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RESEARCH ARTICLE

COLORISM IN TONI MORRISON'S GOD HELP THE CHILD

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Abstract

The present paper has been specifically designed to scrutinize the aspect of colorism in Toni Morrison's well acclaimed novel *God Help the Child*. African American literature is an academic body of writing produced by African descendants residing in America. The literary canon of African- American literature emerged in late part of 18th century in oral forms like sermon, gospel, music, jazz, blues and spirituals. African American writers have deliberately expressed their painful agony, racial segregation, social injustice and ill treatment which they tolerated in white American society. Toni Morrison was a prolific female novelist of African-American literary writing. Morrison's eleventh novel *God Help the Child* prominently deals with colorism, racism and child abuse. Conceptually, the term 'Colorism' was coined by Alice Walker to address the superiority of lighter or white skin over the dark. Colorism has its genetic roots in racism because without racism the standardization of color conflict would not be exist. The novel unfolds the story of Bride, also known as Lula Ann who is born with dark black color. She receives ill treatment by her own parents and gets negative rejection because of having black skin. Bride's dark color ruins her golden childhood period. Louis Bridewell rejects Bride from accepting as his baby. Similarly, Sweetness breeds Bride with harsh treatment and cruelty. The research study will primarily focus on to address the color conflict faced by child protagonist Lula Ann.

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Introduction:-

African people were exported as slave laborers in different continents through Atlantic slave trade. African people were placed as 'sub human/ non human' category by their white masters. African community lived under the dominance of their 'white masters' who were considering them as 'non human'. Black African community faced brutal treatment because of their race, class, gender and of course color. For white people, black people were merely existed. In Ralph Ellison's novel *Invisible Man* the narrator confesses, 'I am invisible, not physically but psychologically'. African community survived under the plight of marginality.

African American literature has acquired the independent statues in literary canon of world literature which began with the writing of Phillis Wheatley in late 18th century. It is an academic body of writing that refers the literature written by African descendants in the United States. African American writers pretended their voice to overcome racism and slavery. These writers have treated the painful suffering, issues and challenges of Black African

community as the subjects of their writing. African American literature includes themes such as racism, slavery, social inequality, colorism and segregation.

Literature Review:-

Ahmed, Roz Salahuddin and Sherzad Shafi Babo in their collaborated article titled *Trauma in Toni Morrison's Novel God Help the Child (2019)* examines traumatic experiences of characters. In the novel Bride, Booker, Brooklyn and Rain all endures some kind of traumatic experience in their childhood. Bride was harshly treated and neglected by her parents. Booker suffers terribly from his brother's untimely murder. Brooklyn lives a life with incompetent parent who was blind to others abusing her. Rain tolerates such toughest hardship. Her mother sells her as a prostitute at early age.

Gol Man Gurung in his article *Racial Passing in Toni Morrison's Novel God Help the Child (2021)* has talked about racial discourse of different characters. African American community had to survive miserably because of their race. Racial oppression was the major factor to black African community in facing ill treatment in America. In the novel, Sweetness, Lula's mother was herself daughter of black parents but she was having a privilege of light skin. She was expecting to have her first baby with similar color. However, Lula Ann born with dark black color that gives mental shock to her. Sweetness endures Lula Ann with harsh treatment. She feels embarrassed on having a dark baby. She does not reveal her motherhood publicly.

Literary Portfolio of Toni Morrison

Born in Ohio, United States, Chloe Anthony Wofford Morrison popularly known as Toni Morrison was a prolific Nobel Prize winning African-American novelist, essayist, short story writer, editor and teaching faculty. She completed her bachelor degree with major English in 1953 from Howard University. Later on she joined Cornell University for her Master degree in 1955 under the subject American Literature. She earned many prestigious awards like National Books Critics Circle Award, Pulitzer Prize and American Book Award for her splendid works. In 1993, she won Noble prize for *Essays Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. She received highest civilian Award in 2012 by US president Barack Obama.

Morrison creatively portrayed the poignant and painful suffering of African community in her fictional works. Morrison's works are centrally pre occupied with racism, color conflict, segregation, inequality, child abuse and slavery. Morrison played vital role in bringing African-American literature into mainstream at global level. She opened a new arena and dimensions in African-American writing. Morrison's major novels include *The Bluest Eye (1970)*, *Sula (1973)*, *Song of Solomon (1977)*, *Tar Baby (1981)* and *Beloved (1987)* and *God Help the Child (2015)*. Once Morrison went to attend a lecture series of short stories. There she listened a story of black young girl who wanted to have blue eyes. Later on she composed her debut novel *The Bluest Eye* in 1970 with same theme. In the novel, she created the character of Pecola, a young Black African girl who want 'Blue Eyes' instead of light skin.

Beloved is a pathetic story of Black African woman who kills her own two years old daughter to save her from the plight of slavery and racial discrimination. *Sula* is a 1973 novel which represents the conflict of good versus evil. The question of right versus wrong can be traced through different characters. *Song of Solomon* published in 1977 displays the controversial relationship between white and black. The plot portrays the life of Milkman, an African American man who searches for his identity in white world. *Tar Baby* is a story of Jadine, a fashionable model and Son who washes up the street' estate on Caribbean island. *God Help the Child (2015)* projects the color conflict of white and black. Bride, the central character of the novel receives harsh treatment from her parents because of her dark color.

Colorism in Toni Morrison's God Help the Child

In western society, along with race, color also equally matters. Racial segregation based on race and color has been existed in many parts of the world. Conceptually, the term 'colorism' was coined and practiced by renowned African American writer Alice Walker in the year of 1982. She invented the term to denote the superiority of white or light skin over black. White was superior in every aspects than black. White people strongly ignored the existence of black people due to their class, race and color considered them as inferior and lower.

Toni Morrison's *God Help the Child* profoundly deals with racism, colorism and child abuse. Lula Ann also known as Bride, a female child terribly faces the issue of color conflict in her childhood period. Ann's parents were having a privilege of lighter skin in white American society. They were curiously expecting their first child to have a same

body color. However, their strong fantasy regarding having lighter skin baby collapsed with the birth of Ann. Ann born with dark black color looking different than her parents. Sweetness and Louis receives traumatic shock after seeing their new born baby. Sweetness compares her child's blackness with Sudanese black people. She clearly blames on her husband regarding the blackness of their baby, she states that the blackness of their child has been inherited from her husband's family, not her's. She says,

Its 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. Really wrong. She was so black scared me. Midnight black, Sudanese black, I'm light skinned, with good hair, what we call high yellow, and so is Lula Ann's father. (Morrison: 71)

Similarly, Louis, Lula's father becomes frustrated internally and strongly rejects Lula from accepting as his baby. He considers Lula more than an enemy to him. He does not even to touch her body. In state of disgust, he breaks his marriage life and leaves both Sweetness and Lula forever. He ruthlessly imposed the responsibility of Lula on his wife. Sweetness narrates,

He wasn't a cussing man she when he said, "Godmann! What the hell is this? I knew we were in trouble. That's what did it. - what caused the fights between me and him. It broke our marriage to pieces. We had three good years together but when she was born he blamed me and treated Lula Ann like she was a stranger- more than that, an enemy. (Morrison: 87)

He never touched her. I never did convince him that i ain't never, ever fooled around with another man. He was dead sure i was lying. We argued and argued till i told him her blackness must be from his own family- not mine. That's when it get worse, so he bad he just up and left and i had to look for another, cheaper place to live. (Morrison: 87)

However, Sweetness endures the responsibility of Lula with many restrictions. She too rarely touches Lula's body. Sweetness feels extremely embarrassed to have a dark skin baby. To protect her social image at outside, she advises Lula not to call her 'mother or 'mama' publicly. She suggests Lula to call her as 'Sweetness'. Sweetness condemns negatively the physical appearance of Lula by comparing with 'witch'.

I told her to call me "sweetness" instead of "mother" or "mama". It was safer. Being that black and having what i think are too-thick lips calling me "mama" would confuse people. Besides, she has funny colored eyes, crow black with a blue tint, something witchy about them too. (Morrison: 107)

Conclusion:-

Through the novel *God Help the Child* Morrison directs her community to show that the issue regarding racism and colorism are divisive within their community too. Bride's mother develops the ideology of white people to measure people. She measures the human through the lance of color. A small child who is not aware from the parameters of 'beauty' receives ill treatment from her parents because of dark black color. She also don't know her dark black color will remain as 'cross' in her life. Bride faces many complexities from external world. The conflict of dark skin over lighter skin pressurize mostly to Bride throughout her childhood. Bride does not get the love and affection of 'motherhood' because of her dark color. Thus, Bride brutally encounters several prejudices on the racial ground.

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