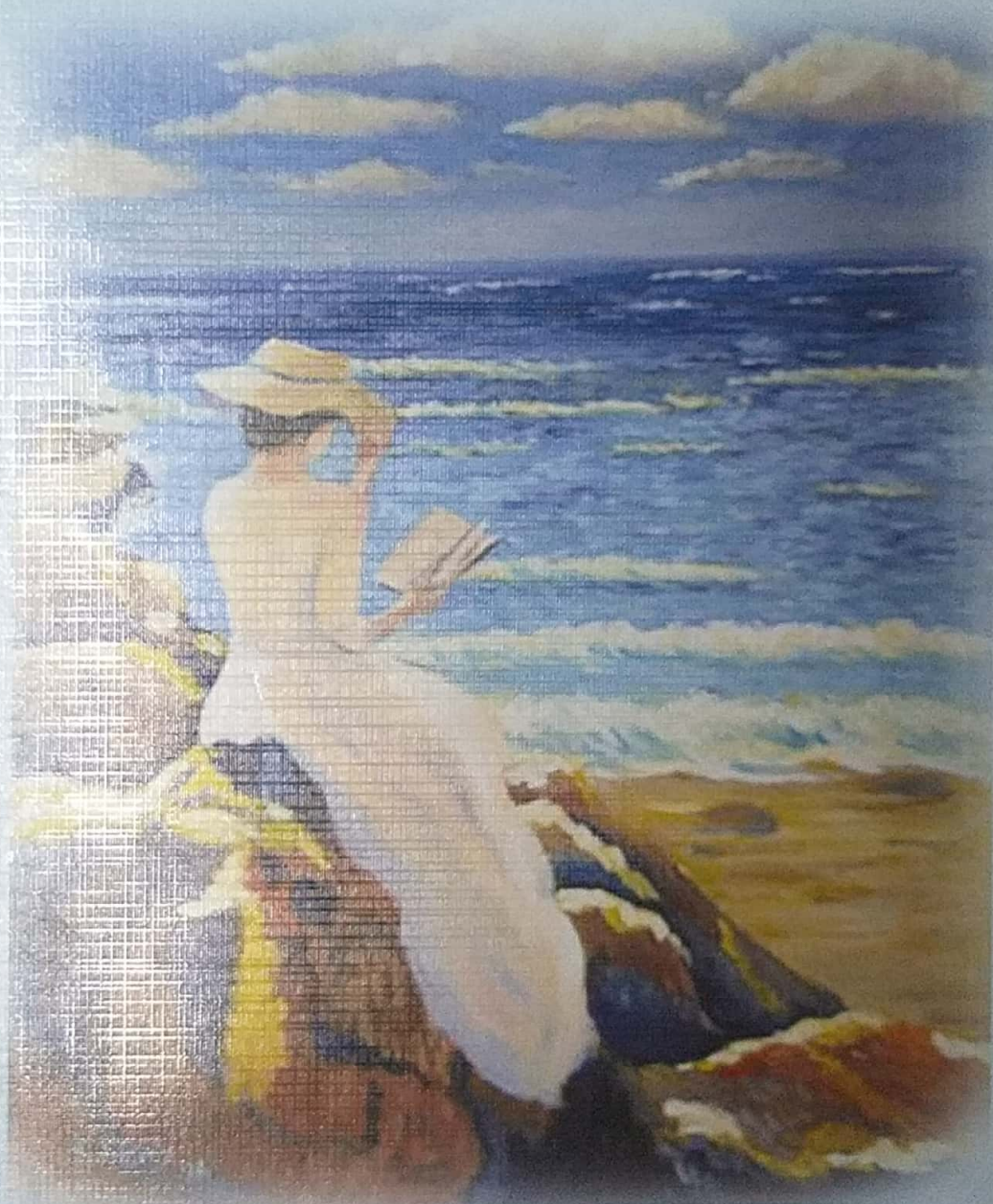


FATHOMLESS OCEAN

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DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
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PERIYAKULAM, TAMILNADU, INDIA

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INNERSELF AND FEMININE IDENTITY: A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON TONI MORRISON'S *SULA* AND BAMA'S *KARUKKU*

A. GREENI

This paper analyses how the self identity of black and Dalit women is exploited in their respective communities. Morrison's *Sula* presents the binary oppositions of self/other and good/evil in order to explore multiple, fluid and changing black sufferings in different forms. Her search for identity is the central theme of the novel. At this juncture, *Bama* is one of the first woman in Dalit writers through her autobiography '*Karukku*' which throws light on the most agonizing and wretched lives of the Dalits. The most suppressed and oppressed part of our country is none other than the Dalit women. *Bama* has an urge to create a new society made up of justice, equality and love. She dreams of the oppressed Dalit community getting united and fighting for their rights as the blacks did in America.

Introduction

Toni Morrison looks from different angles of Afro-American community which is a part, of the custom and tradition in which the people deal with pain, fear, sex and death. Morrison focuses on the women characters who are highly dominated by the community of Bottom which is willing to satisfy the sexual needs in others. She strikes at the fact that there are a lot of references about sex. Firstly, in an erotic foreplay between Jude and Sula this has been clearly exposed in the bed room. In this aspect, when Sula searches for her identity through her affair with Jude.

Smith, a critic, argues that Sula's relationship with Nel is not only in terms of a passionate friendship, it also expresses the mutual understanding of each other. Moreover, Nel is a white, the relationship is very much interracial as well. After the death of Sula, Nel is quite nostalgic of those relationship she had with Sula.

Morrison chooses the other notion of sexuality. She makes the generic observations of Hannah's sex views "Hannah has to be needed to touch men on every day". It's continued in a minute by minute, time to time, once in a half-an-hour and so on. This is Hannah's attitude about sex influence on Sula. Morrison comments that Sula and Hannah had a love-him-and-leave-him attitude. They didn't show any attachment. Due to lack of her motherly love, Hannah doesn't look after anybody else from the community.

Smith acknowledges this and suggests that Morrison as a black woman especially is reluctant to abandon her. Hetro sexist assumes, "Hetro sexual privilege is usually the only privilege that Black women have"(2313). Morrison suggests that hetro sexual relationship with Sula and many affairs has to be practiced in the community of Bottom. According to most of the residents of the Bottom, the worst thing a black woman like such can do is to sleep with a white man. "They insisted that all unions between white men and black woman be rape; for a black woman to be willing was literally untouchable"

Bama portrays that Dalit women face extreme hardships, and violent conditions in their struggle for livelihood, sexual and other forms of violence against Dalit women, who make up the majority of agricultural labourers in India. This has become a potent weapon in the hands of the upper- caste community in preserving the deprived status of the Dalits. Bama mainly concentrates on her autobiographical novel *karukku* which recreates her past life as a pariya girl, a teacher and a nun. In the same way, Bama says most of the males of pariya community were arrested and a few had disappeared into the mountain jungle. The police behaved deplorably towards the women. They use obscene language and swore at them by telling them that since their husbands were away they should entertain the police at night.

Bama shows another instance in *Karukku* from her childhood memories which voiced the joys and sorrows of her people, oppressed by higher castes in India. She saw the humiliation in her grandmother and her mother, father in the fields and the homes of landlords. Despite the memories she had a carefree childhood. Afterwards Bama says that there

are thousand difficulties which beset a Dalit woman living on her own, yet the truth is that in her position as an independent woman, there are many opportunities for her to spend her life to work for the liberation of Dalits.

When Bama analysed the caste differences in society, she began to wonder, 'what did they mean when they call us "paraiya? Had the name become obscene? But we too are human beings?(13) Bama started to look out for means to uplift herself and her community from this trampled existence. Meanwhile, Toni Morrison imposed on self identity when Sula depicts her past life with nostalgic memories very often. Earlier, Sula believes that the freedom referred by immigration will give her a new identity. Nel's freedom is limited by the conflicting influences internal versus external in her own life. She is brought up with a sense of dignity in their family. Sula's woman characters who choose certain desirous paths as themselves about what's right and wrong often create problems of those around them. In the same way, Bama clearly noted that If a Dalit woman neglects their restrictions she would become condemned as an object of hatred in the society. It's clear that both women are 'self' through the ups and downs of their lives.

The Afro-American writers were a source of inspiration to the Dalit writers particularly the treatment of suffering and identity in their works. Both the blacks and the Dalits were slaves. Blacks were total slaves as they were bought and sold like 'animals' to buy freedom from their masters. But in the Indian society freedom from untouchability could not be bought as it was imposed from birth. In *Karukku*, the emphasis was more on the relationship between the self and community. "The self questioning has begun in Bama with wonder, Bama writes "what did it mean when they called as 'paraiya' Had the name become that obscene?(16). Bama starts to watch out for means to uplift her community from this dismal existence. Her elder brother tells her that education is the right path and the only way to attain liberty and equality. The chief source of creative tension in *karukku* becomes the "identity crisis that she experienced during a decisive situation in her life"

Bama comments that not only paraiya women were regarded as slave, sexually abused and touchable by the untouchable but also separate identity by their community. When Bama wrote *karukku* she didn't have the courage to reveal her Dalit identity which swallowed the very words that came into her mouth. She says that in this society if one is born a low-caste, then he has to live the life of humiliation and degradation until his death. Bama has highly differentiated on the paraiya and chaaliar how they are placed in a difficult situation from the community identity. On the other hand, new restrictions have been imposed on sula after her return to the bottom. The community's labeling of sula as evil and bewitched.

Morrison views on mothers are that they are leading an important role in the families for their children, husband, neighbourhood and a kin of other places and so on. For instance, Helene has developed the reflection of Nel but at the same time sula has developed the reflection of Hannah due to lack of her parental care". The community comes together in self-defence against evil. By certain references, Bama wanted to become a nun because she wanted to help the people of her Dalit community through her service of reducing poverty, the child deprived of attending school and stay at home, collecting the firewood, looking after the house, caring for the babies and doing household chores.

Both the novels of *Sula* and *Karukku* make the concept of masculinity as one of the major arguments in the feministic world around the universe. Accordingly, Bama believes that in a male dominated society., Dalit women suffer unimaginable oppression, through not only caste but gender too, from which there is no escape. In the same way, Morrison concentrates on the man protagonist Sula who is a social outcast. Unless she agrees for man's sex in the bedroom, she can't survive her routine life. So she searches for sex in different views. Nel marries Jude and both make the object of parasite. In the same way, Bama tries to overcome by their male dominant culture. She wants to make up herself as a protection of their Dalits. Finally, Bama has taken the extreme step to control the term of masculinity. As far as man power is concerned, Dalits can become highly helpless.

Apart from the above tortures the problem of patriarchal set-up has been raised in both novels. It chooses to analyse why this novel has been sexually discriminated which explores some of the instances who are Sula, Eva and Hannah into the patriarchal societies. In both countries women lose their dignity and self-respect through patriarchy. However Morrison, the celebrated Afro American writer and Bama Dalit writer are conscious of the marginalization and sexual discrimination meted out to woman through the patriarchal societies.

Bama condemned that men look down upon women on the basis of patriarchal notions. The prevailing concepts of gender that are conceived to constitute what is masculine and What is feminine identity, Personality and behavior are largely, if not entirely, cultural constructs that were generated by patriarchal biases. Feminism shows that the woman is guilty in so far as they show a fatalistic acceptance of sexual colonialism. They think that they are powerless and find no way to save themselves against exploitation and victimization.

Conclusion

Feminism movement and literature emphasize that women are individual and that they can affirm their capacity to be strong-willed, independent and also autonomous. While women are kept on a pedestal as a mother, she is also conceived as a sex object, the sources of pleasure and comfort. A beautiful woman is often celebrated outside the premises of marriage. A Woman who is a sex object is the reservoir of all sexual passions. She quenches her own sexual thrust and fulfils the man's too, and if, at all the marriages take place then a woman has to cross various hurdles to get that happy/holy knot. "Marriages may be made in heaven" But a woman lives in hell. Both the novels criticize many eastern countries to devalue women and neglect their role in all their spheres. Hence it has been a universal phenomenon that women have been treated as marginalized, historically.

Towards the end, the novels close with a note of optimism on the Blacks and Dalits. Both reveal women's painful experiences in different forms. Bama clearly shows that Dalit women have no courage and

confidence to compete with in the male-dominated world. In the same way, Morrison strongly opposed that as a black she has been tortured in many way in her society. Their women have been forced to be sometime called as Jezebels.

The protagonist Sula's concepts have only self-identity and self-determination. The women characters that choose certain paths for themselves-who choose to pursue their desires and follow their own ideas about what's right and wrong often create problems of those around them. But these characters benefit from a clear sense of 'self' that sustains: then through the ups and downs of their lives. Bama takes necessary steps to control the manpower in the form of oppression. They were inhumanly treated, insulted and humiliated in the name of race, sex and caste which they belonged. Dalit status has often been associated with occupation which is regarded as ritually impure such as removal of waste and leather work. They work as manual labourers, cleaning latrines and sewage and clearing away human excreta. As a result, they were commonly segregated and they suffered from severe economic disabilities.

Morrison clearly shows that the black community forces many people that they should be practiced as usual one rather than unusual one. The community creates a community or set of community values around the antagonism of Sula, when she dies, they fall apart. They can't do it on their own. Similarly, Nel is the pillar of the black community. Sula has become paraiya. To a large extent, Morrison's famous novel Sula deals with the problem of self-identity and above all it obviously shows she is away from the community. She can achieve the whole and become victorious with a great identity. The protagonist also has been a willing victim to the circumstances of being exploited by the exploiters. Morrison frames herself when a protagonist is transformed into a new woman of 'self', through her searching of lesbian, heterosexual, generic relationship.

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