

# Pecola in Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye: The Voice of Internal Marginalization

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## ABSTRACT

As the title of the article itself suggests, this research work deals with the theme of marginalization as brought out in the novel 'The Bluest Eye' by Toni Morrison. She is a Black American writer and the novel 'The Bluest Eye' deals mainly on racism and this novel focuses on the terrible effects of marginalization on the human psyche. The novel also looks into the devastating effects of the beauty standards of the dominant white culture on the self-image of the female adolescent- the eleven year old Pecola. The novel also pinpoints at her marginalization in her own society. Her father Cholly Breedlove is also marginalized. In fact, marginalization is the process of excluding and sidelining of the under privileged by the privileged. This marginalization is present in practically every society, in every country all over the world. It is not an isolated fact. Depending upon the kind of marginalization that is taking place all over the world. It can be classified as colonial, racial, genderic, communal and social.

**Key words:** Marginalization, beauty standards, privileged, self-image, under privileged.

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## INTRODUCTION

As the title of this article itself suggests, this research work deals with the theme of marginalization as brought out in the novel 'The Bluest Eye' by Toni Morrison. Marginalization is the process of excluding and sidelining of the underprivileged by the privileged. This marginalization is present in practically every society, in every country all over the world. It is not an isolated phenomenon. Depending upon the kind of marginalization that is taking place all over the world, it can be classified as colonial, racial, gender, communal and social.

Colonial marginalization is the marginalization of the colonized by the colonizer. The Britishers who were the colonizers had marginalized their colonies in most parts of the world. The colonized had no voice of their own. Their voice was suppressed by the colonisers and this is primarily the reason why the colonies are still developing themselves economically, socially and politically. India was colonised by the Britishers. Once a flourishing and a prosperous country, she was reduced to a state of deprivation by the colonisers. It was only when the Indian people realized that they were marginalized, they rejuvenated themselves and fought for their independence and got it. Other countries belonging to the African continent also fought against their marginalization and won their freedom not necessarily in a nonviolent way like India's but by violent struggles also.

Gender discrimination has been taking place ever since the human race has been in existence. The dominant male has always dominated the submissive female. In the patriarchal societies all over the world, the male has always bossed over a marginalized woman. It was an unwritten rule that a woman should take care of the family while the male must play the role, of the provider. As a result a woman was confined to the four walls of her house with all the basic amenities like education denied to her. This was nothing but marginalisation with the woman being at the receiving end. It was again with the realisation within the woman herself that she was being marginalised, that the woman wake up from her deep slumber and stood up to fight for freedom from the shackles of male domination.

Communal marginalization takes place normally in countries where there are large communities or groups among the people. The dominant community which may be enjoying certain privileges like high birth, prosperous lineage, and good education generally tends to dominate over the lesser privileged community. This can be seen in countries like India where the dominant castes have marginalized the underprivileged castes. This has also its roots in history where the Aryans marginalized the Dravidians. This is not only found in India but in other countries as well. The original inhabitants of North America, the Red

Indians were not only marginalized by the European settlers but also exterminated by them. The plight of the aboriginals in Australia is also a case of marginalization by the Europeans. Certain sections of society like criminals were deported to Australia by their European bosses as a part of punishment. These people who were marginalized formed their own groups and formed new settlements in Australia and gave themselves a new identity. No wonder, the Australians have a score to settle with the Europeans and the Australians have their daggers drawn at the Europeans.

Social marginalization is seen in practically every society where the higher caste, or higher class people seem to marginalize the people belonging to the lower caste or poor class. The higher caste people in a country like India have sought to deprive the lower caste people of, their privileges and rights on the basis of birth i.e. to which caste a person is born into. Higher the birth of an individual, he gets many privileges. By virtue of their higher birth, the predominant castes have sought to marginalize the people from lower castes. Thanks to the struggle carried out by Mahatma Pule, Mahatma Gandhi, Dr.B.R.Ambedkar and other social reformers, the marginalized sections of Indian society have a place of their own under the sun. Further, the economically richer sections of society have marginalized the poorer sections of society in countries like America, England etc. In England there has always been a perceptible divide between the rich and the poor.

However, racial discrimination has been observed too predominantly all over the world. People have been discriminated against, basing on the colour of their skin. The white-coloured people have not only looked down upon but also have marginalized people who have the black or brown colored skins. The white people think that they are superior to the black people and they have marginalized them. This form of racial discrimination took its worst form when Hitler declared that the 'white' race or the 'Aryan' race as he called it was superior to the other coloured races. This discrimination still exists in subtle forms and the last colony of racism-South Africa gained freedom only in 1991 under the charismatic leadership of the leader of the coloured races Nelson Mandela.

But, it is a fact that the marginalisation of the blacks has left a deep scar on their psyche. The black people or the 'negroes' as they are called have been a marginalized race. The black people were treated as slaves and they were made to work like beasts of burden, and that too in human condition. They were sold by their European masters in their native land Africa and, were shipped to far-away America from 1650 A.D to 1850 A.D. They had to work for their European masters, in their plantations under terrible conditions. The result was, some of them died and the others worked till they were maimed or were too old to work. This evil system of slavery came to an end only in 1863. However, by this time there was a sizeable population of the blacks in South America and they became virtually the inhabitants here. Though the blacks were slaves, they managed to retain their rich cultural heritage and though their white masters tried to impose their culture on the blacks, they firmly resisted it. But when forced by the whites to adopt their customs and traditions, the blacks resorted to syncretism, which is a process of making divergent cultural elements together to create an entirely new culture. They were forced to combine what they could keep up of their own African culture with the new American and European cultures imposed on them by their white masters. This resulted in the first genuine culture of the United States of America which was part African, part European, and part Native American. Thus, the American slaves were able to develop a new and unique culture of their own because of the way in which the slavery in the southern slavery was structured.

But this did have its impact on the psyche of the blacks. Domination has been a trait among the human beings and when the blacks found that they were not able to dominate over their white masters, they started to marginalize the lesser privileged among themselves. The blacks who were a little better off started marginalizing the lesser privileged blacks and this has led to a kind of internal marginalization where in the under privileged themselves marginalize the underprivileged among their own folk. Internal marginalization is the excluding or sidelining of the underprivileged by the underprivileged.

Toni Morrison a Black American woman writer has sought to project the internal marginalization in her novel "The Bluest Eye". Here, she tries to resolve the contradictions inherent in her own African-American identity. She was conscious of her own marginalization within the context of the mainstream, she starts valuing her peripheral existence. As a 'Black Woman Writer', she appears to be concerned, above all, with the idea of a black community. In an interview with Salman Rushdie, she said "I am not sure what the word Negro means, which is why I write books. What is a black child/ woman? Friend/mother? What is a black person? It seems to me that there are so many that inform blackness. One of the modern qualities of being an African-American is the flux, the fluidity, the contradictions that she attempts to project in most of her novels. It is the dreams the plight of the marginalized that she attempts to project in her novels. Her first novel 'The Bluest Eye' traces the plight of a marginalized person in the character of Pecola, an ugly, black girl. She is shunned by society because of her ugliness. It is also a fact that she is not marginalized by the whites, in fact, the whites do not even appear in the novel itself. Pecola is marginalized by the blacks themselves.

The Bluest Eye, a novel by Toni Morrison deals mainly on racism. In fact, this is her first novel and in this novel, Toni Morrison has focused on the terrible effects of "marginalization" on the human psyche. The novel also investigates the

devastating effects of the beauty standards of the predominant white culture on the self-image of the female adolescent-the eleven-year-old Pecola. The novel also pinpoints at her marginalization in her own society. Her father Cholly Breedlove is also marginalized. His father abandons his mother even before Cholly's birth. He is brought up by his aunt and upon her death, he is left all alone. He is befriended and loved by Pauline Williams. They get married. But soon the marriage turns, sour. The result is that since Cholly was internally marginalized, he becomes an alcoholic and it is in this state that he rapes Pecola-his own daughter.

Pecola is an eleven-year old girl and she is born ugly. She is marginalized by her own society just because she is ugly. Through this character, Toni Morrison tries "to show a little girl as a total and complete victim of whatever was around her". Pecola is ignored everywhere because of her ugliness. Her mother would not even look at her, her brother Sammy was indifferent to her, and her father Cholly Breedlove rapes her. Instead of paying attention to her own daughter who needed her attention more than anybody else, Pecola's mother Pauline Breedlove lavishes all her energy on her employer's home and children and she goes to the extent of knocking her down on the floor and slapping her even when the blue berries splatter to the floor and most of the juice splashes on Pecola's legs. When the little white girl in pink begins to cry, Mrs. Breedlove begins to comfort her unmindful of the fact that her own daughter is in deep pain. Here is a woman who was brain-washed by the white movie industry and had decided that her daughter Pecola was ugly and therefore finds it hard to sympathize with her own daughter. Pauline thinks that she is a privileged one for she has got beauty and thereby she seeks to marginalize her own daughter which is a case of internal marginalization. Pauline prefers her employer's white daughter to her own ugly daughter ignoring the fact that her ill-treatment of her own daughter may have far-reaching consequences on Pecola's life.

Pecola's father Cholly Breedlove is a drunkard and he loses no opportunity to have a drink. He is himself a marginalized person. His father, Samson Fuller, had abandoned him even before his birth. He was rescued by his aunt Jimmy who brought him up. When Cholly tried to search for his identity upon the death of his aunt, he was turned away by his father. This lack of identity left a deep scar on the mind of young Cholly. He could have overcome his identity crises if he was able to find some love from his wife Pauline. But as soon as the honeymoon was over, Cholly found that it was rather suffocating for his wife to be dependent on him. He lost his job and became a drunkard and it was in one such drunken state that he raped his daughter Pecola. The rape was itself unintentional and Cholly thought that Pecola was Pauline. Here again, the under privileged Cholly seeks to sideline and dominate over his hapless daughter Pecola who virtually quivered under his weight and strength.

Pecola's brother Sammy is indifferent to her. Lost in his own world, Sammy is very angry with his father because Cholly is very brutal to his mother. As an older sibling, Sammy could have been more sympathetic to Pecola. But this is not to be. He does not care for her. In fact, Pecola stops visiting the theatre just because Sammy does not take her. He is unmindful of her feelings and even here, Pecola is marginalised this time, by her own elder sibling.

Even the society is not kind to Pecola. At school, she is made fun of by her schoolmates. Her classmates derive a peculiar pleasure in poking fun at her. In fact, a group of boys tease her and she is in tears. She is rescued by Claudia MacTeer. Secondly when a boy does some disagreeable thing or misbehaves with them the other black girls seek to insult him by saying "Bobby loves Pecola" Breedlove. Even here, she is befriended by a girl called Maureen Peel who is a tall girl and none of the boys misbehave with her. She is also a black girl but is respected. The other girls step aside when she uses the sink in the girl's toilet at school. She is more privileged than the others and she thinks that she is doing a favour to Pecola by befriending her.

This attitude to Pecola is not liked by Claudia who firmly distances Maureen from Pecola. The teachers at school also seek to marginalize Pecola. They make her sit all by herself on the last bench all by herself not even caring to speak to her. They look the other way and they never speak to her individually. They speak to her only when they have to make a common speech in the class. All this alienates poor Pecola. It is to be noted here, that the school in which Pecola is admitted is not a school meant for the whites but it is a black school. And even here, Pecola is marginalized not by the whites but by her own people. Due to her ugliness, Pecola is humiliated everywhere. There is a coloured girl called Geraldine who lives with her son Junior and husband Louis in Lorian. She pats her cat and does not allow Junior to cry though she fulfils all his physical needs. He is taught not to mix with the other black boys. He is arrogant and he throws stones at the black girls who beat him up. But when he sees Pecola, he gets an opportunity to vent out his feelings. He calls her into his house and throws the cat at her. The cat scratches her face and Pecola is in tears. Junior himself swings the cat and throws it behind the sofa and the cat dies. Even as the injured Pecola wants to go out, he bars her saying "you are my prisoner." Just then Geraldine comes in and throws Pecola out of the house accusing her of hurting Junior and killing her cat. Here is another underprivileged person who humiliates and excludes another underprivileged person.

Thus, snubbed by her own society and family Pecola feels that if she was a little beautiful, then her plight would have been far better. She feels that her parents would not have fought so frequently, if she was a little beautiful. She feels isolated and her eleven-year-old mind does not register the reason for her exclusion. She spends hours sitting before the mirror trying to

discover the "secret of her ugliness, the ugliness that makes her ignored or despised by teachers and students alike." Even the fifty-two-year-old immigrant shop keeper realizes that he need not waste the effort of a glance at her; when she visits his shop to have a look at the Mary Jane candies. Even the shop keeper is black. But he has blue eyes and so, he is better-placed than Pecola. The girl is thus isolated from everybody and the fault lies not in Pecola but in the beauty standards of the dominant culture. Pecola feels that she can be acceptable in her own society is she gets "blue eyes" which is a symbol of beauty. So, she gets into contact with Shophead Church who was a Reader, Advisor and Interpreter of Dreams. He was a faith healer and Pecola feels that he can help her to get the blue eyes so she approaches him and though stumped by her strange request, he agrees to help her and tells that if she offers a poisoned dish to a dog and if it behaves strangely and dies, then she is sure to get the blue eyes. Pecola does as she was told and when the dog dies, she feels that she is getting the blue eyes and is glad that she will be finally accepted by society and her own people. When she is raped by her own father, Pecola is devastated. The poor girl is again at the receiving end because the people of her society feel that she might have provoked her father into raping her. Still, worse is to come. She is carrying her father's child and when her mother pushes her rudely and beats her in a fit of anger, Pecola loses her child. Already under immense pressure from her resolve to get blue eyes in order to look beautiful, she is totally shattered by the incest and the loss of her child. This makes her lose her reason and she goes mad. She is taken away to the suburbs by her mother. She develops an imaginary friend and speaks to this 'friend' about her 'new blue eyes', and how everyone was jealous of her because of these blue eyes.

The procuring of the 'blue eyes' is yet another attempt by Pecola to protest against her isolation. She seeks to protest or rather voice her protest against her own people who have isolated her because of her ugliness. Thus, the voiceless Pecola with whatever reason and maturity within her seeks to 'voice' her protest against her isolation, but fails. Holloway remarks, "Morrison has written of desolation and decay because this is where, us victims of our environments are left." Her friend Claudia, and the principal narrator of "The Bluest Eye" says "All of us all who know her-felt so wholesome after we cleaned ourselves on her. We were so beautiful when we stood astride her ugliness. Her simplicity decorated us, her awkwardness made us think we had a sense of humour. Her inarticulateness made us believe we were eloquent we honed our egos on her, paddled our characters with her frailty and yawned in the fantasy of our strength. "The Bluest Eye" is a telling comment on the plight of an African woman who is herself a marginalized creature in a society dominated by brutal men. Toni Morrison, through the character of Pecola, seeks to focus on the suffering, the mental agony and the acute sense of internal marginalization when a woman fails to live up to the set standards of the dominant culture. Herself, a black woman writer, Morrison has sought to look at Pecola's plight as a woman. As a writer who is herself marginalized by race and gender, Morrison makes her point very clear that internal marginalization does exist even among the underprivileged black people. By focusing on Pecola, a half-girl, half-woman. Morrison has brought into sharp focus the problem of a woman looked at from a woman's eyes. Pecola does not get sympathy even when she needs it the most. She is cornered by her own society and finally ends up marginalizing herself internally. She loses her wits which is the result of her miscarriage and becomes isolated even within herself. She becomes alienated and she is virtually a prisoner both from inside and outside. The overpowering standards of society seem to imprison her and seem to mock at her. To put it in Junior's words "you are my prisoner" and indeed Pecola is a prisoner. When she becomes alienated from her own self, her internal marginalization is complete.

## **CONCLUSION**

It is not that that Pecola has no sympathizers. Her sympathizers are interestingly people who are marginalized themselves. Through the portrayal of these characters, Toni Morrison has also driven home the point that not at all blacks, or the underprivileged indulge in internal marginalization. Characters like China, Marie and Poland who are prostitutes, and Claudia and Frieda who are themselves children and therefore live on the fringe of society. Even Shophead Church is also a marginalized person. He was marginalized by his wife and hence he turned out to be a misanthrope. In a way, it is a protest against the internal marginalization that is forced on him by society. Through Shophead Church, Morrison shows that even the internally marginalized people can hit back or protest this marginalization. To sum up, Toni Morrison has successfully brought out the concept of internal marginalisation in her first novel, "The Bluest Eye", through her character Pecola Breedlove, her alienation by the society and her consequent descent into madness.

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