



## THE DEPICTION OF PECOLA AS A VICTIM OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION IN TONI MORRISON'S "THE BLUEST EYE"

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### Abstract :

*Toni Morrison is considered as the most commendable and celebrated novelist, an essayist and professor in realm of African American Literature. She was the First African woman and recipient of Nobel Prize in Literature in 1993. She also achieved prestigious Pulitzer Prize on account of her outstanding contribution in fiction. Her classical literary works are applauded for extravagant style that reflected the callous consequences of racism and classism in America. The writing style of Morrison is quite punitive in nature as she has successfully and poignantly exposed the consequence of racial discrimination to the African American community. Morrison is also regarded as an emblem of true voice of Black people and their perennial sufferings and exploitations. Her marvellous works includes the prominent themes such as racism, gender discrimination, internal and external hatred along with obsession for white standards of beauty. She became renowned internationally through her first novel entitled The Bluest Eye. She skilfully portrayed the characterization of Pecola as an African- American girl as a victim of racial discrimination. Pecola is hated by everybody due to her dark complexion. She has tremendous passion for blue eyes therefore she prays to God everyday. One day, she was raped by her own father and the tragic protagonist becomes mad. This research paper primarily focuses on the sufferings and misfortunes of Pecola as a protagonist and her treatment as a handkerchief.*

**Key words:** *African American Identity, Racism, Classism, Discrimination, White Standards of Beauty, Identity and Hatred*

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### Introduction :

The original name of Toni Morrison was Chole Ardelia Wofford and she was renowned for the exposure of Black female experiences in African American community. She changed her original name "Chole to Toni" because the people at Howard had problem to pronounce the name 'Chole'. The name Toni had taken from 'Anthony' who



became a Roman Catholic at age of 12. In such a manner, she had to change her original Black name during her college days.

Morrison was supposed to be the first black woman to receive the prestigious Nobel Prize in Literature. In 1993, during her Nobel Prize acceptance speech, she said, "We die. That may be the meaning of life. But we do language. That may be the measure of our lives". Also, she talked about the influence of storytelling. To prove her point regarding their tradition of storytelling, she stated a meaningful story about a blind, black woman. And that poor woman was followed by a group of young people who questioned her authenticity as, "Is there no context of our lives? No song, no literature, no poem full of vitamins, no history connected to experience that you can pass along to help us start strong?... Think of our lives and tell us your particularized world. Make up a story". Furthermore, she commented, "What is most wonderful for me, personally, is to know that the prize at last has been awarded to an African American. Winning as an American is very special-but winning as a Black American is a knockout".

Morrison became encouraged in writing as she grew up with African American music, folklore, rituals and myths. She said that her family was 'intimidated with the supernatural' and they often used signs to foretell future. In her notable novels, she depicted her real childhood experiences. She was immensely inspired by 'Jane Austen, Leo Tolstoy and French writer Gustave Flaubert. Thus, she developed skill for writing brilliant novels. Morrison was deeply motivated by the activists, thinkers who actively participated in the Black Arts Movement. These prominent personalities were Amiri Baraka, Nikki Giovanni, Jayne Cortez, Maya Angelou and James Baldwin as well.

Morrison was criticized by White people for not portraying them as protagonists. She explained her choice in a dulcet tone as: "I look very hard for black fiction because I want to participate in developing a canon of black work. We have had the first rush of black entertainment, where Blacks were writing for Whites and Whites were encouraging this kind of self-flagellation. Now we can get down to the craft of writing, where black people are talking to black people". She mentioned her real past traumatic experiences during her childhood regarding ill-treatment and horrible attitude of racism by the White community. She told when she was at age of two, her family's house was burned while they were in it. Morrison said that "People set our house on fire to evict us". After that horrible hour, her father became grief-stricken with the whites. She explained, "he simply felt that he was better and superior to all white people". In such a manner, she depicted the melancholic miseries of the Black community as well as their marginalization by the society.

Morrison published her magnum opus named as "The Bluest Eye" in 1970. She portrayed the brilliant technique of an omniscient third-person narrative that incorporated in the first person. As she depicted the novel in the narrative form from Claudia McTeer's perspective. Various attempts were made to ban this outrageous novel because it contained contradictory issues such as racism, incest and child molestation which exempted this marvellous literary work from schools and libraries. In an exclusive interview, about her motivations for writing "The Bluest Eye" Morrison commented regarding the obnoxious nature of racism to enlighten her readers as, "how hurtful racism is" and that people are "apologetic about the fact that their skin (is) so dark". Recollecting her dilemma, she said that



"When I was a kid, we called each other names but we did not think it was serious, that you could take it in". Thereafter, she concluded that she "wanted people to understand what it was like to be treated that way".

Morrison mentioned on her motivations to write the novel as, "I felt compelled to write this mostly because in the 1960s, Black male authors published powerful, aggressive, revolutionary fiction or nonfiction, and they had positive racially uplifting rhetoric with them that were stimulating and I thought no one would remember that it wasn't always beautiful". In such a manner, Morrison shared her genuine but realistic expressions on oppressions by the white community. She described in her first ingenious literary work called 'The Bluest Eye', which is founded on Morrison's conversation with a Black girl in her childhood. She raised a rhetoric question about why that Black girl pleads for gaining 'blue eyes' though the magnificent maxim of 'Black is Beautiful' is retrieved. She staunchly described her extraordinary and revolutionary thoughts on racial discrimination. Thus, Morrison became a pioneer of Black community and argued about the classicism of the White community.

According to Morrison, the expression of her style of writing her masterpiece 'The Bluest Eye' was to expose the unjust and oppression of White community. She said, "My choice of language (speakerly, aural, colloquial) my reliance for full comprehension on codes embedded in black culture, my effort to effect immediate co-conspiracy and intimacy (without any distancing, explanatory fabric), as well as my attempt to shape a silence while breaking it are attempts to transfigure the complexity and wealth of Black American culture into a language worthy of the culture"(Foreword, The Bluest Eye).

Morrison in 'The Bluest Eye' sternly spoke about the helplessness of Black women and their devastated condition. She described the characterization of 'Pecola' who was mistreated in her childhood by the oppression and White standards of beauty. In her family too, Pecola was not treated as a normal girl because her own father raped her and her mother used to force her to work during her menstruation. In school too she was compared with blonde white girls. In such a manner, poor Pecola developed inferiority complex plead to God for blue eyes everyday. Morrison described the condition of Pecola as, "Each night without fail, she prayed for blue eyes. Fervently, for a year she had prayed. Although somewhat discouraged, she was not without hope. To have something as had as wonderful as that happen would take a long, long time"(The Bluest Eye, 35).

Morrison portrayed the significant reason behind the desire for blue eye was to get affection by her own family. Morrison weaved the dialogue in picturesque manner as: "if she looked different, beautiful, maybe Cholly would be different and Mrs. Breedlove too. Maybe they would say, why, look at pretty-eyed Pecola...we must not do bad things in front of those pretty eyes" (The Bluest Eye, 34). Morrison depicted the character of Pecola looking for the love of her family and therefore she expressed her innocent thought about love as: "what did love feel like? She wondered hoe do grown ups act when they are in love? Eat fish together?" (The Bluest Eye, 44). Morrison described the horrible hour when her father raped her and she gets pregnant and lost her sanity. This Black protagonist also becomes mad at the end of novel.

Morrison mentioned another incident of the storekeeper when poor Pecola was mistreated. The storekeeper named as Mr. Yacobowaski ignored her because of her Black-skin. She described that situation very poignantly as: "How



can a fifty-two-year-old white immigrant storekeeper...see a little black girl?" (The Bluest Eye, 36). This incident reflected the White-beauty phobia among common people as penned by Morrison.

Morrison portrayed Claudia as an omniscient third person narrator and her perception of white-skin as terrible. She doesn't like the praise of Shirley Temple as a quintessential example of white beauty by Frieda and Pecola. Another incident described by Morrison was of Young Junior and his mother Geraldine, they were light-skinned Black. Geraldine did not allow her son to play with his fellow Black children and hated their own race. Young Junior gently invited Pecola to play with her and callously throws cat on her face and cruelly laughs at her by saying: "You can't get out. You are my prisoner,"(The Bluest Eyes,89). Even Geraldine emotionally abused her because of her race. In such manner, Morrison revealed the racial discrimination in Black community as, "Shut up! Hair uncombed, dresses falling apart, shoes untied and caked with dirt. The end of the world lays in their eyes, and the beginning, and all the waste in between. They were everywhere. They slept six in a bed, all their pee mixing together in the night as they wet their beds each in his own candy-and-potato-chip dream. Get out, You nasty little black bitch. Get out of my house"(The Bluest Eye, 90).

Morrison not only depicted Pecola as a victim of racial discrimination but also her father Cholly had been grief-stricken by the cruelties of racism. He was emotionally tortured by the society since his childhood which made him hide his love or express his feelings. He and his friend Darlene were caught in act when they were intimidating with each other, the wicked White men said, "Get on wind it, nigger...And make it good, nigger, make it good" (The Bluest Eye, 148).

Another instance depicted by Morrison was metaphorical representation of a cute doll with blue eyes. She quoted it as, " It had begun with Christmas and the gift dolls. The big, the special, the loving gift was always a big, blue-eyed Baby Doll. From the clucking sounds of adults, I knew that the doll represented what they thought was my fondest wish"(The Bluest Eye,21). This symbolically reflected the White standards of beauty among the Blacks. Even little girls were obsessed by the blue-eyed conception of beauty. Furthermore, Morrison highlighted that quotation as: "Adults, older girls, shops, magazines, newspapers, window signs-all the world had agreed that a blue-eyed, yellow-haired, pink-skinned doll was what every girl child treasured. Here, they said, this is beautiful, and if you are on this day worthy you may have it"(The Bluest Eye, 22).

Another incident portrayed by Morrison was of image on candy named 'Mary Jane'. This too was another symbol representing the White beauty especially with blue eyes. This ideology of White standards of beauty was considered as superior and immensely gorgeous. The narrator in the novel of Toni Morrison stated it as: "Each pale-yellow wrapper has a picture on it. A picture of little Mary Jane, for whom the candy is named. Smiling white face. Blond hair in gentle disarray, blue eyes looking at her out of a world of clean comfort. The eyes are petulant, mischievous"(The Bluest Eye, 49). This quotation depicted that this beautiful White face will attract people to eat the candy because of Mary Jane.



### Conclusion :

Although slavery of African people was demolished legally, still the African American community was not considered as equal to the Whites. Racial discrimination was still a crucial issue. Toni Morrison, through her classical literary work "The Bluest Eye" shared an eloquent expression of preserving and nurturing the Black cultural heritage and to demolish the inferiority complex of dark-skinned.

Morrison expressed her eminent thoughts regarding the humiliation, oppression and hatred faced by the Black community as well as in their families. She made her readers to think and comprehend the issues by giving appropriate instances in her notable novel. She stood against the classicism of White people and made her readers realize regarding their predicaments. In this way an attempt has been made to explore Pecola as a victim of racial discrimination in Toni Morrison's world famous novel The Bluest Eye.

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