Racism In The Bluest Eye

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Abstract

Racism is very often seen in all communities where one race is considered inferior to the other, and is a major reason behind prejudice and hatred towards one section of the society. Majorly affected from this racism are African-American people who could not come out of their social and psychological inferior complex from centuries. The Bluest Eye is the first novel by Toni Morrison and its publication brought him name and fame globally. This novel enlightens us about the lifestyle of black people who try to personalize the culture of white people but feel rejected in every way. The fact can not be denied that none is slave anymore, and government has tried a lot to bring economic balance; however, African-Americans are still in the fight of proving themselves to be equal to the whites. The blacks have tried and are trying to be a part of white culture, but are set apart in all the ways. Toni Morrison has urged the African-Americans to be proud of their original selves and to find happiness in their own culture and color. This paper is about the struggle of the blacks to be accepted in an alien society – a society which has not accepted them even after decades.

Key Words: Racial Discrimination, Racism, Superior-Inferior Complex, Colonised

Racism is one of the evils which have resulted in enhancing prejudice and discrimination among the different groups of the society. This is a belief of considering one race inferior to another. However, in the present scenario, this definition has broadened its area. It is further subdividing human beings into separate groups based on their behavior and capabilities and likewise given the tags of inferior or superior. Numerous examples of this can be found in South Africa.

Racism was at its peak in 19th century, but even today people are not free from racial discrimination and their hatred towards the black people which is on continuous rise with the passing time. With passing the act ‘The Emancipation Proclamation’, it was thought to bring equality for the blacks. Though this act put a halt on the slave trade, yet the condition of the colored people is awful. Martin Luther King, a Baptist Minister, who himself is black, played a pivotal role to eradicate this discrimination, demanded for the equal rights for his community. In an assembly, he pointed out the poor condition of the Blacks as:

“But one hundred years later, the Negro still is not free. One hundred years later, the life of the Negro is
still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and chains of discrimination.”

Colonialism gave birth to racial discrimination. Europeans had a dream of trading and establishing business all over the world, which pushed them outside their land. They colonized many nations in order to purify the East. Their approach was mainly forceful and dominating. The plan of colonialism is well explained by Walia:

“Colonialism is accompanied by exploitation, annexation and conquest. Its hegemonic power rests on creating the binary opposition of self/other, white/black, good/evil, superior/inferior, and so on.”

On the establishment of the colonialism, whites were highly disliked all around the world. They had to bear the hatred of the blacks for entering their regions and dominating them. After diaspora, whites could not accept the uprising of the blacks and could not permit their status be as higher as theirs. This mere thought resulted in superiority and inferiority complex, further became racial discrimination.

Directly or indirectly the blacks were made to believe that they belong to an abandoned section of society, which can never be equal to that of the whites, and they are meant for slavery of the whites. The will and desire of the black were of no value as the champions could only be from the whites – the superior class of the times. This relationship can be given name of ‘mastery-slavery’. Even before their trade diaspora, natives of the land, even after being aware about their rights and responsibilities at their land, were unintentionally accepting being treated as slaves. And this dominance was possible due to racism only. Racism was the weapon to make others feel that they are inferior in having good accepted color, good land, language and everything else. This was not the situation in Africa only, but India and all other colonized nations, which could not consciously set themselves free from the jaws of British imperialism till now.

This effect can be seen in the works of many novelists. Post-colonial literature is a great example and illustration of the awful condition of psychologically deteriorated and subjugated societies. Many of the African American writers have penned down their pain in their novels, by not presenting themselves only but their whole community. The loss of identity or identity crisis is the main topic their works move around. Among these writers, one name ‘Toni Morrison’ shines because of her very first novel The Bluest Eye. In her novel, she is throwing light on the lives of the black and the way they have to tackle the issue of social and racial discrimination. Though racial discrimination is everywhere in the globe, America is the hub of it. Toni Morrison has the representative of her whole class through her novel and writes about the sad stories of black people’s oppression and subjugation by the white people in a foreign land. In a very young age, Toni Morrison has felt that Afro-Americans have accepted themselves to be slaves of the white community, considering themselves to be inferior to the white class on the basis of color and intellectualism. Toni Morrison is a highly renowned figure in the world today as she has not given a thought to the subjugation of the black only, but the
degraded life style all the men, women and even kids in Africa also. Africans in America are not living the life of a common human being as they experience the treatment worse than with animals. She is pretty much concerned about improving the social status of her community men. On being asked about her views on the black community, she said:

“I am not sure what the word “Negro” means, which is why I write books. What is black child/woman/friend/ mother? What is a black person?”

In the novel The Bluest Eye Morrison presents this problem of identity crisis as it affects the psychological freedom of a being. This novel portrays how badly the white community has affected the black that they have developed a hatred for themselves, their own color and values. The novel is based on the little black girl named Pecola longing for blue eyes, blonde hair and white skin to be accepted in the reign of the whites as:

“Each night, without fail, she prayed for blue eyes. Fervently, for a year she had prayed.”

This novel is the portrayal of all the lives in America which are psychologically dominated because of their color and creed. Pecola who is the central character of the the novel is the most miserable person who faces racial discrimination continuously. Her own mother continues to abuse her for not having blue eyes and white skin something that her employer’s daughter has. She is never loved by her mother and considers her black complexion to be the reason for that. From this behavior and treatment, she develops the thought that she is not beautiful and starts hating the white kids. She thinks her physical appearance is the devil and the mere cause behind being mistreated by the whites and never loved by her mother. She thinks, on having blue eyes, blonde hair and fair skin, nobody will treat her bad, and people perception will change. Blue eye which is badly desired by Pecola can be easily understood as a metaphor. While expressing her desire to have blue eyes, Pecola clearly presents her will to escape from her own life and herself.

The girl who is being described is not an adult, an age where people start thinking about society and social issues, but mere a girl of eleven years who can sense the prejudice and hatred only because of being black. All the characters including mother and children in the novel consider blue eyes to be the symbol of beauty as they all admire Shirley Temple. Pecola is never loved or appreciated character. She has none to praise her and none to feel safe and valued with. In her surrounding, she is taken as one subject to dominate because of her class. Her obsession for blue eyes keeps on increasing with each passing day. She desires blue eyes because she wants to escape from reality and wants to be something that she is not. She thinks that the only solution to her problem is having blue eyes and being white. She is depressed, devalued and degraded. More than being accepted in the society, she wants to be accepted by her own mother and family. This longing can be well proven from the text:

“if she looked different, beautiful, maybe Cholly would be different, and Mrs Breedlove too.”

Puline and Cholly are also very important characters to understand social treatment of the blacks, as their actions prove that blacks are treated wrong because of the accepted oppression and subjugation. Pecola has
none in the world, not accepted by any member of the family and mistreated by her peers. Her pain can be felt when novel reveals her being raped by her father and getting pregnant with her father’s child. She loses not only her virginity but also her mental stability.

One incidence depicting hatred towards black domination is when Pecola goes to grocery store and the shopkeeper, Mr. Yacobowski shows how much he dislikes the white beauty. The narrator of the story also considers white beauty to not to be beauty at all. She never appreciates Frieda and Pecola’s liking for Shirley Temple who is considered to be the model of the town only because of being white and having blue eyes. There is another incidence which depicts how badly Pecola is treated in her society just because of being very black and ugly. It has already been mentioned that Pecola has none to appreciate her – neither in her surroundings nor at her home. She is an isolated character even after being surrounded by many. This is the incidence with Young Junior, who is a black child. His mother is also black but she never wants her son to play with black children. This restriction shows that not only white people hate blacks, but black themselves. This teaching by her mother never lets Young Junior mingle with the black kids. One day he notices Pecola standing alone in the break time and invites her at his place. Though this is weird for Pecola as it is quite unusual for her, she accepts to go because likes to be treated good. When she is standing outside the house of Young Junior, she feels hesitant to enter. At this moment she notices the picture of Jesus Christ and The Bible, and dares to enter. At the entrance only, Young Junior shows the evil face and locks her up in a room, leaving a black cat on her face. He keeps on laughing and calling Pecola to be his prisoner. Not only Young Junior but his mother also does not refrain from insulting her. She says that ‘black people are the embodiments of shame. Six people sleep in one bed. Their hair are uncombed, dresses fall apart and shoes are always dirty.’ Her words are a psychological attack on Pecola, as she experiences being hated for being black by a black.

Not only Pecola, her father also goes through the same nightmare. He has also experienced being rejected and dominated at every stage of life. He feels that he is not as free as white people are. He hates the moment when he was caught having sex with his friend. He is ashamed to be black.

Pecola, the main character of the novel - a character which is mainly portrayed to explain the sufferings of the black - shows the pain of a black child who is abandoned at every place. She is neither liked by her family nor her peers. On the top of it, she is not liked by herself. She longs for blue eyes so that she can lead a normal life as other kids do. But the condition gets worst when she is raped by her father. At the end, she is pregnant with her father’s child and is not mentally stable. She thinks she has the bluest eye and is the most beautiful girl in the world.

The Bluest Eye is an intellectual manifestation of the pain of the black people. Toni Morrison has beautifully and intelligently depicted the effects of black domination on their psyche and their generations. Pecola longs to be as white as white community, wants to have blue eyes, and desires for blonde hair. This is something which
is not possessed by a normal white girl. It shows her eagerness to be accepted in her society that she wants extraordinary features of the white woman.

At the end, it can be said that though with the efforts of government and black leaders, slavery has been eradicated from the professional lives of the blacks, they are still slaves of the whites psychologically. Toni Morrison presents a very good example of black domination with the character of Pecola. Pecola represents the whole Afro-American class. Toni Morrison, in one of her interviews, has stated that the reason she writes is to make people aware that ‘beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder’. Thus the whole black community should be proud of themselves and should not be trapped in the identity crisis.

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