

The Voice of Voices: Toni Morrison

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ABSTRACT

The study proposes to examine Toni Morrison's voice for the voices through her writings. Nobel laureate Toni Morrison is the conspicuous writer of African American society, prominently famous for showcasing the harsh reality of African American society. She raised her voice against injustice, slavery, racism, social rejection, self-rejection, violence, discrimination, and victimization of black society over the dominant white class. Her major concern was to let the readers be conscious of their ancestor's suffering as well as current social concern. She bravely attacked white dominant society with her writing. Her writing was focused on the problems of the society which she presented as an African American writer with her own experience. She wrote and stands for the whole black suffering. Most of the protagonists of her novel are female. And she aims to raise the voice for the problem so she keenly observed and wove the situation in complexity so that the protagonist is trapped and failed to find the solution. Her novels are filled with the emotions like anger, guilt, frustration, low self-esteem, and self-doubt. Most writers choose their hero or heroine with courageous and admiring qualities but Morrison boldly picked her heroines with feeling self-doubt, pity, fear, and anger, and used it as a strong weapon to show the reality of their suffering.

KEYWORDS

Guilt; Racism; Self-doubt; Slavery; Violence.

Introduction

Toni Morrison (Feb18, 1931 – Aug 5, 2019) was the first African American woman to win the Nobel Prize in literature in 1993. She was 39 years old when she published her first novel *The Bluest Eye*. She won Pulitzer Prize in 1988 for *Beloved*. She was also nominated for a national book award for her second novel *Sula*. Toni Morrison's full name was Chloe Anthony Wofford Morrison; she changed her name to Tony Morrison in college while noticing frequent incorrect pronunciation of her original name but later regretted the change. In her childhood, she was fond of Jane Austen

and Leo Tolstoy. She was intelligent since her childhood as in her primary class she was the only one who could read and write clearly. Morrison started her career as a teacher, and professor and later became a writer and editor. She was also part of an informal group of writers at Howard University who met and discussed their works and certain thought process.

Morrison didn't identify her works as feminist despite frequently focusing on female characters. She wants her works to be the beacons of equality. In an interview with Zia Jaffrey, Morrison explains her decision to omit the feminist Moniker:

In order to be as free as I possibly can.... Everything I have ever done in the writing world has been to expand articulation, rather than to close it, to opens door....I think it's a question of equitable access and opening doors to all sorts of things.

Morrison was a keen observer of society and had a deep understanding of feelings. She was very selective in picking certain words and scenarios and topics to explain to the readers. She alluded clearly to equality. During the post-colonial era, society was divided into two groups. The white people represent power and the aristocracy, while the black people are the subjects of mockery, slavery, and subjugation. That is why Morrison did not label her works as feminist: she is a woman speaking out for equality. Because black people were not even treated like animals in the past, it is more important to integrate them into society with equal love, kindness, and respect. She became successful among the readers and the whole society with her thought-provoking works, which prompted the readers to think.

Self-doubt, Guilt and self-destruction in *The Bluest Eye*

Pecola the heroine of the novel is an adolescent girl who was born in Lorain, Ohio at the time of the great depression. Pecola is tortured by her colleagues in school, mocked by her neighbourhood and part of a loveless family where fighting is a daily activity. She was hopeless about her situation. Later she was raped by her drunken father and became pregnant. Morrison's narrator Claudia and Freda are the only sisters who were kind to Pecola and her child. They planted marigolds as the symbol of hope in Pecola's life and her child. But neither the child nor the marigold remains alive. The whole society is in denial about Pecola. Psychologically she was broken completely and started the issue of inferiority complex by

doubting herself the colour of her skin. She wants to fit in the society and the cruel society has set beauty standards of pale white skin and blue eyes and Pecola's dark skin black girl doesn't fit in society. So, she started praying for blue eyes and became insane. Under the pressure of society, she was constantly doubting herself in complete denial and guilty for not having blue eyes. She was not mature enough to fight back to stand out for herself. She became the victim of society. Later the narrator Claudia and Freda were fighting and feeling guilty for Pecola that they planted the seeds so deeply that they died and Pecola's child also didn't survive.

Morrison uses 'Blue Eyes' and 'Marigold' symbolically as both give the message of self-denial, rejection, doubt, and pessimism. Pecola's life was pessimistically woven by Morrison not even a single ray of hope or light is there. *The Bluest Eye* is a disturbing and psychologically triggering novel that the reader would feel every single emotion that Morrison wants to describe. She successfully reaches the reader's psyche that no one can read without reacting or thinking about the situation and the problem. Morrison painted a horrifying picture of African American society on a literary canvas. It came out as a critical movement in the history of African American civil rights. It started as a short story and later became a complete novel written during the most dynamic and turbulent transformation of African American life. And it resulted in black is beautiful, now the slogan is the new beauty standard set by African Americans. Trade, politics, economy all area of society was infected by racism. After an edge of manufacturing white dolls, the manufacturing agency made the black skin dolls, a clear indication of acceptance. No matter what the colour of a human is black or white, they first should be accepted as human beings. Every colour is beautiful with humanity equal love,

respect and care. African Americans are involved in every area of life like pageants, trade, Hollywood movies, sports and many more. They secured their place and it could be possible with the writers like Toni Morrison who wrote not for entertainment but for raising voices for concern are of society and subjugated class. She dared to expose the horrifying truth that compelled her readers to take action against any subjugation and injustice.

The novel is triggering that question that comes in the mind automatically what's the mistake of Pecola? Why does she want blue eyes? Why does she feel ugly? What Pecola wanted is acceptance, love, care and respect. But she was pressurized in all areas of her life, she felt rejected and wants to fit in the parameter of the beauty of having a blue eye. The lonely girl's psychology was completely damaged that she feels so ugly to be accepted by society.

Morrison discussed the worst scenario of racism and the truth of society through Pecola continued the pessimistic approach towards her till the end. Readers hope for Pecola's hope but nothing is found because Morrison aims to show how deeply wounded blacks are from the white dominant society's denial which forces Pecola to feel ugly and become insane.

Violence, Murder, Slavery, Guilt in the *Beloved*

Beloved is the true story based on the horrifying incident of the life of Margaret Garner, who escaped with her family from slavery in Kentucky to freedom in Ohio in 1856. When US Marshals apprehended the family under the Fugitive Slave Act, Margaret Garner murdered one of her children, a daughter, rather than see her enslaved again. In *Beloved*, Morrison raised her voice against the dehumanizing act of slavery. African Americans were subjugated, violated

dehumanized for a long time. They were detached from their true existence. Generation to generation they adopt slavery as the heritage of their ancestors. Slaves were only objected to working hard with followed instructions and entertaining their masters, the white aristocrats. Slaves were not even treated like a human being their condition was more pathetic than animals.

Morrison focuses on the psyche behind the victim's mind and the oppressors in her works. Detachment from self-existence is present here. The ghost of *Beloved* came to take revenge for her murder and existence. With the ghost of *Beloved* Morrison added a gothic element to the novel. She uses the haunted house 124 as a symbol of the horror and terror of the ghost. Morrison was an admirer of Jane Austen which is reflected here with the use of gothic touch. Austen started the gothic term in her *Northanger Abbey* and Morrison followed it with the witty description of house 124.

Protagonist Sethe, the former slave killed her daughter to protect her from being slaved. This haunting act by Seth is the cause of the trigger. It is Sethe's suffering as a slave which compelled her to murder her child. How much she was suffering physically, psychologically and sexually assaulted resulted in this situation of murdering her daughter. It can be a different psyche behind it the anger and frustration of Sethe to rebel against slave life and the torture against her.

Beloved is the rebel against slavery. The echo of Morrison's writing is loud and clear of the need for the transformation of society. What Morrison wanted is equality, her characters demand to be loved, to be accepted, and to be respected to feel beautiful with their skin colour.

Conclusion

Toni Morrison is successful to become the voice of voices through her

outstanding writing which raised the problem of the society of that era slavery, racism, discrimination, violence, murder, rapes and molestation and many more. Morrison's work *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved* indicates the white racist who practised slavery and brutally tortured the African race. Pecola and Sethe experienced violation, rape, murder, molestation and other severe horrifying form of torture, resulting in trauma, and self-denial. Their psychological wounds are more painful than physical wounds that would not heal until death. Morrison's

intention was clear to feel their readers the worst scenario that causes the root of all problems so that the younger generation knows their painful past and learns from it. And they could accept themselves and stand for their rights. The work with full of pessimism she left the hope to conclude the ending more strongly. Morrison was aiming that one can think of something different to the existed scenario of Pecola and Sethe's story. And that resulted positively that Black is Beautiful.

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