

DREADFUL AND DARING EXPERIENCES OF TENDER KIDS IN ‘GOD HELP THE CHILD’

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Concentrating on the problems of black people, many writers produced remarkable novels in the literary world. Racism, colourism, child abuse, religion, poverty, terrorism etc., are the main concepts, the authors prefer to write in their literary works. Colonial conflicts, colour discriminations, economic differences, are rampant throughout the world. The traumatic experiences of minority people in many countries are being revealed to the world by many courageous writers. Tony Morrison is the one who is ready to mention the problems of the black people, gender discrimination and child abuse. In her latest novel *God Help the Child*, she has discussed the traumatic events of the small children, child exploitation both emotional and physical, relationship between parents and children in a realistic way. Thematically, this is a diverse novel. The sheer power, nuances and poetry make this book another masterpiece in her account. Morrison imbues this novel with her great mastery of prose which allows the readers to sweep through this novel at a stretch. Split into many different vignettes, some in first person and some in third person, the narration leaps back and forward in both time and location.

Lula Ann Bridewell, the protagonist in the novel has changed her name as Ann Bride and after sixteen years again shortened her name to Bride. She is tall, elegant and a blue-black beauty and many people look at her with great admiration. She always wears white dresses which reflect her natural beauty. Bride has grown up without love, tenderness, affection and apology.

Bride’s mother and father are light-skinned Afro-Americans who are afraid of their new-born blue-black daughter. Bride’s father Louis never touches his daughter and treats her like his enemy. He suspects his wife’s fidelity because of Bride’s dark skin and it is unable to bear her in his house for more years, he leaves the family. Bride’s mother doesn’t like her daughter call her ‘Mother’ or ‘Mama’, makes bride call her ‘Sweetness’. The reason is in American society colour discrimination is very common and if anyone observes the too-dark-skin of Bride, it is not safer either to Bride or to her mother. Bride’s mother always keeps her inside the doors and thinks it is

correct and safe to her daughter. She wants to be very strict with her daughter and feels that her strictness will help her daughter understand the reality of the society.

Here the author mentions the issue of colour discrimination by the story of Bride's grandmother Lula Mae. She is a housekeeper for a rich white couple who eats every meal she cooks and orders her to scrub their back while they bathe. But she is not allowed to touch the Bible the white people use. There are two Bibles in the church, one for the white people and other for the black people.

The more light skin they have, the more dignity they'll get. So Sweetness wants to hide her daughter Bride and never touches her. She practices tough love in order to prepare her charcoal black daughter for the discrimination she will face in the world. But Bride always wants the love and caring of her mother. She gets an opportunity in her primary school to please her mother and get her attention and affection. She accuses her teacher Sofia Huxley of molesting her which ruins the young teacher's life. For the first time Bride gets her mother's touch and appreciative looks of some people. Bride eventually recognizes her self-worth and leaves her mother as soon as she turns eighteen. She becomes the regional manager of Sylvia, Inc., a cosmetic company. She has designed and named a cosmetic "YOU, GIRL: Cosmetics for Your Personal Millennium" for girls and women of all complexions from ebony to lemonade to milk" (10). One of the designers Jeri advises her to wear only white dresses. "You should always wear white Bride. Only white and all white all the time. Not only because of your name – but because of what it does to you licorice skin."(33)

Bride starts using only white colour dresses and white accessories which make her stunning black beauty. Tony Morrison's characters refuse to live in self accuse and self blame. They want to prove their talent, show their calibre and get their self identity. When Bride is in the joy of success and satisfaction, her boy friend Booker leaves her saying "you are not the woman I want" (8) which hurt her self-respect and ego. Here Tony Morrison creates a suspicion in the minds of the readers about his departure. Why he has left Bride? What is her mistake? Is it colour complexion again? If it is colour, why he has chosen her as his girl friend? After some pages the readers can understand that colour is not the cause to abandon her because Booker adores her style, her dresses, her manners and her beauty. Bride generates enthusiasm and anxiety in the hearts of the readers and they also travel with Bride in search of Booker.

In the journey the readers notice how treatment in the past follows a person into the future, the feelings of inferiority and suppression are hard to erase. Booker Starberne has issues of his own, never tells about them to anyone. He likes Bride's lack of interest in his personal life and his whereabouts. Bride is totally focused on the peripheral things, Booker, who plays jazz, hides behind his intellect, applying himself to the study of the root of all evil, but never really freeing himself to become an entire person.

He carries a burden of rage from his childhood that keeps him from being his own person. Booker has been raised in a large, tight family with no television in sight. His family members are great readers and they encourage their children to read books and conduct family conferences. All the children and parents enjoy their Saturday morning meeting and feast until Adam's missing. Adam is brother of Booker. The Police have searched their house when Booker's father has given a complaint of his missing son Adam. After many days Adam's body is found in a culvert, bones under the strips of his mud-caked yellow T-shirt and no pants or shoes. Adam is a cute boy worshipped by Booker because he is the only person who knows about Booker completely. After some days, the family members come into their routine and the

conferences and breakfast feasts returned but Booker never forgets his brother. He is surprised and thins, “how could they forget and just go on? Who and where was the murderer?” (117)

Then Tony Morrison tells about the cruel nature of people who in the disguise of beauty and benevolence attract the small kids and molest them, abuse them, rape them and kill them. She has satirically addresses the murderer as “nicest man in the world”. “When Booker was fourteen years old, the nicest man was caught and convicted of SSS, the sexually stimulated slaughter of six boys, each of whose names, including Adam’s was tattooed across the shoulders of the nicest man in the world.” (118) He is a retired auto mechanic comes for home repairs, attracts the children with his little dog, a terrier. When the public demands for his death, Booker thinks that a simple death is not enough for the nicest man. He doesn’t want to share his feelings with the public or with his family members. He feels that it is a private and silent agreement between his brother and him. When he asks his parents to start a foundation in his brother’s name, they haven’t shown any interest which makes him leave the family. The person who understands his real agony is his distant relative, his aunt Queen. Tony Morrison creates Queen’s character as a delightful, vivacious and interesting one. Though Queen’s role is simple but her character is the ripest among other characters.

Tony Morrison has tried to apply magic realism in some of the incidents. She has also tried to apply psycho-analytical theory in this story. She has combined magic realism with Freud’s psycho-analytical theory through Bride’s character. When Bride is happy she hasn’t got any peculiar experiences in her life. But she has felt eccentric changes in her body when her lover Booker has left her. “It was when I got dressed for the drive I noticed the first peculiar thing. Every bit of my pubic hair was gone. Not gone as in shaved or waxed, but gone as in erased, as in never having been there in the first place.” (13) But the hair on her head is normal and she doesn’t have any acne or skin disease. It is her psychological feeling that her relation with her lover purely sexual and it is the indication that she has lost her sexual relation with her lover.

She has felt that her two ears which had been pierced since she was eight are gone. There is no hole on her ear lobes and it is difficult for her to wear any ear rings. Ear rings are symbols to show femininity and Bride feels that losing her lover meaning losing her femininity. This also indicates psychosexual feeling of the protagonist.

Next change which is also a combination of psychological and magic realism reflects the inner sensitivity if Bride. When Bride is searching for Booker’s address, her car bumps a big tree as she is unable to observe an automobile coming opposite to her. Her leg is struck between the seats and fractured. A Good Samaritan family Evelyn and Steve have helped her when their adopted daughter Rain has noticed Bride struck in her car. They have given her shelter for six weeks because the doctor has suggested her to take medication to correct her leg for six weeks. After six weeks, when she is bathing heartily she has discovered that her chest is flat. “Completely flat, with only the nipples to prove it was not her back.” (92) Tony Morrison has beautifully applied ‘magic realism’ which shows the world through others’ eyes. Here Bride observes the changes in her which are genuine to her mind. But others don’t notice the changes in her. She hides herself not to show the changes in her which are merely her illusions. At the end, when she meets Booker she perceives all her body parts and she is same like before. This shows her psychological feeling about her lover.

Magical realism tries to tell about the deep inner thinking and its influence on the mindset of the people. It never encourages the black magic or other perverted actions. It tells that one person’s strong aversion can’t kill other person. So magical realist works put causally connected

events side by side in a way that doesn't appear to violate objective reality, but attempts to convince us by details that the events described are linked by more than chance. Bride takes all the incidents in a normally way and struggles to compose herself.

Though Tony Morrison presents the bigotry of White people, she hasn't given censure criticism on the Whites. She shows the intolerance and distorted behaviour of people in some areas and goodness of people as well. Bride's mother Sweetness has given an explanation why she has maintained distance from her daughter with an incident that happened in the society. She tells, "I once saw a girl nowhere near as dark as Lula Ann and who couldn't be more than ten years old tripped by one of a group of white boys and when she fell and tried to scramble up another one put his foot on her behind and knocked her flat again. Those boys held their stomachs and bent over with laughter. Long after she got away, they were still giggling, so proud of themselves." (41) So she has trained her daughter not to look at any one and suggested her to bend her head down while she is walking on the road. Bride has exposed another incident in her life. When she was six years old, her class students were making ape sounds and scratching of the sides, imitating zoo monkeys and treated her like a maverick. "One day a girl and three boys heaped a bunch of bananas on my desk and did their monkey imitations. They treated me like a freak, strange, soiling like a spill of ink on white paper". (56) Though the whites don't call them nigger or negro or cunt, their detestation is clearly visible in their eyes and in their behaviour.

Child Abuse: Child exploitation and maltreatment are very common in the American society. Morrison is not very particular about the black children in the child-abuse cases as she has spotted the sufferings of white children also. In *God Help the Child*, she has mentioned two cases: a boy and a girl who are smothered by the elders. Bride's apartment owner Mr. Leigh has made a boy does dirty things on him to get sexual satisfaction. Though the small boy is crying, he hasn't left the boy and crushed him between his thighs. Another incident is Rain's mother. Rain's mother has insisted her to do nasty things to satisfy a man who paid her money. When Rain has bit him, she got angry and threw her out of the house in the rain and didn't allow her into the house. Steve and Evelyn have seen her and saved her from her mother. Bride is moved by little Rain's story and asks a question.

"If you saw your mother again what would you say to her?"

Rain grinned. "Nothing. I'd chop her head off."

"Oh, Rain. You don't mean that."

"Yes. I do. I used to think about it a lot. How it would look – her eyes, her mouth, the blood shooting out of her neck, Made me feel good just thinking about it." (102)

This incident reveals how the small kids suffer because of the single parents, because of stark poverty and perverted people. Though they try to forget the dark memories from their mind, they can't. This leads to vindictive nature and when they grow up, they do malicious things. According to recent survey conducted throughout the world, child abuse and trafficking cases are raised massively. 80% of the kids especially girls have faced either molestation or abuse. Even the parents pay a lot of attention towards their toddlers; they are unable to save their little ones from the brutal clutches of the perverts. Many celebrities have revealed their torments they faced when they were small children. Exploitation of virginity, money, status etc., is out of control in many countries.

Observing such type of incidents in the society, Morrison has reasonably given the title "God Save the Child" to her book.

The ending of the story is really attention-grabbing with the story of Queen and unison of Bride and Booker. Booker and Bride serve their lovable aunt Queen genuinely and decide to keep her with them. But unfortunately she dies and makes Booker and Bride alone. When Bride is pregnant, both Booker and Bride feel happy and decide to give the child resistance to face the murky and malevolence of the people with great courage and get peaceful and mirthful life. “A child. New life. Immune to evil or illness, protected from kidnap, beatings, rape, racism, insult, hurt, self-loathing, abandonment. Error-free. All goodness. Minus wrath.” (175)

Bride tells about her pregnancy to her mother Sweetness but doesn't mention baby's father name. Sweetness feels very happy about the news and starts thinking about the society and feels that still God must help their baby. She soliloquies and addresses Bride, “Listen to me. You are about to find out what it takes, how the world is, how it works and how it changes when you are a parent. Good luck and God help the child.” The conclusion is rational and practical. Readers accept the conclusion as a correct one without any doubt.

Reference

Morrison. Tony. *God Help the Child*, Chatto & Windus, April, 2015.