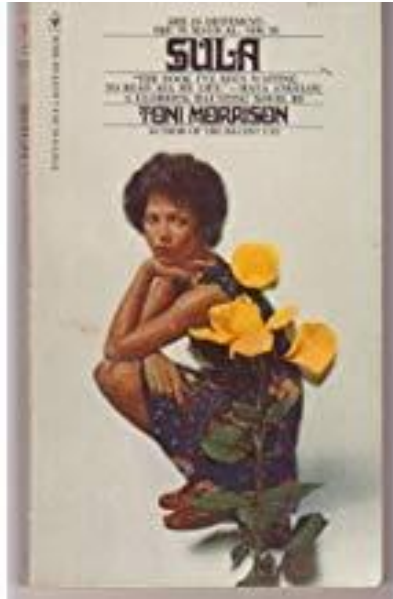


**Critical Review of the Protagonist Characters in the Selected Novels of
Toni Morrison With Reference to
The Bluest Eye and *Sula***

R. Bhuvanewari, M.A., M.Phil.



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Abstract

Toni Morrison is one of the most noteworthy Afro American novelists of the 20th century. She has about eleven novels to her credit. Toni Morrison is one of the most admired living writers; she is regarded as the primary architect in producing an instructive message for Afro-Americans. She has a wide range of audience across racial boundaries. Her works swivel around her experience that she encountered in her black commune. She expresses her various experiences that she has encountered by way of racial discrimination, white oppression and violence in the black community and also clearly portrays the pathetic situation of blacks that is exploitation of blacks by other black. This paper elaborates on the critical review on the protagonist characters of two novels of Toni Morrison with reference to “The Bluest Eye” and “Sula”.

Introduction

Victimization in *The Bluest Eye*

Morrison's writing is always witnessed as an authentic piece of writing as it combines the realistic surroundings of Black families with their neighbourhoods in an Ohio town which is similar to Morrison's hometown. In her first novel “The Bluest Eye”, Pecola is the crucial character. Though

Pecola is the protagonist of the novel, taking up a key role; she is depicted as a lifeless creature and remains a puzzling character throughout the novel.

Pecola

When the novel commences, Pecola is a young Afro American girl who descends from a financially unstable family.

Pecola suffers from low self-esteem and considers herself to be ugly. Her neighbours, Claudia and Frieda were the only friends to Pecola. Nobody in her neighbourhood shows affection towards her. They look at her with hatred and because of this she is possessed with self-hatred and strongly believed in her own ugliness. The whole black community in which our protagonist lives believes that beauty lies only with colour -"whiteness". The community is in the peak of racial discrimination.

She is persistently identified as "ugly" by almost all members, from the petite kids at her school to her own mother. She is usually ridiculed by other children and sometimes tortured by Black boys because of her physical features. They never looked at her inner mind, they harassed her, and this constant denunciation that she undergoes at school and from people around her leads Pecola to seek escape from her grief. The result of which is she started imagining herself as if she is more beautiful. She is so fragile that she is not able to fit herself with the society in which she was born. So she longs to know the way how to make people to adore her; and she has a misconception that if she were beautiful she would not face the torments that she faces in her household.

To Achieve Physical Beauty

Pecola begins to trust that if she achieves physical beauty, her life would automatically get better. This false belief turns out to be absolutely destructive to Pecola, consuming her whole life and ultimately leading her to lose her sanity. The pinnacle of her continual harassment reaches its height, when she was found to be raped by her drunken father. The poor girl betrays herself believing that God has astoundingly given her the blue eyes, which is considered to be a symbol of white community that she prayed for. At the end of the novel, the sufferings she has faced made Pecola to believe that her wishes have been granted. The readers find that her destiny is worse than demise because there is no chance of escape for her. She is victimized to the extreme level that the poor soul simply moves to "the edge of town, where you can see her even now." (The Bluest Eye, p: 205) This key character is constantly victimized and disgraced throughout the novel.

The title *The Bluest Eye* refers to Pecola's devoted wishes for beautiful blue eyes. The readers are brought to the frame of mind that Pecola has been a scapegoat for the entire community. The black people consider her as a doll to express their pain that they face in the same community. Finally, the continuous distress made Pecola to be silent. It has not provided an opportunity to express her grief. She becomes a reminder of human cruelty and an emblem of human suffering. She has been completely destroyed by cruelty of the people. Through Pecola's characterization, Morrison seeks to demonstrate the negative impact of racism on one's self-confidence.

Rebelliousness in "Sula"

In the second novel *Sula*, Morrison brings out a totally contrast character to Pecola who rebels against the community which maddens Pecola. Sula is a completely opposite to the

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characteristics of Pecola. In this novel Sula, Sula and Nel are represented as close friends. Nel is hailed from the family which believes deeply in social standards; in contrast to Sula's family. Sula lives with her grandmother Eva and her mother Hannah. Their house serves as a home for an enormous number of unfamiliar boarders. Despite these differences, Sula and Nel become personally attached to each other.

After they complete their high school, Nel gets married and settles herself into the conventional role of a wife and mother. In contrast, with the impact of her upbringing, Sula adapts to an inconsistent path and starts living a life of independence ignoring social conventions. Her waywardness makes her to have contacts with many persons even with white men. Soon after Nel's marriage, Sula is not found in their Bottom Community for ten years. Then suddenly returns to the home town. Her behaviour and manners made the people look upon Sula as an embodiment of evil. They are astonished by her shameless negligence to social conventions. The people are dumbfounded when they found that Sula has an affair with Nel's husband, her best friend. There comes a breaking point in the bond between the friends. Nel breaks off her acquaintance with Sula. They are united only when, just before Sula dies in 1940, that seems to be a half-hearted reunion.

Sula behaves so arrogantly throughout the novel. Sula never repents for her deeds; she gazes at her mother burning without any annoyance. She is ready to send her grandmother to a nursing home without pity, and superciliously has a sexual affair with her best friend's husband. She could not fit herself to settle with traditional set of marriage and child rising. The women of the Bottom hate Sula because she is really complex and hard to understand. Though she is continuously committing mistakes, she never admits herself and feels sorry for her actions. The main reason for Sula's weirdness is her mind set that makes her not oblige to gender norms and traditional morality. On the surface, Nel and Sula may appear as polar opposites, dissimilar characters with divergent world views, but they are with the identical characters. It is plainly seen throughout the novel. When Sula playfully slays the little boy and the victim is found to be under distress, Nel instead of taking steps to rescue the kid, calmly enjoys the scene. This incident shows both the characters Sula and Nel are with indistinguishable attitudes. They possess a rebellious attitude in their mind.

When the novel is read, the characterization of Sula makes the readers to confuse whether to sympathize her and appreciate her courage or abhor her for being so insensitive to other people's feelings. Till the end she takes a role of a rebel and does the task taken without caring about any criticism that falls on her.

Conclusion

Ultimately, Morrison brings out the multiplicity in the characteristics of women. She has narrated one of her women protagonists as a victim of environment, gender, domestic violence and circumstances and immediately portrays a contrast character with bursting power and who is ready to face anything and takes the form of a weapon for survival in a patriarchal community, as an emancipated woman.

Toni Morrison finds herself trapped between the pressure by the modern developing society and shackles of the ancient partiality. She expresses her concern for women and the problems faced by women, their passion, and perils that they encountered. Toni brings the subconscious mind of the women in depicting these two characters. Pecola is embodiment of submissive and modest character in the women and Sula, on the other hand, indicates a revolutionary mind which is not ready to

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accept the norms that are dictated by the society. It is the two sides of the same coin. The modest character is mostly exhibited since they do not come out of the shell that has been created for the women by the society. The activist character is also found in every woman, which is to assert their audacity and reinforcing the world-shattering features by isolating themselves from the traditional community to find a new fulfilling life. The characters exhibited by Toni Morrison are a voice of her inner self

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R. Bhuvaneshwari, M.A., M.Phil.
Assistant Professor of English
Dr. Mahalingam College of Engineering and Technology
Udumalpet Main Road
Makkinampatti, Pollachi – 642003
Tamilnadu
India
bhuvanram1976@gmail.com