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Images Cut in Ebony: Black Women: Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula*

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Abstract:

There are only two things determining the life of black woman-Racism and Sexism. These two are painfully allied within the life of these 'image of God cut in Ebony' to use Fuller's description of the black. This combination of racial and gender discrimination is lethal. As far as gender inequality is concerned, it is universal in patriarchal societies and is present since the beginning of the universe. But racism was clearly rooted in that period of history when the first Africans were brought as cheap labour to the American work force. Since then black men and women become the property of whites and could be used as machinery that could do any amount of work without demur. They got inhuman treatment. The question of the plight of black women in the white patriarchal society of America was dealt by many Black Women Novelists but in an excellent manner by Toni Morrison.

Keywords: Images, Ebony, Black Women, patriarchal, disillusionment

Despite inhuman conditions black man's condition was much better than that of the black woman. She was a worker in household and fields and also was an object of sexual exploitation by white as well as black man. And after this extreme inhuman treatment she was started to be considered as over-sexed, immoral and loose woman at an arm's distance for instant sexual gratification. She was also considered as a reproducing machine with a high unfailing capacity of the supply at demand of human beings, or black machines, for the capitalist machinery. In the words of Christian, "The black woman was valued for her reproductive capacity [...], the black woman was also seen as different from the white woman in her capacity to do man's work" (83). Thus she was utilized utmost, without any sense of guilt.

Age-old issues, of racial discrimination and sexual stereotyping, lead to a great trauma in black men and women. Such is the case with Cholly and Paline in *The Bluest Eye*, a surpassingly wonderful novel by Toni Morrison. In the patriarchal societies man is the breadwinner and a dominant figure and the woman is dependant and recessive. But black men and women fell into the trap of a vicious system that denies them their sexual roles, they find themselves in an inverted position where the woman is the breadwinner

and man a liability. But the ego of Blackman knows his dominance. So, due to the denial of their roles in the society poor black people resort to mutual exploitation. They brutalize each other their children, their neighbours and thus the whole race. In *The bluest Eye* this fact has been beautifully portrayed.

The Bluest Eye center around the tragic life of Pecola and her parents' failure to give her stability. Her family member, Cholly, Pauline and Sunny, lead a life of frustration and misery because of their ugliness and worthlessness.

No one could have convinced them that they were not relentlessly and aggressively ugly [...]. 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 come from conviction, their conviction. (28)

Cholly Breedlove, the father of Pecola, was abandoned by his mother when he was four days Old, and was rejected by his father who pays more attention to crap game than to Cholly. He becomes a thorough drunkard. Added to these, what was more destructive was his castration at the hands of white men who surprise him in the act of his first sexual encounter and ask him to proceed in their full view.

Pauline, the mother of Pecola, also suffered the ignorance of parents and she blames them for her limp foot. She had to baby sit and run the house because of working mother. She longs for a man for meaningful and complete life. In the initial days of her marriage with Cholly, she was happy but soon there was disillusionment upon disillusionment. In spite of her bitter dissatisfaction with motherhood after the birth of Pecola, she once again become pregnant. As she felt it the "Only honorable creative role in which they can reasonably hope to participate" (81) in the words of Thomson. But she feels debased on white doctors comment in the labour room. "They deliver right away and with no Pain. Just like horses" (97). Feeling of inadequacy and disappointments in life lead Pauline to vent her anger on her Children, as Wade-Gayles puts it : "The daily needs of her children are like lighted matches to the fuse of her disappointment as a black woman denied beauty and romantic love".

Pecola becomes the tragic victim of her parents' disillusionment with life living in an ugly and cruel world where her parents fight brutally, and where school is the playground for vicious taunts and threats, Pecola yearns to be loved. Her realization at a very early age that beauty is necessary for being loved, bewilders her at first, and she succumbs to the white American concepts of beauty, that is blonde hair, White Skin, and above all the blue eyes for which she prays every night to God who never hears. Hedin believes: "Surrounded by cultural messages that she is ugly by definition, she can achieve peace only by retreating into schizophrenia." (50).

More damaging than these is Pecola's rejection at the hands of her own mother in the kitchen of the Fishers. When Pecola drop the hot berry cobbler, on seeing the Fisher's daughter Pauline swoops without pity & with vengeance on Pecola, who is burnt while

cooing to the Fisher's Child, as "a black mammy to the wealthy blonde girl-doll" (Christian 74)

No one loves Pecola except her father. Drunken Cholly sees Pecola bent over the sink washing dishes and then there was a, mixture of feelings in him: "Revulsion, guilt, pity and then love [...]. What would he do for her-ever? [...] What give her?"(127)

Cholly expresses his love for her in a distorted manner by raping her. He in the words of Lee "Violates her body as the other have violated her spirit" (349). Pecola's desire for blue eyes intensifies and a neighborhood seer helps in bringing about this 'miracle.' Ironically she is convinced of her eyes the bluest of all by descending into madness that is at the expense of her sanity.

In Morrison's *Sula*, Sula is another such girl like Pecolia who never got any affection from anyone, neither from her mother Hannah nor grandmother Eva. Hannah herself never received any true love from her mother Eva who becomes the mouthpiece of universal motherhood, though a victim herself of the society at the back. When she is asked by Hannah about her love for Children, she replies :

No time [...] with you all coughin' and me watchin' so TB wouldn't take you off and if you was sleepin' quiet I thought, O Lord, they dead and put my hand over your mouth to feel if the breath was comin; what you talking about did I love you girl? I stayed alive for you." (68-69)

This reflects in such a manner that Hannah is not at all interested in nurturing her Children with care. Apart from providing for their material needs, she has no further interest in them. Sula overhears Hanna's conversation with her friend: "I just don't like her" (57). As a result Sula doesn't feel any strong attachment to her mother. She can watch with aloof interest when her mother burns to death.

Sula is interested neither in matrimony nor in motherhood. Motherhood's only contribution to women, Sula believes, is that it keeps them from committing suicide : "One clear young eye was all that kept the knife away from the throat's curve" (122). Sula is thus an expression of a Black Woman giving birth to self, not to children. "I don't want to make somebody else I want to make myself" (80). In her quest for selfhood, she joins Nel, her childhood friend.

They found relief in each other's personality as solitary little girls of profound loneliness. Daughters of distant mothers and incomprehensible fathers (Sula's because he was dead, Nel's because he wasn't). They found in each other's eyes the intimacy they were looking for. (52)

Sula's friendship with Nel is severed when Sula and Jude are found together by Nel. On Jude's desertion she turns to her children for support and she blames Sula for tarnishing her love for her own children. Sula's total disregard to the conventional values of society shocks everyone and Sula is regarded as an evil force. Yet paradoxically, here is an evil which generates virtue in others.

Their conviction of Sula's evil changed them in accountable yet mysterious ways [...]. They began to cherish their husbands and wives, protect their children, repair their homes and in general band together against the devil in their midst.(117-118)

Thus Morrison's realistic fiction about black women is highly appealing and at the sometime heart rending. Circumstances and human psychology were nicely studied by Morrison before the attempt at the sensitive Black woman fiction. If we read Cowart's essay "Faulkner and Joyce in Morrison's *Song of Solomon*" we get ample hints that her creativity was influenced by Faulkner and Joyce and deserves the place along with them in Literature.

The individual talent, says Eliot at once extends and modifies an inherited literary tradition, and Morrison reveals her power as she integrates her precursors – their subject, their themes, sometimes even their language – into a fiction of universal humanity and moral authority. The presence of her precursors does not qualify her originality and artistic autonomy – it merely guarantees that she will produce not Black literature but literature. (100)

God has used something else to create the outer integument of the black people but they are essentially human beings. Toni Morrison recognizes the very soul of these people and creates their characters in such fashion, with a certain amount of empathy, that the reader is moved and starts imagining what it would be like, if reader himself is in that position. Like a true novelist that she is, Morrison presents her quest for identity in her novels dramatically in terms of the Black life and experience in general.

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