



Feminist perspective of Toni Morrison in "The Bluest Eye"

KEYWORDS

discrimination, feminism, oppression

Ruchee Aggarwal

English Lecturer in govt college 46, Chandigarh

ABSTRACT *The feminist analysis of the selected works of Toni Morrison attempts a reading that views the texts as an ethnic, cultural and political response to the racist, sexist patriarchal and capitalist oppression and domination of the blacks. It demonstrates how the systems of oppression are sustained by the white supremacist and patriarchy. The Bluest Eye makes a scathing attack on the imposition of white standards of beauty on black women and the creation of cultural perversion. It presents a critic of dominant aesthetic that is internalized by majority of black community and attempts to deconstruct the male ethnicity which exercises a hegemonic control over the lives of black America. The Bluest Eye a powerful expression of Toni Morrison's ethnic cultural feminism, a critic of black poverty, powerlessness and loss of positive self image represented by Pecola who feels that blackness has condemned her to ugliness and neglect.*

Pecola in *The Bluest Eye* internalizes the western standards of beauty under the racial pressure of the dominant culture. The colonization of mind fosters Pecola fatal fascination for a pair of blue eyes—a symbol of Anglo Saxon beauty represents a domed attempt on her part to live up to an aesthetic code that is essentially different from the concept of traditional black beauty. Within the black community itself she is violated by her father, rejected by her mother, taunted by the black boys, mistreated by Geraldine and betrayed by Junior. Pecola's destruction is caused by her alienation from the folk knowledge and values that have not been transmitted to her by her mother and makes her vulnerable to the pernicious effects of internalized colonialism.

The three female characters Pecola, Pauline and Claudia occupy pivotal and significant place in the novel. The first person narrator Claudia makes a revealing comment as the novel opens "we had dropped our seeds in his own plot of black dirt. Our innocence and faith were no more productive than his lust or despair". The feminist perspective on incestuous violence against Pecola reveals that as no other expression of male superiority is within the reach of Cholly, he resolves to subduing and possessing his own daughter. As a result of the rape, Pecola gives birth to a still born child, loses her mind and her life becomes a wasteland. Claudia makes an illustrating observation when the novel comes to a close "and Cholly loved her. I am sure he did. He at any rate was the one who loved her. But his touch was fatal, and something he gave her filled the matrix of her agony with death".

Pecola internalizes the Anglo Saxon aesthetic because her mother has exposed her to black heritage and culture. Pauline's rejection of Pecola becomes the cause of her self-deception and doom. Though similarly situated, Claudia's response to the dominant culture is opposed to that of Pecola. She comes to embrace the cast aesthetic tentatively, reluctantly and consciously. Claudia is the only character in the novel that consciously makes an attempt at deconstructing the ideology of the dominant society, seen in her dismembering of the dolls.

An overview of the life and predicaments of Pecola's parents offers an explanation of their abuse of Pecola. Cholly defines himself as a "free man", an outsider in the society of the

black community and its butt of ridicule. His failure to relate to his wife further marginalizes him. Pauline embraces the trapping of the African-American Christianity. She clings to the western notion of linear history which glorifies the future, undervalues the past and belittles the present. She performs neither the role of a mother nor that of a wife. Besides her parents, other black characters like Geraldine, Louise junior, Maureen Peal and a group of black school boys represent the interracial forces that rob Pecola of her personhood, push her into the abyss of a fatal fantasy and lead her to self-destruction. Angela Davis observes: "Rape was a terribly efficient method of keeping black women and men alike in check. It was a routine arm of repression." By presenting Pecola as a scapegoat Toni Morrison is actually indicting the whole society. Although Claudia indicates the emerging consciousness amongst the African American people in U.S.A to love black identity and personality and be free from the racist white domination in the community.

Pecola is powerless to reject the unachievable values esteemed by those around her and finally descends into insanity. Claudia laments seeing Pecola moving in garbage. She accuses everyone, herself, the town and the entire country for Pecola's fate. She says, "I even think now that the land of entire country was hostile to marigolds that year. Certain seeds it will not nurture, certain fruit it will not bear, and when the land kills of its own volition, we acquiesce and say the victim had right to live;" she is, however, helpless now. The social forces which ruined Pecola are still rampant in the country. African American has no resources with which to fight the standards presented to them by the white culture that scorns them.

Even though *The Bluest Eye* is set in the 1940s, Morrison integrates this pressure that blacks feel to live up to white society's standards of beauty with racism. Toni Morrison narrows down her audience to women. She says that there were no books about her. She did not exist in all literature. She writes to fill in the gap. With the publication of the book which is loosely based on a girl she knew in childhood Lorain establishes her new identity. So the novel is not only a protest against colonization and racial discrimination but also reveals women's struggle to strive and thrive.

REFERENCES

1. Chinua Achebe, *The Role of the Writer in New Nation*, Nigeria Magazine, June, 1964 | 2. Harish Narang, *Politics as Fiction: The Novels of NGUGI WA THIONGO*. New Delhi: Creative Books, 1995. | 3. Amit Sarval, Aneeta Rajendran, Makrand Pranjape, ed., *African Studies: English Studies-Indian Perspectives*. New Delhi: Antra, 2005 | 4. Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*. Great Britain: Vintage, 1979 | 5. Angela Davis, *Women, Race and Class*. London: The Women Press Ltd., 1982