

TOPIC: The Concept of Otherness in the Novel “God Help the Child” by Tony Morrison

¹Rashid Ahmed Shah,²Farhat Nawaz,³Muhammad Zaman,⁴Saddam Hussain

^{1*}²Lecturer (English) at Abbottabad University of Science & Technology (AUST)

³English Department Iqra University Karachi

⁴English Lecturer (Visiting) at Baluchistan University of Engineering and Technology Khuzdar

Corresponding author Gmail ID: rashidahmadshah2@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

According to postcolonial and feminist theorists, women are suppressed and depressed by the colonial power and patriarchy and this has not merely happened once in a blue moon but a progressive process even after the independence in many countries especially in America. It is widely seen that women are oppressed and subjugated in the name of racism, colorism, gender difference. The current article deals with such inequalities in society especially in America in the light of the novel “God help the Child (2015)” by Tony Morrison. In the novel, the protagonist named Bride faces such issues and complexities throughout her life starting from her childhood. When she opens her eyes in her home the element of otherness can be vividly seen in the character of Bride, as she was rejected by her parents because of her dark skin and she was deprived of her basic rights in the name of colorism and racism.

KEYWORDS: Postcolonial, feminists, depression, patriarchy, subjugation, inequalities, racism, colorism, otherness, and deprivation.

1. INTRODUCTION

A writer reflects through his/her writings the reality of an era in which he/she lives. Toni Morrison is highlighted among those who raised their voice against the discrimination of African-American women. She is notable for her enormous works in literature. She was an essayist, novelist, and book editor. She wrote her first novel titled, “The Bluest Eye” which was published in 1970, another great work of hers is “The song of Solomon” published in 1977. Although she wrote many other works among them, these two gripped the attention of the public especially in America, and consequently, she got the “National Book Critics Circle Award”. Later

on, in the year 1988 she got the “Pulitzer Prize for her another great work named “Beloved” published in 1987. Due to gaining “Noble Prize in Literature” in the year 1993, she got recognition worldwide.

In the United States of America, the concept of otherness is seen vividly since long ago. The supremacy of white ideologies has been practiced in the discourse of ethnicity. Moreover, gender discrimination, racism, and colorism are the prominent aspects of the United States of America in this regard. Every day people are humiliated in the name of such inequalities in society (Mashaqi, 2018).

Black people and children are victimized due to such issues in society. Morrison is considered to be the most prominent African American writer who talked about such issues explicitly. She stood by such marginalized and those were recognized the others especially in her novel "God help the child (2015)" in which she talks about such difficulties as otherness, racism, colorism and child abuse, etc. She exposes this phenomenon through her protagonist in the novel who is known by the name of Bride original name is Lula Ann but she kept her name Bride later on. Right from her childhood, she faces obstacles even her parents denied her.

One can imagine from the statement of her mother that she told her explicitly that she should call her "Sweetie" instead of "mom" or "mother". From this tiny example, a reader can realize the actual condition of the child. Why she does this only because she was black. Besides this, Morrison discusses the collective trauma of the people who are colonized and having the same condition in the colonial society today as well. Morrison questions such inequalities going on in the United States of America in the name of racism, colorism, sexism, patriarchal system. She says why such discriminations are created especially for African American women. By this, she meant to realize to the world that this is the fundamental right of African and American people as the same as the white society in the United States of America (Ramírez, 2017).

The legacy of slavery still exists in African American bodies. Through the work of Morrison, we realize that they are being

treated in this way. The character Bride tells us their actual face. It is the human tendency and a natural element that everyone surrounding us loves their blood naturally but here in the novel, Bride was neglected by her parents and ultimately the rest of the society. The element of otherness can be examined very clearly not only that she was a dark skin child but also that she was a girl. This is how the postcolonial feminists object that why women are subjugated and suppressed in society (Mashaqi, 2018).

Being the critics we must analyze the circumstances going in the United States which go against humanity as a whole. We have to understand that color makes no difference at all, what is the implication of race, gender, and sex in the real world. Morrison uses such tactics to the subtext to make us understand the phenomenon of society and wants to pave the way for those who undergo these hurdles and obstacles in their life. She also uses the terminologies such as irony, symbols, and transgressing conventional culture to realize the values of ordinary people, especially African Americans in the United States (Ramírez, 2017; Gras, 2016; Ramirez, 2020).

The current article deals with the concept of otherness in Tony Morrison's Novel "God Help the Child (2015)" that how the characters are portrayed especially the protagonist Bride to tell the reader the inequalities and gender discrimination of the patriarchal society in the name of colorism, racism, and sexism in the highly educated and so-called most civilized country The United States (USA).

1.1.Theoretical Framework

Postcolonial theory is considered to be a postmodern intellectual discourse that deals with the relationship between the colonized and European nations. The proposed objective of postcolonialism is to combat the effects on culture by colonialism. It does not deal only with the savaging of the past world but also shows how the world can move on towards justice, equality, and mutual respect. According to postcolonial and feminist theorists, women are subjugated and suppressed by colonial power and patriarchy and they believe that it is an ongoing process even after getting independence not merely in the United States but in so many countries (Chousein, 2013).

The article aims to analyze the concept of otherness in the novel “God Help the Child (2015)” by Tony Morrison while having the lances of the postcolonial feminist theory. Having studied the whole story we realize that there is a dire need to expose the concept of otherness in the novel because readers understand the actual face of the society in which women are treated in the opposite direction as compared to men. This can be easily identified when we jump to the story where the protagonist of the story Bride faces such issues right from her childhood. Bride’s parents deny her and even her mother forbids her not to call her by the name of “mom” or “mother” but “Sweetie” just because she was born with black skin and that she was a girl. The same reflection can be observed if we look at the colonial world.

1.2. Purpose of the Study

The current article deals with the concept of otherness in Tony Morrison’s Novel “God Help the Child (2015)” that how the characters are portrayed especially the protagonist Bride to tell the reader the inequalities and gender discrimination of the patriarchal society in the name of colorism, racism, sexism in the highly educated and so-called most civilized country The United States (U.S.A).

1.3. Objectives of the Study

- To examine the concept of otherness in the novel “God help the child (2015)” by Tony Morrison
- To understand the factors behind the deprivation of people of their basic rights in the name of colorism and racism etc.
- To understand the factors behind the importance of white & light skin and the negation of the black one in our society.
- To understand the representation of postcolonial feminist theory in light of “God help the child (2015) by Tony Morrison.

1.4. Main Questions

1. What is the concept of otherness in the novel “God help the child (2015)” by Tony Morrison?
2. Why some people are deprived of their basic rights in the name of colorism and racism?
3. Why our society gives preference to white or light skin color? And why not black?
4. What is the representation of postcolonial feminist theory in light

of “God help the child (2015) by Tony Morrison?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In the current study, we are examining the facts of American society concerning Toni Morrison’s novel “God help the child (2015)”. Toni Morrison endeavored to put the issues of invisibility, Africanism, violence, blackness, and oppressed relationship. These all factors become the cause of “otherness” in the life of people who have a black physical appearance.

Gras (2016) states that the legacy of slavery still dictates the way black female bodies are seen and treated in 21st century America. The author clarifies the ground reality of American society and how the people of a specific community or the people who have particular color have to bear the annoyance and pain of invisibility and otherness. As it could be seen in the form of Bride the main leading character or the protagonist in “God Help the Child (2015)”. Bride in her childhood having the extra black color of her skin has to bear the rejection of intimacy, care, and love from her own family.

The roots of otherness could be found in the concept of “subaltern”. As Robert warrior states, “Can the subaltern speak” (cited in Sahar Abdelkarim AsadMashaqi K, 2018). Subalternity is itself the subjugation of people apart from the discrimination of caste and creed. Although, the apparatuses are used for race, ethnicity, color, and beauty. These all components of devastation are socially engineered by the dominant or the authoritative class to control the system according to their desire.

Toure (2011) exerts that being black holds [him] back. It clarifies how much the black people in American society have to feel the pain and agony of being a black person. It holds them not to choose what they want in terms of profession, opportunity, or the free lifestyle. As it could be seen in the form of Bride to keep herself apart from the residents of her locality as well as form her own family. Because she was not appreciated by her family for the sin for which she did not commit herself. She was born black, the dark black that is why she was left alone and had to witness the anxiety, stress, and psychological pain in herself.

Bride was kept aloof by her mother sweetness that sweetness herself can represent herself as an adequate member of society. It seems that apartheid or the feeling of otherness is not developed or produced by an individual but by the whole society to play their part in a distinctive as well as discriminative manner (Mashaqi, 2018).

Hoerder (2001) explores in his study the language of narratives that are confounded by the intimate lives of the subalterns. Thereat, the element of language is also used to dominate the people in the society. In “God help the Child (2015)” the characters use very usual and informal language. It clarifies indicates to the readers what kind of background the people have in the society. The mindset of the reader is set to know the capability and credibility of people or specific communities through the language. In an interview, Tony Morrison herself says that language alone protects us from the scariness of things with no names. Here, the scariness of things with no names

could be the color, race, violence, subordination of women, oppression, invisibility, slavery shadism, and pain of discrimination in society.

Mercy (2008) states that Tony Morrison in her other reputed work specifies the racial discrimination and subordination of women taking the color in the context. Further, it also highlights the cause or otherness in the novel “God Help the Child (2015)” in the form of the marginalization of different communities with one another in America. The dominance of white people and the subordination of black people & Afro-American people could be seen vividly. They are kept away as the other one from the white people community in America. As it could be seen when Bride was born and her father left her mother that she could not be their child. It was the social and societal hegemonic pressure on the father not to accept his daughter. Resultantly, he divorced his wife even though he did an uncivilized and barbaric act but did not feel any stress & pain to leave his family instead of leaving together with his family. Tony Morrison in the year 1998 expressed that we (all) are not, in fact, ‘other’. We are choices. Here, the fact of marginalization is seen as the cause of otherness which could be seen in the form of Bride in a very lucid way.

Therefore, after marginalization as the cause of otherness, here the other fact that could be discussed as the intrinsic factor to create the devastative otherness is “beauty”. Bride had big lips and a very dark color of her skin and she felt like the ugliest creature on the face of the earth. She was seeing herself from the eye of others that how society imposes or teaches her to look

like. Bride’s mother herself maintained the distance from Bride and instructed Bride that she should call her “Sweetness” not “mama” anywhere. Here, Bride felt the complicated fact in her personality and bore the stress of not being the person to be kept together with the people and within the community.

According to Wolf (2004) “Beauty is not a universal entity”. It is a socially constructed fact of the society, these are developed and given the momentum to gain power, fame, and dominance in the society. Social injustice just enslaves the people and creates disorder and anarchy in society and nothing else. There are innumerable social inequalities to be addressed in American society they could be exerted out from the “God Help the Child (2015)”. Toni Morrison highlighted the facts about the humiliation and uncivilized facts about the people living in America and across the globe. She lightens the beacon to alleviate the brutalities, discrimination, and the fact of otherness through her peculiar work “God Help The Child (2015)”.

3. METHODOLOGY

The qualitative research paradigm has been applied since the research is literary where the researcher uses thematic and textual analysis to achieve the main goals of the study. The primary source of data collection of the research is Toni Morrison’s novel, God Help the Child (2015). Concisely, the utterances of the characters have been studied and compared to the characteristics of the otherness. Moreover, the behavior of the main characters has been studied to show how otherness shaped their lives

especially Lula Anne (the victim). As a whole, the study shows how black people, and children, in particular, are still suffering from marginalization in modern American society.

3.1. Data Analysis

Thematic and Textual analysis was used as the procedure of data analysis for the research. The novel, *God Help the Child* was thoroughly studied and the constituents of otherness, gender difference, colorism, and racism were scrutinized from the novel.

4. DISCUSSIONS AND FINDINGS

The novel “*God help the child* (2015)” by Tony Morrison is a clear depiction of discrimination of gender, color, and race. These factors become the root cause of otherness in the people of America who have the black color and origin from Africa. The concept of otherness and subaltern can be seen in “*God Help the Child* (2015)”.

For instance, Bride had the name Lula Ann when she was born, by birth she was black. When she was born her mother Sweetness uttered while seeing Bride “**high yellow**” a dark color “**too thick lips... funny colored eyes, crow black with a blue tint, something witchy about them too**” (Morrison, *God Help the Child* p.1, chapter 1). This statement was given by Sweetness for her daughter Bride. It was the racist remarks and Sweetness behaved like the racist while saying that kind of statement for Bride. Sweetness felt very depressed when Bride was born and she did not like and accept Bride by heart and soul. It could be seen through her remarks that she blamed Bride as the enigma on the family.

Sweetness felt that she will have to bear the consequences of the pressure from the people of society that she has given birth to a “Black Child”. It was the post-colonial impact on the mind of Sweetness that black people (African American and Mulatto) were connected with slavery.

The familial relationship was also affected when Sweetness's husband left her while knowing that she has given the child of a black girl. This was the first point in “*God Help the Child*” that how Sweetness is affected by the husband's action and by the social pressure she lives the affected and broken life with the feeling of otherness. While on the other side, Bride being the little child she felt the seclusion and the discriminative behavior from her mother.

Tony Morrison with the child abuse in the form of Bride also highlighted the cruelty and barbarisms in the form of oppressed Sweetness. Because she was under the pressure of society and with the lack of moral support from her husband she lived a deteriorated life. She did not accept Bride wholeheartedly and always showed her rejection at every stage in the life of Bride. It could be seen through the dialogue of Bride, “**It's not my fault**” (Morrison, *God Help the Child* p.1, chapter 1) the words were uttered when Sweetness was talking to her husband.

Sweetness became the prey of the social stereotype if a daughter is born, the woman (mother) is going to be responsible for the birth. This ignorance was prevailing in American society. This was social cancer to grill a woman and torture her mentally in her entire life by her husband and the society itself. On the other side, we can see the

regression in the character of Sweetness when she was doing the introspection of her life. She said, **“So I guess I’m still the bad parent being punished forever till the day I die for doing the well-intended, and in fact, the necessary way I brought her up. I know she hates me”** (Morrison, *God Help the Child* p.4, ch.3). She is regretting her life that how she behaved her entire life to Bride and she knew that she did the unforgettable sins with her daughter.

Bride had been facing discriminative behavior since her childhood in the hand of her family and society. She did not receive any kind of relaxation from her home, friends, and society as a whole. When she was a child, she was told not to say her “Mama” but “Sweetness” by her mother. Sweetness did not want herself to be embarrassed in the locality because of her (Bride). Apart from her brutal and racial acts, to cover the negligence she said that Bride should learn in her childhood how she will be treated in that barbaric society when she grows up.

Apart from her mother, she was also rejected by her boyfriend. Booker said to her, **“You, not the woman I want”** (Morrison, *God Help the Child*). He is not interested in Bride, the reason was the skin color (dark) of Bride. Bride faced rejection in her entire life which created feelings of otherness in her from the beginning. She could not get equal rights as it is seen in her entire life.

Bride oppressed life can be taken as the crystal clear example of the life of other people like her in America. People from the origin of Africa who migrated to America were the main targeted community to live depressed life. Toni Morrison narrated Bride

in her novel **“too weak, too scared to defy sweetness, or the landlord, or Sofia Huxley”** (Morrison, *God Help the Child*).

The life of Bride is seen as devastated by discrimination, brutality, and the inhuman behavior of society. She felt and witnessed every bad experience in her life. She was suffering from place to place and from people to people but she did not receive any positive response. She just got the aloofness and seclusion in her life and nothing else. She traveled from place to place to overcome her pain and the bad experience in her life. Bride herself is the vivid picture of otherness in the novel “*God Help the Child*”. The findings of this work highlight how color, race, ethnicity, and gender discrimination crippled the life of Bride. Otherness is the fact of American society and the novel of Tony Morrison made the universal theme through the dialogues.

5. CONCLUSION

To sum up the whole discussion, we conclude that the concept of otherness can be vividly seen in the novel “*God help the child* (2015)” by Tony Morrison. Throughout the novel, we understand that the inequalities; racism, colorism, sexism, and marginalization of the society of the United States are the core issues to be discussed and there is a dire need to realize them on the international level. As a whole, we understand that human beings are equal and there is no space for such discrimination in the name of such inequalities in society. Tony Morrison like other prominent writers highlighted and raised their voices against such evil practices same like in the colonial world should be stopped and let the peace prevail in the society so that the people can

live a better life irrespective they are from any background, whether they are black or white, king or layman, male or female.

In the novel “God help the child (2015)” the main character Bride was deprived of her basic rights that she was born black and her parents denied her that she was not their child at all. Even her mother told her that she should call her “Sweetness” (her original name) instead of “Mom” or “Mother”. Furthermore, her friend (lover) left her alone even leaving his belongings. Therefore, these shreds of evidence highlight these inequalities going on in the United States. This evil practice can be eradicated from society if human beings are treated equally otherwise the situations will be worse than we have today.

6. REFERENCES

- Chousein, B. C. (2013, August 11). Retrieved from World Architecture Community retrieved from <https://worldarchitecture.org>
- Morrison, T. (2015). *God help the child*. New York : Alfred A. Knopf Toronto USA.
- Gras, D. (2016). Post What? Disarticulating Post-Discourses in Toni Morrison’s *God Help the Child*. *Humanities*, 1-18.
- Ramírez, M. L. (2017). ‘Racialized Beauty’: The Ugly Duckling in Toni Morrison’s *God Help the Child*. *Complutense Journal of English Studies*, 173-189.
- Ramirez, M. L. (2020). The New Witch in Tony Morrison's *Song of Solomon* and *God Help the Child*. *African American Review*, 41-54.
- Sahar Abdelkarim Asad Mashaqi, K. ((2018). A Postcolonial Approach to the Problem of Subalternity in Toni Morrison’s *God Help the Child*. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics & English Literature*, 177-183.
- Toni Morrison. “Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature.” *Michigan Quarterly Review* 28 (1989): 1–34.
- Touré. *Who’s Afraid of Post-Blackness?: What It Means to Be Black Now*. New York: Free Press, 2011.
- Wolf, N. (2004). *The Beauty Myth; How Images of Beauty are Used Against Women: Mitos Kecantikan: Kala Kecantikan Menindas Perempuan*. (A. Swastika, transl.). Yogyakarta: Niagara. (Original Book, 2002).