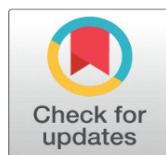
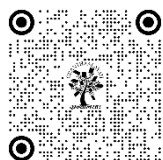


BLACK IS BEAUTIFUL: PAST AND PRESENT

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ABSTRACT

Due to the direct and long experience of discrimination by white people, gender and race has been the most common experience of black authors. Toni Morrison is no exception. In her very first novel she too picked up the issue of race and gender. In an interview in 2004 Morrison described her motivation to write the novel. She adds that in the mid 1960s "most of what was being published by Black men was very powerful, aggressive, revolutionary fiction or nonfiction." These publications "had a very positive, racially uplifting rhetoric." Black male authors expressed sentiments like "Black is beautiful" and used phrases like "Black queen." All these works made Morrison realize that people would forget that "black was not always beautiful". In "The Bluest Eye", her aim is to make the readers remember how racism against black people ruined their life. Morrison's novel is based upon a short story of a young black girl who had a longing for blue eyes. Idea of writing this novel was conceived by Toni Morrison nearly twenty years ago during a workshop at Howard University. Story is partly true. Morrison had a childhood friend who would express her desire for blue eyes. How racism had an adverse effect on young minds that they wanted to turn unreal into reality or the sense of ugliness was so deep that the girl wanted to do away at every cost. In Pecola's case gender too leaves an equally devastating effect on her life. It is her female body which made her more vulnerable and left her completely broken.

Keywords: Black Beauty, Racism, Deprivation, Racism, Self-Loathe



1. INTRODUCTION

The Bluest Eye, Toni Morrison's novel based on a short story, published as a novel in 1970. The novel which lasts 140 pages. The novel has been woven around the theme of longing for beauty and Pecola's desperate efforts to achieve it at anyhow, her physical and mental exploitation, Pecola's fragmented family, racism by white people, another family of Claudia and Frieda, White family where Pauline takes her haven in the

form of maid servant. Through all characters Morrison foregrounded the demonization of blackness in American culture and its repercussions on black people when it is internalised by them. Through Geraldine, Polly, Pecola and other characters, she demonstrated how even the most subtle forms of racism - especially racism from within the black community - can negatively impact self-worth and self-esteem. And how deep seated bitter emotions can bring the upheaval in once life and turn the world topsy-turvy. Expressing the circle of life, *The Bluest Eye* has been divided into four sections, named based on season. Through these four weathers Toni Morrison brings forth the idea of stagnance of

life where for some people alters nothing and if they come out from one net another is already set for them like the novel itself as it incepts with 'Autumn' and concludes with 'Summer'. The four sections are further divided into chapters. As most chapter titles have been taken from the simulated text of a Dick and Jane reader. Three versions of the simulated text appear at the beginning of the novel. The three versions symbolise the different lifestyles explored in the novel and symbolises that for some life is a well organised, happy and with appropriate space for everyone. For some there are some problems but still life is tolerable for them and there is space to repair it. But for certain people it is a hodgepodge without any punctuation, space and completely incomprehensible. Beyond any second chance to improve. And that is the life which the Breedlove family leads in the novel.

The Bluest Eye. saga of a black girl Pecola Breedlove and her family. Although this is precisely ironic that people whose surnames contain 'Love' are immersed in grief and disdain. Pecola's father Cholly Breedlove is an alcoholic who never pays attention to taking care of his family. Once, under the influence of alcohol he set on fire his own house and family got homeless. Racial discrimination dashed Cholly's hopes. By their living, it is evident that they are the poorest family in their surroundings. After losing home, Pecola's family had to take shelter in an abandoned store. Pauline, Pecola's mother shattered under the unbearable circumstances caused by her husband. To escape the bleak reality of her family life, she starts off working with a white family as a servant and finds solace in serving the family, especially the little girl. This is like her second house which is beautiful and she gives more care and love to the little white girl than her own daughter. There is no happy family life for Pecola as her parents frequently engage in fighting with each other. In reality, everyone is living a fragmented and frustrated life. Even at school children bully her. She is discriminated against by teachers due to her race. Pecola's innocent mind is not able to grasp how to resolve the problems. And instead of that she is victimised by her surroundings. Discrimination, bullying by other children and observation of her surroundings make Piccola's mind take its own decision. Owing to this, Pecola thinks that her ugliness is the bone of contention of whatever bad is taking place in her life. Consequently, longing for blue eyes manifested in obsession for her. Blue eyes are the symbol of white beauty as the film star Shirley Temple with blond hair and creamy white skin which were the standard of beauty in white culture. Blue eyes for Pecola are the solution of all problems and source of happiness in her miserable life. Her obsession for blue eyes and all unfortunate incidents of her life drive into madness and she could never achieve in the real world what she achieves in her imagination. In her madness, she surmised that she has turned into a beautiful girl with blue eyes. Only the longing for love remains unfulfilled which eventually culminates into her rape by own father who in an inebriated condition loves her by raping and impregnating her. Consequently, Pecola sinks further and further into the abyss of madness and gives birth to stillborn child. Novel concludes with a battered and shattered state of Pecola, "She was so sad to see. Grown people looked away; children, those who were not frightened by her, laughed outright... the damage done was total" (Morrison, 1970, p. 122).

As in the novel Pecola was having a strong desire for blue eyes which are a symbol of beauty. But it poses a question if only she is responsible for the desire. As it is an old saying that children are akin to small plants and they can be shaped as you like. It is apparently true for Pecola as well because treatment she met by her father, mother, classmates, teachers, familiar and unfamiliar people shaped her into a highly insecure and isolated person. Due to undue treatment Pecola deeply assimilated the feeling that her ugliness is solely responsible for this bad treatment from everyone. If the situation would be otherwise, Pecola might have been altogether a different person. If supposedly her parents would be a happily married couple, her nurturing would be done differently and she too could have led a happy and normal life. Like Claudia and Frieda who also belong to black community but live happily with their parents because they face and accept the reality and make themselves better. But circumstances made Pecola's ugliness even uglier. Raped by her own father. Her mother knocked her down for a white child. She was cheated by the people out in society. Instead of sympathizing with her, they made her a sacrificial goat. In fact, if we observe closely a layered ugliness can be seen which is impinged deeply on different levels. This ugliness is not only exhibited in Breedloves' appearance and day to day life but in their living conditions and conduct towards each other. Only their dark complexion is natural but the other two are imposed either by society or by themselves. From history we know that for years and years black people lived a life worse than animals. They had no rights neither on their bodies, on their children, spouses nor they were treated as human beings. Along with physical pain, mental trauma was a part and parcel of their life. The treatment they met reduced them physically, socially, mentally and economically as objects only. They were compelled to live a fragmented life full of hardships.

No matter how many times and how much one has read about Black people. But it is really hard to survive in a society where there is an acute hierarchy rampant. But it is unfortunate that the way of each society irrespective of country, caste, race or community, comparisons are always made. It is nearly impossible to think and see situations or people in void where your existence is based on each other. Everyone cannot be spiritual and enlightened where one can accept the truth of transiency of this body and immortality of soul. We don't know how many Pecolas in society have been driven mad due to lack of physical beauty. It can be comprehended by the trends in contemporary society where a number of girls and women go for plastic surgery and beauty treatments not because they are ugly or not beautiful. Only to enhance their beauty to look more beautiful than others. This is more true when the technology has been extremely advanced and the world has become a global village. Therefore, it cannot be denied that at an extremely impressionable age, girls like Pecola are highly at risk of ruining their life in absence of right guidance. Pecola, who is surrounded by white beautiful girls with blonde hair, creamy white skin and blue eyes, can easily be victimized by circumstances. For Pecola, the body became the centre of her life which dreadfully shadowed every other aspect of her life where she could grow herself. Irony is that our external appearance makes us forget our mind which can be improved and beautified as much as you like and it never grows old.

The harsh reality of Black people, Toni Morrison came up with, is an attempt to revisit the past which was and still might be lingering. She hits hard in the face of society and tries to expose not only the white community but the flaws of her own community. The novel is thought provoking and demands that something desperately needs to alter. Not in others only but in ourselves too. This concept of black is beautiful for black, raises certain questions after reading Morrison's novel. If black is indeed beautiful then how come that only black suffered the lot of slaves? How had they been suppressed for such a long time? Let alone the others, how could Pecola not get the love and affection of her own parents? Especially of her own mother. A mother who is a symbol of love and affection for her children. A mother who loved and cared for her mistress' white daughter but not her own daughter who is a part of her own body. If she was beautiful then how Pecola became the victim of her own desire for beauty? What makes her take shelter in a white family where she takes good care of a beautiful house and child that belongs to others? It raises one more question in my mind that is Darwin's theory of Survival for the Fittest indeed true. Where people like Pecola, Cholly and Pauline who cannot make themselves perfect according to the prevalent norms of society can't survive? As readers we may think about the number of solutions which Pecola could reach. But if we see from her point of view as a child she made each and every attempt that she could think of. But sometimes it was her innocence, sometimes her nurturing or people who took advantage of her hapless situation that always failed her. All these facts make Pecola internalize feelings of self hatred and inferiority. Although the novel has been divided into four seasons. It begins with autumn and ends with summer. But taking a thorough study of Pecola's life here it seems full of one season only that is of grief, despair and agony that never comes to an end.

Although, it is arguable that the setting of the novel is old. But even now when we see and read about the different cases of barbarity with women based on gender discrimination makes the story as relevant today as it was in the 1970s. Our world is full of these types of cases where women have to suffer just because of their gender. In reality not only the eyes are a symbol of beauty but Pecola too is the symbol of all those children who can't come to terms with their own circumstances what they watch and assimilate. In society, it also conveys the message that an extreme gap or difference of anything escalates into tragedies whether it is physical, mental, economic, social or political. This has been the reason that everyone who advocates the concept of egalitarian society comprehends well that only humanity, fraternity and compassion for each other can bring hope and better future in society. Although we talk about gender equality but in a community where women are more vulnerable than it is thought sobering that if Pecola were a man her situation could have been slightly better or much better. Her stillborn child came as the culmination of what atrocities committed on her and that sank Pecola into the abyss of grief and insanity. Undoubtedly, women have been empowered but still when we see the data of rape it is still very high that make us thoughtful how much situation has been altered. It can be said, way Pecola suffers, exploited and raped by different people, that her female body too become a curse for her. It reminds me of Virginia Woolf's essay 'A Room of One's Own' in which she imagined the twin sister of Shakespeare who too met a similar fate like Pecola due to her gender. This too is the hypocrisy of white people that despite their despise towards black people on one hand they keep them away as they are a stigma on their reputation but on other hand they cannot survive without them and treat them like subhumans or objects.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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