

RACIAL DISSENSION AND PURSUANCE OF SELFHOOD IN KATHRYN STOCKETT'S "THE HELP"

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Abstract: This paper aims to present the pursuance of selfhood in Kathryn Stockett's "The Help". Kathryn Stockett, an American novelist, born and raised in Jackson, Mississippi, is a graduate from the University of Alabama. She moved to New York City later on where she worked in magazine publishing and marketing for nine years. She currently resides in Atlanta with her family. "*The Help*" is her debut novel. Stockett, despite belonging to the dominant class of society goes on to portray the struggles of the African American maids with utmost clarity and depiction. Stockett took five years to complete the novel. She faced many adverse situations on her journey towards finishing her novel. Many of the critics rejected her publication of the novel due to its sensitive subject. Despite the novel being published, even now in the recent era, still undercurrents of subtle racial pressures seem to dominate society.

Introduction: The novel is also an autobiography where the author's experiences are voiced out in the main characters. It is seen that Stockett grew up in a black community. She was taken care of by a black maid for whom she had great reverence and respect. The novel is set in Jackson. Stockett has employed three main characters Aibileen, Minny, and Skeeter of which Aibileen and Minny belong to the black community and Skeeter to the dominant community. Aibileen and Minny work as domestic maids. Though there is no servitude during the era, Aibileen and Minny are treated as slaves. They cannot taste the fruits of education unlike the white Americans, it is also seen that they have a separate community for black Americans and a separate church and grocery store. Though there are many themes on racial discrimination hovering in the novel, the concept of color blindness is vivid where characters like Skeeter and Celia Foote try to empathize to the feelings of the black American maids. Phelan takes on a risky voyage by focusing her attention and literary voice primarily on the struggles of African American maids. She is also viewed as an outcast to the society, but she still embarks on a rough journey, for the entire black community for their sacrifices that they have made, for the families. Likewise Celia Foote, though ignorant of the racial discriminations in her society, treats her maid as her friend on whose friendship, her entire life depends. The novel also focuses on the themes of gender inequality, the importance of education. It is only through education that people will understand the importance of equality. The novel also has a major theme of literature and writing. The importance of literature helps in the transformation of the racist prejudices in the society. While writing about their personal lives and narrating their events to Skeeter, Aibileen and Minny gain an optimistic view on life. It becomes a factor of boosting their self-esteem and helps to understand their complex identity. The main areas of interest in the novel rests on the major issues of racism, the loss of identity, the

segregation of the society, the political trauma that aggravated the discrimination and the powerful use of the vernacular as a tool to defend against the prejudices and how these factors shaped an entire society's thinking. The antiquity behind the rich language that the African American holds pride over has a substantial history behind it. The African American civil rights movement which was rampant during the 1960's embraced the communal campaigns whose chief aim was to end the racial discrimination that the African American community sustained for years together. The movement asked for equal rights for the Africans in correspondence to education, employment, housing, and the right to vote. With the words of Martin Luther King Jr the civil rights movement gained its prominence. This protest revamped the separation that Jim Crow laws held. The law's main maxim 'separate but equal' the law entirely segregated the whites from the blacks they led a dispatched life they had separate schools, bathrooms, houses. The Civil rights movement recoiled from these segregation movements and stressed on the equality and rights of the African American. Martin Luther King, Jr who dreamt of an unbiased nation for African Americans became the hero of the civil rights movement "The Help" by Kathryn Stockett is more distinguished for its rich language; Kathryn has employed the language of the Black Americans to render the pathos of the African American psyche. Kathryn Stockett has three main narrators of which two are black Americans, Aibileen and Minny Jackson. The novel gained its significance for its profound language of the African maid. "The Help" is more distinguished for its rich language; Kathryn has employed the language of the Black Americans to render the pathos of the African American psyche. Kathryn Stockett has three main narrators of which two are black Americans, Aibileen and Minny Jackson. The novel gained its significance for its profound language of the African maid. The author wins over the mission against bigotry through

the powerful rendering of the narratives and through her in-depth characterization. The unique quality that the novel has amongst the other types of novels dealing with racism is that a 'white' American, in an unexpected and beautiful manner goes beyond the limits of her conventional ties and her race, and pens down the remorseful and sorrowful feelings of the once oppressed black Americans. Kathryn's main purpose in writing this novel was to explore the unity that is prevalent in a world where differences hold a major criterion in judging one's claim to equality and being treated fairly. It is also understood that the more compulsive the world becomes the more united are its people. Though the story deals mostly with racism it also takes a feminist standpoint where the story revolves around the two characters who are routinely subjected to torture and agony, so much that their entire identity is smashed to smithereens. *The Help* does not have a boundary for itself in depicting the racial prejudice that the black American underwent. It also talks about the theory of being 'colorblind'. Though the majority of the white societies of that time were against black Americans for racial reasons, few of them went colorblind and treated the black Americans with equality and respect, as Kathryn states: Like my feelings for Mississippi, my feelings for *The Help* conflict greatly. Regarding the lines between the black and white women, I am afraid that I have told too much...not just that life was so much worse for many black women working in the homes in Mississippi, but also that there was so much more love between white families and black domestics than I had the ink or the time to portray (TH 451) The novel also looks upon the underlying themes of differences that people hold up to date - the difference of caste, religious indifferences, where many people are killed treacherously, the differences of gender, the inequalities faced by women are also seen in the

characters of Minny and Leroy. They hold a vast range of such differences which the novel explicitly produces. These are the indifferences in our world has since antiquity. The novel can also be looked in a psychological perspective; the psyche of a person plays a major role in deciding who he or she is. The major characters have a distorted orientation of their self and thus fail to unravel their true self. But it's through optimistic characters like Skeeter and Celia Foote, who bring out their true identity of their self, who were able to instill hopes and aspirations in their lives that they were unaware of. The psychology can also play a major role in defining the true self of a racist because all their life they are hidden in darkness of negativism with a null ray of hope their struggles can be more defined in a psychological panorama of depiction. The novel also looks upon the underlying themes of differences that people hold up to date - the difference of caste, religious indifferences where many people are killed treacherously, the differences of gender, the inequalities faced by women are also seen in the characters of Minny and Leroy. They hold a vast range of such differences which the novel explicitly produces, these are indifferences that our world has since antiquity.

Conclusion : Thus the novel is a rendition of faith for every downtrodden and oppressed people who long for a change in their life. It is in the storms of trouble that our entire self begins to take on a form of shape and meaning. Life is a whirlpool of strives and sorrows without which the identity of the self does not take place. It is only through a brave stand for the Self like that of an Aibileen and Minny, will life make its meaning. If little change in Aibileen and Minny's life could bring a tremendous change why can't it be the same with the rest of the world? Change can influence a person and the rest of the universe.

Be The Change You Wish To See In The World.

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