

Eco-Feminist Study of Toni Morrison’s Novels: The Bluest Eye, Sula And Beloved

¹Abhinav Ahlawat

¹Department of English Maharshi Dayanand University

ABSTRACT : *Eco feminist interpretation of toni morrison’s novels: The Bluest Eye, Sula and Beloved. The present paper aims at the study of Toni Morrison’s novels with an Eco Feministic approach. It is based on the study of three novels The Bluest Eye, Sula and Beloved. It shows how women and nature are related to each other and how both are oppressed by the patriarchal society in the same way and how women and nature both are showing resistance towards this dominance in their own ways. All the female characters in these novels are related and affected by nature in one or other ways. This oppression is still there in the contemporary period.*

I. INTERDUTION

Toni Morrison is the first African-American novelist who won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1993 for “Beloved”. Her novels are known for their epic themes, vivid dialogue, and richly detailed characters. She is an American novelist, editor and professor. She wrote ten novels. Among her best known novels are “The Bluest Eye”, “Sula”(1974), “Song of Solomon”(1977) and “Beloved”(1987). In 2012, an interview in The Guardian, she tells that she became a Catholic at age 12 and received the baptismal name "Anthony", which later became the basis for her nickname "Toni". She did her post-graduation in English from Cornell University in 1955, for which she wrote a thesis on suicide in the works of William Faulkner and Virginia Woolf. Morrison began writing fiction as part of an informal group of poets and writers at Howard who met to discuss their work. She wrote a short story about a black girl who longed to have blue eyes. She later developed the story as her first novel, “The Bluest Eye” (1970). She wrote ten novels, the latest one is “Home” (2012). She also wrote for Children’s literature as well. In contemporary woman novelists of America, Toni Morrison is the rare one who thinks highly of nature in her works. As the emerging of eco-feminism, some studier began to research these novels in terms of eco-feminist Critics. However, the quantities of these studies were small.

Eco-criticism has become one of the fastest-growing and promising areas in literary study and a "self-conscious enterprise", after a slow start in the early 1990s. Eco-feminism describes movements and philosophies that link feminism with ecology. As the environmental movement along with environmental crises raised the consciousness of women to the decay of the earth, they began to see a parallel between the devaluation of the earth and the devaluation of the women. Women began to see the link as not a false construction of weakness, but as a strong unifying force that clarified the violation of women and the earth as part of the same drama of male control. In a book on eco-feminism, “*Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Eco-feminism*” (1990), Diamond and Orenstein claim eco-feminism is a social movement and offer the book as a statement of its ideology (p.xiii). The concept of eco-feminism uses the age-old connection between women and nature as a bridge to strengthen both the feminism and the ecological movements which seek to end the oppression of Women and Nature.

Eco-feminism calls for an end to all oppressions. Eco-feminism connects the exploitation and domination of women with that of the environment, and argues that there is a connection between women and nature that comes from their shared history of oppression by a patriarchal Western society. Thinkers like Linda Vance argue that eco-feminism must re-conceptualize the relationship of Woman and Nature as “sisters” based on shared oppression of the Woman and the non-human world. Both Nature and Women are important themes in Toni Morrison’s novels which provide the appropriateness of applying this theory to her novels. “The bluest eye” is her first novel and usually studied in terms of Psychoanalytic Critics, Postcolonial Critics and Feminist Critics According to data collection, this research was worth doing. Moreover, this novel could largely represent theories of eco-feminism and the early thoughts of Toni Morrison. Cultural eco-feminism has been analyzed through the illustration of rape, menstruation and natural images in the novel. These illustrations emphasize women’s femininity and the connections with nature. Through the kitchen in which the story takes place and the description of housework, the concept of social eco-feminism can be seen.

Social eco-feminists insist that women are close to nature through their long-time social roles which are pregnancy, giving birth, raising children and doing housework. Vandana Shiva describes Eco-feminism by saying that it is the “medicalisation of childbirth and industrialization of plant reproduction”. Natural imagery in Toni Morrison’s “The Bluest Eye” compares women destiny with nature, and uncovers the double pressures from white culture and men suffered by Negro women, criticizing ruling logic which gives oppression to Negro women and nature. In *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison offers a profound critique of codified and institutionalized white language and ideology through the subversion of a school primer that privileges whiteness. The black family and community play a very important and dominating role in the black individual's life. Because of the lack of parents' love and irresponsibility of the community, Pecola loses her sanity, while with the love of their parents and the support from their family, Claudia and her sister Frieda grow up healthily. In “The Bluest Eye”, the black culture is portrayed mainly through the black blues and Aunt Jimmy's funeral. In “The Bluest Eye” Morrison is specifically connected with a particularly impalpable form of racist ideology that, because of its indefinable nature, is paradoxically more pervasive, psychologically damaging and difficult to contest than extreme and overt forms of racism. When Cholly Breedlove reduces his family to a state of homelessness, puts them all 'outdoors', Claudia, the now mature narrator, reflects upon her new awareness of the social, psychological and economic constraints on the black community. This novel very beautifully depicts the comparison, relation, and state of Nature and Women. The novel is divided into the four seasons, but it pointedly refuses to meet the expectations of these seasons. For example, spring, the traditional time of rebirth and renewal, of new lights, colors and new ways reminds Claudia of being whipped with new switches, and it is the season when Pecola is raped. Pecola's baby dies in autumn, the season of harvesting. Morrison uses natural cycles to underline the unnaturalness and misery of her characters', especially female characters experiences. To some degree, she also questions the benevolence of nature, as when Claudia wonders whether; “The earth itself might have been unyielding”, to someone like Pecola. Example of marigolds is also used by Morrison when Claudia and Frieda associate marigolds with the safety and well-being of Pecola's baby. Their ceremonial offering of money and the remaining unsold marigold seeds represents an honest sacrifice on their part. They believe that if the marigolds they have planted grow, then Pecola's baby will be all right. More generally, marigolds represent the constant renewal of nature. In Pecola's case, this cycle of renewal is perverted by her father's rape of her.

“Sula” is her second novel and the best to represent her writing style and technique. Through the narration of the fates of two typical black women Sula, and Nel, the novel demonstrates under the triple oppression of sexism, racialism and classism black women have experienced great hardships and misery in the process of searching for identity and struggling for freedom and equality. Sula and Nel are two Black young girls: clever and poor, together they grow up sharing their secrets, dreams and happiness. Then Sula moves away from the small-town community in the uplands of Ohio to roam the cities of America. Much has changed in the town when she returned ten years later, including Nel, who now has a husband and three children. The bottom is mostly the black community, situated in the hills above the mostly whites, the wealthier community of medallion. The Nature is being described very frequently in the novel. When Sula died, there is one more death, of nature, the Bottoms; a small hill is being transformed into a golf course by the Medallions. The nature is also seen as a destroyer when Nel says:

“The river had killed them all. No more silver-gray flashes, no more flat, wide, unhurried look. No more slowing down of gills...” (pg174).

Morrison shattered the stereotypical image of black women and addresses her with strength, wisdom, and rebellious spirit of exploring themselves. There is an extrinsic relation and comparison between nature and female characters shown by the author. Birds, flowers, fire and most importantly water is very much associated with sula and other characters as well. Birds invoke the idea of flight, which makes sense when we consider that Cecile and Sula both flee at some point in the story. When we meet Rochelle, she wears a "canary-yellow dress" and has the "glare of a canary". And we already know that a "plague of robins" arrives in Medallion just before Sula goes and robins are often associated with the spring, the season of rebirth and growth. Sula has a birthmark shaped like a rose, and "The Rose Tattoo" is the source of the novel's epigraph. These particular flowers are beautiful and fragrant, even intoxicating. Rochelle intoxicates the young Nel, and Sula intoxicates the many men around her. These characters are also a little dangerous in that they disrupt the lives of the people they encounter. But the thing about flowers is, once they're picked, they don't live for very long. Just as the flower's beauty is fleeting, so too is the presence of both of these women in the novel. Water is often associated with death in the novel. For Sula (and Nel, to a lesser degree), it represents Chicken's horrible drowning. Fire might be a cleansing force, but water engulfs and consumes the young boy. Water doesn't comfort Sula but rather agitates and upsets her because of her responsibility for Chicken's death. At the end of the novel, one of the townspeople who die in the tunnel slides and hits the ice below.

Various themes have been explored by the author as, racial discrimination, women friendship, marriage and sex, self growth, evil and goodness etc. Morrison's eco-feminist concern for nature has seldom been studied. Toni Morrison's "Beloved" shows the history of African American women's views of nature and how the institution of slavery fractured African American relationships with the environment and rendered nature as a place of conflict for slaves. . In "Beloved", Toni Morrison, through excavating the relationship between female and nature from the peculiar angle of a woman writer, demonstrates the strong desire of black women to get rid of the miserable fate of slavery and pursue liberation and independence. In this novel Morrison shows the victimized status of both women and nature. In the world of Beloved, trees serve primarily as sources of healing, comfort, and life. Denver's "emerald closet" of boxwood bushes functions as a place of solitude and repose for her. The beautiful trees of Sweet Home mask the true horror of the plantation in Sethe's memory. Paul D finds his freedom by following flowering trees to the North, and Sethe finds hers by escaping through a forest. By imagining the scars on Sethe's back as a "chokecherry tree," Amy Denver sublimates a site of trauma and brutality into one of beauty and growth. But as the sites of lynching and of Sixo's death by burning, however, trees reveal a connection with a darker side of humanity as well. Morrison enhances the world of Beloved by investing it with a supernatural dimension as well. These novels show the recovery of black people under the guidance of nature. In the light of eco-feminist theory, I examine the ideology of the fate of Black Women in "Beloved" "The bluest eye" and "Sula". Morrison, being a black woman writer, in her novels, shows her concern for and reflection about the destiny of the black women, the African-American culture and their communities. Eco-feminists talk about the relation of women and nature. Environment of the nature is being degraded in the novels. Based on the above research achievements and limitations, this proposal is based on a tentative reading of "Sula" and "beloved" and "The bluest eye" from the eco-feminist perspective to show Morrison's eco-feminist consciousness and explore the deep literary value of the novels. The thesis attempts to deepen the understanding of the novels further by reading it from the new perspective of eco-feminism.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY:

- [1] Barbara, Christian. *Black Feminism Criticism: Perspective on Black Women Writers*. New York: Pergamon, 1985. Print.
- [2] Cuomo, C. J. (1992). Unraveling the problems of ecofeminism. *Environmental Ethics*, 14, 351-363. Print.
- [3] Diamond, I. & Orenstein, G. F. (Eds.). (1990). *Reweaving the world: The emergence of ecofeminism*. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books. Print.
- [4] Diamond, I., & Orenstein, G. F. (1990). Introduction. In I. Diamond & G. F. Orenstein (Eds.), *Reweaving the world: The emergence of ecofeminism* (pp. ix-xv). San Francisco: Sierra Club Books. Print.
- [5] Gaard, Greta, ed. *Eco-feminism: woman, animals, nature*. Philadelphia: Temple press, 1993. Print.
- [6] Griffin, S. (1978). *Woman and nature: The roaring inside her*. New York: Harper and Row. Print.
- [7] Mellor, Mary. *Feminism and Ecology*. Cambridge: polity, 1997. Print.
- [8] Mies, Maria and Vandana Shiva. *Ecofeminism*. London: Zed, 1993.
- [9] Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*. London: Vintage, 1997.
- [10] Morrison, Toni. *Sula*. London: Vintage, 1998.
- [11] Shiva, V. (1990). Development as a new project of Western patriarchy. In I. Diamond & G. F. Orenstein (Eds.), *Reweaving the world: The emergence of ecofeminism* (pp. 189-200). San Francisco: Sierra Club Books.