

RACIAL PREJUDICE AND INJUSTICE IN TO KILL A MOCKING BIRD

1st Author Nithya D 2nd Author Ms Mrittika Maitra, MA(PhD)

Student, Department of English , Sathyabama Institute of Science and Technology
,Chennai ,India

MA(PhD)Assistant Professor, Department of English ,Sathyabama Institute of Science and
Technology Chennai ,India

Abstract

To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee is one of the most significant novels that discusses racial inequality and injustice in American society. Set in the American South during the 1930s, the novel shows the experiences of Black people who suffer because of racial prejudice and injustice. This article studies the novel through the idea of systemic racism. It argues that racism in Maycomb is not only caused by individual behaviour, but also by social rules, institutions, and everyday habits that support inequality. The article focuses mainly on Tom Robinson's trial, the role of Atticus Finch, the growth of Scout and Jem, and the behaviour of the White community. It also explains how the novel remains relevant today because issues like inequality and injustice still exist in many societies. The article finally encourages us to recognize injustice and develop empathy, awareness, and a sense of justice.

Keywords: systemic racism, racial prejudice, injustice, inequality

Introduction

To Kill a Mockingbird is a famous American novel published in 1960. The story is narrated by a young girl Scout Finch, who grows up in the city of Maycomb, Alabama. It is through the innocence of Scout, readers slowly discover the deep racial prejudice and injustice present in society. The novel mainly focuses on the trial of Tom Robinson, a Black man falsely accused of assaulting a White woman, Mayella Ewell. Although the evidence clearly shows Tom's innocence, the court still finds him guilty because of racial prejudice.

Thus, the novel considers not just personal hatred and racism, but also a system that is maintained by laws, courts, and society itself. Black people are separated from White people in public spaces, disrespected and deprived of equal rights. This article analyses the novel through the prism of the notion of systemic racism that describes how racism becomes an institution and social practice.

Moreover, this article illustrates different reactions to injustices on the part of different characters. Thus, Atticus Finch attempts to protect justice and equality via the legal system, whereas Scout and Jem realize the injustice of the world surrounding them gradually. The article argues that the novel is not only about the past but also about present-day issues of discrimination and social inequality.

Tom Robinson and the Failure of Justice

The trial of Tom Robinson is the most evident example of systemic racism presented in the novel. Despite the undeniable evidence that Atticus proves that Tom cannot possibly have caused the harm to Mayella since his left arm is disabled the jury pronounces Tom guilty. The reason for such a decision lies in the racism of jurors rather than in the facts of the case. In the White community, everyone was aware that in case of a crime committed by Blacks, especially against White women, Black men were to be guilty automatically.

Therefore, the novel does not focus only on personal racism and hatred, but also touches upon the institutionalized racism, which exists thanks to laws, courts, and society as a whole. Blacks are isolated from Whites in public life; they are despised and denied their rights. This paper provides a discussion of the novel with regard to the issue of systemic racism.

Furthermore, this paper shows various reactions of different characters to the injustices they encounter. Therefore, Atticus Finch tries to defend justice and equality through the legal system, while Scout and Jem learn about the injustices of their surroundings gradually. One can say that the novel needs to be analysed both within its historical context and the modern one.

It also needs to be mentioned that Tom's attitude towards Mayella is misinterpreted. When Tom states that he felt sorry for her, people from the courtroom react very negatively since the society does not expect a Negro to feel sorry for a white lady. This episode reveals how deeply racism influences the minds of Maycomb residents. While the law is supposed to bring justice, in fact, it preserves racial hierarchy.

The court room itself is a sign of inequality. While Black people are required to be seated in the balcony, White citizens are given the freedom to sit in the main part of the court room. Inequality in society is depicted through the way the court room is arranged. The trial scene thus becomes a stage of racial discrimination in itself.

Later in the novel, when Tom himself dies, the system of inequality gets further exposed. Having lost all hopes for justice, he escapes from jail and ends up being killed by the guards. It is obvious that the system values its Black citizens less than the Whites. Tom Robinson's character highlights the failures of institutions that claim justice.

Atticus Finch as a Moral Voice

Atticus Finch is an example of morality and integrity in a society characterized by racism and prejudice. Despite people criticizing him for defending Tom Robinson, Atticus decides to do the right thing. He teaches Scout and Jem the value of respecting others as well as understanding people from their points of view. Atticus's famous advice about 'walking in other people shoes' promotes empathy and understanding.

In court, Atticus patiently presents facts and disproves the lies told by Mayella. Despite having a very good case, the racial prejudices held by the society prove to be more powerful than truth. The above scenario proves that the goodness of individuals cannot easily defeat systemic racism.

When a group of men tries to attack Tom at the jailhouse, Atticus comes out and protects him. In this case, he exhibits courage as well as the significance of fighting injustices even

if the society opposes. Though Atticus loses the case, he gains reputation as an honest and upright man.

The novel teaches that social changes begin with people such as Atticus who resist oppressive systems. Through the Atticus's character, readers are able to realize that silence makes things worse.

Scout, Jem, and the Loss of Innocence

Scout and Jem start with innocent perceptions of both the town and the people living there. Being kids, they assume that all adults and organizations work fairly. Yet, Tom Robinson's trial brings them another perception of the society.

In particular, Jem suffers from the guilty verdict of Tom Robinson. He just cannot understand how people could ignore the evidence. Such disappointment illustrates the loss of the children's innocence as well as realization that the society is unequal. Moreover, Scout comes to realize that racism is socialized and learned in the course of life, in one's language, and within the family.

Another example of learning about the society through Boo Radley is provided. At first, the children were afraid of him due to the rumours that the community spread. Later, they realize that Boo is kind and protective. It illustrates the children's understanding that people who differ from others are often unfairly judged by the society. In this regard, Boo Radley's case resembles that of Tom Robinson.

Thus, through Scout and Jem, the novel shows that racism is a socially taught process.

Everyday Racism in Maycomb Society

White people in Maycomb practice racism not only by violence, but also by common behaviour. Racist language is used by adults as well as by kids. Most citizens choose silence in situations when injustice takes place, and thus discrimination continues.

Characters like Bob Ewell can openly hate people and insult them as being racists. On the other hand, respectable people of society also discriminate through their gossiping, ignoring and accepting attitude. People who seem to be kind and nice, still have advantages because of the system of racism.

Black people in the book show dignity, unity and courage. Black church helps Tom Robinson's family when the whole society rejects them. Characters like Calpurnia are wise, strong and sensitive while living in a racist world. She knows how to behave both in the white community and in the black one, which proves that Black people should change their behaviour in order to live.

In conclusion, the book reveals racism practiced in everyday life and in common social customs. Therefore, the novel describes racism as a problem supported by all people of Maycomb, and not only by several characters.

Conclusion

To Kill a Mockingbird still remains an important novel, as it reveals the effects of systemic racism on such spheres as the administration of justice, personal relationships and dignity of people. The novel demonstrates how courts and other institutions may not work properly in case society is dominated by prejudice with regard to Tom Robinson's case. The novel also raises the issue of moral courage through Atticus Finch. In addition, it shows how

people acquire racism and develop understanding due to empathy and experience with the help of Scout and Jem.

The novel continues to be relevant today because inequality and discrimination still exist in many parts of the world. It encourages readers to question unfair treatment and to support justice and equality. By studying the novel through the idea of systemic racism, readers can better understand how prejudice operates within both society and institutions.

Finally, *To Kill a Mockingbird* proves that literature serves as more than mere entertainment. It may also raise the audience's awareness of some social issues and motivate the

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