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Portrayal Claudia and Frieda as Activists of Child Abuse in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* - A Study

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Morrison's works reflect her learning, personal experiences, power of imagination, word power, great concern for her people, and staunch support for women, strong protest of racism and sexism and thirst for emancipation of women. Some of the characters and ideas of her novels are from the reflections of her personal life too. For instance, *Song of Solomon* written after her father's death reflects not only a search for ancestor but also a tribute to her father and grandfather. The title name, *Song of Solomon* is taken from her grandfather's name, John Solomon. And a scene in which Morrison tells how Pilate Dead's name was chosen randomly was taken from her real life situation; Morrison's mother's name Rahmah Willis was chosen so, similarly Helen Wright in *Sula*, depicted as a church-going woman also reflects Morrison's mother; her biographical information says that Morrison's mother was a church-going woman "whose name Rahmah was picked blindly from the Bible" (3).

The effect of civil rights movement because of which Morrison's family got shifted from South to North is found in *Jazz*. Joe Trace and Violet's "walked and worked and worked and walked" says clearly that Morrison's family had undergone such situations. Morrison's solo fight in bringing up her children after divorcing her husband is what reflected in the portrayal of Morrison's mighty mothers; Eva Peace in *Sula*, Pilate Dead in *Song of Solomon*, and Sethe in *Beloved*. The idea of introducing the protagonist of *Beloved* as ghost was conceived from the scariest ghost stories told by her parents. Thus, Morrison's family background, effect of her community, and the influences of dominated culture, the tormented condition of enslaved people, her education, profession and her care for her people altogether influenced Morrison to become a prolific writer.

The Bluest Eye is a story about a girl, Pecola Breedlove, who was abused by her father and ignored by her mother. And she is made to think that her ugly looking is the root cause for everything, hence she is made believe that the pursuit of blue eyes is the panacea for all her problems. In search of blue eyes, she becomes mad at the end. The meaninglessness of Pecola's life is symbolically depicted through the prelude written thrice, first with proper space and punctuation, secondly without punctuation and finally with neither punctuation nor space. With regard to the afore stated point, Michele Wallace says,

Morrison announces that the meaninglessness of this official text (and perhaps all unitary models) will be a primary focus in *The Bluest eye* by repeating it a second time without punctuation—the law of the Father, or dominant discourse –and a third time without space between the words, undercutting the very basis of the alphabet's power to signify. In the process, Morrison suggests that Pecola's madness

originates less in her individual psyche or the psyche of anyone else in the ghetto; rather, it is socially and linguistically constructed by the dominant discourse (64).

The novel focuses on two important aspects which spoil children's future, they are nothing but the poor relationship of parents and their quarrels that make the children feel inferior and also have some strange ideas in their mind. To substantiate these two aspects, it talks about the families of Claudia and Pecola. Both the families maintain poor relationship; they do not know the art of parenting. The hatred between fathers and mothers affect the children. For instance, the fight between Cholly and Pauline make the children either run away from the house or hide them in order to avoid being sandwiched between their fights. The misunderstanding between Cholly and Pauline causes fearful fights at home, in which they attack each other. In this context, Jennifer Lee Jordan Heinert expresses her view, "His response, violence directed at Darlene, is echoed later in his treatment of both his wife and daughter. Since the parents engage themselves in fighting, the children experience loneliness and the loneliness pave way for strangeness and as a result, Pecola becomes scary, innocent and obsessive about the feeling that she is an ugly looking girl, she cannot arrest anybody's attention, not even her parents' attention, she thinks, had she been blessed with attractive looking, she would have put an end to their fighting, "If she looked different, beautiful, maybe Cholly would be different, and Mrs. Breedlove too. Maybe they'd say, "why, look at pretty-eyed Pecola. We mustn't do bad things in front of those pretty eyes." (46) She would have been a diversion for their routine fights. As she is occupied by many complicated thoughts that belittle her, she becomes an easy prey to the inner and outer world. First, she falls victim to her mother's carelessness; her mother is devoted to her duty to take care of housekeeping works of her employer, but irresponsible to take care of her own family and children. Secondly, she is victimized to an outburst sexual desire of her father, as a sequence of action, she falls victim to the mocking of people that she has seen her father naked, and she is impregnated by her own father. Next, she falls victim to Maureen Pie's sarcastic comments, and for other boys' negative comments. Further she falls victim to Junior and Soaphead Church, the former uses her innocence to kill a cat that he envies for its being the pet of his mother, and the later uses Pecola for killing his diseased dog. Finally, she falls victim to her own maddening thoughts of looking beautiful with blue eyes. When people look at her mercifully considering her madness, she believes that she is now blessed with blue eyes so that everyone is looking at her.

Frieda and Claudia are psychologically affected by the poor treatment of their parents. For instance, how Claudia's mother treated her when she was caught cold. For a diseased person, the medicine and love and care play fifty-fifty role to cure the disease, medicine develops physical fitness, whereas love and care develop mental stability. But in Claudia's case, it is missing, Claudia's mother, instead of advising Claudia by using soothing words and with patting touch so that she can be careful hereafter to avoid such diseases, she scolds and threatens Claudia not to vomit on the bed. This incident reminds the readers how Pecola was treated when she spilled the juice on the floor. Another instance is how Claudia's father treated her sister Frieda when Mr. Henry, his tenant, was caught fondling Frieda's breast. He didn't think about the shameful that would be brought to his daughter if it is publicized through fighting with Mr. Henry. He thinks only about his commanding power to threaten others. Frieda felt ashamed of her father's approach towards a sensitive issue. Since there is no one to bother about and see the things from Claudia and Frieda's point of view, they are affected by self-pity; they pay attention to themselves. It is very critical state of mind, it reduces their confidence, always long for sentimental pain, everything seems to be paining, their thinking descends from loftiness to aloofness, their soul longs to be consoled, their mind expects respect for their feelings, their ears crave for soothing words, their body searches for a lap to rest their head, thus the self-pity they got by the poor treatment of their parents shackles their life. From the above statements, it is clear what kind of relationship can be maintained in their family.

The poor treatment of Claudia's mother when Claudia caught cold affects her psychologically. Claudia's mother worries about the bed getting dirtied by vomiting and threatens Claudia not to vomit. These acts are similar to Pecola's household. Their father is another extreme in showing his commanding power,

when Henry misbehaved with Frieda by fondling her breasts, her father made it publicized to show his commanding power. Because of the above mentioned reasons, both the sisters developed self-pity.

When Pecola is put out door, she gets an opportunity to acquaint with them. Their relationship is developed on mercy ground; when they hear the story about the poor condition of Pecola, they realise that it is more than their own condition and so they give great concern for Pecola. The two sisters are the ones who understand Pecola's pathetic condition and try their level best to protect her from societal issues. Pecola's house is filled either with emptiness or with quarrels as Frieda and Claudia's house. The children dare not speak to the elders of the family rather they try to hide from such embarrassing situations. There is no proper conversation in the family except some warning commands. Since they experience poor treatment by their parents which is similar to Pecola's, they are able to understand Pecola well and they give special care for her. They act as activists to safeguard Pecola and her child so as to bring shame on the fathers like Cholly.

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