

## **Chapter I: Introduction**

### ***The Help* and the Issue of Female Bonding**

This thesis on female bonding in Kathryn Stockett's novel, *The Help* 2009 explores strong unity, harmony and cooperation amidst Black. Solidarity among women who work in the houses of white people appears to be vital in creating a conducive environment for working with dignity and nice payment. The basic concern of this research is to explain how unity amidst Black women is a stepping stone in fighting against racial domination. The Black women, who work as the maids in white families, have no option other than getting united for the sake of establishing equality and individual self-esteem.

Characters like Aibileen, Constantine and Minny work in the houses of white people. They are punctual and devoted to their occupations. Despite their occupational sincerity, they are subjected to the severe discriminatory practices like compulsion to use separate toilet, to use different soap. They are subdued to remain taciturn throughout their work time. Without any fault of their own, they are intimidated. Minny is also subjected to face the torture without any fault. She says, "I've never stole a thing in my life but she told everybody I did and wasn't nobody in town gone hire a sass-mouthing thieving Nigra for a maid and I maid and I might as well go head and work for her for free" (338). Mr Leefolt says, "So, from now on, instead of using the guest bathroom, you can use your own right out there. Won't that be nice?" (29). The conversation of Leefolt with Aibeelin shows that how much the blacks dominated in the whites.

Female bonding is the formation of a close personal relationship and patterns of friendship, attachment and cooperation in females. Female bonding can be dependent on multiple factors such as age, sexual orientation, culture, race and marital

status. For example, some studies have shown that there is relatively strong female bonding evidence which is shared among single women. It is evident that this particular cohort of women sees each other as lifelong confidants due to the absence of a lifelong commitment to a spouse. Along with this, the lack of commitment to their male partners allows women to develop and maintain the strong ties between other single female friends. Female bonding can be further explored within the human context of relationships within the family.

*The Help* tells the story of Jackson, Mississippi in the early 1960s, starting in 1962 and ending in 1964. These are turbulent times for the entire country but especially turbulent for the people in Jackson. For the most part those ways revolve around segregation and the mistreatment of the Negroes that live and work in a white man's town. The first to be introduced is Aibileen Clark, a fifty three year old woman that has been in service nearly her entire life. Aibileen works for the Leefolt family, run by Elizabeth Leefolt. Aibileen takes care of Mae Mobley Leefolt, a two-year old girl that is neglected by a mother that does not pay attention to or care for her own child. Aibileen will raise the child, just like she has raised 17 others. Minny Jackson is the next to be introduced. Minny is a sassy, loud, irritable black woman that works for Hilly Walters Holbrook.

Skeeter approaches Aibileen with the idea to write narratives from the point of view of 12 black maids. Aibileen reluctantly agrees, but soon finds herself as engrossed in the project as Skeeter. They meet clandestinely in the evenings at Aibileen's house to write the book together as the town's struggles with race heat up all around them. Aibileen brings in her best friend, Minny, who is repeatedly fired for speaking her mind, to tell her story, too.

Aibileen and Minny develop a friendship and understanding with Skeeter that neither believed possible. Along the way, Skeeter learns the truth of what happened to her beloved maid, Constantine. Skeeter's book is set in the fictional town of Niveville and published anonymously. It becomes a national bestseller and, soon, the white women of Jackson begin recognizing themselves in the book's character.

The maids struggle with the irony that the children that they rear eventually will grow up to be their employers. Aibileen sees it as her calling to teach the children she raises a different way to be in the world. She tries to subvert the system by planting seeds of kindness and telling secret stories of Green Martian Luther King.

When Mae Mobley begins attending a Baptist preschool her teacher tells her that black people aren't smart enough to go to school. Aibileen asks if Mae Mobley thinks Aibileen is dumb because of the color of her skin, and when Mae says "no," she also concludes that her white teacher is not always right. The teacher seems to be an enforcer of the ways of the Old South, and Mae Mobley's questioning reveals perhaps a New South to come. Aibeelin also tries to make her understand that Black are not always because they have black color. The sentence reveals Aibeelin's view, "Then I use the white paper from my Cole's Drug Store bagand wrap another one just like it. She take it real serious, the unwrapping, letting me tell the story 'bout how it ain't the color a the wrapping that count, it's what we is inside" (295-96).

Minny is the best cook in town but talks back to the Holbrooks enough to get her fired. Minny gets revenge on Hilly which haunts her until the end. The next person to be introduced is Eugenia Skeeter Phelan. Skeeter is best friends with Hilly Holbrook and Elizabeth Leefolt. The twenty- three year olds have been friends since childhood. Skeeter wants to be a writer more than anything but quickly learns that she is sorely under qualified for the position she applied for at Harper and Row, the

famous New York publishing house. Skeeter does get advice from an editor at Harper and Row and runs with it. Mrs. Stein, the editor, tells Skeeter to write about something that disturbs her. Skeeter begins to write about the help - the Negro servants in every white household in Jackson and across most of the South.

Skeeter is on a mission to interview maids to find out what their lives are like working for white people. Skeeter is truly interested in knowing their stories and sharing them with the world. The first person Skeeter interviews are Aibileen. Aibileen is reluctant at first but agrees to help Skeeter with the project. The relationship grows between the two women until they become good friends. Minny is the next person to come on board to work on the project. Soon the story becomes a book and Skeeter struggles to get people to help amid all of the turmoil happening around them, including the deaths of Medgar Evers.

Martin Luther King has just led the 1963 March on Washington and people are watching it on television. Aibileen is amazed by the numbers of people who attended, 250,000 and 60,000 of them were white. Then the Birmingham church bombings occur and everyone in the black community in Jackson mourns.

As the national Civil Rights Movement becomes more organized and more vocal, the locals of Jackson don't see change coming. People seem more entrenched in keeping things the same as they always have been, and the white people of the state express a pride in their segregation, which they claim is beneficial for both white and black people. Fear is a prevailing theme in Aibileen's world.

She worries that the book project will be revealed and that the maids and Skeeter will be harmed. Fear has the controlling effect of keeping people firmly entrenched in their place, but no one can control what happens behind closed doors

Female bonding is the friendship among women, sharing and nurturing each other to overcome their common problems irrespective of their age, race, marital status and culture. However some studies show a considerably strong female bonding among single women. Therefore, this particular group of women considers each other lifelong confidants because of no lifelong commitment to a spouse. The lack of commitment allows them to develop and maintain a strong bond with other single female friends. According to bell hooks , "Female Bonding implies mutuality and it can be defined as a bond developed among any group of women for support and the accomplishment of shared goals" (170).

Female bonding refers to the friendship and harmony among women irrespective to their class and status for their rights and survival. It can also be defined as a strong relationship among women involved in single class movement having positive attitudes towards their goals and sharing their all emotional and other problems and supporting each other to establish themselves. Therefore, bell hooks explains, "the notion of female bonding lies in the affirmation of the solidarity and similarity of all women" (172).

Similarly, Lakshmi Priya "Female friendship is a non-sexual relationship between women based on giving and receiving emotional and moral support and sharing stories and experiences caring and nurturing each other" (5).

This particular definition shows a special kind of women to women relationship without sexual desires for each other, is developed in order to care and nurse each other for their common hurts and problems that help them heal to some extent. According to Coke female bonding means

Females, as gatherers and with responsibility for bearing and raising children, also had a critical need to build cooperation and trust with

other females. A woman in childbirth or with young babies was highly vulnerable and in need of protection and support – cooperation with other females, both in gathering food and in childcare, was essential to survival. (5)

The women who advocate for female bonding argue that all women belong to a single class and a strong bond between them helps to create new social consciousness. This bonding rests on the deep sympathy women have for one another. The impact of Female Bonding induces women to shed all sense of otherness that they have internalized. This bonding provides new avenues for them to liberate themselves from their suffocating conditions and emerge as new beings.

Women's friendships are characterized by relationships in which they can be themselves and in which they have a sense of trust and mutual understanding. Such friendships are the basis of social identity – understanding who one really is in the context of others.

### **Literature Review**

The novel *The Help* has received several literary accolades and acclaims. In projecting a distinct literary voice, Stockett has succeeded in winning a large numbers of readers. It is really startling to see several issues handled tactfully in the single work. The thematic tapestry is one of the most striking aspects of this novel.

Concerning to this aspect of the novel, Clara Zetkin puts forwards her view briefly:

*The Help* has garnered so much attention that many readers have lost objectivity in their analyses. Two contextual stances provide grounding for this essay's interrogation: first, a brief description of an academic panel held one year after Stockett's novel was published, and second,

the positions of various authorities, including author Toni Morrison and visual artist Kara Walker. (87)

According to, Clara Zetkin readers are tempted to break the standard of objectivity while going through Stockett's *The Help*. The magical effects which the novel produces in the readers make them to identify with the plight and predicament of the characters. Readers are tempted towards entering into the subjective territory of characters' feelings.

The elements of post-modernity exist in the center of this novel. Along with the postmodernist ethos, there are also certain glimpses of historical reality; Richard J Lane illustrates this point in his brief critical statement quoted below:

These preparatory references assist in considering *The Help* as a first novel—a species of fiction bearing both innocence and expected errors. More sophisticatedly, in the ken of a novel such as E. L. Doctorow's *Ragtime*, *The Help* may be understood as a postmodern historical novel as defined by Amy Elias in *Sublime Desire*. The *Help* deserves such serious contemplation and speculation as Stockett's postmodern, first novel. (27)

The hegemonic order and principle often followed by the white families are shattered. The subversive ethos is not presented blatantly. Rather it is presented in a subtle and meticulous way. The core message of the novel is that innocence should not remain detached from the strategic battle against the hegemony and horror of the real world of domination.

Smith Mailer is of the opinion that the Blacks in America prior to the advent of the civil rights movement were doomed to confront these charges which are groundless and baseless. They did not have audacity to raise voice. Yet certain

underground practices were afoot to initiate the practice of liberation. Mailer's view is presented below:

*The Help* is set in the early 1960s in Jackson Mississippi, and told primarily from the first-person perspectives of three women: Aibileen, Minny and Skeeter. Aibileen is an African-American maid who cleans houses and cares for the young children of various white families. The fear of being fired from jobs is the chronic headache from which every Black woman is haunted. Though no social campaign is afoot, they themselves sought to defend their professional dignity and freedom. *The Help* aims at fostering message that it is the self that takes precedence over institutionalized forms of liberations. (41)

The power of an individual Black girl to confront any kind of hurdle for the sake of defending one's dignity is the most valuable theme of the novel *The Help*. Mailer subscribes to this sort of view, though it is not obviously manifest in the novel. Minny is Aibileen's confrontational friend who frequently tells her employers what she thinks of them, resulting in her having been fired from nineteen jobs. Yet she faces it nonchalantly.

Becker Bertens is supportive of the notion of feminist over-assertiveness in coping with the difficulties set by the society where institutionalized slavery lies. The solidarity and willingness to make a common cause with each other is the most vital part of this novel. Bertens puts forwards his view regarding the pervading effect of this novel as follows:

Aibileen's point of view develops in this chapter. As are the subsequent chapters in Aibileen's voice, it is written in first person with a prevalent dialect. Aibileen's humor gets her through bad times, and it is clear that



she must keep her real self inside in order to appear the subservient, obedient maid. She is also proud of her skills at raising children and is secretly pleased that they favor her over their own mamas. This foreshadows events where Baby Girl sees herself as belonging more to Aibileen than her own kind. (52)

Out of the three ladies in *The Help*, Aibileen is not as assertive and audacious as others are. Minny is brimful of unrestrained energy. She does not have the idea of how to teach a lesson to the white master. When she knows her own friend is going to publish an article about the discriminatory activities of Minny's white master, Minny is profoundly happy. She had never guessed that the power of pen can quake callous and insensitive whites. Aibileen's viewpoint has to be the viewpoint of every person who has never realized that pen has the power to give a jolt to the rigid structure of society.

The backdrop of this novel is undoubtedly the civil rights movement. According to Rebecca Kelm, the civil rights movement did not occur instantaneously. It is the explosion which erupted due to pervasive injustice lurking in the micro spheres of daily lives. Rebecca's view is listed below:

This first novel adopts the complicated theme of blacks and whites living in a segregated South. A century after the Emancipation Proclamation, black maids raised white children and ran households but were paid poorly, often had to use separate toilets from the family, and watched the children they cared for commit bigotry. In Stockett's narrative, Miss Skeeter, a young white woman, is a naive, aspiring writer who wants to create a series of interviews with local black maids. (57)

Rebecca is of the opinion that several injustices and oppressions lied at the micro level daily interactions between the white family and the professional Blacks. Since there were no organized social campaigns to deal with such a trend, Individuals themselves had to explore suitable technique of saving one's own professional integrity and identity.

Draper Hall argues that the end of institutionalized slavery in the post-civil war America did not guarantee the complete end and eradication of the lingering traces of slavery. Though freedom is achieved by the Black from slavery, they are not equipped with power and resources. Their destiny remained a matter of abstract imagination. Hall discloses his view in the following citation:

Four peerless actors render an array of sharply defined black and white characters in the nascent years of the civil rights movement. They each handle a variety of Southern accents with aplomb and draw out the daily humiliation and pain the maids are subject to, as well as their abiding affection for their white charges. The actors handle the narration and dialogue so well that no character is ever stereotyped.

(20)

As claimed by Hall, the haphazard acts like dismissing workers, caretakers and other menial employees used to bring negative effects in the families of the Black employees. That is why they were in difficult situations. They were in dilemma. They had to remain in the job on the one hand. And on the other they had to minimize the intimidating manners of their white employees. It is these qualities and characteristics which make the novel a superb intertwining of personamjl and political history.

Jephine Meibom emphasizes on the relationship between coloreds and whites during the 1960s in Mississippi. It was extremely tense and discriminating. Social

issues of America in 1960s in Mississippi have been portrayed. Harsh reality of the situation of blacks specially the maids has drawn the major concerned of the researcher here. The following lines have been quoted here. "Subsequently, colored people were required to behave in certain ways to avoid putting their safety at risk. This is conveyed through the seven rules concerning working as a maid for a white family and which Minny's mother imposes on her daughter" (38-39). These rules exist to ensure that Minny, and all of the other colored maids, stay out of their white bosses' business, avoid coming into direct physical contact with them, and always comply with their wishes. These instructions imply that white people are superior, dominant, and possibly dangerous if disobeyed and underline the fundamental rule that all colored people believe.

The presence of racism and segregation in Mississippi and in the other southern states of America has its roots in slavery, which was brought to Mississippi via the colonial French and later on by the English and the Spanish. The development of slavery and the presence of the slaves in the state caused some problems in Mississippi. However, the continuous effort of the black maids and Skeeter maker them able to aware the people towards the social change based on racial discrimination.

The danger of alienation and communication gap provokes any extent of danger. The rapid movement of Black ladies towards change in the culture of domestic working has its own side effect. It inflicts in incurable injury in the psyche and family of those Black workers. Susan Minot puts her view about *The Help* and its questioning of aggressive societal phenomenon:

The insensitivity of the white lady is intimidating in an indirect way.

It is doubtful to know if she intentionally acts the way her does in *The*

*Help*. Because he is compelled to act and react in this way, it is useless to reflect on the private side of the characters' lives. The dominant tendency of the then society is to hanker after materialistic gains at the cost of the sacred values and norms. The prospect of humanity and humility is almost dim. (49)

The expansion of discriminatory micro level culture has inflicted onslaught on the redemptive culture of the nineteenth century Black women. Instead of thinking about the effects of unrestrained dismissal, people simply give free rein to their passions for power, gains and material comfort. The extreme attachment with racial haughtiness and arrogance gains has shadowed other vital part of human life.

Although all these critics examined this novel from multiple angles and arrived at various interpretations, none of them dwell upon the issue of female bonding. Thus the present researcher aims at probing the issue of female bonding. The core essence of female bonding is that there must be a harmonious bond and commonality between woman and woman in a woman's struggle for freedom from patriarchal domination, subjugation and any other forms of discriminatory practices. The researcher makes use of the theory of female bonding or woman centered feminism so that the thematic of female bonding can be clearly traced in the novel *The Help* by Kathryn Stockett.

## **Chapter II: Female Bonding and its Significance**

Female bonding means formation of a close personal relationship and patterns of friendship, attachment, and cooperation among females. Within the context of human relationships the definition and display of female bonding can be dependent on multiple factors such as age, sexual orientation, culture, race and marital status. For example, some studies have shown that there is relatively strong female bonding evidence which is shared among single women. It is evident that this particular cohort of women sees each other as lifelong confidants due to the absence of a lifelong commitment to a spouse. Along with this, the lack of commitment allows women to develop and maintain the strong ties between other single female friends. It can be further explored within the human context of relationships within the family.

As bonding for women is seen inevitable to fight against discriminatory practices in a patriarchal society and get freedom from prejudices based on class, race and gender, theorists profoundly discuss about the importance of relationship among women. According to bell hooks,

We understood that political solidarity between females expressed in sisterhood goes beyond positive recognition of the experiences of women and even shared sympathy for common suffering. Feminist sisterhood is rooted in shared commitment to struggle against patriarchal injustice, no matter the form that injustice takes. Political solidarity between women always undermines sexism and sets the stage for the overthrow of patriarchy. (14 )

According to Coke, "Females, as gatherers and with responsibility for bearing and raising children, also had a critical need to build cooperation and trust with other females. A woman in childbirth or with young babies was highly vulnerable and in

need of protection and support – cooperation with other females, both in gathering food and in childcare, was essential to survival" (5).

This bonding rests on the deep sympathy women have for one another. The impact of Female Bonding induces women to shed all sense of otherness that they have internalized. This bonding provides new avenues for them to liberate themselves from their suffocating conditions and emerge as new beings. Women have long been the victims of subordination and repression in their existing patriarchal society endure them to enhance one woman's relation with another that empower them to resist oppression and common history of subordination.

In the same way N. Lakshmi Priya opines that women's common experience of oppression urges them to form bonds in order to fight back the impact of, class and gender. Reny S. Thomas claims, "Thus, a woman gets excluded into her domestic life becoming solitary and makes them turn to other women for comfort, care, security and unity" (247). According to her, "the emotional attachment and understanding among women saves them from drastic efforts of physical exploitation in domestic violence in and political instability" (248).

Sisterhood among women enables them to feel comfort by sharing almost everything they face and experience including their domestic chores, rearing their children and so on in absence of their male counterpart. This bonding and sharing console them and pave the way to their way of achieving their goal. Reny further adds, "Thus sisterhood is something that unites the woman to not only share their feelings, affections, sorrows and opinions but also helps them to share their domestic chores, looking after children and their needs" (250).

As women are racially suppressed in patriarchal dominating society, they need to form a strong bond among them to acknowledge their power and gain self-

actualization mainly to collectivize their freedom which they later feel possible if they continue this bonding against their oppression establishing equality among them. In order to make this concept more explicit, bell hooks opines:

Radical groups of women continue our commitment to building sisterhood, to making feminist political solidarity between women an ongoing reality. We continue the work of bonding across race and class. We continue to put in place the antisexist thinking and practice which affirms the reality that can achieve self-actualization and success without dominating one another. And we have the good fortune to know every day of our lives that sisterhood is concretely possible, that sisterhood is still powerful. (17-18).

The core essence of feminism is that gender is the socio-cultural construct. The dominant trends, customs, beliefs and ideologies have given birth to the notion of gender differences. So long as gender differences are abolished, it would be difficult to put into practice some of the revolutionary agenda and programs of feminism. According to early radical feminists Female Bonding is mentioned below in a precise way:

All women were a single class movement as it augurs new social consciousness. This bonding rests on the deep sympathy women have for one another. The impact of Female Bonding induces women to shed all sense of otherness that they have internalized. This bonding provides new avenues for them to liberate themselves from their suffocating conditions and emerge as new beings. The alienated, surrendered and oppressed. The black women did not muster courage to revolt against the sexist images of the women in male writings and

so remained passive. The images of black womanhood projected in the literature both by the white and the black were degrading. The worth of women as human beings was degraded and their claims of individuality and identity rejected. (161)

Gender difference is not always the sources of domination. It does not always foster the climate for oppression and subjugation of women by men. Therefore women were forced to attain their goal through female bonding in life and for the same reasons, in fiction too. Women have come out of a common history of subordination and repression and have developed a tradition of Female Bonding. Women from early days have resorted to this bonding to express the quality of their relations with one another and to endure and resist oppression. Even if gender differences are abolished, women may not be totally free from the pitfalls and hazards set by patriarchy as the booby trap to those women who are on the way to securing the prospect of liberation and individual dignity. Unless and until women are guided by the common cause of sacrifice for the collectivization of their freedom, it would be really difficult to actualize the dream of liberation.

Several evidences can be forwarded to claim that many women have not supported other women who have been struggling for justice and equality. A single group of women must have active sense of empathy and participation in the struggles of another group of women. If the sorrow of women does not touch the other, and if they do not unite their efforts, how can they secure the sound prospect of freedom? Group identity of women is cornerstone in guaranteeing the freedom and justice for women. This is the core essence of gender difference feminism. Gender difference theorists accept and even celebrate difference which they argue should not be read as inferiority.



Woman to woman relation is essential in strengthening the possibility of progress in feminist movement. If women are driven by the common purpose and goal and if they are sensitive to the suffering of sisterhood, they can face any challenge that comes on the way. According to hook, "Women to women relationship enable the women of oppressed group to raise voice against the oppressions inequality and the subjugation they experience in the patriarchal society " (163). They bond to get liberation against all kinds of discrimination caring and nurturing them. So, to support this view, relevant quotes of Jayant S. Cherkar can be noted down as, "this triumph over patriarchy is, indeed, vital and highlights the nurturing and caring qualities of female bonding that makes this liberation possible" (408). According to her, the common experience of women makes them bond with one another because of their common oppression they should have the common qualities to get rid of the universal repression. Cherkar further claims, "This commonness in women's experiences of oppression reveals the universality of female subjugation" (408).

The bond amidst women extends supports to extend female solidarity , which involves more women and gets benefitted from care and nurturing and heals their wounds of suffering resulting from prejudice, this way secures women's survival challenging various problems and threatens to its accomplishment.

Kadida Sy opines, "The feeling of solidarity usually urges women to call each other sister in the African American community. It entails more emphasis on the community and less on individual selves, and this group-oriented view represents a good opportunity for black women to form strong bonds" (6).

Gender difference in feminism comes to operate strategically in the field which is entirely dominated by the patriarchal discourse. Since some of the main goal of earlier waves of feminism is already achieved, feminism has renewed option to act

and operate strategically. Without operating strategically, it is really difficult to maintain solid ground in the voices of women can be projected. Just by looking critically at the social and cultural positioning of women, none of significant breakthrough will arise. Strategic approach is key to creating solidarity amidst women.

By raising directly the political voices alone, it would be tough to expect genuine sense of achievement. Efforts should be made to unite the fragmented voice, unacknowledged experience and unidentified expectation so that the discourse of representation works as a strategy. Thus the target of gender difference feminism is to revalue the feminine not for the sake of revaluation but for intended strategic purpose. In the modernist identity politics versions of gender difference, this amounts to asserting differently constructed gender politics versions of gender identities and experiences and mounting political platforms based upon the specific positioning of women.

Some women conscious of feminist movement embodies both the rebellious and conformist conviction. The closer scrutiny of their activities and thinking yields a new level of understanding. Gender does not just appear as the socially constructed category which has to be dismantled. Of course gender is the category which is the outcome of social happening and individual's interaction with social practices and institutions. But the lingering effect of an individual's immersion in gender category is really shocking. It is baffling. The notion of gender as the constructed category needs manipulation so that it would could facilitate women to obtain sense of solidarity.

Margarette Flannery holds different kind of view regarding to the economic profile and position of women in patriarchal society. If Zetkin holds patriarchy as the

mechanism to foster exploitation of women by men, Flannery holds different kind of view. She says that ideology is not important in the Feminist analysis. She argues that social class of women is far more important than the concept of ideology. Her view runs as follows:

For Feminists, the concept of social class is considered to be more important than the concept of patriarchy since the latter is seen as a form of ideology that stems from class exploitation. Women are not a sex class because the only thing they have in common is their sex - an upper class woman, for example, has little if nothing in common with a working class woman. In addition, there is general agreement amongst feminists. (72)

Therefore, the concept of women as the sex class should be abolished in order to boost their economic strength and status. The idea of being an attractive woman capable of tempting man of substance should be kept at bay if and only if women are to be empowered economically. Without economic empowerment, it is pretty challenging to upgrade the working condition.

The importance of female bonding according to feminist theorist is that if females are unite, they share their ideas, if they exchange their sorrow, happiness feelings they can do whatever they want.

The concept of female bonding particularly focuses on the fact that female identity is a construct. In a patriarchal society, several practices, norms, trends and institutional cults exist to intensify the gender differences. To justify and buttress the patriarchal society and ideology, the notion of the victimization of women is intensifies. The rationale of gender difference would be proved and restated. So long

as gender difference is fostered and disseminated to fulfill the benefit of one group, the other would always be in the disadvantage.

*The Help* deals with various forms of discriminations which Black women have to face while working in the houses of white ladies. This novel is set in Mississippi in Jackson. The overall story represents the pathetic condition of black women from 1960-1964. Prior to the advent of civil rights movement, many lower class Black women had to face several discriminations. Many Black women belonging to the lower strata of society are hired in the houses of white people. These Black women are hired to clean houses, wash clothes of the white, iron those clothes, cook food for the white people and look after white people's kids. Although slavery was already abolished and no institutionalized racist practices existed prior to the advent of civil rights movement, many small but humiliating acts of discriminations are committed.

The novel moves round the lives of three female characters, Aibileen, Minny and Skeeter. They are all Black women. They have had the experiences of working in white families. They have the bitter experiences of working in white man's houses. Aibileen says, "I put the iron down real slow, feel that bitter seed grow in my chest, the one planted after Treelore died" (29). In whiteman's house, a Black woman is not allowed to use the same toilet which the white people or the guests of the white people use. A separate toilet is constructed for Black female worker so that no disease can spread. The Black women are still treated as the sources of diseases. "I use my colored bathroom from now on. And then I go on and Clorox the white bathroom again real good" (14). Aibileen says this to Miss Leefolt after she installs a second bathroom for the "colored help", as Hilly has suggested. The white does hardly have problem in taking the service of Black women. But in sharing the same toilet

with the Black, the white has had the serious reservations. For answering back a white lady employer, a Black woman is fired at any time.

Aibileen, Minny and other maids face several kinds of discriminatory practices. They are humiliated so that they could never breach the discipline set by the white. Though the lives of Black female workers are difficult and insecure, they make a common cause with each other. They help one another. When a problem occurs in one Black female worker, other helps her. For instance, Minny is fired by her white lady Miss Walter on the false charge of stealing a precious object of her house. Minny complains, "She telling everybody in town I'm stealing! That's why I can't get no work!" (21). wherever Minny goes to seek job, it is Miss Walter who prevents Minny from getting a job.

A white lady of 23, Skeeter Phelan writes a book to help the black women who are being subjugated by their mistresses. She writes a book telling about the condition of working maids in the houses of whites through the perspectives of the black maids Aibileen, Minny and others. They meet secretly in the evenings at Aibileen's house to write the book which is about against of whites domination over black females. Strong bond and support can be seen among the black women throughout the novel to overcome and heal each other from the oppressions they face. Aibileen says to Minny, "you and the kids want a come stay with me?" Aibileen says Minny when she is beaten by her badly" (313). When Yule May is fired and sent to jail for stealing money to pay tuition fee for her sons, the black women have realized the real devil act of Miss Hilly and they become ready to help Aibileen to [work with Skeeter]. Skeeter says, "After the next one, I start counting . Five . six. seven. I nod back at them, can say nothing but thank you" (253). Skeeter says this when the maids come one by one to help to write the book against the domination. Yule May's and

other events make them realize the importance of their bonding. They know later that only by bonding amongst themselves they can be achieving the real taste of their freedom in the existing patriarchal society.

### **Chapter III: Female Bonding in *The Help***

The novel moves round the lives of female characters like Aibileen, Minny and others. They are all Black women. They have had the experiences of working in white families. They have the bitter experiences of working in white man's houses. In white man's house, a Black woman is not allowed to use the same toilet which the white people or the guests of the white people use. A separate toilet is constructed for Black female worker so that no disease can spread. The Black women are still treated as the sources of disease. Hilly says, "Everybody knows they carry different kinds of diseases than we do" (8). The white does hardly have problem in taking the service of Black women. But in sharing the same toilet with the Black, the white has had the serious reservations. For answering back a white lady employer, a Black woman is fired at any time. For example, Miss Leefolt, the white lady employing Aibileen, goes ahead to build the "colored bathroom" against her husband's wishes. Miss Leafolt's expression shows the clear picture of discrimination. She says to Aibileen, "So, from now on, instead of using the guest bathroom, you can use your own right out there. Won't that be nice?"(29)

Likewise, another example of discrimination is, Skeerer's mother, Mrs Phelan, lets Constantine, who has worked for the family for many years go because her daughter, Lulabelle turns white and shows up at the time when Phelan is hosting a DAR event with several white women. Mrs Phelan explains to Skeeter, "I couldn't have that girl going around Jackson, acting white when she was colored, telling everyone, she got into a DAR party" (363).

Similarly, Minny works for Hilly Holbrook's mother, Miss Walters, but is swiftly accused of stealing silverware and is fired. Furthermore, another black

woman, Yule May, is sentenced to four years in the state penitentiary for stealing Ruby ring of Hilly to send money to her sons.

Minnie's mother narrates a bitter experience about how tolerant and submissive a Black employee should be in the house of white lady. Minny's mother once answers back her white lady in a suggestive way. Since then, she is fired from her job. Any assertive and confidential talk of Black employee results in the untimely and unexpected dismissal of job. Minny's mother counsels Minny in the following excerpt:

First day at my White Lady's house, I ate my ham sandwich in the kitchen; put my plate up in my spot in the cupboard. But when the white lady said: Now, I want you to be sure and hand-wash all the clothes first then put them in the electric machine to finish up. I said: Why I got to handwash when the power washer gone do the job? That is the biggest waste of time I ever heard of. The white lady smiled at me, and five minutes later, I was out on the street (40)

In this novel, the miserable condition of black working women is described. However, the black women form a strong bond together to bond to help each other to get rid of the discriminatory practices imposed on them by the whites. The black women's common experience of oppression encourages them to form a strong bond which helps them to fight back the impact of race, class and gender. Female friendship provides them a shade to be comforted, protection and healing from the tortures they receive by the whites only because of their color. Minny, Aibileen and Skeeter discuss about the possible consequences might be happen if they are caught by the whites. They meet and find out the acute resolution how they can be escaped from the possible danger of finding out who are involved in writing the book. Minny



reveals, "What if we put the Terrible Awful in the book "( 366). Their conversation evidences the essence of strong bond among the women in the novel to free them from their mental pressures.

The discriminatory practices done on them make them realize the importance of the relation among themselves which completely exclude the men later. According to He Zing, "Since women were not regarded as peers of men, they would turn to their own sex as true peers and value female friendship in their pursuit of equality and individuality" (202).

Though the lives of Black female workers are difficult and insecure, they make a common cause with each other. They help one another. When a problem occurs in one Black female worker, others help her. For instance, Minny is fired by her white lady Miss Walter on the false charge of stealing a precious object of her house. This charge is utterly baseless. Minny seeks a job in the houses of other white ladies but fails because Miss Hilly has already spread the rumor of her stealing the silvers in her house. This event prevents Minny from getting a job. At that time, Aibileen helps her getting a job. When Miss Walter is going to telephone to a white lady who is about to give Minny a job, it is Aibileen who disconnects the telephone line. Aibileen's clever act shows how she helps her friend Minny getting the job. She says, "I know somebody real good. She known for her cooking and she look after your kids too "(25). However, hostile and discriminatory the working conditions for the Black, they struggle to survive by helping one another. They never remain indifferent to the suffering of other women. The will to get attached to a bond of women's solidarity and unity has become a good mechanism to survive in the world full of biases, and discrimination.

Miss Hilly and Miss Leefolt are friends. They are white ladies. They are on good terms. Once, Miss Hilly is invited by Leefolt along with other guests. They eat, drink and play cards. They gossip about trivial things. Suddenly Miss Hilly expresses her dissatisfaction with the situation in Miss Leefolt's house. Hilly says that nothing is nastier than using the same toilet which is used by Black kitchen worker. It is Hilly who suggests Leefolt to construct a separate toilet for Black worker. The following snatch of conversation exemplifies how the white ladies talk about constructing separate toilet for their Black workers:

Hilly raises her chin up. Then she give one a 'ah-hems'. She got this way a clearing her throat real delicate-like that get everybody's attention without they even knowing she made them do it. But the guest bathroom's 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 case the Niger uses the inside bathroom and so do we. Law, not this messes again. (7)

Legally, it is forbidden to discriminate against Black people. But these white ladies talk about how horrible to use the same toilet used by the Black servants. Hilly not only commits this sort of racist and discriminatory act but insists Leefolt to commit the similar kind of inhuman act of segregation. If truths about this kind of discrimination come out, these white ladies will have to face public trial. So they remain in their houses, gossip together and talk about committing discriminatory activities.

The theory of female bonding particularly focuses on the fact that female identity is a construct. In a patriarchal society, several practices, norms, trends and institutional cults exist to intensify the gender differences. To justify and buttress the

patriarchal society and ideology, the notion of the victimization of women is intensified. The rationale of gender difference would be proved and restated. So long as gender difference is fostered and disseminated to fulfill the benefit of one group, the other would always be in the disadvantage.

Gender difference is not only the cause of domination. It does not always promote environment for oppression and subjugation of women by men. Still, women are forced to attain their goal through female bonding in life and for the same reasons, in fiction too. Women have common story of subordination and repression. Minny and Aibileen talk. Minny is fired by Celia. She tells Aibileen the reason behind being fired. Minny says that she found bottles of wine in Celia's room which is dangerous for a pregnant woman. When Minny tries to complain Johnney about it Celia threatens her to fire her and asks her to go home. This makes Minny really feel bitter. So, Minny says, "I tell you, that Celia must be the worst one you *ever* had to tend to" (227). She expresses her anger in front of Aibileen about the whites. They talk about how other whites are bad too. Aibileen recalls and says, "Aint't they? You remember that time Miss Walter make you pay for the crystal glass you broke?" (227). They talk about how other whites like Mister Charlie, his wife and Miss Roberta make them work hard, call "nigger" (127) impose other discriminatory practices against them. After sharing their bitter memories they feel better. "Aibileen smiles, pats me on the arm", (228) says Minny. So they share their experiences with each other and get rid of the bitter experiences they have faced in the whites. This helps them get refreshed and make their bond stronger. They try to be happy overcoming the problems through sharing and expressing with each other. This example of their conversation is a clear evidence that there exist a strong bonding between these two women. They have common experiences and problems and they get relieved by sharing with each other.

Thus, according to Urszula Niewiadomska-Flis, "Female bonding makes southern women see these imperatives as threats to their sovereignty, and, what is more, it becomes a vehicle for neutralizing these threats" (25).

Since it has been developed as a tradition of Female Bonding, Women have been struggling from early days to continue this bonding to express with one another. They attempt to endure and resist oppression through creating strong be totally free from the oppressions and fear set by patriarchy. This effort is for those women who are on the way to securing the prospect of liberation and individual dignity. Unless and until women are guided by the common cause of sacrifice for the collectivization of their freedom, it would be really difficult to assure the dream of liberation. The bonding between the characters Aibileen and Minny can be explicitly seen in the novel sharing shoulders and joining hand to hand for their liberation against patriarchy and long term domination. Minny is always bitten by Leroy, her husband. She is even beaten badly by him when she is pregnant. Once when Minny is fired by him she calls Aibileen. Aibileen meets her and talk with her about it. Aibileen says, "You and the kids want a come stay with me?" she says, "Call me on the phone if he gets rough" (313). Minny feels relieved meeting and talking with Aibileen. She gets a complete emotional support from Aibileen. So Minny often goes to Aibileen whenever she gets trouble. She says,

I guess I got to go, 'I say, even though I'd rather spend the rest of my life right here in Aibileen's cozy little kitchen, having her explain the world to me. That's what I love about Aibileen, she can take the most complicated things in life and wrap them up so small and simple, they'll fit right in your pocket'. (313)

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 "Call me on the phone if he gets rough". (313)

A single group of women must have active sense of empathy and participation in the struggles of another group of women. If the sorrow of women does not touch the other, and if they do not unite their efforts, how can they secure the sound prospect of freedom? Group identity of women is the main aspect to gain the freedom and justice for women.

Skeeter is a journalist who works in Jackson league. She wants to bring reform in the relation between the white employer and black employee. She makes use of her pen smartly. She writes several articles on how black women are compelled to work heavily in houses and paid low. She seeks to discourage the trend to construct separate toilet by the white people in their house. Skeeter thinks that she has to use her knowledge and skill of writing to boost the confidence of her female friends who work hard in the houses of the white men. The following lines describe Skeeter's plan to boost confidence in her friends and thereby making them able to live life with dignity and self-esteem:

Well I took a deep breath; I would like to write this showing the point of view of the help. The colored women down here, I tried to picture Constantine's face, Aibileen's. They raise a white child and then twenty years later the child becomes the employer. It is that irony that we love them and they love us yet. I swallowed my face trembling. We do not even allow them to sue the toilet in the house. Again there was silence. (106)

Skeeter is keenly devoted to the idea of uplifting the quality of working conditions of the Black people. In addition, she has also invented ways whereby

Black women exchange information about the difficulties that have come in their occupations. Through her writing, Skeeter wants to promote the horizon of solidarity and unity amidst women of color. From the level of daily occupational activities, Skeeter wants to see the complete end and abolition of discriminatory tactics. She says, "I feel it's my duty to help them" (354).

Woman to woman relation is essential in strengthening the possibility of progress in feminist movement. If women are driven by the common purpose and goal and if they are sensitive to the suffering of sisterhood, they can face any challenge that comes on the way. In this regard, it is more relevant to quote from Lakshmipriya can be presented as;

Not only do they share their feelings, they share material things as well. They use their friendship to fight insecurities and assure their safety and survival while facing economic instability and male chauvinism. This bonding helps them build and strengthening their self-esteem. These women not only share and support each other but try to help their fellow bonds; but their experiences or environment urge them toward female solidarity. (5)

If feminism aims at reshuffling women's relation with men, the significance of woman to woman relation should not be ignored and marginalized. The collective sense of being the member of organized sisterhood is imperative in reformulating woman-woman relation in a new way. Thus the important thing is that it is pretty difficult to launch revolutionary programs of feminist movement without strengthening woman to woman relation from certain viewpoint. Woman to woman relationships are essential to counter-act against the subjugation. In the novel too, Yule May's subjugation bring the black women more together. The feelings of

empathy for each other encourage them to help and stand for each other. They get ready to help to write the book which is going to reveal the inhumane act of whites. "After the next one, I start counting. Five. Six. Seven. I nod back at them "(253). It is not only about the book but also getting together and helping each other to overcome their problems and raise voice together which is the real notion of female bonding.

Before their employers' plan to impose practice of segregation on them, Aibileen and Minny come to meet Skeeter and inform her that they are segregating. Skeeter publishes articles about those alienating and dehumanizing practices of the white people. Skeeter condemns these practices in her articles and laments that the so-called superiority of the white is really shallow. This audacious professional act of Skeeter really paves the way for the promotion of sound and inspiring working conditions. The following lines throw light on this aspect of the women's cooperative bonding:

Minny? You mean . . . Missus Walters' old maid, I say, feeling suddenly how incestuous this is turning. I would not just be peering into Elizabeth's life, but Hilly's too. Minny got her some stories. She responds blatantly. Aibileen, I say. Thank you. Oh, thank you. Yes mam, I certainly do. I just . . . I have to ask you. What changed your mind? Aibileen does not even pause. Miss Hilly, she says. I go quiet, thinking of Hilly's bathroom plan and accusing the maid of stealing and her talk of diseases. The name comes out flat, bitter as a bad pecan. (122)

The house of Skeeter has become a spot for all the Black women who do domestic works in the houses of white ladies. The bossy nature of white men, the discriminatory activities of white ladies, low payment, compulsion to work in extra

hour, the fear of being sexually abused by white men are some of the setbacks faced by the Black workers. So, all the discriminatory activities by the whites are informed to Skeeter. Skeeter also weaves pretty convincing stories out of their bitter experiences and publishes in Jackson daily. Skeeter's articles have got a large number of audiences. The more readers read such stories, the more pressures can be exerted on the racist white who still has hollow sense of superiority.

When I got home, Mother stepped back to get a better look at me.

Well, your skin looks beautiful, she said, but your hair. She sighed,

shook her head. Where is Constantine? I asked. Is she in the Kitchen?

Now let's get all trunks unpacked before you ruin your clothes. I

turned and blinked at her. I did not think I had heard her correctly.

What did you say? Mother stood straighter, something down her dress.

Constantine has gone, street. (69)

At Constantine's sudden disappearance, Skeeter's mother is not as affected as she is. Constantine worked hard in running the family. Due to Constantine, Skeeter's parents got freedom to work and earn and then to rear Skeeter. At least they should have been anxious at the sudden disappearance of Constantine. But Skeeter has not seen any trace of worry and anxiety. So she herself takes bold decision to go to California where Constantine is supposed to live. To save Constantine from possible threat and harm, Skeeter takes bold initiative. From Skeeter's humanitarian approach and initiative, it is undoubtedly clear that the space and scope of gender bonding is likely to be enlarged. And like she was delivering the weather, Mother said, Constantine is no longer employed here.

Barbara opines that it is trend to study the problem of a single woman as an individual being having distinct sensitivity and understanding of her own. According



to Barbara, "problems of women should be viewed in broader category. It is imperative to check the group status and position of women in society to find out factors that contribute to the happening of this sort of problem. For example, Lou Anne , one of the black women gives Louvenia "two weeks off with pay" in order to help her so that she could help her grandson Robert, who is blinded by the whites for using white's bathroom. Skeeter further describes their friendship as, "She brought casseroles to Louvenia's house seven times during those weeks" (358).

In the course of travelling to track Constantine down, Skeeter comes to know that Constantine disappears with the dual purpose of leaving Skeeter free and earning her daily bread herself. Skeeter herself says, "I finally stopped asking people why Constantine had left. It was like she had simply disappeared. I had to accept that Constantine, my one ally, had left me to fend for myself with these people"(69). Wherever Skeeter goes to find out Constantine, she is told that Constantine left her house because she wants to live an independent life. By saying this, they had actually tried to stop Skeeter's move.

Skeeter is that sort of white lady. She is educated and conscious. She is fully aware the dominating practices of whites against black which is against law. She has the view of changing the conditions of black maids taking help from them. She knows well that without changing the views of black maids she can't help them herself. Through the following line of Skeete, it can be viewed that Skeeter has sympathy for black maids and she wants to help them. She asks, "Do you wish you could . . . change things?" (10). She holds the view that solidarity, unity and mutual sense of cooperation are essential in fighting with unnecessary setbacks and hurdles set by the so-called figureheads of society. Skeeter has had noble thought of female bonding. At first women of color who work menial household drudgeries should be actively

helpful and cooperative. Otherwise it would be troublesome for them to achieve remarkable level of progress. In addition, Skeeter subscribes to the conviction that noble thought should be put into practices. Else, thought remains in its abstract level and does not affect life positively and creatively. The following lines written by the chief editor of Jackson League project how popular sentiments are really for Skeeter:

I am responding personally to your resume because I found it admirable that I young lady with absolutely no work experience would apply for an editing job at a publisher as prestigious as ours. You would know this if you had done any amount of research on the business. But your fresh and unique skill of writing and covering subjects matter has enabled us to choose you on this post. You are free to use your pen on any topic that disturbs you. (71)

The vigorous sense of uniting sisterhood in suffering has influenced many persons both senior and junior. Out of genuine sense of support, and sympathy, Skeeter proceeds ahead in her task. She knows the fact well that all working black women must come together to accomplish the project. She only tries to sow the seed of feminist consciousness in black inside black women. More than sympathy and lower level of thought, Skeeter goes ahead in her campaign with the higher level of thoughts like empathy and compassion. Any bad thing that happens to any woman really touches her. Once she feels empathetically the sufferings, she takes initiative. A minimum of five years in the business is mandatory for such a job. Group work becomes successful. When Skeeter has to choose the suitable title of the book. She comes to meet Aibileen and Minny. "We need to decide on the title," I say and rub my temples" (355). They sit together, think and find out the best title for the book which is going to be the main cause of their freedom in the future. Finally Skeeter brings the

manuscript with her to Minny and Aibileen before mailing it. When they see their work, they feel a kind of satisfaction in them. They have that story as a hope for freedom from the existing patriarchal and racially dominated society. Their conversation shows them the way to ahead in their project. "Finally, Minny says, and I can see the hint of something, not exactly a smile, but more like satisfaction" (365).

Put into a stiff corset of social expectations, women, with the aid of their female companions and friends, begin to question and consequently rebel against the stereotypical roles codified as "feminine, those of white middle class house wife, black wife/servant, and privileged white lady" (26).

Women to women relationship not only help them to fight back against patriarchy but also remove their loneliness. They find another woman as true friend to share how they feel and want in absence of their male partner. For example, Minny wonders the friendly behave of her mistress Celia. This happens when Minny goes to work in the house of a white woman named Celia. Celia hires Minny to work in the kitchen. Minny is amazed at the liberal and compassionate attitude of her employer, Celia. Celia is ready to give plenty of freedom to Minny. Minny is impressed by the liberal and tranquil approach of Celia. She says, "I'm wondering why she telling me all this. I' m the maid, she ain't gone win no friends talking to me" (25). Bell hooks emphasis on bonding for sake of reform. According to her,

Sisterhood could not be powerful as long as women were competitively at war with one another. Utopian visions of sisterhood based solely on the awareness of the reality that all women were in some way victimized by male domination were disrupted by discussions of class and race. (14)

By raising directly the political voices alone, it would be tough to expect genuine sense of achievement. Efforts should be made to unite the fragmented voice, unacknowledged experience and unidentified expectation so that the discourse of representation works as a strategy.

The mutual support for each other is of the utmost importance if Black women are to survive peacefully in their occupations. Minny's mother sets down more than half a dozen of rules for those Black women who are willing to work in White people's house. The following rules represent how exhaustive the working conditions are:

Sit down on your behind, Minny, because I am about to tell you the rules for working in a white Lady's house. Rule number one for working for a white lady, Minny. It is nobody's business. You keep your nose out of your white lady's problems, you do not go crying to her with your-you cannot pay the light bill? Your feet are too sore? Remember one thing: you keep out of it, you hear me? Rule number Two: do not ever let that white lady find you sitting on her toilet. I do not care if you have got to go so bad it is coming out of your hairbraid.

(38)

Minny's mother belongs to the old generation. She endured plenty of biases and prejudices. She is subjected to the severe cases of humiliation, horror, fear of dismissal, and vice of self-immolation. Shem, therefore, does not have the idea of resisting against the white people's supremacy in each and every thing. The more tolerant Black people are the more pressures the white people impose on them. But the generation of Minny is far better, smart and intelligent. The Black women of the new generation have developed several strategies to deal with unbearable pressures of

the white people. White people are not your friends. They do not want to hear about it. According to Mgbojirikwe *et al*, "to realize the unavoidability of bringing women together for successful upturning of patriarchal tenets of subjugation. In other words, they seem to believe in the existentialist proverbs which state that, "when people urinate together, it foams and a stick of broom can easily be broken but a bunch of broom can never be broken"(1389).

Aibileen is another important character who directly falls victim to her white employer Miss Leefolt's discriminatory act of constructing toilet. To hide her discriminatory sense of haughtiness and arrogance, Leefolt behaves soberly and gently. In a patronizing way, Leefolt suggests Aibileen to use separate toilet that is recently constructed. In a very surprising way, Leefolt admonishes Aibileen to use the separate toilet that is recently constructed for her. The following lines dramatize Leefolt's condescending attitude which comes in the very patronizing way:

Mister Leefolt and I have decided to build you your very own bathroom. She claps her hands together, drop her chin at me. It is right out there in the garage. Yes ma'am. Where she thinks I been all this time? So, from now on, instead of using the guest bathroom, you can use your own right out there. Won't that be nice? So, from now on, instead of using the guest bathroom, you can use your own right out there. Won't that be nice? (29)

Miss Leefolt knows that it is not humane of her to build a separate toilet for her Black employee. It is not compatible to take Black employee's service and treat her as the most horrible and inferior creature. It is illegal to make a racist tilt in one's approach to the handling of Black employees. So Miss Leefolt assumes an air of affection. She tends to patronize Minny. However compassionate her nature might be,

Mিনny takes such a patronizing attitude as the most horrible expression of racist arrogance. She smiles big now.

On their leisure days, Minny, Aibileen and Skeeter meet together to share about their weeklong experiences of working in the houses of white people. They gossip together, dine with own accord and share about difficulties in their occupations. In these regular assemblages, they feel healed and boosted by the mutual willingness to cooperate one another. The following lines exemplify one instance of female bonding:

We all chatting and smiling at each other like we own in-not cause we mind if they are white people on here, we sit anywhere we want to now thanks to Miss Parks-just cause it is a friendly feeling. I spot Minny in the back center seat. Minny short and bit got shiny black curls. She setting with her legs splayed, her thick arms crossed. She seems to be seventeen years younger than I am. (13)

The frequent meeting, regular conversations on leisure day and sharing of work experiences make these women more confident. They feel much more sure and certain in facing any deviation that come in their professional life. No arrogance and envy have weakened the tie of sisterhood that is firmly cemented amidst them. Though such gathering seems to be trivial, it has made crucial contribution to women's struggles for existence in racism-oriented world. In this regard, it is more relevant to quote from Lakshmipriya can be presented as;

Not only do they share their feelings, they share material things as well. They use their friendship to fight insecurities and assure their safety and survival while and strengthening their self-esteem. These women not only share and support each other but try to help their

fellow bonds; they may not even believe in feminist principles, but their experiences or environment urge them toward female solidarity.

(5)

In this way, the Black women create bonding and defensive mechanism so that they can deal with any probable consequences. The following lines illustrate this aspect of bonding amidst women:

Hello, I say from my side of the room, Good to see you again. I sit on the far end of the sofa. Aibileen sits on the other end of the sofa, between us. I clear my throat, produce a nervous smile. Minny does not smile back. She is fat and short and strong. Her skin is blacker than Aibileen's by ten shades and shiny and taut, like a pair of new patent shoes. I already told Minny how we doing the stories, Aibileen say to me. You helping me write mine. What about hers she gone tell you, while you write it down? (164)

The language of conversation amidst these Black women is full of dialect, and ethnic varieties. Their conversation reflects the class background. The sufferings of these women seem to be unimportant. But the wages they earn by working in the houses of the white families are vital in running their families and sending their children to school. That is why seeking help, security and confidence is of utmost importance. The matters they discuss are often presented in code language throughout the period of discussion. That is why the author incorporates the odd dictions and dialects. Miss Skeeter, Minny nods. She settles in a wooden chair Aibileen has brought out from the kitchen, and the frame creak.

Skeeter becomes the local messiah who liberates sufferings sisters from the traps of lingering racism and discriminations. The more Skeeter becomes mature in

her struggle for freedom and racial equality through her writings, the more broad subject matters she explores. The following lines show how mature shift came in the writing career of Skeeter:

I read through four of the twenty-five pages, mesmerized by how many laws exist to separate us. Negroes and whites are not allowed to share water fountains, movie houses, public restrooms, ballparks, phone booths, circus shows. I think about Constantine, the time my family took her to Memphis with us and the highway had mostly washed out, but we had to drive straight on through because we knew the hotels would not let her in. I think about how no one in the car would come out and say it. We all know about these laws. (173)

Legally, racist practices and discriminations are taken as criminal activities. From rest room, to movie hall and from medicine store to the educational institutions, Black women are treated as though are abominable swine. Skeeter's articles, initially, deal with household discrimination. Now her articles deal with serious and shocking cases of racist interventions. Negroes cannot use the same pharmacy or buy postage stamps at the same window.

Women's importance is centered in feminism which encourages them to strengthen their bond among them in patriarchal society in which the women are dominated and their power is ignored. Women bond together to fight against injustice. According to Kadida Sy,

This form of sisterhood usually extends to female solidarity, which involves more women who benefit from this care and nurturing.

Although female friendship heals wounds resulting from prejudice and secures women's survival, it faces various challenges that threaten its



accomplishments. Besides patriarchal structures, problems traceable to self-centeredness, failure to handle differences between women and lack of sincere commitment threaten the stability of female friendship.

(2)

Women friends provide for each other dependability that goes beyond the concern for self and aims at reaching out to sisters in an attempt to help and elevate them. Black social and political thought has been limited by both the reformist postures toward change. Adhering to a male-defined ethos that far too often equates racial progress with the acquisition of an ill-defined manhood has left much U.S. Black thought with a prominent masculinity bias. In this case the patterns of suppressing Black women's ideas have been similar yet different. Much contemporary U.S. Black feminist thought reflects Black women's increasing willingness to oppose gender inequality within Black civil society. Black women's common experience of oppression urges them to form bonds in order to fight back the impact of race, class and gender. In the novel, Minny says, "I ain't telling nobody about that pie. But I give her what she deserves" (21). According to Morrison, "Female friendship not only helps women counteract the effects of patriarchy but it also provides them with comfort, security and even healing" (2).

For example, in the novel Minny consoles Celia by telling her truth when she thinks dominated by Hilly. She thinks that she is not suitable for Johny, her husband. Hilly thinks her nothing. Celia says, "The way Hilly looked at me....like I was *nothing*. Like I was trash on the side of the road "(336). Celia is really disappointed by the way Hilly behave and calls her "boyfriend stealer",. She says that she is going to leave Johny forever. Hearing this from Celia Minny feels sympathy for her and she thinks that she has to tell her the truth about that pie and Hilly's anger over Celia.

Minnie tells her everything why she got fired. Females have healthy relationship with each other which helps females move in a positive direction. In *The Help*, ends the novel on a positive note Skeeter mending her ways and Minnie takes concrete decisions in life and decides to leave Leroy and live with her children. While she says, "Plenty a black men leave their families behind like trash in a dump, but it's just not something the colored woman do. We got the kids to think about" (311).

The novel concludes with a hopeful scene, the existing racial discrimination to be end. Through the portrayal of female bonding, Stockett reveals the minds of black women characters and brings them from marginality to centrality and shows the inevitability of the bonding for women among themselves.

Besides the theme of Female Bonding amidst the female characters in the novels, one can sense a bond between the novel itself and the female readers. By opening the novel the writer immediately draws the reader into the circle of friends. In her novels, McMillan has skillfully created a whole community of female characters that a broad spectrum of readers can embrace as intimate friends. Thus a survey of the researcher is able to discover the positive self in women and has presented a true picture of female bonding. The women in her novels rediscover their own sustaining power in bonds which have historically served African American in surviving the physical and psychic atrocities of slavery, as well as hardships of reconstruction.

This chapter explores the implications of female bonding that exists in experience of black womanhood. Generally, women bond because of isolation, violence and abuse in patriarchy and racial discrimination. It is the women who suffer oppression which is a shared common experience in a male dominated society. This naturally makes them bond with other women. This bond helps women to survive, sustain and live fulfilling lives as a community even in desperate situations. It

is their common fate that unites them and eventually this bonding defends them against all negative forces including abuse of men.

Female Bonding offers them a sense of healing, a feeling of peace, intimacy and protected which lessens their mental trauma, while equipping them to make constructive contribution to society as a community.

## **Chapter IV Female Bonding to Liberate Women**

The core finding of this research is that solidarity and unity amidst women are instrumental in ending various forms of subjugation and domination. In the novel *The Help*, the two main female characters Aibileen and Minny with other maids help one another actively and resultantly succeed in coping with some of the dreadful discriminatory practices. All these women work as house attendants in white families. They are employed by the white family to scrub floor, wash clothes, clean surrounding and prepare food for the white men. They are long been discriminated by institutionalized discrimination only because of their race. They are born black. The white family members still treat their Black household employees in a discriminatory way.

The white family members like Leefolt, Hilly and Walter often talk about constructing separate toilets for their Black employees. Skeeter is a reporter who works for the Jackson league newspaper. Skeeter writes several articles about how the white families still discriminate their Black employees.

In everyday life, many Black women have to face several discriminatory practices. Black workers in the kitchens of white families have to eat on different plate with different spoon. The Blacks are accused of being lazy, dirty, disease carrier, and are in general less intelligent and less valuable than the whites are. Many white women put down several rules and regulations for their Black employees.

The Black female employees in white family are not allowed to answer their white mistress back. When any white guest comes, the Black employee had to go out, with the kid she is supposed to handle. From eight to five o'clock, Black employees are assigned domestic chores. But payment is low. The payment Black employees get is not compatible with the bulk of household drudgeries they are required to solve.

The women in the help co-operate with each other, share their emotions and problems, feels relieves and gets help from each other in every difficult situations. The mutual help, cooperation and a strong bond can be seen throughout the novel that helps them to get rid of the stresses and tensions in their day to day life. When Aibileen lost her young son Treelore she falls in bed for continuously five months. Minny comes to her every day to see her. She brings food and feeds her and nurtures her. This support makes Aibileen able to wake up and go to work for living even after five month.

Once, Minny is dismissed by her employer Miss Walter. Miss Walter is not only dismissed but also prevented her from getting a job in other families. Miss Walter spread the bad news about Minny. When Minny is about to be employed by a white woman, it is Miss Walter who told the white employer not to employ Minny because she steals jewels and other precious object. In this way Minny is prevented from getting any job in white families. At that time, Aibileen helps Minny.

By the time, Miss Celia is going to select Minny, Aibileen disconnects Miss Walter's telephone line so that no bad information about Minny could reach Celia, the employer of Minny. Yule May , Hilly's maid, is arrested for stealing one of Hilly's rings to pay her twin sons' college fee. All the blacks come to Aibileen and tell that they will help Yule May to get her free from jail. They talk each other and sooth their tensions constantly which are imposed on them by the patriarchal society and the racial discrimination. They never do careless the problems of each other. They always provide compassion and empathy to minimize the tortures they have got. This gives them energy to struggle and to fight back the subjugation and survive in the patriarchal society. They make effort to form a bond among them to get themselves free from the domination.

Skeeter is a passionate lady. When she is worried about her maid Constantine's disappearance, Aibileen helps her find her address. Skeeter knows the full story how Constantine was abused and exploited by her parents. At first she did not know where to find Constantine. Later she knows that Constantine went to her own village to live with her daughter and died after three months. The help of Aibileen makes Skeeter free from being guilty for not able to find Constantine's information. Skeeter is worried about her death however; she knows complete information about her maid who used to take care of her in her childhood.

Notion of bond among the women heals their sorrows and encourages them live and raise their children independently, in absence of their lifelong confidants. Once Minny is beaten treacherously by her husband, Leroy, at that time Aibileen asks her to come to her with her children. On the other hand, Celia also shows her compassion for her wound that she gets from her husband. Celia asks her to sit and she makes coffee for both. Celia also asks her to take leave from her job and take rest. Later, Celia provides Minny lifetime job at her home which helps her to take decision to leave Leroy and live with her children to get rid of the everyday physical tortures from him.

Thus Celia's helps to make her able to fight back against the domination of her husband and live independently with her children. Minny also promises Celia that she will work for her always. This bond between them paves the way to live their life without any tortures.

Additionally, Skeeter writes plenty of articles regarding to the treatment of Black women by their respective white employer. Skeeter openly denounced, in her articles, the callous and insensitive attitude of white ladies towards their Black employees. The white ladies are frightened by Skeeter because Skeeter exposes

realities and facts about their domestic lives. Skeeter is also informed about fresh and new events that happen in the inner domestic lives of the white. The help and support of Skeeter as well as the day to day torture of the white women encourage the black women to come closer and rebel against the domination.

One of the black, Yule May is sentenced to jail for four years for stealing the ruby ring of her mistress, Hilly. She is highly charged. This pathetic scene makes all the blacks sympathize on Yule May. They decide to help her collectively. The blacks conceive more hatred toward whites. Anger at Hilly, over her treatment of Yule May, adds a little faith from Minny, convinces eleven more maids to tell their stories for the book. This encourages other black maids to co-operate with Aibileen to write the book too. They realize the importance of their mutual cooperation to protest the discriminatory practices.

Due to the injustice and cruelty that Constantine and other colored maids in the South have experienced, Skeeter decides to reveal the truth about being a colored maid in Mississippi and to write a book about it. She tries to connect with a group of black maids in order to gain their trust. A task that turns out to be quite difficult and tricky as writing a book about African-Americans in the South during the early 1960s breaks social rules and puts all the black maids at risk. Eventually Skeeter wins Aibileen's trust through a friendship which develops while Aibileen helps Skeeter write a household tips column for the local newspaper. Skeeter accepts the job to write the column as a stepping stone to becoming a writer/ editor at Harper & Row.

Skeeter realizes later that she wants to expose to the world in the form of a book the deplorable conditions the maids in the South endure in order to barely survive. Skeeter publishes articles on Jackson League and thereby puts pressures on

the white people. Through cooperation with Minny and Aibileen, the budding discriminatory practices at the domestic level are discouraged and dismissed.

Unfortunately, such an expose is a dangerous task, not only for Skeeter, but for any maids who agree to help her. Aibileen finally agrees to tell her story. The decision for segregated bathrooms finally makes Aibileen agreeing on cooperating with Skeeter on her book about black maids of Jackson and they begin spending their evenings together and build a friendship. Minny, despite her distrust of whites, finally agrees as well, but she and Aibileen are unable to convince others to tell their stories.

Other black maids are angry about Hilly for firing Yule May and they agree to help to write the book about Hilly and the way she treated Yule May so that they decide to tell their individual experiences to Skeeter. They feel united and powerful for having a voice. But they all know that they will be suffered if Hilly catches them writing the book. Meanwhile Minny reveals the secret about Hilly that Minny reveals in Skeeter's book that silences Hilly. Minny convinces Skeeter and Aibileen that their best protection against Hilly, if their book comes out, is to include the pie story in Minny's section. Even if Hilly recognizes the town as Jackson, she won't tell because it would be admitting to eating poo, once Minny had mixed with a pie. The book becomes a powerful force in giving a voice to the black maids and causes the community of Jackson to reconsider the carefully drawn lines between white and black.

Finally, the book gets published anonymously and becomes a national bestseller. Soon, the white women of Jackson begin recognizing themselves in the book's characters. The maids seem proud of their accomplishment. At the end through the mutual support and collective work of the black maids, Skeeter is able to succeed in her project of writing the book. She has expressed her dissatisfaction about the



society that dominates the blacks and she completes her dream of becoming a writer which was impossible by herself alone. Aibileen is fired by Miss Leafolt and Aibileen has to leave the house of Miss Leafolt and May Moebly. Then Skeeter helps her getting Miss Myrna job in writing the column all along.

Thus, the mutual cooperation and coordination amidst Black women help them to minimize their sufferings, maximize their happiness. And finally it enables them to explore further avenue of opportunities and securities. By making common cause with one another, Black women proceed ahead confidently and assertively in the professional life.

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