

## **Racial Injustice in Sue Monk Kidd's *The Secret Life of Bees***

This research paper makes an effort to examine and analyze Sue Monk Kidd's *The Secret Life of Bees* to explore the racial injustice upon African American by white privileged class. Minority groups in America, especially blacks (African-Americans), believed they were being denied the basic human rights as that were provided for other American citizens (namely, Whites) by the U.S. Constitution, through the legacy of slavery and racism which is projected through this novel. Though American government systems, rules and regulations were changed the White's perception towards Black people remains the same. The African- American characters in the novel are the victims of injustice by the White citizen of the society.

Set in South Carolina in 1964, *The Secret Life of Bees* tells the story of fourteen-year old Lily Owens, a white girl who has been raised by her black maid, Rosaleen, and her abusive and unloving father, T. Ray, after her mother's death in an accident when Lily was four years old. When Lily and Rosaleen take a journey together to Tiburon, South Carolina, to escape a racist criminal justice system and search for information about Lily's mother, they live with and learn from an intimate circle of black women. Within this community of women, Lily, who suffers from a deep sense of mother loss, learns about racism, injustice, discrimination, whiteness, forgiveness, maternal love, spirituality, and creativity. She becomes more aware of the complexities and possibilities of herself and her world. She witness that the whites established a system of privileged for them and ruthless oppression and exploitation to black communities. Consequently, African Americans have become the victims of an endless series of injustice. Black characters are arrested without grounds, beaten by the police, harassed by racist townspeople, etc.

Sue Monk Kidd grew up in Georgia and she studied nursing at Texas Christian University. In her late 20s, she was inspired to become a writer after reading the books of Thomas Merton, the Catholic philosopher and essayist. Kidd took writing classes at Emory University, and later published a series of short essays in magazines like *Reader's Digest* and *Guideposts*. She wrote three books on her conflicted relationship with Christianity and feminism, and in 2002, she published her first novel, *The Secret Life of Bees*, which was a major bestseller. In 2005, she published a second novel, *The Mermaid Chair*, and in 2014 she published her third novel, *The Invention of Wings*. Kidd currently resides in Florida with her husband.

Kidd has presented her personal experiences in the novel about South in the early sixties as a world of paradoxes. There was segregation and the worst injustices. The African-American women prominently populated the world of her childhood, there were enormous racial divides. She remembers the summer of 1964 with its voter registration drives, boiling racial tensions, and the erupting awareness of the cruelty of racism. She tries to give redemption for them through her writing. That personal experience provided a background for the novel.

*The Secret Life of Bees*, demonstrates the misery of racism by portraying black characters with their everyday feeling of being minority. The history of Civil Rights Movement in the South explodes hostility, intolerance and blatant racial injustice which is interwoven throughout the novel. The main character, Lily learns about racial injustice when she experiences what it feels like to be a minority. She does not quite understand how hard it for Rosaleen, Boatwright sisters and Zach because she has never been a minority. Lily knows that they are just like any other person. Because she has the knowledge of being a minority herself, she can sympathize for them when other is racist. At the beginning of the novel, Lily is very oblivious to racism in and around her

life. During her time in Tiburon Lily experiences herself being a minority and faces the injustice around her. In the beginning she has trouble coping with it. In the end she learned to deal with racism and learn the effects. She experiences a rampant racial injustice.

The etymology of the term “justice” which corresponds to “Just”, points distinctly to an origin connected with the ordinances of law. “Justum” is a form of “jussum”, which means ‘that has been ordered’. “Dikaion” comes directly from “dike”, a suit at law. “Recht”, from which came right and righteous, is synonymous with law. The courts of justice, the administration of justice, are the courts and the administration of law. “La justice”, in French, is the established term for judicature. The meaning "the administration of law" in the Mercian hymns, Latin, “justitia” is glossed by Old English “rihtwisnes”, meaning right witness from 1303 in Justice of the peace first attested in 1320 (etymonline.com). Etymology is slight evidence of what the idea now signified is, but the very best evidence of how it sprang up.

Throughout history various theories of Justices have been established. Early theories of justice were set out by the Ancient Greek philosophers like [Plato](#) in his work [The Republic](#), and Aristotle in his [Nicomachean Ethics](#). Advocates of divine command theory argue that justice issues from God. In the 1600s, theorists like [John Locke](#) argued for the theory of [natural law](#). Thinkers in the [social contract](#) tradition argued that justice is derived from the mutual agreement of everyone concerned. In the 1800s, [utilitarian](#) thinkers including [John Stuart Mill](#) argued that justice is what has the best consequences (2). Theories of distributive justice concern what is distributed, between whom they are to be distributed, and what is

the proper distribution. [John Rawl's](#) used a [social contract](#) argument to show that justice, and especially distributive justice, is a form of fairness.

As a philosopher, Rawls was dissatisfied with the traditional philosophical arguments about what makes a social institution just and about what justifies political or social actions and policies. His theory brings social justice to a broader range of people than utilitarian theory does. In utilitarian theory, people should be concerned with creating the greatest total happiness for the members of a society. But this does not address issues of equality. It is possible for an action to be just for utilitarians even if it helps only the elites and hurts everyone else. For Rawls, this would not be true. Rawls argues that all actions taken by a society must at least help and give justice to the lowest members of the society. He says in his classic *A Theory of Justice* "justice is the first virtue of social institutions, as truth is of systems of thought" (3), unjust institutions and laws must be reformed. Justice means each individual has equal rights and liberties, which cannot be diminished or denied for the benefit of any other person or even for society as a whole. He calls this "inviolability founded on justice" (3). For Rawls, in order to develop a right theory of justice, we are to step into an imaginary 'original position', behind what he calls 'a veil of ignorance' (9), to a place where we would not know our own strengths and weaknesses or our own place in the grand social scheme of things. This veil of ignorance creates a condition of equality that ensures personal bias will not influence their choices. Without knowing one's position in life, or where one would wind up after developing principles of justice from an impartial position, Rawls argues that we could develop particularly a fair notion of justice that everyone could agree with (12).

Consequently, with the publication of Iris Young's *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, and the work of Nancy Fraser (1997, 1998, 2000, and 2001) challenged the distributional approach which outcasted the underlying causes of maldistribution. They focus on recognition approach. They are influenced by the real world of political injustice, rather than the imagined realm of an original position. With the examination of real injustices as the focus, these critics argue that there is much more to injustice than maldistribution, especially when one begins to look at exactly who is left out of actual distributions. Young argues that while theories of distributive justice offer models and procedures by which distribution may be improved, none of them thoroughly examines the social, cultural, symbolic, and institutional conditions underlying poor distributions in the first place (14). One of the key problems of the theory of distributive justice argues Young is that "it does not recognize the limits to the application of logic of distribution" (24). For Young, distribution is not the only problem; a concept of justice needs to focus more on the elimination of institutionalized domination and oppression, particularly of those who represent difference and remain un-, mis-, or malrecognized.

Likewise, Nancy Fraser calls justice is, at least, 'bivalent' in this sense in her work that justice requires attention to both distribution and recognition (15). In Fraser and Axel Honneth's volume *Redistribution or Recognition*, she says about recognition that it is a matter of justice because certain forms of misrecognition deny persons "the status of full partners in social interaction simply as a consequence of institutionalized patterns of cultural value in whose construction they have not equally participated" (29). Treating recognition as a matter of justice means treating it as an issue of social status: actors can either by social peers with reciprocal relations of equality, or suffer from status subordination *via* misrecognition. Similarly, in the political realm, Fraser

calls for ‘participatory parity’ of all affected parties in the polity as the necessary procedure to alleviate both distributional and recognition-based forms of injustice (16). As Fraser argues, such a need for participation illustrates not just the need for a bivalent understanding of justice, but a trivalent distribution, recognition and participatory parity. The point shows as both injustices and their remedies are integrally linked.

Further, Fraser develops the notion of parity of participation. According to this norm, justice requires social arrangements that permit all (adult) members of society to interact with one another as peers. Justice needs to focus more generally on the elimination of institutionalized domination and oppression. In order to accomplish this, justice must focus on the political process as a way to address a variety of injustices, including both the inequitable distribution of social goods and the conditions undermining social recognition. This leads directly to Fraser’s insistence on participatory democratic structures to address existing injustices based in both distribution and recognition. Similarly, the central focus for Young, in addressing justice both as distribution and the recognition of difference, is on decision-making structures, and she argues for “democratic decision-making procedures as an element and condition of social justice”(23). Recognition, then, along with inclusion in the political process, become the key to relieving both social oppression and distributional inequity.

For Honneth, one form of disrespect or misrecognition—the lack of rights—is directly linked to democratic participation. There is a direct link, for Honneth, between a lack of respect and recognition and a decline in a person’s membership and

participation in the greater community, including their right to participate in the institutional order (26). He points out participation as:

Citizens are subject to a form of personal disrespect when they are 'structurally excluded from the possession of certain rights within a given society. . . [T]he experience of being denied rights is typically coupled with a loss of self-respect, of the ability to relate to oneself as a partner to interaction in possession of equal rights on a par with all other individuals'. (190)

Honneth tries to give focus on equal dignity or respect as central dimension of recognition. Lack of respect and recognition leads to injustice. The people of different race, color, class and gender lose their self respect due to their exclusion from the possession of certain rights within a given society. Only equal positive rights institutionalize recognition in a publicly manifest way and thus make it easier for the individual to develop self-respect.

In the same manner, the economist [Amartya Sen](#) has raised concerns over Rawls' emphasis on primary social goods, arguing in *Inequality Reexamined* (1992) that we should attend not only to the distribution of primary goods, but also how effectively people are able to use those goods to pursue their ends (30). His conception of justice includes participation as both a freedom and function in itself and as something that supports a range of other functions.

Theorists have defined justice in numerous ways. Inequitable distribution, a lack of recognition, limited participation, and a critical lack of capabilities, at both the individual and group level, all work to produce injustice. Therefore, claims for justice must be integrated into a thorough, comprehensive, and pluralist political understanding of the term. So, the main aim of this research paper is to explore racial

injustice in *The Secret Life of Bees* through the aforementioned insight of justice by Rawl, Fraser, Young, Honneth and Amartya Sen.

Different critics have analyzed *The Secret Life of Bees* from the multiple perspectives which preserve the universal importance of the novel regarding the nature of protagonist and her life. The black characters of the novel have been the victim of racial injustice and discrimination. Rosellen Brown says, “Sue Monk Kidd's fine first novel *The Secret Life of Bees* begins with a paragraph in which she establishes the voice that will carry us pleasurably through her story, and lays out, implicitly, the emotional terrain she will take us through” (11).

The novel *The Secret Life of Bees* is her debut novel. It narrates the story of a young girl who searches truth about the death of her mother Deborah Fontanel Owens and learns the impacts of racism, social evil, whiteness and significance of forgiveness, maternal love, spirituality, and creativity. Similarly, Adam Mazmanian expresses about the character Lily:

Lily is a wonderfully petulant and self-absorbed adolescent, and Kidd deftly portrays her sense of injustice as it expands to accommodate broader social evils. At the same time, the political aspects of Lily's growth never threaten to overwhelm the personal. The core of this story is Lily's search for a mother, and she finds one in a place she never expected. August and her sisters, June and May, are no mere vehicles for Lily's salvation; they are individuals as fully imagined as the sweltering, kudzu-carpeted landscape that surrounds them. (7)

In the review, basically, he talks about the development and maturation of one central character, Lily Owens. Lily runs away from her cruel, abusive father (T. Ray



Owens) and journeys to the town of Tiburon to find information about her dead mother, Deborah Fontanel Owens. Through her, we learn about injustice, the racism, love, and community within the worlds of Tiburon and Sylvan, South Carolina. Moreover, we come to know about strong women, such as August Boatwright and Rosaleen, and the importance of developing female-centric communities.

Nonetheless, Lily is extremely close with Rosaleen in the absence of a mother; she regards Rosaleen as a maternal figure. Rosaleen has an important influence on Lily in the novel when Lily doubts herself, or feels afraid, she can always turn to Rosaleen for love and support. Carl Reiner reveals about the role of Rosaleen in the life of Lily writes:

In *The Secret Life of Bees*, Lilly Owens, in the midst of the Deep South's Civil Right revolt. The memory of her mother's death, which she witnessed, is indelibly printed in her mind. She receives much needed comfort from her warm and protective black nanny, Rosaleen. But, after registers to vote, and sets off to exercise her franchise for the first time, she is waylaid by some of the racist townsfolk, and is subsequently imprisoned for assault. Then she busts Rosaleen out of prison. (7)

Reiner mostly focuses on the role of Rosaleen who makes Lily's way Tiburon. She talks about Lily recalling her very last memory of her mother, Deborah, who died when Lily was a small child. Lily thinks that she played a horrible part in Deborah's death. Reiner talks on how Rosaleen loves Lily and helps to mediate between Lily and her abusive father, and she goes along somewhat reluctantly with Lily's plans out of a combination of love and pity for the young girl.

Moreover, the readers find the symbol of black Mary in the novel *The Secret Life of Bees*. The black Mary serves several functions in the novel. As the picture, it symbolizes mothers and mother surrogates. Lily carries around a wooden picture of the black Mary, which she found among some objects that once belonged to her mother. This picture literally symbolizes Deborah to Lily, and eventually the picture leads Lily to August, a black woman who will become a surrogate mother. Through August, Lily learns about Mary, whom August considers to be the mother of all of humanity. Laurie Grobman reveals about the symbolic value of black Mary in the novel and argues:

Kidd uses blackness specifically, the image of the black Madonna to heal Lily both emotionally and spiritually, stealing from black culture and simultaneously perpetuating the Mammy stereotype. The Boatwright sisters and the Daughters of Mary call their black Mary statue "Our Lady of Chains" because, in a story passed down from generation to generation, a wooden figure of a woman came ashore during the era of slavery, and the slaves believed that she was the mother of Jesus, who came to protect them. Fearing her power, the master chained the statue, but she "broke the chains" (Kidd 110), and the statue represents triumph over oppression for her worshippers.

(7)

In the review, Grobman has written about the richness of African American culture to heal their pain, suffering and disrespect. Lily's great quest is for her mother. The black Madonna is the sorrowful mother, the mother who weeps tears for the suffering, the brokenness of their vulnerable hearts. He talks about how Kidd invites us to enter into our grief and to learn what suffering has to teach us. He links up 'Our Lady of

Chains' symbol to give support for human beings ability to resist, overcome, and transcend all forms of oppression through the power of love, specifically the feminine love of the Divine [Mother](#).

Furthermore, *The Secret Life of Bees* portrays the life of a young, native protagonist who begins her journey from innocence to selfhood in the company of black caregiver and faces the racial injustices and discrimination. Catherine B. Emanuel writes:

Throughout *The Secret Life of Bees*, Lily is forced to examine institutional ideas of justice, and these revised thoughts inspire new ways of being, both for Lily and for Rosaleen. First, Lily discovers that the institution of local justice, the sheriff's office, only metes out fairness to white people. When Rosaleen goes to register to vote, she finds her path impeded by white men who want to denounce Civil Rights' progress. Empowered by the Civil Rights Act of 1963, she dumps her snuff can spit onto their shoes. When she is arrested after being beaten by these men, the sheriff opens her cell to these same men so they can continue the abuse. Lily realizes that Rosaleen's injustice can produce life-threatening consequences. (21)

This review on *The Secret Life of Bees* attempts to analyze this text through the lens of injustice. The novel opens with the Civil Rights Act being signed into law on July 2, 1964. Rosaleen is disbelieving and then celebratory. As a young teenager, she has intuited that people seem to be divided into competing teams and is aware of a do-or-die contest between the white people's team and the colored people's team. She talks about how Lily become acutely aware of what is at stake and helps Rosaleen escape. Her review explains Kidd's discussion on the psychological damage of women's

exclusion, exclusion from representation in society's power positions and in her viewpoint, exclusion from nearly all church images and stories. Additionally, the sufferings, pains and agony of the African Americans constitute throughout Lily's story. The Africans in America are considered as suppressed and oppressed by the whites. Their subjugated life and sufferings are reflected in Afro American writings.

Racism refers to the inequality of people based on color. The white people naturally have the tendency to dominate the black people showing their superiority. The identity of blacks is injured by calling them 'nigger', 'black ass' and 'negroes' by whites. Many black people are destroyed by the White men and their culture. Education and employment facilities are prevented from the Blacks by the White society. They were doubly marginalized in every means. The solution of all these racial injustice must be essential and important. With the achievement of Civil Rights Act (1964) the blacks have erased the ill-effects of racism.

Thus, different critics have interpreted the novel from different perspectives as mentioned above but the issue of racial injustice has not been explored in the text. The researcher is of the opinion that Sue Monk Kidd has presented the grotesque system of racial injustice in her novel *The Secret Life of Bees* has been carried out to fill the gap.

Lily, a white girl who is the protagonist of *The Secret Life of Bees* has experienced the racial attitudes of the whites towards Blacks. Lily's mother died when she is fourteen years old. She lives with her cruel father T. Ray. In order to search the truth about her mother's death she escapes from her father and goes to Tiburon with her black nanny Rosaleen. On the way she encounters certain racial

injustice where she questions whether the real meaning of Civil Rights Act is letting freedom of the blacks.

Both law and attitudes separate the races in the South of America which is represented by Kidd. Politics and attitudes of whites allow injustice and discriminate the blacks and exclude them from full participation in the life of the community. There is a distinction of race, caste and color in the public. Kidd brings out appalling situation of blacks through Rosaleen, Boatwright sisters and Zach. Fugitive from justice, the protagonist Lily starts her journey with Rosaleen to find the secret behind her mother's death. In return, she became familiar with the air of racial prejudices and injustice.

From different perspectives, the concept of justice is different based on numerous fields. It is regarded as the concepts of [moral](#) correctness base on ethics, [rationality](#), [law](#), [religion](#), [equity](#) and fairness. The exact meaning of the term in current philosophical and critical usage is not debated. Some thinkers use to refer to justice is about distribution, but it is also about individual and community recognition, participation and functioning. Others, such as [John Rawls](#) use it in a more specific sense. John Rawls's classic *A Theory of Justice* defines justice as 'a standard whereby the distributive aspects of the basic structure of society are to be assessed'. Justice, then, defines 'the appropriate division of social advantages' (Rawls 1971: 9–10).

Rawls says:

Justice as fairness the original position of equality corresponds to the state of nature in the traditional theory of the social contract. The principles of justice are chosen behind a veil of ignorance. This ensures that no one is advantaged or disadvantaged in the choice of principles by the outcome of natural chance

or the contingency of social circumstances. Since all are similarly situated and no one is able to design principles to favor his particular condition, the principles of justice are the result of a fair agreement or bargain. “Justice as fairness”: it conveys the idea that the principles of justice are agreed to in an initial situation that is fair. (11)

Rawls begins his work with the idea of justice as fairness. According to Rawls theory "the veil of ignorance" is an imaginative device for considering what counts as just and fair in a state of society. He tries to emphasis on a society which is formed and no one knows anything about each other's position or background such as ethnic group, race, or gender, then all are ignorant. If people do not have a clue about what is going on around them and among them, then they are ignorant. They have no knowledge, no information on each other; therefore, they would have to agree on rules which are fair and just without biases. This veil of ignorance may end injustice in the society and provides equal distribution.

In this way Rawls’s notion of ‘justice as fairness’ is justice as just distribution—or, more properly, the rules that govern a just distribution of social, political, and economic goods and bads behind a veil of ignorance. The central conceptual framework of a theory of justice is focused on how and what gets distributed in the construction of a just society. Kidd in *The Secret Life of Bees* writes:

I used to have daydreams in which she was white and married T. Ray, and became my real mother. Other times I was a Negro orphan she found in a cornfield and adopted. Once in a while I had us living in a foreign country like New York, where she could adopt me and we could both stay our natural color. (9)

All things being equal, rich and poor, colored and white, educated and uneducated, are to be treated equally in the distributions of societies. Lilly finds that the color of the skin gives the people the identity such as blacks, whites etc. The racists consider the white race to be superior and black to be inferior. She accepts as a daydream for colorblindness society.

As an American political philosopher, Rawls' concerned in a society of free citizens holding equal basic rights and cooperating within an egalitarian economic system. His principles of justice centers in liberal ideas that should be fair to all citizens regarded as free and as equals. His chief attention was about the basic structure is the location of justice because these institutions distribute the main benefits and burdens of social life: who will receive social recognition, who will have which basic rights, who will have opportunities to get what kind of work, what the distribution of income and wealth will be, and so on. As Rawls' argues about his two principles of justice as:

First: each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive scheme of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar scheme of liberties for others.

Second: social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both (a) reasonably expected to be to everyone's advantage, and (b) attached to positions and offices open to all. (57)

By this, he meant that the basic structures of society should be ordered in such a way that they promote maximum both egalitarian freedom and equality. He views that society should be structured as to provide equality of both liberties and opportunities. Consequently, he opines a society as just to the extent it provided a fair playing field for its citizens.

Contrarily, African Americans are deprived of their basic rights. They not treated completely equally. But throughout the years major steps towards equality have been made and as a whole the United States is close to reaching this goal. The African American Civil Rights Movement aimed to eliminate all racial discrimination and segregation in America. Lily, in the novel says about the Civil Rights Act.

I didn't know whether to be excited for her or worried. All people ever talked about after church were the Negroes and whether they'd get their civil rights. Who was winning—the white people's team or the colored people's team? Like it was a do-or-die contest. When that minister from Alabama, Reverend Martin Luther King, got arrested last month in Florida for wanting to eat in a restaurant, the men at church acted like the white people's team had won the pennant race. I knew they would not take this news lying down, not in one million years. (26)

After the rectification of the act too, there was the discrimination between whites and blacks. People talked about just opposite what struggle for Martin Luther King Jr. who was assassinated for starting civil right movements. Lily reflects upon the signing of the Civil Rights Act, which she and Rosaleen watched live on TV. Lily is not super politically motivated or active, but she is aware of the various racial attitudes and prejudices the people have around her. Even her father represents white supremacy legacy. T. Ray, Lily's father witnesses the cruel behavior of those men, "She dumped snuff juice on three white men! What the hell was she thinking? And on Franklin Posey, for Christ's sake. She couldn't pick somebody normal? He's the meanest nigger hater in Sylvan. He'd as soon kill her as look at her" (47). T. Ray talks about the white people domination towards black. In the South America, the white people pour out streams of hatred and distrust towards those who differ from them in



belief or national origin or color. The lives of blacks have been shown as pathetic and miserable that they still have fear and their basic rights have been dismantled by the white people.

It is not just the individual experience of inequity that comes to the surface with a case of injustice, discrimination and prejudice; it has become part of the African American experiences. In this, the traditional center of attention on distributive justice, or equity, becomes obviously limited to the whites but the African Americans were deprived of it.

Whereas, Young and Fraser, in addition to fair distribution focus on the issue of recognition for equality. Young opines, "If distributional differences are constituted, in part, by social, cultural, economic, and political processes, any examination of justice needs to include discussions of the structures, practices, rules, norms, language, and symbols that mediate social relations (22). They try to explore that a lack of recognition in the social and political realms leads to various forms of insults, degradation, and devaluation at the individual and cultural level, oppressed individuals and communities in the political and cultural realms. This is an injustice not only because it constrains people and does them harm, but also because it is the foundation for distributive injustice. Young begins with the argument that 'where social group differences exist and some groups are privileged while others are oppressed, social justice requires explicitly acknowledging and attending to those group differences in order to undermine oppression' ( 3).

The constitutional right to vote for all citizens are denied for blacks even after a law is passed is explicated by Kidd in *The Secret Life of Bees*. The blacks have gone through many struggles in order to have rights to vote and right to be freeman and woman.

Rosaleen is eager to register her name to vote and she learns to write her name though she is uneducated. She always thinks about it and the day to register her right. The day came and she happily goes to the town to register her vote. On hearing it the racist attacks her and forcibly she is arrested and put in jail for her only fault of wishing to vote. She bears the sufferings made by the white men. The whites have the right to kill the blacks and wound black terribly.

The defective role of churches, to play in the field of race relations is revealed in *The Secret Life of Bees*. The Negro who is integrated into a white church is the lamb inside the lion's stomach. On Lilly's birthday, Rosaleen and Lily go to the church but the Brother Gerald does not allow Rosaleen to get inside the church and he shows a look of disapproval towards Lily for accompanying a black woman. Brother Gerald becomes a failure when he avoids his special responsibility and the opportunity of inviting Rosaleen inside the church, rather he says, "It's funny how you forget the rules. She was not supposed to be inside here. Every time a rumor got going of Negroes coming to worship with us on Sunday morning, the deacons stood locked-arms across the church steps to turn them away" (37). The whites consider the blacks would steal the things from the churches. They never allow the blacks inside the church. Frederick Douglass has examined the Christianity's role in the abuse of blacks in south of America and he express it as,

The religion of South is a mere covering for the most horrid crimes- a justifier of the most appalling barbarity- a sanctifier of the most hateful frauds- and a dark shelter under which the darkest, foulest, grossest and most infernal deeds of slaveholder find the strongest protection. (qtd. in Emanuel 119)

Moreover, there is religious segregation in South and racism was analyzed for religious purposes so that it would be easy to rule over the oppressed groups. African American is not allowed to enter in white's churches. The white established a system of privilege in terms of oppression and exploitation. Indeed, black people find spirituality and salvation from the Christianity figures.

Lack of recognition and inadequate distribution of various goods is an injustice. African Americans are facing cultural domination, disrespect, non recognition and excluded from social and political representation. Without recognition, such an ideal distribution will never occur. The white remains always superior in their positions and gets goods more than they deserve. On the other hand, black community remains inferior and do not have access on political and social structure due to their misrecognition. As in the novel black characters are banned to utilize their rights.

The blacks are racially discriminated and facing injustice in the hospital also. The idea in the minds of the white race is that the Negro is mentally and morally inferior is the basis for racial injustice and discrimination. When Lily, a white girl aged fourteen, enters into the hospital, she is astonished to find the two wings; one is for whites and another one is for blacks. The wing which is meant for black people has lacked all the essential facilities that the white wing has. The blacks' wing is blocked up with the smells of garden, sick people, alcohol, and bathroom deodorizer. The whites never want to step inside the blacks' wing and the blacks are not allowed to enter into the wing which is meant for whites. When Lily tries to get inside the hall where Rosaleen is, the policeman says, "You weren't supposed to be in there!" (59). You need to go to the other side of the building. You're in the colored section" (60). The basic needs are not provided to the black community.

Fraser insists that 'justice today requires both redistribution and recognition' (12). She calls it 'bivalent' for justice that gives attention to both distribution and recognition. Fraser asserts that we have to examine the 'why' of inequity, and how the social context of unjust distributions is a unique and necessary subject of justice theory; this is the key to both understand and remedy existing injustices. The identities of African American are misrecognized, malrecognized, devalued and ignored. Civil Right Movement becomes a way to demands for recognition as a key component of justice for blacks. The practice of misrecognition and disrespect on the individual level is an everyday experience of black community. Lily speaks:

An uneasy feeling settled in my stomach. Last night the television had said a man in Mississippi was killed for registering to vote, and I myself had overheard Mr. Bussey, one of the deacons, say to T. Ray, 'Don't you worry, they're gonna make 'em write their names in perfect cursive and refuse them a card if they forget so much as to dot an I or make a loop in their y'. (34)

Apparently, Lily's finds White citizen attitudes toward African Americans. They hold the opinion that African Americans are not nice. They are trying to deny African Americans of their rights as U.S. citizens by enforcing standards that a white person would not have to meet behave, interact with blacks. It is notable that T. Ray seems to hang on to some prejudices himself; since Mr. Bussey feels the need to reassure him that they will do everything they can to enforce racially motivated vote suppression.

There is a distinction of race, caste and color in the public. The blacks are resisted to enter inside a restaurant or an ice-cream parlour which are owned by whites. Rosaleen explains this situation to Lilly as:

She smiled at me then. “Lily, child, there ain’t gonna be any place that will take a colored woman. I don’t care if she’s the Virgin Mary, nobody’s letting her stay if she’s colored.” “Well, what was the point of the Civil Rights Act?” I said, coming to a full stop in the middle of the road. “Doesn’t that mean people have to let you stay in their motels and eat in their restaurants if you want to?” (75)

Nevertheless, Lilly encounters certain racial issues where she questions whether the real meaning of Civil Rights Act is, letting the blacks inside the motels and the restaurants of whites. Rosaleen admits that people kicks, drags and screams toward them when they enter in white people shop. Lily believes that racism is simply a flaw in social organization and practices.

Kidd brings out the pathetic situation of blacks through Rosaleen. Rosaleen also explains that the blacks are pushed away from the restaurant or the hotel, even though they have money in their pockets and they are ready to pay for. Lot of white folks will not buy the products manufactured by the blacks, which in this novel they have identified by the black Mary picture labeled on the bottles of honey. As August talks about May and April about injustice:

When April and May were eleven, they walked to the market with a nickel each to buy an ice cream. They’d seen the white children in there licking their cones and looking at cartoon books. The man who owned the market gave them the cones but said they had to go outside to eat them. April was headstrong and told him she wanted to look at the cartoon books. She argued with the man for her own way, like she used to do with Father, and finally the man took her arm and pulled her to the door, and her ice cream dropped to the

floor. She came home screaming that it wasn't fair. Our father was the only colored dentist in Richmond, and he'd seen more than his share of unfairness. He told April, 'Nothing's fair in this world. You might as well get that straight right now.'" (86)

April Boatwright once goes to an ice cream parlor where, she is not allowed to enter into the parlor because of the colour. The white owner makes her to stand outside the parlor. She wants to go inside the restaurant and eat the ice creams like the white children. The white owner does not allow her inside the parlor. It makes her upset and finally she commits suicide. The white have no humanity towards the blacks. As Lilly says on May's demise:

August knelt down in the water and shoved the stone off May's chest.

Grabbing May by the shoulders, she pulled her up. Her body made an awful sucking sound as it broke the surface. Her head rolled back, and I saw that her mouth was partially open and her teeth were rimmed with mud. River reeds clung to her hair braids. I looked away. I knew then. May was dead. (159)

Lot of blacks lost their life due to injustice and discrimination. The whites consider themselves to be superior and other to be inferior to them. African Americans are facing lack of respect and recognition and decline in a person's membership and participation in the greater community including the political and institutional order that leads them to face injustice.

Justice needs to focus more on the elimination of institutionalized domination and oppression. Hence, procedural justice is another Young's concept of justice additional to distribution and recognition. Procedural justice is defined as fair and equitable institutional processes of state (25). Justice must locus on the political

process as a way to address both the inequitable distribution of social goods and the conditions undermining social recognition. If African American is not recognized, they do not participate, if they do not participate, they are not recognized. This same condition is applicable in the novel which is presented through African American characters.

Young, again, makes connection clear through *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, which emphasizes on institutions and the political process.

The idea of justice here shifts...to procedural issues of participation in deliberation and decision making. For a norm to be just, everyone who follows it must in principle have an effective voice in its consideration and be able to agree to it without coercion. For a social condition to be just it must enable all to meet their needs and exercise their freedom; thus justice requires that all be able to express their needs. (34)

She focuses on the issue of justice both as distribution and the recognition and argues for 'democratic decision-making procedures as an element and condition of social justice' (23). Recognition along with inclusion in the political process, become the keys to relieving both social oppression and distributional inequity. Justice is considered as a trivalent package. She further explores that her concept is not only understanding of unjust distribution and a lack of recognition, but, importantly, the way the two are tied together in political and social processes.

In the United States, racism has created profound racial tension and conflict in virtually all aspects of American society. The African Americans and other people of colour continue to experience racial injustice and discrimination in more subtle and indirect ways. Until the breakthroughs achieved by the 1950s and 1960s, white

domination over blacks was institutionalized and supported in all branches and levels of government, by denying their civil rights and opportunities to participate in political, economic and social communities.

Martin Luther King has led the 'Civil Rights' movement during the decade 1954-1964 on the growing conviction that 'non-violence' is the way whereby freedoms become possible. On July 2, 1964, Lyndon B. Johnson has signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which has banned discrimination based on race, colour, religion, sex or national origin in employment practices and public accommodations. It is understood that America is devoid of freedom to blacks and the struggles and sufferings of people of colour in 1964, even after the Civil Rights Act was passed, which is shown through the novel *The Secret Life of Bees*. Black people's problems did not end in 1964. On the contrary, after the Civil Rights Act, racist whites in many parts of the United States regarded it as their duty to continue harassing and excluding black people. They are judged by their color. They are backward in all political participation due to their skin pigment. Lilly realizes as:

“... it washed over me for the first time in my life just how much importance the world had ascribed to skin pigment, how lately it seemed that skin pigment was the sun and everything else in the universe was the orbiting planets. Ever since school let out this summer, it had been nothing but skin pigment every livelong day. I was sick of it”. (154)

African Americans are excluded in policy making decision-making processes. As a result they are not getting their proper rights. They were compelled to suffer from injustice imposed upon them by White community. Gary C. Bryner opines 'Justice may require the right to participate in a decision making process, the right to have



one's interest included in the analysis, or the right to be represented by others' (46). One must have recognition in order to have real participation; one must have participation in order to get equity; further equity would make more participation possible, which would strengthen community functioning, and so on. Lilly imagines Zach as Negro lawyer in near future. She shows her positive attitudes towards him:

I've just never heard of a Negro lawyer, that's all. You've got to hear of these things before you can imagine them. "Bullshit. You gotta imagine what's never been." I'm imagining a Negro lawyer. You are a Negro Perry Mason. People are coming to you from all over the state, wrong-accused people, and you get at the truth at the very last minute by tricking the real criminal on the witness stand." (104)

Meanwhile, Lily explores her different attitudes towards Zach, the black boy had his schooling in a Negro school. He describes the condition of blacks as sympathetic and poor because they never have a wonderful future because of their skin color. The blacks lived at the margins of American life the reality was they had to get beyond racism and he has that hope. Even though he knows the fact that he cannot continue his studies because of his race, he is adamant in continuing his studies. He wishes to become a lawyer but he knows that there is lack of freedom and opportunity for the blacks to acquire a wonderful future. He longs for a school where the teacher educates both black and white equally as members of the same great commonwealth. In reality, the involvement of African American and effective participation in all levels of institution and discussion, decision making, and implementation uplifts the condition of Blacks. They get rid from ongoing racial injustice.

Eventually, Lilly has experienced so much racial injustice that she begins to think if the world would be better without defining race:

They (the Daughters of Mary) didn't even think of me being different. Up until then I'd thought that white people and colored people getting along was the big aim, but after that I decided everybody being colorless together was a better plan. I thought of that policeman, Eddie Hazelwurst, saying I'd lowered myself to be in this house of colored women, and for the very life of me I couldn't understand how it had turned out this way, how colored women had become the lowest ones on the totem pole. You only had to look at them to see how special they were, like hidden royalty among us. (209)

Consequently, the Black Mary acts as a standing silent motherly figure for Lily because she has deep connection with it physically and socially. Through prayer she can find comfort and faith in the Black Mary. In the same way, the Daughters of Mary help Lily think about her life as well as what could be done to make it better. They made her think about positives and negatives in life and she now had something to connect to. The Daughters of Mary accepts Lily into their house and show her protection for the things that she is not ready for. Whereas the policeman, Eddie Hazelwurst finds disgusting idea to stay with color people. He tries to impose his supremacy towards black people in the other hand Lily gets spirituality and redemption with them.

Above all, justice is not simply about distribution, but also about all that it takes—recognition, participation, and more—to be able to fully live the lives we design. Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum center on 'capability' approach. Capability approach signifies to the just arrangements not only in simple distributive terms, but also more particularly in how those distributions affect our well-being and

how they 'function'. It indicates the set of valuable functioning that a person has effective access to. Thus, a person's capability represents the effective freedom of an individual to choose between different functions. Amartya Sen argues in *Development as Freedom* 'The central feature of well-being is the ability to achieve valuable functioning. The need for identification and valuation of the important functioning cannot be avoided by looking at something else, such as happiness, desire fulfillment, opulence, or command over primary good (200). Functionings refer to various doings and beings: these could be activities (like eating or reading or seeing), or states of existence or being (being well nourished, being free from disease) (197). So, this capability approach looks forward towards the opportunity to be able to have combination and the person is free to make use of this opportunity or not.

Though, black people have capability to perform, they do not have ground to flourish well. They are overthrown from the white society. The conversation between Lilly and Shop's owner shows the relationship between black producer and the white consumer. The white consumer denied the product as they are prepared by black community which directly affects the economic condition of blacks. Their product would not get sold in the market due to their margin. As Lily figures out as:

I pointed to the honey jars. "Where did you get those?" He thought the tone of shock in my voice was really consternation. "I know what you mean. A lot of folks won't buy it 'cause it's got the Virgin Mary pictured as a colored woman, but see, that's because the woman who makes the honey is colored herself." (62)

However, the black try to raise their living standard, they find obstacles in their way numerously. Lily assumes about the economic condition of black people in the shop.

The Virgin Mary picture represents a color woman which is in honey jar. The white people not only suppressed them in terms of the wages and works but also in the manufacturing of their products.

Similarly, the American citizen's right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness is an acknowledgement of the fact that persons and groups differ. This difference results with the fear on future and barrier in the functioning of individual and community.

Kidd distinguishes the future aim and fear of both blacks and whites in *The Secret Life of Bees*. Lily faces some instant situations that set her advance in motion. In order to start her journey, she has to overcome these situations and prosper. Lily wants to be a writer or English Professor but she fears about her future because her father does not encourage her to achieve her dream. She hopes to reach her goal whenever she sets a chance. She uses to read poetry, write poems, etc. She lacks confidence to attain her goal. She fears about it and portrays herself as an orphan to Zach. Zach, the black boy, he wishes to become a lawyer but he knows that there is lack of freedom and opportunity for the blacks to acquire a wonderful future. Injustice and discrimination is threat to the functioning of both individual and great community.

Consubstantially, the white people always think that they are superior in every way to Black ones. They dominate black people and treat them as an illiterate, savage, barbaric and uncivilized. The focus of the justice either enables or interrupts a living system in its ability to transform primary goods into functioning. African Americans are not able to function properly. They need to face prejudices and became victims that give birth to the obstacles for their well being. Kidd moves beyond stereotypes to portray whites and blacks with the multifaceted personalities that we find in real life. Lily confirms some of T. Ray's prejudices and admits some of her own as:

T. Ray did not think colored women were smart. Since I want to tell the whole truth, which means the worst parts, I thought they could be smart, but not as smart as me, me being white. Lying on the cot in the honey house, though, all I could think was August is so intelligent, so cultured, and I was surprised by this. That's what let me know I had some prejudice buried inside me. (103)

However, she assumes that all African Americans are like Rosaleen, an uneducated laborer-turned-housekeeper. Lily imagines that all African Americans are likewise coarse and uneducated. But when Lily encounters unique, educated, thoughtful August Boatwright, she must change her assumptions and combat her prejudice. At first, Lily feels shocked that a black person could be as smart, sensitive, and creative as August. Recognizing and combating her shock allows Lily to realize the truth about the arbitrariness and irrationality of racism.

Later, when she begins to develop romantic feelings for Zach, Lily once again encounters her own subtle prejudice as:

At my school they made fun of colored people's lips and noses. I myself had laughed at these jokes, hoping to fit in. Now I wished I could pen a letter to my school to be read at opening assembly that would tell them how wrong we'd all been. You should see Zachary Taylor, I'd say. (114)

As a child in Sylvan, Lily learned racism from other schoolchildren. She was taught that black boys could not possibly be handsome, because the features of their faces were so different from those of white boys. When she realizes that this is not the case with Zach, she feels self-righteous as if she has discovered something that the ignorant kids at her old school had missed. But she also realizes that her thought processes had been irrational and racist. As if to combat these tendencies, Lily naively

ignores the social problems that her love for Zach might cause, even as Zach realizes that they probably can never be together in the racist South of that time. 'We can't think of changing our skin,' 'Change the world—that's how we gotta think' (186). Zach says this to Lily when she starts to imagine what their lives would be like if she were African American. He sees such thinking as futile, preferring to focus on changing prejudices rather than biology. For different reasons, both Lily and Zach understand that racism, while irrational, has actual harmful effects. Nevertheless, both will work together to combat the irrationality of racism through feelings and deeds.

Decent paying and safe jobs, quality education, housing and health care, decision making and personal empowerment are all in addition to distributive justice. While equality is discussed recognition is demanded and participation is sought out. The justice for African American is not focus on the distribution of goods to flourish but the process they depend on for that flourishing to occur. Injustice comes not a particular goods denied but with the capability that was restricted to be flourished. Hence, capabilities are linked with distribution, recognition and participation patterns. So besides distribution, recognition and participatory parity as the three different conceptions of justice, Sen and Nussbaum understand all of these as necessary components of a more broad set of factors necessary for our lives to function. Whether we can function fully is the key test of justice. Justice then is not simply about distribution, but also about all that it takes—recognition, participation, and fully functioning the capabilities of every citizen regardless of their color, caste, race, class and gender. Every independent citizen has equal right to live and blossom and to work in neat and clean environment.

The thorough analysis of Kidd's novel *The Secret Life of Bees* justifies the fact that the injustice upon the black characters as the legacy of the white supremacy

which in turn is used to dismantle the same white ideology. The black characters in the novel whose right and freedom has been manipulated by the whites. There was injustice in terms of distribution, recognition, participation and functioning of their capabilities.

The research exposes the racial injustice towards African Americans through Lily Owens a white protagonist narration of what she witness. The black characters are restricted to enjoy their right to life, liberty and pursuit of happiness and freedom. These inalienable rights to every American regardless of their race, color, class and gender were mentioned in the historic documents like 'Declaration of Independence' of July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1776, American Constitution of 1789, "Emancipation Proclamation of Freeing the Slaves" of Aug.28<sup>th</sup>,1863, "Civil Right Act" of 1964 but in practice there is injustice in terms of race and color. Sue Monk Kidd exposes such injustice in her novel *The Secret Life of Bees* in 2002. Lily's father T. Ray can be seen as the representative of white supremacy as he is portrayed as an oppressive, violent and superior to the black around him. Lily considers Rosaleen a member of their family despite her lack of biological relation to them. Rosaleen has some fight for the sake of equal rights. Similarly, Lily's interactions with the Boatwright's and the Daughters of Mary allow her to see the limitation drawn between white and black. Lily begins to realize her own prejudices about what she believed black people could or could not attain. She also finds that June discriminates against her due to her skin color, something she had never experienced before. Lily also gets a more clear understanding of society's view of race through her relationship with Zach. By the story's end, Lily has become an official member of the daughters of Mary. For a fourteen-year-old high school student who has learned to forgive her imperfect

parents, ignore the expectation of her white majority, and embraces the love of a host of incredible black women, Lilly Owens is remarkably self-actualized character.

Thus, this research work has examined, analyzed and interpreted the pathetic condition of black people and their effort to overcome the obstacles. The narration explores the sufferings of the African Americans to overcome of their appalling. Though they are physically, mentally and socially challenged and confined within the boundary of white ideology they become successful to subvert their roles through their revolution.

August Boatwright in the novel is a unique a black woman in the South who runs a successful business and owns a great deal of property. She is educated and has eschewed the conventions of marriage, and does not flinch or shy away from the opportunity to take care of a young white runaway girl. Her calm leadership is an important source of wisdom for Lily as she comes to live with her family. This proves that if blacks are recognized, inclusion and participation in the greater community including the political and social institution and their functioning are fairly managed and implemented into practice will lead them towards their prosperity and actualizing their right. Lilly experiences how the strong bond between black characters that encourage them to secure their justice. Through their examples, Lilly begins to feel that one can get equity, equality and justice through fair distribution, recognition, participatory parity and fully functioning of their capabilities. In absence of these factors, the people in minority and the people who do not have access to authority like the African Americans are presented in *The Secret Life of Bees* are compelled to bear injustice.



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