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

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Abstract

This study examines the cultural trauma of characters with a cultural embodiment of race in the sophisticated but claustrophobic contemporary American society. Morrison's God Help the Child (2015) projects pain and trauma that live under the colored skin as a part of the author's and her character Bride's immense suppression of desire as a triggering force to past memories. Further, this research explores how traces of slavery in the past reconstitute trauma and how the interplay between dominant and residual cultures shapes the trauma of the African Americans. Morrison reveals the inter-racial and intra-racial conflicts in new generations of Americans by presenting the traumatic mind of her protagonist Bride who reconfigures traumatic history through critical acting out and working through trauma. Eventually, she succeeds in recovering and turning her grief into strength. The way through which such trauma is coped with is a researchable issue. It unfolds an individual's consciousness of racism and its influence on the individual psyche as a part of cultural trauma. Further, it unveils the inter-racial and intra-racial consciousness among the African Americans as they develop some guilt complexes within themselves due to their double consciousness and ambiguity contrary to social values. This is an internal conflict experienced by them in an oppressive society.

Key Terms: memory, trauma, acting out, social fabric, double consciousness, indelible mark, residual and dominant culture

Introduction

This research paper examines how racism, as cultural trauma, makes African Americans suffer in an essentially racist society so that they become traumatized, and haunted by their traumatic past, and show the symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and how they cope with such domination. Besides, this study explores the ways African-Americans free themselves from their subjugations or subordinations through a bodily resistance to achieve their independent self. It explores how the blacks revisit and rewrite their traumatic history by switching to the memory of the past. Morrison's *God Help the Child* projects the PTSD that lives just under the colored skin as a part

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of the author's and her character Bride's immense suppression of their desire switching to the memory of the painful past. The way in which such trauma is coped with and worked through is a researchable issue. It explores an individual's consciousness of racism and its influence on the individual psyche as a part of cultural trauma. A close observation of the protagonist's traumatized mind in relationship to society and its brutality falls under the preview of this research.

Furthermore, it examines the struggle of the protagonist's struggle to endure the racial segregation, dominance and hegemony in by a society where all her experiences and livelihood have been shaped solely in the name of skin color and her biological reality which is female sex. Her double marginalization first, for being an African American and secondly, for being a female-fully makes her suffer from an identity crisis. And the context of her lost identity and her obligation to infer the double consciousness push her into a series of 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 based on social conventions that make her traumatized. She eventually succeeds in doing so.

This project studies, firstly, the situation of people of color, their predicaments, and the way they contrive with such situations in modern American society. Secondly, it analyzes the trauma of African Americans due to sexual abuse, homosexuality, and human indifference. Thirdly, it raises 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 on the margin suffer and cope with this sort of cultural trauma. This research makes significant use of concepts developed in racial trauma theory and offers an analysis of the impact of race as a cultural denominator of trauma. The major objective of the study is to demonstrate how the deep-rooted interracial conflict serves as a source of cultural trauma, and how African- Americans cope with this trauma.

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

Morrison adopts a technique of bodily narratives of African-Americans to redraw their history to reconstruct a new reality that can affect their subjectivities and identities, contributing to social change by undertaking the issues of racism, injustice, violence, trauma, and so forth. In the case of racial differences, one has to understand the

relationship between components of a changing process, such as identity, history, trauma, and narrative in the quest for justice and peace in contemporary America. The experiences of African-American people have gone through different historical junctures across different generations. The painful and hostile journey of such people can be traced over a long span of years till date. Black people have become victims of racism, classism, and gender discrimination during different periods in America. They are still at the margins of society, with few opportunities, and social exclusion.

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 their recovery from them. It studies 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. Morrison presents her characters as bold and enduring all sorts of segregation, exploitation, and abuse in a subversive way to challenge social biases. She picks up the issue of race and its impacts 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 black subjugation, firstly, in the name of race, and then sexual and gender violence.

Protagonist Lula Ann Bridewell in *God Help the Child* is despised since her birth for being black. Her father breaks the relationship with both mother and daughter accusing mother Sweetness of infidelity. Her mother urges her to call her Sweetness instead of mother, and she 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 than her boyfriend, Booker, leaves her declaring that she is not the woman he wants, a phrase that 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. They are still at the margins of society with few opportunities and social exclusion.

Literature Review

Morrison's *God Help the Child* has received numerous critical appreciations since its publication in 2015. Regarding race, trauma, and home in Morrison's novels, Schreiber (2010) states, "One of Toni Morrison's great achievements is her ability to depict what it means to be black" (p.11). Even in the age of democracy, the black body is still under the captivity of the white instruments of torture. In a neo-slave era, a set of racist ideologies keeps the black body under constant captivity. Morrison underscores how the ideology of white supremacy and its idealized norms of the body are instilled in

the psyche of blacks. Morrison investigates how African-American bodies fall under the oppressive ideology of white supremacy, which restricts their potential to produce their own identity, space, and autonomous self, breaking the shackles of subjugation. Morrison presents black bodies with the potential to conceive space and agency through the mental idealization of white standards.

Kick (1999) critiques Morrison and her artistic creation concerning memory, sufferings, anxieties, and racial trauma. She further explicates:

The beauty of Toni Morrison is that it points a reader just becoming acquainted with Morrison's works in numerous directions, ensuring recognition of the complexity and diversity of Morrison's scholarship. For those already steeped in Morrison's works, especially those who like Matus herself are teaching the novels, the dimension of racial trauma will unquestionably engage them more profoundly in Morrison's vision. (p. 284)

Morrison's novels are known as quest tales as the characters have a pursuit of the hidden sign, capable of giving them strength and identity among the racial traumatic encounters. She explores blackness through her novels. She intends the readers to collaborate with her to interpret her novels. She puts forth the characters having been pushed to the margins of society with the tag of their race and gender alienation. She also evaluates the core of the African- American reality, particularly that of an African female, and female alienation, resulting in collective racial trauma in most of her novels. Her novels explore the struggles of blacks in their search for identity and their failures in doing so. Morrison establishes herself as a radical thinker, author, editor, and critic who plays a steward role in transforming the American literary landscape with her presence in the African- American literary tradition.

Likewise, Gras (2016) challenges the notion of America's postraciality. She argues that the novel highlights the effect of slavery, which is still haunting black people (p. 1). She writes, "Morrison forces her readers to acknowledge the pervasive mental and physical damage racism and sexism still cause to this day, particularly for black girls and women" (p. 3). In addition to post-raciality, Gras discusses post-feminism to highlight how the black female body is analyzed under "commodity feminism" to reflect on the male gaze (p. 7). Morrison addresses a general problem that poses a threat to the subjectivity of African-American people, ensuring the commodification of their bodies regardless of gender.

Through her novels, Morrison underscores the way black bodies become a target of white ideologies. Peach (2000) asserts that Morrison's use of white American primer

“unfurls the history of Euro-American standards of beauty and in white America’s idealization of the family from an African-American perspective”, reflecting how “they come into conflict with the history that is situated, metaphorically and literally, in the black body” (pp. 32-33). Hence, the black body transforms into a site of struggle that transforms the circumstances into a motive to be able to move on in life. Such bodies host conflicting ideals of blackness and whiteness, and strive to survive in a racist sphere.

Critics view the historical frame of novels by Morrison as therapy for African-Americans who are unaware of their traumatic history. McKay (1999), opines rewriting the traumatic history of African-Americans as “a conscious act toward healing a painful wound and to remind us never to let this atrocity happen again” (p. 3). For McKay, one may argue that rewriting the traumatic history in the novel is needed for self-discovery and recovery. Morrison rewrites the life of the historical figure Bride in *God Help the Child*. The novel portrays the deep pain left behind in African-American bodies, minds, and memories by the whites. He reviews the novel 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 a confined social background.

The protagonist Bride's sufferings and sorrows lead her to become traumatized and she experiences a deep- existential emptiness. Despite her trauma, she works through it and tries to transform herself into strength. In this regard, Raubolt (1999) in his article ‘Trauma, Regression, and the Intensive Group Experience’, talks about this trauma:

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 denial, rejection, induction of guilt feelings, hypocrisy, or repeated trauma by important others. (p.158)

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

Sullivan (2015) reviews Morrison's novel against the backdrop of the deep-rooted psychological impact of racism as a terror among the people of the black community and their attempt to escape from such evil practice through a re-documentation of

traumatic past through critical acting out and working through trauma. To uplift their status, Morrison gives voices to the voiceless through her novel. He further admits:

God Help the Child takes up classic Morrisonian themes: beauty, violence, racism, American blackness and its ghosts of personal and communal trauma, the consumption of bodies—The novel tells the story of Bride, a young, dark-skinned black woman whose life has been shaped by her body's failure to meet the norms of consumable womanhood. As a 'blue-black' child, she is rejected by her 'high-yellow' mother, Sweetness, who refuses to touch her for most of her girlhood... Bride's father, too, vanishes without touching her. (pp. 13- 14)

God Help the Child carries different classic themes of Morrison such as beauty, violence, racism, and so on. A black body is seen as a rejection or social exclusion in contemporary American society. Black bodies carry the scars of communal trauma and repressed desires. Such bodies suffer from an identity crisis, and in an attempt to preserve their self-dignity, go through active transitional phases to subvert or resist the domination. The incidence of such racial segregation, even in the home yard, urges the bride to look into herself for the arousal of self-pride.

For Kick (1999), Jill Matus's special contribution to Morrison's 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. Matus points out that trauma theory has rarely explored racism as trauma. Racial trauma stretches beyond its obvious site in slavery, Matus observes, underscoring Morrison's 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 (p.202). Morrison raises the voice of the voiceless as she presents the dreadful life experiences of her characters, not because of the individual but of racial traumatic events. The shock of comprehending oneself as other is a form of internalized racism and that is intrapersonal which constitutes a collective trauma as it's a fissure in the identity of a group.

Methodology

Drawing upon Sigmund Freud, Cathy Caruth, Dominick LaCapra, Kali Tal, Ron Eyerman, and Geoffrey C. Alexander, this project seeks to do justice to 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 the relationship between literature, race and trauma that is often overlooked in humanities and social sciences research.

Although this research makes significant use of concepts developed in race and trauma, it does not offer a comprehensive analysis of trauma theory, but rather an analysis of the impact of race and slavery as a cultural denominator of trauma and the body's obligation to resist self-discovery is a primary tool of analysis. The major objective of the study is to demonstrate the individual trauma resulting in collective trauma due to deep-rooted interracial conflicts and social injustices.

Trauma, in general, refers to the profound emotional shock that leaves 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 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 a specific focus on psychological, philosophical, ethical, and aesthetic questions about the 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 racial segregation is. To answer the question, it focuses on memory- how an individual struggles to heal emotional scars from the past that recurrently haunt her.

Various theorists and critics have opined on trauma distinctly from their perspectives, as some have 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 the dynamic of trauma repression and symptom formation. In the form of repetitive behaviors and somatic symptoms, we see the overpowering event. By studying the trauma theory related to Freud, Berger (1997) writes concerning the matter of hysteria and neurotic symptoms:

The initial theory of trauma and symptoms became problematic for Freud when he concluded that 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*, a work that originated in his treatment of World War I combat veterans who suffered from repeated nightmares and other symptoms of their wartime experience. (p.570)

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

Cathy Caruth (2001), defines trauma as "an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in often delayed, uncontrolled, repetitive appearance and other intrusive in phenomena" (p.11). Here, trauma, is the return of the repressed. Caruth also points out that general understanding of the traumatic disorder reflects the direct imposition in the mind of the unavoidable reality of a horrific event: The key point of this definition suggests that the response to trauma is delayed, a phenomenon that Freud calls latency. In addition, it interrupts the victim's ability to live in present.

Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma Narrative and History* (1996) 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. She argues, " The historical narrative arises from such intersections of traumatic repetitions, in which history, like the trauma, is never simply one's own, that history is precisely the way we are implicated in each other's traumas" (as cited in Berger, 1997, p. 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. Survivors of traumatic incidents become witnesses of the dreadful traumatic encounters of the past after an incubation period or latency in the future generation to whom this survival is passed on. Morrison's protagonist suffers from such a 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 Alexander (2012) theorizes trauma in the name of the collective unconscious. When a dreadful event leaves a spot or stigma that 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 terms of a different paradigm of the 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 on 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. (pp.1-6)

Cultural trauma is not of 'I' but of 'we'. This trauma takes place in everyday language and activities in every household and everyday discourse. Trauma of the black, marginal, and residual culture is refused to recognize. It is found in ordinary people's conversations or experiences.

Another trauma theorist, Dominick LaCapra (1996), 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 is a melancholic stage in which the victim acts as if she/he is in the trauma period; the latter is the mourning stage, which is an outlet for 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 debates over the literary canon. He does not examine the relationship between historical trauma and literary text. A literary text might be the site of symptomatic combined with critical acting out or working through. In that regard LaCapra states, "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). Acting out is a melancholic stage, a process of returning to trauma in the past. It does not cure anyone immediately. Survivors have fidelity to trauma. They have an affinity with the victims and have empathy towards trauma victims. Working through is a kind of coming out of trauma. It is a process of just going through trauma to create history.

Likewise, another theorist of cultural trauma Eyerman (2004) highlights the constructed collective memories of slavery as the central analytical concern. He sketches a theory of slavery as an African- American cultural trauma that emphasizes 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, which constitutes what Eyerman terms cultural trauma. He argues that 'African American' 'self' or identity has a long history of its formation having been rooted in the collective memory of slavery.

Eyerman, further explicates 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. He further 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 of reconciling present /future needs. (p. 4)

Collective memory refers to the recollections of shared past that are retained by members of a group, large or small. Collective memory exists with collective identity and how societies remember it. Du Bois' (1903) concept of double consciousness which describes the internal conflict experienced by subordinated groups in an oppressive society, triggers the memory of 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 them. Morrison's protagonist also suffers from the triggering memory of her past as well as the black subordination in the racist society.

Similarly, Tal (1996) defines trauma as a threat to life or bodily integrity or a personal encounter with death and violence. She puts her notions beyond the psychologically oriented Freudian and Caruthean lines. She theorizes collective trauma as a clash between dominant and emergent cultures and its aftereffects. Further, she talks about gender and sexual exploitation as a source of cultural trauma as the marginal groups are always prone to being victims. She further opines that trauma is a horrendous event to be expressed in literature rather than to be recreated. This thought has a resemblance with LaCapra's work, which the trauma critics take as the best means of historiography. Every traumatized group has its our particular community, specified by race, sex, religion, or geographical location. This is what we call collective trauma.

Results and Discussion

Racism is a factor for trauma in the novel, though it is implicit. It plays a crucial part in the characters' indulgence in different activities. The 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 as well, Americans have been living with racist, sexist, and imperialist policies. Morrison's polyphonic narrative is symbolic in a sense to utter the sophisticated lifestyle of the citizens of the so-called largest democracy in the world. The typical American mindset has not come out of the slave tradition. *God Help the Child* (2015), 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 traumatic dreads.

The trauma of the loss of an individual as well as collective identity or belongingness intrudes into the Bride's present life, making it complex. This issue of identity has some grounds and some differences to share. An Identity crisis also leads a person towards trauma as Bride in the novel suffers from a being discarded due to her skin color and her loneliness. She finds herself in quicksand, where she neither has her identity nor she accepts the double consciousness in white supremacist dominant culture. Here, trauma is shaped due to the interplay of dominant and residual culture.

American society is such an amalgamation of people where people of color have to sustain their lives by accepting double consciousness. For this, it makes us difficult to judge mother Sweetness, as how she perceives the world and raises her child. In that regard, she argues, "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?" (p. 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 a certain group of people.

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 people's sense of itself. Unlike individual trauma, cultural trauma comprises a dramatic loss of identity and meaning which creates a fissure or hole in the entire collective consciousness and social formations (p. 2). Individual trauma is a part of the trauma of a broader community having motivating factors like race, group, community, and slavery. Slavery itself is not a trauma, rather its memory in the generations ahead creates trauma for them. The memory of slavery and its representation through speech and artworks grounded African American identity and permitted its institutionalization in an organization. And these organizations work for the welfare of the emergent groups, but this triggers the memory and trauma of the people of the new generation.

Morrison truly captures the slavery of the past as a root of trauma in the present generation in an outlook on 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? (pp. 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 lectures 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 blacks' double consciousness.

The voices of the marginal community are repressed and denied to be heard. These voices are highly politicized with the influence of socio-economic and political forces. The work of the critique of the literature on trauma is both to identify and explicate literature by members of a 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 control. Survivors' testimony has been overwhelmed and revised by the dominant culture. The struggle-some and painful experience of Morrison's protagonist Bride is completely overshadowed by 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.

The victim of trauma develops guilt consciousness and experiences a feeling of nothingness. Morrison's protagonist's life is sought pathetically, having been interpellated or trodden in every step under the pathos of race or skin color. In racist society, her paths in 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 no one is there to listen to her, about the pathetic life that she got after her expulsion from the family. Consequently, such sickness within her, results in 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 started after he said, "You are not the woman I want. Neither am I." I still don't know why I said this' (p. 8). A traumatic memory of her expulsion from her family and her boy friend haunts her repeatedly. She tries to overcome this trauma but

it is never easy to do so. After tremendous suffering, she works through her trauma and takes insights for the building of a better future, and she finally succeeds in doing so as she turns her grief into her ultimate power and victory.

Despite the trauma, Bride works through it and turns her grief into strength. This turning of traumatic grief into power can be best resolved in the approach of historiography that LaCapra calls radical constructivism. LaCapra expresses three psychoanalytic topics: acting out versus working through, the return of the repressed, and the semantics 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 for him is transference, which is an occasion for working through the traumatic symptom (pp. 2-8). Therefore, it is imperative to recognize the symptoms and trauma as one's own, to acknowledge that trauma is still inactive and that one is implicated in its destructive effects.

Bride first becomes melancholic as she acts out, and later mourns or works through it 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 PTSD, which she infers as the shaping force for her betterment as she converts her grief to power to become independent by running a cosmetic company named Sylvia Inc. Through hard work and struggles she succeeds to be a manager in a cosmetic company. Bride explicates, "I named it YOU GIRL: Cosmetics for Your Personal Millennium. It's for girls and women of all complexions, from ebony to lemonade to milk. And it's mine, all mine, the idea, the brand, the campaign" (10). Women of all complexions, from ebony to lemonade to milk, reflect that in the name of color, one should not discriminate. She creates a world where there is peace and harmony among people. To maintain herself in society, she has frequently changed her name to create her identity.

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. An accurate representation of trauma cannot be achieved without recreating the event. According to total (1996), "Survivor's testimony constructs trauma literature that reflects the author's identity, 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 (p.16)". Bride's working through and her documented past tell the fact of the marginalization of the black community and how they cope with an identity crisis. Bride's testimony belongs to the survivor community, and it holds at its centre the reconstruction and recuperation of traumatic experience.

Morrison's protagonist develops individual trauma due to race-sex composition, which eventually turns out to be collective. On account of acting out, Bride shows some symptoms of PTSD. She undergoes 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 it, which is helpful for her to recollect and document her past; hence it is an appropriate means to historiography. Only the work of literature, if she presents her recorded memory/history, becomes the source to describe reality rather than to create it as it is.

Trauma literature tells and retells the story of traumatic experiences, in order to make it real to both the victim and the community. These sorts of writings serve both as validation and cathartic vehicle for the traumatized author. Bride's documentation of her past by working through the process reveals the problems and sufferings of the black community, and how they have become traumatized just because of their skin color. An individual character's suffering or trauma is just a representative of the trauma of the entire black community. How they have been traumatized is revealed by the working through of Bride. Working through is a fertile source of creativity and reconstruction, Bride comes to prove herself successful in coping with all the obstacles.

Mother Sweetness' memory of the day when her mother was getting married to a white lad where the couple was 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* (2015) confesses the fact of the sophisticated, traumatic life of people of color in the United States. Morrison's third-person omniscient narration expresses the poignant, heart-rending scenario of contemporary society. She utters:

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. (p. 143)

Through a polyphonic narrative technique and a third-person omniscient point of view, Morrison 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 her family and boyfriend, and her predicament, are all due to her genealogy and color. She works through her bitter past and turns her grief into power.

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. 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 with American society. Trauma reappears due to the necessity to re-assess the past and its meaning regarding individual and collective identity (Tal 24). An identity crisis also leads a person towards trauma, as Bride in the novel suffers from 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 the existing, resembling kinds of suffering and predicaments.

Reconfiguration of a painful past or slavery for black people creates trauma. In *God Help the Child* (2015), 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"(2) give 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 people of color. The following lines of the novel narrated by Sweetness best describe 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 easily, 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. Another 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. (p. 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, the of slavery tradition. Racism and slavery of the past still haunt and traumatize black people.

Conclusions and Recommendations

After a thorough analysis of *God Help the Child*, this research concludes that Morrison's narratives portray traumatic experiences of the new generation of black people in the shadow of skin color, having their root in slavery. The reconfiguration of the memory of slavery in the minds of later generations of blacks constitutes the

collective trauma. The protagonist Bride's traumatic experience is a representation of the entire black community. The trauma of the bride and her mother Sweetness's, is a clash between dominant white culture and residual black culture in the vast mist of the morally desolated American society. Tal's perspective on cultural trauma sheds light on the reality of the conflict between dominant and residual culture. All trauma survivors belong to the residual culture, and their trauma is revised by the dominant culture. Residual groups are the targeted groups and are subject to trauma in the name of race, class, gender, and religious affiliation which are enforced by dominant social groups. The predicament of protagonist, Bride, is overshadowed by the backdrop of racism in sophisticated and morally desolated American society.

In *God Help the Child*, the protagonist is a victim of trauma. As mentioned in the 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 her own suffering and her empathetic engagement with 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"(p. 8). She is haunted by flashback scenes of unimaginable fear for her. She ignores all her sorrows and tries to recover from them. Despite her trauma, she works through it and tries to turn her grief into ultimate power. Bride puts her all efforts to cope with the pathos and suffering and works through her trauma, and has become successful to recover from 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 shaped her trauma. The event that leaves an indelible mark on a particular community serves as a traumatic event. The present-day race has the root of the past day's slavery, which reconstitutes the trauma of the characters in the present. Further, the sexual abuse and murder of Booker's brother also symbolizes the atrocity and humiliation on the part of the residual black community. Various stages of trauma have been examined through this research as a part of the analysis on 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 that Bride undergoes are seen as PTSD and are worked through later.

The present research work has attempted 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 the trauma of the protagonist and her effort to turn her grief into power by self-discovery and self-establishment. Further, it reveals how race and other dimensions like gender, and political and religious affiliations shape cultural trauma as a product of the clash between dominant and residual groups in society. It depicts the protagonist's struggle, who works through trauma in the hope of living 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 practice intra-racism, which is internalized racism. For this, people take this fact for granted and develop some guilt complexes within them selves. 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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