

Community Living And Women; An Ecofeminist scrutiny Of ToniMorrison's Novel Sula

Running Title: Community Living And Women

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Abstract

Nature and women are equally subjugated to domination by men. Toni Morrison's novel Sula centers mostly around women characters. Women are always considered the second sex no matter how talented and self-equipped they are. Toni Morrison talks about the sufferings of the African American women in the novel Sula. My paper will analyze the novel Sula through an Eco-feminist lens. Toni Morrison through her novels shows how women and nature are interconnected and how they are dominated by the patriarchal society. This theory examines the relationship between women and nature. The close association of the characters with the nature helps them to sustain despite the hardships they face during their life. Both Nature and women have so much in common which makes them more powerful.

Keywords: Women, Eco-feminism, Nature, Toni Morrison, Domination

The novel Sula is a women-centered novel. Toni Morrison's novels can be brought down into a concept of eco-feminism, which in other words is also known as ecological feminism. The novel brings in the connection between nature and African American women. The genre eco-feminism describes the movements and philosophies that link feminism with ecology. Gender and diversity have been linked in many ways. Women are considered as 'second sex'. The same happens with nature too. As men consider women as someone below him he considers nature in the same way. People take both for granted. Both women and nature have so many connections between them. They both are passive in so many ways and once they charge against the dominant ones, that will affect dominants the most.

The patriarchal world puts and views the man as someone who tops the hierarchy. But women who are different are considered inferior. The marginalization of women and the destruction of the environmental biodiversity go hand in hand. As the Eco-feminism concerns only to imply that the Eco-feminists are concerned only about the oppression of nature and the oppression of women, but Karen Warren argues, "because all feminists do or must oppose the logic of domination which keeps oppressive conceptual frameworks in place, all feminists must also oppose any isms of domination that are maintained and justified by that logic of domination." (p. 21)

Many Eco-feminist theorists argue that all oppressions are related to each other and they say that there is no primary form of oppression. The women characters in the novel Sula are subject to environmental racism. When the African American people were forcefully made to leave their lands, it is said that they carried spores from their lands as a mark of spiritual and cultural values. These values connect them so much to their root and soil which creates a passionate affection towards nature. The novel explores the equal exploitation of black women by the Americans as the exploitation of the nature by man. The attachment and the affinity of blacks to their belongings make the Americans enslave them. The blacks were affected psychologically due to the cruelty, power and the segregation forced on them, which is similar to the destruction of the ecosystem by man.

The story of this novel revolves around two girls Nel and Sula from their childhood days and talks about their female friendship, their identity and about their community. The novel gives so much emphasis to the female characters and the events of the novel mostly happen in Ohio, the black town. Sula as the title says is the protagonist of the novel is under the light of an unconventional black woman. Sula's life is filled with an unusual social and sexual experiment which is

outrageous and even evil. Through the character of Sula, Morrison shows how black people accept evil as a part of their life.

Sula, which is Morrison's second novel shows the beautiful use of the techniques and the writing style. The description of nature is seen very often in the novel. There were problems throughout the novel with the characters and it happened the same way with nature too. The whites and the blacks had a problem with the land which whites allowed the blacks to stay in beginning. But later on the whites wanted the land back to construct a golf course by the medallions. The whites were trying to make it happen for so long. But this happened after the death of Sula, when nature decided to kill most of the people in the mine destruction. When Sula was dead, the nature was dead too. Nature also took the place of a destroyer, Nel says "The river had killed them all. No more silver-gray flashes, no more flat, wide, unhurried look. No more slowing down of gills. (Sula 174)

Through the character of Sula, Morrison has shattered the Stereotypical image of black women being weak and addresses their wisdom, spirit and strength in exploring themselves. The comparison that the author shows between nature and the female characters has an extrinsic relation. Certain elements of nature are associated with Sula and also with other characters of the novel. Elements like birds, fire and flowers.

The birds invoke the idea of fleeing, flight. We are also to know that Cecile and Sula at some point would flee from the clutches of the society. Sula is like a bird that cannot be contained in a small cage. Sula is a strong woman who explores the world through her strong spirit of resilience. Sula's birthmark which is like a rose on her neck shows her connection with nature. The epigraph of the novel finds its source from the "rose tattoo". Rose is a beautiful flower that is beautiful and at the same time which is intoxicating. Rochelle says that both Nel and Sula are intoxicating the men around them. Rose, the flower is beautiful to see but at the same time once when they are picked by human hands from the plant they don't live so long. The beauty of the flower diminishes within a day, the same happens with both the girls. As the beauty of the flower is fleeting, the presence of the novel is also fleeting in the novel.

Water and fire also play a very important role in the novel. Water can be associated with death in the novel. The death of Chicken Little happens by drowning in the water which torments Sula and Nel so much, a little more for Sula. She considers herself responsible for Chicken little's death and feels much more agitated about that. Fire in the novel acts as a cleaning force. The fire which burns the people acts as a destroyer.

The death of Sula is interlinked with nature. The people of the bottom thought that something good would happen to them after the death of Sula as they considered her bad. But in reality unemployment, late-harvesting, deforesting and bad weather approaches them. The black people were facing so many problems because of the whites who were trying to change the bottomland into a golf course. This led to the cutting of trees and the formation of roads to the suburbs. "The river had killed them all. No more silver-gray flashes, no more flat, wide, unhurried look. No more slowing down of gills" (Sula 174)

The reason for Sula being complex is that it is written from the point of view of an African, which includes the African aesthetic. Morrison has named the characters of the novel in a typical African manner. The male characters in the novel are not given so much importance and they don't have any important work to play other than provoking the female characters.

The male characters presented in the novel are not trustworthy and are portrayed in a very immature manner. Morrison conveys this through the names of the male characters Jude (Judas), Green (naive), Chicken little (diminutive and fearful), Boy-boy (immature and silly). These names can be contrasted to the strong names of the female characters. Sula in the babangi language means one of the Combinations which is to be afraid, to poke, to run away, to alter from a proper condition to a worse one, to be blighted, to fail in spirit, to be overcome, to be paralyzed with fear, or to be stunned. Although the meaning of Sula shows a different light on her, Sula is completely in contrast with the meaning of her name. Morrison also explores to what extent mothers will go to protect their children from this harsh world as she has brought in the same concept in the novel beloved which was discussed earlier. And about the maternal instincts being productive or being harmful.

As the author says 'their friendship was so close, they themselves had difficulty distinguishing one's thoughts from the others'. They were so interconnected to each other. Sula overcomes the societal norms in order to escape the oppression. Social, economic and political conditions affect the lives of the black in very horrid manner. They go through a lot of pressure in the society, which reflect in their attitudes and creates dilemmas that annihilate their mode of life. Violence, fear, horror, pain, shame, and suffering have penetrated into their lives.

Morrison very skilfully explores the world of Oppressions, she skilfully explores the evil effects of the color consciousness. The blacks were only allowed to work as servants the house of the whites restricted by class which put them under a lot of mental pressure. Where else the poor white women were allowed to work in factories and mills. This serious problem caused the blacks to be in a state of isolation, abuse, alienation, lack of recognition and lack of moral support.

From time immemorial women are considered weaker to men. But the condition of the black women are considered even worse when they are considered less than the white men, black men and even the white women. In the novel *Sula* peace and Nel Wright are caught under the gender system of the place called bottom. Although they stay at the top of the hill their place is termed as the bottom. It is said that the African American people were made to stay at the top of the hill as they had to go through the Americans while they travel and they will have to depend on Americans for everything they need. Morrison has made the readers understand the plight of the African American writers through her novel *Sula*.

Conclusion

The novel *Sula* shows the different faces of nature. These novels explore the relationship between women and the mother nature. Although there is an immense concern related to the environmental racism towards the black women, still there is so much to improve the situation. These women are dominant part of the nature who are eventually ignored in the society. These women worshipped nature for a harmonious community living, who loved the nature, lived the nature and respected the nature who are the true bi-product of nature and so it is said that women and nature are inseparable.

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