Internalized Racism

Name

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Date

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Racism and internalized racism has been one of the most important social issues in different parts of the world. The African American community in the United States of America has specifically been exposed to it due to the American history of official slavery. The subject has also been extensively covered through the literature composed by the African American authors, which specifically includes the names of Toni Morison and Charles Fuller. The two authors have explored the nature and concept of internalized racism through their individual works which are, “The Bluest Eye” and “A Soldiers Play” respectively. The simplest definition of internalized racism is the oppression, discrimination and inhumane attitude of an oppressed community on its own members and the concept will be explored in detail in the next sections. This paper will explore and analyze the two famous works “The Bluest Eye” by Toni Morison and “A Soldiers Play” by Charles Fuller, from the lens of internalized racism while paying special attention to the background of the authors and the conditions of the society at the time the books were authored.

Racial discrimination is not a new concept of the society as it had been a major part of the society before and even after the American civil war. The African American community of the United States of America was forcefully enslaved and exposed to the brutality, oppression, inhumane attitude and discrimination of the white supremacist society. The African American community bore this oppression and humiliation for more than a century and it had become a part of their life, from which escape was inevitable. Still, the African American community managed to get their rights from the white dominant society by paying sacrifices and raining their voices. Till the time they got their rights, their minds had been filled with the hate and abhorrence against the white community. There was another section of the African American community which had developed the thinking that the white had oppressed them because they are ugly due to their dark skin color. This was the more damaged community, as their pride and identity were manipulated by the oppression of the white society. So, such members tried to take on the role of oppression and brutality, in the wake of getting the status and recognition like the white society. This is actually internalized racism when the members of the African American community used violence and oppression against other, a bit lower in status, members of their own community to hold their status of being competent and trying to restore their identity of supremacy in the society.

The African American literature is full of the stories which not only shed light on the oppression of the white community towards the black Americans but also of the oppression and violence of the black Americans towards their family members and other members of their community. The literature highlights the fact quite effectively that the torture, violence and depressions to which the black community was exposed during the era of slavery and even after that, had crippled the minds, personality and identity of the black community. The thinking had been instilled in their minds that they are ugly due to their dark skin color which makes the incompetent then the white Americans, who are fair skinned and beautiful, therefore intelligent and competent to hold the important and ruling position in the society. “The Bluest Eye” by Toni Morison and “A Soldiers Play” by Charles Fuller are the two most important works in the African American literature which specifically explore the issue of internalized racism. The two authors, who were mostly active during the latter half of the twentieth century, belonged to the African American community. Though they had not been exposed to slavery directly, however, their forefathers had been the victims of one of the most brutal and violent practices in the history of the United States of America. So, they had known the sacrifices of their community through the words of their forefathers. It was not hard for the believe all the stores because of the fact that the Africana American community was still struggling to get the equality of rights in the united states of America during the twentieth century. The background of the two authors reveals the fact that being a part of the Africa American community, they had been the witness of the oppression and violence directed towards the African American community, even after the abolition of slavery. Moreover, the two works were published in 1970 and 1981 respectively and the conditions of the American society were not quite admirable even then. Although there were state laws that mentioned that the Africana American community is equal in rights and status to the white American community, still it was exposed to discrimination in one or the other way, which has been explored by the two authors through their works.

“The Bluest Eye” by Toni Morison describes the tale of a young African American girl, named Pecola, who believes that she is ugly. She belonged to a dysfunctional family. Her father spent a troubled youth, which had made him violent towards her and her mother. On the other hand, her mother who had a lame foot was victimized and isolate her whole life due to it. Pecola kept reminding herself that she is ugly and wished for the blue eyes thinking that it would make her beautiful. She let society humiliate herself for being ugly. Morrison mention in the story, “Adults, older girls, shops, magazines, newspapers, window signs—all the world had agreed that a blue-eyed, yellow-haired, pink-skinned doll was what every girl child treasured (p. 20).” This is one of the most important examples of internalized racism that a young girl was made to think that she is ugly and thus deserves all the inhumane attitude, just because her skin color is dark. Her parents, who were also dark skinned, did not love her and tried to make her think that she is beautiful, loved and desirable because of their own troubled past and crippled identities. The author has shared the thinking of Pecola, again and again, to show her wish of becoming beautiful by getting the blue eyes (Maulina, 2018). Talking about the beauty standards of the society, which were only met by the white members of the society, Morrison has described that Pecola was almost obsessed with the wrapper of candy because it had the picture of a beautiful white girl,

“A picture of little Mary Jane, for whom the candy is named. Smiling white face. Blond hair in gentle disarray, blue eyes looking at her out of a world of clean comfort. The eyes are petulant, mischievous. To Pecola they are simply pretty. She eats the candy, and its sweetness is good. To eat the candy is somehow to eat the eyes, eat Mary Jane. Love Mary Jane. Be Mary Jane (Morrison, p. 50).”

Another important example of internalized racism shared by Morrison is that Pecola was raped by her own father and not only once but twice. The more disturbing thing is that when she told her mother about that, instead of comforting her and confronting her husband, her mother started beating her. Pecola was not safe even in her own home and was given protection by her neighbors. The violence and oppression of the white society had crippled the personalities of the black Americans, who were not able to progress in their lives because they did not consider themselves capable of that (Khan, & Rahman, 2014).

On the other hand, “A Soldiers Play” by Charles Fuller, which was published in 1981, however, set in Louisiana during the era of 1944, discusses the investigation of the murder of a black soldier. The author has specifically described in the book that racial segregation was still practiced in the army of the United States of America at that time. It was believed that the black sergeant was killed by the white supremacist groups because they could not see the black on the ruling positions even if it was on their own people and community. Fuller has described the discussion of the soldiers that “Something's wrong, ain't it, sir? I mean, those Klan boys, they can't stand to see us in these uniforms. They usually take the stripes and stuff off before they lynch us (p. 45).” However, the later investigation revealed that fact that the black sergeant was killed by the men of his community, due to his inhume attitude toward them. Reflecting on the thoughts of the killed soldier, Fuller mentioned one of the incidents narrated by him, which stated that

“You know the damage one ignorant Negro can do? We were in France in the first war; we'd won decorations. But the white boys had told all them French gals that we had tails. Then they found this ignorant colored soldier, paid him to tie a tail to his ass and run around half-naked, making monkey sounds (Fuller, p. 68).”

One of the most important examples of internalized racism is shared by Fuller through the description of the incident as he has shown that the black soldier considered the other blacks of the community as ugly fools. He used to humiliate them, use violence and oppression against them, as he thought that they deserve it (Storhoff, 1991). On the other hand, he also wanted to become a part of the white society and had a little bit fair skin, so he believed that he would be able to become a part of the white community if he adopts the same attitude towards the men of his community. His thinking and identity were crippled by the inhumane attitude he had faced and he directed all that towards his own people in the hope of achieving a better status and position in the society. However, he was wrong and realized it just second before his death. The white society had taught him that he can reach the upper position by using the violence and oppressing the men under him, and he tried to do the same. He failed in that because the conditions of the society had become a little better at that time, as the black community had stopped being submissive to all the violence and hate directed towards them, which is the main reason he failed in his venture (Anadolu-Okur, 2013).

The two famous works “The Bluest Eye” by Toni Morison and “A Soldiers Play” by Charles Fuller have effectively highlighted the concept and nature of internalize racism among the Africa American community during the latter half of the twentieth century. The oppression and violence which they or their forefathers had faced at the hands of the white community, made them redirect it to the members of their own community and their family members were also no conception. They deemed themselves ugly and less capable and thought that using violence was the only way they could make their position in society, which was actually a wrong attitude.

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