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African-American Female Journey Within in Toni Morrison's Sula**Ahmed Saeed Ahmed Mocbil*****Abstract:**

This paper investigates the African American female journey within in Morrison's Sula. It examines the boundaries within which Sula and Nel the protagonists in this novel respectively shape their journey within and to which extent they succeed in their journey within. It will trace how the female journey within grows, develops, transforms, and expresses itself. the paper will focus also on the direction, the import, and the praxis of the female journey within and it shows how these process relate to black feminist thought as portrayed in this novel This paper uses feminist approach to delineates the female protagonists attempt to achieve their journey within, both define their journey within in relation to others. The strong and independent Sula dies when the community rejects her; Nel, who has become more resolute, will have to confront the difficulties of life alone. Thus, by making them highly accountable to the members of their family and to the community, Morrison manipulates her protagonists to develop into less objectified selves The paper concludes by stating that Morrison depicts two forms of response to the need for journey within for the black woman in patriarchy and racially divided society. Nel exposes a system of repression and suppression; Sula challenges her social environment but seems compelled to learn to adjust to it, failing which her very existence would be challenged.

Keywords: Journey within, repression, suppression and racist society.

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رحلة البحث عن الذات للمرأة الأمريكية من أصل أفريقي في الرواية سولا للكاتبة الأمريكية توني موريسون

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الملخص:

يركز هذا البحث على دراسة رحلة البحث عن الذات للمرأة الأمريكية من أصل أفريقي في الرواية سولا للكاتبة الأمريكية من أصول أفريقية توني موريسون. حيث تهدف هذه الورقة البحثية لدراسة رحلة البحث عن الذات للبطلتان الرئيستان في هذه الرواية التي من خلالها تقوم كل من سولا ونيل بتشكيل رحلتها حول الذات وإلى أي مدى ينجحنا في بحثيهما ورحلتيهما. سوف يتبع هذا البحث كيف تنمو الرحلة الأثنوية للبحث عن الذات وكيف تتطور وتتحوّل وتعبر عن نفسها. كما أن الدراسة ستتركز أيضاً على الاتجاه والاستطراد والتطبيق العملي للرحلة الأثنوية في البحث عن الذات وتوضح كيف ترتبط هذه العملية بالفكر النسوي من ذوي الأصول الإفريقية كما تم تصويره في هذه الرواية سوف تتبع هذه الورقة البحثية المنهج التحليلي للرواية والنظرية الأثنوية للمرأة الأمريكية من الأصول الإفريقية حيث تتبع هذه الورقة البحثية المحاولات الأثنوية التي تحاول من خلالها البطلتان تحقيقها في رحلتيهما في البحث عن الذات، وكل واحدة منهما تحدد رحلتها عن ذاتها فيما يتعلق بالآخرين. ومن خلال أحداث الرواية وقبل نهايتها تموت سولا الشخصية القوية والمستقلة عندما يرفضها المجتمع. وبالنسبة للشخصية الأخرى نيل، التي أصبحت أكثر تصميمًا، سيتعين عليه مواجهة صعوبات الحياة وحدها. وهكذا، من خلال جعلهما كلاهما مسؤولتان بشكل كبير أمام أفراد أسرتهما والمجتمع، وتصور الكاتبة توني موريسون بطلاتهما وهما يتطوران إلى شخصيات ذوات فهم ونضج وموضوعية مع مرور أحداث الرواية. وتوصلت الورقة البحثية إلى النتائج التالية: صورت الكاتبة توني موريسون شكلين من أشكال الاستجابة للحاجة إلى البحث عن الذات للمرأة الأمريكية من ذوات الأصول الإفريقية في النظام الأبوي والمجتمع المنقسم عنصرياً. حيث تكشف شخصية نيل عن نظام الكبت والقمع ومع ذلك تحاول التكيف مع بيئتها. وتتحدى سولا بيئتها الاجتماعية ولكن يبدو أنها مضطرة للتعلم والتكيف معها، وإذا أخفقت في ذلك فإن وجودها ذاته سيواجه تحديات كبيرة.

الكلمات الأفتتاحية: رحلة البحث عن الذات، القمع، الكبت، والمجتمع العنصري.

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1. Introduction:

Toni Morrison is one of the greatest authors of the 20th Century, especially when considering that much of her literary work has actively challenged the stereotypes imposed on African-American women throughout history. The characters in Morrison's novels crafted to allow the reader to explore their journeys and the way in which they are presented, thus questioning the perspective of prevailing history. However, many of the stereotypes have undoubtedly stuck in the African American conscious and so it is necessary to initially perpetuate women in those images before examining exactly how to expel those stereotypes for good. The traditional perspectives on identity and its relation to culture, [Morrison] eschew binary logic to explore multiple forms and root causes of social marginality. As such, with this in mind, this paper will examine the African American female journey within Morrison's work and how it is constructed relates black feminist thought.

This paper intended to:

1- study the journey within in the main protagonists, Sula and Nel respectively within in *Sula* (1973) .

2- examine the boundaries within which Sula and Nel, respectively shape their journey within to which they succeed in reaching their selfhood.

2. The Method of the study:

This study will be done with a view to concluding that Morrison undoubtedly goes some way to dispelling such negative representations and furthers the achievements of black feminism thought in the process.

This paper will examine the boundaries within which Sula and Nel protagonists in Morrison's *Sula* respectively shape their journey within to which they succeed in reaching their selfhood. Valuable insights into the community can be derived from considering the implications of how each individual pursues her endeavors to enjoy a meaningful existence, challenging the boundaries and prejudices demystifying the society they live in. In illustrating how the female journey grows, develops, transforms, and expresses itself, the paper will focus on the direction, the import, and the praxis of the female journey within as portrayed in this novel.

In words of Maggie Galehouse (1999) that the journey within is essentially a learned social product arising out of the experiences with people, parents,

siblings, relatives, peers and general community within the setting of sociocultural milieu. However, this awareness may not happen all at once, as it is a dynamic-ongoing developmental process that begins during infancy and early childhood and continues until death. The social interaction goes a long way in shaping individual's activities and in resolving his/her problems.

A journey within is not just a vague religious concept for M. K Gandhi, but "it is the highest development of man". It is natural for human beings to aspire to higher things. This aspiration is the engine which drives man towards understanding of his potential in body, mind, and spirit. In her book *The Second Sex*, Simone De Beauvoir examines the reasons for "Othering woman". She maintains that the Other-woman-presumed the object according to the subject is deemed as en-soi; "therefore as a being" (160) and "it is in seeking to be made whole through her that man hopes to attain a journey within" (160). Nonetheless, de Beauvoir hopes that the myth of woman will be eradicated, and believes that, as long as women assert themselves, the feature of the other, " will die out in them. For her,

a myth, suggests a subject who propels his (male) hopes and fears toward transcendence. But since women do not promote themselves as subjects, " they have founded no virile myth in which their plans are revealed: they still dream through the dreams of men" (161). And to get out of this situation, Simone De Beauvoir feels that women should get a chance to express themselves from their perspective and by themselves towards getting their real selves. The main protagonist in the novel; *Sula* make an attempt in this direction, as it will be shown in the course of this paper.

Taking the above-mentioned aspects into consideration, this paper will examine the boundaries within which *Sula* and *Nel* protagonists in Morrison's *Sula* respectively shape their journey within to which they succeed in reaching their selfhood. Valuable insights into the community can be derived from considering the implications of how each individual pursues her endeavors to enjoy a meaningful existence, challenging the boundaries and prejudices demystifying the society they live in. In illustrating how the female journey grows, develops, transforms, and expresses itself, the paper will focus on the

direction, the import, and the praxis of the female journey within as portrayed in this novel.

3. Analysis:

Sula revolves around the story of two female characters, Sula Peace is the main protagonist of the novel. She is the daughter of Rekus who died when she was three years old and Hannah was a young and lonely girl of wild dreams. Sula was a heavy brown colored who had large eyes with a birthmark that resembled a stemmed rose to some and many varied things to others. She was born in 1910 to a very unstable family and is from that moment treated differently in the Bottom, the black section of Medallion, Ohio. From the time that she was very young, right until her death, Sula has denied her true emotions. She refuted her need for love and did not acknowledge her family and its impact on her. Sula is an irrational and wavering character. She is impulsive and follows her immediate passions, completely unaware of the feelings other people might have. Sula's unusual exorbitance results from an eccentric upbringing that openly accepts and welcomes transience. Sula is vulnerable and isolated from the rest of the world; because she is impulsive and

disregards the feelings of other people. The narrator describes Sula's house as a "throbbing disorder constantly awry with things, people, voices, and the slamming of doors" (*Sula* 52), which suggests a family accustomed to spontaneous disruptions and fleeting alliances. Sula decides that "sex is pleasant and frequent, but otherwise insignificant" (*Sula* 44). Sula grows up in the atmosphere of an emotional separation between mothers and daughters in her family. As has been stated, we see that the mothers provide only the physical maternal support, but that love lacks in the deep emotional manifestation to their children. Hannah and Eva, her mother, are also alienated. Under Eva's distant eye, and prey to her idiosyncrasies, her children grew up steadily" (41). This dissatisfaction causes Hannah to ask Eva, "Did you ever love us?" (*Sula* 67) "I know you fed us and all. I was talking about something else. Did you ever, you know, play with us?" (*Sula* 68) "Eva leaps out of the window to cover her daughter's body with her own" (*Sula* 75) to save her from a fire; she raises her children single-handedly and even sacrifices her leg to get an insurance because she does not have enough

money to feed her children. Proud of keeping her children alive through the roughest times, Eva does not realize that she needs to be more than a physical caretaker. In such an unrestricted household as the Peace family, with little emotional attachment and moral responsibilities, Sula grows up as an impetuous and ill-tempered girl but independent. After school, Sula follows a wildly divergent path and lives a life of fierce independence and total disregard for social conventions. Shortly after Nel's wedding, Sula leaves the Bottom for a period of ten years. She has many affairs, some with white men. However, she finds people following the same boring routines elsewhere, so she returns to the Bottom and to Nel. Upon her return, the town regards Sula as the very personification of evil for her blatant disregard of social conventions.

Shortly after Nel's wedding, Sula leaves the Bottom for a period of ten years. She has many affairs, some with white men. However, she finds people following the same boring routines elsewhere, so she returns to the Bottom and to Nel. Upon her return, the town regards Sula as the very personification of evil for her blatant disregard of social

conventions. Their hatred in part rests upon Sula's interracial relationships, but is crystallized when Sula has an affair with Nel's husband, Jude, who subsequently abandons Nel. Sula is alienated from other people, and does not view their feelings to be as real as her desires. She sleeps with Jude, Nel's husband, and leaves him soon afterward for another man. Even on her deathbed she refuses to recognize that she hurt Nel, as Nel says to Sula, "What did you take [Jude] for if you didn't love him and why didn't you think of me?" (Sula 144). Sula says: "Well, there was this space. And Jude filled it up. That's all" (Sula 144) and later she "puts Eva (her grandmother) out" (*Sula* 99) into an asylum, completely insensitive to Eva's condition there or the towns' opinion. In this novel, the mother figures play an important role in shaping the central characters towards their journey within. Sula is fatherless, and acquires most of her experiences from their mother: "daughters of distant mothers and incomprehensible fathers ... they found in each other's eyes the intimacy they were looking for" (Sula 52). Sula's household is ruled by her grandmother, Eva, and supervised by her mother, Hannah. Hannah was "a kind and

generous woman and that, coupled with her extraordinary beauty and funky elegance of manner, made them defend her and protect her from any vitriol that newcomers or their wives might spill” (Sula 44-5). Neither Eva nor Hannah was able to express her feelings to her children; Sula's need for love was first expressed at the beginning of the novel when she is twelve years old. Not realizing that Sula is nearby, Hannah, her mother, says: I love Sula. I just don't like her. Sula “only heard Hannah's words and the pronouncement sent her flying up the stairs. In bewilderment, she stood at the window fingering the curtain edge, aware of a sting in her eye” (Sula 57). Sula did not show that her mother's words truly hurt her. She ran away from the problem when she heard Nel call for her. Sula just went on to continue playing with Nel as if nothing had happened and even thought the words of her mother would ring in her head forever, reminding her of the agony and betrayal she felt when those words were uttered.

Family ties play a crucial factor for her journey within in this novel, as in Morrison's world, a family is an extension of the self, the means by which an individual is often judged. The

criticism from one's family is painful, as is the acceptance of its shortcomings. “Sula feels tired of the constant disorder at her mother's house, spent hours in the attic behind a roll of linoleum, galloping through her mind” (Sula 52). When Sula has come back to Medallion at the age of twenty-seven, her grandmother, Eva, affirms: “You need to have some babies. It'll settle you” (Sula 92), and Sula vehemently and self-confidently replies: “I don't want to make somebody else. I want to make myself” (Sula 92). Here, Sula's priority is obviously toward self-construction rather than turning into a breeder; an incubator to produce babies for public consumption. Eva shouts at *Sula's* face and says, “Selfish. Ain't no woman got no business floating around without no man?” (Sula 92), for her community believes that selfhood is equivalent to selfishness. Because Sula is investing in self, she is criticized by others as narrowly selfish and self-centered. This attitude makes Sula vulnerable to criticism and disapproval from others. However, to grow, she needs to experience the painful direct consequences of her actions and convictions. Indeed, throughout the conversation with her grandmother, Sula reiterates the notion

of me-ness: "Whatever burning in me is mine and it's mine to throw" (*Sula* 93). However, her growth and the acceptance of her environment or her new self can occur only when her relationships are sufficiently flexible to allow free interaction. Morrison in this novel focuses on the development of her protagonists, Sula and Nel. A female journey within has been the key to Sula's freedom. In her everyday routine, Sula believes that life should not be viewed as a problem to be solved, either because generally there are no answers or because she does not bother to look for them. Her conviction is that life is not an abstraction but an experience to be lived, a process: "I don't know everything; I just do everything" (*Sula* 143). Sula determines to lead her life the way she desires, "exploring her thoughts and emotions, giving them full reign, feeling no obligation to please anybody unless their pleasure pleased her" (*Sula* 118). Thus, she wants to separate herself from the conditions that produce women's dependence and subordination. She defies the definition of woman determined by her community; instead, she strives for self-assertion. The conceptions of knowledge and behavior that are

articulated in *Sula* have been shaped by a male-dominated culture. Against this strong background, Sula tries to draw on her perspective and vision to create an identity that defies social expectations and constraints and allows her to live in liberty.

In her authentic efforts towards her journey within, Sula has to encounter several obstacles. The mental makeup and disposition of Sula makes her defy a certain set of social codes that make her a stranger in her community. Her contemporaries were hypocritical and women "began to cherish their husbands and wives, protect their children, repair their homes and in general band together against the devil in their midst" (*Sula* 117-18). What is remarkable is that the people there break the bond that Nel and Sula once shared. "It had surprised her a little and saddened her a good deal when Nel behaved the way the others would behave. She was one of the reasons she had drifted back to Medallion" (*Sula* 120). We are further told that Now Nel was one of them and Sula sees that Nel refuses to be alive and that she "belonged to the town and all of its ways. She had given herself over to them, and the flick of their tongues

would drive her back into her little dry corner” (*Sula* 120). Because she has been unsuccessful in reaching out to someone, Sula decides to give an opportunity to others to become as intimate with their selves as she had done in the past. Therefore, the only possible way for her to carry on with life is not to be intimate with someone but live in solitude.

The community at the Bottom looks at Sula as “evil”. She is treated as “evil” because of her independent spirit, her daring nature and her disdain for their values. This part of the novel reveals a dimension of how Sula interacts with and her nurture. The novelist says, “the people in the Bottom said Sula was a roach . . . and said she was a bitch”, and the men said that “Sula slept with white men” (*Sula* 112) as if adultery with white men was a more heinous crime. The people at the Bottom also consider that “all unions between white men and black women be a rape; for a black woman to be willing was literally unthinkable. In that way, they regarded integration with precisely the same venom that white people did” (*Sula* 113). The comfort of the black community members lies in their will to validate their forces against the

intrusions of the outside world: “The purpose of evil was to survive it, and they determined (without ever knowing they had made up, their minds to do it) to survive floods, white people, tuberculosis, famine, and ignorance” (*Sula* 90). Sula's intrinsic character and her emotional dispositions and capacity for amoral relationships make it possible for society to make her a scapegoat.

Pointing out the horrendous evil tendencies in *Sula*, Joseph Wessling in his book *Narcissism in Toni Morrison's Sula* (1988) , maintains that “Their [the communities] use of Sula as a devil figure serves them well, helping them to define themselves and to cope with their own evil tendencies” (289). Hence, they use Sula as a scapegoat for their evil and a rigid and well-ingrained set of values is at the center of their beliefs and principles. However, Sula does not distinguish between good and evil, between what is intrinsically a valuable quality and a destructive defect: “Being good to somebody is just like being mean to somebody. Risky, you do not get anything for it” (*Sula* 144-45). Unlike Nel, who has grasped the meaning and implications of being good, Sula is far from realizing that she

has hurt Nel when she entertained adultery with Jude. Wessling further sees Sula's relationship with others except that of Nel and Ajax as one of "amorality rather than immorality, and one of narcissistic indifference" (289). It is not with detached fascination, not with horror nor with satisfaction, does that Sula witness her mother burn to death. This convinces her community all the more to believe that she embodies evil: "Sula was probably struck dumb, as anybody would be who saw her mamma burn up" (*Sula* 78), but "Eva remained convinced that Sula had watched Hannah burn not because she was paralyzed, but because she was interested" (*Sula*78). Sula is also very evasive and unclear concerning the reason that incited her to seduce her closest friend's husband: "Well, there was this space. In addition, Jude filled it up. That is all. He just filled up the space" (*Sula* 144). There was no attempt whatever deliberately made by her to swap her friend's husband. Sula keeps striving in vain to reach a sense of self in the words of Barbara Christian: "She is not looking for another entity but for another version of herself, for a total union possible only when each perceives the other as possibly being his

or her self" (Black Women Novelist 167). This shows the nature of character of Sula.

In her conception of *Sula*, Morrison could not really define good and evil because, for her, sometimes good resembles evil, and vice versa. The novelist explains in an interview with Robert B.Step to that "evil is as useful as good as, although good is generally more interesting; it is more complicated. I mean, living a good life is more complicated than living an evil life, I think" (216). There is a correlation with de Beauvoir's rendering of the equation woman/other/evil: For if woman is not the only "Other, it remains nonetheless true that she is always defined as the other. . . The Other is Evil; but being necessary to the Good, it turns into the Good; through it, I attain to the whole, but it also separates me there from" (*Beauvoir* 162). It is the persecution that Sula faces that is highlighted, and a callous community that stifles her self-image all the time. What we find is the abiding hypocrisy of the community that marginalizes Sula.

Sula defies the long-honored role and values of patriarchy that were deemed appropriate for a woman when she

chooses to be independent, inquisitive, and strong-willed in her journey within. She discards the belief that a given structure should circumscribe her life or a common tradition limits her vision. Sula possesses a perception that is different from that of her community; it enables her to widen her horizons: "Their [peoples] evidence against Sula was contrived, but their conclusions about her were not. Sula was distinctly different" (*Sula* 118). Since she refuses to abide by any traditional bondage, her entire her life represents a rejection of traditional notions of feminine respectability. Sula represents an immense threat to her community because of her radical thoughts and experiences and her refusal to be submissive to its values and beliefs, which are male-centric. Instead, she relies entirely on her own nihilistic experiences: "the first experience taught her there was no other that you could count on; the second that there was no self to count on either" (*Sula* 118–19). Her journey within is rooted in her deep sense of the self and her natural faith that women should not be brutalized by men. Sula in the process of journey within finds herself as a marginalized woman, she is unable to commune with

the external world and thus, is forced to turn to an inner world: "She was completely free of ambition, with no affection for money, property or things, no greed, no desire to command attention or compliments, no ego. For that reason, she felt no compulsion to verify herself-be consistent with herself" (*Sula* 119). Though she seeks total freedom, Sula needs someone else with whom she can merge and achieve wholeness. Unable to reach personal freedom or a meaningful relationship with another human being, "she fails; consequently, she seeks discovery within and withdraws from the outside world, which culminates in her death" (*Sula* 149).

Commenting on the significance of the death of the protagonist character, Sondra O'Neal in her article *Race, Sex and Self: Aspects of Building in Select Novels by Black American Novelists* writes that "when creativity cannot be attained or sexual assurance realized, authorial narrators present death as the only alternative. Thus, the death in Morrison's *Sula*" (*O'Neal* 35). Against this argument, Sula's death has many dimensions: the Afro-American society is too narrow with its patriarchal world view and suffocating woman like Sula.

Such an Afro-American and American society sadly acquires a negative image in the context of women. Shedding light on those who hinder Sula's growth, Morrison writes: "it was the men who gave her the final label. They were the ones who said she was guilty of the unforgivable thing, the thing for which there was no understanding, no excuse, no compassion" (*Sula* 112). Sula attempts to break out of such a situation by rejecting such a world: "Sula acknowledged none of their attempts to counter-conjure, or their gossip, and seemed to need the services of nobody" (*Sula* 113). She employs strategies of subversion and law-breaking in an aspect of liberation that women must confront from its various angles in its different guises, as Shortens Spellens rightly comments on Sula. "She had determined to lead her life the way she desires, exploring her thoughts and emotions, giving them full reign, feeling no obligation to please anybody unless their pleasure pleased her" (Spellens 118). And Sula's journey within lies in such attempts. Sula embarks on a flight from responsibility and sees that a women sphere is one of dependence and assumed inferiority. She disdains the female role and protests by discarding

marriage and asserting her independence of others control, as Jude thinks: "A funny woman. . . But he could see why she wasn't married; she stirred a man's mind maybe, but not his body" (*Sula* 104). When her grandmother, Eva asks her, "When you have gone to get married? You need to have some babies, till settle you. To which Sula replies; "I don't want to make somebody else. I want to make myself" (*Sula* 92). Endowed with stamina and brightness, Sula refuses to surrender her autonomy and freedom. She insists on being her mistress and guide, but she is bound by a false, crippling social code. Though she rejects the woman's role imposed on her, she is not free, and so it seems, to be whatever her unconscious desire wants her to be. Unlike Nel, Sula in her journey within chooses the aggressive path of challenging and threatening social forces and attempts to define her world from a center of self: "Sula was trying them out and discarding them without any excuse the men could swallow. So, the women, to justify their judgment, cherished their men more, soothed the pride and vanity Sula had bruised" (*Sula* 115). This demonstrates how she refuses to abide by any

traditional bondage; her entire life represents a bold rejection of traditional notions of female respectability.

Through *Sula*, Morrison draws attention to the issue of African-American female journey within, hoping to clarify the way it is defined, the way it becomes perverted and the way it can be realized and affirmed in American society. Sula wants to separate herself from the conditions that produce women's dependence and subordination, and from the women who cannot escape them: "she knew well enough what other women said and felt, or said they felt" (*Sula* 119). Although she believes that to have a loving relationship is the most important thing in marriage, Sula is frightened that the power of love may overcome control of the self: but having no intimate knowledge of "marriage. . . She was ill prepared for the possessiveness of the one person she felt close to" (*Sula* 119). For her, the emotion of love makes individuals act and behave in a way that contradicts reason and causes a loss of will; because she wants to possess control and will, which are traditionally viewed as male goals, Sula appears to be the messenger of a new age. The emotion of

love also brings in the risk of one's being undervalued and also of being viewed as a dependent creature: the men who took her to one or another of those places had merged into one large personality: "the same language of love, the same entertainments of love, the same cooling of love" (*Sula* 120-21); they viewed her as a female rather than as a person of intellect and dignity: She had been looking all along for a friend, and it took her a while to discover that a lover was not a comrade and that no one would ever be that version of herself which "she sought to reach out to and touch with an unloved hand" (*Sula* 121). Sula tries to mold the world according to her wishes and desires, both to secure a protective role for her journey within to experience a sense of freedom from the female predicament as conditioned by the society. However, unable to transform reality, Sula's attempt hinders her knowledge of herself, and ultimately, she severs herself from all relationships with her fellow human beings, even with Nel.

Sula is ready to confront the possibility of finding no course of action suited to her awareness of herself as an individual, or of finding no one who can understand what is happening to her. In

fact, she learns how limited her capacity is in shaping the world according to her wishes, and how elusive and precarious is the autonomy she treasures: "In a way, her strangeness, her naiveté, her craving for the other half of her equation was the consequence of an idle imagination" (*Sula* 121). As the story comes to a close, we see Sula out of her pride with humility and self-assertion. "She might have exchanged the restlessness and preoccupation with whim for an activity that provided her with all she yearned for" (*Sula* 121). Only when Sula perceives the power of loneliness and introspection, she starts to understand her heart and her deep self. It is during the last conversation between Nel and Sula, just before Sula's death that shows her effort towards journey within. When an exasperated Nel draws Sula's attention to her arrogant attitude towards her as her friend, Sula answers with laughter: "What are you talking about? I like my own dirt, Nel. I'm not proud" (*Sula* 71 142). When Nel states that because she is a woman and a colored woman, Sula cannot act like a man, Sula replies: You say I'm a woman and colored. Ain't that the same as being a man?" (*Sula* 142). In her view, Sula is in a white society

being a woman and black is as good as being a black man, for both are suppressed and do not have adequate opportunity to fulfill their goals. She may also be suggesting that, though their society is based on a dominantly masculine system in which the female role is determined; Sula encourages women to use the outside world as a sphere of action. She wants to live her sexual life just as a liberal man does. However, she is not a "whore, but she is labeled as such by her community. Sula also affirms that all black women are dying, just as she is. "But the difference is they die like a stump. Me, I'm going down like one of those redwoods. I sure did live in this world. . . I got me" (*Sula* 143). Sula's emphasis on me and mine signify her relentless and peculiarly private quest for individuation, independence, and selfhood which have generated in her a struggle for psychological, economical, and physical survival.

Morrison wants Sula to be missed by the reader. That is why she dies early in her life. Just as her town and community misses her, the novelist explains in her interview with Robert B. Stepto that she wants the readers "to miss her presence ... and to dislike her

lot, and to be fascinated” (218). She also wonders whether any reader ever realized that “she [Sula] never does anything as bad as her grandmother or her mother did. However, they are alike” (218). Here the novelist seems to be sympathizing with Sula because the community is responsible in one way and another for her behavior.

The other significant character is Nel. She is the daughter of Helene Wright and Wiley. She was born in 1910. Furthermore, she was lighter and could have passed for a white girl if she had been a few shades lighter. Likewise, she was a silly, unimaginative girl living in a very strict and regimented life. Nel's family believes deeply in social conventions; though it is very conformist and patriarchal, the family members lack in emotional attachments. Her parents marry out of convenience, rather than love. For Nel's mother, the absences of her husband, a sailor, were “quite bearable”. Nel is raised in an atmosphere of “oppressive neatness” (*Sula* 29), a strict and organized household that deeply instills society rules in her. Nel's mother constantly attempts to destroy Nel's free spirit and rich imagination. Under Helene's hand, the girl became obedient and polite.

Any enthusiasms that little Nel showed were calmed by the mother until she drove her daughters' imagination underground. “Don't just sit there, honey, you could be pulling your nose” (*Sula* 28). This emotional vacuum compels the girl to seek her missing components in others company. Although this would seem to lead to a sorrowful existence, it was exactly this kind of environment that determines Nel's serene and preserving disposition. In her trip with her mother to visit her dying great-grandmother in the south has a profound effect on Nel's life. Later that same day, while in bed, Nel starts thinking about the different stages of the trip and realizes that she has been on a real journey because she feels different: she has discovered me-ness as she says: I'm me. I'm not their daughter. I'm not Nel. I'm me. Me” (*Sula* 28). In many ways, the trip made her realize her “selfless and look at things around her in a different light, eventually sowing the seeds that initiated the friendship between herself and Sula. This process of self-discovery prompts her to foster a strong friendship with Sula, despite Helene's disdain for Sula's mother. Though she reveals stability at home, some might characterize it as

rigid, she is uncertain about the conventional life of her mother, Helene wants for her; these doubts are hammered home when she meets Rochelle, her grandmother and a former prostitute, the only unconventional woman in her family line.

Nel meets Sula at Garfield Primary School after knowing each other at a distance for over five years. Nel's mother had told her that she could not interact with Sula because of Sula's mother's sooty ways. The intense and sudden friendship between them which was to last many years was originally cultivated for five years. The period in history and the disposition of the people in their immediate surroundings played an impressive part in the formulation of the friendship between Sula and Nel. When they first met at school, it was as if they were always destined to be friends. Each one complimented the other one. After high school, Nel chooses to marry and settles into the conventional role of wife and mother.

During the period of her marriage, Nel realizes through her journey within that a contradiction exists between her status as a real human being and her vocation as a female. Thus, finding a balance

between the demands of the self and the demands of others generates the most serious conflict that Nel encounters in her life. In contravention of the customs of the Bottom, through her journey within, Nel realizes eventually that one can never entirely rely on anyone, especially when her closest friend, Sula, deceives her. It is only when she ponders about her life that she measures how friendless and deserted she had felt in Sula's absence. Nel's return to the meaning of the tie she had with Sula and a certain continuity of the quest for self where she had left it after she got married. She says: "all the time, all the time, I thought I was missing Jude" (*Sula* 174), it is only through her journey within, Nel eventually understands that it is Sula whom she is missing not Jude. "O Lord, Sula, she cried" (*Sula* 174). The narrator adds, "It was a fine cry-loud and long-but it had no bottom and it had no tap, just circles and circles of sorrow" (*Sula* 174). Here is a yearning, desperate feeling that indicates Sula's absence. Finally only Nel's regaining her friendship with Sula had enabled her to evolve, to seek self-fulfillment, and to free herself from some of her mother's constraints and those of the community as well. From

the analysis of this novel the study finds that both Sula and Nel embodied oneness yet distinct “me-ness,” but at a certain point in their lives they take up different paths, and consequently, construct a different pattern for their meaning of self. Nel’s life had expands, for a time, around her husband and their children, but because of Sula, she experiences the excitement of being human and has had the opportunity to go beyond her community’s limitations. Sula’s existence had always revolves around her quest for self and development. Sula and Nel's journey within transform their silence into dialogue and action, and they try to achieve their quest within family and community boundaries.

Conclusion:

In their attempt to achieve their journey within, both define their journey within in relation to others. The strong and independent Sula dies when the community rejects her; Nel, who has become more resolute, will have to confront the difficulties of life alone. Thus, by making them highly accountable to the members of their family and to the community, Morrison manipulates her protagonists to develop into less objectified selves. Morrison

depicts two forms of response to the need for journey within for the black woman in patriarchy and racially divided society. Nel exposes a system of repression and suppression; Sula challenges her social environment but seems compelled to learn to adjust to it, failing which her very existence would be challenged.

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