

Re-Defining the Status of Black American Women in *Sula* by Morrison

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Abstract

Toni Morrison as a novelist is inquisitive about the freedom of mind and soul of black Americans. Her novels furnish themselves to feminist interpretation because they challenge the cultural norms of class, gender and race. Blacks are mentally, socially, and economically paralyzed by the centuries of slavery. Morrison's expedition as a writer is to awaken her community to immense possibilities of life; she offers them by recreating past for the benefit of present. Morrison has objectively pictured the need for change within the black community by juxtaposing Sula and her community, which represents the polarity of ideology. The trust of the research is on the vociferous insubordination of black women against oppression, tyranny and conformity. Sula Peace is a new world black woman decocting choice from choicelessness, responding inventively for change. Sula Chronicles a community in which black woman is dominant. Sula Peace is being conceived as an average woman with the constraints of her community yet Sula is the real symbol of modern black feminine world. She is coming out of her subservient status, demanding dignity in her own community and at the same time creating a new global identity.

Keywords: Negro, Orthodoxy, Conformity, Oppression, Womanist

Toni Morrison had a profound impact on her psyche about the oppressive existential dilemmas of black since her childhood. Later the experience of Howard about Negro, relationships, propensities of life entirely helped her to pitch in to form the bulk of her novels. Morrison prides herself on being a black feminist writer. She has not subscribed herself towards patriarchal domination, neither male-female relationship as a tussle and nor is she a political feminist. Her aim is the illustration of 'self' of Negro women. She can be called a novelist with the wider perspective rather a 'womanist'- one who is implicated with survival and wholeness of the entire population. Negro women are often labeled as racist and sexist while Morrison shatters this notion. In *Sula*, the protagonist Sula Peace dares to intermingle unhesitatingly with white men and finally she is put to rest by the whites in a decent manner.

Maria W. Steward, a black feminist philosopher appealed, as explained by Patricia Hill Collins in the second edition of her book 'Black Feminist Thought', "how long shall the fair daughters of Africa be compelled to bury their minds and talent beneath the load of iron pots and kettles"? (Collins, 2000, p-01) She Challenge Negro women to cast-off contrary images of black womanhood, so conspicuous of her times pointing out that the basic cause of Negro women's poverty is race, femininity and class oppression. In a speech in 1833, she

announced, "Like king Solomon, who put neither nail nor hammer to the temple, yet received the praises; so also have the white Americans gained themselves a name. while in reality, we have been their principal foundation and support". She is inspiring black women to be at par with whites. She stimulated Negro women to devise self-definition of independence and self-reliance and take their kismet into their own hands. And Richardson said, "We have pursued the shadow, they have obtained the substance, we have performed the labour, they have received the profits, we have planted the vines, and they have eaten the fruits of them". (Richardson, 1987, p-59) Thus the paradigm shift could be witnessed in socio-anthropology of black society.

The main objective of aforesaid feminist theories is to redefine society, such as:

- Equality among Males and Females
- Equality among Blacks and Whites
- Right to live, autonomously
- Remove Slavery practices
- Assertion of woman's education
- Black woman's insistence on Self-definition and Self-valuation
- A Black Female centered analysis (special reference to African American)

The present research pivots around the insurgence of black women against the orthodoxy and conformity. Sula

peace, the protagonist of the novel *Sula* is a new world black woman decocting choice from choicelessness, responding inventively for modernization. Sula peace, an ordinary black woman is a good example of insurgent Negro feminine world. She is coming out of her sub-servant status, demanding dignity in her own community; simultaneously she is trying to be at par with the so called white woman and her society. She is trying to come out of her cocoon, breaking the long agonizing shell and she takes pride in her black identity and unabashedly accepts the challenges imposed by sex, caste, colour and creed.

Morrison's *Sula* narrates the actions in the lives of Sula Peace, Eva Peace and Nel Wright during this age of general arousing among the Negroes. Just as in the stories of Jane Austen, male characters in the novel are in the backdrop, the female characters are burly and smoothed and they take over achievement in the like manner, in *Sula* the darling Eva Peace and the protagonist Sula Peace leaves a burly and eternal impression because of their stubborn guts and high self esteem.

Eva epitomized the toughened, strong-minded, unsentimental Negro woman, who had witnessed revolting grief and suffered grand melancholy. Black women for centuries were witnesses to the snatching away of their offspring, being wrenched from their families, subjected to most distressing and mortifying physical violence, and sold and bought as merchandise. She had wrapped up the great truth that sensation where hazardous for survival. And therefore, her womanliness suffered due to the exigencies of endurance. She has brought up her children bravely. Provided for them, established them, and protected them even as adults when they were busted and crushed. In fact her grasp on the fundamentals of life was so firm that she promptly plays the rescuer for her son Plum: "Having given Plum life through tremendous struggles she could not endure his meandering in the artificial pastiche of death, she took him out of his dope-ridden misery and gave him the real thing". (Mckey, 1988, p-26) Eva maintains her poise to the very finish and justifies her behavior as "swooping like a giant heron, so graceful sailing about in its own habitat". (Morrison, 1982, p- 46)

Sula peace adventures herself absolutely and pessimistically. A rebel youngster of volatile moods, "Sula could hardly be counted on to sustain by emotion for more than three minutes". (Morrison, 1982, p-53) However, she was permanent in principle and firm like her grandmother. The anxiety in a very youngster, points to Sula's attitude towards human race for the years to come. When confronted by the white boys, who tried to assault her and Nel, Sula slashed her fingertip in a demanding manner at just the age of twelve. She told the boys "if I can do that to myself what can you suppose I will do to you?" (Morrison, 1982, p-55)

"In the name of black solidarity and survival woman were assigned gender roles not only subordinating them but virtually killing all creativity in them by forcing a mechanical life, solely meant for pleasing men, with no

regard for their own growth and even enjoyment". (Chakranarayan, 2008, 120) Sula totally disregards this conduct of women by the society and because of her sovereign courage; she had spirit of coming out of the traditional womanhood. She knew that she was predestined to be discarded by her people yet she persists in her independent ways. She gives herself a liberty which was considered to be a male prerogative. The silent anguish and deep sadness of black women embossed on their brain and spirit pour forth in her tears of achievement because choosing and throwing away bed partners was her own selection, and she was the master, the regulator. Till the end she retains her freedom. Sula refuses to act like Nel who when projected by Jude, decides to combine her me-ness into her husband Jude self. Sula refuses to give up her femaleness to any chap, even when she was on the edge of it, Ajax leaves her, because like Sula, Ajax is also an exemption who respected sovereignty of men and women alike. The charm and individuality of Sula's femininity is the retention of her girlhood in herself. When Ajax leaves her she remarks:

When I was a little girl the heads of my paper dolls came off and it was a long time before I discovered that my own head would not fall off if I bent my neck. I used to walk around holding it very stiff because I thought a strong wind or a heavy push would snap my neck. Nel was the one who told me the truth. But she was wrong. I did not hold my head stiff enough when I met him and so I lost it just like the dolls. (Morrison, 1982, p-136)

Sula records all the absurdities of conduct and impossibilities of etiquette, considered coarse and scandalous. In a prophetic note, she declares that with the passage of time the scandalous today will be the public allowance and she will be treated with respect and love. Her action on independence and self-determination will be considered a courageous even bold step of a person, who dares to disagree from orthodoxy and thought anew for the betterment of the society. After twenty five years of her death, Nel realizes that Sula was the only person, who dared to be different and to give a fresh outlook to her community, as Nel realizes: "All the time, all that time I thought I was missing Jude." And the loss pressed down on her chest and came up into her throat. "We were girls together, she said as though explaining something "O Lord, Sula", she cried, "girl, girl, girl, girl, girl, girl, girl, girl". (Morrison, 2005, 174) Nel acknowledged that priceless quality of girlhood in Sula, which made Nel accomplish her me-ness and which helped Nel to give up the traditional womanhood and gives reinforcement to Sula's perspective.

Sula represents the reconstruction, edification of dead, lifeless and annihilating Negro community of Bottom and loudly proclaiming the need of change. Her message was "past however glorious or inglorious will be shelved and buried unless used for edification in the present construct and a happier future" (ChakraNarayan, 2008, 128). Sula rises in an upright position because she

desires her community to breath afresh. Sula's firmness to do so is imagined in her rebellious answer when Eva says, "Hellfire don't need lighting and it's already burning in you...."/ "Whatever's burning in me is mine!"/ "Amen"/ "And I'll split this town in two and everything in it before I'll let you put it out." (Morrison, 2005, 93) The visible honesty of Sula towards her "self" displays her complete toughness as a female. The witness of Sula's character as a rebellious women and the true representative of modern black women is justified by the theory of Levi Strauss:

In looking at nature/culture dichotomy, (because Strauss considers them as binary oppositions ... calls 'scandal' that element of social organization that belongs to both categories. The conflict between nature and culture becomes scandal. (Strauss, 2012)

Toni Morrison, the pioneer of black community stimulated the African American Women to take pride in themselves, their race and culture and reject the pessimistic images of black womanhood. She inspired the black women to emancipate themselves with the illusion of colour superiority. Her expedition as a writer is to awaken Negroes to immense possibilities of life; she

offers them by recreating past for the benefit of present. Morrison has objectively pictured the obvious paradigm shift of the black community by juxtaposing Sula and her people, which represents polarity of ideology. She feels the need of self-renewal of the black community. The writer have artistically drawn the portrait of Sula as a specimen of reorganizing black community, who ventured to rebel against conventionalism of Negro society and succeeded in spending her life autonomously. Morrison has well said in her interview with Paula Giddings, "Freeing yourself was one thing, claiming ownership of that freed self was another".

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