

TRIBHUVAN UNIVERSITY

Kathryn Stockett's *The Help*: A Voice against Racial and Patriarchal Prejudice

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Supervisor's Recommendation

This is to certify that Mr. Shiva Kumar Adhikari has prepared this thesis entitled "Kathryn Stockett's *The Help*: A Voice against Racial and Patriarchal Prejudice" under my supervision. I, therefore, recommend it to the Research Committee for acceptance and final evaluation.

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Approval Sheet

The thesis entitled “Kathryn Stockett’s *The Help*: A Voice against Racial and Patriarchal Prejudice” submitted to the Department of English, Prithvi Narayan Campus, Pokhara by Mr. Shiva Kumar Adhikari has been approved by the undersigned members of the Evaluation Committee.

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Shiva Kumar Adhikari

Table of Contents

	Pages
Supervisor's Recommendation	ii
Approval Sheet	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Table of Contents	v
Abstract	vi
Chapter 1: Kathryn Stockett and Black Women's Experience	1-12
Issues and Contexts	1
Literature Review	7
Organization of the Study	11
Chapter 2: Black Feminism: Protest against Whites and Male Domination	13-20
The Concept	13
Double Marginalization	16
Chapter 3: Double Marginalization and Black Women Characters of Stockett	21-47
The Condition of Black Women	21
Gender Discrimination	24
Racial Prejudice	30
Talent Has No Worth	37
Chapter 4: Black Women as Victim of Racism and Sexism	48-51
Works Cited	52-53

Abstract

This study explores the story of black women's melancholy and recovery of their life represented in Kathryn Stockett's *The Help*. The narrative depicts the status of black women who are proficient in their work, but they are not justified with their capabilities and pushed to the margin by two agencies: whites and black males. It proves that black women are always constructed as substandard and incapable to think and act reasonably. The society is more offensive towards the blacks whether they are male or female. Black women's experience of life is far more complex than any other white women like Hilly or black men like Leroy. Thus, the state of black women like Aibileen and Minny is troubling: it is due to two-fold oppressors – white people and black males. It is concluded that black women become the object of violence, exploitation, hatred and neglect on the level of race and gender. This study, therefore, presents the condition of double marginalization of black women in Stockett's novel through the spectacle of feminism.

Chapter 1

Kathryn Stockett and Black Women's Experience

Issues and Contexts

This study focuses on Kathryn Stockett's *The Help* (2009), a story of black reawakening. In particular, it explores the condition of black women who are capable in their work but do not deserve the right place because of the continuous domination by the white people and black males. They are always constructed as inferior and something unable to think and act rationally. The novel is a story that depicts the life of Jackson, Mississippi in 1962. Specifically, the black women are suffering from racism. They are experiencing the depressed social and economical status. In addition, within the exploited race, black women's condition is in a unique and extremely difficult position. They are forced to deal with the oppression that arises from being black and female in a white male supremacist culture. Observing these factors, this study has tried to analyze the suppressed black women in the American society by two fold agencies, i.e. the white and black male, which is prevalent in Stockett's novel.

The title of the novel *The Help* suggests that the content of the study presented is all about relationship between white and black people in the society. It presents the society where black maids like Aibileen help white women in their household works. It is presented with the help of three narrators who are also the main characters in the story: two are black maids and one white lady. These three characters are Aibileen, who works for the help of Leefolt's household; Minny, the best cook in the town; and tall skinny Miss Skeeter, who has a dream to be a writer. But, as the study is concerned with the issues of the black women, the two black characters are the focal point of this study.

The novel presents the society of the Jacksons where the white people have

commonly more privileges. They are enjoying strong social and economical status. Therefore, they have their dominance over the blacks. They try to create a difference to create their superiority.

The story starts with the issue of women of junior league discussing their latest project “The Home Help Sanitation Initiative”. The project suggests that they should make separate lavatories for maids in every house in order to prevent diseases as the white women conclude that it is doubly dangerous for the whites to share the same lavatories with the blacks. Though Aibileen is dominated since long by the white agency, this event makes her think in a different way. She asks many questions to herself about the discrimination prevailing in the society over the black people. Then she decides to assist Skeeter to write a book based on the experiences of the maids on anonymous oral history so that the cruelty of the white could be lauder in the society.

The task is not the easy one, however, it might bring many challenges and risks, which could be fatal for Skeeter and to those black maids who share their experiences. Most are too frightened to take part as they could be fired from their job as domestic helper and one word from a powerful white employer could put them in a hell for stealing as they have seen a young gardener beaten nearly to death for using the wrong lavatory at the gulf club. Even after knowing these, Aibileen and Skeeter become firm to complete the task. With the great preparation, they start to write the book with the first interview from Aibileen. Their objective is to publish the misbehave of landlady upon their maids which could be indigestible to many whites. So, Aibileen and Skeeter do that secretly at night time without making anyone know it.

After finishing the story, they send it to Elaine Stein, the Chief Editor at Harper and Row, who gives Skeeter idea of doing something different to pursue a

career in writing. In the response to those stories, Elaine says that Skeeter needs at least twelve interviews and it needs to be done before New Year. Therefore, Skeeter is in need of other interviewees. However, no one is ready to take risk. Because they all are well aware that it is to invite troubles in their lives before that book can bring any good result. Even Minny, Aibileen's good friend, is not ready. She has been going through the trouble just because she got crossed with Hilly, the woman in whose mother's house she was working before she was fired. Now just because Hilly is spreading lies about Minny's theft, she cannot get any job. This shows how the blacks are agencyless. Though they are not guilty, they are doomed to be represented as criminal because society does not believe what the reality is. Aibileen manages to send Minny to Miss Celia, a newcomer in town, without information of Hilly.

In their project, after the effort of many days, Aibileen manages to convince Minny to participate. Skeeter, disturbed from her personal matters, visits library where she finds Jim Crow laws and feels how the blacks are differentiated and live othered life. In the beginning of the novel Aibileen says: "But it weren't too long before I seen something in me had changed. A bitter seed was planted inside a me" (3). What was the cause of her bitterness? Obviously, the bitterness described by Aibileen is shifted to the harsh reality of racial prejudice caused by the white agency. With the development of the story, they go through many events that show the miserable life of the black people. One-day a black field secretary is murdered in the street. This gives sensation in the black community. From those very days, Hilly comes to find the photocopy of Jim Crow's law from Skeeter's satchel and suspects Skeeter for working with black movement activists.

The domination of the whites over the blacks has prevented many blacks from involving in the project of Aibileen and Skeeter. In the course of time, Skeeter gets the message that Yule May, a maid of Hilly wants to join them, but later she sends a

note from jail. She has stolen a ring from Hilly to pay for her twin sons' education. In fact, the ring was not precious but it was fake one. Hilly has sent Yule jail for worthless thing, pretending that to be precious. The tragedy of the life of the black is seen with the case of poor Yule. Aibileen says; "I think about Yule May setting in jail. Cause Miss Hilly, she in her own jail, but with a lifelong term" (248). It indicates the condition of the black women in the then society. If they are alone and not dominated directly, their situation again is not free. Society itself is the open prison for them She is unable to afford the expenses of higher education of her twin sons and is unable to select any one to send to study keeping another in house. When she asks for loan with Hilly, Hilly refuses and Yule is doomed to steal. With this case of Yule, other black maids get aroused and become ready to help in the book of Aibileen and want to contribute the money from the book to Yule's son. Aibileen and Skeeter are excited that they are able to progress for the book. Skeeter continues taking interviews secretly with great pressure. She works day and night equally ignoring all ups and downs of her personal life, which worsens relation with her boy friend, vulnerable health condition of her mother.

Aibileen continues her project along with her friends. However, as a black woman, her daily life is not easy. Despite being an individual, she is not free to do her work of interest. One day Mr. Leefolt threatens Aibileen that if she talks with Skeeter, she will be out of job with bad reference implying that there is something secret between her and Skeeter and he knows that puts pressure on her to avoid having contact with Skeeter openly.

On the other side, there are vicissitudes in the relationship of Minny and Celia. Celia, quite ignorant from the ways of life of the town, attempts to behave Minny as an equal. However, hegemonized by the construction of the whites about black women, Minny cannot take that as normal and thinks Celia as queer. Minny even

surprises when Celia says good morning to her ““Good morning, Minny! It’s real good to see you,” ‘she says, and I bristle, hearing a white lady being so friendly”” (40). Another factor of tension in their relation is that Minny keeps trying to prevent Miss Celia from joining the company of other women of the town so that she could avoid others to know that Celia has kept her as help. As the poor black civil of the society, Minny has to think about other many things beyond her duties to save her job. But, as a woman, she gets regularly harassed by the violence of her drunkard husband Leroy and is distracted from her plan. Therefore, Minny, a black woman, is the victim of the two-fold dominating agencies i.e. the white people and black males.

In the town, a special function ‘The Benefit’ starts. Everyone gathers there to celebrate Benefit. Celia shows up there and becomes the talk of the function as she has committed such Fashion Faux Pas. As the night progress, she gets drunk and eventually gets a hold of Hilly but Hilly is too upset on the fact that someone has put her name in to win Minny’s pie. She assumes that it is Celia and that Minny has told her about the pie that Minny made for revenge against Hilly. As a result, Hilly insults Celia. Celia throws up and leaves completely embarrassed with Hilly telling everyone that Celia is a compulsive liar. Later, Hilly knows it was Mrs. Walter, who put Hilly’s name.

Celia is divested after the party and Minny tells her why Hilly is mad about pie. After Mrs. Walter is about to go home, Minny cannot be able to find work. After several weeks, Hilly offers her a job, but Minny does not want Yule to lose her job. So, she denies to work for Hilly. Hilly says her that she has said Minny was a thief, so she would never find a job. In this way, for the pursuit of own interest, Hilly ruins the career of Minny. Minny came back next day with chocolate pie of which Hilly eats two slices before Minny tells her that she has put her excrement in it. From that time, Hilly turns as a fierce enemy of Minny. With this story, Celia and Minny’s relation is

more strengthened.

With their regular struggle for the book to be published one day, Aibileen becomes ready to tell the story of Constantine, the maid who reared Skeeter. Skeeter strongly requests her for this for long time but Aibileen has been ignoring. Aibileen, about the anxiety of Minny, says; “Minny doesn’t look worried about book sales. She looks worried about what will happen when the women of Jackson read what we’ve written about them” (225). Aibileen tells Skeeter what happened to Constantine, who had a white baby that she gave for adoption. It is the plight of the black mother of having a fair complexion child. She could not dare to raise her daughter in that case due to different questions and challenges she might have to face with. She regrets her decision and when her daughter Lulabelle is 25 and she comes to live with Constantine. One day, Lulabelle comes to the house and passes at DAR function. When Mrs. Phelan kicks her out Lulabelle spits on her face. Mrs. Phelan forbades Constantine from seeing her and Constantine is forced to go to Chicago where she dies three weeks later. With all these, Skeeter gets disturbed.

They have the pressure of work on them. They complete that hurriedly and for the security, they decide to keep the pie incident in the book as insurance against Hilly. Skeeter is able to send the story in the last hour of the given date. Luckily the book is received by the publisher. Skeeter and her team are promised to receive 60\$ per person as the advance by the publisher. Slowly and gradually, the book starts its effect over the society of Jackson. It is praised by Aibileen’s church secretly and church has secret surprise party for Aibileen. The book comes on TV show. The host likes the book but one of the society’s lady hates it. Slowly rumor about the book as being a collection of the experience of black maids working in whites’ house prevails everywhere and many people start to read the book to find out whether there is the story of their own house. Minny is just waiting for Hilly to read the book.

To suppress the black women society only is not responsible but government also is bias. ‘Separate but equal,’ Miss Hilly say back to Miss Leefolt, ‘That’s what Governor Ross Barnett says is right, and you can’t argue with the *government*’ (185). So, they feel unsecure and lament themselves, “Things ain’t never gone change in this town, Aibileen. We living in hell, we *trapped*. Our *kids* is trapped” (196). Hilly, thus, starts telling people to fire their maids, but she is not sure really guessing the right one.

However, later on, when she finishes the book, she tries to convince them that the story is not of Jackson but of other place just because of the chapter about pie of Minny’s portion. She becomes restless and makes her husband to suspend Leroy. When Leroy finds that he is suspended just because of the book, he comes home and threatens Minny to kill her. Moreover, after that Minny finally manages and decides to leave with her kids and go to her sister’s. On the other side, Hilly, with her tricks, tries to harm Aibileen. She accuses Aibileen of stealing her silver and convinces Miss Leefolt to fire her but Aibileen takes her way out of Hilly pressing charges. Skeeter, on the other side, gets a job offer as a copy editor at Harper’s magazine and leaves for New York. Before she goes, she convinces the editor to make Aibileen as the writer of the home-keeping column, which she has been doing; with the condition, that no one would reveal that the columnist is a black woman. Here again, despite having performed well in her work, Aibileen is not getting the real credit of her work just because of her race.

Literature Review

Stokett’s *The Help* has been the bestseller since its publication. In an attempt to present the world of Jackson in 1960s, the another has introduced many dimensions of life in the book. For this reason, it has been dealt by different critics to explore those varied facets of the text. Talbott Chris praises the work in this way: “What

perfect timing for this optimistic, uplifting debut novel. . . set during the nascent civil rights movement in Jackson, Miss., where black women were trusted to raise white children but not to polish the household silver” (1). About the text, Talbott scrutinizes about the historical timing and period of Civil Rights Movement in Jackson, Mississippi where the novel is set. The whites give the responsibility of rearing children but not wealth. They doubt about the habit of the blacks though the blacks are honest.

About the presentation of the novel, Jenna Lamia states: “The characters handle the narration and the dialogue so well that no character is ever stereotype, the humor is always delightful and the listener is leaded through multi-layered stories of maids and mistress. Thus, the novel is superb in describing the story of black” (10-11). Lamia has praised the story telling technique of the writer and especially she has focused on the humour that lies in the multilayer of the story.

Depicting the novel as a collection of emotional sensations about the presentation of the social scenario, Toby Clements presents the impression of the novel: “Each of the many relationships between the large cast of characters is perfectly captured, and there is layer after layer of irony to excavate when Stockett describes the lives of the women of Jackson (para 3).” In addition, he adds that even though the novel is based on the social reality of the then society, it is savagely funny. He writes “But most impressive – and attractive – is the blend of rage and humour with which she writes and that is what makes this novel at once so horrifying yet so savagely funny (para 3).” Furthermore, Clements reviews the book as one of the complex works but convincing a piece of literature based on real life event. He further states:

The fruition of this project gives the book its narrative arc, but elsewhere the novel is a complex, immaculately structured but

tremendously convincing nest built from secrets and lies. At some stages, it resembles a Feydeau farce, with maids and mistresses popping up one after the other hoping they won't be seen, or the lies they have told won't get out, but there are also moments of real emotional heft, too. (para 4)

According to Clements, the novel is a compound, flawlessly structured work, but extremely convincing that the story is woven from secrets and lies.

In the similar way, Amy Sharps, in *The Guardian Daily*, describes the novel as a depiction of the then society. He relates racial segregation with the social reality and argues,

Kathryn Stockett manages to merge fact and fiction perfectly, exploring different emotions ranging from sadness to happiness - sometimes all in the same paragraph. Stockett has not only written an unforgettable, at times humorous and all-round brilliant story; this is also an informative masterpiece, educating people about life of the help in the segregated society of Jackson, Mississippi in the early 1960s, using some of her personal experiences of growing up in the deep south. (6)

He explains that the novelist is able to depict the true account of the life of black women of Jackson, Mississippi with the correlation of fact and fiction. It is all about the black community who spend their lives bringing up the children of upper class white families.

Sybil Steinberg, in *The Washington Post's Book World*, comments the book with its drawbacks and argues that the writer has not succeeded to represent the actual world rather delineates the negative aspects only. He adds:

Aibileen and Minny share the narration with Skeeter, and one of

Stockett's accomplishments is reproducing African American vernacular and racy humor without resorting to stilted dialogue. She unsparingly delineates the conditions of black servitude a century after the Civil War. (7)

For him, Stockett has not focused on the real issues of the life of the black women. Instead, the use of African American vernacular writing is mocking their pathetic condition because it is 'racy humorous'.

Amy Einhorn, referencing to the history, views the novel as having the vivid detail of real experience of black women. She states:

It was just consider bad manner to discuss race, politics or money, particularly as women," says Kathryn Stockett of her childhood in Jackson, Miss. "We never discussed how thing really were." The first time novelist paid to heed to priority in her debut *The Help* Stockett renders a stirring account of three women two black and one white-who conspire to write a tale, a memoir about life as black domestic in Jackson at the height of the Civil Rights Movement. (8)

In this excerpt, Einhorn believes that the book focuses on the writer's experience of her childhood in Jackson. Through her three characters, she wants to present female experience in Jackson at the time of Civil Rights Movement as black domestic women though she was white.

To speak of the distinct issues of black women, their state of belonging-less-ness to the alleys of women and black race by the othering of white female, male and black male, this study has, therefore, attempted to explore the black women in the novel as doubly marginalized group in the white male supremacist society. Similarly, the research has tried to dig out the interwoven wave of patriarchy that is often created to dominate the female as the secondary being. As a whole the supremacy on

female by the white people including male and female and black male is presented as the multilayer suppression against women through the keen analysis of the text *The Help*.

Organization of the Study

The study has dealt with the questionable situation of black women in the society and how the exterior discourses and the interior internalization of those discourses make the black women prone to work as maid serving the whites and black males. In addition, to analyze and prove the proposed statement of problem and hypothesis, the study is designed in the following way.

The first part of the study is the introductory portion. The main claim of the research and theoretical lenses has been mentioned in detail. In this chapter, issues and contexts of the study, literature review and organization of the study are included. Furthermore, this section discussed on how other critics have analyzed the text and the departure point of the research.

In the second chapter, to strengthen the hypothesis by analyzing the text, the methodological opinions of the critics are presented. This portion includes the black feminism as the methodological tool and incorporates the black feminism as the protest against white and male domination. The concept of double marginalization is discussed in the chapter.

The third chapter provides the overall analysis of the text as textual analysis in relation to the theoretical methodology. Here the doubly marginalized condition of black women characters in the novel is mentioned that includes gender discrimination, racial discrimination and negligence of the talent of black people in the novel.

The final chapter is there to wrap up the ideas and present conclusion of the research. This chapter summaries the study and shows the black women as victims of racism and sexism in the novel *The Help*. After the elaboration and substantiations of

aforementioned chapters, the conclusion states the claim of research based on formerly presented arguments. In this way, with the help of these different chapters, the coherence to prove the hypothesis is maintained.

Chapter 2

Black Feminism: Protest against Whites and Male Domination

The Concept

Simon de Beauvoir defines a 'woman' in her *The Second Sex*: "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman" (267). She argues femininity does not arise from differences in biology, psychology, or intellect. Rather, femininity is a construction of civilization, a reflection not of "essential" differences in men and women but of differences in their situation. One's situation determines the character, not the other way around. Woman is not born fully formed; she is gradually shaped by her upbringing. Biology does not determine what makes a woman a woman, a woman learns her role from man and others in society. A woman is not born passive, secondary, and nonessential, but all the forces in the external world have conspired to make her so. Every individual self, regardless of gender, is entitled to subjectivity; it is only outside forces that have conspired to rob the woman of this right. Destiny is not a cosmic force but a human choice, the result of culture and circumstance.

It can be argued that black men, along with black women have suffered and shared the history of toil and dignity, but it is categorically different to be a black and a woman than it has been to be a black and man. The black men have more choices than the black women do. The black men, victimized by racist oppression turn their rage, anger and frustration at their women, instead of firing back to repressive forces. They abuse and dehumanize black women physically, sexually and mentally. Bell Hooks, in her book *Feminine from Margin to Center*, calls it "Cycle of Violence" and argues:

Black male who is subjugated to control by a boss or authority that is humiliating and degrading . . . doesn't strike out or oppose the employer, . . . he suppresses this violence and anger and releases it to

control situation- home is always the control situation, and the target for his abuse is usually female. The emotion, pain he feels is released and projected onto female. (122)

As Hooks says, the black males get their house as a safe place to release their tension and anger that they got from their boss's humiliation and insult. Opposing and resisting in the face of the white boss could result more violence on their part, so they get the black women as a safe agency to release their rage.

Black women become the object of violence, exploitation, hatred and neglect at the level of race and gender. Their life is like what Andre Reich states that "the fabric of our lives is stitched up with violence and hatred" (404). Black women are doubly alienated, doubly marginalized creature. They are defined as 'the other' to 'the other'. They are considered inferior, insignificant and minority to the white and male supremacy. They have to endure a lot of double dependency. One is on their spouse and the other is the whites. In this way, double marginalization has practically been the onus of the black women.

The idea of othering over the black women either by male or white has politics of centricism. Centricism is just an attempt of one group to keep dominance in the society. So, the effect of hegemonic centricism prevails and naturalizes the domination. In this regard, Val Plumwood states:

The overall effect off hegemonic centric structure at the level of idea is not only to justify oppression by making it seem natural, but also to make it invisible by creation of false universalism in culture, in which experiences of the dominant center are represented as universal, and the experience of those subordinated in the structure are rendered as secondary or irrational. Alternatives to these structures are no longer visible at all once the master standpoint has become part of the very

framework of thought. (163)

Therefore, there is politics of creating superiority of one over the other in hegemonic centric structure. In this, the dominator attempts to get strength by creating duality, dividing others and defining them in derogative manners. Quoting Val Plumwood would be worthy as he argues, “A hegemonic centralism is a primary secondary pattern of attributing that sets open term (the one) as primary or a center and defines marginal oath as secondary as derivative in relation to it” (165). Plumwood concludes that centralism, either racial or gender, uses the technique of separating and misrepresenting the other by creating duality.

From the history, race has been manipulated and defined for the benefit of the whites. Brace, on this, opines: “Race has been a cause of more misunderstanding and human suffering than anything else that can be associated with a single word in a language. It is in fact a prejudice condition by perception” (16). Race usually is used to dehumanize people by stereotyping them by denying them and presenting them as complex because of their physical, mental, moral, social and religious variety. This is socially formed notion. It includes the superiority complex of one’s own race or ethnic group over others. The white society is regarded as superior to the black. This is due to the power that has emphasized historically. The same equation can be applied with the matter of gender. Male defines female and fixes her to mould rather than to let the reality on its own. The black women, the victim of such construction of two centric tendencies, are in unique and different state.

The concept of black feminism was raised when the problem of black women regarding race got unaddressed on the common ground of feminism. White feminists who dominate the feminist discourse have little or no understanding of the white supremacy as racial politics. Not only did some white feminists refuse to acknowledge their ability to oppress the women of color, some claimed that the white

women have always been an antiracist.

Bell Hooks, in *The Feminist Theories*, claims: “Our white four sisters have... often defied patriarchy... not on their own behalf but for the sake of black women, women and children. We have strong antiracist female tradition” (41). Though Hooks points out Rich’s claim to be false, there is little historical evidence to document Rich’s assertion that the white women as a collective group or white woman’s right advocates the anti-racist tradition. As feminism alone could not do justice to the black women’s issues, they vociferously initiated to make their black feminine voice listened on the stage. In 1970s and 80s, several black women writers raised the issue of feminism to the literary and critical forum and started to raise their agendas as the marginalized and doubly oppressed group.

Double Marginalization

Being black and women is being doubly repressed; they are victimized by the black males as well as the white society. Because of all these hardships, in 1973 black women formed a black feminist group called National Black Feminist Organization-Combahee River Collective. It published *Black Feminist Manifesto*, which maintains:

The most general statement of our politics at the present time would be that we are actively committed to struggle against racial, sexual, heterosexual and class oppression and sees our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice are based upon the fact that the major system of oppression are interlocking. The synthesis of these oppressions creates the conditions of our lives. (35)

The black women writers have found critical approach, black feminism, for development of self-strength, resiliency and independence in them. Black feminism, thus, opposes and gets involved in shattering the constructed stereotyped images of black women created by the whites and the black males. It shares a common social

experience because of commonalities of oppression. As the Manifesto states: “Our politic initially sprung from the shared belief that black woman are inherently valuable, that our liberation is necessity not as adjunct to somebody else’s but because of our need as human, person of autonomy” (36), they struggle to assert their selfhood, their identity as humanity and for autonomy.

Black woman’s identity is not just based on racism and repression but on recognizing the fluidity and fragmented nature of racialized and gendered identities. Black feminists have created their own value system and a worldview distinct from that of the black men and the white women. Their total commitment is to combat manifold and simultaneous oppression as Lewis states: “Black women were oppressed dominated in terms of race as well as in terms of sex so they have formed a separate black feminist group whose specific aim is to combat both sexism and racism” (553). Therefore, the black feminist movement is distinct from both the white dominated feminist movement and the exclusive concern of black men because they have a history of their own, which reflects their distinct concern, values, and roles they have played as African-American and women.

The black women’s concerns are different from the white feminists. The white feminists believe that sexism is primary and the most fundamental form of oppression. Kate Millet, for example, in her book *Sexual Politics*, suggests: “Sexism is more primary and more fundamental oppression and the most fundamental concept of power in our societies” (34). Millet’s description is itself an effect of racism. Freedman on such case asserts: “Feminist claim on priority of sexism over racism ignores black women’s lived realities of racism and sexism which are intricably inked in their everyday lives” (67). Thus, to address the complex social status of black women, black feminism introduces womanhood that focuses on self-reliance, obligation and strength. It is more likely to challenge the dominant culture’s

definitions of black women and their socially prescribed role that states self-reliance, femininity and motherhood.

Feminist critics argue that due to the patriarchal hegemony women are focused on their private sphere rather than other concerns or duties. They cannot exercise reason or truly their perfect souls since they linger in this dependent state. To support this notion, Mary Wollstonecraft, in her book *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, states:

Women are told from their infancy, and taught by the example of their mothers, that a little knowledge of human weakness, justly termed cunning, softness of temper, *outward* obedience, and a scrupulous attention to a puerile kind of propriety, will obtain for them the protection of man; and should they be beautiful, everything else is needless, for at least twenty years of their lives. (19)

According to her, women are socialized to be beautiful; so they can attract men. They get delight in their own meekness and diminished bodily strength. They engage in rivalries with other women. Mothers shape and mold their daughters' characters, which are even further ossified into silliness when they attend schools. Usually, women are confined to the private sphere of their homes, where they spend their time conforming to social manners as Wollstonecraft further argues,

The great misfortune is this, that they both acquire manners before morals and knowledge of life before they have from reflection, any acquaintance with the grand ideal outline of human nature. The consequence is natural; satisfied with common nature, they become a prey to prejudices, and taking all their opinions on credit, they blindly submit to authority. (24)

Women become acclimated to staying there rather than entering the public sphere.

They tend not to hold substantial jobs, participate in politics, attain advanced education, discuss and debate the major ideas of the day, or take on noble, heroic duties. Their education is fragmentary and lacking, so coupled with their confinement that they become ignorant and caught in the social prejudices of their age. Since both men and women were endowed with souls by their creator, men do not have a “natural” hegemony over women at the level of individual rights, but their differences in physical strength are carried over in society to falsely justify male hegemony in many other areas of life. As a result, male chauvinism creates such references on women and systematically they attempt to exploit them with the help of so called reality or truth made by themselves.

The oppressors are interwoven into social structures and work together to define the history of the people. According to Hooks, the history of this cultural oppression can be traced back to slavery. In her book *Ain't I A Woman: Black Woman and Feminism*, she asserts: “as far as black slavery white people established a social hierarchy based on race and sex, that ranked white man first, white man second, though some time equal to black men who are ranked third and black women last” (53). These theoretical concepts were developed to call attention to the multiple oppressions experienced by the women of color, reflecting and defining their everyday experiences in their own terms. They established agenda dealing with several themes. According to Gloria T. Hall and Barbara Smith, these themes included the necessity of black feminism’s total commitment to the liberation of black woman and its recognition of black women as valuable and complex human beings.

In this way, Barbara Smith, discussing about black feminist thought, explores that black feminism includes the political awareness of how race, class and gender work together as oppressive force as she argues, “The concept of simultaneity of oppression is the crux of a black feminist thought consists of the personal and

political awareness of how race, class and gender work simultaneously as oppressors” (259). Therefore, black feminism is comprised of theories created by and for the black woman and woman of color.

Black feminism, therefore, provides space for black women and women of color to express their concerns in validating surroundings. Therefore, with the help of the idea black feminist, the study has attempted to explore the complex and distinct experiences of the black women characters of Stockett’s novel.

Chapter 3

Double Marginalization and Black Women Characters of Stockett

The Condition of Black Women

In *The Help*, Stockett has depicted the society of 1960s in Jackson, Mississippi. This study is an attempt to analyze the life of the black women characters and tries to explore the doubly marginalized condition of those black women. The life of the black women is a collection of bitter experiences. The black female experience is characterized by the interlocking oppression of race, class and gender. These oppressions are interwoven into social structure and work together to define history of the lives of the black women. According to Bell Hooks, the history of these cultural oppressors can be traced back to slavery. In her book *Ain't I A Woman: Black Woman and Feminism*, Hooks has given many evidences on the black slavery and social hierarchy based on race and sex. She shows that the white men are ranked the first, the white women the second, the black men the third and the black women the last. In this way, the black women have been defined and categorized in most disadvantaged manner and in dehumanized terms. Those terms are employed to attack the essence of the black women and their sense of personal integrity and self worth.

The issue of women is no more diverse in the novel. Throughout the story, the black women are chased and always have to adjust themselves within the option given by the whites. Even white know they are treating them inhumanly as Skeeter remarks: "They raise a white child and then twenty years later the child becomes the employer. It's that irony, that we love them and they love us, yet.. .. We don't even allow them to use the toilet in the house" (98). But the white never corrected themselves. The Blacks are forced to believe themselves as what they are constructed by the whites. Further, the whites separate the blacks from them and try to differentiate. By showing differences, they can construct the difference something as superiority of the whites.

The same difference can be taken as defect in the black. All these constructions about the blacks by the whites have politics that is to maintain their supremacy. Similarly, the society of subjugated black also has same division within i.e. the division between the black male and the female. In the novel, Minny, though she is a talented woman and earns more than her husband Leroy does, there is the dominance of Leroy. He beats her and imposes his decisions over her, but she does not protest rather fears that he would leave her. However, there are no such rules or characteristics to justify the hierarchy between male and female in the social status, but men, because of their superior status, think that it is right to rule over women. They have established unanimous rule in every aspects of humanity. Their supremacist ideology attempts to encourage women to believe that they are of less value; they are naturally inferior and unequal to men. Thus, dealing with the condition of the black woman is something different.

When Hilly makes her husband suspend Leroy from pipeline, he is unable to resist to his employer, comes to Minny, beats her severely and threatens her to kill:

They fired Leroy last night! And when Leroy asked why, his boss said Mister Holbrook said him to. Holbrook told him its Leroy's Nigger wife the reason and Leroy come home and try to kill me with his bare hands" Minny panting and heaving. "He throws the kids in the yard and locked me in the bathroom and say he gone light the house on fire with me locked inside!" (437)

The black women like Minny and Aibileen neither cannot, thus, assume themselves in alley of Hilly and Miss Leefolt in the name of womanhood because there is abyss of racial discrimination between them. They cannot also find consolation and sense of belongingness with Leroy like black man in the name of their similar race because the black men also consider the black woman soothing as mean and inhuman, only object

to be consumed.

The condition of the black women is very poor and utterly exhausting. Because of the white society's racism and the black men's sexism, there is no room in either area for serious consideration of the life of black women. They are perceived as the female of inferior species. Therefore, Aibileen and Minny belong to the most disadvantaged group. Being black and woman, they are doubly repressed. They cannot put themselves in the class of the white female so far as race is concerned because the blacks are perceived as inferior within human species. On the other hand, they cannot enjoy the privileges of the black men as well.

The condition of Aibileen and Minny is the representative of the black women in the novel. It is incomparable along with the condition of neither woman of white race nor black male. They have their own different and distinct condition. Minny says "But the dichotomy of love and disdain living side-by-side is what surprises me. Most are invited to attend the white children's weddings, but only if they're in their uniforms" (204). It suggests that the white domination against black is in every structure of the society. It is seen in every aspect like physical, verbal, cultural, psychological, economical, and so on. None of the single approach dealing only with gender or race can encompass their condition. Their condition is tormented by interlocking of two agencies. Thus, to deal with them, this study has approached the condition of black women with the perspective of black feminism.

The state of belonginglessness despite being part of both alleys is the condition of black women. When it comes to the issue of gender discrimination, the black women are generalized as the white woman where their plight of being discriminated on the ground of race by white women remains unaddressed. Similarly, when it is about racial discrimination, they are generalized with black male. Here also, their othered status as a woman on the ground of gender within black race remains

unvoiced. The black women, in this way, are the group which is doubly marginalized. They have two agencies ruling and discriminating them. With this view, the experiences of the black women cannot be generalized neither with the black male nor with the white woman. They have their own distinct and different experiences and status in the society.

Gender Discrimination

The black men along with the black women suffered and shared the history of toil and discrimination but it was categorically different to be a black and a woman than it was to be a black and man. The black men have more choices than the black women. Sexism is pervasive as racism in the black women's lives. The story of discrimination of a black woman does not end on the point of her race; another layer of segregation begins within from the same race. A black woman as a woman has to undergo through the bitter experience of being othered from the black male, too. Traditional conception of patriarchal society has its root in black people, too. Thus, on the ground of gender, the black women are separated and stripped up off from the privileges the black males get.

Minnie, Aibileen and other black maids are of less worth and importance than any black male. They have to mould themselves as the construction of the patriarchal society. Men are dominating women as Grimke opines in her statement: "The history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpation on the part of men towards women, having the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her" (37). Women, just because of their sex, need to perform the duties and responsibility prescribed by the males.

Minnie goes out for earning. She works as a maid for the white women. But as she comes back home, after completing her daily duty in the house of her employer, her duty as a woman begins from her door. As a woman, she has certain responsibility

towards her family. She is expected to take care of her children. She should be aware about feeding, education, health and manners of her children because she is the mother, whom patriarchy has constructed as caring, nurturing and responsible for all dimensions of her child. Not only this, but also the whole burden of rearing the children goes to mother. Linda Gordon traces the politics for such values attributed to women as she argues: "These ascribed values constrict black women's option holding them in subordinate position, society's motivation was not to make women especially humane, but to make excellent servant" (190). Women cannot abandon her family and children to let them looked after by the fathers. But the same right is in approach of men if they want. In the novel, Minny complains: "Plenty of black man leaves their families behind like trash in a dump but it's just not something the colored woman can do. We've got the kids to think about" (310-11). Minny thinks about the responsibility that a woman has towards her children. Society has constructed the rules and norms to make the female to act accordingly.

The woman serving those duties are said to be an ideal woman as Lois Tyson states: "The patriarchy tells them that they are unfulfilled as women if they don't have the children, and there is the great deal of pressure brought to bear up on woman in order to recruit them from motherhood" (97). In this way, burdening with the responsibility, males shape women within the patriarchal discourse.

Though both male and female are responsible in bearing child but when it comes to the rearing of children, the whole responsibility comes over women. Males always remain free for any kind of duty they have to fulfill. They can pass their time romancing with women and when they are filled with their interest, they can abandon them without any duty for their child. Constantine, Skeeter's rearer, has her relation with a black male, but after he leaves her, it is only Constantine who has to be worried of her daughter. Black male's interest in black women is just for a few days till they

do not find themselves interested in another one. Aibileen's male Clyde leaves her when he gets filled with her. Then he finds himself interested in another woman called Cocoa. He is able to leave Aibileen easily with no trouble. Aibileen expresses the situation: "My husband Clyde left me for that no-count hussy upon fairish street, one they call Cocoa, I figured I better shut the door for good on that kind a business" (22). When Clyde leaves Aibileen, she is not able to do anything but remains silent. This is the way their society has allowed them.

The women, therefore, are designed to remain in such boundaries that automatically turn them into passive submissive followers. In this way, males can use them the way they like. No matter how much responsibility women bear, they always remain inferior to males because the sexist society has made women inferior to man: "The female is female by virtue of certain lack of qualities and misbegotten males" (Selden 134). Thus, males can always rule and command over women for an easy and comfortable life. With this, the black males can get the primary status in their family.

All Yule, Aibileen and Minny have to go out for earning. They struggle equally against the racist society as the black males do but these women do not get noticeable place in their own house. The credit of women's contribution remains unaddressed. Friedan, in *The Feminine Mystique*, stresses, "Women, who for centuries kept away from their full humanity and unaddressed for their contribution to history. Their fractured, broken lives and muted voices have been the price of patriarchy" (89). Women's contribution to the society remains always unaddressed; thus, she always remains invisible in the society. They should always be scared of the authority of male over them and should always be careful of the respect and reverence to give to their husbands. For example, Minny is always careful that Leroy would not get disturbed. She is aware not to make her action offensive as Leroy would not like that. This is only because she is a woman and insignificant in front of Leroy. When

Minnie is fired from Hilly and is not able to get job in other houses too, she expresses her distasteful feeling.

Minnie is always in attempt to make Leroy pleased. For that, she really cares about when he gets up, when he needs coffee or when he gets hungry, etc. As a woman, she has to take care of her husband no matter what she likes to do. The black male's position in his family remains always dominant, whether he is drunkard or anything like that. But it is the woman who has to handle her family. A male can do what he desires to do, whatever problem the family may have because he has a woman to take care of them all. Minnie's mother's desire is to make her daughter a school teacher, but she has to send her daughter to work as a maid dropping her from school. Minnie says: "I was about to quit school and start my first real job. Mama wanted me to stay on and go on to ninth grade - she'd always wanted to be a school teacher instead of working in Miss Woodra's house. But with my sisters heart problem and my no-good drunk daddy, it was up to me and my Mama" (38). Here, Minnie's father is drunkard and Minnie and her mother have to fill his need and take care of their family; she is not able to follow her mother's dream.

In this way, black women's position like Minnie's position in the family is pathetic. They should turn and play the role as their husbands want them. Their status in the family is of puppet. The males use women for their entertainment. They can sexually abuse; they can be physically violent. In any way, they can present themselves to their wives and women have to endure all this just because she is a woman. Kirk and Ray further clarify the state of women in the family: "Women are beaten down physically, psychologically, sexually, spiritually in which the risk factor is being female. They experience violence as a part in their daily life" (217). Their thought generalizes the misbehave upon female in the male chauvinistic society. In the novel, the same applies. Leroy is a drunk and often comes and beats Minnie but

she has to remain a passive victim. Her body is with signs of his cruelty over her.

Leroy does not need any cause to beat his wife Minny. One tragic fact of this matter is that sometimes he beats her just for entertainment. Once Leroy comes for his work and becomes violent. He starts to beat Minny without any reason:

Leroy screamed at me all night, threw the sugar bowl upside my head, threw my clothes out on porch . . . this time he beat me stone cold sober . . . at first I thought Leroy had found out about my working with Miss Skeeter. It was only reason I could come up with while he was beating me with his hand. But he didn't say about it. He was just beating me for the pure pleasure of it. (304)

Leroy's reasonless beating makes Minny to search for the reason on her own. She tries to relate the cause with her and Skeeter's relation but when she does not get any mention from him about that, she concludes it as his reasonless beating just to entertain himself.

Despite the violence over women by males, women are expected to remain calm and submissive and tolerate everything that comes from males. When women speak back, it is not considered decent. The same thing is imprinted in the conception of Minny, too. She thinks within her and argues about this general conception of the people: "lot a folks think if you talk back to you husband you crossed the line. That justifies the punishment" (312). In this way, all the privileges in the family remain under black male's approach. But a black woman is helpless. She even cannot decide about her personal decisions because the society has created the picture of "Women as human being are substandard, less intelligent, less competent, less able physically, psychologically and spiritually; small body, mind and characters often bad and destructive" (Ruth 96). Here, Ruth also highlights the traditional concept upon female by the patriarchal society.

Minnie shares her daily moment to Leroy and he shows his decision to what she should do and what she should not. When Minny gets Celia different from other white women, she expresses her dissatisfaction on that but Leroy comments on her: “Don’t go getting in her business. Leroy says you just make sure she tells her mister you cleaning his house” (130). Leroy wants his final command on everything. Thus, he keeps ruling and dominating his woman Minny.

In the society, both black male and female have to go through the segregation. But a black male is with more option than a black woman. About this, Bell Hooks, in her “Black Women Shaping Black Feminist Thought,” argues:

Under white domination finds that his male ego is wounded. So he starts his endless cruelty on his woman finding no other role model than that of the white man. Black man may be victimized by racism but sexism allows them to act as an exploiter or oppressors of black woman. But black woman have no such other upon which they could act as oppressor. (15)

This means that black males, hurt by the racism of the society, have black women to pour out his anger upon but black women, who are at the bottom, can do nothing but tolerate the torture of racist and sexist society. Minny has the same condition. When Leroy gets fired from his job, he gets mad and attempts to kill poor Minny.

As Mary Wollstonecraft, in her book *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, opines: “It is a melancholy truth; yet such is the blessed effect of civilization! the most respectable women are the most oppressed; and, unless they have understandings far superiour to the common run of understandings, taking in both sexes, they must, from being treated like contemptible beings, made contemptible” (9). Thus patriarchy has provided male such safe place to express his anger of his hurt ego upon woman. As women are expected to be passive, they have to endure any

discrimination on the side of the black males without any strain in their face.

Stockett's novel, being a true account of the then society, shows the bitter reality of gender discrimination of the contemporary society through the experience of female character and brutal behavior of male force.

Racial Prejudice

The politics of othering is to maintain one's superiority over others. If one group of people attempt to marginalize another group and differentiate from oneself on the ground of different aspects, it is their power-mongering instinct. They try to establish themselves as the center and superior on the premise of keeping another group as margin, inferior and 'the other'.

The power structure of racial discrimination also functions in the same manner. The whites discriminate the blacks by differentiating them on the basis of color. They use their race to maintain superiority over the blacks defining it in relation to negative connotation. For example, C. Loring Brace argues: "Race has been a cause of more mis-understanding and human suffering than anything else that can be associated with a single word in language" (116). In the case of Stockett's novel, the picture of the blacks in the society of Jackson in 1960s is pathetic. In the novel, only because of the social prejudice, the black people are prevented from getting their rights. They are not credited for their quality or any positive point. Their race is erected on the way of their progress. No matter how much qualified and skilled persons they are, they always have to remain mean and subordinate element. They cannot use their talent on their own. If they are to survive, they have to fit themselves within the construction and making of the whites.

Aibileen and Minny are talented women. Aibileen says: "Taking care of white babies, that's what I do, along with all the cooking and the cleaning. I done raised seventeen kids in my life time I know how to get them babies to sleep, stop crying and

go in the toilet bowl before they mamas got out a bed in the morning” (1). It shows that Aibileen is very good at nursing children. She knows every trick and method to serve children. She is well known all over the Jackson for this, and is very veteran on the job as she has reared seventeen children in her life.

Aibileen, the veteran child nurse, works with her efficiency to serve the whites. She works for the Leefolt family to rear their daughter Mae Mobley. It is under her duty to take care of the child and to teach everything during rearing of the child. It is her job to make sure Mae Mobley has good manners. But even owing so much to the black maid, the whites cannot remain calm without creating lines between them on the ground of color. The blacks are considered as “black, ugly, cruel, sexual, rampant, barely human” (Salgado xiii) that they are unworthy of sharing even toilet with the whites; it is far of kitchen and other things. On the day of league meeting, when Hilly and other friends of her are in Miss Leefolt’s house, Hilly needs to go to bathroom but she returns back:

Miss Hilly’s back in her chair looking all bowed up and something else now. ‘Oh Hilly, I wish you’d use the guest bathroom’, says Miss Leefolt rearranging her cards. ‘Aibileen doesn’t clean in the back until after lunch’. ‘But the guest’s bathroom where the help goes’, Miss Hilly says. Nobody says anything for a second. Then Miss Walter nod, like she explaining it all. ‘She is upset cause the Nigra uses the inside bathroom and so do we.’ (7)

Hilly is reluctant of using the same guest bathroom that other maids use but she does not mind the working and preparing of food by maids in her house. In this way, the blacks are made to suffer.

The black women are treated something as a pot of diseases. If the blacks share the white’s toilet, it means sharing the severe and fatal disease: “It’s just plain

dangerous. Everybody knows they carry different kind of disease than we do” (8).

This is not only the conception of Hilly but of other white women, too. When Hilly furthermore says: “This talk ain’t news to me, everywhere in town they got colored bathrooms and most the houses do too” (8), but openly they are hesitating to speak of. For example, though Leefolt suggests Hilly to share the toilet that her maid Aibileen uses but she refuses. Miss Leefolt replies:

‘Elizabeth, if you had the choice’ I hear Miss Hilly say, ‘wouldn’t you rather them take their business outside? ‘I don’t know’, ‘With Raleigh starting his own business and tax season not for the six month...things are real tight for us right now’. . . . ‘You just tell Raleigh every penny he spends on bathroom he’ll get back when ya’ll sell the house.’ . . . ‘It would be nice.’ . . . , taking a little puff of her cigarette, ‘not having her use the one in the house.’ (8)

It clarifies that not only the white males are dominating the blacks but also the white women treat the black women not as the human being. It clearly shows the three fold oppression upon the black women. The white women are not ready to even share the restroom with the black women. It reflects that the blacks are dominated by the whites but the black women are dominated not only by the white men and women but also by their husbands as well.

Miss Leefolt’s financial crisis has stopped her to have a bathroom for the black maids. When she becomes sure about the expenses, she expresses her desire to have the separate bathroom for Aibileen. To fulfill her ego and to get her racist idea erected, Hilly designs a bill what they call “Home Help Sanitation Initiative” (8). This is the bill that requires every home to have a separate bathroom for the black people. She designs this bill and hands down to Skeeter to publish on the newsletter of their league. The bill states:

Hilly Holbrook introduces the Home Help Sanitation Initiative, a disease preventive measure. Low cost bathroom installation in your garage or shed, for homes without such an important fixture.

Ladies did you know that:

*99% of all colored diseases are carried in the urine

* White can become permanently disabled by nearly all of these diseases because we lack immunities coloreds carry in their darker pigmentation. . . .

Protect yourself. Protect your children

From the Holbrook's we say, you are welcome! (158)

It reflects the bitter reality of inhuman behavior on the blacks by the whites. The whites treat them as the barrier of disease and not ready to share the same toilet with them and run the Home Help Sanitation Initiative campaign to make different toilets for the whites and the blacks and name it as a disease preventive measure.

The plight of being queer is like bolt over Aibileen with all those programs of Hilly and her friends. She, though listening all the things tagged to her race, is unable to resist or say that they are not correct in their view blaming and tagging the blacks as storehouse of disease which can harm the whites. Emotionally that gives her distinct torture. Thought she is habitual of digesting shame and insult for the ages, she finds this hard to tolerate: "I'm surprised by how tight my throat get. It's a shame I learned to keep down long time ago" (9). This shows how the blacks are supposed to suppress the shame and insult from the whites. They have mean position in front of the whites and their feeling of getting hurt has no meaning to the whites but for them it really matters. In their daily life, every small things done by the whites result to be the cause of embarrassment; it is only known to those blacks, who experience it.

One day when Leefolt is not at home someone knocks the door. Aibileen

opens door and sees it is one black workman, who is very old, and asks for water:

Hidee, Ma'am. Trouble you for some water? "He ask, I don't recognize him.

"Sho nuff," I say.

I go to get a paper cup form cupboard. It's got happy birthday balloons on it form when May Mobley turn two. I know Miss Leefolt don't want me giving him on a the glasses. (19)

Because of the construction of the society, Aibileen cannot offer water to a thirsty man in a proper manner just because he is a black worker. She has to search a paper cup. The whites do not think worth to share the toilet with the blacks, then how it could be tolerable to Miss Leefolt seeing a black worker using her kitchen's glass. But real tragedy Aibileen feels when he asks her for toilet:

"Beg a pardon" he says. "but where..." he stand there a minute, look down at his feet. "where might I go to make water?"

He look up and I look at him for a minute we just be looking. I mean, it's one a them a funny things. Not the ha-ha funny but the funny where you be thinking: Huh. "I spec you gone have to go in the bushes, back a the house,"

I hear myself say, but I wish it weren't me. (20)

In the house of Leefolt, there are two toilets and one being built but Aibileen has to say there is no place for that man because of his color of skin. This is really pathetic experience to Aibileen. In the white supremacist society, it is daily compulsion to maids like Aibileen to endure and go through such incidents of insult and shamelessness.

This act of preventing the blacks from sharing the same dishes, toilets and other small things are just to construct the foundation of discrimination stronger and

make the blacks always remember that they are mean and insignificant to their white employers. Because such small things regularly come on concern, the blacks keep on memorizing the white's superiority prevailing in the society. Separation is the tool of the white to construct their superiority and higher their ego up. As in Val Plumwood's words, "The other is marked as deviation from the centrality of the One, as color is a deviation from the normal condition of whiteness. Her difference, thus represented as lack, represented as deficiency rather than diversity" (104-5), the whites show differences i.e. of whiteness and blackness. Thus, the blacks are out of approach in different social privileges. The whites keep making areas of differences, not only at the grass-root level but also at the top.

In the novel, the blacks are differentiated and are made to use different hospital, school and bus services. Most of the things in their daily life are supposed to be used in the separate manner. They are doomed to suffer from this tragedy because such othering is institutionalized. Not only individuals like Hilly and Leefolt practice this discrimination on their behaviour, but the practice has been made legal by their law. When Skeeter goes to search any reference book for her study written over the black people, accidentally she finds a copy of booklet that is simply a list of laws stating what coloured people can and cannot do in an assortment of southern states. She goes through some pages:

I read through four of the twenty-five pages, mesmerized by how many laws exist to separate us. Negroes are not allowed to share water fountains, movie house, public restrooms, ball parks, phone booths, circus shows. Negroes can't use the same pharmacy or buy postage stamps the same window as me. We 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. (173)

In this way, in each and every turn of their life, the blacks are made to feel separated between the whites and the blacks. It is the politics of the whites to rule the blacks by separating.

The whites try to construct themselves as different; something distinct which does not belong to the black group and thus superior to them. Lack of whiteness is constructed as something lack of human quality. In this way, the black people are made to believe that they are black because they lack something, thus subordinate to the white people. Thus, separation from the white people makes black feel legally inferior to the whites and it is systematic way of them to do so as Joe Feagin and Melvin P. Pikes argue: “Separate schools, hospitals, waiting rooms, drinking fountains, restaurants, churches, theatre sections and even jail were all systematic legal designation of black inferiority” (30). The matter does not get concluded with these separations but goes farther. It is not only the separation that makes black feel as different and discriminated but also a systematic legal designation to harass the blacks.

The white people assault the blacks time and again. Hilly and Leefolt do not remain only to construct a different bathroom for Aibileen but they keep nagging Aibileen by insulting her by reminding about the colored toilet. They attempt to ravish her ego as a sovereign individual and want to see her surrendering in front of them:

‘Aibileen,’ Hilly continued, ‘how do you like your new bathroom out there? It’s nice to have a place of your own, now isn’t it?’

Aibileen stared at the crack in the dining table. ‘Yes ma’am.’

‘You know, mister Holbrook arranged for that bathroom, Aibileen. Sent the boys over and the equipment, too,’ Hilly smiled.

Aibileen just stood there and I wished I wasn’t in the room, *please*, I thought *please don’t say thank you*.

‘Yes ma’am’ Aibileen opened a drawer and reached inside, but Hilly kept looking at her. It was so obvious what she wanted. Another second passed with no one moving. Hilly cleared her throat and finally Aibileen lowered her head. ‘Thank you, ma’am,’ she whispered she walked back into the kitchen. It’s no wonder she doesn’t want to talk to me. (111)

By compelling Aibileen to be thankful on the matter what she did not like, Hilly attempts to hurt Aibileen’s ego. She tries to shatter Aibileen’s sense of respect to her own self and establish her own white ego. With such nagging of Hilly, time and again, Aibileen gets shattered down emotionally.

Aibileen feels losing her self-respect. The white women smash Aibileen’s sovereign self by reminding her that she is a black and nothing to the whites. The white’s attitude that she is an insect crawling through the petty dust below their feet makes Aibileen sore from her heart, and she starts to think bitter. She contemplates: “I feel that bitter seed grow in my chest the one planted after Treelore died. My face goes hot, my tongue twitchy. I don’t know what to say to her. All I know is I ain’t saying it” (29). A black person is imprisoned in a prison of different boundaries drawn by the white supremacist society. A black woman is prevented from discovering who she really is. The whites tell her only what she can be. They are ignored; they are beyond recognition and thus invisible to the white’s social structures. They do not win their own self. Then how can they be recognized? How much talent and capable a black is, it has no meaning because they are blocked for their progress.

Talent Has No Worth

All the possibilities of the blacks to uplift their characters are barred and they are always limited within the frame constructed by the whites. Thus, the dream of

flying in high always remains unfulfilled. No matter how qualified and deserving the blacks are who are prone to either at home or at work.

Treelore, Aibileen's talent son, who "wore big glasses and reading all the time" (2) also has to work in saw mill where he has to do hard physical work. Yule, Hilly's maid is not 19 in 20 than Hilly. She is a beautiful and qualified woman. She has graduated. Anyone can easily recognize her from the back because she has got such good and smooth hair. Yule is the most educated maid. No matter how much qualified a black person is, no matter how fine personality she has, and how much creative that person is, her possibility of being credited according to her talent is rare for the blacks. She has to fit herself as per the need of the whites, not per her talent. The white patriarchal society has long ago formulated that "White women's place is in home and black woman's place is in the white woman's kitchen" (qtd. In Smith 267). No matter how qualified she is for further study, Yule needs to be a mere house maid for the whites. In this way, the white supremacist society, preventing and blocking every possibility of progress of black individuals, makes their social status safe and keeps maintaining their domination over the blacks.

Whatever talent the blacks have, they are not credited. Rather the whites use that talent in their own benefit only. Minny, the best cook of the Jackson and Aibileen, a veteran child rearer are to pursue their caliber within the frame of the whites. They can use their talent and experience whenever the whites want. If they are uncomfortable and try to speak against the whites or do not want to serve the way the whites want, they lose their whole career. The whites make the blacks worthless if they cannot be the white's use.

Minny, the best cook, worked for Miss Walter for so many years. Hilly, daughter of Miss Walter, tries a lot to make Minny work for her. First, she sends her mother to old age house. She offers job to unemployed Minny thinking she would

accept, but Minny was not ready for that because she knows her acceptance to work as maid to Hilly would make Yule, working maid of Hilly, lose her job that is not acceptable to Minny. Hurt by the rejection of Minny, Hilly spreads the rumour over the town that Minny is a thief. The rumour ruins the career of Minny and no one is ready to hire her as maid. In this way, the black maids are like puppets for the whites. They need to dance whenever the whites want. Any attempt of resistance can turn the whole life of the blacks into a disaster. Those who put questions are considered as bad. Thus, the blacks have no second option than dumb-founding and obeying the white owners.

Even though the question a black raises is reasonable, the whites consider the argument as negative. Linda Gordon clarifies the causes why the whites blame the black women of having poor mental status: “These ascribed values of society constrict black woman’s option holding them in subordinate position. Society’s motivation was not to make black woman especially humane, but to make excellent servant” (190). An arguing human cannot be a good servant. As a result, the blacks are not expected to raise any question though they are reasonable. Minny remembers her first at in work when she was a small girl. Everything was going well as she was careful about the rules taught by her mother but the white lady wanted more:

“Now I want you to be sure and hand wash all the clothes, then put them in the electric machine to finish up.”

I said: “why I got to hand wash when the power washer gone to the job? That’s the biggest waste a time I ever heard of.” That white lady smiled at me, and five minutes later I was out on the street. (39-40)

Though Minny is reasonable in her question why to waste time in washing clothes if the machine is going to do that, she loses her job because the white lady needs an obeyer. Thus, these, who are critical and raise questions, are discouraged. They

cannot argue further. Therefore, they are taught and expected to be a dumb-like.

Talent that a black has can be acceptable if it serves the whites right.

Otherwise that talent has no worth because the society where talent is performed and takes credit is fully captured by the discourse of the whites. Minny, when she rejects the purpose of Hilly to work in her house, loses her career. Though she is qualified for her cookery, she gets no job after her rejection to Hilly. Hilly, the powerful white lady with her creditance in the society, spreads the rumor about Minny's theft all over the town. Then no one is ready to hire her no matter how talent she is in cookery. So, whatever the blacks are, they should fit themselves within the frame the whites have constructed if they are to survive in the society.

The plight of being a black is scary. It is believed that African-Americans are poor, uneducated and deficient in health and thus are not very agreeable in social companies. The whites think that the difference is in the blacks' appearance and certainly in mental and moral capacity. So, they deserve differentiation from the whites. Besides, these beliefs, centering on African American inferiority, there are great number of popular thoughts arranged to justify social segregation. Like blacks who like to be separated, that they are happy in their humble status and would not like to be treated as equals: "Miss Hilly says when I am close enough," Aibileen you like having your own toilet don't you? . . . separate and of your own. . . Miss Hilly asks shaking her head. . . "Aibileen you wouldn't want to go to a school full of white people would you?" (185). With the one and another trick of distinguishing the whites keep validating their superiority over the blacks. To keep their technique working, the whites keep maintaining differences between them in two manners i.e. social differentiation and personal differentiation.

Social differentiation means creating differences in social manners. In social level, the blacks are not allowed to share any social services with the whites. They

have their separate residential areas, separate place to take social services like schools, hospitals, post offices and so on. On a personal level, the whites teach their children to be different from the blacks. It is not considered descent to share any personal thing with the blacks. In her first learning to go to toilet, Mae Mobley, a white child, rushes to the garage to use Aibileen's. Leefolt, disgusted by this, shouts at Mae Mobley: "This is not your bathroom; I didn't raise you to use the colored bathroom! This is dirty out here, Mae Mobley you'll catch diseases! No, no, no!" (95). Mae Mobley, when she does not know what is good and bad, is getting a lesson of blacks as equal to dirt, disease, and thing to be away from. With such kind of treatment, the black's life becomes hellish. They lose their self-respect. Such nagging of insult makes the blacks depressed. When Aibileen hears Leefolt calling her dirty and diseased, she feels bitter inside her. But this is the way of the society, so she suppresses her bitter feelings within her. She narrates her own experience in the novel: "I see her listening to Miss Leefolt call me dirty, diseased. . . I feel bitter seed growing inside me. I want to yell so loud that baby girl hears me that dirty ain't a color, diseased ain't the negro side a town" (96). The blacks are being eaten up inside with all these torments. Aibileen feels hollow from within.

The blacks feel their life is in hell. The whites have all access on every side of the society. So, they are powerful. Being the white means being fortunate and able to right to dominate. Regarding this, Harries and Ordonna state, "The simple fact of whiteness means the overall life, fortune and destiny of white people. White enjoyed wide latitude of opportunities, personal freedom . . . the bottom was reserved for Indians, black and other people of color" (27-28). Whiteness makes the white people to be able to play with the blacks as they want. The whites do not hear the screams of the blacks. They just can do is to remain passive and pray to the god. Within such situation, Aibileen is broken down emotionally. She feels that there is no one to save

them as everyone in their surroundings is the whites to threaten the life of the blacks: “I choked then. The tears rolled down. It’s all them white people that break me, standing around the colored neighborhood. White peoples with guns pointed at colored people. Cause who gonna protect our people? Ain’t no colored policeman” (196). In such situations of society, everywhere the whites, have access to everything and the blacks are only in place to be dominated; there is no hope for the blacks. They cannot go anywhere to complain about the torture they get from the whites.

Every point of power of society is interwoven in such a way that there is no place, where the whites do not have connection. The blacks, in such a condition, neither can tolerate nor can resist the whites. But it is their lot to tolerate because the second option is life threatening for them. Any small mistake from the blacks against the lines drawn by the whites can claim the life of the blacks. In the novel, by mistake, Robert, a black mower, uses the white bathroom at Pinchman and Lawn gets beaten nearly to death and loses his eyes:

‘You hear what happened to Louvenia Brown’s grandson this morning?’

‘Robert’ I say ‘who do the mowing?’

‘Use the bathroom at Pinchman Lawn and Garden say they wasn’t a sign up saying so. Two white men chased him and beat him a tire iron . . . he up at the hospital. I heard he blind.’ (101)

Louvenia Brown’s grandson is carelessly beaten by the whites because of his ‘big crime’ that he mistakenly enters into the white’s bathroom. However, the situation is interwoven in such a way that the blacks neither resist nor bear it.

Unable to risk their life and career, the blacks are rather forced to tolerate whatever the situation is. Yule, being fed up of working for Hilly, wants to leave the place. Yule, an educated woman, wants some place to earn more for the education of

her sons. But in front of wicked white lady, she remains helpless. She, in her letter to Skeeter, writes: “As you know, I used to wait on a friend of yours. I didn’t like working for her and wanted to quit many times but I was afraid to. I was afraid I might never get another job once she’d had her say” (249). Yule, being black, is helpless. Despite the fact that she does not like working for Hilly, she is forced to because the career of the black is depended over recommendation of the whites. Once she gets bad recommendations, she will get in problem. She may never get another job. So, the whites dominate the blacks and threaten for bad recommendations.

In this manner, the black maids’ status is depicted as problematic in the novel. Though they are said to be working as a hired person, their condition is no better than dumb animals. This working as housemaid can be said as the remains of slavery even after many years of declaration of freedom in America. The slave trade indeed disappeared during the middle of the nineteenth century but the master-slave relationship between the whites and the blacks replaced by other forms of bounded labor such as indentures, sharecropping, etc.

Hilly and Leefolt, as women, are subordinate to their husbands. They are limited to their house rather than active participant in earning as their husbands. The final decision of the house is up to the earning males. Here they are also othered on the ground of gender by the white males. Thinking these white women with experience of being sub-ordinate to white males, we cannot assume their behavior towards black women is soft as there is a common ground of womanhood between them. Rather when they treat the black maids, they have jaundiced eye with the racist lenses. They discriminate and exploit the black women. Hazel Carby’s arguments is: “White woman stand in power relation as oppressor of black women” (qtd. in Freedman 97). Thus, the white women, even being women, cannot remain being good to the black women.

In the novel, the experience of black maids is also pathetic. Aibileen thinks that though the white male's racial reaction is life claiming for the blacks, the white woman's reaction is invisible but severer. Aibileen, listening to the news of the white male's violence of racial segregation, ponders about what the possible reaction of the white woman could be if they find about the book Aibileen and her friend are writing. She speculates:

Women they ain't like men. A woman ain't gone beat you with a stick. Miss hilly won't put no pistol on me. Miss Leefolt won't come burn my house down. No, white women like to keep they hands clean. They got shinny little set a tool they use, sharp as a witches fingernails, tidy and laid out neat, like the pricks on dentist trey. They gone take time with them. (188)

Aibileen thinks that the white women are far more dangerous than the males. They do not make their hands dirty but take their revenge taking time with their own tricks.

With regular othering and vicious circle of discrimination, the blacks start to validate themselves as the construction of the whites. They start to think their reality as the one the whites have constructed. They slowly and steadily internalize their potentials to be no more than subordinate to the whites. In this context, Barbara Smith comments: "The white racist and sexist society put a very low value on black women's psyches that they thought we are damaged people merely by the virtue of being black women" (55). Aibileen, in her interview, regards her view about being a maid:

‘Did you know when you were a girl, growing up, that one day you’d be a maid?’

‘Yes Ma’am. Yes I did.’

‘And you know that...because...?’

‘Mama was maid. My grant mama was a house slave.’

‘A house slave. Uh-huh,’ I say but she only nods her hands stay folded. In her lap she watching the words I am writing on the page.

‘Did you...ever have dreams of being something else?’

‘No she says. ‘No ma’am, I didn’t.’ (144)

In this way, Aibileen has internalized the discourse that the whites created for them. She thinks herself a maid from her childhood and cannot expect herself anything else. She says that she has not even dreamt of any other job for her because her parents and grandparents have been doing the same job. With the passage of time, the discourse has framed them within its mould. With such internalization, the blacks cannot recognize the normal behaviors. For them, the hegemony of the whites has become their reality. They find the reality something as unusual and awkward.

Minnie, with the impression of the teaching from her mother and regular othering of the society, has started to feel herself as an inferior to the whites. She has accepted internally that the blacks are different and thus they can never be equal to the whites. Celia, a white lady, treats her normally, she feels her behavior as crazy because it is different from that of other white ladies. Therefore, Minny considers Celia a crazy lady. When Minny goes for her interview in Celia’s house, Celia tries to shake hand with her in introduction and she tells her to sit and serve her cold drink. This humble behavior from a white lady makes Minny feel queer because she is not habituated to that. When Celia says that they are friends, she refuses:

Just after a minute Miss Celia says, ‘you know, I’m lucky to have you as a friend Minny.’

I feel that, hot disgust raise up in my chest. I lower my paper and just look at her. ‘No, ma’am. He ain’t friends.’

‘Well. Sure we are. ‘She smiles, like she’s doing me favor.

‘No, Miss Celia, we ain’t’ ...

‘Is it ...’ looks down at her chicken. ‘Because you’re colored?’

(214).

Minnie has been raised in the society dominated by the white supremacists. Such society cannot accept the relationship between a white and a black. She thinks that there cannot be relationship between a white and a black except the employer and the helper. The long-term othering and discourse of inferiority, she is, thus, hegemonised by the discourse of the white’s superiority.

The blacks are, in such away, ignored in the society. They are victim of racism. On an individual level, they are ill treated by the white individuals. White people’s personal conception towards a black person is very negative and derogatory. On the community level, the total community of the whites acts against the black community. The blacks, with marginalization in every aspect of society, cannot develop their individuality and have to remain dominated. With such domination for a long term, they start to realize the reality that they have very mean status: they are low and inferior. Such hegemonised condition problematizes in more serious manner. Analyzing the examples of the text, the black maids like Aibileen, Minny have to go through all aforementioned bitter experiences of being blacks.

As all the female characters are described through the perspective of male that doesn’t represent the actual experience of female like Simon de Beauvoir comments in *The Second Sex* “The whole of feminine history has been man-made. Just as in America there is no Negro problem, but rather a white problem; just as anti-Semitism is not a Jewish problem, it is our problem; so the woman problem has always been a man problem” (11). Accordingly, the black women have to go through the experience of being other on the ground of gender discrimination as well as of racial, too. That is conspicuously seen in the novel.

In conclusion, this study has presented Stockett's novel as a true account of the supremacy on the blacks by the whites. In which the racial and patriarchal domination is seen not only in terms of the physical brutality, the mental harassment, the social exclusiveness and gender biasness but also in relation to the overall social scenario including political affairs. By presenting the pathetic situation of the black people especially the female characters like Aibileen and Minny, the Stockett is able to raise the voice against the racial and patriarchal prejudice existed in the white dominant society.

Chapter 4

Black Women as Victims of Racism and Sexism

The Help by Stockett takes place in Jackson, Mississippi, during the 1960s, a period that resembles the segregation of the blacks and the superiority of the whites in the southern United States. The novel focuses on the blacks and their work environment, emphasizing the relations with their white employers. The plot follows black maids like Aibileen and Minny and educated white women in their journey to make known the relations.

The novel depicts the double marginalization of the black women. Black women are the oppressed group by the racist and sexist agent. With the rush of creating centrism, the white male supremacist culture has turned the black women something as alien. They have been doubly victimized by the twin immoralities of sexism and racism. The black women dedicate all their working time to serve the white community but they themselves have become the victim of dreadful and unbelievable experience of segregated society. The black women have two fold authorities over them. On the one hand, the whites have oppressed them. On the other hand, their own husbands are dominators. Each of them imposes their authority over the black women. Thus, the black women, despite belonging to two alleys of black race and woman, do not fit in any group.

Aibileen and Minny are the representatives of such state of the black women in the novel. Being black women, they are like the other of others. In the society of Jackson, the blacks are considered as inferior to the whites and in most of the aspects of the daily life, they are differentiated from the whites. From the simple things like sharing dishes to sharing toilet, the blacks are not considered worthy of sharing any public services in society. The blacks have their different hospitals, jails, courts, churches and so on. In this way the blacks are separated from the whites in

institutionalized manner. With such racist attitude in the society, life of the black is very hard. Just because of the color of their skin, the blacks are not given with the facilities that the whites are getting in the society. Similarly, the blacks have to endure regular assault of the white people. The blacks are considered as diseased and dirt. The blacks are not attributed with normalcy. No matter the talent that the blacks possess, they remain unheard. Only the thing a black can do is serve the whites and do the mean kinds of job that are not considered decent to be done by the white people. This is the social experiences of black families of Jackson.

Even though both Minny and her husband Leroy, being blacks, have to undergo the toil of racial discrimination but on the part of Minny is something more than Leroy. Leroy, as a male, has more choices than Minny. He is a male. Thus, he is legitimated to dominate his woman. General conception of the black male like this is just because they are males and they get the authority to dominate the black women. Minny, like other black women, needs to take care about the boundaries created by the patriarchy. They need to perform some more duties than the black males. Sexism is pervasive as racism in the black women's lives. They usually experience sexual and racial domination at once as the systems of operation are intertwined.

In this way, the state of black women like Aibileen and Minny is different from the white women and the black male due to the othering of two-fold oppressors i.e. white woman and black male even though they share some common ground. Minny, a black woman, cannot fit to share the sisterhood with Hilly and Leefolt because those white ladies represent the agencies that oppress the black women. Similarly, the black male's experience cannot also be compared with that of the black women because that may not address the domination of a black woman on the ground of gender.

The condition of black woman like Aibileen is the distinct one that should be

dealt with racism and sexism simultaneously to address the othered condition. When concerned about the gender issue of Aibileen, it comes to the racial issue, too. Their experience of life is far more complex than of any white lady like Hilly or black male like Leroy.

Set against the explosive backdrop of the Civil Rights Movement, the novel looks at how the white community in a Mississippi town uses physical and other forms of violence against its black citizens to try to stop the flow of change. It explores domestic and workplace violence through Leroy's beating of Minny, Elizabeth's beating of Mae Mobley, and through the stories of the maids who have been raped and brutalized on the job by their employers. When Hilly uses her influence to have Yule sentenced to four years in the state penitentiary, it is seen that the legal and penal systems can be used to inflict violence as well.

In the same way, all black women in the novel are at risk of some severe consequence by telling their stories at all. White women are valued in society by their ability to produce children, who are then to be cared for by black women. Few jobs are available for women of both races. Black women are expected to be passive workhorses, and to sacrifice their own homes and family lives for those of their white employers. Through writing and storytelling, Skeeter, Aibileen, and Minny all dare to challenge the gender roles the society sets up from them and receives greater fulfillment in the process. Their challenges are also steps toward an overall healthier community in many ways

Stockett's novel bravely explores the worst of the false stereotypes about black people that they are lazy, dirty, carry diseases, and are in general less intelligent and less valuable than the whites are. She shows how these stories are woven into the fabric of everyday life in Jackson, from the laws to ordinary conversations, and how these beliefs get passed from generation to generation. It shows a deep mistrust of

whites on the part of the black community, who have been betrayed by them repeatedly. It also shows how powerful and how dangerous it can be to challenge the stereotypes and to dissolve the lines that are meant to separate people from each other on the basis of skin colour. Together, the novel truly depicts the doubly marginalized picture of black women such as racial discrimination and subjugation upon the blacks by the whites.

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