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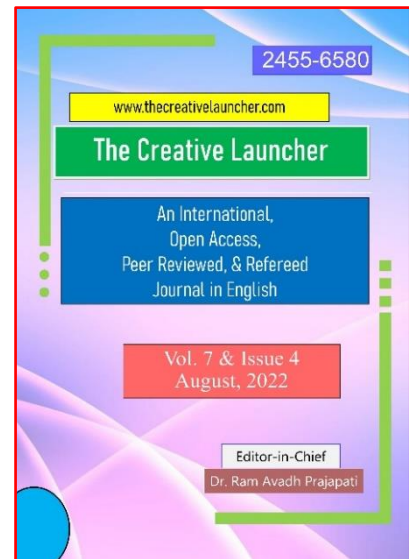
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Research Article



Reentering the Aspects of Eco-feminist Responsiveness in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*

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Abstract

Human beings are supposed to be the gifted creations of the universe in which many more creations are also found. There is a reciprocal or mutual relationship among them. This relationship has been variously defined to be one of the most powerful sensibilities of this universe. Such sensibilities of these creations and co-relations among them can be seen hither and thither which has been rightly defined and recognized as the ecological relations of the species. The concept ecofeminism with its multifaced dimensions is one of them. It is studied in the growth of ecological relations of the women and the environmental happenings all over the world. The present research article attempts to reconnoiter the combination of environment with the creativities and relative coherence of women in Toni Morrison’s well-known novel, *The Bluest Eye*.

Keywords: Gender role, Ecofeminism, Inner sensibilities, oppressions, Relative Coherence, Domination, Environmental Crisis

Toni Morrison was an Afro-American novelist. She was acclaimed to be the first black female editor in fiction at Random House in the late 1960s in New York. She got published her first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, in 1970. The novel became commercial as well as academic success and brought sense of achievement. After this her critically acclaimed novel, *Song of Solomon* came in 1977 which also earned national and international attention for her competence and creativity. Consequently, she won the National Book Critics Circle Award for this renowned work. Later, her creative genius marked great impact and in 1988, she won the Pulitzer Prize for her novel, *Beloved* (1987). It explains its appreciation and was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1993 which verifies her international identity. Through all of her works, she established her own reputation as an author for the Blacks as well as the Black females in the 1970s and 80s. Her impact and reputation became so influential and strong that most of her novels and short stories were adapted into films and serials. Her personality, creativity, sensibility and styles were highly considerable and her most popular works like *Beloved* which were shown into the films with a great interest of current situations of the reality. Morrison’s works are praised for using ecofeminist perspectives as the basic precept of her writings, addressing the harsh consequences of gender and racial discrimination in the United States of America.

As far as the analytical word, ecofeminine is concerned, it is directly related to the term ‘ecocriticism’ which is a semi coinage for ‘Eco’ which stands for short form of ecology and it is concerned with the relationship between living organisms and their natural environment. Cheryl Glotfelty defines the term as “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment” (Glotfelty, 18). It has been related to the relationship between literature and environment or to show how man’s relationship with his physical environment can be correlated within the literary sensibility of feminine problematic world. The area of ecocriticism

is very broad yet the central tenet of ecofeminine sensibility is that it is related to that of ecology which studies the relations of species as well as their exploitations by the various sources of human beings. It is an umbrella term which is not limited to any literary genre but it has included many genres under its shade of a social as well as political movement which regards that the oppression of women and nature are interconnected.

As the literary form, Ecofeminism asserts that all forms of oppression are connected and that the structure of oppression is the same. The dissimilar types of domination such are interlaced in this form of movement which analyses human system of control and assumes that such control is neither justified nor inevitable on any contextual background. Like other movements, the major aim of ecofeminism is to end all oppressions of men and society and liberate women from the consideration of, 'Others,' and nature. It urges for humanity to reconnect with nature and discuss the issues like reproduction of technology, effects of deforestation and indigenous culture. It also raises the issues of hazardous sites located near poor people. The issues like climate change, marginalized people, new politics, and economy are also touched in the theory. In short ecofeminism tries to promote life preserving values and policies.

Ecofeminism is an improved and matured version of feminism, and in order to understand ecofeminism, we must first understand the historical context of feminism, which is known as a women's movement fighting against social, economic, and legal inequalities in society. Feminism stems from the conscious perception of readers and scholars that there is something wrong with society's treatment of women, which must be studied and chewed with the analytical concept of women's centuries-long struggle for social, economic, and legal rights.

Furthermore, one can see that matriarchal society is anti-hierarchical with an equal division concept of labour and a harmony with nature. In these societies the means of livelihood were found rested in women's hands. Most of the Eco-feminist critics are of the opinion that patriarchy is the root cause of the present unsustainable situation. In this regard, Morrison's novel *The Bluest Eye*, which is about a black girl who aspires to have blue eyes for both beauty and the seduction of men, marked her official entry into the field of creative writing. The novel's plot can be understood from the accidental viewpoint of two adolescent sisters named Frieda and Claudia Mac Teer. It shows the horrifying repercussions of racism and the ensuing framing of white standards of beauty, which destroys a young black girl named Pecola Breedlove's sense of self. The main character in the book has internalized the idea that only those with blue eyes and white skin are loved by others, and that those like her, or black people, are not meant to be loved but rather to be exploited. So, when the novel discusses her life over the course of four seasons, she secretly yearns for blue eyes, which ultimately drove her into a humiliating state of madness. Pecola experiences a severe identity crisis as a result, which is made worse by the fact that her father repeatedly rapes her and causes her to become pregnant. When she tries to convey it to her community as a whole, they do not support her; instead, they detach her, tormenting her and driving her insane. As a result, the work stands out as a strong voice

on the literary landscape that seeks to be portrayed, pounded, and questioned within the bounds of beauty by instilling inferior complexity in blacks. Although the novel's reading elicited a range of responses, it nonetheless dove deeply into the problems of self-identity and self-esteem, weaving them together with the simultaneous racial and gender discrimination of individuals.

Vandana Shiva looks very effective in her *Staying Alive*, by explaining the term that it is the “medicalisation of childbirth and industrialization of plant reproduction.” (Vandana, 21) With the key facts of this survey, the present research paper has tried to explore the concepts and dimensions of eco-feminism in Morrison’s novel, *The Bluest Eye*. In this regard, Morrison's books' significant thematic concerns with Nature and Women show that this theory can be applied to her works. Her debut novel, the one you're reading right now, is frequently analyzed in terms of postcolonial feminist and psychoanalytical issues. Additionally, the book may be largely understood by comparing it to ecofeminism theories and Morrison's early ideas. By critiquing and restraining the logic that delivers oppression to Negro women and nature, natural imagery in the novel compares women's destiny with nature and reveals the twofold pressures from white culture and males that Negro women experience. In this book, Morrison makes a powerful argument against the institutionalized and codified linguistic and ideological subversion of a school textbook that favors whiteness over blackness. Pecola loses her mind and suffers from societal abuse as a result of her parents' lack of love and concern for the society, whereas Claudia and her sister Frieda benefit from their parents' love and support as they grow up healthy and maintain themselves for the sake of the future.

Morrison’s novel, *The Bluest Eye* is a story which is set in the community of a small, Midwest town. It characterizes black community for the black nature of human being. The protagonist of the novel, Pecola Breedlove prays each night for the blue-eyed beauty of Shirley Temple as she thinks that everything would be all right if she had beautiful blue eyes. The novel integrates women’s destiny with nature and discloses before its readers how white culture oppresses Negro women and nature. The only aim of the novel is liberating women as well as nature from the crucial hands of the oppressed by creating a harmonious relation between women and nature, and culture and material. Morrison manages to put nature, gender and race together and perceives that there are interconnections between the three. Through the narration of this novel, the novelist deconstructs anthropocentric values which are responsible for all kinds of oppression and also for the domination over nature. The female characters go through a critical situation and try to get their own identity and struggle for freedom of expression and equality to the leading concepts of the area and culture. The novel also seems exploring various themes of racial discrimination, the self-growth of men-women friendship, marriage and sex, evil and goodness. The natural images of water and plants reveal the affiliation between women and nature in this novel.

Morrison attempts to eradicate racism, sexism, and classism in *The Bluest Eye*. The novel contributes to ecofeminist ideas by demonstrating that the patriarchal system is the root cause

of women's and nature's dominance. In America, black people are always subjugated by white dominant people because of their race, class, and gender, and the situation is exacerbated when women are involved. Morrison wants to convince her readers that being black and female is a special gift because it allows them to access special knowledge and have rights to develop. The novelist plays both roles as a woman and an African American writer. It is natural for her to expose the evil of patriarchal society for being a woman writer and she does it well. As an African-American woman novelist, Morrison is looking very successful in highlighting the significance of black culture. Through her novels, she empowers the black women and tries to create their self-identity and their own status in the society by eradicating problems of racism, classism and sexism. At another stage, ecofeminine writers are concerned with the issues of trees, forestry, water, food and farming but in addition to, they deal with environmental effect of racism, sexism and classism which can be vividly seen in the description of destruction and oppression of environment as well as women in *The Bluest Eye*. In this connection, she has detailed her readers that Pecola originally belongs to a residential area with fruit, trees and valley around, but they are disturbed and replaced by the sound and smoke of the big industries. The natural images of trees, rivers and animals have been disturbed and destroyed in the form of modern reformation. Morrison in her novels stated that nature sustains human life and therefore should not be destroyed by the dominated hands.

Morrison in *The Bluest Eye* shows that the root cause of the domination of women and nature is the patriarchal system which perpetuates oppression in the form of the inhumanity. Women and animals are found equally dominated by the patriarchal society. The novelist opens that African-American women have been frequently undervalued and marginalized within American culture by the dominant patriarchal society. Patriarchal authority always legalizes their supremacy over women through various social, political and economic institutions. In the American literary tradition, also, the writers in the dominant group have often silenced and misrepresented the subjugated group of people as well as of women. Consequently, they have propelled the black men and women to a marginal place by showing them as dishonest, misconduct and slave.

Morrison experiences the pains of those black people's lives and scrutinizes the influence of the mainstream culture, especially focusing on the lives of African-American women. In her works, she shows how the white society has imposed their own rules and culture on the Negroes. Natural beauty has been redefined by these whites and the new concept of beauty has been created by the white society which affirms that a white girl with blue eyes like Shirley Temple is beautiful, not Pecola, a black girl. The white people's concept of white beauty creates a damaging effect on the natural colour of the blacks that prevents African-American girls from maintaining their own identities. The protagonist of the novel, Pecola deduces from her daily experiences that her African-American features do not match her with their standards and her blackness isolates her everywhere that's why she wants to throw her black features and wishes for having blue eyes because the blue eyes seem an icon of the privileges given to

the whites: "if her eyes, those eyes that held the pictures, and knew the sights - If those eyes of hers are different, that is to say, beautiful, she herself would be different ... if she looked different beautiful, may be Cholly would be different and Mrs. Breedlove too. (*The Bluest Eye*, 34)

The media also produces the pictures of white girls that make Pecola like girls obsessed with their blue eyes, especially those of Shirley Temple and Mary Jane because they are presented as perfect beauty by the dominant society. Parents have also choice of exact beauty for their children and so her parents also expect the same standards of beauty from her. They treat her badly and often insult her for her blackness but what she can do. They have internalized white culture in their life losing their own. Pecola's blackness creates hatred in the mind of even her father Cholly who expresses his rage in the form of her rape. Consequently, she remains pregnant and suffers a lot for her neglect by the society and finally at the time of delivery her child dies. Nothing is gained here for her. The other black girls support her and help her to get out from her physical as well as psychological damage but she can't leave the idea of beauty; finally, she goes to Soaphead Church who is supposed to be a spiritualist. Soaphead is a representative of white society who exploits Pecola by using her for his personal revenge on his landlady. He tricks Pecola gives her the poisoned meat and orders her to give it to the landlady's dog. Also, he tells her that if the dog reacts to the meat her eyes will become blue. In the hope of her blue eyes, she does so but the dog dies and her dream remains unfulfilled. She thinks that he will give her blue eyes but unexpectedly, Soaphead asks the young boys to prioritize sex. In this way, the novelist presents her views that the white dominant culture is responsible for Pecola's madness.

The other black women are also victims of the male-dominated white people and culture. Pauline, the mother of Pecola is entrapped by the same destructive forces. She is also obsessed with the idea of beauty. She had many expectations from her future husband who will have princely qualities. Thus, she meets her expectations in the form of Cholly who marries her and their married life begins well but it quickly declines. Pauline struggles with her loneliness and a loss of self-esteem when she loses her front tooth. She tries to get solace in Cholly but he is a merciless man who neglects her and leaves her alone. Being deceived by her dreamy object, she begins to have solace in going to movies and imagining herself as a beautiful film star, Jean Harlow. When she loses her second tooth, she gets frustrated and started to hate her own children. She finds satisfaction while working with white family that lives in a clean affluent world, the fascination of white culture which destroys her family life. The great variation of the emotional exploitation can be seen in Darlene who is a young woman with whom Cholly Breedlove has his first sexual experience on the day of his Aunt Jimmy's funeral. When the white men find them performing sexual intercourse, they force Cholly to continue intercourse and even he is beaten by the white people. Consequently, after their departure, he beats Darlene mercilessly and thinks that she is responsible for the rage of white people. When

he finds her pregnant, he abandons her in a victim of sexual harassment by him and other white men.

On the television set, in the newspapers and films, women are portrayed as sex icons. They are often found producing the beautiful and sexy images of girls and women. It is one of the tools which attract customers but affects the young generation badly which can be seen in the society. It can be evidenced in the novel, after watching films, Mr. Henry and Cholly sexually exploit women who become prostitutes. The three prostitutes are also presented as the victims of social injustice in the male dominated society which forces them to enter in prostitution and also abuses them for being so. In this novel, one can see that these prostitutes are well aware of that men are using them only for their sexual satisfaction and nothing else. Frieda and Claudia, two sisters are molested by Mr. Henry who calls them by the names of Greta Garbo and Ginger Rogers, the popular film stars of the 1940's. He fondles Frieda and Claudia and expresses his sexual desire dominantly.

In *The Bluest Eye*, women are degraded by the male authority in which they are molested and sexually harassed by the men. In the condition of women, the men are same as black women are exploited by their own people as well as white dominant people. The American mainstream or media has no hesitation to exploit women either they are black or white. They fight a battle for survival inside and outside of their homes. The male-dominated culture not only dominates women but also dominates animals and the other marginalized people which define ecofeminism in its sphere. In this novel, animals are also degraded and destroyed into the crucial hands of men.

Men are men, and women are exploited as well, as Geraldine, a light-skinned woman who despises black people, demonstrates. Geraldine and her family are heavily influenced by white culture, as evidenced by her decision not to allow her son, Junior, to play with black boys. She wishes for him to play with upper-class and white-colored boys, which has such an impact on Junior that he is unconsciously influenced by his mother's prejudice against black people. Junior entices Pecola to see the cat in his house while his mother is away. When she enters the house, he throws the cat at her, injuring her face. Not only he hurts Pecola but he also throws the cat to windowsill and collides with electric heater and it twitches and dies. In both of his hurts, one can see the domination of ecofeminine sensibility. It does not stop here and when Geraldine walks into the house and asks about the happenings, he throws the blame on innocent Pecola. At this, Geraldine abuses her and drives her out of the house. When Geraldine sees Pecola in her home, she kicks her out and humiliates her: "Get out. . . you nasty little black bitch" (*The Bluest Eye*⁷²). Junior's tyranny is corollary of dominant white society, its class differences and racial attitude of his mother.

Pecola's description of menstruation reflects her cultural ecofeminine sensibility. The moon influences human behaviour, according to the mythical story of women's menstruation. It is also believed that the moon influences female fertility because of their menstrual cycle, which is linked to the celestial body in space. Mystics believe that the moon regulates the

menstrual cycle of women, triggering ovulation and the fertile period, as well as influencing human emotions. Women are inextricably linked to the moon through their blood, emotions, and souls. Various religions and cultures have recognized the connection between women (human) and the moon through mythological stories about women (nature). In this regard of concern, one can reflect the traditional Chinese Medicine which links the moon with the feminine, or yin principle. The Jewish tradition celebrates Rosh Chodesh, the new moon. Many cultures have assigned the moon in a status of goddess, from Babylonian Ishtar to Greek Artemis. This connection is continuous today with religious, spiritual, and even health practices.

In this present concerning novel, Morrison depicts the scene of Pecola's first menstruation which can be seen as the correspondence between the female and nature. Pecola and the MacTeer girls share childhood adventures, and what Claudia remembers particularly, is the starting onset of Pecola's puberty when the eleven-year-old girl unexpectedly has her first menstrual period. Obviously, Pecola is frightened by the sudden bleeding with no physical pain from her private parts. Morrison explains the menstruation cycle of Pecola as well as Frida in the reference of cultural ecofeminism which sanctifies the women's capacity of fertility. Pecola's menstruation initiates her into the growth of feminine sexuality. Because she is unknown to this evolution of human beings that's why Pecola is raped by her father and gets pregnant. Through such description of menstruation cycle, the effects of the moon (nature) on human beings (Pecola) have been appreciated by the various scholars.

To recapitulate, the current discussion demonstrates the dominance of white people over black people under the guidance of natural elements, as explained in the light of ecofeminist theory, and the ideology of Black Women in the novel has been examined in this research paper. Without a doubt, the thought may be concerned with the related thoughts of others, but it has also attempted to broaden the literary concern of the literary spirits. Close reading of the current novel reveals her concern for ecofeminine sensibility as well as reflection on the fate of black women in the United States of America. Ecofeminists discuss the relationship between women and nature, and Morrison's current novel does as well. Environmental studies in the correlation of human nature and behavior is being degraded in the novels from the ecofeminist perspective to show Morrison's ecofeminist consciousness towards the exploration of the deep literary value of the novel as well as of novelist.

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