

## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

#### **1.1 Toni Morrison and Her Works**

Morrison is the most renowned novelist in the history of African American literature. She is the first black woman to receive Nobel Prize in literature. She has written novels raising the issues of blacks over the white domination. She is popular for her novels which deal with some of the most glaring racial evils that include racial segregation and the exploitation of the black people.

Toni Morrison born on 18 February 1931, in Lorain, Ohio, as Chloe Anthony Wofford, is the most prominent twentieth century woman novelist. She was the second of four children and her parents, George Wofford and Ramah Wofford, belonged to working class. After completing her secondary education, she went to Howard University in Washington D. C. which is America's most renowned black college. She gained a B. A. in English from the same university and an M. A. from Cornell University. She adopted the name Toni, as it was difficult for people to pronounce Chloe.

Morrison is different from other novelists because she has managed to invent her own way of literary writing. She is often called 'a poetic writer' though she does not like to be called so. Her themes are always common, but because of her strong power and diversity in her subject matters her literary works appear complicated. Her matured life period has gone through different social changes. She has seen significant changes in civil rights for black people and wider public recognition of Afro-American writers in America. Her novels are said to be historical as her novels deal with historical events related with black people. As Barbara Ringney has said, " her characters are both objects

of and subject to history, events in real time, that succession of antagonistic movement that includes slavery, reconstruction, depression and war,” (qtd. in Peach 2). However, she is not an autobiographical writer, once she said, “My life is uneventful. Writing has to do with the imagination.”(qtd. in Peach 2).

In 1970, she wrote the first novel, *The Bluest Eye* where the novelist has depicted a poor and abused African-American girl who is raped by her father. Her greatest desire is to have blue eyes. The novel describes the pain of internalized racism and Sexism, where blacks internalize all the negative stereotypes of their race. In his criticism Anthony Warde argues:

*The Bluest Eye*, the correlation between gender roles and reproduction it reflected in Pocola’s a aforementioned confusion as to why boys have belly buttons, when only girls have babies, and in the question she poses after her first menstruation: Is it true that I can have a baby now?(163).

In 1973, she wrote her second novel *Sula* where the novelist has created black female characters to raise the issue of black feminism. The novel focuses alternative histories of African- American people in a specific town, considering people’s subversive energies and myth. Sula, the protagonist of the novel violates every norm and values of the community and goes to college, gains knowledge and experiences of the world. She does the thing that is denied by the black community. Eventually, she experiences her life with full autonomy. When Eva advices Sula to marry and become a mother, she replies, “I don’t want to make somebody else. I want to make myself” (*Sula* 92).

Morrison’s third novel is *Song of Solomon* (1997) where the focus shifts from that of black women in their doubly oppression to that of a young black man Milkman Dead,

in search of his identity. The protagonist completes successfully his search for psychological autonomy. It concentrates on rediscovering history and African roots through quest, magic and relationships in the 1950s and 1960s. Her fourth novel is *Tar Baby* (1981) which deals the story of a mother's abuse of her son. The actions of this novel moves from the Caribbean to New York, to small town in Florida. The novel probes as never before the relationships between blacks and blacks, women and men and whites and blacks.

Her next novel *Beloved* (1987) is Morrison's masterpiece, and a magnificent novel. It is set in rural Ohio several years after the civil war. *Beloved* centers on the main character, Sethe who is very proud and beautiful woman, escaped from slavery and haunted by its heritage. *Jazz* (1992) tells the story of a man's murder of his lover. In 1998, she published her next novel *Paradise* which focuses on religion and on the dissipating energies of an old fashioned black community during Civil Rights Movement, looking at their inability to live alongside a community of women constructed as outsiders. She published her next novel *Love* (2003) which follows on the heels of *Paradise*, her masterful story of free slaves, driven across the country until they were able to settle and build their own town.

Morrison published her latest novel, *A Mercy* which reveals what lies beneath the surface of slavery in early America. It is both the story of mothers and daughters and the story of a primitive America. Beside her eight novels, she wrote a play *Dreaming Emmet* in 1985, and published several critical documents such as *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation* etc

Morrison's work carefully rewrites hidden movements in history, discovering facts and dates, lifestyles, clothes. She combines the supernatural and the real in meaning situation. She is a recorder of Black lives and times, and a writer bent on recreating the feelings, hopes, dreams, fears beliefs of the times and the people. To show these, she uses metaphors. In *Song of Solomon*, there is the case of Pilate who is a sensitive, imaginative and powerful woman. She is said not have a navel. Clearly, this is physically impossible but the metaphor of not having a navel indicates that Pilate is her own woman, she has given birth herself.

In Morrison's literary works, there is the description of historical events which are basically related to Black American history. She explores the relationships of power between Black and white, between men and women. In her novels, she uses historical movements of joy importance in Black history. She reinterprets the past and focuses it on Black experience.

Morrison looks at other periods in Black history; she writes about Harlem Renaissance, Jazz age and post World War II. In *Jazz* and *Sula*, Morrison mentions the visionary scenario of Jazz age and post world war. In these novels, she has included the experiences of the Black people. She always describes both factually and symbolically her descriptions resonating with meanings and values. In *Song of Solomon*, she focuses on the 1960s, the moment of Civil Rights Movement. Morrison has depicted the realistic scenario of that period. Many Black men were unable to manage their relationship with women.

Morrison's works concentrate on gender relations, women's lives, motherhood, sisterhood, the community and sexual politics. In *Sula*, she mentions the women's

relation who is supposed strong women. In *Beloved*, she also describes about strong woman. Some of her novels are offered by romantic vision. *Song of Solomon* can be viewed through romantic approach. In this novel Hagar tells: “Look at how I look, I look awful. No wonder he didn’t want me, I look terrible” (309). She uses her sense of self worth and her hold on life. She buys artificial cosmetic things that would increase her beauty.

Morrison applies the supernatural, imaginary and myth in her literary creations. In her novel, *Beloved* she presents the supernatural element. She employs a specifically African American version of the Latin American originated form of magic realism in writing *Beloved*. She places the historical facts, the escape of Sethe’s historical model Margaret Garner and her attempted killing of herself and all her children to avoid returning to slavery, alongside the metaphorical and supernatural, a baby ghost and lived presence of the baby grown up , an adult young woman *Beloved*.

Music is the most dominant factor in her novels. She concentrates in her novels on the song, the music, and the sound of African American women’s lives. Many of her works have a focus on music, the blues and jazz. Through the blues, she evokes the sufferings and realistic social scenario of the slave years.

Anthony Warde opines that prevalent themes of Morrison’s novels include: “race and gender ideology, standards of beauty, memory and loss identity and community and alienation and death” (270).

Like other black writers Morrison creates tension between what comes from outside and what comes from inside. There is joy and pain, success and failure and struggle for integrity.

All experiences are vital to sort out the past and to correct it to the present. “I start with an idea, and then find characters, who can manifest aspects of the idea children adults men or women” says Morrison (qtd in Mc Kay 141).

David Cynthia further says: “Toni Morrison’s novels have attracted both popular and critical attention for their inventive blend of racism and fantasy, unsparing social analysis and passionate philosophical concerns” (323).

In this way, Morrison’s novels’ main features are women’s lives, sexuality and power, music, mixing the magical and historical events, investigating, interrogating and challenging racism.

## **1.2 Toni Morrison as a Black Female Writer**

Morrison was up-brought under racial and male domination. She got more experiences about race and gender. She represents the black women’s voice in her works. 1964 is the most important date for her in the sense of feminism as she divorced with her husband, Harold Morrison protesting against the male domination.

She declares herself to be a black woman writer concerned with focusing on hitherto hidden or misrepresented lives of African American people. As a black woman writer, Morrison provides particular focus women’s roles and the ‘triple burden’ of African American woman, offering critiques of stereotypes and opportunities for women to develop self identity. Her black female characters suffer more than her black male characters. Morrison has better knowledge of the torture of the black women. On the one hand they become the victims of white society on the other hand they have to tolerate the domination of black male characters.

Her novels are crowded with female characters. She depicts southern black experiences through her characters. In her view, south is the ancestral home of black Americans. Eva Peace is a southern woman from Virginia. Likewise, *Jazz* deals with three southern black women who travel to north. Her characters like Eva Peace, True Belle, Rose Dear struggle in the urbane north to establish their healthy identities. They try to bring everything into their ancestors' rural southern posts.

Almost all her characters are destined to live in their respective communities. Those who go outside the communities are destroyed by themselves or by others. When Sula tries to create for her an identity she is abused by the people of her community. Morrison's characters in general and female characters in particular are wounded not only by sexual but also by racial and economic division within American culture.

Toni Morrison believes that the primary function of black history and arts reinterpret and rediscover the black life as lived. African American life and art has been defined by the outsiders. She wants to set up the Afro-American art, life and every value they attached to as inherent current of main stream.

Anglo-American mainstream narratives have ignored the black people. The mainstream fictions have misrepresented the presence of black people and made them alien in their own home. She depicts the black south as the background of her fictions. Her novels depict that America is the indisputable home of Americanized African. They have given their blood, sweat and tears for the betterment and prosperity of America. Her novels can be read as cultural documentaries that record African-American fables, folktales and humors. She negates the Eurocentric discourse that marginalizes black

people. According to her, the African American people must be portrayed as the subjects rather than objects to position them at the center of fictional world.

She humanizes the black characters in her fiction that strive to overcome and excavate enforced invisibility of African-American's social reality. Either in her critical writings or in novels, they are charted with complexity or multiplicity of Blacks- she shows her preoccupation of Black culture and art.

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

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

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

Toni Morrison believes the voices of the black female were missing from American literature. It is not only the white writer but also distinguished black writers



such as James Baldwin, Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison missed to examine the complex and rich life styles of black women. Morrison in her literary works brings the issue that other black male writers have simply ignored. She examines the reality of friendships between black women. Morrison refuses to show her black women characters in a degrading way.

As being a woman of the black ancestry, she brings the attention of the world to the black women writers and their contribution in literature. Morrison is conscious of her primary focus is the black cultural traditions. For this, she chooses her protagonist from black community. Basically, she exploits her childhood memory of Lorain, Ohio, and sets her characters on that ground.

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

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

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

How did the founding writers of young America engage, imagine, employ and create an Africanist presence and persona? (51)

In this way, Toni Morrison has secured her most significant position as a black female writer in American literature. Her literary creations have revolutionized the black feminist approach in the mainstream literary discourse. She has been renowned because of her most accountable black feminist literary genres.

In this context, the research tries to find out-what does Morrison have in her mind while creating such a black female character like Sula who is bold enough to reject to be a mother and goes against the role prescribed by her patriarchal black society? Why does Sula refuse the subsidiary role of soothing the black man's wounded masculinity? Hannah, Sula's mother, sleeps with as many men as she can. Is she a prostitute? The research has tried to depict the black feminism in Morrison's *Sula* by portraying the strong and weak portion of the male and female characters' traits. The protagonist, Sula is entirely succeeded to set up her full autonomy by protesting against the patriarchal pre-existed social values and norms of African American society.

## Chapter: Two

### Black Feminism: General Discussion

#### 2.1 Origin and Development

Barbara Christian is the most renowned feminist writer in American literature. She is the first woman who historically traces the origin of black feminism. In her revealing essay “Shadows Uplifted”, she has depicted the origin and development of the black feminism. She says that it began with the publication of Frances Ellen Watkins Harper’s *Iola Leroy*. The “Shadows uplifted” considered by many to be the first novel by an Afro-American woman. Since Black women were brought to America as slaves to fulfil especially female roles and to work in the fields, and they were described as Black mammy or the loose black women. Black abolitionist, such as William Wells and Frances Harper, were certainly aware of the image of Black people that had developed during the slavery. So the Black abolitionists were particularly important in the development of Black feminism.

Black feminist literature came into mainstream literary trend after the feminist movement of 1960s. The black literary texts and black female writers were dominated by the great hegemony of western as well as white dominant literary trends. About black feminist literary theory, Christian Barbara writes:

Black critical theory is quite different from western form of abstract of logic, [and it] is often in narrative form, in the stories we create, in the riddles and proverbs, in the play with language, since dynamic rather than fixed ideas seem to our liking [.....] my folk in other words have always been a race theory- through more in the form of the hieroglyphs, a written

figure which is both sensual and abstract, both beautiful and communicative (275-76).

Christian calls Harper an abolitionist and a black feminist, and considers her to have been one of the leading figures on the national struggle “to free blacks from slavery, as well as long time spoke person for many black women who were not yet free to speak” (281). Since black women were brought to America as slaves to fulfill specifically female roles and to work in the fields, they were described as black mammy or the loose black woman. In his book *Black Abolitionists*, Benjamin Quarles writes:

Orator like Frederick Douglass, William Brown, Frances Harper were concerned with countering southern images not only of black men but of black women as well, since many of their supporters were white women involved in the struggle for women’s rights, also, black abolitionist had proclaimed themselves on the side of female equality when the Abolitionist Movement spilt over the woman issue (178).

Virginia Woolf and Simone de Beauvoir contributed greatly for the worldwide emergence of feminism in the first half of the twentieth century. Kate Millet, Marry Ellman, Elaine Showalter, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar are the main feminist writers. The Black feminism is derived from their feminist literary creations. Because of low economic condition only a few black women were conscious of this secondary position and only a few of them participated in women’s liberation movement. The most important voice against patriarchy was raised by Mary Wollstoncraft. Though she never meant to Black women but it could be applied as well in the case of black women. But, during the decade of 1960s, within new condition of women, black women found their

position unchanged. African-American women were placed in a dark continent of cooking and childbearing. Unlike white women, African-American woman realized they weren't only subjects to sexual role in patriarchy. Among the flood of feminist diction, many Black women writers appeared with their imaginative tales reconstructing African - American history as well as black subjectivity.

Alice walker, in her famous essay titled, *In Search of Our Mothers Gardens* shows: "the political, economic and social restrictions of slavery and racism have historically stunted the creative lives of black women (62)."

Zora Neale Hurston stands as one of the most important figures on the black female literary tradition. Though she is often criticized for having no politics, she was like Johnson and Locke, against protest writing. Alice walker's writings display the black feminist approach of the African-American literacy tradition. In her most accounted novel, *The Color Purple*, "she depicts the abused life of a young Black women" ( qtd. in Wisker 82). Margaret Atwood is widely regarded as feminist writer whose novels carry live issues in American cultural debate of the 1980s and 1990s- feminism, women's reproductive rights and, of course, African-American culture. Nella Larsen's *Passing*(1929), Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*(1970),Ntozake Shange's *Cypress, Sassafrass and Indigo* are the most accounted literary genres which have paved the trend of black feminism in African-American literature.

## **2.2 Meaning and Definitions**

The term 'black' is often used to refer to a variety of non- white ethnic groups. This form has taken on more political connotations with the rise of black activism in the

USA, since the 1960s and now its usage implies solidarity against racism. The ideas of black have been reclaimed as a source of pride and identity.

The term 'black feminism' is directly related to the activities of the black women who are racially and sexually dominated by the white people as well as black male. They try to seek their identity and existence through literature. The black women do not have significant position in literature. They are marginalized because of sexual as well as racial discrimination. They make the literature main tool to protest racism and sexism existed in the contemporary society. On the way of defining of black feminism, a famous critic Deborah E McDowell asserts about this:

It is a voice of the Negro woman with her head erect and spirit undaunted, is resolutely marching forward, ever conscious of her historic and noble mission of doing bit toward the liberation of her people in particular and the human race in general (187).

Black feminism is the strong voice of Black women for their personal rights. They step forward for their liberation and emancipation. They protest against patriarchal norms as well as for all Black people. The Black women fight to maintain their dignity and reputation in the contemporary society. They want to be identified as full women, free race and a new world. Deborah writes:

Upon her shoulders rests the big task to create and keep alive, in the breast of black men, a holy and consuming passion to break with the slave traditions of the past, to spurn and overcome the fatal insidious inferiority complex of the present which bobs up ever, to arrest the progress new negro manhood movement, and to fight with increasing vigor, with

dauntless courage, unrelenting zeal and intelligent vision for attainment of the stature of a full women, a free race and a new world (187).

Feminist theory helps us to reveal the importance of female's personal and common experiences and struggles. It analyses how sexual difference is constructed with male created discourse in different patriarchal societies. The phrase 'feminist theory' suggests only one unified theory ignoring a range of several feminist perspectives that come under this umbrella term. So it will be justified to talk about feminist theories or perspectives. Feminist theory is not one but many theories or perspectives.

The black feminists usually focus on the interconnection between races, gender and class. Besides racial and sexual, black feminist critical theory demands the inclusion of historical, cultural and philosophical issues.

Black women's movement made up of working class and middle class black women came to counter racism and sexism for both economic improvement and social equality with whites. Combining every inspiring elements of feminist movement, black feminists raised the political and psychological issues. The allegation is that the mainstream of western feminism includes the concerns of white, Christian and middle class minority women and puts aside the voices of minority women- black, Jew and others. Unlike white women, black women are not only subject to sexual role in patriarchy but have to deal with second set of problem compounded by their particular ethnic status and circumstances. In other words, they are oppressed as women again oppressed as minority.

In patriarchal society, men control the conceptual area and determine social values as well as the structures of institutions. It is man who explains, analyzes and describes and directs the female since he has the power to define everything else. In the society women are perceived from the masculine perspective. They attend male dominated schools and colleges and read books prepared by white men. Women are controlled and cultivated through social institution. They are subjects to such social institutions and naming system and ultimately they adopt the images made by white/male power.

Another aspect of Black feminism is the oppression of Black women in terms of race as it is complicated by sexism. Black women's movement, it is generally thought, is entangled with black men's liberation and their emancipation depends on the emancipation of the whole black race. They have to struggle against racism with black men and against sexism with white women. White feminists think that feminism belongs to the well educated and wealthy white women who have enough time and money. Bell Hooks in his essay, *Black Women: Shaping Feminist Theory*, comments that no feminist speaks of those "women without men, without children, with out homes" (33). The existence of all non white is ignored in both critical and literary works. Thus, feminist movement is made one dimensional for white women's sexual oppression.

Mary Helen Washington, in her introduction to *Midnight Birds* says that black women are searching for the specific language, specific symbols and images to record their lives. Morrison, in her *Unspeakable Thing Unspeakable*(1988) says that "the distinguishing feature of black writing lies in its language, its unpolished, seditious, confrontation manipulating, inventive disruptive, masked and unmasking language"(qtd



in Lauret 39). In black women's writings, the concept of the self or the presence of assertive speaker, the presence of father is denied through the creation of a double voiced textual address.

Both black male and female writers share the common racial marginalized position and therefore critics find commonalities in their literature. We can explore the ways in which the commonalities manifest differently in black women's writings. In black men's writings, the negative images of women are depicted due to their conscious superiority. Hortense Spillers offers a more sophisticated approach to this and according to him black women writers must assert the black female myth or say things. In other words for the purpose of liberation, black women writers have to insist on their own space.

To think about literature written by black women writers, we need to establish a different frame of reference. Black women's existence, experience and culture are shaped by the complex system of oppression. The representation of female subjectivity is itself complex and it needs to revision the traditional practice. For African American women, the situation is even more difficult since the cultural definition of the gender. The white feminists never applied to black women in the first place and they have always excluded from the definition of femininity.

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* Beverly 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 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 a classicism 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).

### **2.3 Black Feminist Criticism**

Black feminist criticism protests the massive silence of feminist criticism about women writers and calls for a black feminist aesthetic that would deal with both racial and sexual issues. Black feminist have been especially helpful in revealing the political and theoretical limitations inherent in white mainstream feminists neglect of cultural experience different from their own. For example, black feminists have analyzed the ways in which gender oppression can’t be understood apart from racial oppression. A black woman is oppressed patriarchy, black feminist observe, not just because she is a woman but because she is a black woman. The logic was circular and deadly, a woman whose racial economic situation forced her into hard labor and made her the victim of sexual predators was defined as womanly and therefore unworthy of protection from

those who exploited her. This view was widely held by men, both black and white, and by white women as well. Black women, therefore, were in double blind. They could expect neither gender solidarity from white women nor racial solidarity from black men, the two groups on whom they should have been able to count for help.

White mainstream feminism, while it has tended to marginalize black women because of their race and encourages them to prioritize gender issues over racial issues. As Lorraine Bethel observes an understanding of this double oppression forms the basis of black feminist criticism:

Black feminist literacy criticism offers a frame work for identifying the common socio-aesthetic problems of authors who attempt fashion a literature of cultural identity in the midst of racial /sexual oppression. It incorporates a political analysis that enables us to comprehend and appreciate the incredible achievements. Black women made in establishing artistic and literary traditions of any sorts, and to understand their qualities and sensibilities. Developing and maintaining this consciousness is a basic tenet of Black feminism (178).

On the other hand, some black women feel that feminism is a divisive force in black community. As a result, some have either abandoned feminism or sought ways to reconcile it with the concerns of the black community, as Alice Walker did when she called herself a “womanist” because she works for the survival and wholeness of her people, men and women both. Similarly, Carolyn Denard points out many African American women “advocate what may be called ethnic cultural feminism” (172). It is “concerned more with the particular female cultural values of their own ethnic group

rather than with those of women in general” (171). Drawing of the novels of Toni Morrison to illustrate this approach, Denard explains that ethnic cultural feminism acknowledges the damaging effects of sexism on women of color, both inside and outside their ethnic community, but it “doesn’t advocate as a solution to their oppression[.....] political feminism that alienates black women from their ethnic group” (172). Furthermore, about ethnic cultural feminism, Denard writes: “celebrates the unique feminine cultural values that Black women have developed in spite of and often because of their oppression” (172).

Whatever theoretical preferences Black feminist critics bring to their analysis of literature, their interpretations often demonstrate the importance of understanding gender issues in cultural context. Depending on its theoretical orientation, literary criticism that addresses women’s issues may fall under one or more different headings. Among them are feminist criticism, African American criticism, lesbian criticism, Marxist criticism. Of course, women’s issues will also be addressed in any literary criticism that focuses on women writers from a particular ethnic group.

Black feminist critics argue it is inappropriate to say that white liberal middle class feminism can define the range of experiences, the validity of those experiences. Such approaches to feminism miss out the cultural and economic differences Black women face. Many African women are both aware of the constraints of idealizing mothering, relegating women to one specific role. Other Black women have insisted that white feminist criticism ignores the erotic, the sensuality, of some Black women’s version of feminism, and also ignores differences in economic position suffered by Black women. White feminists make statements and choices which themselves depend upon a

certain standard of living not enjoyed by Black women. In the early 1980s, Black feminist criticism started to become clearly established. It recognized different cultural and subject positions occupied by white and Black women, and expressed by Black women writers. Black feminist critics also recognized specifically women centered and African originated forms of expression and narrative such as oral storytelling, circular forms and personal testimony.

The development of Black feminist criticism by Barbara Smith and Barbara Christian, led to further recognition of Toni Morrison's work. Barbara Christian sees Toni Morrison central theme in *The Bluest Eye* to be a search for beauty in a world which lacks beauty. Pecola lacks a sense of her own value. Like society around her that has copied white values and versions of beauty, she fails to develop a sense of her own individual worth or to recognize beauty in her Blackness.

Black feminist critical approaches usually focus on portrayal of strong women characters and on her interest in self definition and self development among young girls such as Pecola and Claudia (*The Bluest Eye*), Sula (*Sula*) and Hagar (*Song of Solomon*). They comment on mothering and motherhood, such as Sethe's protection of her children as a fierce, loving mother which results in her attempts to kill them rather than letting them be taken back to slavery.

In *We Was Girls Together* (1982), Anna Shannon sees Black women writers' fiction as 'separatist' involving characters' journeys towards identity. As early as 1974, Barbara Smith's emphasis on Black feminist critical approaches to link between Black women and a concentration on Black experience in the novels. In 1979 in *Towards a Feminist Criticism*, Smith defined a 'second wave' of Black feminism, the first having

begun with Francis Harper in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Smith's function as a critic is political and propagandist, attacking the assumption of the Black community that sexist oppression against women either does not occur or does not matter. In earlier movements, such as the Harlem Renaissance and Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, Black women's rights were ignored. Smith argues that literary theory which can deal with Black feminist literature must recognize that Black women writers 'constitute an identifiable literary tradition' (37). Gender is an important critical issue as race and class, and passionate friendships including lesbian relation, must be recognized within texts.

Feminist critics see *Sula* as a crucial novel in the development of Black women's writing. Morrison and Smith's work, alongside Alice Walker's brought African American and Black women's writing into the lives of millions. They also emphasize and celebrate how such writing and vision differs from works in the literary canon.

The writing experience and culture of black women are invisible in the eyes of critics. They are unknown to them. In America, feminists like Alice walker and Barbra Smith realized that they needed to open up the space for the exploration of black women's lives and to redefine the goals and strategies of the white feminist movement. Thus, before, we study the works of black women; we need to look at how black women writers have been viewed critically by the outsiders. Because of racism, the black literature is placed outside the mainstream and black women writings are still outside the black literature. The literacy creations of black woman writers contain stunningly accurate records of impact of white/ male values and practice upon the lives of black, even male, critics seem to be unknown about women's literature. In their eyes black women's works hardly exist because they lack the ability to comprehend black women's experiences. Both the sexual

and racial politics and black and female identity are interlocked in their writings. We find commonalities among the works of black women writers. For instance, we can take the literary works of Toni Morrison, Alice Walker and Zora Neale Hurston where these writers have depicted protest feelings against racial and sexual oppression.

In both critical and literary work black woman writers oppose the ways the male centered and social system have constructed the stereotype women. In other words, the poetic attitude is developed if one gets leisure, economic independence and other opportunities. Cultural, educational and economic difficulties and problems within patriarchal society have suppressed the roles of black women and prevented them to realize their creative possibilities. They are always confined in a dark country cooking and childbearing. The economic and social discrimination are the main obstacles of their creativity. They must have a room of their own to involve in artistic creativity. How do we expect black woman “who owned not even herself” (Walker 34), to write literary work? Not only the social and economic division but also the male/white made literary genres prevents them to express their concerns or black female body in literature.

The writings and experiences of Black women writers are unknown to male critics both white and black and female critics. These segments of literary world do not know whether black women writers exist or not. Their indifference towards black women shows that they do not know the real environment of black women. Black women’s existence, experience and culture and the complex system of oppression are invisible to them. Many books, magazines and articles have been written on the subject of women but black and other third world women are always written at separate pages neglecting them categorically. Before holding any theoretical framework of black feminist approach, we

must be aware of history of black literature and black culture. Thus, black feminist critics realized the need to discover the black feminist perspective in cultural and literary discussion. Barbara Christian, in her “Black Feminist Criticism” (1985) emphasizes on the search for black female experience and self. “Discovery of self is the central theme in her work” (Kaplan 757). Barbara Christian elaborates that black women’s experience and culture are different from that of white ones.

The black feminist critical theory would be less practical and narrow if it rejected the tools of critical analysis simply because they are male and western. Some black feminists found the textual criticism useful and supported to study the texture of sentences, choice of metaphors that are related to black background. They are indebted to Julia Kristeva in their critical orientation. Critics like Barbara Smith recommended isolating thematic, stylistic and linguistic commonalities among black women writers. The commonalities among black women writers are the result of their sharing the common social experiences. The research on gender specific use of language like that of Cixous and Kristeva might be helpful aid for black feminist critics. Julia Kristeva and Helene Cixous maintained that female sexuality is directly associated with the female poetic creativity. In her essay, *The Laugh of Medusa* (1976) calls for women to “write about women and bring women to writing.....(and to) put herself into the text in as into the world and into history by her own movement” (320).

Hazel V. Carby focuses that the complex literary work of black women writer with its political and theoretical problems cannot be solved by deconstruction. Carby in her book *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Rise of Black Women Novelist* (1987) claims:



The critical discourse emphatically includes the historical/cultural specificity while discussing the writing of black women writers. She notices the folk roots of Afro-American culture influenced by transformative power of both historical and urban consciousness (140).

As Carby argues black women's fictions are the evidence of the effect of post modernity: fragmentation or erasure of identity, the loss of history. Morrison's fictions are the obvious examples of these effects. Like Carby, Morrison makes clear, in *Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation*, "that black fiction today functions for a widely scattered black population across the world as the forum for debate and interpretation of their experience, replacing the forms of communication in church and policy of those now vanished tightly knit Black community"(Kaplan 758). Thus, the black feminist issues are tied up tightly with political and cultural problems.

The black feminists play the vital role for the sound development of black feminism. In the context of black social and cultural scenarios, the black feminist writers have raised the issues of feminism in literary level rather than political level. There are racial and sexual issues in the literary genres composed by black woman writers. Especially the most accounted black feminist writers, Toni Morrison, Zora Neale Hurston, Maya Angelou and Alice Walker have played the dominant role for the uplift of black women who are sexually and racially deprived from using their personal rights. They make the literature main medium to protest the racial and sexual suppression. Most of the works of Toni Morrison are based on racism and sexism. In her literary genres, most of the characters belong to black race. They are valiant and full of woman centered psychology. The black feminist writers portray the male characters as passive, immature and have least

role. In *Sula*, Morrison has portrayed such black female characters who are valiant and have sense of revolutionary thoughts and feelings. The women are on the top. Female autonomy is the basic literary tenant in *Sula*.

These above mentioned characteristics are the most important tools to analyze the black feminism in literature. The feminist as well as black feminist tools are used in this research to depict black feminism in *Sula*. Black feminist issues are so widely across cultural, social, political and psychological categories. The ultimate goal of Black feminist criticism is to increase our understanding of women's experience, both in the past and present and promote our appreciation of women's value in the world.

## Chapter: Three

### Black Feminism in *Sula*

#### 3.1 Plot synopsis of *Sula*

*Sula* opens with a description of “The Bottom”, the African American section of a town called Medallion in Ohio. The Bottom got its name from a joke played on a slave by a white farmer. In the text there is written: “A joke. A nigger joke. That was the way it got started” (4). The white master reluctantly gave the land. The slave accepted the land, which turned out to be worthless for farming, and thus the African American settlement founded. The Bottom has its rich history as a lively African American community.

Shadrack is a psychologically disturbed soldier of World War I who is returned to the Bottom. He is famous because of National Suicide Day which is celebrated on January 3<sup>rd</sup> of each year. On this holiday, people who don’t want to continue living with the fear of death are invited to kill themselves. This holiday initially frightens the people in the Bottom, eventually, they become used to it and it becomes a part of local culture.

Helene is the daughter of a prostitute, but she was raised by her grand mother in a strict and sheltered environment. She marries Wiley Wright and moves to Medallion. She spends there respectable life. She also forces her daughter Nel to do the same. When she knows her grandmother Cecile is very ill. Then she decides to go to New Orleans to see her. But Cecile dies before Helene’s arrival. Helene meets her mother Rochelle and introduces Nel to her. Nel is fascinated and shocked by her grandmother’s exotic looks and behavior. All of these experiences change Nel and she realizes that she is a separate person, an individual. She says: “I’m me. I’m not their daughter. I’m not Nel. I’m me. Me” (28). After meeting Sula, their friendship grows.

When Boy Boy leaves Eva with three small children, then she has to face many difficulties to feed them. She leaves her children to Suggs, goes away and returns after eighteen months with only one leg and ten thousand dollars. Rumors say that she cut off her leg in order to get money from insurance company. Any way, she bears the responsibility of maintaining of her children. Pearl and Hannah marry but Hannah becomes a widow recently after Reku's death. Plum fights in the World War I and returns home a drug addict but she kills him burning because of his bad habit. For supporting his murder, she says: "I just thought of a way he could die like a man not all crunched up . . . like a man" (72).

Sula and Nel are twelve years old and interested in men. Nel is calm and reliable but Sula is unpredictable and violent. When they are teased by some white boys, Sula cuts off her own finger to show them her courage. She bravely says: "If I can do that to myself, what do you suppose I'll do to you?" (54-55).

Sula and Nel go down to the river, seeking shade from the heat. They see Chicken Little, a small boy and play with them. Sula grabs his arms and swings him around but unfortunately the boy slips from her hand and flies out into the river and drowns. It was just an accident. Then the dead body is found by a white man. After three days, his funeral is held. Nel and Sula attend but they say nothing. It is an unconscious denial of motherhood and heterosexual of Sula.

In summer, Hannah goes to Eva's house and asks her if she ever loved her children. Eva angrily says that the sacrifice of her leg to keep them alive proves that she loves them. Hannah also brings the reference of murdering of her own son Plum. She

says that she held Plum lovingly in her arms before killing him. She says: “But I held him close first. Real close . . . My baby baby” (72).

Hannah begins canning of fruits and vegetables. She lights the canning fire, her dress catches fire and bursts into flame. Eva hurls herself out of her wheelchair hoping to drag but Hannah runs out of the yard and becomes severely burnt. In it Hannah dies but Eva becomes injured. After recovering, Eva remembers the dream of the red wedding dress and realizes the fire is the event it foretold. During that time, Sula was watching her own mother burn to death and doing nothing to help. Eva believes that Sula intentionally let her mother to die. After marriage of Nel with Jude, Sula leaves town and does not return for almost ten years. Nel settles her life as a good wife.

The second part of novel starts with the arrival of Sula. She walks through streets and people stare at her. Finally she gets Eva’s house. Eva says that “I might have knowed them birds meant something” (91). Their relationship is cold. Eva tells Sula to marry and settle down but Sula denies it and says “I don’t want to make some body else. I want to make myself” (92). She exposes the quest of self identity. In their conversation they bring the references of each other’s misdeeds. Nel knows Sula’s return and hopes that they can restart their friendship. Nel knows about Sula’s traveling and studying in college.

One day Nel finds Sula and her husband Jude in bed together. From that day, she loses her best friend and husband. But after two years, Sula and Jude break their relationship and Jude moves to Detroit for ever. The townspeople are shucked by Sula’s behavior. The rumor goes around that Sula’s sleeping with white men. Then people take Sula as evil and trouble for bringing accident, drought and deaths. The Bottom society outcasts her and makes her as a pariah. Sula sleeps with many men. She attracts with

Albert Jacks, a milk man. She loves him but this relationship is only sexual. Finally, Albert decides to end the relationship which makes her very sad. Heterosexuality is dominated in the novel.

After three years, Nel hears about Sula's sick message and she looks after her according to Sula's direction. They talk about each other's life and loneliness. At the same time, Nel brings the reference of relationship of Sula with Jude. Nel exposes bitter arrogance to Sula. Finally, Sula realizes about her misdeeds and thinks to tell Nel about it and says: "Wait'll I tell Nel" (149).

The townspeople are so excited that Sula is dead. They take this event as good omens. Then people start their different works. The townspeople turn to their traditional ways. Shradack celebrates the National Suicide Day on 3<sup>rd</sup> January ringing his bell. People are demoralized by the recent hard times and most of the people join in the parade. They turn towards the white part of the town, toward the tunnel "the place where their hope had lain since 1927". Because of the crowd, the tunnel collapses and many people are killed.

Over twenty years later, Nel is fifty five years old. She has spent her life taking care of her children but now she is alone. Eva talks about Chicken Little's death and accuses Nel of taking part in it because of her intimacy with Sula. Nel tries to convince Eva Sula is guilt person. Eventually, she realizes the death of Sula and expresses deep grief. She sadly says: "We was girls together . . . girlgirlgirl" (174). She vows to follow the footprints marked by Sula.

### 3.2 Valiant Black Women and Bottom Community

In her fiction, Morrison creates the strong and brave women characters. She depicts the mutual bonding that has always taken place between black women for their survival. Such bonding encourages them to create identities for themselves. Most of female characters portrayed in the novel are unique and non-stereotype. The black culture and its mythologies are rich enough to produce *Sula*. The main character of this novel is Sula. She is a Black woman, who from her early age, acts in accordance with her temperament to be a complete free individual. She is unlikely to be bound within the rules and limitations laid on her by patriarchal society. Her needs for completeness and freedom over a period of years leads her to painful conflict with people, the accepted social norms, beliefs and behavior, and culture. Ultimately, she finds herself in a state of continual war with everything around her. The female role in society is consciously narrowed down. The limitations of the Black female role are even greater in the racist and sexist society. It is no wonder that the town people see Sula's attempt for self-definition as imminent and dangerous.

When Sula returns to the Bottom ten years later, people talk about her, although she is almost thirty, is still unmarried. Her decision of not getting married brings about unexpected shock. A woman can't cross the border line imposed by society, if she goes beyond it, she will be defined as "witch". The same patriarchal voices echo when Eva asks Sula, "When you gone to get married? You need to have some babies. It'll settle you" (92). She is supposed to be a breeder of babies and must be confined within four walls obeying every order imposed by the male power. Sula bravely and very easily replies, "I don't want to make somebody else. I want to make myself" (92). Sula

embodies the Black radical feminist, which seems to be selfish for the society of the Bottom: “selfish. Ain’t no woman got no business floating around with out no man” (92).

Self definition is a dangerous activity, for any woman to engage in, and especially for Black woman. Thus, Sula’s attempt for self definition earns her pariah status in Medallion. Sula’s characterization seems sharply discontinuous from earlier representations of the Black female characters in literature. Morrison pictures her as an embodiment of a radically new Black feminist and her character has the effect of freeing the fettered minds from the oppressive tentacles of a past which prevents them from progressing and projecting a new vision. Since the first landing of Black people in America, they have been exploited by the white people. Mostly the Black women are victims of both racial and sexual oppression. Sula rejects the image of Blacks as victims and tries to create an identity free from the past of racial oppression. Sula seeks for changes, dynamism and newness. In *Sula*, the setting of the novel is the frozen Black world which refuses to invade our present. Sula is impatient for changes. For her “nothing was ever different, they were all the same . . . that’s the same sun I looked at when I was twelve, the same pearl trees” (147). The community’s association of the past is highlighted by the novel’s opening chapter, describing the location of the Bottom.

Nel’s strong bond of Black community with the fixed past beliefs is perfectly expressed in the statement of Nel. For her “hell is change” (108). Some can’t see her “children grow and die, see my food chewed on my plate” (108). The nigger joke tells the history of racial exploitation. The history or the shadow of the cruel past imposes the order or father’s law that Sula wants to burn down. People of the Bottom accept the role of the victim which offers the safety place. Their status of victim protects them from the



rigors of creating a new identity free of their oppressive past: “They were merely victims and knew how to behave in that role . . . But the free fall, oh no, that required demanded –invention” (120).

Sula’s conviction is just opposite to that of her community. For her, the ceaseless changes give rise to her sense of “self”. She perceives the present movement as pure possibility. Sula changes the repetitive sameness. She doesn’t find any newness in life and thinks that if she lives a hundred years, her hair will grow from the same holes; the urine will flow the same way. She is fed up at the sameness of life. “There are not any more new signs and I have sung all the ones there are” (137).

Unlike her friend, Nel, who follows the pattern of life, society has prescribed for her, Sula Peace tries to create her own pattern, to achieve her own self. Her search for self is continuously disturbed by society. Sula’s fate is determined by culture and the view of the people of her community held of women. The tales of the Wright and Peace families and especially of Nel and Sula are highlighted. The histories of these two families are intertwined affecting the Bottom.

Morrison has created the character Nel, a warm conventional woman in accordance with the Black Aesthetic. Nel and Sula are passionate friends until Nel gets married. After marriage, her creativity, enthusiasm, or wilderness can’t overcome social pressure as well as the influence of her parents who “had succeeded in rubbing down to a dull glow and sparkle or sputter she had” (83). Nel surrenders to social custom while Sula escapes from it.

When Nel discovers Sula and Jude having sexual intercourse, it creates a permanent coldness in the relationship between the two women. Nel and Jude are

supposed to be one. They can do nothing without the other, “the two of them together would make one Jude” (83). In short, Nel is nailed to Jude. This materially possessive drive makes Nel unable to forgive Sula. Nel, from the beginning of her life, is being taught to cope with masculine truth which prevents her to live autonomous life. When Sula takes Jude away from Nel, her thighs are empty and dead. For her, Jude or penis gives life to them. By stealing Jude from Nel, Sula “had taken the life from them (thighs)” (111). The very materially possessive drive, Sula rejects when Nel displays forces Sula herself to scheme a plan to nail Ajax: “come on. Lean on me” (133).

Morrison criticizes the institution of marriage which teaches one to possess his or her spouse. When Sula plans to nail Ajax, he returns to male-dominant position in intercourse. “In her words, in her voice, was a sound he knew well. He dragged her under him and made love to her with the steadiness and the intensity of a man about to leave for Dayton” (133-134). *Sula* draws the lives of diverse female characters besides Sula and Nel. The character of each woman is recognized as valiant in society

Helene Wright raises her daughter following the rules laid by her society. Helene never let Nel show any sign of enthusiasm. She orders Nel to pull her nose while sitting idly to meet the physical beauty in accordance with white standard. Helene can't live with connecting to her ancestors. By choosing her own name, she rejects the social and cultural identities imposed by the male dominated society. Helene Wright constantly advises her daughter to be what the Bottom thinks a woman to be.

Unlike Helene Wright, Hannah never likes to be confined within social norms, she is self-indulgent. She is sweet, flirts, and not interested in the make up and fashion. She never wears sleepers or shoes in summer, but in winter wears on the man's leather

slippers. Unlike Eva, her temperament is “light and playful” (42). Her body, movement and almost every thing fascinates all the men in the Bottom. She carries and handles the coal box in such a way that it becomes a gesture of love. If any man looks at the carrying, it does not move to help her “simply because he wanted to see how her thighs looked when she bent to put it down, knowing that she wanted him to see them too” (43).

After Rerku dies, she returns to her mother’s house. In spite of her beauty and youth, she decides not getting married again. After her husband’s death, she expects nothing but “some touching everyday” (44). Like a prostitute, traditionally dressed in red clothes, she doesn’t like to live without the attention of a man. Her flirting is innocent, “sweet” and “guileless” (42). She is an easy lady, but every careful about whom she sleeps with, because she thinks that “sleeping with some one implied for her a measure of trust and a definite commitment” (43-44). For her, sex is a pleasant and ordinary activity she does every day. She doesn’t involve in the sexual intercourse only at night. Sex is not a hidden activity at night. Hannah is a daylight lover. Before she dies, she tells her mother that she has dreamed of wedding in the red dress. Eva knows that a wedding signifies death. As Eva is looking for her comb in her room, she sees Hannah’s burning. The tragedy of Hannah’s burning is reminiscent of the burning of witches; however, it is not caused by human beings. The woman who goes beyond the social rules and norms meets Hannah’s fate, since she may earn the status of witch being either different from the other or unacceptable among the people.

Eva is unique in every context of social, moral and cultural beliefs. The first Peace woman after Sula, we are introduced is Eva, the grandmother of Sula. At first encounter, she seems to be a good mother, loving, kind, and willing to save her children

at all costs, even to the point sticking her leg under a train to sell it. But soon, we find her no more big breasted, kind, religious, forever coping. Eva is an arrogant, independent and cruel woman who is capable of loving and hating intensely. She is decidedly a man lover and strong by virtue of her will. Thus, she is not depicted as weak, docile and passive woman but as strong and bold enough to create and destroy. Her strength is nurtured by her hatred towards her husband Boy Boy. Against the principle of Black Aesthetics, Morrison introduces the unique ideology in the vein of Eva. She loves her children enough to stay alive and keep them alive: “It was such a carrying on to get him born and keep him alive” (71). Eva comes into the scene as the victim of a white and male dominated society. She, with three small children, is abandoned by her husband; they are left with little food and no money in the middle of the winter. She endeavors to protect the lives of her children. She saves the life Plum by using the last of a lard to remove fecal stones from his bowels. She finds herself in a big problem and leaves her children with her neighbor.

After eighteen month, Eva returns to the Bottom with a substantial income at the cost of her leg. The mystery of her missing leg becomes the material of folk legend. Then she establishes herself as queen sitting on a wheel chair and commanding children and entertaining the men of the community. She treats man as a plaything. Though she moves along with the current of the community, she prepares as a god like figure that has the powers of both creation and destruction. She holds the power of life and death over her children. When Plum returns from war being addicted to heroin, she murders him by setting fire. She has a reason to do so and does not think herself guilt. As a mother she has given life and has done everything. She wants him to be a man but he wants to crawl

into her womb. As an Earth Mother Goddess, worshiped by men, she can take the life away if she wants. She kills him and lets him die like a man: “So I just thought of a way he could die like a man not all crunched up and inside my womb, but like a man” (72).

Eva lives in her ever increasing house with a white hillbilly whom she calls Tar Baby, her daughter Hannah, Ralph and three four footed tall grotesques collectively named by Eva, “The deweys”. She is adding something to her house continuously- more staircases and rooms. The senseless increase of her house is a testimony to its owner’s desire for expanded domination.

To come out of man’s history, she rather chooses to subject herself dismemberment, sacrificing a leg. For the sake of self-hood and identity, she sacrifices her beautiful leg. Thus, she refuses to become a will-less object and to be bound by traditional, middle class definition of motherhood. While replying her daughter’s question, Eva says that Black women have no time to play or engage in affectionate manner: “No time. They wasn’t no time. Not none” (69).

The untold tale of the missing leg becomes a graphic representation of sexual and racial differences. The missing leg is seen as a lack and it is the very definition of a woman. In spite of her lack, Eva acts like a phallic mother who assumes godlike powers of control over naming, creation and destruction. Eva loses her leg in patriarchy, so she is defined as woman who lacks something i.e. penis. For the sake of her survival and her powerless position, she cuts off her leg. The same selfmutilation of Eva in the service of survival and her denial of her powerlessness is repeated in the scene in which Sula cuts off the tip of finger to threaten the boys while returning from school. Sula bravely says

“If I can do that to myself, what do you suppose I’ll do to you?”(54-55). Sula exposes her courage to prove her violent nature.

In this way, Morrison has created the most courageous Black female characters to make her novel interesting as well as significant. In this novel, the Black female characters have struggled to establish their own identity rejecting the pre-existed patriarchal social values and norms imposed by the Bottom community. They quest for self-identity, sexual freedom and consuming personal rights as equal as male.

### **3.3 Inactive Black Male Characters**

Morrison denies depicting the traditional stereotype characters as prescribed by Black Aesthetics. The psychologically mutilated male characters and strong Black women characters are alien in Black Aesthetics. Almost all Black male characters are presented in such a way that the Black Aesthetician wished to ban from Black literature. Morrison wants to go beyond the limit of male literary discourse using different strategies. According to Euro-centric literary discourse, as well as traditional Black Aesthetics, the male characters are assertive, bold and heroic like Othello, or Dr. Faustus, and women characters are doting, docile and domestic.

In *Sula* the every name of male characters such as Boy Boy, Chicken Little and the deweys suggest that they remain in a state of perpetual, irresponsible childhood. Three adopted boys, the deweys, are named by Eva. They remain boys forever, never grow up. They do not look alike but they get all mixed up in Eva’s head. With the power of Eva’s naming, they become a “Trinity…… inseparable, loving nothing and no one but themselves” (38). They remain forever irresponsible and all being constantly punished. When something goes wrong, for instance, when the handle from ice-box falls off, all the

deweys get whipped. They have single voice, think with one mind and always have annoying privacy. Their stunned physical growth is parallel by Plum's psychological denial of adulthood. Plum has come back from World War I being addicted to heroin. He is tall a man but he does not like to be matured, but wants to go up into the womb of his mother. Physically he is young and capable to survive himself, but he wants caring from his mother. That is why Eva kills him burning on fire because of his bad habit and passiveness.

Shradack is the first character we are introduced to in *Sula*. He is a Black man, so he is sent to fight in world war I. Running to the heavy bone fire, he sees his friends' heads flying off and then dying like a cattle. He is a psychologically damaged man who has:

No past, no language, no tribe, no source, no address book, no comb, no pocket handkerchief, no faded post card, no soap, no key, no tobacco pouch, no soiled underwear and nothing nothing nothing to do (12).

He has no center, no philosophy, no reason. He does not know the meaning of life. He is a helpless nigger. The unexpectedness of death frightens him and thinks that if one day a year is devoted to the fear of death the rest of the year will be safe and free. Then, "he instituted National Suicide Day" (14).

The Black male characters are willingly emasculated in *Sula* but counterbalanced by the strength of some of the novel's Black women characters like Sula and Eva. In *Sula*, Black men are emasculated not only by Black women but also by white men. For instance, Jude is portrayed as a victim of racial oppression. In every time, he is ordered in

hotel by the whites. So he himself thinks that he has become powerless because of the racial domination.

Jude chooses Nel among many other Black girls for a life partner. His choice is determined by the Bottom's definition of woman. In Bottom or in patriarchy woman is viewed as the inferior actor of garment. Jude knows that Nel has no desire to make herself but delights in caring about some one else. Jude decides to marry Nel when he is planning to work at new River Road. "It was while he was full of such dreams his body already feeling the rough work cloths, his hands already curved to the pick handle" (82). His marriage with Nel enables him to maintain his adulthood or masculinity because everywhere in the white society either at Hotel Medallion where he works as a waiter or in new River Road site, he is emasculated and rendered weak, infantile, or passive who always gets orders. His domination over Nel enables him to assert his own autonomy and compensate the restriction the out side world places on him. In his house, with Nel, he is no longer ordered but he is "The head of a household" (83). With her he is not a waiter moving around the kitchen like a woman.

In conclusion, all the Black male characters are passive. They are emasculated. Most of the Black male characters are depicted as inferior. Boy Boy, Chicken Little, the deweys are dehumanized in their name. The Black male characters are less powerful and have lest role in *Sula*. Reku dies untimely and Hannah becomes a widow. He does not have significant role in novel. Another male character Albert Ajax, a milk man, appears in the second part of novel with least role. After sexual relationship with Sula, he disappears forever. In this way, Morrison has presented psychologically passive and



physically irresponsible male characters; she is successful to depict female superiority in her novel *Sula*.

### **3.4 Anti Heterosexuality in *Sula***

Heterosexual means attraction to the people of the opposite sex. The concept of anti-heterosexual denies the sound sexual relationship with opposite sex. In *Sula*, all the male and female characters are against the traditional heterosexuality.

*Sula* is the critique of the institutions of heterosexuality and reproduction.

Heterosexuality in *Sula* is directly associated with loss and absence. Boy Boy never lives with Eva. Ultimately, he abandons her with small children and marries a woman. After that Eva mysteriously loses her leg in her attempt to rebuild her life and to protect her children. The marriage between Nel and Jude can't work for a long time. Nel is left with her empty and dead thighs. In the beginning, the heterosexual relationship between Sula and Ajax seems pleasing but later when Sula tries to possess him "he dragged her under him and made love to her with the steadiness and the intensity of a man about to leave for Dayton" (134). Ajax leaves Sula with nothing but "his stunning absence" (134). In *Sula*, the union between Nel and Sula constitutes the strongest challenge to Black Aesthetics. The novel as prescribed by Black Aesthetics is to depict Black male relationship as a complementary union. Through the traditional metaphor of the feminine, Sula describes herself as an empty space which is supposed to be filled by man; man and woman are the two halves of each other's equations. In Sula's case, Nel fills the space of Sula and becomes her equation. Nel is "The closet thing to both and other and a self" (119). The Nel-Sula union boldly displaces the heterosexual formula of a man and woman constituting a perfect person, and it has the effect of forming autonomy of women. These

two girls are united perfectly because Sula is active, male-like, and Nel is passive who imagines herself lying on flowered bed and waits for some fiery prince. On the other hand, Sula, in her romantic fantasy, pictures herself as a prince galloping on the horse. They complete heterosexual union which consists of active and passive: the masculine and feminine principles. Unlike traditional description of union, in the Sula-Nel union, it is female, who fills the masculine space.

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

The traditional concept of motherhood or the very institution of reproduction is criticized. When Sula hears her mother saying "I just don't like her" (57), she runs off with Nel. It is the crucial moment that she is rejected by her mother. At that time, both Sula and Nel are their budding sexuality. Now Sula can't maintain the pre oedipal link with her mother. While Sula and Nel involve in the symbolic act of heterosexual play with sticks and ground, Nel finds a thick twig and peels away its bark until it is stripped to "a smooth, creamy innocence". Metaphorically, the phallus is rendered weak and powerless. Later on, Chicken Little comes up to them. Sula swings him around and around until he slips from her hands into the river. The death of Chicken Little suggests Sula's unconscious rebellion against motherhood and refusal of heterosexuality. Both Sula and Nel do not try to save Chicken Little when he quietly slips from Sula's hand. The murder of Chicken Little parallels to Eva's murder of Plum. Here, these women deny the concept of motherhood. Sula and Nel watch Chicken Little disappear in the water

without trying to save him. This incident parallels to the event in which Sula watches her mother burn. Sula is interested in watching her mother dying. She is even indifferent to her mother's dying words: "help me y' all" (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 a mother, Sula bravely replies "I don't want to make somebody else. I want to make myself" (92). Her strong denial of institution of reproduction is her protest against patriarchal society as well as against the institution of heterosexual relationship. She does not accept her traditional role.

Not only through Sula's character but also through the characterization of several Black women who live by their community's valuation of reproduction, *Sula* is the critique of reproductive ideology. Helene Wright tries to raise her daughter following the rules laid by her society. Helene never lets Nel show any sign of enthusiasm: "Any enthusiasm that little Nel showed were calmed by the mother. . ." (81). Helene always orders her to pull her nose. She often commands: "Don't just sit there, honey you could be pulling your nose. . ." (28). Nel has to meet the physical beauty in accordance with white/ male standard. Thus, Nel becomes a perfect woman always feeding and caring her children. When Jude abandons Nel, her preoccupation with her children, twists her maternal love. In earlier part of the novel, Eva Peace is stereotypical, a strong Black woman who always engages in the concern for her children's survival. After her infant son Plum almost dies of constipation and she is forced to extract the rock like waste from his anus in a bitter cold, dark, she resolves to take the action. She leaves her children with a neighbor and goes away to find a better life for her. She prefers to reject the role of the

nurturer and sets out to seek her own better life. Even when she comes back after eighteen months, she maintains a careful distance from her children and later on kills her son because he still expects her to nurture him. Her refusal to play the role of the mother in her life is the consequence of the Black community's prescription that Black women center their lives on representation.

Morrison has created such black characters who possess the concept of anti heterosexuality. Boy Boy leaves Eva and marries another woman. Jude put sexual relationship with Sula and breaks relation with his wife. Hannah sleeps with different men to fulfill her sexual desire. Sula sleeps not only with many black men but also with many white men. Her refusal of marriage and children are a strong opposition of traditional heterosexuality. Such activities are not acceptable in the Bottom community as well as Black culture. There is not a single character who has sound conjugal life. Showing intimate relationship between two characters, Sula and Nel, Morrison challenges pre-existed heterosexual system. In this way, by elaborating various Black male and female characters' traits, Morrison has successfully depicted anti heterosexuality in *Sula*.

### **3.5 Female Autonomy**

The word 'autonomy' refers the right of a group of people to govern itself and to organize its own activities. There is not any domination of rules and systems imposed by others. In such state, people are guided by themselves. Female autonomy means female are superior and they are guided by themselves. They can do whatever they want.

At the age of twelve, Nel and Sula find themselves nearer to each other. They are drawn together not by their sharing the same physical desires. They are not yet matured

enough to participate in sensual, sexual mysteries. The opening line of '1922' - "too cool for ice cream" - implies that they are not sexually hot enough to receive ice cream (penis) as warm and eager tongue is supposed to do. What brings the two girls together is the 'phallus' "the law of the father". The phallus is distinguished from the physical actuality or penis. It is not material object but psychological concept or a signifier of the father's law. The presence of phallus leads them to discover "years before that they were neither white nor male and that all freedom and triumph was forbidden to them. . ." (52). Each of them finds in each other some sustaining forces which "let them use each other to grow on" (52). The phallus is the signifier that institutes male dominant cultural discourse and creates favorable space only for male child.

The bonding between Nel and Sula is also heightened by their rejection to mother-daughter relationships. It is obvious that they are not the member of traditional family. Both of them are "daughters of distant fathers (Sula's because he was dead, Nel's because he was not)" (52). Sula can't maintain pre oedipal bonding with mother since Hannah's pronouncement "sent her flying up the stairs" (57), on the one hand, and because, on the other hand, Hannah pressed by her need for "some touching", admits to not liking her daughter: "I just don't like her (Sula)" (78). Nel, as a result of her mother's treatment becomes the diminished product who grows up in a confined, ordered world in which "any enthusiasm that little Nel showed were calmed by the mother until she drove her daughter's imagination underground" (18). Thus, Nel is incapable of finding a maternal perch for her affection. What are the social norms that compel Helene to calm down the instinct of Nel and why does Helene order Nel to pull her nose? For Helene, Nel must be shaped as society prescribes. Because of these two girls' lack of pre oedipal

bonding, they come to stand to each other as more mother than their actual mothers. They find in each other what they seek for. In this way, from the very beginning of their adulthood, they deviate from beaten paths.

*Sula* is a critique of traditional heterosexual arrangement. Neither Boy Boy nor Jude is presented positively as father and husband nor Nel, Eva and Hannah as mother and wife. Marriage does not work in *Sula* in the manner of traditional heterosexuality. The relationship between Nel and Sula minimizes the institution of heterosexuality. They remain loving each other with the uncritical acceptance and shared curiosity of adolescent adoration. No matter how are different in their attitudes towards existence. They remain emotionally depend upon one another for a long time. "They found in each other's eyes the intimacy they were looking for" (52). Morrison has created Nel, a warm conventional woman. The question rises, how can we connect her life with her ancestors, or her questionable roots? It is a very obvious fact that her grandfather is unknown. Nel's grandfather rejected the conventional things and values. At that time, Black women, if they did not want to follow the conventional track, could choose not to get married and to give to illegitimate children. Nel's grandmother leads just that kind of life from which Nel came. Nel is the descendent of a whore, and it has to do the other hand, Nel's mother, Helene, is conventional and the follower of every rule and norm of her community. Helene is always busy, reacting her own mother, Creole whore, and goes to far extreme of having this rather tidy. Nel, because of wild blood inherited from her grandmother, is creative and enthusiastic. This is the reason of the friendship between Sula and Nel in the first place. Helene adopted the middle class values and imposes control over her daughter's life. Nel's desire for free life, leads her identifying herself as separate, and

different from her maternal heritage. She looks into the mirror and discovers a new life:

“I’m me. I’m not their daughter. I’m not Nel. Me . . . I want . . . I want to be . . .

Wonderful. Oh, Jesus, make me wonderful” (28-29). The trip of south is significant for Nel will leave Medallion. It is more important because it is an opportunity for her to see her own mother reduced to custard by a white conductor.

It is obvious that the relationships between girls and women are essential in Morrison’s fictions. In *Sula*, Morrison emphasizes on Black women’s autonomy and their impact upon each other’s lives. Sula and Nel find each other in 1922 when each girl desires some obviously female with whom to share her feelings:

They were solitary little girls whose loneliness was so profound it intoxicated them and sent them stumbling into Technicolored visions that always included a presence, a some one who quite like the dreamer, shared the delight of the dream. (51).

They are dreamers of the same sensuous fairy tale. Nel imagines a fiery prince who never comes while Sula dreams galloping her like a prince on a gory and white horse. Sula and Nel must struggle with the construction of racism upon their lives besides sexism. The explanation of their realization is that “They were neither white nor male” (52). Their realization of the father’s law brings them together. Their mutual attraction is the result of their longing for mother’s body. They seek to return to the pre oedipal state that is; to the chaotic state where there is no interference of phallus.

Without any plan, they meet everyday. They play and grow together. When Sula overhears her mother saying that she does not like Sula, she goes to the open grass field where Nel and Sula involve in hollowing holes. The two separate holes become the one

as they have grown bigger. Sula's twig with which she has been digging the hole shapes. They collect every thing around them and put in the womb-like hole, i. e. womb-dark continent-where they wish to go back, and the broken twigs and burial of them suggest the absence of father's law in the Dark Continent.

Despite the long separation and their opposing paths, they have still something which brings them closer. Nel is eager to meet Sula when she later comes back after ten years, Nel feels new cleverer with Sula:

It was like getting the use of an eye back having a cataract removed. Her old friend had come home. 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 (95).

Each lacks what other has and one supplies what other lacks. Nel gets refreshed and revitalized when Sula comes to Nel home. She "felt new, soft and new. It had been the longest time since she had had a rib scraping laugh" (98). While talking about their past with Sula, Nel finds herself relaxed. In her constraint conjugal life, she has forgotten the deep pleasure of spontaneous laugh which is very different from the "miscellaneous giggles and smiles she had learned to be content with" (98).

Though there is bitterness in relationship between Nel and Sula when Sula sleeps with Nel's husband, Sula still thinks Nel is the first person who has been real to her. Sula thinks that "Nel was the one person who had wanted nothing from her, who had accepted all aspects of her" (119). After losing Nel, Sula realizes how unsatisfactory her relationships with the men have been. No friend can be as equal as Nel is. She is looking for a friend and discovers that "a lover was not a comrade and could never be for a



woman” (121). For Sula, Nel is a version of herself which she always wants to touch with an ungloved hand. As a result of her idle imagination, she craves for the other half, the real version of herself such as Nel. A woman can only be satisfied with another woman. Sula’s relationship with Ajax can’t reduce her bond with Nel. Why does Sula want to have sexual relationship with Ajax? But their brief affair is not like that of Jude and Nel. Ajax is actually a loving man. Sula loves and respects him because he provides her the intellectual companionship. They are “whole” and at the same time separated individuals, one does not lose his or her identity for the sake of other. They are both perfect and free. It is the social norm, father’s law, which teaches Sula unconsciously to nail Ajax. Then Ajax abandons Sula while she is intending to possess him.

The heterosexuality is not perceived as a deep communion and communication. For Sula, her male partner is no longer needed after sexual intercourse. She uses him as an instrument to feel her own self and existence. After sexual intercourse “she waits impatiently for him to turn away . . . leaving her to the post coital privateness in which she met herself, welcomed herself and joined herself in matchless harmony” (123). Morrison has shown the deepest communication and communion between two women who love each other. Sula regards her bond with Nel as priceless. Their final painful meeting does not bring reconciliation but Sula, in her deathbed, admits to that once they “were two throats and one eye and we had no price” (147).

The bond between Nel and Sula is re-emphasized in Nel’s epiphany recognition that it is her friend Sula that she has missed all these years but not her husband. Her final assertion, “we was girls together . . . O lord, Sula . . . girl, girlgirlgirl” (174) leads her to the perfect sisterhood. It is a moment of self recognition, her return to pre oedipal stage,

uncontaminated by father's law. In the moment of pre-separations (female past) no self is identified. The subjectivity-male in origin, is denied in the free-floating sea of the womb. The last remark of the novel is the expression of woman identified female which is non-representational: "It was a fine cry loud and long but it had no bottom and it had no top, just circles and circles of sorrow" (174).

In conclusion, in *Sula*, all the Black female characters are autonomous and independent. They are presented as dominant women opposing the value and norm of Black Aesthetic. They are sexually, psychologically and culturally free from their patriarchal social hierarchy.

### **3.6 Woman Centered Psychology in *Sula***

Women centered psychology focuses on women's rather than men's experiences and derives its interpretative categories from women's own descriptions of their experiences. Women centered psychologists have found caretaking and its associated values and empathy, affiliation, nurturance, and collective vision of social life to be central to female experience. This new psychology of women, challenges the traditional male idea of the self in relationship. In order to explore this self in relationship, women centered psychology has privileged the continuing mother daughter relationship, all expansion of the male model of the self. Most of the literary models used in the women centered psychology have been of middle or upper class Euro-American origin. Minority literature offers women centered psychology another expansion of the female self beyond the Euro-American mother-daughter or friend-friend dyad. Afro-American literature often explores a self –in community. The mother daughter relationship is certainly crucial in the development of the female affect that central relationship and female development

as a whole. Toni Morrison's *Sula*, a contemporary novel about female friendship offers a view of female psychological development that defies traditional male centered interpretations of female development and calls out for an expansion of the women centered paradigm. Diane Gillestioe and Miss Dehn Kubitschek argue.

Sula demonstrates the inadequacy of traditional male centered psychology's idea of the self by showing that men raised to be autonomous contained selves became alienated and unhappy through the women's lives do not run smoothly, they are raised to be selves in community and except for Sula, have more fulfilling lives. (22)

In showing these two modes of self-definition, the novel anticipated the findings of woman-centered psychology.

Toni Morrison shows the construction of an individual, gendered self as the result of inescapable social context. In the family structure and feminine personality Nancy Chodorow states, "A woman identifies with her own mother and through identification with her child, she (re)experiences herself as a cared for child"(47). In addition, a girl forms her gender identity by observing female role activities that are "immediately apprehensible in the world of her daily life" (51). Further more Elizabeth Abel argues that "Sula exemplifies the tensions generated by the conflict between the identification and autonomy" (426). The novel highlights to this issue of "ambivalence and separation in female friendship (443). Sula centers on self in relation rather than self in community. The Afro-American tradition has always been steeped in context, and assumed self in community. Sula's immersion in social context partakes of along tradition Morrison refuses to privilege the individual female in relation to any particular other. For female

resident in Bottom, the self exists in relation to the entire community there is no alternation. *Sula* is exploration of the interaction between traditional male and female visions of socially and hence of the self. It recognizes *Sula's* challenges to current women centered psychology limited by class and race.

### **3.7 Female Supremacy in *Sula***

In *Sula*, the black female characters are on the topmost position. Apparently, *Sula* traces the history of three generations of women, especially from female perspective. All the female characters' origins go back to their maternal ancestors rejecting the presence of fathers. The history of Helene's origin does not include the role of father. She is the daughter of Creole a whore and it is her grandmother who protests and "took Helene away from the soft lights and flowered carpets of the Sundown House (brothel) and raised her under dolesome eyes of a multicolored Virgin Mary. . ." (17). The grandfather is an unknown figure. Nel is never seen talking and playing with her husband Jude. After abandoning Nel, he does not exist in the novel at all. Throughout the novel, there is not a single scene in which Boy Boy and Hannah, Boy Boy and Plum are talking. Boy Boy neither comes to attend Hannah's funeral nor comes home when Plum dies. The Black male characters neither have dominant role nor have conversation among them.

Previously, the Black women did not want to follow the traditional patterns of life, they could choose not to get married and to give birth to the illegitimate children. Nel's grandmother does the same thing. She goes against the rules and becomes a whore who "struck a match, blew it out and darkened her eye brows with burnt head" (26).

Both *Sula* and *Nel* are fatherless girls. Though *Nel* has father but he does not have his impact on her. They meet everyday without any proper plan. One day, they join in

grass play, Nel finds a thick twig and peels away its barks until it is stripped to a “smooth creamy innocence” (58) like a phallus. Sula involves clearing ground and draws complicated pattern in it with a twig. Her response is like that of an artist. Later on, both of them hollow out holes in earth and make two holes with the twig, and gradually their holes go wider and deeper as they are digging up. Finally, the two separate holes join and becomes one. When Nel’s twig breaks, they put everything they find around them: twigs, paper, bottle, cup etc. into the hole they have made. They replace the soil and cover the hole with uprooted grass. The weak, broken symbolical phallus has been metaphorically exposed. The earth, the perfect womb, is capable enough to diminish the power of “the smooth creamy innocence”. The woman is on the top.

The relationship between Ajax and Sula is often read not as a condemnation of heterosexuality, but the perspective and Morrison’s on the poetical and sensual writing suggests that woman is on the top. The narrator suggests that, in the sense of the sexual intercourse, between Sula and Ajax, the male pilot only takes delight in the sexual pleasure rather than achieving gratification from aggressively asserting power of phallus. “He swallowed her mouth just as her thighs had swallowed his genitals, and the house was very, very quiet” (131).

The union of Sula and Ajax rewrites the ritual of ‘earth and twig’. The swallowing of the actual penis, rather than the burial of the phallus minimizes the power of the so called aggressive phallus. Ajax’s genital is patient, which is easily affected or it is a doll object with out energy. Sula’s thighs on the other hand, are capable enough to emasculate the phallus by swallowing . The role of the phallus is denied claiming the position of women on the top.

Sula, opposite of passive female stature burdened with layers and layers of suppression, is on the top of domestic flyer. It is Sula who supplies water to make Ajax moist and rich. Ajax, Sula's lover, on the other hand is not considered to be a romantic and autonomous male. He is properly understood, in a very cogent sense, not as his own man but as the offspring of his mother's magic. Women's attraction to Ajax is not "due to a ritual of seduction . . . But rather to the habit he acquired thoughtfulness and generosity in all her sons" (126).

The only one strong male character in the novel is Ajax but he often sits by his mother enchanted listening to her words. She is an evil conjure woman and knows about the weather, omens, the living, the dead, dreams, and lives a modest life with her skill. She, an ancestor of seven sons, is also a source of knowledge and inspiration for them. Ajax hears all the stories about Sula and compares her with his mother who, like Sula, is indifferent to establish habits of behavior.

Eva is a victorious figure, and a symbol of matriarchal power, naming people. She plays God. Before she murders her son Plum, she has already emasculated and rendered him infantile by calling "sweet Plum, My baby boy" (72). Tar Baby, a drunkard and thin man with sweet voice, lives in Eva's big house. He does different jobs and drinks alcohol daily. He might have lived better life if Eva had not ridiculed his white skin and infantilized him with her whimsical naming. In her house, she has adopted three boys. Each dewey is markedly different from the other two. One is deeply black with golden eyes, another is light skinned with red hair, the third one is half Mexican with chocolate skin and black bangs. They are called with the same name, dewey by Eva. "What you need to tell them apart for? They's all deweys" (38). The most important is that the name

is not capitalized, “the deweys”. Their individuality, maleness or male ego can’t be created in Eva’s home. And of course, the deweys would have been some ‘what more individuated, perhaps even normal in stature, if Eva had not reduced and trivialized them.

The mother’s body is the ultimate place in which the women are free from every kind of laws of social institution. The womb represents the female power. Womb is the source of energy or fertility. Sula supplies water to Ajax’s soil, “keep it rich and moist” (131). The womb can create and destroy. It is the Earth mother which is the bed for both seed and tomb stone. The death of Chicken Little by water suggests the connection between Vagina and grave. Both water and womb make one suffocate and die: “all wrapped up inside his mamma no more, he suffocate” (72). The Black people of Bottom cherish the false hope of building the new River Road. The same hope keeps them alive, keeps them working in the dirt, “kept them convinced that some magic “government” was going to lift them up, out and away from that dirt.....” (160). The construction of the River Road opens, postpones, and reopens. At last, the thin armed Virginia boys, the Greeks and the knife faced men are employed instead. The decision makes the Blacks mad with anger, and they march toward the site to destroy the tunnel they are forbidden to build.

### **3.8 Sula as a New World Woman**

Morrison presents Sula as a “New World Woman”. She does not limit herself within the limitations imposed by her family, her community. When she returns after ten years, attending college and gaining knowledge about the world, she refuse to maintain the family house in the system of her ancestors before her. Her concept about marriage, child reproduction and sex has been changed and she has formed her own new concept

rejecting old ones. She wants to bring her society in modern trend. Her sexual exploits do not lead her to a state of monogamy.

Morrison's main character Sula, quests for female sexual freedom and new identity in the black community. The women, who follow the traditional norms and values, are good other wise are known as bad in the contemporary Afro-American society. Because of her negligence of traditional values and norms, she is demoralized as a bitch in the community. The issue of women's liberation in society in Bottom community creates a lot of problems, but the Black characters are highly encouraged to protest against racial and sexual oppression.

All the black female characters have been represented as the suppressed women of the patriarchal black community. Most of the characters are daringly engaged to struggle against pre-existed patriarchal values and norms. The Black women should live under the conventional social norms and values. In the Bottom community, there is strict restriction for women in sexual matter. Searching for their freedom in sex and other activities as equal as man is very difficult task in the contemporary society, but she challenges such circumstances and wants to be recognized as a unique woman in the Bottom community. Sula faces all such conditions. She does not concern what the society orders her. She gives emphasis on her own imaginations, feelings, thoughts and emotions. These are the most important guidelines of her life. About Sula's character, Morrison writes:

Sula was distinctly different. Eva's arrogance and Hannah's self-indulgence merged in her and, with a twist that was all her own imagination, she lived out her days exploring her own thoughts and



emotions, giving them full reign, feeling no obligation to please anybody unless their pleasure pleased her (118).

By avoiding social norms, Sula falls in love with Jude who is the husband of her own intimate friend. She dares to have sexual intercourse with him. She denies marriage to escape from sexual boundary. She thinks that marriage is the main obstacle for the liberation of women. Opposing the social and cultural system, Sula makes best friend to a female Nel, not a male. Ultimately, Sula dies of unknown disease. After her death, Nel admires Sula and she also promise to follow the footsteps of Sula.

In this way, Morrison has created her Black female protagonist Sula. Showing her courageous and challenging activities, she has successfully established her as a New World Woman in the Afro-American community. In the novel, Sula has presented many aspects of feminine struggle and their relationship among themselves. She challenges the restrictions imposed by black community over black women. As a Black feminist writer, Morrison has reflected Black experiences, feelings and images in her novel. She tries to make her heroine higher than the social norms and values, although she might face tragic death in recent future. For the quest of self and new identity, black females are ready to undergo any kind of pain and suffering.

## Chapter: Four

### Conclusion

#### *Sula* as a Revolutionary Novel

Morrison's *Sula* is the most significant Black feminist novel to put forward the issue of Black feminism. It is a feminist novel advocating for equality among humanity without discrimination in terms of sex and race. *Sula* deals with some of Black women who are risky and experimental. Sula is more risky, she breaks down the deep rooted patriarchal social values and norms imposed by the culture of the Bottom community. In spite of the fact that she is marginalized in the two folds, she goes to college, sleeps with the husband of her neighbors, does not marry and rejects to be a mother. She is a certain type of adventurer who faces more challenges to be recognized as a new world woman. In order to get access power and autonomy, she breaks out rules, crosses boundaries.

After the publication of Barbara Christian's "Shadow Uplifted", the Black feminism traces its historical development. The back abolitionists played vital role for the upgrade of Black feminism during the slavery. The Black feminist literature came into main literary trend after the feminist movement of 1960s. The Black feminist activists are inspired from white feminist literary creations. Alice Walker, Zora Neale Hurston, Toni Cade, Maya Angelou are the most dominant Black feminist writers who have played significant role to uplift Black feminism in Afro-American literature.

The meaning of Black feminism is absolute liberation of Black women in terms of race, sex and gender as well as consuming rights as equal as male. It is a voice of Negro woman. The Black women are doubly oppressed and the white feminist writers never applied to them in the first place and have deprived from the definition of

feminism. So, Black feminism is the opposition of pre-existed male hegemony social and political scenario.

Black feminist criticism is the most vital tool to analyze the literary activities of the Black female writers. Black feminist literary criticism offers a frame work for identifying the common socio-aesthetic problems of the authors. The women's issues are included in feminist criticism, Afro-American criticism, lesbian criticism and Marxist criticism. The Black feminist criticism is especially woman centered, and oral story telling, circular forms and personal testimony are chief means of it. Black feminist approaches usually focus on portrayal of strong woman characters and on her interest in self definition and self development among the female characters.

In general feminism, there is not included the phenomena of Black women. In political and literary field the white feminism is dominant and hardly gets the issue of black female in the white mainstream literature. The exclusive black female experiences are absent silenced or misrepresented in literary and non literary texts or context by black men as well as white men and women.

There was no political movement to support to those who want to explore the experience of black women. It is important to remember that feminist movement gave power for the development of feminist literature and criticism. It is obvious that there is no developed body of black literary theory whose assumption could be used in the examination of black's writings. The works of black women writers must be examined with the realization that the politics of sex as well as the politics of race and class are crucially interlocking factors in the works of black women writers.

The setting of the novel is in the Bottom community which is not fertile. The novelist has created valiant and dauntless women characters to deal about the feminist issues. Sula, the protagonist of the novel, breaks the patriarchal social values and norms and presented as the most powerful woman in the community. Eva loses her beautiful leg for her own self identity and to maintain her major role in the family. She appeared as full responsible in her family. She dares to burn down her son Plum because of his drug addiction and attention seeking behavior. Hannah sleeps with many men after her husband's death. For her sexual freedom, she undergoes any difficulties. Because of Sula's courageous deeds like cutting finger, sleeping with many men, denying marriage, gaining knowledge from college, she has set up her new and self identity in the society although she is nominated as a bitch.

In this novel, Morrison has presented inactive male characters to give emphasis to the feminist approaches. Boy Boy, Chicken Little and adopted boys the deweys are dehumanized in their name. They are inactive in their activities and have least role for the development of novel. The deweys are always passive, irresponsible and immature. So, the Black male characters are presented against the principal of Black Aesthetics. Shadrack, Plum, Ajax don't have significant role. All the Black male characters in Sula are emasculated and presented as inferior, less powerful and least responsible.

In *Sula*, the male-female relationship is not sound and successful. The separation of Boy Boy and Eva, Nel and Jude show the concept of anti heterosexuality. On the other hand, Nel-Sula relationship is beyond friendship. Nel fills the masculine space of Sula. The strong denial of marriage is Sula's great challenge against heterosexuality, reproduction and motherhood in the patriarchal social scenario.

The Black female characters are successful to establish their autonomy by avoiding father's law in the contemporary society. The protagonist, Sula, is against patriarchal hegemony and she set up her as an autonomous woman in the Afro-American society. By presenting Black male characters' immature and passive role, the novelist has set up female autonomy. After sexual intercourse, no male characters are needed to female. Because of the failure of conjugal life of Eva, Nel and Hannah, Morrison is completely successful to put forward the issue of anti heterosexual institution in novel. By bearing hardships, sorrows, pains and severely tortures, the Black female characters are capable to set up their own autonomous and independent womanhood.

The psychological experiences and feelings are emphasized in *Sula* showing the relationship between mother daughters. Nel-Sula relationship is also vital aspect of woman-centered psychological approach. At the end of the novel, Nel is physically alone and she recognizes the loss. The woman-centered psychology, not only elaborate the theoretical moral perspectives for women's experience, but also takes a particular urgency in a society operating largely on obstruction, separation and detachment.

Female characters are superior in *Sula*. The role of father is denied and women are themselves capable to continue their living without support of men. The Black women are successful to set up their supremacy in terms of sex, race and gender. Nel-Sula relationship strengthens their supreme position in patriarchal society dominating male-female relationship. The novel emphasizes on the failure of male-female relationship. Eva thinks herself as God in the sense of giving birth and taking away the life of her son Plum. The womb represents the female power which is the source of energy and fertility. The woman has creative and destructive power. Throughout the

novel, the Black female characters are successful to maintain female supremacy avoiding phallogocentric approach.

The protagonist of the novel, Sula, is successfully established her new identity. She has suffered many difficulties, pains and tortures for her own self recognition in the Afro-American society.

This research has found out the answers of these questions-what does Morrison have in her mind while creating such a Black female character like Sula who is bold enough to reject to be mother and goes against the role prescribed by her patriarchal Black society? Why does Sula refuse the subsidiary role of soothing the Black man's wounded masculinity? Is Hannah a prostitute? In fact, Morrison has created such a black female character like Sula to make her novel more powerful. Producing such character, she portrays the dominant feelings against patriarchal pre-existed social norms and values of the Bottom community. Sula does want to make somebody else and denies the subordinate role in the family. On the other hand, Hannah is a good instance of freedom fighter in sexuality.

To cut the entire matter short, it is obvious that Morrison's *Sula* is the most significant Black feminist novel in the Afro-American literature where she has dealt a lot of Black feminist issues. By portraying revolutionary visions of her main character Sula, she has entirely succeeded to depict the Black women's liberation. By the medium of her protagonist, she advocates for the liberation of Black women, and explores the minds of women who seek to stay outside the constraining sexual, racial, economical and cultural condition of the patriarchal society. Eventually, she depicts her Black female characters living with full autonomy. It is a revolutionary novel in Afro-American literature.

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