FEMALE SELF-OBJECTIFICATION AND IDENTITY IN FICTION: A PSYCHOANALYTIC STUDY OF SELECTED CROSSCULTURAL GYNOTEXTS

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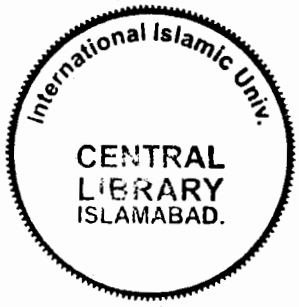

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
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To

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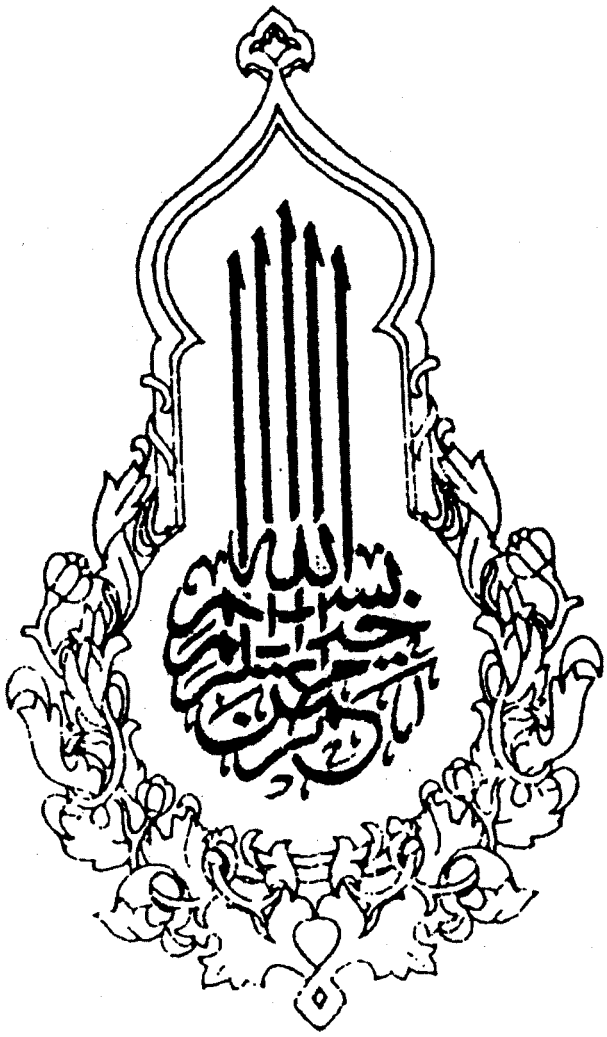
بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

To my parents

Acceptance by the *Viva Voce* Committee

Title of the thesis: Female Self-Objectification and Identity in Fiction: A Psychoanalytic Study of Selected Crosscultural Gynotexts

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ABSTRACT

The present dissertation presents a study of female characters of two selected gynotexts using self-objectification, feminist and psychoanalytic theories as framework for understanding the various aspects of being female in cultures that objectify the female body and the issues concerning identity formation in such situations. The crosscultural selection of the texts— Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and Sidhwa's *Water*— provides an opportunity to discover the differences and similarities regarding self-objectification and its impact prevalent in two distinct culture. Objectification theory assumes that women generally style the image of their physical selves in light of the observers' perspective which is conveyed to them through their gazes. This view of their physical selves leads to certain undesirable behavioral patterns such as anxiety, depression, lack of peak motivational states, excessive body monitoring and sense of shame. The study provides new insights into the effectiveness of psychoanalytic criticism when coupled with objectification and self-objectification theories. The study of the female protagonists of the two gynotexts reveals that the process of identity formation in both the texts has many things in common. These include objectifying attitude towards women both by male and female members of the society; gender discrimination, psychological, verbal and physical violence; social, economic and physical depravity and sense of lack and otherness during the mirror stage. The major difference in the self-objectification pattern of the two texts lies in the nature of physical appearance of their female characters which is ugliness in case of *The Bluest Eye* and beauty in case of *Water* and as an outcome beauty invites objectifying gazes while ugliness *inverse gazes* that are also objectifying, though in a different way.

DECLARATION

I, Hammad Mushtaq son of Mushtaq Ahmed, Registration # 94-FLL/MSENG/F08, student of MS, in the discipline of English Literature, do hereby declare that the matter printed in the thesis **"Female Self-Objectification and Identity in Fiction: A Psychoanalytic, Study of Selected Crosscultural Gynotexts"** submitted by me in partial fulfillment of MS degree, is my original work, and has not been submitted or published earlier. I also solemnly declare that it shall not, in future, be submitted by me for obtaining any other degree from this or any other university or institution.

I also understand that if evidence of plagiarism is found in my thesis/dissertation at any stage, even after the award of a degree, the work may be cancelled and the degree revoked.

This work was carried out and completed at International Islamic University Islamabad, Pakistan.

Signatures of Deponent
HAMMAD MUSHTAQ

Dated: 23 March, 2011

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Study of *identity* has emerged as an important area of scholarly debates in various scholastic fields including sociology, literature, linguistics, psychology, cultural studies, and anthropology whereas each one of these disciplines interprets the concept of identity in accordance with its own specific requirements. The concept today encompasses and links together a variety of theories like identity crisis, the self, the other, personality, self-image, internalization, subject formation, objectification and self-objectification. Among these the theories related to the self and the other, self-image, internalization and subject formation are applied to literary texts with an aim to have in-depth analyses of the characters and their behaviour. The objectification and self-objectification theories are new to the realm of literary analysis yet they have a great potential of defining various aspects of characters' identity formation processes. English fiction is replete with instances where the female characters can be studied in light of the objectification theory. Every fictional work has its own society and its own culture and portrayal of its characters is always subject to values of a specific society or culture where potential of objectification and self-objectification always exists.

Physical attributes of a woman, whether real or fictional, are given great value in every society. The physical attractiveness of the female characters

usually forms a pivotal aesthetic appeal in any renowned fictional writing. This objective beauty incites both male and female gaze, and consequently generates self-objectification among the female characters. An overview of some of the most famous fictional characters establishes the significance and scope of the objectification theory in literature. Fielding's Pamela in *Pamela*, Jane Austen's Elizabeth in *Pride and Prejudice*, Bronte's Cathy Linton in *Wuthering Heights*, Eliot's Maggie Tulliver in *The Mill on the Floss*, and Hardy's Sue in *Jude the Obscure*, all have some levels of complexity due to the objectifying attitudes of the societies they represent. In each one of these novels, the scrutinizing gaze of the male protagonist or antagonist seems to establish an objectified body-consciousness in the female protagonist, making her look at herself from the objectifying eyes of the males.

1.1 Female Objectification and Self-Objectification

The terms *objectification* and *self-objectification* are frequently used in the fields of psychology and gender studies. Psychologists Fredrickson and Roberts proposed the Objectification Theory in 1997 and posited that woman's body is looked at and treated as an object of pleasure by others. Objectification occurs when women encounter the gaze of the people, especially of the male members of the society. Objectification can be defined as "separating out a person's body parts or sexual functions from the rest of her identity and reducing them to the status of mere instruments or regarding them as if they were capable of representing her" (Bartky 1990: 26).

The gaze and views about a woman's body make her view her body the way others see it. Women begin to internalize the views prevalent in the society and to view themselves the way society does. This self-consciousness makes them indulge in a constant self-monitoring of their physical appearance. This behaviour among women is labelled as self-objectification. Self-objectification leads to certain negative experiential and behavioural patterns, such as appearance anxiety and body shame. The prevalent ideals of beauty set by modern electronic media are almost impossible to achieve, and are mainly responsible for women's anxiety and appearance consciousness. Every woman forms part of a society and a culture where her body is most liable to be objectified. Objectification or self-objectification, however, influences different women in different ways (Fredrickson & Roberts 1998). Noll and Fredrickson (1998), in this regard, have devised Self-Objectification Questionnaire which measures individual differences concerning self-objectification. They have listed ten body attributes related to the physical self-concept. These ten attributes have been divided into two groups. Five of these attributes are related to physical appearance i.e. physical attractiveness, weight, sex appeal, measurements, and firmness of muscles; the second group of five attributes is based on physical competence (physical coordination, health, strength, energy level, and physical fitness level). Self-objectification, thus, can be measured on the basis of these attributes which are viewed by individuals in terms of their physical self-concept (Fredrickson, Roberts & Noll 1998). These attributes have been discussed broadly in the second chapter.

The main focus of Objectification and Self-objectification theories is on female body or the way the female body is gazed at by the society. The study of male and female body is given so much importance today that it has evolved into a broad field of study which is catching the interest of a number of theorists. Despotopoulou believes that Laura Mulvey's study on women and film has greatly influenced scholars in a variety of subject areas to study the achievements of women from a new perspective. She presumes that "the controlling gaze, as expounded by Mulvey, was principally incriminated for the objectification of womanhood not only in film but also in other areas where the advancement of women had been impeded or stifled" (Despotopoulou 2004: 569).

1.2 Female Body and the Gaze

Mulvey's assertion (1974) that the female body is styled by the projection of the male fantasy on the female figure was rightly taken up by literary theorists, particularly the feminists, in order to prove "the biased stance of male writers (who are in the privileged position of the gazer) in their representation of female characters" (Despotopoulou 2004: 569). In late 1990's Susan Bordo developed the idea further and carried out interesting studies on the representation of both male and female bodies in the western societies. Bordo's stance seems quite balanced since she attributed the gazing curiosity to both male and female members of the western society by suggesting that the gaze plays an extremely vital role in determining the self-image both among males and females. Bordo, however, believes that the impact or the outcome of the gaze is different for the males and the females.

Bordo seems to agree with the feminist theorist Simone de Beauvoir who believed that the absence of a male gazer is disturbing for a woman while men seem to be indifferent to the female gazes and "men and women are socially sanctioned to deal with the gaze of the Other in different ways. Women learn to anticipate, even play to the sexualizing gaze, trying to become what will please, captivate, turn shame into pride" (1999: 133-34). The gaze, she suggests, provides a kind of "external judgement" and "the disjunction between self-conception and external judgement can be especially harsh when the external definitions carry racial and gender stereotypes with them". She asserts that there is a link between "the gaze" and "primordial shame" (1999: 134). This relationship is also rectified by psychologists like Fredrickson and Roberts who have devised the term *objectification* in order to establish a relationship between society's opinion of a female body and a woman's self-image. Bordo's contemporary Naomi Scheman sees the female gaze as something more complex and asserts that the female seeing may necessarily have three different dimensions:

> There are at least three possible responses to the recognition that women do see, desire, and know despite the compelling theoretical demonstrations of the maleness of the gaze, of desire, and of epistemic authority: one is that we do it in drag, by tapping what Freud called our innate bisexuality; the second is that we do it as socially constructed females, in ways masculinist regimes have uses for; and the third is that we, somehow, impossible as it may seem, do it in creative rebellion, as feminists. (Scheman 1988: 64)

These views clearly negate the Lacanian theory regarding subjectivity which stresses male subjectivity and female objectivity by raising the female from the status of a mere object of desire to the status of a desiring and seeing subject.

1.3 Feminism and the Female Body

The ideas concerning female body, gaze, Otherness and self-objectification are very closely related to the Feminist criticism in literature which aims at analysing literary texts from a feminist perspective. Feminist criticism has evolved into a significant branch of literary theory and criticism. Feminists concentrate upon a diverse range of ideas e.g. women's rights, male hegemony, female depravity and marginalization, suppression or subjugation of female intellect, and exploitation of the female body. Though it is a comparatively new branch of literary theory and is generally associated with the women's movement of the 1960s, yet, according to Barry (2004: 121), its roots can be traced back into books like Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), Olive Schreiner's *Women and Labour* (1911), Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929), Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949), and John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Women* (1869). All these writers assert the significance of women's rights and point out a variety of areas concerning women's inequality. The female inequality is rooted not only in political and legal issues but "its causes are all pervasive and deeply embedded in every aspect of human social life – including economic, political, and social arrangements as well as unquestioned norms, habits, everyday interactions, and personal relationships."(Cudd & Andreasen 2005: 7). Society and culture, therefore, have to be considered whenever women's inequality, injustice, exploitation, objectification and the formation of self-identity are analysed or subjected to critique.

Betty Friedan's work *The Feminine Mystique* (2001) played a vital role in shaping the contemporary feminist studies. She protested against "the most advanced thinkers" who seem to ask the working women "to go back and live their lives as if they were Noras, restricted to the doll's house by Victorian prejudices"(Friedan 2001: 15). The protest against objectification of women as objects or dolls, paved the way for numerous studies about the influence of society and culture on formation of women's self-image. Human body, seen from gender view point, is usually viewed on the basis of biological and hormonal differences. It is, however, important to consider the significance of human body beyond biological facts and differences. Today, many researchers, from a variety of disciplines, believe that bodies play significant role in social and cultural contexts. They suggest that human body, from social and cultural point of view, is capable of conveying social meaning which shape and influence gendered experience (Foucault 1980, Martin 1987, Shilling 1993, Bordo 1993).

The identity of the female characters is determined and analysed in this study through the application of feminist and psychoanalytical theories on the female characters of the novels *The Bluest Eye* and *Water*. The main focus is on the protagonists – Pecola Breedlove and Chuyia – in order to keep the study within the prescribed length. Characters' psychoanalytic study is carried out in this study to unveil the complications related to identity and the influences of cultural objectification on the female characters' identity. The selected texts represent two distinct cultures i.e. the Western/Afro-American and the

Eastern/Indian cultures. This helped determine the cultural similarities and differences that exist in the literatures of these cultures.

1.4 Tony Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*: An Overview of the Plot

In *The Bluest Eye*, Tony Morrison relates the story of an eleven year old African American girl Pecola and her family who face severe psychological troubles because of the dominant white American culture and its signs spread around them. Pecola's personality is damaged by the racist symbols and the power structure of the American culture where black people either do not count at all or count very little. Pecola has multiple troubles: her father, Cholly, is a drunkard and her mother, Pauline, careless and distant. Pauline always feels isolated and ugly because of her blackness and a lame foot and tries to escape into the world of movies, where instead of finding solace she gets further affirmation that she is ugly and does not deserve love. Pecola's parents fight quite often and beat each other. Her brother, Sammy, runs away from home very frequently. Apart from these external circumstances, Pecola's internal, psychological state is also disturbed. She has a strong desire to have blue eyes as she believes that the blue eyes would make her loveable and her life would become pleasant. Her mother's behaviour is also extremely annoying for her and reaffirms her ugliness when she calls Pecola "a nasty little black bitch" (Morrison 1994: 92). Pecola's objectification by the society generates her self-objectification after she internalizes the judgements passed by the society about her ugliness. She starts idealizing the white standards of perfect beauty having white colour, blue eyes and Shirley Temple like looks.

Pecola's father Cholly is a rootless man who was raised by one of his great aunts as his real parents had abandoned him. He hates his marital life and has lost interest in his life. The worst part of his life is revealed when one day he rapes his own daughter making her pregnant "by dropping seeds in his own plot of black dirt" (6). Pauline could not believe the rape incident and beats Pecola for telling a lie. Hopeless of her parents, Pecola goes to a pseudo mystic and requests him to turn her eyes blue. Pecola's friends Claudia and Frieda, unlike the general public, want her baby to live; they sacrifice their savings to help Pecola give birth to her baby. However, the neonate dies after being born prematurely, leaving Pecola in shock. Pecola's suffering take another turn when her father rapes her a second time, runs away from home and dies. In the end, Pecola goes mad thinking that her desire of having blue eyes has been fulfilled.

1.5 Bapsi Sidhwa's *Water*: An Overview of the Plot

Bapsi Sidhwa's novel *Water* is based on a 2005 Canadian film directed and written by Deepa Mehta with dialogues written by Anurag Kashyap. This sounds quite unique and untraditional since traditionally movies are based on novels not the vice versa. The novel is set in 1938 and deals with the lives of some widows living in an Indian *ashram*. The novel is though based on the story of the movie yet it gives a much more detailed view of the lives of these widows. It was first published by Milkweed Press in 2006. The story mainly deals with an eight years old widow Chuyia. Chuyia is a child bride who becomes a widow when her fifty years old husband dies and she is left at a widows' ashram at the mercy of an authoritative and corrupt old widow Madhumati.

Chuyia cannot understand why her head is shaved, why she has to wear a widow's dress or her parents leave her alone. Chuyia's plight is tragic as well as ironical; she is given the status of a widow though she can hardly remember getting married. She cannot bear her separation from her parents and remains extremely disturbed in the outset. The conditions at the ashram are appalling due to Madhumati's abysmal behaviour towards Chuyia and other widows residing at the ashram. However, the widows find themselves compelled to live under her leadership. She uses abusive language for widows, smokes marijuana and prostitutes young widows like Kalyani to the local high gentry with the help of a eunuch pimp Gulabi. Kalyani's friendly attitude and Shakuntala's motherly affection solace Chuyia to some degree and helps her adjust in the new environment. Shakuntala is another significant character of the novel. She is a middle aged widow and a devout Hindu; her questioning and thoughtful nature leads her to enlightenment and she decides to help Chuyia leave the ashram. Narayan's entry in the lives of Chuyia and Kalyani harbingers a great change in their lives. His love for Kalyani is pure and devoid of mere erotic intents. Narayan-Kalyani love affair, however, instigates Madhumati to cut off Kalyani's hair and shut her up in her little room. Here, Shakuntala's interference helps Kalyani leave the ashram in peace and join Narayan. Kalyani's fate however puts her in a very odd situation when she discovers that her lover is the son of one of her customers. Kalyani pleads Narayan to take her back to the ashram without telling him anything about what she had discovered. She commits suicide leaving Narayan bewildered and miserable. In the end, Narayan decides to join Ghandi's

journey and Shakuntala hands over Chuyia to Narayan standing in front of Ghandi's train.

1.6 Thesis Statement

The central argument of my thesis is that the identity formation of the female fictional characters is greatly influenced by internalization of the objectifying views and gazes of the members of the society they live in. This internalization called self-objectification makes the female characters suffer psychologically both on conscious and unconscious levels; however, the patterns of the self-objectification and the ensuing suffering may vary from culture to culture.

1.7 Research Questions

The study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What role does self-objectification play in shaping the identity of the female fictional characters across cultures?

2. How do the female fictional characters react to the image imposed upon them in the social discourses?

1.8 Methodology and Theoretical Framework

I have analysed two crossculturally selected gynotexts in this study in order to discover how the female authors represent women in their works and in what ways their female characters are objectified by the corresponding societies. I have applied feminist and psychoanalytical theories on the female protagonists of Tony Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and Bapsi Sidhwa's *Water* in order to carry out a study

of these crossculturally selected gynotexts (the term refers to the texts written by female authors) with an aim to ascertain the causes and effects of self-objectification among women and the ensuing identity issues in two different cultures these texts represent i.e. the African American culture and the Eastern culture. The term "gynotext" used here has been borrowed from Elaine Showalter who also coined the terms "androtexts" and "gynocriticism" (as cited in Barry 2002: 123). The term refers to the texts written by female authors and the study of such texts is termed as "gynocriticism". Both the texts selected for this study have been authored by female writers and are therefore termed gynotexts. This selection of the gynotexts helped me in determining how female authors create identities of their female characters. In this study I have spotlighted the causes and effects of women's self-objectification in two different cultures, with reference to the literature produced by the female authors belonging to these cultures.

Feminism and psychoanalysis have been used in conjunction by a number of critics and theorists. They have evolved theories which deal with feminism in terms of psychoanalysis. The journey of this admixture starts with Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics (1969)* and Juliet Mitchell's *Psychoanalysis and Feminism (1974)*. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's theory of 'social castration', a significant development in this regard, deals with lack of social power among women. Likewise, Jane Gallop's *Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (1982) and Shelley Saguaro's *Psychoanalysis and Women: A Reader* (2000) provide in depth studies on the subject. Feminist theory deals with the issues like stereotyping, representation, identity and 'othering' of women in world societies and literatures.

It also deals with rediscovering and reconsidering of the women texts which were ignored in the past. Psychoanalytical theory, on the other hand deals with the application of theories given by theorists like Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, and Jacques Lacan, on literature. These theories can play a significant role in understanding the female identity in gynotexts. The present study will, therefore, analyse the female characters of selected gynotexts using feminist theory in terms of the psychoanalytical theory.

Identity in this research refers to a variety of theories posited by different researchers including theories like the self, the body, objectification, self-objectification and Lacan's notion of the Subject. The application of these theories will give an over-all view of the female identity of fictional characters representing different cultures.

The present research offers a study of self-objectification and identity of female characters of two selected works using feminist, psychoanalytical, and self-objectification theories as a framework to understand the various aspects of being a female in cultures that sexually objectify the female body. These texts are Tony Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970) and Bapsi Sidhwa's *Water* (2006). Self-objectification theory is significant for understanding female identity since it hypothesizes that women usually construct the view of their physical selves in light of the observer's or gazer's perspective which can lead to certain negative behavioural patterns such as excessive body monitoring and can have strong impact on their self-identity. Several studies have shown that this behaviour can lead to increased sense of shame, body consciousness, anxiety, depression, sexual

disorders, and eating disorders (Fredrickson, Roberts, Noll, Quinn, & Twenge, 1998; McKinley, 1998, 1999). The present study, however, strives to apply this theory on the major female characters of selected English fictional works written by female authors in order to uncover the causes and effects of self-objectification among the female characters and the consequent formation of their identity. The study thus involves application of a theoretical framework involving three theories that would be applied to the selected texts. These theories are:

A. Self-Objectification theory

B. Feminist theory

C. Psychoanalytic theory

Though these theories appear mutually distinct in their meaning, significance and application yet there are plenty of similarities when these are looked at from the spectacles of the self-objectification theory. Since the major focus of the study is to uncover various aspects of self-objectification among female fictional characters, the feminist theory has to be a part of the theoretical framework; while, on the other hand, the self-objectification theory has been taken from the realm of psychology and it becomes obvious that psychoanalytic criticism has to be made a part of the theoretical framework.

1.9 Plan of Research

Chapter 1. Introduction: The terms objectification, self-objectification and identity have been defined briefly and objectives and significance of the study are discussed. The research

context and rationale of the study have also been deliberated briefly while methodology and delimitation of the research also form part of this chapter.

Chapter 2. Review of Related Literature: Literature related to female identity, self-objectification issues and the issues related to feminist psychoanalytic criticism are discussed and critiqued.

Chapter 3. The Gynotexts and Their Corresponding Cultures: An overview of the two novels – *The Bluest Eye* and *Water* – has followed a discussion related to each novel's background culture i.e. the African-American and the Indian/Hindu culture with a special focus on the identity of women in these cultures.

Chapter 4. Self-Objectification and Female Identity in Tony Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*: Female characters, particularly the protagonist Pecola, are analysed in light of the feminist and psychoanalytical theories in general and self-objectification theory in particular, to investigate the questions I raised regarding female self-objectification and identity.

Chapter 5. Self-Objectification and Female Identity in Bapsi sidhwa's *Water:* Female characters, particularly the protagonist Chuyia, have been analysed in light of the feminist and psychoanalytical theories in general and self-objectification theory

in particular, in order to investigate the questions I raised regarding female self-objectification and identity.

Chapter 6. A comparative study of the two gynotexts are presented in this chapter. Various patterns of the female identity, objectification and self-objectification have been compared in order to figure out the similarities and dissimilarities of this phenomenon in the two cultures in order to conclude the study.

1.10 Delimitations

In this study, two gynotexts, *The Bluest Eyes* and *Water,* have been analysed using self-objectification, feminist and psychoanalytic theories. The selection of the texts has been made on the basis of the distinct cultures they represent; these include the Western and the Eastern cultures. The cultural backgrounds will help determine the cultural differences and similarities that exist regarding female identity and self-objectification.

The two texts have been selected on the basis of several similarities. The stories in both the novels take place almost in the same time period which is 1940 in case of *The Bluest Eye* and 1938 in case of *Water.* Both the novels have been written by female authors and both focus on the lives and identity formation of female characters. The central character in each one of the novels is a female child which made it easier for me to apply psychoanalytic theory as the theory's main focus is development of infants'/children's psyche. These similarities have

made the two texts more relevant and more appropriate for a feminist psychoanalytic study.

The theoretical framework of the study includes the self-objectification, feminist and psychoanalytic theories. The feminist and psychoanalytic theories are very broad and it is not possible to encompass all the aspects of these theories in this research; I will only take into account the aspects of these theories that relate to the self-objectification theory. The feminist theory will not be used directly as a tool of analysis yet it will always stay in the background of the discussion since only the female characters created by female authors will be discussed.

Psychoanalytic criticism also has a variety of dimensions. Though it originates from the theories posited by Sigmund Freud, many theorists have attempted to modify, rediscover and interpret these theories in their own way. In this study, however, only Lacanian approach will be applied on the texts in order to discover the patterns of identity and self-objectification in the female characters of the novels *The Bluest Eye* and *Water*. Again, Lacanian psychoanalysis is quite a broad area and the study will be delimited to only those aspects of the theory that can help understand the phenomenon of self-objectification. Moreover, Psychoanalytic criticism requires an in-depth character analysis and the number of characters in a particular novel is never fixed. The analysis, therefore focuses only on the major female characters of the novels; other characters, however, can be discussed when such discussion would be helpful in understanding the main characters. This means that main focus of the study will be on the protagonists –

Pecola Breedlove and Chuhya– in order to keep the study within the required length.

1.11 Significance of the Study

The works selected for this study– Tony Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970) and Bapsi Sidhwa's *Water* (2006) – are distinguished examples of the representation of women in fiction in two different cultural settings i.e. the US and India. These works contain sufficient matter that implicates the causes and effects of self-objectification among the female characters and provide traces of the unconscious processes of the female characters that are helpful in discovering the psychological bases of the formation of female identity in the corresponding Afro-American and Hindu cultures. Both the works enlighten the readers on self-objectification of women and the consequent construction of their identity in a specific cultural setting, in their own way. Both the works provide ample information about the predicament of women in the cultures wherein they are set and present vital details regarding how societies view women and how women internalize male and female observers' perspectives and form a view about their physical selves in light of these viewpoints. A discussion and analysis of all these issues makes this study valuable for a number of fields including psychology, literature, anthropology, sociology, and cultural studies.

This study focuses on how the female characters in literature form their identity or self-image in light of the socio-cultural feedback they get from other people especially the men living around them. The awareness, understanding and

wisdom the readers can gather from these fictional works is significant because the understanding gathered through literary analysis may not be gathered from any other source. Application of the self-objectification theory on literary works is likely to open new vistas of understanding of the issues related to identity of the female fictional characters and would help critics form new meanings and interpretations of the existing literary texts; it will also suggest new ways of writing to fiction writers.

On academic level, the study provides a new direction to the literary critics interested in psychoanalytic criticism in form of application of the self-objectification theory on literary texts. Self-objectification theory would be a useful addition to the bulk of theories attached with psychoanalytic criticism in particular and literary theory in general. The study also invites new ideological understanding of various dimensions of identity formation in fiction. I have also contributed towards the theoretical bulk of psychoanalytic theory by introducing a new term *the inverse gaze* which would help critics understand the difference between "the gaze" in case of a beautiful or attractive object and the absence of gaze in case of an ugly or unattractive object and the ensuing psychological complication developed by the objects of gaze/inverse gaze.

CHAPTER 2

Review of Literature

The present study strives to deal with a number of theories that are diverse yet intricately related to each other. The broader area of consideration, however, will be self-objectification and the formation of female identity. Apart from this, it is also significant for the study to include a review of the literature related to psychoanalytic criticism and Lacanian and Freudian concepts of the unconscious. Keeping in view this diversity of theoretical relevance in my study, this chapter has been divided into two sections. Section one deals with a review of literature related to Objectification and Self-Objectification theories. Section two of the chapter reviews some books and articles about psychoanalytic criticism and its relevance with self-objectification with a focus on Lacan's concepts of psychoanalysis, particularly the concepts that are related to the formation of human identity and the self. A discussion on feminist perspectives is also embedded in these discussions though it is not focussed on separately.

2.1 Objectification, Self-objectification and Female Identity

The first section of this chapter reviews books and studies related to objectification and self-objectification theories with a focus on feminist connotation of these theories. The related books are listed below in chronological order to show the development of knowledge in this field.

1. Beauvoir, Simone de. (1973). *The Second Sex*. Trans. E. M. Parshley, Trans. New York: Vintage.
2. Henley, N. M. (1977). *Body Politics: Power, Sex and Nonverbal Communication*. New York: Touchstone.
3. Foucault, M. (1980). *The History of Sexuality*. Vol. 1. New Yourk: Vintage.
4. Beneke, T. (1982). *Men on Rape*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982.
5. Martin, E. (1987). *The Women in the Body: A Cultural Analysis of Reproduction*. New York: Routledge.
6. Gordon, M. T., & Riger, S. (1989). *The Female Fear: The Social Cost of Rape*. New York: Free Press.
7. Bartky, S. L. (1990). *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression*. New York: Routledge.
8. Kaschak, E. (1992). *Engendered Lives: A New Psychology of Women's Experience*. New Youk: Basic Books.
9. Bordo, S. (1993). *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
10. Shilling, C. (1993). *The Body and Social Theory*. London: Sage.
11. Bordo, Susan. (1999). *The Male Body: A New Look at Men in Public and in Private*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
12. Brewer, M. B. & Miles, Hewstone (Eds.). (2004). *Self and Social Identity*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Women exist in societies and cultures where their identities are influenced and shaped by conventions, beliefs and behaviour of the people who constitute the society around them. Human body in social and cultural contexts is capable of conveying social meanings which shape and influence gendered experience (e.g. Foucault 1980, Martin 1987, Shilling 1993, Bordo 1993). Objectification is one such influence upon the identity of the female members of every society.

Fredrickson and Roberts proposed the Objectification Theory in 1997. The theory analyses development of the female identity in a society that objectifies the female body. The theorists posit that woman's body is looked at and treated as an object of pleasure by others rather than being treated or looked at as a person, a human being.

Objectification takes place when women encounter the look or gaze of the people, especially of the male members of the society. Bartky defines Objectification as "separating out a person's body parts or sexual functions from the rest of her identity and reducing them to the status of mere instruments or regarding them as if they were capable of representing her" (1990: 26). This treatment of woman's body makes her view her body the way others do. As a result, women begin to internalize the views prevalent in the society and begin to view themselves the way society does. This self-consciousness makes them conscious about their appearance and as a consequent they indulge in a constant self-monitoring of their physical appearance and this behavioural pattern leads them towards anxiety. This trend among women is labelled as self-objectification. Self-objectification, as viewed by researchers, leads to certain negative

behavioural patterns, such as appearance anxiety and body shame. Apart from this, the modern media also influence women constantly as the prevalent ideals of beauty set by the media are almost impossible to achieve. The inability to achieve these standards, in turn, causes anxiety and appearance consciousness among women. Every woman forms part of a society and a culture where her body is most liable to be objectified. However, the impact of objectification or self-objectification on different may vary from one woman to woman (Fredrickson & Roberts 1997). Members of a society that objectifies female bodies acculturate its women to adopt the perspectives of the observers as a primary view of their physical appearance.

The basic stance of the current research has been taken from Fredrickson and Roberts' view posited in their objectification theory (1997, 1998). The objectification theory postulates that female identities are formulated mainly through social and cultural discourses since "bodies exist with social and cultural contexts, and hence are also constructed through sociocultural practices and discourses" (Fredrickson & Roberts 1997: 174). Women face plenty of psychological complications when they are treated as mere bodies instead of being treated as individuals. The gazers of the female body appear to be its potential users and have a consumers gaze and "the common thread running through all forms of sexual objectification is the experience of being treated as a body (or collection of body parts) valued predominantly for its use to (or consumption by) others" (174). The male gaze or visual evaluation is commonly sanctioned by societies and they sexualize females regardless of their age or status

(Westkott 1986: 95). Exploitation of the female body spans from sexualized evaluation to sexual violence (Fischer, Vidmar, & Ellis, 1993; Kaschak, 1992).

Women are not the only victims of objectifying gazes, men are also looked at by women as objects yet, as Hall (1984) suggested, the ratio of female objectification is greater than the ratio of male objectification. The feeling of being looked at is important in this regard since self-objectification is not likely to occur in the individuals who remain indifferent to the objectifying gaze. Women have more chances of experiencing self-objectification since they are more likely to feel being looked at as compared to men (Cary, 1978; Henley, 1977). Male objectifying gaze may have more impact upon the females since that male gazing often accompanies derogatory remarks (Gardner, 1980; Allen, 1984). Theorists also claim that men sexually objectify the women in order to express patriarchy (Connell, 1987; Stoltenberg, 1989). The impact of sexualized gazing becomes questionable when women start owning the perspective of the gazers which according to many researches happens quite often during the male-female social interactions (de Beauvoir, 1973; Young, 1990). Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) proposed the psychological consequences of objectification and its internalization. These are:

a. the emotion of shame,
b. the emotion of anxiety,
c. peak motivational states, and
d. the awareness of internal bodily states. (181-190)

Shame among women is an obvious cause of the feeling of being less appealing or attractive than the social or cultural ideal (Lewis, 1992). Such women start blaming their own selves instead of realizing that the act of gazing was not good. They lay responsibility on their physical selves rather than laying it on a mistake committed through their minds. Shame becomes even more complex when it generates the desire of being hidden or being physically disappeared from others' sight together with the feelings of worthlessness and helplessness (Lewis, 1992; Tangney, Miller, Flicker, & Barlow, 1996).

Anxiety, proclaim Fredrickson and Roberts, can be another outcome of self-objectification since "being female in a culture that objectifies the female body creates multiple opportunities to experience anxiety along with its accompanying vigilance" (1998: 182). They further divide the anxiety resulting from objectification into two types: "appearance anxiety and safety anxiety" (182). The safety anxiety might be an outcome of women's sexual objectification. Studies also show that to avoid sexual objectification women remain unnecessarily attentive about what the males around them are looking at in order to avoid the potential physical harm and this attentiveness may disturb their home and workplace lives (Beneke, 1982; Gordon & Rigger, 1989; Pollitt, 1985).

Peak motivational state can be defined as "those rare moments during which we feel we are truly living, uncontrolled by others, creative and joyful" (Fredrickson & Roberts 183). Women cannot achieve these motivational states frequently due to constant feeling of being watched and the resulting self-consciousness (Young 1990: 146). Fredrickson and Roberts argue in this regard:

> Because women are vigilantly aware of their outer bodily appearance, they may be left with fewer perceptual resources available for attending to inner body experience. This limited-resources perspective would predict that those particular social contexts that highlight women's awareness of observers' evaluations of their bodies would be associated with a correspondent muting of inner sensations. (1997: 184)

Self-objectification plays significant role in construction of social identities. Researchers (Brewer & Miles 2004: 137) believe that the consequences of self-objectification are more severe on women than men. The preoccupation of women with the appearance of their bodies and the thoughts about how they look to others can reduce their efficiency in any task they perform.

2.2 Self-objectification and Psychoanalytic Criticism

Psychoanalytic criticism mainly deals with the application of theories posited by Sigmund Freud and Lacan and their application on literary texts. Self-objectification, being a psychological and unconscious phenomenon, is also linked with psychoanalytic criticism in this section. The section discusses the books and studies dealing with Freudian and Lacanian perspectives of psychoanalysis and their relevance with self-objectification. The related books are listed here in chronological order to show the development of knowledge in this area.

1. Lesser, Simon O. (1957). *Fiction and the unconscious*. Boston: Beacon.
2. Prosser, Eleanor. (1971). *Hamlet and Revenge,* 2nd ed. California: Stanford University Press.

3. Kiell, N. (ed.). (1982). *Psychoanalysis, Psychology, and Literature: A Bibliography,* 2nd ed. Metuchen NJ and London: Scarecrow Press.
4. Ray, William. (1984). *Literary Meaning: From Phenomenology to Deconstruction.* New York: Basil Blackwell.
5. Freud, Sigmund. (1991). *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis.* London: Panguin Books.
6. Harland, Richard. (1999). *Literary Theory from Palto to Barthes: An Introductory History.* Hong Kong: Macmillan Press Ltd.
7. Bertens, Hans. (2001). *Literary Theory: the Basics.* New York: Routledge.
8. Lacan, Jacques. (2001). Ecrits: A Selection. Translated by Alan Sheridan. London/New York: Routledge.
9. Barry, Peter (2002). *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory.*Manchester: Manchester U P.
10. Rabate, Jean-Michel (ed.). (2003). *The Cambridge Companion to Lacan.* Cambridge: Cambridge U P.
11. Homer, Sean. (2005). *Jacques Lacan.* London: Routledge.

Psychoanalysis is a comparatively new branch of knowledge which was developed by Sigmund Freud in the late nineteenth century. *Cambridge Advanced Learners Dictionary* defines the word psychoanalysis as "any of a number of the theories of the human personality, which attempt to examine a person's unconscious mind to discover the hidden causes of their mental problems" (2003). The theory was initially considered for its scientific and therapeutic implications

but with the passage of time it found its way into the realm of social sciences including literature. The immensity of psychoanalytic literary criticism can be realized by Norman Kiell's bibliography which contains about 20,000 items only up to 1980 (Kiell 1982). Psychoanalytic literary criticism deals with the minds associated with literary books. There are three ways of applying psychoanalytic theory on literary texts: analysis of the audience's response, analysis of the character's mind, and analysis of the author's mind. The psychoanalytic critics emphasize the difference between the conscious and the unconscious minds while interpreting literary texts. In psychoanalytic criticism, the unconscious mind in literary texts is discovered through the hidden or between the lines meanings of the text while the apparent meanings are associated with the conscious mind. Barry sums up the job of psychoanalytic critics by saying that "they identify a 'psychic' context for the literary work, at the expense of social or historical context, privileging the individual 'psycho-drama' above the 'social-drama' of class conflict" (Barry 2002: 105).

Psychoanalytic criticism during 1960s was not considered to be a reputable application since "it was accused, for the most part quite rightly, of a crude application of psychoanalytic theory, of a reductive pursuit of phallic and excremental symbolism in literature" (Young 2006: 1). It managed to recover from this accusation after the 1960s after the works of theorists like Lacan. Shoshana Felman while emphasising the relationship between literature and psychoanalysis says:

> A relation in which literature is submitted to the authority, to the prestige of psychoanalysis. While literature is considered as a body of knowledge, whose competence is called upon to interpret. Psychoanalysis, in other words, occupies the place of a subject, literature that of an object; the relation of interpretation is structured as a relation of master to slave. (1997: 5)

The application of psychoanalytic criticism in literature, however, has undergone great changes. Holland (2000: 13) in this regard states that initially the application was crude and relied mostly upon ideas like labeling, pathography, and *id* analysis. He asserts that the liveliest concern of psychoanalytic criticism today is gender and personality which means it mostly deals with the issues related to identity and self-identity. Holland's assertion, "psychoanalysis has become a psychology of the self" seems appropriate and makes the area of discussion in this thesis more current.

Barry weighs Freud's influence by pointing out that although "the therapeutic value of the method is limited" yet "Freud remains a major cultural force and his impact on how we think about ourselves has been incalculable" (Barry 2002: 96). Barry's statement cannot be overemphasised as the tumultuous stir Freud's theories have caused among modern scholars can, perhaps, never be fathomed to its fullest extent. Barry also believes that while trying to discover the hidden causes of hysterical symptoms Freud rather incidentally developed the theory of the unconscious and provided a great insight into human personality.

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Like any other theory that deals with human personality and behaviour, psychoanalytic theory has a great influence in the dominion of literary interpretations. Every literary piece has characters and every character has a

personality, a society to deal with, and an environment to live in. Although these characters are not real yet their realistic outlook makes them necessarily human and liable to critical observation and judgement. These observations and judgements are made available by the application of the literary theories on texts. Literary interpretations, in turn, help understand human motives, desires, attitudes, personality traits, and behavioural patterns in the real life.

2.2.1 The Unconscious

The study of the unconscious mind of either the author or the central character in a literary piece is usually the focal point of any psychoanalytic criticism. Psychoanalysis does not take into account the conscious, logical or rational thoughts; instead, it concerns mainly the unconscious mind which contains irrational, illogical and unknowable thoughts.

Freud divided human mind into three parts: the conscious, the preconscious, and the unconscious. Human mind is not fully discoverable since we are only aware of the thoughts and images that are there at the present moment and form part of our consciousness. However, there are thoughts, images, fears, aspirations and worries that are buried somewhere beneath the conscious and do not come to the surface until we go to sleep or in states similar to sleeping. This hidden phenomenon called the unconscious can provide a wealth of information about human personality and human behaviour. The preconscious, on the other hand, can be called an extension of the conscious. It "consists largely of memory, including things we do without thinking about them, such as walking and driving

a car" (Easthope, 1999: 25). The preconscious can metaphorically be compared to a window from where ideas can slip into the unconscious and vice versa.

The unconscious is a veiled part of the mind which contains irrational, emotional and unintelligible thoughts, desires and fears. Dichter seems to affirm Freud's theory of the unconscious when he strongly asserts that "it has been proved beyond any doubt that many of our daily decisions are governed by motivations over which we have no control and of which we are often quite unaware" (1960: 12). The preconscious is that part of the human mind which contains memories and knowledge that are not always in our conscious mind but we can recall these bits of knowledge when it is required. Lastly, the conscious contains thoughts, images and perceptions that we readily have in our mind at a specific moment of time.

Human memory is something very tricky. We come across thoughts, images, people and countless other things in our lives but very soon we forget most of these experiences of life; or we think we do. But the phenomenon of memory and forgetfulness is not very simple; things that we forget are never fully forgotten, the forgetfulness in most of the cases is temporary and the forgotten memories can revisit human consciousness. At times we are unaware of what exactly is in our mind when we do something, take a decision or behave in a certain way. There are moments in our lives when we are not very conscious of what we are doing, or we do things thoughtlessly. These experiences of life indicate the prevalence of a memory beyond memory, or prevalence of a consciousness beyond consciousness. Freud's concept of unconsciousness has

enabled us to understand these trickeries of memory and forgetfulness and has empowered us to discover new dimensions of the literary texts.

The understanding of the unconscious of a writer or a character is pivotal to psychoanalytic criticism. The study of the unconscious mind in psychoanalytic criticism is mainly based on the theories of psychologists led by Sigmund Freud. Everything we experience, through any of our five senses, always remains in our mind even if we cannot recall it. When these thoughts and images are forgotten, they make the unconscious their new dwelling place and stay there forever. "Unconscious", says Harland, "constitutes the reject bin...for images and impulses now excluded by consciousness...the energy in the unconscious continues to seek to manifest itself, with an urge to self-expression" (1990: 130-31). The thoughts and images thrown in this "reject bin" are not dead at all. In the realm of oblivion these thoughts remain alive, keep on breathing and waiting for the right time, when, through the window of preconscious, they would be able to jump back into the consciousness.

Freudian unconscious is an abode of repressed thoughts and desires that are retrievable through dreams. In normal conditions the unconscious is not discoverable; we can discover the functionality of the unconscious only through phenomena like dreams, slips of tongue, jokes and artistic creations or through certain psychological disorders like phobias and anxieties (Freud: 1991). These ordinary phenomena become extremely helpful in psychoanalysis because they inform about us the unconscious activities of the human mind.

2.2.2 The Author, the Text and the Unconscious

Literary texts offer a good deal of traces of the unconscious of its authors or the characters created by the authors. These traces are discoverable only through the conscious as the unconscious itself is an undiscoverable realm of human psyche. Harland, while discussing the ways of psychoanalytic criticism, asserts that the unconscious is an abode of meaning and it wishes to express these hidden meanings through conscious: "unconscious is a kind of thinking, it works with meaning; in so far as it seeks to express itself, it strives to make those meanings emerge through the socially dominant level of consciously controlled meaning." (1999: 131). Nevertheless, the conscious is under control of the superego which restricts the flow of socially unacceptable desires or sugar-coats them to make them somewhat acceptable.

Freud, as Bertens (2001: 159) and Barry (2002:102) state, believes that the unconscious manifests itself implicitly in figurative language and expresses the hidden desires, of an author or a character, through images, symbols, metaphors, and allusions. Bertens further states that "the unconscious can for instance hide a repressed desire behind an image that would seem to be harmles" (159). He considers psychoanalytic criticism to be another "mode of criticism in which writers are taken to be largely, or wholly, unaware of their texts' deeper meanings" (158). This supposition about the writers encouraged the critics to develop new forms of literary analyses such as deconstruction and contrapuntal reading. Bertens rightly refers to these deeper meanings as the "hidden agenda of the language" (160) which is discoverable through the study of the unconscious.

This hidden agenda is, of course, the latent meanings of a dream, which, according to Freud, are different from the manifest or surface meanings. This is where psychoanalysis becomes extremely helpful to interpretations of the literary texts.

Now the question arises: How does an author project his/her unconscious experiences in literary texts or how a critic manages to dig out these hidden experiences. Holland, as quoted by Ray (1984: 63-64), in his first work *The Dynamics of Literary Response (1968)* explains the process of the transformation of the unconscious thoughts into literary text, "All stories—and all literature—have this basic way of meaning: they transform the unconscious fantasy discoverable through psychoanalysis into the conscious meanings discoverable by conventional interpretations." It must be kept in mind here that psychoanalytic interpretations cannot be seen as something absolute and undisputable since a dream object can always have multiple meanings. Barry, therefore, believes that there is always a "judgemental" element involved in discovering the unconscious meanings of literary texts and "in consequence psychoanalytic interpretations of literature are often controversial" (2002: 102). Despite the chances of controversy, the insights made available by psychoanalytic criticism cannot be overemphasized.

2.2.3 Function of Psychoanalytic Criticism

Here we may not forget that literary characters are analysed as if they were real human beings; that is why any theory applicable to human beings can be applied

to the literary characters. These characters can also be analysed in light of the writer's own personality or in light of his conscious or unconscious desires expressed in a literary piece. Psychoanalytic criticism may interpret a literary text in three different ways:

1. Considering the literary piece an expression of the unconscious of the author.
2. Considering it an expression of the unconscious of the narrator or the character.
3. Considering it an interpretation of the reader's unconscious.

A reader quite often sees a literary text as something like or equivalent to the real life and deals with the literary characters like real life characters, at least while reading the text. T. S. Eliot explained this phenomenon through the phrase *willing suspension of disbelief* (1971: 34) i.e. the audience or the readers willingly surrender their faculty of disbelief and deliberately ignore the fictitious nature of things happening in a literary text, a drama or a movie. Prosser, however, believes that "the willing suspension of disbelief does not imply that an audience leaves all of its knowledge, its ethics, its religious faith, at the box office" (34).

The audience have a double relationship with a text which ultimately adds to the pleasure of the readers; at the same time they consider it to be fictitious as well as to be real. This double relationship enables them to enjoy the text as well as relate it to the real life. Lesser (1957) rightly elucidates the relationship of psychoanalysis with literature, "The supreme virtue of psychoanalysis, from the

point of view of its potential utility for literary study, is that it has investigated the very aspects of man's nature with which the greatest writers of fiction have been preoccupied: the emotional, unconscious or only partly comprehended bases of our behaviour" (1957: 15). The function of psychoanalysis puts great responsibility upon psychoanalysts since their job is to interpret the rational part of human mind in light of the irrational forces of mind, "unlike other psychologies, but like Sophocles and Shakespeare, Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, Melville and Hawthorne, it has concerned itself with the surging, non-rational forces which play so large a part in determining our destiny as well as the part of our being which tries, often in vain, to control and direct them" (15).

2.2.4 Lacanian Psychoanalysis and Self-Objectification

Psychoanalytic theory can significantly explain and analyse various aspects of human identity and its development. The concept of the unconscious in this regard is highly significant since it resides in the centre of every psychoanalytic enquiry. Sigmund Freud believed that the unconscious constitutes repressed desires and fantasies and it is a realm without a language; it contains thoughts that cannot be recalled to consciousness. Lacan, on the other hand, saw the unconscious differently and his concept of the unconscious and the symbolic order introduced a new way of analysing the working of unconscious desire in texts. Homer in this regard asserts that "the object of psychoanalytic criticism was no longer to hunt for phallic symbols or to explain Hamlet's hesitation to revenge his father's death by his repressed sexual desire for his mother but to analyse the

way unconscious desires manifest themselves in the text, through language" (2005: 2).

Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic theory emerges out of structuralism and the psychoanalytic model postulated by Freud which rests upon the concepts of conscious and the unconscious spaces of human psyche. Lacan made significant changes to the psychoanalytic and unconscious theories brought forward by Freud. The structuralist theorists Claude Levi-Strauss and Ferdinand de Saussure believed that culture and language are built upon certain structures which produce meanings in the context of their own symbolizing systems. They also discovered a basic and universal form behind every structure. Lacan's contribution to the field of psychoanalysis is significant due to the variety of new concepts he introduced; these include the imaginary phase, the mirror phase, the symbolic phase, the real, the phallus, the subject of the unconscious, fantasy, and jouissance.

2.2.4.1 The Imaginary and the Mirror Stage

Understanding Lacan's notion of the Mirror Stage enables us to understand the development of human identity from different perspective. Lacan's idea of the mirror stage has its roots in Henri Wallon's notion of Mirror Test which was presented in 1931. The mirror test was an experiment in which a child enables itself gradually to distinguish its reflected image from its mirror image and "this dialectical operation takes place because of the subject's symbolic comprehension of the imaginary space in which his unity is created" (Rabate 2003: 29). In Wallon's view, the mirror test demonstrates a transition from the specular to the

imaginary, then from the imaginary to the symbolic" (29). Lacan revised Wallon's notion of the Mirror Test and introduced the Mirror Stage which is stage in children's development occurring during the sixth and eighteenth month of their lives. It is a time when "the infant anticipates mastery of his bodily unity through identification with the image of a fellow being and through perceiving his own image in a mirror. When the subject recognizes the other in the form of a conflictual link, he arrives at socialization" (30). The mirror stage forms part of the imaginary phase which is a state of an infant's mind when it cannot differentiate between itself and the external world. The child does not have a sense of self and considers itself a part of the mother's body and existence. The child cannot recognize itself as a separate whole. However, when the infant sees itself in the mirror it sees itself as a whole without realizing that what it is seeing is only an image. The image contains a kind of duality in it since it represents the child as well as the other, or the infant's separation from his mother.

Psychologists traditionally believe that the child's increasing awareness of its own physical existence brings self-awareness; it is important in this process that the child must learn to distinguish itself from other individuals. Lacan, however, believes that when an infant looks itself in the mirror it is caught in a dilemma because "it is at once intimately connected to its own sense of self and at the same time external to it" (2005: 21). The infant finds the image of its own self so pleasing and fascinating that it is captivated by the image and falls in a narcissistic love of its own body which ultimately makes him learn to love others. In the beginning the infant recognizes the image as someone real but it is

ultimately able to realize that it is the infant's own image. Lacan believes that this image is also alienating because the infant confuses it with the self. Through this image the child acquires the sense of a unified self and at this very point the infant's ego is born. Lacan also asserts that "the ego is based on an illusory image of wholeness and mastery and it is the function of the ego to maintain this illusion of coherence and mastery. The function of the ego is, in other words, one of misrecognition; of refusing to accept the truth of fragmentation and alienation" (Homer 2005: 25). The ego is formed during the process of identification i.e. when we identify ourselves with someone or something in the world. The birth of ego and the sense of fragmentation thus stand as rivals to each other and consequently play an important role in the infant's future relationships with others. The imaginary stage can be called the realm of images where we fall prey to misperception and misrecognition of ourselves with the others.

Lacanian notion of the mirror image becomes even more relevant to the self-objectification theory when it is coupled with the Lacanian concept of the gaze. The gaze of the other mediates between ourselves and our mirror image and provides a guarantee that we exist. This implies that "we are at once dependent on the other as the guarantor of our own existence and a bitter rival to that same other" (26). This implicates that our physical as well as social identity is constructed on the basis of the gaze of others around us. We see ourselves as people see us and we recognize ourselves as our society defines us.

2.2.4.2 The Symbolic Order

The symbolic order refers to the thesis develop by Lacan that the unconscious is "structured like a language" (Fink 1995: 8, Lacan 2001: 44) and it constitutes a chain of signifiers. Lacan, like De Saussure, believed that the linguistic system is primordial and man is subject to the order imposed by language on the world. Lacan believed that the chain of signifiers constitutes language and the meaning, or the signified, cannot be fixed because meaning depend upon the use of the signifiers and should be determined through the context in which the signifiers are used. Lacan attaches process of language acquisition with human needs and desires and proposes that human desires are insatiable since they cannot be satisfied with the objects that seem to satisfy these desires: "The human individual sets out with a particular organism, with certain biological needs, which are satisfied by certain objects. What effect does the acquisition of language have on these needs? All speech is demand; it presupposes the Other to whom it is addressed, whose very signifiers it takes over in its formulation" (Lacan 2001: ix). Human needs and desires depend a lot upon the desires and needs of others whose otherness defines our own needs and desires. Lacan asserts in this regard:

> By the same token, that which comes from the Other is treated not so much as a particular satisfaction of a need, but rather as a response to an appeal, a gift, a token of love. There is no adequation between the need and the demand that conveys it; indeed, it is the gap between them that constitutes desire, at once particular like the first and absolute like the second. (2001: ix)

This suggests that the foremost attribute of human desire is the lack, from where the desire stems and if this is so, the desire can never be fulfilled since it

stems from the lack itself. Lacan distinguishes desire form an ordinary appetite in order to describe its function, "desire (fundamentally in the singular) is a perpetual effect of symbolic articulation. It is not an appetite: it is essentially excentric and insatiable. That is why Lacan co-ordinates it not with the object that would seem to satisfy it, but with the object that causes it (one is reminded of fetishism)" (Lacan 2001: ix).

In the mirror stage if we consider the child as a signifier, the image it sees is its signified. This implies that the mirror image is what the child considers to be its self. This is also the point where the child starts acquiring language and starts interacting with the people around it through absence of his mother's body and the gender difference taught to it by the society.

2.2.4.3 Unconscious is Structured Like a Language

One of the most significant contributions made by Lacan to linguistic theory was his proposition that "the unconscious is structured like a language" (Fink 1995: 8). This implied that language manifests the structure of the unconscious. Although Lacan's view was based upon structuralism, he differed a great deal from the structuralist view point. While Saussure believed the relationship between the signifier and the signified is almost fixed, Lacan proposed that linguistic meaning cannot evolve or change from one culture to another until there is a shift in meanings of the signifier (the word or sound used) and the signified which is referred to by the signifier is always provisional. Lacan is necessarily a post-structuralist since believes in the uncertainty of the meaning carried by the

signifier and the signified. Lacan recognized a linguistic 'gap' in the process of signification which symbolizes the unattainability of the ultimate meanings of a signifier. This happens due to the distinctive nature of each language system and differences of human psyche. Lacan also discovered a gap in the human psyche which occurs at the time of the split between the Self and Other. He linked the two gaps by postulating that the latter gap occurs due to a gap in the process of linguistic signification.

Lacan assumes that linguistic patterns of a person's speech can reveal the hidden thoughts, desires and aspirations of the unconscious mind. This assumption is extremely relevant to understanding of the identity of fictional characters. The signifying chain present in the linguistic utterances of characters provide a gateway into the unconscious of the characters and enable a psychoanalytic critic to study the nature of their unattainable "Objects cause of Desire" or "Object-Petit-a". This voyage of discovery in a character's unconscious is considerably complicated due to the instability of the chain of signification and the provisional quality of the signifieds.

2.2.4.4 The Real

It is quite complicated to understand the order of the *real* since it cannot be expressed through language. The real is not reality; it stands for whatever there is before the beginning of the symbolic order: "This Lacanian concept of the 'real' is not to be confused with reality, which is perfectly knowable: the subject of desire knows no more than that, since for it reality is entirely phantasmatic"

(Lacan 2001: x). Every human being has an emptiness at the core of his or her being which is caused by the sense of separation, of not being whole.

The difficulty involved in the concept of the *real* is that it cannot be recognized by the symbolic order which means it cannot be explained through words. This implies that conversation and communication has to fail ultimately. The real, believes Lacan, is that "which always returns to the same place. It then became that before which the imaginary faltered, that over which the symbolic stumbles, that which is refractory, resistant. Hence the formula: 'the real is the impossible'. The *real* is quite difficult to understand or grasp since it lacks in the symbolic order and cannot be defined; it may be approached unconsciously but cannot be comprehended. It describes that "which is lacking in the symbolic order, the ineliminable residue of all articulation, the foreclosed element, which may be approached, but never grasped: the umbilical cord of the symbolic" (2001: x). Thus, the *real* is that which cannot be articulated, which comes before symbolisation and yet it causes the provocation of human desire which is an extremely significant area for understanding of the human personality and the formation of human identity.

After a thorough discussion of the available literature on the topic it can be concluded that plenty of literature has been produced on issues like feminism, psychoanalysis, the body, the gaze, objectification and self-objectification. However, self-objectification is a term from the field of psychology which is never before applied on literary texts which makes the present research more substantial and unique.

CHAPTER 3

The Gynotexts and their Corresponding Cultures

The two texts analysed in this study correspond to two distinct cultures and portray characters behaving in accordance with the norms of their own society and culture. *The Bluest Eye* offers a study of the Black-American culture where the issues of race and colour play vital role in formation of the female identity and psyche. An understanding of the history of the black-Americans is necessary in this regard to fully understand the identity formation of the black characters, especially women characters. *Water*, on the other hand, presents characters that live and breathe in the Hindu/Indian culture where women are treated in accordance with the Hindu sacred texts and the old Brahmanical Traditions. More specifically, the novel deals with the treatment of the Hindu widows in the hands of the Indian society. The background cultures of the two novels are discussed separately.

3.1 Race, Feminist Psychoanalysis and *The Bluest Eye*

The issues related to race are gaining more and more critical attention after the intermingling of areas like psychoanalysis, particularly due to recent readings of Franz Fanon's works like *Black Skin White Masks* and *Wretched of the Earth.* The inclusion of the issues of race can be traced back to Christopher Lane's work *The*

Psychoanalysis of Race published in 1998. Lane remarks in the very outset, "we cannot comprehend ethnic and racial disputes without considering the implications of psychic resistance" (1977: 1). Apart from psychoanalysis, Feminist studies have also started emphasizing on the questions of racial identity in the feminist discourses. Claudia Tate, in this regard, has presented a new model of psychoanalysis in her work *Psychoanalysis and Black Novels* which is contextualized on the basis of racial questions. Her work has endeavoured to present a deeper understanding of the issues of identity, desire, subjectivity and alienation, prevalent in the African American literature. While identifying the absence of psychoanalytic readings in the arena of African American literature, she asserts, "Psychoanalysis can tell us much about the complicated social workings of race in the United States and the representations of these workings in the literature of African Americans" (Tate 1998: 5). Elizabeth Abel on the other hand emphasized the feminists to understand the necessity of psychoanalytic interpretation and investigation of the identity that stems out of racialized social norms: "psychoanalysis has been resistant to the social, but it need not always, uniformly, be. It is better for feminism to challenge that resistance than to renounce psychoanalysis entirely or succumb to its seductions" (Able 1990: 199). Toni Morrison's novels usually generate a great deal of interest for the psychoanalytic critics as her writings are usually enriched with both implicit and explicit allusion to the psychological insights of the characters. Peach rightly notes in this regard, "psychoanalytic perspectives on Morrison's fiction developed in the mid-1980's, but some of the initial studies did not have an especially strong

theoretical base. It is only more recently that critics have pursued their psychoanalytic criticism within a poststructuralist framework" (Peach 1998: 205).

The Bluest Eye particularly provides impressive psychological insights into its characters' psychological states of mind. The novel received many feminist reviews in the very outset due to the complex female characters presented in it. The insights into mother-daughter and father-daughter relationships also provide considerable stuff for a feminist-psychoanalytic analysis and interpretation. The novel offers a study of female subjectivity through two entirely different and complex characters i.e. Claudia and Pecola. Claudia manages to negotiate her way into self-identity since she has a better control over the process of identity formation and she is less influenced by the objectifying attitudes of a racist society. Pecola on the other hand fails to attain self-hood and falls prey to an objectifying society.

3.2 Development of the Black American Culture

In order to understand the black American culture, it is important to have a look at the history of the African Americans first. The advent of Africans in America can be traced back to the transportation of the African slaves by the British from various regions during 1500-1900 A.D. The slaves were sold to the owners of sugar plantations. The extensive journeys involved in the trade and caused overcrowding of slaves in the ships and the slaves had to face severe diseases and epidemics (Sylvester 2010). Apart from disease, the slaves suffered from hunger and dehydration while the women slaves sometimes faced sexual harassment and

violence. The miseries of life were at times so unbearable for them that many slaves preferred to commit suicide by jumping into the turbulent salty waters of the Atlantic Ocean (Franklin 1987: 56-7). The African slaves were forcibly made to leave the cultural norms and links with their original lands in order to convert them into perpetual slaves. The process of conversion began somewhere around 1640 when phenomenon of slavery was at its peak and the processes of Othering, stereotyping and racism had started wounding the psyche of these slaves. The slaves did not have any rights and were treated inhumanly. The slaves were used as farmers, servants, shipbuilders and dockworkers (Sylvester 1998). The objectification of slaves was so intense that the state of Virginia included the slaves in the category of real estate in 1705 (Bell 1987: 7). The children of slaves were also compelled to remain slaves for their whole lives through enforcement of laws. The situation improved somewhat during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries yet the laws during the two centuries legalized the racist status of the blacks and freemen alike. They were considered inferior than the whites on biological, cultural and intellectual grounds despite the blacks' struggle for freedom and the subsequent War of Independence (1775-83) (Elkins 1963: 40). However, when some frictions of the white population started feeling concern about the rights of the blacks and consented for abolition of slavery, the Civil War of 1861 initiated because of the differences of the two opposing parties representing the South and the North. The Emancipation Proclamation was issued in 1863 which brought freedom to millions of slaves. The Proclamation, however, was not fully applied to certain border-states like Maryland and Missouri

(Franklin 1987: 40-9). The settlement of black communities in the urban lands and the inception of their jobs in the factories posed new challenges for the Southerners since it became difficult to control and exploit the blacks in the urban areas and the blacks started competing with the whites directly. The whites were also bothered by the social mixing of the black and the white communities. These circumstances made them pass Jim Crow Laws by the last decade of the 1900 A. D. The laws once again brought down the status of millions of uneducated, landless freemen to the lowest ebb since their freedom (Bell 1987: 8-9). The racist discrimination was strong and inhuman. The blacks did not have the right to travel with the whites in the railcars, they could not use the waiting rooms, theatres, restaurants and even the washrooms in presence of the whites. They were also denied access to recreational facilities like beaches and parks (*The Origin of Jim Crow*: 2001). This suggests that the marginalization might have severely affected the psyches of the blacks making them victims of self-objectification.

The humiliating circumstances in the South compelled thousands of blacks to flee to the north in order to look for better opportunities generated by World War I. This phenomenon, known as the Great Migration, continued to happen from 1918 to the mid-1930s. The majority of socially well off blacks settled in Harlem near New York and caused the inauguration of the movement called the Harlem Renaissance. The movement is considered to be a milestone in the social and intellectual. As a logical outcome of the new settlement, the blacks started cutting themselves off from their ancient traditional and cultural norms, unconsciously damaging their identity. Most of the blacks remained poor even

after the migration due to the Great Depression that followed the Harlem Renaissance in the 1930s. These were the conditions wherein the characters of Morrison breathe and live.

3.3 Women, Widowhood and the Hindu Society

Treatment of women in a Hindu society is considerably complex. They are given respect by the family members and the society in general yet according to Dharmastras, "they are ritually impure and a source of impurity (and therefore, e.g., not to study or recite mantras): their husbands are their gurus, and their domestic duties are their rituals" ("Women": The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Religions). The most problematic thing here is that women are not always judged on the basis of their morality, values and behaviour; they are sometimes judged on the grounds that are beyond their control. A widow, for example, has no control over the life and death of her husband yet she suddenly becomes inauspicious after the death of her husband regardless of what the reason of his death was. The image of men on the other hand remains the same even after the death of their wives. The major cause of such behaviour is the concept of auspiciousness and inauspiciousness attached with women in the Hindu belief system. In general, auspicious is something that brings good fortune while inauspicious is something which can cause misfortune. The concept is not just related to women, rather, "almost anything or event tends to be assessed as either more or less auspicious." Everything, from the day to day activities involving combinations of dates and movements to bigger events like marriages and inauguration of businesses have to be planned carefully since the influence of the movement of the planet Saturn or a

supernatural being may strike at an inauspicious moment; to avoid this "times and dates, linked to their specific astronomical conjunctions, are governed by this division; events such as weddings, and new undertakings in general, are therefore arranged in consultation with an astrologer in order that they may coincide with an auspicious moment in the calendar." These beliefs have a more damaging impact on the vulnerable communities like widows because of the belief that "inauspiciousness is personified by certain people (widows and funeral priests are prime examples); merely the sight of such a person is enough to bring about misfortune" ("auspiciousness and inauspiciousness": Oxford Dictionary of Hinduism).

The pivotal theme of the novel *Water* is widowhood in Hinduism. Hindu tradition does not seem very friendly towards widows, especially the widows belonging to high-caste families of the Brahmins. A woman becomes highly ominous, ill-fated and inauspicious soon after the death of her husband. The situation becomes even more complicated in case of child marriages where small girls of five to fifteen years are made to marry men many times older than them. The child marriage "was common throughout the medieval period and into the 19th century, when it became a target for reformers. Under civil legislation, such marriages are now illegal, although still practised in some parts of the country (e.g. Rajasthan) ("Marriage": Oxford Dictionary of Hinduism)."

When their husbands die they are treated like every other widow regardless of their age. The physical image of these widows is made so distinguishable by the Hindu society that a widow can very easily be recognized

even from a distance. The visual distinctiveness makes the chances of objectification even greater in a society that objectifies even the ordinary women. The Hindu society expects a widow to assume a specific physical and behavioural appearance:

> She may be expected to shave off her hair, wear plain white clothing, refrain from ritual, and live in seclusion, perhaps in a semi- ascetic community with other widows. This holds good even for child widows, whose marriage has not been consummated. A childless widow may, in some instances, be cast out, or sent back to her own family by her in-laws. ("Widowhood" Oxford Dictionary of Hinduism)

The most appropriate course of action for a widowed woman "to avoid inauspiciousness", according to the Hindu tradition, is "to immolate herself on her husband's funeral pyre" ("Widowhood": Oxford Dictionary of Hinduism). This, however is the most violent and inhumane way of getting rid of the inauspiciousness and results into the worst kind objectification of a widow.

When these religious and traditional norms convert into social expectations, the social gaze starts influencing the widow's self-image and the internalization of this objectified self-image leads to self-objectification wherein the widow starts considering herself an object, a thing and an inanimate concreteness which cannot have a subjective personality. A widow is not expected to remarry or inherit her husband's property: "Remarriage for a high caste widow was considered taboo, although it was legalized for all in the Hindu Widows Remarriage Act of 1856." The Hindu Marriage Act 1956 also established many women rights concerning their equality with men including their right to remarry and inherit ("Widowhood": Oxford Dictionary of Hinduism).

3.3.1 Strdharma: The Duties of a Hindu Woman

The Hindu Brahmanical beliefs concerning women are called Strdharma or women's duty. These beliefs assign the male members of the society at an honourable and hegemonic place in the society while the female members of the society have to depend upon the male approval in almost every aspect of their life or in whatever role she is assigned. A woman is supposed to be "a dutiful daughter under the care of her father, a faithful wife under the care of her husband, and a widow under the care of her sons; but at no point at all should she be independent of male control." ("Strdharma": Oxford Dictionary of Hinduism). The Hindu religion and society assigns only a subordinate or subaltern role to its woman and severely censures and considers her unrighteous and liable to punishment if she is negligent of these duties. The duties of a faithful wife, for example, include "producing and raising sons, helping one's husband to perform his enjoined rituals, and retaining one's monogamous purity. In this way, after death, one might hope to attain a place in heaven, alongside one's husband" ("Strdharma": OD of Hinduism).

The institute of marriage is though a very sacred and honourable one, yet it tends to negate the rights of woman. Women are quite often handed over to men like lifeless commodities. This happens because the Hindu belief systems approve such inhumane acts performed mainly by the domineering male members of the society. The eight possible types of marriage allowed by the sacred Hindu texts are almost all exploitative and demeaning for the women wherein they are handed over to their husbands like mere objects. The first three types of marriage are

particularly objectifying since the women are given away to their bridegrooms as a gift:

> Manusmrti (3.30ff.) lists eight possible types of marriage: i) Brhma—a father's free gift of his daughter to a Vedically educated groom of good character; ii) Daiva (Divine)—a father's gift of his daughter to an officiating priest while he is performing the sacrifice (i.e. as part of priest's daki); iii) Ara (Seer's Marriage)—involving the bridegroom making a gift of one or two pairs of oxen to the bride's father. ("Marriage": OD of Hinduism)

The fourth type of marriage again may or may not involve the consent of the woman. Likewise, the fifth type involves payment of some money to the bride's relatives and the bride herself; the consent of the girls may not be asked even in the fifth type. The sixth type seems to be the only type where the bride's consent is surely involved "iv) Prjpatya—the bride is given after the couple have been exhorted to practise dharma together; v) Asura (Demonic)—marriage after the free payment of money (i.e. a 'bride-price') to the girl's relatives and the girl herself; vi) Gndharva—a mutually desired union between the bride and bridegroom expressed through sexual intercourse." The last two types are though not practiced very frequently yet these are the most violent types of marriages where women are either forcibly abducted or raped in order to force them into a marital union:

> vii) Rkasa (Fiendish)—marriage by the violent and forcible abduction of the bride; viii) Paica (Ghoulish)—a form of marriage involving the secret rape of a sleeping, intoxicated, or deranged woman. Of these, the final two are considered illegal by Manu, although they are theoretically, perhaps pragmatically, assigned to katriyas in particular. The Gndharva marriage is likewise thought to be the prerogative of katriyas, especially of kings in stories. Marriages i)–iv) are supposed to be reserved for brahmins, although it is a version of the first of these, the Brhma marriage, which has effectively

> become the norm for marriages involving all classes. ("Marriage": OD of Hinduism)

3.3.2 Can the Subaltern Speak? – Silence of the Hindu Women

Women's will, desire and happiness is ignored in most of the cases where they are given to their bridegrooms without asking their consent. The phenomenon, however, is not very simple since the Hindu tradition is very deeply rooted in the minds of the women who have been treated like this for centuries. The women living in the Hindu society are not fully conscious of what state of affairs they are living in. This is mainly due to their strong religious beliefs; they consider it to be part of their fate that they have been made women and they are destined to be treated the way their society treats them. The psychological aspect of the plight of the Hindu women is very well discussed by a post-colonial theorist Gayatri Spivak in her essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* She asserts that the Indian women live in a subaltern position and where they cannot even speak about their own rights or resist the violence against them even if they are given a chance to do so (Spivak 1988). This psychological dilemma is due to their strong beliefs about the way they are made to live or treated by the society. In order to strengthen her argument she presents the example of a Hindu cultural tradition called *Sati*. She argues in this regard that the widow willingly embraces her death after the death of her husband because widows are so deeply influenced by religious and cultural values that they cannot represent themselves and have to surrender themselves to the prevalent cultural belief system which is responsible for their "systematic silencing" and subaltern status (Spivak 1988).

The portrayal of Hindu widows in *Water* is an epitome of Spivak's notion of the female Hindu subaltern since most of the widows staying at the widows' ashram cannot speak against the social injustice and consider it their religious obligation to follow the norms of society regarding role of a widow. Shakuntala and Kalyani, however, are the odd ones out. They prefer to speak when they are disillusioned about the interpretation of the Hindu traditions.

CHAPTER 4

Self-Objectification and Female Identity in Tony Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*

Tony Morrison's novel *The Bluest Eye* is an epitome of the struggle of the black people of America to evade the supremacy of the dominant white culture in order to strengthen the confidence and pride of the black people in having black identity. Powel (2009) in this regards asserts that it is the responsibility of the Afro-American critic and novelist to de-centre the white logos and to "create a universe of critical and fictional meanings where blackness will no longer connote absence, negation, and evil but will come to stand instead for affirmation, presence, and good" (Powell 2009: 748). Morrison seems to do this in her fiction in the true sense of Powel's assertion by highlighting the racist complexities not only between the blacks and the whites but also among the blacks themselves.

4.1 "Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty": Morrison's Critique of Objectified Beauty

Morrison's critique of beauty reminds of Keats' famous assertion "beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty" (1819). Her narrative intends to magnify the false contrasts between beauty and ugliness, whiteness and blackness and cleanliness and dirt, in order to convince its readers that the standards of beauty that objectify the female bodies and ignite hatred, both in the black and the white communities, have to be

negated in favour of a standard that promotes equality and usefulness; for her "beauty was not simply something to behold; it was something one could do" (Morrison 1994: 209). Morrison has tried to redefine beauty and attractiveness in order to break the false standards of beauty both by the black and the white American communities. Her definition of beauty is not based upon the standards set by the white majority but is based on the notion of "usefulness." Walther presents Morrison's views about beauty in these words: "Morrison [....] insists on a beauty who is useful, a beauty who works [...] [she] rejects the beauty of white consumer culture because it separates women "from reality"; she recognizes the fundamental objectification within the specular system of beauty, in which the image becomes separated from the real thing" (Walther 1990: 776). The notion of usefulness sounds quite convincing because 'usefulness', as opposed to attractiveness, is a matter of human will and choice. No one can choose to be physically beautiful or attractive, but everyone has a free will to be useful. It sounds to be a highly pragmatic definition, which is utilitarian at the same time. Morrison's notion of beauty and ugliness sounds exaggerated in the outset when she calls "equating physical beauty with virtue", "the most destructive idea in the history of human thought" (Morrison 1994: 122) yet, considering plight of the women facing facial hatred and objectification, she sounds logical and realistic since virtue alone should be the measure of goodness, not the physical beauty.

The events and the psychological states of the characters in *The Bluest Eye* display Morrison's focuses on the complexity of defining the beauty prevalent in the African-American culture of early 1940s; a culture where the white majority

suppresses the black population in a variety of ways and turns blacks against blacks. Cormier-Hamilton unveils the complexity of American cultural oppression by pointing out that the culture turns blacks against blacks and makes black children indulge in self-hatred: "Thus the white majority culture is both a direct and indirect suppressor, withholding money, power and prestige to turn blacks against blacks, creating an inverted and aberrant community, whose little boys and girls sing songs of self-hatred: "Black e mo! Black e mo!" (Cormier 1994: 118). This objectifying attitude of the society negates that fact that "the victim had no control over" (Morrison 65) her colour or any other physical attributes. While arguing about the reason of touching the theme of beauty and ugliness Morrison herself states that the purpose behind "the assertion of racial beauty" was to raise voice against "the damaging internalization of assumptions of immutable inferiority originating in an outside gaze" (Morrison 210). But the novel is replete with examples that show that the more frequently prevalent objectifying gaze came not from the while community but from the blacks themselves. The internalization of this objectifying gaze made the women and girls of the African-American community to consider themselves to be objectified bodies, worthless, unclean and ugly.

The feminist and psychoanalytic perspective of *The Bluest Eye* is further highlighted by Morrison in the Afterword of the novel where she asserts, "I focused, therefore, on how something as grotesque as the demonization of an entire race could take root inside the most delicate member of society: a child; the most vulnerable member: a female" (Morrison 210). Though the male members of

the society are also affected by the racially objectifying gaze yet the most damaging affect is born by the female members of the society including little girls like Pecola and Claudia who made to realize that they are ugly and inferior through images of ideal feminine beauty in day to day objects and consumer items like white baby dolls, Shirley Temple cups and rappers of Mary Jane candies.

4.2 "The Glazed Separateness": Ugliness and the Inverse-Gaze

Morrison's portrayal of the protagonist Pecola is at the same time striking and shocking. Pecola's self-objectified personality is an outcome of a culture where blackness is viewed as something so worthless that she starts considerning herself to be something non-existent. Her strong desire to disappear from this world is an outcome of the cultural attitude she encounters in her society where Mr. Yacobowski, a white storekeeper, represents a great majority of population who define beauty in terms of white standards of visual attractiveness and express their indifference towards the blacks or physically unattractive people. Whenever Pecola visits Mr. Yacobowski's store, he does not acknowledge her presence and makes her believe that her body does not exist. His psyche is laid bare by Morrison quite naturalistically: "Somewhere between vision and view, his eyes draw back, hesitate, and hover. At some fixed point in time and space he senses that he need not waste the effort of a glance. He does not see her, because for him there is nothing to see" (Morrison 1994: 48). The strange thing about this behaviour is that beautiful objects are objectified by gazing at them while the ugly bodies are objectified by averting the gaze away from them, by showing an attitude that the gazer does not want to waste even a little time for gazing at the

object of ugliness. I would call this hesitation, this reluctance and this drawing back of the eyes, the inverse-gaze which is humiliating and annoying for the object which is rendered worthless for not being considered even worthy of a gaze.

The inverse-gaze thus is a condition where the gazer is well aware of the presence of a human being near him/her yet the gazer finds himself unconsciously reluctant to have a look at the other person; though a cursory look must take place enabling the gazer to weigh the ugliness and decide not-to-see the person again. The form of objectification resulting out of the inverse-gaze is more destructive as compared to a gaze since it throws the object of gaze into a delusion of nonexistence and absence because of the "total absence of human recognition—the glazed separateness" (Morrison 1994: 48). Research shows that women are usually pleased by presence the male gazes as it provides them recognition of their physical attractiveness but when a gaze has a chance of carrying hatred, dislike or racist thought, it can be annoying for the women being gazed at. It's not just Mr. Yacobowski, Pecola can see "it lurking in the eyes of all white people" and being a self-objectified person she is fully aware of the vacuum in their eyes and "the distance must be for her, her blackness" (Morrison 49). The outcome of this attitude is shame and anger and a severe form of anxiety which forces Pecola to love hanker for the blue eyes like Mary Jane. Her affection for Mary Jane depicted by Morrison seems hyperbolic in the outset when she mentions that "three pennies had bought her nine lovely orgasms with Mary Jane", yet by the end of the novel we realize that Pecola's passion for Mary Jane was no less. The

self-same inverse-gaze is felt by Pecola when she realizes that her teachers and even the black boys and girls at school give more attention to Maureen Peal, "a high-yellow dream child with long brown hair [...], a hint of spring in her sloe green eyes, something summery in her complexion, and a rich autumn ripeness in her walk" (Morrison 1994: 43), and ignore her considerably. Every one objectifies Maureen Peal and gazes at her to see beauty flowing out of her body. Thus, the objectifying gaze in both the cases is present yet in case of the black children it is inverse, making them feel worthless in front of Maureen Peal. The third instance of inverse-gaze occurs when Pecola unintentionally spills down the pan of blueberries juice in the kitchen where his mother worked for a white family. Pauline, her mother, not only beats Pecola quite violently but also ignores the pain Pecola was feeling because of her contact with the hot juice. Instead, she starts solacing the white child of her employer as if Pecola does not matter at all for her. Her reluctance to reveal her daughter's true identity in front of the white girls further confirms that for her Pecola's identity is something demeaning and even to mention her name would be something shameful for her.

4.3 Dominant White Culture and Objectification of the Black Body

The American culture, as portrayed by Morrison in *The Bluest Eye*, not only imposes a self-image to the females but also engraves it on the males' minds. Not just the women, but every member of the black community views blackness as nothing more than absence or nothingness because the standards of physical beauty are dictated by various signs of the dominant white culture such as the white heroines of movies, and white baby dolls. The standard of beauty

propagated by the white consumer culture are not acceptable for Morrison as "it separates women 'from reality'; she recognizes the fundamental objectification within the specular system of beauty, in which the image becomes separated from the real thing" (Walther 1990: 776).

Pecola's self-objectification gets its root from a link between the gazes she encounters and the objects of ideal beauty spread around her including. The cultural signs of ideal beauty and the inverse-gazes of the people like Mr. Yacobowski make her believe that whiteness is superior to blackness and black individuals are non-entities, they don't just exist. This body-consciousness generates a deep rooted anxiety in her innocent mind. While eating her candies, she examines Mary Jane's image on the wrapper and wishes to be like her because she considered her to be inferior. Mary Jane's blond hair, her blue eyes and her white colour make her feel inferior and, to her, the process of eating the candy "is somehow to eat the eyes, eat Mary Jane. Love Mary Jane. Be Mary Jane" (Morrison 1994: 62). This denial of the self, this hankering to become someone else, and this despair present in Pecola is very much a product of the people like Mr. Yacobowski. She is victimized by a society that objectifies her body as being ugly and worthless, only because she does not look like the white women.

Virtue, goodness and usefulness have nothing to do with white colour or blue eyes but Pecola believes that if her eyes were blue she would be pretty and virtuous. To her, blue eyes are a license to acceptability. After having the blue eyes her friends would like to play with her, her teachers will love her, the way

they love Maureen Peel, her light-coloured schoolmate. She even believes that her parents will not fight anymore, if she gets her blue eyes; she fantasizes that seeing her blue eyes her parents would say "why, look at pretty-eyed Pecola. We mustn't do bad things in front of those pretty eyes" (Morrison 1994: 46). Pecola is made to believe that black cannot be beautiful and only beauty can ensure happiness. This makes her feel sad and she wishes to look like Maureen Peel because Maureen is treated with respect by all her teachers. This notion of white dominance creates a strong self-objectified image of her own self in Pecola's mind where she sees herself as an object of ugliness, shame and imperfection.

Pecola and other Breedlovers internalize the notion of absence and conveniently buy the objectifying views of the society induced in their unconsciousness through various symbols of the dominant white culture. Pecola's desire to disappear is extremely significant to understand the outcomes of a self-objectified image she has. She wants to keep herself "concealed, veiled, eclipsed—peeping out from behind the shroud very seldom, and then only to yearn for the return of her mask" (Morrison 39). Her behaviour has obvious signs of appearance anxiety and shame stemming out of her self-objectification. Pecola thinks that she has no beauty, no presence, and no existence. This makes her believe that her body should better be concealed from the eyes of those who disregard her presence and ignore her on the basis of being black. Walther's interpretation of Pecola's veiling behaviour is also convincing when she says, "Because Pecola has no beauty, and thus no presence, in the eyes of the visually dominated culture, she absents herself from the society by hiding behind the

reification of her visual [non]appearance." (Walther 1990: 777). In a frenzy of disappointment and helpless in the face of her inability to look beautiful, Pecola wishes to substantiate her self-objectified image by throwing herself into a visual absence:

> "Please make me disappear." She squeezed her eyes shut. Little parts of her body faded away [....] Her fingers went, one by one; then arms disappeared all the way to the elbow. Her feet now. Yes, that was good. The legs all at once. It was hardest above the thighs. She had to be real still and pull. Her stomach would not go. But finally it, too, went away. Then her chest, her neck. The face was hard, too. Almost done, almost. Only her tight, tight eyes were left. They were always left. (Morrison 1994: 45)

Pecola's imaginative display of denial and erasure of her physical-self, expresses the deep anxiety and self-consciousness which Pecola has due to the all-pervasive cultural pressure and misrepresentation of the black body image. She can make all her body disappear in her imagination, except her eyes since she believes that eyes are the most important component of physical beauty and acceptability. The light coloured Maureen Peal seems to be screaming all the time in her black ears "I am cute! And you ugly! Black and ugly black e mos. I am cute!" (Morrison 73). Her inability to make her eyes disappear in her imagination shows that the conversion of black eyes into blue ones is almost impossible. Her relentless desire for a pair of blue eyes is the very essence of her definition of beauty. The cultural environment tends to negate her blackness or the blackness of her eyes. The beauty standard she sees every day on the wrappers of Mary Jane candies is impossible to meet: "the smiling white face. Blond hair in gentle disarray, blue eyes looking at her out of a world of clean comfort." (50). The inability to meet these standards make her feel a deep and unbearable pain and

consequently she wishes to erase her corporeal body in order to conform to the standards of beauty prevalent in American culture. The strong impact of the pain of ugliness has it a physical face too, particularly in case of Pecola. Pecola "folds into herself, like a pleated wing" (73). and walks sluggishly looking downwards like an inanimate object, being pushed forward by some unseen force. Cluadia, Freda and Pecola all face the dehumanizing and objectifying reactions from various members of their society. They cannot understand how to react or how to take this insult. Claudia expresses her feelings, after the insult inflicted by Maureen Peal, in these words: "dolls we could destroy, but we could not destroy the honey voices of parents and aunts, the obedience in the eyes of our peers, the slippery light in the eyes of our teachers when they encountered the Maureen Peals of the world [....] The *Thing* of fear was the *Thing* that made her beautiful and not us" (Morrison 1994: 74). Her generalization of Maureen Peal as a symbol of beauty liked by every member of the society points towards the general conduct of the society which is encouraging and loving towards the white girls and debasing and insulting towards the black girls. Yet the black girls cannot come out of the misery they feel since they cannot escape the inevitable situation.

A major portion of Pecola's body-consciousness seems to stem from her mother Pauline. Pauline's consciousness has its roots in the movies she watches. The protagonists of these movies are all white women having blond hair and blue eyes. This standard of beauty makes her feel inferior because she does not have any of these physical attributes. She unconsciously educates herself about the standards of beauty while watching these movies. Pauline idealizes the beauty of

Jean Harlow, an actress, and tries to look like her by making her hair like Jean. Yet very soon she realizes that she cannot attain her ideal beauty. This disillusionment makes her reverse her hairstyle back to normal and settle down "to just being ugly" (Morrison 123). She absorbs this consciousness so much that it becomes a part of her blood, and from there it transfers into Pecola's blood and unconsciousness. Pecola, in turn, begins to believe that femininity can be created and recreated like a commodity. This belief makes her wish for acquiring blue eyes.

4.4 Self-objectification and the Female Gaze

The Bluest Eye is a study of the cultural values that shape individual's body image and physical self-consciousness. It explores the causes and effects of self-objectification among the black women living in a culture where being white or having blue eyes is the dominant criterion of being beautiful. Balckness is a curse which makes the black women to think about their erasure and disappearance in order to conform with the standards of their culture. Their self-objectified body consciousness makes them feel miserable, defeated, and demonized. Morrison's notion of "usefulness" as criterion for beauty, however, is a great ray of hope for the black women since every black woman can be useful regardless of whether she can change her physical appearance or not.

The novel is not just about white women looking down upon black women; rather, it is about black women looking down upon the black girls and extending their favours for white girls. The objectifying gaze, in *The Bluest Eye,*

is not exclusively male. In this novel, most of the times, women look at other women to determine and measure the level of their beauty or ugliness. So the essence of women's self-objectification emerges not form the domineering male stratum of society, but form an inflicting and humiliating female gaze. Men's gaze, however, is typical; men look at women as sexual objects and make them realize that they are only objects of pleasure, instead of being intelligent or emotional human beings. Pecola's rape by her father Cholly, presents one such example of the aftermath of a defiled and animalistic male gaze.

The character sketch of Claudia is quite different from other female characters in the novel. Claudia's character appears to be a foil to Pecola. Unlike Pecola, she strongly opposes the colourist attitude of her society. She has bread hatred towards the colour consciousness of her community and wants to redefine the notion of beauty. This makes her react against the cultural sympathies for whiteness of colour and blueness of eyes. When on the Christmas Eve, she receives a white baby doll Shirley Temples, she feels humiliated and reacts against "the universal love of white baby dolls, Shirley Temples, and Maureen Peals" (Morrison 1994: 190). Claudis destroys the Shirley Temple doll in order to externalize her fury against the whiteness-prone culture. This attitude shows her complex psyche; she seems to feel the pressure of society and culture regarding objectification of her body and wishes to avert that pressure by showing her disgust for the white doll. This type of reaction seems to be a harbinger of change in "a society where whiteness is the yardstick of personal worth, where Shirley Temple and Jeanne Harlow set standards for beauty and "Dick and Jane" readers

prescribe an oppressive notion of normalcy, where Pecola's shame at her mother's race serves as a model for self-improvement" (Dittmar 1990: 140). She is, however, less affected by the damaging effects of the racist objectification as compared to Pecola as she manages to accept what she has and tries to live with it as a reality she cannot change. Though she cannot comprehend the unworthiness inflicted upon her by Maureen Peal and other members of the society, she dares to admire her ugliness: "we felt comfortable in our skins, enjoyed the news that our senses released to us, admired our dirt, cultivated our scars" (Morrison 1994: 74). Geraldine is another character who deliberately promotes objectification and racist hatred by instructing her son to play only with "white kids" instead of playing with "niggers." She also stereotypes and marginalizes the blacks by telling her son the difference between the collared people and the niggers: "coloured people were neat and quiet; niggers were dirty and loud" (Morrison 1994: 87). She rejects Pecola since she bore all the negative characteristics of her views of nigger girls: "she looked at Pecola. Saw the dirty torn dress, the plaits sticking out on her head, hair matted where the plaits had come undone, the muddy shoes with the wad of gum peeping out from between the cheap soles, the soiled socks, one of which had been walked down into the heel on the shoe." (Morrison 91). Her hatred and objectifying gaze, searching all the objects of ugliness on Pecola's body, culminates into her final, detestable utterance: "You nasty little black bitch. Get out of my house" (92).

Maureen Peal also has an objectifying gaze who considers herself beautiful and quite openly announces in front of Pecola, Claudia and Frieda "I *am*

cute! And you ugly!" All the folks at school, males or females, admire Maureen and give her preference over every black girl. Where these black girls are ignored and marginalized even by the black students and teachers, Maureen Peal is given special treatment due to her light skin: "she enchanted the entire school. When teachers called on her, they smiled encouragingly. Black boys didn't trip her in the halls; white boys didn't stone her, white girls didn't suck their teeth when she was assigned to be their work partners; black girls stepped aside when she wanted to use the sink in the girls' toilets" (Morrison 62). Dubey rightly argues in this regard:

> The presence that defines black feminine characters in the novel as deficient is represented not by the black man but the white woman. [...] Each expression of black feminine desire, whether Pecola's longing for blue eyes, Frieda's love of Shirley Temple, Claudia's hatred of white dolls, Maureen's adoration of Betty Grable, or Pauline's of Jean Harlow, takes the white woman as its object. (Dubey 1994: 39-40)

The novel, thus, appears to be a critique of liberal white feminism which does not include the experience of the black females.

4.5 Self-Objectification and the Mirror Stage

The mirror stage is extremely important in analysing Pecola's unconscious mind. This is a stage in personality development and identity formation where a child faces the myth of an integrated selfhood together with an understanding of the self as other. It is a state of mind where the child has to recognize itself with the outer world called others. Lacan has made distinction between two different others; one with small *'o'* while the other with capital *'O'*: "the lower case 'other' refers to imaginary others. We treat these others as whole unified or coherent egos, and as

reflections of ourselves they give us the sense of being complete whole being. This is the other of the mirror phase who the infant presumes will completely satisfy its desire" (Homer 2005: 70). The big Other on the other hand is "that absolute otherness that we cannot assimilate to our subjectivity. The big other is the symbolic order." The Other provides us the language and the concepts of about ourselves and the outer world: "It is that foreign language that we are born into and must learn to speak if we are to articulate our own desire. It is also the discourse and the desire of those around us, through which we internalize and inflect our own desire" (Homer 70). The mirror stage, however, inaugurates the feeling of "separateness" and "lack" due to child's recognition of itself as a being separate to its mother, which causes pain and complicates the child's mind about its existence.

Pecola's identity is defined by a severe unconscious realization of "lack" or "insufficiency" and the relationship she establishes with the other/Other. She feel lack when she compares her body image with the image of the ideal beauty infused in her conscious and unconscious mind during her early childhood days through images of the white dolls and the images of white and blond Mary Jane made on the candies she eats. The lack and insufficiency in Pecola and Claudia's case is the ideal beauty as presented by the white images prevalent in the culture; these are the images of the other that are impossible to attain. Pecola's main concern in the novel is to overcome the lack or the vacuum in her subjectivity by becoming like the other. Pecola indulges herself in imaginary identification with the white consumer objects. When she compares herself to that ideal image of the

other she experiences strong feelings of envy and disgust since she does not have pleasing colour and features like Maureen Peal. Lacan's theory suggests that a child considers itself to be one with its mother in the pre-mirror stage and is able to recognize itself as a separate entity in the imaginary stage where lack of the mother makes him long to reunite with the mother. The mother becomes the other and the desire of reunion is later transferred into desire of getting other objects around the child. Pecola's psychic life seems to have this dilemma which is evident from her habit of calling her mother Mrs. Breedlove instead of calling her mom or mother. She is utterly neglected by her mother due to her preoccupation with work. Her mother considers her ugly and in her stream of consciousness says, "But I knowed she was ugly. Head full of pretty hair, but Lord she was ugly" (Morrison 126). She beats her up in front of her white employer's daughter and shows hesitation in introducing Pecola as her daughter. This absence of a proper mother-daughter association inaugurates a vacuum in Pecola's life. This unfulfilled desire of being loved by a mother leads Pecola to find satisfaction in the image of the racial other. She gazes at the Shirley Temple cup and takes pleasure in drinking milk again and again in the cup in order to satiate her desire of looking at the white girl's image made on the cup and unconsciously endeavours to cover up the void of her mother's absence. The image on the cup therefore becomes a maternal image for Pecola yet this satisfaction is not enough for Pecola since her desire to be loved is too strong to be satiated. This leads her to a stronger and unattainable desire of having blue eyes. Her mirror image is dominated by lack and insufficiency which makes Pecola believe that only a pair

of blue eyes could make her look beautiful and mend other folks' attitude towards her. Another possibility of her satisfaction appears in form of the wrappers of Mary Jane candies. She strongly desires to be Mary Jane i.e. to be the other which ultimately abates her value for her own self and she heads towards the desire to erase her whole body.

Pecola's identity formation, thus, can be well understood through the study of her unconscious mind during the mirror stage where she recognizes her image both as the self and the other. The process of recognition, however, is marred by the absence of the mother and she confuses her desire of getting reunited with her mother with other objects like Shirley Temple, Mary Jane and Maureen Peal.

A study of Mrs. Breedlove's identity formation also reveals interesting aspects of her unconscious mind. The formation of her identity can be understood through her unconscious mirroring of herself and her self-objectification. Mrs. Breedlove's self-objectification is rooted mainly in three physical attributes i.e. her blackness, a cavity in her front tooth, and the deformity in her foot. These physical attributes through her into the realm of the Mirror Stage where she feels a strong sense of lack and insufficiency. The "crooked, archless foot that flopped when she walked" (Morrison 1994: 110) made her believe that people do not love her and try to avoid her company only because of this deformity. Her feelings of "separateness and unworthiness" (111), she believes, are because of her foot. Due to her foot people ignore her so much that "she alone of all children had no nickname" and there were no "funny jokes and anecdotes about funny things she

had done" (Morrison 1994: 111) This neglect of her objectifying society is internalized by Mrs. Breedlove so deeply that she cannot think about her inner beauty or moral attributes and prefers to think only about her insufficient, deformed and ugly physical attributes.

Apart from this Mrs. Breedlove's identity is partly formulated as a result of the racist gazes of the whites and the blacks in the town of Ohio where she moved after her marriage. In Ohio, when the objectifying gazes of the blacks strike her, she is shocked because she could not expect it from the blacks "Northern colored folk was different too. Dicty-like. No better than whites for meanness. They could make you feel just as no-count, 'cept I didn't expect it from them" (117). Being alienated both from the whites and the blacks, she confines herself to solitude where she does not "even have a cat to talk to" (117). The only hope for her was her husband who loved her in the beginning of her marriage but a time came when "their marriage was shredded with quarrels" (118) and she turned towards the silver screen to find solace and to forget her self-objectified body and the gazes of the people around her.

The world of movies provided her a world of fantasy because "there the flawed became whole, the blind sighted, and the lame and halted threw away their crutches. There death was dead, and people made every gesture in a cloud of music. There the black and white images came together, making a magnificent whole" (122). Fantasy, in Lacanian psychoanalysis is "an imagined scene in which the subject is a protagonist, and always represents the fulfillment of a wish (in the last analysis, an unconscious wish) in a manner that is distorted to a greater

or lesser extent by defensive processes" (Homer 2005: 85). Mrs. Breedlove's desire to look beautiful cannot be fulfilled but the movies act like her fantasies where by identifying herself with the beautiful white protagonists of the movies like Jean Harlow, she sees the fulfillment of her wish, she sees the black and the white merging into a complete whole. She tries to implement that fantasy in the real life as well by fixing her hair like Jean Harlow but the fantasy breaks very soon when she finds her front tooth broken suddenly. The mirror image at once breaks down and the woman who was happy in having a hairstyle like Jean Harlow, the woman who could satisfy herself by an imagined unification of black and white, decides to settle down "to just being ugly" (Morrison 1994: 123). Her broken tooth brings back the sense of self-objectification and she once again starts looking at herself as an object of ugliness and repulsion. The racist attitude of an old doctor further deteriorates her self-image. While visiting the hospital where Mrs. Breedlove was admitted for delivery, he tells some young doctors that black women deliver "with no pain. Just like horses" (125). The visiting doctors do not even stop near her but on the contrary when they visit the white women they do "nice friendly talk" in order to please them.

As a result of her self-objectification she tries to escape into the world of her white employer Mr. Fisher's home and family. By doing so she not only tries to keep away from ugliness of her home, husband and children but also remains close to cleanliness and beauty which she finds in the house she work in. She found "beauty, order, cleanliness, and praise" at the Fishers and started neglecting her children and her husband as if "they were the afterthoughts one has just before

sleep, the early-morning and late-evening edges of her day, the dark edges that made the daily life with the Fishers lighter, more delicate, more lovely" (Morrison 1994: 127). The Fishers "even gave her what she had never had—a nickname—Polly." (128). The situation gives her a kind of split personality; she manages to forget her ugliness, her distorted foot and her broken teeth while she is at the Fishers place but when she comes back her own family the ugliness seems to return with all its force and makes her feel bad about everything around her: her home, her children, and her husband. We may conclude that Mrs. Breedlove's mirror image contains duality, the binary of the self and the other. She recognizes herself at the same time as a self and as an other, the black and the white, and the beautiful and the ugly.

CHAPTER 5

Self-Objectification and Female Identity in Bapsi Sidhwa's *Water*

There are more than one female characters in Bapsi Sidhwa's *Water* that may qualify to be the protagonist of the novel. Chuyia, Kalyani, Shakuntula and Patiraji all play significantly vital roles in the novel. However, from psychoanalytic point of view, there is so much common among these characters that they can be considered as one personality having different shades. All of them are widows whose husbands died in the childhood, all live in the same ashram and all are treated by the society in the almost the same way. Their age however makes them stand apart. Chuyia is only eight, Kalyani in her twenties, Shakuntula in her middle age, while Patiraji seems to be in her seventies. The four women represent four stages of a widow's life in a widows' ashram. Thus, in order to have a better understanding of the development of psychological identity of a widow I have considered them all the protagonists of the novel rolled into one; neither Chuyia nor Kalyani nor Shakuntula but the image of a widow which contains all the four characters.

5.1 Self-objectification and the Formulation of Female Identity

Lacanian psychoanalysis asserts that the unconscious is structured very much like a language and the subject of psychoanalysis is a "desiring subject." Lacan's

notion of the unconscious is based upon structuralist notion of signifier and the signified but it is necessarily post-structuralist since it gives preference to the signifier rather than the signified. Lacan posits that meaning of the signifiers are not fixed there is rather "an incessant sliding of the signifier under the signified" (Lacan 1977: 117). During this "incessant sliding", however, there are certain "anchoring points" where the chain of signification stabilizes and the flow of meaning holds on for some time. The signifier of widow or widowhood is one such signifier in *Water*. The incessant sliding of this signifier shapes the identity of the protagonist(s). The chain of signification wherein the *widowhood* signifier lies contains endless number of signifiers that incessantly shape and reshape the meanings of this signifier. Men, women, life, death, marriage, ashram, happiness, and mourning are but a few examples of the signifiers chained with the key signifier of widowhood. To understand this signifier and its sliding meanings and the ultimate impact of these meanings on construction of the female identities, it is important first to understand the role of men in the Indian society (as depicted in *Water*) because the society portrayed by *Water* is dominated by men who suppress, marginalize and subjugate the female body and mind by imposing their world view on women, particularly the widows. Men consequently play a vital role in determining the female identity in the Indian society.

5.2 Male-Gaze and Formulation of Female Self-objectification

Water presents the Indian culture where men symbolize social, cultural and familial authority. Male members of the Hindu society sexually objectify women and subject them to their sexualizing gaze. They head the patriarchal system and define and secure the belief system of the Hindu society. The female identity and self-objectification seems to rest on the conscious and unconscious acceptance of the world view formulated and implemented by the male members of the society. Widows are of a special interest for men since they are cut off from the society and are easier to approach. Even the sacred books of Hinduism affirm the objectifying attitude of the men towards widows which is pointed out by Madhumati in the novel: "the Mahabharata says, 'just as birds flock to a piece of flesh left on the ground, so all men try to seduce a widow'" (Sidhwa 2006: 151). Widows' thus are highly vulnerable in the Hindu society; they are nothing more than a "piece of flesh" in front of the vulture-like men who are at times ready to devour the object of their desire. This applies to almost all the major male characters portrayed in *Water*. Chuyia's father Somnath is a milder case as compared to other men presented in the novel. He brings the so-called "good news" in the beginning of the novel that Hira Lal's mother wants their six years old daughter Chuyia to marry Hira Lal. The news though shocked his wife Bhagya and left her "short of breath" yet due to her unconscious awareness of the patriarchal power of her husband she prefers to "lower her head to disguise the sudden tumult that agitated her heart" (6). Bhagya is fully aware that Hira Lal is a forty-four years old man and is already a grandfather and marrying an innocent,

six years old child to him would be a matter of great injustice. The man, she believes, would not be able to fulfil Chuyia's physical needs because he would be "old and spent" by the time Chuyia comes to age. He would not be able to "satisfy her stri-svavahava [sexual needs]" (8). She understands that she has no say in the affair since she could smell from the authoritative confidence of her husband that the matter was "settled" already. This inability and lack of authority makes Bhagya so frustrated that she is not left with any other option than pray to Bhagwan that Chuyia may "never come of age" (7). It is Somnath who, in an "authoritative mode" sets the rules for the identity of a Hindu woman by trying to fix the meaning of the signifier *woman* in light of the 'Brahmanical tradition':

> 1. 'A girl' can be 'safe and happy only in her husband's care [....] and she is recognized as a person only when she is one with her husband'.
>
> 2. 'A woman's body is a site for conflict between a demonic stri-svavahava, which is her lustful aspect, and her stri-dharma, which is her womanly duty'.
>
> 3. 'Outside marriage the wife has no recognized existence [....] A woman's role in life is to get married and have sons. That is why she is created: to have sons! That is all!'.
>
> 4. 'Women were dangerous. They sapped a man's strength and stood between him and salvation.' (Sidhwa 2006: 7-9)

This implies that the signifier *woman* stands for an objectified female body. It is a body without its own will, a body with demonic "stri-svavahava", a dangerous being which is like a machine that is supposed to produce nothing but sons. Most importantly, women's will is not asked even in the most life-changing matters of their lives like marriages. They are treated like mindless toys meant only to bring joy and comfort to the male members of their society whether they are their brothers, husbands or fathers. When Somnath declares that he has made

up his mind regarding Chuyia's marriage, Bhagya has no other choice but to submit. The authoritative assertions about "a hoary tradition" from a socially privileged and powerful man frightened Bhagya and "chilled her blood" (8). Her unconscious understanding of her husband's social superiority and her own mental subjugation made her feel guilty and led her to the conclusion that "her husband was right; his words bore the cumulative wisdom of gods and ancient sages, and who was she to challenge that august pantheon?" (9). This internalization of beliefs reveals the self-objectification that takes place in the unconscious of the women who is Chuyia's mother and caretaker. We can assume here that Bhaya's understanding of the Hindu culture, her conscious and unconscious fears and concerns would be transferred to her daughter. Women of the Hindu society own the social and religious objectification and construct their self-image in light of the image formulated by the male *other*.

Another male character is Narayan's father Dwarkanath, who authoritatively asserts his objectifying views about the women of Indian society. Dwarkanath represents the Indian nobility and a society that objectifies the women, particularly the widows. The gentry hide its hypocritical and objectifying behaviour towards the widows under a guise of a surficial concern for the poor widows. Rabindra, in one of his utterances, unveils this simulated guise of the gentry by saying that "the gentry here have an unnatural concern for widows" (Sidhwa 2006: 73). The ugly face of the gentry becomes even more naked when Narayan tries to convince his father Dwarkanath that marrying a widow cannot be bad. When Narayan shows his intention to marry Kalyani, Dwarkanath very

casually remarks "So you've found out she's not a goddess. Don't marry her—keep her as your mistress" (173). Without even acknowledging that he himself was among those who were responsible for Kalyani's forced prostitution, he suggests treating her like an object, a "mistress", instead of a wife. He further tries to justify his treatment of women as objectified beings by referring to the holy texts: "Our holy texts say Brahmins can sleep with whoever they want, and the women they sleep with are blessed" (174). Narayan, however, is not a typical Hindu male; he challenges his father's objectifying thoughts about the widows and women of their society through his counter argument, "I have also studied our scriptures [....] God Ram told his brother never to honour those Brahmins who interpret the holy texts for their own benefit" (Sidhwa 2006: 174). Narayan's remark implicates his respect for the widows. For him the widow signifier refers to an individual, a human being having a personality, a woman having the right to live a normal life with all its pleasures and happiness.

Narayan's friend Rabindra is another man with highly objectifying views about women. Though says very little about the women but even that little reveals his concept of a widow which equates a bull or a slippery step: "widows, bulls, slippery steps and holy men. Avoid these, and Enlightenment awaits" (107). Rabindra's proverbial saying further indicates the general social image of the widows who are nothing but dangerous objects like bulls and slippery steps which every man must avoid. It is quite logical to assume here that all the adult widows living in the ashram are well aware of these ideas and since most of these ideas are backed by the religious scriptures or at least their interpretations, they

internalize and own these conceptions and formulate, both consciously and unconsciously, their self-identity on the basis of these notions objectifying notions.

Female objectification is so deep delved in the Indian society that even a holy man like Sadananda cannot avoid it. During his conversation with Shakuntala he cannot control his sexualizing gazes though their conversation is mostly on religious issues. He imprints every curve and rotundity of Shakuntala's body in his desiring mind through his sexualizing gaze; this happens, quite ironically, at a moment when Shakuntala is in the process of fetching the holy *Water* from the *ghat*:

> As the light shone through her damp sari, it outlined her thighs and legs. It gave him pleasure to watch her. Not for the first time, he observed the grace in her strong, shapely body. Her waist was slender above the rounded flare of her lips, her stomach flat. Her high breasts made shapely mounds beneath her handsome shoulders, and her neck sat straight above the indentations of her collarbones; he wished he could bury his lips in the hollows. He sighed. It was a pity she had become a widow while there was still so much life in her. (Sidhwa 2006: 156)

Here Sadananda recognizes Shakuntala only as an object of pleasure having a "shapely body" with a "slender" waist, a "flat stomach", "high breasts" and "handsome shoulders." His gaze is a highly sexualized and he even wants to "bury his lips in the hollows" despite the fact that he is in full knowledge of Shakuntala's religious devotion and her respect for him. The important thing to note here is that Sadananda sympathizes with Shakuntala not because a good and devoted woman like her was made to live the life of a widow but because "she had become a widow while there was still much life in her." It is quite evident

from Sandananda's thinking that by the word "life" he only means the physical and objectified existence of Shakuntala not her intellectual, moral or social existence. Sadananda also sheds light on the female objectification in the Hindu tradition by telling Shakuntala about the limited options available to a widow in the Brahmanical tradition: "she can commit *sati* and mount her husband's pyre, or lead a life of self-denial and pray for her husband's soul. In some cases, if the family allows it, she may marry her dead husband's brother" (157). This was the objectifying image of a widow that Shakuntala and all the other widows at the ashram had already internalized to the degree of self-objectification and for this reason they could not even think of any other option for a widow.

5.3 Female-Gaze and Formulation of Female Self-Objectification

Males are not the only movers of the social cart of a society that objectifies the female body; females of the Hindu society equally participate in the process of objectification of their fellow women and cause the ensuing self-objectification of the women. They unconsciously contribute in formulation of the widowhood signifier by internalizing the male views about widowhood and by supporting the signifying chain wherein the widowhood signifier lies. Women characters in the novel do this mainly through their objectifying gaze. Madhumati's objectifying gaze is most significant in this regard since she heads the widows' ashram and has authority over other widows living in the ashram. However, Madhumati herself remained subject to shameful objectification and sexual violence when she was merely a fourteen years old child. Her in-laws gave her respect only till the time her husband was alive. The moment her husband died and she entered into

widowhood, her status changed form a person and a daughter-in-law, to a mere body, an inauspicious widow. Here again a mother-in-law, a woman, encouraged the physical assault on another woman. Her mother-in-law ordered her two sons to "to take care of this a brazen hussy" (Sidhwa 2006: 70) and they took care of her by violating her chastity. The sexualized gazes of the two brothers-in-law turned into a full scale assault when they fulfilled their animalistic desires by raping her again and again for a whole week, as if she was a mere inanimate object of pleasure. The violence did not stop there as she was "shorn and beaten and taken twenty miles into the wilderness and discarded." She was later rescued by Gulabi and her comrades and brought to the ashram. The elderly head of the ashram welcomed her and helped her abort the pregnancy caused by the rape. The special treatment and care Madhumati received at the ashram was extremely ironical since she was sent to a *client* by the end of the second month of her stay at the ashram.

This objectifying treatment Madhumati received in the hands of the society left such deep impact on her conscious and unconscious thoughts that later in her life she became a trader of women herself. This behaviour implicates that after accomplishing a complete sense of self-objectification Madhumati had started thinking about other widows as objectified entities that can be used for profit making. She started looking at them as she saw herself in the mirror of self-identity and made them do what she was compelled to do.

Chuyia's mother Bhagya also objectifies Chuyia, though in a different manner than Madhumati did. The moment Bhagya gazes at her sleeping daughter

in the light of a lamp she admires her physical attributes rather than her moral, ethical or spiritual characteristics:

> Her curling eyelashes cast shadows on her cheeks, and her face was full and round like the moon that had risen and now shone through the window. Her mouth was an inlaid bud in the moon of her face. Impulsively, she bent to lightly kiss the sweetness on her daughter's lips. The wash-worn rag that served as Chuyia's tiny sari had ridden up her thighs, and, with her sturdy, rounded limbs, she looked like one of Krishna's cherubic *gopis*. (Sidhwa 2006: 9)

Bhagya's objectifying gaze can see only the physical attributes which make Chuyia a readily acceptable member of the society, particularly for her would-be husband and in-laws. Her personality emerges through the attributes of her physical-self which comprises her beautiful eyelashes and cheeks, her round face, her mouth, her lips, her thighs and her rounded limbs. These are the attributes that later encourage Madhumati to send her out with Gulabi to one of her clients for being raped. Bhagya's gaze, however, is more intricate than just an admiration of her daughter's beautiful limbs. There is an intense sadness and sense of loss hidden behind her gaze since she has an understanding that very soon her daughter would be married to a man of her grandfather's age and her innocence and physical chastity would be ravished by someone she does not love. The sense of sympathy mingled with a strong emotion of love became so strong that "Bhagya's eyes became moist and she was swept by a wave of tenderness and pity she had not allowed herself to feel before" (Sidhwa 2006: 10).

Shakuntala is another female gazer of Chuyia's beauty who noticed "the swelling around her breats" and "wondered if they were incipient breasts, or a fold of the flesh from the way she was hunched over." She was concerned that

Chuyia's physical growth can now be noticed by "a man's lusting eye" (117). Though Shakuntala's gaze is not a sexualizing gaze yet it implicates the self-objectifying unconscious of the woman. Women's objectifying image has become part of Shakuntala's unconscious mind which makes her think that women's body parts are always viewed by men as objects of pleasure and women's personalities are often viewed in light of their physical appearance rather than on the basis of their moral, intellectual or behavioural being. But quite contrary to Shakuntala's fear, it was not a man who noticed nine-years-old-Chuyia's physical beauty; it was rather Madhumati's objectifying gaze that caused the greatest harm to Chuyia when she was deceptively sent out with Gulabi for prostitution. Narayan's mother Bhagwati is also among the women who objectify women. When Narayan tell that he himself has chosen his life partner, she cannot resist asking him "is she fair?" In response Narayan had to remind her "is that all that matter?" (137). Fairness for an Indian mother-in-law means a lot regardless of what colour she herself has; this objectifying attitude is so deep rooted in the minds of the Indian women that every woman wants to become fair or light coloured, at least before her marriage.

Apart from important characters in the novel, the objectifying gazes and utterances are also prevalent among the general public or the minor characters who participate in the process of objectification and othering while they only pass by the widows. While Kalyani was washing away the "fleas and sins" from Kaalu's (Kalyani's pet dog) body and Chuyia started laughing nearby, an old grey-haired woman made them an object of her gaze. The gaze had both a ting of

hatred and an objectifying otherness in it. The woman's gaze "made Kalyani blush and stop mid-sentence, guilty clutching at her wet sari" (Sidhwa 2006: 58). Likewise, when Kalyani was running after Chuyia and slammed into a woman, "she groped at Kalyani, trying to keep her balance" but realizing that it was an untouchable widow, the woman released her immediately and called her "filth." The woman further scolded Kalyani by saying, "You have no morals! You are a widow and yet you run around like you are an unmarried girl? [....] You've polluted me. I have to bath again" (59-60). The impact of this insulting treatment was so severe on Kalyani that she felt "if she could, she would have burrowed into the earth." The severe feelings of insult and the ensuing shame implicates that self-objectification in Kalyani is at work and making her feel like an object of hatred, a peace an untouchable peace of filth whose slightest touch can pollute others and disrupt their purity.

Thus, the subject creation and identity formation of the widows is greatly influenced by the objectifying gaze of both the males and females of the society. The process is so deeply delved in the unconscious minds of all the members of the society that even the most spontaneous utterances of the people – like the one made by the old grey-haired woman – connote objectification of the female body. The process however is complex since a widow plays two roles at the same time; she is an objectified object as well as an objectifying gazer. They are gazed at by the society so often and so intensely that the objectifying identification becomes part of their unconscious understanding. The society initiates the identity formation process of a widow by defining the life-style of the widows which is

dehumanizing to the degree of objectification; which is where the foundation of their self-objectification resides.

5.4 Pattern of Self-objectification among the Widows

All the four widows playing important roles in *Water* belong to a society that objectifies the female body but each one of them has a different pattern of objectification and each one internalizes the objectification patterns in her own way to construct her self-objectified identity. Shakuntala is concerned about the lives of the widows around her. She wants to help women improve their lives. Though she sternly believes in what the scriptures say about the widows, she desperately searches the religious scriptures in order to find some way out for Kalyani's remarriage, she comes across beliefs that even reaffirm her earlier understanding that for a widow "to even think of remarriage is a sin." The religious texts she sternly believed have very precise instructions about the conduct and treatment of a widow: "According to Manusmriti, the foremost Sanskrit text in the orthodox tradition, a widow's head is shaved, her ornaments removed, and she is expected to remain in perpetual mourning" (Sidhwa 2006: 145). A widow cannot even eat like normal human beings as it is her religious obligation "to observe fasts, give up eating 'hot' foods in order to cool her sexual energy, avoid auspicious occasions because she is considered inauspicious (for having caused her husband's death), and to remain celibate, devout and loyal to her husband's memory" (Sidhwa 2006: 145). Though desire for physical decoration is vital to the Indian women and they consider it their foremost duty while their husbands are alive but as soon as their husbands die they are told to

live a simple, odd and abnormal life: "She should give up chewing betel nut, wearing perfumes, flowers, ornaments and dyed clothes, taking food from a vessel of bronze, taking two meals a day, applying kohl to her eyes" (146). The ban also applies on her sexual desires as if a widow is no more an emotional being: "she should wear only a white garment, curb her senses and anger, and sleep on the ground" (146). This implies that the dehumanizing and objectifying description of the life of a widow is rooted deep in the widows' minds and they own, internalize and even propagate these views themselves. The widow's image portrayed by the Hindu scriptures is of an individual who is untouchable, dangerous, far from all sorts of social and physical pleasures. She is an individual who has to suppress her sexual desires and live life in the imaginary company of her dead husband. The process of de-socialization begins soon after the death of her husband and all of a sudden she converts from an auspicious woman to an inauspicious one; from a beautifully dressed and ornamented woman to an oddly clad, simple woman wearing a white garment. It is deeply delved in her unconscious that she is an object of hatred and inauspiciousness who has to live the rest of her life like a half-dead woman. Shakuntala's character has fully internalized.

Shakuntala, however, has a questioning mind and Kalyani's trouble initiates the unveiling of her hidden sympathies for the miserable lives of the widows; later, the information revealed by Sandananda about the newly passed government law about widows' remarriage further encourage Shakuntala to come out of the hard shell of self-objectification. Yet this diversion from the society's given role is not for her own sake; her small phase of diversion and dislocation

from her self-objectified identity is only a small window of time in her life when she is able to convince herself about helping first Kalyani and then Chuyia out of the miseries of the ashram life.

The lives and thoughts of some other widows implicate that they are subject to self-objectification and cannot come out of the identity structure imposed upon them from their society. Madhumati, for example, scolds Gulabi for "giving a widow forbidden food" (Sidhwa 2006: 141) when Gulabi offers *puri-aloo* to Chuyia. The first lesson Madhumati gave to Chuyia, on her arrival at the Ashram, also echoes the internalized and self-objectified views of a widow, "in our shared grief, we're all sisters here, and this ashram is our only refuge [....] Our holy books say, "A wife is part of her husband while he's alive.' [...] And when our husbands die, God help us, the wives also half die [....] So, how can a poor half-dead woman feel any pain" (42). This implies that a widow is like a dead-body, a no-body, a walking carcase who may not even feel the pains of her odd, barren, pleasure-less life assigned to her by the society.

The widow signifier takes new meanings in Madhumati's utterance. Madhumati has not only internalized the society's objectifying values but she also propagates these values among her fellow widows partly because it is necessary for continuation of her authority over other widows of the ashram. This is evident from her attitude towards Kalyani and Chuyia. In the outset of Chuyia's life in the ashram, she tries to induce the objectifying views in her innocent mind by making her realize that wives become almost non-existent or "half dead" after the death of their husbands. This attitude assume another dimension in case of Kalyani when

Madhumati quite ironically scolds Kalyani for being "shameless" and emphasizes the value of purity for a widow despite the fact that she had been forcing Kalyani into prostitution. Later, she shamelessly admits that she sends Kalyani "across the river" only "for survival" of the widows and for that even God cannot question her (Sidhwa 2006: 144). Here Madhumati's utterances are quite spontaneous since she said all this in anger. Her utterances imply that using a widow's body for economic survival is in no way sinful or unjust even if it is a serious breach of the religious beliefs. While, on the other hand, her emphasis on physical purity (by avoiding marriage) is highly paradoxical since Kalyani chastity has already been ravished due to her forced illicit relationships. Thus we can say that Madhumati's objectifying treatment of her fellow widows is based on materialistic reasons rather than on religious reasons and her attitude in this regard is hypocritical.

Kalyani's case is very unique as compared to the rest of the widows since Kalyani is a direct victim of the society's sexualizing gaze and objectification. The high gentry living across the river consider her a mere object of pleasure which they buy and discard after use. On unconscious level Kalyani's self-objectification also seems form a considerable part of her unconscious identity. Her life depends on her physical utility for the ashram and its manager Madhumati. She is given special privileges of living in a separate room and keeping her hair, unlike the rest of the widows who live in shared rooms with their heads shaved. However, Kalyani seems to have accepted the role of being a physical object, meant to please the rich men, until she meets Narayan. Her

thoughts at the time of leaving the ashram – despite Madhumati's warning that she would not let her come back if she goes out once – quite vividly connote her self-objectifying identity:

> The menace in her voice brought home the enormity of the risk she was about to take. After all, the ashram had sheltered her all these many years, even if it had made use of her body to procure income. God alone knew what would have happened to her without Madhumati's authority and Gulabi's vigil outside the doors of the strangers' houses. (Sidhwa 2006: 161).

Kalyani's thoughts also implicate that Madhumati's misuse of her body was not the only reason for acceptance of her objectifying role; the society at large influences her through its sexualizing gaze and objectifying view. She does not seem to be bothered by the (mis)use of her body only because Madhumati provided her security from the "strangers."

The signs of self-objectification are more obvious in Kalyani though the act of leaving the ashram for Narayan was an obvious revolt against her objectified widow identity. She display all the signs of self-objectification pointed out by Fredrickson and Roberts which appear as a consequence of objectification. These signs include the emotion of shame, the emotion of anxiety (appearance and safety), lack of peak motivational states, and the lack of awareness of internal bodily states (Fredrickson & Roberts 1998: 181-90). The emotion of shame strikes very hard when Kalyani realizes that Narayan is Seth Dwarkanath's son, one of her old clients. In her anxiety and a deep emotion of shame, she could not even tell Narayan about why she could not accompany him anymore. Kalyani could not experience her peak motivational states nor she was fully aware of her

internal bodily states due to her self-consciousness and body monitoring based upon the objectifying gazes of the men who watched her or used her for their pleasure. She became aware of her inner states only after her encounter with Narayan whose love was not based only upon Kalyani's physical attractiveness. This awareness of her true self does not last for a long time because the revelation of Narayan's identity as Seth Dwarkanath's son takes Kalyani back into the phase of self-consciousness where she identifies herself as a mere body instead of being a person. The hopelessness and anxiety ensuing out of this condition was so severe that she finally decides to commit suicide. Apart from the appearance anxiety, Kalyani also has a severe safety anxiety as she was well aware that she would not be allowed into the ashram – as ordained by Madhumati – and without her help and support she would be left alone on the mercy of the "strangers."

5.5 "Chuyia's Descent into Widowhood": The Mirror Stage

Lacanian version of psychoanalysis sees identity in light of subject formation. The 'Le stade du miroir' translated as The Mirror Stage is considered as the first significant innovation of Lacan in the arena of psychoanalysis, developed in 1936. In the beginning of the novel Chuyia appears as a carefree, happy child whose little world is made up of her little puppy, her mother and her father and the places around her home where she plays and enjoys her life (Sidhwa 2006: 1-4). This time of her life, in Lacanian terms, can be called the Imaginary Stage of her life where she is one with her mother and the little details of life around her. She cannot imagine parting from her mother or even from the environment she lived in. Her self-identity is not yet established because of her absorption in the happy

childhood days. Chuyia's separation form this little world in the outset of her widowhood initiates a new phase of identity formation; this new phase is based on her alienation from her earlier identity of being one with her mother and the mirroring of her own self as a widow. Chuyia's "descent into widowhood" (Sidhwa 2006: 33) begins when soon after the death of her husband her father announces the news of her husband's death together with a strange new title for Chuyia: "your husband is dead....You are a widow now" (32). Chuyia's new-born identity, her mirror-image is shown to her but she is not able to realize the true meaning of this new identity. That is why she asks naively "for how long Baba?" Her innocent mind cannot even conceive the enormity of the word *widow*, gravity of the situation and the length of time she would have to live with this word and the phenomenon ensuring out of it. After this her mother-in-law initiates the ritual of converting an eight years old innocent girl into a widow. This moment can be called the initiation of the mirror stage since Chuyia starts looking at her own image, through the alienating gazes of her father and her mother-in-law, for the first time in an effort to recognize the role that the society has assigned to her without asking her will. Lacan describes the mirror stage as a stage of identification in human life: "We have only to understand the mirror stage *as an identification*, in the full sense that analysis gives to the term: namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image" (Lacan 2001: 1-2). Chuyia's transformation is sudden but in the beginning of this transformation she is unable to see her new image in its entirety. Lacan's description of the phenomenon emerging out of the viewing of the subject's

mirrored self and its impact on mental development of the subject can be applied on Chuyia's mental development after the death of her husband: "The *mirror stage* is a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation – and which manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image [...] to the assumption of the armour of an alienating identity" (Lacan 2001: 3).

It is difficult for Chuyia to understand her newly born identity as she could not anticipate the precipitation of her separation from her parents and the onset of a strange new disposition called widowhood. In the beginning of the great change, Chuyia is unable to realize why she is being treated oddly by her mother-in-law. The alienating ritual starts quite suddenly and violently: "Suddenly, her mother-in-law loomed over Chuyia, and before Chuyia had time to react she jerked the mangalsutra off her neck and the beads scattered on the ground" (Sidhwa 2006: 33). Chuyia wonders why her mother-in-law has suddenly attacked all her beautifying objects so coldly and indifferently but her little protest is of no avail and the old woman carries on with her violent action: "she grasped Chuyia's hand and, using a brick, violently smashed the red glass bangles that hung from her wrist. Then, methodically, with no more concern for the girl than if she were an inanimate object, she took her other wrist." Chuyia's innocent little heart is unable to find any reason for these actions but she is intelligent enough to realize that "she had ceased to matter to this woman" (33).

Chuyia's conversion into a fully objectified body "an inanimate object" is shocking for her and the mirror image this conversion has produced is still too vague for her to comprehend. She cannot see the permanence of the image which is obvious from her naïve question "for how long Baba?" But even the temporality of the image bothers her since all the beautifying objects (i.e. the mangalsutra, the bangles, and the colourful clothing) are snatched away from her replacing them with a simple, white, unstitched robe. At this point Chuyia begins to look at her newly born self which is separate from her mother. This image is fascination as well as something that provides the basis for rivalry to Chuyia. Lacanian psychoanalysis asserts in this regard that "From the moment the image of unity is posited in opposition to the experience of fragmentation, the subject is established as a rival to itself. A conflict is produced between the infant's fragmented sense of self and the imaginary autonomy out of which the ego is born" (Homer 2005: 26). Chuyia starts screaming when her father leaves her at the ashram at the mercy of Madhumati and other widows living in the ashram. Her mother was not with her for many hours but she starts asking for her mother only when she realizes that now her mother-in-law and her father would leave her alone at the ashram. Her repeated enquiries "Baba, Baba, where is Ma?" are a sign of her realization that she was being separated from her mother and her separation not knowing yet that it would result into her alienation and formulation of her subjective self. The widows at the ashram are all walking mirrors for Chuyia, the mirrors where Chuyia can see not only her future but also various aspects of her own objectified self-identity. Her lessons of widowhood begin

when Madhumati tries to sooth her by saying "In our shared grief, we're all sisters here, and this ashram is our only refuge" (Sidhwa 2006: 42). Madhumati's assertive definitions of widowhood continue to imprint images on Chuyia's innocent mind which would later form Chuyia's own subjective self. However, when Madhumati's second lesson begins, Chuyia shows signs of resistance implying that the widow image was yet not acceptable to her. Madhumati's second lesson, with obvious signs of female objectification, begins with these words: "our holy books say, 'A wife is part of her husband while he's alive.' Right? .... And when our husbands die, God help us, the wives also half die.... So, how can a poor half-dead woman feel any pain?" (Sidhwa 2006: 42). Chuyia's answer to this apparently rhetorical question is annoying for Madhumati because of its rebellious connotation "Because she is half alive....I don't want to be a stupid widow" (42). Madhumati's disparaging remarks for the widows of the ashram work like a mirror to Chuyia too. Madhumati calls them "corpses" and "ass-lickers" (43) and does not care for them more than worthless dead bodies who are not even supposed to feel the pain of their miserable lives.

The formulation of Chuyia's self-objectified identity is mainly based on her mirror image which, in Lacanian terms, is at the same time the image of an-other. Other or others in Lacanian psychoanalysis play a vital role in formulation of human identity, particularly during the mirror stage: "To exist one has to be recognized by an-other. But this means that our image, which is equal to ourselves, is mediated by the gaze of the other. The other, then, becomes the guarantor of ourselves" (Homer 2005: 26). The dilemma here further complicates

the situation when, according to Lacan, the subject is caught in situation where "we are at once dependent on the other as the guarantor of our own existence and a bitter rival to that same other" (26).

Chuyia can see that she has now become a widow yet she is unable to accept this image so her mirror image is at the same time an assurance and recognition of her self as well as (an)other, a rival to herself. The gazes of other widows give assurance to Chuyia of her own identity. Chuyia's fascination for her new image is established when she begins to be friends with Kalyani, Shakuntala and Bua. Other widows are also present in the ashram but Chuyia cannot identify herself with them because their personalities are not fascinating for her; Madhumati and the like-minded widows repel her rather than attracting her. Kalyani is a beautiful young girl and represents the image of a young widow; Shakuntala on the other hand is middle-aged while Bua represents the image of an old widow who has spent all her life in the ashram. Chuyia has good relationships with the three stages of a widows' life at the ashram and this relationship is quite meaningful since Chuyia seems to identify herself with all the three stages of a widow's life mirrored in front of her. Chuyia's dilemma however is that she still hankers for a reunion with her mother and the little environment she left behind. Chuyia's love and attachment with these three widows stands for her fascination with her own mirror image. Madhumati's image also fits in the broader picture of Chuyia's identity but it is a case of rivalry and hatred or the dimension of Chuyia's widow image which she does not like despite the fact that she cannot ignore it.

Chuyia's identity formation is complex and multifarious as she entered into the realm of widowhood quite suddenly where everything was new and strange to her at least in the outset. In the beginning, she could not even recognize her mirror image because she considered it a temporary phase of her life. She begins to realize her descent into widowhood and an objectified body only when her father leaves her after handing her over to the widows in the ashram. She starts recognizing her mirror image through her observations of the widows around her, the utterances of the widows regarding the life style expected out of a widow, and the comments of the people (usually derogatory) outside the ashram. The deeper influences on her psyche concerning the formation of her selfhood include her relationship with Kalyani, Shakuntala, Bua and Madhumati. She sees the brighter side of a widow image in the persons of Kalyani, Shakuntala and Bua and the darker side in Madhumati. Chuyia, however, does not attain a more comprehensive understanding of her mirror image until she is forced into a sexual experience as an object of pleasure.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

The research questions raised on page 5 have adequately been answered through analysis of the two gynotexts. The question regarding role of self-objectification in shaping the identity of the female fictional characters across cultures has been answered through a detailed analysis of the process of self-objectification and identity formation of the female protagonists of the two novels. The second question regarding reaction of the female characters to the objectifying practices of their society has also been answered through a discussion of the behavioural patterns of the female characters.

The analysis of the two gynotexts shows that the female characters in Sidhwa's *Water* and Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* unconsciously allow self-objectification to construct their identities while self-objectification of these characters is generated under influence of the social discourse that objectifies the female body. It is also found that the two novels though belong to two distinct cultures that have developed very far from each other yet the treatment of women in both the cultures has some similar patterns. The female characters in both the novels suffer because of the objectifying society they live in and the self-objectification resulting out of the social objectification. The process of identity formation which leads to self-objectification of women in the two novels involves many aspects that are shared by the cultures of both the novels; these include:

1. Objectification by males and females
2. Discrimination
3. Violence: psychological, verbal and physical
4. Depravity: social, economic and physical
5. Lack, otherness and the Mirror Stage

Both the Hindu and the Black American cultures objectify the females by weighing their worth (lessness) mainly on the basis of their physical appearance rather their morality, conduct, intellectual capabilities or personality as a whole. In *The Bluest Eye*, black females are considered worthless only because they are black. The objectification takes place when the blacks are gazed at by the whites or the blacks themselves. The absence of gaze which I call the inverse-gaze is also a phenomenon which implies that the women with black bodies are considered so worthless by the society that people ignore their presence and do not even look at them. The dominant White American culture portrays white girls as epitome of beauty and attractiveness. The white heroines of movies, white girls made on wrappers of candies, white dolls, and cups containing images of white girls make the black girls and women believe that only white can be beautiful and since they are not white, they are ugly and worthless. The situation in *Water* is though very different yet the objectifying gaze is shed on widows both by men and women. Though female characters in the Hindu culture presented by *Water* suffer mainly due to the role assigned to them by the male custodians of the old Brahmanical traditions, men and women are equally responsible for objectification of women since both gaze at women's bodies only to enjoy the physical beauty of the

women. In case of the widows, however, the gaze contains an element of disrespect and hatred since widows are considered to be objects of inauspiciousness, impurity and evil. Some men, like Dwarkanath, show dual attitude when, on one hand, they seek sexual pleasure from physically attractive women while on the other they hate them for being inauspicious and impure. Concept of beauty in both the cultures is also based mainly on the physical attractiveness of the characters. In *The Bluest Eye* white is pretty and even intelligent while black is ugly and dull. In *Water* too the bodies of physically attractive Kalyani and Chuyia are used by the ashram head Madhumati as objects of financial benefit.

Women also face discrimination and injustice in both the societies due to their physical appearance. Women in *The Bluest Eye* face discrimination, inequality and injustice due to their blackness. The discriminatory practices, however, are prevalent both among the white and the black communities. Black women are considered inferior, evil, dirty and even non-existent in some cases regardless of what character or conduct they have. Same is the case with the widows in *Water*; they face discrimination, inequality and injustice only because their husbands die before them. Just like black women in the American culture, widows are physically recognizable. Their shaved heads and their white apparel easily establish their identities even from a distance. According to the Hindu beliefs their presence makes a place inauspicious and their touch can mar the purity of a person. They are inauspicious, inferior, ominous, ill-fated and impure.

They cannot marry or have good food or wear colourful clothes and are looked down upon whenever they move in the society.

The third aspect of women's self-objectification in the two cultures is the sexualizing gaze and sexual/asexual violence. Pecola feels humiliated by the demeaning utterances of her school fellows who subject her to verbal violence by mocking her for being black and the daughter of a father who sleeps naked. Mrs. Breedlove also neglects her daughter for being black and ugly and expresses her hatred through physical violence in her white employer's kitchen. Pecola's father Cholly sexually violates her after making her an object of his sexualizing gaze. The psychological pain, anxiety and sadness experienced by Pecola due to various objects of cultural dominance of the white can also be termed as psychological violence which leads her first to a strong desire of self-erasure and then to madness. In *Water* Kalyani silently bears the sexualizing gaze and sexual violence her upper-class clients because she was not left with any other option in a scenario where she was abandoned by her family members. Chuyia is though very young yet she is very silently offered to one of the clients for sexual violence. Madhumati herself was once raped by her own brothers-in-law only because she had become a worthless widow.

Social, financial and physical depravity is another area which adds to the sense of self-objectification among women in both the texts. In *The Bluest Eye* black female characters are deprived of wealth, happiness, respect, social freedom and equality. They are made to limit themselves to odd jobs, slums and demeaning circumstances. The self-objectification among the female characters is

strong which does not allow them to think about demanding equal rights and social freedom. Their collective consciousness as sons and daughters of the slaves also keeps them from a realization and understanding of the inequality, biasedness and depravity imposed on them through the dominant white culture. In *Water*, the situation is even worse as the widows experience a multifaceted depravity. They are admitted to an ashram where they are deprived of proper food, clothing and bedding. Their heads are shaved, they cannot marry, they cannot wear colourful dresses, they cannot see their relatives or other members of the society, and they have to curb all their worldly desires in favour of a simple, sad and colourless life. Self-objectification in this case is also very strong; the widows cannot even think of speaking against this depravity of social injustice since they consider the norms of widowhood to be part of their religious duty.

Finally, female self-objectification in the two cultures can also be realized and understood through the phenomena of the mirror stage, otherness and the lack. Both in *The Bluest Eye* and *Water*, women see their mirror image only to get frustrated due to "the lack" or absence of the mother and the realization of the self as other. Pecola and Chuyia both feel the pain of separation from their mothers. Chuyia's separation is more real as she has to leave her parents physically after being declared a widow; Pecola, on the other hand, remains physically in contact with her mother yet her mother's indifference and neglect and her long absences during the day time make her develop a strong sense of lack and separation. Both Pecola and Chuyia feel a strong sense of depravity when they mark the difference between their mirror image the ideal image of a woman in their societies. Pecola

gathers from the cultural signs and symbols around her that the image of an ideal woman must contain white colour, blond hair and blue eyes. Chuyia and other widows of the ashram also feel deprived because they can never regain their status in the society since they can never equate themselves with the married women who happily live with their husbands, wear colourful clothes, eat all sorts of food, beget children and seek pleasure in life without any sense of guilt.

Though the patterns of objectification and self-objectification in the two cultures resemble a lot yet there are certain differences too. Starting with the phenomenon of gaze, we see that Kalyani and Chuyia suffer from the sexualizing gazes of men and objectifying gazes of women but on the other hand Pecola's problem is "the lack" or absence of a gaze, the inverse-gaze. The objectification and self-objectification among women of *The Bluest Eye* is rooted in their physical unattractiveness, their blackness and ugliness while in *Water* the women are not ill-treated because of their ugliness but because of their conversion into widows, noticed through the obvious physical signs like their shaven heads and white attire. The women in both the texts have a strong desire for a change yet in case of *The Bluest Eye* change does not seem possible since Pecola can never be white or she can never have blue eyes. In *Water* on the other hand, change is possible through extremely difficult to handle. Kalyani decides to leave the ashram to get married but ends up committing suicide; Chuyia also manages to leave the ashram with Shakuntala's help but only at the cost of her virginity.

The reaction of the female fictional characters to the objectifying discourse of their society also has similar patterns in both the novels. The reaction

of the objectifying norms of a society can be read through its outcomes as the reaction of something taking place on the unconscious level cannot be observed directly. As posited by Fredrickson and Roberts (1998) the psychological consequences of the phenomena of objectification and self-objectification include the emotion of shame and anxiety, lack of peak motivational states, lack of awareness of internal bodily states. Women in both the cultures/texts suffer from these psychological consequences. Pecola's emotions of shame and anxiety are so severe that she imagines self-erasure and becomes insane in the end of the novel. Both Pecola and Mrs. Breedlove lack awareness of their internal bodily states and cannot attain the peak motivational states. They could become more productive and more useful members of their society had they not caught in the net of self-objectification. Same is the case with Kalyani; the sense of shame and anxiety in Kalyani makes her commit suicide. Widows like Patiraji and Shakuntala could live better lives if they had a chance to attain their peak motivational states. Apart from these ills, women in both the texts have a deep sense of depravity and worthlessness due to the objectifying social discourse which provides tools for shaping the identity and self-image to the women who have no other choice but to live and die in the bounds of this social discourse.

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