

I. Kathryn Stockett's *The Help* and Redefinition of Racism

Kathryn Stockett's *The Help* (2009) examines a highly sensitive issue, racial one and gives a new light to the issue of racism in the western world. Black maids are suppressed and are treated in an inhuman manner by white masters in the novel. Unlike other white characters, Skeeter, the major white character, makes her best efforts to get rid of the maids from suppression and better their position in the society, where they are treated as inferior ones. The white character's complete devotion to the black maids throughout the novel, even in adverse situations, has set a distinct meaning of racism in this novel.

Author Kathryn Stockett belonged to white family and was born in 1969 and raised in Jackson, Mississippi of United States of America. After graduating from University of Alabama with a degree in English and creative writing, she moved to New York City, where she worked in a magazine. She currently lives in Atlanta with her husband and daughter. *The Help* is Kathryn Stockett's debut and best-selling novel. It is her first novel, which is one of the most popular reads. It was published by a Penguin Books publication in 2009. A film on *The Help* has been released in August, 2011 with a main theme "change begins with a whisper". The film visualizes the racial discrimination that takes place in early 1960's Jackson, Mississippi. The stars of this film are Emma Stone, Viola Davis, Octavia Spencer, Bryce Dallas Howard, Jessica Chastain, Sissy Spacek, Mike Vogel and Allison Janney. It is directed by Stockett's childhood friend Tate Taylor. This novel is about the complicated relationship between African-American domestic servants and the white women who employed the maids in the 1960s. In an interview for Entertainment page of *Time Magazine*, Kathryn narrates, "I grew up in the 1970s, but I don't think a

whole lot had changed from the '60s. Oh, it had changed in the law books — but not in the kitchens of white homes” (n. page).

Skeeter was bored with her friends and frustrated by the way they talk to and about their maids. It was a fundamental factor for the creation of *The Help*. Skeeter dreams up an idea that could change life in Jackson for the better, but it is quite a dangerous proposition. Kathryn Stockett wrote this novel by her own experience. Stockett has a black maid in her house whose name is Demetrie. Demetrie has no baby so when someone asks her how many children she has, she would hold up her fingers and say three. She meant one is Stockett and others are her brother Rob and her sister Susan. Kathryn was closer to her than other kids.

The author's parents got divorced when she was six years old. When her mother went on one of her frequent trips, her Daddy put them in the motel he owned and brought in Demetrie to stay with them. She moved to New York City when she was twenty-four. Kathryn Stockett in the novel *The Help* narrates “Mississippi is like my mother. I am allowed to complain about her around me, unless she is their mother”(450). It was easier for her to write *The Help* while living in New York than in Mississippi. The distance added a new perspective.

Although, *The Help* is a large fiction, Stockett wondered an awful lot what her family would think of it, and what Demetrie, the black maid of her own house, would have thought too, even though she was long dead. Kathryn was scared as she was crossing a terrible line by writing in the voice of a black person even belonging from white community. She was afraid she would fail to describe a relationship that was so intensely influential in her life, so loving, so grossly stereotyped in American history and literature. The author of *The Help* states; “I was truly grateful to read Howell Raines's Pulitzer Prize-winning article, "Grady's Gift":

There is no trickier subject for a writer from the South than that of affection between a black person and a white one in the unequal world of segregation. For the dishonesty upon which a society is founded makes every emotion suspect, makes it impossible to know whether what flowed between two people was honest feeling or pity or pragmatism. (450)

Kathryn Stockett read the article and thought how the article's writer found a way to put it into such concise words. There was the same issue she had been struggling with and couldn't catch in her hands, like a wet fish. Mr. Raines managed to nail it down in a few sentences. She was glad to hear she was in the company of others in her struggle.

Like Stockett's feelings for Mississippi, her feelings for *The Help* contradict greatly. She was afraid that she had told too much regarding the lines between black and white women. She was taught not to talk about such uncomfortable things, which was impolite. As a good story includes humor, anger, conflict, and love, Kathryn Stockett has woven the full range of emotions and situations into a moving story. The story of the novel makes readers to laugh, cry and scream at the characters.

The life was not only so much worse for many black women working in the homes in Mississippi, but was also that there was so much more love between black and white characters as portrayed in the Stockett's novel. She doesn't presume to think that she knows what it really felt like to be a black woman in Mississippi, especially in the 1960s. The narrator narrates:

I don't think it is something any white woman on the other end of a black woman's paycheck could ever truly understand. But trying to understand is vital to our humanity. . . . Not that much separates us.

Not nearly as much as I'd thought. I'm pretty sure I can say that no one in my family ever asked Demetrie what it felt like to be black in Mississippi, working for our white family. (451)

The narrator means to say that there is not any broad thing to make separate between white and black, it is just the colour. Nonetheless, the colour is very minor thing in a human being's life. The vital thing is trying to understand to the humanity. The narrator is with the opinion that she does not see any important thing that makes difference between white and black than that the colour. She is sure that nobody in her family asked her maid Demetrie about what difference did she feel as a human being while working in the house of a white family.

Since, the whole story of the novel revolves around the white and black characters, who understand each-others, I have chosen multiculturalism as a prospective of this dissertation under the title of "Cultural Reconciliation". Even being from different cultures, the characters behave each others as if they are from the same culture.

Set in Mississippi during the 1960s, Skeeter is a southern society girl who returns from college determined to become a writer, but turns her friends' lives and a Mississippi town upside down when she decides to take interview of the black women who have spent their lives taking care of prominent southern families. Aibileen, Skeeter's best friend's housekeeper, is the first to open up to the dismay of her friends in the tight-knit black community. Despite Skeeter's life-long friendships hanging in the balance, she and Aibileen continue their collaboration and soon more women come forward to tell their stories and as it turns out, they have a lot to say. Along the way, unlikely friendships are forged and a new sisterhood emerges, but not before everyone in town has a thing or two to say them when they become unwittingly and

unwillingly caught up in the changing times. There are mainly two characters white (Skeeter) and blacks (Abileen and Minny). The white character always understands the feelings of the black characters. The writer here stands for white character – Skeeter – and has treated the black characters Abileen and Minny in a way that depicts the suffering and sorrows of the black maids in the period of slavery system in America.

The Help has three main narrators, Miss Skeeter, Abileen and Minny, and it's divided into thirty-four chapters. In the early 1960's, Jackson Mississippi was completely divided by race. 'Coloured people' as referred to in the book, were not even able to use the same toilets in the houses they worked in because they were assumed to spread coloured diseases to whites (8). Hilly Holbrook and Elizabeth Leefolt have been friends of Skeeter Phelan forever. They are volunteers together and raise money for "poor starving African babies" (163). They play bridge and tennis together and they are thick as thieves. Hilly and Elizabeth are married and have children, but Skeeter is still single. While the wonderful society's women are making party plans and busy looking good for their husbands, their 'coloured' maids take care of their children, cook for them, and clean their houses. Abileen is Miss Leefolt's maid and Minny used to be 'the help' for Hilly's family. Skeeter doesn't see things like Elizabeth and Hilly do. When Hilly decides that she wants to publish an article about coloured germs and why it's important to use separate bathrooms in 'The League's' monthly newsletter. Skeeter gets very irritated. Since she writes the newsletter, she decides to pull a little prank on Hilly and somehow, people decide to donate their toilets for 'the cause' by dumping them off on Hilly's front lawn. Skeeter pretty much gets herself isolated by the whole of Jackson society at this point, but she doesn't care. She decides to do some research into the lives of the 'coloured maids'.

So she wants to take interview with the black maids about their bitter experiences while working in the houses of the white families. Kirkus reviews assert that:

Four peerless actors render an array of sharply defined black and white characters in the nascent years of the Civil Rights Movement. They each handle a variety of southern accents with aplomb and draw out the daily humiliation and pain the maids are subject to as well as their abiding affection for their white charges. . . . The novel is a superb intertwining of personal and political history in Jackson, Miss., in the early 1960s, but this reading gives it a deeper and fuller power. (8)

The three characters Skeeter, Aibileen and Minny move ahead very carefully to write novel, which defines about the condition of the white and blacks characters in the nascent year of Civil Right Movement. *The Help* is the outcome of their work about the daily humiliation and pain faced by the black maids in their white masters' house. The characters of this novel visualize Civil Rights Movement in the early 1960s in Mississippi to get rid of the domination against the blacks.

At first, no black maid wants to talk to Skeeter. All of the blacks in town are scared to death. Black people are beaten to death or sent to prison for doing simple things like accidentally drinking out of the 'white' water fountain and using the toilets of the whites. Aibileen is the first to talk to Miss Skeeter, although she hesitates at length. Miss Skeeter and Aibileen agree that their meetings will be totally confidential and no one can possibly know for both of their sake. Miss Skeeter wants to know what it's like for Aibileen to take care of white children, and how she's treated by the women of the household. After a while, the gossip spreads and other maids show their willingness to share their stories with Miss Skeeter. Skeeter

promises that their names will be changed and the town is a made up name in Mississippi.

Minny is Aibileen's best friend. She has been shunned by Hilly and she luckily found another job even though Hilly told everyone in town not to hire her. Her job and her family are on the line, because her husband would literally kill her if he found out what she was doing. Her story is heart wrenching as she tells it, but everybody loves her for her strong presentation of the ideas.

When all of the stories are collected, Miss Skeeter hopes to make it a book and send it to New York for publishing. She is not really sure whether they will want to publish this sort of material or not although it was exceptional and adoring and was told from the heart of the main characters.

African American women were hardly paid and treated poorly by their bosses. However, they still formed amazing attachment with their children. The children were 'color blind' for a short time as they were not able to understand the racial structure of the society. And it was very hurtful and sad when they grew up and became 'the boss' eventually. However, many of the white women in the story form relationships and realize that their hired maids are the best friends they have. Through the interview between Skeeter and the maids (Aibileen and Minny), readers can feel some of the love and understanding that people had for one another, regardless of race. Kirkus narrates:

Stockett renders a stirring account of three women—two black, one white—who conspire to write a tell-all memoir about life as black domestic in Jackson at the height of the civil-rights movement. The author weaves three distinct voices into a balanced whole, leaving no issue untouched or character slighted... As a child of the South,

Kathryn freely admits that “we took a lot of things for granted. I had to put a lot of distance between myself and those days to realize that it was a little out of the ordinary what we experienced growing up in Mississippi. (10-11)

According to Kirkus, Stockett makes inspiring story of three women, two black and one white, who have a plan to write their memories about life as black maids at the summit of the Civil Rights Movement. The author of *The Help* has woven the distinct stories of three women in a balanced manner without missing any issue of the domination against blacks by whites according the Kirkus’s review. Stockett’s real experience has been materialized in this novel as Kirkus describes.

The story of *The Help* is excellent and the message is so important. Black women have a huge hand in keeping many families together in Mississippi for generations. Without their help, many children would have had no attention or love. The hard work and dedication from these women ironically, in many cases, help to raise future racists, but the love and devotion is there. This is a story that really needed to be told to change the society.

In this novel, 23 year old white girl Skeeter has just returned home after graduating from Ole Miss. She understands problems of black maids. Constantine is her black maid to whom Skeeter loves very much. Skeeter has a deep affection with Constantine as she has brought up Skeeter in her child age. After Skeeter returns from Ole Miss, she doesn’t get Constantine in her home and no one does tell Skeeter about Constantine’s new address. It makes her tensed. Aibileen is another black maid, a wise, regal woman raising her seventeenth white child. She has lost her own son who died while his bosses behaved him carelessly. She is devoted to the little girl she looks after. In the same way Minny is also black character, Aibileen’s best friend, is short,

fat and perhaps the sassiest woman in Mississippi. She can cook very well, but she can't mind her tongue, so she's lost yet another job.

Seemingly as different from one another as can be, these women will nonetheless come together for a secret project that will put them all at a risk. Because they are suffocating within the lines they define their town and their times. And sometimes lines are made to be crossed.

In novel *The Help*, Kathryn Stockett creates three extra-ordinary women. These three women's determination to start a movement of their own ultimately helps to change the dogmatic thinking of the society about the relation between blacks and whites. *The Help* is based on the lives of the maids who have spent their entire life taking care of white children.

II. Multiculturalism and Cultural Reconciliation in Stockett's *The Help*

This novel deals with themes like slavery system, domination against black, bitter condition of black maids in America in 1960s, state of multiculturalism in the American society etc. This dissertation recognizes “multiculturalism” as the most important theme of the novel. That is why this research makes “multiculturalism” a tool under the topic of “Cultural Reconciliation”. Among the three key characters, Skeeter represents from white culture while Aibileen and Minny the black. Skeeter is a writer who closely observes the suppression against Aibileen and Minny from their masters, who are her close friends. Although, she is unable to protest the bad deeds of her friends openly, she always stands in support of the black maids working in the houses of the white families. Taking into account the possibility of more torture and suffering from the white employers, Skeeter always objects the suppressive activities from behind the curtain and quietly helps the maids most of the time. Even being from white culture, Skeeter perfectly understands the feelings of the black maids. They have good relationship, cooperation and understanding among each others. Skeeter helps Aibileen and Minny to struggle in the society. Skeeter, who has also experienced torture and suppression against black maid Constantine from her parents, helps Aibileen and Minny as far as possible. The experience encourages her to write a book about the pain and suffering of the black maids. Bachowski, Donna narrates:

Stockett's deep and complex debut novel, set in early 1960s Jackson, MS, is about three women drawn together to make a difference. In an unlikely, even dangerous, alliance, an upper class white woman and two black maids collaborate to write a book about what it's like to be a black maid working for white families, nosing white babies. (42-43)

Kathryn Stockeet's novel not only presents a simple story of twenty-four year old white girl Skeeter but also talks about African-American women maids' condition during the early 1960s. Skeeter is a white young girl, who is grown up in a culture of white people. She has an impression of white culture from her parents. Even her close friends, who have kept black maids, are also white ones. Aibileen is one of the maids, working in Skeeter's best friend's house. She has already raised 16 children and now raising the seventeenth child in Elizabeth Leefolts' house. The child she is raising is Elizabeth's daughter, Mae Mobley. Aibileen has a flash back of her son Treelore, who died at the age of 24 while working at the Scanlon Taylor Mill late at night, in the rain. He slips of the loading dock into the drive way and gets run over by a tractor. Aibileen stays in bed for months. She comes to work for the Leefolts after Mae Mobley is born. At first she works as usual. Soon, though, she begins resenting her work situation. Skeeter's frequent visit to Elizabeth's house, she encounters with Aibileen's bitter reality. Aibileen finds Skeeter the most appropriate person to share her own life story. She tells how she lost her young son and reveals that he was writing a book about the domination against the black by the white. Hearing the Aibileen's troubles, a sense of pity and humanity arouses in Skeeter's mind. Then, she wants to help Aibileen by all means. But, there is not amicable situation for her to help Aibileen. It is because, though Elizabeth is her close friend, she is not liberal to the black maid. She always wants to dominate the maid and treat her like a slave. In such a surrounding, Skeeter maintains good relationship and cooperation with the black maids. Side by side, she continues relation with her friend Elizabeth as usual. She helps the maid and supports her without letting Elizabeth know about it. This contradictory situation creates many questions: How is a white character supportive to blacks? How does she help the black maids in the odd atmosphere? How do the black

maids feel comfortable to share their feelings and sufferings to the white? Does a white character Skeeter understand the problem of black maids? How do they come to be the encouraging factor for Skeeter to write book about the pain and suffering of the blacks? Why a white character does not support own culture blindly? Why does the white writer of the novel *The Help* defend the blacks? All these questions were the major problems to be resolved in course of doing this dissertation. The dissertation has focused its study in finding the answers of all these questions. This is a book about understanding others and the lives they have lead. The characters all realize a great deal about the "other side" as they work through their project.

The author portrays her character Skeeter as a white and Minny and Aibileen as black characters. Skeeter has got experiences of blacks' pain and suffering from her own black maid Constantine and the maids of her friends. Being a white, she still understands the problems of black maids. Skeeter not only listens to the pain and suffering of black characters but also protests against the whites who want to discriminate the black maids. For instance she stands against the plan of constructing toilet outside the house for the black maids. Miss Skeeter, she frowning at Miss Hilly. She set her cards down face up and says real matter-a-fact, "Maybe we ought to just build you a bathroom outside, Hilly" (9).

The issue of separate bathroom encourages Aibileen to help Skeeter with her book. Aibileen wants to keep her job and her name as a capable surrogate mother but she doesn't support the white woman's idea that the black maid carries diseases that white people don't. The stories told by Aibileen and her friends to Skeeter are funny, sad and terrifying, and are filled with anxiety at the contradictory ways and prejudices of white people.

The novel tells the story of three women during the critical years of the Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi, where it was dangerous to push the boundaries of segregation for both blacks and whites though for very different reasons. So the black maids Aibileen and Minny begin to work with a white woman named Skeeter on a book about their experiences as domestic help to change the society.

Skeeter always carries to the black maids. Here are some evidences which visualize how she plays supportive role to the maids all the time. Skeeter supports blacks by listening to their pain and suffering from their white masters. Skeeter tries to talk to Aibileen in the kitchen. Elizabeth doesn't like Aibileen talking to her friends, though, and Aibileen is nervous. Skeeter brings up the bathroom conversation and asks Aibileen, "Do you ever wish you could...change things?" (10). Here Skeeter says that the society can not be changed by always being afraid of or nervous from theirs masters. They should expose the things if they wish to change the society, she says.

As Skeeter is white girl from white parents and white society, it is not easy for her to carry out the activities, which are against her parents and society but are supportive to the black maids. Despite this odd ground reality, she always helps the black maids and gives a warm company to them.

Skeeter takes Aibileen and other black maids interview in media about the suppression against them and their experiences as maids. In the beginning, Aibileen is not willing to give her interview but later she agrees to give her interview and other maids too in condition to change their real identity in the interview.

"Miss Skeeter, we gone have to be real careful." "We will, I promise."

"And you gone have to change my name . . ." "Of course." I should've mentioned this. "When can we meet? Where can we meet?" "Can't do

it in the white neighborhood, that's for sure. I guess we gone have to do it over at my house." "Do you know any other maids who might be interested?" . . . "I go quiet, thinking of Hilly's bathroom plan and accusing the maid of stealing and her talk of diseases." (121-122)

This is how Skeeter not only helps the black maids to give interview but also persuades to expose the dominating activities against them by the white masters. The interview brings out all the bitter and heart touching experiences of the black maids working in whites' houses. Due to the fear of white masters, the maids chose secret place for interview and want to change their names in the interview. Skeeter also encourages the black maids for not to tolerate suppression and react upon such activities to bring about change.

Although, the black maids feel odd to share their feelings with Skeeter in the beginning, but because of regular visit of Skeeter to them they gradually become mixed up with her and she always wants to co-operate them, and tries to share her positive attitude towards them. By knowing her positive attitude towards them, they feel comfortable to share their feelings and suffering to the white.

Problematic in that novel is set in Jackson, Mississippi during the early 1960s, and is told from three points of view. Skeeter, an educated and prosperous young woman with no real plans for the future, is white. Aibileen is a maid and nanny in Jackson, Mississippi. Aibileen is the first narrator, a middle aged African American employed by Elizabeth Leefolt, Skeeter's good friend. She is a nurturing character, and her tender affection for Mrs. Leefolt's two year old daughter Mae Mobley is a strong beginning. May Mobley is her seventeenth child and Minny, the so-called help who reveal their stories, are black. These three women were going to bring a movement against the white. *Editorial Review* asserts:

This optimistic, uplifting novel set during the nascent civil rights movement in Jackson, where black women were trusted to raise white children but not to polish the household silver. Skeeter is anxious to become a writer, is advised to hone her chops by writing “about what disturbs you.”... the black women on whom the country club sets relies and mistrusts enlisting the help of Aibileen, a maid who’s raised 17 children, and Minny, who’s found herself unemployed more than a few times after mouthing off to her white employers. (1)

When Skeeter keeps up expressing positive attitude to the blacks, the maids feel that she was the only person, who really understands their problems in the surrounding of the white people. Here, the writer clearly portrays how a white understands the blacks. It justifies the central hypothesis of this dissertation. The books, which she read in the library, also influence her to understand the plights of the black maids making her more sensitive and positive towards the maids. Skeeter says:

The booklet is thin, printed on onionskin paper, curling, bound with staples. “Compilation of Jim Crow Laws of the South,” the cover reads. I open the noisy cover page. I read through four of the twenty-five pages, mesmerized by how many laws exist to separate us. Negroes and whites are not allowed to share water fountains, movie houses, public restrooms, ballparks, phone booths, circus shows. . . . We all know about these laws, we live here, but we don’t talk about them. This is the first time I’ve ever seen them written down. (172-73)

It is one of the best evidences that Skeeter understands the problems of black maids by reading the book she finds in the library. By reading the books she knows that Negroes and whites are not allowed to share same water fountains, movie houses,

public rooms, ballparks, phone booths, circus shows and so on. When she knows about the separate laws between the whites and blacks she realizes the extreme level of discrimination between the people of two races in the society.

Constantine, the black maid, rears Skeeter. Skeeter gets more love from her than from her own mother. In the adult age, when she is away from home for university study, she remembers her child-age love and affection from the maid. She is not only appreciating about her unforgettable relation with the maid, but is also able to acknowledge all the problems and dominations faced by the maid. Skeeter is closely encounters with the events of domination and tortures against the black maids from her very early age. When she grows to be adult, an idea of exposing the suppression and excesses against the blacks comes to her mind. She thinks that she would write a book including the experiences of the two black maids after completing graduation.

Skeeter, who is single and graduate from Ole Miss, returns to Jackson longing to be a serious writer. While playing bridge with her friends Hilly and Elizabeth, Skeeter asks Elizabeth's seemingly quiet maid Aibileen for housekeeping advice to fill the column of the local paper. Aibileen's good friend Minny, who works for Hilly's mother, is less expert at playing the game than Aibileen. When Hilly, an aggressively racist social climber, fires Minny for speaking too freely, her bold act of revenge almost destroys her livelihood. Unlike insensible Elizabeth and cruel Hilly, Skeeter is at the verge of enlightenment.

Encouraged by a New York editor, Skeeter decides to write a book about the experience of black maids and enlist Aibileen's help. For Skeeter the book is primarily a chance to prove herself as a writer. The hazards are much higher for the black women who put their lives on the line by telling their true stories. Although the

interpretations are published anonymously, the town's social structure is permanently torn. Skeeter's narration is alive with complexity to her traditional Southern mother remains even after she learns why the beloved black maid who raised her has disappeared. In contrast, Stockett never truly gets inside Aibileen and Minny's head.

Here, the blacks stand as the major persuading factor for writing the book. She thinks writing the book on such experience will make the blacks to be alert against such domination and will help to change the mindsets of the whites and ultimately set out a cultural revolution against discrimination. Skeeter not only helps the blacks by cooperating them but also by writing the book. On the other hand, blacks also help her to write the book by sharing their feelings and becoming the persuading factor for the same. Here, the title of the book embodies the meaning – the help occurs when one understands other.

Although, Skeeter belongs to white culture, she doesn't support her own culture blindly. When she sees the torture and suffering given to the blacks by the whites, she thinks that black are also the human beings like the whites. The situation hurts her and makes her not to be a blind supporter of the white culture.

There are rare evidences that a white author defends black people in literary write ups. Understanding the feelings of the blacks closely, looking at them from positive point of view, the innocent nature and poor condition of the blacks represent the themes that are pro-black people. Even being an author belonging to white background, author Kathryn Stockett defends the black characters. Such evidences are found rare in western literature. Centered on two black maids, Aibileen and Minny, and one white young woman named Skeeter this novel tells how these three women who join forces to write a book about "the help", the good and the bad experiences of the black maids in service to white families. The novel reveals several powerful

elements: the disgraceful state of race relations in the deep south, the seeds of attitudinal change, and the power of the written word. Told from the perspective of these three women, it gives us a painful glance into our not so distant history, and the illogical and degrading practices of segregation. One major theme of the novel demonstrates white southern women were willing to have the care for their children from black maids, but these same maids were not allowed to use the "white" toilet facilities in the home. This understanding is eloquently stated by Skeeter as she reflects on her friendship with the maid, Aibileen, near the end of the novel: "We are just two people. Not much separates us. Not nearly as much as I'd thought" (409).

Besides being a maid for a white family, Aibileen took care of Mae Mobley Leefolt, the family's two year old child. Aibileen tells Mae Mobley secret stories. Mae Mobley loves Aibileen like her mother. She follows Aibileen even her mother is at home. When Aibileen goes to toilet she also goes to the same toilet in which Aibileen goes.

Skeeter is the observer of the suppression against the blacks from her child age. She gets love and affection from Constantine, her black maid, in her child age more than from her mother. It creates positive atmosphere in the mind of Skeeter for the black maid. So, the maids' departure from her house before she returns back home after completing the study makes her very sad. When she returns home from Miss Ole, she tries to find the whereabouts of Constantine, but fails to find her because Constantine has already left the home. It makes her upset.

"Where's Constantine?" I asked. "In the kitchen?" Mother said, "Constantine is no longer employed here... Mother stood straighter, smoothing down her dress. "Constantine's gone, Skeeter. She went to live with her people up in Chicago." "But what? She didn't say

anything in her letters about Chicago.” I knew that wasn’t her surprise.

She would’ve told me such terrible news immediately... I told

Constantine she wasn’t to write to you about leaving. (64)

The dialogues clearly exhibit that how careful Skeeter is towards her maid

Constantine. She feels very sorry after she knows that her mother fired the black maid. She is very disappointed with the harsh and inhuman behavior of her mother towards the maid, who worked in the house for 29 years. It also visualizes how rude is her mother to the maid and how her mother speaks lie about the reason that made the maid to leave her house.

Multiculturalism is the acceptance of multiple ethnic cultures, for practical reasons and/or for the sake of diversity and applied to the demographic make-up of a specific place, usually at the organized level. Multiculturalism as ‘cultural mosaic’ is often contrasted with the concepts assimilation and social integration and has been described as a “salad bowl” rather than a “melting pot”. Multiculturalism refers to the form of a society or a nation where different cultures are accepted and respected. Different scholars give their opinions regarding multiculturalism. According to Nathan Glazer "multiculturalism” refers to the fact that people may come from different cultures and creates many sub-cultures while living in a common society or nation" (253). In the same way, Brian Barry in his book *Culture and Equality* says that multiculturalism can divide people when they need to unite in order to fight for the social justice. Multiculturalism is a situation where two or more than two cultures merge. It is also a public policy approach for managing cultural diversity in differences within a country's boarder. As a policy, multicultural emphasizes the unique characteristics of different cultures especially as they relate to one another in receiving nations.

Multiculturalism can include folk songs, dance, food festival, arts and crafts, museums, heritage languages, ethnic studies, ethnic processes, race relations, culture sharing and human rights. It also aims at something more moderate than radical multicultural theory calls for, and that is respect for and acknowledgement of a range of sub-cultures and changing it in various decrease whether this means a wholesale rejection of assimilation is really not clear. Multiculturalism advocates do not devote any great effort to projecting a picture of how culture and life will in time evolve. It is a response by minority and other groups to their current sense of deprivation and to what they feel is insufficient recognition and respect as well. Multicultural nation is something like the chain of negotiation which always getting through happy ending where minority discourses can respectfully be incorporated in the national discourses.

Fredric Jameson defines culture as a vehicle or a medium whereby the relationship between the groups is transacted. He states:

No group has a culture all by itself. Culture is the nimbus perceived by one group when it comes into contact with another culture and observes another one [...] then a culture is the objectification of everything alien and it is one of the contact groups. (271)

By observing what Jameson postulates here, it can be said that culture is a transforming phenomenon. It is an accumulation of religion, nationalism, language, social rules, conduct, and behavioral pattern and so on. To put forth this idea he further states, "culture is the ensemble of stigma one group bears in the eyes of the other group and nice use" (271). In agreement with the aforesaid proposition, culture in the present research means the belief and attitude about something that people in a particular group or organization share. While interpreting multiculturalism, Kenneth J. Pakenham argues:

One common interpretation of multiculturalism is that society should encourage immigrants to retain their own cultures and languages.

Under this definition, multiculturalism seems to imply that immigrant formalities used do not want the culture of this new country. Canadians and Americans who interpret multiculturalism in this way are perhaps justifiable. Common sense tells them that people cannot be fully members of a society if they are not willing to adapt and use the new society's cultural rules at least some of the times. (80)

In contemporary society, different understanding of multiculturalism has resulted in two different and seemingly inconsistent strategies: The first focuses on interaction and communication between different cultures. Interaction of culture provides opportunities for the cultural differences to communicate and interact to create multiculturalism. The second centers on diversity and cultural uniqueness. Cultural isolation can protect the uniqueness of the local culture of a nation or area and also contribute to global cultural diversity.

These different understanding of multiculturalism are not absolutely distinct from each other. Moreover, the opposing understandings and strategies sometimes actually complement each other work to generate new cultural phenomena that embody the ideologies of the individual cultures and the relationships between them. The term “Transculturation”, coined by Cuban Anthropologist Fernando Ortiz in 1940 in his book *Transcultural Studies*, indicates a translation of one culture with another (4). Mary Louise Pratt coined the phrase “the contact zone” to describe cultural clashes and operations (5). In the cultural environment the illustrated, cultures are not only interacted or isolated. Those two Strategies work at the same time and apply to different aspects of cultures to create new forms of cultures. Multiculturalism can be

defined in a ways that go beyond human activities to give a vivid multi-dimensional understanding of cultural interaction, cultural isolation and phenomena between these two extremes.

Kathryn Stockett has presented three main characters including one white and two blacks. Skeeter is a white character while Aibileen and Minny are black ones. The story behind this book concerns three different main characters: Aibileen, Minny and Ms. Skeeter. Aibileen and Minny are Black maids who raise the white people's children and do all the work around the house. Ms. Skeeter is a white woman, who is upset by the abuse against the blacks. It creates a sense of help to the maids. With the gradual relation growing between Skeeter and the maids, they are accustomed to each others' culture. Then they get mixed up and behave each other as if they are from same culture.

It is not the black maids who are done a disservice by this white writer; instead the white folk. The two principal maid characters, the lovingly maternal Aibileen and the angry, scrappy Minny, leap off the page in all their warm, three-dimensional glory. Book groups armed with hankies will talk and talk about their quiet bravery and the outrageous insults dished out by their vain, racist employers.

The worst of these bosses, a woman known as Miss Hilly, treats Minny like a thief. And she campaigns to have Jackson households install extra toilets so that colored ones will not have to use white families' restricted bathrooms. Miss Hilly makes herself the rival of each of the book's black characters. Hilly is older than Skeeter even though the two were college roommates. Skeeter the liberal-minded spinster begins dating the son of an intolerant local officer; as Skeeter begins wondering what happened to Constantine, the maid who lovingly raised her; and as both Aibileen and Minny become increasingly confidential to the secrets of their

employers' households. Aibileen is this book's loveliest character, especially in scenes that have her raising Mae Mobley, the toddler now in her charge. Having endured the pain of raising white child after white child only to see them grow up and away from her, Aibileen is still ready to embrace another one. On the evidence of Ms. Stockett's autobiographical afterword, this is the part of the story she knows best; she herself had a runaway white mother and was raised by a black woman named Demetrie. She loves Demetrie dearly without ever giving much thought to what Demetrie's life is like.

Skeeter has got a unique sense of compassion and understanding of the women with whom she writes her book in this story. She deals with her own issues; a white and privileged woman. However, she lives her life in a world in which she does not feel comfortable. She does not fit into the circle of friends that she was expected. Skeeter is true to herself and to the women on whose behalf she completes the book, which makes her the perfect story-teller.

Kathryn Stockett's *The Help* is a wonderful debut novel. It follows three women in Jackson, Mississippi from 1962-64, Aibileen a 50years old black woman who has worked as a maid in her whole life, Minny is 30 years old of another black maid and Skeeter a 22 year old white woman who has just finished college at Ole Miss and dreams of being a writer. Skeeter comes up with an idea to gather he experiences of 12 black maids working in the homes of white women. Skeeter convinces Aibileen, the maid of her best friend Elizabeth, to work on her project. Aibileen then convinces Minny, and other maids to join in the project, despite the potentially brutal consequences if they are discovered. As the women work to complete their book on a tight timeline from a New York publisher, the racial tension heats up in Jackson.

Stockett alternates among the three main characters as narrators, giving this novel a unique story that is told from the perspective of both the white employer (Skeeter) and the black maids (Aibileen and Minny). As the three women come to understand each other we see the discovery from both perspectives, which give the novel a deep touching feel. The relationship that forms among these women is strong. Skeeter's all the friends are now married and have babies. She plays bridge with them weekly and is the newsletter editor for the Ladies' League.

Skeeter's groups of friends are part of the rising leaders of Jackson's white society. One woman, an outsider, has married one of the men from their group. Aibileen is the maid for one of Skeeter's best friends. When Aibileen uses her boss' name as a reference, the woman gives Minny a job.

Maids are the help and the white women are the bosses who run their lives. But Skeeter starts talking to Aibileen, then Minny. She starts questioning "the way things are". Soon, the three women have secrets that have to be kept from their friends, both black and white. This secret could change Jackson society if they can't keep it. Kathryn Stockett has written a powerful, poignant story. *The Help* is narrated by the three women Aibileen, Minny, and Skeeter.

The Help studies the complex relationships between the women, the men in their lives, the racial issues of the time, the care for the children, between the blacks and their white bosses, in illness, in romance, in parent adult children connections, spousal abuse, and the way they care for each other. Stockett hits the right tones for the narratives - each woman telling the lives they face. Their interactions build tentatively, then to a powerful trust. When Skeeter first approaches Aibileen with her questions, Aibileen backs away. She has no reason to trust any white woman. Aibileen is the one who brings Minny into Skeeter's life. At the end of *The Help*, none

of the three women could have predicted where they were two years later. *The Help* is centered on the women's stories.

The Help, Kathryn Stockett's bestseller, shares the experiences living in a small Mississippi town and the wide racial divides between black women who served as maids to white women during the turbulent 60s. Centered on two black maids, Aibileen and Minny, and one white young woman named Skeeter, in this novel created a stir through the book. *The Help* that helps to revolutionize the blacks and bring about change in the behavior of the whites with the black people. Kelm Rebecca express:

Set in Stockett's native Jackson, MS, in the early 1960, this first novel adopts the complicated blacks and whites living in a segregated south. A century after the emancipation proclamation, blacks raised white children and ran households but were paid poorly, often had to use separate toilets family and watched the children they cared for commit bigotry. (83)

Here, Kelm Rebecca's statement expresses that the novel has exposed the complicated condition of black maids living in a segregated south in 1960s. Even after one century of proclamation of emancipation, the blacks were treated as maids and were paid poorly by white families as earlier according to her. Rebecca also highlights the example of separate toilets for black maids, which shows the condition of discrimination, as has explained in the novel. In Rebecca's words the two black maids Aibileen and Minny gave series of interviews to the media although there was a high risk for them. The critique also characterizes the existence of multiculturalism by explaining how the white woman Skeeter understands the black maids and contributes to the anti-discrimination movement.

In this novel, Aibileen marks on Mae Mobley, refusing to seek companionship out of some far fetched basis by Stockett, just so she doesn't have to truly inhabit an African American woman. Skeeter only knows that it would have probably been hard for her to write a scene with black maids. *The Help* intertwines the lives of black women working as domestic help for whites, upper-class women in Jackson, Mississippi in the early 1960s. Aibileen has been working for white families since she was a teenager. She's strong, quietly proud, and kind in the care she takes of the white children. In contrast to Aibileen, Minny is, fifteen years younger than the older Aibileen. Because of her sharp tongue, Minny has a hard time keeping a job, and the needs of her large family and abusive husband demand that she work. But it's not just her mouth that gets Minny in trouble; it's the terrible and awful thing she did that haunts her path.

Skeeter had a black maid when she was growing up, but the mystery of her beloved Constantine's departure from her household goes unsolved for a large portion of the book. When Skeeter finds out what happened to Constantine, it personally reinforces for her the theme of the book she's been writing with the help of Aibileen and Minny. The book that provides the first honest, open look at what it's like for a black woman to work for a white family in Jackson. Some of it illustrates how close people can grow to each other, even when society works hard to keep them separate. *The Help* is the outcome of the joint work of Skeeter, Aibileen, and Minny.

Aibileen always takes orders quietly. Her friend Minny has never held her tongue but now must somehow keep secrets about her employer that leave her speechless. Skeeter has full of ambition but thinks it as failure without a husband. Together, these seemingly different women join together to write a tell-all book about

work as a black maid in the South, that could forever alter their destinies and the life of a small town.

There are more than two sides to this story. The book doesn't judge in a lot of instances. This book really celebrates the power of the written word. These women embark on a writing project in order to bring change to their world. They understand the power of writing and that's what makes them both hopeful and fearful at the same time.

The writer, even being a white lady has presented the black characters as protagonists of the novel. It is the prominent and central message of understanding others in this novel.

Generally, most of the literary works are written from the viewpoint of upper classes or powerful forces. In contrary to this fact, the *The Help* has manifested the racial issue from the viewpoint of suppressed class, the blacks. It clarifies that this novel is the powerful write-up that brings out the story of oppressed ones.

The white character Skeeter equally treats the black character Aibileen and Minny like her best friend Elizabeth and Miss Hilly. Skeeter says, "May be we ought to just build you a bathroom outside, Hilly" (9). In this statement, Skeeter, the white character, criticize Hilly, the white employer, for proposing to build a bathroom outside the house for black maids.

White character Skeeter wants to uplift black character Aibileen and Minny in every movement. The following paragraph is one of the splendid instances to say how she always wants to encourage them.

Hilly tells Skeeter she's working to have a law passed that would make it mandatory for white families to build outside bathrooms for their black employees. Skeeter suggests *Hilly* should have a bathroom

outside, and thus begins a slow boiling feud between the two women. After the bridge game, Skeeter apologizes to Aibileen about the bathroom talk and asks her, "Do you ever wish you could...change things? (10)

Here, Hilly shares her wish with Skeeter saying that the black maids should be treated in a different manner than the white ones. She longs to have separate toilets for the black maids. She believes the combine toilets for whites and blacks will transfer diseases to the whites from the black ones. However, Skeeter defends against Hilly's idea.

The story is told through Eugenia Skeeter, who starts to see the injustice around her and talks the maids into telling their stories for a novel. Skeeter loses almost everything from her endeavors, but morphs through to a new understanding of how the world will be. She is at ease with the coming of change. Her friends fight with all their might to continue the status quo, life the way it always has been.

The maids' characters illustrated in *The Help* gain sympathy and respect of others. Although their struggle is bitter, their dignity and honesty are exemplary. Black maids Aibileen and Minny begin to work with a white woman named Skeeter on a book about their experiences as domestic help. They share with Skeeter about how they are treated and behaved by their masters. Their masters used to think as they are below their feet. They are given little food to eat not enough to fulfill their stomach just to make them alive. These black maids are not allowed to talk with their masters relatives and also are not allowed to receive telephone. They are not allowed to take rest even a single minute. Even if their masters' friends want to talk to them, they would be afraid of because their masters used to scold for

exposing the things. Their masters always want to see them being engaged in work all the time and not to open mouth with outsiders.

The personalities of the white women who employ and express the maids are varied, but in general, they all live in a rule of fear. It is not an exaggeration to say that it is a state of terror. The powerful white women use threats and lies to secure and exercise power; the weaker ones use flattery and obedience to maintain their position within the power structure. The whole story is about how fear and denial binds everyone, even those with good intentions, even the victims. In *Weekly Publisher*, Ballantine Hardcover publisher asserts:

Review audio out the daily humiliation and pain the maids are subject to, as well as their abiding affection for their white charges. The actors handle the narration and dialogue so well that no character is ever stereotyped, the humor is always delightful, and the listener is led through the multilayered stories of maids and mistresses. The novel is a superb intertwining to personal and political history in Jackson. (57-58)

According to Ballantine Hardcover, the novel has interwoven not only the humiliation and pain of the maids but also records the personal and political history in Jackson.

The book that Skeeter, Aibileen, and other are working on unveils the stories hidden behind the bright, public face of normal white society. In normal society white people are polite and agreeable, but sometimes superficial and phony. But behind the bright smiles and kitchen doors lies a world of abuse, insults, lies and exploitation. The powerful white wives threaten the reputations and financial security of their colored maids if they don't obey them and destroy their maids anytime. Fear has shuts the mouths and closed the minds, making everyone behave as if hell is normal.

Secretly, Skeeter, Aibileen and other black domestics work together to compile the stories of what life has really been like for the help serving the white families. This shared work weakens the dominion of fear and silence and begins to form new relationships built on trust, courage, respect and honesty. *The Help* helps the readers hear the silenced voices and learn some of the unspoken truths about life behind closed doors.

All the characters of this novel represent two races – black and white. Their all activities characterize the two different cultural realities. White people making the blacks work in their houses as maids and the blacks always being suppressed by the whites are the major situations in this novel. However, the author has introduced a white character Skeeter who is different from other white characters. She always tries to understand the black maids, supports them and encourages them to fight against the suppression from their masters. More than that Skeeter wants to uplift the maids' and bring out the bitter reality they are facing by media and book. It is all for setting out a revolution against the culture of domination and inhuman behavior in opposition to the black people in entire USA. This is how the major characters of *The Help* experience multiculturalism throughout the novel.

Going through the stories of the novel, it can be concluded that the title – Cultural Reconciliation under the tool Multiculturalism – can be seen mainly in the characters of the black and white characters. For instance, Skeeter doesn't see things like Elizabeth and Hilly do. When Hilly decides that she wants to publish an article about coloured germs and why it's important to use separate bathrooms in The League's monthly newsletter, Skeeter gets very irritated. Since she writes the newsletter, she decides to pull a little prank on Hilly and somehow, people decide to donate their toilets for 'the cause' by dumping them off on Hilly's front lawn

(9). Here, Hilly and Elizabeth are the white women who have employed black maids – Minny and Aibileen. Hilly wants to publish an article about coloured germs and plead the importance of using separate bathrooms for whites and blacks.

In another instance, Aibileen warns Minny that Hilly might accuse her of stealing. Minny calls Aibileen at home soon after. Hilly sends Miss Walters to a nursing home and, sure enough, Minny is out of job. Hilly's rude and suppressive character shows that how she hated the black ones. She wants to keep her mother in a nursing home and fire Minny from job. Moreover, she spreads a rumor that Minny is thief so that no one would give her job in the future.

Constantine worked 29 years in Skeeter's house. Skeeter's mother Charlotte is rude towards her maid. She usually tortures Constantine. However, Charlotte's daughter's Skeeter is very kind and supportive towards the maid. She shows her sympathy towards them. Skeeter's mother has already fired Constantine before Skeeter returns house after completing her graduation. Constantine already left her house. The news seriously hurts Skeeter. She asks with many others about the address of Constantine but fails to find. Even belonging from different culture Skeeter and Constantine love and respect each other.

Although, the whites and the blacks seem to be opponent forces, the existence of their cultures in a single setting has reflected the multiculturalism throughout this novel. However, the role of Skeeter depicts well about how a person from one culture can understand the people of other culture in a true manner. Skeeter's support to the black maids and the black maids' total respect towards Skeeter is the splendid example of cultural reconciliation and multiculturalism in the novel.

There are other many instances in the novel which justify that the novel's central ideas are mainly reflected in the characters' character. Minny is the black

character, who previously worked in Hilly's house. But she now works in the house of another white employer Celia as Hilly put her mother in nursing home to take care of her and fires Minny from her job. But Hilly spreads a rumor among the white communities that Minny is a thief that is why she fired her. Aibileen, the black friend of Minny, searches job for Minny in Celia's house. While working in new white employer's house, one day, Celia shows Minny her silver jewelries so that Minny will be responsible if the ornaments were lost. Now Minny is sure that Celia heard Hilly's lie and is playing with her. Here, the author beautifully presents the white employer's bad intention against a black maid even after firing the maid from job.

Skeeter sees Aibileen in her friend Miss Leefult's house for the first time when she comes to meet her friend. Her friend shows unmannered behavior towards her maid Aibileen. By seeing this, Skeeter becomes very upset. She is eager to meet Aibileen secretly. With the frequent meeting between Skeeter and Aibileen, they gradually become one another's friend. They begin to share their inner feelings. Aibileen shares her harsh experiences while working in white employers' houses. She even talks about how her son dies due to the carelessness of her son's boss. Skeeter listens to all these things patiently and realizes the pain and suffering of the black maid. After listening the Aibileen's pathetic story, she not only shows her sympathy to the maid but also determines to help her to come out from the hell like life. It is one of the instances that show how Kathryn Stockett visualizes the cultural reconciliation in the characters' character of *The Help*.

III. Subverting the Traditional Relation between Blacks and Whites

By exposing the bitter reality of the racial discrimination, Kathryn Stockett, author of *The Help*, gives a broad message of cultural reconciliation and multiculturalism existing in a situation when people from one culture truly understand the people of another culture. Even belonging from different culture, the white and black characters behave and understand each others as if they are from same culture. When Skeeter, the main white character, closely watches the daily life of the black maids – Aibileen and Minny –, tries to understand and support them, they got familiarized in each other. With the growing mutual relation, a sense of love, affection and humanity arise in the mind of Skeeter, which ultimately sets out a journey of revolution against racial discrimination.

To note the racial discrimination history, white and black are two different and odd cultures that existed in USA in 1960s in large extent. White always dominated blacks and treated them as inferior being of this world. The author beautifully presents the story of suppression against blacks and brings out the fact about how the blacks were treated inhumanly by the whites.

The author has presented Skeeter as the main white character, who belongs to white atmosphere with white family, friends and culture. She, however, deeply assimilates the plight of black maids working in her own and her close friends' home. The author presents a distinct story which depicts how a white lady Skeeter develops good relationship with black maids even in a conflicting and odd atmosphere and side by side maintains balanced relationship with her parents and friends who are from white background. Moreover, Skeeter helps them to protest against domination and ultimately set out a cultural revolution by exposing the inhuman behavior from whites to blacks by publishing interview in media and writing a book.

Depicting the conflict between the white and black cultures and bringing them together through a distinct story, the author has blended the psychological experiences of the two cultures, which has led towards making the multiculturalism existed. Depression, fear, love and affection and sense of inferiority, domination and revolution among the white and black characters due to their different cultural and racial background are the major factors seen in the characters of *The Help*. However, the common elements are depicted in different way through different characters and different events to create antagonistic and protagonist forces in the novel. Even being a white character Skeeter shows different behavior than other common whites. It is because she can understand the black maids well and is able to help them. The black maids feel comfortable to share every moment of domination with the white Skeeter and ultimately can revolt against the domination by exposing the racial discrimination through media interviews and book.

The Help doesn't only visualize the bitter reality of racial discrimination in 1960s, but also brings out the evidence of mutual understanding and help between the people of two different races. The good relation between white character Skeeter and black characters Aibileen and Minny is the best example of cultural reconciliation in this novel. The philosophy of "multiculturalism and cultural reconciliation" has linked these two contradictory situations interestingly. By going through the story of *The Help*, it can be concluded that those who are unable to understand others are unable to treat the people of another culture in a good way. On the contrary, only those who can understand others can treat others in a humane and just manner.

This dissertation concludes: Understanding others not only helps to make two different cultures exist together but also creates a situation for helping others. A sense of humanity comes to human mind and ultimately helps one to understand others and

discharge human responsibility even in odd situation only when the multiculturalism exists. Suppression and domination create conducive atmosphere for revolutionizing human mind. *The Help* is the wonderful and best write up that depicts the real picture of how the convergence and divergence of two different cultures create harmony and discord in a society. Thus, Kathryn Stockett's novel is the superb manifestation of cultural reconciliation in the multicultural civilization.

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