

Survival of the Black Woman in Toni Morrison's *Sula*

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Toni Morrison is the first African – American woman to win the noble prize for literature. Morrison's work, *Sula* provides struggle for survival of the black community. In *Sula*, her general focus is on socio political struggle for survival that her described of the African – American experience. The black community in Morrison's *Sula* that is defined by the racial barriers created by the surrounded dominant white society. Their dominant white society created the rules and borders that is barriers to impair the survival of black people. *Sula* further investigates the dominant white society influence and impact on the black community and examines the corruptive activity which destroys the unity of black society member to make alienation and weakness.

The life of *Sula* Peace in the black community of Medallion in the 1920s, *Sula* is an independent young woman because of her strong sense of feminine identity and intact survival skill. She is treated as an outcast and stranger of black society because of her refusal to follow the customs of black society. *Sula*'s intimate friend Nel Wright accepts the traditional role and marries to become mother. In spite of losing her own identities and interest. Therefore, *Sula* examines survival and struggles of the internal black society.

In Morrison's *Sula*, the black community is defined that oppressive white society dominates the black society and forms the boundaries with rules which are resisted by black society. The story setting for *Sula* is a small town in Ohio, located white society dominates and exploits the the black people's energy. As a white slave owner assures his slave fertile Bottom land as well as his freedom. However, the slave is deceived by a white owner who misguides him that land on the hillside is "rich and fertile... the Bottom of heaven (and is) the best land there is" (Morrison 5). The white community develops itself in rich position by usurping the fertile land white the black community is compelled to live on the margin of the white society. Thus, the black community identities as an outcast with the designated area, where they agree to live in a poor situation.

Sula's lifelong friend Nel chooses the role of white and mother because she is in need of accepting customs of her society and remains true identity to her hometown. Thus she roots

strongly her status by accepting customs and rules were, the accepted values and tradition imprinted from childhood days where she “sat on the steps of the back porch surrounded by the high silence of the mother’s incredible orderly house...waiting for (her) fiery prince” (Morrison 51). However, her fiancé Jude attains the social role after his position of family breadwinner. So he has to seek a job on the New River Road “It was after he stood in lines for six days”. Jude realized that his employment opportunity and dreams were at risk in the hands of the cruel white employer, therefore stress and frustration arose which consequence to him pressuring Nel.

In novel *Sula*, social pressures lead to frustration. Eva exposes her poor living conditions of the black community. Her routine life turns to bad condition and frustration because of her son’s drug addiction. Although Eva loves her son, she has lost her hope to quiet his cruel quality and drug addiction and therefore plunges him in kerosene to set fire to him. Here nobody from the black community control Eva for this violence because the social pressures and disorder circumstances surrounding it. The characters in *Sula*, then attain their potential existence and growth within the boundaries of the community.

Sula’s return and presence is seen as an evil which caused her as an outcast from her community, “The presence of evil was something to be first recognized, then dealt with, survived, outwitted, triumphed over. Their evidence against Sula was contrived, but their conclusion about her were not” (Morrison 118).

Both Sula and Eva peace strengthen their status in the black community by making violence whenever they face unfavourable situation, because of their self and inner nature. Once Sula threatening by white teenage boys, she cuts hair fingers herself and shows her courage to castrate them. Here with shows he strength and status by refusing by acceptance of lower status of black women.

Eva peace’s loss of her leg is the self-mutilation which is done in order to get insurance money from the white society’s laws, which provide financial support for her children and she bravely confronts white laws in harvesting money and gaining for her economic independence. Although Eva’s role is attractive and heightened in the black community, she is admired by her sacrifice,

“And adult standing or sitting, had to look down at her. But they didn’t know it. They all had the impression that they were looking up at her, up into the open distances of her eyes, up to the soft black of her nostrils and up to the rest of the chin” (Morison 31).

The black people’s perceptions are variety upon her appearance and returning to native place, because she is seemed of a stranger even in her own community. Her strange exterior

beauty, unpredictable and lusty appearance may be harmful for their community's customs and tradition like beautiful rose causing pain those who touch its stem. Thus, Sula's character is portrayed of an independent. She refuses to follow the norms and conventional rituals of its members, such of marriage, and here with family and childbirth.

In *Sula*, the main focus is the African people's struggle and their individual freedom. The racial freedom is secondary to be noted. The black men live in America are American citizens, but their participation is prevented in a white American culture. Racial issues are portrayed throughout the novel.

Sula contains so many different themes, but it is difficult thing to say which one is the important. Morrison shows that the important work is to the community of bottom seriously to survive. In *Sula*, the people of bottom take survival very seriously because their existence is surrounded by white male world. The residents of bottom take best survival by working different kinds of jobs and helping each other when in need. But they are aware that they always have to remain their lives within the boundaries of the aggressive white society. Survival is a primary thing for life of Eva and Hannah. They know themselves that no opportunities being black and female, so they prepare their food by canning food in the summer for the winter season. They are aware of their needs, how to get and fulfill during unfavourable circumstances.

In aggressive white society, black people know the urgent need of survival, so Eva is aware of survival by cutting off her leg to gain an insurance money and develop the financial status of her children. Jude is another character for survival fitness by his eagerness to get job to run his family but that time he can't get job which goes to white boys. So, Jude has no opportunity to get job for his survival, the reason is being a Negro, this can be very damaging to one's self.

On exploring the character of Sula, she has no right opportunity for her creativity. Lack of suitable outlet she becomes dangerous, Sula never realizes that her unintentional sins becomes dangerous to her. Emptiness in Sula's life diverts her life on wrong track by seeking opportunity with men to fulfill her emptiness. Sula destructs herself because of her lack of suitable outlet and her relationship with men. To the community of Bottom Sula is an outcast because she is different form from others and opinion and customs.

Sula is isolated from the community for her extreme independence, but she is careless to be outcasted, she just wants to live her life with free mind. After death of Sula, the black community talks about Sula and her life, but they don't know what to do with their lack of unity and unfocused energy. The death of Sula makes a lesson to the people of Bottom. They realize that productive outlet and work are important for the survival of the people in Sula because it gives the way for fruitful life for the members of the Bottom.

Work Cited

Primary Source:

Morrison, Toni. *Sula*. New York: Penguin Books, 1973. Print.