

NIPPED IN THE BUD: TONI MORRISON'S PECOLA AS THE VICTIM OF ABUSIVE FAMILY AND SOCIETY

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Abstract: The most atrocious and appalling act committed on innocent childhood, sexual abuse as a theme has found its way into literature and media. There are four main types of child mistreatment, including disregard and neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, and emotional abuse. Child Abuse causes fallouts in the development of the psyche of the adult and causes a psychosomatic blockade that thwarts the standard growth of the child. Abuse obliterates the gentle personality and intellect of the child. Psychological explorations have verified that disheartening events of a childhood leave unconstructive effect on an adult's life. It is not essential that all battered and uncared for children will experience long term consequences. There will be discrepancies in the effects depending on the child's age, the kind of abuse and the brutality of abuse. Some children bear the harsh memoirs of abuse and neglect till the end of their lives while others come out comparatively unharmed. The capability to endure the worrying experience depends on the individual characteristics, positive influences like teachers or relatives and social environment. The instant touching effects of abuse and neglect are segregation fear and an incapability to trust which can work out into lifetime consequences together with low self esteem, melancholies and relationship difficulties. The actual burden and trouble that comes as a result of abuse of children can be insufferable, as it is depicted in Toni Morrison's novels. Toni Morrison calls attention to the magnitude of identifying and investigating this catastrophic evil of child abuse especially child sexual abuse so as to put a stop to it.

Keywords: Child Abuse, Depression, Neglect , Psychological Trauma.

Introduction: In the foreword to her novel *The Bluest Eye*, Toni Morrison states her purpose in writing this novel:

I focused, therefore, on how something grotesque as the demonization of an entire race could take root inside the most delicate member of society: a child; the most vulnerable member: a female.

Sexual abuse is reported when a child is used by an adult for sexual purposes or when an adult involves a child in sexual acts. Sexual abuse is a familiar theme for Toni Morrison. In *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola suffers abuse from her father which makes her mad in the end. Cholly, Pecola's father, is often drunk and physically abuses his wife and children. Cholly is disreputable for his rowdiness and discomfiture. In one of his drunken trances, he lights his own house on fire and burns it down. He is an appalling father to both his kids. He neither shows love towards his family nor is available to listen to their problems. He is absent most of the times. His blackness angers him, ultimately leads him to consider he is hideous and unlikable. He robustly believes that he does not deserve a better life. He always uses his anger negatively by hurting those around him. He rapes his own daughter, Pecola, and consequently, she becomes pregnant with his child. Cholly's rape of Pecola, also originates from a vicious and merciless treatment he had received at the hands of two xenophobic whites. He was enforced at gun point to complete his sexual intercourse with a maid in front of them. This horrendous experience leaves an unpredictable effect in his life. Furthermore his

married life also passes through complicated times. That is why when Pecola makes a gesticulation which reminds him of the loving feelings he once had for Pauline, Pecola's sadness and helplessness and his own inability to make her happy provoke a replication of the brutal incapacity and the vulnerable fear that he felt with the white men. One way for him to rid himself of his fears is to project them on to Pecola, and in part he tries to demolish those fears by raping her. Franz Fanon gives a blatant justification for this. 'The buildup of a sense of inadequacy and inferiority in the colonized's psyche', argues Fanon, 'results in violence.' Violence is a form of self assertion. When the native discovers that he cannot hope to become truly white or even expel the Whites, his violence erupts against his own people.

Pecola falls an easy victim to Cholly because she is a child and has no authority or control over adults. He rapes her twice. She is forced to partake in a dreadful sexual act, which is just anticipated towards the physical satisfaction of her father. He rapes her regardless of the outcome. He is more powerful than Pecola, so makes her the prey. This is a form of incest, which leaves Pecola in a psychological disturbance. Cholly's rape results in impregnating Pecola.

Internalized racial discrimination, as substantiated by *The Bluest Eye*, is enormously damaging and is a result of colonialism, globalization and cultural imperialism in our day. The racist idea of physical loveliness that venerates light skinned people with blue eyes and flaxen hair is a principal design in the novel and it scrutinizes the catastrophic effects of

imposing white, middle-class American ideals of beauty on the budding female identity of a young African American girl during the early 1940s. Pecola belongs to Breedlove family, where love subsists paradoxically only in name. Pecola's dysfunctional family causes the most hurt to her because of the everyday hostility and because it engenders a series of other unconstructive events. Mrs. Breedlove's disregard of Pecola comes as a corollary of this family dysfunction and leads to her failure to organize Pecola for life's hardships. Not only does Pauline fail to prepare Pecola for life but she also neglects her child after Cholly's terrible act of raping his own daughter. But Pecola's parents cannot be entirely blamed for her downfall. They were themselves victims of the society they live in. Never valued as an individual when she was a child, Pauline continues throughout her life to seek approval in another's eyes, particularly in her position as a servant for whites. She feels powerful in the kitchen of the white family for whom she works. She fails to acknowledge Pecola but bestows her love on the white family's child. Pecola's desire for blue eyes is in fact an inheritance from Pauline herself; based on idealized white images- images of acceptance and beauty completely disconnected from herself and her blackness.

The unpleasant outcomes of this exploitation would have been narrowed if she had compassionate family surroundings, but Pecola does not have such a family. Her mother does not consider her feelings when she tells her about the rape. In a different occasion of child abuse in the novel when Mr. Henry touches Frieda's breasts she runs out of the house and tells about it to her parents, her parents consider her words and shore up her. Her father chases Mr. Henry out of their house shielding his daughter and strengthening family ties. Morrison compares and contrasts the activities of the parents of the two families. Frieda's parents' behavior lessens the psychological damage caused to her by Mr. Henry's behavior.

In the foreword to the novel, *The Bluest Eye*, Toni Morrison says

The death of self-esteem can occur quickly, easily in children, before their ego has 'legs' so to speak. Couple the vulnerability of youth with indifferent parents, dismissive adults, and a world, which, in its language, laws and images, re-enforces despair, and the journey to destruction is sealed.

Incestuous rape results in lowering Pecola's self esteem which was already very low. She is in need of immense love and caring. She is incapable of realizing the difference between love and lust and becomes insane in the end due to ruthless assimilatory weight of the state of affairs, by losing her individuality believing that she has got blue eyes. Emotional abuse

is as much damaging as the physical and sexual abuse.

The severity of the damage aggravates when she faces emotional abuse along with sexual abuse. She is bullied at the school by her classmates. This chronic emotional abuse results serious psychological trauma. Adults who are mentally abused as children experience emotional health problems and intricacies in personal relationships. Adults suffering from social phobia or adults with anti social mind-set tend to have a history of harrowing childhood. Dorothy O. Lewis in her book *Guilty by Reason of Insanity: A Psychiatrist Explores the Minds of Killers* makes the shocking discovery that most of the murderers had endured perverted physical and sexual violence and abuses in their childhood. Abusive parents often have experienced abuse during their own childhoods. Psychological researches have proved that approximately one third of abused and neglected children will eventually victimize their own children. The present study intends to heave the responsiveness of society about the perils and penalties of exploitation and brutality against children. Effects of child sexual abuse include guilt, self blame, nightmares, insomnia, sexual dysfunction, chronic pain, anxiety etc. The deciphering of adverse effects of sexual abuse can be realized from James Garbarino's statement in an article "Psychological maltreatment is Not an Ancillary Issue". It states that children can rarely absorb and overcome the experience of physical assault and sexual misuse; if they are psychologically mistreated. Emotional abuses also have wider penalty. Emotional abuse includes excessive criticism, degradation, humiliation, ridicule etc. Deblinger, Steer and Lipman comment in an article "Maternal Factors Associated with Sexually Abused Children's Psychological Adjustment" that sexually abused children who receive emotional support are less symptomatic than children who do not. Negative maternal reactions create more severe problems in sexually abused children. Pecola lacks one of necessary conditions that could help her overcome the traumatic experience, a mother's support. Disharmony between family members means the slaughter of the enchantment and delight of children. Domestic violence researchers claim that although the child may not be the direct victim, exposure to uncontrollable violence may have negative psychological outcomes. Pecola's dysfunctional family causes the most damage to her because of the everyday violence and because it engenders a series of other negative events. Pecola witnesses but has no control over these disturbing events. Stunned and horrified by these everyday scenes Pecola tries finding alternative ways to escape this misery. She experiments with methods of endurance trying to

escape her pain, sometimes even wishing her parents would kill each other. Mrs. Breedlove's neglect of Pecola comes as a consequence of this family dysfunction and leads to her failure to prepare Pecola for life's hardships. Psychologists claim that the abused mothers, struggling with the distress of their own lives, may be unable to meet their children's emotional needs. Not only does Pauline fail to prepare Pecola for life but she also neglects her child after Cholly's terrible act.

Psychologically abused children behave in strange manners, and tend to withdraw from normal world and fall disappointed over the behavior of the others. Some children stop responding to the abuse, some fall into silence while some others react aggressively and often plunge into anti social activities and sometimes they show over maturity. Pecola goes insane and isolates herself from the outer world; Cholly becomes aggressive and violent and fights

with his family. Claudia at the same time behaves too much mature for her age as is evidenced from her dismembering the white doll as her protest to the white standards of beauty.

Child abuse is an intricate occurrence with manifold causes and occurs in a range of circumstances and state of affairs. Children are ill-treated by people in a position of power above them. In another aspect, Child abuse is nothing but the repression of the feeble by the authoritative. Children are weaker bodily than their oppressors and so can be conquered effortlessly. If they are courageous enough to raise their voice they are dominated by physical force. Child abuse is any current act or stoppage to act on the part of a parent or guardian which results in bereavement, grave physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse or misuse, an act of failure to act which presents an impending risk of serious harm.

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