

A Black Female's Psychological Agony in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*

J.Suriya Deepa

Assistant professor, Research Department of English, St. Xavier's College (Autonomous), Palayam Kottai -627002, Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Abishekapatti- 627012, Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu, India.

Abstract

Afro - American literature emanated in the United States, from the writers of African descent. It was inaugurated with the slave narratives by the Africans who were brought slaves to America. They were recognized through the eyes of Eurocentric cultured people and graded as secondary, 'the other'. The African descents could not reconcile with the white supremacy. The milieu did not allow the Africans to negotiate their black identity. The white beauty standards confronted the identity of Africans, making them uncomfortable with black skin. This resulted in psychological agony. The stereotypes, 'white' and 'black', become barriers to reckon with. The Afro- American psyche has to negate the black identity to establish a respectable subject position, which in turn is impossible as it is racially determined. This paper, "A Black Female's Psychological Agony in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*", reads the struggle of a black woman, trying to reshape her identity and the cost she pays for it.

Index Terms: identity crisis, psychological agony, racialization and white supremacy.

I.INTRODUCTION

"The most prominent type of racialized ranking represents blackness as a condition to be despised, and most tokens of this type extend this attitude to cover the physical features that are central to the description of Black identity"(qtd in Mahboobeh Khaleghi).

"She has seen it lurking in the eyes of all white people. So. The distaste must be for her, her blackness. All things in her are flux and anticipation. 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” (*BE* 47).

The civil rights movement emerged in the United States in 1960s. It aimed to displace “racial segregation and discrimination against African Americans and to secure legal recognition and federal protection of the citizenship rights enumerated in the constitution and federal law” (Wikipedia). During this time, Toni Morrison wrote her novel, “*The Bluest Eye*” as a contribution to create an identity for Black people, highlighting the plight of African Americans in the White society. This paper aims to read out the vital role of identity “...in the lives of African American” (Beulah 240). They are given negative identity. There is no peace in their life because of their race, being Black. This paper depicts the psychological agony of a Black female through the character of Pecola in *The Bluest Eye*.

II. RESEARCH PROGRESSION

In “*The Bluest Eye*”, the protagonist Pecola, eleven years old Black girl, suffers from psychological agony not because of any guilt or past, but rather of her race. “She is not seen by herself until she hallucinates herself” (Afterword *BE* 211). Pecola is subjected to humiliation because of her blackness, this occurs in every place, wherever she goes. Nowhere has she felt superior. She is effectuated to accept ugliness and inferiority. She is imposed with Eurocentric ideals by the White society, which pilots her to undergo an attempt to reshape her identity as she wants.

The Bluest Eye throws light in the life span of African Americans. It underscores the racial discrimination in the United States in order to bring down it. The world is dominated by the Eurocentric culture which defines the words such as beauty, higher, primary, and superior, regarding their perception. As beauty is associated with white supremacy, most of the people crave to be like Europeans. Ranking the people of all over the world and offering their identity becomes the

responsibility of the west. They impose their opinion and perception in other's mind and make them to internalize it. They project their views to the world through certain media and non-media sources. One can see its effect even in the minds of children. Roya Vakili uses the famous rhyme of white beauty standards as:

Chubby cheeks, dimpled chin.

Rosy lips, teeth within.

Curly hair, very fair.

Eyes are blue, lovely too.

Teachers pet, is that you?

Yes! yes! yes!. (19)

This shows how Eurocentric culture spreads its nature and makes it globalize. This is what happens in Pecola's life also. She is both mentally and physically dominated by the Whites in the society, to which she belongs. The Whites are recognized by themselves and the non -Whites. There is an identity for them. They do not need to do anything to create it. But it is not so in the case of African American. Wherever Pecola goes she, remains unidentified, does not get any recognition. She is not considered as the students, who belong to the same school, are regarded, in her school. She does not get any attention and favour as well, which she aims for. The teachers "...tried never to glance at her, and called on her only when everyone was required to respond" (*BE* 44). Not only that ,she is subjected to humiliation in the hands of her schoolmates, who are graceful and magnificent according to white beauty standards. "She also knew that when of the girls at school wanted to be particularly insulting a boy, or wanted to get an immediate response from him, she could say, 'Bobby loves Pecola Breed love!

Bobby loves Pecola Breed love!' and never fail to get peals of laughter from those in earshot, and mock anger from the accused" (*BE* 44).

These all indict her that she is ill-favored and hideous, that is why she does not receive proper observation as her white classmates get. She is graded low, if her name is associated with any one, immediately the person becomes fury. This is the recognition of a Black in the United States in 1960s. These humiliations do not cease. But it continues even in the public places whenever she comes out.

At once, she proceeds to the shop to buy candies, in return she gives pennies. The shopkeeper "...hesitates, not wanting to touch her hand" (47). Another time also she acquires this kind of insult by the boys, "Heady with the smell of their own musk thrilled by the easy power of a majority, they gaily harassed her" (63). They do this because of her, black, identity; they cannot execute this with one who belongs to their clan. They sing "...Black e mo. Black e mo.Yadaddsleepsnekked. Black e mo. Black e mo yadaddsleep sneeked. Black e mo..."(63). They insult her by indicating her race "...over which the victim had no control" (63). She is compelled to accept the plainness because of being black. These all take shape as inferiority complex in the mind of Pecola. She is enforced to accept herself as inferior. Mrs.Beulah Victor, says that:

The African Americans lost their cultural originality as a result of the inferiority complex engendered in their minds. The American society gave more importance for material wealth and power and the false prestige that the white skin is more superior to any other colour. These prestigious aspects were used as yardsticks to measure ones accomplishment and ones reputation in the society. These were inaccessible heights for the black men and women. (244)

Eventually she internalizes that she is unpleasant and her identity is negative, comparing to the whites. When she wants to go away from these people she cannot, because she thinks "...as long as she was ugly, she would have to stay with these people. Somehow she belonged to them" (*BE* 43). In the author's words: "Long hours she sat looking in the mirror, trying to discover the secret of the ugliness, the ugliness that made her ignored despised at school, by teachers and classmates alike" (*BE* 43). The effects of Euro American racism is been fixed in her mind. Nothing can erase it. She is captured by these "Elitist ideologies", which leads to mental slavery (Beulah 240).

For Pecola love deserving is a rare kind. She wonders while talking about boy friends with Marie. When she converses with Frieda and Claudia she asks, "How do you do that? I mean, how do you get somebody to love you?" (*BE* 30). She is made to think that black does not deserve to be loved. Her thoughts are dominated by the 'Euro American white beauty standards'. She does not willingly take those ideologies into her but rather they are imposed in her mind. She is alienated, ranked low and recognized as an inferior in the white society. Further it is clearly shown that not only love deserving is rare for her but smiling also. When Claudia and Frieda go to meet her, Claudia notices her smiling and says that "... it was rare thing to see on her" (104). There are certain characteristics for which African Americans do not deserve, considering the white's perception. With these ideas they are treated in the United States. Not only the whites but also the coloured people treated them worst. Pecola is compelled to get in to the house of junior, the coloured child. When she tries to get out, junior says "You can't get out. You're my prisoner..." (*BE* 85). She receives this kind of behavior from junior, because he thinks she deserves this because of her ugliness.

These all give her a kind of mental suppression. She does not want to live with this inferiority, so that she just decides to reshape her identity. She wants "... to be a freak than what she was" (Afterword *BE* 206). Because the incidents mentioned above suppress her mentally. She cannot move with these.

Then, she chooses to be with blue eyes, "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 wonderful as that happen would take a long, long time" (*BE* 44). She waits "...a long, long time" but she does not get anything blue. Eventually her mental suppression and her desire for having blue eyes to overcome the earlier lead to insanity. It may be better for her to be identified different rather than negative. At the end she becomes crazy.

III.CONCLUSION

Thus, "The African Americans are caught in an in-between position and in the process seem to lose their personal and social identity" (Beulah Victor 241). In order to break all these 'Elitist ideologies' of the White society the African Americans have to suffer in the hands of Whites. The life of African Americans in the United States is terrible and when they try to reshape an identity for themselves, they have to get rid from the conviction imposed in their mind.

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