

Black Consciousness in Toni Morrison's Novel The Bluest Eye

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Abstract - Toni Morrison is the most well known sophisticated novelist in the history of African American literature. She has been recognised as a strident voice for exploited black people as well as master craftsman of the dominant artistic form. This paper attempts to find out the trial of the blacks women in search of self identity in the novel of Toni Morrison . *The Bluest Eye* is a tragic tale about a young, black girl Pecola and her desire for the bluest eyes, the symbol for her of what it means to be beautiful and therefore worthy in society. The central idea of the novel is the domination of blacks by the existing standards of beauty – blue eyes, blonde hair and white skin. It clarifies the damaging impacts of white standards and the importance on the lives of black people. It represents very sad feeling in terms of tragic conditions of blacks in racist America.

The more emphasis in Toni Morrison's first novel is on racism. She investigates the devastating effects of the beauty standards of the dominant culture of the self image of the African female adolescent. Exploring the complexity of black female experience in white America, Toni Morrison attempts to resolve the contradiction inherent in her African American identity as a black women writer. In the novel *The Bluest Eye* it shows the terrible consequences for black internalising the values of a white culture that both directly & indirectly rejects them. A close study of the interrelationship of race , gender, and class in the novels of Toni Morrison reveals the emergence of an revolutionary pattern. *The Bluest Eye* , are often so overwhelmed by the narrative's emotional content- the child Pecola's incestuous rape, ensuing pregnancy , and subsequent abandonment by her community an descent into madness that they miss the music in this lyrically signified narrative.

Keywords: *sophisticated, strident, racist, investigate, contradiction, gender, incestuous etc.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Toni Morrison presents the non linear African American socio –historical reality, fragmented by a historical past of disconnection and rupture. Her novels show the victimization of black people within the context of a racist social order. In the New York Times '*The Bluest Eye*' is an enquiry into the reason why beauty gets wasted in this country .The beauty in this case is black: The wasting is done by a cultural engine that seems to have been designed to murder possibilities and she does it with a prose so precise. The more emphasis in Toni Morrison's first novel is on racism. She investigates the devastating effects of the beauty standards of the dominant culture of the self image of the African female adolescent. Exploring the complexity of black female experience in white America, Toni Morrison attempts to resolve the contradiction inherent in her African American identity as a black women writer. *The Bluest Eye* (1970) basically concern for racial issues and the Black identity has been made.

The Bluest Eye is not the story of Pecola Breedlove, it is the image of Pecola Breedlove, an eleven year old black

girl who thinks her life would be perfect if only she had blue eyes. *The Bluest Eye* is the story of three black schoolgirls growing up in 1940s, the sister Claudia, Frieda MacTeer and their friend Pecola Breedlove. Claudia and Frieda's parents are strict, protective, and when they have time-which isn't often – loving Pecola is ignored by her mother and abused by her father. Claudia , who tells much of the story , is strong willed eight year old black girl who can't stand the sight of little blond haired, blue eyed dolls.

Pecola , utterly clueless about the war raging inside her, she thinks that her life would be perfect if only she could have blue eyes. In one poignant scene, Pecola had began to menstruate earlier in the day.

Neither she nor Claudia had the vaguest notion that meant; but Frieda, who was couple of years older than Claudia, knew:

'That night, in bed, the three of us lay still. We were full of awe and respect for Pecola. Lying next to real prson who was ministratin was some how sacred. She was different from us now - grown up like' [Morrison . 1999:30]

She herself felt the distance but refused to lord it over us. Pecola is raped by her drunken father and becomes pregnant with his child. As her pregnancy begins to show, instead of being sympathetic, Pecola's mother beats her and forbids her to go to school. When the baby is born prematurely and dies, Pecola loses what little grip on reality she had and begins to go mad. Desperate and confused, she visits a West Indian Preacher called Soaphead, an unscrupulous creep who's almost crazy enough to believe in his own miracle, tells Pecola that God will give her blue eyes, but that she'll be the only one who can see them.

Toni Morrison's novels are a protest against the atrocities of racism and sexism in so far as it affects the development of the self image of the individual in particular. The prime focus of Toni Morrison in her early novels was a feminist perspective which depicts the suffering, victimization and the struggle for survival of the black people.

The *Bluest Eye* are often so overwhelmed by the emotional content of the child Pecola's incestuous rape, ensuing pregnancy and subsequent abandonment by her community and descent into madness that they miss the music in this lyrically signified narrative. Toni Morrison has stated that her narrative effort is to be like something that has probably only been fully expressed perhaps in music.

*The Bluest Eye is the genesis of her effort
"to do what the music did for blacks, what
we use to be able to do with each other in
private in that civilization that existed
underneath the white civilization". [Morrison.
1999 :75]*

The *Bluest Eye* contains an abundance of cultural wisdom. The blues lyrics that punctuate the narrative at critical points suggest a system of folk knowledge and values that is crucial to a young black woman's survival in the 1930s and 1940s and which supports Claudia's cathartic role as storyteller. The *Bluest Eye* (1970) is a telling statement on the tragic effect of race prejudice on children. It deals with the subtlest implications of the dominant society's definition of beauty, and the complexity, tragic effect of those implications. The black children have imposed on themselves white standards and values that have little or nothing to do with their actual lives.

The Bluest Eye is the tragic tale of a young, black girl's desire for the bluest eye, the symbol of beauty and therefore, worthy in society. The pivotal idea in the novel is the domination of blacks by the existing American standards of beauty for blue eyes, blond hair and obsession with the white skin. Toni Morrison's writings centre round the predicament of the blacks in the past as well as the present, but she scrupulously avoids any direct venture of

the whites because she is the least interested in racial confrontation and wants to write for the people of her own in particular, beginning with her debut novel *The Bluest Eye*.

In this novel, it portrays the tragic condition of the blacks in a racist society and examines how the ideologies, perpetuated by the institutions controlled by the dominant group, influence the making of the self image of black women. *The Bluest Eye*, thus makes one of the most powerful attacks on the relationship between the western standards of female beauty and the psychological oppression of black women. In *The Bluest Eye*, Eleven-year-old Pecola is a poor, ugly, black girl who belongs to have blue eyes in the poignant, wistful hope that this will bring her the love she longs for and also somehow alleviate the multiple miseries of her hate-filled, quarrelsome, violent family, ironically named Breedlove. Pecola becomes the victim of one another in a chain of black people including her own mother and father who have been twisted and perverted by the false and often vicious standard of the white world. Pecola not only suffers as a black, but also as a female. If, as a racial being, she is forced to relinquish her individual, cultural ways, as a gender being she is made to subordinate her femininity and remain subsumed in the orbit of patriarchy. A close study of the interrelationship of race, gender and class in the novel of Toni Morrison reveals the emergence of an evolutionary pattern. One can perceive thematic and structural development in her works. She uses each novel as a framework for investigating various problems and solutions to the African's dilemmas. Each successive novel reflects her growing understanding of the nature of the African's oppression. As her narrative structure develops, she learns to shape her theme artistically so as to provide accurate presentation.

In addition to the example of black consciousness, after school one day, a group of boys circle around Pecola and begin making fun of her chanting,

*"Black e mo. Black e mo, Yadaddsleepsnekked.
Black e mo." [Morrison.1999:63]*

Toni Morrison is one of the leading 20th century African American women novelists, who have endeavoured to articulate problems of prejudice and discrimination through her fictional world. Being African American women Toni Morrison boldly presents African American feminist consciousness through her literary endeavour where she strongly expresses her philosophy as a feminist. Toni Morrison's novels raise the themes and issues of racism, sexism, classism, culture, religion, slavery, freedom, and equality, quest for identity, alienation, fragmentation, aspirations and frustrations.

Hence Toni Morrison's novel *The Bluest Eye* pointed out to illustrate on the people, places, language, racism, black consciousness, and traditions of African American People. Toni Morrison's novel brings out the plight condition,

poverty, exploitation of women by the white people, and it also notified on how to overcome such situation. The *Bluest Eye* was nominated for the American Book Award. The black self experience a great existential crisis. Since the Black Africans were subjected to racial discrimination, they underwent the problem of survival in an alien soil. They are made to feel that they are different from others.

The Bluest Eye portrays the tragic, torn lives of a poor black family in 1940's Ohio: Pauline, Cholly, Sam and Pecola. Pecola unlovely and unloved prays each night for blue eyes like those of her privileged blonde, white schoolfellows. She becomes the focus of the hatred engendered by her family's frailty and the world's cruelty. This novel indicates a black girl's quest for white values. Pecola, the black girl, wants to have blue eyes, which is the symbol of white beauty. She believes that such eyes would turn her extremely beautiful. Toni Morrison expresses this beautifully in her novel *The Bluest Eyes*:

Pretty eyes Pretty blue eyes Big blue pretty eyes
Run, Jip, run. Jip runs, Alice runs. Alice has blue eyes.
Jerry has blue eyes Jerry runs. Alice runs. They run
with their blue eyes. Four blue eyes. Four pretty
blue eyes. Blue-sky eyes. Blue-like Mrs. Forest's
blue blouse eyes. Morning-glory-blue-eyes.

Alice-and-Jerry-blue-storybook-eyes.

[Morrison . 1999:46]

The novel shows the psychic state and the resultant behaviour of Pecola under the pressure of white domination. Morrison's interest is in exposing the vicious genocidal effects of racism on the black girl, Pecola.

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