

Complexities of Progenitorship in Toni Morrison's *God Help the Child*

D. Geetha^{1*} and S. Suganya²

¹Ph.D Research Scholar, Bharathiar University Post Graduate Extension and Research Centre, Erode, Tamil Nadu, India; geethaspd@gmail.com

²Assistant Professor, Bharathiar University Post Graduate Extension and Research Centre, Erode, Tamil Nadu, India

Abstract

This study focuses on the struggle and importance of mother in the life of an individual. Mothering is very difficult than fathering. Father plays a minimalistic role and it is the mother, whose part is vital in the upbringing of a child. It attests the pathetic and single mother Sweetness' struggle to raise her daughter Lula Ann Bridewell without physical and emotional oppression. Her strict brought up thus makes her daughter to attain the sense of selfhood and confidence.

Keywords: Confidence, Individual, Mothering, Oppression, Struggle

1. Introduction

The world of literature houses in its themes, conceptions, ideals, imaginations and visions manifested in various forms to enhance the understanding of humanity thereby enabling the human race to accept different perspectives and practices. The ideas are constantly in flux to suit the frame work and at the same time to question the established frame work. Morrison's works are known for its diversity and highlight the issues and themes exclusive to the community along with universal appeal and outlook. Her themes always revolve around the problems of woman, and have solution to overcome the same.

Woman is considered to be the strongest icon than man and she records a vital role in the life of man. Her role as a daughter, wife, sister, mother and friend are some of the prominent positions every woman performs perfectly. She concerns about everything and predict the things which have both positive and negative impact. She is riveted by other people; she either hope to be true or fear that it will become true. She is both the emotional creature and fact-based thinker.

Man can enjoy all the privileges and the society does not question him because it declares man in the highest range; man can do as per his wish – he does not have restrictions like woman; he can have any number of girlfriends, can break the relationship (even as a husband

or lover) if he does not need further and commence a new life with the woman he likes to live with. But this does not apply for a woman; it automatically gets reversed; she is not supposed to follow the same things done by man. The societal frame work never allows her to act according to her wish.

2. Parenting - The Onus and the Angst

Morrison's works prominently deal with the complexities of parenting and her last work, *God Help the Child* serves as a fine example. This novel deals with the saga of an African American single mother Sweetness, who becomes rude because of the racist ideals of America. The race consciousness during 1950's led to lack of self-esteem in woman. As a result, she emerges as an authoritative parent, protects her daughter Lula Ann from getting hurt and it results in her daughters' physical and mental development. More than the physical ease, the emotional well being is a much needed one for every child. She vows to raise Lula Ann to confront the changing world and people without any hurdles.

Sweetness' husband Louis abandoned her shortly after their daughter's birth, condemning the color of his daughter, for which Sweetness turned to be helpless. They

had three good years together but when Bride was born, he blamed Sweetness and treated Bride like a stranger and “more than that, an enemy” (5)¹. He never touched her and this was an utmost shock to Sweetness.

A girl child is a priceless treasure to the family; but Louis never understands this and deserts his family. Left in distress, Sweetness feels: “I don’t have to tell you how hard it is being an abandoned wife” (6)¹. Being a single parent, she finds very difficult to raise her daughter in a racially-biased society. As Bride is born black, Sweetness panics that her daughter cannot face the society which judges the people only by color. She transforms into a strict mother to mould her daughter into a bold girl to face the problems. She confesses that she has to be “very careful in how I raised her. I had to be strict, very strict. Lula Ann needed to learn how to behave, how to keep her head down and not to make trouble... her color is a cross she will always carry” (7)¹.

Through the characterization of Sweetness the hardships of being a woman and the turmoils of a single parent is unveiled. She is forced to be patient with the landlord Mr. Leigh and the friends and strangers who “would lean down and peck in to say something nice and then give a start or jump back before frowning”(8)¹. She is caught in the clutches of the patriarchal society which makes her feeble inside and courageous outside.

3. Bride's Inherited and Ingrained Values

Bride’s courage to face the society in a daring manner comes from her mother. While all the mothers pamper their child with love and warmth, Sweetness is far different from them. Adrienne Rich views that: “The cathexis between mother and daughter – essential, distorted, misused – is the unwritten story. Probably there is nothing in human nature more resonant with changes than the flow of energy between two biologically like bodies”². Her stringent nature towards Bride transforms her to accept everything patiently, without being caught in the depression. Bride feels low, when she is rejected by her boyfriend’s parents in terms of her color. She willfully shortens her name as Bride without seeking others’ consent. The mental ability to think without any dilemmas requires more confidence and this is rightly infused by her mother. The more repudiation she faces, the braver she emerges.

The discriminations Bride faces in her life fill her with grit and determination to become the Regional Manager of a cosmetic product called YOU, GIRL. When she gets rejected by her lover Booker Starbern, she is caught into the river of depression. Even though she wishes to overcome the loss of love, she feels dejected by his term, “you not the woman I want” (8)¹. She considers him as a selfish bastard because he has used her to the core. She wildly utters: “when we went to clubs and concerts we rode in my beautiful Jaguar or in cars I hired. I bought him beautiful shirts – although he never wore them – and did all the shopping” (12)¹. The man she loved has left her like her father.

Bride genuinely loves Booker. When he conceals everything about his family and especially about his brother’s death, she confesses everything to him right from the matters from childhood to her present times. She does not become emotionally weak but turns to be strong minded. She does not crave for the loss of Booker, by making herself depressed; instead she travels in search of him not to love him again but wants to know the reason behind his disregard and eventually finds him in his aunt Queen’s house. She does not burst into tears when she meets him after years but just gives a forcible kick, slaps him as hard as she could and grabs a Michelob bottle from a counter and breaks it on his head which makes him unconscious.

The stream of strength and courage of Bride originally arises from her mother who indirectly teaches her to meet the challenges during her tough times. There are times when Sweetness feels guilty for being rude towards her daughter, but she only perceives that there is no better option to raise Bride in the patriarchal environment. Even Bride considers her mother as stern but only Sweetness is aware about the hidden reasons behind her strict parenting, especially in the case of a daughter. She feels glad about her daughters’ career and growth. She blissfully utters:

Yes, I was tough on her. You bet I was. After she got all the attention following the trial of those teachers, she became hard to handle. By the time she turned twelve going on thirteen I had to be even tougher... See how she turned out? A rich career girl. Can you beat it? (12)¹.

She is delighted to enjoy the fruits of successful parenting.

When Bride reunites with Booker at the end, she aims to bring up their child like her mother. It is evident as she yearns: “A child. New life. Immune to evil or illness,

protected from kidnap, beatings, rape, racism, insult, hurt, self-loathing, abandonment...so they believe”(175)¹.

4. Conclusion

While analyzing the character of Sweetness, her whole life has been very tough and traumatic and the pathetic thing is that Bride too misunderstands her mother, without grasping the underlying fact. When Bride acquires motherhood, she too believes like that of her mother to rear her child free from racial air. Every woman accords much importance to mothering and always shares an unbreakable and emotional bond.

Mothers play a prominent role in the healthy development of children, making the world a much better place. They are most influential educators bestowing timeless wisdom, inculcating healthy sense of self-confidence and fostering spiritual strength which prepares the children to accomplish great things.

5. References

1. Morrison, Toni. *God Help the Child*. Vintage Books, 2015.
2. Rich, Adrienne. *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. W. W. Norton and Company, 1976.