



FEMINISM IN TONI MORRISON'S "THE BLUEST EYE"

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Abstract :

Feminism is an ideology which seeks not only to understand the world but to change it to the advantage of women". "The Bluest Eye" is a novel based on the lives of black women. Toni Morrison has described the world wide gender disparity by her characters like Pecola, Frieda, Pauline and the narrator Claudia who once mentions in the novel that three things have greatly affected Pecola's life: being a child, being Black and being a girl. All the women characters are abused by both white women and men, as well as by Black men. The young Pecola's innocent wish to have a pair of blue eyes is marked by her perception of a world where the cruelty and hardships she suffers are a result of her appearance as an ugly black girl with dark eyes. At home and all around her, Pecola is tortured by the cruelty and dirtiness she constantly witnesses; if she were blessed with the eyes, she would be able to see herself and her world in a new, beautiful way. In the course of a year, Pecola under goes a series of degradations, impregnated by her father and disintegrated into merciful madness, talking to herself imagining she's at last transformed into one of the blue- eyed dolls. The fiction expresses the complex dynamics of experience through which individuals are formed, or deformed by the often conflicting values of their respective communities. The emotional realities of the characters are both as a response to and a reflection of the benign or destructive boundaries of community.

Key words: Feminism, Ideology, The Bluest eye, Gender, Disparity, Torture Conflict, Community.

1 INTRODUCTION

Feminism is an ideology which seeks not only to understand the world but to change it to the advantage of women. One of the primal and seminal concerns of feminism is to declare that a woman is a being. She is not an appendage of man. A woman is not 'the other'. She is not an addition to man. She is an autonomous being, capable of finding her own to salvation. Reason trends in feminist literature are an indication that it is possible for a woman to live in the world where men also live. From the limited perspective of women's rights and suppression of women, feminist literature has moved a step a head in the right direction.

2 EVOLUTION OF BLACK WOMEN WRITERS

Black Writing has always been under siege and during the two hundred and fifty years of slavery, it was a legal crime for blacks to read and write. Black writing did not come into being as a result of some black person's desire to exercise but the thing that motivated the blacks to write was the condition of oppression and the desire of their writings. Black people have often called and even harassed black writers to report on and define the condition of the race. People feel that it is the inherent duty of the writers to communicate the wishes of the people. Being a black writer is an exigency, and black literature constitutes one of the supreme enrichments of black culture and black life.

The men authors of Black American literature have historically ignored and suppressed the women authors and the works they produce. The world of Black literature in the United States has been a world of black men's literature. Though Black women have involved in the development of American literature, no pre – twentieth century black women writers are treated as major contributors to the history of Black literature. Despite the lack of equal reward for equal work black women, continued to write. These women writers have to struggle against the confines of race and sex for both freedom and selfhood.

The fighting sprit of these black women writers endured against all adversities and they exposed their trauma through their writing. The black women writer chose to make a discourse of their own experiences and this led to a strong co – relation between the emergence of the women characters in the fiction of these writers and an acceptance of the black women writers into mainstream American literature as competent writers of fiction.

Most of the Afro - American novelists of the 20th century are concerned with the plight of the black women, her position in family, society and the world. The black women writers wrested for recognition and had to fight against their own male counterparts.

Black women writers, by virtue of their race and gender, find themselves at two points of intersection: one where western culture cuts across vestiges of African heritage and the other where male - female attitudes are in violent collision. Their work addresses what it means to be a black woman, a condition determined by racial make - up. Their fictional characters engage themselves in perplexing struggles to maintain their human dignity and emotional sensitivity in the midst of a threatening world. Being both black and female, these writers write from a vantage point. They project their vision of the world, society, community, family, their lovers - even themselves - most often through the eyes of black female characters and poetic personae. Their angle of vision allows them to see what white people, especially the males, fail to see.

The black woman faces greater problems than the white woman. If the white woman has been considered inferior, the black woman is even lower in the social scheme that is dominantly white and male. She has been sexually abused by the white man and often by the black man. Torn from her family, she has been sold on the open slave market. She has worked in the white women's kitchen and taken care of the white children while her own home has had to be neglected. She has frequently been the scapegoat for the black man's humiliation, as many black woman leaders have pointed out. For black women, their concern with feminism is usually more group - centered than self - centered, more cultural than political.

3 TONI MORRISON'S WORKS - A TURNING POINT

After the 1970's several Afro - American female writers like Paule Marshall, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker appeared as the forefront of American literature. A definite turning point in the history of black women's literature comes with the writings of Toni Morrison. Toni Morrison, the first black woman to receive Nobel Prize in Literature was born on February 18, 1931 in Lorain, Ohio, USA. She has won many prizes and awards and sits in chairs of mainstream American literary organizations and is often the main speaker of major literary gatherings. She has published eleven novels: *The Bluest Eye* (1970), *Sula* (1973), *Song of Solomon* (1977), *Tar Baby* (1981), *Beloved* (1987), *Jazz* (1992), *Paradise* (1998), *Love* (2003), *A Mercy* (2008), *Home* (2012), *God Help The Child* (2015).

Toni Morrison's works are fantastic earthy realism. They are deeply rooted in history and mythology. Her works resonates with mixtures of pleasure and pain, wonder and horror. Her characters come out with the force and beauty of the gashing water, seeming fantastic but as basic as the earth they stand on. They erupt, out of the world, sometimes gently often with force and terror. Her works are sensually combined with the intrigue that only a piercing intellect could create.

Morrison exposes the damages that sexist oppression, both inside and outside of the ethnic group, has had on black women, but she does not allow is negatives to characterize the whole of their experience. Morrison is more concerned with celebrating the unique feminine cultural values that black women have developed inspite of and often because of their oppression.

4 THE BLUEST EYE

Toni Morrison's first novel "The Bluest Eye" which was published in 1970 presents a simple theme. It is the story of a black girl who wants blue eyes as a symbol of beauty, goodness and happiness. This is a real and symbolic statement about the conflict between the good and the beautiful of two cultures and how it affects the psyche of the people within those cultures. The theme is at the base of conflict of artistic and societal values between the Anglo - American and Afro - American cultures, complicated by the Psycho - political dominance of one culture over another. This novel is a book about raise and sex hatred. By exploring the devastating effects that the western ideas of beauty and romantic love have on a vulnerable black girl. This novel also demonstrates how these ideas can invert the natural order of an entire culture. The central character Pecola becomes the scapegoat for that part in all of us. As black and female, Morrison concludes that the Pecolas of America are an accessible dumping ground.

"The Bluest Eye" has the ingredients of a black voice protesting against the myth of the black monolith and the racist tendency to squeeze the great spectrum of Black humanity into the false mold of stereotype. It is the story of a year in the life of Pecola Breedlove, a young black girl in Ohio who believes that she has blue eyes coveted by the blacks. In the course of the year, Pecola undergoes a serious of degradation, impregnated by her father and disintegrated into merciful madness, talking to herself imagining she's at last transformed into one of the blue - eyed dolls.

In a world in which many of the qualities deemed are generated by white male fantasies, the Claudia MacTeer and Pecola Breedlove are doubly excluded; both their gender and the color of their skin mark them as outsiders. Beneath the tangible reminders of differences or exclusion are the intangible but even more powerful expectations and assumptions of the dominant culture. What makes growing up black, female, and poor particularly problematic is that the white definitions or "reality" often do not correspond with either black or female experience.

In "The Bluest Eye" Maureen Peal is envied less for her family's greater affluence than for her light skin, whereas to the same peers Pecola's absolute blackness confirms the other delimiting characteristics of her position at the bottom of social scale. Measured against white standards of skin color and physical beauty, the black female's options, are accommodation, misery, or degradation. The economically and emotionally bankrupt Breedloves are figuratively set against the intact MacTeer family, Mrs. MacTeer's grudging love for her daughters exposes the absence of such affection in Pauline Breedlove's attitude towards Pecola. Pecola's inner crippling, began at her birth with Pauline's declaration of her ugliness, is reinforced as she approaches puberty. During the same year she is sexually violated and impregnated by her own father, whose unpremeditated but shocking act is depicted as a misdirected expression of this love for her.

Pecola's wounding is advanced by another morally deformed member of the community Soaphead Church, a man of mixed blood, is a fraudulent "spiritual advisor" to troubled souls. Though he prides himself on his sexual restraint, in his own way he is more destructive than a weak but essentially amoral Cholly Breedlove. Manipulating Pecola's faith in miracles and pressing her to commit a debased act on his behalf by poisoning his land lady's aged dog, he violates her spiritual innocent as surely as her father abuses her physical innocent. By the age that most girls reach sexual maturity, Pecola is already a lost soul, imprisoned in a madness from which she can never flee.

When people are dehumanized by poverty, prejudice, or restricted opportunity for growth of the cell the capacity for relationship may be perverted. In Morrison's fiction a central and recurring representation of emotional injury as well as violation of the boundaries selfhood is the distortion of the bonds of affection between people. When such emotional disruption occurs between members of the same family in several instances involving the abuse of a child by the parent or another adult of the opposite sex – the attachment is particularly destructive. Generally the abuse is symptomatic of disturbed family relationships as well as a parent's excessive dependence upon a child for emotional release from intolerable circumstances.

Morrison has claimed that 'love or its absence' is one of her central themes. The Bluest Eye is a narrative of both violence and violation – not only of the female body of potentiality and growth of the self as well as the affections and attachments between human beings. Incest and rape become metaphors for both black and white nightmares of inverted love and suffocation of selfhood.

In Morrison's novel, both Cholly and Pecola transgress the social and sexual boundary between allowed and forbidden behavior; however, it is Pecola, the victim, who is punished. Pecola is nullified as a condition of the community's purgation of anxiety and guilt generated by the threat of female sexuality, the violation of blood relationship, and the failure of sympathy. People hate and fear her as a symbol of what they might become themselves and therefore cannot dare to pity.

Claudia and her sister, in tribute to their inarticulate awareness that Pecola is the scapegoat for the community's deepest fears and anxieties about both blackness and sexuality, after up their own magical sacrifice to nature: "And when they come up, we'll know everything is all right" (T.M, p.151). But of course the seeds, like Pecola and her baby, fail to thrive. Claudia compares Pecola with the marigold seeds: a stunted, deprived potentiality of nature, suffocated before she could blossom. Indeed, nature itself seems poised against those at the very bottom of the social order, buried so deeply that they cannot thrive.

Pecola Breedlove is cut off from community in several senses. Even before she is sexually violated, her father consigns his family to a life 'outside'; in a typical drunken rage, he almost burns their shelter down, thus forfeiting all responsibility for its occupants. Pecola's homelessness in the world becomes not only a spiritual but a literal state. Claudia MacTeer, whose family takes Pecola in for a few days, recognizes the horror of the other girls' situation: "outdoors was the end of something, an irrevocable, physical fact, defining and complementing our metaphysical condition" (T.M, p.11). Though Pecola fatefully returns to her own family, who live in an abandoned store, she remains essentially outside the boundaries of community – for the remainder of her tragic life.

The Bluest Eye is the narrative female education of concomitant loss of innocence. The metamorphoses in the lives of the young girls of the novel reverberate through the entire communities of which they are a part. Here Pecola becomes an outcast against whom the group reasserts its values: She is viewed as evil because she transgresses, whether willingly or not, the social and sexual mores of her community.

The figure of pariah is clearly central to vision, as the emblem of different level and forms of exclusion. The community is understood as both a specific social structure – the vehicle through which behaviour is expressed and reinforced – and a set of values operating within that structure.

Toni Morrison raised many pertinent questions about the Afro- American woman, her problems and her relevance in the white, male dominated hierarchy of American society. Characters, predominantly black and female, pass through her novels, ranging from small children to old women. Within the hearts and minds of these people exist a little known world of pain, suffering and humiliation.

A thorough understanding and appreciation of Toni Morrison's novels can come about only through the realization that her works are signifiers of the terrible conditions under which Afro- Americans are the twin issues of racism and sexism. From the earliest period of slavery to modern times colour and gender have been critical points for discrimination. Brutalized- mentally and physically- these racially different people have been oppressed and denied their rightful place in America. Morrison writes about the survival, of black people especially black women. She beautifully presents their existential predicaments, especially the problems faced by black women. She writes, "I'm not interested in happiness in my work. I'm interested in survival- who survives and why they survived" (B.W.J & A.L.V.p.133).

5 STYLE

The language of Morrison in 'The Bluest Eye' could be described as that of comparison. In order to describe something else. Almost every description in the text is a direct object associated or an association with a feeling. This style of comparative writing pervades the text. The oddity or aptness of the associations gives the reader pause and contributes to the beauty of the language. The style of descriptive comparison in the novel blends in perfectly with the theme of associations of race to beauty. Morrison's constant use of associative description is directly linked to the way Pecola's blackness defines her lack of beauty and how Maureen Peale's whiteness and blue eyes are directly associated with her beauty. Morrison's language is so beautiful, it is at once both accurate and profound "Nuns go by as quiet as lust"(T.M,p.5). As far as description goes, this line could have been written; "Nuns go by quietly," but with the comparison to lust, the line takes on whole new levels of meaning. The juxtaposition of a nun(chastity) and the idea of lust is enough to make us to back over the line a second time, and places an importance on the line which it could not have with a non- associative description. The language is beautiful, a sort of sensual prose, almost bordering on poetry. The style of Morrison's descriptions is a key to understanding the major underlying theme of the novel, which is the association of race to beauty.

The narration of Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* is actually a compilation of many different voices. The novel shifts between Claudia Mac Teer's first person narrative and an omniscient narrator. At the end of the novel the omniscient voice and Claudia's narrative merge and the reader realizes this is an older Claudia looking back on her childhood. Morrison uses multiple narrators in order to gain greater validity for her story. Even though the voices are divided they combine to make a whole. The first segment of each of the seasonal sections in the novel begins with Claudia's memories of that season as a young girl. Her first person narration gives a childlike perspective to the story.

Morrison's writing is also characterized by its unique way of dealing with narrative. Instead of using straight forward narration and clear chronology, Morrison often plays with the scenes and the ways in which narration is presented. The first Afro-American woman to win the Nobel Prize for Literature, Morrison has been lauded by critics and colleagues alike. She is admired for her use of language and her interesting narrative devices.

6 ARTISTIC SUCCESS

Toni Morrison has earned a reputation as a gifted story teller and masterful stylist, who has created haunting images of humans isolated by their failures in love and their problems with identity. She demonstrates her artistic skill in memorable, sometimes startling, but always illuminating metaphors, vivid and credible dialogues and graceful syntax. In her novels, Toni Morrison juxtaposes two categories of people's dreams and aspirations, visions of how life should be lived. The first dream types are idyllic, for their proponent's chief aims are to live in concord with people and nature while remaining true to their own heritage. In contrast, dreams in the second category advocate not brotherhood but the competitive acquisition of power or money. Morrison affirms the superiority of idyllic values over competitive- success ones; she clearly details the negative consequences of valuing power or wealth more than other people. Yet she also acknowledges the difficulty of being altruistic in twentieth- century America, the milieu which influences most of her characters. She uses numerous symbolic patterns, in her novels, she relies heavily on recurring colors, sounds, shapes, and other metaphors to convey meaning.

7 CONCLUSION:

As the author has remarked in this context, "The black community is parish community. Black people are pariahs. The civilization of black people that lives apart from but in Juxtaposition to other civilizations is pariah relationship....But a community contains pariahs within it that are very useful for the conscience of that community" (R.R, p.159). From a variety of perspectives, Morrison's fiction expresses the complex dynamics of experience through which individuals are formed, or deformed, by the often conflicting values of their respective communities. The emotional reality of Morrison's characters may thus be understood as both a response to and a reflection of the benign or destructive boundaries of communities.

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