



Alienation in the Characters of Harper Lee's Novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*

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ABSTRACT: *The current study is the Marxist Analysis of "To Kill a Mockingbird" with the perspective of alienation. Alienation is one of the major concepts of Marxism. In Alienation the persons, groups, institutions or even society becomes alien and detached from the products of their own activities. To Kill a Mockingbird is an American classic written by Harper Lee and published in 1960. The novel is written in the perspective of racial injustice and class discrimination prevailing in American State of Alabama. The novel is set in the background of Great Depression in America back in 1930s. The study is qualitative in nature, set in the context of Marxist Criticism. The study reveals the presence of Alienation among the characters of the novel who suffer because of this ill. The study reveals how the major characters suffered owing to alienation. Marx believes that alienation is a great hindrance to human emancipation and the reintegration of man and his return to self is not possible without suppression of man's self-alienation(Petrovic, 2001). According to Marxist Criticism the literature must explore and identify the factors like alienation, class struggle, exploitation of any kind to prepare readers for social change and activity (Habib, 2008). The current study reveals that one of the causes of injustice, discrimination and violence among the characters of the novel was alienation.*

Keywords: Alienation, Marxism, To Kill a Mockingbird, Injustice, Loneliness

Introduction

To Kill a Mockingbird is an American novel written by Harper Lee. The novel was published in the year 1960 and since then it retains its popularity. Hipple (1969) stated that the novel is one of the widely read books in America and has won for its writer the most coveted Pulitzer Prize in 1961. Haggerty (2010) expounds that *To Kill a Mockingbird* is replete with the serious themes and owing to its popularity among readers the novel has never been out of print in America since its first publication. *To Kill a Mockingbird* enjoys everlasting and enduring taste and appeal among American readers. The novel is very much popular among young readers who enjoy it without any difficulty. The child narrator, the use of simple language, devoid

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of difficult jargon and often humorous tone make this novel a valuable reading that discusses the very serious and controversial issues like race, violence and injustice.

The novel is set in Maycomb (a small town in Alabama) and dates to the period between 1932 and 1935. The setting of the novel revolves around the Finch family settled in Maycomb. Though the novel is narrated by Jean Louise Finch the grown up adult but the events are described in her childhood.

The writer Harper Lee (1926-2016) was born in Monroeville, Alabama USA and the setting of the novel is also based in that city. *To Kill a Mockingbird* is Lee's only novel that won her a wide publicity and an honorable name. After her first novel in 1960, Lee's second novel appeared in July 2015 entitled as *Go Set a Watchman* with wide span of 55 years.

To Kill a Mockingbird was published in 1960 and brought with itself wide popularity, respect, rewards and honors for Harper Lee. In 1961, she was awarded with the Pulitzer Prize for her debut novel. Haggerty (2010) very beautifully quotes it:

“Many novels are published, only few of them become best sellers, and even fewer win the Pulitzer Prize. But even among this elite group, few go on to be still widely read in the fifth decade after their publication, or to continually attract new generation of devotees” (p.37-38).

The novel is set in the background of Great Depression, the period of turmoil in the US economy and society. This economic disturbance wrecked havoc on the lives of common masses who were managing so called peaceful life with racial discriminations. But this economic disturbance and upheaval made matters worse and then the things were further exploited as narrated in *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Murphy & Mary, 2010). The events, characters and even the text of the novel support the ideas of 19th century philosopher Karl Marx (1818-1883). His teachings and principles were later on applied to literature. He believed that all ideologies were the product of real social and economic existence and their exploitation. Marxist literary theory is defined as cultural theory that covers, discusses and contains social, economic and political ideas (Eagleton, 1976). One of the principles of Marxism is the identification of alienation in the society among individuals and groups. The main characters of this novel also show the traits of alienation. The major event of

the novel, the rape case against Tom Robinson was also the result of Mayella Ewells' long alienation. The current study explores alienation among the important characters of the novel like Mayella Ewells, Tom Robinson, Calpurnia, Dill, Dolphus Raymond and Boo Radley.

Literature Review

The Literature for the current study is divided in three subsections viz. Marxism, *To Kill a Mockingbird* and Alienation.

Marxism

Eagleton (1976) writes that Marxist criticism is not only *Sociology of Literature* but it explains how the literary work concentrates on forms, styles and meanings. In this context, Marxist criticism is not merely a historical approach to literature but it is sort of new and fresh understanding and reasoning of history. Marxism studies the work of literature in its depth and peeps into the historical and socio economic conditions of the literary work.

Marxism is a cultural theory that embodies a set of social, economic and political ideas. "Marxist criticism has its origin in the writings of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels who interpreted the structure of society and laws of social development that are responsible for the progress of civilization" (Sinha, 2011 p.91).

Parker (2016) points out that literature plays vital role in creating awareness and class consciousness. With reference to Lukacs's *History and Class Consciousness*, which suggests that the novels and other literary forms contain not only *anagnorisis* as described in the narrative theory of Aristotle's *Poetics*, but also creates *reification* and the consciousness of the proletariat class. The best novels are those which pinpoint class struggle and create social awareness for the change by curbing *alienation* and arousing *praxis*. Thus, any novel that supplements the ideas of *alienation*, *praxis*, *reification* and *class consciousness* of Marxism acts as the powerful weapon for change in the society.

Memon (2017) concluded her Marxist study of Bina Shah's *Slum Child* with the note that low working class people were compelled to work for ruling elites for living. They had to perform every day chores and then suffer endless pain and humiliation. With these odd chores, they could not even nourish themselves and their children, thus life went from bad to worse for them. She concludes that the biggest cause of suffering of the working class was alienation among them. Shah

(2010) in her novel *Slum Child* has suggested that how working class proletariats were kept alienated and their solution and salvation lied in praxis i-e struggle for life and action for social change through revolution.

To Kill a Mockingbird

Dave (1974) called *To Kill a Mockingbird* a highly moving human drama of emotions in beautiful words about children and adults, innocence and experience, love and hatred taking the reader to the root of the human behavior.

Stiltner (2002) has analyzed Tom Robinson's character under the undue hatred of many white people against him. She further adds that through this character Lee illustrates a man who toils and tries to win the respect and kindness but ultimately fails owing to the worst racial discriminations prevalent in the society.

Racial issues and the injustice are the manifest themes in *To Kill a Mockingbird* but we need to go further by looking at the covert themes of courage and compassion too (Duke, 2009).

Bloom (2010) has argued that *To Kill a Mockingbird* is a novel with everlasting appeal that comes out of our last Age of innocence the 50s, before the Vietnam War and the upheaval of the Cold War and yet it retains its supremacy. *To Kill a Mockingbird* is replete with diverse themes and different philosophies however the theme of racial injustice dominates the rest (Watkin, 2012).

Faizah (2012) found the racial discrimination and exploitation of blacks in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. She researched the internal and external conflicts of leading characters of the novel. Besides, other social evils like injustice and discrimination, the characters were also the victims of alienation. When her father, Atticus was defending a black Tom Robinson, young Scout was the victim of insecurity and threat. Once she was attacked but saved by Boo Radley. Faizah (2012) has summed up that during 1930 (the period of the novel's setting) the racial discrimination was at peak in America and to be black was a sort of sin in that society. The Whites enjoyed undue freedom and favor and their black counterparts were the victims of hatred, violence, injustice and unfettered segregation. The views of the White people were always prejudiced and they were treating the Blacks as criminals and second rate citizens with no rights to live. Even the church of the Blacks was seen with suspicion and scorn.

Alienation

Alienation is the most important concept of Marxism. Alienation stands for separation and estrangement. In Marxist thought a man or group or class or any institution can be alien to the results and products of his/their/its own activity or to the ways of living in which they live and to other human beings. Marx suggests that till class consciousness arises, human beings live the life of alienation. To be alienated means to be in estranged or distanced relationship to things or people. Owing to the result of capitalist exploitation human beings are not in proper relations either with themselves, other people or with the activities of life (Woodfin & Zarate, 2004).

Woodfin and Zarate (2004) explain the nature of Alienation with the reference to capitalism and state that in the capitalist society a worker is alienated to the products of his labor, the things he makes because the things he makes are not his own; he works for others. People become alienated to themselves because through the superstructure of ideas capitalist pit people against each other in the name of competition. People use each other for their own ends and make themselves an object. To curb alienation, it becomes necessary to develop class consciousness. Because man suffers exploitation till he becomes aware of alienation. Struggle and Praxis thus becomes antithesis to alienation.

Meer (1985) explores alienation in the context of Marxism and elaborates that alienation is the waste of self. Man alienates himself from all the activities of life and thus proves useless for the society. Meer (1985) traces the roots of alienation in a class system. According to him before the division of class based society, all individuals were exempted from this evil and could actively participate in the development of a society through his creative ideals.

Memon (2017) analysed Bina Shah's novel *Slum Child* in the context of alienation and praxis. She notes that class exploitation reduces the marginalized proletariats into social alienation.

This study analyses that the alienation of black marginalized class who despite every potential and energy is forced to suffer at the hands of powerful whites. The Blacks are not only alienated to their self but to their work and to society as well. Their labor, life and existence had no value and meaning and they continued to suffer all this as the part of their fate.

Research Methodology

The scholar has conducted the current study by using qualitative method of research. The text of the novel is analyzed by using interpretive method through the canons of Marxist literary criticism. Qualitative research methodology involves data collections, i-e collection of extensive data on many variables over an extended period of time in a natural, setting and it is the research about the ideas and the way, things are and the way things should be (Gay, 2009).

The qualitative research involves many ways and methods for study but this study has been conducted while using the interpretive method. The scholar has preferred interpretive method because it is very popular method of study in literature and is recommended by numerous scholars. Silverman (2005) called this method hermeneutics and recommended it for the study of any text as it interprets the authors thought and language.

The current study is based on Marxist criticism of Literature. The study of literature set on the guidelines of Karl Marx is known as Marxist criticism. It is a type of criticism in which the critics examine the literary works as the product and find in literary works the role of class and ideology. Marxist criticism is structured on Marxist principles, attitudes, writings and ways of thinking. Cuddon (1991) states that the Marxist critic write from Marx's philosophical point of view in which class struggle occupies the fundamental and basic role. Besides, the Marxist Criticism never ignores the socio historic factor.

Data Analysis

Alienation in the Characters of the Novel

Alienation is one of the central concepts of Marxism. Alienation in its simplest sense stands for separation and estrangement. Alienation can simply be objective alienation which means estrangement from everything forced by outer sources and subjective alienation i-e self-alienation. Besides, a man can be alienated from himself, his work, his fellowmen and even from nature. Alienation results in powerlessness, meaninglessness, social isolation and self estrangement.

The novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* offers plenty of examples of alienation. A lot number of characters seem alienated. As alienation results in estrangement of person from his work and society, the scholars note that all oppressed and marginalized blacks live in the alienation. They are not allowed to be the part of society in which

white dominancy controls everything. The characters like Arthur Radley, Tom Robinson and Mayella Ewell are the real victims of the alienation. The very first chapter of the novel depicts the alienation of Arthur Radley known as Boo Radley.

Boo Radley is a mysterious character in the novel who is always kept locked inside his house because of his wrong doings in his teenage. This confinement and alienation make him suffer and he never comes out of his home. People had attached many stories usually fabricated ones about him. He is so much alienated that Scout, Jem and Dil even wondered if he really existed. They decided to break his alienation and as a result in the end of the novel, the same mysterious, socially outcast. Boo Radley saves the lives of Scout and Jem. In the first chapter of the novel, Boo Radley is introduced as a malevolent phantom.

“Inside the house lived a malevolent phantom. People said he existed but Jem and I had never seen him. People said he went out at night when the moon was high, and peeped in windows when people’s azaleas froze in a cold snap, it was because he had breathed on them. Any stealthy crimes committed in Maycomb were his work. Once the town was terrorized by the Berries of morbid nocturnal events people’s chicken and household pets were found mutilated; though the culprit was Crazy Addie, who eventually drowned himself in Barkers Eddy, people still looked at the Radley Place unwilling to discard their initial suspicion” (Lee, 1960, p.09).

This passage very clearly states that Boo was alienated because of people’s attitude towards him. This forced social alienation keeps a gentleman confined to his house alone. Society nourishes alienation by fabricating false stories and the characters have to suffer throughout their lives.

As an activity, the three children decided to resolve the mystery of Boo Radley and started collecting information regarding him. Through the course of the events they came to know that Boo was a psycho patient who had attacked his father with the pair of scissors. Instead of sending him to asylum, Mr. Radley his father using his influence confined him in home. He was kept chained. However, the children brought him back to the normal life and he used to share with them gifts but in secret and mysterious ways. The kids never encountered him but he regularly offered them gifts by placing them at a particular place.

This Boo Radley appears to be the first victim of social alienation who suffered because of people's misconceptions and prejudice against him.

Another victim of social alienation is Tom Robinson. Tom Robinson is the most important character of this novel. He is the alleged accused of rape in the novel. His alienation was chiefly because of his race. As a member of black community, he was alienated already but the later events in novel augmented his alienation. The poor chap lost his life after being declared guilty despite no evidence against him. He was twenty five years old strong but partly crippled young fellow with a wife and three children. Owing to his association with marginalized class, he had to face lot of hardships. Before this trial of rape, he was also sentenced for thirty days imprisonment for disorderly conduct. He used to work in the fields of Mr. Link Deas.

"It must have been disorderly; said Atticus. What did it consist of?

'Got in a fight with another man he tries to cut me'.

'Did he succeed?'

Yes such, a little not enough to hurt. You see, I -. Tom moved his left shoulder.

'Yes, said Atticus, 'You were both convicted?'

'Yes suh, I had to serve' cause I couldn't pay the fine.

Other fellow paid his in" (Lee, 1960, p.210).

It makes pretty clear that he was poor alienated worker who had to serve for some days in imprisonment because of poverty, low social rank and racial discrimination.

Throughout the trial, Tom denied the allegations against him. On the other hand Mr. Ewell tried his best to prove him an animal that had molested, tormented and sexually assaulted his daughter. The white jury enhanced his alienation further while declaring him guilty for the sin which he had never committed.

Judge Taylor was polling the jury: 'Guilty.... guilty.....guilty....guilty...(Lee, 1960, p.233).

Each time the term guilty was pronounced, it stroke him like hammer and added his social alienation further. This is confirmed with the following statement of Atticus.

"In our courts, when it's a white man's verdict against a black man's, the white man always wins" (Lee, 1960, p.243).

This statement of Atticus is enough to explain the causes of alienation among blacks. The white dominant society forces its oppressed and dominated class to lead the life of alienation and suffering. This situation is well explained as interpellation. Althusser (1971) defines interpellation as the ideological hegemony of a powerful class to impose its dominant ideology on weak and alienated class.

Throughout the novel, the scholar finds the Black socially alienated. They are found living in their own community away from the whites and even having their distinct church. They are alienated in courts with reserved seats in balcony. Because of this social alienation, the gap of understanding between whites and blacks increase and majority of whites take them ugly, uneducated, untrustworthy, immoral and good for nothing.

Another victim of social alienation in the novel is Mr. Dolphus Raymond. Mr. Raymond is a white man who loves and lives with a black woman. Being a wealthy, white he knew that his affair and living with a black woman would never be acceptable to the dominant and powerful whites. Thus, he leads the life of utter alienation and deviate the mode of normal behaviors in life. He accepted the label of being drunk and was looked down upon by white folks as a drinker. He told Scout in chapter 20.

"When I come to town, which I, seldom, if I weave a little and drink out of this sack, folks can say Dolphus Raymond's in the clutches of whiskey that's why he won't change his ways. He can't help himself that's why he lives the way he does" (Lee, 1960, p.221).

Being a rich white, he knew that his marriage and interracial children would never be accepted by whites and he would be shunned from society altogether. So,

he led a pretentious life as a drinker with very bad reputation even Scout considered him an evil.

“As Mr. Dolphus Raymond was, as evil man I accepted his invitation reluctantly, but I followed Dill. Somehow, I didn’t think Atticus would like it if we become friendly with Mr. Raymond, and I knew Aunt Alexandra would not” (Lee, 1960, p. 220).

The worst example of alienation in the novel is Miss Mayella Ewell, the daughter of Bob Ewell and accuser of rape against Tom Robinson. Through trial and cross examination of Atticus, she is found to be the victim of social alienation. Scout reveals her alienation in chapter 19 in following way:

“As Tom Robinson gave his testimony, it came to me that Mayella Ewell must have been the loneliest person in the world. She was even lonelier than Boo Radley, who had not been out of the house in twenty five years. When Atticus asked had she any friends, she seemed not to know what he meant then she thought he was making fun of her. She was as sad, I thought as what Jem called a mixer child: white people wouldn’t have anything to do with her because she lived among pigs; Negroes wouldn’t have anything to do with her because she was white” (Lee, 1960, pp. 211-212).

The above statement reveals that she was suffering alienation since long. She had no friends to talk with and share her worries or joys. Besides, she was the victim of domestic violence. During trial, it was revealed that it was not Tom who had tortured her but in fact it was doing of her father Bob Ewell.

She was the loneliest person with no mother to take care of her. Even she was sent to the school for only one or two years. Socially, she belonged to whites who were simply trash. She was also beaten by her father, when he was drunk.

“Do you love father, Miss Mayella?’ Was his nest

‘Lone him, whatehe mean?’

I mean, is he good to you, is he easy to get along with?

He does tollable, 'cept when'

'Except when?'

Mayella looked at her father, who was sitting with his chair tipped against the railing. He sat up straight and waited for her to answer.

'Except when nothing; said Mayella,

'I said he does tollable.'

Mr. Ewell leaned back again.

'Except when he's drinking?' asked Atticus so gently that Mayella nodded" (Lee, 1960, p.202).

During the proceedings, when Atticus asked her about the happenings of the day; her alienation was explicitly revealed.

"You were screaming all this time?'

'I certainly was;

'Then why didn't the other children hear you? Where were they? at the dump?'

No answer.

'Where were they?'

Why didn't your screams make then come running? The dumps closer than the words, isn't – it?'

No answer.

Or didn't you scream until you saw you father in the window? You didn't think to scream until them, did you?'

No answer

'Did you scream first at your father instead of at Tom Robinson? Was that it?'

No answer

‘Who beat you up? Tom Robinson or your father?’

No answer.

‘What did your father see in the window the crime of rape, or best defense to it? Why don’t you tell the truth’ (Lee, 1960, pp. 206-7)?

Mayella was not only the victim of the social alienation but she was also the victim of domestic violence. Her father was not good to her and used to usually beat her. To curb her alienation and enjoy the life the way she liked; she had invited Tom Robinson. Tom was black a Negro but acceptable to her. She was so worst hit by alienation and loneliness that she could not think of even the consequences of her action. Tom Robinson in his testimony states in chapter 19.

“She reached up and an kissed me side of the face, she says she never kissed a grown man before, and she might as well kiss a nigger she says what her papa do to her don’t count. She says. Kiss me back, nigger.” I say, “Miss Mayella, Lemme outa here” an’ tried to run but she got her back to the door an’ I’d a had to push her, I didn’t manta harm her Mr. Finch” (Lee, 1960, p. 214).

The entire novel is based on the accusation of rape by Ewells on Tom Robinson and its subsequent trial. These statements reveal that this false accusation was the result of Mayella Ewells long alienation. She wanted to seek solace in the company of a black man because her white father was not kind to her and had forced her to suffer loneliness and domestic violence.

Besides these major characters, the elements of alienation are also found in other characters of the novel. For example Miss Maudie who lived across the street of Finch house suffered loneliness and to curb her alienation, she used to invite Finch children to play in her garden. She had settled her world in the garden and stayed more there, than in her home.

Dill the playmate of Scout and Jem is also the victim of social alienation. His mother had remarried and he was not a welcome sign to her. He was left to live with her aunt Rachael. He was sent for a visit but in fact her mother wanted him to get him out of her way.

Calpurina is also victim of alienation. She is a Negro cook working in a white Finch family. Thus, she leads dual life simultaneously. At Finch house, she was not approved and respected by Aunt Alexandra for her colour and being nigger. On the other hand, some niggers never liked her for her close intimation and association with whites. Even Scout and Jem realized during their visit to First Purchase church with her that she lived in two different worlds. She spoke two different languages, one for the white people and other with people to whom she belonged i-e Black.

Findings

The textual evidences from the novel reveal that all the major characters of the novel were the victims of alienation. Boo Radely suffered mainly because of his social alienation. Calpurina was suffering self-alienation and Dill was also the victim of self alienation. Other characters like Tom Robinson, Miss Mayella Ewell and Mr. Dolphus Raymond were self-alienated as well as suffering social alienation. All the leading characters of the novel lead alienated life because the exploiting and discriminated environment outside, left no option of activity of life for them.

Calpurina was never welcomed by Aunt Alexandra at Finch House because she was a black and the blacks viewed with suspicion to her because she worked in the white house. The same was the plight of Mayella Ewell. She was the worst victim of social alienation. Scout reveals her alienation in these words:

“She was as sad, I thought as what Jem called a mixer child, white people wouldn’t have anything to do with her because she lived among pigs; Negroes wouldn’t have anything to do with her because she was white” (Lee, 1960, p. 212).

Thus, the current study finds that *To Kill a Mockingbird* is replete with examples of alienation. Nearly all the characters suffer alienation because the powerful and dominant class forced them to live so. This alienation further fans separation, segregation, violence, and social evils in the society.

Alienation further aggravates the issues of discrimination and hatred. The characters suffering from alienation do not play their due role in the progress of society. They are struck in their own issues and their potential is curbed. Their alienation creates restlessness in them and they cause their own suffering as well as suffering of other members of society.

Marx suggests that to curb this alienation, the marginalized class must develop class consciousness and struggle against it. Because alienation makes existence miserable and keeps the weak class dominated. This results in the wastage of potential, faculties and talent of the weak and the marginalized class of the society.

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