

## Traumatic Plight of Black Women in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*

**V.S.Shakila**

Assistant Professor, Department of English, the Standard Fireworks Rajaratnam College for Women, Sivakasi, India

### Abstract

Fourth world Literature is the term which is used to refer the works of the native writers who belong to the most under developed regions of the world and have been colonized by non-natives. They encompass the experiences of the oppressed and the under privileged victims based on race, class, creed, conflict, gender bias. This paper discusses the traumatic experiences of the black women in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. Morrison is an African-American Woman who uses her novels to depict the victimization of Black women in America by racism, sexism and their exploitation not only by the White world but also by their own men. She traces the difficulties of Black women who suffer the inferior socio- economic status in America. The protagonist Pecola and other Black women experiences a traumatic plight throughout the novel. They are constantly pushed towards the marginal existence because of race, class and gender discrimination. *The Bluest eyes* clearly portrays the tragic condition of the Blacks, particularly Black women in America.

**KEYWORDS:** racism, class, conflict, gender discrimination, trauma.

Countries that are economically weak and inadequately developed are considered as "Fourth World" Countries. Native people of south Africa, America, Aboriginals of Australia, First Nations of Canada, Tribes/Dalits of India are considered as peoples of Fourth World. Fourth World Literature is the term which came into existence by the writers of the fourth world countries who voiced for the indigenous people who are deprived of their rights in their own territories and its riches. It encompasses the experiences of these aboriginal communities based on class, creed, conflict, exploitation and gender discrimination. The writers of the fourth world literature challenges the established notions of the society. This paper discusses the traumatic plight of women particularly Black women due to race, class and gender bias in the novel *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison.

Racism emerged in America when the white masters brought slaves from Africa as labourers to work in coffee plantation farms. The basic myth of racism is that whites are more intelligent and virtuous than the blacks. It is believed that the White skin brings a cultural superiority with it whereas the black skin is always related with sin, dirt and cultural inferiority. Sexism is the next factor which scarred the mental and physical condition of the black women.

The term sexism refers to the gender discrimination that subordinate women to men. While they were raped and lynched by the whites, the black men treated them as immoral beings. The black men regarded them as loose characters and developed a kind of aversion towards the black women. Thus, these women had to fight for their survival both inside and outside their homes.

Another important issue is the class exploitation which is the greatest source of oppression of the Blacks in America. Class bias is related to the system called Capitalism which divides the society into two classes: 'master' and 'slaves'. Here, the Whites belong to the master class and the Blacks to the marginal class, the slaves. The Blacks are pushed towards a margin due this class bias. The Black Women are looked upon as menials and are oppressed and subjugated. They had to work as laborers in plantations and maids in the kitchen of the Whites.

Morrison is the first African-American women to win the Nobel prize for Literature. She uses her novels as an expression to voice the challenges faced by the indigenous people based on race, class, creed, conflict, gender, exploitation and viciousness. In *The Bluest eye*, she portrays the victimization of the black women in America by racism, sexism and classism. These women being black, female and poor are marginalized and exploited not only by the white world but also by their own men. Through multiple perspectives of her characters, Morrison examines the themes of Race, class and gender.

The novel *The Bluest eye* is told in the viewpoint of Claudia Macteer, a nine-year-old Black girl in Lohrain, Ohio. The main protagonist of the novel is Pecola Breedlove, an eleven-year-old Black girl who tries to defeat a bout with self-hatred. She confronts racism every day, not just from whites but also from her own community. Morrison focuses on the intra-racial as well as inter-racial problems. Many other characters in the novel are also pushed to the fringes of existence by racism. Internalized racism is the central conflict in the novel. The Black community wants to adapt to the white's standards of beauty. This proves that they desperately want to be accepted by the whites. Morrison clearly projects the black women's desire for adopting the white standards of beauty and the mental and psychological oppression faced by them when they fail to adopt. She also portrays how the characters adopting the white standards of beauty are led to cruelty and destruction.

The protagonist of the novel Pecola is pushed towards a marginal existence in several incidents because of internal racism. Her encounter with a fifty-two-year-old storekeeper makes her realize that she does not really exist for many people. She becomes a scapegoat and is humiliated by the black boys at her school. Her encounter with Maureen Peal is extremely distressing. She humiliates Pecola saying that

"I am cute, and you are ugly! Black and Ugly" (Morrison 1970:31)

Though Maureen is a black girl, she becomes popular only for her light skin and wealth. Pecola's last encounter is with the West Indian, Soaphead Church. He too abuses her by making her poison a dog he hates. The ultimate brutalization and betrayal for Pecola comes when She is brutally raped by her own father. Thus, Pecola is rejected not only by all the sections of the society but also by her own family. Pecola is abused for having dark skin that implies that she is inferior and ugly. She believes that by obtaining blue eyes she can overcome this brutality in her life. So, she longs for the bluest eyes and finally becomes mad.

The other character who gets victimized by internal racism is Pecola's mother Pauline. She daydreams about movie stars and works as a mammy in the household of the white, The Fishers. She shows all her love and affection to the daughter of the Fisher instead of her own children. When Pecola accidentally drops the pan of berry pie on the floor, Pauline instead of soothing Pecola who gets burnt, consoles the daughter of The

Fishers who is upset by this incident. Pauline is overwhelmed in self-hatred. She cooks pies and keeps the house of the Fishers in good manner whereas she neglects to keep her house in an orderly way. She remains ugly in her house but in the Fisher home, she becomes more significant and her presence is more essential to the whites.

Another important issue which pushes Pecola towards marginality is the Class conflict. Morrison clearly portrays the class conflict in three primer versions in the very beginning of the novel. All the three versions are symbolic of three lifestyles of people. The first version describes about a "perfect" white family of two children Dick and Jane. This clearly describes the white world which the poor blacks can never hope to attain. The second version is the description of the lifestyle of the Macteers who are poor but tries to endure the poverty and racism in Ohio. The third version represents the Breedloves family who are even poorer than the Macteers. The Breedloves family is completely exploited by the capitalist ruling class throughout the novel. These blacks are considered and treated as devils and ugly in Ohio. They were hated for their "blackness" and are rejected from the society.

Gender discrimination is also an important issue which makes the women in the novel suffer. The black women struggle not only because they are black and poor, but also because they are females. They experience dependency, repression, internal racism and alienation. Pecola's destruction is like a massacre which claims her sanity. The black women in the novel experiences the same subjugation and marginalization which any other women would experience in a patriarchal society. Claudia explains the sufferings of her community, that by being a minority in both caste and class they had to move about on the helm of life.

Thus, Morrison portrays the pathetic plight of the Blacks in a racist country America. It shows us how the principles spread by the dominant group, the Whites and adopted by the marginal groups, the Blacks, influence the identity of the black women. Most of the black women in *The Bluest eyes*, long for White beauty, white standards, White freedom and White living. These Black women being Black do not meet the standards of the white society and are removed from the society before they become aware of their self. Pecola stands as an example for the Black women who are unrecognized and marginalized in the society. Morrison has evidently represented the sufferings of the Black in real life through her characters in the *Bluest Eyes*. This novel discloses the tragic condition of the Black women in America.

#### **WORKS CITED**

Bryce, Patrice. *The Novels of Toni Morrison: The Search for self and place within the community*. New York: Peter Lang, 1992.

Gyles, Gloria Wade. *No Crystal Stair: Visions of Race and Sex in Black Women's Fiction*. New York: Pilgrim Press, 1984.

Morrison, Toni. *The Bluest Eye*. London: PEN, 1970.

Sumana, K. *The novels of Toni Morrison: A study in Race, Gender and Class*. New Delhi: Prestige, 1998.