

## Chapter - One

### Introduction

#### 1.1 Toni Morrison as an African American Writer

Toni Morrison was born in Lorain, Ohio, on 18 February, 1931 as Chloe Anthony Wofford. She later changed her name. She was the second of four children of their parents. Her parents George and Ramah Wofford came from working class family. They were both southerners. In 1953, she completed BA in English from Howard University. In 1955, she did MA from Cornell University. Morrison has had a distinguished career as a teacher, editor and professor. From 1955-57, she was an English teacher at Texas Southern University, Houston. She returned to Howard University in 1957 for seven years. Following this period of teaching she turned to publishing and became a senior editor at the New York publishing company, Random House.

Morrison became an Associate Professor of English at the State University of New York from 1961-72. Since 1989, she has been the Robert F. Goheen Professor at Princeton University, New Jersey. She got Nobel Prize for literature in 1993. She is still engaged in writing. Her literary works are very popular as well as suggestive of the themes relating to women's liberation, both economic and sexual.

Morrison has made a great contribution to the promotion of African American literature. She has written novels like *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula*, *Song of Solomon*, *Beloved*, *Jazz*, *Paradise*, *Tar Baby* and *Love*. Her novel *The Bluest Eye* is written in an experimental form. It focuses on issue of racial inequality. *Sula* is one of the most popular novels which even won her the prestigious Nobel Prize for literature in 1993.

It raises the issues like relationship between white and black, men and women, womanhood, female's sexual and economic freedom and several other complexities and biases in the patriarchal society. *Song of Solomon* is her most famous novel. This novel specially concentrates on rediscovery of history and African roots through quest, magic and relationships in the 1950s and 1960s. Her novel *Beloved* which deals the history of past of black people. *Paradise* is another interesting novel which deals with religion and energies of an old fashioned black community during the Civil Rights Movement. *Jazz* specially focuses on a specific historical and cultural moment around the 1930s. *Love* is Morrison's latest novel that deals with human love and passion.

Morrison has not written only novels but also very famous critical essays like *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and Literary Imagination*. It examines the role of race in the works of other famous fiction writers, notably Edgar Allan Poe, Mark Twain, Ernest Hemingway, Willa Cather and others. To understand their treatment of African American characters, she published her essay *Race-ing Justice* soon after the political debate between white and black. Actually it deals with the influential views on race and class.

When we study Morrison's literary productions, we can find major themes in her writings like supernaturalism and reality, recuperation of history, slavery, gendered discrimination, civil rights and sexuality.

Supernaturalism and reality is one of the major themes in her literary writings. Her work carefully rewrites the hidden moments in history, discovering dates, fact, life styles and clothes. She is equally aware of evoking the imagined lives of people at those points in history which she chooses.

In the novel *Beloved*, the supernatural power is revealed through the character Beloved. Her works are concerned with recuperating a black American history and explore the relationship of power between white and black; men and women. She reinterprets the past and reenters it on black experience. She proved a past through her imaginative reconstructions. She also tackles very sensitive issue like slavery or racial discrimination, crossing from Africa to America. *Beloved* imaginatively recreates a moment of history in which slaves were free in the American North but still taken place in the South. Sethe is a protagonist of this novel who escapes across the river Ohio to establish a new life there.

Morrison's literary works also concentrate on gendered relation, women's lives, motherhood, sisterhood, the community and sexual politics. In her works, we can find the theme of civil rights. In both *Song of Solomon and Paradise*, she focuses on the period 1960s. It is the very critical moment of in American history in which the Civil Right Movement had taken place. Milkman Dead's friend Guitar is equally imaginative and violent, caught up with a group of activists. In this period, many black men were unable to manage their relationship with women. They were fully engaged in the movement to protest against the white. At that time blacks were deprived of getting equal rights to white man in the society.

Sexuality and power can also be found as the dominant issue in Morrison's works. She celebrates the erotic and sexual liberation of women. In her novel *Sula*, Sula is a protagonist. She really seeks for her own sexual freedom. She violates the norms and values of sex toward women, imposed by men or patriarchal society. She reveals her sexual power, bedding with several men. She does not like to confine herself within the social boundary.

Morrison's writing career is highly affected by the contemporary literary trend of writing. One cannot provide an overview of African American literature of the 1970s and 1980s without first looking at the preceding decades. Out of the 1950s Civil Rights Movement and the 1960s Black Power Movement, racism in the United States had emerged as a major political and social issue. Liberation movement in African nations such as Nigeria and Kenya as well as the Vietnam War raised the consciousness of many African Americans about the relationship between imperialism and racism.

The Black Arts Movement is the outcome of the Black Power Movement. It did not recuperate only writers such as Frantz Fanon and Richard Wright but also emphasized on black folk forms as bases for art. African American culture was going ahead with its own ideas, forms and styles rather than as a pathology or a derivation of European American culture. As Afro-American writers of the 1960s increasingly saw blacks rather whites as their primary audience. They began to explore with a new intensity of their own culture, history and communities.

Yet despite all this collective exploration, the 1960s was not a monolithic period in African American literary history. Though the most visible writings were culturally nationalistic in tone, several major writers of the 60s such as Ishmael Reed and Adriene Kennedy questioned the Black Arts Movement's tendency to ascribe to all blacks with the same backgrounds, desires and goals. Women writers such as June Jordan challenged the cultural nationalist painting of blackness, almost entirely in male terms. The southerner writers such as Tom Dent and Alice Walker questioned the assumptions of Black Art Movement that the urban Northeast was the only place where real black people lived.

Audre Lorde, homosexual American writer, protested the ways in which lesbians fell outside the cultural nationalist definition of blackness. Paule Marshall is a famous immigrant writer in American literature, claimed that the U.S. Afro-American culture was not the only black culture. It was the mixed experiences of both travelers to newly liberated African and Caribbean, nations of immigrants from those countries to the United States. The immigrants made it increasingly clear the concept of blackness. Meanwhile the cultural nationalists emphasized on a single thought of blackness which had led to one of the most important and inspirational questions of black literary production in the contemporary period: what is fact, does "blackness" means?

In essence, there was no sharp outline between the 1960s and 1970s, either politically or culturally true. By the early 70s, the tone of 40s, political life began to change as the Vietnam War wound down and the anti-war movements separated. Alice Walker is another famous writer in Afro-American literature. She has characterized the 1960s as the decade of death in her novel *Meridian* (1976). The major black movement of the 1960s shifted gears in the 1970s.

However black uprisings like the Attica Prison Revolt (1971) continued into the seventies. In 1971, four people were killed on the occasion of the African American communist revolution. Angela Davis was the leader who had tried to escape from the courtroom with some friends. The black voices continued to demand a hearing in the decades following the 1960s. The most dramatic examples are the 1980 Miami uprising in response to police brutally and the 1993 South Los Angeles' reaction to the Rodney King hearings.

The Civil Rights Movement and the antiwar effort helped to generate other major movements in the early 1970s. Specially in the western United States, other

people of color-Asian Americans, Chicanos, Native Americans sought equality through their own nationalist endeavors and helped to forge the rising debates about multiculturalism. In addition, the contemporary women's movement caught fire a decade before by such manifesto as Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). It gained center stage in the politics of the United States, especially in relation to reproductive rights and sexual violence.

Among the most important pieces of legislation of the 1960s was the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Meanwhile it profoundly affected class formation in African American communities, did so often unpredictably. Though its ban on discrimination of a person's race, color, national origin, religion and sex, it opened up the racialized society of the United States. One of the most significant effects in the 1970s and 1980s was the separation of middle professional blacks from working-class African Americans. It would be a central issue in different communities and went to different schools, churches and the life form of working class and poor blacks. Still, Civil Right Act and Black Power Movement have demanded for the studies of black people. It paved the way for a small number of African Americans to enter historically white universities such as Harvard, Cornell, Princeton, Yale, The University of California, and Columbia. That movement into the universities was extremely important. Till this time only few African American writers had received the critical attention in mainstream institutions.

Critical trends that distinguished the 1960s from the 1970s are the remapping of African American cultural and social history which had been neglected the exploration of African American folk forms and the attention to African American women as writers both creative and scholarly. The attention demanded by their

presence in every multiplicity of African American identities and the increased participation of African Americans in forming the study of American literature.

## **1.2 Morrison's *Sula* as a New World Woman**

In the novel *Sula*, female characters are very dominant. Women's sexual freedom is the main concern of the novelist. The major female characters are Eva Peace, Hannah Peace, Sula Peace, Helene Wright and Nel Wright. They have been represented as the suppressed women of the patriarchal black community. They are bravely engaged in the struggle against the conventional norms and values of sex towards females, determined by male superiority. They do not like to be guided or controlled by others.

In the patriarchal society, women should live under the conventional social norms and values. There is a strict restriction for women in sexual matter. If they behave according to the prescribed rules of their community, they are considered as good women; otherwise bad. So searching for their freedom in the sex as equal as man is very difficult task. Sula is the protagonist in this novel who really faces such situation. She is doubly marginalized as a black and as a woman. She bravely raises her voice against the female oppression in the sexual matter. She does not wish to be confined herself within the social boundary.

The issue of woman's liberation in sex in Bottom community creates a lot of problems. The racial and the gendered discrimination deny women to perform any decisive roles in their community. Female characters in this novel are highly encouraged to protest against such sexual oppression whether based on the patriarchal norms or otherwise.

Sula Peace is a representative of African American community. Morrison has endeavored to present her as a new world woman. By violating the social rules, she falls in love with Jude who is the husband of her own intimate friend Nel. She really dares to have sex with Jude. Not only with Jude but also she has such sexual contact with other men. She always becomes far from marriage thinking that getting marriage would place women within the sexual boundary. So, to escape from such problem, the marriage is hated by Sula.

Nel Wright is another protagonist of this novel. She is Sula's childhood confidant. They share their opinions each other without any hesitation. They have deep relationship because of some similarities. In their childhood age, both girls realize, "Each had discovered years before that they were neither white nor male and that all freedom and triumph was forbidden to them . . ." (*Sula* 52). Their similarities bring them closer. They grow up together in the different family backgrounds. Helene Wright is Nel's mother. She is very strict in morality. So Nel is really instructed to follow the footsteps of other women. She gets married and has children whereas Sula hates marriage and bravely violates the social norms and values of sex in the community. She is nominated a pariah or a bitch. She is socially outcast. She becomes ill and dies ultimately. Nel Wright admires Sula after her death. She also promises to follow the footsteps of Sula.

### **1.3 Critics on *Sula***

*Sula* is a very successful novel written by Morrison. It has elicited from numerous critics since its publication in 1973. Doreatha Drummond Mbalia writes, "The struggle between sexes having been explored in *Sula* [. . .] racism and sexism, although equally oppressive [. . .]" (89). The female characters are doubly marginalized because of the racism and sexism in the African-American community.



In *Sula*, Morrison has tried to depict the exploited female members of the Afro-American community. The gendered discrimination is the main focus in this novel. However, the racial exploitation cannot be denied as a crucial factor. The novel has not incorporated the values of the Black Aesthetics. Madhu Dubey writes:

By Black Aesthetics standards, the novel's inability to represent a new, revolutionary black community would certainly constitute an imaginative and political failure. The black community presented in the novel is moored to the oppression past and is, therefore problematic from a black aesthetic standpoint. When we are first introduced to the Bottom neighborhood, in the beginning of the novel, it has already become a thing of the past. [. . .] in fact, racial and economic oppression appear to be the necessary conditions for the existence of a distinctive black folk culture. (81)

According to critic Dubey, this novel has denied the values of Black Aesthetics. It is quite able to represent a new revolutionary black community. It is uncultivated because all black male characters are passively represented. The racial and economic oppression are quite necessary for the existence of a distinct black folk culture.

The female characters of the novel are really searching for their freedom in sexual matter by violating the patriarchal norms and values toward sex in the black community Bottom. So Jerkily Fisher writes:

Pilate, Hagar and Reba as a loose mix of supportive women (*Song of Solomon*), and says that audacious 'maverick' characters such as Pilate and Sula (*Sula*) offer incitement to readers to battle against sexual

expression and be more daring in attempts a self-achievement and sexual freedom . . . . (1-12)

So Fisher says that Pilate, Hagar and Reba are regarded as a loose mix of supportive women in the novel *Song of Solomon*. But he highly admires the two major characters like Sula in *Sula* and Pilate in *Song of Solomon* because of their great encouragement. Their sexual expressions really try to attempt a self-achievement and the freedom for sex. These characters have a strong quest to establish self-identity.

Eva Peace becomes author of her self taking control of the story and image. To prove this, Rose De Angelis states, "She establishes authorship of her 'self' some things that had been denied to her simply because she was a woman and more significantly because she was a black woman" (2). Sula Peace understands herself very well in comparison to other characters. She has collected much experience about the outer world. She is socially outcast from the start. She has neither man nor children. This social status has diminished the value of her life. The Bottom community is not habituated to understand the real life of a woman, which is known by *Sula*. Sula is asked to have some babies to settle herself by her grandmother Eva from the side of the whole community. In response, she says, "I don't want to make somebody else. I want to make myself" (92). Describing Sula, Valerie Smith writes:

Sula centers on a character who believes that she can create for herself an identity that exists beyond community and social expectations. [. . .] she thus defies social restraints with a vengeance. She disavows gratuitous social flattery refusing to compliment either the food placed before refusing to compliment either the food placed before her or her old friends gone to seed and using her conversation to experiment with her neighbors' responses [. . .] worst of all in her neighbors' judgment

she discards men, black and white, as rapidly as she sleeps with them, even the husband of her best friend, Nel. (276)

Valerie Smith opines that Sula has created herself a self identity. But it is quite beyond the community and the social expectations. She actually rejects the social conventional values and norms in the matter of sex. Her neighbors respond to her that she hates man when she sleeps once with them. So we can guess that Sula has quite distinct character than others. She falls in love with Jude who is the husband of intimate friend Nel Wright. She also hates him after bedding once. So she only knows herself but not others.

Nel Wright and Sula Peace are childhood friends. Both have realized their positions in the community due to their similar conditions. They have become too intimate friends. Sula's childhood confidant Nel Wright functions much like a sister. Sula never asks questions to Nel Wright. Some critics have viewed *Sula* as a lesbian text, Barbara Smith is a lesbian critic who says:

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

It provokes the intimate relationship between two female characters Sula and Nel Wright. Morrison highly criticizes the heterosexual male institutions. She says that such institutions have compelled women to tie up in the family relationship by getting

marriage and having children. The novelist negates such views and tries to establish the women's autonomy and their impact upon each other's lives.

Thus Sula has presented many aspects of feminine struggle and their relationship among themselves. In this novel, most of the female characters are dominated, discriminated and exploited by various elements of society, governed by the very patriarchal system. Sula, the protagonist, challenges the restrictions, imposed by black community over black women.

## Chapter - Two

### Feminism and Feminist Criticism

#### 2.1 History of Feminism

Women were regarded inferior to men from the very beginning of the human civilization. It was said that man was always superior to woman. Men tried to put women under their control. Most sections of society were on the side of men. Steadily the situation started to change women and they became conscious of their sanctuary situation and began to question it. They became quite aware of the fact that they were made weaker, dependent and powerless by men. They were paid less attention in comparison to men. Even they had not got the opportunity to go to school as men.

Regarding the definition of feminism, Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines it, "Belief in the principle that women should have the same rights and opportunities (legal, political, social, economic etc.) as men" (1447). Similarly, the New Columbia Encyclopedia defines it as "Movement for the political, social and educational equality of women with men [ . . .]" (934). The British author and critic Rebecca West remarks, "I only know that other people call me a feminist whenever I express sentiments that differentiate me from a doormat or prostitute" (219). Likewise Adrienne Rich, a contemporary American poet describes feminism as, "The place where in the most natural, organic way subjectivity and politics have to come together" (114).

Feminism is a struggle of women for their freedom in different fields like education, politics, sex, religion and economy. From the very beginning of human civilization, women were totally ignorant about their rights and social roles. As the time passed, they became aware of everything in the community. Some women

started to write the essays, fictions and dramas. These literary works were produced with the strong female voices. Still feminist writers focus on the women's rights and their freedom in various fields. They also cast their views on liberation of women against the patriarchal society. Feminism has affected the world politically, culturally, spiritually and economically. It absolutely rejects the wrong belief of cultural ignorance on women. So, the aim of feminists is to eliminate the oppression and discrimination on the basis of sex, race, age and class religion in the society. Till this time women are being victimized by the sexists' oppression. Though they have occupied the half of the world, they have less dignity than men in the patriarchal society.

By the time of Industrial Revolution a wave of self-awareness emerged in women's thoughts and behaviours. They began to claim their liberation in politics; the right to work and the right to equality. They gradually started to participate in the social works and raised their voices against men. Mary Wollstonecraft first stood with her a voice in support of the education and emancipation of women. She wrote the famous book *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. In her book, she writes:

Female, in fact, denied all political privileges and not allowed as married women, excepting in criminal cases, a civil existence, have their attention naturally drawn from the interest of the whole community of that of the minute parts, though the private duty of any member of society must be very imperfectly performed when not connected with the general good. The mighty business of female life is please and restrained from entering into more important concerns by political and civil oppression". (398)

Thus feminist theorist Wollstonecraft expressed her opinion of feminism with a view to take aware of their situation and the place in the patriarchal society. It helped to create a great arouse in female thought and behaviour. Gradually women knew themselves how they were oppressed and deprived of their own right in the society. At that time her work became a great capsule for females.

During nineteenth century, some writers like Jane Austen, George Eliot and Bronte Sisters stood with the strong feministic views. They were very famous pioneers of the time. They contributed a lot to protest against the condition and status of women in the society. In 1833, Oberlin College was established first for co-education. Francis Wright is one of the first women orators raised her voice for the better education to be offered to women. In course of raising the voice of feminism, Simone de Beavoir produced perhaps the greatest classic of the post World War II feminism. When her work *The Second Sex* appeared in 1949, she was attacked by many people because they felt that women's life was too heavily based on her personal experience and her middle class values. She was also criticized for her historical inaccuracy and anthropological suppositions. In this book, she discusses about the myths of women, determined by the patriarchal society. It also includes the historical, biological and psychological perspectives on women and she further writes:

It is to be seen from these examples that each separate writers reflect the great collective myths: we have seen woman as flesh; the flesh of male is produced in the mother's body and re-created in the embraces of the woman in love. Thus woman is related to nature. (Adams 994)

In this way, Beavoir strongly denies the myth of woman, nominated by the patriarchal society. She opines that woman is seen as flesh by male. But it is absolutely wrong

because woman is quite related to nature and the flesh of the male is first produced in mother's body.

Similarly, Virginia Woolf appeared as one of the major novelists of the twentieth century with a strong view of feminism. Her best feminist writing is *A Room of One's Own*. In this book, Woolf addresses the question of why a sister of Shakespeare would not likely have been able to write anything. Her feminism went in its own direction. It did not go beyond her own upper middle class and held for important differences between men and women. The feminist trend of her time was toward absolute equality with men and the erasure of differences. She held for the radical change that would or should occur as women's freedom. Women's suppressed values begin to affect the conceptions of power in which men and women would come together in purpose and desire. In her work *A Room of One's Own*, she writes:

Nobody knows how many rebellions ferment in the masses of life which people earth women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties and a field for their effort as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow creates to say that they ought to confine themselves. . . . (Adams 822)

Thus, Woolf made a great contribution to feminism. She also tried to raise awareness in women's thought about their rights and situation in the society. She really convinces females saying that women are very calm; they can feel just as men feel. If they are given opportunities to exercise their faculty, they can do anything as their brothers. They have creative power as equal as men. They are not civilized due to the



male dominated social norms and values. They are really confined within only social boundary.

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

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

## **2.2 Feminist Literary Criticism**

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

The first type is concerned with [. . .] woman as the consumer of male produced literature, and with the way in which the hypothesis of a

female reader changes our apprehension of a given text, awakening us to the significance of its textual codes [ . . .]. Its subject include images and stereotypes about women in literature the omissions of and misconceptions about women in criticism and the fissures in male-constructed literary history (Adams 1225-26).

According to Showalter the first type is concerned with woman as the consumer of male produced literary. Females also read the literature written by male. After reading such literature, female will get knowledge why they are used in their literature as stereotypes. When the feminist criticism focuses on the woman as writers it concerns itself with:

When as the producer of textual meaning with the history, genres and structures of literatures by women. Its subject includes the psychodynamic of female creativity; linguistics and the problem of female language; the trajectory of the individual or collective literary career; literary history, studies of particular writers and works. (Adams 1226)

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

The concern with 'conditioning and 'socialization' underpins a crucial set of distinctions that between the terms 'a political position; the second 'a matter of biology' and the third 'a set of culturally defined

characteristics; particularly of these lies much of the force of feminism.

(122)

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

In the 1980s, the mood of feminism as in other critical approaches changed. Firstly, feminist criticism became much more eclectic meaning that it began to draw upon the findings and approaches of other kinds of criticism-Marxism, structuralism, linguistics and soon. Secondly it switched its focus from attacking male versions of the world to exploring the nature of the female worlds and outlook and reconstructing the lost or suppressed records of female experience. Thirdly, attention shifted to the need to construct a new canon of women's writings by rewriting the history of the novel and of poetry in such a way that neglected women writers were given new prominence.

(122-23)

Since the early 1970s, mainly three modes of the feminist criticism have emerged in literary field. These modes can be categorized as French, American and British.

### **2.3 French Feminist Criticism**

French feminists view that the western thought has been based on a systematic repression of women's experience. They have focused on language analyzing the ways in which meaning is produced. They behave language as a male realm. French

feminists remind that language is a realm of public discourse. This idea is drawn from Jacques Lacan. She is one of the most famous psychoanalytic philosophers.

According to French feminists, a child enters to the linguistic realm first as it comes to grasp its separateness from mother just about the time. Meanwhile the child tries to identify himself/herself with her/his family representative of culture. He/she tries to deconstruct the language, philosophy, psychoanalysis, social practices, culture and whole male-centered thinking.

Some feminists have argued that language only tends to give a narrow range of choices. There is a possibility in which women can develop a feminine language. In relation to language of women, Showalter writes:

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

According to the French feminists, the structure of language is phallogentric. It privileges the phallus and more generally masculinity by associating them with things and values more appreciated by culture. Peter Barry writes:

The notion of the *écriture féminine* is found in the writing of Julia Kristeva. She uses the term the symbolic and semiotic to designate two different aspects of language [. . .] the symbolic aspect associated with authority, order, father's repression and control [. . .] (128).

Semiotic means the stage where baby and mother fused together inside the womb of the mother. So feminist language is semiotic and pre-oedipal. Symbolic is quite

associated with the law of father. Roman Selden said that female counterpart can overcome the male when they can project their sexuality in their writing. Her famous essay *The Laugh of Medusa* (1976) is an example of women's writing in which women put their bodies into writing. She also rejects the binary oppositions of male and female. She really supports the deconstructive method of Derrida.

#### **2.4 American Feminist Criticism**

American feminist criticism was created by literary and academic women. They were editors, graduate students, university instructors and professors. These women actively participated in Women Liberation Movement of late 1960s. Elaine Showalter writes, "Feminist criticism was one of the daughters of the women's movement; its other parent was the old patriarchal institution of literary criticism and theory" (7). Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1970) is the first major book of the feminist criticism in the United States. This book highly focused on the sexual politics of women in the United States. It also claimed that men and women both should have equal right in the matter of sex.

American feminist criticism focused on the sexual analysis. The great feminist theorist, Elaine Showalter propounded two modes of American feminism: the feminist critic and the feminist reader. The feminist critics deal with books which have been written by men or male writers. Kate Millett expresses views about the male writers like Norman Mailer, Henry Miller and D.H. Lawrence who have strongly followed the ideological model. These critics examined the ideology of women in the patriarchal society. Millett's approach is concerned with the study of social institution and personal power relations between sexes. Many American critics reviewed great works, written by male writers. They were engaged in embarking on a revisionist rereading of literary tradition. These critics examined the portrayals of women

characters through expressing the patriarchal ideology. They also showed this traditional system of masculine dominance in our literary tradition. Millet, Carelyn Heilbrunn and Judith Fetterely created this model for American feminist criticism.

Another group of American feminist critics like Sandra Gilbert, Susan Gubar, and Patricia Mayor Spacks and Showalter herself created somewhat a different model. These critics named it as gynocriticism. It has studied the writings of these women who faced all obstacles while producing a literature of their own in Showalter's words. Gilbert and Gubar in *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) concern themselves with well-known women writers of the nineteenth century. They also find the general concerns, images and themes which were quite patriarchal. The authors of that time were highly impressed by the patriarchal cultural values and norms.

Gynocriticism mainly focuses on the study of well-known women authors. It rediscovers their historical and cultural backgrounds. It also promotes the females' creativity in their literary trend. Another aspect of the gynocriticism is to discover the neglected or forgotten women writers.

Showalter has overviewed on the feminist criticism. She has divided it into three stages. The first to which she named as feminine, the second feminist and the third stage as female. She had defined the period between 1840-1880 as feminine. In its earliest years, Showalter writes, "Feminist criticism concentrated on exposing the misogyny of literary practice; stereotyped images of women in literature as angels or monsters [. . .] the exclusion of women from literary history" (5). She says that feminist criticism concentrates on exposing the misogyny of literary practice. Male writers extremely treat the female characters as stereotypes in their literary works.

The female authors of this period really followed the masculine tradition. The second stage between 1880-1920 is defined as feminist. In this period the women writers strongly protested against the patriarchal standards and values. Showalter writes, "The second phase of the feminist criticism was the actual discovery that women writers had a literature of their own, whose [. . .] artistic importance had been obscured by the patriarchal values" (6). Since 1920 onwards writers including Elaine Showalter started advocating their own autonomous female perspective. She further states:

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

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

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

Thus American feminist criticism has contributed a lot to the female literature.

Though it has been divided into three stages, it highly focuses on the famous women

writers and their cultural as well as the historical family background. It has also nurtured the creativity of female writers. It strongly protests against the value and norm of the patriarchal society.

## **2.5 British Feminist Criticism**

British feminist criticism emphasizes on the art and the culture. Its main focus remains on the cultural practices, product and knowledge. It claims that there is an intimate relationship among authors, texts and sexes. It also says that a feminist text can be made by male or female authors which is political and cultural, but not biological one. What traditionally is called feminine, is a cultural construction a gender role that has been culturally assigned to countless generations of women.

British feminist theorists emphasize on engagement with historical process in order or promote the social change. Though French feminists seem somehow to be different from British and American feminists. All of them have examined similar problems from different perspectives. Specially French feminists have tended to focus their attention on the language. They say that language which they use, is always patriarchal or male-dominated and phallogocentric.

We can find some differences between British and American feminists. American feminists emphasize on the texts linking women across boundary and deeds. They regard their own critical practices as more political than that of American feminists whom they have faulted for being uninterested in historical details.

Thus British feminists are engaged to promote the literary works of women writers. They try to explore the voice of feminism on the basis of their own art and culture. Anyway they have made great contribution to the female literature.

## **2.6 Black Feminism**



The Civil Rights Movement took place in 1960s in America due to the cause of racial discrimination. It lasted for a year. It did not solve all problems of American people. So the black feminist movement emerged in the mid-1960s which is a continuation of both an intellectual and activist tradition. African-American women confronted both women question and a race problem as major arguments. These issues capture the essence of black feminist thought at the turn of the century. They would create a great shock again among intellectuals and community leaders, both male and female for generations. Feminist perspective has been a persistent and important component of the African-American literary and intellectual tradition since slavery. Most of the scholars have focused primarily on the racial perspectives of blacks. This tendency ignored long years of political struggle against sexism. It also aimed at eradicating the multiple oppressions toward black women's experience. It resulted in erroneous notions about the relevance of feminism to the black community during the second wave of the women's movement.

The black feminism is not a monolithic static ideology and there has been considerable diversity of thought among African Americans. In the essay *Black Feminism in the United States*, Beverley Guy Sheftall mentions some premises which help us to characterize the black feminism. There are as follows:

1. Black women experience a special kind of oppression and suffering in the country which is both racist and sexist because of their dual race and gender identity.
2. This "double jeopardy" has meant that the problems, concerns and needs of black women are different in many ways and distinct from those of both white women and black men.
3. Black women must struggle for gender equality and black liberation.

4. There is no inherent contradiction in the struggle to eradicate sexism and racism as well as the "isms" which plague the human community such as classism and heterosexism.
  5. Black women's unique struggles with respect to racial and sexual politics, their poverty and marginalized status have given them a special view of the world.
- (294)

A historical perspective on the evolution of feminist consciousness among African American women is usually thought to have begun with abolition since the catalyst for the emergence of the women's rights movement in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. It was the movement to abolish slavery. However, for 200 years enslaved African females struggled for their freedom. They involved in protest by bringing slave children into the world. They were sexually exploited by white masters. Even they were separated from family union. White masters really demeaned them as stereotypes. Their life stories paid attention to the peculiar plight of black women and their strategies for resistance. Harriet Jacobs publicized her antebellum autobiography, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself* (1861). It is about the sexual vulnerability. It states unequivocally that slavery is terrible for men. But it is far more terrible for women. In 1831, The Afro-American Female Intelligence Society of Boston was organized by the abolitionists. It highly focused on the rights of women in America. Similarly Maria W. Stewart is a free black woman. She came from Connecticut with abolitionist and feminist impulses. In 1831, she delivered four public lectures in Boston. She was the first female member in the African American Female Intelligence Society. She was probably the first African American woman to speak publicly in defense of women's rights. So she is remembered primarily as the first American-born woman of any race to lecture publicly to racially mixed audiences

of women and men. She spoke about the variety of issues which were relevant to the black community-literacy, self-determination, abolition, economic empowerment and racial unity.

Frederick Douglass was the most prominent black abolitionist. Though he was a black male, he strongly supported the voice of feminism. He believed that the anti-slavery movement was doing much for the elevation and improvement of women. He understood the need for women's independence. He involved in various organizations and movements to achieve equal rights for women. On July 14, 1848, his *North Star* carried the announcement of the Seneca Falls Convention. Being a constant reminder to his readers, he had a strong commitment to the rights of women. Right is of no 'sex' was his slogan which appeared in early issue of the *North Star*.

Involvement on the part of the black women's rights, the struggle goes back to Sojourner Truth. Her new controversial speech "Ar'e n't I A Woman" was delivered in Women Right Convention at Akron, Ohio which was held in 1951.

Black women raised their voices against their double standard of the oppressions. Some black women chose the battle against the male domination by taking the common cause with white men. Black feminists found National Black Feminist Organization in 1973. It has published a manifesto on a black feminist statement:

The most general statement of our politics at the present time would be that we are actively committed to struggle against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression and see as our particular task to develop the integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that

the major systems of oppression are interlocking; the synthesis of these oppressions creates the condition of our lives. (Lauret 68)

In the woman liberation movement, the majority of white women remained silent for the problems of black women. They could not share the aspirations of black women whose condition was comparatively poor. By rejecting white female ideology, black women started constructing a new identity as their own. We know that they were doubly marginalized as a black and a woman. So their rights were totally deprived by the patriarchal black community itself. They were really confined within the households and not allowed to be free in the sexual matter. Norrece T. Jones Jr. writes:

Women progressed further in their thinking about gender than men. Despite the fact that they labored, fought and suffered the identical consequences for any infractions as bondsmen, American-born black men-like their predecessor in Africa-continued to most domestic tasks. This mindset was reinforced by male shareholders whose own sense of women's place and duties coincided in certain ways with those of African men. (86)

When black women established National Black Feminist Organization in 1973. black women writers like Zora Neale Hurston, Toni Cade Bambara, Alice walker, Toni Morrison and others really attract the publishers and readers. They have not presented the stereotypical female characters who are submissive, passive and loving in their novels. They all criticize major socializing institutions by presenting strong revolutionary female characters for their freedom in every field, i.e. sex, education, religion and economy. They displace these Euro-centric qualities with the realistic images. As black women's existence, experience and culture are shaped by

the complex system of oppression, the representation of female subjectivity is itself complex and traditional practice which needs to be revised. Barbara Smith writes about some black feminist writers:

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

Black women writers use black women's language and their cultural experiences in their writing. This takes their writing 'Far beyond the confines of white male literary structures' (9). So there are innumerable commonalities in black women's works. Alice walker responds to her interviewers question why she thinks that the black woman writer has been so ignored in America. She answers:

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

Due to the racism, the black literature is placed outside the mainstream and black women writing are still outside the black literature. The works of black women

writers contain stunning accurate records of the impact of white/male values and practices upon the lives of black women. Even black male critics tend to know about black women's literature. We find many commonalities among the works of black women writers as a result of specific political, social and economic experience. Both the sexual and racial politics are interlocked in their writings. To prove this, Barbara Smith, in her essay *Toward a Black Feminist Criticism* expresses, "A black feminist approach to literature that embodies the realization that the politics of sex as well as the politics of race and class are crucially interlocking action the works of black women writers is an absolute necessity". (5)

Thus, the black feminism has a relatively long history. It has played a great role in African American literature. It has raised the voices of black women in their writing. It has been going ahead exploring the rights and freedom in every field. It expresses the real experiences of black women.

## 2.7 Black Feminist Criticism

In literature, black feminist criticism appears first by deviating syntactic law of language and then asserting black folks for sexual and racial identity simultaneously.

Barbara Smith in her essay *Toward a Black Feminist Criticism* states:

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

(9)

The primary concern of the modern feminist is to develop theories of the sexual difference in reading, writing and literary interpretation. Feminist theory helps us to know about the importance of women's personality, common experiences and struggles. It also analyses how the sexual difference is constructed within different patriarchal societies. Feminist theory consists of various perspectives which tries to find out the women's oppression, causes and consequences. It also prescribes strategies for women's liberation. During 1960s, many feminist writers and critics appeared in Women Liberation Movement with different perspectives and ideologies for common goal of women's liberation in different fields.

The black women writers are ignored by the white male/female, black/male writers and critics. So the black feminists realized to open up the space, needed for the exploration of black women's lives. This necessarily leads to the redefinition of the

strategies of white feminist movement. The creation of black female subjectivity itself challenges to the notion of self because it is perceived as a figure of negation or absence in white language.

They realized that "Without a black feminist critical perspective not only are books by black woman misunderstood; they are destroyed in the process" (Adams 1970). Showalter opines that the black feminist critical perspective examines the books written by black male writers. It also assesses the process of language, destroyed by white or black male writers. It helps the black female writers to make their own language style more effective. So it always tries to defend the overall systems of black female writings

Morrison in her essay *Unspeakable Thing Unspoken* (1988) says, "The distinguishing feature of black writing lies in its language-its unpolished seditious, confrontational manipulating, inventive, disrupting, masked and unmasking language" (30). In black women's writings, the concept of the self, the presence of assertive speaker and the presence of father are denied through the creation of a double voiced textual address.

Black male and female writers share the common racial marginalized positions. So critics find commonalities in their literature. Further we find ways in which the commonalities manifest differently in black women's writing. There are some ways in which they coincide with writings by black men. In black men's writings, the negative and stereotype images of women are depicted due to their conscious superiority. Black feminist approach does not focus only on such elements due to its wide range. It successfully covers the whole area of their literature. Hortense J. Spillers offers a more sophisticated approach to his issue. According to her, black women writers must assert the black female myth or saying things. In short,



for the purposes of liberation, black women writers have to insist on their own name and their own space. To clarify more about black critical theory, Barbara Christian says:

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

According to him, black critical theory is quite different from the western form of abstract logics. It is often written in narrative form with several riddles and proverbs. It includes more sensual and abstract figures. So we can say that the black critical theory is more dynamic in its form than others.

Thus, black feminist criticism evaluates the literary works, produced by the black feminist writers. It has challenged the literary trends of black male writers as well as the white males/females. It has become an effective tool because it deeply analyzes the literary product in terms of the female perspectives i.e. general sex, race and class. It also studies the results and consequences of female literary works.

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

Toni Morrison is the first woman writer who received the Nobel Prize for literature. Really she has contributed a lot in black literature by writing novels, essays and plays. Most of her literary works appeal for black female identity and their rights in every field like politics, education, sex and religion. She portrays the experiences of

black female life in the patriarchal black community. Her writings specially reveal the hidden facts of the society. Writing the self or writing about the self in order to establish a sense of self are crucial elements in the work of Morrison. Most of her works are written in storytelling form. She always employs the first-person narrative technique to guarantee a sense of authenticity.

Feminist critics focus on Morrison's treatment of women and gendered relations. She realizes that the voice of feminism is missing from American literature. It did not only by white writers but also by the distinguished black writers like James Baldwin, Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison. So Morrison brings the issues in her literary works which are simply ignored by others. She deeply examines the reality of friendship between black and white, man and woman, mother and daughter. She shows both the love and the unfriendliness that happen when two human beings are related to each other. In her latest novel *Love*, she portrays how once a very good friend turn to be the enemy of each other. According to the story of the novel, Heed and Christine fall into the deep friendship in the beginning of the novel, but later they become the enemy of each other. They become the victims of social circumstances. Morrison refuses to display her black women characters in a degrading way. Similarly in her novel *Sula*, Sula, Hannah, Eva, Helene and Nel are the dominant black female characters. Sula is the protagonist of the novel. She is outcast by patriarchal black community. She is nominated as a pariah in her community Bottom. She moves forward encouraging herself with the individual power and struggles against the patriarchal society. Sula and Nel are too intimate friends. Both black girls have grown up together in Bottom. They are really instructed with different values and norms of lives. Sula does not follow the footsteps of other females and never gets married

whereas Nel marries and has some children. She is strict in morality like others women in the community.

Morrison's novel *The Bluest Eye* centers on Pecola Breedlove. She is an eleven years old black girl. She believes herself very ugly in her community. So she continuously longs for the blue eyes. This unachievable longing actually brings her to white family value. She had been influenced with the white's patriarchal ideology of beauty. So Pecola's mind is filled with the concept of beauty. Here her blue eyes are considered as the symbol of beauty. Regarding the story of the novel, Pecola is raped by her father. As a result she gives birth to a premature baby who later dies. Reading the novel critically, Carole Lanone examines:

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

Morrison's black female characters are more suffered than her black male characters. She better acknowledges the tortures of the black women. On the one hand, these characters have to be victimized by the white society, on the other hand, they have to tolerate themselves the domination of black male characters.

Her novel *Beloved* also portrays badly oppressed black female characters and their miserable life. The context of her work is clearly linked to race and gender. It traces the female history under slavery. The physical and mental torture directly or indirectly inflicted the slaves. The tremendous impacts are left on their psyche. In

*Beloved*, Morrison exhibits the wide range of emotions undergone by the slaves. Though they are physically free now, their psyche is still bound by the traumatic past. This novel also analyses the mother-daughter relationship in dehumanizing institution-slavery. The protagonist Sethe falls in love with a man Paul D. She also beds with him. She reveals her strong sexual power to man.

Morrison is not only the novelist but also the essayist. *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and Literary Imagination* is a famous critical essay of Morrison in which she has explained about the roles of black writers and their races. She claims that Afro-American novelists, story writers and essayists have contributed a lot to the mainstream literature of America. She had discussed about the works of great Afro-American writers like Ralph Ellison, Mark Twain and others. She also realizes that white American writers have paid less attention to their literature. She further remarks:

Silence from and about the subject was the order of the day. Some of the silences were broken, and some were maintained by the authors who lived with and within the policing narrative, what I am interested in are the strategies for the maintaining the silence and the strategies for breaking it-how did the founding writers of young America engage, imagine, employ and create an African's presence and persona ? (51)

Thus Toni Morrison is a black feminist writer. Her literary works really concentrate on the lives of black women. She has become able to reveal the real experiences and the traumatic past, faced by the black woman.

## Chapter -Three

### The Feminist Perspective in *Sula*

#### 3.1 Black Women's Sexual Freedom

Toni Morrison's second novel *Sula* was published in 1973. This novel won Nobel Prize for literature in 1989. She has presented the most distinct black female characters who bravely reject to follow the conventional patriarchal rules of the black community and choose their lifestyle by using their own consent. All the male characters in the novel are inactive and frozen. The female characters of the novel like Eva Peace, Hannah Peace, Helene Wright and Nel Wright are leading their life styles on their own ways. Morrison wants to revolt against the patriarchal black community Bottom through these female characters. Women are doubly suppressed as a woman and a black in the Bottom. She realized this situation of women and writes, "They were neither white nor male that all freedom and triumph was forbidden to them. . ." (52).

The novel *Sula* is set beside the river Ohio, in the United States. There is the community of black people who started to live by thinking it as the Bottom of heaven. It is dry and infertile land. It is situated on top of the hill. Black people use to call it Bottom. The naming of this place surprises other white people. They usually take it as "A joke. A Nigger Joke" (4).

Sula is the protagonist of this novel. She grows up in the Bottom and observes the black people from the spiritual perspective. She belongs to the Peace family of Bottom where she meets Nel. Nel is a black girl of the Wright family in her neighbourhood. Both black girls become the intimate friends and grow up together in the Bottom. They really seem so aware of their conditions in the community. But they

take the different paths in their lives. Barbara Christian states, "They have taken different roads in life and have formed the meaning of their lives into different patterns" (89). Nel Wright is Helene's daughter. Helene is very strict in morality. So she has instructed Nel to follow her footsteps. Nel behaves with neighbours according to mother's suggestion. She marries Jude and gives birth to three children. She represents herself as a typical housewife. She becomes very loyal to the social values and systems. But Sula refuses to marry; denies the childbirth and breaks the traditional life pattern. She only falls in love with Jude who is the husband of her own intimate friend Nel. She beds with Jude as well as other men in the community but always lives far from real marriage. She struggles against the conventional social system. The patriarchal black community has not allowed women to be free in the matter of sex. Women have been confined within the limited area. But Sula seeks for her freedom in sex. The critic Jerkily Fisher explains about Sula:

Pilate, Hagar and Reba as a loose mix of supportive women (*Song of Solomon*), and says that audacious 'maverick' characters such as Pilate and Sula (*Sula*) offer incitement to readers to battle against sexual expression and be more daring in attempts a self-achievement and sexual freedom. . . . (1-12)

Sula leaves Bottom for a decade. She gains the higher education. She collects much experiences and knowledge of the outer world. She searches for her own distinct identity and returns to Bottom after a decade. Similarly Sonya L. Wilson published the article, 'Why I still Love Sula' by Toni Morrison. Wilson writes:

See, I wouldn't have liked Sula much-kind of her mother didn't like her. But, perhaps like her mother, I love her for what she was. I love that she was. I have to give her credit-Sula had guts! To me, she was a

feminist, and she was well before her time. She lived her own sexual freedom. She is the only woman in the novel who leaves the small town and we never learn what she experienced while she was gone. And she took pride in knowing that no matter what mistakes she'd made, she'd lived on her own terms. So my final thought (this time around) was, Poor Sula she should never have returned to the Bottom. It was just too small for a woman with her big thoughts. 2

When Sula arrives Bottom after longtime, she shocks all the black people of her community. Her neighbours give her a status of 'pariah' in the community. Even her closest friend Nel Wright rejects her in the beginning of the novel. She has been excluded from the community. But she does not compromise with the traditional systems and makes great efforts to establish a society free of suppression and gender discrimination. Her rejection of marriage, reproductive roles and celebration of the individual freedom are her liberal sense toward the sex which strike a heavy blow to the patriarchal stereotypical black community.

According to the story of the novel, the protagonist Sula has to face the great problem, really created by her social phenomenon. She is morally degraded in the society. She expresses her inner intention toward sex while talking to her bosom friend Nel Wright. Nel Wright heartily requests her not to fall in love with her husband Jude. Her case of loving with Jude creates a great clash to their deep friendship. Sula is asked why she has fallen in love with Jude really by Nel Wright and Sula responds to her saying, "I didn't kill him, I just fucked him. If we were such good friends. . ." (145). In her expression, we can realize that she gives a high priority on sexual matter rather than marriage. She also shows her strong power of sexuality.

Sula further says, "After all the old women have lain with the teenagers; when all the young girls have slept with their old drunken uncles. . ." (145). Thus Sula wants to be free in the sexual matter. She really does not like to hide her strong sexual desire within herself. She shares it with her friends and lovers. She dares to stand in the black community taking quite aloof thought in sexual matter. She has great courage to change people's mind according to the outer world. At the end of the novel, she becomes ill and dies unfortunately.

Mostly unique and non-stereotypical female characters are portrayed in the novel. The roles of females in the society are consciously narrowed down. The limitations of the black female roles are even greater in racist and sexist society. Sula draws the lifestyle of the diverse female character besides Helene and Nel Wright. In the community, each woman character is recognized-Helene's lady like and hypocritical demeanor, Hannah's elegant sensuality and Eva's arrogant murderer of her son.

Helene Wright, Nel's Mother, teaches her daughter according to the rules and the laws of the society Bottom. She does not violate the systems of her society. She stands as a good woman in front of other women. She orders Nel to pull her nose while sitting idly to meet the physical beauty of the patriarchal standard and says, "Don't just sit there, honey. You could be pulling your nose. . ." (28). Helene disconnected her name to her ancestors. Her name is chosen by herself. She hates the circumstances of her relationship to the Sundown House and exchanges her name. She goes far away from the Sundown House to Medallion and except once she never goes back there. She regularly advises her daughter to be what Bottom thinks a woman.



Hannah, Sula's mother, never likes to be confined herself within the social norms and values, prescribed by the patriarchal black community. She is not interested in the make up and new fashion. She does not like wearing slippers or shoes in the summer, but in the winter she wears on the "man's leather slippers with the backs flattened" (42). Her temperament is "light and playful" (42). Her body movement and everything fascinates men in Bottom. What she does in the community becomes the gesture of love. "If the man entered and Hannah was carrying a coal scuttle up from the basement, she handled it in such a way that it became a greater of love. He made no move to help her. With it simply because he wanted tossed how her thighs looked when she bent to put it down" (43).

When Hannah's husband Rekus dies, she returns to her mother's house. She is also a dominant black female character. Though she is young and beautiful, she does not decide to get married again. She wants to live freely. She beds with anyone to whom she likes. She really expects nothing but "some touching everyday" (44). Morrison further writes, "Hannah simply refused to live without the attention of a man, and after Rekus' death had a steady sequence of lovers" (42). Her flirting is innocent, "sweet" and "guileless" (42). Sex is a pleasant and ordinary activity for her. She does it everyday. She is a daylight lover. She falls in love with Patsy and Valentine and also beds with them. She wants to spend her life with a great pleasure. Before her death she tells her mother that she has dreamed of a wedding in the red dress. Eva knows that the wedding signifies death. While Eva is searching her comb, she sees her burning.

Eva Peace is Hannah's own mother. She is a courageous woman. Her husband Boy Boy deserts her without giving anything. She lives separately with her three children. So Barbara Christian opines, "Eva is arrogant, independent and decisively a

man lover who loves and hates intensively. She is strong by virtue of her will, wit and idiosyncrasies rather than because of her physique" (78). She dares to be strong because of the oppression of the patriarchal black society. She is deserted by her husband, Boy Boy with three children-Hannah, Pear and Plum. She is left without money and food. She has to face a great difficulty to keep her children alive. She leaves her children with a neighbour, Mrs. Suggs by saying that she would come back the next day but she returns back after eighteen months, "With two crutches, a new black pocket book, and one leg" (34).

After sometimes Eva builds a house and becomes a powerful matriarch of the family. The mystery of her missing leg becomes the material folk legend. She appears as a god-like figure who has the power of both creation and destruction. When Plum returns from the World War II as a heroin addicted, she burns him. She does not feel guilty of her action and gives clear reason of killing him to Hannah, saying "I had room enough in my heart, but not in my womb, but no more. I birthed him once. I couldn't do it again [. . .] I couldn't birth him twice" (7).

She really wants to make him a man. She finds that he wants to be a baby again. She says, "I just thought of a way he could die like a man not all scrunched up inside my womb, but like a man" (72).

She sacrifices her beautiful leg for the sake of her survival. Thus, she refuses to become a willess object and to be bound by the traditional, middle-class definition of motherhood. The mutilation of her leg is repeated in the scene. Sula takes a knife and slices of the tip of her finger to threaten the boys while returning to home from school. Sula bravely says. "If I can do that to myself. What do you suppose I'll do to you?" (55). About Sula's character Morrison says:

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

Eva and Sula Peace are indomitable women. Sula counterparts to the Biblical character Ishmael. She is an unforgettable heroine in the black literature.

Nellie Mckay states:

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

Eva and Sula Peace are indomitable women. Sula counterparts to the Biblical character Ishmael. She is an unforgettable heroine in the black literature.

Nel Wright is Helene's daughter. She is one of the most typical female characters. In this novel, she is regarded as another protagonist who plays a vital role. At the beginning of the novel, she seems very strict in social norms and values, prescribed by the patriarchal black community. She does so because her mother Helene frequently teaches her to follow the footsteps of other women in her community. She gets married and gives birth to three children. Nel's husband Jude had once been a lover of Sula. This brings a clash in their friendship.

Sula leaves Bottom for ten years. She gets education of higher level. She collects knowledge and experiences about the outer world. When Sula returns and

they meet each other again in Bottom. Sula asks Nel if people of Bottom have changed their thought and behaviour. But unexpectedly she knows that they still remain as before Sula is socially outcast. After someday she becomes ill and dies at the hospital bed. By heart, Nel Wright admires Sula after her untimely death. She regards Sula as "Lord" (174). She further says, "Girl, girl, girl, girlgirlgirl" (174).

At the end of the novel, Nel understands Sula's intentions. She wants to follow the footsteps of Sula. She also seeks for her own freedom in sex by revolting against the conventional norms and values of patriarchal black community.

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

Morrison has depicted the unique and non-stereotypical characters in her novel. They are different from concept of Black Aesthetics. The strong black female characters have distorted the black male characters psychologically. She has presented almost all black male characters as very passive, inactive and irresponsible. She tries to establish a different strategy by going beyond the limit of the male literary discourse. According to the traditional Eurocentric discourse and Black Aesthetics, the males are made heroic, valiant, powerful and bold whereas females are fragile, loving, careful, docile and domestic ones. Most of the female characters are victimized by the patriarchal norms and values.

Morrison's black female characters like Sula, Eva, Hannah, Helene and Nel are strong, valiant, responsible and authoritative. She depicts black male characters like Plum, Boy Boy, Ajax, Shadrack, Chicken Little and the deweys as irresponsible to their duties. They deny maturity in their characters and reject any kind of personality development. Most of her male characters are not stable. She accepts this thing in her

interview with Nellie McKay "I'm not obliged to write books about stable black men" (402).

Plum is Eva's son. He has just returned from the World War II. He is quite addicted to heroin. He is tall, a man of six feet, but is not responsible and serious to his duties. He does not like to be mature and always wants to remain as a boy forever. He wants to "crawl back" into his mother's womb" (71). He returns back from the war with a severely distorted mind. Roberta Rubenstein writes, "When he returns from the war, mentally broken like Shadrack, to live a mindless, lethargic existence in his mother's house. Eva takes things into her own hands" (144). Eva has taken her responsibility to make him "a man" (72), but he denies it. When she finds her son in child-like condition, she decides to kill him. So he can die "like a man" (72). Rubenstein further writes, "Finding him one night in his customary drugged baby like state. She cradles him gently, then douses him with kerosene and sets him a fire" (144).

Shadrack is a male character. He first appears in *Sula*. He is also a black man like other characters of the novel. He is sent to fight in the World War I. He has seen there a cruel fighting and his friends dying like cattle. His mind is cracked. When he returns back from the war, he has "No past, no language, no tribe, no source, no address book, no comb, no pencil, no clock, no pocket handkerchief, no tobacco pouch, no soiled under war and nothing nothing [. . .] (12). The unexpectedness of death really frightens him and thinks that if one day of a year is devoted to the fear of death, the rest of the year will be safe and free. Then he established an institution "National Suicide Day" (7). He remains quite silent while drowning Chicken Little in the river. Hortense J. Spillers writes, "Shadrack, the town's crack-brained veteran of

the World War I, has seen them and will not tell, consigns them both to a territory of their own most terrible judgment and isolation" (229).

Jude is a black male character in *Sula*. He is also a creation of Morrison against the concept of Black Aesthetics. Jude marries Nel Wright among many other black girls. He chooses the girl by Bottom's definition of woman. He knows that Nel has no desire to make herself but becomes happy in caring about someone else. His marriage with Nel enables him to maintain his adulthood because he works as a waiter everywhere either at the Hotel Medallion or at New River Road Site. He is emasculated and rendered weak, infantile or passive who always gets orders. His domination over Nel enables him to assert his own autonomy and compensates the restriction of the outer world that places on him. In his house with Nel, he is no longer ordered but he is "the head of a household" (83). He is only a waiter moving around the kitchen like a woman. He also deceives Nel and abandons her. Jude leaves Nel with "No things and no heart" (111). The presentation of Jude's character in *Sula* "clearly pinpoints racial oppression [. . .] black female dominance . . ." (Dubey 71). Jude fails to attain adult masculinity. He only becomes a waiter nothing more than that. So his dignity is lost.

Eva named three adopted boys, the deweys. They are called by same name. They remain irresponsible forever and all being constantly punished. When something goes wrong, the deweys get whipped. They have single voice, "The stunted physical growth of the deweys who remain boys forever, is paralleled by Plum's psychological refusal of adulthood" (Dubey 71).

Boy Boy is also a black male character. He is created against the concept of Black Aesthetics. He seems absolutely irresponsible to his duty. He abandons Eva with three children without giving anything. Dubey further writes "With the exception

of Ajax, all the black male characters in Sula fit the type that Black Aestheticians wished to ban from black literature" (71).

Thus, most of the black male characters are presented in this novel against the concept of the Black Aesthetics by Toni Morrison. These male characters are very passive, hopeless and irresponsible for their duties. They forget what their primary duties are. The married black male characters do not care their children and wives.

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

It is one of the most significant parts of the novel that Sula deals with the discourse of sex. The sexual aspect of the novel is highlighted by the binary term of sex, homosex as well as heterosex. Madhu Dubey writes:

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

The novel is a critic on the institution female-female bonding, the unpleasant momentary relationship of male-female and Sula's rejection of marrying and having babies. In the beginning part of the novel, homosexual discourse has been more dominant whereas in the later part the heterosexual relationships are portrayed. The union of Nel Wright and Sula Peace constitutes the novel's strongest challenge to the Black Aesthetics. As prescribed by Black Aesthetics, one of the functions of black

women writers is to depict the black male-female relationships as necessarily complimentary male-female relationships. Dubey clarifies this idea by stating:

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

Nel Wright and Sula Peace initially find "each other's eyes the intimacy they were looking for" (52). Each virtually creates the other. They are both dependent in sharing their thoughts each other. Morrison further writes" [. . .] they felt the ease and comfort of old friends. "Because each had discovered years before that they were neither white nor male and that all freedom and triumph was forbidden to them" (52). Nel later remembers that girl as they were "Two throats and eye and had no price" (147). The union of Nel and Sula is described romantically like a heterosexual encounter. They are waiting "Prince of dream" like traditional convention and they have fantasies about their lovers which are indicated as "Technicoloured visions" (51). For sometime Nel takes the role of fairy-tale heroine and Sula becomes the fairy tale hero. Nel imagines herself in a fairy tale heroine's posture of waiting passively for a prince. So Morrison writes:

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



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

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

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

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

Though they have different physical body, they are taken as a single person in the community. "Just alike. Both of you. Never was no difference between you" (169). It

becomes clear from Eva's words. Morrison seems to be satisfied when she finds the complimentary and necessary unions of Sula and Nel. But it splits in the later part of novel. Nel and Sula are the representatives of two factors of a mind. Nel represents the orderly rationality of consciousness and more mysterious dimension of dreams and the unconsciousness. They found relief in each other's personality although both are unshaped or formless things. Nel seems stronger and more consistent than Sula. She could hardly be counted on to sustain any emotion for more than three minutes. They complete the heterosexual union which consists of active and passive; the masculine and feminine principles. In the description of the Sula-Nel union, Sula fills the masculine place whereas Nel feminine.

All the female characters are leading their lives without the support of their husbands. Hannah involves in the sexual affair after the death of her husband. She struggles much to run her family. Helene's husband stays outdoor. She does not know even her father since she is the daughter of creole whore. Boy Boy never cares for Eva and his children. According to the story, these female characters are in the same boat. Their husbands are irresponsible for their duties. They never pay attention to their family.

The concept of motherhood or the very institution of reproduction is criticized. When Sula hears mother's saying "I just don't like her" (57). She runs off with Nel. It is the crucial moment that she is rejected by her mother. At the same time both Sula and Nel are in their budding sexuality. Now Sula cannot maintain the proper relationship with her mother as before. While Sula and Nel both involve in symbolic act of heterosexual play with sticks and the ground, Nel finds a thick twig and peels away its bark until it is stripped to "a smooth, creamy innocence" (58).

Metaphorically, the phallus is rendered weak and powerless. Later on, Chicken Little

comes up to them. Sula swings him around and around until he slips from her hands into the river. The death of Chicken Little suggests Sula's unconscious rebellion against motherhood and refusal of heterosexuality. Both Sula and Nel do not try to save Chicken Little. The murder of that boy parallels to Eva's murder of Plum. Here both women deny the concept of motherhood. Sula and Nel watch without trying to save him. This incident parallels to the event in which Sula watches her mother burning case. Sula is even indifferent to her mother's dying words, "Help me ya'al" (77).

Sula is a thirty-year-old unmarried woman. Her decision of not getting married brings about unexpected shocking. When Eva suggests her to marry and become mother, she bravely replies, "I don't want to make somebody else. I want to make myself" (92). Her strong denial of institution of reproduction seems to be selfish in the black society. It can be realized not only through Sula's character but also through other black women who live by their community's valuation of reproduction. Sula is the critic of reproductive ideology. Helen Wright forces her daughter to follow the rules, laid by her society. Jude later marries Nel by observing her obedience to the patriarchal black community. Eva Peace is a strong black woman who always engages in the concern for children's survival. She plays the role of a loving mother. But later she kills Plum because still he expects her to nurture him. Actually she refuses to play the role of the mother during her life. It is the opposite consequence of the black community's prescription that black women centre their lives around reproduction according to the traditional notions.

The novel's treatment of black male-female relationship explores a similar uneasy adjustment to the black aesthetic discourse. All major male-female relationships do not go forward as black aesthetics. This relationship ends with male

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

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

Sula totally differs in the presentation of black images from the earlier ones. She explores a new radical as well as shocking image of black character. At first, Sula rejects black man as a prime victim of racism negating of the presentation of any white characters within the text itself. Blackness is meant as poverty, ignorance and lack of middle class mainstream for the white world. Such assumptions were deeply rooted within the institution of slavery. These were certain stereotypical images of blacks, constructed by whites. They even depicted these stereotypical images in their texts. They created black characters according to their own mental construction as slave, dull and savage. They are morally and intellectually inferior to whites. Even black writers also followed the footsteps of white writers and depicted black female as mirror and invisible people.

But, in *Sula*, these stereotypical images have been totally rejected by Morrison. So it opens a new space in the field of black literature by presenting perfectness in itself. Jerry H. Bryant writes in a review:

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

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

Though Bottom was a place of black community, it was a white man's gift of land to a slave who had performed some difficult task for him. The novel gives a glimpse of slavery system though it is not present in the community. This community is now totally different from other since it has its own unique system. It really presents the black community which is moored to the oppressive past. It is also problematic from Black Aesthetic standpoint. Morrison presents such a world which has its own distinct feature with unique characters and their behaviours. In the community pain becomes a part of pleasure of living as an instance-Sula gets pleasure as well as satisfaction when "She slashed of only the tip of her left forefinger down hard on its edge" (54) to frighten the boys. Enduring pain is one of the principles to get pleasure in case of Nel, too. In the hope of getting a nice nose more

enthusiastically pulls in spite of pain, "While you sitting there, honey, go head and pull your nose. It hurts Mamma". (55)

Sula has the quality of a valiant protagonist. She clearly cultivates those qualities that distinguish her from her neighbours. Here, Morrison's plot relies on a multiplicity of narrative to implicate Sula in the community. She is absolutely alienated from her own black community. Sula enters on a character who can create for herself a new identity that exists beyond community and social expectations. Having most dubious background, the novel is full with strange woman character like Helene Wright. So the Peace women are as complex and nonstereotypical as any one will find in literature. Jerry H. Bryant writes in a review:

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

Morrison has created her characters against the old stereotypical images. They do not follow such images rather they dismantle them. We might first mistake at Eva and Hannah for the banal stereotypes of black women in literature and film. Eva is willing to save her children at any cost. Though she cuts her leg, she becomes able to get insurance for it. So she plays the role of goddess and takes the life of her dearest son. Eva's murder of her son has been the sign of creativity and destructiveness in the human imagination. Her daughter Hannah becomes widow and returns to her mother house with the decision that she never marries again. She has inherited the love of

male for its own sake from her mother. She takes the role of male for "Sex worker" (44) not in traditional sense who dresses in red and really tries to manipulate man to her own end. She is funky having her natural sensuality. She becomes "A day light lover" (24). Morrison further writes:

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

Sula does not care of extra marital affairs. She thinks that it does not make the people to break their married life. Sex does not become a possessive thing for her which can not be shared among friends and so she keeps sexual relation with Jude, the husband of her own bosom friend, Nel. When Nel asks her why she takes her husband away then Sula says "What you mean take him away? . . ." (145). Sula behaves with neighbours whatever she likes.

These three shocking figures of women are not the stereotypical figures of women which Black Aesthetics wishes to ban. They are not also the portrayals of black women's aesthetic demands to form its character what to be. In spite of being a thing of sexual attraction, these women do not share anything in common.

The stereotypical images are presented as the sexual thing of the pleasure not for herself but for the man; may be white man. Morrison has dramatized the significant events through the lives of diverse characters such as Helene Wright, Eva and Hannah Peace. This novel picturizes the exact territory of the endurance power of the Bottom in relation to a woman's behaviour. So she writes:

The community absorbs many styles-Helene's lady like and hypocritical demeanor, Hannah's elegant sensuality, even Eva's arrogant murder of her son-as long as they remain within its definition of woman as wife, mother or man lover. (8)

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

### **3.5 Sula as an Outcast Character**

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

Sula emerges; she leaves the Bottom and returns ten years later, after college and city life that we never see her, to be perceived as a sinister force, sex-hungry, man-stealing, death-dealing, a figure of darkness and betrayal. Having dared to smash the taboos that are her bour's poor



guarantees of simply surviving, she's scorned, despised, abandoned by the people she grew out of to their immense loss. (7)

When the black community of Bottom is trapped with its oppressed condition, Sula demands more change in her life than mere survival. The black people of Bottom including Eva are satisfied with their capacity just to survive. Survival is more important than the change for them because of their perception of evil as an uncontrollable natural phenomenon which inevitably goes on. "The purpose of evil was to survive [. . .]" (18). Evil is free to survive in the world. Sula is evil for the black people of Bottom. They allow her to survive. Sula realizes herself to live realistically and there must be some imagination and exploration. Hence Sula is recognized as uncontrollable natural phenomena such as floods and disease because people fail to discriminate between different kinds of evils: floods, white people's tuberculosis, famine and ignorance. They accept all evil days whether caused by Sula because of her strange behaviour or by a natural disaster or by the white oppression. The new black female subjectivity is defined as birth, evil or pariah in Bottom. From the beginning of Sula's return to Bottom, she is perceived as evil. So people believe that she has a supernatural power.

Morrison prepares the readers for this perception in the very first line of the novel. She associates Sula with night shade. The line begins. "In that place, where they tore the nightshade and black berry patches [ . . . ] (3). And Morrison after many years notes:

My perception of Sula's double-dose of chosen blackness and biological blackness is in the presence of those two words of darkness in "nightshade" as well as in the uncommon quality of the vine itself.; one variety is called "enchanter" and the other "bittersweet" because

the berries taste bitter at first and then sweet. Also nightshade we thought to counteract witchcraft. All of this seemed an wonderful constellation of sings for Sula". (Unspeakable . . .26)

Sula holds an opposite philosophy than that of black community. The opposition between Sula and her community can not be read in the traditional sense. It is not just opposition between a new present and an oppressive past. Sula is a strange woman since she can not assimilate with others. Morrison says about the character of Sula in a conversation with Robert B. Stepto "Sula was hard, for me; very difficult to make difficult to describe woman who could be as a classic type of evil force "(380). She insists on newness and change in her character but she rejects the reproductive function that is highly valued by the patriarchal black community.

Eva advises her to marry and become a mother but she rejects to make somebody else. She wants to make herself. In *Sula*, Morrison has portrayed the heroine who wants to be free in sexual matter by rejecting the role of the mother and is expected to nurture the children. Her bold statement makes clear her radical newness.

Sula returns to Bottom after ten years of college life. So it is symbolically expressed by unnatural plague of robins, "Sula came back to Medallion. The little yam-breasted shuddering birds were everywhere exciting every small children a way from their usual welcome into a vicious stoning" (89). Sula's return to Bottom is greeted with stoning, a punishment traditionally reserved for the public humiliation of crime or more to the point, a witch. In addition, Sula's rearrival becomes a linkage to the physical accidents of others. When Teapot, a young boy, comes to Sula's door to collect bottles, he falls down in her steps and hurts himself. Mr. Finle had sucked on chicken bones for years. He looks up to see Sula in the distance. He chokes on a

chicken bones for years and dies. The result of all these incidents Sula is regarded as the local incarnation of evil, a pariah who affects and creates the change and catastrophe within social and natural world. The disorder in the society and in the natural world, for example, untimely frost in October and an unexpected Spring in January parallel Sula's unnatural refusal to be a mother. Her denial of natural function will create the disorder in the nature. The patriarchal black community defines her as a witch. Her subversion of motherhood causes the black community to construct her as scapegoat. In so far as Sula is not a loving human being. Hortense J. Spillers writes:

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

The desire for sexual freedom and the change in conventional notions lead Sula to disregard for her ancestors. She watches her mother "Burn not because she was paralyzed, but because she was interest" (78). Sula threatens Eva to set fire to her while the later sleeping in the room. She challenges her bonding with static past by sending her grand mother away from her home. She does not keep in touch with the ancestors and insists on self-reliance. Thus, she earns an outcast in her own community. She goes to church without wearing an underwear and beds with men as frequently as she could. She violates every decorum and other socially accepted behaviours. Morrison writes, "She was pariah, and knew it; knew that they despised her and believed that they framed their hatred as disgust for the easy way. She lay

with men which was true. She went to bed with men as frequently as she could” (122).

She knows the rules and polite behaviour but she breaks them. She has inherited with wild blood from Eva and Hannah. Sula adopts Eva's powerful gesture of self-mutilation in the service of survival and her denial of her powerlessness, threatened by some boys on the way to home from school. Sula takes a knife and slices off part of her finger frightening the boys with "If I can do that to myself, what do you suppose I'll do to you?" (55). This act is Sula's own moment of self-recognition of her affiliation with Eva and the world of her maternal ancestors. Sula possesses a birthmark, a stemmed rose, ambiguously phallic and vaginal, a mark of plenitude which distinguishes her from other women. Her newness has no effect in the direction of revitalizing her community's old ways, but her newness remains in a state of perpetual contradiction with them. She sleeps with the husbands of the town once and then discards them. The people of her community react to her in difference of patriarchal values and norms. "Sula-I think this was really part of the difficulty-I didn't know anyone like her. I never knew a woman like that at any rate. But I knew women who looked like that" (382). Morrison states this view about Sula in a conversation with Stepto. Sula is one of the powerful women in the Peace family. She is strongly associated with mother Hannah and grandmother Eva. She shares their personalities, traits and behavioural patterns. She is also a murderer like her grandmother. She unknowingly kills a boy, named Chicken Little as sinful as Eva's act of burning of her own son Plum.

Sula always goes to bed with men without discrimination, and cares for no moral and cultural boundaries as her mother does. She even beds with her closest friend's husband Jude, "was completely free of ambition with no affection for money,

property or things, no greed, no desire to command, attention or compliments no ego" (119). Morrison further states about the newness of Sula with Stepto:

It's a new idea to me-the emasculating black woman [. . .]. Sula I don't regard her as a typical black woman at all. And the fact that the community responds to her that way means that she's unusual. So she's not the run-of-the-mill average black woman." (384)

Sula's rejection of traditional role of motherhood goes beyond the social boundaries and laws which identify women with nurturing and care taking. Because of her endeavour, she becomes a social outcast. The community accepts Sula "as an unnatural witch. Sula's subversion of motherhood and her commitment to temporal discontinuity cause the black community to construct her as a scapegoat" Dubey (70). To justify her actions right in the community, she states to Nel:

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

Later she dies of a mysterious disease like the unconventional heroines of nineteenth century novel. Sula accepts her death bravely and does not feel shame unlike her literary predecessors. She feels very proud of herself while conversing with Nel" I

know what every colored woman in this country is doing. [. . .] Dying just like me. But the difference is they dying like a stamp. Me I'm going down like one of those redwoods. I'm sure and did live in this world" (143). To prove herself right and her actions were justifiable, She again speaks" Oh, they'll love me all right. It will take time, but they'll love me" (145). This is her confidence about her justifiable actions that one day the black community will understand her and her actions. After Sula's death Nel realizes it and misses her "All that time, all that time, I thought I was missing Jude [. . .] we was girls together [. . .] lord, Sula, [. . .] girl, girl, girl, girlgirlgirl" (144).

### **3.6 Sula as Identical Character**

The condition of double suppression is realized by two girls of twelve, Sula and Nel in black community of Medallion. They were neither whites nor males. The protagonist of the novel *Sula* Peace is really searching of her own sexual freedom and tries to establish her own distinct identity in the patriarchal black community by rejecting all social norms and values. From the beginning to the end of the novella, they are framed in the form of a quest of self and wholeness. She is in constant struggle to create an independent and self-sufficient life. She does not hesitate to dismantle the traditional boundaries that dominate every step of human life. Particularly the black women disguise in the name of gender, patriarchy, tradition, rites and rituals as well as number of social system like marriage and reproduction.

In *Sula*, every type of unified subjectivity is challenged; the fixed identity is provisional. There is not isolated being separated from the black community after a long trip to South. Nel looks into the mirror and discovers her me-ness. She says "I'm me. I'm not their daughter. I'm not Nel. I'm me. Me "(28). The mirror does not reflect not a concept called Nel, but something other. Her image merges with the blackness.

Though she endeavors to assert her selfhood, her assertion ends in the reality of her common identity with other women of her community. Whenever she looks into the mirror that reduces her into common darkness of Bottom. Nel is one of those unindividualized women. Each person is unconsciously compelled to behave in the community by social norms of both race and gender.

Sula denies her fixed identity in relation to race and gender. In *Sula*, an identity is always multiple and shared with other members in the community. Sula struggles for personal liberty, self-definition and complete freedom. Sula emphasizes on freedom in sex by rejecting her conventional black identity in relation to male or white power. On the one hand, she makes every endeavour to establish her own sexual freedom, on the other hand, she shares black identity with Nel, Shadrack, Helene, Eva and the community itself. Her such identity merges with the identity of community. Her much quoted assertion, "I don't want to make somebody else. I want to make myself" (92) states her emphasis on feminine self-creation at the expense of nurturance of children. It is crucial to correct understanding of her radical newness. Sula's birthmark is interpreted by every other character in the novel as presenting a variety of images. It is not only a reflection of the characters of those interpreting but also a valid indication of Sula's own multiplicity.

Eva has adopted three different boys debeys called for the same name by her. They are different from each other in physique and in other personal traits. But she has given to all the same name deweys negating their individuality or personal identity. The collective name of the boys is not capitalized rendering them insignificant. Their individuality, male ego or personal entities are denied. They are inseparable because they do not love anybody. When Nel meets Eva in the old people's house, Eva refuses to distinguish between Nel and Sula. Their individual

identity is again denied by her and they become mass. The stereotypical people of black community like Eva rejects the black female individuality and identity. Their self identity mingles with the common identity of black female.

Sula rejects the common identity of black women and tries to establish her own identity. She neglects every norms and value of the community. Sula penetrates further beyond the norms of any community black or white. Although it may be a deeper analysis of selfhood as woman, the dominant norms are realized as both impossible factors that Sula pushes beyond social boundary. So there is a development in the concept of womanhood and selfhood from one book to the next.

Barbara Christian writes:

Sula discovers the hard emotional fact that no one not even her mother or even herself, can be totally relied on. The approach of adolescence marks the growth of their body sexuality and the emergence of their mind consciousness. Along with sexuality comes the desire for knowledge, the knowledge of self. (195)

She frequently beds with the men of her neighbourhood. She does so not to enjoy but to understand herself. She feels the pain and sorrow at the moment. It helps her to know her own self." She went to bed with men as frequently as she could. It was the only place where she could find what she was looking for: misery and the ability to feel deep sorrow [. . .] sexual aesthetics bored her" (122).

Sula's indifference towards the traditional role of black women of getting married and bearing children earns the title of pariah for her. She is considered an evil and a witch in the community. Nel comes to see Sula at hospital bed and they converse each other for a long time. Nel questions over Sula's activities and considers



that it is wrong as she is a traditional woman. She further says "You a woman and a colored woman at that. You can't act like a man. You can't be walking around all independent-like doing whatever you like" (142). This is a general view of woman of the whole black community including Sula. But Sula looks it differently. So she states, "I'm a woman and colored. Ain't that the same as being a man? [. . .]. I really would act like what you call a man" (143-3). This speech reveals her strong and determined personality. She is totally different than the common women of black community. While she conversing with Nel, she further states about herself "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). Being the protagonist of this novel, she has strived a lot to establish herself successfully to achieve what she wants. She says to Nel at her hospital bed "Oh, they'll love me all right. It will take time, but they'll love me" (145).

## **2.7 Myths and Symbols in Morrison's Novels**

Much criticism of Morrison's work considers the use of myths, symbols, the supernatural and magic. Some book reviewers find it difficult to deal with this mixture of myths with history. Others provide a systematic track through the symbolic structures relating these to Morrison's arguments about self-worth, flight, black and white, discovering roots, questioning polarized values and so on. Some are merely rather mechanistic analysis while others link Morrison's work with the African myths from which her works are derived in part and also recognize the musical relationship between contents, intention and use of spirituals, blues and jazz to her themes and arguments.

Hovet and Lounsberry consider "Toni Morrison's use of flight symbolism to suggest freedom or moral and spiritual ascendancy, mentioning the song 'Swing low

sweet chariot' as an escape from the physical world to god" (119-40). They argue flight that also appears in *The Bluest Eye*: Pauline is seen as a fallen bird never fully metamorphosing to flight and sexuality is associated in a religious sense with a fall. Nel Wright is seen in *Sula* as a flightless nester and Sula in sexual free fall leading to isolation and death. However, the sexual and individual self awareness to flight are contrasted with Milkman Dead in *Song of Solomon* who possibly achieves comment. Most of the critics consider how African's experience is cyclic. In a literary form uncommon westerners explain historical resistance to slavery as the cyclic form and blends African religious imagery and references. The form focuses on time as a location for conflict between the western and the African. Milkman Dead in *Song of Solomon* is caught between a fragmented version of time from father and a unified one from his aunt, Pilate. The music is crucial element in the novel that works towards resolution by fusing the past of the African-American presence. The initial relationship is established between the biblical '*Song of Solomon*' and the song of Sugarman, the flying African.

Flight, music and myth re-emerge in the works of Morrison. These things are developed by systematic tracing of the musical references that underlies Morrison's argument, her record of African-American history and the individual and her forms. Morrison breaks new ground in the use of the picaresque in women's writing. Uniquely, she traces jazz riffs and movement in *Jazz*, the blue in *The Bluest Eye*, and the use of popular soul music of the 1960s in *Paradise*.

E.S. Durall sees Morrison using the roots myth as "A search for heritage and ancestry which has been popular since the 1960s among African Americans and quests locating Milkman Dead as finding familial roots is his quest" (105). We can

say that in the novel *Song of Solomon*, African slaves who fly back to Africa focus on their communal activities and ancestral links.

## Chapter - Four

### 4.1 Conclusion

*Sula* is a very popular and suggestive novel, written by the famous novelist Toni Morrison. She is one of the most well-known writers of Afro-American literature. She has written many novels like *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula*, *Tar Baby*, *Song of Solomon*, *Beloved*, *Jazz* and *Love*. And her famous critical essay *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* was published in 1989.

Being a black feminist writer, she has made great contribution to the field of women literature. Most of the themes of her novels touch the contemporary burning issues like gendered relations, women's lives, motherhood, sisterhood, the community and sexual politics. *Sula* presents radical as well as an ambitious mission of Morrison's writing career. She also presents the impact of slavery system on black people in her writing. She is interested to reveal the reality of the black women's double suppression in the patriarchal radicalized society. She is very successful in presenting her characters in the real situation. The stereotypical image of the black is excluded in her writing. She denies the concept of Black Aesthetics writing since her female characters are presented as more brave, active and dominant rather than the males one.

Morrison tries to make her novel a vehicle for a good black literature. Her character Sula quests for female sexual freedom in the black community. She is aware of the double pressure upon the black women who feel themselves "Neither white nor male. . ." (52). And Morrison likes to make them feel "They don't worth more than me" (143) as Sula declares at the end of the novel.

The most contemporary African American novels by black women writers provide the necessary context for a better understanding of black women's concern. We can find also the influence of racism and sexism on the development of love, power, autonomy and creativity in their writing. Black women novelists really portray the human experiences through a much neglected perspective. The exclusive black female experiences are absent and misrepresented in the literature of white male/female and black male writers.

The black feminist fiction like *Sula* has an important part to play in the success of black feminism in redefining and reinterpreting the sphere of the cultural politics. The politics of sex as well as the politics of race and class must be examined with the realizations of the works of black women writers. These issues are crucially interlocking factors in the works of black women writers. So black feminists think that they need different frames of writing to reveal complex system of oppression.

It is more difficult to present the black female subjectivity than female one's. The cultural definition of gender has been rejected by white women writers in their literary works. They have never ever applied to them in the first place. So black women have always been excluded from the definition femininity in the second place. Black feminist and white feminists are turning to each other because of their different methods, priorities and concerns. White feminists define their secondary position in terms of male domination. This is not only problem for black women's liberation. Their oppression is compounded by the virtue of racism. As black women are suppressed by sexism and racism, they are quite different from white women. So they fight against the sexism and racism for their emancipation in different fields like education, sex and politics.

Black feminism is a significant and necessary cultural and political enterprise for black women's liberty. Morrison's *Sula* presents a female language and black experiences. She is searching for a specific language images and symbols which record the lives of the black women and also claim a rightful place in the Afro-American tradition as well as the feminist tradition. It also clarifies the purposes of liberation of black women. Morrison insists on their own name and their own place in the black community.

*Sula* is full of social realism about poor, black and female characters growing up in male-dominated or white patriarchal society. Sula seeks her sexual freedom. She gains the knowledge of herself through sexuality. She experiences the complete aloneness in sex because of her sexual imagination. She knows herself but not about her sexual partners.

*Sula* chronicles a community in which black women dominate the public and the private life. Sula is conceived outside of the constraints ordinarily felt by women in her community. Her status as a woman is only a small part of how she perceives herself and ultimately how she is perceived by readers. Sula is simply too much of an enigma to be truly representative of either group. *Sula* goes as far as Morrison's *Beloved* in describing similar circumstances which cause the tangible, fatal and public tensions. In this novel major characters are forced to live under social restriction. Sula does not put any limits upon herself. She becomes instructive to readers in the novel. She leaves her hometown for ten years. She travels across the country and attends the college. When she returns back to Bottom, she refuses to maintain the family house in the manner of her mother and grandmother.

Besides Sula and Eva, Hannah is also a famous woman in the community. Though they are not perfect in their physical beauty, they have a capacity to lure a

man easily whom they want. They have become a stature of sex in Bottom community even though they do not want to possess any man in their life. Helene becomes able to maintain some sort of position in the society though she came from a whore family. In spite of her position in the society, she cannot oppose anything before a white conductor and becomes a helpless object in the eye of her daughter Nel. Nel becomes violent and self-sufficient in the company of Sula. She turns to be a conventional woman of the community. She gets married with Jude and gives birth to some children. She becomes submissive, docile and learns to be happy in the company of her husband. But her happy world of married life turns to ashes when Jude leaves her. In this novel, all black female characters are actively presented. They are very good and hopeful. They are very responsible for their children whereas male characters are passive, careless and pessimistic. So, the roles of the black female characters are really created against the concept of Black Aesthetics by Morrison.

Another significant part of this novel is the sexual aspect. It is highlighted by the binary terms of sex, homosex and the heterosex. The novel is a critique on the institution of the heterosexuality and reproduction by depicting female-female bonding; the unpleasant momentary relationship of the male-female and Sula's denial of marriage and having babies. In the beginning part of the novel, homosexual discourse has been dominant whereas in the later part the heterosexual relationship is portrayed.

Sula is a unique black woman. She seems entirely different from other women of her community. She really collects unique experiences in sex and boldly challenges the social systems, imposed on females by the patriarchal society. She is labeled as a devil in Bottom. Being a radical black female, she herself explores her emotions towards sex, and rejects whether he may be an adult or child. So, Sula is the most

valiant female character in the black literature. She celebrates the sexual freedom and always tries to maintain the female equality in every field. She also wants to maintain the female autonomy. She struggles against such the patriarchal black community where the black females are not allowed to be free in the matter of sex.

Thus, the modern literature really advocates for women's freedom in the matter of the sex. But the modern society is still headed by the conventional social values and norms. Till this time, women are really confined within the social boundary. So they have to rebel against such social system. Man should be aware of female's difficulty, faced by them in the society.





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