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Prof. Virag S. Gawande

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Aadhar Social
Research & Development
Training Institute Amravati

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Dr. Manashi Gogoi Borgohain

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Violence of Colour and Capitalism in 'The Bluest Eye' Dr Surender Singh

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Abstract

The present analyses compare and contrast the bitter gender violence of colour and capitalism in Toni Morrison's 'The Bluest Eye'. For the black people in the American society, by and large, there emerged three types of violence. At the first level was the violence based on financial status resulting in the exercising of power and influence over the blacks by the whites. The second was the violence based on race and ethnicity as the blacks were brutally tortured and exploited by the whites. The third was the violence based on gender i.e. the violence between the black men and women. Like the first two, the third type of violence also pitiable for the black woman who experiences pain, isolation and exploitation by her own son, husband or father. These three type of violence clubbed together make the life of a black woman miserable. Pecola suffers not only because she is poor and black but also because she is a girl. By analyzing the general and particular violence in 'The Bluest Eye', the conclusion aim is to establish the man- woman domestic violence is not based on gender only but on capitalism and colour also.

Keywords: violence, colour, capitalism, racism, gender, family.

'The Bluest Eye' explicitly exhibits the influence of the colour and capitalism on domestic violence. Furman, emphasising the role played by gender discrimination in the American society, observes: "Just as white people have created and maintained a racist culture, so have men created and maintained a sexist culture." (2). Thus women are treated to be a separate group by virtue of their sex.

Charles Raus had a long conversation with Toni Morrison about the role and relationship between man and woman in her novels. Within black culture he asks her whether she feels that the women bear the burden of living in a society where the men are rarely discriminated against. In answer she finds some problem with defining what men go through in the culture of the black people who really have to work. Men identify with their ability to work and take care of the people they are responsible for. Now the people live in economy and work is being split into pieces, so that they do not do the whole job but just a little part of it. The situation has resulted in unemployment as well. So the women have the domestic burden of trying to keep things going on as well as providing the male member a sort of psychological relief and faith in his important role just by putting up with acts such as drunkenness, arrogance, violence, or even running away. She has to allow him a freedom which is destructive no doubt. It is the women who keep the family going, keep the children safe. (3) Her panoramic view of the African American families, in an often quoted passage from *The Bluest Eye*, informs the readers about the violence in the daily life and also about the role played by women in it:

They ran the houses of the white people and knew it. When white men beat their men, they cleaned the blood and went home to receive abuse from the victim. They beat their children with one hand and stole for them with the other. The hands that felled the trees also cut umbilical cords. The hands that wrung the neck of chickens and butchered hogs and also nudge African violets in the bloom, the arms that loaded sheaves, bales and racks, rocked babies in to sleep. They petted biscuits in to flaky ovals of innocence and shrouded the dead. They ploughed all the day and came home to nestle like plumes under the limbs of their men. (4)

Pecola's parents are the focus of the most extreme victimization of several factors based on race and class. They live in a highly deplorable plight in the store front house because they are poor and black. Each member of the family in his own cell of consciousness, each making his own patchwork of quilt of reality, collecting fragments of experience here, pieces of information there they create a sense of belonging and try to adjust life the way they find each other. The only living thing in the Breedlove's house is the coal stove, which lives independent of everything and everyone, its fire being 'out', 'banked', or 'up'. The fire seems to live, die and go down; everything rest in the room is dead and mechanical.



Their poverty and suffering has made the atmosphere tense and quarrelsome. The novelist describes various episodes that display a deep sense of loss and nothingness in the family which results in utter loss of the faith and affection that is the foundation of a family. On an occasion, Cholly had come home drunk, too drunk even to quarrel with his wife as the fight would lack spontaneity and would be calculated, uninspired and deadly. Mrs Breedlove comes swiftly into the room and stands at the foot of the bed where Cholly lies. She asks for some coal but Cholly does not move. She touches Cholly's foot to awake him and Cholly opens his red and menacing eyes. She repeats her demand of coal as it is too cold to work:

"I said I need some coal. It is as cold as a witch's tit in the house.

"Your whiskey ass would not feel hell fire, but I am cold."

"Leave me lone."

"Not until you get me some coal. If working like a mule doesn't give me right to be worm, what I am doing it for?"(5)

We get a vivid picture of the African American family through the opposite phrase "working like a mule". What Morrison wants to emphasize through the phrase is the sufferings that the black women were undergoing. She, no doubt, gives us a truthful picture of the black community. Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* shows the similar gender relationship and the plight of black women in unambiguous terms. Remarkable is the following extract which resembles the mule image of Toni Morrison:

De whiteman is the de ruler of everything as fur as Ah been able tuh find out. So... (he) throe down the toad and tell the nigger man tuh pick it up. He picks it up because he has to but he doesn't tote it. He had it to his women folks. De nigger woman is de mule uh de world so far as Ah can see.(sic.) (6)

Cholly and Mrs. Breedlove relationship is shadowed by colour and capitalism. Their poverty is traditional but their ugliness is unique. None can convince them that they were not relentlessly and aggressively ugly. Their circumstances are responsible, no doubt, but their ugliness has to with their inner state of mind. They, it seems, wear ugliness because it really does not totally belong to them. Cholly's ugliness results from the despair, dissipation and violence directed towards petty things, but the ugliness of the other members of the family is not proportionate. Failing to find a reason thereof one may conclude that the ugliness comes from their conviction that they are ugly:

It was as though some mysterious all knocking master had given each one a cloak of ugliness to wear, and they had accepted it without question. The master had said, "You are ugly people". They had looked about themselves and saw nothing to contradict the statement; saw, in fact support for its leaning at them from every billboards, every movie, and every glance. "Yes", they had said. "You are right." And they took the ugliness in their hands, threw it as a mantle over them and went about the world with it. (7)

Cholly is totally dumbfound and dysfunctional by another aspect of marriage viz. their children, the reason being he has never lived this relationship in his life, he has never experienced any parent raise him. Naturally he cannot even comprehend the sanctity of such relations and also the sense of responsibility associated with parenthood. It is Pauline- Mrs. Breedlove who earns for the family. She forces Cholly to realize it:

"You sure ain't bringing in nothing. If it was left up to you, we'd all be dead..." Her voice was like earache in the brain.

"I don't give a shit how you get it." A bubble of violence burst in his throat.

"Don't try me this morning man. You say one word more and I'll split you open." (8)

Sammy, their son, is awake too, but pretending to be asleep. Pecola holds her breath. They all know that Mrs Breedlove could have, would have, and had, managed to bring coal from the shed, or she could even have directed Sammy or Pecola to get it. But, sadly enough, it seems that they cannot live without a quarrel. An evening without a quarrel, for them, hangs like the first note of dirge in the sullen air. Pauline runs into the bedroom with a dishpan full of cold water and throws it on Cholly's face. He sits up, choking and spitting. Naked, he leaps up from the bed, and with a flying tackle, grabs his wife around the waist and they hit the floor. Cholly picks her up and knocks her down with the back of his hand. She begins to hit at Cholly's thighs with the dishpan. Dropping to his knee he



strikes her several times in the face. Sammy suddenly begins to beat his father about the head with both his fists. Mrs. Breedlove with flat stone lid runs to Cholly and strikes him to blows, knocking him right back in to the senselessness out of which she had provoked him. Panting, she throws a quilt over him and lets him lie. At the doorway she pauses long enough to ask her son to bring some coal. Morrison comments:

The tiny undistinguished days that Mrs. Breedlove lived were identified, grouped and classed by these quarrels. They gave substance to the minutes and hours otherwise dim and recalled. They relieved the tiresomeness of poverty, gave grandeur to the dead rooms. (9)

Mrs. Breedlove shoulders the traditional male responsibility of earning bread, but she unconsciously absorbs male aggressiveness. To deprive her of these fights was to deprive her of all the zest and reasonableness of life. Cholly, by his habitual drunkenness, provides them the material they need to make their lives tolerable. Mrs. Breedlove considers herself an upright Christian woman, burdened with a no-count man, whom God wants her to punish. In her view Cholly is beyond redemption. She is not interested in Christ, the Redeemer, but Christ, the Judge. Often she can be heard discoursing with Jesus about Cholly. If Cholly stops drinking, she will never forgive Jesus. The lower he sinks the wider and more irresponsible he becomes, the more splendid she and her task become.

No less does Cholly hate her. She is one of the few things abhorrent to him that he can touch and hurt. He pours out on her the sum of all his inarticulate fury and aborted desires. Hating her he can leave himself intact. Cholly and Mrs. Breedlove fight each other with a darkly brutal formalism that is paralleled only by their love making. Tacitly they have agreed not to kill each other. He fights her the way a coward fights a man- with feet, the palms of his hands and teeth. She in turn fights back in a purely feminine way- with frying pans and pokers and occasionally with a flat iron that will sail towards his head. They do not talk, groom, or curse during these beatings:

Cholly and Pauline Breedlove, relate to Pecola in this way. Ironically named since they breed not love but violence and misery, Cholly and Pauline eventually destroy their daughter, whose victimization is a bold symbol of their own despair and frustration. In the pathos of their defeated lives, Morrison demonstrates the process by which self-hatred becomes scapegoating. (10)

Morrison's protagonist, Cholly seems to be unpredictable in this novel. Not that the character of Cholly is unrealistic but she often depicts a reality that is too distressing to consider. Under the critical conditions of web of life, she shows what extraordinary and unspeakable emotional violence ordinary people are capable of committing. Disgusting it is, no doubt, to see Cholly rapes his twelve year old daughter Pecola as he is overcome with pity and love for her. Pauline, the mother, has refused to love her instead she loves the little white girl whose family employs her.

Conclusion

The present analysis largely focuses on the story of a deprived and divided family generally on colour and capitalism and particularly on violence. The blacks are still facing the cruelties resulting from racism. As compared to the life of a white that of a black was intolerable. Apartheid, in various forms, still existed. Blacks are treated as underclass by virtue of their colour and class. Gender bias made things still more unbearable for the black women because they had to bear the additional stings of gender discrimination. The family members especially, Pecola, suffer repeated and excruciating instances of violence in various forms throughout the journey of life, whether in their broken and volatile family or in the unfriendly environment of the outside world. Fundamentally, three types of violence stand out for both their prominence in the story and for their impact on Pecola's family: sexual violence, emotional violence, and domestic violence. These different forms oftentimes overlap, sometimes all three occurring at once. In fact, a toxic combination of sexual, emotional, and domestic violence shatter Pecola's youthful innocence and leaving her largely alone and uncared in her tender age.



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