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THE BLUEST EYE: AN EXPOSITION OF RACIAL, GENDER AND COMMUNAL DISCRIMINATION IN AFRO-AMERICAN BLACK WOMAN

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ABSTRACT

There is no need to introduce Toni Morrison, she has world fame. Her works and accomplishments are an introduction in itself. She is a path-breaking Afro-American creative artist. Her writing engages a wide variety of readers in compelling themes that turns around community, racial discrepancy, sexual harassment, love, equality, incest etc. She is the voice of downtrodden Black woman. She does not take issues and themes from all over the world, but she writes on the crucial issues of her people and has universalized them. She insists to re-write the history, re-assess the culture and erase the stereotypes of racism, sexism and patriarchy. Her novel *The Bluest Eye*, voices the problems of racial, gender, and communal differences in Afro-American society from different angles. There are inter and intra-discrepancies, fascination for White Aesthetics of beauty as well as White economy of life. Morrison has shown that Black women are victims of triple jeopardy, adolescent child abuse and incestuous relationship.

Key words: Path breaking, Afro-American, discrepancy, incestuous, triple jeopardy
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"What we have to do is to re-introduce ourselves to ourselves; we have to know the past so that we can use it for now" -Toni Morrison

There is no need to introduce Toni Morrison, she has world fame. Her works and accomplishments are her introduction itself. She is a path breaking Afro-American writer. Her writing engages a wide variety of readers in compelling themes that turns around community, racial discrepancy, sexual harassment, love, equality, incest etc. She is the voice of downtrodden Black woman. She does not take issues and themes from all over the world, but she writes on the crucial issues of her people and universalized them. She insists to re-write the history, re-assess the culture and erase the

stereotypes of racism, sexism and patriarchy. She does not favour the superiority of White over Black, the superiority of man over woman in America and the World. She claims that her main concern in writing is to bring out the hidden surface of history books of America regarding her people. The main focuses of her works are universality, re-search, re-reading and re-writes of Afro-American history. Thameemul Ansari remarks on her writing. *"Toni Morrison as an African-American woman writer is found to be writing out of racial, gendered, class and national specificity. She delves deep into particular in order to reach the universal"*. Why does she want to re-read, re-search and re-write Afro-American history? There is considerable reason behind it; all history and myth were created by white people and

especially by men under the impression of racial, sexual, patriarchal prejudice and superiority. They have created history and myths of Black for their own advantages and luxury. These notions are anti-human that consider Black as an inferior being or sub-human, Black women is treated just as a sexual being who has no character or self-esteem at all. In contrast, White had been considered God's children, born with blessings; civilized and cultured and they have birth right to rule over Black as masters. Gloria Wade Gyles explains this through an imagery of circles:

There are three major circles of reality in American Society, which reflect degrees of power and powerlessness. There is a large circle in which white people, most of the men, experience influence and power. Far away from it there is a small circle, a narrow space, in which there are the black people, regardless of sex, experience, uncertainty, exploitation and powerlessness. Hidden in this second circle is a third, a small dark enclosure in which black women experience pain, illation and vulnerability. These are the distinguishing marks of black womanhood in white America. (1984: 3 - 4)

Morrison has her own way of assertion; she is secular in her remarks and never attacks White people vehemently for their mistreatment to Blacks. She has unfolded the harsh reality and tried to spread awareness about the miseries and difficulties of her people. This is her special technique that makes her different from other writers of the community. Her writing is known as "village literature", that is Afro-American literature itself. She remarks:

I think long and carefully about what my novels ought to do. They should clarify the roles that have become obscured; they ought to identify those things in the past that are useful and those things that are not; and they ought to give nourishment. (Toni Morrison : TBE, 95)

Besides racial discrimination and several illegal foundation there was gender biased intellectual politics. Black women have been scholarly ignored,

though they have tried immensely to express their own point of view and outlook regarding life and freedom through literature and scholarly articles. There are some important authors of 20th century like Zora Neal Hurston, Anne Petry, Paule Marshall, Gloria Naylor and Alice Walker who have exhibited great creative intellect but they were not considered up to the mark. Black Feminism was the result of such neglect, the slogan that was popularised was *Black is Beautiful*. Morrison was influenced by female writer of Black continent Alice Walker whose magnum opus *The Colour Purple* is the masterpiece of Black Female literature. She was also inspired by another Black female writers of Harlem Renaissance like Nella Larsen and Jessie Fauset.

It is said that literature sheds the sheen of its time as a mirror captures a front image exactly. This concept has evocative connotation, as mirror does not show only outer image but deep emotions can be noticed minutely so is the case of literature, it is not mere narration of a story but a presentation of particular culture of surroundings from multiple angles. *The Bluest Eye* is debut of Morrison's literary journey. It was published in 1970, when the slogan *Black is Beautiful* was on its peak. She own Nobel Prize in 1993, this is the manifestation of her achievement and value of free writing. *The Bluest Eye*, recounts the adventures of three young girls: Pecola Breedlove, Claudia and Frieda ; and Pecola's parents Mr. and Mrs. Breedlove. It examines racism, sexuality and incestuous relationship.

It is a novel of initiation concerning a victimized adolescent Black girl Pecola Breedlove, who is obsessed by the White standard of beauty and longing for a *pair of blue eyes*. Why does she long for blue eyes? Because she thinks that getting blue eyes means to become beautiful, to get rid of all miseries of life , which she has suffered. Though she is raped by her father and becomes pregnant, but still she is fond of blue eyes. She longs for blue eyes not only to achieve White Aesthetics of beauty but also wants to achieve equal right in society that is nothing but normal life of "human beings". There is same delineation in the text of *The Bluest Eye*:

It had occurred to Pecola some time ago that if her eyes...were different...she herself would be different...if she looked different,

beautiful, may be (her father) would be different, and (her mother) too. May be they say...we must not do bad things in front of those blue eyes.(TBE).

Morrison questions woman's condition, specially Black women in America and other parts of the world through her groundbreaking sensibilities. Black woman's life was very traumatic. They were victims of triple jeopardy, one by being a woman, second by being a Black and third by class. Thus there were gender, race and class discrepancy. Regarding gender gap, Morrison says in the text, "our manhood was defined by acquisition. Our womanhood by acquiescence". The theme of the novel "longing for blue eyes" is the manifestation of Morrison's assertion that she expressed in her Nobel Prize lecture, "Tell us what it is to be a woman so that we may know what it is to be a man. What moves at the margin? What it is to have no home in this place? To be set adrift from the one you knew. What it is to live at the edge of towns that cannot bear your company".

Morrison is a creative activist, she stands for the right of her people and specially women. A piece of writing is not just a collection of words, but it talks and reflects the reality of specific province through events and characters. It has universal appeal. That is the reason behind Morrison's creative writing. She reveals that she got the creative inspiration for the novel *The Bluest Eye* from a classmate, she had in elementary school. And further she wrote a short story entitled *Little Black Girl*. Allen Rancler an editor of Macmillan, inspired her to expand her story. So it came in the form of this novel as a voice of Afro-American Black people. And what better character to show condition of Black woman than Pecola Breedlove. A passive and impressionable and girl of eleven, she lacks self-esteem and parental guidance. Pecola Breedlove is a daughter of Cholly and Pauline Breedlove, and is the main character throughout the four sections – Autumn, Winter, Spring and Summer in the novel. Pecola is the character, who not only suffers from White Aesthetics of beauty, but also the victim of the brutality of her own Black society. Her suffering is measureless. There are several instances of harsh treatment with her. She encounters first assault of

discrimination at the time of birth by her own mother, she says, "She looked like a black ball of hair". In America there was the system of *ghettoization*, in which Black were segregated from White community. They had different school, library, hotel, road, water-source etc. these were nothing but racial discrepancy. And they were treated as ugly sub human being in the country. Even the school master remarks on Pecola that "you are ugly people". It shows the mentality of the so called educated White.

Morrison, in *The Bluest Eye* has shown inter and intra-racial discrimination. Light- coloured people in the Black community thought themselves superior to Black people and akin to White race. And they treated them as savage and substandard.

The family of Peals, Geraldine Louis, Elihue Micah Whitcomb represent colour of light-skin family. There are two instances in the novel of intra-racial discrepancy. First, the rude behaviour of Maureen Peal with Pecola, Frieda and Claudia. She irritates Pecola by ugly remarks, "Booby Loves Pecola Breedlove, Booby loves Pecola Breedlove". The second instance occurred when Louis Junior and her mother did inhuman treatment with Pecola. Geraldine blamed her for killing Junior's cat rebuking with uncontrollable anger, "Get out", you nasty littler black bitch. Get out of my house".

These sufferings generated an idea in the mind of Pecola that only blue eyes can solve her problems and eliminate all sufferings, even the incestuous act of her father. That is why she went to Shoaphead Church and asks, "I'd like a pair of new blue eyes". There are other imperative examples of racial sufferings in the novel *The Bluest Eye*. As for reference, at the time of sexual intercourse between Cholly and Darlene in a park. They were disturbed by two White men, one with lamp and other with flashlight. They forced them to continue in their presence. They said them "nigger", "coon", which is the offensive word for Black. They ridiculed them by their awful laugh – "Hee hee hee hee" Come on coon faster. You ain't doing nothing for her". These are the important instances of racial discrepancy.

Let's see gender discrimination in the novel, *The Bluest Eye*. Morrison has revealed the harsh reality of Black women by the characters like

Pecola, Pauline, Frieda, Claudia, even by Maureen and Geraldine. Morrison was highly influenced by *Black Feminism Movement* of 1960s. Pauline lives a very tough life, she suffers tortures of her husband, she suffers "outdoors" in personal life. And several assaults in White minded society. There is misconception regarding Black woman that they are emotionless, characterless and strong like a beast. That's why at the time of Pecola's birth Doctor did not care her and says that, "Black women do not feel pain". This is the extreme example of gender discrimination. Same is the case with Claudia Macteer, whose retrospective narrative of her childhood, "Adults do not talk to us – they give us directions. They issue orders without providing information"

There are other considerable instances of gender discrepancy, of child abuse and incestuous rape. Frieda Macteer is abused by Mr. Henry, one of the relatives of Macteer's family. He tries to molest her. Pecola's case is very critical. Her own father brutally raped her twice. There is symbolical description of this unnatural act by the analogy of the flower marigold does not sprout and earth becomes barren by this heinous act :

Quit as it's kept, there were no marigolds in the fall of 1941 We thought, at the time, that it was because Pecola was having her father's baby that the marigold did not grow.

Thus we notice the novel *The Bluest Eye*, voices the problems of racial, gender, and communal differences in Afro-American society from different angles. There are inter and intra-discrepancies, fascination for White Aesthetics of beauty as well as White economy of life. Morrison has shown that Black women are victims of triple jeopardy, adolescent child abuse and incestuous relationship.

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