

Maternal Abandonment: A Trauma in Dorothy Allison's *Bastard Out of Carolina*

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to explore the trauma of a child which happens due to the mother's abandonment of her child from the birth to the adulthood. In three ways the mother abandons her child and this paper analyses the types of abandonment. The outcome of such abandonment is also terrible which causes trauma in the mind of the victim. Even though the victim goes through all these trauma there is hope as well as despair to live further life. The solitude of the child which is abandoned by its mother is deeply analysed.

KEYWORDS: Motherhood, types of abandonment, trauma, solitude, hope

Dorothy Allison, through *Bastard Out of Carolina* brings out a teenaged mother who loves her daughter more than anything but abandons her daughter Bone unknowingly which is unnoticed by her too. She is very much sensitive towards the fake words of her second husband and tries to advise her daughter. Mother-child relationship is the greatest relationship. The love of mother does not equal to any other love and her attachment with her child cannot be removed easily by any person. Mother is the primary caregiver to whom the child finds fulfilment. The child may feel very free to expose their pains and emotions to her. Thus the maternal relation is both physically and emotionally inevitable for a child.

When a child is separated from its mother, they undergo anxiety disorder, where the child becomes fearful and nervous in the absence of its mother or caregiver. Moreover mother and daughter relationship has certain other feelings than any other relationships in the world. "Mother and daughters have a stronger attachment and greater intimacy than any other parent or child relationships..." (Thompson 899-900). Such relationships help the child to get success and help to lead the life more successfully.

According to Carlock "individuals with higher self esteem tend to believe that they are worthy of love and support and they can set and accomplish goals easily..." (395-98). Thus a mother's relation and her presence are unavoidable and are very much important for the entire life of a daughter. Most of the daughters consider their mother to be their best friend and share their feelings with her. But in her absence they will be entirely shattered and they can't find anyone in the place of their mother. Such are the greatness of the mother daughter relationship. If they lack their mother's presence in their infancy, it will affect the entire life of that particular daughter. As Klockars in his work suggests "... those daughters who have insecure bonds with their mothers in the period of infancy are more likely to have psychological problems less functioning such as reactive attachment

disorder, personality problems, and interpersonal relationship problems especially in the later adulthood...” (219-37).

If a person physically or emotionally or psychologically removes himself from other person who is attached to that person, it creates a kind of solitude and the victim feels the abandonment. As such if a mother abandons her children for some reasons, it results in maternal abandonment. It is an activity which causes a lot of troubles for the children when they come in the society. They will be noticed with different eyes by the fellows. Moreover the entire life of the victim is under question mark. They will be found with the despair and they have low self esteem.

Bone, the protagonist of the novel *Bastard Out Of Carolina* becomes victim of the process called maternal abandonment. She faces all the three types of motherly abandonment which are classified as emotional abandonment, psychological abandonment, and physical abandonment. She is the character who is subjected to acquire a bad status in the society because of the effect of the emotional abandonment of her mother. Emotional abandonment happens “when a parent withholds affection, nurturing or stimulation” (Clifton 199-208). That means the mother fails to provide the emotional needs for her right from the birth which can be connected with the nurturing of the child by its mother and the caring by her etc.

Right from the birth of Bone, she is devoid of her mother’s caring and nourishment. Anney, mother of Bone went on to an unconscious state for about three days after giving birth to her. Bone lacked the care of her mother and the unconscious state of her mother after giving birth to her paved the way for getting of a certificate stamped as illegitimate. This created a trauma in the mind of Bone from her childhood days itself. Bone proclaims her trauma of loneliness because of the absence of her mother as “...I’ve been called Bone all my life, but my name is Ruth Anne. I was named for and by... Aunt Ruth. My mama didn’t have much to say about it, since strictly speaking she wasn’t there...” (1). This is an emotional abandonment which is pointed as “her mother is not fully present for most of Bone’s life...” (Town 88).

The social status of the child is changed only because of the mother’s absence. Anney too regrets for the absence which created trauma in her child in every steps of her life. “Mama always said it would never have happened if she’d been awake...” (3). Moreover the victim Bone isn’t named by her mother. The naming of the child has a great role to its parents. But Bone is emotionally abandoned by her mother unknowingly. So the mistakes which have happened during the birth chased the entire life of Bone and she carried all the miseries of her childhood without describing to anyone. She portrays this as follows:

...Other than the name, they got just about everything else wrong. Neither Aunt Ruth nor Granny could write very clearly, and they hadn’t bothered to discuss how Anne would be spelled, so it wound up spelled three different ways on the form- Ann, Anne, Anna. As for the name of the father, Granny refused to speak...Aunt Ruth had never been sure of his last name anyway. They tried to get away with just scribbling something down, but if the hospital didn’t mind how a baby’s middle name was spelled, they were definite about having a father’s last name. So Granny gave one and Ruth gave another, the clerk got mad, and there I was certified a bastard by the state of South Carolina. (2-3)

Thus from the time of her birth she does not get the caring and nourishment of her mother and for several years Anney ran behind the officers and clerks to get a birth certificate which is not stamped as 'illegitimate'. The activities that Anney does are only because of the love of herself to her daughters but she failed to give an emotional support and caring to her daughter. She has a great concern for her daughter regarding the birth certificate. Even though Granny denies the need for the birth certificate which is not stamped as "illegitimate", Anney has a great concern about it. Granny used to say as "It didn't matter anyhow... Did people read courthouse records? Did they ask to see your birth certificate before they sat themselves on your porch? Everybody who mattered knew, and she didn't give a rat's ass about anybody else..." (3).

The major reason for Anney's emotional abandonment of her daughter is their poverty. She concentrated mainly in giving provisions for her daughters. She worked hard to feed her children. For that she used to leave them in her mother's home or with her sisters. But Bone liked to be in her home itself because her home with her mother will be happier to her. When those wishes fail to occur in real life, she faces the trauma because of the absence of her mother's presence and her nourishment.

Psychological abandonment happens "when the mother treats her children with coldness, apathy or indifference..." (Wyden). Such state of abandonment is also seen in *Bastard Out Of Carolina* where Ruth Anne Bone is depicted as the victim of psychological abandonment by the mother. She faces harassment through her step father both physically and psychologically. Right from the beginning of the novel she is molested by her stepfather in the absence of her mother. Glen hates Bone for her relation with her mother. He beats her brutally in the bathrooms in front of the eyes of Anney. The scars left as a result of the thrashes are severe and Anney, her mother finds no solution for the pains of her daughter. She used to hear and believe the fake reasons of her husband and she advises her daughter to be lovable to Glen. Anney will be angry towards Glen only for short time and she melts in the words of her husband and forgets the pains faced by her daughter. This does not mean that Anney does not love her daughter but she has love and fails to meet the psychological trauma of her daughter. Glen beats Bone for playing racehorse. Bone narrates that event clearly as follows:

...I heard the sound of belt swinging up... It hit me and I screamed. Glen swung his belt again. I screamed at its passage through air, screamed before it hit me...when Daddy Glen unlocked the door, Mama slapped him and grabbed me up in her arms...she cursed him and ran for water to wash my face...(106-07)

But Anney completely changes herself to the words of Glen. She is a more sympathetic character which makes her fall onto the words of Glen. More over she is unconscious about her daughter and fails to analyse the truth and also she forgets the duty of motherhood and always used to melt in the following words of Glen:

"Daddy Glen told her I had called him a bastard, that I had come running through the house knocking things over and called him that name. He cried... swore he hadn't meant to beat me so bad, he didn't know what had made him do it. He sobbed and then he didn't know what had made him do it. He sobbed and then beat his fists against the mattress so hard the springs squeaked". (107)

Glen then added with his dialogue that Anney's daughter told him that she hates him and he would never be her daddy, so he went crazy. Listening to her

words Anney's tension relieved and she comforted him and he too comforted her. "They were making love, Mama sighing, sobbing and Daddy Glen repeating her name ever and over..." (108). In such situation Bone is helpless and she experiences the trauma resulted her mother's abandonment psychologically. Whatever Glen does against Bone, Anney will be angry towards him for about few days and again she goes towards him. In another one moment Anney encounters Glen molesting Bone and she became aggressive and gave him thrashes, cursed him for his activity. Glen apologized her by mourning. He pleaded as follows:

"...Kill me, he said again, louder. Kill me. He butted his head into the metal door, pulled back and rammed again. He shouted... Kill me. Kill me, mama was so close I could have touched her, but her head was turned away, turned to Glen. I could not reach her. Oh God, she cries and I let go of the steering wheel. No, I whispered, but mama didn't hear me. Glen. she said and she moaned and covered her face with her hands. Her body shook as she sobbed. Mine shook as I watched her...She grabbed his head, wrapping her fingers over his forehead to block the impact of his blows...Mama I pleaded but she still wasn't looking at me". (290)

Bone cannot overcome those pains of being abused brutally by her step father and her mother's turn towards him. She cannot bare the pain when her mother stood for the abuser of her own daughter. Bone painfully says that

... I could see her fingers on Glen's shoulder; see the white knuckles holding him tight. My mouth closed over the shout. I would not let go... I'd said I could never hate her, but I hated her now for the way she held him...Could she love me and still hold him like that? I let my head fall back. I did not want to see this... I want everything to stop, the world to end, anything but not to lie bleeding while she held him and cried... First stars would come out as the sky darkened. I wanted to see that, the darkness and the stars. I heard a roar far off, a wave of night and despair waiting for me and followed it out into darkness. (291)

Bone loses all her hope and she thinks herself to be put in the darkness. She cannot face her mother consoling her abuser. Bone does not want to punish her abuser but she is in need of her mother's care and protection. She is aware that Anney will be very much happy in Glen's presence. She cannot be away from him at any circumstance. She falls down when he starts crying and making apologies. By acting like this Anney abandons her dearest daughter psychologically unknowingly which created a kind of low self esteem and a state of despair.

Anney abandons her daughter physically towards the end of the novel. "If a parent isn't present in the child's life..." (Cliffon 199-208), which portray the process physical abandonment. A child needs its mother's protection and care in every aspects of its life, especially during the time of pains.

Bastard Out of Carolina focuses on a poor little girl who is abandoned by her own mother for the sake of her second husband, Glen. The only one who Bone loved to the extreme is her mother. She is separated from the society being stamped as "illegitimate" in her birth certificate. She is called as bastard by the society. She does not lose her hope only for her mother who loved her to the extreme. Whenever she underwent harassments by Glen she longs for her mother

to stop his brutal behaviour. Even though she knows that Anney will stand on the side of her step father when he apologizes, she longs for her.

Bone has faced emotional and psychological abandonment but she never thought that her mother will abandon her physically. Bone has been admitted in a hospital after being left with lot of injuries due to the painful rape by Glen. The physical and psychological pain she come across is not closed in words. She does not explicit her pains by crying, but she says "...my tongue swelled in my mouth. I did not want anyone to know anything. Mama, I almost whispered, but clamped my teeth together..." (297).

She notices her aunt Raylene is taking care of her. She "...kept wondering where Mama had gone...where was Mama, and why wasn't she with me?" (295). Though Raylene cared her as a mother, Bone is not satisfied by her consolation. Raylene said "My poor little girl, you just lay still. We'll get you home. Don't you worry? Don't you worry about nothing? I'll get home and safe..." (298). But she wanted to see her mother's face and the events circles in her mind is the image of Glen and her mother. Raylene says that there are no possibilities for her to see her mother. She comments that "...But I can't tell you anything. None of us can. No one knows where she's gone. I can't explain that to you Bone..." (301).

Anney abandoned Bone not for her unlikeness towards her, but she loved Bone more than anything. The presence of Anney cannot be replaced by anything and nothing will equals to her lovely mother. The trauma of her mother's physical abandonment makes her to be in solitude, in a completely darkened place. She forgets and refuses to have food which is given by her aunt. Apart from the pains caused by injury, the difficulty and loneliness comes as a result of her mother's abandonment is unpredictable and unbearable. She lost all her hopes and the whole world appeared to be strange and the mother's absence physically made her to be more stranger and she said "The world was full of Daddy Glens... I did not want to be in this world anymore" (296). She describes her trauma as follows:

...Everything hurt me, my arm in its cotton sling... the memory of nurse's careful fingers...Most of all my heart hurt me...every time I closed my eyes there was a flash of Glen's face as he had looked above me. I kept turning my head as if mama's prayers still echoed in my ears... My mama had abandoned... the only thing that mattered". (302)

The mental state of her is fully affected due to her mother's abandonment. She refused to talk to anyone including her dearest uncle Earle. During night Anney came to visit her daughter. She reveals the reason for her abandonment. She says "...Bone, I never wanted you to be hurt. I wanted you to be safe. I wanted us all to be happy. I never thought it would go the way it did. I never thought Glen would hurt you like that... and I just loved him... so I couldn't see him that way. I couldn't believe. I couldn't imagine..." (306).

Bone wanted all of her family members to unite. That's the reason that Bone comes to live with her mother and stepfather, though he harassed her even from the childhood but now she is not in a state to live with him. She says with hopelessness as "...we had all wanted the simplest thing to love and be loved and be safe together, but we had lost it and I didn't know how to get it back..."(307). Bone manages to live a solitude life. She is in a dilemma how she would be in the future. She is completely filled with despair. She wonders whether she would be stronger enough like her mother or any other Boatwrights at their age. She shows her despair by saying "...what would I be like when I was fifteen, twenty, and

thirty? would I be as strong as she had been as hungry for love, as desperate, determined and ashamed..." (309). To her without Anney life will be like darkness of night and she looks deep in to it.

Thus Allison gives away the clear portrait of a little girl who is abandoned by her mother who alternately ignores the abuse by her husband on her daughter and chooses to be with him. The importance of the mother's caring through out the life of the child is described. If the suitable companionship is not given by the parents to their children in their childhood it causes serious pains in the life of the children also the life is also a great question. Allison who has experienced the same situation in her childhood is in deep pain and she wanted to enlighten the society with the role of motherhood and her love for her child.

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