Annexure

List of Publications


Discovery of “Self” and “Identity” of Afro – Americans in Toni Morrison’s Sula and Tar Baby

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Abstract: The dawn of the new millennium witnessed a lot of changes in human kind in the context of technology based global world. Yet the discrimination between men and women, economically and socially upgraded and oppressed exist. Women continued to suffer as the most disadvantaged group all over the world. Second-wave feminism was largely concerned with the end to discrimination and oppression. Black Feminism is the process of self-conscious struggle that empowers women. The black women’s marginalization and oppression forced them to search for self-awareness and self-empowerment. Toni Morrison stresses that black women can never become fully empowered in a context of social injustice. In her works, Morrison has explored the experiences and roles of black women in a racist and male dominated society and longings for the search for cultural identity. The inability of male and female characters to form a sense of identity in her novels Sula and Tar Baby is rooted to the cultural trauma they experience which makes it impossible to shape a sense of self. This paper focuses on the dilemma of female figures in constructing their identities in a racist and sexist society. How the protagonists of the novels Tar Baby and Sula project their identities in the midst of racial and patriarchal society is discussed in detail.

Keywords: Black Feminism, gender, patriarchy, oppression, self-awareness, self-identity.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the early decades of the 20th century, there were continuing racial injustice and widespread lynching and other types of violence against the Afro-Americans. The civil war ended and officially, slavery was terminated after all the abolitionist movements. The now ‘free’ Afro-Americans had to achieve a societal standard of whiteness in order to gain acceptance. After 1920, the Afro-American literature thrived in Harlem. It was not only a literary movement. The Harlem Renaissance was the name given to the cultural, social, and artistic explosion that took place in Harlem between the end of World War I and the middle of the 1930s. The 1980s and 1990s saw a major growth in black feminist writers. They let their voices be heard in published works and in academia. They critiqued gender, white male supremacy, patriarchy and other structures of domination. The growth of the woman’s movement, and its impact on the consciousness of Afro-American women in particular, helped fuel a “black women’s literary renaissance” of the 1970s, beginning in earnest with the publication of The Bluest Eye (1970), by Toni Morrison. Morrison went on to publish Sula (1973) and Song of Solomon (1977); her fifth novel, the slave narrative Beloved (1987) became arguably the most influential work of Afro-American literature of the late 20th century. The success of writers like Toni Morrison, Maya Angelou (poet and author of the 1976 memoir I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings) and Alice Walker (winner of the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize in 1982 for The Color Purple) helped inspire a generation of younger black female novelists. Black Feminists has rightly understood the problems of a Black Woman. The double oppression against them is highlighted in their writings. Because of their double identity, black women are the victims of both sexual discrimination and racial discrimination.

2. QUEST FOR IDENTITY

Toni Morrison very well describes how different women characters react and respond differently to the injustice and the inhumanity imposed on them. She further questions black-women’s self-identity, self-concept, and struggles to achieve freedom as a living being if not a human being. In Language Must Not Sicken, Toni Morrison focuses upon how Africans lost their names through the institution of
slavery, which in turn created a loss of connection with their ancestry" (Beaufieu, 171). Toni Morrison stresses that black women can never become fully empowered in a context of social injustice. Her novels give us deep insight into black women’s minds and souls. Morrison makes us listen to the voice of the suppressed group who are left out of literature. Though the movement of Black Feminism and theory came much later, authors like Toni Morrison are finite elements of this movement. The legacy of struggle, the search for voice, the interdependence of thought and action and the significance of empowerment in everyday life are core themes in Black Feminism. As the author’s thought and works are against the sufferings of Blacks and especially the black woman, it can be said that the ideology of Black Feminism is blatantly evident in her novels.

First-wave Black feminism focused upon absolute rights such as suffrage. Second-wave feminism was largely concerned with other issues of equality, such as the end to discrimination and oppression. Issues of race, class and sexuality are central to third-wave feminism. Black women have experienced great hardships and misery in the process of searching for identity and struggling for freedom and equality. In the majority of her novels, Morrison highlights the importance of identity, the formation of the “self”, and the influence of the environment and society on that development. According to Ron Eyerman in Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity, “cultural trauma refers to a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric, affecting a group of people that has achieved some degree of cohesion” (Eyerman 2). African slaves were unified by their environment and society’s racial oppression. In the case of Toni Morrison’s characters, “the trauma in question is slavery, not [only] as an institution or even an experience, but as a collective memory, a form of remembrance that grounded the identity-formation of a people” (Eyerman 1).

The main problem the Afro-Americans face in trying to carve out an identity for them is that white people have defined their existence. According to Neal, it is annoying for any African American to derive contentment or pride from their name because Americans “designate people of African descent as Negro—the name that marked them as slaves—or black, which describes them physically but deprives them of cultural identity” (Neal 52). This label serves as a reminder of the sting of slavery and diaspora. The main character of the novel, Sula is from Black community in Bottom. Sula knew that the lives of Blacks are considered inferior. During her adolescence, Sula realizes that she would be more satisfied if she had more opportunity to live a worthwhile life according to her own will. Sula finds her power not within her community, but in her rebellion against it. Once she insists while talking to her grandmother Eva, “I want to make myself” (Sula 92). Sula wants to resist the system of segregation. Sula desires to go away and try something different from the way she has lived until then in the town: “She escapes to college, submerges herself in the city life” (Sula Cover). Sula imposes a difficult task on herself. She tries to be both an African and an American and she attempts to move from one world into another. However, Sula does not find any place remarkable to quench her actual desires. Eventually, she comes back to the Bottom ten years later. It looks as if that she has found out that she is not received by white world and so she returns to her hometown. However, she comes back changed: “When she returns to her roots, it is as a rebel, a moocker, a wanton sexual seductress” (Sula Cover).

Jadine is a young black woman and works as a model in Europe. She is motherless and was brought up by her black aunt and uncle. She goes to meet them in Isle des Chevaliers in the Caribbean to spend two months. She comes to the island in order to get some rest, have a good time there as well as to think about herself. Her current job implies the fact that she is not the kind of a black woman who would like to care for a household at a white family’s as her aunt actually does. Housekeeping has been the kind of work typical for many black women to occupy. Jadine is well aware of this ill-treatment of black women. But she also knows that her aunt Ondine likes to work as a housekeeper at a white couple’s. The fact that Valerian, the employer and a friend of Ondine’s, has financed Jadine’s studies and hence led her have access to a big city might have helped Jadine to realize that opportunities for women in general can be better than her black family is used to. It gives the impression that this financial help made Jadine longing to live in another world.

Valerian has made it possible for Jadine to meet the white world. Since Jadine has had the chance to see quite a lot of capitals in the world and try a way of living new to her, she has developed a liking for the white culture, which may be seen as a beginning for her hunger for a change. She knows that there are different chances for blacks and whites. However, as a black woman, Jadine has managed to get ahead. She is thought to be a pretty woman. Jadine is conscious of the fortune that she has had but
she wonders why everybody is transfixed by her: “The height? The skin like tar against the canary yellow dress?” (Tur Baby 42). The fact that she has had the opportunity to work as a model has left her in doubt about herself. But she is sure that she would like to make it in the larger society.

2.1. Pseudo Identity

Herbert Kelman was a professor of Social Ethics in Harvard University. According to him, identity refers to “the enduring aspects of a person’s definition of her or him self, the conception of who one is and what one is over time and across situations” (Kelman 3). And he also says that personal identity is “a cumulative product built up over a person’s lifetime experiences” (Kelman 3). According to Erikson, “individuals who reached early adulthood without having established a sense of identity would be incapable of intimacy” (qtd in Bee 372). Hence, such individuals find it difficult to get along with fellow-people and lack comradeship. Identity is a sense of personal continuity and uniqueness based not only on personal need, but also on membership in various groups, such as familial, ethnic and occupational (Bee 372).

Women’s identity is not shaped individually, but in relation to others around them. But the protagonists of Sula and Tur Baby are against this old norm. The revolt against their identity is a fight which many Afro-American women made in the 1960s. Neal says that, “What happened to Black identity under the American impact were twin processes: its dis-Africanization, on one side, and its racialization on the other” (Neal 52-53). Hence, African Americans are a minority within minorities. The memory of dislocation is augmented when one compares African Americans to Americans. The Afro-Americans realize that they find it extremely difficult to identify with a true homeland. Sula and Jadine chose not to conform to the traditional roles as daughters, mothers, and wives. They hated their existing identity. The problem of search for identity is very well connected with the theme of self-hatred and with the desire to be someone else in life. They were successful in getting a pseudo-identity which just resulted in discontentment in their lives. Morrison delineates her women protagonists as the representatives of the emerging emancipated New Women, who breaks the age-old traditions and conventions set up by patriarchy, racism and prejudice. The ways and means to attain their real identity do not align with the identity that really benefits the Black women. Freedom, emancipation and empowerment seem to be a mirage. Yet the Black women’s self-assertiveness confidently reinforces how under-classed black women perceived their own cultural identity.

2.2. Social Reality

The reality of the situation is that unless the Black women understand and accept their age-old traditions and African heritage they would not be able to withstand the hazards of patriarchy, racism and prejudice. Frances M. Beal is a Black feminist and a peace and justice political activist. She co-founded the Black Women’s Liberation Committee of SNCC. She wrote “Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female” in 1969. In that she says,

Her (Black Woman) physical image has been maliciously maligned; she has been sexually molested and abused by the white colonizer... she... has been forced to serve as the white woman’s maid and wet nurse for white children while her own children were more often than not starving and neglected — (Beal, 1)

They were blacks and that is why they suffer. They are females and thus they were prone for victimization. Women have always been marginalized in the western society. The patriarchal creed has always subordinated them and has suppressed their individual self. Subjugation, social discrimination and tortures have been the providence of women since ages. After a few decades the aftermath of Slavery were racism, classism and broken families with formless individuals that still threatened the existence of healthy black life. The blacks accept the self-imposed feeling of ugliness and lack of self-worth without questioning its source. Morrison shows the origin of the roots from where these issues of black inferiority in the mind of African Americans stems from. She also delineates how frustration with being unable to live up to white standards, leads on to hatred which is then cycled on.

Both the black heroines Sula and Jadine face the problem of doubt about their identity. The problem results from their experience with the world around them. Sula and Jadine have their own reasons for changing their blackness into whiteness. The society’s treatment and the impact of the environment along with the ideals of the society are the principal factors that governed the behavior and attitude of...
these two protagonists in the novel. Both Sula and Jadine take the question of identity seriously and are concerned with their dissatisfaction, sadness, doubts and desires. According to Erik Erikson the psychosocial development of an individual ‘encompasses changes in people’s understanding of themselves, one another, and the world around them during the course of development’ (qtd. in Feldman 392). According to Erikson, identity formation, while beginning in childhood, gains prominence during adolescence. Faced with physical growth and sexual maturaton, adolescents must accomplish the task of integrating their prior experiences and characteristics into a personal identity (qtd. in Feldman 392). However, the experience Sula and Jadine draw upon is not capable of fulfilling their need for an identity because their experiences and relationships are limited due to the social and racial groups to which they belong. Both men and women are classified by their relation to each other; man’s masculinity and woman’s femininity is based on who defines it. In the case of the Sula and Tar Baby, it is defined by the white society in which they live.

Sula is a black woman who desires to become somebody else and to make herself visible. Jadine is a black woman who is mad about New York as well as about the elements of white culture; New York made her feel like giggling (Tar Baby 223). Moreover, Jadine thinks that if there is “a black woman’s town in the world,” it is New York. As she claims: “This is home” (Tar Baby 223). Jadine seems to be able to say where she is happy. However she may not be really happy and it may be just her delusion.

Both the female protagonists made an attempt to assimilate into the mainstream society that is very much different from their traditional one. These were Morrison’s emancipated women. They were free and unrestricted. The one thing that they failed to attain is ‘Empowerment’. Both the heroines forgot and neglected their black heritage and were not ready to be empowered. These black women living in the United States try to adopt white patterns in their own ways. They all have similar experiences and they all want to survive in the world according to their own ideas about a worthwhile life. Sula has changed her appearance as well as her manners so as to become more satisfied with herself; Jadine, because of her chance to live in cities, to meet all the pleasing experiences they offer and because of the freedom that she has got, do not need to identify with a town here. Both Sula and Jadine struggle to lead a comfortable life which would make them happier. Sula and Jadine try to break some barriers in their life. According to them these barriers do not let them become an accepted part of the wider society. However, they were not able to keep their situations well in hand. To achieve complete satisfaction with the quality of their lives can be very difficult.

Sula’s change affects negatively her own personality. Since Sula was not satisfied even during her life in the places outside her hometown, the negative reaction of the Bottom to her new manners resulted in only increasing her doubt about herself. Sula is one of many young women of color who have worked to make a better life but they are not successful. Though Sula does not admit her defeat, she is soon aware of her failure in life. Sula’s grandmother blames Sula for throwing her life away. But Sula gets annoyed and replies in irritation: “It’s mine to throw!” (Sula 93). Sula knows that she has not succeeded in her life. Consequently, she prefers seclusion to other people and she refuses to do anything.

Sula begins to spend her time in bed: “It was the only place where she could find what she was looking for: misery and the ability to feel deep sorrow” (Sula 122). Sula’s reaction to the rejection in life is just an expression of self-hatred, because “there is no use in trying anything, joining anything, because you are just no damned good” (Sula 120).

For Jadine, she seems to prefer the patterns of white culture to the patterns of the black one. Initially, she is self-confident, she likes her way of life and she argues with Son about many issues. But after she falls in love with him, there is more pressure on her to encounter black standards. Son is an example of a black person who had a strong identification with other blacks. Son’s pride in being black is a threat to Jadine’s identification with white culture. Son is a threat to her freedom. So Jadine starts to face the problem of her identity. She ends up in an internal conflict and she must fight with herself so that she could feel happy with her lover. Jadine wants to feel at least that she is a part of the larger society. That feeling gives her an inner sense of balance and equality. But the feeling may be just a delusion of her.

Hence Sula and Jadine have become caught up in their attempt at assimilation into the larger society. They dwell on their status in the society and on their living. For Sula, her insight into the failures in
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her life has brought self-hatred into herself and she starts to live in solitude. As far as Jadine is concerned she is threatened by her lover and his values. The mere thought of her being involved in a traditional black life terrifies Jadine.

Sula and Jadine face these particular problems due to their discontent with the quality of their lives. Both these women have adopted an attitude for themselves towards the issue of assimilation into the larger American society. Sula’s attempt to participate in the larger society went in vain. She has not managed to find her own self. Her self-destruction follows and she dies early and alone: “As though for the first time she was completely alone—where she had always wanted to be” (Sula 148). As far as Jadine is concerned she does everything for accomplishing her dream, and she creates the boundaries of her own self by her fixation on white culture. Morrison has vividly described the possible results of racial prejudice of a black woman who has identified herself as a white woman and, therefore, adopted the prejudice of whites against her race.

3. CONCLUSION

The efforts of the female protagonists to get assimilated into American society just resulted in major problems of their personalities. Finally, the lives of these characters are shaped and molded in an unpleasant way. It can be said that none of the characters are able to live under unfavorable conditions without any distress. Sula and Jadine’s experience with trying to be someone else badly affects their lives. The results of the characters’ own choices are just the patterns of the consequences of discontent with a black woman’s status in a society. The quest is largely manifested in the characters’ attempts to survive their victimization. Sula and Jadine attempt to survive the psychic victimization by searching an identity for them. Both Sula and Jadine were emancipated. But they had only a partially fulfilled quest for identity. They were not fully content in their lives. The identity search was disturbed by absorption of the values of the dominant culture. Toni Morrison emphasizes the fact that the survival of black women in a white society depends upon their emphasis on loving their own race, their own culture and loving themselves and not to get trapped in white superiority or white standards of beauty.

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The Concept of Self-Harm in Toni Morrison’s Sula

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Abstract: Sula is Toni Morrison’s second novel published in the year 1973. This novel depicts the story of the life of two black women friends Sula and Nel and about the community in which they lived. The novel can be called a female bildungsroman which runs through the lives of these two women from their childhood to maturity and to death. Sula was nominated for National Book Award in 1973 and received the Ohioana Book Award. In the novel Sula there is an under-current of self-harm that runs throughout the novel. The subject of ‘self-injury’ is also seen to be propagating through the novel. This gloomy background tone of self-injury gives the reader a melancholic taste of the novel. The concept is unique and is exploited very well in the novel. Likewise, the word ‘Death’ is repeated again and again in the novel and its presence is intensified by the death of many characters throughout the novel. Undeniably, this further enhances the solemnness that is blatantly evident while reading the novel. This paper focuses on the concept of self-injury that reverberates through Toni Morrison’s novel Sula.

Keywords: Self-injury, self-mutilation, self-inflict, suicide, death.

1. INTRODUCTION

According to the Mayo clinic, non-suicidal self-injury, simply called self-injury is the act of deliberately harming the surface of one’s own body. The term ‘self-harm’ is generally understood to mean deliberately inflicting injury on oneself [1]. The concept of self-harm resonates through the works of Toni Morrison. Interestingly, Toni Morrison’s thesis for her M.A. degree was on suicide namely “Suicide and Alienation in the Works of Virginia Wolf and William Faulkner.” Notably, there are a lot of self-inflicted deaths and self-destruction in her novels. In Beloved, a woman jumps overboard during the middle passage. Robert Smith in Song of Solomon jumps from the top of Mercy Hospital. Rose Dear, mother of Violet in Jazz drowns herself in a well.

Sula is a multi-faceted novel. Sula is set in Medallion, Ohio. This small town with its close relationships among the neighbors essentially has two segments. One is the valley where the whites live and the other is Bottom where the blacks live. The novel is all about the growth, evolution, progress, and annihilation of a person, a friendship, and a community. The novel also explores the ties between two black girls and community.

2. SELF-INJURY

Self-mutilation and self-inflicted injury are seen to recur many times and the notion resonates very well in the novel Sula. In the beginning of the novel, Eva Peace, a strong black woman indulges in self-mutilation. Eva Peace, Sula’s grandmother, deliberately loses her leg in order to achieve monthly insurance to earn a living for her family. Eva was leading a miserable life while her husband, Boy Boy engaged himself in womanizing, drinking and abusing her. He abandons Eva and her three children after five years of his marriage. When he leaves, “Eva had only $1.65 and 5 eggs, three beets and no idea of what or how to feel. The children needed her; she needed money, and needed to get on with her life. But the demands of feeding her three children were so acute she had to postpone her anger…” (Sula 32). She remained orphaned and was directionless to go anywhere. At that inescapable situation, Eva controls her emotions, postpones her anger and molds her confidence. Initially, she seeks help from her neighbors. She senses that her neighbors could not afford to feed her children for too long. Hence, she decides to find a way to earn enough money to give her children some basic needs. Eva one day left all of her children with the Sbeggs, saying that “She would be back the next
day. Eighteen months later she swept down from a wagon with two crutches, a new black pocketbook, and one leg” (Sula 37). The author does not exactly reveal how Eva lost her one leg. However there is evidence in the novel that Eva received monetary benefit after losing her leg. And Eva returns only after eighteen months from departure. The eighteen months may have been the recovery time that she probably needed to heal the wounds of her amputated leg.

The proof for Eva to have nurtured the self-inflicting instinct within herself can be drawn from the incident when her daughter Hannah catches fire. Eva is found to jump out of the window from the second floor to save her daughter Hannah, who is engulfed in fire. Eva does not care for herself before taking such a decision to jump from the second floor. Eva was casually looking through the window, “...and it was then she saw Hannah burning...” She lifted her heavy frame up on her good leg, and with fists and arms smashed the windowspane. Using her stump as a support on the window sill, her good leg as a lever, she threw herself out of the window. Cut and bleeding she clawed the air trying to aim her body toward the flaming, dancing figure. She missed and came crashing down some twelve feet from Hannah’s smoke” (Sula 76). She fails to save her daughter. She also gets deeply wounded and had to be admitted in a hospital for treatment. Hence, Eva in this novel deliberately harms herself twice. Though, the second time, the act of self-harm is triggered primarily by ‘motherly love’ to protect Hannah, it is a loss of self-respect and self-care that made her to take up such a fatal adventure.

Eva in Sula is depicted as a strong woman. The matriarchal Eva runs the household from a rocking chair fitted into a child’s wagon. Her dominating attitude is reflected time and again in the novel. She has a strong and determined mind. More importantly she believes firmly in all her decisions. She has no second thoughts about her decisions and choices. For instance, her son, Plum, returns from World War I terribly worn-out and sinks under his gloom into drunkenness and drug addiction. Eva’s consecration to Plum does not allow her to watch him deteriorate. Thus, afterrocking him to sleep one night, Eva kills him by soaking his bed with kerosene and lighting it. This act of Eva can also be perceived as a self-inflicting behavior as she desires to destroy her family for a specific reason. Destruction of one’s own family by causing physical harm to blood relations may also be perceived as a self-inflicting behavior. This kind of behavior is analogous to the infanticide in Beloved by Toni Morrison. So the in Beloved kills her two year old daughter to prevent her from being abused in slavery.

The main character of the novel, Sula, also indulges in self-injury when she was a school going girl. Once, Sula and her friend Nel happen to face a band of teenage Irish boys daily on their way to school. With the intention of getting rid of them, Sula, instead of threatening the boys, cuts off the tip of her finger. Sula threatens the boys, pulling out her grandmother’s “paring knife...” Holding the knife in her right hand, she... presses her left forefinger down hard on its edge... She slashed off... the tip of her finger” and taunts, “if I can do that to myself, what you suppose I’ll do to you?” (Sula54). Consequently, the boys are horrified and they run away. The critic Willis crissily remarks, “Sula’s self-mutilation symbolizes castration and directly contests the white male sexual domination of black women that the taunting and threatening boys evoke” [2]. Sula’s act is in agreement with what Richardson says, “Many young people do it in order to release feelings of anger and self-hatred -- to alter their state of mind. It can be a way to communicate distressing feelings that are difficult for them to express” [1]. Sula’s acts and finally her life can also be thought of-as a process that makes others around her to define them. Her act warns the boys to mind their business. Raja Rao pertinently sums up the life of Sula, “Sula never competed; she simply helped others define themselves” [3]. Sula’s preparedness to mutilate her is a way of showing strength. The boys were taller, older, and stronger, and she may not succeed by just attacking them. Hence, she chooses to harm herself. She has the most control over herself. Offending herself shows Sula’s inner courage. The boys hastily leave, realizing that their petty bullying is no match for Sula’s actual self-violence and boldness.

Sula was just thirteen years of age when the incident with the Irish boys occurred. According to Chapman and Kim, “most people who harm themselves begin this behavior at the age of thirteen or fourteen... self-harm is most common among adolescents and young adults” [4]. Sula was an adolescent and Eva was young when they indulged in their first self-harm. According to Chapman, self-harm is rarely seen after fifty and less after forty years of age. The second self-harm that Eva had in her life may be an exception to this. It is important to note that both Eva and Sula did not have any stress disorder to continually inflict injury on them. Both were psychologically strong to cope with
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any adverse environment. There is no incident in the novel that could portray these two women as weaklings. Instead, they are depicted as strong and wild.

Sula represents the radical and revolutionary aspects of black women within the community. She attempts to create a new standard of self-identity for herself. She rejects her upbringing under the hand of her mother and objects to her grandmother’s notions about marriage. When asked by her grandmother Eva, she replies, “I don’t want to make somebody else, I want to make myself” (Sula 92). Rao precisely observes, “She [Sula] is liberated and hardly bothered with moral precision and circumspection. She has sexual union with unlimited people. She knows no alienation for she is imbued with more than her share of feminism” [3]. Sula gets her unique legacy of attitude from her grandmother Eva and mother Hannah. Sula aptly conforms to the notion of the famous proverb, “Eva is mother; like daughter.” Daughters often bear a strong resemblance to their mothers. And daughters are inclined to do what their mothers did before them. The personality and behaviors of Sula were found to be similar to those of Hannah. Her sexual life was akin to her mother Hannah’s life. Her rigid attitude with a tint of self-inflicting instinct is akin to the uniqueness Eva possessed.

Toni Morrison crafts Sula to represent the inverted figures of conventional black women. She is unconventional and unsettled. Sula was bold and strong like Eva. She inherited the maternal characters from both Eva and Hannah. The prompt and unhesitating act of cutting her fingertip is analogous to the losing of one leg by Eva. Rhodes aptly observes, “Sula dared to live her life outside the safe boundaries of her community, but she lived life on her own terms. Not many African-American women in the community had Sula’s nerve or guts”[5].

According to the psychologist Walsh “Self-injury” is intentional, self-effected, low-lethality bodily harm, of a socially unaccepted nature, performed to reduce and or communicate psychological distress” [6]. Eva’s intentional self-effected harm is non-lethal and is performed to reduce distress and get a way out in her miserable life. Similarly, Sula’s act is non-lethal and is performed to communicate the distress. There are many ways in which self-harm can be grouped or classified. According to Vague and Collins self-harm can be divided into four major types: Major, Stereotypic, Compulsive and Impulsive type [7]. Psychologist Walsh classifies self-harm into two major types; direct and indirect. Direct self-harm produces immediate damage to self and the intention is mostly unambiguous. Both Sula and Eva did direct self-harm to themselves. In indirect self-harm, the damage is cumulative and not immediate. The intention is often ambiguous. Indirect self-harmers often deny their intent to self-harm. According to Walsh, the “common examples of indirect self-harm are patterns of substance abuse...that damage physical health” [6]. There are a few characters in the novel Sula who deliberately engage in indirect self-harm. Plum, Eva’s son is seen in the novel as a heroin addict. He was drug-dependent, dejected and had lost his senses due to drug overdose. Eva’s husband Boy Boy is also portrayed as a drunkard. Similarly, the character Shad rack and Tar Baby in Eva’s house were heavy alcoholics. Morrison says, Tar Baby, “…was a mountain boy who stayed to himself, bothering no one, intent solely on drinking himself to death... For it soon became clear that he simply wanted a place to die privately but not quite alone” (Sula43).

In The Bleat Eyed by Toni Morrison there is another type of self-inflicting behavior that is seen. In The Bleat Eyed, the character Pauline is shown to greatly neglect her household because of her racial self-hating instinct. Pauline readily abandons her children and spouse for no reason other than racial self-hatred. Though there is no physical harm inflicted, this sort of negligence on one’s own self and family can be eventually destructive to all the people in the household. Pauline by neglecting her family does a kind of psychological self-harm to herself and her family.

3. SUICIDE DAY

Suicide is the most extreme form of self-harm. David Emile Durkheim (1858 –1917) was a French sociologist, social psychologist and philosopher. Durkheim had defined suicide and classified it into four major types. According to him, “...the term suicide is applied to all cases of death resulting directly or indirectly from a positive or negative act of the victim himself, which he knows will produce this result” [8].

In the initial part of the novel, the character Shadrack comes home from the World War I after being injured in the face and head. Shadrack suffers a psychic injury from the war. During World War I, Shadrack, who was barely twenty and his comrades, met the enemy on a French field in December 1917. He happens to witnesses the brutal death of his friend whose body continues moving forward
even after his head is severed and cut off from his body. This encounter with death and Shadrack's experiences in war leave him with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. He is admitted and treated in the Veterans Hospital. Unfortunately, he could not be completely mended and continues to have hallucinations and outbursts. Though he had survived death in World War I, he was shell-shocked and was in a state of shattered mind. He suddenly attacks a male nurse in the Veterans Hospital when the nurse attempts to feed him. Though he was not fully healed and restored, the Veterans hospital decides to release and discharge Shadrack in order to make room for other sick patients.

Shadrack was put into confinement after the attack. However, his illness gets compounded and disturbed mind becomes more agitated in the jail though he is unable to appropriately perceive it. In jail, he notices the reflection of his face in the toilet water. He finally perceives his facial injury in the water. After he sees a truer picture of himself, he becomes a bit calm and is able perceive a broader conception of his identity. His self-concept included the possibility of suicide. After his release from jail, he creates National Suicide Day, which almost no one in the town took seriously. He declares all by himself that January 3 would be National Suicide Day to order and focus experience. But it was as if his self-concept was so low that he felt like one of the walking dead. Suicide is a very selfish thing to do, depriving others through the loss, and depriving the self of life itself. Shadrack knew very well the whiff of death and was petrified of it, for he could not anticipate it. But if he knew when death could become imminent and come true, then probably there was nothing to fear for. According to Shadrack, "If one day a year were devoted to it [death], everybody could get it out of the way and the rest of the year would be safe and free" (Sula 199). Shadrack continues his parade on the same day every year. Initially, people from Bottom gave little importance to Shadrack and his suicide day. However, over years they got used to him and to the day to an extent that it became the fabric of life up in the Bottom. It was Tar baby who first willingly accepted the idea of the 'National Suicide Day.' Morrison says,

The people either accepted his own evaluation of his [Tar Baby] life, or were indifferent to it. There was, however, a measure of contempt in their indifference, for they had little patience with people who took themselves that seriously. Seriously enough to try to die. And it was natural that he, after all, became the first one to join Shadrack-Tar Baby and the deweys—on National Suicide Day. (Sula 43)

Towards the end of the chapter, the 'National Suicide Day' gains importance again. Sula was already dead and people in Bottom were happy about her death. On the eve of National Suicide Day in 1941, Shadrack is bound by solitude. He looks around for Sula’s purple-and-white belt, the only proof of his only visitor ever in his house. Many years ago, a weepy, startled girl with a tappale-like birthmark over one eye had come to his house. She had looked so nervous that he tried to comfort her with some words of reassurance, but he could manage only one word: “Always.” Then Sula had run away, leaving her belt behind. For the first time since the inception of National Suicide Day, Shadrack wanted to stay home with the memory of his one visitor. Morrison says, “Perhaps that was why for the first time after that cold day in France he was beginning to miss the presence of other people” (Sula 144).

Shadrack also remembers that Sula is no more. The sense of loneliness gets deeper and deeper in his mind. It was the second day of the New Year 1941, when Shadrack was contemplating his loneliness and the absence of Sula. And for the first time, he was hesitant to do his routine parade for the suicide day. Morrison says, “By his day-slash calendar he knew that tomorrow was the day. And for the first time he did not want to go” (Sula 147). He thinks that celebrating the ‘suicide day’ was not doing any good. Sula was another person whom he knew very well and remembered most of his days in his room by the memento that hang on the nail on his wall. In spite of all the suicide days sula’s face was the second one he knew very well who was no more. Morrison describes his feeling,

In the hallway he passed an open door leading to a small room. She lay on a table there. It was surely the same one. The same little-girl face, same tappale over the eye. So he had been wrong. Terribly wrong. No "always" at all. Another dying away of someone whose face he knew. It was then he began to suspect that all those years of rope hauling and bell ringing were never going to do any good. He might as well sit forever on his riverbank and stare out of the window at the moon. (Sula 147)

4. DEATH

To Shadrack's surprise, in the year 1941, National Suicide Day is celebrated by a lot of the townspeople. He was somehow sure that this suicide day would be the last of all. In the afternoon,
The Concept of Self-Harm in Toni Morrison's *Sula*

drenched in sunlight and “certain that this would be the last time he would invite them to end their lives neatly and swiftly, he walked over the rickety bridge and on into the Bottom” (*Sula* 148). Many people turned out to follow him, strutting, skipping, marching, and shuffling their way through the town. They marched up to the tunnel on the New River Road. In a state of mob anger and frustration because the tunnel construction jobs had been given to whites rather than to blacks for so many years, the townspeople climbed over the fence and smashed the construction site. The engrossment of the notion of suicide by the people of bottom may fit into the category ‘Patalistic Suicide’ as described by Durkheim. The townspeople were excessively regulated and their futures were pitilessly blocked and passions violently choked by the oppressive discipline. According to Durkheim, in overly oppressive societies, people may prefer to die than to carry on living within their society [8]. However, it was just the idea that was accepted by the people and no one would have wanted to kill themselves in actual fact. Their furious pitch of joy and revenge outraged which was fed by years of oppression, lost wages, and the poverty they have come to accept as a way of life. Unexpectly, the tunnel collapses in a wall of water, ice, and mud. As a result, many of the townspeople get killed, while Shadrack stands high up on the riverbank, ringing his bell. The tunnel, which initially symbolized freedom from the clutches of poverty and prejudice, deceived the townspeople. Paradoxically, Shadrack reluctantly leads those who rejoiced over Sula’s death to the exemplary celebration of National Suicide Day. He stands high on the riverbank, like a prophet ringing his bell on Judgment Day, as he watches a petrified flock of his community in a scene of sacrifice and judgment. Finally, the suicide day of 1941 brings the death of numerous people of Bottom. Death resounds again and again in the novel literally. In the beginning, the readers witness the death of a little boy, namely Chicken Little. And the middle chapters witness the death of Eva’s children Plum and Hannah. Both succumb to fire while Chicken Little’s life is taken away by water. Towards the end of the novel the main character of the novel, Sula, dies in her own style. Death is talked about much in the novel as much as it is witnessed by the readers.

The presence of the ‘National Suicide day’ in the novel is unusual and unique. Toni Morrison devoted two chapters for the description and main events of the ‘suicide day’. The reason Toni Morrison gave such an importance to ‘suicide’ may reflect the impact on her from her research on ‘suicide’ during her master’s degree program. The ‘suicide day’ though was found to be of little importance in the beginning of the novel, finally gets great emphasis from Morrison. ‘Suicide day’ ultimately involves the actual death of many people in the novel.

5. CONCLUSION

The presence of self-harm in the novel is augmented by its repetition and inclusion of the unique ‘suicide day.’ Both Sula and her grandmother Eva practiced self-harm. Their attitude is similar. Sula had the same quality in her as her grandmother. Toni Morrison has added to the sullenness of the novel by giving extra importance to the ‘suicide day.’ The event that happens in the last ‘suicide day’ in the year is a direct result of the frank internalization of the idea of ‘suicide’ by the community. Many people die on the last ‘suicide day’ which is weird and disastrous. Hence, Toni Morrison phenomenally introduces the concept of ‘Self-Harm’ and maintains it throughout the novel and successfully emphasizes it eventually in the end. Toni Morrison makes the presence of this unique concept of self-harm vivid till the end of the novel. The death of townspeople, though was caused by a catastrophic event and may not be directly related to self-harm, it is triggered and started by the people themselves as they willingly accepted the notion of celebrating such a notorious ‘suicide day.’ Besides this, the word ‘Death’ is seen to resound over and over again literally and through multiple incidents involving the actual death of many characters in the novel producing a melancholic mood in the novel. Hence, the concept of self-harm can be said to be present uniquely and abundantly in the novel *Sula*.

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