

Woman Bonding and Self-Realization: Toni Morrison's God Help the Child

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The paper is based on the vicious game of color, active since ages, oppressing and dominating the Black psyche so deeply that color and absence of it makes one more acceptable or alienable not only to the society but to their own selves too. Referring to that it deals with the Toni Morrison's first novel, The Bluest Eye (1970), focusing on the inner turmoil due to racism and cultural politics. The politics of Dick and Jane primer is explored to expose the trauma deliberately inflicted by the dominant white society on the black children who consequently grow into fragmented beings. The paper studies the devastating repercussions of the beauty standards of the dominant culture on the self-image of the African females of all ages particularly adolescence.

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'Of all things upon the earth that bleed and grow, a herb most bruised is woman.' (Euripides)

The black women in America are triply burdened and disadvantaged. They are black, female and economically underprivileged. This triple burden restricts them from a fuller and meaningful participation in American society mainly because they are confined to their race and the narrow enclosures of sex. As a result, they suffer as blacks amongst the blacks, slaves of the slaves and are forced to occupy the most marginal position in the American social life. Possibly no other social group has been subjected to such an unedifying spectacle of human debasement and depravity. This paper besides illustrating the painful experiences borne by Black females in the latest novel of Toni Morrison, God Help the Child also enumerates the ways in which these oppressed women react to depressive situations such as violence, desertion, severe exploitation and yet come out as victorious beings through their strong women bonding.

Being black, these women suffered from racism; being females they were the victims of sexual atrocities at the hands of the white patriarchs as well as the blacks; and being former slaves, the white establishment forced them to live on meagre resources and were compelled to remain poor. In short, the black women were severely victimized under the triple jeopardy: racism, sexism and classism, to which there was no respite. Their ostracism further deprived them of any refuge which they can look upon for their deliverance. Therefore they fall back on each other, holding, helping and trusting each other, rising like 'phoenix', until they all could comprehend some meaning out of their lives. It is this very female bonding which Morrison highlights in her community dedicated writing.

The novel God Help the Child comes as the eleventh novel of Toni Morrison, the Nobel-Prize-winning, Afro-American author. Its title is adapted from American Jazz singer Billy Holiday's popular song, "God Help the Child." Without any coincidence, the plot sings a triumph song for people overcoming traumatic childhood. The novel is basically a bildungsroman wherein our precocious writer Toni Morrison projects different females of different age groups and in different difficult circumstances,

meeting each other at a crucial point, when one was just about to give up, but prevented by the guidance and support of the other and further buttressed to get on with life and keep moving till the peace within self is achieved. Each character in the novel has a gnawing past continuously suppressed; a festering wound beneath the scab which has to be opened, confronted to be healed.

The story revolves round Lula Ann Bridewell, who makes and remakes her personality to discover the ultimate 'real self'. Her walk from Lula Ann Bridewell to Ann Bride to Bride, a self sufficient mono syllable, was intensely filled with white strewn shards of racism, classism, sexism and double consciousness which she bravely trampled upon. Owing to her dreaded blue black complexion, she was rebuffed before she could open her eyes, deprived of motherly touch and instantly disowned forever by the horrified light skinned father. She became the cause of her parents split as her father could never believe that his wife did not cheat upon him since no one in the family was anywhere near that colour. She was raised up solely and intentionally roughly by her triply oppressed mother, 'Sweetness', who in order to immune her daughter from the curses ready to engulf blacks steals her spine by continuously throwing the racial stigma on her:

'Things got better but I still had to be careful. Very careful in how I raised her. I had to be strict, very strict. Lula Ann needed to learn how to behave, how to keep her head down and not to make trouble. I don't care how many times she changes her name. Her color is a cross she will always carry. But it's not my fault. It's not my fault. It's not my fault. It's not.'¹ The reason Sweetness provides for her sharp behaviour to her daughter seems to be correct when viewed in context of the history of racial discrimination in America. Being a black girl meant to be handled bluntly in a hostile world. Sweetness wanted to equip Lula Ann to brace all hatred meant for blacks in a white society. Thus the deliberate harsh treatment of Lula Ann's mother helped transform vulnerable 'Lula Ann Bridewell' into mature Ann Bride, a girl strong enough to take-in the whole World's venom and smilingly survive.

Unlike Pecola Breedlove, who goes mad in her pursuit of love and beauty, a grownup Ann Bride resuscitates herself from hatred of her world like a phoenix. She works hard and she becomes face of a popular cosmetic line; she is transformed into "Hershey's syrup" from "licorice", Bride from Ann

Bride. On the advice of her designer, she shops only for white and begins to look like, "whipped cream and chocolate soufflé", and "panther in the snow." At one point, she says,

'So I let the name calling, the bullying travel like poison, like lethal viruses through my veins, with no antibiotic available. Which, actually, was a good thing now I think of it, because I built up immunity so tough that not being a 'nigger girl' was all I needed to win. I became a deep dark beauty who doesn't need Botox for kissable lips or tanning spas to hide a deathlike pallor. And I don't need silicon in my butt. I sold my elegant blackness to all those childhood ghosts and now they pay me for it. ... It's glory.'²

Bride turns her despised dark complexion to her favour, outshines the whole world with her success but deep within the dark lie she told in her childhood keeps cankering her. She might have won the world but not the 'self'. The proud, confident, self assured Bride had long back turned an innocent woman, 'Sofia Huxley' her kindergarten teacher, into a convict, a child abuser, just to gain everyone's attention, appreciation and love especially her mother. Bride couldn't have come out of that emotional trauma, would never have confessed the truth before her only man, 'Booker Starbern, whom she was on the verge of losing if iQueen weren't there to strengthen and guide with her age rewarded wisdom.

Queen was Booker's distant aunt. It wouldn't be wrong to call her an alchemist after analysing the vital role she plays in bringing them not only close to each other but to their own traumatized selves. iQueen, 'know hungry' when she sees one. She at once sees the abhorred small vulnerable black 'hungry for love' girl wearing a woman's body and therefore aptly remarks stunningly beautiful Bride as, 'something racoon found and refused to it.'³ She, on sensing; Bride's fear, her dependence on outer appearance, her shallowness, her tendency to run and play coward with her inner self, gets frustratingly annoyed yet successfully reignites the fire of self assertion in her, 'What's the matter with you? ... You come all this way and just turn around and leave?'⁴ And the alchemist treated Bride was now 'determined to discover what she was made of—cotton or steel—there could be no retreat, no turning back.'⁵ this Bride was courageous enough to answer her consciousness and likewise wanted all her iQuestions to be answered, no one could dare treat her as trash, be it her lover.

Bride finally finds Booker, even gets violent to know the reason of his unexplained desertion

and simultaneously accepts the long denied ever suppressed disgraceful truth. She lays bare the real culprit 'Lula Ann Bridewell' who had infested fifteen ripe years of an innocent person and thought some trivial amount of money, air tickets and a Louis Vuitton bag of cosmetics would make for all. But she too had equally smouldered and therefore deserved deliverance, 'Having confessed Lula Ann's sins she felt newly born. No longer forced to relive, no, outlive the disdain of her mother and the abandonment of her father.'¹⁶

Alike Bride, Booker too practices self evasion. Haunted by a sordid past he refuses to live the 'present' from the time his brother was abducted, sexually assaulted and killed. Booker could never let go the anguish of losing his loving brother, Adam. He carries the burden and loss of his brother's death since he was eight years. He tries different things in life but could never get normal, even her blessed relationship with Bride, though for a little while could not infuse in him the needed vitality. It was only when his aunt iQueen holds mirror to his stagnant sterile self that he could be jolted back to life: 'I guess good isn't good enough for you, so you called Adam back and made his murder turn your brain into cadaver and your heart's blood formaldehyde.'¹⁷

Morrison's motif of a 'know all' griot equally propels the novel characters as well as the readers towards self interrogation, essential for integrated authentic identity. It is Morrison who speaks in iQueen's voice forbidding Booker as well as everyone who dies with the dead and ignores the gift of life given by our ultimate shaper, to keep on creating and give new meanings to life.

Although iQueen's role in healing both Bride and Booker is peerless, Brooklyn and Rain can't go unappreciated because they were those energy boosters without whom Bride's journey to self realization would just have been a dream. She honestly couldn't have made either to iQueen or Booker without them. Brooklyn was all her world before meeting any of above mentioned women. She was one package with all that is needed to enjoy life; a jovial companion, a worthy comrade, a wise counsellor and an honest critic. It was Brooklyn's absolute dedication towards Bride that forced her to trust Brooklyn with all the business work and convalesce peacefully from her 'encounter with Huxley' trauma: 'Brooklyn has taken care of explanations to the office staff: attempted rape, foiled, blah, blah. She is a true friend and doesn't annoy me like those

fake ones who come here just to gaze and pity me.'¹⁸ They are joined emotionally, as they embody emphatic understanding of each other's shared experiences. Everything is given out of love, criticism as well; this is the reason why Brooklyn despite knowing Bride's terrain of lies keeps showering her unconditional support.

Morrison uses 'Rain' as the smallest and sharpest tool to proclaim that violence and exploitation in any form must be over ruled. No age can turn you into a scapegoat unless you surrender to it. One must fight back with all the power one has, for ". . . freedom is never free. You have to fight for it. Work for it and make sure you are able to handle it"¹⁹

Rain was a little girl, living with Steve and Evelyn, husband and wife, who helped Bride when she collided her expensive car with a pole, on her trip to find and confront Booker for his betrayal. It was during her recuperation that little Rain narrates her grim past to Bride and her escape from it; how her mother send in a man to sexually abuse her and expels her instead of him when she bits his sexual organ. Even apologizes for her misconduct and returns the money. And how she would like to chop her head off and watch. This telling helped in redistributing the repressed pain that Rain had kept just to herself and simultaneously taught Bride the lesson of fortitude. Rudolph Byrd rightly observes, 'Until we can speak in our own voices the door leading to the self, the world, and the spirit remain bolted forever.'¹⁰

Thus we find that the feeling of love and fellowship in African American communities especially among women is perpetually supported by Toni Morrison. She tries to make all victimized women who are her primary concern, aware of their deep lying strength and manoeuvre them towards a real dignified life, where the internal and external, physical and emotional self are in harmony with each other. She aims at enlightening the spark of self-realization in the victimized women, so they may repossess their lost selves and recognize their adorable distinguished 'being'.

Morrison is one, bent on uplifting her people to the level of salvation by conceiving out of the universe of her mind, stories which unceasingly enhance the bonding among African women that cannot be broken—genuine sisterhood. This sisterly bond is a reciprocal one, one in which each gives

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