

## VOICE OF THE UNVOICED: CHILDREN AS SUBALTERN IN TONI MORRISON'S *THE BLUEST EYE*

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### Abstract

In the arena of world literature, the issues faced by the black children dominate the African- American Literature. Born in the marginalized race, these children struggle in the hands of the cruel world of racial inequality, violence, poverty, illiteracy and oppression make them feeble and hopeless in their lives and also threaten them from rising up in their life. Many of the African-American women writers delve deep into the lives of these black children and have attempted to focus on the social issues particularly the problems faced by the subalterns in formers writings. Toni Morrison is also one among them. She is the most celebrated African – American writer who depicts the consciousness of subaltern black children in many of her novels.

**Keywords:** Afro-American, Marginalized, Subaltern, Oppression, Social issues.

Toni Morrison, a well-known Afro-American women writer and an activist was born in Lorain, Ohio, Feb 18, 1931 and won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1993. She tries to explore the consciousness of the black community in America in her writings. Most of her novels acknowledge America as its citizen and published her debut novel *The Bluest Eye* in 1970, she wrote it, while she was raising her two children and working as a teacher at Howard. Being brought up amidst the integrated community Morrison observes, understands, and realizes the problems, exploitations, sexploitations, sufferings, pains and trauma of the black people completely. These issues haunt her to write more about this marginalized race. Through her works, she tries to portray clearly the trauma and hard – realities of self-loathing of the black children to the outside world. She brings out the self – hatredness of Pecola Breedlove, a black child, who longs for blue eyes.

Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* meticulously focuses on the three major characters Pecola Breedlove, the protagonist, Claudia Mac Teer and her older sister Ferida Mac Teer. Claudia Mac Teer is the narrator of the novel who remembers the days that she has spent with

Pecola Breedlove. The second narrator, the omniscient, offers the reader details about Pecola's family. Cholly Breedlove, Pecola's father has burnt their family house in his drunken mood. Pauline Breedlove, Pecola's mother gets attracted by the white coded values and falls in the line of whites and never minds about the life of her children. It leads Pecola as a roomer in Mac Teer's home. MacTeer's daughters, Claudia and Ferida have become a confident and loving friends of Pecola Breedlove. "We were to be nice to her and not fight"(TBE:14). Pecola is happy in the company of Mac Teer's girls and started to share her childhood days experience that led enjoyment and has a good fun and 'loving conversations', first time in her life after her birth, only in Mac Teer girl's company. Claudia exclaims that 'she laughed when I clowned for her, and smiled and accepted gracefully the food gifts my sister gave her'(TBE:17).

Morrison exposes the trauma of the subaltern children effectively through their voice itself, as Claudia, a black child, is the narrator of this novel. The effects of racism, tribulations are stronger in the Breedlove's family since they internalize the white coded values and fail to protect their children, Pecola and Sammy. They are submissive towards the insults and comments from the white governed society on them. It is true that "The master had said, "You are ugly people", They had looked about themselves and saw nothing to contradict the statement; saw, infact, support for it learning at them from every bill board, every movie, every glance. "yes", they had said, "you are right", And they took the ugliness in their hands, there it as a mantle over them, and went about the world with it(TBE:37).

On the contrary, in the tightly knit families like Mac Teers, despite the influence of white – coded values provide security and affection to their children, Claudia and Frieda. When Mr.Henry, a roomer who shares a room in Mac Teers home has fondled their daughter once and her infuriated father reflects his severe hostility immediately towards Henry. Yet this sought of social security is not provided to Pecola Breed love in her home. Unreasonable family issues of Breedlove's family make their children (Pecola and Sammy) feel alienated. Sammy leaves their home often. It is evident from the following lines "There was a difference in the reaction of the children to these battles. Sammy cursed for a white, or left the house, or threw himself into the fray. He was known, by the time he was fourteen, to have seen away from home no less than twenty – seven times(TBE:41). But Pecola 'on the other hand, restricted by youth and sex' and 'struggled between an overwhelming desire that one would kill the other, and a proud wish that she herself could die'(TBE:41).

Pecola believes in her ugliness and begins to long for blue eyes. She hopes that having blue eyes mean having everything in life such as love, affection, friendship, family and an enviable position in the white cultural society. The narrator avers that "Each night, without fail, she prayed for blue eyes. Fervently, for a year she had prayed. Although somewhat discouraged, she was not without hope. To have something as wonderful as that happen would take a long, long time (TBE:44).

Pecola is not only subjected to disgrace in the society where she lives but also molested several times by her father who fails to express his affection constructively due to his inability. When Pauline, her mother, notices Pecola's abused body on the kitchen floor, beats her instead comforts her. Morrison depicts the similarly affected mother in the racist society turns Pauline from nurturer to oppressor. In such a way, Morrison victimizes the black children in her novels in order to throw light on the world of black innocents in the hands of the ruling white society. Through the members of two families, Morrison clearly draws on the theme of the evils of racism and how it affects, disturbs and spoils the life of the future generation (children) physically and mentally that prevails in the American society years ago.

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