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Traumatic Racial Encounters in Toni Morrison's *God Help the Child*

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By

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Letter of Recommendation

Arjun Nath has completed his thesis entitled “Traumatic Racial Encounters in Toni Morrison's *God Help the Child*” under my supervision. He carried out his research from August 2017 to April 2018 and completed it successfully. I hereby recommend his thesis be submitted for the final Viva voce.

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Letter of Approval

This thesis entitled “Traumatic Racial Encounters in Toni Morrison's *God Help the Child*” submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University by Arjun Nath has been approved by the undersigned members of Research Committee.

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Traumatic Racial Encounters in Morrison's *God Help the Child*

Abstract

This research work examines the cultural trauma of the characters with a cultural embodiment of race in the sophisticated but claustrophobic contemporary American society. Morrison's God Help the Child projects the pain and trauma that live under the colored skin as a part of author's and her character Bride's immense suppression of their desire as a triggering force to past memories. Further, this research explores how the traces of slavery of the past reconstitute trauma and how an interplay between dominant and residual culture shapes the trauma of the African Americans. Morrison reveals the inter-racial and intra-racial conflicts in the new generations of the Americans by presenting the traumatic mind of her protagonist Bride who, in the name of color, is despised and expelled everywhere, making her traumatized. Eventually, she succeeds to recover and turns her grief into strength. The way through which such trauma is coped up with is a researchable issue. It unfolds individual's consciousness of racism and its influence on individual psyche as a part of cultural trauma. Further it unfolds the inter-racial and intra-racial consciousness among the African Americans as they develop some guilt complexes within themselves remaining in an illusion due to their double consciousness which is an internal conflict experienced by them in an oppressive society. This internalized racism still exists in the contemporary American society.

Key Terms: Memory, Trauma, Acting Out, Working Through, Social Fabric, Double Consciousness, Indelible Mark, Residual and Dominant Culture

This research paper examines how racism as cultural trauma makes the African Americans suffer in a racist society so that they become traumatized, and haunted with the traumatic past and show the symptoms of Post- Traumatic Stress Disorder, and how they cope up with such domination. Morrison's *God Help the Child* projects the Post -Traumatic Stress Disorder that lives just under the colored skin as a part of author's and her character Bride's immense suppression of their desire switching to memory of painful past. The way through which such trauma is coped up with is a researchable issue. It unfolds individual's consciousness of racism and its influence on individual psyche as a part of cultural trauma. A close observation of protagonist's traumatized mind in relationship to the society and its brutality falls under the preview of this research.

Further, it explores the struggle of protagonist to endure the racial segregations and her hypnotized obsessions in such a society where all her experiences and livelihood have been shaped just in the name of her skin color and her biological reality that is sex. Her double marginalization firstly for being an African American and secondly for being a female, fully makes her suffer from identity crisis. And the context of her lost identity and her obligation to infer the double consciousness really push her into pain and agonies. These painful experiences of the character frequently haunt her in a delayed manner making her traumatized. Despite her agonies, she tries to rupture the hierarchy on the basis of social conventions that make her traumatized. She eventually succeeds in doing so.

This research work further investigates the trauma of the characters in the backdrop of memory as a shaping force, and analyzes their traumatic memories and the recovery from them. This research studies Toni Morrison's *God Help the Child* with an increasingly common concept of interracial conflict that gives birth to trauma

within the individuals in a claustrophobic racist society where the people of color are not free to breathe without paying cost of their inborn so- called sinister skin.

Morrison presents her characters as bold and enduring all sort of segregation, exploitation and abuse in a subversive way to challenge social biases. She presents the plight of a young, blue-black skinned girl Bride, neglected and abused by the light skinned parents who are ashamed of her. Due to this skin color, her father accuses her mother of sexual infidelity, and abandons both of them. Mother 'Sweetness' threatens Bride not to call her anything maternal, rather Sweetness. This shapes the trauma of the child in her early age from the root of race which functions as the cultural trauma among the characters.

This project makes significant contribution in three areas of critical concern: First, this study brings the situation of people of color in the modern American society. Secondly, it studies the trauma of the African Americans due to sexual abuse, homosexuality, and human indifference. Thirdly, it makes a significant theoretical concern of the so- called civilized American society and people's plight in the name of race and its consequences in the form of trauma, showing how people in the margin suffer and cope up this sort of cultural trauma. This research makes significant use of concepts developed in racial trauma theory and offers an analysis of impact of race as a cultural denominator of trauma. Since the major objective of the study is to demonstrate how the deep-rooted interracial conflict serves as a source of cultural trauma, how African- Americans cope up with this trauma.

The context of the novel is the twenty- first century America and its people's clash in the periphery of race, and its everlasting effects on black community, shaping their memory in the backdrop of past day's slavery and its after- effects. Morrison picks up that very issue of race and its impact on the psyche of the individuals in *God*

Help the Child, a novel that advocates for the solidarity of the entire black community. Morrison's position as a novelist has always been critical enough to critique the cross-cutting issues of subjugation of blacks; firstly in the name of race, and then sexual and gender violence. She often portrays the double marginalization of characters like the protagonist Bride in this novel.

Morrison's protagonist Lula Ann Bridewel in *God Help the Child* is despised since her birth for being black. Her father breaks relationship with both her mother and her daughter accusing mother Sweetness for infidelity. In fact, mother urges her to call her Sweetness instead of anything maternal, and mother leaves her alone where she faces tremendous torture in a society where there is very little freedom for the blacks. Carrying the burden of such childhood pathos, she struggles in a society where no one heals her wounds. Rather her boyfriend Booker leaves her declaring that she is not a woman he wants, a phrase which haunts her there-after. This kind of rejection from everywhere and its effects run throughout the novel like a dark thread representing her dark past. She is a beautiful, submissive, innocent and weak figure interplated under the burden of homelessness, parentslessness and beyond any kind of love and affection.

To get the tender touch and attraction from mother, she accuses an innocent school teacher Sofia Huxley for sexually molesting a child by telling lies. As she does not succeed in her goal, she realizes her fault of accusing Sofia. She begs pardon for her deed but is badly beaten by enraged victim. She is abandoned in every aspect of life. Her struggle and switching to the painful past makes her traumatized. She undergoes acting out of trauma. She undergoes some tremendous physical changes as she loses her womanhood - loss of pubic hair, breasts and body weight. At the core of this novel, there is a celestial quest in which Bride goes on an ultimate journey to find

her real self and some peace of mind. In her case, it involves amnesia and a beautifully depicted backwoods, retro-hippy family take her in and help to build in her some faith in human nature. She goes for self discovery, identity and independence leading a cosmetic business that leads her to ultimate victory. Still traumatic memory works to keep her detached from real social functioning.

Morrison's *God Help the Child* has received numerous critical appreciations since its publication in 2015. Susan Elkin writes regarding Morrison and her novel in relation to memory and its after-effects. He analyzes:

Morrison deliberately makes the physical reality vague and leaves you wondering. Light skinned Sweetness is horrified when Lula Ann, later to call herself Bride, is born. The child is ebony black. . . Centuries of oppression have conditioned them into some black people too. Sweetness's nicely observed, sometimes guilty, sometimes self-justificatory thoughts open the novel and continue as a presence, both in Bride's thinking and personality and in the reader's consciousness of what has formed the main character. . .

Having a mother unable to give unconditional love to her own child – and being treated throughout childhood with shame and contempt – leads Bride to some appalling, approval-seeking behavior of her own. (*The Independent*)

Morrison depicts the pathetic condition of a young black skinned girl Bride, neglected and abused by the light skinned parents in the name of her color. Ages long oppression of slavery in the past and its memory in the new generation with the cultural embodiment of race traumatizes the people of color. This shapes the trauma of the child in her early age from the roots of race which functions as the cultural trauma among the characters. Every individual wants a sense of love, affection, connection and security. When this is broken trauma occurs as Morrison's protagonist

never gets those things and becomes traumatized.

Likewise, Roxane Gay reviews in the light of race as a shaping force of memory, and switching to this memory triggers the traumatic past of the characters. He sees the plight of a young girl and her development in the confined social background. He critiques:

God Help the Child is the kind of novel where you can feel the magnificence just beyond your reach. The writing and storytelling are utterly compelling, but so much is frustratingly flawed. The story carries the shape of a far grander book, where the characters are more fully explored and there is far more at stake. . . Yet still, there is that magnificence, burning beneath the surface of every word. The language, shifts in point of view and the audacity of the novel's premise are overwhelming. Morrison remains an incredibly powerful writer who commands attention no matter the story she is telling. In *God Help the Child* we have a coming-of-age story for an adult woman in arrested development. (*The Guardian*)

The novel presents the difficulties of a neglected and despised girl just because of her skin color; it also presents the moral dilemma of mother Sweetness as she also has memories of her mother who was given a separate Bible to swear at the time of her marriage. This shapes the fractured memory and in the mean time she has the double consciousness which is an internal conflict and situation of ambiguity within the people in an oppressive society regarding their true identity.

Likewise, Jill Matus's special contribution to Morrison scholarship, as well as to trauma theory, is her characterization of Morrison's novels as literary witnesses to the racial trauma African Americans have suffered. To date, Matus points out; trauma theory has rarely explored racism as trauma. Clearly, racial trauma continues beyond

its obvious site in slavery, Matus observes, underscoring Morrison's own assertion that the shock of comprehending oneself as "Other" constitutes trauma. Thus, not just *Beloved*, situated in slave times, but most of Morrison's novels bear witness to racial trauma (202). It is clear that Morrison raises the voice of the voiceless as she presents dreadful life experiences of her characters not because of individual but because of racial traumatic events. The shock of comprehending oneself as other is a form of internalized racism and that is intrapersonal in nature which constitutes a collective trauma as it's a fissure in the identity of a group.

Likewise, Linda L. Kick writes about Morrison and her greatness in her wit, her intellectual prowess on fiction about human devilishness and weakness, and the impact of the past on the emotional faculties. Morrison, as a psychologically oriented novelist successfully depicts the physical and psychological damages in the characters as an African- American experience as the human experience. He critiques:

Morrison has always been more interested in the characters that manage to disengage from their psychological and physical damages in order to embrace the extant African-American experience as the human experience. . . In *God Help the Child*, voices are present to add dissonant timbre to Bride's narration and Morrison's theme . . . Morrison's greatness—the beauty of her prose, her formal and imaginative risk-taking, her intellectual prowess—is founded on fiction about human devilishness and weakness, bodies crippled and in crisis, and the impact of our histories on our emotional faculties. If not at maximum strength, her powers are proudly on display in *God Help the Child*. (*The Atlantic*)

Racial factor creates trauma for the people and it is always a troublesome journey for African-Americans. Morrison, with an anti- racist spirit portrays traumatic sufferings

of different characters in the sophisticated American society. Mainly, characters suffer from traumatic past. Sometimes they become melancholic and sometimes they mourn.

Mostly marginal communities are exposed to the incidents of sexual abuse, child molestation and gender violence as these communities are the target groups. Resembling to that notion, *God Help the Child* also presents some traits of sexual abuse, child molestation and violent imagery to show the individual trauma of the characters too. In this regard, Kara Walker reviews:

Child abuse cuts a jagged scar through Toni Morrison's *God Help the Child*, a brisk modern day fairy tale with shades of the Brothers Grimm: imaginative cruelties visited on children; a journey into the woods; a handsome, vanished lover; witchy older women and a blunt moral — "What you do to children matters. And they might never forget." . . . Morrison herself handles child abuse *Bluest Eye* (1970), in which an 11-year-old girl is raped by her father. The world of *God Help the Child* is crawling with child molesters and child killers — on playgrounds, in back alleys — but they remain oddly blurry, like dot-matrix snapshots culled from current headlines. (*New York Times*)

God Help the Child digs out trauma due to childhood sexual abuse, rape and violence. The world of the novel is crawling with child molesters and child killers. This novel resembles with Morrison's earlier one *The Bluest Eye* in which an 11 years girl is raped by her father. Such sexual abuse and child molestations cause trauma for the characters.

Drawing upon Sigmund Freud, Cathy Caruth, Dominick LaCapra, Kali Tal, Ron Eyerman, and Geoffrey C. Alexander, this project seeks to do justice with the issues raised by the researcher. Analyzing the protagonist's suffering and its traumatic stage in the novel contributes to the intellectual debates in modern narratives with

different theoretical perspectives. Further, it casts light upon relationship between literature, race and trauma that is often overlooked in humanities and social sciences research.

Trauma, in general, refers to the profound emotional shock leaving a long lasting damage to the psychology of a person. It is an action shown by the mind to the body and provides a method of interpretation of disorder, distress and destruction aroused by the psychological repression. In medical Greek term, trauma refers to a severe wound or injury and its aftermath. Trauma theory as a privileged critical category includes diverse fields with its specific focus on psychological, philosophical, ethical and aesthetic questions about nature and representation of traumatic events. The word trauma nowadays is used to describe a kind of psychological wound. This research work explores a badly traumatized protagonist's dreadful past that infects her for the rest of her life, and explores what the main character's attitude to the racial segregation is. In order to answer the question, it focuses on memory- the way in which an individual struggles to heal emotional scars from the past that recurrently haunt her.

Various theorists and critics have opined trauma distinctly as their perspectives as some shed light on individual trauma and some on collective or cultural trauma. The main explorer of trauma as a form of psychoanalysis Sigmund Freud focuses on dynamic of trauma repress and symptom formations. In the form of repetitive behaviors and somatic symptom we see the overpowering event. By studying the trauma theory related to Freud, James Berger writes concerning matter of hysteria and neurotic symptoms :

The initial theory of trauma and symptom become problematic for Freud when he concluded the neurotic symptoms were more often the result of repressed

drives and desires than of traumatic events. Freud returned to the theory of trauma in *Beyond Pleasure Principle*, work which originated in his treatment of world war first combat veterans who suffer from repeated nightmares and other symptoms of their wartime experience. (570)

Here, the gist for psychoanalysis is the traumatic event and its aftermath. Berger rereads Freud and argues that neurotic symptoms are not the causes of repressed desires but of trauma. Freud's extended concept of latency of how the memory of a traumatic event can be lost over a time but then reappeared in the different symptomatic forms.

Cathy Caruth defines trauma as "A overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance and other intrusive phenomena" (11). Here, trauma is the return of the repressed. At the same time Cathy Caruth points out that general understanding of the traumatic disorders reflects the direct imposition on the mind of unavoidable reality of horrific event: " The taking over-physically and neurological of the mind by an event that it can control" (24). The key point of this definition suggests that the response to trauma is delayed, a phenomenon which Freud calls latency. In addition, it interrupts the victim's ability to live in present.

Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience : Trauma Narrative and History* is concerned with the traumatic past experience in the literary text that plays the role to prove the traumatic representation and reference it concerns with how it becomes text and how a wound becomes a voice. Caruth argues, " The historical narrative arises from such intersections of traumatic repetitions, which history like trauma is never simply one's own, that history is precisely the way we are implicated in each other's traumas" (qtd. in Berger's 573). Her main focus is to explore the principles of trauma and its

narrative history which describes the intersections of traumatic narrative. For her, the narrative of trauma becomes delayed history and its aftermath will not be an immediate understanding. Due to the violence inhabits, incomprehensively, their very survival of those who have lived beyond it that it may be witness best in future generation to whom this survival is passed on. Morrison's protagonist suffers from such dreadful experience and becomes traumatized after survival which she, later acts out and works through to document her past.

Contrary to the individual trauma theorists, cultural trauma theorist Geoffrey C. Alexander theorizes trauma in the name of collective unconscious. When a dreadful event leaves a spot or stigma that Geoffrey C. Alexander terms an indelible mark, upon a group consciousness and it is conceived as a wound to social identity, it shapes the trauma of the entire group. He defines trauma in a different paradigm of collective unconscious. For him, trauma occurs when a community is subjected to a dreadful incident leaving an indelible mark and marking their memories in irrevocable ways. This shapes the trauma of the community as a form of cultural trauma.

Regarding this he argues:

Cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways. . . My concern is with traumas that become collective. They can become so if they are conceived as wounds to social identity. This is a matter of intense cultural and political work. (1,6)

Cultural trauma is not of I but of we. Cultural trauma takes place in everyday language and activities in every household in everyday discourse. Other's trauma is refused to recognize. This sort of trauma is found in ordinary people's conversation or

experience.

Likewise, another theorist of cultural trauma Ron Eyerman highlights on the constructed collective memories of slavery as the central analytical concern. Eyerman sketches a theory of slavery as an African- American cultural trauma that seems to emphasize on a new perspective on black American identity. It is not the experience of slavery but the memory of slavery, its reconfiguration in the mind of later generations of blacks, that constitutes what Eyerman terms the cultural trauma. He argues that 'African American' is a historically formed identity that is rooted in the collective memory of slavery.

Similarly, Kali Tal defines trauma as a threat to life or bodily integrity or personal encounter with death and violence. She puts her notion beyond psychologically oriented Freudian and Caruthian line. She theorizes collective trauma as a clash between dominant and emergent culture and its aftereffects. Further she talks about the gender and sexual exploitation as a source of cultural trauma as the marginal groups are always prone to be the victims.

Another trauma theorist Dominick LaCapra puts forward the notion of historiography with two dominant approaches: objectivist and radical constructivist. For this, he further talks about two psychological terms 'acting out' and 'working through'. The former one is a melancholic stage in which the victim acts as if she is in the trauma period, the latter is mourning stage which is an outlet to the traumatic event by remembering the past and turning it into power.

Though LaCapra raises the issue of literary canonicity, he provides an original rethinking of the debates over the literary canon. He does not examine the relation between historical trauma and literary text. Literary text might be the site of symptomatic combined with critical acting out or working through that LaCapra in

this regard states, "That a canonical text should not help permanently itself an ideological order but should rather help "one to foreground ideological problems and to work through them critically" (25). . . Each text would be, in effect, site of trauma with which the reader would have to engage (572). Acting out is a melancholic stage, a process of returning to trauma in the past. It does not cure anyone immediately. Survivors have the fidelity to trauma. They have affinity with the victims and have the empathy towards trauma victims. Working through is a kind of come out of trauma. It is a process of just going through trauma to create history.

Racism is the factor for trauma in the novel though it is implicit, but has crucial part for the characters' indulgence in different activities. Twenty first century is the era of post- modernism where all are free to live their lives without any oppression. Morrison's latest novel *God Help the Child* reveals the fact that in this era also Americans have been living with racist, sexist and imperialist policy. Morrison's polyphonic narrative is symbolic in a sense to utter the sophisticated lifestyle of the citizens in the so-called largest democracy in the world. Typical American mindset has not come out of slave tradition. *God Help the Child* critiques the anti-racist sentiments and collective trauma due to race and gender. Morrison, with anti-race sentiments shows her empathy towards the victims and employs multiple narrators to identify with victimhood and empathize with their sufferings which ultimately lead them to the traumatic dreads.

The trauma of loss of individual as well as collective identity or belongingness intrudes Bride's present life, making it and complex. This issue of identity has some grounds and some differences to share with. Identity crisis also leads a person towards trauma as Bride in the novel suffers being discarded due to skin color and her loneliness. She finds herself in a quicksand where she neither has her individual

identity nor she accepts the double consciousness in white supremacist dominant culture. Here, trauma is shaped due to an interplay of dominant and residual culture.

American society is such an amalgamation of people where people of color have to sustain their lives accepting the double consciousness. For this, it makes us difficult to judge mother Sweetness as how she perceives the world and raises her child, saying: "Some of you probably think it is a bad thing to group ourselves according to skin color- the lighter, the better- in social clubs, neighborhoods, churches, sororities, even colored schools. But how else can we hold on to a little dignity?" (4) It is difficult to identify her choices. She knows this better. But it is clear that her choices have been shaped by the realities of being black in a white world- a world where the lighter the skin, the higher one can climb. The stigma of race should be erased. If not, it causes a collective trauma among certain group of people.

Ron Eyerman's exploration of the formation of African American identity through the theory of cultural trauma, in question, is slavery, not as an institution or as a personal experience, but as a collective memory- a pervasive remembrance that grounded a people's sense of itself. Eyerman, in this regard refutes:

Cultural trauma refers to a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric, affecting a group of people that has achieved some degree of cohesion. In this sense, the trauma need not necessarily be felt by everyone in a community or experienced directly by any or all. . . The notion of an African- American identity was articulated by a generation of black intellectuals for whom slavery was a thing of the past, not the present. It was the memory of slavery and its representation through speech and artworks that grounded African American identity and permitted its institutionalization in organizations. (2)

Unlike individual trauma, cultural trauma comprises of a dramatic loss of identity and meaning which creates a fissure or hole in the entire collective consciousness and the social formations . Individual trauma is the part of the trauma of a broader community having the motivating factors like race, group, community and slavery. Slavery itself is not trauma rather its memory in the generations ahead creates trauma for them.

Memory of slavery and its representation through speech and artworks that grounded African American identity and permitted its institutionalization in organization. And these organizations work for the welfare of the emergent groups, but this triggers the memory and trauma of the people of new generation.

Morrison truly captures the slavery of the past as a root of trauma in the present generation in an outlook of race through her novel *God Help the Child* where, as a third person omniscient narrator she introduces Booker as an undergraduate who has nibbled all courses in African-American studies and is not satisfied with the descriptions by the professors to quench his queries regarding slavery, and African-American cohesion and repulsion. She argues :

He suspected most of the real answers concerning slavery, lynching, forced labor, sharecropping, racism, Reconstruction, Jim Crow, prison labor, migration, civil rights and black revolution movements were all about money. Money withheld, money stolen, money as power, as war. Where was the lecture on how slavery alone catapulted the whole country from agriculture into the industrial age in two decades? (110-11)

In the modern sophisticated society human indifference and money as a common denominator shape the trauma of the individual. Jim Crow law, lynching, civil rights movements and lecture on slavery are just for money. This society does not heal the miseries of the blacks. Every character has his/her traumatic past triggered fully or

partially by race and double consciousness of the blacks.

Similarly, Kali Tal, in *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literature of Trauma*, raises the voice of cognitive psychology and of feminist politics that identifies strongly with the testimonies of rape and incest survivors. In this context, Tal bases her view different from LaCapra and Caruth. Tal argues that the literature of trauma consists only of the writing of the victims and survivors of trauma which quite differs emphatically from psychologically oriented writers like Caruth and LaCapra. Trauma as a life threatening event that displaces one's preconceived notion about the world. Mainly, Tal deals with recent critical approaches to the testimonies of holocaust survivors, literature produced by American veterans of Vietnam war and testimonies of women survivors of incest and child abuse. Her study is based on the systematic violence of woman and a sense of how traumatic literature might change the society. Booker, Bride's boyfriend becomes traumatized when his brother is sexually abused and later murdered.

When survivors' voices belong to marginal community, they are repressed and denied to be heard. These voices are highly politicized with the influence of socio-economic and political forces. Regarding this Kali Tal further states:

Survivor community is a marginal one. Their voices will be drowned out those with the influence and resources to silence them, and to revised version of their trauma. . . Within a society, there may be several targeted groups, whose members are subjected to traumatization in greater or lesser degrees. Targeted groups can and should be examined both in relation to the dominant group and to each other . . . Membership in the targeted group is determined on the basis of externally imposed definitions which are created and which once created are often internalized by members of targeted groups and incorporated into

their individual self concepts. (6-9)

The work of the critique of literature of trauma is both to identify and explicate literature by members of survivors group, and to deconstruct the process by which the dominant culture codifies their traumatic experience. People of opposing interest groups attempt to appropriate traumatic experiences while survivors struggle to retain their control. Survivors' testimony has been overwhelmed and revised by dominant culture. The struggle some and plightful experience of Morrison's protagonist Bride is completely overshadowed in the backdrop of racism in the sophisticated American society, whereas a traumatized victim Bride works through to document her past traumatized life in the line of LaCapra's historiography. Dominant culture represses the voices of marginal culture and poignant experiences of that group get overshadowed.

Protagonist Bride's sufferings and sorrows lead her to become traumatized and she experiences deep- existential emptiness. Despite her trauma she works through it and tries to transform herself into strength. In this regard, Richard R. Raubolt in his article "Trauma, Regression, and the Intensive Group Experience" talks about this trauma which is apt here:

Trauma is a series of experiences that overwhelms the individual. The events or experiences are horrific and overwhelm the person's ability to cope. Trauma becomes pathological when there is no opportunity to speak about the event or experiences. The experience, instead is met with by denial, rejection, induction of guilt feelings, hypocrisy or repeated trauma by important others. (158)

Trauma as a series of experiences frequently disturbs one's mind and destroys the individuals identity. When a survivor trauma has no opportunity to speak about the events and experiences, their conditions become horrible. And as the society denies to

listen their feelings, they become traumatized.

The victim of trauma develops the guilt consciousness and experiences feeling of nothingness. Morrison's protagonist's life is sought pathetic having interpellated or trodden in every step under the pathos of race or skin color. In the racist society, her paths of life are thorny and she is always haunted by her dreadful past memories. She has no better and appropriate means of sharing her inner pain and none is there to listen about her pathetic life that she got after her expulsion from the family. Consequently, such sickness within her results into physical change as she loses her biological appearance with the astonishing extinction of her breasts. Bride is haunted by the words of Booker which she narrates, "I am scared. Something bad is happening to me. I feel like I am melting away. I cannot explain it to you but I do know when it started. It began after he said, 'You are not the woman I want. 'Neither am I.' I still don't know why I said this" (8). Traumatic memory of her expulsion from family and boy friend haunts her repeatedly. She tries to come over this trauma but it is never easy to do so. After tremendous sufferings also she works through her trauma and takes insights for the building up of her better future, and she finally succeeds in doing so as she turns her grief into her ultimate power and victory.

In spite of trauma, Morrison's protagonist Bride works through it and turns her grief into strength. This turning of traumatic grief into power can be best resolved into the approaches of historiography which LaCapra calls radical constructivism. LaCapra sheds light on the links between psychoanalytic concepts to historical, socio-cultural and political critique in elucidating trauma and its aftermath in culture and people. For this, he states:

I adapt psychoanalytic concepts to historical analysis as well as socio-cultural and political critique in elucidating trauma and its aftereffects in culture and in

people. . . . Victims of traumatic, historical events and others not directly experience them. Nor should they become a pretext for avoiding economic, social, and political issues. On the contrary, the very process of working through problems should be closely related to these issues. The appeal to psychoanalytic concepts such as melancholia and mourning, acting out and working through adds a necessary dimension to economic, social, and political analyses but does not constitute a substitute for them. (9)

The symptomatic after-effects of traumatic events are seen in both people and culture with the socio-cultural and political origins. The importance of trauma theory to study history and narrative it allows for an interpretation of cultural symptoms of the growth words, scars on a social body and its compulsive, repeated actions. Victims of these traumatic events neither experience them directly nor becomes a pretext for avoiding these issues. Rather the process of acting out and working through dig out the profound trauma series and adds a dimension to political, economic and social analyses for historiography but does not constitute a substitute. On the behalf of working through, some insights are taken from all aspects for documenting both trauma and history.

In *God Help the Child*, Lula Ann Bride first becomes melancholic as she acts out , and later mourns or works through by documenting her past, getting insights and setting the cornerstone for her future. She recovers herself from all socio-cultural, economic and political upheavals and depravity causing post traumatic stress disorder which she infers as the shaping force for her betterment as she converts her grief to power to run a cosmetic company.

Further, LaCapra comes up with two approaches of historiography: documentary or self sufficient, and radical constructivist research models. The former

is based on the collection of evidence and making referential statements as the truth claims for historiography, and latter, is the radical constructivist identification of history with fictionalization, rhetoric, poetics, performative, or self-referential discourse. In this regard, LaCapra argues:

A documentary or self-sufficient research model . . . may even have been defensible in the attempt to professionalize history under the banner of objectivity and to distance, if not dissociate, it from literature, especially in the form of belles- letters . . . A radically constructivist position has . . . an identity or essential similarity between historiography and fiction, literature, or the aesthetic on structural levels, and their emphasis is on the fictionality of structures in all these areas . . . yet at times their work takes them in directions that may go beyond a radically constructivist identification of history with fictionalization, rhetoric, poetics, performativity or even self-referential discourse. (2-8)

LaCapra expresses three psychoanalytic topics: acting out versus working through, the return of the repressed, and the semantic of transference. A traumatic historical event, LaCapra argues is first to be repressed and then to return in the form of compulsive repetition. The most pervasive concern of him is transference which is an occasion for working through of the traumatic symptom. Therefore, it is imperative to recognize the symptom and trauma as one's own, to acknowledge that trauma is still inactive and that one is implicated in its destructive effects.

The life threatening event, traumatizing the individual displaces his or her preconceived notions about the world where trauma is enacted in a liminal state, beyond the normal human experience and the subject is radically ungrounded.

Accurate representation of trauma cannot be achieved without recreating the event. In

this regard, Tal further argues:

The representations may trigger "flashbacks" in the survivor- reader. However, the re- experience of trauma in the reader will always be derived from the reader's own traumatic experience, and not from the read experience of the survivor- author. . . The writings of trauma survivors comprise a distinct literature of trauma . Literature of trauma is defined by the identity of its author. Literature of trauma holds at its centre the reconstruction and recuperation of the traumatic experience . . . the writings and representations of non-traumatized authors. It comprises a marginal literature similar to that produced by feminist, African- American and queer writers. (16-17)

Survivor's testimony constructs a literature of trauma which reflects the identity of its author as it holds at its centre the reconstruction and recuperation of the traumatic experience. It is engaged in an ongoing dialogue with the representations of non-traumatized authors. Survivors' metaphorical tools are used for representations of trauma. Bride's working through and her documented past tells the fact of the marginalization of black community and how they cope up with identity crisis. Bride's testimony belongs to the survivor community and it holds at its centre the reconstruction and recuperation of traumatic experience.

For Tal, like survivor, the non-traumatized reader has the entire cultural library of symbol, myth and metaphor, but she does not have access to the meanings of the sign that invoke traumatic memory. It comprises of marginal literature as it is an interplay of dominant and residual groups consisting and overshadowing the experiences of the normal humans. For example, Bride's abandonment from family members and others simply in the name of race or color shapes her trauma which she acts out and works through to heal her wounds and to document her past.

Tal opines that trauma is a horrendous event to be expressed in literature rather than to be recreated. This thought has resemblance with LaCapra's working through which the trauma critics take as the best means of historiography. In this regard, Tal argues:

Only the experience of trauma has the traumatizing effect. The combination of the drive to testify and the impossibility of recreating the event for the reader is one of the defining characteristics of trauma literature . . . Each of the trauma has as its victims a certain group of persons definable by characteristics of race, sex, religion and/or geographical location. If the members of a persecuted group define themselves as a community, bonded by their common misfortune, and see their individual sufferings as a part of a common plight, then will the urge to bear witness be present. Without a sense of community power, testimony is useless. (121-125)

Every traumatized group has its particular community specified by race, sex, religion or geographical location. This is what we call collective trauma. Morrison's protagonist develops individual trauma due to race-sex composition which turns eventually to be collective. On the behalf of acting out, Morrison's protagonist Bride shows some symptoms of post traumatic stress disorder. She undergoes in acting out trauma up to the extent that she loses physical appearance with the disappearance of her breasts. Her recovery from acting out or melancholia and proving herself as a successful proprietor of a cosmetic company is an example of healing the wound by means of working through, which is helpful for her to recollect and document her past; and hence it is an apt means to historiography. Only the work of literature, if she presents her recorded memory/history, becomes the source to describe the reality rather than to create it as it is.

Literature of trauma tells and retells the story of the traumatic experience, to make it real both to the victim and to the community. This sort of writings serves both as validation and cathartic vehicle for the traumatized author. Bride's documentation of her past by working through process reveals the problems and sufferings of black community, and how they have become traumatized just because of their skin color. Individual character's suffering or trauma is just the representative of the trauma of entire black community. How they have been traumatized is revealed by the working through of Bride. As working through is a fertile source of creativity and reconstruction, Bride comes to prove herself successful coping up all the obstacles.

Mother Sweetness' memory of the day when her mother was getting married with a white lad where the couple were given separate Bibles; to sway shows her trauma and double consciousness. This shows the traumatic experience of Sweetness too. Morrison's *God Help the Child* confesses the fact of sophisticated, traumatic life of the people of color in the United States. Morrison's third person omniscient narration expresses the poignant, heart rendering scenario of the then society. She utters:

Complaining about her mother, she told him that Sweetness hated her for her black skin. "It's just a color," Booker had said. "A genetic trait- not a flaw, not a curse, not a blessing nor a sin." But," she countered, "other people think racial-" Booker cut her off. . . . Nevertheless, she flat out refused to be derailed from her mission simply because she was outside the comfort zone of paved streets, tight lawns surrounded by racially diverse people who might not help but would not harm her. (143)

Through a polyphonic narrative technique, where Morrison herself appears as a third person omniscient narrator and presents the plight of black people simply in the name

of color. This color issue having its roots in slavery makes the present generation traumatized. Bride's expulsion from family and from boy friend, and her predicament all are due to her genealogy and color. She works through her bitter past and turns her grief into power.

Innocent Sophia Huxley is accused of sexual abuse of a young child, simply because Bride can drag the attention and affection of the parents as well as wider community as she considers it as an adventure. Female is accused by another female. But this is representative of child sexual abuse and incest as a part of cultural trauma since the victims very often belong to residual group. In the novel, Booker's brother's murder after abuse that is homosexual abuse or pederasty is also prevalent in the societies. In this matter, Tal in her essay "We Did not Know What would Happen", asserts:

The women who contributed to and edited the early sexual abuse survivor narrative were dedicated to revealing the atrocities committed in our midst. Determined to break the silence that shrouded incest and rape, they believed that if they spoke out, women all over the country would become enraged and empowered, and would move to challenge the laws and social conditions that protected sexually abusive men. (156)

The women contributors and editors of early sexual abuse narratives were dedicated to reveal the atrocities committed among the mass. Their commitment to break the silence that shrouded incest and rape would make the women empowered and enraged to confront the laws and social conditions protecting the sexually abusive men. Only 'telling' cannot solve problems of sexual abuse rather it is essential to tie contemporary child abuse to the history of women's oppressions. Morrison's presentation of the sufferings of her characters due to sexual abuse is exemplifying

the subversion of the social norms and laws on the behalf of survivor narratives of sexual abuse.

Ron Eyerman further states cultural trauma as a process to reconstitute or reconfigure a collective identity through collective representation as a way to repair the damage in the social groups. For this, he argues:

Like physical or psychic trauma, the articulating discourse surrounding cultural trauma is a process of meditation involving alternative strategies and alternative voices. It is a process that aims to reconstitute or reconfigure a collective identity through collective representation, as a way of repairing the tear in the social fabric. A traumatic tear evokes the need to "narrate new foundations" which includes reinterpreting the past as a means toward reconciling present /future needs. (4)

Collective memory refers to the recollections of shared past that are retained by members of a group, large or small experiences it. Collective memory exists with collective identity and how societies remember it. William Edward Burghardt Du Bois' concept of double consciousness that describes the internal conflict experienced by subordinated groups in an oppressive society triggers the memory of the people of color making them reconfigure their collective identity. The traces of traumatic memory haunt them and consequently they show LaCapra's psychological symptoms- acting out and working through. Morrison's protagonist also suffers from the triggering memory of her own past as well as the black subordination in the racist society.

Identity is what makes us known among others. When our expectations are crushed and we face an identity crisis, we are likely to be traumatized. In this regard, Eyerman further states:

For blacks, this rejection after the raised expectations engendered by emancipation and reconstruction forced a rethinking of their relationship to American society. This was traumatic not only because of crushed expectations but also because it necessitated a reevaluation of the past and its meaning regarding individual and collective identity. (24)

The roots and routes of cultural trauma lie in the rejection after the raised expectations engendered by emancipation and reconstruction forced a rethinking of their relationship to American society. Trauma reappears due to the necessity to re-assess the past and its meaning regarding individual and collective identity. Identity crisis also leads a person towards trauma as Bride in the novel suffers being discarded due to skin color and loneliness. Bride juxtaposes her doubly marginalized conscience and the black history of subjugation. This shapes the trauma of the characters with their recollection of the historic slave tradition and present resembling kinds of suffering and predicaments.

Reconfiguration of painful past or slavery for the black people creates trauma. In *God Help the Child*, mother Sweetness' narration of her past days to her daughter that she had to choose the Bible for blacks in the church to marry Louis transmits a series of cultural trauma within her daughter. Sweetness' words "It's not my fault. She was born with black skin" gives the impression that every generation has a guilt complex of color or race which is sufficient to put an indelible mark on the memory to create trauma among the people of color. The following lines of the novel narrated by Sweetness best describe the cultural trauma among the emergent groups:

Can you imagine how many white folks have Negro blood running and hiding in their veins? . . . My own mother, Lula Mae, could have passed easy, but she chose not to. She told me the price she paid for that decision. When she and

my father went to the courthouse to get married there were two Bibles and they had to put their hands on the one reserved for Negroes. Other one was for white people's hands. The Bible! Can you beat it?. . . God knows what other intimate things they made her do, but no touching of the same Bible. (4)

The decision not to accommodate in passing culture made Sweetness's mother pay a big price. Separate Bibles for Blacks and Whites signify the extent of black subjugation where the roots of these traumatizing conditions are outdated, past tradition of slavery. Racism and slavery of the past still haunts and traumatizes the black people.

Thus, after a thorough analysis of *God Help the Child* , this research comes to a conclusion that Morrison's narrative portrays the traumatic experience of the new generation of black people in the shadow of skin color having its root in slavery. Reconfiguration of the memory of slavery in the minds of later generation of blacks constitutes the collective trauma. Morrison's protagonist Bride's traumatic experience is the representation of the entire black community. Bride and her mother Sweetness's trauma consist of the clash between dominant white culture and residual black culture in the vast mist of the morally desolated American society. Kali Tal's perspective on cultural trauma sheds light on the reality of conflict between dominant and residual culture. All trauma survivors belong to residual culture, and their trauma is revised by dominant culture. Residual groups are the targeted groups and are subject to traumatization in the name of race, class, gender and religious affiliation which are enforced by dominant social groups. The predicament of Morrison's protagonist Bride is overshadowed in the backdrop of racism in the sophisticated and morally desolated American society.

In *God Help the Child*, the protagonist is a victim of trauma. As mentioned in

previous section trauma is a normal response to repeated exposure and empathetic engagement with trauma material. Bride's traumatic experience is the product of her witnessing to her own suffering and her empathetic engagement with the victimhood. Bride's expulsion, simply because of her color makes her traumatized. She is haunted frequently by her past, her sufferings, and Booker's words "You are not the woman I want"(8). She is haunted by flashback scenes of unimaginable fear for her. She ignores all sorrows and tries to recover of it. Despite her trauma, she works through it and tries to turn her grief into ultimate power. Bride puts her full efforts to cope up with the pathos, and sufferings and works through her trauma, and has become successful to recover her trauma as she successfully leads a cosmetic company Sylvia Inc. making both well renowned among the blacks and whites.

The novelist examines the trauma of the characters minutely. Bride's lack of love and affection from family and relatives and the loss of self and collective identity shapes her trauma. The event that leaves an indelible mark on a particular community serves as a traumatic event. Present day race has the root of past day's slavery which reconstitutes the trauma of the characters in the present. Further, sexual abuse and murder of Booker's brother also symbolizes the atrocity and humiliation on the part of residual black community. Various stages of trauma have been examined through this research as a part of analysis on the behalf of personal and cultural facets of trauma. Bride's lack of control and senselessness about her body, persistent haunting and recurrence of painful memories and so on are some of the features in which trauma is manifested in different degrees. Most of the traumatic symptoms which Bride undergoes are seen as PTSD, and are worked through later.

The present research work has made an attempt to uncover the haunting traumatic memories of the protagonist's entire life and her attempt to contrive the

situations. This explores the issue of working through in relation to memory of the protagonist and her effort to turn her grief into power by self discovery and self establishment. Further, it unfolds how race and other dimensions like gender, political and religious affiliations shape cultural trauma as a product of the clash between dominant and residual groups in the society. It depicts the struggle of the protagonist, who works through trauma in the hope to live a normal life. In this way, this research acknowledges Morrison's criticism of American white supremacy and her anti-racist spirit. Through this novel, Morrison implies the inter-racial and intra-racial consciousness among the people in America. Under the burden of racial biases black people are compelled to practise intra-racism that is internalized racism. For this, people take this fact for granted and develop some guilt complexes within the self. Here, subjugation and acceptance go simultaneously which Morrison terms internalized racism, and she gives the message that even in this modern time racism exists in the United States.

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