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Address

- Vikram Nagar, Boudhi Chouk, Latur.
- Tq. Latur, Dis. Latur 413512
- (+91) 9922455749, (+91) 9158387437

Email

- editor@aiirjournal.com
- aiirjpramod@gmail.com

Website

- www.aiirjournal.com

CHIEF EDITOR:– PRAMOD PRAKASHRAO TANDALE

Psychological Disorder In Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye And Sula

Vijay .D .Songire.

Assistant Professor ,
SIES Graduate School of Technology,
Nerul,Navi Mumbai.

Kamalakar .B.Gaikwad.

Assistant Professor,
SIES Graduate School of Technology,
Nerul,Navi Mumbai.

Abstract:

*Toni Morrison, the recipient of the Nobel Prize and the pioneer of black aesthetics expose the dreadful past of the blacks in general and black women in particular. Her writing is multidimensional and she has thrown light on the many issue in the life of the blacks in African American society. Her major concern is racism, sexism, classism, quest for identity etc.. At the same time, she has written about many aspects in the life of the blacks in particular and human in general. The attempt of this paper is to study how some of the characters are psychologically tormented and fractured on the account of the rigidity of the social laws in white supremacist society. The blacks did not find solace under the heavy burden of racism and classism in the respective society. The paper particularly focuses upon the element of psychological disorder in Morrison's novels **The Bluest Eye** and **Sula**. The paper shows that how some of the characters in the respective novels go through the various traumatic situations and find themselves completely imbalanced in their lives. They are confronted with the psychological disorder due to falsehood of man-made culture of racism and classism.*

Key Words : Psychological disorder,fragmentation,racism,classism,sexism,survival.,etc.

Toni Morrison, being the spokesperson of the blacks writes about the various aspects in the lives of the blacks .The blacks became the victims of racism and classism in the racist society of America. The white masters just treated them like animals .They made them slaves for generation for their own profit. On this account, Morrison writes about social, psychological, and economical degradation of the blacks in the African American society. As Usha Jain and Gazi Muzamil rightly asserts about blacks' existence in their article Re-Defining

the Status of Black Women in Sula by Morrison: “Blacks are mentally, socially, and economically paralyzed by the centuries of slavery.”(173) The situation of the black women was more pathetic than men. Toni Morrison has successfully exposed the deplorable condition of the black males as well as females in her novels .As Nasrin Chegeni and Nastaran Chegeni rightly asserts about her: “The African American novelist ,Toni Morrison is a writer deeply concerned with such issues as race,gender and sexuality. She is one of the most prominent writers of fiction in contemporary America. Although the impact of white racism on black communities is undeniable, Morrison addresses the question of the position of women within black communities, and how their relationships with both men and other women shape their lives.”(915)The continuous humiliation and exploitation did a vulnerable impact upon the psyche of the blacks. Some of the male as well as female characters in Morrison’s The Bluest Eye and Sula are confronted with the psychological disorder which has its roots in their unending oppression.

Online glossary defines psychological disorder as “ a disorder of the mind involving thoughts, emotions and behaviors that cause either self or other significant distress. Significant distress can mean that the person is unable to function meet personal needs on their own ,or are a danger to themselves or others. Another popular definition of mental illness is a person’s inability to work or love.” The definition clearly applies to the characters of Morrison’s The Bluest Eye and Sula.Morrison has discussed exploitation, humiliation and marginalization of the blacks in general and black women in particular. The male as well as the female characters in the respective novels face traumatic situation in the novels on the account of racism as well as classism. African American women face triple jeopardy of race ,gender and class.The Bluest Eye depict the lives of the blacks in 1920s. As Hinda Barlez asserts:“In The Bluest Eye, Morrison writes about black people, particularly black female children, surviving the values imposed by the dominant white culture.”(01)There are two families namely The Breedloves and the Mac Teers.The Breedloves live in Lorain Ohio. The condition in which they live indicates the subordinate status of the blacks in the white dominated world.Cholly breedlove works in a coal mine and finds himself unable to provide comfortable life to his family.His wife Pauline who follows the ways of the white country women spends more money to look beautiful.She has become a victim of racial ideology in America. As the narrator narrates: “ Along with the idea of romantic love ,she was introduced to another-physical beauty. Probably the most destructive ideas in the history of human thought.”(95) On this account conflict arises in the relationship of Cholly and Pauline . They fight with each other. The domestic violence affects their daughter Pecola’s life who feels insecure .Pecola as girl child is deprived of parental love and care.her

mother considers her ugly at the time of her birth. The novel discusses many incidents in the novel, which shows Pecola's victimization on the account of her color. To mention but a few her encounter with the shopkeeper Yakobowskey who does not even pay any attention to her, the black boys at school harasses her calling about her father's habit of sleeping naked, Geraldine's son namely Junior too harasses Pecola when she goes to his home. Geraldine too exploits Pecola when she finds her in her home. All this humiliation and exploitation compels Pecola to yearn for the blue eyes. She assumes that if she gets the blue eyes all will treat her differently. This Pecola's inner calling for the blue eyes turns her into insanity. She goes to the Soap Head Church, a man who just deceives people on the name of religion. About his character Alexander observes: "...Soaphead who is Morrison's most detestable character in a novel that is replete with them, represents the worst side of white religion." (120) He wants to get rid of one dog. So when Pecola tells her the wish he takes undue advantage of her ignorance. He gives her food having poison and asks her to give it to the dog he detests. He tells Pecola that if the dog does not react then her wish will not be fulfilled. But if it reacts then her wish will be granted. Pecola does the same. The dog dies after eating the poisonous food and Pecola according to Soaphead Church's suggestion considers that she has got the blue eyes. Pecola a girl child who finds herself victimized under the pressure of racism creates an imaginative friend and she starts talking to her. This is a complete psychological disorder of Pecola whose personality is disintegrated. Eventually Pecola as well as her baby dies which shows Pecola's futile existence in white dominated America.

Besides Pecola, her mother Pauline is also affected by the racial hegemony who starts working as a maid in one white Fisher family. The minute study of her characters shows some kind of psychological disorder in her personality. The definition says that the state of the mind where the individual causes stress to self or others. In the case of Pauline it is true. She is not able to provide warmth of love to her daughter Pecola. She behaves violently with her husband Cholly. On the contrary, she takes care of the children of her white employer. Even when Pecola tells about her rape by her father, Cholly Pauline does not believe which indicates disorder of her mind. She is a woman who has lost all her senses in the pursuit of the white standard of beauty. Later Pecola too follows her mother's footsteps and destroys her own self. As Gillespie observes Pecola's existence in the family and writes: "The two major deterministic forces in Pecola's young life are her mother and father, Cholly and Pauline Breedlove. Significantly, Pecola never calls either of her parents' mom or dad, demonstrating the psychological and emotional distance between the young girl and her parents." (52)

Cholly too is humiliated on the account of racism by two white men when he was making love to one country girl Darline. He felt completely helpless in that situation when the two white men humiliate him saying ,” Do it better” .This humiliation causes his psyche terribly and turns him in a rapist who rapes his daughter Pecola . His act of rape is a kind of psychological disorder in the sense that a father who is unable to understand the difference in love and sensual pleasure. Thus,Pecola,Pauline and Cholly of The Bluest Eye face racial discrimination in American society and find themselves in a chaos of psychological disorder.

Similarly, Morrison’s Sula shows humiliation, exploitation and marginalization of the blacks on the account of racism and classism. The black women in the novel face male patriarchy too. Fundamentally, Sula is a woman’s novel and it talks about the freedom and autonomy of women. The study of the novel shows how some of the characters are suffered and their life is totally shattered. They are in a psychological disorder. Sula, the female protagonist of the novel tries to assert her own identity in the African American society. She is a defiant woman who rejects the norms and social conducts of marriage and motherhood. In her childhood she is deprived of parental love and care just like Pecola of The Bluest Eye. Her mother Hannah who is just engaged in lovemaking with different women teaches her nothing but sexual pleasure. As a wife Pauline follows some codes and conducts whereas Hannah breaks all the codes and conducts a of the family as well as society: “her flirting was sweet ,low and guileless... she would fuck practically anything.” (42-43) Sula’s grandmother too is a woman who tries to attract males. This atmosphere of the family affects Sula’s personality. She does not understand the difference in love and sensual pleasure just like Cholly of The Bluest Eye.She too like her mother takes interest in the company of men. The people of the community do not accept this behavior of Sula and condemn her. Sula even does not hesitate to sleep with her close friend Nel’s husband ,Jude. This betrayal of her close friend shows Sula’s psychological disorder who does not care about the consequences of the action. Even she does not hesitate to defy her grandmother Eva and threatens to kill her .She says to Eva : “ may be the night when you dosing in that wagon flicking flies and swallowing spit, may be .I ‘will just tip on up here with some kerosene and ...and who knows you may make the brightest flame of them all.(94) This incident where Sula threatens Eva a woman who is shown as a responsible mother in the novel is humiliated by her grand daughter. Later Sula is engaged with one black man namely Ajax.Sula feels happiness with him and enjoys love-making with him too. When Sula wants to settle with

Ajax he deserts her unfortunately. In the pursuit of sexual pleasure Sula's personality is disintegrated. She lives a life of a pariah. She is considered as a threat to the community. The complete psychological disorder of Sula is obvious when she treats her grandmother Eva badly. The black community in the novel ostracizes Sula. Black women don't come on her funeral considering her as evil. Here Sula is a victim of age-old ideology of male patriarchy and social norms which consider women evil if they want to do anything on their own. So Joan Bischoff writes about Sula : " She is the modern preternaturally sensitive but rudely thwarted black girl in today's society." (21) No doubt She tries to establish her own identity in the male dominated African American society but her attempt is failed.

Both Pecola in *The Bluest Eye* and Sula in *Sula* try to find out their identity. Pecola is distracted with the idea of white standard of beauty and longs for the same whereas Sula sets her own standards she says: " I want to make myself." (92) Sula leaves a free life. She does not bother any other's opinion or view. Even she is not faithful to her close friend Nel. It makes her character more ambiguous than Pecola. As Lee observes: " While a fore mentioned questions bristle under each of Morrison's texts, in *Sula*, Morrison offers to her readers a main character who telescopes that scandalous epistemology. How can we understand or know Sula, who is not only egoless or without a self. (and hence under minable) but who also is unable to know anything herself." (571)

Morrison has depicted Shadrack as a youth who affected terribly by the experiences of war. He is one of the sufferers in the novel whose psyche is fractured. The war experiences were very torturous for the blacks. After war too they were not duly treated. In the novel *Sula* Shadrack is harassed and humiliated at the hands of police who " took him to jail, booked him for vagrancy and intoxication, and locked him in a cell." (13) As Maureen Reddy writes : "In important ways, Shadrack is much like the questing figure of romance and therefore is linked to Sula, whose journey, like Shadrack's, is a quest for self; each of these quests is complicated by social, political, and economic forces over which the quester has little control, symbolized here by Shadrack's perceived lack of control over his own body." (33)

Plum too is affected due to his experiences of war. Her mother Eva burns him to death in order to make him free from all the anxieties in the novel. About the death of Plum. Reddy writes : " The death of the nameless soldier and of Plum Peace are results of world war, as the blame for Plum's death on Eva who soaks him with Kerosene and lights the match but on those horrors he experienced in war that drove him to seek oblivion through heroin."

(31).Thus, Shadrack and Plum are the sufferers in the novel on the account of race. Their characters stand for the falsehood of racist ideology of the military, which is failed to provide human status to the black soldiers. Thus,Pecola,Pauline and Cholly of The Bluest Eye and Sula ,Hannah,Eva ,Shadrack,Plum of Sula live a life which is complete in disorder .They are not able to come out from the oppressive labyrinth of racism, classism . The female characters like Pecola ,Pauline ,Sula ,Hannah ,Eva ,Nel face male patriarchy too. So they lead life in a psychological trauma. They live in a state of psychological disorder which make their life vulnerable. Morrison here calls for a new social order where both males and females, blacks as well as white will live their life in complete order. Both of the novels The Bluest Eye and Sula showing psychological disorder in the black males as well females long for their upliftment. In these novels Morrison gives voice to the voiceless and want to turn the mental disorder of the blacks into the structured and coherent manner which is affected by the racial hegemony in America.

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