

**TONI MORRISON**

**The Bluest Eye**

## Unit-IV

### Toni Morrison: The Bluest Eye

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#### Introduction

Though Toni Morrison does not like to be classified, she can best be described as a ‘black woman writer’ – a category that she too embraces. These classifications may marginalize the potential of Morrison but for students of Morrison these are important because these tell on various aspects of Morrison’s genius.

When critics call her a “poetic writer” they seem to pay tribute to the lyrical charm of her works. Some call her “D. H. Lawrence of the black psyche” for her insight into the problems that ultimately form the black experience. There are some who pay attention to her magical realism and consider it as a divide between the lyrical modernism of Zora Neale Hurston and existential naturalist experimentation of Richard Wright. Though she is a black writer there are some who would like to call her a nationalist because she is the one who “first approached question of race and imagination with urgency and rigorous open-mindedness,”(New Republic, Brian Lanker).

In fact Morrison is one of the most sophisticated novelists whose singular accomplishment (if one is only to point out one), as a writer is that she has evolved as an artist par categorization. It is for this literary representation that she won for herself 1993 Nobel Prize for literature. She was the first black to receive this honour, which is a validation of her personal achievements, the artistry of African American literature besides being the recognition of the voice of a female.

Second of four children of George and Ramah Willis Wofford Toni Morrison was born Chloe Anthony Wofford in 1931 in Lorain, Ohio, a steel town on the bank of Lake Erie, which played a significant role in sharpening the sensibility of Morrison. It was from here that she gathered the black experience, which she was to dramatize in her novels later. Here she learnt about community that is both a “support system and a hammer.’ Again here she learned that neither race, class nor gender precluded opposition to inhumane conditions.

Morrison developed a strong primary identity under the care of her confident, assertive mother who in indignation had written a letter to President Roosevelt drawing his attention to the bug ridden meal being served to the welfare recipients. She owed her strength to her hardworking racist father who distrusted every white man on earth. They taught her to imbibe in her self-respect and a critical attitude to the world especially to the white standards of beauty and success. Morrison enriched herself both with the folk wisdom that her maternal grand parents imparted through their folk tales of supernatural and the dream book they used to foretell future. Morrison received formal education and was the first in the family to go to college. She did her BA from Howard University in 1953 and MA from Connell University with her thesis on Faulkner and Virginia Woolf. Her teaching career had already begun at Texas Southern University when in 1957 she returned to Howard as an instructor in English. She married Harold Morrison in 1958, had two sons but divorced him in 1964. In 1965 she joined as senior editor in Random House in New York. Though she had started writing at Howard, it took her a marriage, two sons, divorce, job as a editor, single parenting and writing at night to bloom fully into a class of writer that she is today. Morrison is a popular writer whom awards entailed. She won various awards and honours, the Nobel Prize being the highest. She has authored one play, 7 Novels and a book on literary criticism, which are as follows:

1. The Bluest Eye, 1969.
2. Sula, 1973 (National Book Award Nomination in 1975, Ohoana Book Award 1975)

3. *Song of Solomon*, 1977 (National Book Critics Circle Award in 1977, American Acad. and Inst. of Arts and Letters Award in 1977)
4. *Tar Baby*, 1981.
5. *Beloved*, 1987 (Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1988, Robert F. Kennedy Book Award 1988, Melcher Award, National Book Award Nomination in 1987, National Books Critics Circle Award Nomination in 1987)
6. *Jazz*, 1992.
7. *Paradise*, 1997.
8. *Playing In The Dark: Whiteness And Literary Imagination* in 1992.
9. *Dreaming Emmett*, (Play) 1986.

*The Bluest Eye* (1970) is about the rape of a black girl by her father who has been emasculated by white men. It is about the dangers of moral freedom. *Sula* (1974) is the story of a young woman's defiance for freedom from restricting community that is both a victim and a victimizer. It is about the friendship and the slippery boundaries of good and evil. *Song of Solomon* (1977) is the story of feminization of a black man who comes to define freedom not disassociated with responsibilities. *Tar Baby* (1981) is the story of a girl who accepts her commoditification but defines freedom in terms of radical feminism and hence in masculine terms. It also questions the concept of freedom with renunciation of social responsibilities. *Beloved* (1987), *Jazz* (1992) and *Paradise* (1997) form the trilogy of Morrison with a stress on collectivity. *Beloved* is more about the slaves than about Sethe. It is about freedom and owning that freed self. *Jazz* capturing the post war and early migration conditions highlights the uprootedness, alienation and struggle of the black in the city through the story of a marital crisis. *Paradise* as a culmination of Morrison's art and vision is the story of generations and places. Characters remain insignificant in comparison to the places. This novel totally obliterates the centre so that a new world is created.

*The Bluest Eye* is the turbulent story of Picola. It launches a powerful attack on the relationship between western standards of female beauty and the psychological oppression of black woman besides exposing "the ugliness" of black poverty, powerlessness and loss of positive self-concept. Picola Breedlove is rejected by society, black community and her mother as ugly. Longing for love, educated under the White Look she wants to escape her ugliness by acquiring a pair of blue eyes. Stepping into womanhood she is raped by her father and beaten mercilessly by her mother. She goes to Soaphead Church, a so-called supernaturalist who deceives her into believing that she has got blue eyes. Thus Picola lapses into madness and gives birth to a stillborn child. In total isolation in which only her alter ego provides her company, while Picola longs for the bluest eye, the community purges themselves of their evil or ugliness.

Sula of *Sula* is the third of the man loving generation of the Peace family. It is the story of Sula's defiance of community and her friend Nel's conformity to it. Nel and Sula girls descending from two contrasting familial environments, are fast friends. They enter into womanhood and realize their sexuality in two different ways. Nel marries and mothers while Sula much disoriented by her mother's non-love for her leaves Medallion apparently to seek a self-willed life. Her return results, to the bafflement of all, in the institutionalization of her old grandmother, Eva Peace and sex with the husband of her dearest friend, Nel, which shames Jude to leave Nel and Medallion forever. While Sula takes the men of Medallion freely but only to leave them, the women learn to cherish their husband, the old and children. However, Sula's passion changes to possessiveness for Ajax making him fly leaving Sula broken and stricken with a consuming disease. When Sula is dying Nel visits her and to her surprise Sula's comment—"I know what every black woman in this country is doing... Dying just like me. But the difference is they dying like a stump. Me I'm going down one of those redwoods."—leads her to self-realization. The novel inverts the good and evil as the death of Sula, 'the evil' lets loose destruction and deaths in Medallion, which finally makes *Sula* the story of 'wasted beauty'.

*Song of Solomon* is an epic tale of Black America. It is a journey of the male protagonist down south as well as journey through the dark recesses of the past, a voyage in which fantasy and reality merge to restore the lost heritage.

The protagonist, the first male one of Morrison, is Macon Dead III who is called Milkman because his mother nursed him well past infancy. He grows into an emotional chaos while his father mercilessly drives towards money. Fueled by his father Macon III goes on a journey in a hunt for the treasure of gold that his father, and his aunt Pilate had left in a cave in Virginia. Milkman's search finally comes out to be the search for family history that his father had struggled to obscure while chasing middle class respectability. As Milkman travels through Pennsylvania and Virginia, acquiring the jagged pieces of a story he slowly assembles into a long pattern of courage and literal transcendence of tragedy. He is strengthened to face the threat to his life that rises from his own careless past to meet him at the end. The novel ends in ambivalence. The question whether Milkman dies at the hands of his hateful friend or does he survive to use his new knowledge remains unanswered.

The fourth novel Tar Baby set in a Caribbean Island is a romance of violent passions. As the story of Son and Jadine it is a battleground for race, class and culture. The novel is also her first book with white people as central actors. We are taken back to the childhood of a rich orphan who inherits a candy company, marries Margaret, the Principal Beauty of Maine, and settles down as an odd but reasonable man on an island with his two servants Sydney and Ondine. This rich man Valerian Street patronizes his servants' niece Jadine Child, a super-educated, super-beautiful young woman, a Paris model who has a love affair with an escaped criminal, a poor uneducated north Florida black who sneaks into Valerian Street's house and stays unnoticed for four days. Son's presence reveals the racism in both the whites and the black in this house. Jadine is bored and repulsed in Florida where Son takes her to live with the 'real' blacks. She returns to Paris possibly to have a rich white man's child while Son searches for her on Isle des Chevaliers.

Beloved the masterpiece of Morrison is the story of Sethe, Denver and Paul D set after the end of the Civil War during the period of Reconstruction. The central character is Sethe, a woman in her mid-thirties, who is living in an Ohio farmhouse with her daughter, Denver and her mother-in-law, Baby Suggs. This house is the haunt of a sad, malicious and angry ghost, the spirit of Sethe's Baby daughter whom she had killed when she was two to save her from slavery, frightening away the two sons of Sethe and breaking down Baby Suggs. The arrival of Paul D, one of the Sweet Home men of Sethe's past disturbs the house. Their meeting revokes their sweet, sour memories of the slave establishment from where they had ran away to experience the worst. Paul D remained chained in an underground box till torrents of rain threatened his life to fight for his survival along with other men. Sethe remembers her dehumanization at the hands of the new master of the Sweet Home, her arduous journey to meet her beloved daughter during which helped by a white girl she gave birth to Denver. While Paul D's disclosure about her husband, Halle, who had watched her being milked and had gone mad, disturbs Sethe, the disclosure about Sethe's infanticide shatters Paul D. Meanwhile, the returned dead daughter starts cowering down both of them. Sethe withdraws while Paul D leaves, taking shelter in the cellar of the church. At last Denver comes out of her haunted house to seek the community's help. The community women gather to exorcise the ghost. Paul D returns to gather the broken self of Sethe and make her realize that she is her beloved.

Jazz starts with the report of the harrowing incident of shooting down of an eighteen years old girl by her fifty year old lover and the dissection of her body with a knife by his angry wife. Joe Trace is a cosmetic salesman leading a deadened life with his wife, Violet whose obsession of her childlessness makes her sleep with dolls and speak to her parrot. He meets Dorcas and develops an affair with her. Dorcas, who had lost her parents in race riots, is brought up by her aunt Alice whose own personal experience teaches her to press upon Dorcas repression of sexuality. Dorcas a young girl bubbling with zeal to live life wants more than Joe can give her. In desperation he shoots her down while his wife tries to desecrate her body. The novel in fact is the story of Violet to know Dorcas for which she visits Alice. Her insistence to meet Alice elevates both of them psychologically to have a human understanding of the whole episode. The novel thus underlines the need of human understanding and companionship in marital relations.

Paradise the last of Morrison's novel is the story of black chauvinists who kill those women who defy the patriarchal order. In this novel Morrison creates an all black town of Haven and Ruby with ten rock families

whose men take pride in their purity of race and the strength of their ancestors to survive the white oppression. These men abstain from all those weaknesses, which are generally attributed to the black men—violence, infidelity, mobility, irresponsibility and drinking. Women are safe here, as nowhere else they could be yet these women lack wholeness and fulfilment. They are powerless to resist men's decisions and actions. A few kilometers away is situated another world—a refuge for all. It is inhabited by females and males are occasional visitors. It is a world, which acknowledges no distinction of sex, colour, class or race. Their independence seems to be a threat to patriarchy and the nine men of Ruby let out this venom on the innocent and already oppressed women. They kill them in cold blood. Thus the story of the identical twins who couldn't be separated ends in their separation as Deek exalted by love for a convent woman repents after genocide while his twin Steward remains insolvent unapologetic and patriarchal.

Morrison's novels have won wide acclaim. Her literacy honours include National Book Critics Award, American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters Award, Pulitzer Prize and Nobel Prize for her artistic delicacies. However, her success has not been without some setbacks. *Beloved* was turned down for National Book Award. *The Bluest Eye* was rejected for publication several times before it finally came into print. While most of her critics praised her for her achievements as a novelist there are a few who were most critical of her art. Sara Blackburn criticized Morrison's first novel as having been received rather uncritically, its flaws being ignored by white middle class women readers and reviewers who wanted to be more socially conscious about black women. Stanley Crouch in 'New Republic' criticized Morrison capitalizing on the desire of the white reader to consume "black women's tale of being abused by a black men' and of willingness to do almost anything to become a success." Carole Januone's allegation repeats the criticism of Morrison's novel as "protest pulp fiction" because of the horrific picture of slavery "to summon up the specter of white guilt." W. Lawrence Hogue's comment on the attempt of the dominant culture at "repression of non-conformist literary texts" when applied on Morrison implies that "the success of African-American text like those written by Morrison are functions of how they produce many of the dominant establishment's values".

His works have evoked substantial literary criticism most of which center around her presentation of community, failure of system, black culture feminism and her artistic potential. Critics like Barbara Christian and Susan Wills concentrate on Morrison's presentation of community's role in the achievement of wholeness of the individual. Critics like Trudier Harris, Eleanor Taylor and Sandi Russel explore Morrison's strong rootedness in black culture. Lester, Hortense, J. Spiller discuss the feminist sensibility of Morrison. Deborah McDowell, Robert Grant and Michael Awkard explore Morrison's narrative devices.

Denise Heinze in her full-length sociological study of Morrison's novels in the book entitled *The Dilemma of Double Consciousness: Toni Morrison's Novels* analyses the corrupting influence of racism in the life of blacks in America and the use of fantasy and supernatural by Morrison as a fictional technique to mitigate the impact of racism. Patric Bryce Bjork in her book *The Novels of Toni Morrison: the Search for Self and Community* takes up the theme of selfhood in Toni Morrison's novels. *New Dimensions of Spirituality* is a biracial reading of Morrison's novel by a black critic Karla F.C. Holloway and a German critic Stephanie Demetrakopoulus. Holloway sees Morrison building up a universe through a synthesis of metaphors and myth making which are African archetypes. On the other hand, Stephanie's interpretation of Morrison's novels includes universal archetypes. For instance, she reads the tragedy of Philomela in the tragedy of Picola.

Irrespective of some negative criticism Morrison remains an outstanding figure not only in the African-American literature but also in the entire literary world of America. The total corpus of her literary works records her humanistic vision cutting across the boundaries of caste, class and sex.

Her novels neither destroy the double consciousness nor recommend assimilation through emulation. As a writer she demands an emotional-intellectual response to the problems of the times. She exhibits a similar response to Afro-American history and to the American mainstream. Her response is, therefore, not totalising. Her novels call the reader to feel as well as think. She perceives conflict as an essential part of life and her novels as her struggle as a writer capturing the complexities involved, make an effort not to let the conflict become a problem.

## Some Major Themes in Toni Morrison

Freedom forms one of the major themes in Morrison's novels. The theme of freedom forms an inevitable part of the race relations between the black and white in almost all the black writers. Franz Fanon, Ellaine Showalter and Alice Walker have categorised literature into three groups on this basis. Fanon calls them assimilation, immersion and fighting while Ellaine Showalter terms these as imitation and internalization, protest and advocacy, and self-discovery. Alice Walker's suspension, assimilation and emergence more or less correspond to the divisions of the earlier critics. Though Morrison's writing period situates her in the last phase, her novels combine all the three notes through which Morrison presents the different meanings of the term 'freedom'. In the crisis of slavery or emancipation, freedom meant freedom from the white masters. In the crisis of Reconstruction Morrison declares: "Freeing yourself was one thing, owning that freedom was another." (BL 116) For blacks migrated to the Northern cities, freedom in its wider sense implies freedom of will. Sula's freedom is a marked contrast to Baby Sugg's freedom. Similarly to Jadine in Tar Baby freedom means freedom both from blackhood and motherhood. Sethe of Beloved, a slave mother best exemplifies the combination of these three phases/stages/modes into a single whole. Sethe's infanticide speaks of the psycho dynamics of oppression, her resistance or protest against the right of the master and her assertion to claim and own her flesh and the flesh of her flesh.

Self-help is another major theme in Morrison's novels. This theme is the underlying idea in the very first novel, The Bluest Eye that chronicles the history of black oppression. Though Morrison criticizes the prevailing system and presents its limitations, her most powerful characters are those who help themselves. Claudia, Pilate, Lone, Stamp Paid are some such characters who leave an indelible mark on the readers' mind. Her masterpiece Beloved ends on this note: you are your best. Denver stops waiting for his father and comes out of the house to help herself. Sethe learns to love herself.

Morrison's presentation of the system highlights her dissatisfaction with the institutions and life-help agencies such as education, medical services, police social security and even Church. While Dick and Jane primer in The Bluest Eye, is a sharp comment on the misorienting educational pattern for the black, the black history and typing classes in The Paradise her last novel are shown as insufficient to enable the young girls and boys to face the challenges of their times. She shows the lack of medical services for the black as suggested by the treatment of Pauline by the doctor in the hospital in The Bluest Eye, death of Ruby in Paradise and carelessness towards Eva in Sula, but she also shows many of the blacks refusing to go to a white medical man or woman to seek help because of their self-dignity. On the contrary, she also shows more and more women having a craze to be admitted to hospital. In Paradise through Lone she develops a human understanding of their desire to be away from the burden of daily routine work and to be taken care of. Though in Song of Solomon Morrison shows the black medicines/conjuring solving a sexual problem, in Paradise she shows the roots of the black woman working as a psychological tonic for Soane. Morrison shows none else coming to either Connie or Pilate for the traditional black medicines.

Nurturing is another important theme in Morrison. Though nurturing is normally accepted as the basic feminine quality, she has created some nurturing men too. In The Bluest Eye she shows the plight of children whose parents are non-nurturing. In Sula, Eva's house during her lifetime is full of nurturance. In Song of Solomon Pilate's house in spite of lack of modern gadgetry caters to everybody's tastes. In Beloved she introduces a community of men and women who nurture and heal. Here women are mothers with thick love while men like Stamp Paid nurture even small children. In Jazz women assemble at Alice's house. They eat together, laugh, talk, borrow and lend. Alice not only repairs the torn dress of Violet, but she also repairs her torn soul. It is in spite of the fact that women are shown as childless. In Paradise nurturing and healing are the dominant qualities of women both at Ruby and in the Convent. The kitchens of these women are alive with cooking. But for Morrison, nurturing alone is not sufficient. She introduces some women characters like Jadine and Billie Dallia who seek economic independence and freedom from constricting prescriptions of the black community

by seeking an independent identity. While Jadine cuts herself off from her roots and community, the last independent woman of Morrison, Billie achieves a balance by constructing an individual self without severing her relation with her community. She learns to nurture and heal both the black and white without equating her femininity with sexuality. So we see that Morrison works out the theme of individual vs. society while dealing with the theme of nurturance. Milkman's journey down south in search of treasure is his learning to relate to others and nurture, which makes his relation with Sweet really sweet.

The theme of wholeness runs throughout her novels. Her novels are readings into achieving human wholeness through self-realization. This theme is worked out in The Bluest Eye as the theme of black selfhood. In Sula, Sula's sense of wholeness is contrasted with the emotional vacuum of Nel. In Song of Solomon Morrison presents her theme of human wholeness by combining the male virtue of adventure with the feminine quality of nurturance. Sula's preference for an adventurous life to nurturance is in a marked contrast to the human wholeness that Pilate represents. Her male haircut and shoes are only physical symbols of her toughness of spirit, her physical strength and her spirit of adventure, which she combines with her abilities to cook the best-boiled egg. She nurtures Milkman emotionally as well as spiritually.

Violence is a major subject to study for Morrison. She presents violence in varied forms. Her novels, which sometimes evoke criticism because of the gruesome details of violence in them, are in fact studies into those dark recesses of human psyche, which make man inflict injuries on others. Incestuous rape in The Bluest Eye, burning of the drug-addicted son by the mother, abuse by a mother of her son and Son's killing his wife by driving the car into the bed where she sleeps with her lover in Tar Baby, murder of a young woman by her lover and dissection of her body by his wife at her funeral in Jazz and the murder of five women by nine chauvinistic black men in Paradise are disturbing incidents of violence. But Morrison's novels are aimed at understanding the socio psychological aspects of these violent behavioural patterns in order to reach a humanistic conclusion. Very important to note is the fact that she shows all human beings prone to use violence to escape frustration and displace it invariably. The worst hit by this displacement are the children. This displacement theme comes very close to the theme of the scapegoat, which is a recurrent theme in Morrison's novels. Picola and Sula are scapegoated by the community as projection of the evil to realize their goodness.

All these themes are subsumed in one dominant concern i.e. for black consciousness and experience. She writes about it because she has seen and experienced it from near her heart. The ancestral voice of the Black Americans filters through the imagination of Toni Morrison, who gives a painfully lyrical dimension to her stories. However, her humanistic vision transcends both colour and creed as her stories present the socio-psychological reality of human life under duress.

### **American Society and The Black Reality**

Since Morrison is an African American, it is essential to understand the conditions of the black in America that shape the sensibility of a black writer and which a black writer projects in his or her novels. The value pattern on which the Frontier men and their sons based the American society includes liberty, equality, individualism and happiness. But the American society can be best described as a democratic paradox as far as the black existence is concerned. Proclaiming freedom and prosperity white American patriarch denied all access to the same to the blacks who were brought on the US soil as slaves. The white men were the masters not only of nature and themselves but also of the black, the human capital. Hence capitalism was the bases of the social economic set up of the American society. For maximizing profit white men maintained slavery in spite of their high-professed ideals. Blacks were degraded, dehumanized and discriminated against. Whites denied them their human rights and in order to maintain slavery they created myths to enslave their minds. Marriage, family, religion, leisure etc were not affordable to the black slaves.

Though after emancipation blacks were declared free, freedom brought its own miseries. With little money, land and education, the freed blacks were faced with the question of basic physical survival against hunger and oppressive laws especially in the south. That is why north appeared almost a synonym of freedom to blacks

resulting in exodus to north and emergence of ghettos colourism, dearly cherished dream of freedom, urgency for assimilation and resistance of the white, resulted in a complex black psyche. Such was the mode of exploitation of the black spreading over generation that oppression was internalised. Longing and struggling for liberty and equality, the discriminated blacks followed the cult of upward mobility and individualism and equated happiness with white value patterns. They were made to feel that to be black meant to be inferior intellectually, socially and economically. Shelby Steale says, “to be black was to be a victim: therefore, not to be victim was not to be black.”

### **Black American Novel and Morrison's Place in it**

Though black literature came to be recognized as a genre much later, it existed as work songs, spirituals and trickster tales in the oral form. It was an effort of the enslaved blacks to preserve their humanity in the most dehumanising conditions. These also worked as a safety valve to let out the boiling anger against their white masters while the spirituals kept their hopes alive in the hopeless and helpless conditions. They helped them transcend their misery. Their work songs provided them added energy and broke the monotony of the most arduous work in the cotton fields. The most creative were the trickster tales. Through inversion and indirection the blacks wreaked their vengeance upon the whites. Above all they preserved their folk culture in spite of the design of the whites to strip them bare of it.

Unlike the oral literature that was meant only for the black ears, written literature was meant for the white. To begin with. Written black literature was aimed to be a protest in the guise of rediscovering the black experience of affliction and injustice and to justify the humanity of the blacks against the popular philosophies holding blacks as subhuman. That is why Patrick Bryce Bjork says, “Beginning with the 19<sup>th</sup> century slave narratives (1830-1861), the African American text established itself as a medium of propaganda.” These were written under the guidance of some white abolitionists and sold mainly to the northern white people. Their popularity was based on the desire of such readers as demanded Cooper like material than on the abolitionist sympathies. Therefore the address of these writings remained white as they generated the values of the dominant culture.

During reconstruction period and even after emancipation African American literature reproduced the values of the dominant group creating stereotypes especially of mulatto... instead of genuine representation to the black culture as the spirituals and work songs had done. On the other hand Southern white literature created their own black stereotypes such as of mammy, the nurturing double of the pedestalled white woman. Tragic Mulatto theme assumed popularity because it fitted into the concept of the white i.e. mixing up of the race was uplifting for the black by lightening it. The literature of this period reproduced the dilemmas of the mulatto who longed and desperately struggled to be assimilated in the white race but were denied their legal status as the children of the white men and were marginalized. William Wells Brown's Clotell (1853), Frances Harper's Iola LeRoy (1892), Jean Toomer's Cane (1929) are some of the novels written in this tradition. Even the novel Their Eyes Were Watching God by Zora Neale Hurston (1937) fits in the tragic mulatto category.

Important to note is the fact that the protagonists of these novels were rarely a mulatto man; it was a dominantly a mulatto woman. Barbara Christian makes a vital point when she discusses the need of mulatto women as the protagonist to point out physical and cultural and emotion miscegenation:

“Woman in the white culture is not as powerful as man. The existence of mulatto slave man who embodies the qualities of the master is so great a threat, so dangerous an ideal even in fiction that it was seldom tried.”

This was one example of racism combined with sexism. The business of the writer was to reveal what it meant to be a human without regard to either black or white America. Though to some extent he remained subsumed in western literary tradition, he tried to do away with overt propagandistic discourse. His writing served to convey the idea that change can only come from within the self and not as the result of any external political strictures. Ralph Ellison too gave importance to selfhood but he also affirmed the potential of the black folklore that could provide continuity to the slave experience as well as the instruction of communal consciousness. It



could affirm both the humour as well as the horror of their living. The use of folklore in *Invisible Man* represents the aesthetic unity of form and content, though it could not wean itself free from accommodational tone.

Alice Walker and Toni Morrison continued with this aesthetic unity and transformed the Afro-American text into a limitless medium of discovery and affirmation. These women writers portrayed the black women, as they had never been done before. While Harper Larsen and Fauset had worked on tragic mulatto theme with heroines' loyalties divided between black & white social codes. Hurston had created more complex woman protagonists and emphasized upon community and familial concerns while reviving black folklore. Thus in her we find a shift in stress from the problems of being economically and psychologically crippled to the inherent weaknesses and strength of black people. Her works thus lay the foundation of black women's literary tradition. Alice walker and Toni Morrison fall in this tradition. They depict black women not as traditional black women, but as integral members of their community. As a woman writer, Morrison's purpose is not to replace patriarchy, but to recommend a kind of domesticity. She points out how alienation from one's self leads to distortion of reality. The untenable desire to conform to white middle class society and economic values and to internalize what it means to be beautiful, happy and worthy in white society is shown as frustrating and incapacitation. She brings into her books that poignancy of black experience, which is unique of her and which distinguishes her as a writer.

Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* has this distortion as the central point. The writer tells us of the terrible results of the estrangement from one's culture and the resulting self-hatred. Bombarded and humiliated by images of white beauty and the bourgeois ideals Morrison's characters develop self-hatred and invite ostracism until their lives cease to have any meaning beyond seeking the unattainable—to be white.

### **Racial Concerns of Toni Morison**

Morrison is a black writer but her racial concerns are not confined to recreation of black history and black folk culture to show their strength. Though she re-externalises black history, revives black folklore and music, constructs a dominantly black world, criticizes the white system but she does all this without romanticizing or idealizing it. Her real purpose as a black writer is not to substitute one hierarchy with another in a totalising manner. She tries to see certain kind of problems among the member of the black community in a way that is not pedagogical. She studies the problems without race blinders which enables her to understand life erasing the boundaries of colour and race. She is tough with whites as well as blacks for their weaknesses but sympathises with both when they suffer.

Morrison employs many methods to balance her view of reality. She rarely uses colour or race to define or introduce her characters. This strategy is especially applied on her white characters. For example in *The Bluest Eye* though she defines the black by the colour of their skin she does not use any racial qualifiers for the two mistresses of Pauline: "She took a study job in the home of a family of slender means and nervous, pretentious ways." (94). Again she does not give the racial identity or the skin colour of the Fishers. She only says, "It was her good fortune to find a permanent job in the home of a well-to-do family..." (100). This technique is employed in the rest of the novels too. For example in *Beloved* Stamp Paid encounters a man while walking on the road. This man's racial identity is not disclosed but the obsequious behaviour of Stamp Paid clearly establishes the same. In her last novel the racial identity of Connie remains a riddle. The novel begins with the murder of a white woman but it is difficult to establish who of the five woman living in the convent is the white one.

Though all of Morrison's novels are the chronicles of wounded black psyche under white duress, the social history found in her novels is a history of daily inescapable assault by a world, which denies minimum dignity to the blacks. But Morrison's novels also present intra group violence going parallel with intra group violence. Her vision of violence is so penetrating that she sees both white and black as oppressors. White characters like Amy, Tarbaby, Garner couple, Bodwin sibling and Connie are a testimony to the humanistic vision of Morrison. She introduces maximum number of human white characters in her Noble winning novel *Beloved* that catalogues

the most heinous and the longest list of inter-group violence. She shows both the white woman as well as the black woman suffering under patriarchy.

There is a gradual development seen in the vision of Toni Morrison as a black American writer. Her first novel *The Bluest Eye* holds racism as the only and the prime reason of the psychological distortions of her black characters. But a marked change can be seen in her third novel *Song of Solomon*. Dr. Foster and Guitar represent two responses to the white world—integrationist and retaliatory. Morrison does not seem to endorse any of the two. The response of her character Pilate to white man whom she and her brother kill is the third response, which emerges in the novel as the most overwhelming: “A human life is precious... Life is Life. Precious. And the dead you kill is yours.” (208). In her fourth novel *Tar Baby* she creates full blown white characters. Though her main stress remains on the erosion of black cultural values under the white impact, this novel presents that while white values of professionalism and education are an obstacle in the affirmation of cultural roots, she holds her black characters also responsible for that rejection. She shows how the white woman of the highest section of society remains oppressed under patriarchy.

### Detailed Critical Summary

*The Bluest Eye* (1969) was originally written as a short story when Morrison was feeling hurt in spirit after her divorce (1964) with two toddlers to look after in a city and with no support. She wrote it to stay in a writer's group, but shaped it into a novel when she was a black editor in a predominantly white publishing house. The novel was developed to find answers to certain question. It was written as a story she wanted to read. Significantly the novel was written at the end of the decade of cultural nationalism. It makes clear the necessity to raise the slogan of ‘Black is Beautiful’ in opposition to the white monopoly on value. This novel portrays the devastating effects of an oppressive situation in which the oppressed collude in their own oppression by internalising the values of the dominant culture. It is thus about colonization of the human mind to decolonize it. Again the novel gives voice to the centuries old physical exploitation and rape of black women.

The novel is placed in the year 1941 at the end of the great depression when life was hard for everyone, but worse for the black people. Cultural climate in 1941 was sterile with black men being dwarfed into the still segregated US armed services and being given the most menial of duties.

*The Bluest Eye* as the title suggests is about the outcome of the desire of a black girl for a pair of blue eyes to be loved by her family, community and society. As inversion it is the story of an innocent adolescent girl, Pecola Breedlove who unloved, uncared by her drunkard father Cholly and mother Pauline becomes a convenient victim of her community's frustration, anger, ignorance and shame. Entering into womanhood she is raped by her father, who in a confused effort to love this forsaken girl impregnates her. She gives birth to a stillborn child and desperate to escape her ugliness, falls into madness convinced that she has magically been given blue eyes.

Developing the story of Pecola as the story of African-Americans search for identity and racial self-discovery in white America, Morrison begins the novel with an English primer of Dick and Jane with mother, father, Dick and Jane. In the primer Morrison weaves a black story corresponding to the Dick and Jane text with Cholly, Polly, Sammy and Pecola while against the cat and the dog are set two middle class characters—Geraldine with a pet cat that she loves more than her son and Soaphead Church (Elihue Micah Whitecomb) who hates his landlady's dog. There comes a friend in the primer who will play with Jane. This friend is the central narrator Claudia who is the only one to befriend ‘Ugly’ ‘Poor’ Pecola and who being the narrator of the story, in her adult effort, tries to understand the incidents of her adolescence in relation to Pecola's tragedy. This effort is her search for awareness of black selfhood, a search during which Pecola had got lost into misconceptions. This friend may also be the alter ego of Pecola who forsaken by everyone including Claudia, alone takes to her.

Morrison after this preface adds yet another prologue. At its onset she makes Claudia announce the close of the novel: “Pecola was having her father's baby” and “there were no marigolds in the fall of 1941” and at the

end combining the two informs: “the seeds shrivelled and died; her baby too.” The seed symbolize the child.

Thus after using the trope of the primer to strike the theme, Morrison uses another metaphor i.e. of marigold and this time too of great thematic significance. Marigold is most prolific flower, easier to grow, thrives in poor soil and after blooming can reseed for the coming year. But the seeds sown by Claudia and Frieda didn't sprout. It is not that only the seeds sown in the plot of black dirt by Claudia and Frieda did not sprout, none grew elsewhere too, And the reason the adult Claudia concludes was that “the earth was unyielding.” So the baby of Picola died because neither the mother nor the family, community or society accepted and nourished it. Claudia in the last line says, “There is really nothing more to say- except why. But since ‘why’ is difficult to handle, one must take refuge in how.” ‘Why’ the society and community don't yield is too complex to answer. So Claudia narrates the story of her childhood especially in relation to Picola, the protagonist.

Picola is an eleven years old black girl of a drunkard father and a mother, who is a domestic worker. Claudia describes Picola as a child, “The black face holding, like nickels clean black eyes, flared nose, kissing thick lips, and the living, breathing silk of black skin” (148). She is introduced in the first chapter as a ‘case’ of a girl who had nowhere to go because her father had turned the entire family “outdoors” by burning the house. Claudia recollects her childhood memories of her mother's disgust and anger songs and chats, her humiliation at her sickness in her old, cold and green house, her own frustration at being instructed and not talked to by adults, her antagonism to Rosemary for her “white skin” and better economic status. These are combined with the sound of padding feet and the healing touch on her forehead of hands “who doesn't want me (her) to die.” (14) This ultimate security is an assurance against all the discomforts and fears that Claudia as a child had experienced in her poor little house with her parents struggling to make two ends meet. Though the difference in the economic status between Claudia's family and that of Picola is only marginal i.e. of being poor and dirt poor, the sense of security of the two isn't.

Picola had not been put out but was put outdoors not by the landlord but by her own father. For this act he had joined the race of animals and “was indeed, an old dog, a snake, a ratty nigger” (18). Mother Pauline staying at her mistress, brother Sammy with another family, Picola at Claudia's house and father Cholly Breedlove in jail—the family is fragmented and in chaos as reflected in the third version of the primer in the preface.

During Picola's stay at her house Claudia knows of Picola's hunger for blue-and-white Shirley Temple Cup. Claudia hates the Shirley Temples and dismembers the blue-eyed Baby Doll in order to find out what made it beautiful and dear to one and all while it was revolting to her but Picola is crazy to look at Shirley Temple and drinks all the three quarts of milk in order to look like her but only to infuriate otherwise sympathetic Mrs. MacTeer.

In this chapter Morrison lays bare the inner state of the mind of Picola at a stage of life when she has her menarche and thus enters into womanhood. The chapter concludes with Picola realizing that she can now have a baby but doesn't know how. Picola's inquisitiveness as to “how do you get someone to love you” underlines both the budding sexuality and the condition of this child—unloved and uncared for, humiliated and marginalized for her colour of skin, features, poverty and race.

They were ugly because the atmosphere was devoid of any expression of love and care. This chapter by narrating a usual daybreak in the Breedlove's house underlines the absence of love. It tells us of how they needed and bred violence as a psychological compulsion— Cholly to let out on Pauline his frustration at having been humiliated by white men during his first sexual act and Pauline (having internalised white values displayed on the sliver screen) her frustration at the sordidness of her conditions. Both Cholly and Pauline needed each other for displacing their frustration. They didn't need reasons to fight because Cholly's drunkenness and Pauline's assumed Christian uprightness against Cholly's sinfulness was enough to ignite physical bouts before the eyes of Picola and Sammy.

Children reacted differently to these scenes of violence. Sammy let out his anger and when he felt hopeless he ran away but Picola wished either one would kill the other or she would die or just disappear. She imagined

herself dissolving but she could never get her eyes to disappear. She concluded, “As long as she looked the way she did, as long as she was ugly, she would have to stay with these people... Long hours she sat looking in the mirror, trying to discover the secret of the ugliness, that made her ignored or despised at school, by teachers and classmates alike.” (39).

Picola is ignored by all at home as well as at school. Teachers never glanced at her. Girls insult her when they want to insult a boy by saying that he loves Picola. Rejected Picola longs for love and therefore, for beauty. It is this hunger for beauty that makes Picola crazy of Marry Jane candies; she would devour and would become a Marry Jane.

Her lust for Marry Janes take her to the store of Mr. Yacobowski, a white man with grey head, blue eyes and an unfeeling heart for the blacks. He is introduced by Morrison to show the non recognition of the black’s humanity by the white. This incident with special stress on the eyes and looks shows how under the white ‘Look’ and ‘Gaze’ the blacks felt humiliated and stripped off any slightest spec of sense of self pride. Morrison uses natural imagery to point this out. While going to the shop hopeful Picola sees dandelions and admiring their prettiness wandered why “Nobody loves the head of a dandelion.” (41). But having been humiliated by the look of vacuum in the storekeeper’s eye, a total absence of human recognition and distaste which she had seen “lurking in the eyes of all white people” Picola finds the ‘strong’ and ‘many’ dandelions as ‘ugly’ and ‘weeds’.

After experiencing a slight surge of anger, shame settles down on the mind of Picola and tears come in her eyes to escape these tears she decides to “Love Marry Jane. Be Marry Jane.” (43).

The only persons in the neighbourhood who don’t ignore Picola are the three prostitutes—China, Poland and Miss Marie. These singing laughing whores in whores’ clothing are presented as a contrast to the Breedloves. Though geographically and socially marginalized like the Breedloves they exhibit a higher consciousness placed as they are in the apartment above the Breedloves. They show no inhibitions and though isolated have formed their own community retaining the old black cultural qualities of caring and sharing. They are loving and friendly to Picola, who is otherwise ignored, rejected and humiliated by the entire community. Their ‘men talks’ are Picola’s only source of information about loving. Picola’s question, “I never seen nobody with as many boy friends as you got. Miss Marie, How come they all love you?” tells us of the rising sexuality of Picola and Marie’s answer “I’m rich and good looking’ (45) further strengthens Picola’s desire to be beautiful. Her anxiety to know about “how do grown-ups act when they love each other?” (40) remains unattended. As for Cholly and Pauline’s love making Picola only knows the agonising choking sounds of her father and the silence of her mother when in bed.

In chapter 4 the viewpoint shifts again to Claudia, who tells us about the looks of her father that are of ‘hawk fighter’. This fighting spirit Claudia too inherits from him. He is their guide who, instructs them “about which door to keep closed or opened for proper distribution of heat,... discusses qualities of coal...” (52) Though Mr. MacTeer and his wife are not untouched by white values, they have instilled in their children self-value for which they fight Maureen Peal, a high yellow dream girl, rich and enchanting to the entire school and hence a source of irritation for Claudia and Frieda. Her beauty and riches also disturb them but they restore their equilibrium by finding out her flaws to snicker behind her back.

During a short period of friendship while walking back home from school some black adolescent boys corner Picola and wreak their contempt for their blackness on her. They comment on her blackness and the nakedness of her father. Picola starts crying while Frieda in the style of her father and mother intimidates the boys. Maureen buys them ice creams but the friendship soon snaps when she questions Picola about seeing a naked man. Frieda and Claudia infuriated with shame at having seeing their own father naked, enter into a quarrel with Maureen to rescue Picola. Maureen’s reference to Picola’s ‘Old black daddy’ enflames them but Maureen escapes there blows running away shouting about her cuteness and their ugliness.

This incident sets Claudia thinking over the reasons of their ugliness. But she is convinced that she is not inferior; “we felt comfortable in our skins.” 62 Her and Frieda’s reaction to boys as well as to Maureen is a clear indication of their fighting spirit and sense of self-respect, which Picola shows only faintly that too only in

the presence of these fighting girls.

Frieda and Claudia return home. Henry offers them money for ice cream. This part of the chapter brings out two important points—reference to the fear of Frieda and Claudia for Soaphead Church foretelling exploitation of Picola and their lessons in the Christian concept of chastity and repressed sexuality.

In chapter 5 Morrison describes the repressed sexuality of the “sugar brown Mobile girls”, who sleep with their hands folded across their stomach.” They don’t drink, smoke or swear and call “sex nookey”. Therefore, they don’t have boy friend and always marry. They learn at school and college values to work to the satisfaction of their master and above all learn “how to get rid of the funkiness. The dreadful funkiness of passion, the funkiness of nature, the funkiness of wide range of human emotions.” (68) This artificiality and repression of sexuality makes their married life dysfunctional sexually.

Geraldine is one such woman. Her freedom from funkiness is combined with fear of blackness and hatred for the poor black. She neatly draws a distinction between neat quiet coloured people and ‘dirty and loud’ niggers. She is worried about the skin colour of her son, Junior and protects it with lotions. She instils in him the assumed superiority, which wins him few friends.

Junior learns from her the intimidation of the poor black. On one idle day he tempts Picola to his house on a promise to show her some kittens. Overwhelmed with the beauty of the house Picola is lost admiring it. When junior throws the black cat right in her face hurting her, she is startled and frightened and starts crying to the sadistic pleasure of Junior. Her effort to run away is blocked by Junior. Imprisoned in the room, sobbing Picola is attracted to the blue eyes of the cat and the blackness of her fur. Junior jealous at the cats liking for Picola snatches it by its hind legs and swings it. Picola tries to prevent him but both of them fall down and the cat is dashed against the window. Just then Geraldine enters and beholds Picola with contempt and calls her ‘nasty black bitch’. She is accused of killing the cat.

This chapter emphasises the division of the black community on the line of colour and class. Geraldine is introduced to point out the ruling class’ aspirations of the black, their adoption and approximation of their behavioural patterns, looks, living-style and speech pattern of the ruling class and their disassociation from the black community. She underlines how urban surroundings strip them off their natural feelings. Geraldine and Junior’s attitude to Picola further intensifies her humiliation and isolation. While the blue eyes in the black face of the cat further intensifies Picola’s desire for blue eyes.

Chapter 6 describes Frieda’s reaction to Henry’s attempt to molest her. She breaks down in her anxiety at having been ‘ruined’. It exhibits the impact of Christian concept of women’s chastity on the psyche of the young girls and their misinformation about sexuality. Frieda tells Claudia about the rage of her father who cursed Henry, threw her tricycle at him, knocked him down and wanted to shoot him for touching his daughter. She also tells her of the helpless anger of her mother at Henry’s singing of god and her friend’s suggestion of taking Frieda to a doctor. The young girls think that the only way out to prevent ruin and getting fat is to drink like the prostitutes. Therefore, they search for Picola to get whiskey.

They don’t find Picola at home, instead they are told by the two women that they could find her at the Fishers where Picola’s mother works.

This chapter has another important incident of Picola’s non-recognition and her beating at the hands of her Pauline at the Fishers. When Picola accidentally smashes a fresh-baked berry cobbler on to the kitchen floor and splatters the white child’s new pink dress, Pauline knocks Picola to the floor, beats her own daughter, disowns her but she consoles the white child as if she were her own. Like Geraldine, Pauline too treats Picola as a pariah. When the white girl asks her about Picola and her friends, Pauline says, “none, baby”. This incident highlights how internalisation of white values denaturalises motherhood and compels a black to lead an inauthentic life. It also shows the total absence of mother-child symbiosis in Pauline-Picola relationship.

Chapter 7 is an explanation to the isolation of Pauline. Nineth of eleven children Pauline came from Alabama. When she was two years old a rusty nail injured her foot leaving it slightly deformed making her walk with a

limp-like flap. She suffered from total indifference at home was not given a nickname like others and told no story about funny things she did as a child etc. She held her foot responsible for this indifference and unworthiness. So she indulged in private pleasures of neatly lining up things. But her creativity lacked paints and crayons. She missed the green of Alabama when her family moved to Kentucky for better economic opportunities. Entering into teens she fancied a man, a shapeless presence that would love and touch her and her foot would straighten. She would become perfect. It was during one such daydreaming that she met Cholly. Cholly came whistling while she was leaning idly on the fence. She was pleased to hear his whistling and felt some tinkling in her foot. She turned around and held Cholly amidst the colours of sunset reminding her of all the colours of her childhood. Cholly loved Pauline and her deformity and she felt happy, secure and grateful.

Their marriage seemed to go well, but soon they migrated to Lorain. Cholly worked in mills. Pauline though satisfied with housekeeping felt uncomfortable with her loneliness, indifference of the whites and the mockery of the black women at her rural ways. This made her desire for clothes and money. “Money became the focus of their discussion her for clothes and his for drink” (94). She started working. She quarrelled with Cholly, but forsake her job for him when her white mistress awestruck at the sight of drunkard Cholly at her house wanted her to divorce him. Jobless and idle, given to romantic dreams she accepted the white concept of physical beauty from the movies. The perfection on the silver screen and the neatness and luxury of her mistress’s house contrasted the conditions at home. So she went to hospital for her second delivery but felt dehumanised by the doctors and finally when the baby was born it was different from what she had thought— “smart but ugly but Lord she was ugly.” (100)

Soon she assumed the responsibilities of the breadwinner and at the Fishers she enjoyed what she had wished for herself— recognition, some power, beauty and neatness and even a nickname. She developed church morality and found meaningfulness of her life only at her work while her personal life fell into chaos. She felt herself crucified even in her intimate relation to Cholly.

Chapter 8 narrates the story of Charles Breedlove alias Cholly’s past. Forsaken by his father and thrown in a junk heap when four days old by his mother, he was rescued and brought up by great Aunt Jimmy in Georgia. She could not provide him the training and education that a child needs. When at school, he wanted to know about his father his aunt told him that Samson had run to Macon before he was born. Longing for an absent father, Cholly loved a man called Blue Jack as a father image. He found in him the ideal, the God but since God was white he thought Blue must be like the devil.

When aunt Jimmy died, Cholly was again abandoned but he experienced another “rebirth” in his first sexual encounter. On the day of Aunt Jimmy’s funeral, Cholly ran off with Darlene to make love in the woods. This mythic scene of his initiation was undercut, however, by the intrusion of two white men who threw flashlight on the two lovers and at the gun point goaded Cholly to perform for them. And as he did, his hatred grew not for the white men but for Darlene. Unable to lash at them he hated the one who had created the situation, “the one who bore witness to his failure, his impotence, the one whom he had not been able to protect, to spare and to cover from the round moon glow of the flashlight.” (119).

When Cholly thought that Darlene might be pregnant, his fear and hatred for her compelled him to repeat his father’s cycle of abandonment; he ran away to Macon to look for him, but the cycle was completed when he found his father and was rejected by him. With nothing left to lose, Cholly thus became “dangerously free. Free to feel whatever he felt—fear guilt, shame, love, grief, pity. ... He was alone with his own perceptions and appetites and they alone interested him” (126).

Though humiliated and scarred in a racist society and brutally rejected by her father, Cholly was able to forge ahead and follow the beat of the music he carried within. He married Pauline and was happy to satisfy her. But the move north proved fragmenting. As an adult Cholly took refuge in alcohol to sooth his rage and frustration, which was manifested also in his sadistic love making and the violence and brutality in his domestic relationship. Slowly he lapsed into a confused state.

It was one such moment of drunkardness and confusion that he committed a disgraceful act. He saw Picola washing dishes in the kitchen. He felt uncomfortable which was followed by a sense of pleasure, guilt, impotence and a desire to give happiness to Picola. His desire for Picola was intermingled with his desperate desire to rekindle his earlier happiness with Pauline. He raped his daughter because he chose to physically give of himself because it was all that he had left to give in his state of bewildered and besotted despair.

With the rape of Picola the cycle of love-hatred that Cholly had fallen (from Darlene to Pauline to Picola) seems to be completed. Some critics find Morrison's crime tempered by the author's compassion for him. Cholly's desire to love is combined with his regret that he has nothing to relieve Picola's hopelessness. Morrison captures the curious mixture of hate and tenderness that consumes Cholly. Though Morrison does have sympathy for Cholly, she does not absolve him. She does not minimize his crime. By using words like "Stunned silence", "the tightness of her vagina", the painfully "gigantic thrust", her "fingers clinching", her "shocked body" and finally her unconsciousness belie the comment of those who say that Morrison concentration on portraying the reasons of Cholly's unforgivable act make her lay little concentration on Picola's reaction. Cholly Breedlove ultimately died in the workhouse present her perspective.

Morrison presents Pauline as culpable as Cholly for Picola's suffering. Cholly's love is corrupt and tainted, but Pauline is unloving. Though she does not physically rape Picola, but she has ravaged the child's self worth and left her unprotected and vulnerable to outer forces. Picola's rape by her father and her beating by her mother strongly contrast Frieda's molestation and the reaction of her parents.

Chapter 9 completes Picola's self-alienation. In it the narrator introduces the last character of the novel Soaphead Church. Raped by her father and beaten by her mother lonely Picola longing to be loved seeks blue eyes and turns to Soaphead, a "Spiritualist and Psychic Reader" (137). Soaphead is a misanthrope and his power is fraudulent. In fact, he is incapable of any healthy love. Instead he loves worn things and girls. Such is the impact of the theories of discipline; education and good life experimented on him by his father that he equates his love making to his wife, Velma with the Holy Grail. Naturally his marriage lasted only for a few months.

Originally named Elihue Micah Whitcombs Soaphead is a West Indian of mixed blood, "wholly convinced that if black people were more like white they would be better of." Soaphead recognises the narrowness of his acculturation and unlike Pauline and Cholly, who develop destructive self-hatred, Soaphead intellectualises it. He finds comfort in an illusion in which he forms reality through language, assuming a god-like stance. His letter to god written as confession is more of a challenge to god: "I did what you didn't, couldn't and wouldn't do... I played you... I am not afraid of you..." (143).

When Picola comes to Soaphead he is quick to realize her yearning for blue eyes and promises to give her the same though "for the first time (Soaphead) honestly wish (es) he (can) work miracles" (137). He, in fact, uses her in his own schemes of hatred against God and man. He tells Picola to feed the food he gives her to his landlady's dog and if dog behaves strangely, her wish will be granted the following day. The dog does behave strangely because of the poison in the food. Thus Picola, used as a scapegoat is deceived into believing that she has blue eyes. Like Philomela, who raped and muted turned into a nightingale, Picola is seen as a bird: "she flailed her arms like a bird in an eternal grotesquely futile effort to fly. Beating the air, a winged but grounded bird..." (158). She is seen as plucking "her way between the tire runs and the sunflowers, between Coke bottles and milk weed, among all the waste and beauty of the world – which is what she herself was." 159

In the final section of *Summer Claudia* describes how they planned to raise money for their bicycle by selling the seeds of marigold door-to-door. During their visits to these houses Claudia and Frieda overheard the story of Picola's pregnancy: "two ugly people doubling up like that to make more ugly. Be better off in the ground" (148). The sisters felt embarrassed, hurt and sorry for Picola. In their sorrow they gave up their plan for the bicycle and buried the money and sowed the seeds singing the magic words for marigolds to come up as a sign of life of Picola's baby.

The closing chapter of the novel is the end of the primer as a friend comes to play with Jane. Picola is admiring herself in the mirror. The conversation between totally forsaken Picola and her alter ego forms a duet, which

reflects Picola's total submission to illusion. She takes indifference of the people to her as their jealousy for her blue eyes. It also expresses her need for companionship, her bitterness for her mother and her inability to share her memory of the horrible moment of rape even with the person who feels for her. This conversation also reveals the nightmares that Picola has had since her first rape. Morrison gives a very subtle reference to the second rape when the alter ego gets out the information that it was when she was reading of the couch and that it was horrible too. But Picola would not talk about it because her obsession for blue eyes has turned into obsession for the bluest eye to get companionship and love. She is totally oblivious of her condition as a pariah. Adult Claudia recollecting the entire section of her childhood concludes that the community, too, must share the blame for Picola's diminishment. She has through out been made a scapegoat by a neighbourhood of people who themselves live their own unnatural life under the gaze of the dominant culture. Contrasting themselves with Picola, they embolden their own worth; deny their own incongruity and inauthenticity. Picola's madness is, therefore, not Picola's illusion. It is perpetuation of community's own illusion.

## Study of Characters

### Picola

The *Bluest Eye* is a moving examination of Picola's life—her unloving childhood, her repudiation by nearly everyone she encounters and finally the complete denigration of her self. It is a search for the culprits of scapegoating. During one of her interviews Morrison had said, "I was really writing a book I wanted to read. . . . I hadn't seen a book in which black girls were center stage. . . . And I had a major question in mind at that time, which was, how does a child learn self-loathing, for racial purposes? And what might be the consequences." Thus in *The Bluest Eye* Morrison casts a critical glance at the process and symbols of imprinting of self during childhood and at what happens to the self when that process is askew and the symbols are defective. Morrison does this through the character of Picola.

Though the novel begins with the recollections of the narrator Claudia about her childhood, it is Picola's story. The bluest eye in the title refers to her tragedy. Unloved she wishes for beauty symbolized by the blue eyes in order to be loved, but she remains unloved even when she believes she has got blue eyes. Still rejected and repudiated, therefore, she feels the need for a bluer eye and develops an understanding that she is lonely because "my eyes aren't blue enough? Because I don't have the bluest eyes?" (158).

Picola is a victim of racism that created a unique class of black as poor. Picola lives in a totally marginalized economic condition. Her father Cholly Breedlove as a rural immigrant mill worker hardly earns much and whatever he earns he drains it down in drinks. Being black, Picola represents the lowest level of social and economic hierarchy. She lives in stark poverty. Though the family of Claudia is also poor, the abandoned storefront in which the Breedloves live is worse than Claudia's "old, cold and green (house) at night a kerosene lamp lights one large room. The others are braced in darkness, peopled by roaches and mice." It is worse because situated on the outer most fringes of the town it is isolated from the entire community. Its inmates hardly mix up with other blacks. It is worse also because its atmosphere is violence ridden. They are weaklings displacing their frustration on each other.

Her character represents the damaging impact of racism on the black psyche. The racist attitude of white as ideal of beauty gave birth to another evil of colourism resulting in both interracial and intraracial prejudices. Picola is a girl born black, poor and by majority standards ugly. She is unloved, rejected and brutalized in every sphere of society—home, neighbourhood, school and playground. While the culturally blind white storekeeper would not look at her, feels disgusted having to touch her, the black people in the neighbourhood treat her as a scapegoat to cleanse their blackness on. Nobody talks to her or looks at her even at school. Teachers reject her, class fellows would not like to participate in assignment with her and black boys and lighter black girls would leave no chance to heap insults on her. She is treated as a pariah in the society. Picola, therefore, suffers from rejection, hatred and loneliness.



Being in minority in both caste and class, Picola represents the devastating results of racism on the black psyche. She represents that complex process of deculturation in which the oppressed internalises the values of the oppressor and sees oneself in their 'mirror'. Picola had been educated into acceptance of white superiority by the textbooks, billboards, magazine, movies, Shirley Temple cups, Mary Jane candies, glammers actresses and actors, society, neighbourhood, teacher, classmates and her parents.

The lesson in her black inferiority began with her mother, the first companion and educator, who saw that her daughter was ugly, and who fed her but didn't love her. Pauline who has internalised the western standards of beauty and romantic love would talk lovingly to her stillborn Picola but when she is born she has no love for her and her frustration reflects itself when she says, "Lord she was ugly" (100). By working 12 to 16 hours a day she not only ignores the needs of her child but she also beats in them a fear of sinfulness of their father and slovenliness.

As a mother Pauline is a damaging role model for Picola. As an unloving mother she fails to instil self worth and self-respect in Picola while her indifference creates in her a sense of insecurity. Above all Pauline's weaker strategy of survival of escapism through a false identity teaches Picola lessons in living through illusions and acceptance of white value of beauty as the standard. Thus the tragedy of Picola is intensified by her unloving mother. The Breedlove couple breeds not love but hatred and violence.

Picola not only has an unloving mother; she also has a dangerously free father. Cholly Breedlove, unfathered, unsocialized and castrated early in his youth by an encounter with two white men, is a social derelict. Accepting god as a white man, he decides to follow the black- the devil. Though Pauline's emotional dependence on him rescues him temporarily from inhumanity, her turning to the white gods on the silver screen soon breaks the peace in the family. Their married life becomes a darkling plane where clashes conflicts verbal and physical bouts take place before the eyes of two adolescent children. The violence and clashes between the parents worst hit the psyche of Picola. She is so frightened that she wishes either one would kill the other or she would just dissolve and disappear from the scene of violence. It is her wish for a loving world that she wishes for loving eyes.

Picola has an obsession for looks. She seeks her self-image from others. Morrison clearly shows her obsession for this search. *The Bluest Eye* portrays the tragic propensities of a situation in which black girlhood borrows identity model from the mandates of white cultural and from malevolent parental mirrors. Morrison dramatises Jacques Lacan's theory of mirror through Picola. She presents Picola spending long hours looking in the mirror and seeking her image in the eyes of the others. The eyes of everyone reflect an image i.e. a confirmation of the unapproving gaze of her mother.

It is this obsession to seek self-image in others' eyes and reflection of rejection and hatred in them that Picola is hungry for love. Accepting the white standard of beauty of blond hair, white skin and blue eyes Picola wishes only for blue eyes because she thinks the world would change if her eyes were blue. "If she looked different, beautiful, may be Cholly would be different, and Mrs. Breedlove too. May be they'd say, "Why, look at pretty eyed Picola. We must not do bad things in front of these pretty eyes." "So strong is her faith in the power of the blue eyes that she wishes and prays for them. Brutalised by black boys who corner her, her mother who beats her mercilessly even when injured and her father who rapes her repeatedly her faith in the power of blue eyes intensifies.

The survival strength of Picola lies in her firm belief in God, prayers and magical transformation. It is this conviction in miracle that the desire for, as in classic tale turning of an ugly duckling into a swan is born. It is this belief that leads her to the house of Soaphead Church who is known allegedly for his magical powers. This misanthrope enacts the final chapter of Picola's brutalisation when he poisons a dog to death to push Picola into the abyss of insanity by making her believe that she has got blue eyes. The tragedy of Picola is complete. The irony of her life is that if she resorts to fantasy she is considered crazy and isolated and if she tries to live, there is no place for her.

In short, in Morrison's own words *The Bluest Eye* is the story of a "little black girl who wanted to rise up out of the pit of her blackness and see the world with blue eyes. It is a story to substantiate the statement of Shelby Steele, "to the black was to be victim; therefore not to be a victim was not to be black". It is the story of vicious genocidal effect of racism on the blacks especially the black woman. Picola as a child also represents the dangerous impact of a married life shredded with violence. Her madness is a telling statement about the socio-economic and political oppression of the little black girls as they get alienated from black and white American.

### **Pauline's Character**

The Bluest Eye is about alienation and dissonance. It is about the negative results of one social construct i.e. of idealized beauty that makes some superior and others inferior. It is about the loss of self-esteem and self-identity following estrangement from rural south culture, which incapacitates a person to love, form meaningful identity and forge fulfilling interpersonal relationship. It is about how parents in their defeated life go through a process by which their self-hatred becomes scapegoating. Pauline Breedlove nee Pauline Williams is the most significant character in this novel whose life encompasses the whole of Northern community's alienation and dissonance.

Pauline born on the hills of Alabama in the South of America as the ninth of the eleven children of Adam and Fowler Williams, is a victim of a racist society. The demon of racism not only marginalized Pauline, it has also forced her to live a life of extreme poverty and deprivation. She is fifth grade drop out. Her Childhood lacks the usual playfulness. With her mother at work in a white man's house, her childhood was spent in keeping her house. After her marriage, uneducated and poor, she naturally became a domestic servant.

As a domestic worker in a white man's house, she represents that section of the unorganised wageworker that is placed at the lowest rung of society. She represents the black woman who suffered dehumanised at the hands of the white, both man and woman. The black women have been treated as the mules of the world for centuries. The doctors in the hospital also treat her as a mule: "He knowed, I reckon, that may be I weren't no horse foaling. But them others. They didn't know".

Similarly the reaction of the first white lady she worked for denies humanity to Pauline. Pauline's entreaties to this lady to give her the money she had earned fall on deaf ears. Her loss of job is typical of the fate of a black woman. She is dominated by white woman and suffers for the white woman's fears for the black man's sexuality. Pauline's desire to emulate the blond blue-eyed actresses on the silver screen and her wish to possess a house like that of the white are not only an aping of white values, but a reaction to a society which has denied her the very dignity of existence. Pauline is a manifestation of the over powering capitalistic system. Thus Pauline is a clear victim of a society in which race and class factors combine uniquely to block the path of happiness for the poor black.

Pauline is marginalized in the racist society. But she is also alienated from her community. She lacks emotional ties. It may be argued that this is the direct result of her physical and emotional displacement in migration from south to north. But Morrison makes very clear at the onset of the chapter she ascribes to Pauline that the latter's sense of estrangement is life long. As a child she never felt at home anywhere. Pauline was more or less self-absorbed since her childhood. Even in Kentucky she had few friends. In Lorain she mixes up with black women. Her house like her family is totally alienated and marginalized.

Morrison endows Pauline with the responsibility for her inability to forge integrity with her community. We don't find community women gossip with her as they do with Mrs. MacTeer. Her alienation is unlike that of the prostitutes who share their joy and sorrows with each other. Her alienation is unlike that of Geraldine, which stems from her better economic status and lighter skin. Pauline's alienation is the result of copying mechanisms of inferiority complex first by her deformed foot, and then because of her internalisation of the dangerous concepts of beauty and happiness.

Pauline's dented self-image can be traced back to her childhood. As a two-year-old child the prick of a rusty nail left her foot slightly deformed and that was enough to make the child Pauline learn to be separate and

unworthy. She associated her lack of a nickname as neglect and indifference of her parents. Her lowered self-esteem suffered the worse blow when she migrated to the milltown of Lorain where the white and black women in the neighbourhood sneered at her limp, kinky hair and her rural way of dressing and talking. Above all she found herself under the 'Gaze/look' of Jean Harlow etc. representing the white standard of beauty. When she loses her front tooth, she is forced to rank herself at the bottom of the scale she has accepted.

Pauline is seduced by the movies. Pregnant and lonely, she finds comfort in the theatre, where she is deeply influenced by "the most destructive ideas in the history of human thought"—romantic love and beauty. Pauline had a romantic imagination since her youth but in the movies, beauty becomes confused with virtue and thus she gathers self-contempt from there. Comparing the luxury on the screen with the sordidness of her house, she orchestrates a substitute life first vicariously at the theatres and then as an ideal servant at the Fishers where she finds beauty, order and praise.

Pauline's strategies for emotional and psychological survival are weak coping mechanisms of substitution, escape and compensation. As a child she compensates her low self-worth with lining up and ordering of objects. With budding sexuality she develops a romantic imagination to escape into for experiencing wholeness. With a romanticized image of herself she fancies love as "a Presence" before whose glance her foot straightened and her eyes dropped. "She had only to lay her head on his chest and he would lead her away to the sea, to the city, to the woods". Pauline is almost deceived by her idealization of Cholly and can't see that her dependence on him to fulfil her, make her perfect and whole would give her only emotional scars. Thus Pauline not only suffers from low self-esteem she also seeks fulfilment from outside.

Pauline has a fascination for colours. At Alabama, which provided her a fertile ground for the rainbow of colours, she enjoyed green the most. It stirred her creative imagination as she learned to drown her low self-esteem in her passion for order. Morrison comments that Pauline had the eye of an artist but she lacks the paints and crayons. When in Kentucky she recollected the "streak green". In her youth and freedom of imagination her spring of creativity sustained. She describes her first meeting with Cholly as an array of colours. But in Lorain she found no green to look at but that of her kitchen chairs and saw no flying bugs but the truckloads of furniture. Here colours returned to her for some time as a rainbow during her orgasm and it is this thrill that binds Pauline with her drunkard husband. But soon she found difficult in recalling them: "only thing I miss some time is that rainbow. But like I say, I don't recollect it very much any more." (104)

It is the search for these colours that she first turns to the colourful life on the silver screen and then to the 'white pillow slips', 'silvery taps', 'yellow hair', pink nightie' and 'sheets with top hems picked out with blue coneflowers' etc of the Fisher's house. And Pauline turns indifferent to the colourlessness of her house.

Pauline's married life is shredded with violence. Pauline fell in love with Cholly because he tended her deformed foot and hence made her feel whole while Cholly married her because her dependence on him restored (for some time) the self-esteem he had been deprived of by two armed white men who overseered his first sexual act. In this way we see that they needed each other to fulfil themselves. However, after their migration to the north they ventured into the experience of the industrial world. Cholly's diversion and Pauline's loneliness snapped their relationship. Cholly developed the habit of drinking down the sense of his failure in the new economic world while Pauline started living a false life by aping the white to retain her self-worth. "Money became the focus of all their discussions, hers for clothes and his for drink. Reduced to insignificance they needed each other to displace their frustration. Their married live was marked with violence—verbal as well as physical.

Pauline's indifference to her family makes her a miserable failure as a mother. In fact Morrison portrays Pauline as an example of one who struggle to be a ship but fails to be a harbour. She thinks that she is mothering by working as a servant for 12 to 16 hours a day, by beating in her children any sign of slovenliness and instilling in them a fear of the sinfulness of their father. Though Pauline communicates to the unborn child

Picola, she hardly communicates to her after her birth. She feeds her but leaves her emotionally hungry. Her behaviour teaches Picola lessons in illusions. Picola is doomed because her inability to empower her self is cemented as much by the dominant culture's value as her mother. Had Pauline resisted the onslaught on her 'self', had she retained her faith in her cultural heritage and had she taken pride in her blackness, the tragedy of Picola could have been averted. Pauline's Breedlove's love generates subterranean diabolical chaos in Picola's life by introducing her to the destructiveness of a culturally sanctioned mirror symbolized by the "eye" that is decidedly singular and the "bluest" of the world.

Thus Pauline's tragedy, her schizophrenic life is the result of the oppression of racial and capitalistic power that created the division of the privileged and the deprived. Pauline's life is the story of the wounded black psyche under white duress.

### **Cholly**

Some say that through Cholly Breedlove Morrison has dealt with the theme of black man's conflict between owning responsibility to family and freedom to leave. He is romanticised as Morrison's first mobile man. But there are others who read in this character the tragedy of muteness and inarticulateness of black man under the white oppression. The novel is not only the story of the rape of Picola by her father, Cholly, but also a penetration into his personal history. The life of Cholly is a story of abandonment, emasculation and muteness imposed on him by racist, capitalistic and patriarchal society.

Cholly Breedlove is a forsaken man. He was literally abandoned by his father before his birth and by his mother when he was just four days old. Recovered from the junk heap where her mother left him wrapped in two blankets and one newspaper Cholly Breedlove was raised by Great Aunt Jimmy. Though she was a poor substitute of the mother, she was a great support to Cholly physically, emotionally and psychologically. When the aunt died he lost the only emotional anchor he had.

The death of Aunt Jimmy was combined with the most painful and disorienting incident of Cholly's life when he was objectified on his first sexual act by two gunned white men under the flesh light. Cholly was emasculated during this humiliating and frightening experience as the perversity of the cruel and malicious white men made him feel that the male power didn't belong to him. Unable to lash at the enemy, Cholly, for his survival in the absence of any emotional support at home, displaced his frustration on Darlene, his partner in this sexual act. This incident results in adoption of a dangerous survival strategy of misdirection of anger, hatred and frustration.

Since his childhood having heard that his mother "wasn't right in the head" Cholly had a deep longing for his father. When he was in fourth grade he had the courage to ask about his father. He looked for a father figure and found it in Blue Jack, a nice old man whose strength impressed him and Cholly decided that since god was a nice old white man Blue Jack must be the devil—strong and black. It is longing for his father that takes him to Macon when he is gripped with the fear of Darlene's pregnancy after his disillusioning sexual adventure.

Cholly had a painful childhood and the conditions of his life especially in adolescence pushed him further into the abyss of loneliness, separation, frustration and impotence. He arrived at Macon to find his father but only to be discarded. This callous abandonment was so devastating for Cholly that he regressed into an infantile rage. He soiled his pant in a final loss of control. The incident eclipsed any opportunity for emotional maturity, as he lay curled for hours in the fetal position with fists in eyes. With all protection lost Cholly lost his prelapsarian innocence and became dangerously free.

These incidents make him a sympathetic character. The rejection by his father whom he sought to seek comfort from the bruises of the visual confrontation of the white men leaves him mute. Morrison doesn't show him speaking after this incident. Having learnt to internalise his oppression Cholly learnt to get his manhood back through displacement: "These women give him back his manhood, which he takes aimlessly". Clearly he realized his manhood by conquering the body of a woman. His response is thus a reminder of the response of the black men Aunt Jimmy and his friends talked about. The only difference was that the old women received their abuses as displacement of their frustration without retaliation while Cholly's wife didn't. He needed

Pauline to “Pour out on her the sum of all his inarticulate fury and aborted desires. Hating her, he could leave himself intact.”

In spite of these painful incidents Cholly is able to forge ahead. He married Pauline and is caring and compassionate to her. She needed him to make her feel complete and he by doing so could regain and retain his lost manhood. So in Kentucky, they seemed to complement each other. She had her colours and he his music. But the move north proved fragmenting to Pauline—Cholly relationship. His restored manhood as a patriarch and provider came under challenge under the white ‘Look’ and his economic insignificance. He sought refuge in alcohol. He started living an inauthentic life, in sadist lovemaking and violence and brutality of his married/ domestic life.

Cholly having had no role model of parenting knew not how to parent. He became a father, but didn’t father his children; he had no feeling for them. Drunk and confused Cholly communicated with his wife only in violence and this violence in the total absence of parental love played havoc on the psyche of his children. Sammy reacted violently hitting him and screaming to his mother to kill him while Picola responded like a cocoon.

Only once does Cholly feel tenderness for his daughter at her helplessness, hopelessness and unhappiness. He thinks of how to make her smile to “earn him his own respect.” But drunken stupor heightens the confusion of his mind where tenderness for her daughter jumbles with his passion for his youthful wife, hatred for the whites the instinct of displacing it and his own sense of impotence. In such a state of mind Cholly communicates with his daughter, as he did with Pauline—in sex and violence. He rapes Picola.

Though while narrating the physical and psychological rape of Picola Morrison penetrates into the history of her father Cholly rather sympathetically, she doesn’t absolve him. His sin remains beyond acquaintance. He lands himself in the workhouse where he dies. Through Picola, Morrison talks about the rape of the black woman committed for centuries. By narrating the rape of the daughter by her father she shows how black women suffered the burden of the oppression of the black man who themselves victimized, victimize the black women.

Cholly is a victim of the economic system. His frustrations are not only that of a man beaten by a racist system but of a man beaten by an economic system. He is clearly over powered by the capitalist system that is interested in commodification. Claudia in the novel discusses the fear of extreme poverty when she discusses the condition of the outdoors. It is this outdoors that a four-year-old Cholly confronts when his mother wrapped him in a bundle and placed it on a junk heap by the railroad. From then all he encounters is deprivation of one kind or the other. The move north to overcome poverty proves futile for him. He fails to be the provider and the patriarch and lapses into an inauthentic life of drunkardness.

Cholly can also be seen as a victim of the white system of patriarchy. Pauline needs money to create her self-image according to the white ‘Look’ while the capitalist system sinks Cholly into a non-entity. To be a patriarch he needs money, which he can’t earn because he is black and therefore, poor. Morrison shows Cholly as emasculated by the racist capitalist system as well as emasculated by Pauline. The narrator in *The Bluest Eye* describes the quarrel between Cholly and Pauline reversing their roles. Pauline fights like a man while Cholly fights like a coward. He is as muted by the system as is Pauline. If Cholly needs Pauline to displace his frustration and sense his manhood Pauline equally needs Cholly to displace hers and fancy the colours of her childhood. Morrison clearly writes, “And it was Pauline, or rather marrying her, that did for him what the flesh lights didn’t do. . . . he wandered at the arrogance of the woman.

In short Charles Breedlove is a clear testimony to the complex psychological conditions generated in the blacks under white duress.

### **Claudia**

*The Bluest Eye* is much more than a mere indictment of white society for its oppression of blacks or the indictment of blacks for their treatment of woman. It is about the value of self-creation, willingness to take

responsibility for one's own life. This central focus of the novel is presented in the form of the narrator of the novel, Claudia MacTeer.

Though the novel is the story about a poor black girl falling a prey to the system based on racism and sexism, it is Claudia who forms the hub. The novel begins and ends with her voice. It begins with Claudia announcing her efforts to know the reason of Picola's tragedy by trying to understand how it happened and in doing so she retrospect's and introspects. This process illuminates her and teaches her to own responsibility for Picola's tragedy as well as her own life. Her narration and rumination helps her in self-creation. "Even if it fails to grow, everyone must plan his/her own garden of Marry Gold. If someone else does, the seeds are bound to shrivel and die like Picola."

Since to Morrison novels are efforts at thinking clearly and finding answers to certain complex questions of life, Claudia carries out this exercise. Claudia's dismemberment of the white doll is the cardinal aspect of her character and it pertains to the cardinal question "what it was that all the world said (it)was lovable" and "to see what it was made, to discover the dearness, to find the beauty, the desirability that escaped me, but apparently only me ." The novel is an effort to know who are responsible for Picola's tragedy. That is why a critic finds in Claudia "the portrait of a black woman artist as a young girl breaking through sanctioned ignorance and arriving through internal struggle at an emergent consciousness."

Claudia is proffered as a foil to Picola. She is strong and sturdy, independent and confident Though there is only a marginal difference in the economic conditions of these families ,they are poles apart as far as the domestic atmosphere is concerned .Claudia's family has strong kinship ties. Mr.MacTeer's struggle out side the house to provide for and protect the family matches the labour of Mrs. MacTeer at home. Both of them in spite of feeling oppressed, in spite of cherishing white middle class aspirations retain black communal identity. Their anger at the world is certainly better than the feeling of shame and self-hatred that Picola and her family breed. Instead of lashing at each other for displacement of their frustration the MacTeers express their anger. True to their name they show sympathy while the Breedloved contrary to theirs breed not love but violence and self-hatred. Unlike Picola who cuddles the image of blue eyes and blond-haired girls, Claudia destroys them and the values they represent. Thus she shows a high level of consciousness and a positive self-image that her parents have instilled in her.

Through this character Morrison shows what the blacks needed most for survival. Claudia is able to survive because she has the inner strength to with stand the poverty and discrimination of a racist society. She has inherited and learnt it from her parents. Claudia is a precauious child hungry to know and experience more. She has the consciousness to understand and interpret the tragic end of Picola. Her comments clearly place the blame on society. She shows maturity of mind and her survival strategies develop according to the need. She hates white colour and loves her blackness. She says that she felt comfortable in their skin. She is unable to understand the outrageous reaction of her parents when she dismembered "a blue-eyed, yellow-haired, pink-skinned dole was what every girl child treasured." (20). She is violent to the girls with white skin. Though remembering this "disinterested violence" she is filled with shame she learns to change with aging knowing that, "the change was adjustment without improvement." (22). Thus she retains her self-pride and racial pride though she learns to take delight in the worldly ways. Her change is "the conversion from pristine sadism to fabricated hatred, to fraudulent love (22).

### **Structure**

What is said is almost as important as how it is said. The 'manner' is discussed as the structure, style and narrative technique. The study of structure involves the plot or patterning of the subject matter of the novel.

Toni Morrison is a modern writer. Therefore for her events, scene and setting are important also because they perform a symbolic function of representing the inner reality of human psyche. She belongs to that class of black writers for whom structural and stylistic concerns become equally important with the thematic. So we find that symbolic and ironic structure are adopted by her as the chief poetic device of the structure.

*The Bluest Eye* is the first novel of Toni Morrison in which we find her feeling the urgency to dabble and experiment with the structure and narrative style in order to accentuate its thematic impact. The novel is a cerebral investigation into making of a demented personality because of the domination of Eurocentric standard of beauty. Those who lack it assume “a zero image” of themselves which according to Caroline Gerald (*The Black Writer*) “is a an unfulfilled, insignificant, negative sense of self.” Morrison examines in this novel how a child of minority culture learns self-hatred. The child’s education in deculturation and the process of making of zero images begins very early. Morrison castigates the entire educational process of a child that teaches through primers, curriculum, billboards, magazine covers, advertisements, movies, Shirley temple cups and Mary Jane candies damaging lessons in self-loathing. Such pervasive and infectious is the impact of the Eurocentric concept of beauty of blue eyes, blond hair and white skin that the blacks, in minority, unable to blue their eyes and blond their hair try to bleach both their black skin as well as their black soul in order to enter into the mainstream by adopting the white standard of morality, hygiene and happiness. Efforts to whiten themselves invariably makes them estranged from their black culture.

Morrison works out this theme through Picola, an eleven-year girl born black, and poor and by majority standards ugly. Placed in 1941, *The Bluest Eye* narrates through multiple narrative perspectives—the child Claudia, the adult Claudia, Omniscient narrator, first person narrative and stream of consciousness—conscious and unconscious acts of cruelty of community members leading to the insanity of the focal character Picola. The story entails Picola taken as an innocent and convenient victim of her community’s frustration, anger, ignorance and shame. Entering womanhood she is raped by her father, gives birth to a stillborn child and then escapes her sense of ugliness in the illusion of the beauty of blue eyes.

Morrison evolves a structure that contributes to the theme. She ascribes to the prefaces symbolic meanings that help us to understand why and how the tragedy of Picola took place. The novel has two prefaces and four sections named after seasons which are divided into unnumbered chapters some of which take the heading from the last of the three versions of the primer that constitute the first preface. Morrison inverts the meanings through language play underlining the irony that forms an essential elements of the novel hence this structure becomes symbolic as well as ironic.

The novel begins with a primer repeated twice. This paragraph from a child’s reader is used as an epigraph or more precisely as thematic heading. It is repeated twice, each time becoming more chaotic as punctuation, capitalization, and spacing disappear until the final version appears totally incomprehensible. These three versions, standing in contrast to each other are representative of three types of families and individuals introduced in the novel. The first standardized version stands for the ideal white families like the Fishers, who set the norm of the happy family in the society. The second version represents the families like that of Geraldine who is not the standard but look closer to it. The third chaotic version represents the Breedlove and each member of this family. Hence, this preface is used as a epigraph or more precisely as the thematic heading.

By introducing the second preface Morrison weaves a plot that is non-linear. She begins the novel with the close—Picola impregnated by her father gives birth to a dead child. In fact, the plot is devised in such a manner that Claudia while recollecting her childhood episodes tries to understand the tragedy of Picola and with this the reader is also led of towards an illumination. The readers have an insight into the why, which is Morrison’s aim all along.

Morrison uses the third version of the primer in the first preface as the heading of the some of her chapter where she wants to underline the chaos. The scheme of the chapters also correspondence to the contents of the primer. The primer talks of the pretty green and white house and the house of the MacTeer in chapter I and of the Breedlove in chapter II & chapter III taking the title from the 3<sup>rd</sup> version ending half way in the word happy. (THEYAREH) tells us of the drafty damp and dark house of Claudia and the violence that pervades the house of the Breedlove that has compelled the child Sammy runaway many times and makes Picola wish for her physical disappearance.

In the Primer we have “See Jane” after ‘they are happy’. Chapter 4 introduces Maureen Peal who declares to the black girl that she is cute and they are ugly and she finds the world subscribing to her conviction. The primer then introduces the cat and in chapter 5 we meet Geraldine, her son and her cat. Geraldine pinpointing the estrangement of brown girls from black culture and high lights the emotional vacuum that pervades in this so-called happy bourgeois black family. Picola comes to play with the kitten/cat is frightened by Junior and repulsed by Geraldine, but she does notice the possibility of blue eyes in the black face.

Mother in the primer is Pauline in chapter six. Though this chapter narrates molestation of a young girl by a black man, this incident is merely the background for the final incident of the beating and non-recognition of Picola by her mother at the Fishers. She would rather coo to the white child than sooth her own injured daughter. The chapter 7 deriving the title from the third version of preface narrates the estrangement of Pauline from rural south as well as black culture and her family. It ends with Pauline’s words: “Only thing I miss sometimes is that rainbow. But like I say, I don’t recollect it much anymore.” 104.

The primer’s father, big strong and smiling becomes Cholly in the story. This Chapter tells us the agonies of Cholly’s life. Salvaged by his grandaunt from a junk heap where his mother had abandoned him, Cholly’s self image is damaged first by two leering white voyeurs during his first sexual initiation with Darlene followed by his disowning by his gambler father. The process of his isolation completes in the mill town where he substitutes Darlene with his wife, Pauline to displace his anger and frustration and drinks down his life. The chapter ends with Picola’s rape by her emotionally and muddled estranged father.

Having introduced the background of Cholly, called a dog for his misdeeds by the community chapter 9 introduces us to Soaphead Church, a reader and advisor allegedly having super natural power. This man dislikes men and women and finds pleasure in abusing girls. When Picola requests him for a pair of blue eyes, he finds an opportunity to get rid of Bob, the dog of the landlady he detests. He gives food and asks Picola to feed the dog saying that if he behaves strangely, her wish for blue eyes will be granted the following way. Bob, identical to the dog in the primer dies and Picola in her urgency to escape her sense of ugliness lapses into insanity, thinking she has beautiful blue eyes.

After the dog the primer talks of friend. In chapter 10 Frieda and Claudia, the only friends of Picola learn of her pregnancy and notice the overwhelming hatred of community for the unborn child. In their innocent effort to save the child they perform the ritual of sowing of marigold seeds and chanting magic words. But in Picola there is only loneliness. She finds her friend in her alter ego who comes to play with her in chapter 11 and finally Claudia realises that Picola was a scapegoat and victim in a world eager to drive strength from her sad example.

Morrison has not only given two prefaces as props and used the third version of the primer in the first preface as headings using identical items to underline chaos through inversion, she has also divided the text of the novel into sections naming them after seasons. Morrison doesn’t use the usual seasonal cycle. This has symbolic overtones. This schema is prepared by Claudia’s introductory statement in the second preface in which she relates the failure of marigolds to sprout out to the death of Picola’s baby.

At the centre of this nature construct are the physical and psychological events that lead to the rape of Picola. These events form the plot of the novel. The first section is entitled autumn and it comprises Picola’s entry into womanhood. (Ripeness and maturity) amidst desolation (lovelessness). It is indeed the autumn season for Picola but the only abundance she has is of rejection, hatred and humiliation.

The use of names of seasons to indicate the major parts of the novel help Morrison tell her story. By beginning the novel with autumn she indicates that the world of the novel is topsy turvey. Spring usually symbolizes birth and rebirth. Autumn, on the contrary, is the time of death and decay. Summer suggests life in full bloom, ripeness for death. These seasonal divisions help the reader in understanding the fundamental decadence of life for Afro-Americans in the United States. This cycle from autumn to summer also indicates warped psyche of an adolescent African female living in a racist society. Spring season is the season of fertility but in spring



season Picola is raped by her father. Her rape in spring is preceded by a 'false spring' in the winter personified by Maureen Peal representing the coldness accorded to Picola. Hence Morrison uses these seasonal divisions of the novel as another prop to tell the story of the devastation of the self-image of the African-American.

Thus Morrison begins the novel with the idyllic 'Dick and Jane' primer setting the standard for family behaviour and beauty the image of which pervades and overwhelms all the entire American society—from school text books to print and electronic media. Morrison introduces this primer as a prefatory material:

"Morrison arranges the novel so that each of its sections provides a better gloss on key phrases from the novel's preface, a condensed version of the Dick and Jane reader. These phrases describe the (American) cultured ideal of the healthy, supportive well-to-do family. The seven central elements of Jane's world—house, family cat, mother, father, dog and friend—become in turn plot elements but only after they are inverted to fit the realities of Picola's world"

Morrison doesn't introduce the primer as prefatory material and introduce the chapter of *The Bluest Eye* that are recounted by the novel's omniscient narrative voice. Epigraphic sections are thematically tied to the chapters, which they directly precede. For example the chapter, which introduces the Breedlove family to the reader is prefaced by the primer's reference to Jane's very happy family. But the family presented in this chapter is the very antithesis of the standardized, ideal (white) American family of the primer. In this way Morrison establishes an invasive relationship between the pretext (primer) and the text (the portrayal of Afro-American life). Through this she deconstructs the myth of the happy family. She exposes the sense of estrangement hidden between the lines. Portraying the family as happy she suggests the reverse. The inability of the family to respond to Jane's call to play implies that contentment is only superficial. Beneath the healthy lies the rigidity and emotionlessness.

Thus we see that the structure of the novel is significant as it contributes to the theme of the novel. It is artfully devised by Morrison for this purpose. The structure is symbolic and ironic. The overall impact is that the structure becomes complex but its complexity matches the complexity of the issue that Morrison takes up in this novel.

### **Narrative Technique**

Morrison says she tells stories that have not been told. *The Bluest Eye* is also an untold story. Therefore, it is a story that requires several points of view. The novel has a complex narrative pattern. Its complexity is the result of various artificial props that Morrison uses to tell the story. It is also the result of varied points of view, equivocation on the question of human motivation and intent and the absence of reliable authority and any authoritative moral judgement even while exposing the sin of innocence. This dislocation of the centre is post modernistic and Morrison combines it with the traditional black artistic technique of inversion of story telling.

Morrison begins telling her story in a speakerly style reminiscent of the black oral tradition. The first sentence, "Quiet as it's kept, there were no marigold in the folk of 1941," emanates from the Afro-American-community, capturing the milieu of black women conversing with one another. Thus Morrison connects with the reader. Exploiting the child speaker's point of view and naïve but poignant logic, Morrison at once establishes a three-way collaboration between the author, speaker and the reader.

*The Bluest Eye* has a two-voiced narration: by Claudia and by an omniscient presence. Claudia, who narrates the first chapter in each section of the novel, relates matters about her own life and that of her family, as well as information concerning Picola about which she knows: her own dismemberment of white dolls; Mr. Henry's fondling of her sister; Mrs. Breedlove's abuse of her daughter in the Fisher home; and her sister's and her own attempts to save Picola's baby. On the other hand, the omniscient narrator, whose voice controls the chapters that Claudia does not narrate, conveys pertinent information about the histories of characters much older than Claudia, as well as information about Picola of which Claudia could not possibly be aware: Cholly's reaction to the white hunters who discover him and Darlene in the woods; Polly's fascination with movies; Geraldine's attempts to suppress the funkiness of passion; Cholly's motivation for raping his daughter; and Picola's

schizophrenic discussion with herself.

The complexity in the narrative style of the novel stems from the problematic shifting from one to point of view to the other. The voice of the first person narrator splits into two—the child and adult. The adult Claudia as a narrator often ascribes her adult feelings and analytical ability to Claudia the child. It looks rather unconvincing the nine year old child understands the US racist and capitalistic society so well. For example when she says, “And all the time we (knew) that Maureen Peal was not the Enemy and not worthy of such intense hatred. The Thing to fear was the Thing that made her beautiful and not us.” Morrison allows such shifts from the child Claudia to the adult Claudia when she wants us to have a more mature and objective view of the characters and situations. Again the major two narrative voices merge into a single voice. For example after the onset of Picola’s double voicedness the distinctive narrative voices apparently merge into a single voice. Claudia’s information and comprehension clearly comes from the omniscient narrator reflecting that she knows the specifics of Cholly’s incestuous act and speaks of its motivation in the same terms as the omniscient narrator: “Cholly loved her. I am sure he did. He, at any rate, was the only one who loved her enough to touch her, envelop her, give something of himself to her.”

In addition to it Morrison also uses stream of consciousness technique along with omniscient narration. While narrating the history of Pauline’s life she gives Pauline a chance to speak for herself and in this way exposes the innermost recesses of Pauline’s psyche. Thus she employs two narrative techniques within a single chapter. Like Jamesian’s technique she temporarily merges the narrators point of view with that of the character but at the same time she undercuts or problematizes this point of view by presenting its alternatives. She clearly does this in the case of Pauline.

Morrison through this texts and pretexts also provides an ironic frame for the entire novels narrative. Morrison in the novel seems to manipulate the contents to suit the purpose of her narrative strategies. She presents a text and a pretext and establishes a systematic ironic relationship between the two. Though the primer with seven basic elements of Jane’s world—house, family, cat, mother, father, dog and friend, Morrison sets to execute a dissection and deconstruction of the bourgeois myth of happy ideal family. Through this she exposes each individual element of the myth as not only deceptively inaccurate but also wholly inapplicable to Afro-American life. By exhibiting the negative feelings of the Afro-Americans as the direct result of their adoption of white myths Morrison breaks the spell of propaganda of the white world. Thus Morrison uses the primer consciously to trope certain contentions.

Morrison’s narrative scheme is much dependent on the technique of inversion. She inverts the symbolic significances of seasons after which she names the different sections of the novel. Spring, the mythic time for birth and renewed life begins not with images of optimism and growth, but with images of agony and frustration. Even the stereotype images are inverted. For example the father figure is inverted into a rapist (Cholly) and molester (Henry) while Pauline representing the inversion of the mother figure denies her child love and care that she showers upon a white child. Cholly’s rape is a culminating gesture in the novels strategy of inversion. The primer of Jane in the first preface stands in ironic contrast with the families/homes and individual elements that Morrison introduces in the novel.

Besides these two or three narrative voices embedded within the text are three levels of narrative consciousness. The first level is the personal idealized consciousness of childhood as demonstrated in Picola’s yearning for blue eyes. The second represents less, naïve consciousness of the novel’s central narrator, Claudia, who as an adult recalls the ambivalence of childhood images. The third version provides the social/historical consciousness of objective narrator who exposes the contrast between the real and the ideal expressing her anger at the dissolution of black lives.

The Three levels of time are another prop that Morrison in this novel uses to tell her story. The reader is introduced to a present that exists outside the novel proper, the present of Claudia as she remembers her childhood. The novel also offers a peep into the future within the novel through the second preface. Claudia

tells us about the death of the stillborn child of Picola but her madness remains a future for the reader at this stage of the novel. There is some confusion about the time in the beginning chapters of the novel. For example the reader remains confused about what time exist when Picola comes to stay with the MacTeer—whether she stays with them after Cholly burnt their storefront house or some other house they previously lived in.

The novel has a closed form the ending is announced in the beginning. Hence the novel is not about what happens but how that ‘what’ happens. In the second preface Claudia tells us about Picola’s tragedy and gives us the image of the earth in 1941 when there were no marigolds. This image finally establishes the ending of the novel—Picola turned insane, Cholly dead in the workhouse, Sammy left the down and Pauline skill sticking to the Fishers. *The Bluest Eye* thus gives little scope for growth and change. Claudia while introspecting finds herself responding to the reality in a different way but without improvement. It is this closed form that makes critic call *The Bluest Eye* “Toni Morrison’s *The Waste Land*”.

### **Class Consciousness**

The Bluest Eye, which is Morrison’s first novel, shows Morrison’s perception of the white reality as completely oppressive for the helpless migrated blacks in the urban ghettos in the middle years of the last century. The lower class of the black community grips the attention of the writer, who tries to see through their seeming pathology and criminality.

This novel presents the damaging impact of the American creed of upward mobility and middle class values on the poor blacks. Though institutional desegregation is shown as setting in, racial discrimination continues to wreck the socio-economic fabric of black life, as the society remains divided on colour and class lines. In this novel, Morrison has related colour with class. The “brown girls” are better off than the black girls and Maureen Peal with high yellow complexion is “as rich as the richest of the white girls”(BE 52). Picola is not only the ugliest but also the poorest. For poor blacks placed at the lowest rung of social ladder, there is hardly any meaningful black-white interaction. Whites are the elite; ruling class while the black world is almost the pathological community of Gunnar Myrdal.

The Bluest Eye by Toni Morrison is based on the thesis that racism devastates the self-image of the African female in general and of the African female child in particular. It clearly exhibits that the African’s self image is destroyed as a result of racism and the resultant propaganda of the ruling class of its own standards especially of beauty and happiness. Though in The Bluest Eye racism comes under major attack, Morrison streaks the entire text significantly with the impact of class factor too. Through this theme Morrison exhibit her understanding of how racism was a capitalistic set up. She portrays how the ruling class controls the major instruments of economic production and distribution and establish their cultural supremacy by promoting their image through controlling all forms of media and by analogy psychologically enslave the black into acceptance of their ugliness and hence their inferiority to ensure perpetuation of white dominance.

Though some critics like Doreatha Drummond Mbalia see an immature class analysis in The Bluest Eye, the novel has poignant suggestions as to show how economics played a significant role in the lives of the black. Claudia’s statement forms the crux of this thesis.

“To be put out doors by a landlord was one thing—unfortunate, but an aspect of life over which you had no control, since you could not control your income.... Being in minority in both cast and class, we moved about anyway on the hem of life, struggling to consolidate our weaknesses and hang on, or to creep singly up into the major folds of the garment.... Knowing that there was such a thing as out doors bred in us a hunger for property, for ownership.” (18)

Morrison presents the class jealousy of the black clearly when she says, “Renting blacks cast furtive glances at these owned yards and porches and made firmer commitment to by themselves “some nice little old place.”” (18)

The topography that Morrison creates of Lorain is linear, complementing to the hierarchy of a society divided into three major classes—the white rich and ruling, the bourgeois black and white and the poor black. Morrison

also shows how even the thin divisions in these three major categories of class play an important role in determining the mind set of the people and makes a major difference in their lives.

Though Morrison has introduced only a few white characters and that to indirectly, she makes clear suggestion to show that they form the upper most strata of society. They are the mill owners, shop owners and the employers. Thus they are the controllers of the economic life of the lower class. They live in a segregated community. Set in 1940's though Morrison incorporates an integrated school, people of different caste hardly mix up. The public park near the Lake Erie still follows the segregation rule: "Black people were not allowed in the park (84). Morrison clearly draws the class hierarchy by placing this section on a non-linear line i.e. the richest (the Fishers) in the northeast and the poorest (the Breedloves) down in the southeast.

Morrison draws the class distinctions in the mill town not only through the topography but also through the structure of the houses. The richest like the Fishers live in white brick houses. These houses are lovely, have gardens, furniture, ornaments and windows like 'shiny eye glasses...' (84). At the lower level are the "nice little old place" (18), the sturdy houses with porch and yards in which live the first white mistress of Pauline. One-step bellow in the economic hierarchy is the soft grey houses in tree-lined streets where Geraldine or Maureen Peel lives. Lower to them are the drafty houses in which live the families like that of Claudia. At the lowest rung are the abandoned storefronts—the "grey frame houses and black telephone poles around it" (30). In these houses live the most marginalized, the Breedloves and the three prostitutes.

The class distinctions are also manifested in the colour of the sky. While the houses of the poor are near the mills where the sky is grey and leaden the other end of the sky is clear: "The orange-patched sky of the steel mill section never reached this part of the town. The sky was always blue." (84) The difference in the colour of the sky clearly marks the major class distinctions between the rich and the poor.

Morrison also shows the women living in differently structured houses as complementing to the class divisions. The class struggle is clearly visible. The ladies in the decorated lovely white houses are in the image of the southern white women, silent and decorative. Their children are looked after by mummies while they remain totally oblivious of the drudgery of the household works. In the social section slightly lower to them are the women like the first mistress of Pauline who are ignored, noisy and grudging. They displace their frustration on the black women they employ. Lower in the hierarchy to them are the women like Geraldine who have broken selves but struggle hard to look poised. They fear their blackness and ape the living ways of the upper class. Placed next to their status are the leaning, tired women like Mrs. MacTeer's friends who are striving for physical as well as psychological survival in a society based on the paradigms of race, colour, class and gender.

Morrison also displays her class-consciousness by drawing class distinction on the colour line. The white living in the white houses occupy the highest position followed by white skinned black people like Maureen Peel. Morrison describes her elaborately: "She was rich, at least by our standards, as rich as the richest of the white girls, swaddled in comfort and care" (52). Next to them are the brown girls who spend most of their energy in looking like the women of the class upper to them and making their homes look like theirs. One step down is the black people like Mr. and Mrs. MacTeer while at the lowest stature are the ugly black.

Morrison takes extra care while describing the drapery and dressing up of her characters according to their class. The pink nightie of the Fishers' child stand as a marked contrast to the underwear in which sleeps the sick Claudia in the shivering winter. Similarly the white pillow slips edged with embroidery in the Fishers' house are different from the hard boiled starched white sheets in the house of the brown girls and the simple bed clothes in Claudia's house. Significantly Morrison doesn't talk of the dress or drapery in the house of the Breedloves. Morrison also makes shoes and socks the symbols of the class. Easily disintegrating shoes and brown stockings of Claudia and Frieda are certainly a class lower than the Kelley green knee socks and patent leather shoes of Maureen Peel. Picola has shoes but no socks.

Morrison presents these class divisions minutely, accurately and poignantly as she does when she describes the toilet facilities in these houses. The tone in which she describes the toilet facilities in the Breedloves' house

brings out the sordidness of their living conditions: “There were no bath facilities, only a toilet bowl, inaccessible to the eye, if not the ear.” (31). Similarly the zinc bathtub in Claudia’s house is much lower in class than the silvery taps in the Fishers’ house.

Thus Morrison’s class-consciousness is minute, keen and in-depth study of class distinctions exhibited in the structure of the houses, furnishings, dressing up, food items, habits and mannerisms. She makes no secret that while the richest look down upon the poor, the poor look up to the rich which with jealousy, awe and admiration. Significantly Morrison’s presentation of class factor is a typical manifestation of the class distinctions that exist in the USA. These class distinctions are presented as generating not harmful envy but as inspiring an upward mobility in the people. However, Morrison makes no secret to show the racial feelings combined with these class distinctions. She particularly underlines the interracial class distinctions and prejudices through characters like Maureen, Geraldine and Rosemary.

Hence it is not justified to say that Morrison’s class-consciousness is eclipsed under her primary concern for the racism. In fact, Morrison shows how race, colourism and class combine together to play havoc with the psyche of the poor black girls. She shows how economics/class plays a determining role in the interracial and intraracial interpersonal relationships.

### **Feminist Consciousness of Toni Morrison in the *Bluest Eye***

Black women writers who in their own struggle as women experienced the triple jeopardy best represented the rise of the voice of the black women in literature. Weaving and telling stories around and of their struggle, they brought to the front the black woman’s oppression and rape by both white and black men stretching over a period of two centuries.

The novels of Toni Morrison confirm her feminist consciousness. As a black woman writer, she brings the black women out of their ‘invisibility’, creates a world dominated by black women, shows the women’s especially black women’s triple oppression, gives voice to the black women, feminizes spirituality and uses female language. Thus Morrison’s novels are seen as revising history from the female perspective. Not only she studies history from the black woman’s point of view, but she also presents the white woman’s perspective. Her feminist consciousness enables her to see beyond the racial boundaries and develop the theme of female bonding in her novels.

Toni Morrison made her entry into the literary world with a bang. Her first novel *The Bluest Eye* tells the tragic tale of the rape of a twelve year old black girl by her racially emasculated father supporting what Barbara Omolade said, “There can be no analysis of race without an analysis of gender and there is no understanding of gender without an understanding of race.” In her second novel *Sula* Sula and Nel represent two different ways of structuring man-woman relationship showing different responses to gender roles and black man’s mobility. She experiments with masculinising woman as Eva and Sula. In her third novel *Song of Solomon* Morrison fuses the masculine and feminine attributes in both a male (Milkman) and a female character (Pilate). Milkman is Morrison’s woman-loving, humanized mobile man. In her fourth novel *Tar Baby* Morrison portrays a black patriarch enriched with human milk. Through Son and Jadine she explores the contours of man-woman relationship in the changing socio economic contexts and points out the dangers of a masculinized free woman.

Her trilogy—*Beloved*, *Jazz* and *Paradise* trace the changing man-woman relationships since slavery. She shows how even under slavery man-woman relationship though temporary were fulfilling while woman suffered sexual oppression at the hand of white men. *Jazz* through Joe, Violet and Dorcas shows the impact of migration on man woman relationship as repression, trivialization and erratic and inerotic expression of sex and denial of motherly instincts mar man-woman relationship. It also shows violence against black woman inflicted by both black and white men. The last novel of Toni Morrison juxtaposes a patriarchal community with a purely women’s world. She shows how women in spite of being protected and provided for remain unblooming personalities, powerless to resist men’s actions under patriarchy. In this novel she shows men of Ruby as

providers, protectors, nurturers and wife-loving persons co-operating with each other but as gender and racial patriarchy they oppress women who seem to threaten patriarchy. *Paradise* constructs a *paradise* constructed by women who open its doors for both men and women alike. Thus there is a marked development from *The Bluest Eye* to *Paradise*, which shows identification of patriarchy as a greater evil.

### **The Theme of the Scapegoat**

Erich Newmann in 'Depth Psychology and a New Ethic' discusses scapegoating as the result of the necessity of the self and/or the community to get rid itself of the guilt feeling inherent in any individual or group due to failure to attain the acknowledged values of that group. The guilt feeling or shadow is projected, transferred to the outside world and is experienced as an outside object. Scapegoating for an Afro-American would mean self-contempt as a result of the split of self into shadow (evil as black) and unshadowed (ideal as white and American). It also means the divided self of a country which traditionally viewed Afro-Americans as the shadowed or personification of evil.

*The Bluest Eye* has scapegoating as its major theme. As pointed out by Chikwenye Ogunyami in "Order and Disorder in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*", "Running through the novel is the theme of the scapegoat: Geraldine's cat Bob, the dog and Picola are the scapegoats to cleanse American society through their involvement in some violent rituals." Abuses heaped on the focal character of the novel, Picola, by the white & black, men and women alike can be characterized as a ritual of purification—purification of the self.

The novel presents many incidents, which show how white people use the black as scapegoat. The behaviour of the white characters in the novel underline the hatred of the white for the black and the projection of their fears and complexes on to the black. The sneering white men compel Cholly to complete his sexual act at the gunpoint. Clearly they use Cholly as the scapegoat. Their behaviour is so damaging for him that he is castrated for his life. Similarly the first white woman Pauline works for reacts wildly at the appearance of drunkard Cholly at her house. Her reaction is a confirmation that she subscribes to the myth of the black man as a rapist and hence an evil. The third and the most important example of the white reaction to the 'black evil' is seen in Yacobowski episode. Yacobowski is a storekeeper who sells Mary Jane candies to Picola. Morrison shows his cultural blindness in his aversion to even look at Picola. Let alone having to touch her to hold money from her hands. It is a clear manifestation that he holds Picola as an evil.

The black's indictment occurs not at the hands of the white men only. Even the black people in their race for acculturation get decultured and pile insults on other blacks to escape their blackness. Under the dominance of the white they internalise the white concept of black as evil.

Picola victimisation at the hands of a group of young boys is a clear case of scapegoating. Singing and dancing around Picola they call her "Black emo" and "ya daddy sleeps naked". The insults inflicted on Picola describe their ability to disregard their similarity to the victim and reflects their own skin colour, familial situation and depraved condition of their own lives. Morrison comments, "That they were black, or that their own father had similar relaxed habits was irrelevant. It was there *contempt for their own blackness* that gave the first insult its teeth." (55 Italics mine). Clearly by calling her black they project the shadow of their own blackness on to Picola.

Geraldine, a brown middle class woman shows alienation from her cultural centre. Her anxiety for the colour of the skin, her careful development of "thrift, patience, high morals and goodness", her effort to get rid of funkiness, her disgust for the poor blacks, her categorization of dirt black as ugly and nigger and her encounter with Picola exhibit the projection of the shadow onto the vulnerable target. Without Causasian feature of the whites she makes every effort to approximate the white in behaviour by sidestepping what Morrison calls funkiness. Clearly she has internalised the myths created by whites of blacks being dirty and inferior. Her suppression of her sexuality is her effort to falsify the myth of the lewd sexuality (hence evil) of the black woman. Her dysfunctionality and unnaturalness is manifested in her meeting the sexual advances of her black husband as "unsatisfying inconvenience". For her Picola represents the repulsiveness of poverty, the vileness

of blackness and the veritable eruption of funk. When she orders Picola to get out of her house, she is, in fact, pronouncing her fears. Therefore, she projects her own shadow of blackness on Picola. Thus Morrison shows that not only blacks accepted unquestioningly the American standard of beauty, hygiene and morality but they also try to escape blackness by trying to bleach their black souls.

The black neighbourhood of Lorain in the novel is peopled by such persons who as Afro-American aspire to be 'Ideal Americans' through imitation of and approximation to whites. Since they treat their blackness as shadows, they try to reach it escape it or project it on the vulnerable. *The Bluest Eye* presents efforts of the black people to eradicate 'the black evil' as the most tragic stage of deculturation that creates Picolas. It also presents evil as failure—failure to achieve the ideal values and standards that have been set up as desirable by the dominant group i.e. the white.

Not only the community but even the parents also relate to Picola in this way with violence and misery, which the Breedloves breed destroy their daughter with. Picola's victimisation is a bold symbol of their own despair and frustration. *The Bluest Eye* demonstrates how in there defeated life parents go through a process by which their self-hatred becomes scapegoating.

Pauline is an alienated woman and her alienation during her childhood stemmed from her realization that she didn't have a nickname and had a deformed foot. But in the northern city of Loraine her alienation is the outcome of her failure to achieve the white bourgeois model and physical duty. She is frustrated when Picola was born because she was "ugly". Her sense of failure and frustration as a black is objectified as Picola and she is indifferent to her. Her disowning Picola as her daughter and claiming the floor she sweeps at the Fishers as "my floor" is her projection of evil as black and white as ideal.

Cholly's rape of Picola is the deplorable and permanently damaging instance of partial scapegoating in the novel. Like Pauline Cholly is too driven by personal demons which he attempts to purge in violence against his family. Abandoned on a garbage dump by his mother Cholly searches for his father years later but this man more interested in gambling brutally discards him. Cholly lapses into an infantile stage of helplessness and abandonment. He gets out of it with a terrible sense of freedom but his traumatic abandonment, rejection by father and emasculation by two white men during his first sexual experience haunt him. Pauline's dependence on him gives him a sense of self-esteem temporarily and he is kind, compassionate and protective, but further humiliated by his economic powerlessness in Lorain he becomes derelict. Polly comes to stand for Darlene and he "poured out on her the some of all his inarticulate fury and aborted desires". So Cholly needs Pauline to objectify his failure. His treatment of Picola may also be seen as an act of scapegoating though only partially. This scapegoating is made a complicated issue by Morrison who projects Cholly experiencing a surge of tenderness combined with self-hatred and self-contempt as a person muddled with drinking.

At the end of the novel this theme is under lined by the narrator Claudia who in her adult rumination comes to understand the tragedy of Picola as an act of scapegoating:

"All our waste which we dumped on her and which she absorbed. And all our beauty, which was first and which she gave to us. All of us—all who new her. We were so beautiful when we stood astride her ugliness. Her simplicity decorated us; her guilt sanctified us, her pain made us glow with health.... We honed our ego on her, padded our characters with her frailty, and yawned in the fantasy of our strength".

So we see that Picola is used as a scapegoat. This purgative abuse of Picola is reflective of the black community's guilt about its own inability to measure up to some external ideal of beauty, happiness and behaviour. This failure which generates in them self hatred and, therefore, which must be purged. She becomes the black community's shadow of evil just as black community is the white community's evil.

Morrison through this theme questions the very validity of the ideal and the concept of the evil. She emphatically presents how internalisation of external social constructs can lead to the sacrifice of the black off spring, to parental detachment from the child and to complete adoption of a false identity under the influence of white standards. In other words the novel explores the complexities of the question of black self-hood in all the subtle

complications that a society based on caste, colour, race and class creates.

Lying hidden under the theme is the theme of estrangement from cultural roots. As pointed out by Susan Willis in, "Eruption of the Funk: Historicizing Tony Morrison", "the problem at the centre of Morrison's writing is how to maintain Afro-American cultural heritage once the relationship to the black rural south has been stretched thin over distance and generation."

Morrison juxtaposes the denigration and disintegration of Picola's self with the struggle of Claudia for self-preservation and racial pride. Her sadistic dismemberment of white dolls, torture of white girls and her antipathy to Maureen are her efforts at the preservation of self-pride. The difference in the reaction of Claudia and Picola to racial discrimination is that of anger and shame and this reaction owes greatly to their familial atmosphere.

Though Mrs. MacTeer has also imbibed the white standards of beauty as reflected in her Christmas gift to Claudia and fears of the body reflected in her reaction to prostitutes, yet she has preserved the Afro-American mechanisms of self-preservation. Her songs help her to transcend her anxieties. Her loving nurturance of menstruating Picola is symptomatic of her belief in the sanctity of sex and procreation. Similarly Mr. MacTeer discusses the quality of coal with his daughters. His hawk-like countenance inspires in them a fighting spirit. On the other hand Picola has very fickle and passing sense of anger. In her 'shame' dominates and deprives her of the possibilities of a positive self-image and a spirit for self-preservation. Therefore, she falls an easy victim to the black community for their projection of shadow.

In short, *The Bluest Eye* works out the theme of black selfhood combined with the theme of the scapegoat. It is about the sacrifice of Picola. Her tragedy is not only her inability to have racial pride but also the inability of the society and the black community to achieve a positive reading of blackness.

### **Communities of Women**

*The Bluest Eye* tells about the isolation and disintegration of Picola at the hands of the society, community and the family. Susan Willis has observed that the problem dealt with in Morrison's writing is the thinning cultural ties stretching over distance and generations. Her novels portray the changes that have come about in the rural black community since slavery. Community has been a prime concern with Morrison. It is because historically communities had been a great survival force for the black. Hence Morrison's novels are as much investigations into the individual histories as they are the studies of black communities.

Morrison in *The Bluest Eye* has introduced various communities. Being a woman writer she is concerned most about how black women form these communities, how these communities help or harm them, and how with generation and migration these communities are losing their original traditional character.

In *The Bluest Eye*, which is primarily the story of Picola made a pariah by community for not having physical beauty according to Eurocentric standards introduces several communities of women. There are Aunt Jimmy, Miss Alice, Mrs Grains, M'Dear and other friends of these old women who represent the older generation. There is Mrs. MacTeer her friends, Mrs. Della and her sister representing the younger generation in the urban setting. In this generation also come the three prostitutes, Poland Marie and China, who in spite of having accepted white values of beauty, morality and hygiene seem still retaining the caring and sharing values of the old rural black culture.

The great Aunt Jimmy of Cholly and her friends are a group of women representing the community of the early emancipation period. She brought up Cholly, the son of the daughter of her sister, all by herself. Morrison shows her a poor substitute of the organismic mother as reflected by her 'old wrinkled breasts sagging' and Cholly's wish "whether it would have been just as well to have died there." But Aunt Jimmy was a great physical and psychological support to Cholly since he was forsaken by his mother.

Great Aunt Jimmy had a big bunch of friends. They formed a healthy community based on caring and sharing. When she fell sick her friends poured in to "see about her. Some made camomile tea; others rubbed her with



liniment, her close friend read the Bible to her.”(107) When the local natural healer suggested her to have pot liquor, they prepared pot liquor from black-eyed peas, mustards, cabbage, collards, turnips, beets, green beans and juice. This variety is a testimony to their ability to nurture and create abundance even in poverty. Their kitchens were aromatic while their lives were overworked as farm and domestic workers. They were strong physically, emotionally and spiritually: “The hands that felled trees also cut umbilical cords; the hands that wrung the chickens and butchered dogs also nudged African violets into bloom; the arms that loaded the sheaves, bales and sacks also rocked the babies to sleep.” (110)

These women thus represented the human wholeness in spite of the fact that they suffered the worst oppression at the hands of the white men and women and back men: “Every body in the world was in a position to give them order. White women said, “Do this.” White children said, ‘Give me that.’ White men said, “Come here.” Black men said, “Lay down.””(109) Though they were used as sex objects, they knew it and did not show any pathological symptom or psychological scars of their sexual and racial oppression. Their family life was nourished with their love and care: “When white men beat their men, they cleaned up the blood and went home to receive abuses from the victim.” (110)

Thus these women bore the burden of the blackmen’s anger and frustration with a stoic spirit and found reclusiveness in female bonding to transcend their pain and suffering through sharing and caring.

But with the passing of time and migration these communities were weakened under the impact of white culture on the black psyche. A comprehensive networking of propaganda of white values of family, hygiene and morality started diluting the thickness of these communities. The black neighbourhood of Loraine represent this impact. The black women in this industrial town struggle to retain the old spirit of caring and sharing but the marks of oppression on their psyche are clearly visible in their thought and behavioural patterns. Mrs. MacTeer and her friend at the very onset on this novel tell us of the psychological disintegration of a good churchwoman Mrs. Della. These community women aspiring for a nuclear family on the pattern of whites are at the greatest pain over the mobility of black men. They appreciate the visit of Della’s sister to see about her but it is combined with an apprehension of some ulterior motive (to grab her house). Deserted and broken Mrs. Della evokes more fear than sympathy and care of this community of women.

The black women in the neighbourhood of Loraine visit each other, share their fears and to some extent harbour sympathy for the victim, but they show clear marks of internalisation of white values. Geraldine is an appropriate example of distancing from the rural values of sharing and caring. Through her Morrison also tells us how the woman like Geraldine suffer from denaturalisation in their effort to get rid of funkiness. The possibility of fulfilling marital relationships and nurturing motherhood get sterilized.

While Mrs. Geraldine represents total isolation from the community, Mrs. MacTeer represents the ambivalence. Though she shows marks of oppression, she struggles to retain the spirit of the old rural community. As suggested by their name she has sympathy for the victims. She keeps Picola in her house when she is turned outdoor by her father. The burden of economic hardships results in irritability but she is able to transcend the same through singing. She sings blues, which are a help to her and a lesson for her daughters. Though she shows an overt acceptance of white man’s standard of beauty as reflected in her Christmas gift to her daughter, she has instilled in her children self-confidence, racial pride and a fighting spirit.

Black woman of Loraine clearly exhibit a fear of the flesh. Mrs. Della’s severed marital life speaks of suppression of sexuality. Mrs. Dunion apprehends ‘ruin’ of Frieda when she is molested by Henry. The screams of Mrs. MacTeer are also a testimony of her fear of unmarried motherhood. Pauline’s reaction to her daughter’s rape by the father is a reflection of her unsympathetic/cruel attitude to the victim. Though Aunt Jimmy had also beaten Cholly’s mother mercilessly, it was not for carrying the child; it was for abandoning it.

In contrast to this community of women are the community of three prostitutes, Marie, Poland and China. These women clearly show the difference between inhabiting the body and inhibiting it. Though these women because of their unconventionality have been marginalized as social pariahs, Morrison places them above the

rest of the community by placing them in the upper storey. She shows their lives more fulfilling than the lives of Geraldine, Mrs. MacTeer, and Mrs. Breedlove. Though we do find in them anger and hate, they don't appear to be tired or leaning, squandered or devastated; they are self-confident, self-reliant and self-employed social pariahs who have evolved a kinship and companionship in the spirit of traditional neighbourhood. They show a capacity to love, care and nurture as indicated by Miss Marie's maternal interest in otherwise totally rejected child, Picola. She uses words of endearment for her. The epithets like 'puddin'", "Honey" show more of her tenderness than her fondness for food.

The three prostitutes are middle-aged women whose authenticity stands in marked contrast to the inauthentic life of many of the community women. In the capitalist patriarchy these women with "rain-soaked eyes" and "eyes as clean as rain" preserve not only neighbourhood structure of caring and sharing but also the family structure by releasing illicit male desire. They seek pleasure with men but are at war with them. Discovering early in life what men want from women they refuse subordination to men by rejecting domestic roles and traditional morality. By refusing to be the idealistically prostitutes in fiction these women are "whores in whores' clothing". They are different from the women of the community of Aunt Jimmy for their hatred of men. Morrison creates them as human—full of anger and hatred yet without inhibitions, providing sanctuary with their aromatic kitchen, gut level laughter and blues. Hence in the urban set up one generation ahead these women come closest to living the composite life of the older generation of women.

These women represent freedom from patriarchy. Their aesthetics and ethics are radically different from those of the dominant culture. The black middle class—centered on property and propriety. They are the only source of laughter in this otherwise dark novel. Their repartee on the use of drawers is a satire on the bourgeois decorum. Marie's laughter at once beautiful and frightening to Frieda's comment "My mama said you ruined" is a mockery of the offensive hypocrisy of respectability. This community of women is therefore, central to Morrison's scheme in the novel. These women along with other women provide clear alternatives.

In this way we see that though apparently Morrison's novels are about one focal character they penetrate the essence of that character and present the conflicts that they have with their natal communities. She shows how these communities can be a survival support and a disintegrating force. She also shows how these communities undergo a change with the change of place. Through Aunt Jimmy and her friends she shows how the rural women of Georgia had taken the limits of their existence and had transformed them by recreating them in their own image and in the image of their community. Through Pauline she shows how women as individual and community grope for self-worth when their look is tainted by the look of the other. In short The Bluest Eye has as the central scheme the effect of the change of place on the community particularly on women.

### **Man-Woman Relationship in the Bluest Eye**

The issue of black man-woman relationship is paramount in Morrison's agenda as a writer. She herself stated in her interview to Robert Stepto that there is a need to see "what does she (a black woman writer) think are the crucial questions about existence, life, men-women relationship?" The choice of this relation out of all intragroup relationships is based on the belief that since it is the most intimate relationship it is the most complex one. She is interested to see the areas of conflict in man-woman relationship. The conflict in man-woman relationship owes not only to difference in perception, previous experiences and expectation levels but also due to responses. Morrison presents this conflict accentuated by the factors like capitalism, feminism and sexism.

Morrison's first novel The Bluest Eye, which is about the rape of adolescent Picola by her emasculated father, Cholly shows how the levels of internalization of white perspectives by black man and woman amount to their failure or success to form a meaningful relationship. It is a study of the complexities generated under the impact of the Look in this most complex of all human relationships.

The novel, which begins with Claudia remembering her sickness and her mother's rough as well as assuring

touch on her body, soon shifts to a woman's talk about man-woman relationship. Mrs. Macteurs discusses Mrs. Della Jones with one of her friends. This episode serves as a quick insight into the black man-woman relationship. Della's madness foretells Picola's madness. Della Jones, 'a clean', "nice good church woman", (BE 15) who kept "a good house" (BE) was forsaken by her man for a 'heifer'. Shattered by the action of her husband, Mrs. Della roams around at odd hours scaring women like Mrs. Macteurs' friend as a living example of a black woman's lot. It is this knowledge that women like Mrs. Macteurs pass through their talks and songs to their daughters who expect to be loved by their men before they leave them. It is this fear that makes them term men like Jones' husband 'a dog' (BE 15).

A married man not performing the patriarchal role of a provider, protector and a sexual mate for his wife is 'a dog.' Cholly Breedlove is the leading male figure in the novel and is first referred to in the novel as 'the Old Dog Breedlove', (BE 17) "a snake, a ratty nigger" (BE 19) and a "criminal" (BE 119) for turning his own family outdoor. When Cholly impregnates his own daughter, he is termed as "the dirty nigger" (BE 147) by the black women of Lorain. These women, who had earlier sympathized with his family having been turned destitute, hardly sympathize with the victimized girl. The County that had helped the family earlier, the white women who arranged a temporary shelter for Picola do not come out to help the poor pregnant girl. Picola's rape by her father thus serves a dual purpose. Morrison loudly speaks of the not much spoken of the rape of a black woman/girl by a black man, but also exposes the dangers of irresponsible fatherhood, which are graver than that of an absent father.

Morrison also attacks the society that has internalized the Puritanical outlook to sex and got desensitized to the psychological needs of a sexually assaulted girl. To make the matter worse, they who seek 'good' sex through marriage stigmatize and inflict physical torture on these little girls for their sexual adventurism as well as sexual abuse leading to unmarried motherhood. Cholly's mother was beaten by a razor strap by Aunt Jimmy for abandoning the four-day-old child, forcing her to leave Cholly, motherless forever. Picola is beaten mercilessly by her mother for carrying her father's child. The child is undesired, unwanted and revolting: "Bound to be the ugliest thing walking." (BE 148)

Clearly Morrison's sympathies are with the immature innocent young mother, while she lashes at the unsympathizing community and system. Such responses of black community and society are ridiculed by Morrison in one of her interviews too in which replying to a question about dangers of baby mothers Morrison advises adults to stop being kids and understand the natural desires of human body: "Nature wants it then, when the body can handle it, not after 40, when the income can handle it."<sup>19</sup>

Morrison's feminism does not confine to the presentation of oppression of black women by black men, but also exposes the failures of the black women. If Morrison speaks of the emotional damage caused by black men with their irresponsible fatherhood, mobility and irresponsibility, she suggests absence of nurturance that most of the black women in her novels pass on to the next generation. If they have no control over their men, they could at least be nurturing to their children, the part of their flesh and blood.

The theme of nurturance is a recurrent and dominant theme with Morrison. In this novel she studies it as mother-child relationship. Morrison's concern for nurturing includes both physical and emotional need fulfillment. In the very beginning of the novel she makes it clear how a single touch of the mother's reassurance makes life livable for a child in spite of sickness and acute consciousness of poverty.

Pauline did not suffer from hunger in her childhood, nor did Cholly when his mother ran off. But they remained emotionally unsupported. Pauline was not nicknamed and her physical deformity was not compensated with words and touch of assurance. Cholly was fed by the Great Aunt Jimmy who made her sleep with him at times only to get warmth. The symbolic relation between the mother and the child was absent/ hampered. Morrison

introduces Junior to reinforce this idea that poverty is not the cause of lack of proper nurturance. A woman like Geraldine also fails to redress the emotional atrophy in her son though she has both time and money. Junior's loneliness turns him into a bully in the presence of those who are weaker than him. Morrison shows that these mothers are also partially irresponsible because neither do they assure their children of their love, nor they educate them to love themselves and others. For Pauline education means beating into her children a fear—"fear of being clumsy, fear of being like their father, fear of being not loved by God, fear of madness like Cholly's mother..." (BE 102)

Morrison clearly attacks the notion of a good woman who "was an active church woman, did not drink, smoke, or carouse, defended herself mightily against Cholly, rose above him everyway, and felt she was fulfilling a mother's role conscientiously when she pointed out their father's faults to keep them from having them, or pressing them when they showed any slovenliness, no matter how slight, when she worked twelve to sixteen hours a day to support them. And the world agreed with her." (BE 102)

A black woman's failure as a mother is her greatest failure for Morrison. Though Morrison understands Pauline's suffering like that of other black women under the triple jeopardy of sex, race and class, she has been presented neither as a sound ship, nor as a safe harbour. Morrison has presented Picola's madness as much a result of the failure in fatherhood as failure in motherhood. This is her gender relativism. She sympathizes with black men and women when they suffer, but is tough with them when they could have performed better.

Wendy Harding and Jacky Martin read the problematics of Cholly-Pauline relationship as owing to their choice of "more destructive courses available"<sup>20</sup>—emulation and escapism. They observe that Cholly finds some sense in this relationship when they are in harmony with the natural setting. Hence what changed their relationship must be something to do with the city they migrate to.

The city with its idealized fancy world and promise of better life is seen as having an atrophying impact on the black man and the woman. The early-married life of Pauline and Cholly, close to nature, was natural and fulfilling. Cholly met Pauline and was motivated by a feeling of significance he experienced then. "The neatness, the charm, the joy he awakened in her made him want to nest her. He had yet to discover what destroyed that desire." (BE 126) The physics of give and take remained balanced till they came to live in the city. The new sense of insignificance in the new socio-economic conditions in Cholly pushed him towards drinks, while Pauline was lured towards the beauties of what she saw on the silver screen. As her expectations began to soar, satisfaction started alluding. She allowed Cholly have sex with her not because of satisfaction of natural sexual instincts, but for the sense of power, beauty and rainbow she felt during the act: "Not until he has let go of all he has, and give it to me. When he does, I feel a power. I be strong, I be pretty, I be young." (BE 103) This act filled her with old colours and rainbow and she wanted to thank him. Her denaturalised sexual instincts are also suggested in the absence of initiative and total silence for and during the act, which is taken as her arrogance:

And it was Pauline, or rather marrying her, that did for him what the flash light did not do — the constantness, varietylessness, the sheer weight of sameness... The same woman ..., he wondered at the arrogance of the female. (BE 126)

Pauline indulges in the act more as a spectator. Her two pages long recapitulation of it gives no detail of her performing any stimulating role for Cholly. She allows the act ignoring his expectations only for her own satisfaction of beauty, power and colours. Thus Pauline's religiosity, her vicarious satisfaction at the Fishers, her 'arrogance' and Cholly's drunkenness cause greater dysfunctionality in Pauline-Cholly relationship:

He sure ain't give me much more. But it wasn't all bad... But it ain't like that any more. Most times he's thrashing away inside me the rest of the time, I can't even be next to his stinking drunk self. (BE 104)

Morrison shows how Church and religion fail to provide strength to black men and women. Della is a church going woman, but she is unable to derive any strength from it to survive her abandonment by her husband. Similarly, Pauline's association with Church has given her strength only to create 'fear' among her children and see herself being crucified.

Church in the novel has been presented as a disorienting force in man-woman relationship. In fact every society has some social control system to regulate sex behaviour of its members. According to the western system, religion performs a major role in it. So Church or religion, which was the traditional source of spirituality, self-sustenance, hope and self-dignity for black people, becomes a sex-repressing force. The obsession to be a 'nice woman' means repression of natural sexual instincts, which makes a woman like Geraldine sexually dysfunctional, though she has birthed a son. The conflict between Della Jones and her husband is because Della has internalized the white cultural values of religion, sex and hygiene, which are in conflict with the culture of her husband. The marriage of Geraldine and Louis continues in spite of their dysfunctional sexual life because both of them try to evade their sexuality to escape white myth of lewd sexuality of black men and women:

He must rest his weight on his elbows when they make love, ostensibly to avoid hurting her breast but actually to keep her from having to touch or feel too much of him. (BE 69)

This repression has further distorted their sexual life as the women are shown as being obsessed with their looks. Instead of participating in their sexual act, they perform the role of a spectator:

While he moves inside her, she will wonder why they didn't put the necessary but private parts of the body in some more convenient place—like the armpit, for example, or the palm of the hand. Some place one could get to easily and quickly, without undressing. She stiffens when she feels one of her paper curlers coming undone from the activity of love, imprints in her mind which one it is coming loose so she can quickly secure it once he is through. . . . When she senses some spasm about to grip him, she will make rapid movements with her hips, press her fingernails into his back, suck in her breath, and pretend she is having an orgasm. (BE 69)

Morrison calls it "getting rid of the funkiness. The dreadful funkiness of the wide range of human emotions." (BE 68)

Morrison introduces Soaphead Church originally named Elihue Micah Whitcomb to show the effects of repression on a man in a patriarchal system. The son of a religious fanatic, Elihue was chosen by his father to "work out his theories of education, discipline and the good life." (BE 133) The outcome of this experiment on the young child was misanthropy and sexual dysfunctionality. "He did not experience sustained erections and couldn't endure the thought of somebody else's." (BE 131) His Christianity invaded his bedroom: He equated love making with "communion and the Holy Grail," (BE 134) like Pauline: "We stretches our arms outwise like Jesus on the cross." (BE 103) We remember Della Jones whose violet water made her husband run away as the Holy Grail made Soaphead's Velma leave after two months of marriage "the way people leave a hotel room." (BE 140) The comparison does not end here. Della Jones turned mad pained over her abandonment by her husband and though Soaphead survived the desertion helped by his father and books, he cried for Velma even long after. His sexual repression gets serious: "How is it I could lift my eyes from the contemplation of Yours Body and fall deeply into the contemplation of theirs?" (BE 141) Not only it makes him dysfunctional to have any heterosexual relationship, but turns him to adolescent girls to satisfy the little eruptions of his sexuality by playing with their budding breasts.

What is dangerous about this seeming non-patriarch is his assumed power of self-deception, which is more dangerous than that of a patriarch. He misuses his rationality and grants wishes to the emotionally atrophied people in the name of god. Picola is abused by her father sexually, scapegoated by black people for her

ugliness, but by selling her her dream of blue eyes, Soaphead does a greater damage to her. By granting her one illusion, he not only distorts her perception, already tainted by the white beauty standards and lovelessness, but also makes her mad for the bluest eyes pushing her deeper into the quagmire of loneliness. Picola thinks that Claudia does not play with her “Because my eyes aren’t blue enough? Because I don’t have the bluest eyes?” (BE 158)

‘Blue eyes’, therefore, not only symbolize the white standards of beauty, but also represent the expectations. ‘Blue’, ‘blue enough’ and the ‘bluest’ are the levels of expectations, which keep on mounting. Satisfaction of these expectations is a subjective affair. The black men and women in The Bluest Eye have been presented as usually falling a prey to the white standards of not only beauty but also of family.

Most of the blacks of Lorain choose the white standards of family—father as provider, mother as nurturer, children, a decent house to live in and sufficient money to live on. It is a dream that begins with marriage amidst the severely constrained economic conditions in a racist society. Leaving only the three prostitutes and a few bachelors like Soaphead Church, black men and women are shown as living in nuclear family system.

Though most of these families are shown as crumbling or atrophied, all are not utter failures. Howsoever limited the resources, howsoever keen the fear of hunger and rooflessness, the Macteers are shown as fulfilling the basic familial needs.

Mrs. Macteers’ soliloquies, which are insulting to her daughters, Claudia and Frieda, are expressions of a lady burdened with running the house with limited financial resources and with little modern gadgetry support. Like Pauline, she is provoked into beating her daughters at the slightest sight of nastiness. But her beatings are balanced with motherly care and concern that she shows to them. Her songs balance her soliloquies and her nestling, her beating. There is hardly any sign of disharmony between the Macteers couple. Her labour at home matches his labour out door. Their daughters remember seeing their father’s nakedness, which hints at the sexual life of Mrs. and Mr. Macteers. Though Morrison has given very little space to the relationship of Mr. and Mrs. Macteers and whatever information comes, comes through Claudia, Morrison’s masterly poetic strokes create a picture of Mr. Macteers as a responsible father who is struggling like his wife to instil self worth and self help ethic in his daughters.

“Face” writes Gloria Anzaldua, “is the surface of body that is most notably inscribed.”<sup>21</sup> The facial description of Mr. MacTeer contrasts the facial description of the Breedloves to highlight the ‘ugliness that lies in the mind and gets expressed in their responses to their physical reality. Morrison rules out their poverty as the cause of this difference, because it was” traditional and stultifying, it was not unique.” (BE 34)

You looked at them and wondered why they were so ugly; you looked closely and could not find the source. Then you realized that it came from conviction, their conviction. It was as though some mysterious all-knowing master had given each one a cloak of ugliness to wear, and they had each accepted it without question. (Ibid)

This questioning spirit forms the essence of cultural relativism, which Morrison seems to recommend in this novel. Though through Macteers’ family she does not reject the white nuclear family pattern and seems to be asserting her hope for a meaningful existence in spite of the class and racial oppression, Morrison shows more strength in her gender relativism. It is this strength that enables her to probe into the weakness as well as the strength of her female characters. She does not accept the failure of man-woman relationship on the surface level, assigning responsibility to irresponsible males, but also exposes the black woman’s failure.

Morrison has introduced three prostitutes living in the form of sisterhood as a substitute of marriage for structuring man-woman relationship. These three women, China, Poland and Marie, seek relationship with men through sex for money. The narrator calls them whores in whores’ clothing with no bitterness over the loss of innocence or inadequacies of parental love. They drink, smoke and have sex with men hating them because they think

them “inadequate and weak.” (BE 41) So they feel they have a right to cheat them, but they dislike those women who deceive their husbands. They, on the other hand, respect “good Christian colored women, who tended their family, who did not drink or smoke or run around.” (BE 48)

Clearly these women are not much different from other black women in their perception. But they reject the nuclear family and Church. Their non-institutionalized relation with black men shows commercialization of sex, while the institutionalized relation of ‘good’ women with their black men betrays denaturalization of sex. This alternative is rejection of male authority, though they are always obsessed with their appearance, hair and clothes to look beautiful to men. This mode of man-woman relationship is also shown by Morrison as non-fulfilling as symptomatically brought out in their laughter. China’s laughter is spastic and Poland’s is soundless. Poland, who is silent unless drunk. Only Marie’s laughter is free like the flowing river. So is her expression of her old memories of her relation with men: “I was fourteen. We ran away and lived together like married for three years. . . . Oh, Lord. How that man loved me!” (BE 47)

The last word of her expression is a clear sign of her regret for a man who did not leave her, but was left by her for she realized she could sell sex. Her repressed/unfulfilled motherly instincts get expression when she replies to Picola’s question as to if she had any children: “Yeah. Yeah. We had some” Marie *fidged*. She pulled a bobby pin from her hair and began to pick her teeth that meant *she didn’t want to take any more*. (BE 48, Italics mine) These women are different not only in their perception of sex but also in their level of consciousness. Unlike others, they do not need a scapegoat to clean themselves on. Though they are hardly nurturing to Picola, they are the only ones who are humane to her.

Thus Morrison perceives that distortion in man-woman relationship comes as their attitude to sex and parenthood gets distorted and denaturalized. Her treatment of her characters reveals that she holds the individual equally responsible with the system for this distortion. She is concerned most, however, over the impact of this distortion on the young girls. The tragedy of Picola, therefore, seems as the failure of the white system as well as the failure of both black men and women.

In her non-fictional statements Morrison feels concerned about the child mother not because of her adolescent sexual experimentation but because of the non-support the community accords in child rearing. Morrison presentation of Picola’s rape shows that she accepts it as an awful thing but her treatment of Cholly implies that she hates the sin and not the sinner. However, she does not absolve Cholly of the results of his actions. She sums up Cholly’s characters in her message of the horror of the love of a morally free man: “the love of a free man is never safe.” (BE 159)

Thus we see that as a study of man-woman relationship *The Bluest Eye* investigates into the reasons that prevent this relationship from achieving fulfillment. The novel shows Morrison holding migration, religion and education as responsible for causing harm to this relationship. Clearly she holds the psychological enslavement of the blacks to the white values causing denaturalization of this most intimate relationship.

### **The Impact of the Education System on the Black**

In this novel Morrison expresses her disillusionment with the system especially the education system. Education system comprises of formal education at schools and colleges, family as the first educational place and media. Families in the social economic set up of capitalism, racism and colorism struggle to follow the upward mobility value of the Americans and frustration generated by repressions, discrimination and failure is easily transferred on to the members of the family. Morrison shows the black families of Lorain following the nuclear pattern of the whites, with a difference that here the poor working women hardly have time and spirit to educate the child. The difference in the bringing up of Picola and Claudia and Frieda owes also both to the availability of parents at home. She also shows how not only the poor, but even the richer parents like Geraldine fail to

understand the emotional needs of their children and fail at their proper education.

Not only the families are shown as failing in educating the children under the impact of white system, schools and colleges, though segregated, also impart lessons in discrimination on class and colour lines. The students follow the examples of teachers who themselves indulge in discrimination:

When teachers called on her (Maureen), they smiled encouragingly. Black boys didn't trip on her in the halls, white boys didn't stone her, white girls didn't suck their teeth when she was assigned to be their work partners: "black girls stepped aside when she wanted to use the sink in the girl's toilet, and their eyes genuflected under sliding lids." (BE 53, brackets mine)

Not only the behavioural lessons are such, the curriculum is also catering to the white system.

They go to land-grant colleges, normal schools, and learn how to do the white man's work with refinement: home economics to prepare his food; teacher education to instruct black children in obedience; music to soothe the weary master and entertain his blunted soul...The careful development of thrift, patience, high morals and good manners. In short, how to get rid of the funkiness. The dreadful funkiness of passion, the funkiness of nature, the funkiness of the wide range of human emotions. (BE 68)

The world of Media is the world of Shirley Temples, Mary Jones, Betty Garble, Hedy Lamarr, and Jean Harlow. Media especially the world of glamour has also taught them to accept the perceptions, values and standards of white culture with a feeling of self-dislike. "When they wear lipstick, they never cover the entire mouth for fear of lips to thick and they worry, worry, worry about the edges of their hair." (BE 68)

A family like that of McTears has also accepted the white standard of beauty and presents Claudia a white doll without understanding her desire:

The lowness of the stool made for my body, the security and warmth of big Mama's kitchen, the smell of the lilacs, the sound of the music, and, since it would be good to have all my senses engage, the taste of a peach, perhaps afterward. (BE 21)

This lesson in loving whiteness and disliking blackness acquires dangerous proportions when a child like Picola is born to a mother like Pauline. Pauline has been educated through media with the result that "she was never able, after her education in the movies, to look at a face and not assign it some category in the scale of absolute beauty, the scale was one she absorbed in the full from the silver screen." (BE 97) Pauline, powerless to change the world starts enjoying power vicariously at her employer's house. Picola's education into self hatred and vicarious living, her experience of violence at home and her rejection make her long for blue eyes—a symbol of white beauty accepted by black adults too. She does so to be able to make herself acceptable to both the black and the white and ultimately drags herself into madness. Her emotional needs and insufficient and distorted sexual knowledge hardly make her assert herself against her father when he rapes her.

Morrison holds the education pattern and system responsible for Picola's madness, which is also clear from the fact that she gives Picola a good I.Q.. Picola's inquisitiveness to rising sexuality is appreciable. Her questions cannot be answered either by Frieda, Claudia, Maureen and even the prostitutes. Morrison's treatment of black-white relationship in the novel may show the system oppressing the black but she shows that they are human enough to create for themselves a better circumstance. She has introduced Mactears as a criticism of the defeatism that blacks in urban ghettos usually fall in. The Mactears besides pointing out the marginal differences in class distinction serve as a comment on resourcefulness, self-dignity and assertiveness in spite of class deprivation and colour discrimination. Little acts of affection, assurance and resourcefulness, in spite of weighing consciousness of the poverty, instil a fighting spirit. Morrison's voice seems closest to that of Claudia because of the self-analytical and self-critical approach that she represents. Hence, though 'the system-blame' response dominates in the novel, Morrison seems to be demanding introspection and introduces the idea



of cultural relativism as Claudia, which serves as a silver lining in the dark cloud:

... there were no marigolds in the fall of 1941. ... it was my fault. I had planted them too far down the earth. It never occurred to either of us that the earth itself might have been unyielding. (BE 9)

Sula unlike The Bluest Eye, which begins with defeatism, starts with an ironic comment on the black-white relationship as the emergence of Bottom on the hilltop. The promise of the white master to his black slave turns out to be a nigger's joke making their life a veritable struggle for survival both against Nature and the white world. The novel ends with a reversal of situation but with persisting white resistance towards integration in interpersonal relationship. As money finds way into the pockets of blacks during the war, more and more blacks move towards the valley while the whites move across the river or up the hill where still some poor black houses exist. The gap between the black and the white remains both of race and class in spite of the desegregation and coming up of more and more agencies—hospital, asylums, police—though still dominantly white.

The coldness of the white matches the aloofness of the blacks of Bottom who interact only under emergency. The non-cooperation of the black community to police and social agencies on Sula's death is marked, and is suggestive of the power that black as a group wield over the white. Through defiance they "regarded integration with precisely the same venom that white people did." (BE 113)

#### AFRO-AMERICAN FOLK ELEMENT IN THE BLUEST EYE

In "Eruption of the Funk: Historicizing Toni Morrison" Susan Willis says that "the problem at the centre of Morrison's writing is how to maintain an Afro-American cultural heritage once the relationship to the black rural south has been stretched thin over distance and generations." With this as the central focus, the novel The Bluest Eye can be read as the story of Afro-Americans' distance from cultural roots, with their migration from the south to the north. As such the spatial and psychological distance of these people especially the poor black like Picola from the traditional survival mechanism, which had enabled the black slaves survive the most dehumanising condition during chattel slavery, results in loss of racial pride under the impact of white standards.

The Bluest Eye focuses on the forties of the last century, a period of heavy migration of the Afro-Americans to the cities in the north. As such the story of The Bluest Eye doesn't remain only the story of the disorienting effect of inter racial and intra racial prejudices on the young girls like Picola in the mid west. It is also the story of the survival of the black folk culture Trudier Harris says that Morrison in this novel suggests that the vibrancy of the folk culture persists through the fortunes and misfortunes of the characters and it serves to enable them to connect with each other.

Lorain consists of two types of people—those who for integration into the main stream of America ape the white and internalise their values and the myths about themselves created by the whites. Soaphead Church, Geraldine, Maureen Peal, Pauline etc. are such characters who have alienated them from their cultural roots and folk habits. Morrison shows the human element saturated in them. On the other hand are the members like Mrs. MacTeer, her friends and the prostitutes who participate in the tradition that foster black survival, comforts them in times of need and endure creativity. When they feel defeated they use the folk forms that sustain generations of rural blacks.

The migration of Pauline and Cholly reminds us of the Afro-American belief of the black community during and after slavery especially of the north as a freer place and better both economically and socially. The myth of the North worked on Pauline's parents as Morrison says that near the beginning of world war 1, the Williams discovered, from returning neighbours and keen, the possibility of living better in another place... (92). For them the myth of the north is a possibility for prosperity.

The black neighbours in Lorain, Ohio, with historical black folk communities continue with the patterns of survival and use the old folk habits which are still comforting in times of loss, and point to an enduring creative tradition. For example Mrs. MacTeer has a good community network. Again Aunt Jimmy had a strong woman bonding. The care and concern shown to sick Aunt Jimmy are a testimony of the lending and borrowing, caring and sharing quality that was typical of a black rural community. The cures suggested and the food offered to Aunt Jimmy during her illness besides underlining the caring quality of a black community also brings out the belief in natural cause. M'Dear, the local natural healer reminds us of conjurer or hoodoo doctors of the historical folk communities of the blacks. This local doctor M'Dear like the traditional healer lived in a "shack near the woods". Like them though she doesn't have any physical peculiarity like a hunch or a bulging eye, her looming height of over 6 feet, her four big white notes of hair gave her appearance power and authority. Similarly Blue Jack is an active tradition bearer of various kinds of tales. His ghost stories or escape stories are told in the oral form of the Afro-American folk tradition.

The novel besides introducing characters in the line of black historical folk tradition also introduces folk speech especially drawing similes and metaphors from animal and natural world. These speech patterns establish finally a characters distance from or association with the folk culture when Mrs. MacTeer exclaims that she has, "as much business with another mouth to feed as a cat" (23), she uses the typical black metaphorical language. Similarly Miss Marie calls Picola without her socks as "As barelegged as a yard dog" (44)

Besides folk tales, folk speech and folk characters Morrison also shows her characters' belief in natural cure. In the old times since the doctors and western medicines were unavailable and expensive, black people stuck to their belief in homemade remedies and natural cures. Claudia remembers her mother giving her home remedies when she fell sick. She had wrapped her in the hot flannel that made her sweat. Holding on to the traditional belief Aunt Jimmy wears her asafetida bag around her neck while older women wrapped their heads in rags and their breasts in flannel (110).

Nick naming is an old tradition in the black community. It reflected the patterns of caring and incorporation in the black community. While describing Pauline's past Morrison specially mentions Pauline's sensitivity to having not been given a nickname, which had made her feel excluded. She felt unclaimed by her family and parents. It is again this nicknaming that is a major factor why Pauline felt attached to the Fishers in Loraine. By not giving Picola any nickname she maintains that emotional distance from her daughter that she had felt herself as a child.

Rituals also form an essential part of the black folk tradition. Rituals are beliefs long adhered to and occurrences repeated several times. The rituals performed after Aunt Jimmy's death are reminiscent of the black belief in funeral as a return of order to a community disrupted by death, providing relief to the grief for the entire community.

Music and songs had been a useful stress-coping pattern for the blacks especially during slavery. These songs (Blues) helped them transcend their brief and misery creatively. Mrs. MacTeer sings about "hard times, bad times, and somebody-done-gone-and-left-me-times" (24) and "trains and Arkansas" (78). Poland can sing "blues in (her) mealbarrel/Blues upon the self" (44). These songs suspend the muteness that the socio-economic system afflicts the life of black women in the cities. Pauline suffers from this muteness. Hence Morrison shows how his Afro-American cultural heritage was a means of sustenance and survival. Those characters who can sing has been shown as having human candour in their hearts. Though Cholly and Pauline come from the communities in which black people were tied to each other in caring and sharing ways, these dissolve once they step out of these communities. This dissolution makes the bitter realities of race colour and class as fragmenting and disintegrating.

Thus in the world of Sandi Russell, Morrison “uphold (s) Afro-American culture. . . . To be won with this life, to know it and embrace it and draw strength from it: that is what Toni Morrison affirms whole heartedly.” For Morrison communities are important carriers of these culture; communities for her are not geographical entities. They are a feeling, have caring and sharing: “You take the village with you. There is no need for the community, if you have a sense of it inside.”

Through Pauline, Cholly, Picola, Geraldine, Shophead etc. Morrison shows what can happen to a person alienated from black tradition, while through Mrs. MacTeer she shows continuation of the cultural tradition and preservation of racial pride and survival spirit.

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