

The time sequence in a novel becomes its lifeline and *Sula* is designed with the hues of exact years, marked in the calendar of twentieth century. According to E.M. Forster, storytelling is the fundamental aspect of the novel. It rouses our curiosity and sustains our interest till the very end. Morrison's narrative allows us to form a series of pictures, concerning a set of people who had a significant role to play in the mass movement for a changed and better future for humanity. The period mentioned in the novel is that of Negro Renaissance or the New Negro Movement. The battle cry of this movement was to regenerate the negroes spiritually and mentally, to help them regain their lost vigour and potency and to once again restore their self-esteem. Morrison's *Sula* narrates the events in the lives of Eva Peace, Nel Wright, Helene Wright and Sula Peace during this period of general awakening among the blacks. Male characters are in the background, the female characters are strong and rounded and they dominate action in *Sula*. The daring Eva Peace leaves a strong and lasting impression because of her indomitable spirit and high self-esteem. Morrison begins with the account of Helene Wright, the daughter of a Creole whore. Helene tries to hide her mixed blood limitations by adopting meticulous ways, superior airs and by joining a conservative black church. Helene is a strong woman in her own way.

All in all her life was a satisfactory one. She loved her house, and enjoyed manipulating her daughter and her husband. She would sigh sometimes before falling asleep thinking that she had indeed come far enough away from the Sundown house. (*Sula*, p.18)

Still Helene displays the feminine weakness of acting a coquette when defenseless. The white conductor's insulting manner, forces her to do so. Then, for no earthly reason at least no reason that anybody could understand, certainly no reason that Nel understood then or later, she smiled. Like a street pup that wags its tail at the very doorjamb of the butcher shop he has been kicked away from only moments before. (*Sula*, p.21) Helene's daughter Nel is different from her mother. She is an example of self-awakening. After the trip to New Orleans having witnessed the humiliation of her mother on the train, Nel realizes that she had gone on a real trip and now she was different.

"I am me", She whispered "Me" Nel didn't know quite what she meant but on the other hand she knew exactly what she meant. "I'm me. I'm not their daughter. I'm not Nel. I'm me. (*Sula*, p.28)

At age ten this awareness of self, hints at the active mind of the girl child whose self-trust further leads her to befriend Sula. In the beginning, Nel is Sula's double. Both go together as adolescents, unshaped formless things. "Using each other to grow on finding in each other's eyes the intimacy they were looking for." As doubles they get with each other well. For Nel, Sula's return to Bottom after a gap of ten years was like getting the use of an eye back, having a cataract removed. The two are likened to "two throats and one eye." However, as time passes the difference between them becomes apparent. As an individual, Nel reveals her depth of character when after Chicken Little's drowning she keeps the secret to herself till the very end. Though married and fulfilling the role of a mother and wife, she fully supports Sula and enjoys her company. If Sula

was cynical in her remarks, Nel did not refute them. Nel realizes a renewed interest in her love life after Sula's return, but the episode of Sula bedding with Jude, Nel's husband, breaks this relationship. Ultimately Jude leaves his family forever. However in the end Nel overcomes her depression, creates a new life for herself and finally in the end realizes that it was not Jude but Sula whom she missed. Nel is an example of co-operative alliance with another woman. Psychologist Naomi Weisstein deconstructs a psychology that had construed patriarchy as nature. In critique she exposed the fallacy of turning a patriarchal 'is' into a psychological "ought" and under scored the dangers of bestowing scientific authority on sexism. Morrison has envisioned the process of self-awareness in a girl child of nine years and reiterated the honesty of relationship forged in childhood in ripe adulthood. This boldness in the acceptance of sisterhood despite Sula's rejection by her community is a long leap towards gender consciousness and gender balance. The sincere resistance to male authority disassociated women from their honest voices. It led them to speak the language of male approval. For after all Sula is not based on rejection of men by women but a wholesome agreement which asserts women's right to lead independent lives and make their own decisions. An Amazon by temperament, Eva Peace stands out as a woman of wit and grit. She has been acknowledged as one of the most strong female characters in Black Fiction. Eva's determination to do away with her leg and adorn the remaining one so that a perpetual line of male visitors was a regular feature of the Peace house, speaks for Eva's independence and her mysterious feminine charm. Because of her wheel-chair, she was positioned much lower than her visitors. All three Peace women Eva, Hannah, Sula loved maleness and yet these women had their own opinion and choice about male-female relationship. After being deserted by Boy-Boy, Eva is the hardened determined, unsentimental black woman, who has witnessed unspeakable sorrow and suffered great misery. Black women for centuries were witnesses to the snatching away of their children, being wrenched from their families, subjected to most agonizing and humiliating physical abuse, and sold and bought as commodities. From the point of view of existentialism Sula possesses the warrior spirit. She does not feel powerless. Simone de Beauvoir in her world view states. The power of a competent woman over a man is not an illusion. A man may think he is in charge of a situation by virtue of his power to degrade and subdue a woman, but with a woman of competence and spirit this power is not incontrovertible. Sula is a continuum of self-discovery that Pecola attempted and failed. While Pecola's search forces her into a perennial madness, Sula ends in death through denial. "She had no center, no speck around which to grow" (Sula, p.119). The 'center', here is Morrison's metaphor for the black community in Bottom. The black community in Bottom by enforcing its definition of woman as wife, mother and a man's lover, thwarts female self. Sula challenges rather than acquiesces believing in her existential me-ness. She resists in toto Bottom's conventional definition of woman knowing it would stifle female sensuality. Hence attempts at her own

“experimental” exploration of her self. Morrison says Sula “does not believe in any of those laws and breaks them all or ignores them, so that she becomes more interesting. Since she is deprived of a role model, ancestral or contemporary, her attempt is innovative, individualistic and hence “experimental. Sula means water. Morrison sees this as a metaphor for the talented black woman whose gifts are not taken seriously” (Russel, 97). Morrison likens Sula to water and Sula's desire to merge with Ajax as loam. Disillusioned by her failure to form a coherent 'self' her search culminates in failure symbolically in death. Sula has been “alone” right through her childhood, adolescence, and adulthood and hers has been 'a-lone' attempt at self-definition.

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Women's Terrible Subalternity in Select Narratives of Northeast India

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Abstract: The paper aims at examining Indira Goswami's *The Man from Chinnamasta* (2006), Mitra Phukan's *The Collector's Wife* (2005), Mamang Dai's *The Legends of Pensam* (2006) and Easterine Iralu's *A Terrible Matriarchy* (2007) from feminist point of view. All the four narratives explore the suffering of innocent women. Though both patriarchal and matriarchal control co-exists in the ethnic world of Northeast India, it has a strong Tantric tradition from time immemorial; As such it is mostly matriarchal, Goddess Kamakhya being the presiding deity of the region. The ethnic diversity has brought out changes through the ages. For various reasons the status of women of the region has not been different from the same in the mainstream of India. The marginality of women has been reflected by the above-mentioned four women writers in various contexts. Indira Goswami reflects the life and sufferings of Dorothy Brown, the wife of the enlightened Principal of Cotton College, Henry Brown, who kept illicit relations with a Khasi woman and neglected his wife. Mitra Phukan's protagonist Rukmini, wife of Siddharth, the district collector had to suffer similar fate and incessant mental agony. Mamang has depicted the sufferings of Adi women for various superstitious reasons which can be depicted as the incarnations of the Evil. Her Pinyar, the widow, suffered the most. Pinyar's daughter-in-law was very badly attacked by her husband and could save her life due to the intervention of the neighbours. Even a modern girl Arsi curses her fate being born in this part of the world. Easterine Iralu through her girl protagonist Lieno depicts the severe gender discrimination where the grandmother neglected Lieno to the worst extent, always caring and preferring the boys. The grandmother's matriarchal hegemony makes Lieno revolt silently. The various aspects of women's marginal status and subalternity have been analyzed in the paper.

Keywords: Chinnamasta, Pensam, Ecofeminism, black moments.

Women across the globe have been oppressed and suppressed since time immemorial. They have been the eternal subaltern. As such to safeguard their rights the movement called feminism arose, but it has not given any permanent solution to the gender inequality. Feminism roughly means championing the rights of women. Women across the globe through the years from time immemorial have been the worst sufferers of the patriarchal/ matriarchal dominance because of their tolerance, humility, sincerity and strong devotion for loving and caring children and family. Women's subjugation is as old as humanity. A woman is presented as physically, mentally and morally weak. Across centuries the words 'feminism' and 'feminist' have been interpreted in different ways. If not much in the third world countries, consciousness and revolts demanding women's rights arose in other continents including Europe and that has

helped boosting their status though not fully uprooted their griefs and sufferings altogether. After the Second World War emerged the second wave feminism when Simon de Beauvoir insisted 'one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman' (Walters 98). So a woman can change her condition if she so desires and becomes bold. There is no salvation only in love. So Beauvoir presents an image of 'the independent woman'

...wants to be active, a taker, and refuses the passivity man means to impose on her. The modern woman accepts masculine values; she prides herself on thinking, taking action, working, creating on the same terms as man. (qtd. in Walters 98)

She also objects to man's manipulation in interpretation of values which have prevailed over the confused forces of life. This manipulation has subdued Nature and Woman. Beauvoir also argues that Woman stands for Nature, Mystery, the non-human and "what she *represents* is more important than what she *is*, what she herself experiences." (ibidem). Femininity is a kind of myth invented by men to confine women to their oppressed state. So women should make themselves full scale human beings. Only asserting themselves is of no use and it would not free them of their subalternity or marginal status.

Indira Goswami (14 November 1942–29 November 2011), the Jnanpith recipient of 2000, is one of the most towering writers of Assam as well as India. Her novel *The Man from Chinnamasta* (2006) set in the 1920s of the Assam centres round the famous Kamakhya temple, the shakti cult, related mysteries of life, etc. The novel "paints the hoary history of Assam's most famous temple of the Sakta cult, Kamakhya" (blurb) depicts a saga so far unnarrated in Indian English Literature and as such it needs attention as to its themes and significance. Kamakhya, situated on the Nilachal Hills on the bank of the mighty river Brahmaputra at Gauhati (Guwahati) and the ancient city of Pragjyotishpur, is the famous tantric shrine of Goddess Kamakhya. It is described in the tantric tradition that the shrine is the most famous and sacred among the fifty one Sakta shrines of India. Though the work was designed to attack the system of animal sacrifice at the Kamakhya shrine, it is a feminist text in the sense that it exposes the patriarchal dominance which uses the tantric and extra-tantric means to oppress the womankind and keep them 'subaltern'/ marginal as has been prevalent in the society since time immemorial and it is paradoxical that it is happening in the shrine of the Mother Goddess in the name of Her worship. The narrative, though set in 1920s, traces the history of Assam way back from the 18th century when the Britishers intruded the land as missionaries. In the narrative an ascetic who came from Trihut region in Bihar and was living in the Kamakhya caves, had some roles in the ecology of life there. His relationship with Dorothy Brown, the upset wife of Henry Brown, the Principal of the Cotton College of Guwahati, and some other episodes have been focused in the narrative. This ascetic was living in Kamakhya shrine since long and had a youth named Ratnadhar as his disciple and every day so many people, patients like asthma victims, the deranged, the gastric patients, the fathers of marriageable daughters were coming to

Jatadhari. People have various talks about the ascetic. Some say poisonous snakes live in his matted hair, and roll on his body. The ascetic sits on the dead body and chants mantras and most of the times shouts the many names of Goddess Kamakhya including *Chinnamasta*.

Dorothy Brown is the main protagonist who is projected as a feminist and ecofeminist. The Principal of Cotton College, Henry Brown and his wife, Dorothy Brown had fallen out because during the absence of Dorothy, Henry had illicit relation with a Khasi woman. Being upset, Dorothy decided to come to Jatadhari to become his disciple to have some peace of mind. Finally she decided to leave the residence of her husband and live in the Darbhanga House on the Nilachal Hill near the cave of *Chinnamasta* where Jatadhari lived. She thus lived there and became a disciple of Jatadhari. But soon rumours spread that Dorothy had illicit affairs with the ascetic. One night she was attacked by unknown men who tried to rape her. Due to her physical strength and determination she strongly resisted the attackers. But attackers could not be identified. Then she left the place and travelled to different places in the country with Jatadhari. Though Jatadhari was a tantric, he was a strong ecologist. He did not support animal sacrifices. He had some disciples from among the students of Cotton College. Ratnadhar and the disciples prepared a memorandum to present to the head priest of the Kamakhya temple to stop animal sacrifice. Earlier there was human sacrifice, which was stopped. Even the Britishers' shooting birds and animals was protested by the students of Cotton College and the then freedom fighters. These are the ecological or ecofeminist issues highlighted in the novel. But the other tantrik, a hermit from Torsa, who was an opponent of Jatadhari was in strong favour of the tantric rituals and animal sacrifice. Students from different parts of Assam gathered at Kamakhya to take part in the procession against animal sacrifice. Dorothy was living in the Darbhanga House and was enjoying the charm of the Brahmaputra day and night. She was advised by Munshi Vepin Chandra and her well-wishers to be careful. Time was changing and revolutionaries have started their aggression on the Britishers. But Dorothy was confident that no disciple of Gandhi would lay hands on a woman. Her attackers could not be identified. But she was sure that behind that attack was her husband Henry as she parted with him because of his illicit relation with the Khasi woman. Dorothy was a staunch humanist. Though a Britisher, under the influence of Jatadhari or her own religious sensibility she had turned complete vegetarian. She lived on fruits and vegetables. She never touched fish or meat and did not even accept the meat from the offerings to Kamakhya. She influenced the students to protest against animal sacrifice at Kamakhya. But finally she was shot down one day in the evening. It was suspected that it was her husband who killed her. *The Man from Chinnamasta* depicts the status of women in Assam during pre-independence India. Assam was a place of woman worship, being the land of Mother Goddess Kamakhya. The atrocity on Dorothy Brown and her killing, then the Kamakhya priests' wives' miserable life who were cooking for hundreds of devotees every