

Ethnic Bias Explored in 'The Bluest Eye'

Dr. Anju Malik

Associate Professor, Department of English, Pt. NRS Govt. College, Rohtak

ABSTRACT

Toni Morrison's 1970 book "The Bluest Eye," which explores the complicated issues of racial identity, beauty ideals, and ethnic prejudice. This is her first novel. The novel, which takes place in the early 1940s, concentrates on a young African American girl named Pecola Breedlove who longs for blue eyes and thinks that having them will make her attractive and acceptable in a society where whiteness is frequently held up as the pinnacle of beauty. One of the most contentious issues in modern society is ethnicity. Human civilization is segmented along racial & geographic boundaries. Race and ethnicity serve as the most potent languages of human diversity and community. A dominant ethnic minority frequently tends to normalize aspects of its own culture in that country. This book serves as an image, showing us the dreadful results of black people adopting beliefs from a white culture that both overtly and covertly hates them. Even though slavery was formally ended thanks to the courageous efforts of great leaders, African Americans are still not treated on a par with white people.

Keywords: Ethnic Group, Contentious issues, Race, Ethnic Discrimination.

INTRODUCTION

In the heritage of 20th-century American literature, Toni Morrison stands out as a particularly notable contemporary author. Her books include African American individuals and cultures throughout. Morrison is equipped to be the voice for black people since she was the first black woman to win the Nobel Prize in literature. Morrison, who grew up in a black neighborhood in Lorain, Ohio, where she grew up into a working-class family, absorbed much of the black cultural tradition. Morrison, who grew up with a passion for reading, graduated from Howard University with a bachelor's degree.

The main character was raped after being raped by her father. The preterm babies passed away not long after they were delivered. Pecola Breedlove, a depressed black girl, is driven to madness by her longing for a pair of blue eyes. In the book, Pecola had to deal with pressure and ridicule from a variety of sources, including her mother and the neighborhood. The tragic event of Pecola is a prime example of how people of color are treated unfairly in American culture. Her parents' personalities are horribly warped and perverted. Morrison's spiritual affinity therefore became the color of his eyes.

The novel discusses the societal dynamics that influence how cultural concepts like beauty, normality, family, and sexuality are understood and defined. These notions are particularly problematic for African American communities since they are frequently underrepresented in media. The story highlights the perils of growing up and surviving for African-American young women by exposing how these notions' deadly hierarchies are woven throughout our main narratives- reading primers, movies, and commerce. Morrison analyzes how this exclusion affects both specific people and the group as a whole. The Bluest Eye highlights the negative effects of social invisibility & societal division via the lens of Pecola's experience.

In our society, it's common to think that characteristics like skin color or eye shape indicate deeper realities. We view these as a natural explanation for their "otherness." We look down on 'black' people because we see people as being different in terms of their skin tone. Contrary to popular belief, blonde hair and dark complexion are equally important as indicators of interior biological reality. We frequently think that these biological evolutions or matings are 'different' than normal. This presumption, rather than fact, is what our opinions and even the law is based on.

Morrison examines the myths that white people spread that helped to segregate and keep black people out of popular culture. Ethnic stereotypes significantly contribute to the dominant group's dominance over the underdog. She represents the Breedlove family as the African culture that fell prey to white supremacy. They propagated the mythical idea that only white is pure, golden, and attractive for beauty. Black, on the other hand, is a representation of ugly, nasty, and impurity. In order to forward their agendas, they created the illusion of black inferiority, but it stuck in black people's brains and is now impossible for them to overcome. They developed a fervent confidence in it. Since the very beginning, they have been struggling with emotions of inadequacy. Despite having their own unique culture, they accepted their status as outcasts from the majority. The Breedlove family is dissatisfied with their way of life. Pecola, Pauline, and Cholly struggle mightily to integrate into the culture of White Americans and long for their opulent way of

life. There are many situations that show a stark difference between the white and black worlds. Nothing less than a dilapidated, abandoned shop serves as the Breed loves' home. They are in abject poverty. They do domestic service in the homes of White Americans. They have no romantic or other kind of regard for one another. They only have a shared experience of poor self-worth and self-hatred. They consider themselves to be hideous beings, and they yearn for all things white. They firmly hold the opinion that the only individuals who can be loved are white. Their misery is made worse by the fact that they lack a competing ideology to challenge the dominant one. In addition to having identity crises, they also experience erroneous stereotypes.

“It was as though some mysterious all-knowing master had given each one a cloak of ugliness to wear, and they had each accepted it without question.” (39)

As O’ Reilly says: “Pecolla, Pauline, and Cholly Breedlove fall victim to their failure to transcend the imposing definition of ‘The Other’s’ look. Reduced to a state of objectness (thinness), each remains frozen in a world of being-for-the-other and consequently lives a life of shame, alienation, self-hatred and inevitable destruction” (50).

Pecola appears as the personification of the most severe psychological anguish brought on by the repressive setting.

She is most negatively impacted by ethnic markers. Pecola thinks blue eyes & white skin to be a sign of perfect beauty & has an ignorant faith in the white idea of beauty. She is on a crazy quest to find it. She has lived a life devoid of love and affection from infancy. She concludes that no one, not even her own parents, truly cares about her. She feels like a neglected, carefree child who goes unnoticed in public. Her unhappiness is made worse by her conviction that the colour of her skin and eyes is what makes others hate her. She interprets her ethnicity as being ugly since she has dark skin & black eyes. To get acceptance in society, she yearns for blue eyes.

“A little black girl yearns for the blue eyes of a little white girl, and the horror at the heart of her yearning is exceeded only by the evil of fulfilment.” (181)

Race & ethnicity serve as permanent indicators of personal identity. They are the most "effective and compelling determinants of cultural difference." One of Toni Morrison's iconic pieces, *The Bluest Eye*, examines "what it meant to be a black and African descendent in a largely white dominated America" during the time. It illustrates how dominant whites discriminate against black people based on their ethnicity. Morrison uses striking imagery and symbolism to draw attention to the plight of black people. She makes an early comparison to birds:

“Like frenzied, desperate birds, they over decorated everything; fussed and fidgeted over their hard-won homes; canned, jellied, and preserved all summer to fill the cupboards and shelves; they painted, picked, and poked at every corner of their houses.” (18)

She spends as much time as possible in her own imaginary world. She attempts to gain blue eyes in every manner she can to escape reality. She believes that having blue eyes would grant you access to love and devotion. She asks God for blue eyes every night.

“Pretty eyes. Pretty blue eyes. Big blue pretty eyes. Run, Jip, run. Jip runs. Alice runs. Alice has blue eyes. Jerry has blue eyes. Jerry runs. Alice runs. They run with their blue eyes. Four blue eyes. Four pretty blue eyes. Blue -sky-eyes. Blue – like Mrs. Forrest’s blue blouse eyes. Morning- glory – blue- eyes. Alice-and-jerry-blue-storybook-eyes.” (44)

She is afraid to go in front of others for fear of feeling embarrassed and ashamed. Pecola begs Soap head to change her dark eyes to blue since she thinks he is the holy messenger. A letter to God composed by Soap head Church eloquently highlights the importance of ethnicity in African American culture. She aspires to have light skin, blunted hair, blue eyes, and a white doll appearance. Toni Morrison goes into great length about her struggle to be white and her unbalance. She consumes three quarters of a milk each day. She believes that if she drinks milk from a cup that features images of Shirley Temple, she will retain her current beauty. Mary Jane, and her beauty, are her idols. She consumes candy like her in an effort to get attractive features like her. She goes bonkers.

She feels helpless, mistreated, alone, and rootless. She is made fun of by everyone, including her parents, friends, teachers, and neighbours, which seriously harms her mental health. Pecola is bullied by boys at school because she is cheap & unattractive. Even a song they created had two insults: one about the hue of her skin and another about the possibility that her father slept nude. Although Claudia and Frieda rush to her aid, it is wealthy Maureen Peal's presence that ultimately protects the three impoverished black girls from the bullies. Pecola gets disheartened afterwards Maureen insults her explicitly in reference to her father's nudeness. Maureen calls her "ugly" & "black," asserting her superiority above her. In contrast to Pecola, Claudia realizes that Maureen is not her rival, but rather that "the thing to

fear is the thing that makes her beautiful and not us." However, Maureen is gorgeous not due to her looks but rather due to her wealth, while others are unattractive due to their poverty. (Lakshmi 43)

Pecola encounters racial prejudice in addition to from the dominant group but also from their own ethnicity. Pecola's interaction with Geraldine is one of the striking instances that makes her self-hatred worse. Geraldine, a daughter of wealthy black people, shed her funkiness by embracing middle-class, white ideals. Louis Junior, her immoral son whom she supports, invites Pecola into his exemplary Christian home under the guise of a lovely cat. He uses his mother's cat to beat her and enjoys the cruel satisfaction. He murders the cat by putting it into a radiator immediately as Geraldine enters the area and blames Pecola. Geraldine exhibits her disdain towards a poor black girl more so than her grief over her loss of her pet. She started by disparaging the black girl's community as being made up of people who live like animals and urinate in the same bed. Pecola is kicked out of the house & called "a black bitch" by the woman. Geraldine then gives her kid advice on the distinctions between coloured folks and niggers.

Pecola encounters attitudes and visuals predicated on the concept of white supremacy at every step, which feed her propensity for self-hatred. The event with the white shopkeeper illustrates racism inequality's most overt manifestation.

Pecola is shocked by the "totally absence of human recognition" on Mr. Yacobowski's face as she initially sees him. He is a white guy whose religious sense of smell, "honed on the doe-eyed virgin Mary," is foreign to the world she lives in.

Pecola notices a tinge of great anger for her in his eyes along with apathy when she looks at him for a treat. After first ignoring her being there, the shopkeeper feels obligated to offer her candies. Since she is a black depressed girl, he is reluctant to even touch her palm when accepting money. Her young heart is practically broken by the procedure.

"She has seen interest, disgust, even anger in grown male eyes. Yet this vacuum is not new. She has seen it lurking in eyes of all white people... But her blackness is static and dread. And it is the blackness that accounts for, that creates, the vacuum edged with distaste in white eyes." (49)

Pecola is shown in a pitiful state at the book's conclusion. Her father viciously violates her, she gives birth to a dead child, falls towards insanity, & starts to think that her eyes are the bluest blue of all. She withdraws into total seclusion, being emotionally & physically shut off from the town and civilization. Beaulieu expresses the causes of the Pecola disaster in the appropriate terms: "The Bluest Eye explores white beauty standards and their devastating effect on one small black child, Pecola, who learns that because she is black, she will never be beautiful, never be loved, never be worthy.... Her belief is dangerously reinforced by her family and peers, most of whom are victims of the white beauty myth themselves." (50)

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, "The Bluest Eye" is a potent examination of ethnic prejudice and the wide-ranging effects it has on the identities and lives of the individuals. The book challenges readers to address the negative impacts of internalized racism and consider the wider social ramifications of beauty standards based on Eurocentric values through its realistic characters and powerful writing.

We can state with confidence that ethnicity's legitimacy is indisputable in every nation. Members of various ethnic groups have fewer options in terms of housing, politics, money, education, and employment. The Bluest Eye powerfully depicts not just the racial prejudice that African Americans faced at the hands of dominating White Americans, but additionally the misguided philosophies that contributed significantly to the situation. The psychological impact of racial prejudice on characters living in harsh environments and their futile battle against erroneous preconceptions form the core of the book.

REFERENCES

- [1]. Morrison, Toni. *The Bluest Eye*. Vintage Books, 1970.
- [2]. Beaulieu, Elizabeth A. *The Toni Morrison Encyclopaedia*. Westport: Greenwood, 2003.
- [3]. O'Reilly, Andrea. *Toni Morrison and Motherhood: A Politics of the Heart*. America: New York State U.P., 2004.
- [4]. Ryan, Michael. *Literary Theory: A Practical Introduction*. Blackwell Publishers, 1999.
- [5]. Yang, Philips Q. *Ethnic Studies: Issues & Approaches*. State University of New York Press, 2000.
- [6]. Laxmi, V.N., and Zainab Abdulaziz Al Suhaibani. "Dicing with Class, Race and Gender: Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*." *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention*, vol. 4, no. 1, Jan. 2015, pp. 40-46.