

An Anatomization of Incestuous behavior: Psychological reasons for Incest in the novels *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison and *The Blue Bedspread* by Raj Kamal Jha - A comparative study

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Abstract

This article limelight's incest, on the most widely prohibited and undesired taboos, which indicates a relationship that involves sexual encounters between close family members, like father-daughter, mother-son and brother-sister. African-American writer, Toni Morrison, through her rustic and bold portrayal of incestuous relationship, between a father and his daughter in *The Bluest Eye*, shook the readers who find the discussion of such taboos to be repugnant. Here, Morrison tries to portray the father Cholly Breedlove's character in such a way that the readers feel sympathetic towards him because of his distressing past that affects his psychosis and leads to incestuous behaviour. In this same manner, Raj Kamal Jha sheds light on the incest between a brother and his elder sister which is an embodiment of concern between each other, through his award winning novel, *The Blue Bedspread*. With the help of Sigmund Freud's theory of Psychoanalysis and Psychoanalytic Models of Human Psyche, the reasons for the incestuous behaviour of the characters Cholly Breedlove and Pecola in *The Bluest Eye* and the narrator and his elder sister in *The Blue Bedspread* is deduced.

Keywords: *Incest, Psychoanalysis, Models of Human Psyche, Reality and Pleasure principles, Id, Ego, Super-ego.*

Introduction

Pertaining to the social and religious customs, there are some limitations which prohibit certain practices by marking restrictions on them, and we term them taboo. Incest is one among those which take up a unique place in the world of taboos, as it involves sexual emotions and actions between family members or

close relatives. Gone are the days considering this as an alienated concept. As the result of open mindedness and courage of the authors who express such tabooed practices, people have started discussing these events without prejudice by developing another dimension of perceptions. I chose to work on Incest because still the number of people who are tolerant towards encountering tabooed topics is not significant. We will be analysing the psychological reasons behind the incestuous behaviour portrayed in the novel *The Blue Bedspread* by Raj Kamal Jha, by dint of a comparative study with the novel *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison.

Relationships are strings that associate or connect people which could be intimate, platonic, positive, or negative and serve as a bridge for expressing and imbibing feelings, emotions, care, concern so on and so forth. Basically, we have familial relationships, friendships, acquaintanceships, romantic relationships and even more nuanced types that might include workplace relationships, teacher/student relationships, community or group relationships regardless of the intensity. The universe follows stereotypes for these diverse relationships and impose certain limitations and rules on humankind that are inherited through numerous myths, literary works, and postulates from our ancestors that actually work as a rule book. But, when these stereotypes are broken, it agitates obnoxiousness, especially the ones associating sexual relationship between a parent and a child and between siblings.

Incest is considered as a form of abuse or manipulation, not just because of the societal and moral values, but, also as it leads to several undesirable biological complications and consequences which might result in the alterations of the gene pool or develop genetic diseases in the offspring. In today's understanding, after a lot of researches and surveys, we come to know that, in some cases incest occurs accidentally between two people who are not aware of their familial connection. But, there are also cases where it happens consciously which might be a result of developing concern which in course of time changes to sexual desire or might be solely sexual.

Psychology and literature are secretly twinned as both the disciplines have a lot of similarities in dealing with human beings and their emotions; and also any literary work can be tasted to its fullest only if the readers lend themselves to the work, by relating them with the characters. This process of relating, is an embodiment to the Aristotelian concept known as Catharsis. Sigmund Freud's Psychoanalytic theory is head and shoulders above anything that make us understand the exact characteristics and mind set of any character that is portrayed in any literary work. It is more of a therapy done to human beings to find out the exact

character of them by focusing on their unconscious part of routine such as, dreams, and desires, phobias and phobias. And so, with the help of Sigmund Freud's Psychoanalytic Models of Human Psyche, the reasons for the incestuous behaviour of the characters Cholly Breedlove in *The Bluest Eye* and the narrator and his elder sister in *The Blue Bedsread* can be deduced.

Sigmund Freud's Psychoanalytic Models of Human Psyche

One among the greatest neuropsychiatrists and contributors to the field of human psychology is Sigmund Freud, also known as 'The Father of Psychology'. He found the theory of Psychoanalysis which is actually a therapy that involves free association with the patients, to study their unconscious mind through conversing with them, focusing on their desires, fears, and dreams. He believed in the concept that a person's character is a developmental process that advances from childhood to adulthood, with a combination of conscious and unconscious aspects. Psychoanalysis is used to find the distinction between the conscious and unconscious and to bring into light, the psychological motives behind any behavior.

Sigmund Freud's Psychoanalytic Models of Human Psyche can be used to analyze the character Cholly Breedlove in *The Bluest Eye* and the narrator and his sister in *The Blue Bedsread* as the models deal with the human behavior and mental state. One among Freud's human psyche models is the Tripartite model, which explains the three different psyches of a human mind which are the Id, Ego, and the Super-ego. These components are responsible for human behaviors. He formulated the tripartite concept which explains the anatomy of human mind in terms of the retention of memories, where the memories are stored inside the human mind, and from which part of the psyche it is expressed.

To begin with, Id is a form of psyche which works under pleasure principle and serves as the driving force of personality. Pleasure principle is nothing but, the human minds' driving force that is present naturally, which is used for satisfying the desires, wishes, fears etc. In the process of urging for attaining satisfaction, the human mind tends to neglect the societal and moral principles. Freud says that, this Id is the component that comes from the birth of a child and completely unconscious and unlike ego and super-ego, id doesn't evolve as we grow. Thus, Id is an unconscious and irrational part of human psyche which is chaotic and unreasonable.

In addition, Ego is the modified part of Id, which is due to external influences and it works on the reality principle. Ego is the reasoning part of id and plays a major role in satisfying the demands of id, and id doesn't care about the social ethics that are postulated. So, it is obvious that, ego is also a kind of id with the ability of logical reasoning. If id is something which urges to get pleasure, then, ego is something which create strategies and plans to get the same pleasure reasonably. When the ego fails to get satisfaction even after planning, it tries to compensate using some aspects like depression, tension, and anxiety which are termed as defense mechanisms. The creation of mind and psyche is stupendous, because when something is desired and doesn't happen, the id psyche brings in ego psyche which further helps to logically rationalize things and supplies the defense mechanisms as a consoler. This will be enough to prove that unlike id, ego doesn't come from birth but it develops as an individual grows.

The final part of psyche is the Super-ego. There are not much differences between ego and super-ego as they both make plans to get satisfied, but, where super-ego differs is that, while making plans by considering the societal ethics, it goes a step higher and thinks about the negative consequences. To be precise, super-ego is an upgraded version of ego and is considered as the most conscious part of human psyche.

Freud also came up with Dynamic, Economic, and Topographic models of human psyche which involves the working of Id, Ego, and Super-ego that are used to analyze any character in terms of behavior and help us to deduce the reasons for such behaviors. Most of the human beings' minds are like emotional roller coasters as they experience and relate to lot of feelings and emotions in their routine. So, using these models, the characters Cholly Breedlove in *The Bluest Eye* and the narrator and his elder sister in *The Blue Bedspread* can be psychoanalyzed.

Analysing Incest in *The Bluest Eye*

The Bluest Eye is the inaugural novel of Toni Morrison for which she was awarded the Nobel prize. The story is set in Lorain, Ohio between 1940–41, which tells the tragic story of the protagonist Pecola Breedlove who is an African-American girl from an abusive family. She is taken by the MacTeer family after her alcoholic and abusive father Mr. Cholly Breedlove burned the house. Pecola equates beauty and social acceptance with whiteness and the blue eye white people have and wishes to have her own blue eye. On a bad day, while Pecola is washing her dishes, her drunken father sexually abuses her and she is impregnated by

him. Ultimately the baby dies and Pecola goes mad believing in her psychosis, that she has received blue eyes, and then on she starts living an isolated life in her own world.

The episode where Cholly Breedlove rapes his daughter comes under the Dynamic model of Sigmund Freud that emphasizes the forces present in a human mind, which become the reason for conflicts among them. This model holds up two major states of a mind, Conscious or Rational state which experiences the reality, social and moral ethics and becomes the logical part of the mind. The other type is Unconscious or Irrational state which encompasses the repressed feelings, fears, desires, and dreams of a human being. As the mind has different forces in it, there are high chances for the rise of conflicts among them, and these produce a combined force.

The situation where Cholly Breedlove rapes his daughter Pecola shows his mixed uncoordinated thoughts. When Cholly's mother was pregnant with him, his father eloped, and four days after his birth, his mother left him on a dumpster. One of his aunts, Aunt Jimmy retrieved him and brought him up. Growing up, he was not very comfortable with living with an old woman. After the aunt's funeral he was involved in copulation with a friend, Darlene in a forest. Two white men wanted them to continue as they watched, this incident triggered Breedlove's temper and he channelled it towards Darlene instead of the white men because, those were the days when the blacks were treated as slaves. He felt powerless in front of her.

The mind, in order to escape bitter situations, develops some mechanisms that serve as defence. Id plays a major role here because, its nature is to hold irrational, instinctual, secret desires and aims at only satisfying the pleasure principle of human psyche. All these past incidents and the repressed feelings that were a result of them affected Cholly's actions both consciously or unconsciously. Later, as his marital relationship turns out wretched, he only feels burdened by his children. One day, he wonders why his daughter should love him though he has not done anything worthy. He is infuriated by this thought.

Guilt and impotence rose in a bilious duet. What could he do for her—ever? What give her? What say to her? What could a burned-out black man say to the hunched back of his eleven-year-old daughter? If he looked into her face, he would see those haunted, loving eyes. The hauntedness would irritate him—the love would move him to fury. How dare she love him? Hadn't she any sense at all? What was he supposed to do about that? Return it? How? (Morrison 159)

All these thoughts flashes in Cholly's mind and when he sees Pecola scratching one foot with another, the same way Pauline did when he first met her, he wants to repeat how he sucked Pauline's feet again, now in case of Pecola's. He feels tenderness in his heart, and wants to wash away the sorrow that is evident in her face. He is not sure of how to do it, and in the spur of the moment when he holds Pecola from falling, he starts raping her. Only by the end he feels guilty and realises that this kind of sexual relationship from her father would not wipe a child's distress. Filled with tenderness counteracting his fury, he leaves the place after covering her with a quilt. This act shows the shift from his irrational state to a conscious rational state. But he does this a second time as well.

Secondly, the economic model of human psyche deals with the two concepts of pleasure principle and reality principle. Pleasure principle is driven by id, where a person does not think about consequences, but goes behind whatever gives pleasure or satisfaction even if it is irrational. Normally, as a person gets matured, his mind shifts towards the reality principle, where ego takes hold and he thinks of societal principles before making any decision towards the activity that gives pleasure. But, there are also cases where, like Cholly Breedlove, the person gets stuck between both the principles. Here, the person is driven by his id, but after committing the pleasuring activity, he is enthralled by guilt and regret, as a result of the reality principle. The very episode mentioned earlier where Cholly rapes Pecola is a perfect example of this model. Because of his immediate swap from pleasure to reality principle, he feels so guilty and covers her with the quilt. His imbalance between pleasure and reality principle is also the reason for him raping his daughter a second time.

Again the hatred mixed with tenderness. The hatred would not let him pick her up, the tenderness forced him to cover her. So when the child regained consciousness, she was lying on the kitchen floor under a heavy quilt, trying to connect the pain between her legs with the face of her mother looming over her. (Morrison 161)

In topographic model, Freud divides the mind into three parts namely conscious, preconscious, and unconscious. The conscious part of the mind includes the present awareness and memories that are easily accessible. The memories in the preconscious part are the ones that come to our mind when we think about it. The unconscious part of the mind is the most complicated where repressed feelings and emotions are stored apart from memories that are not often recalled. Due to societal constraints and awareness, certain feelings related to id are suppressed. They become a part of the unconscious mind and come out in unexpected disguises.

The actions of Cholly Breedlove can be analysed by categorising them using the topographic model. When he involved in sexual encounter with Darlene and the random women he met before meeting Pauline, he was driven by his id and proceeded consciously. The moment when he first saw Pauline has still been in his preconscious memory. This is the reason he remembers it when he sees Pecola standing in the same posture as Pauline once did, and does the same gesture that he did with his wife. His tenderness wants to stop her leg from itching, but his welled up repressed feelings come out from the unconscious mind and lead to the raping.

The timid, tucked-in look of the scratching toe—that was what Pauline was doing the first time he saw her in Kentucky. Leaning over a fence staring at nothing in particular. The creamy toe of her bare foot scratching a velvet leg. It was such a small and simple gesture, but it filled him then with a wondering softness (Morrison 160)

Analysing Incest in *The Blue Bedspread*

In *The Blue Bedspread*, Raj Kamal Jha has constructed the story in a way where the narrator writes a series of short stories for his niece within which bitter truths about his life are woven. These truths involving various incestuous relationships within family are the ones he wants to let out to avoid depression, but could not due to the social construct where incest is looked upon as an intolerable sin. The narrator does not disclose the names of any character in the story as “it doesn't matter in this city of twelve million names.” (Jha 11) From this, one can gain a perspective that, the events of the novel happen among common individuals, not just in the narrator's family, but are kept secret since the few cases that are exposed are considered disgusting acts without proper introspection. Keeping all his thoughts and feelings to himself, he starts leading a secluded life.

The narrator's parents are not in a happy familial relationship. His father often comes home drunk and physically abuses his mother. There comes an incident where a stranger wave at his mother, and she waves back with a smile, which brings a doubt of extra-marital affair between the two, though there is no other proof for it. At times, the father takes up violence as a response to trivial mistakes done by the children. Because of this, the narrator and his sister resort to each other for the love and concern that they didn't receive from their parents. The sister, four years elder than the narrator, takes good care of him. They go to school and do their daily activities at home together, and sleep in the same bed. They start to play a game that the narrator terms the “Night Game” that turns out to be the time where they express their sexual consciousness and start kissing

and touching each other's private parts. This evolves into asexual relationship that happens almost every night. The siblings find this to be the only happiness and pleasure in their lives that keep them going.

She was fourteen, I was ten, and it was on our ninety square feet of fabric sky that we first kissed and, later, touched each other in what then we thought were the wrong places. And it was this daily theatre of pleasure and fear, played out on our blue bedspread that carried us as if on a wave from one night to the next. (Jha 56)

From the previous chapter, it can be seen that this activity done by the siblings comes under the dynamic model, because the absence of parental love has led to desperation, against which the 'Night Game' serves as a defence. The pleasure and love they desire for is achieved by their conscious actions of concern that evolves into love and unconscious feelings of sexual attraction. They have no second thoughts while involving in such activities because their mind's pleasure-principle is driven by id as their only source of consolation.

It also applies to the economic principle, where the narrator's sister especially is filled with guilt when the narrator is caught touching her inappropriately by their father. He doesn't advise him or make them sleep in separate rooms, but rather makes his son to undress himself intending to insult him. His sister, when she comes to know about this, decides to elope as they won't be able to face each other after these instances and realisations. One day, the sister comes to meet the narrator and finds him as a comfort and consolation for these distressing years since her elopement. They engage in asexual act that night, but out of guilt she leaves her brother again. There is an imbalance between the pleasure and the reality principle as a result of which she couldn't control her desire and involves sexually with her brother, but then leaves out of guilt. The narrator gets hit by the reality principle so hard when less than a year after this incident he gets a call from the police about the death of his sister while delivering a baby girl. Finally, in the story that he's typing, filled with many emotions of regret, guilt, and despair he confesses that he is the father of his niece.

The narrator compared the look of any girl he met with his sister's beauty since their first sexual encounter. His sister was so in his conscious part of the mind that he never got over her even after time passed. After leaving the house for the first time, the sister got married with a person who had similar characteristics like her father. She suffered a miscarriage, and he started drinking alcohol even more and beat her for the reason that she was not able to conceive a child. Her husband could not accept the fact that there is a lesbian

relationship between his wife and mother, which might have been the reason for the miscarriage. One day when the husband came home drunk, he fell from the balcony and lost his life. It can be understood that the narrator's sister was the one who pushed him, and this incident provided her a sense of freedom from the caged feelings of incest. Here, we can interpret that her feelings towards her brother has always been in her preconscious part of the mind because of which she gets reminded by it often, and her repressed feelings are expressed by the aforementioned doings. Both the narrator and his sister have caged their feelings towards each other due to societal values and fear of criticism, and their past with their parents and their relationship take up majority of the unconscious part of their mind and it is expressed in different ways for the both of them.

Conclusion

It is hard to sustain certain relationships as they do not fit into societal norms. The stereotypes and postulates that prevent people from leading a logical and practical life prevail from generation to generation, but they are acceptable only to an extent. It is the need of the hour to research on incest, because people fail to keep an open-mind and psychoanalyze leading them to be considerably less tolerant towards taboos. But biological consequences are the only valid reason to put forth when speaking against incest. The aim of this research was to bring out the psychological reasons and the working of mind when people involve in incest, as every action and behaviour of a human being does not happen all of a sudden, but because of the unconscious feelings that tend to uncover. Human behaviour and cognition depend on the workings of Id, Ego, and Super-ego. Having said that, Psychoanalysis and Psychoanalytic Models of Human Psyche aided in deriving the psychological reasons for the incestuous relationships of Cholly Breedlove and Pecola in *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison and the narrator and his elder sister in *The Blue Bedspread* by Raj Kamal Jha through a comparative study focused on the psychosis of these characters.

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