

**WOMEN'S RESPONSE TO THE SOCIETY IN TONI
MORRISON'S NOVELS, NAMELY SULA, THE BLUEST
EYE AND BELOVED**

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Women's Response to the society in Toni Morrison's Novels,
namely Sula, The Bluest Eye and Beloved.

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ABSTRACT

The Principle Aim of this paper is to throw light on the situation of black women in Toni Morrison's writings. This dissertation focuses on three novels by Morrison, namely, The Bluest Eye, Sula and Beloved to identify problems that black women face in a society because they are black women. So, the first chapter of this thesis attempts to give a study of feminist literary theory. The second chapter a short historical background of black feminism and aesthetics in America, and the place of Toni Morrison in this tradition. The third chapter probes into a critical analysis of the three novels that have been chosen. The fourth chapter draws conclusion by assessing the various responses of these women whom society has placed in difficult and complex situation.

Introduction

Toni Morrison is a very familiar name in Afro- American literature. She is a Nobel Laureate, spokesperson for social reforms, and the most prominent issues in her writing involve the problems of black women in various social situations. The purpose of this paper is to trace women's response to the society in Toni Morrison's novels, namely The Bluest Eyes (1970), Sula (1974) and Beloved (1987), and this will be accomplished through three chapters. The first chapter will be on the assessment and the theory of feminism. Where we will get a general idea of what feminism is all about, how it started, and whether the feminist theory includes black women, or if it only includes the problems of white women only. This chapter will also talk about black women's literature and about Toni Morrison and her "Perceptions of dominant ideology in her fictions".

(Uma-11)

In the second chapter, there will be a thorough analysis of these three novels The Bluest Eyes, Sula and Beloved, where the central female characters, Sula, Pecola and Sethe will be examined as to see how they respond to different difficult situations, society has imposed on them. Here other female characters will also come in comparison to these prominent characters, for example Nel in Sula, to be compared and contrasted with the protagonist. Baby Suggs in Beloved, is to be compared with Sethe. This chapter will deal with a lot of comparative analysis to understand the action and involvement of the chief women characters in their respective society.

The last and the third chapter will be on the assessment of the findings in the previous two chapters, its analysis and the conclusion.

Chapter- 1

Analysis of Feminist Theory from the Perspective of Black Women

To understand the term 'feminism', K K Ruthven in his essay "Feminist Literary Studies" from the book Feminist Literary Theory has said that, The term "feminism" was first used by the French dramatist Alexander Dumas, the younger, in 1872 in a pamphlet 'L' Homme-femme to designate the emerging movement for women's right. Then it generally grew into a world-wide cultural movement to secure the complete equality of women with men in the enjoyment of all human rights, religious, social, political, educational, legal, economical and so on.

Human experience in the society has always been considered and seen as masculine one. It was always men's society, which was a hard experience for women. The cumulative image of men in society was titled, and so much biased, that female voice was lost and never got as equal force as men have. The history of mankind shows it to be a history of the male species. Voice of woman is barely audible. To explain this situation K K Ruthven has said

From Christine de'Pisan to Marry Wollstonecraft, from Simon de'Beauvoir to Jane Austen and beyond, women have been demanding and fighting for their rights in an andocentric world. Feminism is a protest movement launched by women of West for equal social, political, legal, moral, cultural rights with men. Feminism is sentiment that differentiates a female from the doormat. It is an anti masculine movement of the women, by the women and for the women.

(Eagleton-147)

However, he has also said that the roots of feminism may be traced to the late eighteenth century, the period of French Revolution, but before this there were feminist writings done by Mary Astell, the first English feminist, almost centuries earlier. French Revolution was an era of questioning, of demands for a revolutionary restructure of society, of awareness of social injustice. Through this movement, it fought spiritual, racial, economic and social equality to sexually colonized, historically neglected and biologically weak women in focus. The rise of feminism in Europe in the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries is related to the economic prosperity of the new bourgeois resulting in the use of servants to perform domestic work. In nineteenth century, Feminism remained a protest movement against the suppression of women's rights.

Now the question may arise what exactly do we mean by the term 'Feminism', does it mean female-ism, or femaleness, the traits, which all women possess? Or, does it point to a sense of personal courage, or is it a kind of social revolt against convention, like living outside marriage. For example, Juliet Mitchell has referred in her essay "Femininity, Narrative and Psychoanalysis" from the book Feminist Literary Theory, to nineteenth century where Elizabeth Barrett Browning and George Eliot (Mary Ann) lived outside marriage. Would it be right to call them feminist, since they opted out from the institution of marriage?

The early editions of The Oxford English Dictionary defined feminism as a state of being feminine or womanly. But in today's world Feminism is a global and

revolutionary ideology. It calls for a set of attitude, a definite stance. To define 'feminism' and the ideology behind it Mitchell has said-

Feminism is political because it is concerned with the most crucial and vital question like power. It is against status quo and hence revolutionary in spirit. It is usually viewed as a threat by forces, which have an interest in the status quo. These forces are not only sexist, but also go beyond the boundaries of gender and may include economic, political, religious, racist power- playing.

Feminist consciousness is the consciousness of victimization. It talks about the oppression of women and discoveries and changes that can be done. Present day Feminist theorists believe that, strictly speaking feminism is an impossible position. The agnostic definition of feminism sees it as the struggle against all forms of patriarchal and sexist oppressions. (Eagleton-148)

The observation above makes it clear that, Feminism is a term, which has been used for women, and it talks about their social, political, religious and most importantly human rights. But we are shocked when Dr. Jennifer Maher in her essay "The History of Black Feminism and Womanism: Their Emergence from the Modern Women's Movement" from a site in the internet, has pointed out that

With in the Modern Feminist movement, white women have been accused of focusing on oppression in terms of gender white ignoring issues of race, class and sexuality. Alongside defining all women's experience in terms

of their own, this homogenizing excludes issues concerning of oppressors of race, class and gender. In resistance to this, theories of Black Feminism and Womanism were forgotten. These two theoretical concepts were developed to call attention to the multiple oppressions experienced by women of color, reflecting and defining their everyday experiences in their own terms. There are prominent distinction between the black feminist and womanist movement from the modern feminist movement, and this has created separation of ideologies from one another. (google net)

As it is seen and believed that white people have established a social hierarchy based on race and sex, that ranked white men on top, white women second, though sometimes equal to black men who ranked third, and black women last. The specific oppressions African American women have experienced have historically tried to disvalue their characters. This history refers to the history of slavery, where women had no right to have family or even to have a husband; they only belonged to their White masters. This is why Dr. Jennifer Maher has pointed in her article-

Black women have been defined and categorized in dehumanizing terms, terms employed to attack the essence of black women's sense of personal integrity and self worth. Various writers argue that historically black women have been stereotyped as sex objects and breeders and that black women's personal growth has been impeded by the continuing myths of the black matriarchy, a myth accusing black women of emasculating black men. These stereotypes and myths have acted as modes of social control in

their demotion of black women's characters. The modern women's movement has been criticized as inadequately confronting the issues facing black women and women of color.

The women's movement has also been accused of concentrating only on the perspective and concerns of white middle class women, not to mention Mary Wollstonecraft, in her essay a "Vindication of the rights of Women", where she has written specially about middle class women to wake up and to get quality education like men had, not being educated on cooking, managing house and sewing like girls used so have. Various writers have suggested that black women and women of color have been left out of the treatment of the concerns by the modern women's movement. This author argues - "women of color's concerns and struggles have been marginalized, slighted and even ignored with in the agenda of women's movement" (Maher).

It has also been argued that at times black women have avoided the movement in fear of interrogation by their own community members who linked racism with the women's movement. The modern women's movement has been further criticized as being irrelevant and being only concerned with the class interests and betterment of middle-class white women.

The modern women's movement has excluded the issues of crucial importance to the lives of black women and women of color. Therefore, for a certain time black women forgot their own terms and ideologies, the black feminist movement. Black feminism was initialized in order to focus on the specific issues that affect and shape the lives of women of color. And to understand modern feminism and its various aspects, it is absolutely necessary to trace Black Feminism and aesthetics in America.

Chapter -2

Black Feminism and Black Aesthetics in America, and the place of Toni Morrison

In the chapter “Pluralizing Poetics” from Cultural Criticism, Literary Theory, Post structuralism, has said that during the revolutionary period when the Declaration of Independence and Constitution of United States were written, the quarter of the population that was black was not included.

From the outset several centuries ago, the fate of black people in North America involved deportation, slavery, oppression, and struggle. In the pre-civil War era black leaders like Douglass advocated social reform and racial integration while others like Delany recommended Black Nationalism. Washington argued that black citizenship in America should be attained gradually by hard work, vocational education, and moral improvement. These contending political programs, conciliation and integration, reform and redness, nationalism and freedom in Africa-rooted in early American history. What typifies the early years of the civil rights struggle are resistance to segregation, the upsurge of nonviolent protest organizations, the goal of racial integration, and attainment of limited success in the courts and news media. (Leitch, pg-84)

The later years, the days of the black power movement, are characterized by riots and armed resistance than passive nonviolence, where people were concern about legal

rights, and white society had excepted blacks but not in a mood to celebrate or to make them celebrate their racial pride, their own norms and standards.

Again in the essay "Pluralizing Poetics" it has also pointed out that,

African-American folks elements and artistic forms, manifestations of a historically molded black unconscious or 'soul' exhibit, for instance, a collectivistic rather than an individualistic ethos, a repudiate rather than an accommodative psychology, and an oral-musical rather than a textual tradition of discourse. As suggested by its folktales, songs, sermons, blues, and jazz, the black community in America constitutes an internal colony, possessing its own cultural values, styles, voices, customs, themes, techniques and genres. The application of white Euro centric standards often leads to the denigration of African- American modes of being and expression. (Leitch, pg-85)

Just as the whole culture of black America is distinct and different from white America, so the black arts in their authentic forms are, and should continue to be separate. Blacks were felt out as if white society never show them, their culture, music were always separated from the white society and was never appreciated by them.

Writing to American blacks, Baraka declares -" We are a people. We are unconscious captives unless we realize this- that we have always been separate, except in our tranced desire to be the thing that oppressed us"

(Leitch-86)

In the essay "Pluralizing Poetics" from the book Cultural Criticism, Literary Theory, Post structuralism(pg-84-92) has also written that it is not surprising that contemporary black aestheticians find much in the history of canonical African-American literature to criticize. In the past numerous black writers were captivated by the dominant criteria and values of the white world. Speaking of the Harlem Renaissance, for instance, Neal complains, "It did not address itself to the mythology and lifestyle of the Black community. It fails to take roots, to link itself concretely to the struggles of that community, to become its voice and spirit"(Leitch-87). In the same chapter Baraka argues dramatically "the changing of images, of references, is the Black Man's way back to the racial integrity of the captured African, which is where we must take ourselves" (Leitch-87). He also makes racial purity a paramount political and aesthetic touchstone. In this connection, declares Baraka, the black bourgeoisie in America were long ago "created in the image of white people, as they still are, and wanted nothing to do with Black" (Leitch-87). To conclude this part Baraka has said "The poetics of the black aesthetic theorists rests on a revolutionary racial ethic politics, which finds it necessary to take sanctions against certain black individuals and groups in the name of the emergent black people and nation." (Leitch- 87)

Like the history of white people, black history is very much the history of black men. Black history also became the history of Black men's. As black feminists point out, black male critics, radicals and moderates, nationalists and integrationists, regularly 'forgot' black women. In the essay "Pluralizing Poetics"

(pg-84-92), where the formation of numerous black feminist groups in United States, especially the National Black Feminist Organization, observes the rise of African- American women, who in order to make their demands known to the world, must struggle with black men along with white men and women. They are so different that even the, white feminist organizations do not recognize the interests of black women.

Many black women find closer allies with women of color and Third World women than with white women because for them the issue of gender is inextricably enmeshed with the issues of class and race. Within the racial ghettos of contemporary colonial and neocolonial societies, the economic, familial, and political situations of many third world women of color have much in common. White women inhabit another world.

(Leitch-85)

Not surprisingly, when Barbara Smith outlines a project for black feminist literary study, she explicitly links gender, race, and class: "A Black feminist approach to literature that embodies the realization that the politics of sex as well as the politics of race and class are crucially interlocking factors in the works of Black women writers is an absolute necessity"(Leitch- 91).

Among contemporary African- American literary women it is common to regard black women's literature as having its own special poetics and its own traditions. It is perhaps arguable whether the literatures of white women in Western societies also constitute 'minority literatures' given the numerical superiority of

white women in such societies. However the fact that exceedingly few such women writers enter into the canons of great works in a uniformed society as being in a minority status.

Toni Morrison a Nobel Laureate and creative writer, an African American woman who have achieved the impossible by becoming the first African- American to win the Nobel Prize in literature in 1993. Her contributions have become the body of African American literature through both her fiction and critical essays. Her fictions largely focus on the various themes of problems faced by African American women. They give clear understanding of black life, society and culture.

Morrison, a woman of immense talent, comes from a family of industrious and hard working black people, who fought racial oppression and an inferior socio-economic status. Morrison was the second of four children and was named Chloe Anthony Wafford. She grew up in Lorain, Ohio, during the great depression. Morrison excelled in her studies. She received an under- graduate degree in English from Howard University and here she changed her name to Toni. She did her masters from Cornell University. Her first novel was The Bluest Eye, which appeared in 1970, her subsequent novels are Sula (1974), Song of Solomon (1977), which won 'The National Book' critic award, Tar Baby (1981), Beloved (1987), which won the prestigious Pulitzer, Jazz (1991) and Paradise (1998) Toni Morrison's works deal with major contemporary social issues like racism, class exploitations, and sexism. It is best to sum up the worth of Morrison's works in her own words, she writes

If anything I do, in the way of writing novels, (or whatever I write) isn't about the village or the community or about you. Then it is not about anything. I am not interested in indulging myself in some private, closed exercise of my imagination that fulfills only the obligation of my personal dreams- which is to say yes, the work must be political... it seems to me that the best art is political and you ought to make it unquestionably political and irrevocably beautiful at the same time. (Irfan-10)

Through her novels Morrison presents the non-linear African American socio historical reality, where she shows the effect and the after effect of the history of slavery. Her works offer a fresh perspective on black life, their history and genealogy. The major works of her works is slavery and racism, and their psychological and social effects on the blacks over ages. Morrison's novels show the victimization of black people within the context of racial social order. The themes of her novels reflect the sense of identity of a black person trying to recover his/her history and culture, which has so far been suppressed due to white narcissism. Like in her novel The Bluest Eye, Pecola is a victim of the sense of white beauty, and in this novel Toni Morrison showed it very clearly that blacks can not be beautiful, or at least society made them think like that. Then Pecola goes mad being obsessed by the urge of having the bluest eyes and as her father rapes her, not knowing the beauty of father daughter relationship. Sethe kills her daughter, to protect her from the bondage of slavery. All these characters represent the mad,

anarchic and destructive tendencies afflicted by the psychological wounds caused by racial discrimination of the society. So now we turn to examine the proposed three novels of Toni Morrison to understand the problems faced by Afro- American women.

Chapter- 3

Review of The Three Novels

The Bluest Eye

The Bluest Eye (1970) has the ingredients of a black voice and the after effect of their history which is very slow to change, is not interested in individual and has the effect of racist supremacy. It is the story of Pecola Breedlove, a young black girl in Ohio. The Bluest Eye deals with the great range of black famine voice into the artificial mould of stereotype. It allows us to get a deeper look into the black woman's psychic dilemmas, oppressions and trials symbolized by the tragic life of Pecola, who was driven insane by the pressure of having absolute physical beauty, the beauty of a white woman, by having fair skin, blond hair and blue eyes. This was the definition of beauty in the society, which was impossible for Pecola to meet them. The "unsettling emptiness" and the "enemy within" drive Pecola to the need of a man who could make her happy. The emotionally deprived life of Pecola's parents forces her to a state of schizophrenia. Her mother Pauline is troubled by the feelings of motherhood in her life. The daily need of her children seem to her troublesome, as she is totally disappointed in her personal life. Even the life of Pecola's father Cholly is an instance of negligence, frustration and quest for identity. Without parental affection and care, he feels himself alienated from his family. Pecola thus becomes the victim of her parent's bitter dissatisfaction with life, dissatisfaction is greatly connected to the various forms of discrimination with which blacks have to live with in a white American society, she is trapped in a world of taunts

threats and Pecola yearns for love and protection. But neither Pauline nor Cholly can provide her with any emotional or moral support since they themselves are without roots and are emotionally and spiritually depraved. Pecola desires to have blue eyes, she wants in fact to be white, and like her mother Pauline she wants to identify herself with the white women.

Scenes of hatred and ostracism disturb Pecola's childhood. Born into a poor and black family, that lived at the bleak storefront, for they believed they were ugly. Pecola from an early age learns to shut herself behind her ugliness, and for this she wanted to imagine herself as a beautiful girl having the bluest eyes. She sees herself "Long hours she sat looking at the mirror trying to discover the secret of her ugliness" (Morrison: 54). Through this discovery she seeks to escape into a world of fantasy, where she looks different, beautiful and her parents would perhaps say "why, look at the pretty-eyed Pecola, we mustn't do bad things in front of those pretty eyes..." (Morrison: 34). Hence her appeal to God for "pretty eyes, pretty blue eyes". Pecola's desire for blue eyes is the symbol of her search for the American myth of beauty as self-virtue. Pecola's feeling of an outsider in her own home is made apparent by her mother's dislike of her, for "she was ugly" (Morrison: 98),

Pecola's mother Pauline attempts to accommodate herself to the 'Jean Harlow' kind of white values which the community adopts. Her mind creates up an image of a 'smart baby' with 'pretty hair', but repulsed by the reality of an ugly baby girl, she "developed a hatred for things that mystified or obstructed her" (Morrison: 98). Ever since the rainbow of her marriage began to fade, she held her husband Cholly responsible for her failed marriage. Her talent for housekeeping finds fulfillment at the Fisher's

house, where as an 'ideal servant' she gradually neglected her house, her children, and her man. Pecola is emotionally rejected by her mother at a very tender age when she accidentally drops the blackberry pie and her mother screams "crazy fool...my floor, mess..."(Morrison: 85), this same mother is loving towards the child of her white master for the fisher girl she uses words like "hush, baby, hush...don't cry no more..." (Morrison: 85). The most terrible and devastating experience of Pecola is her violation by her own father, Cholly, 'Running away' from home at the death of his grandmother, he learnt to live dangerously free and hence he is unable to fit into the "saneness" of marriages to Pauline. Coming home drunk, he experiences a mixture of emotions "revulsion, guilt, pity then love..." (Morrison: 127). Deprived of a childhood, he cannot comprehend the father-child relationship. His confused mind with the "memories of Pauline and doing of a wild and forbidden thing excited him" (Morrison: 128) to commit this crime.

Pecola's search for blue eyes is symbolic of her need to "get somebody to love" (Morrison: 23). The reason behind thinking like this is that, what Yamini K. murthi has written in her essay "The Bluest Eye: Pecola- A Victim of Dual Oppression" from the book Toni Morrison An Intricate Spectrum

Pecola, an 11-year-old girl is brought up on a set of presumptions influenced by the white standards. She is born to a family which lives in its ugliness, Pecola from her childhood believes that blue eyes would change everything, if she had blue eyes, she would look beautiful, she would be loved, her parents would stop fighting and her brother would not run away, and they would be happy. Every night she fervently prays for

blue eyes, without losing hope. Pecola, as can be seen, is strongly influenced by the white concept of beauty and love. (Uma- 72)

Having seen white children with blue eyes loved and desired she assumes that blue eyes would not only make her beautiful, but also make others love her. She believes if she has blue eyes, she would not have to live with these people who are ugly and unloved. Pecola is not an isolated case. The white absence influences the entire Breedlove family. Unloved by Cholly a few months after her wedding, Pauline starts to go to movies in order to escape the loneliness at home. At the movies, she identifies herself with the characters on the screen, and starts to dream to be like them. Pauline passes on these very traits to Pecola. Both the mother and the daughter think physical beauty would solve all their problems. Both of them are actually product of a social structure they cannot comprehend.

A contrast to the Breedlove family is the MacTeer family. The whiteness does touch this family too, but it helps them to rise above it. It makes them realize their own selves, see the beauty in their blackness and take pride in being black. This is what drives Claudia to hate anything with white standards of beauty, including those blue-eyed dolls, which she always destroys. Like Pecola, Claudia suffers from racist beauty standards and maternal insecurity, but she has a loving and a stable family, which makes all the difference for her. Whereas Pecola is passive when she is abused, Claudia is a fighter. When she finds a group of boys harassing Pecola, she attacks them. Later on in the novel Claudia explains that she is brave because she has not yet learnt her limitations most important, she has not learnt the self-hatred that bothers so many adults in the community. Her presence in the novel reminds us that many black families are not like

Pecola's, they strive together instead of going apart. Thus Claudia is a messenger of suffering but also of hope.

Through Pecola's character, Morrison traces the careful process of growing up from adolescence sensuality into womanly repression. Sensuality in Morrison is related to sexuality, which symbolically portrays the image of the liberated women in her novels.

Sula

In "Sula", Morrison ventures to create a black woman heroine, who consciously embraces the role of the outsider. She is the one who has shattered the image of conventional black woman who conforms to the norms of black community and lives within it, having nothing to do with the white world, its people and their way of life. To describe Sula's character Ayesha observes in her essay "Female Characters of Toni Morrison's novels"

Morrison sketches a very daring and adventurous character in Sula, who breaks all bonds of blood, ties of community and human relationships in her quest for self, but is doomed for life and experience so desensitize and harden her that she loses the capacity to feel. (Irfan- 62)

She is depicted as a failure in her attempts to present herself as a complete human being as she lives according to her own philosophy. But she is a triumphant personality in the end, when the realization of her strong characteristics dawns on Nel and black community, the black community unconsciously accepts her ways and realizes that she had been missing Sula.

The story of oppression and suppression of blacks by the white masters in bottom land in Medallion form the background setting of the novel in which inhabit its characters Eva Peace, Shadrack, Hannah, Helene, Plum, Nel and Sula. The unconventional, daring and experimental nature of Sula is an unusual trait for black woman of the 1930's and 40's. Born into a family known for its tradition of violence and lack of ethics, her family history is responsible for shaping her character. She inherits the quality of violent bravery from her grandmother Eva Peace, who when deserted by her husband Boy Boy does not sit back and mourn, rather rises up determined to survive. She was left alone with her children with no meal to survive. Eva leaves them in the hands for her neighbor, when the suffering from hunger and starvation became unbearable. She comes back with enough money to take care of her children but without a leg. The rumor goes that Eva deliberately placed her leg on the railway track to claim the insurance money. Eva exhibits violent bravery and takes the role of a man, acting against the traditional mode where a woman was supposed to exhibit weakness in mind and soul. From her mother Hannah whose attitude is indifference. Sula inherits an unloving and uncaring attitude. This topped with the pain of maternal neglect when she overhears her mother saying "...I love Sula. I just don't like her" (Morrison: 57), and this teaches her that she has no one to count on. This is a determining factor in her life.

Sula's best friend Nel is a contrast to her character. Nel's experience on train journey with her mother Helene, convinces her of the hard facts of racism and sexual weakness of her mother. The pain of humiliation on the grounds of racism is evident in the scene where a white conductor contemptuously questions Nel and Helene when they accidentally enter the coach meant for the whites. Helene's foolish smile to ingratiate

herself with the white conductor degrades her and disgusts Nel. Nel painfully realizes that “custard was all that (her mother’s dress) hid” (Morrison: 27). This resolution hardens her and she takes the decision never again will she leave her home for fear of being a victim of similar experiences.

Though life has taught both Nel and Sula bitter and painful truths, Nel never really longs for freedom, she dreams for a life of conformity. Sula on the other hand, seeks freedom, sets forth her own objectives and acts according to her own dictates, living out her fantasies. Her values, not surprisingly are contradictory to those of the community in which she lives. Her attempt at self-discovery therefore is by pulling herself from the community and its long cherished values and traditions. She has got the brave and violent blood of her grandmother that inspires her to act such boldly. It establishes Sula’s inheritance of Peace women’s cultivated quality of maleness and the survival tactic. Over hearing her mother saying that she does not love Sula, created a sense of indifference in her. She silently digested this pain and in a way stopped feeling for others. She lost the capacity to feel and her life becomes a continuous attempt to explore the dangerous sides of life without caring about the society and creating her own rules to survive in this cruel loveless world. Sula’s inhumanity can be felt when she sees her mother burning and does not even bother to scream or shout for help; she watches it with detached interest. It seems that life and death has lost its meaning to her. That Sula has failed to inherit the quality of sacrificial love of her grandmother is evident. The deep love for her children leads Eva to harm her own self as a means for survival, to risk her life by throwing herself out of the window to save her burning daughter and also burn her son Plum to death rather than seeing him ruining his life. This love is completely absent

in Sula or is suppressed by the pain of bitter experience. Later when Sula betrays Nel by having an affair with her husband Jude, it is the same resolution to be free from all bonds of attachment and her capacity not to value human emotions and feelings. She only does this to fulfill her sexual curiosity. She does not understand the meaning of human love. She has lost the capacity to feel for anyone, even for her own self. Through her, Morrison has presented the model of a new black woman who is actually a product of contemporary social repression and sufferings.

Beloved

In *Beloved* Morrison's focus is on the unconscious emotional and psychic consequences of slavery. It shows motherhood imprisoned in the curse of slavery. Here, the mother is not being able to fulfill her child's first vital need and that is to feed her by her own breast milk, or taking care of the baby. All these needs of a child made unreliable by slavery, which on the other hand separates Sethe the mother from her child or so enervates and depletes her that she has no self-recognition. Being slaves they had been completely dependent on White people for their entire existence, they now find themselves completely lost and no means of emotion to cope with the freedom. At Sweet Home all the slaves were treated as animals, for this they forgot to identify themselves as human beings. In this novel Toni Morrison has shown the difference between animal and human being. Sethe feels the indignity of being treated as a goat by schoolteacher's nephews, her swollen breasts milked by two grown men. Schoolteacher describes his slaves as if they were animals, and it is his responsibility moreover God has given him the responsibility to take care of them.

Much of the novel focuses on a community of ex-slaves and how they manage to get on track with their lives. The question of racism in this novel came, through the eyes of schoolteacher, who believed what the difference is between a man and an animal. In its vivid portrayal of the Negro community, complete with their desires and troubles, the novel shows that a colored man is like any other man. The novel also addresses the concern of whether it is better to endure the injustices of an unfeeling people or to fight against them.

Closely tied to the theme of race is that of the past. Each of the characters has endured a furious past, complete with the worst horrors imaginable. Sethe has been raped and forced to murder, Paul D has been imprisoned in a cage in a ditch, Stamp Paid was forced to give his wife away to be a sex toy, and the list goes on and on. Many of these men and women have chosen, like Sethe and Paul D, to repress the past. Others worked actively against it, like Stamp Paid. However, no sort of resolution occurs for any of the characters until each learns to accept and deal with the past (which is very alive in the present). Only then the possibility of a future seems to be forming. . This novel has been set in post-civil war Ohio, it traces the life of a young woman, Sethe, who has kept a terrible memory at bay only by shutting down part of her mind, "her former life as a slave on Sweet Home Farm, her escape with her children to what seems a shape heaven, and the tragic events that follow" (Irfan-51) here Irfan has tried to say that when Sethe escaped from Sweet Home she thought she is free and now she can breath and life will be heaven for her. Sethe's life according to Aysha Irfan, records what happened to many women who were forced to work as slaves:

Beloved is a novel that speaks multiply. It reflects the harsh reality of being a black mother and voices the positions of daughters, grandmothers, fathers, male friends, neighbors, community and the mother herself. Sethe's actions are measured and weighted against numerous atrocities and destructions and possible responses to them. The text therefore deliberately centers on the historical fact that there were black women during slavery who suffocated their babies rather than allow them to be offered up to destruction by slavery. (Irfan-52)

Morrison's characters attempt to move from nowhere to somewhere. Baby Suggs, for example, moves from Kentucky to Ohio, where her heart beats for the first time. Later, Sethe joins her, having run away from the schoolteacher and his nephews; and is on verge of being recaptured. Her humanity has been so violated by this man that instead of allowing the whites to enslave them, Sethe feels wise to kill her daughter to save her from psychic death. "If I hadn't killed her. She would have died and that is something I could not bear to happen to her" (Morrison- 200). The novel puts emphasis on the death of Beloved, Sethe's baby girl at the age of two in order to save her from life of slavery, who, mysteriously reappears as a sensuous young woman to claim Sethe's love. The three women characters Sethe, Beloved and Denver remove the male presence from her past and makes effort to achieve wholeness, "to Sethe, the future was a matter of keeping the past at bay" (Morrison-142). After eighteen years of Sethe's living in one hundred twenty four Blue Stone Road with her daughter Denver, Paul D. one of the companions of Sethe's husband makes his appearance, which indicates the reconstructive process of Sethe's personality. To talk about Sethe's personality Irfan has written

Sethe, a victim of both sexist and racist oppression, a slave woman brutally treated by white men, had been “junk heaped” twice before, first by her mother and then by her community was hopeful that Paul D will fill up the vacuum of her “the orange squares on Baby Suggs quilt that signaled how barren 124 really was”. But he turned out to be like any other man refusing to accept her act of killing her babies, charging her, “You got two feet Sethe, not four...what you did was wrong”, soon the ghost of Beloved, Sethe’s crawling already dead daughter embodied as the young woman Beloved arrives to claim Sethe’s love. (Irfan-55)

Sethe is the strongest character in the novel Beloved. As a child she rarely saw her mother, and was brought up by a one armed woman, named Nan, while her mother worked in the field as a slave. Later Sethe finds her mother hanged, along with many other women, but she never discovers the reason behind it. At the age of thirteen Sethe was sold to Sweet Home, a farm in Kentucky. She is bought to to replace Baby Suggs, whose son she later marries. She worked in Sweet Home in the kitchen and made ink for her owner Mr. Garner. All five of the male slaves would like her as a partner, but after a year she choose Halle to be her husband. Life was going pretty fine, but as Mr. Garner died his brother in law took the in charge of Sweet Home. From this point onwards life became unbearable for the slaves. At this point they decide to escape, Sethe sends her three children to Baby Suggs and being pregnant for the fourth time gets beaten mercilessly by the nephews of School Teacher, and having to endure the indignity of their sucking milk from her swollen breasts, she runs away on foot. She gives birth to her

fourth child (Denver) and reaches 124 Bluestone. For twenty-eight days she enjoyed freed life before Schoolteacher arrives to take her and her children back. Rather than allowing this to happen, she takes her children into the woodshed and tries to kill them all, to preserve them from a life of hopeless slavery.

The intolerable nature of her life is no difference from that of many other black characters in the novel. The difference lies in her dramatic response. Various characters try to dissuade her from loving too much, Paul D describes her love as 'too thick' and recognizes that to love in such a way is 'risky', given the precarious nature of slave existence (Morrison- 45). Nevertheless her daughter Denver and the spirit of her dead baby Beloved becomes the focus of her love. She will not allow Paul D to criticize them. She gives up her job and centers her world within the walls of 124 Bluestone Road.

On the other hand Baby Suggs, mother in law of Sethe who gets her freedom through her son. Baby Suggs had eight children from six different fathers, and she always felt the pain of never seeing her children to grow. The people she has known have all "run off...been hanged, got rented out, loaned out, bought up, brought back, store up, mortgaged, won, stolen or seized' (Morrison-23). After Halle has bought her, her freedom she tries to reunite her family, but her efforts are failed. She focuses all her remaining affection upon Halle and his new family. Baby Suggs's life is the practical example of the brutality of the slave system. Her son pays for her freedom. As a slave she had no self, in the carriage she feels her heart beating for the first time. Liberated from oppression she becomes a strong woman. While living at 124 Bluestone, to the community: "a cheerful, buzzing house where Baby Suggs, holy, loved, cautioned, fed,

chastised and soothed” (Morrison- 86-7) she urges her hearers to love themselves, in contrast to their evaluation by white people, “And O my people they do not love your hands. They only use, tie, bind, chop off and leave empty” (Morrison- 88). But the moment she sees Schoolteacher entering her house in order to take back Sethe, this reminds her the terrible chain of events and as a result she loses faith in the God she had believed in. Baby Suggs could not have a normal life; she can not even be buried in the Clearing due to a rule invented by whites. Before dying she informs Sethe and Denver that: “there is no bad luck in the world but whitefolks” (Morrison-89). She holds them responsible for breaking her heart, for stealing all that she owned or for which she dreamed.

After the death of Baby Suggs 124 also lost its connection with the community. The long years of keeping herself in isolation seems to be over when Sethe visits the Carnival with Paul D and Denver. But when her attempt to give a new color to her life is rejected because Paul D deserts her, she turns to Beloved and Denver believing “the world is in this room. This here’s all there is and their needs to be” (Morrison-224) she strives to allow Beloved gain full possession of her presence and throw off the long, dark legacy of her past. But the skating scene shows the instability and uncertainty of their relationship: “Making a circle on a line, the three of them could not stay upright for one whole minute, but nobody saw them falling” (Morrison-174). The absence of coordination and cohesion of the relationship among the three interpreting the ice as suspension of life is shown here

In contrast to the common references to water as a life giving source, in the ice skating scene the water, through present, is frozen. The creek, a tributary to the river, is dormant, without life- dead in the midst of winter.

Thus, in spite of the jubilation, image of death abound. (Morrison-122)

On return, Sethe offers warm milk to both of her daughters, which is not her milk. Sethe repeatedly asserts that the worst aspect of her rape was that the white boys “took my milk” (Morrison-17). She feels robbed of her essence, of her most precious substance, which is her maternal milk. As a child she was deprived of her own mother’s milk; “the little white babies got it first and I got what was left or none. There was no nursing milk to call my own” (Morrison-200). She was not physically starved as a baby- she did get milk from another nursing slave woman- but she was emotionally starved of a significant nurturing relationship of which the nursing milk is symbolic. Laura Gray in her Notes to Beloved says that-

That relationship is associated with one’s core being or essence; if she has no nursing milk to call her own, she feels without a self to call her own. Even before the Schoolteacher’s nephews raped her, she was ravaged as an infant, robbed of her milk essence by the white social structure. (Gray- 78)

The memory of Sethe’s stolen milk shows the picture of her helplessness and her humiliation. Her community disapproves her brutal act of killing her daughter and deserts her. Paul D leaves 124 because he tells Stamp Paid, he is afraid of “That girl in her house” (Morrison-234). Beloved, Sethe’s daughter is introduced as what Irfan has written

in his essay "Beloved- A Feminist Perspective" from the book "Beloved, a Readers Companion,"

A fully dressed woman walked out of the water" (Morrison-50). She is no longer an invisible baby poltergeist but in the flesh at the age she would have been had she lived. Paul D struggles against Beloved's interference who is summoned by Sethe's need to make it clear to her, to build his new life with Sethe. After Paul D is gone, Sethe experiences that "Beloved is her daughter, the chick- the setting of pieces into places designed and made especially for them. The appearance of Beloved in the flesh brings Sethe's repressed guilt into the open. She has come back to claim her mother's attention and love which she had been deprived of. Sethe is delighted to make up for what the child has lost and Denver is ashamed to see her mother (Irfan- 51)

This shows that the reappearance of Beloved as a young woman but walking out of water indicates being an infant, because through breaking of water of mother's womb a child comes out. Then Sethe becoming sure that this is her daughter and her guilt, which helps Beloved to have Sethe completely under her control. Then in the novel Denver has said, "serving a girl not much older than herself" (Morrison-297). But Beloved has also come back to render the judgment, Sethe has never made against herself, charging her mother of rejection, of not loving "too thick", but of not loving enough, of leaving her behind.

Beloved takes physical possession of Sethe, dressing like her, imitating her gestures, and speech, until "it was difficult for Denver to tell who was who" (Morrison-241). Then Beloved begins to absorb Sethe, she grows taller, her belly swells until she

looks pregnant assuming Sethe's motherhood as Sethe shrinks and becomes "like a chastened child" (Morrison-250). Beloved's demands are unlimited. Towards the end of the novel, Sethe becomes completely convinced that Beloved is her daughter whom she killed and feels an urge to love her to compensate what she did to her. Sethe allows herself to be absorbed though it reverts her back to slave hood.

Sethe was able to free herself and her children through her own efforts. But this time she was helped out by her other daughter Denver. If Beloved was absorbing and making her a prisoner, and review her past slave life, then Denver was pulling her to come out of it. It was Denver's decision "to leave the yard, step off the edge of the world...and go ask somebody for help" (Morrison-243) this was the beginning of the reversals in the life of Sethe. Denver was able to escape this, for she realizes that "it was she who had to step off the edge of the world and die because if she didn't, they all would" (Morrison-239). She finally gives up her identification with her dead sister, her own link to the past, and begins her life independently. She goes to the community to seek help to feed the family.

The community, which had withdrawn, from 124 because to them Sethe has killed her own child which was not acceptable at all. To describe this situation Sharmila Sreekumar in her essay "Toni Morrison's Beloved- Stitching Colors" has written-

The women got together to help chase the embodied ghost of Beloved, which allows Paul D, a re-entry into the house. In the last, the narrative voice moves to the point of view of Beloved, who experiences the events not as a reversal but as a repetition; Sethe runs away from her; she is abandoned again. (Uma-104)

Here the community come up to help Sethe to get rid of the ghost of Beloved, who is a constant reminder of her past and her guilt, through this Paul D re enters, who is also associated to Sethe's past and once again she feels empty. Sethe living in isolation is isolated from the circle of her community. The growing misunderstanding between Sethe and Paul D makes Sethe push him outside her circle: "circling him the way she was circling the subject round and round, never changing direction, which might have helped his head" (Morrison-161). Sethe tries to dismiss Paul D and those who were haunting her peace of mind, reminders of those days when she came to Baby Sugg's house and was warmly accepted by her community only for a short time. When Sethe feels choked by the ghostly fingers: "Harder, harder, the fingers moved slowly around towards her wind pipe, making little circle on the way" (Morrison-96). Denver charges Beloved of choking her mother, she denies the charge: "the circle of iron choked it" (Morrison-101). Sethe and her community were chained by the circle of iron Beloved was constantly bringing out the repressed history of Sethe's ancestors, the enslavement by white masters.

The end of the novel circles back to Paul D's arrival again at 124 promising a shared future, "his coming is reverse of his going" (Morrison-270). His movements through the house relax the curse by which Beloved had moved him out. Morrison's novel is not hopelessly miserable or despairing, her characters are wounded but not all of them are ruined. Denver and Paul D courageously face their inner terrors Denver leaves the house even though she expects to be "swallowed up", and to describe the relationship at that point between Paul D and Sethe Sharmila Sreekumar has pointed out that

Paul D returns to Sethe and her fearful murderous love is able to salvage out of wreckage a bolstering faith in both self and other. Paul D tries to pass this faith on to Sethe at the end assuming again a maternal, nurturing role. His offer to rub Sethe's feet undoes his previous characterization of her act as animal. Foot rubbing and bathing reenact the life-restoring human contacts that marked Sethe's first escape from slavery. (Uma-106)

Denver, Ella and the community brings out all odd things like Beloved the ghost who was chanting at 124, which releases Sethe from her daughter's ghost and she loses her individual story. Sethe feels lost after the departure of Beloved and tells Paul D: "She was my best thing" (Morrison-272) to which, he responds by leaning over and taking her hand: "You your best thing, Sethe, you are. His holding feelings are holding hers" (Morrison-273). She immediately replies, "Me? Me?" (Morrison-273) – Thus turning her attention to the self which she is now ready to define. She is more fortunate than Beloved who "although has claim, is not claimed" (Morrison-336). This shows that what a strong woman Sethe is and Denver, Paul D and the community makes her feel of her wholeness. Early in this novel, when Sethe first thinking of a new life with Paul D, she envisions the project as a kind of story telling: "Her story was bearable because it was his well to tell, to refine and tell again" (Morrison-273). She was not sure of herself; she did not want to go through all this again because there was a strong fear of failure in her. But when the ghost arrived, there was no reversals; only repetitions and concepts 'when things were over' cannot apply. This is why Laura Gray has said

Beloved story is not in context to Sethe's mother also, reinforcing the idea that Beloved incarnates at least three generations of abandoned daughter/mother. The relationship between Sethe and Paul D comes closest to a state of mutual recognition and attunement. Paul D touching Sethe's face recalls the touching faces of the mating turtles; the relationship here is not one of merging or of domination but of resonating "likeness" and empathic understanding. (Gray-76)

However, in the end it is Beloved who is given more importance than Sethe. Her desperate struggle to fit into her own way was the frame and the center of the novel. But Beloved's struggle is the struggle of Sethe, Denver, Paul D and Baby Suggs. It is a struggle of all black people in a racist society. Beloved demonstrates, finally, the deep psychic realization of living in a culture in which domination and objection of the self have been institutionalized. Beloved teaches, an inherently social self, rooted in relationship and dependent on its core of mutual recognition. Through Beloved Sethe and Denver get to know who they are and self recognition in the society, Sethe was abandoned by the community for killing Beloved and it was Beloved for whom Sethe again got connected with the community. The inspiration of writing this novel for Morrison was a dead girl, who is never named except by the single word that appears on her tombstone becomes indistinguishable from the 'Sixty Million and more' to whom the novel is dedicated- the forgotten, anonymous, captured black African's who never even made it into slavery, those who died either in Africa or on slave ships.

Chapter - 4

Assessment and Conclusion

Feminism is a term, which is used for women, where women talk about their oppression, domination through men and society. But in terms of feminism, women feminist themselves have created two divisions and that is in terms of color. For this, with in modern feminist movement, white women have been accused of for cossing on oppression in terms of gender while ignoring issues of race, class and sexuality.

Toni Morrison is one of those writers/ novelist who explores the question of what it mean to be just a woman, but a black woman to survive in a society dominated by white ideologies. The title of her first novel The Bluest Eye suggests a dominant white presence. The Bluest Eye – the color of eyes, which is very specific to a particular race and it, is not surprising that the protagonist Pecola, yearns for not just blue eyes but the bluest eyes, and hence yearns to be white. Here it suggests that Pecola, as a solution to her problems, does not want to become a man but white women. This shows that the world is not only divided into men and women but there is another division, called black women, which is unfortunately the worst and the lowest position a women can acquire.

Pecola, an eleven-year-old girl, is brought up on a set of presumptions influenced by the white standards. Since her childhood Pecola has learned to believe that blue eyes would change everything; or if she had blue eyes, she would look beautiful, she would be loved, her parents would stop fighting, her brother would not run away from home and they would all be happily together.

Here Pecola is not fighting against the male dominance, but against her black heritage, which she considers ugly. The tale of Pecola is a black girl's wish to become fair and beautiful. It is almost a twisted fairy tale where the poor deprived girl does not have her dreams come true.

Then the presentations of women in Morrison's novels are different. She does not show woman as an image of angel and mother Mary, but as a victim of white and male society where she may have to act differently. For example, to a mother her child means everything, but Toni Morrison presents a different picture of motherhood, where a mother kills her own child. It happens in her two novels Beloved and Sula. In both cases the act of killing was one with a good purpose. Both Sethe and Eve killed their child in order to save them from the cruel world. In Eve's case, she struggled a lot in order to feed her children; she sacrifices one of her legs so that she could get insurance money for her children. Then when she sees her growing up son taking drugs and getting completely into it, she puts him on fire, or kills him, in order to save him from the miserable life he has been leading. She understood that Plum would never be able to come out of this and in order to free him she has him killed. Now the question can arise whether it is an act of love or something else. It has to be love otherwise in the first place Eve would not have gone through all the trouble in order to feed her children. Then in Beloved Sethe killed her two-year-old daughter in order to save her from the cruel bondage of slavery. She did not want her children to be the victims of white society. Here again Sethe did it out of love. This reflects that motherhood requires a lot of responsibility and strength.

On the other hand, Morrison has also shown terrifying picture of motherhood through the characteristics of Pauline and Hannah. Both play role as mothers whose motherhood, love and affection are missing. In Pauline's case she misbehaved with Pecola because she was black and ugly. She loved her white master's children but hated her own one. Then Hannah never shared love with Sula. Sula over hears her mother saying, "I like Sula, but I just don't love her". This creates a huge emptiness in Sula. She feels that something inside her has died, and Pecola in The Bluest Eyes thought that having bluest eye will make her mother love her. These characters yearn for motherly love and make us feel tat a little bit of love and affection could alter their miserable life.

Now the question arises why Toni Morrison presents these black woman who do not act white female characters or why these characters are different. Is it just because they are women or they are black women? To answer this here comes the responsibility of society. Are these characters just like that, or the society has any influence upon them? The characters in The Bluest Eye, attempt to conform to a standard of beauty in some way. This standard of beauty is established by the society, in which they live and then supported by members of the community. Beauty also linked with respect and happiness. Both people who reach the standards of beauty and those who try are never satisfied with who they are. Pecola Breedlove feels that she must be aesthetically beautiful. She become obsessed with being more and more beautiful, a stage that she feels she can never reach because she is black. The fact that a rigid standard of beauty is stablished, and all the members of the community are pressurized to surrender to it. Beloved deals with the history of slavery, where the white culture thought that the blacks were their slaves and

they do not have any right to live on their own. Sethe is a victim to this and she carries her past with her, which never allows her to have a happy and healthy present life.

Then in Sula, Sula is the example of past slavery period, where even though ground is broken, she never had a chance to have a normal life because of the white society, because the institution called marriage was broken, for example Baby Suggs from Beloved had six children from six different fathers and she never saw her children growing. This past history of slavery has broken the value of family and marriage and Sula is a victim to this. As a result she never experienced healthy loving relation and she never felt hesitant and she was forced to choose a carefree and wild way of life.

To conclude this thesis I would like to present an example from the Jewish love in the figure of Lilith. She was believed to be the first companion of Adam, and she was also made from dust just like he was. But when she realized that Adam was dominating her, she refused to accept him as her superior. She left him to live with the demons and refused to come back even at the order of God. On the contrary, the price of her freedom, she had to agree to the death of a hundred of her demon children. Her story shows that patriarchal society has nothing to offer. Women will always have to find their own ways and must not forget their own self-respect and dignity. In Beloved Sethe has suffered as a slave as a mother because of her guilt and never had the opportunity to lead a normal life of love, care and happiness. But she is such a strong woman who never stepped back and fought till the end, and the legacy can be traced Eva who fought and showed her strength in taking care of her own children by even sacrificing her one leg. In The Bluest Eye,

Pecola becomes a complete victim of the white society, where she thought American beauty, which means having the bluest eye and white color will solve all her problems, but the exception and strength of this novel was Claudia MacTeer.

Thus Toni Morrison has recorded in these three novels, various responses of black women in different situations. Morrison's women actually capture the saga of suffering black women whose ordeal began centuries back, and is still continuing.

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