



## A study of the novels of Toni Morrison and the Concept of Love

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### ABSTRACT:-

Love is never any better than the lover. Wicked people love wickedly, violent people love violently, weak people love weakly, stupid people love stupidly, but the love of a free man is never safe. There is no gift for the beloved. The lover alone possesses his gift of love.

Keywords:- Catholic , Sexuality, Love, Emotions, Discussion

### Introduction :

Love is an eternally strong, forceful, deep, inspirational and meaningful emotion human beings can ever experience. Subsuming both caritas and cupiditas in itself, it manifests itself as affection and devotion between human beings and aspiration for individual choices and expressions of personal fun and happiness. It can bring human beings altogether benefits, pleasure and excellence but as a need or craving to be loved, it may also end up in frustration and even regression. Its unfathomable and mysterious nature is liable to wage wars as well as settle disputes. It is because of this reason that the problematic of love is resolved by treating it as not taking; it is idealized as giving, sacrificing and worshipping and thereby given the central focus in theology. In *Love and Living* it is expressed that when people love truly, the power of love uplifts them from their ordinary selves and they act more thoughtfully, patiently and enthusiastically. Love, therefore, is the most intense and complex feeling. The Anglo-American Catholic writer, Thomas Merton believes that love is an unavoidable emotion and therefore our attitude toward life is conditioned by our attitude to love. He addresses love as the kismet of human beings as it directs human life making it aimed and meaningful. The chapter —Love and Need: Is Love a Package or a Message? of the book, *Love and Living* edited by Stone and Hart exhibits Thomas Merton describing —Love, . . . is a transforming power of almost mystical intensity which endows the lovers with qualities and capacities they never dreamed they could possess . . . Love is not only a special way of being alive, it is the perfection of life. He who loves is more alive and more real than he was when he did not love. But it is also true that environmental conditions and circumstances play a significant role in forming human beings' ideology and understanding of love. It is intricate to define what exactly love is, since with the changes in life style, life values, life conditions and approach to life its expression, state, importance and meaning keeps changing persistently and consistently. The American psychologist, M. Scott Peck perceives love as a problematic notion, which can't be defined truly and satisfactorily. He tries to term love as a circular process of growth. He says, love is —The will to extend one's self for the purpose of nurturing 2 one's own or another's spiritual growth. He defines love as a course which initiating from self-love moves toward the love for others. He calls love a transcending intention and effortful action. M. Scott has discussed love in various contours but despite this he is not willing to remove the mysteriousness from the nature of love. In *The Art of Loving*, Erich Fromm too defines the aesthetic of love as vague and exceptional, but attainable by those who will to practice it earnestly. According to Fromm love is an art which does not happen itself but is created by efforts:-o love is a personal experience which everyone can only have by and for himself further adding that —the ability to be alone is the condition for the ability to love. Thus though problematic, love is considered a sensual emotion and a primary need of human. This intangible and sensitive emotion is always found at a mainstay in the field of both philosophy and psychology. Throughout the ages philosophers and psychologists have remained captivated to draw intensive and extensive studies on the subject. Nevertheless whenever the issue is taken up for discussion, they always encounter contradictions in their perspectives on love. Philosophically, the nature of love, since the time of the Ancient Greeks, has been ascribed spiritual dimensions. Philosophers associate love to life values and ethical perspectives. They explain love as a spiritual vehicle capable of driving human beings to the greatest height. It is seen as a mode of bringing humanity in proximity to divinity. On the other side, psychology, an experimental study/examination of the subconscious states of human mind, relates love to the study of self, self-formation and self-deformation. Psychologists read love and its associated factors from the viewpoint of human growth and its subsequent responses to life. Though a wide range of literature is available on the theme of love, the study at hand is confined to some specific philosophical and psychological theoretical percepts and a few particular approaches to love. The Platonic Eros, Augustinian agape, Aristotelian friendship and Freudian psychoanalytic theory of human mind, which includes his dealings with eros and libido too, provide the basic critical framework of analysis. Plato was the first great philosopher to study love intensely as Eros, teleological centering on the notions of need and deficiency. He utilized his psychology of ethics and the principles of person and soul to find out the origin of love in the state of human flaws and transience. He also established some new psychological methods in the guidance of his teacher, Socrates, to define a variety of love and used his metaphysical theory of Forms to express how love enriches us and brings us in proximity with the divine. Gerasimos Santas who has offered a grand

elucidation on Platonic and Freudian theories of love in his book *Plato and Freud Two Theories of Love*, tells that Plato has argued love as an important element in happiness and —as a powerful motivating force capable of inspiring humans to the greatest attainments in art, science and philosophy. Studying love as something that loves, the lover, and something that is loved, the beloved or ‘the object’ of love, Plato believes, —Eros must have an object, something that is loved; the second that desire for the object is a component of eros, or possibly that eros is a species of desire. Love does not always bring reciprocity. One’s love may or may not be returned, and may be for this reason that studies of love are generally referred to as studies of lover. However, Plato’s main concern is —what are the characteristic effects of love. His *Symposium*, a philosophical text, is widely known as one of the masterpieces of classical literature postulating what can be known as platonic love with its main component of ‘Eros’. Plato’s theory of eros can be found in two of his texts: the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium* but the latter one provides the most detailed information and hence forms the analytical framework of this study. The dramatic setting of *Symposium* is a dinner party at the house of a young poet, Agathon, where the guests including Socrates and his pupil Aristodemus, *Phaedrus*, Agathon’s lover Pausanias, the doctor Eryximachus and the great comic poet Aristophanes are present. After having dinner Eryximachus proposes that instead of merely enjoying drinking they should deliver discourses in the admiration of Eros. *Phaedrus*’ discourse is a pure encomium of the god Eros (the god who is the source of Eros among mankind’s). Santas shows that citing Hesiod and Parmenides he views that —Eros is the oldest of the gods, and being oldest ‘the cause of the greatest goods, granting the greatest benefits. He points out that even those who have great deal of power and wealth cannot imagine a happy life without Eros. Generally, lovers feel more passion toward noble acts than common people because having been preoccupied with Eros they feel more inspiration toward goodness: Eros is thus the greatest motivation for good, whether in 4 private, civic, or military life. To sum up —Eros is the most venerable and honorable of the gods, the most powerful in giving virtue and happiness to men whether living or departed. Eros, thus, attributes goodness to familial love and human relationships. Pausanias asserting the superiority of male-homosexual eros, admires the view of a beloved gratifying the sexual needs of his lover. Accepting it both as a god or goddess he proposes two distinct goddesses of Eros; Common Aphrodite and Heavenly Aphrodite, also known as Eros Pandemos and Eros Uranios. He says that lovers motivated by Common Aphrodite are motiveless and base: —love women as well as boys, love the body rather than the soul, and care for nothing but sexual gratification. Based upon carnal love this love is ephemeral like the beauty of the body. Eros Uranios, on the other hand, is more mature and wise. As it imparts love only to boys and motivates lovers to be more interested in the soul rather than the body, this love is viewed as superior and everlasting. And since viewed as being imparted only to boys by nature, it explains Greek male superiority. It elevates homosexuality above heterosexuality by emphasizing upon its intellectual benefits: Only when the older man loves the boy’s soul and cares for its education and wisdom is it deemed honorable for the beloved to sexually gratify his lover, for the sake of virtue. Eryximachus, though favors Pausanias’ idea of the existence of two kinds of Eros, he prefers to enhance the range of lovers and the objects of love. Santas elucidates that he notices the impact of eros in seasonal order also: —when the opposites heat and cold, draught and moisture, are brought together by the orderly Eros they become bearers of ripe fertility and health to men and animal and plants’; but ‘when the wanton-spirited Eros gains the ascendant in the seasons of the year, great destruction and wrong does he wreck. According to him, Eros is a universal drive —. . . a cosmic power, a principle of generation and reconciliation of opposites. Audre Lorde, a contemporary Afro American woman writer’s understanding of Eros as the force to cause attraction and aspiration among dissimilar and to bring them into harmony is fashioned in this line. Aristophanes, the master of the Old Comedy deals with the mythical proposition of love. He explains that at the time of the origin of man, there were three types of human beings: male, female, and androgynous beings (having both male and female genital parts). He says that each of the third type had four legs, four arms, two faces and two sets of reproductive organs facing opposite sides. Being quite energetic and robust when they began to overthrow gods, Zeus handled the problem very tactfully. In an attempt to prevent their disobedience without ravaging them he sabotaged their strength by splitting all of them in half. By doing so Zeus not only reduced their power but also multiplied them in number which became even more beneficial to him. But it caused another misfortune. Since humans’ original form had been cut into two, each half began to long for the companion from whom it had been severed, and due to their inability to achieve integrity since their genitals were on the opposite sides they began to die in self-negligence. This made Zeus pity them; he turned over their sexual organs providing them their present shape. This way they were able to reproduce and enjoy sexual intercourse. In accordance with this proposition, our purpose to love someone is that we try to attain the —other half of what was our original state. Lovers’ desires to be in association, to live in association and even to die in association should not be merely associated with their desires for sexual intercourse for it is their desire to be whole by rejoining the other half that was once snatched away from them forcefully and reluctantly: —The cause of it all is this, that our original form was as I have described, and we were whole; and the desire and pursuit of this wholeness is called eros. The reason behind people falling in love within the same sex can also be explained by this mythical account of the origin of love. As in their original form they were part of the one androgynous being and by seeking union they try to win a sense of wholeness and completeness.

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## **Labyrinths of Familial Love**

*The love of the family, the love of one person can heal. It heals the scars left by a larger society. A massive, powerful society*

Family, made up of members tied by birth, marriage or fosterage, is a tightly woven social unit, inspiring each involved to share same culture and discharge responsibilities by means of interaction and intercommunication. Familial love and support plays an important role in the formation and maturation of one’s personality by reversing all possibilities of indifference or hostility to meaningful spirituality. Hegel concedes that the institution of family protects one from alienation and isolation providing him/her with the possibilities to develop a coherent sense of belonging. One is allowed to maintain a secure and meaningful place in the world where rather than seeing the world as a singular self in isolation from others he is allowed to be a part of closely knit unit. Hegel sees family as a network of inter-subjectivities. In his book, *Spirit, the Family, and the Unconscious* in Hegel’s Philosophy, David V. Ciavatta elaborates Hegelian view: -We encounter the world, not just as individual but just a primordially as a familial. The core role of a family is to provide protection and strength to its members by catering to their physical and psychological needs. As a crucial medium of socialization, it looks after the basic material needs of its members besides nourishing it with psychological attributes of love and affective nurturance. Love makes an individual feel purposeful in the world; it is important to achieve self-realization. Deprivation of love may attribute

instability and negativity to individuals. Therefore, for the growth of a healthy personality, the love between parent and child is fundamental. Parents contribute vitally in determining the adult lives of their children, an idea proposed by Austrian psychologist, Freud, who asseverates that infancy is the foundation of adult age love relationships, though he studied the negative impact of its absence and that too in terms of sexuality.

Keeping in view the circumstantially-created mother-headed families as the most prevalent form of family structures, Morrison also explores, though with lesser poignancy, the role of the father's love in the growth of a child and the love of the child for the father. Fatherhood generally held as the manifestation of protection and potential preservation reflects in her novels in varied complex and inverted forms. Father's love is presented both as a disorienting, sexually and emotionally devastating response and a strong self-formative value. Normally fathers are presented as pairing or bonding with their sons as Morrison shows sons follow not their mothers; rather they act as their fathers do. Nevertheless through the relationship between Milkman and Pilate, his foster mother, and his subsequent spiritual growth under her guardianship, Morrison seems to be transgressing the limitations of gender particularly foregrounding her belief that for the healthy growth of the self is required the whole community. A son as well as a daughter authenticates their love for the parent(s) through the responsibility towards them even after their death by upholding the ancestral values. Pilate is an extraordinary figure. She is one such towering emblem of mother's love that manifests as nurturance and cultural legacy. Like a daughter she cares for those who belong to her and who ever took care of her. She understands the role of love and care, and nurturance and responsibility that make a family. Like a nurturer she nurtures all. Familial love, thus, shows itself as nurturance that alone transforms a house into a home. This nurturance may come from parents, siblings or community but familial love does not alone ensure a person's capacity to love meaningfully without self-determinism and self-redemption. Morrison's preoccupation with women bonding prevents her from conceiving any sister-sister relationship, which is poignantly missing in her fictional works.

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## CONCLUSION

Love is the elementary force of life. It gives human life motive, energy, aim and meaning. It is a key to the nurturing of one's self, driving it simultaneously toward the development of others in the form of family, community, society and humanity. Since love requires two persons, a lover and the loved, love often turns into phenomenal and problematic sensations capable of leading human being to the heights of elation as well as to the depths of desolation. Love underlines a variety of expressions, emotional/mental states, reactions and attitudes that differ from person to person, proving how intricate and intense an emotion it is. It is too problematic, too deep to be defined, explained, understood or measured within the limited framework of words. The problematic of love also owes itself to the fact that it can evolve as a virtue representing human concern, generous attachment, interpersonal understanding, sympathy and benevolence but it can equally be a vice giving way to obsession, possession, morbidity, incest and so on. It is both for its intensity and complexity that writers in all ages have been attracted to write about it. Though as a black woman writer Morrison's primary concerns remain race and gender, she has treated love as the dominant theme in her entire fictional oeuvre. When Morrison was interrogated about the issue of themes she likes to work upon in her novels, she mentioned love as first. Though she avoids defining it explicitly, its manifestations become apparent when one goes through her writings carefully. Morrison sees love as a substantial though delicate emotion that is likely to be affected under slightest distortions of life values/attitudes. That's why Morrison tries to capture the nuances of this experience, fathoming, investigating and exposing its consistencies and inconsistencies in persons conditioned by peculiar socio-psychological circumstances. Her approach to the handling of this cardinal human emotion is at once philosophical and psychological, which tends to root itself into various traditions, sometimes going by them and sometimes reworking them. Her conception of love owes itself much to Plato's 'Ladder of Love' and his ideology that Eros is the source of wholeness. Though she seems to do away with Augustinian bifurcation of Eros and spirituality, she experiments with Aristotelian theory of friendship and cherishes the virtue of agape. She examines Freudian notion of parent-child fixation but almost through reworking as she seems to endorse Freudian conception that mother's relationship with the child in early stages conditions the adult love choices, but she refuses to probe their relations in terms of sexuality, exhibiting more psychological liming. So Morrison perceptions of love, though significant to life in her novels defies boundaries of theories and disciplines. As a realist and psychologist she is interested in understanding life complexities, morbidities and distortions to reach the marrow of the human problems, but looks for more philosophical answers. Morrison herself admits that she avoids writing books in set formulas and expecting admiration of the readers. What interests her most is the participation of readers into her novels, which she achieves through open-endedness.

Morrison hardly depicts any straightforward, successful human relationship in her novels. She explores love and its problematic dimensions that occur due to its lack, probing the sub-conscious selves of the human beings who are bound to live under oppressive and racially hostile circumstances. Morrison is especially concerned with the realistic approach to love. She does not create idyllic loving figures; rather she adds complexities to this human emotion to make her readers grope with the problems of love to provide lessons which are necessary to get through the hazards of socio-psychological conditionings without losing heart. She investigates into the conventional love equations but hardly delineates them as paradigmatic types. Her primary concern for the parent-child relationship sustains itself as novel after novel she delineates its subnormal expressions and portrays her fictional characters resorting to varied defense mechanisms to survive under the inflictions of grossly conditioning environmental factors. Unlike her contemporary Afro-American women writers like Alice Walker, Audre Lorde, and Angela Davis, who were preoccupied with adult questions, Morrison exhibits a preoccupation with familial matters especially with the problems of the adolescent. She seems to be exploring the nuances of eros in rather a subdued manner, and wherever she does, she does not hold back her sympathies for even those who express it rather unhealthily only because she develops those characters with the penetrating insight of a psychiatrist who is first and foremost a humanist. Her preoccupation with the morbidities and problematic nature of love accounts for her belief in the power of love and her commitment to enrich life. Life is presented in her novels as a complex web of motives and experiences. Love as a spiritual force enables humans transcend all limitations of scanty familial love and stunted libidinal expressions. Hence amidst complexities and nuances of love we find some significant characters who transcend the limitations and failures to move toward large human values of sisterhood/an Afro-American reworking of Christian brotherhood. Therefore, majority of men and women in her novels are presented as ensnared with love – possessed, obsessed, malformed, culturally conditioned and incapacitated yet there are a few stalwarts too who acquire distinctive dimensions for their unbound capacity to love unconditionally.

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