



An Examination Of Trauma's Impact And The Rebirth Of Characters In Toni Morrison's *God Help The Child*

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Abstract The present study analyses how a young abandoned woman achieved success in her life despite experiencing childhood trauma, parental negligence, and societal discrimination, using the character Lula Ann Bridewell from Toni Morrison's *God Help the Child* as a case study. For a child, parents are solely responsible, and abandonment during childhood can lead to a complex phase that often results in trauma. Healing from trauma becomes more feasible when individuals possess self-confidence, self-empowerment and self-motivation. Judith Herman Lewis' trauma theory explores the consequences and healing process of trauma, detailing how a traumatized child navigates obstacles imposed by the dominant society and establishes their self-identity without familial support.

Key words: Trauma, Abandon, Self-empowerment, Self-identity

Trauma is a German word that means "wounds." At first, it was considered a 'physical wound', and later, it was only considered an 'emotional wound'. Trauma emerged in the 1990s.

Trauma is a distressing experience or event that impacts one's personal ability to cope and function. Human beings are easily affected physically and mentally. These types of wounds are called trauma. Trauma can be emotional, physical, and psychological harm. Those who will experience traumatic incidents like abuse,

discrimination, poverty, humiliation, sudden deaths of loved ones, natural disasters, or accidents are called to experience trauma. Accidents and natural disasters are the only traumatic events that are limited in duration and scope and are easily overcome.

The emotional and psychological trauma like abuse, discrimination, and abandonment are the long-lasting traumatic events that the healing process may have taken a long time.

Particularly during childhood, trauma can impact a child's perception of harm or impairment to their physical and mental health, and it may have long term consequences. A child's experiences of physical neglect, mental assault, witnessing violence and sexual assault are all considered forms of childhood trauma. Those who experience trauma during their pregnancy will undoubtedly affect their child, and this will continue until the child's death.

Trauma is not easily ended for one; it will continue at the end of their life. The term adverse childhood, which means childhood psychological disorder, means that those experiencing adverse childhood will also continue their adult lives, and they will experience depression, suicide, self-harm, alcohol misuse, and relationship difficulties. Traumatic symptoms are different from person to person because everyone's response to traumatic incidents is different. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) occurs in the weeks and months following the stressful event, when the symptoms of trauma either remain the same or worsen. Post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a mental health condition that can arise from trauma.

The term post-traumatic stress disorder can create distress and interfere with a person's daily life. Intrusive thoughts, memories, hypervigilance, hyper arousal, and feeling unsafe are some common reactions to traumatic events. Cathy Caruth defines trauma and its effects in *Unclaimed Experience* as; "In its most general definition, trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (Caruth11). In general, trauma is a reflection of unexpected or devastating incidence resulted in recurrent traumatic effects such as hallucination and other indiscreet phenomenon. Further, it is an extremely uncommon experience that characterizes an abruptcatastrophic occurrence.

Trauma can affect any human being at any age. Trauma can affect specific individuals directly in addition to affecting groups or collectivises. A trauma is the unique personal experience of an event or ongoing condition in which the individual feels that their own physical integrity, the physical integrity of a family member is in danger, and their ability to process and integrate their feelings is overwhelmed. This type of trauma is described in Toni Morrison's

novel *God Help the Child*.

This paper investigates how the protagonist overcame societal neglect, parental abandonment and early trauma to attain achievement in her life. Morrison's *God Help the Child* is a story of childhood trauma and abuse, but it is also a tale of healing and redemption. The childhood trauma was perfectly resembled by a well-known and most famous American novelist,

Chole Anthony Wofford Morrison, widely known as Toni Morrison. She was born on February 18, 1931, in Chole Ardelia Wofford. She did a under graduate degree in B.A. in English from Howard University in 1953. She did M.A in American literature from Cornell University in 1955. Her writing career started in 1970. she published her first novel *Bluest Eye* in 1970. Her second novel, *Sula* was published in 1973 and nominated for the National Book Award. She earned precious award like National Book Critics Circle Award in 1977 for *Songs of Solomon*.

Toni Morrison won the Pulitzer Prize for *Beloved* in 1988 which was published in 1987. She got the Noble Prize in Literature in 1993. Her other most important works are *The Black Book* (1974), *Tar Baby* (1981), *Recitatif* (1983), *La Isla de Los Caballeros* (1988), *Jazz* (1992), *Paying in the Dark* (1992), *Paradise* (1997), *The Big Box* (1999), *Love* (2002), *The Book of Mean People* (2002), *A Mercy* (2008), *Penny Butter Fudge* (2009), *Home* (2012), *The Origin of Others* (2017), *The Source of Self-Regard* (2019). Toni Morrison was a giant of the literary world and black literature. Morrison was the first black woman to write. Her novels and other works are based on child abuse, trauma, sexual molestation, neglect, colourism, and the legacy of slaves, the traumatic history of African Americans, interracial discrimination, and restoration processes.

These themes are compiled in her novel *God Help the Child* Toni Morrison's 11th novel; this novel was published on April 30, 2015. In this novel Toni Morrison explores the ways in which childhood experience impact adults. Because her mother, who has lighter skin, found it difficult to love and accept her, Bride, a successful young Black lady, became the person she is today. Bride transforms herself to move past her history. Toni Morrison asserts that parents only give care of their children. Parental concern is a boost for every child because childhood is a memorable and golden period of a child's life. Toni Morrison's character Lula Ann Bridewell was the protagonist of the novel *God Help the Child*. As a child, Lula was disliked by her mother, Sweetness and her father, Louis, only because of Bride's colour.

Lula has blue-black skin, but her mother Sweetness and father Louis are white-skinned, so they are unable to tolerate their daughter's skin tone. Toni Morrison asserts in her novel *God Help the Child* that the protagonist character of this novel Bride's mother Sweetness does not take responsibility to her daughter's skin colour. She blames her daughter Bride only. In the first line of the novel *God Help the Child*, Toni Morrison described as:

"It is not my fault. So you can't blame me. I didn't and have no idea how it happened. It didn't take more than an hour after they pulled her out from between my legs to realize something was wrong. Really wrong" (Morrison 3)

Bride, who is referred to as her mother, has extremely dark complexion from birth. No one in the family resembled that shade of colour.

Sweetness does not like her daughter, Lula Ann Bridewell. She is not a good mother; she does not allow Lula to call her 'Mama'; instead, she insists Bride to address her as 'Sweetness' (Morrison 6). Every child must want parental love and affection, but Bride only receives harsh words and rejection from their parents. It was affecting her a lot. This incident formed childhood trauma for Bride. Childhood trauma, specifically, can affect a child's experience of harm or damage to their psychological and physical body and may have far effect. Lula's father, Louis, left her wife, Sweetness, because he did not want to become the father of dark-skinned Bride.

Sweetness could not tolerate her husband's separation. She believes that Lula is the reason for her life's endlessness.

Sweetness even doesn't want to touch her daughter. Sweetness always feels very ashamed to have Lula as a daughter only because of her skin colour. Morrison explores sweetness's thoughts about her daughter as; "She was so black she scared me. Midnight black,

Sudanese black" (Morrison 3). The protagonist character Bride's childhood was very stressful. When Lula was born, her mother decided to put her in an orphanage. Generally, if a child is put in an orphanage because of a lack of parents, but Lula was mentally abandoned by her mother. Abandonment implies not only leaving us outside but also mentally ignoring us. Especially those who are abandoned by their family are definitely having mental stress. Lula was also deeply affected by her parents' abandonment.

Lula does not know the meanings of the word love and care in her childhood; she saw only suffer during that time. In childhood, all children have some bitter moments, but they put them away easily because they all came from others. But Lula does not put it away that easily because it was only done by her mother. Researcher Van der Kolk said that for someone affected by childhood trauma, it is not easy to be unaltered again. But it can take time to forget those things that happened in their past events. Like Morrison's protagonist Bride struggling to overcome their traumatising obstacles. Despite our greatest efforts to reject it, Toni Morrison asserts in *God Help the Child* that the mind is continuously seeking clarity and is aware of the truth.

These lines are very suitable for Lula because, when she grows up at the age of fifteen, she wants to ignore her past trauma and struggles, instead of proving herself among white

Americans and her parents. Lula changed her name from 'Lula Ann Bridewell' to 'Bride' because she always wants to be unique. She was not worried about her skin tone. She always wore white outfits so that her black still resembled dark. Morrison describes as Bride's blackness as "in her advantage, beautiful white clothes" (Morrison 43). Whoever told her and blamed her skin tone, she retaliated with her outfit. Bride thought that the world focused on and judged their skin tone only, not their inner heart. She started a successful cosmetic company named "Sylvia Inc." It is one of the most famous beauty products in America, named "You Girl".

Bride's best friend, Brooklyn, also struggled, like Brain. Brooklyn always helps whatever brain faces the problem. When Bride reached young adulthood, she met Booker, the black man.

Both fell in love with each other. Bride doesn't know anything about Booker's past. Bride feels excited when Booker is beside her. Bride was such a bold and brave girl, as mentioned by Morrison. For instance, of Bride's courage, when she was young, she points out the sexual abuse culprit, Sofia. Sofia got prison for many years. Bride also had kindness to everyone when she was eighteen, she felt guiltier about Sofia's imprisonment, so she decided to meet her. She told lies to Booker, saying that she has work. So, Booker didn't care about this. Sofia gets angry at her, and she beats her cruelly.

Now Booker departs and says, "You are not the woman I want" (Morrison 8). Bride is unaware of the cause behind Booker's departure. She struggles to come to terms with their separation, which rekindles her past trauma. This situation brings to mind William Faulkner's famous quote: "The past experience is never dead" It's not even past - her childhood trauma is still there, right under her skin (Faulkner 1951). Bride endeavors to overcome her trauma, but it resurfaces once more. Following the dispute with Sofia, she experiences increased fatigue and discovers she is pregnant. Eager to share her joy with Booker, she seeks out his whereabouts. Finally, she arrives at the residence of Booker's aunt, the Queen, where she discloses Booker's childhood trauma: his brother was victimized by Landlord Sofia Huxley.

Booker is not able to tolerate Lula's meeting with Sofia. So that he left you. Bride comes to the realization and shares her emotions with Booker regarding her pregnancy; they both express joy about expecting their baby, and she also admits her deception to him. Bride falls asleep deeply and wakes up with a refreshed spirit. Bride's body returns to normal even she recounts the past, marking the end of her recuperation. Initially, Bride perceives memory as the most challenging aspect of the healing process. Herman says that, "long after the dangerous passed, traumatized people relive the event as though it were continually recurring in the present" (Herman 26). Bride realises her cringes, and she believes that she had emerged absolutely from her past trauma with her self-motivation, self-esteem and self-empowerment.

As a conclusion, regardless of the struggles and problems faced by Lula Ann Bridewell in Toni Morrison's novel *God Help the Child*, she refuses to relinquish her confidence. Continuously, she contends for her identity, demonstrating self-confidence, self-esteem, and empowerment without familial support. Trauma is an event that cannot be erased from one's memory, but with self-motivation, one can surely overcome

such obstacles. Lula Ann Bridewell serves as a prime example of Toni Morrison's strong and bold women, embodying selfempowerment and self-motivation.

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