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**MARXIST ANALYSIS OF *TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD* ACCORDING TO PETER BARRY**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Marxism is one of the most important literary theories that study the socio-historic factors in a literary work. It is very vast theory with many dimensions to cover. The current study is novel analyzed through textual evidences. The study finds that American society was the victim of social injustice, exploitation, racial segregation and class division. The era of novel's setting is widely known as the era of Great Depression which was marked for economic collapse. Marxist criticism explores the writer's consciousness about the socio-historic facts and appreciates how writers make these factors the part of literature. There are many overt incidents in the novel that are connected with covert situations. Marxist critics dig out these overt situations and then connect them with covert happenings of the time. For example, the economic suffering of the characters of the novel was connected with the economic downfall of Great Depression and the case of Tom Robinson was manifestation of Scottsboro trial. Barry (1995) suggests this method of study for Marxist analysis and same is applied in this study.*

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**Keywords:** To Kill a Mockingbird, Marxist Criticism, Peter Barry, Great Depression, Trial, Exploitation, Great Depression

**INTRODUCTION**

*To Kill a Mockingbird* is an outstanding literary work in the genre of Novel which makes the part of American curriculum at school level in various states. The novel is written in the background of Great Depression and growing racial segregation in American State of Alabama back in 1930s (Hipple, 1960). The novel was published in 1960 and won Pulitzer Prize for its writer Harper Lee in the year 1961. Besides Pulitzer Prize, Harper Lee was awarded numerous rewards, appreciations and most coveted Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2007. Haggerty (2010) describing the significance of the novel wrote that the novel is remarkable for its exposing the theme of racial segregation, exploitation and social injustice in USA of its time of setting. Bloom (2012) regarded Scout Finch the protagonist of the novel as one of the most powerful characters in American fiction.

*To Kill a Mockingbird* is a great novel that enjoys rich popularity in USA and outside. The novel seriously discusses the grave issues like racism and injustice. This setting of the novel is dated in the period of Great Depression (1929-1939). This period had adversely affected American

economy and had exposed the vulnerability of Capital System. This depression that engulfed nearly all the capital economies of the world had exposed the worst decline of world's economy (Eichengreen, 2014).

The effects of Great Depression were devastating. Profits and prices had dropped internationally. In US its effects were even more lethal. The unemployment in the USA had risen up to 25% and stock exchange had crashed. The number of companies had gone bankrupt and every individual was adversely affected (Frank & Bernanke, 2007).

*To Kill a Mockingbird* symbolically means the killing of the innocence referring to the death of a black Tom Robinson. The advocate Atticus Finch tries to defend this black man against all odds and though he presents all the evidences and proofs along with the prediction of real happening but the jury that consists of white men denies all the evidences and sentences the black Tom Robinson only because of his being black. In this context the researcher will analyze, investigate and identify the causes of this injustice and loss of innocence (the ultimate killing of Tom Robinson) in blind racism and social stratification that Karl Marx believes is the cause of all evils. Marxist analysis seems to be the appropriate approach to study this problem in the background of this novel.

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 them the role of class and ideology. Marxist criticism is structured on Marxist principles, attitudes, writings and ways of thinking. Cuddon (1991) states 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.

Habib (2008) points out that there was not a single systematic theory on art and literature by Marx. Besides, there is not a single way or only one writer to be given single credit of Marxist criticism. However, Marxist Criticism has emerged as a response to different aspects of Marx's writings. These responses were sometimes in support and sometimes stood against them. However, the foundations of Marxist literary criticism were laid and today it is one of the most influential canons in literature and arts.

There are different models for conducting Marxist study; however, the current study is based on the model suggested by Barry (1995).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review for this study is divided into two headings i.e. Marxism and *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

## MARXISM

According to Tyson (2006) from the Marxist perspective the people are divided into socio-economic classes and these classes are more important than the divisions in terms of religion, race, and ethnicity or gender. It

suggests that basically the differences among people are mostly class based that are the result of economic differences.

Marxism has been widely applied in the study of literary texts. Every year around the world hundreds of scholars study literary texts in Marxist perspective. In fact Twentieth century literary criticism is heavily influenced by Marxist ideologies (Malik & Batra, 2014).

Following are a few examples of Marxist studies of literary works in recent years.

Lashari (2008) conducted a study on Shaikh Ayaz's poetry in Marxist approach and concluded that rebellious characters in poetry of Shaikh Ayaz are based on Marxist ideology.

Berchoua (2014) traces out the elements of class differences in Charles Dickens novel *Hard Times*.

*Animal Farm* is a wonderful novel written by George Orwell (1903-1950). The novel is based on the fable about Russian Revolution of communism and its subsequent rule by Joseph Stalin. This novel is analyzed in different perspectives of Marxism one among them is carried by Smith (2014).

How life is being impacted and how class plays its role in life was the purpose of Marxist studies. This was agreed by Indian scholars while analyzing Hardy's novel *Tess of D'Urbervilles* (Nazir, 2013).

Mashori & Zaib (2015) reviewed the impact of class conflict and human inequality in Pakistani English short story *Zamindar's wife*. Both concluded that how powerful landlords cull money by usurping the property of weak, subjugated and inferior subalterns. In the same story the wife of Zamindar acts on praxis and helps weak subalterns to revolt against a powerful feudal.

### ***To Kill a Mockingbird***

Rapping (2016) appreciated the role of Atticus Finch as a lawyer in *To Kill a Mockingbird* and held him a symbol of all lawyers who struggle against racial injustices in American society. In his research article published in *Michigan Law Review* he stated that many American were denied of basic rights simply because of their race and being black. He added that though slavery had been abolished in America about a century and half ago and segregation was declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court yet blacks had been struggling hard to seek justice and face discrimination in courts as well as in schools.

Winarni (2013) has analyzed *To Kill a Mockingbird* through psychoanalytic approach of Sigmund Freud. His study reveals that major character of the novel Atticus Finch is the victim of affection for his family and prejudice of whites for his defense of a black Tom Robinson in the court.

The outcomes of the study revealed that he became the victim of prejudice because he struggled to defend the truth about his client.

Kumler & Plachick (2008) presented the detailed study of *To Kill a Mockingbird* in the context of social studies. They analyzed that back in 1930's women and African Americans were denied participation in jury services and a large number of students were omitted from schools and institutions on the bases of race and gender.

Amnesty International UK (2016) compared the case of Raif Badawi and Waleed Abul Khair with the case of Atticus Finch in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Raif Badawi was sentenced for ten year with about 1000 floggings of lashes for his belief in freedom of speech in Saudi Arabia. His act was declared un-Islamic and threat to Saudi Government. Waleed Abul Khair was his lawyer who tried to defend him. But on the charges of running an unlicensed organization and breach of allegiance with Saudi rulers he was jailed for 15 year in 2014. Amnesty declared him the champion of human rights and prisoner of conscience who struggled for human rights to defend an innocent like lawyer Atticus Finch of *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

Saini (2015) critically analyzed *To Kill a Mockingbird* through Foucault's lenses for power. According to Foucault, societies run under power mechanism and power defines our relation. In this study the researcher has tried to explore that it's true about *To Kill a Mockingbird* that power relations knit the social fabrics and in this novel the whites enjoyed the power over blacks. This power structure was so strong that Negroes had their separate church and they were only allowed to worship on Sundays.

Yinger (2001) in her edited book has noted that *To Kill a Mockingbird* is rich in historical perspective. The novel is written when America was severely hit by the Great Depression, Tom Robinson's case was also the fictionalized version of Scottsboro trial and Scouts learnt in the class that how cruel Hitler was and her father told him that he was maniac.

Anderson (2010:21-37) pointed out that *To Kill a Mockingbird* is a huge success of Harper Lee though set in the small Town of Alabama and critical period of American history the Great Depression. The novel is the tale of courage, racial prejudice, legal injustice and loss of innocence with killing of Tom Robinson who is punished for the crime he never attempted.

#### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The current study is qualitative in nature. Flick (2009) suggests that qualitative research uses the technique of textualization i.e. the use of text to explore social reality and vice versa. In this type of research, interpretation of the text leads to newer layers of social realities. The field of social science is rich in relying on texts to explore new finding, newer meanings and better understandings.

Qualitative research may be carried out by applying various methods but the current study is based on interpretive method of analysis. Nunan (1992), Bryman (2004) and Silverman (2005) recommend this method for the qualitative study of literature. Silverman (2005) names this method hermeneutics. The current study is modeled on Barry's (1995) model for Marxist study.

Barry (1995) suggests five methods of Marxist analysis of a literary text:

- Marxist analysts make a division between the overt and the covert contents of the literary work and then relate covert matter to the basic Marxist themes such as class struggle are the progression of the society through various historical stages.
- Another method that Marxist critics apply is to relate the context of the literary work to the social class status of the author.
- Marxist analysts also use the method of explaining the nature of whole literary genre in terms of a social period which produced that.
- The fourth Marxist method of study is to relate the literary work to the social assumption of the time in which it is consumed. This is used in cultural materialism.
- The fifth Marxist method of analysis is to politicize a literary form that is all the literary forms are themselves determined by political circumstances.

Out of these five methods the scholars can select any one method or all the methods for Marxist study. For this study the scholar has applied two methods i-e method one and method three to interpret and analyze the text of this novel in detail. Thus, at the end, the scholar succeeds to find the reasons for injustice and the loss of innocence in the roots of racism and class stratification.

#### **DATA ANALYSIS**

Barry (1995:157) writes: "What Marxist critics do. They make a division between the 'overt' (manifest or surface) and 'covert' (latent) or hidden contents of literary work (much as psychoanalytic critics do) and then relate the covert subject matter of the literary work to basic Marxist themes, such as class struggle, or the progression of society through various historical ages, such as, the transition from feudalism to industrial capitalism".

The study of the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* reveals many overt and covert contents.

In chapter 3 Jem brings Walter Cunningham home for lunch. Scout was angry with Walter but Atticus welcomed him.

“Atticus greeted Walter and began a discussion about crops neither Jem nor I could follow.

‘Reason I can’t pass the first grade, Mr. Finch is I’ve had to stay out ever’ spring an’ help Papa with the Chopin’, but there’s another at the house now that’s fields size’ ” (Lee, 1960:22).

In chapter 2 Cunningham’s are more vividly described by Scout. It is learnt that father of Walter Cunningham was the client of Atticus and he used to pay him through supply of vegetables, grains and stove wood.

When Scout asked her father about it:

‘Why does he pay you like that?’ I asked.

‘Because that’s the only way he can pay me. He has no money.’

‘Are we poor, Atticus?’

Atticus nodded. ‘We are indeed.’

‘Jem’s nose wrinkled. ‘Are we as poor as Cunningham’s?’

‘No exactly. The Cunningham’s are country folks, farmers, and the crash hit them hardest’ (Lee, 1960:19).

The novel very beautifully depicts the poverty of Cunningham’s through these textual evidences. Overtly through the ways of Walter Cunningham’s it is shown that Cunningham’s were the poor folks who could neither afford neither education nor proper meals for their kids. Even Atticus acknowledged their poverty and knew very well that they were not able to pay his fees in cash.

When the scholar tried to explore the covert reasons, it was learnt that farmers were suffering mainly because of Great Depression. Atticus referred it as crash. Crash or Great Depression was the critical period in American history. It had adversely affected all sectors of American economy including agriculture. The Great Depression had hit American economy so worst that thousands of people had lost their jobs and banks were bankrupt owing to economic crises. Even the small towns were affected as Cunningham’s were shown in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The novel through the overt description of poverty faced by Cunningham’s at Maycomb depicts the covert impact of Great Depression on American society especially on rural and farming areas.

Farmers had to suffer because owing to worst fall in prices they had less money to support their families and educate their kids. They dropped their kids from schools and if any one attended the school like Walter Cunningham they had nothing to eat in lunch or wear new shoes.

When in chapter 2, Atticus told Scout that they were poor too; it was because of Great Depression and its adverse affects on economy that even lawyers were economically weak and had to avoid luxurious ways of life. Marx as the critic of capitalism had already predicted the fall of capitalist economy.

In chapter 26 of the novel, the readers are shown how the young students were explained the concept of democracy by Miss Gates. When Hitler was prosecuting the Jews; Ms. Gates corrected him that he was persecuting them unabated because he was the government. On the other hand, she told the class that America was a democracy she wrote the word democracy on the board and asked for its definition.

“I raised my hand, remembering an old campaign slogan Atticus has one told me about.

‘What do you think it means, Jean Louise?’

‘Equal rights for all, special privileges for none, I quoted’ (Lee, 1960:270).

Then she explained class that America was democracy because it offers equally right to all citizens where as Germany was a dictatorship because in Germany Jews were persecuted because of prejudice against them.

She told the class that: “We are a democracy and Germany is a dictatorship”. ‘Dictatorship’, she said, “over here we don’t believe in persecuting anybody. Persecution comes from people who are prejudiced. Prejudice she enunciated carefully” (Lee, 1960:270).

Overtly this episode talks about democracy in USA and dictatorship of Hitler in Germany but covertly, the writer has very beautifully exposed the hollowness of American democracy. While relating dictatorship to persecution of Jews and this persecution as the byproduct of prejudice, the writer has connected the persecution of blacks with it. If Germany cannot be democracy while persecuting the Jews, how can America be a true democracy while blacks are being discriminated, exploited and marginalized in the name of race? Blacks were weak, economically shattered and politically as well as socially exploited. That is why they suffer injustice, poverty and discrimination. It supports the teachings of Marx that those handful people forces can exploit the vast majority of weaker proletariats.

In the novel, the readers are overtly shown that Miss Mayella Ewell alleges rape charges against Tom Robinson who loses his life after the Jury sentenced him despite no evidence against him. But covertly the scholar digs out that Mayella Ewell was interested in Tom Robinson and wanted his company.

In chapter 19, Tom Robinson reveals in his testimony that: “She reached up and 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’” (Lee, 1960:214).

Overtly, the readers see that she charges Tom Robinson of rape. It all happens because the day she was attempting sexual assault on Tom, they

were caught by her father, then to avoid his wrath she fabricated false charges against poor Tom Robinson.

Actually Mayella Ewells was the worst victim of alienation. Her father was unkind to her. She had no friends and was confined inside her home doing little chores. For her, Tom Robinson despite his being a nigger was the ray of hope for getting rid of her alienation. She loved to ask him little chores to keep him close to her. The poor chap loved to help a white lady without realizing its consequences. This episode is related to Marxist teachings about alienation.

The novel overtly presents the trial of Tom Robinson to explain the readers about the hollowness of American judicial system. In the novel, the readers are told that Tom Robinson was sentenced despite no evidence against him. He became the victim of racial prejudice. The white jury could not go against the white accuser and the black had to face death.

Overtly the readers are engaged with the proceeding of Tom's Trial at Maycomb court but covertly as if the writer refers to famous Scottsboro Boys Trial. In Scottsboro trial nine black boys were convicted for the alleged rape of two white women in March 1931. The detailed review of the case later revealed that the trial was not fairly conducted and the boys were sentenced because of their race and colour. The same situation of racial injustice is presented via the case of Tom Robinson who was convicted despite no solid evidence against him. The Scottsboro trial was later overturned by the Supreme Court of USA and in retrial four boys were released whereas; the remaining five were sentenced for different length of imprisonment. However, the Scottsboro trial had uncovered the elements of racial discrimination in then America judicial system. Overtly, the novelist brings before us Tom Robinson's case who was alleged falsely for rape. In court Atticus the lawyer of Tom proved his innocence and strongly defended him but the white jury convicted him guilty. The jury could not go against the white accuser in the case of black accused. It reveals the vanity and hollowness of judiciary. This episode confirms the claim of Marx that law and religion are exploited by the powerful bourgeoisie against the weak and marginalized poor. In this novel, blacks are being persecuted in the name of race and colour. This race is not a divine division but the white supremacy often controls them through coercion and injustice.

Barry (1995:168) in his third Marxist method writes: "A third Marxist method is to explain the nature of a whole literary genre in terms of the social period which produced it. For instance, *The Rise of the Novel* by Ian Watt relates the growth of the novel in the eighteenth century to the expansion of the middle classes during that period. The novel 'speaks' for this social class, just as, for instance, *Tragedy* 'speaks for monarchy and the mobility, and the Ballad speaks for the rural and semi urban 'working class'".



In this method of Marxist study, the novel best fits in. *To Kill a Mockingbird* is an American novel that represents the American ways of life. The novel was published in 1960 but was set in America of 1930s. America was then worst hit by Great Depression and the publication of novel dates to the rise of Civil Right movement in America. Thus the novel truly highlights and represents the social period in which it was produced and the period in which it was set.

The period in which the novel is set, was the period of Great Depression in America. Great Depression had bankrupted American economy and sharp fall in prices and rise of unemployment had given birth too many social evils. A vast number of respectable families suffered the pangs of Great Depression and in *To Kill a Mockingbird* we witness the condition of Cunningham's. Owing to decline in prices they had to mortgage their land and rely on loans. Atticus describes this condition as crash. In chapter 2, shedding light on the pitiable condition of Cunningham's, he says: "The Cunningham are country folks, farmers and the crash hit them hardest" (Lee, 1960:19).

Beside Cunningham, other folks in the novel also suffered because of Great Depression. As the prizes had fallen, the land owners could not afford workers in their land. Thus the black who often worked in lands were turned jobless. Resultantly the shopkeepers, merchants, and people of other professions suffered adversely. Even Atticus who was a lawyer could not afford luxuries of life. In chapter 2, when Jam asked him: "Are we poor, Atticus? Atticus nodded, we are indeed" (Lee, 1960:19).

In addition to Great Depression, the novel also reveals about the racial injustice against the black in American judicial system. The case of Tom Robinson in this novel seems as the parody of Scottsboro Trials in America. In this regard Johnson (1994) clearly states: "Tom Robinson's trial bears striking parallels to the most famous or infamous court cases in American history. Both the fictional and historical cases take place in the 1930's, a time of turmoil and change in America and both occur in Alabama. In both too, the defendants were African American men, the accusers white women. In both instances, the charge was rape" (Lee, 1960:15).

In *To Kill a Mockingbird* the author has very beautifully fictionalized the Scottsboro trial in the form of Tom Robinson's case. In Scottsboro trial, the nine black accused were sentenced by the local court on April 9, 1931 despite no solid evidence of rape against them. Johnson (1994), in this regard further states that the accuser white women were in fact prostitutes who had falsely implicated these nine blacks. The court had sentenced eight out of nine accused the capital punishment where as the ninth one was spared because of his minor age.

The Scottsboro trial was reopened on the orders of the Supreme Court of United States in November 1932. In retrial it was proved that the requirements of justice were not met at the local court and they were simply given serious punishment because of their race.

This racial injustice is fictionalized in *To Kill a Mockingbird* as the trial of Tom Robinson. In this trial the accused is not found guilty of rape but the white jury falsely held him guilty and sentenced him.

Like Scottsboro retrial, we find the cases of lynching and severe threats of life to the lawyer of the black in this novel. Atticus was threatened and his kids were attempted murder. At the end of the novel, Boo Radely saved the children of the Atticus. In short, the novel highlights the social issues of the time by exposing racial injustice and discrimination in the American society. American society during the era of the setting of the novel was worst hit by racial discrimination, exploitation and segregation. Though the slavery was abolished in America following the civil war through the thirteenth Amendment; the black continued to suffer the pangs of exploitation and injustice. The black were denied education opportunities of job, property and were viewed with contempt, hatred and racial discrimination. All these evidences are found in the novel. The black were denied education and even their church was in a pitiable condition. When Scout visited the First Purchase Church, she came to know that blacks could not read or write and the church presented the very poor picture.

Karson (2005) in his introduction of *Civil Rights Movement* clearly states that condition for blacks was worse in USA despite little respite from thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth amendments. Meanwhile, in *Plessey V. Fergusson* case, the Supreme Court had legalized segregation. This doctrine was known as “separate but equal” and had given white people the legal cover for their exploitation and injustice. To get this long chain of injustice, exploitation and discriminations nullified the black succeeded in launching a massive mass movement known as “The Civil Rights Movement”.

This movement got momentum in 1950s & 1960s. In 1954 the Supreme Court of USA in a famous verdict *Brown V. Board of Education* declared segregation unconstitutional. However, the condition could not get improved and the cases of exploitation and segregation continued to be marked in the national press. It was perhaps this situation that Martin Luther King and other black leaders had collected millions of people in Washington in 1963 where King had delivered this famous “I have a dream” speech.

“I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the colour of their skin but by the content of their characters. I have a dream today. I have a dream that one day the state of Alabama.....will be transformed into a situation where little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white

girls and walk together as sisters and brothers. I have a dream today” (Karson, 2005:18).

*To Kill a Mockingbird* is the product of this age. This novel very artistically and innocently highlights the issue of racial segregation and injustice. Though being a white herself, Lee depicts the plight of poor blacks in her novel. Thus, in the Marx’s context she fulfills her responsibility as the writer. According to Barry (1995) the Marxist study attempts to see the literary work in the context of the social period in which it is produced. In this method *To Kill a Mockingbird* best fits in. The novel does not only highlights to the events of its age but fictionalizes the real happenings artistically to inculcate a positive message to common masses. One of the major causes of the wider popularity and success of the novel at the time of publication was its affinity to the current mass movement of that time. Thus blacks and whites who believed in moderate, liberal and equal America received this novel with great zeal and enthusiasm.

#### FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

The study of the novel shows that there was marked social injustice and segregation in American society. The study finds that one of the causes of unrest among the members of different classes was economic collapse in America known as Great Depression. The overt reasons of poverty and suffering in the society were related with the covert theme of Great Depression. The study also digs out the cause of rape charges made by Miss Mayella Ewell against Tom Robinson. Overtly it was the charge of rape but covertly she was interested in Tom Robinson and was seducing him to curb her alienation.

The novel also highlights the socio-historic facts of the day. The trial of Tom Robinson was the fictionalized version of Scottsboro trial. Through the trial of Tom Robinson the writer has achieved her purpose of exposing judicial injustice in America. The writer made it clear that in America the law is divided in the name of race. The blacks suffer mostly for the white jury never decides cases on merit and blacks are often victimized.

The novel also highlights famous Civil Rights Movement in America through the character of Atticus Finch as well as other blacks who could stand for their salvation and equal rights. The novel depicts Atticus Finch the white lawyer as antithesis against American white hegemony. This antithesis gave birth to new thesis in the form of more moderate America that elected Barak Obama as the first coloured president of USA.

On the bases of above analysis it can be concluded that *To Kill a Mockingbird* is a wonderful masterpiece in American literature that highlights the socio-historic facts of its age. The novel best fits in Marxist criticism because the Marxist criticism always highlights the socio-economic

and socio-historic factor of the literary work in which it was produced. The setting of the novel in 1930s highlights the pangs of Great Depression. The characters in the novel suffer poverty and other economic constraints because of Great Depression. Owing to the Great Depression, the black had lost their jobs and the farmers had to mortgage their lands. This economic crisis had multiplied the miseries of common people who were already suffering injustice. The publication of the novel in 1960 was marked with the rise of civil rights movement in America. One of the reasons for the wider publicity of the novel lied in the time of its publication.

This novel explores all the ingredients of Marxist criticism. Barry (1995) suggests that Marxist critics explore the overt and covert contents of the literary work and relate them to basic themes of Marxism i.e. class division, exploitation and alienation etc. Through this analysis, the scholar has found that the novel presents the ample examples of class and racial division, the ultimate exploitation of the black and segregation result in alienation and injustice. Thus, the novel best fits in the model of Marxist criticism suggested by Peter Barry.

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