

Chapter 1

Toni Morrison: The Context for the Study

The Argument

This study attempts to explore the existentialist aspect centered in the life and the journey of Sula, the protagonist of Toni Morrison's novel *Sula*. It has made an attempt to emphasize on how the novel, through the protagonist, leaves the legacy of life and makes one to appreciate life compelling one to understand that one needs to make decisions for himself / herself. It tries to bring forth the solid and crystal clear human existence out of the degraded, terrifying, chaotic and meaningless present. Sula's past coupled with her horror present makes an effort to bring forth her life into highlight to analyze the safe future in consideration.

Sula, a young girl from "the Bottom", a mostly Black town in Ohio with a moderate family background, desires the life of her choice and freedom that would let her live with great deal of cherish and contentment. But, in the process of the same existential mission, she goes through several lows, social hardships and sufferings. Despite being in that condition, she never regrets it and embraces them warmly anyway. This entire attempt brings for the curiosity in the novel why Sula makes self-centered decisions with her full self-control despite all her sufferings, social dislocation and isolation.

The major objective of this work is to find out and elaborate Sula's attempts for existential living in the novel. The central point of this project is centered on the life that Sula is living and her optimistic thoughts towards it despite all the sufferings, pains, crises, absurdities and the hell she undergoes. This study explains the process how Sula surpasses her degraded and isolated self. Similarly, it also presents vividly how a girl from a poor and underdeveloped black community keeps herself and her

spirit alive despite the overwhelming pressure from traditional thoughts of people around and social rejection. In the literary world today, this study makes a significant contribution by correlating the novel with the theory of existentialism. It vividly presents how one has to spot existential crisis and bypass it. The novel not only presents the vivid existential self of Sula but also shows the contribution of other characters to its meaning.

Toni Morrison's *Sula* begins with the description of "the Bottom", a mostly black community of Ohio, situated at the high hills above the wealthier white community of Medallion. The Bottom was once gifted by a white master to his slave describing it to be closer to heaven. It moves forward with the "appearance of the First World War veteran immediately after the prologue" (Tally 44). Shadrack, a completely shattered WWI combatant with his idea of "National Suicide Day" to compartmentalize his fear of death. It proceeds further with the introduction of two contrasting families of Nel Wright and Sula Peace respectively. Nel is introduced in the novel as a product of a conventional family, hers is a stable home. She is uncertain of her conventional life her mother, Helene, wants for her. But this doubt hammers home as she meets her former prostitute grandmother Rochelle, the only unconventional woman in the family. But, Sula has a very different family compared to Nel's one. She lives with her mother Hannah and grandmother Eva both of whom are described as eccentric and loose. Sula's house also serves as a home for three adopted boys, Deweys.

Though Nel is a girl of conventional thought process and Sula an experimental and modern minded one as it is mentioned by Asmarani, "Sula is described as having a specific opinion concerning the freedom of her own existence which differs very much from the Black community's normative values" (124). They both become close

friends during their time together in adolescence. They share a good part of their life together. But, as everything is going splendidly, a shocking and traumatic accident brings a drastic change in everything in and around them. Sula accidentally drops her neighborhood boy, Chicken Little, while swinging him around playfully. She loses her grip, the boy falls into a nearby river and drowns. Though it is unintentional, they keep it as secret fearing the result of its exposition. As they grow apart, one day, Sula's mother catches fire accidentally and she dies of the burns that her grandma claims Sula could have prevented if she did not enjoy seeing her mother burning to death.

After completing their high school, Nel opts to get married and settle down with traditional gender roles as a conventional woman. But, Sula does different as she leaves her town following wildly experimental and adventurous way choosing the life of complete independence and unconventional systems. It is a daring move as she is the first woman to leave the town for higher study. She leaves Bottom for ten long years. She is described to be involved in many affairs with white men and so. But, she finds all that boring and returns back to the Bottom and her friend Nel.

The plague of Robins announces the return of an unconventional, outlawed, wild and existentialist Sula, whom the community sees as a symbol of evil for her blatant disregard of social norms and convention. The community hates her for interracial relationship but the hatred storms out even more when she has an affair with her own friend Nel's husband Jude who subsequently abandons Nel. Her senseless act of sending her grandmother Eva to Old Folks Home adds to the disappointment of the people to Sula. But, ironically, her arrival, her strange acts and affairs motivate people to live harmoniously with one another. Later, Nel and Sula break their relationship off. Sula Meets Ajax and has a short term relation with him.

But, she “has to face the tragic ending” (Asmarani 122) as she quickly faces the death because of some mysterious disease in 1940 after Sula Nel achieves half-hearted reconciliation.

Finally, the novel ends in 1985 when Bottom is facing a prospect of a white gulf course. Meanwhile, Nel visits Eva in a nursing home where Eva accuses her of killing Chicken Little. But, Nel admits to herself that she had blamed his death entirely on Sula and set herself as good half of their friendship. She gets angry with Eva and storms out of there. Finally, she realizes that she had quickly adjusted herself to social conventions in an effort to prove herself as good after Chicken Little’s death. After the realization, she goes to Sula’s cemetery and mourns at Sula’s grave calling out her name in sorrow of missing her real good half.

The novel explores the advantageous and disadvantageous aspects of both existential life of choice and freedom and the conventional living. It shows how one comes forth with existential life of choice and freedom with the character sketch of Sula and also presents how one lives simple conventional life with the character sketch of Nel.

The novel deals with Sula’s journey of her life in an attempt to live the life of her choice and complete freedom. In this regard, Matza states, “Sula remains by choice at odds with the community until the end of her life but she is also penned by this world. Sula is responsible for some of her own unhappiness, unwilling as she is to conform to any rule of the social order” (50). She experiences the life that leads her with the path of existence, essence and self-guided archetypes. In this process, she overcomes self-destruction, anarchy and social rejection when she tries to combat conventions and norms of the conventional black society. She shows how determined she is and how confident she is with her decisions and its impacts in her life when she

effortlessly expresses herself being able to live life better than Nel even when she is at her deathbed.

Morrison's novel raises "the complicated problems surrounding the existential freedom that the young, black, female, main character strives hard to achieve" (Asmarani 121). This novel explores the controversial conflict between "goods and evils". It deals with the issues of goods and evils from different viewpoints altogether which depicts the meaning that the humans possess both the good and evils whether they opt conventional living or the experimental existential life of choice and freedom.

Morrison is not only an editor, literary critic and playwright, but also one of the most influential, highly read and effective writers in the world today as her works deal with social realities and complexities in an outstanding way. Her novels are famous for the epic themes, exquisite language, and mostly for the rich detailed African-American characters who are central to their narratives.

Morrison is the most sophisticated and well established novelist in the history of Afro-American literature because she has presented a lot of her experience about the Afro-American culture and traditions in her novels. In her works, she brings the characters who assist her to be probably the greatest novelist in the history of Afro-American literature. In her novels, she generally deals with the issues of class, gender, race and the revision of the history itself with the combination of love, death, heroism, betrayal and modernism. As a writer of the popular texts like *Sula*, *Beloved*, *The Bluest Eyes*, *Song of Solomon*, *Jazz*, *Love* and *A Mercy*, she has earned a lot of recognition around the world.

Morrison was not fully aware of racial discrimination and divisions until she entered her teenage as she was living in an integrated neighborhood. As she was

dedicated in her study, she read many great works of European literature that created an enthusiasm for literature in her. After graduating from Lorial High School in 1949, she continued to pursue her interest in literature in Howard University.

After finishing her master's degree from Howard University, she worked as a teacher in Howard University. She got married to Horald Morrison, and gave birth to their first child in 1961. She then became a part of a writer's group and started writing her first novel. She decided to leave Howard in 1963, after the long summer visit to Europe with her family. She returned to USA then she returned back home to live with her family and gave birth to her second child. With her new child she moved to New York next year where she worked for a textbook publisher as a senior editor. She, then, worked for Random House where she worked as an editor of the works by Toni Cade Bambara and Gayl Jones.

She, finally, announced her arrival in world literature with the publication of her first novel *The Bluest Eyes* in 1970. Next, it was followed by another masterpiece *Sula* in 1973. Then she came up with another blockbuster *Song of Solomon* and Pulitzer Prize winning novel *Beloved*. After Morrison became professor at Princeton University, she produced many great works including *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. For her contribution in this field, she was awarded with the 1993 Nobel Prize in Literature making her the first African-American woman to be so. Later on, she focused more on children's literature and worked as an editor too. She produced some popular novels like *Love, A Mercy, Home, God help the Child*, etc. along with her collection of essays, reviews and speeches *What Moves at the Margin* in 2008.

As an African-American female writer, Morrison has successfully portrayed the perfect social realities and struggles in her works that a black woman and a

freedom lover had to go through in the process of living one's life. In *Sula* too, she reflects the same reality from the point of view of a woman who struggles to live her life in the restricted and conventional world and seeks for the ways to exist fighting those unfavorable social conventions. She advocates for the life of choice and freedom in the novel through her lifelike protagonist Sula.

Review of the Literature

Different critics have analyzed Morrison's *Sula* from different perspectives since its publication. Some of the views regarding the existential approach of *Sula*, the life of choice and complete freedom of the protagonist and the writer of the novel are mentioned in this section. They have chosen to study this novel and its protagonist, Sula, from various perspectives.

Regarding the existential approach in the life of Sula, Diane Matza states, "having rejected marriage and the very few career open to her, Sula does as she pleases, so completely flouting the rules of community and so disrespectful of its narrow and orderly boundaries, the Medallion citizenry looks upon her as unnatural, as an evil spirit"(51). As an existential being of free will, Sula lives with her choices regardless of the conventional social thoughts and barriers of the society.

Like Matza, KeirElizabeth Singleton comments, " she doesn't like anybody asking, questioning her actions, as it is often the case in a patriarchal society in which women are told what steps they should follow in life" (51).Sula, in this novel, acts completely against what convention tells her. She, even as a black woman, challenges the convention and makes her living by herself with her own choices.

Another critic Arunima Ray in her essay "The Quest for 'Home' and 'Wholeness' in *Sula* and *Mendian*" Published in *Afro-American Identity in Toni Morrison and Alice Walker*, takes *Sula* as a quest for the selves of both Nel and Sula

who represent the black feminine notion. Regarding Sula's journey, Ray states that it is, "a clear understanding of self and expanded room in which to hum their own melodies and sing together own lyrics" (61). They both start to understand their inner self best with the companionship they have and they start to grow the feeling of self in them.

Morrison's *Sula* has been recognized as a celebrated novel. The author herself justifies the idea of existential freedom and life of choice of Sula as something important in life. She has penned in the foreword of the novel, "outlawed women are fascinating not always for their behavior but because historically women are seen as naturally disruptive and their status is an illegal one from birth if it is not under the rule of men"(XIV). She sees Sula as a need of the era to challenge the conventions against the free and independent life especially of the women and let them live with their choices and freedom.

Ratna Asmarani comments that Sula is a unique and unconventional thinker who desires to execute the life free will and follows her own choices. She does not bother on what the world around says or believes in as Asmarani has penned down:

Sula prefers to focus on herself in order to fill in her existence with choices that she has taken. It also means that she doesn't care about the norms, social and moral, generally followed by the black community where she lives. Following her existential statement, she really leads a life free of any norms in "the Bottom". She turns upside down many conventions and norms.(126)

So, certainly as a non-believer on dependency and a person of her own choices, she shows the community how one exists in the world by challenging the norms.

Though *Sula* is not as influential a novel of Morrison as *The Bluest Eyes* and

Beloved, it has a lot to offer for the readers with it carrying an agenda of the existence of a black woman and her free will. On the same base, Maggie Galehouse considers Sula as "A New World Black Woman" (56) of her own choice and freedom who can afford to live the life of choice out of choicelessness. He has said, "Sula is improvisational, daring, disruptive, imaginative, modern, out-of-house, outlawed, uncontained and uncontainable. And dangerously female" (57). Despite living in the conventional black community, Sula manages to learn to live her life practicing the freedom and making the choices by her own. She is brave, revolutionary and modern in her acts as well as in her thoughts.

Talking about the themes, Hortens Spillers states, "If we identify Sula as a counter mythology, we are saying that she no longer bounds by a rigid pattern of predictions, predilections and anticipations ... Her strategic place as a potential being might argue that subversion itself- law breaking is an aspect of liberation that women must confront from its various angles" (233). He also studies *Sula* from the perspective that the "women need to follow the strategy of convention breakdown or law breaking if they want to live a happy life of their own choices" (233). Sula is free of the social boundaries and she is creating the place for her to live. She breaks the laws to liberate herself and tries to live a happy life with full independence and freedom.

As a teacher as well as a public intellectual, Morrison always speaks in support of the role of higher education in a democratic culture. She supports the decision of Sula in the novel to go for higher studies. Morrison partially agrees that the creation of Sula in her novel is an autobiographical impulse of herself and her struggles. In the foreword of her novel *Sula*, she writes,

The threshold between the reader and the black-topic text need not be safe,

welcoming lobby I persuaded myself [Sula] needed at that time. My reference was the demolition of the lobby altogether [of all of my books], only *Sula* has the 'entrance'. The others refuse the 'presentation' ... the line of demarcation between them and us (XIII).

She looks to have tried to express herself best in the form of Sula, the protagonist of the novel. She certainly argues that the character of Sula represents her the best.

Robert Grant remarks that the lack of center in Sula's character is one of the reasons why, "thematically and politically the novel is an unpredictable text, and Sula is an enigmatic character whose behavioral motivations are morally and psychologically unclear" (91-92). The unpredictable Sula and her unclear characterization shows that the text discusses the issue in modern and experimental way as Sula, the protagonist is.

According to Justine Tally, "*The Bluest Eyes* and *Sula* are experimental texts, radically innovative in terms of theme and form. Both books contrast the alternative response of resistance and subjugation to sexist and racist oppression" (23). She believes that *Sula* is an experimental novel in a sense that it presents a unique and fighting protagonist who struggle to establish the identity in her life with identity.

Writing about the protagonist and the novel, Silje Linnerud Naess describes that the protagonist struggles in search of the life she desires to live. Her life, as she describes "Is the process of becoming as well as the process of losing self proves to be extremely pertinent in the novel. The novel thus functions as a work in progress, and its evaluation of its characters and of goods and evils can be seen as an ongoing and potentially indefinite activity" (277). For him, the novel also deals with the ongoing evaluation of the goods and evils.

As Sula is an existentialist who lives with her own choices and decisions

regardless of what the world around says or thinks of her, the society doesn't take it too well and easily. The novel clearly shows that the members of Sula's community do not like the "daring and non-conformity" of Sula and they are repelled from them. According to Barbara Christian, "Sula has the distinction of being herself that believes that selfhood can only be selfishness" (167). The community she lives in dislikes the way she lives and does her works. The non-conformity and bravery she possesses makes her different from other women of the community that the community can not tolerate. They think that her selfhood can only be the act of her selfishness.

Sula is Morrison's second novel. It includes and presents her characteristics of fictional writings. This novel is serially written from 1919 to 1965. As far as the narrative techniques of Morrison is concerned, Linden Peach comments, "Toni Morrison's second novel, like her first, is written innovative but finely crafted narrative framework" (39). But Sara Blackburn negatively states, "If she is to maintain the large and serious audience she deserves, she is going to have to address a riskier contemporary reality than this beautiful but nevertheless distanced novel" (3). With clear recognition of Morrison's talent, Blackburn further states, "Morrison is too talented to deal with simple black folk, particularly those double nominates or black woman. She needs to focus on chronicling the doing of white men" (3).

Among many critics of *Sula*, one cultural critic Vasthi Lewis explores traditional African culture in the novel. She claims:

Sula is Morrison's most complex work in reference to traditional African culture- because the African cultural rootedness in women into black American culture is without contrivance and within such extraordinary subtlety that neither the character nor the readers are immediately aware of it ... hundred plus years American-African

tradition continues to manifest itself in our lives. (91)

Here, Lewis talks about how the African and its rootedness has been the hindrance for the women to grow up and live with their own. They are unaware of this reality and just are suppressed and deprived of all what they need to live independently.

Literary critic Diane Mitza further says, "In *Sula*, we find two fully developed woman characters who possess a fiery independence that helps them to defy conventions; Eva Peace and Sula" (43). She, describing Sula and her personal independence as well as freedom, further adds, "Sula's non-conformity is a threat to the community's social values and desire for continuity. At a very young age Sula possesses a quality of boldness and daring that sets her apart from everyone" (52). Certainly, as Sula carries a revolutionary mindset towards the traditional values and thoughts, she has been a true threat to the society and its conventions as she takes no time to break them.

Regarding the existentialism in *Sula* and the protagonist's life of choice and freedom, Kei Elizabeth Singleton states, "Sula is an independent, strong willed living life according to her own rules, she loves and lives for her own happiness. Even as Sula dies, she is able to fight against the double standards and the abuse that she has always tried to fight against" (26). Singleton studies *Sula* in association with Sula's legacy and determination as he examines that she stands firm and strong in her belief that she had made smart decisions and is a strong woman.

Singleton adds, "Sula is firm in all of her decisions and has no hesitation in her action. Morrison shows the strong will of a woman determined to fight against patriarchy and all of its afflictions" (26). In process of her struggle, she is damaged too. Reflecting the same damage, Roberta Rubenstein writes, "Later, Sula becomes figuratively 'one-eyed and disremembered', lacking a basic sense of connection to

others and to the community. While people see themselves more clearly through her, she cannot see herself" (131). In process of revolting against the social barriers, she faces a lot of crisis and sufferings that she can not see herself clearly.

Sula has been reviewed from different schools of criticisms and different cannons of literature. Firstly it was reviewed applying the thematic analysis. The earliest essays published about Sula were in journals that were in their infancy in 1970s and didn't circulate worldwide. John Bischoff, in 1975, reviewed the thematic aspects of Sula relating it to the development of the character Sula. He brings forth the point, "Sula retreats in a solitude for suffering from a thwarted sensitivity" (22). But, on the other hand, Simon De Beauvoir identifies heroism in Sula as she writes, "Sula is a feminist hero who rejects the submissive female role and embraces female well-being on the value of independence and self-sufficiency" (159). Despite all her suffering for the cause of authentic living, Sula fights as a real feminist hero to live the life of her choice and freedom destroying the social barriers and boundaries.

Sula is an attempt by Morrison to search for a complete self and life of full independence. On the same foundation, Barbara Christian argues:

When Sula stares into the abyss that sex so clearly evokes for her, she is not looking for another entity but for another possible version of herself, for a total union is possible only when each perceives the other as possibly being his/herself. Since woman is not usually perceived by man in the total sense, Sula abandons any attempt at union and seeks only herself. (5)

Like in her other novels, Morrison presents a strong headed, bold and self-centered protagonist in her novel *Sula*. Based on the same frame, Ratna Asmarani argues, "Toni Morrison's novel entitled *Sula* raises the complicated problems surrounding the

existential freedom that the young black female main character strives very hard to achieve" (121). Morrison has focused on the protagonist's life of existential freedom despite many backlashes and problems that her protagonist has to go through in her living process.

Morrison's protagonist in *Sula* has been described as one of the uniquely built character who is completely centered on self being indifferent to the community. In the same case, Diane Mitza examines:

Sula's desire to test the limits of her independence and imagination exists in all her actions. Yet without the structure, Morrison tells us it is necessary, and without support and loving nurturing from those around her, Sula's desire must lead her further into a self that will become more alone. Again, this is most apparent in her affair with Jude. Sula demands understanding from Nel but gives no understanding of her own.(51)

Sula takes decisions and makes choices regardless of the result she is going to face. One great positive quality with her is that she never complains and regrets her decisions even though she has to suffer because of the decision she has made. The complete self-centeredness in Sula regardless of her isolated self and her one way dealing present her as a selfish and self-centered character.

Outline of the Study

This study is divided into four chapters. The first chapter explains the protagonist's existentialism and the life of choice and freedom in Morrison's *Sula*. The chapter introduces the background of the study. It clarifies *Sula* as a novel dealing with the protagonist living the life of choice and freedom of her own, summarizes the plot of the novel in brief and presents the brief introduction of the

novelist and her contribution in the literary canon. The chapter introduces the thesis statement, its argument and the tools the research opts to use. The literature review is included in the first chapter of this study. It shows what the other critics have opined regarding this novel, its creator and the perspective and critical theory they have used in order to study this novel. The views, ideas and criticisms of some critiques have been used to show what they agree or disagree on and also to support the major argument of this thesis taking theme as evidence.

The second chapter focuses on the theoretical background of existentialism. It is the major tool that is opted to be used in the study. It also shows how existentialism and existentialist living is created. Attempting to vividly reflect the concept of existentialism is what this section's main objective is. It describes the existentialist living with the life of choice and freedom. This chapter also examines the background of the theory of existentialism and its overall development. It includes the critiques who contributed in the establishment and development of existentialist theory. This section's main purpose is to define the perspectives that are to be used while going through the incidents of the novel.

The third chapter analyses Morrison's *Sula*, using existential philosophy, and its perspectives. The extracts from the novel are taken for presenting the arguments with proofs. The existential living of the protagonist is highlighted in this chapter with its effects in the life of the central character. The novel is thoroughly studied and the necessary lines are textually analyzed with the focus on the choice, bold decision making, freedom and independence, and the indifference and breakdown of social and moral law and conventions. It deals with the issues of goods and evils of both the existential and conventional living of the characters of the novel focusing especially on Sula and Nel

The final chapter is the concluding portion of this thesis. It shows the protagonist's effort to attain the existential freedom in her life, shows the difficulty she has to go through in that process and also the result of that. It concludes that Morrison's novel exhibits the human struggle for existence in the world.

Chapter 2

Existentialism and the Study of Literature

The Concept

Existentialism is an individualistic philosophy that emphasizes on the existence of an individual's freedom and choice. It is a view that humans create their own meaning in life. They try to make the rational decisions despite having lived in an irrational world. Existential philosophy emphasizes on the question of human existence. It believes that there is no purpose and explanation at the center of human existence that human beings are living in the world of nothingness and the only way to encounter the nothingness or finding the meaning in life is by creating the existence of own with the life of choice, individual freedom and responsibility. So, existentialism is "very intense and philosophically specialized form of quest for selfhood" (Ellmann and Feidelson 803). It focuses on the human existence based on the selfhood and independent life. The choice that human kind makes for the existence is given more priority in the existential philosophy.

The terms 'exist' and 'existence' are closely dependent on Latin root 'ex' and 'sistere' where their meaning of 'ex' is 'out' and 'sistere' from 'stare' means 'to stand'. Existentialism means 'to stand out of the crowd' and live with on the way one chooses. Existential philosophy applies to a vision of the condition and existence of human being. As Sartre, in his *Existentialism is Humanism* states that human being is the creator of his or her destiny. Human being first exists and creates his or her meaning in this meaningless world. The main theme of existentialism is, "Existence creates essence" (19). Sartre says that person has no fixed character of 'essence' that has been assigned. Firstly one exists as a being who must choose one's own essence.

The term "existentialism", for Cuddon, means "pertaining to existence or in

logic predicating to declare as true existence” (15). Philosophically, it now applies to a vision of the condition and existence of human, his/her place and function in the world, and his or her relationship or lack of one with God.

Existential philosophy is the interpretation of human existence and essence. It came in practice in opposition to the doctrine that viewed humans as a manifestation of an absolute value. Sartre defines existentialism as an attempt to continue life by creating a system in which one realizes human loneliness and “human subjectivity”(Sartre 10). His focus of existentialism is on ‘being’ and ‘subjectivity’ as opposed to a logical reasoning and ‘objectivity’ which is based on individual experience rather than abstract thought and knowledge.

As a doctrine, existentialism emerged after the two devastating world wars. During the Second World War, Europe was threatened with the strong prevalence of materialism and people started to face the spiritual crisis, doom and decay. Mostly, existentialism came into rise in France and Germany with the world wars bringing the negative human feelings and emotions into the thoughts and acts of the people. The world wars gave rise to widespread feelings of loneliness, despair, pessimism, and frustration. These feelings gave rise to the thinking that the world is meaningless and purposeless as Europe was facing crisis, death, destruction and demolition, the existentialist movement started to flourish with the focus on existence of human beings, the lack of purpose and meaning in life and the solitude of human existence. Existential philosophy is based on individual experiences. So, it came up with the idea that “Existentialism is a set of philosophical ideas that stress the existence of human being, the anxiety and depression which pervade each human life” (Lavine 322). People began to think the guardian organizations like state and church declared and promoted wars and mass killings instead of working for the betterment of human

society as a whole.

Despite having much in common with the philosophies like nihilism, existentialism is more a reaction against the traditional school of thoughts as rationalism, positivism, and empiricism that search for the order and concrete universal meaning. Existentialism as a movement is described as of those who refuse to belong to any philosophical school of thought repudiating the adequacy of any body of belief, system, or philosophy.

Existentialism focuses on the issue that freedom is compulsory and necessary but it is not out of responsibility as the individuals are responsible for their choices and their outcomes. The individuals have their freedom and responsibility thrust upon them as the individuals are forced to choose for themselves. As Sartre says, they are “condemned to be free” (Skirbekk and Gillje 443). The individuals have to choose for their existence and also have to be responsible for what the result of the choice will be.

As existentialism believes that man exists first and then only he creates meaning of himself in this world, the total freedom of individual is more powerful than the system and tradition itself. The only way of creating a new system is by negating the existing system. According to Sartre, “Reality is the product of human consciousness, the existence of predetermined values can be rejected to get liberation from the anxiety of the absurd world” (23). Man may follow the rules of God, or may hand himself to the death, both the choices are ridiculous in the eyes of an absurd. The absurd man lives upon the maximum struggle against the absurdity which seems humanistic and optimistic.

Existentialists advocate that human being is concerned to be a free being because he or she is thrown into the world. Humans must take the freedom of being,

responsibility and result of their actions. The actions and choices negate the actions and choices, resulting in the serious consequences. So, humans must be completely accountable and responsible to their choices without any excuses. Human beings must take decisions, make choices and assume responsibilities. The world is meaningless. So, the responsibility of the human being is to exist.

The role is not fixed and contingent either. As a result, human being is thrown into the world of choice and compelled to make choices. But, sometimes, the problem arises as the human beings refuse to choose when they cannot realize their freedom and the role of their existence. In this same context, Ryan quotes,

Man is free and responsible, but he is responsible only to himself. As with Nietzsche, man creates moral values. Besides being free, man is a finite and contingent being, existing in a world that is devoid of purpose. The pessimism resulting from this position is likewise expressed by Camus doctrine of 'the Absurd'. Absurdity or contradiction arises from the clash between human hopes and desires and the meaningless universe into which man has been thrown. (639)

Existentialists enter into this world with their drive to personalize the most impersonal aspects of this world and human life; space and time. Even the chastened view of space-time that the 'Theory of Relativity' offers as relies on absolute or constant referent, mainly the speed of light. Measurement of time is done by minutes and seconds and space is measured by meters or yards.

This measurement too seems quantitative and here objective in positivist's sense. Flynn further adds:

And yet the notion of what existentialists call 'ekstatic' temporarily adds a qualitative and personal dimension of lived time is a function of our attitudes

and choices. Some people, for example, are always pressed to meet obligations whereas others are at a loss to occupy their time... if 'time is essence', the existentialists will insist that it is then part of who we are is our manner of living the 'already' and the 'not yet' of our existence, made concrete by how we handle our immersion in the everyday.(5-6)

Thus, even the lived time functions according to the choices one makes. As the time is of essence, human beings are living the choices and coming results of their choices to create their own existence.

Different Modes of Existentialism

Existentialism was firstly initiated by the works of German and French phenomenologists Frenz Brento (1838-1917), Edmund Husserl (1895-1938), Dostoevsky (1821-1881), and especially the nineteenth century fathers of existentialism Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) and Fredrich Nietzsche (1844-1900). They were soon followed by the twentieth century existentialists like Martin Heidegger (1889-1979), Jean-Paul-Sartre (1905-1980), Franz Kafka (1883-1924), Simon De Beauvoir (1908-1986), Albert Camus (1913-1960) etc. Among all, Jean-Paul-Sartre is the most influential figure in existential philosophy. So, he is also known as the father of modern existentialism.

Danish Christian philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard, is also known to be the profounder of existential philosophy. His works represent the reactions against the dominant Hegelian philosophy and determinism of the nineteenth century. In contrasting philosophy from Hegel and Plato, with authentic Christianity, Kierkegaard focuses on the concept of individuals, of choices, of dread and of paradox especially focusing on the existence of God and Christian faith.

He came against Hegel's philosophical system that analyzed the existence or

being in an abstract and impersonal way. He turns aside the study of philosophy to subjective, emotional and individualistic living aspect of human existence.

Kierkegaard discusses human being's essence with the existential predictions, limitations, hope, despair, and anxieties. As a Christian thinker, Kierkegaard stated that human beings are god's creatures and they have many possibilities of existence. Humans have to create the existence themselves. He mainly believes that Christianity can guide the human beings alone and also can teach them the real and fundamental nature of making them understand their relation to eternity.

According to Kierkegaard, "Christianity is therefore not a doctrine, but a fact that God has existed" (857). He believes in the existence of God. His faith in God is paradoxical as human beings believe in both His finite and infinite existence when they believe in God's existence. Existence is only possible when human being comes to know the paradoxical presence of God, Christianity and man. Kierkegaard's *Either/Or* and *Stages of Life's Way* are the examples of his methods of oblique communication. Their arguments provide complete descriptions of three spheres of existence that Kierkegaard formulates in order to trace the process of becoming an individual and truly existing in this world. In reference to him, Thomas R. Flynn, in his book *Existentialism; A Very Short Introduction* argues,

There are three existence-spheres, the aesthetic, the ethical, the religious... the ethical sphere is only a transition sphere and therefore its highest expression is repentance as a negative action. The aesthetic sphere is the sphere of immediacy, the ethical, the sphere of requirement, (and the requirement is so infinite that the individual goes bankrupt) the religious, the sphere of fulfillment, but please note, not a fulfillment such as when one fills an alms box or a sack with gold, for

repentance has specifically created a boundless space and as a consequence the religious contradiction: simultaneously to be out on 70,000 fathoms of water and yet be joyful. (27)

As one must expect that each stage will reveal its own relation to temporality that distinguishes it from others. All three stages provide with different kinds of joys and existing feelings to one and let create their essence.

Another prominent figure in existential philosophy is Martin Heidegger. His central concern is the analysis of 'Dasein', an analysis on the way in which human beings exist as distinct from things. Regarding Heidegger, Wiener states that "man exists in an already existing world which is his world, which can no more exist without it. He exists only as a particular 'he'"(193). Heidegger claims that human being is born into the world which he or she has not made. So, is in limitation. Other than his *Being and Time*, he is famous for his *Metaphysics* (1929) in which he describes 'das Nichts' (nothing) meaning the no-thing and phenomenological approach to the situation of human existence.

"Dasein, for Heidegger, means 'the human way of being'. It is his ability to conserve a place in the world for what Heidegger calls the occurrence of being. In a well-known expression from his later work, Heidegger calls man/Dasein 'the shepherd of being'" (Flynn 52-53). Human beings have to create the place for their existence. The fate of human being depends on what kind of space one can create in this world using the choices one has. Heidegger, the author of *Being and Time*, adopts many Kierkegaardian and Nietzschean concepts "to elucidate how we gain access to a being in which we already have something linking" (53). Heidegger states that the individuals have to face the problems of being that one needs to decide one's own existence, create one's potentiality and make cliché and promises.

Despite denying the claim to be an existentialist, Heidegger is known as the leading existential philosopher. He differentiates between 'being' and 'Being'. The forgetfulness of 'Being' or individual into the 'being' or group has compelled people to be lost in unreal existence. He advises one to return back into the ground of metaphysics and find the roots of his/her existence if one has to get back to the lost being. He comes with the point that being is not realized in normal situation. One realizes it in the state of boredom, anxiety, or ill-at-ease. In his *What is Metaphysics?*, he states, "it irrupts when one is bored, profound boredom drifting here and there in the abysses of our existence, like a muffling fog, removes all things and men and oneself along with it into a remarkable indifference. This boredom reveals being as a whole" (4). The human being can not realize the existence and the being in the normal state of mind. But, once one becomes isolated and boredom overwhelms him or her, one finally comes to realize the real existence.

Heidegger, in his *Being and Time* discusses human existence as trapped by temporal dimension, which is the existential time. For him, one cannot escape historical context as he is always bounded by the past. His existentialism emphasizes on existence, boredom, goal, choice and freedom. But, there is dread and anxiety in freedom that forces being to choose and take charge of his being. Anxiety and dread are what show the light of dynamic existence.

Yet another prominent figure of existential philosophy is Fredrich Nietzsche. He announced arrival as an existentialist with the announcement of 'the death of God'. He focused in the non-existence of God. It means that non-existence of all the prevalent values. In his famous saying of philosophical history, 'God is Dead', he opposes religion and Christianity and comments Christianity as "Slave morality". He, in his essay "Death of God and the Anarchist", states that Christianity has become

shelter for weak and disabled people.

Nietzsche speaks about the loneliness of the individuals who have risen above the herd. Referring to Nietzsche, Flynn remarks:

Today... when only the herd animal is honoured... the concept of 'greatness' entails being noble, wanting to be oneself, being capable of being different, standing alone and having to live independently; and the philosopher will betray something of his own ideal when he posits. He shall be the greatest who can be the loneliest, the most hidden, the most deviating, the human being beyond good and evil. (25)

Nietzsche likened himself to Spinoza, a seventeenth century Dutch philosopher who was excommunicated from synagogue for his unorthodox thoughts. In one of his aphorisms, he states, "To live alone one must be either a beast or a God", says Aristotle leaving out the third case: one must be both (25). As Nietzsche insists, "the error of free will is the belief that choices rather than physiological and cultural forces is the basis of our judgments of moral approval and disapproval" (38). He further remarks that "the evil acts at which we are most indignant rest on the error that he who perpetrates them against us possesses free will that is to say that he could have chosen not to cause us this harm" (38-40). So, the choices should be the more prior things in human life rather than the social and psychological forces as the evils occur when one chooses not to choose. If one fail to choose, one fails to live an authentic life.

Nietzsche, the father of 'aesthetic existentialism' brings forth the concept of superhuman or superman and the will-to-power. The higher man above all, the superman, is free from any barriers and boundaries of the community. He believes that the man who searches for general truth accepted by the culture and community is

an objective man and a self-less object like mirror who waits for others' recognition and subjective will. So, the human being of action is an unavoidable force for human existence.

In his "Zarathustra", Nietzsche brings the possibility of a "higher ethic based on the freedom/ability to create values. In this sense, with the 'death of God'... free spirits (Nietzsche's true individuals) are challenged to assume divine prerogatives, among which the most important is that of creating life affirming moral and life enhancing aesthetic values" (40). Here, Nietzsche argues that the greatest human being is the one who lives the authentic life with the practice of choice and freedom. One who can live by his or her own is the superior being to all.

For Nietzsche, God is a human construct and a means of exploitation and domination. God does not matter for the powerful ones but he is shelter for the powerless. Individuals are compelled to surrender against God. So, the existence is subjected to God and believing in God is against humanity and life itself.

Jean-Paul-Sartre, a French novelist, playwright, and the father of modern existentialism, is the most influential and the greatest figure in the existential philosophy. He is among a very few who has actually accepted being called "Existentialist". He is mostly famous for his ideas of existentialism, freedom, choices and responsibility in his works like *Being and Nothingness*, *Existentialism is Humanism*, *The wall*, *Nausea* etc. His idea that "existence precedes essence"(19) comes against the viewpoint of the earlier philosophers that God created the world and gave existence to the human beings. But, unlike Kierkegaard, Sartre claims that existence is prior to essence because of the absence of God. Since the God is not there, there is no any purpose, no value and meaning in this world. Sartre believes that the essence is what one decide to do, what one choose to be. "A world without

purpose, value or meaning is literally senseless, worthless, empty and hopeless”(Rose2). So, the world is absurd to him.

‘Existence precedes essence’, for Sartre, means that there is no anything like human nature. There is no form of mankind for each individual to be measured against. So, referring to Sartre, Willey comments, “Each man is a blank slate on which he will, by his actions come to define his own being” (52). For Sartre, first of human being exists and only then he or she creates the meaning of himself or herself and the things in this world. Human being has no innate nature. He or she must create meaning himself or herself. One must create one’s own nature or essence because it is not fixed. Human being is like an actor dragged into the stage having learned the lines, no script and no prompter to whisper stage directions. One must decide himself or herself on how to live. “We are thrashed into the existence” (22).

According to Sartre, “Man is born a kind of void, a mud” (29). Human being possesses the freedom and choice to be there living passive life lacking the awareness of true existence. But, when lone becomes aware of one’s state, one can have the sense of absurdity and predicament. This awareness or recognition lets one pull himself or herself out of the mud, shape himself or herself differently and think of the true existence in this world. One can finally give meaning to himself or herself and this world by exercising the power of choice and freedom. So, human being is the product of what one chooses or what one wants to be.

Thomas Maunter describes the nature of existence in Sartre’s most influential work *Being and Nothingness* that “The structure of Being and Nothingness is clearly Cartesian, despite the strong influence of Heidegger at the time. On the one hand there is consciousness (being for itself pour soi) and on the other hand, the existence of mere things (being in itself ensoi)” (379). In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre discusses

three modes of existence along with the freedom and conflicts in human's existence. 'being-in-itself', 'being-for-itself' and 'being-for-others' are the three modes of existence. Being-in-itself is the existence without consciousness. So, it is the existence of non-human beings. Similarly, the second mode of existence, being-for-itself, is the existence of human beings with its main features of possessing consciousness that allows and leads humans to make the choices for their existence. Finally, the third mode of existence is being-for-others. It is the social existence of humans in which conflicts unavoidably exist in their relationships to others since both sides want to be the subject by converting others as objects (Sartre 800). So, the human beings exist by themselves with the consciousness, use of choice and freedom, and making the decisions for themselves. In this process, there occurs the social conflict too.

So, conflict is the major feature of social relations of man according to Sartre's existentialism. Similarly, freedom is ". . . by oneself to determine oneself to wish (in the broad sense of choosing). In other words success is not important to freedom" (803). So, for Sartre, freedom is the main feature of conscious human being in which a human being possesses the freedom to choose with his consciousness regardless of the result of his choice.

Simon De Beauvoir, life-long partner of Sartre, is the mostly celebrated female existentialist who gives an original and independent interpretation of existentialism. She concentrates on the moral and personal aspects of life. She applies existentialism to feminism. She sees existentialism from the feminist point of view. She believes that humans are what they do. Citing her, Dr. Ajna Steinburgargues,

Existentialism is a philosophy that outlines the conditions of human existence but rejects any conception of human nature; a philosophy that affirms human freedom but emphasizes that it brings with it not

happy empowerment, but anguish and despair. A philosophy that stresses that humans have choices but expresses little optimism that we will make good use of them or even understand what it would mean to make right choice.(16)

She describes her idea of female existentialism in her works like *The Second Sex*, *The Ethics of Ambiguity* etc. She believes that “All our lives are marked by living with others, by ambiguity and freedom. That much is completely unambiguous” (Steinberg19). For her, no existence can be validly fulfilled if it is limited to itself. Her ethics, in her *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, views the existence of others as an opportunity. She explains how the freedom to men differs from the freedom to women and children.

The concept of human existence is given another turn around by another French existentialist and absurdist Albert Camus. He is concerned with the freedom, choices and responsibility, the loneliness and struggle of the individual for existence in the society. After the Second World War, the uncertainty aroused in the world and it was reflected by the twentieth century existentialism and absurdism. The works of Camus are concerned with existentialism because of the prominence of the themes of absurdity and futility of life, the indifference of the universe, and the necessity of the engagement in a just cause.

Camus believes that human existence is absurd. For him, the world is full of injustice and repetition of same jobs and activities. He advises the mankind to rebel against the absurdities by refusing the participation in those activities. While Sartre and Nietzsche agree on the point that meaning of the world is created by individuals as alone or in social relation, Camus views this as “the source of anguish. He points that we long for the meaning conveyed by the universe that cares but discover only an

empty slay. What are we to do in the absurdity of this situation?" (Flynn 47). Camus offers humans the existential comfort in his interpretation of the Greek *Myth of Sisyphus*. Human is the mortal who is condemned by the god to push a stone up a mountain only to see it roll back down repeatedly for all eternity (47). The absurd job handed to Sisyphus is what he practices without any hesitation. Despite knowing that it will roll down, Sisyphus continuously repeats the same job just to keep his existence.

Yet Camus claims that "Sisyphus is happy because Sisyphus has risen above his fate, not by dull resignation but deliberative choice" (48). He shows that Sisyphus is superior to the inanimate rock. Camus believes that "our only hope is to acknowledge that there is no ultimate hope" (48). So, one must limit one's expectations in view of one's mortality. Camus comments that Sisyphus gives meaning to the situation by refusing to surrender as a representative of modern people who try to create meaning in the meaningless world through his free act for affirmation. Camus further states,

I leave Sisyphus at the foot of mountain! One always finds one's burden again. But Sisyphus teaches higher fidelity that negates the Gods and rises rocks. He too concludes all is well. This universe hence forth without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile. Each atom of the stone, each mineral flake of that night filled mountain, in itself forms a world. The struggle itself towards the heights is enough to fill man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy. (70)

In his allegory of the Nazi occupation of Paris, *The Plague*, Camus, as an existentialist, dramatizes the lived time. He describes that the people are in a "plague ridden, quarantined city; 'hostile to the past, impatient of the present, and cheated of the future, we were much like those whom man's justice or hatred forces to live

behind prison bars” (Flynn 6). This notion of imprisonment as ‘doing time’ is existential.

Camus thinks that the modern problem of anxiety, despair, and crime have emerged after the First World War and the Second World War. For him, the decline of religious belief in the modern day has forced people to realize the dilemma of Sisyphus.

With reference to Camus, Olafson states, “Camus believes in fraternity and humanism rather than in nihilism” (12). In the views of Camus the condition of the modern man is similar to that of King Sisyphus who is the master of all modern humans. He suffers in the world because of his disobedience to God and the passion of life as a hero. Olafson further states that “this universe, here forth, without a master, seems to him neither sterile nor futile” (352). Finally, Camus concludes that human’s condition is absurd as he realizes that there is no guidance of past, and no guarantee of the future life and also the lack of foundation of human values. Despite the anxiety, absurdity and hopelessness, Camus appeals man to act bravely like Sisyphus and create the meaning and essence in this rather meaningless and absurd universe. Some criticize Camus as anti-humanistic and pessimistic. Defending Camus and his philosophy, Ellmann and Fiedelson remark, “He sees man arriving through admission of absurdity at an affirmation of his own worth” (806). The living of absurd man depends on the maximum struggle against the loneliness and absurdity. So, Camus’ philosophy is optimistic and humanistic not pessimistic and anti-humanistic as it focuses on struggle against absurdity for humanity and optimism.

The concept of absurdism of Albert Camus was later dramatized in the twentieth century ‘Theatre of Absurd’ by many twentieth century dramatists and philosophers. It was firstly introduced by Martin Esslin. It defines that the world is

meaningless and is a human construct. Man must create the meaning himself independently. Its main belief is that the absurdity and meaninglessness can be avoided only by practicing absurd and meaningless acts.

As all the existentialists advocate, existentialism is a quest for the place of human being in the universe. The existential themes were presented in the Theatre of Absurd. Samuel Beckett is the most celebrated dramatist and thinker of the 'Theatre of Absurd' along with the likes of Horald Pinter and Joe Osborn. Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* is the most influential work of the 'Theatre of Absurd'. It tells the story of two men waiting for someone called Godot who never comes. They do not know anything about Godot, yet they keep on waiting, passing the time doing meaningless acts. In the play, "To occupy themselves, they eat, sleep, talk, argue, sing, play games and contemplate suicide anything to hold the terrible silence at bay"(76). The play remains at the same old situation throughout as it started. It represents the timeless, repetitive and barren human activities lacking any plot development. Opening with "nothing to be done"(32) and closing with the same remark. The 'Theatre of Absurd' shows the world as a senseless and lacking unified guiding principle. It shows the human beings hopelessly trapped in an incomprehensible universe. The existential crisis, lack of proper communication, inconsequential actions, invariability of situation can be found in absurd plays.

Existentialism is humanism. It starts from humanity. According to Heidegger, "we are hurled (thrown) into existence."(328). Sartre commented that "we are thrashed into the existence" (22). Existentialism does not only mean being alive. Even plants and animals live; they exist but lack awareness and consciousness of their own existence. According to Sartre, "material thing is simply in itself, but mankind is for itself" (125).The being of human being is therefore not the same as the being of

things. Sartre believes that “man’s existence takes priority over whatever he observes” (33). The reason behind this priority is the conscious existence that he has. So, for him, existence takes priority over essence. Essence, for Sartre, means something that consists of the nature or being of something. But, as Sartre believes, human doesn’t have any essence. So, one must create the meaning for himself or herself. One must create the essence of his or her own. One must make decisions for one’s existence with the proper choices and freedom. But it is not out of responsibility as the humans have to be responsible for whatever the consequence of the choice is.

Phenomenology of Husserl, Marcel, and Heidegger is said to be the root of modern existentialism. Phenomenology emphasizes on the internal role and attitudes of the individuals in the production of emotions rather than external world. So, the existentialist thought of individual is believed to be the systematic growth of phenomenology and its concept of intentionality. Based on this ground, Skirbekk and Nils Gilje argue,

Phenomenology aims to describe the everyday items that we use, as they appear to us: the pencil with which I am now writing is described as it is in this context. Phenomenology attacks the view that this school aims to reconstruct the universe in all of its diversity and fullness, with all these qualities, as opposed to one-dimensional standardization based on scientist philosophy. (440)

Human being is a self-conscious being who is ‘condemned to be free’. One is compelled to make directed choices. As Sartre says, these choices incite anxieties and uncertainty into our psyche. But, if the individuals simply follow social customs and system to escape angst, one escapes the responsibility of living with freedom and making decisions with choices, thus creating one’s

own essence. This is what Sartre calls 'Bad Faith'. For him, one must take responsibility for the future with the choice one makes. One cannot simply choose what the gender, class, caste, social background or country one is born into. But, one has to choose what one makes of them if one wants to live authentically. Otherwise his or her existence will be inauthentic. Regarding the issue of authenticity, Thomas R. Flynn states,

The choice of authenticity, moral decision, (Sartre) ... for the existentialists, ethical considerations are paramount. Sartre could have been describing himself when he wrote of Albert Camus on the occasion of the latter's death that he represented the heritage of that long line of moralists whose works constitute what is perhaps most original French letters. In Sartre's views, Camus' stubborn humanism reaffirmed the existence of moral fact against the opportunistic Machiavellians and the moral 'realists' of his day. (63)

He further adds, "Whether we consider Kierkegaard or Nietzsche, Heidegger or Jaspers, Sartre or Beauvoir, Marcel or Camus, each in his/her own way was concerned with the moral fact. The fact that we are awash in obligations and values that are not logical conclusion of any series impersonal facts about the world" (63). As Human beings talk about the point that "ethical considerations are paramount" (8), they insist that the underlying concern is to invite people to examine the authenticity of their personal lives and of society, though each existentialists understand the 'ethical' as with 'freedom' in his or her own way.

Some existentialists are criticized as irrationalists. But, they are not so in a sense that they reject the validity of logical argument and scientific reasoning. They just make an effort to question the power of such reasoning to access the deep personal convictions that the life is guided by. As Kierkegaard said of the dialectical

rationalism of Hegel, “Trying to live your life by this abstract philosophy is like trying to find your way around Denmark with a map on which that country appears the pinhead” (9). The existentialists do not negate the logical argument and scientific reasoning rather they question the validity and authenticity of it.

Existentialists can be divided as ‘theists’ and ‘atheists’ after closely analyzing their thoughts and philosophical beliefs. Soren Kierkegaard, Carl Jasper, Gabriel Marcel, and Martin Buber are known to be the theists as they believe in the Christian faith. But, Fredrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul-Sartre, Albert Camus, and Simon De Beauvoir, on the other hand, are believed to be the atheistic existential philosophers as they reject the existence of God and do not believe in the Christian faith. The theistic existentialists like Kierkegaard and Augustine believe that God is the shelter for human beings. God created the world and humans to exist. But, the atheistic existentialists like Nietzsche and Camus believe that God does not exist or the God is dead. They believe that one exists first and creates the essence in this world. These two streams of existential philosophy are also called ‘religious’ and ‘secular’ stream of existentialism. Despite disagreeing on the issue of the existence of God and the nature of religion, they agree on many issues of human existence like freedom of individuals, choice, authenticity and responsibility.

In his essay “Existentialism is Humanism”, Sartre states that human being first exists and defines himself or herself and finally creates the essence. He believes in authentic existence. As an atheist he denies human’s reliance on God for existence. Individuals decide their own fate with their choice and decisions regardless of what society thinks. Sartre believes that the presence of society always dominates the individual as one is thrown into the existence. One exists in this universe, finds himself or herself free and must choose for himself or herself what he or she is going

to be with his or her choices. So, for Sartre, existence follows essence. The most important thought for individual is to be an independently acting and responsible conscious being rather than what one is given as stereotypes, roles or traditions.

This study focuses on contributing to exhibit the protagonist's revolt against the social system, traditions and values from existential point of view. Existential literature shows the characters forced to answer the question of existence as being forced completely into meaningless situations. Even in the meaningless situation, the existential hero can create his or her own meaning in the absurd, meaningless, and doomed world. Yet he or she acts with his or her internal morality. As Camus believes, existential hero is the one who can act bravely against absurdity, loneliness and meaninglessness. The hero should overcome the fate of doom by choosing the Sisyphus like heroic and brave attitude towards life's apparent meaninglessness. The hero should create meaning in any complicated situation by evolving and modifying his or her attitude towards his or her fate and making his or her own decision to lead the life of the choice of his or her own and freedom.

Chapter- 3

Sula's Existential Being

Sula, the Character

The major contribution attempted by this study is to exhibit the suffering and struggles of human beings for their own existence individually as well as in the society. The world they live in is surrounded by disillusionment, fragmentation, alienation, absurdity and anxieties. The world is a meaningless place and meaninglessness is the meaning of life. The only reward one gets in this life is suffering. In this meaningless and absurd world, the best possible way of living an authentic life is to live with struggle to survive opting to choose and live with the acceptance of the result of the choice and finally live the life with freedom. In this section, the main concern will be the forms of Sula's existential freedom, her life of choice and freedom and the goods and evils of existential living.

Sula, is a young black girl from a conservative black community of the imaginary town "Bottom" in Lorrain, Ohio. She carries with her the specific opinion concerning the freedom and choices of her own and the existence of self which is completely different from the normative values and lifestyle of black community people. Her different opinion regarding her existence is indicated by the birthmark on the eye lid of her eyes.

Sula lives by herself making her own choices regardless of the world around her. Her choice, here, is subjective as she makes her own choices without consulting law, ethics, rules or traditions of the society. The right or wrong is what all she thinks or decides. As an existential thinker, the traditions, values and social norms do not affect her. So, she struggles against the society and its system to stand her existence.

Sula is shown rebelling against the society. She is presented in a way that she

gives more importance or emphasis to her individual thoughts, choices and interest than what the society believes in. Despite living the life with despair, alienation and suffering, she goes on accepting it without complaining and tries to create her own and unique existence in the world, combating against the society to make her life more satisfactory. She is ready to choose, make her own decisions and take the responsibility of the results of her choices.

From the beginning of her life, Sula struggles to find her own identity and create her existence. She strives hard for survival and as a self-conscious and self-decisive woman, she finds the strategies and possibilities of existing even in the meaningless world. She struggles in the void world to create existence like Sisyphus. Her life and living process is the true indication of the belief that existence precedes essence. She initially tries to exist and create the essence afterwards. She chooses to exist and struggle to extract essence.

The Kickstart of Sula's Existential Being.

The appearance of Sula is postponed in the novel and she comes into the spotlight after the horrible experience of the description of the world wars and the traumatic holocaust. The background of doom, alienation, chaos and fragmentation is presented before the introduction of Sula. The celebration of National Suicide Day by Shadrack, a world war victim, as an effort to eradicate the fear of death and traumatic thoughts brings about the issue that one needs to do absurd things to avoid the meaninglessness in life.

Except for the Second World War, nothing ever interferes the celebration of National Suicide Day. It takes place every January third since 1920, although Shadrack, its founder, is for many years the only celebrant. Blasted and astonished by the events of 1917 (1). The condition of Shadrack in the novel makes the readers

conscious about how Sula will be like. Shadrack firstly represents the existential approach by trying to fight life's absurdity with the absurd act of celebrating National Suicide Day. So he has invented it:

Shadrack began a struggle that was to last for twelve days, a struggle to order and focus experience. It had to do with making a place for fear as a way of controlling it. He knew the smell of death and was terrified of it, for he could not anticipate it. It was not death or dying that frightened him, but the unexpectedness of both. In sorting it all out, he hit on the notion that if one day a year were devoted to it, everybody could get it out of the way and the rest of the year would be safe and free. In this manner he instituted National Suicide Day (14).

The existential thought of Shadrack and fight he starts against the absurdity of life. The world itself is replicated and brought into application by Sula in her life but her method of doing it has been different to his.

The first symptom of Sula's existential living in the novel is the condition of her grandmother's house where she lives. She and her mother Hannah live with her grandmother, Eva, in Eva's house after her father's death. The house she lives in is a unique one which is also an inn. It was built in different periods without any fixed plans as the lines go in this way:

Sula Peace lived in a house of many rooms that had been built over a period of five years to the specification of its owner, who kept on adding things: more stairways... there were three sets to the second floor... more rooms, doors and stoops. There were rooms that had three doors, others that opened out on the porch only and were inaccessible from any other part of the house; other that you could get

to only by going through somebody's bedroom... wooly house, where a pot of something was always cooking on the stove... where all sorts of people dropped in; where newspapers were sacked in the hallway, and dirty dishes left for hours at a time in the sink. . . (30-32)

The house she lives in represents "freedom, spontaneity intimacy, warmth, openness and combined with the touch of disorderliness here and there" (Asmarni, 124). The structure of the house clearly shows her the way how she is going to lead her life- completely experimental and unorthodox.

Living in such uniquely built house allows her freedom to grow up. Her mother and grandmother's openness towards sexual behaviours, their free talks and frequent sexual indulgence help her grow as an independent girl with openness to sexual thoughts and freedom. As the granddaughter of the courageous grandmother and the daughter of strong minded mother, she develops herself as a strong figure full of freedom and choices. Her desire for freedom can be reflected in her daydreaming.

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 the role of linoleum galloping through her own mind on a gray and white horse testing sugar and smelling roses in full view of someone who shared both the taste and the speed. (51-52)

Sula always dreams of life that is full of adventure which is accompanied by someone unknown who can understand her well enough. She never believes in herself indulging in a domestic life having husband and children. She wants the complete freedom that lets her find her true self and the world as a whole.

Sula's freedom flourishes even more when she meets Nel, her best friend. Sula

and Nel meet in school and after that they come really close to each other and become friends. They almost look incomplete without each other. Both of them are unique personalities (Sula more existential) who are always in search of discovering their true self and existence in the world they live in; as it is described in the following lines:

So, when they met, first on those chocolate halls and next through the ropes of the swing, 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, they use each other to grow on. Daughters of distant mothers and incomprehensible fathers... they found in each other's eyes the intimacy they were looking for. (52)

They have a unique opinion and free spirits along with wings to fly that set them apart from others, may not be socially but psychologically. Especially, Sula more than Nel is presented to be more adventurous and full of dare who can control the situation be her own with her decision makings. But, "toughness wasn't their quality- adventuresomeness was... and a mean determination to explore everything that interested them" (55). Sula's daring act of slashing her own fingertips to protect herself and helpless Nel proves the argument that she is a brave and adventurous being.

When Sula accidentally hears her mother's words about her while talking to other mothers of the community, she is deeply influenced by the conversation "Sure you do. You love her like I love Sula. I just don't like her. That's the difference" (57). As soon as she hears all these words, she understands that the relationships are not without reserves. One has to live for oneself. Others are not going to do it for her. She has to exist by herself. Even the blood relation does not mean that one cannot feel

detached and also can criticize each other. This is the reason why she watches her mother burning to death quite interestingly. It concludes that she has no burden of any relationships in this world. They are meaningless as the world is. So, “she doesn’t hesitate in having the hot arguments with her grandmother ending up in sending her grandmother to the old people’s home” (93) just with the fear that Eva may kill Sula too.

The major incident that changes her life is the death of the small boy, Chicken Little. Intending to make him happy, Sula swings around and around. Unexpectedly, this action ends in disaster when the little boy’s hands slip from Sula’s grab causing to directly fly towards the deep lake and inevitably get drowned (60). This incident makes her realize that she is not a dependable person as she cannot confess the truth. She knows, now, that she cannot take responsibility for others. The words of her mother and this incident make her understand it clearly that nobody is dependable and one should rely on his or her own. This really makes her existential thought matured and stronger.

Major Aspects of Sula’s Existential Being.

Sula, is shown as a girl with enormous confidence and passion for her individual choices. She emphasizes her individual interest rather than the traditions and values of the community she lives in. She decides, defines and designs herself. She not only makes decisions and takes responsibility for that, she also respects the choices of others’. Nel’s decision to get married is well accepted and supported by Sula despite of her belief of not getting married and settling down in a traditional way. She enjoys the marriage and works hard to complete the marriage successful too.

As an existentialist, Sula is a decision maker. She does not simply follow the tradition but does what she thinks is good and what interests her. Whatever the society

thinks or believes is not her concern or worry as she prioritizes her pleasure at the center and enjoys what she does. She practices her own view of life for her own existence. One significant act that she commits is to leave her hometown to continue her further study. Her choice of leaving hometown is unique and adventurous in a sense that nobody in the black community had done that before. Especially as a woman, her act is completely an out of the box decision. She decides for her own as an existential being. She tries to create the essence by existing in the world created by her own choices and freedom.

Sula's life of choice and freedom can also be presented with the issue that she practices her view on loose sexual relationships as these lines suggest:

She was guilty of the unforgiveable thing- the thing for which there was no understanding, no excuses, and no compassion. The route from which there is no way back, the dirt that could never be washed away. They said that Sula slept with white men. It may not have been true but certainly could have been. She was obviously capable of it. (112)

While she was away from home to the big cities, she had many lovers and many sexual relations. This, for her, is the part of her effort to find her other half who can understand and support her opinion of existential freedom. But, despite the search for the other half of hers, she does not think of settling down in a traditional gender roles like Nel. She wants to experience them and choice is always there with freedom most certainly. On the other hand, her act of sexual relation with white men in the town is a symbol of her revolt against the barriers and social values of the community she lives in. As the existentialist are the rebel against the traditions, Sula's effort above is a clear example that she is a true existentialist.

When finally Sula returns to the "Bottom" from Nashville after ten long years,

Eva urges Sula to enter the community, get married, have a nice family and settle down. But, Sula's individuality is unique. She does not want to answer any authority but she wants to create the authority of her own. When Sula tells Eva that she wants to "make" herself, she rejects the traditional life that demands other's attention and dependency:

"Why don't let your mouth start nothing that your ass can't stand. When you gone get married? You need to have some babies. It'll settle you."

"I don't want to make somebody else. I want to make myself."

"Selfish. Ain't no woman got no business floatin' around without no man?"

"You did"

"Not by choice."

"Mamma did."

"Not by choice. I said itain't right for you want to stay off by yourself... I'm a tell you what you need."

Sula sat up. "I need you to shut your mouth."

"Don't nobody talk to me like that. Don't nobody..."

"This body does..." (92)

When she returns back, she carries the clear existential idea of what kind of existence she wants. She expresses her thoughts without any hesitation. The above quote expresses her existential freedom. She likes to focus on herself in order to fill her existence with her own choices.

Sula's claim that she desires to create herself is more clearly articulated .statement of purpose. She lives the life which is free of norms. Existential characters

are self-centered characters. They give more importance to their individual interests than the acceptable relations, values, norms, and relations of societies. She breaks many conventions and norms of the society. She chooses not to have a family, no intention of having a husband and children, has many short term lovers and relations but treats them only as sexual partners with no love and respect. She never follows the traditions of socialization as praising others' food in church fairs and "she came to church suppers without underwear, brought their steaming platters of food and merely picked at it... relishing nothing, exclaiming over no one's ribs or cobber. They believed that she was laughing at the God" (114-15). All the insane looking activities that she does are not easy for the community people. Her strange and free choices and their practice shows that she lives her life in her own way regardless of what society says.

Sula is a self-centered individual who is different than the others around. She emphasizes on her interest and choices rather than what is good or evil. She lives the life of experiments and explores her own thoughts and emotions and pleases her with her acts. As the following lines suggest:

Sula was distinctively 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 thoughts and emotions giving them full reign, feeling no obligation to please anybody unless their pleasure pleased her. As willing to feel pain as to give pain, to feel pleasure as to give pleasure. Hers was an experimental life... ever since her mother's remarks sent her flying up those stairs, ever since her one major feeling of responsibility had been exercised on the bank of river with a closed place in the middle. (118)

The incidents helped her to realize and find herself and understand the need of authentic existence. She learns to live on her own exercising her freedom after she came to understand her true meaning in this meaningless world.

Certainly, the two major incidents mentioned earlier (Sula hearing her mother's conversation about her and the accidental death of Chicken Little) completely change the way of her thinking and acts. The dependent and confined Sula understands that there is nobody for her and she has to live her life by herself and create her existence and essence. She comes to realize that she cannot take responsibility for others. She has to decide for herself by her own and also comes to understand that she should be responsible for her actions and their output. These two incidents change her into a completely existential being who struggles for survival on her own. As these lines remark:

First experience taught her there was no other way that could count on; the second that there was no self to count on either. She had no center, no speck around which to grow. In the midst of the pleasant conversation with someone she might say, "Why do you chew with your mouth open?" not because the answer interested her but because she wanted to see the person's face change rapidly. She is completely free of ambition, with no affection for money, property or things, no greed, no desire to common attention or complements... no ego. For that reason she felt no compulsion to verify herself... be consistent to herself. (118-19)

These lines clearly state that she finds the world as a meaningless and absurd place and herself as a meaningless being after experiencing these incidents. So, she does not bother about others and learns to live for herself and create her own meaning in her meaningless life with the exercise of her freedom and choices.

Sula practices her living on her own and deals with the issues in life effectively. She is illusive and indifferent to establish habits. Ajax, one of her lovers also describes her in this way:

He had heard all the stories about Sula, and they aroused his curiosity. Her elusiveness and indifference to the established habits of behavior reminded him of his mother who was as stubborn in her pursuits of the occult as the woman of Greater Saint Matthew's were in the search for redeeming grace... suspecting that this was perhaps the only other woman he knew whose life was her own, who could deal with life effectively and who was not interested in nailing him. (127)

These lines prove the argument that she lives by her own with different thoughts and acts and also she has the life of her own, the result of her own choices and decisions.

Sula is a non-conformist individual and her non-conformity is a threat towards the values and norms of community and their continuity. Sula possesses the quality of boldness and daring from the very early age that differentiates her from others. She shows this when she and Nel are returning from school and some white boys try to accuse them. She pulls out a knife and cuts off the tip of her finger and says to the boys, "If I can do this to myself, what you suppose I'll do to you?"(47). She shows her fearlessness and threatens the boys. She does some very fascinating and strange things as watching "her own mamma burn" (78), her affair with her best friend's husband, etc. the community does not accept and appreciate her daring and non-conformity. Yet, she is content with all what happens as a result of her chosen acts.

The protagonist is presented with great realization of self and confidence. She does what pleases her. As an existential being, she chooses what she feels comfortable with rather than what society thinks is legal and ethical. She rejects marriage, flouts

with the rules of the community and is disrespectful of its narrow and orderly boundaries. Sula symbolizes the woman on the edge of possibility. Her desire to test the limits of her independence and imagination can be found in all her activities. But, that leads her into a self that becomes more and more isolated, alienated, and lonelier. After Ajax leaves her, she feels the true isolation and loneliness that makes her suffer a lot as the text suggests,

There was a melody in her head she could not identify or recall ever hearing before. "Perhaps I made it up.", she thought. Then it came to her... the name of the song and all its lyrics just as she had heard it many times before. She sat on the edge of the bed thinking "There aren't any more now songs I have sung all the ones there are." She lay down on the bed and sang a little wandering tune made up of the words I have sung all the songs all the songs I have sung all the songs there are until touched by her own lullaby she grew drowsy and in the hollow of near sleep, she tasted acridness of gold, left the chill of alabaster and smelled the dark, sweet stench of loam. (137)

She starts to suffer with her loneliness and alienation as Ajax leaves her because she has just begun to discover what the possession is and also her another half who can support her in her existential freedom. She is astounded by so new and alien a feeling as it is described in the novel, "Several times she tried to cry out, but the fatigue barely let her open her lips, let alone take the deep breath necessary to scream, so she lay wondering how soon she would gather enough strength and push the rough quilt away from her chin" (148). As suffering, alienation and loneliness are the integral part of the life of existential beings, she goes through the suffering and the state of fragmentation and isolation.

Suffering is not the only part of the existential living, accepting it and enjoying the loneliness is also another aspect of it. As an existentialist, she begins to accept and enjoy the loneliness and alienation, the results of her decisions and choices. She takes the responsibility of her choices and tries to move ahead accepting the reality. She understands that life is just an illusion and one who chooses something has to be responsible for it. Life is full of uncertainty and accepting it is the best way of living the life as it is explained:

The first time she was completely alone... where she had wanted to be... free of the possibility of distraction. It would be here, only here, held by this blind window high above the elm tree, that she might draw her legs up to her chest, close her eyes, put her thumb in her mouth and float over and down the tunnels, just missing the dark walls, down, down until she met a rain scent and would know the water was near, and she could curl into its heavy softness and it would envelop her, carry her and wash her tired flesh always. (148-49)

As Sula realizes the absurdity of life and the meaninglessness of the world, she tries to create her existence in the loneliness and alienation. As existentialism emphasizes on the existence of human being, lack of meaning and purpose in life and solitude of human existence, it assumes that human is thrown into the world in which pain, frustration, sickness, contempt and death dominate. Sula, here, fits completely in the existential category as she lives with the loneliness, solitude, frustration and sickness.

Another key factor that indicates Sula's existential freedom is her emphasis on her opinion over what is good or bad. When she returns back home, she decides to send her grandmother to old people's house for no prominent reason. She just does it because she fears that Eva might kill her like she did to Plum. Even when Sula talks to

Nel about this, she says that there's no clear reason for her evil looking act as the novel explains, "All I know is I'm scared, and there's no place else for me to go. We all that's left, Eva and me" (190) She also thinks that she should have talked earlier to Nel about that. Sula puts Eva away just because she makes her "nervous" (99). Nel also knows that Sula "put Eva away out of meanness. It was true that Eva was foolish in her head, but not so bad as to need locking up" (165). So, Sula is an existentialist in a sense that she clearly makes her decisions what it means to her rather than based on rationality. She, through her own existence, creates her own value and determines a value to her own life.

Sula is a strong willed and mentally tough character who is determined and lives happily even at the time of suffering with the illness fighting the death in her deathbed. She does not let herself go down and struggles for survival and defends herself. She still supports the decisions she made earlier like living alone and not to get married. When Nel visits Sula at her deathbed, Sula is the same, same old, bold, courageous and strong woman as the lines remark:

"That ain't help, Sula. You need to be with somebody grown.

Somebody who can ..."

"I'd rather be here Nellie."

"You know you don't have to be proud with me."

"Proud" Sula's laughter broke through the phlegm ... I like my own dirt"...

"But you a woman and you alone."

"And you? Ain't you alone?"

"I'm not sick. I work."

"Yes of course you do. Work's good for you, Nellie it don't do nothing

for me.”

“You never had to.”

“I never would.” (142)

She is so confident that she still feels that she lived the life better and smarter than the one of Nel. She says, “I sure did live in this world” (143). She believes that she achieved the authentic existence with the exercise of the available choices and freedom. Even when she is lonely, she replies Nel, “Yes. But, 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). She furthermore shows her confidence, responsibility of the decision and choices and self-centeredness by accepting that she does not need verification from anybody else. When Nel asks what she has to show for her living authentic life, she replies, “Show? To who? Girl, got me” (143) this statement of hers shows that she has been able to discover herself and exist in this world better and authentically.

Sula’s resistance against the society and its people’s hatred, indifference and criticism towards her and her struggle for survival represents her in the same frame of Sisyphus, who struggles for the existence resisting the God itself. She exists and creates meaning in her life despite facing many problems from the community people. Community sees her as a plague and hates her. But, it does not make strong willed Sula give up. She does not only show no aggression towards the community but she does not care about their behaviours too. She enjoys her exile. She keeps her thoughts on existential freedom. The most important thing for her is her critical mind, her view on what she really wants in her existence. She does not care whether people agree on her or not and values her self more than anything else and anybody else. This belief can be found in the following lines:

“Is that what I am supposed to do? Spend my life keeping a man?”

“They worth keeping, Sula.”

“They ain’t worth more than me. And besides, I never loved no man because he was worth it. Worth didn’t have nothing to do with it.”

“What did?”

“My mind did. That’s all.” (143-44)

So, with this belief of hers, one can conclude that Sula is a true existentialist who represents powerful human existence and is also critical on what she wants in her existence. She possesses enough courage to express her opinion and practice her choices. Despite suffering because of the result of her choices, she does not give up and fights for survival like Sisyphus. And, the major issue about her as an existentialist is that success isn’t necessary in their life. One lives his or her life with choices regardless of the results of it.

She takes full responsibility of her choices and decision making even when she has been thrown into the deathbed and damnation as the result of the choices she has made. Even when she is breathing her minutes in her life, she feels proud of her life. She “felt her face smiling” and says, “Well, I will be damned”, she thought, “it didn’t even hurt”. “Wait, I’ll tell Nel” (149). She feels that Nel was wrong to expect that Sula was damned. But she knows she existed in this world and created the essence. Even when Nel meets Eva after Sula’s death, Nel comes to realize that Sula was right and lived authentically. Sula took responsibility of her actions but Nel escaped it, feared it. Nel feels disheartened and disappointed as she realizes what she believed she had wasn’t better than what Sula possessed. The lines state:

All these years she had been secretly proud of her calm controlled behavior when Sula was uncontrollable, her compassion for Sula’s

frightened and shamed eyes. Now it seemed that what she had thought was maturity, serenity and compassion was only the tranquility that follows a joyful stimulation. Just as the water closed peacefully over the turbulence of Chicken Little's body, so had contentment washed over her enjoyment. (170)

Finally, even Nel comes to believe that Sula existed into the world created by herself and lived the life in full contentment. For many years, Nel believed she missed Jude but she missed Sula, her true friend, an existentialist, bold and courageous, decision maker, chooser, responsible for her actions and caring to her. She feels the real loss at the end. "We was girls together." She said as though explaining something, "O Lord, Sula", she cried, "girl, girl, girlgirlgirl." It was a fine cry, loud and long, but it had no bottom and it had no top, just circles and circles of sorrow" (174). So, Sula has been able to realize her true self, discover herself and choose for herself regardless of the opinion of others. But, Nel could do it only at the final stage of her life after the bigger suffering in life than that of Sula's one.

Death is another prominent feature of existentialism. Despite combating hard and resisting against the community throughout her life, she, finally, has to face the death at the end because of strange disease. Suffering and death are the integral part of existentialism. So, as an existentialist, she finally faces the tragic damnation and death:

While in this state of weary anticipation, she noticed that she was not breathing, that her heart has stopped completely. A crease of fear touched her breast, for any second there was sure to be violent explosion in her brain, a gasping for breath. Then she realized, or rather she sensed, that there was not going to be any pain. She was not

breathing because she didn't have to. Her body didn't need oxygen.

She was dead. (149)

As an existentialist, she faced the tragic death but not before she lived her life with freedom and choices. She made sure that she lived and existed before she died.

Finally she knows that she doesn't have to struggle anymore and doesn't have to feel the pain.

Thus, despite all the sufferings, pain, loneliness, and struggles, Sula has been able to keep her personal opinion concerning existential freedom in tact with her acts. Throughout the novel, she believes in her existence, chooses for herself, sets her free of all social boundaries, gives emphasis to her personal interest, revolts against traditional norms of society, makes herself, acts boldly and courageously with strong will power and mainly believes in authentic being or existence with her practice of choice and freedom available to her. Thus, the novel shows the existential journey of Sula. She defines, decides and designs herself for her life and is a perfect example of existential being.

The Concept of Good vs Evil in *Sula*.

Throughout the novel, one can find the themes of good vs evil. Nel is shown to be a good being. She is innocent, conservative and hesitating in her acts and thoughts. She gets the tag of good daughter, gets married, has children, and settles down in a traditional lifestyle and gender role. She is a complete stereotype in her acts when she is away from Sula's company. But, Sula on the other hand, is presented as an evil and offensive woman. She goes to college leaving home and family, engages in sexual relations with white men, and returns with what they call the "plague of Robbins" (89). People said that she was "a bitch" (112) as she breaks the barriers of the society and does what she believes in.

Sula, is presented as a pure human being lingering between the tags of good and evil. Throughout the novel, she practices her choices and takes decisions, she has been good at times and evil too. “She had lied only once in her life” (121), which is shown great courage, enthusiasm, will power, and positive thoughts. She is supportive to Nel, respects her decision of getting married, and wants to share happiness and love. She lives with freedom and never restricts others from it. She never regrets on what she does. She accepts the reality and moves ahead discovering and developing her true self. But, among the good works, she also practices some evil acts. Her choices look somehow evil at times. Not being able to confess the reality of Chicken Little’s death (65-66), watching her mother burning with interest (78), sending her grandmother to Old Folk’s Home (94) and being in affair with her best friend’s husband (105) look somewhat evil acts of Sula.

Though Sula does seemingly evil things, she is still honest and proud that makes her heart good but on the other hand, Nel is a conservative and quiet girl. She hides behind innocence. But, heart is actually evil. At the end of the novel, she comes to realize that “the good feeling she had had when Chicken Little had slipped... while Sula had cried and cried when she came back from Shadrack’s house. But, Nel had remained calm...” (170). She wonders “why didn’t I feel bad when it happened? How came it felt so good to see him fall?” (3). Not only that, she comes to realize, at the end, that “the townspeople hadn’t been right the first time, Eva was mean. Sula had even said so. ... Eva knew what she was doing. Always had” (171). Nel regrets that she thought her friend Sula was wrong. So, certainly, the quotes above clarify how evil her choices were and who was good and who was not. Sula showed the remorse even when Nel was excited to see the boy fall in the river. So, the question of good and evil is quite strange and ambiguous in the novel.

The question of good and evil remains unanswered throughout the novel despite its sheer presence in the novel. This question is made even ambiguous and unclear with the last conversation that Sula and Nel had in the novel. The communication between them is presented in this way:

“Hey girl.” Nel paused and turned her head ...

“How you know?” Sula asked.

“Know what?” Nel still wouldn’t look at her.

“About who was good. How you know it was you?”

“What you mean?”

“I mean may be it wasn’t you. May be it was me.” (146)

This conversation creates the great ambiguity of the question of who is good and who is evil in this novel. May be both or may be none.

But the major issue to be discussed here is that Sula is an existentialist. As an existentialist, she gives priority to her choices, beliefs and her emotions rather than what people think as good and in rationality. According to Sartre, reality is the subjective construct. So, the reality is subjective for her too. She observes the reality by her own eyes constructed with her existential self. She rebels against the community’s stereotypes and constructs her own legacy and reality. Her struggle against the stereotypes of the black community is as good as the effort of Sisyphus to challenge the God. So, goods and evils are just subjective constructs of the society and the stereotypes. They differ from person to person and society to society. So, for the existentialists like Sula, there is nothing like good or evil. The only thing they see is an authentic existence.

Chapter 4

The World and the Legacy of Sula

This study on Morrison's *Sula* tries to exhibit the human struggle for his or her existence in the community as well as in the world. Each individual is surrounded by fragmentation, meaninglessness, isolation, anxiety and disappointment. So, to give meaning to one's life, one needs to be meaningless and act meaninglessly as meaninglessness is what gives the meaning to one's life. However one struggles in this world, one only achieves suffering. So, one cannot imagine living his or her life with pride, honor and contentment unless he or she is ready to struggle and resist the toughness and adversities in this world.

The protagonist of the novel, Sula, is a girl from a black conservative community of Bottom located in Ohio, Medallion. She dreams to live the life of freedom and choice creating authentic existence. She struggles hard for it and becomes able to achieve it. As an existentialist, she believes in acts rather than words. She takes actions by choosing and making decisions for herself regardless of ethics, rules, law and traditions of the society. She creates her essence by choosing for herself. She decides to live as a free flowing, experimental and independent girl rejecting the conventional gender roles and social barriers.

According to the existentialist thinkers like Sartre, existence precedes essence and one is the result of his or her choices or actions. Sula, in the novel, also believes that she is nothing but what she decides or chooses for herself to be. She is a confident girl who is sure of individuality and subjectivity. She is a self-centered being who is concerned about her own existence regardless of other beings.

The novel is narrated in the third person perspective. But, Morrison expresses her ideology of black female existence throughout the novel. It can be argued that she

tries to represent herself and her true legacy with the personified characterization of the protagonist, Sula.

Sula is not too concerned about moral and immoral things, or goods or evils. Her acts can be seen as both goods and evils. But, whatever she does, that is the choice that she makes for her existence and to create essence for her. Rejecting the traditional gender role, she accepts to live alone experimenting with her life. She emphasizes more on what pleases her rather than what society thinks is good or evil.

Sula is a novel that confronts with the question of existence. Throughout her life, Sula is in a journey of experiments and experiences. She grows up in a traditional black community of Bottom, leaves and moves to Nashville for her study, involves in sexual relation with white men, returns back to the Bottom, and struggles against the conservative black society and its narrow boundaries. She tries to discover her true self and exist in this meaningless world by creating essence for her life. She goes through the trails of pain, suffering, hatred, loneliness, insecurity, fragmentation, disillusionment and hopelessness. Despite going through all these problems and seeing the world as a meaningless place, she struggles hard to discover her true self, create her own self and make the authentic existence possible in her life with self-dependent choices and decisions. She realizes that one can discover his or her true existence when he or she becomes responsible for his or her choices.

Throughout the novel, Sula is in search of living an authentic life. She tries to create her true existence by strong will and practice of freedom and choices. She is a conscious human being who is aware of her own existence. Using her choice and freedom, she tries to fill her existence. But, in this process, she finds her life full of anxieties, boredom, conflicts, despair and disillusionment. But, later in her life, she realizes the harsh reality and vagueness of the world and life itself as she acts wisely

accepting the results of her choices. She does not give up. She fights as bravely as Sisyphus for her authentic existence. She challenges the society and its conventions and creates her own legacy of existence in this meaningless world.

Sula creates her own legacy in the conventional black community by living the life of her own choices and freedom and taking complete responsibility for her actions. She is an existential character who is in a journey to find the meaning of life. She finds the world difficult, lonely, hopeless and meaningless as she commits a great effort to find happiness and meaning in the world of absurdity, isolation and frustration. She struggles for her existence and overcomes the anxieties and angst by resisting the world of absurdity by doing the absurd acts. In this way, she struggles to exist in this absurd world. Thus, the novel presents her as an existential figure who lives with her own choices to live authentic life in the world full of struggles. Despite her tragic end with a mysterious disease, she lives in the best possible way following existential thoughts and actions and creating the legacy of her own.

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