

Tempest and Tranquillity in Toni Morrison's *Sula*

¹V. Abigail, ²Dr. M. Rakesh Babu,

¹Research Scholar in English, Noorul Islam Centre for Higher Education, Kumaracoil, Kanyakumari, Tamil Nadu, India.629 180.

²Assistant Professor in English, Noorul Islam Centre for Higher Education, Kumaracoil, Kanyakumari, Tamil Nadu, India. 629 180.

-----***-----

Abstract- *In black literature, the issue of cultural clash is present in every narrative voice, and black writers have presented it in a variety of ways highlighting the element of how it is resolved. Morrison is one of them, but she is treated differently than the others. She concentrated her attention on the black characters' disturbed psyches and how they acted in the face of tyranny, rather than on the white characters imposing direct control. Despite the fact that Sula contains no white characters, Morrison had forced Sula to accept the vicissitudes of white culture. Then Sula returns back to Bottom similar to hurricane. Sula's entry accords with robins' demise and her existence throws Nel and her family into a swirl of issues. Sula is experimenting with life. Sula raises a ruckus in the community by experimenting with life and death. Sula rise above and maintains relation between bygone and current, permanent and temporary, supernatural and natural.*

Keywords: Culture, blacks, character, life, death

Toni Morrison's analytical depth and predictive view of literature reveals the African-American life experience in the US. She exposes the terrible truths about black life with her androgynous literary voice. Her creative compositions were arranged in a gradual sequence by the anthropological in her, illustrating the complexity of black life in colours. Morrison stated in one of her interviews that black people are "aggressive, innovative, and creative." She continues the tradition of being explorative and even radical in her characterization, which led to the creation of her unconventional women characters. They are not only reflecting and protesting the situation of the oppressed, but also serving as a didactic to the oppressed and blacks.

In black literature, culture issue is present in each narration. The African-American writers have presented it in a variety of ways highlighting the element of how it is resolved. Morrison is one of them, but she is treated differently than the others. Morrison has not exposed any whites as the villain character in her novels, despite the fact that the conflict is between white civilization and black culture. She simply ignored them, as if she were a post-colonial African and Asian writer. She concentrated her attention on the black characters' disturbed psyches and how they acted in the face of tyranny, rather than on the white characters imposing direct control. It is seen in her debut work, *The Bluest Eye*, Pauline is a black mom who hits her black baby just to calm a white baby. *Sula*, her next novel, continues the story. It is fact that *Sula* is a novel that doesn't have any white characters to deal with. *Sula* absorbs the vicissitudes of white culture and comes back to Bottom similar to a cyclone.

Bottom's beginnings as a "nigger joke" reflects the deception of a white man; Shadrack's Manifesto on National Suicide Day. Chicken Little's unintentional death at the hands of Sula - all of these events perpetuate Sula's wild nature. Sula's home coming coincides with the disappearance of the robins. Her coming back propels Nel Wright and his family into a whirlwind of trouble. Elizabeth Janeway (1979) aptly states that "Morrison's astonishing insight reveals the mixed emotions born of living in a world where white standards and goals are considered is particularly important and at the same time unattainable for them".

The fictional characters of Toni Morrison enact the historical plight of African-Americans in American society in various ways. *Sula* abandoned her home town to explore the cruel whites, came back with mind full of white tricks. The story of Shadrack, a combat veteran, is at the centre of the work, which is told on multiple levels. He becomes psychotic and deranged as a result of the chaotic vicious conflict. On coming back to Medallion, Shadrack established National Suicide Day as an annual event.

Outward disorder, which contradicts the orderliness of his home, represents the ex-inner soldier's battle, he tries as much he can to bring back the peace among everyone. Shadrack is the only witness of Chicken Little's demise, recognises Sula's difficulty. She assures her of permanency by answering the unanswered inquiry with the word "always." Shadrack learns that his efforts are futile many years later when Sula dies.

At the age of adolescence, Sula and Nel are pulled to each other by the realisation that "they are neither white nor male, and that all freedom and triumph are denied to them" (Morrison, 1973). 'They both are lonely small girls, their isolation poisoned both of them which plunged into Technicolored illusions,' writes Morrison (1973), describing Nel and Sula. Nel and Sula encounter one other, and their relationship inspires Sula. That was the love which compels Nel to forgive Sula, when Sula later in the novel almost bewitches Nel's spouse. Contrary to popular belief, women are incapable of keeping their secrets and these friends secured the secret and silent observers of everything. They felt strong relief in their frustrated life because of their good friendship. "Aggression is not as fresh to black women as it is to white women," Morrison tells Claudia Tate. Black women appear to be able to balance nesting with adventure. Taylor-Guthrie (1994) describes them as "both a safe harbour and a ship." This may be seen in both Nel and Sula.

Nel is a good lady like her mom Helene and she follows a cultural and traditional way of good character as wife and virtuous woman. Helene is the lovely daughter of a New Orleans Creole whore. Nel's grandma shields her from the red shutters' shadows, telling her to "always be on the lookout for any evidence of her mother's wild blood" (Morrison 1973).

Helene stifles her daughter's forceful development by acting out of fear. Nel becomes obedient, courteous, and conventional as a result of her orderliness. However, on her way to home Nel sees her mother trembling in front of a white railway conductor, in front of a bunch of angry, scorn-filled impotent black soldiers. She gets restless and sleepless as a result of this experience, and she unveils her self,' stating, "I'm me, I'm not their daughter." I'm not Nel at all. I am who I am. Morrison's film "Me" was released in 1973. She needs a buddy to complement her self-definition because she can't sustain it on her own, and that friend is none other than the much less traditional Sula.

Sula, unlike Nel, is an adventurer who takes an alternative path to self-expression. Sula comes from a long tradition of woman who loves man as a sexual object rather than desire. Sula's mother Hanna is a widow who has many husbands, which irritates the 'decent' upright ladies in neighbour refers her as a nasty. Sula lives in a decrepit house under the authority of her grandmother Eva Peace. Eva Peace defies communal conventions, and she is very free to do everything with only duty and to herself. Eva Peace gave up her leg to feed her children. She is very strong enough to witness her son in fire when he came back from war as a drug addict. Such Eva's powerful strategy is adopted by Sula, who is Eva's granddaughter. Morrison tells Betty Jean Parker the following:

In Sula, I sought to create a situation in which there were two types of people: good and evil. This condition is symbolised by Nel and Sula. Of course, it's not always easy to identify which is which. They are complementary to one another. They help each other out. I suppose they could have formed a fantastic single human being together. But, as you can see, they resemble the head of Janus. (Taylor 1994)

Nel looks to be at odds with vibrant rebel Sula, but they are actually quite similar. Their symbiotic partnership exemplifies the vibrancy of the black past as well as a successful pilgrimage to the origins. She had two experiences during puberty that shaped her affected self. The first is that Sula overhears her mother expressing her dislike for her. Sula is perplexed and feels unwanted, but when Nel approached her again, it draws her back to the brilliant day light from her dark thoughts. Morrison symbolically unfolds the conclusion of the female friendship. They dig a hole and then cover it up, symbolising their oneness, sexuality, and shared responsibility for what is about to happen. Sula solidifies their bond by dropping Chicken Little unknowingly into the river. Sula is unable to grieve the death of Chicken Little makes what she is: "as willing to feel sorrow as to give anguish... she had no core, no speck surrounding (Morrison 1973)." Sula adopts an unusual living style since she has nothing to rely on, not even her'self.'

Sula defies patriarchal and conventional authority by embarking on a 'self-discovery' trip. She is adamant about breaking free from the shackles that bind her. She possesses the tenacity, willpower, and strength to defy the community. She is the one who defines her self-identity. Sula is capable to refuse all attitudes which see a female as nothing more than a burdens. 'Hers was an experimental life,' as Morrison puts it. Sula retains the stubborn demeanour of an outcast who rejects to confirm the dominant culture, beliefs, and qualities, as well as those of her local surroundings.

Unlike Sula, Nel exemplifies the strength of black women to overcome obstacles and maintain cool in the face of adversity. She wanted to challenge white society by becoming a good Catholic. Neither of the buddies, however, is entirely effective. Their 'Technicolored' dream of 'someone' has come crashing down. While the robins are dying, Sula returns to Medallion. She confronts Eva and places her in a nursing home. Her appearance in the community is regarded as a manifestation of evil. Nonetheless, she has a positive impact on them.

Morrison says that Black people commonly never annihilate evil. "Evil, we believe, that has a natural home in the universe. But we may, in fact, be living right next door to it, not only in the metaphysical sense, but also in the sense of humans (Taylor Guthrie)." Sula loses Nel's friendship because he had sex with Nel's husband Jude. Ajax is the only man who is strong enough and free like Sula who can balance her other self. The spiritual and mental emptiness connotes the paper doll's image. Sula is eventually starved to death by the emptiness. She passes away as she believes that she has "sung all the songs there are (Morrison 1973)."

Sula's body is left to the white people by the community, who refuse to mourn her, denying her essence and dishonouring her. At the novel's conclusion, it leads to the community's demise. Sula, on the other hand, realises the importance of community, particularly Nel, in her death. After the death, the need for her 'other i' is confirmed. Nel realises the presence of her friend Sula with her in her mind. Nel found out that actually she was not missing Jude but was missing her friend Sula. "We used to be girls together... Morrison (1973) wrote, "O Lord, Sula...girl, girl, girl girl girl." That girl is Nel, who is taken aback by Eva's allegation that Nel is also culpable and that Nel and Sula are similar. Nel realises that there is no difference between them. This awareness makes to love Sula repeatedly and stop hating her. Nel eventually makes a way to convey her bereft love.

Nel notices that her own eye is twitching while remembering and mourning for her friend. Nel and Sula, as Morrison puts it, "make up one full person." Sula raises a ruckus in the community by experimenting with life and in death she maintains peace. Sula has escaped the modern world's decay, returned to the past, and is now complete. The cry of Nel is described as "a fine cry that was loud and lengthy with rings of grief (159)," evokes awareness as well as peace that can be attained by acknowledging the black past in all of its complexity. As a result, Sula lives on in Nel even after her death as an embodiment of tranquillity.

References

- [1] Janeways, Elizabeth. *Power of the Weak*. New York: Harcourt, 1983.
- [2] Morrison, Toni. (1973). "Roteness: The ancestor as Foundation in Black Women Writers", *A Critical Evaluation*. Ed., Mary Evans, Anchor Press.
- [3] Guthrie, Danille Taylore. *Conversation with Toni Morrison*. New York: The Feminist Press, 1994.
- [4] Taylore, Danille K. *Conversation with Toni Morrison*. New York: Harcourt Pub, 1994.
- [5] Morrison, Toni. (2016). *Sula*. Penguin Random House.
- [6] Hooks, Bell. *Ain't I A Woman: Black Women and Feminism*. New York: Boston, 1981.
- [7] Parveen, Tarana. *Black Womanhood in Toni Morrison's Novels*, 2015.
- [8] Stein, Karen F. "Toni Morrison's Sula: A Black Women's Epis." *Understanding Toni Morrison's Beloved and Sula: Selected Essays and Criticism of the Works by the Nobel prize-Winning Author*. Ed. Solomon O. Iyasere and Marla W, 2000.