AMOTHERHOOD AND CHILDHOOD ; A CRITICAL STUDY ON TONY MORRISON’ ‘THE BLUEST EYE’

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ABSTRACT
The bluest eye (1970), Tony Morrison’s first book portrays a young African American girl named Pecola Breedlove and her psychological meddling with conventional white beauty standards. There are certain themes that profoundly protrude throughout the novel. Issues like poverty, childhood traumas, discrimination etc. can affect the psyche of a person or a community as a whole. Each character of the novel has had past traumas and bad experiences which contribute to their personality and behavior towards others. Childhood traumas are known to affect adults in many ways. It affects the way a person is raised up. As similar experiences are experienced by a whole community, the consequences of them in adulthood might be a similar one. Through this paper, there would be an evaluation how two themes childhood and motherhood are dealt through the major characters. This paper analyses how childhood experiences reflects their actions in adulthood, it also portrays how motherhood becomes a meddled concept amidst the racial discrimination, poverty and segregation faced by an oppressed community.

Keywords: Childhood, trauma, motherhood, race, discrimination, beauty

1. INTRODUCTION
Tony Morrison is known for the richly elaborated African American experiences and beautiful language. Her literary brilliance has scored her Nobel Prize and Pulitzer Prize (Ladner, 1975, pg. 13). Some of her best novels are Sula, The bluest eye, Song of Solomon, Beloved, Jazz, Love and A mercy. Morrison was a brave author who explicitly showed the raw and harsh experiences that the black community had to undergo. In 2012, she received the presidential Medal of Freedom for her rich literary contributions (Ladner, 1975, pg. 14). As an African American living in the US, Morrison faced a lot of issues which she fruitfully expresses through her novels (Hayes, 23). All of Morrison’s childhood was filled with supernatural elements and used African American rituals, music and myths. In all of her works, there are vestiges of supernatural elements, rituals, poverty, racial segregation etc. It was habitual to share stories in their family and thereby story telling is a main methodology employed by Morrison in her books. Morrison had openly stated that always used her childhood memories as an inspiration to start a novel (Ladner, 37). The bluest eye (1970), Tony Morrison’s first book portrays a young African American girl named Pecola Breedlove and her psychological meddling with conventional white beauty standards (Hayes, 18). The novel starts at the end of great depression and with the part autumn, where two African American parents, Mr. and Mrs. MacTeer are concerned about the financial crises than their daughters lives, Frieda and Claudia. They take in two more people, Henry Washington, Mr. MacTeer’s boarder and a young girl Pecola, whose father tried to burn down their house. The county had asked the Mac Teers to provide for her until the family was reunited. Despite the tragedy, the girls befriends with Pecola who loves Shirley Temple for her white skin. Pecola feels increasingly ugly with the segregation and remarks from others. The grocer, her
classmate Maureen accentuated her sense of feeling her ugliness. Pecola believes that she is ugly and only blue eyes can cure her out of her ugliness. One day after returning to her house, she is raped by her own father, Cholly. Frieda and Claudia who finds out that Pecola had been impregnated want the baby to live. They plant Marigold seeds with a wish that if the flowers bloom, the baby will live. But the flowers never bloomed and Pecola’s baby dies out of premature birth. The mentally instable Pecola, finally settles down in believing that she has the bluest eyes in the world. Childhood traumas are known to affect adults in many ways. It affects the way a person is raised up. As similar experiences are experienced by a whole community, the consequences of them in adulthood might be a similar one (Ladner, 46). Through this paper, there would be an evaluation how two themes childhood and motherhood are dealt through the major characters

2. CHILDHOOD TRAUMA AND CONSEQUENCES

There are certain themes that profoundly protrude throughout the novel. Issues like poverty, childhood traumas, discrimination etc. can affect the psyche of a person or a community as a whole (Ladner, 44). Each character of the novel has had past traumas and bad experiences which contribute to their personality and behavior towards others. In the Bluest eye, childhood representations of the white community are agents of accelerated racism towards the white community. From the perspective of a black child, a white child is never a symbol of innocence. They are destructors of their dignity. The worship of white beauty and self-imposition by the white community induces a sense of destructed self-esteem into the black children. Maureen, Rose Mary Velucci are seen as showering their arrogance and superiority of skin colour and money on to them (Hayes, 72). Childhood traumas can result in the creation of a false self. As a consequence of ignorance and avoidance from the parent, the child would have a tendency to adopt a false self (Hayes, 75). This would be reflected as the child grows into an adult. Pecola believed that having blue eyes would solve all problems in her life. Seeing Pauline care for the white kids at the Fishers, Pauline believes that it is her fault that she was born black and ugly. Pecola adores the features that her mother finds attractive most probably to get the same affection as the other white kids and thereby loves Shirley Temple and her white skin whereas Claudia hates Shirley Temple and white dolls. But after a while as Claudia learns to love the white doll, she is adopting a false self. ‘She says ‘Change is adjustment without improvement’ (Hayes, 76). Another consequence of childhood trauma is victimhood thinking. Pauline Breedlove as a child had been isolated being the crippled child. She believes that her crippled leg is the reason for the isolation. Cholly Breedlove who begins to distance himself from Pauline accelerated her feeling of loneliness and she takes up self martyrdom as a way of coping up with the frustration she was suffering. Passive aggressiveness is seen in children and this blends into their characters as adults. Sammy is seen to attack his own father and had ran away from home 27 times, once even staying outside for five months. Pauline and Cholly are seen to be indulging in physical fights to cope up with their anger. This aggressiveness might have led Cholly to rape his own daughter in the end. Passivity is another trait seen in adults who had faced childhood traumas. A best example of passivity is Pecola. She is ignored and ends up having no opinion about anything. When Frieda and Claudia asks what she feels like doing, she says ‘I don’t care’. Claudia, the narrator in the first few chapters of ‘The bluest eye’ is a perfect portrayal of the exhausted psyche of the black community in America. Both the girls want to bully their haughty white neighbor Rose Mary Villanucci. They want her to cry and ask them if they want to pull her pants down (Morrison, 7). Both girls just need to assert their pride by showing their refusal to accept it. It is peculiar to note that Claudia hated to bath. ‘The irritable unimaginative cleanliness’ that was imposed on her was too much. Maybe it reminded of the cleanliness of the white community. Children are dealt with ignorance even if they fall down or fall ill. Claudia is severely scolded for throwing up on bed while she was sick. ‘She is not talking to me, she is talking to the puke’, says Claudia about her mother (Morrison, 9). We were not introduced to Mr Henry, but merely pointed out. The very identity of the child is being questioned on being introduced like this. Similarily, Frieda’s mama introduces Pecola to her daughter as a ‘case’ is coming to their house. It is utter ignorance to treat a person as a case. Nobody asked the kids what they wanted. Just gave her gifts. It is said that ‘Propertied black spenttheir energies and love in their nests and to avoid the outsides’. In the attempts to keep up their houses and make the two ends meet, Pauline’s childhood had contributed greatly to her attitude. Poverty had already left her a sad life, which accentuated when an accident left her toe broken.

‘Noone remarked her food preference; no body remembered her funny things’ (Morrison, 108). She blamed her foot for her separation. Loneliness had stricken her from childhood. A brief hope of care that came from Cholly disappeared with years of marriage, which drove her to the infinite isolation which had suffocated her as a
child. Pauline did not care for her clothes or makeup, just wanted a favorable glance (Morrisson, 117) Her behavior justified of the fact that she started getting the appreciation and dignity with a white family that she never got with her community. She found a solace with the idealistic physical beauty. She was a real mama to the white kids, whereas to her kids, she showed all the frustration (Hayes, 76). In the case of Bluest eye, incest, where a father rapes his daughter is the bravest subject discussed. Morrison has adopted a narrative style as to make the readers feel as ‘conspirators’ with the rapist. Incest was not a much discussed topic until 1975 and Morrison clearly took this forbidden taboo and displayed with courage. The mind of a father who was willing to rape his daughter has to be critically analysed. Cholly begins his story when he was abandoned by his mother, wrapped in blankets and left near the railway tracks to die. Cholly had lost all hope and love. His coldness in his aunt’s funeral is notable. Moreover he was tricked by his cousin Charlie, whom he looked upon He was teased by the White men while he was having sex for the first time in the bushes. He did not hate white men; he hated the girl (Morrison, 40). He was raised by his aunt who dies later. Cholly’s quest in finding his father and finding that he does not want him makes him a person who is not responsible for his own actions. Louise Junior wanted to play and do all the mischievous thing with the black boys. His mother forcing to mingle with just the right kids makes him an angry frustrated boy and he turns out to be a bully who throws gravel if they don’t play with him and taunting girls (Morrison, 86). There are many narrators who tells the story of Pecola from different points of view. Claudia herself is seen with two perspectives, one is Claudia, as a nine year old child and then as an adult who introspect what happened in 1940 to 41. The adult Claudia is a person who is still suffers the consequences of her childhood.

### 3. MOTHERHOOD AS DEALT IN THE BLUEST EYE

One main dilemma that black mothers had to deal was to ensure their physical survival and at the same time emotionally nurture their children. After working hard to keep a roof under their heads, it was common to have an emotional and physical distance with their children. As far as the child is concerned, the role of Motherhood remains unfulfilled in such cases. There would be a space which they try to fix with their coping mechanisms (Ladner, 47). A typical black man is a frustrated one. Unable to take care of their families, working hard and not being able to provide enough, they sought to drinking and violence. A typical example is Cholly who has everyday quarrels and once even tried to burn their house down. This also puts a lot of pressure on to the black mother. Claudia hates the concept of motherhood. She does not like the doll given to her as Christmas present and gets even more frustrated as other elders start scolding her for breaking the doll and how much they had wished for a doll. ‘I couldn’t love it’, she says about the white doll. ‘I had only one wish, to dismember it ‘One fact must be her acceptance that she cannot mother a white child ever. Her aversion to motherhood is probably sprung up from her own frustrated mother who does nothing but screams and displays her frustration on her kids. ‘My mother’s soliloquy irritated and depressed us’ (Morrison, 22). ‘Is it true that I can have a baby now?’ Claudia and Frieda were full of respect for Pecola. Even Pecola felt good about the fact that now she could have babies. This concept of motherhood that the children had, psychologically kills them at the end (Morrison, 30). Page 80 talks about a typical coloured woman who lives an ideal life keeping up all the morals and values, marrying a perfect man and finally being frustrated with her life (Morrison, 80). Here it is Geraldine, who is unable to show her love as a mother to her child, whom she considers a mini version of her husband Louise. She showers her motherhood more on to the cat whom Louise Junior kills and accuses Pecola of killing it. There is always a pressure on the mother to keep their children away from the black ugliness of their mixed diaspora. ‘The child was never allowed to cry’ (Morrison, 84) Thereby she applies lotion and never allows the child’s face to ashen and she closely cuts the boy’s hair, as not reveal the black features.

It is peculiar to note the damaged minds of the black community mothers. Frieda’s mother was seen as singing songs in a strange way, the day her daughter was molested (Morrison, 96). Moreover Pecola’s mother refuses to believe her that she was raped. Pauline found her hope in movies and physical beauty. She was fascinated with movies where white men took care of white women. She was having a tough time when she was five months pregnant with Sammy. It was at a theatre, that she lost her front tooth. It was an ultimate blow on Pauline who tried her best to look beautiful. ‘There I was, 5 months pregnant, trying to look like Jean Harlow and a friend teeth gone’ (Morrison, 121). Pauline found a consolation in conceiving the second baby. She considered Pecola as a friend in her womb. She had to face a comment that ‘these women deliver like horses’. Pauline was deeply disturbed with that commend of the doctor and imagined what he would tell to a white woman on the delivery table. (Morrison, 123). She screamed at the top of her voice portraying that pain and motherhood is a universal experience and not different to different people.
Morrison explains that the book just like her main character was ‘Dismissed, trivialized and misread (Bracken ,1)’. The novel is divided into four sections, each part depicting a season and consequently changing the mood of the plot accordingly. Many titles are extracted from a simulated text of a ‘Dick and Jane reader’. Childhood is an important element that defines the character’s actions. Personalities of major characters are formed with significant events from the childhood. From the perspective of a black child, a white child is never a symbol of innocence. They are destructors of their dignity. The worship of white beauty and self-imposition by the white community induces a sense of destructed self-esteem into the black children. Childhood traumas can result in victimhood thinking, creation of a false self, passive aggressiveness, self-martyrdom etc. which is evident with the characters in The Bluest Eye. Irreplaceable memories of childhood that imbibes certain perspectives about the world makes people inflict even violence in their children. Though there are no theories to prove the certainty of this fact, the probability of childhood trauma implications is significant. Major characters of Morrison’s novel ‘The bluest eye’, like Pecola, Pauline, Cholly, Claudia etc. have childhood trauma affecting them. Motherhood is another major theme analyzed. Motherhood when coupled with the burden of racial discrimination and poverty affects individuality and family life. Mothers like Pauline finds relief and recognition in embracing the white race and ignoring her own children. It goes to an extend where a serious allegation like rape is ignored. Whereas mothers like MacTeer end up letting out their frustration on their kids and thus destroying their childhood, Children of oppressed races like Claudia comes to hate the concept of motherhood with the kind of frustration imposed on them. Her aversion to motherhood is probably sprung up from her own frustrated mother who does nothing but screams and displays her frustration on her kids. ‘My mother’s soliloquy irritated and depressed us (Morrison, 22). ‘Is it true that I can have. The typical middle class coloured woman gets stranded in their confinement to family life and in the process of their everyday fight not to be tagged as a black, they lose all values of motherhood. Geraldine is a good example of a coloured woman who forbids her son in mingling with other kids and finding more affection with the cat rather than her son. With the conventional beauty standards propagated as superior among their community, these children get a feeling of being sidelined. Intergeneric studies are important to ensure knowledge Motherhood and childhood are important themes while dealing with diasporic studies and black literature. It connects various genres like psychology, literature, women’s studies etc.

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