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Theme of Alienation in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*

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Abstract :

*Toni Morrison and Alice Walker , the significant female writers from the African American women's tradition highlight the humiliation and exploitation of the blacks in general and black women in particular. They depict race, class and gender marginalization of the blacks in their novels. Their novels discuss the themes such as racism, classism, sexism, quest for identity, female solidarity, etc. They primarily depict black women's traumatic situation in the racist and male supremacist society. The attempt of this paper is to show the similarity in the writing of these novelists. The paper studies particularly Morrison's **The Bluest Eye** and Walker's **The Color Purple** and investigates that how these novelists have used the theme of alienation in their respected novels.*

Key words : Alienation, sexism, racism, classism, conflict, detachment, etc.

Toni Morrison primarily focuses on the evils of racism in her novel *The Bluest Eye* whereas Walker's *The Color Purple* discusses gender discrimination as well as provides a solution for it. Though these novelists discuss the central ideas in their respected novels some minor themes like child abuse, domestic violence, female solidarity, alienation and husband wife relationship become unavoidable in their novels. The attempt of this paper is to study how these novelists have used the theme of alienation in their respected novels viz., *The Bluest Eye* (1970) and *The Color Purple* (1983)

A dictionary of literary term defines alienation as : “ alienation is the state of being alienated or estranged from something or somebody; it is a condition of the mind.”

Alienation is a state of human mind and people faced it whenever there is crisis in their lives. When people face the problem of existence, they experience the sense of alienation. As Abdul Salim rightly asserts: "Alienation is the basic form of rootlessness, which forms the subject of many psychological, sociological, literary and philosophical studies. Alienation is a major theme of human condition in the contemporary epoch." (67)

Toni Morrison in *The Bluest Eye* and Alice Walker in *The Color Purple* discuss the theme of alienation. Their characters are suffered, humiliated and exploited in the society due to the falsehood of cultural conflicts. The racial ideology in the white dominated society as well as the male chauvinism cripple the existence of the blacks in general and black women in particular which results into the fragmentation of the selves as well as alienation.

Toni Morrison's Pecola, the protagonist of *The Bluest Eye* is a black female child. Since her childhood she is considered as ugly. She is deprived of parental love and care. She is a neglected individual not only at home but also in the society. The falsehood of racial discrimination of ages has devalued the lives of the blacks in general and black women in particular in the novel. Pecola is humiliated and exploited on the account of race, class as well as gender. This triple jeopardy has made her an alienated individual not only at home but also in the society. At home Pecola is helpless figure and a witness to the domestic violence of her father Cholly. Cholly, a male patriarch in the family beats his wife Pauline on trifle issues. Both Pauline and Pecola, being women don't have any option but to face the physical abuse by Cholly. As the novelist writes: "Cholly picked her up and knocked her down with the back of his hand. She fell in a sitting position.... he put his foot in her chest, and she dropped the pan." (32-33) Pecola's situation is more pathetic to see the violence at home at the stage of her adolescence. The domestic violence makes her to feel about her own existence in the society. She simply wants to go away from such violence. However, she being helpless requests to God: "Please God, she whispered into the palm of her hand, 'Please make me disappear.'" (33) She thinks that her parents should not fight in such a way in front of her. The incident terribly hurts her and she feels alienated. The same alienation she feels at school. She is not accepted by the school children on the account of her ugliness. As the narrator writes: "Long hours she sat looking in the mirror, trying to discover the secret of the ugliness, the ugliness that made her ignored and or despised at school by teachers and classrooms alike. She was the only member of of her class who sat alone at a double desk." (3) The black boys too harass her. She is harassed and humiliated by Geraldine's son Junior. Geraldine is a mulatto woman who does not accept Pecola's existence

.She humiliates her when she finds Pecola in her house. The continuous humiliation makes Pecola an alien figure in the novel. She is put outdoors by her father Cholly. Similarly like Pecola Pauline is also an alienated figure in white racist society. She finds herself inferior in front of the country women so she starts imitating the ways of the whites. Both Pecola and Pauline are the victims of racism as well as sexism in African American society. They are victimized under the name of culture. Both live a solitary life. Pecola does not have any one to share her feeling so at last she communicates to God and asks for the blue eyes in order to stop the humiliation. Every night without fail she prays to God. She wants to win over the alienation she has been facing .She thinks that after getting the blue eyes everyone will accept her existence., “If she looked different ,beautiful, may be Cholly would be different, and Mrs Breedlove too .Maybe they would say ,Why look at pretty eyed Pecola. We must not do bad things in front of those pretty eyes.”(34) So here it is important to note that she yearns for the blue eyes to break the evil of alienation, which kills ones physically as well as mentally. Like Pecola her Pauline too is an alienated figure in the novel. As Kavita Arya rightly asserts: “ Pauline is alienated due to her aping of the White bourgeois social model. Even in her childhood she never experiences a sense of belonging to any place.” (33) She feels alienation in the white dominated American society. Even after her marriage too in the earlier days she enjoys Cholly’s company .But later she feels completely alienated from the society. As she narrates in the novel : “That was the lonesome time of my life. I remember looking out them front windows just waiting for Cholly to come home at three o’clock .I did not even have a cat to talk to.” (91) Cholly too in the novel ia an alienated figure. He is not accepted in the white dominated society. Even he is humiliated by two white men while making love with a country girl Darline.This humiliation makes negative impact upon his mind which later turns into the act of her daughter Pecola’s rape.Pecola’s rape by Cholly is a result of alienation that Cholly felt in the racial discrimination by the whites. He could not live a respected life due to poverty. As the narrator informs about their living : The Breed loves did not live in a storefront because they were having temporary difficulty adjusting to the cutbacks at the plant. They lived there because they were poor and black, and they stayed there because they believed they were ugly.” (28) The ugliness of the Breedloves separated them from the mainstream of the white culture. They are treated as ‘others’ in the African American society and became the victims of alienation throughout the novel. Being black females the situation of Pauline and Pecola is more vulnerable in the novel. As Dr Syed Mujahid asserts : “ Toni Morrison’s emphasis is not on the family unit, but it is on the society as a whole. Because of the fragmentation, the Breedloves had been put outdoors. The

novel, in a way, expresses the vulnerability of poor black girls becoming the pariahs in a white society.” (48)

Similarly, like Pecola and Pauline Celie the protagonist of Walker's *The Color Purple* is victimized due to the male chauvinism in the African American society. Just like Pecola she too lives a life of a slave. She is an uneducated poor and neglected female child is doubly raped by her own father, Mr. Alphonso. Morrison's Pecola and Walker's Celie both are raped by their own fathers. They are humiliated and exploited by the evil forces of racism and sexism in the society. Calvin Hernton who regards *The Color Purple* : “ as a twentieth century slave narrative ,in which white exploitation of blacks is replaced by men's exploitation of women.” ((06) Celie starts writing letters to God in the novel in order to get away from the alienation. She is forcefully married with Mr.---- who is an epitome of patriarchy . He just looks at her as an object of his wish fulfillment. Mr.---- marries her in order to make her maid in his house for taking care of his children. Celie is observed as an alien figure in the novel like Pecola and Pauline of *The Bluest Eye*, she is suffered at Mr.-----'s home and not accepted as a wife. It is only after meeting to Sofia and Shug, the blue singer Celie develops her confidence and starts her own sewing business later in the novel.

Sofia and Shug are the women portrayed by Walker who reflect her ideology of womanism. They care for other women like Celie as well as Squeak. Sofia too is a victim of male patriarchy in the novel. Like his father, Harpo too dominates his wife Sofia but she does not listen to him. They even fight with each other. This conflict in their relationship creates a sense of alienation in Sofia's life. As she says to Celie : “ Deep down I still love Harpo, but- he just makes me real tired .She yawn. Laugh. I need a vacation ,she say.” (63) The lines show that Sofia wants to get away from the daily absurdities of her life. Celie's sister Nettie who has to run away from the house to save herself from the evil eyes of Mr.---- lives with the missionary couple Samuel and Corrine .She goes to Africa with them and later starts writing letters to her sister Celie .Through her letters her alienation is reflected .She too like Celie is an alienated figure in Africa. She writes in one of her letters to Celie: “And how are you? dear sister. The years have come and gone without a single word from you. Only the sky above us do we hold in common. I look at it often as if, somehow, reflected from its immensities .I will one day find myself gazing into your eyes. Your dear, large, clean and beautiful eyes. Oh! Celie My life here is nothing but work, work, work, and worry.” (171) The lines show the helplessness of Nettie and her sense of alienation. She lives thousands miles away from her sister and narrates about her living in Africa.

Both Celie and Nettie share the utmost feeling with each other through letters. They are the parentless children. Their mother is died and the man to whom they considered as their father turned out as their stepfather. These things have affected their life and breed sense of alienation in them

Celie's sewing business is nothing but to win over the feelings of loneliness and alienation. Since she is humiliated and oppressed by her father and husband she sees a new hope in her relationship with Sofia as well as Shug. Even she establishes sexual relationship with Shug. Her sexual indulgence with Shug is a result of the alienation that she faced at the very early stage of her life. She wants to establish her own identity just like Pecola and Pauline of *The Bluest Eye* but her way is more competent as well as constructive.

Thus, both Morrison in *The Bluest Eye* and Alice Walker in *The Color Purple* has similarly used the theme of alienation. They have shown the miserable condition of the black women on the account of race, class and gender. They don't find their identity in male patriarchal set up of the society. Due to the continuous humiliation, they suffered alienation in their lives. Morrison and Walker depict alienation of black women in particular and human in general. They both have a powerful vision to free the humanity from such evils of racism, sexism and classism which alienate the blacks from the society. The work written by Morrison and Walker is very significant even today which makes an in depth study in the life of the blacks and appeal for social change .

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