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**THE DARKEST WORLD  
OF THE DARK  
PEOPLES BROUGHT  
TO LIGHT BY TONI  
MORRISON IN HER  
SULA**

**R.Niviya**

Assistant Professor,  
Department of Science  
& Humanities, Jeppiaar Maamallan  
Engineering College,  
Sriperumpudur, Chennai

**Article Particulars**

Received: 17.6.2017

Accepted: 17.6.2017

Published: 19.6.2017

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**Abstract**

*The blacks in America are marginalized and exploited people, their marginality being primarily social and economic. We can hear the voices of protest in their literature. The African American asks a pertinent question, what did he do to be so black and blue. He is condemned because he is black. Nature is responsible for that. What does it mean to be a black man in this world dominated by the white race? He has committed no sin. The African American writer defines his racial condition which is responsible, by and large, for his socio cultural condition in the conspiring world of the white people.*

*Slavery was imposed on the blacks in America for more than three centuries. The land of liberty locked them in a dark and cruel world of slavery. Their racial problem resulted in social, economic and cultural problems. Slavery was institutionalized in their social behaviour. The black race was marginalised in all respects. The life of the African Americans in a dark difficult world is nothing but painful. I have tried to analyse the various aspects and reasons for their struggle in Toni Morrison's Sula.*

*Sula* portrays the pain of struggle and failure. The oppression of the blacks is not because of their stupidity, not because of their laziness, but just because they are blacks. Blacks are wrapped around the fingers of whites to use the blacks as they wish. They were restricted to read and write at that time only to make them believe that the whites are superior to them and obey the white

masters. The ignorance of blacks is used up and enjoyed by the whites. A black slave in *Sula* is slyly deceived by a white farmer with the false promise that he would be given a piece of valley land if he does difficult chores. But he never intends to hand over a piece a valley land to his slave rather he offers a hilly land and makes the slave believe that it is the bottom of heaven. "High up from us," said the master "but when God looks down, it's the bottom. That's why we call it so. It's the bottom of heaven – best land there is" (*Sula* 5). The rough climatic condition in the hill has put the land as well as the black people in the hardship. The cold wind arrests the people in their houses for days. They come out only to collect coal and food whereas the items are available at the doorsteps for the Whites. They miss the days of wages.

The blacks become victims in the hands of whites. The whites are able to grab whatever is valuable. The hilly land which is ignored by the whites once is wanted by them later as it is found suitable for Golf courses and other facilities. Simply they reject the valley land and keep moving to the hilly land and get the best in the hilly area because from the top they have a clear view of a beautiful river and a ring of elms. They chase away the blacks who had gradually become familiar with this land and its climate. The blacks begin to move towards the valley land and leave their own places for the people who are interested. Only the rich white folks build houses on the hills.

The black men have been believing that they would be given jobs in the project of building a bridge to connect Medallion to Porter's Landing. But the white labourers are appointed for this

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project. Jude is one of the black men who anticipates the opportunity. This has been the aim of the people like Jude. This disappointment has made him upset. The dream of a nigger is completely dissolved by the whites.

More than anything he wanted the camaraderie of the road men: the lunch buckets, the hollering, the body movement that in the end produced something real, something he could point to 'I built that road', he could say. How much better sundown would be than the end of a day in the restaurant, where a good day's work was marked by the number of dirty plates and the weight of the garbage bin. 'I built that road'. People would walk over his sweat for years. Perhaps a sledge hammer would come crashing down on his foot, and when people asked him how come he limped, he could say, 'Got that building the New Road' (*Sula* 82).

The pitiful African Americans are portrayed as the 'other' by Morrison as they are not treated as human beings. They are not allowed to mingle with the whites even in the public places. They are given separate toilets, and even in trains they are given a separate coach. Nel and her mother Helene make a trip to her grandmother's place by train. They unknowingly enter the coach which is for white people. In the coach Helene is humiliated by a white conductor for her mistake. "We don't 'low no mistakes on this train. Now git your butt on in there" (*Sula* 21)

Morrison has conveyed the pathetic and disgraceful condition of the blacks in public places and how they are equated with animals by the whites by not allotting them any toilets whereas the white people have access to the facility of using rest rooms in the train and the stations. When Helene enquires about the rest room, she was shown an open place yonder. The real pathos is that the women have become familiar with their condition. All of them, the woman and her four children, three boys and a girl, Helene and her daughter have to squat there in the hot sun. This is the condition of them at every station. The blacks have learnt to take the disadvantages done to them by whites as 'natural'. They don't try to wipe out the evils. They fail to fight against the things which are obstacles to them. They never try to invent ways to change their situation and go against the things which are against them. They prefer to live along with it rather than stop it.

The way the whites react when they are asked about Chicken Little's body, is absolutely inhumane. The reaction of the white world to Chicken Little's death is clearly reprehensible. The white officials consider the matter of returning the boy's body to his family an annoyance. The white Sheriff goes to the extent of asking the bargeman to throw the body back into the water.

It is the failure of the community to realize that the presence of Sula makes them improve their own lives. In order to avoid Sula they begin to live harmoniously with one another. Teapot's mother was once a negligent parent, but becomes caring because of Sula. She believes that Sula is responsible for her son's fracture, though he himself falls down. In order to protect themselves from the evil they join together. Like Teapot's mother, all mothers in the Bottom have eyes on their children.

Their life style is completely changed because of Sula. The wives who have rejected their husbands begin to take steps to make their husbands happy. Sula's presence thus gives the residents of the Bottom a stronger sense of collective identity and strength. It also gives them

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the sense of racial identity. But the community views Sula's death as a positive event. This is the major failure of the race to understand the influence of Sula's presence which makes them live harmoniously with one another. This harmony and their moral activities get dissolved after the death of Sula. As Annerie Hernandez said the good thing among the community is emerged only because of Sula. Though Sula is unconventional, she is responsible to motivate others to uphold them. The identity of the community becomes disintegrated in the absence of Sula. Teapot's mother who takes care of her son begins to beat her child. The women who take care of their mothers-in-law become irresponsible. When Eva is put in the white home by Sula, the people condemn Sula as being cold-hearted. After this incident the women in the families begin to take care of the elders in their families. They do not hesitate to clean the old people's spittoons. But after the death of Sula it is reversed. The old people are considered as a burden by the women. The whole community is shattered after her death. The integration of the community too dies with Sula. The residents of the Bottom fail to keep their identity. The people of the bottom are revitalized by a false hope.

The most aggravating and intolerable experience of the black girl child is harassment that is considered as entertainment by the white boys. The blacks become the scapegoat even to the young white boys. Even at a small age they enjoy themselves through other's sufferings. Once Nel is caught by them. They push her from hand to hand until they become tired. After that incident Nel changes her route from home to school. She has to select a way, which is elaborate.

Marriage is the only thing conducted grandly in the Bottom. But the life after marriage of the main characters mostly end in failure. The marriage between Eva and Boy Boy becomes shattered and also the marriage between Nel and Jude is broken up.

Sula faces only struggle and failure throughout her life. As her mother Hannah shows interest only in men, she fails to take care of her child Sula. Hannah fails in her role as a mother to give a good bring up to her child. She forgets her responsibility to know and ask the needs of Sula and also fails to watch her behaviour. According to the writer Gretchen Turonek, it is the failure of the parents that they are not interested in bringing out what kind of individual they want in their children. Sula is free to do anything she wishes as she is not taught to follow the conventions by her mother. Hannah simply says to her friends that she does not like Sula. Since Sula is not brought up in a conventional way, she has no morals. The people in the Bottom do not want their children to play with Sula. She is an abandoned child in the Bottom. Even though Nel becomes close with Sula, it is not encouraged by her mother Helene. She beds with men as frequently as she could. She believes that it is the only chance to find what she is looking for. She also believes that she can suppress her miseries and deep sorrows. But she is unaware that it is sadness that she is looking for. For her love making seems to be the source of a special kind of joy. She loves the excitement of sex. But this excitement reduces gradually. She rejects the men who regard sex as healthy and beautiful. The sexual aesthetics begins to bore her. But the men who have used her have the same language of love, the entertainment of love. Whenever Sula wants to share her private feeling with them they hood their eyes. They have given only worries to her. They make her discover that a lover cannot be a true friend. She has been looking so long for a friend to touch her with pure hands, "...She sought to reach out to and touch with an ungloved hand" (*Sula* 120 - 121).

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Sula realizes that no one can be substituted for Nel. But Sula lies to Nel once that Eva is planning to burn her. This is because she wants to gain more love from Nel. As she feels one with Nel, she shares her bed with Jude, Nel's husband. But she does not intend to hurt Nel, "She had clung to Nel as the closest thing to both an other and a self, only to discover that she and Nel were not one and the same thing. She had no thought at all of causing Nel pain when she bedded down with Jude" (*Sula* 119).

Sula fails to be loyal to her close buddy. She sleeps with Nel's husband Jude. It is the failure of Sula to believe that she has the right to share Nel's property Jude as she feels that they are one and the same thing. She fails to understand that her doings will hurt her friend Nel. "They had always shared the affection of other people: compared how a boy kissed what line he used with one and then the other" (*Sula* 119). The moment she realizes the feeling of possessiveness for Ajax, Nel is not with her. The discovery of Sula's affair with Jude ends their friendship. It makes both of them incomplete. Sula realizes the nature of possessiveness after her relationship with Ajax. When Nel accuses Sula of taking Jude away from her family, and leaves Sula while she is bedridden, she feels totally isolated.

Sula also faces failure in the attempt to love a person. She believes that she can gain love through a sexual relationship. But the man who sleeps with her fails to love her. Later she realizes that she has been wrong in her attitude. Her love becomes a failure. She completely yields to Ajax. After Nel, she finds pleasure in the company of Ajax. She wants him to share everything with her and vice versa. He takes everything from her, but she could not receive love in return. It seems love is so barren in Sula's life. The moment she feels that she does not even know the name of the man whom she loves and it is not told by him, she becomes shattered.

Sula stood with a worn slip of paper in her fingers and said aloud to no one, 'I didn't even know his name. And if I didn't know his name, then there is nothing I did know and I have know nothing ever at all since the one thing I wanted was to know his name so how could he help but leave me since he was making love to a woman who didn't even know his name' (*Sula* 136).

For Eva, her married life is a complete failure. Her marriage makes her struggle throughout her life. The duration of her married life is only five years. Even during the five years she does not experience a happy life. Her husband BoyBoy never shows any interest in her. He shows much interest in womanizing and drinking. She is tortured by him. He tortures her not because of any anger, simply because of his interest. Torturing a wife out of interest is more cruel than torturing a wife out of anger. His absence from his family may be a relief for Eva. BoyBoy fails to be a responsible husband and also be a responsible father to his three children. He leaves his family without considering the future of his wife and the children. Eva has to play a dual role as a mother and a father after his absence. She is in a situation to control her emotion that is her anger with BoyBoy, because her first motivation is the welfare of her children. She struggles hard to feed her children. As the whites in that area are not rich enough to hire maids, it becomes impossible for Eva to work as a maid. She works in farms and fields for her children. But she fails in her attempt to save her daughter Hannah when she is burning. In order to save her, she jumps from the upstairs window, because she cannot watch her child dying in front of her eyes. This is the reason for her action of burning up her son

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Plum. He becomes a drug addict. Eva is not able to see her son dying because of his drug addiction. She feels that it is better to die in a day rather than dying for days. She loses two of her children for whom she has struggled a lot for years. Her efforts become futile in the middle.

Eva is put in the white church home by Sula. She is not allowed to live in her last days in the house for which she lost her leg. All her efforts for her children and towards building a house become useless. The struggles of Eva become a failure.

It is the failure of Eva to criticize Sula for not following the conventional path though she has been unconventional throughout her life. She criticizes Sula for remaining unmarried though she has suffered a lot because of her marriage and has remained unmarried after BoyBoy's absence. She stresses on Sula to get married. She says that it is necessary for Sula to have some babies, and it will settle her throughout her life. She and Hannah have been independent yet she criticizes Sula for being independent.

Shadrack is a soldier who has a fear of death. As he had experienced the horror of the war field, he imbibed a fear of death. He becomes terrified of death and institutes the National Suicide Day.

“He knew the smell of death and was terrified of it, for he could not anticipate it. It was not death or dying that frightened him, but the unexpectedness of both. In sorting it all out, he hit on the notion that if one day a year were devoted to it, everybody could get it out of the way and the rest of the year would be safe and free. In this manner he instituted National Suicide Day” (*Sula* 14).

But after the death of Sula, he loses his hope in the National Suicide Day.

Shadrack realized through the death of Sula that his National Suicide Day would never ward off death. In the subsequent National Suicide Days, he pays no attention to his ritual and no longer believes in its effectiveness. His National Suicide Day becomes a failure. We could travel along with these characters and feel the pain of struggle and failure of them while reading the novel *Sula*.

**Conclusion**

The African American community has been suffering from both the external cause and the internal cause. The external cause is the power of the whites over the blacks. The blacks are unfortunate as they are treated badly by the whites. They are made as slaves. The whites satisfy their needs through the blacks. There is no harm in being black in colour. But the harm is really found in the ideology of the white people. Their ideology leads only to the humiliation of the *other*. The dark people are unfortunate to be viewed below the level of animals. While Morrison explains the domination of the whites over the darks, she does not fail to expose the weakness of her own people. It is completely their failure to dissolve the unity within the community. Being balanced in her views, Morrison has picturized the diversity found in the African American community in the novel *Sula*.

The relationship between the white and the African American community is not smooth. The major reason for the trauma of the African American community is the racism within the community. Unity is completely absent in the community.

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According to this thesis there are two things which lead the dark people to the darkest world. They are white standards followed by blacks and the lack of healthy communication and relationship within the African American community.

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