

Morrison's Black Women's Quest for love: Politics of Heart in *Song of Solomon*.

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Abstract

This paper explores the theme of love in Morrison's Novel, Song of Solomon. Love is the central issue Morrison refers to time and time again in her fiction. She gives her own unique definition of love that also provides insight into her social and political stance on black womanhood. Her Philosophy of love is absolutely different from the traditionally cherished stereotypical concept of love which is commonly worshiped in the dominant culture. In her Novel, Song of Solomon, she does not describe love as a pure, selfless passion but explores its different political dimensions with its all sort of cultural manifestations. Morrison explores the other side of reality and provides an alternative definition of love in her novel. Her Concept of love enables black women to resist 'matrix of oppression' (a term coined by Patricia Hill Collins to denote the intersecting oppression of race, class and Gender). Stereotypical concept of love as a selfless and self-sacrificing passion is used to oppress women and deny them subjectivity. Patriarchal society demands that women must love their children and family at the expense of their own individuality. Most of her black female characters are influenced by traditional concept of love, which stands for possession, distortion and self-annihilation. These women are incapable of developing a distinctive black female standpoint. Thus her Novel Song of Solomon deals with the theme of love with all its terrible consequences.

Keywords: *Love, Matrix of Oppression, Black Womanhood.*

Morrison says that she always wants to explore the theme of "female love" in her fiction and she often writes about it. As she says in an interview with Margaret Reynolds,

"I was really writing about the way in which women love things, the kind of female love there are: the love of children, and displacement, how one can displace love of self for love of something else. And it's one of the virtues, I think, that women have - also one of the dangers" (Joyce 2003, p.18).

Excessive love with its terrible consequences is one of the dominant themes in Morrison's fiction. Morrison creates various helpless female characters like Ruth and Hagar, who abuse and neglect themselves in search of true love. Their fragile social and cultural identities add confusion to their lives. They are unable to unchain themselves from the failed and crippling relationships. Morrison narrates their painful stories and depicts the possible consequences of such a dangerous choice.

Keith Byreman(2005) writes in 'A short History of Desire' that Morrison and Gloria Naylor both explore the theme of desire in their fiction. Both novelists write about "the ways female desire is distorted and violated within African American communities." Some of Morrison's black female characters only see themselves from the gaze of dominant culture. They are unable to recognize their true selves but just "re-invent themselves in the images of the existing popular culture" and perform "roles found in romance narratives." Morrison depicts in most of her novels that how fragile one's social and cultural identity is. She writes about "the stories of survivors unable to recover from the traumas of personal, gendered, and racial history" (p.76-77).

Morrison destroys the concept of pure, selfless and unconquerable love in her novels. She believes that every passion has a political dimension. Thus she shatters the myth of true love in her fiction. She does do

so by probing deep into the ideological justification behind the promotion of the concept of selfless love. Women are forced to admire and endorse this stereotypical concept of love. Women are pressurized to behave in certain traditional ways. They are conditioned to perform traditional roles and those stereotypical masks paralyze their abilities to see and judge things objectively. Morrison criticizes all those high sounding abstractions and challenges the well known and commonly worshipped stereotypical and traditional concept of love in her fiction.

In her Novel *Song of Solomon* she creates a memorable female character, Ruth who loves her family at the expense of her self. Her unconditional love for them makes her the target of their anger. They always take her for granted and never acknowledge her presence. In *Song of Solomon*, Morrison depicts that self-love is the key to meaningful existence. Blind conformity to prevailing traditions deprives individuals of authentic identities. Thus by questioning social laws and traditions, any individual can cultivate a positive identity. Only those of Morrison's characters are successful in cultivating positive identities that are willing to rebel against the negative and paralyzing societal pressures and patriarchal traditions.

Ruth lives a very inauthentic life. She does not consider herself somebody. She has always been a weak and submissive woman. Through her character Morrison shows that patriarchal upbringing and absolute conformity to patriarchal norms deprive a woman of a meaningful existence. Ruth is not born like this but her dependence upon her father and husband paralyzes her ability to respond positively and to cultivate an authentic individual voice. Ruth is a motherless child, who has been loved and pampered by her father. She makes his father and his love the center of her life. She loves him so much that she even negates her own self. She absorbs everything he offers her as his single child. She never questions him and never doubts his knowledge. Ruth's father is a typical patriarchal father who loves her daughter but treats her as his toy and plaything. He overprotects her daughter and prevents her from developing an individual self. Dr. Foster proves a hurdle in Ruth's emotional growth. Wilfred D. Samuel says in his article 'Liminality and the Search for Self in *Song of Solomon*' that Ruth has most of "inauthentic experiences" in her life, "Ruth grows into womanhood without a personal identity, as the extension of his father" (Bloom 2007, p.6).

Ruth has a very limited number of good experiences in her life. She has spent most of her life within the four walls. She never desires to go beyond that "twelve room citadel." Most of the time she remains confined within her home. Her house only offers her the patriarchal way of living, where woman is nothing but just a toy and her sole purpose in life is to entertain man. Even after marriage, her life does not change at all. The way she used to make her father happy, similarly she begins to love her husband. Thus she grows as an over dependent and over-protected child. Thus throughout her life, she lives like a shadow. The Patriarchal society in which she exists does not offer her anything positive. She finds herself unable to develop even a single significant relationship in life and consequently loses her self worth. She lives a very insignificant and unhappy life. She understands the truth lately, when she confesses to her son,

...because the fact is that I am a small woman. I don't mean little; I mean small, and I am small because I was pressed small. I lived in a big house that pressed me into a small package. I had no friends, only schoolmates who wanted to touch my dress and my white silk stockings. But I didn't think I'd ever need a friend because I had him[her father] (Morrison 1987,p.122).

Ruth loves and devotes her whole life to her family. But she is not loved and admired by anyone. She knows that her father was the only person who ever truly loved her. She defines her relationship with her father in these words, "I was small, but he was big. The only person who ever really cared whether I lived or died. Lots of people were interested in whether I lived or died, but he cared. he cared and there was, and is no one else in the world ever did" (Morrison 1987,p.125). Thus she often used to visit her father's grave , D .Samuel analyzes Ruth's purpose behind visiting her father's grave; he says that the sight of the

very grave, gives her the purpose to live and to believe that she is somebody. The visit validates her existence and gives meaning to her sterile life. Ruth's sense of alienation and isolation again verifies the dominant Morrisonian theme; over-dependence upon others deprives one of a positive and an authentic identity. This sort of individual is left with a fragile sense of self and mostly lives an inauthentic existence. Ruth is also a motherless child and the mother figure is lacking in her life. She seems more like an underdeveloped and undernourished plant. She is an emotionally abused and "psychologically damaged" woman. Her loving and overprotective relationship with her father does not let her nourish her personality but makes her an emotionally crippled child. As Samuel argues,

Morrison's naming of her character is thus not coincidental. All three names---Ruth, Foster, and Dead---suggest dependence and absence. Like her biblical counterpart, Ruth is devoted and loyal to the point of forfeiting all rights to her personal life...[her dependence upon her father also]robs her of a self that results in meaningful, personal development (Bloom 2007, p.7-8)

Her Marriage with Macon introduces her to the more ugly and crude realities of life. The only consolation she finds in her long loveless marriage is her children and especially her son. She finally gives birth to her only son after spending fifteen years in a loveless and suffocating relationship with a man who considers her worthless and treats her as an insignificant woman. This abusive relationship sabotages her self respect .She bears all sort of psychological, emotional and physical abuses silently and lives a passive life. Her Husband Macon considers himself superior. The novel reveals that Macon had spent a traumatic childhood. He is an angry man and Ruth becomes the target of his anger. He abuses, snubs and hates her. He finds her extremely disgusting and repulsive. Macon treats her like a scapegoat. He blames her for having incestuous relationship with her father. He tells his son that he saw her naked in bed with her father's dead body and saw her sucking his father's fingers. In his memory Ruth stands for something ugly and disgusting. What disgusts him most about her was, "the sight of her mouth on the dead man's fingers." Most of the detail of the incident is the fragment of Macon's imagination, as the text tells,

Once he believed that the sight of her mouth on the dead man's fingers would be the thing he would remember always. He was wrong.Little by little he remembered fewer and fewer of the details, until finally he had to imagine them, even fabricate them, and guess what they must have been (Morrison 1987, p.16).

He could not recall all the details, in the end; he fabricates and exaggerates them. Ruth bears all these cruelties and humiliation. She does not open her mouth and never says a word against him. She is not courageous and rebellious enough that she can resist Macon's aggression; she is unable to challenge the authority of her patriarchal husband. Her silence gives Macon an authority to victimize her. It empowers her husband and depowers her.

Ruth's relationship with her husband proves very damaging; it destroys her completely and shakes her inner confidence. Macon marries Ruth to get certain material advantages. It can be called the marriage of convenience. Macon wants to become rich; he wants recognition, so he decides to get married to the most distinguished Doctor's daughter. After getting all the material advantages, he threw her away like a used tissue. He does not provide any emotional support to her and refuses to keep any kind of physical and sexual contact with her. She was just twenty years old at that time and did not even know how to cope with the situation. Macon not merely hates her wife but her sister is the one whom he hates more than anything else in the world. She is "odd, murky, and worst of all unkempt, a regular source of embarrassment"(Morrison 1987,p.20). Ruth's every gesture disgusts Macon, he beats her daily. When he tells Milkman about his past, he says that his father-in-law was "a bigger hypocrite never lived" who was ever interested in knowing the skin-colour of their children. He blames him for doing the nasty thing in the whole world. As he says "nothing could be nastier than a father delivering his own daughter's boy". Macon justifies his anger and rage in every possible way. He complains that his father-in-law did not lend

him a "dime" to buy a land of track. When he requested her wife, she refused to influence his opinion. It infuriated him and he wondered "who she was married to--- me or to him." He builds his case against her on a very faulty logic. He blames his wife for having sexual relationship with her father, only because the doctor once helped her daughter to deliver her babies and remained worried about the colour of their skins and once he saw her near her father's dead body kissing his fingers. On the basis of the above mentioned facts, he reached to this conclusion "nothing to do but to kill a woman like her." (Morrison 1987, p.71-74).

She tells her son, Milkman that she was just twenty years old when her husband refused to touch her. Ruth first time breaks her silence when she shares with him the important details of her life. Her words are symbolic. She unveils the secret that Macon has tried to take his father's life by throwing his medicine away. She also tells her boy that her husband had tried to kill her. When Milkman asked about the particular incident, was she naked in bed with her father? She narrates the other version of the story, "No. But I did kneel there in my slip at his bedside and kissed his beautiful fingers." (Morrison 1987, p.124-125). Thus Ruth appears to be quite innocent who has great respect for her father and does not have an illicit relationship with him. She is not merely abandoned by her husband but also disliked by her son whom she considers the only solace of her life. When her husband abandons her, she finds escape in her love for her son. Long time deprivation of her husband's attention and love forced her to find consolation in her son's love. He becomes the center of her life. She loves and adores him. Macon Dead was called Milkman because she used to feed him even when he was six years old.

Milkman protects her mother and does not let his father beat her. Morrison also analyzes this act of Milkman; he does not do it just for the sake of mother's love but to prove himself a man. Milkman does not consider her mother as an individual. As the text tells,

He [Milkman] was a man who saw another man hit a helpless person. And he had interfered. ... No, He would not pretend that it was love for his mother. She was too insubstantial, too shadowy for love. But it was her vaporishness that made her more needful of defence. She was not a maternal drudge, her mind pressed flat, her shoulders hunched under the burden of house work and care of others, brutalized by the fear of a man... Never had he thought of his mother as a person, a separate individual, with a life apart from allowing or interfering with his own. (Morrison 1987, p.75).

He doubts his mother when his father blames her for having incestuous relationship with his father. Her mother used to nurse her when he was old enough to talk and to stand up. Milkman also doubts her mother's love and sincerity, "And if she did that to me when there was no reason for it... then may be she did other things with her father?" (Morrison 1987, p.12). But occasionally Milkman also feels sympathy for his mother when he talks to Guitar, "She looked like the unhappiest woman in the world. The most miserable... I've never in my whole life heard my mother laugh. She smiles sometimes, even makes a little sound But I don't believe she has ever laughed out loud." (Morrison 1987, p.13).

Ruth could not enjoy her life; she could be called the most misunderstood person in Macon's Dead home. But when Milkman grows up, he feels real sympathy for her when ever he thinks of the miserable life she has spent,

The best years of her life. From age twenty to forty, had been celibate, and aside from the consummation that began his life, the rest of her life had been the same. He hadn't thought much of it when she'd told him, but now it seemed to him that such sexual deprivation would affect her, hurt her in precisely the way it would affect and hurt him... Her mother had been able to live through that by a long nursing of her some occasional visits to some grave yard. (Morrison 1987, p.104).

But Milkman's sense of sympathy could not decrease Ruth's sense of pain.

As Wilfred D. Samuel argues that Ruth could not learn to explore her own interests, she lives for others. She refuses to think about her own needs. She abuses her own body by not resisting all sort of oppression and lives a very circumscribed life. She negates her own needs and makes her father, husband and son the center of her life, while they abuse her in return. Her husband and son “return her love with distaste”. Thus in this way her husband, father and son rejects her love, this rejection makes her life “more inauthentic, empty and isolated.” (Bloom 2007, p.9). She has no independent self to stand on. No one recognizes her efforts. Morrison through Ruth’s character proves that an individual with no authentic identity has very little to contribute. Ruth loves her family at the expense of her own self. Morrison depicts that excessive love is a self- destructive tendency. Ruth excessive love for her loved ones deprives her of a positive identity. Through Ruth’s character Morrison depicts the miserable plight of those women who tried to live up to the standard of patriarchal society which highly glorifies the image of selfless love.

As Valerie Smith in ‘Continuities of Community’ says Macon’s family exemplifies the patriarchal and nuclear family which is considered a very “stable and critical feature not only of American society, but of western civilization in general.”(Bloom 2007, p.34-35). Similarly Macon can be called a patriarchal father. He stands for all the patriarchal fathers. He super-imposes his self on his family. He is more close to Milkman but he also scolds and criticizes him. Macon does not want to keep any relationship with her sister because he does not want to be associated with the bootlegger.

Macon is a dominant and a dysfunctional father. He controls his daughter’s lives. He does not let them grow. They are beautiful and light-skinned black girls like their mother. Macon objectifies them. He treats them as dolls and the playthings. They wear good dresses and roam with their father in the cars. As Stephenie A. Demetera kopoulos says that they stand for all the sisters in a patriarchal society, “ who are made subservient body- servants to a selfish, adored brother simply because he is a male.”(Bloom 2007,p.51).

They just live for their selfish family. Their lives are dictated by their father’s wish. At the age of forty-three Lena analyses her situation and criticizes the patriarchal system of her family. She criticizes Milkman for his ruthless behavior towards them. She tells him plainly that he has no right to interfere in their lives. She says that they spend their whole life entertaining him.

Our girlhood was spent like a found nickel on you. When you slept, we were quiet, when you were hungry, we cooked, but you have never done anything for us where do you get the right to decide our lives? From that hog’s gut that hangs down between your legs?” She calls him a “sad, pitiful, stupid, selfish, hateful man (Morrison 1987, p.215).

She tells him that he has no right to control their lives. She tells him that Corinthian is suffering because of him. He told their father about her love affair with Porter. She has been confined within the home by the father who has also forced her to quit the job. She compares Milkman to their fathers and says that they are the same. She could not get college education just because of him. In a racist society, the black graduate girl finds just one job, the domestic work. During 1960s, all the colored girls were considered suitable for this kind of job. But she hides it from her family because she is ashamed of her job. It is also at the age of forty two she discovers love in her life. It is Porter who makes her realize her miserable condition and inferior status in the family. First time in her life, she realizes her inferior status in the family that she is just a submissive, passive and helpless woman. Just like her mother, her status is no more than a piece of fine furniture.

As Stephenie .A. Demetra kopoulos says in her article ‘Men’s and Women’s individuation’ that she is nothing more than a “persona”, she is only valuable as a “decoration for her family.” She is treated as a family property, and the obvious proof is the way Milkman prevents her from developing any relationship with Porter. Milkman is the youngest in the family but still he considers it his right to interfere in her sister’s life. Thus he once again causes great damage to her because in middle class life, “marriage is the main institution for female individuation.”(Bloom 2007,p.53).

Corinthian first time claims her subjectivity, when she decides to get married. She selects Porter as a husband. First time she challenges the patriarchal norms of her family by selecting Porter as her life partner. Thus she makes the greatest decision of her life. She refuses to exist and begins to live. It is Porter's love that gives her reason to live. He makes her realize her baby doll status in the house. He says that he wants a grown up woman "that's not scared of her daddy. I guess you don't want to be grown-up women." (Morrison 1987, p.196). It is through her relationship with Porter she rediscovers herself and "felt a self-esteem that was quiet new." (Morrison 1987, p.20).

Dusty Miller(1994) in *The Woman Who Hurt Themselves* says that there are many forms of childhood traumas. "It can be experienced through physical and sexual abuse or through invasive caretaking." Corinthian had spent a traumatized life, and most of traumatized children take long time to heal. Some children lead an isolated and quiet life while other "manifest the wounds suffered in childhood, in troubled relationships, life threatening symptoms, and dangerous behavior pattern." (p.5). Corinthian learns to live; her relationship with Porter helps her to heal. While her sister Lena could not heal the emotional and psychological wounds she received in her patriarchal home. In order to get rid of her anger and pain, she finds escape in whisky; it helps her to get rid of a sense of emptiness. She harms and abuses her body and hurts herself terribly. Her self abusive and self destructive behavior destroys her both emotionally and physically. Miller(1994) says in *The Women Who Hurt Themselves* that women hurt themselves more than men. Men usually express their anger and frustration openly. Women cannot because "they are socialized not to fight back, allowing themselves to be hurt or humiliate is far more socially acceptable than being aggressive or violent towards others" (p.9). Drinking is also a way to escape the feeling of pain. Ellen Brass and Laura Davis in their most famous book *The Courage To Heal* mentions the psychological pattern of an abused child. It is very natural for the abuse survivor to "replicate the childhood violence, not knowing how else to act." And the most common emotion "abuse engenders is anger" (qtd. in Miller 1994, p.6).

In *Song of Solomon* Morrison creates various female characters that are robbed of their subjectivity in a patriarchal racist society where they are facing various sort of oppression simultaneously. Like Ruth, Corinthian and Lena, Pilate's grand daughter, Hagar also suffers the same fate, she negates her self for the sake of Milkman. In *Song of Solomon* and *Jazz*, Morrison depicts the negative consequence of excessive love. The positive and constructive relationships help one to heal while the destructive relationships destroy one's inner confidence and a positive sense of self. Milkman is also an angry blackman whose anger prevents him from developing a constructive relationship with a black woman called Hagar. Milkman and Hagar share very positive relationship earlier but with the passage of time, their relationship distorts. The distortion comes when Hagar makes Milkman the center of her life. Milkman's materialistic and worldly nature blinds him and he could not recognize true love. Hagar's excessive love for him becomes the cause of her self destruction. In the beginning, Milkman enjoys the relationship but soon her accessibility infuriates and irritates him. The relationship takes twelve years to last but soon he loses interest in her and the relationship loses its worth in his eyes.

Barbara Rigney in 'Hagar's Mirror; Self and Identity in Morrison's Fiction' discusses the reason for Hagar's death, she says that Hagar is not killed by Milkman's refusal to love, but by her own concept of her selfhood. When she looks into the mirror, it tells her that she is not beautiful at all. She further argues that in Morrison's fiction "identity is always provisional". An individual cannot isolate himself from the community. Human personality is consciously and unconsciously shaped by "social constructions of both race and gender and they are inseparable from their origins" (Peach, 1998, p.52-55). The mirror gives her false image and presents the distorted picture. The mirror only tells her what she herself has internalized. It believes like her that only white skin, blue eyes and golden hair are the symbol of beauty. She is extremely ugly. It convinced her that Milkman has left her because of her ugliness. In fact Hagar is not looking at herself objectively. When he leaves her; she kills herself in extreme helplessness. Only a meaningful relationship can help her to heal and to make her realize her self worth which she could not find till the end. She experiences the worst sort of abuse in the name of love. Hagar is neither respected

nor admired by anyone. Hagar needs a meaningful relationship to heal. Milkman does not treat her as a subject. Milkman does not respect this relationship, that's why he takes her as a his "private honey pot, not a real or legitimate girlfriend," even her new girlfriends never bother about her, because they never considered her a rival, infact "they believed she was less than a rival." (Morrison 1987,p.91).

Hagar excessive love for Milkman becomes the reason of her destruction. She wants to possess him even at the cost of her self-respect. But he misunderstands her love and takes her as an individual whose all time availability irritates him, he does not find her provocative at all. As the text tells, "The stupefying ease with which he had gotten and stayed between her legs" has irritated him. Milkman finds it monotonous and boring, because "it was so free, so abundant, it had lost its fervor." Thus the thought of her does not excite her neck and heart. She is compared to the third beer, not to the first one which one receives with "tearful gratitude" and not to the second one which "confirms and extends the pleasure of the first". She is like the third, "the one you drunk because its' there" (Morrison 1987,p.91). He always gives her gifts at Christmas but not the ones which give her any slight idea about marriage. Milkman does not visit her for months but whenever he goes to her "she was all smiles and welcome." When Milkman becomes involved in his social life, Hagar and her family becomes non-existent for him. After exploiting her for a long period, he decides to leave her without any sense of guilt. As the text tells, "She needed a steady man who could marry her." Thus finally, he ends the love affair by sending "a nice letter" to her. In the very letter he thanks Hagar for her love, he thanks her for making her life happy, and signs the letter "with love, of course, but more than that with gratitude." It is not the word "love" that infuriates Hagar but "flat-out coldness of thank you" (Morrison 1987,p.98-99).

Hagar decides to take revenge by killing Milkman but her love for him prevents her from doing it. When Milkman's mother asks her why she wants to kill her son, she replies because she loves him more than anything else. He is centre of her life. Hagar says, "She wanted him alive more than anybody, but hadn't the least bit of control over the predator that lived inside her." Her "anaconda love" wants to take revenge, "she had no self left, no fears, no wants, and no intelligence that was her own." The problem with Hagar is, she loves Milkman at the expense of her own self. She neglects, ignores and abuses herself. Milkman's mother and Hagar fights over him, both want to possess him. Ruth calls herself Milkman's home and Hagar calls him her only home in the world. But Pilate comes and scolds them. She says that he does not care about both of them. As she says, "two grown up women talking about a man like he was a house or needed one. He ain't a house, he's a man." (Morrison 1987,p.99). Pilate wants them to understand that it is almost impossible to possess a human being and overdependence upon someone causes great harm to one's own identity. As Wilfred D. Samuel says, 'In liminality and Search for self' that Pilate can be called as an independent individual because she carries her identity within herself (Bloom 2007, p.30). But Hagar's position is very vulnerable; she is an extremely pampered child. Her family fulfills her every desire so she does not have the courage and strength to tolerate 'No'. When Milkman refuses to love her and she cannot bear it and loses the zeal to live.

Hagar tries to find out the reason for her rejection and when she looks herself into the mirror, she blames her looks for that. She says to Pilate that she looks horrible, "no wonder he didn't want me. I look terrible" (Morrison 1987, p.308). She tries to fix herself up, she calls herself "a ground hog" and asks for the comb. The mirror breeds too many desires in her small heart. She buys new clothes, perfumes and does everything to fascinate Milkman. Reba and Pilate try hard to protect her but she is different from them. "Like the trees, they are offering her all they had: love murmurs and a protective shade". But they could not save her. She asks a very innocent question from her that why Milkman don't like her hair? Then the mother replies that how it is possible for Milkman not to like the same hair which grows over his stomach, chest, head and hips. But Hagar replies that "He don't like it at all, he hates it." He loves "silky hair", "lemon-coloured skin" and "grey-blue eyes" (Morrison 1987, p.308). As Bertam D. Ashe argues in 'constructing African American standards of Beauty' that when Hagar accepts her inability to kill Milkman, she wants to transform herself; she wants to become a woman whom Milkman could have. Thus she is confirming to the western standard of beauty. (Morrison 1987,p.315). Hagar loses her

individuality and confirms to the superficial patriarchal laws of white racist society. She aspires for an impossible dream. She knows that she could never change her black skin, this extreme self-loathing destroys her. Thus, Hager gives up her conquest and accepts defeat. Guitar even tries to make her realize her fault but fails to convince her. He says, "You think because he does not love you that you are worthless." He tells her love is different from the sense of belonging. Love does not mean to possess someone, to control someone's life. It is something beyond it. He tries to make her realize her worth and value as an individual. He forbids her from offering her whole self to him, "he cannot value you more than you value yourself". Guitar was shocked at her behavior. Her behavior seems strange to him. He compares her to all "doormat women" and their vanity surprised him. "Pretty little black-skinned women, who wanted to kill for love, die for love" (Morrison 1987, p.306).

They want to be loved at any cost. Pilate and Reba try their best to save her but could not because she was different from them, "not strong enough like Pilate, not simple enough like Reba." It's only afterwards that Milkman realizes his mistake that "he'd thrown away (her) like a wad of chewing gum after the favor was gone- she had a right to try to kill him too"(Morrison 1987, p.307). Thus Morrison depicts through her black female characters how excessive love for anything destroys one's ability to craft a strong identity.

Tate(1983) in *Black Women Writers at Work* discusses that usually in Afro-American text black women share different type of relationships. These relationships "falls into two fundamental categories those in which the heroine is a confused and troubled participant, and those which occur after she has achieved some understanding of herself and of others, thus making the relationship mutually beneficial." Protecting one's Self esteem is a very important issue in Afro-American feminist fiction. Black women must avoid those types of relationships that might harm their self-esteem. If a woman does not pay attention to her own well being and base" one's self esteem on self sacrifice by caring exclusively for others" she is bound to suffer. Women's meaningful quest means taking responsibility "for strengthening her self by learning to "love" and "appreciate her self esteem." She must learn to "celebrate her womanhood." (P. ix-xxii) As she says that black women must recognize their desires and protect their self-esteem at any cost.

Morrison 's all black female characters except Pilate in her novel *Song of Solomon* are unable to liberate themselves from the dominant definition of love. They want to possess their loved ones and want to annihilate their selves. They are unable to see that they can possess anything but a human being. They commit the glaring mistake of loving others at the expense of their own dreams, desires and self-esteem. Thus Morrison makes us see the other side of coin by challenging the authenticity of the traditional stereotypical concept of love.

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