

## **ETHNOCENTRIC ARCHETYPES IN ‘THE BLUEST EYE’**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The aim of this qualitative descriptive study is to highlight the negative effects of ethnocentric behaviour of different characters in novel ‘The Bluest Eye’, written by Toni Morrison by applying Jungian theory of archetypes. The novel presents categorized world on basis of racial differences such as the colour of skin and physical beauty in an Afro–American race conscious society in America where white characters, the ruling class perceives the black characters with aggressive behavior of ethnocentrism. The study analyses the influence of symbolic expression of archetypes processed unconsciously as well as consciously through their interaction with one another as well as their actions in very hostile circumstances. Under different slogans, raised by the ruling class, the blacks are ranked as inferiors. The ruling class is fairly able to control their mind in such a manner that they emerge as divergent human beings. It is concluded that there is need to purify the world from dirt of ethnocentrism, which works to divide people into groups, leading ultimately to social inequalities.*

**Keywords:** *Ethnocentrism, Archetypes, Collective Unconscious & Racial Inequalities*

### **INTRODUCTION**

This study aims to examine drastic effects of ethnocentrism on the development of archetypal construction of human psyche of different characters in Toni Morrison’s novel, ‘*The Bluest Eye*’ by applying Jungian theory of archetypes. In 1921, a Swiss psychiatrist, Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961), known as father of archetypal psychology presented a term of ‘The Psyche’, under which, it is believed that a man’s conscious and unconscious simultaneously control his personality; his actions as well as his discourse. Joseph Cambrey, one of Jung’s critics writes that one of the most prominent features of Jungian psyche is ‘his postulation of a core level’, which is phrased as the collective unconscious. This section contains a network of various behavior patterns, taking their shapes as well as being modified continuously under the influence of human instincts and universal symbols (2009, p. 99). Jung’s concepts about archetypes have been taken differently by his critics. The notion of archetypes as being universally fixed beyond limits of time and space and posits that archetypal images demonstrate difference, differing from each other and infinitely deferring a fixed meaning (Dobson, 2005, p. 10).

In this manner its structure is more or less the same in all human beings, projecting universal images of men and women in different roles; as fathers, mothers, husbands, wives, children, and so on. Susan Rowland criticizes Jung’s archetypal notion as being fixed. She is of the view that

archetypes are not universally inherited by individuals rather they vary from culture to culture: 'What archetypes generate in the human psyche varies widely with cultural, social and personal circumstances' (Dobson, 2005, p. 9). Toni Morrison wrote to acme racial matters in her society, which had remained unspeakable for long time. Moreover, she wrote to uplift the Afro-American people, who were slaves, marginalized and suppressed people with wounded minds, bodies and souls. Being an Afro American woman, Morrison experienced the wretchedness of her people closely. To her in a race conscious society, blackness was a socially constructed category, where black identity was a token of shame and humiliation until the black civil rights movement of the 1960s: 'To be called "black" in America meant to live in a state of shame....' (Bouson, 2000, p. 121). She claimed, 'I felt I represented a whole world of women who either were silenced or who had never received the imprimatur of the literary world' (Lister, 2009, p. 8).

It has been a very long tradition among people to favour the people from the similar cultures and reject the people from other cultures. Such ethnically centred behavior of people divides a society into different groups. There are different practices used to communicate hate for people belonging to other races like representational racism, ideological racism, interactional racism and discursive racism. Among all these types discursive racism is the type, the linguistic philosophers of post structuralism like Jacques Derrida (1998), Foucault (1980) and Judith Butler (1997) are more interested. When racial differences are expressed repeatedly and emphatically through hateful verbal expressions by the powerful agencies against people from other races, the hate behind these practices spread at macro level. Progressively these hateful utterances become discursive practices in that society by developing the discriminating gaps in more and more sturdy manner. The psychologically injured people, in form of traumatic memories of those hateful utterances repeat the same words, and in this manner the racial speech acts play a significant role in creation of an environment of otherness.

The selected novel, '*The Bluest Eye*' is Morrison's first novel, which was published in 1970. The setting of the novel is in a black neighbourhood in Lorain, Ohio in 1914. It reflects the gloomy plight of her black characters due to their ugliness and marginalization in a race conscious America. The social and economic status of all the members of the Breedlove family contributes to the development of their psyche. The humiliating treatment of people around them constantly reminds them of their inferiority in such manner that these characters evolve to be quite different from the fixed images of archetypes of a father, a mother, husband, wife, daughter and son, etc. The members of Breedlove family are not only the victims of social ethnocentrism, but they are also the victims of psychic ethnocentrism, since they are enduring social as well as psychological effects of being subjects. The protagonist is nine year old black girl, named Pecola Breedlove, who fails to receive love from her parents, friends and people around her only because she does not fit into the set framework of beauty, and hence is perceived by all of them as an ugly creature. She is a target of verbal and physical abuse in such a society, which celebrates possession of blue

eyes, white skin and golden hair as ideal norms of beauty. Hence she desperately yearns for blue eyes and eventually gets mad.

### **Research Statement**

There are drastic effects of ethnocentrism on development of archetypal construction of human psyche of different characters in Toni Morrison's '*The Bluest Eye*'.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The term ethnocentrism was first used by Sumner in 1906 in which ethnically centred individuals severely crush and devalue the rights of those people who do not share cultural and social norms with them. According to Ken Booth, "ethnocentrism is the 'view of things in which one's own group is the centre of everything, and all others are scaled and rated with reference to it'" (2014, p. 15). Different psychologists observed an unseen force of attraction between the human psyche and the cultural heritage they unconsciously inherit from their ancestors, which leads them to look at the people from other cultures with hatred. In 1960, the emergence and popularity of the civil right movement as well as the women's movements helped reconstruct social consciousness of people. These movements not only modified the constitutional laws, but also brought great expectations to the people who were fighting a war for self-identity in an otherwise hostile socio-political environment. In this context, psychology played a significant role in making people recognize different types of diversity in social groups 'through movements organized to counter racism and sexism had previously existed this period changed U.S. society and the social sciences in several important ways' (Trickett et al. 1994, p.8).

This was the time of empowerment to counter oppressions perpetrated on the basis of colour, gender, power, race, and age. Violence on the grounds of racism, religion, gender discrimination, and power relations has been a common practice in all parts of the world. The underlined agenda of all the movements was to gain power, to raise the social status of the oppressed and to protect their identity. In 1988, Myers presented Optimal Theory, with the help of which human behavior was analyzed on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender and social behavior, particularly in relation to the oppressors and the oppressed. On the other hand, it is believed that all human beings are linked with each other to create complex whole exhibiting multiple dimensions of culture, ideology, religion and race, and on other hand the human beings are studied on the basis of their individuality. According to Myers, this theory emphasizes spirituality, a dimension which was given little attention in most of Western psychological frameworks (1984). Morrison's Black characters faced multiple issues due to a variety of socio-political and economic factors. They were deprived people, who could not enjoy the blessings of life, which were bestowed on the Whites because they were socially and politically superior to the Blacks.

In a hostile atmosphere of 'otherness', there is clear evidence that the black characters have been described on the basis of the standards set by the ruling class, the Whites. Elijah remarked in his

article, “The Emerging Philadelphia African American class structure”, ‘along with slavery came a white supremacist ideology that defined black people as less than human, as genetically inferior to the country’s majority’ (Anderson, 2000, p. 12). According to Cynthia Davis, in an essay, “Self, Society and Myth in Morrison’s Fiction”, ‘All of her characters live in a world, which is defined by the ruling class of White people, which denies their basic rights as humans’ (Peach, 2011, p. 10). Clare Cooper Marcus (1974, 1995) observed the relationship between living things and their environment. In this regard, she studied Jung’s ‘notion of archetypes to understand how people relate to their houses’ (Saegert, 2004, p. 141). The division of the Black and the White characters in an ethnocentric society seems to be exactly in accordance with the Manicheism theory, which illustrates the symbolic representation of white colour for goodness and of black colour for evil. The Manichean allegory presents a process of segregation of people into binary oppositions,: ‘The Manichean allegory provides no phase in-between’ (Ashcroft, et al. 2013, p. 58).

Jung and other psychologists such as Melanie Klein, Myres, Hubert Hermans and Harry Kempen etc., traced the influence of culture, environment, politics, and social status on the development of one’s personality and behavior. MacLennan, one of Jung’s critics compared neuro psychology with archetypal psychology and claimed that the first one is related with the internal structure of human mind, while the latter deals with the external world. Human beings develop their personality on the basis of notions acquired from the world outside and this is practiced by them in their social behavior with each other: ‘Jung takes archetypal notions as being real, empirical, stable, public as well as ‘objective psyche’ (MacLennan, 2005, p. 5). Judith Butler (1997), in this regard studied influence of speech in building of one’s personality traits. Speech not only acts as a vehicle to carry thought, it acts as a tool to control listener’s acts, which are displayed through his / her behavior in a variety of situations. There is a communal relationship between speech and behavior of people, both effecting each other. One such example is the character of Pauline in the novel, whose attitude is totally different at the Fishers from the one she is used to display at her own home.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

In this qualitative study, both types of approaches; inductive as well as deductive are used. Through the inductive approach, Carl Jung’s framework of the Psyche is applied. On the other hand, through the deductive approach, a variety of characters through their discourse patterns, their behavior as well as their actions in different situations and events are analyzed to evaluate the effects of their ethnocentric behaviour, which tend to categorize them into groups.

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

Jung claims that he uses the term universal unconscious because it is different from personal unconscious; it has nothing to do with anybody’s personal desires, ambitions, dreams and past experience. Jung names it collective’ unconscious because it has contents and modes of behavior

that are more or less the same everywhere and in all individuals. It is, in other words, identical in all men and thus constitutes a common psychic substrate of a supra personal nature which is present in every one of us' (Jung, 2014 b, p. 3). Jung's claim fails to be applied in such a society, where the center of all physical charm is set by the whites, all black women go at the margins to become best suitable for abhorrence of all types. In the very beginning of the novel, the effects of ethnocentric behaviour on family archetype are made clear by Morrison's attempt of ironical introduction to the Breedlove family after description of a short story of Dick and Jane, very popular at that time in America: "Here is the house. It is green and white. It has a red door. It is very pretty. Here is the family. Mother, Father, Dick, and Jane" (p. 18).

The archetype of a family serves a two-fold purpose. On one hand it gives the American society an ideal picture of a civilized family in a civilized country, and on the other hand it adds to other hostile factors which lead the marginalized Blacks to their self-destruction. According to Timothy Powell's article "Toni Morrison: The Struggle to Depict the Black Figure on the White Page", "The Dick and Jane primer represents the legalized attempts in establishment of ethnocentrism in the American society" (Powell, 1990). By using the Dick and Jane primer story, Morrison wants her readers to feel the intensity of pain of the marginalized folk in a post colonial America. The relationship between Cholly and Pauline is just opposite to the ideal relationship between Dick and Jane. She gives the description of the house where the Breedlove family dwells that it is more or less like a prison. The place 'prison' is associated with criminals. Cholly is conscious of his status in the society: 'The house he dwelled with his family was not better than a prison' (Dixon, 1990, p. 28). 'They lived there because they were poor and black, and they stayed there because they believed they were ugly' (Morrison, 1970, p. 53). All the family members of the Breedlove family share one single norm that they are terribly ugly.

The nature is kind enough to bestow all its beauty in the whites' world. They have fair skin, golden hair, blue eyes, blue sky, lighted houses and above all a respectable social status. The blacks, on the other hand are seen leading a life full of humiliation, depravity, decadence, wantonness and immorality. They feel helpless because they are not guilty of any crime, they are just helpless in the hands of cruel fate, which has put them in unfavourable circumstances. All types of base tasks are for the black and everything fair and beautiful is for the white: 'There are no lost teeth in the Fisher's or Dick and Jane' (Page, 1995, p. 41). The black women are seen fighting for their acknowledgment against the white men in the world outside their homes as well as against the men, who are their near kith and kin. They enjoy no sense of being loved and being cared by their own black men, since they are deprived of physical charm and beauty. The pierced foot of Pauline and her lost tooth put psychological restrictions on her 'self'. With each sign added to her ugliness, she becomes bitter, which is reflected in her fight with her husband as well as her responsibilities towards her children, especially her daughter. 'Her female characters suffer at the hands of her male characters like Junior, Cholly, and Soaphead, and within this violation

they assert their presence as “master”, “man-in-control”, or “god” at the expense of a young woman who exists only as someone to “impress upon”.

According to Miner, ‘Men are potential rapist, assume presence, language, and reason as their particular province. Women, potential victims, fall prey to absence, silence and madness’ (1985, p. 21). With such a wide gap between these two communities, their society fails to present an ideal image of a society archetype. What is unique in Morrison’s attempt to portray these issues is that her black characters suffer terribly psychological conflicts due to wretched predicaments in the society, and in order to overcome their psychological burden, they tend to destroy their own world. The mothers emerge quite differently from the universal portrayal of mothers and socially rejected, psychologically dejected and ethically demoralized fathers do not feel any responsibility associated with images of traditional caretakers to their families. Their interpersonal relationships with their family members develop in a drastic manner. The special targets of the cruel attitude of these fictional mothers are their daughters, who are prey of domestic violence, physical abuse, verbal abuse, mental torture and sexual abuse mostly by their own close relatives. They feel shame to own their daughters due to the colour of their epidermis and consider them ugly after judging them on the parameters of beauty set by their psychological masters.

Blackness is the major sin of these women, who grow in this sheer loathing sense, received from other such women; their mothers. These dejected, deprived and demoralized mothers give their daughters the same treatment, they have been going through. The archetype of motherhood subverts into unique archetype of ‘motherless’, which is unique to Morrison. The universal image of a mother is that of a person, who sacrifices everything for the comfort of her children without looking at the physical beauty. In universal archetype of mother this natural instinct is inevitable. Another psychologist, Melanie Klein used a more technical term ‘object’ in place of archetype, to describe it as instinctual impulse. Both Klein and Jung believe in existence of innate mental patterns which are further shaped by real experiences in the surrounding world. Klein believes that ‘infant has an innate unconscious awareness of the mother’ (Solomon, 1991, p. 248). She supported her notion on the basis of the way in which young animals turn to their mothers for food and shelter just after their birth. She takes the human animal not different from them and hence finds strong ties between mothers and their babies. In this regard, Jung in 1936 wrote: ‘The instincts shape very close resemblance to archetypes so close, they provide logic that archetypes are unconscious representations of the instincts themselves; or we can say that they provide patterns of instinctive behavior. (Singer, 1969).

Pauline desperately yearns for possession of the glorified world of the whites and consequently deserts her own family. When she sees Peccola for the first time, it is due to her own reflection in the baby girl, which makes her horrified. The girl has close resemblance with its mother, a face, which cannot earn a respectable status in the society: ‘I used to like to watch her... But I knowed

she was ugly' (p. 126). The words 'terribly ugly' reflect the threats of fear and terror owing to the reality that the girl cannot be fitted into the frame of aesthetic beauty of American society, where everybody admires the beauty of Shirley Temple. Everybody wants an escape from his / her blackness towards blueness; the world where the sky is always blue. In this regard the baby girl is born with tokens of failure. She is the target of oppression of all types; social, domestic, psychological as well as physical. The series of adverse circumstances during one year makes Peccola more and more crazy for blue eyes. In contrast to Peccola, the Fishers' girl possesses blue eye and so she is able to captivate Pauline's love, which she is not willing to give to her own daughter.

At many places, it is seen that the depressed married couple of Cholly and Pauline is at daggers drawn with each other. When they find each other not according to the universally accepted standards of anima and animus or at least they do not fit in the framework of their favourite images of archetypes. In the society they are living, the anima archetype is supposed to possess the features associated with American beauty as being white with blue eyes, delicate and fragile. According to Jung, this is a universal image of women, which exists in men about them. Pauline's limp foot and decayed front teeth add to ugliness as well as deformity to her character, which set the foundation of her personality. Nobody can answer the confusions arising in her mind to justify her shortcomings: '... had no nickname: why nobody teased her: why she never left at home anywhere, or that she belonged any place' ( p. 111). With her loss of front tooth, she becomes uglier and loses her self-confidence. Cholly becomes more bitter, harsher and detestable towards her. He starts his time to be spent in drinking to get escape from the very ugliness, bestowed on him. He starts making fun of her growing ugliness. Their relationship becomes worse day by day. Both start fighting with each other, both cannot adhere each other's sight. They curse each other: 'Often she could be heard discoursing with Jesus about Cholly, pleading with Him to help her "strike the bastard down from his pea-knuckle of pride"' ( p. 42).

On the other hand the animus archetype is the parallel image of the masculine occurs naturally in all the women: 'As the counterpart of anima in one's psyche, the animus influences a woman's interactions with men and her attitude towards them (Chang, 2013, p. 105). Pauline cannot tolerate the distorted image of her man in the form of Cholly, who is jobless, drunkard, and who sleeps like animals, without feeling any sense of responsibility to provide woods for making breakfast in a chilly morning, which is a matter of routine, for instance. A famous biologist Jean Piaget (1932) developed various theories, which illustrate different phases of acquisition of moral values among children. He believes that children learn everything from the environment they were surrounded by. Cholly in his childhood has perceived no image of mother, father, brother and sister.. He has been a rejected and abandoned person throughout his life. He is a strange mixture of human and sub human qualities. After the sinful deed, rape of his daughter by him, he

is left with feelings of hatred and care: 'The hatred would not let him pick her up, the tenderness forced him to cover her' (p. 163).

Pauline has no expectations of love and care from her husband for the sin of her ugliness, for which she is not responsible. His abusive behavior earns hatred of his wife in return as a reaction. She wants him to be more and more sinful so that he could be tormented in hell forever for his cruel deeds and sinful acts. She cries to pray Jesus about her husband's fall, a unique wish made by a wife for a husband: , she needed Cholly's sins desperately. The lower he sinks, the wilder and more irresponsible he becomes, the more splendid she and her task become. In the name of Jesus' (p. 42). Normally wives ask for forgiveness, prosperity, success and sound health. On the contrary this woman cannot tolerate her husband's sight. Their life is a complete failure in a society, and they have nothing more to lose. They believe that nature which rewards only those who are beautiful. Cholly find his escape in drinking and Pauline in silver screen, in the world of movies to satisfy her inner desires. It is from the world of movies that she has perceived the notion of physical beauty. This idea makes her more conscious of her own ugliness as remarked by Morrison, 'Along with the idea of romantic love, she is introduced to another – physical beauty. Probably the most destructive idea in the history of human thought' (p. 122). She has never tasted the fruit of love in her life except a few after her marriage.

Morrison wrote to show the effects of ethnocentric behavior on the psyche of black people as something which was result of social and cultural constructs. Morrison's novels serve as 'historical narratives', which bring to light issues of gender, class and race. The racist speeches in the novel evoked the black characters' inherent desires to be beautiful and adorable like the white people in the society. There are persuasive attempts in use of ethos by the whites in form of advertisements, gadgets and movies.

## **DISCUSSION**

It has been a general practice in the world that the people who are in power want to justify the inequalities in the society, they set different standards to deprive the weaker social groups. According to George Bernard Shaw the powerful authorities always try to suppress everything, which could prove to be a threat to "interests involved in established law and order, organized and maintained in the name of religion and justice by politicians who are pure opportunist Have-and-Holders" (Shaw, 1920). Under different slogans such as civilization, religion, race and colour, the powerful agents try to maintain their own authority over the weaker. They would crush all those attempts which could threaten their own interests. Jungian theory of archetypes helps in analysis of characters split into the spheres of ethnocentrism, racism, feminism and other hierarchical frameworks. In an approach to deconstruct a literary text, it provides an opportunity to appreciate the fictional characters in different situations on subjective grounds. The literary



critics, who consider an unlimited capacity of symbols carrying multiple elicited meanings on the basis of interpretations of literary texts, support Jungian concepts.

## CONCLUSION

Ethnocentrism is a psychological phenomenon, which influences the behaviour of people from different races in development of their interpersonal relationships with each other. The world is split into different groups on the basis of colour of skin and other physical features. People tend to adopt stereotypical approaches, when they find another group of people having different socio-cultural norms. They perceive people from different cultural heritage with an attitude of otherness and in this manner the powerful groups try to exploit the rights of less powerful to make them fully deprived of everything, which they themselves enjoy. Although the modern world has become a global village, yet exploitation of weaker communities at the hands of more powerful social and political agents is still a burning issue in different parts of the world. The evil nature of ethnocentrism tends to split a society into hostile groups by promoting intolerance, extremism and terrorism. All social agents should accept human diversity to promote the passion of universal brotherhood, peace and equality of mankind to make the world a better place to live.

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