

Black Emancipation in Toni Morrison's *Sula*

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ABSTRACT

Sula, in the biblical language, plays the role of Moses the deliverer. Moses delivered the Jewish race from the Egyptian bondage and slavery. Similarly, *Sula* tries to deliver the black human race from slavery and subordination to the white race. *Sula* is not appreciated by her own black people on account of their ignorance and total unawareness of what she is doing for their own people. In this respect, she has to go away from the Medallion village for many years and her coming back to the village is not relished by her own people. The black people do not know that she is doing the best for her own people in the manner of awakening them to their independent status as a pre-responsible black citizens. She is a farsighted revolutionary. Her own people do not catch up with *Sula*. Black people do not have a long-range perspective and vision and so they misunderstand her. It is in this atmosphere of resistance that *Sula* has to establish the freedom of her own people who have no notion about anything as they lived in ignorance.

KEYWORDS

Revolutionary; Emancipation; Fight for freedom.

Sula is concerned with the theme of black emancipation. *Sula* is a challenge to her own black race. Many of them are found to be servile imitators of the white tradition and morals. *Sula* awakens the notion of dignity and self-respect among the black race. *Sula* is shown as a fearless freedom fighter in this novel. The aim is to keep its focus on her as a fearless freedom fighter. The novelist has placed greater faith in black women characters as they are adjudged to be the fittest to visualize the future destiny of the black race. Ironically not all the black women characters are in accordance with this specification.

Sula is a novel dealing with the behaviour pattern of the blacks who remain unaware of their own tragic condition. That *Sula* is being an awakener is a threat to the black community as she challenges their smug acceptance of the

white system of values. It will not be an exaggeration if one takes the stand that a small bit of the novelist is projected in the portrayal of *Sula*.

Every radical character is a mouthpiece of Toni Morrison. Two episodes are narrated by the novelist in order to illustrate a kind of psychopathological neurosis exposed in the nigger episode and the National Suicide Day episode. A fertile land is promised to the Nigger as a kind of reward for his work but what he gets is contrary to what is promised to him. Instead of being provided with the valley land, he is given a hilly terrain. The white master brings in a very clever logic to justify that the hill land becomes bottom land when it is viewed by God from above. It is after all a kind of concealed allegory in which what is happening to the Nigger is shown

metaphorically as something that happens to the black race on a larger scale.

The second episode, National Suicide Day is only a mental demonstration of a ritualised rehearsal of symbolic self-killing. The terror of the blacks jumping into the tunnels and losing their lives is a nerve-shattering experience. This incident is only a representation of the attitude of certain black minds who train themselves to be in tune with the prevailing state of oppression and degradation.

Alongside these two incidents, the entire village of the Medallion community stands for a total belief in the settled order of life whatever may be the tragedy and depression arising out of such an unquestioning acceptance of the established values of the whites. It is amidst these scenes of apathy and degeneration the character of Sula is born. Her profound critical perception reveals that what is happening among the blacks is something that is brought on them by themselves. She tries to make them realize that such people are their own enemies who remain without adequate awareness of the necessity for their real freedom.

Everywhere Sula is turned out as her very company is shunned. This shows how the blacks have blindly fallen in line with the conditions of life enforced by the whites. Sula possesses in her a revolutionary plan for the racial and social freedom of the blacks. No one is under the impression that Sula is after all fighting for them. A long-range remedy for social ailments cannot be perceived by short-sighted people like the blacks. The average black believes in the routine satisfaction of life but for them, there is no realization that such habits of acceptance keep them in perpetual slavery. The voice of Sula is a stern protest against such mundane habits of life which bring no enduring solace.

Eva, Hannah, Helene and Nel are characters who represent nothing but an act of living in a self-satisfied way without

being ignited by the idea of resisting the ongoing mode of life.

In the novel *Sula*, the entire theme revolves around roughly six characters. They are Eva, Hannah, Sula, Nel, Helene Wright and Jude. The main reason is that a character like Sula wants to make the best of the worst situation which prevails among them. It is Sula who stands out prominently among them with a protest against every form of behaviour which gets in tune with the white system of values. Only suffering, frustration, despair and even drudgery ensue from the whites for the blacks which are more endured than opposed. For example, the National Suicide Day staged by Shadrack for the purpose of portraying the enormity of suffering undergone by the black is only a ritualized rehearsing of the daily phenomenon of torture and agony experienced by the blacks. Even such demonstration is considered by the passive observers as a form of protest against the atrocity committed by the whites on the blacks. Sula is very different from Shadrack and other passive observers of this stage rehearsal.

Very fierce and open opposition to the white system of values can be the only worthwhile remedy for Sula. Anything short of this is not at all a solution for the emancipation of the blacks. The idea of the liberation of the blacks from the whites can occur among people who are not only awakened but who come out into the open and fight against such gross injustice. There is a very powerful incident in which her mother is very firmly interrogated by her. Sula says that the choice of marriage on the part of her mother is not of her choice but it is the choice of her parents. This is nothing but perpetuating a form of slavery to the white system of values. The policy of what has been done by parents must be so done by their children and it should be so transmitted to the future generation as a policy which keeps the blacks in a state of unending

subordination to the white system of values.

When Sula's grandmother Eva points out when God will hit her for her misdoing or wrongdoing, Sula briskly replies as to how God spared Eva for having killed her child Plum. All these examples cited by her amount to a mounting attack on the blind acceptance of the white system of values. The Medallion village is deeply trapped in superstition. Putting a broomstick on the door of the house for the purpose of averting the ill - omen ensuing on the return of Sula after ten years is nothing but a standing testimony to the lack of knowledge and awareness about life and reality.

Actually, Sula is an ill-omen for both the blacks and the whites. She openly

challenges the agenda of the white race. However, she is not an ill-omen for the blacks. She is the harbinger of good fortune, a prophet of social freedom for the blacks. All her life is only a struggle to liberate the blacks from their ignorance and blind attachment to white values.

The same standards cannot be applied to view the sacrifice of Eva losing her leg for saving her family and Sula watching Chicken Little dying without showing any resistance. A major part of Sula's life is devoted to showing how the blacks live a subhuman life without the proper realization of their condition. The greatest tragedy is not the suffering of the blacks under the whites but the lack of awareness among the blacks who remain without any idea of the need for freedom and where it comes from.

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