



Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*: A Study of the Quest for Individual and Racial Identity

Dr. Shabeena Parveen, Assistant Professor
Department of English
SMP Govt. Girls PG College, Meerut
drshabeenaparveen@gmail.com

Abstract-This paper, entitled Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*: A Study of the Quest for Individual and Racial Identity, describes the quest for personal and racial identity, the issues brought on racial discrimination, and how this led to an identity crisis among Afro-Americans living in a society dominated by white people. Toni Morrison shed light on black consciousness, which was marked by an identity crisis brought on by racial discrimination, in her 1970 debut book, *The Bluest Eye*. The tragic story of a little black girl who has a strong longing for blue eyes, believing that having blue eyes will make her more attractive and deserving, is the central theme of the book. Morrison depicts the tragic results of racial discrimination on helpless black girls who are traumatised and left without any sense of identity.

Keywords- Racism, Identity, Discrimination, Domination, Quest.

Introduction- Toni Morrison's ardent devotion was towards the writing that offered new perspectives on black history, the immense oppression, and the pain endured by her race. She perceived the persecution that African Americans have endured and found it to be very concerning since they believe that their lack in physical attractiveness is what brings them shame and degradation. The main theme of the book is that black people want to be as beautiful as white people, with things like blonde hair, blue eyes, and white skin. Black people find this to be a very sensitive topic and a terrible situation inside a racist societal structure. The main theme of the book is racism, with white representing innocence, virtue, purity, and hope, and black representing something dark, wicked, and terrible. Morrison draws attention to the fact that racism affects black girls' self-esteem and has a negative psychological impact on their mental health.

The Bluest Eye (1970), Toni Morrison's debut book is a critique of the Anglo-American notion of physical beauty, challenging one of its tenets in the debate around female body. Morrison



narrates the startling tale of a black little girl named Pecola Breedlove, who spirals into madness after experiencing repeated emotional and physical abuse from her family, the community at large, and herself using a variety of voices and storytelling approaches. The novel tackles issues of racial self-loathing, the threat of white beauty standards, and the loss of identity via the story of Pecola and those around her. It also explores gender, ethnicity, and identity. This research attempts to examine how the novel presents ideas of identification in relation to race, how it might be seen as a defence of racial pride, and what Morrison suggests as a positive, healing identity.

Morrison drew inspiration for his debut book, *The Bluest Eye*, from the awakening and developing black consciousness of the 1960s, a time marked by an almost evangelical quest for racial and personal identity. Morrison chooses this the central theme of her debut significant work. The book explores the issue of Black people's affecting and seemingly unavoidable fixation with the American ideal of beauty. The discussion between Toni Morrison and a childhood friend served as the seed for the novel. Her friend stated she wanted blue eyes, and they had just begun primary school.

Pecola Breedlove, the main character of the book *The Bluest Eye*, is from a low-income black family and longs for white children's blue eyes in order to receive the same thoughts and outlook as white people. She wants the affection and acceptance of both Black people and White people. She is certain that having blue eyes and light-coloured skin is the primary cause of a negative demeanour. She is surrounded by cultural messages that define her as unattractive, and her only path to become calm is to retreat into schizophrenia. She longs for blue eyes like those of white children. Pecola's own father offended her modesty, which added to her conflict and suffering. It isn't her fault that she has to live a life of restraints. Her community sees her as a helpless, worthless person. She had an unfulfilled ambition. In the novel the narrator narrates: "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. Thrown, in this way, into the binding conviction that only a miracle could relieve her, she would never have known her beauty. She



would see only what there was to see: the eyes of other people.” (Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*, page 44-45)

The profound repercussions of racism on black girls are frankly revealed by Toni Morrison. Interracial disputes and extreme prejudice have been responsible for Pecola's pitiful situation. Her inability can be attributed to both her lack of confidence and her desperate longing for blue eyes. It is impossible for her to overcome her deeply ingrained and intense self-perception of being unattractive, even in her subconscious. It's her own parents who debase her. When a young black girl like Pecola experiences external humiliation along with this kind of emotion, it exacerbates her inferior complex. Pecola's father despises her appearance, and her mother has called her ugly since she was a young girl. Her parents could have prevented her descent into insanity if they had shown her the essential attention and devotion. The narrator says; “It had occurred to Pecola some time ago that if her eyes, those eyes that held the pictures, and knew the sights- if those eyes of hers were different, that is to say, beautiful, she herself would be different. Her teeth were good, and at least her nose was not big and flat like some of those who were thought so cute. If she looked different, beautiful, maybe Cholly would be different, and Mrs. Breedlove too.” (Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*, page 44)

Morrison paints a picture of Pecola's family's terrible existence and how it affects Pecola's quest for blue eyes. Morrison tells the story of the Breedlove family, who live in a one-room flat that is divided into two halves by blankets. Like its owners, the apartment's furnishing is old. The members of the Breedlove family acknowledge their physical appearance. Not only do the white people in Lorain despise them, but they also acknowledge their supremacy and acknowledge that they are inferior to them and the rest of the community. They stop caring about themselves and hide their ugly selves by staying in the backyard. Pecola's quest to have blue eyes is an attempt to counteract the negative perceptions her family has in the community due to their appearance. The person who has had the most impact on Pecola is her mother Pauline. Pauline is an Alabama-born black girl. She gets a childhood nail piercing in her foot. Pauline once met Cholly Samson, a youngster. He comes from a low-income background. Cholly experiences embarrassment from members of his own family. His mother leaves him on



a pile of debris by the railway when he is four days old, wrapped in two blankets. He is raised and given care by his aunt Jimmy. After completing six years of education, Cholly works as an errand boy at the Son's feed and Grain store. Cholly's aunt Jimmy passes away when she is fourteen. At Aunt Jimmy's funeral, Cholly was fussed over. Cholly and Pauline fall in love, make the decision to be married, and move to the north in pursuit of a better life and employment opportunities. After falling in love, Pauline and Cholly choose to be married, move to the north, and look for better opportunities for employment. However, a central topic in *The Bluest Eye* is racism. African-American identities are formed by a variety of issues, including skin colour, money, education, and heritage. In *The Bluest Eye*, a number of African American households are shown displaying their socioeconomic standing and exposing prejudice against other African Americans. Pecola suffers from being black and ugly; she spends a lot of time staring at her in the mirror in an attempt to figure out what makes her so awful. Her family, teachers, and peers all reject or neglect her because of her ugly appearance. She occupies the lone seat at a double desk in her class. Her teachers never make an attempt to look at her; they only do so when the class is asked to answer.

Pecola's unwavering yearning to be accepted and loved defines her struggle for racial and personal identity. Her neighbourhood and family didn't help her in any way; instead, they made it difficult for her to ever be truly happy. Pecola's father, Cholly Breedlove, was a bastard and eventually became her rapist. Cholly's personal life is also painful. As a victim of colour, he is coerced into having sex with two white police officers. They only laughed behind him as they forced him to have sex. He was profoundly affected by these experiences, which ultimately led him to take actions that he would not have taken if he had received the right counsel in those areas. Cholly's neighbourhood and family had a part in shaping the man he became and ultimately his demise.

The majority of the characters in *The Bluest Eye* have unfulfilled desires. They search for who they are because they have lost themselves. Pecola longs to have blue eyes. She still thinks she has those eyes at the book's conclusion. She believes that her blue eyes lead people to regard her unexpectedly, but she has come to terms with it. She desired to be accepted and loved by



society as she saw it. She was able to endure because, whether or not that acceptance and love existed, she chose to believe it. Pecola becomes insane as a result of her identity quest. She interprets social exclusion in words she can understand, even when she is rejected by society for reasons she does not know. Because society doesn't provide her with the direction and validation she needs, it shapes her identity and shapes who she becomes. Cholly experienced a similar sense of alienation from the community. He disappears after committing an act of inhumanity because he was unable to cope with realising what a monster he had become.

The story gently and truthfully examines the detrimental effects that white norms and ideals have on the lives of Black people. The terrible and pitiful circumstances of Black people in a racist society are depicted with poignancy. It also looks at how the institutions that the dominant group controls, with its propagated beliefs, shape how people define themselves, especially black women. Black people's victimization within the framework of a racist societal structure is highlighted in the novel. Black people are not treated equally by such a social structure, which is a toxic force.

Black Americans have been deeply impacted by the racist culture that white Americans have nurtured for generations to the point where black women, like Pecola's mother Pauline, who works as a domestic worker in a white household, detest the ugly things about their own home, their daughter, and their family. By attributing her feelings of inadequacy to herself, she advances even further. As a result, the book turns into a tale that examines the potential grandeur of those who have lost their way because of ideas they have taken from outsiders and explains what it is to be human. The white ladies are taught that although their creamy complexion, blonde hair, and blue eyes are not amazing, they are also the outward embodiment of the finest qualities that God and nature have ever produced. Because of this, the writer explores the myth of beauty standards that are used to evaluate and elevate white women. Black women face discrimination since they do not conform to the perceived white ideals of beauty. Pecola longs for blue eyes not just for aesthetic reasons but also, perhaps deeper down, for acceptance by both white people and black people. Her susceptibility stems from the deep-seated, systemic racism that prevents Black people from enjoying the basic freedoms necessary to lead normal lives.



The notion that Black people are unworthy or ugly was effectively constructed by the white dominant society and forcefully imposed on Black people, leaving a horrific psychological scar that prevented them from succeeding in a society that actively promotes racism. Because they think they are undeserving, the Breedlove family members hate themselves. Pecola, the naive little girl, is oblivious to the fact that she is a victim of white cultural dominance. She has consistently experienced abuse and rejection. She experiences a horrific mental event. In a culture where individuals are objectified and made to feel less than human, Pecola is used as a scapegoat. Her situation was mostly the result of her family's terrible circumstances. However, Pecola's situation is unique, and all adolescent girls had some of the same vulnerabilities.

The persecution of African Americans by White people within the framework of racial and social hierarchy is described in *The Bluest Eye*. Morrison illustrates how prejudice disturbs black females and may be quite hazardous. Thus far, white people have effectively constructed a narrative in which black people are associated with darkness, evil, coarseness, and savagery, while white people are associated with innocence, virtue, purity, and hope. Black people are particularly vulnerable to the effects of white people's ideals of beauty because widespread racism prevents them from accepting their uniqueness and beauty as a result of their racial background. Pecola, an African American girl, feels pressured to abandon her cultural and ethnic background and comply with white authority. Whether they wanted it or not, black people have been fatally drawn to the pro-white culture phenomenon in order to be accepted as members of American society. As a result, insofar as black vulnerability is concerned, the feeling of acceptance is always linked to it.

In the novel *The Bluest Eye* racial classification and the process of self-definition may be easily compared to the sensation of beauty. It is clear from *The Bluest Eye* that racial stereotypes and cultural beauty standards have a significant impact on how people view the world. In the narrative, the idea of beauty is created and upheld by white ideology, and Pecola's desire to fit in with the dominant group ultimately leads to her downfalls. The pursuit of the American ideal of self-virtue and beauty is closely linked to Pecola's longing for "blue eyes."

Black women are urged by Morrison to return to reality and reject the delusional tendencies of



society, as she adjures the female members of the community. Pecola's quest for the American ideal of beauty as self-virtue is closely linked to her longing for "blue eyes." Her delusions, however, become warped as she experiences varying degrees of tyranny both inside and outside of the community. The quest for personal identity and the role that family and community play in that journey are the central themes of the book.

Conclusion-*The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison demonstrates how, within the framework of internalised racism, all of its elements interact to create a set of stereotypes that both male and female characters must contend with and oppose at the same time. A psychotic perversion is included in this group of stereotypes, in which the individual experiences hatred and then tries to resist by erasing the shattered picture of them projecting their hatred onto the object. However, Morrison has shown how the oppressed subjects want to connect with the unfathomable, idealised whiteness in the instance of perversion in the racial discourse. Racial victims under such a system of internalised racism are either deluded or sadomasochistic in their attempts to subvert the racial subjugation apparatus of capitalism. Morrison emphasises the importance of black cultural history and encourages Afro-Americans to embrace their black identity by using Pecola Breedlove as a symbol. Morrison has made it clear to Black people that being Black does not in any way make one less than White. She argues that just because a race's physical characteristics and culture differ, it does not automatically imply that all members of that race are submissive.



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