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The Dynamics of Race, Justice, and Power in Maycomb: A Critical Reading of Harper Lee's To Kill a Mockingbird

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ABSTRACT

Certain individuals have the tendency to make judgements and generalizations about other individuals based on their race that are biased, unjust, and too broad. They do this without having enough information about the individuals in question. This research is a qualitative investigation using the approach of content analysis. The work of Harper Lee titled "To Kill a Mockingbird" will serve as the focus of this investigation. The words, phrases, clauses, and sentences associated with racial prejudice that may be found in the book have been gathered as the data. In order to arrive at the conclusions drawn from the analysis of the data, the data were first classified and categorized. The researcher ensured the data's trustworthiness by reading the book many times, paying close attention each time, and making sure to cover all of the material. After that, they entered the information into a structured format based on the theory. By discussing her results with both her consultants and friends, the approach of triangulation was used in order to increase the reliability of the data that was collected. The findings of this research shed light on four significant aspects. To begin, many individuals in Maycomb have racial biases, particularly towards black people and families whose customs are different from their own. These people also have prejudices against black people. Second, there are two distinct categories that may be used to describe the factors that contribute to racial prejudice. These are distinctions in both the customs of different races and the races themselves. Third, the consequences of racial prejudice in society include discrimination, segregation, and subjugation of people of different races. The end effect is that the racist attitudes shown in the book are reflective of the racist attitudes that exist in Alabama today.

Keywords: Discrimination, Race, Prejudice, Subjugation, Maycomb

INTRODUCTION

To Kill a Mockingbird, a book written by Harper Lee, was first released to the public in the year 1960. It is one of the books that is assigned in most of the high school and college English classes throughout the United States, and it has been translated into more than forty other languages. In 1961, it was honored with the prestigious Pulitzer Prize. The book was praised for its nuanced depiction of a child's awakening to racism and prejudice in the American South, which was one of the themes of the novel. American author Harper Lee, whose full name was Nelle Harper Lee's father, Amasa Coleman Lee, was a lawyer and, by all accounts, a fine citizen and nice guy, like the protagonist of her novel. Amasa Coleman Lee inspired Harper Lee to write *To Kill a Mockingbird*. In "To Kill a Mockingbird," one of the most important plot points is Atticus Finch's inept and ultimately fruitless defense of two African American men accused of murder. After spending one summer as an exchange student at the University of Oxford, Lee enrolled in the law school at the University of Alabama. However, he finally made the decision to pursue a career in New York City rather than Alabama. She got her start in New York working as a reservationist for an airline, but because to the support of her friends, she was able to focus solely on her writing quite quickly. *To Kill a Mockingbird* was first conceived as a collection of short stories, but with the assistance of an editor, it was later developed into a full-length book. The tale is told mostly from the perspective of Jean Louise "Scout" Finch, who is the daughter of white lawyer Atticus Finch and matures from six to nine years old during the course of the book. The plot also includes occasional adult thoughts from Jean Louise. The notions of racial fairness and open-mindedness are concepts that Scout and Jem acquire from their father, who models these traits via his sensitive and generous deeds, notably his public defense of a black man who was falsely accused of raping a white girl. They get the courage and the desire to stand up for what they believe in as a result of their experiences with the social pariah "Boo" Radley, and they also seek a relationship with him as a result of these encounters. Since its first publication in 1961, the novel "To Kill a Mockingbird" has been translated into several languages and has been translated into more than 40 languages throughout the globe. It has received acclaim for its insightfulness and artistic efficiency, but criticism for its preachy tendencies has also been levelled at it. In 1962, it was a big success at the box office. The stage version of the play written by Aaron Sorkin made its premiere during the 2018 season on Broadway. One of the book's primary characters, Charles Baker "Dill" Harris, was modelled after Lee's boyhood friend and next-door neighbor in Monroeville, Alabama, Truman Capote, who was also the author of the novel. In 1959, while Capote was writing an article for *The New Yorker* on the murders committed against the Clutter family, he invited Lee to accompany him as an "assistant researchist." She conducted interviews with locals, took extensive notes, shared her opinions with Capote, and finally travelled to Kansas to attend the trial of the accused over the course of a number of months as a co-author on Capote's book *In Cold Blood*. Capote's book is titled "In Cold Blood." However, in 2006, a letter

from Capote to his aunt was uncovered, in which he admitted reading and liking the sample of *To Kill a Mockingbird* that Lee had shown him, but made no claims to authorship of the novel. This put an end to the rumors that Capote was the mastermind behind Harper Lee's spectacular success with *To Kill a Mockingbird*. After spending some time in New York City, Lee decided to divide her time between that city and her hometown of Monroeville, Alabama. The history of Alabama is the subject of many of her shorter works, and "Romance and High Adventure" (1983) is the title of one of those pieces. A sequel in everything but name, the *To Kill a Mockingbird* prequel *Go Set a Watchman* was published in 2015 and tells the story of an adult version of Scout who visits her childhood home in Alabama in order to spend time with her father. Lee was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom by former President George W. Bush in the year 2007.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Prejudice is an unjust generalization of an entire group (Macionis, 2007: 366). Prejudice comes from prejudgment, which is deciding without enough information. It may also involve prejudging persons who belong to a given group in society. (Endraswara, 2008:78) Furthermore, in this view, a literary text or piece of literature acts as a bounce across time. That literary work becomes proof of the time period it was written in. It will provide the readers with information about occurrences that have ever taken place in the history of humanity. Due to the fact that all parts of life are completely reflected in literary work, it may thus be utilised as a reference to investigating social phenomena. The sociology of literature focuses on the issues that are faced by humans. Literature and real life have an impact on one another because, from time to time, literature discusses the difficulties that real life poses for humans. As a result, it will always influence works of literature.

In this study, the researcher is attempting to make use of all the many sociological viewpoints on literature. This research demonstrates that a piece of literary work may function as a social record, becoming a reflection of the circumstances that existed at the time the literary work was created. Harper Lee wrote "To Kill a Mockingbird" during the time period in which the civil rights movement was gaining momentum in Southern Alabama. In addition, the author's experiences living in Alabama had an impact on the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*. She wrote about her experiences during her upbringing in Alabama at a time when racial prejudice towards black people occurred there, which had many negative repercussions for a great number of individuals. Because of this, the readers of this literary work can grasp the state of racial prejudice that existed in Alabama during the 1930s. As a result, this literary work may be considered an inventory of history and the socio-cultural situation.

Racial Prejudice:

According to Macionis (2007: 366), prejudice may be defined as an unyielding and unjust generalisation towards an entire group of individuals. The term "prejudice" originates from the word "prejudgment," which conveys the idea that a

person has an opinion on anything prior to having sufficient knowledge regarding that topic. It is also possible to interpret this term as referring to the unfavourable beliefs held by certain individuals against other individuals only on the basis of their membership in a specific group within society. Because it may lead to discrimination, segregation, animosity, and oppression, prejudice is a major contributor to the myriad of significant issues that plague modern society. Therefore, we may also describe prejudice in other ways as a collection of attitudes that creates, supports, or justifies them against the other individuals in society. In other words, prejudice is a set of attitudes. As a result, prejudice may be defined as an unyielding and unjust generalisation that generates a negative prejudgment against a specific member of a group without any actual information.

In addition, (Brislin, 2000:209) suggested that prejudice is an emotional component of people's attitudes to other groups, as well as a deeply felt set of sentiments about what is good and evil, right and wrong, and so on and so forth. Someone or some group in society may be subject to bias from other individuals in society or from the majority of people in society. They are susceptible to becoming victims due to the fact that they are unique in some manner.

People who belong to societal groups that are considered to be in the minority are more likely to be the targets of racial prejudice, which is, of course, carried out by those who constitute the majority. As a result, some individuals referred to themselves and the others with whom they have commonalities as a "in-group." The term "out-group" is used to refer to a second group of individuals who are distinct from them. That is developed purposefully, and as a result, you will often discover "we" and "they" in society (Macionis, 2007: 173). Prejudice based on race, however, does not necessarily occur between distinct groups of individuals; rather, it might be experienced by an individual who has differences among others who are part of their own group. As a consequence of this, racial prejudice causes problems in society since it has significant repercussions in social life, repercussions that have the potential to obstruct the path of existence in society.

The expression of racial prejudice often takes the shape of a generalisation. A stereotype may have a good or negative connotation, although in most cases, the connotation is negative. The term "stereotype" refers to a mental construct rather than a simple view or evaluation of another person or group of people. However, this might result in significant issues in one's social life. It has the potential to foster racial prejudice, which disrupts the harmonious functioning of society.

The following are some of the evidence that may be used to describe the racial discrimination that occurred in Lee's novel:

1. Discrimination Based on Race Towards Other Families

The person who is the focus of racial prejudice might suffer a significant amount of suffering as a result of rumours, which are a kind of prejudice. Because rumours are generally nothing more than falsehoods, opinions, and inaccurate observations about the person in question, they have the ability to readily hide the truth about a person. Boo Radley, a character from the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*,

is one of the examples of a person who is shown to have been subjected to this kind of racial discrimination. Someone else is terrified of shutting the Radleys' home because of the prejudice of the Radley family and Boo Radley. This person believes that if people go near the Radley place or take and eat anything from it, they will receive hazardous things that threaten their lives. Because of this, they have the misconception that Radleys are very risky individuals. They have been under the impression of something unfavourable for a considerable amount of time, and this perception is not readily altered. They will never stop supposing that Boo Radley and his family are members of society who represent a threat and are morally repugnant. Nothing that has been said about Boo Radley ever takes place in real life. He just commits one error, but as a result, others judge him to be immoral and punish him accordingly.

2. Racial Prejudice Against Black People

Despite the fact that Tom Robinson is black and Boo Radley is white, the two men have a lot in common with one another. As a black man living in the Deep South during the 1930s, Tom Robinson was subjected to the same racial discrimination that many other black people in the region experienced. Because of the colour of his skin, Tom Robinson is regarded differently. Many individuals have formed an opinion about him in advance. The Tom Robinson trial has become the most prominent illustration of the unfairness that may be observed as a result of racial prejudice.

The Roots of Racist Attitudes and Behaviours

According to the findings of this study, the reasons why Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* contains racist themes may be divided into two categories:

1. Variations in the Tradition

If individuals in a culture are constantly reminded that they are unique among their peers, regardless of their age, they will always have the sensation that they are set apart from the rest of the people in the society. Even young infants who have a naive view of the world around them are able to recognise when some persons are distinct from themselves. As time passes, the residents of Maycomb adopt the traditions of the Radley family. However, at this point, individuals in society begin to have preconceived notions about one another. The majority of people have bad preconceptions about Radleys, particularly Boo Radley, since they do not know where the knowledge about Radleys and Boo Radley came from. Because of this, nobody is interested in getting along with them. These biases are successful in their attempt to scare significant individuals in Maycomb County. Prejudice may arise in society as a result of the disparities since it is constantly brought to people's attention and is powerfully established by tales of exaggeration.

2. The Diversity of the Races

The distinctions between people in society, which may lead to a sense of superiority in certain individuals, are the root cause of prejudice. (Brislin, 2000: 209) suggested that another reason why prejudice occurs in society is because individuals have sentiments or prejudgments about varied or distinct characteristics, cultural

backgrounds and practises, and other disparities. Prejudice may also exist in society because people have feelings or prejudgments about other people. In this instance, the difference is seen as strangeness since it is a brand-new concept that has never been attempted in the history of the culture.

The Effects of Prejudice Against Different Races

People's prejudicial attitudes about one another's race are a barrier to effective communication in our culture. It is one of the sources of problems in social life, and it has a variety of effects on people's interactions with one another, in addition to the fact that it disrupts social order. In addition, racial prejudice also has the potential to lead to very negative effects for society. Racial prejudice may produce social distance in society. Because prejudiced people put up social distance towards other groups or individuals, conscious racial prejudice will create a chasm between major and smaller groups in society. This is since prejudiced people see other groups and individuals with contempt. They believe that their culture and the things they possess are superior to those of other people. Because of this, they avoid engaging with those who they consider to be in the minority. In addition, there is a critical problem known as segregation that makes it so one group is really segregated from another group. (Macionis, 2007: 373) defined segregation as the physical and social isolation of different categories of individuals. Although certain members of a minority group, most notably members of religious organisations, freely practise segregation, majorities are more likely to practise segregation in society. Therefore, segregation is something that may be practiced in every facet of life, from the most little facility in their nation to the most significant facility in the world.

Additionally, prejudiced attitudes are considered to be the root cause of discrimination. Discrimination, on the other hand, relates to behaviour whereas racial prejudice describes an attitude. According to Macionis (2007: 372), discrimination may also be defined as the treatment of different groups of individuals in an uneven manner. In addition, Henslin (2007) suggested that prejudice might be the foundation of discrimination.

In addition to discrimination, which develops into an effect of racial prejudice, there is also oppression in society directed at certain groups of people. According to the Conflict Theory, prejudice is a strategy used by dominant groups to subjugate members of minority groups (Macionis, 2007: 371). Additionally, minorities have a higher risk of being victims of crime in our culture. They put themselves at danger of being assaulted or perhaps murdered by others who despise them. The oppression is comparable in some ways to the other negative effects that come from racial prejudice. Because such behaviours are carried out while neglecting people in life, they pose a significant threat to social life and should be avoided at all costs. People who discriminate against others and oppress them often behave in an unreasonable and sometimes even harsh manner. They do not provide humanity to the situation. Despite the fact that persons of a younger age are not responsible for the wrongdoings of others, they are sometimes used as a convenient scapegoat. According to (Macionis, 2007: 371), they are an easy and safe target for

society to use as a scapegoat. As a result, the researcher is able to draw the conclusion that prejudice towards racial groups leads to certain repercussions in social life. It creates social distance between different social groups in society, which may take severe forms such as segregation, discrimination that treats people differently based on the distinctions they have, and oppression that disregards humanity.

Research Objectives:

The following are some of the goals of this research:

1. To identify instances of racial prejudice
2. To examine the factors that lead to racial biases
3. To explain the effects of racial stereotypes presented in the novel

Research Questions:

1. What kinds of racial bigotries are there shown in the novel?
2. What are the reasons for the racial prejudice that are shown in the novel?
3. What consequences do the author's racist attitudes have throughout the novel?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

It is purely a qualitative study. Qualitative research, according to Creswell (2007: 36), investigates a social or human issue using several methodological approaches. Qualitative research examines natural occurrences to understand and interpret them. Thus, the researcher constructs a comprehensive, holistic picture, analyses words, presents specific information, and performs the study in nature. Qualitative researchers cannot alter data since they only describe or explain a phenomena. Content analysis also evaluates the work. Qualitative research uses it to analyse text data from books, papers, and manuals (Kondracki & Wellmen in Wahyuni, 2012: 122). This research analyses Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird's* racial prejudices, their causes, their effects, and whether they reflect Alabama's real conditions. This research's data comprise phrases, clauses, sentences, and expressions connected to

- 1) the novel's racial biases,
- 2) their causes, and
- 3) their effects.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

***To Kill a Mockingbird's* Racism**

To Kill a Mockingbird addresses racial prejudice in Maycomb County, Alabama. Radleys, a family with distinct traditions than Maycomb, start the narrative. Because their traditions are new to Maycomb County, most people regard them as aliens. Thus, most society rejects them. Some long-standing Radley racial discrimination anecdotes follow. Thus, it's memorable. A strong public view on familial qualities that pass down is remembered for years. Thus, majority of Maycomb County's residents always appraise family. Black folks experience racism too. They tolerate white racism that causes many social issues. Atticus as Maycomb

attorney defends Tom Robinson, an Afro-American, at the finale. Because Atticus defends a black guy, many white people disagree with him. No proof exists that Tom raped Mayella Ewell, a white girl. After Tom is found guilty, Bob Ewell, Mayella's father, terrorizes Atticus and his family. Halloween night, he attempts to murder Scout and Jem. The most dangerous guy in society can rescue them. Boo Radley. Because of their longstanding biases, prejudiced individuals cannot see others objectively. Before understanding someone, one cannot respect them. To understand how others live, one must first get along with them. Prejudice prevents people from thinking rationally. Because of unreasonable prejudice, it may target innocent persons or groups. Harper Lee's work depicts racism. Racism is experienced by black and white victims.

Racism Against Other Families

The home had a vengeful ghost. Jem and I never saw him. He allegedly peered through windows at night. He breathed on azaleas, freezing them in a cold snap. He perpetrated covert Maycomb crimes. Despite not knowing, they believe Boo is responsible for all county crimes. Despite knowing who commits Maycomb's atrocities, Boo Radley's suspicions remain. According to Perry (2003:173), prejudice goes beyond prejudgment since a prejudiced individual refuses to change even when presented with irrefutable proof. All Maycomb residents must hold Boo Radley in contempt. Everyone believes Boo Radley is prejudiced. Maycomb County's youngsters and adults won't touch Radley's stuff since they've been conditioned to think negatively about it. The prejudice of Radley family and Boo Radley makes someone fearful of shutting Radleys' home because people think if they go near Radley's place or take and eat anything from it, they would receive hazardous things that can kill them. They think the Radleys are hazardous A Negro would cut over to the pavement opposite Radley Place at night and whistle. The Radley chicken yard's towering pecan trees flung their fruit onto the Maycomb playground, but the youngsters didn't eat them because Radley pecans would kill you. The Radley yard was a lost ball. (Lee: 11) Long-held negative preconceptions are hard to modify. Boo Radley and his family will always be considered scary and nasty. Scout and Jem's amazement at Calpurnia's behaviour shows how Radleys are in people's minds until Calpurnia, who never criticizes others, does it to Mr. Radley. They don't realize what they've thought of others. They believe society's preconceptions against certain individuals. Boo Radley's tale is a myth. It flows without comprehension. In Maycomb, Radleys are justified and illogically portrayed. "So, Jem received most of his information from Miss Stephanie Crawford, a neighborhood scold, who said she knew the whole thing," Miss Stephanie Crawford told Jem.

Miss Stephanie said Boo was in the living room clipping Maycomb Tribune articles for his scrapbook. Some people lie about Radleys, notably Boo Radley, who never leaves his home. Most Maycomb residents, white and black, dislike him. Boo Radley never leaves his home. Some people use it to condemn Boo Radley without knowing what happens to Radleys.

They just observe that Radley family customs are foreign to their culture. Thus, prejudging them is enough. This discussion shows that Boo Radley's fables are not based on what Miss Maudie Atkinson tells Scout eventually. Miss Maudie stated Arthur Radley only stays in the home. All Maycomb County residents believe Radleys' narrative, notably Boo or Arthur Radley. They don't know who circulated the Boo Radley rumor, but that society's biases always happen. Miss Maudie says Arthur Radley is not what people say in the words above. He only knows why he wants to remain home.

When Scout, Jem, and Dill travel to Radley's home at night, they must cross Radley's fence, revealing another reality about Boo. They stand at the rear window to see inside Radley's residence. Mr. Nathan Radley comes out with a shotgun to see what happened outside his home since they cannot disguise their loudness. Jem must leave his trousers. "Jem waved my words away as if fanning gnats," shocked Jem and Scout. "When I went back for my breeches—they were all in a tangle when I was gettin' out of 'em, I couldn't get 'em loose," he added after a pause. They never realize Boo Radley understands them. He watches Scout and Jem daily. Boo Radley gives Jem and Scout tiny presents through the knothole. He installs Jem and Scout gum, penny and sop bar sculptures. It connects Boo, Jem, and Scout. Boo Radley is nice. He's not weird. He loves Scout and Jem. He shows his friendship via presents. They reconsider Boo after his acts. They say everything is only a -basis view of someone.

CONCLUSION

After analyzing Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* using sociology of literature, the novel's racial prejudice, its causes, its effects, and how it reflects Alabama's real racial prejudice can be concluded as follows. *To Kill a Mockingbird* has two racial prejudices. Most individuals are racist towards black people and families with terrible habits. These descriptions show that racial prejudice may affect everyone. Maycomb County's Radley family's unusual habits might lead to racial discrimination. They deviate from Maycomb customs. Most also evaluate descendants of bad-habit families. Maycomb County's white residents hate black people. They assume black people are lower-class. There will always be those in Maycomb society who think feeling different is a problem. They retain and disseminate it. Thus, the researcher might conclude that racial prejudice in Maycomb County stems from social differences. In Maycomb County, racial prejudice is the basis of new societal issues. Because it's passed down, Maycomb County's differences thrive. *To Kill a Mockingbird* shows that feeling different is inherited. Racism may disrupt society. Racism may divide society, particularly between minorities and majorities. Society segregates minorities. Segregation denies residents access to public amenities. Black people cannot utilise white things. Segregation conceals human equality for equal rights. Racism may also cause discrimination. Prejudiced persons may discriminate for random causes. Thus, society cannot treat everyone equally. Racism may produce oppression. *To Kill a*

Mockingbird reflects Alabama's racism. *To Kill a Mockingbird* draws on several Alabama incidents. In 1931, nine black lads were unfairly accused of raping two white ladies despite no proof. Like Tom Robinson's case. Black individuals in *To Kill a Mockingbird* suffered segregation as Rosa Park did in 1951. They were isolated from white institutions. Everybody may experience racial discrimination. Racism may also happen to anybody, anywhere. It's possible since most people can't tolerate differences. However, since people are different, diversity will always remain in their lives. Differences don't cause problems in society until people manufacture them. Just relax and accept society's differences.

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