

Comparative Study of Racism in African and American Culture: A Case Study of Toni Morrison's the Bluest Eye

Aditya Raj Pandey

Student, BA LL.B, Symbiosis Law School, Hyderabad

Abstract— For the last four decades the issue of racial discrimination has been dealt remarkably by the Afro-American writers but till 1960s despite so many reforms it fundamentally remains unchanged in the United States of America and continues to a great extent even today. Toni Morrison, an Afro-American novelist has challenged and exposed racial domination and discrimination in almost all of her narratives. The socio-cultural condition of black society is the cause of the trauma of black people. The views and perspectives popularized and universalized regarding black people by white have created hierarchy in the African society itself. Internalization of racism by African themselves results into stratification in which women are placed on the last of margin. Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* depicts the dualistic tale of oppressor and oppressed. The racism, oppression and marginalization in Afro-American communities like African, Native American, Anglo and Mulatto have enabled them to develop low opinion regarding themselves, however the novelist tries at her best to bring forth their perspective by exposing the mental colonization of African culture. The present paper attempts to explore the case of racism in Africa and America both focusing on *The Bluest Eye* of Morrison.

Index Terms: Racism, Afro-American Culture, Identity-Crisis, Double Marginalization of Black Women.

INTRODUCTION

Toni Morrison in her novel *The Bluest Eye* has narrated relationship of the oppressor and oppressed in a different way. Undoubtedly the practice of racism existing in African- American community is disseminated by whites in very many ways. The politics of racism and its systematic subjugation can be mapped through the characters of the novel. The internalization of racism has destroyed character's self-esteem and developed hatred and contempt for their own black colour.

The central protagonist of the novel Pecola is characterized by Morrison on the basis of her real-life

experience. The fictional characters of black literary world are reflection of the society and Morrison has proven time and again that the reality exhibited in the realist texts of 19th century by white writers is not universal truth. Her communion with a little girl at the age of eleven poked her to ponder over the existence of God. Morrison is not successful in finding the agreement of that little black girl regarding God as she wanted blue eye. Despite so many prayers the little black girl's heartfelt wish for blue eye cannot be granted. Morrison has mentioned her reaction when she failed to find blue eye after two years of prayers. She writes that "an incredibly beautiful face" I have not experienced before (Oprah, 2001, p. 185). Morrison fails to understand that why this young girl is not able to see her own beauty. The kind of charm the little girl was having for blue eye and the way she revolted for that, created an unforgettable imprint over the mind of Morrison.

In 1965 Morrison started writing, '*The Bluest Eye*' and at that time a different consciousness among black writers got insulated. Against the racist view the movement "Black is beautiful" was at its peak. The precursors of Morrison have already paved path to raise voice against the victimization of black people and further she thinks about her role and need of such movements. Morrison writes, in *The Bluest Eye*, "Why, although reviled by others, could his beauty not be taken for granted within the community? Why did it need wide public articulation?" (Morrison, 1999, p.167)

The oppression of strategic marginalization and racism in the characters of the novel reveal the need of such movements in black community. In the novel it is apparent that characters rate and value themselves as per their blackness. Those who are too black they are observed having self-hatred and self-contempt. Characters like Geraldine are obsessed with the thought to separate those who are less black.

The culture of segregation within black community is apparent. The comparison between the practice of racism in African and American society can be chalked in the novel where women and dark-skinned people in comparison to less dark one is overlooked and victimized. Based on a real story Toni Morrison has created an artistic plot to denounce the practice of racism in Afro- American community. Almost all the characters are gripped into the blackness but Pecola is not at all able to manage herself and she surrenders herself. Morrison is intended to show that the practice of oppression either through racism or gender it is applicable on all but how it is multilayered oppression, and the creation of 'other' within 'other' is an ongoing process. To quote Morrison, "I focused, therefore, on how something so grotesque as the demonization of an entire race could take root inside the most delicate member of society: a child; the most vulnerable member; a female"(Morrison, 1999, p.168).

Blue eye is employed as a metaphor in the novel. When Pecola is looking for blue eye, she wants to move away from her life. She has developed in her mind her identity only in terms of blackness. Blackness is interpreted like ugliness and on the contrary Pecola's wish to be beautiful in terms of white and blue eye. Blue Eye are a metaphor for all the characters including Pecola's mother. Pecola's negligence on the basis of her colour and she is subjected to sexual harassment by her own father is the extreme case of racism.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research paper will follow comparative and analytical method and will do cross referencing as per the available resources. The primary text will be evaluated and analysed. Consisting the issue of racism significant researches produced on Morrison will be analysed.

LITERATURE REVIEW

- *Racism within African American Communities in Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye and Paradise by Maria Bring*

The study shows the comparative evaluation of the two novels of Morrison named *The Bluest Eye* and *Paradise* which exposes practice of racism within the

race. Constant development of 'other' and division of community within community reveal the direct and indirect impact of racial power. The vulnerable condition of a woman is chalked out.

- *Colour Discrimination in Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye by S Anand Raj.*

The paper has focused on the practice of racism and slavery. It highlights the internalization of subjugation of black people and the end result is only going to be madness like Pecola.

- *Marginalisation in Toni Morrison's Beloved and The Bluest Eye by Thejani-i Pohena and Dr. Sivasish Biswas.*

In the selected works of Morrison, the paper traces the process of marginalization and how in Afro-American culture people are strategically forced to accept and welcome their unhomeliness and identity crisis.

ANALYSIS

The novel can be one of the best sources to do the comparative analysis of racism in African and American society. Protagonist of *The Bluest Eye*, the little girl Pecola Breedlove is shown living a life full of hatred and negligence. She has instilled such a low opinion and damaged self of her due to racism that she is not able to appreciate herself. Nonetheless, Pecola thinks she can have cure of her ugliness by obtaining the blue eyes. In the novel it is apparent that racism is multilayered and for Pecola the most tragic thing is the racism within the race. She is victim of black and white both. Culture of the Americans dominated by white does not allow Pecola's visit to many places because of her skin colour and she can never think of having access to the American Dream. Morrison writes about that real life girl on whom Pecola is modelled:

Implicit in her desire was racial self-loathing. And twenty years later I was still wondering about how one learns that. Who told her? Who made her think that it was better to be a freak than what she was? Who had looked at her and found her so wanting, so small a weight on the beauty scale? (Morrison, 1999, p.167).

The yearning for blue eyes is not only because of self-loathing but it is an attempt by Pecola to have love and respect in the society and most importantly in her own family. Morrison has well-presented psychological state of Pecola, "If she looked

different, beautiful, maybe Cholly would be different, and Mrs Breedlove too. Maybe they'd say "Why, look at pretty-eyed Pecola. We mustn't do bad things in front of those pretty eyes" (Morrison, 1999, p. 34). Action of other characters like Pauline and Cholly is the manifestation of the cultural scenario in which they are brought up.

To a great extent the self-hatred Pecola has developed is due to racism and along with racism the loveless environment is intolerable to her. Love is the key human emotion in one or another form for survival and to get that in her life Pecola thinks to have blue eye. She has experienced that the little girls with blue eye are appreciated and if the beauty is measured with height, then she would like to look tall. This paradigm of beauty is ruling over Pecola's mind because she is brought up in racial domineering society.

The longingness for love in the life of Pecola draws attention of the readers when she asks, "What did love feel like? she wondered. How do grown-ups act when they are in love? Eat fish together?" (Morrison, 1999, p. 44). Pecola was not having any concept of love once she talked to a prostitute who was living upstairs to her about love. That prostitute shared her experience with a man with whom she was in love and ate fish. Mrs. Breedlove is having fondness for blue eye. The way fisher girl is loved by her mother Pecola had never tasted that love from her mother's side. For both the community blue eye is synonymous with beauty. Morrison opines that self-contempt and self-hatred will continue in African-American culture unless they evaluate themselves by their own otherwise like Pecola all African-Americans will look at themselves as ugly and worthless:

"Each night without fails, she prayed for blue eyes. Fervently, for a year she had prayed. Although somewhat discouraged, she was not without hope. To have something as wonderful as that happen would take a long, long time. Thrown in this way, into the biding conviction that only a miracle could relieve her, she would never know her beauty. She would only see what there was to see: the eyes of other people (Morrison, 1999, p. 35)."

Finally, the rape of Pecola by her father twice is the climax of continuation of revengeful attitude and vicious cycle of racism. There is no clear-cut justification for the rape however, Cholly can be

taken as a symbol which shows oppression and racism do not exist simultaneously. Morrison suggests that the person who is sufferer, often internalizes an attitude of resentment and its outlet can harm even the nearest one.

Mrs. Breedlove's attitude towards her daughter is revealed when she denies to believe the rape of Pecola by her father. The most pathetic result of racism can be experienced when Pecola talks to her imaginary friend after being insane:

"I wonder what it would be like. Horrible. Really? Yes. Horrible. Then why didn't you tell Mrs. Breedlove? I did tell her! I don't mean the first time. I mean the second time when you were sleeping on the couch. I wasn't sleeping! I was reading! You don't have to shout. You don't understand anything do you? She didn't even believe me when I told her. So why didn't you tell her about the second time? She wouldn't have believed me then either. You're right. No use in telling her when she wouldn't believe you (Morrison, 1999, p. 158)."

After her madness talking to her imaginary friend, Pecola nurtures a perfect culture for herself which is distinct than the white culture. Temporarily in delusion she praises herself because she feels that she has got blue eye. Unless she is away from her dark self, she could not find out beauty in herself. She says to her imaginary friend "if there is somebody with bluer eyes than mine, then maybe there is someone with the bluest eyes. The bluest eyes in the whole world" (Morrison, 1999, p. 158). She is scared of being neglected if someone will have bluer eye than her.

It is apparent in the novel that the family of Pecola is so much under racial self-loathing that every member is having staunch faith in his/her ugliness. Pauline's treatment towards Pecola from the beginning drives her to insanity. The way Pauline treats her new born daughter and shows inclination towards fisher girl, and house of fisher it describes the low self-esteem of family and absolutism of dominant white culture. To quote:

"You looked at them and wondered why they were so ugly; you looked closely and could not find the source. Then you realized that it came from conviction, their conviction. They lived there because they were poor and black, and they stayed there because they believed they were ugly (Morrison, 1999, p. 28)."

It is significant to point out the existing intra-racism in the surrounding community of Pecola. The children of schools created poetic lines to tease her “Black e mo. Black e mo. Yadaddsleepnekked Black e mo” (Morrison, 1999, p. 50) which means Pecola is darker than them. Those who are light skinned they feel proud in teasing the darker one. Another instance is that the best treatment given to Maureen in school by teachers and students both because she is half-white. The only character Claudia, who is younger than Pecola and Frieda, is not able to understand the charm and beauty of white people. When on Christmas blond hair and blue eye dolls are gifted to children by their parents, she feels disturbed and wish to throw out such dolls. She is unaware of the codes of society therefore, wonders over the secret of the beauty of white girls.

CONCLUSION

The lack of appreciation and affirmation in the society of black erode life of most of them. The comparative picture of African and American culture enables us to realize that the freedom is not to be interpreted in terms of the end of colonial period rather it is to understand that mental colonization is equally even more docile and oppressive in nature. The division between light and dark skinned African-Americans exposes the side effects of racism along with oppressor and oppressed relationship. Toni Morrison’s delineation of other characters in the novel exhibits the fact that the oppression of an individual is not limited to him/her rather it spoils life of whole generation. Self-loathing of Pecola’s mother and her father’s process of releasing his traumatic experiences are demonic in nature which destroyed Pecola’s life completely.

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