the soil and cover the holes with uprooted grass. In this course of action both didn't even speak a word. This performance occurs in silence, the inferences being that words would interrupt the unity of action, that the necessity for words indicates a lesser degree of intimacy. Lee writes, "Morrison shows the division between word and delayed significance that becomes known within an individual mind" (573). While narrating her reasons for killing Plum, Eva speaks with two voices which say the same thing but with a difference. One for Hannah stating Plum's decline and Eva's response to it and the other for herself translating the same scene implicitly but with all qualifications of motive and recollected clarity.

The words "pig meat" (50) that Ajax refers remain missing from the text. The referent of pig meat is for Sula and Nel who look sexually attractive. The utterance of these words reveals its immediate properties as both missed yet not missing from the narrative. This spanning between absence and presence becomes characteristic of the metonymic device which Morrison shows operating for herself as well as her characters. Jude's tie and Ajax's license change into

metonym for persons with whom they are associated. Jude's tie, for Nel, becomes both the sign of his absence and the only object of his with Nel. Jude tie is a signifier of absence metaphorically bringing into presence the remembered Jude. Ajax's license, for Sula, becomes the sign of his former presence. When she acquires Ajax's license, it ironically negates Ajax's identity as Sula knows it. As a representation of Ajax, the driver's license signals only absence. Through such associations, Morrison manages to show absences and through such absence, the sense is delivered. *Sula* is pervaded with the inadequacy of words and the desire for meaningful expression. In the silence of one's interior realization, meaning becomes unpredictable or meaningless.

Missing takes place in the novel right from the very beginning as McKee states, "the experience of missing in *Sula* is a particular historical experience . . . as particular persons and things are missed from particular places" (38). The places that indicate missing experience in the novel are the place where Chicken Little sank in the river and the place Eva's missing leg once occupied. These places mark an absence. Neither of these places is what one would expect a place to be, since neither is the present location of anything. Morrison's converts such unoccupied spaces its places they have formerly occupied.

The experience of missing what never was becomes clear near the end of the novel, in 1941, when many people die at the construction site of the proposed tunnel. What the people of the Bottom see when they look at this place is not only what is there, but what might have been there and is not there. Morrison works against such a generalization, to realize experiences of missing that are particular components of Afro-American life.

Loss in Morrison's Sula

Sula opens with loss, with sacrifice of a place to suburban capitalist enterprise separated into years that cannot contain themselves, the narrative knows more than it says, and form the first sentence, the future has already happened. “In that place where they tore the nightshade and blackberry patches from their roots to make room for the Medallion City Golf Course, there was once a neighborhood” (3). The history of the Bottom, its people and its eventual destruction is in real meaning the history of Afro-American.

The black community of Bottom is trapped with its oppressed condition. The black people tolerate the predicament through the means of the joke, the ‘nigger joke”(13), but it does not bring any transformation. Sula embodies a joke that infuses the lives of individuals, neighborhoods and towns, and the humor is quite infectious. The novel is not just about Sula, but the entire human race because nigger jokes can be told by anybody to anybody for comfort when things go wrong.

Sula was written during the U.S American war against Vietnam. So, it mourns the loss of a neighborhood and the death of Peace. It also returns to the impacts of World War I on black Americans. According to Hunt, “400,000 black men were drafted, half of them serving in France” (448). In 1919, a large number of veterans returned to the country. Shadrack, one of the veterans, also comes to Medallion, Ohio. He thinks that the war is not going to cease soon as he has caught sight of the permanent possibility of war. “He knew the smell of death and was terrified of it, for he could not anticipate it. It was not death or dying that frightened him, but the unexpectedness of both” (14). He institutes 3rd January as the National Suicide Day, which merges into the Bottom calendar. He explains that on this day the people can kill themselves or each other. Shadrack’s annual holiday encourages people to avoid the call of death and free themselves with fear, to control death and resist disorder by killing themselves.

In the second last chapter "1941" the ritual ends in actual deaths. When Shadrack heads out for his annual celebration of Suicide Day, he thinks of Sula, the little girl who once came into his shack, the only visitor of his life, who is now dead. He is not really interested in running the Suicide Day celebration, but sets out anyway, ringing his bell. The townspeople are so demoralized by the recent hard times that many of them actually join him in the parade, needing an escape, and the procession eventually includes almost everyone in town. They turn toward the white part of town, toward the tunnel, the place where their hope had lain since 1927. The mob begins smashing things, destroying the new construction. The tunnel collapses and great numbers of people are killed. Shadrack stands on a hill above, ringing his bell and watching the tragic event.

In *Sula*, Morrison portrays African American, historical experiences of loss instead of identifying loss. She identifies missing persons, parts of persons, lost relations and lost possibilities. The absence of which is historically significant. The experience of such loss extends far beyond material suffering.

Absence of Peace in Morrison's Sula

Both the peace of mind and the persons remain loss for several reasons from the very beginning of the novel. Right from the time when the community of Bottom set up in the hills, the people could not live in peace. Their hard work cannot yield sufficient for them and had to find alternate ways for survival.

Sula is deeply hurt when she overhears her mother telling some friends that she loves Sula but doesn't like her. When Sula and Nel go down to the river, they meet Chicken Little, a little boy. They play with him, and Sula grabs his arms and swings him around; her grip slips, and he flies out into the river and drowns. She was so frightened that she runs to see if Shadrack,

who resides nearby, has seen the incident. Shadrack doesn't even give Sula a chance to ask her question; instead he says "Always" (62), which Sula takes as a threat. Sula was so terrified that she runs away from there. This accidental drowning of Chicken Little by Sula elucidates the absence of peace and uncertainty. There are several other situations in the novel where peace remained missing from the characters.

Eva, who sacrifices her leg to keep her children alive and live a peaceful and comfortable life, burns her son- Plum to death. She has many hard times keeping Plum alive as a child, but the war and the addiction have turned him back into a child, and that this time, she doesn't have the power to save him. She kills him out of love, wanting him to die as a man. But she can't save her daughter Hannah when her dress catches fire and bursts into flame. She hurls herself out of her wheelchair and through the second-storey window, hoping she can drag herself to save her, but Hannah runs out of the yard and becomes severely burned when neighbors try to put out the fire. She dies on the way to the hospital. Eva, who was injured in the fall, almost bleeds to death. While she is in the hospital recovering, she remembers the dream of the red wedding dress and realizes the fire is the event it foretold. After Hannah's death, the community never completely trusts Sula the way it accepted her mother because she shatters order. She did not help her mother. She did not try to rescue her from fire. She simply stood by and watched her mother die.

Nel begins a relationship with Jude Greene and gets married to him. Beneath all the cheerfulness of wedding scene is an atmosphere of loss and resignation. After the wedding, Sula immediately leaves the Bottom thinking that she and Nel can no longer be inseparable friends. Nel misses her a lot. After the absence of ten years, Sula comes back to the Bottom. Earlier that day, a huge flock of robins arrives. The townspeople link these two events, considering them both evil omens. Sula walks through streets as the people stare at her. She finally gets to Eva's

house. Their relationship is now cold. Sula threatens to set Eva on fire while she's sleeping, and Eva locks her out of her room. Later, Sula obtains guardianship over Eva and commits her to a shabby nursing home, shocking everyone in town.

Nel's excitement about Sula's return and revival of their friendship do not bring peace to Nel. Nel's husband Jude is interested in Sula, and one day Nel finds them in bed together. Jude feels ashamed and leaves Nel, destroying her safe little world. She has lost her husband and her best friend in the same day. She grieves over the loss of her husband. Nel is fragmented as she has lost half of her identity. But after Sula's death, Nel comes to understand the deep rift in her life without Sula. She finally expresses her repressed feeling for Sula and realizes that it wasn't Jude she was longing for, but Sula.

Sula's behavior shocks the people of the Bottom. The most shocking of her crime is that she has slept with white men. The strong damnation of such an outcome is derived from the racism under which the entire community has suffered. Sula's self-styled interracial affairs are perceived as an insult to all of the black people living in the bottom. They decide that she's nothing but evil and trouble, and ostracize her. She becomes the scapegoat of the town, blamed for every bad thing that happens, including accidents and deaths. Despite being excluded from the community, Sula takes Ajax as a lover. Never before has she opened her soul so freely to a man. Ajax is in love with Sula's masculine qualities but when Sula begins showing feminine qualities, he decides to end the relationship. She is heartbroken and miserable. Sula's final sensory revelation fortifies the theme of friendship. At the time of dying, her thoughts are on Nel. She can hardly wait to tell Nel that dying doesn't hurt.

Peace was a word of substantial, almost obvious, political importance at the time the novel *Sula* was being composed. The on- going Vietnam War was at its climax. Having been

composed at such a time, *Sula* delicately questions the notion of war in terms of the political and social struggles of Afro-Americans, many of which took place within the military or in terms of war related issues such as the draft. The Vietnam War was, in a sense, a testing ground for the end of racial oppression and demands for equality. The black community was also sacrificed in the U.S. American war in Vietnam.

By 1965, peace has many tombstones, Eva can't tell Nel from Sula, and Shadrack makes a final appearance. The epilogue begins, "Things were so much better in 1965. Or so it seemed" (163). This narrative recognition of only seeming improvement presages Nel's visit to the cemetery and her own epiphany that she had been missing Sula, not Jude, all those years. *Sula* ends up with an open-ended description which re-emphasizes the vague borders of personal definitions. Nel's study of the Peace gravestones combines people, words, and desires. Her explanation on the grave markers moves from tangible to intangible as there has been no peace from 1895-1921 or 1890-1923 or 1910-1940 or 1892-1959. Peace was absent in the world, in the black community and in the individual lives of the people now crumbling in graves. The desire of peace in the novel is a response to different wars the novel's characters are caught up in.

Peace is the absence of war and, in the context of a cemetery, the absence of life. A person when dead is said to be at peace. But the absence of war paves way for the positive forces of growth and life, and the word 'Peace' on the tombstones here does not indicate the end of the lives of persons, but the continuing cycle of life and death, of history and spirit, connected ironically and with great complexity to peace. Lee states, "The associative ambiguity of "Peace" clues the reader into thematic suggestion that Peace, both the people and the word, remain missing" (576). Nel's final cry "'O Lord, Sula. . . girl, girl, girlgirlgirl'" (174) echoes the triple

intersection of words, people and desires.The uneven referent of “girl” brings to mind missed people, the missed self, missed meanings, and all the wishes and longings.

Sula is a very complex novel with many underlying themes. Some of the themes that exist are good and evil, friendship and love, survival and community, and death. Montgomery weaves a multi-faceted interpretation of *Sula.* She sketches her belief that “natural disasters, unexpected deaths, and continued racist oppression serve as bitter reminders of the near-tragic dimensions of life, for to be black in America is to experience calamity as an ever-present reality, to live on the brink of apocalypse” (75).

Anti – Heterosexuality

Hetrosexuality in *Sula* is directly associated with loss and absence. Boy Boy never lives with Eva, ultimately he abandons her with small children and marries another woman. After that Eva mysteriously loses her leg in her attempt to build her life and to protect her hungry children. The marriage between Jude and Nel can not work for a long time. In the beginning, the heterosexual relationship between Sula and Ajax seems rewarding and Pleasing but, later on when Sula tries to possess him “he dragged under him and made love to her with the steadiness and the intensity of a man about to leave for Dayton”(134). Ajax leaves Sula with nothing but “his stunning absence” (134). In *Sula* the union between Nel and Sula constitutes the strongest challenge to black Aesthetics. The novel as prescribed by black Aesthetics is to depict black male – female relationship as a complementary union. Through the traditional metaphor of the feminine, sula describes herself as an empty space, which is supposed to be filled by man – man

and woman are the two halves of each other,s equations. In Sula's case Nel fills the space of Sula and becomes her equation.

All the female characters are leading their lives without the support or help of the husband. Hannah is leading with perverted sexual affair after her husband dies. Helene's husband stays outdoor. Helene does not know her father, since she is the daughter of Creole whore. Boy Boy never cares for Eva and his children.

The concept of motherhood or the very institution of reproduction is criticized. When Sula hears her mother saying "I just don't like her" (78), she runs off with Nel. It is the crucial moment that she is rejected by her mother. At that time, both Sula and Nel are in their budding sexuality. Later on, Chicken Little suggests Sula's unconscious rebellion against motherhood and refusal of heterosexuality. Both Sula and Nel do not try to save Chicken Little when he quietly slips from sula's hand. The murder of Chicken Little parallels to Eva's murder of Plum. Here, these women deny the concept of motherhood. Sula and Nel watch Chicken Little disappear in the water without trying to save him, this incident parallels to the event in which sula watches her mother burn. Sula is interested in watching her mother dying. Sula is even indifferent to her mother's dying words: "Help me ya' all" (77).

Sula is thirty years unmarried woman. Her decision of not getting married brings about unexpected shocking. When eva suggests her to marry and become mother, Sula bravely replies, "I don't want to make somebody else. . . I want to make myself"(92). Her strong denial of institution of reproduction seems to be selfish in the black society.

Sula is the critique of reproductive ideology. Helene Wright tries to raise her daughter following the rules laid by her society. Helene never lets Nel show any sign of enthusiasm: "Any enthusiasm that Nel showed were calmed by the mother. . . " (18). Helene always orders her to

pull her nose. She often commands “Don’t just sit there, honey you could be pulling your nose. . . ” (28). Nel has to meet the physical beauty in accordance with white/male standard.

Thus, Nel becomes a perfect woman always feeding and caring her children. In earlier part of the novel Eva Peace is stereotypical a strong black woman who always engages in the concern for her children’s survival. She leaves her children with a neighbour and goes away to find a better life for herself. She prefers to reject the role of the nurturer and sets out to seek her own better life. Even when she comes back after eighteen months she maintains a careful distance from her children, and later on kills her son because still he expects her to nurture him. Her refusal to play the role of the mother in all her life is the consequence of the black community’s prescription that black women center their lives around reproduction.

Female Friendship in *Sula*

Female friendship as the major theme of *Sula* is shaped by the encounter of these two different characters Sula and Nel who come from different background of families. Nel’s mother, Helene Wright tries to be a good woman by keeping her house neat and taking care of little Nel. She wants to show that a good woman is a woman who is able to do the duties of household matters in the following quotation. “Her daughter was more comfort and purpose than she had ever hoped to find in this life. She rose grandly to the occasion of motherhood grateful (18).”

Sula’s mother, Hannah Peace, explores the beauty of sex by sleeping with as many men as she can. She does not even care about other women’s feelings. As a result, she has never succeeded in making a long-lived friendship with any women, because of her sex attitude.

Hannah’s friendships with women were, of course, seldom and short lived, and the newly married couples whom her mother took in soon learned what a hazard she was. She could break

up a marriage before it had even become one. Seeing this, the other women in the town – the 'good' women disagree with what she has done towards the men.

Hannah exasperated the women in the town – the "good" women, who said, "one thing I can't stand is a nasty woman"; the whores, who were hard put to find trade among black men anyway and who resented Hannah's generosity; the middling women, who had both husbands and affairs, because Hannah seemed too unlike them, having no passion attach to her relationship and being wholly incapable of jealousy. (44)

These two different backgrounds of families are capable of separating them by the time Sula and Nel become adults. These two different familial backgrounds have set up their minds specifically when they are separated from one another – the time when they are teenagers since they live in places different from one another. Sula lives in big cities outside Medallion, whereas Nel stays all her life in Medallion. At the time when Sula stays outside Medallion (in the 1920's to the 1940's), there are many things happening among which are: feminism, modernism that permits sexual liberties, and the inventions to improve daily lives' activities. All these values including her familial background bring a great impact on the shaping process of her personality.

Upon returning to Medallion, Sula "willfully defies Medallion's values and its conventions. She slept with her best friend's husband, she put her grandmother in a nursing home, she went to church supper without underwear, and worst of all, it was rumoured, she slept with white men" (Denard 174). All of this "law breaking" in the eyes of Medallion people make them call Sula as a pariah which means that she is an outcast and therefore, she is not accepted by the society itself.

Sula was a pariah, then and knew it. Knew that they despised her and believed that they framed their hatred as disgust for the easy way she lay with men which was true. (122)

According to Deborah E. McDowell, Nel's sexuality is not expressed in itself and for her own pleasure, but rather for the pleasure of her husband and in obedience to a system of ethical judgement and moral virtue. Because Nel's sexuality is harnessed to and only enacted within the institutions that sanction sexuality for women – marriage and family – she does not own it. That is why it is impossible to imagine sex without Jude.

However, this is not so for Sula. Sula " went to bed with men as frequently as she could" (122) and assumed responsibility for her own pleasure (McDowell). She denies the social definitions of "female sexuality and conventions of duty" (p. 83). Sula, in her sexual intercourse does not have any ego and she has no feeling of compulsion to be consistent with herself. (119) She can walk out of any men's lives as she wants because what she needs is only to prove her own sexuality and to fulfill her own satisfaction.

Argument between Sula and Nel is unavoidable since Nel herself has her own principles about hoe to live according to Medallion's values – a place which she never leaves for all her life. As a black woman, she cannot strongly stand against the racism outside her society and sexism inside her society. She does this because she has experienced a terrible Journey with her mother to the south when she is still a little girl.

From that very young age, Nel makes a decision that she will never let other men look at her that way. She will not let that happen again. She thinks that it is too dangerous to stay away from Medallion – the place where she can find protection. For a woman and a black altogether, it is better to group with other women to overcome racism and sexism outside her society. That is why Nel has determined that she will never leave Medallion for all of her life after her first journey: "The many experiences of her trip crowed in on her. It was the last as well as the first time she was ever to leave Medallion." (29).

Nel believes that marital life is what she needs. She needs a man to guide her and to love her. Many women, including Nel, cannot live without a romantic relationship with a man and Nel wants to enjoy her romantic relationship in a marriage which is formally recognized by her patriarchal society – which means that they have to face the authority of male which oppresses women through the social, political, and economic institutions (Humm 159). In this society, women are subordinate to men in order for people to make sex and ultimately reproduce society. Society places higher premiums on men, male activities, production in the factories and waged labour than on women, female activities, reproduction in the home, and domestic or wageless labour. (Ruth 244)

Sula, after the ten-year separation from Nel and when she comes home to Medallion, hopes to find that Nel misses her. The first time, she arrives home, Nel did miss her. Yet, after her bedding down with Jude which is unforgiven according to Nel brings all women in Medallion incliding Nel to blame Sula for what she has done. Sula sees that medallion society has formed its false sisterhood which is never based on truth and it is impossible for her to join them (121). Women in Medallion society seem to group with one another, though actually they complete with each other to seek approval from the other that they are the best. They announce compliments to each other and at that same time, it is also plain that both of them dislike each other. If the truth she reveals provokes other women, they should be able to forgive her instead of confronting her and even abandoning her – in order to sustain the existence of sisterhood. In sisterhood, they are sister, and that is why they know each other's weaknesses and strength and even their inner goodness. Sula does not expect Nel to belong to "the town and all of its ways." (120)

Femininity makes women complete with each other to win men's attention and forget their sisterhood since women in a patriarchal society have been trained to accept the male defined norms. Even though women themselves are involved in female friendship – sharing their secrets and fears -, still the sense of competition between them cannot be abolished because they have been trained to be feminine (Tracy,81). That is why Sula shows the possibility of the impossible that women actually do no need to choose marriage. Women can live alone and women can take care of themselves without men. To be involved in a marriage and have children drag women to the enslavement of a family – to fulfill the needs of their children and husbands with little or even no chance to think about themselves fully. Even if women can think about themselves for a moment, all that she has done to improve themselves are performed to please men's eyes and satisfy their desires.

Morrison suggests that Sula's antinomianism (a principle of rejecting a socially established morality) demands for itself the title of a personalist "virtue" that is validated by the misperception and incomprehension of Nel and the Bottom community. (Grant, 101)

Though hating Sula, Nel finally has to confess that she needs Sula more than she needs Jude as the concept of sisterhood reveals. She misses her togetherness with Sula which is impossible because Sula dies now. Nel's sorrow upon the loss of Sula's bond of sisterhood with her is employed by Toni Morrison to show that "Women's relationship with each other are more important and certainly more enduring than relationship with the men who restlessly drift in and out." (Adams 196)

Strengthening women through sisterhood means a lot to black women as it is emphasized by Toni Morrison. This conforming to sisterhood for black women causes women to be free from

the subordination which is found in male- female relationship. To lose a‘ sister’ is much more miserable than to lose a man. Because of Sula’s death, Nel realizes that she missed Sula for all that time – as her true friend.

Sula as a Pariah

The Black community’s rejection of Sula relates to her experience of sex and refusal of all the cultural, moral and social beliefs of the Bottom. Sula who goes to church supper without underwear, rejects the moral and social values of the bottom community. She also rejects the reproductive Function, which is valued by her community. It is supposed that she sleeps with white men, she discards men black and white, as rapidly as she sleeps with them, even the husband of her best friend Nel. All these deeds make her outsider and also pariah in her own community.

Evil is free to survive in the world and for the black people of Bottom, Sula is evil and they allow her survive. Sula is recognized as uncontrollable natural phenomena such as floods, diseases because of people’s failure to discriminate between different kinds of evils: Floods, white people, tuberculosis, famine and ignorance. They think that racial oppression is as much

evil as the destruction is. And they accept all evil days whether caused by Sula because of her strange behaviour, or caused by a natural disaster, or by the white oppression.

Sula is alien spirit in Bottom, and holds an opposite philosophy than that of black community. The opposition between Sula and her community cannot be read in the traditional sense. It is not just opposition between a new present and an oppressive past. Sula is strange and cannot be assimilated with others. Beside her insistence on newness and change, she rejects the reproductive function so valued by the black community. When Eva advises Sula to marry and become a mother, Sula rejects and says, “I don’t want to make somebody else. I want to make myself” (92). In Sula, Morrison has portrayed the heroine who endeavours to create new black feminine self rejecting the role of the mother who is expected to nurture the children.

After ten years of college life she returns to Bottom, and her arrival is heralded by mass death of robins. Sula looks unnatural in Bottom, and it is symbolically expressed by unnatural plague of robins. The disorder in the society and in the natural world, for example, untimely frost in October and an unexpected spring in January parallel the Sula’s unnatural refusal to be a mother. Her denial of natural function is similar to the disorder in nature. The black community defines her as witch, because the community’s perception of her is determined by the natural disaster it faces.

Her desire for change and new identity lends her to disregard for her ancestors. She watches her mother “burn not because she was paralyzed, but because she was interested” (104). Sula threatens Eva to set fire to her while the latter is sleeping in the room and challenges her bonding with static past by sending her grandmother away from her home. She goes to bed with men as frequently as she could violating every decorum and other socially acceptable behaviours: “she was pariah, then, and knew it. Knew that they despised her and believed that

they framed their hatred as disgust for the easy way she lay with men" (122) . She knows the rules and polite behaviours but she prefers to break them because she has inherited the wild blood from Eva and Hannah. Both Eva's arrogance and Hannah's self- indulgence merged in her. Her life is experimental; she always engages in "exploring her own thoughts and emotion, giving full reign. . ." (118).

Sula's newness has no effect in the direction of revitalizing her community's old ways, but her newness remains in a state of perpetual contradiction with them. Paradoxically, her new way of life works against change, and encourages the black community to adhere to their old, conservative ways; the mothers become more careful, wives become more devoted than ever before: "Teapots mama got a lot of attention anyway and immersed herself in a role she had shown no inclination for: motherhood . . . she became the most devoted mother: sober, clean and industrious" (114).

Physically she is as strong as she is emotionally. She has not been tamed and broken by the natural phenomena of heterosexual family life which most galls the others. Among the weighty evidence piling up us the fact that. Sula did not look her age. She was near thirty and, unlike them, had lost no teeth, suffered no bruises, developed no ring of fat at the waist or pocket at the back of her neck (115).

Her aloofness is heightened by her unique characteristics or qualities. It was rumored that "Sula had no childhood disease, was known to have chicken pox, croup or even a runny nose" (115). She sleeps with the husbands of the town once and then discards them, needing them even less than her own mother did for sexual gratification and affection. The people of Medallion react to her indifference of patriarchal values and her invulnerable physique. People become

more aware and serious about their familial obligation in the way they might counteract Sula's radical criticism of their lives.

She is associated strongly with her mother Hannah and grandmother; and she shares their personalities, traits and behaviour patterns. Like her grandmother she is also a murderer. She unknowingly killed Chicken Little by drowning into the river. Her participation in the drowning of Chicken Little is as sinful as Eva's act of burning her own son. Sula is interested in watching her mother burn and does not go to rescue her mother. Her strange pleasure in watching her mother burn is equal to her grandmother's sacrifice of her leg or insurance money to feed her children. Eva's act of her sacrifice of her body is echoed by Sula's act of cutting off the tip of her finger to threaten the vulgar boys who always terrorize Nel. Sula, like her mother always goes to bed with men without discrimination, and cares for no moral and cultural boundaries. Like Eva, Sula "has no centre, no speck around which to grow . . . no ego. For that reason she felt no compulsion to verify herself (119). She is free of ambition, no self, no greed, and no desire to do any perfect thing.

Sula's rejection of maternal role means an assumption of male freedom, her endeavours to go beyond the social boubdaries and laws, which identify women with nurturing and care taking, and to prove to herself what a black can do. In their final meeting at Sula's room, Sula firmly states that she "would act like what you call a man" (143), in spite of the fact that Nel has reminded Sula that she is "a woman and a coloured woman at that . . . you can't be walking around all independent like, doing whatever you like" (142).

Sula accepts her death bravely and does not feel shame unlike her literary predecessors. Very proudly she claims that it is she rather than the conventional women of her community who is really good. She maintains her difference from other conventional black women on her death

bed; while talking with Nel just before she dies, she herself points out the difference between ending of her life and the endings of most of the black women: “I know what every coloured woman in the country is doing . . . But the difference is they dying like a stump. Me, I’m going down like one of those redwoods” (143).

CHAPTER-4

Conclusion

Feminism is a significant and necessary cultural and political enterprise for the liberation of black women. The black feminist critics combine a contextual approach with minute textual analysis including a concern for the issue of gender-specific uses of language. Morrison’s novel *Sula* employs a female language and black experience. Morrison is searching for a specific language, specific images, specific symbols with which to record the lives of the black women, and she claims a rightful place in the afro-American tradition and the feminist tradition of women writers. It is also clear that, for the purposes of liberation of black women, Morrison insists on their own name and their own place.

As women black women are struggling against sexism subverting all the established father’s laws, and as blacks they are making every endeavour to assert black presence in the white language and signification.

Blacks have not been able to free themselves from the psychic bondage of slavery and stereotype attributed to their body, mind and history. They have been able to accomplish their external journey from bondage to freedom, nor have they been able to accomplish their internal journey, i.e., psychic journey. Rather their life is going more towards deterioration. They are both victims of psychic bondage and its aftermath. Most of the African- Americans are still facing the threat of suicide in their life. They are under terrible threat of despair and are losing hope, love, meaning and essence in their life. This gloomy and awful existence of blacks in America has not only reduced their hope but also led them towards death in life. Therefore, one can generalize and say that their aesthetic body, culture and history are also being deaestheticized day by day.

Morrison portrays a real picture of the blacks' condition in her novel *Sula*, which is full of '*missings*' and '*losses*'. It depicts the life of Afro-American and how they are oppressed and exploited by the whites. The novel addresses issues of racism, prejudice, and suppression of Afro-American. It depicts the hopelessness people feel when they can't get decent jobs and the determination of some to survive. Eva cuts off her leg in order to get money to raise her family. Morrison shows how faced with racist situations, some people had to plead to whites simply to get by, as Helene does on a train heading through the south. Some do fight back, as Sula does when she threatens some white boys who are harassing her.

Throughout the novel, Morrison plays with the idea of dominant female characters. It is odd to find out that there are more men characters mentioned than women characters. Yet, most of the women characters take on the masculine roles. Sula does not act like every other woman in Bottom. She is in charge of her life, and does what she pleases, no matter how far she goes. Sula's interest with Jude is one of the many examples that have shown how her interest conflict

with her relationships with others. Her curiosity has power over her personality, and it has made her such a diverse character.

Morrison emphasizes on the social conditions and historical circumstances (African, slavery, the south, emancipation, reconstruction, northern migration and urbanization, and most important sexism and racism) in which black female experience has been shaped. Morrison knew that the complex experience of black women is understood in the context of their initial separation from Africa and the denial of whites of their humanity. In *Sula* both Sula and Eva are making every endeavour to establish their healthy identities, and to insist their own place.

It is a novel of social realism about growing up poor, black, and female in a male dominated, white middle class society. The novel also points out the humiliation the black women face in the south. On the train ride to New Orleans with her daughter Nel, Helene feels quite embarrassed to see the Afro-American passengers sitting in segregated cars with no bathrooms. They have to use fields near the train tracks. Helene has to plead to a white train conductor who is harassing her. The novel also explicitly presents how a black woman is treated by the black community if she ignores the traditional norms and values.

In each of the ten chapters of the novel we come across death, sometimes metaphoric but more usually actual. The novel mourns the death of ‘Peace’. Morrison has made Sula Peace die early in the story so the Bottom and the reader can miss her. Certainly we do. Her death forces the feel of the sting of death. Yet, Morrison affirms that death can be endured, survived. After all, not all black Medallions perish in the Bottom bridge tragedy. Sula leaves Nel in a grief-stricken state but nonetheless alive. Morrison gives us an unending celebration of Afro-American culture born of an acute sensitivity to the culture’s continuing delicateness. In Afro- American

life Morrison identifies both material losses- missing persons, and parts of persons and non material losses- lost relatives, lost possibilities, lost peace.

Missing itself takes place in the novel because particular persons and things are missed from particular places. The closed place in the middle of the river and the place where Eva's leg once was have nothing in them, they mark the absence of person, or the parts of persons, once present. When persons miss other persons or parts of persons or things, obviously they miss peace. In the novel *Sula* all the characters miss one or the other persons, parts of persons or things. They all miss peace. So, peace is absence in the novel.

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