

CHAPTER-II

The outside gaze in *the Bluest Eye*

It is the general perception that literature is the mirror of society. What happens in the real life directly affects the literary writing. By supporting this argument, Henry James in *The Art of Fiction in Literary Criticism* says, “The only reason for the existence of a novel is that it does compete with life” (2). Even, Virginia Woolf has also stated, “Fiction is like a spider’s web, attached ever so lightly perhaps, but still attached to life at all four corners” (32). Similarly considering literature as an important jargon for the exposition of real life, Morrison has explored in her novels the black experience in America from its roots in slavery to the vital presence in contemporary life. As an editor, she has played significant role in bringing literature into mainstream. In her works, she focuses on the experience of the black Americans, particularly emphasizing black women’s experience in an unjust society and the search for cultural identity. She uses fantasy and mythic elements along with the realistic depiction of racial, gender and class conflict. In literary field, she has excelled in different types of genres such as fiction, non-fiction, short fiction, plays, and libretti. Morrison’s presence in the literary field can be measured up by the statement of Nobel Committee which describes that Morrison delves into the language which she wants to liberate from the fetters of race. Though she is an expert lecturer, educator, editor, essay writer, literary critic and short story writer, it is her work as a novelist that makes her such a significant figure of black American canon. Her novels include *The Bluest Eye* (1970), *Sula* (1974), *Song of Solomon* (1977), *Tar Baby* (1981), *Beloved* (1987), *Jazz* (1992), *Paradise* (1999), *Love* (2003), *A Mercy* (2008).

The Bluest Eye Morrison’s debut novel set in Ohio, delineates the rooted racial biases by describing a black girl’s molestation in the white society. Pecola Breedlove, the protagonist of the novel is victimized by a society that conditions her to believe that she is ugly and therefore worthless, because she does not epitomize white western culture’s idea of beauty. This white standard of beauty is so entrenched in Pecola’s mind that she negates new standard of beauty allowing black to see ‘black as beautiful.’ Throughout the novel, she has an impoverished sense of self and insufficient self-esteem because she tries to accept the values of the white community in order to become worthwhile. By narrating the story of Pecola, the novelist has marked that

one's social and physical environment can drastically affect one's nature and potential for surviving and succeeding in this world. Actually, Morrison has got the idea for the novel from an elementary school classmate whose wish for the eyes of a white girl reveals her contempt for her own racial identity. By ensuring this, Morrison becomes interested in showing the mechanics of feelings of inferiority in case of racial beauty which constitutes the framework of the novel. In the Afterword, she mentions that she wants to make a statement about the damage that racism can do to a young girl Pecola—the most vulnerable member of a community. But she does not want to dehumanize the people who wound the girl because that would simply repeat their mistake. By doing it, Morrison attempts to 'shape a silence while breaking it.' (171)

Before concentrating on the main objective, it is required to discuss the 'Black is Beautiful' movement in which background the novel is written. This movement as mentioned in the introductory part is inspired by the Black Power ideology. It affirms blackness in positive sense and seeks to establish more dignified sense of public representation for Afro-American people. It is the movement that reclaims black identity by asserting new forms of public authorship within the public sphere based on looking and feeling good as a black person. It promotes the diversity within the black culture. Its main purpose is to end the negative misconceptions and connotations associated with the word 'black.' According to this notion, black is something to be proud of. This encourages the black as well as the supporters of African heritage to claim their presence in the white world. Of course, it helps to bring a different type of image regarding blacks.

Morrison's first novel *The Bluest Eye* is published in 1970s when the 'Black is Beautiful' is at its culminating point. By narrating the prevailing circumstances, she projects the racial prejudices determining one's inferiority. Though everyone is enthusiastic by supporting the movement in order to bring a sense of pride, does really blacks get rid of the stereotypes of African in the minds of the white people? Extracting the story from the real life incident of a black girl, Morrison in the novel aims to delineate that in spite of all the efforts done by the movement, blacks are still victims of the white standards of beauty. They adorn or worship it by considering as the supreme quality and aspire to have such kind of beauty. They have not completely accepted the black beauty. The victimization of white logos makes them consider as having no goodness and thus worthless as a human being.

Surrounded by 'Black is beautiful' movement of late 1960s Afro-American culture, Morrison decides to show how the internalized racism affects young black girls so deeply and tragically. She challenges the western standard of beauty and demonstrates that ideology like the concept of beauty is socially constructed and leads the destruction of the black psyche. To bring the main consideration of the novel, Morrison has raised pertinent issues such as racism, theme of negation and self-hatredness, physical beauty as destructive force, psychological trauma in case of female characters, child molestation and the conflict between self and the community. Reading between lines reveals that perception becomes the guiding force in the novel. How the individual is perceived by others creates a sense of identity. The characters in the black community consider themselves as ugly which is in the real sense, the external imposition poses by the outside gaze. Here, this outside gaze is pictured through the lens of racism.

The concept of outside gaze is concerned with the relations of power. The gaze is a technical term which is first discussed by French intellectual namely Michel Foucault's description of the medical gaze. Gaze is the ideological mechanism which from the perspective of dominant groups constructs, and determines the identity of the subaltern. It is not only a mechanism but also a controlling force. Through gaze, one's identity is constructed. Foucault's concept carries the sense of being objectified, subordinated or threatened by the look of others. This effect of gaze directly deals with the concept of 'panopticon surveillance' of Foucault. This panopticon is a model prison designed by Jeremy Bentham which comprises a circular building of prison cells, an open yard and a central tower. From the tower, the prison-keeper could observe all the inmates without himself being observed. Here, prisoners would be subjected to the 'gaze' of the guard, but never really know if they are really being watched. The panopticon ensures the effects of constant surveillance through an invisible and not necessarily actual observer. As far as whites are concerned, they do not impose the white values on the black through physical violence; but by some other implicit ways such as the white gaze. This white gaze is such a subtle, oppressive means that blacks think nothing to fight back. It infuses the white values into Afro-Americans without raising their urges to fight back.

In *The Bluest Eye*, the black people's identity is constructed by the gaze of the white people that controls their codes of behavior. This acts as a pervasive force in Pecola's life. She thinks that the world is determined by eyes' color but is indeed related to psychology. Besides Pecola, the black female characters despise their blackness which in turn leads to self-hatred.

They see themselves through the eyes of the white people which Dubois calls 'Double Consciousness.' Their worship of white beauty has the destructive effect on their community. The hegemonic ideology indicates that whites have not insisted blacks to wear ugliness; rather somehow they are made to wear and accept it without question and resistance. Claudia blames the black community which adapts the white standard of beauty that makes Pecola its scapegoat. All these incidents are nothing but the outcome of the forces of gaze and panopticon.

The blindness to the reality and the lack of self-confidence make all the Pecolas of the world as victims of racism. On the other hand, whites are sometimes blind to the sensitivity of the blacks in spite of the latter being as human beings. For example, during Pauline's delivery of Pecola at the hospital "when he got to me he said now these here women... deliver right away and with no pain, Just like horses" (Morrison, 97). The stereotypical representation of blacks presents how they are seen by whites in terms of body. Even she is compared to an animal which being a woman is considered as devoid of human feelings. In the present world, Pecola's fantasy of changing the world through 'gaze' in turn changes her world with utmost hatred, isolation, negation, humiliation and disillusionment. Though the world remains the same with its racial prejudices, Pecola ultimately falls apart. She needs the approval of other's gaze for her being or existence in the community. But she is not seen by herself until she hallucinates an alter ego.

In America, racism begins with the arrival of African slaves and their exploitation as laborers on the plantation farms. In this condition, they cease to be existed as a human being in the white world and are regarded as profit making body. Racism in the general sense refers to the prejudice, discrimination or antagonism directed against someone of a different race based on the belief that one's own race is superior. It is also defined as the belief that all members of each race possess characteristics, abilities, or qualities specific to that race especially so as to distinguish it as inferior or superior to another race or races. This state of inferiority or superiority brings discrimination on the basis of race. Under the garb of racism, the whites are perceived as more intelligent and virtuous than the blacks. On the other side, blackness is considered with sin and cultural inferiority. This problem of race has been regarded as one of the greatest challenges in making America as a nation. In literature, these biases and prejudices regarding race and class have evolved as the major themes of writing. For example, in the Pulitzer Prize winning novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Harper Lee signifies how an innocent black man is accused of rape only because of his race. His voice could not be heard as he has no right to say anything. Morrison

also considers racism the big obstacle in Afro American history. But she not only explores the evil of inter racism rather she is also concerned about how the racial discrimination takes place within the community.

In *The Bluest Eye*, the racial self loathing has been viewed as the major force in bringing pain and suffering in the life of a little girl—Pecola Breedlove. At every stage, she is frequently reminded of what an ugly girl she is. This inflicts self hatredness in her psychology. By narrating it, the novelist states the condition of the real life girl who is preoccupied with the idea of gaining the blue eyes. As in the Afterword, Morrison says:

Implicit in her desire was racial self- loathing. And twenty years later I was still wondering about how one learns that who told her? Who made her think that it was better to be a freak than what she was – who had looked at her and found her so wanting, so small a weight on the beauty scale. (167)

It is the community's social and cultural structure that internalizes hatredness in the minds of the characters. While reading the novel, one finds community's ingrained values so overwhelming that the individual potential gets wasted. Sometimes, individual becomes so hapless that he/she finds no way but yields what the community forces. For instance, Pecola is insulted not only by teachers and classmates but by everyone whenever she goes. The behavior of these people makes her realize that she is blacker than anyone. This brings the destruction of self image which leads her into insanity. At this juncture, she fails to sustain her sanctity as a girl against the norms of black community. In order to get a look of others, she all the time feels that if her eyes were blue, she would be pretty, virtuous, and loved; friends would play with her at recess, teachers would smile at Pecola the same way they smile at Maureen Peal, and even her parents might stop fighting because she would not want to bad things in front of those pretty eyes. It reflects Pecola's belief that all would happen in a right way if she has the dark blue eyes. Here, in spite of encouraging Pecola to live a peaceful and comfortable life, the white as well as black community contributes in making her a ruined and worthless girl. Even the parents don't support her girl to come out of the deep sea of racism.

In the novel, it appears that community is more powerful than the individual. It has the holding position in creating the laws of society. Under the supervision of these laws, individual is not free to choose anything whatever he likes. Rather the norms and cultural values of the community determine his way of thinking and behaving. This makes the person fit himself into the framework made by community. If he fails in doing so, he has to suffer in the whole life.

This all the more powerful holding of the community is most visible in case of Pecola Breedlove. By examining herself by the norms of the mainstream society, she does not find any virtue in herself. What the others say she considers it true and never protest against it. She neither rejects nor makes any choice in such type of society. In this situation, she absorbs what is thrown upon her. For instance, when her classmates tease her by saying 'Black e mos, Black e mos' (50), she dares not to stop them. She silently bears all the ill- shot behavior against her. She looks as if she is devoid of any kind of feeling. In McTeer's family, she also faces the same experience. When she is about to give birth to an illegitimate child, she patiently does what Frieda says. Even she does not have enough maturity to understand this incident of childbearing. From the beginning till the end, she faces problems all the time.

Undoubtedly, individual pursuit is annihilated by the norms of the community. Sometimes it becomes very difficult to proceed with these norms. They become determinant by capturing one's soul and body. It is these norms that make Breedlove family discard their own love and their own children. In case of Cholly, it is the black hating culture that has made him the confused, angry, self hating rapist. Surrounded by the racial prejudices, Pauline prefers white girl to Pecola. The self rejection can be seen in her life when she not only internalizes a view of herself as ugly and worthless, but also rejects her own daughter. In order to console herself, she frequently goes to watch movies. Here, she tries to imitate the actress and finds some sort of consolation regarding her own color. While working at the house of the white people, she poses herself as an ideal servant in order to get love from the white. Throughout the story, the most apparent contradiction between community vs. individual comes on the surface when Claudia resists against the beauty of white standards.

In case of Pecola, the conflict between the self and the community appears when Pecola convinces herself in her madness that she could at last succeed in getting the dark, pretty eyes. Her madness brings her sufferings end. But the characters representing the community have no interest whether she consoles herself or not. The community considers her as black as she used to be. The same conflict is noticed in case of Sethe, the protagonist of *Beloved* when she tries to raise herself from the trauma of slavery, the so- called white master forces her to throw herself again into the darkness of slavery. This compels her to murder her daughter in order to escape from slavery. Rather than offering a site for survival in a hostile and threatening world, the community represents the very antithesis of survival. It rejects Pecola and indeed drives her to

psychic disintegration. Claudia's final meditation on Pecola's fate poses the reality where she views the shattering of Pecola as part of an entire economy of sterility and death; it embraces the community and the land itself:

It was the fault of the earth, the land, of our town. I even think now that the land of the entire country was hostile to marigolds that year.... Certain seeds it will not nurture, certain fruit it will not bear, and when the land kills of its own volition, we acquiesce and say the victim had no right to live. (164)

In the novel, white skin or light colored skin is identified with beauty and purity. What is white in color is all beautiful. The adoration of Shirley Temple, the white baby doll given to Claudia, light-skinned Maureen, Pauline's preference for the little white girl, demonstrate the prevailing dominance of whiteness. It is the make belief among blacks as well as in whites that "All civilizations derive from the white race, that none can exist without its help and that a society is great and brilliant only so far as it preserves the blood of the noble group that created it" (133). Consequently believing in this notion, the white culture dominates over the blacks. Shirley Temple, Dick and Jane, the blonde Christmas Dolls—these are the embodiments of the white logos which society holds up for Pecola to judge herself against. These figures of the white mythology to which she compares herself, are the catalysts that brings Pecola's psychic disintegration, leaving her alienated from any sense of an authentic black self. Blackness is judged by the standards of the white logos. In the novel, the movies are the primary vehicle for transmitting these images of white logos. Blacks are considered nothing in their own personality. They are compared to the white figures as Mr. Henry compliments Frieda and Claudia by comparing them to Greto Garbo and Ginger Rogers immediately after meeting them.

One's visibility depends upon one's beauty. Pecola's self, her presence as a subject, remains unrecognized by those who have absorbed white standards of visual attractiveness. This allows a denial of one's body. In this context, it is not the individual alone who internalizes the white-defined norms of beauty. Rather the whole black community tries to inculcate the white criteria of beauty. Here, the black characters internalize dominant values related to race, class, and gender and construct themselves always with disastrous results. The whole McTeer family in the novel assumes a sense of inferiority and ugliness or as happens in case of Pecola, experiences the ultimate negation and totally disappears. Destructive and ultimate fatal impact of the white values or ideals upon the personality of the black girl is suggested by Pecola's denial of her own identity.

In case of racism, Pecola is the most vulnerable character in the novel. Her innocent mind resembles that of Tom Robinson, the character in *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960). Like Morrison's novel, this work also presents Negro as inferior race and is often less reliable and trustworthy. This statement as Harper Lee thinks contains no truth and reality. To reveal the true situation, he presents Atticus as an anti-racist. Atticus not believing in any kind of racial discrimination decides to rescue the young innocent black Tom Robinson in the court from the accusation of raping a white woman. But in opposition to Atticus, the white jury refuses to declare Tom as innocent which infiltrates racial discrimination in the novel. Here, it is obvious that it is not one's innocence or guilt that decides one's fate; rather race becomes the single defining factor in the jury's decision. This becomes crystal clear by the statement of Atticus who tells to his daughter Scout:

There's something in our world that makes men lose their heads—they couldn't be fair if they tried. In our courts, when it's a whiteman's word against a black man's word, the white always wins. They're ugly; but these are the facts of life.' (Lee, 56)

This ugliness in Morrison's opinion, is not inherent in black people; rather the external imposition as Fanon opines, makes them feel ugly and having no beauty at any cost. For example, the ugliness the Breedlove family wears is not real, it comes from conviction. As Morrison's perspective clarifies this argument,

It was as though some mysterious all knowing master had given each one a clock of ugliness to wear and they had each accepted it without question. The master had said, "You are ugly people." They had look about themselves and saw nothing to contradict the statement; saw, in fact, support for it leaning at them from every billboard, every movie, every glance. "Yes," they had said. "You are right." And they took the ugliness in their hands, threw it as a mantle over them, and went about the world with it. Dealing with it each according to his way. (28)

This shows how the characters perish in a community that is plagued by self hatredness. Pauline fascinated by the white cultural norms, learns to despise her own race and to identify with white images by viewing them. Sitting alone in the dark with her hair done in Jean Harlow's style, Pauline cultivates her love for the white world. Her fascination is not different from Pecola's obsession with blue eyes.

In America, many Afro-American writers explain how beauty is defined, expressed and often used as a form of oppression. The characters often convey contempt for a beauty standard suggesting that white or light skin and long, straight hair connote beauty. This obsession with

physical beauty is an indication of how black writers are deeply affected by the discrimination against the black skins and body. For example, Gwendolyn Brooks' *Maud Martha* (1953) is about a black woman who is deeply affected by other's perception of her skin color and cultural identity. When Maud Martha Brown watches her husband pull a white girl to the dance floor, she realizes that he does not approve of her skin color. Even this notion of white standard has been echoed by the main character in "Reena" (1983) by Paule Marshall. Though the protagonist Reena no longer wishes to be white or have blond hair, she knows the reality:

We live surrounded by white images, and white in this world is synonymous with the good, light, beauty, success, so that despite ourselves sometimes, we run after the whiteness and deny our darkness which has been made into the symbol of all that is evil and interior. (Marshall, 92)

The black girl, the black family and the black worldview face destruction and disintegration due to their acceptance and assimilation of the white culture. This culture is indirectly imposed upon the blacks by various institutions e.g. cinema, educational system, religion. The supreme values such as whiteness, beauty and wealth symbolized by the Shirley Temple, the Mary Janes, all the cultural stereotypes created by the white middle class become subconsciously internalized by the black community. This leads inevitably to the loss of self-esteem, to self hatred and the denial of one's identity. In this sense, Pecola's individual quest for a blue-eyed self is an example of analogous quests undertaken by other blacks.

Furthermore, the physical beauty is the damaging force in one's life. The novelist reveals this concept of beauty by claiming it as 'one of the most destructive ideas in the history of human thought' (95). By describing it, the purpose is to explore how western standards of beauty are created and propagated within and among the black community. It also shows how the perpetuation of beauty myths affects individual particularly female adolescents. Through the characters of Pecola and Pauline, one comes to understand the devastating effects of the white standards of beauty. But this concept of beauty is socially constructed. These characters suffer because they accept others' truth as their own which causes distortion of self images. Pecola is most affected by the conviction of beauty with whiteness, believing in the wrong notion that physical beauty is associated with love and is necessary for affection and respect. Her hopeless desire to be identified as a white girl eventually drives Pecola to insanity. This consideration of physical beauty as a destructive force reminds one of William Butler Yeats who regards the same thing. In 'A Prayer for my Daughter', he considers physical beauty a cause for great misery and

suffering. It is noticeable in the case of Helen and Venus. It dries up natural kindness from the heart. By stating it, he says:

Being made beautiful overmuch,
Consider beauty a sufficient end,
Lose natural kindness and may be
The heart—revealing intimacy. (20—23)

William Shakespeare also thinks the external beauty as short lived or transient and emphasizes to inculcate the inner beauty acquiring immortal significance. Nonetheless, the manifestation of physical beauty in Pecola's mind has been created so powerfully that she regards physical beauty as a sufficient end. But in this context, one can't completely blame Pecola for possessing such idea of beauty in the true sense of the word. Pecola lives in a brutal world of rejection deprived of even parental affection. At this juncture, she is not able to understand self-love. Her final step into madness described by the narrator indicates the extent of Morrison's tragedy, "A little black girl yearns for the blue eyes of a little white girl, and the horror at the heart of her yearning is exceeded only by the evil of fulfillment" (162). In desperation, Pecola creates a friend out of her imagination who will love her and assure her that she has the bluest eyes in the world, bluer than the sky.

Resisting the stereotypes prevalent in a society is no easy matter. In his recent book *Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking* (2005), Malcolm Gladwell shows how easy it is for people to internalize negative qualities about themselves. Such happens in case of Pecola. But in contrary to Pecola, Claudia a nine-year old girl has been equipped with the shield of self-love to combat negative influences from black and white society. She has developed an environment that encourages her feel pride for herself. Her rejection for the white baby dolls and Shirley Temple beauty symbolizes her sense of self-pride. She does not delve on the physical beauty. When Maureen Peal calls Claudia as ugly and black, she doesn't underestimate herself. Unlike Pecola, she thinks:

What was the secret? What did we lack? What was it important? And so what? Guileless and without vanity, we were still in love with ourselves then. We felt comfortable in our skins, enjoyed the news that our senses released to us, admired our dirt, cultivated our scars, and could not comprehend this unworthiness. (57)

In this way, Claudia does not demoralize herself by considering ugly and black. She projects herself as the resistance of racism and serves as a foil to Pecola and the other young girls who idolize Shirley Temple. In her childhood, she comes to the realization that she will not be

valued because she is black and female. In spite of it, she does not like the beauty of the whites. Claudia makes it clear when she declares to Pecola and Frieda that she has ‘unsullied hatred’ (13) for Shirley Temple.

The rejection of white baby doll symbolizes that Claudia resists the pressure to conform to a white vision of beauty. Her learning to Shirley Temple clarifies that beauty is something which is not natural or inherent. At this point of time, Claudia’s consciousness can also be read as decolonizing her mind from colonial oppression as she frees herself from white standards imposed on black people. Here, through the character of Claudia, Morrison recalls the post colonial thinker Ngugi Wa Thiong O’ who presents the same spirit of resistance against colonialism. He rejects English language as it may erode the significance of the native language. By telling the dominance of the West, he in ‘Decolonizing the Mind’ says:

Its most important area of domination was the mental universe of the Colonized, the control through culture, of how people perceived themselves and their relationship to the world. Economic and political control can never be complete or effective without mental control. To control a people’s culture is to control their tools of self-definition in relationship to others. (407)

This colonialism involves two things as Ngugi thinks ‘destruction or the deliberate undervaluing of a people’s culture, their art, dances, religions, history, geography, education, orature and literature, and the conscious elevation of the language of the colonizer’ (407). In *The Bluest Eye*, the characters such as Pecola and her mother Pauline let themselves to be dominated by the so called supremacy of white culture. The underestimation of black culture by the white may lead to the psychic disintegration in the black community. This also brings tremendous change in its people. They are in the position that they cannot appreciate their sense of beauty and cultural values. To them, the values imposing by others become all the more important as it seems they have no other way but to accept their cultural stereotypes. This fosters the supremacy of the dominant culture over them. The dominance of white standards of beauty regards blacks as having no morality, integrity and goodness which is not in any way appropriate.

Here, the characters have only two choices: internalize the white value system and hate themselves, or retain their own self worth while acknowledging their hatredness and violence toward the white culture. But the white culture is so pervasive and all powerful that only the strongest of people can survive with self esteem in this harsh social environment. Secondly, the lack of self love creates problems in characters’ lives. They find no goodness in themselves and hence find the disastrous end. In the novel, it is demonstrated clearly by portraying the character

of a black girl, Pecola Breedlove. Her search for self-identity in a community which is plagued by the virus of racism, leads to find no significance in her life. She is not only tortured by the outside gaze but also by her own parents. In the novel from beginning to the end, she suffers because of her physical appearance. One of the reasons of her suffering is the lack of self love. Always seeing herself through the eyes of others, she never finds anything good in herself to love. As the story unfolds, Claudia comes to hold that it is Pecola's conviction that she is ugly and consequently her deep internalization of white standards of beauty and value that ultimately leads her to the path of frustration. Her rape by her father not only brings the physical torture rather it strikes her to be ruined psychologically.

The all-pervasive white standards of beauty as Pecola desires, leads to the damaging path. While observing the circumstances, Pecola is so much fed up with her condition that she prays God to make her disappear. She wants to remain invisible like the invisible man created by Ralph Ellison. The invisible man after experiencing the trauma infuriated by race, comes to know that being black in a white society makes him invisible because he is considered as stereotype not as real person. Similarly, being black and poor, Pecola's presence is really her absence. She is observed as a thing not as human being. For instance, Mrs. McTeer once refers to her as something, not someone. Another time when she goes to Mr. Yacobowski's store to purchase Mary Jane candies, he does not look at Pecola. "His eyes hesitate, and hover because he does not want to 'waste the effort of a glance' on a poor, little black girl" (36). He does not see her because for him there is nothing to see. By accepting the norms imposing by others, Pecola humiliates and degrades herself. Because of the lack of self, her failed quest culminates into madness. Once Pecola's other self materializes, her suffering ends. She finally has a friend—herself. Her condition is clearly observed when the novelist in the Afterword states, "She is not seen by herself until she hallucinates a self" (171). But in actual, the self could not be discovered into the reality because the whites as well as blacks damn Pecola.

Furthermore, child molestation is also one of the recurring themes which bring the ultimate act of brutalization and betrayal. This appears not only in case of Pecola, rather Freida and Claudia face this kind of humiliation simultaneously. In the very beginning of the novel, McTeer's behavior towards Pecola and her daughters reflects how the children have been treated by their parents as well as other people. Besides, these children feel a sense of self humiliation at the every juncture of life. At the coming stage of adolescent, they are sexually harassed by the

people of their own community. As Pecola is being raped by her own father, Frieda is physically touched by a black man Mr. Henry. These incidents reveal the exploitation of the children by their own people.

In the 20th century, writers are concerned about the marginal position of black female through their works. Toni Morrison is one such writer who is primarily interested in showing the gender disparity prevailing among the blacks. Her work not only places the black experience to the front, it places women at its heart. In this regard Morrison herself explains, “When I began, there was just one thing that I wanted to write about which was the true devastation of racism on the most vulnerable, the most helpless unit in the society—a black female and a child” (qtd. in Derifus, 5). But she does not consider herself as a feminist writer. In an interview, she reveals that she does not believe in patriarchy and matriarchy; rather she advocates the equitable access and opening doors to both male and female. In America, black women have been victimized by racism, sexism and classism not only from the white world but also from their own people. Sexism prominent theme of the 20th century literature referring to gender basis exists against women in patriarchal modes which consider them as subordinate to men. This brings gender differences which are not natural but manmade. Even, women have been tortured while working on the plantation farms as laborers and in the kitchens of the white households. Being black, female and poor, these women have to suffer in their whole life. They were more oppressed physically and mentally and their cause of grievances seems greater than the white women. The dominance of the white as well as black male forces them to the periphery of marginality.

In the literary works, Morrison has tried to study the development of black women’s image from its stage of invisibility to its present stage of self assertion and self definition. She is very much concerned about the gender disparity prevailing among the black women. This gender disparity becomes one of the major issues depicting women subservient to men. For instance, in *Song of Soloman*, Morrison describes as what happens to women whose values are determined by the men who control their lives. At this juncture, the female characters regard such type of values as useless and damaging. Here, male characters have been depicted more powerful to have control over the women. Meacon Dead representing the dominance of male society cares for his son only because Milkman is the successor to inherit the wealth of the Deads, but he ignores his daughters and wife. His wife Ruth looks as her son Milkman describes “like the unhappiest woman in the world. The most miserable... I’ve never in my whole life heard my

mother laugh; she smiles sometimes, even makes a little sound. But I don't she has ever laughed out loud" (47). Ruth has been suppressed all her life by her husband who cares only about his wealth and uses his family just to show off. Dead's women are dependent on Meacon's decisions and cannot decide about their lives themselves. Similarly *The Bluest Eye* exhibits three things—race, class and gender affecting the black women deeply. Pecola Breedlove's suffering occurs because of her blackness and her womanhood. As a female child, she is triply oppressed and devalued in American culture. Under such circumstances, Pecola's desires for having blue eyes seems natural as for her, it is the one and only lens that can make not only herself but also her world beautiful. Though Pecola's yearning may reveal her self-negation but the black community as a whole is also suffering from cultural schizophrenia in *Tar Baby* that they also adhere to white values unwittingly. Morrison makes it clear that all black women have to face problems even if they have everything. This is obvious when Jadine does not enjoy her position without restrains in spite of having all that other black women dream about. She has beauty, education, independence, wealth and her upper class status but men treat Jadine as an ordinary African American woman. So even if black women manage to accomplish their dream, it does not help them to step out of the sexist paradigm—they are still treated as subordinate by black as well as white men.

It is evident that all the black women in *The Bluest Eye* experience dependency, repression, internal racism and alienation. They have the fear of being put 'outdoors' as Cholly Breedlove has put his family by burning the house. At one place, the condition of female blacks emerges quite clear when the narrator Claudia explains the reality of her mother and other women's position in the community, "Being a minority in both caste and class, we moved about anyway on the hem of life" (11). Pauline feels alienated after getting married to Cholly. At one place, she regrets, "I didn't have a cat to talk to" (91). She like Ruth, has also been subjected the domestic violence by her husband frequently. But when the limit crosses, she presents a sense of self realization by affirming, "If working like a mule don't give me the right to be warm, who am I doing it" (30). To avoid the reality of being ugliness, Pauline takes solace in the movies, watching the pretty actresses and emulating their hairstyles. Later on, she begins to spend most of her days taking care of a white family, so she can at least keep the illusion of being beautiful. Nonetheless the prostitutes depend on the male characters for the survival. The condition of Pecola is the same one. In the novel, the woman in the form of Pecola is presented so innocent

that she does not know what is happening with her. Her question to Frieda, “Is it true that I can have a baby now?” (23) reflects her ignorance of the ill treatment posited by her own father. It is obvious that the novelist projects female as ignorant and being an ignorant she faces difficulties throughout the whole life. The concern towards the sanctity of womanhood has been surfaced through the character of Frieda who after sexually harassed by Mr. Henry as she cries, “I don’t want to be ruined.” (61)

In understanding the female projection in *The Bluest Eye*, it is appropriate to mention three stages of female literary subcultures described by Elaine Showalter. In “The Female Tradition,” Showalter distinguishes these stages in an eloquent way. According to her, first phase involves imitation of the prevailing modes of the dominant tradition and internalization of its standards of art and its view on social rules. Secondly, the literary subculture marks the protest against the standards and values and the advocacy of minority rights. In the third phase, Showalter describes a period of self discovery, a search for identity. Intense reading of Morrison’s novels reveals that they present characters striving with Showaltian phases of female literary subcultures. Forcing by the community, Pecola tries to internalize the standards of white beauty. It’s not only she but the whole Breedlove family is traumatized by the notion of beauty. This makes the Breedlove spouse to reject even their own children as it happens more in case of their female child, Pecola. In studying Pecola from a psychological perspective, it elucidates that she and much of her community are trapped in Showalter’s first phase of growth for a subculture. This happens not only in case of Pecola but in other novels, Morrison portrays the characters who seem to inculcate the phases of female literary tradition. Like the characters of *The Bluest Eye*, Jadine in *Tar Baby* also imbibes the norms of the mainstream society. She is so desperate towards it that she wants to fit into the white society as smoothly as possible. She chooses to succeed in that society by adopting its culture and their way of lives. But in opposition to these, the characters like Son (*Tar Baby*), Claudia the narrator of *The Bluest Eye* disregard the prevailing norms of the white standards. Their sense of pride leads them to move from the stage of protest to the self discovery. Taking instance from *Tar Baby*, it is apparent that unlike Jadine, Son feels at ease in his own culture. He is proud of being African American and does not want black people to assimilate completely into the mainstream society. He has a strong wish to preserve the black culture as a distinct culture among other cultures in the world. Similarly Claudia is one such character who is able to move beyond Showalter’s stage of

advocacy to the self discovery. She protests against the mores of the dominant society. She has progressed beyond the second stage to the quest for searching identity. When she destroys her white doll with its glassy blue eyes, she demonstrates pride in her identity and ability to understand the repressive values pervading her black community.

Furthermore, class distinction within the community emerges one of the major concepts in Afro- American writing especially in the works of Toni Morrison. In her novels, she presents different strata of black community that expose prejudices within the community which clearly display the social status regarding black people. For instance, in *The Bluest Eye*, the class division is classified from the upper middle class of Geraldine to the McTeer family and ultimately highlights the condition of the poorest family of Breedloves. These three class divisions reflect the social status and attitude of the characters towards another community. The best example of displaying a high social status is presented when Pecola is captured by Junior. Junior belonging to upper middle black family is brought up by his parents in such a way that he feels himself superior to other children. He does not understand the hardships of black people of lower class because his mother has framed his mindset in a way that differentiates colored man from the niggers. By telling the distinction, his mother says, "Colored people were neat and quiet; niggers were dirty and loud" (67). Believing in this notion, Junior bothers Pecola by pushing her into his house forcibly. Here, Pecola is tortured by both the mother and her son because they consider her as inferior and ugly. The upper class people want to assimilate into the white society and do not allow family members to associate with the poorest class. Another example of a black character regarding him superior from others is Soaphead Church. His sense of superiority is based on the white stream of blood which is not evident on the skin but rather only in his mind.

Besides, McTeer family represents the middle class distinction by exposing their own norms and prejudices. They are no doubt, poor yet they live in such conditions that they can even afford to help poorer characters such as Pecola, for a short time by providing them a place to stay until their problems are solved. In McTeer family, the parents' love of their children although hidden and the close relationship between the two sisters makes the McTeers' daughters' lives easier than it is for many other black children. It is the family's surroundings that make Claudia not to fill with self-loathing. When Maureen Peal insults Pecola and the two sisters, "I am cute,

and you ugly! Black and ugly black e mos; I am cute!” (56) Pecola feels embarrassed by this statement. But Claudia affirming her self-love entirely rejects this notion:

Doll we could destroy, but we could not destroy the honey voices of parents and aunts, the obedience in the eyes of our peers, the slippery light in the eyes of our teachers when they encountered the Maureen Peals of the world. What was the secret? What did we lack? Why was it important? And so what? Guileless and without vanity, we were still in love with ourselves then. We felt comfortable in our skins, enjoyed the news that our senses released to us, admired our dirt, cultivated our scars, and could not comprehend this unworthiness.

Here, Claudia’s character seems to be influenced by ‘Black is Beautiful’ movement which sees beauty in black aesthetics. It indirectly escapes one from the hovering outside gaze.

The most vulnerable class of black community is the poorest class of Breedloves. In real sense, the Breedlove family not only struggles for the survival, but also considers it very ugly. This makes it the most oppressed and traumatized family in the whole novel. Here, the children never experience parental care and affection of their own family, are overlooked at school and other places. The girl Pecola attributes all the misfortunes and traumas to her appearance. Occupying the lowest position in the social order, Cholly’s despicable behavior leads the family ‘no place to go.’ Unlike the struggling but loving McTeers whose integrity as a family is intact despite economic hardships, the Breedloves are broken and show all the symptomatic signs of disintegration. The literal ‘outdooriness’ of their life symbolizes their forlorn status as social pariahs. By depicting this, Morrison describes how the family as a basic social unit suffers most from the psychic erosion caused by a prolonged period of hardships and humiliation. Undoubtedly, the class division becomes the most problematic issue in case of Pecola and Breedlove family. They are disregarded by their own community only on the basis of discrimination resulting from the stream of race, class, and gender. By considering the situation of the poorest class in its own community, Morrison says, “Grass wouldn’t grow where they lived. Flowers died. Shades fell down. Tin cans and tires blossomed where they lived. They lived on cold black-eyed peas and orange pop. Like flies they hovered; like flies they settled. And this one had settled in her house” (72). This superiority of one class over the other not only hovers in *The Bluest Eye* rather it constitutes the theme in the novels like *Tar Baby* and *Song of Solomon*. Jadine the protagonist of *Tar Baby* represents upper class after being adopted by white millionaire couple while the poorest class is represented by Son. This way Morrison surfaces the

class distinction by making one responsible for the discrimination within the same community which inflicts indirectly the racial- hatredness.

By delineating the story of Pecola Breedlove, Morrison concentrates on the issue of racism by showing how deep it is ingrained in the minds of the black people that it sometimes forces them into insanity. The situation becomes unbearable when parents as well as one's own community appear hostile. This evil of racism not only affects the psyche but also brings the inferiority on the basis of color. Underneath all these issues, the outside gaze is all the time pervasive and it is this gaze which destroys characters' life silently. It dominates so much over their souls that they do not have any intention to fight back against whites but accept as a destiny to bear.

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