

# A STUDY OF ATTACHMENT THEORY IN TONI MORRISON'S *GOD HELP THE CHILD*

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## ABSTRACT

Literature is like a soul where everything will submerge into it. Most Afro-American writers depict the reality of people's relationship among themselves in their society. One among them is Toni Morrison. Good parenting leads to good life; Parenting is a real base for all the infants. Morrison starting from her first novel *The Bluest Eye* till her last novel *God Help the Child* clearly exposes her ideas about relationship between parents and children. According to Attachment theory, attachment has a lasting psychological connectedness between human beings especially, between parents and children. The researcher attempts to explore the most loving and the least bothered parenting through Toni Morrison's *God Help the Child* in relation to attachment theory with some textual evidence.

**KEYWORDS:** Literature, Afro-American literature, Toni Morrison, Parenting, Children, Attachment theory, Psychology.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

"We never know the love of a parent till we become parents ourselves", says Henry Ward Beecher. It is rightly said, the moment a person becomes parent he/she has lots of responsibility to be fulfilled. A Parent is not only a caretaker who takes care of his/her children by giving them their daily needs rather they should be real heroes in showing the children to lead a better future. It is very much essential to keep an eye on their children so that they are groomed to be good humans.

A Parent should lead his/her children like a shepherd who takes care of goats. Being a good shepherd to their children, parents can help them bear real fruits in future. It is from the parents that children learn. It is of great significant that each parent must lead their children in every walks of their early stages of life. Each child is precious.

This paper is an attempt to analyse how Toni Morrison expresses the relationship between parents and children in her novel *God Help the Child*. The researcher with the help of the novel aims to analyse the bonding between Parents and Children with Attachment Theory.

## 2. A Safe Heaven- An Essential Beginning to Life

When an infant is born, it is compared to an empty bottle. It is safe and secure. Initially to grab attention or to try he will unconsciously express his ideas. It learns to speak, express ideas to others as it grows gradually. As Jaques Lacon says, "Unconscious is structured like a language". Here the word 'unconscious' is, the child who attempts to speak in the initial level without knowing what it really expresses. Like Structure of language, a child also starts to speak from letter to sentences. Through this a child creates its own unique identity. Children behavior and activities depict the way they are brought up. It is the mere responsibility of parents to lead the future of children in a right way. Especially, it is a mother who plays an essential role in bringing up children. A known secured heaven will be nothing but mother's womb where a baby starts grooming. The bonding between a mother and a child plays a vital role throughout its life.

### 3. ATTACHMENT THEORY

“Attachment is a deep and permanent emotional bond that unites a person to another across period and universe (Ainsworth, 1973 and Bowlby, 1969)”. “Attachment is regarded as explicit actions of any person in the childhood, such as looking for closeness to the affectionate character when sad or in danger (Bowlby, 1969)”.

Attachment performance of youngsters towards a kid embraces reacting acutely and applicably to the need of the child. This behavior seems common irrespective of nations. Attachment theory describes sprouting of the relationship between parent and child and the growth of this bond in the long run.

Attachment theory in psychology initiates with the influential work of John Bowlby in 1958. In 1930, John Bowlby, as a psychiatrist, attended to many children who were emotionally disturbed when he was working in Child Guidance Clinic in London.

This involvement steered Bowlby to study the significance of the parent-child relationship in respect to their communal, emotive as well as rational development. Specially, this molded the confidence regarding the bond concerning the small sucking child split-ups from its mother and later alienation induced. Bowlby to express his attachment gives three benchmarks in the theory.

1. The early position and genetic task of close emotional bonds between individuals are controlled by cybernetic system situated within the central nervous system.
2. The child's development grounded on the predominantly influenced by manners the child is handled and cared by people significantly the mother figure.
3. Theories that appeal definite stages of development are needed.

### 4. TONI MORRISON AND GOD HELP THE CHILD

Toni Morrison was born on February 18, 1931 in Lorain, Ohio. She was the second wealth to her family. She lived during the great despair in her country. She was fascinated in rituals, folklore, music and myths. Her works were: *The Bluest Eye* (1970), *Sula* (1973), *Song of Solomon* (1977), *Tar Baby* (1981), *Beloved* (1987), *Jazz* (1992), *Paradise* (1998), *A Mercy* (2008), *Home* (2012) and *God Help the Child* in 2015. She was awarded for outstanding works in her literature. She passed away on August 5, 2015. The novel *God Help the Child* is not a chronological portrayal, rather it has a few chapters to explain the story to the reader and evidently there are constant shifts from the current situation of the narrator to the past throughout the text. The novel begins with the statement of the protagonist of the novel, namely Sweetness, the protagonist

It's not my fault. So you can't blame me. I didn't do it 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. She was so black she scared me (Morrison, 2015).

Though Lula Ann was born of two light-skinned parents, she was black in complexion when she was born and the mother was appalled looking at her appearance. This created a deep distress in her and she was struggling to understand why this had happened. It had repercussions on the marital life of Sweetness and her husband and consequently a rift was created between them resulting in breakdown in their wedlock. Lula Ann was treated as a stranger and they even went to the extent of making her untouchable. The husband of Sweetness was reluctant to get involved in his new-born's life; he would not even touch her.

With all these ups downs, life kept going for Lula Ann. When she turned twenty three, she changed her name to Bride. She started a new career as a cosmetics distributor. There is something praiseworthy about this girl, she had a helping tendency. We have to speak about Booker who was her close friend. The journey of finding Booker culminated in a dramatic and emotional scene. Both of them had a similar background story of their early childhood, until that day they were haunted by the pain of that particular experience. However, it appeared that both of them were heading towards a prosperous time. Bride revealed that she was pregnant and both of them decided to give the new child an upbringing that they did not receive and a happy childhood experience which they were deprived of. Together they decided to provide the child with a safe and secure atmosphere that they did not have. The decision that they made was really marvelous. They did not pass on the negative past, but they presented something which was completely new and unexpected.

### 5. GOD HELP THE CHILD AND ATTACHMENT THEORY

The first chapter, titled, 'Sweetness' is entirely on Lula Ann's mother. She likes to be called by her name instead of being addressed as Mother. "I told her to call me 'Sweetness' instead of 'Mother' or 'Mama'. It was safer (p 6)". Lula Ann's mother wanted to call her daughter by her name Sweetness. She was supposed to be sweet in her approach, character and relationship. But she acted contradictorily to the quality her name meant to be. It was ironical indeed.

The only distress that Sweetness had from the time she gave birth to Lula Ann was that the child was black-skinned, whereas the parents were light-skinned. It was disheartening that the parents were troubled by the external look of the child for which she was not responsible. Instead of loving the daughter, she hated. She didn't hesitate to think whether the child could be given in adoption or be left on the steps of a church totally abandoned. Rather than caring for the child, the mother had a strong impulse to kill her by way of holding a blanket over the child's face to stop her breath. All these happened due to lack of love for the child.

According to Bowlby's theory, the early childhood years are very important to a newborn. The mother has the ultimate responsibility to love and care for the child. A safe ambient should be created. Sweetness did not possess such qualities of a mother, instead she had extreme hatred and dislike. She kept a distance from her child physically, emotionally and psychologically. "nursing her was like having a pickaninny sucking my teat. I went to bottle-feeding soon as I got home (p. 5)."

Sweetness, as a mother should have given the child everything she needed to grow as a happy and healthy child. But all along, the mother expressed extreme repulsion and treated her as she was a non-entity. The child was denied of love and security.

Her black skin would scare white people or make the laugh? and trick her. See if I hadn't trained Lula Ann properly she wouldn't have known to always cross the street and avoid white boys (p. 41).

The attachment theory holds a principle that the primary caregiver should afford the infant with love and nutrition in order to ensure healthy and normal development. Contradictory to this theory, what Sweetness provided was rejection and acceptance. The child became weak and unable to handle difficulties by the way she was trained to avoid danger and unwanted attention. The mother gave a wrong understanding of appearance. She behaved as if only appearance mattered the most. The child should have been trained to be proud of her identity.

Sweetness had her own way of parenting Lula Ann and she thought that it was her unique way of expressing her love to the daughter in spite of her dark skin. While comparing the theory of Bowlby with her parenting, she failed to provide the child with emotional security, closeness and love which are supposed to be the most important aspects of an infant's life. She failed in her duty as a mother.

Lula Ann was not also caring for her mother; the love of a child to its mother was missing in their relationship. This was realized by Sweetness when Bride moved away from her, leaving her alone. "What you do to children matters. And they might never forget. She sends me money and stuff, but I ain't seen her in I don't know how long" (p. 43). Lula Ann had the heart to take care of her mother but in an affectionate way; it was cold and odd. Though she was given money and other things she was in need of, yet real love and closeness were absent in their relationship. It should be noted that Lula Ann experienced maternal deprivation while applying the theory of Bowlby. The physical presence of mother did not give her love and attention that every child needed.

Bowlby, in his theory quotes that every human person has a basic need for closeness and love, he calls it monotropy. He speaks of affectionless psychopathy which means that a person suffering from it will act on impulse and will have no regard for the consequences his or her actions might cause. Bride could be considered as a clear example of a person who could suffer from affectionless psychopathy. Her contribution in the trial towards Huxley proves it.

Bride went through unbearable feelings when she was abandoned by Booker, who was everything for her. He must have resembled her mother. Bowlby expresses that all human beings, irrespective of age, need people in close proximity. So that everyone is assured of someone's strong support and guidance. We explore a new world when there is attachment to a person and there should be a secured feeling with regard to the caretaker, only this will turn the human beings to develop into secure and well-functioning beings. This attachment is like two sides of the same coin. These two sides are supposed to complement each other. Bride did not experience the strong love of a caretaker who was with her in difficulties. As a consequence, Bride sought comfort and company in alcohol, pill and casual sex.

My life is falling down. I'm sleeping with men whose names I don't know and not remembering any of it. Sweetness. Why am I so miserable? Because he left me? I have what I've worked for and am good at it. I'm proud of myself, I really am, but it's the Vicodin and the hangover that make me keep remembering some not-so-proud junk in the past (p. 53).

Bride could not comprehend how she got trapped into such behavior and way of life that she was leading. Her upbringing had a negative impact on her adult life. Attachment theory expresses a notion that addictiveness is way of affecting regulation. She found addiction to immoral life and drugs as the best way to cope with her reality. Everything became tough. It was difficult for her to overcome the abandonment by Booker. At the same time, she did not realize the fact that her problems were linked to the absence of a genuine and loving caregiver in her early childhood.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Toni Morrison clearly expresses to every reader through her novel *God Help the Child* the real suffering of childhood through the character Lula Ann. From this novel Morrison clearly exhibits how attachment plays a vital role and how non-attachment leads children to a wrong direction, as Lula Ann goes after men and alcohol and also the pain and agony of childhood experience a person may go through due to the absence of a caregiver and lack of attention.

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