

Embracing Conflict: Unveiling Feminist Narratives in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and Susan Jarratt's "Feminism and Composition"

Fahmeda Yeasmin

Assistant Professor of English, University Of Chittagong, Chittagong-4331, Bangladesh
Email: fahmedayeasmin@cu.ac.bd

Abstract:

Feminist composition scholars explore issues related to identity. This involves considering how different identities, including gender identities, are represented in written texts and how writers can navigate and challenge traditional norms. In her novel *The Bluest Eye*, Toni Morrison provides a superb example of how a writer can navigate and challenge traditional norms surrounding gender identity. The novel's protagonist Pecola Breedlove is a black girl who suffered from mental anxiety and pain from the family members and society. She was raped by her father and distressed by the people of the society in a tormented way. Although she had a strong inclination to have a free life, she wanted to fly like a bird; she did not find anyone beside her to speak on behalf of her rights. Her voice and tears are neither valued nor considered. At the end, Pecola is mentally unstable and vexed. Although a few were sympathetic to see the abyss of her life, they were not that courageous to help her even at that time. Susan Jarratt shares the note that although a few feminists avoid conflict because they think that confliction will not bring any harmonious result, however, most of the feminists are inclined to embrace conflict and eager to reveal the social gap because they regard this standpoint as a momentous platform not to uplift dejection but to bring awareness and to show the social disparity.

Keywords: Existential Crisis, Confliction, Feminism, Narrative techniques, Criticism

Date of Submission: 18-12-2023

Date of Acceptance: 28-12-2023

Toni Morrison encapsulated Pecola's situation by the narrator Claudia MacTeer in this way: "We tried to see her without looking at her, and never, never went near. Not because she was absurd, or repulsive, or because we were frightened, but because we had failed her. Our flowers never grew." (204). Pecola was all alone in her world. The little girl Pecola who wanted to fly like a free bird in the sky at the end of the novel was the representation of a living death. The flower is the symbol of love, faith, care, purity, peace, and pleasure. MacTeer delineated the note that flowers never grew which means they had lost her faith, love, hope everything in their life.

Jarratt brought this exigent view by highlighting the note from *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* in this way- "Recognizing the inevitability of conflict is not grounds for despair but the starting point for creating a consciousness in students and teachers through which the inequalities generating those conflicts can be acknowledged and transformed" (119). Morrison's characters reflect this view, evoke a discussion, and offer an insight, why women have been hesitant to expect anything from the society, what are the reasons behind their vexed mentality, and where the actual gaps and conflictions are amplified. Women are the sufferers because of the dominating mentality of the men in this male dominated society. Toni Morrison has given a strong scenario of the oppressed women in this way: "They licked their lips and clucked their tongues in fond remembrance of pains they had endured-childbirth, rheumatism, croup, sprains, backaches, piles..." (137-138). Despite the pain they have endured, the women in Morrison's novel are reluctant to voice dissent. Most of them are not that bold or courageous to raise their voice against prejudice or discrimination as their ancestors tolerated everything silently. Social gap, pressure and the dithering condition of women induced them to expect less than zero from the society. Morrison also suggests that this is because the women have been told repeatedly by men that their voices do not matter so much so that they believe it. As the narrator of the novel explains, "It came from conviction, their conviction... The master had said, "You are ugly people." They had said. "Yes, you are right." (39).

Hook speaks directly to the issue of conflict in the title of her recent collection of essays, *Talking Back*. Jarratt portrays the contingent condition of women from the observation of Hook in this way-

“Hook remembers women’s voices as strong and angry in her experience as a child in southern black family and community. She was silenced not by men but by the adult women in her family who tried to socialize her as a female child into using the right kind of speech.” (119-20). In *The Bluest Eye*, the little girl Pecola was silent by her mother and by the other members of society. Her father raped her, she gave birth to a baby and the baby also died soon. Despite facing intolerable pain, suffering, and challenges, she did not run anywhere for love, care, or justice. The traumatic nature of the people strained her life with relentless tears. She viewed the people of the society as stones not as human beings and her expectations from society were less than zero. Morrison brought the true and tragic scenario of women as well as poked a provocative question regarding equality and justice to the fickle-minded society.

The character Pecola in *The Bluest Eye* depicted the note that the life of a woman is different from a man from the very beginning of their life. Women are taught by the society that they are not allowed to raise voice in any case, they should have mountainous patience, they are not permitted to cry or demand anything, and finally they must remember that they are like dolls without life or agency. Morrison portrayed the true scenario by the voice of MacTeer in this way: “Tears threatened to erase the aloofness of their authority...I did not know why I destroyed those dolls. But I know that nobody ever asked me what I wanted for Christmas.” (21). The suffering of her heart did not allow her to cry loudly due to the rigorous mentality of her family members. Although she could not raise her voice before her family members, she wanted to demolish their blind and one-eyed desire by destroying those dolls. Here, the message is disclosed boldly that women are the subjugated matter from the initial stages of life.

MacTeer thrusts us to realize the issue that women should not tolerate discrimination by following the path of the ancestors silently and blindly they should talk back to their identity by exposing their values and rights. Women must be acknowledged as an individual being with life not as an object without life.

Class, color, or caste conflicts are the center of attention at today’s time. It is conspicuous that women are exploited in life. However, if we keep the close lens then evidence will be profoundly found that black women are more oppressed comparing to the white women. At the end, we see that Pecola was crying and requesting earnestly to give her blue eyes from her beautiful friend (a white girl). She had an earnest inclination to achieve the mesmerizing gift. It was her strong belief that blue eyes would be able to give her beauty, peace, love, care, security, and attention. She was mentally unstable, and all her friends left her. Although she was mad due to sufferings, her pathetic situation pokes us to think regarding the present condition of the women (especially black women who are the still fighting in the society from different perspectives). For black women, Hook explains the “struggle has not been to emerge from silence into speech but to change the nature and direction of our speech, to make a speech that compels listeners, one that is heard.” MacTeer in *The Bluest Eye* pointed out the note that no one cared about her voice. Although she had not the desire to receive the doll, she always received the item on Christmas day from her family members. MacTeer revealed the yearning of her heart in this way- “The loving gift was always a big, blue-eyed Baby Doll...Pretend I was its mother? I had no interest in babies or the concept of motherhood. I was interested only in humans my own age and size.” (21). She wanted to raise her voice and desired to have her active participation only with human beings, but her family members always caged her life with a chain and her voice with a lifeless object.

Existential crisis is a predominant issue. In this society, women struggle vigorously to find their identity as an individual human being. Toni Morrison has brought out the real scenario that because of the torment of the society, very often women especially black women (like Pecola), are eager to move to another race and they are inclined to sacrifice their own identity and life without thinking twice. The contingent note is also firmly found in our society that men even black men are free whereas women are bound by the strong net of the male dominated society. By the male character Cholly, Toni Morrison has depicted the nature of men in this way “Cholly was free. Dangerously free. Free to feel whatever he felt-fear, guilt, shame, love, grief, pity. Free to be tender or violent...free to sleep in doorways or between the white sheets of a singing woman. Free to take a job, free to leave it.” Men are not chained or forced to give any answer to anyone for their deed. They can express disagreement openly whereas women are the topics of discussion and criticism.

Feminist scholars have critiqued traditional approaches to conflict resolution for their often male-centric perspectives. Different issues as for instance hegemonic, complicit, subordinate, and marginalized nature of the male dominated society are taken into consideration in this standpoint. They argue for more inclusive, gender-aware methodologies that consider diverse experiences. Morrison has highlighted the sharp gap of society in her writing. Jarratt manifested the note- “Feminists are arguing the argument issue...Examining the ways some feminist theorists discover a productive tension.” (121). Writing of the feminists raises the flag of an effective discussion.

The fact cannot be denied that educational institutions enforce the power and control of the existing social order, they also allow students and teachers to challenge, oppose, and resist those forces. However, the fact must be acknowledged that interconnection and complex discussion of the topic will expand the vision and the writing capabilities of the students in a positive way. This topic will accelerate a constructive discussion. During the discussion, the students will find out the reasons behind the conflicts as well as show their endeavor to bring a way to overcome the challenges (by reflecting their own experiences and by connecting the real scenario of the society).

Feminism often critiques patriarchal structures that contribute to power imbalances between genders. Conflict arises when feminist perspectives challenge traditional norms and systems that perpetuate male dominance. Susan Jarratt says that "Differences of gender, race and class among students and teachers provide situations in which conflict does arise, and we need more than the ideal of the harmonious, nurturing composition class in our repertory of teaching practices to deal with these problems." (113). Women are not supposed to spend their whole life with uncertainty. They should be strong, patient, and vigorous even at the time of facing any challenging situation. Toni Morrison concluded her novel at the last part by the voice of Claudia MacTeer - "My mother's hand is unextinguished. She is strong, smiling, and relaxed while the world falls down about her." (187-188). The tornado of the nature and the toxic mentality of the male dominated society may keep the women at chaotic or aimless for a brief period, but it cannot be the ultimate destination of their life. Women should be valiant in raising their voice for equity. They must embrace their own identity with love and respect without fearing the red eyes of society. Literature like *The Bluest Eye* escalates our conscience level as well as provides a way for us to discuss what productive conflict can look like and why it is important.

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