

**Tribhuvan University**

**Subalternity and Silence in Harper Lee's Novel *To Kill a Mockingbird***

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## Subalternity and Silence in Harper Lee's Novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*

### Abstract

*This research studies Harper Lee's novel To Kill A Mockingbird from the perspective of Subaltern Studies and subaltern silence. The novel tells the story of number of subaltern characters systematically silenced in the Southern American society of Maycomb. Even though number of characters fall under subaltern category, this research analyzes the subalternity of black character Tom Robinson. Tom Robinson faces court trial in the charge of raping a white woman Mayella. The narrator of the novel is teenage a white girl named Scout whose father Atticus Finch fights the case to save the innocent black man. Even when proofs point out that he is innocent, the court has to declare him guilty because of the social expectation and racist belief that the blacks should never secure a win over the white people. Tom cannot speak against the white, white lawyer has to speak for him but even then, he is not heard speaking by himself or by the means of his generous lawyer. He is imprisoned and shot dead by the white police devising his fake attempt to escape.*

**Keywords:** Subalternity, Soceity, Subaltern, Deconstruction, Discourse

Harper Lee's novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* is a representation of the condition of blacks in Southern American society. The novel is set in small southern American town called Maycomb during 1930s. Scout, a thirteen years old girl, narrates about the court trial faced by an innocent black character Tom Robinson in the charge of raping a white woman. Atticus, renowned white lawyer and the father of narrator fights the case to save the innocent black man and puts maximum effort to defend him. Despite his effort and the sufficient reasons to declare him innocent, the biased court declares him guilty and he is imprisoned. In prison, he is shot dead by the whites devising his fake attempt to escape.

Tom Robinson is a black character who has been marginalized in racist society throughout the novel. He is a representative subaltern character of the racist American society. Harper Lee depicts him as a subaltern character but is unable to confer him the voice. Even if he speaks, he is not heard. The subaltern silence has been problematized. To examine the subaltern silence and its problematic is the basic concern of this research.

The subaltern character Tom Robinson has been hegemonized due to the racist domination of the whites. Whites exercise power over him with the help of law and police and even his white lawyer cannot save him. The white woman Mayella fakes a rape calling him to her home to help her in domestic works. He pleads for his innocence in the court but his voice is insignificant and unheard because of hegemonic, elitist discourses of the whites in the society.

The basic objective of the study is to underscore the fact how the elitist, racist discourses are responsible for the subaltern silence. With the examination of the subaltern character Tom, the muted history of the minority blacks are unearthed in the course of this research. Though this research uses the concepts of the some of the

noted subaltern historians, it does not offer comprehensive and overall analysis of the Subaltern Studies and its debates. The research is purely textual and thus, field study about the issues of subalternity is not included.

This research is remarkable repertoire for the future researchers as it explores the subaltern silence in particular historical circumstances. It also helps to understand the marginalization of the minorities due to the power exercised by the dominant elites with the construction of the elitist discourses. Those discourses silence the minority discourses and voices.

Lee from her Pulitzer Prize winner novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*, has drawn the attention of numerous scholars and critics since its publication in 1960. Her critic Thomas Mallow asserts “In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, empathy is Atticus’s chief and much repeated prescription for all that ails us morally” (103). He further adds:

The book never persists in ambiguity. Mr. Underwood, a man who despises Negroes but protects Atticus with a shotgun is glimpsed a couple of times and then dropped. The author prefers returning to the feel-good and improbable. By the time the novel nears its conclusion and a classmate of Scout’s gives a report on how bad Hitler is? The book has begun to cherish its own goodness. (110)

The tyrannical side of the whites in American society is juxtaposed with Hitler in the novel by Lee according to Mallow. Similarly critic Kaa Vonja Hinton asserts “Atticus is in the position of begin a Christ like figure, bearing the sin of the community” (11). He further adds, "*To Kill a Mockingbird* examines southern religion practices and beliefs revealing the tension that exists within a society. Atticus uses Christian values to raise Scout and Jem. Serving as their primary example, he teaches the children to be ethical, moral and just" (50). Hinton has seen the ethical side of the novel. Another

critic Edythe M. McGovern ascribes hope for future in the white lawyer as he opines “Atticus is the symbol of future” (5). He further writes, "*To Kill a Mockingbird* suggests that the novel is universally compelling because Lee’s overall theme of threatening boundaries covers a wide spectrum, from law to social standing, from childhood innocence to racism. Sometimes, of course, violent action is necessary to alter boundaries" (9).

Considering all above criticisms, it becomes clear that though the text has been analyzed from various perspectives. But there is no critic who explores the subalternity of the characters and their silence in the novel. It seems that there is strong need to carry out research on this text from a new perspective of subaltern studies. Without proper study on this issue the meaning of text will remain incomplete. Therefore, this researcher proposes to carry out the research from the theoretical strands of subaltern studies.

When we look for the meaning of the term subaltern, we find that the word subaltern means “of lower rank” (59). The word is still in use in British military to refer to the military officer who is below the rank of captain. In simple meaning of the term, all the subordinate groups that are considered as lower ranked in a society can be kept under this term. In our society, the people like lower caste, untouchables, economically poor, Dalits, women etc. can fall under this term. Even the groups like colonized, blacks, the working class can fall under this category. The first person to use it as a term to refer to the peasant group of Italian society in his socio-economic study is the Italian neo-Marxist Antonio Gramsci. He saw them as the people in the society who lack the awareness of their subordination. Since the term subaltern means the marginalized, Dalits, widow women, colonized, blacks, silenced groups of society and history, Subaltern Studies becomes the project that helps to reclaim minority,

muted histories of the society.

Subaltern Studies started in India around 1982 when a series of journal articles published by Oxford University Press in India. A group of Indian scholars led by Ranajit Guha trained in the west wanted to reclaim their history. Therefore, they began to elaborate the condition of subalterns and rewrite their histories. They wanted to reclaim the silent minority history theorizing the subaltern and subalternity.

According to Gramsci is “The subaltern classes, by definition, are not unified and cannot unite until they are able to become a “State”: their history, therefore, is intertwined with that of civil society, and thereby with the history of State and groups of States” (*Critical Theory since Plato* 946). As a class, subaltern class is not state and they have no history of their own. Their history has been lost within the history of civil society or state. Their history is silenced because of their appearance as the civil society itself. It is present but anonymous within the history of the civil society. So, with the aim to recover “the small silenced voice of history- the voice of subaltern” (Guha 45), South Asian intellectuals started to publish subaltern writings as *Subaltern Studies: Writing on South Asian History* in the early 1980s. Ranjit Guha was the first editor and pioneer to the subaltern study group. Guha’s systematically developed the discipline of Subaltern Studies. For him, Indian history, whether colonial, national, Marxist, or neocolonial, has been written by elite, about the elite and for the elite. Therefore, it has ignored “the people” of India or the “subaltern”.

In the early stage, the theorists of subaltern studies attempted to recover the silenced histories of the minorities including the histories of peasant insurgencies during British Rule in India. Various theorists involved later and they started to point out that the subaltern histories of the women were not taken seriously by the earlier subaltern historicists. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak pointed out the gendered

subalternity of women. She attempted to recover the muted histories of women.

Spivak's essay "Can Subaltern Speak?" is an application of Derridean analysis which looks at the problematic of subaltern voice and historiography.

The patriarchal ideology controls the women's body and is responsible to keep women in shadow, in the inability to speak and gives the Third World women the subaltern condition according to Spivak. She has to be ready even to face the sickness or poverty according to Ganesh in the novel. In her essay "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography", Spivak emphasizes on the need to notice and investigate the "gendered subaltern"—women. Spivak puts forward the problems of the absence of the voice and history of women's involvement in insurgency in the elite historiography and the neglect of attention to the female subaltern in the Subaltern Studies project. This observation has uncovered the particularly serious marginalization of women, as Spivak writes in her famous essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?", "Within the effaced itinerary of the subaltern subject, the track of sexual difference is doubly effaced. . . . If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow" (287).

The first problem of subaltern historiography according to Spivak in the method of analysis itself: postcolonialism applies external, male-dominated discourse from the Western academy to the question of the subaltern and therefore is in danger of reproducing a form of 'colonization' of the subaltern subject which subaltern studies attempts to oppose. The second problem concerns the nature of what is identified by this analysis: to identify the subaltern and bring that voice out of the silent shadows of history and liberate them from their 'subaltern' status, and include that hidden or obscured identity into dominant discourse. The third problem related to

the valorization of the subaltern making them speak: for the subaltern to speak. Their true and authentic identity is to essentialize that voice, again reproducing the very attributes the project set out to challenge in the first place. The logic of these arguments leads to the conclusion that the subaltern to be 'subaltern' (24), he or she must remain silent. And so, too, must the postcolonial critic. To enable the subaltern voice, Spivak acts as an essentialist essentializing the ethnic, racial or any other identities of the subaltern. Her position is thus, strategic essentialist position. In favor of Spivak, David Richards further argues clarifying the position:

Subaltern identification, however compromised, is necessary to enable agency, according to Fanon's . . . premise. In order to break open this dilemma, Spivak proposes a kind of compromise to enable subaltern identity and therefore agency. Her concept of 'strategic essentialism' argues that it is necessary to adopt certain 'essentialized' identities (national, ethnic, gender, racial) in order to 'speak' and to achieve specific strategic goals. (23)

The position of strategic use of essentialized subaltern identity is necessary as the humanist project of enabling subaltern agency.

Dipesh Chakrabarty underscores the need to write the history of the subaltern groups but he carefully avoids essentialism in the name of recovering the subaltern voices in such histories. In his essay "Radical Histories and Question of Enlightenment Rationalism: Some Recent Critiques of 'Subaltern Studies'", he asserts:

What will history produced in this mode look like? I cannot say, for one cannot write this history in a pure form. The language of the states, of citizenship, of wholes and totalities, the legacy of Enlightenment rationalism...will always cut across it. At the same time this other history will

present itself as that which disrupts these languages. (757)

Thus, the form of subaltern historiography is open-ended and is not codified as in the dominant modes of historiography for Chakrabarty. The history from below or the subaltern historiography is necessary but if one devises particular language or vocabulary to write them in the name of creating the subaltern language, it becomes essentialist. Even in the subaltern history, the language of elites, states and even the imperial language and vocabulary of the Western rationality may come overlapping to each other. Thus, subaltern historian should be non-committal to any particular position or jargons.

In this regard David Richards in his essay “Framing Identity” writes about the agenda of subaltern studies and argues that it is, "Concerned with the rewriting of the history . . . not as the traditional narrative of elites engaged in a heroic struggle with . . . but as small-scale local insurrections (often failing) enacted by groups and individuals-workers, peasants, women-ignored or ‘written out’ of the historical grand narrative" (23).

It is a clear from his assertion that the term subaltern stands for all the groups and intellectuals who are ignored by the traditional, elitist, colonial historiography including workers, peasants, women etc. To recover their history and to articulate their new collective political and cultural agency with the resistance to the discourses of elitist nationalism, Subaltern Studies Collective or Group (SSG) was found in India by South Asian intellectuals and academics. Partha Chatterjee, the prominent member of Subaltern Studies Group (SSG) future defines the project that “the task now is to fill up . . . emptiness, that is, the representation of subaltern consciousness in elitist historiography. It must be given its own specific content with its own history of development” (62). Thus, the central question of subaltern historiography is to

represent the subaltern consciousness with the articulation of the new forms of political and cultural agency of subaltern groups.

While reading the literary texts for the recovery of the subaltern voice the representation of characters and the writer's position and agency to speak about the subaltern characters, the characters' growth to awareness of their subordination and subalternity, their agency to their life and the conscious of resistance to come out of the subalternity are very important. Margery Sabin in her essay "In Search of Subaltern Consciousness", with the emphasis on analysis of the writer's position, writes, "In searching for subaltern consciousness through writing, projection of writer's own social position and values are always discernible" (178). For Sabin the writers may knowingly involve to repress or to articulate the subaltern voices.

Subaltern studies has developed and become wider with the time. It has studied wide range of the histories that are muted and given them voice. When the lost, muted history is written, it does not remain in subaltern condition. It becomes the part of mainstream discourse and politicizes the injustice to the subaltern. In his "Introduction" to *Reading Subaltern Study* David Ludden writes:

Subaltern Studies does not mean today what it meant in 1982, 1985, 1989, or 1993. How did this change occur? Intellectual environments have changed too much to allow us to measure cause-and-effect in particular acts of writing and reading. Change has occurred inside the Subaltern Studies project, but ambiguously, as we will see, and how much internal change is cause or effect of external change is unknowable, because inside and outside, subaltern subjects have been reinvented disparately.(2)

Though there are numbers of development and changes within the field of Subaltern studies internally, it is hard to find out how much the external influences affected

those changes. It is hard to find out the cause and effect of the external changes to the internal changes inside the Subaltern Studies.

This research defines Subaltern and subalternity on the basis of the various theorists and scholars and list the instances that help me to justify the characters of Harper Lee's novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* as subalterns. This researcher focuses on various factors like social, political economic, historical, official beside the factors of racism and argue that the theory of race is not sufficient to give voice to subalterns because it itself is Eurocentric and elitist discourse professed by the whites to show themselves superior and is optimized with the language of the oppressors. In the theory of race it is impossible for a subaltern to speak.

*Subaltern* is an adjective meaning "of lower rank"; it is still used in the British military to describe the ranks below captain. In recent political and cultural theory especially that associated with the Subaltern Studies group and with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *subaltern* is used as a catchall term for members of subordinated populations — the colonized, women, blacks, the working class — although it is most often used to describe those oppressed by British colonialism and by the political and economic upheavals of the Postcolonial period. "The word 'subaltern'...stands for the meaning as given in the Concise Oxford Dictionary, that is, 'of inferior rank'. It will be used... as a name for the general attitude of subordination in South Asian Society whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or in any other way" (Guha, vii).

Ranajit Guha has begun with this simple definition of the subaltern and developed it to include various silenced histories of the society. He includes the basis of class, caste, age, gender, the office post or any other marker of division between social classes.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argues that subaltern is not:

just a classy word for oppressed, for Other, for somebody who's not getting a piece of the pie....In postcolonial terms, everything that has limited or no access to the cultural imperialism is subaltern – a space of difference. Now who would say that's just the oppressed? The working class is oppressed. It's not subaltern....Many people want to claim subalternity. They are the least interesting and the most dangerous. I mean, just by being a discriminated-against minority on the university campus, they don't need the word 'subaltern'....They should see what the mechanics of the discrimination are. They're within the hegemonic discourse wanting a piece of the pie and not being allowed, so let them speak, use the hegemonic discourse. They should not call themselves subaltern. (29-47)

Spivak points out that many people want to claim subalternity but everybody does not fit the category of subaltern. The oppressed who can raise their voice at any time should not be regarded as subaltern. Discrimination alone does not qualify a person to be a subaltern. We have to see the mechanism of discrimination. The mechanism should be such that it does not let the oppressed voice to come out and s/he is systematically silenced. Even if s/he speaks, the voice is not heard within the mechanism.

In his number of essays, Homi Bhabha, major postcolonial thinker, emphasizes the importance of social power relations in his working definition of 'subaltern' groups as "oppressed, minority groups whose presence was crucial to the self-definition of the majority group: subaltern social groups were also in a position to subvert the authority of those who has hegemonic power." (191-207) Here, the term subaltern is used to denote marginalized and oppressed people(s) specifically

struggling against hegemonic globalization.

Considering these some of the definitions of subaltern and their subalternity, this researcher has listed the major issues in *To Kill a Mockingbird* that assist me to show the insufficiency of the Eurocentric discourses of racism and affirm the need of subaltern studies to study them. In this novel, the novelist uses two terms for socially marginalized persons and characters- “black niggers” and “white niggers.” Even if the whites are superior to black people because of their skin-color, many economically poor whites are marginalized in society in terms of class and they are compelled to bear the shame and oppression from the upper class people. They are called “trash” and “white niggers” as seen with the cases of Ewells and Cunninghams. The theory of racism is not suitable for the study of such interracial marginalization. Being white and so-called superior to niggers, they cannot speak of their oppression in terms of racism and thus, are compelled to remain subalterns forever.

Tom Robinson has been falsely accused by poor white woman Mayella Ewell of raping her and the official verdict shows him guilty. It is very ironic hearing as more it attempts show Tom guilty, clearer becomes the fact that he is innocent. Even if he is innocent, he is slapped with the punishment of imprisonment. Robinson belongs to “black nigger” and Mayella belong to “trash” or “white nigger” of the society and both are the subalterns as both are social outcasts. But there is no consciousness among them about their common subalternity.

As Spivak says, “everything that has limited or no access to the cultural imperialism is subaltern – a space of difference” in postcolonial sense (29-47), many characters of the novel fall under the category of subaltern. Though there are many white characters in the novel they have no role to play to extend the cultural colonialism. Ewells, Cunninghams, Radleys and so on, have nothing to contribute or

think about the cultural imperialism. They are like the outsiders of the white race even though they are whites. So, they are subalterns.

Atticus Finch, a white lawyer, attempts to defend the black Tom from the rape charge even though he knows he is not going to save him. This white voice that speaks for the black lacks agency and the subaltern can never be emancipated from the hegemonic discourses and is unable to be conscious of his subalternity.

This research subaltern silence and muted histories of the minority characters who are socially, economically and racially in lower rank in American society reading Harper Lee's novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Besides, this research explores on the major concern of the novelist for the need of ending the racism and its cruelty through racial reconciliation, at the same time, longing of superiority of her white family in the Southern society of Maycomb. The novel is set in the 1930s in Maycomb, Alabama, a town so small and insular that, according to Scout, her father is "related by blood or marriage to nearly every family in the town" (5). Though each and every people are connected and familiar with each other, the small Southern American town is full of racial division and hatred. The racially divided town and its strict class system help the reader to visualize the frictional life in the South during the 1930s.

Maycomb County of the novel can be taken as microcosm of American society as a whole where Harper Lee makes realistic depiction of the Great Depression of the 1930s in the novel. Maycomb is small town, everyone knows what goes on there, and there's rarely any excitement. Lee describes it as being an old, humid, sleepy and laidback town where everyone knows each others' business.

The story in *To Kill a Mockingbird* is narrated by a teenage girl named Scout Finch. Scout Finch lives with her brother, Jem, and their widowed father, Atticus, in the dull town of Alabama called Maycomb. Maycomb is suffering through the Great

Depression but Atticus is a prominent lawyer and the Finch family is reasonably well off in comparison to the rest of society. She comes to contact with the racial prejudice when her father takes up the case of Tom Robinson, a poor black man who has been accused of a rape, by a poor white woman Mayella Ewell. Scout faces various instances of racial prejudice with the racist attitude of Aunt Alexandra and Lula, who thinks the whites are not desirable presence for the black church and protests Calpurnia for bringing Scout and Jem to the black church. Thus, we see the race and race relation full of prejudices pervades the society of Maycomb.

The novelist deals with the problems of racism and injustice inflicted upon the so-called socially inferior 'other' race of Black people with the examination of the case fought for the justice for the innocent accused Black character Tom Robinson by the White lawyer Atticus Finch. The mockery of the racist justice is voiced as Scout narrates the proceeding of the court with the highlight that Tom Robinson is being victimized by the racial hatred:

Atticus sometimes said that one way to tell whether a witness was lying or telling the truth was to listen rather than watch: I applied his test—Tom denied it three times in one breath, but quietly, with no hint of whining in his voice, and I found myself believing him in spite of his protesting too much. He seemed to be a respectable Negro, and a respectable Negro would never go up into somebody's yard of his own volition. (212)

She sees Tom Robinson as a respectable Negro who never goes to the other people's premises and thus, there is no question of his interference and raping Mayella. He would not go to her yard if she had not called him. As soon as Atticus asks him the question regarding to the rape he denies the charge. Here, Scout has highlighted the reality of the Black people's innocence but in the latent level of psychology, she has

stereotyped the black men as servile and obedient to the white people. Thus, she unknowingly asserts the White superiority over the Blacks of the Maycomb society. With the claim of Tom's innocence, she emphasizes that Blacks are also the respectable social beings and there is the need of racial reconciliation, not the hatred as Mayella displays. But, in the racial reconciliation, she unknowingly asserts the White supremacy with the stereotyping of the Black people as servile, obedient and gentle. In the name of reconciliation, the writer inherently professes the politics of White control and domination over the Black people that itself is the burning example of racism.

Racism and intolerance take different forms in this novel. The majority of the white population of Maycomb is racist. They see Blacks as second-class citizens and second-class humans. When the sheriff arrests Boo he says he, "hadn't the heart to put him in the jail alongside Negroes" (12) because Boo is a white man. The prison is made by the whites only to punish the black people and the whites are above its sentence.

When Atticus, the father of the narrator Mrs. Dubose tells the children, "Your father's no better than the niggers and trash he works for!" (113) as Atticus, the father of the narrator and Jem, defends Tom Robinson in the trial as Mr. Cunningham is part of a mob of men who would have lynched Tom Robinson, if Atticus had not been on guard outside the jail.

The novel is full of ironic remarks from Lee's narrator about the way women were regarded in the Maycomb community. She draws the sharp line between Simon Finch's daughters and son and the controlling measure taken for the daughters. She narrates:

There were six bedrooms upstairs, four for the eight female children, one for

Welcome Finch, the sole son, and one for visiting relatives. Simple enough; but the daughters' rooms could be reached only by one staircase, Welcome's room and the guestroom only by another. The Daughters' Staircase was in the ground floor bedroom of their parents, so Simon always knew the hours of his daughters' nocturnal comings and goings. (88-89)

Women are thus, treated as inferiors and so we can say the prejudice upon the women is also the social fact of the society. If we see woman as distinct class, the class prejudice upon women is considerably high in the society of the small Southern town.

Scout narrates her experiences about the school, the racism that pervades the social institutions and the society and her childish speculation about the biased hearing of the Tom Robinson's case. Scout goes to school for the first time and hates the school. She and Jem find gifts apparently left for them in a knothole of a tree on the Radley property. Dill, the friend of Scout and Jem, returns the following summer, and he, Scout, and Jem begin to act out the story of Boo Radley. Atticus puts a stop to their actions, urging the children to try to see life from another person's perspective before making judgments. Atticus is, thus, the ideal figure who does not judge the people according to their skin color or appearances even though he is a white man.

To the dismay of Maycomb's racist white community, Atticus agrees to defend a black man named Tom Robinson, who has been accused of raping a white woman. The plot revolves around the trial faced by Tom Robinson and musing of the narrator and her brother upon the idea of justice. Because of Atticus's decision to fight the case from Tom's side, Jem and Scout are subjected to abuse from other children, even when they celebrate Christmas at the family compound on Finch's Landing. Calpurnia, the Finches' black cook, takes them to the local black church, where the warm and close-knit community largely embraces the children.

Atticus's sister, Alexandra, comes to live with the Finches the next summer. Dill, who is supposed to live with his "new father" in another town, runs away and comes to Maycomb (128). Tom Robinson's trial begins, and when the accused man is placed in the local jail, a mob gathers to lynch him. Atticus faces the mob down the night before the trial. Jem and Scout, who have sneaked out of the house, soon join him. Scout recognizes one of the men, and her polite questioning about his son shames him into dispersing the mob.

At the trial itself, the children sit in the "colored balcony" with the town's black citizens (181). Atticus provides clear evidence that the accusers, Mayella Ewell and her father, Bob, are lying: in fact, Mayella propositioned Tom Robinson, was caught by her father, and then accused Tom of rape to cover her shame and guilt. Atticus provides impressive evidence that the marks on Mayella's face are from wounds that her father inflicted; upon discovering her with Tom, he called her a whore and beat her. Yet, despite the significant evidence pointing to Tom's innocence, the all-white jury convicts him. The innocent Tom later tries to escape from prison and is shot to death. In the aftermath of the trial, Jem's faith in justice is badly shaken, and he lapses into despondency and doubt.

Despite the verdict, Bob Ewell feels that Atticus and the judge have made a fool out of him, and he vows revenge. He menaces Tom Robinson's widow, tries to break into the judge's house, and finally attacks Jem and Scout as they walk home from a Halloween party. Boo Radley intervenes, however, saving the children and stabbing Ewell fatally during the struggle. Boo carries the wounded Jem back to Atticus's house, where the sheriff, in order to protect Boo, insists that Ewell tripped over a tree root and fell on his own knife. After sitting with Scout for a while, Boo disappears once more into the Radley house.

Later, Scout feels as though she can finally imagine what life is like for Boo. He has become a human being to her at last. With this realization, Scout embraces her father's advice to practice sympathy and understanding and demonstrates that her experiences with hatred and prejudice will not smear her faith in human goodness.

*To Kill a Mockingbird* tells us a great deal about its social hierarchy during a time of poverty, from its respectable citizens holding responsible posts, such as Atticus, down to the "entailed" farmers -the Cunninghams (23), the white "absolute trash" -the Ewells (136-37), and finally, at the bottom, the black community - "niggers" (77), who have their own hierarchy based chiefly on education, with the Reverend Sykes, Calpurnia and Zeebo at the top. Although Zeebo is a mere refuse and dead dog collector in the eyes of the whites, to the blacks he holds the important position of Superintendent of Music.

With many of its extending families combined with prejudice, Maycomb's history ensures that family traits or what are believed to be family traits, are passed down from generation to generation. Heredity is deemed important by snobs like Aunty Alexandra. There are also internecine disputes between families, such as the one between the Cunninghams and the Coninghams. The narrator narrates the prejudice as if it is hereditatry, like the caste system. She narrates:

There was indeed a caste system in Maycomb, but to my mind it worked this way: the older citizens, the present generation of people who had lived side by side for years and years, were utterly predictable to one another: they took for granted attitudes, character shadings, even gestures, as having been repeated in each generation and refined by time. (145)

We can see racial prejudice and silence of black people Dolphus Raymond's position, and also Alexandra's remarks on Cal, and the Missionary Ladies. Dolphus Raymond

is living miserable life with pretended drunkard lifestyle because he has married a black woman and bore the children of mixed blood who are not accepted by both the blacks and whites. He says; “It ain’t honest but it’s mighty helpful to folks. Secretly, Miss Finch, I’m not much of a drinker, but you see they could never, never understand that I live like I do because that’s the way I want to live” (221). The society is full of the racial prejudice and it never lets Raymond to live as he likes. So, even though he is white he never leaves the company of the black people because the white community never receives him well. He is a fallen man in the eyes of the whites. He expresses his bitter hatred towards the society full of racist prejudice. He comments about the society before the narrator and the other children that the racist society never lets him even to cry against the injustice in the society. He says he wants to cry; “Cry about the simple hell people give other people—without even thinking. Cry about the hell white people give colored folks, without even stopping to think that they’re people, too” (222). The bitter racial prejudice is seen with the conversation among the children and the Raymond. Since Raymond cannot cry about the racist society he has to feign drunkard and ally with the blacks of the society. It shows his liberal sympathetic stance for the downtrodden blacks of the society of Maycomb.

The beliefs and ideologies of the people of the Maycomb County are invaded by the notion of race. The whites like Alexandra and the blacks like Lula can be taken as the fitting examples to see how their beliefs and ideologies are molded in the mold of race. The racial superiority is seen in Alexandra as she thinks Finch family as the prestigious and superior while the poor Cunninghams are considered as inferior. Even the narrator, having anti-racist stance, uses the word nigger for a black. Lula hates the white children coming to the black church.

The narrator's Aunt Alexandra- obsessed with the superiority of the Finch family, part of the local white aristocracy. She does not allow Scout to play with Walter Cunningham. The Cunninghams are lower class whites - poor farmers, badly hit by the Depression. When the narrator Scout and her brother Jem protest their aunt and ask for the justification why they should not play with other white children similar to them, the aunt shows the bitter class-prejudice for the Cunninghams because of their poverty and the pride of the rich Finches, "'Don't be silly, Jean Louise,' said Aunt Alexandra. 'The thing is, you can scrub Walter Cunningham till he shines, you can put him in shoes and a new suit, but he'll never be like Jem. Besides, there's a drinking streak in that family a mile wide. Finch women aren't interested in that sort of people'" (247).

Aunt has her own reason not letting the children to play with Cunninghams. She has the air of superiority over the Cunninghams as they are trash for her. As narration goes, "She took off her glasses and stared at me. 'I'll tell you why,' she said. 'Because— he—is—trash, that's why you can't play with him. I'll not have you around him, picking up his habits and learning Lord-knows-what. You're enough of a problem to your father as it is'" (248).

Aunt Alexandra is typical Southern white woman who hates the values of the blacks. When she comes to live with her brother Atticus' family, she is not happy with the way the narrator and her brother Jem are being reared by the black maid Calpurnia. She hates the children of the white people going to the church of the blacks. She wants Atticus to fire Calpurnia as she takes the narrator and her brother Jem to her church. The reaction of aunt has been narrated in the conversation as:

I told him in detail about our trip to church with Calpurnia. Atticus seemed to enjoy it, but Aunt Alexandra, who was sitting in a corner quietly sewing, put

down her embroidery and stared at us.

‘You all were coming back from Calpurnia’s church that Sunday?’

Jem said, ‘Yessum, she took us.’

I remembered something. ‘Yessum, and she promised me I could come out to her house some afternoon. Atticus. I’ll go next Sunday if it’s all right, can I?’

Cal said she’d come get me if you were off in the car.’

‘You may *not*.’ (149)

The children will be corrupted if they go to the church of the black people in the view of Aunt Alexandra. She complains Atticus about this and proposes him to fire her. Her racist attitude that the values of the black are not civilized has been highlighted with this instance. But Atticus is very kind to Calpurnia, the black maid. So he defends her and rejects the possibility of firing her. He does not want his sister meddling in his family matter. It is highlighted in the conversation between aunt and Atticus:

‘And don’t try to get around it. You’ve got to face it sooner or later and it might as well be tonight. We don’t need her now.’

Atticus’s voice was even: ‘Alexandra, Calpurnia’s not leaving this house until she wants to. You may think otherwise, but I couldn’t have got along without her all these years. She’s a faithful member of this family and you’ll simply have to accept things the way they are. Besides, sister, I don’t want you working your head off for us—you’ve no reason to do that. We still need Cal as much as we ever did.’ (150-51)

Aunt Alexandra entertains the white missionary ladies and they talk about the way the people live in the town in a gathering. Those missionary ladies have the prejudiced racist attitude as they believe that the people in Africa live in “sin and squalor” (255).

One of the missionary lady Mrs. Merriweather says to the narrator “Jean Louise . . . you are a fortunate girl. You live in a Christian home with Christian folks in a Christian town. Out there in J. Grimes Everett’s land there’s nothing but sin and squalor” (255). Thus, for them they are civilized and the Africans are barbaric. The claim of the missionary ladies understanding the Africa as sinful place fits properly in the case of those American ladies even though they are not European rather only whites. The women see people as misguided and call the wife of Tom Robinson “darky’s wife” who never calls for forgiveness in the church even after her husband rapes a white woman (255). But they do not think the possibility of Tom’s innocence because he is black. The racial prejudice is seen in them as they talk:

‘Gertrude,’ she said, ‘I tell you there are some good but misguided people in this town. Good, but misguided. Folks in this town who think they’re doing right, I mean. Now far be it from me to say who, but some of ‘em in this town thought they were doing the right thing a while back, but all they did was stir ‘em up. That’s all they did.’ (257)

Race can also be tied in to society in the novel: Tom Robinson in court shows his pity for Mayella, which is seen as disrespect for someone higher in the pecking order of Maycomb society. We can see that Lee makes her black characters unsteretyped, rounded, three-dimensional figures, more noble than the whites partly because of their humility, but also capable of prejudice as seen with Lula. Lula protests Calpurnia for bringing the narrator and her brother to the church of the black folks. It shows the racial prejudice is not only in the whites but also in the blacks. The narrator narrates the protest as:

I felt Calpurnia’s hand dig into my shoulder. ‘What you want, Lula?’ she asked, in tones I had never heard her use. She spoke quietly, contemptuously.

'I wants to know why you bringin' white chillun to nigger church.'

'They's my comp'ny,' said Calpurnia. Again I thought her voice strange: she was talking like the rest of them.

'Yeah, an'I reckon you's comp'ny at the Finch house durin' the week.' (131)

Although the theme of racial prejudice can be closely tied in to that of race and the fate of the Robinsons, there is a lot more to Maycomb's prejudice, some of which can be also linked to religion. Boo Radley is another obvious victim, but also the "nigger lover" Atticus and his children, and, more subtly, Miss Maudie (92).

While Atticus comes across as a free thinker on religion, most of Maycomb has fixed views on the subject. It is shown as a non-conformist community (that is, protestant but not of the established Church), divided into shades of Baptism, Methodism and Presbyterianism. It is often handy when we criticize literature to divide characters up according to their philosophies: whether they are pleasure-lovers (hedonists), or whether they think pleasure is wrong (puritans). This distinction between people goes back through history - in the Roman Empire it was Epicureans (hedonists) versus Stoics (puritans), in the English Civil War Cavaliers (hedonists) versus Roundheads (puritans) - and is especially useful in analysing Shakespeare. In *Mockingbird* the puritans are the Primitive Baptist sect "the foot-washers" (175) - example, Nathan Radley - who set themselves up against those who enjoy life, such as Miss Maudie. Before the trial Miss Maudie is engaged in a scriptural battle with the foot-washers over her pleasure-giving flowers: "He that cometh in vanity departeth in darkness" (175), riposted with, "A merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance" (175). Mr Radley, for all his religious fervor, tries to prevent any further acts of altruistic kindness by Arthur by cementing up the knot-hole. This does not, however, mean that Lee's message is one of out-and-out hedonism - Boo's fate after the joyriding incident

is enough confirmation of that, as are the consequences of Bob Ewell's drinking - rather it is one of getting the balance between pleasure and abstinence right, as Miss Maudie does.

It is as well to mention here that Atticus's maxim of getting into someone else's skin or shoes in order to understand them is close to the Christian precept of treating others as you would like them to treat you - a rule ignored by many of the Maycomb Christians. In theory, all American Negroes have had equal rights in law since the end of the Civil War in 1865. Yet that does not mean that they receive justice. The court's verdict against Tom Robinson, shown through Jem's trusting, inexperienced eyes, emphasizes this. Atticus upholds his belief in the law for, apart from minor improvements which he agrees could be made, he thinks it is satisfactory. What do need to change are people's attitudes. The law can function, but justice cannot be carried out until attitudes change. It is people who must apply the law justly.

Judge Taylor is an honorable man who does his best to see that Tom Robinson has a fair trial by appointing Atticus to defend him. He is a responsible judge who keeps his court well disciplined, despite his casual air and unusual habits, such as eating cigars and cleaning his nails whilst the court is in session.

Beside the physical confinements of Tom Robinson and Boo Radley, there are also mental prisons which a number of the citizens of Maycomb are in. Tom's real prison is his race, while Boo is imprisoned by prejudice as much as by his father, and both are imprisoned by their stereotypes. Mayella is trapped by loneliness, ignorance and poverty. Scout feels that "a pink cotton penitentiary" is about to descend on her (150). Mrs. Dubose is imprisoned in her morphine hell, the farmers by entailment, the entire black community by prejudice, lack of education, poverty, and the small-town

mentality with its traditions, which in turn holds back members of the white community like Atticus who want to make progress. Think of more examples of imprisonment.

Atticus represents Tom Robinson even though success is unlikely. Thus, he becomes the role model for the racial tolerance and motivation for those who envision the egalitarian society devoid of the racial hatred. His stance is to attempt saving an innocent black even though the outcome is pretty predictable underscores the need of racial harmony. The conversation between the narrator and the father lawyer Atticus highlights the situation of the social notion of justice in which innocent blacks lose the case and it is shameful for the whites to fight the case from the side of the blacks. Thus, Atticus is the idol for the anti-racist activists as he proves the blacks are only the human beings like others and thus, they have just humane characters like telling lies and desiring a woman sometimes but it cannot be the racial character of the blacks as whole. Thus, in humanistic, moral ground, Atticus is able to prove blacks as ordinary human beings, not the immoral, barbaric creatures.

The important theme of *To Kill a Mockingbird* is the book's exploration of the moral nature of human beings—that is, whether people are essentially good or essentially evil. The novel approaches this question by dramatizing Scout and Jem's transition from a perspective of childhood innocence, in which they assume that people are good because they have never seen evil, to a more adult perspective, in which they have confronted evil and must incorporate it into their understanding of the world. As a result of this portrayal of the transition from innocence to experience, one of the book's important subthemes involves the threat that hatred, prejudice, and ignorance pose to the innocent: people such as Tom Robinson and Boo Radley are not prepared for the evil that they encounter, and, as a result, they are destroyed. Even

Jem is victimized to an extent by his discovery of the evil of racism during and after the trial. Whereas Scout is able to maintain her basic faith in human nature despite Tom's conviction, Jem's faith in justice and in humanity is badly damaged, and he retreats into a state of disillusionment.

The moral voice of *To Kill a Mockingbird* is embodied by Atticus Finch, who is virtually unique in the novel in that he has experienced and understood evil without losing his faith in the human capacity for goodness. Atticus understands that, rather than being simply creatures of good or creatures of evil, most people have both good and bad qualities. The important thing is to appreciate the good qualities and understand the bad qualities by treating others with sympathy and trying to see life from their perspective. He tries to teach this ultimate moral lesson to Jem and Scout to show them that it is possible to live with conscience without losing hope or becoming cynical. In this way, Atticus is able to admire Mrs. Dubose's courage even while deploring her racism. Scout's progress as a character in the novel is defined by her gradual development toward understanding Atticus's lessons, culminating when, in the final chapters, Scout at last sees Boo Radley as a human being. Her newfound ability to view the world from his perspective ensures that she will not become jaded as she loses her innocence.

The black community in Maycomb, despite its abundance of admirable qualities, squats below even the Ewells, enabling Bob Ewell to make up for his own lack of importance by persecuting Tom Robinson. These rigid social divisions that make up so much of the adult world are revealed in the book to be both irrational and destructive. For example, Scout cannot understand why Aunt Alexandra refuses to let her consort with young Walter Cunningham. Lee uses the children's perplexity at the unpleasant layering of Maycomb society to critique the role of class status and,

ultimately, prejudice in human interaction.

There is prejudice against anyone who doesn't fit in to Maycomb's fixed expectations of how people should behave. The most important victim of this type of prejudice is Boo Radley. Most of the town are prejudiced against Boo. Local gossip portrays him as a malevolent phantom. Children run past the Radley house out of fear and won't eat anything that came from Radley trees, believing them poisoned. Yet a very few people accept him for what he is. Miss Maudie remembers him when he was a boy who always spoke nicely; and Atticus tries to make the children understand him and not torment him. By the end of the novel, the children respect him too.

The prejudice that exists around Boo Radley is the example of the prejudice against individual. From the older generation gossiping about him and his history to the local children tormenting him, Boo becomes the subject of mystery and an evil character. Atticus again tries to steer the children away from this behavior.

The Black community was reproached for being overly sensitive to the use of racial insults and for its failure to appreciate the context and message of the novel. The use of racist epithets or negative and debased imagery is not the only basis upon which to determine the racist or anti-racist character of a book has been ignored. Jane Kansas, a columnist for the *Halifax Daily News*, typified the prevailing mindset. She, along with other partisans of the book, invoked the lecture Miss Maudie Atkinson delivers to Atticus Finch's daughter, Scout, on why it is "a sin to kill a mockingbird" (99). This speech was exalted as the most eloquent literary anti-racist statement. Indeed, the lines define the book; "Mockingbirds don't do one thing but make music for us to enjoy. They don't eat up people's gardens, don't nest in corncribs, they don't do one thing but sing their hearts out for us. That's why it's a sin to kill a mockingbird" (99).

However, Kansas and others failed to explore the obvious meaning behind these words. Is not the mockingbird a metaphor for the entire African American population? Do these lines, as the partisans of the book assert, embody the loftiest ideals and sentiments? Harper Lee's motives notwithstanding, they are not a paean to the intrinsic equality and humanity of all peoples, nor do they acknowledge that Blacks are endowed with the same worth and rights as whites. These lines say that Black people are useful and harmless creatures—akin to well-mannered pets—that should not be treated brutally. This is reminiscent of the thinking that pervaded certain sectors of the abolition movement against slavery which did not extol the equality of Africans, but paralleled the propaganda of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, arguing that just as one should not treat one's horse, ox or dog cruelly, one should not treat one's Black cruelly. By imposing this mockingbird image on African Americans, the novel does not challenge the insidious conception of superior versus inferior 'races', the notion of those meant to rule versus those meant to be ruled. What it attacks are the worst—particularly violent—excesses of the racist social order, leaving the racist social order itself intact. In short, as Malcolm X would probably have said, it presents the outlook of the 'enlightened' versus the 'unenlightened' slave owner, who wishes to preserve the value of his human property, the beasts of burden, to labour for his benefit, enjoyment and profit.

Central to the view that *To Kill a Mockingbird* is a solid and inherently anti-racist work is the role of Atticus Finch, the white lawyer who defends Tom Robinson, the Black man wrongly accused of raping a white woman. Indeed, Atticus goes so far as to save Tom from a lynching. However, this act has no historical foundation. The acclaimed exhibition *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America*, sponsored by the Roth-Horowitz Gallery and the New York Historical Society,

documented more than 600 incidents of lynching. This landmark exposition and study established that ‘lynchers tended to be ordinary people and respectable people, few of whom had any difficulties justifying their atrocities in the name of maintaining the social and racial order and the purity of the Anglo-Saxon race’. In two years of investigation, the exhibit researchers found no evidence of intervention by a white person to stop even a single lynching.

*To Kill a Mockingbird* gives no inkling of this mass protest and instead creates the indelible impression that the entire Black community existed in a complete state of paralysis. It was African North Americans who took up the task of confronting and organizing against racism, who through weal and woe, trial and tribulation, carried on—and still carry on—the battle for equal rights and dignity. Those whites who did, and do, make significant contributions gave, and give, their solidarity in response.

From the various instances analyzed so far, we can conclude the bleak condition of the Southern Black people of America due to the apartheid policy during the time of Great Depression in 1930s. The Whites of the society are superior to the Blacks on the basis of the fairness of their skin and the Blacks are victimized in various ways- by racial segregation, economic exploitation, abuse, lynchings and so on. They are subalterns without questions; they are systematically silenced.

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