

## Chapter One

### New World Woman: Toni Morrison's *Sula*

#### Introduction

In Toni Morrison's *Sula*, female characters are dominant. Feminine identity is the main concern of the novelist. Main characters – Eva Peace, *Sula* Peace and Nel Wright are the suppressed women of the patriarchal African–American community. They are engaged in the struggle against the patriarchal black community for their identity and autonomy. These characters are doubly marginalized. Violating the patriarchal norms and values, they are in search of their own identity. They want to have full control over their lives by themselves. They don't want to be guided or controlled by others.

In the patriarchal society, the role of women is determined by the society. They are considered second class citizen. Their identity is limited within the boundaries of their household. If they behave according to the prescribed rules of their community, they are considered good women of the society, otherwise bad women. Identity formation is very difficult task for the women of the community. If they realize their 'self' and try to create it, they become outcast of the community. *Sula*, protagonist of this novel suffers the same situation. *Sula*, who is black heroine of the novel raises her voice against the oppressive system of patriarchal society where she is suppressed as a black and as a woman.

The issue of identity for the women of Bottom community creates a lot of problems. It's really problematic for the doubly marginalized women to seek their own identity. Racial as well as gender discrimination denies women to perform any decisive role or create their own self. The double suppression of female characters and their attempt to come out from it is the main focus of this novel.

Sula Peace, protagonist of the novel, a member of African-American community is an attempt of Morrison to present her as a 'New World Woman'. Sula does not limit herself within the limitations imposed by her family, her community, or the era in which she is depicted. When she returns after ten years attending college and gaining knowledge about the world, she refuses to maintain the family house in the manner of her mother and grandmother before her. Her sexual exploits do not lead her to a state of monogamy, shared domesticity or even steady companionship. Her interest is interpreted as selfishness; she believes in self-nurture as an end in and of itself. Whereas for Eva, Nel and the other women in town mothering, caretaking and running a household are non-negotiable women's work.

Nel Wright is another important character of the novel. Nel is Sula's childhood confidante. Both girls are too intimate to each other because of some similarities they have. In their childhood both girls realize, "Each had discovered years before that they were neither white nor male and that all freedom and triumph was forbidden to them, they had set about creation something else to be" (*Sula* 52). Both girls are, "Daughters of distant mothers and incomprehensible fathers ( *Sula's* because he was dead, Nel's because he wasn't )" (52). These similarities bring them closer. They grow up together in the different environment of their family in the same community. Nel has been taught to be fit in the traditional community values by her mother Helene. So according to the instruction she follows the footsteps of other women of her community. She gets married, has children and tries to make others not herself. While Sula violates every norm and value of the community and runs to college, gains knowledge and experience of the world, returns to Bottom with a completely new shocking personality. She does the things that is denied by the community. She experiences her life with full autonomy over it. As a result she turns to be a witch, an

evil, a pariah etc. for the people of black community. She becomes an outcast in her own community as people ostracize her. In traditional terms of course, Sula is an evil and Nel is good. Nel becomes the reliable and likable woman for community. Nel believes in traditional norms and values of community. She follows them like other women of the community. So, she is liked by every member of the community. Sula is hated in the same community as she violates established norms and values.

### **Review of Literature**

*Sula* a successful novel by Toni Morrison has generated a huge amount of criticism from numerous critics since its publication in 1973. The novel has been viewed from different perspectives. Doreatha Drummond Mbalia writes, " The struggle between sexes having been explored in *Sula* [...] racism and sexism, although equally oppressive [...]" (89). The female members are doubly marginalized because of the racism and sexism in the African-American community. In *Sula* Morrison tries to depict the exploited female members of the African-American community. Sexual exploitation is mainly focused in the novel by novelist though racial exploitation cannot be denied as a factor. The novel has not incorporated the values of Black Aesthetic. Madhu Dubey writes:

By Black Aesthetic standards, the novel's inability to represent a new, revolutionary black community would certainly constitute an imaginative and political failure. The black community presented in the novel is moored to the oppressive past and is, therefore problematic from a Black Aesthetic standpoint. When we are first introduced to the Bottom neighbourhood, in the beginning of the novel, it has already become a thing of the past. [...] In fact, racial and

economic oppression appear to be the necessary conditions for the existence of a distinctive black folk culture. (81)

The female characters of the novel are striving to create their 'self' by freeing themselves from the established patriarchal norms. Eva Peace becomes author of her 'self' taking control of the story and her image. To prove this Rose De Angelis states, "She establishes authorship of her 'self' something that had been denied to her simply because she was a woman and more significantly because she was a black woman" (2). Sula Peace, who understands herself very well in comparison to other characters, armed with a college education and an edgy cynicism. She is an outcast from the start. Her status as a woman without a man and a woman without children simply does not translate into a life that the Bottom understands. The Bottom community is not habituated to understand the life of a woman, which is led by Sula. Sula is asked to have some babies to settle herself by her grandmother Eva from the side of whole community. In response she says, "I don't want to make somebody else. I want to make myself"(92). Describing *Sula* Valerie Smith writes:

*Sula* centers on a character who believes that she can create for herself an identity that exists beyond community and social expectations. [...] She thus defies social restraints with a vengeance. She disavows gratuitous social flattery, refusing to compliment either the food placed before her or her old friends gone to seed, and using her conversation to experiment with her neighbors' responses. [...] Worst of all in her neighbors' judgement she discards men, black and white, as rapidly as she sleeps with them, even the husband of her best friend, Nel. (276)

Nel Wright and Sula Peace are childhood friends. Both have realized their position in the community and their similar condition. They become too intimate

friends. Sula's childhood confidante, Nel functions much like a sister, someone whose presence Sula never fundamentally questions. Some critics go further arguing as Barbara Smith does, that *Sula* can be read as a lesbian text. Smith says:

It works as a lesbian novel not only because of the passionate friendship between *Sula* and Nel but because of Morrison's consistently critical stance toward the heterosexual institution of male, female relationships, marriage and the family. Consciously or not, Morrison's work poses both lesbian and feminist questions about black women's autonomy and their impact upon each other's lives. (175)

*Sula* has presented many aspects of feminine struggle and their relationship among themselves. Female members are dominated, discriminated and exploited by the patriarchal system. Sula, the protagonist challenges the constraints of black community over black women.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Feminism and Feminist Literary Criticism**

#### **History of Feminism**

Women were regarded inferior from the beginning of the civilization. It was said that man was always superior to female. Male always tried to put women under their control. All the world was on the side of male. Steadily the situation started to change. Women became conscious of their secondary situation and began to question it. They became quite aware of the fact that they were made weaker, dependent, powerless by men. They were paid less attention in comparison to male and they have not got the opportunity to go to school as the male. They were not given the systematic training. Realising the miserable situation of women Mary Wollstonecraft first raised her voice in support of the education and emancipation of women. She was the first feminist theorist and with her publication of "A Vindication of Rights of Women" (1792) feminism gained momentum.

The New Columbia Encyclopedia defines feminism as, "Movement for the political, social and educational equality of women with men [...]"(934). Feminism is a struggle of women for the womanhood. Feminist writers focus on the women's rights and their emancipation. They also cast their view on the liberation of women from the patriarchal society. Feminism affects the world politically, culturally, spiritually and economically. They reject the tradition of masculinity. They debate for the equality of sex. Feminists reject the wrong belief of cultural ignorance on women. Feminists' aim is to eliminate the oppression and discrimination on the basis of sex, race, age, class, religion etc.

Women are victimized by the sexist oppression. Though they have occupied the half of the world they do not exist at all in the patriarchal society. By the time of

industrial revolution, a wave of self-awareness among women emerged. They began to claim political freedom the right to work as well as the right to equality and freedom. At the same time the women were fighting against slavery and poverty. They also fought for the emancipation of women. Then they entered into social enterprises and formalistic work. During nineteenth century there were some women writers who focused on feminist perspective. They were Jane Austin, George Eliot and Bronte sisters. They were pioneers of their time. They contributed a lot to the protest against the condition and status of women in the society. The wave of awareness among women enabled them to start working for the freedom of women. In 1833, Oberlin College was established first for co-education. The education offered to women was traditional and conventional. Francis Wright, who is one of the first women orators raised her voice for the better education to be offered to women. French feminist Simone de Beauvoir wrote a famous book *The Second Sex*, one of the most important books on feminism where she writes: "One is not born but rather becomes a woman" (297). This has revolutionalized the minds of people and helps to propel feminist thinking for the next fifty years or more. She touched upon questions and issues that lie at the very heart of feminist inquiry.

American Woman Suffrage Association was established for the upliftment of women. However, during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the American Woman Suffrage Association fought for the emancipation and betterment of women, it could not achieve its goal satisfactorily. The movement culminated in the winning of the vote in 1920 and then the feminist movement remain dormant for forty years. After 1960 only feminist literary criticism came into existence as a political movement, expressing social, economic and cultural freedom and equality between men and women.

The Women's Movement of the 1960s was not, of course, the start of feminism. Rather it was a renewal of an old tradition of thought and action. The feminist theory is used for the study of sex discrimination and their power relationship. It also expresses the female voice against the patriarchal society.

### **Feminist Literary Criticism**

The feminist literary criticism of today is the direct product of the 'Women's Movement' of the 1960s. A precise or complete definition of feminist criticism is not formulated, but since its inception, its theorists and practitioners have agreed that it is a, "Corrective, unmasking the omissions and distortion of the past –the errors of a literary critical tradition that form and reflect a culture created, perpetuated, and dominated by men." (Mc Dowell 186). In the first phase of it, focused on 'the woman as reader' and the second phase on 'the woman as writer. The American feminist critic Elaine Showalter in her essay "Towards a Feminist Poetics"(1979) says:

The first type is concerned with [...] woman as the consumer of male produced literature, and with the way in which the hypothesis of a female reader changes our apprehension of a given text, awakening us to the significance of its textual codes[...] Its subjects include images and stereotypes about women in literature the omissions of and misconceptions about women in criticism, and the fissures in male-constructed literary history. (128)

When feminist criticism focuses on 'the woman as writer' it concerns itself with:

Woman as the producer of textual meaning, with the history, genres and structures of literatures by women. Its subjects include the psychodynamics of female creativity; linguistics and the problem of female language; the trajectory of the individual or collective literary

career; literary history, and of course, studies of particular writers and works. (Showalter 128)

The representation of women in literature was felt to be one of the most important forms of 'socialization'. Since, it provided the role models which indicated to women and men, what constructed acceptable versions of the 'feminine', and legitimate feminine goals and aspirations. Peter Barry writes:

The concern with 'conditioning' and 'socialization' underpins a crucial set of distinctions that between the terms 'feminist' 'female' and 'feminine'. The first is 'a political position', the second 'a matter of biology', and the third 'a set of culturally defined characteristics'. Particularly, in the distinction between the second and third of these lies much of the force of feminism. (122)

In feminist criticism, in the 1970s the main focus was into exposing the mechanism of patriarchy, that is, the cultural mind-set in men and women, which perpetuated sexual inequality. Critical attention was provided to books by male writers, in which influential or typical images of women were constructed. Barry further writes:

In the 1980s, the mood of feminism as in other critical approaches changed. Firstly, feminist criticism became much more eclectic, meaning that it began to draw upon the findings and approaches of other kinds of criticism- Marxism, structuralism, linguistics and so on. Secondly, it switched its focus from attacking male versions of the world to exploring the nature of the female world and outlook and reconstructing the lost or suppressed records of female experience. Thirdly, attention shifted to the need to construct a new canon of

women's writings by rewriting the history of the novel and of poetry in such a way that neglected women writers were given new prominence. (Barry 122-123)

Since the early 1970s, three strains of feminist criticism have emerged. Strains that can be categorized as French, American and British problems from somewhat different perspectives.

### **French Feminist Criticism**

French feminists view that western thought has been based on a systematic repression of women's experience. They have focused their attention on language analyzing the ways in which meaning is produced. They behave language as a male realm. Drawing on the ideas of the psychoanalytic philosopher Jacques Lacan, French feminists remind that language is a realm of public discourse.

According to French feminists, a child enters into the linguistic realm first as it comes to grasp its separateness from its mother, just about the time that boys identify with their father, the family representative of culture. They tried to deconstruct the language, philosophy, psychoanalysis and social practices, culture and whole male centered thinking.

There are some French feminists who have argued that language only seems to give women a narrow range of choices. There is a possibility that women can develop a feminine language. In relation to language of women Showalter writes:

French feminists have described *écriture féminine*, a practice of writing "in the Feminine" which undermines the linguistic, syntactical, and metaphysical conventions of western narrative. [...] The *écriture féminine* is connected to the rhythms of the female body and to sexual pleasure. (9)

According to the French feminists, the structure of language is phallogentric, it privileges the phallus and more generally masculinity by associating them with things and values more appreciated by culture. Peter Barry writes, "The notion of the écriture feminine is found in the writing of Julia Kristeva. She uses the terms the symbolic and semiotic to designate two different aspects of language [...] the symbolic aspect associated with authority, order, fathers repression and control [...]" (128). Semiotic means the stage where baby and mother fused together inside the womb of the mother. So, feminist language is semiotic and pre-oedipal. Symbolic is associated with the law of father. Roman Selden said that female counterpart can overcome the male when they can project their sexuality in their writing. Her famous essay 'The Laugh of Medusa' (1976) is an example of women's writing where the women put their bodies into writing. She also rejects the binary oppositions of male and female and supports the deconstructive method of Derrida.

### **American Feminist Criticism**

American Feminist Criticism was created by literary and academic women editors, graduate students, university instructors and professors who have participated in the 'Women's Liberation Movement' of late 1960s. Elaine Showalter writes, "Feminist criticism was one of the daughters of the women's movement, its other parent was the old patriarchal institution of literary criticism and theory" (7). Kate Millett's 'Sexual Politics' (1970) is the first major book of feminist criticism in the United States. Since the late 1960s feminist criticism developed as part of the international women's movement. Feminist criticism has focused on women readers and critics, who bring different perceptions and expectations to their literary experience and has insisted that women have also told the important stories of their culture.

American feminist criticism focused on the text analysis. Elaine Showalter propounded two modes of American feminism, first is 'feminist critique' and other is 'feminist reader'. Feminist critics deal with books written by men. Kate Millet expresses about the male other e.g. Norman Mailer, Henry Miller and D.H. Lawrence, who follow the ideological model. These critics examined the women's position in patriarchal ideology. Millett's approach is concerned with the study of social, institutional and personal power relations between the sexes.

Many American critics reviewed great works by male writers, embarking on a revisionist rereading of literary tradition. These critics examined the portrayals of women characters expressing the patriarchal ideology, implicit in such work and showing how clearly this tradition of systematic masculine dominance is inscribed in our literary tradition. Millett, Carelyn Heilbrunn and Judith Fetterely, among many others created this model for American feminist criticism.

Another group of American feminist critics including Sandra Gilbert, Susan Gubar, Patricia Mayor Spacks and Showalter herself created a somewhat different model. These critics named it as "gynocriticism". It has studied the writing of these women who against all obstacles produced 'a literature of their own' in Showalter's words. Gilbert and Gubar, in 'The Madwoman in the Attic' (1979) concern themselves with well-known women writers of the nineteenth century, but they too find that general concerns images, themes were patriarchal because the author that they have treated wrote in a culture whose fundamental definition of literary authority are both overtly and covertly patriarchal.

Gynocriticism mainly focused on the study of well-known women authors, to rediscover women's history and culture, particularly women's community that have

nurtured female creativity. Another aspect of the gynocriticism is to discover neglected or forgotten women writer.

Showalter has overviewed on the feminist criticism. She has divided it into three stages. First stage to which she named as Feminine, second stage as Feminist and third stage as Female. She has defined the period between 1840-1880 as Feminine. In its earliest years, Showalter writes, "Feminist criticism concentrated on exposing the misogyny of literary practice; the stereotyped images of women in literature as angels or monsters [...] the exclusion of women from literary history "(5). The women authors of this period followed the masculine tradition. The second stage between 1880-1920 is defined as Feminist. In this period the women writers protested against the patriarchal standards and values. Showalter writes, " The second phase of feminist criticism was the discovery that women writers had a literature of their own, whose [...] artistic importance, had been obscured by the patriarchal values" (6). Since 1920 onwards writers, according to Showalter, started advocating their own autonomous female perspective. She states:

In its third phase feminist criticism demanded not just the recognition of women's writing but a radical rethinking of the conceptual grounds of literary study a revision of the accepted theoretical assumptions about reading and writing that have been based entirely on male literary experiences. (8)

Indeed Showalter's historical approach to women's culture allows a feminist critic to use theories based on non feminist disciplines as well. She said that unlike other literary theories feminist criticism has its root on various disciplines. Showalter expresses:

Feminist criticism differs from other contemporary schools of critical theory in not deriving its literary principles from a single authority figure [...] Rather, these have evolved from several sources from extensive readings in women's literature; from exchanges with feminist theorists in other disciplines, especially history, psychology, anthropology [...] and literary theory. (4)

### **British Feminist Criticism**

British feminist criticism emphasizes on art and culture. Their focus remains on the cultural practice, products and knowledge. In their opinion there is relationship between author, text and sex and said that a feminist text can be made by male or female author which is political and cultural and is not biological. What traditionally is called feminine, is a cultural construction a gender role that has been culturally assigned to countless generations of women.

British feminist theory emphasizes on engagement with historical process in order to promote social change. Though French feminists seem somehow to be different from British and American feminists, all of them have examined similar problems from somewhat different perspectives. French feminists have specially tended to focus their attention on language and said that the language they use is always patriarchal- male dominated and phallogentric.

British feminists tend to distinguish themselves from what they see as an American emphasis on texts linking women across boundary and deeds and an under emphasis on popular art and culture. They regard their own critical practice as more political than that of American feminists, whom they have faulted for being uninterested in historical details.

## **Black Feminism**

In the 1960s rebellion to revolution was a burning question. Black and white voices were raised in protest against racism, poverty, war, corruption and sexism. The civil rights and black power movements fired the women's rights movements of the 1960s. The women's rights movement of the 1960s was the most important phase for feminism. For years feminists were advocating for the equal rights of women, who are marginalized from the civilizations.

Most of the leading feminists were middleclass white women. They did not have the knowledge or the understanding of the life and experience of black women. White feminists thought that the women's movement as their own. They were unable to include black women in their movement. They were not treated as equal to them. Black women's presence in the rights movement was not counted. The voices of black women, raising their problems, tuned out or silenced. They could be heard only if their statement echoed the sentiments of the dominant white feminist discourse. So, many black women had been alienated from white women's movement.

Black women raised their voices against their double standard of the oppression. Some black women chose the battle against the male domination by taking the common cause with white women. But others had the different aim and opposed the racial oppression along with those of the gender and class. The history of rape of black women by white men shows the evidence of racial-sexual oppression which is neither solely racial not solely sexual. Because of this fact, black women stepped along with black men; whereas white women did not have the similar relationship with white men. Black feminists founded the " National Black Feminist Organization" in 1973. It has published a manifesto on 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 women liberation movement, the majority of white woman remained silent for the problems of black women. They could not share the aspirations of the black women, whose condition was comparatively poor. So, black women were not represented in the movement. Black feminists rejected the white feminine ideology and they started to construct a new identity as black women, full of racial pride in themselves. White feminists defined their oppression in terms of male domination but there were other responsible factors for black women's liberation. So, black feminists began to question the white feminists' definition of what it meant to be 'female'. Black women were defined as "the other" to the "the other". In this way their doubly marginalized condition was the main cause for the establishment of " National Black Feminist Organization" in 1973. Black women writers like Zora Neale Hurston, Toni Cade Bambara, Alice Walker, Toni Morrison and others were attracted the publishers and readers by not presenting the stereotypical female characters who are submissive, passive and loving in their novels. They all criticize major socializing institutions by presenting strong, revolutionary female characters. They displace these Euro-centric qualities with the realistic images. As, black women's existence, experience and culture are shaped by the complex system of oppression, the representation of female subjectivity is itself complex and it needs to revision the traditional practice. Barbara Smith writes about some black feminist writers as:

Zora Neale Hurston, Margaret Walker, Toni Morrison and Alice Walker incorporate the traditional black female activities of root working, herbal medicine, conjure and midwifery into the fabric of their stories is not mere coincidence, nor is their use of specifically black female language to express their own and their characters thoughts accidental." (8-9)

Black women writers use black women's 'language' and their 'cultural experiences' in their writing. This takes their writing "far beyond the confines of white/male literary structures" (Smith 9). So there are innumerable commonalities in black women's works. Alice Walker responds her interviewer's question why she thinks that the black woman writer has been so ignored in America and if she has even more difficulty than the black male writers. She answers:

There are two reasons why the black woman writer is not taken as seriously as the black male writer. One is that she's a woman. Critics seem unusually ill-equipped to intelligently discuss and analyze the works of black women. Generally, they do not even make the attempt; they prefer rather to talk about the lives of black women writers are not- it would seem- very likable-until recently they were the least willing worshippers of male supremacy- comments about them tend to be cruel. (O'Brien 201)

Barbara Smith further writes about Toni Morrison: " Morrison's work poses both lesbian and feminist questions about black women's autonomy and their impact upon each other's lives" (9). She is impressed by the new perspective of Toni Morrison. She says that in *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula* the relationships between girls and women are essential.

Due to the racism the black literature is placed outside the mainstream and black women writing 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. We find many commonalities among the works of black women writers as a result of specific political, social and economic experience they have been obliged to share. Both the sexual and racial politics and, black and female identity are interlocked in their writings. To prove this Barbara Smith in her essay, 'Toward a Black Feminist Criticism' expresses, "A Black feminist approach to literature that embodies the realization that the politics of sex as well as the politics of race and class are crucially interlocking factors in the works of Black women writers is an absolute necessity." (5)

### **Black Feminist Criticism**

In literature black women's identity appears first by distorting syntactic law of language and then asserting black folks for sexual and racial identity simultaneously. Barbara Smith in her essay "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism" states:

Black feminist criticism would by definition be highly innovative, embodying the daring spirit of the works themselves. The Black feminist critic would be constantly aware of the political implications of her work and would assert the connections between it and the political situation of all Black women [...] Black feminist criticism would owe its existence to a Black feminist movement while at the same time contributing ideas that women in the movement could use.

(9)

The primary concern of the modern feminist is to develop theories of sexual difference in reading, writing and literary interpretation. Feminist theory helps us to reveal the importance of female's personal and common experiences and struggles. It analyses how sexual difference is constructed within different patriarchal societies. Feminist theory is not one but many theories or perspectives. Feminists, in spite of different perspectives, try to find out the women's oppression its causes and consequences, and also to prescribe strategies for women's liberation. In 1960s, many feminist writers and critics came into women liberation movement with different perspectives and ideologies for common goal of women's liberation.

The black women writers are ignored by the white male/female and male black writers and critics. The black feminist realized to open up the space needed for the exploration of black women's lives and this necessarily leads to the redefinition of the strategies of white feminist movement. The creation of black female subjectivity is itself challenge to the notion of self because it is perceived as a figure of negation or absence in white language.

They realized that "Without a Black feminist critical perspective not only are books by black woman misunderstood, they are destroyed in the process" (Showalter 170). Morrison in her 'Unspeakable Thing Unspoken' (1988) says: "The distinguishing feature of black writing lies in its language- its unpolished seditious, confrontational manipulating, inventive, disruptive, masked and unmasking language" (30). In black women's writings the concept of the 'self' or the presence of assertive speaker- the presence of father-is denied through the creation of a double voiced textual address.

Black male and female writers share the common racial marginalized position. So, critics find commonalities in their literature, but we find the ways in which the

commonalities manifest differently in black women's writings and the ways in which they coincide with writings by black men. In black men's writings the negative, stereotype image of women are depicted due to their conscious superiority. Black feminists approach not only focuses on such elements but it has a wide range. Hortense J. Spillers offers a more sophisticated approach to this issue, and according to her, black women writers must assert the black female myth or say things. In short, for the purposes of liberation, black women writers have to insist on their own name and their own space (213). To clarify more about black critical theory, Barbara Christian says:

Black critical theory is quite different from western form of abstract logic, [and it] is often in narrative form, in the stories we create in the riddles and proverbs, in the play with language, since dynamic rather than fixed ideas seem more to our liking [...] many folk, in other words have always been a race theory though more in the form of the hieroglyphs, a written figure which is both sensual and abstract, both beautiful and communicative. (275-76)

### **Toni Morrison as a Black Feminist Writer**

Toni Morrison, the first black woman to receive Nobel Prize, was born on February 18, 1931 in the poor but fast growing multi-racial steel town of Lorain, Ohio, as the second child of George and Ramah Willis Wofford, among their four children. Her parents moved to Ohio from the south to escape racism and to find better opportunities in the north. Her father was a hard working and dignified man. He took a great deal of pride in the quality of his work, so that each time he welded a perfect steam he would also welded his name on to the side of ship. Her mother was a church going woman and she sang in choir. Woffords were proud of their heritage.

Morrison's maternal grandparent John Solomn, a skilled musician and Ardelia Willis, an enthusiastic woman familiar with the stories of ghosts and magic, were the constructive family influences in her career development. They were partly responsible for her new style in America "magic realism", that Morrison consistently protests to be labeled on her fiction (Peach 3).

Toni Morrison as being a woman of the black ancestry brings the attention of the world to black women writers and their contribution in literature. Up to 1970s, in the literary circles of white society, the point of view of black women was kept under shadow. The poet Gwendolyn Brooks, the winner of the Pulitzer Prize and the playwright Lorraine Hansberry worked vigorously as the literary figures. Their literary works were not included in the course book. Very few black women writers received notice for their work from mainstream literary circles.

Toni Morrison believes the voice of the black female was missing from American literature. It is not only the white writers but also distinguished black writers such as James Baldwin, Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison missed to examine the complex and rich life style of black women. Morrison in her literary works brings the issues that other black male writers had simply ignored. She examines the reality of friendship between black women. Morrison shows both the love and the estrangement that happen when two human are being related to each other. In her latest novel *Love* she portrays how once a very good friends Heed and Christine turn to be the enemy of each other. They both are the victims of social circumstances. Morrison refuses to display her black women characters in a degrading way. In her novel *Sula* she portrays a female character named Sula, the protagonist, whom the society outcasts, yet Sula moves forward encouraging herself with the individual will power and struggles successfully. Nominated for the National Book Award, this rich and moving

novel traces the lives of two black heroines Nel Wright and Sula. The novel describes their growing up together in a small Ohio town. When they grow up, their paths of womanhood becomes different. Nel chooses to remain in the place of her birth to marry, to raise a family and to become a pillar of the tightly knit black community. Sula rejects all that Nel has accepted. She escapes to college and submerges herself in the city life. When she returns to her roots, it is as a rebel and a mocker of the stereotypical role of female members of the community.

Morrison's positivist attitude towards woman can be observed in what she expresses in her collection of essays *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and Literary Imagination*, she writes about her primary responsibility:

My work required me to think about how free I can be as an African-American woman writer in my genderized, sexualized, wholly racialized world. To think about (and wrestle with) the full implications of my situation leads me to consider what happens when other writers work in a highly and historically racialized society. For them, as for me, imagining is not merely looking or looking at; nor is it taking oneself intact into the other. (4)

She shows her concern towards the black women and determines to work for them. She is not satisfied with what she has observed the condition of the black women, but whatever she is doing has well satisfied her. Morrison shares her experience of being a black woman writer in historically racialized society. She feels still restricted in her genderized and sexualized society.

Morrison is aware of her responsibility to the black women community. She is conscious of her primary focus is the portrayal of black cultural traditions. She has belief that it helps to create a distinctively black literature as important as canonical

literature. For this, Morrison always chooses her protagonist from black community. Basically, she exploits her childhood memory of Lorain, Ohio, and sets her characters on that ground. The young characters grow up in a neighborhood almost like those Morrison knew as a child. The strong longing for unachievable leads her protagonist to downfall. For example her novel *The Bluest Eye* (1970), centers on Pecola Breedlove, an eleven years black girl, who believes she is ugly and continuously longs for the blue eyes. This unachievable longing brings her at the mouth of death and gets an untimely death. Pecola's mother, who works for a white family, has influenced with the white's patriarchal ideology of beauty. She fills in Pecola's mind that blue eyes are considered the symbol of beauty. Pecola's fixation turns to insanity, however, after she is raped by her father and subsequently gives birth to a premature baby who later dies. Reading the novel critically Carole Ianone examines:

*The Bluest Eye* attempts to show the terrible consequences for black internalizing the values of a white culture that both directly and indirectly rejects them [...] Pecola becomes victim of one after another in a chain of black people in this book, including her own mother and father, who have been twisted and perverted by the false, empty and often vicious standards of the white world. (59-60)

Her black female characters suffer more than her black male characters. Morrison better acknowledges the torture of the black women. On the one hand they become the victims of white society on the other hand they have to tolerate the domination of black male characters.

In her most accountable, another novel, *Beloved* (1987) has also portrayed the badly oppressed black female characters and their miserable life. The context of her work is clearly linked to race and gender and traces the female history under slavery.

The physical and mental torture inflicted on the slaves left a tremendous impact on their psyche. In *Beloved*, Morrison exhibits the range of emotions undergone by the slaves who are now physically free but mentally bounded by the traumatic past. *Beloved* is rather a testament to the stubbornness of a mother's love in opposition to the dehumanizing demand of an inhuman institution – slavery. Morrison thematizes and discusses the seldom discussed experience of black women. The situation of women as slaves is complex as their suffering is double of being black and female, and this brings out other aspects of racial and sexual discrimination. This novel explores the range of a mother's emotions and the extent to which she can go for the welfare of her children. *Beloved* elaborates the female pain, history that is inscribed in the mental and the physical scar that each woman in the narrative bears as a result of the suffering caused by the most inhuman and peculiar institution of slavery.

Morrison by presenting the most accountable black female characters in her fictions as Pecola, Sula, Sethe etc. remains successful to portray the life of black women, their experiences and their trial to violate the western patriarchal norms regarding the feminine norms and values in the fully racialized society. Morrison does not only reflect the pain of blacks but she also portrays the suffering of human beings in her novels. Morrison in *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and Literary Imagination* further remarks:

Silence from and about the subject was the order of the day. Some of the silences were broken, and some were maintained by the authors who lived with and within the policing narrative. What I am interested in are the strategies for the maintaining the silence and the strategies for breaking it. How did the founding writers of young America

engage, imagine, employ and create an Africanist presence and  
persona? (51)

Morrison targets silence and likes to break it. For her, silencing women itself is  
directly or indirectly, knowingly or unknowingly being practiced in many black  
communities.

## Chapter Three

### Feminist Perspectives in *Sula*

#### The Black Female Voice

Toni Morrison's second novel *Sula* is considered as an important statement in contemporary discussions on black aesthetic. In this novel, Morrison has presented most distinct black female characters, who reject the old stereotypical patriarchal roles of women and choose their life styles by using their own consent. All the male characters in the novel are inactive and frozen. They don't develop in the novel like female characters. The female characters of the novel like Eva Peace, Hannah Peace and Sula Peace are leading their lives on their own way. These female characters have played the double role of masculine and feminine. By creating such characters against the 'black aesthetic' Morrison wants to revolt against the patriarchal black community where women are doubly suppressed. Realizing the situation of double suppression Morrison writes "they were neither white nor male that all freedom and triumph was forbidden to them" (52).

The novel is set beside the Ohio River of the United States. There is the community of black people who started to live there thinking it the bottom of heaven although it is dry and unfertile on the top of the hill. Black people use to call it as Bottom. The naming of the place surprises to other white people and they take it as "A joke. A nigger joke" (4). Sula, the protagonist of the novel, who grows up in the Bottom is aware of this nigger joke and she observes the black people from spiritual perspective. Sula belongs to the peace family of Bottom. She meets Nel, a black girl of the Wright family in her neighborhood. Both girls become intimate friends and grow up together in the black community of Bottom. Both the girls seem aware of their condition in the community. But they take different paths in their lives Barbara

Christian states "They have taken different roads in life and have formed the meaningness of their lives into different patterns" (89). Nel follows the traditional life style. She marries, gives birth to three children and leads her life as a typical housewife like other women of her community. She becomes loyal to the social values and systems. She identifies herself with the identity of her community. She mingles herself in the community. But, Sula refuses to marry, denies childbirth and breaks the traditional life pattern. She longs for the individual freedom and revolts against the social, cultural and gender barriers privileged in the black community of Bottom. So Sula leaves Bottom and gains higher education, new experiences and knowledge of the world. She sets forth in search of her own distinct identity and returns Bottom after a decade. When she returns to the community, she shocks all the black people of her community by her distinct behavior. She is taken as an evil force in her community. They give her a 'pariah' status in the community. Even her closest friend, Nel discards her in the beginning. She has been excluded from the community. But she doesn't compromise with traditional systems and makes her effort to establish a free society without suppression and discrimination. Her liberal sense towards sex, rejection of marriage and reproductive role and her celebration of individual freedom strikes a heavy blow to the patriarchal stereotypical black community. Nel becomes aware of things slowly and understands Sula and admires her as "Lord" (174). Sula is trying to maintain a single stand point; to create her identity in relation to her virtues avoiding traditional norms and values. She wants to be defined by her own values. She attempts to establish her own individual self. So, she rejects the traditional role of women that her mother and grandmother abide by. Madhu Dubey writes about her "Sula rejects the old image of blacks as victims and reaches for an identity free of the past of racial oppression" (75). Barbara Christian states about the novel:

*Sula*, penetrates further beyond the norms of any community, black or white, although through them, to a deeper analysis of selfhood as women. Realizing that the dominant norms are both impossible or undesirable, *Sula* pushes beyond them. So there is a development in the concept of womanhood and selfhood. (95)

Mostly unique and non-stereotypical female characters are portrayed in the novel. The female role in the society is consciously narrowed down, and the limitations of the black female role are even greater in racist and sexist society. *Sula* draws the lives of diverse female characters besides Sula and Nel. In the community each woman's character is recognized - Helen's ladylike and hypocritical demeanor, Hannah's elegant sensuality, and Eva's arrogant murder of her son.

Helen Wright (Nel's mother) raises her daughter according to the rules and laws of the society. Helen orders Nel different things to do. She never let Nel show any sign of enthusiasm. She follows the values and norms of the patriarchal black community. She orders Nel to pull her nose while sitting idly to meet the physical beauty of the patriarchal standard. "Don't just sit there, honey. You could be pulling your nose---" (28). Helen disconnected her name to her ancestors. By choosing her own name she rejects the social and cultural identities. She hates the circumstances of her birth to a Creole prostitute. She dismisses her relationship to the Sundown House and exchanges her name. She goes far away from the Sundown House to Medallion, and except once she never goes back to there. She regularly advises her daughter to be what the Bottom thinks a woman to be.

Hannah (Sula's mother) never likes to be confined within social norms. She is not interested in the make up and fashion. She never wears slippers or shoes in summer, but in winter wears on the "man's leather slippers with the backs flattened"

(42). Her temperament is "light and playful" (42). Her body, movement and almost everything fascinates all the men in the Bottom. Whatever she does, becomes the gesture of love." If the man entered and Hannah was carrying a coal scuttle up from the basement, she handled it in such a way that it became a gesture of love. He made no move to help her. With it simply because he wanted to see how her thighs looked when she bent to put it down" (43).

When Hannah's husband, Rekus dies, she returns to her mother's house. She is young and beautiful but she decides not to get married again. She wants to live her life freely. She beds with anyone to whom she likes. She does not discriminate anyone. She expects nothing but "some touching everyday" (44). Morrison further writes "Hannah simply refused to live without the attentions of a man, and after Rekus' death had a steady sequence of lovers" (42). Her flirting is innocent, "sweet" and "guileless" (42). For her sex is a pleasant and ordinary activity she does everyday. She is a daylight lover. She is suspicious about her mother for her and asks "Mama, did you ever love us?" (67). In the context of child rearing she says "I love Sula. I just don't like her." (57). Before her death she tells her mother that she has dreamed of a wedding in the red dress. Eva knows that wedding signifies death. While Eva is searching her comb she sees her burning. It shows the fate of the witches. The woman who goes beyond the social rules and norms meets Hannah's fate.

Another unique and bold character is Eva Peace, Sula's grandmother. She is not depicted as a weak, docile and passive woman but strong and valiant enough to create and destroy. In the beginning she seems to be good mother, loving, kind and willing to save her children at all costs, even cutting of her leg under the train for claiming insurance money, but in the later part we find her, in Barbara Christian's words "Eva is arrogant independent, decidedly a man lover who loves and hates

intensely. She is strong by virtue of her will, wit and idiosyncrasies rather than because of her physique" (78). She becomes so strong because of the oppression of patriarchal black society. She is deserted by her husband, Boy Boy with three children - Hannach, Pearl and Plum. She hates him extremely and this hate helps her to move forward in her life. She is left without money and food. She has to face great difficulty to keep her children alive. She leaves her children with a neighbour, Mrs. Suggs by saying she would be back the next day but she reruns after eighteen months "with two crutches, a new black pocket book, and one leg" (34). She builds a building and becomes a powerful matriarch of the family. The mystery of her missing leg becomes the material of folk legend. She appears as a god - like figure who has the powers of both creation and destruction. After Plum returns from war being addicted to heroin. She kills him by setting fire. She doesn't feel guilty of her action and she gives clear reason for killing him to Hannah "I had room enough in my heart, but not in my womb, but no more. I birthed him once. I couldn't do it again [...]. I couldn't birth him twice" (71). She wants him to be a man and when she finds that he wants to be a baby again she kills him. She says "I just thought of a way he could die like a man not all scrunched up inside my womb, but like a man-" (72).

For the sake of selfhood and identity, she scarifies her beautiful leg. Thus, she refuses to become a will-less object and to be bound by traditional, middle-class definition of motherhood. Her mutilation of her leg for the sake of her survival is repeated in the scene in which Sula takes a knife and slices of the tip of her finger to threaten the boys while returning from school; Sula bravely says, "if I can do that to myself. What do you suppose I'll do to you?" (55). About Sula's character Morrison has written:

Sula was distinctly different. Eva's arrogance and Hannah's self indulgence merged in her and, with a twist that was all her own imagination, she lived out her days exploring her own thought and emotions, giving them full reign, feeling no obligation to please anybody unless their pleasure pleased her. (118)

She has the maternal bonding with Eva, Hannah and other ancestors. Nellie McKay states:

The indomitable Peace Women, especially Eva and Sula Peace, grandmother and granddaughter, are two of the most powerful black women characters in literature. Sula, counterpart to the Biblical Ishmael, her hand against everyone, and everyone's hands against her is an unforgettable and anomalous heroine. (397)

### **Inactivity of Black Male Characters**

Morrison has depicted unique and nonstereotypical characters in her novel. They are different than the prescription of Black Aesthetics. The strong black female characters and passive, inactive and psychologically distorted black male characters are against the Black Aesthetics. Morrison has presented almost all black male characters passive, inactive and psychologically distorted. Morrison tries to establish a different strategy by going beyond the limit of male literary discourse. According to the traditional Eurocentric discourse and Black Aesthetics the male characters are heroic, valiant, powerful and bold and female characters are fragile, loving, caring, docile and domestic. Most of the women characters are the victims of the patriarchal norms and values. But, Morrison's black women characters like Sula, Eva, Helen and Hannah are strong, valiant and authoritative in their households. And she depicts her black male characters like Plum, Boy Boy, Ajax. Shadrack, Jude, Chicken Little and

the deweys are irresponsible to their duties, denies maturity in their characters, reject any kind of development in their personalities and seem passive, inactive in course of their responsibility. Her most of male characters are not stable. Morrison accepts this thing in her interview with Nelli Mckay "I'm not obliged to write books about stable black men" (402).

Plum has returned from World War I. He has the addiction of heroin. He is tall, a man of six feet, but he is not responsible and serious for his duties. He does not like to be matured and wants to remain as a boy. He wants to "Crawl back" into his mother's "Womb" (71). When he returns from the war he is mentally distorted.

Roberta Ruberntein writes "When he returns from the war, mentally broken like Shadrack, to live a mindless, lethargic existence in his mother's house, Eva takes things into her own hands" (144). Eva has taken her responsibility to make him "a man" (72) but he denies it. When she finds her son in child like condition she decides to kill him so that he can die "like a man" (72). Rubenstein further writes "Finding him one night in his room in his customary drugged baby like state, she cradles him gently, then douses him with kerosene and sets him afire," (144)

Shadrack is the first character we encounter in Sula. He is also black man like other characters of the novel. He is sent to fight in World War I. He has seen there the cruel fighting and his friends dying like cattle. His mental condition is damaged. When he returns from the war he has "no past, no language, no tribe, no source, no address book, no comb, no pencil, no clock, no pocket handkerchief, no rug, no bed, no can opener, no faded postcard, no soap, no key, no tobacco pouch, no soiled underwear and nothing nothing [...]" (12). The unexpectedness of death frightens him and thinks that if one day of a year is devoted to the fear of death the rest of the year will be safe and free. Then, he instituted "National Suicide Day" (7). He has seen the

evil done by Sula of drowning Chicken Little but he remains silent. Hortense J.

Spillers writes "Shadrack, the town's crack - brained veteran of World War I, has seen them and will not tell, consigns them both to a territory of their own most terrible judgement and isolation" (229).

Ajax (Albert Jacks) is another black male character in the novel. He is matched with the Black Aesthetics' concept of black male character. So, he is different than other black male characters in the novel. He seems intelligent and active but not as Sula and Eva. He also follows the footsteps of other male characters of the novel who defy women characters or their counterparts like Boy Boy and Jude. He seems impressed with Sula's intelligence and toughness but he deserts her with "nothing but his stunning absence" (134). Sula is impressed only with this male character in the novel. Morrison states in an interview with Robert B. Stepto "Ajax [...] terribly unemployed dude, who has interests of his own, whose mother neglected him but nevertheless assumed all sorts of things about him ..." (385).

Jude a black male character in *Sula* is also a creation of Morrison against the concept of Black Aesthetics. Jude marries Nel among many other black girls. He chooses the girl by the Bottom's definition of woman. Jude knows that Nel has no desire to make herself but becomes happy in caring about someone else. His marriage with Nel enables him to maintain his adulthood or masculinity because everywhere in the white society either at the Hotel Medallion where he works as a waiter or in New River Road Site, he is emasculated and rendered weak, infantile, or passive who always gets orders. His domination over Nel enables him to assert his own autonomy and compensates the restriction the outside world places on him. In his house with Nel, he is no longer ordered but he is "The head of a household" (83). With her he is not a waiter moving around the kitchen like a woman. He also deceives Nel and

abandons her. Jude leaves Nel with "no thighs and no heart" (111). The presentation of Jude's character in *Sula* "clearly pinpoints racial oppression [...] black female dominance ..." (Dubey 71). Jude's failure to attain adult masculinity derives from his forced employment as a waiter, his inability to find any other meaningful work.

Three adopted boys by Eva, the deweys, are named by herself, remain boys forever and they never grow up. They are not same but Eva named them by the same name. They remain forever irresponsible and all being constantly punished. When something goes wrong, the deweys get whipped. They have single voice. "The stunted physical growth of the deweys, who remain boys forever, is paralleled by Plum's psychological refusal of adulthood" (Dubey 71). Boy Boy, Eva's husband has abandoned her with three children without anything. So, Boy Boy, the black male character is also not suited to the Black Aesthetics. Dubey further writes "with the exception of Ajax, all the black male characters in *Sula* fit the type that Black Aestheticians wished to ban from black literature." (71).

### **A Critique on Heterosexuality and Reproduction**

Madhu Dubey writes:

*Sula* embodies a radically new black femininity that upsets all the oppositions (between past and present individual and community, absence and presence) that structure Black Aesthetic discourse. [...] *Sula* emphasizes the sexual rather than the racial constraints on black women. Several other elements of the novel seem to invite of feminist reading, such as its depiction of black men and its critique of the institution of heterosexuality and reproduction. (70)

It is the significant part of the novel that *Sula* deals with the discourse of sex as one of the significant part of the novel. The sexual aspect of the novel is highlighted by the

binary terms of sex, homosexual as well as heterosexual. The novel is a critique on the institution of heterosexuality and reproduction by depicting female-female bonding, the unpleasant momentary relationship of male-female and Sula's rejection of marrying and having babies. In the beginning part of the novel, homosexual discourse has been dominant whereas in the later part the heterosexual relationships are portrayed. The union of Nel and Sula constitutes the novel's strongest challenge to the black aesthetics. As prescribed by black aesthetics one of the functions of black women writers is to depict the black male-female relationships as necessary complementary unions. But the novel keeps an uneasy relationship with black aesthetics by presenting female-female relationships and unpleasant momentary male-female relationships. Dubey clarifies this idea by stating:

The novel's treatment of black male-female relationships exhibits a similar uneasy adjustment to the terms of black nationalist discourse. All the major black male-female unions in *Sula* end with male desertion, and with a bleak vision of heterosexual femininity as characterized by loss and absence. (72)

Nel Wright and Sula Peace initially find "in each other's eyes the intimacy they were looking for" (52). Each virtually creates the other as one sees who she is through the other girl's eyes. Morrison writes "[...] they felt the ease and comfort of old friends. Because each had discovered years before that they were neither white nor male and that all freedom and triumph was forbidden to them" (52). Nel later remembers that as girls they were "two throats and one eye and [we] had no price" (147). Nel and Sula's union is described romantically like a heterosexual encounter. Like traditional convention, they are waiting for their "Prince of dream" and they have fantasies about their lovers which are indicated as "Technicoloured visions" (51). For

sometime, Nel takes the role of fairy - tale heroine and Sula becomes the fairy - tale hero. Nel imagines herself in a fairy tale heroine's posture of waiting passively for a prince.

When Nel, an only child sat on the steps of her back porch surrounded by the high silence of her mother's incredibly orderly house, feeling the neatness pointing at her back, she studied the poplars and fell easily into a picture of herself lying on a flowered bed, tangled in her own hair, waiting for some fiery prince" (51).

And similarly Sula also dreams of galloping on a gray - and - white horse like a prince. She takes the role of a male rather than the female.

Sula, also an only child, but wedged into a household of throbbing disorder constantly awry with things, people, voices and the slamming of doors, spent hours in the attic behind a roll of linoleum galloping through her own mind on a gray - and - white horse tasting sugar and smelling roses in full view of a someone who shared both the taste and the speed. (51)

In Morrison's narrative of a unique female friendship, Sula and Nel initially discover their own essence and begin to grow through their reciprocal connection. Nel thinks "their friendship was so close, they themselves had difficulty distinguishing one's thoughts from the other's" (83). Both girls materially and metaphysically have what other lack. Sula needs Nel as the closest thing to both another and a self, and Nel, who constitutes the other half of Sula's equation, needs Sula to nurture herself by keeping her dark forces out. Sula helps Nel to define herself and to see old things with new eyes.

Sula, who made her laugh, who made her see old things with new eyes, in whose presence she felt clever, gentle and a little raunchy. Sula, whose past she had lived through and with whom the present was a constant sharing of perceptions. Talking to Sula had always been a conversation with herself. (95)

Though they have different physical body, they are taken as a single person in the community. "Just alike. Both of you. Never was no difference between you " (169) which becomes clear from Eva's words. Morrison seems to be satisfied when she finds the complimentary, necessary unions of Sula and Nel which, but, splits in the later part of the novel. Nel and Sula are the representatives of two factors of a mind. Nel represents the orderly rationality of consciousness and repression whereas Sula embodies the darker, more mysterious and incongruous dimension of dreams and the unconscious. "They found relief in each other's personality. Although both were unshaped, formless things, Nel seems stronger and more consistent than Sula, Who could hardly be counted on to sustain any emotion for more than three minutes" (53). They complete the heterosexual union which consists of active and passive: the masculine and feminine principles. Unlike traditional description of union, in the Sula-Nel union, it is female, Sula, who fills the masculine place.

All the female characters are leading their lives without the support or help of their husbands. Hannah is leading with perverted sexual affair after her husband dies. Helen'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" (57), 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. Now Sula cannot maintain the pre - oedipal link with her mother. While Sula and Nel involve in symbolic act of heterosexual play with sticks and the ground, Nel finds a thick twig and peels away its bark until it is stripped to "a smooth, creamy innocence" (58). Metaphorically, the phallus is rendered weak and powerless. Later on, chicken little comes up to them. Sula swings him around and around until he slips from her hands into the river. The death of 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 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. Not only through Sula's character but also through the characterization of several black women who live by their community's valuation of reproduction. Sula is the critique of reproductive ideology. Helene Wright tries to raise her daughter following rules laid by her society. Jude later marries Nel by observing her obedience to the patriarchal society. Eva Peace is a strong black woman who always engages in the concern for her children's survival. She plays the role of loving mother. But later she kills Plum 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 centre their lives around reproduction.

The novel's treatment of black male - female relationship explores a similar uneasy adjustment to the black aesthetic discourse. All major male - female relationships do not go forward as black aesthetic wish to go rather this relationship ends with male desertion taking away all possibilities of heterosexuality.

Heterosexuality can be possible only in a condition of loss and absence that the characters have to face if they wish to continue the heterosexual relationship. Boy Boy deserts Eva after a short married life with small three children to grow. The married life of Nel and Jude also has to face the same destiny as it breaks in the middle of their life. Nel is left with dead heart. And, Ajax leaves Sula with haunting presence. Morrison's attempt to criticize the institution of heterosexuality and reproductivity in *Sula* by using "Sula as the embodiment of a radically new black femininity" (Dubey 74) remains shocking for the black aestheticians.

### **Dismantling of Old Stereotypical Images**

*Sula* totally differs in the presentation of black images from the earlier ones and explores a new radical as well as shocking image of black characters. At first, *Sula* rejects the black man as a prime victim of racism negating the presentation of any white characters with in the text itself. For the white world blackness meant poverty, ignorance and lack of middle class mainstream and Euro - American cultural attributes. Such assumptions were deeply rooted within the institution of slavery. These were certain stereotypical images of blacks constructed by whites. They even depicted these stereotypical images in their texts. They created black characters according to their own mental construct as slave, dull, savage, morally and intellectually inferior to whites, big body with little mind having parasiting nature etc.

Even black writers also followed the footsteps of white writers and depicted blacks as minor, invisible people.

But, *Sula* rejects these images and opens a new space in the field of black literature by presenting a unique characters and story of black community which is perfect in itself. Jerry H. Bryant writes in a review:

Her originality and power emerge in characters like Sula that we have seldom seen before and that do not fit the familiar black images. One - legged Eva Peace, Sula's grandmother, burns her son to death [...]. Sula's mother Hannah entertains men without discrimination in the pantry of Eva's home. Sula's friend Nel realizes that she experienced a thrill of pleasure when she watched Sula's victim drown. [...] these acts and emotions appear as the thrust of some powerful new force, loosening the foundations of the old stereotypes and conventional manners. (9)

The novel does not present any white characters, except Tar Baby, who also has been invisible in the black society. Most people believe that "he was half white, but Eva says he was all white" (39). In this novel, Morrison ruptures the stereotypical assumption of binary system where whites are privileged over the blacks without presenting any white character.

Bottom, though, a place of black community, was a white man's gift of land to a slave who had performed some difficult task for him. The novel gives a glimpse of slavery system, though it is not present in the community. This community is now totally different from other community since it has its own unique system. The black community presented in the novel is moored to the oppressive past and is, therefore, problematic from a black aesthetic standpoint. Morrison presents such a world which

has its own distinct feature with unique characters and their behaviors. In the community pain becomes a part of pleasure of living, as an instance- Sula gets pleasure as well as satisfaction when "she slashed off only the tip of her left forefinger down hard on its edge"(54) to frighten the boys. Indurance of pain to get pleasure is one of the principle in case of Nel, too. In the hope of getting a nice nose more enthusiastically pulls in spite of pain, "While you sitting there, honey, go" head and pull your nose'. 'It hurts Mamma' (55).

*Sula* features a valiant protagonist. Sula clearly cultivates those qualities that distinguish her from her neighbors. Here, too, Morrison's plot relies on a multiplicity of narratives to implicate Sula in the very community from which she is alienated. *Sula* enters on a character who believes that she can create for herself an identity that exists beyond community and social expectations. The novel is full with strange women characters as Helene Wright, having most dubious background, so the peace women are marvelous. The portrayal of black women are as complex and nonstereotypical as any one will find in literature. Jerry H. Bryant writes in a review:

Sula, Ms. Morrison's protagonist, has qualities I have seen in a fictional black female only recently. When She is 11 years old, she cuts off the tip of her finger to demonstrate to a gang of threatening boys what She can do to herself. She swings a child around by the wrists and half intentionally test him slip out of her grasp into the river where he drowns. In the shadows of her porch, she watches in an "interested" way while her mother burns to death. (8)

Morrison has created her characters against the old stereotypical images. They do not follow the old stereotypes rather they dismantle them. Eva, her grandmother and Hannah, her mother, we might at first mistake them for the banal stereotypes of black

women in literature and film. Eva, as the many, is willing to save her children at any cost, even to the point of sticking her leg under a train to get insurance for it, on the one hand, and she plays the role of goddess, and takes the life of her dearest son, Plum, when she finds him crawling back into her womb, on the other hand. Eva's murder of her son has been a sign of creativity and destructiveness in the human imagination. Eva's daughter, Hannah becomes widow and returns to her mother's house with the decision that she never marries again. She has inherited from her mother the love of male for its own sake. She takes the role of male for "Sex worker" (44) not in traditional sense who dresses in red tries to manipulate man to her own ends: she is funky, making no attempts to lure the man than simply having her natural sensuality. She becomes, as Morrison puts "a day light lover"(44).

Sula, following the tradition, also becomes a sex worker not because it enjoys her but it explores her inner self. Sex, for Sula, becomes an instrument to explore herself as she always tried to do something more something new. Like Hannah Sula sleeps with the husbands of her neighbourhood indiscriminately. Sula sleeps with them once and discards them unlike her mother. Sula does not experience sex as a pleasant past time. In sex, she knows not her partner but herself "Because of her drive for self knowledge and because of the imagination she brings to the memories of her ancestors and to her own experiences, Sula emerges as a unique woman"(86).

Sula does not care extra marital affairs and thinks that this does not make the people to break their married life. Sex, for her, does not become a possessive thing which can not be shared among friends and so she keeps sexual relation with Jude, the husband of her most intimate friend, Nel. When Nel asks her why she takes her husband away then Sula says "What you mean take him away? I didn't kill him, I just fucked him. If we were such good friends how come you couldn't get over it?"(145)

Sula, without caring the rules of the society, shows her idiosyncratic behaviors she likes.

These three shocking figures of women are not the stereotypical figures to which black aesthetic wishes to ban, they are also not the portrayals of black woman black aesthetic demands to form its characters to be. In spite of being a thing of sexual attraction, these women do not share anything in common. By presenting these three images of black woman, Morrison dismantles the stereotypical image of black woman as a sexual thing of pleasure not for herself but for the man, may be white man. By dramatizing significant events in the lives of diverse characters such as Helen Wright, Eva and Hannah Peace, the novel figures the exact territory of the endurance power of Bottom in relation to a woman's behaviour:

The community absorbs many styles - Helen's lady like and hypocritical demeanor, Hannah's elegant sensuality, even Eva's arrogant murder of her son - as long as they remain within its definition of woman as wife, mother or man lover. (81)

Sula threatening to the statement that black women centre their whole life on the reproductive activities decides not to make any self rather to explore her inner self: "I don't want to make somebody else. I want to make myself" (92). Though Sula's strong challenge to the reproductive system directly hurts to the sentiment of black to the image of black aesthetic; it gives a forceful blow to the image of black woman as a child bearer machine. So *Sula* becomes Morrison's utmost attempt to dismantle the old stereotypes and conventional images of black women by presenting such diverse characters.

## **Sula as an Outcast**

Morrison's protagonist, Sula is the most distinct character in the black literature. Sarah Blackburn writes about Sula's character:

Sula emerges; she leaves the Bottom and returns 10 years later, after college and city life that we never see here, to be perceived as a sinister force, sex - hungry, man - stealing, death - dealing, a figure of darkness and betrayal. Having dared to Smash the taboos that are her neighbor's poor guarantees of simply surviving, she's scorned, despised, abandoned by the people she grew out of - to their immense loss. (7)

When the black community of Bottom is trapped with its oppressed condition, Sula demands more from life than mere survival. The black people of Bottom including Eva are satisfied with their capacity just to survive. For them survival rather than change is important because of their perception of evil as an uncontrollable natural phenomena which inevitably goes on. "The purpose of evil was to survive [...]" (18). Evil is free to survive in the world; and for the black people of Bottom, Sula is evil and they allow her survive. For Sula, to live life realistically there must be some imagination, some exploration, so there can be some creative action. Hence, 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 accept all evil days whether caused by Sula because of her strange behaviour, or caused by a natural disaster, or by the white oppression. The new black female subjectivity is defined as bitch, evil or pariah, in Bottom. From the beginning of her return to the Bottom, Sula is perceived as evil – so evil that the towns people believe that she has supernatural powers. Morrison prepares the reader for this perception in the very first line of the novel, when she associates

Sula with night shade. The line begins, "In that place, where they tore the nightshade and blackberry patches [...]" (3) and Morrison, after many years notes:

My perception of Sula's double-dose of chosen blackness and biological blackness is in the presence of those two words of darkness in "nightshade" as well as in the uncommon quality of the vine itself. One variety is called "enchanter", and the other "bittersweet" because the berries taste bitter at first and then sweet. Also nightshade was thought to counteract witchcraft. All of this seemed a wonderful constellation of signs for Sula." (Unspeakable ...26)

Sula 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. Morrison says about the character of Sula in a conversation with Robert B. Stepto "Sula was hard, for me; very difficult to make up that kind of character. Not difficult to think it up, but difficult to describe a woman who could be used as a classic type of evil force" (380). She insists on newness and change in her character but she rejects the reproductive function that is highly valued by the black community. Eva advises her to marry and become a mother but she rejects to make somebody else rather she wants to make herself. In *Sula*, Morrison has portrayed the heroine who wants to create new black feminine self rejecting the role of the mother who is expected to nurture the children. Her bold statement makes clear her radical newness.

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, "Sula came back to Medallion. The little

yam - breasted shuddering birds were everywhere, exciting very small children away from their usual welcome into a vicious stoning." (89). Sula's return to the Bottom is greeted with a stoning, a punishment traditionally reserved for the public humiliation of criminal or, more to the point, a witch. In addition, Sula's re-arrival becomes linked to the physical accidents of others. When Teapot, a young boy, comes to Sula's door to collect bottles, he falls down her steps and hurts himself. And when Mr. Finley, who had sucked on chicken bones for years, looks up to see Sula in the distance, he chokes on a chicken bone and dies (113-14). The result of all these incidents is that Sula comes to be regarded as the local incarnation of evil, a pariah who effects and creates change and catastrophe within social and natural worlds. 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 similar to the disorder in nature. The black community defines her as a witch. Her subversion of motherhood causes the black community to construct her as a scapegoat. In so far as Sula is not a loving human being. Hortense J. Spillers writes:

Sula is both loved and hated by the reader, embraced and rejected simultaneously because her audience is forced to accept the corruption of absolutes and what has been left in their place - the complex, alienated transitory gestures of a personality who has no framework of moral reference beyond or other than herself. (222)

The desire for new identity and change in conventional notions, lend her to disregard for her ancestors. She watches her mother "burn not because she was paralyzed, but because she was interested" (78). 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 does not like to keep in touch with the ancestors and insists on self reliance. Thus, she earns the pariah status in Medallion. She becomes an outcast in her own community. She goes to church without wearing an underwear, goes to bed with men as frequently as she could violating every decorum and other socially acceptable behaviours, Morrison writes:

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. Which was true she went to bed with men as frequently as she could. (122)

She knows the rules and polite behaviour but she breaks them because she has inherited the wild blood from Eva and Hannah. Sula adopts Eva's powerful strategy: her first act in the novel repeats Eva's gesture of self - mutilation in the service of survival and her denial of her powerlessness. Threatened by some boys on the way home from school. Sula takes a knife and slices off part of her finger, frightening the boys with "If I can do that to myself, what do you suppose I'll do to you?" (55). This act is Sula's own moment of self - recognition of her affiliation with Eva and the world of her maternal ancestors. Sula possesses a birthmark, a stemmed rose, ambiguously phallic and vaginal, a mark of plentitude which distinguishes her from other women. 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. She sleeps with the husbands of the town once and then discards them, needing them even less than her mother did for sexual gratification and affection. The people of her community react to her indifference of patriarchal values.

"Sula - I think this was really part of the difficulty - I didn't know anyone like her. I never knew a woman like that at any rate. But I knew women who looked like

that" (382) Morrison states this view about Sula in a conversation with Stepto. Sula is one of the powerful peace women. 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 for insurance money to feed her children. Eva's act of 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. She even beds with her closest friends' husband, Jude, "was completely free of ambition, with no affection for money, property or things, no greed, no desire to command, attention or compliments - no ego." (119). Morrison further states about the newness of Sula with Stepto "It's a new idea to me - the emasculating black woman. [...] Sula I don't regard her as a typical black woman at all. And the fact that the community responds to her that way means that she's unusual. So she's not the run - of - the - mill average black woman." (384).

Sula's rejection of the role of a traditional black women of getting married, having children, is her trial of going beyond the social boundaries and laws, which identify women with nurturing and care taking, and to prove to herself what a black woman can do. Because of her this endeavour, she becomes an outcast of the society. The community accepts Sula "as an unnatural witch. Sula's subversion of motherhood and her commitment to temporal discontinuity cause the black community to

construct her as a scapegoat" (Dubey 77). To justify her actions right in the community she states to Nel:

After all the old women have lain with the teen-agers; when all the young girls have slept with their old drunken uncles; after all the black men fuck all the white ones; when all the white women kiss all the black ones; when the guards have raped all the jailbirds and after all the whores make love to their grannies; after all the faggots get their mother's trim; when Lindbergh sleeps with Bessie Smith and Norma Shearer makes it with Stepin Fetchit; after all the dogs have fucked all the cats and every weathervane on every barn flies off the roof to mount the hogs... then there'll be a little love left over for me. And I know just what it will feel like." (145-46)

Later, she dies of a mysterious disease like the unconventional heroines of nineteenth century novel were punished. But Sula accepts her death bravely and does not feel shame unlike her literary predecessors. Becoming very proud she claims that it is he rather than the conventional women of her community who is really good. She shows her difference from other conventional black women on her death bed with the conversation with Nel, "I know what every colored woman in this country is doing. [...] Dying just like me. But the difference is they dying like a stump. Me, I'm going down like one of those redwoods. I sure did live in this world" (143). To prove herself right and her actions were justifiable she again speaks "Oh, they'll love me all right. It will take time, but they'll love me-" (145). This is her confidence about her justifiable actions that one day the black people of the black community will understand her and her actions. After Sula's death Nel realizes it and misses her "All that time, all that

time, I thought I was missing Jude. [...] We was girls together. [...] O Lord, Sula, [...] girl, girl, girl girl girl -" (174).

### **The Quest of Self and Identity**

The condition of double suppression is realized by two girls of twelve, Sula and Nel, in black community of Meddalion, "that they were neither white nor male" (52). The protagonist of the novel, Sula Peace is in search of her own self and tries to establish her own distinct identity in the traditional black community by rejecting all social norms and values. She tries to create an identity that has no any stain of slavery and racism. Sula's actions from the beginning to the end in the novel are framed in the form of a quest of self and wholeness. She creates wholeness perfection and completeness of life. She is in constant struggle to create an independent and self-sufficient life. She does not hesitate to dismantle the traditional boundaries that dominate every step of human life, particularly the black women disguising in the name of gender/patriarchy, tradition, rites and rituals and a number of social systems like marriage and reproduction.

In *Sula* every type of unified subjectivity is challenged; the fixed identity is provisional. There is not isolated being separated from the black community. After a long trip to South, Nel looks into the mirror and discovers her me-ness. She says, "I'm me. I'm not their daughter. I'm not Nel. I'm me. Me" (28). The mirror reflects not a concept called Nel, but something other. Her image merges with the blackness. Though she endeavors to assert her selfhood, her assertion ends in the reality of her common identity with other women of her community. Whenever she looks into the mirror that reduces her into common darkness of Bottom. Nel is one of those unindividuated women. Each person is unconsciously compelled to be constructed by social norms of both race and gender that *Sula* objects to.

Sula denies her fixed identity in relation to race and gender. In *Sula* an identity is always multiple and shared with other members in the community. Sula struggles for personal liberty, self definition and complete freedom. Sula emphasizes on self rejecting to create her identity in relation to male or white power; on the one hand, she makes every endeavor to establish her own identity, on the other hand she shares black identity with Nel, Shadrack, Helene, Eva and the community itself. Her identity multiple as it is, is merged with the identity of community. Her much quoted assertion, "I don't want to make somebody else. I want to make myself" (92) states her emphasis on feminine self - creation at the expense of nurturance of children is crucial to correct understanding of her radical newness Barbara Rigney states "Even Sula's birthmark, potentially a sign of an individual self however fragmented and multiple, is rather an indication of relationship, being one of a series of marks, brands or emblems [...]" (56). Sula's birthmark, for example, interpreted by every other character in the novel as presenting a variety of images, is not only a reflection of the characters of those interpreting, but is also a valid indication of Sula's own multiplicity. Rigney further writes "Her mark is, in fact, a stemmed rose, a tadpole, a snake, an ash from her mother's burning body, all interacting to represent aspects of Sula's ambiguous essence" (56). Relating to Sula's birthmark Deborah E. McDowell states, "Sula's birthmark acts as a metaphor for her figurative selves, her multiple identity" (quodt. in Peach 56).

Eva has adopted three different boys. They are different from each other in physique and in other personal traits. But she has given to all the same name deweys negating their individuality or personal identity. The collective name of the boys is not capitalized rendering them insignificant. Their individuality, male ego, or personal entities are denied. They are inseparable, loving noone, caring nothing. When Nel

meets Eva in the old people's house, Eva refuses to distinguish between Nel and Sula. Their individual identity is again denied by her and they become mass. Like Eva, the stereotypical people of black community also rejects the black female individual self and identity. Their self and identity mingles with the common identity of black female identity.

Sula, rejecting the common identity of black women of the community tries to establish her own identity. She neglects every norm and value of the community. Sula, penetrates further beyond the norms of any community, black or white, although through them, to a deeper analysis of selfhood as woman. Realizing that the dominant norms are both impossible or undesirable, *Sula* pushes beyond them. So there is a development in the concept of womanhood and selfhood from one book to the next.

Barbara Christian Writes:

Sula discovers the hard emotional fact that no one, not even her mother, or even herself, can be totally relied on. The approach of adolescence marks the growth of their body sexuality and the emergence of their mind consciousness. Along with sexuality comes the desire for knowledge, the knowledge of self. (95)

Sula frequently beds with the men of her neighbourhood not to enjoy but to understand her own self. The pain and sorrow, she feels at the moment helps her to know her own self. "She went to bed with men as frequently as she could. It was the only place where she could find what she was looking for: misery and the ability to feel deep sorrow. [...] Sexual aesthetics bored her. Although she did not regard sex as ugly, she liked to think of it as wicked" (122).

Sula's indifference towards the traditional role of black women of getting married and bearing the matriarchal role, earns for her title of pariah. She is

considered an evil, a witch in the community. She has intercoursed with her close friend's husband, Jude, which brings a great rift in their friendship. Nel comes to see Sula at her deathbed and they converse there about it. Nel, a traditional woman of the community, questions over her activities and considering it is wrong she says "You a woman and a colored woman at that. You can't act like a man. You can't be walking around all independent - like, doing whatever you like" (142). This is the general view of the whole black community women of Sula, but Sula looks it differently. So she states "I'm a woman and colored. Ain't that the same as being a man? [...] I really would act like what you call a man" (142-3). This speech reveals her strong and determined personality. She is totally different than the common women of black community. In her conversation with Nel she further states about her self "My lonely is mine. Now your lonely is somebody else's made by somebody else and handed to you. Ain't that something? A secondhand lonely" (143). Sula, the protagonist has strived a lot to establish her identity and her own self in the traditional black community she thinks herself successful to achieve what she wants. Though she is considered a witch an evil, a pariah but she hopes people will understand her and her goodness in future. She says to Nel on her deathbed "Oh, they'll love me all right. It will take time, but they'll love me" (145).

## Chapter Four

### Conclusion

*Sula* is a powerful book in the field of black feminist literature. It presents a radical as well as an ambitious mission of Morrison's writing career. Morrison does not engage herself only in racial discourse and the presentation of black slavery like most black writers. She presents the impact of slavery system on blacks. Specially she is interested to present the black women's double suppression in the patriarchal racialized society. She is successful in presenting her characters in the real situation which black deserves and not in the stereotypical images of blacks.

Morrison tries to make her novel a vehicle for a good black literature that quests for the identity of the black women. She is aware of double pressure upon the black women who feel themselves "neither white nor male" (52) and Morrison likes to make them feel "they don't worth more than me" (143) as Sula declares at the end of the novel.

Contemporary Afro-American novels by black women writers provide the necessary context for a better understanding of black women's concern to the influence of racism and sexism on the development of love, power, autonomy and creativity. Black women novelists portray the human experiences through a much neglected perspective. The exclusive black female experiences are absent, silenced or misrepresented in literary and non literary texts or contexts by black men as well as white men and women.

The black feminist fiction such as *Sula* had a large part to play in the success of black feminism in redefining and reinterpreting the sphere of cultural politics. The black women writers displace the stereotypes with realistic images. The works of black women writers must be examined with the realization that the politics of sex as

well as the politics of race and class are crucially interlocking factors in the works of black women writers. So black feminists think that they need a different frame of reference because of their existence, experience and culture, which are shaped by the complex system of oppression.

The representation of female subjectivity is impossible in male dominated literary discourse and representation of black female subjectivity is even more difficult. Since the cultural definitions of gender the white women writers are writing against have never even applied to them in the first place, and black women have always been excluded from the definition of femininity in the second place. Black feminists and white feminists are turning to each other because their methods, priorities, concerns are different. White feminists define their secondary position in terms of male domination but this is not only problem for black women's liberation, their oppression is compounded by the virtue of racism. As, black women are suppressed by sexism and racism quite different from white women. So they fight against sexism and racism for their emancipation.

Black feminism is a significant and necessary cultural and political enterprise for the liberation of black women. Morrison's *Sula* presents 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. In *Sula* both Sula and Eva are struggling to establish their identities and to insist their own place. *Sula* is a novel of social realism about poor, black and female characters growing up in male-dominated, white patriarchal society. Sula desires for the knowledge of self. Her search for

wholeness and self knowledge is strengthened at her vulnerable age; and through sexuality she gains the knowledge of herself. Because of her drive for self knowledge and because of the imagination, she experiences complete aloneness in sex; she knows not her partner, but herself.

*Sula* chronicles a community in which black women dominate public and private life. Sula is conceived outside of the constraints ordinarily felt by women in her community. Her status as woman is only a small part of how she perceives herself and, ultimately, how she is perceived by readers. Sula is simply too much of an enigma to be truly representative of either group. In many ways, *Sula* goes as far as Morrison's *Beloved* in describing the extent to which one woman's rejection of every available social script generates tangible, even fatal, public tension. Despite any real or perceived limitations imposed by her family her community, to the era in which she is depicted, Sula does not put any limits upon herself. Sula becomes instructive to readers precisely because she is deemed destructive by other characters in the novel. She leaves her hometown for ten years, during which she travels across the country and attends college. When she returns, she refuses to maintain the family house in the manner of her mother and grandmother before her.

Besides Sula and Eva, Hannah is also famous woman in the community. Though they are not perfect in their physical beauty, they have a capacity to lure a man easily whom they want. They have become a stature of sex in Bottom community even though they do not want to possess any man in their life. Helene is able to maintain some sort of position in the society despite her origination from a whore. In spite of her position in the society she cannot protect her before a white conductor and becomes a helpless object in the eye of her daughter, Nel. Nel, for a time being, becomes violent and self sufficient in the company of Sula. Later, she

turns to be a conventional woman of the community marrying with Jude. She becomes submissive, docile and learns to be happy in the company of her husband. But, her happy world of married life turns to ashes when he leaves her without her heart. By presenting unhappy relationships with black male Morrison is trying to criticize the heterosexuality and reproductive systems of the patriarchal society. The female characters of black community realize their self and position in the society after the rejection of males. So, they are in constant motion in search of what they want to be.

Sula is a unique black woman, completely different than other women of her community. Not only because of her unique experience in sex but also because of her rejection of her own culture's definition of women. She is labeled as a devil in Bottom. Being a radical black feminist she seeks herself, explores her emotions and imagination, and rejects to make someone else, whether that someone be a man or a child. So, Sula in black literature is most valiant female character who celebrates sexual liberation and tries to maintain female equality and female autonomy. She fights against the heterosexual and racial reign for the emancipation of all black women.

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